

Methodism's Ecumenical Perspective

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An American church historian, not a Methodist, remarked that John Wesley was the most ecumenically-minded of all the great reformers.¹ Hence, it follows logically that the Methodist Movement has been marked visibly by the imprint of the ecumenical tendencies of its founder and father.

THE MEANING OF "ECUMENICAL PERSPECTIVE"

At the outset it is imperative that we have clearly in mind the meaning of the term "ecumenical" and that we understand what is meant by an "ecumenical perspective." Etymologically speaking, the term "ecumenical" means "universal" or "world-wide." Some one suggested that the best definition of "ecumenical" is that it is the Protestant word for "catholic." The following definitive analysis by President John A. Mackay is both illuminating and adequate: "The Ecumenical Movement is the fulfillment by the Christian Church of its total task, on a world front, in the spirit of Christian unity."²

THE ECUMENICAL MIND AND SPIRIT OF JOHN WESLEY

Let us study this definition of ecumenicity and discover where-in it is justifiable to speak of John Wesley, the Father of Methodism, as intensely ecumenically-minded. In this statement concerning the Ecumenical Movement quoted above, four universals become apparent immediately: (1) The Church of Christ; (2) The Whole Gospel; (3) The World View; (4) The Spirit of Christian Unity.

Our study of John Wesley will lead us to conclude that he was ecumenically-minded because of his affirmations, both in doctrine and deed, concerning each of these ecumenical universals. He was a

¹ Anderson, W. K. (ed), *Methodism*, p. 283.

² *The Interseminary Series*, Vol. II, Bk. 4, p. 40.

member of the Church of Christ in the catholic tradition, and he hesitated persistently to break with the Church of England. He proclaimed the whole Gospel in all of its applicable aspects. The world was his parish. He was concerned deeply for fellowship with all those whose hearts were one in Christian essentials even though they differed in their opinions.

JOHN WESLEY AND THE CHURCH OF ENGLAND

From the earliest days of his childhood John Wesley was under the religious influence of the Church of England. He grew up in the Established Church. The father of John Wesley was the Rev. Samuel Wesley, an ordained minister of the Church of England and for nearly forty years the rector of Epworth Parish in Lincolnshire.

The mother of John Wesley was Susanna Wesley, whom all the world recognizes as the greatest single human factor in Wesley's life. She was the daughter of Dr. Samuel Annesley, a Dissenting minister, and one of the many sufferers under the cruel law of Non-conformity. However, at the early age of thirteen she deliberately conformed to the Church of England, thus leaving the Dissenters and uniting with the Established Church.

The education of the Wesley children was almost entirely entrusted to Mrs. Wesley. The religious training of the children, of course, received her most careful attention. She prepared for them an admirably clear body of explanation upon the Catechism and the Creed, and she was accustomed to meet them separately once a week, at a specified time, for an hour of religious conversation and instruction. Thus, the entire childhood of John Wesley was lived in a religious environment, and the dominant religious influence was that of the Church of England. He was a son of the Rectory and the Church at Epworth.

In January 1714 John Wesley was entered as a gown-boy in the Charterhouse School of London. While there he affirmed that he read his Bible and said his prayers every day, and that he took the Sacrament with devout regularity.

Wesley was admitted as a commoner at Christ Church College, Oxford, on July 13, 1720. Whatever religious influence there was at Oxford, however slight it may have been at this time,³ was that of the Church of England.

³ Winchester, C. T., *The Life of John Wesley*, p. 18.

Through the early months of 1725 Wesley was making up his mind to take orders in the Established Church. His father, at first, counseled delay, cautioning him not to enter the priest's office to have a piece of bread; but his mother, with better knowledge of her son, felt sure that he would never take such obligations upon himself from unworthy motives, and warmly advised him to take deacon's orders as soon as possible. In the autumn the decisive step was taken; John Wesley was ordained deacon by Bishop Potter on September 17, 1725.

In March 1726 Wesley was elected Fellow of Lincoln College, Oxford. In 1727 Wesley left Oxford to become curate in the parish of Wroote, the parish adjoining the parish of Epworth, and for which his father was also responsible. In 1728 Wesley was ordained a presbyter in the Church of England. He returned to Oxford in 1729, and remained in Lincoln College until the end of 1735.

In the fall of 1729 John Wesley, after his return to Oxford, became the recognized leader of what is known as the Holy Club, a group of individuals of earnest religious purpose who banded themselves together into a society in order to lead a more strict and disciplined religious life. There were but four members at first: John Wesley, Charles Wesley, Robert Morgan and Robert Kirkham. The number varied from time to time, once rising as high as twenty-nine; but when Wesley left Oxford in 1735 there were fourteen. The two members of the Holy Club who probably exerted the greater influence upon John Wesley at this time were John Clayton and Robert Morgan. It was Clayton from whom Wesley derived many of the High Church notions he entertained at the time; it was Morgan who introduced him to the work of practical benevolence.

Wesley, writing under the title *A Short History of Methodism*, has this to say about the members of the Holy Club:

"They were all zealous members of the Church of England; not only tenacious of all her doctrines, so far as they knew them, but of all her discipline, to the minutest circumstance."⁴

Then again, in his *Thoughts Upon Methodism*, Wesley declares:

"They were all zealous members of the Church of England,

⁴ *Selections From the Writings of the Rev. John Wesley, M.A.*, Welch, Herbert (ed.), p. 205.

and had no peculiar opinions, but were distinguished only by their constant attendance on the church and sacrament."⁵

In 1735 Wesley left England for two years to go as a missionary for the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel to the Indians in the new colony of Georgia in America. Here are his own words in a later article entitled *Farther Thoughts on Separation From the Church*:

I went to America, strongly attached to the Bible, the primitive Church, and the Church of England, from which I would not vary in one jot or tittle on any account whatever. In this spirit I returned as regular a clergyman as any in the three kingdoms.⁶

In view of this discussion it seems logical to summarize the relationship of John Wesley to the Church of England previous to his Aldersgate experience in 1738 in the following words of Faulkner:

It is acknowledged on all hands that previous to his conversion in 1738 Wesley was an ardent High Churchman. He recommended confession, he practiced weekly communion, he observed all the festivals and the fasts on Wednesdays and Fridays, he mixed the sacramental wine with water, and in other respects anticipated the churchly enthusiasm of the Oxford reformers of 1833.⁷

After his Aldersgate experience, and until the end of his life, John Wesley considered himself a devoted member of the Church of England.

