

Methodism | A Brief Introduction

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1 | Introduction: Origins and Core Beliefs

Origins of Methodism

Methodism traces its origins to 18th-century England with the evangelical movement led by John Wesley, his brother Charles Wesley, and George Whitefield. The movement sought to reform the Church of England (the Anglican Church) and revitalize Christianity in England through a methodical approach to faith and practice, hence the name “Methodism” (which was originally a derogatory title given to the original participants).

What became a world-wide movement began with the Wesley brothers’ zeal and hunger for a powerful, devout, and pietistic Christianity that moved beyond the cultural Christianity which marked much of Anglicanism in England at the time. The Wesley’s believed in the promises of scripture for believers who were supernaturally empowered by the Holy Spirit—on the basis of Christ’s atoning work—to live free not only from the guilt of sin but also **the power of sinning**. They believe that 2 Timothy 3:5 perfectly described Anglican Christianity as a “form of religion but denying the power” (2 Tim. 3:5) and were moved by the hunger for righteousness to preach the good news of a life that conformed to the risen-ness of Christ rather than the fallen-ness of Adam.

John Wesley famously wrote in “Thoughts Upon Methodism”:

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

Because of his passion for discipleship in addition to evangelism, John Wesley emphasized the importance of small group accountability through “class meetings” and “bands.” His preaching in open fields, often to the working class, led to the growth of Methodism as a separate movement within the broader streams of orthodox Christianity.

Wesley never intended to start a movement that was separate from the Church of England, but his unconventional methods of preaching and evangelism, along with the Revolutionary War in America, were driving factors behind Methodism becoming something independent from the Anglican Church.

As the Second Great Awakening was kindling in America, Wesley needed leaders who could preach and administer sacraments. The Anglican Church was unwilling to ordain lay leaders for such roles in America, so Wesley, following his sense of the leading of the Holy Spirit, moved forward in ordaining lay ministers for the sake of advancing the Kingdom of God in America.

At the time of the founding of the United States, Methodism gained massive ground through the efforts of circuit riders like Francis Asbury, who traveled extensively to spread the Methodist message across the frontier. Methodism, then, became a leading force during the Second Great Awakening, contributing to the shaping of American religious landscape.

In the 19th and 20th centuries, Methodism experienced several schisms and mergers, resulting in the formation of various denominations such as the Methodist Episcopal Church, the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, and the Methodist Protestant Church. These denominations eventually united in 1939 to form The Methodist Church, which later merged with the Evangelical United Brethren Church in 1968 to become the United Methodist Church.

Since 2019, more than 7,000 congregations across the United States have disaffiliated from the United Methodist Church over the church’s views on sexual ethics (specifically, the ordination of practicing

homosexuals). While sexual ethics has been the presenting symptom for this most recent schism, the true cause of the split is the doctrine of the inspiration and authority of scripture.

Today, Methodism remains one of the largest Protestant denominations worldwide, with various branches and offshoots continuing the Wesleyan tradition.

Core Beliefs

- **The Great Tradition of Christianity.** As a devout Anglican, Wesley stood in the broader streams of classical, orthodox Christianity in his affirmation of the ecumenical creeds and councils of the early church. He was a strong believer in Christian tradition, as far as it accomplished its goal of preserving the biblical witness rather than adding to what scriptures teach in a way that contradicts the biblical message.
- **Entire Sanctification/Christian Perfection.** Wesley believed that God raised up Methodists for the single purpose of proclaiming the message of entire sanctification. Wesley described this doctrine as “the grand depositum which God has lodged with the people called Methodist; and for the sake of propagating this chiefly He appeared to have raised us up.” Most people misunderstand entire sanctification. Wesley defined the doctrine as, “A full salvation from all our sins, from pride, self-will, anger, unbelief, or, as the Apostle expresses it, “Go on to perfection” [Heb. 6:1 KJV]. But what is perfection? The word has various senses: here it means perfect love. It is love excluding sin; love filling the heart, taking up the whole capacity of the soul. It is love “rejoicing evermore, praying without ceasing, in everything giving thanks” [1 Thess. 5:16–18 KJV] (“The Scripture Way of Salvation”). In sum, entire sanctification can be defined as the fullness of the Spirit, victory of sin, and a life of holy love.
- **Assurance of Salvation.** One of John Wesley’s major contributions to Western Christianity was his robust teaching on the doctrine of assurance (the ways we can be sure that we are, in fact, reconciled to God and walking with him). Wesley believed that we could be sure of our salvation both inwardly and outwardly.
- **Arminian Theology.** Unlike many within the Protestant tradition, Wesley was an Arminian, meaning that he rejected the notion that God unconditionally predestines individuals to heaven or hell. Rather, Wesley believed that at the heart of salvation is a *love* relationship, rather than merely a change in status (going from guilty to innocent). If salvation is a love relationship—Wesley reasoned—then individuals must be enabled by grace to willingly cooperate with the saving work of God, as freedom of agency is required for love.
- **Salvation as a Journey Over Merely a Change in Status.** Many within the Protestant tradition think of salvation first and foremost as a change in status from guilty to innocent (justification). Wesley believed in justification, however, he believed that at the heart of Christian conversion was the new birth (regeneration) along with an ongoing, reconciled relationship with God. Wesley, in other words, emphasized what God does in us above what God does for us in salvation. Salvation, thought Wesley, should be thought of as a life-long journey of faith in which we walk in a love-relationship with God based on Christ’s atoning work and by the power of the Holy Spirit. Ultimately, Wesleyans understand that salvation in the life of the individual is about the healing, or redeeming of the image of God in humanity, over and above a transactional status change.
- **Social Holiness.** The Methodists strongly emphasized the importance of discipleship in the small group setting (what they called “bands”); that holiness of heart and life cannot be fulfilled in isolation, but in community.

Means of Grace. Central to Methodism is a robust understanding of two forms of the Means of Grace (“means of grace” being the ways in which God’s sanctifying grace is administered in the life of the believer). The first form of the means of grace is works of piety (e.g., spiritual disciplines such as Bible study, prayer, fasting, etc.), and the second being works of mercy (feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, visiting prisoners, etc.).

Suggested Reading

Origins of Methodism

- Richard P. Heitzenrater. *Wesley and the People Called Methodist: Second Edition*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2013.
- Kevin Watson. *Perfect Love: Recovering Entire Sanctification—The Lost Power of the Methodist Movement*. Franklin, TN: Seedbed, 2022.
- Kenneth Collins. *A Real Christian: The Life of John Wesley*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2000.
- Jean Miller Schmidt, Russell E. Richey, and Kenneth E. Rowe. *American Methodism: A Compact History*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2012.
- Ryan Danker. *Wesley and the Anglicans: Political Division in Early Evangelicalism*. Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2016.

Core Beliefs

- Thomas Oden. *Classic Christianity: A Systematic Theology*. New York: Harper One, 2009.
- Kenneth J. Collins and Jason E. Vickers. *The Sermons of John Wesley: A Collection for the Christian Journey*. Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2013.
- Kenneth J. Collins. *The Theology of John Wesley: Holy Love and the Shape of Grace*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2011.
- Roger Olson. *Arminian Theology: Myths and Realities*. Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2006.
- Ryan Danker, Editor. *The Faith Once Delivered: A Wesleyan Witness to Christian Orthodoxy*. Franklin, TN: Seedbed, 2024.

