

# JOHN WESLEY AND THE METHODISTS

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Methodism is the name given to the religious denominations which owe their origin to the evangelical revival set on foot by John Wesley, in the early part of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. John Wesley was an Anglican clergyman who was dismayed by the apathy and indifference of his own Church in the England of two hundred and fifty years ago or so, and who set out to re-ignite its religious fervour, with results which went far beyond his original intentions.

The first beginnings of the movement can be traced back to 1729, when John, then a Fellow of Lincoln College, Oxford, together with his brother Charles and several other companions, banded together into a “Holy Club,” imposing upon themselves strict rules of religious observance. Their methodical piety earned for them the nickname “Methodists,” a name John Wesley gladly adopted, and in no way resented. It was quite a good name, even as in the Catholic Church priests who belong to Religious Orders are known as “Regulars” because they undertake to regulate their lives according to the Rule of the Order to which they belong.

These small beginnings paved the way for the enormous influence of John Wesley over more than five generations of followers, and indeed over all forms of modern Protestantism. And no one can study his campaign for “Christianity in earnest” without sympathy and the kindling of the religious sense within his own soul. Whatever may be one’s ultimate judgement of the movement he set on foot, all must recognize in it that spirit of personal religion without which merely external observances would be but an empty shell.

## 1

### JOHN WESLEY

John Wesley, the son of an Anglican clergyman, was born at Epworth Rectory in 1703. Going to Oxford, he became a Fellow of Lincoln College in 1726. There, as we have seen, with his brother Charles and other companions, including George Whitefield, he formed a group which met together for mutual spiritual improvement. The members gave themselves to study and prayer, bound themselves by strict rules of fasting, of regular weekly Communion, and of good works, such as visiting the sick and instructing neglected children.

This programme earned for John Wesley, not only the nickname “Methodist,” but also the charge of being a “Papist.” But neither Wesley nor his accusers really knew what Catholicism meant, though the spirit inspiring such religious earnestness was undoubtedly Catholic. Indeed, he drew much of his inspiration from the Catholic classic, *The Imitation of Christ*, by Thomas a’ Kempis, a book he later urged his hearers to make the subject of their daily meditation.

Yet the Catholic Church, as a Church, he saw only through the eyes of current Protestant prejudices. He declared that “no Romanist can expect to be saved according to the terms of the Christian Covenant.” In 1778 he protested against Lord North’s proposal to grant relief to Catholics from their legal disabilities. He was too good a man, of course, to be consciously unjust. He believed he was standing for principle. His charity insisted again and again that “Methodists are the friends of all, and the enemies of none.” But he was certainly not a “Papist”!

In 1735, after admission to Anglican Orders, he went as a missionary to America, to minister to the English settlers there according to Anglican rites, and to evangelize the Red Indians. But the colonists found him too rigidly insistent on what they considered High Church Ritual, and too dictatorial towards themselves; and in 1738 he returned to England with a sense of almost complete failure. Then came the spiritual crisis of his life.

On the voyage to America in 1735 he had as fellow-travellers twenty-six Moravians, followers of the teachings of John Hus. These people had profoundly impressed him by their deep personal religion and unswerving confidence in God. When, therefore, on his return to London he met Peter Bohler, a young Moravian, he accepted the suggestion that he should attend with him a meeting of the Moravians in Aldersgate Street.

There, on May 24<sup>th</sup>, 1738, whilst listening to the reading of Luther’s Preface to the Epistle to the Romans, he says, “I felt my heart strangely warmed, and an assurance given me that He had taken away MY sins, even MINE, and saved me from the law of sin and death. I then testified to all I now first felt in my heart.”

From this experience, so individualistic and subjective, Wesley concluded that all the rule-keeping of his “Holy Club” had been in vain, and that for salvation all must experience a “New Birth,” a perceptible conversion like that of St. Paul on the way to Damascus. Moreover, he adopted the doctrine of the Moravians that, after one’s conversion, sin altogether ceases, and one instantly attains perfection in the sight of God. These ideas he greatly modified in later years; but he certainly came away from that Moravian meeting feeling that he had never before been a Christian in any true sense of the word.

John Wesley could not keep his new convictions to himself. He at once began to preach his new doctrine, and persuaded his brother Charles and George Whitefield to join him in a series of revival campaigns. At first, Wesley preached only in Anglican Churches, but he soon followed Whitefield’s example and began to conduct open-air meetings, with sensational results.

In 1739 he organized the converted societies under his own control, the first beginning of the “Wesleyan Methodist Society.” He did not dream of affiliating these societies officially to the Church of England. Many of the converted were not Anglicans, and regarded the society and its preachers and worship as enough for them. Wesley hoped that they would become Anglicans eventually, as we shall see. But, for the time being, he just went ahead, leaving the future to take care of itself.

In 1741, the needs of the work forced him, though very reluctantly, to appoint lay-preachers; but he allowed them to preach only, and not fulfil the other functions of the clergy. However, on that point also, he had to give way later.

In 1742 he instituted class-meetings, with class-leaders, for devotions and mutual help, all classes being knitted together into his “Society of the people called Methodists.” He would not call it a Church. The only “Church” he acknowledged was the Church of England. Even when he came to die, in 1791, after fifty-two years of zealous labour in the organization of his “Society,” he still professed adherence to the Church of England.

## 2

### METHODIST DOCTRINE

The Methodist Churches today exist in a state of complete separation from the Church of England to which Wesley himself belonged. How the separation came about we shall see later, when dealing expressly with that subject. Here, taking separation as an accomplished fact, let us try to get some idea of distinctive Methodist teaching.

Unfortunately no precise statement can be made, to which all Methodists would subscribe. Methodists themselves admit this.

Writing in the book, *Towards Reunion*, p. 95, Prof. A. V. Murray, Vice-President of the Primitive Methodist Conference, says, “It is important to notice that it is impossible as yet to speak of “Methodism” as if it stood for one thing either in matters of faith or in matters of order:” And he goes on to say, p. 99, “There are on the one hand strong supporters of ‘Free Catholic’ ideals, ministers who like a good deal of ritual in their services and are strong sacramentarians, and even call themselves ‘Wesley-Catholics’; and on the other hand there are ministers who hate all that kind of thing with a fierce hatred. There are ministers whose modernism is very pronounced; and there are others who hold by sudden conversions and by the verbal inspiration of the Bible. These differences of faith are, of course, characteristic of all Protestant bodies today. The distinctive feature of Methodism, however, is that all these differences are somehow equated to the doctrines of John Wesley; and the somewhat bold assumption is made in the United Statement of Doctrine that Wesley’s Sermons and Notes on the New Testament, liberally interpreted, can become a standard of faith for the new Church.”

