

THE FUTURE OF WESLEYAN THEOLOGY WITH A MISSIONAL AGENDA:  
RECONCILIATION AND THE EUCHARIST

David Rainey, NTC Manchester

*Introduction*

In 1998 Clark Pinnock asserted an idea that has become common in the theology of missions. Pinnock stated, “The time is surely ripe for theological advance in the context of world missions.”<sup>1</sup> He added, “The question is – will we grasp this opportunity for evangelical and Wesleyan theology?”, then, Pinnock made a further statement that should be taken seriously, “The identity of an evangelical theologian is defined more sociologically than precisely theologically.”<sup>2</sup> It is legitimate to add that often missions had become a sociological study rather than a theological study and this created added problems for the church’s understanding of missions. So, the proposal offered here is that John Wesley’s understanding of the practice of mission was grounded in an ecclesiological theology of mission. But some preliminary work has to be done.

*1. Preliminary Overview*

In 2004 William Abraham addressed the Wesleyan Theological Society with an essay titled, “The End of Wesleyan Theology.”<sup>3</sup> He began, “Wesleyan theology is slowly being laid to rest,”<sup>4</sup> and then lamented, “There are as many Wesleys as there are scholars.”<sup>5</sup> He continued:

They have migrated to Evangelicalism, to Feminism, to Narrative Theology, to Liberation Theology, to Process Theology, to Paul Tillich, to Karl Barth, to John Howard Yoder, to Michel Foucault, to Rosemary Ruether, to Ellen Charry, to anything and to everyone under the sun.<sup>6</sup>

The problem is not that Wesley cannot be integrated to other appropriate theological traditions, it is that, for some, Wesley has been lost in the migration and one can no longer find Wesley.

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<sup>1</sup> Clark Pinnock, “Evangelical Theologians Facing the Future: An Ancient and Future Paradigm,” *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 33: 2 (1998), p. 7.

<sup>2</sup> Clark Pinnock, p. 8.

<sup>3</sup> William Abraham, “The End of Wesleyan Theology,” *Wesleyan Theological Journal*, 40:1 (Spring, 2005), p. 7-25.

<sup>4</sup> Abraham, p. 7.

<sup>5</sup> Abraham, p. 13.

<sup>6</sup> Abraham, p. 15.

One example will suffice. In the *Wesleyan Theological Journal* (Fall, 2009), Michael Zbaraschuk began, "As Wesleyan thinkers continue to refine their approaches to the theological world, both process thought and open theism are making the case to be conceptual theological options."<sup>7</sup> The essay was designed to offer theological directions for Wesleyan Christology but the difficulty with the essay appears when John Wesley made no contribution to the Christological discussion. Or, in other words, to make Wesleyan theology relevant some have ignored the theological John Wesley and, in other cases, some have attempted to re-invent John Wesley. Like Albert Schweitzer's, *Quest of the Historical Jesus*, in the effort to make Jesus relevant, one had to re-invent the historical Jesus. Perhaps the future of Wesleyan theology will enter a new invigoration with the publication of Tom Noble's 2010 address to the Wesleyan Theological Society, "To Serve the Present Age: Authentic Wesleyan Theology Today." Although this material offers support for Tom Noble's Presidential Address another and different direction on the future of Wesleyan theology will be presented. This article is a follow-up to the recently published article, "The Established Church and Evangelical Theology: John Wesley's Ecclesiology."<sup>8</sup> Here again, one can afford to listen to William Abraham's expressed concern that Wesley's "ferve sacramentalism" has been sidelined in the church's mission. It should be considered a theological error in Wesleyan ecclesial theology when Wesley's own sacramental theology is ignored.

Some further comments will be helpful to place the idea of a re-assessment of the future of Wesleyan theology with a missional perspective in relation to the Eucharist. Over thirty years ago Albert Outler offered a useful assessment on John Wesley and why he had been ignored in the broader academic community. Outler wrote, "...we don't have many mass evangelists of record with anything like Wesley's immersion in classical culture, his eager openness to 'modern' science and social change, his awareness of the entire Christian tradition as a living resource – and even fewer with his ecclesial vision of a sacramental community as a nurturing environment of Christian experience."<sup>9</sup> It is his almost throw away comment "sacramental community" that should be recovered to develop not only a proposal

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<sup>7</sup> Michael Zbaraschuk, "Process Theology Resources for Open and Relational Christology," *Wesleyan Theological Journal*, 44:2 (Spring, 2009), p. 154.

