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THE SACRAMENTS IN EARLY AMERICAN METHODISM

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In an essay written in 1929[1] Professor Tillich concluded that the sacraments continue to exist in modern Protestantism largely through historical impetus. The conservatism of custom and a vague awareness that their observance is somehow due to our Lord are apparently sufficient to prevent their total extinction. The last generation has of course witnessed a liturgical revival in our churches; but this new interest is by no means universal and appears on the whole to be superficial. It is less devoted to an understanding of Christian faith which might require liturgical expression than to the ornamentation of the places and procedures of worship. Its activity is rooted less in theology than in aesthetics and psychology, being perhaps more often an expression of cultural sophistication than of any serious appreciation of the sacramental quality of Christian life.

Contemporary theological reconstruction would benefit from an historical study of the place of the sacraments in the evolution of Protestantism. How, for instance, has it come about that Presbyterians so little know and appreciate the sacramental teaching of Calvin? The concern of this paper, a modest inquiry into one small part of the large question, may be posed as follows: How does it happen, considering its Wesleyan roots, that American Methodism places so little value upon the sacraments?

As thus phrased the question implies two statements which if true will simply describe matters of fact, and it seeks a connecting link between them. It implies that Wesley practiced a sacramental Christianity. It implies that contemporary American Methodism is typically non-sacramentalist, not to say anti-sacramentalist. Without seeking to establish it further, the latter point may be referred to Tillich's discussion, to my comment on the so-called liturgical revival, and to your own assessment of the temper of American Methodism. The former point will be dealt with immediately.

The remainder of the paper will suggest one area in which the causal connections are to be looked for. Our study will be limited to the period from Methodist beginnings here in 1766 to the division of the Methodist Episcopal Church in 1844, a date which adequately delimits the first period of internal development.

Wesley's Synthesis of Evangelicalism and Sacramentalism

However inevitable the eventual separation of Methodism from the Church of England may now appear to have been, Wesley's own estimate of the relationship is clear. The worship of Methodism, he once wrote, is deliberately defective; like the sermons at the University it presupposes as its proper context the whole complex of corporate worship which is found only in the larger Christian community.[2] His missionary endeavors presupposed the same matrix; as he often said, Wesley was only preaching the "plain old religion of the Church" which people insisted on calling by the "new name of Methodism."[3] His lifelong attachment to the English Church was no mere sentiment, but derived from his profoundly soteriological evaluation of the Christian community.[4]

Wesley's conversion at Aldersgate in May 1738 did not, as is frequently claimed, result in an evangelicalism which depreciated the Christian tradition as the objective bearer of redemptive Love. His earliest biographers were content to describe what on occasion seemed to them contrary emphases in Wesley's thought and practice.[5] The issue was first seriously confused in the later nineteenth century when certain Anglo-Catholics, stressing his sacramentalism apart from his evangelicalism, tried to claim Wesley as their own.[6] The Methodists replied by perpetrating the same error in reverse: they accented his evangelicalism apart from his sacramentalism.[7] Most importantly, that aspect of Wesley which was emphasized was reinterpreted in terms dictated by the respective concerns of each of the warring factions.

Wesley was never a high churchman in the Tractarian sense; yet so obvious a fact has seldom been rightly considered. Nor was he one of those "high and dry" eighteenth century churchmen recently described by George Every.[8] That he may have been to a degree before Aldersgate; but he could slough off the several characteristics of ritualism, asceticism and legalism without its affecting his fundamental stance. He was, most characteristically, a holdover (as Abbey and Overton have said) of a type of churchman standing in lineal descent from Richard Hooker, Lancelot Andrewes, George Herbert and Jeremy Taylor.[9] And this he was before and after his conversion.

Wesley did not become a revivalist as the nineteenth century would later use that term. Those who have glorified the importance of Wesley's conversion and those who have disparaged it are equally wrong; in George Croft Cell's graphic phrase, "tarred with the same fallacious pitch."[10] The error lies in their all having interpreted the conversion in subjectivistic terms.

Aldersgate gave to Wesley a sense of acceptance before God

through no merit of his own but through Christ's atoning blood. What God had done for him he felt constrained to tell all men that God wanted to do for them also. It was not in his own experience but in the Love of God which effectuated that experience that the origin and power of the Revival lay. Wesley's stress on the initiative of divine grace led him to declare that "the true Gospel touches the very edge of Calvinism."[11] The means of congress between God and man were seen as divinely appointed: the Word and sacraments, mediated through the historic church, instruments for the use of the Holy Spirit. Certainly he was accustomed to describe vital religion as "experimental"; but, as Sydney Dimond has said, "Assurance... was saved from subjectivism by a larger conception of the grace whereby we are saved."[12] Those interpreters are surely wrong who see in Wesley a proto-Schleiermacher.

Wesley's mature theology—though he may not have used either term—was both Catholic and Evangelical, a synthesis holding together in uneasy but fruitful tension polarities which cannot be pulled together neatly, yet each of which is necessary to its opposite number, as both are to the whole.[13]

In his realization that man of himself can do nothing to save himself, his belief in God's universal love and prevenient grace, and his stress on the necessity of personal acceptance of God's offer of salvation, Wesley was deeply evangelical. In his insistence that genuine religion is social, his demand for "fruits of righteousness," his careful system of nurture, his stress upon corporate worship, his delight in the communion of saints, and his appeal to reason and Christian history, he was genuinely Catholic.

