

**BAPTISM, CONFIRMATION, AND CHURCH MEMBERSHIP
IN THE METHODIST CHURCH BEFORE THE UNION OF 1968:
A HISTORICAL AND THEOLOGICAL STUDY
(PART I)**

OLE E. BORGEN

JOHN WESLEY

GOD WORKING TO SAVE: THE HOLY SPIRIT AS AGENT

The author of faith and salvation is God alone. It is he that works in us both to will and to do. He is the sole Giver of every good gift, and the sole Author of every good work. There is no more of power than of merit in man; but as all merit is in the Son of God, in what he has done and suffered for us, so all power is in the Spirit of God. And therefore every man, in order to believe unto salvation, must receive the Holy Ghost. . . . Although no man on earth can explain the particular manner wherein the Spirit of God works on the soul, yet whosoever has these fruits [of the Spirit], cannot but know and feel that God has wrought them in his heart. . . . But however it is expressed, it is certain all true faith, and the whole work of salvation, every good thought, word, and work, is altogether by the operation of the Spirit of God.¹

This passage from "A Farther Appeal to Men of Reason and Religion," (Part one, finished Dec. 22, 1744) has been quoted at some length, for the simple reason that this passage outlines the soteriological framework within which Wesley's sacramental doctrine operates. In terms of the human need of salvation, Wesley naturally focuses on the human state, present and past: therefore, his strong emphasis on the doctrine of "original sin" and the corruption of all human beings. But he centers the origin, initiative and cause of our salvation in God alone, more specifically in God's love. Thus we can understand his insistence upon the doctrine of the Trinity, and the involvement of the full Godhead, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, in the work of salvation. The passage just cited above is unequivocal when saying, "the author of faith and salvation is God alone," and, "that every man, *in order to believe* unto salvation, must receive the Holy Ghost."—and, finally, that "the whole work of salvation, . . . is altogether by the operation of the Spirit of God." Salvation has God for its foundation and source, as well as continuous fountain. The redemption already procured is graciously applied, and salvation becomes a present reality. It is God who works, and the human being who receives and responds, *after God in his grace has made this possible*. And in this great work of salvation it has pleased God to appoint certain means by which

¹*The Works of John Wesley*, Thomas Jackson, ed. (14 vols; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1958-1959. Reprint), VIII, 49. (*Works*). John Wesley, *Explanatory Notes upon the New Testament* (London: The Epworth Press, 1954. Reprint), Hebr. 9:14. (*N. T. Notes*).

he bestows his grace. Although he is free to give his grace without any means whatever,² God has chosen such means for our benefit.

Yet not from these the Power proceeds,
 Trumpets, or Rods, or Cloaths, or Shades,
 Thy only Arm the Work hath done,
 If Instruments thy Wisdom chuse,
 Thy grace confers their Saving Use:
 Salvation is from GOD alone.³

God works through the operations of the Holy Spirit. God can only be known through the Spirit, and Christ is present through the Spirit. Whenever he speaks of anything in connection with the means of grace, and the sacraments in particular, Wesley unhesitatingly affirms that whatever is, or becomes, or happens in, with or through any means whatever, or any action or words connected therewith, is done by God through The Holy Spirit. The means may vary and may, if God so chooses, be completely absent. Still, this is the *ordinary* way God works to save and preserve.

One last point demands attention in this connection. The advocates of the doctrine of "stillness" (and their modern Methodist counterparts, who "believe" in a kind of mystically bestowed religious inner-feeling, and find little or no use for Bible, prayer, the Christian fellowship, and sacraments) make a distinction between God's working immediately and directly on human hearts, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, the mediating means which at best are of secondary importance, if any at all. Wesley would have nothing to do with such views. Not only does he insist on a constant use of the means of grace, but he also refuses to acknowledge any difference between "mediate" and "immediate" in God's economy of salvation.

But all inspiration, *though by means*, is *immediate*. Suppose, for instance, you are employed in private prayer, and God pours his love into your heart. God then acts *immediately* on your soul; and the love of him which you then experience, is as *immediately* breathed into you by the Holy Ghost, as if you had lived seventeen hundred years ago. Change the terms: Say, God then *assists* you to love him. Well, and is not this *immediate assistance*? Say, His Spirit *concur*s with yours. You gain no ground. It is *immediate concurrence*, or not at all. God, a Spirit, acts upon your spirit. Make it out any otherwise if you can.⁴

²*Works*, V, 188.

³John Wesley and Charles Wesley, *Hymns on the Lord's Supper*. With a Preface concerning the Christian Sacrament and Sacrifice. Extracted from Doctor Brevint. (First edition. Bristol; Printed by Felix Farley, 1745), (The Hymns: *HLS*; the Preface: Brevint (W)), *HLS*, no. 61:3; cf. Brevint (W), sec. IV, 4, 14.

⁴*Works*, VIII, 107. The italics of the words "Though by means" are mine. See also *Wesley's Standard Sermons*, E. M. Sugden, ed. (2 vols; London: The Epworth Press, 1961), II, 99, 103. (*St. S*)

In another place he is just as explicit: "Faith . . . as every gift of God, is properly supernatural, is an *immediate* gift of God, which *He commonly gives* in the *use of such means* as He hath ordained."⁵ Here again, Wesley's emphasis is upon God's working through the means. Although the means are ordained by God, yet their function as means is only actualized in God's working immediately through these means. Whatever means or instrument is employed, God still is active in an immediate and direct way. Thus Wesley avoids the trap of "quietistic spiritualism." At the same time he counteracts any overemphasis on the means as such. They are means only when God employs them, and we use them because he has promised to use them as channels for his grace. We find him where he has promised to meet us.

BAPTISM

By the water then, as a means, the water of baptism we are regenerated or born again; whence it is also called, by the Apostle, 'the washing of regeneration.' Our Church therefore ascribes no greater virtue to baptism than Christ himself has done.⁶

Baptism, therefore, serves the same function as the other instituted means of grace. God has so ordained that through this ordinance his grace is channeled to the baptizand according to his/her state and needs. It parallels closely the various aspects of the Lord's Supper, with the major distinction that baptism is initiatory; its function is to *commence* what the Lord's Supper (and the other means of grace as well) are basically ordained to *preserve* and *develop*: a life in faith and holiness. While the other means are used by God as converting, as well as confirming ordinances, the task of baptism is to be the starting point on the road of salvation. We are obligated to make use of baptism, to which God has tied us, although he is free to bestow his grace with or without means. "Indeed," Wesley admits, "where it [baptism] cannot be had, the case is different, but extraordinary cases do not make void a standing rule."⁷

In Wesley's doctrine and theology of the way of salvation, the doctrine of original sin is a necessary presupposition for his doctrine of grace:

This, then, is the foundation of the new birth, — the entire corruption of our nature. Hence it is, that being born in sin, we must be 'born again.' Hence every one that is born of a woman must be born of the Spirit of God.⁸