<sup>8</sup> David Rainey, "The Established Church and Evangelical Theology: John Wesley's Ecclesiology," *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 12.4, (October, 2010), p. 420-434.

<sup>9</sup> Albert Outler, "The Place of Wesley in the Christian Tradition," in *The Place of Wesley in the Christian Tradition*, ed., Kenneth Rowe, Metuchen, N.J.: The Scarecrow Press, 1976), p.

for the future of Wesleyan theology but a proposal for the future of the Church's universal mission. What is needed is not simply a count of how many times the Eucharist is celebrated during the year but a continuation of Wesley's Eucharistic theology for the Church of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. In light of this, it will be established that Wesley's Eucharistic theology and practice was not a sideline to the 18<sup>th</sup> century revival.

## 2. *John Wesley's Eucharist Theology: Pre-1738*

Recently, Geordan Hammond has continued his important research into the early years of John Wesley's ministry and theology.<sup>10</sup> His research confirmed that Wesley was influenced by the sacramental theology of the Non-Jurors and Daniel Brevint. Through these people Wesley accepted the concept of the mysterious presence of Christ at the Eucharist through the actual presence of the Holy Spirit. Wesley formulated this position before the beginning of the revival in 1738 yet Wesley never wavered on this point during the revival.<sup>11</sup> Thus, the bread and wine were effective channels of God's grace. This meant that the Eucharistic celebration was a key to the ongoing influence of the revival. As Geordan Hammond stated, "An important aspect of Brevint's theology (shared by the Wesleys) is that through celebrating the Eucharist, the faithful receive God's grace and are empowered for holy Living."<sup>12</sup> It is clearly evident in this sacramental theology the communicant can be transformed by God's grace at the Eucharistic table. Hammond goes on to assert in his brief analysis of the 1745 publication *Hymns on the Lord's Supper*, "that the Wesleys led a revival that was (a) liturgical and evangelical."<sup>13</sup> For Wesley it was the participation in the continually effective sacrifice of Christ on the cross expressed through the Lord's Supper that was so crucial. Our reconciliation to God transforms us into a 'living sacrifice' and so the Lord's Supper applies the full effect of God's grace to the participant. This is partially affirmed in Kyle Tau's comment, "It is the church's union with Christ through the partaking of the sacrament that procures for us reconciliation with the Father."<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Geordan Hammond, "The Wesleys Sacramental Theology and Practice in Georgia," *Proceeding of the Charles Wesley Society* 13, (2009), p. 53-73.

<sup>11</sup> Hammond, p. 57.

<sup>12</sup> Hammond, p. 64.

<sup>13</sup> Hammond, p. 63.

<sup>14</sup> Kyle Tau, "A Wesleyan Analysis of the Nazarene Doctrinal Stance on the Lord's Supper," *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 43.2, (Spring, 2008), p. 107.

Geordan Hammond insisted, “John Wesley’s high regard for the Eucharist was a constant and unwavering aspect of his life and ministry.”<sup>15</sup> He is not alone in insisting that the Eucharist is an important key to understanding the 18<sup>th</sup> century revival. Albert Outler confirmed this in his editorial comment regarding Wesley’s sermon, *The Duty of Constant Communion*; the Sermon had been developed from John Nelson’s writings. John Wesley wrote an extract of the 17<sup>th</sup>-18<sup>th</sup> century Non-Juror’s sacramental theology in 1732. The sermon, though, was published in the June 1787 *Arminian Magazine* and Outler added, “What may be most noteworthy about this sermon is that it represents Wesley’s fullest and most explicit statement of his Eucharistic doctrine and praxis...”<sup>16</sup> The point is that the future of Wesleyan theology can get its bearings directly from John Wesley in order to understand an authentic mission of the Church. Still, we need to recognise how his Eucharistic theology created mission. Wesley’s Eucharistic theology is a theology of reconciliation, he also described this as holiness, i.e., love of God and neighbour. With this in mind he expected Methodists to attend the Eucharistic service each week, for Wesley this was integral to the holiness and mission of the church. It is then important to recognise that the Lord’s Table was the place to experience reconciliation.

