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JOHN WESLEY AND AMERICA

IN 1976, the bicentennial year of the United States of America, I wrote:

> As Oxford undergraduates neither John nor Charles Wesley seems to have bothered his head much about America. They came out as missionaries almost on the spur of the moment, and during a comparatively brief stay they both suffered severe hardship and disappointment. Yet strangely enough both planned to return, and to their dying day both retained a deep affection for America and its people. At least a small measure of the phenomenal growth of Methodism in the U.S.A., and therefore in the world at large, can be traced to this affection, while the distinctive quality of American Methodism is in turn indebted to American affection for "Mr. Wesley". The Wesleys' mental pictures of America were always coloured by what they personally experienced in the newly founded colony of Georgia, where they spent most of their time, or in South Carolina's proud Charleston, though Charles Wesley also spent a month in Boston *en route* [back] to England.[1]

The time seems to have come for me to expand that paragraph, at least so far as it refers to John Wesley and America.

There was a strong strain of the romantic in Wesley. This seems to have overcome even his fervent dedication to the pursuit of learning and holiness in Oxford, which had led to his firm refusal to succeed his father as rector of Epworth. In a long logic-chopping letter to his father, meticulously composed between 10th and 19th December 1734, he announced this decision, which seemed unshakable.[2] Yet within a year he and a group of his Oxford Methodists were on their way to Britain's newest colony, apparently under the idealistic spell of the "noble savage" who might be brought into the fold of the true Shepherd, and in the process confirm and strengthen Wesley's own visions of

[1] Frank Baker: *From Wesley to Asbury* (Durham, N.C., Duke University Press, 1976), p. 3.
[2] *The Works of John Wesley* (Oxford edn.), Vol. 25, *Letters*, i, pp. 397-410.

"holiness unto the Lord".[3] His first dispatch home for the columns of the *Gentleman's Magazine* described a long interview with some Chickasaw Indians, "showing what a deep and habitual sense of a divine Providence is imprinted on the minds of those ignorant heathens, and how excellently they are prepared to receive the Gospel".[4] Alas! His multifarious responsibilities in a huge parish, magnified by his conscientiousness in learning new languages in an attempt to cope with every last resident, and finally frustrated by an emotional entanglement in a place where he had looked forward to seeing no women "but those which are almost of a different species"[5] eventually proved too much for him. Not only that, however. He had become disillusioned about the Indians, and swung to the other extreme when he presented his report to the Georgia Trustees, describing them as mostly "gluttons, drunkards, thieves, dissemblers, liars". And yet, paradoxically, to the end of his days he constantly looked back nostalgically upon his Georgia Indians, and they furnished him with frequent examples to challenge mere nominal Christians.[6] Even the weather remained vividly in his memory. In his *Journal* for 7th August 1766, for instance, he says of one remarkable occasion: "We had as hot a day as most I have known in Georgia." (The meteorological tables in the *Gentleman's Magazine* show that the thermometers on that and the two following days hit 70, 71, and 73 degrees, and it was hardly likely to be higher in the West Riding of Yorkshire, where Wesley was.) On at least two other occasions his *Journal* compared British weather to that in Georgia—on 26th May 1762 and 1st September 1784—on the latter occasion as his preachers were gathering in Bristol to set out for America.

The evidence shows that Wesley saw himself—again somewhat romantically—as forsaking family, friends, comfort, and civilization, when he embarked for Georgia, perhaps never to return. In fact he was back in England within a little over two years, almost a quarter of this period having been spent on two tiny ocean-going vessels from and to his native land. But these twenty-one months on American soil made a huge impact on a very long life, and thus indirectly on the lives of the millions of his followers through the centuries. He learned to compare the spiritual values of liturgical sophistication and simple faith; he came to understand human nature more fully, and encountered the horrors of black slavery; he began to experiment with spiritual song on a much larger scale, and was introduced to the rich treasures of German hymnody; he even inaugurated meetings for Christian

[3] See his letter to John Burton on 10th October, as he prepared to board the *Simmonds*: "I hope to learn the true sense of the gospel of Christ by preaching it to the heathens . . . They are as little children, humble, willing to learn, and eager to do the will of God . . . I then hope . . . to feel the powers of that second motive to visit the heathen, even the desire to impart to them what I have received, a saving knowledge of the gospel of Christ." (ibid., pp. 439-42).

