

THE EPISCOPAL ADDRESS

Salutation

Fathers and Mother, Brothers and Sisters:

This is the first time this salutation has been used in the Episcopal Address to a General Conference. Heretofore it would have been inappropriate. Now it is proper, because in 1980 a woman was elected to our episcopacy, demonstrating that even in so venerable an institution as the church, "Time makes ancient good uncouth."¹

The election of Marjorie Matthews is a watershed in ecclesiastical history. There is no other instance in the whole of Christendom where a major world communion has opened its episcopal ranks to a woman. By divine providence The United Methodist Church in this way has given validity to the New Testament claim: "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus" (Galatians 3:28).

The revelation of God is not static. Divine disclosure does not end with the last verse in the New Testament. What happened in the first century needs the achievements of subsequent ages, including the 20th century, to provide a full account of the mighty acts of God in history. "And these all, having obtained a good report through faith, received not the promise; God having provided some better thing for us, that they without as should not be made perfect" (Hebrews 11:39-40).

In Memoriam

Each age can take pride in its own prophets and seers. In this Council of Bishops our lives have been enriched and our work strengthened by 12 of our colleagues who, during the past quadrennium, have been translated from the Church Militant to the Church Triumphant:

Escrivao A. Zunguze
Alfred J. Shaw

Donald H. Tippett
Charles W. Brashares

¹ James Russell Lowell, *The Present Crisis*, stanza 18, line 2.

Mangal Singh
 J. Waskom Pickett
 Richard C. Raines
 C. Ernst Sommer

Reuben H. Mueller
 Harold R. Heininger
 J. Kenneth Shamblin
 Gabriel Sundaram

But to call their names is to start to count the blessings they have bestowed upon us, and then suddenly to stop, realizing that, like sands on the seashore and stars in the sky, they are too numerous to tally.

OUR INSPIRATION IS FROM THE PAST

Origin

This General Conference is auspicious. It comes in the year of our 200th anniversary as a church. Though Methodism as a moral and spiritual movement had been in existence in England since 1739, and in the colonies since 1766, what had been a mere collection of religious societies on both sides of the Atlantic became on the American continent in 1784 a new church with its own mission and its special place in the wide economy of God's grace.

John Wesley was, under God, its founder. He who refused to organize his followers into a denomination in the old world felt obligated, after the Revolutionary War, to provide his disciples with one in the new. Consequently, he gave them their doctrinal standards in the Apostles' Creed and an abbreviated form of the Thirty-Nine Articles of Religion, as well as their rites and ritual and ordinal, which he edited for them from the Book of Common Prayer. He lent them his General Rules. At the same time he ordained two of his lay preachers and sent them to become the nucleus of their ministry, while he ordained a clergyman from the Church of England, Dr. Thomas Coke, as their superintendent, made him his plenipotentiary, and designated their own Francis Asbury another superintendent to serve with Dr. Coke in the governance of the new church.

"As our American brethren are now totally disentangled, both from the state and the English hierarchy, we dare not entangle them again, either with the one or the other," affirmed Mr. Wesley. "They are now at full liberty simply to follow the Scriptures and the primitive church. And we judge it best that they should stand fast in that liberty wherewith God has so strangely set them free."²

² John Wesley, "Letter to Dr. Coke, Mr. Asbury, and Our Brethren in North America," Abel Stevens, *History of the Methodist Episcopal Church*, Eaton and Mains, N. Y., and Curts and Jennings, Cincinnati, Ohio, n.d., Vol. II, p. 183.

And stand fast in liberty our Methodist forebears did. They accepted the liturgy Mr. Wesley had prepared for them from the Book of Common Prayer, at least to the extent of using its forms of performing Baptism, the Lord's Supper, marriage, and ordination. They gladly adopted Wesley's doctrines and theology and recognized him as their father in the faith. But beyond this, they took advantage of their religious as well as political freedom. The polity and discipline of the church was decidedly its own. Its preaching and regular services of worship were spontaneous and free, like open country, fresh air, and running streams, adapted to the tastes and understanding of simple, untutored, and emotional people, who were reached more often through the heart than through the head, and who responded with their whole being to the Word of God. More than all else, it was democratic and self-determinative. It did not accept anything, even advice from Mr. Wesley, until it had discussed it, debated its merits and demerits, and then determined by majority vote whether it wanted it or not. The freedom that characterizes the United States has characterized Methodism since its inception as a church.

The Christmas Conference, which met in Lovely Lane Chapel here in Baltimore from December 24, 1784, through January 2, 1785, lasted only 10 days. Yet in that short time the decision to become a church was made, the name of the church chosen, episcopal government adopted, three orders of ministry established, discipline and polity determined, and, above all else, purpose and mission conceived, and the plan of achievement devised and put immediately into operation.

The conference consisted of as many of the traveling preachers as could be collected. There were about 60 of them. Two were Black: Harry Hosier and Richard Allen. All were laymen. Twelve of this number were made elders. Probably 15 others were made deacons. Dr. Thomas Coke was confirmed in the general superintendency to which Wesley had ordained him. And the two elders Wesley had ordained and sent over with him—Richard Whatcoat and Thomas Vasey—were gladly accepted as ministers in the new church.

