

Keeping Faith

An Ecumenical Commentary on the Articles of Religion
and Confession of Faith in the Wesleyan Tradition

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with Andrew Kinsey



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The Holy Spirit

Articles of Religion: Article IV: **Of the Holy Ghost**

The Holy Ghost, proceeding from the Father and the Son, is of one substance, majesty and glory with the Father and the Son, very and eternal God.

Confession of Faith: Article III: **The Holy Spirit**

We believe in the Holy Spirit who proceeds from and is one in being with the Father and the Son. He convinces the world of sin, of righteousness and of judgment. He leads men through faithful response to the gospel into the fellowship of the Church. He comforts, sustains and empowers the faithful and guides them into all truth.

Who Is the Holy Spirit?

We already determined that the Holy Spirit (sometimes referred to as the Holy Ghost) is one of the Three Persons of the Trinity and also the fullness of God's essence. The Spirit is thus "one in being with the Father and the Son," and at the same time distinct from each. The Father, Son, and Spirit are not three parts of the Trinity; each is both a distinct Person and the essence of God. This why we say that God is three in one and one in three. The unity reminds us that the Spirit, like the other two Persons of the Trinity, is God, and therefore worthy of our worship. When

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we praise, we can address our praise to the Spirit. Likewise when we pray, we can pray directly to the Spirit. The church proclaims the Holy Spirit to be God because of both Scripture and worship.

Christian doctrine helps us worship God well. Likewise, Christian worship helps us understand what we should teach. This is an ancient principle in the church, which states that the "law of praying is the law of believing," and the "law of believing is the law of praying." This principle is found in a Latin expression: *lex orandi, lex credendi*. *Lex orandi* means "the law of praying," while *lex credendi* means "the law of believing." As the Methodist theologian Geoffrey Wainwright has noted, this expression can be read in two ways; it "makes the rule of prayer a norm for belief," but it also suggests that "what must be believed governs what may and should be prayed." The result is that "worship influences doctrine and doctrine worship."¹ This principle made it necessary first for the church to confess, "we believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life, who proceeds from the Father and the Son." This was necessary because proper worship demanded it. Now the doctrine of the Holy Spirit governs how we can properly worship. If we deny the divinity of the Holy Spirit, we could neither worship well nor be true Christian disciples. This is why we pray and sing for the Spirit to illumine us. This is present in our prayer before reading Scripture, where we pray to the Spirit as Lord and say, "Lord, open our hearts and minds by the power of your Holy Spirit, that, as the Scriptures are read and your Word proclaimed, we may hear with joy what you say to us today."²

Why does proper worship require that we confess the Holy Spirit is as fully God as the Father and the Son? St. Basil the Great, who lived from 330–379 CE and helped the church craft its language to speak of God, put forth one of the central reasons. He wrote a famous treatise, called *On the Holy Spirit*, that maintained the tradition of speaking of the Holy Spirit as God against those who wanted to think of the Spirit as somehow less than God. Basil emphasized that we would not be able to offer God praise and glory properly if we did not recognize that we praise and glorify God by equating all three Persons of the Trinity. We praise and glorify God by saying, "Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit." This

1. Wainwright, *Doxology*, 218.

2. *United Methodist Hymnal*, 6.

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is an ancient expression of our prayer of praise, known as a doxology. If we fail to recognize that all three Persons refer in the same way to God while at the same time maintaining their distinctness, then we could not praise God as we should. Because the central task of our lives is to praise and glorify God, this would have dire consequences for understanding the reason for our own creaturely existence.

The Holy Spirit is the object of our worship, prayer, and praise. At the same time, the Spirit is the origin and means of our prayers. Charles Wesley's hymn of prayer to the Holy Spirit, "Come, Holy Ghost, Our Hearts Inspire," brings out this threefold reality of the Spirit's work. The Spirit receives our prayers, originates our prayers, and sustains our prayers:

Come, Holy Ghost, our hearts inspire,
let us thine influence prove;
source of the old prophetic fire,
fountain of life and love.

Come, Holy Ghost (for moved by thee
the prophets wrote and spoke),
unlock the truth, thyself the key,
unseal the sacred book.