[4] ibid., pp. 464-6.

[5] ibid., p. 440.

[6] Frank Baker: *From Wesley to Asbury* (Durham, Duke University Press, 1976), p. 9.

fellowship as a supplement to formal worship, and welcomed laymen and women as fellow-workers in his parish. Indeed Georgia proved a fertile soil for the trial planting of many important features of his later English Methodist societies. Small wonder that he regarded this missionary period as "the second rise of Methodism" after its beginnings in Oxford.[7]

Wesley's successor in Savannah, George Whitefield, more than echoed Wesley's own realization, that in spite of the frustrations something important had been accomplished. Perhaps his exuberant testimony owed a little to the deference which the younger man felt was owing to the older, the pupil to the tutor, but only a little:

> The good Mr. John Wesley has done in America, under God, is inexpressible. His name is very precious among the people; and he has laid such a foundation that I hope neither men nor devils will ever be able to shake. Oh! that I may follow him as he has Christ! [8]

On the face of things, however, Whitefield himself accomplished a great deal more during his own seven visits to America, from the last of which he did not return. His thousands of converts maintained and spread along the eastern seaboard the revival which Wesley believed had begun in Georgia,[9] and some of their disciples kept the evangelical flame burning for a generation, until just before Whitefield's death, when the appeal came from New York to Wesley for some experienced Methodist itinerant preachers to organize the infant society there.[10]

The year 1738 was an epochal one for John Wesley. In February he stepped on English soil once more; on 24th May his heart was "strangely warmed"; 13th June to 16th September he devoted to visiting the Moravians in Europe; on 9th October, during a two-day walk to Oxford, he eagerly read the first edition of the first description by Jonathan Edwards of the "Great Awakening" in New England, a book which had come hot from the London press the previous year.[11] Immediately he made an extract for a friend, though it was not until 1744 that he published his own abridgement of Edwards's work, as *A Narrative of the Late Work of God.* Wesley could hardly have been expected to sympathize with Edwards's Calvinism, but in fact this

[7] ibid., p. 13.

[8] George Whitefield: *Journals* (London, Banner of Truth Trust, 1960), 2nd June 1738 (p. 157).

[9] See *Journal*, 29th May and 5th June 1737, and his letter to James Hutton, 16th June 1737 (Oxford edn., Vol. 25, p. 509). See also his sermon, *Some Account of the Late Work of God in North America* (1778), I. 1-4, where he claims, not only that "it pleased God to begin a work of grace in the newly planted Colony of Georgia", as well as "a wonderful work of God in several parts of New England", but also that as the New England revival spread southward, so the work "advanced by slow degrees from Georgia towards the north", the two being linked by the preaching of Whitefield.

[10] The thread of evidence so far remains very thin, but see Baker: *From Wesley to Asbury*, pp. 30-2.

[11] Jonathan Edwards: *The Great Awakening*, ed. C. C. Goen (Yale University Press, 1972), pp. 32-46.

was merely the first of five of his publications which Wesley edited for publication, the others being *The Distinguishing Marks of a Work of the Spirit of God* (also in 1744), *Thoughts concerning the Present Revival of Religion in New England* (1745), *An Extract of The Life of the late Rev. Mr. Brainerd, Missionary to the Indians* (1768), and an extract from Edwards's major work, *A Treatise concerning Religious Affections*, published in Volume 23 of Wesley's own *Works* (1773).[12]

Wesley's massive use of the work of Jonathan Edwards itself underlines his continued commitment to the religious life of America, long after his departure in 1737, though he seems never to have corresponded with Edwards. Among his huge list of correspondents, however, were many Americans, quite apart from his British preachers and the Moravians. We may instance the Quaker, Anthony Benezet; the Salzburger, Martin Bolzius; Samuel Davies, Edwards's successor as President of Princeton College; Alexander Garden of Charleston; Devereux Jarratt of Virginia; Ann Jarvis, his grand-niece, who had married a sea-captain trustee of John Street Methodist Church in New York; John Mosely of Philadelphia; Gilbert Tennent of New Jersey; William White, first bishop of the Protestant Episcopal Church, and Dr. Carl von Wrangel, provost of the Swedish Lutheran Churches on the Delaware.