Francis Asbury was elected by his American brethren to the superintendency. On three successive days, starting with Christmas 1784, he was ordained deacon, elder, and superintendent respectively. Dr. Coke, acting in the capacity of the traditional bishop, and assisted by the two elders ordained by Wesley, ordained Asbury. A fourth person participated in the ordination and laid his hands also on the head of the first bishop ordained in America. That person was the venerable Philip

William Otterbein, a Reformed minister in Baltimore, who later, with Martin Boehm, founded the Church of the United Brethren in Christ.

This church was organized 16 years later. Its purpose was to serve German-speaking people of similar persuasion to the Methodists. Between 1803 and 1807 another German-speaking ecclesiastical body known as the Evangelical Association arose in this country under the leadership of Jacob Albright. All three churches—Methodist, United Brethren, and Evangelical—were grounded in the same basic theology, motivated by the same moral and spiritual purpose, pietistic in disposition and behavior, episcopally governed, and with only minor variations, alike in discipline and polity.

Racial discrimination prompted Black people in Philadelphia and New York to organize new churches: the African Methodist Episcopal Church in 1816 and the African Methodist Episcopal Church Zion in 1820. Both were in doctrine and discipline exact duplicates of the mother church, so that the first two Black denominations ever formed were Methodist.

The Christmas Conference at Lovely Lane Chapel in Baltimore gave to Christendom the Methodist Episcopal Church, the first national church to be organized in the new world. Its hallmark was the connectional system. Every charge, whether a single church or circuit, was inextricably bound to every other charge. It emphasized the unity of the whole, not the diversity of the parts. Therefore, its policies and programs were determined by what came to be a representative general conference to which all the annual conferences and individual congregations adhered. Its clergy held membership in an annual conference, not in a local church. Its ministers were deployed according to need, appointed annually by bishops, and sent to rather than called by the congregations they served. Its doctrines, so it believed, came by divine revelation, not human discovery, so they were not subject to the changing opinions of succeeding general conferences. This church rapidly emerged into the forefront of the nation and expanded around the world.

Purpose

The Methodist Episcopal Church, in its first Discipline, declared that God raised it up "to reform the continent and to spread scriptural holiness over the land." The twin foci of our denomination since its inception have been social involvement and evangelization, the reformation of society according to the ideals of the Kingdom of God, and the salvation of individual men and women through the grace of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Social Accomplishments: Impact on the Nation

The Christmas Conference of 1784 condemned slavery and resolved "to extirpate this abomination from among us." Consequently it declared that Methodists must free their slaves within 12 months or withdraw from the church. Many Methodists did neither, and the church itself divided over the issue of slavery 60 years later. Yet, despite the schism, Methodism as a whole contributed immeasurably to the abolition movement, winning from President Lincoln the admission that the nation would never have won the crusade to free the slaves if it had not been for the influence of the Methodist Episcopal Church.

The 18th Amendment, making the manufacture, sale and consumption of alcoholic beverages illegal in the United States, and the 19th Amendment, extending suffrage to women, found their most numerous and most effective sponsors in the various branches of Methodism. Frances E. Willard, for example, who won the accolade "the incarnation of modern Methodism," was preeminent in both movements—prohibition and the right of women to vote. The United Brethren Church was the first to forbid its members to consume alcohol, and the Methodist Episcopal Church, to organize a national Board of Temperance. All denominations advocated temperance, but the Methodists, realizing that Uncle Sam was rapidly degenerating from a social drinker into a sot, demanded total abstinence from the consumption of alcohol. The year 1920 saw the passage of both amendments. In the most recent past, no other church has done more than the United Methodist to secure the passage of the Equal Rights Amendment.

Our record in higher education is exemplary. Ours was the first denomination anywhere to offer women a liberal arts education. Wesleyan College in Macon, Ga., is the oldest college to award degrees to women in the entire world. Through the Freedmen's Aid Society, the Methodist Episcopal Church took major responsibility for the education of Black people after the Civil War. Chautauqua, started by a Methodist minister and layman on a camp-meeting ground, was the pioneer program in adult education outside college and the instigator of the first correspondence schools in this country. Today, The United Methodist Church supports more universities and colleges, with the largest student enrollment, of any denomination in America.

We have been equal to the best of our sister denominations in the establishment of homes for orphans and other needy children as well as for the elderly. We have developed a network of hospitals throughout our conferences, some of which are among the best in the nation. Our church has pioneered in the advocacy

of prison reform and the humane treatment of criminals. The Goodwill Industries sprang out of the efforts of a Methodist pastor in Boston to give employment to the indigent.

Our most splendid social achievements have been in the field of business and industrial relations. Due to our connectional system we have as a church been able to do more than others in settling strikes and improving the lot of the laborers in this country. We have sponsored the six-day working week, the eight-hour working day, the minimum wage, decent working conditions, and fair employment practices. The Methodist Episcopal Church fashioned in 1908 the first social creed in history—a landmark in the development of ethics for business and industry.

Progress Within the Church

What Methodism recommended to secular society, it sought to exemplify in its own denominational life. Therefore, its history presents a church that has always been in process of being renewed and reformed.

