

ECUMENICAL ATTRIBUTES OF METHODISM IN THE CZECH LANDS¹

by Joyce Michael

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Dr. S.T. Kimbrough might have been describing Czech Methodism when he declared that “fore-shadowings of a decidedly *ecumenical* spirit pervaded...early missionary efforts...in the Baltic States, Russia and Siberia/Manchuria...”² Indeed, his citation of the World Service Report of 1923 calls to mind a statement made in 1921 regarding the decision to organize Methodist congregations in Czechoslovakia. The World Service Report states that there is “every indication” that “...Methodism is to render its greatest service, by helping to revive vital religion within the Russian Orthodox Church.”³ Likewise, a proclamation issued in Czechoslovakia on August 25, 1921, emphasizes Methodism’s “...sincere purpose to cooperate with all existing Christian bodies in this land...” by making “our best contribution” to such groups.⁴ This ecumenical approach is in keeping with the policy for European missions that was adopted by the Methodist Episcopal Church, South in 1920. After asserting that “careful consideration should be given to the principles of comity and cooperation with other evangelical forces...in order to second their efforts...,” this document concludes that “special attention [should] be given...to existing Protestant Churches...with a view of aiding

¹The phrase, “the Czech lands,” primarily refers to the regions of Bohemia and Moravia. Although the Methodist movement also established some congregations in Slovakia during the First Republic of Czechoslovakia, the Methodist movement in Czechoslovakia began in Bohemia, and most of its congregations were established in that part of the country. Thus, this paper will focus on Methodism in the Czech lands. The term, “Evangelical Methodist Church,” will be used to refer to the Methodist Church in Czechoslovakia because that has been the official name of the denomination since its inception, although the term “United Methodist Church” is often used to identify the denomination currently.

² S T Kimbrough, Jr., ed. *Methodism in Russia and the Baltic States: History and Renewal* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1995) 171.

³ Ralph Diffendorfer, ed., *The World Service Report of the Methodist Episcopal Church* (Chicago: Methodist Book Concern, 1923) 220. Cited by Kimbrough 171.

⁴ *Protokol I. Schůze československé misie [Minutes of the First Meeting of the Czechoslovak Mission]* 1922: 29. Cited by Vilém Schneeberger in *Methodism in Czechoslovakia 1918-1992*, trans. B. and M. Malac (Praha: Evangelická církev metodistická [Prague: Evangelical Methodist Church], 2004) 25. (The Czech title of a work that is being cited will be translated only the first time that it is cited.)

Dr. Schneeberger became part of the Evangelical Methodist Church as a result of a revival movement that was initiated by young people following the Second World War. He served as the pastor of the Prague 2 congregation before becoming District Superintendent in 1968. After relinquishing that position in 1989, he returned to the parish ministry until his retirement in 1999. He is also a scholar of Wesley, as well as an author and translator.

and strengthening them by cooperation and in no case purposely weakening them by competition.”⁵

Rev. Josef Dobeš, the first Czech-American pastor sent by the Methodist Episcopal Church, South to serve in Czechoslovakia, must have valued this stance, insofar as he was part of the Free Reformed Church in Austria and Germany prior to being called to serve a Congregational Church in Connecticut. Dobeš’ involvement with Methodism began in 1906 when a district superintendent in Texas invited him to serve in an area where a number of Czech immigrants had settled. Similarly, his spiritual mentor, Václav Cejnar, originally was the pastor of a Czech Presbyterian Church in Austria and served Czech members of the Bethlehem Congregational Church in Chicago before the Methodist Episcopal Church, South asked him to work with Czech expatriates living in Texas. Apparently his ecumenical background predisposed Dobeš to recruit workers from the Unity of Brethren, the Evangelical Church of Czech Brethren (ECCB), and the Baptist Church to assist with the revival services that he began to hold in large tents at various locations in Prague after he arrived there in May, 1920. He charitably recalls: “I advised those who made a decision for Christ to join any Protestant Church, any one of their own preference.”⁶ Thus, it seems reasonable to conclude that Dobeš and his pioneering colleagues approached their task in Czechoslovakia with the sort of collaborative spirit that is affirmed in the passage in *Methodism in Russia and the Baltic States* which notes that the Methodist movement in Finland “...did not want to tear down anything that others had built, but instead [wanted] to work with other Christians to fulfill the work of God.”⁷

