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Methodists and Episcopalians in the American Context: Siblings Separated

From Birth

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It has been often said that Episcopalians and Methodists are “sibling” churches, but I would like to suggest here that the relationship is in fact a subtler one. They are siblings separated at birth (like the sisters in the old Disney movie, “The Parent Trap”). Because of this they show signs both of their family heritage and their differing environments. More importantly, until very recently they have had little if any formal contact, so they can become reacquainted without the years of ecclesiastical bickering and disputations that have characterized our relationships with other churches. This paper hopes to flesh out why this has occurred, some of the ramifications of it, and some implications for future ecumenical discussion.

In order to understand both colonial Anglicanism and the emergence of Methodism one must begin with some broad generalizations about Restoration Anglicanism. The Restoration saw a consolidating of certain positions within the Church of England. The previous century had seen large-scale debate over what Anglicanism was to be and what was to be its relationship with the Reformation of the continent. Beginning with the Reformation a number of principles began to emerge as “normative” within Anglicanism. (I must quickly add that they never gained unanimity, but their influence cannot be ignored.)

The first was the triumph of what may be called “Prayer Book spirituality.” The BCP called for the regular recitation of certain prayers, and set forth a rhythm of piety that shaped the

day, the week, and the year. Undergirding this was an understanding of Christianization that emphasized the accumulation of holy habits brought about by these regular actions. The undegirding idea might be stated “by doing we become.” Religious action helps shape the soul. This stands in contrast to the Puritan emphasis upon a religious life that began with the transformed heart. Puritans had criticized the Elizabethan settlement for not emphasizing the state of the soul. Without the right spirit they argued religious action is a sham. Only by becoming could we do. Restoration Anglicanism, on the whole, rejected such claims. Along with this one might also add that the physical place of worship was likewise emphasized. A solemn location enhanced the dignity of worship, which in turn made it more efficacious.

A second principle was the triumph of the episcopacy. Here we might subdivide the issue of the episcopacy into questions of theory and of fact. The theoretical question was how necessary was the office. Was it part of the essence (esse) of the church, or merely part of its right ordering (bene esse)? On this point Restoration Anglicans differed, and this became one of the dividing points between “High Church” and “Low Church” Anglicans. The “Preface to the Ordinal” merely stated “from the Apostles’ time there have been these Orders of Ministers in Christ’s Church; Bishops, Priests, and Deacons.” No official position was made about the nature of episcopacy other than this. The practical question, however, was whether it was possible to serve in the Church of England without Episcopal ordination. The earlier Prayer Book of the previous century had been ambivalent about this point, but the BCP of 1662 clearly demanded “Episcopal Consecration or Ordination” as a prerequisite for ministry in the Church of England. We might add here that much of this new emphasis upon episcopacy flowed from earlier Anglican study of the church fathers.

A third principle was an emphasis upon moderation, and a suspicion of enthusiasm. Anglicans were convinced that the great destructiveness of the English Civil Wars and the Commonwealth period flowed from religious fanaticism. This attitude is reflected in the very first paragraph of Jeremy Taylor’s Holy Living. “I have lived to see religion painted upon banners, and thrust out of churches, and the temple turned into a tabernacle, and God to be worshipped not as He is, the Father of our Lord Jesus, the King of sufferings; nor as the God of peace; but rather as the Lord of hosts, which title he was pleased to lay aside when the kingdom of the gospel was preached by the Prince of peace.”¹ The Commonwealth was the age of Levelers, Diggers, Ranters, Quakers, et al, each believing that they were called by God to do their actions. Enthusiasm was the source of religious discord and social disruption.

Such were some key emphases in the Restoration church. We might also note that Restoration Anglicanism saw two of its chief tasks were to inculcate Christian morality and to defend revealed religion against its critics. The first was viewed as important because of a perceived decline in morality as a result of the dislocations of the Commonwealth period. The second became important in the face of the rise of Deism that questioned both biblical revelation and basic Christian doctrines. A work like Joseph Butler’s Analogy of Religion was a masterful defense of revelation, and the life of the church.

This context is important both because it would mark colonial Anglicanism and it would be the rendering of Anglicanism against which John Wesley revolted. Wesley’s emphasis upon the transformed heart is a protest against the piety of the Prayer Book as an end in itself. As he stated in his “An Earnest Appeal to Men of Reason and Religion,” a religion of church, prayer,

¹ Jeremy Taylor, The Rule and Exercise of Holy Living, abridged with a Preface by Anne Lamb (New York, 1970), 3.

sacrament, fasting, holy reading, etc., was of no value without the inner working of the Spirit.²

Secondly, Wesley’s own reading of the early church (particularly of the church in Alexandria) led him to question the elevated view of episcopacy, and to instead claim that bishop and presbyter were of the same order. Finally it was precisely on the question of the working of the Spirit that led Wesley to his famous confrontation with Joseph Butler. The tragedy of the conflict between these two great religious geniuses is that they inhabited largely different religious universes. Butler was a man of the Restoration who was keenly aware of opponents to Christianity from the “left” (i.e., Deists, etc.). Wesley’s critique was not even on his theological radar screen.

As I have said the Restoration themes became manifested in colonial Anglicanism, but with regional variations. The Anglicanism of the southern colonies emphasized reason and morality, and did not have a particularly high ecclesiology. Anglicans in the north (many of whom were converts) emphasized a high view of episcopacy. But both were critical of the experiential based religion of the heart that took root in the American colonies in the 1740s. The Great Awakening can be broadly seen as the American equivalent of the Wesley revival of England. Both movements emphasized this new religious understanding known as Evangelicalism. Wesley’s associate George Whitefield, was the great proponent of it on both sides of the Atlantic. Evangelical, or conversion oriented, piety became increasingly popular throughout the 18th century, but colonial Anglicans, with one exception, rejected it. That exception, however, was a major one. Large segments of the southern Anglican lay population seemed to be attracted to it, but had few clergy to support them. They seemed to find the established southern churches lacking in warmth and vigor. This lay response became the seedbed for the growth of Methodism.

² “An Earnest Appeal to Men of Reason and Religion,” in John Wesley, Albert C. Outler, ed. (New York, 1964), 400.

The period of the American Revolution was a very difficult period for American Anglicanism. Loyalties were tested, and in some areas conflict occurred between colonial Anglicans and their non-Anglican neighbors. Anglicanism became tarred with Toryism (not always fairly). During the war the southern religious establishments were terminated, and at the end of the war Anglican missionaries (SPG clergy) were forced to retire. Furthermore, many loyalist laity left the new nation for parts of the British empire where they could remain loyal to the crown. The decade of the 1780s saw the remains of colonial Anglicanism buffeted and bloodied, and some questioned whether it would survive. The 1780s witnessed the organization of the Protestant Episcopal Church. The organization was a tricky one and necessitated compromises between the high church northern church, and the low church southern churches, reflected in both the constitution and in the BCP of 1789.

Now let us note what Methodists were doing at this time. Throughout the 1770s and 1780s Methodism was quickly growing, and in 1784 John Wesley had sent Thomas Coke to America to help organize this new church. The Christmas Conference of 1784 outlined the order and structure of American Methodism. We should note the difference in tenor in the organizational thrust of these two bodies. The response of the Episcopal Church was careful, institutional, and with a strong concern for continuity. Great concern was taken in crafting both a constitution and a Prayer Book. As the Preface to the BCP stated, “this Church is far from intending to depart from the Church of England in any essential point of doctrine, discipline, or worship.” This care bespoke a general attitude among Episcopalians at the time. Having been transformed as a result of the Revolution from an established (or at the very least imperial) church, into a small minority status community, the first concern was to make sure order, identity, and continuity were maintained. In contrast Methodism’s response (at least to this non-

Methodist) was vigorous, innovative, and outward looking, and this followed in decisions made in the years following the Christmas conference. These attitudes in turn perhaps shaped the early histories of these communities. Methodism quickly took on distinctly American vernacular elements and became the largest religious community in America. Episcopalians maintained the liturgical and ecclesiastical connection with the Church of England and remained a small religious community.

Episcopal historians speak of the events of the 1780s as the “great compromise” bringing together the low church South and the high church north into one united church, but they often ignore that what was lost from colonial Anglicanism was the Methodist community (we might also note that what was also lost was the for African Methodist churches). Episcopalians were too preoccupied with their internal concerns to reach out to the fledgling Methodist community. Not that there were no attempts. In 1791 Thomas Coke wrote to William White about the possibility of union. He noted, however, two concerns that stood in the way, and both reflect diverging views of the role of the church in the new society. The first concerned the ministers ordained of Coke and Asbury who would not give up the right to administer sacraments. The second concerned Methodist preachers, who would not surrender their right to preach even though they did not know biblical languages.³ Both regular ordination and a learned clergy were considered normative for Anglican clergy at the time, but Coke called for latitude in the name of mission. Nothing came of the request, and Methodists and Episcopalians went on in their separate ways.

Nineteenth century developments within the Episcopal Church did not aid in bringing the two communions together. They still largely occupied different intellectual, social, and cultural

³ The correspondence is found in William White, Memoirs of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the United States of America... (New York, 1836), 343-8.

spheres. This was true even for the evangelical revival that swept up a significant part of the Episcopal Church in the early nineteenth century. Anglican Evangelicalism had its roots in England in the second half of the 18th century. But on both key theological and cultural points it did not lead to a closer rapprochement with Methodism. On the theological level Anglican Evangelicalism was Calvinistic rather than Arminian. It tended therefore to see itself associated more with Presbyterianism than with Methodism. Many of its leaders were trained at places like Princeton and adopted key element of the Princeton theology. This closeness to Presbyterianism was not merely because of theology. Episcopalians and Presbyterians occupied the same social location. They both advocated a learned ministry, and favored a refined culture. They both ministered (albeit not exclusively) to educated and professional laity. Methodism (at least in antebellum America) was largely outside of their orbit. It was usually grouped as one of the “popular” churches.

Other developments pushed the churches even further away from each other. The antebellum American high church movement, and the later growth of the influence of the Oxford Movement tended to reinforce those emphases on apostolic order, priestly ministry, and sacramentalism (not to mention Catholicism) that Methodists had rejected. Just as was the case in England, the Oxford revival increased the separation between Episcopalians and Methodists. Likewise (though by no means with intention), the Muhlenberg Memorial of the 1850s had something of the same effect. Proponents of the Muhlenberg Memorial advocated an opening up of Episcopal ministry to non-Episcopalians and a new flexibility to worship. The former proposal was rejected at the time but the latter did find favor. This liturgical flexibility, along with the enrichments in worship that Muhlenberg also advocated made the Episcopal Church’s role in the growing cities extremely important. By the latter part of the nineteenth century the

Episcopal Church was largely an urban church. Although Methodists did have an important role in urban America, in many ways its soul was still tied to rural America.

The twentieth century saw the beginnings of some important reverses in this sense of separation. The rise of Methodists in the socio-economic order beginning in the second half of the 19th century began to lessen the social division between them and Episcopalians. This in turn made Methodists more open to certain cultural trappings (gothic architecture, formal choirs, etc.) that they had earlier scorned. Indeed throughout the twentieth century liturgical practices became less and less points of heated division that they once were. This was not merely on the level of praxis. The liturgical revival of the 20th century believed that in the teachings of the early church there might be a foundation for Christian unity. New liturgies began to take on this common “apostolic” form. And from this liturgical work came new openings for theological unity. Baptism, Eucharist, and Ministry is perhaps the best-known example. Much of this took place because of the rise in prominence of the university based divinity school. These institutions, emphasized a broad ecumenical curriculum in contrast to narrowly denominational ones. Many Methodists and Episcopalians studied together in these institutions. And indeed Methodists did not merely study in them but governed many of the most important of them (Duke, Drew, Emory, etc.) and in these Methodist ecumenical institutions Episcopal students studied. Hence the siblings finally had a chance to meet.

But we must note that in meeting at his late date, Methodists and Episcopalians are meeting in a religious world that is different from earlier ecumenical moments. I will only mention two aspects of this new world. The first is the new divide within Christianity. For almost 450 years the fundamental divide within western Christianity was a Protestant/Catholic one. The Protestant/Catholic divide we should emphasize was not merely theological—it was

cultural as well, and entailed differing understandings of human nature and the good society in addition to formal theological differences. If one looked at ecumenical discussion during the earlier period, the Protestant/Catholic divide was the large (if sometimes unspoken) factor driving the discussions. In the last thirty years the Protestant/Catholic divide has been less present. This is one of the great accomplishments of the mid 20th century ecumenical movement (albeit there were social forces acting here as well). But in the intervening years a new fracture has emerged, or a liberal/conservative tension. This is not the liberal/conservative fission of the early twentieth century that fought over biblical inspiration, the virgin birth, and the creeds. Rather this division is over a series of interlocking cultural/moral questions on how (or whether) the church should appropriate the cultural issues emerging in the 1960s and 1970s. Here too the divisions are both theological and cultural. What will the ecumenical endeavor look like when it is played out over this new fission?

The second new factor is what may be called the new particularism. Mid century ecumenism spoke confidently of moving beyond narrow ecclesial traditions. They offered a vision of a new unity that would transcend older traditions. In this sense the education of the ecumenical university based divinity schools was a theological analogue to the great modernist belief that bigness and unity are better. In recent decades, however, ecclesiastical communities have increasingly discovered the value of their particular traditions. Without a solid grounding in the specificity of their individual life and story, these bodies cannot keep the loyalty of their people. But how is this to be achieved? At one point the churches could presuppose a knowledge of the specific, but now they cannot. Denominational identity is crucial for denominational well being, and clergy must be trained in an understanding of this. Formation is now a buzz word, and it implies formation into a specific tradition. What does the ecumenical

endeavor mean in a world shaped by this new particularism? How can one envision the ecumenical process to make us both more united and more linked with our local stories?

That is the challenge of beginning an ecumenical journey at this point in time. It is the challenge that we as Methodists and Episcopalians have taken up.

Authority in Anglicanism

A paper for the Methodist Episcopal Dialogue, February 2003
By Ephraim Radner, Diocese of Colorado

Introduction: Authority, Ethos, and Anglican Scripturalism

To characterize authority for a community, one must first understand the organs of reception, the framework by which individuals and groups “hear and obey” the authoritative norms by which they live. Indeed, actual “authorities” – whether they be persons, ideals, or documented standards – achieve identifiable focus only within the parameters of these organs of reception, and ought not to be identified apart from them.¹

Along these lines, Anglicans have often spoken in terms of an “ethos” that shapes and limits their common life, as opposed to a defined system of “authority” or “doctrine” that explicitly constrains it. This is a helpful and also misleading way of speaking. It is helpful in pointing to the fundamental force and reality of communal attitudes of particular authorities as they in fact order the church’s life; but it is misleading if the appeal to “ethos” is used to dissolve the reality within Anglicanism of a constraining authority altogether. Furthermore, it is

¹To take the United States as a political example: while the Constitution represents a final authority of appeal, in fact very few people know it or refer to it. Representatives of the people do, under particular circumstances, and those circumstances themselves mark the parameters in which Constitution is articulated and applied. But what orders the representatives and their circumstances of hearing, especially in relationship with the “people”? Without arguing the point, we can see why some would place the Declaration of Independence on an authoritative par with the Constitution, insofar as it may define the limiting and informing character of the community’s encultured expectations or values, as it selects representatives and the circumstances that elicit and constrain appeals to the Constitution. “Constitutional” governments, from Africa to Asia, vary in the nature of their authority, despite having a common structure and set of appeals, in large measure because there is enormous variation in the organs of reception from culture to culture.

often logically difficult to ground authority in ethos or in communal organs of reception in an exact manner, and hence Anglicans tend to work around the edges of the challenge, and in controverted situations to ignore the challenge altogether in favor simply of alternative modes of authoritative appeal which fail to convince precisely because their articulation tends to float free of the “ethos”.

Despite, or because of, the purported “vagueness” of an Anglican framework of authority, the experienced and increasing reality of diversity in both teaching and practice within and among Anglican churches has both seized upon and suffered from this long-standing inexactitude, giving rise to a host of competing arguments for “particular standards of authority”. These arguments have boiled down to several main commitments. All maintain a reference to Scripture, but the latter’s actual force in controverted discussions has been weak. The more substantive disagreements are from within the following positions:

- Anglicanism has no constraining authority besides the “Creeds”²;
- None besides the Book of Common Prayer (interpreted in full or thin terms)³;
- The normative authority of the several “Formularies” together⁴;
- In every case, “Canon Law” as the proper adjudicator of the above, defined within particular local synods.

²This represents the views of progressives within the Communion, especially in North America, who argue that beyond the creedal affirmations and the Scriptural base to which they refer – variously understood -- much (all?) falls into the category of *adiaphora*; this might even include the shape and duties of the three-fold ministry (and here radical evangelicals in, for instance, the Diocese of Sydney overlap pragmatically with radical revisionists).

³ This represents the more moderate position of most North American Anglicans, and undergirds hopes for “comprehension” through the BCP’s wide set of references as well as the assumption that Prayer Book revision represents the appropriate place in which to further theological reform.

⁴ This, finally, is the more conservative position, embodied in something like the Prayer Book Society, which appeals to a strict set of purportedly “classic” Anglican “standards” – Creeds, BCP, Ordinal, and Articles of Religion.

Thus, whatever one’s views on the matter, the practical struggle over authority has moved into the realm of the legislative, and probably the proposal with the most potential for political and perhaps clarifying influence within Anglicanism as a whole, has been the initiated project out of Lambeth 1998 to rationalize and make coherent among themselves the canonical systems of the Communion’s constituent members.⁵

The press for canonical uniformity is, however, more a reactive response to a situation of growing unease within the Communion than the expression of a positive dynamic actually driving the Communion. In the past, the seeds of conflict between the kinds of positions noted above have been historically contained by functional “structures” of authority – the respectful collegial oversight of bishops bound to patterns of counsel and to *de facto* commonalities of formulary -- and it is just these structures that today appear unsteady. The Inter-Anglican Theological and Doctrinal Commission’s so-called “Virginia Report” on the “communion” of the church, for all of its careful examination of theologically substantive concepts like Trinity and *koinonia*, actually made its public mark by suggesting new and wider adjudicatory structures for the Communion, thereby furthering the sense that ecclesial “politics” should remain the arena in which “authority” finds its legs.⁶ And in light of these trajectories, taken in the midst of very serious and developing conflicts around the Communion over teaching on sexuality in particular, the notion of “Anglican authority” might perhaps best be sifted from ecclesial debris when the dust settles over the next decade, and not before.

⁵ Cf. the paper of Norman Doe on “Canon Law and Communion”, presented to the Anglican Primates in March of 2001 (available through the Anglican Consultative Council). Doe has written widely on local and world-wide Anglican canon law. There is reason to doubt the Communion’s ability to further this project legislatively any time soon.

⁶ The report, commissioned by Lambeth 1988, was published in 1997 (London: Anglican Consultative Council). Chapters 3 and 6 raise the “structural” issues which caught people’s attention.

Short of such futuristic retrospectives, the purpose of this paper is to uncover a deeper source to this increasingly manifest problem of locating authority within Anglican churches. I will argue, first, that this source can be found in the historic Anglican refusal to inhibit the “first-order” character of Scriptural language and substance, a refusal that derives from what I would call the “encultured” base of Anglicans’ various appeals to authoritative entities or documents. And, secondly, I will suggest that the odd disappearance of Scripture’s claims in present Anglican discussions (despite appeals made by conservatives especially to its supreme authority) is attributable to the disarray of Anglicanism’s “second-order” structures (those noted above).⁷ Indeed, the original relationship of Scripture and Standard was one wherein the latter’s role was to protect the former’s unfettered hearing. The dynamic of evolution in rapidly emerging modernity, however, with its overturning of the “corporate” character of Scriptural formation, has been to reverse these roles and purposes: Scripture has more and more been applied primarily to buttress the authority of the Standards, however they may be identified by various Anglican groups. Unlike other churches, Anglicans have traditionally refused to demand anything other than Scripture as the ostensive framework for their primary claims (and I say this well aware that it flies in the face of much contemporary popular, if unexamined, wisdom about the supposed “three-legged stool” of Anglicanism’s appeal to Tradition and Reason in addition to Scripture). In any case, I believe that the problems inherent in such “fundamentalism” when it is corporately – as opposed to individually – embraced are those with which we live today.⁸

⁷ Cf. arguments in R. R. Reno’s *In the Ruins of the Church* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2002), cc. 5 and 9. In these chapters, Reno contrasts the increasing inability of the “standards” *qua* functional norms to maintain the more fundamental (to Anglicanism) practice of the “reiterated” hearing of Scripture embodied in the Daily Office.

⁸ For a pugnacious discussion of the conceptual ambiguities in speaking about “Scripture, Reason, and Tradition” within the context of contemporary Anglicanism (in contrast to its more “classic” 16th- and 17th-century texts), cf. Christopher Seitz, *Word Without End: The Old Testament as Abiding Theological Witness* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publ., 1998), chapter 8, “Biblical Authority in the Late Twentieth Century: The Baltimore Declaration, Scripture-Reason-Tradition and the Canonical Approach”.

2. *The form of the 18th-century Anglican “ethos”: the Religious Society*

I propose now that we look at the question of Authority within context of this discussion with Methodists in terms, first, of the 18th-century alternatives of ethos which, in a critical way, bear some connection with contemporary realities: that is, in response to the growth of religious pluralism within the British nation. From there, I will try to move backwards to locate a more general set of informing Anglican commitments about the role of Scripture and community that, I will argue, continue to be embodied in the movement outside of England into America and the evolving Anglican Communion.

The reality of religious pluralism in England was determined amid the violence of the Civil War and subsequent Commonwealth in the mid-17th-century. Its intractability and social challenge, while resisted in many ways at the time of the Restoration, was inescapable; and by the early 18th-century it had become the primary motive behind ecclesiastical politics and the theology that grew up around such discussions. There was a time when every English schoolboy – and certainly every student of divinity – knew about the Bangorian Controversy. The fact that this episode is no longer a standard part of Anglican self-understanding, however, does not subvert its status as an exemplar of the religious age: the bishop of Bangor, Benjamin Hoadly, had argued in a sermon that the “Kingdom of Christ” was a purely “spiritual” reality and hence was not logically (or morally) subject to a political establishment. Hoadly’s vision, impregnated as it was with overt Lockean sentiments, was designed to open up a social space in England for most religious sects and denominations, and to question the Anglican claim that ecclesial structures (including and especially forms of worship) themselves formed an essential part of the Gospel. The ensuing controversy grew so heated, and came to engulf the passions of the Church’s political parties so voraciously, that the synodical center of the Church of England, its

“Convocation”, was simply dissolved – “prorogued” – indefinitely; indeed, it failed to meet for almost another 150 years.

The practical result of this studious avoidance of decision-making was that religious pluralism become ensconced as the “new fact” of British society by the 1720’s, its legally protected status, of course, requiring another century to work itself out. And in line with Locke’s own explicit theological vision, the center of gravity for understanding Christianity began to shift from communal conformity into the realm of “private” belief, the standard of which was, to use the technical phrase of the day (and so pilloried by someone like William Law) “sincerity of conscience”.

Amid the growing and increasingly recognized market place of religious choices, the individual’s religious identity demanded new criteria, beyond the authority of hierarchy and nation, indeed beyond even the imprimatur simply of Protestant claims to Scriptural origins, by which to judge the internal commitments by which religious values were now seen to be determined. These criteria fell within the category of what today we would call “authenticity” of Christian character, and what in the 18th-century were qualified as “marks of genuineness”.

It is here that I would like to disengage some of the peculiar elements that pressed Anglicanism and what became Methodism in different directions: how do we know and judge what is “genuine” Christianity, or a “genuine Christian”? Without going into details, let me simply say that the search for the “authentic” in the face of religious privatization had for some time – indeed as a recurrent dynamic within the Church’s history but with a special purpose since the Reformation – followed the logic of “primitivism”: that which could be tied most closely to the apostolic and early church was to be most valued. In the debate among competing sects in the 16th-century, this form of argument had gained a new edge with the evolution of historical

research, and by the mid-17th-century in England it had triumphed as the standard form of documentary science. Now thrown to the individual, the quest for the “original” Christianity in the 18th-century had become a national passion, for many something almost at one with religious faith itself.

On a broader level, Primitivism came to fuel a variety of what could be called “renewal” movements designed to refocus the lives, not only of individuals in their private decision-making, but in their association with the Church or churches themselves. Chief among these renewal movements were the so-called Religious Societies that began to spring up around London and elsewhere in the country beginning in the late 1600’s. I want to turn our attention here in particular to the useful contrasts that emerge in this context between conforming Anglicanism and the nascent Methodist movement. My comments are general and hardly novel; but because so much attention has been paid to Wesley’s adaptation of the Religious Society, Anglicans have tended to ignore the illuminative value for their own tradition of the original structures that Wesley, as it were, inherited and transformed.⁹

The form of the Religious Society was that of a weekly gathering of parish laymen for the purpose of prayer and mutual edification. Its origin is usually associated with Anthony Horneck, a German émigré to England who became an Anglican minister and who, in 1678, organized such a group in London for which he wrote a set of “Rules” that became fundamental to the many societies that later spread through the Church. The religious motive behind these societies was explicated by Horneck in a number of sermons and books, including a work

⁹ The literature on the Religious Societies has grown over the years. For an overview, see *The Church of England c.1689-c.1833* (eds. J. Walsh, C. Haydon, S. Taylor, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), esp. the c. 5 (“The Church, the societies and the moral revolution of 1688” by John Spurr) and c. 7 (“The origins and ideals of the SPCK 1699-1716”, by Craig Rose).

entitled “The Happy Ascetick” (1681)¹⁰. Horneck conceived of his small groups as the seed or leaven of witness by which the larger Church and world would be converted to a deeper Christian discipleship. This hope was, in turn, based on his reading of the conversionary history of the early Church (particularly through the eyes of the highly popular primitivist historian William Cave). As Horneck explained, the Roman Empire was converted through the testimony of small societies of “holiness” -- the early Christians that is -- whose pneumatic existence exhibited the embodied form of the Crucified Jesus in the pagan culture’s midst.

However much Horneck’s Lutheran background may have influenced his stress upon the Cross, his theological outlook apparently hit upon an Anglican enthusiasm (if there is such a thing), for not only did his societies proliferate but the shape of their life, as Horneck described it, followed a pattern bound to appeal to the established church.¹¹ While the overall criterion of membership was an individual “resolution” to pursue “a holy and serious life” (Rule 1), the way this was to be enacted was decidedly familiar: only those “confirmed by a bishop” could be members; only ordained ministers could lead the group; only prayers from the Prayer Book could be used; only “psalms” could be sung; personal discussions of “practical divinity” or of “spiritual concerns” were neither required nor to be freely pursued except with the direction of the minister; and a large part of the society’s efforts involved the regular collection of dues and contributions to be used for preaching missions and almsgiving among “the poor”. Finally, Horneck appended a set of “special” rules, which included the relational elements of the Sermon on the Mount, the discipline of self-examination, daily prayer, obedience, and commitment to the

¹⁰ *The Happy Ascetick: or, The Best Exercise, To which is added a Letter to a Person of Quality, Concerning the Holy Lives of the Primitive Christians* (London: Henry Mortlock, 1681).

¹¹ Horneck’s “Rules” were published as a Preface to his *Several Sermons upon the Fifth of St. Matthew; Being Part of Christ’s Sermon on the Mount*, 2 vols. (London, 1717), pp. viiiiff.. They are reproduced in David Lowes Watson, *The Early Methodist Class Meeting: It’s Origin and Significance* (Nahsville: Discipleship Resources, 1987), pp. 188f..

Church of England (Rule 17) – all things that, in his other writings, Horneck associates with the apostolic imitation of Christ’s own life.

It should be said that subsequent societies, whose origins were quite independent of Horneck’s personal legacy, tended to cohere in vision with this general outlook: that is, they all exhibited an intentional renewal of “primitive apostolic” holiness of life that was tied to the “form” of the crucified Christ in such a way that its manifestation might work for the “world”’s conversion; further this renewal’s formative vehicle proved to be the instruments of the established church itself, in whose patterns of relationship “holiness” would be embodied. Finally, I would note that while the explicit theological rationale disappeared, many of the practical forms of this “society” devotion entered into the mainstream of Anglican evangelical spirituality, in part through the 19th-century evolution of the Religious Society itself into the missionary movement of the Church of England through organs like the Church Missionary Society (CMS). (I point this out because even Anglican evangelicalism moved in a direction somewhat different from the original branching out of the Religious Society Movement that marked the birth of Methodism.)

While I have no expertise to comment very accurately on this matter, it is worth simply contrasting Horneck’s vision with Wesley’s more mature use of the Classes and Bands. One way to state this contrast is to describe Horneck’s societies as a kind of communally *formative* primitivism, while Wesley increasingly saw his societies more explicitly as the instruments of *conversionary* primitivism. And in this sense Wesley’s instincts were far more in tune with the religious thrust of evolving pluralism, for he tied primitive holiness more to the individual’s conscience than to the individual’s community, and saw the latter more as a vehicle for this conversion and transformation than as the object of the holy, and even less (in the Puritan sense)

as an *ecclesiolum* of the holy. Not that the formative character of the religious society was not somehow basic for Wesley as for his contemporaries. But because Wesley’s understanding of “Genuine Christianity”, with its emphasis upon the experiential contours of justification and sanctification, found its articulation as an internal phenomenon, the communal character of the society was identified less by its ostensive practices – common prayer, study, discussion, almsgiving, and relational accountability – than by the *nota* of its conversionary functions: preaching that leads to justification, commitment, and the effectiveness of individual encouragement and growth. “Authentic” Christianity, as Wesley described it, found its demonstration in the internal legitimation of the era’s critical religious categories: the “assurance” felt by a “sincere conscience”.¹²

The formal “standards” for this genuineness, as Wesley saw it, were of course Scriptural, just as with all the religious societies; indeed, they were soon explicitly “Wesleyan” as well (a development whose logic I would like to hear about). But my purpose now is to bring into view the “ethos”, and not the bare standards themselves. For as the religious societies went, so arguably went the churches that finally embraced them. While the Classes and Bands of Methodism finally moved in the unambiguous direction of conversionary devotion and the ecclesial structures that facilitated this, Renewal Primitivism that remained within the Church of England eventually fell back firmly upon the standards that the High Church movement had been culling from its documentary mining of the Early Church over many years, that is to say, the particular “forms” of communal life deemed “apostolic”. In William Beveridge’s enumerations (common with many others’), these included the “Apostolic Deposit” of Scripture (and

¹² I have in mind here Wesley’s 1753 “A Plain Account of Genuine Christianity”, reprinted in Albert C. Outler’s (ed.) *John Wesley* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964), pp. 181-196. I should point out that, in our own post-Emersonian American context, Horneck and Wesley will seem to have far more in common than in distinction, given their sense, for instance, of the essential Christian need for a regulated and formative “society” at all.

enshrined in the Book of Common Prayer and in the Articles of Religion); the “fellowship” or “communion” of established ecclesial life; the Lord’s Supper as the “highest act of religion”; and finally regular corporate public prayer according to the BCP.¹³

And while it is true that the “conversionary” ethos of the Methodists initially had a far greater missionary success than the “conforming” religious societies, “formative primitivism” had its own outward impetus, enacted by the missionary societies like the S.P.G., which sought to “propagate the Gospel” precisely by multiplying and supporting the formal and apostolically “genuine” standards articulated by people like Beveridge.

The crucial elements of distinction were not, in the end, missionary desire in any case, but the location of apostolic authenticity: for conforming Anglicans it lay in the usage of the Prayer Book and in the dynamics of that “fellowship” or “communion” that lived within the Prayerbook’s molding parameters. In the eyes of 18th-century Anglican theorists, the Prayerbook’s framework -- and its effective imposition on society was part of its own character -- in itself worked the gears of apostolic formation, and the society of the larger Church acted as the very arena wherein “holy living” was necessarily embodied through the virtues and crucible demanded by the very process of “conformity”.

Finally, if this sketch of the matter is accurate, it seems to cohere with a consistent Anglican “ethos” that stretches from the 16th century through much of the 20th century. It is this ethos that defines the “organs of obedience” and that thereby points to the character of authoritative witness and ministry that I would argue has marked the Episcopal Church, until recently anyway. And so let me now attempt to define it more broadly.

¹³ Cf. his sermon (102) on “The Exemplary Holiness of the Primitive Christians”, found in his *Theological Works* (Oxford: John Henry Parker, 1844), vol. 4, pp. 441ff.. Cf. Robert D. Cornwall, “The Search for the Primitive Church: The Use of Early Church Fathers in the High Church Anglican Tradition, 1680-1745”, in *Anglican and Episcopal History* (59:3, September 1990), pp. 303-329.

3. *Cranmer’s founding ethos of Formative Scripturalism*

If we turn to what is widely acknowledged to be one of the main pillars of the Anglican ethos, the Book of Common Prayer, we find that its theological rationale as articulated by Cranmer was fundamentally explicated in terms of the corporate formative powers so clearly presupposed still by the 18th-century renewal groups of the Religious Societies. Cranmer, however, describes that power in a particular and important way as the force of specifically *Scriptural* immersion by a people. Indeed, this represents the 16th-century value of the “primitive”, if you will, in contrast to the more institutional elements identified by 17th- and 18th-century Anglican divines. Nonetheless, we can see the continuity of interest here.

Right at the opening of the 1549 BCP’s Preface, Cranmer seeks to display the Scriptural basis and goal of his revision in the practice of the early church: “the common prayers in the Church”, he writes, have their “firste originall and ground”, as far as their purpose is concerned, displayed in the practice of the “auncient fathers”. It was they, Cranmer goes on to explain, who first “so ordered the matter that all the whole Bible (or the greatest parte thereof) should be read over once in the year”, by both clergy and people. Indeed, throughout the Preface and the essay “Of Ceremonies”, the “auncient fathers”, the “olde fathers”, and “antyquitye” are used as groundings for the specifically Scriptural (not doctrinal) revisions the new Prayer Book attempts.

This appeal to *antiquity*, stated so forthrightly by Cranmer, was not, however a simple desire to “return to the sources” in the way that that later primitivists, and certainly that modern liturgical scholars have sought to govern their researches. The authority of “antiquity”, for Cranmer, in fact lay elsewhere. He appeals to the “olde fathers”, not for liturgical forms or even for doctrinal substance within the liturgy, but only because the early Church (in Cranmer's mind)

offers a faithful model of Scriptural exposition within the "divine service" of clergy and people. We could call the authority of antiquity in this case a matter of "pragmatic exemplarism", the historically proven virtue of Scriptural conformance. This is a far cry from "antiquarianism", because Cranmer was not actually interested in the forms of public prayer from the early Church. Nor does he appeal to the past, liturgically, as to a theological "tradition" which bears the weight of authority because of some intrinsic continuity it holds with apostolic truth. If the past deserved to be followed, it was only because the past had read the Scriptures, presented them in whole to the people, and practiced their formative powers in an ordered and effective manner. If Anglicanism has a take on "sanctity", it lies in this discernment of formal historical providence.

Such an authority is hardly insignificant for Cranmer. The fact that Scriptural prayer has actually been enacted in the past is a gift from God to be seized in the present, and utilized through the continuous submission of the church to its best achievements. Thus, *antiquity* exercises authority in liturgical matters through the church's present willingness to engage its continuous forms of faithfulness. (This view is articulated formally in Article 34 of the later Thirty-Nine Articles of Religion, "Of the Traditions of the Church", one of the most useful summaries of a classic Anglican view of the relationship between Scripture and Tradition.) What Cranmer calls *order* essentially orients the church's common prayer towards the achieved examples of its past, and asserts an intrinsic conservatism in revision from the start. In theory, after all, *any* form of prayer that built up the people of the church in Scriptural knowledge and practice, would be acceptable as a liturgical framework for the Christian Church. In practice, however, the achievement of Scriptural upbuilding made accessible through continued forms of prayer actually demands embrace out of a humble trust in its reiteration.

In "Of Ceremonies" especially, the dependence of "order" on "antiquity's" achieved Scriptural formation is clearly spelled out: one is to revise only those rites that "confounde and darken" the clarity of Scriptural edification; but other than this, one "oughte rather to have reverence" for past ceremonies. Why? For "theyr antyquitye", whose reiteration, in contrast to all "innovacions and newefangelnesse", necessarily promotes "unitie and concorde". Cranmer uses the phrases "decent ordre" or "quyete dyscyplyne" repeatedly throughout these expositions of liturgical revision, and they refer to far more than the virtues and benefits of political submission within a hierarchical society. "Order" allows for the reception of the past's examples; and these examples grant the pragmatic leverage needed to fulfill the church's mandate to build up her people in Scriptural truth.

Informing all of Cranmer's commitment to the elements of scripture, antiquity, and order in liturgical life is the final purpose of "edification", a word whose cognates and semantic relatives run through the Preface and "Of Ceremonies". For some, this has seemed to mark out Cranmer's over-intellectualized Reformation culture, where "right doctrine" was made the key to salvation. Our own modern term "formation", however, gives a better hint at this purpose's meaning for Cranmer, and we can yet better grasp its fuller sense by perceiving the flow of imagery in something like Ephesians 4:12-16. Here we find a concatenation of words like "building up", "growing into", "maturing", "knowing", "believing together", "measure of fulness" all applied to the process by which the Church, through its mutually accountable life together in ministry and teaching, comes to resemble the image of Christ. A glance at Cranmer's homily on Scripture shows how he imbues the reading of Scripture in general with just these effective virtues. (Cf. the wonderful Collect, for Proper 28 in ECUSA's current Prayer Book, for an example of this essentially and salvifically "formative" understanding of Scripture.)

Applied to the liturgical realm of priest and people conjoined, this power of reading and hearing the Word constitutes the central act of "divine service" or "liturgy" for Cranmer, an event whose formative and corporate shape is given in the received ordering of Scripture's public reiteration.

While there is no question, then, that Cranmer’s reformation placed Scripture as the supreme “authority” for the Church, how this Scripture was to be received or heard was peculiar, especially in comparison with other well-known Reformation leaders. Cranmer is adamantly opposed to viewing Scripture primarily as a source of right doctrine, and therefore as the object of human reasoning and interpretation; rather it is to act as the practical “organizer of life” for the whole people, and its meaning is accessible only to the “virtuous” who submit to the corporate demands of the Church’s (and nation’s) “body”. His early “Preface to the Bible”, a defense of the 1540 vernacular translation promoted by Henry VIII, provides in this case a kind of hermeneutic mirror to his later Liturgical explications in the Prayer Book prefaces: the Bible is for “all people” as the sole trustworthy guide for their common “edification” for salvation; it provides for the “complete” ordering of life in “all things”, and Scriptural “abuse” is conversely tied to Scriptural applications that induce “disorder” within the Church and commonwealth; the right understanding of Scripture is given only for and to the formation of “pure morals”, and its distortion is most readily provoked through its subjection to the demands of “speculative reason”. The “purest” imposition of Scriptural “authority”, therefore, is an ordered process whereby the people are exposed to the “whole” Scriptures in a regular and socially interconnected way, such that the Bible’s content saturates their common hearing, and from this, their common life. In Cranmer’s terms, this would mark the fulfillment of the Holy Spirit’s particular vocation within the Church.

Outside these parameters of Scriptural practice, the “reformed” Cranmer exhibited an astonishing looseness of concern with the details of patristic testimony, dogmatic systems, and even the theological bases for ecclesiastical and sacramental forms. The latter – including the vaunted Anglican commitments to episcopacy and a particular shape to the “Holy Communion” – had “authoritative” value for a mixture of reasons (mostly social order and the efficacy of “edifying” exposition and historical experience) that only *indirectly* derived from Scripture. Indeed, Cranmer’s personal subordination of the actual form of the “historic episcopacy” to the needs of social policy is notorious, and when the late 17th-century bishop Gilbert Burnet published (for his own Whig purposes) until then unseen records demonstrating Cranmer’s willingness, under certain circumstances, even to jettison the episcopacy altogether, it caused a sensation.¹⁴

4. *“Scripture-in-Communion” as a conciliar reality: the evolution of the Anglican Communion*

This looseness, however, was not the same as voiding the notion of the “authoritative” itself. Rather, it tended to solidify its center within the corporate practices of the “Scriptural liturgy”, and enhance – “authoritatively”, in a secondary sense -- those elements of common life that supported, regularized, and protected these practices. And while Cranmer himself hardly constitutes the *fons sapientiae* of the Anglican tradition, the framework he bequeathed to the Church of England in fact remained fairly firm, and provided the basis for subsequent theological articulations of “authority” for the Church in just such a way that the 18th-century Religious Societies fell almost imperceptibly within their ordering reach.

¹⁴Cranmer’s remarks, recorded in the course of a royal Commission’s conversations, can be found in the volume of “Records and Original Papers” in Burnet’s *The History of the Reformation of the Church of England* (1714).

What became a rather more pedestrian form of authoritative “standard” or formulary, viz. the Thirty-Nine Articles (whose demanded subscription by Anglican clergy has, around the world, been gradually relaxed or wholly abandoned), was in any case an outworking of this more basic authoritative ethos of “formative scripturalism”. Unlike most other Protestant “confessions”, the Articles adopt a simple and creedal narrative approach to the doctrine of God, ending with an exposition of the “sufficiency” of Scripture for the explication of the “faith”, and then moving on to a short list of controverted dogmatic questions (following a mild, though largely Protestant slant on these matters). The bulk of the remaining articles, however, are devoted to church order and social relations. These reflect a strong Augustinian ecclesiology, especially in their emphasis upon the realities of the *corpus permixtum* of the visible Body of Christ, and of the entailed demand for the virtues of corporate order within this historical object of tension between sin and grace.

To this degree, the Articles stand in complete coherence with the organs of formation and reception that Cranmer had so carefully outlined: a people corporately formed by the whole Scripture, whose doctrinal identity was to be circumscribed by protections against dogmatic interpretation and detail (generally thought to be Roman Catholic vices, and later attached to forms of Puritanism). And the Elizabethan Church which edited the original Articles from Cranmer’s hand did so with a quite deliberate view to founding Cranmer’s formative vision upon theological rationales, like Augustine’s, that explained “antiquity, order, and edification” in terms of the pressures exerted by the call to national evangelical reconciliation within the realm of fallen individual passions. Elizabeth’s Archbishop Whitgift, in particular, provided the

theological tools for this argument in his defences of the Prayer Book and ministerial order of the Church of England against the growing Puritan movement.¹⁵

What came to be called “conformity” in this context was therefore far more than a political program, but a broad theological argument about the nature of the Christian Church’s authoritative witness within a “communion of the Scripturally-molded”, whose contours lay in the practices of a people’s common worship and order rather than in the definitions of an institution’s or an individual’s confession, and in the virtues of a person’s Scripturally-infused social relationships (“duties”) rather than in the dogmatic integrity of a person’s discourse. The paradox to which this later gave rise – that individual conscience is provided latitude precisely in its strict subjection to the boundaries of the ordered corporate hearing (and praying) of Scripture – is one that remains as puzzling to contemporary individualists as it did to 16th and 17th-century dogmatists and to 18th-century pilgrims of the “sincere”.