The role of his conversion—which was of course profoundly important—must be carefully assessed. What it did, precisely, was to put God at the center of his life rather than himself. It is exactly this which precludes his being read in terms of nineteenth century revivalism (or twentieth century liberalism) fully as much as it precludes his being read in terms of ecclesiasticism of whatever sort. Wesley preached no new Gospel but rather the Reformed Catholicism of classical Anglicanism. If it seemed new it was only because personal conviction and the needs of the times had given it a new urgency.

In the light of such an interpretation of Wesley's theological orientation his specific teachings on the sacraments must be studied. A careful survey of the sources for ascertaining his baptismal theology leaves one not altogether sure of his meaning. Since, in any event, Baptism quite naturally played no role in the progress of English

Methodism in his lifetime, what can be said may be deferred to the study of American Methodism.

With the Lord's Supper the case is entirely different. Allowing for Miss Underhill's Anglo-Catholic bias one may yet agree that the Wesleyan Revival was as much a sacramental as an evangelical revival;[14] to the dry religiosity of the eighteenth century the one was as much a stranger as the other. Wesley's understanding of the Lord's Supper is chiefly expressed in the 166 Eucharistic hymns based upon Dean Brevint's treatise *The Christian Sacrament and Sacrifice.*[15] Issued over the names of both brothers, the hymns went through nine editions in Wesley's lifetime and the abridged tract was issued besides in separate editions. The doctrine set forth there is consistent and clear, and is reinforced by many other references adduced from Wesley's works.[16]

As a memorial of the death of Christ the sacrament is no mere reminder of that event, but a true *anamnesis;* the eternal meaning of the event is made here and now operative for faith.[17] As symbols the bread and wine re-present the body and blood of Christ as spiritual nourishment with which the Living Christ feeds His people now. The elements are signs; not bare signs, but efficacious signs of the grace they signify. The Eucharist does not itself confer grace, but the Holy Spirit through the sacrament does confer grace; a Christian will not despise the means. Through expectant use of the means ordained by our Lord, faithful communicants are vouchsafed His Real Presence. That Christ is really present as both Host and Food Wesley had no doubt. It would be gratuitous to add that by this Wesley meant no form of *impanation.* His doctrine is most clearly related to that of Calvin mediated through the seventeenth century divines.

The Holy Supper is a communion feast in which Christians share in Christ and in each other, not only those present but the whole community of saints, in heaven as on earth. It is both anticipation and pledge of the Messianic Banquet when Christ shall have secured His Kingdom. The Wesleyan Eucharistic hymns supplementing the Anglican liturgy revived the eschatological note that had been missing in Western liturgies from earliest centuries.

The Eucharist, moreover, is a sacrifice. Each celebration represents the "one oblation, once offered," as also Christ's eternal Sacrifice in heaven. Nowhere is the synthetic character of Wesley's theology more clear than here. In the Eucharist man cannot offer Christ again, nor at all; least of all, instead of himself. Christ eternally offers Himself. Through faith man may claim Christ's self-oblation re-presented in the sacrament. In receiving man offers himself in the sacra-

ment to God. To be able to claim Christ's sacrifice he must give himself; to be able to give himself he must claim Christ's sacrifice. The Eucharist is at once a call to utter consecration and a means of following the call to the utmost.

Actual reception of the Living Christ depends on faith, in the sense that an unbeliever does not receive Him, but not in the sense that it is the faith of the communicant which effects Christ's Presence. He is present by the Word and Holy Spirit; He is appropriated by faith. The Eucharist bestows grace not only on the justified but on earnest seekers as well. No preparation is required other than a willingness to receive what God offers and to do what God requires to be done. The promises of God are to all; the sacrament is both a converting and sustaining ordinance, symbolizing, witnessing to, and effectuating all that is in the Gospel promised to him who accepts. And since so great benefits flow from the faithful use of the sacrament, it should be received—in Wesley's word—constantly, as often as possible. To do so shows a spirit receptive to the promise of grace and thankful for grace bestowed.

If it is true that Christian faith is defined by action as well as words, then Wesley's own constant reception of the Holy Supper, his frequent admonition to his people to communicate, his evident joy in the large numbers who flocked to celebrations, his instruction to hesitating Methodists that the character of an unworthy celebrant in no way vitiates the efficacy of the sacrament, his observance of great festivals with a daily celebration throughout the octave, his explicit instruction to the Americans that the Eucharist be celebrated every Sunday, and finally, that most bitterly debated of his actions, the irregular ordinations to provide a sacramental ministry for America—all these witness to an understanding of the Gospel in which sacramentalism is so intimately related to evangelicalism as to be put asunder only at the peril of the wholeness of the faith.

