

“REDEEMING THE TIME”: THE MAKING OF EARLY AMERICAN METHODISM

By

Michael Kenneth Turner

Dissertation

Submitted to the Faculty of the  
Graduate School of Vanderbilt University  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

in

Religion

May, 2009

Nashville, Tennessee

Approved:

Dean James Hudnut-Beumler

Professor M. Douglas Meeks

Professor James P. Byrd

Professor Dennis C. Dickerson

Copyright ©2009 by Michael Kenneth Turner  
All Rights Reserved

To my ever-supportive and loving wife, Stephanie

and

To my father, Thomas, who helped every step of the way

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The idea for this dissertation took nascent form during my time as a participant in the 2006 Wesley Studies Seminar. I am very grateful for the fellowship from Duke Divinity School that enabled me to participate in the seminar and do early research on the dissertation. In particular, I would like to thank that group's helpful leader and organizer, Dr. Richard Heitzenrater. I am also appreciative of the conversations, suggestions, and encouragement I received from Dean Lacey Warner (Duke Divinity School), Dr. Jason Vickers (United Theological Seminary), Dr. Sarah Lancaster (Methodist Theological School of Ohio), Dr. Rex Matthews (Candler School of Theology), and Dr. Steve McCormick (Nazarene Theological Seminary) both during and following the seminar.

I am also thankful for all my colleagues and mentors at Vanderbilt University. First and foremost, I would like to thank the members of my dissertation committee. Dean James Hudnut-Beumler, my chair, is among the most knowledgeable students of American Religious History that I know. I am very grateful for his guidance through the program. Dr. M. Douglas Meeks not only possesses a rich and thorough understanding of theology and Wesleyan history, but is also a continual source of encouragement. He has been one of my biggest supporters at Vanderbilt. I am very appreciative of the opportunities and confidence he regularly places in me. Dr. Dennis C. Dickerson is among the most skilled historians I know. I am particularly grateful for his teaching me that Methodism in American cannot be fully understood until one takes into account the disenfranchised and rival Wesleyan traditions that appeared in response to the actions and shortcomings of the Methodist Episcopal Church. I would also like to

thank the multi-talented, Dr. James P. Byrd. Beyond being a knowledgeable historian of American religion, Jimmy has been a helpful advocate and guide through the rocky terrain of graduate education.

There are a number of professors and friends who have helped me both with this project and throughout my schooling. During my time as a student at Candler School of Theology, I received tremendous mentorship and encouragement from my advisor Dr. E. Brooks Holifield, Dr. Gary Laderman, and Dr. W. Steven Gunter. While at Vanderbilt University, I had the good fortune of working with a variety of talented faculty members and students. I am particularly thankful to Dr. Dale Johnson, Dr. Kathleen Flake, Dr. Patout Burns, the late Dr. Howard Harrod, Dr. Michael Stephens, Professor Miles S. Mullins, and Rev. Mark E. Reynolds. I am also thankful to my dear friends Fred and Teresa Dailey; they graciously allowed me to utilize their home as an office during a portion of the document's writing.

Nobody was as important to me in the completion of this dissertation than my family. I am very grateful for the support and encouragement I received from my siblings, Noelle, Nathaniel, and Seneca, as well as my parents, Fran, Dan, Nancy, and Thomas, and my late great aunts, Bea and Ruby.

I have dedicated this dissertation to two people who were particularly helpful in its preparation, my wife Stephanie and my father Dr. Thomas N. Turner. Stephanie has supported me, suffering and rejoicing in every step of the graduate process. My father, who teaches at the University of Tennessee, inspired in my love of history at an early age. He read every word of this dissertation and made innumerable suggestions that have helped shape it into a better document.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
<b>DEDICATION</b> .....	<b>iii</b>
<b>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS</b> .....	<b>iv</b>
<b>I. INTRODUCTION</b> .....	<b>1</b>
A. General Overview.....	1
B. Relationship to Recent Scholarship .....	6
C. Contribution of this Study .....	16
D. Chapter Outline .....	17
<b>II. FOUNDING</b> .....	<b>21</b>
A. Methodism and the New World .....	21
1. The Accidental Rise of Methodism .....	21
2. The Cry for Structure.....	23
3. Challenges of the American Context.....	26
4. The Ordinance Controversy.....	31
B. The Architects of American Methodism .....	33
1. Wesley’s Plan .....	33
2. Wesley’s Missionaries to the New World.....	40
3. Asbury and Coke .....	44
C. The Christmas Conference.....	50
1. Christmas Eve Sessions .....	50
2. The Thirteenth General Conference.....	53
D. Conclusion: Consolidating the Movement.....	63
<b>III. ENTHUSIASM</b> .....	<b>65</b>
A. Enthusiasm and Methodism.....	65
1. Worship and Enthusiasm in Early Methodism.....	65
2. Quarterly Meetings and Methodist Enthusiasm.....	69
3. Methodism and the Great Revival Trend in the Early Republic .....	72
B. The Camp Meeting Phenomena.....	77
1. The Rise of Camp Meetings .....	77
2. Camp Meeting Excesses .....	80
3. Defending the Meetings.....	84
C. Enthusiasm and its Discontents.....	85
1. The Formalists.....	86
2. Limits and Quarterly Meetings .....	89
3. Correcting Excess.....	93
D. Conclusion: Enthusiasm Tempered .....	97

<b>IV. CHALLENGES.....</b>	<b>101</b>
A. The High Church Critique.....	101
1. The Danger of Populism: Charles Wesley’s Critique.....	101
2. Authority Sustained: John Wesley’s Response.....	108
B. The Republican Critique.....	111
1. The Council.....	111
2. James O’Kelly and the Presbyterian Critique.....	114
3. Authority Decried: Schism and the Conference of 1792.....	120
4. Authority Sustained: The Aftermath.....	123
C. The African Methodist Critique.....	127
1. A Methodist Among Methodists: Richard Allen.....	128
2. Allen’s Critique.....	130
3. A House Divided: The Formation of the A.M.E. Church.....	133
D. Conclusion: Denominational Methodism.....	135
<b>V. THE WESLEYANS.....</b>	<b>137</b>
A. Methodism on Two Continents.....	137
1. Parallels.....	137
2. Differences.....	140
B. Early Tensions.....	145
1. Wesley and the Bishops.....	145
2. The Controversy of 1787.....	146
3. Asbury, Wesley, and the Dynamics of Power.....	151
C. Later Tensions.....	154
1. The Precarious Place of Dr. Coke.....	154
2. Coke and Two Methodisms.....	160
3. Controversy and the Conference of 1808.....	165
D. Conclusion: Toward a National Methodism.....	173
<b>VI. NATIONALISM.....</b>	<b>174</b>
A. Early Appeals to the Nation.....	174
1. The Washington Correspondence.....	175
2. The Constitutionalist.....	177
3. William McKendree and the Episcopacy.....	183
B. The Changing Nation.....	193
1. America in 1816.....	194
2. The Rise of Nationalism.....	197
C. Methodism in Transition.....	199
1. The War and the Church.....	199
2. The Death of a Patriarch.....	203
D. Methodism and the “Era of Good Feelings”.....	206
1. Missions.....	206
2. Publishing.....	208
3. Education.....	210
4. The Sunday School.....	215
5. Theology.....	217

E. Conclusion: Growth and Change.....	224
<b>VII. REFORM.....</b>	<b>226</b>
A. Questioning Polity.....	226
1. The Continuing Debate Over the Episcopacy .....	226
2. The Debate Over Presiding Elders .....	229
3. The General Conference of 1820.....	234
B. The Reformers .....	241
1. The Push for Reform.....	241
2. Obstacles to Reform.....	247
3. Changing Directions.....	251
C. Organizing the Reform Movement .....	257
D. The Anti-Reformers.....	258
1. The Dorsey Incident .....	259
2. The Old Side Critique.....	261
3. The Anti-Reform Movement.....	266
E. Schism .....	269
1. Trials and Expulsions .....	269
2. The General Conference of 1828 and the Methodist Protestant Church.....	272
F. Summary and Conclusions.....	274
<b>VIII. CONCLUSION.....</b>	<b>277</b>
<b>BIBLIOGRAPHY.....</b>	<b>282</b>
A. General Sources .....	282
B. Primary Sources.....	282
1. Primary Sources: Collections .....	282
2. Primary Sources: Conference Proceedings.....	282
3. Primary Sources: Early Histories.....	283
4. Primary Sources: Journals, Letters, Diaries, and Autobiographies .....	284
5. Primary Materials: Sermons and Treatises.....	288
C. Secondary Sources .....	289
1. Secondary Sources: Historical Overviews.....	289
2. Secondary Sources: Early Republic.....	291
3. Secondary Sources: Biographies.....	292
4. Secondary Sources: Articles, 1783-1900 .....	294
5. Articles, 1901-1949 .....	294
6. Articles, 1950-1980 .....	294
7. Articles, 1981-present .....	295



## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

In the past twenty years, there has been a resurgence of interest in the study of American Methodism. Many of the most important studies produced in that time have understood the history of early American Methodism within the context of religious populism and enthusiasm. This characterization, while not entirely without warrant, is an oversimplification of the history of the movement. From its very beginnings in America, a portion of the fledgling denomination maintained strong ties to top to bottom religious hierarchy and sought to create a distinct class of educated, polished clergy. The purpose of this study is not to reject outright but rather, to refine the populist interpretation of the movement. In doing so, this study may challenge or at least call into question themes such as democracy, revival, and denominational identity.

#### A. General Overview

By the middle of the nineteenth century, Methodism had been firmly established as the most prominent religious movement in the United States. Between the years of 1775 and 1830, the Methodist Episcopal Church had ballooned in size from what had been a scattered confederation of societies with a total membership of 3, 148 members to a denominational body of approximately 476, 153.<sup>1</sup> Rapid denominational growth continued, and by 1850 that number nearly half million had

---

<sup>1</sup> David Hempton, *Methodism: Empire of the Spirit* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), 216.

more than tripled. This meant that nearly one of every fifteen Americans belonged to a Methodist church.<sup>2</sup> The major Methodist religious bodies had also become integral to nearly every aspect of American society by the middle of the nineteenth century. Methodists were pioneers in founding educational institutions, book publishing, and were intimately involved in the political life of the nation, being major moral and political advocates on issues such as slavery, abolitionism and temperance. Methodism was no longer solely the denomination of the rural and the poor but, in point of fact, was firmly ensconced in the upper echelons of society. In fact, the Methodists had reached such a level of prominence in American culture, that while campaigning for the presidency in 1867, Ulysses S. Grant remarked that there were three great parties in the United States – the Democrat Party, the Republican Party, and the Methodist Church.<sup>3</sup>

Methodism's move into the epicenter of culture represented a distinct shift from its image in pre-revolutionary America. In the late eighteenth century, the Methodists were widely attacked for being antithetical to the mores of American society. They were notorious if not famous for an uneducated clergy, enthusiastic revival practices and an allegedly antinomian theology. Methodists of the founding era were reviled as barbaric.<sup>4</sup> Recent studies of the Early Republic have contended that this characterization of early American Methodism supports the notion that the

---

<sup>2</sup> Nathan Hatch, "The Puzzle of American Methodism," *Church History* 63: 2 (1994), 11.

<sup>3</sup> Richard J. Carwardine, "Methodists, Politics, and the Coming of the American Civil War," in *Methodism and the Shaping of American Culture*, eds. Nathan O. Hatch and John H. Wigger (Nashville: Abingdon, 2001), 309.

<sup>4</sup> See, for instance, Philo Aletheias, "Some Remarks on the Nature, Causes, and Dangerous Errors, and Infectious Spread of the Present Enthusiasm in America," *United States Magazine* 1 (October 1779), 414.

religious movement was dramatically different from other variants of religion that previously gained significance in the United States. Notably, historians such as Nathan Hatch, characterize the rise of Methodism to prominence being directly related to their “barbarism.” Stressing its essentially populist character, Hatch contends, “The rise of evangelical Christianity in the early republic is...a story of the success of common people in shaping the culture after their own priorities.”<sup>5</sup> Hatch means by this that early American Methodism directly appealed to a post-revolutionary American citizenship that very much wanted to be in control of their own religious destiny. As this citizenship was largely uneducated and of the lower reaches of society, groups such as the Methodists spoke the language and invoked the culture of the people.

When seen in light of the analysis of Early Methodism put forth by scholars such as Hatch, Methodism’s move from a burgeoning counter-cultural movement to an organized, formal denomination seems like an abrupt shift away from the body’s originating values. In fact, Hatch and, other historians such as, John Wigger argued that Methodism underwent a dramatic qualitative change in the middle decades of the nineteenth century, where the Church’s religious populist stance was dramatically transformed by the desire for affluence and social respectability.<sup>6</sup>

However, embedded in this analysis, are some fundamental oversimplifications of Early American Methodist identity. While varieties of

---

<sup>5</sup> Nathan Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 9.

<sup>6</sup> John H. Wigger, *Taking Heaven by Storm: Methodism and the Rise of Popular Christianity in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998; reprint, Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2001), 190; Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity*, 193-209.

religious enthusiasm were prevalent in Early American Methodism, this was not the only means through which the religious body interacted with society. Russell Richey, in his 1991 study *Early American Methodism*, pointed out that Methodist identity was a multifarious entity in the Early Republic. Richey delineates four distinct voices<sup>7</sup> present in early American Methodism: a popular voice, a Wesleyan voice, an Anglican voice and a republican voice.<sup>8</sup> David Hempton's 2005 study, *Methodism: Empire of the Spirit*, follows this reasoning further, arguing that transatlantic Methodism was, fundamentally characterized by the tension between enlightenment and enthusiasm. According to Hempton, these two impulses were deeply embedded in Methodism and, subsequently, shaped the denomination in innumerable ways. While Hempton does not fully flesh out this argument, he does add a level of qualification to the unilaterally populist coloring placed on Methodism by much other recent historiography.<sup>9</sup>

Following the line of thought present in the works of scholars such as Richey and Hempton, the purpose of this study is to present a cogent overview of Early American Methodism and, most importantly, to identify the key tensions that contributed to the formalization of American Methodism in between the years of 1784-1835.<sup>10</sup> To use the language of denominational studies, this project is seeking to understand the transition of the Methodist Episcopal Church from a

---

<sup>7</sup> This essay was also published in the April 1990 issue of *Methodist History*.

<sup>8</sup> Russell E. Richey, *Early American Methodism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991), 83.

<sup>9</sup> Hempton, *Methodism: Empire of the Spirit*, 32.

<sup>10</sup> The dates of 1784 to 1835 encompass the period between the founding of the Methodist Episcopal Church and the death of the Church's fourth Bishop, William McKendree.

“Constitutional Confederacy” to a “Corporation.”<sup>11</sup> Certainly, this transition was furthered through Methodism’s attempt to respond to the growing needs of the nation through the creation of voluntary societies and the expansion of the educational ministry of the Church. However, ideologically this transition has distinctive roots from the Methodist Episcopal Church’s very beginnings in American society. Notably, American Methodists were constantly and consistently engaged in an ongoing self-identification discussion about what it meant to be an *American* Methodist. During its first decades, leaders of the Methodist Episcopal Church were engaged in an active dialogue concerning issues such as ecclesiology, nationalism, theological identity, missionary enterprises, religious enthusiasm and ties with British Methodism. Central to all of these concerns was a fundamental desire by leaders to build a great American denomination complete with educational, missionary, and theological voices.

Methodism’s transition from a burgeoning counter-cultural religious movement into the quintessentially “American” denomination was neither sudden nor a matter of happenstance. In fact, the characteristic tension of early American Methodism - and one that resonates with contemporary Methodism as well - is that between formalism and populism. This tension between populism and formalism, which was visible before the Church’s foundation in 1784, would be integral in shaping the denomination during its formative years. The essential argument of this

---

<sup>11</sup> Craig Dykstra and James Hudnut-Beumler, “The National Organizational Structures of Protestant Denominations: An Invitation to Conversation,” in *The Organizational Revolution: Presbyterians and American Denominationalism*, ed. Milton J. Coalter, John M. Mulder, and Louis B. Weeks (Louisville, KY: Westminster, 1992), 308-15. See also, Russell E. Richey, “History as a Bearer of Denominational Identity: Methodism as a Case Study,” in *Perspectives on American Methodism: Interpretive Essays*, ed. Russell E. Richey, Kenneth E. Rowe, and Jean Miller Schmidt (Nashville: Kingswood Books, 1993).

dissertation is that it was through the dialectical tension between populism and formalism that the Methodist Episcopal Church took its shape as the premiere religious denomination in the United States in the years between 1784 and 1835. The incipient formalism of the founding period of the Church's history resonated strongly with the basic ethos of the Church in 1835.

### **B. Relationship to Recent Scholarship**

This project is, partially, an outgrowth of the ongoing debate concerning Methodism in the Early Republic that has raged on in recent historiography. The principle focus of these debates has been on the issue of populism and early American Methodism. The historiography has differed on the extent of the democratic or egalitarian tendencies attributed to the Methodists in this period.<sup>12</sup> The writings of Nathan Hatch and his scholastic supporters represent one side of this debate. As previously stated, Hatch's work on American Methodism in the late colonial and Early Republic periods has emphasized the ecstatic and revolutionary nature of the denomination. His most pivotal work was *The Democratization of American Christianity*, which was published in 1989. In this study Hatch contended

---

<sup>12</sup> There are a few other studies of importance that will not be covered in this essay. Notably, Christopher Owen, *The Sacred Flame of Love: Methodism and Society in Nineteenth-Century Georgia* (Athens, Ga.: University of Georgia Press, 1998) is an interesting study of Methodism in nineteenth-century Georgia. Owen's book, an expanded dissertation from Emory University, is strongest in its analysis of mid and late nineteenth century southern Methodism. Likewise, William H. Williams, *The Garden of American Methodism: the Delmarva Peninsula, 1769-1820* (Wilmington, Del.: Scholarly Resources, Inc., 1984) and Dee Andrews, *The Methodists and Revolutionary America, 1760-1800: the Shaping of an Evangelical Culture* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2000) are both excellent social histories of American Methodism, strongest in their assessment of Methodism and the mid-Atlantic states. Most recently, David Hempton, *Methodism: Empire of the Spirit* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005) parallels English and American Methodism in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. It is strongest in its analysis of English Methodism.

that the growth of upstart churches, epitomized by the Methodists, in the early republic was largely a by-product of their egalitarianism tendencies. In fact, Hatch contended that the unique combination of “popular sovereignty” and “evangelical fervor” enabled groups such as the Methodists to flourish in “America’s nonrestrictive environment.”<sup>13</sup>

Hatch’s work, in turn, is a direct outgrowth of other broader major historical interpretations of, particularly Jacksonian America. Following political scholars such as Arthur Schlesinger, Jr. and Frederick Jackson Turner, Hatch is deeply invested in notions of Jacksonian American being an age of the poor rural and working class populations positing themselves against the business and political elites, ushering in the expansion of democracy in America. For Hatch, the upstart evangelical churches contributed greatly to this endeavor.

Hatch’s basic argument rests on the premise that many non-established religious groups flourished in the newly formed United States due to a passion for egalitarianism that was a direct outgrowth of the revolutionary impulses of the American War for Independence. According to Hatch, groups such as the Methodists, Baptists, black churches, Christians and Mormons ministered and related to a predominately uneducated and rural population through vernacular preaching, the creation of a mass religious printing culture, and populist modes of theological expression. These modes of thinking and worshipping were largely attractive to a westward expanding populace that was infused with notions of individual potency due to victory in achieving American independence.

While Hatch can be said to view the Methodists as the vanguard of popular Christianity in the Early Republic, they are only one of several groups considered in

---

<sup>13</sup> Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity*, 9.

his analysis. Therefore, it was left to Hatch's student, John H. Wigger, to fully define the Methodists as the champions of democratic religion. Wigger's 1997 study, *Taking Heaven by Storm: Methodism and the Rise of Popular Christianity in America* focuses directly on the dynamics of growth in early American Methodism. Wigger's book borrows heavily from the methodology of his mentor;<sup>14</sup> presumably, even his title is adapted from one of Hatch's chapter titles, "Storming Heaven by the Back Door."<sup>15</sup> In this study, Wigger explores the reason for the Methodists rapid expansion in the years following the American Revolution. Similar to Hatch, Wigger insists that the Methodists established their success by appealing to notions of popular sovereignty that flourished in the wake of the American Revolution. More importantly, though, Wigger's study explores the reasons that the Methodists experienced exceptional success. In the first place, the denomination was able to reach a geographically diffuse population through a clever and well-planned system of organizing preaching circuits and planting lay-led societies. In essence, the Methodists followed the population as they dispersed to various newly open parts of the United States. Secondly, through integrating camp meetings and camp meeting rhetoric into their practices of regular piety, the denomination was able to capitalize on the popular appeal of these "Holy Fairs." Thirdly, the Methodists used populist rhetoric, a cadre of lay preachers, and a clergy that very much resembled the rural populations to which they ministered.

Other recent works on aspects of early Methodism have reinforced this interpretation of the denomination. Most significantly, Cynthia Lynn Lyerly's 1998 study, *Methodism and the Southern Mind, 1770-1810*, and Lester Ruth's 2000 work, *A*

---

<sup>14</sup> Wigger, *Taking Heaven by Storm*, vii.

<sup>15</sup> Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity*, 49.



*Little Heaven Below: Worship at Early Methodist Quarterly Meetings*, have sought to understand aspects of early American Methodism through a populist lens. Lyerly's work, on the other hand, is a more localized version of Wigger's book. In *Methodism and the Southern Mind*, Lyerly attempts to understand the reasons that Methodism experienced numerical success in the South. Notably, she identifies Methodism as a religious group that was "ridiculed, feared, and harassed" in southern society.<sup>16</sup> In the late 18<sup>th</sup> century, Methodism grew in prominence through making direct appeal to those on the outskirts of Southern society. Ruth's book, on the other hand, is a more compartmentalized study, that attempts to understand dynamics in early Methodist liturgy. The work was initially his doctoral dissertation in liturgics at Notre Dame. While studying there he became acquainted with Hatch and Wigger. Specifically, Ruth's work is a study of the early Methodist Quarterly Meetings. He argues that these Quarterly Meetings were transformed from administrative affairs to raucous festivals in early America. Ruth reflects, "What began as a straightforward borrowing of an administrative idea and name from British Quakers—a group not known for its liturgical exuberance—became one of the loudest, liveliest occasions for worship," in early Methodism.<sup>17</sup> For Ruth, the richness of early American Methodist populism is found in these "great liturgical festivals," which were complete with shouting, testimonies, and religious exercises.

All of these works share some common threads. In the first place, each of these books concludes that the character of early American Methodism was essentially egalitarian. This means that American Methodism offered preaching,

---

<sup>16</sup> Cynthia Lynn Lyerly, *Methodism and the Southern Mind, 1770-1810* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 101.

<sup>17</sup> Lester Ruth, *A Little Heaven Below: Worship at Early Methodist Quarterly Meetings* (Nashville: Kingswood Books, 2000), 209.

leadership, and worship opportunities to all members of their societies, regardless of race, class, or gender. These studies also conclude that the key aspect of early American Methodism was its ecstatic nature. While Ruth's work is the most detailed examination of ecstatic worship practices in early Methodism, Wigger and Hatch also identify Methodism as being a heavily experiential "boiling hot religion."<sup>18</sup> Finally, each of these works posits a declension thesis. They conclude that around the year 1830, Methodists became consumed with the quest for respectability and heightened social class. As a result ecstatic and egalitarian practices began to give way toward more skewed social agendas, such as the support of slavery.<sup>19</sup>

The other side of the debate is represented in some more recent studies on the early South that have contradicted the conclusions pushed forth by scholars such as Hatch and Wigger as well as other scholars. Notably, Christine Leigh Heyrman's study *The Southern Cross: the Beginnings of the Bible Belt* has deemphasized both the revolutionary and egalitarian nature of the early evangelical groups in the antebellum South. Heyrman's argument has generated a plethora of support, even earning her the prestigious Bancroft Award in 1998. While the scope of Heyrman's study extends beyond the Methodists, the largest percentage of her historical documentation is from Methodist sources. Heyrman does not characterize the southern Methodists, Baptists and Presbyterians in a very positive light. In fact, rather than being seen as egalitarian revolutionaries, these groups are viewed as agitators who forced their way into the lives of southerners through exploiting cultural fascination with evil and, most importantly, through preying on society's

---

<sup>18</sup> Wigger, *Taking Heaven by Storm*, 104.

<sup>19</sup> Christine Leigh Heyrman, *Southern Cross: the Beginnings of the Bible Belt* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997), 254-255.

weakest members, women and young people. Furthermore, Heyrman contends that these religious groups did not achieve substantial success in the South until after they had begun to embrace traditional southern values of patriarchy and became advocates for slavery.

Heyrman is not alone in her assessment of early religious groups in the South. In fact, two broader studies, Rachel Klein's 1990 work, *Unification of a Slave State: The Rise of the Planter Class in the South Carolina Backcountry 1760-1808* and Stephanie McCurry's 1995 work, *Masters of Small Worlds: Yeoman Households, Gender Relations, and the Political Culture of the Antebellum South Carolina Low Country* made similar arguments. Each of these studies has concluded, with Heyrman, that the extent of populism present in early Methodism has been greatly exaggerated.

Although there have been several studies of Methodism in the United States during the Early Republic, none of these works have looked seriously at the process through which Methodism entered the mainstream of American society. The only work that has attempted to do this is A. Gregory Schneider's 1993 study, *The Way of the Cross Leads Home: the Domestication of American Methodism*.<sup>20</sup> Schneider's study is distinctively different methodologically than the other works mentioned. Rather than focusing on broad historical issues, Schneider is most interested in understanding the language of early American Methodism. Focusing on the Ohio Valley, Schneider contrasts the culture of early American Methodism with the southern culture of honor. Methodism, according to Schneider, was centered on principles of self-denial and simplicity, while the southern culture of honor was focused on material wealth and self-assertion.

---

<sup>20</sup> A. Gregory Schneider, *The Way of the Cross Leads Home: the Domestication of American Methodism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993).

According to Schneider, Methodism gained adherents early on partially because they were similar to the southern culture of honor in focusing on family. As such, familial language and imagery, such as the prodigal son and the self-sacrificing mother, became essential to early Methodism. This focus on the family provided a means by which Methodism became more intrinsically linked to republican virtues. Meaning, the focus on the family provided a rationale for the establishment of benevolent societies that advocated various social causes. As a result of the increases focused on social causes, the class meetings and camp meetings diminished in significance. More importantly, this eventually had the effect of dividing social and religious life from one another. As the Church continued to grow in corporate significance, many members felt discouraged by the further incorporation of the body into the nation. It was these discontents that formed the Holiness movement.

These contradictory interpretations of early American Methodism raise a number of historiographical issues. The first problem is that of sources and methodology. For the most part, the scholars cited in this essay have focused on the most extremes variants of their evidence. When recording in their diaries, people tend to focus on the exceptional events of their lives, as opposed to the ordinary. Thus, when referring to the ecstatic moments of their religious experience or a radical itinerant, it is difficult to determine where these reflections fit into a more complete picture of religious life. The selective nature of such approaches presents obvious difficulties related to historical interpretation. Likewise, it is left chiefly to the interpretation of the reader as to whether these episodes of excitement are empowering or manipulative. This problem is not unique to early American

Methodism. However, in the case of American Methodism, it provides a partial explanation for the differing interpretations of the radicalism of the movement.

The differing interpretations of early Methodism also present important issues of chronology. The works of Wigger, Hatch and Lyerly draw chiefly on Methodist resources and self-understanding in the years prior to and shortly after 1800. Alternatively, Heyrman's work focuses, mainly, on the period after the "Great Revival" in the South of 1800. The question is, subsequently, raised as to whether Methodism underwent any fundamental change in character much earlier than 1830.

This project seeks to contribute to this ongoing debate concerning the identity of early American Methodism by providing a new interpretive lens. Rather than looking at the question from the perspective of the rank-and-file itinerant preacher, convert, or disgruntled southerner, this dissertation attempts to reevaluate the Methodist Episcopal Church's history on its own terms. Specifically, this dissertation concentrates on the intentions of the leaders of the Methodist Episcopal Church during this formative period. A close examination of the controversies and challenges faced by the leadership of the denomination in its first fifty years of existence reveals that the Methodist Episcopal Church faced constant struggle over issues such as the polity, revivalism, and nationalism.

There have been relatively few previous studies of any substantial scholarly merit produced that take seriously the institutional history of American Methodism. The major published works that look seriously at institutional aspects of American Methodism are dated narrative surveys,<sup>21</sup> a few critical biographies on individual

---

<sup>21</sup> The most widely used volume remains, Frederick Norwood, *The Story of American Methodism: A History of United Methodists and Their Relations* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1974). Of more scholarly sophistication is, Emory S. Bucke, ed. *History of Methodism*. 3 vols. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1964).

church leaders,<sup>22</sup> and larger works on certain ecclesial themes in Methodism by Russell E. Richey and James Kirby. Kirby's most significant contribution to the study of early American Methodism was his 2000 study, *The Episcopacy in American Methodism*. In this study<sup>23</sup> Kirby explores the evolution of the powers and functioning of the office of the bishop in American Methodism. He devotes some substantial attention, in the earliest chapters, to the models of the episcopacy defined in the 1808 constitution of the Methodist Episcopal Church, and defended by Bishops Asbury, Soule and McKendree.<sup>24</sup>

Richey, on the other hand, has produced two studies of particular importance for early Methodism. Notably, his 1996 study, *The Methodist Conference in America: a History* utilizes the conference as a means to explore the essential character of American Methodism and, subsequently, reasserts the importance of conference for understanding American Methodist history. According to Richey, conference was the central means through which "American Methodism ordered and structured itself."<sup>25</sup> Through his examination of its key features, Richey concludes for early

---

<sup>22</sup> The only biographical studies of particular note on early American Methodist leaders are Vickers classic biography on Thomas Coke and Salter's recent study of Francis Asbury. The complete references are, John A. Vickers, *Thomas Coke: Apostle of Methodism* (London: Epworth Press, 1969) and Darius Salter, *America's Bishop: the Life of Francis Asbury* (Nappanee, Ind.: Francis Asbury Press, 2003).

<sup>23</sup> Kirby's work builds on Norman Spellmann's 1961 dissertation on the evolution of the General Superintendency in Methodism. Norman Spellmann, "The General Superintendency in American Methodism, 1784-1870," (Ph.D. diss., Yale University, 1961). See also, Russell E. Richey and Thomas E. Frank, *Episcopacy in the Methodist Tradition: Perspectives and Proposals* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2004).

<sup>24</sup> James Kirby, *The Episcopacy in American Methodism* (Nashville: Kingswood Books, 2000).

<sup>25</sup> Russell E. Richey, *The Methodist Conference in America: A History* (Nashville: Kingswood Books, 1996), 13.

Methodism, the conference was the chief spiritual, as well as political, meeting place for the denomination.

Richey's 1991 work, *Early American Methodism*, is also a profound foray into the character of early American Methodism. With uncanny sophistication, this work utilizes six essays on individual aspects of early American Methodism's worldview to explore the denomination's essential multifarious nature in its early history. This work, like most of the other pieces written by Richey, looks mainly at the writings of prominent church leaders and the work of the Conference. *Early American Methodism* is chiefly focused on the period from 1770 to 1810, though it seems heavily weighted to the earlier portion of this period. The essays deal, thematically, with the nature and evolution of conference in early Methodism, the essentially apolitical nature of Methodism early American, the southern roots of American Methodism, and the four languages of early American Methodism. Richey's analysis of early American Methodism adds a layer of complexity to the religious group not revealed in either prominent version of the social histories described in this historiography.

The limitation of the works of figures such as Richey and Kirby, though, is that they often do not substantially bridge the gap between the major institutional issues of early Methodism and the larger social issues surrounding the movement. Despite this, Richey's arguments, in particular, point toward a valuable route for studying American Methodism. Through studying the Methodist Church's leadership, institutional patterns, and internal and external controversies in the Early Republic, a more nuanced appreciation for the character of the religious group can be reached.

## **B. Contribution of this Study**

This study is important in that it contributes to the wider field of studies on religion and the early Republic, by adding further complexity to the debates regarding populism and the early American evangelical movements. The Methodists are the largest and, debatably, the most significant of the groups that are considered “democratizing.” Through an analysis of Methodism’s character and self-understanding in the years from 1784-1835, the limits of this populism can be established and qualified. Nathan Hatch’s widely influential interpretation stresses the wide influence of the Methodists in shaping American culture. According to Hatch’s work, the Methodists were egalitarian and anti-establishment through the period around 1830. This dissertation attempts to qualify that claim and, instead, argues that staunch hierarchical and non-egalitarian elements were present within the Methodist Episcopal Church from its founding in 1784.

Second, this study provides a solid overview of the growth and expansion of Methodism between 1784 and 1835. Is important for students and practitioners of Methodism to understand the history of the movement.

Finally, this study adds to the literature on early American Methodism by contributing a serious investigation of institutional self-understanding from the period 1784 to 1835. Rather than approach the history of the Methodism through the lens of revival, democracy, or the market, I have attempted to understand the movement through the personalities, interactions, and intentions of its leaders. As a result, this study shows that Methodism was not simply the byproduct of trends within the nation. Instead, Methodism has its own story or, indeed, stories.

The topics of race and slavery haunt the history of early American Methodism. This study only follows the story of the Methodist Episcopal Church up



until around the year 1835. As a result, the crisis over abolitionism and sectionalism is not directly engaged. However, the topics of race and slavery are engaged in a few places. More importantly, one of the sub-themes of this study is that the leaders of the Methodist Episcopal Church had a propensity for choosing the expedient or immediately success path over the correct path. To no topic does this apply more than slavery and race.

### **C. Chapter Outline**

This work is divided into two sub-sections and six chapters. The first sub-section, "Denominational Builders," will focus around the character of Methodism in the first two decades of the Church's existence. Essentially, this section will be centered on the multifarious nature of American Methodism and its struggle to forge an institutional identity.

The second chapter, "Founding" examines the formation of the Methodist Episcopal Church. Essentially, this chapter reviews the precarious circumstances that contributed to the establishment of the Methodist Episcopal Church as the first denomination organized in the United States. The tension between populism and formalism was already present at the time of the denomination's founding. Specifically, this tension was apparent in the Christmas Conference that organized the new Church and in the *Discipline*, or rules of governance, approved by that Conference. The new denomination was established with a strong Church government and a legitimate hierarchy for Church leadership. Thus, the denomination's leaders intended for the ensuing Church to be controlled by a strong autocratic form of government.

In the third chapter, "Enthusiasm" the direction changes and centers on the conflict in Methodism over the raucous revivals and camp meetings of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The camp meeting phenomena served as a chief means of Methodist growth and expansion. These rowdy affairs were enormously popular and succeeded in adding a tremendous number of congregants and preachers to the Methodist Episcopal Church; nowhere was this more apparent than in the western country. However, despite their popularity, the raucous enthusiasm of Methodist worship was not uniformly accepted. In fact, portions of the Methodist Episcopal were vocal critics of it and leaders within the denomination sought to control the affairs through introducing greater form and regulation.

The fourth chapter, "Challenges" examines the criticisms levied against the autocratic elements of the Methodist Episcopal Church's polity. The Republican Methodists and the African Methodist groups levied the most poignant criticisms. The former group accused the Methodists of being too rigidly hierarchical in terms of the church's organization and structure. Similarly, the critiques and separations of the African Methodist groups from the Methodist Episcopal Church were, largely, in response to growing frustration with the limits being imposed on African-Americans by the Church's hierarchy.

The theme of the second sub-section of this work, "Transformations" relates to American Methodism's formation of its own unique identity and its movement into the center of American culture. Functionally, these transitions coincide with structures of formalism asserting themselves against the populist impulses in American Methodism.

The fifth chapter, "Wesleyans" attempts to characterize and describe the relationship between American and British Methodism. It investigates what might

be termed the winnowing connection between the American and British Methodists in the Early Republic. The connection between English and American Methodists was of considerable importance in the years immediately surrounding the founding of the Methodist Episcopal Church. Many of the formal characteristics of the early Methodists were directly inherited from their British counterparts, including the denomination's structure and Church government. However, this connection diminished in importance as the two denominations continued to establish distinctively different identities. The conflict between the British and American Methodist Conferences that existed in the late eighteenth and nineteenth century revealed that the Methodist Episcopal Church was determined to be a strong and autonomous religious organization that maintained only superficial ties to its British counterpart.

The sixth chapter, "Nationalism" explores the metamorphosis of the Methodist Episcopal Church from what had been an essentially apolitical religious group, to a religious body fully engaged in the life of the nation. This transformation was partially the outgrowth of the desire of denominational leaders to become a powerful and premiere American denominational body and increased republicanism in the laity and preachers. Regardless, the period between 1808 and 1835 witnessed the expansion of the denomination's infrastructure. This growth was particularly evident in the work of the denomination in publishing, missions, education and the creation of a distinctively American variant of Wesleyan theology.

The seventh chapter, "Reform" focuses on the reform movement's challenge to the Methodist Episcopal Church's government. Self-proclaimed "Reformers" criticized the autocratic aspects of the Methodist Episcopal Church's government. Specifically, the Reformers took to task the power of the bishops and the lack of lay

representatives in General Conference. The reform challenge represented a pivotal example of the tension between formalism and populism in Methodist history.

## CHAPTER II

### FOUNDING

The transplanting of Methodism from Britain to the British colonies in North America came about by both design and the evolutionary eccentricities of a new environment and a people interacting with it. In its nascent stage in America, Methodism was comprised of a group of loosely affiliated Societies founded by Irish immigrants. In the wake of the American Revolution, this loose confederation of Societies underwent dramatic growth and expansion largely because of the efforts of a strong, autocratic leadership.

A new chapter of that story began the moment that Thomas Coke (1747-1814) stepped ashore in the New World on November 3, 1784. His arrival ushered in an important new era in American Methodism. Not only did Coke bring with him the blueprints by which the Methodist Episcopal Church in America was formed, it was also through his and Francis Asbury's guidance that the American Methodists took the nascent steps toward becoming a distinct, authoritative, and American institution.

#### **A. Methodism and the New World**

##### **1. The Accidental Rise of Methodism**

At the time of Coke's arrival, North American Methodism was in a precarious state. In its earliest days in a North American context, Methodism

was a loose collection of societies that lacked cohesion, meaningful connection with one another, and organization. The movement was known for its inclusive worship services, ecstatic worship style, and evangelical preaching. However, in spite of the populism present in the early worship services, the members of the new societies longed for a greater sense of respectability and cohesion.

Methodism's rise in the British colonies had happened more accidentally than deliberately. And, in fact, its origins can be partially traced to the displacement of immigrants in the New World. According to most sources, the first Methodist society was established in New York in 1766 by a small number of Irish immigrants. The immigrants, who were part of Methodist societies in Ireland, found worship options in the New York area limited and lacking in piety. As a result, the immigrants took it upon themselves to begin holding their own religious meetings.<sup>26</sup> The first meetings were held in the home of Philip Embury (1729-1775), a local preacher. Eventually, the members of the society moved the meetings to a rented room.

The New York society experienced significant growth after a charismatic soldier known as "Captain" Thomas Webb (1726-1801) joined the group. Webb was actually a lieutenant in the British Army stationed in Albany. His regiment was first sent to North America in 1758 to serve in the French and Indian War. Webb was among those Red Coats who conquered the city of Quebec, stalling France's progress in the Seven Years' War. In fact, he lost an eye in that battle. Partially due to the influence of Moravian preaching, Webb converted to Christianity after a prolonged battle with depression in 1764. He quickly found a

---

<sup>26</sup> Nathan Bangs, *A History of Methodist Episcopal Church* (New York: Philips and Hunt, 1880), 1: 46f.

spiritual home among the Methodists, and he took up preaching and assisting Embury in the New York society. The former soldier's boisterous spirit and red military coat served as a great novelty and "brought greater numbers to hear, more than the room could contain."<sup>27</sup> Webb's influence aided the New York Methodists in procuring ground in New York's John Street where they built a meetinghouse in 1768, which was originally called "Wesley's Chapel." The New York meeting house is, generally, considered to be the first Methodist one in America.

A phenomenon that occurred almost simultaneously with the rise of the Methodist society in New York was the emergence of a society in Frederick County, Maryland. Another Irishman, Robert Strawbridge (1732 -1781), began to hold public meetings and formed a society. Strawbridge's society built the "Log Meeting-House" in the Pipe Creek area.<sup>28</sup> In the years following the establishment of the first societies, other Methodist societies began to appear in North America. For instance, Webb made excursions to places such as Long Island and Philadelphia, preaching and helping lay the foundation for further societies.

## **2. The Cry for Structure**

When the society on John Street had reached sufficient size, it began construction of "Wesley Chapel." By now, the members were dissatisfied with Embury. Many considered him to possess only "moderate preaching abilities."

---

<sup>27</sup> Jesse Lee, *A Short History of the Methodists of the United States of America* (Baltimore: Magill and Clime, 1810), 16.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 17-18.

Thomas Taylor, who had emigrated from England to the United States, became associated with the New York Society. It was he who penned a letter to John Wesley on behalf of the society. In the letter, the society requires a more qualified and legitimate preacher. Taylor pleaded, "In regard to a preacher, if possible we must have a man of wisdom, of sound faith, and a good disciplinarian: one whose heart and soul are in the work..."<sup>29</sup> In due course, this letter helped propel Wesley to make a formal connection with the American Methodists.

At a conference in Leeds on August 1, 1768, Wesley laid out the plight of Methodists in North America and procured two volunteers – Richard Boardman (d.1782), and Joseph Pilmore (1739-1825) – to aid the American societies. Two further volunteers, Robert Williams (1745-1775) and John King, arrived in the British colonies somewhat later. Williams was a local preacher in England and had received a permit from Wesley to help. Williams, however, was not sent over by Wesley, but received a license from Pilmore, after a trial period.<sup>30</sup>

The itinerant preachers were effective in consolidating the various societies and expanding the presence of the Methodist movement in the surrounding territories. In particular, the itinerants preached considerably in the urban locales present in New Jersey, Philadelphia, and New York.

The ministry of the Methodists was expanded further after the arrival of two more itinerants, Francis Asbury (1745-1816) and Richard Wright, on October 7, 1771. Asbury immediately felt a kinship with the residents of the British colonies. He recorded, "I feel a regard for the people: and I think the Americans

---

<sup>29</sup> Bangs, *History of the Methodist Episcopal Church*, 1:53.

<sup>30</sup> Lee, *Short History*, 19f



are more ready to receive the word than the English..."<sup>31</sup> His primary goal, upon arriving in the New World, was to expand the reach of the Methodists beyond the confines of urban areas. Asbury recorded in his journal, "At present I am dissatisfied. I judge we are to be shut up in the cities this winter. My brethren seem unwilling to leave the cities, but I think I shall show them the way."<sup>32</sup> As a result, Asbury focused much of his attention on bringing the Methodist message and forming societies in rural, agrarian areas.<sup>33</sup>

Asbury's interest in expanding the ministry of the church to the country led to the Methodist lay preachers evangelizing and helping to create societies in Delaware, Maryland, and Virginia. Asbury, Pilmore, and Williams all made journeys into Virginia. Williams was particularly important in the development of Methodism in Virginia. Williams visited Norfolk, Virginia without giving public notice. He stood on the steps of the courthouse and began to sing; soon after, a large number of people gathered around him to which he preached in a fiery style. William's exhortation laid the foundation for the formation of the first Methodist society in Virginia.<sup>34</sup>

Initially Francis Asbury was made the General Assistant in America, a title which in reality made him the head of all preachers and societies in North America.<sup>35</sup> Wesley was not completely satisfied however, and determined, that

---

<sup>31</sup> Francis Asbury, *The Journal and Letters of Francis Asbury*, ed. Elmer T. Clark (London: Epworth, 1958), 1: 9.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 1:10.

<sup>33</sup> Lee, *Short History*, 31.

<sup>34</sup> Bangs, *History of the Methodist Episcopal Church*, 1: 73f.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 1: 74.

the American Methodists would benefit from the experience of two further lay preachers, Thomas Rankin (1738?-1810) and George Shadford. The two tenured British Methodists arrived in America on June 3, 1773. Rankin had served as an itinerating preacher for eleven years; as such, he was more tenured than any of the other American preachers. As such, he was appointed as the General Assistant of the societies in America.

### **3. Challenges of the American Context**

The efforts of the Methodist preachers to centralize and expand the ministry of the religious movement were fraught with difficulties. Notably, many of the itinerant preachers were unwilling to “submit entirely to the authority of Mr. Wesley in all matters.”<sup>36</sup> This problem was exasperated by the appointment of Thomas Rankin as general assistant. Rankin was endowed with more authority than any other preacher had been given up to this point in the American setting. His primary purpose in traveling to America was to impose order, discipline, and uniformity on the scattered confederation of societies. Notably, Rankin sought to impose greater discipline on the societies, but expunging corrupt members from the societies. To begin accomplishing his goals, Rankin called the first annual conference of the Methodists in North America on July 4, 1773 in the city of Philadelphia. The American Methodist preachers had, previously, met in Quarterly Conferences, where stations were assigned to each traveling minister. The new annual conference, which was attended by six or seven traveling ministers, sought to exert authority over the

---

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 1: 80.

preachers.<sup>37</sup> For instance, each preacher was expressly told to submit to the authority of Wesley and the conference. The Methodist preachers were also forbidden from reprinting the books written by John Wesley without permission. This rule was instituted mainly because Robert Williams had reprinted and distributed many of Wesley's works and sermons. Wesley and Rankin hoped to centralize the printing and selling of books, so that that profits derived might be used to help support the lay preachers. Finally, the preachers were expressly forbidden from administering the ordinances of Eucharist and baptism.<sup>38</sup>

While Rankin was a competent and capable General Assistant who succeeded in helping bring greater uniformity to the Methodists in North America, all his contemporaries did not view him with admiration. His work at expunging problematic members from the society met with resistance, particularly in New York. More importantly, Rankin never quite understood American sensibilities and the raucous revival spirit that characterized many of the Methodist meetings. In regard to Rankin's popularity, the nineteenth century Methodist historian Abel Stevens hypothesized, "The principles of his administration were good, and necessary for the infant Church; but he seems to have been unhappy in his official manner. He had not the tact of Asbury to adapt himself to the free and easy Americans...."<sup>39</sup> And, indeed, Rankin's stern demeanor caused problems in a few instances. He had trouble adapting to the raucous worship style that characterized early Methodism. In several instances

---

<sup>37</sup> Lee, *Short History*, 38.

<sup>38</sup> Bangs, 1:79.

<sup>39</sup> Abel Stevens, *The History of the Methodist Episcopal Church in the United States of America* (New York: Carlton and Porter, 1864), 1: 228.

when he was present for an emotive outbreak, it greatly disturbed him. Rankin wrote, "I preached from Ezekiel's vision of the dry bones: 'And there was great shaking.' I was obligated to stop again and again, and beg of the people to compose themselves."<sup>40</sup> Partially as a result of these factors, many of the American preachers met Rankin's authority with resistance.

The prohibition against administering the sacraments proved to be particularly controversial. Prior to 1784, the Methodist Societies in America were considered to be a part of the Church of England. As such, it was expected that members of the Methodist societies would attend Church of England religious services in order to partake of the sacraments. This was problematic, partially because Methodist societies were developing in areas without a substantial Church of England presence, making it impossible for many believers to have access to the sacraments. More importantly, there was a conviction among many Methodist lay preachers that the clergy of the Church of England were generally without true religion. In his 1810 *A Short History of the Methodists*, Jesse Lee reminisced, "In many places for a hundred miles together, there was no one to baptize a child, except a minister of the established church; the greatest objection to this plan therefore was, that by far the greatest part of them were destitute of religion."<sup>41</sup>

Robert Strawbridge, the Irish immigrant who started the first society in Maryland, found the prohibition of administering the sacraments within the Methodist societies deeply troubling. In defiance of the ban, Strawbridge

---

<sup>40</sup> Lee, *Short History*, 112.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 41.

administered the sacraments among the Methodists in Maryland, without the consent of the conference. He was met with such considerable opposition that by 1774 Strawbridge discontinued his service as lay preacher.

The nascent order and connection that had been established among the Methodists in America was jeopardized by the escalating tensions between the British and America. On July 4, 1776 the Continental Congress declared the thirteen united colonies free and independent states, which turned the early skirmishes between the British and colonists into a full-fledged war. As a result of the conflict, the Methodist lay preachers and society members present in America immediately fell under suspicion. Nathan Bangs summed up the suspicions,

To those who were deeply interested in the success of our arms and who were actuated only by the blind impulses of human nature in its depraved state, it was provoking to find a people in the midst of them led on by a number of active and zealous preachers, who were from principle averse to war...Add to this the fact, that their first leaders were directly from England, some of whom had not concealed their partiality for their mother country, and all under a leader who had boldly advocated the cause of his government, and denounced the Americas as rebels, it is no wonder than any one who wished to raise the wind of persecution against a Methodist preacher, need only should *Tory*, and his wish was accomplished.<sup>42</sup>

There were a number of reasons that the political sympathies of Methodists were suspect. In the first place, Methodism was intimately associated with England. John Wesley, the presumed head of world Methodism, had published a pamphlet addressed to Americans in which he condemned their conduct and sided with the British cause. This pamphlet, known as *Calm Address to our American Colonies*, succeeded in increasing ire against Methodists in America.

---

<sup>42</sup> Bangs, *History of the Methodist Episcopal Church*, 139.

Secondly, some of the Methodist lay preachers in America were English by birth. In fact, only four out of the twenty-five remaining lay preacher were from England. However, these four were the most public figures in American Methodism at the time. At least two of the remaining English Methodist clergy – Rankin and Richard Rodda - were outspoken in their condemnation of the American cause. In September 1777, Thomas Rankin fled to the British lines. While in the British occupied territory of Philadelphia he declared from the pulpit, “that God would not revive his work in America until they submitted to their rightful sovereign, George III.” As a result of comments such as this, even the American born lay preachers fell under suspicion. By the early months of 1777, Francis Asbury was the only English born Methodist lay preacher remaining in America.

For that matter, even society members fell under religious persecution during the days of the American Revolution, partially due to extreme cases of behavior. One society member, Chauncey Clowe, enlisted about three hundred men for the British cause. He was arrested and hung as a traitor. While only two Methodists were part of the plot, it did little to exhaust the suspicions levied against the Methodists.<sup>43</sup>

In this tension filled climate, the connection between the various Methodist societies was continually strained. Preachers were separated from their circuits, societies were dwindling, and Francis Asbury – the only remaining English Methodist import – was forced into hiding at the home of Thomas White in Delaware (as he was unable to take the oath of loyalty required by the state of Maryland). For that matter, the majority of ministers of the Church of England

---

<sup>43</sup> Lee, *Short History*, 121f.

had – in the midst of patriotic fervor and persecution – left their churches and returned to England. As a result, the shortage of qualified persons to perform the sacraments was amplified.

#### **4. The Ordinance Controversy**

It was almost inevitable that during the years of the American Revolution, there was an increased push among the American Methodist lay preachers for the right to administer the sacraments. Perennially, the Methodist lay preachers were divided on how to deal with the question of administering the sacraments. Notably, at the Deer Creek Conference in 1777 and the Leesburg, Virginia Conference of May 18, 1778, the question of “Shall we administer the ordinances?” was posed. In both cases, the decision was made to suspend deliberations for another year.

The issue regarding administering the ordinances reached a critical juncture in 1779. On May 18, the seventh conference of the Methodist lay preachers was held at Broken-back church, which was located in Fluvanna County of Virginia. At the conference of Fluvanna, the southern preachers appointed a committee to ordain ministers. The members of the committee first ordained each other and then proceeded to ordain others by laying hands upon them. The ordained preachers proceeded to administer the Lord’s Supper and perform baptisms.<sup>44</sup>

Due to continued anti-Methodist sentiment brought on by the ongoing American War for Independence, Francis Asbury was unable to attend the

---

<sup>44</sup> Bangs, *History of the Methodist Episcopal Church*, 1: 131f.

conference. As a result, the northern lay preachers decided to meet at a preparatory conference on April 28<sup>th</sup> for “the convenience of the preachers in the northern states.”<sup>45</sup> They met in the location that Asbury was staying, Thomas White’s home in Delaware. In many ways, the preparatory conference was a preemptive strike against the southern churches. At the conference it was confirmed that “By all means” the American Methodists should guard against separation from the Church of England.<sup>46</sup> Critics accused Asbury of utilizing the northern conference to fortify support against the anticipated move of the southern brethren to ordain. The northern preachers sent William Watters to represent their views at the conference in Virginia.<sup>47</sup>

The Fluvanna Conference, essentially, caused a temporary separation between the northern and southern Methodists. When the eighth conference assembled in Baltimore on April 24, 1780, the southern preachers met separately in Virginia on May 8-10. Deeply concerned about the decision to ordain made at the previous year’s Fluvanna Conference, Asbury, Edward Drumgole, Watters, and Freeborn Garrettson (1752-1827) attended the southern conference. After three days of deliberation, Asbury and his compatriots were able to convince the southern conference to suspend the measures they had adopted at the previous conference for a year.<sup>48</sup> Furthermore, for the sake of “agreement” the Conference

---

<sup>45</sup> *Minutes of the Methodist Conferences Annually Held in America: From 1773 to 1813* (New York: Daniel Hitt and Thomas Ware, 1813), 19.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 19.

<sup>47</sup> Bangs, *History of the Methodist Episcopal Church*, 1: 130.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 1: 136f.



of 1782 agreed to “erase that question proposed in Deer-Creek conference respecting the ordinances.”<sup>49</sup>

## **B. The Architects of American Methodism**

### **1. Wesley’s Plan**

By the end of the American Revolution, the Methodists in America were in a unique situation; they were in the position to either flourish or fade into insignificance. Despite all of its hindrances, Methodism grew during this war years. Between the time of Asbury’s arrival in 1771 and 1784, Methodism grew from about five hundred persons to over fifteen thousand. However, the Methodist preachers were desperate for a unique ordination system and system of organization that was democratic, yet endowed with meaningful power.

The American Revolutionary War came to a conclusion with the surrender at Yorktown in 1781 and the Peace of Paris in 1783. With peace reestablished between England and America, the persecution and tension aimed against Methodists was lessened. Moreover, interchange between the Methodists in both England and America was made possible again. The renewed interchange made it possible for the religious movement’s head, John Wesley, and the British Conference to address the crisis concerning the ordinances in the newly formed United States.

Practically since the establishment of the first societies in the New World, the issue of administering the ordinances preoccupied the American Methodists. This situation was amplified further by the close of the American Revolution.

---

<sup>49</sup> *Minutes of the Methodist Conferences*, 37.

During the period immediately following the Revolution, those Methodists who continued to consider themselves members of the Church of England found themselves with a shortage of parishes in which to receive the ordinances. Virginia was hit particularly hard. Prior to the American Revolution, the Church of England was Virginia's established religion. At the time of the outbreak of the war there were 95 churches, 91 clergymen, and 164 churches. However, by the end of the war, many of the clergy persons had retreated to England. As a result, 34 parishes were without ministers and an additional 23 parishes were abandoned.<sup>50</sup>

Asbury, who had spent considerable time in the 1770s convincing his brethren to hold out on making their own decision regarding the administering of the sacraments until John Wesley and the English Conference was given an opportunity to act, wrote to the religious movement's founder on numerous occasions requesting aid from Wesley specifically or for the sending of some other ordained clergyman.<sup>51</sup> Wesley was not unsympathetic to the American plight. He rejected offers to come to America, citing such issues as "being detained by the building of a new chapel."<sup>52</sup> However, he did petition the Bishop of London to ordain one or several of the Methodists for work in North America. He was, of course, denied in his request.<sup>53</sup> By 1783, Wesley realized that the only

---

<sup>50</sup> E. Clowes Chorley, *Men and Movements in the American Episcopal Church* (New York: Scribner's, 1946), 27.

<sup>51</sup> Asbury, 1: 378; 3: 24.

<sup>52</sup> Bangs, *History of the Methodist Episcopal Church*, 1: 77. From a letter received by Francis Asbury on May 6, 1773.