It has been rightly recognized that this character of authority, as given Scripturally in “communion and conformity,” is a very “catholic” one, both in a Western and Eastern sense, and as opposed to many Protestant approaches. For it sees Scripture’s interpretation as finding its authoritative expression only as it is discerned and articulated within the unity of the Body of Christ, and enabled through the virtues of communion itself. And once this “catholic” element is recognized (as even many contemporary Anglican evangelicals are increasingly willing to admit), some of the contemporary and popularly knotty arguments within Anglicanism itself over the authority of human “tradition” and “reason” are eased. Certainly, the 19th-century Tractarians (like Isaac Williams) who lifted the “three-fold cord” of “Scripture, Tradition, and Reason” to a new level of explanatory power understood Hooker, their primary source here,

¹⁵ I follow the splendid argument of Peter Lake in this. Cf. his *Anglicans and Puritans: Presbyterian and Conformist Thought from Whitgift to Hooker* (London: Unwin Hyman, 1988).

aright when they tied the latter two elements intrinsically to both Scripture’s popular reception and the community within which it is received. “Tradition” in this light is properly understood as the ordered way that Scripture is heard and “reason” is identified with the communal apprehension of the natural law coherent with Scripture.¹⁶

The thorough-going character of this Anglican reliance upon the formative expression of authority as “Scripture-in-Communion”, however, also makes its catholicism distinct from Roman and Eastern traditions precisely in its formal self-limitations. The late 17th- and early 18th-century “High Church” program, for instance, more and more identified ecclesial authority with the marks of the episcopacy, the structures of the Holy Communion, and the explicit contours of the Prayer Book. This identification proved a kind of overstatement of particulars in comparison with the “ethos” of Anglican authority that had, by contrast, generally granted primary weight to the communal virtues which these ecclesial elements *historically* deployed (*de facto* rather than *de jure divino*) for the sake both of fulfilling the formative power of Scripture and also embodying its truths in its true object (the Body of Christ). Notions of “primitive” authority like Beveridge’s, then, could reasonably be viewed – and many later Evangelicals did so view them – as a deforming exaggeration.¹⁷

Of all the treatments of this matter, I would commend the 17th-century theologian Herbert Thorndike’s nuanced understanding of the Church as probably constituting the furthest one can

¹⁶ Williams, in his discussion of the “providential” character of the BCP in *Tract 86*, actually replaces “reason” in this triad with “the Sacraments”, a revealing move that implicitly ties forms of prayer with a collective wisdom, whose “nature” is divinely governed by providence. The 1981 “Elucidation” of the Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission’s Report on Authority tries valiantly (par. 2) to express this essential and hierarchical connection between Scripture and Tradition and Reason, constrained (oddly enough) by its inability to draw clearly the historical implications of its own *koinonia* ecclesiology for Scriptural authority.

¹⁷ Although the dictum of the 17th-century Anglican apologist Chillingworth, to the effect that “the Bible and the Bible alone is the religion of Protestants” evoked the Tractarians’ ire, its application to Anglicanism is credible if it is understood within the context of the “formative communion” whose stable “catholic” structures are in fact demanded by Scripture’s purpose. Anglo-Catholic hostility towards liberal Protestantism was so great, however, that they latched onto the distortions of High Church primitivism without properly grasping the deeper Scriptural sources of its initial impetus.

and ought to push the “catholic” character of Anglican authority.¹⁸ Thorndike’s creative work as a pre-Restoration High Church Royalist proved, more than any other Anglican thinker’s, the most profound detailer of the commitments already laid in Cranmer’s era that viewed the Church as the historically effective (and historically accountable and responsible) *culture* of Scriptural formation. His masterful exposition of the nature of Christian authority within the reality of human history, wrung from the personal tragedy of Civil War and ecclesial self-destruction, was governed by a sensitivity to the weight of social history’s providential demands upon the Christian vocation. This acuity with regard to historical constraint, which included a sophisticated account of the cultural character of religious knowledge, is what, in turn, allowed him both to maintain the validation of “traditional forms” even while acknowledging their secondary status as servants to the Word’s destiny to give birth to and mature a “new people” in Christ Jesus.

It is not surprising that Thorndike proved the primary exponent of the so-called Vincentian Canon as the authoritative template of ecclesial self-exposition. This summary of the parameters for the Church’s discriminating test in controverted matters – *quod ubique, quod semper, quod ab omnibus creditum est* (“what has been believed everywhere, always, and by all”)¹⁹ – was more expressive than constructive of a number of Anglican attitudes towards the authoritative constraints upon Scripture’s interpretative rule. It included appeals to the “Primitive” Church of the Fathers (later expressly of the “first four centuries”), the “apostolic deposit” of the “undivided Church”, the respect due to what was coherent with and sustaining of these elements including later Western standards of orthodox Scriptural and doctrinal exposition

¹⁸ The key text is Book I of Part I of his *Epilogue to the Tragedy of the Church of England* (1659), reprinted in Vol. 2 of Thorndike’s *Theological Works* (Oxford: John Henry Parker, 1845). Long consigned to the limited lineage of Tractarian forbears, Thorndike has emerged more recently as a great synthesizer of Anglican theological concerns, on a par with Hooker and even his better in terms of systematic clarity and theoretical creativity.

¹⁹ Defined by Vincent of Lérins in his *Commonitorium*, II.3.

and liturgical practice, and finally the appeal to the corporate articulations of these various elements in historic ecclesial and catholic council. While Thorndike himself provided a sophisticated set of arguments for drawing together these already embedded Anglican sentiments under the Vincentian Canon’s ordering, he never claimed to be suggesting some new framework of authority, only to be identifying a healthy way of “being the Christian Church” that was already established in the Church’s historical nature. Later Tractarian theologians brought into relief the various elements noted above in explicit ways, and it could be argued that something like the famous “Chicago-Lambeth Quadrilateral” is itself but an ecumenically-oriented tool for articulating Thorndike’s basic point.

I mention Thorndike, furthermore, less because of his influence (which was slight) as because of the explanatory force of his ecclesiology for experienced Anglicanism, particularly as it took form in a context independent of the particular struggles of England, viz. the American colonies and the nascent United States. The odd theological amalgam that characterized the self-understanding of 18th-century Episcopalians²⁰ is matched only by the ease with which the founding conventions of the Episcopal Church could move from jettisoning creedal articles (and whole creeds themselves!) to restoring their full canonical force in ways that were to enhance their popular authority in comparison with the past.²¹ The pragmatic demand was strong, of course, that the young Church accede to the strictures of England’s hierarchy on these matters if it were to receive permission to have its own bishops’ consecrated in Britain. But there was

²⁰ Cf. the recommended 1804 “reading list” and “library” for ordinands and clergy, which includes a pot-pourri of Restoration High Church writers, Revolutionary Latitudinarians, Patristic scholars and historians, Primitivists (of all stripes), Hutchinsonians, Protestant biblical commentators, and rationalists.

²¹ The shape of the *Proposed Book of Common Prayer*, an emended version of 1662 English book edited by William White and William Smith, included the excision of the Athanasian and Nicene Creeds (for both moral and doctrinal reasons), the removal from the Apostles’ Creed of the article on Christ’s Descent into Hell, reference to baptism as “regeneration” and to ministers as “priests”. All of these were restored *in toto* (except that Athanasian Creed) along with some new language regarding ordination vows, upon the objections of Canterbury (not to mention the clamorings of many American Anglicans).

more to the topsy-turvy swings back to “uniformity in Doctrine and Discipline” with the Church of England than the savvy politics of Latitudinarianism.

For what finally asserted itself through all the machinations of denominational self-construction in North America was the underlying drive to “conformity”, in the Anglican sense, that finally came to rest upon the undergirding character and shape of the Prayer Book’s “scriptural worship”. The rationalist master formulator and politician of the Episcopal Church’s origins William White (later a bishop from Philadelphia) was at first no great proponent of doctrinal standards nor of subservience to British ecclesial attitudes (though he later worked hard to reestablish a revised form of the Thirty-Nine Articles for PECUSA²²). Nonetheless, his framing descriptions of Anglican Christianity in America were given in decidedly “conformist” tones: a church defined by the “ancient habits” and “stated ordinances” that render a church closest to the “form of the religion of the Scriptures”.²³ It was an explanatory vessel into whose hold the practices of the Prayer Book naturally fell, and the doctrinally minimalist face of corporate Scriptural formation was smoothly assumed by the life of the newly birthed Anglican “communion”.

The reality of this “communion” character, already intrinsic to the Church of England’s identification with Scripture’s social formation through conforming worship, took on a concrete political relief: the new Anglican church in America owed its being to and maintained its integrity through its dependence upon corporate accord with the British church, its hierarchy, and the forms of its communal prayer. What was to become the official ground to the “Anglican

²² The Articles were indeed restored to the Prayer Book in 1801, edited with an eye mainly to the changed civil structures of America; their subscription, however, was never made mandatory by canon.

²³ From the opening Preface and closing chapter of *The case of the Episcopal Churches in the United States Considered* (1782), reprinted in Robert W. Prichard (ed.), *Readings from the History of the Episcopal Church* (Wilton[CT]: Morehouse-Barlow....), pp. 61 and 79.

Communion” that the Lambeth Conferences would enunciate in the later 19th- and earlier 20th-centuries, was therefore actually enacted before the fact in the mechanisms by which the Episcopal Church was founded – adherence in “uniformity” to England’s “Doctrine and Discipline”, bound by a cohesive episcopate, embodied in a set form of “common prayer”, and open to national variation in matters “inessential” and non-“contradicting” of the “Word of God”, in accordance with the demands of local “civil constitutions”.²⁴

In a way that far exceeded the Church of England’s own self-norming, ECUSA thereby adopted a “conciliar” approach to its self-formation, not merely through the structures of its representative “convention”, but more fundamentally through its accepted limitation by “counsel” (and even permission) with another national church. As a result, no set of “formularies” in themselves, apart from Scripture, could hold legal explanatory force for the faith of ECUSA, and that Scripture’s authority came to bear only in coherence with the common practices and counsel of some “larger” Church.²⁵ The Church of England can rely upon a canonically established pattern of appeal to certain doctrinal authorities²⁶, and the British and American Methodists have even more explicit standards which, among other things, tie Scriptural interpretation directly to Wesley’s own commentary. ECUSA’s only “legal” explicated parameters are found in the “Preamble” to its Constitution and focus, by contrast, less on documented standards, than on the church’s “constituent” membership in the larger Church,

²⁴ These matters, contained in Acts, Resolutions, and convention correspondence with the Archbishop of Canterbury, are detailed in the *Journals* of the first Conventions (ed. William Stevens Perry [Claremont, NH, 1874]).

²⁵ Leaving aside the presenting issue of blessing same-sex unions, the recent “Open Opinion on the Authority of General Convention”, written by C. Seitz, P. Turner, R. R. Reno, and P. Zahl, convincingly outlines the nature of the “conciliar economy” that the Episcopal Church adopted through both the process of its formative establishment and the open-endedness of its adjudicating responsibilities within the larger Church. The paper can be accessed on the internet at www.seadinternational.com.

²⁶ Cf. the Anglican-Methodist Covenant, paragraphs 104f.. Even here, however, the canons refer to Creeds and “councils” and the “teaching of the Fathers” only insofar as they “agreeable to the Scriptures”, a traditionally loose order of appeal. The “formularies” of the Prayer Book and Ordinal, however, are explicitly noted.

both “one, holy, apostolic, and catholic” and defined by the “communion” of other Anglican churches.

The search for documented definitions of these standards, however, has stymied many. The only reference to the “Book of Common Prayer” in this constitutional context is apparently to a generic version ideally shared within the Communion itself, and only insofar as it enunciates something called the “historic Faith and Order”. The “vows” of the ordained in ECUSA require a written affirmation that Scripture is to be identified with “the Word of God”, that it “contains all things necessary for salvation”, and that the ordinand will “conform to the doctrine, discipline, and worship of the Episcopal Church”. What exactly explicates these elements is left unclear, especially when (as in the case of the consecration of bishops) the “guarding of the faith, unity, and discipline of the Church” is something stated in a context in which “the Church” itself seems to be equated with an entity “throughout the world” whose “heritage” far exceeds ECUSA’s own canonical structures.²⁷

It is also sociologically odd that, within the self-conscious denominational pluralism of America, ECUSA did not respond to the normal pressures of sectarian exactitude by clarifying its internal standards, but continued instead to exist within a system whose coherence still presupposed the corporate force of normative “conformity” tied to the culture of an alien politics. Furthermore, as the Anglican Communion has evolved, numerically exploding in membership after the middle of the 20th century, Anglican self-identity has drifted in this same direction as ECUSA’s foundational conciliarism. As the Lambeth Conferences progressively outlined the basis for admission to the Communion, the standards of the formularies were gradually allowed to fall away as necessary conditions (already, the Articles were dropped at Lambeth 1888),

²⁷ See the 1979 BCP, pp. 513 and 517f..

leaving in their place something like ECUSA’s dependence upon “Prayer Book” testimony to “historic faith and order”, which is practically embodied and adjudicated in episcopal conciliarism (the latter of which was formally articulated finally at Lambeth 1988).

From one perspective one can see this evolution as part of the consistent Anglican refusal to erect as legislatively normative anything beyond a formative Scripturalism whose framework remains grounded in the somewhat fluid reality of conciliar consensus, still embodied primarily in episcopal collegiality. And to this degree, the Communion’s own life can be understood as a continued (if often unintentional) groping after something like Thorndike’s Vincentian Canon. But from another perspective, there is a growing awareness that perhaps the present circumstances of both local and global social fragmentation cannot support either the time or even the theological presuppositions required for this groping. Confusion over Prayer Book revision within various national churches, widening disagreements over the place and even value of normative Scriptural applications among and within various national churches, and the political dynamics that are more and more pitting local and wider conciliar accountabilities against each other are all rendering the very practice of formative corporate Scripturalism something pragmatically and conceptually incoherent for many Anglicans.

Anglican ecumenical discussions, then, take place within an arena of dispute over authority itself – between a historically tethered apprehension of the conciliar authority of “scripture-in-communion”, on the one hand, and the increased contemporary reliance upon various juridical authorities on the other. This latter reliance is perhaps reactive to a sense of despair over the decreased effectiveness of the former. I believe that any ecumenical agreement must be seen in terms of choices made regarding these two perspectives, and they will take the form of commitments to their practical outcomes. Both the theological explorations and

rationales, but also the structural proposals of such agreements will necessarily represent potentially divergent movements in relation to Anglicanism’s future. To this extent our conversations now represent not some mere expression of “who we are”, but will demand a resolution of that reality posed as an interrogative: who shall we become?

Understandings of Ecclesiology
in United Methodism
Russell E. Richey
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United Methodism defines itself and exhibits its ecclesial sensibilities with four books. Two of these, the Bible and Hymnal, one finds in the pew and in the homes of the Methodist faithful. The other two, The Book of Discipline and The Book of Worship, one finds in the studies of ministers or in church libraries.¹ Each characterizes or shapes the church, albeit in a distinct way. All are important. Each works for and works itself into the drama of the church's daily life. The Discipline and Book of Worship function off stage, so to speak, but determine how the play unfolds, who acts, and what instructions to follow. Bible and Hymnbook script Methodist life together. The latter provides rituals from birth to death, scripts Sunday morning, structures the weekly praise of God, specifies the Psalms to read and the hymns to sing. The former--studied downstairs by all ages in Sunday school, now frequently read upstairs and fulsomely in accordance with the uniform lections--scripts life lived in Christ. The four books, Scripture, hymnbook, discipline, and book of worship, define how United Methodists do church.²

¹. The full titles are The Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church, 2000 (Nashville: The United Methodist Publishing House, 2000); The United Methodist Book of Worship (Nashville: The United Methodist Publishing House, 1992) and The United Methodist Hymnal (Nashville: The United Methodist Publishing House, 1989). The first is revised and a new version published after each General Conference, typically quadrennially.

². For an effort to set out standards of United Methodist doctrine by their official level of authority, see Scott J. Jones, United Methodist Doctrine: The Extreme Center (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2002), 43-56. Jones distinguishes ten texts that fall into three levels. First are the constitutional standards, which include items embraced in the Discipline (Constitution, Articles, Confession and General Rules) plus infrequently used but official standards, Wesley's "Standard Sermons" and Explanatory Notes Upon the New Testament. At a second level he

Wesley's Transmittal

Each of these books John Wesley conveyed to the little North American Methodist movement and conveyed at the point of the movement's becoming church. His "Large Minutes," the governing instrument of the British movement, constituted the basis of the first Discipline.³ Compiled out of the decisions of the "governing" conferences of Wesley with his preachers, the "Large Minutes" and the American versions thereof, the Discipline, provided quasi-constitution for the reformist Methodist movement, specified its distinctive practices and gatherings, and outlined its ministerial tasks and duties. Appended to the Discipline (in its first, 1785 edition) were A Collection of Psalms and Hymns for the Lord's Day.⁴ A Pocket Hymnbook appeared the next year, one in a long series of hymn books for the Methodist people. The Wesleys had selected verse from Charles and structured and organized the collection to guide the faithful in the way of salvation.⁵ It would function for Methodists as the Book of Common Prayer (BCP) would for Anglicans, as lens on Scripture and guide to the Christian life. It began with hymns

places contemporary statements, namely other parts of the Discipline and the wonderful but rarely used Book of Resolutions. At the third level he locates Hymnal and Book of Worship which he terms liturgy. In his formulations, he recognizes the degrees of authority represented but draws on all three levels. For a simpler schema, compare Ted A. Campbell, Methodist Doctrine: The Essentials (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1999), "Appendix 2," 116-22. See also Thomas C. Oden, Doctrinal Standards in the Wesleyan Tradition (Grand Rapids: Francis Asbury Press of Zondervan Publishing House, 1988). The discussion that follows addresses the issues they raise.

³. Minutes of Several Conversations Between the Rev. Thomas Coke, LL. D., the Rev. Francis Asbury and others, at a Conference, Begun in Baltimore, in the State of Maryland, on Monday, the 27th of December, in the Year 1784 (Philadelphia: Charles Cist, 1785). For the text of the first Discipline in parallel columns with the ■Large Minutes■ see Jno. J. Tigert, A Constitutional History of American Episcopal Methodism, 3^d. ed. (Nashville: Publishing House of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, 1908), 532-602.

⁴. See Carlton R. Young, Companion to The United Methodist Hymnal (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1993), 94-95.

⁵. See The Works of John Wesley, 7, A Collection of Hymns for the use of the People called Methodists, ed. Franz Hildebrandt and Oliver A. Beckerlegge, with the assistance of James Dale (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1983).

entreating the sinner to turn to God, followed by several sections posing the consequences of one's action, either with God in heaven or in death and hell. A second part contrasted formal and inward religion. In a third part, the Wesleys located hymns evocative of repentance, conviction, conversion and perseverance. Part four, the longest with ten sections, exhibited 261 hymns for Christians struggling towards perfection. The final part featured hymns for Methodist societies and classes.

The BCP was dear to the Wesleys and John had edited and digested it into the Sunday Service of the Methodists in North America. Despite the latter's apparently restrictive title, it provided a full set of rituals--morning prayer, evening prayer, weekday litany, Sunday service, eucharist, two baptismal rites, marriage, and orders for communion of the sick, burial and ordination services for deacons, elders and superintendents. It also included a brief lectionary and twenty-four Articles of Religion, excerpted from Anglicanism's Thirty-Nine.⁶

A letter from Wesley conveyed these documents and authorized the establishment of the new church. Addressed to the two bishop-(superintendent-)-designees and their brethren, "To Dr. COKE, Mr. ASBURY, and our Brethren in *NORTH AMERICA*," it instructed the young church: "They are now at full liberty, simply to follow the Scriptures and the Primitive Church."⁷ The injunction to follow Scripture was hardly needed but it did effectively found the new church with the fourth book.

With Scripture, hymnbook, discipline, and book of worship, Wesley made provision for the movement that would call itself the Methodist Episcopal Church. By reference, inclusion,

⁶. John Wesley's Sunday Service of the Methodists in North America, with an introduction by James F. White (Nashville: Quarterly Review, 1984).

⁷. Russell E. Richey, Kenneth E. Rowe and Jean Miller Schmidt, The Methodist Experience in America: A Sourcebook, II (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2000), 1784a, 72. Hereinafter this volume is abbreviated MEA.

and allusion these books pointed to other standards, Articles of Religion (adapted from the Thirty-Nine), Wesley's Sermons, his Notes on the New Testament, and the General Rules, a set of injunctions for the ethical life, largely echoed in the Discipline. These standards also figured (and figure) in the definition of Methodism and of the Methodist way of life, but they tended to be less the day-to-day, week-to-week, traveling companions for Methodists in their pilgrim's progress. Scripture, hymnbook, discipline, and book of worship were made to travel.

The Books and their Ecclesial Import

Two points about these books and their ecclesiological import should be registered. First, there is a rough correspondence between the four and the putative Wesleyan quadrilateral-- Scripture, experience, reason and tradition.⁸ We might rightly connect each of the books with all parts of the quadrilateral. But each book had, as well, a special force with respect to one of these Methodist epistemological impulses. Second, the four pulled early American Methodism in ecclesially different directions, one might say, in one of two opposing ecclesiological directions. Each book, its primary quadrilateral association, and its early ecclesial significance deserve remark.

8

. See Ted A. Campbell, "The 'Wesleyan Quadrilateral': The Story of a Modern Methodist Myth," and Albert C. Outler, "The Wesleyan Quadrilateral--In John Wesley," in Thomas A. Langford, ed., Doctrine and Theology in The United Methodist Church (Nashville: Kingswood Books/Abingdon Press, 1991), 154-61 and 75-88; W. Stephen Gunter et al., Wesley and the Quadrilateral: Renewing the Conversation (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1997); Scott J. Jones, John Wesley's Conception and Use of Scripture (Nashville: Kingswood Books/Abingdon, 1995); Scott J. Jones, United Methodist Doctrine: The Extreme Center; and Walter Klaiber and Manfred Marquardt, Living Grace: An Outline of United Methodist Theology, translated and adapted by J. Steven O'Malley and Ulrike R. M. Guthrie (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2001), 17-92.

The hymnal normed **experience**, providing poetic scripts for the Methodists to follow towards perfection. The Discipline, and the various authoritative texts which it included or referenced, gathered Methodist experience and belief, individual and collective, into **reasoned** order. These two books, one for the believer's purse, the other for the preacher's saddle bag, pulled inward and towards a Wesleyan identity. They provided Methodists a Wesleyan grammar for the Christian life, a Wesleyan missional ecclesiology.⁹ The 1787 Discipline made that missional ecclesial assertion explicitly, in defining Methodist purpose:

Of the Rise of Methodism (so called) in Europe and America.

Quest. 1. What was the Rise of Methodism, so called, in Europe?

Answ. In 1729, two young Men, reading the Bible, saw they could not be saved without Holiness, followed after it, and incited others so to do. In 1737, they saw likewise, that Men are justified before they are sanctified: but still Holiness was their Object. God then thrust them out, to raise an holy People.

...

Quest. 3. What may we reasonably believe to be God's Design, in raising up the Preachers called Methodists?

Answ. To reform the Continent, and spread scripture Holiness over these Lands. As a Proof hereof, we have seen in the Course of fifteen Years a great a glorious Work of God, from New-York through the Jersies, Pennsylvania, Maryland, Virginia, North and South Carolina, even to Georgia.¹⁰

"To reform the continent and spread scripture holiness over these lands" refined John Wesley's purposive formulation for the American context. This mantra, despite its inward pull, did not

⁹. For an overview of Wesley's theology and theological development accenting its missional and salvific character, see Kenneth J. Collins, John Wesley: A Theological Journal (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2003).

¹⁰. Form of Discipline, for the Ministers, Preachers, and Members of the Methodist Episcopal Church in America (New York: W. Ross, 1787), 3. Compare the earlier (1784) formulation, lacking the second assertion, actually lacking points (2) and (3) of Methodist purpose, in the first Discipline, in Tigert, Constitutional History, 535.

yield a sectarian spirit--though such claims have occasionally been made--but instead an evangelical or missionary denominationalism. No sectarians, Methodists did not withdraw from a sinful world but sought to transform it. They would transform it revivalistically, by bringing in the sheaves and in witness against sins, individual and social. And what would they transform? Note their ambitions, hardly those of a sect but instead quite impressive territorial or geographical ambitions, indicated above in the church's commitment to reform the entire continent. They began, moreover, with a passion to take on what has been the most intractable American dilemma, that of race. They began with a commitment to African Americans and their freedom.¹¹

Methodists undertook such transformative endeavor with Wesley's machines--the class-quarterly meeting-conference structure; exacting disciplines for both members and preachers; an elaborate schema of local and itinerant ministries; and Wesley-like superintendents with powers to appoint preachers to circuits or stations.¹² These practices, sung about in Wesleyan verse and performed in the directives of the Discipline, implicitly carried an ecclesiology, a missionary conception of the church. But as practices, as practical or experimental divinity, Methodism's

¹¹. On early Methodism's antislavery witness and the retreat therefrom, see A. Gregory Schneider, The Way of the Cross Leads Home: The Domestication of American Methodism (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1993); Christine Leigh Heyrman, Southern Cross: The Beginnings of the Bible Belt (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1997); John H. Wigger, Taking Heaven by Storm: Methodism and the Rise of Popular Christianity in America (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998); Cynthia Lynn Lyerly, Methodism and the Southern Mind, 1770-1810 (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998); Dee E. Andrews, Religion and the Revolution: The Rise of the Methodists in the Greater Middle Atlantic, 1760-1800 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999); Donald G. Mathews, Religion in the Old South (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1977); H. Shelton Smith, In His Image, But . . . : Racism in Southern Religion, 1780-1910 (Durham: Duke University Press, 1972); and my Early American Methodism (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1991).

¹². One gets a nice overview of the Methodist missionary system through the day-to-day activities, the scenes described, and the instructions of its itinerant apostle and chief bishop. See The Journal and Letters of Francis Asbury, ed. Elmer T. Clark, 3 vols. (London and Nashville: Epworth Press & Abingdon Press, 1958). For a recent review of Asbury at the center of Methodism's missionary system, see Darius L. Salter, America's Bishop: The Life of Francis Asbury (Nappanee, IN: Francis Asbury Press of Evangel Publishing House, 2003).

gatherings, rituals, offices and strategies did not yield very clear and concise theory.¹³

Methodists became better at doing church than articulating an ecclesiology.

If hymnbook and Discipline produced an implicit expansive missional denominationalism, Bible (**Scripture**) and Sunday Service (**tradition**) claimed Wesley's Anglican heritage and proclaimed Methodism's catholic identity. They pulled outward. Although early Methodists may have been insecure in and frequently unclear about this ecumenical identity, it was there. It was there by received tradition. The Sunday Service provided Methodists with the rights and rites for their middle name. Affirming its dependence on the BCP, Wesley asserted in the preface to the Sunday Service:

I believe there is no LITURGY in the World, either in ancient or modern language, which breathes more of a solid scriptural, rational Piety, than the COMMONPRAYER of the CHURCH of ENGLAND. .

Wesley conceded that he had shortened the Supper, omitted a few sentences from Baptism and Burial, and dropped some holy days and psalms.¹⁴ But far more impressive than the abridgements and omissions was Wesley's preservation of the substance and structure of the BCP.¹⁵

¹³. On this dimension to Wesleyan theology, see Robert E. Cushman, John Wesley's Experimental Divinity: Studies in Methodist Doctrinal Standards (Nashville: Kingswood Books/Abingdon, 1989); Thomas A. Langford, Practical Divinity: Theology in the Wesleyan Tradition (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1983); Scott J. Jones, United Methodist Doctrine: The Extreme Center (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2002), pp. 61, 71-77, 241-97); Kenneth J. Collins, A Real Christian: The Life of John Wesley (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1999).

¹⁴. Sunday Service, p. A 1. White's "Introduction" and "Notes" provide more extensive documentation of Wesley's changes to the BCP.

¹⁵. One may most easily visualize the changes and yet the integrity of the liturgies in Nolan B. Harmon's The Rites and Ritual of Episcopal Methodism (Nashville: Publishing House of the M.E. Church, South, 1926). In separate sections on the Eucharist, Infant Baptism, Adult Baptism, Matrimony, Burial and The Ordinal, Harmon

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Appropriately, those gathered in 1784 at the organizing Christmas Conference decided to call their new ecclesial entity, the Methodist **Episcopal** Church, a name that they patented before the Protestant **Episcopals** did. They communed to Cranmerian cadences for eucharist. They ordained deacons, elders and bishops with ritual little altered from the BCP and lived into Anglicanism's threefold ministry. Although they could not claim apostolic succession and early and often found themselves defending the legitimacy of their orders, Methodist Episcopalans nevertheless sustained an orderly laying-on of hands from John Wesley onwards.¹⁶

Accordingly, Methodist formal definitions of the church and sacraments remained those in the BCP, the (Anglican) articles and the creeds. The church manifested itself in faithful congregations where the pure Word was preached and the Sacraments administered according to Christ's ordinance. The church defined itself with the classic "notes"--one, holy, catholic, and apostolic. Church by the book! So, in providing this book, these books, Wesley intended to anchor the American branch of his movement liturgically in the church to which he remained loyal. This was, to reiterate, a church that deserved its middle name.

Methodism's immersion in Scripture did not distinguish it from other Pietist movements and its appreciation thereof did not distinguish it from Protestants generally. Indeed, Methodists

puts into six parallel columns across two pages: Ancient Sources, The 1661 Prayer Book, Wesley's Sunday Service, 1844 ME Ritual, 1922 MECS Ritual, and 1924 ME Ritual.

¹⁶. For the first sustained defense of Methodist ecclesiology, ministry and episcopacy, see the annotated Discipline produced by bishops Thomas Coke and Francis Asbury, The Doctrines and Disciplines of the Methodist Episcopal Church, in America (Philadelphia: Henry Tuckniss, 1798) and excerpts in Richey, Rowe and Schmidt, MEA, II, 1798. "Wesley's ministry laid the essential foundation of what became the Methodist style of episcopacy, and in many ways that foundation has remained intact in America," Gerald F. Moede, "Bishops in the Methodist Tradition: Historical Perspectives," Episcopacy: Lutheran-United Methodist Dialogue II, ed. Jack M. Tuel and Roger W. Fjeld (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1991), 52-69, 58. For an overview and assessment of the office, see James E. Kirby, The Episcopacy in American Methodism (Nashville: Kingswood Books/Abingdon, 2000); Thomas Edward Frank, Polity, Practice and the Mission of The United Methodist Church, Updated edition (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2002), 229-53; and Norman Woods Spellmann, The General Superintendency in American Methodism, 1784-1870, Ph.D. Dissertation, Yale University, April 1961.

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knew themselves to be a movement united in common endeavor with all who lived and loved Scripture. This unitive impulse, in its earliest North American expression, one might term "evangelical" rather than "catholic." Among the groups with whom Methodists experienced the greatest commonality were the United Brethren and Evangelical Alliance, two groups with roots in Reformed-Mennonite and Lutheran Pietism respectively, with their own distinctive evangelical-Reformation ecclesiology and with a strong confessional orientation. They shared much with the Methodists, including a unitive spirit, and over time grew even closer, eventually combining with one another and later with the Methodists to form United Methodism. That union, as we will note below, connected the new church with the major branches of the Protestant Reformation, with its diverse ecclesial principles, and with a confession of faith, occasionally updated, with a clear articulation of the classic "notes" of the church.

The two unitive commitments tugged the Methodist Episcopal Church in different directions--either back towards their Anglican roots or forward into the Protestant endeavor to Christianize America--though the difference in the two options would become more marked as one of the two referents or poles itself moved (as the Protestant Episcopal Church gravitated away from the shared evangelicalism). Initially both Scripture and Sunday Service situated the distinctive Wesleyan ecclesial patterns and the energetic, competitive Methodist itinerant ministries within shared Protestant visions of the church.¹⁷

The Quadrilateral: A Literary Evolution?

¹⁷. For recent efforts to review Methodist ecclesiology, typically with reference to its Wesleyan foundations and their catholic import, see Ted A. Campbell, Methodist Doctrine: The Essentials (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1999) 64-79; Scott J. Jones, United Methodist Doctrine: The Extreme Center, 241-74; Walter Klaiber and Manfred Marquardt, Living Grace: An Outline of United Methodist Theology, section 4, 311-417; and Theodore Runyon, The New Creation: John Wesley's Theology Today (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1998).

Over the course of two centuries, Methodism's four books and Methodist ecclesial sensibilities underwent interesting and significant shifts. Tradition suffered in the rough and tumble of evangelistic, frontier oriented, camp-meeting-dominated Methodism. That trend surfaced early, in the Methodist decision to abandon its book of worship, its BCP, the Sunday Service of the Methodists in North America. Jesse Lee explained why in his early, first person narrative of the American church, A Short History of the Methodists.

[T]he prayer book, as revised by Mr. Wesley, was introduced among us; and in the large towns, and in some country places, our preachers read prayers on the Lord's day: and in some cases the preachers read part of the morning service on Wednesdays and Fridays. But some of the preachers who had been long accustomed to prayer extempore, were unwilling to adopt this new plan. Being fully satisfied that they could pray better, and with more devotion while their eyes were shut, than they could with their eyes open. After a few years the prayer book was laid aside, and has never been used since in public worship.¹⁸

As Lee noted, revivalistic evangelicalism trumped the prayer book. At times and in places, Methodism behaved like a continuous camp meeting. And the camp meeting did suit Methodist polity--Methodist practice of church--quite nicely. Routinely in the nineteenth century, Methodists placed in a camp meeting their warm weather quarterly meeting.¹⁹ By locating in a camp meeting the circuit's--the local church unit's--official or business meeting Methodists

¹⁸. (Baltimore: Magill and Clime, 1810; Facsimile edition, Rutland, VT: Academy Books, 1974), 340.

¹⁹. The placement of camp meeting in quarterly meeting can be seen in the quarterly meeting records reproduced in William Warren Sweet, ed., Religion on the American Frontier. 1783-1840, IV, The Methodists: A Collection of Source Materials (New York: Cooper Square Publishers, Inc. 1964; originally published by the University of Chicago, 1946). I have explored the relation between camp meeting and quarterly meeting in The Methodist Conference in America: A History (Nashville: Kingswood Books/Abingdon, 1996) and in Early American Methodism (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991).

embraced albeit informally a revivalistic modality of being church. Experience, conversion, revivalism thus upstaged tradition.

However, Methodist Episcopalals did not, could not, give up rituals for the Supper, Baptism, ordination, marriage. Indeed, though the Sunday Service, as book, did not define Methodism's liturgical life, the several services, typically and as appropriate, would be gathered together in the high point of the church's worship calendar, the two day quarterly meeting. And when camp meetings emerged, Methodists located the quarterly meeting there, the Lord's Supper being one of its high water marks.²⁰ Nor did improvement in those texts cease. Methodists tracked Anglican reforms and kept up-to-date versions of the ritual available to preachers in the quadrennially produced Discipline.²¹ On the popular level and over the course of the nineteenth century, Methodists gradually reclaimed traditions that had been important to the Wesleys, including prayers and entire services that could hardly be managed without a published order in congregant's hands much less with preacher's eyes shut. This reclamation went on more in the urban and upscale congregations than in rural areas but was modeled for all preachers in annual conferences. In 1905 the Methodist Episcopal Church and the Episcopal Church, South formalized that trend by including both an "Order of Worship" and a Psalter in the jointly published Methodist Hymnal.²² And in 1945, the new Methodist Church [MC] (uniting in 1939 the Methodist Episcopal Church [MEC], the Methodist Episcopal Church, South [MECS] and the Methodist Protestant Church [MPC]), revisited Wesley's recrafting or remodeling of the

²⁰. See The Methodist Conference in America: A History, Early American Methodism, and Lester Ruth, A Little Heaven Below (Nashville: Abingdon/Kingswood, 2000).

²¹. See Karen B. Westerfield Tucker, American Methodist Worship (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001).

²². Young, Companion to The United Methodist Hymnal, 112-13.

BCP. The Book of Worship for Church and Home, provided a BCP-like full set of services. A sequel Book of Worship appeared in 1965 and The United Methodist Book of Worship in 1992.²³ With each of these successive liturgical efforts, save this most recent, Methodism reasserted its connection to the BCP and enriched its sense of tradition as mediated through Anglicanism.

Bible, Discipline, Hymnbook

Scripture, reason and experience--and their literary expressions of Bible, Discipline and hymnbook--found an easier path into the life of the young Methodist movement and into its ecclesial sensibilities. Mr. Wesley had exhorted his preachers and people to read and had made ample provision for their reading in his many publications. The American Methodists carried on that program, even under frontier conditions. They created a surrogate Wesley, in the person and office of Book Agent, who took responsibility for an aggressive publishing and distributing campaign of popular literature and eventually serials. Preachers functioned as regional sales representatives for the publishing enterprise. Colporteurs they were, with responsibilities to push the product, handle sales, collect and forward receipts, and in every way cultivate the reading and buying habit.²⁴ They kept a percentage of the profit, in some instances, substantially augmenting what was otherwise a meager annual salary.²⁵ Available records indicate significant sales of

²³. See Tucker, American Methodist Worship, 3-30.

²⁴. See James Penn Pilkington and Walter Newton Vernon, Jr., The United Methodist Publishing House: A History, 2 vols. (Nashville: Abingdon, 1968 and 1989).

²⁵. For an illustration of this point and documents which sustain the argument of this paragraph, see Sweet, ed. The Methodists: A Collection of Source Materials, 1946), 709, 680-709.

catechisms, pious memoirs, spiritual guides, Bibles, hymnals and Disciplines and much more modest sales of weightier items whether by Wesley or his theological successors. In one particularly profitable year (1814), Benjamin Lakin sold 1314 items. Hymnals constituted 413 of that total, Disciplines 505.²⁶ So the Methodist movement put pocket hymnals and mass produced Bibles into the laps of the people. The preachers, if not all the laity, had carried a third book, the Discipline. Their saddle bags reputedly came with Bible, hymnbook and Discipline.

The canon of Scripture, of course, did not change nor has Methodism's faithfulness to it. The modes of that fidelity have evolved, taken on complexity, found institutional niches, but nevertheless sustained the twofold commitments inherited from Mr. Wesley. He wanted his people and preachers to be students of the Bible. From the laity he expected daily reading, the small group (class) for study and prayer, hymns and sermons for interpretation and personal witness through testimony in the Love Feast. He expected the same from the preachers but also careful study of his commentary, Notes on the New Testament, drawn from what he regarded as the best scholarship of the day and formally defined touchstone of orthodoxy. On the popular level, today's United Methodists have Disciple Bible plus an incredible array of other adult Biblical resources from the United Methodist Publishing House (Cokesbury and Abingdon). Cokesbury makes similar provision for all other age groups. The clergy typically own the Interpreter's Bible and are acquiring the New Interpreter's Bible. Or if the IB and NIB are not to taste, Abingdon features several other commentaries itself and its distributing arm, Cokesbury, offers series from other publishers as well. The digitally inclined can discover the incredible array of United Methodist Biblical resources through the Publishing House and other

²⁶. Ibid., 706.

denominational agencies--Biblical guides, commentaries and devotional materials. Between the days of class meeting and Notes on the New Testament and today's Disciple Bible and New Interpreter's Bible lie almost two centuries of Methodist leadership in the Sunday School as a medium for popular instruction and of Methodist endeavor to stay current with Biblical scholarship. Over that period Methodists had lived into the ecumenical promise of Scripture, becoming a denomination that spanned the center of American Protestantism from moderate evangelicalism to progressive liberalism.

Both hymnals and Disciplines have undergone dramatic changes since leaving Mr. Wesley's hand. Initially, the Discipline,²⁷ titled to reflect "The Large Minutes" from which it derived--"Minutes of Several Conversations Between The Rev. Thomas Coke, LL.D. The Rev. Francis Asbury And Others . . . Composing a Form of Discipline For the Ministers, Preachers and Other Members of the Methodist Episcopal Church in America"--functioned as a guide to corporate Christian life. It served the gathered community as the hymnal served the individual believer, as rules for the pilgrim's progress. It really did discipline. Though addressed to the preachers, through them it instructed the faithful as well concerning dress, behavior, intermarriage, slavery, distilled beverages, means of grace, devotional practices, life together, and belief in short, the way of salvation. Initially an action pamphlet, the Discipline grew gradually as Methodist expansion required enhancements to the simple missional imperatives inherited from Wesley and as the church saw reason to specify more clearly its belief, structures, authority and governance. In 1788, 1789 and 1790, the church annexed to the Discipline "some other useful Pieces," Arminian essays by Wesley against Calvinist doctrines of predestination

²⁷. Tigert, Constitutional History, 463, 533. Tigert examined the titles and contents of the early Disciplines in Appendix I, 463-76.

and unconditional perseverance and others explaining Christian perfection and baptism. In 1792, Methodists signaled the purpose the Discipline play in setting forth reasoned belief by retitling it The Doctrines and Discipline of the Methodist Episcopal Church.

Over time much of the explicitly doctrinal content of the Discipline eroded or to be more precise was "outsourced," specified as authoritative but separately published. This change in Methodism's BOOK, sometimes interpreted as the church's loss of theological fiber, might better be construed as the consequence of ecclesial maturation. Ecclesial maturation led to a sharper constitutional awareness, most notably in the General Conference of 1808, which passed "Restrictive Rules" protecting Methodist doctrine, conference structure, episcopacy and "General Rules."²⁸ Ecclesial maturation led to the rapid growth of a publication empire which produced or reproduced theological as well as devotional, historical and instructional materials in abundance. Ecclesial maturation led to ever greater organizational complexity and therefore required much greater Disciplinary specificity and precision.²⁹ So for a variety of reasons the Discipline, over time, kept doctrine to a minimum and let polity flourish. In 1972, however, consequent to the uniting of the Evangelical United Brethren and the Methodists and the challenge of putting together confessional and doctrinal traditions that drew on the Anglican, Calvinist, Lutheran and Anabaptist Reformations, a Theological Commission brought in and General Conference adopted a rich theological apparatus. Revised in 1988 (and referenced below), this Disciplinary apparatus now plays a decisive role in orienting the church, and

²⁸. MEA, II, 1808.

²⁹. Richey, Methodist Conference in America, traces this evolution.

particularly those undergoing the ordination process, towards United Methodist doctrine and theology as witness to the church's apostolic and catholic faith.³⁰

American Methodists began with an hymnal filled with Charles Wesley's verse, a poetic guide to the *via salutis*, the way of salvation. In the latest hymnal, that of 1989, only 7% of the hymns come from Charles (52 of 734). Successive hymnals have seen a steady erosion of Wesley's hymns. Or to put it more constructively, successive hymnals have made increasing space for hymns expressive of the religious impulses of the day and/or the larger Christian witness. However, almost from the start, American Methodist leaders, like their British counterparts, struggled to keeping the faithful faithfully signing Charles's hymns. The first American-generated hymnbook, the Pocket Hymn Book of 1786, drew on hymnals by Robert Spence as well as by the Wesleys.³¹ Soon music reflecting the African American experience, camp meetings and revivals, singing schools and the Sunday school competed with that bearing the Wesleyan imprimatur. Hymnals capturing these religious impulses appeared quickly. As early as 1801, A Collection of Hymns and Spiritual Songs Selected from Various Authors by Richard Allen, African Minister appeared. Camp meeting hymnals appeared soon thereafter and thereafter the official or authorized hymnals, which appeared regularly (for the MEC: 1786,

³⁰. For exploration of the 1972 statement and its 1988 revision, see Langford, ed., Doctrine and Theology in The United Methodist Church.

³¹. Young, Companion to The United Methodist Hymnal, 97-108.

