

C H U R C H
Membership
M A N U A L

THE METHODIST CHURCH IN SINGAPORE

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Membership

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Foreword

I want to congratulate the Board of Discipleship and Nurture for producing this revised Membership Manual. The Manual, written by a group of pastors of the Trinity Annual Conference of The Methodist Church in Singapore, will be the main text used in all our churches in the preparation of candidates for baptism and membership into the local church.

The articles contained in the manual have been written to provide those seeking baptism and membership a basic understanding of the Methodist tenets of faith. It also seeks to clarify the meaning of being a Christian, give direction to Christian growth, assist in responsible Christian living, and introduce the history and polity of the Methodist church.

The Board has laboured long in producing this important manual. It certainly deserves a place in the library of every Methodist Christian in Singapore.

May the God of love and peace bless you.

Shalom

Rev Dr Isaac Lim
President
Trinity Annual Conference
The Methodist Church in Singapore

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Introduction

This latest revision of the membership manual follows the strong tradition of the previous editions to provide both a manual for membership in a Methodist church as well as a helpful reading to persons inquiring about the Christian faith.

The original authors of the previous edition have revised all but one of the chapters in this manual. For example, chapter 11 on the “The Story of the Church’ now includes more information on the spread of Christianity eastwards into Asia. A notable inclusion in the appendices is the relevant new sections on membership of the 2002 Edition of The Methodist Book of Discipline.

We are grateful to all who contributed in one way or another to the production of this revised manual, in particular the pastors who revised the various chapters.

All glory and praise to our God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit!

**Board of Discipleship & Nurture
Trinity Annual Conference
The Methodist Church in Singapore**



Christian Beginnings

PART

one

1

Who Are We?

MAIN THOUGHTS

- ✦ In understanding who we are, four premises have to be made:
 1. We are God's creation.
 2. We have lost our fellowship with God.
 3. We can restore our fellowship with God.
 4. Accepting Christ is the only way back to God.
- ✦ Our new life in Jesus Christ begins with a process of transformation. Three fundamental components of this transformation are:
 1. The Approach
 2. The Agreement
 3. The Acceptance
- ✦ The certainty of transformation comes from our faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. This faith enables a committed Christian to live life to the fullest, and distinguishes him from a nominal one.
- ✦ The Bible acknowledges our inclination to sin even after salvation. Should we sin, however, our fellowship with Christ can be restored by our admission of wrongdoing and Christ's willingness to forgive.
- ✦ Baptism is an expression of transformation. It is the inner spiritual meaning, not the method of baptism, that is significant to a changed life.

INTRODUCTION

Since the dawn of time, the question of WHO WE ARE has always been the single ultimate objective of man's search for meaning and purpose in life. Philosophers and thinkers of ages past devoted entire lives to the search for the answer, which God has so kindly revealed to us in Jesus Christ.

And so as you prepare to become a member of a church, a Methodist Church at any given locality, this Membership Manual begins with the question, "WHO ARE WE?" This necessary start in defining our identity should lead naturally to defining our destiny as well, which is the question of why we are here or what the purpose of our existence here on earth is. And the good news is the answers to these two questions can be found in what God has revealed to us in Jesus Christ. Let us begin.

FOUR PREMISES FOR AN UNDERSTANDING

To begin this fascinating journey of understanding "who we are", four premises have to be made.

We are God's Creation

Man is not a product of chance, as proponents of evolution would like us to believe. Man is a creation of God. Though each of us is the result of the love between a man and a woman, God is the One behind the creation of life and He therefore defines the purpose of life.

The account of the Creation in Genesis records that after forming man from the earth, God breathed His life (or spirit) into him (Genesis 2:7), with the intention of enjoying with man a personal and living relationship no other creation could enter into. This is the purpose of our existence — to have fellowship with God.

The French scientist, Blaise Pascal wrote, "There is in everyone a God-shaped vacuum which only God can fill."

We have lost our Fellowship with God

Sadly, this fellowship was lost through disobedience. Man, created with the freedom of choice, chose to go his own way instead and missed out

Chapter 1: Who Are We?

on the intended plan of God for this fellowship. This is, in essence, what is called sin. Whether it is an active and a willful rebellion, or a passive indifference towards God, the heart of the problem is self-centredness. And because of this, man does evil things in spite of his inherent noble qualities.

We can restore our Fellowship with God

However, there is a way out of this sad state of man's condition — through Jesus Christ. This is the good news. Jesus Christ took our sins upon Himself and paid fully the penalty of our disobedience with His life. By dying on the cross, Jesus provided a way to restore our separation from God.

Accepting Christ is the Only Way back to God

Since God continues to give us freedom of choice, we need to decide. The choice is ours: to accept or to reject this offer from God.

For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.

John 3:16

This famous verse in the Bible assures us that to believe in Jesus as God's only way back to Him is to be promised eternal life. This life begins now and entails a process of TRANSFORMATION.

COMPONENTS OF TRANSFORMATION

There are three fundamental components of transformation.

The Approach

We do not come to God on our terms and on our conditions, or at our convenience. On the contrary, the approach to God is done with a sense of dependence, in humility and repentance. Jesus used the picture of birth to describe how transformation begins. Just as a child does not

PART ONE Christian Beginnings

choose to be born, so in spiritual birth, God acts first and we respond in gratitude, humility and repentance.

Nicodemus, a learned teacher, thought that to be born again was to be as helpless as coming forth physically from the womb. Ridiculous as it may sound, the principle is sound. The first Beatitude ratifies this.

*Blessed are the poor in spirit (meaning the humble),
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*

Matthew 5:3

The gate through which we enter God's kingdom is a lowly gate. The proud will not bend to enter. Neither will the arrogant.

*Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name,
he gave the right to become children of God*

John 1:12

The Agreement

The humble and repentant approach will agree with what God has revealed in His word about the four assumptions made at the beginning of this chapter. It is an admission that we had a destiny that was destroyed, a relationship robbed and a paradise lost and that God's provision of Jesus Christ on the cross is the only way back. There is no other way of recovering the fellowship that God intended for us to enjoy with Him.

These admissions are expressed in the prayer of confession when we receive Jesus Christ into our lives. This prayer is also called the Sinner's Prayer:

Lord Jesus Christ, I admit that I am a sinner and am self-centred. I have done and said and thought many wrong things that are basically going against You and Your will. I turn from my sins in repentance. I thank You for dying for me, for paying the penalty that I rightly deserve.

Chapter 1: Who Are We?

The Acceptance

Merely acknowledging our helpless situation is insufficient. It constitutes only an admission and a confession of who we are and where we are. We need to decisively make a request. Jesus invites us to ask in order that we may receive. (Matthew 7:7). With this in mind, the second half of the Sinner's Prayer is thus:

And now, Lord Jesus, I open the door of my life and heart and ask You to come in. Come in to restore my fellowship and relationship with You. Come in as my Saviour to cleanse me and as my Lord to take control of me. Fill me with your Holy Spirit so that I may follow You and serve You and have fellowship with other Christians all the days of my life. Amen.

Thus the Sinner's Prayer has 4 elements:

- There are sins to admit.
- There is a Saviour to believe in.
- There is the Lord to consider.
- There is a door to open.

TRANSFORMED LIVES

The Certainty of Transformation

Praying the Sinner's Prayer answers the question of who we are in terms of Jesus Christ. Every Christian can have the assurance of their salvation in Jesus Christ. A genuine faith in the Lord Jesus Christ rests upon the fact that God hears our prayers and promises to come into our lives to cleanse us and to place us under new management, under His management. The security of a firm foundation for our faith rests not in us but in God and in the trustworthiness of His word.

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And this is the testimony: God gave us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life.

1 John 5:11-12

This is what is meant by being truly born again with a new life in order to enjoy a right relationship with God through Jesus Christ. Without this confidence, we cannot experience true happiness and any deep fulfillment in our lives, which God intended to bless us with.

This assurance of faith in the Lord Jesus Christ is the certainty that distinguishes a Christian in name (a nominal Christian) and a Christian in deed (a committed Christian). For the Christian in name, Christianity is no more than a mere profession of decency and duty. For the Christian in deed, it is a practical reality of living life to its fullest. This distinction contrasts an outward piety with an inward reality.

What if we sin again?

What if a person continues to sin after becoming a Christian? Does he have to receive Christ all over again? Such a course of action is not necessary. When we receive Christ, the Holy Spirit takes up residence in us as a seal of our redemption. The Bible does not teach about the removal of this seal. However, it is clear about grieving and quenching the Spirit.

And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with which you were marked with a seal for the day of redemption.

Ephesians 4:30

Do not quench the Spirit.

1 Thessalonians 5:19

It is the fellowship and not the relationship that is strained when there is disobedience. Take the example of a father and his son. The fellowship can reach such a state as the father invoking a verbal disowning of the

Chapter 1: Who Are We?

son in heated anger, but the son remains the son in the relationship, by birth and by blood.

Should we sin, our fellowship with Christ can be restored by our admission of wrongdoing and Christ's willingness to forgive. One of the most frequently used verses in the Bible tells of this.

If we confess our sins, he who is faithful and just will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

1 John 1:9

The Bible acknowledges our inclination to continue to sin even after salvation.

For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace.

Romans 6:14

We will not be sinless but God's willingness to forgive should lead us to sin less.

Testimonies of Transformation

Here are the testimonies of two individuals who have discovered who they are truly in Jesus Christ.

"I always assumed I was a Christian because my parents went to church regularly and took me along ever since I could remember. When people spoke of a personal faith, it sounded to me more like a blind faith, a leap in the dark. But then one day, I realized the whole thing was reversed. I was in the dark. It was a leap from darkness into light. Faith is not blind. In fact, it is an eye-opener."

A busy executive with no time for God joked with his friends. "If I ever went inside a church, the roof would fall in on me."

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One day, he did and it happened, metaphorically speaking. He was thunderstruck by what he saw — the warmth, the joy and the people. Drawn by what he saw, he soon came to place his faith in Jesus.

Perhaps you too have such a testimony. Putting it down on paper allows you to express in a written form what the Bible enjoins in Psalms.

*Let the redeemed of the LORD say so, those He redeemed
from the hands of the enemy.*

Psalms 107:2

It can even be the first draft of your own personal tract for evangelism. Here is a helpful outline for your story of salvation.

- Before — a short sketch of what your life was like before you became a Christian.
- How — what steps you took to become a Christian.
- After — the changes in your life after you became a Christian.

BAPTISM

Baptism is an expression of transformation. It is one of two sacraments held by all Protestant churches. The other is the sacrament of Holy Communion. Baptism is the sacrament of initiation. It initiates a believer into the body of Christ, the Church. It marks a new beginning in a public witness in which he declares unashamedly to the world (family, friends, colleagues and neighbours) that he has been transformed by the gospel of Jesus Christ.

A sacrament is an outward sign of an inward change. And baptism is a public sign that a new inward life centred about a restored relationship has begun. Baptism celebrates the themes of death to the old life and birth into a new. It is the cleansing and purification of our souls, and signifies that we have been incorporated into the growth of the body of Christ.

Chapter 1: Who Are We?

There are two forms of baptism: infant and adult.

Infant Baptism

This form of baptism emphasizes two important points.

- God's love is freely given and quite independent of our actions. There is nothing we can do to earn it.
- The church has a responsibility to nurture and protect its members.

The baptized infant becomes a preparatory member of the church until he reaches the age of sixteen where he can make his own personal profession of faith. Here he publicly professes his faith and assumes both the baptismal vows taken on his behalf at infancy, as well as his membership vows. Until then, parents have the primary role and responsibility of passing on the faith to their children.

Adult Baptism

Adult baptism is for older children (those 16 years and older) and adults and emphasizes one other important point: personal acceptance of God's grace. If a person is not ready for the membership vows, he enters the constituency roll which includes preparatory members (those baptized as infants) who have reached sixteen but are not ready to be received into full membership.

Methods of Baptism

There are three methods of baptism and The Methodist Church in Singapore employs any of them upon request.

- Sprinkling, which symbolizes cleansing.
- Pouring, which symbolizes the outpouring of the gift of the Holy Spirit.
- Immersion, which symbolizes the death, burial and resurrection of Christ.

However, it is the inner spiritual meaning, not the mode of baptism, that is significant to a changed life.

CONCLUSION

Beginnings are crucial. Can we construct a building before we lay a stable foundation? Can we grow if we have not been born? That is why Jesus answered Nicodemus thus:

I tell you the truth, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit. Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit. You should not be surprised at my saying, "You must be born again."

John 3:5-7

QUESTIONS

1. What reasons do you have for wanting to have a restored personal relationship with God through Jesus Christ?
2. Share your born-again experience with someone or share how you are journeying towards this born-again experience.
3. Can you believe that Jesus Christ is the only way to God in a multi-religious society?
4. How can you be sure you are truly born again?

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2

Growing In Christ

MAIN THOUGHTS

- ✦ The goal of growth is to become like Christ. Three marks of maturity in Christ are stability, charity and unity.
- ✦ Jesus has bequeathed His church with many gifts for growth through the power of the Holy Spirit.
- ✦ The grounds for Christian growth consist of three dimensions, each drawn from the illustration of a wheel:
 1. Volitional Dimension: Hub and Rim
 2. Vertical Dimension: Downward and upward spoke
 3. Horizontal Dimension: Inward and outward spoke
- ✦ A suggested five-step approach to doing daily devotions for Christian growth consists of the following:
 1. Pray
 2. Read
 3. Reflect
 4. Pray More
 5. Share
- ✦ Having a spiritual mentor or another Christian who can pace us in our spiritual walk will be useful in helping us to grow.

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INTRODUCTION

A person's spiritual birth takes place at the time he receives Jesus Christ into his life. This event is a source of great joy (Luke 15:7). But if the person remains in a state of spiritual infancy and does not grow towards spiritual maturity, the joy becomes a grave concern. And so as we become part of God's family, growth towards spiritual maturity should be one of our major concerns.

GOAL OF GROWTH

The goal of growth is to become like Christ. God's ultimate purpose for each one of us is to become more and more like the Lord Jesus Christ. This, according to the Apostle Paul, should be:

*Until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge
of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to
the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.*

Ephesians 4:13

The next three verses show us three marks of maturity in Christ.

Stability

*Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the
waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by
the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming.*

Ephesians 4:14

When we are stable in our faith, we will not be tossed about by every religious novelty. Most members of cults come from churches which are weak in feeding their people the Word of God. Their immaturity makes them vulnerable to false teachings and they become easy to deceive and to mislead.

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Charity

Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ.

Ephesians 4:15

Truth without love has been termed brutality. In the same way, love without truth is hypocrisy. Charity is love with truth. Many times, we shield those we love from the truth if knowing the truth will hurt them. But the Bible reminds us that “Faithful are the wounds of a friend; profuse are the kisses of an enemy.” (Proverbs 27:6).

Unity

From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.

Ephesians 4:16

The body grows as each member grows and seeks to build others up in love. Love promotes individual and collective growth. Isolated Christians cannot minister to others nor can they be ministered to. Belonging to a church and to a small group is one of the most conducive ways to promote this mark of maturity in Christ — unity.

GIFTS FOR GROWTH

To accomplish this growth, Jesus has bequeathed His church with many gifts through the power of the Holy Spirit.

It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature,

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*attaining to the whole measure
of the fullness of Christ.*

Ephesians 4:11-13

These spiritual gifts are in terms of offices or faculty for equipping the rest of the body of Christ for service and ministry. They are the apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers and together they serve to enable growth towards unity and maturity. Traditionally, it has been the common understanding that ministry and service are left to such gifted people. However, this verse is quite clear that ministry belongs to the whole body, not just to the faculty whose primary role is actually to equip the whole people of God for works of service and ministry. It is equally clear that the path and progression towards unity and maturity for the whole people of God is to do the ministry, duly equipped.

GROUND'S FOR DYNAMIC GROWTH

The grounds for growth in the Christian life consists of three dimensions — the volitional, the vertical and the horizontal. Dawson Trotman, founder of the Navigators, developed a wheel to provide us with a good visual illustration for this.

The hub and rim of the wheel make up the first dimension — volitional. The four spokes of the wheel represent the vertical and horizontal dimensions in beautiful symmetry. When growing in Christ towards maturity is grounded on these three dimensions of the wheel illustration, balance and harmony become evident. Growth is not to be lopsided but balanced. The vertical overflowing into the horizontal is likened to the promised rivers of living water flowing from our inner beings as we centre our lives on Jesus. (John 7:38).

The Volitional Dimension

This is the relationship of the will and it is made up of two components — the hub and the rim.

Chapter 2: Growing In Christ

The Hub

*Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation;
the old has gone, the new has come!*

2 Corinthians 5:17

When you receive Christ, you become a new creation. It is a promise that the old management of our life has been dethroned and the rule of Christ enthroned as the new management. When Christ continues to remain in this central position as the hub of our lives, we will grow into this new identity and destiny. This requires a daily act of surrendering our will to His authority as Lord. The Apostle Paul gives us such an example when he says:

I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.

Galatians 2:20

The Rim

*Whoever has My commands and obeys them,
he is the one who loves Me. He who loves Me will be loved by
My Father, and I too will love him and show Myself to him.*

John 14:21

When we obey Christ and follow His leading and His commandments, it shows in our outward lives. Though some acts of obedience to God are more internal, like attitudes, habits, motives, sense of values and day-to-day thoughts, they will eventually surface in our relationships with others. Obedience to God is like the metal rim of the wheel that pulls the whole wheel tightly inwards towards the centre, making the wheel round. Conversely, disobedience grieves the Holy Spirit and causes the rim to become loose and makes everything fall apart. And so, Scripture pleads:

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*Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy,
to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God —
this is your spiritual act of worship.*

Romans 12:1

The Vertical Dimension

This dimension points to our relationship with God. There are two dynamic components in this dimension, the downward spoke and the upward spoke, each representing the direction of our communication between God and us.

The Downward Spoke

The downward foundational spoke is God's word to us. God speaks to us through His revealed word.

*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

The word of God is a solid foundation on which we can all stand.

*Do not let this Book of the Law depart from your mouth; meditate on
it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written
in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful.*

Joshua 1:8

The Upward Spoke

Prayer is the upward flow in our relationship with God. It is a response to God speaking to us.

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*If you remain in Me and My words remain in you,
ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you.*

John 15:7

God desires us to call on His name. Jesus Himself teaches us:

*Until now you have not asked for anything in My name.
Ask and you will receive, and your joy will be complete.*

John 16:24

God is only a prayer away.

*Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything,
by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests
to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding,
will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.*

Philippians 4:6-7

The Horizontal Dimension

The horizontal dimension of the wheel represents our relationship with others and it also has two components — the inward and the outward motion.

The Inward Motion

*And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward
love and good deeds. Let us not give up meeting together,
as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another
— and all the more as you see the Day approaching.*

Hebrews 10:24-25

This is how we are to fellowship with believers. We are to encourage one another to become more like Christ. And Jesus Himself has promised to be present whenever we gather in His name.

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*For where two or three come together in My name,
there am I with them.*

Matthew 18:20

The Outward Motion

Sharing Christ with unbelievers represents the outward dynamic of our faith and this witness can be accomplished by deeds as well as by words. Jesus Himself gives the secret for success in this.

“Come, follow Me,” Jesus said, “and I will make you fishers of men.”

Matthew 4:19

Jesus makes this promise to all who will follow Him. It is His responsibility to make us “fishermen”. Witnessing for Christ is not about merely learning “fishing” skills. It is primarily about following Jesus. The boldness to witness does not come any other way. It comes about when we trust in the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes.

*I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God
for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew,
then for the Gentile.*

Romans 1:16

GUIDE FOR DAILY GROWTH

On a practical basis, growth involves having regular daily devotions or quiet time. The Scripture Union has a method of Bible reading which is recommended. If you do not already have such a regular time with the Lord each day, you can follow Scripture Union’s simple five-step approach in your daily devotions.

Pray

Pray that the Holy Spirit will help you understand the Bible passage that you are about to read. Use the prayer of the Psalmist.

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Open my eyes that I may see wonderful things in your law.

Psalms 119:18

And here is the reason:

Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet's own interpretation. For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.

2 Peter 1:20-21

Read

After praying, read the passage specified for that day. There is a tendency to read for information and one may read through too quickly. But remember that reading God's word is not just to input hard data. It is listening to what God is saying. So read deeply and let "the word of Christ dwell in you richly" (Colossians 3:16).

Reflect

After reading, reflect on the meaning of the passage. Discern what God has just said to you. Is there a personal word from Him regarding your situation? Meditate on the words till Christ is formed in you. Allow the knowledge that you have gained to transform your life. Reflect on how the thought that impressed you most can be applied specifically to you for that day. The next day will have another application. This keeps your reflection practical, realistic and fresh.

Pray More

Use your thoughts and your reading as a basis for further prayer. There is a two-way conversation between God and you here. Focus your prayer on what you have just read and meditated upon. Your prayer should be relevant to what God is saying to you that day. After all, your prayer is a response to God.

Share

Finally, share your thoughts or discovery with someone else. This builds a certain accountability within you to help you to guard your time with the Lord. Perhaps the application may be to do your quiet time with another person to inject stimulus into that person's devotion. This can be done in church camps or retreats.

GUIDE FOR CHALLENGING GROWTH

One of the most practical ways to sustain your growth is to ask someone to help you. Ask God to send someone into your life to be a spiritual mentor to show you the ropes of walking with God and working for Him. This is a useful guide for challenging growth. Having another Christian in your spiritual walk can be a great source of encouragement. Like a long-distance race, which the Christian life certainly is, we need to pace one another. The gift of true spiritual friendship is rare and precious. A husband and wife need to find this in each other also. This is why the Bible enjoins us not to be unequally yoked.

CONCLUSION

Spiritual growth, unlike physical growth, has no limits. There are endless possibilities of maturing in our faith in the Lord. Other areas include how to pray, how to resist temptation and evil, how to tell others about our faith, and how God guides us. These and other aspects of growth will come your way as you continue to grow in the Lord.

QUESTIONS

1. What steps would you take to grow towards spiritual maturity?
2. How can the church, which includes you, help build one another up in love?
3. How do you think God is preparing you with His gifts and graces for growth towards ministry in the church and the world?
4. With whom would you like to share your faith and belief? What steps can you begin to take?

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3

The Holy Bible

MAIN THOUGHTS

- ✦ The Holy Bible is the written word of God's self-revelation to us.
- ✦ It is inspired by the Holy Spirit and so possesses a unique character of being divine and human like the incarnate Son of God, Jesus Christ.
- ✦ As a book, the Bible has been handed down to us through generations of Christians and the miracle is that its integrity and unity have been consistently maintained over thousands of years.
- ✦ In order to understand the Bible, we need the Holy Spirit to illuminate its words in our souls.

INTRODUCTION

The Methodist view of the Christian Bible is set out by its founder John Wesley who wrote:

We believe, indeed, that all Scripture is given by inspiration of God; and herein we are distinguished from Jews, Turks, and infidels. We believe the written word of God to be the only and sufficient rule both of Christian faith and practice; and herein we are fundamentally distinguished from those of the Romish church. (Jackson, T. ed., *Works*, VIII, 340: 1929)

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Although John Wesley was an accomplished linguist, well-versed in Hebrew, Greek, German and Latin, he devoted his efforts to be a *homo unius libri*, and that book is the Bible. Thus he declares in his preface to his Standard Sermon (1931): “O give me that book! At any price, give me the book of God! ... here is knowledge enough for me.”

REVELATION

All human attempts to relate to the Creator God can only be a grope in the dark at best. Questions like “How can we know that there is a Creator God?” and “What kind of a God is He?” abound. Logically, the only definitive way for us to know our Creator is by His self-revelation to us. It is here that the Bible plays the vital role as the medium of divine revelation. The Bible is not a record of man’s search for God but God’s self-disclosure to His creation, mankind.

General Revelation

Our Creator God is warm and relational rather than withdrawn and isolated. From the beginning of creation, God showed Himself to be personable, casually talking with Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. The couple, in turn, had no difficulty relating to Him in the context of His creation on the whole (Genesis 1 and 2). Thus, the creator, the creation and the creature were in perfect harmony.

An atheist may suggest that creation or nature exists as a given entity, eternal in itself without the need of a creator. But this does not adequately account for the human need to make sense of life and to search out the instincts of the divine. These instincts cannot be simply dismissed as mere superstitions or a by-product of evolution. The Bible tells us that the Creator God has embedded His very own presence, character and will in nature so that no one can deny His authorship. Paul put it this way:

For since the creation of the world God’s invisible qualities — His eternal power and divine nature — have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse.

Romans 1:20

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This is also known as the Christian doctrine of General Revelation.

Special Revelation

Many of the prophetic books like Daniel, Ezekiel and Revelation evince the fact that the Creator God was actively at work in history to realize His purpose for mankind. These prophets frequently used formulas like “The word of the Lord came to me” and “Thus says the Lord” to preface their speeches because they saw themselves as God’s messengers.

The climax of this special revelation came in the incarnation of God’s Son as Jesus of Nazareth. In Him, God was fully enfleshed as a human being. The testimonies of those who witnessed His life and ministry have been recorded and handed down to us as the New Testament. This has become the definitive source of knowledge about the Creator God as the Trinity, consisting of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Thus the letter to the Hebrews begins:

In the past, God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made the universe.

Hebrews 1:1-2

Through Jesus Christ, God revealed Himself in fully human terms while, at the same time, being fully God. Through Him, we have the most intimate offer of relationship possible from the Triune Godhead. This is known to Christians as the doctrine of Special Revelation. It is here that the Holy Bible demonstrates that it is indeed the written word of God, revealing Himself through His dealings with mankind in both the Old and New Testaments.

Inspiration of the Bible

The character of the Bible is basically incarnational. It is co-authored by God and man. Peter wrote:

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*Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of
Scripture came about by the prophet's own interpretation.
For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men
spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.*
2 Peter 1:20-21

Paul confirmed it thus:

All Scripture is God-breathed....
2 Timothy 3:16

The Christian doctrine of the inspiration of the Bible largely stands on these two passages. This inspiration of the Bible is not mechanical where the human writer is reduced to being a mere recording machine. It is also not a romantic inspiration like that of a musician or poet. More importantly, this is not a case of spirit possession where the will and character of the human writer is obscured. Clearly in the production of the Bible, God has worked a supernatural influence over the writers in their life experiences so that the words used were guided and approved by the Holy Spirit. Thus, the biblical authors conscientiously applied themselves as they recorded their divine revelations. This can be seen by the marks of the individual styles in their works.

However, to say that the Bible is inspired by God does not mean that every word and idea is of God. Foolish words like “there is no God” (Psalm 14:1) could not have come from God. This also applies to words spoken by the devil as seen in Genesis 3:1, 4-5. Such expressions are far from being divine revelation but are yet part of the Bible because they reveal God’s character indirectly.

On other occasions, a writer may use a firsthand account like in John 20:3-10, where John gave his personal account of his approach to the newly discovered empty tomb with Peter. Then there is the use of existing records as in Matthew 1:1-16 and Luke 1:1-4. There are also the words that God literally put into men’s mouths that they should speak them, as exemplified in Jeremiah.

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This is the word that came to Jeremiah from the Lord:

“This is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says,

‘Write in a book all the words I have spoken to you.’”

Jeremiah 30:1-2

The above reveals that the Bible contains very disparate materials, yet its unity and integrity are consistently upheld. This coherence underlines the nature of the divine supervision over the production that took over a thousand years. This then is the Bible’s distinctive divine quality as God’s written word to us.

Illumination of the Bible

But there is a second part to biblical inspiration that is just as crucial. This is the illuminating work of the Holy Spirit in the reader. For the ancient Bible to come alive today, we need the Holy Spirit to lead and teach us (John 14:15-18, 24-26). The Holy Spirit lives in us Christians to be the living witness of our identity as God’s children (Romans 8:13-16). Far from being passive, He actively helps us in our weaknesses, teaching, interceding and leading us to do God’s will (Romans 8:26-27). In this way, the Holy Spirit brings us to experience for ourselves God’s truth and reality as revealed in the Bible.

HOW WE GOT OUR BIBLE

The word “bible” literally means a library of books as its Greek root word, *biblion*, means book. Our Protestant Bible is composed of 66 ancient writings consisting of two testaments: the old, with 39 books, and the new, with 27 books. Originally, they were written on scrolls made of either skin or papyrus for a span of over a thousand years.