<sup>53</sup> John Vickers, *Thomas Coke: Apostle of Methodism* (London: Epworth, 1969), 71.

true solution to the ordinance crisis among the North American Methodists was in an American episcopate. At the present juncture, there was no episcopacy in the United States. In fact, until 1784 all ordained clergy persons in the Church of England were required to take the oath of allegiance, even if they were not citizens of England.<sup>54</sup>

Traditionally, in the Church of England, the notion of the episcopacy rested on the idea that there were two separate types of ordination, episcopal and presbyter. In practice both types of ordination were bestowed through the efforts of the bishopric, or those who held episcopal ordination. In 1746, John Wesley read Lord Peter King's *Account of the Primitive Church*. King's work convinced Wesley that the two orders were, in fact, identical. As such, he came to believe that a presbyter – such as himself – had as much right to ordain others to the priesthood as a bishop.<sup>55</sup> Wesley's reading of Edward Stillingfleet's 1659 work, *The Irenicon*, strengthened these views. Stillingfleet's work was written in order to help reconcile the Episcopalians and Presbyterians of his day. This work demonstrated to Wesley's satisfaction that in the early church presbyters and bishops were, basically, the same. Furthermore, Stillingfleet denied that any form of church government, let alone the episcopacy, was divinely sanctioned. In a 1755 letter to James Clark, Wesley wrote,

As to my own judgment, I still believe "the Episcopal form of Church government to be both scriptural and apostolic": I mean, well agreeing with the practice and writings of the Apostles. But that it is prescribed in Scripture I do not believe. This opinion (which I once heartily espoused) I have been heartily ashamed of ever since I read Dr. Stillingfleet's *Irenicon*. I

---

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 71-72.

<sup>55</sup> John Wesley, *The Letters of Rev. John Wesley*, ed. John Telford (London: Epworth, 1931), 3: 136, 18; 4: 7:21.

think he has unanswerably proved that neither Christ or His Apostles prescribed any particular form of Church government, and that the plea for the divine right of Episcopacy was never heard of in the primitive Church.<sup>56</sup>

Despite arriving at the conclusion that there was no difference between episcopal and presbyter ordination thirty years earlier and that he possessed the right to ordain, Wesley had been slow to exercise this power. In letter dated June 1780 he wrote, "I see abundance of reasons why I should not use that right unless I was turned out by the Church."<sup>57</sup> While he had been determined to preserve the peace and to not "violate the established order of the national Church to which I belonged."<sup>58</sup> However, Wesley believed that Church of England's virtual abandonment of the American context, as well as the established Church's refusal to aid him in his efforts to ordain Methodist preachers for America, had effectively forced his hand.

So, in 1784 Wesley decided to respond to the plight of the American Methodists in a definitive way. This brings us full circle to Thomas Coke. On September 1 in Bristol, Wesley, with the assistance of Thomas Coke and James Creighton, ordained Richard Whatcoat (1736-1806), and Thomas Vasey as deacons. Furthermore, Coke was set aside as a General Superintendent over the Methodists in America. Coke, Vasey, and Whatcoat were equipped with a new prayer book, a plan for setting up an independent Methodist Church in North

---

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., 3: 182.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., 7:4.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., 7: 237.

America, a new version of *A Collection of Psalms and Hymns for the Lord's Day*, and revised Articles of Religion.<sup>59</sup>

Thomas Coke, who was to be Wesley's right hand man in America, remains a controversial figure in the history of Methodism. Many of his contemporaries blamed Coke for exercising undue influence upon Wesley. Among Coke's chief critics were Charles Wesley and John Wesley's one-time traveling companion, Joseph Bradford. In 1794, three years after John's death, Bradford wrote a letter to Richard Rodda in which he blamed Coke for being behind John Wesley's decision to ordain some persons in the English Methodist Conference of 1785. Bradford wrote, "...he [John Wesley] was so much hurt by Dr. Coke's conduct in persuading the people to dissent from the original plan that he threatened him in a letter to have no more to do with him if he did not desist from so persuading the people."<sup>60</sup>

And, in some respects, Coke had been controversial his entire career in ministry. During his time as a parish priest in South Petherton, Coke was discontent and constantly enmeshed in difficulties. Coke established friendships with and read tracts written by Dissenters, enthusiastic Anglicans, and Methodists. Partially due to this influence, Coke began a series of fairly controversial activities in his churches; he started the practice of preaching extemporaneously and in an enthusiastic style and he tried to institute a weekly communion at a time when it was customary for people to celebrate the

---

<sup>59</sup> Richard Heitzenrater, *Wesley and the People Called Methodists* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1995), 287f.

<sup>60</sup> Quoted in Vickers, *Thomas Coke*, 107. Letter to Rodda dated May 28<sup>th</sup>, 1794.

Eucharist four to six times a year.<sup>61</sup> The result of these changes to his ministry was that Coke's congregations grew, but so did his number of opponents.

Finally, the conflict between his detractors and Coke met a climax in the spring of 1777. On Easter Sunday (March 30),<sup>62</sup> Coke was publicly dismissed from his parish in front of the entire congregation. Immediately after he was excused from the church, a new curate, who had been hired in secret earlier that week, stepped into the pulpit and gave a sermon condemning Coke. As Coke exited the church, the bells were rung and several people began celebrating his dismissal by drinking cider in the city streets.<sup>63</sup>

The controversy surrounding Coke's life in ministry certainly cannot be attributed to lack of learning on his part. Coke was among the best educated of Methodist preachers. He received a B.A., M.A., and doctorate in Civil Law from Jesus College of Oxford University.<sup>64</sup> Coke was also an ordained priest in the Church of England; he was ordained a deacon in 1770 and a priest in 1772. Subsequently, he served as mayor of Breton and as a curate at South Petherton, before joining the Methodist Connection at some point in time before June 30, 1777.

Certainly, Wesley realized that Coke was – at times – prone to impulse and hasty decisions. He wrote in a letter to Adam Clarke in 1788, “The Doctor is

---

<sup>61</sup> Vickers, *Thomas Coke*, 26f.

<sup>62</sup> The date is not certain; however, there is a record of Coke presiding on the March 23 marriage register and no record of his presiding at the March 30 Easter vestry.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, 35. See also, Henry Moore, *The Life of John Wesley* (London: John Kershaw, 1825), 2: 310.

<sup>64</sup> Vickers, *Thomas Coke*, 11.

often too hasty.”<sup>65</sup> On another occasion he remarked, “Dr. Coke and I are like the French and the Dutch. The French have been compared to a flea, and the Dutch to a louse. I creep like a louse, and the ground I get I keep; but the Doctor leaps like a flea, and is sometimes obliged to leap back again.”<sup>66</sup> And, for that matter, Wesley did not include a spiritual memoir when Coke’s portrait appeared on the cover of the May 1779 issue of the *Arminian Magazine*. This omission was irregular for Wesley.

However, Wesley found Coke to be a useful ally. In particular, John Wesley utilized Coke’s legal abilities on numerous occasions. Coke helped Wesley prepare a Deed of Declaration, which enlisted a Legal Hundred, or one hundred ministers that were the legal Conference of the Methodists. The result of this move was that a legal focus of authority for Methodism, beyond John Wesley, was put into place. Furthermore, Coke helped Wesley secure preaching-houses on the Conference plan, which kept the ownership of the preaching-houses in the hands of the Methodist Conference. Wesley sincerely believed Coke to be a well-intentioned man, passionately committed to the Methodist cause. John Wesley wrote, “I believe Dr. Coke is as free from ambition as from covetousness. ...He is now such a right hand to me as Thomas Walsh was.”<sup>67</sup> And, for these reasons, Wesley found Coke to be the perfect candidate to aid the Americans.

---

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., 46. Letter to Adam Clarke 5<sup>th</sup> November, 1788.

<sup>66</sup> Jonathan Crowther, *Life of the Rev. Thomas Coke* (Leeds: Edward Baines, 1815), 233.

<sup>67</sup> Wesley, *Letters*, 7: 288.

## 2. Wesley's Missionaries to the New World

Thomas Coke, Richard Whatcoat, and Thomas Vasey set sail for America on the morning of Saturday September 18. After a voyage of six and a half weeks, which Coke described as “very agreeable”,<sup>68</sup> the men arrived in New York on November 3. Upon doing so, Coke immediately sought out the Methodist preaching-house located on John Street. At Wesley's Chapel, Coke shared his plans with the preacher stationed in New York, John Dickins (1747-1798). Dickins was an England born Methodist who had come to America prior to the Revolution. He became associated with the Methodists in Virginia in 1774 and began serving as an itinerant in 1777. Coke reflected, “I have opened Mr. Wesley's plan to brother *Dickens*...and he highly approves of it, says that al the Preachers most earnestly long for such a regulation, and that Mr. *Asbury* he is sure will agree to it.”<sup>69</sup>

Rather than seeking Asbury out immediately, Coke and his companions<sup>70</sup> preached several times in New York before voyaging to Philadelphia two days later. They spent nearly a week in Philadelphia. At the invitation of Dr. Samuel Magaw, Coke preached at St. Paul's Church and in the Methodist Chapel. After preaching to the Methodist society in Philadelphia, Coke shared with that group

---

<sup>68</sup> Thomas Coke, *The Journals of Dr. Thomas Coke*, ed. John A. Vickers (Nashville, TN: Kingswood Books, 2005), 31.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, 31.

<sup>70</sup> Whatcoat traveled with Coke for some time after the landing in America. He was part of the initial meeting between Asbury and Coke. It is unclear whether Vasey continued with Coke after the arrival in New York; there is no mention of him again until after December.



of believers the plan of church government Wesley had devised.<sup>71</sup> Prior to leaving Philadelphia for Delaware, Coke preached at the church of Dr. William White. He did not share with these men Wesley's plan, a decision he later regretted, as he feared it made him appear ungrateful for their hospitality.<sup>72</sup> The three men progressed to Delaware, where they first preached at Duck Creek Cross Roads, before visiting Dover. While in Dover, Coke met Freeborn Garrettson, with whom he was quite impressed.<sup>73</sup>

Finally, on Sunday November 14, Coke and Whatcoat arrived at Barret's Chapel,<sup>74</sup> located in a wooded area near Frederica. News of Coke's arrival had been brought in advance, so that as he traveled he was usually expected. In this particular case, Asbury expected Coke at Barret's Chapel. As such, he gathered together several of the preachers to join him in welcoming Coke. However, the encounter only came after Coke had preached and presided over the worship service, which was attended by, according to Coke, between 500 and 600 persons. Of the first meeting, Coke recorded,

In this chapel, in the midst of a forest, I had a noble congregation, to which I endeavoured to set forth our blessed Redeemer, as our wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption. After the sermon, a plain robust man came up to me in the pulpit, and kissed me: I thought it could be no other than Mr. *Asbury*, and I was not deceived.<sup>75</sup>

---

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, 32 (see footnote 32).

<sup>72</sup> *Vickers, Thomas Coke*, 81.

<sup>73</sup> *Coke, Journal*, 33.

<sup>74</sup> The chapel was donated by and named after Phillip Barret. Barret was a friend and supporter of Asbury and the Methodist cause. Coke recorded that Barret had "gone to heaven a few days ago," at the time of this meeting.

<sup>75</sup> *Coke, Journal*, 34.

Asbury's account of the meeting was less cinematic. He wrote,

I came to Barratt's chapel: here, to my great joy, I met these dear men of God, Dr. Coke and Richard Whatcoat, we were greatly comforted together. The Doctor preached on "Christ our wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption."<sup>76</sup>

Prior to the worship, Asbury had no opportunity to speak with Whatcoat or Coke. As such, he had no definite idea of Wesley's intentions. As such, he did not expect to see Whatcoat, who was not ordained in the Church of England, aid Coke in distributing the sacraments. Asbury recorded, "Having had no opportunity of conversing with them before public worship, I was greatly surprised to see brother Whatcoat assist by taking the cup in the administration of the sacraments."<sup>77</sup>

After the service, Coke shared Wesley's plans with Asbury. So, following the love feast that concluded the service, the two men and eleven preachers shared a meal at the home of Mrs. Barret, which was about a mile from the chapel. Asbury confessed to being "shocked when first informed of the intention of these my brethren in coming to this country."<sup>78</sup> Coke confirmed that Asbury held these sentiments; he reflected, "I privately opened our plan to Mr. Asbury. He expressed considerably doubt concerning it, which I rather applauded than otherwise."<sup>79</sup> And, in fact, Asbury had some inclination of Wesley's plan prior to meeting Coke. Wesley wrote Asbury a letter while Coke was at sea. In it Wesley made it clear in his letter to Asbury that he was considering the possibility of a

---

<sup>76</sup> Asbury, 1: 471.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid., 1: 471.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid., 1: 471.

<sup>79</sup> Coke, 34.

separate ordination for the Methodists. In the letter Wesley stated that was seeking a middle way between the Anglican parochial system and congregationalism for the Methodists. He was, thus, wary of the American Methodists maintaining a close connection with the American Episcopalians. Wesley wrote,

You are aware of the danger on either hand and I scarce know which is the greater? One or the other, so far as it takes place, will overturn Methodism from the foundation: Either our traveling Preachers turning Independents and gathering Congregations each for himself: Or procuring Ordination in a *regular way*, & accepting Parochial Cures.<sup>80</sup>

Asbury brought the cadre of preachers along to the meeting in anticipation of the need to call a Conference. The preachers gathered with Coke and Asbury unanimously agreed that a Conference was necessary. And, Freeborn Garrettson was sent “like an arrow, from North to South, directing him to send messengers to the right and left, and to gather all the preachers together at Baltimore on Christmas-Eve.”<sup>81</sup> It was, sadly, a task for which Garrettson was later criticized. Jesse Lee wrote, “...being fond of preaching by the way, and thinking he could do the business by writing, he did not give timely notice to the preachers who were it the extremities of the world; and of course several of them were not at the conference.”<sup>82</sup>

---

<sup>80</sup> Quoted in Vickers, *Thomas Coke*, 74. *Proceedings of the Wesley Historical Society* 33 (1961), 11.

<sup>81</sup> Coke, *Journal*, 35.

<sup>82</sup> Lee, 89.

### 3. Asbury and Coke

Francis Asbury<sup>83</sup> and Thomas Coke were fully aware of the importance of the upcoming Christmas Conference. Already at the time of their initial meeting, the two men were discussing issues beyond ordination and polity; they were discussing the establishment of a school or college.<sup>84</sup> The two men were beginning to carefully and deliberately map out and piece together a new type of religious organization, one that would expand the country and become one of the most powerful religious bodies in the world. In many ways, Francis Asbury and Thomas Coke were a strange pairing. The two men shared many differences, and few similarities.

Thomas Coke was born to a well-educated, wealthy family in the affluent city of Brecon. His father, Bartholomew Coke, was an apothecary who renowned for his skills in the medical profession and had even served a few years in public life, serving as a Common Councilman, alderman, and bailiff. So, Coke was raised as a “Gentlemen Commoner” with a tremendous amount of privilege. His childhood was spent being part of high society. He was a warm-hearted, friendly, carefree youth, with an eye for the women.<sup>85</sup> Coke was “short, with round, cherubic features often lit by a smile.”<sup>86</sup> Coke’s journey into the Christian

---

<sup>83</sup> There is no definitive biography of Francis Asbury. The best treatments are Darius L. Salter, *America’s Bishop: The Life of Francis Asbury* (Nappanee, IN: Francis Asbury Press, 2003) and Frank Baker’s chapters in *From Wesley to Asbury*. Prior to Salter’s volume, the best biography on Asbury was L.C. Rudolph, *Francis Asbury* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1966). The latter volume, in particular, is somewhat enmeshed in hagiography.

<sup>84</sup> Coke, *Journal*, 35.

<sup>85</sup> Vickers, *Thomas Coke*, 4-8.

<sup>86</sup> Vickers, *Thomas Coke*, 82.

faith was, partially, an intellectual one. He was reared with some relationship with the Church of England. During his student days at Oxford University Coke was heavily influenced by Deist writings. Deism was an emerging intellectual trend – more popular in Universities than in the general populace – that deemphasized the supernatural elements of Christianity. Coke experienced an “intellectual conversion” upon reading Bishop Sherlock’s *Trial of the Witness of Jesus*. This work convinced him to embrace more orthodox beliefs again.<sup>87</sup> It was this conviction that led to his pursuit of ordination in the Church of England. His discouragement with the parish eventually led to his embrace of Methodism. Coke was also someone who was inexperienced in ministry and newcomer to America.

Asbury, in contrast, was stern and frail, suffering frequent bouts with ill health brought upon, partially, by years of hard travel in America. And, despite being self-uneducated and socially uncouth, Asbury possessed tremendous natural charisma and leadership abilities. Coke remarked,

I exceedingly reverence Mr. *Asbury*; he has so much simplicity, like a child, so much wisdom and consideration, so much meekness and love; and under all this, though hardly to be perceived, so much command and authority, that he is exactly qualified for a primitive Bishop.<sup>88</sup>

Francis Asbury was a man of humble origins. Like Coke, he was English, having been born near Birmingham on August 20 or 21, 1745. His family was poor. Francis’s father, Joseph Asbury, worked as a farmer and gardener for two wealthy families in the area; the families were the Wyrleys of Hamstead and the

---

<sup>87</sup> Vickers, *Thomas Coke*, 15.

<sup>88</sup> Coke, *Journal*, 35.

Goughs of Perry Hall.<sup>89</sup> Francis received some elementary schooling, before being apprenticed to John Griffin. Specifically, Griffin practiced the trade of chape filing; he made fittings for sword scabbards, bucket handles, belt buckles, and similar items.<sup>90</sup>

Asbury had from his youth possessed a serious demeanor. During his childhood he was derisively nicknamed the “Methodist Parson” by his classmates. While Asbury did not become a Methodist until his adult years, the movement’s very name was synonymous with excessive religiosity in many parts of England. And, in this particular case, the nickname seems to have been partially derided from his serious nature and from his mother offering frequently inviting persons of religious character into her home.<sup>91</sup>

Asbury was, to some extent, reared in the Christian faith. While his father was not a deeply faithful man, his mother, Elizabeth Asbury, was quite religious and it was she who had influenced his faith. According to a family tradition, Elizabeth Asbury had a vision before Francis’s birth in which it was revealed that her son would be a boy and a great religious reader. Perhaps as a result of this, Elizabeth and Francis spent much time reading religious books and discussing important subjects together during his youth.<sup>92</sup>

Asbury’s first association with the Methodists came while he was a teenager. The district in which Francis was raised was a center of Evangelicalism;

---

<sup>89</sup> Frank Baker, *From Wesley to Asbury* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1976), 107.

<sup>90</sup> Baker, 108.

<sup>91</sup> Asbury, 1: 720.

<sup>92</sup> Baker, 107.

so the influence of enthusiastic religion was widespread. Asbury was particularly inspired by this form of religion upon attending the evangelical preaching at All Saint's Church, which was sponsored by the Earl of Dartmouth. Francis was so excited by the preaching that he began devouring sermon literature by Methodists such as George Whitefield and John Cennick. This reading inspired him to seek out more information about the Methodists. He became a regular visitor at Methodist gatherings.

However, Asbury believed himself to be in a state of unbelief until he had a distinct experience of conversion. When he was sixteen he experienced a new sense of divine forgiveness. After a hearing the preaching of Alexander Mather, he retreated to his home where he prayed with some friends in his father's barn. At that point, he experienced "...a marvellous display of the grace of God, which some might think was full sanctification..."<sup>93</sup> Elsewhere, Asbury wrote, "...I knew myself to be in a state of disbelief. On a certain time when we were praying in my father's barn, I believed the Lord pardoned my sins and justified my soul..."<sup>94</sup>

Asbury's also enjoyed a longer career in ministry than Coke. His time as a preacher began at the age of eighteen. Soon after his conversion he was given the responsibility of leading the new Methodist class at Bromwich Heath. Shortly thereafter he received his official status as a local preacher. John Vickers stated, "The term 'local' preacher was then quite an elastic one: despite his duties as an apprentice, he was soon traveling widely – not only in Staffordshire, but into

---

<sup>93</sup> Ibid.,1: 125.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid., 1: 721.

Gloucestershire and Derbyshire...<sup>95</sup> Asbury became a fulltime Methodist itinerant, filling in for the ill William Orpe in his own circuit, before being appointed as the junior preacher in the Bedfordshire Circuit in 1767. In 1768, he was received into full connection at the 1768 Conference and appointed to the Colchester Circuit and, a few months later, the Salisbury Circuit. In 1769, he returned to Bedfordshire before being reappointed to Wilshire South.<sup>96</sup> And, in 1771 he left for America, a post he served faithfully the rest of his life.

Regarding Asbury's character, Thomas Ware (1758-1842) reflected in his "Characteristics – the Conference of 1784" article for the *Methodist Magazine and Quarterly Review*,

Amongst those pioneers, Asbury stood chief, by mutual consent. There was something in his person, his eye, his mien, and in the music of his voice, that interested all who saw and heard him. He was naturally witty and satirical; but grace and good sense predominated; so he never let himself down beneath the dignity of a man, and a man of God.<sup>97</sup>

More than anything else, Asbury was someone who had proven himself to the American societies and preachers, through courage, tireless perseverance, and many years of service in American ministry.

Asbury sensed Coke as a novice to the essence of America. So, immediately following their initial meeting, Asbury decided to give Coke a "crash-course" in America. Life for itinerant preachers in the United States was more challenging than it was in the British Isles. At this point in time, following

---

<sup>95</sup> John A. Vickers, *Francis Asbury*, People Called Methodist Series (Peterborough, U.K.: Foundry Press, 1993), 8.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

<sup>97</sup> T. Ware, "Characteristics - the Conference of 1784," *The Methodist Magazine and Quarterly Review* 13 (January 1831), 102.



the War for Independence, the United States possessed few urban areas. Philadelphia and New York were the largest towns in America. However, the vast majority of people in England's former colonies lived in rural areas. So, in order to reach the scattered settlements, Methodist itinerants had to cross over a tremendous amount of wilderness territory that was unsettled, treacherous, and only marginally explored. To mention only one sign of the precariousness of an itinerant preacher's life, it was not uncommon for them to carry a musket and powder horn for dealing with the trials of the frontier.<sup>98</sup> Asbury introduced Coke to "American Methodism," by sending him on a route of nearly a thousand miles, through Maryland and Virginia. It was the very route that Asbury had just ridden. Asbury's hope was that Coke would come to appreciate not only the plight of the American preachers, but also the commitment present in their ranks.

Coke's "crash course" was a journey fraught with difficulties, but it generally proved edifying. Wherever he went, people came in droves to take the Lord's Supper and to have their children baptized. Coke was guided and aided by Asbury's black servant, Harry Hosier or "Black Harry." Harry was from North Carolina and was an eloquent preacher, despite being illiterate. His sermons attracted white, as well as black, listeners and for years he traveled with Asbury and other preachers. In fact, he traveled to England with Freeborn Garrettson in 1790. Coke was very impressed by Harry. He recorded, "I really believe he is one of the best preachers in the world, there is such an amazing power attends his preaching, though he cannot read; and he is one of the

---

<sup>98</sup> In fact, Asbury's powder horn is housed in the United Methodist Archives Center.

humblest creatures I ever saw.” Unfortunately, Harry “fell from grace,” succumbing the temptation of alcohol.<sup>99</sup>

Suffice to say, though, that after his experience in the American circuits, Coke knew more about American life, not to mention that of the preachers who served the Methodists in America. It may not have changed his personality. However He was at least more ready to understand the situations with which Asbury and the American preachers had to deal.

### **C. The Christmas Conference**

#### **1. Christmas Eve Sessions**

The highly anticipated 1784 conference opened on Christmas Eve in the Lovely Lane Chapel, located in Baltimore. The Christmas Conference represented a pivotal shift in the history of the fledgling religious movement. In the first place, at this Conference, the American Methodists became an independent, distinct Church. And, secondly, the Conference represented a definite centralization of the religious movement’s power.

Asbury and Coke had reunited on December 14, when Coke crossed the Chesapeake Bay. Asbury had been traveling through the western parts of Maryland, spreading news of Wesley’s plan among the Methodist societies and preachers. In the ten days before the beginning of the conference, Asbury and Coke began to make plans for the location of their college.<sup>100</sup> They also journeyed

---

<sup>99</sup> Coke, *Journal*, 35-37.

<sup>100</sup> The proposed location was Abingdon.

to Perry Hall, the “mansion-house” of Henry Dorsey, who was sympathetic to the Methodist cause.<sup>101</sup> At Gough’s home, the two men made the necessary preparations for the upcoming conference.

The conference was laden with worship, as was typical of Methodist gatherings. There was a service at six each morning; this was an hour later than services were normally scheduled at conferences, however, the later scheduling was a concession to the severe weather. Coke normally preached at noon, except on ordination and days, where the services were held at ten. Evening services were held as well; they were so well attended that three were held simultaneously, at Lovely Lane, Point Chapel, and the local Dutch Church, whose pastor was Asbury’s friend, Philip Otterbein.<sup>102</sup>

During the first day of the Christmas Conference, Coke presented Wesley’s letter of September 10, 1784. In this letter addressed “To Dr. Coke, Mr. Asbury, and our Brethren in North America,” Wesley laid out his rationale for setting up an independent church in America. He declared that “a very uncommon train of providences” had led to a political situation in America that made it necessary for the American Methodists to become separate from the Church of England. And, thus, Wesley pronounced the Methodists an independent Church. Wesley wrote, “They are now at full liberty to simply to follow the Scriptures and the Primitive Church.”<sup>103</sup>

---

<sup>101</sup> Coke, *Journal*, 41. In a candid spirit, Coke admitted in his journal that Gough’s impressive home had robbed its owner of “... a considerable part of his religion.”

<sup>102</sup> Vickers, *Thomas Coke*, 86.

<sup>103</sup> Wesley, *Letters*, 7: 238f.

Beyond establishing the American Methodists as an independent Church, Wesley's letter directed the conference to consolidate the power of the movement not just into a "Conference", but also into the hands of superintendents, or directors. He wrote, "I have accordingly appointed Dr. Coke and Mr. Francis Asbury to be joint superintendents over our brethren in North America."<sup>104</sup>

After the presentation of the letter, Coke outlined for the preachers Wesley's scheme for an independent church. Wesley had drawn up a sketch of his proposals for America, but this had either disappeared or was not referenced at the time of the conference.<sup>105</sup> Instead, Coke drew his presentation both from making exegetical comments on Wesley's letter and his own knowledge of Wesley's intentions.

It's unclear whether Coke made extensive commentary on the new prayer book or revised Articles of Religion. In his letter, Wesley had "advised" the preachers to use them both. And both represented significant shifts from the established Church of England. The new prayer book, which was titled *The Sunday Service for the Methodists in North America*, was an abridgement of the *Book of Common Prayer*. Wesley shortened the Sunday Service, which was called Morning Prayer in the *Book of Common Prayer*. He also left out several Psalms, deleted parts of others, removed other problematic or excessive text, omitted the liturgical calendar, the visitation of the sick, the confirmation service, the catechism, the Athanasian Creed, and a few other elements. Wesley's revisions also allowed sprinkling as an alternative to immersion in baptism. He also used

---

<sup>104</sup> Ibid., 7: 239.

<sup>105</sup> Baker, 148.

the word “elder” instead of “presbyter” and “superintendent” instead of “bishop.” In his revision of the Thirty-Nine Article of Religion, Wesley omitted fifteen. He also abridged several others. Notably, he omitted the Articles he believed to disagree with scripture; among those omitted were Of the Three Creeds, Of Works before Justification, Of Christ alone without Sin, Of Predestination and Election, Of the Authority of General Councils, Of Ministering in the Congregation.<sup>106</sup>

## 2. The Thirteenth General Conference

The conference, at which the Methodist Episcopal Church was formed, did not go as either Wesley or Coke had envisioned. In fact, Wesley and Coke did not envision a Conference where lengthy debates over rules, let alone formal elections would take place. But, Francis Asbury, who was more sensitive to the realities of the American situation, insisted on such a conference. In all probability, Asbury was aware that the only way to truly impose authority and exercise power in the American context was to include the Methodist preachers in the decision making process required for the formation of a new religious organization.

At Asbury’s insistence the thirteenth general conference officially began when the preachers reconvened on December 27. Coke and Asbury presided over the conference proceedings. Asbury summed up the Conference of 1784 in just a few sentences. He wrote in his journal,

---

<sup>106</sup> Heitzenrater, 289-290. John Wesley, *The Sunday Service of the Methodists in North America. With Other Occasional Services* (London, 1784).

We then rode to Baltimore, where we met a few preachers; it was agreed to form ourselves into an Episcopal Church, and to have superintendents, elders, and deacons. When the conference was seated, Dr. Coke and myself were unanimously elected to the superintendency of the Church, and my ordination followed, after being previously ordained deacon and elder....<sup>107</sup>

As Asbury made clear, even in his succinct style, a number of significant decisions were made during the course of the Conference. Most significantly, the decision was made to form the Methodist Episcopal Church, a name that did not originate with Asbury, Coke, or Wesley, but was instead envisioned by John Dickins.<sup>108</sup> However, the most significant action that occurred at this Conference was the successful creation of authoritative structures to monitor, discipline, and direct the Methodists in America. Notably, two such structures were created, an episcopacy and a controlling conference.

In its initial conception, the primary purpose of the Christmas Conference was one of conveyance. Wesley and the English ministers he had sent conceived of the conference as a time when the Methodist preachers in America would accept Wesley's appointment of Asbury and Coke as General Superintendents, be jubilant over Wesley's decision to institute a new Church, and ordain an appropriate number of Methodist clergy to oversee the circuits. And, certainly, the latter of these goals went mostly as expected; besides Asbury (and Whatcoat and Vasey who were ordained directly by Wesley), there were thirteen preachers elected to elder's orders.<sup>109</sup> However, what Wesley and Coke did not initially

---

<sup>107</sup> Asbury, 1:474.

<sup>108</sup> Thomas Ware, *Sketches of the Life and Travels of Rev. Thomas Ware* (New York: G. Lane and P.P. Sandford, 1842), 106.

<sup>109</sup> Lee, 90. They were Freeborn Garrettson, Jeremiah Lambert, William Gill, Reuben Ellis, Le Roy Cole, James O'Kelly, John Hagerty, Richard Ivey, James O.

foresee was the radical transition of power from Wesley to the American preachers that would occur during the Conference of 1784.

The creation of a distinct and powerful episcopacy was one of the first orders of the general conference. Whether intentional or unintentional, Wesley's act of "setting aside" Coke and Asbury as general superintendents laid the framework for the establishment of a distinct and powerful episcopal order within the Methodist Episcopal Church.<sup>110</sup>

Thomas Coke did much to inflate the power of the superintendent position. On the occasion of the ordination of Francis Asbury, Thomas Coke preached a sermon on Revelations 3: 7-11. In the sermon Coke sought to "delineate the character of a Christian Bishop" and justify the ordinations. In the first place, he stated that Methodism contained an Episcopal form of church government. In doing so, he explicitly used the word "bishop." He also reaffirmed his and Wesley's right to ordain. Following a similar line of logic to what Wesley had employed, Coke stated that there existed nowhere an unbroken line of apostolic succession and, furthermore, the Methodists had as much right to ordain "as most of the Reformed Churches in Christendom: Our Ordination, in its lowest view, being equal to any of the Presbyterian as origination with three Presbyters of the Church of England." Coke concluded that Methodism, by

---

Cromwell, Beverly Allen, John Tunnel, Henry Willis, and Nelson Reed. Also, John Dickins, Caleb Boyer, and Ignatius Pigman were elected to deacon orders.

<sup>110</sup> A.B. Lawson, *John Wesley and the Christian Ministry* makes the case that Coke misrepresented Wesley's view of consecration. According to Lawson, Wesley did not intend any formal consecration of Asbury and Coke, since he was not entitled to confer orders that he did not possess. John Vickers disagrees with Lawson's position. He contends that there is a "vital distinction in Wesley's mind between the office and function of a bishop." Also, Wesley set a "separate order of service for the setting apart of the superintendent." Vickers, *Thomas Coke*, 88.

its very nature, was Episcopal in its form of church polity. Furthermore, Coke expounded on the “ten grand characteristics of a Christian bishop.” These attributes included gentleness, patience, fortitude, meekness, wisdom, zeal, humility, and communion with God.<sup>111</sup>

Asbury compounded this power, by relocating the source of the episcopacy from Wesley to the American Conference. Rather than simply accept the appointment as general superintendent conferred on him by Wesley, Asbury insisted on being elected to such a position by his fellow preachers. Asbury was, predictably, unanimously elected. Subsequently, Asbury was ordained a deacon, elder, and finally superintendent on successive days of the conference.<sup>112</sup>

Asbury’s move was a carefully concocted one; on one level, he was appealing to the democratic spirit permeating the newly born United States in the wake of the American Revolution. Asbury recognized that true power in its American context could be effectively exercised only after the people first gave it. And, on the other hand, Asbury’s move was one that moved the locus of power away from Wesley to himself.

The use of the word “bishop” was not commonplace in the Christmas Conference. The creation of a blueprint for a new denomination was an onerous task. And, in fact, the debate surrounding its creation, carried out in the Conference, was done so with sensitivity to the time constraints. As a result of

---

<sup>111</sup> Thomas Coke, “The Substance of a Sermon Preached at Baltimore in the State of Maryland before the General Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church on the 27<sup>th</sup> of December, 1784 at the Ordination of Francis Asbury to the Office of a Superintendent (London: J. Paramore, 1785), 14-21. Russell E. Richey and Thomas E. Frank, *Episcopacy in the Methodist Tradition: Perspectives and Proposals* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2004), 47. Vickers, *Thomas Coke*, 88-90.

<sup>112</sup> Lee, *Short History*, 89.



the hastiness in which it came together, there were some issues of debate that were worked out over the course of the next several conferences. Asbury was upset with the ordering of the questions and answers and he rearranged the questions into an order more to his liking. Asbury's revised edition was, subsequently, edited by John Dickins. Among the revisions made by Dickins and Asbury was substituting the term "bishop" for that of "superintendent." Asbury made the substitution and had Coke and the three conferences ratify it as the scriptural name and equivalent meaning in 1787.<sup>113</sup> It was, obviously, a move that Thomas Coke had little problem with. He utilized the term in his Journal when he first met Asbury. More importantly, his ordination sermon had invoked the title. Coke had written, "It is evident to every discerning reader, that the words *Bishop, Elder, Overseer, & c.* are synonymous terms throughout the writing of St. Paul."<sup>114</sup>

In many ways, the powers and status that a bishop exercised was reemphasized by the orchestrations of the Conference. During the Conference and at other intervals following it, the superintendents (or bishops), along with a few of the elders, actually donned clerical robes and bands.<sup>115</sup> While this move proved to be quite controversial and was linked with some as the decline of primitive Methodism, it stood to reemphasize the point that Coke, Asbury, and others were trying to make: the Methodist Episcopal Church was a denomination that stood firmly in ecclesial accord with its Anglican heritage.

---

<sup>113</sup> Lee, *Short History*, 121-125; Richey and Frank, 47; Baker 150f.

<sup>114</sup> Coke, *The Substance of a Sermon*, 11.

<sup>115</sup> Lee, *Short History*, 103.

The second substantial act that occurred during the Christmas Conference was that the Baltimore Conference assumed full legislative, electoral, and disciplinary power over the fledgling denomination. It presumed this power by convening itself, by acting through majority rule, assuming the power to ordain and elect superintendents, and the power to regulate and amend the rules of the societies.<sup>116</sup> And, hence, the Conference of 1784 set itself up as the controlling body of the Methodists in America.

In the first place, the Conference assumed the right to control the rules and regulations by which the Church and societies operated. The majority of the remainder of the conference was spent drawing up a “form of discipline.”<sup>117</sup> More than three-quarters of the 1785 *Discipline*, that the 1784 Conference produced, was taken directly from the John Wesley’s 1780 *Minutes*. There were, for the most part, only minor omissions and changes made from the originating text. However, there were at least three significant changes, each of which were significant and illustrated the power that the Baltimore Conference was exhibiting. First of all, the decision was made to make possible “the future union of the Methodists.” In the *Minutes* of the 1784 Conference, the question was posed,

Q.2. What can be done in order to the future Union of the Methodists.

A. During the Life of the Rev. Mr. Wesley, we acknowledge ourselves his Sons in the Gospels, ready in Matters belong to Church-Government, to obey his Commands. And we do engage after his Dead, to do every Thing that we judge consistent with the Cause of Religion in *America* and the political interests of these States, to preserve and promote our Union with

---

<sup>116</sup> Russell E. Richey, *The Methodist Conference in America: A History* (Nashville: Kingswood Books, 1996), 35-37.

<sup>117</sup> Lee, *Short History*, 90.

the Methodists in Europe.<sup>118</sup>

Hence, the first major “American innovation” of Wesley’s *Minutes* was made at the insistence of Thomas Coke. It ensured a level of connectedness between the American and British Methodists. This innovation, however, was not widely popular and “caused uneasiness.”<sup>119</sup> Asbury, in particular, had serious issues with it. However, he chose to keep silence during the conference. This issue did not go away and became a serious contention in subsequent days.

The second major innovation was the creation of a threefold order of ministry. This order was based on underlying assumptions present in the *Sunday Service*. Notably, the three orders were deacons, elders, and superintendents, referred to in the *Discipline* as bishops.

In order to best understand the tri-fold division of ministry in early Methodism, it is important to first understand how the churches were organized. Methodists were organized into, first, societies which were divided into smaller classes of twelve or more persons. Class leaders, who were normally laypeople, led the classes. The leaders of the classes met weekly (and, eventually, only monthly) with the preacher, who guided and supervised. Finally, Methodist

---

<sup>118</sup> Methodist Episcopal Church, *Minutes of Several Conversations Between the Rev. Thomas Coke, the Rev. Francis Asbury and Others* (Philadelphia: Charles Cist, 1785), 3. It is also important to note that “Europe” was the general word used among American Methodists to connote Wesley’s Connection. This was, partially, to avoid using the words “England” or “Britain” which some American preachers found unpatriotic.

<sup>119</sup> Lee, *Short History*, 91.

Societies were organized into “circuits”; a circuit consisted of all the Methodist Societies in a given geographic area, in most cases.<sup>120</sup>

Deacon and elder orders were given by the election of the majority of the Conference and the laying on of hands by the bishops. Their responsibilities differed; in most cases, deacon ordination was given prior to receiving ordination as an elder. Essentially, the responsibility of a deacon or “helper” (as they were often referred) was to serve and assist elders, who were often referred to as “assistants”, on given circuits in preaching, administering the sacraments, and supervising the various societies. In most cases, the deacon was responsible for overseeing specific classes and Societies. The elder, on the other hand, was responsible for all of the Societies on a given circuit. They were responsible also for overseeing the deacons, administering the sacraments and preaching in an assigned circuit.

The superintendent or bishop was an elected position. As inferred by the earlier comments, the powers of the bishop were fairly vast. Abel Stevens reflected that the power of the bishop “were extraordinary, almost plenary; but he was subjected to extraordinary amenability.”<sup>121</sup> These powers included setting the appointments for the forthcoming year; essentially, the bishops were in charge of where ministers were sent for a given year. The bishops were also endowed with the power to preside and, to some extent, direct the conversation held at conference in a given year. Likewise, they could unite two or more Annual Conferences (which were the regional Conferences held each year) and

---

<sup>120</sup> Abel Stevens, *A Compendious History of American Methodism* (New York: Carlton and Porter, 1867), 198-199.

<sup>121</sup> Stevens, *Compendious History*, 197.

dictate the time of year that they would meet. In the intervals between conferences, the bishops were endowed with the power to change, receive, or even suspend preachers. The bishop also settled conflicts and handled appeals from preachers and society members. Finally, while ordination or preachers was decided by the Conference, the bishop had veto power over such votes.<sup>122</sup>

The third major American innovation was the addition of rules that called for the complete emancipation of black slaves by their Methodist masters. While these rules proved to be quite controversial and, ultimately, proved to be short lived, it is significant that the Conference assumed the power to regulate the moral practices of its members. The rules stated that slavery was contrary to the “Golden Law of God” and that every member of the Methodist societies who owns slaves was required “after notice given him by the preacher, within twelve months (except in Virginia, and there within two years) legally execute and record an instrument, whereby he sets free every slave in his possession.”<sup>123</sup>

Furthermore, rules were added that refused admittance of slaveholders to the Methodist societies and the immediate expulsion of those who gave away or sold slaves, rather than free them. Not surprisingly, the southern Methodists opposed these rules. As a result, the execution of the rules was suspended at the June 1785 conference. By the general conference of 1808 the “greater part of the rule about slavery was abolished, and no part of it was retained respecting

---

<sup>122</sup> Methodist Episcopal Church, *The Form of Discipline for the Ministers, Preachers, and Members of the Methodist Episcopal Church in America Considered* (New York: Ross, 1787), 6-10; Stevens, *Compendious History*, 197f.

<sup>123</sup> MEC, *Minutes*, 15.

private members.”<sup>124</sup> And, in fact, the conference of 1816 declared the battle against slavery a lost cause.

What is clear from the events of the Conference of 1784/5 is that the newly formed Methodist Episcopal Church was deliberately creating the necessary authoritative structures to control and help expand the fledgling denomination. These structures included means of education. With that understanding, another significant act of the Conference of 1784 was the establishment of a school. The school was, in most ways, Francis Asbury’s aspiration. The idea originated in the years prior to the Christmas Conference, when Francis Asbury had a vision of “great prospects for schools” in America.<sup>125</sup> During his time as a refugee in Delaware, he became convinced of the need for a “Kingswood school” in America.<sup>126</sup> As a result, Asbury tirelessly campaigned for the institution, even receiving some early contributions. When Coke arrived in America, Asbury immediately shared his aspiration for a school with his fellow future bishop. Coke joined Asbury in fundraising for the school. At the end of the Christmas Conference, on January 1, 1785 the two bishops were able to convince the conference to approve the plan for a school and to donate money accordingly.

The school’s name, in itself, represented another tribute to the power of the newly formed bishopric. According to tradition, the Baltimore Conference deadlocked over the name for the school. Deciding not to name the school “New

---

<sup>124</sup> Lee, *Short History*, 97f.

<sup>125</sup> Asbury, *Journal and Letters*, 3:123. Letter was to Jacob Hall, November 10, 1793.

<sup>126</sup> Kingswood School was founded near Bristol, England by John Wesley in 1748. It was originally aimed at educating the sons of itinerant preachers. However, its goal became expanded over time.

Kingswood,” the Conference was undecided as to whether name the school after Asbury or Coke. Subsequently, Thomas Coke proposed the name “Cokesbury,” which was accepted.<sup>127</sup>

Coke and Asbury were to supervise the school. They suggested that the school take middle class children who were able to pay. However, the primary goal of the school was to care for orphans and preachers’ sons. The school, however, faced numerous challenges due to inadequate schoolmasters and lack of funding. As a result, by 1796 even the optimistic Francis Asbury withdrew his support from the school.<sup>128</sup> However, the school was significant, in that it represented the Methodist Episcopal Church’s first efforts to create meaningful educational institutions in America.

#### **D. Conclusion: Consolidating the Movement**

Coke and Asbury spent the days following the Christmas Conference spreading its message: Methodism in America had come of age. And, indeed, the days following the Christmas Conference were full of energy and potency for the fledgling religious movement. Abel Stevens remarked, “It’s whole history, before the arrival of Coke, wears an aspect of vagueness, of uncertainty. Hereafter it is to proceed with a definitive and more historic scope.”<sup>129</sup> As Stevens suggested, Asbury, Coke, and a cadre of other preachers worked tirelessly to help grow and

---

<sup>127</sup> John Emory, *A Defense of ‘Our Fathers’ and of the Original Organization of the Methodist Episcopal Church against Alexander McCaine and Others* (New York: N. Bangs and J. Emory, 1827), 56; John Abernathy Smith, “Cokesbury College: Kingswood in America,” *Methodist History* 28:4 (July 1990), 223.

<sup>128</sup> Smith, 222-236.

<sup>129</sup> Stevens, *Compendious History*, 200.

consolidate the United State's first "denomination" in the months and years following 1784.

The great dilemma that faced the Methodists in the years following 1784 had to do with revivalism, though. The new Church was plagued by a cruel dualism. On the one hand, the Methodist Episcopal Church in America was attempting to become a complete, formalized institution. However, the Church's primary means of growth in the early nineteenth century was raucous, uncontrolled revivalism. In the decades to come, the challenge of the new denomination was to bring both conceptions of the Church into symmetry.



## CHAPTER III

### ENTHUSIASM

Throughout much of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, Methodism was intimately associated with enthusiastic worship services. People thought of Methodists as shouting from the pews, echoing approbation to the preachers in the pulpit, waiving arms and handkerchiefs, crying, praying aloud and unbidden, even breaking spontaneously into song. This association was not unfounded. In fact, many early Methodist preachers associated success or the making of converts with “the noise,” which normally consisted of shouting, moaning, and crying.<sup>130</sup> However, while this religious enthusiasm was a vital part of early Methodism, it was also something that portions of the church criticized and sought to control. This faction of the Church saw the exhibitions of enthusiasm in services, not as religious ecstasy, but as shallow emotionalism.

#### A. Enthusiasm and Methodism

##### 1. Worship and Enthusiasm in Early Methodism

From its earliest days, Methodist worship was characterized by raucous enthusiasm. For instance, the growth of Methodism in England had been propelled by John Wesley’s involvement in open-air revival preaching exercises.

---

<sup>130</sup> See, for instance, James Meacham, “A Journal of James Meacham,” in *Historical Papers* (Durham, N.C.: Trinity College Historical Society and The North Carolina Conference Historical Society, 1912), 90.

Pushed by his one-time friend George Whitefield (1714-1770), John Wesley began preaching to outdoor crowds at first in Bristol and, eventually, through England. These events were privy to bursts of heated religious activity, such as people “falling into strange fits.”<sup>131</sup>

This religious enthusiasm carried over from its British context, when Methodism was imported to America in the middle decades of the eighteenth century. In fact, Methodism in early America was partially brought about by an increasing lack of expressive faith in the colonies. Certainly, the Irish immigrants who formed the first societies found the established churches lacking in “true religion.” It was only through the prompting of a “mother in Israel” named Barbara Heck “whose zeal in the cause of God they were all indebted for the revival of the spirit of piety among them.” Supposedly, Heck was disgusted with the vice that her and related Irish immigrant families were engaged in. One day, she exploded into the room and seized a pack of cards that the men were playing with and threw them in the fire. She then turned to Philip Embury and proclaimed, “You must preach to us, or we shall all go to hell together, and God will require our blood at your hands!”<sup>132</sup> This religious expressiveness and intensity was only intensified in the first society when Captain Webb joined their ranks. His boisterous and expressive mannerisms led to many explosive conversions and aided the society in its early growth.

For that matter, this form of religious enthusiasm and expressiveness was not limited to the first societies. This relentless enthusiasm was present wherever

---

<sup>131</sup> Heitzenrater, *Wesley and the People Called Methodists*, 100.

<sup>132</sup> Bangs, *History of the Methodist Episcopal Church*, 1: 47-48.

Methodists preached. For instance, Freeborn Garrettson reported that in 1776, as he was preaching to a predominantly Presbyterian audience, "...the word took such effect on the heart of a woman, that she cried so loud for mercy as to make the church ring...In a few minutes the Lord set her soul at liberty. She clapped her hands in an ecstasy of joy..."<sup>133</sup>

For a number of reasons, this style of worship was one of the most distinctive marks of early Methodism. In the first place, American Methodism was a lay centered movement. From its beginnings in England, Methodism was organized around the small group model. Specifically, Methodist Societies were organized into classes of around twelve persons. In some cases, Societies were also organized into smaller bands of five to ten Methodists. The Societies were tended and visited by a preacher. However, traveling preachers were required to visit a large number of Societies in a geographic area and, as a result, it was frequent for a Society to go a significant period of time without a visit from a preacher. In the absence of the preacher, the class leaders, who were lay leaders that demonstrated a specific maturity in the Christian faith, were the central worship leaders.

The small group nature of early Methodism created a highly participatory environment. Class members were expected to be vocal participants in the classes by doing such acts as sharing their testimonies with one another. This activity contributed to the making of a highly participatory Methodist core audience being present at the larger gatherings. Furthermore, several of the class members graduated to the rank of licensed exhorter. Licensed exhorters were,

---

<sup>133</sup> Freeborn Garrettson, *American Methodist Pioneer: Freeborn Garrettson*, ed. Robert Drew Simpson (Rutland, Va.: Academy Books, 1984), 58-59.

generally, lay members who taught and spoke at Methodist gatherings in the areas. They were not preachers; instead they were laypersons that worked another professions. However, many exhorters went on to become local preachers or traveling preachers.<sup>134</sup>

In the second place, the Methodists frequently called upon lay attendees, both class leaders and class members to offer testimony, share their religious experience, or offer prayers. This practice was not, for that matter, limited to members of the Methodist Societies. William Burke recounted, “The practice then among the Methodists was to call upon all the seekers of religion to pray in public at the prayer meeting.”<sup>135</sup> These exhortations proved to be powerful moments of religious experience for participants. In many cases, conversion occurred during these exhortations or lay prayers.

And, finally, enthusiastic worship was encouraged and inspired by the preachers. The Methodist preacher Thomas Ware recounted, “People love the preacher who makes them feel.”<sup>136</sup> Successes were measured by the emotional reaction earned from the attendees of services. Writing in 1779, Freeborn Garrettson recorded the events of a preaching excursion. He wrote,

I preached at a new place, where the congregation consisted mostly of young people...We had a wonderful display of the power of the Lord. After

---

<sup>134</sup> Stevens, *Compendious History*, 199.

<sup>135</sup> William Burke, “Autobiography of William Burke” in *Sketches of Western Methodism: Biographical, Historical, and Miscellaneous*, ed. James B. Finley (Cincinnati: Hitchcock and Walden, 1854), 25.

<sup>136</sup> Thomas Ware, *Sketches of the Life and Travels of Rev. Thomas Ware* (New York: G. Lane and P.P. Sandford, 1842), 175.

I had finished my discourse, the young people hung around each other, crying for mercy.<sup>137</sup>

Garrettson's experience was not unique. Methodist preachers in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries measured success and failures by the number of converts and visceral emotional experiences produced by congregations. For this reason, the most successful and desirable of Methodist preachers in early America were those who exhibited enthusiastic preaching.

In fact, the early Methodists became notorious for enthusiastic preaching and the breakout of religious exercises during worship. Ware remarked, "The charge preferred against us was not hypocrisy, but enthusiasm. Our opposers did not blame us for not living up to our profession outwardly, but for professing too much."<sup>138</sup> As a result, contemporaries frequently criticized the Methodists. One such critic wrote,

God was not in the earthquake, storm, or whirlwind, but in the still small voice. *Quere*, Is not 150 or 200 communicants of exemplary lives, more like successful preaching, than perhaps a dozen infamous characters, crying and sprawling on the ground, on hearing the loud bellowing of an ignorant methodist?<sup>139</sup>

## 2. Quarterly Meetings and Methodist Enthusiasm

The most notorious examples of Methodist enthusiasm were not the society worship services. While, certainly, enthusiastic worship was typical of

---

<sup>137</sup> Nathan Bangs, *The Life of the Rev. Freeborn Garrettson: Compiled from his Printed and Manuscript Journals* (New York: O. Lane and C.B. Tippet, 1845), 97.

<sup>138</sup> *Ibid.*, 103-104.

<sup>139</sup> Philo Aletheias, "Some Remarks on the Nature, Causes, and Dangerous Errors, and Infectious Spread of the Present Enthusiasm in America," *United States Magazine* 1 (October 1779), 417.

many Methodist congregations, the large gatherings of Methodists in such functions as the quarterly and camp meetings were the more famous examples.

The quarterly meeting was one of the most prominent places for enthusiastic worship in early American Methodism. At their origination, quarterly meetings were business meetings for individual circuits. The quarterly meetings were first developed in England. John Bennet borrowed the concept and, in fact, name from the Quakers. The utilization of quarterly business meetings for a given circuit proved to be so effective that John Wesley actually mandated these meetings at the 1749 Annual Conference.<sup>140</sup> The quarterly meetings gained popularity and, over time, became a staple of British Methodism. As the meetings grew to be more frequently utilized in circuits, they also grew in scope. Over time, some of the meetings became public worship events attended by hundreds of persons.

Following the example of their British counterparts, the American Methodists used quarterly meetings as a form of public worship, as well as an occasion for discussing business matters. Initially, the American version of the quarterly meeting greatly resembled the British version. They were held on a single day, normally a Tuesday. The meetings centered on the business issues of the circuit that needed to be discussed. Normally, various worship festivities were scheduled around the business affairs; so, a love feast, watch night service, and preaching service were normally planned to supplement the business being conducted.

---

<sup>140</sup> Lester Ruth, *A Little Heaven Below: Worship at Early Methodist Quarterly Meetings* (Nashville: Kingswood Books, 2000), 18-19.

However, as the meetings continued, their popularity increased. It was not uncommon for crowds in attendance to number in the hundreds or beyond. Freeborn Garrettson claimed that he frequently saw several thousand people at the quarterly meetings.<sup>141</sup> The quarterly meetings represented a key time of community for rural America; thus, people were willing to travel considerable distances to attend the meetings. In an attempt to explain American quarterly meetings to a British audience, Bishop Thomas Coke wrote,

Their Quarterly-meetings on this continent are much attended to. The Brethren for twenty miles round, and sometimes for thirty or forty, meet together. The meetings always last two days. All the Travelling Preachers in the circuit are present, and they with perhaps a local Preacher or two, give the people a sermon one after another, besides the Love-feast, and (now) the sacrament.<sup>142</sup>

Already by the end of the eighteenth century, the quarterly meetings resembled the camp meetings that would flourish throughout nineteenth century America. Notably, the quarterly meetings were expanded to multiple day affairs. In most cases, the meetings were transited from beginning on a weekday to either a Friday or Saturday. In general, the heart of the quarterly meeting was not the business conducted but, instead, the love feast and the variety of preaching services.<sup>143</sup>

And, the worship in the quarterly meetings was known to frequently be marked by raucous enthusiasm. For example, preachers often sought to move their congregations into a religious frenzy. So, in many cases, preaching services

---

<sup>141</sup> Garrettson, 122.

<sup>142</sup> See Ruth 24 fn 13.

<sup>143</sup> Ruth, 25.

often witnesses the outbreak of crying, shouting, and other signs of intense engagement from those in attendance. One preacher wrote,

On Friday the eleventh I set out for Burke quarterly meeting in Georgia, where, on Saturday the twelfth, we had a very quickening season. The whole assembly of hearers were dissolved in tears, while I enforced these words, "The eyes of the Lord are upon the righteous, and his ears are open until their cry."<sup>144</sup>

### 3. Methodism and the Great Revival Trend in the Early Republic

The raucous enthusiasm of Methodist worship was a natural fit for and perhaps even a causal factor in the evangelical revivals that broke out around the year 1800. The Methodist preachers and Societies effectively adapted to and helped fuel these revivals. As a result, these revivals helped the Methodists enjoy substantial numerical growth.

Around the year 1800, an "astonishing revival" took place in the western and southern regions of the country, particularly centered in the large geographic area that Francis Asbury named the Western Conference.<sup>145</sup> The Western Conference included "...Kentucky, Tennessee, the Carolinas, and many other parts" (as well as much of the area that would constitute the Ohio, Missouri, and Mississippi conferences).<sup>146</sup>

By most accounts, these areas were predominantly bereft of organized religion prior to the revivals. For that matter, the western region was full of

---

<sup>144</sup> B[everly] Allen, "Some Account of the Work of God in America," *Arminian Magazine* 15 (1792), 407-408.

<sup>145</sup> Burke, 34.