⁵*The Letters of the Rev. John Wesley, A.M., John Telford, ed. (8 vols; London: The Epworth Press, 1931), II, 46. (Letters); Works, VI, 369. The italics are mine. cf. Egil Grislie, "The Wesleyan Doctrine of the Lord's Supper." The Duke Divinity School Bulletin, vol. 28, No. 2, May 1963, 101-102.*

⁶*Works, X, 192; cf. 188, 191, 192, 193; VI, 395; Letters II. 227; N. T. Notes, John 3:5; Acts. 22:16; St. S., I, 242 n; Colin Williams, John Wesley's Theology Today (New York: Abingdon Press, 1960), 116-117; Paul S. Sanders, An Appraisal of John Wesley's Sacramentalism in the Evolution of Early American Methodism. (Unpublished Ph.D. Thesis, New York: Union Theological Seminary, 1954), 114. (Sanders).*

⁷*Works, X, 193.*

In the *Treatise on Baptism* Wesley continues in the same vein. "This plainly includes infants; for they too die; therefore they have sinned; but not by actual sin; therefore, by original; else what need have they of the death of Christ?"⁹ But at the same time Wesley adds, "But that any one will be damned for this alone, I allow not, till you show me where it is written."¹⁰ Just as the rejection of original sin would make Christ's suffering and death unnecessary and meaningless, so the doctrine of damnation merely because of imputed guilt, would seriously question the efficacy of the Atonement: Christ died for all, and all, consequently, must be effectively covered by Christ's death unless they wilfully reject its benefits. "And none every was or can be a loser but by his own choice."¹¹

By virtue of Christ's Atonement, prevenient grace is given to all people. Through the grace of God assisting him, any person has the power to choose and do good, as well as evil.¹² In his teachings on prevenient grace, Wesley actually operates with a two-fold doctrine of "invincible ignorance": one for those who do not know, who have not yet heard the gospel, namely, the heathens; and one for those who are not able to know, namely, the infants. He positively rejects the possibility of any of these being lost, if they make use of the grace they have received, according to their ability. "So that no man sins because he has not grace, but because he does not use the grace which he hath."¹³ The imputed guilt of Adam's sin is cancelled by the imputation of Christ's righteousness as soon as they are born.

Nevertheless, as Wesley sees it, baptism generally, in an *ordinary* way, is necessary to salvation, but not in the absolute sense: "I hold nothing to be (strickly speaking) necessary to salvation but the mind which was in Christ."¹⁴

It is true the second Adam has found a remedy for the disease which came upon all men by the offence of the first. But the benefit of this is to be received through the means which he hath appointed; through baptism in particular, which is the ordinary means he hath appointed for that purpose; and to which God hath tied us, though he may not have tied himself.¹⁵

⁸*Works*, VI, 66, 67, 68; cf. VIII, 277; *N. T. Notes*, Rom. 5:12.

⁹*Works*, X, 190, 193; cf. *Minutes of the Methodist Conferences* (London: Published by John Mason at the Wesleyan Conference Office, 1862), I, 464-465; (*Minutes*) John Wesley, *Explanatory Notes upon the Old Testament* (3 vols; Bristol: Printed by William Pine in Wine Street, 1765), Josh. 6:21; 1 Sam. 15:3; (*O. T. Notes*). *Works*, IX, 316.

¹⁰*Works*, VI, 240; [John Wesley?], *Thoughts upon Infant-Baptism. Extracted from a later Writer*. (Bristol: Farley, 1751), 10. (*Thoughts*)

¹¹*Works*, X, 190; cf. VI, 194, 240.

¹²*Works*, V, 109; 345; VI, 61, 512; VII, 187-188, 189, 197, 228-229; X, 229-230; *Letters*, VI, 239; *St. S.*, I, 302, 373.

¹³*Works*, VI, 512.

¹⁴*Works*, X, 198; *Letters*, III, 36.

¹⁵*Works*, X, 193; cf. 188, 198, *Letters*, 357; *N. T. Notes*, John 3:5; *St. S.*, II, 139.

The first benefit of the Atonement is, “. . . the washing away the guilt of original sin, by the application of Christ's death.” Baptism is the *ordinary* means of justification.¹⁶ The content of this justification is pardon, that is, the forgiveness of all our sins, and the being restored to God's favor, finding acceptance with him. It brings about a *relative* change; it is related to what God does *for* us through his Son, and must not be confused with sanctification and its beginning, the New Birth, which affects a *real* change and implies what God does *in* us by his Spirit.¹⁷ There is no doubt that Wesley holds a doctrine of baptismal regeneration, or new birth, of which baptism is a sign and a means: First, the new birth, by the free mercy of God, is “. . . ordinarily annexed to baptism”; and, secondly, infants are born again in baptism: “Who denies that ye were then made children of God, and heirs of the Kingdom of heaven?” Wesley goes on and speaks of “those who were made the children of God by baptism. . . .”¹⁸ At the same time he contends against confusing the outward means and the grace conveyed through that means. Wesley never questions the validity of baptism, but asserts that since “efficacy” is not a formal, but an actual matter, it may or may not follow Baptism, and the grace received may even be lost.¹⁹ The new birth can be given through other means as well: “To say, then, that ye cannot be born again, that there is no new birth but in baptism, is to seal you all under damnation, . . .”²⁰ For those who have lost the grace they received in Baptism, God has given other means, through which they may be born again, such as the Lord's Supper and Scripture, thus providing, as it were, a “second chance.”

The grace conveyed through baptism may properly be termed “objective” in that its origin is found outside the subject. It must not be considered objective, however, in the sense of being impersonal and formal only: Wesley teaches that something new is *born*, comes into being, a “principle of grace is infused,” the Holy Spirit is given, and the baptized is “mystically united to Christ”—“From which spiritual, vital union with him, proceeds the influence of his grace on those that are baptized.”²¹ The important thing is that it is *God* who does it. The new birth is a mysterious act of God which we cannot fully understand, but which is none the less real: “Nor is it an objection of any weight against this, that we cannot

¹⁶*Works*, X, 190, 191, 193, 198; *Letters*, II, 227.

¹⁷*St. S.*, I, 119, 507; II, 227, 365, 443-434, 446; *Works*, VIII, 46-47, 48, 49, etc.

¹⁸*St. S.*, I, 283, 295-297; *Letters*, IV, 38; *Works*, X, 191, 192, 193, 198.

¹⁹*St. S.*, II, 238; *N. T. Notes*, John 3:5; Acts 22:16; Eph. 5:26; 1 Pet. 3:21; *Letters*, IV, 42; *Works*, VI, 395; cf. X, 192: “Nor does she (our Church) ascribe it to the outward washing, but to the inward grace, which added thereto, makes it a sacrament.” The same distinction is found in a sermon preached as early as 1733: *St. S.*, I, 267.

