

WHOSE TABLE? WHAT GUESTS? THE EUCHARIST AS HOSPITALITY

by

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John Wesley left for his theological progeny a varied, even “storied” history regarding the question of who is to be invited and admitted to the Lord’s Supper. From the days of Wesley’s missionary efforts in Georgia, there are two significant incidents of his “fencing the table” of the eucharist. In one instance, Wesley refused to serve Johann Martin Bolzius because of the issue of Bolzius’ baptism. The refusal was not because Bolzius had never been baptized, but, in Wesley’s own words, because Bolzius had not been “baptized by a minister who had been *episcopally ordained*.”¹ It was an incident that Wesley himself would later describe as “high church zeal” for protecting the Lord’s Table.

The second episode was the incident when Wesley refused to serve Sophia (Hopkey) Williamson, ostensibly because she had not presented her name to receive the eucharist with enough advance notice. The issue was complicated by the fact that the former Miss Hopkey had been a romantic interest of John Wesley. Recently married, her husband brought civil charges against Wesley to a grand jury in Savannah, based on that and other incidents at which he took offense. Of the ten counts in the

¹*The Works of John Wesley*, bicentennial edition (Nashville: Abingdon, 1984), vol. 20: 305. Hereafter cited as *Works*. Wesley’s comment on this twelve years later was, “Can anyone carry *High Church* zeal any higher than this? And how well have I been since beaten with my own staff!” His regret over this incident was deep.

indictment against Wesley, two were for repelling individuals from Holy Communion, and two were for refusing the selection of individuals as godparents because they were not regular communicants.² In stark contrast to those incidents where Wesley refused to serve communion to those who approached the table, just a few years after his return to England a visitor to one of his services made the observation that Wesley, “seemed to allow all promiscuously to come to the Lord’s table.”³ Wesley had charges leveled against him from both ends of the spectrum saying that he was being too harsh in his efforts to fence the table, and being too lax on the same issue.

Using the tension between these episodes in John Wesley’s ministry, this essay explores the question of the hospitality of the eucharist. More specifically, the following three questions will be addressed from within the Wesleyan tradition:

1. Is it inhospitable to restrict access to the eucharist—to fence the table?
2. If the table is fenced, what are the requirements for admission? Who is to be invited?
3. How should requirements for admission to the table be “enforced”?

In considering each of these questions, a trajectory will be traced from John Wesley to the 21st century, considering how the questions have been answered at various points along an “arc” of Wesleyan liturgy and practice.

Is It Inhospitable to Fence the Table?

John Wesley inherited a tradition in the *Book of Common Prayer* of the Church of England (hereafter BCP) that had clear instructions for those presiding at the eucharist. The Prayer Book had a prescribed formula of warning: “My duty is to exhort you to consider the dignity of the holy mystery and the great peril of the unworthy receiving thereof, and so to search and examine your own consciences, as you should come holy and clean to a most godly and heavenly feast.” Would-be communicants

²There was obvious personal acrimony in the charges, but the validity of the charges was not ultimately put to the test. Wesley made an early return to England before the matter went to court.

³*Works*, 26:48. The observation is passed along to Wesley in a letter from Rev. Ralph Erskine, dated January 31, 1741.

were to test themselves against the Ten Commandments, confess their sins, repent of wickedness, reconcile quarrels and make restitution, “for otherwise the receiving of the holy communion doth nothing else but increase your damnation.” At each communion, the congregation was told that “if any of you be a blasphemer of God, an hinderer or slanderer of his Word, an adulterer, or be in malice or envy, or in any other grievous crime, bewail your sins and come not to this holy table, lest after the taking of that holy sacrament the devil enter into you.”⁴

As is often the case, there was considerable opportunity for variance between the written instructions and the pastoral implementation thereof. In the more than century and a half that had passed from the inception of the BCP to Wesley’s time, the pendulum had swung back and forth between stringency and laxity in implementing these directives. In the 1570s, when there was growing concern about admitting unworthy members to the table, “bishops tightened their rules on access, and there was a flood of books on preparation for the sacrament.”⁵ In the early seventeenth century, there were concerns that the pendulum had swung too far the other way, and some of the clergy had become overzealous in excluding parishioners from the sacrament. This led to requirements that priests submit a list of the names of any who had been denied communion.⁶