The question of the relationship of the Methodist Movement to the Church of England was always present in the mind of Wesley. Time and time again he refers to it in his writings, and year after year it was discussed at his Conferences.

Wesley was as faithful in his attendance at the regular services of the Established Church as his labors and travels would permit. His *Journal* contains a large number of references to the fact that he had attended the regular church services on a particular day in a particular place.⁸ Just so, he repeatedly urged the members

⁵ *Selections From the Writings of the Rev. John Wesley, M.A.*, Welch, Herbert (ed.), p. 205.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 288.

⁷ Faulkner, John A., *Wesley As Sociologist, Theologian, Churchman*, pp. 85, 86.

⁸ *The Heart of John Wesley's Journal*, Parker, P. L. (ed.), pp. 109, 151, 152, 170, 220, 251, 252, 277, 357.

of the Methodist Societies to attend the regular services of the Church of England.⁹ And in order to encourage this practice of attending the regular services of the Church of England, Wesley insisted that the hours of the Methodist meetings should not be the same as those of the services of the Established Church.¹⁰

Wesley always had a sincere love and a profound respect for the Church of England. In his article on *Farther Thoughts on Separation From the Church* he declared:

Next after the primitive Church, I esteemed our own, the Church of England, as the most Scriptural National Church in the world. I therefore not only assented to all the doctrines, but observed all the Rubric in the Liturgy; and that with all possible exactness, even at the peril of my life.¹¹

In a letter to Sir Harry Trelawney Wesley wrote:

Having had an opportunity of seeing several of the churches abroad, and having deeply considered the several sorts of Dissenters at home, I am fully convinced that our own Church, with all her blemishes, is nearer the Scriptural plan than any other in Europe.¹²

In a *Sermon on the Ministerial Office* Wesley said:

I hold all the doctrines of the Church of England. I love her liturgy. I approve her plan of discipline, and only wish it could be put in execution. I do not knowingly vary from any rule of the Church, unless in those few instances, where I judge, and as far as I judge, there is an absolute necessity.¹³

In a letter to Mr. Walter Churchey, written later in his life, Wesley said:

Dr. Coke made two or three little alterations in the prayer book without my knowledge. I took particular care throughout, to alter nothing merely for altering' sake. In religion, I am for as few innovations as possible. I love the old wine best.¹⁴

Nor did Wesley ever believe that the Methodist Movement was in any way undermining the Church of England. Rather, he

⁹ *The Journal of the Rev. John Wesley, A.M.*, (Standard Edition—Curnock, N., ed.), Vol. VII, p. 516.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 217.

¹¹ *Selections From the Writings of the Rev. John Wesley, M.A.*, Welch, Herbert (ed.), p. 287.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 287.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 287.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 287.

contended that the Methodist Societies in their efforts for revival and reformation were really defending and helping the Established Church. In his treatise entitled *An Earnest Appeal to Men of Reason and Religion*, Wesley wrote:

That is the very proposition I undertake to prove: — that we are now defending the Church, even the Church of England, in opposition to all those who either secretly undermine or more openly attempt to destroy it.¹⁵

Likewise, in his *Reasons Against a Separation From the Church of England*, Wesley contended:

We look upon ourselves, not as the authors or ringleaders of a particular sect or party (it is the farthest thing from our thoughts); but as messengers of God to those who are Christians in name, but Heathens in heart and in life, to call them back to that from which they are fallen, to real genuine Christianity.¹⁶

Throughout his entire life Wesley urged the Methodists not to separate from the Church of England. We note the following words of Wesley written in 1790:

Nay, I continually and earnestly cautioned them against it; reminding them that we were a part of the Church of England, whom God had raised up, not only to save our own souls, but to enliven our neighbors, those of the Church in particular.¹⁷

Keeping in mind the above statements which reveal the general attitude of John Wesley after 1738 toward the Church of England, we now proceed to a more detailed and chronological study of Wesley's relationship to the Established Church.

In June 1744, at the first meeting of the Methodist preachers in Conference, Wesley exhorted them to keep to the Church, remarking, that "this was their peculiar glory — not to form any new sect, but, remaining in their own Church to do all men all the good they possibly could."¹⁸ At the important Conference held at Leeds in 1755, both John Wesley and his brother Charles with equal earnestness deprecated the tendency toward Dissent which so often had revealed itself among the preachers.¹⁹

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 227.

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 289.

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 289.

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 289.

¹⁹ *The Journal of the Rev. John Wesley, A.M.*, (Standard Edition—Curnock, N., ed.), Vol. IV, pp. 106, 115, 116.

A most important document is the letter of Wesley to the Rev. Samuel Walker, a zealous clergyman in Truro, written after the Conference of 1755. At the outset of this letter Wesley states the following reasons which had been urged by some of the preachers at the Conference in support of separation from the Established Church: (1) It is both absurd and sinful to declare such an assent and consent to the liturgy of the Established Church as is required to it, however excellent it may be; (2) they could not confine themselves merely to the use of forms; (3) the decretals of the Church were the very dregs of popery and many of the canons as grossly wicked as absurd; (4) they feared that many of the Church of England ministers neither lived the gospel, taught it, nor knew it; (5) consequently, the doctrines preached by these clergymen were fundamentally wrong.

The remainder of the contents of this letter from Wesley to Walker reveal the following facts: (1) The Conference of 1755 could not come to an agreement as to the lawfulness of separating from the Church of England; (2) the only point settled was that there was no present expediency for such a separation; (3) the arguments used in favor of separation were arguments which Wesley could not answer to his own satisfaction; (4) finally, rather than give up open air preaching, extemporaneous prayer, forming societies, and permitting men not episcopally ordained to preach, Wesley would wholly separate himself from the Established Church.²⁹

In 1758 Wesley issued a pamphlet entitled *Reasons Against Separation From the Church of England*. In this he presented twelve reasons for the Methodists not becoming a separate church or denomination. These are as follows: (1) It would contradict our repeated declarations. (2) It would give occasion of offence to the enemies of God. (3) It would prejudice against us pious folk who now receive benefit from our preaching. (4) It would hinder multitudes who do not love God from hearing us. (5) It would cause hundreds, if not thousands, of our people to separate from us. (6) It would cause much strife, first between those who left the church and those who did not, and second between those who left us and those who did not, whereas we are now in peace. (7) It would cause public and private controversy, and thus take our time from preaching vital religion. (8) We should have to form a plan for a new church, and for that we have neither time nor com-

petence. (9) Even distant thoughts of leaving the church have caused some to conceive and express contempt of the clergy. (10) History shows that reformers — instance Arndt and Robert Bolton — have done much more good when they remained in their churches than when they separated. (11) This is shown in England in our own memory. Those who left the church and formed new bodies have not prospered, and have not been more holy or useful than before. (12) Such separation would contradict the very end for which God has raised us up. That end is to quicken our brethren of the Church of England.²¹

One of Wesley's sermons is entitled "On Schism." It is based upon the text in I Corinthians 12:25: "That there might be no schism in the body." The following quotations from this sermon help us realize the philosophy underlying Wesley's insistence that the Methodists remain in fellowship with the Church of England:

"To separate ourselves from a body of living Christians, with whom we were before united, is a grievous breach of the law of love."