²⁰*St. S.*, I, 295; cf. II, 241: “‘Has he not been baptized already? He cannot be born again now.’ Can he not be born again? Do you affirm this? Then he cannot be saved.”

²¹*Works*, X, 191.

comprehend how this work can be wrought in infants. For neither can we comprehend how it is wrought in a person of riper years."²²

Wesley, nevertheless, rejects the suggestion that infants believe, aided by the faith of others, as Luther proposed.²³ While Calvin operates with a concept of "federal holiness," that is, the children have holiness by the parents' being within the covenant, John Wesley rejects this also.²⁴ For him there is only *actual* faith and *actual* holiness. Even children are born of parents who have attained "perfection," are born in sin.²⁵ Now, at baptism, the parents and godparents promise that the infant be taught: "You do not undertake that he shall renounce the devil and serve God; this the baptizand himself undertakes. You do undertake to see that he be taught what things a Christian ought to know and believe."²⁶ From the very moment—the first dawn of reason, from the time the infant begins to speak or run alone, and as early as possible should parents begin to instil true religion in the minds of the children. The purpose of this education is to counteract the natural corruption so that the children may grow in grace:

Scripture, reason, and experience jointly testify that, inasmuch as the corruption of nature is earlier than our instructions can be, we should take all pains and care to counteract this corruption as early as possible. The bias of nature is set the wrong way; Education is designed to set it right. This, by the grace of God, is to turn the bias from self-will, pride, anger, revenge, and the love of the world, to resignation, lowliness, meekness, and the love of God.²⁷

In essence, the teaching, guidance and correction, life and relationship with truly Christian parents becomes a veritable means of grace to their children. Their example and teaching become part of the process of mortification which all Christians must pursue, by God's grace; thus enabling the children to "grow in grace" until they are capable of embracing consciously and willingly the new life in Christ: ". . . a child is born

²²St. S., II, 238.

²³See, for instance, Martin Luther, *Three Treatises* (Philadelphia: The Muhlenberg Press, [1943]), 187. *The Book of Concord*, Theodore G. Tappert, ed. (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1959), 443.

²⁴John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*. John T. McNeill, ed. (2 vols; Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1960. *Library of Christian Classics*, vols. XX-XXI), sec. IV, 16:15, 1337. Samuel Wesley, *The Pious Communicant Rightly Prepar'd: or A Discourse Concerning the Blessed Sacrament: . . .* (London: Printed for Charles Harper, at the Flower-de-luce over against St. Dunstan's Church in Fleet Street, 1700), 237.

²⁵John Wesley, *Sermons on Several Occasions* (vol. IV; First edition. Bristol: Printed by John Grabham, 1760), 258: ". . . I answer, Sin is entail'd upon me, not by my immediate, but by my First Parent. In Adam all died: By the Disobedience of One, all Men were constituted Sinners. And this Constitution involves all without Exception, who were in his Loins when he ate the Forbidden Fruit." (*Serm. on Sev. Occ.*)

²⁶*Works*, X, 508. *Letters*, VII, 271.

²⁷*Works*, XIII, 476.

of God in a short time, if not in a moment. But it is by slow degree that he afterwards grows up to the measure of the full stature of Christ."²⁸ The task of the parents is to train the children up in holiness, ". . . and fit them for the enjoyment of God in eternity"—to "habituate them to make God their end in all things; and inure them, in all they do, to aim at knowing, loving, and serving God."²⁹ Although pointing out the difficulties involved, Wesley still affirms the efficacy of Christian nurture: "Many parents . . . present see the fruit of the seed they have sown, and have the comfort of observing that their children grow in grace in the same proportion." At the same time he passes severe and harsh judgement upon parents who have failed in their obligations: "The wickedness of the children is generally owing to the fault or neglect of their parents. For it is a general, though not universal rule, though it admits of some exceptions, 'Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it.'" (Proverbs 22:6)³⁰ In his "Christian Instructions," published in 1760, Wesley writes:

ONE of the greatest Faults which parents can commit, . . . is that instead of bringing up their Children, as those that are now the Children of God, by the second Birth which they received in Baptism, they think only of giving them such an Education as is suitable for their first Birth. They take great Care of them, as they are Children of Adam, but none as they are Children of God. Thus they are Murderers of their own Children, stifling the Life of God which was begun in their Soul.³¹

Thus, growth in grace and faith comes through the slow methods of instruction, but not its first beginning: "But the seed must first be sown before it can increase at all."³² This work cannot begin too soon. Wesley refuses to limit the area of God's working salvation in men. Experience had taught him otherwise: ". . . we have known a larger number of persons, of every age and sex, from early childhood to extreme old age, who have given all the proofs which the nature of the thing admits, that they are sanctified throughout."³³ In speaking of baptism and teaching Wesley calls these "the two great branches" of the whole design of Christ's commission to disciple the world:

Disciple all nations—Make them My disciples. This includes the whole design of Christ's commission. Baptizing and teaching are the two great branches of that general design. And these were to be determined by the circumstances of things; which made it necessary in baptizing adult Jew or heathens, to teach them before they were baptized; in discipling their children, to baptize them before they were taught: as the

²⁸St. S., II, 240.

²⁹Works, VII, 79. Wesley's two sermons. "On Family Religion" (Works, VII, 76 ff.), and "On the Education of Children" (Works, VII, 86 ff.), are interesting statements of his views on Christian nurture, including some advice as to what methods to employ.

³⁰Works, VII, 77.

³¹"Christian Instructions" no. 216, *Serm. on Sev. Occ.*, 307.

³²Letters, II, 48.

³³Works, VI, 526; VII, 267.

Jewish children, in all ages, were first circumcised, and after taught to do all God had commanded them.³⁴

It is on the background of these basic views that the following statement must be understood: "Baptism doth now save us, if we live answerable thereto; if we repent, believe, and obey the gospel: Supposing this, as it admits us into the Church here, so in glory hereafter."³⁵ This passage is part of Wesley's discussion of baptism in general, and is, consequently, applicable to baptisms of infants as well as adults. The work begun in baptism must issue forth in subsequent repentance, faith and obedience, which are demands binding on all who have received God's grace, by whatever means, according to their state, abilities and circumstances.³⁶ As the children are taught and achieve the understanding of reason and use the grace they have received, they will steadily grow in grace and holiness and consciously and willingly embrace a life of holiness when they are able.

Nevertheless, it is all too evident that many who were baptized still live a life of sin instead of holiness.