Wesley also published a revised handful of works by American writers other than Edwards: Cotton Mather's *Life and Death of the Renown'd Mr. John Eliot, who was the first Preacher of the Gospel to the Indians in America*, in Volume 50 of his *Christian Library* (1755); *The Good Soldier* (1756), a sermon by Samuel Davies preached to a company of Virginia volunteers; excerpts from Benjamin Franklin's *Experiments and Observations on Electricity* in his own treatise *The Desideratum; or Electricity made Plain and Useful* (1760); several of Benezet's works in his own *Thoughts upon Slavery* (1774); and four works on the Revolutionary War by the expatriate Joseph Galloway (1780-1)—though perhaps it is cheating a little to mention a loyalist in this context!

Wesley's deep interest in the proclamation of the gospel in America continued unabated during the decades following his return. Discussing a Scots proposal for "a concert of prayer and praise" designed "to revive true religion in all parts of Christendom", Wesley suggested:

> Might it not be practicable to have the concurrence of Mr. Edwards in New England, if not of Mr. Tennent also? It is evidently one work with what we have seen here. Why should we not all praise God with one heart?[13]

In 1749 he first read Edwards's *Extract of Mr. Brainerd's Journal*. He

[12] For fuller details see Charles A. Rogers: "John Wesley and Jonathan Edwards", in *The Duke Divinity School Review*, Vol. 31 (1966), pp. 20-38, which deals also with Wesley's retort to Edwards's *Freedom of the Will*.

[13] *Letters* ii, 16th March 1745 (Oxford edn., Vol. 26, p. 128).

read it somewhat critically, because Brainerd magnified "his own work above that which God wrought in Scotland, or among the English in New England".[14] At least from 1753 onwards, Wesley warmly assisted Dr. John Gillies of Glasgow—later Whitefield's editor and biographer—with a massive work on international revivals entitled *Historical Collections relating to Remarkable Periods of the Success of the Gospel*, of which the first two volumes appeared in 1754.[15] It is indeed possible that Wesley recommended to Gillies the two volumes of Thomas Prince's *Christian History*, published in Boston, 1744-5, which he had read in April 1753, for Gillies made extensive use of the American accounts therein, depending almost solely upon them, indeed, for his very lengthy narrative of the "Great Awakening".[16] Gillies also included a narrative of the work in Virginia from Samuel Davies, dated 1751, and contributions continued to flow in, to fill an Appendix in 1761, to which again Wesley's writings contributed. Wesley assisted in other ways. On 1st September 1757, Gillies wrote telling Wesley:

> Scotland is a bad place for getting subscriptions for books. I had hardly been able to publish the *Historical Collections*, but for the subscriptions you got me in England.

Wesley's correspondence with the Rev. Samuel Davies of Hanover Country, Virginia, apparently arose from a visit paid to the two Wesley brothers in London by Davies and Gilbert Tennent on 26th October 1754, when they were raising funds for the College of New Jersey, now Princeton University. Wesley termed this "an admirable design, if it will bring Protestants of every denomination to bear with one another". Davies noted in his diary:

> Notwithstanding all their wild notions, [the Wesley brothers] appear very benevolent, devout, and zealous men, that are labouring with all their might to awaken the secure world to a sense of religion . . .[17]

Wesley sent parcels of his works, especially his hymns, to Davies, and rejoiced to hear how the black slaves would sometimes spend whole nights in singing them.[18]

The lack of documentary evidence to the contrary seems to imply that after the death of Samuel Davies in 1761 John Wesley had fewer contacts with America, and even Whitefield, with whom his correspondence had slackened, remained in Great Britain from 1755 to 1763. In January 1764, however, Wesley wrote a "kind letter" to Whitefield, who responded by hinting that his old friend should send over some

