One of the few ways in which United Methodists in North America are truly united, is in their shared sense that something fundamental is seriously ailing in the present life of the church. Through the 1980s there was a series of attempts to diagnose and treat the malady. By 1990 the Council of Bishops joined the effort, launching an initiative to recover Vital Congregations that nurture Faithful Disciples. As this initiative suggests, the main issue of concern is not polity but the role of the church as a means of grace—i.e., as an important channel through which God is graciously at work, nurturing Christian life and spreading redemptive influence in the world.

There is an obvious assumption in these recent diagnoses that things used to be different in Methodism. However, they rarely engage in the historical analysis that would test this assumption, or gain wisdom from the past toward recovering what was lost. Gathering such historical perspective is the underlying goal of this study. In the process, I hope to demonstrate that important dimensions of the role of the church as a means of “social grace” that John Wesley recommended to the early Methodists have been obscured among his North American descendants by the cultural, institutional, and theological dynamics of their historical development. Given the limitations of a single study, I have focused my analysis on the Methodist predecessors of the current United Methodist Church.

I. Wesley on the Church as a Means of Social Grace

In keeping with my thesis, I must begin this study with Wesley himself. Wesley’s ecclesiological reflection took place in the midst of his struggle to shepherd an “evangelical order” within a “catholic” church that offered little support for his enterprise. It is now generally agreed that the fruit of this practical-theological venture was a creative synthesis of Anglican and Moravian/Pietist emphases: namely, an ecclesiological ideal of small intentional gatherings linked integrally to the corporate worship of the larger church (ecclesiolae in ecclesia). What is not as often seen is that this ecclesiological synthesis was more than a pragmatic compromise. Wesley’s pastoral insistence on the integral relation between intentional small groups and traditional Christian worship was grounded in his most fundamental convictions about human nature, the human problem, and the Way of Salvation.
A. Role of the Affections in Wesley’s Theological Anthropology

This point requires elaboration because it is pivotal to the later analysis of changes in American Methodism. To take up the issue of human nature first, recent studies have drawn our attention to the centrality of the affections in Wesley’s theological anthropology. His typical list of the faculties which constitute the Image of God in humanity included: understanding, will, liberty, and conscience. In considering this list, it is crucial to recognize that Wesley was not using “will” to designate rational self-determination, as we tend to do; rather, he identified will with the affections. In making this identification he was purposefully distancing himself from the intellectualist stream that was gaining dominance in Western psychology. This stream concentrated on the need for reason to subordinate and control emotion in human actions. Wesley, by comparison, had a deep appreciation for the positive contribution of the affections to human action.

The contribution of the affections that Wesley valued was twofold. One dimension was the provision of motive power. For all of its benefits, Wesley recognized that rational persuasion alone was rarely sufficient to motivate sustained human action. He found the more compelling and enduring basis for such action in the affections—particularly the cardinal affection of love. As he once put it, “From the true love of God and [other humans] directly flows every Christian grace, every holy and happy temper. And from these springs uniform holiness of conversation.”

The other valued dimension of the affections was their habitual facilitation and orientation of human action. Motivating desire alone is insufficient for accomplishing the more complex and fulfilling human acts if we lack the “freedom” for these acts that comes from disciplined practice (e.g., I lack the “freedom” to fulfill my desire to play a Bach concerto). Wesley considered this to be as true in the spiritual life as anywhere, which is why he insisted that holiness must become an “habitual disposition of the heart” (i.e., the affections) if it is to be manifest in our lives. This insistence has led several scholars recently to correlate Wesley’s model of Christian life with a “character ethic,” where meaningful moral actions are grounded in nurtured affections (character dispositions).

For all of his appreciation of the way in which habituated affections help “free” us for lives of holiness, Wesley was aware that some thinkers presented the influence of our affections on our actions as invincible, thereby undermining human freedom. To avoid such implications he carefully distinguished “liberty” from will. Liberty is our capacity to enact (or to refuse to enact!) our desires and inclinations. It is also what allowed Wesley to affirm the contributions of motive, habit, education, and argument to human action, without rendering such actions totally determined.

It is because our actions are not totally determined that Wesley took the issues of human sin and salvation so seriously. The role of the affections was central to his understanding of both of these topics. In the case of sin, Wesley maintained that the issue was more than individual wrong actions. He frequently discussed sin in terms of a
threefold division: sinful nature or tempers, sinful words, and sinful actions. The point of this division was that our sinful actions and words flow from corrupted tempers (another term for the affections), so the problem of sin must ultimately be addressed at this affectional level. By corollary, Wesley’s chief complaint against the models of Christian salvation which he discerned among his fellow Anglican clergy was that they restricted themselves to outward matters, neglecting the affectional dimension of human life. His own typical definition of Christian life placed primary emphasis on renewing this “inward” dimension, described in such terms as: “the life of God in the [human] soul; a participation of the divine nature; the mind that was in Christ; or, the renewal of our heart after the image of [God who] created us.” Since holiness of thought, word, and action would flow from such renewal, Wesley once identified the essential goal of all true religion as the recovery of holy tempers.

B. Church as a Means of Social Grace for Nurturing Affections

But how does this recovery take place? How are our sin-debilitated affections reempowered and the sinful distortions of their patterning influence reshaped? Wesley was quite clear that we cannot accomplish this through human effort alone. Its possibility lies instead in the gracious regenerating impact of God’s restored pardoning Presence in the lives of believers. But God’s grace does not infuse holy tempers instantaneously complete. Rather, God graciously restores in believers the “seed” of every virtue. These seeds then strengthen and take shape as we responsively “grow in grace.”

And what facilitates such responsive growth? Wesley’s answer was a recommended set of “means of grace.” It is important to note that Wesley valued the means of grace both as avenues by which God conveys the gracious Presence that enables our growth in holiness and as “exercises” by which we responsively nurture that holiness. Since holiness is rooted in the affections, he also highlighted the way in which various means of grace serve to enliven our affectional motivation and/or to shape our affectional character. Indeed, Wesley’s developed set of recommended means of grace manifests a conscious concern to balance these two effects.

The point that I want to make for this study is that Wesley’s ecclesiological interconnection of intentional small groups (ecclesiolae) and the worship of the larger church (ecclesia) is a central aspect of his dynamic conception of the means of grace. This might best be seen by distinguishing four dimensions of “social grace” involved in this interconnection.

1. **Social grace as corporate liturgical worship and eucharist.** The first dimension concerns Wesley’s insistence on the importance of his followers continuing to participate in the worship services of their respective churches (primarily Anglican). He was convinced that regular corporate (i.e., social) worship—with its eucharist, preaching, and liturgy—is a vital
means of graciously empowering and shaping Christian affections. Since this role is central to
the Anglican definition of the church as a place where the pure Word of God is preached and the
sacraments duly administered, Wesley retained this definition in the Articles of Religion that he
prepared for the American Methodists when they became a distinct church.

