

## AT YOUR SERVICE – AGAIN!

### Some comments on *The Methodist Worship Book*

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The title of this lecture is, I confess, a personal conceit. It is just possible that some of you are old enough to remember that, shortly after the publication of the 1975 *Methodist Service Book*, I wrote a little commentary on it called *At Your Service*.<sup>1</sup> In the last few months I have found myself writing and speaking a good deal about the successor to the 1975 book, *The Methodist Worship Book*. So, for me, it's 'At Your Service – Again!'

In this lecture, I intend to compare the 1999 book with its predecessor on a number of counts, in the hope of illustrating the ways in which the Methodist Church and its liturgy have moved on during the last quarter of a century. Since any such exercise in comparison risks appearing to be critical of one of the phenomena being compared, I had better begin by saying that I regard the publication of the 1975 book as one of the most significant turning points in 20th century Methodism. The book was absolutely right for Methodism in the mid 1970s and beyond. If our needs today are in some respects different, and there is no doubt that they are, that is no criticism of *MSB* in its own context.

I have previously written with enthusiasm about the 1975 book:

There can be no doubt that its impact on British Methodism has been immense. *MSB* brought many of the insights of the Liturgical Movement into the weekly worship of country chapels and suburban churches; it assisted the decline of the afterthought communion (the optional extra, in the form of bits of the communion service, tacked on to the end of a full-length preaching service); indeed it not only encouraged the use of the full service of word and sacrament, but also promoted more frequent celebrations of the Eucharist. *MSB* can also be credited with bringing about a much more widespread use of the lectionary, since the ecumenical lectionary it included was far more 'user friendly' than the one previously offered. In general, *MSB* introduced British Methodism to what was then contemporary liturgical English, a more truly 'modern' form of language than that which had been provided by the 1936 *Book of Offices*, and to services that were clearly and effectively structured, with joy and thanksgiving at their centre. By supplying advice about non-eucharistic Sunday worship, it also discouraged the sort of preaching service where everything led up to the sermon and nothing much followed. All these developments, though none of them has been without its critics, have done much to enhance Methodist worship. Those who produced *MSB* did a fine job, for which the whole Methodist Church should be grateful.<sup>2</sup>

So, on the clear understanding that *MSB* was the right book for British Methodism when it appeared, let us compare it with its successor, the newly-published *Methodist*

### *Worship Book.*

I propose to concentrate on three main aspects of the books – their range of services, their language and their theology.

First, the range of services. If I were indeed writing a successor to *At Your Service*, I should be describing a very much bigger volume than appeared in 1975. There are reasons for this, and they do not include the one suggested by a writer to the *Methodist Recorder* who alleged that the Faith and Order Committee had deliberately produced a self-indulgent *magnum opus*.<sup>3</sup> *The Methodist Worship Book* is a big book because that is what the Methodist people asked for. They did not actually request it in so many words, of course. No one wrote in and said ‘Please produce a book with 605 pages!’ But they did write in with such comments as: ‘We want very much more provision for Holy Communion,’ ‘We need much more material related to death,’ ‘We want adequate resources for preaching services,’ ‘We would appreciate material for private or small group devotions.’ ‘We don’t want such things as healing and commissioning and welcome services relegated to separate booklets; we want them in the main text.’ So, without always realising it, people were corporately asking for a much more comprehensive book than the one they had been using, and in fact reacting to several years of using MSB.