<sup>146</sup> Peter Cartwright, *The Autobiography of Peter Cartwright* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1956), 43.



terrifying terrain and a disperse population. The wilderness in areas such as Kentucky was not yet tame in the years immediately following 1784. Colonel Daniel Boone led settlers into the Kentucky wilderness only about a decade prior to the Christmas Conference. As a result, preachers who hoped to make headway into the region were forced to make due on very little. Abel Stevens wrote,

...the pioneers of Methodism in that part of Western Virginia and the Western territory suffered many privations, and underwent much toil and labor, preaching in forts and cabins, sleeping on straw, bear and buffalo skins, living on bear meat, venison, and wild turkey, traveling over mountains and through solitary valleys, and sometimes lying on the cold ground; receiving but a scanty support...<sup>147</sup>

The settlers also had to be constantly on their guard against attacks, as well as difficult terrain. Native American attacks were a constant fear when traveling through the western country. Methodist preacher William Burke recounted an incident when he was traveling with sixteen preachers, including Bishop Francis Asbury. Burke wrote,

I will here introduce a plan that Mr. Asbury suggested before we left the settlements. It was to make a rope long enough to tie to the trees all around the camp when we stopped at night, except a small passage for us to retreat, should the Indians surprise us; the rope to be so fixed as to strike the Indians below the knees, in which ease they would fall forward, and we would retreat into the dark and pour in a fire upon them from our rifles.<sup>148</sup>

Around the year 1784, the Methodists, Baptists, and Presbyterians began organizing churches and religious societies in places such as Kentucky.<sup>149</sup> But, these churches and societies were, initially, quite small and met with significant

---

<sup>147</sup> Stevens, *A Compendious History of American Methodism*, 223-224.

<sup>148</sup> Burke, 35.

<sup>149</sup> Theophilus Arminius, "Account of the Rise and Progress of the Work of God in the Western County pt. 1," *The Methodist Magazine* (May 1819), 184.

resistance from the surrounding culture. The western culture was notorious for being staunchly patriarchal and full of behavior that enthusiastic religious groups such as the Methodists believed licentious, such as gambling, drinking, and dancing. The revival was, thus, considered by the Methodists and other religious groups to be of monumental significance. Jesse Lee wrote, "...there was a remarkable revival of religion in the western county, both in Tennessee, and Kentucky states; such a work as had never been seen in that part of the world, since the first settling of the county."<sup>150</sup>

This great revival was fueled, in part, by the utilization of innovative ways of obtaining converts. Notably, religious groups such as the Methodists introduced to the region a new religious practice that they referred to as camp meetings. In a part of the country where people lived far apart and hungered for social contact, scheduled camp meetings in times when farm labor was less in demand was an ideal lure. Neighbors spread for miles and miles apart could gather for a week of religious meetings and socialization. The social lure alone was sheer magnetism. Camp meetings were the perfect religious draw for frontier and rural society.

The first substantial reports of camp meetings can be traced to Kentucky. Modern historians have credited the first camp meeting to the revival work of James McGready (1763-1817), a Presbyterian preacher.<sup>151</sup> McGready, who was originally from North Carolina, became the minister of three small congregations in Logan County, Kentucky in 1796. In an effort to grow his small churches,

---

<sup>150</sup> Lee, 274-75.

<sup>151</sup> It is important to realize that McGready was not credited as the initial instigator of the camp meeting phenomena by all of his contemporaries.

McGready experimented with a variety of methods. He organized his parishioners into prayer societies; each prayer society, in turn, petitioned God for a renewal of religion. Moreover, following the tradition of the Scottish Presbyterian seasonal revivals, he began holding joint communion services that began on Friday with preaching and ended on Sunday afternoon with a communion service.<sup>152</sup>

McGready held one of these services at his Red River Church in June 1800, where two visiting ministers joined him. The two ministers were John and William McGee; John was a Methodist, while William was a Presbyterian. Regardless, McGready allowed them to participate in the service. The enthusiastic preaching style of the Methodist preachers worked the crowd into a religious frenzy. McGready and other persons began interpreting these events as a clear sign that God had begun a great revival. The next month an even more spectacular series of outdoor religious services were held at Gasper River Church, constituting the first camp meeting. In the months to come, camp meetings began to sweep across the western counties.<sup>153</sup>

The most significant camp meeting was the one held at Cane Ridge, Kentucky in August 1801. Led by Presbyterian ministers such as Barton Warren Stone (1772-1844), the Cane Ridge Revival attracted somewhere between twenty and thirty thousand people from various religious groups. It's popularity stemmed from a variety of reasons. In the first place, it was highly ecumenical.

---

<sup>152</sup> See, Leigh Eric Schmidt, *Holy Fairs: Scotland and the Making of American Revivalism*, Second Edition (Grand Rapids, MI: William Eerdmans, 2001).

<sup>153</sup> John Boles, *The Great Revival: Beginnings of the Bible Belt* (Lexington, Ky. University Press of Kentucky, 1996), 52-55.

While it was not well attended by Baptists who were “confined pretty much to their own people,” Methodists and Presbyterians attended in droves.<sup>154</sup> In the second place, Stowe made effective use of advertising. He advertised to Methodists and Presbyterian fellowships throughout the area that the Cane Ridge revival was to be one of the greatest revival meetings in history. And, finally, it lived up to the hype concocted for it. The revival was noted for its outbreaks of experiential religion.

Cane Ridge served as a rallying event for many of Protestant groups in the Western County. The Methodist preacher Peter Cartwright (1785-1872) wrote,

From this camp-meeting, for so it ought to be called, the news spread through all the churches, and through all the land, and it excited great wonder and surprise; but it kindled religious flame that spread all over Kentucky and through many other states.<sup>155</sup>

In particular, Cane Ridge provided a tremendous amount of inspiration for the Methodist churches. According to Cartwright, it was from Cane Ridge that “...our camp-meetings took their rise.”<sup>156</sup>

Thus, the success of revivals at places such Cane Ridge, helped inspire the Methodists to begin organizing and utilizing camp meetings as a means of making ventures into the Western country. Many of the early camp meetings were done in conjunction with the Presbyterians. The two groups took the name “General Camp Meetings” for their joint efforts.<sup>157</sup> Nathan Bangs recounted that

---

<sup>154</sup> Arminius, “Account of the Rise and Progress of the Work of God in the Western Country, pt. 1,” 186.

<sup>155</sup> Cartwright, 34.

<sup>156</sup> *Ibid.*, 34.

<sup>157</sup> Bangs, *History of the Methodist Episcopal Church*, 2: 110.

some of the Presbyterians were heavily involved in the work of the camp meetings, while others were less eager. He wrote, "Though at the meeting the Methodists appeared to be the most actively engaged in the work, yet some of the Presbyterian brethren engaged heartily, while other stood aloof, not knowing what judgment to form of it."<sup>158</sup>

As a general rule, the camp meeting was a natural fit for the Methodist Episcopal Church. The Church was already notorious for emphasizing an enthusiastic style of preaching. More significantly, the camp meetings bore a strong resemblance to the quarterly meetings already flourishing in parts of America, as well as to the revivals John Wesley and George Whitefield had conducted in the middle decades of the eighteenth century. And, partially because of this familiarity, the camp meetings served as one of the most effective tools for Methodist expansions. Methodist camp meetings flourished in the Western Conference through the early decades of the nineteenth century.

## **E. The Camp Meeting Phenomena**

### **1. The Rise of Camp Meetings**

Camp meetings were a distinct departure from other forms of emotional worship that the Methodists had previously engaged in. Essentially they were an innovation of the traditional revival format. The primary differences between camp meetings and a traditional revival were the duration of the camp meeting,

---

<sup>158</sup> Bangs, *History of the Methodist Episcopal Church*, 2: 107.

the utilization of an almost entirely outdoor setting, and particularly radically examples of religious exercises.

A camp meeting was a protracted affair, lasting several days. The dates of the meeting were generally advertised in local newspapers and in a variety of other fashions. Invariably, the events were held in the Western Conference around harvest time, normally sometime between July and October. Holding the revivals during the fall helped make it possible for people to spend several days away from their farms and livelihoods. The protracted nature of the event, thus, allowed for a very intense “religious retreat” for its attendees. Over the course of the two to three day affair, persons were exposed to a variety of preaching, singing, and prayer services. Thus, they were given extended opportunity to join in the fervor of the crowd and heed the preachers’ call for repentance.

Similarly, the setting for a camp meeting was predominantly outdoors. The earliest camp meetings occasionally utilized preaching houses, but the size of the crowds quickly made that an ineffective option. And, over time, the site where a camp meeting was to be hosted was carefully chosen in order to create a specific emotional atmosphere. B.W. Gorham’s book, *The Camp Meeting Manual*, provides rich insight into the work that went on in the planning of camp meetings. According to Gorham, it was important for preachers to choose sites in areas that were hospitable to the religious gatherings, in order to attract the optimum number of participants and to avoid violent interruptions. Likewise, it was important for the site of a camp meeting to have adequate natural resources to accommodate a large crowd of several thousand people. Finally, there was a liturgical dimension to choosing the site of camp meetings. It was important that when the small trees were removed, the remaining trees formed a covering of

tree limbs over the site, helping to emphasize the contradiction between the darkness of the surrounding forest and the camp meeting site.<sup>159</sup>

And, camp meetings were known for their excess emotionalism. During camp meetings highly visible displays of emotion were frequently present. While fits of “shouting” or “crying” were well known to Methodists, other more radical religious exercises were less frequently seen. As participants in the revival were convicted of their sinfulness, received forgiveness from their sins, or simply were caught up in the fervor of the event, fits of falling, rolling on the ground, dancing, jumping, barking, and “the jerks.”<sup>160</sup> Jerks were probably the most common action to take place. They developed slowly; for instance, the forearm might begin to twitch, this twitching eventually spread until ever muscle joined in the spasmodic twitching.

While the emotional exercises contributed to the exciting atmosphere of the camp meeting, they were also happenings that led to a significant amount of contention. In some cases, the various exercises were considered involuntary and, at times, not a desired occurrence. Peter Cartwright wrote,

...there was a great deal of sympathetic feeling with many that claimed to be under the influence of the jerking exercise; and yet, with many, it was perfectly involuntary. It was, on all occasions, my practice to recommend fervent prayer as a remedy...<sup>161</sup>

---

<sup>159</sup> B.W. Gorham, *Camp Meeting Manual, a Practice Book for the Camp Ground* (Boston: H.V. Degen, 1854), 121. Dickson D. Bruce, Jr. *They All Sang Hallelujah: Plain-Folk Camp-Meeting Religion, 1800-1845* (Knoxville, TN: University of Tennessee Press, 1974), 69-70.

<sup>160</sup> Bangs, *History of the Methodist Episcopal Church*, 2: 161.

<sup>161</sup> Cartwright, 46.

Furthermore, these emotional outbursts invoked anger from many in the surrounding communities. Cartwright recounted a story from an 1804 camp meeting, in which he was forced to talk two brothers out of horsewhipping him; the brothers blamed Cartwright for giving their sisters the jerks.<sup>162</sup>

Camp meetings were criticized for a variety of other reasons, as well. Some critics insisted that camp meetings had become more social than theological affairs. Part of the attraction of camp meetings was their entertainment or social value. The western country was, at times, an isolating and lonely place for residents. It was not uncommon for there to be a significant geographic distance between the closest residence. As a result, part of the attraction of the camp meetings was the opportunity for social interaction and entertainment that they provided. In many cases, the affairs took on the form of a religious holiday, providing a place for persons to share in a community event.

The consequence of the social nature of these meetings was that there were behavioral lapses that occurred. Women in the community would use the camp meetings as times to show off their newest dresses. For many young people, the camp meetings became large courting grounds. An Alabama girl wrote that she had acquired “many boy friends” and informed her friend that she and the girls had enjoyed themselves “more than ever before.”

## **2. Camp Meeting Excesses**

---

<sup>162</sup> Ibid., 45-46.



The criticisms levied against the meetings were not entirely unfounded. Camp meetings were much more organized and meticulously planned than many critics realized. However, camp meetings were carefully designed to optimize the emotional reaction from participants and, thus, maximize the number of converts.

Even the layout of the campsite was designed with the intention of optimizing the emotional reaction of the attendees. Camp meetings were normally organized in a circular pattern, an open horseshoe pattern, or an oblong pattern. Tents occupied much of the campground, with wagons, livestock, and provisions for cooking kept behind them. And, of course, the focal point of each camp group was the pulpit. Pulpits were enclosed spaces, elevated several feet from the ground and, depending on the campground layout, was located at either the end or the center of the campground. There were also two sections of seats made of planks of wood that were used as seating for the event. In most cases, women sat on one side of the divide, while men sat on the other. Slaves were normally relegated to the back of the event, where a black preacher led them in service.<sup>163</sup>

In most cases, directly in front of the pulpit was an area known as the mourner's bench or anxious seat. This area was designed to optimize the number of converts and quantity of religious enthusiasm during each service. The mourner's bench was an area about twenty to twenty-five inches high and several feet long. The notion was that sinners in need of redemption should come forward and sit in those particular seats. This area was noted for emotional

---

<sup>163</sup> Bruce, 71-80.

outbreaks and, in many cases, a time for the preachers or other devout lay people to enter into deep spiritual conversations with supplicants. It is unclear when the first mourner's bench was introduced. The historian Timothy L. Smith located its first use to a congregation in New York in 1808. He wrote,

Long promotion of camp meetings had stamped Wesleyanism with a fervor which city churches expressed in yearly seasons of special religious interest called "protracted meetings." Here sinners were bidden each night to the "anxious seat," or mourner's bench, devised about 1808 in a crowded New York City chapel to enable saints to deal with seekers more conveniently.<sup>164</sup>

Other accounts link the development of the mourner's bench to a frontier innovation. For instance, some sources claim a Methodist pastor named John Easter called for supplicants to gather around a bench in the front of the chapel as early as 1798. However, what is clear is that the mourner's bench became a staple of camp meeting revivalism by the first decade of the nineteenth century. The great revivalist Charles Finney (1792-1875) developed many of his methods through innovating techniques learned from the western revivals. During his revivals he developed the practice of roping off the first few rows of seats. Referring to this area as "anxious seats," he urged those in need to repentance to move to this area.

The layout of the entire affair was also organized in a careful and efficient manner. For instance, the various breaks and transitions between services were announced with the blowing of a trumpet. In most cases the camp meeting opened on a Thursday with an evening meeting. Generally, there was no sermon on the first night. Instead, there was a mixture of congregational songs and

---

<sup>164</sup> Timothy L., Smith, *Revivalism and Social Reform in Mid-Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: Abingdon Press, 1957), 46.

ministerial exchanges. Sometime between ten and midnight, the crowd returned to their tents, with some penitents staying behind so they might continue to pray while others surrounded them with songs and words. The services resumed around five in the morning with family prayer, followed by a group assembly featuring a morning prayer. The morning prayer normally concluded between six-thirty and seven, ending in time for breakfast. A morning service commenced following breakfast. This service was followed by a time of testimonials, normally given by recent converts. At around eleven the primary sermon was given; it was, normally, the only non-extemporaneous, or prepared, sermon of the day. The eleven in the morning service was followed by a closing song and then lunch. And, finally, there was an evening service full of singing and minister exchanges.<sup>165</sup>

However, despite being carefully planned, camp meetings were designed with far more emphasis on optimizing the emotional response from the maximum number of participants than any notion of controlling the crowd. While many preachers showed aptitude over keeping the crowds in control, ultimately the number of clergy was not sufficient to monitor the vast populations in attendance.

And, moreover, they became the special providence of some of the most radical preachers of the Methodist Episcopal Church. The most famous example of this was Lorenzo Dow (1777-1834). Dow, who was nicknamed “Crazy Dow” by some of his contemporaries, was notorious for his eccentricities. He wore ragged clothes and a long beard, and made claims to have some spiritually

---

<sup>165</sup> Bruce, 80-85.

fueled mystical and psychic abilities. Most importantly, Dow was a skilled preacher who knew how to work his audience into a frenzied state. Jacob Young, who traveled with Dow on several occasions, recollected one particularly colorful sermon in which he went into a lengthy description of the instrument of the “devil.” He described it as a “...short chain of five links, with a hook at one end, a crook at the other, and a swivel in the middle.”<sup>166</sup> Dow proceeded to use the illustration to denounce Universalism, Calvinism, atheism, and to advocate the supremacy of the Bible.

### 3. Defending the Meetings

Despite its divisiveness, many Methodist preachers and bishops accepted the numerical success of events such as camp meetings as signs of the work of God. As a result, events such as the camp meetings were, for the most part, defended by the preachers and denominational leaders. By and large, the clergy believed that the positive of the events far outweighed the negative. For that matter, the prevailing notion was that much of the criticism levied against Methodist camp meetings and worship was exaggerated. One author wrote,

But these meetings did not escape censure and opposition. – It is difficult indeed to controul a large collection of people, of every description; hence it is, that there might have been, and probably were many irregularities. The enemies of these meetings who were generally prejudiced and bigoted professors, or the wicked who had no liking for them; took advantage of every circumstance, and exaggerated every unfavourable occurrence to such a degree as to give a false and dreadful colouring.<sup>167</sup>

---

<sup>166</sup> Jacob Young, *Autobiography of a Pioneer; or, the Nativity, Experience, Travels, and Ministerial Labors of Rev. Jacob Young* (Cincinnati: Cranston and Curtis, 1857), 237.

And, for many Methodists, the effectiveness of camp meetings was enough to satisfy many preachers. For instance, *The Weekly Recorder* noted that an 1818 camp meeting in the Philadelphia Conference was “that (with the exception of a few individuals) the whole of the vast concourse of people behaved themselves with the utmost propriety.”<sup>168</sup>

Overall, the reception of camp meetings was quite mixed. Newspapers fluctuated in their opinion, ranging from abhorrence to excitement. The mixed reviews prompted Methodists into a position of constantly having to defend the affairs. For instance, in order “To remove this skepticism from the minds of candid inquirers after truth...” Nathan Bangs argued that they were acceptable because there was no doubt that many sinners “were delivered” at the meeting, “...similar instances of mental and bodily exercises” were recorded in the Bible and in the revivals of Jonathan Edwards and John Wesley.<sup>169</sup> Though, Bangs was willing to accept that “...there must have been some disorder, some mingling of human passions not sanctified by grace, and some words and gesticulations not in accordance with strict religious decorum.”<sup>170</sup>

## F. Enthusiasm and its Discontents

---

<sup>167</sup> Theophilus Armenius; “Account of the Rise and Progress of the Work of God in the Western Country, pt. 3,” *The Methodist Magazine* 2 (July 1819), 274.

<sup>168</sup> “Methodist Camp Meeting,” in *The Weekly Recorder* 5 (October 2, 1818), 59.

<sup>169</sup> Bangs, *History of the Methodist Episcopal Church*, 2: 112-114.

<sup>170</sup> *Ibid.*, 113.

## 1. The Formalists

Despite being hugely popular affairs, camp meetings and other types of enthusiastic worship also presented dangers for the Methodists. Among other factors, Methodists faced criticism from internal, as well as external sources, for the excesses present in their various worship services.

All factions of the fledgling Methodist Episcopal Church did not readily accept the enthusiastic worship style that flourished among the Methodists. In fact, some viewed this worship tendency as indecent and offensive. Ezekiel Cooper (1763-1847) recounted that one society member complained to him about the “noise” that many persons emitted upon receiving conversion. He wrote,

Some asked: "Could not those effects be produced without the shouting and noise?" My reply was, generally, I did not know how that might be, but this was certain, they were not produced before, and I doubted whether they would have been, had not God worked in this extraordinary manner; for I did not see or hear of any such effects then being so extensive and general except where there was this noise and power attending them. I also observed it was not the noise that produced the effects, but the effects of the power which produced the noise....<sup>171</sup>

Though, even Cooper admitted that not all who “made the noise” were sincere. He insisted, however, that stopping the “noise,” would affect those being genuinely converted.

In some locations the excesses present in worship took on a racial dimension. Already by the late eighteenth century, many Methodist societies were racially segregated in some significant ways. This was the case in the Calvert circuit, located in western Maryland. While the black and white members

---

<sup>171</sup> George Phoebus, *Beams of Light on Early Methodism in America: chiefly drawn from the diary, letters, manuscripts, documents, and original tracts of the Rev. Ezekiel Cooper* (New York: Phillips and Hunt, 1887), 91.

each attended preaching services, the members were racially separated into classes. William Colbert (1764-1835), who was the preacher on the Calvert circuit, met regularly with both the white and black classes. During 1789 he successfully raised the membership of the societies on his circuit by one hundred members. However, that number included a loss of over one hundred white members and the gain of two hundred black members.

The tension between the white and black members was heightened by different styles of worship present at the respective meetings. For the most part, the black class meetings were more loud and ecstatic than their white counterparts. During the preaching services, the enthusiasm present more commonplace among the black congregants drew the criticism and ire of the white members. At the Easter meeting of 1789 the tension between the two racial groups reached its zenith. At this particular meeting, fits of enthusiasm broke out among the black members; many of the black persons in attendance engaged in shouting, falling, and other highly emotional activities. This enthusiasm eventually spread to many of the white members present. Colbert recounted,

...for a considerable time the people were attentive, to ward the last I endeavoured to cry aloud and spare not, the black people that stood out of doors began to shout aloud—two of them fell to the ground and began to wallow whilst others were praying for them, and I have no reason to doubt but the power of God was manifest in the house among the white people. One of the white society was much opposd to the noise and was for going away, but was prevented by a power that came on him, and was so wrought on that he took hold on one of his brothers that stood by to keep from falling. Capt John Hughs's wife another of the white society began to cry as she was standing, and as suddenly deprivd of the use of limbs fell on the floor but soon recoverd.<sup>172</sup>

---

<sup>172</sup> [William Colbert], "A Journal of the Travels of William Colbert, Methodist Preacher thro' parts of Maryland, Pennsylvania, New York, Delaware and Virginia in 1790-1838," 8 vols. (Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary,

At subsequent preaching stops, Colbert met with greater hostility. In order to diffuse the situation, he preached at the entrance to the partition that separated black and white congregants. Colbert preached with exuberance and, predictably, the black members of the classes were very receptive, breaking into religious exercises. The white members, though, were quite unhappy. As a result, the meeting was greatly shortened. One woman remarked, “she would come no more, and that she believed I should kill myself.” Likewise, Colbert had trouble acquiring help in his efforts, mainly because other preachers feared that his enthusiastic style risked alienating whites. He wrote, “Our friends here were fearful that the noise would prevent the people from coming in the future.”<sup>173</sup>

In other cases, this distaste for enthusiastic worship ran parallel to social divisions. For instance, Ezekiel Cooper recounted a 1798 controversy that broke out in Philadelphia. The society in Philadelphia was made up of both the “most wealthy and respectable members” and the “poor majority.” A dispute over an undisclosed matter broke out between the two groups and the itinerant assigned to the society, Lawrence McCombs, took the side of the wealthier members and he removed from power, several class members who did not agree with his decision. The presiding elder, Mr. Everett, disagreed with the removals and moved McCombs to a new appointment.<sup>174</sup> Eventually, the wealthy parties withdrew from the society. This controversy, however, was not simply about social caste. In fact, the social divide coincided with differences regarding

---

typescript version,), 1: 6. Ann Taves, *Fits, Trances, and Visions; Experiencing Religion and Explaining Experience from Wesley to James* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1999), 91.

<sup>173</sup> Colbert, 1: 6. Taves, 91.

<sup>174</sup> Phoebus, 288.



religious enthusiasm. Cooper recounted that in the midst of this controversy, "...a work of religion broke out among us, which the others opposed with much severity, and endeavored to make it be believed that it was a delusion, etc."<sup>175</sup> After the wealthy members had exited the society, the revival began again. Cooper recounted, "...as to the work of religion, it went on gloriously."<sup>176</sup>

## 2. Limits and Quarterly Meetings

So, while the increasingly more ecstatic worship of early Methodism was popular for the number of converts it brought into the church, it was also distasteful to certain factions of the church. Furthermore, the church leaders were not interested in enthusiasm remaining unchecked. Because of this dissent, efforts were made by denominational leaders to control and limit the excesses of enthusiastic worship in them through such means as holding the meetings in conjunction with official gatherings of preachers. So, for much of the early nineteenth century quarterly meetings presented a comparable, more controllable alternative to their camp meeting counterparts.

The quarterly meetings had the advantage of being somewhat more controllable than their camp meeting counterparts. This was partly because the meetings allowed for a more even division between private and public worship. The early Methodists distinguished between "public worship," which consisted of those events, which were open for everyone to attend, and "private worship," or more restricted meetings and worship services reserved for members of the

---

<sup>175</sup> Ibid., 290.

<sup>176</sup> Ibid., 291.

Methodist societies. The public worship included the normal Sunday worship. In 1791, Bishop Thomas Coke estimated that for a normal worship in Methodist churches there were approximately five non-members for every member in attendance.<sup>177</sup> And, quarterly meetings and camp meetings were full of instances of public worship.

Quarterly meetings had substantial instances of private worship, as well. Nowhere was this more prominent than in the love feast. The love feast practiced by the Methodists was based on the Moravian derivation of the agape love feast, which was a staple of early Christianity. Love feasts were not synonymous; instead, they were a time of worship, fellowship, and the sharing of some light food (often water and bread or a sweet bun), which emphasized love and harmony. A typical love feast was organized in the following way: “hymn, prayer, eating of bread and water, testimonies, monetary collection, hymn, prayer, and benediction.”<sup>178</sup> The love feasts were almost always held in closed spaces (whether it be a barn, home, or meetinghouse), in order to better control the number of participants. Love feasts were normally limited to members of the Methodist Episcopal Church; only select outsiders were permitted to attend.

Like the preaching services, the testimonials given at the love feasts often elicited a powerful, emotive experience from listeners. The testimonials were, invariably given by those common persons in attendance at the quarterly meetings. The testimonies were normally a reflection from an individual on the manner in which God had transformed their lives and been the source of their

---

<sup>177</sup> Thomas Coke, “Letter to Samuel Seabury, Philadelphia, 14 May 1791,” in *A Letter to a Methodist*, 4<sup>th</sup> ed. (Baltimore: George Lycett, 1869), 44. Ruth, 35.

<sup>178</sup> Ruth, 106.

salvation. After listening to love feast testimonial on August 9, 1789, Ezekiel Cooper reflected, "Surely the Lord sent the angel of his presence, with a living coal from the altar, and applied it to every heart and tongue."<sup>179</sup>

Many listeners appreciated the lack of pretences characteristic of the testimonies. Certainly, official representatives of the Methodist Episcopal Church dominated the preaching services. However, the love feast testimonials normally came from persons lacking theological training and, in many cases, social standing. This lack of polish was deeply moving to many listeners. One wrote,

...where I hear men, women, and youth, most of whom make no pretension to eloquence or learning, speak in artless language, or broken accents, of God's goodness to them, and it is still interesting, affecting, and as it were, new to me every Sabbath.<sup>180</sup>

However, the quarterly meetings also allowed for more controllable public worship spaces than their camp meeting counterparts. The events were, generally, attended by all of the preachers, exhorters, and class leaders in a given circuit. For that matter, preachers from other areas often traveled to attend the meetings. And, finally, the bishops did their best to attend as many quarterly meetings as possible in a given year. This abundance of preachers and exhorters made possible the creation of many smaller, simultaneous worship services. Similarly, love feasts and worship services were often held at the same time for the same reason. In a Delmarva quarterly meeting, for instance, those in attendance were divided between an Episcopal church and a Methodist

---

<sup>179</sup> Phoebus, 95.

<sup>180</sup> Elbert Osborn, *Passages in the Life and Ministry of Elbert Osborn, an Itinerant Minister of the Methodist Episcopal Church, illustrating the Providence and Grace of God* (New York: published for the author, 1857), 52. Quoted in Ruth, 109.

meetinghouse for worship services.<sup>181</sup> In some cases, even the outdoors was used if an appropriate venue was not. During an 1808 meeting, Seth Crowell preached from a wagon while a love feast was going on inside the meetinghouse.<sup>182</sup>

Not only did quarterly meetings allow a clearer divide between public and private worship, they were also somewhat easier to supervise than camp meetings and many other major public worship events. This substantial attendance by church leaders allowed for greater supervision of the more chaotic elements of the revival. In camp meetings, quarterly meetings, and other public worship services, there were constant disruptions. The disturbances ranged from annoyances to more threatening behavior. For instance, drunkenness, laughter, brawling, attempted whipping of black members, and the stoning of Methodist meetinghouses were some of the many problems that broke out around public worship events. Persons seeking to forcibly remove relatives or friends from the worship sessions also occasionally interrupted the event.

Many preachers and lay leaders among the Methodists became adept at dismantling and controlling the disturbances at both camp and quarterly meetings. A Methodist in southwest Ohio named Ezekiel Dimmitt gained a reputation for his physical strength and his willingness to use it to suppress disturbances.<sup>183</sup> And, in other cases, preachers used the disturbances as an occasion to gain converts. Peter Cartwright recounted with pride that at one

---

<sup>181</sup> Henry Boehm journal, 2 July 1815. See also, J.B. Wakeley, *The Patriarch of One Hundred Years; Reminiscences, Historical and Biographical of Rev. Henry Boehm* (New York: Nelson & Phillips, 1875).

<sup>182</sup> Seth Crowell, *The Journal of Seth Crowell; containing an Account of His Travels as a Methodist Preacher for Twelve Years* (New York: J.C. Totten, 1813), 82.

<sup>183</sup> Ruth, 52.

camp meeting he preached recounted that one father was very suspicious of the camp meeting. His daughter wanted to attend and the father consented under the provision that he would accompany her. The father "...said I must be a very bad man, for all the women in the country were falling in love with me."<sup>184</sup> He hoped that by attending the camp meeting he might gather the proof he needed to justify a public flogging of Cartwright. Cartwright wrote, "The trumpet sounded for preaching; I mounted the stand and preached; this man came and heard me. I saw clearly from his looks, that he was convicted, and had a hard struggle in his mind." At the end of the preaching service, "my gang of rowdies fell by dozens on the right and left, my special persecutor fell suddenly, as if a rifle ball had been shot through his heart."<sup>185</sup>

### 3. Correcting Excess

Camp meetings were particularly problematic for leaders in the Methodist Episcopal Church. While these events were enormously popular and beneficial to the Church, they also suffered from excesses and, according to some leaders, the propagation of bad theology.

Many church leaders recognized that the revivals did, on occasion, get out of hand. Excessive religious exercises and outbreaks were troublesome to many pastors and leaders. It was widely believed that such excesses ultimately hurt the reputation and cause of the Methodist Episcopal Church. Nathan Bangs wrote,

But while these extraordinary meetings were exerting a hallowed influence upon the older states, and were therefore hailed particularly by the

---

<sup>184</sup> Cartwright, 103.

<sup>185</sup> Ibid., 104.

Methodists as instruments of great good to the souls of people, those in Kentucky ran into such wild excess in some instances, as to bring them into disrepute in the estimation of the more sober part of the community.<sup>186</sup>

Likewise, Bangs believed that these revivals attracted some advocates of misleading theology. The camp meetings suffered from "...the introduction, by some men of eminent talents, and considerable influence, of the Socinian and Arian heresies." In particular, Bangs believed that the revivals attracted persons interested in spreading seeds of doubt regarding elements of the Christian faith held in high esteem by the Methodists. According to Bangs, these men did much to "strengthen the cause of skepticism."<sup>187</sup>

The excesses present in camp meetings led to the eventual dissolution of the alliance between the various denominations in the promotion of camp meetings. Moreover, it led to a division among the Presbyterians. The Presbyterians mostly withdrew from holding camp meetings. The Kentucky Synod of the Presbyterian Church, U.S.A. had dissolved the Cumberland Presbytery in 1806, over differences regarding ordination, revivalism, and the interpretation of scripture. However, in 1810 a faction of the Presbyterians who supported the revivals in the western county withdrew from the Presbyterian Church, U.S.A. and formed the Cumberland Presbyterians in 1810.

As a rule, the leaders of the Methodist Episcopal Church preached a middle path. They wanted to be able to continue the revivals "without involving themselves in the responsibility of those wild rhapsodies and unseemly

---

<sup>186</sup> Bangs, *History of the Methodist Episcopal Church*, 2: 159-160.

<sup>187</sup> *Ibid.*, 2: 161.

gesticulations.”<sup>188</sup> And, hence, the Methodist Episcopal Church encouraged its preachers to practice moderation in the revivals. As a result, official accounts of camp meetings often emphasize the general moderation that the religious enthusiasm embodied. One account credited the success of a Long Island camp meeting held in 1818 as being partially due to the order in which it was conducted. The observer wrote,

One thing which contributed greatly to the promotion of the cause of God at this meeting was the order and regularity which prevailed. There was little or no disturbance from spectators; and but little confusion in any of the religious exercises...in general, the exercises were conducted with much decorum and regularity.<sup>189</sup>

An account of a New Haven revival held in 1826 emphasized the presence of enthusiasm without excessiveness, as well. Andrew Spalding wrote, “There was no extravagance, but the Holy Spirit seemed to descend like the gentle shower upon the mown grass...”<sup>190</sup>

There was a movement by some preachers to increase the theological value of camp meetings. For instance, some preachers sought to incorporate traditional hymns more into the camp meeting settings, moving away from the use of the simple camp meeting songs. H. Smith, a preacher in the Northumberland District, wrote to the *Methodist Magazine*. He noted,

We have long been convinced that singing those *little things* called *Camp-Meeting Songs*, and the effects produced by them, have, upon the whole, proved a great injury to the work of religion, and a stumbling-block to

---

<sup>188</sup> Ibid., 2: 162.

<sup>189</sup> Ibid., 2: 276. Reprinted from “A Short Account of Camp-Meeting Held a Cow-Harbour, Long Island, Which Commenced August 11, 1818,” *The Methodist Magazine* 1 (September 1818), 360.

<sup>190</sup> Andrew Spalding, “Commendable Zeal for Missions: Extract of a Letter from Mr. Andrew Spalding to the Rev. Wilbur Fisk,” *The Methodist Magazine* 9 (January 1826), 40.

many serious people. We therefore discouraged the singing of them at all our Camp-Meetings, and strongly recommended the singing of our excellent hymns.<sup>191</sup>

Likewise, the most excessive of the “camp meeting men” fell under attack from leaders within the denomination. For instance, Nicholas Snethen (1769-1845) was an outspoken critic of Lorenzo Dow. Snethen was a prominent voice within early American Methodism. He was born in New York and entered the Methodist Episcopal itinerancy in 1794. He served primarily in the New England, Maryland, New York, and Washington D.C. areas. In 1800, he published a refutation to James O’Kelly’s *Author’s Apology for Protesting Against the Methodist Episcopal Government*, in which he defended the Methodist episcopacy against O’Kelly’s critique. This work, which was well received by preachers within the Methodist Episcopal Church, helped Snethen carve out a reputation for himself as an important thinker and write. Following its publication, he agreed to travel with Francis Asbury. The bishop went on to nickname Snethen his “silver trumpet.” By 1805, Snethen had left the itinerant ministry; he had, instead, “settled down” and become a local preacher within the Baltimore area.

In 1805, Snethen wrote a letter to the British Conference warning them of an impending visit by Lorenzo Dow. Throughout his life, Dow made several visits to England. During these visits, he held widely attending raucous camp meeting revivals. Snethen’s letter accused Dow of religious excess and malicious intent. Snethen wrote,

---

<sup>191</sup> H. Smith, “Account of the Work of God on Northumberland District,” *The Methodist Magazine* 5 (December 1822), 473.



Mr. Lorenzo Dow has embarked again for Europe...His confidence of success must at least be very considerably increased, having succeeded so well in *deceiving* or *duping* so many of the preachers in the American Connexion. I hope that our brethren in Europe will unanimously resolve to have nothing at all to do with him.

Snethen further accused Dow of having abandoned the tempered, discipline essential to a Methodist. He reflected,

....the lines of distinction should always be kept very clear between the Methodist preacher and his *ape*. I am sorry, my dear friend, that we can give you no better specimen of the fruits of Methodism in this country. ...Shall it be published in the streets of London and Dublin, that Methodist preachers in America, have so departed from Wesley and their own discipline, as to *countenance and bid God speed such a man as Mr. Dow*; the last person in the world who should have been suffered to trample Methodism under foot with impunity or countenance.<sup>192</sup>

Predictably, Dow was very much offended by Snethen's letter. In his journal, Dow reflected, with some glee, that the British Conference agreed that Snethen's letter was written with a malicious spirit. Furthermore, he believed Snethen was appropriately punished for his actions. Dow wrote,

I am informed by a special letter from Joseph Mitchell, dated New York, May 1806, that N. Snethen had *located*, and that in consequence of his opposition, & c. Mr. Joyce tells me that he saw brother Beatty, a local preacher from America...who informed him, that Mr. Snethen had mostly lost his congregations, in consequence of his bitter ambition or activity in writing to Europe against me.<sup>193</sup>

### **G. Conclusion: Enthusiasm Tempered**

The enthusiasm that so richly characterized early American Methodism was waning by the middle decades of the nineteenth century. Accompanying

---

<sup>192</sup> Charles Coleman Sellars, *Lorenzo Dow: The Bearer of the Word* (New York: Minton, Balch and Company, 1928), 104f.

<sup>193</sup> Lorenzo Dow, *Perambulations of Cosmopolite; or, Travels and Labors of Lorenzo Dow in Europe and America Including a Brief Account of His Early Life and Christian Experiences, as Contain in His Journal* (New York: Richard C. Valentine, 1855), 196.

this phenomenon was the decline of quarterly meetings and camp meetings in significance and frequency. By the 1850s, for instance, quarterly meetings, in particular, were less frequently held and not as well attended as they once were. B.W. Gorham reflected, "Our modern Quarterly Meetings, where indeed we continue to have Quarterly Meetings at all, usually call together but two of us, the P. Elder and the Pastor."<sup>194</sup> Orange Scott reflected nostalgically, "The fame of our Quarterly meetings in former times has come down to us from the fathers...they used to create a great interest among the people."<sup>195</sup> And, for the most parts, when they were held, the meetings returned to being the business sessions that they were in eighteenth century British Methodism.

Likewise, camp meetings underwent significant changes as the nineteenth century progressed. They continued to exist, but the Methodist enthusiasm for the events waned. Camp Meetings enjoyed some renewed success in large urban areas, under charismatic preachers such as Charles Finney. But in the western county and many other areas they ceased being the common occurrences they were in the early decades of the nineteenth century.

And, in many ways, the divide between formalists and revivalists that began in the first stage of the revivalists was intensified in the 1830s and beyond. More and more, camp meetings were the providence of many of the rural preachers who existed in areas without large number of other Methodist preachers. The more educated and urban clergy increasingly alienated from

---

<sup>194</sup> Gorham, 37.

<sup>195</sup> Orange Scott, "Quarterly Meetings," *Zion's Herald* 6 (14 January 1834), 8. Russell Richey, *The Methodist Conference in America: A History* (Nashville: Kingswood, 1996).

these events, viewing them as uncivilized and uncontrollable. Those who continued to lead them were sometimes referred to as “camp meeting men.”<sup>196</sup> These camp meeting men interpreted the “decline of Camp Meetings in some part of the country is, as we fear, a providential indication indeed –an indication painfully distinct, of the growing worldliness of the church.”<sup>197</sup> In many substantial ways, they considered themselves the true heart of “primitive Methodism.”

These changes were partially the by-product of three distinct trends in nineteenth century Methodism. In the first place, the revivals were simply not as necessary as they once were for bringing together communities. The previously sparsely settled areas in places such as the western county were now more settled. In the northern and mid-Atlantic states, urban areas had grown in number and importance. By 1850 the western country contained over 130 small towns, each of which contained between 500 and 2500 persons.<sup>198</sup>

A second reason for the decline of these events, which fostered enthusiastic worship was that Methodist Episcopal Church introduced changes to its system of itinerancy. The Methodists moved away from appointing pastors to a large circuit. Instead, circuits were often split into stations. As a result, there

---

<sup>196</sup> Young, 300.

<sup>197</sup> Gorham, 23.

<sup>198</sup> Donald B. Dodd and Wyndle S. Dodd, eds., *Historical Statistics of the South, 1790-1970* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1973); *The Seventh Census of the United States: 1850* (Washington, 1853); E. Brooks Holifield, *The Gentlemen Theologians: American Theology in Southern Culture, 1795-1860* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1978), 6.

was a birth of “parish consciousness.”<sup>199</sup> Ministers were, thus, less inclined to think of instigating the large regional meetings.

Finally, these events simply lost their newness and novelty. As audiences continued to grow in wealth and education, there were other aspects of the denomination that consumed the attention of the membership. This was, in fact, a natural evolution for the denomination, which was transiting more firmly into a multi-faceted organization.

---

<sup>199</sup> Ruth, 185.

## CHAPTER IV

### CHALLENGES

The state of the Methodism in America was causing concern and division not only in America but in England, as well. While the enthusiasm and emotionalism of the worship services and the appeals used in the camp meeting were disturbing, even horrifying to high church Methodists, the very ordination and investiture of the clergy was of even more urgent and divisive concern.

Thus, the days following the Christmas Conference of 1784 were tenuous. Asbury, Coke, and many of the other leaders of the Church tried valiantly to give the nascent denomination a shape and form that would contribute to its overall growth and survival. The ensuing structure, however, elicited both criticism and controversy. Some critics accused the organization's utilization of uncouth, uneducated clergy as undermining authentic ordination and providing more harm to constituents. While other critics found the balance of uncouth, uneducated preachers and autocratic church government too restrictive.

#### **A. The High Church Critique**

##### **1. The Danger of Populism: Charles Wesley's Critique**

British Methodists levied some of the earliest attacks against the Methodist Episcopal Church. The most notable criticism came from one of the

leaders of the British Methodists, Charles Wesley.<sup>200</sup> Charles Wesley and several of his contemporaries believed that the formation of the new independent Methodist church signaled a new and dangerous direction for the Methodist movement. Charles Wesley and the other “high church” Methodists feared that the American Methodist separation from the Church of England signified a movement away from a strong, hierarchical, formalized church base and a movement toward an informal, populist-controlled church.

Charles was neither understanding nor supportive of his brother’s plan for the American Methodists. When Charles learned of the ordinations conducted at Bristol, he was furious. To Charles, the method of ordination of American Methodist preachers had theological as well as methodological implications. Charles believed that his brother’s actions belittled ordination, making it more anthropocentric and less theocentric. He admonished a congregation in 1787 to never take the sacraments from “these self-created bishops and self-made priests.”<sup>201</sup> He also wrote a series of scathing verses condemning the actions taken by his brother and the American Church. In one poem, Charles Wesley condemned Coke (referred to as C\_\_\_) and his brother John Wesley (referred to as W\_\_\_). Charles Wesley wrote,

So easily are Bishops made  
By man’s or woman’s whim?  
W\_\_\_ his hands on C\_\_\_ hath laid,  
By who laid hands on him?  
Hands on himself he laid, and took  
An Apostolic Chair:  
And then ordain’d his creatures C\_\_\_

---

<sup>200</sup> See John Vickers, *Thomas Coke: Apostle of Methodism*, 100-113.

<sup>201</sup> John Pawson, “Letter from John Pawson to Charles Atmore, 8th August, 1787.” Quoted from Vickers, *Thomas Coke Apostle of Methodism*, 102.

His Heir and Successor...<sup>202</sup>

Charles Wesley was, moreover, a strong advocate of an educated, institutionally trained clergy. As such, he and his brother constantly argued about the status and role that the lay preachers should have in the Methodist movement. In fact, Charles never particularly liked the involvement of lay preachers. In an effort to temper their influence and teachings, Charles initially took an active role in traveling with, aiding, and instructing the Methodist lay preachers. His relationship with the preachers took a decisively more negative turn after marrying and ceasing regular travel in 1749. In order to continue exercising a role in the supervision of lay preacher, Charles began examining and purging preachers in 1751. He expelled quite a few lay preachers from the Methodists. His primary complaint was, perpetually, ignorance and lack of education. For instance, in 1752 Charles wrote about the expulsion of Michael Fenwick,

I went to the room that I might hear with my own ears one of whom many strange things had been told me. But such a preacher have I never heard, and hope I shall never again. It was beyond description. I cannot say he preached false doctrine or true, or any doctrine at all, but pure unmixed nonsense. Not one sentence did he utter that could do the least good to any one soul. Now and then a text of Scripture, or a verse quotation was dragged in by the head or shoulders. I could scarce refrain from stopping him. He set my blood a galloping and threw me into such a sweat that I expected the fever to follow.<sup>203</sup>

---

<sup>202</sup> Charles Wesley, *Representative Verse of Charles Wesley*, ed. Frank Baker (London: Epworth, 1962), 367f.

<sup>203</sup> Charles Wesley, *The Journal of the Rev. Charles Wesley, M.A., sometime student of Christ Church, Oxford: to which are appended selections from his correspondence and poetry*, ed. Thomas Jackson (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1980), 2: 77-8. See also, John Lenton, "Charles Wesley and the Preachers," in *Charles Wesley: Life, Literature, and Legacy*, ed. Kenneth G.C. Newport and Ted A. Campbell (Peterborough, U.K.: Epworth, 2007), 93.

Consistently throughout his ministry, Charles Wesley was deeply critical of lay preachers who wanted the power to administer the sacraments. In 1762 he wrote some verses based on Numbers 16: 10 (“And seek ye the priesthood also?”). He wrote,

Raised from the people’s lowest lees,  
Guard, Lord, they preaching witnesses,  
And let their pride the honour claim  
Of sealing covenants in thy name:  
Rather than suffer them to dare  
Usurp the priestly character,  
Save from the arrogant offense,  
And snatch them uncorrupted thence.<sup>204</sup>

Charles Wesley’s disliked, immensely, the presence of unqualified lay preachers within the Methodist movement. Moreover, he was deeply afraid of these lay preachers being given too much power. As a result of these prejudices, the American ordinations were a nightmare come true for Charles Wesley. If Methodism embraced its own model of ordination, he believed that control of the movement would fundamentally shift away from its proper leaders toward the more uncouth lay preachers. Notably, he held deep suspicions of Francis Asbury, whom he reviled as unsuitable for such power. Charles Wesley wrote,

A Roman emperor ‘tis said,  
His favourite horse a consul made;  
But Coke brings greater things to pass,  
He makes a bishop of an ass.<sup>205</sup>

---

<sup>204</sup> Charles Wesley, *Charles Wesley: A Reader*, ed. John R. Tyson (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 425.

<sup>205</sup> Asbury, 3: 65.



Furthermore, Charles understood the ordinations to signal a change in his relationship with his brother. For years, he and John had argued about the lay preachers. For instance, Charles Wesley purged Michael Fenwick from the ranks of the lay preachers on at least two different occasions, but John kept reinstating him.<sup>206</sup> In a letter to Thomas Chandler he noted that John “always had the ascendant over me.” He further noted that, “...for fifty years we kept the sheep in the fold.” The ordinations, however, led to a fundamental separation from the Church of England. Charles believed that this separation signified a fundamental separation from his brother. He wrote, “Thus our partnership dissolved, but not our friendship.”<sup>207</sup>

Ultimately, Charles believed that the blame for the American ordinations and the subsequent formation of the Methodist Episcopal Church lay with Thomas Coke. Even prior to the ordinations, Charles was suspicious of Coke. As early as 1779, Charles Wesley was suspicious of Coke. He feared Coke’s influence on his brother and feared that Coke’s support of the cause of lay-preachers would lead the Methodists down an incorrect path. In a letter written to John Wesley in December 1779, Charles Wesley wrote,

I was totally ignorant of your Brother’s spirit till very lately. He appeared to me to be a *proud* man; but I am not satisfied that he is a man of *genuine humility*. I thought him an *enemy* to Methodism; but I now find him its *real friend*, as far as Methodism is a friend of the Church of England; and on *your* plan the Church of England never had so great a friend...I laboured during part of these last two years with some, who saw your Brother in the same light as I did; and no doubt, their prejudices served to heighten mine.

---

<sup>206</sup> Lenton, 93.

<sup>207</sup> John A. Vickers, “Documents and Source Materials,” in *A History of the Methodist Church in Great Britain*, ed. Rupert Davies, A Raymond George, and Gordon Rupp (London: Epworth Press, 1988): 4: 204-5. See, Heitzenrater, 293.

Whilst I thus viewed everything, respecting him, with a jaundiced eye, it is no wonder that I interpreted all he said, that would bear a double meaning, in the worst sense.<sup>208</sup>

After the ordinations at Bristol, Charles Wesley's condemnation of Coke intensified. Crediting Coke with manipulating his brother, Charles Wesley wrote,

W\_\_\_ himself and friends betrays,  
By his good sense forsook,  
While suddenly his hands he lays  
On the hot head of C\_\_\_\_.<sup>209</sup>

By most accounts, it is believed that Charles Wesley wrote the *Strictures*, which was a condemnation of the sermon given by Coke on the occasion of Asbury's ordination. In this 1785 pamphlet, the author asserted,

As an Englishman, he condemns the constitution of his country, --as a clergyman, he vilifies his brethren with the opprobrious names of hirelings and parasites; --as a Methodist preacher, he contradicts the uniform declarations of the Rev. John and Charles Wesley.<sup>210</sup>

Other British Methodists shared Charles Wesley's harsh opinion of Thomas Coke. Joseph Bradford blamed Coke for the ordinations John conducted for Scotland in 1785. He wrote of John Wesley,

---

<sup>208</sup> Charles Wesley, "Letter to John Wesley, 15<sup>th</sup> December, 1779," *Arminian Magazine* 13 (1790), 50f.

<sup>209</sup> Wesley, *Representative Verse of Charles Wesley*, 367f.

<sup>210</sup> A Methodist of the Church of England. *Strictures on the Substance of a Sermon Preached at Baltimore in the State of Maryland, before the general conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church* (London: G. Herdsfield, 1785), 4. See Vickers, *Thomas Coke: Apostle of Methodism*, 102.

That he ever intended it should take place in England I never did nor never can believe and, with respect to Scotland, he often declared to me and the congregation at Edinburgh so he were over persuaded to it; and a few months before his death he was so much hurt by Dr. Coke's conduct in persuading the people to dissent from the original plan that he threatened him in a letter to have no more to do with him if he did not desist from so persuading the people.<sup>211</sup>

However, Coke's influence over John Wesley was greatly exaggerated. By most accounts, the ordinations at Bristol and in Scotland were supported by Coke, but not prompted by him. The ordinations were, instead, the direct byproduct of John Wesley struggling to find a means to bring the sacraments to parishioners in areas that suffered from a dearth of Anglican clergy.

And, many British Methodist defended Coke. John Pawson (1737-1806), one of those ordained for Scotland in 1785, reported, "I am well assured that this was a matter fully determined upon by Mr. Wesley himself... I am satisfied that it was not through Dr. Coke's influence with Mr. Wesley that these steps were taken, but that the plan was wholly his own."<sup>212</sup> Pawson acquiesced, however, that John Wesley had portrayed himself in various ways at various times on the matter of separation from the Church of Scotland. Pawson believed that this inconsistency was more the byproduct of enhanced age and criticism, than manipulations by Coke. Pawson wrote,

The truth is, the good old man has been so pestered with his brother & the High Church bigots on all sides that I really believe he does not know what

---

<sup>211</sup> Joseph Bradford, "Letter to Rodda, 28<sup>th</sup> May 1794." Quoted from, Vickers, *Thomas Coke: Apostle of Methodism*, 106f.

<sup>212</sup> Thomas Jackson, *Lives of the Early Methodist Preachers: Chiefly Written by Themselves* (London: Wesleyan Conference Office, 1865), 4: 54.

to do. And you may add to this that Dr. Coke with his well-meant zeal drives quite too fast, & by that means defeats his own designs. When Mr. Wesley was here he told the whole Sunday night's Congregation that it never came into his head to separate from the Church of Scotland, but that Dr. Coke had entirely mistaken his meaning throughout the whole business...So that is quite evident that he has forgotten what he himself said on that subject last Conference. Poor dear soul, his memory fails him, therefore he speaks in a very unguarded manner sometimes.<sup>213</sup>

## 2. Authority Sustained: John Wesley's Response

Ultimately, it was Charles Wesley's greatest fear was that separation of the American Methodists from the Church of England would precipitate a similar separation among the British Methodists. In a letter to his brother, Charles wrote,

When once you began ordaining in America, I knew, and you knew, that your Preachers here would never rest till you ordained them. You told me they would separate by and by. The Doctor tells us the same. His Methodist episcopal Church in Baltimore was intended to beget a Methodist episcopal Church here. You know he comes, armed with your authority, to make us all Dissenters. One of your sons assured me, that not a Preacher in London would refuse orders from the Doctor.<sup>214</sup>

John Wesley did not believe that the separation of the American and Scottish Methodists from the respective established churches was as audacious or dangerous as his brother did. John Wesley was convinced that that the separation of the American Methodists (and subsequently Scottish) was a distinct event necessitated by circumstance. In fact, it is fair to say that all the ordinations conducted by John Wesley were part of a larger mission agenda, an attempt to provide the sacraments in areas that were bereft of Anglican clergy. As John

---

<sup>213</sup> John Pawson, "Letter from Pawson to Atmore, 2<sup>nd</sup> June, 1785," *Wesley Historical Society Proceedings* 12 (1912), 107ff. See, Vickers, *Thomas Coke: Apostle of Methodism*, 107.

<sup>214</sup> Thomas Jackson, *The Life of the Rev. Charles Wesley* (New York: G. Lane and P.P. Sandford, 1842), 394. See, Vickers, *Thomas Coke: Apostle of Methodism*, 105.

made clear in a 1786 letter to Charles, he was telling the societies that he visited, “The Methodists will not leave the Church, at least while I live.”<sup>215</sup> At the 1785 English Methodist Conference, John Wesley announced that he had relinquished no power in drawing up a Deed of Declaration. Furthermore, he refused to ordain any for England, including none for those in isolated places such as Yorkshire. Finally, he answered those who claimed separation was inevitable after his death by stating, “I dare not avoid doing what good I can while I live, for fear of evil that may follow when I am dead.”<sup>216</sup> He reiterated this point in a September 13, 1785 letter to his brother; he wrote, “If you will not or cannot help me yourself; do not hinder those that can and will. I must and will save as many souls as I can while I live without being careful about what may *possibly be* when I die.”<sup>217</sup>

Ultimately, John Wesley was more of a pragmatist about separation than his brother. Or, at the very least, he was at least more practical about *functional* separation. For example, many of the preachers wanted to hold Methodist preaching during church hours, at least in the larger towns. This issue came up at the 1786 Bristol Conference. Charles Wesley supposedly exclaimed “No!” and stamped his feet. Coke, who was among those advocating this preaching during Church hours, dropped into his chair “as if shot.”<sup>218</sup> John, however, was willing to make concessions on the issue if there were no Church of England within a

---

<sup>215</sup> Wesley, *The Letters of John Wesley*, 7: 324.

<sup>216</sup> *Minutes of the Methodist Conferences*, vol. 1, 1744-1798 (London: Mason, 1862), 193. Heitzenrater, 294.

<sup>217</sup> Wesley, *The Letters of John Wesley*, 7:288f.

<sup>218</sup> Vickers, *Thomas Coke: Apostle of Methodism*, 111.

few miles, if the Church of England minister in the area was corrupt, or if the minister preached “pernicious doctrine” (such as Arianism).<sup>219</sup> During his travels, John had encountered many members of the Anglican clergy whom he found repugnant in doctrine or person. As a result of these encounters, John believed that “One may leave *a* church (which I would advise in some cases) without leaving *the* Church.”<sup>220</sup>

Regardless, John Wesley did not believe that the criticism levied by his brother and other High Church Methodists was accurate. Instead, this event points to an intriguing difference between John and Charles. John was, basically, an ecclesiological pragmatist. While he was loyal to the Church of England, he only embraced the practices of the Established Church in so far as they aided him in the cause of saving souls. As such, John believed that the American Methodists could form a separate denomination that adhered to proper standards of belief and conduct. Charles, on the other hand, was horribly afraid of Dissenter status. Inevitably, his primary allegiance lay not with the Methodist’s cause, but with the Church of England.

So, John Wesley believed that the best manner in which to exercise authority, and keep the lay preacher base of the American Church in control, was through insisting on doctrinal deference and appointing proper leaders. For this reason, John Wesley designed the *Sunday Service* and appointed strong Episcopal leaders.

---

<sup>219</sup> *Minutes of the Methodist Conferences*, vol. 1, 1744-1798, 193.