[14] *Journal*, 9th December 1749.
[15] *Letters*, Oxford edn., Vol. 26, pp. 505, 513-14.
[16] Gillies: *Historical Collections* (Banner of Truth Trust reprint of the 1845 edn.), pp. 337-427.
[17] Davies: *Journal*, ed. G. W. Pilcher (Urbana, Il., University of Illinois Press, 1967), p. 132; cf. Wesley's own *Journal*, 26th October 1754, though he does not mention Davies.
[18] *Journal*, 27th July 1755; 1st March 1756; 28th January 1757.

preachers to America: "Here is room for a hundred itinerants".[19] Whitefield undoubtedly repeated his pleas in person after his return in 1765, when they once more began to meet frequently. Wesley sadly described him on 28th October as "an old, old man, fairly worn out in his Master's service, though he has hardly seen fifty years". In 1766 a determined effort was made to secure a "quadruple alliance" between the two Wesleys, Whitefield, and the Countess of Huntingdon.[20] Meantime still other letters were reaching Wesley from America, urging him to send over some itinerant preachers.[21] Urgent confirmation came from Dr. Carl Magnus von Wrangel, "one of the King of Sweden's chaplains", who had "spent several years in Pennsylvania". When Wesley dined with him in October 1768, Dr. Wrangel "strongly pleaded for our sending some of our preachers to help [the American Christians], multitudes of whom are as sheep without a shepherd".[22]

Whether arriving before or after this dinner with Dr. Wrangel, a letter from Thomas Taylor an Englishman in New York, written 11th April 1768, settled the issue for Wesley. Taylor recounted the story of the society there, the impact of Whitefield's last visit to New York, the homespun efforts of Philip Embury and Thomas Webb as preachers, and the hope of worthy permanent premises if only Wesley could send some help, especially a qualified itinerant preacher.[23] Wesley hesitated no longer. He printed Taylor's letter, circulated it among his preachers and leading laymen, and at the 1769 Conference called for volunteers for America, as well as taking up a collection from his preachers, which paid for the passage of those volunteers, with sufficient left over to make a generous gift to the New York society. Wesley quite deliberately sent over two qualified itinerants rather than the one asked for—Richard Boardman and Joseph Pilmoor—and entrusted them to the oversight of Whitefield, whom they visited before leaving for America. In gratitude for Wesley's warm advocacy of their infant cause, the New York trustees named their new home Wesley Chapel.

Emboldened by his obvious concern, invitations came to Wesley to return in person to the country of his first missionary venture. Immediately on arriving in New York, Boardman wrote to Wesley:

> There appears such a willingness in the Americans to hear the word as I never saw before . . . But, dear sir, what shall I say to almost everybody I see; they ask, 'Does Mr. Wesley think he shall ever come over to see us?'[24]

[19] Tyerman: *Whitefield*, ii, pp. 477-8.

[20] ibid., ii, pp. 496-7, 531-2, 534.

[21] *Some Account of the Late Work of God in North America*, I. 8. It is quite possible, however, that Wesley's slightly vague dating is incorrect, and that he was in fact thinking of later letters, such as that from Thomas Bell of 1st May 1769, for which see Baker: *From Wesley to Asbury*, pp. 81-2.

[22] *Journal*, 14th October 1768.

[23] Baker: *From Wesley to Asbury*, pp. 72-9.

[24] New York, 4th November 1769 (see *Arminian Magazine*, 1784, pp. 163-4). Pilmor had written from Philadelphia, where Boardman had left him, on 31st October (ibid., 1783, pp. 276-7).

Wesley was obviously moved, and seriously considered undertaking the arduous voyage, even though he was now nearing threescore years and ten.