Take the Holy Communion as an example. In 1985, the Lord’s Supper was celebrated more frequently in most Methodist churches than it was in 1975. I have no hard evidence for that assertion, but that is my belief and often, when I have expressed it, others have confirmed it as compatible with their own perception. I have no doubt that the compilers of *MSB* were absolutely right to supply one familiar form for the Lord’s Supper (essentially the *Book of Common Prayer* service, as successively amended for Methodists) and one modern language eucharist, The Sunday Service, which reflected the insights of the Liturgical Movement. The Sunday Service was a runaway success. Whether we like the fact or not, it almost completely eclipsed the 1936/1662 service. But with more frequent use, it slowly began to pall. For me, this took more than ten years, but it happened. Methodists attending ecumenical celebrations in the Parish Church began to notice, after 1980, that worshippers in the Church of England had four eucharistic prayers, not just one, even if they didn’t always know which page to turn to for the one being used that day. More and more requests were sent to the Faith and Order Committee for more eucharistic material. That is one reason why we have eight full orders for Holy Communion, plus one for a celebration in a home or hospital. Another is that Methodism, undoubtedly influenced by the 1975 book, is now much more aware of the onward march of the Christian Year. At an early stage, the Liturgical sub-Committee hit upon the novel idea of preparing separate and complete orders of service for the major seasons and festivals of the Christian Year. The idea was that this would not only provide variety within the eucharistic rite but would also spare congregations from having to dart around from page to page, an activity which does not rank as one of our great denominational strengths!

The response to this idea, when we issued several eucharistic services for trial use in 1992, was overwhelmingly positive. It was now clear beyond any doubt to the Faith and Order Committee and the Liturgical sub-Committee that the eucharistic provision which was adequate in 1975 was no longer adequate and that our tentative plans for including several full eucharistic orders in the new book were just what our contemporary Methodist Church needed.

If the very full eucharistic rites of 1999, compared with 1975, illustrate a desire for

more comprehensive liturgical provision, this could be illustrated in other ways too. In many ways, the 1975 book was minimalist; it contained, for the most part, one example of each of a relatively few services. By contrast, *MWB* is much more inclusive. Instead of one complete funeral service, supplemented by two pages of advice about the burial or cremation of a child, there are offices which may be used before a funeral – these being Prayers in the Home or Hospital after a Death, an Office of Commendation, and a Vigil; there are two funeral services, one designed to be used in a church, a crematorium or a cemetery, and followed by committal, the other being for use at a crematorium or cemetery, including committal, and followed by a service of thanksgiving in church. There is a complete funeral service for a child, and a separate one for a stillborn child. Finally, there is a service for the burial of ashes. Some of this very substantial provision directly meets what correspondents specifically requested – the service for the burial of ashes, for instance. Some of it – a good example is the vigil – recognizes another way in which British Methodism has changed, as we incorporate into our liturgical provision customs that are precious to Christians who have come to Britain from other parts of the world.

I could go on. I could mention the new and splendid provision of Holy Week services. I could list all the other new features of the book and itemise the services of admission, commissioning and welcome, the pastoral services, the services related to church and domestic buildings, and much more. But you can read the four pages of the Contents for yourselves, as no doubt you have done, and compare them with the one page of 1975 Contents.

But just one more comment, before we move on to language. There are some needs that a worship book simply cannot meet. An official liturgy cannot, for instance, provide for entirely ‘free’ forms of worship. We devised a spoof rubric, ‘If there is to be a spontaneous happening, it shall happen here,’ to illustrate this point. Needless to say, it has not appeared in print.

I now turn to the important question of liturgical language, and I begin with what the media decided was the most newsworthy feature of *The Methodist Worship Book*. It isn’t every week that the Methodist Church is given extensive coverage by GMTV, ITV’s ‘Sunday Morning,’ Radio 4 news, Radio Five Live, the BBC World Service, innumerable local radio stations, almost every national daily newspaper, some weeklies, and scores of regional and local papers. The most surreal event, perhaps, was the appearance on ‘The Vanessa Show’ of the Revd Norman Wallwork, a most distinguished member of the Methodist Sacramental Fellowship! The reason for all this media interest was one word, the word ‘Mother’ addressed to God in one eucharistic prayer, where the text reads ‘God our Father and our Mother, we give you thanks and praise.’<sup>4</sup> At one level, I deplore the fuss that has been made about this single use of that form of address. After all, God is addressed or described as ‘Father’ over 400 times, and as ‘Mother’ only once. But I can understand why some critics feel that once is once too often, and the language used by a service book to speak of or to God clearly relates to a major issue for the writers and users of liturgical texts: what sort of God do we believe in and seek to worship?

