

THE FAITH ONCE DELIVERED: A WESLEYAN WITNESS

Dr. Ryan N. Danker, general editor
Dr. Jonathan Powers, assisting editor
Dr. Kevin Watson, assisting editor

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INTRODUCTION

1. In January of 2022 over fifty Wesleyan scholars gathered in Alexandria, Virginia, for the Next Methodism Summit. The event was a time of worship, fellowship, and work. Unlike most academic gatherings, the Next Methodism Summit was organized around working groups that convened over select topics and produced the main sections of *The Faith Once Delivered: A Wesleyan Witness*. The result of the Summit is the text that you see before you; a text meant to guide the theological trajectory of Methodism for the next century or more. It is nothing less than a robust affirmation of the historic Christian faith and the particular gifts of the Wesleyan movement within the larger Church.

2. The Summit gathered scholars from across America and included participants from a number of Methodist, Anglican, Holiness, and Pentecostal denominations. Great effort was spent trying to gather international scholars from outside the U.S. but pandemic protocols were too difficult to overcome in the short amount of time we had to organize the Summit.

3. “The Next Methodism” is an intentionally broad term that includes the heirs of the Wesley brothers in numerous denominational forms, but focuses on the future of Methodism in a time of upheaval. It was apparent to the scholars gathered at the Summit that United Methodism, the largest of the Methodist branches, is entering a time of division. In such a time, this gathering was intended to provide a theological foundation, steeped in Scripture, the liturgy and tradition of the Church, and the emphases of the Wesleyan revival. As scholars and leaders in the Wesleyan tradition we cherish this tradition and want to ensure its continued growth no matter what institutional forms might emerge. One aspect of the tradition was used to guide our work, the restoration of the Image of God in humankind. This central theme runs throughout the text, its centrality marked by the capitalization of “Image” throughout when referring to the divine Image.

4. Methodism is no stranger to division. The history of Methodism in the U.S., for example, is one of both division and growth. Some forms of Methodism have now entered a season of decline. Others are growing. The hope underlying this document is that a vital and growing Methodism will be founded on the truth of the Christian faith as it has been received. We believe that Methodism was intended to find its

secure footing in “the faith once delivered” (Jude 3) and only on this foundation can the experiential emphasis of the tradition be justified. The historic faith and the experience of the believer are not at odds with one another when experience is guided by the wisdom of divine revelation and communal accountability. Or put differently, the Spirit who inspired the Scripture will not guide the believer away from a scriptural faith.

5. The challenges faced by the Wesleyan family are not to be underestimated. For over two centuries, cultural, social, and political forces have tried to undermine the witness of the Wesleyan family around the world. At times, these forces have succeeded. The acceptance of slavery in the American context, the rise of Protestant liberalism in the West, and various forms of fundamentalism, has worked against the evangelical witness of the Wesleyan movement. In many parts of the globe, the sacramental nature of the movement has been forgotten. In others, holiness of heart and life has lost its central place in proclamation. In communities where respectability was more important than transformation, the Wesleyan system of intentional accountability has been sidelined as an historic relic. In the present day, some have replaced the transformed life with political activity, refusing to see that transformation is the work of the Spirit that begins in the heart and then moves into society.

6. But with all of these challenges, the Spirit that drove John and Charles Wesley to preach across the British Isles, that inspired passionate laity such as Barbara Heck and Philip Embury to evangelize the American colonies, the same Spirit that led Thomas Coke to give his life in order to spread the Gospel in Asia, and that empowered missionaries in Africa and in so many other places, is still with us and still inspiring Wesleyan Christians worldwide. They are inspired to preach scriptural holiness and to live out that message through lives of holy and sacrificial love. We hope and pray that the Spirit might use this work to inspire, lead, and drive us all to greater faithfulness, to missionary zeal, and to perfect love.

7. *The Faith Once Delivered: A Wesleyan Witness* is divided into six sections. These sections were written by scholars and church leaders at the Summit and edited by a team of scholars steeped in Wesleyan history and theology. The editing process aimed at two things: one, we wanted the text to be clear and accessible to a large audience. The document may be heavy at times given the topics covered, but the most accessible language was used as long as the meaning of the text was not undermined in the process. Second, the editors worked to bring the various voices

of the text together into a more unified presentation. This was not an easy task given the number of people who worked on the text—and you will notice shifts in style from time-to-time—but the text is readable and usable. Subsections have been added throughout the text. We believe that the message this work contains is useful for study in small groups, churches, or classrooms.

8. Citations from Scripture and from the Wesley brothers are the most common quotations throughout the text. The biblical scholars at the Summit chose the New Revised Standard Version (1989) as the standard Bible translation for the document. Additionally, a number of church fathers are referenced. It was thought best to limit citations to foundational voices in order to highlight the timeless nature of the message. Theological and historical originality has been intentionally avoided. The document has continuous paragraph numbers throughout the document. References to *The Faith Once Delivered* can be made using section number and/or paragraph number.

9. It is the hope of the contributors and editors of *The Faith Once Delivered: A Wesleyan Witness* that we have faithfully presented the faith as we have received it in God's self-revelation; in the creation, the calling of Israel, the covenant, and ultimately in Jesus of Nazareth, God made flesh. In the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, we truly see who God is and what God has done for the world he loves. We believe that this faith has been handed on to us in the apostolic witness, in Scripture, and in the faithful Tradition of the Church. It was this faith that the Wesley brothers were taught in the Church of England, this faith that they held despite opposition, and this faith that they preached out of love for God and others. It is our hope that this message of wholeness, of love, and true freedom will be proclaimed by Wesleyan believers for centuries to come that we may truly sing with those who have gone before:

Thy nature, gracious Lord, impart
come quickly from above;
write thy new name upon my heart,
thy new best name of Love.

(Charles Wesley, "O for a Heart to Praise My God")

SECTION ONE
GOD: FATHER, SON, AND HOLY SPIRIT

10. With faithful Christians throughout the ages, we confess our faith in one God made known to the creation he loves fully and finally in the person of Jesus of Nazareth. In Christ, God has been revealed eternally as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Because the Methodist tradition stands within the universal Church, there is no distinctively Wesleyan doctrine of God. Instead, in what Wesley called the “catholic spirit,” our confession is the same in substance as all orthodox communities who seek to adhere to the faith of the Apostles. That is the doctrine we describe here.

11. It is in God in whom “we live and move and have our being” (Acts 17:28). He is the beginning and end of all things. So God must be the foundation for any faithful account of the Christian life. As Christians in the Wesleyan tradition, we confess that our primary knowledge of God comes both from the Apostles who received it from Jesus Christ and from Scripture. But who is the God whom Jesus called “Father” and who together with his only Son Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit is worshiped and glorified? The Church confesses that God is one, yet in three Persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. This revelation is found in Scripture and provides the means to interpret Scripture faithfully.

12. The purpose of true religion, Wesley wrote, was to restore in us the Image of God in which human beings were originally created but that has been distorted by sin (*A Farther Appeal to Men of Reason and Religion*). Centuries before Wesley, Augustine of Hippo wrote that God made us for himself that we might find our highest fulfillment and happiness in worshiping him (*Confessions*). So in order to understand what it means to be human, to be the people God intends us to be, we must know who this God is in whose Image we are being restored.

Attributes of God

13. Human beings are incapable of fully comprehending God. Yet because God lovingly makes himself known to us, we are able to know what and who God is. God can be known in part by reflecting on the creation and even through rational thought. Who God is, however, is made known in Scripture and, ultimately, in Jesus Christ, God with us.

14. We begin to answer the question, “What is God?” by referencing the classical attributes. Taken as a whole, the classical attributes reflect what is commonly understood by the word “God.”

Eternality and Immutability

15. God is unchanging: “As he ever was, so he ever will be; as there was no beginning of his existence, so there will be no end” (Wesley, “On Eternity”). This is the foundation for the distinction between the creator and creatures. Creatures are dependent on God for their existence and are created. They are subject to change. By contrast, God is not caused by anything external to himself. God is eternal Being, the great I AM who is entirely self-sufficient and free. Because God is eternal, God is unchangeable, or immutable: “I am the Lord, I do not change” (Malachi 3:6).

16. Because God is eternal and immutable, he is also impassible, meaning that he is not subject to the sufferings that we experience as creatures, e.g., sickness and loss. Although impassible and self-sufficient, God is full of compassion and sympathizes with his creatures in our sufferings, hardships, and tragedies.

Perfection, Necessity, and Simplicity

17. God is perfect. God’s greatness has no limits, and his goodness has no boundaries. God’s goodness and greatness are necessary. Indeed, God’s very existence and essence are necessary; it is not possible that God could ever cease to exist or fail to be great or good.

18. God is simple, which means that God is not composed of extended parts or pieces. God is not built out of elements or attributes that are distinct from him. God is his goodness and greatness.

19. God is necessarily and perfectly good. God does not just happen to be good; God is “light, and in him is no darkness at all” (1 John 1:5). There is no possibility that God is anything other than perfect goodness. And “God is love” (1 John 4:8). God loves the world. Because of his divine nature, God’s very essence is holy love. Charles Wesley wrote: “Thy nature and thy name is love” (“Wrestling Jacob”).

Omnipresence

20. The omnipresence (everywhere-present) of God is closely related to his eternity. Just as God exists infinitely, so he exists throughout infinite space: “God is in this, and every place” (Wesley, “On the Omnipresence of God”). Since God is everywhere at once, he also acts everywhere at once. But while God is everywhere and everywhere working, he does not work coercively. Wesley says, “God acts in heaven, in earth, and under the earth, throughout the whole compass of his creation . . . strongly and sweetly influencing all, and yet without destroying the liberty of his rational creatures” (Wesley, “On the Omnipresence of God”).

Omnipotence

21. Just as God is present throughout his creation, so he is all-powerful over it. God’s power is boundless in scope; he is able to do whatever he wills (Wesley, “The Unity of the Divine Being”). God’s power is manifest both through his creation of all things (Genesis 1) and through his providence over all that he has made, such that all creation is dependent upon God’s power not only at its beginning, but also continually and forever.

Omniscience

22. As God is present throughout his creation, he knows all that happens within it. Since God is eternal, and thus not limited by time, “he sees at once whatever was, is, or will be to the end of time” (Wesley, “On Predestination”). God has intimate and personal knowledge of his creation and its creatures. Therefore, Christians gratefully affirm that God is “all-wise.”

Holiness

23. God is holy. He is perfect goodness, a goodness that is not tainted in any way. In him there is no blemish, only absolute purity and self-consistency. Though such holiness is distinctive of God’s absolute perfection, God invites creatures to share in his holiness.

God Is Spirit

24. The eternal God is not merely a super-powerful creature. “God is spirit,” meaning, first, that God is not part of the material creation and, second, that God is superior also to the spiritual creation (“seen and unseen,” as stated in the Nicene Creed). God is beyond all categories and all definitions.

25. “God is spirit,” Jesus says, “and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth” (John 4:24). Simply by being who God is, and apart from anything God has done, God is worthy of our worship and reverence.

The Trinity

26. The mystery of God “cannot be apprehended by human reason,” as Gregory of Nazianzus said (*Oration* 28.11). We can only know God as God reveals his nature and purposes, which we can know by faith. The church’s doctrine of the Trinity was formulated by taking seriously the self-revelation of God. The doctrine was described at the ecumenical Councils of Nicaea and Constantinople held in 325 and 381 and the Trinity is plainly reflected in the lasting statement of those councils, the universal creed of the Church, the Nicene Creed. This is not to say that the councils created this doctrine, but rather that the councils affirmed what had been taught from the beginning by Christ and his apostles.

27. To call God Trinity is to confess that God is both truly one and truly three. This distinguishes Christianity from all other faiths. Unlike Judaism and Islam, the Triune God does not exist in solitude but in the community of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Unlike polytheistic religions in which each deity has a separate will and power, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit exist together in perfect unity.

28. To confess that the eternal God is Trinity is to confess that God is eternally triune. Therefore, God is not a single being who, like an actor assuming different roles or identities in different plays, took on the different personalities at different points in history. God did not play the part of the Father when he created the world, the role of the Son in the Incarnation, and finally the part of the Holy Spirit to inspire and empower the apostles. Nor are “Father,” “Son,” and “Holy Spirit” simply different metaphors used by the authors of Scripture to describe God. The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are the proper names of the Persons. They are three

distinct Persons existing in an eternal communion before and independent of Creation.

29. The God of Scripture is the God revealed as Trinity. Historically, for example, the Church has interpreted Abraham's three heavenly guests at Mamre to be the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (Genesis 18). At Jesus' Baptism the three Persons are depicted as distinct when the voice of the Father declares "This is my Son, the Beloved," and the Son is anointed by the Holy Spirit, who descends upon Jesus in the form of a dove (Matthew 3:17). In Jesus' farewell sermon (John 14-17), he tells the apostles that he will pray to the Father to send another Comforter, the Holy Spirit, who is the Spirit of truth to give understanding to the apostles (John 14:16). Examples such as these reveal that whenever God speaks or acts in Scripture, he does so as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

30. At the same time that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are distinct Persons, they are united in a single Godhead. The Son and Spirit, because they are from the Father who is the source of divinity, share in the Father's divine nature. As the Nicene Creed says, the Son is "God from God, Light from Light, true God of true God, begotten, not made, of one Being [or nature] with the Father." Jesus claims this relationship with the Father when he told the apostles, "the Father and I are one" (John 10:30). The Son and Spirit are one with the Father in the sense of possessing all the attributes of the Father's divinity. Because of this, they reveal the invisible Father.

