With the closing article we have a change of pace from the lecture to the sermon, from the academic to the devotional, from the study of the past to the challenge of the present. We are fortunate in being able to reveal in action one of the prophetic Methodist preachers of our own day. We present excerpts from an address delivered by one of our own distinguished alumni, Bishop Kenneth Goodson, on the present quadrennial theme of the United Methodist Church—"A New Church for a New World." Those who know Bishop Goodson will recognize his racy style and individual accent in this lightly edited version preserved by means of recording tape from an occasion at which I myself was present. I can personally witness to the great emotional impact originally made by our colleague upon a huge gathering, and I believe that some of his anecdotes and examples of somewhat unorthodox types of ministry tailored for modern need may well provide a healthy stimulus to all of us. Thus our study of the Methodist preachers of yesterday, reinforced by a living document furnished by one of today, may enable us to be more nearly the devoted, enthusiastic, and adventurous Methodist preachers who are needed for the different world of tomorrow.

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Wesley's Early Preachers in America

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The scattered Methodist societies which arose in America during the 1760's owed their birth and initial sustenance not only to individuals but to a general movement of pietism and revival which had long been spreading over Europe and America, being known here as The Great Awakening. One of the chief carriers of the religious infection was a member of the Wesleys' Holy Club at Oxford, George Whitefield, and some American pockets of Methodist fellowship retained direct though tenuous links with his wide-ranging evangelism. The individuals who formed the focal points of these pioneer Methodist societies, however, were for the most part local preachers who had emigrated from Britain for personal reasons—men of limited intellectual and administrative gifts, but eager to reproduce in as close a replica as possible the spiritual surroundings which they had regretfully left behind in their home country.

Both in Great Britain and in other countries Methodism has usually propagated itself by means of converted laymen, who from telling others of their own experience of salvation have graduated to preaching from a text, the exhorter thus becoming the preacher. At first these men were "local" preachers, exercising a "spare time" ministry in the area where they lived and worked. From their ranks emerged the specialists, the itinerant preachers—still laymen—who under Wesley's direction served various circuits, itinerating week by week within the circuits, and travelling year by year from one circuit to another, all the time supported financially by the Methodist people. A local preacher whose livelihood (or lack of it) took him to another area or country frequently gathered around himself a group of sympathizers and converts who met regularly for Christian fellowship—a Methodist society. This society the local preacher tried to oversee as best he could, but usually came to realise that this task demanded different talents and much more time than that of evangelical preaching. He thereupon appealed to Wesley or to one of his itiner-

ants to supply the leadership and organization necessary to keep alive the spiritual glow.

This was in effect what happened in the American colonies. After emigrating from England to New York, Thomas Taylor discovered an infant Methodist society which had been raised by Philip Embury (an Irish local preacher)and strengthened by Captain Thomas Webb (an English local preacher). After five months among the New York Methodists, who accepted him sufficiently to make him one of the trustees of the land which they had purchased for building a permanent headquarters, Taylor realised that expert help was highly desirable. On April 11, 1768 he wrote direct to Wesley, asking for guidance in drawing up a trust deed for the proposed preaching house, and making the convincing point that although financial help would not be refused this was not their main need:

> We want an able, experienced preacher; one who has both gifts and graces necessary for the work. God has not despised the day of small things. There is a real work begun in many hearts by the preaching of Mr. Webb and Mr. Embury: but although they are both useful, and their hearts in the work, they want many qualifications necessary for such an undertaking, where they have none to direct them. And the progress of the gospel here depends much on the qualifications of the preachers. . . . We must have a man of wisdom, of sound faith, and a good disciplinarian; one whose heart and soul are in the work.

If such a man could be sent, Taylor continued, "I doubt not but by the goodness of God such a flame would be soon kindled as would never stop until it reached the great South Sea."[1]

Wesley presented the gist of Taylor's letter to his preachers meeting in Conference at Bristol that August, accompanied by a note (probably from Thomas Webb) about "a few people in Maryland who had lately been awakened under the ministry of Robert Strawbridge," and who added their own "pressing call" for help.[2] Wesley left the matter for their consideration until the following Conference. Joseph Pilmoor, for one, was "deeply impressed with a longing desire to visit America."[3] A month or two later, reinforced by the pleas of the Swedish chaplain from Philadelphia, Dr. Wrangel,[4]

1. *Methodist History* III, 3-15 (January, 1965), especially pp, 3, 14.
2. John Atkinson, *The Beginnings of the Wesleyan Movement in America*, (New York: Hunt & Eaton, 1896), pp. 101, 109.
3. Atkinson, *op. cit.*, pp. 101, 108-11; cf. W. W. Sweet, *Men of Zeal* (New York: Abingdon, 1935), p. 89.
4. John Wesley, *Journal*, Standard Edition (London: Epworth Press, 1938), V. 290.

Wesley printed Taylor's appeal as an eight-page pamphlet entitled "A Letter, &c." A copy of this he sent to each of his Assistants—the itinerant preachers in charge of the various circuits—with instructions to read it publicly and to receive subscriptions for the brethren in New York. He continued to drop hints to individual preachers such as Christopher Hopper: "If Joseph Cownley or you have a mind to step over to New York, I will not say you nay. I believe it would help your own health and help many precious souls."[5]

At the Conference which met at Leeds on August 3, 1769, Wesley finally issued the open challenge to which all this had been leading: "We have a pressing call from our brethren at New York (who have built a preaching-house) to come over and help them. Who is willing to go?" Although several, including Pilmoor, had almost certainly resolved to volunteer, they diffidently remained silent. It seems certain that Wesley canvassed for two men rather than the one requested by Taylor, as he also did on subsequent occasions, and looked for two men who could work amicably as senior and junior partner. John Pawson stated that "several of the brethren offered to go if I would go along with them."[6] On the following day the call was repeated.[7] The volunteers were forthcoming, and the Minutes record Wesley's choice: "Richard Boardman and Joseph Pilmoor."[8]