2. **Social grace as mutual encouragement and support.** The second dimension of “social
grace” is indicated by Wesley’s creation of specific Methodist gatherings to provide mutual
couragement and support for those pursuing growth in holiness. This move was sparked by his
growing conviction that “The gospel of Christ knows no religion, but social; no holiness but
social holiness.” As he later clarified, “I mean not only that [holiness] cannot subsist so well, but
that it cannot subsist at all without society, without living and conversing with [others].”  
Perhaps the most effective means that Wesley developed for evoking such communal
empowerment for holiness was the love feast, an occasion at which Methodists sang of being
“nourished with social grace.”

3. **Social grace as mutual accountability.** The closely related third dimension of “social
grace” also found its primary means in distinctive Methodist gatherings. Wesley’s experience in
the Methodist revival convinced him of the vital role of mutual accountability (or discipline) for
guiding new believers’ growth in holiness. The most concrete form that this shaping discipline
took was a creative set of overlapping levels of accountability groups that Wesley
designed—class meetings, bands, and select societies. The broadest form that it took was the
connection that he established between continued society membership and observance of the
General Rules. The preface to these Rules captures well the second and third dimension of
Wesley’s overall ecclesiology in its definition of a Methodist society as “a company of [persons]
‘having the form, and seeking the power of godliness’, united in order to pray together, to
receive the word of exhortation, and to watch over one another in love, that they may help each
other to work out their salvation.”

4. **Social grace as presence in the society at large.** The final dimension of “social grace”
in Wesley’s ecclesiology relates to the church’s role as a means of God’s gracious redemptive
presence in society at large. Wesley took it for granted that as Christians grow in holiness, they
will naturally give their lives in service to others. In this connection he once defined the church
as: “a body of [persons] compacted together in order, first, to save [their] own soul, then to assist
each other in working out their salvation, and afterwards, as far as in them lies, to save all
[persons] from present and future misery, to overturn the kingdom of Satan, and set up the
kingdom of Christ.” Wesley was quite clear that this salvific work in society should address
physical and material needs as well as

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spiritual needs. Indeed, he specifically repudiated the valuation of works of mercy as mere incentives to evangelization. Addressing the physical and material needs of others was part of God’s overall redemptive will, whether it leads to opportunities for evangelization or not.25

II. Progressive Eclipse of Social Grace in American Methodism

Such was Wesley’s ideal conception of the church as a means of social grace—a setting for nurturing Christian character and spawning agents of God’s gracious presence in the world. It must be admitted that this ideal never found full expression even among the British Methodists under Wesley’s immediate supervision. Its fate was even more precarious among his North American descendants. The following consideration of this latter setting will be organized around major epochs of American Methodism, observing the shifting fortunes of the four dimensions of social grace in each epoch, and the progressive obscuring of the role of the church as a means of grace throughout.

A. 1772–1816, Church as Countercultural Community

Both the beginning and ending dates for the formative epoch of American Methodism are debatable. Perhaps the best way to define the period is in terms of Francis Asbury’s extended ministry, from his appointment as first superintendent in 1772 until his death in 1816. A commonly recognized force impacting American Methodists throughout this period was their institutional transition from a society within Anglicanism into an independent church.26 While strains had been growing for some time, this transition took place officially at the 1784 Christmas Conference. An immediate change in the Minutes emerging from that conference was the deletion of the agenda of “reforming the (Anglican) church” from the description of God’s purpose in raising up the Methodists.27 After all, Methodists were now themselves the church, or on the way to becoming one. The ambivalence of their actual situation is symbolized by their retention of the term “society” throughout the 1785 Minutes. Their 1792 Discipline admitted the ambiguity of this use of “society” in places where “church” might be expected, but the wholesale revision of such passages did not take place until 1816 (symbolizing the end of the epoch).28

Recent historical studies have emphasized a less recognized but equally important cultural force that impacted the ecclesiological sense of early American Methodists—their status as a countercultural movement within the dominant “culture of honor and deference” in society at large (particularly in the upper South, which was early Methodism’s stronghold).29 While hardly a thoroughly egalitarian community, early Methodism’s theology and worship practices provided affirmation of worth and possibilities of involvement that were denied women, slaves, and the poor in the larger society. This won
them the disdain (and frequent abuse) of the “elite” of society, which in turn reinforced their
countercultural sense. Indeed, Francis Asbury gauged the very success of the Methodist
movement by its reproach from the “respectable” folk of society.30 His concern near the end of
his life over the fact that Methodism was itself becoming “respectable,” and drawing in the
wealthy, was obvious (and another marker of the end of the epoch).31

With such institutional and cultural forces at work, what became of the various
dimensions of the church as a means of social grace that Wesley commended to his American
followers?

1. Loss of liturgical worship and (nearly) eucharist. Wesley valued liturgical Lord’s
Day worship so highly that one of the items he prepared specifically for the new American
church was the Sunday Service, an edited version of the Book of Common Prayer. The American
Methodists barely acknowledged this resource, quickly laying it aside in favor of the continuing
“freedom” and focus on preaching in their society meeting worship.32 In part this move reflects
the Enlightenment distrust of tradition. But among North American colonists this general
tendency was heightened by a sense of being a new People of God set free from the bondage of
Egypt (i.e., Anglican traditions) accretions to recover the pristine and simple religion of the
Bible. Such a “primitivist” vision was common in early American Methodism, and the Sunday
Service was one of its victims.33

With the Sunday Service went the regular pattern of Scripture readings in the lectionary,
meant to insure that worshippers were given a balanced and complete model of Christ—to adore
and emulate. Also forfeited were formal confessions, with their “objective” interrogation of
motivations and prejudices, which Wesley found so beneficial to continued responsible growth
in grace.34 Both of these losses were compensated somewhat by the heightened role of
hymns—and Wesley’s carefully edited hymnals—in early Methodist worship.35

But something even more central to Wesley’s model of Christian life and growth was
also at stake in the quiet dismissal of the Sunday Service. In the prefatory letter to this volume
Wesley had implored the American Methodists to celebrate the Lord’s Supper weekly. This
request was no passing fancy, nor a mere concern with liturgical etiquette. Wesley had come to
value the Lord’s Supper as the “grand channel” whereby the empowering grace of the Spirit is
conveyed to human souls.36 He longed for his American followers to be nourished frequently by
this grace. But this was not to be, because the American Methodists did not share Wesley’s
valuation of the Lord’s Supper. To be sure, prior to 1784 some American lay preachers had
lobbied for sacramental rights, but this had more to do with their tension with—and ridicule
by—Anglican priests than a concern for
enabling frequent communion. They actually viewed the Lord’s Supper more as a duty than as a vital means of grace, and were content to interpret lack of opportunity as suspending the obligation to receive! This helps explain why, even when ordination to sacramental rights came, the celebration of communion remained infrequent—at most usually only at quarterly conference. Moreover, in this quarterly setting it was often pruned of its liturgical framework and closely fused with the love feast. Overall, its function was more “disciplinary” (was one allowed to attend or not?) than character-forming.

