

A UNITED METHODIST THEOLOGY OF SERVICE

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I. Introduction

A renewed interest in the theology of Christian service has resulted in recent years in a reevaluation of the ministry of the deacon, beginning with Vatican II and the ministry-oriented work of the World Council of Church and continuing to this day in many denominations, including The United Methodist Church (UMC). In 1996, the UMC instituted the order of permanent deacon, replacing the lay diaconal minister with an office of deacon as ordained clergy. At the same time, the UMC eliminated the long-standing sequential ordination of elders first as deacons, replacing that with the category of probationary elder and probationary deacon. Also in 1996, the UMC removed the language of representative ministry from the Disciplinary description of ministry and made the ministry of service part of the ordained office.¹ Needless to say, the church has had some difficulties adjusting to this new understanding of ministry, ranging from harsh rhetoric and confusion to embracing the new diaconate as essential to the emerging ministry of the UMC. At the same time as the UMC is reordering its ordained ministry on these new lines, it does not seem to be able to describe with sufficient clarity its understanding of ministry.² Part of the problem may be located in the church's lack of a clear theology of service.

¹ The United Methodist Church. *The Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church*. (Nashville: The United Methodist Publishing House, 2004). Most references to the *Book of Discipline* (BOD) are to the 2004 edition, unless otherwise indicated. ¶ 430 of the 1992 Book of Discipline stated that “those who are ordained are committed to becoming conscious *representatives* of the whole gospel and are responsible for the transmission of that gospel to the end that all the world may be saved. Their ordination is fulfilled in the ministry of Word, Sacrament, and Order.” This language was changed in the 1996 Discipline to “those who are ordained make a commitment to conscious *living* of the whole gospel and to the proclamation of that gospel to the end that the world may be saved” (¶ 303). This is followed by, “Ordination is fulfilled in leadership of the people of God through the ministries of Service, Words, Sacrament, and Order. The Church’s ministry of service is a primary representation of God’s love” (¶ 303.2)

² As evidence of this lack of clarity, note that the General Conferences of the UMC since the United Conference have wrestled with some question of ministry, and have instituted several studies of ministry, including the present study, which has been given four more years.

There are two interconnected reasons why developing a UM theology of service is important. The first concerns how service is understood as the common ministry of all Christians. This is primarily a question of how the church understands the ministry of the laity.³ The second is how service is understood within the context of the specialized and set-apart ministry of the ordained. The problem with the ministry of the ordained and UM ecclesiology is noted in the 2007 Study of Ministry Commission document as that which made the commission's task so complex, namely contending with "the immensely complex and eclectic ecclesiology of The United Methodist Church."⁴ Even while proclaiming that Christian service belongs to the whole body of the church, the UMC in its polity makes Christian service the provenance of a few called out of the laity to serve as ordained by the ordination to service. Those who are set-apart in this way are then said to be "servant leaders."⁵ The ordination to ministries of service adds an unnecessary layer of confusion to the understanding of service derived from the common ministry of the baptized. While the church draws a strong connection between baptism and Christian service for the laity, the ordination to service by those who are set-apart jeopardizes the strength of that connection by identifying service as the responsibility of those ordained to ministerial offices.

³ The Roman Catholic Church has some of the best literature on the service of the laity. For example, Collins, John N. *Are all Christians Ministers?* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1992). Collins offers a thorough Roman Catholic view of this problem, which may be useful in diagnosing the problems faced by the UMC. See also: Kriewald, Diedra. "Diakonia as a 'Sacred Order' in the United Methodist Church." *Quarterly Review*, Winter 1999/2000, pp 357-371. Kriewald writes: "A strong and revitalized lay ministry is also a commonly recognized goal [like strengthening of the ancient Order of Deacons] among the Christian assemblies. *Laos* and *diakonia* are increasingly understood as separate-but-equal partners for the mission of the church in the world. As The United Methodist Church has moved to reorganize the Order of Deacons, many worry that a permanent and ordained diaconate will weaken the ministry of the laity. There is good reason to be suspicious, for the ordained have indeed developed a cultic class system" (360).

⁴ 2007 Study of Ministry Commission Report. General Board of Higher Education and Ministry, Q108.

⁵ BOD ¶136-137.

The root of this problem can be located in two common themes regarding the development of a theology of service in the last century of Christian thought. The first common theme is that the Greek word *diakonia*, and all the words of the *diakon-* group, as it is found in Mark 10:45 and elsewhere in the New Testament conveys the full meaning of Christian service. The commonly accepted example of proper Christian service as *diakonia* is Jesus' humility and self-emptying, in his willingness to serve and not be served, and in his representation of God's creative work in bringing about the new creation. But this view has been called into question by those who argue that *diakonia* is not intended to convey such a full range of meaning, and may in fact convey another meaning altogether.

John Collins, for instance, argues that the intended meaning of *diakonia* for the nascent church had very little to do with humble service to the poor and disadvantaged and much more to do with service to a superior office. Specifically, Collins argues that Jesus' *diakonia* in Mark 10:45 was specifically for God and, thus, not directly intended as charity for the oppressed of the ancient world.⁶ More importantly, the service of Jesus is directly related to the saving work of Jesus. "In saying that he has come to serve, the Son of man is saying that he has come to save."⁷ Thus, Collins argues, the *diakonia* of Christ had more to do with God's offer of salvation for sinful humanity than with the meeting of material needs of those in want. Collins does not argue that the meeting of material needs was not part of the ancient church's lexicon. He does argue that we err when we make the whole meaning of Christian service as solely meeting of material needs of those in want.

⁶ Collins, John N. *Diakonia: Re-interpreting the Ancient Sources*. (New York: Oxford UP, 1990).

⁷ Collins. *Diakonia*, p 52.

The second theme is the regular invocation of Mark 10:45 as the standard text for discussing Christian service: “For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many” (NRSV). The centrality of this text to the Christian understanding of service is the characterization of service as a following of the life, ministry, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ *in a certain way*. The “settled” interpretation of this text says that Jesus, as the Son of Man, came to serve and to give his life over to death so that many may be saved from their spiritual debts as well as be in service to those who were materially and politically impoverished. This reading separates the two phrases of the verse and offers a separate interpretation for each phrase. This, Collins suggests, is a problematic way to engage in consistent and meaningful biblical interpretation especially for a phrase that is as important to the Christian life as service.⁸ In terms of Christian service, the verse has been taken to mean that Jesus is the example of service to the needy, especially those for whom being served was distinctly unlikely, like the poor and societal outcasts. Frequently neglected is the sense that the service of Jesus also has to do with salvation. The dual senses of service as salvation and service to the neediest indicates that a theology of service has a foundation in God’s acts of salvation, which are principally represented in the Church by baptism and Eucharist.

To that end, this paper develops a United Methodist theology of service rooted in the sacraments of baptism and Eucharist. Baptism commissions Christians for service to the world. Through baptism, Christians are united in Christ and united in Christ’s service to the world as a form of obedience to God’s intentions for the world. In terms of Christian service, baptism marks the entry into the Christian life of service and Holy

⁸ Collins, *Diakonia*, pp 46-62. “As well then as having no agreed opinion among commentators as to what the service of the Son of man consists in, we have reason enough to doubt that his service is the kind comprehended under the modern notion of “diakonia” (p 62).

Communion marks the continual nurturing of the Christian through the Holy Spirit in following the way of Jesus. Holy Communion teaches and guides the believer into giving of one's life in service as praise to God for God's acts of salvation and in mercy for the lives of others. This giving over of life is the expectation of all who are baptized into Christ and nurtured in Christ through Holy Communion.⁹ Whereas this theology of service is also a theology of grace, I will argue that the Christian service of the baptized community nurtured in the Eucharist is service to God in works of piety and service to others in works of mercy. To serve in this way is to experience these works as a means of grace and thus to experience that important "growth in grace" that John Wesley expected of those who sought to follow Christ.¹⁰

II. The Entry into Christian Service: The Common Ministry of the Baptized

Through baptism, a Christian is "called...to [the] ministry of servanthood in the world to the glory of God and for human fulfillment."¹¹ Baptism commissions the members of the church and all who follow Jesus to "service, *diakonia*, in the world."

Baptism is a sign of God's grace and a sign of one's decision to follow the way of Jesus,

⁹ It is on this point that I want to locate the meaning of ordained ministry and the authority given through ordination to persons serving the ministry of the church. Specifically, ordination confers a sacramental authority, which is generally a teaching office. The connection between ordination and Christian service can be found in the sacramental teaching office of inviting people into the meaning and form of Christian service found in baptism and Holy Communion. It is here that the church can locate the presidential authority of the ordained elder and the specific service ministry of an ordained deacon, the latter of which serve at the table, a service the content of which is teaching the form of Christian service to the baptized for the sake of the world. For this reason, I think it is necessary to do away with the notion of servant leadership and with ordaining any person to the ministry of service, recovering the language of authority and adding the language of a teaching office. The emphasis on ordination as primarily an ordination to a teaching office is credited to M. Douglas Meeks.

¹⁰ On the works of piety and works of mercy as means of grace, see Joerg Rieger, "Between God and the Poor" in *The Poor and the People Called Methodists* (Richard P. Heitzenrater, ed., Nashville: Kingswood, 1999. pp 83-99) and, Theodore Jennings, *Good News to the Poor: John Wesley's Evangelical Economics* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1990).

¹¹ BOD ¶125.