<sup>220</sup> Wesley, *The Letters of John Wesley*, 7: 327. See, Heitzenrater, 296.

## **B. The Republican Critique**

### **1. The Council**

And, in fact, the hierarchical order established by John Wesley drew ire from some sources. Several of the southern Methodists anticipated a more egalitarian model of Church government being instituted. The authoritarian structure of the Methodist Episcopal Church's polity and the leadership style of Francis Asbury drew intense ire and criticism from a contingent of the newly formed denomination.

In the years following the Christmas Conference, the American Methodist societies grew at a swift pace throughout the newly formed nation. By 1789, eleven conferences were being held annually by the increasingly geographic disperse Methodists. In an effort to centralize power, Francis Asbury proposed the creation of a council at the various conferences of that year. The council was to be comprised of bishops, presiding elders, and other select representatives. The council was to be empowered to make critical decisions and to call together a general conference of the entire Church. According to Jesse Lee, "The Bishops said, they had made it a matter of prayer; and they believed the present plan was the best they could think of."<sup>221</sup> The plan aroused some opposition but was eventually adopted.

The council system quickly proved to be unpopular among the democratically minded Methodists. It's main advocate, though, was Francis Asbury. Asbury wrote in a letter to Thomas Morrell, "I wish to see the council

---

<sup>221</sup> Lee, 147.

empowered and consolidated, or the Methodists will be a confused, divided people, like some others."<sup>222</sup> However, the council quickly drew ire for exceeding its authority. Initially, the council adopted the resolution, "Every resolution of the first council shall be put to a vote in each conference, and shall not be adopted unless it obtains a majority of the different conferences."<sup>223</sup> However, the council eventually waffled on that agenda, choosing to allow plans adopted by the majority of preachers, as opposed to a majority of conferences. Lee noted that the council "changed the plan, and determined that if a majority of the preachers in the different districts should approve of the proceedings of the council, it should then be binding on every preacher in each district."<sup>224</sup>

The proceedings of the council proved to be very unpopular. Jesse Lee, for instance, wrote a letter opposing it. Lee argued that a general conference would be more equitable. The council, by and large, felt a general conference was unrealistic given the geographical disparity between the various conferences. Ezekiel Cooper received a number of letters from ministers who viciously opposed the council. He addressed a letter to Bishop Asbury in which he stated,

How do you find preachers to the southward upon the Council and its Constitution? Is all smooth? I wish the enemy may not make and take advantage

---

<sup>222</sup> Francis Asbury, "Letter from Asbury to Morrell, 20<sup>th</sup> January, 1791," *World Parish* (1960), 20. Quoted from Vickers, *Thomas Coke*, 175.

<sup>223</sup> Lee, 151.

<sup>224</sup> *Ibid.*, 153.



of some upon the subject. I confess my mind is uneasy at seeing any thing so irritating among the brethren as this matter appears to be.<sup>225</sup>

Thomas Coke was never a firm advocate of the Council, for that matter. It proved to be a source of contention between he and Asbury. While initially acquiescing to the plan, Coke returned to America in 1791 determined to oppose it. Asbury wrote, "I found the Doctor's sentiments, with regard to the council quite changed." As a partial byproduct of Coke's reactions, Asbury determined that a General Conference was the best course of action. He wrote, "I felt perfectly calm, and acceded to a general conference, for the sake of peace."<sup>226</sup> Coke gave account of Asbury's change of heart to James O'Kelly. He wrote,

...I think no step will be taken during my absence, to prevent the General Conference; it would be so gross an insult on truth, justice, mercy, and peace, that it will not be, I think attempted. If it be, and successfully, we will call a Congress.<sup>227</sup>

Regardless, the negative reception of the council by the preachers necessitated the calling of a General Conference in 1792. Despite the initial reservations of the bishops about the difficulties in holding such a conference, it was agreed that a General Conference was the only effective way of controlling the dissention in American Methodism. By this point, the council was so unpopular that Bishop Asbury "requested that the name of the *council* might not be mentioned in the conference again."<sup>228</sup>

---

<sup>225</sup> Phoebus, 118.

<sup>226</sup> Asbury, *Journals*, 1: 667f.

<sup>227</sup> Asbury, *Journals*, 3: 99. The letter to O'Kelly is reprinted in this volume.

<sup>228</sup> Phoebus, 175.

## 2. James O'Kelly and the Presbyterian Critique

The most vicious opposition to the council was from James O'Kelly (1736?-1826).<sup>229</sup> Kelly was, oddly, one of the persons named to serve on the council. However, O'Kelly quickly grew disgusted with the agenda and eventually disowned the work that the council was conducting. Lee wrote, "While he was at the first council, he appeared to be united to the plan, and to the members; but after he returned to *Virginia*, he exclaimed bitterly against the proceedings and against what he himself had done in the business."<sup>230</sup> O'Kelly was frustrated with the manner council meetings were conducted. Rather than it being the sharing of a group of equals, he felt Francis Asbury dominated the proceeding. O'Kelly reflected, "The political process was carried on in the following manner; Francis would propose a few sentences at a time, & c."<sup>231</sup> O'Kelly did not participate in or attend any subsequent meetings.

O'Kelly's critical reaction was not exactly a surprise to his contemporaries. In many ways, O'Kelly was the great iconoclast of the early founders of Methodism; he constantly railed against the authority of the bishops. And, despite being accused of hubris and malicious intent by many commentators,

---

<sup>229</sup> Frank Woodward, "Francis Asbury and James O'Kelly: The Language and Development of American Methodist Episcopal Structure," *Methodist History* 41 (2003), 12-24. Frederick Abbott Norwood, "James O'Kelly-Methodist Maverick," *Methodist History* 4 (1966), 14-28. J. Timothy Allen, "Religion and Politics: James O'Kelly's Republicanism and Francis Asbury's Federalism," *Methodist History* 44 (2006), 153-165. J. Timothy Allen, "'Some Expectation of Being Promoted': Ambition, Abolition, and Reverend James O'Kelly," *The North Carolina Historical Review* 84 (2007), 59-81.

<sup>230</sup> Lee, 157.

<sup>231</sup> James O'Kelly, *Author's Apology for Protestings Against the Methodist Episcopal Government* (Richmond: John Dixon, 1798), 16.

O'Kelly's criticisms resonated deeply with many Methodists in the early national period.

O'Kelly's influence and fame was particularly strong in the southern states. He was one of the older and more experienced preachers. O'Kelly converted to Methodism sometime after the summer of 1774. His wife, Elizabeth, and son, William, converted to Methodism after Methodist preachers came into the Mecklenburg County area in the mid-1770s.<sup>232</sup> He became a lay preacher in the Methodist Connection on January 2, 1775.<sup>233</sup> So, at the time he entered ministry, O'Kelly was thirty-eight or thirty-nine years of age; by the 1792 General Conference he was in his mid-fifties. Typically, lay preachers were young men in their early twenties. And, by the 1792, he had served Virginia and the bordering counties of North Carolina for over fifteen years.

Despite his advanced age, many of the southern preachers found O'Kelly's background to be one which they could relate comfortably. There is no authoritative record of the date and place of his birth. It is clear that he had little formal education and was from a lower-income family. By some accounts, he was born in Ireland around 1736. Other accounts place his birth in Tidewater Virginia around that same year.

---

<sup>232</sup> W.E. MacClenny, *The Life of Rev. James O'Kelly and the Early History of the Christian Church in the South* (Raleigh, N.C.: Edwards and Broughton Printing Company, 1910), 16-20. MacClenny's work paints a much more sympathetic portrait of O'Kelly than many of his contemporaries did. However, it remains the most authoritative biography on the iconoclast.

<sup>233</sup> *Ibid.*, 22. O'Kelly did not regularly keep a journal and, as a result, many of the dates in his life are somewhat questionable. However, according to MacClenny, this particular date is drawn from a prayer book he was given on the account of his ordination (at the Christmas Conference on January 2, 1785). In this prayer book, January 2, 1775 was listed as the date which he began to preach.

O’Kelly’s appeal also stemmed from his staunch patriotism. Unlike many of the official leaders of the Methodist Episcopal Church, O’Kelly never wavered his support of American independence. In fact, O’Kelly served as a private in two campaigns of American Revolutionary War; at some point, he claimed that he was taken as a prisoner and was forced to resist bribery to betray his country, as well. Furthermore, O’Kelly was one of a few Methodist preachers who remained active in ministry throughout the entire Revolutionary War.<sup>234</sup>

O’Kelly was also a talented and charismatic preacher. He was generally considered to possess strong oratory gifts. One writer noted,

The people flocked to hear him, and great was the work of God under his powerful exhortations and earnest prayers. The parish minister was greatly enraged that an upstart Methodist preacher should have the temerity to preach in his chapel, and what was worse, that he should attract more people than the regular successor of the apostles.<sup>235</sup>

His preaching talents and restless spirit led to him traveling widely throughout the region, which, in turn, helped his reputation grow. He preached at private homes, churches, and any venue he was able. Supposedly, Thomas Jefferson struck up a friendship with O’Kelly in the years following his separation from the Methodists. Jefferson was quite taken with O’Kelly’s oratory gifts. As such, he invited O’Kelly to Washington D.C. to preach before a statesman. The story is, as follows,

---

<sup>234</sup> Ibid., 42f.

<sup>235</sup> Ibid., 22f.

On one occasion Mr. O’Kelly visited Mr. Jefferson in Washington. The great statesman, knowing of the preacher’s ability, obtained the use of the hall of the House of Representatives and invited Mr. O’Kelly to preach. ...to the chagrin of the distinguished host, the preacher fell far below Mr. Jefferson’s expectation. Believing this failure did his friend a great injustice, the great political leader insisted on a second effort. Mr. O’Kelly agreed. The appointment was again made, and the people urged to give him another hearing. They did hear him again, and were abundantly repaid, for Mr. O’Kelly preached one of the great sermons of his life, and the host was the most delighted man in the audience. When he had finished Mr. Jefferson arose with tears in his eyes, and said, that while he was no preacher, in his opinion James O’Kelly was one the greatest preachers living.<sup>236</sup>

And, by all accounts, O’Kelly was a deeply passionate man with strong convictions. Supposedly, prior to his conversion O’Kelly was an avid fiddle player; after converting he chose to purge all negative influences from his life, so he “laid his fiddle on a huge fire and burned it.”<sup>237</sup> He was prone to fiery behavior. He was known for his “hot Irish blood” and for making disparaging comments in the heat of anger. Francis Asbury was a frequent target. For instance, at one point, he referred to the bishop as a “long headed’ Englishman.”<sup>238</sup>

Partially because of his strong personality, preaching competence, and advanced age, O’Kelly quickly became a leader among the southern Methodists.

---

<sup>236</sup> Ibid., 171.

<sup>237</sup> Ibid., 20.

<sup>238</sup> Ibid., 40.

However, the single biggest factor that contributed to O’Kelly’s popularity among a contingency of the southern preachers was his staunch embrace of “republicanism.”

O’Kelly was not in favor of the episcopal form of church government adopted by the American Methodists. Instead, he advocated a Presbyterian form of Church government. Ostensibly, O’Kelly was a supporter of a form of church government that operated based on the equal vote and voice of all the preachers.

O’Kelly adamantly believed that the episcopal form of church government adopted by the Methodists was not based upon a proper interpretation of Christian Scripture. According to O’Kelly, “Christ is the *only* head of his church” and, thus, “...his [Christ’s] ministers are on a perfect equality. Superiority is expressly forbidden.” Furthermore, O’Kelly pointed out that at the conference in Jerusalem recorded in the *Book of Acts*, “there were no ministers by the title of bishop.”<sup>239</sup> Likewise, O’Kelly contended that in the Apostolic Church, “*The traveling and settled Ministers, were all workers together in the Church, and Churches; on a perfect equality.*”<sup>240</sup>

The criticisms O’Kelly levied against the developments in American Methodism predated the formation of the Methodist Episcopal Church. O’Kelly was one of the leaders of the Conference that met in Fluvanna. He was, thus, a fierce advocate for forming a presbytery for the purpose of ordaining elders to administer the sacraments. At the Conference held in 1782 at Ellis’s preaching house in Sussex County, Virginia, Asbury apparently provided a paper for the

---

<sup>239</sup> O’Kelly, *Author’s Apology*, 97f.

<sup>240</sup> *Ibid.*, 99.

preachers to sign, which claimed loyalty to Wesley. O’Kelly was the lone person to not sign the paper.<sup>241</sup>

However, by the time of the General Conference of 1792, O’Kelly’s ire had reached new heights. His contemporaries accused him of having “ambition,” unfairly attacking Bishop Asbury, and for divisiveness. Ezekiel Cooper was so concerned about O’Kelly that he wrote to Thomas Coke in August of 1791. In his letter, Cooper warned Coke that tensions were at a high. For that reason, Bishop Coke should “come with great care, with precaution...” when he came to “this Continent again.” Cooper was concerned that Asbury’s most ardent supporters would be angry at Coke for his opposition to the Council. More significantly, Cooper was concerned that Bishop Coke might be in danger if he favored O’Kelly’s “scheme.” Cooper wrote,

I fear our brother in the lower part of Virginia is too much prejudiced against Mr. A., and I candidly believe his ambition carries him to measures unbecoming a servant of Jesus, in filling other minds with his own prejudices to strengthen his party, and obtain a conquest for a conquest.<sup>242</sup>

This “republicanism” resonated with many of the preachers in the Methodist Connection. Many of the young Methodist preachers were more democratically minded and thus suspicious of the episcopal system. Thus, O’Kelly’s open criticism of the bishopric during the 1792 General Conference echoed the concerns of many in attendance.

---

<sup>241</sup> MacClenny, 43.

<sup>242</sup> Thomas Coke and Ezekiel Cooper, “Correspondence of Dr. Coke and Ezekiel Cooper,” *Methodist Review* 33 (1887), 59.

### 3. Authority Decried: Schism and the Conference of 1792

On November 1, 1792 the first General Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church convened in Baltimore. The Conference itself proved to be one of the most significant meeting grounds in early Methodism for the debate between populism and authority. After experimenting with committee charged with bringing forth propositions, it was determined that any member of the Conference was permitted to bring issues to the Conference.<sup>243</sup> This format allowed for the exploration and outright challenge of hierarchical authority of Methodist polity to be brought forth.

The most significant part of the Conference was the motion of James O'Kelly. On the second day of the Conference, O'Kelly proposed an amendment that, if approved, would dramatically curtail the power of the bishops. In the Methodist system, one of the primary powers of the bishops is that they are given executive power to assign preachers to circuit; furthermore, the bishops can move and reappoint preachers, as they believe fit. O'Kelly proposed that this power be tempered by giving the preachers the right to appeal their appointment. The amendment was,

After the Bishop appoints the Preachers at Conference to their several circuits, if any one think himself injured by the appointment, he shall have liberty to appeal to the Conference and state his objections; and if the Conference approve his objections, the Bishop shall appoint him to another circuit.<sup>244</sup>

---

<sup>243</sup> Thomas Benjamin Neely, *Journal of the General Conference, 1792* (Cincinnati: Curts and Jennings, 1899), 1.

<sup>244</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.



The amendment proposed by O’Kelly was, mostly, directed toward Francis Asbury. Bishop Coke was frequently abroad, doing missions work or in England, and virtually all of the appointments were set by Francis Asbury. The consummate politician, Asbury dismissed himself from the deliberations, allowing Thomas Coke to preside. However, he wrote a letter to the Conference in which he stated the case against O’Kelly’s amendment. In the letter, Asbury assuaged the fears of his supporters. He wrote, “Let my absence give you no pain—Dr. Coke presides. I am happily excused from assisting to make laws by which myself am to be governed: I have only to obey and execute.”<sup>245</sup>

Furthermore, Asbury contended in this letter that,

...I never stationed a preacher through enmity or punishment. I have acted for the glory of God, the good of the people, and to promote the usefulness of the preachers. Are you sure, that if you please yourselves, that the people will be as fully satisfied? They often say, “Let us have such a preacher;” and sometimes, “We will not have such a preacher—we will sooner pay him to stay at home.” Perhaps I must say, “His appeal forced him upon you.” I am one—ye are many. I am as willing to serve you as ever. I want not to sit in any man’s way. I scorn to solicit votes; I am a very trembling, poor creature to hear praise or dispraise. Speak your minds freely; but remember, you are only making laws for the present time; it may be, that as in some other things, so in this, a future day may give you further light.<sup>246</sup>

The proposed amendment spawned a long debate in the Conference. Over the course of the three days it was debated, the motion attracted and, subsequently, lost supporters. During this time it garnered support from several prominent leaders among the Methodists, including Freeborn Garrettson and William McKendree (1757-1835).<sup>247</sup>

---

<sup>245</sup> Ibid., 2.

<sup>246</sup> Ibid., 2.

<sup>247</sup> Ibid., 3.

Advocates in favor of O’Kelly’s amendment echoed the call of liberty. They contended that the present arrangement was against the precepts of freedom. They contended that, “they who would submit to this absolute dominion must forfeit all claims to freedom, and ought to have their ears bored through with an awl, and to be fastened to their master’s door and become slaves for life.”<sup>248</sup> The founder of the first Methodist Societies in Georgia, Hope Hull<sup>249</sup> (1763-1818), was said to echo these sentiments. He exclaimed, “O Heaven! Are we not Americans! Did not our fathers bleed to free their sons from the British yoke? and shall we be slaves to ecclesiastical oppression?”<sup>250</sup>

Those who were against the amendment invoked the precedent and authority of John Wesley, who had recently died. They contended, “...Mr. Wesley, the father of the Methodist family, had devised the plan, and deemed it essential for the preservation of the itinerancy.”<sup>251</sup> Other critics contended, “...such liberty would be injurious to the church, because preachers would ever be appealing.”<sup>252</sup>

The amendment was eventually defeated; a vote was finally taken at the service held in Phillip Otterbein’s German Reformed Church on Monday, November 5. This issue with O’Kelly’s amendment was not, necessarily, content. Indeed, many of the Methodist preachers echoed similar concerns. Thomas Ware

---

<sup>248</sup> Ware, 221.

<sup>249</sup> Samuel Gardner Ayers, *Methodist Heroes of Other Days* (Cincinnati: the Methodist Book Concern, 1916), 95f.

<sup>250</sup> O’Kelly, *Author’s Apology*, 38.

<sup>251</sup> Ware, 221.

<sup>252</sup> O’Kelly, *Author’s Apology*, 35.

believed that, “Had Mr. O’Kelly’s proposition been differently managed it might possibly have been carried.”<sup>253</sup> In fact, Ware contended, O’Kelly’s polemics precipitated the motion’s defeat. Ware wrote, “...according to the showing of brother O’Kelly, Mr. Wesley, if he were alive, ought to blush.”<sup>254</sup> Ware also noted,

For myself, at first I did not see any thing very objectionable in it. But when it came to be debated, I very much disliked the spirit of those who advocated it, and wondered at the severity in which the movers and others who spoke in favour of it indulged in the course of their remarks.<sup>255</sup>

Frustrated by the outcome of the vote, O’Kelly and a small contingency of preachers sent a letter to General Conference. The letter, which was read on Tuesday, announced that O’Kelly and his group withdrew from Conference and the Methodist Connection. Freeborn Garrettson, who was sympathetic to O’Kelly’s plight, was appointed to head a committee that was tasked with persuading those who had withdrawn to remain. Garrettson’s committee was unsuccessful in this endeavor.<sup>256</sup> O’Kelly and his followers formed the “Republican Methodist Church.” In 1794, he and his followers renamed themselves “the Christian Church,” having given up hopes of reconciling with the Methodist Episcopal Church.

#### **4. Authority Sustained: The Aftermath**

O’Kelly did not go away quietly. In the days following the General Conference of 1792, O’Kelly continued to launch a vigorous attack against the

---

<sup>253</sup> Ibid., 220.

<sup>254</sup> Ibid., 221.

<sup>255</sup> Ibid., 220f.

<sup>256</sup> Neely, 4.

Methodist episcopacy. O’Kelly’s clarion warning was that “old Methodism” had been lost in the wake of the Christmas Conference. He believed the hierarchical rigidity present in the new system of Methodist government was counter to the republican character of the earlier American movement. He wrote, “Episcopacy is no ways related to old Methodism, neither as the root nor branch; but is an adopted stranger.”<sup>257</sup>

After his letter of resignation from the Conference, Thomas Coke was alleged to condemn O’Kelly. Coke apparently declared, “I am obliged to extend charity towards O’Kelly and others: They have done violence to their public faith; because they promised to abide by the decision of the conference!”<sup>258</sup>

Coke’s criticism was the one of many wrongs O’Kelly believed Coke and Asbury inflicted upon him. He also accused the bishops of smearing his patriotism.

O’Kelly wrote, “Not long since, those despotic Prelates, who are emigrants from England, and desire to lord it over freemen, published, by strong indication, that I was an enemy of our civil government!”<sup>259</sup>

Believing himself unfairly maligned by the bishops’ revisionist account of 1792, O’Kelly anonymously published *Author’s Apology for Protesting Against the Methodist Episcopal Government*. In this tract, O’Kelly reiterated his criticisms of the episcopacy; he focused largely on his own interpretation of Scripture in this regard. In the remainder of the tract, O’Kelly presented his own account of the events of 1792 and the proceeding years. The work is filled with severe criticisms

---

<sup>257</sup> James O’Kelly, *A Vindication of the Author’s Apology with Reflections on the Reply* (Raleigh, N.C.: Joseph Galin, 1801), 6.

<sup>258</sup> O’Kelly, *Author’s Apology*, 40.

<sup>259</sup> O’Kelly, *Vindication*, 28.

of Francis Asbury, accusing him of being a power-monger and claiming the episcopacy, rather than being elected to it. Furthermore, he accused Coke and Asbury of refusing any substantial efforts of reconciliation with O’Kelly and his followers.

O’Kelly’s *Author’s Apology* prompted a response from Nicholas Snethen titled *Reply to An Apology for Protesting Against the Methodist Episcopal Church*. Snethen wrote the tract not “...because we think his arguments merit a reply, or because we fear that the basis of episcopacy will be shaken by him.” The reply was written because of O’Kelly continuing influence. Snethen recorded, “But Mr. O’Kelly had a number of friends in the Methodist society, who placed a greater confidence in him than all the Methodist preachers besides...”<sup>260</sup>

The basic claim of Snethan’s tract was that, “The charges alleged against Mr. Asbury and the general conference, have been obviated by the preachers, to the satisfaction of our friends in general.”<sup>261</sup> Snethen’s *Reply* was divided into two parts. The first part concentrated on O’Kelly’s attacks on Asbury. Notably, Snethen took O’Kelly to task for vilifying Asbury. In particular, Snethen reasserted that Asbury did not seize the bishopric but was, despite O’Kelly’s claims to the contrary, elected unanimously to that position and never opposed to sharing the episcopal office. He, further, explained in great length Asbury’s virtue and tireless work in ministry.

The second portion of the *Reply* defended the institution of the episcopacy. In this portion of his work, Snethen puts forth the basic notion that church

---

<sup>260</sup> Nicholas Snethen, *A Reply to Author’s Apology for Protesting Against the Methodist Episcopal Government* (Philadelphia: Henry Tuckness, 1800), 52f.

<sup>261</sup> *Ibid.*, iii.

government was not set by Scripture and, at times, individual liberties in its regard must be suspended for the good of the many. Snethen further contends that the Methodists are in no danger of embracing “popery” and, instead, are tolerant to many viewpoints. He writes, “No denomination of christians have been more indulgent towards other denominations, than the Methodists.”<sup>262</sup> Furthermore, Snethen criticized O’Kelly for focusing so much of his time and passion on issues of church government. He wrote, “The business of a Methodist preacher is not to take care of this or that society only, but to save as many souls as he can...”<sup>263</sup>

Snethen’s *Reply* prompted a response from O’Kelly. He published *A Vindication of the Author’s Apology with Reflections on the Reply* in 1801 in which he reasserted the case for a greater degree of religious liberty in the Methodist system. In his *Vindication*, O’Kelly “corrected” many of the errors he believed Snethen’s work contained.

In his reply, O’Kelly returned to his focus on the 1792 amendment. He pointed out that “...an *injured man* could have no *appeal* from the Bishop’s appointment!...I would have been stationed with joy, if I could have had an appeal in case of injury.” Furthermore, O’Kelly asserted that Asbury interfered directly in the conversation regarding the amendment by sending a letter to the Conference. O’Kelly wrote, “The Compiler saith, *the Bishop interferes not*. He did

---

<sup>262</sup> Ibid., 57.

<sup>263</sup> Ibid., 57.

interfere; and after leaving the conference in the height of the dispute, he sent letters back, and in them he did plead against the appeal.”<sup>264</sup>

O’Kelly also accused Snethen of ignorance concerning the fact of the supposed election of Asbury and Coke (mainly through reprinting Wesley’s letter, in which the two were appointed). And, O’Kelly also took to task the inability of Snethen or the other defenders of the episcopacy to substantiate their claims based on Scripture. Finally, O’Kelly criticized the Methodist Episcopal Church’s treatment of local, or settled, pastors. He wrote, “You greatly undervalue your *local* preachers, *even* those who assist in the circuits.”<sup>265</sup>

While only a small portion of the Methodist preachers followed O’Kelly’s exit, the altercation resonated deeply with the entire Connection. Prior to the Conference, Ezekiel Cooper wrote of the dread invoked by anticipation of the event. He record, “I fear some unfortunate end will come upon us before we get duty settled one way or the other.”<sup>266</sup> In a substantial way, Cooper’s fears were brought to fruition. Despite O’Kelly’s departure from the Conference, his criticisms of the autocratic elements of Methodist polity remained substantial issues for many of the remaining preachers for years to come.

### C. The African Methodist Critique

---

<sup>264</sup> O’Kelly, *Vindication*, 25f.

<sup>265</sup> *Ibid.*, 56.

<sup>266</sup> Phoebus, 129. Quoted from Cooper’s diary on April 29, 1792.

## 1. A Methodist Among Methodists: Richard Allen

Among those who shared concerns with O’Kelly regarding the “decline” of Methodism was Richard Allen (1760-1831). While Allen was not as critical of the episcopacy as O’Kelly, he did believe that the authentic Methodism had been lost in the quest for social status and respectability.

Richard Allen was a prominent figure in early Methodism. He was among the first generation of North American converts to Methodism. Allen was born in Philadelphia on February 14, 1760. While still a child, he and the majority of his family were sold to a family in Delaware. Allen spent the first twenty years of his life in slavery. While he described his master, Stokely Sturgis, as “...what the world called a good master,” he noted that slavery was “a bitter pill.”<sup>267</sup> Allen experienced dramatic experiences of salvation during his youth and his master allowed him to attend Methodist class meetings in Delaware.

Allen was also one of the earliest Methodist preachers. His master’s financial hardship provided Allen with the opportunity to seek employment in a variety of manual labor positions<sup>268</sup> and begin a preaching career. He was able to purchase his own freedom with the proceeds from his employment. In the wake of the Revolutionary War and after he had purchased his freedom, Allen began more aggressive preaching tours throughout the mid-Atlantic region. He preached to racially mixed congregations and, by his own account, was quite successful. Referring to one account of his preaching, he wrote,

---

<sup>267</sup> Richard Allen, *Life, Experience, and Gospel Labours of the Rt. Rev. Richard Allen* (Philadelphia: Martin and Boden Printers, 1833), 6f.

<sup>268</sup> Allen worked jobs cutting wood, working in a brickyard, and driving a wagon.



I preached my farewell sermon, and left these dear people. It was a time of visitation from above. many were the slain of the Lord...There were but few coloured people in the neighbourhood--the most of my congregation was white. Some said, this man must be a man of God; I never heard such preaching before.<sup>269</sup>

He was licensed as a local preacher by St. George's United Methodist Church in 1784. By 1785, Allen's reputation as a preacher had grown to the extent that Francis Asbury requested his presence as a traveling companion to the southern states.<sup>270</sup> Allen declined the invitation, citing that he needed to be able to do some manual labor to provide income to supplement his preaching. Allen recorded,

I told him if I was taken sick, who was to support me? ...He said that was as much as he got, his victuals and clothes. I told him he would be taken care of, let his afflictions be as they were, or let him be taken sick where he would, he would be taken care of; but I doubted whether it would be the case with myself.<sup>271</sup>

And, Allen held Methodism in the highest esteem. It was the religion that had converted him and, he believed, one of the most effective at saving souls. He wrote, "I feel thankful ever I heard a Methodist preacher." He further noted that the Methodists "proved beneficial to thousands" of people.<sup>272</sup>

---

<sup>269</sup> Allen, 9f.

<sup>270</sup>H. Lee Cheek, Jr. "Original Diversity: Bishops Allen, Asbury and Black Methodism," *Methodist History* 35 (1997), 188-191.

<sup>271</sup> Allen, 11.

<sup>272</sup> *Ibid.*, 17f.

## 2. Allen's Critique

By the mid-1780s Allen was growing discontent with the Methodist Episcopal Church. In fact, Allen believed that the essential character of Methodism was undergoing a metamorphosis since the Christmas Conference of 1784.<sup>273</sup>

Allen's understanding of Methodism predated the organization of the denomination. He believed that early American Methodism was characterized by the absence of color boundaries. He noted, "...in the first rise and progress in Delaware State, and elsewhere, the coloured people were their greatest support; for there were but few of us free."<sup>274</sup> In its American inception, Allen believed that Methodism was characterized by the use of common language and extemporaneous preaching. Allen wrote, "We are beholden to the Methodists, under God, for the light of the Gospel we enjoy; for all other denominations preached so high-flown that we were not able to comprehend their doctrine."<sup>275</sup>

According to Allen, the fundamental character of Methodism underwent a change with the formation of the Methodist Episcopal Church. In reference the 1784 Christmas Conference, Allen wrote,

December, 1784, General Conference sat in Baltimore, the first General Conference ever held in America...This was the beginning of the Episcopal Church amongst the Methodists. Many of the ministers were set apart in

---

<sup>273</sup> See, Dennis C. Dickerson, *A Liberated Past: Explorations in A.M.E. Church History* (Nashville: A.M.E.C. Sunday School Union, 2003), 17-26.

<sup>274</sup> Allen, 16f.

<sup>275</sup> *Ibid.*, 17.

holy orders at this Conference, and were said to be entitled to the gown; and I have thought religion has been declining in the church ever since.<sup>276</sup>

Allen and other black Methodists were frustrated by the growing racism present in the new Methodist Episcopal Church. As the Methodist Episcopal Church expanded in girth, church meetings became more socially divided affairs. In the earliest days of Methodism, black preachers such as Richard Allen and Harry Hosier had preached to racially mixed congregations. Likewise, it had been the practice for preaching services to be racially mixed. However, in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, this was beginning to change. During class meetings, camp meetings, and other religious services, African-Americans were, increasingly, required to sit in separate spaces apart from white Methodists. Allen believed that these new developments were the byproduct of the leaders and prominent ministers within the new denomination seeking authority, legitimacy, and status within American society. The white Methodists were willing to sacrifice an egalitarian stance on race, in order to be palatable and considered “respectable” to society. Allen believed that this compromise was a betrayal of core Methodist values. He recorded, “There was a pamphlet published by some person which stated that when the Methodists were no people, then they were a people; and now they have become a people, they were no people, which had often serious weight upon my mind.”<sup>277</sup>

---

<sup>276</sup> Ibid., 10f.

<sup>277</sup> Ibid., 11.

The catalyst that finally led to separation occurred at St. George's Methodist Episcopal Church.<sup>278</sup> In 1787 Richard Allen, lay preacher Absalom Jones (1746-1818), and other black worshippers withdrew from Philadelphia's St. George's Methodist Episcopal Church. The withdrawal was precipitated by the church trustees' decision to remove Absalom Jones from St. George's while he was engaged in prayer. The number of black persons attending the predominantly white congregation had grown exponentially over the preceding several months. With increased numbers, the white trustees decided to move the black persons to the gallery of the church. They black members acquiesced and attempted to take the seats that were directly over the ones they normally sat in. These were, apparently, the incorrect seats. Absalom Jones and the others were forcibly removed in the middle of the act of prayer. Allen wrote,

We had not been long upon our knees before I heard considerable scuffling and low talking. I raised my head up and saw one of the trustees, H-- M--, having hold of the Rev. Absalom Jones, pulling him up off of his knees, and saying, "You must get up--you must not kneel here." Mr. Jones replied, "wait until prayer is over." Mr. H-- M-- said "no, you must get up now, or I will call for aid and I force you away."<sup>279</sup>

As a partial response to this incident, Allen and his associates withdrew from the congregation and joined together in the "Free African Society" in Philadelphia. Due to " these and various other acts of unchristian conduct, they considered it their duty to devise a plan in order to build a house of their own to

---

<sup>278</sup> See, Dee Andrews, "The People and the Preachers at St. George's: The Anatomy of a Methodist Schism," in *Rethinking Methodist History: A Bicentennial Historical Consultation* (Nashville: Kingswood Books, 1985), 125-133.

<sup>279</sup> Allen, 13.

worship God under their own vine and fig-tree.”<sup>280</sup> Allen launched a campaign to fund the building project. By the summer of 1794, a remodeled blacksmith shop was deemed appropriate.

### 3. A House Divided: The Formation of the A.M.E. Church

While the formation of Bethel was a direct reaction to the changing social situation in the Methodist societies, it was not done with the immediate intent of separating from the Methodist Connection. In fact, the original plan was to create a separate sphere where black Methodists could worship freely and preserve the “old Methodism,” while being supplied with Methodist Episcopal preachers. However, the black Methodists, eventually, came to believe that the oppressive nature of Methodist polity was impossible to withstand.

The first Bethel building was dedicated in June 1794. Francis Asbury preached the dedication sermon. However, throughout the course of the building, Allen met with considerable resistance from white Philadelphia Methodist preachers, such as Richard Whatcoat and Lemuel Green.

“Mother” Bethel Church was, initially, under the auspices of the Methodist Episcopal Church; however, they found this arrangement oppressive. The members of Bethel found that the process of incorporation “entirely deprived us of that liberty we expected to enjoy...we were again brought into bondage by the white preachers.”<sup>281</sup> For instance, Allen and the other leaders of

---

<sup>280</sup> Noah Calwell Cannon, *A History of the African Methodist Episcopal Church* (Rochester: Strong and Dawson, 1842), 4.

<sup>281</sup> *The Doctrines and Discipline of the African Methodist Episcopal Church* (Philadelphia: Richard Allen and Jacob Tapsico, 1817), 4f.

Bethel claimed that the elder - presumably presiding elder James Smith - "demanded the keys of the house, with the books and papers belonging to the church; telling us at other times, we should have no more meetings without his leave."<sup>282</sup> So, after laboring under this system for ten years, the congregation unanimously signed a petition for a supplement, liberating the congregation from the Methodist Episcopal Church. The legal separation saved the "right and proprietary of our house" from Methodist Episcopal ownership.<sup>283</sup>

Following this legal separation, Bethel continued to receive preachers from the Methodist Episcopal Church. However, Bethel was not able to meet the monetary requirements of supporting a white preacher and found that, in many cases these ministers supplied to them were among the worst in the Church; they were not always "acceptable to the Bethel people, and not in much esteem among the white Methodists, as preachers."<sup>284</sup> As a response to Bethel's consistent refusals to accept government from the Methodist Episcopal Church, John Emory (1789-1835) published a circular letter disowning the congregation of Bethel. At this point, Bethel started turned away a series of Methodist preachers who sought to exert authority over them.<sup>285</sup>

---

<sup>282</sup> Ibid., 5.

<sup>283</sup> Benjamin Tucker Tanner, *An Outline of Our History and Government for African Methodist Churchmen, Ministerial and Lay* (Philadelphia: A.M.E. Book Concern, 1884), 142-148. Quoted from Will B. Gravely, "African Methodists and the Rise of Black Denominationalism," in *Perspectives on American Methodism: Interpretive Essays*, ed. Russell E. Richey, Kenneth E. Rowe, and Jean Miller Schmidt (Nashville: Kingswood Books), 112.

<sup>284</sup> Ibid., 5f.

<sup>285</sup> Ibid., 5-8.

In 1816, Richard Allen and Bethel formalized their final separation from the Methodist Episcopal Church by joining together with other black Methodists who “were treated in a similar manner, by the white preachers and trustees, and many of them drove away, who were disposed to seek a place of worship for themselves, rather than go to law.”<sup>286</sup> The resulting denomination was called the African Methodist Episcopal Church. That name was officially adopted on April 9, 1816 when Richard Allen, Daniel Coker, and James Champion convinced other black Methodist churches in the Baltimore and Philadelphia to join together with them.

The separation served as a final commentary on the shifting nature of the Methodist Episcopal Church. Allen and his associates believed that the Methodism they had known and believed in was no longer present. The Methodist Episcopal Church now embodied a rigid structure that was oppressive, that indulged “greedy dogs.” The members of the A.M.E.C. separated in order to free themselves from what they referred to as the “spiritual despotism” of the Methodist Episcopal Church.<sup>287</sup>

#### **D. Conclusion: Denominational Methodism**

By the end of the eighteenth century, the Methodist Episcopal Church was transiting into a distinct and powerful religious organization. The Methodist Episcopal Church had grown to become a religious organization that maintained distinct autocratic elements that some constituents found oppressive and

---

<sup>286</sup> Ibid., 8.

<sup>287</sup> Ibid., 9.

alienating. However, these very elements had also begun to provide autonomy, meaning, structure, and identity to the populist elements of the Church. In the years that followed 1792, the debate over the proper balance between authority and liberty were to shape much of the course of the history of the Methodist Episcopal Church.



## CHAPTER V

### THE WESLEYANS

By the beginning of the nineteenth century, the Methodist Episcopal Church had become a religious organization that bore increasing dissimilarities to its British counterpart. With widespread numeric and geographic growth, a virtual mastery of an uneducated, lower class of preachers that were kept in check by an increasingly well-organized and authoritative system of church government, the Methodist Episcopal Church was transiting into a powerful denominational body. The desire for autonomy and the compromises the American Methodists made in their quest for greater status on the North American continent contributed to a divisive split between the Methodists of England and North America.

#### **A. Methodism on Two Continents**

##### **1. Parallels**

The Methodist Episcopal Church shared many parallels with its English counterpart. After all, the basic principles of the Methodist Episcopal Church's system of church organization were inherited from Wesley's British Connexion. Likewise, at the dawn of the nineteenth century the two movements shared many theological and social perspectives.

From an organizational standpoint, the American Methodist system of church organization was a direct transplant of the model practiced by John

Wesley in eighteenth century England. Like their British counterparts, the Methodists adopted a system of organization that utilized traveling preachers. These preachers were assigned to oversee a series of Societies (known as “circuits”) in a given geographic area. This system proved to be particularly effective in reaching wilderness and frontier areas.

As a byproduct of their traveling and oversight responsibilities, traveling preachers (“elders” in Methodist Episcopal polity) were only able to meet with Societies infrequently. They utilized local preachers (“deacons” or “helpers” in Methodist Episcopal language) to assist with the Societies in their absence. And, like the British Methodists, the daily running of the local Society was left in the hands of two persons, the class leader and the stewards. The stewards took responsibility for the secular affairs of the society, items such as building maintenance and financial elements of the Societies. The class-leader took responsibility for the day-to-day sacred affairs of the society; the class—leader gave spiritual direction in the absence of the deacons and elders.

Conferences were held annually to analyze and direct the traveling preachers. The complexities and sheer size of the American geographical situation necessitated an expansion of that model to include a wider number of circuits and regionalized conference, but the essentials were the same. Even the strong episcopal leadership of the Methodist Episcopal Church was based on the precedent of John Wesley. Wesley exercised wide authority over the British Methodists. At his discretion, preachers were appointed, disciplined, and the evaluated. The episcopal form of government adopted by the American Methodists was, to some extent, based on this model. The Bishops, particularly

Francis Asbury, were endowed with the power to appoint, move, and discipline pastors.

In terms of ideology, the Americans owed much to their British counterparts, as well. The preachers in the Methodist Episcopal Church espoused a theology that was influenced very heavily by Wesley. More significantly, in its earliest days the Methodist Episcopal Church sustained some of the social radicalism of the British Methodists. The preachers in the Methodist Episcopal Church were sent to preach to all persons, regardless of social status. As previously stated, this meant that they Methodists preached heavily to working class and agrarian persons.

And, like the British Methodists, many of the ministers in the Methodist Episcopal Church initially shared the antislavery concerns of Wesley. Wesley was a fierce advocate against chattel slavery. In his tract, *Thoughts Upon Slavery*, Wesley vehemently condemned the institution. Pulling heavily from the work of American Quaker author Anthony Benezet, Wesley utilized the pages of this tract to describe the means through which Europeans had corrupted the African people; through introducing alcohol and principles of avarice, Europeans helped encourage the people to begin trading and selling one another. Furthermore, Wesley described the brutal process with which slaves were shipped and sold. Wesley then devoted the remainder of the piece to taking on the arguments that had been levied in support of slavery. Attempting to appeal to the slave merchants, plantation owners, and captains of the slave ships, Wesley called for an end to the institution. He proclaimed,

...Where is the justice of inflicting the severest evil on those that have done us no wrong?...[Does not] an Angolan have the same natural rights as an Englishman, and on which he sets as high a value?...I absolutely deny all

slave-holding to be consistent with a degree of natural justice.<sup>288</sup>

Following Wesley's example, the Methodist Episcopal Church – at least initially - vehemently condemned slavery as a vile institution that should be abolished. Many of the leaders of early American Methodism were ardent advocates against slavery, including Freeborn Garrettson, Francis Asbury, and Thomas Coke. At the 1784 Christmas Conference it was determined that slaveholders would be expelled from their societies. The *Minutes* recorded,

Quest. 12. *What shall we do with our friends that will buy and sell slaves?*

*Ans.* If they buy with no other design than to hold them as slaves, and have been previously warned, they shall be expelled; and permitted to sell on no consideration.<sup>289</sup>

## 2. Differences

In the years immediately following the establishment of the American Methodists into a sovereign denomination, many of the elements imported from the British Methodists were either lost or took on a distinctively *American* look and feel. For instance, geography played a major role in differentiating the two movements. Itinerating preachers in America were forced to cover much larger distances than their English counterparts. As a result, it became the practice in America for several activities to be combined into a religious marathon of sorts. It was not uncommon for business meetings, love feasts, Lord's Supper, and watch-night services being combined into a protracted affair. As discussed previously, this contributed to the creation of camp meetings.

---

<sup>288</sup> John Wesley, *Thoughts on Slavery* (Philadelphia: Joseph Crukshank, 1773), 34.

<sup>289</sup> *Minutes of the Methodist Conferences*, 1: 46f.

Early American Methodist worship also bore steep deviations from their English counterpart. In general, the American Methodists did not maintain the strict devotion to high liturgical elements.<sup>290</sup> While Wesley had provided for the Americans a *Sunday Service for the Methodists* based closely upon the *Book of Common Prayer*, the Service never gained popularity in America. In general, the average American Methodist preacher was not interested in high liturgy. Jesse Lee wrote,

At this time the prayer book, as revised by Mr. Wesley, was introduced among us; and in the large towns, and in some country places, our preachers read prayers on the Lord's day; and in some cases the preachers read part of the morning service on Wednesdays and Fridays. But some of the preachers who had been long accustomed to pray extempore, were unwilling to adopt this new plan. Being fully satisfied that they could pray better, and with more devotion while their eyes were shut, than they could with their eyes open. After a few years the prayer book was laid aside, and has never been used since in public worship.<sup>291</sup>

This lack of interest in traditional elements of Anglican worship was, probably, the byproduct of shifting population patterns and a disinterested cadre of preachers. The development of traditions and the use of high liturgy in worship were curtailed by the transitory nature of the population. Services were usually kept accessible to the most base of the population.<sup>292</sup> Francis Asbury shared the disdain for high liturgy that many of the other Methodist preachers carried. Asbury rarely used the formal prayers present in the *Sunday Service*. For that matter, Asbury was never passionate about the regular administering of the

---

<sup>290</sup> Frederick V. Mills, Sr. "Methodist Preaching 1798-1840: Form and Function," *Methodist History* 43 (2004), 3-16.

<sup>291</sup> Lee, 107.

<sup>292</sup> Frank Baker, "The Americanizing of Methodism," *A.M.E. Zion Quarterly Review* 87 (1975), 15.

Lord's Supper. Asbury's primary concern was for ministers to be properly devoted to the gospel message; he was little concerned with high liturgical observance and, for that reason, he rarely requested more formalized practices from the preachers.<sup>293</sup>

And, in fact, the quest for converts became the predominant concerns of the preachers in the Methodist Episcopal Church. This contributed to the low-church style worship, but also strict membership standards. The class-ticket emerged in 1741 British Methodism as a device for enforcing discipline within the Societies. A new one was given every three-months to members of the class who were in good standing. The tickets were required for admittance into the class meetings. After the establishment of the Methodist Episcopal Church, the American Methodists ceased enforcing strict membership standards and, for the most part, practices such as the class-ticket were discontinued. The practice continued in Britain until late in the nineteenth century.<sup>294</sup>

The organizational similarities took steep turns, largely due to the actions of the British Conference after Wesley's death. The British Methodists followed the American and Irish in separating from the Church of England. The ordination that the British embraced lacked the bi-fold order of the American. Instead of having elders and deacons, the British Methodists embraced only a single form of ordination. Furthermore, the British Methodists disavowed the use of the title

---

<sup>293</sup> Fred Hood, "Community and the Rhetoric of 'Freedom': Early Methodist Worship," *Methodist History* 9 (1970), 13-25.

<sup>294</sup> Baker, "Americanizing of Methodism," 5f.

“bishop” for their superintendents; the true power of the British Methodists was placed squarely in the hands of the Conference.<sup>295</sup>

The Methodist Episcopal Church’s desire for unabated growth contributed to a decline in their social concern. The issue most affected by this compromise was slavery. While the British Methodists remained ardent abolitionists, the American Methodists compromised on the issue. The promise of the Christmas Conference to excommunicate slaveholders was never enforced. The 1785 *Minutes* noted, “It is recommended to all our brethren to suspend the execution of the minute on slavery, till the deliberations of a future conference...”<sup>296</sup>

The Methodist Episcopal Church’s official stand on slavery further wavered. By 1800, the Methodist Episcopal Church had moved away from a hard abolitionist rule; instead, they extended their opposition only to slaveholding in states where laws allowed emancipation. This directive was given at the conference that dictated that each annual conference should circulate petitions calling for the gradual emancipation of slaves in states that did not yet allow it. This directive, which was signed by bishops and prominent clergy, William McKendree, Jesse Lee, and Ezekiel Cooper, did little good. The majority of annual conferences did not follow through with this plan.<sup>297</sup>

---

<sup>295</sup> See, for instance, John Munsey Turner, *Wesleyan Methodism* (Peterborough, U.K.: Epworth, 2005), 5-16.

<sup>296</sup> *Minutes of the Methodist Conferences*, 1: 55.

<sup>297</sup> Donald Mathews, *Slavery and Methodism; a Chapter in American Morality, 1780-1845* (Princeton, N.J., Princeton University Press, 1965), 20-21.

In 1816, the General Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church declared the war against slavery a lost battle. The Committee on Slavery concluded, "...under the present, existing circumstances in relation to slavery, little can be done to abolish the practice so contrary to the principles of moral justice." Furthermore, the Committee concluded, the General Conference was powerless to change the civil code and Methodists, in general, were "too easily contented with laws unfriendly to freedom."<sup>298</sup>

The softening attitudes among the leaders of the Methodist Episcopal Church can be attributed to two reasons. In the first place, the Methodists had enjoyed their most substantial success in the slave-holding states. So, in order to be more palatable to this culture, the denomination loosened their stances on slavery. Francis Asbury actually took lodging in slaveholders' homes, albeit at considerable guilt. Asbury wrote, "O to be dependent on slaveholders is in part to be a slave, and I was free born."<sup>299</sup> Secondly, by preaching fierce message of abolitionism, the Methodists were not allowed to minister to the slaves. Fearing that the slaves were destined for eternal damnation, the Methodists ceased preaching a message that was offensive to the slaveholders, so they might be allowed to convert the slaves.<sup>300</sup>

In essence, the desire of the leaders of the Methodist Episcopal Church to maintain harmony within their denomination, while extending their message to

---

<sup>298</sup> Lewis Curts, ed. *The History of the General Conferences of the Methodist Episcopal Church from 1792 to 1896* (Cincinnati: Curts and Jennings, 1900), 169.

<sup>299</sup> Asbury, 2: 151.

<sup>300</sup> See also, Donald Mathews, *Religion in the Old South* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1977).



the widest number of people predominated all other concerns. The more geographically contained and numerically smaller British Methodists were more ardently committed to the originating social principles of the denomination.

## **B. Early Tensions**

### **1. Wesley and the Bishops**

The growing differences between the British and American Methodists were not merely wrought by geography and patterns of growth. The splintering relationship between the two religious bodies was also the byproduct of the American Church desiring autonomy and widespread acceptance and prevalence in culture.

The first issue of division between the two movements had to do with *authority*. Echoing the cries of American Independence, the leadership of the Methodist Episcopal Church had little desire to serve under the auspices of British rule. Evidence of the Methodist Episcopal Church's desire for ecclesial independence surfaced in the days immediately following the Christmas Conference. Asbury, Coke, and the General Conference adopted titles and power that were not anticipated by John Wesley and the English Connection.

The Christmas Conference made several moves that detracted from the unity between the English and American Methodists. As stated previously, rather than allowing John Wesley's admonitions and plans create a new Church, the American Methodists chose to go their separate way. While they did not disregard Wesley's plan for the establishment of a religious denomination in America, the plans were used as a cornerstone for a larger discussion. The actual

decisions to establish a denomination, elect general superintendents, and decide on issues of denominational polity were decided by the consensus of the preachers in attendance.

Wesley did not accept that his power over the Methodist Episcopal Church was waning. In fact, he chided Asbury and Coke for their audacity and ego. When he learned that the Methodist Episcopal Church had named their school “Cokesbury College,” Wesley was furious. In a letter to Francis Asbury, Wesley chided the self-aggrandizing of the name of the institution. Wesley wrote, “In one point, my dear brother, I am a little afraid both the Doctor and you differ from me. I study to be little: you study to be great. I creep; you strut along. I found a school; you a college!” Wesley further criticized Asbury and Coke’s use of the title “bishop.” He wrote, “How can you, how dare you suffer yourself to be called Bishop? I shudder, I start at the very thought! Men may call me a knave or a fool, a rascal, a scoundrel, and I am content; but they shall never call me Bishop!”<sup>301</sup>

## 2. The Controversy of 1787

Despite abundant evidence to the contrary, John Wesley was convinced that he could continue to exercise control over the American Methodists throughout the final years of his life. As a result, he responded to the insubordination of Asbury by appointing a third “superintendent” in 1787. Wesley’s actions helped wreck a divisive split between the British and American Methodists.

---

<sup>301</sup> Wesley, *Letters*, 8: 91.

By the mid-1780s, Wesley's influence in America was waning. He complained to Thomas Coke "of his hearing very seldom from any of his sons in the United States."<sup>302</sup> Wesley did maintain an irregular correspondence with a few of the American Methodist preachers, such as Freeborn Garrettson and Ezekiel Cooper. Most of this correspondence concerned spiritual matters, such as Wesley repeatedly imploring Garrettson to transcribe and send his journal.<sup>303</sup>

The majority of Wesley's communication with the Americans occurred through Thomas Coke. Throughout the 1780s, Coke traveled widely. He rarely was in the United States for prolonged periods of time and he made frequent trips to England, where he aided Wesley in a variety of endeavors. Wesley wrote of Coke, "I can exceedingly ill spare him from England, as I have no clergyman capable of supplying his lack of service."<sup>304</sup>

Wesley gave Coke detailed instructions before he sent him back to America. In a letter dated September 6, 1786, Wesley wrote, "I desire that you would appoint a General Conference of all our preachers in the United States, to meet at Baltimore on 1<sup>st</sup> May 1787. And that Mr. Richard Whatcoat may be appointed Superintendent with Mr. Francis Asbury."<sup>305</sup>

While Asbury consented to call the General Conference, he was unhappy with Wesley's interference with American affairs. In March of 1787, Thomas Coke met with Francis Asbury. According to Coke, the meeting was, at least

---

<sup>302</sup> Phoebus, 114. Coke recounted this complaint in a letter to Ezekiel Cooper.

<sup>303</sup> Bangs, *Life of the Rev. Freeborn Garrettson*, 146-153.

<sup>304</sup> Letter was reproduced in Bangs, *Life of the Rev. Freeborn Garrettson*, 153.

<sup>305</sup> Wesley, *Letters*, 7:339.

initially, quite tense. Coke noted, "Our interview at first was rather cool, but soon the spirit of peace and love came upon us, and all jealousies were immediately removed."<sup>306</sup>

In August 1788, Asbury wrote a letter to Jaspar Winscom in which he more fully expounded upon his sentiments. Winscom was a shopkeeper turned Methodist local preacher in Winchester, England; he and Asbury became acquainted when the latter was stationed in the Wiltshire South Circuit. In this uncharacteristically frank letter (written to a "confidential friend"), Asbury provided an explanation for his frustration with Wesley. In Asbury's estimate, it was impossible for someone who was thousands of miles away to make decisions for the American Church. "I am sure that no man or number of men in England can direct either the head or the body here unless he or they should possess divine powers, be omnipotent, omniscient and omnipresent."<sup>307</sup>

In Asbury's opinion, it was impossible to properly exercise authority without having proper relationship and understanding of the plights of the preachers. Asbury conceded that he found it difficult to visit with all the circuits in a given year and, thus, it would be impossible for Wesley. He wrote, "I have been prevented from visiting some circuits that have been formed 3 or 4 years that have wanted my pastoral care...if I was wholly at my own disposal I should see them all in the space of 12 or 15 months." And, there was no way that the American preachers would submit to someone who had no relationship with them. Asbury recorded, "That one thousand preachers traveling and local; and

---

<sup>306</sup> Coke, *Journals*, 85.

<sup>307</sup> Asbury, 3: 63.

thirty thousand people would submit to a man they never have nor can see, his advice they will follow as they judge it right."<sup>308</sup>

Wesley also lacked a clear understanding of the emerging American national identity. According to Asbury, his stance against the American Revolutionary War had made Wesley unpopular in America. Asbury recounted, "There is not a man in the world so obnoxious to the American politicians as our dear old Daddy."<sup>309</sup> Asbury feared that Wesley's continued interference might invoke an examination by the government. He recorded, "We have a number of Captains and Colonels and men that are deep in the policy of their country and they will examine the policy of our CHURCH, to see if it is sound."<sup>310</sup>

Asbury's sentiments reflected the concerns of many of the American Methodist preachers. At the Conference of 1787, the preachers refused to acknowledge Wesley's appointment of Whatcoat. Furthermore, the Methodist preachers decided to remove Wesley's name from the list of superintendents. Solidifying the separation, Asbury and Coke introduced the word "bishop" in the *Minutes* of 1788. Jesse Lee insisted that the decision was not made by the Conference but, instead, by the two bishops. Lee wrote,

They changed the title themselves without the consent of the Conference and then asked the preachers at the next Conference if the word 'bishop' might stand in the Minutes...Some of the preachers opposed the alteration and wished to remain the former title, but a majority of the preachers agreed to let the word 'bishop' remain.<sup>311</sup>

---

<sup>308</sup> Ibid., 3: 62f.

<sup>309</sup> Ibid., 3:62.

<sup>310</sup> Ibid., 3:64.

<sup>311</sup> Lee, 128.

The American preachers were concerned with the power being exercised by Wesley. Thomas Ware noted that many of the Americans feared that Wesley would attempt to govern the Methodist Episcopal Church, much as he did the Methodist Connection in England. In England, “Mr. Wesley had been in the habit of calling his preachers together, not to legislate, but to confer.... but the right to *decide* all questions he reserved to himself.”