31. These claims are implicit in Scripture's description of Christ as the only begotten Son (John 1:18). Since the Son is begotten of the Father, he possesses the same nature as the Father even as any offspring possesses the same nature as its parents and not some other nature. Because the Son is the Word or Reason (*Logos*) of the Father (John 1:1) and the wisdom and power of the Father (1 Corinthians 1:24), he is essential to the being of the Father.

32. Likewise, the Holy Spirit, who is the Father's holiness, is only able by being of the same nature as the Father to sanctify us by making us partakers of the Father's holiness. Although the Son and Spirit go out from the Father, they remain one with him because they are eternally united to him. As Jesus said, "I am in the Father and the Father is in me" (John 14:11). Because the Son and Spirit are eternally united to the Father's being, they are themselves eternal and not creatures. Because the Son and Spirit share in the Father's eternal divinity, they are worshiped and glorified

together with him. The unity of operations by the Father, Son, and Spirit reveals the single rule (*monarchia*) of the Father whose transcendent and providential will is actualized in creation.

33. The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are equally divine. Paul declares this when he says of the Son “who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself” (Philippians 2:6-7). Since the Son possesses the nature of God, he is equal to the Father in divinity. When Jesus said, “the Father is greater than I,” (John 14:28) he did not mean that he was inferior to the Father in nature—a lesser god—but that the Father, as the source of the Son’s divinity, was superior in authority, sending the Son to do the Father’s will (as Gregory of Nazianzus argued, *Oration* 30.7). Alternatively, following Augustine of Hippo in *On the Trinity*, the Father may be thought to be “greater” than the incarnate Son who emptied himself of his shared glory by taking the form of a servant to fulfill the Father’s redemptive purposes.

34. The doctrine of the Trinity reveals the character of God as love (1 John 4:8) and underscores the loving community (*perichoresis*) of the three Persons, such that they are one *being* (*ousia*). Actions flow from this loving community, and we perceive these actions in Scripture and the world, but the *being* of God is not to be equated with these actions. Acknowledging our creation in God’s Image, Christians strive to be “transcripts of the Trinity” (Charles Wesley, “Sinners, Turn: Why Will You Die”), working to live in loving community, from which flows loving actions.

35. There is an expansiveness to God’s love for humanity that, through the Incarnation and the gift of the Spirit, invites humankind into the life of the Trinity and makes us partakers of the divine nature (2 Peter 1:4). A particular emphasis in the Wesleyan/Methodist tradition is the communal nature of this invitation. Human participation is not a private but a corporate experience through the communion of the Church. The historic classes, bands, and societies of Methodism are examples of how this communion is maintained and, thus, how the community of the Church is a fellowship that mirrors the loving unity of the Trinity.

God the Father

36. In the Nicene Creed the Church confesses, “We believe in one God, the Father, the Almighty...” The Person of the Father is the principle, the beginning, the source, the fountainhead of the oneness and divinity of the Son and Spirit. For the early

church theologian Gregory of Nazianzus, the Fatherhood of God highlights the abundance and generosity of God's nature. The Father's being eternally overflows to the Son and Spirit.

37. Therefore the Father is never without the Son and the Holy Spirit, for the Son is begotten of the Father and the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father, eternally. As Gregory of Nazianzus wryly remarks, the Son and the Holy Spirit are "from" the Father, but they are not "after" the Father! Augustine of Hippo expresses this same point when he says, commenting on John 1:1, "In the beginning was the Word...", that the Father is the "beginning" from whom the Word and Spirit come (*On the Trinity* 4.32). The primacy of the Father is the source of divine unity. In their work "for us and for our salvation" the Son and Spirit fulfill the Father's will.

38. The term "Father" is inherently relational. One cannot understand or speak of the Father without reference to the Son. God is eternally Father, and the Son is eternally begotten, just as the Spirit proceeds eternally from the Father and the Son. Wesley notes that Christ shares a unity of essence with the Father, being altogether "supreme, eternal, independent" and that Christ is "distinct from God the Father," "the Word whom the Father begot or spoke from eternity" (*Explanatory Notes upon the New Testament*, John 1:1). Something similar can be said of the Holy Spirit, who is distinct and yet, like the Father and the Son, is Lord.

39. "We believe in one God... creator of all that is." The work of God as Creator is never the work of God (the Father) alone but always also the work of the Son and Spirit. Through and with the Spirit and the Son the Father created humanity in the divine Image, so that from the beginning we might be God's children. But having voluntarily fallen away, we are dependent on Christ to give us the Spirit of Adoption in Baptism so that being united with the Son we may be his siblings and claim his Father as our Father and become joint heirs with Christ (Romans 8:15).

40. Recovering the identity of God the Father is bound up with acknowledging the unity of the Persons and work of God. Just as the first Person of the Trinity is not solely Creator, so the second Person of the Trinity is not solely Redeemer, nor is the third Person solely Sustainer. Because of the unity of the Father, Son, and Spirit each is Creator, Redeemer, Sustainer. Therefore "Creator" is not an accurate substitute for "Father," and "Redeemer" and "Sustainer" cannot serve in place of "Son" and "Spirit."

The Son, Jesus Christ

41. From everlasting to everlasting, the Son is the Father's Word. True and eternal God, the Son, the only-begotten of the Father, is of the same substance with the Father. For our salvation, the Son came down from heaven, being made flesh of the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary. The Son, obedient to the Father's will, emptied himself, taking the form of a servant (Philippians 2:7). Jesus Christ has two perfect natures, divine and human, each nature's characteristics preserved and joined together without confusion, change, division, or separation.

42. The Son, the Word who is the perfect, living Image of the Father, fashioned humanity after his Image (Genesis 1:26). Yet when the divine Image in us was marred and distorted by sin, the very same Word who made us in the beginning remade us by fashioning a new humanity in Mary's womb. Jesus is the second Adam who, by his perfect obedience to the Father, restored Adam's descendants to right relationship with God by his death and life (Romans 5:6-13). As the second Adam in whom the Image of God is perfectly displayed, Christ reveals to us what God intended for humanity from the beginning.

43. By his resurrection, Jesus, as "first born from the dead" (Colossians 1:18), reveals the perfected and glorified human nature proper to the resurrected humanity of the New Creation (2 Corinthians 5:17). In the resurrected Jesus, therefore, we behold what we may hope to become at our resurrection. As Charles Wesley writes, "Made like him, like him we rise, ours the cross the grave, the skies" ("Christ the Lord Is Risen Today"). Thus only in Jesus do we come to a right knowledge both of God and of ourselves, of the end for which we were made, of what we are meant to be.

44. John Wesley often emphasized the three offices of Christ: Prophet, Priest, and King. In sending the Son, the Father fulfills the covenant with Israel. He is the Anointed Prophet who speaks God's Word perfectly. He is the Anointed Priest who offers the ultimate sacrifice. He is the Anointed King whose kingdom will know no end.

45. The Wesleyan/Methodist tradition affirms the breadth of biblical imagery that is used to describe the reconciling work of Christ. Christ died for our sins "in accordance with the scriptures" (1 Corinthians 15:3). His work addresses our condition—the guilt and estrangement as well as the corruption and the shame of

sin. In his life, death, and resurrection, Jesus overcomes the disobedience and unfaithfulness of humanity.

46. Grounded in his Incarnation, the saving work of Christ includes his teaching and example (1 Peter 2:21), it involves his sacrificial death on our behalf (1 Peter 2:24), and it culminates in his glorious defeat of sin, death, and the devil (1 Corinthians 15:54-57; Hebrews 2:14). He came in the “likeness of sinful flesh” (Romans 8:3) and became a sin offering (2 Corinthians 5:21). His sacrifice was to “remove sin” (Hebrews 9:26) so that sinners might be cleansed from sin (Hebrews 9:14; 10:10) and thereby become “the righteousness of God” (2 Corinthians 5:21) and be “freed” from their sins (Romans 6:22).

47. Denying himself and taking up his cross as a full and perfect sacrifice, the Son was crucified, died and buried. He rose again bodily on the third day, ascended into heaven, and sits on the Father’s right hand, interceding for us until he comes again to earth to judge the living and the dead. His kingdom will never end. “God also highly exalted” the Son “and gave him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father” (Philippians 2:9-11).

48. The Son is the Mediator of a new covenant who redeems us from our transgressions. He is the sacrifice that takes away our sins, (Hebrews 9:15 and 1 John 2:1-2), reconciling us to God. The Son establishes peace, justice, joy, and love. He renews God’s Image and radically transforms the “old existence” into a “new creation” characterized by moral, personal, and social holiness, and by a new community in which there “is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus” (Galatians 3:28).

49. The Church participates in the incarnate Son’s human nature by the Holy Spirit in order “to be conformed to the image of [God’s] Son” (Romans 8:29). This conformity entails learning obedience to God as the Son is obedient (Romans 5:19) and practicing love towards others by having the same mind that was in Jesus Christ (Philippians 2:1-11), but it is nothing less than “present[ing] [our] bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is [our] spiritual worship... but be[ing] transformed by the renewing of [our] minds” (Romans 12:1-2). In the words of the Covenant Renewal Service (see *The United Methodist Hymnal* 607), each of us prays:

I am no longer my own, but thine.
Put me to what thou wilt, rank me with whom thou wilt.
Put me to doing, put me to suffering.
Let me be employed by thee or laid aside for thee,
exalted for thee or brought low for thee.
Let me be full, let me be empty.
Let me have all things, let me have nothing.
I freely and heartily yield all things
to thy pleasure and disposal.
And now, O glorious and blessed God,
Father, Son, and Holy Spirit,
thou art mine and I am thine. So be it.
And the covenant which I have made on earth,
let it be ratified in heaven. Amen.

The Holy Spirit

50. As the Third Person of the Trinity, the Holy Spirit binds together the Father and the Son with himself. The Spirit, as much as the Father and the Son, deserves our worship and adoration. The Spirit, together with the Father and the Son, works at every stage of our salvation. Without the Holy Spirit, there is no Trinity. Because of the Holy Spirit, we are drawn into God's work of salvation and empowered to share in God's own life as God's children, in whom the Image of God is being fully restored.

51. In Scripture the Holy Spirit is a gift, breathed by the Father through the Son, but this gift is no passive object. In the Old Testament, the Spirit sweeps over the waters of creation (Genesis 1:1-2). The Spirit falls on prophets enabling them to proclaim God's Word (Isaiah 61:1); the Spirit fills the people of God, sustaining them with the "joy of your salvation" (Psalm 51:12).

52. In the New Testament, the Spirit "blows where it chooses" (John 3:8), drawing women and men to Christ, filling Christ's disciples with the power of the gospel, and bestowing gifts to build up Christ's Church (see 1 Corinthians 12; Ephesians 4; and Hebrews 2:3-4). The work of the Spirit can be distinguished from the work of Jesus Christ—the Spirit is "another Advocate" (John 14:16)—but the Spirit's work cannot be set against the work of Christ. The Holy Spirit is "the Spirit of truth..."

whom the Father will send in my name, [who] will teach you everything, and remind you of all that I have said to you” (John 14:17, 26). Both the distinctive work of the Spirit and the Son as well as their fundamental unity can be maintained because they share in the unity of the Triune God.

53. John Wesley, in his sermon “The Great Privilege of Those That Are Born of God,” preached that for those in whom the Image of God has been restored:

The Spirit or breath of God is immediately inspired, breathed into the new-born soul; and the same breath which comes from, returns to, God. As it is continually received by faith, so it is continually rendered back by love, by prayer, and praise, and thanksgiving; love and praise, and prayer being the breath of every soul which is truly born of God.

54. This is life in the Spirit, and we see this life most fully in the life of Jesus Christ. At his Baptism, the Spirit descended on Jesus in the form of a dove. In his ministry, Jesus preached, prayed, and performed mighty deeds, all signs of the Spirit’s power. His resurrection was by the Spirit (Romans 8:11), and after he was raised, Jesus breathes the Spirit on his disciples for the forgiveness of sins (John 20:22-23). Those who would live according to the Image of God must entrust themselves to the Holy Spirit, as Jesus did.

55. In giving the Spirit, the Father and the Son offer the benefits of full salvation, applying the blood of Christ to those who turn to him in faith. It is the Spirit’s work to reveal the fullness of God and of his saving work. In the words of Charles Wesley:

Spirit of faith, come down,
reveal the things of God,
and make to us the Godhead known,
and witness with the blood.
'Tis thine the blood to apply
and give us eyes to see,
who did for every sinner die
hath surely died for me.

No one can truly say
that Jesus is the Lord,
unless thou take the veil away
and breathe the living Word.

Then, only then, we feel
our interest in his blood,
and cry with joy unspeakable,
“Thou art my Lord, my God!”