The Prayer Book itself had, from the beginning, made provision for appropriate exhortations to be spoken to the congregation. One option exhorted parishioners not to partake unworthily, while a second option exhorted them not to neglect the sacrament, i.e., because of an overwhelming sense of unworthiness. An Elizabethan catechism demonstrates the way the clerics attempted to strike the appropriate balance. It argued that full perfection is not possible, yet imperfection should not keep one “from coming to the Lord’s Supper, which the Lord willed to be a help in our imperfection and weakness. . . . Yea, if we were perfect, there would be no need of any use of the Lord’s Supper among us. But hereto these things that I have spoken of do tend, that every man bring with him to the supper repentance, faith, and charity, so near as possibly may be, sincere

⁴Christopher Haigh, “Communion and Community: Exclusion from Communion in Post-Reformation England,” *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, vol. 51, No. 4, October 2000: 724.

⁵*Ibid.*

⁶*Ibid.*, 723.

and unfeigned.” Wesley, then, had inherited a tradition that did not shy away from fencing the table, yet did not want to fence it in such a way that kept earnest parishioners away. It was a tradition Wesley continued, though he implemented some changes in the method of fencing the table.

John Wesley retained the sense of the urgency of soul-searching preparation for the celebration of the eucharist. One example of the way that he expressed the dangers of unworthily receiving the sacrament can be found in the lyrics of this hymn (#56) in his *Hymns for the Lord’s Supper*:

1. How dreadful is the mystery
Which, instituted, Lord, by Thee,
Or life or death conveys!
Death to the impious and profane;
Nor shall our faith in Thee be vain,
Who here expect thy grace.
2. Who eats unworthily this bread
Pulls down Thy curses on his head,
And eats his deadly bane;
And shall not we who rightly eat
Live by the salutary meat,
And equal blessings gain?
3. Destruction if Thy body shed,
And strike the soul of sinners dead
Who dare the signs abuse,
Surely the instrument Divine
To all that are, or would be, Thine
Shall saving health diffuse.⁸

When Wesley prepared *The Sunday Service of the Methodists in North America*,⁹ he included a eucharistic liturgy that was essentially the same

⁷Alexander Nowell, *A Catechism written in Latin . . . translated into English by Thomas Norton*, ed. G. E. Corrie (Parker Society, Cambridge, 1853), cited in John E. Booty, “Preparation for the Lord’s Supper in Elizabethan England,” *Anglican Theological Review*, vol. 40, no. 2 (April 1967), 140.

⁸J. Ernest Rattenbury, *The Eucharistic Hymns of John and Charles Wesley*, American edition, edited by Timothy J. Crouch. Cleveland, OH: OSL Publications, 1990, p. H-18.

⁹A reprint is available in *John Wesley’s Prayer Book: The Sunday Service of the Methodists in North America*, with introduction, notes, and commentary by James F. White (Akron, OH: OSL Publications, 1991).

as the BCP liturgy. The prayer book was received in America with neither the same devotion that Wesley personally had for it, nor with the devotion that he anticipated for American Methodists. Shortly after Wesley's death, the book underwent significant editing. Both the editing of the service book and the loss of the use of Wesley's eucharistic hymns brought about changes in the actual eucharistic practices of American Methodists. The focus on penitential preparation for the sacrament was not lost, however. Simply put, along the trajectory that we are following, there has been no substantial change in the principle of fencing the table. There have been changes in the question of how, precisely, that is done, but *that* the table should be fenced has not been seriously brought into question.¹⁰

What Are the Requirements for Admission? Who Is To Be Invited?

From at least as early as the time of Justin Martyr's *First Apology*, the Church has considered baptism as a minimum requirement for admission to the table.¹¹ At times this has been explicitly stated, at times it has merely been implied, and at other times it has been rejected as a requirement. Through the centuries, however, this has been a starting point for the conversation. Aside from the previously mentioned incident in Georgia (with Johann Bolzius), John Wesley did not directly address the question of whether baptism was required for admission to the table. There has been "vigorous debate over whether Wesley himself viewed baptism as an absolute prerequisite for participation in the Lord's Supper. He

¹⁰Within the United Methodist denomination there have been significant changes in the question of whether or not the table should be fenced. See L. Edward Phillips, "Open Tables and Closed Minds: United Methodist Attitudes Toward the 'Open Communion Table,'" *Liturgy* 20(4):27-25; Mark W. Stamm, "Open Communion as a United Methodist Exception," *Quarterly Review* 22 (3), Fall 2002: 261-272. Phillips comments, "Many United Methodist congregations go beyond the conventional ecumenical sense in which an open table means opened to baptized Christians in good standing from other ecclesial communities. Rather, Methodist openness typically means openness to everyone who may be present at the communion service—be they Christian, or curious agnostic, or even Jewish, Hindu, or Buddhist" [27-28]. Similarly, Mark Stamm writes that "many (if not most) United Methodists have already settled the question—official rites, rubrics, and resolutions notwithstanding. Indeed, the vast majority of United Methodist parishes practice a completely open table, with no restrictions whatsoever, and they have come to take it for granted" [262-263].