The majority of the American Methodist preachers believed that weighty decisions, such as the selection of superintendents and issues of church policy, should be made by the Conference. Ware wrote, “To place the power of deciding all questions discussed, or nearly all, in the hands of the superintendents, was what could never be introduced among us.”<sup>312</sup> Therefore, the preachers did not respond favorable to Wesley’s decision to change the date and place of the General Conference and to appoint Whatcoat to the superintendency. Ware wrote,

The liberty he took liberty in changing the time and place of holding the conference gave serious offence to many of the preachers. But this was not all, nor even the chief matter, which caused some trouble at the conference. Mr. Wesley had appointed Mr. Whatcoat a superintendent...there was not one of the preachers inclined to submit, much as they loved and honoured him.<sup>313</sup>

It is important to realize that neither Asbury nor the majority of American Methodists had serious problems with Richard Whatcoat.<sup>314</sup> The opposition

---

<sup>312</sup> Ware, 130.

<sup>313</sup> *Ibid.*, 129f.

<sup>314</sup> For more information on Richard Whatcat, see the following sources: P. Douglass Gorrie, *The Lives of Eminent Methodist Ministers* (Auburn: Derby and Miller, 1853), 212-223; Richard Whatcoat, *To Go and Serve the Desolate Sheep in*

levied against Whatcoat's appointment to the episcopacy was aimed strictly at Wesley. As evidence of that, Whatcoat was actually elected to the episcopacy in 1800.

Whatcoat was, in fact, a very uncontroversial minister. Born in Gloucestershire, England, he served as a band leader, class leader, steward, and local preacher in England, Ireland, and Wales prior to volunteering to accompany Thomas Coke to America in 1784. As previously noted, he was present at the organization of the Methodist Episcopal Church. And, he served in large districts in America in the years following the Christmas Conference. He was known for being, "a man of the amiable temper, unassuming simplicity, and saintly piety." He died in 1806 and was memorialized in the *Minutes* of that year. The author – presumably Asbury - wrote,

We will not use many words to describe this almost inimitable man. So deeply serious—who ever saw him light or trifling? Who ever heard him speak evil or any person? Who ever heard him speak an idle word? Dead to envy; pride, and praise; sober without sadness; cheerful without levity; careful without covetousness, and decent without pride.<sup>315</sup>

### 3. Asbury, Wesley, and the Dynamics of Power

Perhaps as much as anything, the controversy of 1787 was a struggle between Asbury and Wesley for power over the Methodists in America. This was evident in the preachers' reaction to Wesley's proclamations and in Wesley's response to the actions of the controversy of 1787.

---

*America: The Diary/Journal of Bishop Richard Whatcoat, 1789-1800*, ed. Samuel J. Rogel (London: Academica Press, 2001).

<sup>315</sup> William C. Larrabee, *Asbury and His Colaborers*, ed. D.W. Clark (Cincinnati: Hitchcock and Walden, 1852), 1: 340f.

For many of the preachers in attendance at the General Conference of 1787, the key issue was not simply Wesley's exercise of power. Many of the preachers resisted Wesley's authority because they were concerned about the specific decisions Wesley might make. In particular, many of the preachers were concerned that if the Methodist Episcopal Church recognized the power of Wesley, it would enable him to recall Francis Asbury to England. Thomas Ware wrote, "There were also suspicions entertained by some of the preachers, and, perhaps, by Mr. Asbury himself, that, if Mr. Whatcoat were received as a superintendent, Mr. Asbury would be recalled. For this none of us were prepared."<sup>316</sup> Many of the American Methodist preachers held far greater affection for Asbury than loyalty to Wesley. And, thus, Wesley's actions had to be stopped.

However, in the Conference of the 1787, the Methodist preachers sought to redefine, not completely sever the relationship between themselves and Wesley. Thomas Ware recorded, "As to Mr. Wesley, there were none of us disposed to accuse him of a desire to tyrannize over us, and, in consequence, to withdraw our love and confidence from him."<sup>317</sup> Instead, the Conference sought to assuage the decision to separate from Wesley's authority by writing him "a long and loving letter." The letter implored Wesley to understand the American Methodists to be his "spiritual children."<sup>318</sup>

---

<sup>316</sup> Ware, 131.

<sup>317</sup> *Ibid.*, 131.

<sup>318</sup> Wesley, *Letters* 8: 24f.



Not surprisingly, Wesley was not pleased with the actions of the 1787 Conference or its attempt to assuage him. The chief target of his animosity, however, was Asbury. In his September 20, 1788 letter, Wesley rebuked the actions of Asbury and the American Methodists. He wrote,

There is, indeed, a wide difference between the relation wherein you stand to the Americans and the relation wherein I stand to all the Methodists. You are the elder brother of the American Methodists: I am under God the father of the whole [Methodist] family. Therefore I naturally care for you all in a manner no other person can do. Therefore I in a measure provide for you all, for the supplies which Dr. Coke provides for you, he could not provide were it not for me, were it not that I not only permit him to collect but also support him in so doing.<sup>319</sup>

Wesley was convinced that Asbury was attempting to exercise an undue amount of power in America. This notion was not formed simply out of personal experiences with Asbury; Wesley had also heard a variety of reports condemning Asbury from contemporaries. Throughout his career in ministry, his critics accused Asbury of being a power-monger. In the late decades of the nineteenth century, his most notorious critics were James O'Kelly and his former partner in America, Thomas Rankin. Asbury firmly believed that Rankin, in particular, had perverted Wesley's understanding of him. Utilizing the language of the *Third Epistle of John*, Asbury wrote,

I hope we shall live in peace, but you may be sure I have had it on all side and I believe Diotrephes has got the ear of old Daddy too. He sometimes prates against me with malicious words because I was bold to stay when he like a coward ran away, not only through fear, but hopes of gaining preferment in the church or state.<sup>320</sup>

---

<sup>319</sup> Asbury, 3: 64.

<sup>320</sup> *Ibid.*, 3: 63. In 3 *John*, the author is writing Gaius to warn him of Diotrephes. The latter figure was, allegedly, seeking power in the church.

However, Wesley remained unhappy with Asbury until the end of his life. In a letter written to an unknown recipient on October 31, 1789, Wesley wrote, "I was a little surprised when I received some letters from Mr. Asbury affirming that no person in Europe knew how to direct those in America." Wesley had also been informed by George Shadford that Asbury had stated, "Mr. Wesley and I are like Caesar and Pompey: he will bear no equal, and I will bear no superior." These remarks coupled with Asbury's "friends" voting Wesley's "names out of the American Minutes...completed the matter and showed that he had no connexion with me."<sup>321</sup>

And, while Asbury would persist in his claims to have simpler ambitions, it was abundantly clear that he had little interest in sharing substantial power in America with anyone else. He wrote, "For our old Daddy to appoint Conferences when and where he pleased, to appoint a joint superintendent with me, were strokes of power we did not understand." And, thus, Asbury wanted "...union but no subordination, connexion but no subjection" between the Americans and British Methodists.<sup>322</sup>

### **C. Later Tensions**

#### **1. The Precarious Place of Dr. Coke**

Even after the events of 1787, Thomas Coke continued to be the chief connecting point between the British and American Methodists. Coke remained a

---

<sup>321</sup> Ibid., 3: 75.

<sup>322</sup> Ibid., 3: 63f.

close advisor to Wesley in England and one of the chief guiding forces in America. In the years following the death of John Wesley, Coke's status in both England and America underwent steep redefinition. And, for the American Methodists, the winnowing relationship with Thomas Coke served to further separate the British and American Methodists.

John Wesley died on March 2, 1791. In both America and England, Wesley had achieved the status of a legend by the time of his death. And, thus, his death was greeted with large outpourings of sympathy from all sources. *The Gentleman's Magazine* noted that Wesley was "one of the few characters who outlived enmity and prejudice, and received, in his latter years, every mark of respect from every denomination."<sup>323</sup>

The news struck the Americas hard, as well. At the time that Wesley's death was announced in the papers, Asbury and Coke were traveling together in Virginia. Abel Stevens wrote, "America, and the whole Methodist world, was struck with solemnity by the death of Wesley. It was like the fall of a monarch."<sup>324</sup> Coke wrote, "For near a day I was not able to weep; but afterwards some refreshing tears gave me almost inexpressible ease."<sup>325</sup> In his *Journal*, Asbury eulogized Wesley. He wrote,

He died in his own house in London, in the eighty-eighth year of his age, after preaching the Gospel sixty-four years. When we consider his plain and nervous writings; his uncommon talent for sermonizing and journalizing; that he had such a steady flow of animal spirits; so much of

---

<sup>323</sup> Richard Heitzenrater, *The Elusive Mr. Wesley* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1984), 2: 154.

<sup>324</sup> Abel Stevens, *History of the Methodist Episcopal Church* (New York: Carlton and Porter, 1868), 2: 120.

<sup>325</sup> Coke, *Journals*, 165.

the spirit of government in him; his knowledge as an observer; his attainments as a scholar; his expression as a Christian; I conclude, his equal is not to be found among all the sons he hath brought up, nor his superior among all the sons of Adam he may have left behind.<sup>326</sup>

Prior to his death, Wesley once again implored the Methodist Episcopal Church to retain its ties to its British counterpart. Twenty-nine days before his death, John Wesley wrote a letter to Ezekiel Cooper. It would be the last letter written he wrote to the America. In this letter, Wesley acknowledged that his death was close at hand. He wrote, "Those that desire to write, or say anything to me, have no time to lose, for time has shaken me by my hand, and death is not far behind." But he urged the Americans to, "...never give place to one thought of separating from your brethren in Europe." Wesley insisted that the Methodists should, "Lose no opportunity to declaring to all men, that the Methodists are one people in all the world, and that it is their full determination to continue."<sup>327</sup>

For his part, Thomas Coke attempted to keep this relationship between the British Connection and the Methodist Episcopal Church strong. Between 1784 and 1804, Thomas Coke made nine separate trips to North America. He split the remainder of his time between England and doing mission works in areas such as the West Indies. Prior to Wesley's death, these trips allowed Coke to act as both a "co-bishop" with Asbury in America (though, Asbury was clearly the dominant of the two) and as a lieutenant to John Wesley in England. Hence, his person provided the strong connecting point between the two movements.

---

<sup>326</sup> Asbury, 1: 673.

<sup>327</sup> John Wesley, "Letter from Rev. J. Wesley to E.C. of Philadelphia," *The Methodist Magazine* 6 (1823), 67.

However, Coke's relationship with both the British and the American Conferences underwent radical redefinition in the days following Wesley's death. Shortly after Wesley's death, Coke returned to England. At this point, he expected to be elected the "President of the European Methodists."<sup>328</sup> Prior to leaving America, Coke preached a memorial service for Wesley in Philadelphia and Baltimore. He focused on the biblical text of *2 Kings* 2:12, which was an account of the Elijah being brought to heaven. In his sermon, Coke compared himself to Elisha. Contemporaries speculated that Coke was juxtaposing himself as Wesley's successor in preaching this sermon.<sup>329</sup> In a September 23, 1791 letter to Asbury, Coke mentioned his regret over the choice of topic for this funeral service. Coke wrote of "the imprudence I was led into in preaching Mr. Wesley's funeral sermon."<sup>330</sup>

Coke's ambitions were somewhat premature, though. While he was well educated and ordained in the Church of England, he was also a relative newcomer to the Methodist itinerancy. More importantly, he was someone who had been controversial through much of his career in ministry. Upon arriving in England, Coke found his ambitions dashed. He attended the Irish Conference that met on July 1 in Dublin. He had, numerous times, presided on Wesley's behalf at this Conference. The preachers chose to reject his authority, however. They formed a committee and elected one of their fellow preachers as chairman.

---

<sup>328</sup> Coke was fully aware that no single clergy member would exercise the same power that Wesley did. The Deed of Declaration, which Coke helped draw up, clearly indicated the legal Conference inherited the majority of Wesley's power.

<sup>329</sup> Vickers, *Thomas Coke: Apostle of Methodism*, 192.

<sup>330</sup> Asbury, 3: 101f.

They did so “in order to give Dr. Coke a plain intimation, once and for all, that however highly they esteemed and loved him, they could not accept any minister as occupying the exalted position long sustained by the venerated Wesley.”<sup>331</sup> At the Manchester Conference of that year he was met with a similar reaction. William Thompson was elected President, while Coke was selected as Secretary. He occupied this position for many years.<sup>332</sup>

Partially due to the limited leadership role rewarded to him in England, Coke spent the early part of 1791 seriously considering a permanent relocation to America. Eventually, he decided against such relocation, choosing to focus on his missionary endeavors instead. In a letter to Ezekiel Cooper written on November 22, 1791, Coke reflected,

I had some design of going over to you for good and all, as the German proverb is but I now feel such a desire of being the happy instrument of spreading the Gospel in France, that I believe I shall never give up my labours there entirely to others.<sup>333</sup>

In 1796, Thomas Coke changed his mind once again. He arrived in Baltimore in time for the General Conference of that year. Due to sheer numeric and geographic size, the business of the Conference that year was organizing the Methodist Episcopal Church into six districts, each of which was governed by an Annual Conference. Furthermore, with large growth, came the need for more active bishops. In particular, the Conference sought to find relief for Francis Asbury. Asbury was, eventually, asked to nominate a new bishop to assist him in

---

<sup>331</sup> Charles Henry Crookshank, *History of Methodism in Ireland* (Belfast: R.S. Allen, 1885), 2: 38.

<sup>332</sup> Vickers, *Thomas Coke: Apostle of Methodism*, 193.

<sup>333</sup> Thomas Coke and Ezekiel Cooper, “Correspondence of Dr. Coke and Ezekiel Cooper,” *Methodist Review* 69 (1887), 59f.

his duties. Coke requested that the business be suspended until the next day. The next day of the Conference, Coke offered to give himself entirely over to the American Church. He wrote,

I offer myself to my American brethren entirely to their service, all I am and have, with my talents and labours in every respect, without any mental reservation whatsoever, to labour among them and to assist Bishop Asbury; not to station the preacher at any time when he is present, but to exercise all episcopal duties when I hold a Conference, in his absence and by his consent, and to visit the West Indies and France when there is an opening, and I can be spared.<sup>334</sup>

Coke's offer was, in fact, met with a mixed reaction. Preachers such as Jesse Lee believed that Coke's primary loyalties were to Europe. As a result, he and many others did not want to accept Coke's offer. Asbury intervened on Coke's behalf arguing that to reject his offer would diminish the doctor in the eyes of the British. After a two-day debate, the vast majority of the one hundred ministers in attendance voted to accept Coke as a full-time bishop.<sup>335</sup> William Phoebus recounted,

The Reverend Superintendent Asbury then reached out his hand in a pathetic speech, the purport of which was, "Our enemies said we were divided, but all past grievances were buried, and friends at first are friends at last, and I hope to never be divided." The Doctor took his right hand in token of submission, while many present were in tears of joy to see the happy union in the heads of department, and from a prospect of the Wesleyan episcopacy being likely to continue in regular succession.<sup>336</sup>

---

<sup>334</sup> Lee, *A Short History*, 248f.

<sup>335</sup> Warren A. Candler, *Life of Thomas Coke* (Nashville: M.E.C.S. Publishing House, 1923), 172ff. Candler refers to an unspecified eyewitness account.

<sup>336</sup> William Phoebus, *Memories of Bishop Whatcoat* (New York: J. Allen, 1828). Quoted in Candler, 175f and Vickers, *Thomas Coke: Apostle of Methodism*, 234.

## 2. Coke and Two Methodisms

In the days following the General Conference of 1796, Asbury made it abundantly clear that it was he, not Coke, who controlled the Methodist Episcopal Church. Shortly after the Conference, Asbury proposed a plan of operations. Coke was assigned to oversee Albany, New England, Vermont, Philadelphia, and New York. Asbury, meanwhile, held the Southern Conferences. Coke was frustrated by this plan. He wrote,

I was astonished. I did not see in this plan anything which related in the least degree to my being a Coadjuter in the Episcopacy, or serving to strengthen it; though it was for that purpose, as the primary point, that it was thought eligible by the General Conference that I should reside for life in America.

Coke protested that he was “not consulted in the least degree whatever either in public or in private concerning the station of a single preacher, & had nothing...peculiarly useful to do, but to preach.” Another source of contention was in regard to his assigned territory. He wrote, “The Northern States would be covered with snow. I should have Mountains of Snow to ride over, only to preach in general (a few Towns excepted) to the Family where I was, and a few of their neighbors.” Coke further lamented, “When Bishop Asbury retired, I fell on my face before God, & said, ‘O my God, what have I done?’”<sup>337</sup>

Asbury did not fully trust Coke’s commitment to stay in America. In September 23, 1797, Asbury recorded in his journal, “I am sensibly assured that Americans ought to act as if they expected to lose me every day, and had no dependence upon Doctor Coke; taking prudent care not to place themselves at all

---

<sup>337</sup> Asbury, 3: 334f.



under the controlling influence of British Methodists.”<sup>338</sup> And, when Coke set sail for England on February 6, 1797 to settle some affairs, Asbury sent a letter to his fellow bishop. Asbury wrote,

When I consider the solemn offer you made of yourself to the General Conference, and their free and deliberate acceptance of you as their Episcopos, I must view you as most assuredly bound to this branch of the Methodist Episcopal Church in the United States of America. ..although you may be called to Europe, to fulfill some prior engagements, and wind up your temporal affairs, nothing ought to prevent your hasty return to the continent, to live and die in America. I shall look upon you as violating your most solemn obligations if you delay your return.<sup>339</sup>

Asbury’s concerns were not without merit. The preachers at the English Methodist Conference of 1797 were not happy that Coke had committed himself fully to the Americans. In response to this action, the Conference elected Coke to the Presidential Chair. Furthermore, representatives from the Conference authored a note to the Americans asking that Coke be released from his obligations. The note that was sent to the Americans insisted that Coke was indispensable to the British Conference during this tenuous time in their history. At this juncture, the British Methodists had formally separated from the Church of England. The letter read,

It is on this ground, that we must request the return of our friend and brother, the Reverend Doctor Coke. He has often been a peace-maker amongst us, and we have frequently experienced the salutary effects of his advice and exertions in behalf of this part of the Connection. He had informed us of the engagements he had made to you. But you must spare him to us for a time, at least while these convulsions continue in our Societies, and the sooner you permit him to return, the greater will be the favour.

---

<sup>338</sup> Asbury, 2: 133.

<sup>339</sup> Asbury, 3: 157f.

Asbury did not respond favorably to the request of the English Methodists. He wrote,

With respect to the Doctor's returning to use, I leave your enlarged understandings and a good sense to judge. You will see the number of souls upon our Annual Minutes; and, as men of reading, you may judge over what a vast continent the Societies are scattered... The ordaining and stationing of the Preachers can only be performed by myself, in the Doctor's absence.<sup>340</sup>

For the next several years, Coke occupied a nebulous place in both American and British Methodism. Coke remained deeply conflicted about his dual status. At some junctures, he earnestly expected to commit himself fully to the American project. In a letter dated April 21, 1798 to Ezekiel Cooper, Coke wrote,

Unless I am particularly wanted in America, I believe I shall spend the new winter in England, God willing, which will enable me to settle all of my little affairs in this Country in the compleatest manner, so as to be ready to devote myself the Service of the American Brethren.<sup>341</sup>

But, at other times, he stated that his primary commitment was to the European Methodists. In a letter to Thomas Barber dated August 7, 1800, Coke wrote, "I do love Ireland above all other places...I sacrificed my important position in America for your sakes, and there is nothing gives me equal delight as serving the Irish Brethren."<sup>342</sup>

Both groups of Methodists wanted his primary loyalty. And, as a result, the language of ownership crept into the correspondence between the two bodies. Coke was allowed to return to England through 1800. He returned to America for the General Conference of 1800. This Conference "...lent the Doctor

---

<sup>340</sup> Vickers, *Thomas Coke: Apostle of Methodism*, 239f.

<sup>341</sup> Coke and Cooper, "Correspondences," 60.

<sup>342</sup> Thomas Coke, "Letter to Thomas Barber, 7<sup>th</sup> August 1800," *Proceedings of the Wesley Historical Society* 2 (1930), 205f.

to you for a season, to return to us as soon as he conveniently can; but at the farthest, by the meeting our next General Conference." The Conference persisted to state, "...we still feel an ardent desire for his continuance in America, arising from the critical state of Bishop's Asbury's health, the extension of our work, our affection for and our approbation of the Doctor, and his probable usefulness, provided he continue with us."<sup>343</sup>

However, the relationship between Coke and the American Methodists was suffering by 1800. With Asbury suffering with ill health and Coke rarely present in America, the Conference elected a third bishop. It took three ballots for a new bishop to be chosen; there was general dissent on the first ballot, the second ballot was a tie between Jesse Lee and Richard Whatcoat, but Whatcoat was elected on the third ballot. Despite the Conference's decision that the new bishop "should be on equal footing, and be joint superintendents" with Asbury, the reality of the matter was that Asbury continued to exercise supreme executive power over the Methodist Episcopal Church.<sup>344</sup> Whatcoat, himself suffering with less than perfect health, did manage to relieve Asbury of some of his travel responsibilities, though.

Even after the election of Whatcoat to the episcopacy, Coke did not completely abandon his plans to settle in America. In a letter sent to some American preachers in 1801, Coke wrote, "In America only I consider myself at home. I have been kept abroad for several years past by the will of God. However, I shall endeavour to wind every thing round, so that, if the Lord will

---

<sup>343</sup> Asbury, 3: 186f.

<sup>344</sup> Lee, *Short History*, 267f.

but suffer me, I may close my Career among you."<sup>345</sup> Prior to sailing for America in 1803, Coke warned the British Conference that he might never return to England. In a letter to Ezekiel Cooper he wrote, "The Lord has opened my way wonderfully & clearly (I was going to say, that he has written it on my mind as with a Sunbeam) to be wholly yours."<sup>346</sup> And to Richard Whatcoat he wrote, "Every shackle, every engagement, every obligation, in Europe, has been loosed or discharged."<sup>347</sup>

Asbury did not believe in the truthfulness of Coke's commitment to America. By the time of the 1804 visit, Asbury had concluded that Coke's primary allegiances were to Europe. He wrote, "It appears to me that he cannot well be spared from the Irish and English Connection, without irreparable damage; and I suppose he is better fitted for the whirl of public life than to be hidden in our woods." Asbury concluded "...all the Doctor wants is to keep his name amongst us..."<sup>348</sup>

In fact, by 1804 Asbury seemed to have basically decided that the Methodist Episcopal Church would be better without Coke. Asbury was not at all interested in maintaining the bond with England that Coke represented. For that matter, he was not interested in sharing meaningful power with him. In a letter to George Roberts Asbury admitted, "I am deeply sensible that neither Dr.

---

<sup>345</sup> Thomas Coke, "Letter to George Roberts, James Moore, and others, 28<sup>th</sup> February, 1801," (Drew University). Quoted from Vickers, *Thomas Coke: Apostle of Methodism*, 244f.

<sup>346</sup> Coke and Cooper, "Correspondences," 61f.

<sup>347</sup> Thomas Coke, "Letter to Bishop Whatcoat, from Petersburg, 2<sup>nd</sup> November 1803," (Historical Society of Pennsylvania).

<sup>348</sup> Asbury, 3: 277.

Coke nor any other person can render me any essential services in the Annual Conferences, more than the members of said conferences can do, unless they will take the whole work out of my hands."<sup>349</sup>

By the conclusion of his ninth visit to America, Coke had decided that his primary responsibilities were to the European Methodists. Prior to the conclusion of his visit, he and Asbury shared an exchange. He concluded, "In Europe, I have incomparably more time to literary matters, that I could have in the United States. In respect to Preaching, I can preach in the year to three or four times the number of People I could preach to in the United States."<sup>350</sup> The General Conference of 1804 gave Coke permission to return to England, with the provision that he was to return in time for the 1808 General Conference.

### **3. Controversy and the Conference of 1808**

Coke's 1804 visit was to be his final trip to America. By the end of that visit, it was abundantly clear to him that his talents were better utilized in England. Significantly, in the spring of 1805, he married Penelope Goulding Smith of Bradford-Avon. He was fifty-seven years old at the time of his marriage. Coke continued to travel after his marriage; however, his trips were more limited than previously.

Coke's marriage did not come as a surprise to Asbury. Asbury, himself, embraced celibacy and preferred his preachers to stay celibate. In his estimate, a traveling ministry was inconsistent with marriage. At this point in time, the

---

<sup>349</sup> Ibid., 3: 274.

<sup>350</sup> Ibid., 3: 334f.

Methodists in America had lost around two hundred preachers to marriage and its consequence, settling down. Asbury referred to marriage as “a ceremony as awful as death.”<sup>351</sup> In a particular revealing passage in his journal, Asbury recorded,

If I should die in celibacy, when I think quite probably, I give the following reasons for what can scarcely be called my choice. I was called in my fourteenth year; I began my public exercised between sixteen and seventeen; at twenty-one I traveled; at twenty-six I came to America...At thirty-nine I was ordained superintendent bishop in America. Amongst the duties imposed upon me by my office was that of traveling extensively, and I could hardly expect to find a woman with grace enough to enable her to live but one week out of the fifty-two with her husband: besides, what right has any man to take advantage of the affections of a woman, make her his wife, and by a voluntary absence subvert the whole order and economy of the marriage state, by separating those whom neither God, nature, nor the requirements of civil society permit long to be *put asunder*? ...if I have done wrong, I hope God and the sex will forgive me.<sup>352</sup>

However, Asbury recognized that he and Coke were very different men. Coke was more the marrying type. Asbury claimed to have told Bishop Whatcoat at the General Conference of 1800 that, “the Doctor I thought would marry. I have told him since I expect to hear he was married; how could I divine all this.”<sup>353</sup> And, while Asbury embraced a celibate ministry, Coke was more interested in looking for was to support “settled” Methodist preachers.

In the wake of his marriage, Coke sought to redefine his relationship with the Americans. He wrote Asbury that “he did not intend to visit America again as a visitor, but rather as a sojourner (if at all), could work be appointed him to

---

<sup>351</sup> Ibid., 2: 474.

<sup>352</sup> Ibid., 2: 423.

<sup>353</sup> Ibid., 3: 322.

do.”<sup>354</sup> Two months after his marriage, Coke sent a circular letter to each of the preachers in the Methodist Episcopal Church. In the circular, he noted that the promise he made in 1796 “to reside with you for life” was delayed, not cancelled, by his marriage. Coke noted that his wife was his “twin soul” and, thus, willing to settle down with him in America. However, Coke did not want her move to be “transitory.” The concluded that conditions must be met for the two of them to move to America permanently. Notably, Coke wanted an equal share in authority with Asbury. Coke wrote,

I should be willing to come over to you for life, on the express condition that the seven Conferences should be divided betwixt us [Asbury and Coke], three and four, and four and three, each of us changing our division annually; and that this plan at all events should continue permanent and unalterable during both our lives.<sup>355</sup>

The preachers in America rejected Coke’s conditions. All of the annual conferences replied to Coke’s circular letter by flatly rejecting his conditions. The Conferences agreed with Asbury, that Coke was changing the terms of his original commitment. Asbury wrote, “Dr. Coke has made proposals to serve the connection on a different ground, the conferences, all that have heard, have rejected the Doctor’s letter....”<sup>356</sup>

Coke’s status with the Americans was further diminished in 1807, when correspondence he had carried on with William White (1748-1836) of the Protestant Episcopal Church came to light. In the spring of 1791, Coke began corresponding with White “on the subject of uniting the Methodist *society* with

---

<sup>354</sup> Ibid., 2: 474.

<sup>355</sup> Ibid., 3: 318f.

<sup>356</sup> Ibid., 3: 347.

the Protestant Episcopal Church.”<sup>357</sup> White was one of the first bishops of the Protestant Episcopal Church, the post-Revolutionary Anglican Communion in the United States.

At the time of this communication with White, Coke was concerned that the American Methodists had gone too far in separating from the Church of England. Specifically, Coke feared that he and Asbury had gone too far in the Christmas Conference of 1784. Coke wrote, “I am not sure but I went further *in the* separation of our Church in America than Mr. Wesley, from whom I had received my commission, did intend.”<sup>358</sup> It is unclear to what extent Wesley was aware, or even prodded onward, this communication. However, Coke did desire that this union take place before Wesley’s death.

Coke’s desire for re-union was also born out of his rediscovered affection for the Church of England. In a 1790 correspondence with Bishop Samuel Seabury of Connecticut, he proclaimed that his “Love for the Church of England has returned.” He further assured Seabury that he had done much to dissuade the Methodists of England and Ireland from pursuing separation.<sup>359</sup>

Thus, in his correspondence and conversations with White, Coke outlined a plan for a merger between the Methodist Episcopal Church and the Protestant Episcopal Church. The plan called for the “re-ordination of the Methodist ministers.” Recognizing that the Protestant Episcopal Church would never recognize the Methodist Episcopal Church’s ordination, Coke realized that all of

---

<sup>357</sup> “Methodist Episcopacy,” *The Churchmen’s Magazine* 4 (1807), 415.

<sup>358</sup> “Appendix to Methodist Episcopacy,” *The Churchmen’s Magazine* 4 (1807), 452.

<sup>359</sup> Thomas Coke, “Letter to Seabury, 14<sup>th</sup> May 1791,” (Facsimile in Bodleian Library, Oxford). Quoted from Vickers, *Thomas Coke: Apostle of Methodism*, 177.



the Methodist preachers would need to be ordained as Episcopal priests. Coke requested that this be done for all of those who had been ordained in the Methodist Episcopal Church.<sup>360</sup>

Coke was concerned that there would be several hindrances to this plan. Notably, he knew that some “preachers would hardly submit to re-union” if it was up to the current bishops of the Protestant Episcopal Church.<sup>361</sup> Hence, Coke “suggested...but not a *condition made, of admitting to the Episcopacy, himself*” and Asbury.<sup>362</sup> The larger obstacle was, however, Asbury. Coke anticipated a harsh reaction from his fellow bishop. He wrote, “*Mr. Asbury, whose influence is very capital, will not easily comply: nay, I know he will be exceedingly averse to it.*”<sup>363</sup>

Coke’s plan was brought before the bishops of the Episcopal Church at the September 1792 Convention in New York. The plan was rejected seemingly on the grounds that the Methodists were not recognized as a Church, but rather as a society. White and Coke ceased correspondence on the issue. Coke believed that his proposal was misunderstood. Rev. Uzel Ogden of New Jersey told him “it was thrown out because they did not understand the full meaning of it.”<sup>364</sup>

Coke had originally asked White to keep the correspondence secret. He wrote, “...secrecy is of great importance in your present state of business, till the minds of you, your brother bishops, and Mr. Wesley, be circumstantially known.

---

<sup>360</sup> “Methodist Episcopacy,” 416f.

<sup>361</sup> “Appendix to Methodist Episcopacy,” 453.

<sup>362</sup> “Methodist Episcopacy,” 416.

<sup>363</sup> “Appendix to Methodist Episcopacy,” 453.

<sup>364</sup> Asbury, 3: 382.

I must therefore beg that these thing be confined to yourself and Dr. Magow...”  
He further implored White to “if you have no thoughts of improving this proposal...burn this letter.”<sup>365</sup>

Despite Coke’s plea for confidentiality, White assumed that their earlier conversations and correspondence were mostly public knowledge by 1807. In fact, Coke had only revealed this correspondence to a few people. Though, he had disclosed his communication with White to Asbury a few months after it had occurred. White gave a copy of the letter to a Dr. Kemp who published it without his knowledge. In 1807, the correspondence was printed and referenced in a series of articles in the Protestant Episcopal Church’s *The Churchmen Magazine*. The articles were not about Coke per se; instead, they were condemning the Methodist Episcopacy in general, while utilizing Coke’s letter to support this position.<sup>366</sup>

The publication of Coke’s letter was a significant blow to his reputation in America. As a result, he sent a letter to the American Conference in 1808. In the letter, he attempted to explain his frame of mind at the time of his communication with White. He insisted that he now believes that his suppositions at the time were erroneous. Coke contended that his primary concern was in solidifying and perpetuating the existence of the Methodists in America. At the time of his communication with Bishop White, he believed that “the Connection would be more likely to be saved from convulsions by a union with the old Episcopal Church than any other way...by a junction on proper

---

<sup>365</sup> “Appendix to Methodist Episcopacy,” 454.

<sup>366</sup> Bangs, *History of the Methodist Episcopal Church*, 2: 205f.

terms.” Despite White’s claim to the contrary, Coke declared that he never had any intention of himself or Asbury giving up the episcopacy.<sup>367</sup>

He pursued the union on purely practical grounds, not because he believed the Anglican form of ordination was superior to the Methodists. His own views resonated with Wesley in arguing against an “*uninterrupted apostolic succession of bishops*” and for the synonymous nature of the ordination of bishops and presbyters. The re-ordination included in his proposals was purely conceded to for the sake of the Protestant Episcopal Church and “would have been perfectly justifiable for the enlargement of the field of action.”<sup>368</sup>

Already in a precarious situation with the Americans, the revelation of his correspondence with White could not have come at a much worse time for Coke. Between his setting conditions for a return and the revelation of a correspondence with White, Coke became quite controversial in America. In a letter to Alexander M’Caine, Asbury advised, “I now wish to guard against anything that might make discord between us and the British connexion through Dr. Coke. We should all be pious, produce and pure and entertain high and honorable thoughts of each other.”<sup>369</sup> In March, Coke wrote his long time friend Ezekiel Cooper and implored him to speak at the Conference of 1808 on his behalf. He wrote,

I do not wish any arbitrary power, any individual decisive voice. I would not use it, if my Brethren gave it to me...I do not deserve to be treated severely by any of my American Brethren. But if instead of calling me in such a manner as will *enable* me to fulfill my engagements to them, they

---

<sup>367</sup> Asbury, 3: 382-4.

<sup>368</sup> Ibid., 3: 383f.

<sup>369</sup> Ibid., 3: 387.

blot my name out of their printed minutes, it will not be blotted out of the Lamb's Book of Life.<sup>370</sup>

However, the damage had been done. At the General Conference of 1808, Thomas Coke was stripped of his power in North America. At the Conference, four resolutions were passed in regard to Coke. In the first place, the General Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church agreed to allow Coke to remain in Europe until he was recalled. Secondly, the Conference retained "a grateful remembrance" of the work of Coke in America. Third, and most importantly, Coke's name was permitted to stay in the *Minutes* along with the other bishop. However, Coke was no longer permitted to act in that capacity in America. The amendment stated,

Dr. Coke, at the request of the British Conference, and by consent of our General Conference, resides in Europe; he is not to exercise the office of superintendent or bishop among us in the United States, until he be recalled by the General Conference, or by all the annual conferences respectively.<sup>371</sup>

Finally, it was resolved that a letter was to be sent to the British Conference and Coke communicating the previous resolutions.

Coke accepted the resolutions. In a letter to Ezekiel Cooper he stated that he was "fully satisfied with the determinations of the General Conference. Even the one paragraph, which a little affected me at first reading, I fully approved of on cool reflection—that Dr. Coke shall not superintend in the United States."<sup>372</sup>

---

<sup>370</sup> Coke and Cooper, "Correspondence," 69f.

<sup>371</sup> Curts, 71.

<sup>372</sup> Coke and Cooper, "Correspondence," 70f.

#### **D. Conclusion: Toward a National Methodism**

While Coke maintained some correspondence with his “American Brethren” up through his death in 1814, the Conference of 1808 effectively finalized his separation from the Methodist Episcopal Church. Coke’s person had served as the primary lynchpin connecting the British and American Methodists. With his removal from power, that relationship was mostly severed.

The severing of substantive ties with Coke was the culmination of a process that began in 1784. With the Christmas Conference of that year, the Methodist Episcopal Church embarked upon a journey to become a distinct, autonomous religious organization. And, while the leaders and preachers of the Methodist Episcopal Church shared certain core similarities with their British counterparts, the preachers in America lacked a clear desire to either submit to or emulate the British Conference. While embracing the fundamental polity and theological identity of the British Methodists, the American Methodists of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries had embraced a style of worship and a set of evangelical priorities that the leaders believed would lead to the optimal number of converts. The rebuffs issued against Wesley and Coke made the decision of the Methodist Episcopal Church to become a *distinct* and *American* church official.

## CHAPTER VI

### NATIONALISM

By 1835, the Methodist Episcopal Church had emerged as an institution that was fully engaged in the life of the United States. Between the years 1808 and 1835, the Methodist Episcopal Church nearly tripled its size, growing from approximately 174, 560 members in 1810 to 478, 053 in 1830.<sup>373</sup> This growth brought with it a new, yet familiar, set of challenges. Many of the new preachers and members recruited during these years were infatuated with democracy, opportunity, and American nationalism. As a result, the leaders within the denomination were forced to struggle with determining how to maintain the balance between strong, autocratic denominational government and a democratic base of preachers and congregants. As a result of this tension between formalism and populism, the Methodist Episcopal Church underwent organizational redefinition in this period and the expansion of the denomination's infrastructure. This growth included the expansion of the work of the denomination in publishing, missions, education and the creation of a distinctively American variant of Wesleyan theology.

#### A. Early Appeals to the Nation

---

<sup>373</sup> David Hempton, *Methodism: Empire of the Spirit* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), 212. Numbers were taken from U.S. Census data.

## 1. The Washington Correspondence

The leaders of the Methodist Episcopal Church never intended for the denomination to exist on the periphery of society. The period after the American Revolution represented unchartered territory for religious groups. While a few state sponsored churches persisted,<sup>374</sup> much of the United State was open for religious experimentation and evangelism by newer and smaller religious groups. Concerned for the survival of the young denomination, Coke and Asbury made overtures to forge a relationship with the leader of the United States in the days immediately following the Christmas Conference.

Despite being associated with a well-known Tory in their “spiritual father” John Wesley, Francis Asbury and Thomas Coke attempted to strengthen ties with the American government in the earliest days of the Methodist Episcopal Church’s existence. The most famous among their contacts was no less than George Washington. On June 26, 1785, Asbury and Coke visited Washington at his home in Mount Vernon, Virginia. Brigadier General Daniel Roberdeau made the visit between the three men possible; he had written a recommendation to the Washington vouching for the two preachers. While Washington was not elected to the presidency until April 30, 1789, his success as commander of the Continental Army during the Revolutionary War had led to

---

<sup>374</sup> The First Amendment, which was passed with the Bill of Rights in 1791, was interpreted as implying that the Federal Government could not institute a national religion. However, it was generally believed that individual states still retained the right to institute statewide churches. In 1868, with the passing of the Fourteenth Amendment (which regulated the power of individual states), the prohibition against established religions was understood to include religions established by the state, as well as a national established church. The last state sponsored church was the Congregational Church in Massachusetts. It was disestablished in 1833.

him gaining enormous popularity. Washington was, almost without a doubt, the most respected person in the newly formed country and a leader in its political life in the years immediately prior to his ascendancy to the Presidency.<sup>375</sup>

The three men dined together and discussed the subject of slavery.<sup>376</sup> The two bishops had hoped Washington would sign a petition they had drawn up condemning the institution. According to Coke,

He informed us that he was of our sentiments, and had signified his thoughts on the subject to most of the great men of the State: that he did not see it proper to sign the petition, but if the Assembly took it into consideration, would signify his sentiments to the Assembly by a letter.<sup>377</sup>

Asbury sought to strengthen the relationship with Washington the following year. On April 24, 1786, Asbury sent Washington and his wife, Martha, gifts of prayer books and sermons (presumably John Wesley's). He wrote, "Receive them as a small token of my great respect and veneration of your Person—"<sup>378</sup>

After Washington's election to the presidency in April of 1789, Asbury and Coke sought to strengthen the status of the Methodist Episcopal Church within the new government by assuring Washington of their support and imploring him to stand up for the freedom of religion in the United States. Thus, On May 29, Asbury and Coke composed a second letter to Washington. In this

---

<sup>375</sup> For instance, in 1787 Washington headed the Virginia delegation to the Constitutional Convention and was elected presiding officer.

<sup>376</sup> All three men record the meeting in their Diary and Journals. However, Coke is the only one who does so at any length. See, George Washington, *The Diaries of George Washington: 1784-June 1786*, eds. Donald Jackson and Dorothy Twohig (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1978), 4: 145; Asbury, 1: 489.

<sup>377</sup> Coke, *Journal*, 63f.

<sup>378</sup> Asbury, 3: 47.



letter written on behalf of the church, the bishops expressed “warm feelings of the heart” and “sincere congratulations” regarding Washington’s appointment to the Presidency. In this letter, the bishops further promised Washington their continued prayers. They wrote,

...we promise you our fervent prayers to the throne of grace, that GOD Almighty may endue you with all the grace and gifts of his Holy Spirit, that may enable you to fill up your important station to his glory, the good of his church, the happiness and prosperity of the United States, and the welfare of mankind.<sup>379</sup>

Washington responded to the bishops in a letter. He thanked the bishops and “Society collectively” for their “expressions of joy” in regard to Washington’s election. Furthermore, Washington proclaimed,

It shall be my endeavor to manifest the purity of my inclinations for promoting the happiness of mankind, as well as the sincerity of my desires to contribute whatever may be in my power toward the civil and religious liberties of the American people.<sup>380</sup>

## **2. The Constitutionals**

Reaching out to governmental leaders, such as Washington, was a sign that from its inception the leaders of the Methodist Episcopal Church intended for the denomination to exist in, not separate, from the United States culture. As the Church matured, it also underwent an organizational transformation that was further evidence that the denomination was becoming fully incorporated into the life of the nation.

Increasingly in the years after the American Revolution, the members of the Methodist Episcopal Church were absorbing the democratic spirit that proliferated throughout American culture. An efficient system of church polity,

---

<sup>379</sup> Ibid., 3: 71.

<sup>380</sup> Ibid., 3: 71.

Asbury's shrewd appointment and assignment of preachers to unchurched areas such as those included in the Western Conference, and the mastering of innovative revival techniques such as camp meetings all aided the Methodist Episcopal Church's rapid growth in the years following its founding. And with this rapid growth, emerged the need for organizational redefinition. The new membership and preachers within the denomination was predominated democratically minded; many of them held deep suspicions regarding the autocratic elements present in their denomination's system of church government.

The General Conference of 1808 met on May 6 in Baltimore. A committee was put together to put together plans "for regulating the General Conference." The committee was composed of fourteen preachers, two from each Conference; it included, Jesse Lee and Phillip Bruce from the Virginia Conference, Ezekiel Cooper and John Wilson from the New York Conference, Josiah Randle and William Phoebus from the South Carolina Conference, William McKendree and William Burke from the Western Conference, Nelson Reed and Stephen Roszel from the Baltimore Conference, Thomas Ware and John McClasky from the Philadelphia Conference, and Joshua Soule and George Pickering from the New England Conference. The committee chose Joshua Soule, Phillip Bruce, and Ezekiel Cooper (1763-1847) to put together a "report" to be submitted to the General Conference. The final report submitted became the Constitution of the Methodist Episcopal Church.<sup>381</sup>

---

<sup>381</sup> Horace M. Du Bose, *Life of Joshua Soule* (Nashville: M.E.C.S. Publishing House, 1916), 77f.

Joshua Soule (1781-1867) became the primary scribe of the Constitution. Soule was a young preacher; he was only twenty-six at the time of the Constitution's writing. However, he was an established preacher in the Connection. He was born in Bristol, Maine in 1781, converted to Methodism at the age of sixteen, and became a traveling preacher in 1799. He served principally in Maine and was assigned as a presiding elder over the "District of Maine" in 1804. So, by 1808 Soule was a young but established preacher.<sup>382</sup>

More importantly, Soule was known as a careful and astute thinker among the Methodist preachers. While he received little formal education, he was reared in a middle-class New England family that provided him with frequent exposure and home instruction in secular and religious topics. His father, a sea captain, took particular delight in debating the merits of Calvinism with his son.<sup>383</sup> Later in life, he was made the denomination's book-agent and became known as an outspoken opponent of Calvinism, Universalism, and Unitarianism. Already before his twenty-seventh birthday, Soule was recognized as one of the most intellectually gifted minds in the Methodist Episcopal Church.

Soule and Ezekiel Cooper both drew up separate Constitutions. Soule's version was, however, accepted by the large committee. The Constitution advocated for a delegated General Conference. The first proposition stated, "The General Conference shall be composed of delegates from the Annual Conference."<sup>384</sup> This proposition was meant to discourage the representative

---

<sup>382</sup> Ibid., 24-70.

<sup>383</sup> Ibid., 15-23.

<sup>384</sup> Ibid., 79.

disparity that had dominated the General Conference since 1792. Increasingly, the democratically minded Methodists desired for the Church's system of government to resemble the national government; and, as a result, there was a strong desire for proportional representation system such as what had been adopted by Congress. At the General Conference of 1804 the Baltimore and Philadelphia Conferences sent seventy members, while the other five sent only 42 combined. The Philadelphia Conference sent forty-two representatives to the Western Conference's four. The growing body of "western" preachers wanted an equal stake in the governance of the denomination.

Soule's work, however, almost immediately met with controversy. The leader of the opposition was Jesse Lee (1758-1816). Jesse Lee was an enormously important preacher in early Methodism. He hailed from Prince George County, Virginia. Unlike many of his contemporaries, Lee's family was fairly wealthy. They owned a sizeable farm and employed a large number of servants. Lee became a Methodist in 1775, largely due to the revival work of George Shadford, Edward Drumgole, and William Glendenning. In 1778 he was appointed a class leader; the following year, Asbury recruited him into the ranks of the traveling preachers. After repeatedly refusing the opportunity, he was finally ordained as a deacon and elder at the New York Conference of 1790.<sup>385</sup>

Lee established a reputation for himself as the leader of Methodism in New England. In fact, his contemporaries lauded him as the "Apostle of the East." While Asbury had been reluctant to send preachers to Congregationalist dominated New England, Lee felt drawn to the area. At the New York

---

<sup>385</sup> Lee, *Short History*, 369-371; William H. Meredith, *Jesse Lee: a Methodist Apostle* (New York: Eaton and Mains, 1909), 10-39.

Conference of 1789, Lee was appointed to the new Stamford, Connecticut Circuit. Stamford was the first and, at the time, only circuit in New England. Over the course of the next several years, Lee served as a traveling preacher and, beginning in 1791, as a presiding elder in Boston, Maine, and Rhode Island. He was a very skilled preacher; one author wrote, "As a speaker he had few if any equals—that is, in moving a crowd to laughter, tears, and actions."<sup>386</sup> He was also known as a man of swift intellect; he was known for his skill in debate and in letters (and, indeed, he would go on to write the very important first history of American Methodism).<sup>387</sup> Partially as a result of these talents, Lee met with considerable success in helping the Methodist presence grow substantially in all of these areas.<sup>388</sup>

By the time of the General Conference of 1808, Lee was growing frustrated with the state of his denomination. In those years, his weight had ballooned to between two hundred and fifty pounds and three hundred pounds and his health began to decline.<sup>389</sup> In particular, Lee's relationship with the Methodist Episcopal Church had soured when he lost the election to the episcopacy at the General Conference of 1800. He tied Richard Whatcoat on the second ballot and

---

<sup>386</sup> Lee, *Short History*, 386.

<sup>387</sup> Ayres, 44. Ayres recounts one story of Lee's wit. Supposedly, at one point Lee was riding along horseback with two other men. The men, who were lawyers, proceeded to debate Lee on a series of topics. Lee effectively won each argument. One of the men turned to him and asked, "What are you anyway, a fool or a knave?" Lee responded, "Neither gentlemen. I believe I am just between the two."

<sup>388</sup> Lee, *Short History*, 378-380.

<sup>389</sup> There are various accounts of his weight toward the end of his life. See, Lee, 385. See also, Ayres, 44.

lost on the third. Lee believed that this loss was due to a conspiracy levied against him. He believed that there was the circulation of a report among the Methodists during the elections. According to Lee the report stated, "That Mr. Asbury had said that Brother Lee had imposed himself on him, and on the connexion, for eighteen months past, and he would have gotten rid of him long ago if he could."<sup>390</sup> Regardless, Lee never fully recovered from the loss of the election. If anything, the loss had solidified – in his mind – the need of protecting the rights of established, experienced Methodist preachers. And, as a byproduct, Lee became a firm advocate of the rites of senior, established preachers over against the newer, less proven preachers, such as those from the Western Conference.

Thus, Jesse Lee opposed the Constitution on the grounds of "Conference rights." Lee was concerned about the rights of preachers who had seniority in the connection. Specifically, Lee wanted preference to be given to preachers with seniority in the election of delegates. Lee echoed the concerns of many present at the Conference and, likely, his status within the Methodist Connection influenced many, as well. As a result, when the resolution calling for a delegated General Conference was put to a vote, it was defeated.

Four days after it had originally been introduced, on Monday, May 23, the Constitution was introduced again. Future bishop Enoch George (1767-1828) revised the controversial resolution to read the following, "The General Conference shall be composed of one member for every five members of each Annual Conference." Soule subsequently added, "to be appointed either by

---

<sup>390</sup> Lee, *Short History*, 385.

seniority or choice at the discretion of such Annual Conference.” The revised motion satisfied Lee and his supporters.<sup>391</sup> As a result, the Constitution passed. Though, portions of it were tested in ensuing years.

### **3. William McKendree and the Episcopacy**

Another difficulty facing the General Conference of 1808 was the episcopacy. The generation that had held power for so long was passing. The removal of Coke, the increasingly poor health of Asbury, and the death of Whatcoat created the need for other bishops to be appointed. The decision as to who to elect was one fraught with difficulties. The Conference was forced to elect a bishop that appealed to both the autocratic and democratic elements in the denomination.

Francis Asbury had been the central authority in the Methodist Episcopal Church from 1784 until the Conference of 1808. Partially due to his own mechanizations and partially do to the absentee status of Thomas Coke, Francis Asbury had been the only bishop operating in America from the Christmas Conference until 1800. In 1800, Richard Whatcoat was appointed to the episcopacy. Whatcoat had not proven to be truly effective in relieving Asbury of his duties, either. He took on a subservient role to Asbury from the outset and frequently battled ill health. Whatcoat died on July 5, 1806, just a few short years after accepting the position. As such, from 1784 until 1808, Asbury exercised the sole power of making appointments in America and he was primarily

---

<sup>391</sup> Du Bose, 83f.

responsible for supervising and disciplining the pastors. Furthermore, Asbury had also been the chief influence broker in early American Methodism.

The General Conference of 1808 was aware that there was the need for one or multiple new bishops. Increasingly, Asbury was dealing with bouts of illness and not able to complete all the duties of the bishop. Throughout his *Journal*, Asbury complained about illness of various sorts. Asbury frequently suffered from a “high fever” and feebleness.<sup>392</sup> His riding on horseback from circuit to circuit and his frequent exposure to the elements exacerbated these symptoms. Fearing for his health, the conference in Virginia asked Asbury to take some time off from traveling in 1797. It is significant that Asbury recognized his own growing weakness and followed the advice of the Conference and did actually take a few weeks off. In fact, Asbury contemplated retiring from the episcopacy in 1800. At the General Conference of 1800 he stated that, “he was so weak and feeble both in body and mind, that he was not able to go through the fatigues of his office.”<sup>393</sup> The Conference persuaded him to continue his duties. The preachers feared that Asbury’s ill health would necessitate his retirement or lead to his death. The preachers, thus, realized that there was a need to elect a capable leader to the bishopric, one who could assist Bishop Asbury in his duties and, eventually, succeed him as the central leader of the Methodist Episcopal Church.

In spite of the loss of some leaders and the growing inability of Asbury, the election of a bishop was an enormously challenging endeavor for the Church. The preachers debated as to the number of bishops to be elected. It was variously

---

<sup>392</sup> Asbury, 2: 287.

<sup>393</sup> Lee, *Short History*, 252-253, 266.



argued for seven and two bishops. The Conference eventually determined that only one was necessary. However, even the process of selecting a single bishop was onerous. All of the prior bishops had been English born and directly sanctioned by John Wesley. It was also significant that whoever was chosen to the bishopric be able to relate adequately to all of the preachers, even the most uncouth. The occasionally brash Coke had appeared to be an elitist to some of the Americans. One of the examples of the American reaction to Coke occurred during the 1787 General Conference. Coke interrupted Nelson Reed (1751-1840),<sup>394</sup> saying, "You must think you are my equals." Reed responded, "Yes, sir, we do; and we are not only the equals of Dr. Coke, but of Dr. Coke's king."<sup>395</sup> Finally, simply determining the correct person to be endowed with such a significant amount of power was an enormously difficult undertaking. Divisions and personal conflicts made a single choice more difficult than multiple choices. Nonetheless, agreement was reached.

The vote was held on May 12<sup>th</sup> and William McKendree was elected by a sizable majority of votes. McKendree received 95 votes; the person receiving the next largest number of votes was Ezekiel Cooper who received 24, Jesse Lee and Thomas Ware received 4 and 3, respectively.<sup>396</sup> William McKendree (1757-1835) proved to be an excellent selection. His demeanor, organizational skills, and background aided him in appealing to both the democratically minded preachers and the more autocratically minded denominational leaders.

---

<sup>394</sup> Nelson Reed was one of the elders ordained in 1784. He served in Virginia and Maryland. He was later made a presiding elder.

<sup>395</sup> Candler, 121f.

<sup>396</sup> Curts, 71.

McKendree was well liked, mild in his demeanor, known for living an exemplary life, and a natural leader. After McKendree's election to the episcopacy, Thomas Coke wrote of him, "Except one... I prefer him before all the preachers in the United States. The mildness, the caution, the humility, the fear of doing what is wrong, etc., of that man, qualify him in a high degree for that office he fills."<sup>397</sup>

McKendree appealed to the "western" preachers in Methodism, because he had earned his stripes in their midst. Cartwright wrote of McKendree, "...truly he was, in his feelings and habits, a Western man and a Western bishop."<sup>398</sup> In fact, McKendree had an almost unparalleled record of service in the Western Conference. In 1800, Asbury appointed McKendree to serve as the presiding elder over the "Kentucky district." The Kentucky district was quite vast, expanding beyond the state of Kentucky into Tennessee and Ohio. Presiding elders were, essentially, the single preacher assigned to oversee the workings of a specific district.<sup>399</sup> At the time of his appointment, the district was in a precarious state. This district had been poorly attended to by the bishops, contained geographically large circuits, and had neither a presiding elder nor a sufficient number of preachers.

McKendree effectively administered over the Western Conference for eight years. Nathan Bangs declared, "Mr. McKendree was the life and soul of this

---

<sup>397</sup> Coke and Cooper, "Correspondences," 71.

<sup>398</sup> Cartwright, 241.

<sup>399</sup> See, Fred W. Price, "The Role of the Presiding Elder in the Growth of the Methodist Episcopal Church, 1784-1832," (Ph.D. diss., Drew University, 1987).

army of itinerants."<sup>400</sup> He served the area during a time when religious revivals were rampantly spreading and aiding the Methodists in substantial growth in the "west." McKendree effectively recruited preachers away from to the ranks of the itinerancy. As significantly, he was able to deploy these preachers to efficiently reach an optimal number of persons throughout the vast region.

McKendree's background also resonated with the rank-and-file Methodist preacher. He shared a narrative that was immanently relatable. He was born to a middle class family in King William County, Virginia on July 6, 1757.<sup>401</sup> William's father, Robert, was a planter. William was raised in that profession, as well. In rural Virginia, formal education was only available to those with significant money. As a result, William received only a rudimentary education from the country schools; for the most part, he was self-educated. Furthermore, he served as a schoolteacher for a few years after the Revolutionary War.<sup>402</sup> Also, like many of his fellow itinerating preachers, McKendree was a staunch patriot. While McKendree never spoke of it to fellow preachers, he served in the Continental Army during the American Revolution. By several accounts, McKendree was even present during Charles Cornwallis's surrender at Yorktown.<sup>403</sup>

---

<sup>400</sup> Bangs, *History of the Methodist Episcopal Church*, 2: 111.

<sup>401</sup> E.E. Hoss, *William McKendree: a Biographical Study* (Nashville: M.E.C.S. Publishing House, 1916), 9.

<sup>402</sup> Robert Paine, *Life and Times of William McKendree, Bishop of the Methodist Episcopal Church* (Nashville: M.E.C.S., 1922), 15-19. Paine's biography is the most substantive and best biography on McKendree.

<sup>403</sup> Paine, 20f. In asserting this claim, Paine is citing sources other than McKendree himself. Regardless, there is widespread agreement that McKendree served in this War.

