

# **METHODISM AT WORSHIP**

BY

**The Rev. Bruce Gentle, M.A. (Oxon.)**  
**Chaplain, A.I.F.**



**With a Foreword by**  
**The President-General of the Methodist Church**  
**of Australasia.**

Rev

1-  
A

METHODISM AT WORSHIP



# METHODISM AT WORSHIP

*A Plea for a Vital and More Balanced  
Worship.*

By

The Rev. BRUCE GENTLE, M.A. (Oxon.),  
Chaplain, A.I.F.

With a Foreword by the President-General of the  
Methodist Church of Australasia  
(the Rev. H. M. Wheller).



THE BOOK DEPOT

Melbourne.

1945.

*To Margaret.*

## FOREWORD

THE recovery of the sense of awe, of reverence, and of adoration is one of the primary duties of the Church to-day. The greatest act, whether personal or corporate, of which man is capable is the act of worship. Nothing can be quite so important as the worship of God.

Padre Bruce Gentle has wrought a good work in this effort to awaken within our Church a sense of responsibility, and to make us conscious of our rich heritage in this matter of worship. It is part of the genius of Methodism to have a certain flexibility in both her organisation and in her forms of worship. Here is a plea so to order our forms of worship that they may become increasingly helpful in making our people aware of the Divine Presence. The supreme thing is that when our people gather together to worship they should touch the hem of the Garment of God.

What we do for our people is important, but what we help them to do for themselves is more important. The relationship of this principle to the art of worship is obvious, and it is now generally regarded that our people should have a larger part in our services.

This timely exploration of the field, its reminder of the Wesley tradition, and its note of urgency concerning our own day, will, I trust, deepen in all who read it the sense of the sacredness of worship. We must ever seek a worthy expression of our approach to God, and in this as in other matters we shall do well to commit ourselves to the leading of the Divine Spirit. I commend this study especially to our ministers and local preachers.

H. M. WHELLER.

President-General.

Albert Street Church, Brisbane,

23rd January, 1945.

## INTRODUCTION

NO better introduction to the subject of Methodism at Worship can be offered than what has already been given us in the Preface to "The Book of Offices," being the Orders of Service authorised for use in the Methodist Church, together with the Order for Morning Prayer. The forms of service in this book were authorised for use in the Methodist Church by the Conference at Newcastle-on-Tyne, July, 1936. The Order for Morning Prayer is included for the convenience of the Methodist Churches where it is in use.

The Preface runs, "These forms of service have been prepared by the direction of the Conference for the use of the Methodist people, now happily united into one great Church. The work has been done with much care, with prolonged consideration, and with a devout reliance upon the help of the Holy Spirit.

"The wealth of liturgical devotion which is the noble heritage of the universal Church has been largely used, and forms of worship belonging to the East and the West, to ancient times, and to more modern days, have all been explored to enrich these pages. It is hoped and believed that the very best expressions of Christian devotion throughout the ages will be found embodied in these forms of prayer and praise.

"There are abundant advantages in the use of such hallowed forms as these, for they not only unite us with the universal Church of Christ, dispersed throughout all ages and all lands, in our acts of worship, but they put into ordered and reverent words the most sacred desires and emotions of the Christian soul.

"It must not be thought that there is here any attempt to disparage the practice of free prayer, which has always been one of the glories of Methodism. The urgent petitions of the heart can never be confined to printed words, such as are found here. In many of the services there is an express place for extemporary prayer, and it is fervently hoped that the habit of such



prayer will revive and extend among us, both in our public worship, and in our more private devotions. But there is no real conflict between free prayer and liturgical prayer, for the most fervent and the most helpful prayers that ever came from the inspiration of the moment will be found to owe much in their expression to the remembrance of the language of the Bible, of the great liturgies, and of the hymns of Methodism. It is to be hoped that the use of these services will contribute much both to the form and the spirit of extemporaneous prayer, and that such prayer in its freedom and inspiration will be used more, and not less, in the days before us.