The 1975 Service Book was criticized by some people on the grounds that it presents an image of God in which concepts like omnipotence and lordship predominate. Masculine power images, it was said, occurred altogether too frequently in prayers (‘Almighty God,’ ‘King of the universe,’ ‘Lord’). The collects were cited particularly in this respect. But this was not simply a question of masculine terms: the book, the

critics suggested, like many other liturgical sources, did not do justice to our understanding of God as fundamentally loving, fundamentally gracious, fundamentally self-emptying. There was far too much about power and kingship, glory and lordship. There was far too little that reflected the suffering, self-giving God revealed in Jesus.

In 1989 the Faith and Order Committee set up a Working Party to look at the specific question of the language and imagery that we use about God, in the context of our concern for inclusivity and our understanding of male and female created in God's image. That Working Party prepared a report which was adopted by the Methodist Conference in 1992.<sup>5</sup> It argued that the Bible itself uses considerably more images than we sometimes recognize and it encouraged the exploration of a wider range of imagery in speaking to or about God.

While work on the new book was underway, some of those who wrote to the Faith and Order Committee felt that this was a burning issue, and that radical change was needed; others were inclined to regard such discussion as a threat to our traditional understanding of the nature of God, and wished to resist radical changes. What was evident was that the question needed to be addressed. Nothing could be more basic to liturgy than our understanding of God.

In fact the issue was treated with the utmost seriousness and tackled resolutely. While resisting calls from some quarters for an abandonment of traditional trinitarian language and of 'masculine power words' like 'Almighty,' 'Father,' 'Lord' and 'King,' those who drafted the services consciously and with genuine conviction strove to include other words and images which do justice to our understanding of God as loving, gracious, self-emptying, suffering and self-giving. The Collects well illustrate this point. If you open the book to pages 536 and 537, you will find that, of the seven collects on the double page, one begins 'Almighty God' and another 'God our Father,' which are traditional 'powerful' or 'masculine' images. The others begin 'O God, rich in mercy,' 'God of compassion,' 'Most merciful God,' 'Eternal God' and 'God of all-redeeming grace.' The traditional biblical imagery, including 'power' language, has not been expunged from the book. Plenty of it (some may feel too much) remains. But alongside it there is other imagery, equally biblical, of compassion, grace, mercy and love, which can only enrich our liturgical expression of our understanding of God.

But back to 'God our Father and our Mother.' During the consultation process, one solitary appearance of the word 'Mother,' addressed to God in the second Ordinary Seasons service for Holy Communion, caused over thirty correspondents considerable displeasure. Hardly anything else attracted so much adverse comment. Consequently, the Faith and Order Committee, with a heavy heart, omitted the word from the final text which it submitted to the Conference. But the Conference resolved by a substantial majority to restore it. This decision reflects the Conference's recognition of the diversity that exists among Methodists; though some are still uncomfortable with the idea of the 'motherhood' of God, such an understanding is precious to others, and the Conference was willing to allow them an opportunity to express it.

Throughout the book, and not just among the Collects, where it is perhaps most striking, a wide range of imagery is employed in addressing or referring to God. This is a clear and important development since 1975. Because the use of inclusive language to refer to human beings is now more or less taken for granted among all but the most unreformed of Methodists, it is perhaps also worth reminding ourselves that this is another matter in which the new book differs from its predecessor. In 1975, few

people (though there were some) thought it offensive to pray for ‘the salvation of mankind’ or that we might use God’s gifts ‘to set men free from drudgery’ or to confess ‘that we have sinned against our fellow men.’<sup>6</sup> Sensitivity in this area was a coming thing, but it had not come sufficiently to affect *The Methodist Service Book*. But I think I can say with complete confidence that you will not find a single instance in our new worship book where the word ‘men’ is used when ‘men, women and children’ is the sense intended, or indeed any other instance of exclusive language in reference to human beings.