In 1925, Superintendent J. L. Neill stated that “in terms of membership, [the Czechoslovak mission] stands in third place among all the missions of the Methodist Episcopal Church South, just behind China and Korea.”⁸ It is likely that this initial success

⁵ “Policy in Europe,” Board of Mission of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South. Reprinted by Schneeberger as Appendix 1, 151.

⁶ Josef Dobeš, “Slovo na rozloučenou,” *Křesťanský buditel* [“A Parting Word,” *The Christian Advocate*] 1940: 4f. Cited by Schneeberger 24. (All references to *The Christian Advocate* are to the Czechoslovak version of that publication.)

⁷ Kimbrough 31.

⁸ *Protokol 4. výroční konference [Minutes of the Fourth Annual Conference]* 1925: p.15. Cited by Schneeberger, p. 48. Relatedly, the first chapter of *Methodism in Russia and the Baltic States* ends with this observation; “After the war, the Methodist Episcopal Church, South...began working in Europe.... Up to now [1928,] this work has been most successful in Czechoslovakia. “ p. 36.

Superintendent Neill was raised and educated in the United States, and served as the Conference Secretary of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South before arriving in Czechoslovakia in 1921. He was an advocate for the work in Czechoslovakia at Methodist Churches in the United States during extended visits in 1924 and 1925. Although he returned to Czechoslovakia with assurances of American interest and support, he told the 1925 Annual Conference that “...the Czechs must carry on this work by themselves. I have felt for some time, as I feel now, that it is not

resulted from the fact that the Methodist movement in Czechoslovakia was closely aligned with the linguistic and cultural heritage of the Czech lands and with the traditions of the Czech Reformation. Indeed, as early as 1877, Václav Pázdral – a Czech man, who became a member of the Wesleyan Methodist Church in Germany before starting a similar church in the Bohemian town of Kladno – emphasized the life-changing impact of receiving both bread and wine during communion.⁹ Thus, the first Methodist preacher in the Czech lands heartily affirmed the fundamental reform that Jan Hus initiated from his prison cell in Constance when he called for both bread and wine to be served to all communicants. Pázdral’s closeness to the heritage of the Czech Reformation was also demonstrated by the memorable speech that he delivered on the occasion of the 300th anniversary of the death of the noted Czech educator and final bishop of the original Unity of Brethren, John Amos Comenius.¹⁰

Likewise, Josef Dobeš paired his slogan, “Czech nation, return to Christ,” with a tendency to draw upon aspects of the Czech Reformation that had particular import for his hearers.¹¹ For example, the congregation that was formed as a result of Dobeš’ first tent meetings in Prague-Vršovice initially worshipped at the Church of St. Martin-in-the-Wall, where communion “in both kinds” was first served in 1414. Dobeš captures a sense of the parallel between the Eucharist that was celebrated in the autumn of 1414 and that which he administered on May 15, 1921 when he writes: “The first members were originally either from the Catholic Church, or had been unbelievers or unchurched. That is why Holy Communion had such special meaning for them.... Before, they had only been served the bread; now they would also receive the wine.”¹² The enduring significance of this event and of the precedent set by Hus’ ground-breaking mandate is given compelling expression by the

desirable to call too many Americans here; God will call enough young Czechs....” (*Protokol 4. výroční konference 1925*: p. 15. Cited by Schneeberger, p. 60.