The Methodist Protestant Church broke the hold of the clergy on the reins of control by according the laity equal representation with them in general conference. And today lay representation in our church is so pronounced that the formula for distribution of membership on most of our agencies is one-third laymen, one-third laywomen, and one-third clergy.

The same has been true of us in according rights to women. Our women, following in the footsteps of Barbara Heck, the Mother of American Methodism, were the first to organize a Woman's Home Missionary Society, which became in 1884 an official agency of the Methodist Episcopal Church. One of its presidents was Lucy Webb Hayes, at that time the First Lady of the United States. Women became delegates to general conference 11 years before the nation gave them the franchise. And today the Women's Division of the Board of Global Ministries is probably the most influential body in the whole church.

Though the Congregationalists ordained the first woman, the first denomination officially to authorize the ordination of women was the Church of the United Brethren in 1889. In 1956, Georgia Harkness did more than anyone else to achieve full clerical rights for women in The Methodist Church. As a result, today The United Methodist Church has more female ministers than perhaps all the other major denominations combined.

Though the Roman Catholic Church was the first to have a Black person in the episcopacy in the Western Hemisphere, ours was the first to elect Black persons to that office with full responsibility over annual conferences. Today there is in the

United States only one Black ordinary bishop in the Roman Catholic Church and one diocesan bishop in the Episcopal Church, while The United Methodist Church has eight in the effective relationship. At the level of decisionmaking, our denomination is the most completely integrated racially of any in America.

In the beginning the only credentials our clergy had were their devotion and industry. As late as 1952, the standard route to conference membership and ordination was through the conference course of study. Our theological seminaries were, at best, auxiliary. Financially they had to fend for themselves. They received less denominational support than those of any other major denomination. In 1968 The United Methodist Church established the Ministerial Education Fund, in which 2 percent of the operational budget of every local church is designated for ministerial education. As a result, we stand with the Southern Baptists and Roman Catholics in doing more to support the education of the clergy than any other denomination in America.

From its inception the Methodist Episcopal Church has been a world church. Our first bishop, Thomas Coke, was an intrepid missionary, who died at sea on his way to India to organize the church there as he had in America. Of the 12 persons ordained as elders in 1784, three were sent as missionaries outside the bounds of the United States. A Black, John Stewart, began to evangelize the American Indians. In 1819 Nathan Bangs led in the establishment of the Methodist Missionary Society. Our first overseas mission was to Liberia in Africa in 1833. By 1948 we had conferences in 50 nations over the world. Most of these have become autonomous churches.

The World Methodist Council, organized by British and American Methodism in 1881, is the second oldest of the world communions, antedating the Lutheran World Federation and the Baptist World Alliance by more than half a century. Our denomination helped to organize the Federal Council of Churches of Christ in America, now the National Council of Churches of Christ in the USA. The Methodist Episcopal Church gave it, with slight alterations, its own Social Creed, and its first president was a bishop of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South. Both the Methodist Church and the Evangelical United Brethren Church were charter members of the World Council of Churches, and from the beginning until recently The Methodist Church has been its strongest financial supporter. A Methodist layman, John R. Mott, helped to lay the foundation of the ecumenical movement and was the president of its first conference in Edinburgh, Scotland, in 1910.

Growth and Expansion

What our church has done to improve society, it has been able to do only because of the devotion and piety of its members and because its membership has composed so large a segment of the society it has sought to change. Personal holiness, the church has believed, is essential to social righteousness and to the rectification of the nation and of the world. Thus, since its inception in 1784, its mission has been to transform the lives of individual men and women and to incorporate them through Baptism and confirmation into its own corporate body. Growth and expansion have always been the hallmark of Methodism.

In 1784 the ratio of Methodists to the population of the United States was only one in 213 persons. By 1926 our church reached a ratio of one in 17, which it maintained, with a temporary decline during the Depression, until 1960. Between 1800 and 1950 the rate of increase in the population of this country was 36.4 percent, while that of our church was 168.62 percent. Indeed, as late as 1950 our growth rate was ahead of the nation's by 2.61 percent. Until the large inflow of immigrants from Ireland and central and southern Europe in the middle of the 19th century, Methodism was numerically the largest religious body in the United States and, indeed, remained the largest Protestant church until 1970.

"It may fairly be said," affirmed Abraham Lincoln in May 1864, "that the Methodist Episcopal Church, not less devoted than the best, is by its greatest numbers the most important of all. It is by no fault in others that the Methodist Church sends more soldiers to the field, more nurses to the hospitals, and more prayers to heaven than any. God bless the Methodist Church."³

OUR DUTY IS IN THE PRESENT

The Reformation of the World

Today we are a world church, and our duties are commensurate with the needs of humanity. Our forebears sought to reform a continent. Their accomplishments inspire us now to essay the reformation of the world.

Unless we can abolish war, the chances are there will not be any world left for us to reform. An all-out nuclear war would eradicate civilization and in all probability destroy human life itself. Proposals and plans to curtail nuclear developments, to impose a nuclear freeze, to guarantee nuclear parity between the

³ Carl Sandburg, *Abraham Lincoln: The War Years*, Harcourt Brace and World, Inc., N. Y., 1939, Vol. III, p. 224.