¹¹James F. White, *A Brief History of Christian Worship* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1993), 54.

never explicitly addressed the point. The majority of scholars have argued that Wesley simply assumed it, since most of those who found their way to Wesley's societies were already baptized. And yet, they were not all baptized, nor is it absolutely clear that Wesley required them to be baptized before entering the society or partaking at its table."¹²

In the Church of England in Wesley's day, while baptism (followed by confirmation)¹³ was generally considered a minimal requirement for admission to the table, it was not the only requirement. The BCP tradition established three general reasons for denying someone admission to the table: sin, malice, and ignorance.¹⁴ In other words, Anglican practice in Wesley's era was that a baptized, confirmed member who was not an "open and notorious evil liver" was invited to the table. Wesley's encounter with Moravians during and immediately subsequent to his Georgia experience drew his attention beyond the Anglican thresholds of baptism and confirmation to the issue of *assurance* of one's salvation. This focus would have considerable influence on Wesley's reflection on the sacraments.

While Wesley was positively influenced by the Moravians, he eventually split with them over conflicting views on the sacraments. The Moravians taught that the eucharist was not to be received by anyone who did not have full assurance of faith in Christ. Through the testimony of others (including Wesley's mother, Susanna), Wesley came to believe that the eucharist itself could be the very moment that assurance was experienced.¹⁵ The rift over this issue widened, with the Moravians teaching their

¹²Randy L. Maddox, *Responsible Grace: John Wesley's Practical Theology* (Nashville: Kingswood Books, 1994), 228.

¹³John Bowmer notes that "The Church of England, in principle, allowed only the confirmed to communicate, for to them the Sacrament was a confirming ordinance, reserved only for those who had been initiated into membership." *The Sacrament of the Lord's Supper in Early Methodism* (London: Dacre Press, 1951), 108.

¹⁴Haigh, 722.

¹⁵Wesley's journal entry for Monday, September 3, 1739 reads: "I talked largely with my mother who told me that till a short time since she had scarce heard such a thing mentioned as the having forgiveness of sins now, or God's Spirit bearing witness with our spirit; much less did she imagine that this was the common privilege of all true believers. 'Therefore' (said she) 'I never durst ask for it myself. But two or three weeks ago, while my son Hall [son-in-law Westley Hall, married to her daughter, Martha] was pronouncing these words, in delivering the cup to me, 'The blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, which was given for thee,' the words struck through my heart, and I knew God for Christ's sake had forgiven *me* all my sins.'" *Works*, 19:93.

“stillness” doctrine and Wesley countering with his view of the sacrament as a converting ordinance. Wesley’s journal (June 1740) records the substance of the growing rift between himself and the Moravians who were a part of the Fetter Lane Society. So disturbed was he by the Moravian stillness teachings that he gave daily discourses for a week at Fetter Lane on the means of grace, from Sunday, June 22, through Saturday, June 28. On Friday (June 27) he insisted that the eucharist was a converting ordinance:

Experience shows the gross falsehood of that assertion that the Lord’s Supper is not a *converting* ordinance. Ye are the witnesses. For many now present know, the very beginning of your *conversion* to God (perhaps, in some, the first deep *conviction*) was wrought at the Lord’s Supper.¹⁶

On Saturday, he again affirmed that the eucharist could be a means of *preventing* grace, and thus a *converting* ordinance:

I showed at large, (1) that the Lord’s Supper was ordained by God to be a *means of conveying* to men either *preventing* or *justifying*, or *sanctifying grace*, according to their several necessities; (2) that the persons for whom it was ordained are all those who know and feel that they *want the grace* of God, either to *restrain* them from sin, or to *show their sins forgiven*, or to *renew their souls* in the image of God; (3) that inasmuch as we come to his table, not to give him anything but to *receive* whatsoever he sees best for us, there is *no previous preparation* indispensably necessary, but a *desire* to receive whatsoever he pleases to give; and (4) that *no fitness* is required at the time of communicating but a *sense of our state*, of our utter sinfulness and helplessness; every one who knows he is *fit for hell* being just *fit to come to Christ*, in this as well as all other ways of his appointment.¹⁷

This view of the sacrament was disseminated to Methodists through Wesley’s collection of eucharistic hymns, with verses like the following:

Sinner, with awe draw near,
And find thy Saviour here,
In His ordinances still,
Touch His sacramental clothes;

¹⁶Works, 19:158.