(“Spirit of Faith, Come Down”)

SECTION TWO CREATION: IMAGE GIVEN AND MARRED

56. Creation is the work of God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The Father worked through the Son and the Spirit. Creation began with the divine declaration “let there be light” (Genesis 1:3). In an eternal movement, the Father spoke forth all things through his Word who was “in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being” (John 1:2-3). This Word, the Son, is the divine Image who served as the architect and serves now as the aim of creation (Colossians 1:15-16). The Spirit hovers over creation to complete the work of the Father and the Son (Genesis 1:2).

An Ordered Creation

57. No matter how much we reduce the universe to its smallest components, we will be hard-pressed to find the reason or cause for its existence. The reason or cause for its existence and its continuance must be external to it. And yet, a contingent entity such as the universe cannot have a beginningless beginning; the universe is not eternal. And if it is not eternal and had a beginning, its beginning was caused. Nothing causes its own beginning. Wesley attributed the order of this universe to a first cause, namely, God. He asserted that a mindless chaotic beginning would not account for the order observed in the universe.

58. Why is there order in the universe rather than disorder? Wesley simply observed “... from what we see of heaven and earth, we may infer the eternal power and Godhead of the great Creator” (*Notes on the OT*, Genesis 1:1). God is the author and cause of the universe and the order that we see in it. Wesley’s views were consistent with other attempts to argue for the existence of God: the very existence of heaven and earth enable us to infer the existence of their causes, namely, the existence of a good God.

59. Creation is good, and the creation of human beings is very good (Genesis 1:31). From the highest to the lowest, goodness is built into every aspect of the creation. The goodness of every living thing testifies to the glory of God by expressing his holiness (Isaiah 6:3). And in making creation good, God has given us the gift of his glory and called us to reflect that glory in holy lives.

God's Relationship with the Creation

60. God is in a dynamic and life-giving relationship with his creation. The entire created order is dependent upon him for life (Psalm 36:6, 1 Corinthians 8:6). Nothing exists without the hands of the Potter holding it together (Isaiah 48:13). Out of nothing, God made all things in a single divine act (Romans 4:17; Hebrews 11:3). To acknowledge God as God is to know that the Father sustains all things by his Word and continuously breathes life into all things by his Spirit (Job 33:4; Acts 17:25).

61. Creation unfolds in beauty and order through the Son and the Spirit. Reflecting on God's bringing order to creation, Wesley states, "The Creator could have made his work perfect at first, but by this gradual proceeding he would show ordinarily the method of his providence and grace" (*Notes on the OT*, Genesis 1:2). God first created and then shaped creation so that it would reflect his life.

62. Genesis describes creation as moving from chaos to order by means of God filling the emptiness and ordering the disordered. All things come forth with time and through time as the Spirit enlarges and matures every living thing in accordance with its own design (Ecclesiastes 3:1). Through God's artistry, creation grows and blossoms into the harmony and symmetry found in the holiness of God. Through love, God made creatures in goodness so that in radiating his glory they might share his holiness and delight in his happiness.

63. As God's handiwork, creation is forged in and for love. He fills creation with divine promise and purpose (Romans 11:36). There is a deep relational structure to the universe that expresses divine communion and fellowship. The order and arrangement of creation in Genesis 1 reveals how everything has its own place in God's grand symphony. From the sun and planets to the smallest forms of life, all is formed and knitted together so that the Psalmist declares "I am fearfully and wonderfully made" (Psalm 139:14). Through this mutuality and interdependence, "the heavens are telling the glory of God; and the firmament proclaims his handiwork" (Psalms 19:1). God has designed *all things* for relationship with himself and with one another.

Humanity as Object of God's Love

64. Humanity as a whole and every individual within it has come into being as an object of God's love. Humans are subjects of love in the sense that they are created as recipients of holy love, and made to be capable of loving with that same love. Indeed, the final purpose of human existence is only fulfilled in holy love, continuously growing in this life and in the one to come.

65. For this, humans were endowed in creation with the ability to observe and learn. We learn from the physical world, directly from God, from others, from past teaching and experience, and we use this capacity to reason, prioritize, and process information. Ideally, this gaining of information is transformed into understanding and wisdom expressed in holy actions and holy character, thus allowing the full expression of love.

66. The purpose of knowing is to suitably love. Love can be defined as the motivating affectionate desire for another that seeks the fulfillment of that other's final purpose. It is motivating because it leads to willful action. This love is affectionate because it generates relationship and is expressed in desire for the company and wellbeing of the other. It seeks the final purpose because true affection is relational and oriented toward the ongoing good of those we truly love.

Humanity and the Image of God

67. According to Genesis, the creation of humans is distinctive because only human beings are created in God's Image (Genesis 1:26-27). The Image of God is a powerful idea but is confined almost entirely to three passages in the opening chapters of Genesis (1:26-27; 5:1-2; 9:6; cf. 5:3). Even these passages are not entirely transparent as to what the idea means. This has resulted in the notion of God's Image being invested with a vast number of meanings, not all of which can be accurate because not all of them agree.

68. Interpretations have taken two primary approaches. One view is to believe that the idea of humans being created in the Image of God communicates the specialness of human beings; the Image of God is a kind of *essence* (or substance) marking humans as inherently dignified and worthy of respect as "Image-bearers." The other view is that the Image is less about *essence* than it is about *ethics*: From this

perspective, human beings are in the Image of God if they do, in fact, image God. If they do not, then they are not.

69. Careful study casts light on these two views (and others). In the ancient world, monarchs were the royal representatives of the gods and often set up images of themselves in conquered territory to stand in for their own power and ownership. In this light, the biblical Image has profound *ethical* ramifications: Human beings *represent* God in the world. This would explain why Genesis 1 moves immediately to describe the privileged position of human beings vis-à-vis the rest of the created order (1:28). But in Scripture, the Image of God is intrinsic to all humans everywhere and always. It never applies only to a powerful few at the top of the social hierarchy, nor is it based on ethics, but applies intrinsically to *all* humankind, explicitly including *both male and female* (Genesis 1:26-27; 5:1-2).

70. But what exactly is God's Image? Just this far in Genesis 1, Scripture presents God as one who creates—making room for other things, entities, elements—and who does so non-violently, arranging and ordering and blessing. These aspects of God's Image must comprise part of what it means to image God. Human “dominion” over creation, for example, must image the God who is Lord of creation and rules benevolently with blessing for all creatures, not just humans, and judges all creation to be very good. The violence that marks life east of Eden (Genesis 4:1-16; 6:11-13) is a failure to bear God's Image (cf. James 3:9); the spilling of blood is of utmost concern precisely because of the Image of God in humans (Genesis 9:6). We are called, therefore, to protect and value human life from conception to natural death. Violence against the creation is a rejection of the mandate implicit in being an Image-bearer.

71. It seems clear that the Image of God combines *both* ethical and essential aspects. But whatever else it communicates, the Image is fundamentally a creational category: God *creates* or *makes* humans in this fashion (Genesis 1:26-27; 5:1-2; 9:6), which means that humans do not create themselves but belong to their Lord (Psalm 100:3). Connection to creation is apparent also in Christ, who the New Testament calls “the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation” (Colossians 1:15; see also 2 Corinthians 4:4; Hebrews 1:3), and in whom all things were created (Colossians 1:16; John 1:3, 10). Christ's very essence is God—and comprehensively so (Colossians 1:19)—with ethical ramifications: Christ, too, creates, orders, arranges, blesses, and chooses suffering rather than retaliation.

Wesley's View of the Image of God

72. Wesley helpfully espoused a threefold picture of the Image of God—political, moral, and natural—that incorporates the best of what came before him in the history of interpretation. The *natural Image* is understood as the divine gift that makes humanity capable of entering into relationship with God. The Fall caused this capacity to be corrupted. Yet God's prevenient grace has restored in humans the ability to respond to God's gift.

73. The *political Image* enables humanity to lead, manage, or steward God's creation. The use of "dominion" in Genesis 1:26 to describe the human relation toward creation does not mean enslavement or subjugation but proper care and stewardship, thus imaging God's benevolent and responsive love expressed toward creation.

74. The *moral Image* is humanity made for living in God's will, in loving relationship with God and others. It is expressed through God's infusing human beings with his love, resulting in humankind's ability to live lives directed or motivated by divine love. This quality of life is expressed in various ways such as holy living, righteousness, justice, mercy, and truth. This is the dimension that reflects God's Trinitarian love, which humanity can depend on for life itself. This love is present in human affairs through love for God and others, through faithfulness to God's will, a prayerful life, acts of mercy and piety, and so forth.

75. Jesus Christ manifests all three dimensions of the Image, and this is the basis for humanity's hope to embody God's Image. Christ is the revelation of God's *natural Image* in his constant communion with the Father; he embodied the *political Image* by preaching God's alternative kingdom within the context of the Roman Empire; he is the revelation of God's *moral Image* incarnating God's love and obedience to God. As Wesley says, "[Christ] is the Image of God - Hence also we may understand how great is the glory of Christ. He that sees the Son, sees the Father in the face of Christ. The Son exactly exhibits the Father to us" (*Explanatory Notes on the New Testament*, 2 Corinthians 4:4).

76. While the Wesley brothers may have stressed God's moral Image more than other dimensions, a full assessment of their arguments on public issues, especially slavery, shows that they viewed all aspects of the Image of God as integrally related. This is most clearly expressed in Wesley's widely distributed anti-slavery tract,

Thoughts Upon Slavery, in which Wesley challenged all those who were involved in the eighteenth-century slave trade (a corruption of the *political dimension* of God's Image) to desist from the practice without delay on account of the principle of mercy, justice, and truth (God's *moral* Image) because enslaved Africans are kin to Europeans just as Cain and Abel were kin (God's *natural* Image).

The Fall

77. As Wesleyans, we believe that sin is any deviation from God's perfect character. That means that sin is fundamentally opposition to God and his good purposes for the creation. As such, sin is God's enemy and our own. We need a robust account of sin, especially if we want a rich account of salvation. Our distinctive Wesleyan understanding of salvation as freedom from sin for a life of holiness depends on a rigorous assessment of our culpability. The depth of our sin is the problem to which the good news of salvation is addressed. Sin is a disease; Christ is our healer. The greater our awareness of the seriousness of our sin, the greater will be our appreciation for the mercies of God and the promise of wholeness.

78. God created us as an act of his perfect love to relate to him in love. Our bent toward sin is a disease that we cannot heal in our own strength. God created us and desires to bless us abundantly. We sin when we reject God's will for us and choose to place our own desires and preferences above God's perfect desires. This does not mean that humans are now incapable of love, or substantive relationships with one another, and with the rest of creation. Human beings have not lost the ability to know the world around them, to learn from the past and from others.

79. Human beings were originally endowed with the Image of God, but that Image has been fundamentally marred in every human creature. Having been made free in the beginning to embrace God's perfect love, humanity chose to turn from God. As a result, sin entered the world. The world after the Fall is marked by brokenness, rebellion, decay, and death. Another way to say this is that the disease of sin infects the world. In turn, every part of the creation, every creature, human institution, individual and corporate relationship, every philosophy, human reason—even our bodies, experiences, and thoughts—are themselves diseased by the sin that has been conveyed to every generation.

80. Each person born after the Fall has been marked by this corruption even if the guilt of sin—after Christ's atoning work on the cross—is no longer passed from Adam

to the rest of humanity. The bent to sin is effectively conveyed to each person. For this reason, we cannot return to God, model his holiness, or be restored to the full Image of God through our intelligence, power, efforts, religiosity, or inherent nature.

81. Even our love for one another, reflecting as it does the love we have from God, is corrupted by the Fall. The other-oriented, self-giving nature was replaced by bondage to a self-consumed heart. The love of husband and wife, parent and child, siblings, friends, fellow believers and even our love for enemies—following Christ’s command—is tainted by selfishness without the grace of God transforming it. Only through the grace of God in Christ Jesus can we begin to live a life that fully embodies the Image of God. Only then will we be completely able to live the life of holy love to which God calls each person and community.

Sin

82. Scripture speaks of sin both as a power to which we are captive and as actions in which we participate. That means that sin is not limited to our behavior. It’s far worse. Sin acts against us and upon us. Sin enslaves us. Apart from God’s redeeming grace in Christ, we are “sold into slavery under sin” (Romans 7:14). And as this power stands over us, we also participate in it. We are complicit. People sin against us. We sin against other people. And we sin against God. As sinners, we are “hostile to God” (Romans 8:7) and we “cannot please God” (Romans 8:8). We make ourselves his enemies (Romans 5:10). Our opposition to God makes us objects of divine wrath, which is God’s measured, principled, and just opposition to every thing that stands against his good purposes in creation. For this we stand guilty before God and are in need of his forgiveness.

83. Scripture also describes the twofold nature of sin. On the one hand, there are sins. These are actions that are contrary to God’s nature and his intentions for human life. These may be either intentional or unintentional. But of greater significance is sin as the corruption of human nature. This is the antagonism to God and his will with which we are born. This is the source of what Wesley called “sin rightly so-called,” that is, an intentional transgression of the known will of God.