It is indeed a bold assumption to think that the bewildering variety of beliefs held by Methodists can ever be reduced to one definite and consistent standard. All that we can do is to give the teaching of the Deed of Union, of 1932, to which it is the Methodist hope that all their Churches will subscribe.

This Deed of Union declares that Methodists claim a place in the “Holy Catholic Church,” and that they accept the Apostolic Faith, the historic Creeds, the Protestant principles of the Reformation, the Holy Scriptures as the only Rule of Faith, and the evangelical doctrines in Wesley’s Sermons and Notes on the New Testament.

Great difficulty arises from the fact that Methodists cannot agree as to what the “Holy Catholic Church” is, nor as to the contents of the Apostolic Faith. Hosts of them do not believe in the historic creeds, which cannot be reconciled

with the principles of the Protestant reformation. The theory of the Bible only as the Rule of Faith is negated by the appeal to the “Apostolic Faith” and the “Historic Creeds,” an appeal which introduces Tradition also as a Rule of Faith! And modern Methodists repudiate much of the teaching contained in Wesley’s Sermons and Notes. Still, no clearer general statement of Methodist doctrine can be given, and therefore we must turn to more specific matters, beginning with a brief glance at John Wesley’s own position.

### 3

#### WESLEY’S TEACHINGS

John Wesley always claimed to accept fully the teaching of the Church of England as contained in the Book of Common Prayer, and the Thirty-Nine Articles of Religion. But, in his preaching, he concentrated on the one aim of reviving personal religion, demanding of his listeners the same revolutionary change that had come over his own life. So long as they were CONVERTED from indifference to a new and enthusiastic religious experience, he seemed to leave them completely uninstructed in the Anglican Creed in which he himself professed to believe. What wonder that his converts imagined the whole of the Christian religion to consist in a felt assurance of salvation, and in the determination to try to live a better life than previously!

How interested John Wesley was in personal experience without regard to doctrinal consistency is evident from the “Christian Library” he prescribed for the training of his preachers. It included his own Notes on the New Testament, the Imitation of Christ, the Homilies of Macarius, the Spiritual Letters of Brother Lawrence and of St. John of the Cross, the Thoughts of Pascal, and the Spiritual Guide of Michael de Molinos. Every book listed, save his own Notes, was written by a Catholic who would have insisted on the necessity of belonging to the Catholic Church, and being in union with Rome! But Wesley was interested, not in the Faith they professed, but only in their rules for spiritual living and for progress in virtue. Doctrinally, he himself was ever vague, uncertain, and inconsistent; and anything but a reliable guide to the beliefs required of Christians.

#### 3a

##### BELIEF IN THE BIBLE

Wesley certainly accepted the doctrine that “God’s Written Word is the only and sufficient rule both of faith and practice,” which all Methodists profess. But he denounced “private interpretation” as a seed-plot of endless errors. In his Journal Vol. IV, he wrote, “That you need not any man to teach you is a text which has been brought in support of the rankest enthusiasm.”

He himself justified his own interpretation at times by appealing to the “voice of antiquity,” or Tradition; at other times, by arguing from reason or “undeniable inference.” When Tradition was quoted against him, or his inferences were denied, he appealed to the “Inner Light,” the testimony of the Spirit within his own soul. But others claimed that the “Inner Light” led them to quite other conclusions, and that they preferred the testimony of the Spirit within THEIR souls to the leadership of “Blind John.” In such cases, Wesley was reduced to declaring them victims of feeling, imagination, and self-deception; a charge which they promptly turned against himself.

That he felt the hopelessness of the position is indicated by his words in Preface to Standard Sermons, “Some say that I have mistaken the way myself . . . and it is very possible that I have.”

#### 3b

##### SIN

Absorbed by thoughts of individual salvation, and of the necessity of conversion, John Wesley devoted little attention to the great dogmatic affirmations about God, the Holy Trinity, and the Divinity of Christ. Those he never denied, of course. He took them for granted. But conversion implies repentance of sins, and the subject of sin assumed great importance in his eyes.

His starting-point was from the Ninth of the Anglican “Articles of Religion,” which declares that “Original Sin . . . is the fault and corruption of the nature of every man that naturally is engendered of the offspring of Adam.” He believed, therefore, in the Fall of the human race in Adam, interpreting inherited sin at first as a poison resulting in the

utter depravity of unredeemed humanity. But this extreme Calvinism he later repudiated, denying that man is wholly corrupt, but insisting on the impossibility of eternal salvation without the grace of Christ, which alone can cleanse us both of original sin and of personal sins.

### 3c

#### SALVATION

The very heart and soul of Methodism lies in its doctrine of salvation. John Wesley's passionate desire was to save souls; and it was to preach salvation that he sent his preachers. It is only to be expected, therefore, that his greatest contribution to Protestantism would be his doctrine bearing on this subject.

The essence of his teaching may be summed up in the promise of a NEW BIRTH, with FREE, PRESENT, and FULL SALVATION, to all who would respond to his invitation to repentance.

For Wesley, the "New Birth" was the experience of conversion, shattering "inward sin," and immediately justifying the soul before God. Believing in the necessity of such an instant regeneration, he urgently and almost desperately sought in his revival meetings to shock his hearers into decision, and surrender to the grace of God. And the very force of his personality worked wonders in the most unexpected places. But, in later life, as Henry Bett, in his book, *The Spirit of Methodism*, p. 36, writes, he "frankly confessed that he was wrong in his early insistence upon two things - the necessity and suddenness of the experience; and he admitted both that it was not possessed by some, though it was the privilege of all; and also that the experience might come gradually."

As regards the explanation of the "New Birth," Wesley did not regard it as taking the place of baptismal regeneration. He accepted the Anglican Prayer Book teaching that "none can enter into the Kingdom of God except he be regenerate and born anew of water and the Holy Ghost"; and that it is by baptism that one becomes "a member of Christ, the child of God, and an inheritor of the Kingdom of Heaven." For him, therefore, the "New Birth" was evidence of repentance of post-baptismal sin, and of a new start in the spiritual life which had already been received. But he gave little thought to theology, and so preached the necessity of a "New Birth" without qualification that his own followers interpreted it as taking the place of baptism, and providing the very beginnings of the life of grace within the soul. The strange thing is that Wesley knew this, and permitted it, making no effort to correct misunderstandings, though the misconception was not in accordance with his own convictions! This is one of the many mysteries of inconsistency in Wesley which defy solution. But it is not surprising that modern Methodists have come to regard baptism, not as effecting regeneration, but merely a symbol of "inner conversion." Infant baptism is for them no more than a "dedication service," symbolizing the grace which will be given to the child in later life after having been consciously converted to Christ.