Soviet Union and United States are no more than palliatives. They do not cure the disease. All nuclear weapons possessed by any and every nation must simultaneously be destroyed, and neutral nations that do not possess such weapons must be the agents engaged to destroy them and to guarantee that their destruction is complete.

War is malignant. And, given the disposition of governments to exercise military force unconscionably for purposes of expansion, ideological uniformity, the coercion of populations, and nationalistic prestige and power, conventional weapons are also intolerable. Christian conscience demands total disarmament by disbanding armies, navies, and air forces over the face of the earth.

The early church with one voice condemned war. The Augustinian and medieval doctrine of the Just War was a later concession by the church to secularistic society and imperial government which at the time were at least nominally Christian. When its provisions were strictly adhered to, all it did was to enable Christians to kill other Christians on a restricted scale and a bit more humanely than otherwise, but they got killed just the same. Under contemporary circumstances the doctrine of the Just War is a ridiculous anachronism. Jesus came that all might have life and have it more abundantly. We are the disciples of the Prince of Peace. He died on the cross rather than call down legions of angels to destroy his enemies. The church's message to the world is that any nation that selfishly tries to preserve its national existence by military means alone is bound to lose it, while those nations that give themselves unselfishly to the saving of their people and humanity will by divine grace achieve an exemplary place in history and become an earthly model of the kingdom of God.

Just as important as the abolition of war are the universal respect for human rights, the freedom of persons in every nation and society, the safeguards of life, liberty, and the means of happiness to all people who inhabit the earth. The danger of enslavement is as terrifying as the threat of nuclear disaster. The inability freely to express one's thoughts, to disseminate new ideas, and to pursue the dictates of conscience are as oppressive as death itself. The domination of any portion of humanity by an oppressive, totalitarian regime is an evil which the church must resist with the same vigor and determination that it resists war. Blackmail of one nation by another through superior military force and the suppression of the citizenry of a country by its own government are comparable to a holocaust. Jesus announced his mission and therefore the mission of his church: "to preach deliverance to the captives" and "to set at liberty them that are

oppressed" (Luke 4:18). "Give liberty to whom liberty is due," proclaims John Wesley, "that is to every child of man, to every partaker of human nature. Let none serve you but by his own voluntary choice. Away with all whips, all chains, all compulsion!"⁴

It is the inalienable right of every person to security and well-being within the society in which that person lives. Yet contemporary society is victimized by crime, and human life appears as cheap today as it did in the most degenerate societies of antiquity. A thief kills with the same abandon that he or she steals. This is due in part to the inadequacy of our system of criminal justice and the brutalization of prisoners within our penal institutions. It is unconscionable to incarcerate with hardened criminals first-time young offenders and persons whose crimes do not involve physical injury and danger to other persons. Indeed, such persons should not be put in penal institutions at all. Rather, their sentences should be in the form of financial reparation to the people whom they have injured and the society whose laws they have violated, even if this must take the form of constructive work for others with no remuneration beyond mere subsistence to themselves. In this country it costs the public more money to keep a person in prison for a year than it does to pay a student's expenses in college.

Every person indicted for a crime should be given a trial within a few weeks of indictment. Appeals after conviction should not be so easily obtained. Hand guns should be outlawed and plea bargaining only sparingly used. What justice is there in excusing one person for a crime in order to obtain that person's testimony against an accomplice in order to convict the accomplice? The parole system is far too lax and needs careful study and revision. Every precaution must be taken that a person convicted of premeditated murder not endanger the public again. Justice is the foundation of society. Even the mercy of God never subverts his justice. If it did, the atonement of Christ would have no meaning. To show mercy to a murderer and at the same time to do an injustice to an innocent person who becomes the murderer's victim is a mockery to creation and an offence to Almighty God.

The most basic human right is the opportunity of a decent livelihood. Every person deserves the opportunity to acquire the material resources to live creatively and happily. Persons incapacitated beyond the point of productive labor are entitled to

⁴ John Wesley, "Thoughts upon Slavery," V. 6, *Works*, Jackson Edition, Wesleyan-Methodist Book-Room, London, n.d., Vol. XI, p. 79.

compassionate care and to whatever satisfaction their condition will permit. Old age should be a season of serenity for those who attain it. Retirement income should be adequate to enable a person to maintain a reasonable standard of living.

Unemployment and rampant inflation are twin economic evils that, like cancer to the human body, decimate and in the end destroy the body of society. Both are morally intolerable.

Though talent and industry deserve recognition and reward and though property and possessions should not be denied to them who earn them, still gross inequities cannot be countenanced by a morally responsible people. Retirement pay of several hundred thousand dollars for the executive of a corporation, when workers in that business are unemployed; and large government pensions equal in some instances to the highest salary a person received during the years of active service, when the social security system of the country is in jeopardy, are difficult to understand, much less to justify. "In cases of dire need," says St. Thomas Aquinas, "all things are common property."⁵ That is, the superfluous goods of the rich are to be shared with the poor. "Feed the man dying of hunger," the fathers of the church admonish, "because if you have not fed him, you have killed him."⁶ And John Wesley adds, "Treat every poor person as you would God Almighty should treat you!"⁷

Though the church champions the cause of the poor and underprivileged, it does not thereby indiscriminately condemn the affluent and blame them for the plight of the poor. It is counterproductive to try to create a guilt complex among prosperous people by constantly reminding them that a very small percentage of the world's population consumes a preponderant amount of the world's resources and goods, as if they deliberately cause this imbalance. It is false to assume that wealth is synonymous with exploitation and greed; and poverty with generosity and unselfishness. Saint Augustine observes that a person may have a lot of wealth in his possession but no avarice whatever in his heart, while another without any money at all may be consumed by covetousness. There are enough resources in most countries for the maintenance and well-being of their population. Small, overpopulated countries by industry and

⁵ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, II-II, Q. 66, A. 7.