The Old Testament is actually based on the Hebrew Scriptures which our Lord Jesus used during His earthly ministry. It categorised its 24 books into Law, Prophets and Writing. In contrast, our Old Testament has been expanded into 39 books by dividing some of the books into two, like First and Second Samuel. The Old Testament has also been reorganised

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into Law, History, the Psalms, Wisdom and Prophecy. In the case of the New Testament, the 27 books are grouped into Biography, comprising the four Gospels and the book of Acts; 21 Letters from the apostles and their assistants; and a prophetic book of the Revelation of John.

Canon of the Bible

Our Bible has come to us through a long and complex process that corresponds to the historical development of God's people, Israel, in the Old Testament and the church of Christ in the New Testament. The process of identifying and collecting scriptural writings that are considered to be authoritative is called the canonisation of the Bible. The word "canon" originated from the ancient Sumerian word for reed which referred to the measuring rod. Later it came to mean a rule or norm, and eventually a catalogue or list. The basic criterion of the Christian canon centred on the person of Jesus Christ and His apostles. Thus, for example, Christ's acceptance and use of the Hebrew Scriptures is the basis for the church to include it as its Old Testament.

In the beginning, the ancient records of the Old Testament were essentially passed down to successive generations through word of mouth in songs and stories that parents shared with their children, especially on special observances like child circumcisions and festive occasions like the Passover meal. Writing was time consuming and tended to be a specialised skill. As a result, the Old Testament, which is the Hebrew Bible of the Jews, was only completed between 1400 and 400 B.C. With the rise of Hellenism led by Alexander the Great, Greek was established as the common language in the Greco-Roman Empire. This led to the Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible called the Septuagint, represented as LXX, because it took 70 scholars to produce it from 250 to 200 B.C. So Jesus had two versions of the Scriptures for His use.

The New Testament books were written between 45 and 85 A.D. The earliest book is thought to be Paul's letter to the Thessalonian Christians written around 50 A.D. The earliest Gospel is thought to be Mark's account dated around 60 A.D. When the church expanded

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and multiplied, it became necessary for the ever-cumulating body of Christian writings to be identified as authoritative in order to preserve its identity and legitimacy as of the Christian community.

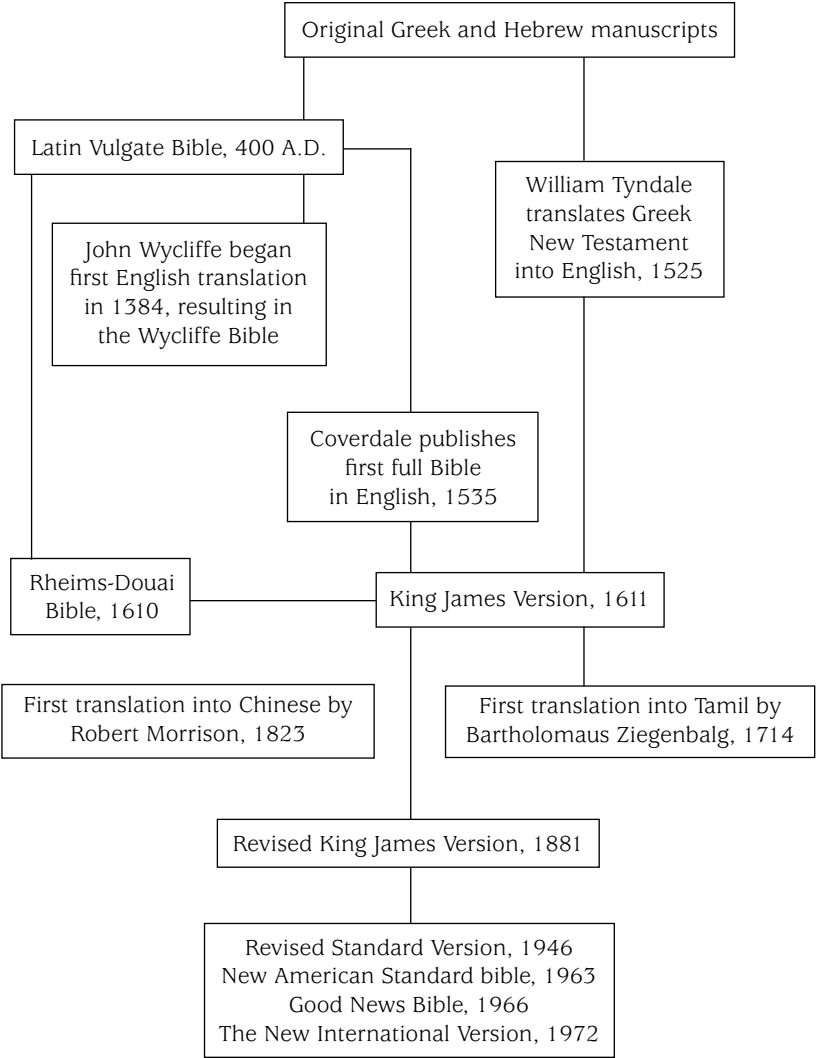
Between 140 and 150 A.D., a heretical theologian named Marcion proposed a bible that only comprised the Gospels and the Pauline Epistles. The Old Testament and much of the New Testament were excluded. He based his selection on Christ's revelation that God is love, so he decided that any writings that did not teach this truth expressly could not be scriptural. Shortly after Marcion's expulsion from Rome, a new heresy sprang up in Asia Minor that tried to expand the canon where Marcion had sought to reduce it. Montanus, a converted pagan priest, and his two prophetess-disciples, Prisca and Maximilla, claimed to be the bearers of a new divine revelation from God.

These events show that the early church encountered the issue of authority as Christianity grew. Most significantly, in 367 A.D., Athanasius, the great Alexandrian theologian, circulated his thirty-ninth Easter Letter in which he listed the 27 New Testament books as canonical, to which nothing is to be added or subtracted. This list was then verified by the Third Council of Carthage in 397 A.D. The Christian Bible was canonised by the early church through council meetings that assembled its leaders and representatives.

Translating the Bible

The need to translate the Bible into the languages of the common people has always been presumed to begin with Moses' record of the Ten Commandments at Mount Sinai. The object of God's revelation has always been for everyone in His community to know Him personally. Jerome translated the Old and New Testaments of 66 books into Latin in 400 A.D. This translation is called the Vulgate Bible because it was in the common language of his day. Ironically the church hung on to Latin even when it no longer was the common language. After the passing of the Roman Empire, the Bible became a closed book for the ordinary people. This resulted in the Reformation movement where the fundamental authority and availability of the Bible were re-emphasised.

TRANSLATIONS OF THE BIBLE



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The Protestant church was thus born with its emphasis on the primacy of the Bible as God's written word for everyone.

There were many who worked on translating biblical portions into English before John Wycliffe became the first to translate the Vulgate Bible into English. In 1525, William Tyndale became the first person to translate the Greek New Testament into English and he was martyred for doing so. Most significantly, King James I ordered the translation of the first official English Bible in 1608 and published it in 1611. Since then the English-speaking world has seen a proliferation of English versions of the Bible. The New International Version is arguably the most popular today.

READING THE BIBLE

The Bible is the product of God's community comprising both Israel and the Church. In turn, the identity of this community is defined by the Bible. It is therefore paramount that the reading and understanding of the Bible is properly set within the full historical tradition of this community. Outside this framework, we can easily misread the Bible, resulting in confusion and misapprehension. Hence, we need to cultivate correct, healthy Bible reading habits from the start. For ease of memory, the acronym HEAR can be used to introduce four basic disciplines of Bible reading — hearing, examining, applying and reading.

Hearing

The Bible was written first to be heard and so to be read aloud. In a time when reading and writing were not as common as they are today, hearing the spoken word was the norm. This is exemplified in the 21 letters of the New Testament which were circulated and read out to the first-century Christians. In the Old Testament, ancient stories like those of the patriarchs and the prophetic writings were first told, then committed to writing and read out to successive audiences.

According to the Bible, hearing God's word has the vital function of awakening faith in the hearer. Paul put it this way:

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*How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in?
And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard?
And how can they hear without someone preaching to them?
And how can they preach unless they are sent? As it is written,
“How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!”*

Romans 10:14-15

*Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message,
and the message is heard through the word of Christ.*

Romans 10:17

Thus, even with the predominance of multimedia today, the need to hear the word of God is irreplaceable. This is because hearing stimulates personal faith as the hearer receives not only the message but also the authority of the preacher who has been sent by God. In this way, God’s message is not an abstract concept but a divine-human face-to-face encounter that stimulates faith, a trust relationship.

Further, when God’s word is preached in public, the activity of hearing becomes a communal act where we learn to share a common trust relationship with God. Hearing the word will then give us a community identity as God’s people.

For these personal and corporate reasons it is vital for us to hear the word of God being preached. It is therefore important to attend a church worship where the Bible is faithfully preached, because it is a vital source of nurture for our Christian life. Hearing the Bible proclaimed by a gifted expositor is simply faith inspiring. There is nothing like it.

Examining

The second discipline is to examine God’s word by studying it. Luke commended the Bereans’ confidence in God’s word to his readers.

*Now the Bereans were of more noble character than
the Thessalonians, for they received the message with
great eagerness and examined the Scriptures*

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*every day to see
if what Paul said was true.*

Acts 17:11

It is typical that the New Testament writers saw the Bible as the authority against which the claims that various people made about God were verified. As Christians, we need to study the Bible systematically to know what it actually says so that we will know what we believe and why we believe. For our faith to grow, we need understanding. God has never asked for blind faith because He created in us rational minds. For this reason, the Christian faith is built on a reasonable confidence in Jesus Christ. This confidence provides a solid foundation for a personal trust in God. Thus the Bible is an open invitation for us to obtain a reasonable comprehension of God.

A good way to start studying the Bible is to join a group. In a good Bible study group, you will learn the fundamental skills in interpreting the Bible. This involves observing what the passage says and then expressing its inherent meaning. But, most of all, it is in a group setting that we learn to apply the Bible in our lives. We learn from others how they live out biblical truths in life situations. The best reason for joining a serious Bible study group is wanting to live in God's truth. Often, it is in such close-knit groups that we learn to practise our faith.

Applying

We should never lose sight of the primary purpose of the Bible, which is to provide the framework for living life as our Creator God has intended for us. The usefulness of the Bible is precisely for the equipping of the Christian to do God's good will.

*All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking,
correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God
may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.*

2 Timothy 3:16

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Firstly, applying the Bible in our lives is principle-based. The stories and events in the Bible do not present themselves as blueprints for life. They reveal divine principles through the human drama. These are fundamental moral principles shared by all human societies. We should therefore focus on identifying these moral principles from the Bible for application in our lives.

Secondly, applying the Bible in our lives is a matter of personal responsibility. We should obey the leading of the Holy Spirit through God's word. Christ's command for us to love our neighbours as we love ourselves should not simply be accepted as a good idea. It has to be translated into personal action such as reaching out to our colleagues, friends and acquaintances.

Finally, applying the Bible in our lives is also a communal responsibility. Biblical truths are incredibly demanding. Perhaps that is why God gave us the local church for membership. We need help in applying God's word. Mutual encouragement, modelling and guiding are ways in which we can build Christian character in one another. Hence, just as hearing God's word being preached is vital for spiritual feeling, being a member of a Bible study group is similarly vital to spiritual transformation. God's word cannot be simply heard. It must also be obeyed, if we are to live as God's children.

Reading

Devotional Bible reading is the most personal habit that we can cultivate. Below are some guidelines for a rewarding Bible-reading habit based on John Wesley's principles set out in Explanatory Notes Upon the Old Testament.

- Set aside a specific time each day, if possible, every morning and evening, to read the Bible without distraction or hurry.
- Plan to read through the whole Bible at least once. Read a chapter out of the Old Testament and one out of the New Testament, if possible. If that cannot be done, read one chapter or part of one. An aid like a Bible handbook, a study Bible or a one-volume commentary can help to introduce the various biblical materials. It is important to

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remember that the Bible is a library containing varied literary forms and styles ranging from easy-to-read narrative stories to the awkward Proverbs and bewildering prophetic writings like Revelation. So we need aids to help us make the necessary adjustments to read the whole Bible.

- Read the Bible with the single objective to know the mind of God and be committed to obeying His will. In order to know the will of God, keep a sharp eye on faith and maintain the harmonious connection between the basic doctrines of original sin, justification by faith, the new birth, and inward and outward holiness. The key is to let the passage speak naturally. Do not force a reading of meaning. We have to allow the Holy Spirit, the illuminator of our souls, to guide and convince us.
- Pray earnestly before reading the Bible since it can only be understood through the same Spirit who inspired it. Use a diary to record what God is revealing to you personally. It may be a command to obey, a promise to claim, a sin to repent of, a praise to offer, or a prophetic word to share. Be specific and brief. Close your reading with prayer. Record what you have learnt in your diary in order that it be written upon your heart. Do not rely on memory!
- The Bible is to be applied and not just read. As John Wesley emphasised, “Whatever you resolve, begin to execute the first moment you can. So shall you find this word to be indeed the power of God unto present, and eternal salvation.”

CONCLUSION

We read the Bible simply because it is the written word of God. Christ Himself set the definitive attitude to the Bible when He declared:

*It is written, “Man does not live on bread alone,
but on every word that comes from the mouth of God”.*

Matthew 4:4

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To this end, the importance of the Bible may be better appreciated through three biblical metaphors: milk, fire and sword.

In 1 Peter 2:2-3, the Bible is depicted metaphorically as milk. The passage describes how Christians are fed with the imperishable word of God and how they should continue to crave for it, like newborn babes craving for milk, not just to survive but also to grow. In both 1 Corinthians 3:1-3 and Hebrews 5:12-14, the believers in the respective churches are chided for being spiritually immature, failing to feed on the meat of God's word. This reinforces the fact that Christian growth is basically dependent on reading and applying the Bible in our lives.

Next, the metaphor of fire is used to describe the Bible. The psalmist declares, "Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path" (Psalm 119:105). The prophet Jeremiah spoke of his own intense experience with God's word.

*But if I say, "I will not mention him or speak any more in his name,"
his word is in my heart like a fire, a fire shut up in my bones.
I am weary of holding it in; indeed, I cannot.*

Jeremiah 20:9

Fire is a passion. The Bible guides and invigorates our lives so that we are wholly passionate about God. There is no such creature as a dispassionate Christian in God's eyes.

Lastly, the word of God is seen as an offensive weapon, sharper than any two-edged sword. It penetrates soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart (Hebrews 4:12). Here is a picture of the Holy Spirit wielding the Bible as a sword to slice through our so-called grey areas of life, detecting the true intentions of the human heart. In Paul's view, the Christian is involved in spiritual warfare and therefore needs to put on the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God, as part of his necessary armament (Ephesians 6:17). It is important to note that the Bible is the Spirit's sword. When He wields it, the human heart is convicted of its sin, resulting in repentance and followed by restoration.

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Thus, the Bible, the word of God, is indispensable for growth and for truthful living. To neglect it is to starve ourselves. This is the reason for the many emaciated Christians who feed on everything except the Bible.

Wesley's evocative view of the Bible is worth repeating:

I want to know one thing about the way to heaven: how to land safe on that happy shore. God Himself has condescended to teach the way; for this very end He came from heaven. He hath written it down in a book. O give me that book! At any price, give me the book of God! I have it: here is knowledge enough for me. Let me be *homo unius libri*.

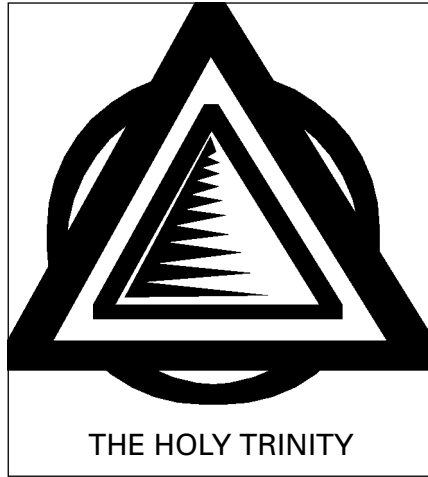
QUESTIONS

1. How is the Bible God's revelation to us?
2. What role does the Holy Spirit play in making the Bible relevant to us?
3. Does the Bible have a central place in your life and in your church?
4. What is the primary aim of reading the Bible?

Further Reading

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Christian Beliefs

PART

two

4

We Believe In God The Father

MAIN THOUGHTS

- ✦ God has spoken and revealed Himself to us through three avenues: creation, the conscience and Christ.
- ✦ God The Father is the first person in the Holy Trinity.
- ✦ Our relationship with God should be a father-son praying relationship.
- ✦ Recognising God as our heavenly Father opens us up to His love, His care, His protection and His guidance.
- ✦ God is omnipresent (all-present), omniscient (all-knowing) and omnipotent (all-powerful).

INTRODUCTION

It is essential in a course of preparation for church membership to know what our beliefs are. What do we believe in? What do we stand for? What are the basic beliefs of our faith? These are all important questions but they do not point us to a creed or some impersonal, academic doctrine. They point to the questions “Who do you believe in?” and “To whom do you belong?” And the simple answers to these two questions are “We believe in God” and “We belong to God’s kingdom.”

PART TWO Christian Beliefs

This section on Christian beliefs seeks to help you “know what you believe” and “know why you believe”, which are also titles of Paul E. Little’s two very helpful books. The Christian’s belief system is not man-made. It is based on God’s divine revelation. There is no need to struggle to know God. There is no need to embark on ascetic programmes or esoteric journeys to search for Him. For us, God is readily found.

WE CAN KNOW GOD

God has spoken to us in His word. He has revealed Himself to us. Because of this, we can know Him, but not through our own understanding. Finite mortals have little hope of comprehending the infinite God apart from some kind of disclosure from Him. God has promised to reveal Himself to those who seek Him.

*Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness,
for they will be filled.*

Matthew 5:6

*“You will seek Me and find Me when you seek Me with all your heart.
I will be found by you,” declares the Lord*

Jeremiah 29:13-14

So to those who still ask if there is a God, the answer is that He is there and He is not silent. God has spoken and revealed Himself to us through three avenues: creation, the conscience and Christ.

Creation

Creation speaks of God. All it took was just one footprint to indicate to Robinson Crusoe the presence of another person on his island. Look at the whole of creation. Consider the myriad of footprints.

Chapter 4: We Believe In God The Father

*The heavens declare the glory of God;
the skies proclaim the work of His hands.*

Psalms 19:1

This is evidence enough of the handiwork of a Creator God. That is why the ancient creeds of our faith declare, “I believe in God The Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth.”

There is a God. He is the Creator God. He is the genesis of everything. Even an evolutionary process has to have a beginning. Only “fools say... there is no God” (Psalm 14:1).

The atheist’s position is indefensible. One cannot know enough of everything to dogmatically claim that no God exists. The intellectual integrity of the agnostics is at least intact; they do not deny God’s existence, they merely choose not to believe. But the argument is compelling. Every building has its architect. Every painting has its artist. So the outward nature of creation must have its Creator. To a friend who loved the ways and mysteries of nature, Longfellow wrote:

*“Come, wander with me,” she said,
“Into regions yet untrod;
And read what still is unread
In the manuscripts of God.”*

Conscience

If the outward voice of creation is overwhelming, the inward voice of the conscience within man is insistent. The conscience is a built-in guidance system that evaluates what is right and what is wrong. Disobedience brings guilt and shame. On the other hand, obedience brings a sense of peace and inner well-being.

The existence of the conscience points to the existence of an absolutely moral being — God. The knowledge of right and wrong with reference to a moral being provides a basis and a standard for ethical choices in both the private domain and the public domain. The existence of God is written in our nature. And deep within man are yearnings and

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longings that are crying out for satisfaction. These are as unmistakable as the pull of gravity. Man cannot explain this insistent voice apart from God.

Christ

The greatest voice, however, is in a person. In Jesus of Nazareth, God incarnated (became flesh) as the Christ. He entered human history and lived among men. The accounts in the Gospels present Jesus as Immanuel, which means God is with us.

Creation reveals God's power and God's works. The conscience reveals God's values and qualities. But it is in Jesus Christ that God reveals His very nature and being as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. These are not three separate beings but Three-in-One, the Holy Trinity.

Theologians and scholars throughout history have tried to comprehend this truth and fathom its mystery. In itself the doctrine of the Holy Trinity can only be a divine revelation, not a human fabrication. The Holy Trinity is not three separate gods in one happy but mysterious family. It is the Triune, the Three-in-One. It is a teaching of the Bible and is expressed as a Trinitarian formula in the Doxology, the Gloria Patri, the wedding pronouncement, the benediction and in baptism.

GOD THE FATHER

As a person, God can be known in a personal way. In fact, He desires to be known. He desires to have a father-son relationship with each of us. God is our heavenly Father. God the Father is the first person in the Holy Trinity.

*Now if we are children, then we are heirs — heirs of God and
co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in His sufferings
in order that we may also share in His glory.*

Romans 8:17

Belief Determines Behaviour

As heirs to God's glory, we have to change our behaviour. Words do not prove a living faith. Real faith involves a change due to what you believe in. Belief determines behaviour.

Believing that God is our heavenly Father should cause us to behave in a way which befits His sons and daughters. Proclamation is one thing; our lives have to be changed for the better too. Profession of belief does not guarantee profession of faith. Satan and his demons also believe but their lives are not changed. It is important for each of us to experience a personal encounter with God and feel His love and power regularly.

For example, you may believe that God is able to forgive sins. But it is more important that you allow God to forgive your sins so that you can live as a forgiven person with the ability to forgive others. You may have faith in an absolutely reliable and trustworthy God but it is also important to test that faith to prove that God is totally reliable.

Paul warned Timothy that in the last days there will be people who believe but are not changed. These people will hold on to a form of godliness but deny its power (2 Timothy 3:5). The warning is clear and sharp. Belief and faith are meant to be real and powerful. They have to change our behaviour and our lives. If they do not, they become a deception and a delusion.

We must therefore guard ourselves from making the mistake of thinking that we are Christians by a mechanical profession and a superficial adherence to the faith without its vibrant life-changing properties. This is a danger which we need to heed at the early stages of preparing to be a church member.

A Father-Son Praying Relationship

Our relationship with God is more than believing in God the Father. It involves believing that God is our Father. Our relationship with God is personal because He is our heavenly Father. When our Lord Jesus Christ taught His disciples to pray the Lord's Prayer, he taught them to begin with "Our Father who art in heaven...". Our relationship with God is a father-son praying relationship.

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The next line in the Lord's Prayer, "Hallowed be Thy name", characterizes our relationship with our Father in heaven. To know the Father who is in heaven is to worship Him. Worship takes place not only on Sundays and in church. It continues into every moment of our lives because God is no less our heavenly Father in our office than in our canteen.

"Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven" reminds us to accept God's lordship in our lives and to serve Him. These two lines translate into witnessing, evangelism and service. As God's children, we want to tell the world about our heavenly Father and we want to serve Him.

A Sense of Belonging

Recognising God as our heavenly Father means that we are given a sense of belonging in a family of brothers and sisters. As His children, we receive His love, protection and guidance. To know God is to belong to a world-wide family of brothers and sisters united under the loving Fatherhood of God.

*How great is the love the Father has lavished on us,
that we should be called children of God!*

1 John 3:1

WHAT IS GOD LIKE?

There are many false and low views of God. J. B. Phillips in *Your God is Too Small* says that many people think of God as "a traffic cop, a killjoy, a pampering grandfather, a for-emergency-only fireman and an alien". God is thought of as distant, remote and unknowable. But the God of Christians is not like this.

The following describes God:

- He is an infinite yet personal God, disclosing Himself and desiring our fellowship.

Chapter 4: We Believe In God The Father

- He is the Creator.
- He is the moral reference point for right and wrong.
- He is the Triune God, forgiving and faithful.
- He is Jesus Christ.

*Do you not know? Have you not heard? The Lord is the
Everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth.*

*He will not grow tired or weary, and His understanding no one
can fathom. He gives strength to the weary and increases the power
of the weak. Even youths grow tired and weary, and young men
stumble and fall; but those who hope in the Lord will renew their
strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not
grow weary, they will walk and not be faint.*

Isaiah 40:28-31

From this passage, we learn that God is also omnipresent (all-present), omniscient (all-knowing) and omnipotent (all-powerful). Our knowledge of God is not a theoretical one but one which is practical, powerful, energizing and life-giving.

Knowing and believing God is radical and life-changing. Some find this too uncomfortable and risky. Those who really believe and have faith put their trust in someone that is like a solid rock. All other ground is sinking sand.

QUESTIONS

1. Do you have any questions that cause you or your friends to hold back on belief in the existence of God?
2. Is there any belief about God that you struggle with because of some past experience?
3. Is there anything holding you back from enjoying God as your heavenly Father?
4. How has your belief affected your behaviour thus far in your Christian journey?

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5

We Believe In God The Son, Jesus Christ

MAIN THOUGHTS

- ✦ God The Son is Jesus Christ, the second person in the Holy Trinity.
- ✦ In Jesus Christ, God took on human form to reveal Himself to the world.
- ✦ Because God loved us, He sent Jesus Christ to come to die on the cross to break the awesome power of sin and save us from eternal death.
- ✦ Three powerful effects of the death of Christ on the cross are healing, redemption and atonement.

INTRODUCTION

God The Son is Jesus Christ, the second person in the Holy Trinity. Jesus Christ is God in human form. God came to us to reveal Himself to us in the form of His Son. Knowing Jesus is knowing God.

Jesus taught His disciples and followers many things, most of which were easy to understand, though difficult to apply. However, there are two aspects of His teachings which are puzzling and difficult to understand. The first is His claim to be God and the other is His insistence that He must suffer and die. Studying these two claims will give us an idea of who God the Son is and why He came.

JESUS CLAIMS TO BE GOD

Jesus Hints that He is God

At the beginning of His ministry, Jesus spoke of this vital truth indirectly. It was necessary. Every Jew was repeatedly taught from childhood that there is only one God — besides Him there is no other. Chinese, Indian and Greek mythologies are filled with stories of gods taking on human forms. For them it would not be so hard to believe that the one supreme God took on human form to reveal Himself to the world. But not so with the Jews. If Jesus had made this claim directly when He began His ministry the Jews would have rejected Him outright. He would have been accused of blasphemy.

Jesus dropped many hints that He was God at the beginning of His ministry. For example, when He healed a paralysed man, Jesus did more than just heal him of his physical suffering. Knowing full well that the Jewish leaders were absolutely certain that no one except God had the authority to forgive sins, He told the paralytic that his sins were forgiven (Mark 2:5).

Besides words, His actions also spoke of His claim to be God. When the lives of His disciples were threatened by a raging storm on the Sea of Galilee, He spoke to the howling winds and the violent waves and, in an instant, the sea became perfectly calm. His disciples said, “Who is this? Even the wind and the waves obey Him!” (Mark 4:41). Perhaps His disciples remembered the creation story when God spoke and nature responded.

Jesus Says that He is God

As His ministry progressed Jesus began to reveal more about Himself. During an argument with the religious leaders, Jesus implied that His ministry was greater than Abraham’s and that He knew Abraham personally. The Jews retorted, “You are not yet 50 years old, and you have seen Abraham!”

“I tell you the truth,” Jesus answered, “before Abraham was born, I am.”

The name of God in Hebrew is Yahweh, which means “I am”. It is a most appropriate name. It answers these questions: Who is the one supreme God? “I am”; Who is the one who holds the keys of life and death? “I am”; who is the one who created heaven and earth? “I am”; Who is the one who holds the destiny of mankind? “I am”.

Jesus did not say like King David, “Yahweh is my shepherd.” He said, “I am the good shepherd.” (John 10:14). He also said, “I and the Father are one.” (John 10:30). Jesus did not say like the psalmist, “Yahweh has made known to me the path of life.” (Psalm 16:11). Instead, Jesus said, “I give them eternal life.” (John 10:28).

So Jesus’ reply to the remark of the Jewish leaders was very significant. He was claiming to be the God of the Old Testament. That is why they responded by trying to stone him (John 8:59; John 10:31-33).

Indirectly at first, but quite plainly as His ministry progressed, Jesus claimed to be God. Both His disciples and His enemies (some Jewish religious leaders) recognized it. This claim greatly angered His enemies and baffled His disciples. His enemies very quickly concluded that He was a liar, a lunatic and thus a danger to the community. They began to devise plans for His removal.