2. **Centrality of mutual encouragement and support.** If little of Wesley’s first dimension of the church as social grace survived in early American Methodism, the fortunes of the second dimension were quite different. As Russell Richey has shown, early American Methodism exemplified the role of church as a community of encouragement and support. In part this was a function of their nature as a countercultural movement, members of such a movement depend on the support and repeated affirmation of others who share their vision. In part it was due to the egalitarian dynamic of their community which provided opportunities for fellowship and support that were excluded in the larger society. And in part it was nurtured by the distinctive form of worship that emerged in quarterly conferences and shifted to the conjoined early camp meetings—worship which spread the fire of love and holy zeal to the point of “melting” them together. These quarterly gatherings epitomized church as a means of *enlivening* social grace.

3. **Modifying mutual accountability.** The stark contrast between the fortunes of the first and second dimension of social grace suggests that the operative definition of “church” in early American Methodism was that of the society in the General Rules. This would fit with the high visibility that the General Rules held throughout this period: the requirement of reading the Rules in each congregation at least once a year was carried over into the new church, to facilitate this the Rules were bound with the *Discipline* in 1788, and in 1789 they were incorporated into its very text.

On this basis one would expect Wesley’s insistence on accountability as a means of *shaping* grace to remain intact through this period. In general it did, but on careful inspection a subtle—but significant—change of emphasis began to appear. Signs of this modification are evident already in the notes that Coke and Asbury published with the 1798 *Discipline*. While they praised the General Rules lavishly, they chose to describe them as “a system of ethics” rather than a set of spiritual disciplines. This suggests that they viewed the Rules more as a list of criteria for judging proper moral choices than as a means for shaping Christian character. By corollary, “discipline” for
them appears to mean primarily purging from the society those who make unholy choices. While Wesley certainly accepted this purgative role of discipline (or accountability), by comparison he focused more attention on its formative role in shaping Christian character.

Ironically, the incipient weakening of mutual accountability that I am suggesting is evident in early American Methodism was directly connected to its heightening of the second dimension of social grace. One connection was the strengthened egalitarian impulse among American Methodists—which began to undermine the authority of “others” to hold one accountable. This is apparent already in the 1785 Minutes where an original question in the British Minutes about whether Methodist leaders were providing sufficient oversight of “helpers” is altered to directions for fraternal accountability among the American preachers. From such beginnings it is no wonder that the major issue of ecclesiological debate through this period was the legitimacy of the episcopacy. Nor is it surprising that hierarchical authority would be only the first target of the progressive rejection of all external accountability as individualism spread its corrosive influence through culture and church in North America.

Another evident link between the heightened mutual support and diluted mutual accountability in early American Methodism is a change that took place in their distinctive gatherings. Sharing of personal testimonies gained an increasing role in these gatherings—whether class meetings, love feasts, or preacher’s conferences—displacing other components like routine spiritual examination. While sharing spiritual biographies does play a significant role in shaping character (through emulation), it cannot replace the role of challenge/support for honest spiritual self-assessment available through mutual confession and spiritual direction. It is evident that the latter benefits were beginning to slip from focus when the philosophical justification that Coke and Asbury choose to highlight for the band meetings is not how they help shape Christian character, but how they strengthen the “social principle” inherent in the human soul.

### 4. Presence as reforming evangel

By “social principle” Coke and Asbury meant a desire for fellowship, not an intuitive commitment to socio-economic justice. More to the point, they were not endorsing political activism for such justice. While early Methodist bishops affirmed that God raised up the Methodists in America as a reforming force, they assumed that this reform would come—as William McKendree put it in a revealing slip of the tongue—by spreading holiness through the land. They took particular pride in the fact that Methodists had not grasped for political power to accomplish their Christianizing aims. Underlying this pride was their emphatic rejection of the long-standing model of established
churches (having suffered so recently at the hands of established Anglicanism). In retrospect, this wedding of commitment to religious liberty with the mission of reforming or Christianizing society made the newly-formed Methodist Episcopal Church a prototype of that distinctively American form of church—the denomination.

Thus the early Methodists set out to reform America by evangelistic incorporation of others into their community and convictions. Wesley would have shared their sense that transformation of individuals was foundational to the larger reforming task. But he would have been very uncomfortable with some of the ways in which their focus on individual spiritual life served to marginalize concern for basic human needs. The best example is slavery. Wesley was an ardent opponent of this institution, specifically attacking religious justifications of it. Most American Methodists initially rejected slavery as well, but the cause often proved to be less central to their understanding of God’s redemptive purposes than it was for Wesley. As a result, when some slave holders responded to abolitionist themes in early Methodist preaching by preventing their slaves from attending worship, even Asbury acquiesced to granting relative praise for those slave holders who allowed slaves freedom to worship while withholding freedom of their bodies.

As Jon Butler has argued, there is more at stake here than simply a failure of nerve. When Christian traditions in America made peace with slavery for the purposes of evangelization it had a significant impact on their understanding of Christianity—reducing both salvation and ethics to individual and private matters. While the early American Methodists may not have traveled all the way down this road yet, they had taken the first steps. These steps reveal the dangers when the enlivening effect of grace begins to lose connection with its shaping effect in the church.

I hasten to add that, as with other Christian traditions in America, the most faithful resistance to such dangers was among those Africans who embraced Methodism despite any role it played in their subjugation. But sadly, as one final mark of the end of any supposed idyllic foundational epoch of American Methodism, these African Methodists were finding it necessary by 1816 to set up separate denominational structures to insure themselves civil treatment and equality in worship and ministry.

B. 1816–1900, Church as Self-Selected Fellowship of Individuals

As the elderly Asbury had sensed, Methodism’s place in North American culture was undergoing a radical change. Within a few years of his death, growth would make it the largest ecclesial tradition in the United States. The influence this brought was compounded by the
tendency of other traditions to appropriate doctrinal emphases and religious practices from the Methodists. The overall impact was such that historians of North American religion often dub the nineteenth century the “Methodist Century.”