⁹ In a hand-written account, Pázdral recalls: “On June 1, 1877, my wife and I, and our son [Methodius], set out on a journey to the Wesleyan Methodists in Wurttemberg. On June 15, 1877 (...), my soul found peace with God. On June 29th, my wife and I received, for the first time, Holy Communion with both bread and wine.... On November 15th, I made a covenant with my gracious God[, and] on December 19th, we returned home....” (Schneeberger, p. 9)

¹⁰ Josef Barták also preached about Hus in southern Bohemia in the early 1920s. Furthermore, in 1922, he announced that “the first Hussite services since 1620 would be held” in Třeboň, and he wrote a book entitled *John Hus in Constance* which was published in 1935. (Schneeberger, p. 35)

Although Barták grew up in Bohemia, he followed Cejnar to the United States, where he completed his seminary education. Subsequently, he served a Czech congregation in Chicago, prior to returning to Czechoslovakia where he was a pastor and a District Superintendent before being taken to a Nazi concentration camp. Eventually, the Germans sent him to the United States in exchange for a German prisoner. Although Rev. Barták returned to Czechoslovakia after the war, he had to go into exile in Austria in 1950 because he held American citizenship. (see Schneeberger, p.29-30.)

¹¹ Schneeberger, p. 21.

¹² Schneeberger, p. 27.

exiled, twentieth-century Czech theologian, Jan Milič Lochman, who reminds us that “[f]or the Hussites, the Lord’s Supper was much more than a mere ceremony.... The blood of Christ is the bond of salvation for all the people of God.... In the presence of the Lord, all distinctions dissolve; all the children of God join in their common heritage.”¹³

The chalice, “which symbolized the equality of all believers before God” from the very start of the Hussite movement, remains a key symbol on Methodist church buildings and in Methodist worship settings to this very day.¹⁴ Furthermore, “Articles of Faith,” that were published by the Methodist Mission in 1923, includes a paragraph “Regarding communion in both kinds,” which asserts that “[t]he Cup of our Lord should not be withheld from common people because both elements of the Lord’s Supper should be served to all Christians, according to Christ’s command and instructions.”¹⁵ This statement is in keeping with the Methodist understanding of the Eucharist that is articulated in the communion hymn in which Charles Wesley proclaims: “Your blood for sinners intercedes/Redemption for the world to gain,” as well as in John Wesley’s translation of a hymn entitled, “Jesus, Your Blood and Righteousness” which was written by the Moravian count Nicolaus L. von Zizendorf.¹⁶

It may also be noteworthy that Methodist churches in Czechoslovakia were often given names that had great historical and spiritual significance for the descendants of the Czech Reformation. For example, the church that was built in Plzeň in 1927, following an especially an especially successful evangelistic crusade, was called “Bethlehem Chapel,” in honor of the place where Jan Hus began to preach his challenging sermons in 1396. The original Bethlehem Chapel, which was completed in 1394, was intended to be “...a house of bread where common folk...could fill themselves with...God’s holy word.”¹⁷ Other Methodist churches built in the Czech lands during the early 1920s were also named

¹³ Jan Milič Lochman, *Christ and Prometheus?: A Quest for Theological Identity* (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1988), p. 7

¹⁴ Jiří Otter, *Pět okruhů Prahou po stopách české reformace [Five Circuits Through Prague in the Footsteps of the Czech Reformation]* (Praha: Kalich [Prague: Chalice], 2005), p. 35. (Citation trans. J. Michael)

¹⁵ *Články Víry a Všeobecná pravidla církve metodistické [The Articles of Faith and General Bylaws of the Methodist Church]* (Praha: Metodistická Misie Odbor Literární [Prague: Department of Literature of the Methodist Mission], 1923), p. 7. (citation trans. J. Michael)

¹⁶ Charles Wesley, “Victim Divine, Your Grace We Claim,” *Lutheran Book of Worship* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House 1978), p. 202. The fourth verse of Zinzendorf’s hymn declares: “Lord, I believe, were sinners more / Than sands upon the ocean shore, / You have for all a ransom paid, / For all a full atonement made.” *Lutheran Book of Worship*, p.302.

A chalice in front of a Bible was part of the logo of the Evangelical Methodist Church as early as 1923, and continues to demarcate the courtyard entrance to the District Office on Ječná Street. However, the United Methodist symbol of the cross and flame has now been placed above the Ječná Street entrance.

¹⁷ Jiří Otter, *Pět okruhů*, p.35. Citation trans. J. Michael.