JESUS HAD TO DIE ON THE CROSS

There was one other thing which puzzled Jesus’ disciples. He clearly told them that He would be rejected by the religious authorities, arrested and put to death. Jesus was fully aware of the obvious dangers of visiting Jerusalem. However, at the appointed time of His ministry, He calmly went into the city and into the hands of the authorities.

The Crucifixion

Christians tend to look back on the cross as something wonderful. It is wonderful. But before the beauty of the cross can be appreciated, the stark reality of the Crucifixion has to be confronted.

The arrest, the torture, the humiliation and the execution of Christ was a most horrible and damnable thing. Self-righteous, arrogant and

hypocritical men looked upon pure goodness — they gazed into the eyes of the one who represented all that was pure and good, true and holy — and spat at it. They reviled and cursed Jesus. These self-righteous religious fanatics orchestrated Jesus' malicious execution.

Love Conquers Sin

But that is not the whole story. Because of his persistent love, Christ bravely entered Jerusalem. He could have easily avoided the confrontation. He deliberately chose to go on preaching and teaching the truth in the face of hostile opposition. It seems that suffering and true love must go together.

Consider this illustration. A mother loves her teenaged daughter who has fallen into the wrong company. The girl picks up bad attitudes and begins to rebel — even to the point of becoming violent. She rejects her mother's love and authority and, in fits of anger, breaks things in the home. Imagine the suffering the mother feels. The easiest solution will be to get her daughter out of the house. The mother can report her to the police, disown her or send her to remand prison. That will ease the pain a little. But if the mother decides to go on loving in spite of the pain and rejection, she risks even more pain and suffering.

Christ chose to go on loving even in the face of hostile opposition. A steadfast love and a willingness to suffer are all part of the reason why Christ died on the cross, which symbolizes His love for us.

Christ had to die to break the awesome power of sin. Sin is much more than a wrong action. For example, if a father loses his temper and unfairly shouts abuses at his child, a number of things can happen. He damages himself. He reinforces a harmful pattern of behaviour which increases the possibility of his doing it again. He allows his anger to control him. His child is also deeply affected. The child becomes insecure, copies his father's poor behaviour pattern and, soon, is also unable to control his own anger.

Sin is a powerful force which enslaves us. It is an infectious disease which has spread over all the earth and which has been passed down through generations.

EFFECTS OF CHRIST'S DEATH

God brought good out of evil at the cross. It may have been a horrible evil that put Christ on the cross. But Christ, by laying down His life, brought life and salvation to all mankind.

Faith without works is dead. If we believe the incredible truth that Christ died for our sins, then we, like Christ, in the face of much evil, should also lay down our lives and trust that God can bring good out of evil.

The Bible uses many pictures to describe the powerful effects of the death of Christ. There are three common ones: healing, redemption and atonement.

Healing

*He Himself bore our sins in His body on the tree,
so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness;
by His wounds you have been healed.*

1 Peter 2:24

Imagine a deadly virus which an incurable disease and which has infected everyone. Sin is like that. Christ did not isolate Himself from the disease. Instead, He drew the effects of the disease close to Himself and suffered the consequences. But He Himself was not infected with the disease.

He carried our sins on His body. He died and rose from the dead, overcoming the dreaded disease of sin. Through His suffering and death the cure for the disease called sin was found. By His wounds we are healed.

Redemption

Redemption is payment made to buy someone His freedom from slavery.

*But when the time had fully come, God sent His Son,
born of a woman, born under law, to redeem those under law,
that we might receive the full rights of sons.*

Galatians 4:4-5

PART TWO Christian Beliefs

Imagine a slave being auctioned. His hands are bound. He is completely at the mercy of his owner. A kind and generous person steps forward and pays the price for his freedom. He brings the slave into his own home and adopts him as his own child. This was what Christ did for us on the cross.

Atonement

This is the Jewish belief that the death (the blood) of a sacrificial animal (usually a lamb) atones, that is, makes up or settles the account for our sins.

*How much more, then, will the blood of Christ,
who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself unblemished to God,
cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to death,
so that we may serve the living God!*

Hebrews 9:14

Imagine a condemned prisoner about to be executed for his crimes. At the last moment, someone intervenes and offers to take the criminal's place and be executed himself. On the cross, Christ took our place and bore the punishment for our sin.

Jesus Rose from the Dead

The resurrection of Christ is the foundation stone of the Christian faith. The physical body of Christ was raised from the dead. All our Christian doctrines are built around this fact.

*And if Christ has not been raised, our preaching
is useless and so is your faith.*

1 Corinthians 15:14

This is why the early Christians carefully documented the eyewitness accounts of the resurrection of Christ. His resurrection verifies Jesus' claim to be God. The resurrection vindicates Jesus' suffering and death. The resurrection loudly declares Jesus' victory over sin. If we believe that

Christ rose from the dead, then we should experience that victory in our lives. Sin should no longer be our master.

The Holy Trinity

Our understanding of what God is like comes primarily from Jesus.

- He taught His disciples to worship the Father.
- He claimed to be God.
- He taught His disciples to regard the Holy Spirit as a unique person — a divine counsellor like Himself.

The early Christians worshipped the Father. They gave glory, honour and praise to Jesus — they worshipped the Son of God. They received the Holy Spirit — they realized that their own lives were like a temple for God. God dwelled in their lives through the Holy Spirit.

It was not long before the Christian church developed the doctrine of the Trinity to describe these incredible truths taught by Christ.

- There is one God. The Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit are one. We affirm the full divinity of Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit. They are worthy to receive the worship that is due to God alone.
- The one supreme God has expressed Himself in three persons — the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

Through the ages, many have found it difficult to understand how God can be one and yet three. We cannot understand how God can be in Singapore and, say, the United States at the same time. We cannot understand how God can listen to the prayers of a million people at the same time. But what is important is we believe that He can do all these things. God is far greater than what our finite minds will ever be able to fully understand.

God has revealed Himself to us in history through Jesus Christ. Jesus is our clearest and best image of God. In Colossians 2:9, Paul writes, “For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form.”

When we study the behaviour and reactions of Jesus, we gaze at the behaviour and reactions of God. When we understand the words of

Christ, we grasp the word of God. When we see how Christ loved His disciples, we see the Father's love for all His children.

CONCLUSION

Jesus Christ is the true God and was also a man. That is why Jesus is called the Son of God and the Son of Man. We conclude that Jesus Christ is God for He possesses the attributes of God. He is eternal, unchangeable, omnipotent, omnipresent and omniscient. The Bible ascribes to Him many divine names — Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Counsellor, Prince of Peace and, supreme over all, God. He was also truly a man because the Bible expressly calls Him so. He had human feelings and acted as one. He had a body and a soul. The miracles and mighty acts which Jesus performed on earth were nothing compared to His condescending to take on the form and likeness of man (John 1:1-4; Colossians 1:16-17). Jesus' life was the ransom that bought our souls, redeeming us from our lost and condemned state. Through redeeming us, He became our Lord and Saviour.

QUESTIONS

1. In what way is Jesus central to our faith?
2. What do we mean when we say that Jesus is both human and God?
3. What does Jesus' resurrection proclaim?
4. What did Jesus tell us about God?
5. What is Jesus doing now?

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6

We Believe In The Holy Spirit

MAIN THOUGHTS

- ✦ The Holy Spirit is the third person in the Holy Trinity.
- ✦ The Holy Spirit teaches us to love God, helps us to understand the Bible, transforms our lives, gives us power to overcome sin, equips us for ministry and gives us power and boldness to witness for the Lord.
- ✦ The Holy Spirit can be grieved by our persistence in disobedience or our indifference.
- ✦ There are two views as to what is meant by being baptized in the Holy Spirit — the Pentecostal view and the traditional view.

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, much has been written on the person and work of the Holy Spirit. In the church, there have been differences in opinion and heated arguments over this issue. As a result, many people are confused about the Holy Spirit. Many think that the Bible is unclear when it comes to the Holy Spirit.

This chapter is written with the firm conviction that the Bible is crystal clear on the central facts of the Holy Spirit. If we study the Bible carefully, we will find that there is hardly any disagreement about the main facts of the Holy Spirit except for some disagreement over a small portion. This

chapter will concentrate mainly on the clear central facts concerning the Holy Spirit. The last section of this chapter will deal briefly with the minor disagreement over the Holy Spirit.

CENTRAL FACTS OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

The Holy Spirit is God

In a previous chapter, we learnt the amazing truth that Jesus is more than a man — He is God. In the same way we also believe that the Holy Spirit is God. He is the third person of the Godhead (the Trinity). The Holy Spirit is not an impersonal force. He is a person. He brings to the believer the personal presence of God. John 14:16 and John 15:26 record the very personal way in which Jesus refers to the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit Dwells In Every Christian

The full wisdom, beauty and power of the Almighty God is found in the person of the Holy Spirit. And the Holy Spirit dwells in each of us. Read slowly through Romans 8. Note the importance placed on the Holy Spirit in this chapter.

*... if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ,
he does not belong to Christ.*

Romans 8:9

The message of this verse is that everyone who belongs to Christ must have his Spirit dwelling in him. If we have committed our lives to the Lord Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit dwells within our bodies (1 Corinthians 6:19, 12:13).

Although the fullness of God dwells in our lives through the Holy Spirit we can, by our disobedience and hardness of heart, restrict or quench the Holy Spirit (1 Thessalonians 5:19). If we persist in our disobedience or indifference, we may actually wound or grieve the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 5:18).

BE FILLED WITH THE HOLY SPIRIT

Why do we need to be filled with the Holy Spirit when we already have the Holy Spirit? The Holy Spirit is a person. His dwelling in your life implies that there is a relationship between you and Him.

Consider a newly married couple. They are living together for the first time. They are in love. They already have a relationship. However, that relationship can easily be strained. Their love can turn to hate if they do not make the effort to nurture their love. There are many new things that they have to learn about each other.

This is what it means to be continually filled with the Holy Spirit. We need to ensure that our relationship with the Holy Spirit keeps growing. You may have been a Christian for some time. But you need to continually check your relationship with the Holy Spirit. You have to check regularly to see if your relationship with the Holy Spirit is growing or being quenched.

Paul's exhortation to the Ephesian Christians who already had the Holy Spirit was to "go on being filled" with the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 5:18).

THE WORK OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

In this very important section, we shall learn what it means to be filled with the Holy Spirit, how one can keep from grieving the Holy Spirit and what the Holy Spirit is trying to do in our lives. The Holy Spirit wants to do for you all that the Lord did for His disciples. Just as the Lord patiently instructed, counselled and befriended His disciples, the Holy Spirit, who is called the Counsellor, will patiently help you become like Christ.

Loving God

The Holy Spirit will teach us to express our love for God in meaningful worship. He longs to open up our hearts and lives to true worship (John 16:13). He will glorify Christ. He will draw us into experiences of intimate, personal communion with God. He will help us realize that God is our loving heavenly Father (Romans 8:15; Galatians 4:6). Ask the Holy Spirit to fill your life. Ask Him to teach you how to worship. These are His roles.

Understanding the Bible

The Holy Spirit who inspired the writing of the Bible will help us understand it. The work of the Holy Spirit as our teacher is highlighted in 1 John 2:26-27. If you ask Him, the Holy Spirit will not only help you to understand the Bible but also to apply its teachings in your daily living.

Transforming Lives

The Holy Spirit will gently show us the areas of our lives that need transforming. Our Lord Jesus is essentially holy. He is completely pure and righteous. And He wants us to be holy as well. Our Lord Jesus Himself said that the Holy Spirit would “convict the world of sin” (John 16:8-11). In other words, it means that one of the primary tasks of the Holy Spirit is to point out our faults. He shows us what is wrong in our lives.

By ourselves, we may not be able to identify specifically the areas in our lives that can be improved on. There are many weaknesses in our lives. Sometimes we feel condemned by our weaknesses. The Holy Spirit points out our weaknesses to help us, not to condemn us.

If your mind is filled with accusing and condemning thoughts for mistakes committed, it is not the work of the Holy Spirit. It is either your anger at yourself or the work of the devil. The devil is called the “accuser of our brothers, who accuses them before our God day and night” (Revelation 12:10). Too many Christians believe the devil’s lie. We think we are such poor examples of Christians and our faults are so many that we can never overcome them. Such defeated and negative thinking paralyses us and grieves the Holy Spirit.

Power to Overcome

The Holy Spirit gives us the power to overcome sin. He not only shows us our sin but He also gives us the power to overcome it. In addition to this, we also have pardon and forgiveness for our past sins. In Christ, by the working of the Holy Spirit, we have the power to overcome our present sins. Read through Romans 8 again and allow the Holy Spirit to fill your heart with this great hope — the hope of being like Christ in every way.

Chapter 6: We Believe In The Holy Spirit

Be careful to note that having the Holy Spirit does not mean that we will never sin again. The Holy Spirit in us continues to transform our lives day by day. Because of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, we should be growing to be more like Christ with each day. The Holy Spirit plays this key role in transforming our lives.

Equipping for Ministry

The Holy Spirit equips us for ministry. Apart from transforming our characters, the Holy Spirit also challenges us to work. The great mission of bringing salvation to the whole world which our Lord Jesus began is now continued by the Holy Spirit. Through the Holy Spirit our Lord gives us gifts and abilities which need to be developed.

Each of us has a role to play in the building of God's kingdom. We must each discover our spiritual gifts and use them. A spiritual gift is a special, extraordinary, supernatural or divinely ordained spiritual ability given by the infinite strength and power of the Holy Spirit to every Christian. It is given according to God's grace for use within the body of Christ. Gifts are not given for individual glory but for us to glorify God. The Holy Spirit stands ready to help us; all we have to do is ask Him.

Read prayerfully through Romans 12, Ephesians 4, and 1 Corinthians 12. Ask the Holy Spirit to show you your gifts. Approach your church leaders or pastors for their opinions. Find your ministry in the body of Christ.

The Power to Witness

The Holy Spirit gives us power and boldness to be witnesses for our Lord Jesus Christ. On our own, we may feel inadequate to serve God. We may even feel ashamed of being a Christian. If you are afraid to share God's love with others, ask the Holy Spirit to take away the fears and fill your life with His boldness. Jesus Himself said:

*But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you;
and you will be my witnesses....*

Acts 1:8

The Fruit of the Spirit

The fruit of the Spirit is not a spiritual gift. Spiritual gifts define what a Christian does while the fruit of the Spirit defines what a Christian is. The fruit comes naturally as the believer walks closer with God and yields to the Holy Spirit. It is the manifestation of the maturity of a believer. Read Galatians 5:22 and imagine yourself being described. By faith, see yourself as being full of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. This is what the Holy Spirit can do for us if we let Him take control of us.

BAPTIZED IN THE HOLY SPIRIT

The main point of disagreement on the subject of the Holy Spirit concerns the meaning of the phrase “baptized in the Holy Spirit”. There are two main views on this.

The Pentecostal View

The main Pentecostal churches (for example, the Assemblies of God and the Full Gospel Businessmen’s Fellowship) hold this view. They believe that for a person to be baptized in the Spirit, one has to experience the working of the Holy Spirit (an emotional, tangible experience). The evidence of this is being able to speak in tongues (that is, experiencing the Holy Spirit praying through them in a language they have not learnt). They believe that all Christians have the Holy Spirit dwelling in them. All Christians have received the Holy Spirit but not all Christians have been baptized in the Holy Spirit.

There are one or two extreme groups that hold the belief that if one does not speak in tongues, one does not have the Holy Spirit and therefore is not saved and is thus not a Christian. Such teaching should be rejected.

The Traditional View

The other dominant view maintains that there is no distinction between receiving the Spirit and being baptized in the Spirit. When a person

Chapter 6: We Believe In The Holy Spirit

makes his personal commitment to the Lord Jesus Christ, he receives the Holy Spirit. He is baptized with the Holy Spirit. He need not experience anything dramatic. The Lord takes us at our word and gives us His spirit. All Christians are therefore baptized in the Holy Spirit.

There are also some groups who take this view to an extreme and harshly judge any who disagree. These groups believe that anyone who speaks of the need for Christians to be baptized in the Holy Spirit is of the devil. To them, speaking in tongues, prophecy and healing are not the work of the Holy Spirit but that of the devil. Such teaching should also be rejected.

Which View?

Read Michael Green's *I Believe In the Holy Spirit* for a further discussion on this topic. Both views quote the Bible in their bid to establish their cases. Suffice it to say that each has its dangers when taken to the extreme.

Should you hold the Pentecostal view, be careful not to give the impression that anyone who does not speak in tongues is a "second-class" Christian. You can certainly encourage your fellow Christians to seek deeper experiences with the Lord. There is nothing wrong with experiences. However, do bear in mind that there have been many mighty men and women of God who have demonstrated the power and the fruit of the Holy Spirit but have never spoken in tongues.

If you hold the traditional view, beware of over-reacting against the Pentecostal emphasis on experience. The gifts of tongues, prophecy and healing are all well-documented in the Bible. Learn to open your heart and life to the Holy Spirit and be willing to receive any gift that God gives you.

This difference in views, however, is not very important. The main issue is our transformation by the Holy Spirit into someone who is more like Christ. If one is not transformed, it does not help if one speaks in tongues or not.

QUESTIONS

1. How do you hear the Holy Spirit speaking to you? Share an example.
2. Do you sense the Holy Spirit helping you with your weaknesses (sins)? Share an example.
3. How would you answer someone who says, “I don’t understand the Holy Spirit”?

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Christian Behaviour

PART

three



Our Christian Commitment

MAIN THOUGHTS

Christian commitment is related to our baptism and membership in the local church. To better understand its meaning, it should be considered in relation to:

- a) the question of commitment asked at the Baptism Ritual;
- b) the question of commitment asked at the Reception Service, and the areas of commitment as outlined in the membership vows, that is, prayers, presence, gifts and service.

INTRODUCTION

As part of the process of becoming a member of the church, a Christian makes certain promises.

At adult baptism, the candidate is asked the question — *“Do you confess Jesus Christ as your Saviour, put your whole trust in His grace, and promise to serve Him as your Lord, in union with the church which Christ has opened to people of all ages, nations, and races?”* A further question asked is, *“According to the grace given to you, will you remain faithful members of Christ’s holy Church and serve as Christ’s representatives in the world?”* (UMH p.34).

Upon reception into the Methodist Church, the candidate is asked — *“As members of Christ’s universal Church, will you be loyal to the Methodist Church and do all in your power to strengthen its ministries?”* (UMH 38).

Later on in the service, upon reception into the local congregation,

the candidate (along with others) is then asked — *“As members of this congregation, will you faithfully participate in its ministries, by your prayers, your presence, your gifts and service?”*

The responses to these questions are what we normally call the Baptism and Membership Vows.

All these questions call for commitment, and they form the basis of this chapter.

THE LORDSHIP OF CHRIST

However, before we consider these questions, there is a far more basic issue for us to ponder. More important than “What am I committing myself to,” is to ask, “Who am I committing myself to?”

Our Christian faith is not simply an allegiance to a set of rules and doctrines. Ours is commitment to a Person — the Lord Jesus Christ. Hence, these promises, which we make at various services, do not have any meaning apart from Him. These are questions that make sense only after we have made a personal commitment to Him.

Our commitment to Christ as our Lord must naturally lead to our commitment to the Church. The Lordship of Jesus Christ is not only something personal to one who believes in Him. Christ is Lord over all of creation as well as the Church (Colossians 1:15-20; Ephesians 5:23). In other words one can say, “Jesus is Lord of my life; Jesus is also Lord of my Church; Jesus is also Lord of this world which I live in.”

THE COMMITMENT AT BAPTISM

When we repented and believed in Jesus Christ, God’s Spirit baptised us into the Body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12:13). The latter is a term we use to describe the body of all Christians around the world. In other words, baptism is a sign of the believer’s incorporation into the universal Church.

Having become a member of the church, the commitment then is to be “faithful members” and “serve as Christ’s representatives in the world.” What is expected after baptism is that the candidate be faithful

Chapter 7: Our Christian Commitment

to the church and live such a life by words and deeds that reflect Christ's presence in the world. Who we are and how we conduct ourselves will either bring a good, or bad, name, to the larger body of believers to which we belong, as well as to the one who is our Lord.

THE COMMITMENT AT RECEPTION INTO THE LOCAL CHURCH

However, while making the above commitment is a noble gesture, the question arises, "Who is he accountable to for the working out of his promise?" Ultimately, of course, the Christian is accountable to God on the day of judgement. But while he is still on the face of this earth, how is he made to account for his promise? To say "I am accountable to the church (which is the universal body of Christ)" makes little practical sense, because in this case it is an amorphous entity.

This is where the Reception (part of the) Service locates the line of accountability. Here the candidate, having promised to "remain a faithful member of Christ's holy Church", is received into "the membership of this congregation". In other words, the Christian's allegiance to the Body of Christ is now located specifically to a particular part of the Body, a local congregation of the Methodist Church. Here the Christian is not just made accountable to the local church but he is also accountable for his prayers, his presence, his gifts and his service. The obedience to God's will and commandments, which he promised at the Baptism Service, is now made more specific and practical.

OUR MEMBERSHIP VOWS

A Question of Loyalty

Our membership vows address the issue of our loyalty to the church, in particular to the Methodist Church. This does not mean one cannot attend other churches, or one's loyalty cannot be transferred to another denomination. In practical terms, when a person becomes a member of a church, his name is listed on the membership roll. That particular

church is accountable for that member on the roll and the individual is accountable to the church for his promises.

For the sake of practicality, churches do accept members from one another through transfers. When these have been officially acted upon, the line of accountability then shifts accordingly. The person then becomes responsible to that church and the latter for the new member.

As long as a person is a member of that congregation, he must be loyal to it. That loyalty is measured (in the Methodist Church) in terms of upholding the church by the member's prayers, presence, gifts and service.

Upholding the Church by Our Prayers

The early church in Acts was a praying church. The church prayed when they had to choose leaders (Acts 1:24; 6:6). It was while the church was praying that the Holy Spirit came upon them (Acts 4:31). Prayer played a critical part in the miracles (Acts 9:40; 10:2). When prayer pervaded the life of the church so much, it was inevitable that the individuals who made up the congregations were people who prayed.

In particular, when we consider prayer as part of the membership vows, it is essentially on the church that we want to focus. (We assume that when the Christian prays, he has no difficulty presenting his own personal needs to the Lord.) Here in the vow, the member must pray for the various people and programmes of the church. This involves more than just waiting for the pastor's announcement, or for the requests to come over the pulpit on Sundays. If one's heart is for the church, and one values the place of prayer in affecting people and events, then there must be attempts to personally find out the areas of concern that must be made matters of prayer.

At the same time, prayer should not be restricted only to our local Methodist church. The local congregation in which one is a member is only a part of the Body of Christ. The prayer net must be cast over other Methodist churches as well as the other denominations. This is especially so in Singapore where what happens in one church may have repercussions for others.

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While the nature of the vow may tend to make us feel that it is personal prayer, we should not rule out that prayers must also be made collectively, such as in prayer meetings and prayer groups.

Upholding the Church by Our Presence

One problem facing churches today is that of absentee members. Due to the small size of Singapore and the many churches within it, there is a lot of movement of Christians across churches. The close proximity of many churches, and of homes to churches other than one's own, render inevitable some visitation of churches amongst Christians.

It is good perhaps to distinguish between an acceptable visitation to churches and "church-hopping". Church visitation may be acceptable if it is to find out more about other denominations, to visit a friend, an occasional worship together with friends from various denominations, certain official celebrations of the other churches and the like. The important criterion here is occasional and not long-term.

"Church-hopping", on the other hand, is like shopping in the supermarket. One picks a church, as one does an item off the shelf, without bothering to read the labels, the ingredients, the manufacturer, and the expiry date. One then tastes the product, likes it, and continues to consume. However, when one's taste changes, one tries another product. The problem with this approach is that it is based on how one feels about the church rather than the contribution one makes to help the church become what it is supposed to be.

It is important therefore that a careful selection process takes place before one decides on church membership. This involves several visits, perhaps worshipping regularly for a few months, reading through materials about the church, talking to the leaders, getting to know some members and praying during this whole process. However, once the decision has been made, one must be committed to that church and be present there in person, unless business or duty calls one to be overseas.

Presence implies participation. One can be sitting in the pew on Sunday, but without the involvement of the person in the spirit, there is

no worship (John 4:24). The same goes for one's presence in the church. Membership implies participation.

Being present also does not just mean attendance at Sunday worship. There are programmes and activities which need the participation and support of members. Some of these activities are for the member's own benefit, some are for others.

Therefore, by "presence" in this vow, the reference is to active membership, being regular and participative.

It is inevitable in the life of the church that there are times of stress or crises. This vow of presence means that during this period one is not the first to transfer membership. If one has been faithful in praying for the church, and actively receiving requests to intercede in a looming crisis, it is unlikely one would be the first to leave. One's commitment to the church to be present means one must be there to work through the struggles with the pastors, leaders and other members of the church. Someone has aptly pointed out that rats are the first to desert a sinking ship.

Upholding the Church by Our Gifts

The first thing that comes to mind when considering this vow on "gifts" is money. This is after all what we put into the offering bag during Sunday worship.

The church is upheld in many ways by money. The salaries of pastors and staff, the purchase and maintenance of property, and programmes and materials — all these need money. Very often we relate this giving of money to tithing.

When tithing was used in the Old Testament, it was not money that was originally intended. The first things tithed included all of one's material possessions. A tenth was to be set aside to provide for the Levites, the tribe chosen for their special ministry in the worship of God in Israel. In this sense, the ten percent (which is what the tithe is) belongs to God, and hence not to return it to Him is considered robbery (Malachi 3:8).

Money can be used as a convenient equivalent for a tenth of our income or whatever we earn. However, it should not detract us from the

point that tithes as gifts include things other than money. Hence, the term “gifts”.

When we vow to uphold the church by our gifts, it can, in a very wide sense, include whatever we give to God and the church. This will include material things as well as non-material things, money as well as non-currency items.

Whatever our gifts — money, or material possessions — using them to uphold the church is a sign of our loyalty as members of the church.

Upholding the Church by Our Service

The fourth criterion of our loyalty to the church is to uphold it by our service. This is a word that is not much in use today. The term we use more frequently now is ministry. The former term as found in the vow is in this context the better choice.

Service is a more inclusive word of the two. In the teaching of Jesus, an important mark of our following Him is that of servanthood (Mark 10:45). Here the reference is to Himself, who came not to be served but to serve. The emphasis is on His willing attitude to serve. He then became a man and sacrificed Himself for us (Philippians 2:1-11). The attitude must precede the act. Otherwise one can perform the works of a servant and not have the heart of servant, which is the more important requirement in service. A humble heart, submissive to his Lord, is an important pre-requisite for a servant.

A good servant is one with initiative (Luke 19:15-27). A servant is quick to respond to the calls of his Master. However, this does not mean we wait to be commanded before performing the service. A good servant has a quick eye to see what is happening around and responding accordingly.

Service therefore is other-centred. It is finding out what the needs of others are, and then taking the necessary steps to have those needs met, and there may be times when doing this is inconvenient to us. The key principle that should motivate us to serve is love, that is, loving our neighbour as ourselves.

In the church, there are numerous ways to serve. There are official avenues of service. Included here are ushering, singing in the choir,

serving in committees, Sunday School and other ministries and programmes of the church. But there are also the unpublicised and unofficial avenues for service. This include arrangement of chairs, cleaning the floors, tables, cups and even toilets. This is not glamorous work but then did our Lord seek glamour and receive it when He came to serve us? The silent servants of God are blessed just as well.

HOW'S THAT ACCOUNTABILITY AGAIN?

It is fine to think about accountability as an important reason for making a public commitment to a local church. But how is that worked out in practical terms? Does the church insist on a checklist or a report card of some kind from every individual member on carrying out his vows?

With regards to prayer, for example, it is difficult for the pastor or church leader to know whether a person has really been praying for the church. Even asking a point-blank question may not elicit an honest response.

We do not keep an attendance record of every person who comes to church on Sundays. As church membership rises above a thousand, this is quite an impossible task for the occasional absence. Over a period of time, continual absence may be detected.

Gifts are perhaps easier to track, if donors' names are recorded, or tithing or giving is through the pledge system. Still, it is not possible to know about those who are not part of the system.

Service is perhaps the easiest of the vows to keep track of. The reasons for this is simply that the volunteers are usually very visible by the service they perform.