This change in status was bound to affect the Methodists’ sense of being a countercultural movement. Internal religious dynamics undercut this sense even more. In an insightful analysis Gregory Schneider has traced the ironic transformation of the once subversive forms of Methodist spirituality into a thoroughly domesticated religion which offered legitimation to the existing political and economic order and transferred primary responsibility for the salvation of souls from the church to the home.57

Before considering the impact of this social transformation on the experience of church as a means of grace, it would be helpful to note its effect on the Methodists’ theological understanding of the church. This issue can be addressed with increasing confidence through the nineteenth century as prescribed courses of study assumed their role in ministerial education.  

Actually, the first thing that emerges from reflecting on these courses is the degree to which nineteenth-century American Methodism was dependant upon British Methodist theologians: in addition to some of Wesley’s works, many of the writings of John Fletcher and Adam Clarke appear on the lists; particularly influential through the second half of the century was Richard Watson’s Theological Institutes;59 and William Pope’s Compendium of Christian Theology began to displace Watson toward the end of the century.60 Not until the last decade of the century were both Pope and Watson being progressively replaced by such American theologians as Luther Lee, Miner Raymond, Thomas Summers, and John Miley.61

It is no accident that Watson and Pope were so amenable to American Methodists. Nineteenth-century British Methodism shared many of the ecclesial dynamics of its American counterpart. More importantly, it shared the influence of North Atlantic Enlightenment culture; for what is most striking in this epoch is the way that the Enlightenment exaltation of the individual (largely through such religious embodiments as deism or revivalism) steadily eroded emphasis on the church. Indeed, it became characteristic of nineteenth-century North American theology—across the Protestant spectrum—to focus on individual soteriology, virtually disregarding the church.62 If anything, American Methodism led the way in this development.63

Even when ecclesiology was granted a doctrinal locus the influence of Enlightenment individualism showed through. The dominating issue of this locus became justifying ecclesial polity to Enlightenment sensitivities.64 And if a theological definition of church was given, it usually boiled down to “a fellowship of individuals who believe alike.” As the catechism adopted by the Methodist Episcopal traditions at the culmination of this epoch put it: “[The church] is the universal society of believers in Jesus scattered throughout the world, who are
nevertheless one in Him; because they recognize Him as their head; because His Spirit dwells in them; and because they accept the law of love contained in His Gospel as the rule of their lives.’

What is missing in such a definition, of course, is Wesley’s sense of the church as a central means of the gracious formation of faithful disciples, not simply an arena in which they congregate. I believe that a major factor in explaining this absence is that Wesley’s American descendants rather quickly abandoned his anthropology, with its appreciation of the positive contribution of the affections to human action.

The reason for this abandonment is not hard to find. Methodism’s proclamation of universally-available salvation put them at odds with the Reformed assumption of predestination. The most influential exponent of this latter view in colonial North America was Jonathan Edwards, who emphasized the role of the religious affections in motivating and guiding human action precisely in order to account for predestination. Wesley’s American descendants chose not to follow him in using a distinction between will and liberty to preserve an appreciation for the role of the affections while avoiding deterministic implications. Instead, they were drawn to the more intellectualist account of human action championed by Thomas Reid and the Scottish common-sense school of philosophy. For Reid, the “will” was identified with the power of rational self-determination and “habits” or “affections” were considered irrational influences that the will must control. Identical definitions of will, with the discounting of any positive role of habits or affections in human action, came to dominate Methodist theology—on both sides of the Atlantic—through the nineteenth century.

The impact of this changed anthropology on soteriology was profound. Salvation was increasingly presented in Methodist theology as more a matter of human will (our “gracious ability”) than of the regenerating work of the Spirit. And even when the Spirit’s role was retained, it was recast from Wesley’s model. For example, Wilbur Fisk ended up describing regeneration as the Holy Spirit’s unilateral transformation of unholy affections after the human will abdicated its role. Miley later made clearer than Fisk that evil motive states (i.e., affections) remain in believers until entire sanctification. But he portrayed this latter event as the time when the Spirit comes in a fuller measure to subdue evil tendencies and make spiritual affections dominant, while admitting that “We know nothing more of the mode of this inner work than we know of the mode of the Spirit in the work of regeneration.” What neither of these accounts allows is a role for the gradual habituating of the affections as an integral part of the Way of Salvation.

In this light, it is little wonder that Wesley’s full-orbed ideal of the church as a means of social grace progressively faded from the consciousness of nineteenth-century Methodism. There is no better example than the first major American Methodist systematics, which defined the purpose of the Christian church as the establishment and continuance of the means of grace, but then delimited these means to
the preaching of the Gospel and the sacraments. To gain a better idea of what this was overlooking, I turn again to the four dimensions of the church as a means of social grace.

**1. Continuing marginalization of liturgy and eucharist.** The generally low valuation of Wesley’s first dimension of social grace continued through the nineteenth century. For example, there was little attempt to reappropriate his liturgical recommendations, given the success of their informal worship styles. I say styles because there was diversity among Methodists of this time, particularly between the more staid Eastern seaboard and the frontier. The bishops found their hands full simply trying to establish agreement on the main components of worship among these groups.

Part of the disdain for liturgy through this period was surely due to a strong anti-Roman Catholic sentiment that Methodists shared with nineteenth-century American Protestantism in general. But the loss of appreciation for the contribution of patterned affections to human action also played a role. This is evident in the responses to initial suggestions near the end of the century of reappropriating Wesley’s *Sunday Service*; no benefit of liturgy for true religion could be conceived, only its likelihood of stifling the “life” of the worship service. Analogous assumptions are reflected in the growing displacement of Wesley hymns by “gospel songs” in Methodist worship.

The eucharist fared little better through the nineteenth-century. The standard Methodist rubrics had to require quarterly celebration. The most notable move toward more frequent communion was in the Southern church, hoping to establish monthly celebration. But even this falls far short of Wesley’s hopes, which reflects that American Methodists still considered the issue more as a matter of obligation than as an opportunity to partake of the “grand channel” of God’s grace!