⁶ Gratian, *Decretum*, C. 21, dist. LXXXVI. Cf. *The Pastoral Constitution of the Church in the Modern World*, Chapter III, Section 1, Division 69, Documents of Vatican II, edited by Walter M. Abbott and Joseph Gallagher, Gold Press, N. Y., 1966, p. 279.

⁷ cf. John Wesley, *op. cit.*, Vol. VIII, p. 262.

creativity have acquired a high standard of living, while some large and relatively rich countries either because of exploitation or mismanagement are ravaged by poverty.

There is inherent merit in the Protestant ethic of the moral and spiritual value of productive and creative labor, and a direct historical corollary between societies that have actively espoused it and their prosperity. The Industrial Revolution began in Great Britain and reached its zenith in the United States. The United States has generated more wealth than any other nation. At the same time it has given more away in help to others than almost all the other nations combined. The Marshall Plan stands as a monument to national philanthropy, unmatched in size and effectiveness in all history. A vital element of liberty is economic freedom. The right of a person to own and use the wealth he or she has honestly made, so long as the person does not abuse that right by despoiling others, is preferable to the ownership of all wealth by the state and its control and management by governmental bureaucrats. Certainly industry and hard work are indigenous to Methodism. John Wesley saved England from the revolution which struck France by changing the people rife for revolution into productive citizens. "Economic ambition, he believed to be a good servant but an accursed master."⁸ Indeed, he describes money "as that most precious talent which contains all the rest" and contends that it "is unspeakably precious if we are wise and faithful stewards of it."⁹

The church stands above and in judgment of all economic systems. Its sole concern with them is that they promote the material welfare of all God's people.

Every nation is inextricably bound to every other nation. The economy of one affects the economies of the others. Therefore, uncontrolled nationalism has outlived its usefulness. The times demand an international superstructure with the power and authority to legislate in behalf of the well-being of all peoples, to arbitrate disputes, to restrain violence, and to obliterate war.

Personal Redemption and Righteousness

The reformation of the world depends on the redemption of its inhabitants. There can never be a just and orderly society apart from righteous people who constitute it. We have spent much time dealing with social structures, debating the merits and

⁸ John Wesley Bready, *England Before and After Wesley*, Hodder and Stoughton, Ltd., London, n.d., p. 234.

⁹ Sermon LI, "The Good Steward," I, 7, in *Works*, Vol. VI, p. 139.

demerits of various political and economic systems, and attempting by abstract, idealistic principles to reshape institutions and organizations, and far too little time evangelizing people, trying by the power of the gospel to convict them of sin, and offering them the gift of redemption through faith in Jesus Christ, whereby they obtain both a divine purpose for their lives and the power for its fulfillment. Our primary mission is to commend our Savior to them.

People alone as individuals can be redeemed, not institutions, structures of society, or forms of government. These agencies, however, can and should be changed and improved, better to serve all people. Neither the United States nor the Soviet Union will exist in heaven. Yet we pray that many of the citizens of both countries will. Even the church has no institutional existence beyond time and space. Each person whom God has made must answer personally to God for the life that person has lived. Everyone hopes to hear God call him or her by name and say: "Well done, good and faithful servant, . . . enter thou into the joys of thy Lord" (Matthew 25:32).

The church is not to be a mirror of the world but a reflection of heaven. Its ethics are the teachings of Jesus and not the mores of contemporary secular society. The basis of its message is the disclosure of God, not the opinions of people. It is the servant of God's Word revealed in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testament. It does not countenance as a permissive life style what the Bible labels as sin, nor is it to subvert the heinousness of sin by excusing it as an illness or minor mistake. The Bible affirms, "the soul that sinneth, it shall die" (Ezekiel 14:4).

Though the church stands in judgment and condemns sin, it never ceases to love the sinner. Like its Lord, it is invariably compassionate, merciful, and forgiving. It cannot turn its back on any suppliant. Its doors are always open to sinners, and they are welcome into its fellowship. But this does not mean that it condones their sin and becomes a champion of their style of living when it is contrary to its own. It does not provide them with a platform to advocate a form of behavior inconsistent with its gospel. It accepts a person just as the person is in order for Christ to make him or her into what he or she ought to become. It sees people not as they are but as they can be.

It is futile to try to pass judgment on a person's sexual predisposition or the bent of his or her inner nature. It is God who made us, and not we ourselves. (Psalm 100:3*b*). In whatever way our nature was formed before birth, that is not our responsibility, and God does not hold us accountable for what we cannot help. Only God knows the secrets of our heart and can read our inmost

thoughts. But the church must insist on moral and spiritual discipline. The Bible teaches that God will not permit us to be tempted beyond that we are able to bear (I Corinthians 10:13). Only in the marriage of man and woman can the church countenance sexual expression. When persons remain in the unmarried state, the church expects from them, both male and female, a life of chastity, continence, and celibacy. After all, our divine Lord himself never married, yet his life was without sin.