“who came not to be served, but to serve.”¹² Baptism is the entry point into Christian service. In the Eucharist, Christians learn to live in the world as Jesus lived in the world. The *epiclesis* prayer in Word and Table I of the United Methodist Church petitions God to “make us one with Christ, one with each other, and one in ministry to all the world.”¹³ Thus, participation in the Eucharist gives form to the work Christians do in the world as members of the body of Christ.

In the United Methodist Church, there is no specific consensus on the precise meaning of service, despite the church’s generous use of the word to describe forms of ministry, forms of leadership, and forms of action. There is, however, as basic fundamental understanding of service in the UMC. The UMC describes the meaning of Christian service rooted in baptism as the “general ministry of all baptized Christians.”¹⁴ To understand Christian service is to take an account of the ministry of Jesus Christ as a “servant” of God and as a “servant” to the children of God. Without disregarding the theology of *kenosis* (that the ministry of Christ begins with the self-emptying of the word), the gospels imply that the ministry of Jesus begins with the baptism by John, in order to “fulfill all righteousness.”¹⁵ Similarly, the way to develop our theology of service is to look through the prism of baptism as the sign-act that joins a believer to Christ’s body and thus to Christ’s life and ministry.

Baptism is an appropriate prism for opening up this theology because the theology of baptism casts light on all aspects of Christian life: forgiveness of sins, regeneration and new birth, growth in grace, sanctification. Ideally, Christians learn to live rightly and act

¹² BOD ¶ 305.

¹³ The United Methodist Book of Worship (BOW). (Nashville: Abingdon, 1992). p 38.

¹⁴ BOD ¶305.

¹⁵ Matthew 3:15 (NRSV)

justly in the world through a baptism that joins them to Christ and to the Christian community, assuming that being joined to Christ and the Christian community leads one into living rightly and acting justly. In this section, I will investigate the first part of the argument that baptism is the entry into the life of Christian service. I will focus my comments on three aspects of baptism: (a) union with the body of Christ as the locus of service; (b) the sacramental sign-act of baptism as an entry into Christian service; and (c) the consequent initiation to the discipline of holy living. The final section suggests a movement from the sign-act of the sacramental moment, through union with Christ, into a life of service in the world that Jesus loves. Then the discussion moves to the Eucharist as the *form* of Christian service as how the life of service in the world that Jesus loves is characterized.

Union with Christ

The covenant of baptism, initiated and maintained by God's grace, is a covenant to share in Christ's own life, a resurrected life through the power of the Spirit, and thus to be brought into a union with Christ and a union of equality through covenant community with others. This equality within the covenant community is not bound by the human community itself. Rather, the bounds of the covenant extend to all that God has made, and is extended in service to all that is created and sustained by God's Holy Spirit. Union with Christ through the sacramental moment of baptism brings about a re-union in human communities and a new unification with the natural world.

The causes and methods of division and isolation in the modern world are manifold. Discriminations, divisions, and isolations of all kinds haunt every corner of the globe, nurtured by a strong world spirit of xenophobia, fear, and death. We are told that

this is a “dog-eat-dog” world and that we must have the spirit of the rugged individualist, not realizing that these ways of death benefit very few and destroy the lives of many who are poor and variously marginalized. Jon Sobrino describes those caught on the underside of this madness as “the crucified people.”¹⁶ But even the recognition of the scope of the problem faced by the world’s crucified, and by the crucifiers, can lead to more division and isolation through the sheer power of disillusionment, the sense that the pandemic of poverty and oppression is too much to begin to overcome.¹⁷ Such disillusionment springs from a vision of a world lacking in hope, with a bleak future. The mere description of baptism as that which brings people into unity with Christ and with each other is vacuous without an explicit connection to a community that continues to serve as the body of Christ, a community that actively pursues life and an end to the kinds of crucifixions Sobrino describes. This community depends on a unifying Spirit – a community of life and service that is brought together through the resurrecting power of the Holy Spirit of Christ.

Jürgen Moltmann describes the divisive state of affairs in this world, whether they are within and between people or between people and the natural world, as the affairs of

¹⁶ This is one of Sobrino’s many descriptions of the crucified people: “We must not forget that there are millions of persons in the world who do not simply die, but, in various ways, die as Jesus died, at the hands of “pagans,” at the hands of the modern idolaters of national security or of wealth. Many men and women really die, crucified, murdered, tortured to death, or “disappeared,” for justice’s sake. Many others die a slow crucifixion caused by structural injustice. Entire people today are transformed into trash and offal by the appetites of other men and women, peoples without face or comeliness, like the crucified one. Unfortunately, this is not a metaphor, but a daily reality.” Sobrino, Jon. *Jesus in Latin America*. (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1988). p 151-152.

¹⁷ Certainly, churches and individuals make efforts against the economies that contribute to poverty and oppression. The economist Jeffery Sachs, for instance, has proposed that extreme poverty can be eliminated from the globe within a decade. He also argues that the world’s economies need to be more closely integrated in order to avoid punishing those who live at the lower end of the economic scale. See *The End of Poverty: Economic Possibilities for Our Time* (New York: Penguin, 2005) and *Common Wealth: Economics for a Crowded Planet* (New York: Penguin, 2008).

death, the symptoms of which are “division and isolation.”¹⁸ Moltmann writes that the power of the Spirit of Life counteracts the spirits of death by being a uniting Spirit: “Death is the power of disintegration in these relationships, which make and keep life alive. Hope for the resurrection of the body awakens the energies for living, and through reconciliation and healing brings human beings on to the path of eternal life. Death divides – the Spirit unites.”¹⁹ Being united with Christ in baptism is to suffer his death and to rejoice in his resurrection. And through the Spirit of Christ’s resurrection, by being united in life with Christ, the baptized become a community of service to the divided and isolated world in need of Christ’s enlivening and uniting Spirit. To enter into the community of service in union with Christ is begin following the way of Jesus Christ. The way of Jesus includes praise to God, a life of prayer, and a commitment to the common body of the Church, which is Christ’s body. This way also includes a life of service, justice, and love for all those who are God’s children.

The Jesus encountered in the gospels is present with those whom the world would just as soon remain as strangers, dim shadows on back streets to be forgotten about or legislated away into an impoverished death or prison. His service to the world is a service to the estranged. His ministry was to the outcast, the poor, and the neglected, while at the same time calling oppressors, the wealthy, and the privileged to account and a new way of living that honors all life. In this light, Christian service in the context of baptism as union with Christ is about bringing about the reconciliation of all estrangements. “The reconciliation of the whole cosmos through Christ is for the justification of all created

¹⁸ Moltmann, Jürgen. *The Way of Jesus Christ*. (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993). pp 264.

¹⁹ Moltmann, *The Way of Jesus Christ*, p 265.

beings who have been injured and have lost their rights, and aims at the implementation of God's righteousness and justice, which alone secures the life and peace of creation."²⁰

“Baptism is ground in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ; the grace which baptism makes available is that of the atonement of Christ which makes possible our reconciliation with God.”²¹ Without the life-changing and death-overcoming service of Christ on the cross, there would be no reconciliation with God and continued division of communities. Yet, since God has worked through Jesus Christ to bring about reconciliation, persons enter into the gift of atonement and are reconciled to God through baptism. Baptism is a sign of one's covenantal entry in Christ's own life, into the way of Jesus. “In baptism the Church declares that it is bound in covenant to God; through baptism new persons are initiated into that covenant. The covenant connects God, the community of faith, and the person being baptized.”²²

This covenant community of the baptized, while having the appearance of an exclusive society, is one that becomes more open to the world through the sacramental presence of God in baptism. Christian service initiated in baptism is grounded in this claim, that being baptized into Christ is to be baptized into the world that Christ was incarnate in and to be baptized into the ministry which Christ modeled, namely praise to God through service to those in need of mercy, who are no longer marginalized in Christ.

The Sacramental Sign-Act of Baptism

United Methodism is not noted for being an especially sacramental denomination. It is not common to celebrate the Eucharist every time the community gathers. Baptism is

²⁰ Moltmann, *The Way of Jesus Christ*, p 312.

²¹ Felton, Gayle Carlton. *By Water and the Spirit: Making Connections for Identity and Ministry*. (Nashville: Discipleship Resources, 1997). p 17.

²² Felton, *By Water and the Spirit*, p 18.

an episodic feature of United Methodist worship; that it, its occurrence is often less frequent than the celebration of the Eucharist.²³ As such, baptism for the UMC has not been as formative to the Methodist understanding of the Christian life as it should be. This is not to say that baptism is not important to the UMC, but that its formative effect is lessened by its decreasing frequency. UMs do not hold that one must be baptized to join the church or receive forgiveness of sins and salvation from God through Christ. Forgiveness of sins, in current popular interpretation, is often seen as a matter of one's personal faith.²⁴ Membership in the church is a matter perennially before the General Conference and is rendered unclear by the document on baptism.²⁵ Nevertheless, the UMC, like Wesley, recognizes that baptism is a command of Christ and is therefore important as a sign of God's covenant with Christ's church: "In baptism, the Church declares that it is bound in covenant to God; through baptism new persons are initiated into that covenant. The covenant connects God, the community of faith, and the person being baptized; all three are essential to the fulfillment of the baptismal covenant."²⁶

Wesley held to the traditional Anglican position that baptism was necessary for membership in the church and for its importance toward erasing the stain of original sin.²⁷ Infants may be baptized for forgiveness of sins with hopes for subsequent spiritual

²³ I am referencing my personal experience as a pastor, as well as the generally held belief that the frequency of baptism, as a sign of new membership in the UMC, is decreasing.