Say not then in your heart, 'I *was once* baptized, therefore I am now a child of God.' Alas, that consequence will by no means hold. How many are the baptized gluttons and drunkards, the baptized liars and common swearers, the baptized railers and evilspeakers, the baptized whoremongers, thieves, extortioners? What think you? Are these now the children of God?³⁷

The grace of baptism, as all grace, may be lost. Lindström suggests that Wesley here shows a "pietistic tendency."³⁸ However, his choice of term is rather unfortunate. "Pietism" implies antisacramental tendencies,³⁹ something of which Wesley cannot be accused. Wesley's allowance that baptismal grace may be and is lost does not issue from a down-grading of Baptism and baptismal grace, but from basic Arminian position: *All* grace may be lost; it is always a possibility, although never a necessity. Regardless of a person's spiritual state, he/she may fall, even if after hav-

³⁴*N. T. Notes*, Matt. 28:19; cf. *O. T. Notes*, Deut. 11:18. Note, Wesley is silent about "being converted" here. It is only a question of "teaching" and "baptizing."

³⁵*Works*, X, 192.

³⁶See sermon on "The Repentance of Believers," *St. S.*, II, 379 ff., where Wesley describes a repentance which involves conquering evils such as pride, self-will, love of the world, etc., which are the same tendencies that must be broken by means of education and discipline in children; cf. *Works*, VII, 89f., 153-154; *Letters*, II, 45, 50.

³⁷*St. S.*, I, 295; cf. II, 241-242; *Letters*, II, 266; *Works*, VI, 512, 526; X, 249, 251, 252 f.; Sanders, 116.

³⁸Harald Lindström, *Wesley and Sanctification* (Stockholm: Nya Bokförlags Aktiebolaget, 1946), 107.

³⁹See under "Pietismus," *Die Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart*. (Dritte, völlig neu bearbeitete Auflage, 7 Bände. Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck), 1957), V, 371: "Geistliches Amt, Gottesdienst, Sakramente, Beichtinstitut, fromme Sitte wurden gleichgültig."

ing reached "perfection."⁴⁰ It is impossible that Wesley could avoid such a doctrine, since the alternatives would be either the Roman doctrine of *ex opere operato* with its concomitant "indelible mark," or a Calvinistic doctrine of "perseverance," both of which Wesley abhorred. Therefore, the principle of grace that was infused in baptism, the presence of the Holy Spirit dwelling within, ". . . will not be wholly taken away, unless we *quench* the Holy Spirit of God by long-continued wickedness."⁴¹ In other words, a person does not fall out of grace by just "grieving the Spirit," but by living in continued willful sin to the point that the Spirit departs, that the Holy Spirit is quenched. At any one level, the person who "keepeth himself" according to the grace received, whether that be the prevenient grace of the heathen who never heard the gospel, or the fulness of grace of the one who is "entirely sanctified," he is only made responsible for breaking the law of God to the extent that law is made known to him.⁴² If a baptized person sins he may receive forgiveness: "And they who in act or deed sin after their baptism, when they turn to God unfeignedly, are likewise washed by this sacrifice from their sins, in such sort that there remaineth not any spot of sin, that shall be imputed to their damnation."⁴³

Thus Wesley, would hold out the two great parts of salvation, justification and the new birth, as the major benefits conveyed in baptism. The richness of his doctrines of baptismal grace is not thereby exhausted. God grants pardon and forgiveness, and restores the baptized person to his favor. At the same time the heart is inwardly justified; an effusion of grace is given and he is born again. These represent, as it were, the objective and the subjective sides of this saving work. But Wesley refuses to halt here, knowing the danger of disjoining what God has thus joined together: emphasis on the objective would lead to Antinomianism in its various forms; while pursuance of the latter tends to quietism, mysticism and "enthusiasm," He, therefore, ties the two sides together, not in the tensions of polarity, but in the unity of relationship. First, there is a contractual relationship, expressed in forensic terms, corresponding to justification; and, secondly, an intimate personal relationship expressed in terms of union with Christ as Head and Body of the church, correspond-

⁴⁰*Works*, VI, 526; XI, 422, 426, 442, 446; *Letters*, V, 38-39. For Wesley's views on the "progress" from grace to sin, see *St. S.*, I, 307-309.

⁴¹*Works*, X, 192.

⁴²This is a consequence of Wesley's doctrine of "universal redemption." He comes close to accepting "universal salvation" as well, but avoids it by maintaining, not that all heathens are saved, but that all who live answerable to the grace they have received, will be saved. See *N. T. Notes*, Acts 10:35; *Journal*, III, 215; *Letters*, V, p. 263; *Minutes*, I, 96; *Works*, VII, 47-48, 197.

⁴³"The Doctrine of Salvation, Faith and Good Works: Extracted from the Homilies of the Church of England." (by John Wesley). Albert Outler, *John Wesley* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964), 124.

ing to the new birth.⁴⁴ Both are established and sustained by God, but the person is still left free to decide whether to remain a partner or not.

The contractual relationship is generally called "covenant," more specifically the "covenant of grace." The character of this covenant is one of mutual agreement between God and human, the latter, however, represented by the God-Man and Mediator Jesus Christ: He purchased this new covenant with his own blood, thereby satisfying the terms of the covenant which were: "Do this and live." Instead, he established a new condition: "Believe and live."⁴⁵ A covenant demands mutual responsibility and privileges. On God's part, he promises to be the God of "Abraham and all his spiritual offspring" forever; that promise includes all blessings, temporal and eternal.⁴⁶ On the person's part faith is required, which God also gives, and the inseparable *fruit* of this faith, obedience.⁴⁷ In baptism the baptizand promises to renounce the devil and all his works, and makes a solemn promise to keep all of God's commandments.⁴⁸ At the same time he partakes of the benefits of the covenant and becomes a child of God by adoption, an heir of God, and a joint-heir with Christ.⁴⁹ Of this covenant circumcision was the sign and seal, assuring God's people that God would make good on his covenant; and signifying that they were in covenant with God and obliged to fulfill its terms. Circumcision was the way of entering into this covenant, as baptism is the entering seal now: "It is the initiatory sacrament, which enters us into covenant with God."⁵⁰ Thus the covenant emerges as a legal structure or framework within which God's grace is operative in a special way. The mutual relationships are expressed in forensic terms: heir, adoption, stipulation, contract, duty, privilege, promises, and so on. Baptism is the "gate" into this covenant.

But Wesley's doctrine of baptism is not correctly understood if only being seen as entry into the covenant. For Wesley the contractual relationships of the covenant are important, but must be considered subsidiary to the personal relationship, Christ dwelling within the heart of people, the "life of God in man," or understood as love and holiness, not imputed, but actual.

"By Baptism we are admitted into the Church, and consequently made members of Christ, its head. The Jews were admitted into the Church by

⁴⁴*Works*, VII, 314: "The former is necessary to *entitle* us to heaven; the latter to *qualify* us for it, Without the righteousness of Christ we could have no *claim* to glory; without holiness we could have no *fitness* for it."

⁴⁵*Works*, VII, 230; X, 194; *St. S.*, I, 132, 133; *O. T. Notes*, Exod. 24:6; *N. T. Notes*, Mark 14:24; Hebr. 9:16, 10:15.

