

## CHRIST UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

History Series: The History of John Wesley and the Methodist Church

Compiled by John H. Evans

Sabbath March 18, 2007

### PART 23: FROM THE PAST INTO THE FUTURE

We closed the March 11 notes with the death of John Wesley in 1791. Charles had died in 1788. The movement however, as the work of the Holy Spirit, rose up strong leaders who had enormous effect in the decades following and are still with us today. It began with the abolition of slavery and prison reform in cooperation with other religious groups, especially the Quakers. It continued to ameliorate the effects of the industrial revolution by involvement in the early labor movement, especially in the late 1800's and early 1900's. We continue today to seek to strike a balance between evangelism and social action. To aid in consideration of this it will be helpful to know the basic Methodist beliefs. In this part we give quotes that provide us with an overview. This will be followed by a more extensive, but still condensed, statement of fundamental Methodist doctrines in Part 24 which, in turn, will be followed by a more comprehensive statement and source identification of doctrines in Parts 25 and 26.

As was mentioned previously, Wesley regarded Methodism as a religion for the whole person and for all humankind, i.e., a world religion. To quote Charles Wesley:

Sent by my Lord, on you I call;  
The invitation is to ALL:  
Come, all the world; come, sinner, thou!  
All things in Christ are ready now.

“I am not afraid that the people called Methodist should ever cease to exist either in Europe or America. But I am afraid least they should exist only as a dead sect, having the form of religion without the power. And this undoubtedly will be the case unless they hold fast both doctrine, spirit and discipline they first set out.”

— John Wesley, Aug. 6, 1786

In the following quote from John Wesley, Arians are followers of Arias (approximately 280-336 AD) who taught that Jesus was not of the same substance as God, i.e., not divine but an elevated mortal. Socinians are followers of Socinus (1539-1604 AD) who denied the Trinity and the divinity of Christ and held that salvation can be attained solely by practicing the virtues exemplified by Christ:

The distinguishing marks of a Methodist are not his opinions of any sort. His assenting to this or that scheme of religion, his embracing any particular set of notions, his espousing the judgment of one man or another are all quite wide of the point. Whosoever, therefore, imagines that a Methodist is a man of such or such an opinion is grossly ignorant of the whole affair; he mistakes the truth totally. We

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believe that “all scripture is given by inspiration of God”; and herein are we distinguished from the Jews, Turks and infidels. We believe the written word of God to be the only rule both of faith and practice; and herein we are fundamentally distinguished from those of the Roman church. We believe Christ to be the eternal, the supreme God; and herein we are distinguished from the Socinians and Arians. But as to all opinions that do not strike at the root of Christianity, we think and let think.”

— John Wesley *The Character of a Methodist*

The eighteenth century with its collapse of the old social order, its appalling economic maladjustments and poverty, its rampant immorality and atheism...was more like our generation than any period in history. Christians were in despair. Did not their enemies say that Christianity had one foot in the grave, and needed only decent obsequies to complete its history?... Then came the Wesleys to light a fire that broke into such a conflagration of triumphant faith as the English-speaking world had never known before. Once more came an authentic outbreak of spiritual life, hope, born out of despair.... If we Christians were worth our salt, we could reproduce that now.

— Harry Emerson Fosdick in *Our Day and Wesley's*  
(Harry Emerson Fosdick (1878-1969) was a prominent preacher and writer.)