84. Sin is universal. Everyone in the world has been subjected to sin and has participated in it. That doesn’t mean, however, that sin is essential to human existence. This becomes clear when we look to Jesus, who was “born in human

likeness” and “found in human form” (Philippians 2:7). He has become like us in every way, “yet without sin” (Hebrews 4:15; cf. 2:14–18). So, if Jesus is fully human, and if Jesus never sinned, that means that sin is not an essential feature of human life. To the contrary, sin degrades and dehumanizes us. Captivity to and complicity with sin is subhuman existence. Jesus came to set us free from sin and make us fully human.

85. Jesus Christ perfectly embodies the fulfillment of God’s intentions for humanity as his divine-Image bearers. When we transgress, we fail to fulfill God’s intentions for us as bearers of his Image. To sin is to miss the mark of what it means to be fully human. The first sin occurred when the first humans were deceived and tempted by Satan. They failed to trust God. They willingly betrayed God by disobeying his command.

86. As stewards of creation, sin in humanity results in the entire creation being corrupted by sin and influenced by malevolent powers seen and unseen. We are not only sinners—we inhabit a world infected with sin. We must battle against sin within our own hearts, and we must resist unjust structures and institutions that sinful men and women have built. As Wesley put it:

‘By one man’s disobedience,’ as the Apostle observes... as many as were then in the loins of their forefather, ‘were made,’ or constituted, ‘sinners:’ Not only deprived of the favour of God, but also of this Image, of all virtue, righteousness, and true holiness; and sunk, partly into the image of the devil, – in pride, malice, and all other diabolical tempers; partly into the image of the brute, being fallen under the dominion of brutal passions and grovelling appetites. Hence also death entered into the world, with all his forerunners and attendants, – pain, sickness, and a whole train of uneasy, as well as unholy passions and tempers (“God’s Love to Fallen Man”).

Sin is both individual and corporate. It affects each of us. It affects the whole world.

87. Perhaps the greatest consequence of Adam and Eve’s sin is death. Death is a result of sin, not a matter of arbitrary divine reprisal. Life is a gift from God, the I AM. God is life, and we have life only in communion with him and as a gift from him. Thus, sin breaches our relationship with our Creator, and death is the inevitable result.

88. But what is death? It is expressed both spiritually and physically. Spiritual death is separation from God as the source of life. This gives the end of present life its horror. Adam and Eve experienced spiritual death when they were exiled from the immediate presence of God. Their untroubled relationship to God died, as did their peaceful relationship to one another. But death is not only a feature of our spirituality. We are embodied creatures, and our bondage to sin also results in the death of our physical bodies. When Adam and Eve sinned, death entered the world and spread to their offspring. Cain murdered his brother Abel. Spiritual and physical death belong together. We experience spiritual death in separation from God, which ultimately leads to the death of the body. This frames the double need that is met in Jesus. He restores us to the immediate presence of God and gives us spiritual life. He makes us participants in his resurrection to restore and glorify our physical lives.

SECTION THREE REVELATION: THE IMAGE REVEALED

The Self-Revelation of God

89. God recognizes that we are limited, and so he provides us with the ability to know him, his will, and his purposes through direct revelation and indirect revelation, such as the natural world. As the psalmist wrote, “The heavens are telling the glory of God; and the firmament proclaims his handiwork” (Psalm 19:1). Revelation is God explaining himself to us: about who he is, what he is like, what he does, and what his purposes are. Revelation communicates God himself.

90. God has revealed himself through and to the world. He is revealed through mighty acts and inspired words. God spoke all creation into existence (Genesis 1) and all creation bears witness to the glory of God. Human life, reflecting the Image of the Triune God, bears witness to the creative power of God, the covenantal love of God, and the value of relationship and community. He makes it possible to discern when and where he is active in the world, to align our lives rightly with his will, and to join in his mission.

91. Revelation is not a secondary activity of God, meant to help creation know its Creator. Rather, it is part of God’s nature to communicate. The Gospel of John makes this clear, identifying Jesus as the incarnate *Logos* (Word/Reason), the Word made flesh. This grounds the claim that revelation is both dynamic and consistent. The Word of God is identified as the Second Person of the Trinity. Just as the nature of the Trinity remains consistent across all time and places, so the revelation made available through the Word is likewise consistent even as it is translated and expressed in time and place (1 Samuel 15:29, James 1:17).

92. God acts in history to make himself known and has moved throughout all centuries to speak to hearts that are searching for him. God spoke to Adam, to Noah, to Abraham, to Hagar. God spoke to Jacob and Joseph, and to Moses and Miriam. God spoke through the law, and through judges and kings. He spoke through mighty acts of deliverance, and through prophets and prophetesses. And in the fullness of time, God spoke by incarnating his Word, revealing his order and love in Jesus. Jesus is a unique person, fully divine and fully human.

Scripture

93. As the incarnate Word of God, Jesus reveals in a definitive and authoritative manner the glory, nature, and purposes of God. The Scripture uses the same term, *Logos*, to describe both the Second Person of the Trinity and the written record of God's self-revelation. Thus, Scripture mirrors the same dual nature as the incarnate Word. It was written by humans in the languages of the time—Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek—with all the attributes, expressions, and cultural understandings of the ancient period. This is why the Bible in places depicts unfaithful human realities, such as slavery, patriarchy, and violence, which do not reflect God's good purposes for his creation.

94. At the same time, the Bible is inspired (2 Timothy 3:16), literally "God-breathed." Though the precise manner of inspiration is a mystery, the affirmation that all Scripture is inspired means that God stands as the ultimate author. Consequently, Scripture contains all things necessary to salvation, is sufficient to guide us in all matters of faith and practice, and continues to speak authoritatively in our time. The Scripture is a trustworthy revelation of the will and mind of God.

95. Because of its dual nature, the Bible is unlike any other book. It records God's mighty acts and words over time; the testimonies of God speaking, the ways God has, again and again, revealed himself to redeem his creation. Those who experienced and received his acts of revelation preserved it in writing. Having seen, and even touched, the revelation of God they were chosen to proclaim and preserve that revelation, so that those who came after them might recognize God when he is speaking (1 John 1:1-4).

96. The interpretation of Scripture calls for the careful use of appropriate tools developed to understand its historical and cultural context and meaning. However, faithful interpretation also requires the leading of the Spirit to uncover the deeper truths of its message. The same Spirit that inspired the original human writers continues to work in human readers to understand his message in all times. This is known as double inspiration. Charles Wesley wrote in 1783:

If God enlighten through his Word,
I shall my kind Enlightener bless;
but void and naked of my Lord,
what are all verbal promises?

Nothing to me, till faith divine
inspire, inspeak, and make them mine.

Jesus, the appropriating grace
'tis thine on sinners to bestow.
Open mine eyes to see thy face,
open my heart thyself to know.
And then I through thy Word obtain
sure present, and eternal gain.

97. As the Spirit worked in Jesus's ministry to point people to him, so the Spirit works to point readers to Jesus in Scripture. The writers of the Old Testament in God's covenant with Israel look forward to the full revelation of God coming in Jesus Christ; the writers of the New Testament point back to and amplify the Person and work of God in Jesus Christ. All interpretation, therefore, must conform to the life and teachings of Jesus Christ. For this reason, Wesley taught that the first tool in the interpretation of Scripture is Scripture itself: comparing passages across books from both testaments to see the overarching work of God. The work of interpretation is never complete.

Scriptural Authority

98. Scripture possesses an authority that stands above our experiences and viewpoints. In the words of Wesley, "God himself has condescended to teach the way, for to this very end he came down from heaven. He has written it down in a book; O give me that book" (Preface, *Sermons on Several Occasions*). Scripture preserves the various ways that God has spoken to reclaim and redeem creation. History, poetry, prophecy, law, parable, and apocalyptic literature all bear consistent witness to the redeeming love of God throughout the Bible.

99. With St. Paul we affirm that, "All scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, so that everyone who belongs to God may be proficient, equipped for every good work" (2 Timothy 3:16-17). Scripture is trustworthy as God's revealed word to us, guiding us through the real and difficult circumstances of life, not only in theory or when life is easy. As we progress on the way of discipleship, we grow in this confidence in the truthfulness of God's word because we find it so in our experience of grace. In this way, Scripture's authority leads and directs our experience, rather than the other

way round. The circumstances of our lives then provide the occasions in which—even contrary to appearances—we are able to test and find that God is true and faithful, and his Word is reliable.

100. This revelation is not static, however. Revelation is dynamic because it is found in the ongoing communication of God with his people through the process of inspiration. The Holy Spirit illuminates human reason to recognize that God is revealing insights about God and his will. When we are inspired, the Holy Spirit confirms that we are rightly understanding and presenting God’s revelation in harmony with the faithful witness of God in the Church through the centuries.

101. The authority of Scripture grows from a developing relationship of love: a love of God for us as revealed in Jesus and our love in return for God. The circumstances of our everyday lives—our needs, our ethical challenges, the problems as well as the joys we encounter—become the occasions for us to trust God’s love as revealed through in Scripture, and for God’s Word to prove true once more, even in ways that surprise us. So we do not use the circumstances we experience to judge God’s Word; rather, we experience the truth of God’s Word as we trust it in our lives, even when it seems hard at first to do so. We do not judge the Scripture, then; instead, God’s Word, applied, shapes us and offers the platform for our lives to reach the fullness of God’s purpose for us. The Scripture provides God’s vision for life and happiness, true wholeness, including but not limited to human flourishing, the good of singleness, the marriage of one man and one woman, true friendship, fulfillment in vocation, and holy community. The Scripture also calls us to mission, sending us to love our neighbor. Those who have been illuminated by the Holy Spirit to recognize the revelation of God both enjoy fellowship with God through the salvation made available in Jesus Christ and desire to share this revelation so that others can share in salvation.

Tradition

102. The Word of God in Scripture is further illumined for us by means of Tradition, exemplified in the great ecumenical creeds, often spoken of as the “deposit of faith.” Tradition has been given by Christ to the world and has been preserved to the present and for every generation to come. This deposit is a precious gift; when energized by the power of the Holy Spirit, Tradition reflects the light of God’s word in many and beautiful ways. It contains ways of interpreting the Word of God and faithful lenses for understanding and teaching. Tradition also provides

applications of God's Word in the life of the Church, through the customs and practices of the Christian community, often long hallowed by time and experience.

103. But we must be careful, for Tradition, while a treasure, is not a dead or static thing. In this way, it is like the Church itself, which has been likened to a mighty river that has its source in the high country of the earthly ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ, the teaching of his apostles and first witnesses, and the life of the primitive Christian community in those first years— itself rooted in God's covenant with Israel and the Word of God through the prophets. That stream comes down through the long reach of history, sometimes a small channel that cuts deeply and at other times a vast flood that overflows the country around it, its course at times dividing and later reuniting, but always one and the same river.

104. The same river imagery can be used for Tradition, which has its origin in the same high country, and reflects the living testimony and practice of the faithful over time and around the world, down to us. Its very existence at all is a witness to the faithfulness of God, the continuing presence of the Holy Spirit among God's people, and the willing labors of God's servants in every age as they are filled with that Spirit and experience God's grace afresh. Like a river in nature, this one has banks that definite it, its course determined by the Holy Scripture and by the creeds and early councils of the Church as faithful interpreters of the Word. And like a physical river that picks up minerals and particles as it flows along its course, so the river of Tradition also picks up matter from the times and places where it has been. Some of these additions—we might call them "traditions" with a little "t"—offer new tastes and expressions to the great old flow and enhance our appreciation of it. Sadly, some admixtures prove to be unnecessary or even pollutants that, though they may abide in the waters for a time (even a long time), must be and will be ultimately cleansed from its course by the same faithful Holy Spirit.

105. Thus, again, there is a deep consistency across time and place, even while there is not sameness of expression or appearance everywhere and "everywhen." Appearances and characteristics can change across time and in various places. Some teachings and practices, though not essential to the river of Tradition, enhance its taste and improve its flow for a time—and this, too, is in the gift of God. Others, though they may appear pleasing for a time, must ultimately be dropped or cleared out. This, too, helps to account for how there are differences in emphasis (flow) and practice (appearance) over time. It also accounts for the possibility of disagreement among those who are drawing from the same river but have varying perspectives. Yet

we can recognize a much deeper continuity that blesses all, for the same Holy Spirit continues to energize the flow and to steer the river's mighty course as it makes its way across time and place. Tradition represents an important aspect of the faith and fellowship of the entire Church. It is a gift of the Holy Spirit to unite us in fellowship with all who have ever lived in Christ, and through our faithful practice with all who will ever live and love and trust in Jesus.

106. We do not make this journey of faith alone, or in isolation. It is a relay, and we are the present stage in that great race (Hebrews 12:1; 2 Timothy 4:7) to fulfill the call and charge of God in Christ to “make disciples of all nations” (Matthew 28:19). Others have been on this quest before us. Guided by the Holy Spirit, they have in times of strife from without and stress within produced the great creeds, which set the truly broad bounds of faithful Christian conversation. The creeds are like a compass, which is not north but points steadfastly to the north, so that we might not lose our way and wander off the path into danger and the confusion that often produces heresy.