“Let it be remembered that the danger of formality is always present in every kind of worship, and let us resolve, by the grace of God, to bring to the use of these prayers, and to every act of worship, a sense of real penitence, the living faith that lays hold of God and of the life that is eternal, and the adoring heart that ever seeks to worship Him, in spirit and in truth.”

To restore to Methodist worship a right balance between the two elements of worship referred to in the Preface, the free spontaneous movement of the Spirit and the forms and orders necessary to conserve vital religious values, is the aim and object of this paper.

I would pay a humble and sincere tribute to the help and inspiration which I have received from fellowship with a saint of our Church, the late Rev. Joseph Bryant. His lively interest in our subject and his ripe judgment were made available to me, in many precious conversations, and in the preparation of this paper I have felt his sympathetic and warm approval.

I would also acknowledge the graciousness of the President-General, who so kindly read this paper and wrote the Foreword.

BRUCE GENTLE.

## METHODISM AT WORSHIP

An address delivered to the Methodist ministers of the Brisbane District, at the Chermiside Garden Settlement, 13th November, 1944, by Chaplain, the Rev. Bruce Gentle, M.A. (Oxon.).

### *Two Reasons for Heightened Interest in Methodist Worship.*

THERE is to-day a new interest in and concern for the worshipping life of our Church. As I see it, this quickening of interest is traceable to two main causes. In the first place, there is widespread unhappiness about much that passes for worship in our churches. Many of us are disturbed by prevailing standards and tendencies. We note a weariness, a lack of buoyancy, that suggests a dying-out of supernatural power. Too often we experience a lack of reverence that can only point to an absence of any grand or adequate sense of God. We note a tendency to “experiment” in orders of service, which often results in the exclusion of important elements of worship, and not seldom the inclusion of inappropriate “features” which are justified on no better grounds than that they are said to “attract” or “appeal” to the people. This tinkering with Methodist worship would seem to indicate that there are no clear convictions guiding us in the conduct of our public worship, and this lack of stability and sense in our worshipping life is disquieting, to say the least of it.

The other reason for a heightened interest amongst us, in the subject of worship, is a positive yearning for a more adequate worshipping life. We are not so isolated as we were. Our fellowship with other Churches, and our experience of their practices, has given to us a

deeper appreciation of the wealth of the worshipping life of the whole Christian Church. For some of us this has revealed a poverty in our own spiritual experience and a desire to enter more fully into the great stream of devotion of the Church catholic. We want to see ourselves and our worship in relation to the worship of the universal Church. We want to examine afresh what, as Methodists, we believe about worship, and so guide our conduct of public worship accordingly.

### *Worship a Neglected Study.*

It is extraordinary how little attention has been given to this subject. So far as I know, there is no course of instruction given to Methodist theological students in the Commonwealth, in the history and conduct of worship. We inherit a certain familiar pattern of worship; we sing and pray and read the Scriptures, we preach, and pronounce the Benediction, but how we came to do these things, or why they should follow each other in the sequence to which we are now accustomed, is seldom considered. It may, of course, be contended that compared with the primary evangelical mission of our Church, these matters are secondary considerations. But whatever the evangel we preach, it is still preached within the context of an act of divine worship. And in such an act, where our first object must be to praise and glorify God, can anything we do or leave undone be considered unimportant?

### *Scope of This Paper.*

Now a word must be said about the scope of this paper. Obviously it cannot take the place of a course of lectures covering every aspect of our subject, but it ought to be within our compass to point to important problems and considerations that face us to-day in the worshipping life and practice of our Church. This, then, is our procedure: First, believing that many of our troubles spring from a lack of vital relationship with

the past, we have attempted to trace the history of worship within Methodism. Methodism was transplanted from England to Australia. In that process and in the development of our country we have lost touch with much that characterised the worship of the Wesleys, and which still is traceable in British Methodism. We speak much of Wesley, and give him lip service as the founder of our great Church, but we know little of his teaching in matters of worship, and we heed him less in his practices. Our first object then is to get back to original sources and trace the story of worship as Wesley would tell it. Second, in the light of this brief excursion into our forgotten history, we dare to pass certain strictures against modern tendencies and practices in Methodist worship as being out of line with historic tradition, and contrary to the mind of Wesley. Particularly do we contend that the "free," "extempore" elements in our worship have been given too much right of way, with a consequent dangerous lack of balance. The emotional and subjective elements have been encouraged at the expense of the intellectual, objective, formal and ordered elements of our worship. We see "the signs of the self-exhaustion of the subjective religious tendency" in our Church and desire to offer a corrective.