McKendree had converted to Methodism during the 1787 revival in the Brunswick District of Virginia led by John Easter. McKendree's parents had been members of the Episcopal Church in Virginia. With much of rural Virginia bereft of Episcopal priests in the days following the American Revolution, the Methodists were able to make serious incursions into the state. McKendree's parents joined the Methodists shortly after the arrival of preachers from the fledgling denomination first came into the area. McKendree initially had little interest in religion. He was inspired to attend Easter's revival by a friend. One night while he and a friend were "reading a comedy and drinking wine," his friend's wife returned home and shared a powerful testimony about the conversions that were going on during Methodist preaching. McKendree was so touched by her experience that he vowed to seek out religion. So, he attended Easter's revivals; during their sessions and in private conversations with the preacher he was convinced of his sinfulness and found salvation. McKendree wrote, "But deliverance was at hand...I could rejoice indeed, yes, with joy unspeakable and full of glory!"<sup>404</sup>

Not long after finding salvation at the Methodist revivals, McKendree was spurred on to begin a career as a preacher. He frequently shared his testimony with friends, family, and neighbors. His aptitude in sharing his story, led to others – including his own father – suggesting he pursue the ministry. Easter persuaded McKendree to attend the district Conference in Petersburg, Virginia. At this Conference, which was held nine months after his conversion, McKendree was licensed to preach and he accepted an appointment to the

---

<sup>404</sup> Quoted in Paine, 33f. From a letter McKendree wrote to Francis Asbury 1803.

Mecklenburg Circuit. He was ordained an elder on December 25, 1791. Over the course of the next several years, McKendree served circuits and traveled widely throughout the United States. As much as any of his contemporaries, McKendree undertook the rigors of the itinerant lifestyle, including the rigors of constant travel, the paltry income, and the necessity of living on the good graces of members of the Methodist societies.

However, McKendree had also proven himself to the more autocratically minded denomination leaders, such as Asbury. Initially, this was not the case. McKendree shared a friendship with James O’Kelly, who was his presiding elder. Along with O’Kelly he shared concerns “about the present aspect of our Church government.”<sup>405</sup> In a letter to Asbury, McKendree reflected on his attitudes at the time. He wrote, “Evil was determined against the connection, justified by the supposition that the bishop and his creatures were working the ruin of the Church to gratify their pride and ambition.” O’Kelly promised to build “‘a glorious Church,’ ‘no slavery,’ etc.”<sup>406</sup> Due to these concerns, he refused to take an official station at Conference. McKendree’s separation was short-lived. After a meeting with Asbury, he agreed to accept an appointment in Norfolk and Portsmouth. Though, McKendree did remark, “...it was a year of contention and much confusion.”<sup>407</sup>

McKendree’s involvement in the O’Kelly schism propelled him to engage in critical contemplation of the Methodist Episcopal Church’s government.

---

<sup>405</sup> Paine, 72. From the *Journal of William McKendree* (Vanderbilt University).

<sup>406</sup> Paine, 41.

<sup>407</sup> *Ibid.*, 90.

McKendree determined that he and O’Kelly were flawed in the base supposition of their thinking. He wrote, “It was founded upon the supposition that a ruinous government was being introduced by the revolutionizing Conference....”<sup>408</sup> And, in fact, McKendree became a strong advocate of the power of the episcopacy.

Beyond being a strong believer in Methodism’s system of church government, McKendree also possessed a deep and abiding interest in theology and the education of preachers. Cartwright wrote,

He was a profound theologian, and understood thoroughly the organic laws of ecclesiastic government; he was dignified, shrewd parliamentary presiding officer, a profound judge of human nature, and one of the strongest debater and logical reasoners that ever graced an American pulpit.<sup>409</sup>

Perhaps pulling from his experiences as a schoolteacher and the example of Wesley, McKendree proposed a course of reading and study for his ministers, while serving as a presiding elder. Cartwright recounted his experiences with McKendree as a presiding elder. He wrote, “He selected books, for me, both literary and theological; and every quarterly visit he made, he examined into my progress, and corrected my errors, if I had fallen into any. He delighted to instruct me in English grammar.”<sup>410</sup>

McKendree brought a different leadership style to the episcopacy than that of Asbury. McKendree’s dress and demeanor were more distinctively “western” than the elder bishop. Like the Western Conference Methodist preachers, McKendree rarely wore clerical gowns, instead preferring simpler

---

<sup>408</sup> Ibid., 41.

<sup>409</sup> Cartwright, 241.

<sup>410</sup> Ibid., 63.

garments. The day prior to his election to the episcopacy, McKendree delivered a sermon at the Light-street church. The sermon was well received and aided McKendree's election. Nathan Bangs wrote that the sermon, "had such an effect on the minds of all present, that they seemed to say, with one accord, 'This is the man of our choice, whom God has appointed to rule over us.'"<sup>411</sup> However, the sermon also served as many of the preachers' introduction to McKendree. And, at the beginning of his sermon, Bangs noted that the presiding elder seemed uncouth and dull-witted. He wrote,

Bishop M'Kendree entered the pulpit at the hour for commencing the services, clothed in very coarse and homely garments, which he had worn in the woods of the west; and after singing, he kneeled in prayer. As was often the case with him when he commenced his prayer, he seemed to falter in his speech, clipping some of his words at the end, and hanging upon a syllable as if it were difficult for him to pronounce the word. I looked at him, not without some feelings of distrust, thinking to myself, 'I wonder what awkward backwoodsman they have put into the pulpit this morning, to disgrace us with his mawkish manners and uncouth phraseology?'"<sup>412</sup>

McKendree was, also, more accommodating to the opinions of the preachers than Asbury had been. Asbury was notorious for not sharing power.

For example, at one point Asbury instructed his preachers,

Brethren, if any of you should have anything peculiar in your circumstances that should be known to the superintendent in making your appointment, if you will drop me a note, I will, as far as will be compatible with the great interests of the church, endeavor to accommodate you.

A preacher sent Asbury a note requesting to be moved to the west, where he had relatives. Asbury did not answer the preacher's request. In fact, he appointed the preacher to the east. At a later juncture, the preacher confronted Asbury. He said,

---

<sup>411</sup> Bangs, *History of the Methodist Episcopal Church*, 2: 238.

<sup>412</sup> P. Douglass Gorrie, *The Lives of Eminent Methodist Ministers* (Auburn: Derby and Miller, 1853), 282.

“If that’s the way you answer prayers you will get no more prayers from me.”

Asbury responded, “Well, be a good boy, James, and all things will work together for good.”<sup>413</sup> Particularly regarding the appointment of preachers, McKendree was much more willing to share power. In 1811 he wrote a letter to Asbury in which he made the case for the aid of presiding elders in making appointments. McKendree wrote,

I am fully convinced of the utility and necessity of the council of the presiding elders in stationing the preacher...I still refuse to take the *whole* responsibility upon myself, not that I am afraid of proper accountability, but because I conceive the proposition included one highly improper.<sup>414</sup>

Despite the fact that he sought and listened to the opinions of elders, McKendree remained a believer in a strong episcopacy. He and Asbury remained united in their resistance of weakening the office in any manner. McKendree also introduced practices, which he believed would further accentuate the bishop’s role at General Conference. For instance, he introduced the practice of the bishop presiding with strict Rules of Order. Asbury, like Wesley before him, preferred a more parental role to a presidential one. Alternatively, McKendree believed that a strict adherence to rules, guidelines, and procedure would be the most efficient way to deal with the business of Conference.<sup>415</sup>

McKendree also introduced the practice of an episcopal address. The General Conference of 1812 commenced on May 1 in New York City. After

---

<sup>413</sup> Frederick E. Maser and Robert Drew Simpson, *If Saddlebags Could Talk: Methodist Stories and Anecdotes* (Franklin, TN: Providence House Publishing, 1998), 20.

<sup>414</sup> Paine, 157.

<sup>415</sup> *Ibid.*, 159.



Asbury had read a letter from Coke and Rules of Order were presented, McKendree proceeded to read an address he had written. The address caught many of the preachers, including Asbury, off guard. After McKendree had finished his remarks, Asbury rose to his feet and said to McKendree, "I have something to say to you before the Conference." McKendree stood up and faced the elder bishop. Asbury said, "This is a new thing. I never did business this way; and why is this new thing introduced?" McKendree held his ground, though with respect, replying, "You are our father; we are your sons. You never had need of it. I am only a brother, and have need of it." Asbury acquiesced and, in fact, gave a few remarks of his own outlining the work of Methodism over the course of the past few years.<sup>416</sup> Such addresses became a staple of the General Conferences and, in fact, represented a time within the Conference for the Bishop to present an agenda and orienting direction for the body of preachers.

Thus, in many substantial ways, McKendree and Soule were adapting, rather than replacing the autocratic form of leadership introduced by Francis Asbury. Recognizing that Asbury's persona had enabled him to exercise power in a manner that no one else could have, the new leaders of the Methodist Episcopal Church sought to adapt leadership principles in such a way as to sustain the founding principles of the denomination, while indulging the populism present among a large portion of the preachers.

## **B. The Changing Nation**

---

<sup>416</sup> Curts, 75f.

## 1. America in 1816

In the years following the General Conference of 1808, America as a nation began to change in dramatic ways, all of which impacted on Methodism. From 1812 to 1815, the United States was engaged in a War with the British Empire. Enamored by the notion of “Manifest Destiny,” America attempted to conquer British controlled Canada. In response, the British Empire launched a counter-invasion that devastated the United States.

On February 18, 1815, the Treaty of Ghent went into effect. The treaty, which put an end to the hostilities between British and American forces in the so-called War of 1812, marked the beginning of a new era in American history. In the years following the War of 1812, the United States underwent a number of significant transformations encompassing the economy, transportation, and ideology. And, at its heart, the years following the War were ones full of optimism fueled nationalism.

The War of 1812 was devastating for the United States in many substantial ways. Many of the cities in the United States were burned and looted in the conflict with the British. The destruction was not limited to coastal cities, but also cities such as New York and Buffalo. Nowhere was the damage more extensive than the nascent country’s capital, where the Capital, the White House, the Navy Yard, and several other public buildings were burned. Furthermore, the Treaty of Ghent did not address the grievances that began the war.

Despite these losses, the prevailing view in the United States was one of optimism. After all, the United States had experienced moments of victory in their battles with the mightiest nation in the world. For instance, the mighty British Royal Navy had not managed to completely dominate the United States

Navy. In fact, the U.S. Navy had dealt some embarrassing blows to the Royal Navy. For instance, the USS *Constitution* was able to defeat HMS *Guerriere*. The American navy had also experienced success on the Great Lakes. The most notorious battle of the War of 1812 occurred in January 8, 1815, after the Treaty of Ghent had been signed, but before it went into effect. Andrew Jackson launched a devastating attack against the British in New Orleans. Over two thousand British soldiers were slain, while there were only seventy-one American casualties. Despite the fact that the battle took place after the war was technically over, it was hailed as a great victory by the American people. The battle elevated Andrew Jackson to the status of national hero. And, while the United States had gained nothing from the Treaty of Ghent, they had also lost nothing. Effectively, the young nation had survived an onerous ordeal and earned recognition from the international community as an independent nation.<sup>417</sup>

The economy underwent vast changes in the years following the conclusion of the war. The United States began the transition from a semi-subsistence agricultural economy to a capitalist, market-driven economy. In particular, the language of progress and concepts about the public good became the *modus operandi* of the nation. The conclusion of the war opened the door for growth in international trade. In fact, imports rose to \$147 million in 1816, a growth of approximately \$34 million from the previous year. Likewise, exports rose to \$82 million in 1816, a growth of \$29.5 million from a year earlier.<sup>418</sup> In the

---

<sup>417</sup> There are many fine treatments of the War of 1812. See, for instance, Walter R. Borneman, *1812: The War that Forged a Nation* (New York: HarperCollins Books, 2004).

<sup>418</sup> C. Edward Skeen, *1816: America Rising* (Lexington, KY: University of Kentucky Press, 2003), 16f.

years following the War, the courts began to promote new uses for land, instead of protecting old uses. Increasingly, conflicts over property rights were assessed based on the greater good of the community. For instance, if the owner of a mill protested a new dam impeding his business operations, the courts tended to acknowledge the justice of the mill owner's complaint. However, the courts rejected the complaint anyway. The new legal approach emphasized freedom for the expansion of manufacturing and commerce. And, as a byproduct of this looser interpretation of laws, business corporations began to appear on American soil. The Boston Manufacturing Corporation was established in 1813. Once it proved successful, other corporations followed. The expansion of commerce and manufacturing also spurred demands for credit. And, as a result, state legislatures chartered a series of new banks. By 1818, 392 banks existed in America; in 1811 there had been only 88.<sup>419</sup>

Progress in technology spurred the expansion of the market place. In particular, advances were made in the realm of transportation. In the years following the War, there was significant progress made in the construction of canals and the steamboat. In 1807, Robert Fulton launched his steamboat, *North River* (better known as the *Clermont*), from New York to Albany. It made the trek in five days. By the War of 1812, boats built by Fulton and John Stevens were being utilized regularly in the Mid-Atlantic States. The steamboats succeeded in helping to expand the range of commerce. The years following the War of 1812 also saw the opening of various canals. The completion of the Erie canal in 1825

---

<sup>419</sup> Daniel Feller, *The Jacksonian Promise: America, 1815-1840* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1995), 34f.

was particularly momentous. The opening of canals dramatically reduced the cost of transporting goods; the cost of transporting items such as food, flour, grain, and lumber fell dramatically. As a result, trade became more viable. Transportation was not the only area that underwent vast improvements after 1815. The success with transportation innovation inspired inventiveness in other areas, such as in fabric and building. By the 1820s, cotton and wool spinning mills sprung up across the northeast and ironworks factories sprung up in the Mid-Atlantic States.

## 2. The Rise of Nationalism

Among the most important results of the War of 1812 was the rise of American nationalism. In his Seventh Annual Message in December 1815, President James Madison announced that the War had succeeded in bringing the United States respect abroad. More importantly, Madison praised the industrious and ingenious nature of the American people. He deemed the United States a “highly favored and happy country.”<sup>420</sup> Madison’s words accurately summed up the prevailing sentiment of America in the period after the War of 1812. The American people were, in substantial ways, excited about the possibilities opened to their country. By 1823 this confidence had manifested itself in the Monroe Doctrine; it was a U.S. foreign policy which forbids foreign nations to interfere in the western hemisphere upon the threat of U.S. retaliation.

One of the results of this increased optimism about the state of America was the temporary collapse of the existing two-party political system. Prior to the

---

<sup>420</sup> James Madison, “Seventh Annual Message, Dec. 5, 1815,” in *A Compilation of the Messages and Papers of the Presidents, 1788-1897*, ed. James D. Richardson (Washington D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1897-1900), 1: 568.

War of 1812, there were deep divisions between the Democrat-Republicans and the Federalist parties. In the midst of the War, Nathan Bangs remarked, "...party politics, particularly in the eastern section of our country, never ran higher than they did about this time."<sup>421</sup> In particular, the Federalists were opposed to the War and the reelection of James Madison to the presidency in 1812. In response to the mounting aggression of the British and the blame that they placed on the Republicans, the Federalist Massachusetts state legislature called together the Hartford Convention on October 10, 1814. The primary aim of the Convention was to propose constitutional amendments that would protect New England's interests and embarrass the Republicans. The proposed amendments would have prohibited trade embargoes that lasted more than sixty days, requiring a two-thirds majority in Congress for a declaration of war, removing the Three-Fifths Compromise, limiting Presidential to a one term limit, and requiring each President to be from a different state than his predecessor.

Unfortunately for the Federalists, the Convention ended shortly before the conclusion of the War. The perceived favorable conclusion of the War to the general American population served to publicly disgrace the actions of the Hartford Convention and, by association, the Federalists broadly conceived.<sup>422</sup> As a result of this disgrace, the Federalists essentially disbanded. Many of its members, inspired by anti-party rhetoric proliferating in popular society, joined the Democratic-Republican. As a result, there was a widespread ease of partisan rhetoric and the embrace of an increasingly national perspective on governance.

---

<sup>421</sup> Bangs, *History of the Methodist Episcopal Church*, 2: 360.

<sup>422</sup> Skeen, 19-23.

While the party unification proved to be transitory, eventually giving way to new party alignments split between “conservative agrarian, states-right” and “nationalistic-capitalistic” agendas, it was temporarily successful in unifying a nation.<sup>423</sup> The American people were, throughout the period from 1815-1835, full of optimism and excitement about their country and its possibility for genuine greatness.<sup>424</sup>

### C. Methodism in Transition

#### 1. The War and the Church

The War of 1812 was a challenging and traumatic event for the Methodists. Several Methodist leaders voiced their concerns. Nathan Bangs contended that it “...created a great sensation throughout the country and particularly among those who regarded religion as breathing nought but peace and good will to man.”<sup>425</sup> Jacob Young echoed these concerns. He wrote,

My alarm for my country arose out of three considerations: First, a division among ourselves. The two great leading parties were Federalists and Republicans. The Federalists were generally opposed to the war, but the Republicans were the strongest. Secondly, I dreaded the British navy; I knew we were not able to contend with them on the water, and I feared

---

<sup>423</sup> Ibid., xv.

<sup>424</sup> Other excellent modern treatments of this period include: David Waldstreicher, *In the Midst of Perpetual Fetes: The Making of American Nationalism, 1776-1820* (Chapel Hill, N.C.: University of North Carolina Press, 1997); Steven Watts, *The Republic Reborn: War and the Making of Liberal America, 1790-1820* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1987); Charles Sellers, *The Market Revolution: Jacksonian America, 1815-46*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991); and Daniel Walker Howe, *What Hath God Wrought: The Transformation of America, 1815-1848* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007).

<sup>425</sup> Bangs, *History of the Methodist Episcopal Church*, 2: 347.

they would blockade all our seaports. Thirdly, I dreaded the savages in the north, and in the south; I knew they would become British allies—I dread the tomahawk and scalping-knife—I was alarmed, also, for my own safety.<sup>426</sup>

The War was challenging for the Methodists. Preachers, such as Jacob Young, noted that scarcity and illness ravaged the country. In 1813 Young was stationed in the Ohio District. He noted, "...to heighten our trouble through the country, the fever had broken out in the camp at Black Rock, run up to the Lake, and spread out through the country." Young also dealt with widespread food shortage in these years. He wrote, "I found the people very much straitened for breadstuff...."<sup>427</sup>

The War also affected the relationship between the Methodists in Canada and the United States. Indeed, Methodists serving in the armed forces of each respective country were forced to take arms against one another. Bangs wrote, "...it was foreseen that the Methodists in these two countries must necessarily come into unhappy collisions with each other, and perhaps be obliged, however reluctantly, to spill each other's blood."<sup>428</sup>

At the General Conference of 1812, Nathan Bangs was appointed to serve as presiding elder in Montreal all circuits on the northwestern side of the St. Lawrence. Bangs had actually started his career in ministry in Canada. He was converted under Methodist preaching in Canada and served the Oswegatchie, Quebec, and Niagara Circuit between 1801 and 1808. Despite his familiarity and affinity for Canada, Bangs believed that it was unsafe for him to return to that

---

<sup>426</sup> Young, 279.

<sup>427</sup> Ibid., 308f.

<sup>428</sup> Bangs, *History of the Methodist Episcopal Church*, 2: 349.



nation. So, he relinquished his service to this area and took refuge in New York.<sup>429</sup>

The Canadian Methodists were, for the most part, prevented from attending Methodist Episcopal Church Conferences during the War years. By the conclusion of the War in 1815, Methodist membership in Canada had dramatically declined, despite the fact that sixteen circuit riders still worked the country. In 1820, the Methodist Episcopal Church agreed to allow the British Wesleyans to occupy Lower Canada exclusively. The Methodist Episcopal Church continued to maintain a presence in Upper Canada. In 1824, Upper Canada was set apart as its own Conference; at that time, it was comprised of 5215 members and twenty-nine circuit riders. In 1828, the new "Canada Conference" voted to become independent from the Methodist Episcopal Church. It was comprised of nearly 10,000 members and forty-nine circuit riders. The Conference invited Nathan Bangs to serve as their bishop, a position he declined.<sup>430</sup> William Case (1780-1855). In 1833, the Methodist Episcopal Church in Canada merged with the British Wesleyans. They formed the Wesleyan Methodist Church in Canada.<sup>431</sup>

Between the years of 1812 and 1815, the American Methodist members and preachers were enmeshed in the War and its politics. The preponderance of American Methodists were sympathetic to the War effort. Jacob Young wrote, "I

---

<sup>429</sup> Abel Stevens, *Life and Times of Nathan Bangs, D.D.* (New York: Carlton and Porter, 1863), 199f.

<sup>430</sup> *Ibid.*, 266f.

<sup>431</sup> Neil Semple, *The Lord's Dominion: The History of Canadian Methodism* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1996), 77-99.

found the people very much agitated; some were angry, and some were frightened; but a large majority were well pleased with what Congress had done.<sup>432</sup> Cartwright noted that Methodists in the west volunteered in droves for the War. He wrote,

A braver set of men never lived than was found in this Western world, and many of them volunteered and helped to achieve another glorious victory over the legions of England, and her savage allied thousands. Of course there were many of our members went into the war, and deemed it their duty to defend our common country under General Jackson.<sup>433</sup>

Several Methodist preachers, such as Alfred Brunson, were so enamored with the war effort that they joined the army. Brunson later came to regret this decision, "I had erred in entering the army instead of preaching."<sup>434</sup>

The leaders of the Methodist Episcopal Church were also sympathetic to the republican cause. Asbury insisted that each preacher pray for the country.

Bangs recorded,

Asbury...declared most plainly and pointedly, on the floor of an annual conference, that he who refused, at this time especially, to pray for his country, deserved not the name of a Christian or a Christian minister, inasmuch as it was specifically enjoined on all such, not only to honor magistrates, but to 'pray for all that are in authority, that we may lead quiet and peaceable lives, in all godliness and honesty.<sup>435</sup>

Henry Boehm noted that William McKendree was a staunch republican. He wrote, "The bishop was full of patriotism, and with a national subject he was

---

<sup>432</sup> Young, 278.

<sup>433</sup> Cartwright, 96.

<sup>434</sup> Alfred Brunson, *A Western Pioneer; or, Incidents of the Life and Times of Rev. Alfred Brunson, A.M., D.D.* (Cincinnati: Walden and Stowe, 1880), 107.

<sup>435</sup> Bangs, *History of the Methodist Episcopal Church*, 2: 355f.

perfectly at home. He was the intimate friend and a great admirer of General Jackson, and related many characteristic anecdotes concerning him."<sup>436</sup>

## 2. The Death of a Patriarch

The aftermath of the War brought about good and bad feelings. Not long after the conclusion of the war, Francis Asbury died in Spottsylvania, Virginia on March 31, 1816. The last few years of his life had been marred by poor health. His traveling companion, John Wesley Bond, noted that in the final years of his life, Asbury suffered with a myriad of ailments including rheumatism, asthma, and pleurisy. Bond wrote, "...his lungs were much affected; the discharge of mucus exceedingly great: his cough was very distressing, and his old asthmatical complaint being aggravated thereby, he at some times appeared near strangling."<sup>437</sup> Asbury and Bond set out for Baltimore in the winter of 1815-1816. Asbury hoped to reach Baltimore in time for the May 2 General Conference. On March 24 at 3 p.m., Asbury preached his last sermon. His breathing was so labored that he could not remain standing, so Asbury delivered the sermon while seated on a table. The following day, he traveled to the home of George Arnold. After a few days of illness, Asbury passed away while seated in a chair. In his last moments, he rested on Bond's hand for a while, but mustered enough

---

<sup>436</sup> Henry Boehm, *Reminiscences, Historical and Biographical, of Sixty-Four Years in the Ministry* (New York: Carlton and Porter, 1865), 423.

<sup>437</sup> Robert Bull, "John Wesley Bond's Reminiscences of Francis Asbury," *Methodist History* 4 (1965), 12.

strength to raise his hands as a testimony of his faith before he took his last breath.<sup>438</sup>

Asbury's body arrived in Baltimore on May 9 and his official funeral was held at Light-street Church the next day. William McKendree presented the funeral oration. John Wesley Bond and Henry Boehm, both of who had assisted Asbury at various points in his travels, acted in the role of family. Bond had procured Asbury's remains from Virginia, Boehm was among those who stayed with Asbury's corpse the night before the funeral, and the two men both followed the body as the chief mourners in the service itself. The following days, funeral orations were preached throughout Baltimore.<sup>439</sup> And, in fact, some orations were given in other cities prior to the official Baltimore funeral.

Asbury was not a man of great riches. He had, however, inherited about two thousand dollars from a woman in Baltimore. He left a Bible to every child who was named after him up to the year of his death. And, he also left eighty dollars a year to Elizabeth Dickins, who was the widow of John Dickens. John Dickens had been the first book agent of the Methodist Episcopal Church. She continued to receive the money until her death in 1835.<sup>440</sup> Bishop McKendree was willed much of the old books and clothes of Asbury.<sup>441</sup>

Asbury's death was an anticipated but traumatic event for the Methodists in America. In his April 23<sup>rd</sup> funeral discourse for Asbury, Ezekiel Cooper

---

<sup>438</sup> Ibid., 3.

<sup>439</sup> Boehm, 431-433.

<sup>440</sup> Ibid., 435.

<sup>441</sup> Young, 325.

captured the feeling of grief that permeated much of American Methodism. He wrote, "Are we not dreaming? Is it a reality? or, can it be so? that Asbury, is certainly dead? ....But the die is cast, the seal is fixed; it is a sad reality; it is no fancy or imagination; inflexible truth pronounces *He is dead!*"<sup>442</sup>

The most significant factor about the passing of Asbury was that it represented the end of an old era and the beginning of a new one. With the death of the founder and long time leader of the Methodist Episcopal Church, there was a general belief that the episcopacy needed to be expanded and Conference needed to become more efficient and organized. At the General Conference of 1816, Enoch George and Robert Roberts (1778-1843) were elected to the episcopacy.

In the post-Asbury era, the affairs of this conference were organized more strictly to expedite business than ever before. Jacob Young remarked, "This conference transacted a great amount of important business."<sup>443</sup> Henry Boehm reiterated, "There was a vast amount of business done at the General Conference of 1816, and it was more methodical than formerly."<sup>444</sup> This type of organization and formality was characteristic of the years after Asbury's death. McKendree and his fellow bishops insisted on greater organization and accountability from presiding elders and preachers than before. Recalling the year 1823, Alfred

---

<sup>442</sup> Ezekiel Cooper, *The Substance of a Funeral Discourse, Delivered at the Request of the Annual Conference on Tuesday, the 23d of April, 1816, at St. George's Church, Philadelphia on the Death of the Rev. Francis Asbury* (Philadelphia: Jonathan Pounder, 1819), 3.

<sup>443</sup> Young, 324.

<sup>444</sup> Boehm, 436.

Brunson wrote, "We had some revivals in the circuit this year, but our chief concern was to discipline and train the Church."<sup>445</sup>

#### **D. Methodism and the "Era of Good Feelings"**

##### **1. Missions**

The members and leaders of the Methodist Episcopal Church were not exempt from the excitement and nationalism that reigned in much of America in this period. In fact, during the period of 1815-1835 the Methodist Episcopal Church was characterized by optimism and an infrastructure expansion that was at least partially an outgrowth of the national spirit.

In these years, the missionary endeavors of the Methodist Episcopal Church underwent substantial expansion. Immediately following the Christmas Conference of 1784, the Methodist Episcopal Church maintained only a fleeting interest in missions. Thomas Coke was the exception. He made multiple trips abroad, most notably to the West Indies. The first decades of the Methodist Episcopal Church's existence were, principally, spent evangelizing throughout the vast continent of North America.

In 1820, the Missionary Society of the Methodist Episcopal Church was organized. The purpose of the Society was to raise money for mission works and to raise awareness of the need for mission. The earliest mission work was with the Native American tribes. In 1822, William Capers (1790-1855) was sent to the Creek Indians in Georgia and Alabama. That same year, Robert Paine (1799-1882)

---

<sup>445</sup> Brunson, 282.

was sent to the Cherokees in Tennessee.<sup>446</sup> In subsequent years, schools and further missionary efforts were made to various Native American tribes. McKendree and others interpreted these efforts as great success. In a letter to Thomas Mason, McKendree wrote, "From a general view of our Missions, and of what the Lord is doing by us, we certainly have abundant cause to 'thank God and take courage,' and to persevere very faithfully and diligently in the great work...."<sup>447</sup>

By the 1830s, the Methodist Episcopal Church was becoming interested in foreign missions. Already by 1820 this interest was germinating in the denomination. In that year, Methodist Episcopal Church elder John Emory delivered an address to the British Methodists. He remarked,

Our work and recompense are both before us. The continents, and the islands of the seas, are whitening to the harvest. Ethiopia stretches out her hands unto God; and savage tribes attend His word. The Lord of the harvest opens his glory, and looks down from above; and He says to the heart of each labourer, 'Fear not,--be strong; --lo, I am with you always: be though faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life.'" With the animating sound of that voice, let us rise up, and go to the work of the Lord...<sup>448</sup>

Samuel Luckey (1791-1869), the secretary of the Missionary Society, furthered this plea. He wrote,

Of the eight hundred millions who inhabit the earth, only two hundred millions are estimated to have any knowledge of the Gospel of Christ. All the rest are shrouded in moral darkness. Africa is a vast moral waste. The inhabitants of Asia are, for the more part, carried away with their dumb idols, or shut up in Mohammedan delusion. Their very religious

---

<sup>446</sup> George Frederick Mellen, "Early Methodists and the Cherokees," *Methodist Quarterly Review* 66(1917), 477.

<sup>447</sup> William McKendree, John Johnston, Joseph Travis, and F. Reed, "Religious and Missionary Intelligence," *The Methodist Magazine* 6 (1823), 395f.

<sup>448</sup> John Emory, *The Substance of a Sermon*, *The Methodist Magazine* 5 (1822), 289.

ceremonies are barbarous and licentious beyond description, and calculated to inspire a caste and benevolent mind with indignation and horror. ...Although Europe, is, to a great extent, *nominally* Christian, yet even there, if we except the favored island which gave birth to Methodism, we may see a vast field for missionary labour.<sup>449</sup>

In 1833 the first foreign missionary project of the Church was launched. It was to Liberia. In 1835, missionaries were sent to South America.

## 2. Publishing

One of the key areas of growth in this period was the publishing empire of Methodism. Between 1789 and 1835, the Methodist Book Concern underwent a dramatic transformation. It went from being a small, heavily indebted part of the denomination, to a flourishing, self-sufficient entity. The Book Concern became an effective means to support the emerging educational agenda of the denomination.

In May 1789, the New York Conference organized the Methodist Book Concern. However, initially, the project was unfunded. Since there were no Church funds, John Dickins (1747-1798) lent the Book Concern six hundred dollars. He was appointed Book Steward. The Book Concern was initially located in Philadelphia simply because Dickins had been appointed there. In its earliest days, the Book Concern was located wherever the Book Steward was appointed. After Dickins' death in 1798, Ezekiel Cooper became the denomination's second Book Steward. After some controversy and debate, in 1804 the Book Concern

---

<sup>449</sup> Samuel Luckey, "A Plea for the Missionary Cause," *The Methodist Magazine and Quarterly Review* 13 (1831), 133.



moved to New York. In 1808, John Wilson succeeded Cooper.<sup>450</sup> After Wilson's untimely death in 1810, Daniel Hitt succeeded him; Thomas Ware (1769-1851) was elected as assistant. In 1816, Joshua Soule was elected, with Thomas Mason serving as assistant.<sup>451</sup>

The Book Concern underwent general expansion in 1820. In that year, Nathan Bangs was elected Book Agent, with Thomas Mason serving as assistant. Despite protests from the Book Committee, Bangs established a bindery for the Book Concern. As Bangs had predicted, the bindery was a success. In 1824, a printing house was established.<sup>452</sup> The General Conference of 1820, bowing to pressure from the western Methodists, opened a western branch of the Book Concern in Cincinnati. In 1839 it was chartered as the Western Methodist Book Concern.<sup>453</sup>

Under Bang's supervision, the Book Concern flourished. On August 9, 1826, *The Christian Advocate and Journal* was launched. It proved to be a successful periodical. The circulation soared to thirty thousand. In 1828, Bangs was elected editor after the end of his term as Book Agent. Previously, the *Methodist Magazine* was launched in 1818. Modeled after John Wesley's *Arminian Magazine*, the "great design of this publication is to circulate religious knowledge."<sup>454</sup> It served

---

<sup>450</sup> H.C. Jennings, *The Methodist Book Concern: A Romance of History* (New York: Methodist Book Concern, 1924), 17-23.

<sup>451</sup> W.F. Whitlock, *The Story of the Book Concern* (Cincinnati: Jennings and Pye, 1903), 37f.

<sup>452</sup> Jennings, 25.

<sup>453</sup> Whitlock, 39.

<sup>454</sup> Joshua Soule and Thomas Mason, "Address of the Editors of the Methodist Magazine," *Methodist Magazine* 1 (1818), 1.

as one vessel through which theology, biography and autobiography, and religious news was disseminated through the denomination. The *Methodist Magazine* was organized into the following categories:

1. Divinity. 2. Biography. 3. Scripture illustrated. 4. The Attributes of God displayed in the works of Creation and Providence. 5. The grace of God manifested. 6. Miscellaneous. 7. Religious and Missionary intelligence. 9. Obituary. 9. Poetry.<sup>455</sup>

In 1830, the periodical transited to a quarterly format and was renamed the *Methodist Magazine and Quarterly Review*.

### 3. Education

Another key area that saw growth in those years was the educational ministry of the Church. In the years after the War of 1812, the Methodist Episcopal Church took part in founding a plethora of educational institutions. Certain western preachers resisted the cause of education. Peter Cartwright wrote, "I do not wish to undervalue education, but really I have seen so many of these educated preachers who forcibly reminded me of lettuce growing under the shade of a peach-tree....that I turn away sick and faint."<sup>456</sup> But, in the years following the War of 1812, the denominational leaders were intent on promoting education among its preachers and members.

Education was an early interest of the Methodist Episcopal Church. The first *Discipline* actually stated that preachers were to instruct congregants and

---

<sup>455</sup> Ibid., 5.

<sup>456</sup> Cartwright, 64.

promote education “else you are not called to be a Methodist.”<sup>457</sup> The first educational institution founded by the Methodist Episcopal Church was Cokesbury College. Cokesbury had been the joint effort of Francis Asbury and Thomas Coke to form an American equivalent to John Wesley’s Kingswood School in Bristol, England. Like Kingswood, Cokesbury was intended to serve as a school for orphans and the children of preachers. The “College” was formed in Abingdon, Maryland. While funding was problematic, the school was partially completed and went into operation sometime before September 19, 1787.<sup>458</sup> The school suffered hard times, however. Due to mismanagement by headmasters, inadequate funding, improper supervision by the bishops, and destruction on two separate incidents by fire, the school was forced to close. The property was sold in 1799 to pay debts accrued by the school.<sup>459</sup>

While Cokesbury was a failed project, Bishop Asbury proceeded to found other educational institutes. Among those he contributed to the founding of were Ebenezer Academy in Virginia. Asbury and the Kentucky Methodists founded Bethel Academy, which opened in 1794. Sometime before 1792, Asbury and the Methodists in Uniontown, Pennsylvania founded Union School.<sup>460</sup>

In the period after Asbury’s death, the educational agenda of the Methodist Episcopal Church was extended. In these years, preachers were

---

<sup>457</sup> *Minutes of Several Conversation between the Rev. Thomas Coke, the Rev. Francis Asbury and Others*, 112f.

<sup>458</sup> Asbury attended an examination on that day. Thus, the school was in operation at that time.

<sup>459</sup> Smith, 223-235.

<sup>460</sup> A.W. Cummings, *The Early Schools of Methodism* (New York: Phillips and Hunt, 1886), 35-60.

increasingly encouraged to study and preach. An 1818 article in the *Methodist Magazine* encouraged ministers to “Read and study Scripture,” and “Study and consider well the subjects on which you intend to preach.”<sup>461</sup> A subsequent series of articles published throughout the 1823 volume of the same periodical encouraged ministers to study subjects such as Christian biography, chronology, theology, and biblical languages for the “cultivation of our mental powers.”<sup>462</sup> That same year an article stressing the importance of ministerial study from the *British Wesleyan Methodist Magazine* was published in the *Methodist Magazine*. It stated, “...it should not be forgotten, that the improvement of our time and opportunities is what is what our great Creator expects and demands from us all; and that he who neglects this part of his Christian duty must given an account of such neglect to God.”<sup>463</sup>

Along with this increased emphasis on education, came the founding of a number of academies and colleges. In 1816, Asbury College was founded in Baltimore. In 1818, Joshua Soule and Thomas Mason posted a notice in the *Methodist Magazine*. The notice read,

Many sincere friends of Methodism have long realized the great deficiency in the methods and means of education, and have regretted the want of seminaries under the special direction and superintendence of that religious community to which they are united. ...The Asbury College has probably exceeded in its progress, considering the short time it has been established, any literary institution in the country.<sup>464</sup>

---

<sup>461</sup> “Directions to Ministers,” *Methodist Magazine* 1 (1818), 278.

<sup>462</sup> “The Importance of Study to a Minister of the Gospel,” *The Methodist Magazine* 5 (1822), 347.

<sup>463</sup> William Hinson, “On the Duty of Christians to ‘Give Attendance to Reading’,” *The Methodist Magazine* 6 (1823), 342.

<sup>464</sup> Cummings, 90.

The lofty promises of the school were difficult to live up to. Presumably due to funding issues, Asbury College ended up closing abruptly, only a few years after it first opened. Nathan Bangs wrote,

...the friends of education...were not much gratified, as it seemed to promise more than could be rationally expected, and was rather calculated to blazon forth the attainments of the professors than enlighten the public by a sober statement of fact. It continued for a short time, and then, greatly to the disappointment and mortification of its friends, went down as suddenly as it had come up, and Asbury College lives only in the recollection of those who rejoiced over its rise and mourned over its fall...<sup>465</sup>

The failure of Cokesbury and Asbury Colleges did not dissuade the Methodists. Methodists continued to found colleges and schools throughout the nineteenth century. In fact, the Committee of Education at the General Conference of 1820 recommended to the Conference that all Annual Conferences establish institutions of learning under their direct control. The bishops were, further, instructed to appoint preachers to serve as teachers, presidents, and principals of these institutions. The Committee of Education of the General Conference of 1824 reported that they approved of this course of action. They passed the following resolution:

*Resolved, & c. .* That we approve of the resolution passed in the General Conference of 1820, on the subject of seminaries of learning, and hereby recommend that every annual conference, not having a seminary of learning, use its utmost exertion to effect such an establishment.<sup>466</sup>

Partially as a result of these recommendations, Conferences began aggressively establishing institutions of higher education. Among those was

---

<sup>465</sup> Ibid., 91.

<sup>466</sup> *Journals of the General Conference*, 1: 295.

McKendree College in Lebanon, Illinois, which was founded in 1828 as a Methodist academy. William McKendree donated 480 acres of land for the campus. It became a college in 1835. The Virginia Methodists built Randolph-Macon College in 1830. Madison College was founded in Uniontown, Pennsylvania in 1827. In 1833, Dickinson College (which was founded in 1783) became a Methodist Episcopal Church college.<sup>467</sup> Lagrange College had its beginnings as a female academy founded in Georgia in 1831.

One of the most important early colleges was Wesleyan University in Middleton, Connecticut. By 1830, there was an increasing desire among Methodists to create a great university. So, with cooperation from New England and New York, the property of “the American Literary, Scientific, and Military Academy” was purchased. In May of 1831, Wesleyan University was established on this property.<sup>468</sup> Wilbur Fisk (1792-1839) was selected as the first president of the institution. Fisk had previously served as principal of the Wesleyan Academy in Massachusetts. Fisk and his contemporaries had high hopes for the school, believing it represented a new era in Methodist sponsored education. In his inaugural address, Fisk stated,

...we stand upon the threshold of a new dispensation in the science of education, and especially in the history of American colleges and universities. And we hope to grow up and spread out with the increasing improvements of the age; and collect into a luminous focus every additional ray that emanates from the sun of science.<sup>469</sup>

---

<sup>467</sup> Cummings,193.

<sup>468</sup> Ibid., 169-173.

<sup>469</sup> Wilbur Fisk, “An Inaugural Address, Delivered at the Opening of the Wesleyan University, in Middleton, Connecticut, September 21, 1831, “ *Methodist Magazine* 13 (1831), 439.

#### 4. The Sunday School

Beyond establishing academies, colleges, and seminaries, many leaders within the Methodist Episcopal Church also pushed for increased education within individual congregations. The Sunday school movement had begun in England around 1780. Originally, the movement had attempted to provide some basic education to working-class people. The education was broader than religious instruction and was confined to Sunday because it was many working class people's only day off.<sup>470</sup> At the Christmas Conference of 1784 and in subsequent years, the denomination emphasized the need to educate the children of Society members. In 1790, the Conference held in Charleston, South Carolina on February 15-17 determined to establish Sunday Schools to help educate poor children.<sup>471</sup>

By the 1820s, the denominational leaders were particularly interested in making sure that children received proper religious instruction. The General Conference of 1824 resolved that it was the obligation of every preacher to organize the children into classes for religious instruction. The resolution stated,

*Resolved*, by the delegates of the annual conference in General Conference assembled, 1. That, as far as practicable, it shall be the duty of every preacher of a circuit or station to obtain the names of the children belonging to his congregation; to form them into classes for the purpose of giving them religious instruction, to instruct them regularly himself, as much as his other duties will allow; to appoint a suitable leader for each class, who

---

<sup>470</sup> There are a number of excellent treatments on the history of the Sunday School. See, Anne M. Boylan, *Sunday School: The Formation of an American Institution, 1790-1880* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988); Addie Grace Wardle, *History of the Sunday School Movement in the Methodist Episcopal Church* (New York: Methodist Book Concern, 1918).

<sup>471</sup> James Kirby, Russell E. Richey, and Kenneth E. Rowe, *The Methodists* (Westport, Connecticut: Praeger, 1996), 170f.

shall instruct them his absence; and to leave his successor a correct amount of each class thus formed with the name of the leader.<sup>472</sup>

In April 1827, the Sunday School Union was organized in New York City. Its goals were, essentially, to ensure that a proper religious instruction was given to each child in the Methodist churches and societies. Nathan Bangs was made the headmaster of the Sunday School Union. At its first annual meeting, Bangs recorded that “there were reported 251 auxiliary societies, 1025 schools, 2,048 superintendents, 10,290 teachers, and 63,240 scholars, besides 2,000 managers and visitors.”<sup>473</sup>

Bangs proved to be capable and adept leader. Under his guidance, the Sunday School Movement flourished. Bangs utilized the Methodist Book Concern to support the Movement. Bibles, hymnals, teachers manuals, and the denomination’s first periodical for children, *The Child’s Magazine* were all published to support the Sunday School Union. Bangs even added a regular column in the *Christian Advocate*. The column promoted the Sunday school, through providing news and teacher training instructions. The 1832 General Conference instructed presiding elders to promote the cause of Sunday schools and required preachers to include Sunday school updates in their annual reports.<sup>474</sup>

---

<sup>472</sup> *Journals of the General Conference*, 1: 295.

<sup>473</sup> Bangs, *History of the Methodist Episcopal Church*, 3: 345.

<sup>474</sup> Kirby, Richey, and Rowe, 181.



## 5. Theology

With the expansion of the educational and publishing interests of the Methodist Episcopal Church, came more extensive interest in expanding the theological discourse of the denomination. Early American Methodist theological writings were limited. For several decades, the majority of theological writings referenced and utilized by preachers were imported from England. Specifically, John Wesley's *Sermons, Explanatory Notes on the New Testament*, and *Explanatory Notes on the Old Testament* were widely consulted and referenced. John Fletcher (1729-1785), who was one of John Wesley's lieutenants in England, wrote *Five Checks to Antinomianism*. The work, which took to task criticisms levied against Wesley by Calvinists, was widely popular and influential in both America and the British Empire.<sup>475</sup> Adam Clarke (1762-1832), a British Methodist, wrote a multi-volume *Commentary on the Bible* that became a standard reference for Methodists on both continents. The other theological works of Adam Clarke were published and influential in America. Richard Watson (1781-1833) was another prolific British Methodist theologian. His *Theological Institutes: or a View of the Evidences, Doctrines, Morals and Institutions of Christianity*, which began to be published in 1823, were influential in American Methodist theological circles. The first volume of Watson's work was published in 1825; its publication actually began in America before the multi-volume work was complete. In 1830 a review in *The Methodist Magazine and Quarterly Review* stated, "...the frequency and

---

<sup>475</sup> See, John A. Knight, *John William Fletcher and the Early Methodist Tradition* (Ph.D. diss., Vanderbilt University, 1966). See also, David Shipley, *Methodist Arminianism in the Theology of John Fletcher* (Ph.D. diss., Yale University, 1942).

eagerness with which it has been demanded, afford the best proofs of the high value of the work...<sup>476</sup>

Despite their lack of early involvement in writing theology, the American Methodists were interested in doctrine and theology. Many of the preachers and members of the Methodist Episcopal Church were quite proud of the theological tradition inherited from Wesley. In fact, oral debates between Calvinists and Methodists became a staple of frontier Methodism. Peter Cartwright recalled one occasion where he outdebated Congregationalists. Cartwright reflected, "...I leveled my whole Arminian artillery against their Calvinism."<sup>477</sup>

In the period after the War of 1812, deliberate attempts were made by the General Conference to preserve the doctrinal heritage of Methodism. In 1816 the General Conference appointed a "Committee of Safety", which was charged with determining "whether our doctrines have been maintained, discipline faithfully and impartially enforced, and the stations and circuits duly attended."<sup>478</sup> The committee, which was chaired by Joshua Soule, determined,

After due examination, your committee are of opinion that, in some parts of the connexion, doctrines contrary to our established articles of faith, and of dangerous tendency, have made their appearance among us, especially the ancient doctrines of *Arianism*, *Socinianism*, and *Pelagianism*, under certain new and obscure modifications.<sup>479</sup>

---

<sup>476</sup> "Review of *Theological Institutes: or a View of the Evidences, Doctrines, Morals and Institutions of Christianity*. By Richard Watson," *Methodist Magazine and Quarterly Review* 12 (1830), 272.

<sup>477</sup> Cartwright, 77.

<sup>478</sup> *Journals of the General Conference*, 1: 128f.

<sup>479</sup> *Ibid.*, 1: 155. See, Richard P. Heizenrater, "At Full Liberty: Doctrinal Standards in Early American Methodism," in *Doctrine and Theology of the United Methodist Church*, ed. Thomas Langford (Nashville: Kingswood Books, 1991), 120.

As a result of the emergence of what were now believed to be false doctrines, a number of significant Methodist theological treatments were published in this period. The first substantive American Methodist theological work was by Asa Shinn (1781-1853).<sup>480</sup> Shinn was self-educated and spent the majority of his preaching career in Maryland and Ohio. In 1812 he wrote *An Essay on the Plan of Salvation*. This work represented the first major analysis of a theological topic written by an American Methodist. In 1818, the previously mentioned *The Methodist Magazine* went into circulation. It disseminated theological articles. According to its original editors, Soule and Mason, the purpose of the periodical was "...to circulate religious knowledge. . . ." The authors added, "...the strictest care will be taken to guard the purity and simplicity of the doctrines of the gospel against innovations of superstition on the one hand, and of false philosophy on the other."<sup>481</sup>

In these early works, the Methodist theologians defined the tradition over against Calvinism. Calvinism was a system of theology that emphasized the sovereignty of God above all other theological doctrines. Calvinist doctrine upholds a belief in the total depravity of human beings, as a consequence of the original sin of human beings. As no human being is worthy of salvation, God has in God's infinite grace, predestined certain human beings for salvation. The human beings are chosen through no action of their own. There were, of course, many variants of Calvinism.

---

<sup>480</sup> Shinn is detailed further in Chapter Six.

<sup>481</sup> Soule and Mason, "Address of the Editors," 3.

While Methodism retained a belief in the total depravity of human being, John Wesley had stressed a threefold order of grace. According to Wesley, God imparted to each human being prevenient grace. Prevenient grace was resistible (contrary to the Calvinist belief that all forms of God's grace were irresistible), but compelling. This form of grace restored a portion of free will to each person; essentially, it enabled each human being to decide whether or not to petition God for forgiveness from their sinfulness. This type grace made conversion or, justifying grace, a possibility for everyone. After conversion, believers entered into a life long process of pursuing holiness and spiritual perfection; this process was made possible by sanctifying grace.

One of the most prolific opponents of Calvinism in American Methodism was Nathan Bangs (1778-1862). As previously noted, Bangs was an enormously influential and important figure in American Methodism. He was born in Stratford, Connecticut to a middle-class Episcopalian family. He underwent a conversion around 1800, after joining a Methodist Society. In 1804, Bangs was ordained. At various points in his career, he served in Canada and New York. Bangs was enormously important in promoting the cause of education and learning in Methodism.<sup>482</sup> This concern was present through his work as a Book Agent, as an editor of important Methodist journals, in the Sunday School Union, and as a prolific writer in Methodism.

In 1815, Nathan Bangs published *Errors of Hopkinsianism*. The work was quite popular, selling three thousand copies in a six-month period. In 1818, he published a second part to this work entitled, *The Reformer Reformed*. The title of

---

<sup>482</sup> E. Brooks Holifield, "Nathan Bangs," in *Makers of Christian Theology in America*, ed. Mark G. Toulouse and James O. Duke (Nashville: Abingdon, 1997), 121f.

the latter was “...suggested by the conviction that if the Reformation carried with it errors of such pernicious consequence as it was believed must flow from the doctrine of an efficient operation of universal and immutable decrees the Reformation itself needed reforming.”<sup>483</sup> In fact, both of these works by Bangs were directed against Seth Williston, who Bang’s connected with Hopkinsianism. Hopkinsianism was a form of Calvinism espoused by Samuel Hopkins (1721-1803). Hopkins was the leader of “New Divinity” theology, a school of theology that originated at Yale College. Unlike more traditional forms of Calvinism, Hopkins and his advocates utilized the argumentation of Jonathan Edward’s 1754 work *Freedom of the Will* to reconcile divine sovereignty with determinism. Edwards did so by differentiating between moral and natural necessity. Edwards contended that natural necessity referred to actual physical and mental limitations. Alternatively, moral necessity referred to the fact that human beings have the capability of acting freely, but are prone to dispositions. Essentially, Edwards and Hopkins believed that sin was voluntary, but nearly inevitable as sinners lacked inclination to choose salvation.<sup>484</sup>

Bangs’s attack, however, was levied against Williston who did not advocate free will. And, as a result, it was not really a sustained attack against Hopkinsianism. Bangs works, essentially, condemned Calvinism for its lack of biblical foundation, its denial of human free agency, and, most importantly, the

---

<sup>483</sup> Stevens, *Life of Nathan Bangs*, 223.

<sup>484</sup> Joseph Conforti, “Samuel Hopkins,” in *Makers of Christian Theology in America*, ed. Mark G. Toulouse and James O. Duke (Nashville: Abingdon, 1997), 73f.

Methodist theologians believed that predestination ultimately held God responsible for the sin of those not predestined for salvation.<sup>485</sup>

Wilbur Fisk, president of Wesleyan University, also took up the pen against Calvinism. In 1835, Wilbur Fisk published *Calvinist Controversy*. In this work, he attacked Calvinism on the same grounds Bangs had. Like Bangs, Fisk insisted that free agency was not incompatible with the sovereignty of God. He wrote, "We acknowledge and maintain that God has a plan, one part of which is, to govern his responsible subjects without controlling their will by a fixed decree."<sup>486</sup> Fisk, further, argued that Scripture did not support the claims of the Calvinists. He wrote, "...there is not a single passage which teaches directly that God hath foreordained whatsoever comes to pass."<sup>487</sup> Furthermore, Fisk continued that if predestination were a reality, it would pit "...God's secret decrees against his revealed word." After all, the Scripture commands persons not to sin, yet predestination preordains that they sin.<sup>488</sup> And, like Bangs, Fisk contended that Calvinism "destroys...the accountability of man."<sup>489</sup>

The theology produced in this period began to diverge from its British Methodist foundation. Notably, the theological writings were infused with great optimism about the human condition. In substantive ways, it is likely these

---

<sup>485</sup> E. Brooks Holifield, *Theology in America: Christian Thought from the Age of the Puritans to the Civil War* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 263.

<sup>486</sup> Wilbur Fisk, *Calvinist Controversy: Embracing a Sermon on Predestination and Election; and Several Numbers on the Same Subject* (New York: Phillips and Hunt, 1880), 14.

<sup>487</sup> *Ibid.*, 15.

<sup>488</sup> *Ibid.*, 22.

<sup>489</sup> *Ibid.*, 20.

emphases were the product of the era. The most distinctive mark of early American Methodist theology was its enhanced emphasis on free will. Increasingly, Methodist theologians such as Bangs deemphasized original sin in favor of emphasizing human free agency. The argument that prevenient grace restored human freedom was not sufficient for Bangs. Instead, Bangs and others were intent on asserting the existence of free will on philosophical as well as theological grounds. In 1817 Bangs published, *Examination of the Doctrine of Predestination*. Taking on Jonathan Edwards, Bangs contested Edwards's notion that human free will was kept in check by motives and inclinations. According to Bangs, Edwards wrote of human motives as if they were physical causes. According to Bangs, Edwards had incorrectly assumed that there was a correlation between mental and physical acts. Bangs argued, further, that the best argument for human free will was the consciousness of it.<sup>490</sup>

Another distinctive mark of American Methodist theology that emerged in this period was an emphasis on sanctification. While Wesley had interpreted sanctification to be the gradual increase of holiness through a believer's life, parts of American Methodism expanded its meaning. Wesley believed spiritual perfection a possibility in this lifetime, but he never claimed it for himself. Nathan Bangs came to understand sanctification and perfection as distinct possibilities. He wrote, "The doctrine of Perfection should not be considered a mere point of speculation; but it must, if we would be benefited by it, have an experimental influence upon our hearts, and a practice influence upon our

---

<sup>490</sup> Holifield, *Theology in America*, 265.

lives.”<sup>491</sup> Bangs further believed that this work was not necessarily one that took a lifetime. It could be cut short by God. He wrote, “...if we improve the grace bestowed upon us with fidelity, that he will cut short his work in righteousness, and cleanse the thoughts of our heart by the inspiration of his holy Spirit.”<sup>492</sup>

Timothy Merritt (1775-1845) also understood spiritual perfection to be an instantaneous work of the Holy Spirit. Merritt, who hailed from Connecticut, served primarily in New England. In 1825 he published *The Christian’s Manual: A Treatise on Christian Perfection*. In 1839 he established and became editor of the periodical, *The Guide to Christian Perfection*. It was later renamed *The Guide to Holiness*.

Phoebe Palmer (1807-1874) was, also, an enormously influential advocate for entire sanctification. Palmer professed with her husband, Dr. Walter Clark Palmer, to have attained entire sanctification. She held meetings in her home for years. Nathan Bangs and Merritt were among those who became intimate associates of Palmer. She became editor of *The Guide to Holiness* and wrote a number of books that stressed the reality of spiritual perfection.

### **E. Conclusion: Growth and Change**

This metamorphosis of the Methodist Episcopal Church from an apolitical collection of societies into a large organization fully tied into the life of the nation was gradual. In the decade after 1784, the denomination’s leaders made early overtures to become acquainted with the nation’s leader and to assure him of

---

<sup>491</sup> Nathan Bangs, *The Reformer Reformed: Or, a Second Part of the Errors of Hopkinsianism Detected and Refuted* (New York: John C. Totten, 1818), 251.

<sup>492</sup> *Ibid.*, 252.



their support. The Church also evidenced its evolution as a denomination by establishing significant publishing and educational agenda. By the beginning of the nineteenth century, the Methodist Episcopal Church increasingly exhibited national pride and an active interest in becoming more fully incorporated into the American nation. For that matter, the young denomination began to resemble the American nation. It did so not just through exhibiting national pride, but also through writing a Constitution, establishing a proportionally representative overseeing legislative body, and maintaining a strong executive power in the episcopacy.