Expand thy wings, celestial Dove,
brood o'er our nature's night;
on our disordered spirits move,
and let there now be light.

God, through the Spirit we shall know
if thou within us shine,
and sound, with all thy saints below,
the depths of love divine.³

Charles Wesley's hymn directly addresses the Holy Spirit as someone who acts. The Spirit has "divine agency," which means that what the Spirit does is what God does. God and the Spirit are one and the same. This is a key reason why the Nicene Creed also insists that the Spirit is God.

3. *United Methodist Hymnal*, 603.

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The creed states that we believe "in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life, who proceeds from the Father and the Son, who with the Father and the Son is worshiped and glorified, who has spoken through the prophets." Who can give life but God? Who can speak through the prophets? Who is worthy of worship and of being glorified? Who else is Lord? The Spirit is all these things, because the Spirit is God.

We must be careful to avoid two common errors in speaking about the Holy Spirit. The first is to deny that the Holy Spirit is God, even if this means that we think of the Spirit as a quasi-god who manifests God's power but is not fully God. The Spirit is more than just a manifestation of God's power. The second is to see the Father, the Son and the Spirit as three modes of God where God first appears in the mode of the Father, then in the mode of the Son, and finally in the mode of the Spirit. This error states that when God appears as Father, God is neither Son nor Spirit; when God appears as Son, God does not remain Father and is not yet Spirit; and when God appears as Spirit, God is no longer Father and Son. In other words, God the Father "morphs" into God the Son, who then "morphs" into the Holy Spirit. These are ancient errors that the church has always rejected.

The second error gives rise to a faulty division of history in terms of various dispensations. The first dispensation is that of the Father, and is usually thought to be the time of the Old Testament. The second is the dispensation of the Son, the time of the New Testament. The third is of the Holy Spirit and is found in modern times when both the Old and New Testament covenants are superseded by a new "spiritual" covenant that exists without the church or a community of faith. This dispensationalist form of thinking often misleads people into claiming that they can be "spiritual" without being "religious." In other words, they have no need of the church, the Scriptures, or the Christian tradition because they have a relationship with the Holy Spirit and so no longer need these things. It is wrong because it sets the Father, the Son, and the Spirit against each other. Each must "overcome" the other Persons in order for God to become God. This would make it necessary for God to be in conflict with God's self for the sake of our redemption, and it would reject most of those names for God that we mentioned in the first lesson.

What Does the Spirit Do?

The Spirit is God not only because proper worship demands that we confess the Spirit as such, but even more because Holy Scripture does. We see this most clearly in the Gospel of John where once again Jesus speaks of his "going away" from the disciples because of his impending crucifixion and then ascension. He will no longer be with the disciples in the same bodily form that he was with them in his pre-resurrection and pre-ascension life. Rather than this being a cause for alarm and sadness, he tells the disciples that it is actually to their "advantage" that he go away, for otherwise "the Counselor will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you" (John 16:7). The Counselor who is coming to them is the Holy Spirit. Then Jesus explains what the Counselor will do:

And when he comes, he will convince the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment; concerning sin, because they do not believe in me; concerning righteousness, because I go to the Father, and you will see me no more; concerning judgment, because the ruler of this world is judged. I have yet many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth; for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you. All that the Father has is mine; therefore I said that he will take what is mine and declare it to you. (John 16:8-15)⁴

The Holy Spirit reveals what the Father makes known to the Son. The Spirit can only do this because the Spirit shares the fullness of God with the Father and the Son.