Altogether from 1769 to 1774 Wesley sent over eight of his itinerants in matched pairs, with one each time as the recognized leader. All were young men in their early thirties except for the two chosen in 1771, Francis Asbury and Richard Wright; Asbury was only 26 and Wright apparently younger still. Following them in 1773 were two very experienced men to face increasing problems, Thomas Rankin and George Shadford. In 1774 came two men with lesser experience, James Dempster and Martin Rodda. After the successful Revolution Wesley sent two more, preachers with many more years and experience to their credit than any of their predecessors, and ordained to boot, in order to salvage whatever might remain of Methodist traditions and discipline in the liberated colonies. To a greater or lesser degree each of these ten men helped to impress Wesley's

5. John Wesley, *Letters*, ed. John Telford (London: Epworth Press, 1931), V:123.
6. *Lives of Early Methodist Preachers*, ed. Thomas Jackson, 6 vols. (London: Wesleyan Conference Office, 1872), IV:37.
7. Sweet, *op. cit.*, p. 91.
8. *Minutes of the Methodist Conferences* (London: Wesleyan Conference Office, 1862), I:86.

ideas upon American Methodism, though the key period for this process was the first decade, and the key figure the man who remained behind when his loyalist brethren left for England, Francis Asbury.

One important element in American Methodist progress during the 1770's was the struggle for power between the pioneer local preachers and their absent leader, acting through these itinerant preachers dispatched with delegated authority to guide the fortunes of the new societies. Regarded in another way this was a struggle also between a tendency to somewhat formless revivalism and organized churchmanship. It is true that the immigrant local preachers, notably Robert Strawbridge in Maryland, warmed enthusiastically to the growing community of converts looking to them for leadership, and strove to organize them into a self-sufficient church complete with ministry and sacraments. It is also true on the other hand that neither Wesley nor his itinerants despised emotional evangelism. Nevertheless on the issue of revivalism versus church order there existed a clear line of demarcation between the emigrants and Wesley.

Out of the resulting tension, and to some extent arising from it, was forged a vigorous new denomination, tautly disciplined and closely organized, yet at the same time flexible enough to grasp every evangelical opportunity presented by the American frontier. Upon the expanding frontier, therefore, Methodism proved a formidable rival to the Baptists, about whom Asbury made the comment: "Like ghosts they haunt us from place to place."[9]

Before leaving London the first two British itinerants, Boardman and Pilmoor, sought and received additional advice and blessing not only from Charles Wesley but also from that veteran missionary George Whitefield, whom John Wesley had asked to keep an eye on them when he embarked on what proved to be his last visit to America.[10] Both in organizing the societies and in tempering the eager outcroppings of undisciplined emotionalism they were far more successful than was sometimes acknowledged, either by their contemporaries or by some later historians. After a very stormy passage they disembarked at Gloucester Point, New Jersey on October 21, 1769, and were surprised to discover in nearby Philadelphia another Methodist society, which was already receiving the friendly succour of Captain Webb and of Robert Williams. Williams had recently arrived from Ireland, where he had served for three years as an itinerant preacher in a subsidiary probationary capacity; Wesley had accepted his offer to work in America on a completely voluntary basis on condition that he would subject himself to the authority of the regular itinerants who would soon follow him out.[11]

9. *The Journal and Letters of Francis Asbury*, ed. Elmer T. Clark (Nashville: Abingdon, 1958), I:176.

10. Atkinson, *op. cit.*, pp. 119, 125-6; Wesley, *Letters*, V:184.

Boardman, who was the senior by a few months and had served six years as an itinerant (at least four as an Assistant) against Pilmoor's three (none as Assistant), was now Wesley's Assistant in charge of Methodism throughout the American continent—Circuit No. 50 in the British *Minutes* for the following year. After discussion he decided that the two of them must divide forces; leaving his junior colleague to organize the work in Philadelphia he went on to their original destination of New York.

Pilmoor proved himself fully adequate to this first major responsibility. He attended worship at St. Paul's Church and secured the cooperation of the local Anglican clergyman, the Rev. William Stringer; he preached in the open air; he introduced the good British Methodist practice of a preaching service at 5.0 a.m. before people went off to their work; he publicly read and explained Wesley's *Nature, Design, and General Rules of the United Societies*, of which a new edition (making at least nineteen thus far) had just been published. Soon he was introducing prayer meetings and the love feast, visiting the local prisoners (and preaching a charity sermon for them), attempting a preaching itinerary in the rural areas, and helping to secure Old St. George's as a permanent building for the parent society in Philadelphia, and settled upon the type of trust officially recommended by Wesley.[12] Once established in Old St. George's Pilmoor publicly nailed his Methodist colours to the mast, so that his hearers would all know what he as Wesley's agent stood for:

1. That the Methodist society was never designed to make a separation from the Church of England, or to be looked upon as a church.
2. That it was at first and is still intended for the benefit of all those of every denomination who, being truly convinced of sin and the danger they are exposed to, earnestly desire to flee from the wrath to come.
3. That any person who is so convinced, and desires admittance into the society, will readily be received as a *probationer*.
4. That those who walk according to the oracles of God, and thereby

11. W. C. Barclay, *Early American Methodism, 1779-1844* (New York: Board of Missions, 1949), I:29-32; cf. Atkinson, *op. cit.*, pp. 130, 141-2, and *Arminian Magazine*, 1784, p. 163; for Williams's visit to Philadelphia in September 1769, see A. W. Cliffe, *The Glory of our Methodist Heritage* (Philadelphia, 1956), pp. 72-3.

12. J. P. Lockwood, *The Western Pioneers* (London: Wesleyan Conference Office, 1881), pp. 83-92; cf. Atkinson, *op. cit.*, pp. 147-160, 166-7, 172-5.

give proof of their sincerity, will readily be admitted into full connection with the Methodists.