However, checking on accountability in this way may be really missing the point. The purpose is not punitive; it is to encourage. The church is accountable for the member: not to issue demerit points when he defaults, but to provide opportunities for redemption and renewal. This is done through ministries like the small groups, discipleship and nurture programmes, as well as through the pulpit and the worship services.

At the same time, the individual member is also responsible for his own progress in faith. If there is a slack or sin, and one is sensitive and

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responsive to the conviction of the Holy Spirit in one's life, there must also be the willingness to follow through by actively participating in the opportunities for growth that the church provides.

In the end, what we hope for is a happy balance of the two — the church being responsible for its members, and the members being responsible for the church.

QUESTIONS

1. What is meant by “the Lordship of Jesus Christ”?
Colossians 1:9-23; Philippians 2:1-11.
2. What kind of prayer did the early church engage in?
Read through the book of Acts, highlighting events where they happened, and then going back to examine them in detail.
3. Ask your friends how their churches (especially of other denominations) pray, view and monitor church attendance, “tithe”, recruit volunteers for ministry.
4. What is the tithe? How does the New Testament view it?
Genesis 14:17-20; Leviticus 27:30-33; 2 Cor 8 and 9; Hebrews 7:4.
5. Have an appointment with your pastor, and ask him or her where the areas of needs are and how you may fit it in.

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8

Our Christian Conduct

MAIN THOUGHTS

Christian conduct is to be understood from the perspectives of our covenant with God in Christ and the kingdom of God.

To better understand its meaning, it should be considered in relation to:

- a) the “kingdom” perspective in the Old Testament, with particular reference on the Ten Commandments and the way they show us how to conduct our lives;
- b) the New Testament perspective through examining the Sermon on the Mount and what it has to show us as to how to conduct our lives.

INTRODUCTION

“Now that I am a Christian, what’s next? I know that I am to pray, read the Bible and go to church. What else is there for me? How am I supposed to conduct myself? What am I expected to do?”

This chapter attempts to answer such questions, especially with regards to what a Christian is expected to do. The preceding chapter has already examined these in the light of the Christian’s commitment to the church. Here we will try to consider our Christian conduct from the perspectives of the covenant between God and man, as well as the kingdom of God.

MEANING OF THE COVENANT

Covenant comes from old Hebrew concept *berith* meaning that which binds the parties (whether between men, or between men and God) together (*International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia*). This solemn binding agreement when recorded in the Bible was almost always sealed with the shedding of blood, though not the drinking of it; this latter being common among many of the pagan tribes, but which the Lord forbade.

There were many covenant-making events in the Old Testament between God and men, beginning with Adam, but also with Noah, Abraham, Moses and David being the major ones.

However, the key covenant in the Old Testament was between God and Abraham, as it was to have repercussions right on into New Testament times. Towards the end of the life of Jesus, He instituted the “new” covenant in His blood (Luke 22:20). (The word ‘testament’ referred to the documents of the covenant made.)

The covenant that God made with Abraham was that through him all the families of the earth would be blessed (Genesis 12:3). This blessing was the salvation of fallen humankind, an event that had taken place as recorded in Genesis 3. Abraham’s covenant with God was continued through Isaac and Jacob. However, by the time the people of God fell into slavery in Egypt, they had almost all but forgotten their God. Exodus 2:24 records that God “heard their groaning, and God remembered His covenant with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob”. In other words, it was on the basis of the covenant made earlier between God and their forefathers, that He responded to the cries of His people.

While Abraham, Isaac and Jacob had personal encounters with God regarding their covenants with Him, the succeeding generations did not. Hence, the Laws that God gave Moses were to enable the children of Israel to know who the Lord, their God, was, what their responsibilities were and how they were to conduct themselves as people of the covenant.

For our purpose in this chapter, we want to look at what these “laws” are. From the Old Testament, the essence of these are found in the Ten Commandments. While many of the other so-called Laws of Moses might seem irrelevant in today’s context, it would help to see them as

detailed elaborations of these Ten Commandments. Hence, if we were to examine just these 10, then we would have a fair idea of what is expected of us as modern-day people of the covenant.

From the New Testament, we will consider mainly the teaching of Jesus, as found in the Sermon on the Mount. Several times in this sermon, we hear Jesus saying, “You have heard that it was said.” He was referring to the distortions of the Laws by the Jewish religious teachers of His time. At the same time, in correcting them, He was giving a blueprint as to how people of the new covenant should conduct themselves.

THE TEN COMMANDMENTS

The Purpose of the Commandments

God had redeemed the Israelites from the clutches of Pharaoh and in so doing had been faithful to the covenant He had made with Abraham (Genesis 15:12-15), where in a prophetic vision God revealed to him what would happen to his descendants. Life in the covenant with God was to be one of joyful fellowship with Him. The Laws were designed to further what God had already done in saving His people by creating them into a covenant community, one that would reflect His own nature. It was to be a community in which God could dwell and by which He could be magnified.

In the covenant that God established with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, He promised several things. Firstly, there was the establishment of a great people, or community, or nation (Genesis 12:2). It was through this people as descendants of Abraham that the other peoples of the earth would be blessed. Bearing in mind the promise of the Messiah that God had made in Genesis 3:15, it would be from this people that He would come. Secondly, there was the promise of blessings (Genesis 12:3) and one important blessing of this was to be free of curses (v.3b).

The Laws are not to be seen simply as codes by which the people were to keep their behaviour in check. Rather they were laws to enable the people to live up to their obligations under the covenant which God had

made with their forefathers, and which had been the basis for their coming into being as a nation, and their being rescued from slavery in Egypt.

The Laws would also distinguish them from the pagan nations around them in that the Israelites were to separate themselves from the other peoples with whom they would interact, by their unique identity with the Lord God, Jehovah. Hence, the Israelites were to be the “holy” (separate, set aside) community reflecting God’s nature, as a witness to the surrounding nations. They were the only people who had a covenant with God and hence the necessity for this distinction.

What Are the Ten Commandments?

Exodus 20:1-7 gives a list of the Commandments in detail. Since God gave them to Moses on two tablets, we can divide them (paraphrased) into two parts:

First Tablet

1. No other gods.
2. No image of God.
3. No dishonouring of God’s name.
4. No desecration of God’s day.
5. No dishonouring of God’s representatives (parents).

Second Tablet

1. No taking away of a neighbour’s life.
2. No taking away of his wife, his home, the dearest of his goods.
3. No taking away of his goods.
4. No taking away of his good name.
5. Not even coveting of his good or his goods.

The Worship of God

The first tablet focused on the worship of God and relationship with Him. This was to be on Him, Jehovah, and Him alone. There were to be no other gods (idols). Even His name was not to be used lightly or in vain. A day was to be set aside when all labour had to cease for the purpose

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of worship only. Because God was the Head of the family of Israel, worshipping Him also meant respect for the heads of families, the parents.

The Service of Neighbour

The second tablet focused on service to one's neighbour and relationship to him. This meant not taking his life (murder), his wife (adultery), his goods (stealing), his good name (false witness), nor even the desire for any of these (covet).

The First Tablet

In our worship of God and relationship with Him, the Ten Commandments challenge us to treasure the uniqueness of our Lord God, Jehovah.

Although as Christians today we are not easily swayed back into idolatry as the Israelites did in the past, we do have modern idols. A simple definition of an idol is that it is person or thing which becomes indispensable to the extent that it takes the place of God. It could be what an individual makes with his own abilities or it could be anything which is the product of another person's labour.

Following from the above meaning then, there are an abundance of modern "gods" — from the simple consumer items to the luxurious goods of our materialistic world. Money. Cars. Houses. Electronic gadgets.

However, the non-material can also become our idol, as in philosophies, and political ideologies.

Then, there is hero-worship. The *first* and *second commandments* therefore warn us against substituting any person or "thing" for God. He must have first place.

The turning away from the Lord to these idols does not come suddenly. It is a gradual process of erosion of our faith and relationship. Hence, the emphasis also on the need to take God's name seriously (the *third commandment*). The initial stages or signs of a deterioration in a relationship is when a person's name is used in jokes, curses and swearing. However, if we are conscious of the uniqueness and power of the Person who owns that Name, and we also love Him, it is less likely that the Name be taken lightly.

The same can be said for making promises. Using the name of God in order to give credence to our words, and then not keeping them, is also a violation of this commandment.

The *fourth commandment* is more than just crowning one day in the week (Sunday) for worship in our churches. The principle of the Sabbath also includes the understanding that all of our time belongs to God; our working days as well as our rest. We need to rest, as God did after six days of creating. At the same time, what we do during that rest is also important for it also is God's time. As Jesus showed, it is not a time of idleness but could be used to help others (Matthew 12:1-12). Also, if we consider this commandment in the first tablet as focusing on the worship of God, we can see that how we use our time, in fact all of our life, is worship (Romans 12:1,2).

The commandments were given also to provide order for God's community. In God's plan, this is where parents have a special place (the *fifth commandment*). The proper raising of children lays the groundwork for a stable, secure, orderly society. One key responsibility of parents is to teach them the Law (Deuteronomy 6:7) in order that they may know the God who covenanted with their forefathers to bless them (Deuteronomy 6:2,3). This foundation is to be strengthened and built upon by the children who, in return, honouring their parents. And so the cycle continues.

One only has to look at the current emphases by governments in both the West and East on traditional and family values to see that violating this commandment is to the detriment of their nations. Again, if we were to tag this commandment with the first tablet focusing on worship, we can see that exemplary family life is worship unto God.

The Second Tablet

While the first tablet focuses on the vertical foundations of a holy community, the second dwells on the horizontal structures that must be established. Hence, they are about how we relate to our neighbour. In order to be a covenant community distinct from others, their relationships within the community must be exemplary and reflect the holiness of their God.

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It begins with the aim of ensuring that our neighbour is physically secure. The *sixth commandment* therefore prohibits the taking of his life.

As an extension of respecting the family structure laid down in the first tablet, we also need to ensure the security of his marriage, as well as the stability of ours. Therefore, the *seventh commandment* forbids committing adultery. It needs to be seen in the social, and not just sexual, context, how infidelity and the breakdown of marriages erode the very fabric of society.

For the community to ensure orderliness, there must be security also of property. We must respect what belongs to others as theirs. Hence, the *eighth commandment*, not to steal. Just as in the first tablet our respect (worship) for God requires us not to take His name in vain, so too in our respect for our neighbour, we are commanded not to take away his good name. Hence, the *ninth commandment* against bearing false witness against our neighbour. When we tell lies against him, we damage not just his credibility and reputation, but also his whole person.

Finally, while four commandments in the second tablet refer to the expected conduct of God's people, the final one points to the heart of the problem. Before action, there is the desire, the ulterior motive, and the evil intent. "Covet" (the *tenth commandment*) carries the idea of something dishonourable and dishonest. This deals with the root of evil in relationships. If such sentiments were absent, it is unlikely we would commit such acts.

The Great Commandment

In the teaching of our Lord Jesus, the above laws were summed up in what we call the Great Commandment.

*You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and
with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind;
and, Love your neighbor as yourself.*

Luke 10:27; see also Deuteronomy 6:4,5

THE NEW TESTAMENT

The Love Motive

When we consider the conduct of the Christian from the perspective of the New Testament, this motive of love seems to be the common thread as well.

You have heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbour and hate your enemy.' But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that? And if you greet only your brothers, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that? Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

Matthew 5:43-48

In other words, the love, and the related actions flowing out of us who are children of God, are meant to reflect the love of our Heavenly Father. Jesus contrasted these with what the non-believers would do. In His teachings, this contrast was seen in His reference to two kingdoms.

TWO CONTRASTING KINGDOMS

We the children of God are also citizens of the kingdom of God. Jesus instructed his disciples to let their light so shine before the world so that people may see their good works and so glorify their Father in heaven. In other words, the kingdom of God is also the kingdom of light.

There is also the presence of another contrasting kingdom. The Devil seized dominion over the world from Adam and Eve, and for that reason Jesus called him the ruler of this world (John 12:31, 14:30, 16:11). In John 8:44, Jesus pointed out that the “father” in this other kingdom is the devil, who is the father of lies. The culture of this Devil-dominated kingdom, or world, is sin.

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Consequently, the actions that flow from this other kingdom reflect its head. In 1 Corinthians 6:9,10, the Apostle Paul identified those who belong to it as the sexually immoral, idolaters, adulterers, prostitutes, homosexual offenders, thieves, the greedy, drunkards, slanderers, and swindlers.

However, God rescued us from this kingdom of darkness in order that we might enter into His kingdom (Col 1:13,14).

In the New Testament, the standards of the kingdom of God can be found in a brief but comprehensive summary in the teachings of Jesus, which we often call the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7).

The Sermon on the Mount

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus referred to the laws of the Old Testament, as well as the embellishments which the Pharisees had added on. The Laws which Moses gave to the people of Israel were meant to formalise the covenant relationship between God and His people. Over the years, the formalities became more important than the relationship, something in which the religious leaders like the Pharisees had become experts at but which Jesus took issue with.

There was exposition and explanation of the law in the Sermon. However, Jesus went beyond the law. Remember, the Laws were given to order the life of God's people under the old covenant. This covenant, made with Abraham (Genesis 12:1-3, to fulfil the Messianic promise in Gen 3:15) was fulfilled in Jesus. Hence, at the end of His ministry, Jesus could say, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood." The new covenant brings a new dimension to living in it.

A quick reading of the Sermon brings one often to the phrase, "You have heard that it was said But I say to you." With these parenthetical statements, Jesus was teaching that his hearers and disciples could have learned certain principles from the Old Testament and from the Pharisees. He, however, had certain teachings that would explain more clearly what they had learned from the Jewish Scriptures, and correct whatever errors they had picked up from the Pharisees. At the same time, His expectations of their conduct in this new covenant was refreshing.

“The Sermon on the Mount is the most complete delineation anywhere in the New Testament of the Christian counter-culture. Here is a Christian value-system, ethical standard, religious devotion, and attitude to money, ambition, life style and network of relationships — all of which are totally at variance with those of the non-Christian world. And this Christian counter-culture is the life of the kingdom of God, a fully human life indeed but lived under the divine rule.” (Stott, *Christian Counter-Culture*, p. 19)

This was counter-culture vis-à-vis what was promoted by the then religious leaders. However, they were in fact the kind of culture that people of the new covenant were to follow.

OTHER AREAS OF CONDUCT

Jesus covered a wide area of Christian conduct, if not all, in the Sermon.

On Anger, Lust and Honest Speech

Here Jesus related His teaching to the sixth and seventh of the Ten Commandments. To be angry with our brother might not lead to murder. Yet in our Lord's teaching, before God it was tantamount to murder (Matthew 5:21-26). However, Jesus came to teach the need to love our neighbour as we love ourselves (as can be seen in the second part of the Great Commandment).

Similarly, Jesus equated a man lusting after a woman (and vice versa) as adultery (Matthew 5:27-30). Adultery was not just an act, but also a matter of the heart. The prescription from our Lord in this matter was very radical. Pluck off, cut off and throw away — those parts of our body that caused us to sin. The meaning is not literal but implies the removal from our lives of what might cause us to sin or become the causes of temptation.

Jesus also placed a high regard on marriage. In the Sermon, Jesus seemed to give room for divorce on only one ground and that is infidelity (Matthew 5:31,32).

With regards to the making of promises (vis-a-vis the third commandment), Jesus emphasised honesty in intention to be shown in

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one's speech (Matthew 5:33-37). A Christian must say what he means and mean what he says.

On Real Religion

Much of what Jesus taught in the Sermon was in opposition to Phariseeism. If there was one common feature in the latter, it was hypocrisy. As opposed to the outward show of the Pharisees when they gave alms, when they prayed and fasted, Jesus emphasised secrecy (Matthew 6:1-6; 16-18). These are to be practised in private, for they are directed toward God, rather than men, and God sees the heart, not just the actions. When these are done in secret, there is room for thoughtfulness in the action rather than just it being mechanical (Matthew 7:7-11).

Real religion finds security not in material things but in God (Matthew 6:19-34). Citizens of the kingdom have as King One who is also their Father (Matthew 6:9). He will provide for their needs when they place Him first in their lives. He must be their God, and not be replaced by mammon.

On Relationships

Jesus touched on two kinds of relationships — to one's enemies, and to one's brother.

With regards to the former, Jesus taught not only about non-retaliation (Matthew 5:38-42), but also actively loving one's enemies (Matthew 5:43-48).

There was a group of people Jesus identified as "false prophets" (Matthew 7:13-20), who deceptively claimed to be teachers of the truth. Their teaching led to destruction. Jesus warned His hearers to beware of such people. He also provided a test by which they could be identified (vv. 17-19). This involved looking at their "fruits", that is, by examining their character and how they lived (i.e. their conduct), by the content of their teaching, and by the effect of their teaching on their followers' character and conduct.

In the Christian's relationships with others in the faith, he was to be a brother rather than judge (Matthew 7:1-6).

Action, Not Just Knowledge

Jesus concluded the sermon by emphasising the need to act on these teachings, that is, they are to help the Christian to conduct his life, and not just purely for information (Matthew 7:21-27). Practising the teachings of the Sermon on the Mount would mean for the Christian a radical way of life; just as light is contrasted with darkness, so are the people of the kingdom of God contrasted with those of the other kingdom.

HOLY LIFE

The standard of Christian conduct in the Sermon is very high. It might even seem impossible to attain. This applies not just to the Sermon, but to the Ten Commandments as well. Right Christian conduct cannot be possible without a life that is right with God.

The Sermon is for Christians, just as the Ten Commandments are for the people of God. Kingdom conduct is for kingdom people, that is, those who have had a spiritual rebirth (John 3:3). Only those born again may find it possible to live out the kingdom lifestyle. This is because the born-again person has the presence of the Holy Spirit to empower such living (John 3:6, John 16:13, 1 Corinthians 3:16).

Another way to look at Christian conduct is to consider it from the perspective of righteousness. What kind of conduct is expected of the Christian? Right conduct.

However, righteousness in action must flow from a right standing with and before God. One must come to God in Christ in the new covenant, because it is of Him, and through Him, that one is in a right position before God. Subsequently, he can be right with himself, and with others, and also right in his attitudes and, consequently, in doing the right things.

Being in the right position is just the beginning, as this does not necessarily mean that there will be automatic deeds of righteousness shown in one's life. The motivation and the desire to do what is right may be there. However, the fruit of righteousness is what the Holy Spirit produces as the person responds to His work in his life. At the same time, the Christian can find out what the fruits of righteousness are and

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conform his life accordingly. As he does, the Holy Spirit changes his character into the likeness of Christ (2 Corinthians 3:18).

For God to reign, He must have control over the realm. Personalising the concept of the kingdom of God would mean that I must surrender my life to Jesus, and acknowledge that He is my King. He will then empower me by His Spirit to live up to the standards laid down in His Word.

QUESTIONS

1. What are the differences between the Old and New Covenants? What are the benefits of the New over the Old Covenant?
2. The Ten Commandments were written as prohibitions. Are they therefore negative or positive? Explain.
3. How would you apply each of the Ten Commandments in the context of Singapore society today?
4. Who is the “enemy” that we need to love? If we are to love our “enemy” why call him that at all?
5. What would you do when you find that the standards in the Ten Commandments and the Sermon on the Mount conflict with what you see in our society? In your church? In your family?

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9

Our Christian Worship

MAIN THOUGHTS

- ✦ Worship is our response of gratitude to God.
- ✦ Worship involves the entire person — his posture, hands and body movements and senses.
- ✦ The form of worship of The Methodist Church in Singapore follows guidelines laid down by *The United Methodist Hymnal* and *The Book of Discipline* of The Methodist Church in Singapore.
- ✦ Five elements of worship are used by Methodist churches in their worship services: preparation, praise, prayer, proclamation and promise.

INTRODUCTION

Christians come, Sunday after Sunday, gather in big congregations or small ones for what they call a worship service. To the public, this is the most visible act that Christians participate in — the act of worship. This chapter attempts to answer a few basic questions about worship — what it is, why Christians do it, and how one can worship.

WORSHIP

What is Worship?

Worship is a human response. It is a response to God's activity in the world — creation, nature and history — through Christ and His church, and in our daily lives. It is a show of gratitude for all that God has given us. It is one way we can thank our Creator God.

Worship is our response to God's call for a special appointed time with all of us, His family members. Removing all preoccupation, we open ourselves to enjoy God's presence (and allow Him to enjoy ours) during that space of time. So worship can be said to be a hospitality. We create a holy space in our lives for God. We celebrate the time we have together with songs, prayers and expressions of love for God and for one another.

Worship reflects how much God is worth to us. The word "worship" comes from the word "worth-ship". Our measure of God's worth is expressed in our willingness to spend quality time with Him as His family. We worship God as His family — together. There is a place for private worship but it cannot replace public or corporate worship.

Why Worship?

Worship the Lord your God, and serve Him only.

Matthew 4:10

We worship God because it is a command from Him. People tend to model themselves after what they worship. If we worship any other created thing which is limited and temporal, we cannot become who God intends for us to be — people who share His image, that is, His character and life. We become like the created thing which we worship — limited and temporal. St Augustine said, "You have made us for Yourself. Our hearts are restless until they find their rest in You."

We need God in order to be whole. To be fully alive, it is vital that we spend quality time with God and allow Him to be the centre of our attention so that He can begin to give us His life. Jesus said, "I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full." (John 10:10).

Chapter 9: Our Christian Worship

Ireneus, Bishop of Lyons, in the second century wrote, “The glory of God is human beings fully alive.”

The worship of God benefits us because of our innate need for Him. However, worship is not only for our own good. God wants to enjoy us. He wants to enfold us in His love and enjoy our undivided attention. Worship is our gift of love to God.

The Centre of Worship

It can be quite easy to lose our focus of worship in the midst of enthusiastic singing or clapping. There is a danger of shifting our focus to how much we enjoy the worship service or whether we feel God’s presence. Worship is not a theatrical production where the focus is on its entertainment value.

The central focus of worship is always God. He is the reason for us to gather together to meet and enjoy the time of worship. Whether we “feel it” or not, God has promised us that He will be there (Matt 18:20) when we meet in His name. How one feels does not really matter as long as one’s focus is on Him and on spending that time with Him.

THE WHOLE PERSON IN WORSHIP

Christians have been seen doing many actions during worship. They sit, stand and kneel. Sometimes they clap, dance, shout, lift their hands or even embrace one another. It is a puzzle to non-believers.

But this is how Christians communicate with God. These are our expressions of worship. As human beings, we communicate with our five senses. In worship, we communicate with and receive communication from God and one another through the senses as well. The different actions and aids pertaining to worship will be discussed in this section.

Postures

Standing affirms the dignity we have in Christ to be able to stand before God as His redeemed people. Kneeling expresses contrition, humility and submission. In old churches (until the eighteenth century), there

were no pews. People stood throughout the services. Only the old, the infirm and the bishop sat during the service. Sitting therefore has no liturgical significance historically but we can use it to symbolize our willingness to find rest in God.

HAND MOVEMENTS

Raising of the hands can indicate praise of God. Clapping of the hands can be a show of joy. Upraised palms with arms slightly raised (what has been called the *orans* position) show one's openness to God. Clasped hands express the intensity of one's desire.

In certain traditions, the sign of the cross is made by touching one's forehead, heart, and left and right shoulders. It is a physical, silent prayer in which one remembers one's baptism and recommits one's mind (forehead), one's heart, one's actions (arms) to God. Blessings given by God through the minister are communicated through the raised arm of the minister or even by the sign of the cross made over the people.

Body Movements

Dancing often expresses joy. Hugging (which is usually our substitute for the kiss of peace) shows our affection for one another. Handshakes spell "Welcome" and "Hello" for all. The kiss of peace, which traditionally indicates love, reconciliation and affection, is not often practised in our churches because, culturally, Asian Christians are more conservative. Bowing the head with the eyes closed has usually been the action associated with prayer. Though bowing the head is a show of reverence, closing the eyes is more for the practical purpose of cutting out distractions. The traditional prayer position has been to keep one's eyes open and one's hands in the *orans* position.

Sight

The gift of sight enhances our worship experience. Leaders in worship — pastors, choir members, worship leaders — wear distinctive clothes, signifying the dignity of the ordained or the leadership offices they hold

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in the church. Colours are used to create an atmosphere of worship or to convey certain messages. It has been a practice of our church to use liturgical colours.

- Purple is used to symbolize royalty and our preparation for the coming of the King (either through anticipation or through penitence).
- White is the colour of purity and celebrative joy.
- Green is the colour of growth, revelation, nurture and hope.
- Red is the colour of fire and blood, the fire of the Holy Spirit and, according to the second-century Christian writer Tertullian, “the blood of the martyrs which is the seed of the church”.

Symbols

Symbols affect our emotions as they speak beyond the level of our minds. The cross is the most familiar symbol for Christians. The empty cross speaks of the love of God revealed in Christ and of the risen Christ. A crucifix, which is a cross with the body of Christ on it, speaks profoundly of the intensity of that love and sacrifice portrayed at the Crucifixion. Other symbols include the dove — a symbol of the Holy Spirit; light — God’s leading; the anchor — God’s unshakeable faithfulness or our hope grounded in Him; and the equilateral triangle — the Trinity. Though some people find symbols distracting, many find them extremely helpful in prayer and worship. It is important not to discount something which means a lot to another simply because one does not respond positively to it. God made everyone different.

Inside the Church

The cross represents what is central and what is proclaimed in the Christian faith — Christ. In nearly every church the cross is placed in the central position in the sanctuary. This is usually in the centre of the altar area.

The communion table is also in the centre of the altar area because Holy Communion is one of the chief means of grace in the Methodist church. The baptismal font normally stands at the back of the church, by the entrance, indicating that we are received into the church through

baptism into Christ's life. It may also stand near the communion table, underlining for all the importance of the two sacraments of the church — Baptism and the Holy Communion.

The lectern and the pulpit are usually on either side of the altar area — one is where the Bible is read and the other, where God's word is proclaimed. The pulpit Bible, which often sits open on the communion table, should be on the left at the lectern because it is from there that the Bible is read.

Flowers are placed to beautify the sanctuary area and enhance our worship experience. They should be placed at specially assigned places — NOT on the communion table (which is only for communion elements) nor on the pulpit (where it obscures and distracts the preacher). They are preferably placed at the altar or by the side of the pulpit and lectern.

Other Senses

Most activities in the worship services are communicated to us through the senses of hearing, seeing and feeling. Our sense of taste comes into use during communion services when we consume the bread and grape juice.

Most Methodist churches do not use incense for worship. In Jewish worship and in the worship of older churches, for example, in Orthodox churches, Roman Catholic churches and Anglican churches, incense is used. This symbolizes prayers rising up to heaven as offerings of smell to God. We, His people, are called to be a fragrant offering to Him.

WORSHIP IN THE METHODIST CHURCH

There are no enshrined forms of worship in the Methodist church though it follows a general guideline — an outline of sequences in worship in which the essential elements of worship are included. This outline has been used by Christians, including John Wesley, for a long time. Wesley's

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Sunday Service, which he edited for Methodists in America, displays these characteristics.

The main resources that we use in Singapore are The United Methodist Hymnal and The United Methodist Book of Worship. These two books provide us with a balanced worship diet where the key elements of worship are present in an orderly and proportionate way. This is essential for the health of the body of Christ, the Church.

Much has been said in recent years about set or liturgical worship and free form worship (sometimes referred to in our churches as “prayer and praise”). In the narrow sense, true free-form worship seldom exists because most services termed “free form” do have some set patterns. The only difference is the proportion of time given to certain worship elements and the pace and style of the worship service. Both forms — liturgical and prayer and praise — can be true worship offered to God though the forms differ.

The form of worship which one chooses should be the one which speaks to and best expresses one’s personality and character. For example, an introvert may prefer the more liturgical worship and an extrovert, the prayer and praise form. What is important is that we worship God in spirit and in truth. Both forms are practised in the Methodist churches in Singapore.

SEQUENCE AND ELEMENTS IN WORSHIP

Isaiah 6:1-8 describes a typical worship experience. In it, one can find five elements of worship which are used by churches in their worship services — preparation, praise, prayer, proclamation and promise.

Preparation

Preparation for Sunday worship actually begins on Saturday night, especially if one attends the early morning service. Such worshippers should ensure that they sleep early on Saturday night.