⁴⁶*O. T. Notes*, Exod. 37:10; Jer. 31:32; Isa. 24:5; *N. T. Notes*, Mark 14:24; *Works*, X, p. 238.

⁴⁷*Works*, X, 191, 194.

⁴⁸*St. S.*, II, 242; cf. *Letters*, III, 109-110.

⁴⁹*Works*, X, 192, 194; VIII, 73; *St. S.*, I, 296-297; *N. T. Notes*, Hebr. 9:15; Gal. 3:27.

⁵⁰*O. T. Notes*, Gen. 17:10; 21:4; Joshua 5:5, 7; *N. T. Notes*, Rom. 4:11; *Works*, X, 188, 191, 192, 194-195; *Thoughts*, 5.

circumcision, so are the Christian by baptism."⁵¹ While the covenant expresses a formal, legal, and objective relationship between two subjects, namely, God and the human being; the union with Christ and his Body, conjoined with the new birth, expresses an actual, living, and personal relationship between two subjects. It involves a two-fold union with Christ, as Body and as Head.

For 'as many as are baptized into Christ,' in his name, 'have' thereby 'put on Christ' (Gal. 3:27); that is, are mystically united to Christ, and made one with him. For 'by one Spirit we are all baptized into one body' (1 Cor. 12:13) namely, the Church, the body of Christ' (Eph. 4:12).

The person who is baptized is made a member of Christ; he is engrafted into Christ by being made a member of his Church.⁵³ This corresponds to a passage in the *Notes*, which connects this conception of the church directly with baptism: "And here is a native specimen of a New Testament Church; which is a company of men, called by the gospel, grafted into Christ by baptism, animated by love, united by all kinds of fellowship. . . .⁵⁴ Thus, although baptism admits into the visible and organizational church as well as the church as the mystical Body of Christ, nevertheless, it is possible to be a member of the former and not of the latter, because membership in the mystical Body is not a formal, but a spiritual matter. Therefore, Wesley continues, "From which spiritual, vital union with him, proceeds the influence of his grace on those that are baptized."⁵⁵ Here is the clue to the question of the continued efficacy of baptism: as long as a person is one with this root, he will draw spiritual life from it. By virtue of this union with the Body of Christ, he becomes a member of Christ as the Head of the Body, i.e, Christ is the *ruler* of his Body, and thus also of all its members. At the same time the baptized person receives a share in all the privileges and promises given to the church by Christ, as well as the formal rights according to church order, such as, for instance, access to the Lord's Table.

"The Baptism of young children is to be retained in the Church."⁵⁶ With this simple sentence from his Article on Baptism, Wesley affirms his preference for infant baptism. The last parts of his *Treatise on Baptism* and all of *Thoughts Upon Infant Baptism* are concerned with arguments supporting infant baptism. He argues on several levels; first, on the basis

⁵¹*Works*, X, 191.

⁵²*Works*, X, 191; cf. *N. T. Notes*, 1 Cor. 12:13; "For by that one Spirit, which we received in baptism, we are all united in one body."

⁵³*Works*, VIII, 73; X, 192, 195, 198; *N. T. Notes*, Acts 5:11; Rom. 6:3; 1 Cor. 1:13; *Letters*, I, 358; *O. T. Notes*, Malachi 2:10.

⁵⁴*N. T. Notes*, Acts 5:11.

⁵⁵*Works*, X, 191; cf. *N. T. Notes*, Rom. 6:3; *O. T. Notes*, Isa. 61:3.

⁵⁶Wesley's Article XVII, "Of Baptism;" cf. *St. S.*, II, 139.

of the infants' need: "Even infants must be born again; . . . And now, by the appointment of Christ, they are to be baptized; which shows they are unclean, and that there is no salvation for them, but 'by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost.'"⁵⁷ Secondly, infants ought to come to Christ, be admitted into the church and dedicated to God:

If infants ought to come to Christ, if they are capable of admission into the Church of God, and consequently, of solemn sacramental dedication to him, then they are proper subjects of baptism. But infants are capable of coming to Christ, of admission into the Church, and solemn dedication to God.⁵⁸

Thirdly, Wesley argues from apostolic practice. There are, of course, no explicit examples given in the New Testament of baptism of infants, and Wesley, therefore, is constrained to argue on the basis of probabilities: The Jews constantly baptized and circumcised all infant proselytes. It is, therefore, very likely, that the apostles did the same. Furthermore, Jesus nowhere forbids his disciples to baptize them.⁵⁹ It is also inconceivable that there were no infants in all the households that were baptized.⁶⁰ Likewise, and fourthly, support for infant baptism may also be found in the practice of the church through the ages. This is the witness of "all antiquity" as well as the later church history, and ". . . were never opposed till the last century but one, by some not very holy men in Germany [i.e., the Anabaptists]."⁶¹ But, lastly, Wesley's main argument in support of baptizing infants is based upon the continuity of the covenant of grace established with Abraham. The covenant is still the same; it is an evangelical covenant. A new seal, baptism, was set to Abraham's covenant, instead of circumcision; the seals differed, but the deed was the same.⁶² Infants were, and still are, under the gospel covenant. Consequently, they have a right to the entering seal of the covenant, "the Christian Door at Entrance, that is Baptism."⁶³ Facing the objection that, according to Scripture, repentance and faith ought to be before baptism, Wesley ventures only one rebuttal, from the parallel of circumcision and baptism: "Now, if infants were capable of being circumcised, notwithstanding that repentance and faith were to go before circumcision in grown persons, they are just as capable of being baptized; notwithstanding that repentance and faith are, in grown persons, to go before baptism."⁶⁴ This also points out the fact that Wesley believed in baptism for grown per-

⁵⁷ *Works*, X, 190, 193, 198; IX, 316, 427, 428, 438.

⁵⁸ *Works*, X, 195; cf. 198; *Thoughts*, 4; *N. T. Notes*, Matt. 19:14; Mark 10:14.

⁵⁹ *Works*, X, 196-198.

⁶⁰ *N. T. Notes*, Acts 16:15; *Thoughts*, 5.

⁶¹ *Works*, X, 197-198; *Thoughts*, 10.

⁶² *Works*, X, 188, 191, 192, 194-195, 196, 197, 199, 201, 240; *O. T. Notes*, Gen. 17:10; *N. T. Notes*, Col. 2:11-12; Phil. 3:2-3; *Thoughts*, 3-4; *St. S.*, I, p. 295.

⁶³ *Works*, X, 194; *Thoughts*, 5.

⁶⁴ *Works*, X, 199; *Thoughts*, 7-10.

sons as well. For the penitent adult it could also be a veritable means of grace.⁶⁵ However, a further discussion of that part of Wesley's doctrines lies outside the scope of this study.