Successive letters partly tell the story. On 30th December 1769, he wrote: "It is not yet determined whether I should go to America or not . . . I must have a clearer call before I am at liberty to leave Europe." To Ann Bolton, on 25th January 1770: "If I should be called to America (though I determine nothing yet), it might be a long time before we meet again." To Lady Maxwell, on 17th February: "I have some thoughts of going to America; but the way is not yet plain. I wait till Providence shall speak more clearly on one side or the other." His last letter to Whitefield, on 21st February 1770, written after hearing that his old friend had arrived in Charleston, South Carolina:

> I trust our Lord has more work for you to do in Europe as well as in America. And who knows but before your return to England I may pay another visit to the New World? I have been strongly solicited by several of our friends in New York and Philadelphia. They urge many reasons, some of which appear to be of considerable weight. And my age is no objection at all; for I bless God my health is not barely as good but abundantly better in several respects than when I was five-and-twenty. But there are so many reasons on the other side that as yet I can determine nothing; so I must wait for further light. For the present I must beg of you to supply my lack of service by encouraging our preachers as you judge best, who are as yet comparatively young and inexperienced . . .

Whitefield did in fact encourage Boardman and Pilmoor, both in Philadelphia and in New York.[25]

The months passed by, and Wesley's efforts to recruit more preachers for America during 1770 failed. About his own visit he still remained unclear. On 14th December 1770, he wrote: "If I live till spring, and should have a clear, pressing call, I am as ready to embark for America as for Ireland." On 13th July 1771, he wrote:

> My call to America is not yet clear. I have no business there as long as they can do without me. At present I am a debtor to the people of England and Ireland, and especially to them that believe.

At the Conference in August 1771, however, five preachers volunteered, of whom Francis Asbury and Richard Wright were dispatched. Wesley could therefore write on 14th August, perhaps with some relief: "As yet you need take no thought about my going to America; I have some more business to do in Europe."

Other preachers had already travelled to America at their own expense, though it was not until 1773 that Wesley felt sufficiently confident to name two of them at the end of the list of preachers for America in his *Minutes*: "Thomas Rankin, George Shadford, Francis

[25] Tyerman: *Whitefield*, pp. 588-9.

Asbury, Richard Boardman, Richard Wright, Joseph Pilmoor, Robert Williams, John King." Early in 1772 Captain Thomas Webb had arrived in England on a recruiting campaign for still more itinerant preachers, and was allowed to deliver a rousing exhortation to the preachers assembled in the 1772 Conference. He had succeeded in winning over both George Shadford and Thomas Rankin, who had therefore volunteered to set sail for America in the spring of 1772.[26]

Even by the end of 1771, however, Wesley's mind seems to have been clarified, first, that he was not really *needed* in America, with six British preachers already there; and secondly, that there were problems enough to keep him in England, especially those arising out of the misunderstood doctrinal statement of his 1770 Conference, and his launching of a thirty-two volume edition of his collected *Works*. So that when his old clerical friend, Walter Sellon, asked him about the rumour that he was going to America to seek bishop's orders, Wesley's enigmatic reply (on 1st February 1772), at least seems to make it clear that the visit was at least as unlikely as his ecclesiastical elevation:

> You do not rightly understand your information, "I am going to America to turn bishop." . . . I am not to be a bishop till I am in America. While I am in Europe, therefore, you have nothing to fear. But as soon as ever you hear of my being landed at Philadelphia, it will be time for your apprehensions to revive.

From 1773 onwards the organization of American Methodism became tighter, under the administration of Thomas Rankin, whom Wesley had deliberately named his General Assistant—almost the equivalent of the bishop which it was rumoured that Wesley was to become. Rankin summoned the first American Methodist Conference that year, and in its general organization, its agenda, and its printed *Minutes*, saw to it that Mr. Wesley's precedents were followed. During the following years, though native American preachers were rapidly multiplying, Wesley's English itinerants were clearly in command. This pre-eminence was shattered in 1777, when their British nationality seemed to make it imperative, both for them personally and for the general health of American Methodism, that they should leave a country torn by a war demanding independence from Britain. It was a tearful farewell, marked by twenty-five American signatures on a declaration of loyalty to "the old Methodist doctrine" and "the whole Methodist Discipline, as laid down in [Wesley's 1770] *Minutes*".[27]

Asbury remained, of course, as did James Dempster, though he left the itinerancy, became a Presbyterian minister in New York, and lost touch with Methodism. It was Asbury who managed with some difficulty to preserve the handful of separatist American preachers in their avowed loyalty to the ways of Wesley until the end of the war and the

[26] Baker: *From Wesley to Asbury*, pp. 60-1, 94-5.