The issues of inclusive language and that of the imagery we use in connection with God, important though they are, are not the only issues about language and style which are worthy of note. I have long argued that the language of prayer should be more akin to poetry than to prose. This is especially true, I think, of adoration and of thanksgiving. Not surprisingly, some Methodists revealed, during the consultation process, that they were people of prose. But most correspondents who commented at all on the style of the draft services were thrilled with the beauty of many of the prayers and other texts. Perhaps I could give some examples of what I mean.

Take, for instance, the lovely prayer which comes at the end of Prayer in the Morning:

Lord our God,  
as with all creation  
we offer you the life of this new day,  
give us grace to love and serve you  
to the praise of Jesus Christ our Lord.<sup>7</sup>

or the glorious prayer at the end of Prayer in the Evening:

Lord our God,  
at the ending of this day,  
and in the darkness and silence of this night,  
cover us with healing and forgiveness,  
that we may take our rest in peace;  
through Jesus Christ our Lord.<sup>8</sup>

or consider these words from the Christmas and Epiphany Eucharist:

Searched for,  
Christ comes.  
  
To the wise and powerful,  
star-led to Bethlehem,  
seeking a king,  
he comes, child of Mary,  
crowned with meekness,  
worthy of every gift.<sup>9</sup>

or these, from the same service, which also appear at the Preparation of the Gifts in one of the Ordinary Seasons services:

Lord and Giver of every good thing,  
we bring to you  
bread and wine for our communion,  
lives and gifts for your kingdom,  
all for transformation  
through your grace and love

made known in Jesus Christ our Saviour.<sup>10</sup>

Or what about the great prayer of thanksgiving in Holy Communion for Advent, which includes these words:

God of all glory and light of our salvation,  
we offer you thanks and praise  
through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord.

By your living Word  
you called all things into being,  
breathed into life the desire of your heart  
and shaped us in your own likeness.  
Though we rejected your love,  
you did not give us up  
or cease to fashion our salvation.  
You made a covenant to be our God,  
spoke to us through the prophets,  
and prepared the way for our redemption.<sup>11</sup>

All these examples are of new material, specially written for our new worship book. My final example of style and imagery, however, is not new. You will find it at the end of the Preface, and leading into the *Sanctus* in Holy Communion for the Easter Season:

Therefore with angels and archangels  
and all the company of heaven  
we bless and praise your glorious name, saying:<sup>12</sup>

This, as I said, is not new. But you will not find it in the 1975 Sunday Service, which offered at this point only the rather apologetic

And so with the whole company of heaven we join in the unending hymn of praise.<sup>13</sup>

No ‘angels and archangels’ were deemed appropriate in a new liturgy in 1975. But I think that, compared with *The Methodist Hymn Book* and *The Methodist Service Book, Hymns and Psalms* and now *The Methodist Worship Book* demonstrate a certain recovery of nerve. The compilers of our 1983 hymn book were not afraid, for example, to restore many authentic texts, as in the treatment of ‘When I survey the wondrous cross,’ where the vivid imagery of stanza four (‘His dying crimson, like a robe, spreads o’er his body on the tree’) was too much for the editors of *The Methodist Hymn Book*, even though that stanza is of pivotal importance to the text as a whole.<sup>14</sup> And in our most recent liturgical text, as we have seen, the ‘angels and archangels,’ who were considered much too picturesque in 1975, have made a welcome return.

Another fascinating example is the Prayer of Humble Access, that prayer which is apparently such a significant part of Methodist spirituality that there were (unsuccessful) Memorials to the Conference demanding its inclusion in each and every eucharistic order. In 1975, the prayer was completely rewritten as follows:

Lord, we come to your table trusting in your mercy and not in any  
goodness of our own.  
We are not worthy even to gather up the crumbs under your table, but it is  
your nature always to have mercy, and on that we depend.