5. That if any person or persons in the society walk disorderly and transgress the holy law of God, we will admonish him of his error; we will strive to restore him in the spirit of meekness; we will bear with him for a time; but if he remain incorrigible and impenitent, we must then of necessity inform him that he is no longer a member of the society. . . .[13]

After five months Pilmoor claimed: "In Philadelphia there are now 182 in society to whom I have given tickets, and they meet in class and attend to all the discipline of the Methodists as well as the people in London or Bristol." That same entry was preceded by a prophetic note: "If we had more preachers—men of faith and prayer who would preach Christ Jesus the Lord—'tis probable the American Methodists would soon equal, if not exceed, the Europeans."[14]

Meantime Boardman was tracing a similar path in the New York area, though (one suspects) with not quite the vigour and finesse displayed by Pilmoor, to whom it was left later to introduce the love feast to the New York society and (more important) to straighten out the legal tangles over the new building there.[15] Like Pilmoor, Boardman seems to have made limited preaching itineraries around his headquarters, and to have been genuinely concerned about the rural areas. His first letter to Wesley reported: "There appears such a willingness in the Americans to hear the word as I never saw before. They have no preaching in some parts of the Back Settlements. I doubt not but an effectual door will be opened among them."[16]

Boardman and Pilmoor, however, suffered from the common human failing of not being able to do everything at the same time. To this was apparently added the complication that the man in charge, Boardman, was somewhat less able and forceful than his colleague, and was also living under the shadow of the recent death of his wife and young daughter.[17] Nor was Pilmoor inclined to undermine the

13. Atkinson, *op cit.*, pp. 159-60; this is largely a summary of Wesley's *General Rules.*

14. Lockwood, *op. cit.*, pp. 95-6. N.B. Robert Williams seems already to have printed class tickets, and issued them to the members in New York; see J. B. Wakeley, *Lost Chapters recovered from the early history of American Methodism* (New York: 1858), pp. 195, 414-5, 424. (Wakeley is in error in describing them as love feast tickets.)

15. Atkinson, *op. cit.*, pp. 175, 178-181, and Wakeley, *op. cit.*, pp. 199-206; see also my notes on the legal problems in *Methodist History* III (January, 1965), pp. 12-13.

16. *Arminian Magazine* (1784), p. 164.

17. Lockwood, *op. cit.*, p. 39.

authority of Boardman and take over the reins for himself. In spite of their eagerness to preach the gospel in the "back settlements," New York and Philadelphia clearly constituted key areas upon which initially they must concentrate. Successfully they introduced or reinforced most of the features appropriate to large city societies, and pleaded with Wesley for more trained helpers. Pilmoor wrote on May 5, 1770:

Brother Boardman and I are chiefly confined to the cities, and therefore cannot at present go much into the country, as we have more work upon our hands than we are able to perform. There is work enough for two preachers in each place, and if two of our brethren would come over I believe it would be attended with a great blessing, for then we could visit the places adjacent to the cities.[18]

There seems little doubt that the appeals for help which reached Wesley from both Boardman and Pilmoor were not only on account of the magnitude of the opportunity but because of the problem of maintaining the traditional Methodist discipline in view of the increasing independence of the local preachers. Embury in New York (until he left for Ashgrove in 1770) and Webb as preacher-at-large and pastor in his own Long Island estate were apparently content with their lot. Williams was more ambitious. He was in any case a little more than a local preacher, though a little less than a regular itinerant; as a tireless evangelist and colporteur he seems to have acted as a free lance, and his not uncommendable activities in publishing Methodist literature were eventually regarded as an overstepping of his powers. Williams had arrived a few weeks before Pilmoor and Boardman. Some months later came John King. He had never served as an itinerant in England, but as a local preacher Wesley regarded him as "stubborn and headstrong," and he gained a reputation for "screaming" while he preached. In view of his lack of credentials Pilmoor allowed him to serve some of the country societies only, and even then with extreme reluctance.[19] In his 1770 *Minutes* Wesley did indeed append the names of both Williams and King to those of Pilmoor and Boardman (in that order) on the American circuit, but they were dropped from the *Minutes* of 1771, almost certainly because of complaints from the regular itinerants.

Yet so overwhelmed did Boardman and Pilmoor find themselves by the problems and opportunities of New York and Philadelphia that they left Webb and Williams and King almost unsupervised.

18. *Arminian Magazine* (1784), p. 224.

19. Wesley, *Letters*, VI:166-7; Lockwood, *op. cit.*, p. 117.

When Pilmoor heard Williams preach a few times in Philadelphia he admired his sincerity, but noted: "His gifts are small, yet he may be useful to the country people, who are in general like sheep without shepherds."[20] Unfortunately Williams was preacher rather than pastor, and the country people largely remained without a shepherd, as did those in the other cities. Williams had preached in Baltimore before Pilmoor, as probably had King, but not until Pilmoor's visit in June 1772 were the *General Rules* expounded and a society organized.[21] Similarly Williams had landed in Norfolk, Virginia, and preached there subsequently, but it was left to Pilmoor to organize the first Methodist societies in Portsmouth and Norfolk in November 1772.[22] Pilmoor's extended journey into the south, however, during which he accomplished such consolidation, was not possible until Wesley had answered the call for reinforcements.

Far more dangerous—at least from the ecclesiastical standpoint of Wesley and his itinerants—was the status of Robert Strawbridge in Maryland. No one is yet absolutely certain just when he arrived from his native Ireland, where he had been one of Wesley's local preachers, but it is almost certain that he had been established as an evangelical leader for several years before Wesley's helpers arrived. He had been very effective in forming societies, building a log meeting house, inspiring his converts themselves to exhort, and had even begun to baptize and (apparently) to administer the Lord's Supper to his followers. Although Boardman may have attempted a preaching foray into Maryland, neither he nor Pilmoor undertook any serious supervision of Strawbridge's work. Pilmoor heard him preach "a plain, useful sermon" during a rare visit to Philadelphia in January 1770.[23] So far, so good. But he returned to be a law unto himself. Success naturally fed his self-confidence if not his self-esteem, and every year of his continued independence made the deferred but inevitable power struggle likely to be the more severe.