1802, 1808, 1821, 1836, 1849, 1878, 1905) contended with a variety of popular alternatives.³²

Worship wars are hardly new.³³

United Methodism

In 1968, The United Methodist Church [UMC] was created, bringing together The Evangelical United Brethren Church and The Methodist Church, and uniting into one the heritage and traditions that had informed the Evangelical Association, the United Brethren, the Methodist Protestants and the two Episcopal Methodisms. The first two of these had united with one another in 1946, the latter three with each other in 1939.³⁴ The '68 union connected the new church with the major branches of and diverse ecclesial principles of the Protestant Reformation, through the UB with the Anabaptist and Reformed, through the EA with the Lutheran, through the Methodists with the Anglican reformations. The larger question of how the new church brought into harmony the practices, policies and polity of these several denomination impulses lies beyond the scope of this enquiry. Here we do need to take note of the doctrinal, specifically ecclesiological, challenge represented in his union. In 1968, the uniting conference and UMC Discipline cared for the challenge by positing the congruence of doctrine of the two predecessor churches and of the most terse expressions thereof, the EUB "Confession of Faith" and the MC

³². For the stemma of MEC, MECS, MPC and MC hymnals, see Young, Companion to The United Methodist Hymnal, 94-95; for EUB, 81-82. See also MEA, II, 29-30.

³³. See Thomas G. Long, Beyond the Worship Wars: Building Vital and Faithful Worship (N.P.: the Alban Institute, 2001).

³⁴. For the terse, official narrative of this union and the histories behind it, see The Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church, 2000, 9-20, 50-59.

"Articles of Religion." Not content to leave it there, General Conference established a "Theological Study Commission" with a broad mandate, including the possibility of "a contemporary formulation of doctrine and belief."³⁵

The Commission chose not to craft a new confession, creed or set of articles but instead to embrace the EUB Confession and MC Articles within a long Disciplinary doctrinal-theological disquisition. Revised in 1988, this section now constitutes Part II of the Discipline, "Doctrinal Standards and Our Theological Task." Accordingly, Part I of the Discipline, the Constitution, continues both Articles and Confession (Para 3, Article III) and revises the "Restrictive Rules" to protect both statements of belief. The Constitution, also includes important ecclesial and ecumenical affirmations, as we note below. However, it is this Part II, which governs the reception and interpretation of these two standards, the General Rules and Wesley's Sermons and Notes on the New Testament, which figures most prominently in United Methodist ecclesial understanding. One section, Para 101, treats "Our Doctrinal Heritage," covering "Our Common Heritage as Christians," "Basic Christian Affirmations," "Our Distinctive Heritage as United Methodists," "Distinctive Wesleyan Emphases," "Doctrine and Discipline in the Christian Life," and "General Rules and Social Principles." The following section, Para 102, attends to "Our Doctrinal History." Then follow the standards, Articles, Confession and General Rules, reproduced in full, and declaratory statements indicating where the authoritative Sermons and Notes may be acquired. A fourth section, Para 104, "Our Theological Task," sets forth guidelines for drawing on doctrine. It offers important distinctions

³⁵. Albert C. Outler, "Introduction to the Report of the 1968-72 Theological Study Commission," in Langford, ed., Doctrine and Theology in The United Methodist Church, 20-25. The entire volume, on which this discussion draws, attends to the 1972 Commission and 1988 Committee and the resultant doctrinal-theological disciplinary sections. See also Frank, Polity, Practice and the Mission of The United Methodist Church, 141-57.

between doctrine and theology, sets forth characteristics of United Methodism's theological task, describes the quadrilateral and its hermeneutics, identifies challenges to theology, and concludes with a discussion of the church's ecumenical commitment.³⁶

United Methodism's Four Books

The framing of distinctively Methodist and Wesleyan belief within an explicitly ecclesiological, indeed an ecclesologically ecumenical, setting represents an important development. Not a surprising development, perhaps, but nevertheless an important development. Not surprising given Methodism's investment in the ecumenical enterprise nor because as we have noted, the other specifically Methodist books, hymnal and book of worship, in addition to discipline,³⁷ have also shifted in that ecumenical direction.

The current Hymnal gathers the best of the church's praise, whether recent or ancient. Supplementary volumes have followed so as to capture the "The Faith We Sing" and "Global Praise" of the church, the best of its music, the best of its verse. The Hymnal also features the liturgies used commonly in congregational life, reflecting as we note below, the ecumenical liturgical consensus. In addition, United Methodists understand the two sacraments, Baptism

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. See the final section below on the ecclesiological and ecumenically ecclesiological import of the Discipline.

³⁷. The Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church, 2000, The United Methodist Book of Worship, 1992, and The United Methodist Hymnal, 1989.

and the Lord's Supper, as rites for the whole church--Baptism, inherently ecumenical, and Eucharist, so now nuanced, often with the Wesleyan gloss that it is a converting ordinance.³⁸

The two books, then, that had once looked inward and towards a distinctively Wesleyan identity--the Discipline and Hymnal--now sustain that identity within a clearly catholic context. Insofar as these two books sustain their function as the quadrilateral principles of reason and experience, respectively, they point now as do Scripture and tradition, towards Wesleyan or Methodist belief as within the faith confessed commonly across Christianity.

Scripture always functions, at least in Methodist/Wesleyan understanding, to orient believers towards the common witness of the church and the unity realized and promised in Christ. And such an affirmation and a direction clearly inform United Methodist scholarly and devotional attention the Bible. The clear commitment, within United Methodism, to hold together critical scholarship and piety--nicely epitomized in "Disciple"--orients this fundamental or primary epistemological criterion towards the other three aspects of the quadrilateral, a point that the Discipline itself makes explicitly.³⁹

The United Methodist Book of Worship also repositions its witness to Methodism's tradition(s) within an ecumenical context. Eucharist can still be celebrated with the beautiful phrases of Archbishop Cranmer, but that liturgy, setting IV, now functions as an alternative in Book of Worship (and in Hymnal), as also in BCP. The Book of Worship no longer orients

³⁸. United Methodists divide as to whether the "open table" extends universally or to the baptized. See E. Byron Anderson, The Meaning of Holy Communion in The United Methodist Church (Nashville: GBOD/Discipleship Resources, 2000); Gayle Carlton Felton, This Gift of Water: The Practice and Theology of Baptism among Methodists in America (Nashville: Abingdon Press, c1992); ----, By Water and the Spirit: Making Connections for Identity and Ministry, The Christian Initiation Series (Nashville: GBOD/Discipleship Resources, 2003); also on web at http://www.gbod.org/worship/articles/water_spirit/; ----, "The Holy Mystery: A United Methodist Understanding of Holy Communion," Holy Communion Study Committee, General Conference; and Lester Ruth, A Little Heaven Below (Nashville: Abingdon/Kingswood, 2000).

³⁹. The Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church, 2000, 78-79.

Methodism exclusively towards its Anglican past but rather more broadly to the catholic tradition generally or perhaps one might say to the Anglican-Methodist reception of the catholic tradition. From beginning to end, from its initial setting out "The Basic Pattern of Worship" to its concluding rites for missionaries and deaconesses, the Book of Worship draws into United Methodist life the best liturgical wisdom and practices of the twentieth century liturgical and ecumenical movements. The witness of the BCP remains but now surrounded by worship patterns reflective of the great tradition of the church and its global expression today.

The Book of Worship does still function as an indicator of the place of tradition, in its widest sense, in United Methodist life. Some areas of the denomination and some congregations have become liturgically self-conscious to a remarkable extent. In such places worship draws significantly and imaginatively on The Book of Worship. There congregations experience the church year, the lectionary, the rich array of special services, a high degree of liturgical self-awareness and albs and stoles. The trend is sufficiently prominent as to have worried Thomas Langford who complained that a once preaching church had become a liturgical church.⁴⁰ Still, large sectors of United Methodism function out of lower church paradigms, in some cases now re-energized with the so-called "contemporary" styles of worship and music and a church-growth ecclesiology. The Book of Worship continues therefore, as ecclesial touchstone and provides one clue to United Methodism's ecclesial self-understanding. Its use signals orientation towards ecclesial self-understanding and catholicity predicated on the long Christian tradition. Its non-use often signals investment rather in more evangelical, missional and present-oriented forms of Christian unity.

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. Langford enunciated such claims several times in conversation or discussion.

Methodism's four books continue to sustain indebtedness to John Wesley--the Wesleyan commitment perhaps more salient post-1968 than before--but the important but diverse heritages mediated through the EUB have helped reduce the distance or tension between that Wesleyan ecclesial self-understanding and that oriented towards the larger Christian witness. And in lessening that tension or achieving the new balance, the four books function with some degree of harmony. Their harmony owes to the long-term developments to which we have alluded, rather than the formal enunciation of a quadrilateral hermeneutic or epistemology. Nevertheless, the quadrilateral, tersely described in *Disciplines* since 1972, provides United Methodists a language with which to grasp and explain this common focus. And, in various ways, the Discipline has become more explicit about Methodism's doctrinal commitments.

Discipline: Catholic Spirit

After 1968 and especially after 1972, the new church imbedded within the Discipline expressions of a catholic spirit and pointers towards an ecumenical ecclesiology, understanding the bringing together of traditions representing the major strands of the Protestant Reformation as opportunity for still greater unity. That ecumenical, unitive or catholic commitment defines United Methodism--in its structure, policy and program, indeed, in its very Constitution--in the following ways.

The Preamble to the Constitution (Part I) situates the newly constituted church within the universal church.

Article III of the Constitution incorporates and Articles I and II of the Restrictive Rules protect the Articles of Religion, John Wesley's adaptation of the Thirty-nine Articles and the Confession of Faith, from the Evangelical United Brethren Church, thereby defining

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the church in classic Reformation terms (Articles) and claiming its classic marks or notes, "one, holy, apostolic and catholic" (Confession).

Article IV of the Constitution on the "Inclusiveness of the Church" proclaims The United Methodist Church "a part of the church universal" and commits it to overcoming all those forces and factors which divide the human family.

Article V of the Constitution on "Ecumenical Relations" affirms "As part of the church universal, The United Methodist Church believes the Lord of the church is calling Christians everywhere to strive toward unity. . . ."

The ecumenical, unitive or catholic commitment, United Methodism also builds into its structure, policy and program elsewhere in the Discipline--in particular:

"Our Doctrinal Heritage" in Part II locates United Methodism within the "common heritage with Christians of every age and nation" and sets out "Basic Christian Affirmations" which United Methodists confess with all Christians.

This statement concludes that "With other Christians, we declare the essential oneness of the church in Christ Jesus." It illustrates that ground of and commitment to unity, affirming, "This rich heritage of shared Christian belief finds expression in our hymnody and liturgies. Our unity is affirmed in the historic creeds as we confess one holy, catholic, and apostolic church. It is also experienced in joint ventures of ministry and in various forms of ecumenical cooperation.

. . . "Our avowed ecumenical commitment as United Methodists is to gather our own doctrinal emphases into the larger Christian unity, there to be made more meaningful in a richer whole."

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"Our Doctrinal History" begins by insisting that the church's constitutive traditions "understood themselves as standing in the central stream of Christian spirituality and doctrine," characterizes the church's vocation as "catholic spirit," and concludes by positing the recovery, updating and reinvigorating of "our distinctive doctrinal heritage--catholic, evangelical, and reformed--as essential to both evangelism and ecumenical dialogue.

"Our Theological Task" ends with a section on "Ecumenical Commitment" insisting that "Christian unity is not an option" but is mandated theologically, biblically and practically "a gift to be received and expressed."

"The Ministry of All Christians," Part III of the Discipline situates important United Methodist rubrics--the Journey of a Connectional People, Servant Ministry, Servant Leadership, Called to Inclusiveness, and the Fulfillment of Ministry Through The United Methodist Church--within the narration of the longer and larger story of God's covenantal initiatives and of the Church's mission.

Part V, Chapter One, "The Local Church," in framing the church's global mission makes provision for cooperative parishes and ecumenical shared ministries.

The rubric on "Church Membership," para 214, states "The United Methodist Church is a part of the holy catholic (universal) church, as we confess in the Apostles Creed." The

next paragraph affirms "A member of any local United Methodist church is a member of the denomination and the catholic (universal) church."

The episcopal or superintending office is assigned a number of tasks, among them, "to seek and be a sign of the unity of the faith" and "to exercise the discipline of the whole Church" (para 404) and specifically "To provide liaison and leadership in the quest for Christian unity in ministry, mission, and structure and in the search for strengthened relationships with other living faith communities" (para 414).

The General Commission on Christian Unity and Interreligious Concerns, and its corresponding boards or officers on jurisdictional, conference, district, and congregational levels, are charged explicitly to exercise "ecumenical leadership" towards Christian unity and dialogue with others faiths, cultures and ideologies.

The Discipline acknowledges UMC membership explicitly in several "Interdenominational Agencies"--World Methodist Council, the Consultation on Church Union (COCU), the National Council of Churches, the World Council of Churches, the Commission on Pan-Methodist Cooperation and the American Bible Society--and assigns UMC leadership therein to the bishops and GCCUIC leadership (para 2401).

United Methodism's formal commitments to unity and catholicity set impressive standards and directions and accord with the role United Methodism and its predecessor denominations have exercised within the ecumenical movement. Methodism has been a major ecumenical player. At this writing, Methodists head both the National and World Council of

Churches. In the past, Methodists have played leadership roles in COCU, indeed, in many unitive efforts at regional, national and global levels. Over recent decades, United Methodism has invested much in bi-lateral dialogues, as for instance, the one for which this essay is crafted.⁴¹ The catholic language of the Discipline, the prominence of Methodists in ecumenical endeavor, and the clear commitment of the church's leadership to dialogue give the appearance of ecclesiological single-mindedness and coherence. In actual practice, various kinds of unities beckon the church, United Methodists work on different fronts, the genuine laborers for unity and catholicity remain few, the church at all levels voices more commitment than it proves willing to honor, some within the denomination express open hostility to ecumenical efforts and many remain absolutely oblivious to investments long made. And the important tension with which the denomination began, a tension lived out by John and Charles Wesley, the ecclesiological tension between the church's catholic and its missional self-understanding remains present, if lessened in intensity. That tension can sometimes be obscured, forgotten, neglected, overlooked in ecumenical conversation in Methodist self-representation--in efforts to mirror our conversational partners or as a stratagem towards unity. The ecclesiological tension should not be obscured. It constitutes an important gift of Methodism to the large church.

Discipline: Missional Commitment

The missional understanding of the church remains prominent in the two books where it has been most salient from the start, in Discipline and Hymnal. Both nicely exhibit the tension,

⁴¹. On Methodist participation in the various ecumenical conversations, see Geoffrey Wainwright, Methodists in Dialog (Nashville: Kingswood Books/Abingdon, 1995).

now both sides of the tension, within which United Methodism does church. The unitive side of this tension we have described above. The missional is equally prominent.

The Discipline devotes four paragraphs of the "Preamble" to the church's unity, but affirms in a fifth, "The church of Jesus Christ exists in and for the world, and its very dividedness is a hindrance to its mission in that world." The "Restrictive Rules" continue the protection to Methodism's distinctive, missional understanding of episcopacy or superintendency, as itinerant and general in character. Several articles within the Constitution delineate the nature and tasks of the conferences of United Methodism and Para 31 identifies the annual conference as "the basic body in the Church." In so defining the church connectionally and at that level which admits into ordained ministry, at which ordination occurs, and from which ministries proceed and ministers sent, United Methodism sustains Wesley's missional ecclesiology. The Discipline treats the understanding and tasks of ministry that flow from this ecclesiology later. But from this definition flow Methodism's distinctive itinerant and appointive commitments. Part II on "Doctrinal Standards and Our Theological Task," as we have noted, accent Wesleyan practical, soteriological and missional emphases within the shared catholic heritage.

The missional understanding becomes more marked in Part III, "The Ministry of All Christians," subtitled "The Mission and Ministry of the Church." Para 120. The Mission proclaims

The mission of the Church is to make disciples of Jesus Christ. Local churches provide the most significant arena through which disciple-making occurs.

The "Rationale for our Mission," immediately following, begins:

The mission of the Church is to make disciples of Jesus Christ by proclaiming the good news of God's grace and thus seeking the fulfillment of God's reign and realm in the world. The fulfillment of God's reign and realm in the world is the vision Scripture holds before us.

The phrasing attempts to hold justification and justice, evangelism and social transformation, in tension, but the adequate development of the latter missional emphasis really is to be found in the next major Disciplinary section, Part IV. Part III does set the mood by reference to and exegesis of Matthew 28:19-20. As of the 1996 Discipline, III also enunciates a theme of servant ministry and servant leadership. That calling figures prominently in the office of the permanent deacon but belongs also to the laity and is added as well to that of the elder and therefore of bishops. The full implications of and an adequate theology for servanthood need to be more fully developed especially since the church made this missional addition, a fourth, to the traditional three--word, sacrament and order.⁴²

Another section in III, para 138, declares the church to be "Called to Inclusiveness." That mission of the church, to be agent and anticipatory of the kingdom and of the redemption of the world, the Discipline develops quite fully in Part IV, "Social Principles," pp. 95-122. This long treatise recalls early Methodism's social witness (including antislavery), notes the 1908 elaboration and adoption by the MEC of a social creed (other predecessor denominations following later) and develops United Methodism's contemporary social commitments under six

⁴². On issues and problems related to this concept, see Frank, Polity, Practice and the Mission of The United Methodist Church, 162-68.

rubrics, "The Natural World," "The Nurturing Community," "The Social Community," "The Economic Community," "The Political Community," and "The World Community." The principles are to guide United Methodist attitudes and practices with respect to the world outside the church. They also apply within, touching matters of marriage, divorce, sexuality, family violence, sexual harassment, abortion, care at the end of life, and suicide. More fully developed stances on both internal and external concerns, General Conference has chosen to locate in a now huge, quadrennially produced tome, The Book of Resolutions. One might wish that this could be added as a fifth book defining United Methodism and exhibiting its ecclesial sensibilities. However, despite its official status, United Methodist laity and clergy seemingly make little use of it. Fortunately, they are more likely to heed the injunction that appears with the "Social Creed" in the Discipline that the creed be available to the people and used in Sunday worship. A variant of the creed appears in the Hymnal to be used as an affirmation of faith.

The Discipline continues efforts to balance evangelism and social concern, mission and catholicity in the balance of what has now become a long book. Part V on "Organization and Administration," for instance, begins the treatment on "The Local Church" with successive paragraphs, the first of which affirms definitionally, "The **local church** provides the most significant arena through which disciple-making occurs." The next paragraph, treating the local church's function, declares, "The church of Jesus Christ exists in and for the world. It is primarily at the level of the local church that the church encounters the world."

The United Methodist Hymnal achieves the same balance, the balance at least in part explaining its wildly successful introduction and congregational adoption. It retains the favorites derived from Methodism's revivalistic and holiness past, like Fanny Crosby's "Pass Me Not, O Gentle Savior," "Blessed Assurance," "I am Thine, O Lord," and "Rescue the Perishing." It

includes social gospel hymns by Harry Emerson Fosdick and Frank Mason North, civil rights songs, and verse from across the world. Alongside Methodism's missional anthems can be found chants ancient and modern, from the Community of Taize or Byzantium.⁴³ Like the Discipline, the Hymnal invites United Methodists to claim their distinctive voice but to sound it loudly for the church catholic.

Conclusion

United Methodism's four books define it and exhibit its ecclesial sensibilities, To only two of them, the Bible and Hymnal, would most United Methodists have ready access. The other two, The Book of Discipline and The Book of Worship, some Methodists would have never seen. Nevertheless, each works for and works itself into the drama of the church's daily life. The Discipline and Book of Worship function off stage determining how the play unfolds, who acts, and what instructions to follow. Bible and Hymnbook script Methodist life together. For present life together, especially life in congregations, the four books orient Methodists towards the Word, mediate United Methodism's traditions, including particularly its Wesleyan heritage, offer experiential expressions of the faith once delivered, and order belief and practice accordingly. The books evidence United Methodism's actual use of quadrilateral ways of knowing Christ and being Christ-like. They also show, in their convergence, a convergence clearer more so now, than in earlier days, how the four-fold epistemology or hermeneutic yields a common focus. In these four books, the catholic and missional, the high liturgical and fervid

⁴³. Young, Companion to The United Methodist Hymnal.

evangelical that Mr. Wesley held so curiously together come again into tension. The four books beckon United Methodists who press to one extreme or the other to reclaim balance and live our distinctive witness. Scripture, hymnbook, discipline, and book of worship, define how United Methodists do church. Ecclesiology in its most familiar doctrinal form this may not be. But in structure and practice, in office and program, United Methodists nevertheless live faithfully into the ecumenical ecclesial consensus, adding thereunto what they affirm to be an apostolic commitment to mission. Methodists offer a **via** salutis to augment the tradition's ordo salutis and an ecclesiological **via** to augment the tradition's ecclesiological ordo.⁴⁴

⁴⁴. See Jones, United Methodist Doctrine: The Extreme Center, 246-70 and Campbell, Methodist Doctrine: The Essentials, 64-79.

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**METHOPALIANISM - IS THERE SUCH A THING? OBSERVATIONS ABOUT
COMMONALITIES AND CONVERGENCES
BY
MARION GRAU**

Being not so much new to the concept of ecumenical dialogue, but at least unfamiliar with its stated purpose and procedure in this case, I asked Tom Ferguson what the purpose of this sort of a dialogue might be. He suggested it would be important for both churches is to ponder on what can we do together more effectively, in terms of small or rural churches, in terms of lobbying and social change. That the eventual goal is full communion for enhanced cooperation in mission and world. For that purpose, it seems essential to foster a dialogue around issues that matter, that have to do with life, with ‘people in the pews,’ as well as with clergy and other leaders, with where needs and desires in culture and society are, and not engage in yet another version of bickering about issues arising from clericalism or polity differences.

I was invited to focus my deliberations for this phase of the dialogue on soteriology and ecclesiology. I define these doctrinal topoi as follows:¹ To me, soteriology means discerning, speaking, writing, dreaming about things concerning the physical healing, spiritual education and divine transformation of not only humanity but the entire creation towards a more fully lived life in deeply spirited relation with the Trinity. Ecclesiology for me, at its best, is concerned with issues of where within this process of transformation and healing the community of the church finds itself. How it defines itself, its purpose, views its history, locates its present and envisions its future.

¹I would like to stress that this particular paper does not claim anything but preliminary status. While it may contain some thoughts that I might develop further towards an epistemology that might be helpful to Episcopalians in particular, the present version represents only a sketch. At this stage, my examples are culled mostly from the Episcopal side of things, I have not had a chance to log the equivalent yet on the Methodist side.

I find it further important to locate this particular paper. It is written from a distinct perspective within the Episcopal Church, by a theologian who has a German pietist and Lutheran past and a more recent Methodist lineage.² So, is my theology ‘Episcopal’, is it “Methodist,” or even crypto-“Lutheran”? And from this particular, personal question arises a larger, poignant question that I hardly find discussed among those who do ‘denominational theology’: What makes a theology denominational, makes it Methodist, Anglican? Are there airtight differences between them? Does it mean that I am only doing ‘Anglican theology’ when I discuss what has been written or said by Anglicans? Such a narrow definition seems self-defeating and absurd.³ Rather, I find relevant to my theological process as an Episcopalian everything that helps me understand and conceive better what it means to live as a Christian in this particular church body, with the particular gifts and challenges that this includes. (And I will outline these as I see them below.) That means, no artificial focus on being in conversation with so-called “Anglican” authors only, but with any theological contribution that helps us embody the particular charism of this church body.

Between preoccupations with denominational affiliations, theological topoi, contents, values, and theological method: Where are the differences between these two church bodies to be found? What are the shared values that can help forge coalitions and dialogue? It seems to me that shared ground may not necessarily be found in issues of polity, though those do of course distinguish our churches from each other. My educated hunch is that they might be found to a

² My ph.d. is from Drew University, where I studied with the Methodist Catherine Keller, who is herself a student of the Methodist John Cobb. As Bruce Mullin pointed out in his paper *Methodists and Episcopalians in the American Context: Siblings Separated By Birth*, some Methodist schools bring together a fair number of Methodists and Episcopalians. Drew for example, has a significant minority of Episcopal students that are able to take occasional classes on Anglican polity, and have formed a caucus for the furthering of their needs within this Methodist setting.

³ This attitude might also lead to the rather problematic practice of using third-rate Anglican writers rather than first rate non-Anglican thinkers just in order to be able to claim doing Anglican theology. Many Anglican writers, however, pull significantly from the modern German Protestant tradition (Barth, Tillich, Bonhoeffer) so even reading an Anglican theologian does not necessarily offer access to Anglican ‘content,’ whatever that may be.

significant degree in shared assumptions about methodology, as well as issues both churches face in common, issues that affect our larger cultural and social context.

As Integrity’s president Michael Hopkins has recently suggested in the face of the controversies around bishop Gene Robinson’s confirmation, we would do well to remember and focus that we have more in common within the Episcopal Church than divides us.⁴ Likewise, in order for the present dialogue to be successful, it seems crucial (but certainly not uncontested) for all involved to recognize diversity within and between our church bodies can be a good thing, and must not be a threat.⁵ This despite the fact that indeed some within these bodies do see difference and diversity as a danger to the church. But what will these coalitions and dialogues look like?⁶ Who is entering into coalition with whom? There are likely many persons who feel closer to people of different faiths than they feel to people of their own faith who take a very different approach to it.⁷ On the more progressive side of both denominations I see (because that is what I most observe and stand within) increasing possibilities for coalition/dialogue around issues of economics and environment. Issues that have the ability to bring people together beyond the usual programmatic dividing lines (which often are biblical hermeneutics and issues

⁴ find quote in one of the newspaper articles.

⁵ This already positions me in a particular way within the Episcopal Church. There are those who found it necessary to be drawing lines, to be circling the wagons against the full inclusion and valuing of the calling and ministry of sexual minorities, regarding the confirmation of Gene Robinson. Others are finding their understanding of church one that needs to work to more fully embody the slogan the church has chosen for its signs: “The Episcopal Church welcomes you.” It is among the latter that I count myself. Thus I find myself agreeing, at least here, with Mark Harris, who argues that the Anglican Communion’s only “distinctive “doctrines” [...] would be the call to be comprehensive and the belief that all theology is provisional.” Mark Harris, *The Challenge of Change: The Anglican Communion in the Post-Modern Era* (New York: Church Publishing, 1998), 11.

⁶ And keep in mind that I am a relative newcomer to the wider picture of denominational reality and politics in the USA.

⁷ A Sufi muslim who believes in allowing for many forms of worship of Allah, who does not believe in the need for mediation through a mullah, whose worship includes spontaneous forms of music and dance, and honors diversity in terms of gender and faith practice has more in common with a progressive Protestant than with a fundamentalist mullah who outlaws music, wants to keep women at home, and wants to institute a strict form of sharia as state law. Likewise, fundamentalist Christians have more in common with Islamic fundamentalists than they care to acknowledge.

of human sexuality). What increasingly fascinates me is the newly shifting position of certain groups of evangelicals.⁸ On the more evangelical continuum, issues of gender and human sexuality often form potential for coalition. Expressly those issues are also what separate the faithful intra-denominationally. So one thing to look at is where within the denomination does a person in dialogue stand and is it perhaps even a ‘double dialogue’ that includes a different location on the progressive-evangelical continuum as well as a different denomination?⁹ Along with a deepening dialogue between Methodists and Episcopalians, I also hope to see more and in fact embody more of a fruitful dialogue between so-called “liberals” and so-called “evangelicals.” I believe both sides can learn from each other. The social gospel saw persons like Rauschenbusch who were able to embody a creative tension between the progressive politics of the social gospel and the faithful depth and passion of an evangelical. This third option, or any other number of thinkable combinations between what often form the extremes in our churches, is rarely lived in our churches today. But I see possibilities for this option being embodied again in the younger generations who are dissatisfied with what they often perceive as the spiritual emptiness of liberal theologies as well as with the aggressive biblicisms of evangelical options.

But back to the present conversation. So what might we focus on? What makes a doctrine/theology denominationally specific? Its thematic content, its authors’ denominational affiliation, its specific methodology, its relevance for the past, present, and future of a specific church body? What if the dialogue occurs between two churches who have struggled with the difficulties of walking a “via media” or, with the increasing lack of a “unifying theology.”¹⁰ There are moves in each denomination to address what some consider a dangerous loss of focus

⁸. A defining feature of U.S. evangelicalism has been its ability to transcend denominationality on behalf of a shared concern for holy living and faith.

⁹. I am aware now as before of the difficulty of using terms such as progressive and evangelical. They are neither very accurate, nor very descriptive. I am using them simply because of a lack of better terms.

¹⁰. John B. Cobb Jr., *Grace & Responsibility: A Wesleyan Theology for Today* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1995), 8.

and tradition by pronouncing a “radical orthodoxy” within the Anglican context, or a “rebirth of orthodoxy” within Methodism, though they take different shapes.¹¹ Other approaches to rethinking where we are today include the projects of constructive theologians, among whom I count myself, who aim to critically and constructively engage scripture, tradition and reason/experience in the present context, i.e. a post-Christian hegemony in the West, post-modern challenges to the securities of Western epistemologies, and the inquiries into colonial and neo-colonial economic imperialisms that our churches have been complicit with as well as at times subversive to. So: What does it mean to be church in such a context?

While the present meeting is focusing on doctrine, I have been wondering if it is not theological methodology (i.e. *how* we produce theological utterances) rather than doctrinal content that binds these two churches together *and* sets them apart from other vernacular churches/reformation traditions.¹² And further, if not these methods of coming to theological positions are not a doctrinal formation, if more implicitly so. Expression of doctrine occurs not only through creeds, but often through social engagement, through incarnate living of one’s faith. Thus I propose that there are certain commonalities, struggles as well as chances, gifts and challenges that Episcopalians and Methodists share and that are expressed in lived faith practice as well as doctrinal formation. A preliminary list of these issues in the ECUSA includes: The shape of lay and ordained ministry and the relationship between them,¹³ the promotion of peace, Anglican AIDS initiatives, the shape and form of women’s ministries, the presence of ethnic and

¹¹ The culprit is often designated as a monolithically understood “modernity” that has destroyed faith, mores and doctrine. In various forms, then, a return to forms of premodern faith is promoted by such anti-modernists. See for example John. ed Milbank, *Radical Orthodoxy: A New Theology* (London: Routledge, 1999) and Thomas Oden, *The Rebirth of Orthodoxy: Signs of New Life in Theology* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 2003).

¹² This along with the problems Anglicans keep experiencing when they find themselves asked for their doctrinal standpoints. See Ian T Douglas and Kwok Pui-Lan, *Beyond Colonial Anglicanism: The Anglican Communion in the Twentyfirst Century* (New York: Church Publishing, 2001), 6.

¹³ The General Convention 2003 has abolished the difference between Canon 9 and ‘regular’ ordinations to the priesthood. It will have to be seen what the impact of this clerical ministry and theological education will be.

cultural minorities in church and ministry, human sexuality, biomedical ethics, environment, economics, ‘mission’/‘development’, and other issues concerning the ‘postcolonial’ relations to formerly planted churches.

A Shared Approach to Theological Methodology:

My answer hitherto¹⁴ has been that more than a question of content and denominational affiliation, what has stood out for me is the methodology of Episcopal, and in many ways of Methodist formations of theology.¹⁵ Each of these faith communities acknowledges a variety of resources for theology:

Anglican/Episcopal tripod: scripture, tradition, reason, (experience.)¹⁶

Methodist quadrilateral: scripture, tradition, reason, experience.¹⁷

These benchmarks outline, at least, a shared commitment to ongoing negotiation in the process of doing theology. The specifics of this will still have to be mapped out. This multiple theological epistemology flows out of a soteriology that affirms that revelation/redemption is not

¹⁴ Such as it is, with close to three years of teaching in an Episcopal Seminary and struggling with defining what Anglican theologies might look like under my belt.

¹⁵ Both churches have been highly influenced by theologians from outside their own tradition, and it would be insincere to pretend otherwise. (Luther and Zinzendorf are some of the more obvious influences.) There is little in my opinion to commend the use of unoriginal but denominationally ‘correct’ theologians who merely rehash the thoughts of others from outside the tradition. Rather, what seems to me to be important beyond the denominational provenance of a theologian or source is how that theologian or source can speak to the issues that are facing the church at this time, and how what this theologian offers helps and enhances the commitment of Methodists or Episcopalians to considering scripture, tradition, reason, and experience in the formation of their past and present lives in faith.

¹⁶ In his preface to *The Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity*, Richard Hooker lists experience as one of the sources of education of the human mind. See Chapter VI, 1. Many Episcopal theologians have added the category of experience. Or, one may not want to distinguish as tightly between reason and experience and see them as deeply connected. In an environment where we have at least begun to deconstruct binaries like mind and body, etc. Despite the fact that both denominations have at times stressed scripture as the central one of these facets, they also recognize the importance of others. Hooker does however recommend the *via media* as a third alternative to the sole focus on scripture or tradition. This remains crucial even if we also stress that Hooker saw scripture as the central cord around which the two other are woven.

¹⁷ The new motto of one United Methodist website is then, prophetically: Open Hearts. Open Minds. Open Doors. <http://unitedmethodist.org> (Accessed July 18, 2003).

mediated *sola scriptura* but through other sources as well. This shows considerable confidence in the ability of humanity to do this (relatively) successfully, it shows confidence in body and mind, is the effect of a processual soteriology and a relatively positive anthropology/ecclesiology. Both denominations contend with the pervasiveness of Calvinist theological concepts such as double predestination, utter fallenness and depravity of humanity, the extreme dependency of humanity on the salvific work of Christ, and an extreme doctrine of divine omnipotence. These features are starkly embedded in much of American Christianity and have become pervasive also in mainline churches through the excessive fundamentalist/conservative backlashes against the excesses of liberal theology and the culture wars of the sixties, coming both from the larger context of society, and in part also as it prevails within their own church bodies.¹⁸ This is counterbalanced, more or less forcefully through a commitment to negotiate scriptural reading with the past and present forms of tradition, as well as forms of human reasoning and experience. That would suggest that neither of them is inclined to a literalist reading of scripture or tradition, but is committed to negotiating scripture with its reception throughout history, as well as with human thought and experience in the contemporary context of the church in society and world.

The great attraction of the Episcopal Church for me as a person and theologian was and is that it understands its theology as provisional, contextual, and in process. That it not only allows, but requires its faithful to engage in discernment of the will and power of the triune God in their lives. **That part of its doctrinal expression is the very resistance to setting doctrines in stone.** And I have reason to believe that similar things can be said for the Methodist Quadrilateral.

Both denominations thus are committed to considering multiple factors in their theological deliberations. I have wanted to stress, against those who would claim the

¹⁸ Furthermore, as far as I can tell, neither denomination is strongly involved in apocalyptic thinking, and does therein also find itself at odds with much of the more conservative Christian contingent in U.S. society.

consequence of this plural approach to theology is the cause for a lack of center and doctrinal clarity, that, in fact, there is a doctrine right in here: The commitment to recognize divine inspiration not only in the bible (not *sola scriptura*), but to find its expression also in postbiblical theology and in the forms of reason and experience found within humanity. That, at least, is my reading. How they are negotiated is another thing, but it seems beyond denial that biblical literalism is not an option. At least Hooker, in his Preface to the laws energetically rejected the literalism of the Calvinists as well as the traditionalism of the Catholic church. The Anglican via media is by definition trying to find this middle way between the extremes by help of reason. Methodists have retained the three components, and added a fourth that was evolving during the enlightenment: experience, emotion. Thus, both bodies are committed to living with ongoing questions in the context of their cultural location, and to negotiating multiple sources of inspiration. To my mind at least, this produces a diversity of approaches and opinions on various doctrinal matters, to which both communities then have already committed themselves. That is, for me at least, literalist readings of the bible are out of the question. Not even Lutheranism has produced, aside perhaps from certain parts of American Lutheranism, a strict literalism, but *sola scriptura* has also meant commitment to critical ways of reading the bible, even has produced them in the form of German higher criticism.

Theological moves of recent decades: recovering of pneumatology to redevelop a fully trinitarian faith. Retrieval of the Jesus of the synoptic gospels to balance the almost exclusive doctrinal focus on Johannine christology for doctrinal utterances such as the Nicene Creed. from there flows: focus on human encounter, embracing, healing, forgiveness, transgression of boundaries of purity, transformation, economic challenges. I increasingly see concerns like these come to the fore.

A Common Focus on a Positive Anthropology and Processual Soteriology:

In contrast to the Lutheran reformation with brought with it a renaissance of Augustinian thought in the West, the Anglican reformation, as well as Methodism brought with it a return to

patristic writings beyond and before Augustine. This includes the influx of Greek Eastern writers, who had a less pessimistic anthropology than is commonly found within Augustinian Western Latin context. Thus both denominations have less of a tendency to focus on the ‘total depravity’ of all humanity, but rather to see within every person the potential for conversion as well as for sanctification. Both, in their contemporary versions, have retained little of the harshness of Calvinist double predestination. The shape of many soteriologies found within both communities emphasizes a mutual engagement in the process of salvation rather than a starkly one-sided act of God with a completely passive human on the receiving side (at least compared to strong Calvinism). The strong emphasis among many Episcopalians on an ‘incarnational faith’ is an example for this affirmation of a basic human goodness. Many Episcopalians describe their faith as “incarnational” or incarnation-centered, but there are many whose soteriology focuses on the cross.¹⁹ Many stress the primacy of the baptismal covenant for the full inclusion in the church and calling to ministry.²⁰

Within both denominations one will find a tendency to what one might call Arian, semi/pelagian, or Arminian sentiments around soteriology. A fair number of Methodists, whose soteriology has been described with the Wesleyan “way of salvation,” find themselves attracted to process theology, which also sees creation as involved in a process, if not as determined as most Christian doctrine has it. Wesley recommended self-examination and self-discipline as a way to form the believer ever more fully towards sanctification. Many Episcopalians likewise believe in the possibility for humans to improve throughout life and see salvation as an ongoing

¹⁹ I am beginning to wonder if this difference translates into different ecclesiologies and positions towards human sexuality, among other. If Christ’s incarnation is considered salvific, and hence human incarnation takes on a central place, rather than redemptive suffering, there seems to be less emphasis on “original sin” as formulated by Augustine, and more on the grace, beauty, and wholeness of incarnation.

²⁰ Those favoring the inclusion of sexual minorities in the ECUSA have argued that those who oppose the ordination and consecration of GLBTs should also not baptize them. (This could also be interpreted as a critique of the clerical hierarchy within the Anglican polity.)

process.²¹ However, theologians of both traditions also recognize the need to go beyond the affirmation of the goodness of incarnational life to a challenge towards the faithful.²²

A Common Concern for Economic Justice:

Sallie McFague, an Episcopal theologian has named as detrimental to the continued relevance and prophetic witness of the churches the continuing obsessive focus on issues of human sexuality, while neglecting growing economic inequity both at home and worldwide, as well as ecological destruction.²³ While there is a comparatively thin basis upon which to erect edifices of sexual ethics that condemn same sex erotic encounters, the witness against economic exploitation of the poor and the disregard of God’s creation is far more prevalent in biblical texts as well as in tradition. But why this strange occupation on a minority among sexual subjects? Is it perhaps also because it is easier to focus upon what can be isolated and looked at from a safe distance rather than having to undergo a reality check of our own complex involvement in, and the churches’ potential complicities with economic exploitation and environmental degradation?

While class differences has likely in the past been an issue that may have prevented dialogue between Methodists and Episcopalians on issues of social and economic justice, the changing profiles of both churches, and especially the less patrician shape of the Episcopal Church in the Midwest and West as well as in pockets on the East Coast will likely enable future dialogues. This may then be a good time to remember that both Methodists and Anglicans/Episcopalians showed significant involvement in social justice before and during the

²¹ Hence, perhaps, also Episcopalians’ sustained deep interest in monastic communities and life.

²² John Cobb calls this the need to not only proclaim gospel, but also the law. “One of our problems is that law and gospel have fallen apart. We rarely challenge ourselves by presenting high standards of personal living.” See Cobb Jr., *Grace & Responsibility*, 11. Similarly, the influx of newcomers recovering from religious abuse in more conservative churchbodies has often led Episcopalian clergy and teachers to emphasize affirmation and grace to the detriment of challenge towards a changed live. I see both denominations struggling with how to bring grace and responsibility, as John Cobb puts it, into a healthy a balance.

²³ Sallie McFague, *Life Abundant: Rethinking Theology and Economy for a Planet in Peril* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2000), 203.

time of the Social Gospel. Both denominations were involved in developing the “Social Creed” in 1910.²⁴ We can remember Wesley’s concern for working people, but also Frederick Denison Maurice, the “ritualist slum priest” James Huntington, William Dwight Porter Bliss, and women like Vida Scudder on the Anglican/Episcopal side. The “Anglican Left” has rarely been a central topic in Episcopal circles, and this may be a good time to remember and reevaluate it for the prophetic witness of the Episcopal Church as well for dialogue with the UMC.²⁵ Having gone to a historically Methodist school, I encountered and learned to appreciate the social dimensions of Methodism, and I believe it has made me a better and more passionate Episcopalian, certainly also because I felt that this is still an area of much-needed growth for my church. A recent incident of where this commonality has become visible is the involvement of clergy/pastors and laity from both churches in protests against the WTO in Seattle, in the Jubilee drive for debt relief (which has seen significant Anglican involvement), and continue work in local, national and global ways to address issues of inequity and poverty. A dilemma faced by both denominations, as well as many other church contexts: How to distinguish social welfare from what easily turns into gentrification, middle class values, and upward mobility? That was likely one of the reasons why the social gospel did not last. Can we rediscover the heritage of a “social creed” in the light of both national and international economic crises and disasters?

Challenges for the future are:

²⁴ It can be found in the Methodist hymnal on p. 122. Episcopalians were not members of the FCC until the 1940s, so were not signees of the Social Creed. However, Bruce Mullin argues and Tom Ferguson confirms, they were involved in forming it, in conversation, etc. Part of the difference between the churches is however also where they position their social efforts. Episcopalians more in terms of establishmentarian strategies, Methodists taking it more practical out in the cities. This is a challenging difference.

²⁵ For this purpose, see the important contribution of Markwell, Bernard Kent Markwell, *The Anglican Left: Radical Social Reformers in the Church of England and the Protestant Episcopal Church, 1846-1954* (Brooklyn: Carlson Publishing, 1991).

-Protesting and lobbying against abuse of corporate power structures that disregard values of the common good (John Cobb), that neglect human needs, the integrity of the environment at the expense of what masks as profitability and effectivity. (at home and abroad)

-embodying alternative forms of living together and supporting community both human and non-human (co-housing, denser living in urban areas rather than commuting, living without cars, etc.)

-working towards local, national, and international economies that do not sell out local people against each other worldwide for the lowest bidder.

- debt relief and the issues involved in the debt of nations as well as individuals

-how can we as churches go beyond being an instrument to help people enter the current consumer capitalist market as obedient consumers? How can we learn to distinguish between striving for economic justice and the cooptation of the churches as a means to promote a (no longer exclusively Protestant) work ethic that bolsters current economic forces while being unable to help guarantee that this work ethic will result in employment or better lives.

A Growing Concern about the Destruction and Manipulation of Creation:

Lately, I have been noticing an increasing convergence not only among progressive Methodists and Episcopalians, but also between evangelical Methodists and Episcopalians. At this point in time, evangelicals of the more moderate kind are again engaging in issues of social justice, and of, as they name it, ‘stewardship of creation.’ This is where I see a potential for prophetic witness that unites persons of faith between the two denominations, beyond the differences of evangelical and progressive. This relatively new common concern can serve to bring together evangelicals and progressives, it is a movement that defies political and left-right issues, that is if people can move beyond the stale and stifling, paralyzing boundaries.²⁶

²⁶ Edward O. Wilson, *The Future of Life* (New York: Vintage Books, 2002), 157ff.