“Bethlehem” or “Hus” Chapel.¹⁸ Thus, the plea that Hus made from prison just a month before his martyrdom was fulfilled centuries later by a Protestant denomination with British roots, as well as by indigenous Czech churches. On June 10, 1415, Hus wrote: “...I entreat you...to support Bethlehem Chapel as far as God shall permit his holy word to be preached there. I trust that God will preserve that chapel..., and cause greater good to be done there by others than by me, his unprofitable servant.”¹⁹ The Bethlehem and Hus Chapels, that arose as a result of Methodist mission work, were committed to faithfully preserving and interpreting the Holy Scriptures, which were identified by the Methodist Articles of Faith as “containing everything needed for salvation”.²⁰ Thus, indirect confirmation appears to have been given of the enthusiastic analysis that Martin Luther ventured in 1562 when he asked: “How could...Jan Hus ever have reached the point in [his] lifetime where [he] could be in all places? But now that [he is] dead, [he is] made to appear everywhere. In every pulpit, one must cope with him...”²¹

This appraisal of Hus’ impact may seem to be far removed in time and space from Methodism’s arrival in the Republic of Czechoslovakia in the twentieth century. However, the letters, which Czech pastors serving in the United States wrote to the Methodist Episcopal Church, South asking for a Methodist mission to be established in their homeland, emphasized that “Methodism owed a special debt to the Czech lands, since it was the cradle of the *Unitas Fratrum* (Moravians)” who sought to faithfully advance Hus’ principles of reform.²² Those requests also stressed that “John Wesley was led to his ‘heart-warming experience’ through the work of Moravian missionaries from Herrnhut...”²³ Wesley subsequently went to meet with the descendants of the Czech Reformation who had settled at Herrnhut after being forced into exile during the harsh Counter-reformation period. However, Wesley severed his ties with the Moravians who had once been his spiritual mentors when

¹⁸ For example, there was a Bethlehem Chapel in Sedlec, and there were Hus Chapels in Protivin, Sedlčany, Bernartice, and Stráž nad Nežákou.

¹⁹ Jan Hus, letter “To all the Faithful People of Bohemia,” 10 June 1415, in Jiří Otter, *The Witness of Czech Protestantism* (Praha: Kalich[Prague, Chalice], 1970), p. 31

²⁰ *Články Víry a Všeobecná pravidla církve metodistické*. 2. Citation trans. J. Michael.

²¹ Thomas A. Fudge, “‘The Shouting Hus’: Heresy Appropriated as Propaganda in the Sixteenth Century,” *Communio Viatorum* XXXVII. 3 (1999): p. 197.

²² Schneeberger, p. 16.

²³ *Ibid.* A description of the migration that occurred during the Counter-reformation, written by Czech Methodists from Bulgaria, states that “[a]fter the Battle of White Mountain...when the Czech lands suffered from bitter religious disputes, our forefathers decided to leave their native land in order to preserve their faith.” R. Růžičková, “Mikulov na moravě,” *Oběžník* [“Mikolov in Moravia,” *Memorandum*] 59: 7. Cited by Schneeberger, p. 87. Since there were no Methodists in 1620, the forefathers of the Czech Bulgarians who returned to their homeland in 1949 and 1950 are likely to have been heirs of the Czech Reformation.

irreconcilable theological differences became evident. Nevertheless, Amedeo Molnár's assertion that "[t]he Brethren tradition has touched Wesley and Methodism in several ways" suggests that some notable traces of the Brethren's perspective may be evident in Wesley's thought.²⁴

Although it is beyond the scope of this paper to explore this hypothesis in detail, it may be useful to note that the forerunners of the Herrnhut community and the Moravian, Brethren with whom Wesley had contact were the *Unitas Fratrum* (Czech: *Jednota bratrská* / English: the Unity of Brethren.) Initially, the Unity "... concentrated on forming [a] committed fellowship of resolute disciples of Jesus outside the main stream of society..." and served to radiate "...the spirit of Christ into the surrounding culture indirectly, but effectively."²⁵ Yet, as time went on, the *Unitas Fratrum* became more actively involved in fostering religious devotion through publishing activities, and, in the wake of the Counter-reformation, its dispersed membership established mission operations in many corners of the world.²⁶ Thus, Lochman asserts that the Unity of Brethren became "...the one group to emerge from the crucible of the fifteenth century Bohemian reform[ation] which was able to manifest singular qualities of tenacity and endurance."²⁷ Thereby, the *Unitas Fratrum* aptly fulfilled Comenius' hope that its exiled members would function as a "hidden seed" throughout the world.²⁸

