One of the important influences upon John Wesley's theology was the Book of Common Prayer of the Church of England. Phrases drawn from the Prayer Book appear again and again in Wesley's letters. He often uses the language of the Prayer Book in his polemical writings. But the book was not simply a thesaurus of convenient arguments; Wesley also prayed the book. As a priest of the church, he used it regularly in services of public worship. Wesley's high opinion of the Prayer Book is reflected in his judgment that "there is no Liturgy in the world, either in ancient or modern language, which breathes more of solid, Scriptural, rational piety than the Common Prayer of the Church of England."  

It was natural, therefore, that Wesley should take the Book of Common Prayer as the basis of the Sunday Service which he prepared for American Methodists in 1784.

That the Prayer Book and the Sunday Service are in many places identical in content has somewhat obscured the significant differences between the two documents. Having decided to take the Book of Common Prayer as the basis of his new liturgy, Wesley still had to decide what sort of changes to make in the book. He might have made only those changes needed to adapt the Prayer Book to the political situation in 1784. The newly independent Americans could not be expected to pray daily for King George III of England, as the Prayer Book prescribed. The curious thing is that Wesley went well beyond this minimum. We may ask why he did so. Apparently the Prayer Book did not express to Wesley's entire satisfaction the distinctive theological emphases of the Methodist revival. He took the opportunity presented to him by the organization of the Methodist Episcopal Church in America to prepare a liturgy which would state more precisely the doctrine of the Methodists.

In no part of the Sunday Service are Wesley's deviations from the Prayer Book more extensive and more significant than in his treatment of the orders for the baptism of infants and of adults. The purpose of this paper is to describe the differences between Wesley's services for baptism and those in the Prayer Book, and thus to clarify one aspect of the relationship between the Anglican and the Wesleyan traditions. In my judgment the basis of these differences is to be found in Wesley's understanding of faith. The relevant por-

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tions of Wesley's doctrine of faith will be presented, therefore, as a part of the following exposition of Wesley's orders for infant and for adult baptism.

Faith and Infant Baptism

The Book of Common Prayer teaches that those persons who are baptized are justified and regenerated by means of the sacrament. The Prayer Book also insists that justification is by faith. One might suppose, therefore, that only adults are to be baptized. On the contrary, children are justified in baptism, the Prayer Book declares, even though they cannot personally make an act of faith. How is this possible? The Prayer Book requires that each child be represented at the font by godparents. The child promises, by means of these godparents, that after he reaches the age of reason he will believe and strive to obey the law of God. On the basis of this undertaking, the child receives baptism.

When Wesley published his Treatise on Baptism in 1756, he followed the doctrine of the Prayer Book. According to this Treatise, the child who is baptized is justified by God in the sacrament. However, sometime before 1784 Wesley abandoned that position, for in revising the Prayer Book service for the baptism of infants he cut out the references to godparents and the confession of faith which these sponsors make in the name of the child. By means of this radical surgery, Wesley eliminated a major defect in the Prayer Book service. After all, faith, if it is to be a meaningful category, must be a personal act. One man cannot believe for another, as the Prayer Book implies. Nor is it possible for godparents to guarantee infallibly that their godchild will believe when he comes of age, as their engagement obliges them to do. Therefore, whatever benefit the child receives in baptism cannot depend upon his possession of faith. The one such benefit which Wesley recognizes is admission into the visible church of God. In this congregation the infant baptized has free access to those means of grace through which he may receive living faith and regeneration.

To be sure, references to regeneration appear in the order for infant baptism in the Sunday Service. Wesley reads the phrases of the Prayer Book in a sense different from that intended by its authors, however. God is petitioned that the infant "may enjoy the everlasting benediction" of God's "heavenly washing" and "may be born again, and be made an heir of everlasting salvation." The

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6 One may note that Wesley's infrequent references to baptism as the sign of initiation into the new covenant appear only in contexts in which he teaches that infants are regenerated in baptism (The


1 Harmon, pp. 170, 176, 190, 184.
2 Ibid., pp. 170, 176.
Prayer Book means by these phrases, let the infant receive these benefits now, in baptism. Wesley, on the other hand, reads into these phrases a future meaning. Prayer is made that at some future time, presumably when the child is old enough to comprehend the Gospel and to seek the gift of faith, regeneration will be effected by God.