Then, thirdly, we believe that in our present chaos there is but one road to take and that, the road back to our earliest history, to the wise balance in worship as our founder conceived it, and as he taught his growing Society. In this regard we outline six important considerations that are calculated to bring Methodism back to its historic tradition and its rightful place in the worshipping life of the Church universal.

### I

How soon, in the history of the Methodist Movement, did problems associated with their worshipping life arise? At first the preaching of the Wesleys was followed by dramatic results. Crowds were converted and



Methodist Societies were formed. But as soon as the converts were gathered into companies for fellowship and the sharing of their new-found joys and experiences, considerations as to whether these meetings were to be their sole worshipping activity, and exactly what form these corporate acts of devotion should take were bound to present themselves. A number of references in Wesley's Journal indicates only too clearly that he was very much aware of the problems confronting his new Societies in this respect, and that from the very beginning they received his most earnest attention. After all, a priest of the Anglican Church, dubbed a "Methodist" because of his regular attendance at the service of Holy Communion, and his strict observance of the religious ordinances of his Church, one who was nurtured and trained within her devotional life, could hardly leave without direction matters pertaining to the worship of his own movement.

What did Wesley believe about Christian worship, and what direction did he give to his early Church?

### *Two Streams of Worshipping Tradition United in Wesley.*

Wesley inherited two streams of worshipping tradition, Anglican and Puritan, and these traditions are both united in his person. His ancestry provides a significant clue to his faith and life. He was essentially a child of the Christian Church. His great-grandfather, both his grandfathers, and his own father were all ministers of the Church of England. Yet significantly enough, his great-grandfather and both his grandfathers were, all three, amongst the Puritan divines who went out into the wilderness in 1662, giving up their livings and becoming nonconformist for conscience sake. No doubt the courage and the faith of his fathers had a strong influence on Wesley himself when he, too, was compelled to endure bitter hostility from his Mother Church. However, his immediate ancestry was that of the High Church party within the National Church.

His father was intended for the nonconformist ministry and to that end had been sent to a Dissenting college. But in this institution Samuel found so much sectarian and political controversy, and so little vital religion, that he finally revolted against all nonconformity, and setting off on foot for Oxford, with two pounds five shillings in his pocket, sought orders in the Church of England. In due course he graduated, and in 1689 was ordained "priest," thus reuniting his branch of the family with the Church which had expelled his father and grandfather, and which afterwards looked with prejudice on the efforts of his sons. A similar flight from nonconformity characterised John Wesley's mother. Susannah was the daughter of the scholarly Dr. Annersley, who also was numbered among the ejected Puritan divines. At the age of thirteen, and before meeting Samuel Wesley, Susannah on her own initiative left Dissent and joined the State Church. The reason for her action lies in a discontent with the stern Calvinism then dominant in nonconformity. Thus John Wesley inherited a rich history of independent judgment and action, combining to a unique degree both Puritan and Anglican traditions. But in either case the example before him was that of a disciplined and somewhat austere worshipping life and a deep appreciation of the institutional element necessary to religion. Though the nonconformists of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries left the established Church, it was only to establish another Church, whose chief glory lay in its spiritual independence of the State. Those nonconformist Churches rejoiced in their spiritual autonomy, and held that theirs was a true Church, where the Word of God was preached and the Sacraments rightly administered. They were not religious anarchists, consequently whether we trace Wesley's spiritual history either to Puritan or Anglican sources, in either case he was bound to hold a high conception of the place of the Church and the discipline necessary to maintain it.