"Separation opens a door to all unkind tempers, both in ourselves and others."

"Do not rashly tear asunder the sacred ties, which unite you to any Christian Society.... If you are a living member, if you live the life that is hid with Christ in God, then take care how you rend the body of Christ, by separating from your brethren. It is a thing of evil in itself. It is a sore evil in its consequences. Oh have pity upon yourself! Have pity on your brethren! Have pity even upon the world of the ungodly! Do not lay more stumbling blocks in the way of those for whom Christ died."

In a letter written by Mr. Wesley from Birmingham, March 5, 1783, to Samuel Bradburn, he says: "When the Methodists leave the Church of England, God will leave the Methodists."²²

Somewhat late in his life Wesley wrote a sermon entitled "On

²⁰ Tyerman, L., *The Life and Times of the Rev. John Wesley, M.A.*, Vol. II, pp. 207-209.

²¹ Faulkner, John A., *Wesley As Sociologist, Theologian, Churchman*, pp. 114, 115.

²² Sermon LXXX. *The Works of the Rev. John Wesley, A.M.* American Edition. Emory, John (ed.) *Sermons*, Vol. 2.

²³ The original letter is in the British Museum, London.

Attending the Church Service."²⁴ It was written to refute those among the Methodists who had alleged the evil living of certain clergymen of the Church of England as an excuse for not attending worship in the Established Church. Throughout this sermon Wesley asserts that the original Methodist rule was a good one, namely, that every member of the Methodist Society should attend the Church and Sacrament unless he had been bred among Christians of another denomination.

At the Conference of 1788 held in London it was stated by Mr. Wesley that in the course of fifty years the Methodists had not willingly varied from the church in doctrine or discipline. However, he did point out that of necessity certain new church features were used by the Societies, viz, preaching in the fields, extemporary prayer, the employment of lay preachers, forming and regulating societies, and the holding of yearly Conferences.²⁵

In the April, 1790, issue of the *Arminian Magazine* appear the following words of John Wesley:

I never had any design of separating from the Church: I have no such design now. I do not believe the Methodists in general design it, when I am no more seen. I do, and will do, all that is in my power to prevent such an event . . . I declare once more, that I live and die a member of the Church of England; and that none, who regard my judgment or advice, will ever separate from it.²⁶

One illustration from the life of Charles Wesley is noteworthy at this point. When Charles was on his death-bed he sent for the Parish Vicar and remarked to him: "Sir, whatever the world may have thought of me I have lived and I die in the communion of the Church of England, and I will be buried in the yard of my Parish Church."²⁷ A short time afterward the body of Charles Wesley was borne to his grave in the churchyard of the Marylebone Parish, London, by eight Anglican priests.

In view of the above discussion about John Wesley's professed loyalty to the Church of England the question naturally arises,

²⁴ Sermon CIX. *The Works of the Rev. John Wesley, A.M.* American Edition. Emory, John (ed.) *Sermons*, Vol. 2.

²⁵ *The Journal of the Rev. John Wesley, A.M.* Standard Edition. Cur-nock, N. (ed.), Vol. VII, p. 422.

²⁶ Tyerman, L. *The Life and Times of the Rev. John Wesley, M.A.* Vol. III, pp. 634, 635.

²⁷ Anderson, W. K. (ed.) *Methodism*, p. 40.

Why, then, did Mr. Wesley in 1784 depart from the ecclesiastical practice of the Established Church in his ordaining Thomas Coke, as superintendent, and Richard Whatcoat and Thomas Vasey, as presbyters, to supervise the Methodist Societies in America?

Spare forbids a detailed discussion of this ecclesiastical innovation on the part of Mr. Wesley. A few summary statements must suffice. When John Wesley realized that the Methodist Societies in America needed ordained ecclesiastical administrative leadership, he tried, first of all, in vain, to get the Church of England to ordain such leaders. Then, when he was forced to take such drastic action in the ordination of the leaders for America, he based his right to do it upon his own ecclesiastical ordination, as a presbyter, in the Church of England. In other words, what he was doing, however contrary to the established practice, he believed he was doing through the authority of the Church of England, and through it all his own words reveal that he considered himself and the Methodist Societies as parts of the Church of England.

Looking back on the scene it is easy to conclude that it was inevitable that ultimately the Methodist Societies would be formed into a separate denomination. And so history has given its verdict that Wesley was wrong in at least one particular—when he said that God would leave the Methodists if the Methodists left the Church of England.

But we are reminded constantly of Methodism's tremendous debt to Anglicanism. Dr. W. W. Sweet summarizes this debt in these weighty words:

1. Methodism owes to Anglicanism a rich churchly heritage and tradition. Methodism's relation to Anglican churchly tradition saved Methodism from becoming merely a sect movement. A sect "harps" on one or two doctrinal strings. A church emphasizes the total catholic doctrinal portion. Methodism was undergirded by the Thirty-nine Articles of the Church of England.

2. Methodism owes to Anglicanism a heritage of dignified worship and a historic liturgy.

3. Methodism owes to Anglicanism the tradition of a dignified hymnody.

4. The Methodist form of church government is based upon the Low Church Anglican concepts of church polity of Bishops King and Skillingfleet, whose conclusions Wesley accepted and passed on to us. Although there is no form of church government presented in Scripture, Wesley held that the episcopal form was not contrary to Scripture and is the best.

5. Methodism is indebted to Anglicanism in gaining a foothold in America. The work of Devereux Jarratt, evangelical Anglican clergyman in Virginia, illustrates this.

6. Methodism owes to Anglicanism an educational tradition which has made the Methodist Church in America one of the most significant educational influences in the land.²⁸

We re-affirm that Methodism is in the Holy Catholic tradition. The Methodist Revival was not a new religion or sect. It was not another Reformation. Rather, it was a revival of the Reformation which in turn had been a rediscovery of the heart of the Gospel as revealed in Jesus Christ and as demonstrated in the Apostolic Church. Methodism represents a purification of historic Christianity. Methodists belong to that Movement which Jesus launched among men in the first century and we must not lose the sense of historic continuity.