John Cobb was one of the first to argue that religious people can and must contribute if we do want to preserve even a semblance of a natural world around us. Scientist E.O. Wilson likewise holds ecumenical efforts that put environmental issues high priority in high regard and considers them essential for the survival of humanity and other animal species.²⁷ This must happen in an ecumenical global setting, and by remembering the worldwide connections between nature, environmental protection, poverty, local laws and efforts and the effects this has on people around the globe. Environmental policies that protect nature in places where humans can afford to do so must not allowed to create destruction and pollution among the poor and ethnic non-whites.²⁸ If we let nature ‘go to hell,’ so will part of creation that humans were entrusted to respect and coexist with, and part of their own spirit will die. This is part of what was done to Native Americans and Indigenous Peoples across the earth who have been pushed aside by what has been called progress. The issues are complex, and we need to move beyond the stereotypes and dualities. beyond the dualisms of either capitalism or communism. Communism has even a worse environmental record than capitalism. It is for the churches and religious bodies to provide ethical and moral consciousness that can help equip those who will act and make decisions on behalf of the environment. The churches should help enable people to re-connect their spirit to their bodies, and to the body of the earth.

A Common Wrestling for the Equality of Women in Ministry:

Both church bodies are still struggling with giving women equal access to local, regional and national leadership. Both are in theory and theology committed to the equality of women, but even where the oral commitment is there, the practice still lags far behind.

²⁷ Wilson, *Future of Life*, 159.

²⁸ For this particular global connectivity, see the excellent report by Tom Knudsen of the Sacramento Bee. Tom Knudson, “State of Denial: A Special Report on the Environment,” *Sacramento Bee*, 27 April 2003, [Http://www.sacbee.com/denial](http://www.sacbee.com/denial).

Overwhelmingly, men occupy key positions and sexism, theological and ecclesial, pervades much of the church structures. The recovery of pneumatology to redevelop a fully trinitarian faith included the search for a feminine face of God and finding a relevant space for women in the church. This happened in relation with claiming more space for women in a male-dominated church (and in case you thought this was no longer an issue, you only had to attend the ECUSA’s General Convention to note that it yet remains a church of predominantly older white men, some of them the most vocal opponents of changes in how this church addresses issues of gender and sexuality in ordained ministry. We see many women priests, but few in prominent positions, large parishes, or as diocesan bishops.

How far have we come, if anywhere, in regards to recovering the feminine face of God, of pneumatology, where are we on gender-neutral (at least?) or feminine and masculine images of God? We continue to see the putdown and trivialization of women providing teaching ministries. Clericalism occurs among women occurs as well as among men, often perhaps initially as a strategy to counteract sexism, though it continues to have problematic effects. Issues of internalized sexism continue to abound and to exacerbate external sexist practices and attitudes.

A Common Wrestling with Ethnocentricity in the National Context

Both denominations began as white, European denominations, but have through mission expanded to other continents and ethnicities. They are still largely white churches, with Episcopalians lagging behind Methodists in their efforts to reach out and include African Americans and Latinos and other non-Europeans. In the same vein, hymnody and theology remain largely eurocentric, and only hesitatingly open to other cultural influences upon liturgy, prayer life, theology and faith practice. What is a good way to address this in a church that remains overwhelmingly Euro-American? Who is involved in the dialogue to address these issues? What do the demographics of our churches look like? With 20/20, the new initiative of the ECUSA meant to attract and foster increased membership to a great degree by reaching out

to youth, has also pledged that it wants to look as diverse as the society in which it is located. How will this happen? What are the issues involved in fostering, mentoring, recruiting minority leadership, to foster and mentor minority (thereby I mean both young and ethnic minority) seminarians and young priests?

A Common Wrestling with Ethnocentricity in the International Context: Increasing Awareness of the Post-Colonial Reality of Global Mission

Both churches struggle with what it means to be a church of European origins, of missionary nature and with a strong U.S. presence in an age of U.S. imperialism. What does it mean to live as a church with global connections in a time after official colonialism is over, but economic globalism and unilateral U.S. cultural imperialism loom far and wide. How can both churches repent of their ethnocentric missionary efforts in collusion with the British empire, change present liturgical and theological practice as well as missionary practice, without losing a voice that challenges problematic and oppressive practices whether at home or abroad? These issues have for the Episcopal Church and for the Anglican Communion erupted most poignantly in the events around the Lambeth meeting in 1998 and are highly complex in their implications for intra-Anglican dialogue, and I believe also for Methodist-Episcopal dialogues.²⁹ Kwok Pui-Lan, in particular, has described the Anglican church as a cultural hybrid.³⁰ Methodism is

²⁹ Should there be an Archbishop of Canterbury, i.e. an Anglo primate as the primary focus figure of the communion. What is the shape of the communion? In trying to force doctrinal and practical conformity and ‘obedience’ is not the formerly colonial logic of the British empire being reinforced. How can the Anglican communion (if that then still is a good term for it) continue as companions in faith without repeating the mistakes and imperialisms of the past, no matter who engages in them. See Douglas and Kwok Pui-Lan, *Beyond Colonial Anglicanism*, 10, 3, 6. Colonial mimicry also means that the colonized have become skillful at mimicking the logic, polity, structures, and certain forms of theology of the colonizers and are then turning it back towards the ‘empire.’ Sugi’s book on the Bible in the Third World maps wonderfully the complexity of colonial interactions with missionaries and the bible. Also, how can we find responses to the prosperity gospel that is taking over in Latin America and Africa? A missionary logic that combines Western economics with Western lower class spirituality. A tempting and problematic mix. “That is the faith you brought us” needs to be detailed: Who brought the faith and how did they teach it, transmit it, and - how is it received, filtered, amended, applied in the new context. Need to recognize and take responsibility for the contextuality of all forms of mission and faith.

³⁰ Theologians that have engaged in these questions are John Cobb (Methodist), Ian Douglas, Kwok Pui Lan, Christopher Duraisingh (Anglican), among other. See Douglas and Kwok Pui-Lan, *Beyond Colonial Anglicanism*, 56.

perhaps even more so: its lineage combines German pietism with Anglicanism. These forms of initial hybridity are part of what distinguishes and blesses Anglican and Methodist forms of faith. Remembering those forms of hybridity could help to honor other forms of diversity as they clamor for entrance.

Challenges for the future: How to live the tension between mission and decolonization? Anglicans concerned about the past, present and future of a colonial church who has been in collusion with the British empire in the spreading of Western religion and Western culture around the world tend to disavow a mission and often leave missionary efforts to more missionary oriented Anglicans who harbor less suspicion about cultural imperialism unless it fits their agenda.³¹ What I would hope to see is that many Anglicans begin to think self-critically both about mission and about cultural imperialism, and negotiate them in tension with each other. The extremes we have been seeing up until now: progressives disinvolved and dismissive of mission but passionately self-critical up until a self-defeating paralysis, conservatives uncritically passionate about mission, without taking into account the realities and dangers of cultural imperialism in missionary efforts, are not sufficient for an adequate, complex response to the challenges of churches wrestling with addressing the realities of post-colonial existence. How to define mission in a context that must also be aware and respond to current neo-imperialist globalisms that function to feed a U.S. consumer capitalist economy is a highly critical moment. This definition of mission must include how Anglicans/Episcopalians live at home and abroad. The connections and the exploitations can no longer be denied. Defining and living a mission that embraces both spiritual nurturing and social justice.³²

³¹ See, for example, the accusations brought by some of those who oppose the confirmation of Gene Robinson as bishop of New Hampshire of cultural imperialism of the American church. This “unilateral action” was described as an act of imperialism, just as the Iraq war. However, the same people were not particularly vocal in opposing the preemptive strikes against Iraq and apply little thought to the cultural imperialism that is involved in their own efforts at “spreading the gospel” around the world along with a particular theology that is inculcated in a conservative U.S. culture, that carries a particular cultural, and yes, potentially imperialist charge.

³² Douglas and Kwok Pui-Lan, *Beyond Colonial Anglicanism*, 3,6, 10.

Furthermore, how can we negotiate the ambivalence of the particular British slant on episcopal hierarchy and church polity, as the imperial structure is reflected, for better and for worse, in the ecclesial hierarchy. What was and is the interaction between native and imperial structures of patriarchal leadership? How have particular cultural renderings of Christianity influenced the interpretation of the Bible?³³ What is happening when voices from former missionary churches are calling for a more legislative and binding function of the Lambeth conference in order to press certain conservative issues?

The new canons of the ECUSA ask that priests be proficient in a language/culture other than their native own. Even so it seemed that while the struggle for the inclusion of sexual minorities in the Episcopal church was pushed forward significantly at this convention, the struggle for the furthering of ministries of ethnic minorities received far less attention, and at least at this point, has experienced a personnel setback. A sign of hope for worldwide mission is the report prepared for the GC entitled “Companions in Transformation” which aims to address and amend the problems of colonialist missions. Progressives among Episcopalians have trouble articulating a sense of mission, they find it hard to negotiate mission with a critique of empire. But ‘hands off’ is not an option, since it is way too late for that. It now it a matter of what engagement in mission looks like and there, too, we need to talk beyond the lines of conservative and progressive, about how various forms of power have structured and continue to structure faith, party lines, cultural controversies.

A Common Fight Against the Growing Threat of AIDS worldwide:

The Episcopal Church, because of its strong presence in Africa where AIDS is raging worse than pestilence ever did, eliminating entire congregations, has had global AIDS on its mind for quite some time now. It continues to call the church to remembering its sisters and

³³. See Sugi’s The Bible in the Third World.

brothers at home and abroad in the struggle against AIDS. When we talk about infectious diseases like malaria and AIDS, we think we're only talking about human issues, but these infections can travel also because of the way in which environments are destroyed, (malaria esp. spreads when humans live in too close proximity with farm animals, i.e. in slums, and cramped quarters. destruction of environment that leads to people moving to slums, all that goes hand in hand. If we believe that our calling as it comes to us in this particular *kairos* is not only to care for the so-called spiritual needs of our fellow humans, but also to see their bodies and spirits as integral to each other, then this must be on top of our list, and not just in words, it must transpire into our actions. Spiritual environmental action can also enliven the ministries of our parishes, bring youth back into the church, engage many who are not generally found in churches. that is, this is not only our calling, but it can also help fill our churches. We need to be able to make sensible and strong links between spiritual nourishing and environmental action. They should be hand in hand, strengthening each other, rather than the one go at the cost of the other. We have seen that in the later phases of the social gospel, and that led to an unfortunate split between society and spirituality, some of which turned into the opposite of what was initially intended.

A Common Opposition Against Preemptive War and US-Unilateralism:

The spokespersons of both churches spoke out against the war on Iraq, sometimes more clearly than others. Both share a commitment to peace in the Middle East, in Africa, and are committed ecumenism and interreligious dialogue. What is needed in these efforts is great wisdom and clarity, a sound, intelligent and deep analysis of the contexts and histories, beyond the cooptation of progressive, postmodern and postcolonial concepts such as “cultural imperialism” for conservative agendas.³⁴ We need more honest, self-critical, and open

³⁴ As seen at IRD booth which tried to mark its “defense of marriage” as a concern for social justice. Likewise, arguments against Gene Robinson’s confirmation were laced with language that invoked postcolonial theory, i.e. the claim that it constitutes an act of cultural imperialism.

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conversations of what constitutes a necessary expression of mission of a Christian community and what constitutes problematic instances of cultural imperialism if we want to move beyond the short-sighted accusations and designations of blame that ultimately only serve to separate and polarize.

This is the extent of my deliberations so far. They are meant as no more than a preliminary vision of what might be points of interaction for the future. I would like to thank the committee for inviting me, and for allowing me to contribute to its work.

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Doctrine in the Episcopal Church: The Christological Center

[A paper by the Very Rev’d William H. Petersen, Provost and Professor of Ecclesiastical & Ecumenical History, Bexley Hall Seminary, Columbus, OH, delivered to the United Methodist-Episcopal Dialogue, session of 10-13 August 2003 at Minneapolis, MN.]

I. Prologue

I begin with a story. The venue of the following tale is the collegiate gothic chapel of the Divinity School in Rochester, New York, and the time, nearly a decade ago, is Wednesday morning of the third week in the Great Fifty Days of Easter at 10:45 a.m. The chords of a magnificent organ postlude have barely ceased their sending-forth encouragements to an ecumenical congregation that has just celebrated the Holy Eucharist under the presidency of a United Methodist elder—one of our professors of preaching and Black Church studies—in a rite according to the United Methodist Book of Worship. My own prayerful reverie is abruptly broken as one of my senior seminarians in the pew ahead turns and declares more than asks, “Dean Petersen, Methodists don’t believe in the real presence, do they?”

Nearly a contemporary in age, my interlocutor had proved a reluctant student of the liturgiology received under my tutelage. She had come to seminary knowing the “right rite” and the “correct ceremony.” Moreover, she knew what to think about liturgical theology and had been less than receptive to other constructions. Even so, at this juncture, I was caught off guard and, like Mary, pondered in my heart “what manner of salutation this might be.” Several

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thoughts, few tactful and none generous, raced through my mind. What, I said, however, was, “Well, Nancy, let’s reflect on what we’ve just experienced.”

And so I began a catalogue: “we’ve sung several excellent Wesley hymns, and, during communion yet another one that seems rather pointed in this regard.¹ But beyond that, after readings from our common lectionary and a splendid homily about Christ creating community among us, the bread and wine were brought forward, the Great Thanksgiving with its sung *sursum corda* and *Sanctus-Benedictus*, not to mention spoken words of institution, anamnesis, acclamation, epiclesis, and supplication was prayed; then the bread was broken during a fraction anthem employing Pauline words about communion as the Body of Christ, and lastly we received this with words further assuring us of a communion with Christ in this sacrament. Doesn’t all this, not to mention the vesture of the sanctuary party in cassock albs and the presider in the same with a magnificent stole of the season’s color, say ‘real presence’ to you?” And so I ended, thinking silently, “QED!” Her reply, nevertheless, took my breath away. “Yes, yes, I know all that. But my friend, who is a UMC seminarian here, says that Methodists don’t believe in the real presence.”

The primary point of this vignette in the present context of ecumenical dialogue is simply that, from beginning to end, we all must have reference to the accepted, constitutive documents of our traditions as authoritative in matters of faith and order, if not of life and work as well, rather than the opinions of particular members or groups within our traditions. This at once can

¹“Glory, love, and praise, and honor for our food now bestowed render we the Donor...Who himself for all hath given...” Hymnal 1982, #300.

save us from indulging, secretly or overtly, in stereotypes of one another that we may have learned from others or formed from personal experience. A secondary point of the story, however, is that its focus sets the liturgical context for my assigned task of setting forth “doctrine in the Episcopal Church.”

II. Doctrine in the Ecclesial Constitution of ECUSA

Insofar as the Episcopal Church participates in a more universal Anglican ethos, the subject of doctrine in the Church represents a notorious difficulty. For it has been often remarked that Anglican theology is “occasional” rather than “systematic.” To be sure, this is not to say that Anglicans attend to theology, and therefore, doctrine, in an off-hand or temporally casual manner. Rather, it is to recognize that traditionally Anglicans “do” theology as occasions—usually ones of crisis—arise in ecclesial life and mission. For the rest, as doctrine may involve instruction, formation of the Church’s mind, and proclamation of the Gospel, these tasks are for the most part ordered around a liturgical center. Anglicanism exhibits, then, a firm commitment to that doctrinal principle operative in the Church from the earliest times but articulated as late as the 8th Century in the west by Prosper of Aquitaine and usually formulated, *lex orandi, lex credendi*, or, “praying shapes believing.”²

² Prosper of Aquitaine c. 390 - c. 463 is usually credited with the formulation *lex supplicandi statuat legem credendi* from which the shorter phrase is derived. I am indebted to Professor Lee Mitchell for the evocative translation of the maxim as it forms the title of one of his excellent contributions to liturgical theology.

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In what follows, I will attempt to explicate as well as expand upon what this might mean for any consideration of doctrine in the Episcopal Church it may be seen in reference to the claim of my title, namely, that there is an indelible christological center to the enterprise.

A. The ordination oath (“doctrine, discipline, and worship”)

At the ordination of every bishop, priest, and deacon in the Episcopal Church there is a moment in the public examination of the candidates where a public oath is required of each—it is both *viva voce* and publicly signed before the bishop presiding and the congregation. The major point of it is that the ordinand promises adherence to the Episcopal Church’s “doctrine, discipline, and worship.” As to worship and discipline the Book of Common Prayer 1979 and the Hymnal 1982 (along with other authorized supplementary liturgical materials) and the Constitution and Canons of ECUSA (along with those of the particular dioceses) clearly form the outward and visible referents of the oath. It is less immediately clear what the repository of doctrine implied by the oath of conformity might be. But beyond that, it would seem important to discern how doctrine is related to discipline and worship. I take these questions up in reverse order.

B. The ECUSA expansion (Preface 1789 BCP) in Anglicanism

The phrase “doctrine, discipline, and worship” has the sonority and complexity of Cranmerian prose, yet it is in fact American, coined by the Rev’d Dr William Smith, the author

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of the “Preface” to the Proposed Book of Common Prayer of 1786.³ That “Preface” in a somewhat condensed form became *the* “Preface” to the first Book of Common Prayer (1789) of the Episcopal Church in the United States. The principal occasion of its appearance was the need to justify to the mother Church of England all the alterations which the new American church was making in the production of its own Book of Common Prayer. Hence,

It seems unnecessary to enumerate all the different alterations and amendments. They will appear, and it is to be hoped, the reasons of them also, upon a comparison of this with the Book of Common Prayer of the Church of England. In which it will also appear that this Church is far from intending to depart from the Church of England in any essential point of *doctrine, discipline, or worship*; or further than local circumstances require.⁴

The phrase, now found in all three ordination services, is first found in public liturgy in the Ordinal to the American BCP 1792, but it was then limited only to the public oath of conformity taken by bishops-elect at their presentation.⁵ Until 1901, the oath of conformity at ordinations to the diaconate and priesthood promised conformity to the “doctrines and worship of the Protestant

³William Smith (1727-1803), DD (Oxon) was born in Aberdeen, Scotland, from the University of which he graduated in 1747. For a time he was an agent of the Society for the Propagation of the gospel and in American became a noted educator, clergyman (1753), and founder of the Philadelphia Academy, one of the fore-runners of the University of Pennsylvania. Smith was something of a polymath and played many roles in late-colonial, early-national society. After independence he moved to Maryland and was invariably a deputy to the General Convention. He chaired the committee appointed to 1785 to revise and adapt the Book of Common Prayer to the new situation and in this position accomplished much of the task including authorship of the “Preface.” *Dictionary of American Biography*, Vol x, p. 356 and Massey H. Shepherd, *American Prayer Book Commentary*, (Oxford University Press, 1950), p. v-vi.

⁴Cited in Book of Common Prayer (1979), p. 11, emphasis added.

⁵“In the Name of God, Amen. I, *N.*, chosen bishop of the Protestant Episcopal Church in *N.*, do promise conformity and obedience to the Doctrine, Discipline, and Worship of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the United States of America. So help me God, through Jesus Christ.” BCP, 1792.

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Episcopal Church in the United States,” as well as declaring that the ordinands believed “the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments to be the Word of God and to contain all things necessary to salvation.”⁶

Two things may be noted here. First, and in regard to bishops-elect, the oath in ECUSA’s Prayer Book replaces an oath of allegiance to the archbishop that was required in the English ordinals from 1549 onward.⁷ The formula “doctrine, discipline, and worship” from Smith’s “Preface” thus replaced promises of fealty to the person holding an office and ministry no longer continued in the new and emphatically *not* “by law established” Episcopal Church. Secondly, such a public oath did not seem necessary in ordination liturgies for deacons and priests because they in fact did express fealty to the person of their bishops (or “others having authority over you”) during the course of the “Examination” in the ordination rites. With the official adoption of the 1979 Book of Common Prayer, the oaths for all three orders were rendered nearly identical,⁸ all were made part of the public liturgy, and each featured the triadic phrase of conformity to the “doctrine, discipline, and worship of the Episcopal Church.”

⁶Hatchett, Marion J. *Commentary on the American Prayer Book*, (New York: Seabury Press, 1980), 518.

⁷In the Name of GOD, Amen. I, *N.*, chosen Bisshoppe of the Church and sie of *N.* doe professe and promesse, al due reuerence and obedience to the Archebisshoppe, and to the Metropolitically church of *N.* and to their successours: so helpe me God, and his holy gossell.” *First & Second Prayer Books of Edward VI* (London: Dent & Sons, 1919), 310.

⁸The exceptions being two: (1) the oath required of bishops-elect retained at its start the invocation of the Trinity that it had always featured, and (2) to the bishops-elect oath was added the declaration concerning the Scriptures as the Word of God and containing “all things necessary to salvation” form the oath ECUSA had always required of its diaconal and presbyteral ordinands as based on prior English models of required subscription to the Articles of Religion, the Prayer Book and the Ordinal (*cf.* Cn 36, *The Canon Law of the Church of England*, 1603).

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While the initial formulation of the expression pointed to an external situation,⁹ from the earliest times of the Episcopal Church’s history the phrase has been internally important and given application in crucial moments. And, although the phrase may in its liturgical use appear to apply only to the clergy, closer scrutiny and consideration of the locus of its utterance and signing always points to the larger context of the Church itself. It thus bears significance not only for all clergy and laity, but to this particular consideration of doctrine in the Episcopal Church.

C. The christological dynamic among *lex orandi, lex credenti, lex agendi*

Taken individually, the words *doctrine, discipline, and worship* connote basic elements of the being and activity of the Church as Anglican tradition has received and understood these aspects of ecclesial life and mission. While these meanings are significant in themselves, in the teachings of the Book of Common Prayer their inter-relationship bears even greater import. Indeed, I would claim that the phrase represents an entire ecclesiology in condensed form. This ecclesiology is grounded in the *triplex munus Christi*, the three-fold office of Christ as “prophet, priest, and king.”¹⁰ It is consistent with a line that may be traced back through the Caroline

⁹Prior to the foundation of the Episcopal Church it had been only *worship* and *doctrine* that had appeared in the oaths explicitly. No mention was made of *discipline* (i.e., the *lex agendi* or polity). The particulars of this had been implicitly assumed by the fact of the liturgical setting and the establishment by law of the Church of England as the religious expression of the English nation. The new situation in American after independence required a more explicit reference to the implied ecclesiology.

¹⁰Though usually articulated in Latin, this doctrinal-ecclesial formulation is sufficiently venerable as to be clearly discernable in Scripture (after all, the crucial turning point between the public ministry and the passion narratives in the Synoptic Gospels is the Transfiguration episode, the point of which is at the conclusion of the vision the chosen disciples “saw only Jesus,” meaning not that he is simply the priest-victim of the passion shortly to come, but that the offices of Elijah and Moses are now as well to be understood as held in unity by Jesus as the Christ). The formulation is well-enough attested, East & West, in the liturgical tradition as well from the earliest

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Divines of the 17th Century, particularly to Lancelot Andrewes as a classic articulator of the Anglican position.¹¹ Further, the phrase contains within itself a doctrinal approach akin to (but not in one-to-one correlation with) the typical description of Anglican theological methodology as attributed to Richard Hooker and centered on the dynamic among Scripture, reason, and tradition.¹² At this juncture, however, it is important to note the indelible christological center to the doctrinal enterprise in the life and mission of the church.

This translates itself immediately into three corresponding and proportional areas of the Church’s life and mission. Within these three areas of liturgy (*worship*), doctrine, and polity (*discipline*) there is an internal rationale operative and depending for the operation of its principles on the *triplex munus Christi* flowing from Christ at the very center of the Church as a

times to our own (*cf.* for instance the great Epiphany hymn which contains the following in verse two: “manifest at Jordan’s stream, prophet, priest, and king supreme...” Hymnal 1982, # 135).

¹¹Bishop Andrewes (1555-1626) is a cardinal figure particularly because his active career and mature theology occurs in a time after the turbulence of 16th-century attempts at ecclesiastical settlement in England and before the cataclysmic rift in English-speaking Christianity between what was to become Anglicanism as opposed to those traditions (Presbyterian, Congregational, Baptist, &c) that were distilled out of the puritan strain within the C of E that formed part of the crisis of the English Civil War and Interregnum (1641-1660). Andrewes’ classic formulation, subsequently taken as a kind of Anglican slogan, was articulated in a sermon: “Nobis *Canon* unus in Scripta relatus a Deo, *Duo Testamenta, Tria Symbola, Quatuor Priora Concilia, Quinque saecula, Patrumque* per ea series, tercentos ante Constantinum annos, ducentos a Constantino, regulam nobis *Religionis* figurat.” [*Opuscula quaedam Posthuma*, Library of Anglo-Catholic Theology, Vol. 10, (London: Parker, 1850), p. 91], that is, “One canon, two testaments, three creeds, four general councils, five centuries...form the rule of our religion.”

¹²“Briefly put, the method bequeathed to Anglicanism by Hooker consists in holding Scripture, reason and experience in an essentially dynamic tension with regard to the life and mission of the Church. When confronted by a question of polity [discipline], liturgy [worship], or doctrine such a method encourages us to test Scripture, our experience, and the tradition of the Church by means of *reason*. At the same time, historical *experience* must be allowed to explicate the meaning of Scripture. Finally, with respect to either reason or experience as currently conceived or perceived, *Scripture* must be held as judging tradition (*e.g.*, is “x” a legitimate development or a cancerous aberration?) and revealing the limitations of reason (especially as we may be tempted to make it the sole or ultimate arbiter),” W. Petersen & R. Goesser, *Traditions Transplanted...* (Forward Movement Publications, 1981), p.28. For the centrality of Hooker to Anglican theological method, *cf.* especially John E. Booty, “Hooker and Anglicanism,” in *Studies in Richard Hooker*, ed. by W. Speed Hill (Cleveland, Case Western Reserve University Press, 1972), 207-239, and particularly 228-229.

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whole and, indeed, of every individual Christian. This may be formulated as the *lex orandi*, *lex credendi*, *lex agendi*. As these three are mutually interrelated in a dynamic relationship, provision is made by their critical interplay for both a check-and-balance against distortion and also for legitimate growth.

In such an ecclesiology there is a primacy given to the liturgical, the *lex orandi*, because worship has to do with primary theology and provides the locus for the celebration, appropriation, and demonstration of the Church’s values as a community of the resurrection, the Body of Christ under historical conditions. As we celebrate through liturgical forms (principally, of course, Baptism and Eucharist, but also Daily Office and rites of passage) we appropriate patternings or formation into Christ (*cf.* especially Ephesians 4). And if the internal aspect of the Church’s *leitourgia* is worship, then its external or missional aspect is *diakonia*, or that service that is a demonstration of those values so celebrated and appropriated.

This liturgical experience then informs the *lex credendi*, that is the reflective theological task that seeks to understand the experience for the purposes of teaching and proclamation. This thinking function, having to do with “the mind of the Church” as it is focused in Christ also reflexively functions to monitor liturgical developments for authenticity and to keep them from inappropriate accretion or inauthentic pathways.¹³ The *lex credendi*, or area of doctrine, also serves to educate the Church in matters that have to do with the area of polity (*discipline*) so that

¹³The Preface to the first (1549) Book of Common Prayer is instructive in this regard as it begins, “There was never any thing by the wit of man so well devised, or so sure established, which in continuance of time hath not been corrupted: as, among other things, it may plainly appear by the common prayers in the Church, commonly called Divine Service...” BCP 1979, 866.

characteristic behavior on any level of the Church’s life and mission is coherent and consistent. In return the area of *discipline* rooted in the governance function of the three-fold office of Christ receives its authorization (*i.e.*, the process by which theology is shaped into doctrine).¹⁴

The area of governance associated with the *lex agendi* of the Church’s life and mission, as we have seen in other areas, has only secondarily or in a derivative sense to do with legal structures, procedures, and organizational arrangements (Constitutions and Canons) as the external standards of ecclesial life and mission.¹⁵ Rather, in its basic and living sense, *discipline* has to do with, in this case, the Anglican heritage of our family patterns of living together and characteristic ways by which we relate to the general societies in which we are set as *ecclesia*. As such, we have already seen how the *lex agendi* rooted in a particular office of Christ relates to doctrine (the *lex credendi*). We come full circle, then, in noting that *discipline* as exhibiting the polity of the Church’s life and mission relates to the *lex orandi* by providing the ordering or ministerial wherewithal by which any celebration, appropriation, and demonstration of its central value—the Paschal Mystery—takes place.

D. Behind Creed, Articles, & Catechism: what is Doctrine?

According to the living christological principle, then, *doctrine* in its most basic sense must be the *ecclesia*, the Body of Christ-People of God, ordered in their life according to a

¹⁴This process of theology moving into doctrine is described in the next section.

¹⁵ This is simply to claim for the contemporary church a continuity with the early church: the living ethos is faced with the need to develop norms and in the process creates the standards that, in turn, serve to test and try the lived ethos as time goes by.

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formational teaching (*didache*) and in their mission according to a characteristic proclamation (*kerygma*). Creeds, Articles of Religion, and Catechisms, vital as they are to the doctrinal enterprise as standards, are derivative within the Church. This, it seems to me, is an indication of what was meant by the petition in the BCP’s “Prayer for the Whole State of Christ’s Church” that the clergy “may, both by their life and doctrine, set forth thy true and *lively* Word...”¹⁶

Another way of saying all this is that theology is ordered and articulate reflection upon the experience of salvation in Jesus Christ as the incarnation of the Triune God and that, in its turn, *doctrine* is authorized theology. While Anglicanism does not have a definable corpus of doctrine based on a theological figure (such as a Luther, a Calvin, or even a Wesley), nor a set of doctrinal confessions,¹⁷ some definite things can nevertheless be said about the nature of doctrine on the basis of the Articles of Religion and the Book of Common Prayer, Article VI states:

Holy Scripture containeth all things necessary to salvation: so that whatsoever is not read therein, nor may be proved thereby, is not to be required of any man, tht it should be believed as an article of Faith, or be thought requisite or necessary to salvation.¹⁸

¹⁶BCP 1979, 329 (my emphasis), that is “lively” in the sense of “living.”

¹⁷The Articles of Religion (1571) are sometimes mistakenly thought of in this way, however. Witness Jedin *et al.* in *Atlas zur Kirchengeschichte* (Herder, 1970), 93, where they are referred to as “die Anglikanische Konfession.” While ordinands of the Church of England were required until the 20th Century to subscribe the Articles *ex animo* as a doctrinal standard, in the Episcopal Church they were not even adopted by the General Convention until 1801 and then in modified form in view of its non-established status. Ordinands were never required to sign the Articles. Subsequently, the amended Articles were published in the back of the BCP and in the 1979 revision take their place and status there under the general heading “Historical Documents of the Church.”

¹⁸Articles of Religion, BCP 1979, 868.

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Doctrine as authorized theology or authoritative teaching must therefore be congruent with Scripture or be warranted by it. Thus the chief symbol and standard in the area of doctrine is the Bible itself. But note well that the standard is chiefly a guardian from any addition to what may be required for salvation. The Bible, moreover, is not the sole doctrinal standard. Anglicanism has been chary of construing the Church’s life and mission from any single theological approach or line of interpretation, even while holding to the fundamental doctrines of Christian faith as they may be (1) discerned in Scripture, (2) summarized in the baptismal (Apostles’) and ecumenical (Nicene) Creeds,¹⁹ and (3) interpreted or elaborated by prophets, apostles, teachers, and the Church itself. Doctrine is not an immutable corpus of material; it may develop over time, but its sound development is marked by the maintenance of essential continuity or coherence with its sources, of which Scripture is the primary one, along with the historical teachings of the Church as they meet the evangelical criterion of not adding to what must be believed for salvation.

It is precisely here that the *discipline* aspect of the triad begins to have relationship to *doctrine* as we have seen above, particularly in the authorization that the *lex agendi* or area of polity provides in the process of authorizing, correcting, or developing doctrine. But, having set forth an ecclesiological paradigm for understanding doctrine in the Episcopal Church, it is now necessary to turn directly to a particular and fundamental exhibition of that doctrine.

¹⁹The Episcopal Church did not retain the *Tria symbola* of Andrewes’ formulation as did the Church of England and, indeed, other traditions, for instance, the Lutheran. What that may mean is variously interpreted.

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III. The Centrality of the Paschal Mystery—An Explicit Recovery & Renewal

It is a commonplace of the ecumenical movement that if you want the doctrine of the Episcopal Church you must look to the Book of Common Prayer. In the process, for instance, of the Lutheran-Episcopal Dialogue III (1983-1991) it was early proposed to test the doctrinal agreement and compatibility between the two traditions that previous series (LED I & II) had claimed and somewhat explicated by a project of comparing Augsburg Confession with the Articles of Religion. In the event, the comparison was made not with the Articles but with the Book of Common Prayer 1979. I believe that tack will prove fruitful for United Methodist-Episcopal Dialogue as well.

It has been proposed above that liturgy is at the heart of the matter and that ecclesial life and mission at any level from the total Church to the individual believer must be authentically and in a living manner centered on Jesus Christ. One of the principal features of the BCP 1979 is that it roots the celebration, appropriation, and demonstration of salvation in the Paschal Mystery. All is ordered or reflected upon from this reality held in faith. As part of the liturgical renewal of our times, this central feature informs all other doctrinal aspects of the Church’s life and mission.

The splendor of the unified four-fold liturgy of Easter Eve with its lighting and blessing of the Paschal Candle, the recounting of salvation history from creation through exodus to restoration and renewal of the People of God, the celebration of Christian initiation in Baptism, proceeding to the first Eucharist of Easter forms an inexhaustible source and ground for the exhibition of living doctrine, especially as it ushers in, to use John of Damascus’ great paschal

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hymn’s phrase, “the queen of seasons bright,” the Great Fifty Days of Easter culminating in Pentecost.

The doctrine of the crucified, risen, ascended, glorified Christ revealing the Triune Mystery of divinity in its turn and sending the Holy Spirit who forms the Church and energizes its life and mission is at the heart of what the Episcopal Church claims to understand by salvation in all its dimensions and implications. That this focus on the Paschal Mystery is a relatively new emphasis is without question and it begs a related one: is this consistent with previous Anglican doctrinal understandings?

It is a commonplace that Anglicans when engaged in doctrinal discussions rely heavily (but, of course, not exclusively) on three scriptural sources: (1) the theological interpretation of the Christ event represented by the Gospel of John, especially (as compared to the synoptic Gospels) its clear setting forth of Jesus as the Christ in relationship to the other two persons of the Holy Trinity; (2) the fourth chapter of Ephesians, particularly as it relates the living Christ and growth into the character of Christ as at the heart of ecclesiology on any level—again from the individual Christian to the total *ecclesia*; and (3) the first chapter of Colossians where the cosmic Christ—in whom all things coinhere—calls and forms for the mission of reconciliation.²⁰

²⁰Apart from the entire Johannine Gospel, the passages that I have particularly in mind are: (1) Ephesians 4:1-15, and especially “There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of us all, who is above all and through all and in all. But grace was given to each of us according to the measure of Christ’s gift...” and “until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature humanity, to the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ; so that we may no longer be children, tossed about by every wind of doctrine...”; and (2) Colossians, “[Jesus Christ] is the express image of the invisible God, the first-born of creation; for in him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible...all things were created through him and for him... For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile to himself all things...making peace by the blood of his cross... And you...he has now reconciled in his body of flesh by his death, in order to present you holy and

Again, all that is claimed here is that notice be taken of the three principal *loci* or touchstones by which Anglicans typically resort for (in the order mentioned) their *theology*, *ecclesiology*, and *missiology*.

To the extent that this characterization is accurate, well and good. But such a doctrinal tendency is adduced not to conclude ecumenical conversation, but, quite the opposite, to open it. And also, it should be added, Anglicans live under the canon of not expounding one part of Scripture to the exclusion of others. Yet to return to the point, I would claim that the renewed emphasis on the Paschal Mystery is consistent with traditional Anglicanism, especially in the light of the typical scriptural *loci* just cited.

It may be claimed, to the contrary of this assertion, that it is more typical of Anglican doctrine to focus upon the incarnation of Jesus as the Christ of the Triune God. I would answer that the whole point of the incarnation (and it is, in fact, to be considered part of the Paschal Mystery) is its result and that neither Anglicanism in general, nor the Episcopal Church in particular, has ever lost its doctrinal hold upon that reality, though, of course, it has been tested in controversy.

IV. Some Doctrinal Implications of the Paschal Mystery

blameless and irreproachable before him, provided that you continue in the faith; stable and steadfast, not shifting from the hope of the gospel which you heard, which has been preached to every creature under heaven, and of which I, Paul, became and minister.”

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In conclusion, I would like, then, to turn to what I see as several doctrinal implications of this renewed emphasis on the Paschal Mystery. Given the assigned length of this paper, now well over the limit, these will have at present to be entered almost by title but with a little explanation.

First of all, with the re-appropriation of the Paschal Mystery has come a renewal of Baptism. Once this rite was normally observed almost in private, frequently on a Sunday afternoon with only parents and sponsors in attendance. Now for at least a quarter-of-a-century Episcopalians (with others of course) have been celebrating Baptism publicly in the context of the main and eucharistic liturgy of the Lord’s Day. As this is done the congregation is put in mind of its own incorporation into Christ, renewing its baptismal promises, and looking for growth into Christ by what one of our best theologians has called “the sacrament of perpetual union.”²¹ Baptism, then, is not private, but an ecclesial affair. Among the many implications of such a baptismal ecclesiology is a renewed appreciation for the priesthood of all believers that militates against clericalism by including the ordained or ministerial priesthood as within rather than above the laity.²² Also to be noted here is a small revolution in our doctrine of the Holy Spirit! Between the water rite and the consignation with chrism (making each Christian truly that, a “little Christ”), is a prayer invoking the seven gifts of the Spirit—previously postponed to

²¹F. D. Maurice, *The Kingdom of Christ*, (London, 1842), 96ff.

²²“Holy Baptism,” BCP 1979, xxx. Especially significant in this regard is the following said or by the entire congregation, “We receive you into the household of God, confess the faith of Christ crucified, proclaim his resurrection, and share with us in his eternal priesthood.”

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Confirmation. The implications of this renewed pneumatology have largely yet to be explicated, but they are nonetheless important to mention here.²³

Secondly, the recovery of the Paschal Mystery underlies the norm of the Eucharist as the principal liturgy of the Lord’s Day throughout the year. Having received their identity and mission in Baptism, the faithful gather to hear their story, the story of the People of God in God’s Word and its timely explication; to pray for forgiveness, reconciliation, and the life of the world for which Christ died and rose again; and to celebrate the Sacrament of their growth and nourishment in Christ, finally being sent forth “to love and serve the Lord” in persons and peoples created in the divine image and, indeed, in the stewardship of creation, neither of which may be regarded any longer from a “human” (in the Pauline sense) or “worldly” (in the Johannine sense) point of view.

In the context of the Eucharist, it will also be well to mention the doctrinal appropriation of an eschatology that is at once more primitive and contemporary than that which had obtained from the late medieval period until well into the 19th Century. The Eucharist is held to be the meeting point of time and eternity (eternity being distinguished as qualitatively different from time and not just time extended indefinitely).²⁴ In this encounter, graceful energies are released

²³The seven enumerated gifts (Isaiah 11:1-3) are given more of a verbal formulation than has previously been the case whether in KJV or BCP. Thus: “Heavenly Father, we thank you that by water and the Holy Spirit you have bestowed upon these your servant the forgiveness of sins, and have raised them to the new life of grace. Sustain them, O Lord, in your Holy Spirit. Give them an [1] inquiring [wisdom] and [2] discerning [understanding] heart, the courage [3] to will [counsel] and [4] to persevere [strength], a spirit [5] to know [knowledge] and [6] to love [love] you, and the gift of [7] joy and wonder [holy fear] in all your works. Amen.”

²⁴For English-speaking theology (and Anglicanism specifically) it was F. D. Maurice (1805-1872) who reappropriated and advanced this eschatology in the last of his *Theological Essays* (London, 1854).

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for the necessary christological formation in the faithful. The chief liturgical locus of a direct statement in regard to this eschatology may be seen in contrasting the old form of absolution after the General Confession with the new. Previously, this absolution pronounced over the people ended, “and bring you to everlasting life”; it now reads “and keep you in eternal life.” There are many implications of this primitive-contemporary eschatology that impinge on everything from our understandings of the sacraments in the life of the Church to the issues of social justice in her mission.

Thirdly and lastly, there is a doctrinal implication for Episcopalians in all this, namely, that the ecumenical enterprise is not one that is to be entered into after all else is said and done or when we have, at some hypothetical point in the future (presumably a nano-second before the Parousia!) gotten our own ecclesial house in order. Ecumenism must be part of our breathing in and breathing out, part of the Spirit’s inspiration and respiration in and through us as we engage the life and mission of the Church together. Whatever we say we believe will be, literally, *incredible* without the ecumenical.

There is, of course, much more to be said in the matter of doctrine in the Episcopal Church. The major point has been to claim a radical christological center for doctrine. Here, then, we may cite John Keble’s wonderful morning hymn concluding with the aspiration that “we may live more nearly as we pray.” We might all justly agree that I have, not as well as might be done, but to some degree at least “put the best face” on the subject of doctrine in my Church! Therefore, I want to end by altering the prayer to include that “we may live more nearly as we

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believe.” And thus there will be a better and more christly harmony among the *orandi*, the *agendi*, and, indeed, the *credendi* in our life together.

Methodist-Episcopal Dialogue

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

Ted A. Campbell

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

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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 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

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these discussions.²⁵

The United Methodist Church is grounded in two distinct Christian traditions, 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.²⁶

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

²⁵Cf. William Abraham, *Waking from Doctrinal Amnesia: The Healing of Doctrine in The United Methodist Church* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1995).

²⁶Ted 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).

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 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 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). 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 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,²⁷ and defended by Thomas Oden.²⁸ 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.

²⁷Richard 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.

²⁸Thomas Oden, *Doctrinal Standards in the Wesleyan Tradition* (Grand Rapids, MI: Francis Asbury Press, 1988).

A.6 Statement of “Our Theological Task” (Included in *Discipline* but not 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 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).²⁹ 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).³⁰ Only in the twentieth century (beginning with the 1964 *Hymnal*)

²⁹ Cf. Nolan B. Harmon, “The Creeds in American Methodism” (in *Encyclopedia of World Methodism*, s.v. “Confession of Faith,” 1:563).

³⁰An 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).

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.³¹ 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.”³² He insisted on the content of the ancient creeds, but did not insist that

³¹“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]).

³²The 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 "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

believers should subscribe to their precise words.³³ 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.”³⁴ 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?”³⁵ This doctrinally dubious question

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).

³³Wesley, sermon “On the Trinity,” ¶ 4 (in Jackson, 6:201; Outler, *Sermons* 2:377-378).

³⁴*Book of Discipline* 1996, ¶ 2624.3.d (p. 656).

³⁵*Hymnal* of 1935, p. 543.

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?”³⁶ 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?”³⁷ 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.³⁸

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 attention to issues of doctrine and Wesleyan spirituality.

³⁶*Hymnal* of 1964, ritual section, no. 829.

³⁷*Hymnal* of 1964, ritual section, no. 828.

³⁸*Hymnal* of 1988, p. 35.

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?³⁹

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,⁴⁰ 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 these doctrinal standards include two rather different sets of “doctrines.” They include, on the one hand,

³⁹UMC *Discipline* 1996, ¶ 327, questions 8-10.

⁴⁰UMC *Discipline* 1996, ¶ 2624, item “f.”