The Spirit "convinces," "guides," "speaks," "declares," and "glorifies." The Spirit does these actions with specific attention to judgment, righteousness, truth, and language. The Spirit convinces us of sin and judges it in our lives. This is not for the purpose of condemnation, but to lead us into righteousness. The Holy Spirit makes the church holy by guiding us into the life of God. The Spirit "hears" the conversation between the Father and Son and manifests it in the church and the world. If we "speak" or "hear" the Word of God, it is because the Spirit makes such speaking

4. See Geoffrey Wainwright's "The Holy Spirit," 278.

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and hearing possible. This is sometimes done with ecstatic manifestations that appear unruly. At other times, all appears in good order. In fact, often when we pray, the leader begins with the statement, "The Lord be with you," to which the church responds, "And also with you." "The Lord" in this exchange refers to the "Holy Spirit," who is the "Lord" and "giver of life." This is an important exchange because it reminds us that even if everything is done in the proper order in the life of the church—even if persons presiding are properly ordained and preachers properly credentialed, and the Discipline obeyed and respected—it is still insufficient unless the Holy Spirit is present in our common life. So we invoke the Spirit's presence: "The Lord be with you." The Spirit undergirds our speech and makes it truthful. This happens when our freely expressed words and actions correspond to how God intends the world to be. The Spirit is the Spirit of truth, which means that the Spirit is also the Spirit of Jesus, who is the truth made known to the world.

Jesus and the Holy Spirit should never be separated, even though they are distinct. They are distinct in their identity. In fact, an interesting "inversion" takes place in the relationship between them. When Jesus' ministry begins, it is the Holy Spirit who inaugurates it. John the Baptist prophesies that One is coming after him who is greater than he. His greatness will be shown in that He will baptize with the Holy Spirit, whereas John only baptizes with water. Yet when Jesus meets John at the Jordan River, Jesus accepts John's baptism. This baptism is also done in the Holy Spirit; this is when the Spirit comes upon Jesus and prepares him for ministry.

Now when all the people were baptized, and when Jesus also had been baptized and was praying, the heaven was opened, and the Holy Spirit descended upon him in bodily form, as a dove, and a voice came from heaven, "Thou art my beloved Son; with thee I am well pleased." (Luke 3:21-22)

After this Jesus begins his ministry, which represents the ministry of Israel itself. For just as Israel wandered forty years in the desert and faced temptations, so Jesus wanders forty days in the wilderness and faces similar temptations. It is the Spirit who leads him during this time.

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And Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan, and was led by the Spirit for forty days in the wilderness, tempted by the devil. (Luke 4:1-2)

Although the Spirit leads Jesus in his ministry, after his Resurrection, Jesus sends the Holy Spirit upon the church so that the church can continue his ministry. This occurs at Pentecost and represents the "inversion" between them. The Spirit makes Jesus' mission possible from the incarnation through the ascension. Jesus then sends the Spirit on the church to continue his mission until he comes again.

When we discussed the ascension in lesson three, we noticed that Jesus promised to send his disciples the Holy Spirit who would help them witness to Jesus. After Jesus ascended, the disciples gathered together on the day of Pentecost, which was a Jewish festival. Scripture recounts the sending of the Spirit, who now empowers the disciples to carry on Jesus' ministry in Acts 2.

When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. And suddenly a sound came from heaven like the rush of a mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. And there appeared to them tongues as of fire, distributed and resting on each one of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance. (Acts 2:1-4)

This resulted, as the presence of the Spirit often does, in ecstatic manifestations of God's power and glory. We should not fear these ecstatic manifestations; however, the true Pentecostal miracle is never found in displays of power for their own sake. The true Pentecostal miracle is found in the common life the Holy Spirit produces.

When the Spirit came upon the disciples and they spoke in other tongues, the people who witnessed these ecstatic manifestations questioned them. Some thought the apostles were drunk. Peter gave a sermon explaining how these events were the fulfillment of prophecy from Joel that God would pour out the Holy Spirit on all flesh (Acts 2:17). In response to Peter's sermon, many people are converted. They came together and formed a common life.

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5. St. Basil, *On the F*
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had all things in common; they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need. Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having the goodwill of all the people. And day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved. (Acts 2:43-47)

So what does the Holy Spirit do? The Spirit makes possible the witness of the church by creating a common life. This common life should have a social and economic manifestation, but a unity of doctrine, ritual, and discipline also characterizes it. To resist this unity is to resist the Holy Spirit. The Spirit is the unity between Father and Son. When the Spirit constitutes the church, it will participate in this unity. As St. Basil recognized, through the Spirit "the Church is set in order." The church is constituted and ordered through the gifts of the Holy Spirit.⁵ Yves Congar, an important Catholic theologian who wrote on the Holy Spirit, made four key points about the relationship between the Spirit and the church.