References to Moravian Christians in *Methodism in Russia and the Baltic States* provide evidence of the extensive territory over which the exiled Unity of Brethren spread their legacy, while simultaneously suggesting that fundamental connections exist between Methodists and Moravians. It may be more than mere coincidence that a Ukrainian soldier named Yasinisky, who converted to Methodism and taught Bible at Methodist schools prior to his ordination in Russia, was reared in a Moravian household.²⁹ It may be more than a

²⁴ Amedeo Molnár, "Místo metodismu v rodině reformačních církví," *Metodismus v rodině církví* ["The Place of Methodism in the Family of Reformation Churches," *Methodism in the Family of Churches*] (Praha: Evangelická církev metodistická) [Prague: Evangelical Methodist Church, 2002], p. 9.

²⁵ Lochman, p. 11

²⁶ In the remote Moravian village of Kunwald, a building located on the spot where the *Unitas Fratrum* worshipped prior to their expulsion from the Czech lands in 1621, now contains a pictorial exhibit which illustrates the many places where the dispersed descendants of the Unity of Brethren are currently involved in mission.

²⁷ David R. Holeton, "Church or Sect: The Jednota bratrská and the Growth of Dissent from Mainline Utraquism," *Communio Viatorum* XXXVII.1 (1999), p. 5.

²⁸ Comenius' image of the "hidden seed" is mentioned by Jiří Otter in *The First United Church in the Heart of Europe: The Evangelical Church of Czech Brethren*, trans. J. Otter and L. G. Matheson (Praha: Kalich [Prague: Chalice], 1992), p. 40. Otter supports Holeton's conclusion when he observes that, "[i]n spite of continuous persecutions, small groups of secret...Protestants, called the 'Quiet in the Land' or the 'Hidden Seed', gathered together illegally for secret worship in remote places in the forests, rocks, and caves."

²⁹ Kimbrough, p. 77.

chance occurrence that a Moravian lay preacher named Karl Krum was one of two men who were instrumental in beginning the evangelistic services that led to the formation of the first Methodist congregation in Estonia.³⁰ It may not be an accident that Alfred Freiberg, a Moravian pastor in Latvia, “became [so] absorbed in Wesleyan and Methodist literature” that he and his 125 member congregation eventually joined the Methodist church in Liejapa.³¹ Dr. Kimbrough logically concludes that “...the main body of the Liejapa Methodist Church had its origin outside of Methodism and through contact with Methodists and the Wesleyan tradition discovered its own identity.”³² Yet, the fact that a lecture entitled, “Methodism is a child of the Reformation,” was given on the afternoon that Freiberg’s congregation united with the Methodist church seems to indicate that both groups were aware of shared features that may enable Moravians and Methodists to enter into particularly fulfilling relationships. On that occasion, special mention was made of “...Wesley’s association with Moravian believers on his ocean voyage [to] America and his conversion [at] the Moravian meeting place in Aldersgate...”³³

A similar pattern was evident in Czechoslovakia where descendents of the old *Unitas Fratrum*, which was reconstituted in its homeland after the First World War, eventually embraced the resolution calling for the unification of all Protestant denominations, that was adopted by the 1933 Annual Conference of the Czechoslovak Evangelical Methodist Church. Initially, other Protestant denominations did not respond to this resolution; however, by 1938, consultations had been held with representatives of the Baptists, the ECCB, and the Unity of Brethren. In 1943, the latter group issued a joint statement with the Methodists, which declared: “The Evangelical Methodist Church and the Unity of Brethren have agreed, with God’s help, to create, either alone or with other denominations..., a United Church that will stand on the foundations of the old *Unitas Fratrum* in doctrine, as well as church organization... so that we can more successfully develop our evangelistic and mission outreach... and through these... establish the dominion of our King, Jesus Christ, in the land of our forefathers, as well as in the most remote lands.”³⁴

³⁰ Ibid , pp.131, 151.