In sum, Wesley fully approves of infant baptism, through which, as a means, God's Holy Spirit conveys the grace of justification and the new birth. At the same time, baptism is the entrance gate into covenant with God and into the church, and, as a consequence, makes the baptized person a member of Christ's Body. The emphasis is neither on baptism as an outward rite, nor on the person to be baptized or the one who performs the baptism, but on *God's* work through this means. We are bound to make use of this sacrament and means of grace, while God is free to convey his grace with or without any means according to his own good will.

CONFIRMATION

Wesley never proposed a doctrine of confirmation. In his book of worship for American Methodism, the so-called *Sunday Service*, the Office of Confirmation was omitted. He quotes in one of his writings parts from the Office of Confirmation in the *Book of Common Prayer*,⁶⁶ but only to defend his doctrines of the Holy Spirit and assurance. On the other hand, he attacks the Roman Catholic doctrine of confirmation, calls it "an abuse" and says, "But it must be allowed, Christ did not institute Confirmation; therefore it is no sacrament at all."⁶⁷

Traditionally, the Church of England in its *Book of Common Prayer* has considered confirmation a completion of baptism, in which the person to be confirmed takes upon himself the vows which were taken at his baptism. Wesley, however, holds that this is already done at baptism of the infant: "You [that is, parents and godparents] do not undertake that he shall renounce the devil and serve God; this the baptizand himself undertakes."⁶⁸ Infants are capable of entering into covenant, and may be obliged by compacts made in their name, and receive advantage by them: ". . . it requires neither more or less perfect obedience than *you promised* in your baptism. *You then undertook* to keep the commandments of God by his help;" The promise and the vow are the child's own. It is his/her part, not theirs who carry him to baptism.⁶⁹ Thus, as Wesley saw it, and he claimed to follow the Church of England here, no ratification of the baptismal vows in a rite of confirmation was necessary. They were already binding for the child, even from the time he received baptism as an infant.

Secondly, for the Church of England, confirmation, although not considered a sacrament, nevertheless functioned as a kind of means of grace.

⁶⁵*N. T. Notes*, Acts 22:16; *Works*, VIII, 48, 52; X, p. 199.

⁶⁶*Works*, VIII, 73, 103; *Letters*, IV, 379.

⁶⁷*Works*, X, 151; cf. 117, 135-136.

⁶⁸*Works*, X, 508.

⁶⁹*Works*, VII, 154; X, 193-194, 198, 508.

Through the laying on of hands by the bishop there issued an endowment of the Holy Spirit for strength and power, although the church also teaches that the Holy Spirit is given in baptism as well.⁷⁰ For Wesley the Holy Spirit and the grace of justification and the new birth were to be received through another means of grace, such as the Lord's Supper or the Word of God, if the person had lost the grace received at baptism. If she/he, on the other hand, had kept the faith, the conscious inner assurance confirmed a state of grace *now*. For Wesley, the bestowal of the Holy Spirit was not to be *bound* to a rite given at a set time; and the strength and certainty of God's graced, were always actual, never formal.

Thirdly, confirmation was generally held to be prerequisite for partaking of the Lord's Supper. Wesley, however, never set confirmation forth as a condition for being admitted to the communion table. For him baptism sufficed for admittance. He once administered the Lord's Supper to a small girl of nine, after having conversed with her in order to be assured that she understood the meaning of the sacrament, all this after she had been refused communion at the parish church.⁷¹ And, since the Lord's Supper for Wesley also was a converting ordinance, all baptized persons who sincerely sought God's grace and were honest seekers after faith, were considered proper and fit participants of the sacrament.⁷² Later on, Wesley introduced the so-called "communion tickets" which in a practical way safe-guarded the table and imposed a certain disciplinary control with regard to those who were admitted to the Lord's Table.

Thus, the conclusion is reached, that for Wesley the Office of Confirmation was of little or no importance. This is the more remarkable since his close friend John Fletcher in a letter dated August 1, 1775, clearly recommends that Wesley take up the *Prayer Book* practice: "That the important office of confirmation shall be performed with the utmost solemnity by Mr. Wesley or by the Moderators, and that none shall be admitted to the sacrament of the Lord's Supper but such as have been confirmed or are ready to be confirmed."⁷³ Wesley never as much as mentions this suggestion, and takes no account of it when writing the *Sunday Service*, giving a clear indication of his indifferent attitude to the rite.

MEMBERSHIP

As already mentioned above in our discussion of Wesley's doctrine of baptism, for him baptism was the means which entered a person into

⁷⁰See, for instance, *N. T. Notes*, 1 Cor. 12:13: "For by that *one Spirit*, which we received in baptism, we are all united in one body."

⁷¹*The Journal of the Rev. John Wesley, A.M.*, Nehemiah Curnock, ed. (8 vol; New York: Eaton & Mains, 1909), V, 291, n. 1; cf. I, 181, n. 3; 370; III, 434. (*Journal*). *Works*, VII, 422. John C. Bowmer, *The Sacrament of the Lord's Supper in Early Methodism*. (London: Dacre Press, 1951), 103 ff. (Bowmer)

⁷²*Letters*, VI, 124; Sanders, 293; Bowmer, 106 ff.

⁷³*Journal*, VIII, 333.

membership in the Body of Christ and union with him. At the same time, the baptizand was admitted into the church as well. Nowhere is confirmation or any other rite or ceremony in addition to baptism required by Wesley for church membership.

But Wesley also operates with membership on another level, namely, membership in the Methodist societies. These, however, were conceived of as societies within the Church of England. Consequently, Wesley set only one condition for reception: "There is only one condition previously required in those who desire admission into these societies—a desire 'to flee from the wrath to come, to be saved from their sins' But wherever this is really fixed in the soul, it will be shown by its fruits."⁷⁴ Personal dedication and commitment to Christ are the only requirements: " 'Is a man a believer in Jesus Christ and is his life suitable to his profession?' are not only the *main* but the *sole* inquiries I make in order to his admission into our society."⁷⁵

Thus, Wesley actually practiced a threefold membership: reception into the church, and into the Body of Christ, both through the work of the Holy Spirit in baptism as the means, (although unbaptized adults and those who had lost their faith could also receive the latter through other means of grace such as the Lord's Supper or the Word of God). The unbaptized adult was subsequently received into the church through baptism,⁷⁶ most likely followed by membership in a Methodist society. All three conceptions are reflected in our situation today, and have definitely become a part of the problems we now are attempting to solve.

NINETEENTH CENTURY METHODISM

BAPTISM

As has already been mentioned above, Wesley published a book of worship, the *Sunday Service*, for the use of American Methodism in 1784. As early as 1786 some changes were made; by whom is not known.⁷⁷ The pioneering spirit of individual freedom, the frontier situation and the basically sectarian stance of American Methodism, even before 1784, soon expressed itself as a church which was largely non-liturgical. "One looks in vain for any extended serious treatment of the sacraments in the extant of writings of the early Methodist leaders."⁷⁸ Baptism for infants was understood as admission into the church, and incorporation into the family

⁷⁴*Works*, VIII, 270; cf. *The Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church* (Nashville: The Methodist Publishing House, 1968), 50.

