

source for scholarly study and citation of the poetical works of John and Charles Wesley.

There is an ongoing need for the cross-referencing of materials and for adequate indexing of all publications. It may be said, however, that one is better prepared today to study the works of Charles Wesley than ever before.

For Further Reading

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Authority and the 'Wesleyan Quadrilateral'

Ted A. Campbell

'Wesleyan Quadrilateral' is a term that has been used since the early 1970s to describe the use of scripture, tradition, reason, and experience as sources and guidelines for Christian theological and moral reflection in Methodist or Wesleyan communities. The word 'quadrilateral' (without 'Wesleyan') appeared in a statement of 'Our Theological Task' adopted by the United Methodist Church (UMC) in 1972, a statement that was significantly revised in 1988.¹ Discussion of the 'Wesleyan quadrilateral' has become a focal point since 1972 for the larger discussion of theological authority in the United Methodist Church and in other Wesleyan and Methodist communities. This essay will consider the larger issue of sources of religious authority as well as particular matters related to the definition of the 'Wesleyan quadrilateral.'

Evolution of the Concept of the Wesleyan Quadrilateral

The study of the Wesleyan quadrilateral and related issues about the authority of scripture in relation to other sources and norms of theology has developed as a result of a substantial revival of Wesleyan studies since the 1960s. Prior to that time, the only substantial, critical account of the interrelated religious authorities underlying John Wesley's thought was a little-known German dissertation by Stanley Frost, whose work on *Die Autoritätslehre in den Werken John Wesleys* ('Teaching on Authority in the Works of John Wesley') was published in 1938. Frost described a variety of sources of authority in Wesley, emphasising that it was the primal authority of God that underlay all expressions of theological authority, including that of the Holy Scriptures.² It is unfortunate that Frost's work has remained unstudied, since his notion of the authority of God underlying all other grounds of authority could provide a way to integrate the various approaches that have been provided in the discussion of sources and norms of authority.

Colin Williams' influential book *John Wesley's Theology Today* (1960) offered a consideration of 'Authority and Experience' early on and divided this discussion into five subcategories that foreshadowed the development of the

'Wesleyan quadrilateral': the first two subcategories had to do with the authority of scripture, and the subsequent subcategories dealt with experience, reason, and tradition. Williams understood 'tradition' as denoting developments beyond the time of the New Testament scriptures; for example, traditions about orders of ministry and the liturgy of the church.³ Williams' categories would provide a basic framework for the discussion of the Wesleyan quadrilateral in the decades that followed.

Williams' four categories appeared in a discussion of 'The Wesleyan Concept of Authority' in a 1970 interim report of United Methodism's Theological Study Commission on Doctrine and Doctrinal Standards presented to the specially called General Conference of the newly organized denomination that met in St. Louis that year.⁴ The Commission, chaired by Prof. Albert C. Outler of Southern Methodist University, had been authorized by the denomination's uniting conference in 1968 to examine and make recommendations concerning the church's doctrinal statements, especially since the new church inherited distinct doctrinal statements from the former Evangelical United Brethren Church (EUB) and the former Methodist Church. The interim report of 1970 signalled the Commission's intention to develop a contemporary statement of faith rather than replacing the inherited statements. Its discussion of 'The Wesleyan Concept of Authority' is an entirely historical, that is, non-normative, account of John Wesley's understanding of religious authority which appeared in a sequence of sections dealing with a variety of sources for authority in the traditions of the Methodist and the EUB churches. In describing John Wesley's views, the report noted that:

In this quadrilateral of 'standards,' Scripture stands foremost without a rival. Tradition is the distillate of the formative experiences of the People of God in their wrestlings with problems of biblical interpretation. 'Experience' ('the inner witness of the Spirit') is the name for that vital transit from the objective focus of faith to its subjective center – from 'dead faith' (correct belief) to 'living faith' that justifies and saves. And reason is the referee of the terms in which all this is expressed. Any insight, therefore, that is a disclosure from Scripture, illumined by tradition, realized in experience, and confirmed by reason is as fully authoritative as men may hope for in this life.⁵

A few features stand out in this account. The final authority of scripture, consistent with John Wesley's own views, was unambiguously asserted. Also consistent with John Wesley's views was its claim that 'experience' was to be understood primarily as religious experience, 'the inner witness of the Spirit.' More problematically, however, Wesley was understood in this account as holding a notion of 'tradition' answering to the way in which Williams and

Outler had become familiar with the term in contemporary ecumenical circles, that is, as a positive indication of the work of God through the history of the Christian community, especially in the period after the New Testament. Perhaps most importantly, in this account the 'quadrilateral' was understood to be 'Wesleyan' in that it was utilized as a way of summarizing John Wesley's own views of authority in Christian communities.