2 | Entire Sanctification

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

The “Grand Depositum” of Methodism

John Wesley believed that God raised up the people called “Methodist” to proclaim to the world this doctrine of entire sanctification. Referring to entire sanctification, Wesley wrote in a letter “the grand depositum which God has lodged with the people called Methodists; and for the sake of propagating this chiefly He appeared to have raised us up.”

Defining Entire Sanctification

Entire sanctification is the fullness of the Spirit, victory over sin, and a life of holy love. By fullness of the Spirit, we mean the state in which the Holy Spirit gets all of us; it means we have the Spirit in every part of us. We have given ourselves over entirely for the Holy Spirit to move freely in us and through us. Entire sanctification is the work of the Holy Spirit in perfecting our love of God and neighbor by making that holy love our highest desire.

1. **Wesley’s Definition.** John Wesley defined entire sanctification as: A full salvation from all our sins, from pride, self-will, anger, unbelief, or, as the Apostle expresses it, “Go on to perfection” [Heb. 6:1 KJV]. But what is perfection? The word has various senses: here it means perfect love. It is love excluding sin; love filling the heart, taking up the whole capacity of the soul. It is love “rejoicing evermore, praying without ceasing, in everything giving thanks” [1 Thess. 5:16–18 KJV].¹
2. **The Positive and Negative of Entire Sanctification.** According to Wesley, we can think of entire sanctification both negatively and positively. Negatively, entire sanctification is the elimination of sin from our nature. It is the total correction of our inward bent towards self. Positively, entire sanctification is the freedom to have an undivided heart that is singularly fixed on loving and obeying God; it means experiencing the fullness of God’s perfect love.
3. **The Work of God, Not Human Accomplishment.** The claim that Christians can be made perfect in love seems like a tall order. Still, perfection in love is both the mandatory and natural follow-up of regeneration because if for no other reason than that he who begins a good work sees it through to completion (Phil. 1:6). The promise of entire sanctification is not a claim to what we are capable of but of what the sovereign Holy Trinity can accomplish in sinners. Christian perfection is the fruit of belief that the redemptive work of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit is powerful enough to transform self-centered sinners into individuals who are fully abandoned to God. It is as Paul says, “Now may the God of peace himself sanctify you completely, and may your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. He who calls you is faithful; he will surely do it” (1 Thess. 5:23–24; italics added).

¹ John Wesley, “Scripture Way of Salvation.”

4. **Pleasing God is the Highest Desire.** The doctrine of entire sanctification affirms the biblical teaching that Christians need not sin. We need not sin because the Holy Spirit has dealt with the cause of sinning, which the Apostle Paul calls the “flesh” (Rom. 7–8). Habitual sin results from a willful determination to have our way in life. As we’ve been discussing all along, the Holy Spirit can transform this pattern of thinking and acting. The Holy Spirit can make it so that pleasing God is our highest desire. Because of the Holy Spirit, we can have what the Bible calls a “whole heart.”² This is not a heart that is flawless in all its understandings, or even in all its feelings, but one that is completely given over to knowing and serving God.³ The result is that a person is no longer inclined or “bent” to disobeying but is now “bent” to please God.
5. **The Indwelling of Perfect Love.** Being filled with the Holy Spirit is synonymous with the fullness of perfect, holy love. We discussed above that within the inner life of the Holy Trinity, the Holy Spirit is the eternal bond of holy love shared between the Father and the Son. Externally, the Holy Spirit is the gift of the Father and the Son to the world. When the Father and Son send the Holy Spirit to indwell believers, it is the indwelling of a holy love free from deficiency or corruption. Entire sanctification is the witness of God’s promise to extend the perfect bond of holy fellowship with Christians; it is the embodiment of being given over entirely to the perfect love of God that is the Holy Spirit.

Biblical Support

We cannot use a concordance to do theology, meaning that the theological message of the text comes through after Holy Spirit-led interpretation. Note that the most essential doctrine of the Christian faith is the Trinity, and the word “Trinity” appears nowhere in scripture. However, the Scriptures themselves witness to God as one, yet three distinct persons. Interpretive work must be done to arrive at that theological conclusion. That said, the broader witness of scripture supports the idea that God can heal believers from the disease of sin.⁴ Here are some Bible verses that Wesleyans have pointed to in support of the doctrine of entire sanctification.

- **1 Thessalonians 5:34–24** — “May the God of peace himself sanctify you entirely; and may your spirit and soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. The one who calls you is faithful, and he will do this.” (NRSV)
- **Matthew 5:48** — “You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.”
- **Romans 6:1** — “What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? By no means! How can we who died to sin still live it in?”
- **Romans 6:4** — “We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in the newness of life.”
- **Romans 6:6** — “We know that our old self was crucified with him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin. For one who has died has been set free from sin.
- **Romans 6:11** — “So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive in God in Christ Jesus. Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, to make you obey its passions.”

² See e.g., 1 Kgs 15:14. KJV “perfect heart.” Modern translations struggle to avoid the connotations of flawlessness that “perfect” conveys.

³ Wesley specified that entire sanctification does not include being perfect in knowledge, free from mistakes, free from infirmities, free from temptation, nor free from further growth.

⁴ For more on this see Ayars, Bounds, and Friedeman, *Holiness: A Biblical, Historical, and Systematic Theology* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2023).

- **Romans 8:1–4** — “There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death. For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do. By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.”
- **Deuteronomy 6:4–5** — “Hear, O Israel: The Lord your God, the Lord is one. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might.”
- **Psalms 51:10** — “Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me.”

Entire Sanctification in Church History

It is essential to note that this doctrine of perfect love did not originate with John Wesley. Wesley merely rediscovered and brought attention to the doctrine for a new generation of Christians. One can strongly argue from the Scriptures that the doctrine originates with the Bible and the apostolic witness to the redeeming work of Jesus enshrined in the New Testament, which is why many theologians through history have championed this teaching. Some of those include: (1) the early Christian Fathers (including Ignatius of Antioch, The Didache, Barnabas, the Shepherd of Hermas, Polycarp), (2) the later Greek Fathers (Irenaeus, Origen, Clement of Alexandria, Tertullian), (3) the Latin Fathers (Cyprian and Ambrose of Milan), (4) the Cappadocian Fathers (Gregory of Nyssa), (5) Augustine, (6) John Cassian, (7) Bernard of Clairvaux, and (8) Thomas Aquinas.

The When and How of Entire Sanctification

In general, Wesleyans agree on what sanctification is (perfect love). Where there is disagreement is on when and how it happens. Some movements within the history of Methodism believe that all one must do is ask for it and God will do it (the “short way,” typically associated with groups such as the Nazarenes, Salvation Army, Pentecostals, and others). Other movements believe that it is a slow and steady process that happens over a lifetime, and one may or may not arrive (the “long way,” typically associated with the larger groups like the United Methodist Church).