Likewise, the church expects from married couples faithfulness and devotion to each other as long as they both shall live and the establishment of a home which is a haven of blessedness and a place of peace. The procreation of children and their rearing in the nurture and admonition of the Lord are the glory of marriage. Though abortion may be essential in extreme circumstances, to say that the fetus in a woman's womb is her own property to do with as she pleases and to use abortion for immoral purposes is a barbaric act displaying the lowest form of degeneracy. Abortion must never be permitted to become the means for promiscuity and sexual indulgence.

The perennial purpose of the church is to lead people to Jesus, so that he can remake their lives like his very own.

Renewal and Accountability

The euphoria and optimism that marked the centennial of the Methodist churches in 1884 are out of place in 1984. The expectation then that our denominations were invincible and would always be in the vanguard of the march of Christendom toward the establishment of the Kingdom of God on earth was short lived.

Inevitable progress was the dream of the 19th century. But that dream has been dissipated in the nightmare of the 20th century—the most war-ridden, violent, and destructive period in all history. To be sure, there have been more gains in scientific and technological knowledge in this century than in all the preceding centuries combined, but this knowledge is more a threat than it is a boon to human existence, and because of it we live in constant dread of annihilation. In its preoccupation with the material things of life, the 20th century has lost sight of the spiritual altogether. The eternal dimension of human nature is overshadowed by the temporal, so that the image of God has almost been erased from the countenance of his creatures.

Likewise, The United Methodist Church, which has done so much to improve the material lot of people, has done far too little to save their souls. Since 1966 our denomination has continually lost members in the United States. Some years it has lost more

than the size of a small annual conference. Indeed, the accumulated loss is double the entire membership of the Evangelical United Brethren Church at the time of union. If our losses continue as they have been, there will not be members left in the United States to implement the social programs of which we are so proud. Fortunately, gains in membership are taking place in our churches overseas, especially in Africa and Asia. For example, in the last decade, our churches in Zimbabwe and Mozambique, despite wars, rose from 5,280 members to 30,000 and from 6,000 to 32,000, respectively; while our membership in Angola has jumped from 40,000 to 90,000, and in Zaire from 100,000 to 370,000. Our offspring in Indonesia has experienced a 30 percent growth and in Korea a 300 percent. The Evangelical Methodist Church in Bolivia has doubled in membership in the last three years. Soon we may be looking to our offspring abroad to send missionaries and evangelists to the western world to save us.

Much of the time and energy of recent general conferences have been spent on internal affairs rather than on the church's mission to the outside world.

Various caucuses have arisen within the church to voice their own concerns and promote their own interests. The church has not only heard and heeded them, but even funded them, so that they have become lobbying groups throughout the connection. Undue concessions to a disparity of concerns could lead to polarization and in time impair the unity of the church.

The quota system, assuring proper representation to minorities, women, and young people, has enabled us to avoid structural discrimination and to utilize the gifts and graces of persons from all segments of the church. We should, however, be judicious in the use of it, always making it an asset by discovering and employing the new talent it affords, and never permitting it to become the tool of reverse discrimination, or an end in itself. It is unfortunate that even the church has found it necessary to establish monitoring agencies to assure justice to all its membership.

We have been fortunate in the efficiency and effectiveness of the staffs of our boards and agencies. However, these staff persons must not think of themselves as so efficient that they do not need always to seek advice and guidance from local leadership in areas where they sponsor projects or are in any way involved. All boards and agencies must remember that they are tools of the denomination, designed to aid it in the performance of its mission; they are not intended to speak for it or to represent it to the outside world. No board or agency should ever be allowed to

become so big and powerful that it gives the appearance of being an autonomous entity and presumes in its policies and procedures to disregard the opinions and wishes of the general membership of the denomination.

We support the Board of Global Ministries as the sole sending agency of missionaries and disapprove the organization of another sending agency in competition with it. However, in fairness to the concerns of those who feel the necessity for a second agency, we urge that measures be taken to assure our people that evangelization and evangelism are a vital part of the philosophy and practice of mission by the board and that its staff is committed to Wesleyan theology. We strongly support the emphasis on indigenous leadership in the church throughout the world.

The benevolent monies of the church should be expended on causes related to the nature and life of the church and over which the church has some measure of control. Our boards and agencies should not be permitted to make grants to political causes or support movements based on ideologies contrary to the Christian faith.

Only the General Conference can determine policy and, when in session, speak for the whole church. The bishops, however, are general superintendents of the denomination as a whole. They alone are charged, under the constitution, with "the general oversight and promotion of the temporal and spiritual interests of the entire church." As prophets, they should speak for God to the church on all questions concerning its duty. As priests and chief pastors, they should constantly seek its welfare. They should be its voice to society and the world, its ambassadors to all humanity.