²⁴ Felton, *By Water and the Spirit*, pp 1-2. I am referencing the opening section of the document, where there is an emphasis on the two aspects of baptism: sacramental and evangelical. It is my sense that the evangelical aspect of baptism carries the weight of the UM theology of baptism. For instance: "Without personal decision and commitment to Christ, the baptismal gift is rendered ineffective."

²⁵ The lack of clarity stems from what may be termed a disposition toward theological openness in the UMC. Note the following from *By Water and the Spirit*: "When a baptized person has professed her or his Christian faith and has been confirmed, that person enters *more fully* into the responsibilities and privileges of membership in the Church...[S]tatistics of church membership are counts of professed/confirmed members rather than of all baptized members" (p 39).

²⁶ Felton, *By Water and the Spirit*, p 18.

²⁷ Works of John Wesley (Jackson Edition). Volume 10, *A Treatise on Baptism*, II.1: "That we are all born under the guilt of Adam's sin, and that all sin deserves eternal misery, was the unanimous sense of the

regeneration, but the real concern for Wesley was how a baptized infant confirms his or her faith as an adult. The same holds true for those baptized as adults, that the faith expressed in baptism is confirmed through holy living. Thus, for Wesley, baptism was the appropriate rite of initiation into the Church, but the mere participation in the rite does not equate to the new birth and subsequent regeneration.²⁸ Put another way: baptism is the usual sign of regeneration and new birth and the efficacy of the sacrament is finally found in holy living enabled by the presence of the Holy Spirit.²⁹ This means that baptism has an important and enduring function in the spectrum of a faithful response to Christ within the community of the church. Baptism is a public recognition by the church that God acts through grace “for us” in order to affect a change “in us.”³⁰ Yet, to claim the spiritual benefits of baptism was not enough for Wesley, for spiritual benefits emerge as material and natural effects; that is, as evidence of spiritual regeneration. The new birth, the change affected “in us” “makes it natural, and in a manner necessary to us, to love every child of man...”³¹ Baptism, as the sign of spiritual regeneration, makes Christian service, both to God and for the world, a *natural* state of affairs, rather than one that is *unnatural*, and indeed *impossible*, due to the universal damaging nature of sin.

ancient church, as it is expressed in the Ninth Article of our own... This plainly includes infants, for they too die; therefore they have sinned: But not by actual sin; therefore, by original...”

²⁸ In the sermon “The New Birth”, Wesley concludes by investigating whether “the new birth” and baptism are the same thing. He concludes that they are not, and edits the Larger Catechism to that effect: “Baptism is a sacrament wherein Christ hath ordained the washing with water to be a sign and seal of regeneration by His Spirit. Here is it manifest that baptism, the sign, is spoken of as distinct from the thing signified, regeneration.” Works of John Wesley (Bicentennial Edition). Volume 2, Sermon 45 (The New Birth), IV.1.

²⁹ This point is recognized in various ways by Methodist and Wesleyan scholars. Ted Campbell, for instance, notes that “Methodists have not found it easy to come to a consensus about the relationship between baptism and salvation... John Wesley affirmed the [position that baptism is itself the means of justification and regeneration] with respect to the baptism of infants. However, he warned that mature persons cannot “rely on” baptism, since it is possible to deny the faith into which one was baptized.” *Methodist Doctrine: The Essentials*. (Nashville: Abingdon, 1999). p 71-72.

³⁰ Wesley (Bicentennial Edition), *The New Birth*, 1.

³¹ Wesley (Bicentennial Edition), *The New Birth*, III.1.

“By Water and the Spirit” seeks to outline the basic understanding of baptism in the UM perspective by focusing on the effects of grace found *in* baptism as the sacramental meaning and on the transformation *consequent* to baptism as the evangelical meaning of baptism. The title encapsulates the rhetorical thrust of the document, which is to recover for Methodism a sense of baptism as having both these sacramental (by Water) and evangelical aspects (and the Spirit).³² In this view, the physical sacramental act of baptism by water, the use of a created thing to communicate divine grace, opens the baptized to the spiritual power of forgiveness and regeneration, a new life in Christ and a new holy life in the world.

In the evangelical sense, there is a distinct connection between baptism and Christian service, where baptism marks the entry into a form of Christian life that is first redeemed through Jesus Christ and then seeks to grow in love with God and neighbor.

New birth into life in Christ, which is signified by baptism, is the beginning of that process of growth in grace and holiness through which God brings us into closer relationship with Jesus Christ, and shapes our lives increasingly into conformity with the divine will. Sanctification is a gift of the gracious presence of the Holy Spirit, a yielding to the Spirit’s power, a deepening of our love for God and neighbor. Holiness of heart and life, in the Wesleyan tradition, always involves both personal and social holiness...Baptized believers and the community of faith are obligated to manifest to the world the new redeemed humanity which lives in loving relationship with God and strives to put an end to all human estrangements.³³

Beyond the sign of baptism by water, the further signification of actual regeneration is evidenced by “loving relationships” that “put an end to all human estrangements.”

³² *By Water and the Spirit* sets up this division between the evangelical and the sacramental aspects of baptism. Evangelical means that baptism represents the spirit of conversion and the consequent power of baptism to bring about holy living (living the “good news”) and sacramental means the initiation into a covenant with God. See also fn24.

³³ Felton, *By Water and the Spirit*, p 23.

It is important to note that the evangelical emphasis does not diminish the sacramental role of baptism, the former explicitly connecting believers with God in Christ, the latter connecting the community of faith together in the water of baptism. Wesley held that the sacrament of baptism is the “ordinary means” by which God brings about salvation in human lives. This “ordinary means” evokes both the work of grace and the ministry of the church. Yet, for Wesley and for the UMC, the sacramental nature of baptism as the “ordinary means” must be balanced with the personal decision to receive the gift of salvation (thus to avoid destroying human will) and the ongoing commitment to living a regenerated life through grace in Christian love with the neighbor (thus to portray human will coalescing with God’s will). One possible reading of this perspective is that the sacramental confirms the evangelical and is in some sense the evidence of the efficacy of the personal decision. For this reason, there is some difficulty with placing too much of an emphasis on the point of personal decision and not enough of an emphasis on the sacramental role of baptism in establishing the covenant with God. The diminishment of the properly sacramental role of baptism in favor of a strong evangelistic role would result in the view that baptism itself was not so much an act of divine grace as “an expression of human choice.”³⁴

The problem associated with ensuring that the evangelical and sacramental features of baptism do not overpower the other creates a sense that UMs cannot really say what baptism is without furthering a false divide between the sacramentalist and evangelical camps. At the risk of doing just that, baptism is first and foremost *sacramental*, the proper understanding of which is that baptism has the character of an act of divine grace to which Christians respond, thus, “. . . in a sacrament God offers the gift

³⁴ Felton, *By Water and the Spirit*, p 3.

of God's unfailing grace for us to accept."³⁵ In the reception of this gift of grace, one is invited into a new way of life through the transformation of the human condition. The sign-act of baptism is the beginning of action together in Christ for the sake of the gospel in the world.

Traditionally, the theology of baptism focused on overcoming estrangement from God, and the more the theology of baptism focuses directly on the remission of sin, the stronger the connection between forgiveness and baptism and the lessening of the importance for overcoming the sin that exists between human beings, which is a state of estrangement that hampers Christian service. For instance, in traditions that insist on believer's baptism, where one must be able to confess one's sinfulness before baptism, there is a stronger insistence that the exterior sign of baptism signifies an "inward individual experience, which the one baptized can 'confess'..."³⁶ There, baptism is focused on the signification of forgiveness of sins with respect to God and does not approach in a meaningful way the sinful estrangement from others persons and the creation. John Howard Yoder writes that such a view "does not make the world new," meaning that the purpose of baptism is to transform the baptized and baptized communities into a new creation.³⁷

Baptism is sacramental in the sense that "baptism *is* the formation of a new people whose newness and togetherness explicitly relativize prior stratifications and

³⁵ Felton, *By Water and the Spirit*, pp 4-5.

³⁶ Yoder, John Howard. *Body Politics: Five Practices of the Christian Community before the Watching World*. (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1992). p.33. On the previous page, he writes that the "primary meaning of baptism is the new society it creates, by inducting all kinds of people into the same people. The church is...that new society; it is therefore also the model for the world's moving in the same direction" (p 32).

³⁷ Yoder, *Body Politics*, p 33.

classification.”³⁸ United Methodist theology has no problem with this view of baptism as sacramental, even when the evangelical sense is folded into the singular sacramental sense. “Sacraments are effective means of God’s presence mediated through the created world. God becoming incarnate in Jesus Christ is the supreme instance of this kind of divine action.”³⁹ The sacramental converts the usual and ordinary (which, in Augustinian thought is the *unnatural*) into a new creation, toward a recovery of the image of the triune God, represented and actualized by union with Christ (which is *natural*). In this sense, baptism is *sacramentally* the entry into Christian service.

Baptism and Holy Living

“Christ constitutes the Church as his Body by the power of the Holy Spirit...The Church draws new persons into itself as it seeks to remain faithful to its commission to proclaim and exemplify the Gospel. Baptism is the sacrament of initiation and incorporation into the Body of Christ.”⁴⁰ Through baptism, Christians become part of the body of Christ and are incorporated into the full life of the Church. By being incorporated and embodied in the Church, baptized Christians are brought into union with Christ and equality with all other baptized Christians, through the gift of grace. Union with Christ, who was incarnate as a human being, also brings the baptized into equality with all others. Union with Christ and equality with others are the characteristics of the end of estrangement that is represented by baptism. Overcoming estrangement and sin through union with Christ in baptism opens a pathway for a new life of Christian service.