³¹ Ibid, p. 113.

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid, p. 115.

³⁴ V. Našinec, *Kronika ECM (Chronicles of the Evangelical Methodist Church)*, p. 860. Cited by Schneeberger, p. 77. Relatedly, an organization called the Union of Protestant Churches was established in 1927 to foster “...the closest working cooperation... and mutual understanding between the brothers and sisters of all denominations.” (Schneeberger, p. 73).

A very different understanding of church union was expressed by Superintendent Josef Barták when he reflected on the union of Presbyterian, Congregational, and Methodist Churches in Canada in these terms: "...[W]hy could not Protestant Churches here achieve this unification [sooner] by becoming autonomous members of this Church?"³⁵ This statement seems to suggest that at a certain point the traditions of the Methodist Church, rather than those of the *Unitas Fratrum*, were viewed as constituting the necessary foundation for the proposed union of Czech denominations. Likewise, the fact that negotiations regarding the anticipated merger with the Unity of Brethren ceased when the Nazi occupation ended invites the conclusion that Czechoslovak Methodists felt compelled to adopt the doctrines, structure, and name of the *Unitas Fratrum* because the war had cut them off from the American Church. Yet, insofar as church leaders refused to link their original calls for union with the economic difficulties that were brought about by the Depression, it may be reasonable to hypothesize that the proposed merger between the Unity of Brethren and Czechoslovak Methodists was based on more than financial needs and organizational necessities.³⁶

John Wesley's split with the Moravians has been well-documented and carefully analyzed. However, significant parallels between the reform movement that Wesley inaugurated and the foci of the original members of the *Unitas Fratrum* may merit consideration. Historical evidence suggests that "...the Brethren did not set out to break with Utraquism any more than the Puritans in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries [and Wesleys' followers in the eighteenth century] set out to leave the Church of England." Each of these streams of renewal "...began as reformist movements within their respective national churches who saw the work of their inherited reformations as only half done."³⁷ In particular,

³⁵ J. P. Barták, "Stanovisko církve metodistické k otázce sjednocení evangelických církví," *Křesťanský buditel* ["The Position of the Methodist Church on the Unification of Protestant Churches," *The Christian Advocate*] 1940, p. 6. Cited by Schneeberger, p. 76.

³⁶ The Declaration on Church Union that was passed by the 1933 Annual Conference of the Evangelical Methodist Church included this disclaimer: "We absolutely reject the idea of unification, if based on material needs caused by the present world economic crisis because we see [this] as evidence of a lack of faith in God.... [However], although we reject the basic notion of church unification at this time, when motivations for this would be mixed with...the need for earthly security, at the same time, we sincerely desire closer cooperation and unity.... We pray that God would soon fulfill the pastoral prayer of our Lord Jesus that all would become one.... We desire the increase of spiritual gifts, flowing from the collective, rich spiritual experiences of the believers who are now dispersed in various denominations.... We wish...that the joint Church would truly be the living church of Christ...; that it [would] become a great moral power to be reckoned with in public life, in the nation, and the entire world..." "Resolution on Church Unification," Schneeberger, Appendix 2, p.154.