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).⁴¹

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.⁴² 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.⁴³

That is to say, Wesley understood doctrine in relation to the unity of particular

⁴¹Colin Williams, *John Wesley’s Theology Today* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1960), pp. 16-17.

⁴²Wesley, “A Letter to a Roman Catholic” (in Jackson *Works* 10:80-86).

⁴³Wesley, “Principles of a Methodist Farther Explained” VI:4-6 (in Jackson *Works* 8:472-475).

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,⁴⁴ and eventually the inclusion of the historic creeds (late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries).

⁴⁴There 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.

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.⁴⁵ 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).

⁴⁵Geoffrey 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).

THE UNDERSTANDING AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE MINISTRY OF THE
LAITY

in the Episcopal Church USA and The United Methodist Church

Patricia N. Page

UNDERSTANDINGS

The understanding of the ministry of the people of God has been a major concern of Christian churches throughout the world during the latter half of the 20th century.

In 1953 Yves Congar, a French Dominican theologian, produced a massive study of the theology of the laity. Hendrik Kraemer, a Dutch Protestant theologian, wrote *The Theology of the Laity* in 1958. Lay centers were established in Germany and Switzerland. The World Council of Churches inaugurated a division on the ministry of laity. The theological and liturgical strivings of the Vatican Council II (1962-65), especially the encouragement of Bible reading and Bible study, influenced the theology and liturgy in many churches not least in the emphasis on the biblical model of the church as the *whole people of God* (Greek., “laos”).

The talk about the ministry of the laity got lost in the passions of the 60s and early 70s but people such as Mark Gibbs, a Church of England lay man, and T .Ralph Morton, an ordained minister in the Church of Scotland, wrote *God’s Frozen People: A Book for and about Christian Laymen* in 1965.

Their work bore fruit in the early 1970’s. The Episcopal Church created a unit on lay ministry which published *99%: Resources for Lay Ministry* and held conferences through out the USA. The Board of the Church Army, an Anglican lay evangelistic group, maintained the

National Institute for Lay Training at the General Theological Seminary from 1975-1982 (I was Director of Training of this program from 1975-1980.) The Lutheran Church established a Department of Ministry in Daily Life. A group of Roman Catholic clergy and laity who were deeply committed to the ministry of the whole people of God founded the National Center for the Laity in 1978. Gradually dioceses, conferences, synods, councils developed educational programs for laity.

Concurrent with these developments in the understanding of the ministry of laity was extensive work in the first revision of the Episcopal Book of Common Prayer since 1928. At the same time the United Methodist Church was engaged in the first substantial revision of the content and format of its Hymnal, including General Services, since the 1870’s which embodied the former Methodist and former Evangelical United Brethren traditions. (*The United Methodist Hymnal*, the United Methodist Publishing House, 1988, p. v.)

The Understanding of Ministry of the Laity in the 1979 Episcopal Church Book of Common Prayer.

The 1979 Book of Common Prayer provided a radically new liturgy of Holy Baptism and a new Catechism both of which defined and shaped the Episcopal Church’s new understanding of the ministry of the whole people of God. The most formative aspects of this liturgy are:

- a) The introductory sentence to the rubrics concerning the service is: “Holy Baptism is full initiation by water and the Holy Spirit into Christ’s Body the Church.” There is provision for confirmations, receptions of members from other churches, and

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renewal of baptismal vows but all of these are only for the purpose of strengthening the vows made at baptism.

- b) Statement of person’s commitment to be baptized (or by parents and godparents on behalf of candidate) and congregation’s promise to support persons “in their life in Christ”.
- c) The Baptismal Covenant: statement of faith as found in the Apostles’ Creed, promises to live the Christian life, prayers for those making this commitment.

The promises are

Will you continue in the apostles’ teaching and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in the prayers?

Will you persevere in resisting evil, and whenever you fall into sin, repent and return to the Lord?

Will you proclaim by word and example the Good News of God in Christ?

Will you seek and serve Christ in all persons, loving your neighbor as yourself?

Will you strive for justice and peace among all people, and respect the dignity of every human being?

The candidate for baptism (or sponsors) and the congregation which renews its vows in each baptism responds to each question: “I will, with God’s help.”

- d) Thanksgiving over the Water – a recounting of the place of water in the Biblical story and blessing this water so it can provide power to those being baptized “to continue for ever in the risen life of Jesus Christ.”
- e) Following the baptism the whole congregation says, “We receive you into the household of God. Confess the faith of Christ crucified, proclaim his resurrection, and share with us in his eternal priesthood.”

The Baptismal Covenant in the Hymnal of the United Methodist Church

The Hymnal of the United Methodist Church 1989 has four liturgical orders of the Baptismal Covenant which follow the same format as the service of Holy Baptism in the Book of Common Prayer. Three of these orders contain a form for confirmation or reaffirmation of faith. Also, different from the BCP liturgy, these three orders provide an order for reception into the United Methodist Church for members of Christ’s universal church and an order for reception into the local congregation coming from other UMC congregations. The fourth order is for use by a congregation for baptismal reaffirmation when there is no baptism, confirmation, or reception.

What do these liturgies tell us about the ministry of the people of God?

The Episcopal and the United Methodist liturgies contain similar clear pictures of the new persons those baptized are intended to grow into:

members of the household of God

faithful members of God’s holy church

Christ’s representatives in the world

true disciples who walk in the way that leads to life

faithful disciples

sharers in Christ’s holy priesthood

In each liturgy there is acknowledgment of the important ministry of the whole community to “support these persons in their life in Christ.”

The understanding of the ministry of the Church in the Catechism in the Book of Common Prayer (*pages 854-856*)

Q. What is the Church?

A. The Church is the community of the New Covenant.

Q. How is the Church described in the Bible?

A. The Church is described as the Body of which Jesus Christ is the Head and of which all baptized persons are members. It is called the People of God, the New Israel, a holy nation, a royal priesthood, and the pillar and ground of truth.

Q. What is the mission of the Church?

A. The mission of the Church is to restore all people to unity with God and each other in Christ.

Q. How does the Church pursue its mission?

A. The Church pursues its mission as it prays and worships, proclaims the Gospel, and promotes justice, peace, and love.

Q. Through whom does the Church carry out its mission?

A. The Church carries out its mission through the ministry of all its members.

The Ministry

Q. Who are the ministers of the Church?

A. The ministers of the Church are lay persons, bishops, priest, and deacons.

Q. What is the ministry of the laity?

A. The ministry of lay persons is to represent Christ and his Church; to bear witness to him wherever they may be; and, according to the gifts given them, to carry out Christ’s work of reconciliation in the world; and to take their place in the life, worship, and governance of the Church.

Subsequent definitions of the ministry of a bishop, of a priest, of a deacon.

Definitions of the Mission and Ministry of the Church in the United Methodist Church Book of Discipline, 2000

Section II. The Ministry of All Christians

Par. 125 “All Christians are called through their baptism to this ministry of servanthood.

Par. 127 “This ministry of all Christians in Christ’s name and spirit is both a gift and a task. . . .Entrance into the church is acknowledged in baptism and ratified in confirmation.”

Section III. Servant Ministry and Servant Leadership

Par 131 “The ministry of all Christians consists of service for the mission of God in the World. . . . the ministry of all Christians is shaped by the teachings of Jesus.”

Par 132 “The United Methodist Church has traditionally recognized these gifts and callings in the ordained offices of elder and deacon. The United Methodist tradition has

recognized that laypersons as well as ordained persons are gifted and called by God to lead the Church.”

Section IV. Servant Ministry

Par. 133 “The ministry of all Christians consists of privilege and obligation . . . In the United Methodist tradition these two dimensions of Christian discipleship are wholly interdependent.”

Par. 134 “Our Relationship with God: Privilege”

Par. 135 “Our Relationship with Christ in the World: Obligation

Section V. Servant Leadership

Par. 136 “Within The United Methodist Church, there are those called to servant leadership, lay and ordained. Such calls are evidenced by special gifts, evidence of God’s grace, and promise of usefulness. . . The privilege of servant leadership in the Church is the call to share in the preparation of congregations and the whole Church for the mission of God in the world..”

Other significant descriptions in the Book of Discipline:

Par. 216 The Meaning of Membership

When persons are baptized they become full members of the Church. They become “professing members” when they “covenant together with God and with the members of the local church to keep the vows which are a part of the order of confirmation and reception into the Church:

To renounce the spiritual forces of wickedness, reject the evil powers of the world, and repent of their sin;

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To accept the freedom and power God gives them to resist evil, injustice, and oppression;

To confess Jesus Christ as Savior, put their whole trust in his grace, and promise to serve him as their Lord;

To remain faithful members of Christ’s holy church and serve as Christ’s Representative in the world;

To be loyal to The United Methodist Church and do all in their power to strengthen their ministries;

To faithfully participate in its ministries by their prayers, their presence, their gifts, and their service;

To receive and profess the Christian faith as contained in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments”.

Summary:

Much of the theology of the ministry of the laity in both the Episcopal Church and The United Methodist Church has been reinforced by the developing theology of baptism. This has been true not only for our two churches but also in the worldwide ecumenical body represented in the World Council of Churches. The Lima text, Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry, 1982, is the culmination of special ecumenical consultations beginning in 1927 as well as bilateral conversations.

The fact that the Catechism in the Book of Common Prayer 1979 placed the definition of the ministry of the laity at the head of the descriptions of the ministry of the Church gave a strong boost to lay persons trying to understand their vocation. However, there

was considerable confusion as to what that meant. Some people considered Holy Baptism as the “ordination” of laity for ministry. The acceptance of women as deacons gave new life to the ancient order of the diaconate but it did provide more confusion to lay people who were trying to understand their vocation. In the 1990’s it became popular to talk about the Ministry of the Baptized. However, so often this phrase was often followed by the discussion of “the ministry of the baptized” and “the ministry of the ordained” which denied the basic assumption that “ordained “ are also primarily in the ministry of the baptized.

The web page of the Office for Ministry Development of the Episcopal Church now reads: “*Resources for ministry of the baptized including the clergy.*” (*Italics added.*)

The United Methodist Church in its Book of Discipline, par. 219, defines *The Call to Ministry of All the Baptized*. “All members of Christ’s universal church are called to share in the ministry which is committed to the whole church of Jesus Christ. Therefore, each member of the United Methodist Church is to be a servant of Christ on mission in the local and worldwide community.

RESPONSIBILITIES

Ministry of the laity in the Episcopal Church

Its life

A From Title III, Canon 1 – 4 of the Episcopal Church of the United States:

Canon 1. Of the Ministry of All Baptized Persons. Sec. 1. Each Diocese shall make provision for the affirmation and development of all baptized persons, including:

- (a) Assistance in understanding that all baptized persons are called to minister in Christ’s name, to identify their gifts with the help of the Church and to serve Christ’s mission at all times and in all places.
- (b) Assistance in understanding that all baptized persons are called to sustain their ministries through commitment to life-long Christian form

Canon 3. Of Discernment

Sec. 1. The Bishop and Commission shall provide encouragement, training, and necessary resources to assist each congregation in developing an ongoing process of community discernment appropriate the cultural background, age, and life experiences of all persons seeing direction in their call to ministry.

Canon 4. Of Licensed Ministries

Sec. 1. A confirmed communicant in good standing, or in extraordinary circumstances, subject to guidelines, established by the Bishop, a communicant in good standing, may be licensed by the Ecclesiastical Authority to serve as Pastoral Leader, Worship Leader, Preacher, Eucharistic Minister, Eucharistic Visitor, Catechist. The guidelines should include discernment, selection, training, continuing education and the duration of licenses.

Professional lay ministries: Directors of Christian Education, Parish Visitors, Parish Nurses, Communicators, Youth Workers, Teachers and others all of whom should be helped

through the process of discernment, training, and deployment.

Its worship:

The rubrics of the Book of Common Prayer 1979 specifically provide for a lay person as well as a clerical person to lead in many services of the Episcopal Church. This is true of the Daily Offices of Morning, Noon Day, Evening Prayer, and Compline. In the 1928 Prayer Book it allowed for the “minister” to be the leader.

In Pastoral services such as Ministration to the Sick and the Burial of the Dead the leader may be a deacon or a lay person.

Only a bishop or a priest can pronounce absolution where there is confession provided or where there is to be an anointing. Both a deacon and a lay person can hear a confession in the Reconciliation of a Penitent, but cannot give absolution. When it is necessary to have anointing as in Ministry to the Sick a lay person or a deacon “may perform anointing with oil blessed by a bishop or priest.” The Lay Eucharist Minister can administer the consecrated bread and wine in the church when there is not a clergy person present.

In the celebration of the Holy Eucharist lay persons may be appointed to read the Lessons, the Old Testament Lesson and the Epistle, and the Prayers of the People.

The Celebration of a New Ministry is primarily for the institution of priests and deacons in their new ministries. The rubrics also provide for this service being used for lay persons: “A lay person being instituted should read one of the Lessons and assist where appropriate.”

In its governance

Lay people are expected to form the vestry of each congregation. The members are elected in the annual meeting of the congregation.

Each congregation elects delegates and alternates to its annual diocesan convention. Each diocese decides the number of lay delegates and alternates. Every active clerical person in the diocese automatically has a seat and vote.

Each diocese elects its 4 lay and 4 clerical delegates to the triennial General Convention.

In each diocese lay persons and clergy are elected to the Standing Committee and the Diocesan Council. The Council appoints lay and clerical persons to serve on the departments and committees of the diocese.

Discipline and accountability

The Task Force on Disciplinary Policy and Procedure of Title IV of the Canons of the Episcopal Church : Fitness for Ministry, Accountability and Ecclesiastical Discipline will present its revisions for a vote in the General Convention, June, 2006. These revisions would extend the disciplinary canons to “All persons [ordained and lay] serving in this Church shall abide by these Canons in their personal conduct in acts performed for or within the Church” “According to these revisions it would be more possible to expel laity from the community for among other offenses ‘an act which results in the person being repelled from the Holy Communion, an act which brings scandal or disrepute upon the Church, or which threatens the welfare or safety of the church, church property, the church community, or any member,” (From a report in *The Living Church*, Steve Waring, March 6, 2005, p. 6.)

Ministry of the laity in The United Methodist Church

Its life

Par. 250 “Out of the general ministry of each local church there shall be elected by the charge conference. [The charge conference is made up on the members of the church council plus clergy who have a charge conference relationship.]

1.” **a lay leader** who shall function as the primary lay representative of the laity in that local church and shall have the following responsibilities:

- a) fostering awareness of the role of laity both within the congregation and through their ministries in the home , workplace, community, and world, and finding ways within the community of faith to recognize all these ministries
- b) meeting regularly with the pastor to discuss the state of the church and the needs for ministry;
- c) membership in the charge conference and the church council, the committee on finance, and the committee on lay leadership where, along with the pastor, the lay leader shall serve as an interpreter of the actions and programs of the annual conference and the general Church...
- d) continuing involvement in study and training opportunities to develop a growing understanding of the Church’s reason for existence and the types of ministry that will most effectively fulfill the Church’s mission;

e) assisting in advising the church council of opportunities available and the the needs expressed for a more effective ministry of the church through its laity in the community;

f) informing the laity of training opportunities provided by the annual conference.”

It is recommended that a lay leader also serve as a lay member of the annual conference. Each charge is entitled to as many lay members of annual conference as there are clergy in the charge.

Par. 258 “There shall be elected annually, by the charge conference in each local church, a **committee on lay leadership** that is composed of full members of the local church. The charge of this committee is to identify, develop, deploy, evaluate, and monitor Christian spiritual leadership for the local congregation.” The pastor is to chair the committee, a lay person elected by the committee will serve as vice chairperson. The committee will consist of no more than nine persons in addition to the pastor and lay leader.

Par. 266 Lay Speaking Ministries

“A **lay speaker** (local church or certified [by the district or conference committee on Lay Speaking Ministries]) is a member of a local church or charge who is ready and desirous to serve the Church and who is well informed on and committed to the Scriptures and the doctrine, heritage, organization, and life of The United Methodist Church and who has received specific training to develop skills in witnessing to the Christian faith through spoken communication, church and community leadership, and

care-giving ministries. An applicant must be active in the support of the local church or charge.”

Par. 270 Provisions for Lay Missioners

Lay missioners are committed lay persons, mostly volunteers, who are willing to be trained and work in a team with a pastor-mentor to develop faith communities, establish community ministries, develop church school extension programs, and engage in congregational development. . . . They are accountable to their pastor-mentor as members of the ministry team. . . . The concept of lay missioners is theologically based in the ministry of the laity.”

Its worship

The United Methodist Book of Worship contains some introductory comments on baptism: “Baptism anticipates a lifetime of further and deeper experiences of God, further acts of Christian commitment and ministries in the world. Confirmation, ordinations, and consecrations to particular ministries, and all other steps in ministry.”

Its governance

A charge has as many lay members of the annual conference (the term is lay member) as it has clergy. The lay members are elected by the council (the administrative body of the church). In order to keep the number of clergy and lay equal, where there are clergy and clergy in non-local church appointments which do not have a corresponding lay member,

other laity have to be added. These might be presidents of United Methodist Women, United Methodist Men, and United Methodist Youth or lay persons who chair committees.

Lay delegates to General Conference are elected by the lay members of annual conferences to be equal to the number of clergy being elected by clergy members of the annual conference. The number elected to the Conference is determined by a formula which is basically based on the numbers in the annual conference,

Discipline and accountability

Both ordained and lay persons may be charged with offenses defined by the Order and Discipline of the United Methodist Church. Those covering lay persons are listed in Paragraph 2702, Section 3, of the Book of Discipline.

3. A professing member of a local church [includes both lay and ordained] may be charged with the following offenses, and , if so, may choose a trial: (a) immorality; (b) crime; (c) disobedience to the Order and Discipline of the United Methodist Church; (d) dissemination of doctrines contrary to the established standards of doctrine of The United Methodist Church; (e) sexual abuse; (f) sexual misconduct: child abuse; (h) harassment, including , but not limited to racial and/or sexual harassment; (i) racial or gender discrimination; or (relationships and/or behaviors that undermine the ministry of persons serving within an appointment (presumably this would referred to an ordained person).

Paragraph 2704, Section 4, When a respondent is a layperson, gives directions for cases when the grievances or complaints have been brought against a lay person..

SUMMARY

The Episcopal Church and the United Methodist Church both have a number of provisions for promoting the ministry of laity within the body of the Church. These have their justification in the format for the vows which all members take in Holy Baptism and the Baptismal Covenant. Each affirm that the ministry of the laity is to carry out Christ’s ministry in the world.

Still there is confusion about the ministry of the laity. We honor ordination of the few more than we do the baptism of us all. We experience the structures authorized for lay leaders as being of the next level up to – or just below - the status of the ordained. The Episcopal Church has invested much in the theological education of those to be ordained and very little in preparing all the laity for our ministry in daily life.

However, God has moved us a long way in our understanding of the Baptismal Covenant and we believe is still opening up to us the fuller vocation of being God’s people.

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**FOR INFORMATION ONLY - NOT FOR CIRCULATION – YOU MAY NOT QUOTE OR
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United Methodist Evangelicals and Ecumenism
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In this paper I want to explore what it will take to get United Methodist Evangelicals to take ecumenism seriously. En route to dealing with this query I need to set the scene by making some preliminary remarks about the nature and ethos of evangelicalism within United Methodism and by noting why this stream of the contemporary church has been so lukewarm about ecumenism. Perhaps I should also note straight away that by ecumenism I mean here the intention to work aggressively for the full organic unity of Christians in one universal body of faith.¹

Like evangelicalism in the wider Christian world evangelicalism within the United Methodist Church is a complex, diverse movement.² To be sure, we can discern an immediate network of platitudes that are the mark of the evangelical tradition. Characteristically evangelicals are committed to the authority of scripture, to a robust body of traditional doctrine, to conversion, to evangelism at home and abroad, to ministry among the needy, and so on. However, the embodiment of these primary commitments is thoroughly diverse with differences of emphasis making a significant difference to the overall picture presented. Thus the tradition is internally contested and dynamic rather than fixed and static.

There are two ways to plot the diversity: one diachronic and the other synchronic.

¹ I have in mind the vision mapped out at New Delhi in 1961.

² I have given my own analysis of the evangelical tradition as a whole in *The Coming Great Revival* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1984). For a recent and refreshing theological interpretation of evangelicalism see Gary J. Dorrien, *The Remaking of Evangelical Theology* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1998).

On the diachronic front evangelicals in The United Methodist Church bear traces of the three massive expressions of the evangelical tradition that have cropped up within Protestantism. First, with the Reformation The United Methodist evangelicals are staunchly committed to scriptural authority. This represents a strong epistemological bent towards foundationalism in theology, namely, the aim to ground everything in scripture construed as the bearer of special revelation. To be sure, within Methodism evangelicals generally receive scripture either as the warrant and carrier of the great doctrines of the tradition or, more recently, they receive scripture within the context of the great doctrines of the tradition often seen as securing the narrative of the bible as a whole.³ Either way, they are not at all opposed to the great Tradition of the Church and have no quarrel with the doctrines of the Trinity, Incarnation, and the like, enshrined in the ecumenical creeds. Indeed evangelicals generally lament the loss of material doctrine within Methodism over the years.

Second, evangelicals in United Methodism bear the marks of the Evangelical Awakening that took place in the eighteenth century. This is absolutely critical for understanding evangelicals within The United Methodist Church. The great hero here, of course, is John Wesley and the model for current practice is the work of early Methodism. For United Methodist evangelicals John Wesley represents the best of the evangelical tradition. They see him as a mentor, a brilliant evangelist, a social reformer, a remarkable organizer, and an astute thinker. Above all they see him as championing the critical significance of living piety over against dead orthodoxy, institutional religion, social activism, and intellectual abstraction. More particularly they gravitate to several features of his life and work that they wish to emulate, namely, his conversion at Aldersgate, his remaining within the church of his day to reform and renew it, and his combining of personal

³ The latter vision has been championed with great élan by Joel Green in his commentaries and writings.

piety with social activism. Overall evangelicals see themselves as the true bearers of the early Methodist tradition as developed and implemented by Wesley. They are best understood as mainline Pietists.

Third, evangelicals within The United Methodist Church bear the marks of the Fundamentalist-Modernist disputes of twentieth century Christianity in the United States. Interestingly, United Methodist evangelicals were not seduced into the fundamentalist vision of scripture, even though many may *de facto* be inerrantists. The issues to note here are more sociological and historical. Thus evangelicals in The United Methodist Church have found themselves gravitating towards Conservative Evangelicalism as a distinct grouping within twentieth century Christianity.⁴ This is in part because they felt alienated from the leadership of their own church and looked elsewhere for friendship and support. Effectively shut out of the corridors of theological education, they founded Asbury Theological Seminary in Wilmore, Kentucky. Its leaders immediately sought collegiality within the wider network of post-fundamentalist institutions like Fuller Theological Seminary, the Consortium of Evangelical Colleges, the National Association of Evangelicals, the Lausanne Movement, and the like. This sociological development dovetails with another development, namely the tendency to see the enemy as any and all kinds of Liberal Protestantism. Thus United Methodist evangelicals, while they have been uneasy with this dichotomy here and there, have readily reached for the standard polarity between Conservative and Liberal forms of American Christianity both as a means of analysis and as a polemical weapon to be used when needed against their critics and opponents. Not surprisingly they tend to see forms of Liberation theology as an extension of Liberal Protestantism.

⁴ This is one reason why they have such a high regard for English Evangelicals like Bishop Tom Wright, F.F. Bruce, I. Howard Marshall, J. I. Packer, and John Stott.

These observations are intended to bring to light various tensions and differences that lie below the surface within the tradition as a whole. Evangelicals are not a monolithic tradition; they differ over how best to express the tradition even while they recognize that they operate within determinate boundaries. The tensions and differences within the tradition are also manifest in the plethora of organizations that evangelicals have formed within The United Methodist Church. At this point we shift to the synchronic.

Generally speaking these organizations take the form of renewal organizations. The best-known, best-organized, and oldest organization is that of the Good News Movement.⁵ But there are many others: The Mission Society for United Methodists,⁶ Lifewatch,⁷ The Confessing Movement within The United Methodist Church,⁸ A Foundation for Theological Education,⁹ Transforming Congregations,¹⁰ the Coalition for United Methodist Accountability,¹¹ and the United Methodist unit of the Institute on Religion and Democracy.¹² These represent the formally identified groups that have emerged over the last forty years. However, it would be a serious mistake to ignore the more fluid forms of renewal that United Methodist evangelicals have taken to heart. Thus many evangelicals in The United Methodist Church have been deeply involved in the Church Growth Movement and in the Charismatic Movement. The point to register at this juncture is not that we have here a well-organized army of evangelicals, drunk with power, and funded by right wing conservative politicians; rather what we have is a volatile, energetic, amorphous, semi-

⁵ The Good News Movement really acts as a clearing house for most of the renewal movements in The United Methodist Church.

⁶ The concern in this case is the planting of local churches outside the United States.

⁷ This group is committed to the right to life of the unborn.

⁸ Here the interest is the doctrinal renewal of The United Methodist Church.

⁹ This group funds evangelical scholarship, nurturing students through to the Ph.D. level.

¹⁰ In this instance a positive ministry is developed for persons struggling with homosexuality.

¹¹ This is effectively a legal watchdog and advisory body.

¹² Here the concern is the relation between faith and politics.

organized network of believers who are serious about Christianity, committed to scripture, funded by personal piety, and intent on evangelism.¹³

Coming now more closely to the topic of ecumenism, the crucial observation to make at this stage is that overall evangelicals in The United Methodist Church have not really had a heart for ecumenism. This is a stark statement, but I think that any realistic assessment of the commitment of evangelicals to ecumenism must begin there. Clearly the next step is to track why this is the case. Why have United Methodist evangelicals been so hesitant about, if not hostile to, ecumenism? I think of many reasons why this is the case.

First, evangelicals within United Methodism have felt themselves to be a beleaguered minority, opposed by mainline leaders whose identity was in part constituted by a commitment to ecumenism. Thus, for many evangelicals the enemy has been, in fact, ecumenists who treated them with disdain. Evangelicals were sent off to Kentucky, to the backwoods where they belonged, that is, to a rural world of fundamentalism and conservative politics.¹⁴ They had no hope that they would ever be accepted or treated respectfully by the ecumenical leaders of the denomination. Second, given their minority status their first concern was survival. Enormous amounts of energy had to be mustered to organize, to work out strategies of ministry, to sustain their parachurch institutions, to articulate their concerns, to fend off criticism, and so on. What is now part of the wider mainline situation, namely, concern with survival, has always been integral to the life of evangelicalism; in both cases the energy left over for ecumenism is minimal.

¹³ The former view is that essentially developed in Leon Howell, *United Methodism @ Risk* (Kingston, New York: Information Project for United Methodists, 2003). For a reply from the evangelical side see Rile B. Case, *A Good News Response to: United Methodism @Risk* (Wilmore: Good News, n.d.)

¹⁴ It is a fact that Asbury Theological Seminary remains the elephant in the room for many United Methodist leaders and institutions. Its resounding success in terms of growth and impact represents a failure of prediction on the part of moderate and Liberal leaders and something of an intellectual embarrassment yet to be overcome.

Going deeper in our analysis, a third factor inhibiting commitment to ecumenism is lack of faith in the instrumentalities of ecumenism as represented, say, by the World Council of Churches and its national counterparts. By the time the modern evangelical movement in The United Methodist Church was formed, I think it is fair to say that the commitment to evangelism as understood by evangelicals within mainstream ecumenism was lukewarm at best and non-existent at worst. Donald McGavran’s stinging criticism in the late sixties when he called on the World Council of Churches to remember the two billion who had never heard the name of Christ was readily noted in evangelical circles.¹⁵ The formation of an alternative voice in mission and evangelism represented by Lausanne and other conferences simply consolidated the suspicions of evangelicals. Ongoing and unresolved disputes with the Board of Global Ministries only hastened the day when evangelicals formed their own Mission Board of The United Methodist Church.¹⁶ This represented the climactic manifestation of a tacit conviction: mainline ecumenical leaders and institutions were effectively a hindrance to the mission of the church. The cognitive dissonance between a core conviction of evangelicals and the missionary practices of ecumenism left the evangelicals with the obvious resolution: forget about ecumenism.

I suspect that there were several other factors that reinforced this resolution. One of these factors was and is a distrust of bureaucracies and institutions generally. Evangelicals readily believe that the tendency to corruption in corporate institutions is so endemic that the spiritual risks involved in any kind of organic merger or union are massive. Another factor at work was a cosmic and even apocalyptic fear of one-world movements. Perhaps the whole

¹⁵ George Hunter III was a student of McGavran and went on to become an international leader in the Church Growth Movement.

¹⁶ For a recent analysis of “missions” see James V. Heidinger II, “Are we Serious About Missions?” in *Good News*, January/February 2004, 11.

ecumenical movement, some thought, is really a cover for the forces of Rome or of Moscow; either way it is best to be suspicious and not participate. A third factor was the trend towards secular conceptions of theology and ministry and a perception that many ecumenists were all too ready to sacrifice the uniqueness of Christ in the salvation of the world, thus cutting a critical element in missionary labor.

If I am right in my judgment that evangelicals have no heart for ecumenism, then the challenge of getting them to take ecumenism seriously is an enormous one. In fact, evangelicals generally think that they have been vindicated in their assessment of ecumenism. They readily note that while most Christians could not care less about denominations much less about some kind of united church, the current leadership of The United Methodist Church has lost heart where ecumenism is concerned. To be sure, ecclesial civility requires paying lip service to ecumenism, and ongoing contractual obligations requires the continued funding of the current instrumentalities of ecumenism; however, ecumenism is theologically brain dead; it simply does not engage the brightest and best of the emerging leadership. There is little in ecumenism that fires the theological imagination; there is no pied piper like Albert Outler coming back from Vatican II to rally the troops and give the marching orders. The energy of the church is now redirected to other issues and causes. It is directed at survival, evangelism, and church growth; it is directed to the diverse special-interest groups that have become the allegiance of choice; and it is directed to managing the conflicts that threaten disunity within The United Methodist church itself. It is a sign of how low the ecumenical flame is burning that the recent failure to make any progress between The United Methodist Church and the African Methodist Episcopal Church

was barely noticed even as a blip on the screen of ecumenical activity. Folk had long ago switched to other channels.

The current difficulties facing the Anglican tradition over homosexuality only serve to weaken the prospects of ecumenism. Evangelicals have no interest in union with any body that shifts from what they perceive as biblical teaching on homosexuality. Indeed many evangelicals would be fully prepared to form whole new ecclesial bodies rather than compromise. Truth, as represented by scriptural authority, takes precedence over unity. Hence, the prospect for interest in, much less engagement with, ecumenism looks grim indeed.

Yet this is not the whole story. Evangelicals in The United Methodist Church have readily come together with other evangelical and renewalism movements across the mainline traditions.¹⁷ This may be a matter of political expediency, but I think that this is a cynical reading of the situation; commitment to the gospel really does compel believers towards unity. Earlier generations of evangelicals have sought to reach across traditional boundaries to form a united front. Furthermore, I think that evangelicals in The United Methodist Church have come to a much deeper appreciation for the common Faith of the Church over the last generation. Hence, they are keen to join hands with those who want to uphold the great doctrines of the Church, especially so if this will help the cause of evangelism. In this the work of Thomas Oden has been highly influential.¹⁸ Equally, there is still a distant memory within evangelicalism that mission and ecumenism were originally joined, thus there is always room for the recovery of this original and originating vision. Finally, I think that

¹⁷ The relevant organization is known as The Association for Church Renewal.

¹⁸ Thomas Oden’s effort to retrieve the patristic faith of the Church has received widespread acceptance among evangelicals in the United Methodist Church. Indeed Oden has become one of the leading figures in the evangelical tradition as a whole in the contemporary scene.

the current generation of leadership in the making is less defensive and more open in their outlook. While operationally they are still focused in issues of scripture, doctrine, and evangelism, they might well be interested in new versions of ecumenism that take seriously their core commitments.

So we come directly to the question with which I opened this paper: what would it take to get United Methodist evangelicals to take ecumenism seriously? I think the following *desiderata* would be minimally essential. I will mention five.

First, evangelicals will have to be convinced that the unity of the church is an imperative, that it is, in fact, a matter of obedience to God. Thus the case for the unity of the church will have to be made in robust theological, biblical, and soteriological categories. Frankly, my sense is that evangelicals look upon the great varieties of denominations and local churches, that is, the ecclesial *status quo*, as divinely permitted if not mandated. Like Methodism more generally, they have no robust ecclesiology beyond one that sees every Christian group as already being part of the church universal; they think that disunity is well down the hierarchy of sins; and they are far from sure that God wills an organic form of unity. Thus the case for organic unity will have to be made from the bottom up, so to speak.

Second, there will have to be a resolute recognition that the current instrumentalities of ecumenism have failed in various ways. Without some kind of significant intellectual and practical repentance, it is likely that evangelicals will think that the renewal of ecumenism is a waste of time and effort. They have no stake in reviving a failed enterprise; they have seen the movie version of ecumenism, and they have no interest in rewinding it. Any future vision of ecumenism will have to begin with a heavy dose of realism and contrition.

Third, there will have to be some kind of assurance not just that any new instrumentalities of unity will need to be created over time, but that any such instrumentalities will be under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Thus, ecumenism must be more than some kind of ecclesiastical engineering worked out in committee and mandated from above. It will have to be something that both bubbles up from within the heart of the church and that can be legitimately seen as a genuine work of the Holy Spirit. To be sure, there will be no new ventures in ecumenism without the hard reality of institutional embodiment, but such embodiment will also have to be interpretable as the work of the Holy Spirit if it is to have purchase.

Fourth, any future version and expression of ecumenism will have to be intimately related to evangelism. Thus the connection between evangelism and unity will have to be reforged in categories and practices that evangelicals can appropriate. To this end, the claim that current expressions of Christianity can actually aid evangelism by providing healthy competition or by furnishing different brands of Christianity for different kinds of personalities will have to be met head-on and overturned. Unity and mission will have to be brought together in convincing and practical ways. Concrete experiments along these lines would speak volumes.

Fifth, ecumenism will have to be such that it preserves the great doctrines of the tradition and the uniqueness of Christ in the salvation of the world. Any idea that doctrine divides and action unites will be resisted. Contemporary evangelicals are hard at work trying to outgrow anti-credalist forms of Biblicism; they have come to a much deeper appreciation of the Nicene tradition of faith. Hence they have no interest in any movement that would undercut the gains made in this territory. An ecumenism devoted merely to uniting humanity

or to fixing the world’s ills that is not grounded in the doctrines of the Church will be seen as sub-Christian and rejected as ineffective.

This list of *disiderata* constitutes a massive challenge to any ecumenist interested in persuading United Methodist evangelicals to get on board the ecumenical train. The worst ecumenists can fear is that evangelicals will oppose any effort to get the ecumenical train back on the rails. Certainly there is enough skepticism, contrariness, and disillusionment among evangelicals to make this a likely trend in some circles. The next best thing ecumenists can hope for is that evangelicals will stay engaged in the conversation, remain open to new possibilities, and lend a hand when they can. In this instance, evangelicals would keep their distance but be ready to help if invited to do so. Of course, the very best ecumenists might hope for is that evangelicals might become part of a whole new network of thinkers and agents who would surprise even themselves in producing fresh ways of conceiving and practicing ecumenism in the future.¹⁹

I would not bet a month’s salary on that option, but I would bet more than my shirt on it. Evangelicals have far more fecundity and resources than is commonly recognized. There are thousands of them abroad within The United Methodist Church; they are much more mature theologically and intellectually than they were a generation ago; they care deeply about the Church; they have a long history of advance, retreat, and renewal; and they really do not have any stomach for sectarianism or division. Most importantly they really do believe in the work of the Holy Spirit in the life of the faithful. Hence, if unity is the work of the Holy Spirit, they are highly likely to follow that lead as and when it happens in the Spirit’s good time.

¹⁹ I dare to predict that genuinely fresh thinking on ecumenism will emerge from within the evangelical tradition as a whole over the next decade.

**WORLD MISSION AND THE HISTORIC EPISCOPATE IN THE APOSTOLICITY
OF THE EPISCOPAL CHURCH**

An address to the Bilateral Dialogue between the United Methodist Church and the Episcopal Church USA, by the Very Rev’d Titus Presler, Th.D., D.D., Dean and President and Professor of Mission and World Christianity at the Episcopal Theological Seminary of the Southwest, Austin, Texas, given at Perkins School of Theology at Southern Methodist University, Dallas, Texas, 16 January 2004

Draft, for interim internal use only by the ECUSA/UMC Dialogue. Please do not quote. Author is revising the paper significantly for future publication, and the ECUSA/UMC Dialogue will receive the revised paper when it has been prepared.

The stated topic of the January 2004 dialogue between the United Methodist Church and the Episcopal Church USA is *Apostolicity and Mission*. An overall concern articulated by the dialogue organizers is to discern how the episcopate assists and enhances the service of the gospel, and not vice versa. We are to inquire how the historic episcopate, locally adapted, supports the overall apostolicity, or “sent-ness” of the church, and how the historic episcopate is a sign, though not a guarantee, of the apostolic faith. Within this overall concern, the topic suggested for Prof. Billy Abraham of Perkins School of Theology and myself is to illuminate how the our respective churches have remained faithful to the apostolic faith through mission.

I come to this topic as a missiologist, that is, as a scholar of the theology, history and practice of Christian mission. My principal focus as a missiologist has been on the interaction between the Christian gospel and local cultures. Shona Christianity in Zimbabwe has been a major research area for me, and this arose out of the time I spent there with my wife and family as an Episcopal missionary. Currently I am conducting research in my homeland of India, where I was born and grew up as the child of United Methodist missionaries engaged in theological education at the Leonard Theological

College at Jabalpur, a United Methodist institution in Madhya Pradesh. Thus to this ecumenical dialogue I bring some experience of the global mission work of United Methodism. Indeed, I have a vivid and fond memory of our family visit to John Subhan, the first convert from Islam to become a United Methodist Bishop, at his home in Nagpur, Madhya Pradesh.

Mission theology is a major interest of my current reflection and writing, with a growing emphasis on the nature and formation of missionary identity. I have just come, for instance, from teaching in the Mission Personnel Orientation for outgoing Episcopal missionaries that is being held over these two weeks at the Episcopal Theological Seminary of the Southwest in Austin, where I am Dean and President, and Professor of Mission and World Christianity. For the past six years I have served on the Standing Commission on World Mission, which advises the church’s General Convention; I was secretary, 1998-2000, and chair, 2001-03. In addition to my commitments in the international cross-cultural dimension of mission, from my experience as an inner-city parish rector I bring strong interest in more local mission in the multi-cultural and Hispanic realities of the USA today.

Following a definition of terms, I propose to do three things in this address. First, I explore Anglican and Episcopal faithfulness in mission and highlight the difference between the voluntary society pattern of mission work in the Church of England and as the more ecclesiocentric pattern of mission work in the Episcopal Church USA. Second, I highlight the role of the historic episcopate in Episcopal mission and its catalytic role in the communion as a whole. Third, I survey major themes in the decline and rise of world mission in the Episcopal Church in the latter part of the 20th century.

Terms of Discourse

I turn now to setting forth my understanding of the terms we are using.

Acknowledging that mission is a feature shared by virtually all religions today and not a peculiarity of Christianity,¹ I define religious mission as the spiritual vision and the practical means through which people project their religious faith and work and invite the participation and adherence of others. This definition applies equally to the Islamic Center of Austin, Texas; the New Earth and Blessed Peace Buddhist Meditation Society in Cambridge, Massachusetts; the Bahai Foi Centre d’Information in Montreal; the Hare Krishna Temple in Newcastle-upon-Tyne; and, closer to home, the Board of Global Ministries of the United Methodist Church, and the Anglican and Global Relations Cluster of the Episcopal Church. In diverse ways all of these groups project their religious faith and work and invite the participation and adherence of others.

On the basis of its Latin root in the verb *mittere*, meaning *to send*, I define Christian mission most briefly as the activity of sending and being sent in Christ. More expansively, I define Christian mission as the activity of sending and being sent across significant boundaries of human experience to bear witness in word and deed to God’s action in Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit. The stipulation of “significant boundaries of human experience” alludes to a connotation so inherent in the common

¹ While Christianity and Islam used to be identified as the two great missionary religions, developments in the latter part of the 20th century emphasize the missionary thrust of many other religions. The Ramakrishna Mission founded by Swami Vivekenanda has long had mission outreach in the Global North, as have numerous other more recent Hindu movements, including the Hindutva forces in contemporary Indian politics. Likewise, many Buddhist groups have been quite missionary in their presence and outreach. Elsewhere, I have shown that the Liberation War in Zimbabwe transformed Chivanhu, the traditional religion of the Shona people, into a missionary religion (*Transfigured Night: Mission and Culture in Zimbabwe’s Vigil Movement* (Pretoria: University of South Africa Press, 1999)).

understanding of mission that is virtually a denotation, namely, that we are on mission when we are bearing witness with persons and communities who are different from ourselves. That difference may be social, economic, racial, ethnic, linguistic, geographic, or, as is usually the case some combination of these. Yes, it is true that we are carrying out God’s mission when we do anything that is God’s will — anything that accords, say, with the mission statement of a congregation, conference or diocese — but the term mission retains its robust distinctiveness when it is distinguished from this more inclusive faithfulness that I term *ministry*. Mission, in brief, is ministry in the dimension of difference.

With mission defined so intrinsically as sending and being sent in Christ, the question how our church has been *apostolic* in mission can seem tautological, for, on the basis of its root in the Greek verb *apostello*, the conference organizers quite rightly equate apostolicity with *sentness*. The organizers go on, however, to define the question as one of how our churches have through mission been faithful to the apostolic faith, that is, the faith that the mission church is sent to offer, share and proclaim. What is and what is not the apostolic faith is today very much in dispute, as it has been in most periods of Christian history. The fiery quality of today’s debates about whether the Episcopal Church has fulfilled or departed from the apostolic faith in the consecration of a homosexual bishop press in upon us Episcopalians daily, but the nature of the debate is not in itself unique in any way. With the Lambeth Conference of 1888, and with the import of Anglican liturgy Sunday by Sunday, I affirm a mainstream Episcopal and

Anglican understanding that the Nicene Creed is “the sufficient statement of the Christian faith.”²

Concerning definitions of terms, it is important to explore the Episcopal Church’s official view of mission. The church’s current Catechism, unlike earlier catechisms, quite specifically undertakes to define mission. To the question, “What is the mission of the Church?” the Catechism responds, “The mission of the Church is to restore all people to unity with God and each other in Christ.” A follow-up question, “How does the Church pursue its mission?” prompts the response, “The Church pursues its mission as it prays and worships, proclaims the gospel, and promotes justice, peace and love.”³ Since the Prayerbook’s authorization in 1979, These catechetical statements have proved to be touchstones for the missional formulations of many dioceses, parishes, seminaries and other groups in the church. Indeed, the fact that the Baptismal Covenant and the Catechism highlight mission has been a major factor in stimulating church groups to engage the missional question of what God is calling them to be and do. The catechetical statements specify theologically the purpose of mission as reconciliation between God and humanity and specify the ministries that fulfill that mission. The definitions I have suggested are more simply descriptive, setting forth what distinguishes religious mission from other kinds of religious activity and what distinguishes Christian mission from the broad range of Christian ministry.

From a theological standpoint, the Episcopal Catechism could have given its missiological statements firmer ground by locating mission decisively in the character

²Book of Common Prayer, p. 877.

³Book of Common Prayer, p. 855.

and activity of God, rather than by associating mission with the activity of the church.

An alternative sequence might read:

Q: What is the mission of God?