Forgiveness of sins is central to the notion of Christian service, for it is sin itself that drives humans into egocentrism and the self-delusion of managing one’s own needs

³⁸ Yoder, *Body Politics*, p 33.

³⁹ Felton, *By Water and the Spirit*, pp 12-13.

⁴⁰ Felton, *By Water and the Spirit*, p 21.

to the exclusion of all others. One of the effects of sin is the negation of the proper understanding of service, which is to live Christ's own life for God's own people in the midst of the divine creation. The forgiveness of sins and the new life that is attendant upon that are real indicators of the divine will of grace working in the world and working in the lives of the baptized.

The structure and the rubrics of the baptismal rite in United Methodism, and the tradition of being baptized by one who is properly recognized by the Church shows that baptism is not just between one person and God, but instead a communal expression of faith in God's grace. The community's response to the personal and public statement of faith in God's grace is to aid in bringing about, through guidance, encouragement, and reproof, the faithful life that springs from the gift of baptism. As an "outward sign" of an "inward grace," baptism is an act that inspires action. In this sense, it is appropriate to say that the importance of baptism for Wesley is not found explicitly in the sign-act, but in the action that rises out of it. These are the "marks of the new birth" and a commitment to holy living, which explicitly includes the love of God and the love of the neighbor. Randy Maddox writes, "Even though Wesley never included baptism on any of his lists, he surely considered it to be a means of grace. The reason for its omission was that it is not a *repeated* means for the *progressive* nurturing of holiness, as were the other means on the list. Rather, baptism marked the initiation of the life of holiness."⁴¹

The initiation into Christian life through baptism begins the process of bringing about an end to estrangement from God and estrangement from others. "The defining purpose of baptism [for Wesley] is not to bestow our juridical pardon, but to initiate the

⁴¹ Maddox, Randy L. *Responsible Grace: John Wesley's Practical Theology*. (Nashville: Abingdon, 1994). p 222.

graciously-empowered transformation of our lives.”⁴² And, important for Wesley as evidenced by his lists of means of grace, the Christian life is to be a thoroughly transformed life, the process of which requires the will and the effort to dutifully follow Christ. So baptism is the entry into the Christian life, which is the entrance into the way of Jesus. This means that a covenant is made between God, the community of faith, and the believer. One is baptized into a community of faith. Baptism joins one to others, forming a relationship based on a mutual comprehension and reception of divine grace and a common understanding of life together under this grace. Baptism heals the bond that is severed by estrangement and returns believers to a proper relationship with God and with others. In the context of the covenant community of this grace, the “strange” and the “familiar” are brought together in one place through the help of grace. The grace of baptism in the context of a theology of service is the grace of bringing together, of regenerating fractured human relationships through the recovery of the image of God. In Methodist theology, this is called holy living.

Holy living is the central moment of Christian service as it relates to the baptized life in the United Methodist understanding. This moment invokes the Wesleyan practical theology of the connection between personal and social holiness. Wesley writes in various places about the personal and social qualities of holiness, or Christian perfection. The famous phrase that “The gospel of Christ knows of no religion, but social; no holiness but social holiness” states generally Wesley’s view of Christian holiness.⁴³ By this, he does not mean that there is no sense at all of personal holiness, for this is necessary as a spiritual matter. He does mean that a manifestly genuine personal holiness

⁴² Maddox, *Responsible Grace*. p 222.

⁴³ The Works of John Wesley, Jackson Edition. *List of Poetical Works*, Preface, 4 & 5. Vol. XIV.

will exercise itself as social holiness; that is, as service in love to the neighbor.⁴⁴ The redemption within is evident through the work without. These are works for the kingdom of God as evidence of one's personal searching for holiness through the gift of grace.

The UMC agrees: "Baptized believers and the community of faith are obligated to manifest to the world the new redeemed humanity which lives in loving relationship with God and strives to put an end to all human estrangements. There are no conditions of human life that exclude persons from the sacrament of baptism. We strive for and look forward to the reign of God on earth, of which baptism is a sign. Baptism is fulfilled only when the believer and the Church are wholly conformed to the image of Christ."⁴⁵ The movement from the sacramental sign-act to the sacramental action enjoined by baptism into union with Christ is signaled as the advent of Christian service. This Christian service, as the kind of holiness Wesley urged the Methodists toward, is a service that is found in the way of Jesus: to have the mind of Christ and to walk as Christ walked. This kind of holiness Wesley connected with Holy Communion in the sermon "On the Duty of Constant Communion:"

Consider the Lord's Supper, Secondly, as a mercy from God to man. As God, whose mercy is over all his works, and particularly over the children of men, knew there was but one way for man to be happy like himself; namely, by being like him in holiness; as he knew we could do nothing towards this of ourselves, he has given us certain means of obtaining his help. Ones of these is the Lord's

⁴⁴ As an example, see the sermon "On the Wedding Garment," *The Works of John Wesley, Bicentennial Edition*, IV.127.9. "The righteousness of Christ is, doubtless, necessary for any soul that enters into glory. But so is personal holiness, too, for every child of man. But it is highly needful to be observed that they are necessary in different respects. The former is necessary to entitle us to heaven; the latter to qualify us for it." Later in the same sermon (IV.127.17): "What, then, is that holiness which is the true "wedding garment," the only qualification for glory?...It first, through the energy of God, worketh love to God and all mankind; and, by this love, every holy and heavenly temper, in particular, lowliness, meekness, gentleness, temperance, and longsuffering. "It is neither circumcision," – the attending on all Christian ordinances, "nor uncircumcision," – the fulfilling of all heathen morality, but "the keeping the commandments of God;" particularly those, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and thy neighbor as thyself. In a word, holiness is having "the mind that was in Christ, "and the "walking as Christ walked."

⁴⁵ Felton, *By Water and the Spirit*, pp 23-24.

Supper, which, of his infinite mercy, he hath given for this very end; that through this means we may be assisted to attain those blessings which he hath prepared for us; that we may obtain holiness on earth, and everlasting glory in heaven.⁴⁶

Holy Communion, the Eucharist, as the *form* of Christian service is the subject of the next section. But the form cannot be fully known without the proper context; that is, baptism as the entry to Christian service properly orients one to the form of service presented in the Eucharist. Baptism by itself is a statement of redemption and covenant; in other words, baptism declares that one is redeemed through the covenantal power of God. Baptism coupled with the common fellowship of the Eucharist presents a redeemed society in covenant with God for the continuing redemption of the world. In the Eucharist, we are moved closer into communion with one another, that is with God's whole creation, and into closer communion, and thus closer union, with God in Christ.⁴⁷

III. Learning from the Eucharist: the Form of Christian Service

The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not a participation in the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ? Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread.

1 Corinthians 10: 16-17 (Revised English Bible)

Baptism marks the entry into a life of Christian service where Christians are brought into union with Christ and equality with others. The Eucharist nurtures this unity and equality by pointing toward the expectation of God's re-union with and redemption of the world. The Eucharist teaches the expectations of God's purposes for the world by participation in the body and blood of Christ (that is, in Christ's own life). In this

⁴⁶ The Works of John Wesley, Bicentennial Edition. *The Duty of Constant Communion*. Vol. III.101.II.5.

⁴⁷ Karl Barth calls this the unequivocal, total, and universal law of service. "The service of the community is a differentiated service. But it is a differentiated whole. Hence the concern of one, quite irrespective of the fact that it is his concern in particular, is also the concern of others. None can try to serve in his own small sphere without considering all the other spheres for which his own service will always have indirect significance, and may even acquire and have direct significance as in the pursuit of his concerns he is also involved in the problems of these other spheres as well...All Christians equally will constantly need remission of their sins in the co-operation in service." CD IV.2: 67.1, p 694.

participation in Christ's life, the forms of Christian service are learned. The first form of service taught by the Eucharist is *worship*; that is, the Eucharist teaches that the first orientation of Christian service is praise to God for God's acts in history and praise for the gift of a redeemed and being redeemed life that is called to service through baptism. The second form of service taught by the Eucharist is *mercy*. Mercy is that which Jesus instructs his followers to discover ("Go and learn what this means: I desire mercy, not sacrifice") and that which is action on behalf of those in need. These works of praise and mercy as the forms of Christian service are done in anticipation of the Kingdom of God.⁴⁸

To participate in the Eucharist is not to just take part in a ritual, but to dwell and participate in the real presence of Christ, and to be moved by that real presence into Christ-like action in the world that received his incarnation. This is what is meant by the *anamnesis*, the "dangerous memory", of the Eucharist:

Anamnesis conveys a meaning of active remembrance that goes beyond merely recalling an event in history. It is different from memory and simple recall. It is a movement of the mind, moving from remembrance to act. *Anamnesis* in the Eucharist has the ethical implication of calling on one to participate in the sacrifice and ministry of the life of Christ. This calls for self-examination under the grace of God in light of the body of Christ. This examination ensures that one is willing to eat the bread as the body and drink the cup, indeed that one is willing to allow the *anamnesis* to be a "dangerous memory."⁴⁹

The dangerous memory of the Eucharist is a call to praise the world-changing and incarnating God and a call to mercy in a world marked by godlessness and mercilessness. In the Eucharist, the call to mercy is firmly rooted in an orientation of praise to God. The

⁴⁸ Matthew 9: 13.