So feed us with the body and blood of Jesus Christ, your Son, that we may for ever live in him and he in us.<sup>15</sup>

But in the only draft order in which the prayer appeared in 1992, the *Alternative Service Book* text, very much closer to Cranmer's original, was printed:

We do not presume  
to come to this your table, merciful Lord,  
trusting in our own righteousness,  
but in your manifold and great mercies.  
We are not worthy  
so much as to gather up the crumbs  
under your table.  
But you are the same Lord  
whose nature is always to have mercy.  
Grant us therefore, gracious Lord,  
so to eat the flesh of your dear Son Jesus Christ  
and to drink his blood,  
that we may evermore dwell in him  
and he in us.<sup>16</sup>

The powerful, Johannine imagery, retained in the 1980/1992 text, has survived into the new book – another example of our being less afraid than a generation ago of such evocative language. But the consultation exercise also revealed that what many people recognized as the Prayer of Humble Access was in fact the 1975 version, and not the Cranmer text or something closer to it. In order to serve both those who rejoice in the rich imagery of the original and those who have grown up with or otherwise come to love the 1975 text, both have been included in the five places where the Prayer of Humble Access is printed.<sup>17</sup>

Another significant change from 1975, which has to do with language and imagery, is in the treatment of the Covenant Service. The Liturgical sub-Committee was aware of a deep division of opinion about this service among Methodists. There are some of us who love it, regarding it as one of the treasures (possibly the only treasure!) of the Methodist liturgical inheritance. And there are others of us who detest it, judging it to be far too individualistic and expressive of much too firm a commitment to be appropriate for most present-day congregations. There was not much that the Liturgical sub-Committee could do about this division of opinion, for it was clearly unthinkable to omit the Covenant Service from the new book. But careful attention was paid to the language used in order to make the corporate dimension of the covenant, as well as the individual, as clear as possible. And in one place in particular, the actual Covenant Prayer and its introduction, we took the slightly courageous step of offering an alternative text.

There has for years been criticism of the words 'Put me to doing, put me to suffering,' and it has often been remarked that any words which need a footnote to explain them (as in 1975) should not appear in a liturgical text at all. On the other hand, the familiar words are precious to many people. Responding to several requests, we resolved to explore the possibility of a new version of the prayer, which would attempt to express the same concepts but would not simply translate the well known form. We embarked upon this project, secretly believing that it could not be done. But done it was, and I believe that the new Covenant Prayer, which is provided in the book, with the 1975 form offered as an alternative, is one of its most striking features:

I am no longer my own but yours.  
Your will, not mine, be done in all things,  
wherever you may place me,  
in all that I do  
and in all that I may endure;  
when there is work for me  
and when there is none;  
when I am troubled  
and when I am at peace.  
Your will be done  
when I am valued  
and when I am disregarded;  
when I find fulfilment  
and when it is lacking;  
when I have all things,  
and when I have nothing.

I willingly offer  
all I have and am  
to serve you,  
as and where you choose.

Glorious and blessed God,  
Father, Son and Holy Spirit,  
you are mine and I am yours.  
May it be so for ever.  
Let this covenant now made on earth  
be fulfilled in heaven. Amen.<sup>18</sup>

Time will tell whether the 1999 Covenant Prayer will, like the 1975 Prayer of Humble Access, become the better known version, deplored by some but beloved by others.

Before we leave the matter of language, let us take a brief look at the question of ecumenical texts. Unlike some denominations, who shall be nameless, we believed it to be right to use the English Language Liturgical Commission (ELLC) texts, unaltered, for the major common texts – *Glory to God in the highest*, the Nicene Creed, the Apostles' Creed, *Sursum Corda*, *Sanctus*, *Benedictus Qui Venit*, *Gloria Patri*, *Te Deum Laudamus*, *Benedictus*, *Magnificat*, *Nunc Dimittis* and the Lord's Prayer. The Lord's Prayer, however, is set out, whenever it appears, in the so called 'modified traditional' version ('Our Father, who art in heaven...') as well as the ELLC text. This is a notable development since 1975. Then, the ICET texts, which at that time were widely acceptable, were included in the body of the services, with the exception of the Lord's Prayer, which was relegated to an appendix. This effectively ensured that the modern language version was never used. What we have in *The Methodist Worship Book* will enable either the familiar or the modern language version to be used. It will also be helpful to any of the growing number of people who do not know any version of the Lord's Prayer, if they happen to find themselves in church.