1. **The Short Way.** “Christian perfection now by total consecration and faith. The most optimistic view on holiness teaches that believers can experience Christian perfection now, in the present moment, through an act of entire consecration and faith, whereby believers surrender their lives to the lordship of Christ and trust God to purify and empower them. Christian perfection is a simple synergism in which the work of consecration and faith by a Christian is met immediately with deliverance from the inner propensity to sin by the Holy Spirit.”⁵ This perspective makes a distinction between entire sanctification and Christian maturity.
2. **The Middle Way.** “The next view on holiness in the Wesleyan tradition affirms with the “shorter way” that entire sanctification is realized in a Christian’s life through personal consecration and faith. Also like the “shorter way,” it makes a distinction between Christian perfection and spiritual maturity. Perfection is what makes growth toward spiritual maturity optimal. However, unlike the “shorter way,” it does not believe that faith necessary to appropriate Christian perfection is a power inherent at any given moment in a believer’s life. Rather, sanctifying faith is seen as a gift of grace, a grace with which a Christian can choose to cooperate or not. The grace capable of creating this faith is more than what

⁵ Ayars, Bounds, and Friedeman, *Holiness*, 335–336.

one receives at conversion.”⁶ This perspective makes a distinction between entire sanctification and Christian maturity.

3. **The Long Way.** “In contrast to the previous two positions, the third Wesleyan view on holiness emphasizes that Christian perfection is realized most often in a believer’s life after a long journey of dying to self, following many years of spiritual development. There will be some Christians who will realize entire sanctification in the present life, but most will not experience it until just before death or at the point of death. A belief in the persistence and stubbornness of original sin forms the heart of the doctrine. This recalcitrance can only be overcome gradually over a lifetime through significant growth in grace, personal denial, and spiritual development.”⁷ Christian maturity and entire sanctification are closely linked in this view.

Suggested Reading

- John Wesley, “The Scripture Way of Salvation.”
- Matt Ayars, Christopher Bounds, and Caleb Friedeman, *Holiness: A Biblical, Historical, and Systematic Theology*. Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2023.
- Keith Drury. *Holiness for Ordinary People*. 25th Edition. Wesleyan Publishing House, 2009.

⁶ Ibid., 337–338.

⁷ Ibid., 339–340.

3 | Arminian theology

Who is Jacob Arminias?

Jacob Arminius (1560-1609) was a Dutch theologian known for his opposition to the strict Calvinist doctrines of predestination and his development of what would come to be known as Arminianism. Here are some key points of his life and theological contributions:

- **Early Life and Education.** Born in Oudewater, Netherlands, Jacobus Arminius studied at the University of Leiden and later under Theodore Beza in Geneva. His education placed him within the Reformed tradition initially, but he gradually developed ideas that diverged from strict Calvinism.
- **Theological Career.** Arminius became a pastor in Amsterdam in 1588 and later a professor of theology at Leiden University in 1603. During his tenure, he began to question and critique the Calvinist doctrine of predestination, which led to significant controversy.
- **Key Doctrines.** Arminius argued for a more conditional understanding of predestination, emphasizing free will and God's foreknowledge rather than absolute predestination. His views suggested that salvation was available to all people, not just a predestined elect.
- **Arminianism.** After Arminius' death, his followers formalized his teachings in the Remonstrance of 1610, a document that laid out the five main points of Arminianism: conditional election, unlimited atonement, prevenient grace, resistible grace, and the possibility of falling from grace. These ideas contrasted sharply with the Calvinist TULIP (Total depravity, Unconditional election, Limited atonement, Irresistible grace, Perseverance of the saints).
- **Synod of Dort.** The theological debate between Arminianism and Calvinism culminated in the Synod of Dort (1618-1619), which condemned Arminianism and affirmed the Calvinist position. Despite this, Arminianism continued to influence many Protestant traditions, particularly Methodism and the broader Evangelical movement.

Five-Point Calvinism

The five points of Calvinism were articulated in response to the theological positions put forward by the Remonstrants (followers of Jacob Arminius) and were formally codified at the Synod of Dort (1618-1619). The Canons of Dort summarize these five points and provide a detailed theological basis for them. These points collectively emphasize the sovereignty of God in the process of salvation, human inability to achieve salvation apart from divine intervention, and the assurance of salvation for those who are truly elect.

- **Total Depravity.** This doctrine asserts that as a result of the fall, every part of human nature is corrupted by sin. This does not mean that people are as bad as they could be, but rather that sin affects all aspects of a person's being (mind, will, emotions, etc.). Consequently, individuals are unable to come to God and choose salvation on their own because their will is bound by sin.
- **Unconditional Election.** According to this principle, God's election of certain individuals for salvation is not based on any foreseen merit, effort, or action on their part. Instead, it is solely based on His will and purpose. God's choice is not conditioned upon any human action or decision.
- **Limited Atonement.** This point teaches that Christ's atoning sacrifice on the cross was intended to save the elect only. Although Christ's death is sufficient to atone for the sins of the entire world, it was God's intention to effectively secure salvation for those He has chosen. Thus, the atonement is limited in its intended scope but not in its power or value.

- **Irresistible Grace.** Irresistible grace means that when God extends His grace to the elect, it will inevitably result in their salvation. The Holy Spirit effectively draws the chosen individuals to Christ, overcoming their resistance to the gospel. This grace is not coercive, but it is so powerful that it brings about the intended response of faith and repentance.
- **Perseverance of the Saints.** This doctrine holds that those whom God has elected and regenerated will persevere in faith until the end. They are eternally secure and cannot lose their salvation. True believers may fall into sin, but they will ultimately return to God and be preserved by His grace.

John Wesley's Objections to Five-Point Calvinism. "Calvinists, who deny that salvation can ever be lost, reason on the subject in a marvelous way. They tell us, that no virgin's lamp can go out; no promising harvest be choked with thorns; no branch in Christ can ever be cut off from unfruitfulness; no pardon can ever be forfeited, and no name blotted out of God's book! They insist that no salt can ever lose its savor; nobody can ever "receive the grace of God in vain"; "bury his talents"; "neglect such great salvation"; trifle away "a day of grace"; "look back" after putting his hand to the gospel plow. Nobody can "grieve the Spirit" till He is "quenched," and strives no more, nor "deny the Lord that bought them"; nor "bring upon themselves swift destruction. Nobody, or body of believers, can ever get so lukewarm that Jesus will spew them out of His mouth. They use reams of paper to argue that if one ever got lost he was never found. John 17:12; that if one falls, he never stood. Rom. 11:16-22 and Heb. 6:4-6; if one was ever "cast forth," he was never in, and "if one ever withered," he was never green. John 15:1-6; and that "if any man draws back," it proves that he never had anything to draw back from. Heb. 10:38,39; that if one ever "falls away into spiritual darkness," he was never enlightened. Heb 6:4-6; that if you "again get entangled in the pollutions of the world," it shows that you never escaped. 2 Pet 2:20; that if you "put salvation away" you never had it to put away, and if you make shipwreck of faith, there was no ship of faith there!! In short they say: If you get it, you can't lose it; and if you lose it you never had it. May God save us from accepting a doctrine, that must be defended by such fallacious reasoning!"

Biblical Support for Arminian Theology

- **1 Timothy 2:3-4** — This is good, and pleases God our Savior, who wants all people to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth.
This verse highlights God's desire for all people to be saved, suggesting that salvation is available to everyone, not just a preselected few.
- **2 Peter 3:9** — "The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. Instead he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance."
Peter emphasizes God's patience and desire for everyone to repent, indicating that individuals have the choice to turn to God.
- **Ezekiel 18:23** — Do I take any pleasure in the death of the wicked? declares the Sovereign Lord. Rather, am I not pleased when they turn from their ways and live?
God expresses no pleasure in the death of the wicked, showing His preference for their repentance and life, which suggests an opportunity for change and choice.
- **1 John 2:2** — He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world.
This verse indicates that Christ's sacrifice was for the sins of the entire world, not just a select group, implying a universal potential for salvation.
- **Matthew 23:37** — Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were not willing.