A strong church requires a strong ministry. Originally the Methodist societies depended on lay ministry, and the ministry of the laity always has been and always shall be a strong factor in the mission of the church. When Methodism was organized into a church in 1784, a clear and distinctive ministry was established in contradistinction to the general ministry of the laity. Divine calling and ordination, setting certain people apart, to do the special work of God through fulltime service as preachers, prophets, priests, teachers, and evangelists, constituted the official ministry of our church. Those ministers were called by God and recognized through their gifts and graces by the conference. They were not selected by the people as their representative ministers. A minister in the Lutheran and Reformed traditions is representative of the laity in the performance of ministerial functions. In the Methodist tradition

the minister is representative of Jesus Christ. In the establishment of our ministry, John Wesley wrote his American offspring that he modeled their ministry after that of the Church of England, which he thought "the best constituted national church in the world"¹⁰ and gave to them deacons, elders, and superintendents, or bishops.

Bishop Francis Asbury, in the last address he ever wrote for General Conference, and which was read posthumously as the Episcopal Address at the General Conference of 1816, said: "We are prepared, and, if called upon, to prove and demonstrate even in your assembly, not from uncertain Church Histories and testimonies, but from the pure Oracles of the New Testament—Three distinct ordinations, three distinct powers rising in gospel order by constituted degrees, one over another and under the government, and distinct in names, that is to say Apostles, Elders, and Deacons. We will enter the sanctuary of divine truth, here we shall stand, this is our ground."¹¹

This General Conference, therefore, should do nothing to dilute or weaken but everything to strengthen the traditional Methodist concept of ministry. The laity of the church is strengthened, not impaired, by a distinctive ordained ministry. It is weakened when the lines of distinction between it and its ministers are erased. It is paralyzed when the duties and expectations of all the people of God are arrogated to a few professionals. Justice and service belong to laity and clergy alike, for together we are the servants of God.

Our church has been ecumenical since its inception. "Our Lord," John Wesley wrote, "probably glances at all these prejudices, which different sects had against each other, and intimates that he would not have his followers imbibe that narrow spirit. Would to God this had been more highly attended to among the unhappy divisions and subdivisions into which the church has been crumbled! And that we might advance so far as cordially to embrace our brethren in Christ, of whatever party or denomination they are!"¹²

Therefore, we affirm our commitment to the ecumenical cause. As denominations we need one another. We can do more together than any one of us can do alone. We expect our church to continue

¹⁰ *The Letters of the Rev. John Wesley, A.M.*, Telford Edition, Epworth Press, London, 1931, Vol. VII, p. 239.

¹¹ *The Journal and Letters of Francis Asbury*, Potts Edition, Epworth and Abingdon Presses, London and Nashville, 1958, Vol. III, p. 532.

¹² John Wesley, *Explanatory Note on the New Testament*, Epworth Press, London, 1976 Edition, p. 35.

its membership in both the National and World Council of Churches as well as the World Methodist Council. But we dare not give blanket approval and endorsement to all their pronouncements and programs. We reserve the right always to evaluate and criticize them. We expect from them responsible and impartial leadership and call upon our representatives to such bodies to assure the same.

Each quadrennium we get a plethora of petitions to General Conference. Most of them have to do with our own structure and organization, and come largely from boards and agencies. As a result our Discipline expands like a telephone book. We have more rules and regulations than we know how to administer. Perhaps it would be wise to call a moratorium on all such organizational proposals. Certainly the General Conference should act sparingly in regard to them. It should not enact into legislation anything that is not fully considered and debated on the floor of the Conference. What it does not have time properly to consider, it should not consider at all.

The business of the church is not maintenance but mission, not the renovation of its own organization but the salvation of the world.

OUR HOPE IS IN THE FUTURE

This Bicentennial anniversary should not be made an occasion for Methodist triumphalism. The most wholesome attitude we can take is that we possess nothing distinctive that is absolutely necessary for the salvation of the world. Indeed, what is necessary for the salvation of the world is not what we have that is different from what other Christian bodies possess, but rather what we hold in common with all of them, namely Jesus Christ, who alone can save sinners from their sins. "Neither is there salvation in any other; for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved" (Acts 4:12). Therefore, our mood as a church should be one of penitence. We have had the opportunity to do so much. But the record shows that we have done far too little.

But our mood should also be one of hope and expectancy. God has given to The United Methodist Church the resources to assure it a place in his redemptive mission as long as time shall last. Whether it remains an autonomous body as it now is or loses its denominational identity in a larger ecumenical organization, thereby anticipating perfect unity in Christ, its heritage is too precious to be lost and will always constitute one of the priceless

treasures of Christendom. Though it is only 200 years old, the youngest of the major denominations, its contribution to humankind has been far in excess of its years.

Experimentation

Methodism has been the least doctrinaire of any of the major bodies of Christendom. Unlike its Protestant forebears, it has not started with abstract doctrines and theories and sought to apply them rigidly without regard to practical difficulties. It has always been willing to experiment. Faced with a perplexing problem, a situation of desperate human need, it has been willing to apply one remedy after another, until one of them has worked, and the problem solved. Therefore, most of its practices have emerged as the result of numerous experimentations.

The itinerancy, the conferences, the connectional system, the use of lay preachers, the superintendency, episcopal appointments, even the organization of the Methodist Episcopal Church itself were all grand experiments. They came as the result of the pressure of events. They were not parts of a preconceived ecclesiastical plan.