By the time the notion of the quadrilateral appeared in the statement on 'Our Theological Task' adopted by the 1972 General Conference of the UMC, however, several things had changed in the description of the quadrilateral. Most importantly, the discussion of the quadrilateral in the 1972 statement was no longer couched as a discussion of John Wesley's understanding of authority, but was instead given as a discussion of 'Doctrinal Guidelines in the United Methodist Church.' The elements of the quadrilateral were not attributed to John Wesley; they appeared as guidelines for contemporary theological reflection in the church.⁶

Although members of the Theological Study Commission intended to assert the primacy of scripture among other authorities, the 1972 statement was vulnerable to the charge that it held the four elements of the quadrilateral to be equally authoritative; thus some critics claimed that the problem with the quadrilateral was that it was an 'equilateral.' A critical pair of sentences stated that "There is a primacy that goes with Scripture, as the constitutive witness to the biblical wellsprings of our faith. In practice, however, theological reflection may find its point of departure in tradition, "experience," or rational analysis."⁷ This was significantly different than 'Scripture stands foremost without a rival' in the earlier interim report. The second sentence did not strictly contradict the first; it simply claimed that a 'point of departure' could be found in the other elements of the quadrilateral besides scripture. The construction of the sentences, especially the use of the transitional 'However' ('There is a primacy that goes with Scripture . . . However . . .') lent the impression that the second sentence seriously qualified the claim to scriptural primacy in the first sentence.

The understanding of 'tradition' was significantly changed in the 1972 document. The formulation adopted in 1972 reflected the precise language of the Montreal 1963 Faith and Order statement on 'Scripture, Tradition, and Traditions,' a document that Outler himself had helped to shape,⁸ and the 1972 UMC document made explicit reference to 'contemporary Faith and Order discussions of "Tradition and Traditions." ' The 1972 statement identified three senses of 'tradition': tradition as process, tradition as reflecting the diversity (and division) of the churches, and then a 'transcendent' sense:

In a third sense, however, 'the Christian tradition' may be spoken of transcendently: as the history of that environment of grace in and by

which all Christians live, which is the continuance through time and space of God's self-giving love in Jesus Christ. It is in this transcendent sense of *tradition* that Christians, who have been isolated from one another by various barriers of schism, race and rivalries may recognize one another as Christians together.⁹

This 'transcendent' sense of tradition answered to what the Montreal Faith and Order Conference called 'Tradition', with a capital 'T', although the Montreal statement was bolder, referring to 'Tradition' in this sense as 'the Gospel itself'. 'The Christian tradition' was understood as coming both prior to, as well as subsequent to, the New Testament.

Although the definition of 'reason' in the 1972 statement remained focused on 'rational analysis', the section on 'experience' was expanded to include reference to communal as well as individual experience in addition to the distinctly Wesleyan sense of experience as the assurance of divine pardon.¹⁰ Moreover, the 1972 statement made the claim that 'In this task of reappraising and applying the gospel, theological pluralism should be recognized as a principle.' The Commission drafters seem to have understood 'theological pluralism' to denote a healthy dialogue framed by a given Christian theological inheritance, but the term 'pluralism' was to take on broader meanings in subsequent years, specifically, when it came to be associated with inter-religious dialogue and with forms of conceptual relativism associated with postmodern culture from the 1980s.