Jesus expresses a desire to protect and gather the people of Jerusalem, but their unwillingness highlights the role of human response and choice.

- **Revelation 3:20** — “Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with that person, and they with me.”
The imagery of Jesus knocking on a door and waiting to be let in symbolizes the invitation to a relationship that requires a personal response.
- **Romans 10:13** — For, ‘Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.’
The promise of salvation to “everyone who calls” on God’s name suggests that salvation is available to all who choose to seek it.

Theology Starting with Jesus (not Adam)

Calvinist soteriology (theology of salvation) expressed in TULIP begins with the fallen-ness of Adam (total depravity) and builds from there. However, Jesus is the preeminent form of divine revelation (the perfect image of God (Heb. 1)). Because Jesus is the “exact imprint” of God, Wesleyans (and Arminians) prefers making Jesus the starting point of soteriology.

The Five Points of the Remonstrance

The Remonstrance of 1610 is a theological document drafted by the followers of Jacob Arminius, who sought to outline their opposition to certain aspects of Calvinist doctrine, particularly predestination.

- **Conditional Election.** God elects individuals to salvation based on foreseen faith or unbelief. This opposes the Calvinist doctrine of unconditional election, where God’s choice is not based on any foreseen merit or action.
- **Unlimited Atonement.** Christ’s atoning sacrifice was made for all people, but only those who believe in Him will be saved. This contrasts with the Calvinist view of limited atonement, which holds that Christ died only for the elect.
- **Prevenient Grace.** God’s grace is necessary for anyone to come to faith, but this grace can be resisted. This opposes the Calvinist belief in irresistible grace, where those elected by God cannot resist His call to salvation.
- **Resistible Grace.** God’s grace enables humans to respond to His offer of salvation, but it is not coercive, and individuals can choose to reject it.
- **Possibility of Falling from Grace.** Believers can fall from grace and lose their salvation if they turn away from God. This is contrary to the Calvinist doctrine of the perseverance of the saints, which holds that those truly elected by God will persevere in faith and cannot lose their salvation.
- **Holy Love.** Holy Love is central to Wesley’s theology. John Wesley understood salvation first and foremost as a love relationship over and above a change in status (guilty to innocent). For love to be love, free agency must remain intact. Before God was a Sovereign, he was a Father.

Suggested Reading

- Roger Olson. *Arminian Theology: Myths and Realities*. Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2006
- Roger Olson. *Against Calvinism*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011.
- Don Thorsen. *Calvin vs. Wesley: Bringing Belief into Practice*. Nashville: Abingdon, 2013.

- John Baillie, John T. McNeill, and Henry P. Van Dusen. *Institutes of the Christian Religion & 2*, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles, vol. 1 of *The Library of Christian Classics*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2011.
- Jerry Walls and Joseph Dongell. *Why I'm Not a Calvinist*. Downers Grove: IVP, 2004.

4 | The Wesleyan Quadrilateral

The Wesleyan Quadrilateral is a methodological approach used primarily in Methodist theology for theological reflection and doctrinal development. It was formulated by Albert C. Outler, a 20th-century Methodist theologian, based on the teachings of John Wesley, the founder of Methodism. The Quadrilateral consists of four sources of theological authority:

1. **Scripture.** The Bible is considered the primary and most authoritative source for theology and Christian practice. Wesley emphasized the importance of the scriptures in understanding God's will and teaching.
2. **Tradition.** This includes the accumulated wisdom and practices of the Church throughout its history. Wesley valued the teachings of early church fathers, ecumenical councils, and the historical continuity of the faith.
3. **Reason.** Reason is used to interpret and understand the Scriptures and tradition. It involves logical analysis, critical thinking, and the ability to make coherent and rational arguments about faith.
4. **Experience.** Personal and communal experiences of God, particularly the inner witness of the Holy Spirit, are essential. This includes individual spiritual experiences and the collective experiences of the Christian community.

Importance of the Wesleyan Quadrilateral

1. **Holistic Approach.** The Quadrilateral offers a balanced and comprehensive approach to theological reflection, ensuring that no single source of authority is used in isolation. It recognizes the complexity of faith and encourages the integration of various perspectives.
2. **Flexibility and Adaptability.** By incorporating multiple sources of authority, the Quadrilateral allows for adaptability in theological reflection and practice. This is particularly useful in addressing new issues and contexts that arise in the modern world.
3. **Emphasis on Experience.** The inclusion of experience as a source of authority highlights the importance of personal and communal encounters with God. This experiential dimension underscores the dynamic and living nature of faith.
4. **Rational Engagement.** The emphasis on reason encourages thoughtful and informed engagement with theological issues. It promotes a faith that is intellectually robust and able to dialogue with contemporary philosophical and scientific thought.
5. **Continuity and Tradition.** By valuing tradition, the Quadrilateral maintains continuity with the historical faith of the Church. This ensures that contemporary theological reflection is grounded in the wisdom of the past.
6. **Biblical Centrality.** While it incorporates other sources of authority, the Quadrilateral places primary importance on Scripture, ensuring that theological reflection remains rooted in the foundational texts of the Christian faith.

Why is the Wesleyan Quadrilateral Controversial?

The Wesleyan Quadrilateral, while valued for its holistic approach to theology, is also a subject of controversy for several reasons:

1. **Relative Weight of Sources.** Critics argue about the relative weight and authority of each source in the Quadrilateral. While Scripture is often considered primary, there can be disagreements about how much authority should be given to tradition, reason, and experience. Some worry that overemphasizing reason or experience might undermine the authority of Scripture.
2. **Subjectivity of Experience.** The inclusion of experience as a source of authority can be controversial because experiences are inherently subjective and can vary widely between individuals and communities. Critics argue that this can lead to theological pluralism and inconsistency, making it difficult to maintain doctrinal coherence.
3. **Interpretive Challenges.** The integration of four sources of authority can create interpretive challenges. Balancing these sources requires discernment and can lead to conflicting interpretations. Critics argue that this complexity can make it harder to arrive at clear theological conclusions.
4. **Tradition vs. Innovation.** The Quadrilateral's emphasis on tradition can be seen as both a strength and a weakness. While it ensures continuity with the past, critics argue that it can also hinder innovation and adaptation to new contexts. Conversely, some worry that too much emphasis on reason and experience might lead to a departure from traditional doctrines.
5. **Potential for Rationalism.** Some critics argue that giving too much weight to reason can lead to a form of rationalism that diminishes the mystery and supernatural aspects of faith. They fear that an over-reliance on human reason might lead to a watered-down theology that aligns too closely with contemporary secular thought.
6. **Misinterpretation of Wesley's Intent.** Some scholars and theologians argue that Albert Outler's formulation of the Quadrilateral does not fully capture John Wesley's original intent. They claim that Wesley himself placed a much stronger emphasis on Scripture as the ultimate authority and that the Quadrilateral, as popularly understood, might misrepresent this aspect of his theology.

In summary, the Wesleyan Quadrilateral is controversial because it introduces a complex interplay of sources of authority that can lead to varied interpretations and theological approaches. While it provides a flexible framework for theological reflection, it also raises significant questions about the nature and hierarchy of authority in Christian theology.

5 | Methodism within Christianity

This chapter offers a comparison of Roman Catholicism, Eastern Orthodoxy, and the Mainline Protestant denominations.