### 3d

#### FREE GIFT

The effect of the "New Birth" was, according to Wesley, FREE, PRESENT and FULL SALVATION.

In declaring salvation free for all men of good-will, John Wesley expressly rejected Calvin's teaching that it is for the elect only. He insisted that Christ died for all, and declared Calvin's doctrine of the predestination of the elect only to be "full of blasphemy." In his revival meetings he stressed each man's power to choose salvation, and laid immense emphasis on the need of surrendering to the grace of God. On this important issue he separated from his associate, George Whitefield, who believed in the Calvinistic doctrine of salvation for elect souls only.

On the other hand, by declaring salvation free, Wesley cannot be said to have accepted the Lutheran doctrine of justification by faith only, and not by works. Many modern Methodists still teach that Lutheran doctrine. But they are not followers of Wesley in that. It is true that Wesley was first "converted" at a Moravian meeting in 1738, whilst listening to the reading of Luther's Preface to the Epistle to the Romans. But, in 1741, he publicly rejected Luther's Commentary on Romans, and his teaching of justification by faith only. Later on, in his Journal he wrote, "The grand error of the Moravians is that they follow Luther for better or for worse, and hence their no works, no law, no commandments." In "Sermon 20" he says, "We are afraid lest any should use the phrase 'the righteousness of Christ is imputed to me' as a cover for his unrighteousness. We have seen this done a thousand times. Warn them against

making void that solemn decree of God, 'Without holiness no man shall see the Lord,' by a vain imagination of being 'holy in Christ.' O warn them that, if they remain unrighteous, the righteousness of Christ will profit them nothing."

On this same plea that salvation is free to all who are willing to accept it, many Methodists also feel called upon to reject the Catholic doctrine of merit. That good works are meritorious before God, and deserving of eternal reward, they deny, despite Our Lord's words, "Be glad and rejoice, for your reward is very great in Heaven." (Matt. 5: 12.) But here, too, Wesley was Catholic rather than Protestant in his teaching. "As to merit itself, of which we have been so dreadfully afraid," he wrote, "we are rewarded according to our works, yea, because of our works. How does this differ from SECUNDUM MERITA OPERUM, 'as our works deserve'? Can you split this hair? I doubt I cannot." (Fitchett, Wesley and His Century, p. 381.)

### 3e

#### PRESENT ASSURANCE

Methodists hold that acceptance of grace, with consequent "conversion," brings with it an absolute and divinely begotten ASSURANCE that one's sins are forgiven, and that one is indeed in God's love and friendship. This they regard as their great contribution to Protestantism, the genuine recovery of a most important yet forgotten evangelical truth.

It would be an injustice to Methodists to attribute to them the doctrine that it is sufficient to believe on Christ to be saved. Calvinists taught that doctrine, for they declared that once one had received the assurance of election and justification, it could never be lost. For them the question, "Are you saved?", was full of meaning. But for Methodists the question is as meaningless as for Catholics. They agree with Catholics that no one is ever allowed to presume certainty of salvation. Always later sins are possible. One can fall from grace.

Still, Methodists hold, as John Wesley held, that, whilst assurance of eternal salvation is not possible, assurance of present pardon of sin is possible. In fact, it is necessary. If one's sins are forgiven, one has that certainty, the Holy Spirit immediately and directly testifying to the soul that it is in the grace of God, and that it is the child of God. If one has not that certainty, as infallible as faith itself, then one's sins are not forgiven at all.

In this doctrine, that man can not only attain to the grace of God, but can know with infallible certainty that he has attained to it, Wesley was definitely at variance with Catholic teaching. The Catholic Church admits that one can have a well-grounded confidence that he is in God's love and friendship, both by the knowledge of one's own sincerity, and the testimony of a good conscience. This trust in God gives sufficient peace of soul. But absolute and infallible assurance is not possible, and is but a form of self-deception. Even St. Paul did not claim it. "I am not conscious to myself of anything," he wrote to the Corinthians, "yet I am not hereby justified." (1 Cor. 4: 4.) There are things we must leave to God.

Wesley himself, in his old age, greatly modified his ideas on this matter. He retracted his teaching that inward assurance is necessary for salvation, and that those who lack it are still in their sins. "When, fifty years ago," he wrote, "my brother Charles and I, in the simplicity of our hearts, taught the people that, unless they knew their sins were forgiven, they were under the wrath and curse of God, I marvel they did not stone us." (H. Maldwyn Hughes, Christian Foundations, p. 158.)

### 3f

#### FULL SALVATION

In his earlier years, Wesley held the strange doctrine that conversion often meant, not only the forgiveness of sins, but the instantaneous change of a sinner into a saint. It meant "entire deliverance from every evil work, sinful thought, passion, desire, temper, from all inbred corruption, and all the remains of the carnal mind." (Sermon 83.)

From 1759 till 1762, many of his followers claimed this experience, and the number of "saints" multiplied exceedingly. Those who claimed this "entire sanctification" were grouped into special "Select Societies." But Wesley was soon disillusioned by their hypocrisy, jealousy, envy, and discord. The "Select Societies" were soon abolished, and Wesley came back to Catholic sanity with his teaching of an obligation to tend to perfection by progressive growth in virtue. Conversion is but the starting-point from which one must press on towards holiness.

Inevitably Wesley had to face the question of the fate of those who died before having attained to perfect holiness. For he himself held that every soul must be entirely holy before it could be admitted to Heaven, and the Divine Presence. Having no idea of the Catholic doctrine of Purgatory, he thought that the act itself of dying must cleanse the soul of all residual defects.

On this matter, the words of a modern Methodist are significant. In his book, *Christian Foundations*, a manual of doctrine for Wesleyan Methodists, p. 215, Dr. H. Maldwyn Hughes writes, "Unless it be supposed that the physical process of death produces an inevitable moral change (and in that case the change could not strictly be described as MORAL), not all Christians can be held to be ready for the Blessed Life. When we add the further considerations of those who die in infancy, and of those who have had no spiritual opportunity, it seems as though the implicates of Christian teaching compel us to assume, for some, at any rate, an Intermediate State between death and judgement." And he then invites his readers at least to consider the Roman Catholic doctrine of Purgatory. But why not consider the whole body of Catholic teaching, instead of timidly and wistfully looking in the direction of this or that element of it which was too hastily repudiated by the Protestant reformers?