Wesley's mail contained not only appeals from Boardman and Pilmoor but complaints about them. Pilmoor had from the outset resisted Boardman's demands that they should change places three or four times a year, visualising himself as what he eventually became, an evangelical parish clergyman with settled headquarters—though

20. Lockwood, *op. cit.*, p. 86.
21. Atkinson, *op. cit.*, pp. 333-343.
22. *Ibid.*, pp. 354-62; cf. W. W. Sweet, *Virginia Methodism* (Richmond, Va.: Whittet & Shepperson, 1955), pp. 53-7.
23. Atkinson, *op. cit.*, p. 171.

in his zeal to "do good in the itinerant way" he did indeed refuse the possibility of ordination and a living in the West Indies.[24] Under the warmth of American generosity, both in praise and in money, even Boardman came to share Pilmoor's desire to spend most of his time as the pastor of a large society, with occasional preaching excursions into the country.

For whatever reason, help was clearly needed in America. On several occasions Wesley seriously pondered coming over himself. At any rate in 1771 he released two more men from his stations, out of the five who volunteered. They were both young men, apparently better designed to supplement than to supplant the labours of their predecessors. Richard Wright, who had been admitted on trial only the previous year, and even then not given a regular station, proved a broken reed, though during the two and a half years that he remained he did a little good. His head, also, seems to have been turned by American generosity and flattery.[25] The senior of the pair, Francis Asbury, was only 26 years old, and had had only four years' experience in country circuits, even then not as an Assistant. The choice did not seem unduly promising.

Asbury, nevertheless, whether so commissioned by Wesley or not, believed himself capable of doing a better job than his two seniors, and was prepared to shake things up, cost what it might. Less than a week after joining Boardman in New York his *Journal* noted:

> I remain in New York, though unsatisfied with our being both in town together. I have not yet the thing which I seek—a circulation of preachers, to avoid partiality and popularity. However, I am fixed to the Methodist plan, and do what I do faithfully, as to God. I expect trouble is at hand. This I expected when I left England.[26]

Two days later came a similar complaint:

> 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. I am in trouble, and more trouble is at hand, for I am determined to make a stand against all partiality. . . . I am come over with an upright intention, and through the grace of God I will make it appear: and I am determined that no man shall bias me with soft words and fair speeches. . . .[27]

The following spring Asbury's mind was somewhat eased by Boardman's plan that the two younger men should take over New

24. Lockwood, *op. cit.*, pp. 119, 125, 199-211; cf. Wakeley, *op. cit.*, pp. 211-8.
25. Asbury, *Journal*, I:37, 116.
26. *Ibid.*, I:10.
27. *Ibid.*, cf. p. 16.

York and Philadelphia for three months, while Boardman himself visited the Boston area and Pilmoor toured Virginia.[28] He was greatly disturbed, however, when he reached Philadelphia for the first time since his arrival there four months earlier, to find society discipline (as he thought) unduly relaxed, especially in the matter of strangers being given unlimited access to the private gatherings of the society. He found the same kind of thing when he took a tour of duty in New York, and put forward an agenda of sixteen points "for the better ordering of the spiritual and temporal affairs of the society." In this tightening of discipline he was supported by a letter from Wesley, and much strengthened on October 10 by a further letter appointing him Assistant in place of Boardman.[29] Already he had heard a whisper which seemed to imply that his senior colleagues were being recalled to England, and he had clearly added his own to other complaints about them.[30] Boardman took the news of Asbury's promotion over him with good grace, but Pilmoor felt that he had been betrayed, and was furious.[31]

As a matter of fact Asbury's added responsibility was for a short time only, and he must surely have known it. At the Leeds Conference in August 1772 Thomas Webb had stirred the assembly with an appeal for more preachers for America, and there appears to have been no lack of volunteers. For almost two years Wesley had been pleading with Thomas Rankin, one of his most experienced men, to help straighten the tangled American skein. Webb's appeal was just sufficient to tip the scales in America's favour, even though Rankin was wise enough to make allowances for Webb's "lively imagination."[32] Rankin, a man of 35 who had been an itinerant preacher for eleven years, at least seven of them as an Assistant, had even spent the year 1770-71 on the London circuit—when Wesley earmarked him for America. He chose as his companion George Shadford, who was a year younger, had begun his ministry as Rankin's junior colleague in Cornwall, and had now itinerated for four years, the latter two as Assistant.

It was arranged that the two men should each take charge of an English circuit until the spring, when they would leave for America with Webb. They sailed on Good Friday, April 9, 1773, accom-

28. See Wakeley, *op. cit.*, pp. 203-4, for notes on Boardman's introduction of Methodism into New England ahead of Jesse Lee.
29. *Journal*, I:41, 46; both letters have disappeared.
30. *Ibid.*, I:39, 41, 45.
31. *Ibid.*, I:48, 57.
32. *Lives of Early Methodist Preachers*, V:183-4.

panied by Webb's new bride and another English local preacher, Joseph Yerbury—his name is spelt in several different ways. Webb had persuaded Yerbury to try his hand at the American itinerancy, but the young man found that he was not cut out for the task and returned to England with Richard Wright.[33] The party arrived in Philadelphia on June 1, 1773.