Origins and Historical Background

- **Methodism:** Methodism originated in the 18th century as a revival movement within the Church of England, led by John Wesley and his brother Charles. It eventually became a separate denomination due to differences in theology and practice.
- **Roman Catholicism:** It traces its origins back to the early Christian community and sees itself as the continuation of the original church established by Jesus Christ. The Roman Catholic Church became a distinct entity following the Great Schism of 1054, which divided it from the Eastern Orthodox Church.
- **Eastern Orthodox Church:** Traces its roots back to the early Christian communities established by the apostles. It formally separated from the Roman Catholic Church in the Great Schism of 1054, due to theological, political, and cultural differences.
- **Anglicans:** Emerged in the 16th century during the English Reformation when the Church of England broke away from the Roman Catholic Church. It retains many elements of Catholic liturgy and structure but incorporates Reformation principles.
- **Baptists:** Emerged in the early 17th century, with roots in English Separatism. The Baptist movement was strongly influenced by the Anabaptists and emphasized believer's baptism and the authority of Scripture.
- **Presbyterians:** Traces its roots back to the Protestant Reformation in the 16th century, particularly the teachings of John Calvin and John Knox. It became a distinct tradition with a strong emphasis on Reformed theology and governance by elders.
- **Pentecostals:** Emerged in the early 20th century during the Pentecostal revival movement, particularly marked by events such as the Azusa Street Revival in 1906. It emphasizes a direct personal experience of God through the baptism with the Holy Spirit.

Authority and Leadership

- **Methodism:** Methodism does not have a single central authority like the Pope. Leadership structures can vary, but they typically include a system of conferences (local, regional, and general) and a variety of clergy and lay leaders. Bishops are prominent in some Methodist branches but do not hold the same level of authority as in Catholicism.
- **Roman Catholicism:** The Pope, who is considered the successor of Saint Peter, is the supreme authority in the Roman Catholic Church. The church's hierarchy includes cardinals, bishops, and priests, and it places a strong emphasis on apostolic succession.
- **Eastern Orthodox Church:** Organized as a communion of autocephalous (self-governing) churches, each led by a bishop, often titled a patriarch, metropolitan, or archbishop. The Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople holds a position of honor but does not have the same authority as the Pope in Catholicism.
- **Anglicans:** Governed by a system of bishops, with the Archbishop of Canterbury being the symbolic leader of the global Anglican Communion. Authority is shared between bishops and synods (councils) at various levels (parish, diocesan, provincial, and national).

- **Baptists:** Generally embrace a congregational form of church governance, where each local congregation is autonomous and self-governing. Leadership structures can vary, but there is no hierarchical authority above the local church.
- **Presbyterians:** Governed by a system of elders (presbyters) in a representative form of church government. Local congregations elect elders to the session (local governing body), and representatives to presbyteries (regional bodies) and the General Assembly (national body).
- **Pentecostals:** Generally features a more decentralized and congregational form of governance, though some denominations have a hierarchical structure. Authority is often vested in charismatic leaders and pastors. Examples of Pentecostal denominations include the Assemblies of God and the Church of God in Christ.

Doctrine and Theology

- **Methodism:** Methodists generally recognize two sacraments (Baptism and the Lord's Supper). They emphasize personal faith and the importance of scripture. Methodists believe in the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist but typically do not hold to the doctrine of transubstantiation.
- **Roman Catholicism:** Key doctrines include the belief in the seven sacraments (Baptism, Confirmation, Eucharist, Penance, Anointing of the Sick, Holy Orders, and Matrimony), the authority of the Pope, the veneration of saints, and the belief in transubstantiation (the bread and wine become the actual body and blood of Christ during the Eucharist).
- **Eastern Orthodox Church:** Emphasizes the continuity of Holy Tradition, which includes the Scriptures, the writings of the Church Fathers, and the decisions of ecumenical councils. Recognizes seven sacraments (Baptism, Chrismation, Eucharist, Confession, Holy Orders, Marriage, and Anointing of the Sick). It places a strong emphasis on theosis (divinization or becoming one with God).
- **Anglicans:** Holds to the "via media" or "middle way" between Roman Catholicism and Protestant Reformation principles. It values the authority of Scripture, tradition, and reason. Anglicans recognize two sacraments as generally necessary for salvation (Baptism and the Eucharist) and other rites that are sacramental in nature (such as Confirmation, Ordination, Marriage, Confession, and Anointing of the Sick).
- **Baptists:** Emphasize the authority of Scripture and the necessity of personal conversion and believer's baptism (baptism only of those who profess faith in Jesus Christ). They generally do not recognize infant baptism. Baptists also believe in the priesthood of all believers and the autonomy of the local church.
- **Presbyterians:** Adheres to Reformed theology, emphasizing the sovereignty of God, the authority of Scripture, and the necessity of grace through faith. Presbyterians adhere to the Westminster Confession of Faith and recognize two sacraments (Baptism and the Lord's Supper).
- **Pentecostals:** Emphasizes the baptism with the Holy Spirit, which is often evidenced by speaking in tongues (glossolalia), prophecy, healing, and other spiritual gifts. Pentecostals stress a personal and experiential faith, the authority of Scripture, and a vibrant, expressive form of worship. They typically recognize two ordinances (Baptism and the Lord's Supper), though the emphasis on the Holy Spirit sets them apart.

Worship and Liturgy

- **Methodism:** Methodist worship services are more flexible and can vary widely, though they often include hymns, prayers, scripture readings, and a sermon. The style of worship can range from formal to informal, and there is a strong tradition of hymn singing.
- **Roman Catholicism:** Catholic worship is highly liturgical and follows a set form of prayers and rituals, with the Mass as the central act of worship. The liturgical calendar, including feasts and saints' days, plays a significant role in Catholic practice.
- **Eastern Orthodox Church:** Worship is highly liturgical and follows a set structure, with the Divine Liturgy as the central act of worship. The liturgy involves chanting, incense, icons, and a series of prescribed prayers and rituals. The liturgical calendar, including numerous feasts and fasts, plays a significant role in Orthodox practice.
- **Anglicans:** Worship is liturgical, following the Book of Common Prayer (or equivalent in different Anglican provinces). Services include structured prayers, readings from Scripture, creeds, and sacraments. The Eucharist (Holy Communion) is central to worship, and services are often more formal and ceremonial.
- **Baptists:** Worship services typically include congregational singing, prayers, scripture reading, and a sermon. The style of worship can range from traditional to contemporary, often reflecting the preferences of the local congregation. Baptists emphasize preaching and Bible teaching.
- **Presbyterians:** Worship is generally orderly and reverent, with a strong emphasis on preaching and the reading of Scripture. Services typically include hymns or Psalms, prayers, a sermon, and the sacraments.
- **Pentecostals:** Worship services are often characterized by expressive and spontaneous elements, including speaking in tongues, prophecy, healing services, vibrant singing, clapping, dancing, and sometimes shouting. Worship is typically more informal and emotional, focusing on an immediate experience of the Holy Spirit.