### 3g

#### THE CHURCH

The ever-growing number of converts from his preaching of FREE, PRESENT and FULL SALVATION looked to Wesley as their spiritual leader; and he had no choice but to organize them in some way. But he had no thought of founding any new denomination or sect. He thought only of new life within the Church of which he was an ordained clergyman, the Church of England. "What may we reasonably believe," he wrote, to be God's design in raising up the preachers called Methodists? Not to form any new sect; but to reform the nation, particularly the Church; and to spread Scriptural holiness over the land." (G. H. Curteis, *Dissent in Its Relation to the Church of England*, p. 346.)

But 18<sup>th</sup> century Anglicanism did not want to be reformed. It frowned on enthusiasm of any kind, calling it "fanaticism." Anglican rectors refused the use of their churches to the revivalist preachers, and refused Communion to Methodists. Bishop Butler said to Wesley, "This pretending to extraordinary revelation and gifts of the Holy Ghost is a horrid thing, a very horrid thing."

John Wesley, therefore, ignored the authority of Anglican Bishops, and all diocesan and parochial limits. He sent his preachers where he would, and continued building up his Methodist Societies, which had no constitutional link with the Church of England, and no status or privileges within that Church. How did he justify himself in this? He fell back upon a vague theory of the "Church Invisible." He viewed the Anglican Church as a visible legal and human organization only. For him, the Church of England was a legal establishment, so that, in disobeying the Bishops, he was violating legal authority only, and not spiritual authority. The latter authority he persuaded himself to have from the "Invisible Church," a mission from the invisible Head of the Church, Christ Himself, with whom he and his Methodists were united by invisible bonds of grace. And he persuaded himself that thus his independent "Society" was in no way a separation from the Church of England.

By 1744, the Wesleyan Methodist Society was effectively organized. In that same year, the first Wesleyan Conference resolved that they did not want a schism from the Church of England, and expressed the hope that they would be recognized as an auxiliary organization. "We agree," they declared, "to obey the Bishops as far as conscience allows. We do not desire a schism. But we must not neglect to save souls for fear of any consequences." John Wesley saw the threat in those last words. He recognized the drift towards separation, lamented it, and struggled against it.

In 1789, two years before his death, he said. "In God's name, stop! You all yourselves were first called to the Church of England; and although you all will have a thousand temptations to leave it and set up for yourselves, regard them not. Be Church of England men still. Do not cast away that peculiar glory which God has put upon you, and frustrate the design of Providence, the very end for which God raised you up." Again, in 1790, shortly before his death, Wesley said, "I declare I live and die a member of the Church of England; and none who regard my opinion or advice will ever separate from it."

But his own appeal to the "Invisible Church" against the authority of the Bishops of the visible Anglican Church,

and his own practices, led inevitably to the separation he dreaded; even though, in deference to him, the separation which was bound to come was postponed till after his death.

### 3h

#### THE MINISTRY

A further difficulty arose for John Wesley as regards a supply of clergy for his rapidly growing Society. To solve this, he developed his own distinctive view about Holy Orders. He believed implicitly in the necessity of an Apostolic succession of Holy Orders, but persuaded himself that there was no real difference between bishops and priests, and that the latter had as much power to ordain others as the bishops themselves.

He therefore proceeded to lay hands on his own preachers, believing he was giving valid ordination. In 1784, he went so far as to “consecrate” Thomas Coke as “Superintendent” over the Methodists in America. Coke was already an ordained Anglican clergyman, every bit as much as Wesley himself. Wesley had nothing that Coke himself did not already have. In any case, if bishop and priest are one and the same thing, Coke could not have further been consecrated a bishop! There is another mystery here in Wesley’s action which seems beyond solution. But one thing is certain. He did believe that ordained preachers received a power and jurisdiction not possessed by the unordained laity; and, to the end, he fought for a clergy-controlled Society. It was a losing battle.

In 1790, the year before his death, Wesley wrote, “As long as I live, the people shall have no share in choosing either stewards or leaders. We have not, and never have had, such a custom.”

In 1797, six years after Wesley’s death, Alexander Kilham was expelled by the Wesleyan Methodists for maintaining that there is no real difference between clergy and laity, and for demanding that the laity should share with the clergy in control. Kilham thereupon founded the “Methodist New Connection.”

In 1810, Hugh Bourne and William Clowes, Methodists who had never been ordained at all, founded the “Primitive Methodists,” to consist of “converted people” apart from all standards of faith and order.

For long, the Wesleyan Methodists stood their ground, reserving to the ordained ministry at least the right of officiating at the Lord’s Supper. But they have yielded finally even on that point, allowing unordained laymen to officiate in the absence of a minister.

Today, people who call themselves Methodists stand for a “priesthood of all believers.” The Methodist Professor A. V. Murray writes, “Ministers hold no priesthood differing in kind from that which is common to the Lord’s people.” They are set apart, he says, “for the sake of Church order, and not because of any priestly virtue inherent in their office.” (Towards Reunion, p. 91.)

For the modern Methodist, therefore, there is no Apostolic succession of Holy Orders. Whilst the rite of imposition of hands has been retained in the ordination service, it is regarded as a symbolical ceremony only, of no great importance, and not implying any doctrine of presbyteral succession. Ministers are inwardly called by the Spirit, and appointed by the people to act on their behalf. Their authorization is “from below,” not “from above”; from their fellow-men, not from God. Such was not the mind of John Wesley; but, again, his own practice undoubtedly paved the way for these later developments.

### 4

#### BREAK IN ANGLICANISM

John Wesley, as we have seen, never wanted his Methodist Society to abandon the Church of England. To the very end, he fought against secession. But, for fifty years, he had been steadily preparing the way, in spite of himself, for ultimate separation. He taught doctrines unknown in the Church of England, ignored its authority in favour of his own, introduced services foreign to the Prayer Book, and created a new ministry at his own hands neither valid nor regular according to Anglican principles.

Long before his death the “Society of people called Methodists” was really a distinct non-conformist sect, however he might try to disguise the fact from himself. But the pretence of conformity was kept up until his death in 1791. Even two years afterwards, the Methodist Conference of 1793 could still affirm its determination to remain in the Church of England. But a final and irreparable break came in 1795 when the Manchester Conference of Wesleyan

Methodists adopted its “Plan of Pacification” to conciliate the Methodist laity, authorizing unordained members of the Society to celebrate the Lord’s Supper and administer the Communion. Even so, not until 1892 did Wesleyans venture to describe their Society as a “Church.” And from then on, the “Methodist Church” was indeed one more rival organization added to the ever-growing number of Protestant Churches, altogether distinct and separate from the Anglican Communion.