107. Others on the road before us have passed along insights to guide, equip, warn, and help us. They are both men and women, drawn from every place and people where the Gospel message has been embraced. Among these we can name the great fathers and mothers of the Church who carried the faithful message after the apostolic era and formulated the great early statements of faith. We can point to Late Antiquity, the Medieval era and its counterpart in the East, the “Byzantine commonwealth.” Beyond the Mediterranean world we can point to the ancient Christian communities in India and Ethiopia and elsewhere. We can find this faith witness amongst the various Reformations and the Renaissance, and later in the great revivals and missionary enterprises, particularly the trans-Atlantic Evangelical Revival that swept up the Wesley brothers and so many others in the Spirit's wake. With each era comes great insights and new applications—all grounded in the same Scripture and forming part of the long Tradition as applied by the guidance of the Holy Spirit into the everyday experience of God's people. This “experience,” properly understood, is redeemed and made alive by grace, and transforms lives, and even communities and cultures.

108. John and Charles Wesley pointed us to the Tradition and contributed to it. The Wesley brothers considered the early church to be the purest expression of faithfulness to the revelation of God. They tested the faithfulness of all other periods and expressions of the Christian faith by the early church. They did this because

they saw the early church as best embodying the ideals of the visible church made possible by the Spirit. Wesley saw echoes of this purity throughout church history, highlighting the work of the Reformers in their attempt to return to that purity, particularly the Reformers of the English Church, the compilation of the Book of Common Prayer, and the work of Anglican theologians in the 17th century. The key for the faithful today, however, is not simply to emulate Wesley. He saw these eras as faithfully pointing to Christ and so he embraced them. Likewise, this is why we embrace Wesley. He is not the point, nor would he want to be. He points to Christ.

SECTION FOUR SALVATION: THE IMAGE RESTORED

109. The Fall marred the Image of God in humanity. Rather than reflecting God as intended at creation, humanity's corruption marred the Image. Salvation is the restoration that God has initiated in Christ to heal humanity—and even creation itself—so that it might once more reflect his Image.

The Way or Order of Salvation

110. The process by which the Image of God and communion with God is restored is called a way or order of salvation. It is a way of describing the effects that the grace of God has in human life. Or to put it differently, it is the way to describe what salvation looks like and the process that believers go through as they move from a sinful life, one turned away from God, to a life turned toward God, a life of freedom, wholeness, and Christlikeness.

Salvation

111. The redemption of humanity, the restoration of the Image, can be understood as gaining freedom: *freedom from*, on the one hand, and *freedom to*, on the other hand. The first is *freedom from* the power of actual sins and *freedom from* the guilt of sin. Later in the Christian journey, this freedom includes *freedom from* the being of sin, a being or nature set against the things of God. Simply put, *freedom from* is liberty from both *sinful acts* and from *sinful being*. Our need is twofold and corresponds to two works of grace expressed in Wesley's sermon, "The Scripture Way of Salvation": justification (and regeneration) on the one hand and entire sanctification on the other.

112. Salvation also embraces *freedom to*, that is, the *freedom to* love God and neighbor. This is what Charles Wesley pointed to when he wrote: "My chains fell off, my heart was free; I rose, went forth, and followed thee ("And Can It Be that I Should Gain"). Freed from the chains of sin, we are free to love as we ought, and as we have been created to do. This too is what salvation is about; it is a movement of restoration, a redemption whose origin is from the Father, rooted in the atoning work of Christ, and administered by the Holy Spirit.

Grace

113. Grace enables people to walk in the ways of God. It is the salvific strength of the Almighty mediated to believers by nothing less than the presence of the Holy Spirit. Grace is universal. It also entails a *relation* to the Most High, “For ‘In him we live and move and have our being’” (Acts 17:28a). At its heart, a Wesleyan believes that grace is dynamic and transformative. Grace is not static; it is inherently active. Wesley described grace as the “power of the Holy Spirit” (“The Spirit of Bondage and Adoption”).

114. We can distinguish the characteristics of grace from the categories of grace (God’s calling to us, convicting us, pardoning us, and sanctifying us) and finally from the nature of grace itself (the gifts of peace and power). Wesley’s own breakthrough in terms of his understanding of grace came in March 1738 when he was convinced that grace must be understood in terms of *both* happiness (peace) *and* holiness (power).

115. The way or order of salvation can be understood in terms of how the presence of the Holy Spirit is manifested in both peace and power in the lives of believers. In other words, those who trust in Jesus Christ will be transformed in *being* over time, from grace to grace, with purity of heart as the goal when the Holy Spirit reigns in believers’ hearts without a rival.

Prevenient Grace

116. The Wesleyan tradition affirms the doctrine of original sin, even a doctrine of total depravity (humanity after the Fall is “totally corrupted”). Given the broad and devastating consequences of sin, God must take the first step and restore basic human capacities so that we might hear his call. The grace that makes this possible is prevenient grace, “the grace that goes before.” It is God’s initiative.

117. Prevenient grace comes in two forms: both free and cooperant grace. By free grace, God of his own power restores four faculties making humanity responsible and therefore redeemable. These restored faculties include: (1) conscience, (2) a measure of freedom to receive the ongoing grace of God, (3) knowledge of the moral law, and (4) knowledge of the basic attributes of God. This is a universal benefit that everyone receives. Prevenient grace invokes our cooperation and is the ongoing work of the Holy Spirit through these four restored faculties. These overtures are

expressed in the form of convincing grace when the Holy Spirit uses the moral law, and our failure to live by it, to lead us to repentance. This convincing grace can be rejected.

118. Prevenient grace is the beginning of salvation and everyone is to a certain degree on the path of redemption, but prevenient grace is just the beginning of the restoration of the Image of God in humanity. On its own, prevenient grace is not redemptive. It is the Father's call—and his enabling us to respond—to enter into that saving relationship with him.

Repentance

119. Repentance is at the heart of the Wesleyan message: calling sinners to turn from sin and brokenness to wholeness in Christ. In 1777 when Wesley recounted the beginnings of the Methodist revival, he observed: “two or three Clergymen of the Church of England began vehemently to call sinners to repentance” (“On Laying the Foundation of the New Chapel”). So important was repentance that Wesley referred to it as one of the three main doctrines of Methodism along with faith and holiness. He called repentance the “porch of religion.”

120. Beyond this, an examination of the three basic rules of the early Methodist societies (doing no harm, doing good, and employing the means of grace) reveals the fruits of genuine repentance. It also reveals the very purpose of Methodism, its core identity, so to speak. Put another way, Methodism has always been about repentance, transformation, turning around, openness to new life, that in the end can lead to an embrace of the gospel. Those who remain stubbornly opposed to personal change, making their own experience the center of all values, will never embrace such wisdom.

121. Because the need of sinners is twofold, repentance is also twofold. We are called to repent of *sinful acts* and the reality of a *corrupted nature*. The first repentance, termed “legal,” is among other things the conviction and repentance of the sins that we have committed. The second repentance, called “evangelical,” is a conviction and repentance of the sin that lingers, the inbred sin that remains even in believers. This second repentance highlights the importance of a second work of grace for all who have been born of God. Redemption is not accomplished in one grand stroke.

Justifying Grace and Assurance

122. Justification—God’s pardon—is the work that God does *for us* after repentance. He forgives all our past sins. This pardon is a change in *relation*: Once alienated, we are now friends. The foundation of our pardon is nothing less than the person and work of Christ, especially his atoning death on the cross. St. Paul wrote that in Christ “we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace that he lavished on us” (Ephesians 1:7-8a). Jesus Christ, and he alone, can heal the divine and human relationship, disrupted by sin. He of all human beings is also divine. Only he is sinless (e.g., Hebrews 1:3). In other words, unlike all other human beings, who are steeped in sin, Christ is not a part of the problem. In his death and resurrection all the Persons of the Trinity are involved: The Father gives the gift of his Son who is received through the work of the Holy Spirit.

123. This gift of forgiveness shows us that God pardons not the godly but the ungodly. We do not have to clean ourselves up first before we can be forgiven. We can *receive* this gracious gift now. Indeed, it is not by human effort or by works of the law that sinners are justified. It is by grace through faith alone in Jesus Christ. Justification is a sheer gift and is therefore a manifestation of free grace. It is nothing less than freedom from the guilt of sin.

124. Often, this work of pardon is followed by the direct witness of the Holy Spirit in assuring grace, a conviction that we can be certain—not just mentally but experientially—of God’s pardon and acceptance. We can know that God’s pardon has been granted to us and his renewal work has begun in our hearts. We call this assurance. It is illustrated in Wesley’s own language: “an assurance was given to me that he had taken away my sins, even mine...” (*Journal*, May 24, 1738). And also, “It is that very Spirit bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God” (Romans 8:16).

Initial Sanctifying Grace (The New Birth) and Assurance

125. Justification is the work that God does *for us*; the new birth or initial sanctification is the work that God does *in us*. The God of holy love who is merciful to forgive us our sins is also good and powerful enough to transform our natures, even the dispositions of the heart. The new birth, as Wesley expressed it, is the gateway to the life of holiness and the beginning of the restoration of the Image of

God. It's the beginning of sanctification. In the new birth, believers are transformed by God's grace to become *holy*. St. Paul spoke about this new life in terms of a new creation when he wrote that, "if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new!" (2 Corinthians 5:17). Those found in Christ begin to love God and their neighbors as they ought. The gift of the new birth is received by grace through faith in Jesus Christ.

126. Through the grace of the new birth, the Holy Spirit awakens the spiritual senses so that we discern the invisible, eternal world, and rejoice in the love of God that is now found in our hearts by the power of the Holy Spirit. As the Holy Spirit bears a direct witness to our forgiveness, the Holy Spirit bears a direct witness to believers that they are the very children of God. The work of restoration is made plain in this gift of assurance.

The Process of Sanctification

127. The Methodist tradition describes sanctification as three distinct movements of grace: (1) initial sanctification or the new birth, (2) the process of sanctification, and (3) entire sanctification. This process characterizes the life of serious Christian discipleship as believers grow in grace, with changes in degree along the way. In this process believers become more patient, more kind, more peaceful, more holy. In other words, believers become more and more like Jesus. Scripture speaks of this when it says that we are called to "grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ" (Ephesians 4:15). This process is energized by a rich divine and human cooperation. As Wesley put it, "God works; therefore you can work...God works; therefore you must work" ("On Working Out of Our Own Salvation").

128. The new birth and entire sanctification can be distinguished from the process of sanctification. They are not progressive changes, but something *new*. In the new birth, this qualitative change is the transition from a life of sin to initial holiness. In entire sanctification it is the transition from impurity of heart to perfect love.

129. The process of sanctification is an example of cooperant grace, of God and humanity working together with God by grace. However, both the new birth and entire sanctification are wonderful examples of free grace—God's work—gifts to be *received* by grace through faith alone. Wesley expressed this basic truth in his pithy observation: "Exactly as we are justified by faith, so are we sanctified by faith. Faith is

the condition, and the *only* condition of sanctification, *exactly as it is of justification*” (“The Scripture Way of Salvation”).

Entirely Sanctifying Grace

130. When Wesley wanted to clarify an important doctrine he often stated what that doctrine is *not*. In his *Plain Account of Christian Perfection*, he argued that entire sanctification or Christian perfection does not mean freedom from: (a) ignorance, (b) mistaken judgment, (c) infirmities (bodily limitations that characterize the human condition), or (d) temptation. There is no state of grace in this life from which believers cannot fall. Beyond this, Wesley taught that there is always a need to grow in grace, in the knowledge and love of God, in particular, but that an entirely sanctified heart will continue to grow since the knowledge and the love of God are ever inexhaustible.

131. Wesley’s positive statements about entire sanctification can be seen in the freedoms discussed earlier: *freedom from* and *freedom to*. Perfect love is *freedom from* the being of sin. Justification is freedom from the *guilt* of sin, the new birth is freedom from the *power or dominion* of sin, and entire sanctification is nothing less than freedom from the *being* of sin. Entire sanctification is *freedom to* love God with all our heart, mind, soul, and strength and to love our neighbors as ourselves (Mark 12:29-31).

132. Entire sanctification is the restoration of the Image of God in us, in which our lives reflect the Image of the One who is Love. The fullness of entire sanctification can be seen in St. Paul’s prayer for the Thessalonian believers, including his understanding that this completed work is the act of God: “May the God of peace himself sanctify you entirely; and may your spirit and soul and body be kept sound and blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. The one who calls you is faithful, and he will do this” (1 Thessalonians 5:23-24).

133. In terms of how and when entire sanctification is received Wesley wrote:

And by this token may you surely know whether you seek it by faith or by works. If by works, you want something to be done first, before you are sanctified. You think, ‘I must first be or do thus or thus.’ Then you are seeking it by works unto this day. If you seek it by faith, you may expect it as you are: and if as you are, then expect it *now* (“The Scripture Way of Salvation”).

Perfect love is a gift of God. As a gift it can be received *now*. Early Wesleyans knew, however, that this restoration of the moral Image of God is often found in “waiting,” i.e., using the means of grace and the works of piety and mercy.