Social and Ethical Issues

- **Methodism:** Methodism also addresses social and ethical issues, often emphasizing social justice, charity, and community service. Methodist teachings on issues like marriage, sexuality, and social issues can vary, particularly among different Methodist denominations.
- **Roman Catholicism:** The Catholic Church holds specific teachings on social and ethical issues based on its doctrines and the teachings of the Pope and church councils. It has definitive positions on issues such as abortion, contraception, marriage, and social justice.
- **Eastern Orthodox Church:** Holds traditional views on many social and ethical issues, often emphasizing the teachings of the Church Fathers and the decisions of ecumenical councils. The Orthodox Church tends to be conservative on issues such as marriage, sexuality, and bioethics.
- **Anglicans:** Also emphasizes social justice and involvement in societal issues. Views on social and ethical issues can vary widely among different Anglican provinces and congregations, reflecting the diversity within the Anglican Communion.
- **Baptists:** Teachings on social and ethical issues can vary widely among different Baptist groups. Some Baptists emphasize individual responsibility and local church autonomy, leading to a range of views on social issues. Many Baptists focus on evangelism and personal morality.

- **Presbyterians:** Historically, Presbyterians have emphasized social responsibility and involvement in societal issues. Views on social and ethical issues can vary, but there is often a focus on education, mission work, and social justice.
- **Pentecostals:** Views on social and ethical issues can vary widely. Some Pentecostal groups emphasize personal morality and holiness, including conservative views on issues like alcohol, tobacco, and modesty. Others may be actively engaged in social justice and community service.

Practices

- **Methodism:** Methodists typically emphasize personal and communal prayer, Bible study, and active participation in social justice causes. Confession is usually a personal practice rather than a sacrament involving a priest.
- **Roman Catholicism:** Practices such as the rosary, veneration of relics, and pilgrimages are common. Confession to a priest is a regular practice for the forgiveness of sins.
- **Eastern Orthodox Church:** Practices include the use of icons, fasting, liturgical prayer, and participation in the sacraments. The Orthodox spiritual life emphasizes asceticism, monasticism, and the Jesus Prayer.
- **Anglicans:** Practices include structured liturgical worship, the use of the Book of Common Prayer, participation in the sacraments, and a strong emphasis on the liturgical calendar. Anglicans also engage in personal and communal prayer, Bible study, and social justice work.
- **Baptists:** Practices typically include personal and communal prayer, Bible study, and participation in the ordinances of baptism and the Lord's Supper. Baptists often emphasize evangelism, missions, and personal morality.
- **Presbyterians:** Practices include personal and communal prayer, Bible study, and participation in the sacraments. Presbyterians place a strong emphasis on the preached Word and catechism for teaching the faith.
- **Pentecostals:** Practices include vibrant and spontaneous worship, speaking in tongues, prophecy, healing services, personal and communal prayer, and active evangelism. Pentecostals place a strong emphasis on personal conversion experiences and the ongoing work of the Holy Spirit.

6 | Methodist Denominations

This chapter is an overview of the larger, US-based Methodist denominations.

Overview

The World Methodist Council lists 73 member denominations (there are many more!) totaling over 50 million members. Many of these denominations still bear the name “Methodist” while others do not (e.g., the Church of the Nazarene, the Salvation Army, the Assemblies of God (and other Pentecostal groups), etc.).

The United Methodist Church

Churches and Members Statistics (US only)

- Churches: c. 30,000
- Members: c. 6 million
- Clergy: 30,500

Origins

The United Methodist Church was formed in 1968 through the merger of the Methodist Church and the Evangelical United Brethren Church. Both denominations had roots in the Wesleyan tradition, which began with John Wesley in the 18th century. The Methodist movement started in the 1730s as a revival within the Church of England, led by John and Charles Wesley. It emphasized personal holiness, social justice, and the need for a disciplined Christian life.

Core Beliefs

- **Wesleyan Theology:** The UMC follows Wesleyan-Arminian theology, emphasizing God's grace, the possibility of entire sanctification, and the importance of personal and social holiness.
- **The Articles of Religion and Confession of Faith:** The UMC adheres to the Methodist 25 Articles of Religion and the Confession of Faith, foundational documents that outline key theological principles.
- **The Quadrilateral:** The UMC uses the Wesleyan Quadrilateral as a framework for theological reflection, balancing Scripture, tradition, reason, and experience.
- **Inclusivity:** The UMC promotes inclusivity and welcomes diverse theological perspectives, aiming to be a “big tent” that encompasses various viewpoints within the Christian faith.

Governance

- **Connectional Polity:** The UMC operates under a connectional polity, which means that local congregations are connected to regional and global church structures.
- **General Conference:** The General Conference, which meets every four years, is the highest legislative body. It sets policies, approves doctrine, and makes key decisions for the denomination.
- **Annual Conferences:** The church is divided into regional Annual Conferences, each led by a bishop. These conferences are responsible for ordaining clergy, overseeing churches, and implementing church policies at the regional level.
- **Episcopal Leadership:** Bishops provide spiritual leadership and administrative oversight within the UMC's episcopal system.

Worship and Practices

- **Worship Services:** UMC worship services typically feature a blend of traditional liturgy and contemporary elements, with an emphasis on preaching, hymns, prayer, and the sacraments.

- **Sacraments:** The UMC recognizes two sacraments: baptism and the Lord's Supper (Communion). Both are seen as means of grace and central to the life of the church.
- **Open Table:** The UMC practices an open table for Communion, inviting all who seek Christ to participate, regardless of denominational affiliation.

Global Presence

- **International Reach:** The UMC is a global denomination with a significant presence in the United States, Africa, Europe, and the Philippines. It operates missions, educational institutions, and health services worldwide.
- **Mission Work:** The UMC is actively involved in global mission work, focusing on evangelism, humanitarian aid, education, healthcare, and disaster relief.

Contemporary Issues

- **Inclusivity Debates:** The UMC has faced significant debates over issues of inclusivity, particularly regarding the ordination of LGBTQ+ clergy and the recognition of same-sex marriages. These debates have led to tensions and discussions about the future structure and unity of the denomination.
- **Splits:** Ongoing discussions and potential plans for restructuring or splitting the denomination have been prominent as different factions within the UMC seek ways to address theological and social disagreements.

Education and Institutions

The UMC partners with several higher education institutions, but the following are UMC owned-and-operated seminaries:

- Drew Theological School
- Candler School of Theology
- Boston University School of Theology
- Claremont School of Theology
- Duke Divinity School
- Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary
- Iliff School of Theology
- Methodist Theological School in Ohio
- Perkins School of Theology
- Saint Paul School of Theology
- United Theological Seminary
- Wesley Theological Seminary
- Gammon Theological Seminary

The Church of the Nazarene

Churches, Members, and Clergy

- Churches: 5,000
- Members: 630,000
- Clergy: 17,000

Origins

The Church of the Nazarene was founded in 1908 in Pilot Point, Texas, through the merger of fifteen regional holiness groups that sought to create a unified movement emphasizing sanctification and a deep commitment to Christian holiness. By the late 19th century, many within the Holiness Movement felt that mainline Methodist churches had become too formal, worldly, and distant from the original fervor of Wesleyan teachings. This led to the formation of independent holiness groups that prioritized a return to simple, heartfelt piety and a focus on personal holiness.

Core Beliefs

- **Wesleyan Theology:** The Church of the Nazarene follows Wesleyan-Arminian theology, emphasizing God's grace, the possibility of entire sanctification, and the importance of personal and social holiness.
- **Holiness Doctrine:** Central to Nazarene theology is the doctrine of sanctification, particularly the concept of entire sanctification. This belief holds that Christians can achieve a state of holiness through a second work of grace following salvation, where they are filled with the Holy Spirit and purified from original sin.
- **Scripture:** The Bible is the inspired word of God and the final authority in all matters of faith and practice.
- **Entire Sanctification:** The belief in a second, transformative work of grace following conversion, leading to a state of Christian perfection or holiness.