Try to be in the church at least five minutes before the service starts. As one enters the church, a spirit of expectation and reverence should prevail. Then sit quietly and allow the strains of the organ or taped music to wash away body tension, as you focus your attention on God. For some, looking at the cross at the altar area helps them to focus on God. For others, it can be taking deep, long breaths and closing their eyes to cut out all distractions.

Preparation is “centring in” on God, which is best achieved if one is not rushed, tired or sleepy. Chatting with friends, catching up on church work, playing with a friend’s child from the next pew or rushing in to find a seat because we arrive late does not help us to centre our attention on God.

Praise

The choir, in the choral introit, leads God’s people into a time of praise. The worship leader, in the call to worship, verbalizes this by inviting everyone to centre his mind and heart on God and to praise Him. The hymn of praise or a series of praise choruses follows this. A joyous mood filled with jubilation, celebration, praise and adoration pervades. In prayer and praise services, the music may even be loud, fast and upbeat. Clapping and dancing are also not uncommon in these services where tambourines and drums may be utilized to contribute to the offering of praise to God.

Prayer

Prayer follows praise as we enter the presence of God in joy and experience the truth about ourselves. We sense our sinfulness and our unworthiness in His presence. In this spirit, a slow and soft prayer song is sung or played. We express our willingness to open our lives before God for Him to examine, forgive and heal. The song may remind us of God’s constant love for us.

Following this is a period of silence for worshippers to bring their individual prayers of confession to God. Sometimes, the leader lists out the failings of the church in the prayer of confession. Sins can

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be corporate as well as individual. How we conduct ourselves as a church affects people and God. We need forgiveness for our failure to live as Christ's church. We also need forgiveness from one another for letting one another down by our indifference, negligence and spiteful actions.

The assurance of forgiveness, based on God's promise (1 John 1:9) is declared by the pastor or worship leader. Standing on the promise of God that He will be gracious, the leader leads the people into prayers of intercession (sometimes called the pastoral prayer because the pastor is often the leader) for the world, the nation, the church and specific needs of individuals. The prayer period closes with the whole family of God praying the Lord's Prayer together. The choir may close this time of prayer with the prayer response.

Proclamation

Forgiven people, on the way to attaining wholeness, need to hear the word of God and be nurtured by it. The word of God comes to us through the Bible reading, the anthem or choral offering, the sermon and the creed. Bible reading differs from church to church in Singapore. Some churches follow a sermon series on a specific theme or topic and have their readings tied to the theme. A few Methodist churches follow the lectionary, a series of pre-set yearly readings from four sources — the Psalms, the Old Testament, the Epistles and the Gospels.

Standing for the reading of the Gospel for the day is a sign of our special respect for the part of the Bible which gives us a record of our Lord's life and teachings. After the reading, a hymn of preparation is usually sung before the sermon to prepare the congregation for an exposition of the Bible. The choral offering or anthem is also sung, by the church choir or a soloist, during this part of the service. Following this is the reading of either the Nicene Creed or the Apostles' Creed by the congregation. (The Nicene Creed is the most ancient and more universally accepted Christian affirmation of faith.) All these — Bible reading, sermon, anthem and creed — proclaim the faith of our forebears which we now accept as our own.

Promise

What follows the hearing of God's word is obedience. At this point of the service, we make a promise to obey and respond to God's invitation or call. We also hear His promise to be with us always as we walk in His light. We commit ourselves to God again in the prayer of dedication after hearing His call through the proclamation.

Community concerns (sometimes referred to blandly as church notices or announcements) have a place in worship too. The activities of the church are part and parcel of its commitment to the Lord. The lifting up of its activities during this part of the service is, in fact, the offering of its life and work to God in response to the proclamation.

The offering (sometimes called the collection) is the symbolic giving back to God of everything we have from Him (Romans 12:1-2). We give a portion of what we have with this understanding in mind. The Doxology states this in a very clear way. During the Doxology, the congregation stands and faces the symbol of Christ in the church. In some churches, it is the cross at the altar area. In others, it is a huge cross hanging on the wall facing the congregation.

The hymn of dedication captures the spirit of commitment and surrender of the people. Finally, the benediction or blessing from God sends His people out in the power of His Spirit. The choir highlights this when it sings the choral response. In case the people do not get the message to go out and be the Church wherever they are, the organ postlude, usually loud and lively, pushes them out to serve God in the world.

QUESTIONS

1. What is worship?
2. Imagine yourself with a friend whom you have just brought to church. This friend has no idea of how Christians worship. Try to explain to this friend the different actions, symbols and sequence of worship.
3. Which part of the worship service speaks most to you? What speaks to you most about the greatness of God or the love of God in the architecture and layout of your church? Which physical movement or posture do you find most helpful for you in worship?

Further Reading

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ADDITIONAL READING

Styles of Worship of The Methodist Church in Singapore

INTRODUCTION

A story was told of a pastor who was leading a Traditional Service. One Sunday, as he began the service, he invited the congregation to stand while he would speak to them and they would respond to him. But as they stood, he had trouble with the microphone. He spoke into it but there was no amplification. He wrangled and twisted the wires while muttering into it. And while he was muttering, the microphone amplification suddenly returned, and the last of his sentences was clearly amplified to the congregation, “Why aren’t you working? WHAT’S WRONG WITH YOU?” The congregation promptly responded, “AND ALSO WITH YOU!”

The liturgy phrases, “The Lord be with you!” and the response “And also with you!” are often used in Methodist churches, and tell us a truth — that God is alive today. He leads us, He guides us, He responds to us. And He expects us to respond positively to any work He chooses to do through the Holy Spirit today.

RENEWAL MOVEMENTS IN WORSHIP

Through history, God has often brought a renewal movement in worship that restores something of significance that helps us respond positively to God in worship. Two such renewal movements in history, very simply put, are:

- Sixteenth to eighteenth century, hymns and classical music renaissance
- Twentieth century, contemporary songs and Charismatic renewal

Styles of Worship of The Methodist Church in Singapore

Just what did these movements restore to the worship life of God's church? Through the sixteenth to eighteenth century, the hymn revival brought majesty back to corporate singing. Rich skill and techniques were developed for sacred songs. And over the centuries, liturgies were developed with much depth to reflect the many occasions in church life.

Through the twentieth century Charismatic worship renewal, the element of intimacy in worshipping God was restored. There was a reintroduction of personal response, emotional love and joy, and posturing one's body through raising of hands and bowing to help us respond to God in worship. Of course, being a more contemporary renewal, the Charismatic worship renewal brought songs which reflect contemporary culture and language better.

In truth, God wants us to have all the above elements when approaching Him in worship. We should give the best in technique and well thought-out liturgies, as well as respond passionately, emotionally, and identify with a language and style familiar to our culture.

In the Bible, Jesus tells us, (Matthew 13:52) "Therefore every teacher of the law who has been instructed about the kingdom of heaven is like the owner of a house who brings out of his storeroom new treasures as well as old."

The church, which is the guardian of God's truth, should learn to identify these new and old treasures of worship, and learn to use them in its worship to God.

WORSHIP TRADITIONS IN THE METHODIST CHURCH

The Traditional Service and Charismatic Service

Both these renewals have led either directly or indirectly to two worship traditions found in Methodist churches: the Traditional Service, and the Charismatic Service. They both have a biblical approach toward approaching God in worship.

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The Traditional and Charismatic service orders may vary in detail from congregation to congregation, but the above represents a general and common outline most congregations use. Both forms have a flow that conforms to a biblical approach into the inner courts of God.

The presence of God can be experienced in both styles of worship. Through both the Traditional and Charismatic forms of worship, people are able to give their lives to Jesus to serve Him, exercise spiritual gifts of healing, prophecy and intercession. God gives gifts, whether in the sixteenth to eighteenth or the twentieth centuries. These gifts are meant for the church to use and be blessed, and neither tradition is meant to have a monopoly on the movement of God.

Worship Approaches	Traditional Services	Charismatic Services
Preparation to gear people to get ready. (Biblical image: laver for washing)	1. Welcome 2. Call to Worship	1. Opening words
Entering into God's presence. (Biblical image: outer courts)	3. Hymns of Praise 4. Responsive Reading 5. <i>Gloria Patri</i>	2. Praise segment — declarative, often fast songs
Entering deeper into God's presence. (Biblical image: inner courts, holy of holies)	6. Hymn of Prayer 7. Silent of Prayer 8. Pastoral Prayer	3. Worship segment — intimacy, drawing near, often slower songs
Preparation for Word	9. Hymn of Preparation 10. Scripture Reading	4. Song, or intensive prayer for the preaching
Participation and sending forth	11. Hymn of Dedication 12. Benediction	5. Altar call, ministry time 6. Closing dedication prayer

The “Blended” or “Contemporary” Service

There is a third worship form that is developing in Methodist churches, and that is a “Blended” worship form, which is called the “Contemporary” worship form by some churches. This is really an effort to bring the best of Traditional and Charismatic styles into one service. It takes great skill to blend these forms well, but it is born out of a vision to unite different

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congregations and to help individual worshippers broaden their worship life. Such “Blended” worship styles are often used at major events which bring different congregations together, and to remind them that although they have different preferences, they are united under a common vision and common Lordship of Jesus. Such unity in worship is powerful!

The Bible tells us in Psalm 133:

*How good and pleasant it is
when brothers live together in unity!*

*It is like precious oil poured on the head,
running down on the beard,*

*running down on Aaron’s beard,
down upon the collar of his robes.*

*It is as if the dew of Hermon
were falling on Mount Zion.*

*For there the LORD bestows his blessing
even life forevermore.*

The Methodist Church will see more of this “Life-Blessing” of God when the church lives and gathers in unity, including in its worship life.

Contributions To Worship

There are several ways you can contribute to help God’s people draw closer to God in worship in the Methodist Church. Do consider these ways if God leads you:

- There is a need for people who are gifted in Traditional music or Contemporary music to develop the worship life of local churches. Pastors sometimes may not have the necessary musical gifts to do this. If you have the basic music gifts and can be available for training, by being a worship or music director, you can really help a

congregation meet with God in worship, and be challenged to serve Him with all their hearts.

- The best way of using the best traits of Traditional and Charismatic styles, is to write new worship songs which have the depth and richness of the hymns, together with the intimacy, music and language of contemporary songs. If you are a songwriter, why not avail yourself for God to use you? New worship songs can be a powerful means of helping God's people find a fresh experience with God.
- Blending traditional and charismatic styles is technically difficult. But the promise of groups of different people united by a common vision is a powerful and exciting one! Many people are good at only one style. If you have the technical expertise, and the burden for a deeper and greater unity in the church, why not develop yourself further to see if you can help the church blend these styles in worship well?
- Ultimately, God is moving today, and He calls His church to follow Him. May we follow hard after God, appropriating the new and old treasures He has given us to draw near, to know Him better, and live our lives for Him!

10

Holy Communion

MAIN THOUGHTS

- ✦ Christians gather at Holy Communion to celebrate Jesus' presence with them as the crucified and risen Lord.
- ✦ In many of the Methodist churches in Singapore, anyone who has a need or desire for Christ can take Holy Communion. In some (primarily Chinese Annual Conference and Emmanuel Tamil Annual Conference Churches) the person must be baptized before he or she can partake.
- ✦ Holy Communion brings with it a promise of Christ's coming again and a reminder of God's love for us through the sacrifice of His Son.
- ✦ The bread represents Christ's broken body and the grape juice (wine) represents His blood shed for us.

INTRODUCTION

Methodists recognize and observe two sacraments: Baptism and Holy Communion. Baptism was discussed in Chapter 1.

WHAT IS HOLY COMMUNION?

The Presence

Jesus is here. This is the greatest promise given to Christians whenever they gather for Holy Communion. They do not gather just to remember “poor” Jesus who died. Christians gather to celebrate His presence with them as the crucified and risen Lord.

Many of us have been taught that Holy Communion is only a memorial meal. In view of this teaching, we go to the communion table looking solemn and sad. We also leave after receiving the elements of bread and wine looking equally sad. This teaching is inadequate. It is neither a full biblical nor a Methodist (Wesleyan) understanding.

When the Bible referred to Holy Communion as being done in remembrance of Christ, the word used was the Greek *anamnesis*. This word means to make effective in the present an event in the past. It does not simply mean to remember or repeat a past event. Christ died for us, once and for all — a unique event in history. Holy Communion brings before our spiritual eyes Christ’s love, Christ’s work and Christ’s risen presence. Christ is present with us as we celebrate Holy Communion as He instructed us.

The Wesley brothers wrote several hymns on Holy Communion. These Eucharistic hymns were published along with excerpts from Dean Brevint’s commentary on Holy Communion. By including Brevint’s commentary, the brothers indicated their support for his position regarding Holy Communion:

I want and seek my Saviour Himself and haste to this sacrament for John hasted to His sepulchre — because I hope to find Him there. I come then to God’s altar, with a full persuasion that these words — this is my body — promise me more than a figure; that this holy banquet is not a bare memorial only but may actually convey as many blessings to me, as it brings curses on the profane receiver. When thou sayest, “Go, take and eat this bread which I have blessed,” I will doubt no more

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of being fed with the bread of life, than if I were eating thy very flesh....

These are the words of the Wesleys:

Draw near, ye blood-besprinkled race,
and take what God vouchsafes to give;
the outward sign of inward grace,
ordain'd by Christ Himself, receive:
the sign transmits the signified,
the grace is by the means applied.
Meal of Joy

As Methodists, we believe that Christ is truly present in a unique way whenever we celebrate Holy Communion. And if Jesus is truly present whenever we celebrate Holy Communion, then the meal is a meal of joy.

It is no wonder that the Methodist movement was both an evangelical revival within the Anglican Church of the eighteenth century and a sacramental revival. The early Methodists thronged the placid Anglican churches of that day every time Holy Communion was celebrated.

The older name for Holy Communion was Eucharist. It literally means thanksgiving. Communion is a time of celebration and joy. Christians of the early church have actually been known to celebrate Holy Communion using the horizontal slab of a freshly killed martyr's coffin as a table. It is a celebration of ultimate victory and hope in the midst of pain, suffering and death.

Meal of Meeting and of Healing

If Jesus is present whenever Holy Communion is celebrated, we will want to meet Him as often as possible. John Wesley called Holy Communion a "converting ordinance". God uses the sacrament as a means of displaying grace to touch a penitent sinner, a tired burnt-out Christian, a suffering struggler or a faithful disciple. The Wesleys called upon all to

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receive Communion “as frequently as possible”. John Wesley himself did so several times in a week.

Jesus is present at Holy Communion to heal, to touch and to forgive. In the words of *The United Methodist Hymnal*, we receive “all other benefits of His passion” when we receive Holy Communion. One of the benefits of His passion is healing.

...and by His wounds we are healed.

Isaiah 53:5

For the Wesleys, Communion is the chief means of grace for growing towards Christian perfection:

The prayer, the fast, the word conveys,
When mix'd with faith, Thy life to me;
In all the channels of Thy grace,
I still have fellowship with Thee:
*But chiefly here my soul is fed
With fullness of immortal bread.*

*Communion closer far I feel,
And deeper drink the atoning blood;
The joy is more unspeakable,
And yields me larger draughts of God....*

(Hymns on the Lord's Supper 54/4-5. Italics added.)

Using the Wesleys' therapeutic model of salvation, formation toward Christian perfection can be said to be a long-term spiritual therapy toward healing and wholeness defined as “holiness in heart and life”.

The altar call at Holy Communion can also be a call to receive Christ. It is possible for one to receive Jesus as Lord and Saviour at the communion table. Unlike Roman Catholics, we do not localise Christ's presence to the elements of bread and wine. Nor do we believe that

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there is any physical change in the elements. We believe that Christ comes to us through the elements. They are the contact points of our meeting with Him. How Christ comes among us during Holy Communion is not as important as the affirmation that He does come to us. John Wesley said that the sacraments are not “dry breasts”.

PARTAKING OF THE BREAD AND WINE

Who is Invited?

These are the words of invitation from Methodist hymnals:

Ye that do truly and earnestly repent of your sins,
and are in love and charity with your neighbours,
and intend to live a new life,
following the commandments of God,
and walking from henceforth in His holy ways:

Draw near with faith,...

Christ our Lord invites to His table all who love Him,
who earnestly repent of their sin
and seek to live in peace with one another.

The only qualifications stated in the invitation are: one's need and desire. Charles Wesley put it this way:

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

Do not begin to make excuse; ah! Do not you His grace refuse;
your worldly cares and pleasures leave, and take what Jesus hath to give.

Come and partake the gospel feast, be saved from sin, in Jesus rest; O taste the goodness of our God, and eat His flesh and drink His blood.

See Him set forth before your eyes; behold the bleeding sacrifice; His offered love make haste to embrace, and freely now be saved by grace.

Ye who believe His record true shall sup with Him and He with you; come to the feast, be saved from sin, for Jesus waits to take you in.

Communion speaks very loudly to all about the gracious generosity of God. Indeed, grace is one of the strongest themes of the Wesleys' theology of Communion.

Anyone who has a need or desire for Christ can come. Many Methodist churches in Singapore practise this free communion. Others hold an open communion position, that is, they allow any baptized person from any denomination to come and receive Holy Communion.

Holy Communion is a converting ordinance. Christ touches us in a way that is beyond our imagination — in eating and drinking, in partaking of His love. As regards whether children can take Holy Communion, John Wesley can be used as an example. Wesley had his first communion at the age of 7. Occasionally, he gave Holy Communion to children who had some understanding of the meal's significance. So there are precedents in our Methodist tradition in giving Holy Communion to children.

Communion and the Presence of Others

When we come to the communion table, we are confronted with the presence of other people. Some are friends and some are strangers. Some may even be “enemies”. The table is a place where we should cast away our prejudices and enmities. Much has been written in the Bible about setting things right with our neighbours before taking Holy Communion.

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Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to your brother; then come and offer your gift.

Matthew 5:23-24

Therefore, whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of sinning against the body and blood of the Lord. A man ought to examine himself before he eats of the bread and drinks of the cup. For anyone who eats and drinks without recognizing the body of the Lord eats and drinks judgment on himself.

1 Corinthians 11:27-29

There are sins of commission and sins of omission. When we have bread — spiritual or physical bread — at our table while another person does not have, the problem should not be ignored. We have to work to ensure that the other person should also have what he needs.

John Wesley had this to say about sharing:

The more you lay out on your own apparel, the less you have left to clothe the naked, to feed the hungry, to lodge the strangers, to relieve those that are sick and in prison, and to lessen the numberless afflictions to which we are exposed in this vale of tears.... Every shilling which you save from your own apparel, you may expend in clothing the naked, and relieving the various necessities of the poor, whom ye “have always with you”. Therefore, every shilling which you needlessly spend on your apparel is, in effect, stolen from God and the poor!

When you are laying out that money in costly apparel which you could have otherwise spared for the poor, you thereby deprive them of what God, the proprietor of all, had lodged in

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your hands for their use. If so, what you put upon yourself, you are, in effect tearing from the back of the naked; as the costly and delicate food which you eat, you are snatching from the mouth of the hungry.

Basil the Great, Bishop of Caesarea in the fourth century, added to it:

The bread in your cupboard belongs to the hungry (person), the coat hanging unused in your closet belongs to the (person) who needs it; the shoes rotting in your closet belong to the (person) who has no shoes; the money which you put in the bank belongs to the poor. You do wrong to everyone you could help but fail to help.

The Family Meal

Holy Communion is a family meal which reminds us that we are not alone. We have one another. The family of Christ spans continents and cuts through barriers of time. It is a very big family. At Holy Communion, we are reminded again of this link with the “communion of saints”, the “cloud of witnesses” (Hebrews 12:1) which surrounds us.

Therefore with angels and archangels
and all the company of heaven,
we laud and magnify Thy glorious name,
evermore praising Thee saying:
Holy, holy, holy....

The United Methodist Hymnal

A Pregnant Promise

“Christ has died, Christ is risen, Christ will come again.”

We affirm this during the service. We affirm that, one day, Christ will come again to bring about the coming of a new order — a new heaven and a new earth, a new Eden for all of God’s creation.

Chapter 10: Holy Communion

This hope of a new dawn keeps us going as Christ's people. Today we eat and drink in His presence at His table. This is but a foretaste of the heavenly banquet which Christ prepares for us when He comes in final victory. Communion therefore is a pregnant promise. It gives us hope for the future.

Becoming Bread and Wine

As the physical body of Jesus Christ was broken and poured out for all, so the Church, Christ's mystical body, must be broken and poured out for the world that He loves. "Love one another," Jesus says, "as I have loved you." Let us become His bread and His wine for the world that He loves.

COMMON QUESTIONS ABOUT COMMUNION

Who Can Celebrate Holy Communion?

Only an ordained elder of the church can do so. This is to ensure that everything is done with decency and order. It minimises abuse and wrong teaching. An ordained deacon or a lay person might be given the authority to celebrate it in the absence of an ordained elder. This person will have to be given a letter of dispensation from the Bishop authorising him / her to celebrate Holy Communion.

Why is Communion Only Celebrated Once a Month In Our Church?

The reasons are historical and pragmatic. Methodism came to us from England via America and India, where ordained ministers were short in supply and Holy Communion could not be celebrated weekly. The frequency of Holy Communion services was reduced to once a month by the time Methodism came to Singapore. Practical reasons given by pastors and local church leaders include the following:

- Traffic jams at the church car parks when the Holy Communion services "run overtime" into the next service
- The logistics of the communion preparation

- The length of the Holy Communion services leaves little time for sermon delivery.

There is no theological reason why Holy Communion should be celebrated once a month. The early Christians celebrated it whenever they met and the Wesleys had it frequently.

Why is Grape Juice Used Instead of Wine?

We do not want to stumble potential and recovering alcoholics. It is a clear statement of Christian social concern.

Can One Receive Communion If One Feels Sinful?

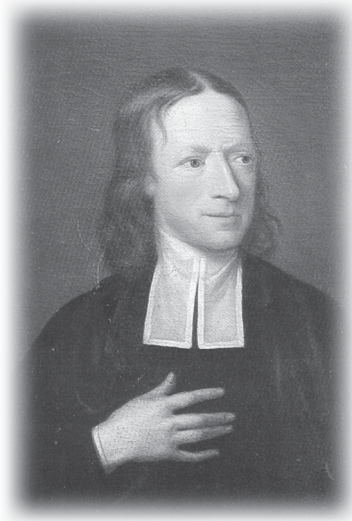
Communion is for sinners. What is required is a desire for change (repentance) and a desire for the Lord. Look at the words of invitation again. Focus on the love of God for you — His grace, His ability to forgive, heal and restore you. Come!

QUESTIONS

1. “Holy Communion is more than a memorial meal.” What else does Holy Communion do or say to the church and to you according to this chapter?
2. What discovery have you made about Holy Communion in this chapter which you did not know before?
3. How does that affect the way you live as a Christian?

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Christian Body

PART

four

11

The Story Of The Church

MAIN THOUGHTS

- ✦ The story of the church began with the Great Commission of our Lord Jesus Christ.
- ✦ The early church had to struggle against the Roman Empire and the early Christians suffered greatly for their faith.
- ✦ Christianity spread into Africa and Asia even in the period of the Apostles.
- ✦ During the Middle Ages, the Christian church fell into a spiritual slump.
- ✦ The Reformation was a time of great spiritual renewal which gave rise to Protestantism.
- ✦ The Great Evangelical Awakening in Europe in the 18th century produced the modern missionary movement which eventually brought missionaries to the shores of Singapore.

INTRODUCTION

Jesus Christ is universally recognised as being the centre of the human story. All world events are dated from the time of the historical Jesus. For example, we say that the Great Wall of China was constructed in

214 B.C. (that is 214 years before Christ) or Singapore was founded by Sir Stamford Raffles in 1819 A.D. (1,819 years *anno domini*, that is, in the year of the Lord). No other person who has ever lived has had as much influence as Jesus Christ. The great influence of Jesus on humankind is very much the result of His church, which has carried on His work openly and visibly for the past 21 centuries of human history.

BEGINNINGS

The Great Commission

Jesus Christ is not only the redeemer of the world but also the founder of the Christian church (Matthew 16:16-18). This church founded by Christ is not merely a spiritual association of men and women but also a public society consisting of members and leaders who can be known and identified (Hebrews 13:17). This church or Christian society has to be public and visible so that those who desire will be able to know whom to go to and learn of salvation (Acts 2:42-47).

*Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them
in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,
and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you.
And surely I am with you always,
to the very end of the age.*

Matthew 28:19-20

Jesus Christ, after His resurrection, commanded His first followers to convert, baptise and instruct all the nations of the world. The Christian church, therefore, rightly carries out her teaching office in all nations by faithfully following the Great Commission given to her by the risen Christ.

The church is of God and will be preserved to the end of time, for the conduct of worship and the due administration of God's Word and Sacraments, the maintenance of Christian

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fellowship and discipline, the edification of believers, and the conversion of the world.

UMC Baptismal Covenant III

Resurrection and Pentecost

Jesus began His ministry when He gathered about Him a little band of followers whose lives were changed as they lived with Him and caught His spirit. He called them to be with Him, to speak for Him and work on His behalf (Mark 3:13-15). The time came, however, when He was taken from them through betrayal and death by crucifixion. The followers of Jesus fell into despair. However, this misery was dramatically changed to one of victory when they realised that their master was no longer dead but alive and was present with them forevermore.

On the fiftieth day after Jesus' resurrection came Pentecost, which means fiftieth. On this day, the followers of Jesus experienced His Spirit in an overflowing manner, causing them to establish publicly the first Christian church in Jerusalem. This was where the story of the Christian church actually began. Although it is a story that is more than 2,000 years old, it will continue uninterrupted until the return of Jesus Christ in power and glory.

It is a simple fact of history that it was the Resurrection belief that brought the church into being; and when the church swept out from Jerusalem to the conquest of the earth, it was the Resurrection message that was the driving power...If Christ had not truly risen, the church which bears His Name would have perished long ago; for fierce attacks, social, political, intellectual, have been launched against it down the years. Many a time, indeed, it has seemed doomed and dead, and the gravediggers have been busy at its tomb; but always it has broken the grave and rolled the stone away. Only the fact of the Resurrection of Jesus can explain the church of the Living God.

James Steward

Struggle and Triumph

In the first centuries after Christ the civil powers of the day opposed Christianity strongly. In 64 A.D., the Roman emperor Nero tortured and put many Christians to death. Another Roman emperor, Domitian, prohibited Christianity in 80 A.D. and for more than 200 years persecutions were common and tens of thousands of Christians became martyrs. The Christian church, however, multiplied in the midst of this persecution. In 150 A.D. Justin Martyr, a great leader of the church, wrote, "There is no people, neither among the barbarians, nor the Greeks, nor any known tribe, where prayers and thanksgiving are not offered to God in the name of Christ crucified."

In fact the New Testament implies that the Gospel had extended beyond the boundaries of the Roman Empire. For example Acts 2:9-11 refers to the presence of non Romans such as "Parthians, Medes and Elamites... and Arabs" who also heard the apostles "declaring the wonders of God in our own tongues!" (v 11) on the day of Pentecost. Later in Acts 8:26-40 we read of the conversion of the Eunuch from Ethiopia. The church in Ethiopia trace their beginnings to this recorded event. Evidently the Gospel did not only spread in a Northern and Western direction towards Asia Minor and Rome with the Apostle Paul. It also spread South towards Ethiopia in Africa and East towards Mesopotamia and Persia, all within the lifetime of the apostles of Christ. With the spread of the Gospel towards the direction of Mesopotamia and Persia we learn of Christian missionary penetration into Arabia and India in those early days as well. In fact, one of the oldest and strongest traditions in church history is that Thomas the apostle carried the Gospel to India, where he was said to have been martyred in Madras in east India, making him rightfully "The Apostle to Asia". By the end of the first century the church which Christ founded had spread to most of the known nations and so had truly become universal (or catholic), in spite of the persecutions carried out by the mighty Roman Empire and others.

It is interesting to note that the world ruled by the Roman Empire was a world where religious pluralism was a reality. One could choose to

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worship any of the many gods that different peoples within the empire worshipped. One could even worship several gods at the same time. This great religious tolerance had only one condition. No matter which of the gods one chose to pray to, one must still pray to the Roman emperor as though he were a god.

To the early Christian church, Christ was above the many gods of the nations and Christ was greater than the emperor. Proclaiming that Christ was the one true God then was tantamount to proclaiming that the emperor was not god and that the gods of the nations were not true. For this reason, the Roman emperors tried very hard to crush the church of Jesus Christ for 300 years. Preaching the supremacy and uniqueness of Christ then was not politically correct.