### *Wesley's England.*

Now let us turn to Wesley himself and the England he knew in the early eighteenth century. Nonconformists tend to paint a gloomier picture of the religious life of England at this time than is warranted. At the same time, there was much to cause a sensitive soul considerable concern. The clergy were financially secure, closely tied to the landed aristocracy, neglectful of their pastoral responsibilities, and content with a diminished religious life in themselves. Their services of worship were perfunctory, irregularly held, and the service of Holy Communion seldom offered to the people. These were roughly the conditions when Wesley and the "three or four serious young gentlemen," who were their first associates, were undergraduates at Oxford. The Wesleys were scholars who through their study of the past came to recognise the religious shortcomings of their day. They studied Thomas à Kempis, Jeremy Taylor, and especially William Law. The Methodist movement can be said to have had its genesis in the rediscovery in the souls of its founders of the reality of the worshipping life. A passionate striving after holiness has always been associated with the Methodist movement. It breathes through the hymns of Charles Wesley, and we can trace this character back to the Holy Club, at Oxford. There Wesley and his small company sought in regular communions, in fasting and discipline, a holier way of life.

### *Importance of Wesley's Early Devotional Training.*

Too often we tend to forget the story of the first thirty-five years of Wesley's life and the tremendous importance of his devotional training in shaping and directing the habits and customs of his followers. Nor do we wish to underestimate or "play down" the immense significance for Wesley and his Church of his own evangelical experience with the Moravian brethren.

Indeed, apart from that experience there would not have been a Methodist movement at all, and in order to have a full picture of Methodism at worship we must study the place and effect of the evangelical experience in the life of Wesley and his Revival.

### *His Evangelical Experience.*

After more than two years of defeat and disillusionment as a colonial missionary, Wesley returned to England. "I went to America to convert the Indians, but Q who will convert me?" was the cry of his soul. "How can I preach to others when I have not faith myself?" he says to Peter Bohler.

The 24th May, 1738, was the climax to a long and strenuous struggle. Note that he attended Evensong at St. Paul's that day, and was much moved by the anthem, "Out of the deep have I called unto Thee, O Lord. Lord, hear my voice. O let Thine ears consider well the voice of my complaint." Wesley found great comfort in the words, "My soul fleeth unto the Lord, before the morning watch I say, before the morning watch." That same evening, "most unwillingly," he attended a Society in Aldersgate Street. This was the Damascus Road when Wesley felt his heart strangely warmed. "I felt I did trust in Christ, Christ alone, for my salvation, and an assurance was given me that He had taken away my sins, even mine, and saved me from the law of sin and death."

This experience released Wesley's dynamic energies and his missionary labours followed with astonishing results. He and his preachers were ambassadors for Christ, and they were determined to reach every man and woman who would listen to them with the good news of Salvation. There was an immediate response. Vast congregations gathered wherever the Wesleys preached. Conversions followed conversions, a new Society was formed and divided into classes for fellowship and instruction. Wesley rode on horseback from one end of England to the other with tireless devotion.

He preached, he taught, and he wrote. Prisons, work-houses, society meetings, and whatever churches would open their doors to him were the scenes of his endeavour to plant the Gospel into the hearts of all who would believe.

### *Growing Opposition of the Church.*

So far, everything done was in accordance with conservative, even High Church, precedent. The most starchiness of his clerical brethren would admit that the holding of religious services in gaols, prisons, work-houses and the like was within the scope of the Church's scheme, though these things had been grossly neglected. Soon, however, "the Enthusiast" was to take a step which shocked beyond repair the dignity of his more stiff and formal brethren.

### *Wesley Preaches in the Open Air.*

Wesley went to Bristol, where Whitefield had been preaching out of doors with great success. He invited Wesley to join him. Wesley was in a dilemma. "I could scarce reconcile myself at first to this strange way of preaching in the fields, having been all my life (till very lately) so tenacious of every point relating to decency and order, that I should have thought the saving of souls almost a sin if it had not been done in a Church." However, Wesley was convinced that it was necessary, if he hoped to reach the toiling masses who were outcasts and alienated from the Church, to go out into the highways and hedgerows and "compel them to come in."