The Church of England, of course, could scarcely complain of this rebellion of Methodists against the authority of the Church they had hitherto accepted; for the Church of England itself had done the same, setting the example by its own rebellion against the great Mother-Church of Rome.

#### 4a

### METHODIST DIVISIONS

The very principles that led to the separation of the Methodist Society from the Church of England, led in turn to dissension amongst Methodists themselves. John Wesley himself insisted that, to be a Methodist, it was necessary to be “Wesleyan.” All secessions from HIS movement were branches cut off from the original living tree. But controversies arose, often manifesting themselves with an extreme bitterness of feeling which earned the derision of the ungodly.

As early as 1741, in almost the first days of the Society, George Whitefield abandoned it to found the “Calvinistic Methodists.” Wesley had never been able to bear the Calvinistic doctrine of the election and predestination of some to the exclusion of others; and his differences with Whitefield over this issue led to the latter’s separation from him, and the establishing of a new society of Methodists under the patronage of Lady Huntingdon. Hence the name often given to the Calvinistic Methodists, “Lady Huntingdon’s Connection.”

After Wesley’s death, the burning issue was the question of the status of the clergy as opposed to that of the laity. The subsequent history of Methodism is a record of the struggle for survival of a privileged clerical order superior to and distinct from unordained members of the Society. Until his death in 1791, Wesley had insisted on the distinction. In 1797, Alexander Kilham was expelled from the Wesleyan Methodists for demanding lay-representation at the Annual Conference. He, and his followers, thereupon founded the “Methodist New Connection.”

In 1810, Hugh Bourne and William Clowes, two unordained Wesleyans, commenced a series of open-air revival meetings. Forbidden by Conference to continue them, they seceded, and started a new sect called “The Primitive Methodists.” In 1815, another Wesleyan, William O’Bryan, began the “Bible Christians” in Cornwall.

In 1907, Kilham’s “Methodist New Connection,” and O’Bryan’s “Bible Christians” merged into a “United Methodist Church,” in which the laity were granted all the rights the Wesleyan Methodists were unwilling to concede.

In 1932, the Wesleyan Methodists, Primitive Methodists, and United Methodists met in Conference, and proclaimed themselves one in a kind of external unity as the “Methodist Church in Great Britain.” The Wesleyan Methodists were the ones who had to capitulate, acknowledging no inherent power in the ministry not possessed by every member of the laity. John Wesley’s own teachings were again abrogated.

#### 4b

### AMERICAN METHODISTS

We have seen how John Wesley went to America in 1735 as an Anglican chaplain to the colonists of Georgia; and how, on his return in 1738, he was “converted” at a Moravian meeting to the ideas which led to his Methodist apostolate.

That Methodist apostolate went to America in 1776 with the advent there of Philip Embury, one of Wesley’s lay-preachers. By him Methodist principles were preached for the first time in the colonies, as they were then. Three years later, John Wesley officially sent two of his ordained preachers, Joseph Pilmore and Richard Boardman, who organized the first Methodist Society in America.

In 1784, the increasing numbers of Methodists in what had by then become the independent United States of America suggested to Wesley the need of a “Superintendent” who would occupy much the same place there as he himself occupied in England. He therefore set apart by imposition of hands a Dr. Thomas Coke who, after his arrival



in the States, was accorded the title of “Bishop,” and claimed episcopal authority both to rule the Church, and ordain future ministers.

Wesley himself had not granted the title of “Bishop,” but that of “Superintendent”; and he resented the usurpation. However, in that same year, American Methodists met in a special Convention at Baltimore, and organized themselves into the “Methodist Episcopal Church.” That Dr. Coke was not satisfied that he had really received valid episcopal consecration is evident from the fact that, in 1791, he applied to the Pennsylvanian Bishop White, of the Protestant Episcopal Church of the United States of America (as the Church of England in America had become after the Declaration of Independence) for the re-consecration of himself as “Bishop.” From the Catholic point of view, of course, since it regards Anglican Orders themselves as invalid, things were not bettered by the additional ceremony. Nor do modern Methodists regard the ceremony as having made any real difference. For the vast majority of them still regard the “Methodist Episcopate” as an “Office,” not as an “Order.”

As in England, so in America, division after division has occurred amongst the Methodists. Negro converts, attracted by the unrestrained emotionalism at revival meetings, became so numerous that the racial factor soon began to assert itself more than uncomfortably; and, in 1816, the independent African Methodist Episcopal Church was established, both whites and negroes agreeing that it was better to have separate Churches.

In 1830, the rejection of episcopacy in favour of congregational principles resulted in a new “Methodist Protestant Church.”

In 1842, a further “Wesleyan Methodist Connection” or “Church of America” was commenced at Utica, New York State.

In 1845, the “Methodist Episcopal Church South” separated from the “Methodist Episcopal Church North” over the slavery issue.

And so the divisions have gone on until today, in the United States alone, there are nineteen different Church denominations, all claiming to be “Methodists,” despite their many variations.

#### 4c

### ORGANIZATION

When John Wesley first commenced his preaching crusade, he gathered his converts into a “Society,” and spoke of them as “the people who are called Methodists.” He organized them into “classes,” an idea he adopted from the Moravians. Members were to meet regularly for study, prayer, and Christian fellowship, under the direction of “class-leaders.”

From these “classes” there developed “local societies,” or groups of classes, equivalent to what we now call local churches. Today, members of a local church are enrolled in a class which is expected to meet weekly for the above purposes, each member paying “class-money,” which is the main contribution towards support of the Methodist Church. “Membership,” writes Prof. A. V. Murray, “is open to all persons who sincerely desire to be saved from their sins through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, and evidence the same in life and conduct, and who seek to take up the duties and privileges of the Methodist Church.” (Towards Reunion, p. 91.)

Local societies or churches are grouped together to form a “Circuit.” The old Methodist name for an ordained minister was “travelling preacher,” instead of “local preacher,” who was mostly an unordained layman. The minister moved on circuit from local congregation to local congregation. Today “Circuits” may have one or more ministers, with several churches.

Representatives of all the churches in each Circuit meet in Quarterly Conferences. The Circuits, in turn, are grouped into Districts; and representatives of each District meet twice yearly in “Synods.”