One portion of the exhibition of "The Faith of Britain" in St. Paul's Cathedral, London, during the summer of 1951, was entitled "New Life." One-half of the space in the "New Life" display was devoted to John Wesley and the Wesleyan Revival. Accompanying the display were these words: "In the 18th century John Wesley recovered the Evangelical note of the Gospel. He spent his life going up and down the country on horseback rousing the conscience of the nation."

JOHN WESLEY AND THE WHOLE GOSPEL

We proceed to a discussion of the second reason for affirming the ecumenical mind of John Wesley: he proclaimed the whole Gospel in all of its applicable aspects. The student of John Wesley is well-acquainted with the tremendous emphasis he placed upon the *personal* aspects of the Christian Faith.

The story of John Wesley's spiritual pilgrimage up to the time of Aldersgate in 1738 is the narrative of a soul struggling for personal spiritual certainty. The rigorous discipline of the Holy Club at Oxford was a search for spiritual assurance. The reason for going to Georgia as a missionary was "to save our souls."²⁹ The constant daily discipline undertaken by John Wesley on the voyage to America revealed the intensity of his spiritual longing.³⁰ On the journey he was profoundly impressed by the spiritual confidence of the Moravian Christians in the midst of the storms.³¹

²⁷ Anderson, W. K. (ed.), *Methodism*, p. 40.

²⁸ Anderson, W. K. (ed.), *Methodism*, pp. 49, 50.

²⁹ *The Journal of John Wesley* (Abridged Edition, Curnock, N., ed.), p. 7.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 7, 8.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 10.

Upon his return to England Wesley wrote: "The faith I want is 'a sure trust and confidence in God, that, through the merits of Christ, my sins are forgiven, and I reconciled to the favour of God.' . . . I want that faith which none can have without knowing that he hath it. . . ." ³³

Wesley's spiritual search for personal assurance was satisfied at Aldersgate. All Methodists are familiar with his record of his spiritual experience: "About a quarter before nine, while he was describing the change which God works in the heart through faith in Christ, I felt my heart strangely warmed. I felt I did trust in Christ, Christ alone, for salvation: and an assurance was given me, that He had taken away my sins, even mine, and saved me from the law of sin and death." ³⁴

After Aldersgate Wesley went forth to proclaim a spiritual experience in Christ which is witnessed to by the Holy Spirit. He was thrilled as his mother related to him the story of her new-found spiritual assurance. ³⁵ He finds joy in recording in his *Journal* the testimony of one of his converts, John Nelson, who "was as sure his sins were forgiven, as he could be of the shining of the sun." ³⁶

Methodist soldiers on the battlefields of the continent wrote to Mr. Wesley telling about their spiritual confidence in the midst of danger. ³⁷ Edward Greenfield, a tinner in Cornwall, was accused unjustly because "he says he knows his sins are forgiven." ³⁸ Then there was Sarah Peters, a member of the London Society, who was never known to doubt concerning her own salvation. ³⁹

But the Christian Gospel in its Wesleyan personalness also included the spiritual transformation of the attitudes and habits of the individual. To Wesley Christian goodness meant Christian conversation, Christian conduct, Christian character. In his search for Christian assurance Wesley said that he wanted a spiritual experience that would be manifest in its fruits—that would free him from

³² Ibid., p. 11.

³³ Ibid., p. 37.

³⁴ Ibid., p. 51.

³⁵ Ibid., pp. 80, 81.

³⁶ Ibid., p. 126.

³⁷ Ibid., pp. 159, 195, 196.

³⁸ Ibid., pp. 176, 177.

³⁹ Ibid., p. 231.

sin, fear, doubt and despair.⁴⁰ Immediately after his Aldersgate experience Wesley knew he was transformed because he testified publicly and he began to pray for his enemies.⁴¹ As a result of his Aldersgate experience Wesley discovered the power of victory in the midst of temptation.⁴²

Innumerable are the converts of the Wesleyan Revival who were transformed by the grace of God. Permit me to mention only a few: The woman who was "converted" even in her tongue;⁴³ Mary Cheesebrook, a former "mistress," to whom God gave a new heart;⁴⁴ Edward Greenfield, the tinner who became "remarkable for a quite contrary behaviour";⁴⁵ the referee at cock-fights, who after his conversion gave Mr. Wesley his referee's chair (which Mr. Wesley used as a study chair in London) because he had no further use for it; and Wesley's barber, who was divinely delivered from the drink habit.⁴⁶

As a result of Wesley's emphasis upon the personal aspects of the Christian Gospel he was an extremely careful disciplinarian in relation to the members of the Methodist Societies. How often we read in his *Journal* that he "purged" the Society of all those who did not give living evidence of their Christian profession.⁴⁷

But we must move on to a consideration of the *social* aspects of the Christian Gospel proclaimed by Wesley. Salvation by faith produces the fruit of social righteousness. Salvation makes people concerned about the needs of others. Wesley was continually helping the poor and needy by providing funds, from which they could either borrow or receive benevolences.⁴⁸ He provided work for the unemployed.⁴⁹ He provided the sick with necessary medicine.⁵⁰

The influence of the Gospel was seen in mighty transformations. Three illustrations of social transformations—in Kingswood;

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 37.

⁴¹ Ibid., p. 51.

⁴² Ibid., p. 51.

⁴³ Ibid., p. 130.

⁴⁴ Ibid., pp. 212, 213.

⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 176.

⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 254.

⁴⁷ Ibid., pp. 107, 120, 121, 133, 141, 150, 159, 168, 201, 230.

⁴⁸ Ibid., pp. 104, 108, 109, 160, 163, 164, 192, 213.

⁴⁹ Ibid., pp. 104, 122.

⁵⁰ Ibid., pp. 197, 205, 213.

St. Just, Cornwall; Epworth—in Wesley's own words, are illuminating:

. . . a short account of what had been done in Kingswood: The scene is already changed. Kingswood does not now, as a year ago, resound with cursing and blasphemy. It is no more filled with drunkenness and uncleanness, and the idle diversions that naturally lead thereto. It is no longer full of wars and fightings, of clamour and bitterness, of wrath and envyings. Peace and love are there.⁶¹

It is remarkable that those of St. Just (Cornwall) were the chief of the whole for hurling, fighting, drinking, and all manner of wickedness: but many of the lions are become lambs, are continually praising God, and calling their old companions in sin to come and magnify the Lord together.⁶²

I see plainly, we have often judged amiss, when we have measured the increase of the work of God in this, and other places, by the increase of the Society only. The Society here (Epworth) is not large; but God has wrought upon the whole place. Sabbath-breaking and drunkenness are no more seen in these streets; cursing and swearing are rarely heard. Wickedness hides its head already.⁶³

In view of all this it is easy to understand the answer of a Cornish Methodist, who, when asked, "How do you explain the morality of the people and the strength of their convictions?" answered, "A man named Wesley passed this way."