This interpretation of Wesley's intentions is supported by a consideration of the way in which he edited the text of the Prayer Book. The effect of omitting the exhortation on the Gospel (Harmon, p. 174) and the address to the sponsors or godparents (p. 176) is the heightening of the note of futurity in the prayer for the Spirit (p. 176) and the Mozarabic sentences. These sentences read in part as follows:

O Merciful God, grant that the old Adam in this Child may be so buried, that the new man may be raised up in him. Amen. Grant that all carnal affections may die in him, and that all things belonging to the Spirit may live and grow in him. Amen. Grant that he may have power and strength to have victory, and to triumph against the devil, the world, and the flesh. Amen. Grant that whosoever is dedicated to thee by our office and ministry, may also be endued with heavenly virtues, and everlastingly rewarded, through thy mercy, O blessed Lord God, who dost live and govern all things, world without end. Amen.

The following omissions in the prayers after the application of water may also be taken into consideration. Those portions of the Prayer Book text which Wesley excised are italicized.

Seeing now, dearly beloved brethren, that this child is regenerate and grafted into the body of Christ's Church. . . .

We yield thee hearty thanks, most merciful Father, that it hath pleased thee to regenerate this Infant with thy Holy Spirit, to receive him (Wesley = this infant) for thine own Child by Adoption . . . .

There are two sentences in the Sunday Service which imply, contrary to the view just expressed, that an infant is justified and regenerated in baptism. The following language in the Prayer Book is repeated by Wesley, except for minor changes in punctuation and capitalization. "We call upon thee for this Infant that he coming to thy holy baptism, may receive remission of his sins by spiritual Regeneration." 8 The following sentence in the Prayer Book is retained by Wesley, with one notable change. The word "therein" (italicized below) is omitted in 1784. Even with this omission the sentence can be taken to imply baptismal regeneration.

Regard, we beseech thee, the supplications of thy Congregation, sanctifie this Water to the mysticall washing away of sin: and grant that this Child now to be baptized therein, may receive the fulness of thy grace . . . .

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6 Ibid., p. 180.
7 Ibid., p. 184.
8 Ibid., p. 170.
9 Ibid., p. 180. The phrase, "Sanctifie this Water to the mysticall washing away of sin," might be read in the following way. May this water be set apart to serve as a sign of that regeneration which all men need. Let this water be a "visible word," a statement of the way in which reconciliation to God is effected.
The fact that Wesley omitted “therein” from this passage suggests that he felt his emendation ruled out the identification of the moment of justification and the moment of baptism. What seemed to Wesley to be sufficient may not seem so to the modern reader. It may be supposed that this ambiguity, and the retention of the statement, quoted above, which unambiguously teaches baptismal regeneration, are to be attributed to hasty editing on Wesley’s part. The retention of these two sentences in the Sunday Service does not warrant the conclusion that the order for infant baptism, considered as a whole, teaches baptismal regeneration. Those persons who find this concept in the order for infant baptism must account for Wesley’s extensive alterations in the service. Why would Wesley have taken this trouble if he had not intended to exclude this doctrine?

Faith and Adult Baptism

A few aspects of Wesley’s doctrine of faith may be recalled as background for the following discussion of the order for adult baptism in the Sunday Service. To begin with, Wesley’s definition of faith may be considered. Wesley makes a distinction between assent and justifying faith. Assent is a reasoned judgment that the statements of Scripture are true. This judgment is based upon a consideration of the arguments for the divine inspiration of Scripture. Justifying faith is described in part as “conviction,” the certain knowledge that God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself. This knowledge becomes in turn the basis of trust or confidence in God. Justifying faith is a gift of God to those persons whom he has chosen to receive it. Ordinarily God gives such faith only to those persons who, under grace, have fulfilled certain conditions which he has established. These conditions are the use of the means of grace and works “meet for repentance,” that is, a sincere effort to fulfil the requirements of the law of God.

The temporal relationship between the conditions, justifying faith and justification may be considered next. The gift of justifying faith is logically prior to justification itself; in point of time, however, the two actions occur simultaneously. On the other hand, an unspecified length of time separates the fulfilment of the conditions of justification, on the part of the individual, and the gift of justifying faith and justification on the part of God. God has promised to justify the man who performs the conditions which he has established; he has not promised to justify a man as soon as he fulfils the conditions. The period of time which elapses between the point at which the conditions are satisfied and the point at which faith is given varies from case to case. Some persons may receive justifying faith shortly after they give their assent and are convinced of sin; in other situations many years intervene between conviction and faith. The mo-
ment of justification is determined by God at his good pleasure.\textsuperscript{10}

These remarks by Wesley are all relevant to the question of faith and adult baptism. The man who comes to baptism has already given his assent to the Gospel. He will have performed works “meet for repentance.” He has fulfilled, therefore, the conditions of justification. He will in fact be justified in baptism if God chooses to grant justifying faith and the justification which accompanies it to him at that time. Justification does not necessarily take place at baptism, however. That God has not bound himself to justify a man at a specific point after the conditions have been performed implies that he has not bound himself to justify in baptism every obedient man who receives the sacrament.