### 3. *John Wesley’s Eucharist Theology: Post-1738*

But it is important to note some alterations in Wesley Eucharistic practice from the Georgian ministry to the outbreak of the revival in 1738 and in the following years. During his brief time in Georgia he followed a strict Non-Juror approach and, consequently, one might think that Wesley’s method was invasive in investigating people’s spiritual disciplines. After 1738 there is a discernable shift to a more open table without the priestly investigation into people’s behaviour. Two illustrations will suffice to make this point. First, Wesley clearly made a break from his earlier ‘fencing’ of the Table in his post-1738 disagreements with the ‘stillness’ understanding of the London Moravians at Fetter Lane by identifying his openness in Eucharistic theology. In part he wrote, “I showed at large (1) that the Lord’s Supper was ordained by God to be a *means of conveying* to men either *preventing* or *justifying*, or *sanctifying grace* ... (4) that no *fitness* is required at the time of communicating but a *sense of our state*, of our utter sinfulness and helplessness; every one who knows he is

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<sup>15</sup> Hammond, p. 59.

<sup>16</sup> Albert Outler, in *The Duty of Constant Communion* (BE) 3; P. 427-428.

*fit for hell* being just *fit to come to Christ...*”<sup>17</sup> Now the mission of the church has been identified. At the Lord’s Table all are invited and depending on a person’s spiritual state, it is possible to experience the awareness of sin and the need of Christ (preventing grace), or, a conversion to Christ (justifying grace), or, growth in holiness (sanctifying grace). Secondly, that this became the norm is evident in his own Journal accounts of the hundreds, perhaps thousands, who attended his Eucharistic services throughout Great Britain. J. Ernest Rattenbury conveniently gave us an account of Wesley’s estimated numbers of participants during the last 10 years of his life. I will quote Rattenbury at length if only to emphasise that missions and the Lord’s Supper were integrally united by Wesley.

LEEDS – “Easter Day, I preached in the church morning and evening, when we had about 800 communicants; “at the communion was such a sight as I am persuaded was never seen in Manchester before, 11 or 12,00 communicants at once”; LEEDS – “We were ten clergymen and 7 or 800 communicants”; “I found it work enough to read prayers and preach, and administer the Sacrament to several hundred people”; MACCLESFIELD – “We administered the Sacrament to about 13,00 persons”; MANCHESTER again – “Mr. Baily came very opportunely to assist me, it was supposed there were 13 or 14,00 communicants”; “Easter Day – near 1000 communicants”; LEEDS – “Having five clergymen to assist me, we administered the Lord’s Supper to 16 or 17,00 persons”; BRISTOL – “It was supposed we had 1000 communicants, and I believe none went away empty”; MANCHESTER – “We had 12,00 communicants”; SHEFFIELD – “I read prayers, preached, and administered the Sacrament to above 500 communicants”; OLD CHURCH, LEEDS – “We have eighteen clergymen and about 1,100 communicants”; SHEFFIELD – “I read prayers, preached, and administered the Sacrament to 6 or 7,00”; BIRMINGHAM – “Mr. Heath read prayers and assisted in delivering the Sacrament to 7 or 8,00 communicants.”<sup>18</sup>

This account shall end with Wesley’s record of his ministry in Dublin, Ireland:

I preached at the new room at 7, at 11 I went to the Cathedral, I desired those of our Society who did not go to parish Churches, would go with me to S. Patrick’s. Many of them did so. It was said the number of communicants was about 500; more than went there in the whole year before Methodists were known in Ireland.<sup>19</sup>

To emphasise the place of the Lord’s Table in the life of the Church, and for Wesley, during the revival, may not have been particularly unusual.<sup>20</sup> But, perhaps, it is remarkable that Wesley could attract such large crowds at the Eucharistic celebration.

<sup>17</sup> June 28, 1740, *Journal* (BE) 19, p. 159.