Triumph Over The Roman Empire

In the struggle between the Roman Empire and the Christian church, the church not only triumphed but also outlasted the empire. The Roman Empire failed in destroying Christianity. Finally, in 311 A.D., Emperor Constantine issued the Edict of Milan which proclaimed toleration for Christians. He claimed to have seen, just before a battle, a vision of the cross in the sky. Thereafter, he placed the cross above the Roman standards and forbade the persecution of Christians. By the time Emperor Constantine died in 337 A.D. Christianity was firmly and widely established in the Roman Empire. In 395 A.D. the majority position of Christians in the Roman state was recognised when Christianity became the only official state religion.

The church was now to be faced with dangers that were different from persecution — the danger of worldliness, misuse of power, lowering of moral standards ... (However) Christians in this western part of the world had the opportunity, which no Christians had had before them, to influence a whole civilisation and to turn it in a Christian direction.

John Foster

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In the midst of this triumph of the Christian church over the Roman Empire, the forces of evil retaliated. Christ had predicted that false prophets would come. Some of the false teachings which the church had to struggle against at this time were Arianism (318 A.D.) which denied that Jesus Christ is God, Macedonianism (361 A.D.) which denied that the Holy Spirit is God, and Pelagianism (400 A.D.) which denied that humanity is fallen because of sin and in need of the divine grace of salvation. There were also the Nestorians (428 A.D.) who taught that there were two persons in Christ.

Holy and learned men, known today as the church fathers, wrote against the heresies threatening the church. This protected the purity of the faith and, at the same time, aided in spreading the scriptural doctrines about Jesus Christ. The disturbances to the faith had the good effect of requiring the church to define clearly her teachings which can be traced back to the very apostles of Jesus Christ (1 Cor 15:1-3, Jude 3)

THE DARK AGES

The long period between the eventual break-up of the Roman Empire and the beginning of the modern world is called the Middle Ages. Chronologically this period of time is between 600 and 1400 A.D. The Middle Ages for Western Europe are often referred to as the Dark Ages. This is the period in history when the church of Jesus Christ fell into a spiritual slump resulting in spiritual darkness for the world at large.

Interestingly during the first half of the Middle Ages, a Christian Bishop from Persia by the name of Alopen brought the Gospel into China. A monument in the Chinese Capital of Chang An was set up in 781 A.D. commemorating the permission of the Chinese Emperor given for him to propagate his message within the realm. Christianity flourished in China and was known as the Syrian Illustrious Religion with many converts and monasteries being built. However in 845 A.D., a pro-Daoist Emperor persecuted both Buddhists and Christians 'lest they confuse the customs of China'. By 900 A.D. nothing much was heard of Christianity in China anymore.

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When Christians were earlier persecuted by the Roman Empire, only those who truly committed themselves to Christ joined the church. However, when the church later received favour from the empire, many joined it because it had now become the acceptable and fashionable thing to do. For them, there was no great commitment to God and Christ. It was a time of the weakening of the church. This spread of nominal Christianity brought about the beginning of the Dark Ages in Western Europe. It was a time when one could be baptised and accepted into church membership without deep Christian commitment.

The Christian Empire

In time, that situation in Europe gave rise to the concept of the Christian Society (*Corpus Christianum*) and later to the Christian Empire (the Holy Roman Empire established in 962 A.D. by Otto I). For most people at that time, being a citizen of a Christian Society automatically meant being a Christian. Nominal Christianity sunk to a new low where one could be a Christian merely on the basis of his citizenship.

This was also the time of rising prominence of the Church of Rome over the other churches. When the Roman Empire began to crumble and fall, the bishop of Rome became the centre of power, replacing the emperor. Great power ultimately corrupted the bishops of Rome, who were by then known as popes or fathers. The pope soon became a prince of the world with territory and an army under his control. With such examples given by the leaders of the church, ordinary people had a low standard of life.

This was a time of decline for the church at large. Many church leaders were ignorant men and the most important offices in the church were frequently bought by those who had the most money. Some of those who held office in church did not even have Christian convictions themselves and lived immoral lives.

The Dark Ages was also a time of medieval feudalism. It was a time of religious intolerance. Physical force was used against those who did not agree with the teachings of the Roman church. It was a time when the church had near absolute power, as evidenced by the Spanish Inquisition.

The Crusades

This inner sufferings of the church were matched by her outward sufferings. Barbarian tribes from the borders of the Roman Empire attacked first the declining empire and then the new emerging countries which embraced Christianity in Western Europe. These countries were later also attacked by Normans and Danes.

Meanwhile, in the east of the Roman Empire, a new threat was also emerging. The armies of Islam had conquered much of the Roman Empire in the east and large numbers of nominal Christians embraced the religion of the conquerors. Between 1096 and 1272, many groups of people from the so-called Christian world of the west banded together under the direction of the church to wage war against the Muslim invaders. These expeditions were known as the Crusades and they ended mostly in horrible failure.

The Great Split

Structurally, this period saw the division of the church into two major branches. In 1054 the single Catholic church split into the Eastern Orthodox church in the east and the Roman Catholic church under the pope in the west.

This great schism formally ruptured communion between the churches under the pope at Rome, Leo IX, and those under the patriarch at Constantinople, Michael Cerularius. The east and the west grew further apart economically, politically and culturally. But when the split came, doctrinal issues were given as the cause.

One of these was the matter of papal claims. The pope was claiming absolute power in the east as well as the west. Greek churches in the east were willing to accord honour to the pope but not universal supremacy.

The other doctrinal issue revolved around the Nicene Creed. When churches in the west inserted a phrase into the creed to read “The Holy Spirit... who proceeds from the Father *and the Son*”, the Greeks felt that only another ecumenical council could make changes to the Nicene Creed, which was established earlier by the First Ecumenical Council in 325 A.D.

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This shameful division of the Christian church reflected a time of great spiritual darkness upon God's people throughout.

Light In The Dark Ages

The Dark Ages also had its moments and areas of brightness. It was a time when monasticism spread vibrantly outwards. Monasticism originated in Egypt in the third century. Later, St Benedict (480-547 A.D.) founded the Benedictine Order and wrote his famous rule. It was the Benedictine monasteries which preserved learning and evangelised the barbarian invaders. During the next 500 years, when nations were conquered and scattered throughout Europe, monks established monasteries among invading tribesmen, and education and the Gospel were brought to the people.

If it had not been for these missionary Monastics all of Europe would have fallen to utter chaos and the ancient Greek and Roman cultures would have been entirely lost. The church, through her missionary monks, christianised the new nations of Europe and helped to preserve civilisation.

The time of the barbarian invasions was a dangerous time for the church as it came close to being destroyed many times. But God always proved to be faithful. Truly the promise of Jesus has been vindicated by church history: "on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell will not overcome it." (Matthew 16:18)

The Middle Ages in Europe was also a time of great Christian thinkers, the most well-known of whom was St Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274). His ideas and thinking continue to influence learned Christians even today. Other great men of God from this period of history include St Francis of Assisi (1181–1226) and St Dominic Guzman (1170–1221). Outside the mainstream church, John Wycliffe (1329–1384) in England and John Huss (1373–1415) in Bohemia were teaching and preaching, and making the Bible more easily available and understood by the common people.

What many may not be aware of is that between the 10th to 13th century, Christianity was spreading among many of the Central Asian

tribal peoples to the West and North of China. It seemed possible at that time that the Mongols would embrace Christianity as a whole people. However after the death of Kublai Khan (1216–1294) the choice had gone against Christianity; with Mongols in the West embracing Islam and to the East — Buddhism.

THE REFORMATION

The Protestant Reformation began in Germany in the sixteenth century. The world was changing, cities were growing and trade and commerce were developing. Unfortunately, the old Roman church did not adjust itself to the new world order.

Martin Luther

Early in the sixteenth century, the pope needed money to complete St Peter's Cathedral in Rome. His agents sold indulgences which were said to be able to shorten the time one needed to spend in Purgatory after death. When one of the pope's agents began selling these indulgences in Wittenberg, Germany, Martin Luther, an earnest and devout monk who had found peace with God through simple faith in Jesus Christ, nailed on the church door 95 declarations against this and other abuses of the Medieval church.

Luther's action started the fierce fight against the pope, indulgences, image worship, the Mass and the Roman priesthood. The pope ordered Luther to retract his criticism or be put out of the church. Luther publicly burned the order of the pope. His action set off a chain of events. Several German princes, for political as well as religious reasons, took sides with Luther and other reformers. At the Diet of Worms (1521) the emperor Charles V and the Catholic leaders insisted that Luther must recant. He refused and Protestantism was founded. Luther was not the only reformer. Ulrich Zwingli of Switzerland, John Calvin of Geneva and John Knox of Scotland were other leaders of the Reformation.

The verb *protestari* from which the adjective Protestant is derived means not simply "to protest" but also "to witness or confess". Protestants

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believed they were confessing the primitive faith of the early church, which had been obscured by the later innovations of the medieval church.

Some of the important truths recovered at the Reformation were:

- the sufficiency of the Bible for faith and practice,
- the priesthood of all believers,
- salvation through grace and faith in Christ alone,
- the assurance of salvation, and
- the Lord's Supper as a memorial of the death of Christ rather than as a mass.

Renewal Of The Church

One of the results of the work of Luther and other reformers associated with him was a renewal of life within the Roman Catholic church itself. This was a movement called the Counter Reformation. Men who owed their allegiance to Rome began to realise that there were many things wrong in the church. However, they did not wish to break away, as the Protestants had done.

The Roman Catholics called the Council of Trent (1542-68) which clarified doctrines and reformed administrative abuses. The Society of Jesus (Jesuits), founded in 1540 by Ignatius of Loyola (1491-1556), helped to renew the church. With well-trained Jesuit evangelists and organisers in the vanguard, a great portion of southern Germany and Eastern Europe was recaptured for the Church of Rome in the second half of the sixteenth century. Even more impressive was the growth of the Roman Catholic church overseas in the second half of the seventeenth century in America, Africa and Asia. This was the time of the Jesuits St Francis Xavier (1506-52) in Southeast Asia, Robert De Nobili (1557-1656) in India and Matteo Ricci (1552-1610) in China.

In fact by the early 17th century, Jesuit, Dominican and Franciscan religious order were evangelising the educated classes in China. The first native Chinese Bishop was consecrated in 1674 and there was slow but steady growth among the population in the midst of occasional persecution and criticism. In 1784 a Korean by the name of Lee Sung-Hun was baptised in Beijing. He was the first officially baptised christian

in Korean history. He founded the church in Korea because he was convinced that the Christian faith alone could regenerate his nation. Jesuit and Dominican religious orders also carried out missionary work in Japan in the late 16th and early 17th century. In 1592 there were about 70 Japanese brothers. In 1601 the first two Japanese priests were ordained. The Dojuku (native catechists) played a major role in evangelising their own people. However in 1614, an edict was passed declaring Christianity an evil religion endangering Japan. Christian activities were prohibited. Many Japanese Christians kept their faith and suffered martyrdom.

Meanwhile in Europe, the Roman church after having survived the Protestant advance in the mid-sixteenth century, grew stronger. In truth, the Protestant Reformation benefited both the Protestant and Roman Catholic churches.

The Modern Advance Of The Church

Before the great Missionary Movement of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, there was first the Great Evangelical Awakening of the eighteenth century.

While the Great Evangelical Awakening specifically refers to a series of revivals in the American colonies between 1725 and 1760, it must not be forgotten that the Wesleyan revival was going on in Britain at about the same time. In fact, George Whitefield, after 1740, preached effectively on both sides of the Atlantic, helping to plant Evangelical Christianity, with its great emphasis on repentance from sin and a personal conversion to Christ, firmly on American shores.

However, prior to the Great Evangelical Awakening of the eighteenth century, Continental Europe experienced the Pietist revival under Philip Jacob Spener (1635-1705). Pietism produced the Moravian movement in Germany which influenced the beginnings of the Wesleyan revival.

The Great Evangelical Awakening

Beginning with Continental Europe, spiritual revivals started in Germany and spread from there to Scandinavia and Switzerland in the early

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eighteenth century. These revivals were seen as a movement known as Pietism. Cutting across social classes and creeds, Pietists such as Count Ludwig von Zinzendorf (1700-60) emphasised New Testament preaching and simplicity and the necessity of a personal experience of Christ. They were also deeply concerned for missions and evangelism as well as the Christian social ministry. The Moravian church, founded under Zinzendorf, became one of the most intensely missionary-minded churches in modern history.

This same pattern of evangelical revivals was found in Britain and North America in the eighteenth century. John Wesley, after his “heart warming” experience in 1738 in London, started a new wave of Gospel preaching. Turning first to England’s largely unevangelised population, Wesley soon won hundreds of thousands of converts. Many of them kindled the evangelical zeal of the Church of England whilst others joined various evangelical denominations. But a large number formed societies which eventually became the Methodist church after his death in 1791.

The influence of the Wesleyan movement affected lives not only in England but all over the British Isles, the European continent and America. It produced a popular style of direct evangelistic preaching and emphasised fervent hymn singing, both of which became traditions in Protestantism. It also stimulated far-reaching social changes in Britain and America — particularly the abolition of slavery and prison reforms.

In Britain, evangelicals tried to bring about peaceful change and reform in a multitude of ways: the fervour of the Clapham sect to abolish slavery in the British Empire; Lord Shaftesbury’s parliamentary factory legislation and mining reform; W.E. Gladstone’s political reforms passing through Parliament in the period 1868-94. In America slavery was finally abolished legally after the Civil War (1801–65).

The Modern Missionary Movement

The great revival of the eighteenth century, especially the Wesleyan renewal in Britain, made possible one of the most significant developments in Christian history — the modern missionary movement. Out of the

evangelical and Pietist awakenings came new efforts to carry the Gospel of Christ to other lands. The repercussions of these eighteenth-century evangelical revivals were eventually felt all over the world.

However, it is unfortunate that for most of the time the modern missionary movement seemed to be unequally yoked with western colonial imperialism especially in Asia. For example, the Opium Wars of 1839 and 1842 and the war with Britain and France in 1856-60 did not only serve to open China's door to the west. They also in a morally dubious manner, brought about a new era of Christian missionary opportunities there. Asian Christians today have the responsibility to live their Christian life in such a manner that they will give the lie to the impression that becoming a Christian have resulted in the loss of their God-given Asian identity.

THE METHODIST CHURCH IN SINGAPORE

The Methodists have always been missionary-minded from the beginning. In 1819 the Missionary Society of the Methodist Episcopal Church came into being, formed largely by men who had been missionary preachers. In 1847, the mission to China was under way and in 1856, the mission to India. The stage was set for the Malay archipelago, lying between the two sub-continents of India and China, to become a field of challenge to Methodist missionary endeavour.

William F. Oldham was appointed by the South India Conference on 25 November 1884 as missionary to Singapore. James M. Thoburn and Oldham arrived in Singapore on 8 February 1885 after conducting a mission in Rangoon. On the next day in the Town Hall, the first Methodist English evangelistic meeting was conducted with Thoburn preaching the first sermon, which was on the text of Zechariah 4:6, "*Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit, says the Lord Almighty.*"

In 1888 the work of the Methodists in the Malay archipelago became formally separated from that of the South India Conference. The work of the Methodist Mission in our part of the world developed from its early days along language lines — English, Tamil, Chinese and Malay.

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These developed into the three Annual conferences of the Methodist Church in Singapore today.

Besides church planting, the Methodist mission became known also for her mission schools and missionary work, as Methodist missions also started to appear in the Philippines, Sarawak, Java, Sumatra and Peninsular Malaya.

The years of the World Wars proved to be disruptive but did not succeed in destroying the Methodist Church in Singapore, which eventually became an autonomous church. In 1968, the General Conference of the United Methodist Church meeting in Dallas granted an enabling act for the constitution of the affiliated autonomous Methodist Church in Malaysia and Singapore. The Methodist Church in Malaysia was constituted on 4 December 1976 and the Methodist Church in Singapore was constituted on 8 December 1976.

*Within the Christian church — One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic —
the Methodist Church holds and cherishes a true place,
having been raised up by God to spread scriptural
holiness throughout the world.*

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12

John Wesley

MAIN THOUGHTS

- ✦ John Wesley was the founder of Methodism.
- ✦ Wesley's experience of being "strangely warmed" at a small group meeting at Aldersgate Street changed his ministry completely.
- ✦ In his lifetime, Wesley organized Methodism and, by the time of his death, Methodism had spread far beyond the borders of the United Kingdom.
- ✦ Wesleyan theology teaches Conditional Eternal Security, that is, as long as we continue to trust in Jesus Christ we are eternally secure and saved.

INTRODUCTION

The founder of Methodism — that is probably the best way to describe John Wesley. He was a truly gifted and remarkable person, yet not without weaknesses, the chief of which was his neglect of his marriage. But his contributions to the spread of Christianity far outweighed his personal deficiencies. And some historians credit the Wesleyan revival with saving England from the level of bloody revolution that France experienced.

THE YOUNG WESLEY

His Parents

John's father, Samuel Wesley, was the son and grandson of Puritan clergy (pastors). Samuel Wesley, an able scholar, was rector of Epworth and (later) Wroot parishes. Although a man of courage and faith he was often in debt. He was also a difficult husband.

Suzanna Wesley was the daughter of a Dissenting minister. Unlike her husband Samuel, she refused to be part of the Church of England. A woman of real and deep faith, she conducted her own religious meetings. She was a good housewife and competent mother, educating all her daughters, and was very widely read herself. She observed strict discipline for the children, regarding the conquering of their wills "a matter of salvation".

Due to differences in political views, Samuel and Suzanna experienced times of separation and reconciliation. One of these periods of reconciliation resulted in John Wesley's birth.

Childhood

John Wesley was born in 1703, the fifteenth of 19 children (only 10 survived, three boys and seven girls). When he was 6 years old, some of his father's irate and boorish parishioners set fire to their home. John escaped a fiery death by being rescued at the last moment. With the whole family safe, his parents' thanksgiving led to Suzanna's conviction that God had something special planned for John's life. She referred to him as "a brand plucked from the burning".

When he was eleven, John was sent to Charter House to study as a foundation scholar (free scholarship). Charter House was also a sanatorium and John saw many people die there. This could be the time when he first acquired his morbid fear of dying.

Oxford

In 1720, Wesley entered Christ College, the best Oxford society. He was an excellent student, reading widely in many languages. He graduated in

1724 and applied for ordination. He was ordained deacon in 1725 and priest in 1728. He then left Oxford to assist his father at Epworth.

His brother Charles came to Oxford in 1726 and began the Holy Club, a study group. Because of their discipline they were derisively dubbed Methodists. John returned to Oxford as a tutor and took over leadership of the Holy Club. The club's regimen included sacraments, prayer and worship, Bible study, prison ministry and other forms of social concerns.

STRANGELY WARMED

Georgia

In 1735 James Oglethorpe of the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel challenged John and Charles to go to the colony of Georgia in North America to minister. Challenged by the opportunity to preach to the American Indians (whom they called noble savages), both agreed.

During the sea voyage their ship met with a violent storm. During the storm John, who still had a deep fear of dying, was terrified. It was then that he saw a group of Moravian Christians worshipping despite the elements. They showed no fear of death. John Wesley was impressed. In Georgia, John moved even closer to the Moravians.

But his ministry there was to prove disastrous. Soon after, Charles returned to England. John was disillusioned by the American Indians and ministered mainly to the white settlers. But his austere ways resulted in many complaints. The crunch came when he refused a lady who was a former romantic interest, Holy Communion. Her husband sued John and won the case. Wesley left for England, disgraced and disillusioned.

Aldersgate

Back in England, John met Peter Bohler, a Moravian preacher. Despite John's own inner struggles with the assurance of salvation, Bohler encouraged John to "preach faith until you have it and then because you have it you will preach it".

Meanwhile Charles had a spiritual experience which turned his life around. Three days later, John Wesley also had his life-changing experience. On 24 May 1738 John attended a small group (society) meeting at Aldersgate Street. During that meeting, when Martin Luther's Preface to the Epistle to the Romans was read, John Wesley felt his heart "strangely warmed". That experience turned his life and his entire ministry around. From then on, he pursued his mission of bringing the good news to others with renewed fervour.

The Aldersgate experience is remembered by Methodists as the event that changed the life of John Wesley. It was at that point in time that he received his call from God to travel far and wide to preach the Gospel.

Beyond Aldersgate

John had discovered a new way of preaching after his "strangely warmed" experience at Aldersgate and nothing could stop him. There was much opposition to his preaching. Many churches and pulpits were closed to him.

Because of this restriction by churches, Wesley, following a suggestion by George Whitefield that he should try "open air" preaching, preached in public places like markets and town squares. Though repulsed by his new settings initially, Wesley was soon astonished at the response of the people. Crowds of up to thirty thousands would come and hear him preach. Most of them were the poor whom the established churches could not reach. John Wesley had brought the Gospel to the working class.

THE WORLD IS MY PARISH

Wesley the Evangelist

John Wesley determined that he would not be restricted by church barriers. He took the Gospel to as many parts of the country as he could. His most well-known statement, "I look on all the world as my parish", sums up his attitude in preaching the Gospel of Christ.

He preached almost anywhere — the marketplace, the town square, on hills, in fields, in gardens, in prisons and even on the tombstone of his father's grave. In his lifetime, John Wesley travelled 250,000 miles (400,000 km), preached more than 40,000 times and wrote 200 books. He had never been known to disappoint a congregation. He went about mostly on horseback.

Wesley Organises Methodism

John Wesley also pioneered the small group movement. Soon after he began his renewed ministry, Wesley realized that the more important aspect of evangelism came after a person's conversion, in the form of follow-up and care for the convert's spiritual life. To this end, he formed what was then called societies.

These society meetings brought people together to share, study, worship and pray. Wesley also formed bands, classes and pastoral care groups to meet the needs of different people in the Methodist movement. These small groups helped many to grow in Christian maturity. The society meetings were also the cornerstone of the movement. Leaders were appointed and attendance was recorded. These meetings also became the backbone of the Methodist financial system. Through collections the purchase of their now famous chapel at Bristol was made possible.

A significant development within the Methodist societies was the use of lay preachers. This was actually the idea of Wesley's mother Suzanna, who insisted that he try it. Today the involvement of lay people in ministry is a characteristic and strength of the Methodist Church in Singapore.

The Methodists also engaged in social ministries. They organised schools for the children of poor miners, homes for the poor, free medical clinics, co-operatives for the underprivileged and even loans for struggling businesses. All of this contributed to John Wesley's ideal of recovering primitive (or original) Christianity and spreading "scriptural holiness" throughout the land.

Wesley's Death

John Wesley died on 1 February 1791 at the age of 87. At the time of his death, Methodism had spread throughout the United Kingdom and beyond to the American colonies. His last words were, “The best of all is, God is with us.”

WESLEYAN THEOLOGY

Predestination and Security

Although John Wesley emerged from the Protestant Reformation his theological views were not Calvinistic. In Calvinistic Reformed theology the view on predestination de-emphasizes the aspects of free will and choice on our part in regard to having faith in God. It speaks about God's irresistible grace on whom He chooses to save and its accomplishment without our exercise of choice.

Wesleyan theology emphasizes our enabling through God's prevenient (that which goes before) grace to make a choice for God and thus receive salvation in Jesus Christ. Because of this choice that we have, Wesleyan theology does not support the once-saved-always-saved teaching (known as Unconditional Eternal Security). We can still choose to reject God and fall away even after we have been saved.

Instead, Wesleyan theology teaches Conditional Eternal Security, that is as long as we continue to trust in Jesus Christ we are eternally secure and saved but only “as long as”. If we reject Christ at any point in time after we are saved, we are no longer eternally secure.

John Wesley believed that as Christians, we would still sin but also that all could experience salvation from sin. This salvation requires a definite experience of God's grace — love expelling sin and living in God inwardly and outwardly righteous.

This is not a teaching about sinless perfection. It is a challenge to Christians to strive for spiritual maturity up to the point of “loving God with heart, soul, mind and strength”. John Wesley believed that we should experience a growing victory over sin and he saw Christian

perfection as an experience after initial salvation and as God's provision for us.

Assurance of Salvation

So how can we know we are saved? John Wesley described the assurance of being saved as 'an inward impression of the soul'.

*The Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit
that we are God's children.*

Romans 8:16

This is the witness of the spirit and it is confirmed by a good conscience and a biblically-based life.

John Wesley described the witness of the Spirit as 'the main doctrine of Methodism' and 'the foundation of Christianity'. It was so important to Wesley that he maintained that Methodists should "understand, explain and define this doctrine because it is one great part of the testimony which God has given them to bear to all mankind'.

The witness of the Spirit is the Methodist teaching on assurance of salvation, available to all Christians through the grace of God.

CONCLUSION

John Wesley's contribution to the history of Christianity can be summarized in four areas.

- A revitalized church.
- Powerful preaching and effective evangelism.
- The rediscovery of the biblical blueprint of church organization — small groups.
- Theologically, the emphasis on free will, assurance of salvation and the process of sanctification or holiness.

QUESTIONS

1. How do you understand the “heart warming” experience of John Wesley?
2. How would you respond to Wesley’s recognition of the importance of evangelism and follow-up for the convert’s spiritual life?
3. How is the involvement of lay ministry and lay preachers a strength of the Methodist church?
4. Respond to John Wesley’s understanding of Christian perfection as an experience after initial salvation and as God’s provision for us.

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13

The Structure of The Methodist Church In Singapore

MAIN THOUGHTS:

- ✦ The Methodist Church In Singapore adopts the connectional system of church structure.
- ✦ The highest decision-making body of The Methodist Church In Singapore is the General Conference, followed by three Annual Conferences organized along language lines.
- ✦ Local churches are linked to their respective Annual Conferences through local conferences.
- ✦ The affairs of the church in between local conferences are administered by the Local Church Executive Committee (LCEC).
- ✦ As a member of the church, you have a responsibility to support your church by attending the worship services regularly, praying for your church, volunteering your service and giving to your church.

INTRODUCTION

A church, like any organization, has a structure. A good church structure should facilitate growth and development. It should also have an internal check-and-balance system that regulates its ministry. Adjusting the

elements of its structure to meet challenges posed by a changing world is also an important characteristic of a dynamic and sound structure.

The structure inherited by The Methodist Church In Singapore is broadly patterned after The United Methodist Church. However, the Annual Conferences of The Methodist Church In Singapore have the unique feature of being organized along language lines.

SYSTEMS OF CHURCH STRUCTURE

The Congregational System

The congregational system is adopted by churches of the Baptist, Presbyterian, Brethren and Pentecostal denominations. This system gives greater autonomy to the local congregations than the connectional system. The link between churches of the same denomination is very loose and decentralized. The congregational system allows the local church more freedom in deciding her own policies and emphases without being bound by central control. One consequence of this is that each church calls for and employs a pastor of its choice.

The Connectional System

In the connectional system, which is adopted by the Methodist, Anglican and Lutheran churches, the link between local congregations belonging to the same denomination is stronger than that of the congregational system. There is usually an Episcopal head who oversees the spiritual affairs of the denomination. Pastors in the connectional structure are appointed to churches by a central body. In the case of The Methodist Church In Singapore, it is the president of the Annual Conference who makes the pastoral appointments in consultation with members of the Board of Appointment.

A Comparison of the Systems

Both structures have their strengths and weaknesses. One outstanding advantage of the congregational structure is that it allows the local church

freedom to employ a pastor of its choice. This is beneficial to the church if the pastor is effective. In such a case, the church can retain the pastor for a long period of time without the interruption and adjustment which a constant change of pastors may bring about.

The appointive system of the connectional church ensures that good pastors are rotated and not hoarded by larger and richer congregations which may have the means to grant special benefits to attract and retain good pastors. Disruptions exist but it seems a fairer system.

The connectional structure is also in a stronger position to rally support for common projects and ministries. However, the congregational structure, which gives more autonomy to the local congregations, tends to respond faster to changing needs and demands without bureaucratic hindrances.

CONFERENCES OF THE METHODIST CHURCH

The General Conference

The highest decision-making body of The Methodist Church In Singapore is the General Conference. It meets once every four years. At the General Conference, important decisions affecting the Methodist church are made and common stands on issues are adopted. It is at the General Conference that the bishop and some other key leaders of the church are elected to serve a four-year term. The bishop, who is elected from among travelling elders with at least 10 years of membership in full connection with his Annual Conference, may serve a maximum of three four-year terms. While the bishop is the Episcopal head of the church, he is not allowed to speak on behalf of the church unless guided by the General Conference to do so.