If there is one word which seems to me to arise from this consideration of the language of *The Methodist Worship Book*, as compared with its predecessor, it is 'inclusivity.' There is inclusive language for human beings; there is a remarkably wide range of forms of address for God; there are alternatives for certain familiar texts. I



suppose the word 'inclusivity' could also be applied to the contents of the book, with which I dealt earlier.

The final section of this lecture is about theology. To some extent, I have already touched upon theology, for example in talking about the language and imagery the services employ when describing or addressing God. But a few more things are perhaps worth saying.

First, eucharistic theology. Members of the Methodist Sacramental Fellowship will need no reminder that John and Charles Wesley were convinced of the real presence of Christ in this sacrament. One of the casualties of the consultation exercise was an epiclesis asking God through the Spirit 'to infuse this bread and wine with life and power,' a deliberate echo of Charles Wesley's hymn, 'Come, Holy Ghost, thine influence shed,'<sup>19</sup> with its lines 'Thy life infuse into the bread, thy power into the wine' – a magnificent hymn for which there is, incidentally, no natural place in a eucharist other than during a eucharistic prayer! But many correspondents found this Wesleyan style epiclesis was theologically unacceptable and objected to what they regarded as Roman theology being foisted upon Methodists. It is wrong, they claimed, to ask for the Spirit to be poured out on inanimate objects. In the end, the Liturgical sub-Committee resolved to use essentially the same form of epiclesis in every Great Prayer:

Send (or 'Pour out') your Holy Spirit  
that these gifts of bread and wine  
may be for us the body and blood of Christ.<sup>20</sup>

This is the form suggested by the three wise persons (affectionately known as the 'Gang of Three') who were appointed to review the comments on the 1992 rites and make recommendations. It is a deliberately ambiguous formula which does not preclude me from believing what Charles Wesley believed but does not absolutely require that I should. It could be taken to be no stronger than the essentially receptionist sentence of 1975, which can only just be described as an epiclesis:

Grant that by the power of the Holy Spirit  
we who receive your gifts of bread and wine  
may share in the body and blood of Christ.<sup>21</sup>

But it is capable of meaning much more. I am convinced that theological ambiguity at this point is not disreputable, for in reality only God knows what happens, and, to return to the concept of 'inclusivity,' it would have been wrong to include in a eucharistic prayer any phrase which would cause unnecessary offence. But I do regret the loss of Wesley's 'infusion.'

Next, a word or two about heaven and prayer for the departed. In the MSF Conference Lecture ten years ago, Michael Townsend asked 'Whatever Happened to Heaven?' and, finding *The Methodist Service Book* a little weak in its sense of heaven, suggested that 'we can try to ensure that when the present liturgies are revised they are pervaded by a greater sense of the church triumphant than the present ones.'<sup>22</sup>

No doubt the fact that Michael was a member of the Liturgical sub-Committee helped to ensure that this desirable objective was met. Certainly, the new book is not afraid, as I have already indicated, to talk about 'angels and archangels,' and even in eucharists when it doesn't, it employs such words as:

And so, with all the faithful of every time and place,  
we join with choirs of angels in the eternal hymn:<sup>23</sup>

or

And so we offer our praise  
with all your people, on earth and in heaven.  
With the full chorus of your creation,  
we proclaim the glory of your name:<sup>24</sup>

In 'Prayer with the Dying' there is the wonderful commendation, 'Go forth upon your journey, Christian soul...', previously known to many Methodists courtesy of Cardinal Newman and Sir Edward Elgar. This text ends with the words,

May you rest in peace  
and may the City of God be your eternal dwelling.

As in 1975, prayers for the departed are optional in the Funeral section of the book, but there are also many 'remembrances' of the departed elsewhere, where 'remembering' is a device for avoiding the word 'praying.' This is another example of studied ambiguity which is entirely defensible, though it does do violence to the structure of prayers of intercession ('We pray for...', 'We pray for...', 'We pray for...', 'We remember ...M').<sup>26</sup> Rather interestingly, the only place where the same verb is used for the departed as for the living is in the Easter eucharist intercessions,<sup>27</sup> where it is God who is asked to 'remember,' for example 'Remember in your love those who suffer' and 'Remember in your love those who have died.'