The 1972 statement was adopted by an overwhelming majority of the UMC General Conference of that year, and the idea of the 'Wesleyan quadrilateral' came to be understood as a distinctly Wesleyan and Methodist contribution to Christian thought, often attributed in popular church culture to John Wesley himself, perhaps reflecting the suggestion made by Colin Williams and the 1970 draft statement. The quadrilateral became a staple of United Methodist theological work. Dennis M. Campbell, for example, utilized it in 1982 as a framework for the investigation of Christian approaches to professional ethics.¹¹

By the early 1980s, however, the statement of 'Our Theological Task', and its assertion of the quadrilateral, in particular, had come under fire from many, especially conservatives, within the UMC. Jerry L. Walls wrote on *The Problem of Pluralism* in 1986.¹² Ted A. Campbell questioned whether the quadrilateral as formulated in the UMC could be attributed directly to John Wesley,¹³ and others expressed growing unease with the weakness of the statement's claims about biblical authority. The 1984 UMC General Conference authorized a new Theological Study Commission to consider revising the earlier statement, and the denomination's 1988 General Conference adopted a revised statement offered by the Commission.

When it was adopted in 1988, the primary significance of the revised statement was understood to be its clear assertion of the primacy of scripture among the elements of the quadrilateral. The first sentence under the topic of scripture in the revised statement claims that 'United Methodists share with other Christians the conviction that Scripture is the primary source and criterion for Christian doctrine.'¹⁴ The section on the quadrilateral concludes with a statement that 'In theological reflection, the resources of tradition, experience, and reason are integral to our study of Scripture without displacing Scripture's primacy for faith and practice.'¹⁵

The 1988 document also made other important revisions that have not been as widely acknowledged. It removed references in the earlier document that claimed that historic UM doctrinal statements should not 'be construed literally and juridically.'¹⁶ This statement appeared to contradict the restrictive rules of the denomination's constitution, which maintain a legally ('juridically') protected status for the Articles of Religion, the General Rules, and the Confession of Faith. This would bear on the issue of the scope or intent of doctrinal change intended by the quadrilateral and the statement of 'Our Theological Task.' Moreover, the 1988 statement made an important distinction between 'theology' and 'doctrine', where the latter represents the church's consistent teachings and the former ('theology') can denote ongoing attempts at the application of theological insights to new situations and reappropriating the insights affirmed in communally sanctioned doctrinal standards.¹⁷

Moreover, the 1988 revision significantly altered the statement on tradition in the document, removing the references to the 'transcendent' meaning of tradition that had come from the Montreal Faith and Order statement of 1963. This left the 1988 statement with a sense of tradition more as an appendage to the Christian faith, referring to material subsequent to scripture, and without the very strong sense of Montreal 1963 or of the earlier 1972 statement about the 'transcendent' meaning of tradition. To be fair, the preface to the UM doctrinal standards in the 1988 *Book of Discipline* (and subsequent *Disciplines*) does refer to 'the apostolic witness to Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord, which is the source and measure of all valid Christian teaching.'¹⁸ This claim suggests the transcendent meaning of 'tradition' as it had been expressed earlier, because the core meaning of 'Tradition (capital T)' was 'the apostolic witness to Jesus Christ.' But in the revised UM doctrinal statement, it was detached from the category of 'tradition.'

Discussion of the Wesleyan quadrilateral and related issues of authority has not abated since the 1988 revision. William J. Abraham has argued that the quadrilateral offers only a methodology for theological reflection, but not a means of affirming the substance of historical doctrinal claims.¹⁹ Others have cautiously advocated positive approaches to affirming the Wesleyan

quadrilateral. Wesleyan evangelical theologian Donald Thorsen has explored the quadrilateral as a resource for evangelical Christians, especially for those of the Wesleyan-Holiness tradition.²⁰ W. Stephen Gunter and a group of United Methodist scholars, including Ted A. Campbell, Rebekah L. Miles, Scott J. Jones, and Randy L. Maddox have explored the relevance of the quadrilateral for theological renewal in the United Methodist Church.²¹

The UMC statement of the Wesleyan quadrilateral has also influenced other Methodist churches and the World Methodist Council. A similar, though briefer, statement, including a reference to the role of tradition, experience, and reason in the interpretation of scripture, was adopted by the Methodist Church in India in the 1970s or earlier 1980s.²² The basic idea was also expressed in the statement of 'Wesleyan Essentials of Christian Faith' adopted by the World Methodist Council in 1996: 'Methodists acknowledge that scriptural reflection is influenced by the processes of reason, tradition and experience, while aware that Scripture is the primary source and criteria of Christian doctrine.'²³

Issues Associated with the Wesleyan Quadrilateral

We now turn to a consideration of some particular issues related to the Wesleyan quadrilateral and the broader issues of authority in Wesleyan and Methodist churches.