The Organization of American Methodism

Arising through the efforts of private members and occasional lay preachers who had come to America for reasons of their own, Methodism from its beginnings here was nearly autonomous. Wesley sent over only eight official missionaries. Francis Asbury, the only one who stayed to make a lasting impression, was only 27 years old when he arrived, had had little experience, and was no thoroughgoing Anglican—hardly a man to have been able to interpret the mind of Wesley to the Societies on this side. Yet it was Asbury who must be accounted the founder of American Methodism, even when one allows for his sincere efforts to keep the Americans under Wesley's control.

In any case the remove to America must have exerted influences further tending to remold Methodism, for it could not but be touched by the cultural spirit. Individualism and voluntarism were fundamental values, in religion as in politics and in society at large. Nourished in a society largely unchurched, most active in colonies where Anglicanism represented social, political and cultural values not shared by the dissenting churches around them, the American Methodists were from the beginning not only autonomous but indigenous.

The early center of the movement was in Virginia, where its beginnings had coincided with the Southern phase of the Great Awakening. Aside from Asbury and Shadford, the most successful preachers were ones such as Strawbridge and Williams, suspect to Wesley because of their attitude toward the Church. Native preachers recruited from the ranks of the newly converted came to share the leadership. Lacking familiarity with the mind of Wesley, as indeed with any larger frame of reference in which to interpret their own conversion or that of any one else, they pursued their preaching not as an adjunct of the English Church but as an isolated revivalistic movement. To equate their position with even the evangelical side of Wesley's synthesis is unwarrantable.

While in 1776 some Virginia Methodists refused to join with Baptists and Presbyterians in the fight for religious liberty, averring that they wished to be considered Anglicans, not dissenters,[18] yet the opposite is more nearly the case. Actual contact between Anglicans and Methodists was slight, even in Virginia. The Methodist people by no means all considered themselves Anglicans. Some belonged to other churches; perhaps most had no church affiliation at all, finding in the Societies whatever spiritual nourishment they had. Some of the preachers were friendly toward the Church, some hostile; most were indifferent. The Anglican parsons who interested themselves in Methodism were few enough to be counted on one hand. Since the origin of their sympathies lay precisely in a feeling that Anglicanism as practiced here was lacking in evangelical fervor, they would not have been effective in acquainting the preachers with the Church's finest claims.

The Sacramental Controversy which racked the movement from 1772 through 1781 revealed the lack of any effective relationship between Methodism and its putative parent together with a growing sectarian spirit among the Methodists. A number of preachers and members had insisted on having the sacraments in their Societies; some of the preachers, having engaged in mutual ordination, began to baptize and celebrate the Lord's Supper. The controversy was finally halted by a tentative decision to stay by the Church until more direct ad-

vice might be had from Wesley. Meanwhile the Revolution came to an end and the Anglican establishment was ended. Wesley was but putting the best face on the situation when in September 1784 he wrote: "They are now at full liberty simply to follow the Scriptures and the Primitive Church. And we judge it best that they should stand fast in that liberty wherewith God has so strangely made them free."[19]

Organized during Christmastide, 1784, the Methodist Episcopal Church was now clearly intended to be a *church,* no longer a preaching mission ambiguously related to Anglicanism. It was furnished an ecclesiastical order: general superintendents, elders and deacons, together with lay preachers and private members, under a centralized system of discipline. It was furnished a standard of doctrine: the Thirty-Nine Articles revised to accord more nearly with the doctrinal needs of the situation and express more clearly an Arminianism already found in them by Anglican theologians. It was furnished forms of worship, together with an Ordinal, in a slightly revised and abridged Prayer Book called *The Sunday Service;* as also a hymn book, significantly a collection of Psalm paraphrases such as were commonly sung in the English Church. Wesley's recommendations had furnished the basis of organization; but Asbury had refused to comply with Wesley's directive that he serve as joint superintendent with Coke, until they should have been elected by the American preachers. These two facts may serve to illustrate the tension between the native bent of American Methodism and the Anglican cast of its Wesleyan legacy, a tension which would run as a *leit-motiv* through its subsequent history.

The Sacraments in Early American Methodism

The sixty years from 1784 to 1844 include the Second Awakenings, the Finney era, and the period of most rapid and extensive westward movement. Antedating the rise of any native Methodist theologian, they constitute the new church's first period of internal development and external adjustment. The first decade suffices to show what would prove the main trend.

The Psalm paraphrases were simply ignored. There came into general use a collection of evangelistic hymns, first issued in England in a pirated edition by a preacher Robert Spence, who had been roundly belabored by Wesley for his pains. This was published in Philadelphia in 1790 over the names of Coke and Asbury.[20] Containing many Wesleyan hymns, and covering nearly every aspect of "heart religion," it was admirably suited to its original intended purpose. But it was not adequate, nor had it been intended, to cover all the occasions of faith, life and worship about which a *church* needs to sing. Augmented from time to time, it remained until 1836 the recommended hymnal. Not

until 1849 was a hymnal published which presented in comprehensive fashion hymns on the whole round of Christian life.