And, not without some controversy during last year's Conference, endorsement was given to the inclusion of these words at the end of Prayer in the Evening, though their use there is optional:

May the souls of the faithful,  
through the mercies of God,  
rest in peace and rise in glory. Amen.<sup>28</sup>

But, to return to the communion of saints and a rich sense of heaven, compare the commendation in the 1975 *Service Book* funeral service with its equivalent of 1999. 1975 has:

Merciful God, you have made us all and given your Son for our redemption. We commend our *brother N* to your perfect mercy and wisdom, for in you alone we put our trust.<sup>29</sup>

No mention there of heaven or the saints! But in the new funeral service, we read at this point:

Into your keeping, O merciful God,  
we commend your servant *N*.  
Receive *her/him* into the arms of your mercy,  
into the joy of everlasting peace,  
and into the glorious company of the saints in light;  
through Jesus Christ our Lord.<sup>30</sup>

— a distinct improvement, I suggest!

Finally, *The Methodist Worship Book* has a much stronger sense of the power of signs and symbols. This is a theological point, because an incarnational and sacramental

religion depends upon the belief that God uses material things to convey grace. The 1975 book had bread and wine at the eucharist, water and an optional candle – though only for infants – at baptism, rings at a wedding (though it was the giving of rings, rather than the rings, which God was asked to bless). In 1999, we still have all these, except that candles may be given to the baptized, whatever their age, and we do not shrink from asking God to bless the rings themselves. We also have the opportunity for ashing at the start of Lent, for footwashing on Maundy Thursday, not to mention the stripping of the communion table later that day, for the lighting of an Easter Candle at the Easter Vigil and subsequently at Baptisms, for the laying on of hands and/or anointing with oil at a Service for Healing and Wholeness, and for the dedication of domestic buildings as well as of church buildings and their furnishings. I suggest that it is an important theological truth which many Methodists have still to embrace that worship is not words alone.

So, at your service again, I am happy to commend *The Methodist Worship Book* to you, if it still needs any commendation, and to invite you to find in its pages a rich spiritual resource for a Methodism whose worship has moved on and developed since the previous service book appeared in 1975, and can still be further renewed and enriched.

## References

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- 2 Neil Dixon, *Towards a New Methodist Service Book in Epworth Review*, September 1990, p 52
- 3 *The Methodist Recorder*, 26 March 1998
- 4 *The Methodist Worship Book*, 1999, cited hereafter as *MWB*, p 204
- 5 Conference *Agenda* 1992, pp 80 - 107
- 6 *The Methodist Service Book*, 1975, cited hereafter as *MSB*, pp B7, B8 and B5
- 7 *MWB*, p 14
- 8 *MWB*, p 24
- 9 *MWB*, p133
- 10 *MWB*, pp 136 and 191
- 11 *MWB*, p124
- 12 *MWB*, p 170
- 13 *MSB*, pB13
- 14 See *The Methodist Hymn Book*, 1933, no 182, and *Hymns and Psalms*, 1983, no 180
- 15 *MSB*, pB15
- 16 *The Alternative Service Book*, 1980, p 128
- 17 *MWB*, pp 123, 157, 195, 227 and 233
- 18 *MWB*, pp288f
- 19 *Hymns and Psalms* no 602
- 20 See, for example, *MWB*, pp 126,138,155 and 181
- 21 *MSB*, p B14
- 22 Michael J. Townsend, *Whatever Happened to Heaven?*, MSF Conference Lecture, 1989, p 23
- 23 *MWB*, p 180
- 24 *MWB*, p 125
- 25 *MWB*, p 431

- 26 See, for example, *MWB*, pp 35f, 45ff, 152f and 188
- 27 *MWB*, pp 165f
- 28 *MWB*, p 25
- 29 *MSB*, p F14
- 30 *MWB*, p 456