The first issue is simply the historical question of whether, or in what sense, John Wesley could be considered the author or originator of the so-called Wesleyan quadrilateral. There are some grounds in Wesley's writings for such a claim. Two passages in Wesley's works, in particular, should be considered. (1) Wesley's doctrinal treatise on 'Original Sin' (1756) was formally titled 'The Doctrine of Original Sin, according to Scripture, Reason, and Experience.'²⁴ (2) The preface to the first collected edition of Wesley's works (1771) has the following statement: 'So that in this edition I present to serious and candid men my last and maturest thoughts, agreeable, I hope, to Scripture, reason, and Christian antiquity.'²⁵ If one were to place these two statements together, and made the further assumption that 'Christian antiquity' was understood to be an element of Christian 'tradition,' then one might be able at least to interpolate a 'quadrilateral' of authorities named by Wesley. Albert Outler made just such an interpolation in claiming that the quadrilateral was derived from John Wesley.²⁶

But the assumption that Wesley himself understood 'Christian antiquity' to be an element of 'tradition' is highly problematic because, in the first place, the term 'tradition' was a negatively weighted term in Wesley's culture, and he himself did not utilize the term in the positive sense in which it is used in describing the 'Wesleyan' quadrilateral. Furthermore, regardless of how

the term 'tradition' was utilized by Wesley, there does not seem to be a corresponding concept in his thought that would designate the continuity of God's work through the history of Christian communities. As Outler himself pointed out, Protestants had come to a renewed and positive sense of Christian tradition only in the 1950s and 1960s,²⁷ and it is not appropriate to expect such a concept in the thought of Wesley. For this reason, Scott J. Jones proposed that we might think of a group of five authorities in Wesley's work, including scripture, the early Church ('Christian antiquity'), the Church of England, and then reason and experience.²⁸ But even here, one could not claim that Wesley himself saw these five sources of authority as somehow linked together as a systematic means of evaluating theological claims. Perhaps it would be better to claim that the Wesleyan quadrilateral is a fruitful contemporary means of evaluating theological and moral claims, grounded in both the Wesleyan inheritance and in ecumenical insights such as the renewed sense of 'tradition' that has prevailed since the 1950s and 1960s.

A second issue in the discussion of the Wesleyan quadrilateral has been the issue of the authority of scripture. As indicated above, the 1988 revision of the UMC statement about the quadrilateral made clear the primary authority of the scriptures and in doing so better accounted for the status of scripture in historic doctrinal standards including the Articles of Religion inherited from the Methodist Church and the Confession of Faith inherited from the Evangelical United Brethren Church. This revision also made clear that the internal authority of the scripture is grounded in their conveyance of 'the apostolic faith,' the gospel message that lies at the core of Christian belief.

The issue of biblical authority in relation to other authorities was examined critically by Scott J. Jones in his study of *John Wesley's Conception and Use of Scripture* (1995). Jones showed that John Wesley shared a common conviction from the culture of the Reformation according to which there is a central core or meaning of scripture as a whole, typically described as the 'analogy of faith' (Romans 12:6). Based on Wesley's comment on this passage in the *Explanatory Notes upon the New Testament* and other documents, Jones showed that Wesley held 'the analogy of faith' (and thus the central meaning of scripture as a whole) to lie in a core of beliefs about the 'way of salvation': Wesley's own definition of the 'analogy of faith' was 'the general tenor of . . . the scriptures, . . . that grand scheme of doctrine which is delivered [in the scriptures], touching original sin, justification by faith, and present, inward salvation.'²⁹ Jones thus exposed a critical element in understanding Wesley's view of biblical authority that had been overlooked in earlier scholarship: he showed that the 'analogy of faith' functioned for Wesley as a norm within scripture that should guide the proper understanding of scripture as a whole.