<sup>18</sup> J. Ernest Rattenbury, *The Eucharistic Hymns of John and Charles Wesley*, (Akron, Ohio: OSL Publications 1990, 1996), p. 2-3.

<sup>19</sup> Rattenbury, p. 3.

<sup>20</sup> W.M. Jacob gave a brief account of the regularity of Eucharistic practice in England. The frequency of the Eucharistic celebration depended on the size of population. For instance, he

Wesley consistently maintained that he was a ‘High Churchman’.<sup>21</sup> It meant his model for church renewal was the first three centuries, along with a high regard for the ecclesial institution of the Church of England, which he combined with his political conservatism. Yet his ecclesiology was not narrowly focussed and now there is evidence of his open Eucharistic approach. Further support for Wesley’s open approach can be gleaned from his writings. As the Methodist movement developed Wesley adopted a mission in which he intended to include all people in the renewal of the nation. In different ways this was controversial yet Wesley was aware that he could not gain approval from everybody all the time. His 1749 *Letter to a Roman Catholic* is a helpful example.

In the letter he distinguished between doctrine and opinion and his doctrine was grounded in the scripturally based Nicene Creed; his ecclesiology of the universal church was based on the trinitarian relationship with the living and departed humanity. He began the letter recognising the controversy of his reconciling theology. He wrote, “Many Protestants (so called) will be angry with me, too, for writing to you in this manner...”<sup>22</sup> Near the end of the Letter he continued his ecumenical mindset, “If a man sincerely believes thus much and practices accordingly, can any one possibly persuade you to think that such a man shall perish everlastingly.”<sup>23</sup> Then he concluded, “My dear friend consider: I am not persuading you to leave or change your religion, but to follow after that fear and love of God without which all religion is vain.”<sup>24</sup> John Wesley ended with a call to peace and reconciliation between Protestants and Roman Catholics.<sup>25</sup> Although the Roman Catholic Church exercised no

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stated, “London’s large population meant clergy frequently celebrated Holy Communion.” Then he added, “During the early eighteenth century the majority of village clergy celebrated communion three times a year but bishops clearly exhorted incumbents to provide an additional celebration, usually on the Sunday nearest Michaelmas,” *The Clerical Profession in the Long Eighteenth Century (1680-1840)*, (Oxford: Oxford University press, 2007), p. 184, 185.

<sup>21</sup> This was not a term that can be easily defined in the eighteenth century. William Gibson’s work on the early eighteenth century Bishop William Talbot indicated the looseness of categories such as ‘High Church’ and ‘Low Church.’ Gibson concluded, “In short there was no clearly delineated doctrines that so easily differentiated High and Low Churchmen,” “William Talbot and Church Parties 1688-1730,” *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, 38:1, January, 2007, p. 48.

<sup>22</sup> *Letter to a Roman Catholic*, pt. 3, in *John Wesley*, ed. Albert Outler, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1964), p. 493.

<sup>23</sup> *Letter to a Roman Catholic*, pt. 11, p. 496.

<sup>24</sup> *Letter to a Roman Catholic*, pt. 13, p. 496.

<sup>25</sup> *Letter to a Roman Catholic*, p. 498-499. For Wesley’s more critical approach to Roman Catholicism, see David Rainey, “The Established Church and Evangelical Theology: John

influence on the rise of 18<sup>th</sup> century Methodism, Wesley's attempt at reconciliation was quite remarkable.

Again, it can be repeated that Wesley consistently called himself a 'High Churchman' so it is accurate to say that Wesley constructed his theology within the boundaries of the Church of England, based in Richard Hooker, and to that were added the Anglican interpretations of the first three centuries of the Christian church. But into the Methodist movement came many Dissenters. These were the people who opposed the established Church of England. Wesley knew the Dissenting ecclesiologies since both Wesley's father and his mother came from the Dissenting tradition but they left the Dissenters and moved into the Church of England. Wesley, during the revival, acknowledged that the Dissenters gave him genuine problems, yet he never opposed their involvement in Methodism.