³⁷ Holeton 35. My parenthetical addition to this citation reflects the fact that John Wesley never broke with the Anglican Church, and only reluctantly, approved the establishment of an independent Methodist Church in the 'new world' at the time of the American revolution.

when "... a small group [of believers]...settled at Kunwald...in a remote part of northeast Bohemia, their retreat was not driven primarily by doctrinal differences with Utraquism, but rather [by] a zeal for moral perfection and spiritual intensity."³⁸ Although John Wesley often engaged in doctrinal debates with the Moravians, his stress on the importance of nurturing habits of personal holiness and spiritual discipline is undeniable. Likewise, the Unity's "...emphatic insistence that a true and serious reform of the church must have social-ethical and social-critical dimensions" has a clear parallel in aspects of Wesley's work that were focused on promoting social justice.³⁹ Wesley's disapproval of the comfortable life-style that was cultivated by some Anglican clergy is in keeping with the Unity's perception that its leaders should practice humble submission to God, rather than being driven by a prideful pursuit of power and wealth.⁴⁰ Likewise, the Unity's efforts to foster learning and preserve culture through extensive publishing activities are akin to Wesley's attempts to make affordable copies of his prolific literary output available to the underprivileged masses of British society.⁴¹

In addition, some of Wesley's key theological concerns appear to have been shared by John Amos Comenius, who 'first and foremost, considered himself to be a theologian.'⁴² As such, Comenius "... [felt] free to use the expression 'justify by works,' which provoked horror among orthodox theologians of the Reformation. But he [made] justification by work dependent on the acceptance of grace which necessarily precedes it."⁴³ Reverberations of Wesley's emphasis on the dynamic relationship which pertains between prevenient grace and the responsibility to serve others in response to that grace can be heard in this analysis of

³⁸ Holeton 10.

³⁹ Lochman 11.

⁴⁰ This feature of the Unity's distinctive emphasis may be summarized in this way: "In contrast to Hussite warriors, the Brethren, 'as people with no sword,' stressed the uncompromising following of Jesus Christ as the 'Silent King' and the 'Lamb of God' on his 'narrow way.'" Otter, *The First Unified Church*, p.19.

⁴¹ The extent to which the Catholic Church was threatened by the publishing activities which the *Unitas Fratrum* carried out prior to 1620 is intimated by the fact that after the St. James Day Mandate was issued in 1508, "Brethren books were seized and burned, and calls went out for further confiscation and destruction of the objectionable materials. A moratorium was issued against Brethren publishing and their printing presses were shut down." Such policies became even more oppressive during the reign of Ferdinand 1 (1526-64), who eventually decreed that "...all persons dealing in heretical books were to be drowned...." However, "[t]he Unity continued to publish from clandestine presses," which "...were frequently...moved to avoid detection and destruction." Thomas A. Fudge. "The Problem of Religious Liberty in Early Modern Bohemia," *Communio Viatorum* XXXVII.1 (1999), pp. 73, 77, 78.

It is interesting to note that communist authorities similarly sought to restrict church publications. Yet, the Evangelical Methodist Church continued to prepare mimeographed booklets "'in the dark' (illegally), without any prior approval of the censors." (Schneeberger, p. 138) Thus, it appears that printed materials were valued as highly in Methodist circles in the second half of the twentieth century as they were after the Battle of White Mountain.

⁴² Josef Smolik, "Comenius on Justification and Sanctification," *Communio Viatorum* X.2 (1198), p.137.

⁴³ *Ibid*, p. 137.

Comenius' perspective. Furthermore, although Comenius' treatment of the "concept of justification" is quite complex, there may be an affinity between Comenius' reflections on the human potential to 'participate in the divinity of Christ' and Wesley's views about about what it means to be perfected in love.⁴⁴ Wesley's emphasis on human evil may reflect a somewhat different understanding of human nature than which informs Comenius' rejection of "a preliminary negative view of the world and of the human being."⁴⁵ However, echoes of Wesley's stress on the human being's divine capacity to accept and embody the unconditional love that seeks to be related to humankind may be heard in Comenius' assertion that "...it is a sign of...human lack of gratitude that we...acknowledge in ourselves the power of the old Adam, but do not use the power of the new Adam. May we restrain from putting limits on the grace of God, which he distributes so widely."⁴⁶