Building on Jones' discovery of Wesley's understanding of this central

norm within scripture, we might observe that, unlike other Protestant theologians, Wesley defined the 'analogy' of faith almost entirely with reference to the believer's appropriation of the work of Christ, specifically, in conviction of sin, justification, and sanctification. That is to say, Wesley's definition focuses on what has been called the *fides qua creditur*, the 'faith by which [something] is believed.' Other Protestant theologians defined the 'analogy of faith' with reference to the objective facts of Christ's work on behalf of humankind, that is to say, the *fides quae creditur*, the 'faith that is believed.' Thus the Reformed theologian Guillaume du Buc (Bucanus) of Lausanne defined the 'analogy of faith' as 'the constant and unchanging sense of Scripture expounded in open [or clear] passages of Scripture and agreeing with the Apostles' Creed, the Decalogue, and the Lord's Prayer.'³⁰ In this sense, the 'analogy of faith' denotes what in the patristic tradition had been called the 'rule of faith' involving the narrative of Christ's work embedded in the ancient creeds, which continued to norm the church's understanding of the scriptures. We might say, then, that Wesley's understanding of the central meaning of scripture needs to be balanced by an ecumenical perspective that emphasizes the objective work of Christ in addition to a believer's appropriation of the work of Christ. This would comport well with the claim in the 1972 version of the quadrilateral that the 'transcendent' sense of Christian tradition involves the Gospel itself, or the repeated claims of the 1988 revision of the quadrilateral statement that the 'apostolic faith' underlies the scriptures and is the internal ground of the scripture's meaning.

These considerations lead us to a third issue related to the Wesleyan quadrilateral, and that has to do with the use of 'tradition' as a source and norm for authority. As we have seen above, the term 'tradition' and the conceptions of tradition used in the Wesleyan quadrilateral cannot be claimed as a direct inheritance from John Wesley or earlier strands of Wesleyan doctrine or theology. It was a central contribution of the Faith and Order work of the 1950s and 1960s in which Albert C. Outler was centrally involved. It was natural for Outler as well as Colin Williams (also a participant in Faith and Order dialogues) to see Wesley's appeals to 'Christian antiquity' and to the Church of England as presaging this twentieth-century ecumenical reappropriation of Christian tradition. One can even make the case that in some ways John Wesley appealed positively to medieval precedents for Methodist work such as the Dominican use of lay preachers or his concern for the poor as bearing the image of Christ.³¹ But whatever Wesleyan precedents might be claimed for it, the conception of tradition that appears in the quadrilateral should be fairly represented as a twentieth-century development, and in this respect it may be important to recognize that neither the 1972 nor the 1988 version of the statement on 'Our Theological Task' attributed the quadrilateral or its conception of tradition directly to John Wesley.

As indicated above, a critical transition occurred in the understandings of tradition expressed between the 1972 and 1988 versions of the Wesleyan quadrilateral. The 1972 version called directly upon the Montreal 1963 definition of 'tradition' as encompassing 'the Gospel itself,' which precedes scripture and which, as the heart of 'the apostolic faith,' norms the meaning of the scriptures. This sense of tradition is far less clear in the 1988 revision, which on the whole views tradition as embracing positively valued material from the history of the Christian community subsequent to the time of the New Testament. Neither of these senses of tradition could be justified by appeal to Wesley, but a case can be made that the 'transcendent' sense of tradition ('Tradition,' with capital T, as described at Montreal) can be seen as the 'rule of faith' that is embedded in scripture (e.g., 1 Corinthians 15:1–4) and which norms the meaning of scripture. The 1988 revision of 'Our Theological Task' speaks of 'the apostolic faith' in just this way, although it does not identify this as tradition in any sense: 'the apostolic witness to Jesus as Savior and Lord, which is the source and measure of all valid Christian teaching.'³² Recognition of one sense of Christian tradition that embraces this central meaning of apostolic witness (*kerygma*) might be a way of seeing Christian scripture and Christian tradition as interlocking authorities, both of which have the apostolic message at their core.