1. The church is made by the Spirit.
2. The Spirit is the principle of communion.
3. The Spirit is the principle of catholicity.
4. The Spirit keeps the church apostolic.⁶

When we discuss the teachings on the church, we will return to these four points. They are known as the "four marks" of the church; it is holy, one, catholic, and apostolic.

It is the Holy Spirit who inspires Scripture and allows us to receive it as we should. Article four of our Confession of Faith explicitly states this. We turn next to Holy Scripture.

5. St. Basil, *On the Holy Spirit*, 65.

6. See vol. 2 of Congar's *I Believe in the Holy Spirit*.

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Questions for Consideration:

1. Who is the Holy Spirit?
2. What is the importance of *lex orandi, lex credendi*?
3. What are the implications of denying the divinity of the Holy Spirit?
4. How do you understand the Holy Spirit?
5. What does it mean to say that the Holy Spirit is both the object of prayer and the means of prayer?
6. What are the two common errors in speaking about the Holy Spirit?
7. What does the Holy Spirit do?
8. What are some of the key passages of Scripture that help us understand the Spirit?
9. What kind of community does the Spirit create? What are the political and economic implications of the Spirit's activity in the church?
10. What are the four key points we need to keep in mind about the relationship between the Spirit and the church?

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The Church

Confession of Faith: Article V: **The Church**

We believe the Christian Church is the community of all true believers under the Lordship of Christ. We believe it is one, holy, apostolic and catholic. It is the redemptive fellowship in which the Word of God is preached by men divinely called, and the sacraments are duly administered according to Christ's own appointment. Under the discipline of the Holy Spirit the Church exists for the maintenance of worship, the edification of believers and the redemption of the world.

Articles of Religion: Article XIII: **Of the Church**

The visible church of Christ is a congregation of faithful men in which the pure Word of God is preached, and the Sacraments duly administered according to Christ's ordinance, in all those things that of necessity are requisite to the same.

Articles of Religion: Article XXII: **Of the Rites and Ceremonies of the Church**

It is not necessary that rites and ceremonies should in all places be the same, or exactly alike; for they have always been different, and may be changed according to the diversity of countries, times and men's manners, so that nothing be ordained against God's Word. Whosoever, through his private judgment, willingly and purposely doth openly break the rites and ceremonies of the church to which he belongs, which are not repugnant to the Word of God, and are ordained and approved by common authority, ought to be rebuked openly, that others may fear to do the like, as one that offendeth against the common order of the church,

and woundeth the church. He that shall offend against such an ordinance, shall be cut off from Christ, and shall be punished with eternal damnation.

A part from our belief in the holy catholic and apostolic Church, the object of our Religion for the making of two classes, the Christian Lordship of Christ is larger than a "communitarian" church is not a community cannot occur of Christ. To more redemption the church is a community leader, a derivative of the authority it is not the

Secondly, These are the means for the church to understand Christ's Lordship, and it cannot be made by the church and keeps

and woundeth the consciences of weak brethren. Every particular church may ordain, change, or abolish rites and ceremonies so that all things may be done to edification.

A part from the three Persons of the Trinity, the only other object of our belief in the Nicene Creed is the church—"we believe in one holy catholic and apostolic church." Our Confession of Faith and Articles of Religion follow closely the Nicene Creed by also making the church an object of our confession: "We believe the Christian Church is . . ." We make two claims about the church in our confession. First, "We believe the Christian Church is the community of all true believers under the Lordship of Christ." By this confession, we recognize that the true church is larger than the United Methodist Church. All "true believers" who are a "community under the Lordship of Christ" constitute the church. The church is not a collection of individuals, but a community. True belief cannot occur without participation in such a community, but the community cannot be the church if it does not place itself under the Lordship of Christ. To be subject to a community for the sake of community is no more redemptive than to be an individual standing alone. What makes the church is not the gathering of a community, but the gathering of a community that recognizes Christ as its head. If the bishop, a charismatic leader, a democratic process, a political interest, or any other such thing is the authority under which a community gathers rather than Christ, then it is not the church.