Glorifying Grace

134. Because the grace of Jesus Christ is sufficient for all our needs in this life and the cleansing of sin, no purification takes place beyond the grave. In death, believers enter into paradise, an intermediate state, in which they are in the presence of the glorified Christ. Scripture states: “away from the body...[is to be] at home with the Lord” (2 Corinthians 5:8). As death brings about the end of this life, so too will the Second Coming of Christ bring about the end of the intermediate state of believers with the full inauguration of the new creation.

SECTION FIVE THE CHURCH: LIFE IN THE IMAGE

The Nature of the Church

135. The Church of Jesus Christ on earth is the manifest presence of our Lord among the peoples of all nations. The worldwide Church of true believers is expressed in local church bodies existing in highly varied cultural contexts. God established the Church for the redemption and transformation of the world.

136. In the proper sense, the Church is a body of people united together in the service of God. The primary meaning of “church” is a visible, gathered local congregation assembled to hear the pure Word of God preached and to eat of one bread and drink of one cup. However, in a broader sense “Church” means the catholic or universal church; that is, all the Christians under heaven.

137. The Church is the “faithful company” in which the means of grace are offered, just as it is the primary location of the gifts of the Spirit and healing. The means of grace are tangible and visible practices whereby God the Father, through the power of the Holy Spirit, forms us in the Image of Christ the Son. The Church, both visible and invisible, participates in the means of grace.

138. Throughout time the people of God have used three metaphors to speak of the nature of the Church. First, the Church is the beloved Bride of Christ. It consists of people of all nations and throughout all time—past, present, and future—who have been joined to Christ. Christ loves the Church and gave himself up for her in order to make her holy, cleansing her with the washing of water by the word so as to present her in splendor and without blemish (Ephesians 5:25-27).

139. Second, the Church is the Body of Christ. It consists of the people of God, called out of the world to bear visible witness as a body—even a physical manifestation—to the free, transformative gift of grace received in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Thus, the Church represents the tangible and visible witness of Jesus Christ on earth, apart from which there is no ordinary possibility of salvation. Christ has given to the Church the ministry and orders of God for the gathering and the perfecting of its members in this life.

140. Both of these biblical metaphors demonstrate the visible and tangible nature of the Church. And yet, the Church is not confined to what is seen. The Church is both visible and invisible. The visible and invisible Church should not be considered

two separate churches, but rather two aspects of the one, true Church in Jesus Christ. The Church exists as the community of believers throughout the world and across time, once estranged from God but now adopted as children of God, who rejoice in his gracious and mighty acts of salvation. The members of the Church serve as a signpost of God's final redemption as they profess faith in Jesus Christ and proclaim his peace to those who were once far off but have now been brought near through his blood (Ephesians 2:13). The Church regularly gathers together in the tangible presence of God—and the presence of one another—to hear the word of God proclaimed and to receive the sacraments “duly administered.”

141. Third, the Church is the new Israel. When humanity sinned and fell short of God's glory, he chose a people, Israel, to be his light and to make clear his purposes to a broken and hurting world. He gave them the mark of circumcision as a sign of his covenant, and he gave his law so that they might reflect his holiness to the world. In the fullness of time, God sent his son Jesus Christ—fully God and fully human—for the rescue and redemption of the entire world, to fulfill as a first-century Jew the calling of Israel.

142. We believe that the good news of Jesus Christ cannot be contained, but is to be proclaimed in word and deed in faithfulness to Christ's command and for the sake of the world. To this end, the Triune God has established the Church. In the Church, God gives us the grace by which the Image of Christ overcomes the image of Adam, reinstating us in his love. The sign of circumcision marked Israel. The Church is marked by Baptism. Through Baptism we are brought into the Church and consequently made members of Christ its Head (John Wesley, “A Treatise on Baptism”). This tangible mark bears witness to a new way of being God's people in the world.

143. The Church of Jesus Christ is marked by its “oneness.” Christ continues to pray for the Church as he did in John 17—that we may share in the same unity that Christ shares with the Father. The Church has “one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all” (Ephesians 4:5-6). Sadly, oneness is often the last thing the world sees in the Church. Nevertheless, if we are to take Jesus' prayer seriously we must strive for the oneness of the Church, trusting in the efficacy of his prayer and the empowerment of the Spirit.

144. The Church is “holy.” This holiness is a gift that flows from Christ's redeeming and sanctifying work. God gives this gift so that the Church might manifest God's holy love to the world. We lament that the Church has often failed to live up to the

call to be a holy people. Yet we believe that the Triune God continues to sanctify the Church for the sake of the world. When we gather together we encounter Christ as the one who both judges and gives grace to his Church that the Church might be whole in him.

145. The Church is marked by its catholicity. The diversity of the Church is a sign of the Kingdom brought to fullness in the oneness of the Church. In Christ, we belong to each other regardless of social status, race, ethnicity, or gender. The catholicity of the Church also extends across time. To be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord (2 Corinthians 5:8). When we gather together in the Lord's presence we join our praises with the Church in heaven. As Charles Wesley wrote:

Let saints on earth unite to sing
with those to glory gone,
for all the servants of our King
in earth and heaven are one.

("Come, Let Us Join Our Friends Above")

146. Finally, the Church is apostolic as it guards the good deposit of faith that was given by Christ to the apostles (1 Timothy 6:20). Just as the apostles were called to bear witness to what they had seen and heard, we are called to bear faithful witness to Jesus Christ, to pass on intact that which we have received.

Church Order and Discipleship

147. The Church is the called-out people of God; the term "church" itself means "the called-out ones." As such, the Church is named and redeemed by God through the work of Jesus Christ, and it is measured by its ability to pass on apostolic doctrine and witness throughout history. This calling is grounded in the discipline of grace, which guides and matures Christian life from the threshold of justifying faith to its fullness in sanctification. Such discipline is instilled in the Church through the practice of the means of grace, acts of piety, and acts of mercy.

148. Discipleship in the Wesleyan tradition is an integration of personal and social holiness, not only for those already in the Church but also for those invited to become Christ followers. The holy love of God produces mature believers who bear the Image of Christ in the world. God's grace moves in believers "to think, speak, and act, in every instance in a manner worthy of our Christian calling" (Wesley, "Of the Church"). Transformed by grace, believers are given a spirit of humility and

mutual affection—in the vulnerability of more intimate groups and the majesty of corporate worship—in order to be like Christ in laying down their lives for one another and for the world. Their time, energy, and possessions come under the direction of the Word of God and are freely shared for the building up of the Church and as a witness to those outside it. Methodists enter into this order and discipline of accountable life together in what historically were known as bands, classes, and societies.

149. The Church’s tangible witness of Christ’s love and presence permeates a truly Christian home, the congregation gathered for worship, and even the society at large. The life-giving love of God should be visible to others. That same love sparks generosity of heart and hand towards those in need. Believers are “provoked to love and to good works; to patient continuance in well-doing; and to abound more and more in that holiness without which no man can see the Lord” (Wesley, “Scriptural Christianity”).

Church Discipline

150. Methodism was built on a shared commitment to doctrine lived out through embodied discipline. Wesleyan doctrine was first and foremost grounded in “the faith that was once for all entrusted to the saints” (Jude 3). Methodist discipline first sought a return to the practices of the early church, particularly its first three centuries. Methodist discipline is expressed personally and corporately. Methodists search the Scripture, pray, and fast privately and corporately. Methodists gather for worship, receive the sacraments, watch over one another’s souls, and confess their sins. They engage in works of mercy, which are expressed both individually and communally.

151. Methodism was built on the certainty that the Christian life must be lived in community. Christian discipleship is lived in visible corporate (embodied) ways. When John Wesley said, “there is no holiness but social holiness,” he meant that we should not expect to grow in holiness on our own. This is vital for contemporary Wesleyans to reclaim. We must be connected to other people who are also following Jesus.

152. Social holiness was expressed within early Methodism through the class meeting and the band meeting. Classes were groups of 7-12 people who met weekly to discuss the present state of their relationship with the Triune God. Class meetings

were required for membership in Methodism, both as a renewal movement within the Church of England and as many within Methodism organized as separate churches. Bands were groups of 3-5 people, divided by gender, where sin was confessed for the sake of healing and growth in holiness (James 5:16).

153. As some in Methodism transitioned from a renewal movement within a church to become a church in the newly formed United States, they brought its vision for social holiness into its understanding of how a church should be conceived and how it should live. This can be seen in the title of early Methodist polity book, *The Doctrines and Discipline of the Methodist Episcopal Church*.

154. The Methodist vision for corporate, embodied, social holiness did not leave room for nominal Christianity. Discipline meant a disciplined or structured life that provided the necessary boundaries for growing in grace. It also meant that those who persisted in living undisciplined lives were removed from the fellowship. Reclaiming a disciplined fellowship is a pressing need for the next Methodism.

The Means of Grace

155. The means of grace as a concept is not unique to Wesley or Wesleyan thought. Wesley's commitment to it reflects his formation in the larger Church, particularly the Church of England. A means of grace is a channel by which God communicates grace: the power of the Holy Spirit. In his sermon, "The Means of Grace," Wesley highlighted primary means of grace including: meditating on scripture, prayer, fasting, and the works of mercy such as care for the poor. The Church is the steward of the means of grace. As Irenaeus said, "Where the church is, there is the Spirit of God; and where the Spirit of God is, there is the church, and every kind of grace" (*Against Heresies*, III.24.1). Faith and holy living are the fruit of the Father's self-giving in the Son by the Spirit who indwells the Church through the means of grace.

156. While grace is not limited to the Church, the means of grace form the basis of the Church's life together. It is both where and how we participate in the love of God and grow in Christlikeness through the power of grace. As a household of faith we recognize that through specific tangible and visible practices, we place ourselves in the posture of receiving God's transforming work. The many varied means of grace allow us to live out the Great Commandment to love God and neighbor (Matthew 22:36-40). Works of piety are those practices by which we demonstrate our love and devotion to God, whereas works of mercy demonstrate our love and care

for neighbor. Works of piety and mercy coalesce to make up life in the Image of Christ, by which the Church embodies God's love.

Works of Piety

Worship

157. The eternal fulfillment of God's all-encompassing purposes is the exaltation of his Son, Jesus Christ, to whom every knee will bend, and every tongue confess that he is Lord (Philippians 2:10-11). Local corporate worship not only foreshadows our eternal vocation of praise but it is also a participation, in real time, in the ceaseless worship of the communion of all the saints, both in heaven and on earth.

158. Corporate worship is the premiere event of the Church—an occasion to express acts of holy devotion in partnership with other believers. God's covenant people, gathered in local assemblies, come in answer to the joyful call of God. In worship, we make our glad response to this invitation and we are united with God and one another. Through the preached word, Holy Communion, prayer, giving of offerings, song, exhortation, and other acts of worship, we actively engage in relationship with the Triune God and surrender anew to God's will.

159. The relationship that we are describing is known and centered in the person of Jesus Christ, our risen Lord. Christ is truly present in our worship. As the Incarnate and Ascended One who sits at the right hand of the Father, he both receives our worship and leads our worship. He is our great high priest, the embodiment of our message, and the once and final sacrifice to which we unite ourselves in offering to the Father. Jesus's presence among us is the defining character of Christian worship.

160. We therefore commit ourselves to regular and communal assembling as disciples of Jesus Christ to give glory to God (Hebrews 10:25). In this we bear witness to our identity as God's people and celebrate the grand narrative of God's eternal activity. In regular and communal worship, we gather to be spiritually formed in Christlikeness, to be edified, and empowered by the Holy Spirit to live holy lives for the sake of the world, fulfilling God's Kingdom purposes.

Preaching

161. We affirm preaching as a gift of the Triune God to the Church, from the Father, through the Son, by the power of the Holy Spirit. When the Word of God is proclaimed and heard as a means of grace, the Spirit opens the hearts and the minds

of the worshipers to acknowledge the gracious presence of God in Jesus Christ. Through the presence of Christ, the Spirit extends God's prevenient, justifying, and sanctifying grace. Through the reading and preaching of the Word of God in Scripture, the Spirit illumines and inspires God's people to a life of joyful praise and faithful obedience.

162. Prayerful attentiveness in preaching the Word of God is our most precious resource for sustaining Christian identity. Preaching is a vital resource in identity-denying conditions. In preaching, God's people are called to remember the scriptural witness to the love of God for the world, proclaiming Jesus Christ is God's giving of himself to restore the divine Image in humanity. Through the sanctifying speech of the Holy Spirit, preaching serves as a means of grace by which the Church is restored and enjoys newness of life in Jesus Christ through the love of God and neighbor.

163. Wesleyan preaching is characterized by the Christ-centered worship of God. Renewal has always come through preachers whose first interest in life is reverent and realistic attention to God and God's Word in worship. When we assemble as God's people, Christ freely shares himself and the Word is read, spoken, heard, and believed. By the Spirit's power we become that which we hear, renewed in the divine Image in Jesus Christ.

164. We affirm that all sin, evil, suffering, need, and want can now be seen in light of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. In him God has acted in such a way that the realistic response of God's people is joy. In joyful praise we acknowledge the primacy of God's great love for the world. In sharing our love for him with others our lives become the good news we proclaim.