Fourth, although it has not been a contentious issue, the use of reason as a source and norm of theological and moral reflection is another issue that has to be considered in relation to the Wesleyan quadrilateral. A number of scholars have examined Wesley's own use of philosophical traditions. Henry D. Rack and D. W. Bebbington have both reflected on the ways in which John Wesley reflected the general culture of the Enlightenment.³³ Frederick Dreyer, Gregory Clapper, and Richard Brantley have all pointed to Wesley's utilization of Lockean concepts (such as 'simple ideas') to explain the epistemological status of religious experiences.³⁴ None of these maintained straightforwardly that Wesley simply acquiesced in Locke's empirical epistemology. In Rack's words, 'Wesley was certainly a Lockean, though not quite a wholehearted one,'³⁵ since Wesley's claim to religious experience as a valid source of knowledge contradicted Locke's central claim to knowledge based solely on sense experience. In fact, Rex Dale Matthews' 1986 Harvard dissertation on "'Religion and Reason Joined": A Study in the Theology of John Wesley' examined this concept in detail, showing that Wesley's 'transcendental empiricism' in fact had Aristotelian roots – though sometimes expressed in Lockean language. Wesley thus provided a critical account of religious experience including his emphasis on the 'witness of the Holy Spirit.'³⁶

The assertion of reason as a source and criterion of theological and moral reflection in the Wesleyan quadrilateral (both in the 1972 and 1988 versions of

it) relied little on Wesley's own epistemological views and emphasized the role of reason as a divinely given tool for understanding what has been revealed in scripture and, to a lesser extent, by tradition and the experience of the divine. Rebekah L. Miles has developed this conception of 'the instrumental role of reason,' emphasizing the limits of reason, both according to Wesley and in contemporary epistemological reflection. This prompted Miles to caution Wesleyans against thinking that 'reason' can somehow function by itself as a source or criterion of theological or moral claims, stressing that reason always functions in an 'instrumental' role as it helps clarify truths that we have in the first place from God, whether we have come to know these truths by way of scripture, tradition, or our own experience.³⁷

This leads to a fifth issue related to the Wesleyan quadrilateral – the appeal to experience as a source and criterion for Christian theological and moral reflection. From what has been said in the previous paragraphs, one can see that in Wesley's own thought, reason and experience could hardly be separated, since he understood experience (religious experience as well as sense experience) as a critical ground of human knowledge. The 1970 interim report that first laid out the Wesleyan quadrilateral as a doctrinal proposal for the UMC considered experience only as an historical category describing John Wesley's views. Appropriate to this setting, it dwelt on Wesley's understanding of such religious experiences as conviction of sin and assurance of pardon. The versions of the document on 'Our Theological Task' approved by the 1972 and 1988 General Conferences of the UMC also referred to the Wesleyan emphasis on personal religious experience, but the 1972 statement opened up the possibility of other realms of human experience, since the believer's 'mindset' will be changed in such a way that all of their experiences ('the empirical sciences, the arts, philosophy, and culture in general') become ways of knowing the divine, and the knowledge of the divine affects all other avenues of knowledge.³⁸ Developing this notion of experience as an element of the Wesleyan quadrilateral, Randy L. Maddox has made the case that experience cannot be separated from tradition, since tradition can denote 'seasoned wisdom,' the knowledge gained by a community through reflection on its own experience.³⁹

A sixth and final issue related to the Wesleyan quadrilateral, perhaps an overarching or framing issue, has to do with its status in relation to other doctrinal claims made by Wesleyan churches and specifically by the United Methodist Church. William J. Abraham has raised this issue most passionately, arguing that the quadrilateral has deflected United Methodism from making specific theological claims and leading the church instead to a generalized avowal of four theological criteria so broadly stated that almost nothing in the known universe could be excluded from them.⁴⁰ There can be little doubt that some United Methodists took the statement of 'Our Theological

Task' as taking priority over historic statements of doctrine, and in fact the version of this statement approved by the 1972 General Conference did indeed pass judgment on the earlier doctrinal standards by claiming that they were 'not to be construed literally and juridically,'⁴¹ although this language was removed in the 1988 revision.⁴²