### *He Authorises Itinerant Preachers.*

With the growth of his Societies, the necessity to authorise local and itinerant preachers became obvious, and here again Wesley was criticised by his Church.

They complained that these men were ignorant and unlearned. The Oxford don saw to it that they did not remain ignorant long. He imposed on them a stern discipline, insisting that they would need to spend five hours each day in reading the most useful books. I wonder how many ministers of our Church spend that time per day in the same pursuit? He told them that one can never be a deep preacher without extensive reading any more than a thorough Christian.

The history of Wesley's spiritual pilgrimage shows the following sequence: First, after his New Birth, came the preaching of the Gospel, the inner compulsion to preach to the saving of souls. Then followed the unorthodox methods of reaching the people, which in turn aroused the hostility of his Church, and finally, and as a consequence the problem of his own relationship to the Anglican Church, and the necessity of attending to the worshipping life of his own movement.

### *Reluctantly, Wesley Breaks with the Established Church.*

The Methodist movement need never have developed into a Church apart, if the Established Church had been more imaginative, more concerned for the lower strata of society, and more religiously alive. As it was, the people called Methodists were denied the ministry of the Church, and Wesley was compelled to provide an alternative worshipping framework, within which his people could be nurtured in the Christian Faith.

There never could have been a man more reluctant to leave his own Church than was Wesley. He had no intention of promoting schism, but rather of exercising the prophetic ministry to which he felt himself called and creating "a little flock" of realistic Christians within the National Church. He urged that his meetings should be held at times other than those used for the Church services, and he refrained from offering communion when it was obtainable from the local parish church.



### *Necessity for Wesley to Provide Alternative Worship.*

Uncompromising opposition from his own Church, however, and the fact that his newly won converts, who previously had had no Church affiliation, needed instruction and help in the Christian life, compelled Wesley to provide some alternative order of worship and discipline to that of the Established Church. Wesley was too clear-headed to evade the issue, and this appears to have been his direction in the matter. In the Large Minutes of 1744, he says, "But some may say our service is public worship. Yes, but not such as supersedes the Church service. It presupposes public prayer like the sermons at the University. If it were designed to be instead of the Church service it would be essentially defective, for it seldom has the four grand parts of public prayer, deprecation, petition, intercession and thanksgiving. If the people put ours in the room of the Church service, we hurt them that stay with us and ruin them that leave us."

### *An Alternative Liturgy.*

When, however, a reconciliation became less and less likely between Wesley and his Church, he addressed himself to the task of preparing an alternative liturgy. It closely resembled the Anglican liturgy, for which he had an unbounded admiration. "I believe," he says, "there is no liturgy in the world, either in ancient or modern language, which breathes more of a solid scriptural rational piety than the Common Prayer of the Church of England."

Consequently, in a letter to the ministers of the newly established Methodist Church in U.S.A., he wrote: "I have prepared a liturgy, little differing from that of the Church of England (I think the best constituted national Church in the world) which I advise all travelling preachers to use on the Lord's Day, in all the

congregations, reading the Litany only on Wednesday and Fridays, and praying extempore on all other days. I also advise the elders to administer the Supper of the Lord on every Lord's Day."

## II

From this swift survey we can appreciate how Wesley was striving to hold two things in balance, the spontaneous and free expression of the spirit on the one hand, and on the other the forms and order necessary to conserve the essential elements of Christian worship. In this regard Methodism is both Evangelical and Catholic. One of our major troubles to-day is that we have tended to divorce these two from each other. We have come to associate Methodist worship with only one of its two historic streams. We give unbounded liberty to the spontaneous expression of the preacher in prayers, readings and preaching, and we neglect the order necessary to the continuing life of the Church.

