

CHRIST UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

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

Compiled by John H. Evans

Sabbath March 25, 2007

PART 24: METHODIST DOCTRINE

The notes for last week were, in essence, the first of several dealing with Methodist doctrines. We continue with the Methodist doctrine today and with Wesley's general theology in Parts 25 and 26. This week, we begin with a quote:

It is not a new doctrine but a new life the first Methodists sought for themselves and others. To realize in the hearts of men the true ideal of Christianity, to maintain its personal experience and to extend it – this was their design; and their system of government grew up out of this and was accordingly shaped by it.

The Methodist church is not a creedal church; in other words, there is no one affirmation of faith demanded for membership. The *Book of Worship for Church and Home* includes five creeds: The Apostle's Creed, The Nicene Creed, The Korean Creed, A Creed in the Words of St. John and A Modern Affirmation. Three of these – the Apostle's, the Korean and the Modern – are included in our hymnal. The Apostle's creed is the most frequently recited. I urge you to read them and distill from them the essence of our belief: God as Father and Jesus Christ His only Son; The Holy Spirit; The Church consisting of Christians everywhere; the Forgiveness of Sins; The Resurrection of the Body and Eternal Life.

In the *Book of Common Prayer* of The Church of England there are thirty-nine Articles of Religion. From these John Wesley selected twenty-four as suitable for the Methodist church in America, and he added an additional one that applies to our American national government. These were approved by the first conference in the United States, the Christmas Conference of 1784. They will not be reproduced here; but we will state their substance. (It's ok to heave a sigh of relief!)

1. There is one true God who made and preserves all things. Father, Son and Holy Spirit are one God, the Trinity.
2. Jesus is the divine Son of God, was born of the Virgin Mary, and was crucified, dead and buried for the sins of men.
3. Jesus rose from the dead and ascended to heaven. He will return to judge all men.
4. The Holy Spirit came from the Father and the Son and is one with them in the Trinity.
5. The Holy Scriptures contain all truth necessary for salvation.
6. The ancient rites and ceremonies of the Old Testament do not bind Christians but its moral teachings should be obeyed.
7. Original sin is the evil in Man's nature that he inherits.

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8. The free will of Man must have God's help in order that he may do good and please God.
9. We are justified, i.e., pardoned not because of good works, but by faith in Jesus Christ as our Savior.
10. Good works are the fruits of faith and pleasing to God.
11. It is not possible to do more good works than God requires.
12. If one sins after justification, or pardon, he may repent and be forgiven.
13. The Church of Jesus Christ is a congregation of faithful people in which the gospel is preached and the sacraments administered.
14. Purgatory is not taught in the Bible; neither is praying to saints or worshiping images or relics.
15. Public worship should not be conducted in a language that the people do not understand. To do so is contrary to the Word of God and the custom of the early church.
16. Sacraments are badges of Christian profession and signs of God's Grace. Christ ordained only two: Baptism and the Supper of the Lord.
17. Baptism is a sign of Christian profession. The baptism of young children should be retained in the church.
18. The Sacrament of the Lord's Supper is a sign of brotherly love and a memorial of Christ's death. It should be observed in a spiritual manner but should not be made an object of worship.
19. In the Lord's Supper lay members should receive both bread and wine.
20. There is no value in masses for the dead. This is a dangerous deceit.
21. Ministers may marry at their own discretion.
22. It is not necessary to have the same rites and ceremonies in all places. These may be changed to meet the needs of different countries and times.
23. Affirms the independence and authority of our national government.
24. Christians may possess private property, but they should give liberally to the poor.
25. A Christian may swear, when a magistrate requires it, without violating the teachings of the Bible.

You may note that about half of these are to distinguish us from the church at Rome. A complete and official listing of the Methodist Articles of Faith can be found on the United Methodist Church website at: <http://archives.umc.org/interior.asp?mid=1648>