¹⁷Works, 19:159.

Present in His power to heal,
Virtue from His body flows. [#39, v.1]¹⁸

Come, to the supper come,
Sinners, there still is room;
Every soul may be His guest,
Jesus gives the eternal word;
Share the monumental feast,
Eat the supper of your Lord. [#8, v.1]¹⁹

The “open table” which this implies must be put into perspective. While the invitation given by Wesley was much broader than was common in the Anglican Church, it was not a blanket invitation given to all, regardless of intent or desire. It was an invitation to sinners, but sinners purposefully seeking the grace of God. In most cases, membership in a Methodist society was required, but membership in Methodist societies did not require conversion as a prerequisite.

The resources Wesley provided for the Methodist Episcopal Church in America had the potential to produce an approach to the eucharist which closely paralleled Wesley’s, but that potential was never realized. Wesley’s *Sunday Service* was not embraced, and in 1792 (the year after Wesley’s death) it underwent considerable revision.²⁰ There is no evidence that an American edition of Wesley’s 166 eucharistic hymns was published, and the most widely used Methodist hymnal in early American Methodism had just nine eucharistic hymns included.

Lester Ruth makes the argument that early American Methodists came to consider the Lord’s Supper as among the forms of what was for them “private worship.” Like the meetings of the classes and societies, and their Love Feasts, the Lord’s Supper became a ritual that was “restricted in access, even to the point of overt exclusion.”²¹ By the mid-nineteenth century, however, Methodism proclaimed a much more open invitation to the table. No longer was membership in a Methodist society

¹⁸Rattenbury, H-13.

¹⁹Ibid., H-3.

²⁰For a discussion of the revisions, see William Wade Nash, chapter 2, “The Liturgical Revision of 1792,” in “A History of Public Worship in the Methodist Episcopal Church and the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, From 1784 to 1905,” Ph.D., Notre Dame, 1981, 87-206.

²¹Lester Ruth, *A Little Heaven Below: Worship at Early Methodist Quarterly Meetings* (Nashville: Kingswood Books, 2000), 103.

a requirement for admission to the table. Methodists were concerned to distinguish themselves from Baptists who practiced “close communion.” A mid-nineteenth century polemical Baptist work, defending their view of close communion, drew the following Methodist response:

When the table is spread, by any one denomination, and the bread and wine placed thereon, it is emphatically *the table of the Lord*, and not the table of *that particular denomination*. The duty of the administrator is to invite all orthodox Christians who are in good standing in their respective Churches—as the Methodists *invariably* do—to join in the commemoration of the death and sufferings of Christ.²²

Although there were efforts by some mid-nineteenth-century Methodists to make baptism a requirement for admission to the table, those efforts failed, primarily due to this disagreement with Baptists. In the midst of the debate, Methodists “were reluctant to concede . . . the necessity of Baptism prior to Communion.”²³

As various holiness denominations formed and developed their rituals for communion, they generally framed the invitation with baptism not explicitly mentioned as a prerequisite for admission to the table, nor was membership in their particular denomination required. They would admit members of other churches to their table, with the expectation that, although they were not formally members, their lives would conform *in principle* to the membership requirements of that denomination. The Free Methodist Church, in its “general directions” for the Lord’s Supper, stipulated that:

1. No person shall be admitted to the Lord’s Supper among us who is guilty of any immoral or unchristian practice for which we would exclude a member of our Church.
2. All persons properly included in the general invitation may be allowed to partake of the Lord’s Supper among us.²⁴

²²William G. Brownlow, *The Great Iron Wheel Examined; or, Its False Spokes Extracted, and An Exhibition of Elder Graves, its Builder* (Nashville, TN: Published for the Author, 1856), 178.

²³Karen B. Westerfield Tucker, *American Methodist Worship* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 145.