⁷⁵*Letters*, IV, 297-298.

⁷⁶*Letters*, I, 358.

⁷⁷Sanders; 274, 284, "The phrase 'didst sanctify water to the mystical washing away of sin' was changed to 'didst sanctify water for this holy sacrament,'—a change evidently made to get away from any implication of baptismal regeneration."

⁷⁸Sanders, 282.

of God. Some may even have held that some kind of regeneration was effected, as a preparatory grace.⁷⁹ Nevertheless, the *Sunday Service* soon fell into disuse. In 1792 the sacramental rites, the occasional offices and the Articles of Religion were incorporated into the *Discipline*. The rest of the *Sunday Service* disappeared.⁸⁰ The changes made in 1792 were allowed to remain without alterations for some sixty years.⁸¹ As for the rite of baptism, the implications of regeneration were allowed to stand, but the pastor was free to use another formulation. The idea of baptism as incorporation into the church was, strangley enough, omitted, and it would be difficult to say what baptism really meant for Methodism at that time, only on the basis of the ambiguous form of 1792.

An English theologian, Richard Watson, published in 1823 his two-volume *Theological Institutes*. It is generally held that this work exercised a great influence on early 19th-century American Methodism. Wheeler flatly states, "The Wesleyan view of the grace bestowed in baptism has been clearly stated by Richard Watson. . . ."⁸³ Watson holds that for the adult believer baptism means admission into the covenant of grace and the church of Christ. It is a seal and pledge on God's part, and the baptizand takes upon himself the obligations of faith and obedience.

To the infant child, it is a visible reception into the same covenant and Church, — a pledge of acceptance through Christ, — the bestowment of a title to all the grace of the covenant as circumstances may require, and as the mind of the child may be capable, or made capable, of receiving it; and as may be sought in future life by prayer, when the period of reason and moral choice shall arrive. It conveys also the present 'blessing' of Christ. . . , which blessing cannot be merely nominal, but must be substantial and efficacious. It secures too the gift of the Holy Spirit . . . by which the actual regeneration of those children who die in infancy is effected; and which are a *seed of life* in those who are spared, to prepare them for instruction in the word of God, . . . to incline their will and affections to good, and to begin and maintain in them the war against inward and outward evil, so that they may be Divinely assisted, as reasons strengthens, to make their calling and election sure.⁸⁴

Although Watson rejects baptismal regeneration,⁸⁵ and clearly puts the emphasis upon the covenantal, i.e., the forensic, relationship of justification, finding forgiveness and favor with God, he still holds that

⁷⁹Sanders, 286.

⁸⁰See Sanders, 248 ff. for a survey of this development.

⁸¹Sanders, 390. The first major revision of the Ritual was made in the South in 1854, in the North in 1864.

⁸²Sanders, 393, 397.

⁸³Sanders, 402 ff. Henry Wheeler, *History and Exposition of the Twenty-five Articles of Religion of the Methodist Episcopal Church*. (New York: The Methodist Book Concern, 1924. Reprint.), 303-304. (Wheeler).

⁸⁴Richard Watson, *Theological Institutes* (2 vols; New York: Published by T. Mason and G. Lane, 1836), II, 646.

⁸⁵Sanders, 403, n. 27.

the infant receives the Holy Spirit. An actual regeneration is effected for those who die in infancy, but not for those "who are spared." The latter have a "seed of life" implanted, but Watson shies away from calling this "regeneration." Actually, since "regeneration" is effectuated upon the death of the infant, and not at her/his baptism, Watson must be using this concept in a different sense that Wesley did. For Wesley regeneration was synonymous with the new birth, which again was seen as a beginning of the new life and personal relationship with Christ, which also meant the bestowal of the Holy Spirit. The subsequent process of spiritual growth Wesley calls "sanctification," whether seen as leading the child on toward a *conscious* acceptance of the life of faith when reaching the age of discretion, or the ensuing process of "going on to perfection." Watson seems to be using "regeneration" in about the same way Wesley uses the concept of "sanctification," or at least as something which is postponed to the time of a conscious conversion experience later in life. Watson does not use the idea of the new birth in connection with baptism, but prefers to speak of "the gift of the Spirit," and "a seed of life." But what else can this be if not the new birth? Where the spirit of God is, there is true spiritual life. The *seed* is something living, a new life, with the capacity of growing to the point of later becoming a conscious faith as well. Watson's views, then, may be seen as basically expressing 1) justification and entrance into a covenantal relationship as the essential benefits of Baptism; 2) the Holy Spirit is secured, and gives immediate "regeneration" to the child who dies in infancy at the point of death, not at the point of baptism, — but not to the child who grows up; 3) for him regeneration is postponed to the age of discretion, at which time ". . . they may be Divinely assisted, as reason strengthens, to make their calling and election sure." Watson does give a much richer content as regards the benefits received at baptism than later Methodism does. But he has nevertheless weakened Wesley's doctrines to some extent, showing an ambiguity which subsequently led to a further weakening of the doctrine of baptism, as understood by the Methodist Church. Sanders sums up the attitudes of Methodism up to the bisection of the church in 1844-1845 in this way,

The Articles, Wesley's position. . . , the baptismal hymns and theological works such as Watson's *Institutes* all viewed the sacrament as induction into the corporate body of the church, and as both representative and exhibitory of the covenant character of the Christian Gospel. Baptism stands witness to the free grace of God and furnishes a means of incorporation into the covenant fellowship where redemption through grace is normally to be found. Since children are included within the covenant, the Baptism of infants was vigorously defended. It further binds those who are baptized to trust in Christ alone for salvation and to the moral effort of obedience to God's will. In the sacrament there is a spiritual transaction whereby a persons' status vis-à-vis the "realm of redemption" is changed; to view this in terms of mechanical efficacy was termed "excess," but to depreciate this spiritual reality was no less vigorously termed "defect."⁸⁶

Even after the division of the church was a fact, the doctrinal development within the Methodist Episcopal Church as regards baptism continued along the same lines. The idea of regeneration had, by and large, disappeared. Still, it was held that baptism by no means was just an empty sign. To that extent the church followed Wesley's Articles of Religion. But the emphasis lay somewhere else, namely, on the covenantal relationship and induction into membership. A treatment of the problem of church government printed at the Office of the *Christian Advocate* in 1852 clearly states, "The sacrament of baptism is admitted . . . to be the regular door of entrance into the church."⁸⁷ The Catechism of the Methodist Episcopal Church, first approved in 1852, exhibits the same tendencies,

71. What is the inward grace signified in baptism? A death unto sin and a new birth unto righteousness.
72. What advantages are secured to baptized persons? They are admitted to the visible Church of Christ; their relation to him as the Mediator of the new covenant, and their title to the spiritual blessings thereto belonging, are solemnly confirmed.⁸⁸