By 1835, the Methodist Episcopal Church had grown into a large corporate entity fully tied into the nation. With an extensive mission organization, a large number of colleges and schools, a burgeoning publishing empire and a rapidly growing membership, the Methodist Episcopal Church had become one of the largest organizations in the United States.

## CHAPTER VII

### REFORM

As the Methodist Episcopal Church continued to grow in membership and terms of infrastructure, the polity of the denomination increasingly came under attack. Despite the compromise of 1808, which had introduced more equitable representation at the General Conference, the representation of populist sentiment in the denomination continued to push for greater reforms to the church's government throughout the 1820s and 1830s. Self-proclaimed "Reformers" sought to dramatically transform the polity of the Methodist Episcopal Church through reconfiguring the power of the episcopacy and introducing lay representatives to the denomination's legislative body. These measures met with considerable resistance from the autocratically minded leaders of the denomination and ultimately resulted in schism. As a result of this controversy, the denomination's identity as a hierarchical religious body was sustained.

#### A. Questioning Polity

##### 1. The Continuing Debate Over the Episcopacy

The Methodist Episcopal Church's system of ecclesial government remained a hotly debated topic throughout the nineteenth century. In a country

that was increasingly “republican,” the rigidly hierarchical system of organization adopted by the denomination seemed anachronistic or oppressive to many Americans. By the early decades of the nineteenth century, denominations and religious groups of all sorts littered the American landscape. In these years, the Methodist Episcopal Church retained a numerical advantage over the other denominations. Partially as a byproduct of its success, the Methodist Episcopal Church was a frequent target of criticism. In the west and south the Methodists chief opponents were Baptists. In the northeast the chief opponents of the Methodists were, primarily, the Calvinists and the Universalists.

One of the most vocal critics of the Methodist Episcopal Church’s system of government was Elias Smith (1769-1846). Smith was ordained as a Congregationalist, but was also a former Baptist and someone who had Universalist leanings. In 1808, he began the publication of *The Herald of Gospel Liberty*, which was the first exclusively religious newspaper published in the United States. The paper was founded with the intention of “...describing the nature of civil and religious liberty, to come to the capacities of those whose advantages have been small, as to acquiring a general knowledge of the world.”<sup>493</sup>

In 1809, Smith published a scathing review of Methodist polity. Smith believed that the government of the Methodist Episcopal Church was oppressive, in that it shut out the voice of those not ordained. The “people” had no voice in

---

<sup>493</sup> Elias Smith, “Address to the Public: To the Subscribers for This Paper, and to All Who May Hereafter Read Its Contents,” *Herald of Gospel Liberty* 1:1 (September 1, 1808), 1.

appointments or ordination. These things were left in the hand of bishops and Conferences, instead of the local congregation. Furthermore, in his estimate, the Methodist bishops were endowed with too much power. He was particularly critical of the power of appointment given to the bishops. Smith wrote, "The presiding elders are not chosen by the people, but by the bishops...The people have no voice." Smith believed that this system of government was not simply oppressive to Methodist but could have a detrimental effect on the United States more broadly conceived. He wrote, "...methodist government; which I think is in its natural injurious to the government of the United States...A bishop over the church, will lead to a king over the whole." Smith, thus, expressed hope that the denomination "...may lay aside that *tyrannical government*, and adopt that where Jesus is *king*, and the great shepherd and the bishops of souls."<sup>494</sup> In his response to criticisms of his understanding of Methodist government, Smith reiterated, "...the *Methodist* form of government...it appears to me, the most *artful; deep laid plan*, to bind men under the name of religion; raise a few above the rest, as guides, heads, masters..."<sup>495</sup> Smith's criticisms were representative of the views of many observers throughout America. In distinct ways, the autocratic system of church government practiced by the Methodists seemed out of place in a Republican nation.

---

<sup>494</sup> Elias Smith, "Review of the Methodist Discipline," *Herald of Gospel Liberty* 1: 24 (July 21, 1809), 93f.

<sup>495</sup> Elias Smith, "Remarks on Timothy Merritt's book, 'Animadversions on Mr. Elias's Review of Doctrines and Discipline of the Methodist Church in America,'" *Herald of Gospel Liberty* 1: 25 (August 4, 1809), 98.

## 2. The Debate Over Presiding Elders

Criticism of Methodist governance also came from within the tradition. One of the first and most unbending critics was James O’Kelly. O’Kelly had vigorously criticized the denomination for not allowing preachers to have an appeal, when being assigned preaching stations for the year. Furthermore, O’Kelly was an outspoken critic of the episcopacy; he believed it was endowed with too much power. While he was criticized for ambition and divisiveness, O’Kelly was not alone in his view. Like O’Kelly, other Methodist preachers and lay people had expressed criticism of the Methodist Episcopal Church’s system of church government. In particular, a growing portion of Methodists began to push for revising and limiting the power of the episcopacy. After McKendree’s election as bishop in 1808, these debates intensified.

The 1808 approval of a Constitution by the Methodist Episcopal Church further democratized the Methodist General Conference, by making it a delegated body. The second major achievement of the Constitution was the introduction of a rule that preserved the power of the episcopacy from alteration. This rule, technically the “third restrictive rule” was stated as such, “[The General Conference] shall not change or alter any part or rule of our government, so as to do away with the episcopacy or destroy the plan of our itinerant general superintendency.”<sup>496</sup>

It was pointed out in the last chapter that the Constitution was not immediately accepted. The General Conference dissected it to examine each of its parts. While the issue of a delegated General Conference dominated the debate

---

<sup>496</sup> Curts, 1: 82f.

of 1808, the episcopacy was discussed. Notably, many preachers wanted to see the bishop's power restricted, through making presiding elders elected, not appointed. Ezekiel Cooper proposed a motion to that effect. It read,

That the fifth section of *The Discipline* after the question, "By whom shall the presiding elders be chosen?" the answer shall be – "Ans, 1<sup>st</sup>. Each annual conference respectively, without debate, shall choose, by ballot its own presiding elders."<sup>497</sup>

The motion failed, by a vote of 52 to 73. The motion failed for a number of years. Not least of these was the fact that the motion was made late in the Conference after much debate over the Constitution had already occurred. Furthermore, Joshua Soule and Elijah R. Sabin motioned that the vote be taken without a debate.<sup>498</sup>

Despite the motion's defeat, many prominent Methodists continued to push for limitations being placed on the appointive powers of the bishop. The faction supporting reduction of the power of the bishop was a large and vocal minority and felt the balance was turning in their favor. This effort was particularly troubling to Francis Asbury. Asbury believed that the appointment of presiding elders was a natural extension of a bishop's power. He feared that electing presiding elders would dramatically reconfigure the distribution of power within the denomination. Asbury, not trusting of denominational politics, believed that this would cause the Church to become more status centered. Shortly after the Conference of 1808, on May 27<sup>th</sup> he wrote a letter to Thomas L. Douglas, presiding elder in the Yadkin District. Asbury wrote,

Such a deliberate attempt to take away the last remains of Episcopacy,

---

<sup>497</sup> Ibid., 1: 82f.

<sup>498</sup> Ibid., 84. Price, 90-92.

deprives us of our privileges, wholesale and retail. Ah! Have I lost the confidence of the American People and preachers? or only a few overgrown members that have been disappointed? and the city lord who wish to be bishops, presiding elders, deacons, and to reign without us—over us?<sup>499</sup>

By, 1810, Asbury's concern was intensified. He wrote to Christopher Frye, the presiding elder of the Greenbrier District, in September, 1810. In this letter, Asbury speculated,

Perhaps there may be a struggle in the next General Conference, whether the government shall be Presbyterians and local, or Episcopal in its small remains. If the poison of electioneering obtains, woe to the presiding elders. They are the Bishops' man; keep them back. But it will remain to know what powers are recorded, what the General Conference ceded to the delegated Conference—and if in dismembering to the Episcopacy they will not dissolve themselves and the constitution.<sup>500</sup>

Asbury feared that the election of presiding elders was an assault on the very system of church government offered by the Methodists. Specifically, he feared that the Methodists were moving toward a Presbyterian polity.

As Asbury predicted, the issue of the election of presiding elders did erupt again at the delegated General Conference of 1812, which was held at John Street Church in New York City. Members of the Genesee Conference chose to exercise their resistance to the appointment of presiding elders by bishops, through not choosing any as delegates. Henry Boehm wrote, "It is singular they did not send one of their presiding elders."<sup>501</sup>

At this Conference, Jesse Lee, Asa Shinn, and Nicholas Snethen pushed the issue. The proposal was eventually defeated by a narrow margin of forty-two to forty-

---

<sup>499</sup> Asbury, 3: 392.

<sup>500</sup> *Ibid.*, 3: 439.

<sup>501</sup> Boehm, 360.

five.<sup>502</sup> However, heated debate precipitated the motion's defeat. A frustrated Asbury turned his back on each of the speakers who proposed the election of presiding elders. Jesse Lee, who was one of the most outspoken personalities among the Methodists, made an impassioned case for election. Supposedly, one of the Methodists remarked "no man of common sense would have adduced such arguments as Mr. Lee." Turning his attention to Asbury, Lee said, "Our brother has said no one of common sense would use such arguments. I am, therefore, Mr. President, compelled to believe the brother things me a man of uncommon sense." Asbury turned back around to face Lee and remarked, "Yes! Yes! Brother Lee, you are a man of uncommon sense." Lee answered, "Then, sir, I beg that uncommon attention may be paid to what I say." Asbury again turned his face to the wall while Lee finished his argument.<sup>503</sup>

Asbury interpreted the entire discussion as a personal attack. In the midst of the Conference, the bishop wrote a letter to Laban Clark. Clark was among those who supported the election of presiding elders. An obviously hurt Asbury wrote,

Give me leave as an affectionate Father to address a dear Son...I will freely turn my Back, and my children shall freely speak against me or my administration. I wish difficulties may be brought. But am I not your Father? What have I said, what have I done? Come and tell me, or write to me your heart your whole heart.<sup>504</sup>

Clark's response attempted to assuage Asbury that the entire discussion was not

---

<sup>502</sup> *Journals of the General Conference*, 1: 114.

<sup>503</sup> J.B. Wakeley, *The Heroes of Methodism, Containing Sketches of Eminent Methodist Ministers, and Characteristic Anecdotes of their Personal History* (New York: Carlton and Porter, 1857), 256f.

<sup>504</sup> Francis Asbury, "Some Newly Discovered Unpublished Letters, 1808-1825," *Methodist History*, ed. Albea Godbold, 3 (1965), 8f.



personal. He further indicated that his decision about the issue of presiding elder had been partially informed by his fear of alienating a significant portion of the Methodist preachers. He wrote,

You ask Sir, 'What have I said? What have I done?' and request me to tell all that is in my heart....What you say of my severity in Conference, I have not intended it....it was never designed against my venerable Father....it was a personal prejudice....I have always said I have greater confidence in Bishop Asbury than any other man on earth; and if ever a change is to take place in that department of our government it must take place while our Father & faithful friend is with us, lest unhappy consequence should follow....I think it was fully understood at the last Gen. Conference that those who opposed a present alteration contemplated one in future; and I fear too great a change....the entire rejection of [the Presiding Elder] from among us, which is wished by some.<sup>505</sup>

The issue of the election of presiding elders was debated again at the General Conference of 1816. Asbury died prior to the Conference. However, in the months prior to his death, he had continued to mount an attack against the election of presiding elders. In an August 25, 1815 letter to Jacob Young, who was presiding elder of the Ohio District, Asbury expressed concern that the election of presiding elders would lead to a settled ministry and the death of itinerancy.<sup>506</sup> At the General Conference of 1816, Samuel Merwin proposed a compromise resolution, which was amended by Nathan Bangs. The motion read,

*Quest.* How are the presiding elders chosen and appointed?

*Ans.* The bishop, at an early period of the annual conference, shall nominate an elder for each district and the conference shall without debate, either confirm or reject such nomination. If the person or persons so nominated buy not elected by the conference, the bishop shall nominate two others for each of the vacant districts, one of whom shall be chosen. And the presiding elder so elected and appointed shall remain in office four years, unless dismissed by the mutual consent of the bishop and the conference, or

---

<sup>505</sup> Ibid., 9-11.

<sup>506</sup> Francis Asbury, "Unpublished Letters of Francis Asbury," *Methodist History* 1 (1962), 60f.

elected to some other office by the General Conference. But no presiding elder shall be removed from office during the term of four years without his consent, unless the reasons for such removal be stated to him in the presence of the conference, which shall decide, without debate, on his case.<sup>507</sup>

Merwin's motion was defeated twice. The motion was first considered in a committee made up of the whole body. It was defeated 60 to 42. It was subsequently defeated by a vote of 63 to 38, when considered again by the General Conference.<sup>508</sup>

### 3. The General Conference of 1820

Whether or not presiding elders should be elected or appointed remained the paramount issue of the General Conference of 1820. The General Conference of 1820 convened at the Eutaw Street Church in Baltimore on Monday, May 1st. William McKendree set the tone for the discourse with his Episcopal Address. McKendree was, generally, viewed by the preachers of the Methodist Episcopal Church as a more accommodating bishop than Asbury. However, McKendree remained firmly committed to not weakening the governing power of the episcopacy. Because of this, he stringently opposed the election of presiding elders. McKendree was dealing with poor health and was only able to attend small portions of the General Conference. However, he prepared a written address that was read by Bishop Roberts.<sup>509</sup> In the opening address, McKendree made his stance very clear. He stated,

---

<sup>507</sup> *Journals of the General Conference*, 1: 140.

<sup>508</sup> *Ibid.*, 1: 140f. Price, 98.

<sup>509</sup> Curts, 84. Though, Paine states McKendree read the address.

The General Conference of 1808...constituted a delegated Conference, and by constitutional restrictions ratified and perpetuated our system of doctrines and discipline and the rights and privileges of all the preachers and members; in a word, all the essential parts of our system of government. It is presumed that no radical change can be made for the better at present.<sup>510</sup>

McKendree's address received a "vote of thanks" by members of "an Annual Conference."<sup>511</sup> The other two bishops did not echo McKendree's stance. Bishops George and Roberts did not believe that electing presiding elders was against the Church's constitution. Nicholas Snethen remarked,

We have three bishops; one of them [M'Kendree] says the giving of power to the Annual Conferences in the choice of presiding elders is unconstitutional. A second [George] says it is not; and a third [Roberts] used the term without any precise technical meaning. He grants that the change will take from the episcopacy some of its former power, but he is willing to part with it. Of course he believes there is nothing in the restrictions to prevent the Annual Conferences from electing presiding elders.<sup>512</sup>

McKendree gained a powerful ally in the support of the power of the episcopacy, when Joshua Soule was elected as a bishop. McKendree's ill health, coupled with the continued growth of the Methodist membership, caused the Committee on the Episcopacy to recommend the election and ordination another general superintendent. The General Conference concurred with the recommendation. On May 13, Soule was elected with 47 votes; Soule defeated Nathan Bangs, who received 38 votes.<sup>513</sup> Soule, who authored the Constitution, believed in preserving the power of the episcopacy. In his estimate, attempts to

---

<sup>510</sup> Paine, 232.

<sup>511</sup> Edward J. Drinkhouse, *History of Methodist Reform: Synoptical of General Methodism 1703 to 1898* (Norwood, Mass.: Norwood Press, 1899), 2: 3.

<sup>512</sup> *Ibid.*, 2: 3.

<sup>513</sup> Curts, 86.

weaken the office by allowing presiding elders to be chosen by election, was unconstitutional.

Most of the General Conference sessions on Tuesday May 16 and Wednesday May 17 were spent in debate as to whether presiding elders should be elected or appointed by the bishops. During the sessions, preachers were often given extensions beyond the normal fifteen minutes to speak.<sup>514</sup> In the midst of heated emotions, a few of the preachers sought to find compromise. John Emory and Ezekiel Cooper offered a compromise resolution that was modeled closely on the resolution offered by Merwin and Bangs four years earlier. The resolution read,

*Resolved, &c., That the bishop, or the president of each annual conference, shall ascertain the number of presiding elders wanted, and shall nominate three time the number, out of which nomination the conference shall, without debate, elect by ballot the presiding elders.*<sup>515</sup>

No decision was immediately made upon this resolution; it was decided to table a further discussion of the resolution for the time being.

The following day, the debate over the election of presiding elders continued. Rather than immediately decide upon the Cooper/Emory resolution, Nathan Bangs and William Capers proposed the establishment of a committee, made up of three persons desiring election and three persons opposed to it. The committee would be tasked with determining "...whether any, and if any, what, alteration might be made to conciliate the wishes of the brethren upon this subject."<sup>516</sup> Capers and Bangs were on opposite sides of the issue; the majority of

---

<sup>514</sup> Price, 100.

<sup>515</sup> *Journals of the General Conference*, 1: 213.

<sup>516</sup> *Ibid.*, 1: 218.

the preachers hence, interpreted the bi-partisan nature of the resolution as a positive measure. Thus, it was approved. Nathan Bangs, Ezekiel Cooper, and John Emory were chosen as the pro-election representatives; Steven G. Roszel, William Capers Joshua Wells were chosen as the anti-election representatives.

On May 19<sup>th</sup>, Ezekiel Cooper presented a report detailing the conclusions of the committee. In essence, the committee expanded the Cooper/Emory resolution. The report recommended that bishops be given authority to nominate three persons for every one presiding elder vacancy. The conferences would be empowered to elect a presiding elder from the group of nominees. The committee also determined to make the presiding elders the official advisors to the bishops in regard to appointments; this was a practice McKendree had practiced anyway. The report stated,

The committee appointed to confer with the bishops on a plan to conciliate the wishes of the brethren on the subject of choosing presiding elders, recommend to the conference the adoption of the following resolutions, to be inserted in their proper place in our Discipline: - *Resolved, & c.* 1. That whenever, in any annual conference, there shall be a vacancy or vacancies in the office of presiding elder, in consequence of his period of service of four years having expired, or the bishop wishing to remove any presiding elder, or by death, resignation, or otherwise, the bishop or president of the conference, having ascertained the number wanted from any of these causes, shall nominate three times the number, out of which the conference shall elect by ballot, without debate, the number wanted: *Provided*, when there is more than one wanted not more than three at a time shall be nominated, nor more than one at a time elected: *Provided*, also, that in cause of any vacancy or vacancies in the office of presiding elder in the interval of the annual conference, the bishop shall have authority to fill the said vacancy or vacancies until the ensuing annual conference. *Resolved, & c.*, 2. That the presiding elders be, and hereby are, made the advisory counsel of the bishop or president of the conference in stationing the preachers.<sup>517</sup>

The resolution was written by John Emory, but was signed by all six members of

---

<sup>517</sup> Ibid., 1: 221.

the committee. Weary over argumentation, the Conference adopted the resolutions by a vote of 86 to 61.<sup>518</sup>

However, the resolution was not acceptable to all the Methodists. Most notably, Bishop-elect Soule believed the resolutions reached by the committee were unconstitutional. After the resolutions were adopted, Soule requested a leave of absence from the Conference for the afternoon. On May 19<sup>th</sup>, Soule sent a letter to the Conference. In the letter he stated that he could not support the resolutions of the committee. Furthermore, Soule resigned the office of the episcopacy. He wrote,

In consequence of an act of the General Conference passed this day, in which I conceive the constitution of the Methodist Episcopal Church is violated and that episcopal government which has heretofore distinguished her greatly enervated by a transfer of executive power from the episcopacy to the Annual Conferences, it becomes my duty to notify you, from the imposition of whose hands only I can be qualified for the office of superintendent, that, under the existing state of things, I cannot consistently with my convictions of propriety and obligation, enter upon the work of an itinerant general superintendent...I ardently desire peace, and, if it will tend to promote it, am willing; perfectly willing that my name should rest in forgetfulness.<sup>519</sup>

Bishop Roberts brought the letter to the attention of McKendree on Monday, May 22. It was Roberts's opinion that Soule had little desire to "submit to the authority of the General Conference." Bishop George was tasked with visiting with Soule to further investigate his sentiment. George was satisfied that Soule was not disrespecting the authority of the Conference. McKendree wrote in his journal, "Soule disavowed the sentiment which the letter was supposed to contain, and stated his vows on the back of the letter in terms too plain to be

---

<sup>518</sup> Du Bose, 138.

<sup>519</sup> Ibid., 140.

misunderstood.” On the back of the statement, Soule wrote,

At the special request of Bishop McKendree , I hereby certify that in the above statement I mean no more than that I cannot, consistently with my vows of propriety and responsibility, administer that part of the government particularly embraced in the acts of the General Conference above mentioned.<sup>520</sup>

By couching his stance as a kind of moral high ground, Soule forced the three bishops to reexamine their own positions. Roberts decided that he agreed with McKendree and Soule that the action taken by the General Conference was unconstitutional. George chose to abstain. All three agreed that Soule should still be ordained as a bishop.<sup>521</sup> Subsequently, on the morning of Tuesday, May 23 the ill McKendree made a personal statement before Conference. He read Soule’s letter to the Conference and, once again, expressed his belief that the resolutions adopted by the General Conference were unconstitutional.

After McKendree’s remarks, two caucuses were formed. Those in favor of the election of presiding elders held a caucus and agreed to halt Soule’s ordination. Those not in favor of the election of presiding elders (even those who had agreed to the compromise) considered its adoption nullified.<sup>522</sup> A motion was made to reconsider the vote regarding the election of presiding elders. The vote was tied, 43 to 43. Bishop Roberts refused to cast what would have been a deciding vote. A motion was brought forward to suspend the resolution until the next General Conference. It prevailed, 45 to 34.

On Thursday, May 25, while the first resolution was being debated,

---

<sup>520</sup> Ibid., 141f.

<sup>521</sup> Ibid., 142.

<sup>522</sup> Paine, 239.

Bishop-elect Soule came forward and asked for permission to resign. It was the day he was to be ordained. No vote was taken immediately. And, in fact, Steven Roszel made it clear to Bishop George that those who opposed the election of presiding elders would vote for no one but Soule to serve in the episcopacy. After a decision had been reached to suspend deliberations on the presiding elder issue, a vote was finally taken. Roszel motioned for Soule to withdraw his resignation. The motion carried, with 49 votes in favor. Soule remained adamant; after the resolution passed, Soule came forward and once again stated his desire to redesign. The resignation was accepted.<sup>523</sup>

After the vote had been taken, those in favor of the election of presiding elders met with Bishops George and Roberts asking them to decline the appointment of another bishop. McKendree was absent from this conversation; due to his poor health, he had left the city. The two remaining bishops acquiesced to the desire of those who wanted no bishop to be elected at this General Conference. George announced to the Conference that with all the chaos of the proceeding days, it would be best to not elect a bishop at this juncture. Three different preachers raised the issue of electing a bishop; in each cause George was able to convince the preacher to withhold the request. George's argument was, essentially, that he feared the minority would withdraw from the Church if Soule were elected.<sup>524</sup>

Toward the end of the Conference, a further resolution was proposed. The resolution called for the "old rules" concerning the appointment of presiding

---

<sup>523</sup> Curts, 86-89.

<sup>524</sup> Paine, 240-243.



elders to be in place until the issue was debated at the next General Conference.

It stated,

...that the rule passed at this Conference respecting the nomination and election of presiding elders be suspended until the next General Conference; and that the superintendents be and they are hereby directed to act under the old rule regarding the appointment of presiding elders.<sup>525</sup>

This motion passed, by a vote of 55 to 35. The 1820 General Conference adjourned on May 27. But, over the course of the next several years, the debate about the power of the episcopacy, the election of presiding elders, and reform within the denomination intensified.

## **B. The Reformers**

### **1. The Push for Reform**

In between the 1820 and 1824 General Conferences, discussions about the authoritative nature of the Methodist Episcopal Church's polity continued throughout the denomination. The push for reform within the Methodist Episcopal Church was not limited to discussions within the General Conference. Advocates for a rebalancing of power within the Methodist Episcopal Church stressed the issue in pulpits, tracts, and periodicals. The manner in which the presiding elder question had been dealt with in the General Conference of 1820 convinced many commentators that the election of presiding elders was not a sufficient fix to the imbalance of power within the denomination. As a result, reformers became progressively more radical. They proceeded to stress the need for lay representation in General and Annual Conferences. This push for reform

---

<sup>525</sup> Curts, 89.

was made particularly evident in periodicals, such as the *Reformer* and the *Wesleyan Repository and Religious Intelligencer*.

*The Reformer* was a monthly religious periodical published by Galen L. Austin. It began publication in January of 1820. The *Reformer* did not represent any single denomination; instead, it was a Protestant publication that supported the cause of reform among, primarily, the Methodists, Baptists, and Presbyterians. The stated goal of the magazine was “to convey light on subjects of importance pertaining to religion and the cause of truth.”<sup>526</sup> In February of 1821, William S. Stockton of Trenton, New Jersey began the publication of a *Wesleyan Repository and Religious Intelligencer*. The *Wesleyan Repository and Religious Intelligencer* was started to expand the dialogue about the Methodist Episcopal Church’s government. Stockton was convinced that the official church press was not open to this conversation. In October 1821, Stockton published an “apologia,” in which he described his rationale for the periodical. Stockton wrote,

Though the Editor does not feel competent to point out the best possible plan to promote itinerancy, and a faithful and correct administration of discipline, may he not be permitted to keep his pages open for the free discussion of the principles and practices of the M.E.C. government, within the two extremes of despotism on the one hand, and anarchy on the other, without exposing the Repository to the ungenerous charge of enmity to Methodism.<sup>527</sup>

The chief critic of the Methodist government publishing in the *Reformer* was a letter contributor identified operating under the pseudonym, “A METHODIST.” The most well known contributor to the *Repository* was Nicholas Snethen.

---

<sup>526</sup> “Prospectus,” *Reformer* 1: 1 (January, 1820), 1.

<sup>527</sup> William Stockton, “Apologia,” *The Wesleyan Repository and Religious Intelligencer* 1 (October 25, 1821), 234.

Snethen was a fairly prominent Methodist preacher. By 1808, he was one of the most outspoken advocates for a delegated General Conference. By 1812, he had become a firm supporter of the election of presiding elders. Beginning in 1821, Snethen began to publish a series of articles criticizing the power of the episcopacy and pushing for lay representation. Initially, most of these articles were published under various pseudonyms. Though, Snethen eventually compiled them into an 1835 collection published in his own name.

Disappointed by the outcome of the General Conference of 1820, Snethen believed that the only way to enact genuine change within the denomination was to move the discourse from the Conference to the public. He wrote,

But all I have said in favor of the election of presiding elders, has procured no favor for the rights of the church; and though I was the first mover of the nomination being in the bishops, the measure gained no mutual concession. The evidence is abundantly sufficient to convince every one, that this great controversy can only be successfully managed upon its own merits, before the tribunal of the public....<sup>528</sup>

One basic contention present in the pages of both the *Reformer* and the *Wesleyan Repository and Religious Intelligencer* was that the Methodist Episcopal Church's government placed too much power in the hands of too few people. In the September 27, 1821 issue of the *Repository*, the author of a series of articles entitled "On Church Government" insisted, "Christianity is and ever must remain, both as to doctrine, and worship, and government, what the New

---

<sup>528</sup> Snethen, *Snethen on Lay Representations, or Essays on Lay Representation and Church Government. Collected from the Wesleyan Repository, the Mutual Rights, and the Mutual Rights and Christian intelligencer, from 1820 to 1829 inclusive, and now republished in a chronological order with an introduction by the Rev. Nicholas Snethen* (Baltimore: John Harrod, 1835), 244. Originally published as, Philo Pisticus, "The Farewell Address of Philo Pisticus, to the Readers of the 3d vol. of the *Wesleyan Repository*," *Wesleyan Repository and Religious Intelligencer* 3 (April 1824), 470.

Testament represents it. We have the doctrine, we have the worship, but have we the government in its perfection....<sup>529</sup>

One of the primary concerns of the reform publications was the episcopacy. Both publications contended that the Methodist bishops were entrusted with too much power. Snethen contended that the bishops and presiding elders held a veritable monopoly of power and, hence, could harm the preachers without fear of reproach. He wrote,

The discipline of the Methodist Episcopal church having divided unto its bishops more power than they themselves can execute in person, authorizes them to divide the circuits and stations into districts, and to appoint elders to preside over those district in their absence, to do all their duties, ordination excepted. But no common or written law, or rule exists, by which these servants, or their masters for them, are made accountable to the Annual or General Conferences for their official acts.<sup>530</sup>

Snethen believed that, in its present form, the Methodist Episcopal Church had embraced one of two extremes in church government. Snethen wrote, "...our plan and the congregational plan, are the two extremes in church government. In ours, all the power is in the hands of the bishops and preachers—in theirs, in the people."<sup>531</sup> By Snethen's point of view, the Methodist Episcopal Church's form of church government was contrary to Christian Scripture. Snethen believed that religious freedom did not just include freedom from sin; it also contained civil

---

<sup>529</sup> A METHODIST, "On Church Government," *The Wesleyan Repository and Religious Intelligencer* 1 (September 27, 1821), 208.

<sup>530</sup> Snethen, *Snethen on Lay Representations*, 37-39. Originally published as, Nicholas Snethen, "Remarks and Observations Addressed to Traveling Preachers," *Wesleyan Repository and Religious Intelligencer* (August 1822), 133.

<sup>531</sup> Snethen, *Snethen on Lay Representation*, 68. Originally published as, Philo Pisticus, "The Present State of Things," *Wesleyan Repository and Religious Intelligencer* 1 (October, 1821), 249.

and social components. Citing the New Testament book of John 8: 36, Snethen argued,

Should any one, however, be found bold enough to attempt to father either the principles, or the practices of religious bondage in the church, upon the authority of Jesus Christ, we hold that he may be effectively refuted by these words, "If the son shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed."<sup>532</sup>

Furthermore, Snethen believed that the oppressive nature of the Methodist Episcopal Church's polity was distinctively un-American. He wrote, "Is it not remarkable that the American people who have a government *sui generis* of their own originating and making, should be so tenacious of the religious polity of the European churches from which their ancestors sprung?"<sup>533</sup>

Echoing many of Snethen's concerns about the Methodist church government, "A METHODIST" argued in the pages of the *Reformer* for the introduction of lay representation as a partial cure to the inadequacies in the Methodist Episcopal Church's system. In 1820, the ordained elders constituted the entirety of the voting delegates who attended General and Annual Conferences. "A METHODIST" wrote, "I would recommend a *restriction* of the present absolute power of our General and Annual Conferences, and the adoption of a LAY REPRESENTATION. A large majority of our members, and Lay preachers, will then have their present grievances amicably redressed..."<sup>534</sup> Snethen agreed with this sentiment; he argued for the rights of lay people. He wrote, "

---

<sup>532</sup> Snethen, *Snethen on Lay Representation*, 75. Originally published as, Philo Pisticus, "On Church Freedom," *Wesleyan Repository and Religious Intelligencer* 1 (December, 1821), 289.

<sup>533</sup> *Ibid.*, 78.

<sup>534</sup> A METHODIST, "A Letter," *Reformer* 1: 4 (April, 1820), 94.

A Methodist preacher should be able to say with truth, that those who become members of the Methodist Episcopal Church, become the guardians of their religious rights and privileges; that the overseers of this flock and heritage of God, are not its Lords. Our book of discipline will never be complete without a bill of rights.<sup>535</sup>

The push for lay representation was, at least in part, an outgrowth of the fear of the consequences of too much power being concentrated in a select few.

“A METHODIST” feared that the unchecked power of the bishops and ministers in governing the Church left lay people impotent in battling corruption. The letter writer reflected,

But this sovereignty of our conferences, or in other words of our preachers, we should have no cause to fear, were we sure always to preserve our primitive character. But let our ministers once become worldly, avaricious, high minded and overbearing, and we shall see what dreadful havock will ensue, by an undue exercise of that power, over which we have no more control, than we have over the elements of the natural world.<sup>536</sup>

“A METHODIST” feared that the American Methodists would fall into the same traps as their English counterparts. The English Methodists were described in the pages of the *Reformer* as having become wealth and status centered. A December, 1822 article accused the English Methodist preachers of being “*Lord of the Funds.*” The article noted, “.... Methodist Parsons collect a revenue in Manchester alone, or not less than from 4000 pounds to 5000 a year, for their own exclusive use...the Almighty never called these men by His Holy Spirit, thus to live in luxurious idleness, --robbing their fellow creatures.”<sup>537</sup>

---

<sup>535</sup> Snethen, *Snethen on Lay Representation*, 93. Originally published, Thousands, “Methodist History.—Letters to a Young Preacher, No. IV,” *Western Repository* 1 (January, 1822), 334.

<sup>536</sup> A METHODIST, “A Letter,” *Reformer* 1:4 (April, 1820), 93.

<sup>537</sup> “Methodists in England,” *Reformer* 3: 34 (December, 1822), 275f.

The letters published in the *Reformer* were cynical about the possibility of genuine change. In fact, "A METHODIST" feared that the unchecked power of the bishops would prevent positive reform within the denomination. "A METHODIST" wrote,

...if the bishops, with the presiding elders, who as so many parts of a grand machine, always move together, can maintain their sway over their brethren in the ministry, it is not likely they will listen to the appeals of their people, praying to be admitted to a participation with them in the government of the church.<sup>538</sup>

## 2. Obstacles to Reform

While the voices pushing for reform garnered some significant support, they also were met with considerable resistance. This resistance came from those who supported the present form of church government practiced by the Methodists. These defenders of the established form of church hierarchy were often dubbed "Old Side" Methodists. The "Old Side" Methodists were effective in gathering support through publications and the mechanizations of denominational politics.

The new champion of the episcopacy and the greatest opponent of the Reformers was William McKendree. McKendree was a staunch opponent of limiting the power of the episcopacy. Between 1820 and 1824, the senior bishop reached out to each of the annual conferences. He attempted to persuade the annual conferences regarding the unconstitutionality of the resolutions pushed forth at the 1820 General Conference supporting the election of presiding elders.

---

<sup>538</sup> A METHODIST, "Letter," *Reformer* 1: 6 (June, 1820), 139f.

In accomplishing this end, McKendree presented an address to each of the twelve regional Annual Conferences. In this address he argued that changing the manner in which presiding elders were chosen would dramatically undermine the present form of church government practices by the Methodist Episcopal Church. McKendree contended that such a change would transfer authority in the denomination from the episcopacy to the Annual Conferences. Furthermore, he believed that limiting or eliminating the episcopacy was a direct impairment to the itinerancy. McKendree further argued that the bishops, who were not bound by geographical bounds, were chiefly responsible for promoting harmony within the denomination. And, finally, McKendree believed that any proposals seeking to limit the episcopacy were unconstitutional. This was significant to democratically minded preachers, because the constitution protected rights. If the Constitution were openly violated, it would become an impotent document that could not accomplish this end. McKendree wrote,

1. It would effectually transfer the executive authority from the bishops to the Annual Conferences and thereby do away the form of episcopacy and itinerant general superintendency which is recognized in our form of Discipline, and confirmed in the third Article of the Constitution.
2. By doing away the present effective general superintendency, our itinerant plan of preaching the gospel would be greatly injured if not entirely destroyed.
3. In point of law, it would effectually divest the members of our Church of all constitutional security for their rights and reduce them to the necessity of depending entirely on the wisdom and general of the General Conference....<sup>539</sup>

McKendree's efforts focused on the accomplishment of two ends. In the first place, he sought to gather support for his stance on the issue of presiding elders. But, also, McKendree attempted to make Annual Conferences decide on

---

<sup>539</sup> Paine, 259.



the extent of the power of the General Conference. If individual Annual Conferences decided on the question, they were essentially declaring that General Conferences had no power to determine the constitutionality of its own actions. As a result of McKendree's efforts, seven of the twelve Annual Conferences declared the resolutions concerning the election of presiding elders unconstitutional. Primarily, the southern and western Conferences agreed with McKendree. The other five Conferences were not willing to affirm the changes, primarily because these Conferences did not want to acknowledge the inability of General Conference to make this decision. For the sake of unity, McKendree was able to convince the seven Annual Conferences that agreed with him to hold their case until the next General Conference.<sup>540</sup>

In fact, Annual Conferences served as the principal battleground for discussions about reform in between the 1820 and 1824 General Conferences. For instance, John Emory put into circulation a paper addressed to the members of the Baltimore Conference. The paper was in regard to the "suspended resolutions" of 1820. Within the paper, criticism of Joshua Soule's actions during that Conference was made. Soule confronted Emory directly about it during the April 8, 1824 Baltimore Annual Conference. On the first day of the Conference a question was posed about each preacher, "Are all the preachers blameless in life and conversation?" When Soule's name was mentioned, someone answered "Nothing against him." Soule immediately rose to his feet, held up the pamphlet, and declared, "Yes, there is." At his request, a discussion of his character was held over until Emory arrived. A few days later, after Emory had arrived, the

---

<sup>540</sup> Ibid., 265.

question was taken up again. Soule, insisting the paper Emory had written had smeared his character, addressed the Conference at considerable length. After Soule had finished speaking, John Emory presented a tort. One commentator reflected that Soule's speech was "so triumphant that the parties retracted their accusation and confessed that they had done him injury."<sup>541</sup>

Those who resisted the measures proposed by the reformers did not limit their critiques to Conference. Some written material was published, as well. The most significant written response to the reformers was Nathan Bang's *Vindication of the Methodist Episcopacy*. The Methodist Book Concern published it in 1820. Bangs was a "progressive" within the Methodist Episcopal Church; he had been one of the most outspoken advocates for the election of presiding elders. However, Bangs was suspicious of the Reformers agenda. He was interested in gradual reform, not the adoption of radical measures. Most importantly, he feared that pushing radical agendas could lead to schism within the denomination.

The arguments presented in *Vindication* were not revolutionary. In this work, Bangs did not directly confront the issues of lay representation or presiding elders. Instead, he focused his attention on justifying the legitimacy of the Episcopal form of Church government. Pulling from Scripture and Christian antiquity, Bangs asserted that the Bible recommended no specific form of Church government. However, the form of government practiced in the primitive church was not radically different than that practiced by the Methodists. Furthermore, Bangs believed that a superintending episcopacy was the best way to govern a

---

<sup>541</sup> Du Bose, 165f.

denomination composed of itinerating ministers. Finally, Bangs was quick to remind his readers that the true source of the power of the episcopacy was the Conference. He wrote,

We have our itinerating superintendency, which derives its authority from, and is responsible, to the body of elders, who claim the right of regulating the affairs of the church...the whole power of the church is vested in the general conference, which is composed of a select body of elders chosen by each annual conference, who have the sole right of making rules for the government of the church; of regulating every thing, whether relating to the general superintendency of itinerating bishops, or to the more particular duties of elders and deacons.<sup>542</sup>

### 3. Changing Directions

The Reformers met with a resounding defeat at the General Conference of 1824. At the Conference this year, no Reform agenda was positively ruled on. The General Conference met in Baltimore, beginning Saturday, May 1, 1824. With tensions at a high level, it was abundantly clear to many observers that no truly satisfactory agreement between the populist Reformers and the autocratically minded “Old Side” Methodists was possible. The “Old Side” Methodists feared that if they gave ground on the presiding elder issue, it would lead to further unraveling of the power of the episcopacy. Contrary to this, the most radical of the Reformers were not satisfied with the presiding elders being elected; they desired more far reaching change, such as lay representation. In a letter to William McKendree, Joshua Soule lamented,

On proposing and recommending to the Annual Conferences the adoption of the suspended resolutions of the General Conference I have my doubts and fears. I am decidedly of your opinion, that, although the resolutions are no improvement of our system, but rather tend to enfeeble its energies, yet,

---

<sup>542</sup> Nathan Bangs, *Vindication of the Methodist Episcopacy* (New York: Bangs and Mason, 1820), 66.

if no further encroachments are made upon the executive authority, the government may be administered under the provisions of those resolutions. And if I had any sufficient security that the adoption of these resolutions in constitutional order would be the means of reconciliation and lay the foundation for permanent peace, I would cordially recommend them for such adoption. But it is impossible for me to conceive that those brethren who for so many years have contested the radical principles of the government will rest satisfied while the essential features of the episcopacy remain.<sup>543</sup>

And, in fact, the Reformers did not succeed in many of their goals. The suspended resolutions of the 1820 General Conference were not dealt with. In fact, they were reaffirmed as unfinished business. Furthermore, the Conference asserted that these resolution should not be "...inserted in the revised form of the Discipline" before the next General Conference.<sup>544</sup> John Emory, Nathan Bangs, and other "progressives" ceased pushing forward the issue of presiding elders. They feared the "radicalism" that had come to characterize those who considered themselves "Reformers."<sup>545</sup>

The Reformers experienced yet another defeat when Joshua Soule was elected to the episcopacy. Soule was an ardent opponent of the Reformers and was, in fact, blamed by many of them for the outcome of the presiding elder question at the previous General Conference. Due to rapid growth of the Church and McKendree's increasingly ill health, the Committee on the Episcopacy recommended the election of two bishops in order to the reduce the work load of Bishops George and Roberts. Joshua Soule was narrowly elected the bishopric on the second ballot; he received 65 votes which was the minimum number that

---

<sup>543</sup> Du Bose, 157.

<sup>544</sup> Curts, 94.

<sup>545</sup> Robert Emory, *The Life of John Emory, D.D.* (New York: George Lane, 1841), 150.

was required for election. On the third ballot, Elijah Hedding (1780-1852) received 66. Hedding was a New York native, who had served for twenty-five years, principally in New York and New England. Soule and Hedding were, thus, elected as bishops.<sup>546</sup> They received ordination as such on Friday, May 28<sup>th</sup>.

The Reformers were successful, however, in pushing forward the question of lay representation. On Wednesday May 12, a resolution was passed that called for the Committee on Addresses, Memorials, and Petitions to investigate the feelings of the itinerating preachers, local preachers, and lay people regarding a lay delegation to General Conference.<sup>547</sup> Twelve persons constituted the committee, including Nathan Bangs, William Beauchamp, and William Capers. Throughout the General Conference, the Committee accepted and assessed petitions from preachers and lay persons. In most cases, these petitions were read before the General Conference prior to being turned over to the Committee.

While the nature of the discussion on the issue of lay delegation is not recorded, at some point the issue of finances was brought up as one of the primary arguments in favor of lay representation. It was generally recognized that preachers were poorly paid. The Reformers contended that this pay deficiency was partially the result of a lack of lay representatives to Conference. They contended that the introduction of lay delegates would be directly beneficial to increasing the funds of preachers. Essentially, the argument was that if lay people were involved in Conference they could take an active role in helping set the salaries. This would have two benefits. In the first place, it would

---

<sup>546</sup> Curts, 93.

<sup>547</sup> *Journal of the General Conference*, 260.

remove preachers from the perceived impropriety of setting their own salaries. Secondly, lay people being more actively involved in making salary decisions would encourage increased accountability and generosity. For the most part, this argument was not convincing to the Old Side Methodists. They believed that the lack of giving was more related to circumstances, than a lack of generosity.

On Friday, May 28, the Committee on Addresses, Memorials, and Petitions presented a report to the General Conference. In it, the Committee declared that a lay delegation was not in the best interests of the denomination. Further, it directed the book agents to prepare fifteen hundred copies of a circular written by Bishops McKendree, George, and Roberts. Copies of the circular were to be given to presiding elders and distributed to members.

Essentially, the circular explained the Methodist Episcopal Church's rationale for not including lay representatives at General Conference. The prose of the circular attempted to be assuaging to the Reformers. In the circular, the proposals for the introduction of lay delegates offered by preachers were recounted. And, it was acknowledged that the proposed changes to church government were intended not as criticism of current impropriety, but as preemptive measures to resist future corruption. However, the circular was very clear in arguing that the "rights and privileges" of lay people were best protected not through lay representation, but through the preservation of the Constitution.

In its conclusion, the circular elaborated four distinct reasons that the proposed changes were inexpedient. In the first place, the change would put the itinerancy and the membership of the Church at odds on certain issues. Second, the reform measures presuppose that the actions of the episcopacy and the General Conference up to this point have been displeasing or destructive. The

authors of the circular did not believe this to be the case. Thirdly, implementing a system of lay delegation would be tedious. And, finally, because introducing lay delegates would give districts more conveniently located to the meeting place of General Conference unfair advantages.<sup>548</sup>

The Reformers were somewhat divided in their interpretation of actions of the Conference of 1824. One reviewer, operating under the pseudonym “Honestus,” wrote a detailed critique of the bishops’ circular letter. Specifically, Honestus took to task nearly every assertion made in the bishops’ letter. The contributor was particularly emphatic in emphasizing that it was not love of power, but love of Christ that propelled the lay people to ask for representation.<sup>549</sup> Honestus also emphasized that the Christian Scriptures did not exclude laity from being involved in issues of polity. Honestus wrote,

...the scriptures appear to secure to the ministry the pastoral charge in watching over the church *for its good*, as those who are to give account for the faithful discharge of their duties—to faithfully preach the word, and administer the ordinances—and those principles of scripture discipline laid down for dealing with members; but as to the form of the polity according to which the minutia of rights are to be settled agreeably to existing usages, or rules, as well as the origination of these rules of usages, which is a subject of ecclesiastical legislation, we see not that they have any prerogatives above what belong also to the laity.<sup>550</sup>

However, despite these obvious losses, some Reformers tried to put a positive spin on the Conference. A contributor to the *Reformer* believed that, at the very least, positive momentum was gained during the Conference. In a

---

<sup>548</sup> Curts, 96f.

<sup>549</sup> Honestus, “A Review of the Circular of the General Conference of 1824,” 1 *Mutual Rights and Methodist Protestant* 1 (August, 1824), 9.

<sup>550</sup> Honestus, “Review of the Circular of the General Conference of 1824, Continued,” *Mutual Rights and Methodist Protestant* 1 (September, 1824), 46f.

review published of the General Conference of 1824 understood the election of the several progressives to positions of leadership as a positive move.

Specifically, the review expressed jubilation that John Emory was elected as secretary of the Conference and as an Assistant Book Agent, Nathan Bangs as Book Agent to New York, Martin Ruter as Book Agent to the Western Book Concern, and that Hedding was elected as a bishop. The author of the review wrote,

In the election of choice of the principal officers, agents, and superintendents, the “*Old side*” got one superintendent only, and that by a majority of only one vote; but the “*Reformers*” got the secretary of the conference, the three book agents at New York and Cincinnati, and one superintendent, on their side—so that out of those five principle officers and agents, which tested, pretty well, the strength of party, the “*Old side*,” got but one, and the “*the Reformer*,” obtained four.<sup>551</sup>

Thus, the *Reformer* contributor hoped that change was a possibility. The reviewer wrote, “This augurs quite favorably to the cause of reform—and it is apprehended, that by the sitting of the next General Conference, the cause of reform will greatly strengthen and prevail.”<sup>552</sup>

The conclusion of the Conference of 1824 marked the beginning of a new direction for the Reformers. Increasingly Reformers came to believe that genuine change to the denomination’s polity was impossible to attain at the Church government level. Many of the Reformers started to believe that in order to enact real change, they would need to do so from the grassroots level.

---

<sup>551</sup> “Methodist General Conference,” *Reformer* 5:55 (July, 1824), 147.

<sup>552</sup> *Ibid.*, 147.



#### 4. Organizing the Reform Movement

The more radical of the Reformers were not satisfied with the outcome of the Conference of 1824, nor were they hopeful. And, in the period between 1824 and 1828, became much more organized and intensified their efforts for reform.

After the disappointment of 1824, the Reformers became more organized. The primary method by which the Reformers organized the movement was through the formation of "Union Societies." Union Societies were, essentially, designed to service both the pietistic and worship agendas that other Methodist Episcopal churches and societies did, while simultaneously pushing a reform agenda. As such, the Union Societies were places where reform issues were discussed and agendas concocted. Specifically, they first originated as a means to test the assertion of General Conference of 1824 that the Reform movement lacked significant lay support. Specifically, its mission was, as follows:

to ascertain the number of persons in the Methodist Church who are friendly to such alteration (the exclusive right of the ministers to make 'rules and regulations'), to raise societies in all part of these United States, to correspond with each other on such subjects as they may believe calculated to improve our church polity.<sup>553</sup>

By 1824, Baltimore had become the center of the Reform Movement. The first Union Society was founded there. In 1824, the *Mutual Rights* began to be published in Baltimore; the leaders of the Baltimore Union Society edited it. *The Wesleyan Repository* was discontinued in 1824. Stockton had published the periodical at a personal loss and was willing to continue it. However, the Baltimore Union Society preferred it be moved from Philadelphia to Baltimore. It

---

<sup>553</sup> Drinkhouse, 2: 71.

was reorganized as *The Mutual Rights* and began publication in August of 1824.<sup>554</sup> It was a forty page monthly magazine printed by John T. Toy. Its publication run was between fifteen hundred and two thousand every month. Samuel K. Jennings was the chairman of the editorial committee, which was constituted by leaders of the Baltimore Union Societies. The magazine sought to be the radical reformers answered to the *Methodist Magazine*. While the progressive Bangs and Emory edited the latter publication, it was critical of the efforts of the radical reformers.

Increasingly, preachers and society members began to associate the cause of lay representation with republicanism. In a letter to *Mutual Rights*, a layman from Tennessee wrote,

...it is no less strange that in a land of freeman, and in an age when the divine rights of kings and priests to make laws for the church and state without their consent, is universally denied; such a body as the General Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church should deny the right of suffrage to her members.<sup>555</sup>

Following the example of the Baltimore Union Society, Union Societies began to appear throughout Methodism. There were preachers and lay people sympathetic to the views of the Reformers throughout the United States. As a result, Union Societies were founded in areas as diverse as New York, Vermont, Pennsylvania, North Carolina, Ohio, and Alabama.

### C. The Anti-Reformers

---

<sup>554</sup> Ibid, 2: 69.

<sup>555</sup> A Layman of Tennessee, "Letter," *Mutual Rights and Methodist Protestant* 2 (May, 1825), 386. Drinkhouse, 2: 79.

## 1. The Dorsey Incident

The leaders of the Methodist Episcopal Church attempted to keep the Reform movement in check. Among the actions taken, included attempting to stop the distribution of material slanderous to church government being distributed by Methodist preachers. In 1821, the Baltimore Conference received Dennis B. Dorsey on trial. Dorsey became influenced by Reform literature. Dorsey distributed a letter to some friends emphasizing problems with the Methodist Episcopal Church's government. At the Annual Conference held in Baltimore on April 12, 1827, Stephen G. Roszel charged Dorsey with distributing derogatory literature. Dorsey said little in his own defense and claimed the letter that was being referenced as his own. He was formally charged "for having actively engaged in the circulation of an improper periodical work." He was further instructed to refrain from spreading any publications criticizing the Methodist Episcopal Church government. Dorsey refused to take a pledge to comply with that instruction. After a protracted conversation, the Conference decided to not give Dorsey an appointment for that year.<sup>556</sup>

As a result of the reprimanding of Dorsey, the most radical Reformers were further mobilized for action and more tentative Reformers were silenced. The Baltimore Union Society protested the Baltimore Annual Conference's proceedings. Asa Shinn became a particularly vocal critic. Shinn was a tenured preacher, having served as an itinerant preacher principally in Maryland and Ohio since 1800. However, during his childhood he was hit in the head by a horseshoe. At various points in his life, he suffered bouts with mental illness that

---

<sup>556</sup> Drinkhouse, 2: 104-107.

were credited to that childhood accident. And, in fact, he died in an asylum in 1853. Partially as a result of his mental health struggles, Shinn was viewed as eccentric. After the Baltimore Annual Conference ruled to discontinue Dorsey for a year, Shinn addressed a radical paper to that Conference. In it he said,

I retain a lively recollection of the times and seasons when an Emory, a Ryland, and a Griffith made a noble stand on your floor; and when other intelligent brethren with them plead the cause of liberty against the dangerous accumulations of ecclesiastical power. Whence is it then that in your last session, you laid an embargo upon the *Mutual Rights*? Is Emory gone from among you? Is the voice of Ryland no more heard? Has Griffith retired to the mournful solitudes of discouraged silence? Does modest Hanson still refuse to open his mouth? And have Waugh and Davis found out that truth reaches too deep to be safely followed in all its connections? Does the thunder of S.G.R. [Roszel] still terrify the rising ministry? And have your young men "stipulated" to enjoy the consolations of passive obedience and non-resistance? Whence is it that the dismal tidings have come to us from Baltimore?<sup>557</sup>

Nicholas Snethen was propelled to respond to the Dorsey incident, as well. In an 1827 article in the *Mutual Rights* titled "An Address to the Friends of Reform," Snethen criticized the actions of the Baltimore Conference and, in fact, painted the Reformers as victims. He contended that Dorsey was a victim and the recent attacks on Reformers signaled a new direction in denominational relations. The Reformers had always existed peacefully within the boundaries of denominational discourse. He believed that every Methodist Episcopal preacher who had published articles or letters in the *Wesleyan Repository* and *Mutual Rights* was known the presiding elders and bishops. Snethen believed that the manner in which Dorsey was treated indicated that the Old Side Methodists were unwilling to dialogue about reform issues. He noted, "I notice this last case as proof of the fact, that the itinerant preachers have taken a stand against reform,

---

<sup>557</sup> Ibid., 2: 108.

or representation, which must change our relation to them." Snethen believed "...power has usurped authority over truth; *we are not to be reasoned with, but punished.*" Snethen further anticipated that the General Conference of 1828 might enact widespread expulsion. He wrote,

We have all along asserted, that there is power enough in the rulers of the Methodist Episcopal Church, to excommunicate us all, and we are still of the same opinion; but if any one should doubt it, let him remember, that the body of men of whom we mean to ask for a fish, may give us a scorpion; that the very General Conference of 1828, may make rules, if they conceive they are not already made, to reach every reformer.<sup>558</sup>

## 2. The Old Side Critique

The criticisms from the Reformers did not go without response from the Old Side Methodists. In 1827, two important refutations of the Reformers were published. The first of these was *An Appeal to the Methodists in Opposition to the Changes Proposed in their Church Government*. Thomas E. Bond (1782-1856) wrote this tract. Bond was a well-educated local preacher in the Methodist Episcopal Church. He was born in Baltimore and, in fact, spent much of his life there. He was trained as a medical doctor. He practiced medicine for a number of years, and then took a position as chair of the medical College of Maryland. He eventually resigned from this position due to failing health and became a local preacher in the Methodist Episcopal Church. His dissatisfaction with the sentiments of the Reformers propelled him to write the tract.

Bond's *Appeal* was principally an attack on the agenda of the Reformers. Bond actually satirically dedicated the work to Nicholas Snethen. Snethen had

---

<sup>558</sup> Snethen, *Snethen on Lay Representation*, 342-344. Originally published as, Nicholas Snethen, "An Address to the Friends of Reform," *Mutual Rights and Methodist Protestant* (May, 1827), 248-250.

commented in the *Mutual Right* about Bond's book prior to its completion. Snethen had accused Bond of "desertion;" after all, Bond was a local preacher, who had the same nonexistent voting rights as the Conference.

The principal argument of Bond's appeal was that the laity lacked the right to demand representation. Scripture, he contended, did not demand a representative government. For that matter, it representation cannot be considered a natural right of any laity. Bond drew a distinction between the U.S. government and the Methodist Episcopal Church's government. In his estimation, the former could demand representation and changes to the constitution because it originated in the people. Contrary to this, the latter originated with the clergy. He wrote, "The government of the United States originated with the people. The people, therefore, were the necessarily antecedent to their rulers...and hence are the only legitimate source of all power and authority in the government." Contrary to this, "The government of the Methodist Episcopal church originated with the ministry, and the lay members voluntarily entered into the association..."<sup>559</sup> Subsequently, any rights possessed by the non-itinerating preachers are acquired, not natural.