A comparison of the theological insights advanced by the last bishop of the *Unitas Fratrum* and the understandings expounded by John Wesley may elucidate the formative influence that the Moravians' ancestors had on Methodism, while simultaneously inviting a deeper analysis of the points at which Wesley's perspective diverged from the position that had been adopted by the descendents of the *Unitas Fratrum*. Notwithstanding those differences, the fact that Methodist pastors were sometimes invited to speak at events commemorating Hus' martyrdom and Comenius' life suggests that Czech Protestants recognized a connection between the two traditions. A similar awareness may have led the Evangelical Church of Czech Brethren, which also cherishes the legacy of Hus and Comenius, to invite Methodist pastors to preach to their congregations on the two-hundredth anniversary of Wesley's Aldersgate experience.⁴⁷

The ecumenical spirit of Czech Methodism continues to be evident in the present time, as Rev. Josef Červeňák, the first District Superintendent of Czech ancestry to be born and raised as a Methodist, carefully nurtures this tradition.⁴⁸ The respect that Superintendent

⁴⁴ Ibid. pp. 139-40.

⁴⁵ Ibid. p. 141.

⁴⁶ Ibid. p. 141.

⁴⁷ Schneeberger, p. 76. As noted previously, in 1892, the founder of the Methodist congregation in Kaldno delivered a speech that "electrified" his hearers on the occasion of the 300th anniversary of Comenius' death. (Schneeberger, p. 11) Moreover, even during communist times, the bishop of the Central Conference of Europe was permitted to visit Czechoslovakia on the occasion of the 500th anniversary of the establishment of the *Unitas Fratrum*. (Schneeberger, p. 101).

⁴⁸ Superintendent Červeňák's family was among the Methodists who returned to the Czech lands in 1949/50 after having been in exile in Bulgaria. Rev. Červeňák was educated at the Comenius Theological Faculty in Prague, before serving congregations in Jihlava, Bratislava, and Prague. He has been the District Superintendent since 1989. Superintendent Červeňák's wife and daughter are both engaged in Diaconal work with handicapped persons, and his son is actively involved in ecumenical and congregational activities as well. Family is an extremely important

Červeňák commands other church leaders in the Czech Republic may be demonstrated by the fact that on January 1, 2005, he was the only head of a small, non-indigenous Czech denomination who was chosen to deliver a spoken meditation at an interdenominational worship service that also featured leaders of the Roman Catholic, Hussite, ECCB, and Silesian Lutheran Churches. Similarly, at an international ecumenical gathering that was held in Prague in May 2005, Superintendent Červeňák was one of three Czech participants in an event entitled, “The Voice of the Church in Europe: a Bishops’ Forum,” which also included church leaders from Slovakia, Poland, Hungary, Germany, and Austria.⁴⁹ Superintendent Červeňák’s deep commitment to ecumenical relationships may be illustrated by his report to the 2002 Annual Conference, which contains the following admission: “It is sometimes difficult to realize that churches are not able to be more united, more like-minded... [and it] grieves us whenever denominations have difficulty coming to an understanding among themselves.”⁵⁰ Elsewhere, however, Superintendent Červeňák warmly declares that all-in-all, the Christian community in the Czech Republic is “a beautiful family of churches” and he balances his belief that United Methodism provides people with a unique opportunity to live according to biblical Christianity with the bold observation that “[t]o be a Methodist is to be ecumenical.”⁵¹ It thus appears that Czech Methodism’s ecumenical heritage remains strong in this new century.

component of Rev. Červeňák’s understanding of life and faith.

⁴⁹ Program booklet for “S setkání křesťanů, Praha 2005: Pozvání k naději” [Gathering of Christians, Prague 2005: Invitation to Hope]. In speaking with Superintendent Červeňák about the respect that other denominational leaders have for him, he graciously concluded that every member of the Czech Ecumenical Council of Churches commands equal respect, before using the analogy of his own extended family to illustrate the sense of kinship that characterizes the Czech Ecumenical Council of Churches. (Josef Červeňák, Conversation with J. Michael, 6 October 2005.)

⁵⁰ *Zprávy k 65. Výroční konferenci* [Reports of the Sixty-fifth Annual Conference] 2002, pp. 3 and 7. (citation trans. J. Michael)

⁵¹ *Zprávy k 65. Výroční konferenci* 2002, p. 3, and (Josef Červeňák, Conversation with J. Michael, 6 October 2005.)