The Annual Conference

The next level in the organisational chart of The Methodist Church In Singapore is the Annual Conference which meets annually.

There are three Annual Conferences organised along language lines:

PART FOUR Christian Body

- The Tamil-speaking Emmanuel Tamil Annual Conference
- The Chinese-speaking Chinese Annual Conference
- The English-speaking Trinity Annual Conference.

Each Annual Conference is headed by a president. The president is elected quadrennially. Each Annual Conference may decide whether to elect a vice-president from among the laity to assist the president. The vice-president is elected every two years.

District superintendents are appointed to help the president attend to matters relating to the pastors and churches in the various districts of each Annual Conference. They also chair local conferences.

Every church in the Annual Conference sends delegates to the Annual Conference sessions. Though the membership sizes may vary, each church is given a maximum of five delegates depending on membership size.

A significant component of the Conference's revenue comes from a system of financing called the conference commitment. This is usually calculated based on the number of members in each church. For TRAC the conference commitment goes into paying the salaries of pastors and other full-time workers. It also pays for Conference programmes and activities organized by the various boards.

The Annual Conferences were originally organized along language lines to reflect the different target audiences each Conference was supposed to work with. However, there has been much overlapping and duplication over the years. The Chinese and the Emmanuel Tamil Annual Conferences have English-speaking congregations. The Trinity Annual Conference has services for both Chinese-speaking and Tamil-speaking worshippers.

Local Conferences

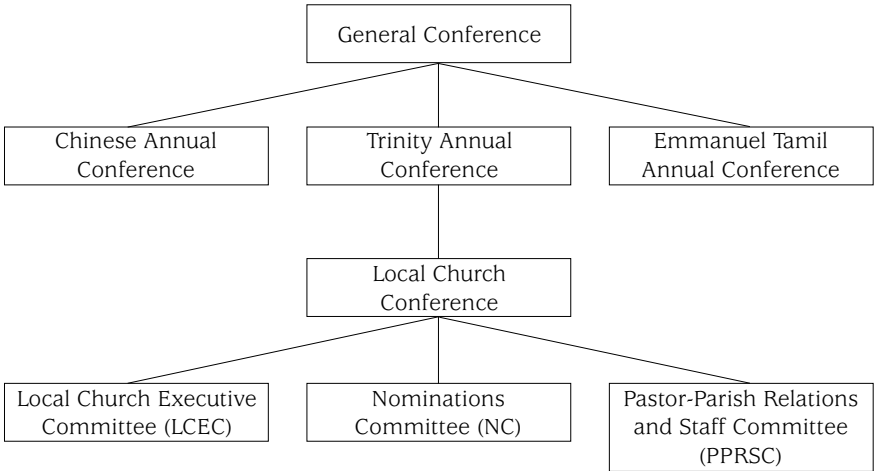
Local churches are linked to the Annual Conference through the local conferences which usually meet twice a year. Meetings at this level are usually presided by the district superintendent. At these meetings, officers of the local churches are elected and the budget for the new year is adopted.

Chapter 13: The Structure of The Methodist Church In Singapore

In between the local conferences, the affairs of the church are administered by the Local Church Executive Committee (LCEC). Other committees such as the Worship & Music and Finance, together with organizations like the Boys' Brigade, Girls' Brigade, Church School and the Women's Society for Christian Service (WSCS) help to fulfil the wide-ranging ministry of the local church.

Pastors are appointed to churches annually. The Pastor-Parish Relations and Staff Committee (PPRSC) of the local church plays an important role in assisting pastors in their work and by giving them feedback to improve their ministry. When there is a need for a change of pastor, the PPRSC usually acts on behalf of the church to request for a change. A pastor may also make a personal request for a change of appointment. The local churches take care of the salaries of staff employed by them. The salaries of pastors are paid by the Annual Conference.

SKELETAL STRUCTURE OF THE METHODIST CHURCH IN SINGAPORE



PASTORS

The Pastoral Ministry

Ordained pastors are people who have responded to the call of pastoral ministry. Theirs is a call to the Ministry of Word and Sacraments, besides providing pastoral leadership and care.

To be a pastor, one is required to undergo a two-step ordination process. A candidate begins work as a member-on-trial (MOT). After two years, the candidate may be ordained as a deacon, subject to the clearance of the Board on the Ministry and the Ministerial Session. A deacon is still a member-on-trial, though now he may be addressed as “Reverend”.

The final stage of ordination takes place at least two years after the candidate has been ordained a deacon. The candidate will have to be interviewed and cleared by both the Board on the Ministry and the Ministerial Session to be elected an elder. A person ordained as an elder is subject to the Ministerial Session which votes on his character every year. In The Methodist Church In Singapore, an ordained pastor accepts the itinerant system of appointment and goes wherever the President appoints.

Your Place in the Church

The church is only as strong as the people who make up its membership. If it is your desire and prayer to see your church grow stronger, win more souls for Christ and change society with the teachings of God’s kingdom, you should do these four things:

- Attend worship services regularly.
- Pray for your church.
- Volunteer your service.
- Give cheerfully and generously to support the work of the church.

This commitment constitutes the four-fold pledge which every member makes at the service of confirmation and reception into membership.

Chapter 13: The Structure of The Methodist Church In Singapore

Paul in his letters to the Christians in Corinth, Ephesus and Rome reminds us that we have different roles to play in the ministry and life of the church. It is required of every Christian to offer his time and talent, service and gifts to support the church.

CONCLUSION

We will conclude by looking at two passages, one taken from the ‘Baptismal Covenant’ and the other from Paul’s letter to the Ephesians. These passages should keep us focused on what a church should be.

The Church is of God,
and will be preserved to the end of time,
for the conduct of worship
and the due administration of God’s Word and Sacraments,
the maintenance of Christian fellowship and discipline,
the edification of believers,
and the conversion of the world.
All, of every age and station,
stand in need of the means of grace which it alone supplies.

“The Baptismal Covenant III”, The United Methodist Hymnal

*It was He who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets,
some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers,
to prepare God’s people for works of service, so that the body of
Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and
in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature,
attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.*

Ephesians 4:11-13

QUESTIONS

1. Compare the congregational and connectional systems. List the advantages and disadvantages of each system.
2. The Methodist Church In Singapore is organized along language lines. Is there a better way of organizing the church? What would you do to help bring about a change to the system?
3. The Annual Conferences have largely depended upon a system of conference commitment to take care of the financial needs. Suggest some other ways in which funds may be raised to support the work of The Methodist Church In Singapore.
4. Find out the names of the various heads of committees and organizations in your own church. Ask them to tell you a little about what they are doing and how you may participate in some of their programmes.

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14

The Mission Of The Church

MAIN THOUGHTS

- ✦ Our God is a missionary God and our faith has a missions mandate.
- ✦ The missions of the church comprises both the evangelistic dimension and the social outreach components of our faith.
- ✦ To be faithful to our missions mandate, we need to cultivate a deeper love for God and be generous in sharing Christian love through proclamation and praxis.

INTRODUCTION

Our God is a missionary God. Throughout the Bible, we read about God's love for His people – responding to their cries, reaching out to them, expressing His interest in their temporal and spiritual well-being, and revealing His redemptive plan for humankind. If Christians are concerned about missions, as they should be, then the primary reason for this concern is because they want to follow after the heart of their missionary God.

But what exactly is involved when we talk about missions? A popular understanding is that missions is evangelism, and the difference between the two is that evangelism is done within the boundaries of a country where the church is located, whereas missions refers to

cross-cultural evangelism in another country. This understanding, while helpful to some extent, has its limitation. Firstly, missions is broader than evangelism and we must not restrict our understanding of missions to evangelism. Secondly, we do not have to travel overseas to do cross-cultural evangelism. When a church is made up of mainly middle-class members, reaching out with the Gospel of Christ to the poorer sector of the population within the boundaries of the same country is also a way of doing cross-cultural evangelism.

A more balanced and therefore a better view of missions is one that is holistic. In the mid-1970s, when Chinese Christians gathered in Hong Kong for the First Chinese Congress on World Evangelization, the late Dr. Stanley Mooneyham, then working with World Vision International, reminded those present that missions, grounded in scriptures and traditions, encompasses both evangelism and social concerns. These two essential elements of missions are the two wings of the Church. We should not emphasize one at the expense of the other, nor should we carry with us a mistaken view that one is more important than the other. The missions of the Church cannot take off, as it were, without both.

COMPONENTS OF MISSIONS

Evangelism

It has been said that evangelism is like a poor beggar telling another beggar where to find food. The food, in this case, is the Gospel. Out of God's generosity and grace, and not because we deserve it, the Good News of Christ Jesus has been made available to anyone who would receive it. A clearer picture of evangelism, however, is presented by William Temple, an outstanding Anglican Archbishop of the last century. According to him, "To evangelize is to present Jesus Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit, that (people) shall come to put their trust in God through Him, to accept Him as their Saviour, and to serve Him as their King in the fellowship of His church." In Temple's definition, evangelism is incomplete if it means just pressing for a decision from

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anyone to accept Christ, the way some popular methods of evangelism seem to advocate. Pressing for a decision, and then leaving the person to struggle, is a hit-and-run superficial idea of evangelism which, in the long run, brings dishonour to the church. Beyond inviting someone to make a decision for Christ, evangelism must guide and nurture new believers not only to accept Jesus as Saviour but, more importantly, to serve God as their King and to get themselves initiated into the life, fellowship and ministry of the church.

Christians are called to share the Gospel and make disciples (Matthew 28:18-20) because we recognize that Jesus Christ, the incarnate Son of God, is the only one who can grant eternal life to those who accept His gift of salvation (John 3:16, 14:6; Acts 4:12).

Unfortunately, while evangelism is something Christians broadly agree that they should do, in reality it is also an area which is generally not practised. Michael Green observed in his book *Evangelism through the Local Church* that “evangelism is essential to the nature of Christianity, yet it is honoured more for the breach than the observance.”

There are many reasons why many Christians neglect evangelism. One reason could be because they have not been sufficiently taught and challenged to evangelize by their local churches. Left on their own, Christians may not be sure of what to say to their friends about Jesus as God’s great gift of love to humanity. A remedy for such a problem is for the church to assume greater responsibility in teaching members about evangelism and offering them guidance on how to evangelize in our plural society. There is also a place for serious theological education for lay members to help them think through and understand the evangelistic implication of their belief in Jesus as the incarnate Son of God.

In our plural world, we need to keep in mind that evangelism must be done with sensitivity, wisdom, creativity and reason, when we share the Gospel with others. To promote tolerance and harmony, we must add, does not mean that the truth of the Gospel should be compromised. Truth must be proclaimed, but with civility, clear thinking and a generous sharing of the love of God. Perhaps more important than verbal proclamation of the Gospel is that we should back up our

evangelistic efforts with transformed lives. When others see evidence of changes in the life of one touched by God, the message which is shared by that Christian will have greater impact and credibility for those we try to reach.

Christian Social Concerns

The first two paragraphs of the Methodist Social Principles state very clearly our view on social outreach:

Christian social responsibility is rooted in the teachings of the Bible. It is an integral part of the Gospel which the Church is expected to proclaim, uphold and follow.

The Methodist Church has a special interest in social concerns because of its desire to be obedient to Christ in bringing the whole of life with its activities, possessions, relationships and environment into conformity with the will of God. Such obedience is exemplified in the life and labour of John Wesley who ministered to the physical, intellectual, spiritual and social needs of the people to whom he preached the Gospel of personal redemption and social holiness.

From a biblical perspective, Christians have been called to be the “salt of the world” and the “light of the world” (Matthew 5:13,14). To be the salt and the light of the world means that we cannot “privatise” our faith and withdraw ourselves from engaging in the public square where we interact with people of diverse ethnic backgrounds and social standing. Our presence and engagement in society must be value-added in the sense that we should expose evil, strengthen the common good and lead people to the truth of God in Christ Jesus.

Elsewhere we have also been reminded to uphold and exercise justice, righteousness and loving kindness (Psalm 33:5, 106:3; Jeremiah 9:23-24; Amos 5:24). These are virtues embodied in God’s own character. Surely Christians who claim to follow the God who is just, upright and loving would

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cultivate such virtues as well, not merely for private benefits but more so for social engagement and the public benefit of the community at large.

Students of the Bible will recognize that God has an ongoing interest in the welfare and affairs of the world. Just as he cares for the poor, the lonely, the sojourners, and the marginalized in society, we should also be responsive to the plight and problems of these people. In the parable of the Good Samaritan, Jesus makes clear the social implication of the Gospel. What is the point of being religious and learned and yet refusing to reach out to someone who has been assaulted and left to die on the roadside?

Part of the reason why we should care for the weak and attend to their needs is that the voice of the vulnerable are often easily drowned by the demands of the articulate and the interests of the powerful. Christians must therefore be in the forefront, speaking against forces of evil and social injustice and providing informed input to shape social policies that will enhance the well-being of the deprived and disadvantaged. At the practical level, Christians should engage in meaningful works, both within our own country and abroad, to create gainful employment for the unemployed; alleviate pain for those who suffer; provide care for those who are neglected; bring healing to those who are sick; and befriend those who are lonely and friendless.

When our Lord returns, we should look forward to hear Him say to us these well-known verses:

*For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat,
I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink,
I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and
you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me,
I was in prison and you came to visit me.*

Matthew 25:35-36

YOUR INVOLVEMENT IN MISSIONS

Over the years, The Methodist Church In Singapore has accomplished much in evangelism and social concerns. That is not to say that we

should be satisfied with what we have done. There is always room for improvement and there will always be opportunities for evangelism and social outreach. The situation in the harvest fields remains unchanged since the New Testament time. The harvest is still plentiful and there is a perennial shortage of labourers.

Here are some mission projects which our churches have either been involved in, or should consider getting involved.

Seasonal Projects

Many Methodist churches have adopted seasonal projects which include:

- ✦ Christmas outreach programme at major shopping and civic centres.
- ✦ *Thank God It's Good Friday* (TGIGF) held in churches and members' homes during Holy Week.
- ✦ Lunar New Year Dinners where Christians invite their non-Christian parents and dialect-speaking friends to an evangelistic function.
- ✦ New Year evangelistic concerts with well-known artists and Christians in the entertainment world sharing the Good News and giving testimonies through songs and skits.
- ✦ Community blessings outreach when churches mobilize members to visit the surrounding neighbourhood with small gifts and greetings for special occasions like the Lantern festival.

Caring Evangelism

This is a project which helps Christians to cultivate friendship with people of other faiths and those with none and at the appropriate time introduce their friends to Christ. Unlike other evangelistic methods which demand instant decisions, caring evangelism is friendship evangelism for Christians who recognize that sound relationship requires patience and honest interest in the welfare of others. While it is our prayer that those we befriend will find our faith meaningful

and become Christians themselves, it must be said that friendship has its own intrinsic value, and no worthwhile friendship, based on trust and mutual respect, should be terminated or pushed aside even if our friends refuse to accept the Christian faith.

Grassroots Evangelism

There is a renewed interest in grassroots evangelism where churches seek to reach out to the mainly Mandarin/dialect-speaking Singaporeans, most of them staying in public housing estates. It is no secret that the majority of Christians in Singapore are English-educated. From the findings of recent Population Censuses, conducted once every 10 years, the church has a high proportion of members who have received tertiary education, and are holding good jobs, earning above-average incomes, and living in private apartments or landed properties. This is not the place to debate on why churches have more high-achievers than other faiths. The fact remains, however, that with greater blessings come greater responsibility for us to reach out not only to the successful, but also to those in the lower social strata of our society and those in our neighbouring countries trapped in abject poverty. Grassroots evangelism, within our own country, reaches out to factory workers, school dropouts, labourers, and blue-collar workers – people generally termed as HDB heartlanders.

Personal Evangelism

Some churches have challenged their members to share the Gospel with at least one person in a given year, and to bring that person to the church. This challenge allows the members to have a personal stake in the evangelistic ministry of the church and in so doing to ensure that future church growth comes about mainly through conversion instead of through transfers or biological expansion. To bring one person to Christ each year, or even one every two years, is not a formidable task. It is, in fact, something achievable and something which all members can participate in.

Sojourners in Our Midst

One social phenomenon found in a country like Singapore is the presence of a large number of guest-workers. These are people who have come to Singapore in search of jobs. They are sojourners who have left their loved ones back home, hoping to earn a decent living in a foreign land. Here is an opportunity where the church does not need to travel far, to find a mission field, for Christian outreach. The workers who have come from afar have brought the mission fields to our doorstep, and in many instances, into our own homes as domestic helpers. Missions means the church together with Christian employers should love such sojourners, treating them fairly, besides sharing the Good News of Christ with them.

Prison Ministry

This is an aspect of Christian outreach which Methodists have often given leadership. Volunteers in this ministry visit inmates in prisons and befriend their families in their times of need.

Helping the Poor and Needy

In terms of social concern, many churches have regular programmes to assist the local poor and needy. On festive occasions such as Christmas, donations in kind like toiletries and canned food are collected from members for distribution to poor families and homes for the needy. This collection has now been extended to cover the Lunar New Year season, to ensure that the recipients will not have to wait a year before the church makes another visit.

Emergency Relief

It is encouraging to note that our members, in the main, have exceptionally kind hearts. They have been generous with their donations whenever they are called upon to support emergency relief work overseas. Over the decades we have collected donations of cash and kind for places like Rwanda, Iran, India, China, Vietnam, Cambodia, Afghanistan, the Philippines and Taiwan for relief work among victims of earthquakes, floods and other disasters.

Mission Schools

When the Methodist church first appeared in Singapore, the pioneer missionaries concentrated their efforts on building up the church through mission schools. Though mission schools today are under the jurisdiction of the Government, they still offer significant contributions to society in terms of imparting Christian values and providing Christian care and guidance. The full-time Christian ministry staff, sent and supported by the church, continue with the tradition of offering pastoral care to and sharing the Gospel of Christ with students and teachers.

Methodist Welfare Services

The Methodist Welfare Services (MWS) is the social outreach arm of the Methodist Church in Singapore. It offers a wide spectrum of social services to the community at large. The services range from hospice care, giving bursaries to needy students, caring for the elderly sick, to managing a number of Family Service Centres (FSC). Some local churches are active partners of MWS. For example, Christ Methodist Church works with MWS to manage the Christalite Home for the Aged, and many churches are directly involved in running FSCs in strategic residential locations. The largest outreach project at present is the Bethany Methodist Nursing Home, at Choa Chu Kang. Methodists who are concerned about Christian social outreach to the community can pledge their financial support for the works of the MWS through GIRO.

Methodist Missions Society

The Methodist Missions Society (MMS) was formed out of a need to have an umbrella organization under which the Methodist Church In Singapore can send out her own missionaries for missions work overseas. Since its inception, MMS has expanded its work primarily to neighbouring countries, planting churches, setting up schools and vocational training centres, providing medical care, helping to build development projects that benefit remote villages, and running an orphanage.

CONCLUSION

Every member of the Methodist Church should and can be involved in missions. It is a biblical mandate from our missionary God which requires our active participation in both evangelism and social concerns, expressed through proclamation and praxis. A balanced and biblical view of missions must follow the example set by our Lord Jesus Christ when He announced:

The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because He has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour.

Luke 4:18-19

QUESTIONS

1. Michael Green observes that “evangelism is essential to the nature of Christianity, yet it is honoured more for the breach than the observance.” Do you agree with this statement? What would you do to ensure that more Christians are engaged in evangelism?
2. Is the evangelistic goal of introducing at least one person, per year, to the Gospel of Christ and then bringing that person to church a practical goal? Will you do it? Will you begin to pray for one person who is not a Christian and ask God to help you bring that person to Christ and to the church?
3. Social concern is an integral component of missions. Suggest some ways to raise awareness among our members to the social issues of our time.

Chapter 14: The Mission Of The Church

4. What are the pluses and minuses of having a church that is predominantly middle-class? What must we do to make our churches more welcoming to people from the lower social strata of society?
5. Contact the MWS and the MMS and ask them for information regarding their ministries. Ask how you may be involved in their work. Consider supporting their work with regular giving through GIRO.

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Appendixes

APPENDIX 1

The Articles of Religion of The Methodist Church (1784)¹

Article I. — Of Faith In the Holy Trinity

There is but one living and true God, everlasting, without body or parts, of infinite power, wisdom, and goodness; the maker and preserver of all things, visible and invisible. And in unity of this Godhead there are three persons, of one substance, power, and eternity — the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost.

Article II. — Of the Word, or the Son of God, who was made very Man

The Son, who is the Word of the Father, the very and eternal God, of one substance with the Father, took man's nature in the womb of the blessed Virgin; so that two whole and perfect natures, that is to say, the Godhead and Manhood, were joined together in one person, never to the dividend; whereof is one Christ, very God and very Man, who truly suffered, was crucified, dead, and buried, to reconcile his Father to us, and to be a sacrifice, not only for original guilt, but also for the actual sins of men.

Article III. — Of the Resurrection of Christ

Christ did truly rise again from the dead, and took again his body, with all things appertaining to the perfection of man's nature, wherewith he ascended into heaven, and there sitteth until he return to judge all men at the last day.

Article IV. — Of the Holy Ghost

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

¹Protected by Restrictive Rule (¶15), in The Book of Discipline of the Methodist Church in Singapore (2002).

**Article V. — Of the Sufficiency of the
Holy Scriptures for Salvation**

The Holy Scriptures contain all things necessary to salvation; so that whatsoever is not read therein, nor may be proved thereby, is not to be required of any man that it should be believed as an article of faith, or be thought requisite or necessary to salvation. In the name of the Holy Scriptures we do understand those canonical books of the Old and New Testament, of whose authority was never any doubt in the church. The names of the canonical books are:

Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy, Joshua, Judges, Ruth, The First Book of Samuel, The Second Book of Samuel, The First Book of Kings, The Second Book of Kings, The First Book of Chronicles, The Second Book of Chronicles, The Book of Ezra, The Book of Nehemiah, The Book of Esther, The Book of Job, The Psalms, The Proverbs, Ecclesiastes or the Preacher, Cantica or Song of Solomon, Four Prophets the Greater, Twelve Prophets the Less.

All the books of the New Testament, as they are commonly received, we do receive and account canonical.

Article VI. — Of the Old Testament

The Old Testament is not contrary to the New; for both in the Old and New Testament everlasting life is offered to mankind by Christ, who is the only Mediator between God and man, being both God and Man. Wherefore they are not to be heard who feign that the old fathers did look only for transitory promises. Although the law given from God by Moses as touching ceremonies and rites doth not bind Christians, nor ought the civil precepts thereof of necessity be received in any commonwealth; yet notwithstanding, no Christian whatsoever is free from the obedience of the commandments which are called moral.

Article VII. — Of Original or Birth Sin

Original sin standeth not in the following of Adam (as the Pelagians do vainly talk), but it is the corruption of the nature of every man, that naturally is engendered of the offspring of Adam, whereby man is very

far gone from original righteousness, and of his own nature inclined to evil, and that continually.

Article VIII. — Of Free Will

The condition of man after the fall of Adam is such that he cannot turn and prepare himself, by his own natural strength and works, to faith, and calling upon God; wherefore we have no power to do good works, pleasant and acceptable to God without the grace of God by Christ preventing us, that we may have a good will, and working with us, when we have that good will.

Article IX. — Of the Justification of Man

We are accounted righteous before God only for the merit of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, by faith, and not for our own works or deservings. Wherefore, that we are justified by faith only is a most wholesome doctrine, and very full of comfort.

Article X. — Of Good Works

Although good works, which are the fruits of faith, and follow after justification, cannot put away our sins, and endure the severity of God's judgement; yet are they pleasing and acceptable to God in Christ, and spring out of a true and lively faith, insomuch that by them a lively faith may be as evidently known as a tree is discerned by its fruit.

Article XI. — Of Works of Supererogation

Voluntary works — besides, over and above God's commandments — which are called works of supererogation, cannot be taught without arrogancy and impiety. For by them men do declare that they do not only render unto God as much as they are bound to do, but that they do more for his sake than of bounden duty is required; whereas Christ saith plainly: When ye have done all that is commanded of you, say, We are unprofitable servants.

Article XII. — Of Sin after Justification

Not every sin willingly committed after justification is the sin against the Holy Spirit, and unpardonable. Wherefore, the grant of repentance is not to be denied to such as fall into sin after justification: after we have received the Holy Spirit, we may depart from grace given, and fall into sin, and, by the grace of God, rise again and amend our lives. And therefore they are to be condemned who say they can no more sin as long as they live here; or deny the place of forgiveness to such as truly repent.

Article XIII. — Of the Church

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

Article XIV. — Of Purgatory

The Romish doctrine concerning purgatory, pardon, worshipping, and adoration, as well of images as of relics, and also invocation of saints, is a fond thing, vainly invented, and grounded upon no warrant of Scripture, but repugnant to the Word of God.

**Article XV.— Of Speaking in the Congregation in such a
Tongue as the People Understand**

It is a thing plainly repugnant to the Word of God, and the custom of the primitive Church, to have public prayer in the church, or to administer the Sacraments, in a tongue not understood by the people.

Article XVI. — Of the Sacraments

Sacraments ordained of Christ are not only badges or tokens of Christian men's profession, but rather they are certain signs of grace, and God's goodwill toward us, by which he doth work invisibly in us, and doth not only quicken, but also strengthen and confirm, our faith in him.

There are two Sacraments ordained of Christ our Lord in the Gospel; that is to say, Baptism and the Supper of the Lord.

Those five commonly called sacraments, that is say, confirmation, penance, orders, matrimony, and extreme unction, are not to be counted for Sacraments of the Gospel; being such as have partly grown out of the *corrupt* following of the apostles, and partly are states of life allowed in the Scripture, but yet have not the like nature of Baptism and the Lord's Supper, because they have not any visible sign or ceremony ordained of God.

The Sacraments were not ordained of Christ to be gazed upon, or to be carried about; but that we should duly use them. And in such only as worthily receive the same they have a wholesome effect or operation; but they that receive them unworthily, purchase to themselves condemnation, as St. Paul saith (I Corinthians 11:29).

Article XVII. — Of Baptism

Baptism is not only a sign of profession and mark of difference whereby Christians are distinguished from others that are not baptized; but it is also a sign of regeneration or the new birth. The baptism of young children is to be retained in the church.

Article XVIII. — Of the Lord's Supper

The Supper of the Lord is not only a sign of the love that Christians ought to have among themselves one to another, but rather is a sacrament of our redemption by Christ's death; insomuch that, to such as rightly, worthily, and with faith receive the same, the bread which we break is a partaking of the body of Christ; and likewise the cup of blessing is a partaking of the blood of Christ.

Transubstantiation, or the change of the substance of bread and wine in the Supper of our Lord, cannot be proved by Holy Writ, but is repugnant to the plain words of Scripture, overthroweth the nature of a sacrament, and hath given occasion to many superstitions.

The body of Christ is given, taken, and eaten in the Supper, only after

a heavenly and spiritual manner. And the means whereby the body of Christ is received and eaten in the Supper is faith.

The Sacrament of the Lord's Supper was not by Christ's ordinance reserved, carried about, lifted up, or worshipped.

Article XIX. — Of Both Kinds

The cup of the Lord is not to be denied to the lay people; for both the parts of the Lord's Supper, by Christ's ordinance and commandment, ought to be administered to all Christians alike.

**Article XX. — Of the One Oblation of Christ,
Finished Upon the Cross**

The offering of Christ, once made, is that perfect redemption, propitiation, and satisfaction for all the sins of the whole world, both original and actual; and there is none other satisfaction for sin but that alone. Wherefore the sacrifice of masses, in the which it is commonly said that the priest doth offer Christ for the quick and the dead, to have remission of pain or guilt, is a blasphemous fable and dangerous deceit.

Article XXI. — Of the Marriage of Ministers

The ministers of Christ are not recommended by God's law either to vow the estate of single life, or to abstain from marriage; therefore it is lawful for them, as for all other Christians, to marry at their own discretion, as they shall judge the same to serve best to godliness.