As a result of the Gospel of Human Rights which Wesley proclaimed he had a tremendous influence in the direction of social reform. Dr. Walter G. Muelder summarizes the social reform tendencies in Wesley's Gospel by noting the following areas in which they were manifest: opposition to the liquor traffic; the attack on slavery; the class-less Gospel; the stewardship of wealth; combatting cliches which rationalized the plight of the poor; faith in the capacities for leadership among the poor; political responsibility of Christians; and prison reform.⁶⁴

The English rector at Gateshead, in 1895, in his book, *The Attitudes of the Church to Some Social Problems*, said: "The man who did most to reform the social life of England in the last century was John Wesley."⁶⁵ J. R. Green in his *History of the English People* says, "The Methodists themselves were the least result of

⁶¹ Ibid., p. 91.

⁶² Ibid., p. 165.

⁶³ Ibid., p. 222.

⁶⁴ Anderson, W. K. (ed.), *Methodism*, pp. 194-197.

⁶⁵ Moore, John M., *Methodism in Belief and Action*, pp. 210, 211.

the Methodist revival . . . a result of the religious revival was the steady attempt, which has never ceased from that day to this, to remedy the guilt, the ignorance, the physical suffering, the social degradation, of the profligate and the poor."⁶⁶

JOHN WESLEY AND THE WORLD VIEW

John Wesley is the author of the oft-repeated dictum, "The world is my parish." Wesley accepted his Christian responsibility to the world—the world of people, irrespective of class; the world of races, irrespective of geography; the world of human relationships, irrespective of circumstance.

Wesley proclaimed the universality of God's grace as revealed in Jesus Christ. Theologically, he opposed the doctrine of pre-destination. In a sermon entitled "Free Grace,"⁶⁷ preached at Bristol, he, first of all, defines the doctrine in these words: "Call it therefore by whatever name you please, election, preterition, predestination, or reprobation, it comes in the end to the same thing. The sense of all is plainly this: by virtue of an eternal, unchangeable, irresistible decree of God, one part of mankind are infallibly saved, and the rest infallibly damned; it being impossible that any of the former should be damned, or that any of the latter should be saved."

He then proceeds to mention seven reasons why he believes that the doctrine of predestination is not the doctrine of God: (1) it makes void the ordinance of God; (2) it tends to destroy holiness; (3) it tends to destroy the comfort of religion; (4) it tends to destroy our zeal for good works; (5) it has a tendency to overthrow the whole Christian revelation; (6) it makes the Christian revelation contradict itself; (7) it is a doctrine full of blasphemy.

In his ministry Wesley had a class-less Gospel. He ministered to people—people in their needs, irrespective of class or circumstance. He was a Christian witness to the country-folk of Epworth, the working folks of London and Bristol, the intellectuals of Oxford, the gentry of the towns, the dirty colliers of Kingswood, the rude folk of Wednesbury, the down-and-out of Newcastle-on-Tyne, the prisoners in Newgate, the insane in Bedlam. Methodism must always be viewed as a people's movement.

⁶⁶ Ibid, p. 211.

⁶⁷ Welch, H. (ed.), *Selections from the Writings of the Rev. John Wesley, M.A.*, pp. 30-45.

John Wesley was, also, concerned about the world of races. He preached a sermon entitled "The General Spread of the Gospel."⁵⁸ It is based on the text in Isaiah 11:9: "The earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea." This is a missionary sermon in which the religious complexion of the world is described as follows:

Supposing the world to be divided into thirty parts, nineteen of them are professed heathens, altogether as ignorant of Christ as if he had never come into the world; six of the remaining parts are professed Mohammedans, so that only five in thirty are so much as nominally Christians!

In this sermon is the prophetic insight that just as the Methodist leaven had spread from Oxford into all of England, so from England it will ultimately spread into all the world. However, there is nothing narrow about Wesley's viewpoint. He longs and prays for the day when the Christian faith, in its purity and power, will be dominant in all the world.

The Methodist Revival had a profound influence upon Christian Missions. The date commonly accepted for the inauguration of modern missions is 1792. Dr. James Cannon once declared:

The new spirit of enthusiasm among the non-conformist Churches of England, and the Established Church as well, which found expression in modern missions is traceable almost directly to the response of those bodies to the influence of the Wesleyans during the preceding half-century. John Wesley was in his grave when William Carey sailed for India, but Wesley made Carey possible.⁵⁹

Referring again to the Faith of Britain exhibition in St. Paul's Cathedral, London, it was pointed out there that it was during the forty years immediately following the Wesleyan Revival that the seven great missionary societies of Great Britain were founded:

Methodist Missionary Society	1786
Baptist Missionary Society	1792
London Missionary Society	1795
Church Missionary Society	1799
British and Foreign Bible Society	1804
Church Mission to the Jews	1809
Church of Scotland Foreign Missions Conference	1824

⁵⁸ Welch, H. (ed.), *Selections from the Writings of the Rev. John Wesley, M.A.*, pp. 157-170.

⁵⁹ Anderson, W. K. (ed.), *Methodism*, p. 212.

Methodism has always been characterized by a triumphant missionary aggressiveness. From the day that Richard Boardman and Joseph Pilmore left England as the first Methodist missionaries to America until the present moment, Methodism has followed the vision of the Christ of the Great Commission to whom all continents, tongues, and races belong.

That the Wesleyan Revival has grown into a world movement is shown by the following statistics relative to contemporary Methodist Membership:⁶⁰

America	
U.S.A.	11,073,900
Canada	528,000
Mexico	16,300
Central and South America	188,400
West Indies	66,800
Europe	
British Isles	796,200
Continental Europe	132,200
Africa	536,900
Asia	568,500
Australasia	310,300
<hr/>	
Total	14,217,500

JOHN WESLEY AND CHRISTIAN UNITY

The fourth, and final, line of evidence in affirming the ecumenical mind and spirit of John Wesley is his demonstration of Christian unity. He was ever anxious for warm-hearted Christian fellowship among all true followers of Jesus Christ.