A: The mission of God is to restore all people to unity with God and each other in Christ.

Q: What is the mission of the Church?

A: God invites and calls the Church to participate in God’s mission of reconciling all people to God and each other in Christ.

The question of how the church fulfills its mission would follow as the Catechism presently has it, “. . . as it prays and worships . . .” and so forth. The point here is that God is a missionary God, yearning and working for reconciliation with humanity. Mission neither begins in the church nor belongs to the church, for it begins in God. The church is faithful in mission as it responds to God’s invitation that we join God in offering our life and labor in reconciling the world with God.⁴

In the midst of all these clarifications, the question how the Episcopal Church has remained faithful to the apostolic faith through mission retains some ambiguity. On one hand, it can be taken as asking whether in its mission work the church has shared the apostolic faith or some other, perhaps sub-Christian faith. Reviewing the course of Anglican and Episcopal mission history will shed light on this question. On the other hand, the question can be taken as asking whether the church has been faithful in

⁴ These themes are developed in my introduction to world mission, *Horizons of Mission* (Boston and Cambridge: Cowley Publications, 2001).

fulfilling the “sentness” that is central to apostolicity. Has the church persevered in mission, in responding to God’s call to bear witness to Christ over the significant boundaries of human experience? Has the church been willing to be sent to minister in the dimension of difference? Or has the church been content to nurture its own life, unencumbered by encounters with the other who is different? Reviewing Anglican and Episcopal mission history will shed light on this question, as well.

For the question whether and how the church has been willing to be sent in the dimension of difference, this study focuses on the global dimension of that sentness. Anglican and Episcopal mission initiatives have had many local expressions over the centuries — with the poor, with women and children, with the sick, with immigrants, with victims of war, and many others. The global dimension of mission is equally important. It has warrant in the universal horizon of God’s salvation as anticipated in the Old Testament; in the inclusive embrace expressed in Jesus’ ministry and teaching; in the missionary character of the early Christian movement; and in the cosmic soteriology found everywhere in the New Testament. “A missionary is someone who leaves home,” says Jane Butterfield, mission personnel director for the Episcopal Church.⁵ This straightforward and empirical marker highlights the fact that global mission, while not better or more meritorious than other forms of mission, is an especially costly discipleship, both for the individual and for the church at large.⁶ The church’s faithfulness in international and cross-cultural mission is, therefore, an especially useful

⁵ In personal conversation.

⁶ The peculiarly sacrificial quality of cross-cultural, international mission is discussed in *Horizons of Mission*, 44.

marker of the church’s faithfulness to the apostolic faith, the church’s willingness to leave home and minister in the dimension of difference.

Turning to the “historic episcopate”, an important concept for our topic, the phrase occurs in the Chicago-Lambeth Quadrilateral as the fourth characteristic of the proposed basis for Christian unity: “The Historic Episcopate, locally adapted in the methods of its administration to the varying needs of the nations and peoples called of God into the unity of His Church.”⁷ What is meant is the institution of bishops as an order of ministry in the church, with such ordination viewed as a sacramental rite.⁸ The adjective *historic* refers to the view that the Anglican episcopate stands in the line of bishops extending back to the apostles of Jesus through the successive laying on of hands in the ordination rites through Christian history. This apostolic succession is viewed as a sign of the Anglican tradition’s continuity and unity with the life and faith of the universal church as extended through time since the ministry of Jesus and through space throughout the world.

It is with these understandings of mission, apostolicity, the apostolic faith and the historic episcopate, that I address two questions: How has the Episcopal Church remained faithful to the apostolic faith through mission? How has the historic episcopate helped or hindered the church’s faithfulness to the apostolic faith through mission?

I. APOSTOLICITY IN ANGLICAN AND EPISCOPAL WORLD MISSION

⁷ *Book of Common Prayer*, pp. 877-878.

⁸ This understanding differs from the United Methodist understanding prevailing today, in which elders and deacons are the two ordained orders in the church, and in which bishops are viewed as elders with a wider oversight in the church’s life.

A review of Anglican and Episcopal mission history is appropriate with a view to inquiring into whether and how the Anglican tradition and its American Episcopal expression has been faithful to the I first explore the role of the historic episcopate in the difference between the voluntary society pattern of mission organization in the Church of England, and what I term the ecclesiocentric pattern of mission organization in the Episcopal Church USA. Exploring this difference also provides opportunity to highlight major features of the history of Anglican and Episcopal mission work.

The Voluntary Principle in the Church of England

Although many people consider world mission as somehow intrinsic to the ethos of Protestant and Anglican churches, the fact is that the reformations in European Christianity that occurred in the 16th century issued in churches that for roughly 200 years were preoccupied primarily with their internal struggles for viability and which continued to view the world primarily through the lens of state-establishment, where Christian concern and vision stopped at national borders. Certainly, the state-established Church of England long displayed little concern even its own Anglicans outside the British Isles, in the American colonies and in India, for instance, let alone for bearing witness to Christ among non-Christians. American Anglicans long sought a bishop for their pastoral care, but they were consistently refused by successive archbishops of Canterbury.

With such lack of official interest in church life and work beyond Britain, it was finally the initiative of concerned individuals that prompted Anglican mission outreach. In the 1690s, English rector Thomas Bray was asked to help organize Anglican Church

work in Maryland. Disturbed by the low morale of the Anglicans he found in the colonies, their lack of resources and their lack of vision for vital outreach, he founded the first two mission societies within Anglicanism. Notably with four laymen, not with a bishop, he established in 1698 the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge (SPCK), which grew rapidly to become a major book distributor and publisher to this day, now with autonomous branches in the USA, India, Ireland and Australia.

Bray followed this first society with another in 1701, the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts (SPG), which was intended both to minister to Britons overseas and to evangelize non-Christians living under the British crown. Formed as a Society by Royal Charter, the SPG had state recognition and official position in the Church, but it needed to raise its own funds, so, again, it did not have the official support of dioceses and their bishops. It became a major missionary-sending agency with an initial focus on the American colonies, where it worked with American Indians and African Americans and founded some of the oldest parishes of what is now the Episcopal Church. Gradually its work spread to many parts of the world, mostly to areas of British influence. Since the Anglo-Catholic revival of the 19th century, the society has promoted a High Church style of Anglicanism. Anglicans in areas of SPG work tend, as a result, to have a high view of clerical orders, enjoy incense and bells in their worship, and exercise caution about ecumenical cooperation. Significantly, they have been slower in affirming the ordination of women to priesthood.

As an example, the Anglican episcopate in southern Africa, where the SPG was very active, is characterized by a distinct sense of privilege, somewhat high and lifted up,

and this has contributed to turmoil in the episcopate in Zimbabwe, Zambia and Malawi.⁹

On another side, I suggest that when the strong sense of episcopal vocation in the Anglo-Catholic movement is combined with the movement’s social engagement, its fruit includes the prophecy of Trevor Huddleston and Desmond Tutu, figures who certainly have advanced the mission of the church as bishops.¹⁰

The 19th century blossoming of Anglican and Protestant mission work was energized by the founding of more “voluntary societies ” like the SPCK, the fruit of a general evangelical awakening in the 18th century. They are termed “voluntary” because they were founded, organized and funded by interested individuals, not by the governing central structures of churches. Concerned that the Church of England continued to be relatively inactive in world mission, a group of Anglican evangelicals known as the Clapham Sect founded the Church Missionary Society (CMS) in 1799. Best known among them was William Wilberforce, who as a member of Parliament was active in the abolition of the slave trade and slavery itself in the British Empire. The CMS both addressed such injustices in the international system and pursued world evangelization with a vision that such work was a prelude to the inauguration of God’s kingdom in a coming millennial age.

⁹ In Zimbabwe, turmoil has been prominent and constant during the tenures of the three first African bishops of Mashonaland, now Harare — Peter Hatendi, Jonathan Siyachitema, and Nolbert Kunonga — from 1981 to the present. Similar turmoil characterized the episcopate of Elijah Masuko in Manicaland, 1981 to 1999. In Zambia, Bernard Milango, bishop of Northern Zambia and archbishop of the Province of Central Africa, was effectively barred from ministry in his diocese by widespread protests in 2002, and his translation to a diocese in Malawi later that year was delayed by further controversy and struggle.

¹⁰ Huddleston, a member of the Society of St. John the Evangelist, was a prominent anti-apartheid activist while a bishop. Tutu’s participation in the struggle began while he was a parish priest and extended through his time as secretary of the South African Council of Churches, bishop of the Diocese of Johannesburg, and archbishop of Capetown and the Anglican Church of Southern Africa. In retirement, his leadership of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission cemented his global reputation. Tutu is today the best known and most respected Anglican bishop of the 20th century, easily eclipsing William Temple, archbishop of Canterbury earlier in the century.

Whereas the SPG was chartered to operate within areas of British rule, the CMS sought to initiate work outside the British colonial structure and so express the universality of mission. While initially distrusted by English bishops on account of its autonomy, by the mid-1800s the CMS had the support of numerous bishops and was integrating mission throughout the world into the ethos of the Church of England. Consistent with its evangelical roots and in contrast with the SPG, the CMS promoted a Low Church style of Anglicanism. Anglicans in areas of CMS work — east Africa, for instance — tend, as a result, to be more revivalist, less eucharistic, and more ready to affirm the ordination of women.

One inheritor of the CMS heritage is the presently retiring archbishop of Uganda, Livingstone Mpalanyi Nkoyoyo. The archbishop’s Kampala residence, still termed a palace after the Church of England’s terminology, was constructed by Nkoyoyo on a fairly grand scale — not, however, as a display of elevated status but for a remarkable ministry of hospitality he and his wife Ruth offer to many visitors from both within and outside Uganda. Reflecting the evangelical CMS background and the East Africa Revival of the 1930s which it nurtured, the archbishop’s episcopal visitations are characterized by ongoing revivalism. “Wherever I go, I have an altar call,” he told me, and there he does not mean simply the invitation to communion! With such mission spirit in the episcopate, it is not surprising that the three most populous Anglican provinces in the communion today, outside of Britain, are Nigeria, Uganda and Kenya.

Mano Rumalshah, the current bishop of Peshawar in the United Church of Pakistan frequently points out that an underside of the diverse emphases of the English voluntary mission societies is competing theologies and ecclesiologies. Anglicans in

some parts of the world actually identify themselves primarily as CMS Christians or SPG Christians. Evangelization by both societies in Tanzania, for instance, has made the unity of that particular Anglican province hard to live out.

The major mission policy-maker in 19th-century English mission was not a bishop but Henry Venn, a layman and general secretary of the CMS from 1841 to 1872. He is best known for setting forth as a chief goal “establishing a Native Church upon the principles of self-support, self-government, and self-extension.” Keenly aware of the twin perils of missionary paternalism and indigenous dependency, Venn counseled missionaries to develop local leadership that would enable new churches to stand on their own as soon as possible. These “Three-Self Principles” anticipated by more than a century a current view that the missionary should work him/herself out of a job. Strikingly, Venn recommended for each local effort what he called the euthanasia of a mission:

It is important ever to keep in view what has been happily termed “the Euthanasia of a Mission” where the Missionary is surrounded by well-trained Native congregations under Native Pastors, when he gradually and wisely abridges his own labours, and relaxes his superintendence over the Pastors till they are able to sustain their own Christian ordinances, and the District ceases to be a Missionary field, and passes into Christian parishes under the constituted ecclesiastical authorities.

In theory, this principle helped to moderate patterns of missionary direction and indigenous subservience. As for the role of the historic episcopate, the ideal of self-government was meant that while episcopal oversight of a new work would initially be provided nominally by foreign bishops from afar through the CMS, direct and local episcopal jurisdiction would arrive in the form of an indigenous episcopate, ordained as

the “Native Church” became stronger and its clergy experienced enough to assume the mantle of bishops.

Accordingly, the CMS initiated the first mission venture to be directed by an African bishop. Consecrated in 1864 as the first non-European bishop of the Anglican Communion, Samuel Adjai Crowther, a former slave, developed church work in the Niger River delta in eastern Nigeria. In the imperial heyday of the “Scramble for Africa” that commenced in 1885, however, Henry Venn’s successors were not nearly so open to indigenous leadership, and Bp. Crowther’s three successor bishops after his death in 1891 were all Europeans. Thus even the CMS ultimately recommended the appointment of English bishops for its mission work.

While today the British societies are smaller than they once were, the spread of Anglicanism around the world was due chiefly to their work. This says several important things about Anglican mission history. First, Anglicanism was spread not by top-down policies of the Church of England hierarchy, but by the initiative of grassroots groups that were passionate about mission and that developed networks of support at the parish level. Mission vision, not ecclesiastical ambition, is responsible for the existence of the Anglican Communion. As mission work grew, bishops were appointed to oversee the church in mission areas. Mission policy, however, was formulated and implemented by the societies. Second, because these groups were voluntary rather than official, they were able to preserve their activism and their particular theological, geographical and strategic emphases from being blunted by the perennially competing priorities of central church structures. This accounts for the staying power of Anglican mission over the last three centuries. Third, in the context of the Church of England’s state-established link with a

major colonial power, the societies’ central role preserved a critical distance between mission work and colonial policy. Contrary to popular stereotypes today, Anglican mission was *not* simply the religious instrument of British imperialism, and it was certainly not primarily the instrument of alliances between the state and the episcopate of a state-established church.

The American Ecclesiocentric Model of the Missionary Church

For Anglicans living in the anti-royalist fervor of the American Revolution and its aftermath, establishing the Episcopal Church as an autonomous body, not governed from England and yet in full communion with the Archbishop of Canterbury, was a survival strategy mandated by their desire both to maintain Anglican worship and to be accepted as loyal citizens of the new United States. This American innovation formed the first non-British province of what came to be known as the Anglican Communion and established what has become the communion’s distinctive pattern of relationships: full local autonomy in legislative decision-making; full inter-provincial communion, united through the Archbishop of Canterbury; and committed consultation, since 1867 chiefly through the Lambeth Conference of bishops. Beyond survival, the American experience was a breakthrough for Anglican mission, for it created the concept of an indigenous Anglican Christianity outside Britain. It is probably not coincidental that the consecration of Samuel Seabury as the first American bishop in 1784 was followed by an act of Parliament in 1786 that authorized the consecration in England of bishops for dioceses abroad.

However innovative, the new American church was so small and weak that one historian dubbed the period 1789-1835 as “The Church Convalescent”! In the early years the American church naturally focused on settling its internal life, not on mission. It adapted the Book of Common Prayer to the American situation, obtained its first bishops, organized dioceses and established a form of government that was new to Anglicanism. With General Convention modeled on the United States Congress, Episcopal polity from the beginning was more clearly and more centrally organized than in the Church of England. This centralized, inclusive and democratic polity was a fundamental condition for the two centralized modes of mission that developed in the American church: the centralized missionary society and the appointment of missionary bishops.

The western frontier of the growing nation was the initial mission horizon for Episcopalians, and it slowly widened to include the world. The 1792 General Convention adopted a short-lived plan to direct and raise funds “for supporting missionaries to preach the Gospel on the frontiers,” but, interestingly, most of the early frontier work was carried out by diocesan committees, presumably with the support of their bishops. Further afield, Africa became one focus of interest through the Liberia project of the American Colonization Society, founded in 1816 to help freed slaves return to that continent.

The pivotal event was the 1835 General Convention’s decision to amend the constitution of the Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society, founded in 1821, to read: constitution to read, “The Society shall be considered as comprehending all persons who are members of this Church.” Although certainly solving the membership problem, this

change had a strongly theological motivation, as expressed at the time by Bp. George Washington Doane of New Jersey:

By the original constitution of Christ, the Church as the Church, was the one great Missionary Society; and the Apostles, and the Bishops, their successors, his perpetual trustees; and this great trust could not, and should never be divided or deputed. The duty . . . to support the Church in preaching the Gospel to every creature, was one which passed on every Christian by terms of his baptismal vow, and from which he could never be absolved.

It is significant for our topic that “preaching the Gospel to every creature” is regarded here as inherent in apostolicity and that that bishops are regarded as the apostolic trustees of that apostolic obligation. At the same time, legislating that every Episcopalian was — and still is today! — a member of the Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society emphasized that the Church as a whole is called to mission, which defines the Church’s nature. Thus mission cannot be delegated to one part of the Church, still less to the purely voluntary inclinations of some of its members. Instead, it must be embraced by the whole Church and expressed through the missionary activity of each of its baptized members. Here we see strong precedent for today’s emphasis on baptismal mission and on the missional nature of the Church.

Reinforcing also today’s recognition that local and global concerns are inter-related and equally important, the 1835 convention declared the unity of the mission field:

For the guidance of the Committees it is declared that the missionary field is always to be regarded as one, THE WORLD — the terms domestic and foreign being understood as terms of locality adopted for convenience. *Domestic* missions are those which are established *within*, and *foreign* missions are those that are established *without*, the territory of the United States.

This insistence on the unity of mission contrasted with the quite exclusive emphases of English Anglican societies, with some devoted to domestic concerns and others to foreign.

II. The Role of Missionary Bishops in Anglican Global Mission

Creating the office of missionary bishop, a bishop sent to establish the Church in a particular area, was the third major contribution of the 1835 General Convention.

Again, Bp. Doane expressed the theological foundation of this innovation:

A missionary bishop is a bishop sent forth by the Church, not sought for of the Church; going before to organize the Church, not waiting till the Church has partially been organized; a leader not a follower, in the march of the Redeemer’s conquering and triumphant Gospel . . . sent by the Church, even as the Church is sent by Christ.

Doane was very clearly stressing the apostolic role of a bishop as one sent to preach the gospel. This perspective was premised on a fairly high-church view that the presence of a bishop means that the Church itself is present and that a bishop in such circumstances has the authority to “grow the Church” from that simple fact of presence. One is put in mind of the statement of Ignatius of Antioch, “Where the bishop is, there is the Church.” As an evangelical voluntary society, the CMS, by contrast, believed that the episcopate should be the crown, not the foundation, of Church growth and that, in any case, the first bishop should be an indigenous Christian, not a missionary.

The 1835 convention employed the new office first to build the Church’s work on the western frontier and elected missionary bishops for the northwest and southwest. Jackson Kemper was consecrated at convention as the Church’s first missionary bishop,

and through his constant mission travels he laid the foundations of the Church in Missouri, Indiana, Iowa, Wisconsin, Minnesota, Nebraska and Kansas. The first missionary bishop with a non-US jurisdiction was William Boone, elected in 1844 to be bishop of Amoy and Other Parts of China, where Episcopal missionaries had first arrived in 1835. Liberia, where the DFMS sent missionaries in 1835 and 1836, received a missionary bishop in 1851 and its first African American missionary bishop, Samuel Ferguson, in 1884. In Japan, the third major area of 19th-century Episcopal mission, the three Episcopal missionaries who arrived in 1859 were the first non-Roman Christian missionaries in that country’s history, and Channing Moore Williams became missionary bishop in 1866.

The innovation of missionary bishops took hold with the Church of England and its missionary societies. It is striking how many missionary bishops, in addition to Jackson Kemper and Channing Moore Williams, are commemorated in the Episcopal Church calendar. George Augustus Selwyn had an important role in establishing the church in New Zealand/Aotearoa before his death in 1870. John Coleridge Patteson, missionary bishop of Melanesia, and his companions were martyred in the South Pacific in 1871. James Hannington, a CMS missionary appointed bishop of Eastern Equatorial Africa was martyred with his companions while on their way into Uganda in 1885. Samuel Isaac Joseph Schereschewsky was a Lithuanian Jew educated and converted in Germany, who then prepared for the Episcopal priesthood at General Seminary in New York, learned Mandarin on the boat to China as an Episcopal missionary, later became bishop of Shanghai and died in Japan in 1906, having translated the Bible into Mandarin and finishing the work blind and chair-ridden by a stroke. Charles Henry Brent is

commemorated principally on account of his ecumenical work in the Faith and Order Movement, but his ecumenical convictions were shaped powerfully by his missionary episcopate in the Philippines.¹¹

On the side of indigenous bishops whose early appointments were crucial in the strengthening of indigenous churches, the chapel at Partnership House in London, where CMS, USPG and several other English Anglican mission agencies are housed today, Samuel Adjai Crowther is depicted in stained glass, alongside three other pioneering leaders of Anglican churches with which both the CMS and the SPG were involved: Bp. Vedanayakam Samuel Azariah of South India, Bp. Tsae Seng Sing of China, and Bp. Joseph Sakunoshin Motoda of Japan. Clearly, the historic episcopate has been regarded by many streams of Anglicanism as an important catalyst for the church’s participation in God’s mission.

At this point I wish to highlight two major reservations concerning the role of the historic episcopate in the mission of the Anglican Communion. One concerns the history of the Episcopal Church. The major Episcopal mission fields in the 19th century were China, Japan, Liberia, and many parts of Latin America, with a focus on Central America, the Caribbean and Brazil. The role of American Episcopal bishops was strong in these areas, though in the case of China that was limited to Taiwan after 1950. In many instances the establishment of a missionary district was followed by that of a missionary diocese, headed, typically, by a missionary bishop, and then finally its

¹¹ Although not commemorated in any calendar, notable service was rendered by George Wyndham Hamilton Knight-Bruce, the pioneering bishop of Anglicanism in Zimbabwe. He gave up the post of bishop of Bloemfontein in South Africa, to become an SPG missionary and the first bishop of Mashonaland in Rhodesia.

incorporation in the Episcopal Church as a regular diocese. The result was that after World War II the Episcopal Church USA was virtually a communion of its own within the Anglican Communion, with many international jurisdictions, numbering 21 even as late as 1973.

Obviously, this was not an ideal trajectory for local and indigenous self-determination on the more typical Anglican model of provincial autonomy. Instead, it perpetuated a colonial model that even the Church of England, supposed handmaid of the great colonial power of the modern period, had never presumed to institute. In a number of Latin American jurisdictions, a vigorous missionary episcopate gave a strong start to the life of the church, but its perpetuation over decades, followed by indigenous bishops leading dioceses still integrally part of the USA church sometimes led to stagnation. While the Brazilian church became autonomous in 1965, Liberia joined the Province of West Africa only in 1982, the Episcopal Church in the Philippines became autonomous only in 1990, the church in Mexico in 1995, and the Central American Province in 1998. With the exception of Brazil, all of these jurisdictions are weak and still in search of identity and viability. The centralized, ecclesiocentric mode of Episcopal mission and the strong hand of expatriate missionary bishops may be a factor in this phenomenon.

Over the past few years, the Episcopal Church has continued to have eight non-USA jurisdictions. The 2003 General Convention actually authorized the re-incorporation of the Diocese of Puerto Rico, at its request, and that occurred at convention, and the new incorporation of the Diocese Venezuela, previously extra-provincial in the Anglican Communion, was also authorized and is now in the process of occurring. We on the Standing Commission on World Mission have supported these

moves from the perspective of accepting the now longstanding international character of our church, understanding that national boundaries should not define the Body of Christ, and realizing that insisting on an autonomy that may not be viable may do greater harm in the long run.

The second reservation I offer arises out of the general experience of the Anglican Communion around the world, as expressed at an international consultation held in 2001. In its final report the conference noted that Anglican governance is characterized by episcopal leadership in the form of bishops in the historical episcopate, and by synodical governance in the form of conventions, councils and synods that include all orders of ministry among their members. “In some parts of our communion,” said the conferees,

the role of bishops in leadership has grown out of proportion to synodical governance. Simply put, bishops sometimes exercise power at the expense of councils. The result is that the participation of the whole people of God is diminished. In turn mission is diminished. Where lay people, and often the clergy as well, are excluded from the decisions that resolve particular issues or determine the future direction of a church, hurt, anger, frustration, and despondency are often the results. In some settings, incessant conflict between people and bishop ensues. In others, valuable leaders simply withdraw from the life of the church.

Naturally, the conference crafted a recommendation that the Anglican Consultative Council address this issue in a variety of ways.

The conference was also concerned about the accountability of bishops to the whole people of God rather than to narrow sectional interests:

The Chicago-Lambeth Quadrilateral of 1886 and 1888 recognized the need for the episcopal office to adapt to local culture. We rejoice in the wonderful variety in modes of leadership that have emerged, along with locally adapted worship, theology, and pastoral care. At the same time, we grieve to see dioceses where

bishops appear more accountable to their class or ethnic group than to God. We are aware of whole societies and large numbers of clergy who live in harsh and unnecessary poverty. However, no office in the Church should be sought to advance personal security or to protect group interest. We need leaders who serve God by serving even the neighbor who is different.

The ACC might consider including in its recommendation for review of canons a request that provinces look critically at the relation between their particular adaptation of the episcopate and the Gospel's model of the leader as one who serves. The Council might request that provinces consider canonical revisions to nurture a style of leadership closer to that of Jesus and the early Christian communities.

III. The Decline and Rise of Episcopal World Mission

I turn now to the late 20th-century decline and rise of global mission engagement in the Episcopal Church, for it bears on the question of how the church has remained faithful to the apostolic faith through mission. Close to 500 Episcopal missionaries served outside the United States in 1933. By the mid-1970s there were fewer than 70. What happened? And what’s happening today to cause that number to climb again beyond 200?

The decline was steep, even aside from the missionaries who left China in 1950 under pressure from the new Communist government. Five crises of new awareness in the mission thinking of the Episcopal Church prompted mission cutbacks during the late 20th century, and each crisis has moved world mission in new directions. These crises were not peculiar to the Episcopal Church, for they were experienced by mainline Protestant denomination, as well, including the United Methodist Church. The five types of new awareness are highlighted as crises because they were experienced as such by

people at the time. In retrospect, we may view a particular development in a relatively neutral or even hopeful light, but people in the churches, especially those involved in world mission, experienced them as crises. And they were experienced more or less simultaneously, though with differing intensity at various times in various communities and churches.

First, a crisis of confidence in the universal validity of the Christian gospel prompted skepticism among mainline churches about evangelism, conversion and church-planting. Religious diversity is home territory for the gospel, for, despite recurring persecution during its first three centuries, the Christian movement grew exponentially in the exuberantly multi-religious environment of the Mediterranean world. Nevertheless, religious diversity felt like a new situation to Christians in the relatively mono-religious environment of mid-20th-century Europe and USA. They needed to step back and take their bearings. Dialogue with people of other religions, not proclamation, was seen as the urgent need.

Second, a crisis of guilt and repentance for political colonialism and cultural imperialism prompted Christians in the Global North to fear that mission was just meddling, what a student in one of my classes called “toxic mission.” Doubt deepened when supposedly Christian nations ignited two world wars and allowed the Holocaust. The global power of Euro-American finance, technology and culture made many suspect that mission from the north would repeat the colonial past. In the 1970s, church leaders in the Global South called briefly for a moratorium on missionaries.

Third, in the 1960s came a crisis of responsibility as the church recognized the interlocking realities of poverty, racism and injustice in urban America. The General

Convention Special Program of 1967 responded by granting church funds to empowerment movements within the USA. Funding for world mission was reduced radically on account of the shift in priorities. “Why send missionaries abroad,” many asked, “when we’ve got so many problems unsolved at home?” Disenchantment with new policies prompted a drop in giving, which further reduced world mission funding.

Fourth, came the crisis of institutions. People felt reluctant to support missionaries who would represent anything so fallible as an institutional church. They realized that injustice depends not only on personal sin but also on the complicity of institutions, including churches. Lacking grassroots congregational support, world mission shared the general malaise of the institutional church.

The cumulative effect of these four crises was bivalent. On one hand, the crises prompted reconsideration and withdrawal from some expressions of the mission impulse: evangelism, for instance, and international mission. On the other hand, in each of these crises the church was pondering and expressing its discipleship, indeed its mission, in new ways: inter-faith dialogue, for instance, and costly work for racial and economic justice in the United States.

Ironically, the fifth crisis for world mission was the crisis of success. Bearing witness in the dimension of difference created self-governing churches around the world that became enthusiastically self-propagating and, albeit more slowly, self-supporting. By 2000 Christians numbered constituted a third of the world’s population, or 2 billion people, including 81 million Anglicans, and about 60 percent in both categories live in the Two-Thirds World. Equally significant, the indigenous churches became self-theologizing, and today any North American theological curriculum that does not include

Global South theologians is regarded as seriously deficient. However slow in implementation, the mission movement had always expected missionaries to work themselves out of their jobs. As westerners made way for indigenous pastors, doctors, nurses, teachers and theologians, it looked like there might be no further need for missionaries.

With all these downsizing influences, why is the number of Episcopal missionaries rising again beyond 200 — admittedly still a small number when compared with United Methodism, but in proportion to our size as a church not a great deal smaller than the so-called Board Missionaries of the Board of Global Ministries?¹²

Forming relationships and building community in Christ have become increasingly central. The Partnership in Mission principle articulated by the Anglican Consultative Council in 1973 moved Anglicans from need-based mission to relationship-based mission arising out of invitations:

The emergence everywhere of autonomous churches in independent nations has challenged our inherited idea of mission as a movement from “Christendom” in the West to the “non-Christian” world. In its place has come the conviction that there is but one mission in all the world, and that this one mission is shared by the world-wide Christian community. The responsibility for mission in any place belongs *primarily* to the church in that place. However, the universality of the gospel and the oneness of God’s mission mean also that this mission must be shared in each and every place with fellow-Christians from each and every part of the world with their distinctive insights and contributions. If we once acted as though there were only givers who had nothing to receive and receivers who had nothing to give, the oneness of the missionary task must make us all both givers and receivers,¹³

¹² Statistics from EL Msn issue & from UMC website.

¹³ Anglican Consultative Council, *Partners in Mission, Second Meeting: Dublin, Ireland, 17-27 July 1973* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1973), 53.

Companions in Transformation is the title and central theme of the vision statement presented to the 2003 General Convention by the church’s Standing Commission on World Mission:

Companionship is the central characteristic that God’s missionary people are developing in the Episcopal Church in the 21st century. God is calling our church as a whole to be a companion with other churches in the Anglican Communion and beyond. Dioceses and parishes are living out their call to be companions with dioceses and parishes in other countries. Individual missionaries are ministering as companions in their places of service.

Literally, companions share bread together. Theologically, companions share in Christ the bread of life. Today the missionary and the mission community journey with others and form community in Christ. In such companionship both missionary and supporting community are transfigured as they experience the gospel life of their companion communities. The personal and communal presence of companionship coheres with an Anglican theological emphasis on incarnation as the culmination of God’s presence in the world.¹⁴

In explicating this companionship, the commission states that in the 21st century, God is calling Christians and the church to be a mission companion that is a: witness, pilgrim, servant, prophet, ambassador, host, and sacrament.

Mutuality in mission means that fixing problems abroad is no longer the focus, nor do stubborn problems at home invalidate mission. Indeed, cross-cultural encounters shed light on issues at home. The DFMS insistence of 1835 that the domestic and foreign are inter-related was eroded in the late 20th century, but there is a growing conviction today that global community means that local and international mission are intimately related and that we need both. Not only are today’s Episcopal missionaries acutely aware

¹⁴ Standing Commission on World Mission, *Companions in Transformation: The Episcopal Church’s World Mission in a New Century* (Harrisburg: Morehouse, 2003), 5

of the mistakes of colonial mission, but they tend to be critics of America’s globalizing culture as they search for more life-giving ways of building community.

Sending missionaries is complicated, yet when the personal dimension of missionary presence was subtracted and mission was reduced to funding development projects, alienation was the result in inter-church relationships. Today Episcopalians are rediscovering how personal presence can be a sacrament of the global Christ as the church both sends and receives in mission.

In relating to other religions, Anglicans today realize that witness means listening and learning as well as proclaiming. Inter-religious encounters need people who will live in the interface, and missionaries are generally the people willing to do that. Episcopalians also recognize anew that in the global religious dialogue, Jesus’ gospel is a gift that needs sharing, especially among the many who have never heard it.

Such intuitions helped Episcopal global mission begin to flourish again in the last 25 years. A number of grassroots groups were founded to supplement the Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society: the Episcopal Church Missionary Community in 1974, the South American Missionary Society/USA in 1976, Episcopal World Mission in 1982, Sharing of Ministries Abroad/USA in 1985, and Anglican Frontier Missions in 1994. Missionaries from all groups are increasing, and they do almost anything one can imagine: evangelism and justice advocacy, parish ministry and eco-consulting, AIDS work and church-planting.

Important for the role of the historic episcopate in the church’s global mission today is the companion diocese movement, which I suggest is the single phenomenon that has done more to catalyze inter-Anglican encounter and global mission than any other

over the past 30 years. There are literally hundreds of inter-diocesan relationships throughout the communion today, and about 85 of the 100 domestic Episcopal dioceses have companion dioceses in other parts of the world. Many of these relationships began with encounters between bishops, many of these occurring at the Lambeth conferences. The longest surviving relationship and one of the most active and productive is between the Diocese of Oklahoma and the Diocese of West Ankole in Uganda, the fruit of a meeting between the bishops of those two dioceses at Lambeth 1978. For many of the American bishops, there was no particular preceding interest in the world church or in global mission. Instead, simple friendship prompted a desire for engagement, and this developed into mutual mission. Such companionship, I suggest, recapitulates the movement of the incarnation that is so central to Anglican theology and mission. Companion diocese relationships have introduced thousands of Episcopalians to the world church every year through and short-term missions.

SUMMARY NOTES

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**AN EPISCOPALIAN UNDERSTANDING OF
EPISKOPE AND EPISCOPACY**

By J. Robert Wright

[Prepared for the Dialogue of Episcopalians and Methodists at the Perkins School of Theology,
Dallas Texas, 15-17 January 2004]

One: Preliminary Considerations

I am honored to be invited to address this ongoing consultation that is involved in the arduous task of preparing for the ecumenical reunion of our two churches. Two churches, I should add, that many of us are convinced belong together both because of our common origin and also because of our common purpose. Two churches, as Archbishop Rowan Williams has recently remarked, that are preparing and yearning for that "one day when we shall be led, in both thankfulness and repentance, to share with one another what we have learned apart; to bring to one another a history not without its shadows and stresses, but still one in which something quite distinctive has been learned." When I was kindly invited to offer a presentation for this gathering, it was understood that I would have to be entering from the outside, in medias res as it were, only to depart after this meeting is over, and that I would of course have to draw largely upon my other work on episcopacy in other contexts and with other churches and try to "make it fit," and this is what I have done.

It is also obvious that there are many ways to define a topic for a session such as this, as is evident from the single word "Episcope" that appears by my name on the minutes of your last planning session when compared to the fuller title appearing by my name on the draft agenda that I have only recently received: "how churches have maintained faithfulness to apostolic faith through the historic episcopate." Such a title is well and good, of course, but one has to add from the outset that our churches should also be faithful to mission (even to common mission, as the

Lutherans were right to insist in their dialogue with us). Also we should be faithful to Biblical faith, as many in our churches would protest, or faithful to the Gospel, as many others would put it, or faithful to the mind and intelligence and reason that God has given us, as many prophetic voices would say, or faithful to the Holy Tradition, as churches whose membership is far larger than Methodism or Anglicanism would express the church's purpose. Yes, words do matter, and there is much involved in choosing them. At the other end of my announced topic, also, many of us would also want to point out that the historic episcopate is only one means, albeit a very important one, to maintain that faithfulness, but that other means to facilitate such faithfulness must also include prayer and worship, study of the Scriptures and of theology, the practice of love and charity and the other virtues, and so on.

Still another preliminary consideration that must be noted here is that both our churches are ongoing members of something now called "Churches Uniting in Christ," and in that context we may soon be called upon to consider seriously a document proposing a way forward to the reconciliation of ordained ministries in the context of an agreement for full communion among nine of us. That document is not quite ready yet in its final form for public release, and debate and evaluation by our churches, but it too will affect how we see such things as historic episcopacy, and as one member of the team that has been drafting it I can only say that I wish it were ready for our open consideration at this present meeting. But it is not, so for the time being we must be content to prepare the way, and to try to understand our own selves better.

And so, after the foregoing preliminary considerations, I turn to my task at hand and propose to offer a paper in two more sections, the former consisting of my own study of episcopacy in the early church that evolved from my part in the Moscow Consultation on Episcopacy with representative theologians and historians of the Russian Orthodox Church in

August of 1992; and the latter consisting of my description of episcopacy and the historic episcopate as I believe them to be generally understood in the Episcopal Church today, prepared over the last two decades for various audiences including my students in early church history and my many and long-suffering friends within the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.

Two: The Early Church

To most thoughtful persons in the Episcopal Church, probably in most churches, to be "faithful to the apostolic faith through the historic episcopate" must involve a faithfulness, in some sense, to the theology and practice of episcopacy as that evidence has come down to us from the early church, and in this sense "the early church" or "the apostolic faith" must also include the Biblical evidence as well. Yet before we plunge directly into the early evidence from my Moscow paper of 1992, I must remark upon how difficult it is to be "faithful to Scripture" and I shall cite just one example related to episcopacy. Let us take 1 Timothy 3:2, "Now a bishop must be the husband of one wife" (RSV) or "A Bishop must be married only once" (NRSV). But any intelligent person should know that to be faithful to the Biblical evidence here, one must be faithful to the text of the Greek New Testament, which reads (in transliteration) "mias gunaikos andra." And this can in fact be translated and interpreted in many ways, and has been given many different meanings by various scholars and various churches. This simple little statement from the Bible can mean:

A Bishop must be a married man.

A Bishop must be a married man, still married and not divorced.

A Bishop must have been or be a married man, or if divorced cannot be remarried.

A Bishop whose wife has died may not marry again.

A Bishop, whether a married man or a remarried man, can not have more than one wife at any

one time, i.e. can not be a bigamist.

A Bishop can not be celibate or remarried.

A Bishop can be either celibate/unmarried, or married, but if married must not be divorced or remarried.

A Bishop must be a husband and not a wife.

A Bishop must be a man and not a woman.

A Bishop, whether man or woman, must be the head of a family.

A Bishop, whether man or woman, must be married (Whether to a woman or a man?).

A Bishop can be a man or woman but, if married, may not be divorced or remarried.

A Bishop, if married, must be a man who is not divorced or remarried, but if not married can be a woman or a man.

The mind boggles at all this, and of course you can add additional possibilities of your own making. In fact, in protestant churches that have Bishops, such as The Episcopal Church, this tends to be what happens. Each person, especially each clergyperson who is already a Bishop or who aspires to episcopacy tends to construct meanings to this passage of Scripture that include themselves but rule out other categories that they want to exclude in their own little world, and then they defend their interpretation by replying that it is obvious to any sensible person!

But in ecumenical dialogue, what happens to this verse when its meaning is sought from the largest churches of the world? What interpretations do the Roman Catholic and Orthodox Churches give? Here the range of interpretation is much narrower because the one meaning on which they both agree is that the Bishop must be male and celibate. Just think of it: If we start with a verse from Scripture that says "a bishop must be the husband of one wife," if we wish to be faithful to Scripture and to the apostolic faith about this verse, the largest church in the world says it means that the Bishop must NOT be the husband of one wife, or indeed of any wife. Clever modern interpreters in the Roman Church will hasten to point out that such an interpretation is only by canon law, which the Pope (defined as "the lawgiver" in the official Code of Canon Law in that church) has the power to change, but then the question must be pressed, why elevate such an exclusion of married persons from episcopal office into an absolute

rule if it is not clearly stipulated in Scripture and if the plain literal meaning of Scripture seems to say just the opposite? How can a church be faithful to the apostolic faith through the historic episcopate if most of its own bishops are living in contradiction to the plain meaning of Scripture by being married? After all, Scripture does not say merely that a bishop must be the husband of one wife or, if he prefers, can be married! Or, if he prefers, can be divorced and re-married! Now in the Orthodox churches the interpretations of 1 Timothy 3:2 tend to be a bit more relaxed than in the Roman Catholic Church, since the Orthodox allow priests to marry, and also permit formerly married priests whose wives have died to become bishops. In fact, clever modern interpreters of this scriptural verse in the Orthodox tradition place an entirely different meaning upon it, when they say the verse means that a Bishop can not be translated to another diocese. Yes, Orthodox theologians have actually told me that this is what the passage clearly means, for a celibate male priest, by consecration to the historic episcopate is actually married to his diocese and may not be translated to another. Although here too there are procedures even in Orthodox canon law that enable one to get around such restrictions.

Well, these were some of the questions that actually came up in the discussion of episcopacy as a means of being faithful to apostolic faith in our 1992 dialogue with the Russian Orthodox. But the apostolic faith, of course, means much more than merely following the celibacy of Jesus, who presumably chose not to marry and whose human life, we all believe (don't we?), points the way for us to live for others, even for God, rather than for our own narrow pleasures. So I now offer for this group the paper that I presented in that dialogue of 1992, which could be re-titled for today as an account of the place of historic episcopacy in the apostolic faith, to which we all seek to be faithful.

1. Pre-Christian Antecedents: a) Jewish and b) Gentile

The word "Bishop" itself comes from the Greek words "*epi*" meaning "over" and "*skopos*" meaning "seer," and so an "*episkopos*" is literally an "over-seer" or a "superintendent" or even an "inspector" (or, in medieval Latin sources, a "speculator"). Attempts have often been made to find prototypes of the Christian "Bishop" in the Jewish or Gentile backgrounds of Christianity.

We consider first the Jewish, where we find that some have derived the office from that of the ruler of the Jewish synagogue, who presided over the synagogue worship and selected those who took part in its services. In the Septuagint, or Greek, version of the Old Testament (cf. Job 20:29, Wisdom of Solomon 1:6), as also commonly in Philo the Hellenized Jew of Alexandria, the term *episkopos* is used of God, but also in a number of instances of ordinary "overseers," and yet never of cultic persons. Philo gives the title once to Moses, and in First Maccabees the word is used of the inspectors set over the Jews by Antiochus Epiphanes to carry out his religious policy. More recently, the discoveries of the Qumran manuscripts near the Dead Sea have raised again the possible Jewish origin of such an officer, known by the Hebrew word "*mebaqqer*." The Damascus Document describes such an . overseer or inspector of the camp, who taught the works of God to the members of the covenant community, looked after them "as does a shepherd his flock," and supervised the admission of new members, the discipline of offenders, and all financial transactions. Likewise in the Manual of Discipline from Qumran, the same sort of officer appears, comparable to the "steward" of the Essene community that is noted by Josephus. Whether or not there is any direct relationship between the overseer of these communities and the office of bishop in the early Christian church cannot be determined for certain. It does seem the case, however, that the "*mebaqqer*" of the Dead Sea documents is, if anything, even more "monarchical" than the "*episkopos*" of the New Testament texts, and for this reason, if for no

other, the connection seems remote.

Any possible connections with a Gentile background, though, are even more remote than the Jewish ones. The term "*episkopos*" is fairly common in Greek literature, papyri, and inscriptions, both in its general meaning of "oversight" and as a technical name for officials, both civil and religious. In the works of Homer and others after him, it is applied to the gods. Stoic philosophers used the term to describe their own mission as messengers and heralds of the gods. Syrian inscriptions record "*episkopoi*" as overseers of buildings, provisions and coinage, and cultic associations of Greece and the Aegean isles record the term in reference to directors and cashiers.

I think one must say in concluding this first section that the pre-Christian evidence, both Jewish and Gentile, although enlightening, is not determinative for the early Christian understanding.