165. In his preaching ministry, John Wesley proclaimed that God in his great mercy has turned the world toward Jesus Christ by preaching the Gospel in the following manner: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor" (Luke 4:18-19). In the next Methodism, it is important that preachers follow Wesley's example of making the Gospel known to listeners in ways that are appropriate to their spiritual, moral, economic, and social conditions. And this will include preaching the Gospel in ways that meet people where they stand in relation to God and others.

Sacraments

166. We affirm the sacraments of Baptism and Holy Communion as sacraments instituted by Christ as gifts to the Church. In his sermon “The Means of Grace,” John Wesley affirmed the historic meaning of a sacrament as an “...outward sign of an inward grace and a means whereby we receive the same.” As we regularly receive the sacraments, we believe that God’s grace is present, given to us, to form and restore us in the Image of God.

Baptism

167. Baptism is both initiation and conversion into the death and resurrected life of Jesus Christ. It is a sacrament open to persons of all ages. The person and work of Jesus and the meaning of his death and resurrection are the principal emphases of the rite. The apostle Paul claims as much in his treatment of Baptism in Romans 6:3-4: “Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? Therefore we have been buried with him by baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life.”

168. Through Baptism, we participate in the death and resurrection of Christ, rising from the waters with a new identity as God’s holy people. As the Holy Spirit descended on Jesus in the waters of Baptism, the voice of the Father rang out from the heavens, “You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased” (Luke 3:22). In the waters of Baptism, we too are incorporated into the family of God, sons and daughters bathed with the power of the Holy Spirit. This family, born of water and the Spirit, includes the great heritage of saints of all ages, nations, and races, spanning the breadth of Christian history, who have served the Lord faithfully across time and space.

169. As the sacrament that brings a person into the Church, Baptism is the normative link to all other means of grace within the Christian community (Wesley, *A Treatise on Baptism*). Baptism initiates us into this covenantal community called the Church, which itself is shaped by the means of grace and through the means of grace shapes those who are in it. We thus describe the baptized members of the Church as those who are shaped by the biblical narrative, are relational in nature, and are missional in purpose. In Baptism we are commissioned, by grace, to serve God in the world, responding to God’s call to be the tangible, visible witness of Christ to everyone we meet. The sacrament brings us into something that is bigger than

ourselves. We acknowledge that faith and holiness is personal, yet it is lived out communally (i.e., social holiness). For this reason the regular practice of the reaffirmation of Baptism is essential for the liturgical life of the Church. It reminds us of our identity as the people of God, being transformed by grace to serve God in the world.

170. Baptism is also indicative of the physical death and new, resurrected life the Christian will one-day experience in the corporeal body. The act serves as a reminder that death is prevalent and will one day claim us all. However, it also offers comfort, acknowledging that death does not have the final word. Since we have been united with Christ in his death, we will also be united with him in his resurrection. Every Christian funeral is thus representative of Baptism. The deceased is identified as one who has now entered into the fullness of their Baptism. They have reached complete union with Christ who has accepted them into his death so as to be purified, healed, and freed of death itself. Likewise, the Christian has joined Christ in new, resurrected life, following in both death and resurrection where Christ has first led.

Holy Communion

171. While the sacrament of Baptism brings persons into the Church, the sacrament of Holy Communion continually “re-members” the Body of Christ as we gather to celebrate the sacrifice of Christ. Since the time of the apostles the Lord’s Table has been central to the liturgical life of the Church. The Wesley brothers understood the centrality of Holy Communion in the life of the Church and believed that a deeply sacramental life was necessary for Christian formation and the life of holiness. Early Methodists were encouraged to receive communion weekly, even to receive it as often as possible (Wesley, “The Duty of Constant Communion”). They were mockingly called “sacramentarians” for their Eucharistic devotion.

172. In Holy Communion the crucified and risen Christ is present with us as our gracious host. The grace poured out in this encounter convicts, heals, and sanctifies the Church as we cooperate with the Holy Spirit who transforms us in holiness going on to Christian perfection.

173. In Holy Communion we remember the mighty acts of God in Jesus Christ and his sacrifice for our sins on the cross. However, this is more than an intellectual exercise. We believe that through the power of the Holy Spirit, Christ’s sacrifice becomes present with us, “...not done and gone many years since, but, as to expiating grace and mercy, still lasting, still new, still the same that it was when it was

first offered to us” (Wesley, Preface, *Hymns on the Lord’s Supper*). In Holy Communion the physical bread and cup, and those physically gathered, are infused with the living presence of Christ. His body and blood in this sacrament nourish our very bodies and souls. The broken body of Christ heals our brokenness, enabling us to live out our Baptismal calling.

174. In turn, we offer ourselves in service to Christ as we join our sacrifice with his, in unity with the Church across time and space. In Holy Communion we catch a glimpse of the heavenly banquet that God has prepared for the new creation. We look forward to the time when Christ comes again and all of creation is restored in the new heaven and the new earth.

Catechesis and Formation

175. Catechesis is a holistic process that forms lives in the Image of Christ. Renewal often accompanies an intentional commitment to teach basic Christian beliefs and to guide the Christian in Christ-like behavior and holy desire. In particular, catechesis is the intentional practice of teaching the basics of the Christian faith. From the earliest days of the Church, teachers—catechists—have instructed seekers and those who grew up in the Church. They taught the outlines of the Christian faith. The Apostles’ Creed is an example of how the Church taught these basics. Following the English reformers who constructed a catechism and placed it in the Book of Common Prayer, Wesley highly valued this training for the faithful. Both the catechism’s placement within the Prayer Book and Wesley’s own efforts to communicate the faith show that catechesis is not separate from the life of the Church, but integral to it. But note that the catechism was placed together with the church’s liturgy. Teaching and practice go together in the making of a Christian.

176. The Church offers formative practices accessible to everyone who desires to walk in the way of Christ and grow in Christlikeness. Faith and holiness are both caught and taught. The life of the Church and the practices in which we participate instruct us in the faith in deeply formative ways—and in some ways they are more critical than formal published curriculum written to teach the things of God. In true Wesleyan spirit, knowledge and vital piety must be joined (e.g., Charles Wesley’s hymn “For Children”); neither can be neglected for a fully-orbed faith! What we do as a Christian community informs who we are as Christians, which in turn determines how we demonstrate our love for God and respond to the needs of the brokenness in the world.

177. Our identity as Christians is found in Christ. He is the beginning and the end of Christian identity. And we know him as Lord both experientially by the Spirit and in the Church's teachings about him. Participating in the liturgical life of the Church teaches us in ways lectures cannot and vice versa. There is value in knowing the doctrines of the faith and in knowing the faith as practice. Participating in works of mercy and doing good by showing love of neighbor through providing food to the hungry, clothing and shelter for those without, as well as visiting and helping those who are sick and in prison, cultivates the fruit of the Spirit that we might grow in kindness, compassion, and gentleness. Learning faith involves the same whole person endeavor that encompasses loving God—heart, mind, soul and strength. Catechesis is as much about being transformed by participation in and cooperation with the Holy Spirit as it is about being informed of the things of God.

178. Participation in the means of grace—both acts of piety and mercy—provide all members of the household of faith opportunities to know the ways of Christ and to grow in Christlikeness regardless of age or intellectual capacity. The next Methodism will hold onto the ways in which persons learn to watch over one another in love, examining their lives and supporting one another as they work out their salvation together.

Works of Mercy

Evangelism—God's Initiation

179. The Wesleyan understanding of evangelism always begins with God. In God's very first acts of creation, the calling of Israel to be God's own people, and continuing through Jesus Christ, God opens his arms to us, making space within himself for us. This openness precedes all else. Before we are even aware of it, God already loves us and is reaching out to us, offering his grace to us in Jesus Christ, and inviting us to respond in faith and love.

180. Likewise, engaging in evangelism with a Wesleyan spirit involves embodying God's posture of openness as we reach out to others with the hope that they might respond in faith and be formed by God's offer of relationship. In all our practices, we communicate a vision of life made possible by the power of God in Jesus Christ—also known as grace—and walk with others as they experience conversion and are moved to begin a journey of faith marked by holiness and transformation into the likeness of Christ.

Evangelism as a Means of Grace

181. The Holy Spirit of God moves in multiple directions, working within and through us toward others and within and through others toward us. In this way, evangelism becomes a means of grace through which God works to meet and bless all people.

182. When we open our arms to others, just as God has opened his arms to us, we become messengers of reconciliation and ambassadors for Christ. Walking with others in patient, humble openness creates space for the Holy Spirit to move, awakening people to the reality of their sin and their profound need for God. As the Holy Spirit awakens the need for God and the unmerited love and grace that God offers, and as others come to trust that we do, in fact, love them the way that we say that we love them, the space becomes secure enough for others to experience the grace of God offered to them in Jesus Christ, and to respond in repentance and faith.

Evangelism and Formation

183. Wesleyan evangelism takes conversion seriously. Our desire is to see persons experience an awakening to our need for God, repentance of sin, and conversion to new life. However, our vision does not stop there. A Wesleyan vision is driven by the expectation that persons will experience full salvation and become people whose lives are marked by holiness. Full salvation here is the restoration of the Image of God in the redeemed person. It is critical that we walk with people in love so they can experience God's gift of conversion, and continue to walk with them as they seek to become more and more like Jesus, "changed from glory into glory" as the Image of God is restored. Wesleyan evangelism intentionally aims at conversion as a milestone in the Christian journey, focuses on the vision of being renewed in the Image of God, and helps to ensure the continuation of the journey of discipleship.

184. Wesleyan evangelism is a practice of both individuals and groups. In either case, a key principle is that both individuals and groups embody God's posture of openness as they share the Good News with their family, friends, and neighbors and continue to walk with them as they become more and more like Jesus.

185. Individual Christians are formed in grace and then share their faith with others through their words, deeds, and lifestyle. Collectively, communities of Christians

demonstrate their faith through ritual and life together. We show the world how being formed in grace affects our relationships to one another and orders our life together. Both individual Christians and communities of Christians evangelize systems by identifying the brokenness of current systems and working for transformation and healing.

186. Evangelism is not in competition with other works of mercy such as missions or prophetically speaking to broken structures. Rather, it works in tandem with these ministries as we seek to “spread scriptural holiness across the land,” to change the hearts of those in leadership through social, political, and economic advocacy.

Work with and for the Poor

187. Wesley preferred the company of the poor. He believed that they were more attuned to the voice of God and lacked the pretensions that cloud human judgment. But his love for the poor was more than just one of preference; he believed that Christians are called to care for those who are in need, especially those of the household of faith. Key to Wesley’s understanding was the reality that the poor were not “out there” but were a part of early Methodism; they were society members, class members, leaders, and people who were not only recipients but who contributed to the life of the movement.

188. Work with and for the poor is a means of grace as it fulfills Christ’s mandate to love. Throughout Christian history, this concern has been central to the life of the Church as it is an act of acknowledging the Image of God in all persons. It was out of love—and following the command of Christ—that the early church set up care for the widowed and orphaned. And out of love early church leaders such as Basil the Great created the first hospital. Christians are called to care for those who have not. As Wesleyans, we must carry on this sacred duty for and with others in a community of outpouring love. We will also oppose measures that oppress the poor, keeping them always in mind, as known and loved, in the communities in which we live and serve.

Justice

189. Justice is the enactment of God’s will for human flourishing. Acknowledging the ways that sin has distorted the Image in individual human lives, we also acknowledge how that distortion has taken on systemic implications. Justice is not a

political rally or a partisan rant, nor will it be met by policy alone. Justice is a desire combined with actions that seeks to overcome the effects of sin in the public square, driven by a firm commitment to the reality of the Image in all persons and holding fast to Christ's mandate that we love one another.

190. As Wesleyans, we commit ourselves to the common good as an expression of God's love for all people. This includes a desire to see God's will in all areas of life, in the protection of the vulnerable, the right to flourish in education, free enterprise, free speech, and to live peaceably with all in a world where violence against anyone is a thing of the past. Justice requires governments to seek all peaceful means to end conflict before engaging in warfare.

191. We acknowledge that our vision of justice needs to be shaped and formed by the scriptural witness in all things and that our efforts—fueled by grace—must be aligned with God's ultimate purposes for his creation. The work of seeking justice for all people will be a mark of the faithful community until Christ comes in final victory and overcomes the sin that has beset the social order. But until that time, we continue our work for a peaceable and just world joining in God's work of redemption and restoration.

SECTION SIX:
THE FULLNESS OF TIME: THE GLORIFIED IMAGE

192. In the fullness of time known only to God, the risen and ascended Christ will return. He will establish his Kingdom and bring to completion the Father's plan for the redemption of creation and the perfection of his Image in redeemed humanity. Christ's second coming will not be like his first coming in meekness and humility. His second coming will be in power (Matthew 26:63-64) and triumph to claim in the Father's name the vineyard of the world (Matthew 21:40-41) and place all things under the Father's authority (1 Corinthians 15:24-28). His will be a Kingdom different from the kingdoms of the world for it will be characterized by perfect justice and peace.