**2. From support to rapport.** The second dimension of the church as a means of social grace, which had remained relatively strong in our first epoch, suffered greater deterioration during this period. While mutual encouragement and support had been strong among early Methodists, the forms of communal religious expression that they emphasized eventually fostered adoption—at least among whites—of an evangelical version of the Victorian domestic ideology of privacy, individualism and affection. On these terms persons are less likely to acknowledge their need of social identification and support, or to provide that support when it involves admitting their own struggles. They are more inclined to gather with like-minded folk for simple camaraderie, entertainment and education. As a Methodist preacher with fifty years of experience observed in 1878: “Our people talk less in class, but they work more in the Sunday school.” One could
add that by the end of the century they went less to camp meetings and more to the refined (and nonintrusive) Chautauqua meetings that were developed by Methodist pastor John Vincent in 1874.⁷⁹

To get a sense of the overall impact of these developments, consider Luther Lee’s description of the purpose of the church: “Christianity requires us to maintain rational and pure Christian fellowship for our mutual comfort and edification ... to keep selves separate from sinners ... to provide mutual watch care, instruction and support ... to have regular and orderly assemblies for public worship ... to maintain healthy moral discipline ... and to spread the truth and convert the world.”⁸⁰ It sounds very proper--and very dull--and this is only 1856! It leaves you wondering what would motivate people to be involved.

The answer to this question is more predictable than one might imagine. When an intellectualist psychology succeeds in discounting the role of the affections as the motive power and patterned guides of human action, two related consequences typically ensue: on the one hand the affections become valued primarily for their affectivity or emotional sensation; on the other hand decisionistic moralism sets in, with each human choice being considered an isolated rational duty, and judged accordingly. As such, some late nineteenth-century Methodist (and United Brethren) theologians justified the place of the church in Christian life as fulfilling our human emotional need for fellowship.⁸¹ More often participation in church was presented as a rational duty that we owe to God.⁸² In neither case was there much interest in how this participation helps “free” us to love God and others more faithfully.

3. The demise of mutual accountability. The incipient modification of discipline noted in the foundational epoch of American Methodism found full bloom in the nineteenth century, leading to the virtual demise of mutual accountability as a means of graciously forming Christian character. Here again the replacement of Wesley’s anthropology with an intellectualist psychology fueled developments. On the latter terms discipline has no direct concern with the supportive shaping of character to provide foundation for holy lives; it is instead a matter of insuring that persons recognize their duty, are supervised in fulfilling that duty, and are held liable when they do not. Note how this correlates to Bishop Elijah Hedding’s 1842 address aimed at strengthening the administration of discipline in the Methodist Episcopal Church: “The great work of discipline is to instruct, educate, and govern the people, and thus help them on toward heaven; to restrain and keep them from evil, or warn, reprove, and reclaim them when any may have erred, or fallen into sin.”⁸³
One problem with this account of discipline—for a church in the United States—is that it is set on a collision course with popular understandings of the constitutionally-established Enlightenment ideal of freedom of conscience in religious matters. The more fundamental problem, if Wesley’s assumption of the positive contributions of the affections to human actions is correct, is that it holds persons accountable for actions that it does little to enable them to perform. The predictable response was that folk would resist or reject this accountability, and pastors would become increasingly reticent to impose it.

This is exactly what transpired in American Methodism through the nineteenth-century, as evidenced by the difficulties with enforcing the General Rules and the moves toward abolishing probationary membership. The most concrete form it took was the demise of class meetings. Attempts to explain this demise have highlighted such factors as the change of form in the meetings from mutual spiritual examination to individual testimony, the move to larger class sizes, the loss of pastoral nerve to disfellowship, and the overall change of focus from discipleship to fellowship. Put in terms of the factor that I have been emphasizing, the meetings shifted from being a means of shared challenge/support aimed at shaping character to a gathering for individual members to rehearse the correct choices that they had made. The latter format proved as likely to provoke envy, despair, hypocrisy, or boredom as it was to foster growth. It is no wonder that persons opted out!

It is worth noting in passing that this demise of accountability groups was a major factor in the growing dissatisfaction of the nineteenth-century holiness movement. When they eventually separated from the Methodist Episcopal traditions, holiness groups developed models of the church that placed primary emphasis on upholding accountability. Unfortunately, they did so within the continuing assumptions of Scottish common sense rationalism. Thus they found themselves dealing with the same dynamics as their parent traditions, only a generation or two later.

4. Presence as domesticated exemplar. Initial signs of accommodation to culture were noted in early Methodism. Such tendencies were vigorously resisted through the first half of the nineteenth century. Evidence of this resistance can be found even in the many contemporary defenses of Methodism’s ecclesiological status against various “high-church” attacks. The major strategy in these defenses was appeal to the apostolic life of the Methodist people. Precisely for this reason, they also carried admonitions for Methodists to persist in holy living and sacrificial mission within a catholic spirit toward all others who love and serve Christ.

The most visible area in which these admonitions failed and the major Methodist groups accommodated by mid-century to
current cultural agendas was in the struggle over slavery. This accommodation served to accelerate the growth of individualism and the privatization of Christian faith that was already taking place among Methodists. As Major Jones (a black Methodist theologian) put it, the white church turned from an understanding of church as the family of God to that of brothers in Christ—a spiritual brotherhood that accommodated underlying inequality. Jones goes on to note some echo-effects of privatization among the African Methodist traditions.

Such privatizing of Christian faith has drastic implications for the role of the church as a means of grace in society at large. For example, it made it easier for folk to confuse the church’s public mission with the defense or propagation of the reigning values and practices of society. Instances of Methodist appropriation of such civil religion themes are not hard to find in the later nineteenth century.

For others, privatization served to undercut the holistic nature of the mission of the church, with social service and reform being subsumed into personal evangelism. A striking example of this transformation is an influential theology text that defined the mission of the church simply as “the promotion of the Christian religion in all the world, through the holy example of believers and preaching of the Gospel.”

Finally, privatization encourages viewing mission to the world as a distinct (and optional) task from Christian discipleship per se. This move is reflected in the development of mission institutions in Methodism. Whereas early Methodists understood the entire purpose and work of the church as mission, in 1820 a distinct volunteer society was formed to focus on this task, and in 1872 the Methodist Episcopal Church embraced this division by incorporating the society as one department within its larger structure.

Thus, by the end of the nineteenth century the role of the church in society for much of American Methodism had been reduced to being a civil or evangelistic example. Given the further decline of both the enlivening and the shaping roles of the church as a means of grace, it was a very domesticated example at that!