### *Modern Subjective Tendencies.*

This, we contend, has led us to a sorry and unbalanced plight in our worshipping life. We have forgotten that there is a real difference between private and personal devotions and public acts of worship. We have tipped the scales on the side of individual utterance and spontaneous expression, which in turn has issued in a dangerous subjectivism. We have tended to put man in the centre of our worship instead of God. We aim to comfort, edify and surround him with our exhortations, instead of glorifying the Most High. We substitute on the slightest pretext the shallow sentimental hymns of Alexander's for the solid scriptural and doctrinal hymns of Wesley and Watts. We come to associate worship with what is described as "the right atmosphere" and certain emotional conditions, instead of an attitude of mind and heart turned outward towards God and His



Christ, irrespective of how we feel. Recently I attended a suburban Church Anniversary, and since it was a special occasion, and a larger congregation than usual the choir had prepared special music. Imagine my reactions when the opening anthem, apparently calculated to engender the "right atmosphere," was none other than "Beautiful Isle of Somewhere"! Shades of our fathers, who began worship in the mood "We praise Thee, O God, we acknowledge Thee to be the Lord"!

There ought to be two authentic notes in Methodism at worship, and they are "Awe" and "Abandon." We know too much "Abandon"; we experience too little "Awe." The true reverence and feeling of awe that makes worship distinctive from all other activities can only come from an overwhelming sense of God. Our contention is that in order to keep and recapture in our worshipping life a deep awareness of God we must right the balance, i.e., we must return to Wesleyan standards and practices, to a more catholic conception of worship and lay hold on our liturgical heritage.

### III

We can do this in the following ways:

#### *Worship is Godward Devotion.*

First, we must restore to our worship the orientation of the early Church where the blessed Triune God is the centre of devotions. Christian worship is in the first place and above all the worship of God. It is a recognition on the part of the creature of his relationship to the Creator, to whom he belongs and for whose glory he exists. True worship begins in the adoration of the Eternal Saviour of Mankind. "Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for He hath visited and redeemed His people." Our worship is a response to the nature of God and what He has done for us. It is not so much a matter of our feelings, it is our duty as well as our delight to set forth the praises of the Most High.

Worship is essentially Godward and adoration inseparable from it. This was the orientation of the earliest prayers of the Christian Church. "They are monumental things, these prayers, built up out of solid masses of objective fact. Sentence by sentence, phrase by phrase, they present to us some fresh facet of the redeeming work of God and Christ, and in worship when the adoring gaze was led from point to point of the soaring structure the spirit of thanksgiving awoke and poured itself out." We, too, in our Methodist acts of worship, must keep our souls directed outwards to God and His mighty acts.

Wesley rejoiced that he was delivered from individualistic and subjective religion; we must see to it that we, too, share his insistence on an essentially objective approach to worship. It will save us from much that is shallow, sickly and sentimental.

#### *Corporate Worship Calls for Corporate Prayers.*

We have already hinted that part of our trouble comes from a confusion in our own minds between personal and private devotions and public prayer. Our Church has developed the gift and encouraged the practice of extempore prayer. We have held that prayer must rise spontaneously from grateful hearts and express the petitions that rise naturally from our immediate needs. And indeed there must always be a place for unfettered prayers in our worship. Many Methodists would rightly hold that their most treasured experiences have been the memory of prayers offered by men of mature spiritual experience and steeped in the language and thought of the Scriptures. But it would be idle to deny that sometimes extempore prayer falls to a low level of attainment. Particularly is this the case to-day. It may be attributable to the fact that we and our congregations are not so familiar with the devotional treasury of the Psalms and the Bible as our fathers were, but too often extempore prayers merely echo the

thin poverty of a man's own devotional life. We sometimes complain that written or corporate prayers may become formal and meaningless, but is there anything so formal as extempore prayers that follow the same mental pattern, the same stereotyped phrases, the same narrow field of experience and which come tripping off the tongue with monotonous regularity?

The fact is that when we have to do with corporate worship we need corporate prayers. That is why Wesley was so insistent on providing his people with a liturgy. He did so simply because it provided for congregational worship a recognisable framework in which people could both pray in their prayers and pray as they ought.