#### 4. *Wesley's Further Reconciling Intentions*

Wesley took the problems created by the Dissenters to the annual Conference meetings because he correctly claimed that they deliberately tried to move Methodism out of the Church of England, thus, for Wesley, they were a cause of disunity.<sup>26</sup> If there is evidence of Wesley attempting reconciliation with Roman Catholics (at least he meant to end hostilities between the two traditions), then the Dissenting movement, as an acknowledged cause of disunity for the established Church and thus within Methodism, still required Wesley to portray Methodism as an inclusive reconciling movement and, therefore, no one could be excluded. Thus the Dissenters were allowed to remain, though Wesley disagreed with their intentions. At the same time Wesley had tried, at an early date in the revival, to maintain peace with the Methodists of the Calvinist theology, both within the Church of England and those opposing the Church of England.<sup>27</sup> This open generosity is confirmed in his 1755 sermon, *Catholic Spirit*. For the sake of Christian unity and reconciliation he wrote, "I inquire not, 'Do you receive the Supper of the Lord in the same posture and manner that I do?'"<sup>28</sup> The formal practice of the Eucharist service of his early years had been replaced by an open visible Eucharistic Table of reconciliation during the revival.

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Wesley's Ecclesiology," *International Journal of Systematic Theology*, 12:4, (October, 2010), p. 428.

<sup>26</sup> *Farther Thoughts on Separation from the Church* (BE) 9, p. 539.

<sup>27</sup> Richard P. Heitzenrater, *Wesley and the People Called Methodists*, (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1995), p. 171-172 gives a brief account of the attempt at reconciliation which was not entirely successful.

<sup>28</sup> *Catholic Spirit* (BE) 2, p. 87.

The sermon, *The Means of Grace*, made it clear that John Wesley knew that many Methodists disregarded the importance of the sacraments and for these Methodists a wedge divided spirituality and sacramental practice. Wesley rejected this; for him the sacraments were not an option but were vital for the Christian life. The sacraments effectively conveyed God's grace to the participant, thus the revival could not afford to downplay sacramental life. Yet, Wesley was also aware of the abuse attributed to sacramental practice; he commented, "all these means, when separate from the end, are less than nothing and vanity; that if they do not actually conduce to the knowledge and love of God they are not acceptable in his sight..."<sup>29</sup> Though he recognised the possible misdirection in the sacramental act he did not reject sacramental practice but endeavoured to place it in its proper theological place. Wesley believed there was nothing 'automatic' in the sacraments, i.e., the sacraments did not contain grace in themselves, it is God who works through these appointed channels of grace. He continually asserted that the 'means of grace' which included the sacraments, transforms the participant. In the sermon he wrote his familiar phrase, "By the 'means of grace' I understand outward signs, words, or actions ordained by God, and appointed for this end – to be the *ordinary* channels whereby he might convey to men preventing, justifying, or sanctifying grace."<sup>30</sup> He implied that in like manner to the sacraments, prayer or the reading of scripture can become abusive but one does not abandon the practice because of misuse.

It is in this sermon, *Means of Grace*, that we find Wesley's emphasis on the Lord's Supper as a converting ordinance and should not be abandoned in opposition to the ill conceived 'waiting on God' model of the London Moravians. He stated, "use all the means which God has ordained. For who knows in which God will meet thee with the grace that bringeth salvation?"<sup>31</sup> To this he would then add at the end of the sermon the spiritual value of the means of grace, "not for their own sake, but in order to the renewal of your soul in righteousness and true holiness."<sup>32</sup> As stated earlier, it is possible to discern the implication that the Lord's Supper is to be a constant activity for the unconverted and the believer in the development of the spiritual life.

It is worth noting that Charles Wesley was completely in line with this way of theological thought. From *Hymns on the Lord's Supper* is Hymn #165:

How happy are Thy servants, Lord,

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<sup>29</sup> *The Means of Grace* (BE) 1, p. 381.

<sup>30</sup> *The Means of Grace*, p. 381.

<sup>31</sup> *The Means of Grace*, p. 395.

<sup>32</sup> *The Means of Grace*, p. 396-397.

Who, thus remember Thee!  
 What tongue can tell our sweet accord,  
 Our perfect harmony.

Who Thy mystery supper share,  
 Here at Thy table fed,  
 Many, and yet but One we are,  
 One undivided bread.

One with the living Bread Divine,  
 Which now by faith we eat,  
 Our hearts and minds, and spirits join,  
 And all in Jesus meet.