²⁴*The Doctrines and Discipline of the Free Methodist Church* (Rochester, NY: Published by the General Conference, 1866), 114. The Pilgrim Holiness

The first *Manual* of the merged Church of the Nazarene included the statement that the Lord's Supper is "distinctly for those who are prepared for reverent appreciation of its significance. . . . It being the Communion feast, only those who have faith in Christ and love for the saints should be called to participate therein."²⁵ The statement remains virtually unchanged today. The ritual includes the words, "This is His table. The feast is for His disciples."²⁶ There has generally been a progression, in the rituals, to a more restricted invitation (as compared to Wesley), with no formal provision through the liturgy to make the broader scope of the invitation a part of the service. A notable exception would be the instructions in the *Discipline* of the Wesleyan Church which read: "It is expected that Wesleyan ministers shall carefully admonish the people that only those who are in right relations with God and with their neighbors should come to the Lord's table, and that others should come only if in so doing they are expressing repentance and seeking forgiveness."²⁷

These instructions explicitly offer the possibility of an invitation to those not yet converted, and offer the possibility of the eucharist as a converting ordinance.

How Should Requirements for a Person's Admission to the Table be "Enforced"?

The clergy of the Church of England employed a variety of means of fencing the table. They included house to house visitation and examination of one's fitness for admission to the table a fortnight before quarterly communion, or monthly visitation by the parish priest for the same purpose. Some clergy issued tokens to those who qualified to communicate.²⁸ Additionally, parishioners could object, even as a fellow parish-

Church position on admission to the table was, "No person shall be admitted to the Lord's Supper who is guilty of any practice for which we would exclude a member of our church." *Manual of the Pilgrim Holiness Church* (Indianapolis, IN: The Pilgrim Publishing House, 1954), 103.

²⁵*Manual of the Pentecostal Church of the Nazarene* (1908), 30.

²⁶*Ibid.*, 63. The current ritual for the Church of the Nazarene contains the same phrasing.

²⁷*The Discipline of the Wesleyan Church 2000* (Indianapolis, IN: Wesleyan Publishing House, 2001), 354.

²⁸Haigh, 728-729. He notes that the use of tokens was "usually to exclude those who had not paid their contributions."

ioner knelt to receive, resulting in their being turned away.²⁹ The exhortations that were included in the BCP liturgy served as another layer of the fencing of the table, and the recitation of the Decalogue was intended as a point of reflection and self-examination. Multiple means, then, were used to fence the table.

Wesley's initial desire was that Methodists would receive the Lord's Supper in their local parishes. When that took place, the fencing of the table was a matter for the parish priest. As Methodists began to call for (and receive) more eucharistic services of their own, they had to come up with their own ways of fencing the table. Membership in the Methodist societies became the primary means of accomplishing that. The commitments made by those who were received into membership in Methodist societies became the measure of their admission to the table, provided they remained a member in good standing. Communion tickets or tokens—issued to Methodists who were examined and found to be in good standing—became the practical, visible method of fencing the table. Essentially, the fencing of Methodist societies doubled as the fencing of the table.

Early American Methodism adopted the same means of fencing the table. Wesley's confidence in both the appropriateness and the effectiveness of this method of determining one's admission to the table is arguably the reason that Wesley dropped the BCP exhortations from the liturgy when he created the *Sunday Service*. With those exhortations gone, one of the layers of fencing the table was gone and the focus centered on society membership. As the function of accountability and examination within the society declined over the course of the nineteenth century, the purposeful examination of communicants also declined. In practice, "most Methodist churches in the nineteenth century saw the 'Ye that do truly and earnestly repent' as a sufficient safeguard when ministers and church leaders carefully judged worthy communicants by that standard and the fundamental doctrines of the Christian faith."³⁰ When holiness denominations began to form, several of the layers of fencing the table had fallen out of use and were not recovered by them. There were not specific exhortations provided in the liturgy, and the recitation of the Decalogue was not generally incorporated. Neither specific means nor

²⁹Ibid., 738-739.

³⁰Tucker, 144.

specific time frames were designated for examination by pastors, classes, or societies.³¹

While several of the formal means of fencing the table had fallen out of use, there were still measures used to create a fence, albeit more subtle ones. While the rituals were generally brief, and included no formal exhortation, the scripture that was read frequently served as a means of fencing the table. The Church of the Nazarene *Manual*, for example, has always instructed that the administration of the Lord's Supper may be introduced by an appropriate sermon and the reading of 1 Corinthians 11:23-29, Luke 22:14-20, or some other appropriate passage. The selection of the verses influences the tone of the invitation to the table. In the Luke passage, the break at verse 20 avoids the issue of the presence of Judas, the betrayer, at the Last Supper. The boundaries of the Corinthian passage serve to highlight the warning on eating and drinking unworthily, without giving a context for those cautionary words. It lends itself to a different interpretation than Wesley had for that passage: "Wesley's conception of 'eating and drinking unworthily' is not 'being unworthy to eat and drink,' but he interprets the words in the sense of a sinner taking the Holy Sacrament in such a rude and disorderly way that one was 'hungry and another drunken.'" ³²

While some of the more overt means of fencing the table became absent, the fencing was stringently accomplished nonetheless. Officially, the restrictions to admission to the table may have become fewer, but in practice frequently the words and the tone in which they are spoken created a daunting boundary.