2. The New Testament Evidence

Turning next to the New Testament evidence, and following lines of interpretation established by the late Professor Massey H. Shepherd 1, we find seven key references, generally dating from the turn of the first century: I Timothy 3: 1-7, Titus 1: 7 -9, I Peter 2:25, Philippians 1:1, Acts 20:28, Acts 1:20, and I Peter 5:2-4. We now look at these passages in detail, citing the translations of the Revised Standard Version:

1. I Timothy 3:1-7: "If anyone aspires to the office of a bishop ("the office of oversight"), he desires a noble task. Now a bishop must be above reproach, married only once ("*mias gunaikos andra*" = "the husband of one wife"), temperate, sensible, dignified, hospitable, an apt teacher, no drunkard, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, and no lover of money. He must manage

his own household well, keeping his children submissive and respectful in every way; for if a man does not know how to manage his own household, how can he care for God's church? He must not be a recent convert, or he may be puffed up with conceit and fall into the condemnation of the devil; moreover, he must be well thought of by outsiders, or he may fall into reproach and the snare of the devil."

This passage is followed by a parallel statement of diaconal qualifications and duties in I Timothy 3:8-13, which repeats some qualifications but not others and treats deacons in the plural although the bishop was referenced in the singular.

St. Augustine of Hippo in the early fifth century, commenting on the author's meaning in this passage, says: "He wanted to explain what 'episcopate' means: it is the name of a task, not an honor. It is, in fact, a Greek word, derived from the fact that a man who is put in authority over others 'superintends' them, that is, he has responsibility for them. For the Greek '*skopos*' means 'intention' (in the sense of 'direction of the intention'); and so we may, if we wish, translate '*epi-skopein*' as 'super-intend'. Hence a 'bishop' who has set his heart on a position of eminence rather than an opportunity for service should realize that he is no bishop." (*City of God* 19:19).

2. Titus 1:7-9: "A bishop, as God's steward, must be blameless; he must not be arrogant or quick-tempered or a drunkard or violent or greedy for gain, but hospitable, a lover of goodness, master of himself, upright, holy, and self-controlled; he must hold firm to the sure word as taught, so that he may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine and also to confront those who contradict it."

We note that both these passages from the Pastoral Letters are statements of the qualifications and duties of a bishop, in doctrinal and moral terms but with no mention of any sacramental

duties. The former passage, from I Timothy, assumes that the bishop will be a man, and one who is married. Mandatory celibacy is clearly ruled out, although one might stretch the meaning of the passage to allow optional celibacy in some instances.

3. In I Peter 2:25, the term "*episkopos*" is used as a title of Christ: "You were straying like sheep, but now you have returned to the shepherd and guardian (the King James Version translates this literally as "bishop") of your souls." This passage may also be compared to the Septuagint Greek translation of Wisdom 1 :6, where God is called the "*episkopos* of man's heart."

4. Philippians 1:1: "Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus. To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are at Philippi, with the bishops and deacons." As in I Timothy 3, we note the close association of bishops with deacons.

5. Acts 20:28, in a speech attributed to Paul: "Take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you guardians (the King James Version translates this as "overseers"), to feed the church of the Lord which he obtained with his own blood."

We note that this passage is addressed to those who were previously designated as the "*presbyteroi*" of the church of Ephesus; hence, the terms "*presbyteros*" and "*episkopos*" are interchangeable here.

There are also two significant New Testament instances where forms of the word other than the noun are used:

6. Acts 1:20: "It is written in the Book of Psalms [109:8], 'Let his habitation become desolate, and let there be no one to live in it'; and 'His office (King James translates literally as 'bishopric') let another take'." Here the reference is to the 'overship' forfeited by Judas' treachery and suicide, after which Judas was replaced as a member of the Twelve.

7. I Peter 5:2 -4: "Tend the flock of God that is in your charge, [exercising the oversight] (not in the earliest or best manuscripts, but the King James version does include it, translating as 'oversight') not by constraint but willingly, not for shameful gain but eagerly, not as domineering over those in your charge but being examples to the flock. And when the chief shepherd is manifested, you will obtain the unfading crown of glory. "

As an exhortation to the elders ("*presbyteroi*"), this passage, as also Acts 20:28, is a second example of the interchangeability of the terms "*episkopos*" and "*presbyteros*" in the New Testament evidence. (The two are also interchangeable in First Clement, written about 96 A.D., for whom the ministerial function of the 'presbyters' is '*episkope*' .)

In terms of recent ecumenical agreements that are related to this New Testament evidence, we note first the Lima Statement from the Faith and Order Commission of the World Council of Churches (BEM, 1982): "A ministry of *episkope* is necessary to express and safeguard the unity of the body. Every church needs this ministry of unity in some form..." (Ministry, para. 23).

Second, we note the Canterbury Statement on Ministry and Ordination from the Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission (1976): "The early churches may well have had considerable diversity in the structure of pastoral ministry, though it is clear that some churches were headed by ministers who were called '*episcopoi*' and '*presbyteroi*.' While the first missionary churches were not a loose aggregation of autonomous communities, we have no

evidence that 'bishops' and 'presbyters' were appointed everywhere in the primitive period. The terms 'bishop' and 'presbyter' could be applied to the same man or to men with identical or very similar functions. Just as the formation of the canon of the New Testament was a process incomplete until the second half of the second century, so also the full emergence of the threefold ministry of bishop, presbyter, and deacon required a longer period than the apostolic age. Thereafter this threefold structure became universal in the Church." (Para. 6.)

And in the same statement, we read: "An essential element in the ordained ministry is its responsibility for 'oversight' ('episcopate'). This responsibility involves fidelity to the apostolic faith, its embodiment in the life of the Church today, and its transmission to the Church of tomorrow. Presbyters are joined with the bishop in his oversight of the church and in the ministry of the word and the sacraments; they are given authority to preside at the Eucharist and to pronounce absolution. Deacons, although not so empowered, are associated with bishops and presbyters in the ministry of word and sacrament, and assist in oversight." (Para 9.)

With the completion of this survey from the evidence of the New Testament, we shall now turn to the witness of the early church fathers, and here we shall discern in them, in common with the study of Bishop Kallistos of Diokleia (formerly Timothy Ware)² and with the address to the bishop-elect on page 517 of the 1979 Book of Common Prayer of the Episcopal Church, three separate and complementary, but not contradictory emphases in the ministry of bishops in the early church: the bishop as president of the Eucharist (in Sts. Ignatius and Hippolytus), the bishop as teacher of the faith (in St. Irenaeus), and the bishop as leader in the councils of the church (in St. Cyprian).

3. The Witness of St. Ignatius of Antioch and St. Hippolytus of Rome to the Bishop as President of the Eucharist and Provider of the Sacraments.

When we come to the writings of St. Ignatius of Antioch, c. 107 A.D., we encounter directly the emergence of the monepiscopate at the head of a threefold ministerial office, a development that can be fully explained by none of the surviving documents of the post-apostolic age. Not only does Ignatius make the presbyters or elders, no less than the deacons, subordinate to the bishop, but he is also the first clear witness to the monepiscopate (also called, perhaps misleadingly, the “monarchical” episcopate), that is, the phenomenon of a single bishop presiding as authoritative leader of the entire Christian community in a given city or place. How far one can generalize from the evidence he presents is certainly a question, and it has been suggested that at Alexandria the collegial system of presbyter-bishops may have survived well into the third century, but he does reflect the situation as it was in Syria and Asia Minor at the beginning of the second Christian century.

Ignatius was only rediscovered in the Christian West, and his letters identified and translated in the seventeenth century, thanks to the work of the Anglican Bishops Ussher and Pearson. Their work on Ignatius, in fact, soon persuaded the Church of England to adopt a "higher" doctrine of the episcopate, that is, no longer as merely "*bene esse*" in a strict parity with the ministries of non-episcopal churches but rather the concept of episcopacy as being even of "divine right" (over against the Puritans). It is not hard to detect their influence in the English Act of Uniformity, 1662, which made episcopal ordination to the priesthood a virtual and invariable necessity for incumbency of all benefices in the Church of England. 3

"With Ignatius, we have the first clear evidence, as we do not have in the New Testament, of a threefold church order of bishops, presbyters, and deacons (in order, 1-2-3), mentioned together no less than twelve times in five of his seven letters. For Ignatius, all three, bishops and presbyters and deacons, are "appointed according to the will of Jesus Christ" (Philadelphians,

preface), and the three even seem to have titles of a hierarchical sort: the bishop is "*axiotheos*" (godly), the presbyters "*axioi*" (worthy), and the deacon "*syndoulos*" (fellow servant) (Mag. 2, d. Smyrn. 12). Ignatius always puts the three in this same order, at times relating them to the unity of the church and its one Eucharist (Phil. 4), and he often portrays the three offices as representatives or antitypes of heavenly realities. His most common analogies, or symbolic correspondences, are between the bishop and God the Father, between presbyters and the apostolic council, and between deacons and Jesus Christ (Mag. 6, Trall. 3). In two other places, though, it is the bishop who is analogous to Jesus Christ (Mag. 3, Eph. 3), and in one place the parallel is of the presbytery with Jesus Christ's "law," to which the deacon must submit (Mag. 2). The presbyters or elders, moreover, function for Ignatius as something of a college under the presidency of the one bishop. There is "one bishop together with the presbyters and the deacons my fellow servants," he remarks (Phil. 4), and elsewhere he likens the relation of the presbyters to the bishop "as the strings to a musical instrument" (Eph. 4).

The bishop is for Ignatius the center of the church's unity in every given place and community, and as such Ignatius expects the bishop to be obeyed. We should "be subject to the bishop as to Jesus Christ," he urges, and "we should look on the bishop as the Lord himself" (Trall. 2, Eph. 6). The bishop presides "in God's place" (Mag. 6), and so, without the bishop, there can be no Eucharist and no church. He writes: "Avoid divisions, as the source of evils. Let all of you follow the bishop as Jesus Christ did the Father. ...Let no one do any of the things that concern the church without the bishop. Let that Eucharist be considered valid which is held under the bishop, or under someone whom he appoints. VWherever the bishop appears, there let the people be, just as wherever Jesus Christ is, there is the catholic church. It is not lawful either to baptize or to hold an '*agape*' without the bishop. VWhatever he approves is also pleasing to

God...He who honors the bishop is honored by God. He who does anything without the bishop's knowledge is serving the devil." (Smyrn. 8).

Insofar as any texts of Ignatius indicate his views of what would later come to be called "apostolic succession," he presents what Metropolitan John Zizioulas has called an "eschatological approach to apostolic continuity," as the future end is anticipated even now in the church's eucharistic structure under episcopal presidency (cf. Mag. 6)4. Ignatius says little else about "apostolic succession," which we do find in a rudimentary form in his contemporary Clement of Rome and in a more developed way in Tertullian and St. Irenaeus of Lyons almost a century later. He says nothing about ordination, for which the first clear evidence is Hippolytus nearly a century later, nor does he present Holy Orders as being "sequential" or "cumulative," that is, the "lower" being a prerequisite for the "higher." Overall, for Ignatius the bishop is the one who presides over the eucharistic unity of each local church, an emphasis that has been made well known in this century by the Russian theologian Nicolas Manasseff. 5

The church, in Ignatius' view, is essentially eucharistic by nature: there is an organic relation between the Body of Christ understood as community, and the Body of Christ understood as sacrament. For Ignatius, then, the bishop is not primarily a teacher or administrator, but the one who presides at, and as "*episkopos*" watches over, the eucharistic liturgy. The presidency of the Eucharist can be designated by the bishop to one or more selected presbyters, although for Ignatius bishops and presbyters are not interchangeable (as they were in the First Epistle of Clement, c. 96 A.D.). In a typical passage Ignatius writes: "Take care to participate in one Eucharist, for there is one flesh of our Lord Jesus Christ, and one cup for union with his blood, one altar, just as there is one bishop together with the presbyters and the deacons my fellow servants" (Phil. 4). His emphasis upon the Eucharist as the focus of the church's unity, and of the

centrality of the bishop's eucharistic ministry within the one church, is seen here in his repetition of the word "one," as Ware (p. 4) has observed: "one Eucharist...one flesh...one cup...one altar...one bishop." So there is one bishop, one eucharistic Body, and one church, all three being interdependent. The theme recurs constantly in his writings: "Let there be one prayer in common, one supplication, one mind, one hope in 10ve...Hasten all to come together as to one temple of God, as to one altar, to one Jesus Christ, who came forth from the one Father, is with the one Father, and departed to the one Father" (Mag. 7).

The context of the emphasis on unity in Ignatius, of course, must be kept in mind. Ignatius is writing at a time when there was probably only one bishop for any city and also no more than one eucharistic assembly for any city, a situation which greatly reinforced the bishop's function as the visible focus of unity, not as a distant administrator and occasional visitor but as the local chief pastor whom all the people saw at least every Sunday at the Eucharist. And it was not yet a time of assistant bishops (suffragans, auxiliaries, coadjutors), as are now common in virtually every church that is episcopally ordered, nor of titular bishops, as are frequently encountered in the Orthodox and Roman Catholic Churches, nor of overlapping episcopal jurisdictions, which are found, in contradiction of the eighth canon of the first Ecumenical Council of Nicaea (325 A.D.), in these churches as well as occasionally in the Anglican Communion. Even in the Holy City of Jerusalem, where in March of 1992 this present essay was written, as late as the end of the fourth century the pilgrim woman Egeria found that, despite the large numbers of pilgrims as well as local resident Christians, there was still as a rule only one Eucharist on each Sunday or feast, celebrated by the one bishop of Jerusalem and attended by everyone (*Travels*, 24-43).

To explain the transition from the earlier evidence, and more especially from the interchangeability of episcopate and presbyterate that we find in Acts 20 and I Peter 5 and in I

Clement to the fully developed moniscopate at the head of a threefold ministerial office that we find in Ignatius and later in Hippolytus, scholars have advanced two contrasting interpretations: 1) that the episcopate arose by elevation from the presbyterate, or 2) that the presbyterate evolved by delegation from the episcopate.

The former interpretation is the classic hypothesis of the Anglican Bishop J.R Lightfoot: that originally "bishops" and "presbyters" or "elders" were synonymous terms, but that the episcopate arose out of the presbyterate by "elevation" into a distinct and higher order and thus, by implication, the "original" ministry of the church was presbyteral rather than episcopal. Adolf von Harnack and R.H. Streeter also inclined to this interpretation, the former emphasizing a process of localization and the latter suggesting a stage of collective or collegial episcopate in some places before the moniscopate was fully established. The interpretation that the episcopate arose by elevation from the presbyterate, both offices being originally synonymous and interchangeable, was also, with slightly differing emphasis, the position of St. Jerome, who in the fifth century wrote: "A presbyter...is the same as a bishop, and before ambition entered into religion by the devil's instigation and people began to say 'I belong to Paul, I to Apollos, I to Cephas,' the churches were governed by the council of presbyters, acting together."
(Commentary on Titus 1:6-7.)

The other view, that the presbyterate evolved by delegation from the episcopate, maintains that there was an original distinction between the office of bishop and that of presbyter or elder, admitting that (some) bishops may also have been numbered among the presbyterate but stressing that the bishops were presbyters/elders specifically appointed/ordained for liturgical and pastoral functions of oversight and holding that not all presbyters/elders were bishops. In this view, the presbyterate was a position of honor, not of ministerial office, although in time, with

the rise of the monepiscopate, presbyters/elders had certain ministerial functions of a liturgical and pastoral nature delegated to them by the bishops. R. Sohm and W. Lowrie, among others, have inclined to this latter interpretation, concluding that the presbyterate as an order of ministry and not merely a title of honor or seniority came into being by delegation from the episcopate.

The Anglican tradition has generally held to the second of these interpretations at least since the mid-seventeenth century, influenced as it has been to a "higher" view of the distinctiveness and necessity of episcopal office, in part, by the rediscoveries of the epistles of Ignatius of Antioch and Clement of Rome in the seventeenth century (and of Hippolytus still later). This transition in understanding of the episcopate can be seen from a very interesting perspective in the changes of Scriptural texts appointed for the ordination rites of the Church of England before and after 1662 and for the Episcopal Church in the U.S.A. before and after its Prayer Book of 1979.⁶ Before the revised Ordinal of 1662, the Church of England used the passage we have examined from I Timothy 3, which speaks of the qualifications and duties of a bishop ("*episkopos*"), as the Epistle to be read liturgically in the rites for *both* priesthood and episcopate, thus suggesting no distinction between the two, and allowed the passage from Acts 20, which uses the term "bishops" but implies an interchangeability with presbyters, as the alternative Epistle in the rite for ordination to the priesthood. In the Ordinal of 1662, however, which was revised to show clearly the episcopate as a separate and distinct order, an entirely different passage (Ephesians 4: 7 -13, which has no mention of bishops) was substituted for I Timothy 3 in the rite for priesthood and the reading from Acts 20 was transferred to the rite for ordination to the episcopate. Even two of the three alternative Gospels in the pre-1662 rite for priesthood, Matthew 28:18-20 and John 20:19-23, both of which contain commissions to the Apostles, were transferred to the rite for the episcopate, presumably to show that bishops and not priests were

the successors of the Apostles. And in the 1979 Prayer Book ordinal of the Episcopal Church in the U.S.A., the passage from I Timothy 3 was retained as the Epistle for the episcopate and that from Ephesians 4 for the priesthood, and the ambiguous passage from Acts 20 is gone altogether. The passage from John 20 is now the first choice for the Gospel, and the passage from Matthew 28 is gone altogether, presumably because its text is later and doubtful.

Nearly a century following St. Ignatius, the next major block of evidence about the episcopate is found in the *Apostolic Tradition* of St. Hippolytus, the conservative/traditional bishop or presbyter of Rome, which is generally dated to about 210 A.D. and is very similar to Ignatius in its emphasis upon the bishop as president of the Eucharist and provider of the sacraments. Hippolytan authorship of this treatise, which contains the earliest ordination rites known in church history and is the earliest surviving document to look anything like a book of common prayers, was firmly established by R.H. Connolly in 1916 on the basis of further manuscript discoveries in the late nineteenth century. The definitive text is now that of the Roman Catholic scholar Bernard Botte, although in English the text is best known in translations by Anglicans Gregory Dix (which is overly complicated), B.S. Easton (which is oversimplified) and GJ. Cuming (which is the most helpful).

Comparing Hippolytus to Ignatius, we find certain similarities and other differences. Similar to Ignatius, we find in Hippolytus a full threefold order headed by the moniscopate, bishops and presbyters not interchangeable, and the three orders not prescribed as cumulative. In contrast to Ignatius, however, we find in Hippolytus the popular election of bishops ("chosen by all the people") and a succession that is established on the basis of ordination by episcopal laying-on-of-hands, as well as the principle that it is the bishop alone who ordains. [Canon 4 of the first ecumenical council, Nicaea I, in 325, will state for the first time that three bishops are necessary

for episcopal ordination or consecration.] Hippolytus' stipulation "Let the bishop be ordained after he has been chosen by all the people" clearly excludes any appointment of bishops "from above," such as by secular authority, or by a synod of bishops, or by a patriarch, or by a Pope. For Hippolytus the ordination of a bishop is to take place on a Sunday, the descent of the Spirit is invoked, and the new bishop is described in terms of "high priesthood" with authority to remit sins (which implies, at least possibly, authority to admit to eucharistic communion). The bishop is also shown as presiding at the Eucharist and at Christian initiation, as ordaining presbyters and deacons, as consecrating the three holy oils, as appointing some minor officers, and as taking a lead in daily instruction and in giving various blessings.

The rediscovery and authentication of the text of Hippolytus seems to have been the principal influence leading to the affirmation of the Roman Catholic Church, made at the Second Vatican Council, that the episcopate is the primary order of ministry constituting the fullness of the sacrament of holy orders (a view which Anglicans have generally held since the seventeenth century).⁷ By this decision, the Roman Catholic Church in effect moved from the first interpretation of the evidence of St. Ignatius noted above to the second, and in the new (1968) Roman Pontifical, the ordination prayer for a bishop is paraphrased from that of Hippolytus, as is the same prayer in the new (1979) ordinal of The Book of Common Prayer of the Episcopal Church. Both of these recently revised prayers for the ordination of a bishop, therefore (but not that of the Church of England), are now paraphrased from the same Hippolytan prototype, the earliest ordination prayer known in the church's history.

Hippolytus' concept of succession, also, is most clearly stated in his *Refutation of All Heresies* (I, Proemium): "None will refute these [errors], save the Holy Spirit bequeathed unto the Church, which the Apostles, having in the first instance received, have transmitted to those who have

rightly believed. But we, as being their successors, and as participators in this grace, high-priesthood, and office of teaching, as well as being reputed guardians of the Church, must not be found deficient in vigilance, or disposed to suppress correct doctrine."

4. The Witness of St. Irenaeus of Lyons to the Bishop as Teacher of the Apostolic Faith

When we turn to St. Irenaeus, Bishop of Lyons c. 185-200 A.D., we find the bishop presented primarily as the link between each local church and the teaching of the apostles. Irenaeus generally echoes the eucharistic teaching of Ignatius, remarking that "Our opinion agrees with the Eucharist and the Eucharist confirms our opinion" (*Adversus Haereses* Iv:18.5), but his greater emphasis is upon apostolic doctrine. Because of his confrontation with the Gnostics, Irenaeus attaches particular importance to the continuity of church teaching and its relationship to apostolic tradition and apostolic authority. Whereas the Gnostics had appealed to a secret tradition handed down by a hidden succession of teachers, Irenaeus answered by appealing to an apostolic tradition that had been openly proclaimed in the four canonical gospels and openly taught in the unbroken public succession of bishops seated upon the episcopal throne or chair in each local church, especially in those churches of known apostolic foundation. [The bishop was thus seated, as was still the custom of teachers in that day and on until St. John Chrysostom began the custom of standing to preach.] Irenaeus is thus a contrast to Ignatius, who had very little to say about the bishop as preacher and teacher of the faith and very little to say about the bishop as the link between the church of the apostles and that of his own day. Whereas for Ignatius the bishop's "cathedra" or throne was the chair upon which he sits at the Eucharist, for Irenaeus it is far closer to the chair of a professor: "The throne is the symbol of teaching," he says (*Demonstration*, 2). And while for Ignatius the bishop is primarily the one who unites us around the Eucharist, for Irenaeus the bishop is above all the one who teaches the one truth, by which unity is preserved. "Having received this preaching and this faith," he says, "the church,

although scattered in the whole world, carefully preserves it as if living in one house" (*Adv. Haer. 1.10.3*).

For Irenaeus, though, as for Clement of Rome before him and for Acts 20 and I Peter 5, the bishop is synonymous or interchangeable with the presbyter, and this is illustrated in a famous statement he makes concerning the bishop's teaching authority as based on a succession from the apostles: "We should obey those presbyters in the church who have their succession from the apostles, and who, together with succession in the episcopate, have received the assured 'charisma' of truth" (*Adv. Haer. IV26.2*). Apostolic succession for Irenaeus, as Ware emphasizes, is not a mechanical or quasi-magical way of ensuring the preservation of "valid" sacraments, but, rather, its purpose is to preserve the continuity of apostolic doctrine and, understood in this sense, is not something that the bishop enjoys as a personal possession in isolation from the local community and place where he presides. It does seem significant that, when Irenaeus constructs his succession lists, like Hegesippus his contemporary in the mid second century and like Eusebius of Caesarea in the early fourth century, he does not trace the succession through the consecrators of each bishop, as is often done today, but through the throne or seat or see of each Christian community in each place. Irenaeus says: "We can enumerate those who were established by the apostles as bishops in the churches, and their successors down to our time," and he refers next to "those whom the apostles left as their successors, to whom they handed over their own teaching position" (*Adv. Haer. 111.3*). He also says, "We appeal to that tradition which has come down from the apostles and is guarded by the successions of presbyters [here, as before, synonymous with bishops] in the churches" (*Adv. Haer. 11.2*). And again, "What if there should be a dispute about some matter of moderate importance? Should we not turn to the oldest churches, where the apostles themselves were known, and find out from them the clear and

certain answer to the problem now being raised? Even if the apostles had not left their writings to us, ought we not to follow the rule of the tradition which they handed down to those to whom they committed the churches?" (*Adv. Haer. IV!*).

The same concept, we may remark, is also found in Tertullian, writing about the same time and also confronting the Gnostic crisis, although he does add the notion of a succession in ordination. He says of the Gnostics: "Let them produce the original records of their churches. Let them unfold the roll of their bishops, running down in due succession from the beginning in such a manner as that first bishop of theirs shall be able to show for his ordainer and predecessor some one of the apostles or of apostolic men" (*De Prescriptione Hereticorum 3.2*).

It is also worth noting that the concept of "succession" in the ministry of bishops comes earliest in the First Epistle of St. Clement of Rome, c. 96 A.D. (rediscovered to the West only in the seventeenth century). There the understanding is the more rudimentary one of a retrospective linear historical succession of persons by appointment, as Zizioulas observes, rather than the succession in teaching first emphasized by Irenaeus and Tertullian or the eschatological approach to succession found in Ignatius of Antioch. Clement writes: "The apostles also knew, through our Lord Jesus Christ, that there would be strife over the question of the bishop's office. Therefore, for this reason,...they appointed the aforesaid persons and later made further provision that if they should fall asleep other approved men should succeed to their ministry" (I Cor. 44). And he further explains his view that the succession is of persons by appointment: "The apostles received the Gospel for us from the Lord Jesus Christ; Jesus the Christ was sent from God, and the apostles from Christ" (I Cor. 42).

5. The Witness of St. Cyprian of Carthage to the Bishop as Leader in the Councils of the Church and the Bond of Administrative Unity between Each Local Church and All the Others

It remains to treat, rather more briefly, the witness of St. Cyprian of Carthage, who died in 258 A.D., which constitutes the third emphasis or model of episcopal ministry from the preNicene period. Cyprian was a bishop who gave such priority to his function of administrative governance that he was even willing to flee persecution and the prospect of martyrdom with his own people around the year 250, and later to re-admit the lapsed, in order to continue from a safe distance his episcopal administration and to preserve the unity of the church under his oversight. For him the offices of bishop and presbyter are distinct and not interchangeable, and he is also the first Christian writer to portray the three orders as sequential or cumulative. Like Ignatius, he speaks of the local church as assembled around the altar with the bishop as its eucharistic president, and in one respect his concept of apostolicity is even stronger than that of Irenaeus, going so far as to identify the bishops with the apostles ("*apostolos, id est episcopus*": Letter 3.3.1).

Cyprian's view of episcopal succession is a noteworthy development from those of Ignatius, Clement, Tertullian, and Irenaeus, for it is a succession by means of consecration, or rather, a succession of episcopal authority handed down by means of ordination. In his view bishops were directly instituted and consecrated by the apostles who were themselves consecrated by Christ. "Hence by means of a chain of succession through time ("*per temporum et successionum vices*") the ordination of bishops and the structure ("*ratio*") of the church has flowed on so that the church is built upon bishops and every act of the church is controlled by these same superiors" ("*praepositos*"), he writes, even referring to "all those placed in charge who have succeeded to the apostles by delegated ordination" (Letters 33.1.1, 66.4.2). What constitutes a bishop for Cyprian, then, is ordination, followed by occupancy of the episcopal chair ("*cathedra*") and supervisory responsibility ("*episcopatus*") over a flock of people ("*plebs*"). (cf. Letters 44.1.1,

45.3.1,48.4.1). Here we see, clearly, in the way in which he treats both succession and ordination, his emphasis upon the episcopal authority necessary for the administrative governance and good ordering necessary for the church to survive in time. And his stress on the need for unity with one's bishop echoes Ignatius of Antioch: "The church is the people united to the bishop, the flock clinging to its shepherd. From this you should know that the bishop is in the church and the church in the bishop" ("*Episcopus in ecclesia et ecclesia in episcopo*": Letter 66.8.3). Even more, to be "in communion" with one's bishop is to be "in communion with the Catholic Church" (Letter 55.1.2).

Cyprian's primary emphasis, thus, is upon the bishop as the bond of unity between the local church and the church universal; indeed, he is the author of the earliest surviving treatise on the nature of the church: *De Unitate Ecclesiae*. In this context, he stresses the conciliar or collegial character of the worldwide episcopate, of bishops meeting in council and together reaching a common mind under the Spirit's guidance, and so he calls our attention to this conciliar and collegial feature of any episcopate that would claim to be truly "historic," a feature that has its more recent parallel, for Anglicans, in the worldwide Lambeth Conference of bishops that has met at periodic intervals since the year 1867. And to the question of how bishops should make decisions in such meetings, Cyprian replies that it is not numbers but concord that matters: "the greatest significance is not given to numbers but to the harmony of those who pray" ("Non multitudini sed unanimitati deprecantium plurimum tribui": *De Unitate Ecclesiae* 12). He summarized this principle of the conciliar solidarity of the episcopate in a phrase the meaning of which is much debated: "The episcopate is a single whole, of which each bishop has a right to and a responsibility for the whole" ("Episcopatus unus est, cuius a singulis in solidum pars tenetur": *De Unitate* 5). Each bishop, in other words (Ware suggests, and I agree), shares in the

one episcopate, not as having part of the whole but as being an expression of the whole; just as there are many local churches but only one universal church, so there are many individual bishops but only one worldwide episcopate. His meaning is not, however, as simple as a statement that "the whole is made up of the sum of the individual parts." The bishop, though, is the bond of unity between each local church and all the others, and this is his emphasis. He makes his point another way when he says: "There is one church throughout the whole world divided by Christ into many members, also one episcopate diffused in a harmonious multitude of many bishops" (Letter 55.24.2).

As for those bishops who deny this unity by insisting on their own teachings or actions even to the point of schism, Cyprian declares: "He, therefore, who observes neither the unity of the Spirit nor the bond of peace, and separates himself from the bond of the church and from the college of the bishops, can have neither the power nor the honor of a bishop since he has not wished either the unity or the peace of the episcopate" (Letter 55.24.2). And in a way that could not anticipate the questions raised in our time by the existence of suffragan or auxiliary bishops and of overlapping jurisdictions in full communion, Cyprian expounds the Lord's words in John 10: 16 "There shall be one flock and one shepherd" by stating his own maxim: "A number of shepherds or of flocks in one place is unthinkable" (*De Unitate* 8). Thus, Cyprian's doctrine of episcopal collegiality is directly linked to his doctrine of the church, as he summarizes: "It is particularly incumbent upon those of us who preside over the church as bishops to uphold this unity firmly and to be its champions, so that we may prove the episcopate also to be itself one and undivided" (*De Unitate* 5).

The bishop's ministry for the good ordering of the church is also related, in Cyprian's letters, to the bishop's personal role as an exemplar and living standard of conduct: "In proportion as the

fall of a bishop is an event which tends ruinously to the fall of his followers, so on the other hand it is useful and salutary when a bishop shows himself to the brethren as one to be imitated in the strength of faith" (Letter 9.1.2). "May the Lord who condescends to elect and to appoint for himself bishops in his church protect those chosen and also appointed by his will and assistance, inspiring them in their government and supplying both vigor for restraining the insolence of the wicked and mildness for nourishing the repentance of the lapsed" (Letter 48.4.2). "While the bond of concord remains, and the undivided sacrament of the Catholic Church endures, every bishop disposes and directs his own acts, and will have to give an account of his purposes to the Lord" (Letter 55.21.2).

6. Conclusions

Thus we have seen three complementary, but not contradictory, models or emphases of episcopal ministry in the early Christian church, in the writings of 1) Sts. Ignatius of Antioch and Hippolytus of Rome, 2) St. Irenaeus of Lyons, and 3) St. Cyprian of Carthage. These three models emphasize, respectively, the roles of the bishop as 1) eucharistic president, 2) chief teacher, and 3) administrative leader. They also present three different models of church unity, each *focused* upon the bishop and again complementary rather than contradictory: 1) eucharistic unity, 2) doctrinal unity, and 3) administrative unity. And, finally, they present three complementary pictures of the primary ministry of a bishop: 1) one who presides over the eucharistic unity of each local church, 2) the link in time between each local church and the teaching of the apostles, and 3) the bond across space for the unity of each local church with all the others. It is also possible that these three models, or emphases, or pictures, bear some relationship to the classical description of the work of Christ as 1) Priest (Ignatius and Hippolytus), 2) Prophet (Irenaeus), and 3) King (Cyprian).

Several questions for discussion arise out of the early evidence, and to list them is, of course,

by no means to solve them: 1) Can we place the early patristic development upon a level of authority equal to that of, or even greater than, the evidence of the New Testament (which is admittedly rather sparse)? 2) What weight of authority should we give today to the qualifications for episcopal office established in I Timothy 3:1-7 and in Titus 1:7-9? 3) Do we today regard the emergence of the moniscopate at the head of the threefold ministerial office in Ignatius and Hippolytus as necessary? as irreversible? 4) Do we regard the distinction of episcopate from presbyterate as essential, in spite of their interchangeability in Acts 20, I Peter 5, I Clement, and Irenaeus? 5) Given the absence of any evidence for the prescription of cumulative orders before the work of Cyprian, do we regard this development as necessary and irreversible, or only as normative or even indifferent? 6) Given the evidence for popular choice of bishops in the earliest ordination rites, those of Hippolytus, what judgment should we make upon other methods for appointment of bishops by rulers, popes, patriarchs, or synods of bishops? 7) Are the five different concepts of episcopal/apostolic succession that we have encountered all complementary and capable of synthesis, or should one or more of them be given a higher weight of authority: eschatological (Ignatius), retrospective/linear/historical (Clement), doctrinal (Irenaeus), ordination (Tertullian and Hippolytus), and authoritative/administrative (Cyprian)? 8) Is the indelibility of Holy Orders, and in particular the life tenure of episcopal ordination, which does not seem to be mentioned in this early evidence apart from Clement of Rome's remark that the apostles made provision that if those whom they appointed "should fall asleep other approved men should succeed to their ministry," nonetheless an essential and constitutive ingredient of what might be called the "historic" episcopate? 9) To what extent are the three major emphases outlined in this paper, as well as the differing concepts of episcopal/apostolic succession and other differences concerning interchangeability, cumulative orders, indelibility, and the like,

mainly attributable to geographical differences, such as Antioch and Asia Minor, Syria, Rome, and North Africa, and thus reflective of an inculturation or cultural differentiation that was perhaps more readily tolerated in this early period than today? 10) "What are the emphases, or functions, of episcopal ministry in our current liturgical texts, and how do they correspond to the classical evidence of episcopal ministry that comes from the New Testament and from Ignatius and Hippolytus, Irenaeus, and Cyprian? 11) Are there other functions of bishops today more important than any of the three that have been highlighted in this essay? 12) "What are, and what should be, the major emphases or functions in episcopal ministry today?

Three: The Episcopal Church and the Historic Episcopate Today

One of the self-discoveries of the Episcopal Church in its dialogue with the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America was that the Episcopal Church has no official definition of the historic episcopate, other than the statement in the Chicago-Lambeth Quadrilateral, point 4, which I assume you have already covered historically in this dialogue. We consider that it must be a "given" in any ecumenical agreement for full communion, both linking us to the apostolic faith of the early church and at the same time pointing us towards the coming great church of the future. We do not, however, unchurch those churches who do not yet stand in that succession, and we, probably too readily, assume that our own practice about episcopacy must be the only correct interpretation of the matter. In the document *Called to Common Mission* (1999; hereafter CCM), the Episcopal Church and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America agreed, and I paraphrase here, "to include regularly one or more bishops of the other church to participate in the laying-on-of-hands at the ordinations of their own bishops as a sign, though not a guarantee, of the unity and apostolic continuity of the whole church. With the laying-on-

of-hands by other bishops, such ordinations will involve prayer for the gift of the Holy Spirit. Both churches will value and maintain a ministry of episkope as one of the ways, in the context of other ordained ministries and of the whole people of God, in which the apostolic succession of the church is visibly expressed and personally symbolized in fidelity to the gospel through the ages. By such a liturgical statement the churches recognize that the bishop serves the diocese or synod through ties of collegiality and consultation that strengthen its links with the universal church. It is also a liturgical expression of our full communion, calling for mutual planning and common mission in each place. We agree that when persons duly called and elected are ordained in this way, they are understood to join bishops already in this succession and thus to enter the historic episcopate." (CCM 12, paraphrase). This is, now and currently, just about the closest thing the Episcopal Church has to any official definition expanding what we mean by the phrase "historic episcopate." The third and final section of this paper therefore now turns to the substance of what I and other Episcopalians tended to say about historic episcopacy in our dialogue with the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, how we explained it.

The unofficial definition of historic episcopate that we developed in our dialogue with the Lutherans, which I believe does resonate with what the Episcopal Church tends to believe about it, went something like the following. The historic episcopate is one important strand in the apostolicity of the church. It is a sign of the church's intention to remain faithful to the apostolic teaching and mission of the gospel, at the same time that it is also a sign of the final ingathering of all of God's humanity foretold in Matthew 19:28. It is a succession of bishops or church leaders whose roots are planted in the time of the early church, pointing back to the centrality of Christ and the teaching of the apostles, and to such other strands of apostolicity as the biblical canon, the creeds and councils, and the sacraments, while at the same time pointing forward in

order to oversee, or superintend, or give leadership to, the mission of the church today. In the words of the 1982 Lima statement on Baptism, Eucharist, and Ministry from the Faith and Order Commission of the World Council of Churches, representative of widespread international agreement and whose director at that time was an American Lutheran, the historic episcopate is "a sign though not a guarantee," in personal terms, of the unity and continuity of the church's faith throughout time and space. It points towards a unity of the church, a communion of churches, that is greater than any one denomination or local judicature, at the same time that it points toward the spiritual, missiological, and doctrinal continuity of the church of today with the church of the ages. It is still accepted and practiced by some three-fourths of the world's Christians and is the only ministerial institution that exists to promote the unity and mutual responsibility of the worldwide church.

The Episcopal Church believes that this sign, this teaching about the historic episcopate, with its ancient roots and global expression, is (in the words of our 1982 General Convention) "essential to the reunion of the church" even though we do not believe it is necessary to salvation nor a condition for recognizing the churchly character of other churches. The historic episcopate is conveyed by installing or ordaining a new bishop by prayer for the gift of the Holy Spirit with the laying on of hands by at least three other bishops already sharing in the historic episcopate, there being at least three as testimony that something more than local interest is involved in the ministry of oversight or episkope within the church. This belief, which was early expressed in the first ecumenical council of Nicaea (325), Episcopalians share with other churches of the "catholic" family, such as the Eastern Orthodox and the Roman Catholics, although unlike them we do not attach to the historic episcopate a mandate of celibacy or an exclusion of the ordination of women (an exclusion which, according to Cardinal Ratzinger, is "infallibly

taught"). And although we agree with those churches that we would not enter full communion with a church that does not have it, we do not insist that churches with whom we enter full communion must require it of others. We do not seek to condemn the past of those churches who since the Reformation have been without it, but it is our conviction that the full visible unity of the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic church for the future, of which it is a sign, will not come about apart from it. We believe that it will be an obvious and normative ingredient to a common Christian life in the future. All this, we believe, is a reasonable ecumenical interpretation or adaptation of an institution that has stood the test of time but also, we would agree, has like all institutions become somewhat ossified and is always in need of renewal. We understand the bishop in this way to be a visible and symbolic (although human and imperfect) sign of the presence of the Good Shepherd among us, as well as a personal means of connecting the diocese or synod that he or she serves to the wider church, of representing more than local interest groups, effecting communication and pointing beyond the narrow boundaries of parochialism to connect us to other dioceses, countries, continents, and cultures.

Placed in broader context, we believe that the episcopate is founded upon the mission and ministry of the whole people of God, the only reasons why the CCM said rather less about the mission and ministry of all the baptized being that Lutherans and Episcopalians had never seriously disagreed on that point and much of it was already covered in earlier stages of the dialogue. Our lay people are already reconciled by their baptisms, which is another significant ingredient of apostolicity, but the remaining problem not yet settled, as the foundation document of CUIC also points out, is with the ordinations of clergy, which of course is related to the historic episcopate.

Next, a few words about the history of the American Episcopal Church, its struggles to

maintain the historic episcopate which our Anglican tradition inherited with the Reformation, but especially about our American struggles to free the historic episcopate from what seemed to us the pomposity and bureaucracy of the temporal and political connections by which it was entangled in the British establishment of that day. You have other historians in your dialogue from both churches who know this story as well as I or probably better, but I shall summarize the story as it unfolded in our dialogue with the Lutherans, and that story begins with one basic fact. It is remarkable that after the American Revolution colonial Anglicanism survived at all, associated as it was with the tyranny of British rule. There were no resident Anglican bishops in early America, and the colonists at first opposed any suggestion of episcopacy, which they linked with "proud prelacy" in England. The 1789 founding convention of the Episcopal Church, which met in Philadelphia, finally resolved that the historic ordained ministry was to be retained, although the bishops were to be elected by both clergy and laity, not appointed by the crown or subject to it. It provided that both clergy and laity were to share in the government of the church at diocesan conventions and in General Convention, and that the national structures of our church would be rather minimal and therefore hopefully less tempted to domination from above. Though consonant with conciliar patterns in the early church, such changes in the structure, practice, and understanding of episcopacy from England were influenced by American colonial experience as well as by a positive evaluation of American federal governmental philosophy and practice at that time, the Articles of Confederation being of particular influence. Collectively, these arrangements in the Episcopal Church have come to be known as "the constitutional episcopate," enabling bishops to fulfill their particular historic functions within and on behalf of the community of the faithful but not above or apart from it. The preface to our very first Book of Common Prayer (1789/90), still authoritative today, did confirm that we were (and are) "far

from intending to depart from the Church of England in any essential point of doctrine, discipline, or worship," but one should note that it binds us only to the essential points (which are, cleverly, not identified) and then adds "or further than local circumstances require," thus leaving room for us to distance ourselves from the secondary trappings (from our perspective) that had accrued to episcopacy in the Church of England. And in 1792 this same phraseology entered the Ordinal of our Prayer Book in the public oath of conformity required of bishops-elect, replacing the oath of allegiance to the archbishop that was required in the Church of England. Although we remember Samuel Seabury as our very first bishop, it was William White, first Bishop of Pennsylvania, who was the central figure of the Episcopal Church in its first half-century. It was White who developed a practical model of episcopacy and of the office of Presiding Bishop, of which he was the first distinguished occupant, and it was he who skillfully transferred and adapted the principles of episcopacy inherited from the English reformation to the new world in which the Episcopal Church was born. Since the Revolutionary War in the late 18th century the development of American Anglicanism has produced in the Episcopal Church distinctive characteristics in four areas:

1) Episcopate: For us the powers of bishops are defined and limited by a written constitution, and our bishops are elected by both clerical and lay delegates rather than as in England appointed by the crown in a complicated process that involves the church's own choice only at an early stage. In the catechism of our latest (1979) Book of Common Prayer we describe the particular ministry of a bishop in this way: "to represent Christ and his Church, particularly as apostle, chief priest, and pastor of a diocese; to guard the faith, unity, and discipline of the whole Church; to proclaim the Word of God; to act in Christ's name for the

reconciliation of the world and the building up of the Church; and to ordain others to continue Christ's ministry." We also have authoritative catechetical descriptions of the particular ministries of laity and of other clergy, all of whom are seen as "representing Christ and his Church" each in different but collaborative ways, just as we believe that in Christ's one, holy, catholic, and apostolic church "every member has, in virtue of his or her own baptism, his or her special vocation and ministry." The church is linked to the apostles both by Baptism and by ordination in the historic episcopate.

2) Authority: We maintain our own representative system of church government independent of the English Parliament. Constitutionally, our General Convention, involving both clergy and laity, has final authority for us. We do not seek to be an established church, and most Episcopalians would probably be content to see the establishment terminated in England. If something is good and true, we would say, it will flourish best if it is allowed to be freely accepted and not imposed.

3) Finance: We depend largely upon voluntary financial support, rather than drawing, as the Church of England still does in part, upon ancient ecclesiastical endowments that can too easily allow the clergy to be independent of lay support.