[27] MS. Minutes of the 1777 Conference, kept by Philip Gatch (Methodist Theological School in Ohio, Delaware, Ohio). Cf. Baker: *From Wesley to Asbury*, pp. 98-100.

formation of a new church in a new nation.

Most of the American-born Methodists favoured independence from all control by Great Britain, and some of them knew that Wesley himself had felt that way until he read Samuel Johnson's *Taxation No Tyranny*, and under its influence published *A Calm Address to our American Colonies* (1774). Few of them, however, had seen that offending work, because of the closure of all the ports except British-held New York, the means by which letters did filter through.[28] Those Virginian preachers who wished to extend national independence into a complete break with Wesley's Methodism, however, did not command the same wide base of support as did Asbury. Englishman though he was, Asbury managed to secure annual delaying votes until such time as the war ended and Mr. Wesley could come to their aid. The tenor of Wesley's letters remained the same throughout, along the lines reported by Freeborn Garrettson in 1781:

> We met and received Mr. Wesley's answer, which was that we should continue on the old plan until further direction. We unanimously agreed to follow his counsel, and went on harmoniously.[29]

The American Methodists continued to rely for sacramental administrations upon a number of sympathetic clergy of different denominations scattered along the eastern seaboard, and to wait somewhat impatiently for the ordination of their own preachers. Nevertheless both membership and ministry doubled in numbers during the war, so that when peace came in 1783 seventy preachers were caring for almost 4,000 members.

Restoration of normal conditions was subject to seemingly interminable delays. A few months later Lord Cornwallis surrendered at Yorktown; in March 1782 a new Government took over in England; preliminary peace plans were signed in November 1782; on 3rd September 1783, the Treaty of Paris was signed, and ratified on 14th January 1784. Thus there was a lengthy but inevitable delay before "further direction" came from Wesley, although communications across the Atlantic had improved considerably. Wesley himself had not been idle, however, though he was less anxious because in 1782 William Watters had assured him that the ordination controversy had been put to rest.[30] On 17th September 1783, he wrote to another American preacher, Edward Dromgoole:

> When the Government in America is settled, I believe some of our brethren will be ready to come over. I cannot advise them to do it yet. First let us see

[28] See Frank Baker: "The Shaping of Wesley's *Calm Address*" (*Methodist History*, October 1975, pp. 3-12, especially I. 5). Cf. Wesley's letter of 22nd February 1782 to William Watters: "Now and then I suppose you can contrive to send a letter to New York and thence to your friends in England."

[29] Freeborn Garrettson, *Experience and Travels* (Philadelphia, Hall, 1791), p. 207 (at the Conference beginning 16th April 1781).

[30] *Letters*, 22nd February 1782.

> how Providence opens itself. And I am the less in haste because I am persuaded Bro. Asbury is raised up to preserve order among you, and to do just what I should do myself, if it pleased God to bring me to America.

On 3rd October of the same year he warned the American preachers against what might offer itself as a simple and speedy solution, the embracing of any free-lance preachers who arrived from England, "who will not be subject to the American Conference", nor place themselves under Asbury's direction. The same letter reinforced Asbury's authority as General Assistant.[31] Meantime Wesley discussed with Dr. Thomas Coke, his ordained right-hand man in England, something much more drastic and imaginative, which eventually led to Wesley's "little sketch" of a new church, a revised Book of Common Prayer, Ordinal, and the Articles of Religion, his assuming of rights of ordination, and a commendatory letter "To Dr. Coke, Mr. Asbury, and our Brethren in North America". At last he was doing for America what he had long refused to do for England—founding a new church.