The *Sunday Service,* as Jesse Lee wrote with scarcely concealed satisfaction, was soon laid aside.[21] In 1792 the forms for administering the sacraments, the Ordinal, and the occasional services were revised and taken over into the Discipline; the rest disappeared. It had been the prayer book which marked out the form of the new church at its organization in 1784. The next year when the first Discipline was printed it was appended to the Prayer Book. In 1786 a new edition of both was issued under one cover. Six years later only the Discipline was printed, with one section including all that was left of the prayer book.

It is clear what was happening. Wesley had tried to produce a church by decree; he had succeeded in surrounding a preaching movement with the appurtenances of a church. And the new church went on behaving much as it had behaved as a missionary campaign. Under other circumstances Methodism might have been comprehended as a preaching order within Anglicanism. It was in fact erected in America into an independent ecclesiastical body, having the form of a church but not the self-awareness thereof. Unselfconsciously it identified the *ecclesia* with itself and proceeded to evaluate doctrine, worship and discipline in terms derived from its own parochial understanding of Christian experience. American Methodism showed itself more and more a sect. What was the place of the sacraments in this evolution?

Baptism

Wesley's revision of the Article on Baptism, adopted in 1784 and never changed, read as follows:[22]

> Baptism is not only a sign of profession and mark of difference whereby Christians are distinguished from others that are not baptized; but it is also a sign of regeneration or the new birth. The baptism of young children is to be retained in the church.

The crucial phrase would seem to be "a sign of regeneration or the new birth." Evidence in the sermons and the *Treatise on Baptism*[23] indicates that Wesley held to the Anglican view that infants are in Baptism cleansed from the guilt of original sin; Wesley's Arminianism was not the latitudinarian sort which refused to take original sin seriously. Yet his Arminanism insisted upon a universal objective atonement wrought in the death of Christ; and this Wesley seems never to have related to the teaching of baptismal regeneration.

It is plain, in any case, that whatever regeneration is wrought in Baptism he did not take to be moral regeneration.[24] Man grows up inevitably to sin; to be saved he must be brought to a conviction of sinfulness and an acceptance of pardoning grace. Forensic justification

may have taken place in principle in the death of Christ, or mediately in infant baptism; but moral regeneration takes place only in a conscious experience of justification continued in a conscious pursuit of holiness.

As the English Church did, so Wesley distinguished between a sign and the thing signified. Baptism did not confer grace *ex opere operato*. Was it then simply a "badge of profession"? But something must have been meant separable from a profession of faith; for Wesley directed the Americans to retain infant baptism, omitted any reference to sponsors who might be thought to make such an affirmation on the child's part, and omitted the rite of confirmation through which the baptizand might later make the affirmation his own. His meaning is to be sought in a view which preserves the objectivity of grace without compromising the responsibility of free response.

Such a view may be found in Wesley. Indeed, his strongest arguments concern Baptism as a means of incorporation within the covenant community, and the least ambiguous teaching of the revised offices is the same.[25] Yet Wesley omitted from the Article that portion which had described the sacrament as an instrument whereby

> they that receive [it] rightly are grafted into the church; the promises of forgiveness of sin and of our adoption to be sons of God by the Holy Ghost, are visibly signed and sealed; faith is confirmed, and grace increased by virtue of prayer unto God.

Part of American Methodism's confusion regarding Baptism must be laid to Wesley.

The Article on Baptism must be interpreted in the light of that on sacraments generally. Wesley's revision reads thus:

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

Framed originally to establish against Roman Catholics on the one hand and radical Protestants on the other the view that sacraments are sacred actions in which God and man play mutually interrelated roles, such that, as the Methodist expositor Wheeler says, in them "God embraces us and offers himself to be embraced by us,"[26] this Article had been changed slightly. Where the second clause had read, "but rather they be certain sure witnesses and effectual signs of grace," Wesley's revision read, "but rather they are certain signs of grace." The Article still insists that sacraments are "not only badges or tokens of Christian men's profession"; by his omission Wesley may have thought to lessen the danger of an *ex opere operato* interpretation, but he retained the phrase "by which he doth work invisibly in us." It is unlikely that he

meant sacraments to be reduced to the barrenness suggested by the modern connotation of the word "sign."

The baptismal offices as revised by Wesley were free of the more obvious expressions of baptismal regeneration. Yet the rites were still capable of teaching it, as is shown by the fact that subsequent revisions were chiefly concerned to whittle away one or another instance of such language. They had been framed to express that doctrine, and short of completely overhauling them—which would be done in the twentieth century—it was impossible to express through them a view altogether devoid of the teaching that Baptism is an effectual instrument of grace.

The American revision of the offices in 1792 further omitted the several elements which most clearly defined Baptism as adoption, possibly influenced by what appeared to be the intent of the Article as revised by Wesley. It is impossible to say on the basis of the offices as they existed after that what Methodism intended by Baptism.

Changes in 1792 in the office for adult baptism opened the way for viewing that rite as believer's baptism. In a largely unchurched society and in a church whose primary aim was the conversion of adults, increased attention to adult baptism and a consequent deflection toward the Anabaptist position would not be unexpected. Indeed, for a two year period it was allowed that one baptized in infancy might be baptized again upon conversion.[27] But a disciplinary provision continued unchanged through the entire period under survey specifically enjoined infant baptism; memoirs of preachers are full of passages noting their defense of the practice. Moreover, a treatise on Baptism appearing as an appendix to the same 1792 Discipline, after fourteen pages defending "sprinkling" against "dipping," spent its remaining fifty-four pages defending infant baptism; of the strictly theological meaning of the sacrament there was however no indication.