Article XXII. — Of the Rites and Ceremonies of Churches

It is not necessary that rites and ceremonies should in all places be the same, or exactly alike; for they have been always different, and may be changed according to the diversity of countries, times, and men's manners, so that nothing be ordained against God's Word. Whosoever, through his private judgement, willingly and purposely doth openly break the rites and ceremonies of the church to which he belongeth, which are not repugnant to the Word of God, and are ordained and

approved by common authority, ought to be rebuked openly (that others may fear to do the like), as one that offendeth against the common order of the church, and woundeth the consciences of weak brethren.

Every particular church may ordain, change, or abolish rites and ceremonies, so that all things may be done to edification.

**Article XXIII. — Of the Duty of Christian to
the Civil Authority**

It is the duty of all Christians, and especially of all Christian ministers, to observe and obey the laws and commands of the governing or supreme authority of the country of which they are citizens or subjects or in which they reside, and to use all laudable means to encourage and enjoin obedience to the powers that be.

Article XXIV. — Of Christian Men's Goods

The riches and goods of Christians, are not common, as touching the right, title, and possession of the same, as some do falsely boast. Notwithstanding, every man ought, of such things as he possesseth, liberally to give alms to the poor, according to his ability.

Article XXV. — Of a Christian Man's Oath

As we confess that vain and rash swearing is forbidden Christian men by our Lord Jesus Christ and James his apostle, so we judge that the Christian religion doth not prohibit, but that a man may swear when the magistrate requireth, in a cause of faith and charity, so it be done according to the prophet's teaching, in justice, judgement, and truth.

Article XXVI. — Of Sanctification

Sanctification is that renewal of our fallen nature by the Holy Ghost, received through faith in Jesus Christ, whose blood of atonement cleanseth from all sin; whereby we are not only delivered from the guilt of sin, but are washed from its pollution, saved from its power, and are enabled, through grace, to love God with all our hearts and to walk in his holy commandments blameless.

APPENDIX 2

The General Rules of The Methodist Church

The Nature, Design, and General Rules of Our United Societies

In the latter end of the year 1739 eight or ten persons who appeared to be deeply convicted of sin, and earnestly groaning for redemption, came to Mr Wesley in London. They desired, as did two or three more the next day, that he would spend some time with them in prayer, and advise them how to flee from the wrath to come, which they saw continually hanging over their heads. That he might have more time for this great work, he appointed a day when they might all come together, which from thenceforward they did every week, namely, on Thursday in the evening. To these, and as many more as desired to join with them (for their number increased daily), he gave those advices from time to time which he judged most needful for them, and they always concluded their meeting with prayer suited to their several necessities.

This was the rise of the **United Society**, first in Europe, and then in America. Such a society is no other than “a company of men having the *form* and seeking the *power* of godliness, united in order to pray together, to receive the word of exhortation, and to watch over one another in love, that they may help each other to work out their salvation.”

That it may the more easily be discerned whether they are indeed working out their own salvation, each society is divided into smaller companies, called classes, according to their respective places of abode. There are about twelve persons in a class, one of whom is styled the **leader**. It is his duty:

1. To see each person in his class once a week at least, in order:
 - a) to inquire how his soul prosper;
 - b) to advise, reprove, comfort, or exhort, as occasion may require;
 - c) to receive what he is willing to give toward the relief of the preachers, church, and poor.

Membership Manual

2. To meet the ministers and the stewards of the society once a week, in order:
 - a) to inform the minister of any that are sick, or of any that walk disorderly and will not be reproved;
 - b) to pay the stewards what he has received of his class in the week preceding.

There is only one condition previously required of those who desire admission into these societies — “a desire to flee from the wrath to come, and to be saved from their sins.” But wherever this is really fixed in the soul it will be shown by its fruits.

It is therefore expected of all who continue therein that they shall continue to evidence their desire of salvation,

First: By doing no harm, by avoiding evil of every kind, especially that which is most generally practised, such as:

- The taking of the name of God in vain.
- The profaning the day of the Lord, either by doing ordinary work therein or by buying or selling.
- Drunkenness, buying or selling spirituous liquors, or drinking them, unless in cases of extreme necessity.
- Slaveholding; buying or selling slaves.
- Fighting, quarreling, brawling, brother going to law with brother; returning evil for evil, or railing for railing; the using of many words in buying or selling.
- The buying or selling goods that have not paid the duty.
- The giving or taking of things on usury — that is, unlawful interest.
- Uncharitable or unprofitable conversation; particularly speaking evil of magistrates or ministers.
- Doing to others as we would not they should do unto us.

Doing what we know is not for the glory of God, as:

- The putting on of gold and costly apparel.

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- The taking of such diversions as cannot be used in the name of the Lord Jesus.
- The singing those songs, or reading those books, which do not tend to the knowledge or love of God.
- Softness and needless self-indulgence.
- Laying up treasure upon earth.
- Borrowing without a probability of paying; or taking up goods without a probability of paying for them.
- It is expected of all who continue in these societies that they shall continue to evidence their desire of salvation.

Secondly: By doing good; by being in every kind merciful after their power; as they have opportunity, doing good of every possible sort, and, as far as possible, to all men:

- To their bodies, of the ability which God giveth, by giving food to the hungry, by clothing the naked, by visiting or helping them that are sick or in prison;
- To their souls, by instructing, reproofing, or exhorting all we have any inter-course with; trampling under foot that enthusiastic doctrine, that “we are not to do good unless our *hearts be free to it.*”
- By doing good, especially to them that are of the household of faith or groaning so to be; employing them preferably to others; buying one of another; helping each other in business, and so much the more because the world will love its own and them only.
- By all possible diligence and frugality, that the gospel be not blamed.
- By running with patience the race which is set before them, denying themselves, and taking up their cross daily; submitting to bear the reproach of Christ, to be as the filth and offscouring of the world; and looking that men should say all manner of evil of them *falsely*, for the Lord’s sake.
- It is expected of all who desire to continue in these societies that they shall continue to evidence their desire of salvation,

Thirdly: By attending upon all the ordinances of God; such are:

- The public worship of God.
- The ministry of the Word, either read or expounded.
- The Supper of the Lord.
- Family and private prayer.
- Searching the scriptures.
- Fasting or abstinence.

These are the General Rules of our societies; all of which we are taught of God to observe, even in his written Word, which is the only rule, and the sufficient rule, both of our faith and practice. And all these we know his Spirit writes on truly awakened hearts. If there be any among us who observes them not, who habitually breaks any of them, let it be known unto them who watch over that soul as they who must give an account. We will admonish him of the error of his ways. We will bear with him for a season. But, if then he repent not, he hath no more place among us. We have delivered our own souls.

APPENDIX 3

Social Principles

Section I. Our Methodist Heritage

1. Christian social responsibility is rooted in the teachings of the Bible. It is an integral part of the Gospel which the Church is expected to proclaim, uphold and follow.
2. The Methodist Church has a special interest in social concerns because of its desire to be obedient to Christ in bringing the whole of life with its activities, possessions, relationships and environment into conformity with the will of God. Such obedience is exemplified in the life and labour of John Wesley who ministered to the physical, intellectual, spiritual and social needs of the people to whom he preached the Gospel of personal redemption and social holiness.
3. It is out of our gratitude for God's love and in affirmation of our belief in the inestimable worth of each individual and the integrity of God's creation, that we renew our commitment to become faithful witnesses to the Gospel.

Section II. Our Methodist Theological Basis for Social Concerns

1. We believe that God is the Creator of all people, regardless of race, creed, status or sex, and that each person is of infinite worth. We believe that all persons have supreme value in the sight of God and ought to be so regarded by us.
2. We believe that "the earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof". Our own abilities and all we possess are gifts from God and should be held and used in stewardship to Him.
3. We believe that God in Christ is seeking to redeem all people and societies. We believe that the grace of God in Christ is available for redemption from individual and social sins as we seek to do His Holy will in penitence and obedience.
4. Since Jesus died and was raised from the dead for the redemption of all people, we believe we should live to help save humanity from sin

and from every influence which would harm or destroy a person. All institutions and practices will be tested by their effect upon persons.

5. The Methodist Church must view the perplexing times and problems we face today in the light of the life and teaching of Jesus. Jesus teaches us to love our neighbours and to seek justice for all. Silence and passivity in the face of need, injustice and exploitation is to deny Christ.

Section III. Our Methodist Social Principles

The following Social Principles are formulated as a response of the Methodist Church in Singapore to human issues in the contemporary world. They are based on a biblical and theological foundation enriched by our Methodist tradition. The Social Principles call on all members of the Methodist Church in Singapore to a prayerful response of faith and practice.

Sharing God's Love In the Family

We affirm the importance and sanctity of the family. We believe that the healthy family unit forms a basic social environment in which responsible teachings can be imparted, moral values disseminated, and where love is shared and the worth of each person is affirmed. We deplore and reject values and morals which undermine the sanctity of family life.

1. The Marital Relationship and Divorce.

- a) We affirm the sanctity of the marriage covenant which is expressed in love, mutual support, personal commitment, and fidelity between a man and a woman. We reject social norms that assume different standards for women than for men in marriage.
- b) The Church views with great concern the increasing number of divorces and affirms the need for adequate premarital and marital counselling as well as marriage enrichment programmes. We also encourage an active and supportive commitment of the church and our society to minister in love to the divorced and their families.

2. *Parent-Child Relationships.*

- a) We affirm the shared responsibility for parenting by men and women and encourage social, economic, and religious efforts to enhance and strengthen relationships within families.
- b) We recognise the burden of single parent families and their need for understanding, care and support from the community and the Church.
- c) We view with concern the diminishing time available for families to be together in our modern society. Families need to give priority to spending quality time together for family life enrichment, and in worship and recreation.
- d) We believe that children have a duty to honour, respect and care for their parents especially in sickness and old age.

3. *God's Gift of Sex.*

- a) We recognise that human sexuality is a gift of God. Sexual intercourse is a sacred experience only when it is accompanied by the love and fidelity of a holy matrimony. We believe that sexual intercourse outside the bonds of matrimony is contrary to the will of God.
- b) We deplore all forms of commercialisation and exploitation of sex with their consequent degradation of the human personhood. The distribution of pornographic and other sex-exploitative material should always be banned.
- c) We consider the practice of homosexuality to be incompatible with Christian teachings. However, we do recognise that homosexual persons are individuals of sacred worth. They need the ministry and guidance of the Church as well as the spiritual and emotional support of a caring fellowship.
- d) We believe that individuals who are confused about their sexual identity need the healing and transforming power of God's grace rather than sex-change operations.
- e) We affirm the integrity of single persons and reject all social practices that discriminate or social attitudes that are prejudicial against persons because they are unmarried.

4. *Birth Control and Abortion.*

- a) We believe that planned parenthood, practised with respect for human life, fulfills rather than violates the will of God. It is the duty of each married couple prayerfully and responsibly to seek parenthood, avert it, or defer it in accordance with the best expression of their Christian love.
- b) We affirm that life begins at conception and that the human embryo is not simply a mass of tissue that has the potential of life. We therefore do not subscribe to abortion except on medical grounds. We call on all Christians to a searching and prayerful inquiry in situations in which abortion may be contemplated and to seek medical, pastoral, and other appropriate counselling.

5. *Infertility and Assisted Methods of Reproduction.*

- a) We affirm that every child is a gift from God and not a right to be demanded from God. Procreation is always by the grace of God and not simply a product of modern science even when assisted methods of human reproduction are used.
- b) We recognise that infertility may be a cause of suffering for some married couples. We accept the procedures of assisted human reproduction which can be regarded as methods to assist natural reproduction as long as the egg or sperms of another person or surrogate mothers are not used.
- c) Married couples who are burdened with the problem of infertility should prayerfully examine their motives for wanting a child and consider and understand the medical, spiritual, moral and legal implications of assisted reproductive procedures.
- d) We are also concerned that assisted methods of human reproduction may be used for sex selection or by single persons or homosexual couples to have a child. We believe that this is not God's divine plan for the family.

The Stewardship of Wealth

We claim all economic systems to be under the judgement of God and we need to test each aspect of every economic system by the commands of Christ and judge its practices by the Christian gospel.

1. *Property and Possessions.*

We believe that ownership of property is a trusteeship under God and all our possessions are a trust from God to be managed responsibly. It is contrary to our Christian faith for any person or group of persons to have exclusive and arbitrary control of any part of the created universe.

2. *The Acquisition of Wealth.*

- a) We need to prayerfully evaluate our personal and business practices so that we will not be influenced and controlled by the standards and values of a materialistic society and an extravagant lifestyle.
- b) We support all honest measures that would reduce the concentration of wealth in the hands of a few. We should ensure that materialistic progress does not destroy our community spirit, undermine our family and dehumanise the individual.

3. *A Simple Lifestyle and Consumerism.*

- a) We call on all Christians to adopt a simple lifestyle and to be ever conscious and vigilant against the influence of consumerism which thrives on pride and greed.
- b) A simple lifestyle is not necessarily a call to an ascetic life. It is a spiritual discipline which increases our awareness of God's presence and providence in our lives. A simple lifestyle frees us to be more sensitive to the needs of the poor and the beauty of God's world.

4. *Gambling.*

- a) Gambling is an expression of one's desire to instant wealth. It is a form of bondage and a social sickness motivated by greed and covetousness. It is also a menace to society as it compromises the best interests of moral, social, economic and spiritual life of the community.
- b) We do not subscribe to any form of gambling.

The Responsible Use of Power

The Christian point of view demands that concentrations of power in government, industry, business, and religious organisations be used responsibly for the welfare of the community.

1. Political Responsibilities.

- a) We believe that all governments are under the sovereignty of God.
- b) “Separation of church and state” means no organic union of the two but does permit interaction. The Church should continually exert a strong moral influence upon the state, by supporting policies and programmes which are just and compassionate and opposing policies and programmes which are not.
- c) We believe that consensus building promotes social peace and order. It helps to provide an environment for healthy exchanges of ideas in a fair and orderly manner. However, decision making by consensus is fair and effective only if the people have sufficient channels opened for them to participate meaningfully in the process of decision making.
- d) We will uplift all those in authority who serve the public in our prayers and we support their efforts to secure justice, benefits, and equal opportunities for all people.

2. The Christian and military service.

The Methodist Church, true to the principles of the New Testament, teaches respect for properly constituted civil authority. It encourages both love of country and love of all men. It believes that the defence of the country is the responsibility of every able-bodied citizen.

3. The Use of Technology.

We affirm that all technology is a gift from God and may contribute to the well being of all individuals and societies. However, we believe scientific and technological knowledge must be applied with spiritual wisdom if technology is not to be abused or to become a burden to society.

Social Responsibilities in Community Life

We recognise that Singapore is a multi-racial, multi-cultural and multi-religious society and believe that everyone is of equal worth in God's sight regardless of our creed, race, sex or age. We seek to work towards societies in which each person's unique value is recognised, affirmed, and strengthened.

1. *Multi-religious Understanding.*

- a) We believe that it is necessary and healthy to engage in open and honest dialogue with persons of other faiths in a spirit of love, mutual respect and sensitivity.
- b) We affirm the right of individuals to change their faith as well as to share their faith with others. We also affirm the right of religious groups to exercise their faith without undue legal, political or financial encumbrances.

2. *Multi-racial Harmony.*

- a) We believe that the cornerstone of racial harmony is love and acceptance of our neighbours regardless of their race or religious beliefs.
- b) Racism inhibits and cripples our growth in Christ as it is antithetical to the gospel itself. Racial pride and prejudice when left unchecked is a potential source of inter-racial strife and conflict.
- c) We rejoice in the gifts which each ethnic history and culture brings to our total life. We further assert the rights of members of racial and ethnic minorities to equal opportunities in employment and promotion; in education and training; in voting; in public housing; and in positions of leadership and in all aspects of community life.

3. *Rights of Women.*

- a) We affirm women and men to be equal in every aspect of their common life. Women should therefore be given equal treatment in employment, promotion, compensation and citizenship privileges. We recognise the importance of women in decision-making positions at all levels of life.

4. *Rights of the Aged.*

We support social policies that integrate the aging into the life of the

total community, including sufficient incomes, increased and non-discriminatory employment opportunities, educational and service opportunities, and adequate medical care and housing within existing communities.

5. *Rights of Children.*

We recognise that parents and society in general have special obligations to children. Children should not be deprived of education, food, shelter, clothing and health care. Furthermore, they must be protected from economic and sexual exploitation.

6. *Rights of the Disabled.*

We affirm the responsibility of the church and society to minister to needs of persons with mental, physical and/or psychological disabilities. We urge the church and society to help disabled persons to enable them be full participants in the community of faith and in the society at large.

7. *Rights and Social Responsibilities.*

It is important to make a distinction between a selfish and self-centred attitude to life and a healthy self-respect and self-love for oneself.

8. We believe that it is only when we recognise and fulfill our social responsibilities and obligations that our basic human rights will be respected. The affirmation of basic human rights and social responsibilities is an essential ingredient of democracy.

9. *The Pursuit of Excellence.*

- a) We believe that excellence should not be pursued only in academic achievements, economic prosperity or productivity. We need also to strive for excellence in artistic, creative and spiritual endeavours.
- b) We believe that a lifestyle grounded on spiritual values is our best defence against a blind utilitarian, selfish and materialistic approach to life.

Serving Others with God's Love

We affirm that it is in the Christian spirit for a person to be able to place the overall interest and welfare of the community before the interest of the self. We believe that each person has a special gift or talent which can

be used for the development of a compassionate society.

1. *Caring for the Poor.*

- a) We believe that meeting human needs is both a private and public responsibility. We need to be conscious of the plights of the poor and powerless in our society and the world.
- b) We believe that it is our Christian duty to provide opportunities for education and training for the poor to upgrade or be gainfully employed.

2. *The Promotion of Workers' Welfare.*

- a) We stand for reasonable hours of work, for fair wages and for just and proper working conditions. All workers should be given time for leisure and recreation. Employees and employers alike have the right to organise for collective bargaining.
- b) We fully support public and private programmes of economic security for old age and adequate insurance coverage for sickness and injury.
- c) We believe in the dignity of labour and that unemployment tends to destroy human self-respect. We regard our vocations as spheres of service to God.

3. *The Provision of Health Care.*

- a) We affirm that our bodies are the temples of the Holy Spirit and that it is our Christian responsibility to adopt healthy lifestyles. We also believe that affordable basic health care must be available to all.
- b) We recognise overeating, alcoholism and smoking as major factors which contribute to illness and premature deaths. We discourage overeating and the consumption of alcohol and tobacco and fully support all educational programmes to change these unhealthy lifestyles. We believe that the Church is called to be a healing and redemptive fellowship for those struggling with these problems.
- c) We affirm God's sovereignty in healing and the need for medical resources to be used with common sense and compassion.
- d) We affirm the maintenance of rigid controls in testing new technologies and drugs.

4. *Caring for the Dying and Euthanasia.*

- a) We believe that God is always seeking to alleviate human suffering and we are called to be the channels of His grace and love to those who are dying.
- b) The time between the diagnosis of terminal illness and the event of death can be transformed into a time of blessing and an opportunity for emotional and spiritual growth through the loving concern of those providing hospice care.
- c) We do not subscribe to euthanasia for those who are terminally ill as euthanasia fails to recognise the spiritual dimension of life. We fully endorse hospice care as the more humane alternative to euthanasia.

5. *Ministry to Drug Addicts.*

We support regulations that protect society from the abuse of drugs. The drug dependent person is an individual of infinite worth in need of treatment and rehabilitation. Drug abuse should be viewed as a symptom of wider disorders for which remedies should be sought.

6. *Ministry to Prisoners.*

- a) In the love of Christ who came to save those who are lost, we need to minister to those in prisons and their families. We should also promote systems of rehabilitation that will restore, preserve, and nurture the humanity of the imprisoned.
- b) We support legislations and social policies to reduce and eliminate crime.

7. *Ministry To Foreign Maids and Labourers.*

We urge Christian employers of foreign maids and labourers to regard such employment as an opportunity for ministry to the poor from the less developed countries. We deplore the exploitation of such workers and fully support measures to provide these workers with proper living and working conditions, and fair wages.

Caring for God's World

All creation is of the Lord and we are called to be responsible stewards

of water, air, soil, minerals, energy resources, plants, animal life and outer space. We believe the Church has the responsibility and power to inculcate higher moral and spiritual values which are necessary to address the problems raised by the ecological crisis, the abuse of technological advances and the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction.

1. *Conservation Of Natural Resources.*

We support and encourage policies aimed at conservation of our natural resources, the prevention of pollution of our air, water and soil, the protection of wild life and the humane treatment of animals.

2. *Building A World Community.*

- a) We stand for the promotion of international goodwill, peace and understanding among all nations. We believe that international cooperation will lead to peace and world order.
- b) We believe that war is incompatible with the teachings and example of Christ and that the influence of the Church must always be on the side of every effort seeking to remove the seeds of war.
- c) We respect properly constituted civil authority and encourage both love of country and love of all people. We believe that the defence of the country is the responsibility of every able-bodied citizen.
- d) We affirm our historic concern for the world as our parish and seek for all persons and people full and equal membership in a truly world community.

Section IV. Our Methodist Social Creed

1. We believe in God, Creator of the world; and in Jesus Christ the Redeemer of creation. We believe in the Holy Spirit, through whom we acknowledge God's gifts, and we repent of our sin in misusing these gifts for personal gain.
2. We affirm the natural world as God's handiwork and dedicate ourselves to its care, preservation, enhancement, and faithful use by humankind.
3. We joyfully receive for ourselves and others, the blessings of community, sexuality, marriage and the family.

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4. We commit ourselves to the rights of men, women, children, youth, young adults, the aging, the dying, and those with handicaps; to improvement in the quality of life, and to the rights and dignity of racial, ethnic, and religious minorities.
5. We believe in the right and duty of persons to work for the good of themselves and others; in the rights of property as a trust from God, collective bargaining, and the cultivation of a simple lifestyle; and in the elimination of economic and social distress.
6. We dedicate ourselves to peace throughout the world, to freedom for all people, and to the rule of justice and law among nations.
7. We believe in the present and final triumph of God in human affairs, and affirm that the world is our parish.

APPENDIX 4

The Meaning of Membership

¶109. When persons unite with a local Methodist church, they profess their faith in God, the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth, and in Jesus Christ, His only Son; and in the Holy Spirit. Thus, they make known their desire to live their daily lives as disciples of Jesus Christ. They covenant together with God and with the members of the local church to keep the vows which are part of the order of confirmation and reception into the Church.

1. To confess Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour and pledge their allegiance to his kingdom,
2. To receive and profess the Christian faith as contained in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testament,
3. To promise according to the grace given them to live a Christian life and always remain faithful members of Christ's holy Church,
4. And to be loyal to The Methodist Church and uphold it by their prayers, their presence, their gifts, and their service.

¶110. Faithful membership in the local church is essential for personal growth and for developing an increasing sensitivity to the will and grace of God. As members involve themselves in private and public prayer, worship, the Sacraments, study, Christian action, systematic giving and holy discipline, they grow in their appreciation of Christ, understanding of God at work in history and the natural order, and an understanding of themselves.

¶111. Faithful discipleship includes the obligation to participate in the corporate life of the congregation with fellow members of the Body of Christ. A member is bound in sacred covenant to shoulder the burdens, share the risks and celebrate the joys of fellow members. A Christian is called to speak the truth in love, always ready to confront conflict in the spirit of forgiveness and reconciliation.

¶112. A member of The Methodist Church is to be a servant of Christ on mission in the local and worldwide community. The servanthood is performed in family life, daily work, recreation and social activities, responsible citizenship, the stewardship of property and accumulated resources, the issues of corporate life and all attitudes towards other persons. Participation in disciplined groups is an expected part of personal mission involvement. Each member is called upon to be a witness for Christ in the world, a light and leaven in society, and a reconciler in a culture of conflict. Each member is to identify with the agony and suffering of the world and to radiate and exemplify the Christ. The standards of attitude and conduct set forth in the Social Principles shall be considered as an essential resource for guiding each member of the Church in being a servant of Christ on mission.

¶113. All members of the church should study the principles of Christian stewardship and dedicate themselves, their time, talents, and substance to God and the advancement of His kingdom. In recognition of God's ownership they should practise systematic and proportionate giving (Malachi 3:8-12; I Corinthians 16:2). They should regard Christian liberality as a privilege and sacred duty, and freely give of their substance for the spread of the gospel at home and abroad, for the maintenance of the local church and for the support of the agencies and enterprises of the general church.

¶114. All members are to be held accountable for their faithfulness to their covenant and vows with God and the other members of the church. Should any member be accused of violating the covenant and failing to keep the vows which the member entered into with God and the other members of the local church as stated in, it shall be the responsibility of the local church and the pastor to minister to that person in compliance with the provisions of 130, 131 and 132 [referring to the "Care of Members"] in an effort to enable the member to faithfully perform the vows and covenant of membership.

¶115. Dissension in the church, both in spirit and in practice, should be avoided. Members should ever be diligent to maintain the unity of the church, local and general. They should not speak disparagingly of one

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another, but pray earnestly for and in honour prefer one another and together labour “to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” (Ephesians 4:3).

¶116. The foregoing rules as taught in the Holy Scriptures and enjoined upon believers are herein set forth for the guidance of the members of the church and for the proper regulation of the church. Should any members violate or habitually neglect these rules, those who have been appointed to watch over them shall admonish them in love, but if, after repeated and prayerful admonition they do not reform, they shall be dealt with as those disobedient to the Order and Discipline of the church.

APPENDIX 5

The Christian Calendar



Advent

The Christian calendar begins with the season of Advent. Christ the Judge and anticipated Messiah is emphasised in this season. This season begins four Sundays before Christmas Day. It is a time of preparation for the coming of Christ. Advent focuses on preparation, anticipation and the forerunners of Christ, like John the Baptist. Hopes, dreams and waiting are the themes of Advent. The colour of Advent is purple, symbolising penitence and preparation.

Christmastide

Christmastide begins on 25 December (Christmas Day). Jesus Christ, God Incarnate, is emphasised in this season. It is a time of celebration of the Incarnation (John 1:14). The focus is on the birth of Jesus Christ and its themes are joy, the gift of love, and family. The colour for this short season is white which symbolises celebration and purity.

Epiphany

Epiphany begins on 6 January (Epiphany Day). This season highlights Christ, the Revealer of God to all peoples. It is a season when Christians

celebrate Jesus Christ being “shown forth” or “manifested (epiphanised)” to all humankind as Saviour of the world. This season focuses on the stories of Jesus’ early life, the visit of the wise men, his baptism and the wedding feast at Cana. The themes throughout this season are reconciliation, renewal and missions. Green, the symbol of growth and spring, is the colour of Epiphany.

Lent

Lent begins on Ash Wednesday, 40 days before Easter (excluding Sundays). Jesus Christ, the Revealer of human beings to themselves, takes centre stage in Lent. It is a season of preparation for Easter, a time for fasting, self-denial, prayer and repentance. This season focuses on the life and ministry of Jesus, especially his last days in Jerusalem. Passion, repentance, salvation, confession and spiritual discipline are the themes of this season. Purple, symbolising penitence and preparation, colours this season. The liturgical colour of Good Friday is black, for darkness, suffering and death. Many churches (including the Anglican and Lutheran) have changed it to red to denote the blood of Christ that was shed and the martyr-nature of his death.

Eastertide

This season begins on Easter Sunday and Christ the living God is emphasised. It is a season of celebration, revolving around the resurrection and ascension of Christ. Ascension Day is 40 days after Easter. The focus in this season is on resurrection and new life. Its themes are new beginnings, life and joy. The liturgical colour of this season is white, symbolising purity and celebration.

Pentecost

Fifty days after Easter is the beginning of Pentecost (also called Whitsun), a season when we celebrate the gift of the Holy Spirit on Christians and the birth of the Church. God the Holy Spirit is emphasised this season. The season focuses on the gift and the work of the Holy Spirit, the life and mission of the Christian community. The themes of this season

include God's community, the Spirit's gifts and fruit, vitality, spontaneity and enthusiasm. The colour of Pentecost is red, symbolising the fire of the Holy Spirit and the blood of the martyrs which is the seed of the Church.

Kingdomtide

Kingdomtide begins on the last Sunday in August and is the last season of the Christian calendar. The emphasis of this season is Christ the King Eternal. It is a season in which we affirm that all we do in our personal, social, economic, political and religious life come under the kingship of the Triune God. The kingdom of God, Christian lifestyle and maturity are the focus of this season and its theme is growth. The colour of Kingdomtide is green, the colour of growth and spring.

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