A different reading of the work of the Theological Study Commission (1968–1972) would be that it presupposed the historic doctrines and practices defined in the UMC's Confession of Faith, its Articles of Religion, and its General Rules, all of which were protected by the restrictive rules in the denomination's constitution.⁴³ On this reading, the purpose or intent of the quadrilateral was not to call into question historic Christian teachings or distinctively Methodist teachings, but rather to offer criteria for reflection on new issues that had not been dealt with in the doctrinal and moral documents that the UMC inherited from the Evangelical United Brethren and the Methodist Church. In favor of this reading is the preface entitled 'The Gospel in a New Age' at the beginning of the 1972 statement of 'Our Theological Task,' a preface that calls Christians to 'proclaim and live out the eternal gospel in an age of catastrophic perils and soaring hopes.'⁴⁴ Also consistent with this interpretation of the 1972 statement is its own explicit restatement of historic Christian doctrines (such as the doctrine of the Trinity) and of distinctive Wesleyan teachings, a statement that was expanded in the 1988 revision of the statement.⁴⁵

In his work on Wesley's teachings about authority, Stanley Frost suggested in the 1930s that we should consider all forms of authority as expressions of the authority of God. It is possible to see at least three elements of the Wesleyan quadrilateral as interlocking expressions of divine authority, specifically conveying the central Christian belief in the work of God in Jesus Christ. The gospel that lies at the heart of the apostolic faith, the belief 'that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures, and that he was buried, and that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures' (I Corinthians 15:3b–4) is the heart and nucleus of the Christian tradition (or 'Tradition'), the apostolic faith that is 'the source and measure of all valid Christian teaching.'⁴⁶ It is the inner norm that shaped the canon of Christian scripture in the first place and continues to shape its interpretation in the half-year liturgical sequence involving Advent, Christmas, Epiphany, Lent, and Easter. It is the faith that was handed on in the forms of baptismal profession that evolved into the historic creeds and the faith that is proclaimed in the celebration of the Lord's Supper ('Christ has died. Christ is risen. Christ will come again.') and in faithful Christian preaching.⁴⁷ The Wesleyan tradition has insisted that it is the same faith that shapes believers' experience of divine grace given through the work of God in Jesus Christ, by the present power of the Holy Spirit. Thus the content of Christian tradition, Christian

scripture, and Christian experience can be understood as interlocking means by which the one gospel of Jesus Christ is known and proclaimed in Christian communities. Reason, as Rex Dale Matthews and Rebekah L. Miles have pointed out, serves an ancillary or instrumental role as a divinely given capacity by which individuals and communities understand this common faith and experience.

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Methodism in the UK and Ireland

Martin Wellings

Methodism began in Great Britain and much of its early development and distinctive identity was inevitably shaped by its British (or, more specifically, English) context. Although by the time of the first Methodist Oecumenical Conference in 1881 American Methodism was far more numerous than its British counterpart, the American promoters and advocates of the conference were keen for it to take place in London, at the City Road Chapel opened by John Wesley in 1778.¹ British Methodism therefore holds an inescapable chronological priority in the history of world Methodism and it has also often been accorded a courteous priority of esteem, being regarded still as the 'mother church' by Methodists from many parts of the globe.² The story of the origins and development of Methodism in what is now the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland, therefore, is the story, first, of an eighteenth-century movement which gave birth to the whole Methodist enterprise and then of a nineteenth-century church whose influence reached out across the world through the missionary endeavors of the various British Connexions within and beyond the British Empire. The twentieth-century story, marked by the quest for reunion within Methodism, by the ecumenical pilgrimage in England and by the challenge of secularization, is more specific to Britain and Ireland, but the broad issues exemplified by this narrative play out in different ways in many other parts of the world also.

The interpretation of Methodism's story by the writing of its history is almost as old as the Methodist movement itself. Indeed, narrative was a fundamental component of the Evangelical Revival even before Wesley's Aldersgate Street experience. From John Wesley's defense of the Oxford Holy Club in his letter to Richard Morgan and the serial publication, from 1740 until 1791, of his carefully crafted *Journal* onwards, apologists and detractors, hagiographers and imitators, enthusiasts and alarmists, and psychologists of all kinds, have debated Methodist origins and have sometimes also considered the movement's subsequent development. The historiographical field is wide, and ever-expanding, enriched in more recent times by the insights of economic, social, cultural, literary, and feminist historians, and influenced by

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