In his description of "The Character of a Methodist" Mr. Wesley makes it plain that the distinguishing marks of a Methodist should be the distinctive characteristics of any Christian:

The distinguishing marks of a Methodist are not his opinions of any sort . . . Neither are words or phrases of any sort . . . Nor do we desire to be distinguished by actions, customs, or usages of an indifferent nature . . . Nor is he distinguished by laying the whole stress of religion on any single part of it . . . A Methodist is one who has "the love of God shed abroad in his heart by the Holy Ghost given unto him"; one who "loves the Lord his God with all his heart, and with all his soul, and with all his mind, and with all his strength." . . .

⁶⁰ *The Methodists of the World*, p. 28.

. . . from real Christians, of whatsoever denomination they be, we earnestly desire not to be distinguished at all . . .⁶¹

“Catholic Spirit” is the title of one of Wesley’s sermons.⁶² It is based on the words found in II Kings 10:15: “Is thine heart right, as my heart is with thy heart? If it be, give me thine hand.” Commenting on the text Wesley remarks that there is no inquiry concerning opinions or modes of worship. Rather, it is an inquiry concerning the attitude of the heart toward Jesus Christ and one’s fellow-men.

And so Wesley describes the man of a catholic spirit thusly:

But while he is steadily fixed in his religious principles, in what he believes to be the truth as it is in Jesus; while he firmly adheres to that worship of God which he judges to be most acceptable in his sight; and while he is united, by the tenderest and closest ties, to one particular congregation—his heart is enlarged towards all mankind, those he knows, and those he does not; he embraces with strong and cordial affection neighbors and strangers, friends and enemies. This is catholic, or universal, love.

If then we take this word in the strictest sense, a man of a catholic spirit is one who, in the manner above mentioned, gives his hand to all whose hearts are right with his heart.

John Wesley has another sermon entitled “A Caution Against Bigotry.”⁶³ The text is found in Mark 9:38, 39: “And John answered Him, saying, Master, we saw one casting out devils in Thy name; and he followeth not us.” Wesley discusses first the identity of this one who “followeth not us.” Perhaps he is one who “has no outward connexion with us” in the Gospel ministry, or one who “is not of our party,” or one who “differs from us in our religious opinions,” or one who differs “in some point of practice,” or even one who may belong to a church “as we account to be in many respects anti-Scriptural and anti-Christian.”

But Wesley concludes that if this other person really casts out devils in Christ’s name, his work is not to be hindered. (He is careful to state that even ordination should not be denied him.) The sermon reaches a climax as he cautions his followers against bigotry, which he defines as “too strong an attachment to, or fondness for, our own party, opinion, church, and religion.”

⁶¹ Welch, H. (ed.), *Selections from the Writings of the Rev. John Wesley, M.A.*, pp. 292-302.

⁶² *Ibid.*, pp. 106-121.

⁶³ *Sermons on Several Occasions by the Rev. John Wesley, A.M.*, First Series, pp. 428-442.

During his entire ministry John Wesley craved fellowship and unity with other Christians. Early in his ministry he was greatly disturbed by his enforced separation from the Fetter Lane Society and he set a day of prayer to try to discover if re-union were possible.⁶⁴

He was careful to note that "the points in question between us and either the German or English Antinomians are not points of opinion, but of practice." He continues, "We break with no man for his opinion. We think, and let think."⁶⁵

Wesley's *Short History of the Methodists* concludes with this comment: "We leave every man to enjoy his own opinion, and to use his own mode of worship, desiring only that the love of God and his neighbor be the ruling principle in his heart, and show itself in his life by an uniform practice of justice, mercy, and truth. And, accordingly, we give the right hand of fellowship to every lover of God and man, whatever his opinion or mode of worship be, of which he is to give an account to God only."⁶⁶

The magnanimity of Wesley's Christian spirit is revealed in a letter to a Roman Catholic, written from Dublin, in 1749. In the opening paragraphs he points out that in the midst of differences of opinion men must beware of wrong tempers toward each other. In the concluding paragraphs he asks for a four-fold mutual covenant: (1) not to hurt one another; (2) to speak nothing harsh or unkind to each other; (3) resolve to harbour no unkind thought, no unfriendly temper, toward each other; (4) to help each other on in whatever we are agreed leads to the Kingdom.

Certainly enough has been said and enough illustrations cited to reveal the concern of John Wesley for a spirit of true Christian unity among all believers. He sought earnestly "to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace," remembering "there is one body, and one Spirit, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all."⁶⁸

⁶⁴ *The Journal of John Wesley* (Abridged Edition, Curnock, N., ed.), pp. 97-100, 108.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 174.

⁶⁶ Carter, H., *The Methodist Heritage*, pp. 202, 203.

⁶⁷ Welch, H. (ed.), *Selections from the Writings of the Rev. John Wesley, M.A.*, pp. 303-311.

⁶⁸ Ephesians 4:3-6.

Thus we bring to a close this section on the ecumenical mind and spirit of John Wesley. Because of his identification with the four universals of ecumenicity—the Church of Christ, the Whole Gospel, the World View, Christian Unity—we agree that he was “the most ecumenically minded of all the great reformers.”

METHODISM'S ECUMENICAL PERSPECTIVE IN THE 19TH AND 20TH CENTURIES

The ecumenical perspective of Methodism has remained undimmed since the days of the Wesleys. Wherever Methodism has been found there has been the concern about the Church of Christ, the Whole Gospel, the World View, the spirit of Christian Unity. It is interesting to note the “ecumenical” nature of the sacraments that has developed in Methodism. The Holy Communion is for all who wish to receive it. In Baptism any one of the three modes may be used. The creed of Methodism is the catholic tradition. Methodism emphasizes both approaches to religion: the historical, or traditional, the psychological, or experiential.

Dr. Muelder summarizes the social reforms in 19th century England of which the Methodists were active supporters: freedom of worship for Roman Catholics; the Reform Bill of 1832, relating to the franchise; the projects of the Clapham Sect, who were interested in Christianizing various social relationships; the abolition of slavery; the humanizing of the prison system; the reform of the penal code; new industrial legislation; and the whole area of social service.

Methodism in America has been just as sensitive to the needs of people. Methodism's concern about the relevancy of the Gospel has been seen in its successful adaptation to developing American life. On the American frontier the Methodist Church re-inforced the democratic challenge of the New World. Methodism sponsored religious revivals, educational opportunities and kept alive a keen social consciousness.