4) Mission: Our Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society was re-organized in 1835 to include every one of our members, thus defining still today our entire church as itself a missionary society, even though we do not always live up to this ideal. We are probably the most reluctant of all major churches in the area of evangelism, largely because we emphatically do not believe in proselytism and are quite reluctant to seek converts from any other church. In Russia, for example, our policy is to help the oldest church that is already there, rather than to send our missionaries to convert Russians who have not had a chance to even hear their own

Orthodox church for some 75 years. In Africa, on the other hand, where there are multitudes who have not yet heard the good news of the gospel, Anglicanism is growing fast thanks to its non-proselytizing evangelism.

After much intervening history, in the late nineteenth century the first and enduring principles of unity were generated on which the Episcopal Church, and for that matter the entire Anglican Communion of Churches over all the world in their various local adaptations, still stand. These principles date formally from the years 1886-1888 and are collectively called the Chicago-Lambeth Quadrilateral, originating with our House of Bishops meeting at Chicago in 1886 and then endorsed in slightly different form by the worldwide meeting of Anglican bishops at Lambeth, the London residence of the archbishop of Canterbury, in 1888. This Quadrilateral, as you probably know, enumerates four points or articles upon which Anglican churches believe agreement is necessary for a basis of an approach to ecumenical reunion with other churches: the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, the Apostles' and Nicene Creeds, the gospel sacraments of Baptism and Eucharist as instituted by Christ and generally necessary to salvation, and the historic episcopate "locally adapted in the methods of its administration." Historians will here recognize in these four points a similarity to the developments that are sometimes called the institutional marks of early catholicism, as the growing church of the patristic period sought by these very means to spread the gospel in the Roman Empire and beyond as well as to define itself over against the heresies of Gnosticism. These four points also constitute what many theologians would say are the major strands of apostolicity, and the obvious evangelistic potential of these four points is still available today. It was probably all of this that led the compilers of the Quadrilateral at Chicago in 1886 to affirm what they called "the principles of unity exemplified by the undivided Catholic Church during the first ages of its existence."

Generally, the Lambeth Conferences as well as successive triennial General Conventions of the Episcopal Church in the USA have continued to affirm and have refused to replace or even significantly alter this Quadrilateral as the fundamental Anglican consensus for full communion or full church fellowship with other churches that are not Anglican. The Quadrilateral is, for example, the basis for our relationships of full communion with the Old Catholic Churches as well as for our ecumenical discussions with Lutherans and all other churches. Its four points, one should note, are described as a basis for an approach, a beginning not an ending, a terminus a quo not a terminus ad quem. And within the Quadrilateral Episcopalians would see the fourth point of the historic episcopate as a sign or personification, even a means of personal transmission, of the other three points or marks or strands of apostolicity--the scriptures, creeds, and sacraments. To claim the historic episcopate is to say that we intend to live in visible continuity with this heritage, to claim it and appreciate it.

It was the dream and hope of William Reed Huntington, the Quadrilateral's founder, rector of Grace Church on Broadway in New York City, and the most distinguished priest in the Episcopal church at the turn of the nineteenth century into the twentieth, that these four principles could serve as a foundation to unite all or most of American protestant Christianity. Writing in the spirit of American confidence that was celebrating a newly found national unity in the years since the Civil War's end in 1865, Huntington saw the need for the Episcopal Church in this country "to strip Anglicanism of the picturesque costume which English life has thrown around it," which he in rather colorful language pictured as "a flutter of surplices, a vision of village spires and cathedral towers, a somewhat stiff and stately company of deans, prebendaries, and choristers, and that is about all." Huntington went on to remark, in his book that originated the Quadrilateral, *The Church-Idea* (1870): "If our whole ambition as Anglicans

in America be to continue a small but eminently respectable body of Christians, and to offer a refuge to people of refinement and sensibility, who are shocked by the irreverences they are apt to encounter elsewhere; in a word, if we care to be only a countercheck and not a force in society; then let us say as much in plain terms, and frankly renounce any and all claim to Catholicity. We have only, in such a case, to wrap the robe of our dignity about us, and walk quietly along in a seclusion no one will take much trouble to disturb. Thus may we be a Church in name, and a sect in deed. But if we aim at something nobler than this, if we would have our Communion become national in very truth,--in other words, if we would bring the Church of Christ into the closest possible sympathy with the throbbing, sorrowing, sinning, repenting, aspiring heart of this great people,--then let us press our reasonable claims to be the reconciler of a divided household, not in a spirit of arrogance (which ill befits those whose best possessions have come to them by inheritance), but with affectionate earnestness and an intelligent zeal." From such motivation William Reed Huntington, greatest of all American Episcopalian ecumenists, crafted and presented the Quadrilateral's four points. He was also a leading figure in Prayer Book revision and vocal advocate of a greatly enhanced and almost-equal place for women in the church of that day, and his memory and ecumenical vision is now commemorated annually in a service at Grace Church.

The Lambeth Conference of 1920 described Huntington's legacy, our ideal of church unity, in this way: "The vision which rises before us is that of a Church, genuinely Catholic, loyal to all truth, and gathering into its fellowship all 'who profess and call themselves Christians,' within whose visible unity all the treasures of faith and order, bequeathed as a heritage by the past to the present, shall be possessed in common, and made serviceable to the whole Body of Christ. Within this unity Christian Communion now separated from one another

would retain much that has long been distinctive in their methods of worship and service. It is through a rich diversity of life and devotion that the unity of the whole fellowship will be fulfilled." Enumerating and expanding upon the points of the Quadrilateral, it concluded with "A ministry acknowledged by every part of the Church as possessing not only the inward call of the Spirit, but also the commission of Christ and the authority of the whole body." The conference then asked: "May we not reasonably claim that the Episcopate is the one means of providing such a ministry? It is not that we call in question for a moment the spiritual reality of the ministries of those Communion which do not possess the Episcopate. On the contrary, we thankfully acknowledge that these ministries have been manifestly blessed and owned by the Holy Spirit as effective means of grace. But we submit that considerations alike of history and of present experience justify the claim which we make on behalf of the Episcopate."

The Lambeth report of 1958 made this vision from 1920 even more explicit: "Loyalty to the age-long tradition of the Church, and to our own experience, compels us to believe that a ministry to be acknowledged by every part of the Church can only be attained through the historic episcopate, though not necessarily in the precise form prevailing in any part of the Anglican Communion. This ministry we believe to have been given to the Church by Divine Providence from primitive Christian times with its traditional functions of pastoral care and oversight, ordination, leadership in worship, and teaching. We fully recognize that there are other forms of ministry than episcopacy in which have been revealed the gracious activity of God in the life of the universal Church. We believe that other Churches have often borne more effective witness, for example, to the status and vocation of the laity as spiritual persons and to the fellowship and discipline of congregational life than has been done in some of the Churches of our communion. It is our longing that all the spiritual gifts and insights by which the

particular Churches live to God's glory may find their full scope and enrichment in a united Church." All this is to indicate our belief that the reunion of the churches will simply not occur without a ministry recognized by all of them and that only a ministry in the apostolic succession of the historic episcopate stands any chance of achieving such universal recognition. Our insistence on the historic episcopate thus has to do with the contextual necessities of a movement toward a common and wider Christian life. It is for this reason that the Episcopal Church will come to see the historic episcopate, as I shall explain in a moment, as "essential to the reunion of the church" and therefore in this sense, but only in this sense, as a "condition."

The Quadrilateral's first three points (scriptures, creeds, and the dominical sacraments) we share in common with many protestant churches, but its fourth point, the historic episcopate, we share primarily with the Eastern Orthodox and Roman Catholic Churches, although they both would insist that it be restricted to men who are celibate. Although we would regard all four points of the Quadrilateral as together constituting a charter of "catholicity," as constituting the major strands of "apostolicity," the absence of this fourth point in most churches of the protestant tradition has meant that attention has somewhat narrowly focused upon it as our link with "catholicity" whereas the other three are seen as our links, or bridges, to evangelical protestantism. The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, in its official statement on ecumenism, says that it seek links in both directions, even "full communion" (the official term used), and presumably this is why Lutherans, having entered full communion with us, also continue in dialogue with the Roman Catholics and Orthodox.

The 1982 General Convention of the Episcopal Church reassessed the relation of the historic episcopate to the concept of apostolicity, especially as a result of our ecumenical dialogues with the Lutheran churches, and it came up with the following adaptation, which is the

origin of our phraseology "essential to the reunion of the church" that I mentioned earlier:

"Apostolicity is evidenced in continuity with the teaching, the ministry, and the mission of the apostles. Apostolic teaching must, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, be founded upon the Holy Scriptures and the ancient fathers and creeds, making its proclamation of Jesus Christ and his gospel for each new age consistent with those sources, not merely reproducing them in a transmission of verbal identity. Apostolic ministry exists to promote, safeguard and serve apostolic teaching. All Christians are called to this ministry by their Baptism. In order to serve, lead and enable this ministry, some are set apart and ordained in the historic orders of Bishop, Presbyter, and Deacon. We understand the historic episcopate as central to this apostolic ministry and essential to the reunion of the Church, even as we acknowledge 'the spiritual reality of the ministries of those Communion which do not possess the Episcopate' [quoted from the Lambeth Conference of 1920]. Apostolic mission is itself a succession of apostolic teaching and ministry inherited from the past and carried into the present and future. Bishops in apostolic succession are, therefore, the focus and personal symbols of this inheritance and mission as they preach and teach the gospel and summon the people of God to their mission of worship and service." We may note, as regards this important position statement voted by the General Convention of 1982, that Apostolic teaching is drawn from the heritage of the past, especially from the Bible, that Apostolic mission looks to carry this heritage into the future, and that Apostolic ministry, especially the historic episcopate, is seen as "central" in holding it all together and the historic episcopate as "essential" to the reunion of the entire Church (but not as essential to salvation nor as necessary for recognizing the ecclesial character of other churches). And thus, although we do not see the historic episcopate as something required by the gospel, we do regard it as a matter of faith, as being something more than a mere structural adiaphoron.

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The statement of our General Convention of 1982, I should add, also needs to be seen in the context of the agreed and official ordination rite for a bishop in our latest (1979) Book of Common Prayer. The bishop-elect is described as chosen by the clergy and people of the diocese to be their bishop and chief pastor, and he or she then declares under oath that the Holy Scriptures are the Word of God and contain all things necessary to salvation. Following this the bishop-elect promises to conform to the doctrine, discipline, and worship of the Episcopal Church, and then the people are invited to declare openly whether or not it is their will that this person be ordained a bishop (Very occasionally there are some loud NO's!). Then, after readings from the Scriptures, there follows the the section called the "examination," which is solemnly read in public before the consecration of every new bishop and constitutes our own modern re-statement of the traditional prophetic, priestly, and governing functions that have historically characterized the episcopate since the time of such writers as Ignatius, Irenaeus, and Cyprian in the early church. Each of the three paragraphs, one after another, can be related to leadership and oversight in proclamation, worship, and governance, taking their historic roots in these three authors:

The people have chosen you and have affirmed their trust in you by acclaiming your election. A bishop in God's holy Church is called to be one with the apostles in proclaiming Christ's resurrection and interpreting the gospel, and to testify to Christ's sovereignty as Lord of lords and King of kings.

You are called to guard the faith, unity, and discipline of the Church; to celebrate and to provide for the administration of the sacraments of the New Covenant; to ordain priests and deacons and to join in ordaining bishops; and to be in all things a faithful pastor and wholesome example for the entire flock of Christ.

With your fellow bishops you will share in the leadership of the Church throughout the world. Your heritage is the faith of patriarchs, prophets, apostles, and martyrs, and those of every generation who have looked to God in hope. Your joy will be to follow him

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who came, not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many.

After these paragraphs the examination continues with public questions in which the bishop-elect promises to be faithful in prayer and in the study of Holy Scripture, to boldly proclaim and interpret the gospel, to encourage and support all baptized people in their gifts and ministries, to guard the faith, unity, and discipline of the church, to share in the governance of the church, and to be merciful to all, showing compassion to the poor and strangers and defending those who have no helper. The bishop-elect is then required to lead the congregation in reciting the Nicene Creed, as the Presiding Bishop says "We therefore call upon you, chosen to be a guardian of the Church's faith, to lead us in confessing that faith." And immediately after the prayer for consecration of the bishop, which in our American Prayer Book is drawn from the earliest form of such a prayer in the western church, that is, Hippolytus, the new bishop is given a Bible in order to state publicly that the authority of his or her episcopal ministry is to be discharged under the Holy Scriptures.

Still one other context in which our understanding of historic episcopacy must be seen is that of our official canon law, whereby it is stipulated that every bishop-elect, once chosen by his or her diocese, must also receive the approval of the wider church. Under our Canon 22, sections 3-5, of Title III, this must be signified by the affirmative consents of a majority of all Bishops exercising jurisdiction and of all diocesan Standing Committees, or by majority votes of both houses of our General Convention if the bishop's election occurred within 120 days thereof. Of the former of these procedures, Bishops-elect not confirmed by majorities of Bishops and Standing Committees, I am not aware of any statistical record; but of the latter eventuality, where a Bishop-elect fails to receive the necessary votes at a General Convention, I am aware of nine such cases. This procedure therefore is one way in which, at least in our canon law, there is

provision to ensure that new bishops are representative of more than mere local interests.

My summary has nearly ended as to what the Episcopal Church officially believes about the historic episcopate that it has struggled so hard to maintain. It is sometimes said that "Anglicans have no one understanding of the historic episcopate that is required of all Anglicans," but this is true only in a limited sense since Episcopalians do in fact have an accumulated official doctrinal belief about it that is contained within and can be derived from our Book of Common Prayer, the resolutions of Lambeth Conferences, our canon law, and the acts of our General Conventions. All of those pertinent passages I have now endeavored to cite. For us it is a matter of faith and not just a structural adiaphoron. And I should add that we did not start out in the Lutheran-Episcopal dialogue urging Lutherans to receive the historic episcopate from us, to become Episcopalians, as some have unfairly complained; it was the Lutheran representatives then who honestly thought that would be the better recommendation. The Episcopal Church claims no exclusive "corner" or "market" on the historic episcopate, from the very first we said we thought it would be better for the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America to receive it from other Lutheran churches under the Augsburg Confession who already stand within it, and we certainly defend Lutheran freedom to work out an evangelical expression of it that the ELCA can live with, which they are obviously doing.

Still one other remark seems appropriate as this paper concludes. The many years of dialogue process leading up to the CCM and full communion with the Lutherans also enabled us in the Episcopal Church, even forced us, to consider which aspects of the historic episcopate as we have known it in later twentieth century America are things of the first order, and which aspects we could be prepared and content not necessarily to expect to see in the historic episcopate of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America in full communion with us.

Lutherans understandably wanted to know just what they would be taking on in such an arrangement; concerned lest the vitality of their "people's church" be constrained and their "indigenous evangelical imagination" be stifled. Most of the things we would consider essential I have already mentioned, and the revised CCM covers them all. Obviously we do not consider it essential to the historic episcopate that the bishop be a celibate male, as the Roman Catholics and the Orthodox do, nor that the bishop must be a monk and grow a beard, as do the Orthodox.

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Coming nearer to home, we do not consider it essential to the historic episcopate that every bishop or diocese must have a cathedral church, or that the bishop should wear a ring and a cross and a cope and mitre and march last in the procession and sit high upon a throne or carry a crozier or be styled "The Right Reverend" or wear a purple shirt or, for that matter, wear clericals at all, or even draw a larger salary than the other clergy! All these things are commonly encountered in the Episcopal Church today, but they are not regarded by us as in any way essential to the historic episcopate. We have at least one living bishop who has never worn a mitre on his head, and there was a period a couple of centuries ago when none of them did. We have some dioceses without cathedrals, and early on, most of them in this country did not. We recently had one bishop whose "throne" was a folding stool that he carried in his car, calling his "cathedral" any building in which he unfolded it, and we had one new diocese that decided to begin its life only with a bishop and not with any of the peripherals or with any diocesan offices or administration unless or until it agreed that it needed them for the sake of the church's mission in its own locale and culture. (That diocese did pay the bishop a large salary, though!). I should add that one function of the bishop as we understand it is precisely to call the church beyond its own culture at times, to speak prophetically in relation to other cultures and countries and races, to be cross-cultural as well as enculturated, and perhaps, in the name of the gospel, at times to be counter-cultural. And yet we also support the rights of the laity to speak their considered Christian minds in public as well, even in contradiction of the pronouncements of our bishops, as the first President Bush did in disagreeing with our Presiding Bishop Edmond Browning over the Persian Gulf War, or, as much earlier in England, Thomas Becket did against King Henry II.

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.¹ The missionary context and the 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.² James White characterized Wesley’s program as “pragmatic traditionalism” with the emphasis on traditionalism.³ After Wesley’s death, and under the energetic leadership of Francis

¹ *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).

² 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.

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

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 1789⁴, 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;
- 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.⁵ 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.

⁴ “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.

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

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 what we might call the “ecumenical ordo” of traditional catholic liturgy.⁶ 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.⁷ 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

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

⁷ 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.

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 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**.⁸

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

⁸ **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.”

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.

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 1745.⁹

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 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).

⁹ 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 Hearts: Essays on Liturgy and Music Honoring Marion J. Hatchett*. J. Neil Alexander, (ed.) (Church Publishing, 1999) 244-260.]

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 of 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 19th 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 20th 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 undergirds 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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“One Lord, One Faith, One Baptism”

Ruth A. Meyers

This summer, I received an email from Tom Ferguson, requesting the title of my presentation. I didn’t have one yet, but I came up with one that is biblically based, sufficiently generic to allow me to say almost anything, and sufficiently ecumenical for a bilateral dialogue. It is common in academic work to have a subtitle, and I considered whether to include one. But the one that came to mind – “*Two* Baptismal Covenants” – was, I thought, more likely to evoke confusion rather than clarity, or even curiosity, so I settled for ““One Lord, One Faith, One Baptism.””

But what of these two baptismal covenants? As some of you know, the seminary where I teach, Seabury-Western Theological Seminary, is located across the street from Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary, a seminary in the United Methodist tradition (on occasion, they’re known as “East Jesus Tech” and “West Jesus Tech”). A few years ago, my colleague Ruth Duck and I discovered we were teaching essentially the same course during the same academic term on the same subject – baptism. That seemed like a poor use of our resources, so we agreed to co-teach the course the next time it was scheduled. Our first obstacle was agreeing upon a title for the course. Mine had been entitled “Christian Initiation,” a term that Episcopalians understand to include baptism, confirmation, and admission to communion. But Professor Duck thought that her Methodist students would not immediately understand that term, and she suggested that we use her title: “The Baptismal Covenant.” It was in that moment that I realized how easy it can be for common terminology to obscure difference.

For United Methodists, the term “Baptismal Covenant” refers to the entire baptismal liturgy. *By Water and the Spirit*, the document we read in preparation for this session, speaks of “the Services of the Baptismal Covenant” (p. 4), and in fact suggests that there are *four* Baptismal Covenants.” I wondered whether this was confusing for any of the Episcopalians. For us, there is only *one* Baptismal Covenant, by which we mean not the entire service, but one

particular text. This covenant is a series of questions and answers, beginning with the Apostles’ Creed in interrogatory form (“Do you believe in God the Father?” to which the congregation responds with the first paragraph of the Creed, and so on). Immediately following the creedal questions are five questions inquiring about one’s willingness to live a Christian life by:

- continuing in the apostles’ teaching and fellowship;
- persevering in resisting evil;
- proclaiming the gospel in word and deed;
- seeking and serving Christ in all persons; and
- striving for justice and peace.

The Baptismal Covenant was introduced in the 1979 *Book of Common Prayer*, and over the nearly three decades since its introduction, it has become widely used, not only at every celebration of baptism, but also at every celebration of the Easter Vigil and often on other baptismal feasts – the day of Pentecost, All Saints’ Day, and the feast of the Baptism of Jesus (the first Sunday after Epiphany). Moreover, Episcopalians are prone to citing the Baptismal Covenant when talking about Christian commitment.

So titling a course “The Baptismal Covenant” would not work for Episcopalians, who might think this was a course about ethics rather than liturgy. In the end, my colleague and I settled on the title “Baptism and Reaffirmation,” which at least has similar meanings on both sides of the street.

Background to the 1979 BCP

The Episcopalian “Baptismal Covenant” is one feature of a baptismal rite that is almost entirely rewritten from earlier services. The chair of the drafting committee pointed out to me (with a certain degree of pride) that the only text they kept from earlier prayer books was the baptismal formula, “I baptize you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.” Everything else was newly written or reworded substantially.

The development of the 1979 rite reflects major shifts in Episcopalians’ understanding and practice of baptism. We are not alone in this, as the introductory section of *By Water and the Spirit* shows. During the past half-century, there has been a ecumenical recovery of the significance of baptism for Christian faith and life, leading to the new ecumenical convergence represented in the 1982 document *Baptism, Eucharist, and Ministry*. *By Water and the Spirit* sketches the historical background to this from a United Methodist perspective. What follows is a bit of the Episcopalian story.

While the Methodist tradition seems to have devalued the sacramental nature of baptism, to the point that baptism came to be understood more as a matter of human choice rather than divine grace (*BWS*, pp. 2-3), Episcopalians have always maintained the significance of baptism as a sacrament. During the nineteenth century, this became a point of controversy. How could the baptismal rite speak of regeneration in the case of infant baptism, since infants are unable to manifest a personal conversion? So intractable was this debate within the Episcopal Church that it became a key factor in the formation of the Reformed Episcopal Church, which continues as a separate body today. In this separation, the Episcopal Church lost its most ardent evangelicals. We may have lost some of that evangelical fervor nearly a century earlier, when the Methodists emerged as a separate body. Perhaps Episcopalians might now be able to receive from United Methodists more of the evangelical emphasis on personal decision and commitment to Christ. At the same time, I wonder whether United Methodists might be encouraged to develop a stronger sacramental theology. I admit to being troubled by the statement in *By Water and the Spirit* (p. 12) that “new birth may not always coincide with the moment of the administration of water or the laying on of hands.” This may be merely a hedge against a purely mechanical or magical view of the sacrament. Nonetheless, for Anglicans baptism is a sure and certain sign of God’s grace, and we believe that baptism does effect new birth.

Even if Episcopalians were able to retain a sacramental understanding of baptism – and I think this is a fair assessment, particularly in light of the Anglo-Catholic revival during the

nineteenth century, which gave new emphasis to the significance of sacraments – even so, baptism was largely at the periphery of Episcopal Church life for much of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The sixteenth-century Anglican prayer books had called for baptism to be administered at Morning or Evening Prayer on a Sunday or holy day, “when the most number of people may come together,” so that the congregation might witness the incorporation of a new member of the Church and might remember their own baptisms. But the prayer books of the Episcopal Church eliminated the rationale for public baptism and relaxed the stipulation about Sunday baptism, omitting the phrase “when the most number of people come together” and allowing the minister to appoint a day other than a Sunday or holy day. It became common in the Episcopal Church for baptism to be administered on a Sunday afternoon with only family and perhaps a few friends gathered. (I recall such a setting at the baptism of one of my cousins in the early 1960s.) Baptism might be a sacrament, a sure and certain means of God’s grace, but it was not a high point of parish life.

Administered as an essentially private rite, baptism was primarily a rite of passage celebrating the birth of an infant. This is the Christendom model, with an underlying assumption that “everyone” is a Christian, and that all aspects of the child’s life – home, school, society, in addition to church – are Christian in their orientation. I think this is a heritage we share as Episcopalians and United Methodists, even if historically we understood baptism differently. Moreover, the twentieth-century recovery of the significance of baptism, which we also share, has been occasioned, at least in part, by the emergence of post-Christendom. In a post-Christendom world, we discover that we need a stronger identity, a stronger articulation of our commitments. Reclaiming the centrality of baptism is giving us that identity. It makes sense, too, that we should do so by turning to the first three or four centuries of Christian history, to the time before Christendom. *By Water and the Spirit* is largely silent about this surrounding context, and I wonder whether it would be profitable for us to reflect further on the impact of post-Christendom.

New Emphases in the 1979 BCP

A recovery of the significance of baptism was underway in some parishes and dioceses well before official development of the 1979 Prayer Book. In the late 1930s, William Palmer Ladd, Dean of Berkeley Divinity School, started writing a column that introduced Episcopalians to the ideas of the liturgical renewal movement. While the primary emphasis of this movement was restoration of a weekly Sunday eucharist with the people receiving, baptism received some attention as well. Drawing upon newly discovered and translated patristic sources, Ladd highlighted the ancient celebration of baptism at the Easter Vigil and encouraged a more public celebration of baptism. Over the next three decades, other church leaders also called for the celebration of baptism in the presence of the congregation, recommended a more abundant use of water, and urged substantive preparation of parents and godparents of infant candidates. This was not an official program of the Episcopal Church but rather a grassroots movement.

Alongside these changes, liturgical scholars continued to fill in the picture of patristic baptismal practice. In contrast to the mid twentieth-century use of baptism as a family occasion marking the birth of a child with the sprinkling of a few drops of water, baptism in the early church was a celebration rich with symbol and ritual drama. Adult candidates prepared for their baptism during a lengthy catechumenate that culminated at the Easter Vigil, a liturgy that included not only full immersion but also anointing and laying on of hands, and concluded with the newly baptized participating in the eucharist with the congregation. New understandings of the power of baptism in the early church encouraged twentieth-century liturgical leaders as they worked for the recovery of the significance of baptism.

The revisers who developed the 1979 baptismal rite relied heavily on the new scholarly understandings, not surprising in view of the value Anglicans have always placed upon liturgy that is based upon ancient church practice. Fundamental to the 1979 revision is the opening statement “Concerning the Service” that prefaces the baptismal rite: “Holy Baptism is full

initiation by water and the Holy Spirit into Christ’s Body the Church” (BCP p. 298). Like the ancient baptismal rites, the 1979 rite culminates with the celebration of the eucharist. The newly baptized, including infants, may receive communion, a practice that has been increasingly accepted over the past three decades (although the rubrics are silent about whether the newly baptized receive). On this United Methodists and Episcopalians are clearly in agreement, as *By Water and the Spirit* states succinctly: “The Services of the Baptismal Covenant appropriately conclude with Holy Communion, through which the union of the new member with the Body of Christ is most fully expressed” (p. 20).

The baptismal eucharist is not just any celebration of the eucharist. The 1979 Prayer Book calls for baptism to be administered “within the Eucharist at the chief service on a Sunday or other feast” (p. 298) and further recommends that baptism be reserved for baptismal feasts (Easter Vigil, Pentecost, All Saints’ Day or the Sunday after All Saints’, and the Baptism of Jesus on the first Sunday after the Epiphany), as well as the visit of a bishop. As *By Water and the Spirit* puts it, “baptism is a rite of the whole Church, which ordinarily requires the participation of the gathered, worshiping congregation” (p. 10). As Episcopalians and United Methodists, we share this theological premise, and we have each adopted ritual texts that enact it. In our baptismal rites, the gathered community promises to support the newly baptized in their life in Christ and reaffirms its own faith, and after the baptism the congregation formally welcomes the newly baptized and exchanges the Peace with them. (Although all of the options are not present in each of the services provided in the *United Methodist Book of Worship*, at least some are included in each Service of the Baptismal Covenant.) In the Episcopal Church, these reforms are commonplace and unremarkable today. Moreover, some congregations and dioceses actively discourage what one of my students calls “drive-by baptisms,” wherein parents bring their new baby for baptism to the grandparents’ parish, a place they have long since left and to which they rarely return, or even to a local congregation where they have no ties and no intention of ever establishing any connection. This is the Christendom model of baptism and the

continuation of such requests reminds me that we are still teetering between Christendom and post-Christendom.

The 1979 Prayer Book orients the church toward post-Christendom, calling for parents and godparents “to be instructed in the meaning of Baptism, in their duties to help the new Christians grow in the knowledge and love of God, and in their responsibilities as members of [the] Church” (p. 298). The rite requires parents and godparents to state their willingness to raise the child in the Christian faith and life and to assist the child in growing into the full stature of Christ. Here, too, United Methodists and Episcopalians take similar stances, encouraging nurture in Christian faith and ongoing commitment to Christ.

Although the 1979 Prayer Book is silent about the preparation of adults, such preparation is assumed, and our *Book of Occasional Services* has since 1979 provided a catechumenal process for the Christian formation of unbaptized adults as they journey toward baptism. The process, though not the terminology, is similar to the material in *Come to the Waters: Baptism and Our Ministry of Welcoming Seekers and Making Disciples*, published by Discipleship Resources (United Methodist) in 1995. This is an area of significant ecumenical cooperation, evident in the work of the North American Association for the Catechumenate, which for over a decade has brought together Anglicans, United Methodists, Lutherans, and churches in the Reformed tradition in the United States and Canada to provide training and support for churches implementing such a process. *By Water and the Spirit* (p. 13) stresses the growing importance of evangelizing and nurturing adult converts in the contemporary context, one which is increasingly indifferent or hostile to Christian faith, and fewer and fewer children are raised in Christian families and communities of faith.

In addition to insistence on preparation and new attention to baptism as a rite that ordinarily requires a gathered community, Episcopalians and United Methodists share an understanding of baptism as a sacrament of conversion, in which we turn from our sinful human condition to the God who has been revealed in Jesus Christ, and God frees and restores us. Our

baptismal rites use similar language for the renunciation of the spiritual forces of wickedness, the evil powers of this world, and the sinful desires that draw us from the love of God.

Corresponding to this renunciation of evil, candidates turn and accept Christ. Again, the language of our rites is similar, as the candidates promise to accept Jesus as Savior, to trust in his grace and love, and to follow and obey him.

Following this renunciation and affirmation by those about to be baptized, the Prayer Book invites the congregation to “join with those committing themselves to Christ and renew our own baptismal covenant.” As noted above, this covenant begins with the interrogatory Apostles’ Creed and continues with five questions about Christian life. It is a powerful statement of *our* belief and *our* willingness, with God’s help, to manifest this faith in our daily lives. This approach to covenant is rather different from the United Methodist “Services of the Baptismal Covenant.” *By Water and the Spirit* (pp. 8-9) explains that this title for the baptismal liturgies was chosen as an expression of the covenant God has entered with God’s people, the covenant first made with the people of Israel and then made anew through the death and resurrection of Jesus. Thus the entire baptismal liturgy is about initiating people into this covenant. The emphasis on God’s initiative is striking. Yes, covenant involves the community of faith and the person baptized into that covenant community. Nonetheless, *God* takes the initiative to make and renew the covenant, and *God* enables individuals and the community to respond with faithful commitment.

I wonder whether Episcopalians might receive from the United Methodist approach a deeper appreciation for God’s work in leading us to baptism and sustaining us in baptismal living. Certainly, God’s action is articulated as the congregation professes its faith in the Apostles’ Creed and in the commitments that are each made “with God’s help.” But when Episcopalians speak of the Baptismal Covenant, they usually mean the questions about Christian life; the creedal questions are rarely mentioned when we use the Baptismal Covenant rhetorically to urge more faithful Christian life or to express our missional commitments. Moreover, making

these promises *before* the administration of the water can imply that God’s grace follows upon or even is contingent upon our action, that *our* covenant promises of faithful living precede *God’s* gift. In contrast, *By Water and the Spirit* (p. 5) insists that all grace “precedes and enables any movement we can make toward God.”

Though we have different emphases in our use of the term “baptismal covenant,” Episcopalians and United Methodists share a renewed appreciation for baptism as the foundation for Christian life. All Christian believers, we insist, share in ministry, embodying Christ in our day-to-day lives, manifesting Christ’s reconciling love in the world. For Episcopalians, baptismal ministry is a relatively recent concept, and we are still learning what it means. It may be more fully articulated and more deeply rooted in the Wesleyan tradition of personal and social holiness, and I wonder whether Episcopalians might be enriched by an exploration of the Methodist understanding of sanctification.

Episcopalians have a somewhat longer history of understanding confirmation, rather than baptism, as the primary rite of Christian commitment. The ritual basis for this was in place in the 1662 *Book of Common Prayer*, which introduced a question at confirmation asking the candidates whether they renewed the promises and vows made at their baptism, “ratifying and confirming” them. From this ritual inquiry came the informal shorthand teaching, “God confirms, and we confirm.” But significant emphasis on the commitment made at confirmation would have come only in the nineteenth century, after confirmation came to be more regularly practiced (which required both the presence of bishops, a reality on American soil only in the late eighteenth century, and a ready means of travel, vastly improved with the advent of the railroad in the nineteenth century).

Full Initiation by Water and the Holy Spirit

As confirmation became more customary, Anglicans began to debate the meaning of confirmation in relation to baptism, a debate that lasted until nearly the end of the twentieth

century. Anglicans such as Arthur James Mason and Gregory Dix argued that baptism in water was a preliminary rite, effecting forgiveness of sin and requiring completion through the bestowal of the Spirit in confirmation. Citing many of the same biblical and patristic texts, others such as Geoffrey Lampe insisted that initiation, including the bestowal of the Holy Spirit, was complete in baptism.

When the Episcopal Church began drafting the new initiatory rites, the question was still not settled. But there was growing scholarly consensus that initiation in the early church was accomplished in a single rite comprising administration of water, anointing, laying on of hands, and consignation, culminating in admission to communion. The revisers determined to restore this so-called primitive unity of the initiatory rite. To signify this, they included in baptism the prayer for the sevenfold gifts of the Holy Spirit, a prayer that had been part of confirmation in the medieval Western rites and in every Anglican Prayer Book. This prayer follows the administration of the water, and after the prayer comes a consignation and hand-laying with an optional anointing. The rubrics permit the order of the actions to be reversed, that is, water, consignation, prayer, instead of water, prayer, consignation.

One way to understand this rite is to identify two steps: water-baptism and Spirit-baptism. The Prayer Book mitigates against such an interpretation by the formula accompanying the hand-laying (a formula that was agreed upon only after multiple revisions and prolonged discussion): “you are sealed by the Holy Spirit *in Baptism* and marked as Christ’s own for ever.” Certainly this *could* be seen as a distinct baptism of the Holy Spirit. Yet the inclusion of the phrase “in Baptism” makes this ambiguous. “In Baptism” could just as easily be a reference to the water of baptism, and the prayer of Thanksgiving over the Water (BCP pp. 306-307) supports such an interpretation. “In [water] your Son Jesus received the baptism of John and was anointed by the Holy Spirit as the Messiah.” “Through the [water of baptism] we are reborn by the Holy Spirit.”

In contrast to Prayer Book’s ambiguity about the precise location of the Holy Spirit in baptism, *By Water and the Spirit* (p. 9) makes a clear distinction: “Water is administered in the

name of the triune God (specified in the ritual as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit)... and the Holy Spirit is invoked with the laying on of hands.” This is consistent with the language of “The Baptismal Covenant I” in *The United Methodist Book of Worship*: immediately after the administration of the water, the pastor lays hands on the candidate’s head and says, “The Holy Spirit work within you, that being born through water and the Holy Spirit, you may be a faithful disciple of Christ” (*UMBOW* p. 91).

As I consider the complicated history of confirmation, I find it problematic to distinguish so precisely between baptism in water and baptism of the Spirit. The two have been connected since the apostolic age, as *By Water and the Spirit* recognizes. But difficulties arise when the bestowal of the Spirit is connected only with a hand-laying or other action after the administration of the water. (I note that the United Methodist service includes as an option, in addition to the hand-laying, a consignation with or without anointing, using the formula from the 1979 Prayer Book, “You are sealed by the Holy Spirit in baptism and marked as Christ’s own forever.”) One problem with separating water and Spirit baptism is evident in the development of confirmation as a separate rite and the subsequent struggle to articulate its meaning. Confirmation has been called “a rite in search of a theology” for good reason, and the twentieth-century Anglican debate about the bestowal of the Spirit in baptism and/or confirmation makes me very cautious about separating baptism of the Spirit from water baptism.

A different question arises when there is a baptismal rite that does not include a separate, explicit bestowal of the Spirit. *The United Methodist Book of Worship* provides two services of The Baptismal Covenant from rituals of the former Methodist and former Evangelical United Brethren churches. The first (The Baptismal Covenant II-B), for children and others unable to answer for themselves, includes only water baptism in the triune name; the sole mention of the Spirit (apart from the triune name in the baptismal formula) comes in a prayer at the end of the rite, which includes a petition “that by the restraining and renewing influence of the Holy Spirit, they may ever be true children of thine, serving thee faithfully all their days” (*UMBOW* p. 105).

The second (The Baptismal Covenant III) includes baptism for those able to answer for themselves along with confirmation, reaffirmation of faith, and reception into the United Methodist Church. Confirmation comes immediately after the administration of water in the triune name, and each person who has been baptized is confirmed through the laying on of hands by the pastor, who says, “the Lord defend you with his heavenly grace and by his Spirit confirm you in the faith and fellowship of all true disciples of Jesus Christ” (*UMBOW* p. 108). This invocation of the Spirit appears similar in intent to the hand-laying in “The Baptismal Covenant I.” But what about the children who are baptized using “The Baptismal Covenant II-B”? There is no explicit bestowal of the Spirit in that service. By making such a neat distinction between the signs of water baptism and Spirit baptism, *By Water and the Spirit* calls into question whether – or when – these children receive the Spirit.

This is probably not a subject for substantial ecumenical dialogue, but rather an invitation to United Methodists to consider more fully the theological implications of the various baptismal rites provided in their worship books. The Lutheran liturgical scholar Maxwell Johnson points out that the revised Roman Catholic rite of confirmation, along with baptismal rites in the 1979 *Book of Common Prayer* and the 1978 *Lutheran Book of Worship*, adopted the traditional *Eastern* (specifically, Byzantine) formula for the bestowal of the Spirit; he does not consider the United Methodist rite. Johnson laments the absence of the medieval Western prayer for the anointing after baptism: “God the Father Almighty, who has brought you to a new birth through water and the Holy Spirit and has forgiven your sins, himself anoints you into eternal life.” He argues further that this anointing should be secondary to the laying on of hands, which should be accompanied by the traditional Western prayer for the sevenfold gifts of the Spirit.

Episcopalians might look anew at the Prayer Book rite in light of Johnson’s recommendations.

For our purposes, I note only that the traditional anointing prayer speaks of rebirth by water and the Spirit, and that in the early medieval baptismal rite, this prayer preceded hand-laying and the prayer for the sevenfold gifts of the Spirit. What I find absent in both the revised

baptismal rite in *The United Methodist Book of Worship* and in the document *By Water and the Spirit* is a clear recognition baptism of the Spirit occurs *through* the water of baptism, even if also signified by a subsequent ritual action and text.

Nurturing the Life of Faith

A consideration of the bestowal of the Spirit has introduced the subject of confirmation with its complicated history. I do not think any Western Church has untangled this knot in recent revisions and accompanying documents. *By Water and the Spirit* insists that confirmation, as the laying on of hands, has been restored to the current baptismal ritual. Yet it also states that persons baptized as infants participate in what is now called confirmation, which is “the first public affirmation of the grace of God in one’s baptism and the acknowledgment of one’s acceptance of that grace by faith” (BWS p. 18). *By Water and the Spirit* attempts to explain this by describing confirmation as “a dynamic action of the Holy Spirit that can be repeated” (BWS p. 18). Certainly I would concur that the Spirit can be bestowed more than once. But if the ritualization of the Spirit is “confirmation,” why does *The United Methodist Book of Worship* introduce the title “Reaffirmation” for ritualizing occasions of reaffirming faith after confirmation?

The effect of confirmation is also unclear. *By Water and the Spirit* stipulates that it is not an entrance into Church membership, which occurs at baptism. But it also states that a person who is confirmed “enters more fully into the responsibilities and privileges of membership in the Church” (BWS p. 19). The only example given is that statistics of church membership count professed/confirmed members rather than all baptized members. It is difficult to understand how one can enter church membership yet not be counted a member of the church.

I hasten to add the Episcopalians are also contradictory in our practice and theology. We define baptism as “full initiation by water and the Spirit,” but then expect that adults, “unless baptized with laying on of hands by a bishop” (BCP p. 412), make a public affirmation of faith in

the presence of the bishop and receive the laying on of hands by the bishop. Is baptism full initiation or is it not? Knowing that this rubric was an eleventh-hour addition, inserted by the House of Bishops (with the subsequent approval of the House of Deputies) as the Prayer Book was first being approved at the 1976 General Convention, only serves to remind Episcopalians of the significance attached by many to the ritual connection with a bishop.

For Episcopalians, confirmation, though not a sacrament of initiation, is a gateway to additional responsibilities and privileges of membership. The canons require a person to be a “confirmed adult communicant in good standing” to hold a number of elected or appointed offices and to be ordained. In adopting this language (six years after the Prayer Book was adopted), the Episcopal Church gave confirmation a quasi-initiatory status, introducing a different level of membership.

I do not want to argue against the value of a public affirmation of faith for those baptized as infants. But I suggest that we give it too much weight when we require it for some aspects of church membership. The primary ritual reaffirmation of our baptism occurs when we gather for Eucharist, wherein we are reconstituted as the Body of Christ, restored to the new life bestowed in baptism, united once again with Christ and with one another, renewed by the Holy Spirit. *By Water and the Spirit* states this clearly: “In celebrating the Eucharist, we remember the grace given to us in our baptism and partake of the spiritual food necessary for sustaining and fulfilling the promises of baptism” (*BWS* p. 20). Perhaps in both of our traditions we might benefit from recognizing more clearly the fundamental connection between baptism and eucharist. We might then make regular participation in eucharist and the life of the Christian community the criteria for the responsibilities and privileges of membership, rather than insisting upon the single ritual moment of confirmation.

Touching upon one other aspect of the relation of baptism and the eucharist, *By Water and the Spirit* comments, “Unbaptized persons who receive communion should be counseled and nurtured toward baptism as soon as possible” (p. 20). In the Episcopal Church, we are

experiencing a growing practice of open communion, by which is meant an invitation for all present to receive communion, whether or not baptized. My hunch is that our post-Christendom context is presenting us with increasing numbers of unbaptized adults at worship, and that the successful restoration of eucharist as the principal Sunday service in the Episcopal Church presents us with few or no alternative worship services in which seekers are fully welcome. Perhaps as we together reflect on our theology of baptism and eucharist we might have wisdom to offer one another.

Conclusion

Episcopalians and United Methodists have both benefitted from the ecumenical scholarship and liturgical renewal of the twentieth century. We have similar understandings of baptism, ritualized in similar ways in our most recent services of baptism, even though we use the term “baptismal covenant” quite differently. A survey of our history suggests that we bring different emphases to our contemporary approaches: United Methodists have emphasized the evangelical dimensions of baptismal practice, while Episcopalians have stressed the sacramental nature of baptism. Perhaps these are gifts we might bring to one another in our ecumenical cooperation. Today, both churches might profit from consideration of how we ritualize the bestowal of the Holy Spirit in baptism, in light of the most recent liturgical scholarship.

Together, in this post-Christendom age, we are learning anew about making disciples. Renewed baptismal theology and practice is enlivening our appreciation for baptism as the primary sacrament of ministry. Yet the understanding and practice of confirmation in each of our churches undermine to some extent the significance of God’s call and commissioning of each Christian that occur through baptism. Working ecumenically, we might encourage and assist one another as we wrestle with the complicated history of confirmation and consider how best to encourage faithful Christian living today.

I believe that a baptismal ecclesiology is emerging in the Episcopal Church, that is, an

understanding that baptism forms us as Christians and as the Church, the people of God, who are called and sent to participate in the *missio Dei*. This, I believe is essential for us to be Christians as we leave Christendom behind. I hope that such an understanding of baptism can also be at the heart of our ecumenical endeavors.