Representatives of the whole Church meet at an Annual Conference, which is the Supreme Court with an annually-elected President. Since 1881, Methodists throughout the world send delegates to an Ecumenical Conference, which meets every ten years.

It is not claimed that this organization is of apostolic derivation, nor that it has any Divine sanction. It is a structure of human origin only, which is based solely on considerations of expediency and utility. The only “continuity” with early Christianity required by Methodists is not that of an ordained clergy, or of constitutional organization, but of the

preaching of the Word, and the administration of the Sacraments of Baptism and the Lord's Supper. And that leads us to Methodist forms of worship.

#### 4d

### WORSHIP

When, in 1726, John Wesley formed his "Holy Club" at Oxford, one of his strict rules had been that of regular weekly Communion according to Anglican rites. This rule earned for him and his companions the nickname of "Sacramentarians". His own sister wrote to him, blaming him for "Communion every Sunday," on the ground that it would lessen his reverence for the "sacred ordinance."

After his Moravian conversion in 1738, however, he took to open-air preaching; and of necessity his revival meetings had to be "non-sacramental." Fervent sermons, ex-tempore prayer, and stirring hymns, of which the majority were composed by his brother Charles, were the order of the day. But Wesley never regarded his open-air services as providing all the needs of public worship. He protested that such services, if they stood alone, would be greatly deficient in essential things. He assumed that his converts would also attend Sunday worship in Anglican parish churches; and he urged them, above all, to receive Holy Communion, the "supreme expression of Christian fellowship." One of his Sermons is, "On the Duty of Constant Communion" as often as possible.

But his "Methodists" were not welcomed to Communion by the orthodox Anglican clergy. Moreover, they regarded their revival meetings and study-class devotions as quite sufficient in themselves. The Hymn Book of the Society became their chief book of devotion, and they became a "singing and praying" people, with less and less attraction for ritual and liturgy. Once again, Wesley had set forces into operation which he could not control, and which developed in ways he did not wish, and which he believed to be contrary to the Will of God.

Sacraments, accordingly, assumed less and less importance in the eyes of Methodists. We have already seen, when dealing with the "New Birth" (See Section 3c 'Salvation'), how the Sacrament of Baptism gradually lost significance and became but a symbolical ceremony, effecting nothing. The Sacrament of Holy Communion also fell into neglect, and was treated with scant respect.

Wesley himself ever retained the Anglican Liturgy in accordance with his duty as an Anglican clergyman, and insisted upon its retention. Dr. Adam Clarke, one of the fathers of Methodism, complained that Methodists acted in a way utterly unbecoming the gravity of so sacred a rite. In *Lives of the Preachers*, Vol. IV, pp. 302-3, James Rogers relates the story of how a Mr. Fletcher, of Madeley, went into the yard to meet three Methodist preachers who had come to see him. He took with him a bottle of red wine and some bread; and, after some prayers, handed around the bread and wine to the three others with the words, "The Body of the Lord which was broken for you . . . the Blood of Our Lord Jesus Christ." So they had their fellowship meal. And all were edified. John Wesley would have been horrified. He would have pronounced the whole procedure a dreadful desecration.

Methodists today regard as a sufficient form of worship the usual non-conformist service consisting of the reading of Scripture, the singing of hymns, a sermon, and extempore prayer. Holy Communion is celebrated once or twice a month, following morning or evening worship. A table is covered with a linen cloth, bread is placed upon it, together with little glasses of wine like trays of inkwells, the glasses replacing the traditional chalice for hygienic reasons. The wine is, as a rule, unfermented, in deference to temperance sentiment.

At times the Anglican Communion service is followed, though usually much abbreviated. But strong and anti-liturgical feeling in many Methodist Churches makes it impossible to impose any one form, and there are many alternative practices in use, each minister having full liberty to introduce hymns and extempore prayer as he thinks fit. For most Methodists, the "Lord's Supper" is a sacred meal meant to intensify the bonds of friendliness and fellowship between all who participate in it.

#### 5

### MODERN METHODISM

It would be impossible to have read all that has been set out so far in this booklet, and not to realize that modern Methodism is certainly not the Methodism of John Wesley. It has drifted very far from the convictions of its founder.

For Wesley had ever professed belief in the Anglican Church, and in the teachings of the Book of Common Prayer. He so wanted all to be Anglicans that he demanded, in Sermon 115, that dissenting converts should be weaned from their Chapels and restored to the Church of England. He dreaded lest his “Methodist Society” should ever become a “Church” separated from that of which he was an ordained clergyman. Yet the Methodists of today form “Churches” not connected with Anglicanism. Methodist Conferences have put on record their denunciations of the Book of Common Prayer as “heretical and Romanizing.” And the fear of schism, so conspicuous in John Wesley, has almost entirely disappeared from amongst Methodists. They have divided from one another, and sub-divided, on well-nigh any pretext.

It is true that, obsessed by the idea of “personal conversion,” Wesley omitted to instruct his followers with sufficient care in other matters he thought essential; but modern Methodists do not stress today even the experience of conversion as Wesley did. For them, the idea of “fellowship” has become the all-important consideration.

Methodist Churches, too, have become not only non-liturgical, but anti-liturgical. John Wesley’s own “ritualism” would have been intolerable in their eyes. Their theory of ordination is radically different from his. Again, so long as he lived he insisted on the practice of weekly Communion. Since his death, Methodists have profoundly modified their behaviour, and many admit that Holy Communion means little or nothing to them.

Neither would Wesley’s ascetical rules have any appeal to the modern Methodist. In Sermon 116, he warns the lax that “the man who never fasts is not more in the way of salvation than the man who never prays.” But how many Methodists observe even the Quarterly Fasts prescribed by the Wesleyan Church Calendars?

Both in theory and practice, all along the line, modern Methodism has moved farther and farther away from the religion of John Wesley. If his ways and teachings were of God, the later developments cannot be; if later developments are of God, then Wesley himself fell into error. Or must we suspect both earlier and later phases of Methodism to have been equally the result of sincere but mistaken zeal? To the Christian, later developments certainly have all the signs of progressive departure from the truth. Methodist theology has tended more and more towards liberal and rationalistic views incompatible with the teachings of the New Testament at all. Individualism, subjectivism, and emotionalism have led to a diversity and chaos which render the profession of the one name “Methodist” almost meaningless. And that multitudes of Methodists should fail to see this is the enigma which every thinking man must find baffling in the extreme.