Rankin, of course, being appointed "General Assistant" by Wesley, immediately took over responsibility from Asbury, and Asbury seems to have been genuinely happy to give place to such an obviously experienced disciplinarian.[34] Even Pilmoor and Boardman seemed to turn over a new leaf, though by December both had determined to return to England.[35] Although somewhat austere and even domineering in character, contrasting greatly with Shadford's warmth and spiritual informality, on the whole Rankin merited Asbury's gratitude. Asbury was cautious, however. In such a pioneering situation it was still frequently necessary for him to make his own working decisions, but he was very careful to add the proviso—"unless Mr. Rankin has given orders to the contrary."[36] As General Assistant Rankin in effect exercised an episcopal role, stationing the other preachers in their circuits, but limiting himself to none.[37]

Within six weeks of his arrival Thomas Rankin had summoned the preachers to America's first General Conference, designed to set the tone for a more tightly organized connection. By this the authority of Wesley and the British Conference was explicitly extended to America, and their doctrine and discipline as contained in their *Minutes* was accepted as the American norm. Any preachers who proved disloyal to the *Minutes* were no longer to be regarded as in connection with Wesley. Wesley's writings were only to be reprinted with his consent or that of his authorized itinerant representatives; Williams, who had erred at this point, was warned that he might sell what he had, but must reprint no more. No preacher was to administer the sacraments. The printed rule on this point was inflexible, but Asbury's manuscript account shows that an exception

33. *Ibid.*, V:185, and Rankin's MS diary (at Garrett Theological Seminary, Evanston, Illinois), for 5 June, 1774.
34. Asbury, *Journal*, I:82.
35. Rankin, MS diary for August 29, December 2, 1773.
36. Asbury, *Journal* III:19.
37. *Minutes of the Methodist Conferences, held annually in America, from 1773 to 1794, inclusive* (Philadelphia: Tuckniss, 1795), pp. 14-15; see also the much fuller MS minutes kept by Philip Gatch, copied from the *Western Christian Advocate* of May 19 and 26, 1837 by the Baltimore Conference Methodist Historical Society (1964), pp. 2-3; cf. Asbury, *Journal* I:246.

was made in the case of Strawbridge, who had been doing it for years, a practice winked at by Boardman and Pilmoor, so that even Asbury had felt "obliged to connive . . . for the sake of peace."[38] Strawbridge, however, was only to administer "under the particular direction of the Assistant." To Asbury was allotted the task of bringing Strawbridge to good old-fashioned Methodist wisdom. At the Maryland Quarterly Meeting on August 2, Asbury reports:

> I read a part of our minutes, to see if brother Strawbridge would conform; but he appeared to be inflexible. He would not administer the ordinances under our direction at all. Many things were said on the subject; and a few of the people took part with him.

A firm beginning had at last been made, however, and at least Strawbridge now knew that in Wesley's eyes he was clearly a renegade, only able to continue in defiance at the cost of a schism, which in a few years almost took place.

The names of Williams and King (as mentioned above) had been dropped from the British *Minutes* in 1771, clearly because these two were by Wesley regarded simply as local preachers assisting the regular itinerants. Nor were their names reinstated until 1773—there had just been time for an assurance to reach England that these two, at any rate, were prepared to toe the connectional line. The name of Strawbridge never appeared in the British *Minutes*, and in 1774 was dropped from the American *Minutes* after appearing in 1773, and dropped surely as an implied threat to his precarious status. In 1775 he was once more stationed, but then dropped completely. The reason is clearly illustrated in Asbury's *Journal* for August 27, 1775, describing a Virginia Quarterly Meeting: "Mr. Strawbridge discovered his independent principles, in objecting to our discipline. He appears to want no preachers: he can do as well or better than they." For better or worse the government of the Methodist societies *as a connection* was to remain firmly under the control of Wesley's official itinerant preachers and those who were loyal to them.

By the time of that first American Conference there had begun a trickle of British and native local preachers who were regarded as barely acceptable for the full-time itinerancy. In the 1773 *Minutes* ten preachers were stationed in six circuits. Of these men four were British itinerants—Rankin, Shadford, Asbury, and Wright. Five were British immigrants, all apparently formerly local preachers—King, Strawbridge, Yerbury, Williams, and Abraham Whitworth.

38. *Minutes*, 1773, pp. 5-6; Asbury, *Journal*, I:60, 85.

One only was a native American—William Watters, a promising young man of twenty-one, a product of Baltimore County, Maryland, though brought into the ministry by Williams rather than by Strawbridge.[39] Within a few years the four British-trained itinerants were to be reduced to one, and the American-raised to be greatly multiplied. By the standards of their most competent leaders, Rankin and Asbury, the latter were not too promising.

After an extended journey into the south in 1772 Pilmoor had noted—and if Rankin and Asbury ever read these words they would have said, "Amen!":

> God has undoubtedly begun a good work in these parts by the ministry of Messrs. John King, and Robert Williams, and Robert Strawbridge, but there is much danger from those who follow a heated imagination rather than the pure illumination of the Spirit and the direction of the Word of God. Wherever I go I find it necessary to bear testimony against all wildness, shouting, and confusion in the worship of God, and at the same time to feed and preserve the sacred fire which is certainly kindled in many hearts in this country.[40]

Eight years later a sympathetic evangelical clergyman confessed his fears to the great friend of the Methodists, the Rev. Devereux Jarratt of Bath parish, Dinwiddie County, Virginia: "The Methodists . . . countenance so many illiterate creatures void of all prudence and discretion that I have no expectation of any good and lasting effects from their misguided zeal." Jarratt's reply showed that he was in general agreement, though he pointed out: "Surely [Wesley's] preachers from Europe are not such lame hands as those among us."[41] Asbury himself frequently marvelled how such poor tools could be so greatly used: "The Lord hath done great things for these people, notwithstanding the weakness of the instruments, and some little irregularities."[42] In 1773 he pointed out to his parents in England that being stationed in Maryland he was "in the greatest part of the work," where they had "many country-born preachers and exhorters."[43] They exercised him greatly. On 25 August that year he licensed two exhorters; on the 28th he met Philip Ebert, who had begun to itinerate, but of whose fitness Asbury doubted; on the 29th

39. *A Short Account of . . . William Watters. Drawn up by himself* (Alexandria, 1806), pp. 18-30.
40. Quoted from his journal for Nov. 16, 1772 in W. W. Sweet, *Men of Zeal*, p. 103.
41. Asbury, *Journal* III:24-5.
42. *Ibid.*, I:50.
43. *Ibid.*, III:18.