There are no prayers so comprehensive in their sweep, so rhythmical in their structure, so right in their sense as the great prayers of the Catholic Church; yet seldom do our people either hear or join in the General Prayers of Thanksgiving and Confession. These prayers, in a marvellous completeness, include the needs of the whole congregation, and we miss much when we neglect them. After all, our Lord Himself gave us a "form" of prayer, and the command "in this manner pray ye." Endless repetition does not stale our Lord's Prayer, nor would it be different in the case of the great prayers of the Church. Everything depends on the intention and the spirit in which our prayers are offered, and a familiar pattern of prayer can be of great value. It can provide a recognisable ladder set up from earth to heaven, making communion with God immediate and real.

### *The Sacrament of the Word.*

The Sacrament of the Word has always held pride of place in Methodist worship. The Bible, we believe, is the Word of God to our souls and, therefore, whatever else may be subordinate, we insist that the reading of the Scriptures and the preaching of the Word shall be the foci around which our worship revolves. Yet even

here our practice is haphazard and our preaching wide of the central truths of the Living Word. In the reading of the Scriptures every preacher is left to his own device as to what passage he shall read. He follows no lectionary, and the result is that many congregations hear only the more obvious Psalms and lessons over and over again, while endless tracts of both Old and New Testaments are never heard. A lectionary not only provides for a systematic reading of the whole Word of God, but it links us to the great historic events of our Faith. It is incredible that many important days in the Church calendar are ignored by our preachers. Whitsunday, All Saints' Day, the Seasons of Advent, Christmas, Lent, Easter and Trinity are given grudging recognition. We pretend, as Methodists, to hold fast by the Word of God; it is said to be our anchorage, but our carelessness in handling it would suggest a half faith only, and that we have broken with our moorings. We need to restore to our worship the true centrality of the Word of God.

### *The Right Use of Symbols.*

Another help in the Godward focussing of our worship is the right use of symbols that are understood by the people. Methodism is timidly feeling its way back to the use of simple and significant symbols. The fact is, we cannot get away from symbolic thinking; it is universal. As Dr. Waterhouse points out, the reaction of the Reformers against symbolism in the Middle Ages merely resulted in a fresh set of symbols being set up. The severity of Puritan life and worship is just as much symbolic as the ornate ritualism of Catholicism. It is not a question as to symbolism or no symbolism, but what symbolism best sets forth what we believe. We are in the Puritan stream of tradition in this regard, but that is not to say that we shall rule out the significant symbols of our faith, especially when the only other alternative is an ugly church building, and the focal point the back of an organist or choir furnishings. We do not



hesitate to display the symbols of our national life, the flag finds a conspicuous place, and the honour roll, but seldom are we reminded by the silent witness of the Cross that we and all mankind worship the Saviour who has redeemed us at so great cost. Yet it is certain that when the symbol of the Cross is introduced into our church buildings, our churches will come to be the obvious places in which to meditate and pray. Our hymn writers use all the resource of language to create a visional image of the supreme self-sacrifice of Jesus; why should we not set before us a continual reminder of His eternal sacrifice? Symbols call for imagination and faith, and therefore we ought not, through fearful literalness, withhold a means of grace to sensitive souls. If God may speak to some through a humble wayside flower, He can scarce fail to reach the soul turned outward towards the Cross of His Divine Son.

### *The Place of Holy Communion.*

Inseparable from a consideration of symbols is the place of the Lord's Supper in Methodist worship. As one who, in the capacity of a military chaplain, shares the rich service of Holy Communion every Sunday morning, as Wesley did, I can only testify to its deep satisfactions and high religious value. Admittedly, the question of the frequency with which we offer Communion, or participate in it, is not the important one, but rather the deep significance we attach to it, when we do join in this glad and solemn feast. If we merely offer or receive the Body and the Blood of our Lord perfunctorily, it were better that we desisted altogether. Yet surely the full Communion Service, with Collect, Epistle, Gospel, prayers and preaching, is the richest worshipping experience of all. A practice which is not common amongst us, and yet one which I am persuaded would heighten the symbolic significance of our Communion, would be the presence on the Lord's Table of a Common Communion Cup and Unbroken Bread, and at the words of institution in the prayer of consecration

the minister would actually "take bread and break it," as Jesus did, and again accompanying the appropriate words, he would "take the cup." Instruction of our people in the appropriate attitude to receive the Communion would not be out of place, and engender in them the right spirit of supplication.