⁴⁹ Charlton, Matthew W. "Evangelism, Hospitality and Eucharist." *Doxology: A Journal for Worship*. Vol. 20, 2003, pp 60-75. See also: Bruce T. Morrill, *Anamnesis as Dangerous Memory: Political and Liturgical Theology in Dialogue* (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 2000). This book examines the political theology of J.B. Metz and the liturgical theology of A. Schmemmann. Morrill concludes that the *anamnesis* and liturgy have theological and practical ethical considerations that effect one's political and social interactions.

“service” of mercy is shaped by the “service” of praise. This call to service generally is to participate in the service of Christ as the body of Christ for the reconciliation of the world. *Baptism, Eucharist, and Ministry* places this sense of service clearly within the central meaning of the Eucharist: “As it is entirely the gift of God, the eucharist brings into the present age a new reality which transforms Christians into the image of Christ and therefore makes them his effective witnesses... The eucharistic community is nourished and strengthened for confessing by word and action the Lord Jesus Christ who gave his life for the salvation of the world.”⁵⁰ The United Methodist Church, in its most recent theological statement on the Eucharist, *This Holy Mystery*, takes up in various ways the forms of praise and mercy that are the marks of a Christian service shaped by the Eucharist. The next section will discuss how The United Methodist Church understands the Eucharist to teach the form of Christian service as praise and mercy.

“This Holy Mystery” and the Form of Christian Service as Praise and Mercy

The 2004 General Conference adopted *This Holy Mystery (THM)* as the official statement of the United Methodist theology of the Eucharist. The document seeks to portray the historical and theological reasons behind UM sacramental practice as well as demonstrate how those historical and theological positions become, through the liturgical act of communion, a form of living in the world, called “ethical Christian discipleship.”⁵¹ “Ethical Christian discipleship” is described as sending “persons into the world to live

⁵⁰ The World Council of Churches. *Baptism, Eucharist, and Ministry*. (Geneva, Switzerland: WCC Publications, 1982). p 15.

⁵¹ *This Holy Mystery: A United Methodist Understanding of Holy Communion*. (Nashville: The General Board of Discipleship of The United Methodist Church, 2004). p 35. While I find the use of the phrase “ethical Christian discipleship” odd (would not Christian discipleship of necessity be ethical?), I understand why the modifier is used in this case. For the most part, the phrase “Christian discipleship” in these times of individualized religion does not produce a sense of an ethical obligation to others and the creation. So Christian discipleship becomes something done only for oneself whereas ethical Christian discipleship opens up the field of discipleship beyond the support of one’s personal faith into the realm of the transformation of the world for the sake of Jesus Christ.

lovingly and justly as servants of Christ by healing the sick, feeding the hungry, caring for the stranger, freeing the oppressed, and working to develop social structures that are consistent with the gospel.”⁵² How does the liturgical act of Eucharist form “ethical Christian discipleship”?

The section of *THM* titled “The Meaning of Holy Communion” describes several different meanings of Holy Communion, the last of which describes the holy meal in eschatological terms.⁵³ *THM* describes the eschatological meaning of Holy Communion as having to do with the “outcome of God’s purpose for the world.”⁵⁴ Through Holy Communion, Christians are formed by the expectations of the Kingdom of God into lives marked by service for the Kingdom of God. “In the midst of the personal and systemic brokenness in which we live, we yearn for everlasting fellowship with Christ and ultimate fulfillment of the divine plan. Nourished by sacramental grace, we strive to be formed into the image of Christ and to be made instruments for transformation of the world”⁵⁵ In this sense, Christian service is the divine work of the body of Christ to draw the world closer to the eschatological fulfillment in the Kingdom of God.

This “end” properly characterizes the “beginning” of service, namely that Christian service in the present is for God’s eschatological purposes for the future of creation. Jürgen Moltmann, in his *Theology of Hope*, concludes that hope, as the eschatological fulfillment of God’s purposes in history, is made manifest in history by the transformation of peoples and structures that work against this fulfillment. In this transformation, Moltmann includes the view that Christians must simply hope for and

⁵² *THM*, 36. *THM* quotes the UM Book of Discipline here.

⁵³ *THM*, pp 8-9.

⁵⁴ *THM*, p 9.

⁵⁵ *THM*, p 9.

wait on Christ's return, thus refuting the view that there are no ethical or moral responsibilities that pertain to Christian hope in God's future. This mission of Christ-followers "means not merely propagation of faith and hope, but also historic transformation of life. The life of the body, including also social and public life, is expected as a sacrifice in day-to-day obedience. Not to be conformed to this world does not mean merely to be transformed in oneself, but to transform in opposition and creative expectation the face of the world in the midst of which one believes, hopes, and loves."⁵⁶

This Holy Mystery returns frequently to the eschatological meaning of the Eucharist, especially as it pertains to Christian action in the world. The gathering of Christians and those seeking God at the Table "exemplify the nature of the church and model the world as God would have it be."⁵⁷ From this common gathering, the Eucharist becomes a source of spiritual nourishment for continued growth in holiness through the "challenging and arduous" journey of Christianity.⁵⁸ This holiness is an expectation of a future hope that must be sustained and nurtured by grace. Thus,

As we return to the Table again and again, we are strengthened repeatedly. We go out empowered to live as disciples, reconcilers, and witnesses...As we encounter Christ in Holy Communion and are repeatedly touched by divine grace, we are progressively shaped into Christ's image. All of this work is not done in a moment, no matter how dramatic an experience we may enjoy. It is, instead, a lifelong process through which God intends to shape us into people motivated by love, empowered and impassioned to do Christ's work in world. The identity and ministry that God bestows on us in our baptism are fulfilled as we continue to be transformed into disciples who can respond to God's love by loving God and others.⁵⁹

⁵⁶ Moltmann, Jürgen. *Theology of Hope*. (London: SCM Press, 1967). p 330.

⁵⁷ *THM*, p 8.

⁵⁸ *THM*, p 10.

⁵⁹ *THM*, p10.

The grace of table fellowship with Christ and with others who share the hope of the eschatological banquet are energized and sent from the Table into the world to seek the world's transformation. From the Table, "God's people are sent to work compassionately for healing, reconciliation, justice, and peace. Such work requires prophetic, subversive actions...claiming and making real the victory of the risen Christ over all evil, sin, and death...Celebrations of Holy Communion are, therefore, a foretaste of the realm of God, when God's future breaks into our present world."⁶⁰

The fullness of the UM understanding of the Eucharist is strongly rooted in the "discipling" opportunities made meaningful through this eschatological understanding. For many UM's, this may be a surprising and positive realization, namely that the UM primary reason for communion is not simply thanksgiving, remembrance, and the like, but is decisively formed by what the meal and the table fellowship represent with respect to God's redemptive purposes for the world and how Christians are responsible for living and acting in the reality of those redemptive purposes.

The orientation of praise for what God has done, is doing, and will do in this world is transformed through the fellowship of the Table into the orientation to mercy. "As we commune, we become aware of the worth and the needs of other people and are reminded of our responsibility. We express the compassion of Christ through acts of caring and kindness toward those we encounter in our daily lives."⁶¹ The compassion of Christ is not the pity of Christ (where pity implies a certain distance from the other's reality), but is the "voluntary fellow-suffering" of Christ for the people of the world.⁶² This compassion is presented to those who commune with Christ at the Table as the form

⁶⁰ *THM*, p 36.

⁶¹ *THM*, p 10.

⁶² Jon Sobrino is responsible for this phrase.

of a merciful Christian service rising out of praise to God. The Wesleyan phrase for merciful Christian service formed in praise is, again, “holy living” (which is also a more “religious” way to indicate what is meant by “ethical Christian discipleship”). Thus, “Holy Communion is to be conducted in ways that make apparent the inherent link between the Table and holy living, both individual and corporate. Participation in the Eucharist bears fruit in the world in attitudes and actions of personal and social holiness...As we gratefully receive God’s abundant grace, we are challenged to accept fully our responsibility and accountability for renewal of the social order, liberation for the oppressed, and the coming of the realm of God.”⁶³

In this official document of the UMC, there is a distinct move from an orientation to praise to an orientation to mercy, where both praise and mercy are forms of Christian service. The service of praise, in its orientation to God and the work of Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit, is recognition of God’s purposes for the creation and the believer’s proper place in it. The form of service as praise moves into the service of mercy in order to accomplish God’s purposes in the world: We praise God in order to know what to do and we do in order to praise God.⁶⁴

⁶³ *THM*, p 36.

⁶⁴ At this point, I find it necessary to address briefly to place of evangelism with respect to the Eucharist. I have cautioned against a too strong connection between the Eucharist and evangelism in the past (see my article “Evangelism, Hospitality, and Eucharist” referenced above). In this paper, I could be read as dismissing the evangelical character of the Eucharist in favor of the form of service. My thought about this is that evangelism and Christian service are not separate enterprises, but that Christian service is fundamentally “evangelical”: it is a concrete expression of the gospel that cannot refrain from communicating the gospel in some manner appropriate to the service engaged in. For instance, *THM* states that “As members of the congregation partake of the Lord’s Supper, the bonds of love within are strengthened and the worshiping community is empowered to reach out in dynamic and meaningful ways to evangelize and to work for peace and justice” (p 34). Working for peace and justice is evangelical in the proper sense because it is an expression of the good news of Christ in world that is full of war and rumors of war and a disturbing amount of global injustice. To merely proclaim the good news and not work for its implementation is to leave Jesus in the manger, proclaiming “look, there he is.” To evangelize is to engage actively in the world with the extraordinary good news of the gospel.