The average Methodist, member or preacher, would not have derived his understanding of the sacrament from the Articles or offices alone, or even primarily. From what, then? The first American edition of Wesley appeared in 1826, though surely he had been read in English editions earlier. Watson's *Institutes* was published in New York in 1825, Adam Clarke's *Christian Theology* in 1840. The hymnal meanwhile had been augmented with baptismal hymns by Charles Wesley, Doddridge and Watts. From all these sources a meaningful doctrine could have been derived. Baptism stands witness to the grace of God seeking the salvation of every man. It furnishes the means of incorporation into the covenant fellowship where redemption through grace is normally expected to be found. It binds those baptized to trust in Christ alone for salvation and seals the promises of God that such

trust is all that is required. In Baptism there is a spiritual transaction whereby a person's status vis-a-vis the realm of redemption is changed; to view this mechanically was termed "excess," but to depreciate its reality was no less vigorously termed "defect."

But Wesley, Watson and Clarke were not the most powerful influences upon the preachers. It was not until 1828 that any standard course of reading was prescribed for the preachers; theological education was wholly lacking. There was no parochial system of pastoral care. Baptisms would have been performed sporadically whenever one of the elders or rather larger number of deacons happened on the scene. That large percentage of the preachers who were ordained were debarred from administering Baptism. How significant can the sacrament have been in the absence of any developed sense of the church?

So we have been led finally to that context in which its explication is most significant: the relation of Baptism to church membership. The usual view of the church among revivalistic Protestants in the period under consideration was in terms of voluntary association of like-minded believers. Baptists were consistently sectarian. The Halfway Covenant had of course mitigated the stringency of voluntarism among Congregationalists; the Presbyterians had generally managed to keep their covenant theology relatively intact. The Methodists were in a particular case. On the one hand sectarian patterns abounded. Despite Wesley's dictum that the only requirement for being a Methodist was a desire to be saved, the Americans tended more and more to make conversion a pre-requisite. To become a member one must go through a period of probation; he might be admitted or not, and if admitted might later be suspended. Admission and suspension and readmittance depended on meeting certain demands centering in a specific sort of experience and consequent conformity to specific moralistic criteria.

Yet there were always elements working against complete sectarianization. The centralized episcopacy and the itinerancy both provided for Methodists a sense of being an inclusive whole. Hardly less important than conversion was the nurture provided in the bands and classes; derived probably from Wesley's knowledge of the catechumenate in the primitive church, they represented that element of instruction and discipline which has been a constant element in the definition of the Christian *ecclesia.*

Nonetheless, through most of this period Methodism showed remarkably little church consciousness. The early Disciplines often have the word "society" where one expects the word "church." Communicant members of other churches were explicitly allowed to be Methodists, remaining at the same time Presbyterians or whatever. Though both instances are traceable to the peculiar origins of Methodism, they

comport strangely with the self-awareness of an autonomous church.

It was not until 1836 that any recognizable concept of church membership was put into the Discipline, not until 1856 that the relation of baptized children to the church was spelled out in the Discipline, and not until 1864 that a form for receiving members into the church was inserted into the Ritual.[28] By then Wesley's Arminianism was being replaced by Daniel Whedon's "Freedomism;" what in Wesley had been "gracious ability" became simply "ability."[29] This example of the way in which American Methodism misconstrued Wesley by dissolving his synthesis indicates also the direction in which it would finally move to delineate the meaning of Baptism; but that would not be until later in the century.

For the early period it may be concluded that Baptism must have meant less than official definitions and systematic treatises suggest. The most noticeable aspect of the question is its ambiguity. Through lack of interest, lack of theological ability, and preoccupation with what no doubt seemed a more pressing task, the church failed to arrive at any view of Baptism clear and profound enough to withstand the corrosive effect of that emasculation of evangelicalism which would be the end product of a hundred years of revivalism.

The Lord's Supper

Of the several Articles of Religion concerning the Eucharist the crucial one is No. XVIII, of which the most pertinent section reads as follows:

> The supper of the Lord is not only a sign of the love that Christians ought to have among themselves one to another, but rather is a sacrament of our redemption by Christ's death: insomuch, that to such as rightly, worthily, and with faith receive the same, the bread which we break is a partaking of the body of Christ; and likewise the cup of blessing is a partaking of the blood of Christ.

Originally framed to refute both the Roman doctrine of transubstantiation and left-wing Protestant teaching which a later Methodist described as "but a partial and inadequate statement of the nature and purpose of the Eucharist,"[30] the Article was adopted by the Americans unchanged.