C. 1900–1968, Church as Modern Bureaucracy

Methodists in the United States entered the twentieth century very proud of their identification by Theodore Roosevelt as the greatest and most representative church in the nation. They would watch this supposed status dissipate as the century progressed, sharing in the larger demise of the de facto Protestant establishment that had remained through the nineteenth century despite the de jure disestablishment of religion. This demise was fueled by such early twentieth-century cultural forces as accelerated immigration,
urbanization and industrialization, as well as social response to the World Wars and modern intellectual trends.\textsuperscript{95}

In retrospect, a more significant cultural force affecting the Methodist understanding of the church through the first half of the twentieth century was modernization, with its emphasis on technological production and hierarchical, rational bureaucracies. The ecclesial energy of the various Methodist groups was consumed in this period by efforts to consolidate and rationalize the many ministry efforts and agencies that had developed over the course of their history.\textsuperscript{96} Such organizational concerns were particularly a factor in the drives for merger that serve to define this epoch.\textsuperscript{97}

If there is one issue that sociologists agree upon it is that modern rationalistic bureaucracies tend to alienate their members. Such alienation is quite apparent in Methodist theological reflection of this period.\textsuperscript{98} One effect was to reinforce theological neglect of the doctrine of the church. As a classic example, when the Methodist Church published an eight-volume series summarizing “Our Faith” in 1950 there was no direct consideration of the church included!\textsuperscript{99} Interestingly, this neglect spanned the boundaries of the vigorous theological divides of the time, since these divides focused primarily on the doctrines of revelation and Christology.\textsuperscript{100}

The impact of modernization is even more evident when the doctrine of the church was treated in Methodist theologies of this period. It became standard to describe the church as simply the “organization” of Christians for worship, instruction, and administration of religious ordinances.\textsuperscript{101} The rationalization involved in this description is palpable. More implicit, but undeniable, is the continuing Enlightenment individualism that views the existence of the church as much more dependant upon the Christians who make it up than vice versa.\textsuperscript{102}

An initial sense of how this continuing individualism affected the notion of the church as a means of grace is provided by Henry Sheldon’s extended argument that while the church may have some effective instrumentality in nurturing Christian character, it has no sovereign prerogative in its production—that belongs to the individual.\textsuperscript{103} Further details will again be considered in terms of the four dimensions of social grace.

1. Nascent liturgical recovery, but for what purpose? The turn of the century witnessed the first serious suggestions since its demise in early Methodism of resurrecting Wesley’s Sunday Service for Methodist worship. However, the concern that often sparked these suggestions was that the Methodists were losing their more sophisticated urban members to the Episcopalians!\textsuperscript{104} This is hardly a strong rationale for recovering liturgy as a means of grace.

In fairness, it must be admitted that the desire for better liturgy that found expression in the 1935 joint Hymnal and the 1945 Book of Worship for the newly-merged Methodist Church was
also fueled by an emerging renewed interest in Wesley and the broader “catholic” Christian tradition. But this interest faced the imposing obstacle of the rationalistic/moralistic dismissal of ritual and symbol being disseminated by the dominant theological force in American Methodism of the time—Boston Personalism. With such a prevailing mood, the gains made in reintroducing liturgy to worship are remarkable, and the relative stalemate of efforts to encourage more frequent eucharist is quite understandable.

2. Idealization of fellowship. If the nineteenth century fostered a transition to church as a self-selected fellowship of individuals, the forces of modernization in the twentieth century have served to drive these individuals apart. As sociologists have argued, modern bureaucracies tend to make individuals both autonomous and anonymous to one another. A 1960 study of the Methodist Church revealed this process very much at work.

A common response to such social dynamics is to idealize some subunit of society as an alternative to the bureaucracy. I suspect that this contributed to the tendency of later Personalists to present the church as the ideal setting for meeting a person’s need for social relations. Such an apology for—and implied definition of—the church as an arena for nurturing social relations was given particular prominence among Methodists in mid-century through the writings of Harris Franklin Rall, who never tired of quoting Wesley’s insistence on the social nature of religion in his support. Despite this apparent sanction, there is quite a distance between the vague ideal of such fellowship and Wesley’s specific structures for mutual encouragement and support as a means of grace.

3. The sovereign individual conscience. The twentieth century brought little to reverse the demise of mutual accountability noted in the previous period. While Scottish common-sense rationalism may have been laid aside, it was replaced by Boston Personalism’s neo-Kantian dismissal of the affections and insistence on the sovereignty of individual conscience. On such terms the very idea of a positive role of spiritual discipline becomes alien. As such, it is no surprise that the ritual for reception of members adopted in 1939 for the merged Methodist Church deleted all theological mention of discipline. As Frederick Norwood quipped, whereas the problem of early Methodists had been to keep their names on the class rolls, the problem faced now by Methodist congregations is to get apostate, inactive, or even deceased members’ names off the church rolls.

4. Presence as (accommodated) social activist. A broad privatization of the mission of the church in society was noted in late nineteenth-century Methodism. A strong reaction to this privatization emerged in the early twentieth century,
particularly in the Northern churches. This reaction insisted that addressing society’s problems was central to Christian life, gaining it the title “the Social Gospel.” The growing influence of this agenda can be traced by the addition of works emphasizing the Church’s role in addressing the socio-economic problems of the day—in terms both of service and of advocacy for change—to first the Methodist Episcopal and then the Methodist Protestant courses of study. These programmatic works were soon supplemented by a series of books giving guidance on how pastors could lead local congregations in developing social programs for the moral, religious, and economic problems of the communities in which they are found.

To be sure, not everyone welcomed this emphasis on the church’s social agenda. Indeed, North American Protestantism of the early twentieth century tended to divide across the board into warring camps over the mission of the church. The result was all-too-often a lamentable polarization between concern for the spiritual transformation of individual lives and efforts for the socio-economic transformation of an alienating and oppressive social order. This polarization was as frequent in Methodist circles as anywhere else, and its aftershocks remain with us.

With hindsight, one of the most remarkable aspects of this particular theme is the degree to which even the strongest proponents of social activism remain accommodated to various social assumptions and pressures. Perhaps the most striking example is the theological justification offered by Albert Knudson (Dean of the Boston University School of Theology) for the creation of the segregated Central Jurisdiction for African-Americans as part of the 1939 merger to form the Methodist Church. Another example that has been given extended attention by Stephen Long is the embracing of militarist agendas during the World Wars.

In this regard it is quite interesting that arguments for embracing the Social Gospel agenda in Methodist circles were often expressed by appeal to Wesley’s claim that “Christianity is essentially a social religion.” This appeal is misleading because Wesley’s original claim was not dealing with social action—at least not directly—but with the need for mutual support in the development of holy affections. He understood that consistent and faithful social action must be grounded in such formation; but this connection is precisely what twentieth-century Methodism—on both sides of the debate—had largely lost!

Moreover, even those scattered voices through this period calling for a renewed focus on forming Christian tempers or character, as foundational to Christian life in the world, lacked clarity on what this involved or how to accomplish it. For some of them Christian tempers were simply motivational “moods” that
could be created by artful worship services. For others they were “attitudes” to be secured by proper pastoral management techniques. Still others appeared to assume that they emerge rather naturally through social relations with other Christians. Only the most brave venture the suggestion during this period that spiritual disciplines play a role. In short, little remained of Wesley’s conception of the church as a means of social grace for nurturing Christian affections.