**5a**

**STATISTICS**

The following table gives the present (1952) approximate membership of the main divisions of world-wide Methodism, including the recently formed United Church of Canada, and the foreign missions:

**I. THE UNITED STATES**

The Methodist Church . . . . .	8,430,146
African Methodist Episcopal . . . . .	868,735
African Methodist Episcopal Zion . . . . .	489,244
Coloured Methodist Episcopal . . . . .	381,000
The Free Methodist . . . . .	46,783
The Wesleyan Methodist . . . . .	29,331
Smaller Methodist Churches (13 Sects) . . .	51,657

**II. UNITED CHURCH OF CANADA. . . . . 716,064**

**III. BRITISH COMMONWEALTH AND EMPIRE**

Great Britain . . . . .	1,264,493
Australasia . . . . .	189,437
New Zealand . . . . .	24,813
South Africa . . . . .	303,148

IV. Mexico, Brazil, Korea, Japan, etc. . . . .86,169

World Total . . . . . 12,881,020

**5b**

**REUNION PROBLEM**

In the midst of all their divisions, there has been steadily growing up amongst thoughtful Methodists an awareness that all disunity is a departure from the New Testament conception of the Church. For in the New Testament the Church is always presented as a single visible Society, founded by Christ Himself upon the Apostles, and guaranteed by Him “all days even till the end of the world:” (See Matthew 28:20)

The Church itself, therefore, is not a HUMAN CONSTRUCTION, but a DIVINE CREATION. This last point is not yet clear to Methodists. But, impressed by the need of unity, different groups amongst them have sincerely tried to lessen their divisions.

In 1925, the Methodist Church of Canada united with the Congregationalists, the Presbyterians, and the Union Churches of Western Canada to form the United Church of Canada.

In 1932, the various Methodist Churches in Great Britain proclaimed themselves one organization.

In 1939, in America, the Methodist Episcopal Church, the Methodist Episcopal Church South, and the Methodist Protestant Church, made a reunion compact.

No one can view such efforts without profound respect and sympathy. But the great difficulty is that all such moves are based on the concept of the Church as a merely human organization, and on a principle of individualism which leaves things in the same position really as if no efforts at reunion had been made at all. For what is the difference between individuals uniting to form independent Churches of their own construction in the first place, and several of those individual Churches uniting to form a larger but still independent Church of their own construction to replace them? Divisions are lessened. Yes. But their larger Church is still divided from other Christian Churches, and is as far from being the SORT of Church Christ intended as the Churches which have decided to combine in order to form it.

In response to the “Lausanne Conference Reports,” the Wesleyan Methodists of England issued the following statement:

“The Conference feels called upon to bear its continued and emphatic witness to the reality of immediate intercourse between God and the individual soul, and of the assurance that every man may have of his acceptance in Jesus Christ, and his participation in all the fruits of the Spirit. The Conference would also stress the privilege and duty of corporate fellowship in Christ Jesus of all who are redeemed by Him.”

Dr. Hugh Martin, a prominent Baptist who at least begins to see that the Church must be “given by God and gathering men to itself” rather than be the result of any merely human agreement of individual men to associate in an organization of their own making, says of the Wesleyan Methodist Statement, “It sounds like the individual first and the Church second, a long way second; isolated redeemed souls joining together for worship. That there is a truth here I should be the last to deny. . . . But it is surely only half the truth about the Christian Faith.” (Christian Reunion, p. 35.)

Far greater insight was shown by the Anglican Archbishop of Canterbury, Frederick Temple, when preaching on “Catholicism and individualism,” at the consecration of Truro Cathedral, in England.

“Men speak,” he said, “as if Christians came first, and the Church after; as if the origin of the Church was in the wills of the individuals who composed it. But, on the contrary, throughout the teaching of the Apostles, we see it is the Church that comes first, and the members of it afterwards. In the New Testament, the Kingdom of Heaven is already in existence, and men are invited into it. The Church takes its origin, not in the will of man, but in the will of the Lord Jesus Christ. Everywhere men are called in; they do not come in and make the Church by coming. They are called into that which already exists; they are recognized as members when they are within; but their membership depends on their admission, and not upon their constituting themselves into a body in the sight of the Lord.”

If Archbishop Temple remained in the Church of England despite his clear perception that “the Church takes its origin, not in the will of man, but in the will of the Lord Jesus Christ,” it was only because he was wrongly persuaded that the Church of England had never really departed from Catholic Unity. But history shows that the Anglican Church had its origin as an independent Church in the will of a man; in the will of Henry VIII. The Anglican Church broke away from that Catholic Church to which all Englishmen had previously belonged, every bit as much as the Methodist Church broke away from the Anglican Church after the death of John Wesley. Had Archbishop Temple realized that, he would have had no choice in conscience on his own principles but to return to the Catholic Church of the centuries, which alone can trace its origin back to Christ Himself, and the Apostles.

Unfortunately, in their discussions of reunion, all Protestants, Methodists and others, as well as Anglicans, reject any idea of returning to a unity which should never have been abandoned. They declare that, rather, they think of “Union” as an ideal not yet realized. They refuse to look upon unity as a past fact long lost, and to be recovered. They envisage a “Church Universal” in the future, which will make room for the inclusion in the one Church of the most varied differences in belief and worship. Thus, writing on behalf of Methodists, F. B. James says, “We believe we have something to give as well as receive, our own treasure to bring into the great Church that one day shall be:” (How Christians Worship, p. 88.)

But one who understands the New Testament insistence on “one Lord, one faith, one baptism” (Eph 4:5) cannot accept the prospect of the “most varied differences in belief and worship”; nor can he believe in “a great Church that shall one day be,” in the light of Our Lord’s words, “I will build My Church,” (Mt. 16:18) and in the light of His promise, “Behold I am with you all days till the end of the world.” (Mt. 28:20) We must believe in a Church that IS, not in a Church that SHALL BE. The true Church must have been in this world all days since Christ, even as it will continue till the end of time. No imaginary “Church Universal” which has not yet come into existence, but is to begin to be in the future, can possibly fulfil the conditions required by Holy Scripture. And both Scripture and history force us back to the Catholic Church of the ages, united today under the Bishop of Rome, successor of St. Peter, upon whom as chief amongst the Apostles Christ personally founded His Church.

“We are not prepared to repudiate our past, and the truth—or so much of the truth, even though it be a half-truth—which experience has taught us,” writes Prof. W. L. Sperry, in his book Religion in America. But are not the Methodist churches of today based precisely upon a repudiation of the past? Their very development into denominations so different from anything John Wesley ever intended is a repudiation of their own past, even as the Church of England to which he belonged had repudiated its past in abandoning the Catholic Church. They were the Protestant reformers who abandoned the religion of their forefathers. The Protestant today who returns to Catholic unity, returns to that religion which should never have been rejected in the first place. [Note too, that such returning Protestants CAN bring back with them something of their original Catholic heritage which may have received less emphasis than it ought over the passing ages. Thus, for example, love for the Scriptures, which has always marked the good Catholic’s spiritual life, can be re-vivified by those who return to the Catholic fold who have been especially imbued with this grace from God.]