The changes Wesley had made in the liturgy served either to make the office a more explicit expression of evangelical doctrine, as he understood it, or to adapt it to the needs of the American situation, as he understood that. In the former category are only two changes of consequence: the absolution became a prayer for pardon, the word "priest" became "elder." Changes in the latter category were more numerous: the *Sanctus* and *Gloria in excelsis* were to be said, not chant-

ed; the service was shortened by the omission of the long exhortations —which were needless, since the class meetings were a more stringent means of discipline; and rubrics pertinent only to the Anglican situation were excised. No change (save for the omission of one redundant word) was made in the Prayer of Consecration. The effort sometimes made to characterize Wesley's revision as Puritan surely breaks down here; if it had been so, he would have substituted for the Consecration a prayer of thanksgiving and the Words of Institution.

In 1792 the Americans deleted the entire Ante-Communion—all the service preceding the Offertory—and with it the concept of the Christian Year. Other changes were required by the assumption that now the Eucharist would follow a usual preaching service: e.g. the Intercessions were omitted, doubtless because they would have been included in the long extemporaneous prayer earlier. Still others were reflective of the more informal worship prevalent here: the *Sursum Corda* was omitted, along with the Proper Prefaces, and extemporaneous prayer was allowed in the liturgy itself. A rubric at the end authorized the omission of any or all of the ritual *except the Consecration.* The exact form of Eucharistic observance was evidently thought to be a matter of indifference; but a prayer expressive of an undefined but real relationship between the material elements and their spiritual use was retained as the indispensable minimum.

Drastic as the 1792 revision of Wesley's prayer book was, the forms which were preserved were not touched for another sixty years; and these the years during which the influence of revivalism and the frontier should have been most insistent. At the expense of completeness the core of the liturgy was transferred to the Discipline, the one book sure to be available. The requirement that the forms be used was doubtless not heeded literally; in 1824 the Discipline contained a special admonition on their faithful use, doubtless a reflection of a freedom approaching license. Yet the fact that they were retained and used at all indicates some attitude of conservatism toward the Wesleyan heritage.

There is no evidence of an American edition of the Eucharistic hymns, though a few were included in the *Pocket Hymn Book* and a few others added as that collection gradually evolved into a church hymnal. The one best source of Wesley's Eucharistic doctrine was therefore largely lacking.

There was no hymn on the eschatological aspect of the sacrament. It is certain these Methodists were interested in "last things." One recalls further that the great camp meetings began as Eucharistic celebrations, and this remained a normal part of most Methodist meetings. Whether any conscious relation between communion and eschatology was made, there is no evidence.

There was only one hymn on the sacrament as sacrifice. Again, it is certain these Methodists talked and sang about the sacrifice of Christ. The greater number of hymns on the Lord's Supper, whether by Wesley or others, dealt with it as a memorial of the death. But that was the least profound meaning of Wesley's teaching; rather it was the pleading of the eternal sacrifice joined with the Real Presence of the Risen Christ which made Wesley's doctrine potent. Of that particular understanding of the matter among the Americans there is no evidence at all.

Clarke's *Discourse on the Nature and Design of the Eucharist* was published in New York in 1842, having been first published in London in 1812. The teaching of such a work, taken together with that of Wesley and Watson, the Articles of Religion, the liturgy, and such Eucharistic hymns as were available, presented (even more so than in the case of Baptism) a consistent and meaningful doctrine. All alike held the Supper to be both genuine sign and seal of the mercies of God revealed in the death of Christ, as it is also both sign and seal of man's answering self-oblation. Christ is present in His Supper to be received in faith. Like Baptism the Eucharist was seen as a federal rite; participating in it through faith was believed in very fact to assure one's continuance within the covenant of grace. In the sacrament questing grace calls forth answering faith and questing faith meets answering grace.

But how widely are we to suppose that this teaching was known and understood? How often was it expounded? How frequently was the Eucharist celebrated? It remained the rule that only elders could administer the Lord's Supper. It would have been expedient to allow at least every preacher in charge of a circuit to do so; it may be argued that the failure to do this shows that Methodism was not seriously concerned to maintain a regular program of Eucharistic celebration. It could just as well be argued that the refusal to allow lay preachers, even though in charge of circuits, to celebrate constitutes another of those examples of conservatism we have encountered. In any event, communions must have been infrequent, since deacons and unordained preachers constituted the larger number of all the itinerants.

Moreover, there was a growing tendency to "fence the Table." In Notes appended to the Discipline of 1796 the two bishops had admonished the elders to be "very cautious how they admit . . . persons who are not in our society."[31] Although non-members might be admitted after examination, in their case as in that of members the right to communicate appears to have rested upon being adjudged worthy. Nothing was said any more of Wesley's insistence that "honest seekers" be admitted, nor of the converting power of the Eucharist.

Certainly the Lord's Supper was not central to Methodist worship. The Love Feast may at first have been as important; it was more frequently held, and in a revivalistic atmosphere the fervent testimonies of awakened believers may have caused it to seem more vital. Still, the Eucharist would have been celebrated at every quarterly visitation by the presiding elder riding his rounds; the people may have exerted more effort to be present at those quarterly meetings than it would occur to modern Methodists to suspect.