Wesley was especially keen to know how the practices of religion transform the reality of life. The Methodism of Wesley's time was thoroughly organized to move people away from sinful lives through instruction and discipline and into lives pursuing Christian perfection through the means of grace. In other words, any Methodist understanding of the Eucharist cannot be satisfied with the good rhetoric of a theological explanation and, at some point, must encounter the reality of Christian life. Wesley pointed to the "means of grace", in which he included Holy Communion, as those practices where a Christian may "ordinarily" encounter the grace of God. In the constancy of these ordinary encounters, a Christian grows in grace, that is, one increasingly understands the love of God expressed in and by Jesus Christ and expresses that love in the world in works of mercy. The next section addresses the Eucharist as a means of grace in the context of the doctrine of sanctification. It is on this point that Wesleyan theology is sometimes accused of being "semi-Pelagian" or affirming an understanding of "works righteousness." The means of grace and the service that extends from them, however, are not "free choices" but grace-filled responses to the "love of God shed abroad in their hearts."⁶⁵

The Eucharist as Means of Grace and the Doctrine of Sanctification

The Eucharist is a means of grace that forms participants in Christian service. The experience and exposure to the ideas, actions, and practices of the Eucharist bring about a new learning of the ways of God in the world. The repetition of the Eucharist in the congregation has a heuristic effect (ideally speaking), drawing Christians back into the story of Jesus' life and death and the promise of new life through the resurrection.

⁶⁵ Wesley examined members of the societies on several questions including, "Is the love of God shed abroad in your heart?" Works of John Wesley (Jackson Edition), vol. 8.

Wesley indicated as much in his sermon “The Duty of Constant Communion.” Not only are Christians to communicate as frequently as possible because it is the “plain command of Christ,” but also because the Eucharist is “the food of our souls: this gives strength to perform our duty, and leads us on to perfection.”⁶⁶

Now, what “duty” is it that Wesley means, beyond the duty of constant communion? Later in the sermon, Wesley describes what he means by duty: “Whatever we can do, that we ought.”⁶⁷ This has primarily to do with attending to the commands of God. Should we not obey the commands of God always, not infrequently, but constantly? “And this great truth, that we are obliged to keep every command as far as we can, is clearly proved from the absurdity of the contrary opinion; for were we to allow that we are not obliged to obey every commandment of God as often as we can, we have no argument left to prove that any man is bound to obey any command at any time.”⁶⁸ And, “In a word: considering this as a command of God, he that does not communicate as often as he can has no piety; considering it as a mercy, he that does not communicate as often as he can has no wisdom.”⁶⁹ In responding to the objection that constant communion has had no discernible effect on one’s life, Wesley responds, “But undoubtedly we shall find benefit sooner or later, though perhaps insensibly. We shall be insensibly strengthened, made more fit for the service of God, and more constant in it.”⁷⁰

The Eucharist through “constant communion” teaches that God has the power and the will to transform the world into the eschatological banquet. As such, the Christian

⁶⁶ Outler, Albert C. and Richard P. Heitzenrater. *John Wesley’s Sermons: An Anthology*. (Nashville: Abingdon, 1991). “The Duty of Constant Communion,” p 503.

⁶⁷ *The Duty of Constant Communion*, p 504.

⁶⁸ *The Duty of Constant Communion*, p 504.

⁶⁹ *The Duty of Constant Communion*, p 505.

⁷⁰ *The Duty of Constant Communion*, pp 508-9.

service formed through the Eucharist aims to transform the world from one way of being to another way of being; that is, Christian service aims to transform the world from one of injustice to one that is marked by the justice of the eschatological banquet. To care for the lives of others and to share what has been given with the community is the more difficult way. Wesley was right to insist that the way a Christian lived must reflect the faith a Christian professed. The holy life is an expression of one's sense of Christian service derived from one's faith nurtured by constant communion, which is firmly rooted in the doctrine of sanctification.

It is axiomatic for Wesley that the doctrine of sanctification is inclusive of the whole Christian life: the person (the soul or spirit), home and family, community, and so forth.⁷¹ All the works of God for the sake of God's creation are intended for the whole redemption of that creation. For this reason, Wesley understood sanctification as a movement in life with the necessary help of grace, one that necessarily is marked at the outset by "being born again" and completed in the eternal kingdom of God: the new creation. Sanctification as the progress of grace is explained by Wesley as going on "from grace to grace." Being born again is grace, as are being "zealous of good works," abstaining "from all appearance of evil," and doing good to all people.⁷² The movement from grace to grace is a movement from a state of sin to a state of sinlessness, from living the life of Adam and Eve to living in the life of Christ. To have the heart and mind of

⁷¹ On this point, there are several excellent essays, including Ted Jennings' book *Good News to the Poor* and M. Douglas Meeks' chapter "Sanctification and Economy: A Wesleyan Perspective on Stewardship" in *Rethinking Wesley's Theology*, (Randy Maddox, ed.); also, Runyon's premise in *The New Creation* is that Wesley's theology is marked out by creation and new creation, including all of human life.

⁷² Outlert and Heitzenrater, eds. *John Wesley's Sermons*. "The Scripture Way of Salvation," I.8, p 374. Of course, Wesley wrote, "doing good to all men."

Christ is Wesley's definition of Christian perfection, and marks the 'final' work of grace in human life.⁷³

There are two dovetailed meanings of perfection in Wesley. First, the Christian is 'so far perfect as not to commit sin' and, second, the person is entirely sanctified: in whom is the mind of Christ, who walks with a pure heart and does not cause others to stumble.⁷⁴ "This it is to be a perfect man, to be 'sanctified throughout'; even 'to have a heart so all-flaming with the love of God', 'as continually to offer up every thought, word, and work, as spiritual sacrifice, acceptable to God, through Christ'; in every thought of our hearts, in every word of our tongues, in every work of our hands, to 'show forth his praise, who hath called us out of darkness into His marvelous light.'"⁷⁵ Wesley denies that Christians must commit sin as long as they live, as if sin were somehow necessary in order to live in this world.⁷⁶ So, if sin is not necessary, indeed to not sin is commanded by the scripture, then the willful and Christ-centered action of *not sinning at all, or not sinning willfully or habitually*, is a possibility in time. "Least of all can you with any colour of argument infer that any man *must* commit sin at all. No, God forbid we should thus speak. No necessity of sinning was laid upon them. The grace of God was surely sufficient for them. And it is sufficient for us at this day. With the temptation which fell on them that was a way to escape, as there is to every soul of man in every temptation; so that whosoever is tempted to any sin need not yield; for no man is tempted

⁷³ To say Christian perfection is the 'final' work of grace is not really accurate. Wesley held that a person can fall away from grace, and this would include the grace of perfection. But this is not a 'static' grace. Randy Maddox writes, "On the negative side [of Wesley's defense of perfection] Wesley stipulated that Christians, however mature they might become in this life, do not approach the absolute perfections of omniscience, infallibility, or omnipotence. Their understanding remains limited, their judgment subject to error (in matter not essential for salvation) and their actions limited by the (nonmoral) infirmities of the present human condition." *Responsible Grace*, p 181.

⁷⁴ Wesley, John. *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection*. (Peterborough: Epworth, 1952). p 19.

⁷⁵ Wesley, *Plain Account*, p 30.

⁷⁶ See Wesley's sermon entitled *Christian Perfection* in Outler and Heizenrater, pp 69-84.

above that he is able to bear.”⁷⁷ The movement of grace to grace progressively purifies the Christian of evil thoughts, evil tempers, and evil actions and leads them into right intention.⁷⁸ The Christian is “purified from pride; for Christ was lowly of heart. He is pure from self-will or desire; for Christ desired only to do the will of his Father, and to finish his work. And he is pure from anger, in the common sense of the world; for Christ was meek and gentle, patient and long-suffering... Thus doth Jesus ‘save his people from their sins’: and not only from outward sins, but also from the sins of their hearts; from evil thoughts and evil tempers.”⁷⁹

Wesley repeatedly returned to the definition that perfection is having the mind that was also in Jesus Christ, which accordingly meant that Christians are free from sin through the meritorious work of Christ. One is only able to achieve a state of perfection through grace working within. The works that rise out of a grace-filled life are in themselves, purely as works, lacking in merit. And so, one’s works will not bring one to perfection, only grace will. The work of God’s grace in a person is manifested in works that rise out of faith.⁸⁰ This was a significant point of controversy between Wesley and the British Calvinists, especially as it suggests that Christ’s imputed righteousness is completed through the work of grace in the midst of life rather than being a ‘once for all’ spiritual event.

For Calvin, sanctification depends solely on God’s free choice of a limited number of human beings to receive the double grace of election and salvation. Without

⁷⁷ Sermon *Christian Perfection*, II.14, p 78.

⁷⁸ Runyon, Theodore. *The New Creation: John Wesley’s Theology Today*. (Nashville: Abingdon, 1998). “A case could be made that in the doctrine of perfection Wesley’s concern was mainly for perfection of *intention*, for focusing and purifying dedication and commitment. If intention is rightly direction, he seemed to be saying, this is what really counts.” p 223.

⁷⁹ Sermon *Christian Perfection*, II.26-27, p 82-83.