At the Methodist General Conference in 1908 the now famous “Social Creed of Methodism” was adopted. This creed, as is generally known, became the basis of that adopted by the Federal Council of the Churches of Christ in America. The people called Methodists have always been in the forefront of the struggle against

⁶⁹ Anderson, W. K. (ed.) *Methodism*, pp. 197-199.

slavery, for temperance, for better race relations, and for peace in the world.

Through the years Methodism has been characterized by its missionary aggressiveness. The normal mood of Methodism has been the missionary mood. The stirring story of Methodist advance across the continent and of the establishment of younger churches around the world is the story of a resistless evangelism. God raised Methodism up to be Christianity in earnest.

Today three-fourths of the Protestant missionary enterprise is carried by the churches in Great Britain and in the United States of America. The Methodist Church carries one-sixteenth of the total load of missionary activity. At the present time the Methodist Church has 1,421 active missionaries serving overseas—245 more than it had in 1946 when the Communists began their tightening of controls in China.

Methodism has, likewise, been active in movements of church unity. Sometimes Methodists have participated in actual church union. Witness the following unions: The Methodist Church of Canada, 1874; The Methodist Church in Australia, 1907; The United Church of Canada, 1925; The Methodist Church of Great Britain, 1932; The Methodist Church, 1939; The Church of Christ in Japan, 1941; The Church of South India, 1947.

Always Methodists have been actively interested in cooperative church movements. Methodists have participated in all of the great ecumenical conferences: those dealing with evangelism and missionary cooperation: Edinburgh, 1910; Jerusalem, 1929; Madras, 1938; Whitby, 1947; those dealing with theology and faith and order: Edinburgh, 1910; Lausanne, 1927; Edinburgh, 1937; those relating to social action and life and work: Edinburgh, 1910; Stockholm, 1925; Oxford, 1937. The Methodists were actively represented at Amsterdam in 1948 and are members of the World Council of Churches.

One other way in which Methodism has tried to foster a greater spirit of Christian unity has been through the development of an ecumenical Methodism. Beginning in 1881 a series of Ecumenical Methodist Conferences have been held, and the eighth such conference was in session in Oxford, England, from August 28 to September 7, 1951.

WHAT HAPPENED AT OXFORD?

At Oxford, Methodists of the world met together. Such an Ecumenical Methodist Conference is a family reunion of all those Protestant denominations which claim John Wesley as spiritual father. There are approximately thirty-five such denominations in the world with an aggregate membership of over fourteen million Methodists. There were five hundred official delegates at Oxford: one hundred from Great Britain and Ireland, two hundred from the United States of America, and two hundred from the rest of the world.

It was unusually appropriate that the Conference was held in Oxford, "the cradle of Methodism." Wesley's father, Samuel Wesley, had been a student in Exeter College. Three of the Wesley brothers, Samuel, John and Charles, attended Christ Church College. For twenty-five years John Wesley was a Fellow of Lincoln College, where was formed the Holy Club. George Whitefield was a student in Pembroke College, and it was in Oxford that he met John Wesley for the first time. Thomas Coke was a student in Jesus College. John Wesley was ordained deacon and priest in the Christ Church Cathedral, and he preached his first sermon at South Leigh, just eight miles from Oxford. Charles Wesley was ordained deacon in Christ Church Cathedral. Both John and Charles preached in the University Church of St. Mary the Virgin. It was in Merton College that the term "Methodist" was originated.

Methodists of the world fellowshiped together at Oxford. It was inevitable that there should be an exhilarating experience of fellowship among representative Methodists from all over the world. The assignment of delegates to various Oxford Colleges for housing and meals contributed greatly to the opportunities for fellowship. Then there were daily occasions of Christian fellowship at the Conference sessions in the Wesley Memorial Methodist Church, at coffee time, at tea-time, and in the discussion groups. Two public receptions for the delegates were held: by the Vice-Chancellor of Oxford University, and by the Mayor and Mayoress of Oxford.

Methodists of the world worshipped together at Oxford. Public "acts of worship" for the beginning of each day's sessions had been prepared in advance, and printed booklets were used by the delegates. Some Methodist would lead in the worship ritual, and then

a Methodist from some other part of the world would bring the devotional message. There were also public worship services in the evening and on Sunday.

At Oxford Methodists of the world thought together. The general purpose of Oxford was three-fold: (1) to re-evaluate the Methodist heritage; (2) to re-examine the Methodist doctrines in the light of contemporary thought; (3) to re-assess the Methodist contribution to the Universal Church. The following listing of the topics, discussed by leaders of Methodist thought, helps to reveal the intense thoughtfulness of the Conference sessions:

Methodist Traditions (in various parts of the world)

Methodism and the Catholic Tradition

Methodism's Message

Methodist Doctrines

Methodism and Protestant Tradition

Methodist Means of Grace

Methodist Fellowship

Methodism and Totalitarianism

Methodism and Other Churches

Methodism and Social Witness

Methodism and Scientific Humanism

Methodism and the Changing Social Order

Methodism and Biblical Criticism

Methodism and Personal Responsibility

Methodism and Recent Theological Tendencies

Methodism and the World Church

Methodism and Evangelism

Methodism and Missions

Likewise, Methodists of the world discussed together at Oxford. The delegates were divided into five adult discussion groups and one youth group. The discussion groups met each morning after the formal lectures. Here is a sample list of the questions prepared for discussion:

Can we hold Wesley's doctrine of justification in its entirety today?

Is perfect love possible while human ignorance remains?

In what sense is Baptism a sacrament?

Are we satisfied with our traditional means of fellowship?

How true is it that Methodism has no distinctive doctrines but

only distinctive emphases?

Is there any case for a national Church?

How can we uphold the Christian standard of marriage in a secular society?

What are the foundation principles which Christian education in any sphere ought to serve?

What are the basic principles of a Christian doctrine of work? How can these be brought to bear on those in industry and the professions?

“There can be neither Jew nor Greek, but all are one in Christ.” How does this bear on our modern race problems?

Is the laity given enough, or too much, responsibility in the affairs of the local church?

Are we sufficiently aware of our responsibility in local and national politics?

How can the Christian faith be made to seem relevant to the modern man?

Has the desire to spread our form of civilization any place in the missionary motive?

On the last evening of the Conference a composite summary of the findings of the discussion groups was presented to the entire Conference. Some of the findings are these:

1. The doctrines of justification by faith and sanctification must be restored to places of primacy in the theological thinking and experience of individuals.