This Catechism appeared in three versions, with increasing degree of difficulty and comprehensiveness according to the age and abilities of the children. *Catechism* No. 3 contains the same questions and answers as do the other two, but has in addition a section of "Explanatory and Practical Questions," and some definitions. Some of these questions are,

- Q. What is meant by an inward spiritual grace?
 A. Some favor given us, whereby the state of our souls is made better.
- Q. What is the water used in baptism designed to represent?
 A. The blood of Christ, by which he washes us from our sins.
- Q. What obligations were laid upon you in Christian baptism?
 A. My baptism obliges me to renounce the devil and all his works, the pomp and vanity of this wicked world, and all the sinful lusts of the flesh; also to believe the whole faith of the gospel, and to keep God's holy will and commandments, walking in the same all the days of my life.
- Q. Ought not children to be carefully instructed in the nature and obligations of the baptismal covenant?
 A. They ought; and as soon as they are capable, they ought to assume its pledges as their own.
- Q. Will Christian baptism of itself save souls?
 A. It will not; unless we indeed become new creatures in Christ, and are created in him unto good works, we shall forfeit the benefits secured to us by baptism.

⁸⁶Sanders, 422-423. Sanders' assessment of Wesley in this connection does not agree with the facts of the case, as shown in the previous discussion of Wesley's views. Wesley definitely held a doctrine of baptismal regeneration.

⁸⁷M. M. Henkle, *Analysis of the Principles of Church Government; Particularly That of the Methodist Episcopal Church* (Nashville: Printed in the Office of the *Christian Advocate*, 1852), 47.

⁸⁸*Catechism of the Methodist Episcopal Church* (New York: Hunt & Eaton, 1890), No. 2, 33-34. (*Catechism*).

Q. Have we reason, then, to be grateful for this rite and ordinance of our holy religion?

A. We should indeed be grateful for it as a divinely appointed means of enabling us to work out our salvation, and to lay hold on eternal life.⁸⁹

Here all traces of any doctrine of baptismal regeneration has completely disappeared. The "inward grace" of baptism is no longer defined as "new birth" or "regeneration" or the gift of the Holy Spirit. A death unto sin and a new birth are *signified* (i.e., indicated), and not effectuated. The baptized person is admitted into the "visible Church of Christ," but nothing is said about become a member of the Body of Christ or entering into union with him. The covenantal relationship to Christ is confirmed, as is the right to the spiritual blessings of that covenant. But the relationship with Christ is here only seen as the forensically understood contractual relationship, and not as the living relationship of one who is born of God. The blood of Christ is spoken of only in terms of procuring salvation. Nothing is said about its appropriation or application. Even those who advocate baptismal regeneration do not claim that baptism *of itself* saves any souls. Wesley would also reject such an *ex opere operato* function of baptism. But he would assert that God, through the Holy Spirit, uses baptism as a means to effectuate justification and the beginning of the new life with God, a life which then is to develop and grow into full and responsible maturity. Wesley would hold that through the means of baptism the infant has become a "new creature in Christ." All this has disappeared from the teachings of the Methodist Episcopal Church by the time this Catechism was published. Thus, as early as some sixty years after the death of Wesley, the Methodist Episcopal Church had adopted a doctrine of baptism quite different from that of Wesley and the *Sunday Service*.

CHURCH MEMBERSHIP

For some seventy to eighty years American Methodism was without any form that would correspond to the Office of Confirmation. It was not until 1864 that the Methodist Episcopal Church introduced a membership rite. The Methodist Episcopal Church, South, did the same in 1870.⁹⁰ Wesley's only condition for membership in the Methodist societies was "a desire to flee from the wrath to come and to be saved from their sins." In spite of that, conversion was often considered a precondition for admission into Methodism in the United States. The ambiguity of the church at that time, is shown, on the one hand, by the fact that the Wesleyan view of baptism was never officially disclaimed, and, on the other hand, that not every person baptized by a Methodist preacher was considered a member of a Methodist church. Infant baptism was vigorously defended,

⁸⁹Catechism, No. 3, 48-50. The word "signifying" is defined as "indicating."

⁹⁰Sanders, 291.

and the baptized children seen as in some sense having a relationship to a Methodist church. Great care was taken in making provisions for Christian instruction for them. But, in order to become a full member, they had to use another way.

Whether a "seeker after faith," or a person raised within the church family, she/he first had to go through a period of probation, i.e., a period of two, and later, six months, during which the person on trial met regularly with a class leader. The class leader then recommended the probationer to the minister, who accepted the person as member, and gave her/him a ticket, renewable quarterly, which admitted her/him to the Lord's Supper, the class meeting and the Love Feast. Thus, being given a ticket was, in fact, admission into the church. This membership, however, was not permanent. The preacher regularly checked the rolls and those who did not live up to their profession were excluded. In a sense, a Methodist was always on probation.⁹¹

Slowly the societal character of Methodism changed to that of a church. In *practice*, baptism, although formally a precondition for membership, was no longer considered the gate to the church. Instead a formal membership rite was developed. In some way, the baptized child belonged to the church family, but could only become a full member by being received through this membership rite.⁹²

CONFIRMATION

The Methodist Episcopal Church and Methodist Episcopal Church, South in this period did not have confirmation or any comparable rite, whether in the sense of confirming the baptismal covenant or as a precondition for partaking of the Lord's Supper.⁹³

Thus, Wesley fully approves infant baptism. It is a means of grace through which the grace of justification and the new birth is conveyed. Baptism is the entrance gate into covenant with God and makes the baptizand a member of Christ's Body, It is a means through which God works. Confirmation, although an important rite in the Church of England, was of little or no importance to Wesley. His conception of membership was threefold: membership in the Church (of England); membership in the Body of Christ through the work of the Holy Spirit in the means of grace especially baptism; and membership in the Methodist society.

During the 19th century the church in America gradually lost Wesley's doctrine of baptismal regeneration and adopted a doctrine of baptism quite different from that of Wesley and the *Sunday Service*. A consistent

⁹¹Sanders, 415-416.

⁹²Sanders, 419. See also M. Lawrence Snow, "Confirmation and the Methodist Church." *The Versicle* (vol. XIII, No. 4, 1963, Reprint), 2.

⁹³Sanders, 419.

vagueness and lack of clear membership rites also characterized the church. Definite membership rites were introduced as late as 1864 (The Methodist Episcopal Church) and 1870 (The Methodist Episcopal Church, South). Up to that time the granting of a "ticket" to the probationer actually served as an "admission" into the church. Baptism was no longer seen as the gate to the church, although formally remaining a precondition for membership. Reception through a formal membership rite became the established practice and rule.

No confirmation rite was developed during this period.

It would, of course, be of some interest to carry our survey into the 20th century. This will be done in an article in the next issue of *Methodist History*, together with a discussion how these doctrines and practices developed within continental European Methodism.

(To be continued)