⁸⁰ In making this connection, Wesley seems to be following the spirit of the Letter of James, which was barely tolerated by Luther and Calvin.

election, there is no salvation. The elect become the ones who are saved. Calvin emphasized this point in the chapters on election in the *Institutes*, concerned that it is understood to be tethered to his understanding of the absolute sovereignty of God. Within Calvin's system as a whole, the doctrine of unconditional election rises out of God's sovereignty. Providence requires that God foreordain the fate of all human beings, otherwise a belief in works righteousness would confuse believers about God's sovereign rule, which is unconfused and absolutely sovereign. To that end, election is the foundation of a human being's individual salvation. It is the "mother" of faith.⁸¹ Predestination is "...God's eternal decree, by which he compacted within himself what he willed to become of each man."⁸² Christ is the body from whose members the elect are chosen. Only these elect receive the call, the vocation, of Christian salvation. They alone are justified by the redemptive act of Christ, engrafted into Christ as their Head, and set on the course of sanctification. Thus being engrafted into Christ, the elect are never cut off from their salvation. Christian hope always remains with them because of their relationship with Christ. For faith, Christ is the "clearest mirror," the best example of God's election. Christ was "...not made Son of God by righteous living but was freely given such honor so that he might afterward share his gifts with others."⁸³ Christ is this example for the elect because, as human beings, they are unable to attain this kind of honor by their own merits.⁸⁴

⁸¹ McNeill, John T., ed. and Ford Lewis Battles, translator. *Calvin: Institutes of the Christian Religion, vol I&2*. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1960). III.xxii.10

⁸² Calvin, *Institutes*, III.xxi.5.

⁸³ Calvin, *Institutes*, III.xxii.1.

⁸⁴ I have heard this point preached in several Presbyterian Churches as a "great comfort to the soul" to know that God is absolutely in control, especially of salvation.

For Wesley, this view of God's predestination of human salvation is not at all necessary to maintain the sovereignty of God. In Wesley's sermon "On the Omnipresence of God," he makes clear his position that there is no place, nor any being, where God is not. God is everywhere and in all things. God works in the omnipresent capacity to, first, sustain all things in order to prevent the creation from returning to a "primitive nothing." Second, God works omnipresently by governing all things, "every moment superintending everything that he has made." Finally, God works by "strongly and sweetly influencing all, and yet without destroying the liberty of his rational creatures."⁸⁵ This final category points toward the way in which Wesley understands the relationship between a sovereign God and a responsible human choice. For Wesley, a sovereign God is concerned with preserving human liberty. While God's grace is universally available to all people, not all people will participate in that grace by a responsible choice. Wesley goes against all claims of predestination, where God's grace is limited (not universal) and irresistible (not responsible). God's sovereignty is fundamentally not overpowering for Wesley. Instead, God's sovereignty is exercised by enabling the human response to the overtures of grace. It becomes a human responsibility to respond to these overtures.⁸⁶ This human response is ongoing, as God's grace seeks to guide Christians into a whole life, nurtured in the life of the Spirit through the wisdom of the cross.

The doctrine of sanctification has traditionally dealt with the 'spiritual' side of Christian life, to which the 'practical' side of Christian life is appended as somewhat of an afterthought. The result of this one-sidedness has been an overemphasis on salvation

⁸⁵ Sermon *On the Omnipresence of God*, II.1, p 526.

⁸⁶ On the idea of "responsible grace," the standard reference is Maddox, Randy L. *Responsible Grace: John Wesley's Practical Theology*. (Nashville: Kingswood (Abingdon), 1994).

by faith alone and a neglect of a practical morality (by this, I mean good works, right living, and living justly, for instance). In Steve Long's book on Wesley's moral theology, he makes the important claim that Wesley did have a 'moral theology' and that this theology must be understood christologically. "If we do not know God as Triune, we cannot receive the holy tempers for the moral life that will make us happy...If we know the good, we know Christ. If we know Christ, we know the good."⁸⁷ Any moral theology, or any proper exercise of the good, or of works, must be initiated by grace. And this grace "works"; that is, it does not stagnant in the justified/sanctified person, but generates action and nurtures necessary growth in faith. It is important to remember that for Wesley, a "Christian" who was not growing in grace was "backsliding" away from grace. He inveighed on this issue in several places. Later in his ministry, his ire turned more and more to the rich (and one did not have to have much to be rich to Mr. Wesley). In his portrayals of the evils of riches, Wesley demonstrates that he understands the grace of sanctification to be transformative to the 'practical' side of human life, which means a transformation in how one lives in the world.

The grace-filled orientation to God, characterized by "growth in grace," moves the Christian to live in the world with a stance of love for the neighbor. Receiving the grace of sanctification as a vocation of Christian discipleship places a follower of Christ in the right orientation with respect to God's continual creative work in bringing about the new creation. When the love of others is practiced in the light of sanctification it becomes a product of one's redeemed spiritual sense and orientation to God. To derive a fuller vision of service from the grace of sanctification will give United Methodists both a

⁸⁷ Long, D. Stephen. *John Wesley's Moral Theology: The Quest for God and Goodness*. (Nashville: Kingswood (Abingdon), 2005. p 120.

historic and theologically sound foundation upon which it will be better able to describe the one service to God that is given in baptism and the varying ways that one service may be manifested in loving care to the world. In the United Methodist Church, this is expressed in the public service of baptism and in the public ministry of the church to the world. “The heart of Christian ministry is Christ's ministry of outreaching love. Christian ministry is the expression of the mind and mission of Christ by a community of Christians that demonstrates a common life of gratitude and devotion, witness and service, celebration and discipleship. All Christians are called through their baptism to this ministry of servanthood in the world to the glory of God and for human fulfillment. The forms of this ministry are diverse in locale, in interest, and in denominational accent, yet always catholic in spirit and outreach.”⁸⁸

There has been movement toward recovering the peculiar Wesleyan doctrine of sanctification and Christian Perfection in the UMC not only because it is distinctive of the Methodist tradition but also because it expresses a specifically Christian way of living in the world. The doctrine of Christian perfection shaped the reception of the Methodist movement in England, especially as it was understood by its opponents and those legitimately seeking to understand what Mr. Wesley was about. Christian perfection can be thought of as recovering the image of God impressed on the human creature by God in the creative moment that has been marred by the stain of sin. Sanctification removes the stain of sin by degrees, drawing a person ever closer to the ‘final’ good of recovering the image of God in Christ. Christian perfection is not what one attains through one’s good works or proper behavior, but is wholly a gift of God for those who fully exemplify the life of Christ in their own life. With this understanding of sanctification, Christian service

⁸⁸ BOD ¶125.

(both works of piety and works of mercy) formed by the Eucharist may be fully understood as a work of grace.

The Eucharist is the form of Christian service because by constant participation in it, Christians hear again the great works of God and are moved to the service of praise. Consequently, the service of praise is transformed into the service of mercy, whose representational form is the eschatological banquet where all are welcomed and cared for under the exquisite hosting of Jesus Christ. Furthermore, the Eucharist is the form of Christian service because it is to be a frequent practice that connects believers with grace and enables “growth in grace.” Growth in grace is practically recognized as holy living and is further related to the Wesleyan understanding of sanctification as Christian perfection. The final section of this thesis takes the whole issue of Christian service as an issue of public theology. That is, all Christian service initiated in baptism and formed in the Eucharist is a public event, a public ministry, on view for the world with the hope of bringing about the world’s redemption.

IV. Christian Service as Public Theology

Baptism initiates a person into Christian service and the form of Christian service as praise and mercy is taught in the Eucharist. A life characterized by this kind of Christian service is exemplified in “holy living” and noted in Wesleyan terms as “growth in grace.” By no means are these private expressions of one’s Christian faith. The idea of Christian service as praise to God and mercy to others suggests that service in the name of Jesus Christ is incarnational and immediately public.

As such, in the United Methodist Church, baptism and Eucharist are public expressions of faith. The baptismal liturgy asks those being baptized “Do you accept the

freedom and power God gives you to resist evil, injustice, and oppression in whatever forms they present themselves?”⁸⁹ The intent of this question, which immediately follows the question regarding one’s belief in the remission of sin, is to indicate that through one’s baptism, a Christian is expected to serve God by opposing that which is against God, namely evil, injustice, and oppression. These are the works of mercy. Similarly, the *epiclesis* prayer of Word and Table I points to the redemptive work in the world expected by those who come to the table: “Make [the bread and wine] be for us the body and blood of Christ, that we may be for the world the body of Christ, redeemed by his blood.”⁹⁰ The intention of being for the world as the body of Christ is to be incarnate in the world as the body of Christ to engage directly against the personal and systemic sin that continues to betray Jesus Christ and Christ-followers to the cross.

Christian service understood in the mode of the sacraments is not an automatic panacea to the ills of the world, just as the ministry of Jesus did not destroy all the manifestations of sin in the world. The concept of Christian service put forward here in terms of baptism and Eucharist may be described as a community-oriented expression of the sacrificial love of Jesus for the people of God infused with the hopeful expectation that the coming Kingdom of God will put all to rights. By seeking Christ together in service to God and others, Christians begin on a path of discipleship that in drawing closer to Christ presses outward into the world in service. That is, one that is drawn closer to Christ is constrained to serve the world as Christ served the world by being present in

⁸⁹ BOW, p 88.

⁹⁰ BOW, p 38.

the world.⁹¹ This Christian presence in the world is an incarnational presence expressed by “priesthood of all believers.”