Second, "We believe the church is one holy catholic and apostolic." These are the four marks of the church that are found in the Nicene Creed. These two confessions mutually enrich each other. We understand what it means for the church to be one, holy, catholic, and apostolic when we see the church as a true community under the Lordship of Christ. Likewise we understand what it means for the church to be a true community under Christ's Lordship when we find in it the marks of unity, holiness, catholicity, and apostolicity. The church becomes this through the Holy Spirit; it cannot become this on its own. Yves Congar stated that the church is made by the Spirit, who is the principle of communion and catholicity and keeps the church apostolic. In other words, the Spirit's work is as-

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sociated with the "four marks" of the church. The Spirit's presence makes it holy and in so doing "communicates" God's own presence to it. This "communication" produces a "communion" that makes it one. This unity exists in every time and place and thus is "catholic." But it also always connects the church to its originating mission and witness, which was and is the work of the apostles. We will examine all four marks.

Unity

The church is One because it is the body of Christ, and Christ's body cannot be divided. Jesus prayed that all his followers would be "completely one." He prayed,

As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me. The glory that you have given me I have given them, so that they may be one, as we are one. I in them and you in me, that they may become completely one, so that the world may know that you have sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me. (John 17:21-23)

The unity of Christ's disciples is essential to his mission in the world; it is the reason he sends the Spirit on the church. If we are not one, then the world may not know that the Father sent the Son to love and redeem the world. Our unity reflects the life of the Trinity in the world. Paul also admonished us to have this kind of unity when he instructed us to "let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus" (Phil 2:5). In the letter to the Ephesians, he stresses this unity:

I, therefore, the prisoner in the lord, beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all. (Eph 4:1-6)

If we are supposed to have this unity, how do we account for the scandalous fact of our divisions? After all, the church is divided among many competing churches, some of which do not recognize each other as le-

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gitimate expressions of Christianity. The history of the Wesleyan tradition has never been one of unity. First, the Church of England divided from the Roman Catholic Church. Then we broke off to form the Methodist Episcopal Church, which split over the question of slavery and then continued to divide until today we have so many different Wesleyan denominations that they are not easy to count. We have the African Methodist Episcopal Church, the United Methodist Church, the Nazarenes, the African Methodist Episcopal Church Zion, the Free Methodists, the Christian Methodist Episcopal Church, the Wesleyans, the Church of God and more. The United Methodist Church is one of the more recent additions to the Wesleyan tradition. This is just to mention some of the divisions within the Wesleyan tradition, let alone the greater Protestant and Orthodox traditions. Given the history of division and conflict within the church, do we dare confess that the church is "one"?

This raises the question, What makes the church "one"? For Roman Catholics, the unity of the church is found in the bishop of Rome. To be in the unity of the church requires communion with him. The Anglican Church has four instruments of unity: the archbishop of Canterbury; the Lambeth Conference; the Anglican Consultative Council, a permanent consultative body; and the Primates' Meeting, which is the gathering of the archbishops from all of the Anglican provinces. Both the Catholic and the Anglican Church are global; they seek to bring together into communion people from every nation on the planet. "Free" churches do not always have this same global reach. Rather than seeking that kind of unity, they seek only a local unity based on a commonly shared faith that would include doctrine and discipline. The Wesleyan tradition contains elements of both a free church and a Catholic or Anglican one. For instance, consistent with the free church tradition, we state that the unity of the church is found in "a congregation of faithful men in which the pure Word of God is preached." Here the unity of the church is found in the faithfulness of the gathered community. This could appear to be more of an "internal" source of authority, which is to say that the unity is not found in some external instrument. It is not a matter of being in communion with a bishop from Rome or Canterbury, but in participating in the faithfulness of the local church. Yet unlike Baptist or other free church bodies, we do not think that each local church has autonomy to determine for itself what consti-

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tutes that faithfulness. Thus we also state that the church's unity is found where "the Sacraments [are] duly administered according to Christ's ordinance" and where "the Word of God is preached by men divinely called, and the sacraments are duly administered according to Christ's own appointment." This constitutes an "external" instrument of unity. How do we know where the Word of God is rightly preached and the sacraments "duly administered" by persons "divinely called"? Like the Anglican and Catholics, this is a matter of being in communion with one's local bishop, who lays hands on those ordained and thus tells them to "take authority" to preach the gospel and administer the sacraments. Most Wesleyans also have a conference that sets the doctrine and discipline of the church by which we can identify what it means to be "divinely called." We trust that the Holy Spirit works through this conferencing to lead us to discern how we are to structure our common life. Conferencing finds its biblical precedence in what the early disciples did in Acts 15 when they gathered to discern how the new community was to live.