In 1812 a curious move was taken which has ever since further complicated the effort to understand the meaning of Methodist orders: it was allowed that local preachers might be ordained. Local preachers were men in secular occupations licensed to preach and perform some functions of pastoral oversight. In the absence of a parochial system their contribution was immense; but they were (and still are) strictly differentiated from "travelling preachers"—i.e., what we should call the professional ministry. The anomalous situation was created in which a "lay" preacher might be ordained elder and yet be a member of a charge committed to an itinerant who was only a deacon or not ordained at all. The church's answer to infrequent Communion was not to allow unordained men to celebrate but to extend ordination to men who were not itinerants. But it may be supposed that after this the societies had the Communion more often.

As evangelical doctrine became stereotyped within the narrow confines of a particular anthropology and soteriology, so the Eucharist would appear to have lost its fullness of meaning. If the whole significance of justification could be thought to be satisfactorily expressed in the phrase "saved by the blood"; if the whole meaning of sanctification could be thought to be summed up in a moralistic legalism; if the richly varied theology of Wesley could be acceptably reduced to the one word "Aldersgate"; then the Eucharist could presumably be satisfactorily characterized as a memorial rite. It was not sacramentalism alone which suffered. By the end of our period Protestant theology in America, where it had come under sustained revivalistic influence, had become curiously truncated, resulting in a vast oversimplification of the problems of Christian faith and life.[32]

It may be concluded that the Eucharist doubtless meant less than official definitions and systematic treatises suggest; but perhaps more than any overt evidence adduced here shows. The tenacity with which the Methodists clung to infant baptism, apparently finding in it a grace which their logic was never rightly able to assess, is indicative of their attitude. Without being articulate about it, they may have found in the Supper a means through which their gracious Lord designed to feed their hungry souls.

Early Methodism in America was insufficiently acquainted with the mind of Wesley to have been able to sympathize with his insistence that Methodism was understandable only within an Anglican structure, or to appreciate his high regard for the corporate Christian body, or to penetrate his carefully instructed theological synthesis of sacramentalism and evangelicalism. Unprepared to take its place as a church, the movement was suddenly thrust into autonomy; through sixty years, unused to its churchly institutions, untutored in classical Christian doctrine, fumblingly learning what it meant to be a church, at one turn and another it revealed through its actions the effects of its initial orphanage. Further deflected from a full-orbed Christianity by pressures from the American scene, both secular and religious, Methodism most readily aligned itself with pietistic sectarianism and thus reinforced that strain of its constitution which leaned toward moralistic and emotionalistic individualism. Constantly pursuing its missionary labors and but little given to attempts at self-definition, it came all but unconsciously to define itself—and thus to redefine its institutions—in terms of its own narrow understanding of that one primary concern.

Early Methodism in America had failed to achieve sufficient coherence to enable it to preserve the marrow of its legacy while at the same time adapting it to the demands of a new time and a new land. Although maintaining a halting loyalty to its Wesleyan heritage, the church was clearly more concerned with evangelism than with sacramentalism. Wesley's synthesis was dissolved. As revivalism was not the same as Wesley's evangelical ministry, so the confused sacramental teaching and erratic sacramental practice of the Americans was not the same as Wesley's own. The loss of the fertilizing vitality which results from keeping each close to the other was serious enough; but the loss was finally more serious. The church had been rendered peculiarly vulnerable to the infiltration of alien ideologies, and would find itself unable to maintain either evangelicalism or sacramentalism under the impact of the rise of rational idealism.

1. P. Tillich, "Nature and Sacrament," in *The Protestant Era* (Chicago, 1948), pp. 94-112.
2. J. Wesley, Minutes of the Conference; quoted in L. Tyerman, *The Life and Times of John Wesley* (6th edition, 3 vols.; London 1890), II, 576.
3. J. Wesley, *Journal* (Standard Edition, ed. N. Curnock, 8 vols.; London 1909-1916), II, 293.
4. Cf. G. C. Cell, *The Rediscovery of John Wesley* (New York, 1935), p. 145. "Wesley's life-long resistance to the separation of his societies from the Anglican Church was therefore dictated by something far more significant than a blindly tenacious conservatism. It was dictated by an intelligent religious appreciation of the Christian Church as the means of grace. It was rooted and grounded in a profoundly *soteriological* evaluation of the Church" (italics Cell's).
5. J. Whitehead's *Life of the Rev. John Wesley* (London, 1793) was the first official biography. See also T. Coke and H. Moore, *Life of the Rev. Mr. Wesley* (American edition; Philadelphia, 1793); R. Watson, *Life of Rev. John Wesley* (First American edition; New York, 1853). Even Tyerman concludes that if Wesley appears inconsistent, "we must take [him] as we find him" (*op. cit.*, I. 496).
6. E.g., W. H. Holden, *John Wesley in Company with High Churchmen* (Lon-

don, 1870); F. Hockin, *John Wesley and Modern Methodism* (4th edition; London, 1887); R. D. Urlin, *John Wesley's Place in Church History* (London, 1870); A. S. Little, *The Times and Teaching of John Wesley* (Milwaukee, 1905).