Nor can beliefs which “our experience” has taught us, human opinions as fallible and variable as all our subjective impressions and moods, be a worthy substitute for the real truths which the Christ, the Son of God, has taught us; truths preserved by the infallible teaching authority of the Catholic Church He established in order to safe guard His religion against the unreliability of human conjectures and judgements. It is to the Catholic Church we must return, to find the unity Our Divine Lord intended, which He wills today as always, and for which He earnestly prayed.

## 6

### CONCLUSION

Throughout this study of Methodism, the merely human factors in its origin and development have surely become abundantly evident. John Wesley himself was indeed a good and earnest man. But good and earnest men can be mistaken. Wesley never grasped the New Testament doctrine of the Church as a visible yet spiritual society, the Kingdom of Christ in this world, endowed with Divine authority, and guaranteed by Him all days till the end of time.

It was not his fault that he lacked this perception. He had never known the Catholic Church, having been born into

the Church of England, one amongst the many forms of Protestantism dating from the Reformation. Omitting whole regions of Christian thought and practice, therefore, he dwelt disproportionately on a few great truths that seemed important to him, creating the impression that religion was concerned almost solely with the personal relations of the individual soul with God.

No one could deny, of course, that personal religion is of the utmost importance. Without it, as we have already said (in our third paragraph) “merely external observances would be but an empty shell.” But why persist in thinking that religion must be either a matter of form, or a matter of fervour? It must be both. We can dispense with neither form nor fervour. And it is certainly a mistake to imagine that Catholicism means “formalism” with little regard for deep, interior, and personal spirituality.

The Rev. R. J. Campbell, when Pastor of the City Temple, London, wrote in the Sunday Herald, November 4, 1915, after a visit to France, “Since the war began, I have realized in French churches as I never did before the devotional value, the practical helpfulness, of the reservation of the Sacrament of the Altar. It makes all the difference between a dead building and a place that is a sanctuary indeed, wherein worshippers feel that they are in immediate contact with the supernatural and divine.”

“Immediate contact with the supernatural and divine”! Little as many realize it, that is the most important thing in the Catholic religion. The Catholic Church exists to produce that in each and all of her members. To attain to that is more important in her eyes than to attain to any ecclesiastical dignity or authority in her power to bestow. She may clothe her Popes in their white robes, her Cardinals in their scarlet, her Bishops and Monsignori in their purple. But of all that she takes but little notice when death takes her officials from this world. The one and only condition of perpetual memory and esteem in the Catholic Church is that her members should love God, strive for union with Him, make progress in the practice of virtue, and attain to holiness and perfection. Those only who have done this does she canonize, raise to her altars, and offer to the faithful both as models and an inspiration of conduct.

“We Methodists,” writes the Rev. Edward Shillito, “stand for the subordination of all organization to the spiritual life, against the paralysing influence of machinery.” The Catholic Church agrees with him that all organization must be subordinated to the spiritual life. Of its very nature, the organization of the Church must be ordained to spiritual values, even in its temporal administration and works of mercy. But Mr. Shillito is mistaken in regarding the “machinery” of Catholic organization as “paralysing:”

The German Protestant, Dr. Heiler, Professor of Comparative Religion at Marburg University, showed deeper understanding when he wrote in his book *Katholicismus*, p. 657, “Catholicism is no mere fabric of dogmas and laws and ceremonies and pious practices; but a living organism in whose inmost part the tenderest and most delicate religious emotions play freely. Roman Catholicism is an endlessly rich and life-strengthening organism.”

Never have the Saints of the Catholic Church felt that hierarchical authority and the machinery of organization have come between their souls and God. But they have all realized that it would be an abuse of the spiritual to reject the essential authority of the Catholic Church. Our Lord taught both the religion of the spirit and religion of authority, and each needs the other; that the former may be preserved from self-deception and eccentricity; that the latter may be preserved from the letter which kills once it becomes divorced from the Spirit that is the source of Light and Love and Life. Baron von Hugel, the Catholic layman so beloved of Protestants of all denominations, declares in his book, *The Mystical Element of Religion*, that a properly developed personal religion must be mystical, intellectual, and institutional, arising from religious experience, dogma, sacraments, and public worship according to liturgical form.

These concluding thoughts on “personal religion” have been concerned with the interior holiness and perfection which every sincere Methodist makes his ideal, yet which probably constitutes the greatest source of his misconceptions about the Catholic Church. But fears here are groundless.

If ever a man devoted himself heart and soul to the preaching of the necessity of personal religion, and of aiming always at entire sanctification, it was John Wesley. Yet, had he been a Catholic, never would he have dreamed of abandoning the Catholic Church. St. Francis of Assisi did, as a Catholic, what Wesley tried to do as an Anglican. But the Anglican Church did not understand John Wesley, whilst the Catholic Church did understand St. Francis, and would have understood Wesley. The parallel between the two men is most remarkable. Both were moved in the first place by a deep spiritual experience which they described as their “conversion.” Both felt the need of surrendering

themselves completely to the Holy Will of God, and making love of Him their dominant inspiration. Both sought perfection themselves, and felt impelled to preach the Gospel to all the world, beyond all parochial limits, and especially to the poor. Both aimed at simple sermons that the least of God's children could understand.

Yet St. Francis, doing all that John Wesley wanted to do, had no need to leave the Catholic Church in order to do so. Safeguarded by the wise direction of Catholic principles and by humble, self-effacing obedience to the authorities of his Church, he remained within its unity; whilst Wesley, with no help from the Anglican Church of his baptism, had to fulfil what he thought to be God's Will as best he knew how, only to found a movement which drifted from Anglicanism, and from his own teachings, to dissipate its energies in almost endless disintegrations.

Had Wesley had the advantages of the Catholic Faith, had he ever really known the Catholic Church, he, with his earnestness and zeal would have felt quite at home within the Catholic fold, and found his apostolate for the good of souls appreciated, promoted, and blessed in the way his generous heart ever hoped that it would be. And today, the Methodist who becomes a Catholic becomes what John Wesley would love to have been, and which, in the light of that fuller knowledge than any he possessed in this world, he now wishes he had been.

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