Only the General Conference speaks officially for the United Methodist Church. The bishops are supposed to "guard and preserve" the teaching of the church as it comes down to us in our doctrines and discipline. They are not allowed to innovate and teach their own idiosyncratic theology. Likewise, pastors in charge of local churches are bound by the "yoke of obedience" to teach what the doctrine and discipline of the church sets forth. They are not allowed to put forth their own individual opinions as church teaching. If they do, they violate their ordination vows. This is why we have "chargeable offenses" for violating the doctrine and discipline of the church. Ordination is a communal rite, not an individual right.

Holiness

The holiness of the church should not be confused with a claim that people in the church are always morally superior to those outside the church. We know this is not always true. The church is holy because the Holy Spirit calls it into existence, not because the people who gather are themselves naturally morally superior. Our Confession states, "Under the discipline of the Holy Spirit the church exists for the maintenance of wor-

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ship, the edification of believers and the redemption of the world." The Spirit disciplines us so that we might "maintain worship," "edify believers" and thereby "redeem the world."

Maintenance of Worship

Holiness is inseparable from the proper worship of God. The Holy Spirit disciplines the church by leading it into proper worship. This is why the sacrament of initiation into the church is baptism. It reminds us that our own efforts to be holy always fail, and we must first have our will and our intellect transformed by the Spirit's power at baptism so that we might be holy as God intends. Baptism is a mini-exodus. Just as Israel left Egypt to travel with God in the desert to the promised land, so we are called out of sinfulness to sojourn with God to that holy city God prepares for us. It is the journey that makes us holy, not the power of our own will and intellect. This holiness comes as a gift and not an accomplishment. We must participate in the gift; we must receive it and continually act on it, making it our own. No one in the church has ever thought that the water of baptism was magical, as if someone could just throw the water on another who would then be suddenly and instantly transformed. Baptism, like the Eucharist, must be received by faith for it to be efficacious.

Faith is also a gift of the Holy Spirit that makes us holy, but it is not a gift that God forces upon us. We freely receive and act upon it. We must voluntarily enter into the journey of discipleship, but faith is given to anyone who asks. Thus, unlike certain Calvinist churches in which Jesus' death on the cross is not intended for all, in the Wesleyan tradition, as the Scripture clearly states, Jesus died for all. The Wesleyan hymn "Come, Sinners, to the Gospel Feast" sets this forth nicely:

Come, sinners, to the gospel feast;
let every soul be Jesus' guest.
Ye need not one be left behind,
for God hath bid all humankind.¹

Christ's sacrifice on the cross is for everyone. God seeks to sanctify the world, and potentially every human creature, by inviting him or her to

1. *United Methodist Hymnal*, 339.

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baptism and Eucharist whereby God makes us holy by allowing us to participate in God's own life. Our holiness, then, is a participated holiness. In the Methodist tradition, it is no sin to hope that all might be saved.

Baptism and Eucharist are connected. Baptism is the initiation into Christ's body, which should only be done once. Eucharist is the repeatable feast whereby we boldly commune with God because of what Christ has done for us. For this reason, the Eucharist presupposes the transformation that occurs at baptism. To teach that people can come to the Eucharist without baptism is to deny that our holiness is a participated holiness, and to assume that we can come to Jesus without the grace of baptism. It is to fall into the Pelagian heresy of thinking we have all that we need to live into God's holiness simply by being creatures. Baptism reminds us that we do not have what we need without first following Jesus through his death and resurrection. Through baptism we receive the grace that allows us to participate in the Eucharist. Frequent participation in the Eucharist strengthens and confirms the grace offered to us at baptism, a grace that must always be received by faith. The next lesson will discuss more fully what the Wesleyan tradition believes about Baptism and the Lord's Supper. The early Wesleyans were supposed to receive the Lord's Supper frequently; it is even in their general rules. This is a crucial reason why we ordain clergy. If they do not provide frequent celebrations of the Lord's Supper, the reason for ordination makes little sense.