7. E.g., J. H. Rigg, *The Churchmanship of John Wesley* (revised edition; London, 1886); *The Living Wesley* (2nd edition; London, 1891); G. J. Stevenson, *Memorials of the Wesley Family* (London, 1872).
8. G. Every, *The High Church Party, 1688-1718* (London, 1956).
9. C. J. Abbey and J. H. Overton, *The English Church in the Eighteenth Century* (2 vols.; London, 1878), I, 135f.; II, 67-72. See also G. W. O. Addleshaw, *The High Church Tradition* (London, 1941); P. E. More and F. L. Cross, *Anglicanism* (Milwaukee, 1935), especially P. E. More, "The Spirit of Anglicanism" and F. R. Arnott, "Anglicanism in the Seventeenth Century."
10. Cell, *op. cit.*, p. 185.
11. J. Wesley, Minutes of the 1745 Conference; quoted in Cell, *op. cit.*, p. 243.
12. S. Dimond, *The Psychology of the Methodist Revival* (London, 1926), p. 235.
13. Cf. Cell's comment, "The Wesleyan reconstruction of the Christian ethic of life is an original and unique synthesis of the Protestant ethic of grace with the Catholic ethic of holiness" (*op. cit.*, p. 347).
14. E. Underhill, *Worship* (New York, 1937), pp. 303-307.
15. See J. E. Rattenbury, *The Eucharistic Hymns of John and Charles Wesley* (London, 1948) for discussion and for a reprint of the hymns and the "extract" of Brevint's tract.
16. The chief sources for ascertaining Wesley's Eucharistic doctrine are, besides the hymns, the following: "The Duty of Constant Communion" (*Sermons on Several Occasions*, ed. by T. Jackson, 2 vols.; New York, 1831, Sermon No. CVI, written 1732, revised 1788); "The Means of Grace" (Standard Edition of the *Standard Sermons*, ed. by E. H. Sugden, 2 vols.; London, 1921, sermon XII); "Upon our Lord's Sermon on the Mount, Discourse VI" (*ibid.*, sermon XXI); *Explanatory Notes upon the New Testament* (London, 1755; based on Bengel's *Gnomon*, and constituting with the Standard Sermons the doctrinal standard of British Methodism); *A Roman Catechism, with a Reply Thereto* (*Works*, 3rd American edition, ed. by J. Emory; 7 vols.; New York, 1831, Vol. V); *Popery Calmly Considered* (*ibid.*); besides hundreds of occasional and incidental references in the *Journal* and the *Letters* (Standard Edition, ed. J. Telford, 8 vols.; London, 1931), together with his revision of the Prayer Book offices and the Thirty-Nine Articles of Religion for the Americans in 1784. See also J. C. Bowmer, *The Sacrament of the Lord's Supper in Early Methodism* (Westminster, 1951).
17. Cf. G. Dix, *The Shape of the Liturgy* (Westminster, 1945), p. 161.
18. Petition presented to the Virginia Assembly; quoted in C. F. James, *Documentary History of the Struggle for Religious Liberty in Virginia* (Lynchburg, 1900), p. 75.
19. *Letters*, VII, 237ff.
20. *A Pocket Hymn-Book, designed as a Constant Companion for the Pious* (10th edition; Philadelphia, 1790).
21. J. Lee, *Short History of the Methodists in the United States of America 1766-1809* (Baltimore, 1810) p. 107.
22. A comparison of the text of Wesley's revision of the Thirty-Nine Articles with the original may be found in R. Emory, *History of the Discipline of the Methodist Episcopal Church* (New York, 1844), pp. 95-109.
23. The sources for Wesley's teaching on Baptism are chiefly the following: *A Treatise on Baptism* (*Works*, Vol. VI); *Notes upon the New Testament;* the following Standard Sermons: XII, "The Means of Grace;" XIV, "The Marks of the New Birth;" XV, "The Great Privilege of Those That Are Born of God;" XXXVIII, "Original Sin," and XXXIX, "New Birth;" together with Wesley's revision of the Articles of Religion and the offices of the Book of Common Prayer.
24. See especially Standard Sermons XIV, XV, and XXXIX. Wesley very nearly overstated his case in the sermon on Original Sin (XXXVIII), so anxious was he to confute the Socinian views of Dr. John Taylor. Proper emphasis must be allowed his insistent stress on prevenient grace.
25. See N. B. Harmon, *The Rites and Ritual of Episcopal Methodism* (Nashville, 1926) for a detailed study of changes in the offices.
26. H. Wheeler, *History and Exposition of the Twenty-five Articles of Religion of the Methodist Episcopal Church* (New York, 1908), p. 281.
27. Emory, *op. cit.* p. 45. This was in 1784; the action was rescinded in 1786. All subsequent references to Disciplinary provisions are taken from Emory.
28. Cf. F. G. Hibbard, *Christian Baptism* (New York, 1842); *The Religion of Childhood* (Cincinnati, 1864).
29. Cf. L. H. Scott, "Methodist Theology in America in the Nineteenth Century," *Religion in Life*, XXV, 1 (Winter, 1955-56), 87-98.
30. Wheeler, *op. cit.*, p. 314.
31. Emory, *op. cit.*, p. 323.
32. Cf. S. E. Mead, "American Protestantism During the Revolutionary Epoch," *Church History*, XXII, 4 (December 1953), 279-297.