Daniel Ruff broached the subject of his own call to the ministry while he and Asbury slept in the same bed, which shook under them because of his agitation; on September 1 Asbury lamented:

> I was in company with Brother Whitworth [who was expelled the following year] and Brother Strawbridge, . . . but was much distressed on account of so few preachers well qualified for the work, and so many who are forward to preach without due qualifications.[44]

Small wonder that there was erosion in the ranks of the American Methodist itinerancy. It is impossible to secure adequate information about many of the preachers, not even the date and place of their birth, or whether they were immigrants or American-born. Between 1773 and 1778, however, the American *Minutes* record the names of over sixty men, quite apart from the British itinerants. Of these only 28 remained in 1778—including ten admitted on trial that very year! A few were very young, like William Duke, who was accepted into the itinerancy when he was sixteen. Many of these left to get married, or the better to support a wife and family. In some instances a lack of aptitude was clearly demonstrated; others became "worn out," still others simply weary. One of the technical terms contributed by American Methodism was applied to the men thus lost to the itinerancy—they "located." Some of them became men of substance whose homes were thrown open as preaching centres, such as Colonel John Beck; others helped to raise important churches, as did William Moore, one of the founders of Lovely Lane Chapel, Baltimore. Upon the tough and courageous residue was soon to descend the destiny of staffing and steering a new denomination, fortunately under the supervising eye of Francis Asbury.

Rankin's second American Conference, held in May 1774, continued the work begun in the first. His journal recorded: "We proceeded in all things on the same plan as in England, which our Minutes will declare."[45] Travelling south from the Conference, he noted:

> I met all the societies as I rode along, and found many truly alive to God. Nevertheless, I saw the necessity of enforcing our discipline strongly wherever I came. I found a degree of slackness in this respect in almost every society. I am more and more convinced that unless the whole plan of our discipline is closely attended to we can never see that work, nor the fruit of our labours, as we would desire.[46]

44. *Ibid.*, I:91-2.
45. *Lives of Early Methodist Preachers*, V:200.
46. MS Journal, July 29, 1774.

The British Conference that year sent replacements for Pilmoor and Boardman, who had returned in January—James Dempster, an itinerant of ten years' standing, eight of them as an Assistant, and Martin Rodda, who had been an itinerant intermittently for seven years, the last as Dempster's colleague in Cornwall.

The new men came at a difficult period. Such was the anti-British atmosphere that within a year Rankin wrote telling Asbury that both Rodda and Dempster were returning to England, and he with them. In his reply Asbury apparently stated his opinion that to desert the Americans would be "an eternal dishonour to the Methodists," and shamed them into remaining for at least the time being.[47] For the time being they all stayed, and worked faithfully, and seemed to be giving special attention to training the American preachers who would soon be taking over the reins.[48] The declared policy of the British preachers was to remain neutral in political matters, and some of them were avowed pacifists. Yet their sympathies were naturally with the mother country. Martin Rodda apparently seems to have given them a bad reputation by injudicious loyalist propaganda, but in his favour it should be noted that he shared with Rankin the credit for bringing Freeborn Garrettson into the American ministry.[49]

In 1776 James Dempster left the itinerant work, though for a time he seems to have served the Methodist cause in beleaguered New York.[50] In September 1777 Rankin and Rodda left en route to England, though in fact they were not able to sail until the following spring. In March 1778 Shadford also gave up the work, leaving Asbury, in spite of attempted persuasion and admitted nostalgia, alone.[51]

In view of this eventuality there had been tearful farewells, allied with careful preparations, at the Conference of 1777, which had been preceded by a preparatory caucus. Question 11 (not reproduced in

47. Asbury, *Journal* I:161, 163.
48. Asbury at least was concerned about this. On an earlier occasion he had chided Williams for what he felt was faulty doctrine, and it seems fairly certain that he similarly passed on his opinions about their preaching technique to other rising preachers such as Samuel Spragg, who spoiled a good sermon with "a few pompous, swelling words," and Richard Webster, whose language contained "some little inaccuracies." (See his *Journal* I:97, 188, 195-6.)
49. *The Experience and Travels of Mr. Freeborn Garrettson* (Philadelphia: Hall, 1791), pp. 44-7, 82. See also below, pp. 176-7.
50. Barclay, *op. cit.*, p. 44.
51. Asbury, *Journal* I:228, 234-5, 243, 249, 263-9.

the printed *Minutes*) was one of the most significant in its acknowledgment of the past and its looking towards the future:

Q. 11. Can anything be done in order to lay a foundation for a future union, supposing the old preachers should be, by the times, constrained to return to Great Britain? Would it not be well for all who are willing to sign some articles of agreement, and strictly adhere to the same till other preachers are sent by Mr. Wesley and the brethren in conference?

The twenty preachers present resolved: "We will do it." Their document (to which in fact 25 signatures were appended) was almost word for word a copy of that signed by the preachers in the British Conference in 1769, 1773, 1774, and 1775, pledging allegiance to their evangelical task and to the doctrines and discipline of Methodism as set forth in the *Minutes*.[52] The American version went on to add a fourth point: "To choose a committee of Assistants to transact the business that is now done by the General Assistant and the old preachers who came from Britain." The committee consisted of three native Americans—Daniel Ruff, William Watters, and Philip Gatch—together with two British immigrants who had fully thrown in their lot with America—Edward Drumgoole and William Glendenning.[53] Whatever the duration or the fortunes of the war, the preachers in conference were convinced that British Methodism must remain their model, and that if at all possible they must remain under Wesley's wing. The deep emotions of the leavetaking were undoubtedly caused not merely by sentimental attachments but by a catastrophic sense of the loss of spiritual guidance entailed by the break. Asbury's *Journal* noted:

When the time of parting came, many wept as if they had lost their first-born sons. They appeared to be in the deepest distress, thinking, as I suppose, they should not see the faces of the English preachers any more. This was such a parting as I never saw before.[54]

Perhaps we should view the occasion also through the eyes of one of those same native preachers, William Watters:

I never saw so affecting a scene at the parting of the preachers before. Our hearts were knit together as the hearts of David and Jonathan, and we were obliged to use great violence to our feelings in tearing ourselves asunder. This was the last time I ever saw my very worthy friends and fathers, Rankin and Shadford.[55]

52. *Minutes* (1862), I:88, 110, 116, 121.
53. MS Minutes of Philip Gatch (see Note 37); cf. Watters, *op. cit.*, pp. 56-7.
54. *Journal* I:239.
55. Watters, *op. cit.*, p. 57.