2. Both justification and sanctification have social as well as personal implications.

3. Infant baptism is a confused issue.

4. The Sacrament of the Lord's Supper must be raised to its high place in Christian worship.

5. Christian individuals must be trained in the use of the means of grace.

6. A sense of spiritual fellowship must be restored to Methodist Churches.

7. Christian ethics must be insisted upon in every relationship of life.

8. There is much confusion as to marriage and divorce.

9. The Church is responsible for Christian education.

10. The Church must not make itself synonymous with any economic system.

11. Racial differences are to be appreciated; racial tensions must be done away with.

12. Methodists must become aware of their responsibility for the political life of the nation.

Finally, the Methodists of the world affirmed together at Oxford. The Conference voted favorably upon the following administrative details. The new name of the Conference is World Methodist Conference. The officers are to be a president, a vice-president, and two secretaries. A secretariat with offices both in New York and London is to be set up. In the future, meetings will be held every five years instead of every ten years. The Conference established seven working committees: youth, education, faith and order, women's work, exchange of ministers, finance, and evangelism. It was voted to recommend to the respective member bodies the establishment of a Methodist House at Oxford University. The Conference approved plans for a world-wide Methodist evangelistic crusade to be held in 1953, to follow a year of preparation in 1952. The Youth Section of the Conference addressed a message to the Methodist Youth of the World. The entire Conference addressed a message to the Methodists of the world.

I wish to summarize the doctrinal affirmations of Oxford in this seven-fold manner:

1. The distinctive emphases of Methodist doctrines are restated: (1) Justification by faith; (2) The witness of the Spirit; (3) Perfect love; (4) Universality of the Gospel.

2. The primary problem of the world is theological. Only the grace of God is adequate to meet contemporary needs. But it must be the grace of God in its total applicability.

3. There must be a renewed emphasis on Biblical theology.

4. The content of theology must be valid in the light of contemporary thought.

5. The statement of theology must be comprehensible to modern man.

6. The doctrines of justification and sanctification must be emphasized in both their personal and social aspects.

7. Evangelism is the crying need of the world. A sound evangelism is doctrinal in its content.

And so the Eighth Ecumenical Methodist Conference is a matter of history. But its spirit and affirmations are contemporary guideposts along Methodism's pathway to increased moral relevance and spiritual effectiveness.

THE CONTEMPORARY CONCERN

The Ecumenical Movement has been characterized as "the great new fact of our era."⁷⁰ What shall be Methodism's contemporary response to the Ecumenical Movement? Three main answers have been given to this question. On the one hand, there has been a minority, a limited minority, who have asserted that Methodism should have nothing to do with the Ecumenical Movement, that Methodism should repent of its ecumenical activities in the past. However, this appears to be a wholly unrealistic attitude, and to continue to insist upon non-cooperation with other Christians invalidates one's right to serve the present age.

A second response to the question of Methodism's relationship to the Ecumenical Movement is given by those who call for a merging of the Methodist Church with other Protestant denominations. This is the desire for actual church union. This attitude was expressed by a delegate from the United Church of Canada to the Ecumenical Conference at Oxford:

We shall do nothing to hinder Ecumenical Methodism and shall probably contribute to its needs. But if the choice had to be between the World Church and Ecumenical Methodism, it would be the former. And we should be none the less Methodist in so choosing. Meanwhile, Ecumenical Methodism needs the United Church of Canada and the Church of South India, so that Ecumenical Methodism, however fine, shall not be its final goal.⁷¹

A third attitude concerning Methodism's response to the Ecumenical Movement, and this seems the most practical of all, is the creation of a strong Methodism sharing its distinctive heritage with other Christians joined in the Ecumenical Movement. Recent Christian history reveals both an intra- and an inter-Confessional movement toward ecumenical unity.

In one of his books Dr. William E. Sangster, immediate past president of the Methodist Church of Great Britain, pleads for a strong Methodism rather than merged Methodism:

⁷⁰ Carter, Henry, *The Methodist Heritage*, p. 1.

⁷¹ Arthur Organ, writing in the *United Church Observer*, October 1, 1951.

Methodism has a distinctive contribution to the Holy Catholic Church . . . The urgent need of all Methodists who desire the reunion of Christendom is not first to copy the customs of others, but to preserve and enhance their own rich heritage. This is not to build barriers against sister communions: this is, rather, to enrich the Church that is yet to be by safeguarding the "grand depositum" which God has lodged with us . . . We do not believe that God said His last word by John Wesley . . . But we remember that God said a true word by John Wesley, a word the world manifestly needs, and to the witness of which we have been called.⁷²

A strong Methodism, because of its distinctive characteristics, is peculiarly fitted to lead in the Ecumenical Movement. Methodism unites with the older Churches of the Continent in the recognition of the significance of the Church as the Creation of God in Jesus Christ and in appreciation of the significance of Christian worship.

Methodism unites with those of the evangelical tradition in emphasizing preaching and evangelism. Methodism unites with those of the primitive type in placing high value upon fellowship and practical helpfulness. Methodism unites with those of the prophetic type in proclaiming the Lordship of Christ over all of life and in the necessity of bringing institutions into conformity to God's will.

Ecumenical Christianity needs the distinctive emphases of Methodism. What are these emphases? Basil Mathews lists the following ten vital characteristics, combined in a particular way, that set Methodism apart as unique: (1) its whole life is rooted and grounded in personal experience; (2) experience has as its first fruit a change of heart which is called conversion; (3) experience and change of heart can be shared by every man and woman, boy and girl, on the planet; (4) a passionate belief in the priceless value of the individual immortal soul; (5) the unrelenting search for the soul in need; (6) the social passion for the poor and needy; (7) world outlook; (8) enthusiasm; (9) its blend of organization with inspiration; (10) group fellowship.⁷³

Two closing words are in order. First, American Methodism enjoys a strategic opportunity in the march of Methodism, and in enabling Methodism to make its full contribution to the Ecumenical Movement. Numerically, seventy-eight per cent of the Methodists of the world are in the United States of America. And certainly

⁷² Sangster, W. E., *Methodism Can Be Born Again*, pp. 39, 40.

⁷³ Basil Mathews in the *Christian Advocate*, September 3, 1936.

in material resources American Methodists are far ahead of all other geographical areas.

Finally, the challenge to contemporary Methodism is that of experiencing spiritual renewal. Spiritual renewal is not a transient emotionalism, but the Divine redirection of life in all its relationships. It is the renewal of one's own self. It is renewal of fellowship within the worshipping community of which one is a member. It is renewal of testimony to the universality of the redeeming grace of God in Christ. It is renewal of life as servants of mankind.

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