Furthermore, Bond believed the schemes proposed by the Reformers were impractical and unnecessary. In his estimate, there were no issues of legislation that required the attention of an extra body of delegates. The expenses of delegates would also be an imposition on the Conference. Bond concluded, "In short, the project presented by our disaffected members is a bold and reckless innovation; for the adoption of which, we have neither the idea of necessity—the

---

<sup>559</sup> Thomas E. Bond, *An Appeal to the Methodists in Opposition to the Changes Proposed in their Church Government* (Baltimore: Armstrong and Plaskitt, 1827) 23.

prospect of utility, or the sanction of experience."<sup>560</sup>

Bond remained an active participant in the discussions with the Reformers. In 1828 he published *Narrative and Defence of the Church Authorities*. Between 1831 and 1832 he edited a Baltimore based journal titled *The Itinerant*. The periodical was designed to defend the polity of the Methodist Episcopal Church. In 1840, Bond became editor of *The Christian Advocate and Journal*, the most widely read periodical of the Methodist Episcopal Church. He served as editor of that journal for twelve years.

His tract was, perhaps, the most influential of the anti-Reform publications. Nicholas Snethen published a series of scathing review of it in the *Mutual Rights* almost immediately after its publication. However, Bond's work was widely read by lay members of the Methodist Episcopal Church. And, it proved to be very influential. It was partially influential in helping convert lay people to the "Old Side" point of view and for further organizing the anti-Reform movement.

Bond's tract was partially inspired by the Reformer Alexander McCaine (1775-1856). McCaine was among the most outspoken of the Reformers. He was born in Ireland and educated in England. Upon immigrating to the United States in 1791, he joined up with the Methodists. In 1801 he was ordained an elder. For a number of years he traveled with Asbury, before becoming a local preacher in 1821. Upon becoming a local preacher without voting rights in Conference, he became interested in lay representation. After the Conference of 1824, McCaine became devoted to the cause of reform. In 1825, he began investigate the origins

---

<sup>560</sup> Ibid., 67.

of the Episcopal form of church government practiced by the Methodists. His inquires manifested themselves in a series of articles published in the *Mutual Rights*. In 1827, he published the first edition of *The History and Mystery of the Methodist Episcopacy, or a Glance at the Institutions of the Church, as we received them from our fathers*.

McCaine was a caustic writer. Essentially, McCaine entire work was geared at discrediting the Episcopal form of government practiced by the Methodist Episcopal Church. McCaine argued that John Wesley did not sanction the form of church government practiced by the Methodist Episcopal Church. Instead, Asbury and Coke imposed it on the preachers and Societies. Utilizing the name of Wesley, the two self-proclaimed bishops recognized the Societies under the name of the "Methodist Episcopal Church," without the explicit consent of the lay people or local preachers. In his conclusion, McCaine argued,

In the preceding pages, we have spread before our readers such documents as were found to be connected with the origins of the episcopacy. We are sorry that this *exposé* will not reflect much credit upon those who were instrumental in saddling it upon us. We are persuaded that the impartial, intelligent, and pious of other denominations will pronounce our episcopacy to be illegitimate; and that the means which were used to introduce it into the Church were neither fair nor honorable.<sup>561</sup>

McCaine's work met with mixed reaction from fellow Reformers. Most praised his research and the depth of his understanding of the Methodist Episcopacy. Others were concerned that McCaine did not take up the cause of lay representation in his work. More importantly, they feared that McCaine's work would draw unnecessary ire from the denominational leaders.

In 1827 a second critical response to the Reformers was published. John

---

<sup>561</sup> Drinkhouse, 2: 113.



Emory published *Defence of "Our Fathers."* His work was principally a refutation to McCaine's *History and Mystery*. Emory, much like Nathan Bangs, was a progressive who related to the Reformers on issues such as the election of presiding elders. However, he felt that lay representation and other more radical measures proposed by the Reformers were unwarranted. John Emory was one of the most prominent members of the Methodist Episcopal Church. He was born in Queen Anne County, Maryland in 1789. He was among the best education of the preachers. He was educated by tutors and at Washington College. He studied law and was admitted to the bar in 1808. However, he decided to leave the law and, instead, entered the itinerancy in 1810. He quickly became a leader in the denomination. He was one of the promoters of educational interests in the denomination. He was very involved in the Book Concern, a founding editor on the *Methodist Quarterly Review*, and a well-published writer. He was also instrumental in the founding of the University of New York, Wesleyan University, and Dickinson College. Emory was also involved in denominational politics. He served as secretary to General Conference in 1824 and as a delegate to the British Wesleyan Conference in 1820. In 1832, Emory was elected to the episcopacy.<sup>562</sup>

Emory's *Defence* aimed at discrediting McCaine's work. He believed McCaine's work to be one that attempted to push forth the Reform agenda by slandering Asbury and Coke. Emory followed Nathan Bang's work on the episcopacy in arguing that there is a precedent in Christian antiquity and Scripture to support an Episcopal form of church government. More importantly,

---

<sup>562</sup> Robert Emory, 11-150.

Emory argued that Wesley intended for an episcopacy in principal, if not name. Furthermore, Emory believed that the laity sanctioned the formation of the Methodist Episcopal Church. He wrote,

We maintain, then, that the proceedings of the conference in organizing the "Methodist Episcopal Church" with general superintendents, vested with Episcopal powers, and intended to act as bishops, were, *in fact*, if not in *form*, approved and sanctioned by the people, the Methodist people of the day. And that the preachers set apart at that conference, in their appropriate and respective characters, as deacons, elders, and superintendents or bishops, were freely and cordially received and greeted by the people, as such; and the sacraments gladly accepted, as they had long been urgently demanded, at their hands.<sup>563</sup>

### 3. The Anti-Reform Movement

The controversial publications of 1827, further mobilized both the Reformers and the Old Side Methodists. The Reformers increased their efforts to form Union Societies, make their voices heard through publications, and hold Conventions aimed at creating a unified discourse. The anti-reformers, however, followed the example of the Reformers. The Baltimore based anti-reformers organized themselves in public and private meetings and presented to their Annual Conference detailed accusations levied against the Reformers.

The Reformers experienced some growth and greater unity as a result of the controversy. Union Societies continued to be established through 1827. And, various conventions and gatherings of Reformers were held that year. A large meeting of reform minded preachers was held in Pittsburgh on March 30, 1827. On Jul 25, 1827, a large gathering of Reformers located on the lower eastern shore of Maryland took place. On November 15, 1827, a General Convention was

---

<sup>563</sup> Emory, *A Defence of "Our Fathers"*, 71.

called held in Baltimore.<sup>564</sup>

Similarly, the Old Side Methodists also became increasingly organized. Private and public meetings focused on criticizing and disavowing the Reformers were in held in Baltimore throughout 1827. On August 7, 1827, a public meeting for male members of the Methodist Episcopal Church was held at an old Baptist Church located at the corner of Pitt and Front streets in Baltimore. Thomas Bond was intimately involved with the organization of the meeting; his tract had proven to be widely popular and influential. Hence, he was successful in helping draw like-minded preachers and lay people to the meeting. The meeting was also well publicized in pulpits.

This public meeting was geared toward those who opposed the agenda of the Reformers. It, in fact, constituted the first organized meeting of an anti-reform party within the denomination. Bond, in all probability, was integral in the organization of this public meeting. At the meeting two resolutions were passed. In the first place, it was decided that the Baltimore Annual Conference had acted prudently in relation to Dorsey. Secondly, the body determined to publish an Address. The Address justified the Baltimore Annual Conference's actions in suspending Dorsey. The authors of the tract argued that the Conference's actions were a direct a response to the increasingly questionable activities and slanderous publications of the Reformers. The authors of the Address contended that the slanderous attacks of the Reformers had, in fact, violated the Methodist Episcopal Church's Discipline.<sup>565</sup>

---

<sup>564</sup> Drinkhouse, 2:71, 120f.

<sup>565</sup> Ibid., 2: 122f.

Francis Waters (1792-1868), a Methodist preacher in Baltimore who had become a leader in the Reform movement, published a sixteen-page response to the anti-reform Address. It was titled "Somerset County, Md., September 14, 1827." Asa Shinn published a response titled, "A Finishing Stroke to the high claims of ecclesiastical sovereignty in reply to the Address of a meeting of lay members. Dennis B. Dorsey, Henry Bascom (1796-1850), and an anonymous "Member of the Baltimore Conference" also published responses. The responses restated the case for Reform. Furthermore, the responses claimed that the anti-reform meeting was not as large as the Address claimed; it could have been no more than 350. Furthermore, the Reformers stated their refusal to leave the Methodist Episcopal Church. Bascom, a New York born preacher who had principally served in the Western Conference, declared in his response, "Let reformers be firm; we will not leave the Church; and where we can yield, for peace' sake let us do it; let us only resist where principle and duty calls for it."<sup>566</sup>

However, despite these responses, Bond's Baltimore based anti-reformers continued to mount attacks against the Reformers. On August 17, 1827, the anti-reformers put together a committee of seven prominent laypersons in the Methodist Episcopal Church. The committee was charged with investigating the actions of members of the Baltimore Union Society. The committee determined that "the members of the Baltimore Union Society have violated the discipline of the Methodist episcopal church."<sup>567</sup> They had done so through the publication of

---

<sup>566</sup> Drinkhouse, 2: 124.

<sup>567</sup> *A Narrative and Defence of the Proceedings of the Methodist Episcopal Church in Baltimore City Station Against Certain Local Preachers and Lay-Members of Said Church by the Persons Who Preferred and Sustained the Charges* (Baltimore: Armstrong and Plaskitt, 1828), 18.

slanderous materials. The committee reflected,

We repeat then, that it is not for being reformers themselves or for endeavouring to make reformers of others, nor for uttering and publishing their opinions on the subject of reform, that we complain of the members of the Baltimore Union Society, but we complain that they have employed against their brethren in the ministry and against the discipline of the church, the severest invectives and the most vehement railing. They have impugned the motives of our venerable bishops and our itinerant ministers with unrelenting severity—and accused them without the shadow of proof, with conduct which would render men odious even in civil society, and how much more in the church of God.<sup>568</sup>

This anti-reform document cited several specific pieces of literatures it believed particularly troublesome. Included in this list were several *Mutual Rights* essays, particularly those by Nicholas Snethen and Asa Shinn. McCaine's *History and Mystery of the Methodist Episcopacy* was also listed.<sup>569</sup> The tract argued the Baltimore Union Society had violated the Discipline of the Methodist Episcopal Church through its publication of slanderous materials.

## D. Schism

### 1. Trials and Expulsions

The efforts of the anti-reformers were successful in propelling action from the Baltimore Annual Conference. Thomas Bond published the findings of the committee of seven as *Narrative and Defence of the Proceedings of the Methodist Episcopal Church in Baltimore City Station*. Beyond including a statement from the committee, extracts from writings and other evidence was included. It

---

<sup>568</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

<sup>569</sup> *Ibid.*, 23f.

condemned individually members of the Baltimore Union Society for publishing material that was malicious to the denomination.

On September 8, 1827, James M. Hanson, the preacher charged with the Baltimore City Station, sent a notices to eleven local preachers and one itinerant preacher, Alexander McCain. Twenty-five laymen were also sent notices. The notices reported that charges by the committee of seven had been filed against the person receiving the notice. Furthermore, a hearing was established for these grievances to be addresses.

Samuel Jennings (1771-1854) received one such notice. Jennings was trained as a doctor, but entered the itinerant ministry in 1814. In 1817, he chose to cease itinerating and become a local preacher in Baltimore. Jennings was a prominent member of the Baltimore Union Society. Members of the Committee of Seven had interviewed with him for two hours, attempting with no avail to get him to disavow publications such as the *Mutual Rights*, to which he had been a prominent contributor. After receiving a notice, he requested a summary of the charged being levied against him. The charges were, as follows:

The Rev. Samuel K. Jennings is charged with endeavoring to sow dissentions in the society of or church in this station or city known by the name of the Methodist Episcopal Church, and with the violation of the general rule of the discipline of the said church or society, which prohibits its member from doing harm, and requires them to avoid evil of every kind; and especially the violating that clause of said general rule which prohibits speaking evil of ministers.<sup>570</sup>

The trials were conducted before a committee composed of three local preachers, John W. Harris, Samuel Williams, and Thomas Bassford. Hanson served as chair. The trials were conducted in order of time served in the ministry.

---

<sup>570</sup> Drinkhouse, 2: 128.

As such, Jennings, who had served thirty years, was tried first. McCaine was tried second. McCaine's *History and Mystery* was discussed at great length during the proceedings. The committee found it particularly slanderous. Each of the defendants lodged protests. However, Hanson overruled the protests. All of the nine preachers were suspended from the ministry. McCaine, who refused to acknowledge the court or the jury, was expelled from the Methodist Episcopal Church outright. The lay people were similarly expunged from the Churches and Societies.<sup>571</sup> On December 26, 1827, the Baltimore District Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church sustained the expulsions of the Reformers.

If the expulsion was intended to quash the Reform Movement it failed. After the expulsion of members of the Baltimore Union Society, Reform efforts intensified rather than abated. Throughout the summer and early fall of 1827, Union Societies met frequently, a variety of pamphlets were published, and public meetings were held. The most prominent of these meetings was a General Convention of Reformers held on November 15. Nicholas Snethen was appointed temporary chairman of this Convention. The Convention itself issued a ten paragraph Memorial, which again stated that the Reformers were "petitioning under the subject of lay and local representation." Furthermore, the Memorial was clear in not intending to hurt the feelings or reputations of their opposition.<sup>572</sup>

---

<sup>571</sup> Ibid., 2: 130.

<sup>572</sup> Ibid., 2: 140.

On December 23, 1827, Samuel Jennings and the other expelled members of the Baltimore Union Society gathered together to discuss their next course of action. They decided to form an independent society. They declared,

We the undersigned, formerly members of the Methodist Episcopal Church in the city of Baltimore, having been excluded from the fellowship of that body, by what we conceive to be an unjustifiable process, based upon insufficient charges, and those charges not sustained by competent testimony, have, for the present, agreed to unite together as a society of original Methodists, under the "General Rules of the United Societies" prepared by the Revs. John and Charles Wesley.

Furthermore, the excluded Reformers determined that they would reunite with the Methodist Episcopal Church if reform were to occur. They wrote,

Our object is to wait and see whether the present abuses in the administration of the government shall be corrected. If they should, and freedom of inquiry and public discussion be permitted in the Methodist Episcopal Church, it will afford us pleasure to return, provided we can do so without relinquishing the opinions for which we were excluded...<sup>573</sup>

On December 31, the female friends and wives of those expelled joined together and wrote a letter to James M. Hanson. In the letter, they announced their withdrawal from the Methodist Episcopal Church. On April 1, 1828, the new society renamed itself "The Associated Methodist Reformers."

## **2. The General Conference of 1828 and the Methodist Protestant Church**

After the deliberations of the General Conference of 1828, the newly formed society was further strengthened. The General Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church 1828 met in Pittsburgh. Unfortunately for the Reformers, the General Conference sustained the expulsions.

---

<sup>573</sup> Ibid., 2: 148f.



The opposition to the Reformers had reached such a high level that many “progressives” who had previously supported the election of presiding elders were now willing to vote against it in an effort to not allow the Reformers to gain ground. As a result, a resolution was passed that the “suspended resolutions” of 1820 were declared null and void. The resolution read,

*Resolved:* That the resolutions commonly called the suspended resolutions, rendering the presiding elders elective, etc., and which were referred to this Conference by the last General Conference as unfinished business and reported to us at this Conference, be, and the same are hereby, rescinded and made void.<sup>574</sup>

The General Conference also adopted a motion of John Emory, which allowed for a reunification of the expelled members of the Baltimore Union Society if the *Mutual Rights* was discontinued, the Baltimore Union Society was dissolved, and proper contrition was shown. The resolution read,

If any persons expelled as aforesaid feel free to concede that publications have appeared in said “Mutual Rights,” the nature and character of which were unjustifiable, inflammatory, and do not admit of justification, and that others, though for want of proper information, or unintentionally, have yet in fact misrepresented individuals and facts, and that they regret these things; if it be voluntarily agreed also, that the Union Societies above alluded to shall be abolished, and the periodical called “Mutual Rights” be discontinued at the close of the current volume, which shall be completed with due respect to the conciliatory and pacific design of this arrangement, then this General Conference does hereby give authority for the restoration to their ministry or membership, respectively, in the Methodist Episcopal Church, of any person or persons so expelled as aforesaid; provided this arrangement shall be mutually assented to by any individual or individuals so expelled, and also by the quarterly meeting conference and the minister or preacher having the charge in any circuit or station within which any expulsion may have taken place....<sup>575</sup>

The decisive action of the General Conference of 1828 convinced many Reformers that the Methodist Episcopal Church was no longer open to a

---

<sup>574</sup> Curts, 103.

<sup>575</sup> *Ibid.*, 101.

constructive dialogue on church government. In fact, the denomination seemed intent on limiting free speech. As a result, many reform minded preachers joined with the castaways from the Baltimore Union Society. On November 12, 1828 a Reform Convention was held in Baltimore. An organization was formed that took on the provisional name, "The Associate Methodist Churches." On November 2, 1830, 114 delegates from fourteen Annual Conferences were sent to a General Conference for this new religious body held in Baltimore. A Constitution and Discipline was adopted, as well as a new name. The new denomination was named "Methodist Protestant Church." The new Church was formed under a polity that rejected the episcopacy and adopted the principles of lay representation.<sup>576</sup>

The Methodist Episcopal Church did not finally adopt lay delegation until the late nineteenth century. In 1869, the Methodist Episcopal Church allowed lay delegation in Annual and General Conference. In 1872, the northern branch of the Methodist Episcopal Church allowed a lay delegation, as well.

### **E. Summary and Conclusions**

From its beginning in 1784, the Methodist Episcopal Church had been characterized by a rigidly hierarchical system of church government. This system of governance featured a powerful episcopacy, which was charged with appointing, supervising, and disciplining the preachers and presiding over Annual and General Conferences. Beginning in 1792, the General Conference was introduced in the Methodist Episcopal Church. It represented a centralized

---

<sup>576</sup> Drinkhouse, 2: 256-267.

legislative body charged with electing bishops, overseeing appeals, and making necessary revisions to the rules and discipline that governed that Methodist Episcopal Church. This system of polity lacked many essential democratic features. That lack was not lost on many of its members who were caught up in the democratic fervor of this young country. They had thrown off one oppressor, in the form of England, and saw Methodist episcopal polity as another foe to liberty. Many members and many preachers within the Methodist Episcopal Church viewed the Church as overly oppressive and hierarchical.

Throughout the first decades of the nineteenth century, republican minded members of the Methodist Episcopal Church opposed many of the autocratic features of Methodist church government. This opposition was particularly acute throughout the 1820s, when self-proclaimed “Reformers” sought to limit the power of the episcopacy and further democratize the General Conference, through including lay people in its composition. The struggle between formalists and the populists that characterized the 1820s had two substantial effects. In the first place, the hierarchical form of church government adopted by the Methodist Episcopal Church was sustained. Secondly, the expulsions of the dissidents and the oppression of free speech within the Church was evidence that the denominational leaders intended to utilize their considerable influence and power to suppress the seeds of discord. Reform could not thrive in the Church in this period because the organic nature of the Methodist Episcopal Church would not allow it. Throughout this period of time, the Methodist Episcopal Church was transiting into a powerful corporate body. And, as a result the denominational leaders were not interested in free speech or open discourse about potentially divisive issue; they were instead, only

interested in establishing a harmony that would further enable the Church's growth and expansion.

## CHAPTER VIII

### CONCLUSION

The death of William McKendree, in 1835, signaled the end of an era.<sup>577</sup> With the exception of Francis Asbury, there had been no more important figure in the first fifty years of American Methodist history than McKendree, the fourth bishop of Methodist Episcopal Church. McKendree left behind a denomination that had many issues left to deal with. In the ensuing years, Methodists in America would be forced to directly tackle moral and legal questions related to slavery, and participate in an enduring discussion about the power of the episcopacy. But, McKendree's death came at a time when the Methodist Episcopal Church had grown to a tremendous numeric size and become the United State's premiere religious denomination.

The founding and establishment of the Methodist Episcopal Church had spanned two generations and fifty years. Between the years 1784 and 1835, the denomination achieved unprecedented numeric growth, autonomy from its English counterpart, established a distinct but complex form of church government, and transited from an apolitical, small, loosely confederated group of Societies to a fully functioning, mammoth religious organization that was involved in almost all parts of American society.

---

<sup>577</sup> McKendree died on March 5, 1835 in Sumner County, Tennessee. John Emory also died in 1835.

The thematic explorations present in this dissertation reveal a number of important elements related to the identity of early American Methodism. Among those critical attributes is that the early Methodists were, to some extent, the architects of their own story. The Methodist Episcopal Church, and Methodism broadly conceived, was not simply caught up in the unfolding tapestry of important trends in American history. They were not mere byproduct of the market, democratic fervor, revivalism, or political tensions that characterized the early American Republic. In fact, some of the transitions in early American Methodism, which might be conceived as corollaries to these events, were as much the product of personality conflicts, as anything.

The story of Methodism crafted by the leaders of the Methodist Episcopal Church was one of contradictions. The early Methodists were extraordinary effective in reaching out to an American citizenship increasingly enthralled with notions of popular sovereignty. However, it would be a mistake to characterize the denomination as populist. The Methodist Episcopal remained fiercely committed to a strong, at times oppressive, church government. Likewise, the early Methodists were infamous for having a constituency made up of uncouth, uneducated rabble-rousers. At the same time, the denomination was a leader in the founding of educational institutions in the nineteenth century.

Leaders like Asbury and Coke had little desire to share power or responsibility with any but a select few of their “brethren.” This was not simply because the leaders of early Methodism were power-mongers. The political figures present at the beginning of the United States, ranging from Washington to Jefferson, had little interest in founding a purely democratic nation. Instead, they were interested in crafting a viable nation-state. In the same manner, the

founders of early Methodism were embarking upon a task that was heretofore unprecedented. They were not interested in crafting a populist church; they were instead interested in creating a viable, successful religious organization. In their eyes, a necessary component for such an entity was a top down hierarchy that carefully organized the circuits, deployed preachers according to each person's respective gifts in ministry, and built an infrastructure that pushed for not only numeric growth but also the education and personal betterment of parishioners and preachers.

The early leaders of the Methodist Episcopal Church were more successful than they ever dreamed. Fueled by a strong leadership, revivalism, and an efficient system for deploying preachers, the young denomination grew at an astronomical rate. And, with substantial numerical growth came greater resources and the opportunity for the denomination to found educational institutions, embark upon missionary endeavors, and become a prolific contributor to an emerging publishing medium.

However, in substantive ways, the Methodist Episcopal Church was the victim of its own success. In the denomination's earliest days, survival and growth were the paramount concerns. As a result, there was a reconfiguring of priorities in the movement. The Methodist Episcopal Church was the scion of John Wesley's British Methodist movement. Wesley and the early British Methodists maintained a strong commitment to poor. For instance, in Wesley's *Plain Account of the People Called Methodists*, he contended that the work of stewards was, "To send relief to the poor..." and "Give none that asks relief,

either an ill word or an ill look."<sup>578</sup> Wesley was also passionately committed to providing affordable medical treatment and education to the impoverished. These concerns still haunted early American Methodism, but they were relegated to secondary importance. Survival of the movement and salvation of an individual's soul was the paramount concern of the Methodist Episcopal Church in the early period.

The rapid denominational growth and other foundational issues, such as the battle against slavery, were also compromised in American Methodism. John Wesley and the early American Methodist leaders believed slavery to be vile and reprehensible. The issue of slavery continued to spur tremendous controversy in the Methodist Episcopal Church, particularly in the years following 1835. However, in the early decades of the nineteenth century, the Methodist Episcopal Church softened its stance on slavery, in order to better appeal to slave masters and to be allowed to preach to slaves. The Methodist clergy were willing to subvert issues of social significance in order to attain their primary goals, salvation of souls and denominational growth.

The growth and success carried another cost. The leaders of the Methodist Episcopal Church were forced to develop a more democratic model of church government. With numeric growth came constant debate over the denomination's system of organization. In the period after 1812, the Methodist Episcopal Church grew at a rapid pace. This growth ran parallel to an influx of both nationalism and democratic fervor in the United States. Hence, with numeric growth came an influx of populist sentiment. In between 1808 to 1835,

---

<sup>578</sup> John Wesley, *The Works of Reverend John Wesley, A.M., Sometime Fellow of Lincoln College, Oxford*, ed. John Emory (New York: 1839), 5: 186.



the denomination debated issues related to its top down religious hierarchy. These issues included the power of the bishops, the establishment of a General Conference, proportional representation by state in General Conference, and lay representation. The early nineteenth century was marked by a myriad of compromises regarding these issues, in order to accommodate the growing democratic impulses in the denomination.

Despite its failings, the contributions of the Methodist Episcopal Church to American life and particularly to the religious fabric of early America in its founding period should not be overlooked. The power impact of the denomination was manifested on several areas of American culture. The Methodist Episcopal Church was a pioneer in print culture, education, and missions. More importantly, the denominational model created by the Methodist Episcopal proved to have the advantage of being resilient and capable of handling a wide variety of perspectives and debates. Many of the tensions present at the founding, including the tensions between the autocratic and populist groups, remain with the denomination today.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

### A. General Sources

O'Brien, Elmer J. *Methodist Reviews Index 1818-1985: A Retrospective Index of Periodical Articles and Book Reviews*. 2 vols. Nashville: Board of Higher Education and Ministry, The United Methodist Church, 1989.

Pilcher, Elijah H. *Index to the Methodist Quarterly Review, Including the Methodist Magazine, and the Methodist Magazine and Quarterly Review, 1818-1881*. New York: Phillips & Hunt, 1884.

### B. Primary Sources

#### 1. Primary Sources: Collections

Norwood, Frederick. *Sourcebook of American Methodism*. Nashville: Abingdon, 1982.

Richey, Russell E., Kenneth E. Rowe, and Jean Miller Schmidt eds. *The Methodist Experience in America*. Vol. 2. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2000.

Ruth, Lester, ed. *Early Methodist Life and Spirituality: A Reader*. Nashville: Kingswood Books, 2005.

Sernett, Milton C. *African American Religious History: a Documentary Witness*. 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1999.

#### 2. Primary Sources: Conference Proceedings

African Methodist Episcopal Church. *The Doctrines and Discipline of the African Methodist Episcopal Church*. Philadelphia: Richard Allen and Jacob Tapsico, 1817.

Curts, Lewis, ed. *The History of the General Conferences of the Methodist Episcopal Church from 1792 to 1896*. Cincinnati: Curts and Jennings, 1900.

Methodist Episcopal Church. *The Form of Discipline for the Ministers, Preachers, and Members of the Methodist Episcopal Church in America Considered*. New York: Ross, 1787.

\_\_\_\_\_. *Journals of the General Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church*. 2 Vols. New York: Carlton and Phillips, 1855.

\_\_\_\_\_. *Minutes of the Methodist Conferences Annually Held in America: From 1773 to 1813*. New York: Daniel Hitt and Thomas Ware, 1813.

\_\_\_\_\_. *Minutes of Several Conversations between the Rev. Thomas Coke, the Rev. Francis Asbury and Others*. Philadelphia: Charles Cist, 1785.

Neely, Thomas Benjamin. *Journal of the General Conference, 1792*. Cincinnati: Curts and Jennings, 1899.

Sherman, David *History of the Revisions of the Discipline of the Methodist Episcopal Church*. New York: Nelson and Phillips, 1874.

#### **i. Primary Sources: Early Histories**

Bangs, Nathan. *A History of the Methodist Episcopal Church*. 4 vols. New York: Philips and Hunt, 1880.

Barnes, Annie Maria. *Scenes in Pioneer Methodism*. Nashville: Publishing House of M.E. Church, South, 1890.

Cannon, Noah Calwell. *A History of the African Methodist Episcopal Church*. Rochester: Strong and Dawson, 1842.

Dixon, James. *Methodism in America: With the Personal Narrative of the Author During a Tour through a Part of the United States and Canada*. London: John Mason, 1849.

Drinkhouse, Edward J. *History of Methodist Reform: Synoptical of General Methodism 1703 to 1898*. 2 Vols. Norwood, Mass.: Norwood Press, 1899.

Finley, James B. *Sketches of Western Methodism*. Cincinnati: Methodist Book Concern, 1855.

Lednum, John. *A History of the Rise of Methodism in America Containing Sketches of Methodist Itinerant Preachers From 1736-1785*. Philadelphia: Published by the Author, 1862.

Lee, Jesse. *A Short History of the Methodists*. Baltimore: Magill and Clime Booksellers, 1810.

Stevens, Abel. *A Compendious History of American Methodism*. New York:

Carlton and Porter, 1867.

\_\_\_\_\_. *The History of the Methodist Episcopal Church in the United States of America*. 4 Vols. New York: Carlton and Porter, 1864.

Tanner, Benjamin Tucker. *An Outline of Our History and Government for African Methodist Churchmen, Ministerial and Lay*. Philadelphia: A.M.E. Book Concern, 1884.

## ii. Primary Sources: Journals, Letters, Diaries, and Autobiographies

Allen, Richard. *Life, Experience, and Gospel Labours of the Rt. Rev. Richard Allen*. Philadelphia: Martin and Boden, Printers, 1833.

Asbury, Francis. *The Journal of the Rev. Francis Asbury, Bishop of the Methodist Episcopal Church, From August 7, 1771, to December 7, 1815*, ed. Elmer E. Clark, et al. 3 Vols. London: Epworth Press, 1958.

\_\_\_\_\_. *The Causes, Evils, and Cures of Heart and Church Divisions: Extracted from the works of Burroughs and Baxter*, ed. Thomas O. Summers. Nashville: Publishing House of the M.E. Church, South, 1890.

\_\_\_\_\_. "Discovery: Excerpts From Asbury's Journal," ed. Frederick E. Maser. *Methodist History* 9 (January 1971): 34-43.

\_\_\_\_\_. "Discovery: the Journal and Letters of Francis Asbury," ed. Frederick E. Maser. *Methodist History* 9 (October 1970): 53-57.

\_\_\_\_\_. "Extract of a Letter From the Rev. Francis Asbury to the Rev. Dr. Coke." *Methodist History* 3 (July 1965): 47-48.

\_\_\_\_\_. "Four Letters to Bishop Francis Asbury." *Methodist History* 11 (April 1973): 54-58.

\_\_\_\_\_. "The Lost Letters of Francis Asbury." *Methodist History* 39 (April 2001): 201-206.

\_\_\_\_\_. "Reminiscences of Bishop Asbury." *Methodist History* 1 (October 1962): 61-63. Reprinted from *Christian Advocate and Journal* 15:180, June 23 1841.

\_\_\_\_\_. "An Unpublished Asbury Letter: to Stephen Brooks, March 23 1796," ed. Frederick Maser. *Methodist History* 21 (July 1983): 238-240.

\_\_\_\_\_. "Unpublished Letters of Bishop Francis Asbury," ed. J. Manning Potts. *Methodist History* 1 (October 1962): 39-61.

- \_\_\_\_\_. "Unpublished Letters of Bishop Francis Asbury." *Methodist History* 2 (April 1964): 57-60.
- Asbury, Francis, et. al. "Some Newly Discovered Unpublished Letters, 1808-1825: F. Asbury, N. Bangs, and Others," ed. Frederick A. Norwood. *Methodist History* 3 (July 1965): 3-24.
- Asbury, Francis and Thomas Coke. "Some Coke and Asbury Material: Letters," *Methodist History* 22 (January 1984): 128-132.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Two Episcopal Letters: F. Asbury to Thomas Morrell and T. Coke to Richard Whatcoat," ed. Frederick E. Maser. *Methodist History* 37 (April 1999): 202-205.
- Asbury, Francis and Freeborn and Garrettson. "Lost Letters of Bishop Asbury: to Freeborn Garrettson," ed. Robert Drew Simpson. *Methodist History* 32 (January 1994): 99-105.
- Asbury, Francis and John Wesley. "The Excitement of a Rediscovery: Letters of F. Asbury and J. Wesley; 2pts," ed. Mark Shenise. *Methodist History* 33 (July 1995): 262-266.
- Bond, John Wesley. "John Wesley Bond's Reminiscences of Francis Asbury," ed. Robert Bull. *Methodist History* 4 (October 1965): 3-32.
- Boehm, Henry. *Reminiscences, Historical and Biographical, of Sixty-Four Years in the Ministry*. New York: Carlton and Porter, 1865.
- Brunson, Alfred. *A Western Pioneer; or, Incidents of the Life and Times of Rev. Alfred Brunson, A.M., D.D.* 2 Vols. Cincinnati: Walden and Stowe, 1880.
- Burke, William. *Autobiography of Rev. William Burke*. Cincinnati: Methodist Book Concern, 1855.
- Cartwright, Peter. *The Autobiography of Peter Cartwright*. Nashville: Abingdon, 1984.
- Coke, Thomas. *The Journals of Thomas Coke*, ed. John A. Vickers. Nashville: Kingswood, 2005.
- Crowell, Seth. *The Journal of Seth Crowell; Containing an Account of His Travels as a Methodist Preacher for Twelve Years*. New York: J.C. Totten, 1813.
- Dow, Lorenzo. *The Dealings of God, Man, and the Devil as Exemplified in the Life, Experience, and Travels of Lorenzo Dow*. 2 Vols. Cincinnati: Applegate, Pounsford and Co., 1874.
- Garrettson, Freeborn. *American Methodist Pioneer: the Life and Journals of the Rev.*

- Freeborn Garrettson, 1752-1827. Rutland, Vt.: P Academy Books, 1984.
- Elaw, Zilpha. "Memoirs of the Life, Religious Experience, Ministerial Travels, and Labors of Mrs. Zilpha Elaw." In *Sisters of the Spirit: Three Black Women's Autobiographies of the Nineteenth Century*, ed. William L. Andrews, 49-160. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986.
- Foote, Julia. "A Brand Plucked from the Fire: An Autobiographical Sketch by Mrs. Julia A. J. Foote." In *Sisters of the Spirit: Three Black Women's Autobiographies of the Nineteenth Century*, ed. William L. Andrews, 161-234. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986.
- Jackson, Thomas, ed. *Lives of the Early Methodist Preachers: Chiefly Written by Themselves*. 4<sup>th</sup> Edition. 6 Vols. London: Wesleyan Conference Office, 1871.
- Jarratt, Devereux. *The Life of the Reverend Devereux Jarratt, rector of Bath parish, Dinwiddie County, Virginia*. Baltimore: Printed by Warner & Hanna, 1806.
- Jea, John. "The Life, History, and Unparalleled Sufferings of John Jea, the African Preacher." In *Black Itinerants of the Gospel: The Narratives of John Jea and George White*, ed. Graham Russell Hodges, 89-164. Madison: Madison House, 1993.
- Larrabee, William C. *Asbury and His Colaborers*, ed. D.W. Clark. 2 Vols. Cincinnati: Hitchcock and Walden, 1852.
- Lee, Jarena. "The Life Experience and Religious Experience of Jarena Lee." In *Sisters of the Spirit: Three Black Women's Autobiographies of the Nineteenth Century*, ed. William L. Andrews, 25-48. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Religious Experiences and Journal of Mrs. Jarena Lee*. Nashville: AMEC Sunday School Union, 1991.
- Maser, Frederick. "The Whereabouts of Some Wesley and Asbury Letters." *Methodist History* 34 (January 1996): 119-121.
- Myers, Lewis. "Lewis Myers' Reminiscences of Francis Asbury," ed. Robert Bull. *Methodist History* 7 (October 1968): 5-10.
- Osborn, Elbert. *Passages in the Life and Ministry of Elbert Osborn, an Itinerant Minister of the Methodist Episcopal Church, illustrating the Providence and Grace of God*. New York: Published for the Author, 1857.
- Phebus, Geo. A. *Beams of Light on Early Methodism in America: Chiefly Drawn from the Diary, Letters, Manuscripts, Documents, and Original Tracts of Rev. Ezekiel Cooper*. New York: Phillips and Hunt, 1887.

- Rankin, Thomas. "A Short Account of Mr. Thomas Rankin." *The Arminian Magazine: Consisting of Extracts and Original Treatises on Universal Redemption* 2 (1779): 182-198.
- Roberts, George. "George Roberts' Reminiscences of Francis Asbury," ed. Robert Bull. *Methodist History* 5 (July 1967): 25-35.
- Spicer, Thomas. *Autobiography of Rev. Tobias Spencer; Containing Incidents and Observations; also Some Account of his Visit to England*. Boston: C.H. Peirce and Company, 1851.
- Travis, Joseph. *Autobiography of Rev. Joseph Travis, A.M.* Nashville: E. Stevenson and F.A. Owen, 1856.
- Wakeley, J.B. *The Patriarch of One Hundred Years; Reminisces, Historical and Biographical of Rev. Henry Boehm*. New York: Nelson and Phillips, 1875.
- Ware, Thomas. *Sketches of the Life and Travels of Rev. Thomas Ware*. New York: G. Lane and P.P. Sandford, 1842.
- Wesley, Charles. *Charles Wesley: A Reader*, ed. John R. Tyson. New York: Oxford University Press, 1989.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *The Journal of the Rev. Charles Wesley, M.A., Sometime Student of Christ Church, Oxford: to which are appended selections from his correspondence and poetry*, ed. Thomas Jackson. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1980.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Representative Verse of Charles Wesley*, ed. Frank Baker. London: Epworth, 1962.
- Wesley, John. *The Elusive Mr. Wesley*, ed. Richard Heitzenrater. 2 Vols. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1984.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *The Letters of Rev. John Wesley*, ed. John Telford. 8 Vols. London: Epworth, 1931.
- Whatcoat, Richard. *To Go and Serve the Desolate Sheep in America: The Diary/Journal of Bishop Richard Whatcoat, 1789-1800*, ed. Samuel J. Rogel. London: Academica Press, 2001.
- White, George. "A Brief Account of the Life, Experience, Travels, and Gospel Labours of George White, an African." In *Black Itinerants of the Gospel: The Narratives of John Jea and George White*, ed. Graham Russell Hodges, 51-88. Madison: Madison House, 1993.
- Wightman, William May. *Life of William Capers, D.D., One of the Bishops of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South*. Nashville: J. B. M'Ferrin, 1858.
- Young, Jacob. *Autobiography of a Pioneer; or, the Nativity, Experience, Travels, and*

*Ministerial Labors of Rev. Jacob Young.* Cincinnati: Cranston and Curtis, 1857.

### iii. Primary Materials: Sermons and Treatises

Bangs, Nathan. *The Reformer Reformed: Or, a Second Part of the Errors of Hopkinsianism Detected and Refuted.* New York: John C. Totten, 1818.

\_\_\_\_\_. *Vindication of the Methodist Episcopacy.* New York: Bangs and Mason, 1820.

Bond, Thomas. *An Appeal to the Methodists in Opposition to the Changes Proposed in their Church Government.* Baltimore: Armstrong and Plaskitt, 1827.

Bond, Thomas, et al. *A Narrative and Defence of the Proceedings of the Methodist Episcopal Church in Baltimore City Station Against Certain Local Preachers and Lay-Members of Said Church by the Persons Who Preferred and Sustained the Charges.* Baltimore: Armstrong and Plaskitt, 1828.

Coke, Thomas. *The Substance of a Sermon, Preached at Baltimore, in the State of Maryland, Before the General Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church: On the 27th of December, 1785, at the Ordination of the Rev. Francis Asbury, to the Office of a Superintendent.* Baltimore: Goddard and Langworthy, 1785.

Cooper, Ezekiel. *The Substance of a Funeral discourse, Delivered at the Request of the Annual Conference, on Tuesday, the 23d of April, 1816, in St. George's Church, Philadelphia: On the Death of the Rev. Francis Asbury of the Methodist Episcopal Church.* Philadelphia: Jonathan Pounder, 1819.

Dow, Lorenzo. *History of Cosmopolite.* Philadelphia: Printed by Joseph Rakestraw, 1816.

Emory, John. *A Defence of "Our Fathers" and of the Original Organization of the Methodist Episcopal Church, Against the Rev. Alexander McCaine and Others; with Historical and Critical Notices of Early American Methodism.* New York: Bangs and Emory, 1827.

Fisk, Wilbur. *Calvinist Controversy: Embracing a Sermon on Predestination and Election; and Several Numbers on the Same Subject.* New York: Phillips and Hunt, 1880.

Garrettson Freeborn. *A Letter to the Rev. Lyman Beecher.* Boston: Thomas Rowe, 1817.

Gorham, B.W. *Camp Meeting Manual, a Practice Book for the Camp Ground.* Boston: H.V. Degen, 1854.



- McCaine, Alexander. *A Defence of the Truth As Set Forth in the "History and Mystery of Methodist Episcopacy Being a Reply to John Emory's "Defence of Our Fathers."* Baltimore: Sherwood and Co., 1850.
- O'Kelly, James. *Vindication of the Author's Apology: with Reflections on the Reply, and a Few Remarks on Bishop Asbury's Annotations on his Book of Discipline.* Raleigh: Joseph Gales, 1801.
- Reid, N.F. *Sermons and Speeches of the Rev. N.F. Reid, D.D. of North Carolina.* Raleigh, N.C.: E.J. Hale and Son, 1874.
- Shinn, Asa. *An Essay on the Plan of Salvation: in which the Several Sources of Evidence are Examined and Applied to the Interesting Doctrine of Redemption, in its relation to the Government and Moral Attributes of the Deity.* Baltimore: Neal, Wills and Cole, 1813.
- Snethen, Nicholas. *A Discourse on the Death of the Rev. Francis Asbury: Late Bishop of the Methodist Episcopal Church in the United States.* Baltimore: John J. Harrod, 1816
- \_\_\_\_\_. *A Reply to an Apology for Protesting Against the Methodist Episcopal Government.* Philadelphia: Printed by Henry Tuckniss, 1800.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Snethen on Lay Representations, or Essays on Lay Representation and Church Government. Collected from the Wesleyan Repository, the Mutual Rights, and the Mutual Rights and Christian intelligencer, from 1820 to 1829 inclusive, and now republished in a chronological order with an introduction by the Rev. Nicholas Snethen.* Baltimore: John Harrod, 1835.
- Soule, Joshua. *A Sermon on the Death of the Rev. Francis Asbury, Senior Bishop of the Methodist Episcopal Church in the United States of America: Preached in the Methodist Episcopal Church in Eutaw-Street, Baltimore, on the 12th May, 1816.* New York: J.C. Totten, 1816.
- Wesley, John. *The Sunday Service of the Methodists in North America. With Other Occasional Services.* London, 1784.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Thoughts on Slavery.* Philadelphia: Joseph Crukshank, 1773.

## C. Secondary Sources

### 1. Secondary Sources: Historical Overviews

- Boylan, Anne M. *Sunday School: The Formation of an American Institution, 1790-1880.* New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988.

- Bucke, Emory S., ed. *The History of American Methodism*. 3 volumes. New York: Abingdon Press, 1964.
- Campbell, James T. *Songs of Zion: The African Methodist Episcopal Church in the United States and South Africa*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1995.
- Cummings, A.W. *The Early Schools of Methodism*. New York: Phillips and Hunt, 1886.
- Dickerson, Dennis C. *Religion, Race, and Region: Research Notes on A.M.E. Church History*. Nashville: AMEC Sunday School Union/Legacy Publishers, 1995.
- Hempton, David. *Methodism: Empire of the Spirit*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005.
- Jennings, H.C. *The Methodist Book Concern: A Romance of History*. New York: Methodist Book Concern, 1924.
- Kirby, James E. *The Episcopacy in American Methodism*. Nashville: Abingdon, 2000.
- Kirby, James, Russell E. Richey, and Kenneth E. Rowe. *The Methodists*. Westport, Connecticut: Praeger, 1996.
- Maser, Frederick E. *The Dramatic Story of Early American Methodism*. New York: Abingdon Press, 1965.
- Richardson, Harry Van Buren. *Dark Salvation: The Story of Methodism as It Developed Among Blacks in America*. C. Eric Lincoln Series in Black Religion. Garden City, N.Y.: Anchor Press, 1976.
- Richey, Russell E. and Thomas E. Frank. *The Episcopacy in the Methodist Tradition: Perspectives and Proposals*. Nashville: Abingdon, 2004.
- Richey, Russell E. *The Methodist Conference in America: A History*. Nashville: Kingswood Books, 1996.
- Schmidt, Jean Miller. *Grace Sufficient: A History of Women in American Methodism, 1760-1939*. Nashville: Abingdon, 1999.
- Semple, Neil. *The Lord's Dominion: The History of Canadian Methodism*. Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen University's Press, 1996.
- Sweet, William Warren. *Methodism in American History*. Cincinnati: The Methodist Book Concern, 1933.

Taves, Ann. *Fits, Trances, and Visions; Experiencing Religion and Explaining Experience from Wesley to James*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1999.

Turner, John Munsey. *Wesleyan Methodism*. Peterborough, U.K.: Epworth, 2005.

Wardle, Addie Grace. *History of the Sunday School Movement in the Methodist Episcopal Church*. New York: Methodist Book Concern, 1918.

Whitlock, W.F. *The Story of the Book Concern*. Cincinnati: Jennings and Pye, 1903.

## 2. Secondary Sources: Early Republic

Andrews, Dee. *The Methodists and Revolutionary America, 1760-1800: the Shaping of an Evangelical Culture*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000.

Baker, Frank. *From Wesley to Asbury: Studies in Early American Methodism*. Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1976.

Boles, John. *The Great Revival: Beginnings of the Bible Belt*. Lexington, Ky. University Press of Kentucky, 1996.

Bruce, Dickson D. *And They All Sang Hallelujah: Plain-Folk Camp-Meeting Religion, 1800-1845*. Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1974.

Hatch, Nathan O. *The Democratization of American Christianity*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989.

Hatch, Nathan O. and John Wigger, eds. *Methodism and the Shaping of American Culture*. Nashville: Kingswood, 2001.

Holified, E. Brooks. *Theology in America: Christian Thought from the Age of the Puritans to the Civil War*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003.

Lang, Edward M. *Francis Asbury's Reading of Theology; a Bibliographic Study*. Evanston, Ill.: Garrett Theological Seminary Library, 1972.

\_\_\_\_\_. "The Theology of Francis Asbury." Ph.D. diss., Northwestern University, 1972.

Lyerly, Cynthia Lynn. *Methodism and the Southern Mind, 1770-1810*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1998.

Mathews, Donald G. *Religion in the Old South*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1977.

\_\_\_\_\_. *Slavery and Methodism: a Chapter in American Morality, 1780-*

1845. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1965.
- Owen, Christopher. *The Sacred Flame of Love: Methodism and Society in Nineteenth-Century Georgia*. Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1998.
- Price, Fred W. "The Role of the Presiding Elder in the Growth of the Methodist Episcopal Church, 1784-1832." Ph.D. diss., Drew University, 1987.
- Richey, Russell E. *Early American Methodism*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991.
- Ruth, Lester. *A Little Heaven Below: Worship at Early Methodist Quarterly Meetings*. Nashville: Kingswood Books, 2000.
- Schneider, A. Gregory. *The Way of the Cross Leads Home: The Domestication of American Methodism*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993.
- Smith, Timothy L. *Revivalism and Social Reform in Mid-Nineteenth-Century America*. New York: Abingdon Press, 1957.
- Spellmann, Norman Woods. "The General Superintendency in American Methodism, 1784-1870." Ph.D. diss., Yale University, April 1961.
- Wigger, John H. *Taking Heaven by Storm: Methodism and the Rise of Popular Christianity in America*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1998.
- Williams, William. *The Garden of American Methodism: the Delmarva Peninsula, 1769-1820*. Wilmington: Published for the Peninsula Conference of the United Methodist Church by Scholarly Resources, 1984.

### 3. Secondary Sources: Biographies

- Ayers, Samuel Gardner. *Methodist Heroes of Other Days*. Cincinnati: the Methodist Book Concern, 1916.
- Bangs, Nathan. *The Life of the Rev. Freeborn Garrettson: Compiled from his Printed and Manuscript Journals*. New York: O. Lane and C.B. Tippet, 1845.
- Candler, Warren A. *Life of Thomas Coke*. Nashville: M.E.C.S. Publishing House, 1923.
- Clark, D.W. *The Life and Times of Rev. Elijah Hedding, D.D.; Late Senior Bishop of the Methodist Episcopal Church*. New York: Carlton and Porter, 1857.
- Clowes, Chorley E. *Men and Movements in the American Episcopal Church*. New York: Scribner's, 1946.

- Crowther, Jonathan. *Life of the Rev. Thomas Coke*. Leeds: Edward Baines, 1815.
- Du Bose, Horace M. *Life of Joshua Soule* Nashville: M.E.C.S. Publishing House, 1916.
- Emory, Robert. *The Life of John Emory*. New York: George Lane, 1841.
- Gorrie, P. Douglass. *The Lives of Eminent Methodist Ministers*. Auburn: Derby and Miller, 1853.
- Heitzenrater, Richard. *Wesley and the People Called Methodists*. Nashville: Abingdon, 1995.
- Hoss, E.E. *William McKendree: a Biographical Study*. Nashville: M.E.C.S. Publishing House, 1916.
- Jackson, Thomas. *The Life of the Rev. Charles Wesley*. New York: G. Lane and P.P. Sandford, 1842.
- Knight, John A. *John William Fletcher and the Early Methodist Tradition*. Ph.D. diss., Vanderbilt University, 1966.
- MacClenny, W.E. *The Life of Rev. James O'Kelly and the Early History of the Christian Church in the South*. Raleigh, N.C.: Edwards and Broughton Printing Company, 1910.
- Meredith, William H. *Jesse Lee: a Methodist Apostle*. New York: Eaton and Mains, 1909.
- Newport, Kenneth G.C. and Ted A. Campbell. *Charles Wesley: Life, Literature, and Legacy*. Peterborough, U.K.: Epworth, 2007.
- Paine, Robert. *Life and Times of William McKendree, Bishop of the Methodist Episcopal Church*. Nashville: M.E.C.S., 1922.
- Phoebus, William. *Memories of Bishop Whatcoat*. New York: J. Allen, 1828.
- Rudolph, L.C. *Francis Asbury*. Nashville: Abingdon, 1966.
- Salter, Darius L. *America's Bishop: The Life of Francis Asbury*. Nappanee, IN: Francis Asbury Press, 2003.
- Shipley, David. *Methodist Arminianism in the Theology of John Fletcher*. Ph.D. diss., Yale University, 1942.
- Stevens, Abel. *Life and Times of Nathan Bangs, D.D.* New York: Carlton and Porter, 1863.
- Toulouse, Mark G. and James O. Duke. *Makers of Christian Theology in America*.

Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1997

Vickers, John. *Thomas Coke: Apostle of Methodism*. London: Epworth, 1969.

Wakeley, J.B, *The Heroes of Methodism: Containing Sketches of Eminent Methodist Ministers, and Characteristic Anecdotes of their Personal History*. New York: Carlton and Porter, 1857.

#### **4. Secondary Sources: Articles, 1783-1900**

"Bishop Asbury's Errors." *The Quarterly Review of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South* 30 (1889): 195-203.

"Francis Asbury." *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* 33 (June to November, 1866): 210-221.

#### **5. Articles, 1901-1949**

Ayres, Samuel Gardiner. "Francis Asbury and his Presbyterian Friends." *Methodist Quarterly Review* 66 (1917): 467-475.

Brooks, Eugene Clyde. "Francis Asbury an Educational Reformer." *Methodist Quarterly Review* 65 (1916): 341-352.

Dempsey, Elam Franklin. "Francis Asbury the Theologian." *Methodist Quarterly Review* 65 (1916): 334-340.

Joy, James Richard. "Francis Asbury: a Founder of the American nation." *Methodist Review* 105 (1922): 70-76.

#### **6. Articles, 1950-1980**

Baker, Frank. "Americanizing of Methodism." *A.M.E. Zion Quarterly Review* 87 1975 (1975): 5-20.

Blankenship, Paul F. "Bishop Asbury and the Germans." *Methodist History* 4 (April 1966): 5-13.

Bradley, David. "Francis Asbury and the Development of African Churches in America." *Methodist History* 10 (October 1971): 3-29.

Brannan, Emora. "Episcopal Overtures to Coke and Asbury During the Christmas Conference, 1784." *Methodist History* 14 (April 1976): 203-212.

- Chandler, Douglas R. "Towards the Americanizing of Methodism." *Methodist History* 13 (October 1974): 3-16.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Francis Asbury and His Difficulties With John Wesley and Thomas Rankin." *Methodist History* 3 (April 1965): 3-19.
- Godbold, Albea. "Methodist Episcopacy." *Methodist History* 11 (October 1972): 15-29.
- Gravely, Will B. "African Methodists and the Rise of Black Denominationalism," in *Perspectives on American Methodism: Interpretive Essays*, ed. Russell E. Richey, Kenneth E. Rowe, and Jean Miller Schmidt, 108-126. Nashville: Kingswood Books, 1993.
- Hood, Fred. "Community and the Rhetoric of Freedom: Early American Methodist Worship." *Methodist History* 9 (October 1970): 13-25.
- May, James. "Francis Asbury and Thomas White: a Refugee Preacher and his Tory Patron." *Methodist History* 14 (April 1976): 141-164.
- Norwood, Frederick. "James O'Kelly: Methodist Maverick." *Methodist History* 4 (April 1966): 14-28.
- Shockley, Grant S. "Methodism, Society and Black Evangelism in America: Retrospect and Prospect." *Methodist History* 12 (July 1974): 145-182.
- Smith, Warren Thomas. "Christmas Conference." *Methodist History* 6 (July 1968): 3-27.
- Steinmetz, David C. "Asbury's Doctrine of Ministry." *Duke Divinity School Review* 40 (Winter 1975): 10-17.
- Warman, John B. "Francis Asbury and Jacob Albright." *Methodist History* 16 (January 1978): 75-81.

## 7. Articles, 1981-present

- Andrews, Dee "The People and the Preachers at St George's: an Anatomy of a Methodist Schism." In *Rethinking Methodist History: a Bicentennial Historical Consultation*, eds. Russell E. Richey, Kenneth E. Rowe (Nashville: United Methodist Publishing House, 1985): 125-133.
- Broadnax, Reginald. "Was James Varick the Founder of the AME Zion Church?" *AME Zion Quarterly Review* 109 (January 1997): 33-50.
- Cheek, H. Lee, Jr. "Original Diversity: Bishops Allen, Asbury and Black

- Methodism." *Methodist History* 35 (April 1997): 188-191.
- Dunlap, E. Dale. "The United Methodist System of Itinerant Ministry." *Rethinking Methodist History: a Bicentennial Historical Consultation*, eds. Russell E. Richey, Kenneth E. Rowe (Nashville, Tenn : United Methodist Publishing House, 1985): 18-28.
- Gorrell, Donald K. "'Ride a Circuit or Let it Alone': Early Practices that Kept the United Brethren, Albright People and Methodists Apart." *Methodist History* 25 (October 1986): 4-16.
- Heitzenrater, Richard, "At Full Liberty: Doctrinal Standards in Early American Methodism," in *Doctrine and Theology of the United Methodist Church*, ed. Thomas Langford (Nashville: Kingswood Books, 1991): 109-124.
- Lyerly, Cynthia Lynn. "Francis Asbury and the Opposition to Early Methodism: Methodism's Effect on Society." *Methodist History* 31 (July 1993): 224-235.
- Maser, Frederick. "When did Methodism Become a Church?" *Methodist History* 25 (July 1987): 258-259.
- Mills, Frederick V. "Methodist Preaching 1798-1840: Form and Function," *Methodist History* 43 (2004), 3-16.
- Peluso, Gary E. "Francis Asbury on American Public Life: Sacred and Secular Orders." *Methodist History* 30 (July 1992): 206-216.
- Smith, John Abernathy. "Cokesbury College: Kingswood in America; 18th Century Methodist College." *Methodist History* 28 (July 1990): 219-236.
- Smith, Timothy L. "Francis Asbury: the Making of a Bishop and the Americanization of a Loyalist." In *A Spectrum of Thought: Essays in Honor of Dennis Kinlaw*, ed. Michael L. Peterson (Wilmore, Ky: Francis Asbury Publishing Company, 1982): 95-111.
- Stein, K. James. "Baltimore 1784: Historical - Theological – Ecclesiastical." *Methodist History* 23 (October 1984): 25-43.
- Wynne, Edward. "Bishop Asbury and the Sunday School." *Methodist History* 18 (July 1980): 272-276