The fact that the baptism of adults is not always accompanied by justification and regeneration is implied in Wesley’s order for adult baptism in the Sunday Service. In the Book of Common Prayer, prayer that regeneration will be effected in baptism is made before water is applied.\textsuperscript{11} The material to be read after the baptism itself implies that undoubtedly the man baptized is now regenerate.\textsuperscript{12} Wesley does not make this assumption. He changes the Prayer Book service for baptism accordingly. The prayers for the candidate’s regeneration in the sacrament are retained. The statements after baptism which imply that every baptized man is regenerate are dropped. The following changes in the prayers after baptism may be noted. Material omitted by Wesley is italicized.

Seeing now, dearly beloved brethren, that these persons are regenerate and grafted into the body of Christ’s Church, let us give thanks unto Almighty God for these benefits . . .
Give thy Holy Spirit to these Persons; that being now born again, and made heirs of everlasting salvation . . . they may continue thy servants . . ..\textsuperscript{13}

The individual who is not justified and regenerated in baptism may obtain some benefit from the sacrament. Admission into the church of God is to be counted among the possible benefits of baptism, along with justification and regeneration. In the church one has access to all of the means of grace through which God ordinarily works to justify and to regenerate men. Therefore, to be admitted to the church confers a substantial benefit upon the person so admitted.

The New Testament records cases in which an individual was justified and regenerated before he received the sacrament of baptism. This should not be taken to mean that such a person need not be baptized. Wesley insists that an individual who has been justified

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{10} Wesley, Works, VI, 348; The Letters of the Rev. John Wesley (8 vols.: London: Epworth Press, 1931), V, 337.\textsuperscript{10}
\item \textsuperscript{11} Harmon, pp. 216, 220, 224.\textsuperscript{11}
\item \textsuperscript{12} “Seeing now, dearly beloved brethren, that these persons are regenerate and grafted into the body of Christ’s Church;” “Give thy holy spirit to these persons, that being now born again, and made heirs of everlasting salvation” (Harmon, pp. 226, 228).\textsuperscript{12}
\item \textsuperscript{13} Ibid., pp. 226, 228.\textsuperscript{13}
\end{itemize}
and regenerated apart from baptism should receive the sacrament.\(^{14}\)
The function of the sacrament in these cases is twofold. First of all, it is the ceremony of initiation into the visible church. Furthermore, the person who receives baptism may thereby give testimony to the faith that is within him.\(^{15}\)

**Summation**

In this paper it has been suggested that Wesley revised the Book of Common Prayer in the light of his thoroughgoing adherence to the principle of justification by faith. Wesley is prepared to administer baptism both to infants and to adults. Since an infant does not possess faith, he cannot be justified in baptism. In Wesley’s hands, then, the baptism of infants becomes an occasion on which two things are done. The child is received into the Church, the sphere in which saving grace is particularly active, and prayer is made that God in his good time will justify the child. Perhaps the act of baptism is also to be seen as a “visible word,” a proclamation by means of a symbolic act of man’s sinful state and his need to receive God’s reconciliation.

The baptism of adults, once again, is an occasion on which an individual is received into the visible Church. The congregation also prays that God may grant the gifts of justifying faith and justification to the person baptized. If God pleases, the person who has fulfilled the conditions of justification does in fact receive these gifts. That he has done so is evidenced by his personal assurance of salvation, new interior dispositions of joy, peace and love and the augmentation of his ability to resist temptation and to obey the will of God.

In conclusion a summary in poetic form of the Wesleyan doctrine of baptism may be quoted. The following hymn is one of two written to be sung at the baptism of adults. It is hymn CCCCLXV in Wesley’s *Collection of Hymns, For the Use of the People Called Methodists*.\(^{16}\)

Father, Son, and Holy Ghost,
In solemn power come down!
Present with thy heavenly host
Thine ordinance to crown:
See a sinful worm of earth!
Bless to him the cleansing flood!
Plunge him by a second birth
Into the depths of God.

\(^{15}\)Ibid., p. 195 (Mk. 16:15).
Let the promised, inward grace
Accompany the sign:
On his new-born soul impress
The character divine!
Father, all thy love reveal!
Jesus, all thy name impart!
Holy Ghost, renew and dwell
For ever in his heart!