The last two years had seen an even greater swing to the south in the expansion of Methodism. During 1775-76 a wildfire revival had spread through much of Virginia, spilling over into North Carolina, so that by this time two-thirds of the American Methodists lived within the orbit of the evangelical Episcopalian, the Rev. Devereux Jarratt. Jarratt had co-operated heartily with Robert Williams and his colleagues because he was assured that like their founder they "were true members of the Church of England," whose "design was to build up and not to divide the church." George Shadford sponsored a petition to the General Convention at Williamsburg to dissociate the Methodists from the Baptists, pointing out that they were "not Dissenters, but a Religious Society in communion with the Church of England." Like many of Wesley's Anglican colleagues, Jarratt even agreed to attend the deliberations of the Methodists' conference. Williams himself died before the revival reached its climax, but his task was eagerly taken up by Shadford, and (somewhat less eagerly) by Rankin.[56]

The Virginia revival added to the dimensions of Methodist opportunity, but also of the difficulty, especially as the Episcopalian clergy, who were theoretically needed to administer the sacraments to Methodists, were in increasingly short supply—or in increasingly hotter water with liberty-minded Americans. After lengthy discussion of the problem the members of the 1777 Conference unanimously agreed not themselves to begin administering, but "to lay it over for the determination of the next Conference."[57] When that Conference came round Asbury had prudently but sadly gone into semi-retirement in Delaware until his way should open up for a fuller itinerancy —though at least he had remained in America, to do what little he could. Upon the committee, therefore, was thrown the responsibility of guiding affairs at the Leesburg Conference. Watters reports:

Having no old preachers with us, we were as orphans bereft of our spiritual parents, and though young and unexperienced to transact the business of conference, yet the Lord looked graciously upon us, and had the uppermost seats in all our hearts, and of course in our meeting.

As the consideration of our administering the ordinances [was] at the last conference laid over till this, it of course came on and found many advocates. It was with considerable difficulty that a large majority

56. Jesse Lee, *A Short History of the Methodists* (Baltimore: Magill and Clime, 1810), pp. 51-9; cf. Sweet, *Virginia Methodism*, pp. 76-7, and Asbury, *Journal* I:178.
57. Watters, *op. cit.*, p. 57.

was prevailed on to lay it over again, till the next conference, hoping that we should by then be able to see our way more clear in so important a change.[58]

For the 1779 Conference a preparatory meeting was held at Judge Thomas White's in Delaware, mainly for the convenience of Asbury, whose headquarters this was. William Watters came in the hope of persuading Asbury to attend the regular Conference planned to meet in Fluvanna, Virginia, but without success. Asbury and those of the northern circuits felt it unwise to court danger to their cause by going into Virginia, and Watters was deputed to carry their greetings and opinions. When the more numerous southern brethren met at the appointed time they were inclined to regard this preliminary gathering as a conspiracy to defeat their position on the sacramental issue, and accordingly refused to endorse the northern proposition that in succession to Rankin Asbury should be regarded as "General Assistant in America." Claiming that "the Episcopal Establishment is now dissolved, and therefore in almost all our circuits the members are without the ordinances," they appointed a presbytery of three preachers to ordain themselves and the others in order that they might duly administer the sacraments. Interestingly enough, this same group which thus made a daring ecclesiastical innovation was extremely conservative in other ways, reinforcing the authority of the Assistant in each circuit, and insisting that the local preachers and exhorters should not get out of line. That lesson at least they had well learned from the British itinerants, and the ordination proposals were considered as carefully and prayerfully as even John Wesley could have wished—though he could hardly have agreed with the conclusions reached.[59]

Watters' chief reason for attending both conferences was his fear that if steps were taken to administer the sacraments "an entire division" might result.[60] Others also were anxious to prevent this. In 1780 the northern preachers again held a separate Conference, which on this occasion was attended not only by Watters but by two of the ordaining presbytery of the south, Philip Gatch and Reuben Ellis. Asbury and his colleagues were adamant that only the complete cessation of administration of the sacraments could prevent a schism between the northern and southern Methodists. Asbury, Garrettson, and Watters were asked to attend the southern Conference

58. *Ibid.*, pp. 68-9.
59. Gatch's MS Minutes, pp. 9-11; cf. Watters, *op. cit.*, pp. 73-4.
60. Watters, *op. cit.*, pp. 71-2.

to present this point of view. The ultimatum in fact seemed to harden the issue. And then suddenly the matter was resolved by Asbury's suggestion that his brethren should simply suspend administration for one year. This first delay led to others, and matters stood in pretty much the same shape when the war ended in 1783. Asbury and others urged upon Wesley that it was now up to him to help them out of their dilemma.

It was at this stage, after a decade's enforced delay, that Wesley sent over his last pair of itinerants, Richard Whatcoat and Thomas Vasey. Each was older than any of his predecessors. Vasey had been born in the same year as Asbury, and was now nearing forty, having been an itinerant for nine years. Whatcoat was forty-eight, and had been an itinerant for sixteen years, and frequently an Assistant. He was regarded by Wesley as an admirable successor to Asbury as General Assistant, and eventually like him was in fact elevated to the American Methodist episcopacy. These men were the first exemplars of the precious gift of Holy Orders so long impatiently awaited by American Methodism, and they assisted Thomas Coke in ordaining Asbury. Through these years of waiting, however, Asbury had grown steadily in stature among his American colleagues, as they had in his eyes (helped partly by the training which he strove to furnish), so that when the time came he refused vicarious ordination from Wesley's hands alone, but sought and received the mandate of the American itinerants. Thus was born a church which had been strangely preserved to make the best of two worlds, the old and the new, the episcopal and the presbyterian, of ordered worship and revival meeting, of city and frontier.