So dear the tie where souls agree  
 In Jesu's dying love:  
 Then only can it closer be,  
 When all are join'd above.<sup>33</sup>

##### 5. *Reconciliation as Inclusiveness*

A slight change in direction will add to the depth of the analysis of Wesley's missional agenda and his critical assessment of renewal in the church. His remarkable but small treatise, *Thoughts Upon a Late Phenomenon* (1788) is important. In this document Wesley offered a critical assessment of renewal movements throughout history. His assessment stated that revival movements had only a short duration; thirty years was the norm before a renewal movement lost its original effectiveness.<sup>34</sup> He brought this analysis into his own life by describing the beginning of Methodism and the immediate attempt by some to separate from the established Church. This, for Wesley, was a disastrous move and had been rejected by repeated Conferences.<sup>35</sup> Wesley added a note that has often been ignored, "they will not be a distinct body."<sup>36</sup> Here he meant that Methodism would not separate from the Church of England and therefore would not become a distinct body. Years earlier in 1742 he had used a similar approach.<sup>37</sup> Wesley followed a basic Nicene theology interpreted through the 16<sup>th</sup> century Reformation to define Methodism in general terms:

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<sup>33</sup> In J. Ernest Rattenbury, p. 202.

<sup>34</sup> *Thoughts Upon a Late Phenomenon*, pt. 4, (BE) 9, p. 535.

<sup>35</sup> *Thoughts Upon a Late Phenomenon*, pt. 6, p. 536.

<sup>36</sup> *Thoughts Upon a Late Phenomenon*, pt. 7, p. 536.

<sup>37</sup> *The Character of a Methodist*, (BE) 9, p. 32-46.

A Methodist is one who has the love of God shed abroad in his heart by the Holy Ghost given unto him; one who loves the Lord his God with all his heart, and with all his soul, and with all his mind, and with all his strength. God is the joy of all his heart and the desire of his soul...<sup>38</sup>

In these quotes Wesley refused to be drawn into a narrow definition of exclusion. His attempt was to include all people from all the Christian traditions. Once the revival began in 1738 Wesley displayed this generosity of God's love in his Eucharistic practice and theology.

### 6. *The Current Situation*

Howard Snyder's contribution in the edited work, *Evangelical Ecclesiology: Reality or Illusion?*, is an important chapter on the dynamic understanding of the church.<sup>39</sup> Although his overly critical use of the word 'institution' is unnecessary, Howard Snyder provided a useful way to see the bigger picture of the Church.<sup>40</sup> As a dialogue partner with Howard Snyder's essay let me add a much earlier work, T.W. Manson's, *The Church's Ministry* (1948). Manson's basic agenda was to establish that the essential ministry of the church is the 'continuation of the Incarnation'. All other ministries are derivative from Christ. Manson made some incredibly important statements on the ministry of the Church; one such statement deals with the Church as a living organism. "Again because the Church is a living organism we cannot simply go back to the New Testament times and say that whatever we find there must be binding for ever, and that anything in the Church's life and organisation that cannot be shown to have existed in the Apostolic Age has no right to exist at all."<sup>41</sup> That seems to resonate with John Wesley's ecclesial methodology and formation. John Wesley never implied a debate between 'organic' versus 'institutional'; he held both ideas together

<sup>38</sup> *The Character of a Methodist*, pt. 5, p. 35.

<sup>39</sup> Howard Snyder, "The Marks of Evangelical Ecclesiology," in *Evangelical Ecclesiology: Illusion or Reality?*, ed. John G. Stackhouse, Jr., (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003), p. 77-103.

<sup>40</sup> Howard Snyder's work appears to assert a more functional level of ecclesiology. He questioned the adequacy of the four traditional marks, 'one, holy, catholic, and apostolic church', with the comment, "I suggest two inherent limitations: the ambiguity of the traditional marks and, more seriously, their inadequate biblical grounding" (p. 84). I would question both assumptions. The four traditional marks are biblically based and were always open-ended, not restrictive, and they should be read in that manner.