Joerg Rieger suggests as much in his work on describing the works of mercy as means of grace. For Rieger, the issue with the church is not with having the correct practices or (it seems to me) having a meaningful practice of ordination; that is, concern with getting worship ‘right’ should be counter-balanced with the concern to get service in terms of mercy ‘right.’ He laments the church’s move from the margins to the mainline precisely because it causes the people of the mainline church to take a myopic view of those in desperate need of mercy. Thus, he notes sardonically, “We Methodists have made it and we want others to make it too. In this context, our concern for the margins is reduced to a matter of service to the disadvantaged. All that remains to be done is to provide a chance for them to become more like us.”⁹² To make “them...become more like us” is a spiritual colonizing of the disadvantaged and suffers them the disrespect of not being accepted (so to speak) as part of the priesthood of all believers. The “pressing outward” into the margins of the world in the form of Christian service is a move to help meet the needs of brothers and sisters in the body of Christ, not in the form of charity to an unknown other, but in the form of a community-oriented praise to God by service in mercy to the merciless.

The 1961 New Delhi Report of the World Council of Churches begins the report of the section on the theology of service by distinguishing Christian service from

⁹¹ The Third Assembly of the World Council of Churches. *The New Delhi Report*. (New York: Association Press, 1961). p 111. “The more we are drawn to Christ, the more we are constrained to serve the world.”

⁹² Rieger, Joerg and John J. Vincent, eds. *Methodist and Radical: Rejuvenating a Tradition*. (Nashville: Kingswood, 2003). p 16.

philanthropy.⁹³ “Christian service...springs from and is nourished by God’s costly love as revealed by Jesus Christ. Any Christian ethic of service must have its roots there. The measure of God’s love for men is to be seen in the fact that his Son was willing to die for them.”⁹⁴ Philanthropy is giving and acting for a social cause that one chooses. Christian service, on the other hand, is giving one’s life to the service of God for the hope of the world.

In light of world events the commission members had before them, Christian service took on a role of addressing world developments through service as a sacrificial love that mirrors the sacrificial love of Christ for the world. Thus, “Christian service or *diakonia* must have forms and structures relevant to the present needs and clearly a response to the costly love of God for the whole world...In this complex and changing world the forms of Christian service cannot be confined to a single pattern. Each unique situation may require a different form. Also the *diakonia* (service) of the Church is expressed in different ways, through the presence of the individual Christian in the secular world and through the organized life of the churches.”⁹⁵ The incarnational example of Christian service is the sacrificial love of God in Christ present now in the world through individual and corporate acts of service that press outward into the margins of the world. Acts of Christian service, rooted in baptism and formed in Eucharist, are finally transformative acts that deeply affect the world by being the presence of Christ in the public margins. The proximity of Christ expressed in acts of Christian service is an encouragement that the eschatological promise of a common banquet table is being fulfilled.

⁹³ *The New Delhi Report*, p 93.

⁹⁴ *The New Delhi Report*, p 93.

⁹⁵ *The New Delhi Report*, p 111.

V. Thoughts on the Future of Ministry in the UMC

Drawing the outlines of a UM theology of service will present an opportunity to help the church move forward with its understanding of ministry rather than remaining mired in the unending structural discussion of the meaning of ministry. The move forward can begin precisely by developing a theology of service that is strongly connected to baptism and the common table to which all who seek Christ are called. For the UMC, developing a theology of service from the theologies of baptism and Eucharist takes advantage of the most recent and most substantive theological statements from the church, *By Water and the Spirit* on baptism and *This Holy Mystery* on the Eucharist.

Baptism incorporates all the baptized into the service of Christ. The Eucharist forms all those who commune into the service of praise and mercy expected of those who are growing in grace. At the very least, this should be a starting point for the ongoing discussion of the orders of ministry in the UMC. Since it is the case that the strongest theological statements the UMC has are the recent documents on baptism and Eucharist, it stands to reason that these should be recognized as authoritative teachings of the UMC from which the church may draw other teachings of consequence.

As noted in the opening section, there is significant confusion about the meaning of service, especially as it relates to ordination. Presently, deacons are ordained to word and service and elders to word, service, sacrament, and order (deacons now have some limited sacramental authority that may be provisionally granted by the bishop). The Study of Ministry Commission is investigating and considering removing the ordination to service from the elder's orders in order to clarify the ministry of the deacon as a ministry of service.

A major problem with this move is that there never should have been an ordination to a ministry of service that was not explicitly understood as a fully representational ministry for either the elder or the deacon.⁹⁶ Christians are baptized into service and formed in service through communion with Christ. Thus, Christian service belongs to the body of Christ. This importance of the general ministry of all the baptized as *diakonia* to the world has been muddled by the ordination to service. This would not be as much of a problem if the church maintained the language of the ordained as a representative ministry. Yet, it is this “sameness” that is the source of some difficulty in developing a clear theology of service generally and the ordering of ministry specifically. The key problem is the attempt to distinguish the “service” of general ministry from the “service” of the ordained. While the intent of the distinction is to show that the ordained are in a form of “servant leadership” and authority through service with respect to the general body of the church, the effect is an overall diminishment of the church’s understanding of service as the general ministry of the baptized.⁹⁷ It is confusing to claim that all baptized Christians have entered into the ministry of service to the world through their baptism and that all baptized Christians who are ordained have a specific ministry called “service” that is distinct from the general ministry of the baptized. For

⁹⁶ I have been alerted to the difficulties surrounding the language of “representation,” namely as such usage served to support notions related to the power of the ordained to determine the ministerial direction of the church, amongst other concerns over power. I am not convinced, however, that just because a usage has been misunderstood that it must be jettisoned altogether. Angela Shier-Jones notes that British Methodists have a “principle of representative selection.” “God calls all people to the Christian ministry. Those who are called to the ordained ministry are set apart for this ministry ‘for the sake of Church Order and not because of any priestly virtue inherent in the office.’” *A Work in Progress: Methodists Doing Theology*. (Werrington: Epworth Press, 2005). p 268.

⁹⁷ This can also be read as claiming that the notion of “servant leadership” is a difficult idea for Christians. It is contradictory to claim that someone can lead in service. However, one’s service can become an example for another’s, as Christ is the ultimate example of Christian service. Similarly, service can be rendered through a stronger understanding of authority. The service of Jesus Christ is precisely the ultimate example because of the authority he had in performing his works of service.

this reason, there is no sense in which there can be an ordination to service without diminishing the calling to service that belongs to all Christians.⁹⁸

To ordain to a ministry of service, even with the accompanying language of “servant leadership,” is to compel the church to think about service in terms of “following the leader” rather than being together on the way of Jesus. The ordination to service as it presently stands systematizes Christian service, thus rendering it subservient to the system of the church at precisely the time that system must undergo a massive transformation to avoid an increasingly certain death. My sense is that the systemization of service limits the ability of Christian service to bring about the redemptive transformation God is working for by limiting the sense that members of the UMC may serve Christ without first checking in with someone with the proper credentials. Service belongs to the body and not specifically to the individual members, for all are called to serve and each serves the body and the world in a unique way.

The church needs to continue, and deepen, its study of the orders of ministry. Historically, the order of the deacon was understood to represent Christ to the church and thus to aid the bishop in service to the community by preparing the holy meal and taking it to those in need, while also delivering alms and other supplies. Now, by way of a casual observation, deacons are professional music leaders and educators. Very few serve in direct ministries of justice to the poor, which neither pays well nor has the glamour attend to a massive pipe organ. Is it the best meaning of an ordination to Christian service

⁹⁸ On this point, see Collins, John. *Deacons and the Church: Making connections between old and new*. (Harrisburg: Morehouse, 2002). “One of the recurring problems theologians have faced in attempting to develop a distinctive theology for the diaconate has in fact arisen from this foundational element of service. The problem is as simple as it is stark. If service is the defining characteristic of deacons, in what way does their involvement in works of service distinguish them from any other member of a Christian community, all of whom are called by the gospel to attend to the needs of those around them? And why are deacons commissioned to such service by the solemn ritual of ordination? Ordination makes them part of the clergy, but do they need to belong to the order of the clergy in order to feed the hungry or visit the sick?” (p. 12)

to plan the educational or music programs of the church? To be fair, this critique also applies to the elder who is ordained to service. What about the ordination to service has made the ministry of the elder any different or has transformed the world?

I would propose that the UMC no longer ordain persons to service, whether they seek ordination as elder or deacon. This means that the church has to become more specific with its terminology in terms of that to which it is ordaining people. It is not sufficient to describe what a deacon does with the words “service” and “word.” The same is true for the elder. The deacon prepares the members of the church for ministry in the world and supports persons in the exercise of their Christian service. The elder, rather than belonging to an “order,” is ordained to and holds the teaching authority of the church, which further underpins the preaching and sacramental ministry of the elder (remember that the baptized learn from the Eucharist). Finally, should the church wish to continue to ordain people to service, the only way such an ordination would make sense would be for it to be explicitly “representational.”

Another hope is that the argument that the service of the deacon (who is ordained to ministries of Word and Service) is a different *kind* of service than that to which the elder is ordained (elders are ordained to ministries of Word, Service, Sacrament, and Order) will take a more positive and lay-oriented tone. This argument figures prominently in the 2007 commission report, leading to the suggestion that “service” should be removed from the elder’s orders to better clarify the ministry of the deacon.⁹⁹ This move would leave the church vulnerable to an increased sense of clericalism where it will be easier to claim that the work of the ordained is different, and perhaps better, than the common service expected of all baptized Christians. This argument expresses a

⁹⁹ 2007 Study of Ministry report and accompanying survey.

misunderstanding of the nature of Christian service and disregards how that service may be manifested in a church living in the Wesleyan tradition.

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