Conclusion

As scholars at the close of the twentieth century began to more clearly articulate Wesley's views of the sacraments, many pastors, seeking to be serious about their Wesleyan tradition, have been faced with signifi-

³¹A notable exception was some of the churches in the Northeast prior to their merger into the Pentecostal Church of the Nazarene. The First Pentecostal Church of Lynn, Massachusetts, for example, made provision for monthly communion, and their *Manual* specified, "The covenant meeting should be held the last Friday evening before the first Sunday in every month, and the Holy Communion should be celebrated on the succeeding Lord's day." *Manual of the First Pentecostal Church of Lynn, Mass.* (Providence: Pentecostal Printing Co., 1898), 14.

³²Bowmer, 113.

cant challenges as they seek to reincorporate portions of their worshiping tradition that have fallen out of use. Specifically, how can the hospitality of the eucharist (extending a broader invitation) be practiced in ways that more closely reflect Wesley's pattern? There is nothing in our Wesleyan tradition to support the suggestion that fencing the table and a view of the eucharist as hospitality are mutually exclusive. In fact, I would suggest, it is possible (even preferable) to simultaneously focus on extending an invitation to the table to those not yet converted *and* develop more specific ways of fencing the table. Essential to this approach is a renewed emphasis on the Lord's Supper as a *means of grace*, not *just* a memorial of the death of Christ.

If the Lord's Supper is seen as a means of grace, the invitation to receive that grace should be offered as widely as possible. One should extend the invitation to the table to all who are present and seeking the grace of God through Jesus Christ. Yet, as Geoffrey Wainwright notes, "Tensions arise between the poles of communion as a means of grace and the need to maintain the integrity of the celebrating community. To receive communion is to become part of the sign-enacting community, which is charged with the faithful stewardship of God's mysteries in the world."³³ To limit the scope of the invitation is poor hospitality; but to extend an invitation that fails to give the truth of the new life to which one is invited is likewise poor hospitality. As Mark Stamm comments, the invitation to the table "must not contradict the biblical expectation that those who eat and drink with Jesus will repent, opening their hearts to new life. . . . Those who would eat and drink with Jesus may well be warned as well as invited."³⁴ The broad invitation is to practice "eucharist as hospitality." The warning is fencing the table. Fencing the table, if done appropriately, is setting a boundary. And boundaries are not antithetical to hospitality, but a component of genuine hospitality.³⁵ According to Thomas Oden:

A community with no boundaries can neither have a liturgical center nor remain a community of worship. A center without a

³³Geoffrey Wainwright, *Worship with One Accord: Where Liturgy and Ecumenism Embrace* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 114.

³⁴Stamm, 269.

³⁵For a discussion of the interplay between hospitality and boundaries, see Christine D. Pohl, *Making Room: Recovering Hospitality as a Christian Tradition* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), particularly chapter 7, "The Fragility of Hospitality: Limits, Boundaries, Temptations," 127-149.

circumference is just a dot, nothing more. It is the circumference that marks the boundary of the circle. To eliminate the boundary is to eliminate the circle itself. The circle of faith cannot identify its center without recognizing its perimeter.”³⁶

The goal of fencing the table is not to create a boundary that is impermeable. Instead, we delineate one that is clearly marked, with an open invitation to all to enter. The boundary’s intent is less to keep people out than it is to mark a threshold that all are invited to cross. In faithfulness to the tradition of Wesley, a significant part of that invitation should be into a community of faith where there is accountable discipleship—which becomes an important part of fencing the table. In one sense, the eucharist does not create the boundary, but it lets us see where the boundary is. So the invitation is given. This is God’s table. All who are earnestly seeking God’s grace, in repentance, are invited to God’s feast.

³⁶Thomas Oden, *The Rebirth of Orthodoxy: Signs of New Life in Christianity* (New York: Harper San Francisco, 2003), 131.



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