Governance

- **Local Churches:** Local congregations are the primary organizational unit, each led by a pastor and governed by a church board elected by the congregation members.
- **Districts:** Local churches are grouped into districts, each overseen by a district superintendent. District assemblies are held annually, where representatives from each church meet to conduct business and plan cooperative ministries.
- **General Assembly:** The highest governing body is the General Assembly, which meets every four years. It comprises delegates from around the world and is responsible for setting policies, electing general superintendents, and addressing major theological and administrative issues.
- **General Superintendents:** Six general superintendents provide leadership and oversight to the global church, ensuring doctrinal integrity and facilitating international cooperation.

Worship and Practice

- **Worship Services:** Tends to be modern.
- **Sacraments:** Baptism and Communion. Baptism of both infants and adults permitted by immersion, pouring, or sprinkling.
- **Communion:** Open table (can be taken without baptism).

Global Presence

The Church of the Nazarene has around 2.6 million members worldwide and it operates in over 160 world areas, including countries, territories, and provinces.

Contemporary Issues

Navigating complex social issues such as gender identity, sexual orientation, and same-sex marriage while upholding traditional theological stances, and responding to the Black Lives Matter movement, racial reconciliation, and other social justice issues within the church and broader community.

Educational Institutions

The Nazarenes have Bible colleges and universities world-wide. The ones in the states include:

- Eastern Nazarene College
- Mount Vernon Nazarene University
- Nazarene Bible College
- Nazarene Theological Seminary
- Northwest Nazarene University
- Olivet Nazarene University
- Point Loma Nazarene University
- Southern Nazarene University
- Trevecca Nazarene University

The Global Methodist Church

Churches and Members Statistics

- Churches: 4,495
- Members: c. 700,000
- Clergy: 4,500

Origins

The Global Methodist Church was officially launched on May 1, 2022. It was established by congregations and leaders who sought to maintain a traditionalist stance on theological issues, especially those related to marriage and sexuality. The formation of the GMC came after years of debate within the UMC over the ordination of LGBTQ+ clergy and the celebration of same-sex marriages. The differing views led to significant tensions and the eventual decision by traditionalists to form a separate denomination.

Core Beliefs

- **Wesleyan Theology:** The GMC adheres to Wesleyan-Arminian theology, emphasizing the teachings of John Wesley, including the importance of personal holiness, sanctification, and a life of discipleship.
- **Traditional View on Marriage and Sexuality:** The GMC maintains a traditional understanding of marriage as a union between one man and one woman and does not ordain LGBTQ+ clergy.
- **Scriptural Authority:** The GMC places a strong emphasis on the authority of Scripture, viewing the Bible as the inspired and infallible Word of God that guides faith and practice.

Governance

- **Connectional Polity:** Like the UMC, the GMC operates under a connectional polity, where local congregations are connected through regional and global structures.
- **Transitional Leadership Council:** During its initial phase, the GMC is governed by a Transitional Leadership Council, which oversees the formation and implementation of policies and structures.
- **General Conference:** The GMC plans to hold a General Conference, where delegates will meet to establish the church's permanent governance structures, adopt official doctrines, and make key decisions.

Worship and Practices

- **Worship Services:** Worship in the GMC typically includes traditional elements such as hymns, preaching, prayer, and the sacraments, with an emphasis on reverence and adherence to historical Christian practices.
- **Sacraments:** The GMC recognizes two sacraments: baptism and the Lord's Supper (Communion), viewing them as means of grace that are central to Christian life.
- **Evangelism and Discipleship:** The GMC places a strong emphasis on evangelism and discipleship, encouraging members to live out their faith actively and share the gospel with others.

Global Presence

- **Expansion:** Although newly formed, the GMC aims to establish a strong global presence, building on connections with traditionalist Methodists around the world.
- **Mission Work:** The GMC is committed to global mission work, focusing on church planting, evangelism, education, healthcare, and social services.

Contemporary Issues

- **Doctrinal Clarity:** The GMC aims to provide clear doctrinal guidelines and maintain theological consistency across the denomination.
- **Growth and Development:** The GMC is focused on growth and development, both in terms of increasing membership and expanding its mission efforts globally.
- **Navigating Challenges:** As a new denomination, the GMC will navigate the challenges of establishing its identity, governance, and organizational structures while remaining true to its core beliefs and mission.

Educational Institutions

The GMC does not own or operate any educational institutions. They do, however, have a list of recommended seminaries for ordinands to complete their educational requirements for ordination. They are:

- Wesley Biblical Seminary
- Truett Theological Seminary (Baylor University)
- Asbury Theological Seminary
- United Theological Seminary
- Ashland Theological Seminary
- Beeson Divinity School (Samford University)

The Free Methodist Church

Churches and Members

- Churches: 856
- Members: 68,356
- Clergy: 2,011

Origins

The Free Methodist Church was founded in 1860 in Pekin, New York, by Benjamin Titus Roberts and other like-minded individuals. They sought to address what they perceived as spiritual decline and social injustices within the Methodist Episcopal Church. The formation of the FMC was driven by concerns over issues such as the practice of pew rentals (which discriminated against the poor), the need for abolition of slavery, and a desire for a return to the holiness teachings of John Wesley.

Core Beliefs

- **Holiness and Sanctification:** The FMC emphasizes the Wesleyan doctrine of entire sanctification, teaching that Christians can achieve a state of holiness through the work of the Holy Spirit.
- **Social Justice:** The denomination has a strong commitment to social justice, historically advocating for the abolition of slavery, and today, engaging in efforts to address poverty, human trafficking, racial equality, and other social issues.
- **Free Worship:** The name "Free Methodist" reflects the church's principles, including the provision of free seats in church (opposing the practice of pew rentals), and freedom in worship, promoting a less formal and more expressive worship style.
- **The Authority of Scripture:** The FMC upholds the Bible as the inspired Word of God and the final authority for faith and practice.

Governance

- **Connectional Polity:** The FMC operates under a connectional system of governance, which means that local congregations are connected and accountable to regional conferences and the global church structure.

- **General Conference:** The highest decision-making body is the General Conference, which meets every four years to set policies, elect leaders, and address doctrinal issues.
- **Bishops:** The denomination is overseen by bishops, who provide spiritual leadership and administrative oversight.

Worship and Practices

- **Worship Services:** Worship in the FMC is typically characterized by a blend of traditional and contemporary elements, with an emphasis on heartfelt, Spirit-led worship.
- **Sacraments:** The FMC recognizes two sacraments: baptism and the Lord's Supper (Communion), both viewed as means of grace.
- **Community Life:** The church places a strong emphasis on community life, including small groups, discipleship programs, and service to the broader community.

Global Presence

- **Expansion:** Since its founding, the Free Methodist Church has grown beyond the United States to establish a global presence. Today, it has congregations in many countries across Africa, Asia, Europe, and Latin America.
- **Missions and Outreach:** The FMC is actively involved in missionary work and global outreach, focusing on church planting, education, healthcare, and social services.

Contemporary Issues

- **Social Engagement:** The FMC continues to engage with contemporary social issues, advocating for justice and compassion in areas such as human trafficking, racial reconciliation, and economic disparity.
- **Evangelism and Discipleship:** The denomination maintains a strong focus on evangelism and discipleship, encouraging members to live out their faith through personal holiness and active service.