In a sense, however, Asbury's ordination and the official setting up of the Methodist Episcopal Church in 1784 were only the icing on the cake. The main task had been accomplished by those eight pioneer preachers rather than by their two belated successors. It is true, as William Warren Sweet has pointed out, that the departure of the British itinerants to leave the work in the hands of native preachers can hardly be regretted; it was one of the better by-products of the sad conflict between a repressive mother country and a vigorous, virile, colony. It is doubtful, however, whether their return should be described as an "unmixed blessing."[61] It was certainly not so regarded by the native preachers themselves. Another important point must be made. Although American Methodism had not been

61. W. W. Sweet, *Religion on the American Frontier, 1783-1840. Vol. IV. The Methodists* (University of Chicago Press, 1946), p. 36.

unduly hurt by the withdrawal of the British preachers, especially as they regretfully left Asbury behind, it would have been immeasurably hurt had they never come. They came with a purpose; they fulfilled that purpose, and they left, albeit sooner than either Wesley or they had intended, and under far different circumstances than any of them could have wished.

They had fulfilled their purpose. This first decade constituted the period of securing church order for the Methodist societies in America, the second that of securing Holy Orders. Had the American Methodists been without the oversight of Wesley's delegates in either quest Methodism would not have developed along the same lines that it did, and one suspects that it might have evaporated into a formless and dwindling revivalist sect. Not that the actual Methodist discipline in all its details so earnestly inculcated by Boardman and Pilmoor and their later colleagues was all that important in itself. A living organism needs periodically to discard its tissue that it may be renewed, needs also to adapt itself to a different environment. Many of the prominent features of early Methodism, both in Britain and America, have become outmoded, notably the early morning services, the love feasts, the class tickets (at least in America), and even the class meeting itself. The chief value of the work and witness of the early British itinerants was that they helped to ensure that the scattered American Methodist societies did indeed learn to function as part of a living organism, a connectional unity, instead of developing at random. The Methodist Episcopal Church, for all its seeming dissociation from Wesley's British Methodist societies, was in fact their vigorous extension into a new area and a new era, and owed a great debt to those agents of his who struggled against prejudice and persecution to help set it on its feet.

The Early Native Methodist Preachers

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"I was the first American who had gone out amongst the Methodists to preach the Gospel," wrote William Watters,[1] whose claim to be the first native American Methodist itinerant has been traditionally acknowledged.[2] Born in Baltimore County, Maryland, on October 16, 1751, to Godfrey and Sarah Watters, William was among that distinguished band of young preachers produced by the preaching of Robert Strawbridge and Robert Williams. Although his parents were members of the Church of England and his father a vestryman, young Watters complained that the only two ministers he knew "were both immoral men, and had no gifts for the ministry." In contrast, the Methodists "lived in a manner I never had known any to live before." In his autobiography Watters gave a detailed account of the "memorable change [which] took place in May, 1771, in the twentieth year of my age," a "change from darkness to light, from death to life," so that he then "enjoyed experimental religion in its native life and power."[3] Illustrating the vital contribution of lay witness to the Methodist revival, Watters wrote:

> In one sense we were all preachers; . . . On the Lord's Day we commonly divided into little bands, and went out into different neighbourhoods, wherever there was a door open to receive us; two, three, or four in company, and would sing our hymns, pray, read, talk to the people, and some soon began to add a word of exhortation. . . . The little flock was of one heart and mind, and the Lord spread the leaven of his grace from heart to heart, from house to house, and from one neighbourhood to an-

1. *A Short Account of the Christian Experience and Ministerial Labours of William Watters* (Alexandria: S. Snowden, 1806), p. 33. Hereafter cited as Watters, *Short Account.*

2. Cf., Jesse Lee, *A Short History of the Methodists in the United States of America; etc.* (Baltimore: Magill and Clime, 1810), p. 45; Abel Stevens, *History of the Methodist Episcopal Church in the United States of America* (New York: Phillips and Hunt, 1884), I, 175; and Emory S. Bucke, Editor, *The History of American Methodism* (New York: Abingdon Press, 1964), I, 139. Hereafter cited as Lee, *Short History*; Stevens, *History*; and HAM, I.

3. Watters, *Short Account,* pp. 1, 3, 16, 17.

A Prayer for Methodist Preachers

Almighty God and heavenly Father, who of thine infinite love and goodness towards us hast given to us thy only and most dearly beloved Son Jesus Christ to be our redeemer and the author of everlasting life; who after he had made perfect our redemption by his death, and was ascended into heaven, sent abroad into the world his apostles, prophets, evangelists, doctors, and pastors, by whose labour and ministry he gathered together a great flock in all the parts of the world, to set forth the eternal praise of thy holy name; for these so great benefits of thy eternal goodness, and for that thou hast vouchsafed to call these thy servants here present to the same office and ministry appointed for the salvation of mankind, we render unto thee most hearty thanks, we praise and worship thee; and we humbly beseech thee, by the same thy blessed Son, to grant unto all who either here or elsewhere call upon thy holy name that we may continue to show ourselves thankful unto thee for these and all other thy benefits, and that we may daily increase and go forward in the knowledge and faith of thee and thy Son by the Holy Spirit. So that as well by these thy ministers, as by them over whom they shall be appointed thy ministers, thy holy name may be for ever glorified, and thy blessed kingdom enlarged, through the same thy Son Jesus Christ our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with thee in the unity of the same Holy Spirit, world without end. Amen.

[From "The Form and Manner of ordaining of Elders" in John Wesley's *Sunday Service of the Methodists in North America: with other occasional services*, London, 1784.]

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