Our Communion Service places us in the full stream of catholic tradition, and is one more fruitful help to the right orientation of our worshipping life. There is something solid and objective, something historic and eternal in the recreation of the life and sacrifice of our Lord which makes it specially suited to the true needs of worship. I have been astonished to find how casual and careless is the observance of the Lord's Supper in many of our churches. Inadequate preparation, slovenly habits, a service that is tacked on to the ordinary service, and often abbreviated to keep pace with the clock, is a travesty of the Methodist view of the Communion. Again, it seems that the smaller preaching places in our circuits seldom have the communion at all. No wonder that we leave the way open to a superstitious and unworthy view of the Communion.

### *Doctrine of the Church.*

\* Our last necessity for a right balance in Methodist worship is a clear and impelling doctrine of the objective significance of the Church itself. Dr. Rattenbury reminds us that the Church must be thought of as the supernatural body, divinely appointed, and a means of grace in itself. The Church is the earthly steward of the Word and Sacraments. It had its birth at Pentecost, and is a supernatural creation. The Church belongs to the unseen world, but it is manifest in time. It is the Body of Christ. He is the Head, and we are "very members incorporate in the mystical body of Thy Son, which is the blessed company of all faithful people." Such a high doctrine is consistent with the views of Wesley, and a necessary background to every consideration of the worshipping life of our Church.



### *A Plea for Full Methodist Worship.*

Now, as you have patiently followed this paper, you may have felt that I have overemphasised the objective, formal, and institutional elements in worship. Indeed, some of you may be uncharitable enough to say, "If this man feels as he does, why not go into the rich liturgical life of the Church of England, and be done with it?" My answer is that Methodism holds much that is of real value. I love her evangelical emphasis, her extempore prayers, her priceless hymn book. She has a vitality that is life and health and salvation. She has the warm breath of Christian fellowship and an enthusiasm that is sanctified by God's Holy Spirit. These things and more I find in Methodism, but I want no emasculated Methodism; no shallow Church that strikes not more than a dozen notes in the wide range of Christian tradition and experience. I want a full, rich Church, as its founder conceived it—in line with historic tradition and keeping in its worshipping life a right balance; holding to the catholic tradition of the objective nature of the Church and her Sacraments, yet rejoicing in her freedom to adventure as the Spirit of God dictates.

---

Spectator Publishing Co. Pty. Ltd., Printers,  
134a Little Collins Street, Melbourne.

---

# **Other Methodist Publications**

---

## **"THE SLIP-RAIL SERIES"**

A new series of booklets, especially written by leading Australian Methodists, with especial attention to the guidance of youth from the Sunday school and Bible class to the Church.

No. 1—"The Church and the Sacraments," by E. C. Pallot, M.A., B.D., Ph.D. Price 4d.

No. 2—"A Guide to Bible Class Leaders," by C. Gallacher, M.A., B.D., Dip.Ed. Price 4d.

No. 3—"Wanted—Christian Leaders," by David Lewis. Price 6d.

No. 4—"The God of the Bible," by E. C. Pallot, M.A., B.D., Ph.D. Price 6d.

---

## **"THE YOUNG METHODIST"**

By E. C. Pallot, M.A., B.D., Ph.D.

A simple and brief introduction to the history, beliefs and enterprises of the people called Methodists. Specially written for young people, for group study and private reading. Crown 8vo., 92 pages, 2nd edition. Illustrated. Price 1/6.

---

## **"OUR GREAT TEXTBOOK"**

Its Origin, Outline and Authority.

By E. C. Pallot, M.A., B.D., Ph.D.

A devotional approach to the Scriptures prepared for the use of Sunday school teachers, Bible classes, and for Scripture instruction in schools and colleges. With assignments of work based on the text. 2nd edition. Price 1/-.  

---

The booklets described above are procurable from any of the Methodist Book Depots in Australia and New Zealand, and are published by

# **THE METHODIST BOOK DEPOT,**

288 Little Collins Street,  
Melbourne.