193. Although the precise details of Christ's ultimate Kingdom lie beyond our experience such that our knowledge of it is comparable to seeing "in a mirror, dimly" (1 Corinthians 13:12); Scripture is a sufficient revelation that we may not be without hope, ignorant about death, life beyond death, and the eternal life in the resurrection (1 Thessalonians 4:13). Such knowledge is, as Paul expressed it, of "first importance" and the "good news... in which [we] stand, through which [we] are being saved, if [we] hold firmly" (1 Corinthians 15:1-3).

Final Judgment

194. At Christ's return, there will be a general resurrection of all who have died. All people will stand before the Lord to be held responsible for their lives and their use of the talents entrusted to them. Each person will be judged according to God's perfect union of wisdom, justice, and mercy. Those who died in Christ and whose lives of faith have borne the fruit of repentance for sin out of love for God (Luke 3:8) and the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23), clothed in the wedding garments of holiness (Hebrews 12:14), forgiveness (Matthew 6:14-15), and mercy (5:7) will receive the Lord's mercy. They will enter into his heavenly wedding feast (Matthew 22:1-12) where the Church adorned as a bride will be united to Christ her Bridegroom.

195. Those whose lives of infidelity to God lack the wedding garment (Matthew 22:11) of holiness and the fruit of justice and mercy, being also without contrition for sin, will be separated from the saints, and excluded from the heavenly banquet. They will be consigned to the punishments of hell according to God's just judgment.

This is the final death that is the result of sin (Romans 6:23). For sin, as alienation from God who is life, is death. As Jesus declares, “I am the vine, you are the branches. Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing. Whoever does not abide in me is thrown away like a branch and withers; such branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned” (John 15:5-6). God has placed before us “life and death, blessings and curses” (Deuteronomy 30:19). Those who choose God find life and blessedness in fellowship with him. Those who choose their own will, trusting in their own capacities and in mortal creatures to bring them happiness, ultimately find only death. Any more than this, we leave to God’s wisdom and justice.

Christ, Firstborn of the Dead

196. The Christian hope of eternal life begins with Christ’s resurrection. As an Easter people, we confess that Jesus was crucified, truly died, and was raised from the dead by the power of God. This resurrection was not a spiritual resurrection in which Jesus appeared to his disciples as a phantom or a hallucination. Rather it was a bodily resurrection in which the very flesh that was put to death on the cross was raised to life again, still bearing the scars of Jesus’ passion (John 20:27). When the disciples doubted that the risen Christ was actually Jesus in the flesh, he proved to them that it really was his body by eating a piece of fish (Luke 24:41-43). Jesus’ resurrection was evidence that, by his perfect obedience to the Father, he had reconciled humanity to God bringing life to many (Romans 5:17). By the life found in his divinity, he overcame death (John 10:18) and placed even death under his feet (1 Corinthians 15:26).

197. In the risen Jesus, we see not just a single man raised from the dead, we see resurrected humanity. We see ourselves as we will ultimately be. Because Christ assumed a mortal nature like ours that was subject to death, his resurrection revealed that our mortal bodies also can and will be raised from death. As Charles Wesley put it in his great Easter hymn, “Made like him, like him we rise, ours the cross, the grave, the skies” (“Christ the Lord is Risen Today”).

198. By his resurrection, Jesus is not only the “firstborn from the dead” (Colossians 1:18) but he is the “first fruits of those who have died” (1 Corinthians 15:20, 23). Thus, his resurrection is the first stage in God’s final redemption of his material creation—a redemption that will include the raising of our mortal bodies. Through his death and resurrection, reconciling God and humanity, Christ inaugurated the

“new creation” (2 Corinthians 5:17). He is the new Adam (1 Corinthians 15:22), and therefore, as Gregory of Nyssa put it, the “first born of [the new] creation” (Colossians 1:17-18), the father of a new human race, “a priestly kingdom and a holy nation” (Exodus 19:6; 1 Peter 2:9). This “new creation” finds its climax at Christ’s return and with it the general resurrection when those who died in him will be raised to eternal life.

199. Since Christ is the “firstborn from the dead,” he provides a model for thinking about our resurrection. Since Christ’s was a bodily resurrection, so will ours be. It is the fulfillment of Ezekiel’s prophetic vision of the valley of dry bones to whom God says, “I will cause breath to enter you, and you shall live” (Ezekiel 37:5). It is not a spiritual resurrection attained at Baptism in which one acquires a new sense of religious consciousness. Although the Church has historically taught that after death the souls of the saints, like the thief on the cross to whom Jesus said, “Today you will be with me in Paradise” (Luke 23:43), are united with God in heaven, this is only a temporary state before the soul’s reunion with the body at the resurrection. In this way, the Christian hope of salvation is different from other views according to which the soul is liberated from the body at death and ascends to heaven. Rather, for Christians, salvation is not confined to the immaterial soul, but to the material creation—including our bodies—that God pronounced “very good” (Genesis 1:31) at the beginning.

200. Because of sin, however, the natural harmony of soul and body under the rule of God’s Spirit was corrupted. The harmony of this union was disrupted by conflicting impulses within the body and the human will, which was dominated by disordered loves that worshiped creatures rather than the Creator (Romans 1:25). Paul describes this inner conflict when he writes, “I know that nothing good dwells within me, that is, in my flesh...For I delight in the law of God in my inmost self, but I see in my members another law at war with the law of my mind, making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members” (Romans 7:18, 22-23). This inner conflict between the law of the mind and the law of sin in one’s members renders our bodies what Paul calls “this body of death” (Romans 7:24). Thus, the body is not *intrinsically* bad, an impediment to our fellowship with God, a prison from which our soul must be delivered. But it must be healed of the corruption and disorder that are the result of sin.

201. The healing that restores our bodies to the health and harmony God originally intended for us will come at the resurrection. The body of the resurrection will not

be a different body, as claimed in religions that believe in reincarnation, but the same body only transformed. As a seed is transformed into a mature plant (1 Corinthians 15:37), so our bodies will become what God intends them to be: glorified bodies reflecting God's brilliance just like Christ's resurrected body. Our bodies will be spiritual, but not in the sense that they will cease to be material. Rather as the body of Jesus, the second Adam (1 Corinthians 15:45), was controlled by the indwelling Word, so too the body and soul of resurrected humanity will be suffused with the Spirit of Christ so that we will bear the Image of the Man from Heaven (1 Corinthians 15:49).

202. Through the indwelling of the Spirit, who is the resurrecting power of God (Romans 8:11), the conflict between soul and body will end. The soul and body will exist in harmony and unity, controlled by the Spirit and oriented toward the spiritual goods found in communion with God. For, as Paul writes, "If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies also through his Spirit that dwells in you" (Romans 8:11). So, the corruptible and mortal nature of our bodies will partake of the divine nature. They will become indestructible and eternal (1 Corinthians 15:53-54). Therefore, "the sting of death" will be no more (1 Corinthians 15:56) for "God himself will be with [his people]; he will wipe away every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more..." (Revelation 21:4).

Beatific Vision of the Lamb upon the Throne

203. The resurrection of the body is not an end in itself. It is merely the redemption of our creaturely nature. This redemption is the necessary condition for becoming citizens of the New Jerusalem where God is the object of our complete contemplation and worship. Indeed, the essence of heaven is the vision of God. When considering whether heaven is a place or a state, John Wesley answered, "There is no opposition between these two...It is a place wherein God more immediately dwells with those who are saints who are in a glorified state...[empowered] to see God, to know God, and to love God," (Letter to Mary Bishop, April 17, 1776).

204. Since no human language can express the glory of the heavenly Jerusalem (2 Corinthians 12:3-4), John, when writing Revelation, used the language of Isaiah's vision (Isaiah 6:2-3) to describe the saints' communion with God in the

metaphorical language of a heavenly throne room. Here every creature offers shouts of worship, “Holy, holy, holy, the Lord God the Almighty, who was and is and is to come...To the one seated on the throne and to the Lamb be blessing and honor and glory and might forever and ever” (Revelation 4:8; 5:13). This is the worship that God intended when he created humanity to enjoy his perfect goodness, a goodness that exceeds human imagination. This is the destiny for which we were made. For in offering praise, human nature flourishes. It fulfills its highest purpose: to know, love, and glorify the Triune God who is our highest good. Then we will find our highest pleasure in joining with the heavenly host in glorifying the One who is the source of our life and our salvation. In this way, we will be equal to the deathless angels, untroubled by the social and familial demands of this life, freed for the eternal worship of the Triune God (Luke 20:36).

205. Our soul’s fellowship with Christ at the resurrection will be an intimate union with our Beloved who best knows and loves us. This, however, will by no means be a private communion. The saints will be united in praise with the myriads of creatures worshiping around the throne (Revelation 5:11). In the resurrection God will unite all things in heaven and earth in himself so that we may truly know him as the “one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all” (Ephesians 4:6). Then the divisions of peoples along lines of race and culture will be no more; for we will see that “Christ is all and in all” (Colossians 3:11).

206. God will be to us our “all in all,” for we will see that “He himself is before all things, and in him all things hold together” (Colossians 1:17). In other words, through our communion with the Father through the Son in the Holy Spirit we shall be partakers of his divinity, which will supply all that we need for life and flourishing. Additionally, God will be the object of our unceasing adoration; our minds will not be diverted by trivial worries or temptations that distract our prayer and study in this life. Indeed, God will fill the whole of our consciousness.

207. As our “all in all” Christ will be the source of perfect unity for all the saints, as opposed to the present age where our love is often divided between creatures and God. Indeed, the failure to love God above all is the source of sin because we turn God’s creatures into idols. In the resurrection, however, when we will love God above all things, we will rightly love all other things in God who is their source. In loving God, we will perfectly love all that God loves: creation, our neighbors, and ourselves. When in the resurrection we are made perfect by the indwelling of Christ’s Spirit, we will fully realize the unity for which Jesus prayed, “that they may

be one, as we are one, I in them and you [Father] in me, that they may become completely one” (John 17:22-23).

208. In Christ’s Kingdom, the One through whom all things were made (John 1:3) and who was from the beginning the principle of unity for all creation has reconciled all things in himself (2 Corinthians 5:18). He has become our peace (Ephesians 2:14). This is the ultimate life for which Charles Wesley yearned when he wrote:

Finish, then, thy new creation;
pure and spotless let us be.
Let us see thy great salvation,
perfectly restored in thee;
changed from glory into glory,
till in heaven we take our place,
till we cast our crowns before thee,
lost in wonder, love, and praise
 (“Love Divine, All Loves Excelling”)

Living in Hope on Our Pilgrimage

209. In Baptism, we become participants in the new creation by being united to Christ as members of his risen body and given new life in the Holy Spirit. Our baptismal identity as members of Christ’s body is grounded in Christ’s resurrection and the hope of our resurrection. Yet, the resurrection and the new creation are not wholly future realities. Through the life-giving power that raised Jesus from the dead (Romans 8:11), the Holy Spirit who dwells within us now is transforming us “into [Christ’s likeness] from one degree of glory to another” (2 Corinthians 3:18). The Spirit is perfecting us in love that we might have the purity of heart necessary to receive Christ at his return (cf. Matthew 5:8).

210. Yet in the present, we do not have a clear vision of what our resurrected life in the New Jerusalem will be. Our life, as Paul puts it, is “hidden with Christ in God” (Colossians 3:3) and only when he is revealed at the resurrection will we see what we have become when we “will be revealed with him in glory” (Colossians 3:4). For, although “we are God’s children now, what we will be has not yet been revealed. What we do know is this: when he is revealed, we will be like him, for we will see him as he is” (1 John 3:2). In the resurrection, we will be like the resurrected Jesus, perfected humanity; then our minds, purified of sin, will, like a clear mirror, reflect

the glory of God. He will be the object of our uninterrupted contemplation and adoration.

211. Such glory, however, is hidden from us because we are people now living in exile far from our home in the heavenly city. We are pilgrims who have yet to reach our destination. Yet as an Easter people who live in between Christ's inauguration of the new creation and its consummation at his return we live as a people of hope. Knowing God's faithfulness in the past, we live in hope and confidence that God will fulfill his promises. As a people of hope, we live lives oriented to the future rather than immersed in the present as if it were the only reality.

212. We recognize that this is not our home. So although we live as resident aliens (1 Peter 2:11) building houses, planting gardens, marrying, having children, and serving the present age by seeking the peace and prosperity of our earthly city (Jeremiah 29:5-7), because our citizenship is in heaven (Philippians 3:20), we live as a people watching and waiting, always praying, "Thy Kingdom come."

213. As a people who every Sunday celebrate Jesus' resurrection and gather around the Lord's table to join with the saints who have gone before us already feasting at Christ's heavenly banquet, we confess that we should order our lives in the present to be an anticipation of our life of perfect liberty under the Lordship of Christ in the Kingdom of God. Therefore, we seek the just flourishing of all people set free from the chains of sin for lives of personal and social holiness. As a people governed by the love of God shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit (Romans 5:5), we the Church strive through works of mercy and justice to be for the world the Image of the God who serves as a light to the nations (Isaiah 60:3), drawing all peoples to the Lord.