This is not the place to describe in detail the actual formation of the Methodist Episcopal Church in the United States of America. I wish simply to underline the fact that this was something long considered, a deliberate plan on Wesley's part. Into this plan he distilled the essence of his great love both for the Church of England and for his American followers. He prepared for them two key documents—the preface to his *Sunday Service*, and his printed letter to the American preachers—dated respectively from Bristol 9th and 10th September 1784, on the eve of Coke's departure for America as his ambassador and plenipotentiary. His love for his native Church, a love constantly preserved and proclaimed in spite of his many departures from her ways, including this unauthorized revision of her prayer-book, appears in the opening sentence of the preface:

> I believe there is no Liturgy in the world, either in ancient or modern language, which breathes more of a solid, scriptural, rational piety, than the Common Prayer of the Church of England.

It was this in particular, as well as a reformed episcopacy, that he sought to bequeath to the American Methodists. His love for these transatlantic followers, and his acceptance of their political independence as providential, are amply demonstrated in his letter to them:

> By a very uncommon train of providences, many of the provinces of North America are totally disjoined from their mother country, and erected into independent states . . . A civil authority is exercised over them, partly by the Congress, partly by the provincial Assemblies. But no one either exercises or claims any ecclesiastical authority at all. In this peculiar situation some thousands of the inhabitants of these States desire my advice; and in compliance with their desire, I have drawn up a little sketch.

[31] Jesse Lee: *A Short History of the Methodists* (Baltimore, Magill & Clime, 1810), pp. 85-6.

The following paragraphs of the letter, numbered 2-6, outline his long-deferred decision "to violate the established order of the national church" by exercising at last his conviction that as an ordained presbyter he was empowered in extraordinary circumstances—which then existed—to ordain his preachers. He had therefore, he continued,

> appointed Dr. Coke and Mr. Francis Asbury to be joint *Superintendents* [a term replacing bishops in his *Sunday Service*, and one with a long history in that usage] over our brethren in North America; as also Richard Whatcoat and Thomas Vasey to act as *Elders* among them, by baptizing and administering the Lord's Supper.

In the following sentence he reiterated his claims about the Book of Common Prayer, but extended them to the Church of England itself—"I think, the best constituted national Church in the world." He sets aside the idea of once more asking English bishops to ordain the preachers as being too slow and too perilous, involving the danger of entangling his American brethren once more with the English hierarchy. And he closes with his own declaration of independence for them:

> They are now at full liberty, simply to follow the Scriptures and the Primitive Church. And we judge it best that they should stand fast in that liberty wherewith God has so strangely made them free.

This was no grudging concession to rebellious children, but a conscientious attempt to guide the destinies of the whole Methodist family, of whom he believed himself to be the father and acknowledged head. That this was in a measure challenged by Asbury's refusal to accept Wesley's dictum without the concurrence of the American preachers; that only sections of the *Sunday Service* came into widespread use; that only three-quarters of Wesley's 1780 "Large" *Minutes* was transcribed directly into the first American *Discipline*; and that *episcopos* was eventually translated more literally into "bishop" rather than "superintendent", hardly disturbs the basic fact that in principle American Methodism heartily welcomed Wesley's plans for their new church. The leading personnel for that new church, her doctrinal standards, her administrative structure, her ordering of worship, was his magnificent birthday present for them.[32]

Wesley continued in close touch with American Methodism to his dying day. True, there were occasional sharp exchanges, but Asbury's references to "dear old Daddy"[33] evinced not only his mistaken belief that Wesley was losing his grip, but also his genuine affection for the spiritual father of the Methodist Episcopal Church. Wesley's transatlantic correspondents multiplied to encompass many American-born preachers. It is altogether fitting that to one of these was written

[32] For fuller details about the points raised in the last three paragraphs see the present author's books, *John Wesley and the Church of England*, chapters 14 and 15, and *From Wesley to Asbury*, chapters 8, 9 and 10.

[33] Asbury's letter to Jasper Wincom, 15th August 1788 (*Letters*, iii, p. 62).

his last American letter, on 1st February 1791, only a month before his death. In spite of disclaimers in the letter itself, his hand was still firm, especially in penning the address, "To the Revd. Mr. Ezekiel Cooper, in Annapolis":

Near London, Feb. 1, 1791

My dear brother

Those that desire to write or say anything to *me* have no time to lose, for time has shaken me by the hand, and death is not far behind. But I have reason to be thankful for the time that is past. I felt none of the infirmities of old age for fourscore and six years. It was not till a year and an half ago that my strength and my sight failed. And still I am enabled to scrawl a little, and to creep, though I cannot run. Probably I should not be able to do so much, did not many of you assist me by your prayers.