Educational Institutions

The FMC has established several educational institutions to train leaders and promote its values, including:

- Roberts Wesleyan College
- Seattle Pacific University in Washington.
- Azusa Pacific University
- Central Christian College
- Greenville University
- Northeastern Seminary
- Spring Arbor University

The Congregational Methodist Church

Churches and Members

- Churches: c. 200
- Members: c. 15,000
- Clergy: 300

Origins

The Congregational Methodist Church was founded in 1852 in Georgia, USA. It emerged from a desire for greater local church autonomy within the Methodist Episcopal Church, South. Dissatisfaction with the centralized authority of bishops and the desire for a more democratic church governance model led to the establishment of the CMC by ministers and laypeople.

Core Beliefs

- **Wesleyan-Arminian Theology:** The CMC adheres to the theological principles of John Wesley, emphasizing the possibility of personal holiness, prevenient grace, and the importance of a life dedicated to discipleship.
- **Scriptural Authority:** The denomination upholds the Bible as the inspired and authoritative Word of God, guiding faith and practice.

Governance

- **Congregational Polity:** Unlike the connectional system of other Methodist bodies, the CMC operates with a congregational polity, giving individual congregations significant autonomy in their governance and decision-making processes.
- **Annual Conference:** While local congregations are largely self-governing, they are connected through regional Annual Conferences, which provide support and coordination for cooperative efforts in mission and ministry.
- **General Conference:** The highest legislative body of the CMC is the General Conference, which meets periodically to make denominational decisions, set policies, and provide guidance on theological and social issues.

Worship and Practices

- **Worship Services:** Worship in the CMC typically includes traditional elements such as hymns, preaching, prayer, and the sacraments, reflecting a blend of Methodist liturgical practices and congregational participation.
- **Sacraments:** The CMC recognizes two sacraments—baptism and the Lord's Supper (Communion)—as means of grace and central elements of worship.
- **Holiness and Evangelism:** The CMC emphasizes personal holiness and the importance of evangelism, encouraging members to lead lives that reflect their faith and to actively share the gospel.
- **Sunday School:** The denomination places a strong emphasis on Christian education, with Sunday School programs playing a central role in the spiritual formation of both children and adults.

Global Presence

- **Expansion:** The CMC primarily has a presence in the United States, particularly in the Southern states, but it also engages in mission work and has connections with congregations and ministries abroad.
- **Mission Work:** The CMC is involved in various mission efforts, including church planting, evangelism, education, and social services, both domestically and internationally.

Contemporary Issues

Cultural Relevance and Adaptation

- **Engaging Younger Generations:** Finding ways to attract and retain younger members in an increasingly secular society.
- **Worship Style:** Balancing tradition worship practices with contemporary styles to appeal to a diverse congregation.

Social and Ethical Issues

- **LGBTQ+:** Navigating the church's stance on LGBTQ+ issues, including marriage and ordination

- **Gender Equality:** Addressing gender roles within the church, including the ordination of women and their leadership roles.

Theological Unity and Diversity

- **Doctrinal Consistency:** Maintaining a consistent theological position while allowing for diverse interpretations within the church.
- **Ecumenism:** Engaging in dialogue and partnerships with other Christian denominations while preserving the church's distinct identity.

Leadership and Governance

- **Clergy Training and Support:** Ensuring clergy receive adequate training and support, including mental health resources and continuing education.
- **Lay Leadership:** Encouraging and developing effective lay leadership within the congregations.

Membership and Attendance

- **Declining Membership:** Addressing the decline in church membership and attendance in many regions.
- **Community Engagement:** Increasing the church's visibility and impact in local communities through outreach and service.

Technology and Digital Presence

- **Improving the church's response to the demand for online worship and digital ministry as well as the demand for online visibility.**

Global Reach

- **Expanding and supporting global missions efforts and church planting.**

Educational Institutions

The CMC does not have any of its own educational institutions.

The Wesleyan Church

Churches and Members

- Churches: 1,731
- Members: 231,339
- Clergy: 3,400

Origins

The Wesleyan Church was officially formed in 1968 through the merger of the Wesleyan Methodist Church and the Pilgrim Holiness Church. Both denominations had their origins in the 19th century, emerging from the broader Methodist movement. The Wesleyan Methodist Church was founded in 1843 in Utica, New York, primarily due to disagreements with the Methodist Episcopal Church over issues such as slavery, church governance, and the doctrine of sanctification. The Pilgrim Holiness Church, established in the early 20th century, had similar theological emphases and a strong focus on personal holiness and revivalism.

Core Beliefs

- **Wesleyan-Arminian Theology:** The Wesleyan Church adheres to Wesleyan-Arminian theology, emphasizing free will, the possibility of falling from grace, and the necessity of personal repentance and faith for salvation.

- **Sanctification:** A key doctrine is entire sanctification, which teaches that believers can achieve a state of holiness and perfect love through the work of the Holy Spirit.
- **Scriptural Authority:** The Wesleyan Church holds the Bible as the inspired and authoritative Word of God, guiding all aspects of faith and practice.
- **Social Justice:** The denomination has a strong historical and contemporary commitment to social justice, advocating for issues such as racial equality, gender equality, and the abolition of human trafficking.

Governance

- **Connectional Polity:** The Wesleyan Church operates under a connectional polity, meaning that local congregations are interconnected and accountable to regional and general church structures.
- **General Conference:** The General Conference, which meets every four years, is the highest legislative body. It sets policies, elects leaders, and addresses doctrinal and practical issues for the denomination.
- **District Conferences:** The church is divided into districts, each overseen by a district superintendent and governed by a district conference. These conferences support local churches and coordinate regional ministry efforts.
- **Board of General Superintendents:** This board provides global leadership and strategic direction for the denomination, ensuring that its mission and vision are effectively implemented.

Worship and Practices

- **Worship Services:** Worship in the Wesleyan Church typically includes a blend of traditional and contemporary elements, such as hymns, praise songs, preaching, prayer, and the sacraments.
- **Sacraments:** The church recognizes two sacraments—baptism and the Lord's Supper (Communion)—as means of grace and central practices in the life of believers.
- **Discipleship and Holiness:** The Wesleyan Church emphasizes the importance of discipleship and living a holy life. Members are encouraged to grow in their faith and live out their commitment to Christ through personal piety and ethical behavior.

Global Presence

- **International Reach:** The Wesleyan Church has a significant global presence, with congregations and mission efforts in over 90 countries. The denomination is organized into various world regions, each with its own leadership and administrative structures.
- **Mission Work:** The church is actively involved in global missions, focusing on evangelism, church planting, education, healthcare, and disaster relief.

Contemporary Issues

- **Community Engagement:** The church encourages active engagement in local communities, promoting initiatives that support social justice, community development, and holistic well-being.
- **Inclusivity:** The Wesleyan Church strives to be inclusive and relevant, addressing contemporary social issues and engaging effectively with diverse cultures and contexts.
- **Intergenerational Ministry:** The denomination places importance on ministries that serve all age groups, including children, youth, and senior adults, fostering an inclusive and supportive church environment.

Educational Institutions

- Houghton University
- Indiana Wesleyan University
- Kingswood University
- Oklahoma Wesleyan University
- Southern Wesleyan University
- Wesley Seminary