III. CONCLUSION: PRESENT FRAGMENTATION AND HOPES FOR RENEWAL

It is extremely hazardous to venture historical analysis of events within the last twenty-five years. Perhaps all that needs to be said is that contemporary Methodism, like all of American mainline religion, has struggled with the fragmentation of community fostered by modernism. It has struggled to minister to this fragmentation in society around it and to make sense of (and peace with) this fragmentation within its own life.

A recently completed five-year study of American Presbyterians, which highlighted this same fragmentation, reached the conclusion that American mainstream Protestant churches are going through a period of dramatic redefinition. They then urged Presbyterians to dialogue seriously with their tradition in this redefinition. One could hope for no less as Methodists seek to reformulate Vital Congregations that nurture Faithful Disciples.

Fortunately, there are signs that such dialogue is beginning to take place. In the most general sense, Wesley is being taken more seriously as a theological mentor by contemporary American Methodist theologians than has ever been the case. For specific dialogue with Wesley’s understanding of the nature and mission of the church, one can point to the very helpful books by Howard Snyder. For careful consideration of how Wesley drew upon the various means of grace to empower and shape Christian character there is the work of Henry Knight. Concerning the role of Wesley’s intentional groups in providing both support and accountability, one need only notice the restoration of the class meetings to the United Methodist Discipline in 1988, spearheaded by the efforts of David Lowes Watson. And for a vigorous engagement with Wesley’s hopes for the Methodists to serve as a means of God’s gracious transformation of the current socio-economic order, one can turn to Theodore Jennings.

While all of this is significant, if the connection that I have drawn between the abandonment of Wesley’s anthropological assumptions and the demise of his conception of the church as a means of grace is persuasive, then an equally important development is the renewed interest in Methodist circles—largely through the influence of Stanley Hauerwas—in character ethics and the role of the church as a community of character formation. On these terms the dialogue with Wesley should be more fruitful.

I would add in closing, however, that this must be a dialogue with Wesley. What is desperately needed by contemporary American Methodism is not a
mere replication of Wesley’s model of the church, but an appropriation of the practical-theological wisdom embodied in that model. In particular, we need to recover the connection between spirit and discipline that Wesley recognized was essential to the continued vitality of Methodism (and which he saw slipping away already in 1786).  

Notes

1. This paper honors Ted Runyon on the occasion of completing thirty-five years of teaching at Candler School of Theology, Emory University.


4. I believe that most of the characteristics noted in these Methodist groups can be demonstrated (if perhaps slightly later) in the Evangelical Association and the United Brethren, and will note a few examples. I will also mention some possible correlations to developments in African-American Methodist groups, but found this to be an area in need of far more foundational studies.


7. Much more detail and documentation of the following summary can be found in Randy L. Maddox, *Responsible Grace: John Wesley’s Practical Theology* (forthcoming).


10. The best analysis of this aspect of Wesley is Steele, “Gracious Affections,” which places Wesley’s psychology in a “voluntarist” tradition where affections and reason are co-determinate of human actions.

11. A Letter to the Rev. Mr. Baily of Cork, §III.1, Works 9:309. Wesley is using “conversation” here is the (now archaic) sense of all human actions.


13. In addition to the previously cited works of Clapper and Steele, see Stanley Hauerwas, Character and the Christian Life: A Study in Theological Ethics (San Antonio, TX: Trinity University Press, 1975); and Leonard Hulley, To Be and To Do: Exploring Wesley’s Thought on Ethical Behaviour (Pretoria: University of South Africa, 1988).


18. E.g., Minutes (2 Aug. 1745), Q. 1, in John Wesley, ed. Albert Outler (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964), 152. See Maddox, Responsible Grace, Chapter 11, for a discussion of two passages where Wesley argues that holy tempers can be implanted in a fully mature state.


22. In the hymn used at love feasts, Hymns, #507, st. 1, Works 7:698.


27. See p. 4 of the reprint of these minutes in Methodist Disciplines, 1785–1789 (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1992).

28. The admission in the 1792 Discipline is in a note to §26. David Sherman, History of the Revisions of the Discipline of the Methodist Episcopal Church (New York:
Nelson & Phillips, 1874), notes the first instance of a change of “society” to “church” in 1796 (Q. 20, p. 121). In 1816 this change was made systematically: e.g., §42 (121), §46 (122), §48 (123) and §83 (128).


37. Note Asbury’s comments—long after the fact—on how Anglican priests would taunt Methodist preachers that “We were a Church, and no church” due to their lack of sacramental privilege; in his valedictory address (5 Aug. 1813), Journal and Letters, 3:476–77.


40. This is the major thesis of Richey, Early American Methodism.

41. Cf. Richey, Early American Methodism, 13, 68.

42. See the 1785 Minutes, Q. 61 (p. 23) and the 1788 & 1789 Disciplines in Methodist Disciplines, 1785–1789.

44. Note their defense of “fencing the society” (p. 154), and their description of removing “fallen” society members in terms of the intention to “have a holy people, or none!” (p. 167).
45. Even in removing someone from the society his intention was to reawaken their spiritual responsiveness; e.g., Journal (25 June 1745), Works 20:34; and Letter to John Valton (18 Jan. 1782), Letters (Telford) 7:101.
46. See 1785 Minutes, Q. 66 (p. 24) in Methodist Disciplines, 1785–89; and the discussion in Richey, Early American Methodism, 123 note 35.
47. The best example is again Coke and Asbury’s notes in the 1798 Discipline. A major goal of these notes was answering James O’Kelly’s challenge against episcopal authority in The Author’s Apology for Protesting Against the Methodist Episcopal Government (Richmond, VA: John Dixon, 1798). This issue would lead to the Methodist Protestant Church defection in 1828.
48. This increase at class meetings is noted by Coke and Asbury in their notes to the 1798 Discipline, 147–48. Coke was particularly struck by the heightened role of this function in the preacher’s conferences in America (see the quote cited in Richey, Early American Methodism, 21, 76–77). On the role in love feasts, see Richard O. Johnson, “The Development of the Love Feast in Early American Methodism,” Methodist History 18 (1979):67–83.
49. Cf. 1798 Discipline, 152.
51. Cf. Asbury’s 1813 valedictory address, Journal and Letters, 3:480. See also Richey’s perceptive comments on the change in the 1785 Minutes from “reform the nation” to “reform the continent” (Early American Methodism, 33–46).
52. Cf. the description of establishment as the greatest impediment in the world to the progress of vital Christianity in the 1787 Discipline, pp. 5–6 (in Methodist Disciplines, 1785–1789).
54. E.g., 1798 Discipline, 138; and the journal entry for 1 Feb. 1809 in Journal and Letters, 2:541. See also the discussion of the ambivalence on slavery among early Methodists in Richey, Early American Methodism, 58–59; and Schneider, Way of the Cross, 207.
57. See Schneider, Way of the Cross, esp. 149ff.
Richard Watson, *Theological Institutes: or, A View of the Evidences, Doctrines, Morals, and Institutions of Christianity* (New York: Lane and Tippett, 1848; British original, 1825–28) was on the course of study for the MEC from 1848–92, the MECS from 1878–1902, and the MPC from 1830–1920. In addition, Samuel Wakefield’s *A Complete System of Christian Theology: Or, A Concise, Comprehensive and Systematic View of the Evidences, Doctrines, Morals and Institutions of Christianity* (Pittsburgh, PA: J.L. Read & Son, 1869) was essentially an abridgement of Watson.