From time [to time] I have given a distinct account of the work of God which has been wrought in Britain and Ireland, for more[34] than half a century. We want some of you to give us a connected relation of what our Lord has been doing in America, from the time that Richard Boardman accepted the invitation and left his country to serve you. See that you never give place to one thought of separating from your brethren in Europe. Lose no opportunity of declaring to all men, that the Methodists are One People in all the world; and that it is their full determination so to continue,

Though mountains rise, and oceans roll
To sever us in vain.[35]

To the care of our common Lord I commit you, and am

Your Affectionate Friend & Brother
JOHN WESLEY

Thus within a month of his death Wesley begged for a history of American Methodism, and asserted his oneness with his brethren across the Atlantic in the words of his brother Charles. How many times he had thought sadly of his leaving the American shores over fifty-four years earlier, and of all that had happened since to his friends there! We may in closing, especially in this bicentennial year of American Methodism, realize his sense of physical separation yet of continuing spiritual fellowship between the two major branches of the Methodist family, as we read part of the fuller context of Charles Wesley's words:

We part in body, not in mind.
Our minds continue one.
And each to each in Jesus join'd,
We hand in hand go on.

[34] Actually "many".
[35] John and Charles Wesley, *Redemption Hymns* (1747), p. 69. Last hymn in the work, entitled, "At Parting of Friends", v. 4 of eight.

Subsists as in us all one soul,
No power can make us twain,
And mountains rise, and oceans roll,
To sever us in vain.

Present we still in spirit are,
And intimately nigh,
While on the wings of faith and prayer,
We each to other fly.

FRANK BAKER.

LOCAL HISTORIES

Paisley Methodist Central Hall—A History (24pp) 1983. Copies, price 60p post free, from Mr. A. Jones, 20b, Park Road, Paisley, Renfewshire, Scotland.

Nutgrove Methodist Church (St. Helen's): 100 Years of Worship in the Present Church. Commemorative Brochure. (12pp) 1983. by Kenneth M Lysons. Copies, price 80p post free, from the author at Latham, Scotchbarn Lane, Whiston, Prescot, Merseyside, L35 7JB.

Combe Martin Methodist Church: *A short history and souvenir 1883-1983.* Copies, price £1.15 post free, from Pastor Blacklock, Methodist Manse, Combe Martin, Devon.

Braunton Methodist Church, 150th Anniversary 1833-1983. 12pp. with folding map. Copies, price £1.20 post free, from J. R. Flewellen, 7, Brannocks Hill, Braunton, Devon, EX33 1BD.

The Oatlands Story 1883-1983: A Brief History of Oatlands Methodist Church (Harrogate) (17pp.) 1983. by Arnold Kellett. Copies price 50p plus postage, from R. J. Wise, 5, Mallinson Way, Harrogate, HG2 9HL.

A History of the Methodist Church on Bushey Heath 1883-1983 (18pp.) by John M. Wood. Copies, price 70p post free, from Mr. M. H. Wilson, 16, Pickets Close, Bushey Heath, Herts, WD2 1NL.

Methodist Church, Williton, Centenary Brochure 1884-1984, (8pp.) by A. G. Pointon. Copies, price 20p post free from Mrs. S. Pearce, Dashwood House, Bicknoller, Taunton.

Looking back at 200 years of Methodism in Worsley (Manchester) by Paul Hassall (52pp.) 1984. Copies from the author at 7, Summerfield Road, Roe Green, Worsley, MANCHESTER M28 4RS, price £2.00 post free.

Delph Methodist Sunday School 1784-1984 by Alan Braley (36pp.) illus. Copies £1.50 post free, from Mr. R. Stubbs, 63, Grains Road, Delph, OLDHAM, OL3 5DS.