<sup>41</sup> T.W. Manson, *The Church's Ministry*, (London: Hodder & Stoughton Limited, 1948), p. 85-86.

in evangelical tension and it is a key in understanding Wesley's missional ecclesiology. And so, in combining Howard Snyder's contribution, T.W. Manson's book, and John Wesley's 'High Churchmanship' with Eucharistic theology we discover an inclusive ecclesiology effective for the Church's missional agenda.

### 7. *A Current Eucharistic Practice*

In liturgical practice the Liturgy of the Table begins with the 'passing of the peace'. This act was not in the 18<sup>th</sup> century Eucharistic service, it was introduced in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The 'passing of the peace' made explicit what was implicit in the liturgy. This act is not a welcoming to the service, or the church, or the Table; it is an act of reconciliation. The priest states, 'The peace of the Lord be always with you.' The congregation responds, 'And also with you.' Then the instruction is given, 'Let us offer one another the sign of peace'. When properly done, the service is a direct statement that the church is the place of reconciliation. The 'passing of the peace' is a visible sign that God's people are a people of reconciliation and it is this visibility that conveys mission to the world. Anthony Thiselton repeated this idea by stating, "To share the peace in the Eucharist or the Lord's Supper is to learn the habit of living in a state of reconciliation with others, and of sharing collaboratively in a common mission and commitment."<sup>42</sup>

For the Eucharist to be viable the Christian community is not to be understood as a group of individuals gathered in worship, it is a group of people united at the Table of the Lord living in the grace of the Holy Spirit. Since the Eucharist is a thanksgiving celebration of Christ's sacrifice, the Letter to the Ephesians becomes important. There we read, "For he is our peace; for in his flesh he has made both groups into one and has broken down the dividing wall, that is, the hostility between us...and might reconcile both groups to God in one body through the cross, thus putting to death that hostility through it" (Eph. 2: 14, 16). This is confirmed in Paul's second letter to the Corinthians, "So we are ambassadors for Christ, since God is making his appeal through us; we entreat you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God" (II Cor. 5: 20). Consequently, being, 'a living sacrifice' (Rom 12:1) is a sacramental act and is a continuation of Christ's finished sacrifice which carries with it the enormous potential for missions in the theology of reconciliation through the Incarnation. With detailed precision Sarah Whittle connected the community meal (Eucharist) in I Cor. 10-11 with Rom. 12:1. Concerning I Cor. 10-11 she stated, "This may be more than an

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<sup>42</sup> *The Hermeneutics of Doctrine*, (Cambridge: William B. Eerdmans, 2007), p. 88.

interesting digression because it is on this very basis, says Paul, that the covenant meal we eat together-the cup we share and the bread we break-is participation in the body of Christ (I Cor. 10:16).” Then she concluded, “This corporate sacrifice is one of consecration and communion, an offering of peace and reconciliation with God and one another.”<sup>43</sup>

### *Conclusion*

If the explicit reconciliation theology is missing then the Eucharist becomes a ritual of habit rather than the declaration of the visible reconciled community known as the Church. It is visible reconciliation through Christ’s work and in the power of the Holy Spirit that creates the ‘marks of the church’. Regardless of how many ‘marks’ are authentic to the church’s identity it is only in reconciliation that the church’s identity becomes authentic.

The Eucharistic practice of reconciliation among the participants in the service should be required in all Eucharistic liturgy. Such an act of reconciliation would then be applied to the world and all of creation. No doubt there are powerful eschatological implications in this. Just as Wesley excluded no one from the Table so all of God’s creation should be in focus at the Eucharist. As Mary Elizabeth Mullins Moore indicated, “The self-giving of God and humanity are critical to New Creation, and it is clearly glimpsed in the sacraments and in Jesus’ giving of his own life for his friends (John 15:13).”<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Sarah Whittle, “Bodies Given for the Body: Covenant, Community and Consecration in Romans 12:1,” *Wesleyan Theological Journal*, 48.1, (Spring, 2011), p. 101-102, 105.

<sup>44</sup> Mary Elizabeth Mullins Moore, “New Creation, Repentance, Reparation and Reconciliation,” in *Wesleyan Perspectives on New Creation*, ed., M. Douglas Meeks, (Nashville: Kingswood Books, 2004), p. 112.