The whole of Methodism arose out of the demands of practical life. It began as a series of divine improvisations, comparable to the emergence of Christianity itself as described in the New Testament. Its greatest asset, we believe, as we enter the third century of our history, is our church's flexibility and adaptability, its willingness to improvise, to be made all things to all people that it might by all means save some (I Corinthians 9:22).

Theology

Therefore, Methodist theology is basically pragmatic. It eschews abstract thought and speculation. Though it adheres to reason, its reason is common sense, the assumption that religious thought is a guide to action and that the truth of every belief can be attested to and confirmed by its moral and spiritual consequences. John Wesley was the people's theologian. He taught Christian truth to convince, convict, and convert the masses.

The single source of Methodist theology is the Bible. Reason is necessary to understand doctrine; and tradition (knowledge and appreciation of the past), an aid to its interpretation; while experience is the organ for its validation in personal life. But the Bible alone is its source. The Bible is not a book written by people to express their own religious ideas and to describe the kind of Deity they would like to worship. It is God's own disclosure of himself, the account of his mighty acts in history, and his

directives for our salvation. It is not for us to change and modify according to our preferences, but to accept and believe and try to live by.

The essence of Wesleyan theology is the doctrine of salvation. More than any other major Protestant theologian, John Wesley maintains a nice balance between the all-sufficiency of divine grace and the necessity for responsible human freedom. Synergism is the descriptive label of the Wesleyan doctrine—salvation in all its stages is a process of cooperation between God and human beings.

Its presupposition is that all persons are sinners and cannot save themselves. But even in a state of sin, God reaches out to them through his prevenient grace, so that no one is deprived of conscience, the ability to discern value, to distinguish between good and evil, and then to know the degrees of worth, that is, what is good, better, and best in the scale of existence.

The sole foundation on which salvation rests is the atonement. Jesus Christ died on the cross for our sins, and not for ours only but for the sins of the whole world. The atonement is universal in its scope and in the intention of God. But it is not universal in its application and effectiveness. It is effective only for those who freely and gladly accept for themselves the benefits of Christ's death.

Forgiveness and regeneration are the initial and concomitant acts of salvation. God forgives us our sins for Christ's sake and declares us to be justified, and that by grace alone. But at the same time he cleanses us from sin and transforms us into righteous and upright people.

Sanctification is synonymous with Christian living. The longer we live with God the more like him we become. Saintliness is the normal characteristic of the Christian. The goal of Christian living is entire sanctification, or Christian perfection, which means simply that the dominating motive of life is unselfish love. Our love for one another is comparable to the love of God for us.

The Wesleyan emphasis is on the work of the Holy Spirit, who is God living with, guiding, and empowering his people.

Ethics

Since Christian perfection is a temporal attainment and the entire process of salvation is completed in this life, Wesleyan ethics is an ethics of self-realization. In this respect, it stands in contrast to the ethics of the Reformation, which is an ethics of aspiration. With the Reformers, forgiveness is a lifelong necessity; the best acts of the holiest people are tainted by sin and

corruption; righteousness is less a reality than it is a hope; and salvation is attained only in heaven.

Roman Catholicism and Eastern Orthodoxy emphasize the attainment of holiness in the here and now. But in order to do this, a person must withdraw from the secular world and live a life of prayer and solitude and render service to others from outside the bounds of the normal condition of everyday life. Saintliness in Catholic and Orthodox tradition belongs only to the favored few.

But John Wesley taught that holiness of heart and life is the characteristic of every Christian. One must be genuinely holy here on earth before one can expect to see God and live permanently with him in heaven. "The sanctified," Wesley says, shall see God "in all things here" as well as "hereafter in heaven".¹³

Methodist ethics since the inception of the Methodist movement has sought to create a society conducive to holiness and to populate that society with holy people. "The kingdom of glory in heaven," Wesley affirms, "is the continuation and perfection of the kingdom of grace on earth".¹⁴

Opportunity

This General Conference, in which we remember our past, face our obligations in the present, and anticipate and plan for the future, has a great opportunity under God for improving and expanding The United Methodist Church and enabling it more properly to fulfill the mission God has given it in the world. That mission is the perennial task of evangelization, of winning uncommitted persons, one by one, to the Christian faith, teaching them authoritatively what basically to believe and not to believe, giving them moral precepts by which to live, and nurturing them in spirituality and holiness, so that their goodness is exemplary, influential, and even captivating. Converted and transformed persons are the only means for the rectification of society and the assurance of justice, opportunity, and happiness for all God's people on the face of the earth.

The future lies before us, but to possess it and serve it, we as a church must already have been possessed by our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, in whose name we witness, to whose life we conform, and by whose power we reclaim the world.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 29.

¹⁴ "Sermon on the Mount: VI," III, 8, *Wesley's Standard Sermons*, Sugden Edition, Epworth Press, London, 1935, Vol. I, p. 439.

The Episcopal Address has been written by Bishop William R. Cannon, who was selected by the Council of Bishops. It has been perfected for presentation at the 1984 session of the General Conference after considerable preparation, including discussion and debate at regular meetings of the Council of Bishops. Though not reflecting the view of every bishop at every point, in finished form this address has been approved by the Council of Bishops of The United Methodist Church.