Edification of Believers

The Wesleyan General Rules expect Methodists to attend regularly upon the Lord's Supper. This is not to be done as a mere ritual, but so that we might receive the grace to live a life of holiness. Mr. Wesley recognized that one of the problems in the church of his day was a "formality" to religion that did not lead to a proper edification of believers. In the preface to his published sermons, he explained that his work had two purposes, the first of which was "to guard those who are just setting their faces toward heaven . . . from formality, from mere outside religion, which has almost driven heart-religion out of the world." Formality occurs when we are more concerned with the "forms" by which we worship than we are with what those forms are supposed to accomplish in our lives. In other words,

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The Methodist religion of the heart, void the law In other words forms in our these forms, gion of the heart with Although on Article XXI or herself to For this reason, willin of the church of God, and rebuked upon against the of weak brethren church to rebuke, even or bishop. a pastor, so because of that the church forms of religion of

2. Wesley

we say all the proper words and follow the correct procedures, but they have no effect. They do not make us more Christlike, more holy. Wesley sought to guard the Methodist people against such a mere formality in our worship and common life, which occurs when institutional procedures become more central than the practices that lead to holiness.

The Methodist concern against formality never led Wesley or the Methodists to reject proper forms of worship as inconsequential to the religion of the heart. Rules and correct liturgical forms were not abandoned, but they were put in their proper place. This is captured in Wesley's second stated purpose for his work: "to warn those who know the religion of the heart, the faith which worketh by love, lest at any time they make void the law through faith, and so fall back into the snare of the devil."² In other words, one error in the life of the church is to have all the proper forms in our worship, doctrine, and discipline, but nothing more than these forms, which do not *do* anything; they do not produce the "religion of the heart." A second error is to think we can have the religion of the heart without the proper forms of worship, doctrine, and discipline. Although our church recognizes a proper diversity of such forms (see Article XXII above), we also confess that no one should take it upon him or herself to alter these forms solely based on her or his private judgment. For this reason, the articles state, "Whosoever, through his private judgment, willingly and purposely doth openly break the rites and ceremonies of the church to which he belongs, which are not repugnant to the Word of God, and are ordained and approved by common authority, ought to be rebuked openly, that others may fear to do the like, as one that offendeth against the common order of the church, and woundeth the consciences of weak brethren." We Methodists find the rites and ceremonies of our church to be so important that openly breaking them should issue in a rebuke, even if that rebuke must be given to a pastor, superintendent, or bishop. The rites and ceremonies belong to the whole church. When a pastor, superintendent, or bishop changes those rites and ceremonies because of her or his individual conscience, she or he violates the trust that the church places in her or him to guard and preserve the faith. The forms of our rules, worship, and doctrine do not guarantee holiness (the religion of the heart). But the latter does not cancel out those forms. They

2. Wesley, *Works*, 1:106.

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are necessary if we are to have the proper edification of believers. What is this proper edification? It is to have our lives embody the life of blessedness or beatitude that Jesus pronounced in his Sermon on the Mount. This is what Wesley meant by the "religion of the heart," which is poverty of spirit, meekness, mourning, righteousness, mercifulness, purity of heart, peaceableness, and persecution for righteousness' sake. He did not teach that the "religion of the heart" was some inward experience of God that could only be known by an individual believer. The religion of the heart is a life lived in conformity with what Jesus pronounced as blessed in his Sermon on the Mount (Matt 5-7). The purpose of the church's discipline, doctrine, and worship is to cultivate this way of life, to "edify" believers into it. But we should never think of discipline, doctrine, and worship as a formal means to the religion of the heart that can be dispensed with once we think we have heart religion. We will return to these important themes in our ninth lesson on the Christian life.

