

**TWO IMPORTANT LEGACIES OF THE
CHURCH OF ENGLAND TO JOHN WESLEY:
ANGLICANISM'S HOMILIES AND
ITS ARTICLES OF RELIGION**

CHARLES YRIGOYEN, JR.

In his valuable 1970 book *John Wesley and the Church of England* the master Methodist historian Frank Baker (1910-1999) quoted John Wesley's father Samuel Wesley's advice to his son: "The [Anglican] *Homilies* should be often and carefully read"¹ These Homilies, or sermons, were originally prepared and published for disaffected and unlearned Anglican clergy to be read to their congregations. They were intended as a means for teaching congregants the marrow of Anglican doctrine and encouraging them to practice committed Christian living.

As a result of actions of the Convocation of 1542 the Church of England developed two *Books of Homilies*. The first, published in 1562, was largely the work of Anglican Archbishop of Canterbury Thomas Cranmer (1489–1556), and contained the following Homilies:

A Fruitful Exhortation to the Reading of Holy Scripture (two parts);
Of the Misery of all Mankind (two parts);
Of the Salvation of all Mankind (two parts);
Of the True and Lively Faith (two parts);
Of Good Works (three parts);
Of Christian Love and Charity (two parts);
Against Swearing and Perjury (two parts);
Of the Declining [Falling] from God (two parts);
An Exhortation Against the Fear of Death (three parts);
An Exhortation to Obedience (three parts);
Against Whoredom and Adultery (three parts); and
Against Strife and Contention (three parts).²

A second *Book of Homilies* with 21 general entries was published in 1571 and was prepared by John Jewel (1523–1571), Edmund Grindal (1519?–

¹Frank Baker, *John Wesley and the Church of England* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1970), 16.

²*Certain Sermons or Homilies Appointed to be Read in Churches in the times of Queen Elizabeth of famous memory*, ed. John Griffiths (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1938). This edition of the Homilies, is edited by Griffiths (1806–1885), who was also Warden of Wadham College Oxford and Keeper of the Archives, has a listing of Scriptural passages and other notes which are helpful to the reader. The title of each of the Homilies in both first and second books has been shortened. Readers may wish to consult them for the original and more lengthy title.

1583) and Matthew Parker (1504–1575). Grindal and Parker served terms as Archbishops of Canterbury; Jewel was Bishop of Salisbury and is credited with an effective ministry and building the library at Salisbury Cathedral. The second *Book of Homilies*, larger than the first, included these sermons:

Admonition to all Ministers Ecclesiastical;
 Of the Right Use of the Church (two parts);
 Against [the] Peril of Idolatry (three parts);
 For Repairing and Keeping Clean and Comely Adorning of
 Churches (two parts);
 Of Good Works; and first of Fasting;
 Against Gluttony and Drunkenness;
 Against Excess of Apparel;
 An Homily on Prayer (two parts);
 Of the Place and Time of Prayer;
 Of Common Prayer and Sacraments;
 An Information for them that take Offence at Certain Places of the
 Holy Scriptures (two parts);
 Of Almsdeeds (three parts);
 Of the Nativity and Birth of our Savior Jesus Christ;
 Of the Passion, Good Friday concerning the Death and passion of
 our Savior Jesus Christ (two parts);
 Of the Resurrection, for Easter Day;
 Of the Receiving of the Sacrament (two parts);
 An Homily concerning the Coming Down of the Holy Ghost, for
 Whitsunday (two parts);
 An Homily for the Days of Rogation Week (four parts);
 Of the State of Matrimony;
 Against Idleness;
 Of Repentance and True Reconciliation unto God (three parts);
 An Homily against Disobedience and Wilful Rebellion (six parts);
 and
 A thanksgiving for the suppression of the last Rebellion:

There are at least two principal comments in the literature which demonstrate John Wesley's high regard for the Homilies. The first includes his own comments on the important substance of the Homilies.³ The second is his publication of *The Doctrine of Salvation, Faith, and Good Works, Extracted from the Homilies of the Church of England* (Oxford: n. p., 1738) in which he incorporated the first five homilies penned by Thomas Cranmer in the 1571 *Book of Homilies*.⁴ Given his high opinion of the Homilies, when

³ *Certain Sermons or Homilies Appointed to be Read in Churches in the Time of the Late Queen Elizabeth . . .* in the bibliography of Albert Outler, ed., *The Works of John Wesley, Sermons* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1987) Vol. 4:586.

⁴ Randy L. Maddox, ed., *Doctrinal and Controversial Treatises I, The Works of John Wesley* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2012) Vol. 12:27–43.

he was contemplating providing his Methodist followers, did Wesley decide to provide them with a set of sermons, one of the four Doctrinal Standards of The United Methodist Church, and akin to the style of the Homilies, which would contain the essence his teaching and a pattern for their beliefs and lifestyle? Although tempting to believe this to be his plan, he does not state this as his purpose. If true, it is another influential legacy from his Anglican upbringing. Apparently Charles Wesley, John's younger brother and partner in the Methodist movement, as a faithful Anglican, seemed to have shared his brother's high estimation of the Homilies.⁵

The second legacy mentioned here affirmed by John Wesley are the Thirty-nine Articles of Religion, a set of official doctrinal statements designed to define principal theological positions held by the Church of England. Earlier versions of these Articles were sets of Ten Articles (1536), Six Articles (1539), and Forty-Two Articles (1553). The Thirty-Nine Articles with slight change were decided by Convocation and published in 1563 as summaries of Anglican interpretations of critical theological themes.⁶

In 1784 John Wesley allowed Methodists in the newly formed United States to organize their own church, which they called the Methodist Episcopal Church. He sent them a published worship book entitled *The Sunday Service of the Methodists in North America. With Other occasional Services*. Included in this book were Wesley's edited version of the Church of England's Thirty-Nine Articles of Religion.⁷ He expected American Methodists to use these Articles of Religion as a basis for their basic beliefs.

It must also be observed that the original Article XXXV listed the names of the Homilies from the second Book "from the time of King Edward VI" which were "to be read in Churches by the Ministers, diligently and distinctly, that they may be understood [*sic*] of the people" thus demonstrating the close relationship, at least in Charles Wesley's mind between the Homilies and the Articles.

Notably the Articles remain a Doctrinal Standard of The United Methodist Church. My invited question is "Who pays attention to them?"

⁵ S T Kimbrough, Jr., and Kenneth G. C. Newport, eds., *The Manuscript Journal of The Reverend Charles Wesley, M.A.* (Nashville: Kingswood Books, 2008, 2007), Vol 1:104, 142, 145, 162, 217.

⁶ F. L. Cross and E. A. Livingstone, eds., "Thirty-Nine Articles," in *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1997), 1611.

⁷ Charles Yrigoyen, Jr., *Belief Matters: United Methodism's Doctrinal Standards* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2001), 71.