For example, Charles Hodge’s influential three-volume *Systematic Theology* (New York: Scribners, 1872–75) devotes detailed attention to the steps of individual salvation but has no chapter specifically on the church!

Consider already Asbury’s summary in his journal (23–24 Oct. 1799) of the grand doctrines of the gospel which he tried to preach—a list covering the whole ordo salutis, but with nothing on the church or other means of grace (*Journal and Letters*, 2:210). With this precedent, it is no great surprise that the first theology text published by an American Methodist should have no chapter on the church; i.e., Thomas Neely Ralston, *Elements of Divinity* (1840), ed. T.O. Summers (Nashville, TN: A.H. Redford, 1871). Other similar texts would be Asbury Lowrey, *Positive Theology* (Cincinnati, OH: Methodist Book Concern, 1860); Stephen Mason Merrill, *Doctrinal Aspects of Christian Experience* (Cincinnati, OH: Curtis & Jennings, 1882); and George Smith, *Elements of Divinity*, revised by T.O. Summers (Nashville, TN: MECS Publishing House, 1885).

Note how Lee, *Elements of Theology*, spends most of his section on ecclesiology justifying the Wesleyan Methodist Connection rejection of the episcopacy; while Raymond, *Systematic Theology*, devotes over one hundred pages to justifying episcopal polity after only nine pages on the nature of the church.

*Standard Catechism of the Methodist Episcopal Church and the Methodist Episcopal Church South* (New York: Eaton & Mains, 1905), Question 102.


69. This movement is traced in Robert E. Chiles, Theological Transitions in American Methodism (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1965), 115–43.

70. Cf. Fisk, Calvinistic Controversies, 244–45.


77. See Schneider, Way of Cross, 92ff.

78. Leonard Gurley’s 1878 Memorial Discourse, quoted in Schneider, Way of the Cross, 204.


80. Lee, Elements of Theology, 486–87.


82. This theme was strong already in Watson, Theological Institutes, 2:572. See also Lee, Elements of Theology, 344, 363ff; Lowrey, Positive Theology, 168ff; Wakefield, System of Theology, 538–39; and Miley, Systematic Theology, 2:388.


84. Note how the question of whether the obvious demise of discipline in the church is a result of pastoral unfaithfulness or of a growing respect for individual liberty and a better conception of the function of the church is debated in the Episcopal Address in the Journal of the General Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, ed. David S. Monroe (New York: Eaton & Mains, 1900), 59–60.

85. Concerning the general rules, note Cartwright’s discussion of Moses Henkle’s Primary Platform of Methodism, or Exposition of the General Rules (Nashville, TN:

86. While class meetings had some continuing presence among the MPC, they were largely defunct by 1880 in the MEC and MECS. The most helpful analysis of this demise is David Francis Holsclaw, “The Demise of Disciplined Christian Fellowship: The Methodist Class Meeting in Nineteenth Century America” (University of California, Davis Ph.D. thesis, 1979). See also Watson, Class Meeting, 136–37, 145; and a related study of British Methodism making many of the same points, William Walter Dean, “Disciplined Fellowship: The Rise and Decline of Cell Groups in British Methodism” (University of Iowa Ph.D. thesis, 1985). Class meetings have remained more central to African Methodism, but the concern for recovery of a more vital role even there is evident in Bettye J. Allen, The Class Leaders System (Nashville, TN: AMEC Sunday School Union, 1992).


93. Amos Binney, Theological Compend, (1840) revised by Daniel Steele (New York: Nelson & Phillips, 1875), 174. This text was geared to, and widely used for, lay education, but also spent time on all three courses of study. For further discussion of these early stages of the Public/Private split in American Protestantism, see Jean


97. I.e., the 1939 merger to form the Methodist Church, the 1946 merger that resulted in the Evangelical United Brethren, and the 1968 merger creating the United Methodist Church.


100. For example, note how little attention the doctrine of the church receives in Lewis’s *Christian Manifesto*.


109. Note the survey results reported in Shilling, Methodism and Society, 160–61.


113. Note in this regard the complaint in the Episcopal Address at the 1956 Methodist General Conference that the notion of discipline is alien to modern culture and this culture has now infiltrated the church, in Daily Christian Advocate (26 April 1956), 59.

114. Norwood, Church Membership, 11 (the 1939 ritual is noted on p. 52).


117. The pioneering study of this development is Schmidt, Souls or the Social Order.


120. Long, *Living the Discipline*.


123. There is no better example than Albert Beaven, *The Local Church: Its Purpose and Program* (New York: Abingdon, 1937), which was on the 1944 MC course of study.


125. Note the way this suggestion is ventured in the 1956 Episcopal Address to General Conference (59–60).


130. See especially *The Problem of Wine Skins: Church Structure in a Technological Age* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity, 1975); *The Radical Wesley and Patterns of Church Renewal* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity, 1980); *Liberating the Church: The Ecology of Church and Kingdom* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity, 1983); and *Signs of the Spirit: How God Reshapes the Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1989).


Wesley recognized the Church itself as a means of grace -- a grace-filled and grace-sharing community of faithful people. United Methodism shares with other Protestant communions the understanding that the proclamation of the Word through preaching, teaching, and the life of the Church is a primary means of God’s grace. The origin and. Copyright 2008 General Board of Discipleship. Do not reproduce without permission. 4. rapid growth of Methodism as a revival movement occurred largely through the medium of the proclaimed Gospel. John Wesley also emphasized the importance of prayer, fasting. Bib Putnam’s most recent book, American Grace, coauthored with David Campbell of Notre Dame, focuses on the role of religion in American public life. Based on data from two of the most comprehensive national surveys on religion and civic engagement ever conducted, American Grace is the winner of the American Political Science Association’s Woodrow Wilson Foundation Award for the best book on government, politics, or international affairs. Lecture I. Americans are religiously devout.