Redemption of the World

The church is not an enclave that exists for its own sake; it is one of the forms of Christ's body, and Christ seeks to draw all people to him. Therefore the church exists for the sake of Christ's mission, which is nothing short of the redemption of the world. This is Christian hope. Lesson three discussed this in explaining the importance of Jesus' return. There we mentioned the passage of the final vision found in the book of Revelation, which stated, "And I saw no temple in the city, for its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb. And the city has no need of sun or moon to shine upon it, for the glory of God is its light, and its lamp is the Lamb. By its light shall the nations walk; and the kings of the earth shall bring their glory into it, and its gates shall never be shut by day—and there shall be no night there; they shall bring into it the glory and the honor of the nations." Christian hope is that the nations of the world will learn to "walk" by the light of Christ, a light that he shines in the Sermon on the Mount.

Catholicity

The word *catholic* means reality; it cannot be a substitution. United Methodist are our parent Anglican traditions. This created Reformed churches, Congregational worship, or discipline all United Methodist of affection, but also United Methodist catholic Church, or who confesses faith yet experienced the led to that genuine throughout the world loyalty to other individuals or nation.

Apostolic

The "apostolic" nature is a witness to Christ, and the church its basis. The most important canonical biblical apostles had accepted walked and talked the resurrection, New Testament. We affirm the church

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Catholicity

The word *catholic* means "according to the whole." The church is a global reality; it cannot be turned into an individual, regional, or national institution. United Methodism, as well as other Wesleyan churches, like our parent Anglican Church, stand in both the Catholic and Reformed traditions. This creates tensions, as well as opportunities. Unlike some Reformed churches, we do not believe in the autonomy of the congregation. Congregations cannot decide for themselves on issues of doctrine, worship, or discipline. We are a "connectional" church, which means that all United Methodist Churches are bound together not only by bonds of affection, but also by a discipline and an episcopal structure. But the United Methodist Church is not—and has never claimed to be—the catholic Church, or even the sole Wesleyan church. We are one church who confesses faith in a larger catholic Church, even though we have not yet experienced the true unity of that catholic Church. We are committed to that genuine catholicity. Our brothers and sisters are all Christians throughout the world. Our loyalty to them must come even before our loyalty to other important associations such as the family, corporation, or nation.

Apostolic

The "apostolic" nature of the church arises from the fact that the apostles' witness to Christ, especially as it comes to us through Holy Scripture, gives the church its basic form. It does this primarily through the Bible. One of the most important signs of the church's "apostolicity" is that we read the canonical biblical texts each Sunday and find in them God's Word. The apostles had access to that Word in a way different from our own. They walked and talked with Jesus both before and after his resurrection. After the resurrection, their witness became the basis for the Gospels in the New Testament. Whenever we gather as church and listen to this witness, we affirm the church's "apostolic" character.

A division does occur over whether the Scriptures alone provide the basis for the apostolic character of the church. For Catholics and Anglicans, the historic succession of bishops, supposedly from Peter un-

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til today, also provides the basis for the apostolic nature of the church. Bishops in apostolic succession lay hands on all the ordained in those two churches, giving it the form of a catholic unity dating back to Peter himself. Methodists tend to find this to be a "formality" that does not guarantee the apostolic nature of the church. We tend to side with the Orthodox Church, which finds "apostolicity" to be less a historical succession and more an eschatological reality where the witness of the apostles surrounds the church when it gathers consistent with the apostolic witness.

Questions for Consideration:

1. What are the two claims we make about the church?
2. What makes the church?
3. What are the four marks of the church?
4. How is the Holy Spirit associated with the four marks of the church?
5. What is unity in the church? How do we account for it?
6. What is holiness?
7. How does the Holy Spirit work to discipline us?
8. What does it mean to say that our holiness is a "participated holiness"?
9. How do we deny our holiness when we teach people that they can come to the Eucharist without baptism?
10. What was John Wesley's concern about the formality of religion?
11. What is the error of the religion of the heart without proper form?
12. Religion of the heart is more than an inward experience—what does this mean?
13. What does "catholic" mean?
14. What does "apostolic" mean?

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