

The Status of Methodist Preachers in America, 1769-1791

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Wesley's Methodism was not planned in advance, but was a step by step response to situations, a slowly accumulating series of experiments at bringing new spiritual life to the Church of England, an institution seemingly being strangled by forms and traditions. Wesley introduced new methods derived from new concepts of God's work, and these new methods were frequently embodied in new terminology—or rather in old terminology given a new ecclesiastical meaning. As Methodists in America, we have inherited many of these new terms, whose existence from antiquity we have sometimes taken for granted. From time to time, however, we discover those who interpret these terms differently, or who—"How can it be!"—have never heard of them in a religious context. We have our own Methodist gobbledegook, or babblegab, or perhaps we should call it "Methodese." This essay, therefore, attempts an exploration of the early Methodist preachers against the background of some unfamiliar history and some peculiar terms in order that we may feel our way into a fuller understanding of the essential ethos of Methodism and its ministry.

In 1738, as a clergyman of fourteen years' standing, John Wesley became convinced that salvation by faith alone was neglected by his mother Church, both as an ancient theological belief and as an authentic personal experience. In proclaiming his own personal assurance of this experience in Bristol in 1739, he both preached in the open air and by his testimonies revitalized two old religious societies of the Church of England. Later that year he accepted the invitation of a group of people in London who wished him to become their spiritual director—the first truly *Methodist* society, in the sense of owing complete allegiance (under God) to him alone.¹ Either late in 1740 or early in 1741 he deliberately enrolled his first full-time itinerant lay preacher, Thomas Maxfield.² Apparently it was this growing volunteer army of lay itinerants which became increasingly responsible for the spread and administration of Methodist societies throughout the British Isles. In 1743 Wesley prepared a set of *General Rules* for his followers, in order to distinguish them both from

worldly people and from nominal Christians; this gave them visible identity through higher standards both of personal and corporate discipline. In 1744 he invited both his handful of clerical colleagues and some of his lay helpers to confer with him about the doctrinal content of their message and the organization of their societies—the first annual *Conference*. At the 1746 Conference he discussed for the first time the division of England into *circuits*, and his periodical *stationing* of the preachers in them. Late in 1746 he began to publish a series of *sermons* expounding his confirmed beliefs about the way of salvation. At the Conference of 1747 he maintained that although bishops, priests, and deacons were scriptural orders, yet it was the will of God that in church government there should be a "necessary variety."³ In 1749 he instituted the *quarterly meeting* for the preachers and leaders in every circuit.⁴ He also appointed one of the lay *helpers* to be his chief *assistant* in each circuit. Thus during Methodism's first decade Wesley had established a new ecclesiastical entity. This was set forth in two pamphlets, published in 1749, which codified the discussions on *doctrine* and on *discipline*, and established Methodism's position as a *society* within the Church of England, yet with its own integrated unity because both preachers and people were *in connection* with John Wesley. Although much more development was to take place on both sides of the Atlantic, in effect Methodism had come of age.

Wesley's beginnings in England were in a measure re-enacted during the first twenty years of Methodism in America. The enthusiastic lay pioneers in New York had appealed in 1768 for one of Wesley's itinerant preachers to direct them: "We want [i.e. need] an able, experienced preacher, one who has both gifts and graces necessary for the work . . . The progress of the gospel here depends much on the qualifications of the preachers."⁵ Wesley sought to engender comradeship in America rather than undue individualism, and consistently sent out his preachers in pairs, beginning with Boardman and Pilmore in 1769, continuing with Asbury and Wright in 1771, Rankin and Shadford in

1773, and in 1774 Dempster and Rodda to replace Boardman and Pilmore.⁶ The ranks of these "official" itinerants were supplemented by British local preachers, who came out as free lances at their own charge, or in the course of some secular undertaking, men like Strawbridge, Williams, Dromgoole, King, Glendenning, and others, some of whom became almost indistinguishable to later eyes from the native preachers, whom they greatly helped to stabilize. Two immigrant volunteers in effect founded the Methodist Publishing House, Robert Williams and John Dickins, and another, Robert Strawbridge, was the pioneer and driving force behind the explosion of Methodist preaching in the south, especially through the agency of the steadily growing band of young American preachers whom he enrolled.⁷ Even by 1774 these American-born preachers outnumbered the British.

The British travelling preachers found it somewhat difficult to assimilate these disparate individuals into their own more ordered ways, especially as they themselves mostly shuttled between New York and Philadelphia. This was true even after the arrival of Asbury, who was eager to dislodge the English from their roitage in the cities. Indeed they were slow to learn of what was happening in the south quite independently of their own oversight, and not until 1772 did Pilmore set out on a lengthy missionary tour down as far as Georgia, nor did Asbury himself visit that state until 1788. Nevertheless, by 1773, when the newly-arrived "General Assistant," Thomas Rankin—aged 35 to Asbury's 27—summoned the first American Methodist Conference, understanding and integration were at least beginning. Along with three of the latest four of Wesley's itinerants were present four of the volunteer British preachers, and even one of the native preachers, William Watters, who could not disguise his awe on the occasion, as one "unworthy of a name and place amongst the servants of God."⁸

The Minutes of the 1773 Conference made it clear from the outset that the preachers were all very much under discipline, and that that discipline was exercised by Wesley himself. Each solemnly responded "Yes" to a series of written questions posed by Wesley's "General Assistant":

Ought not the authority of Mr. Wesley and that conference to extend to the preachers and people in America, as well as in Great Britain and Ireland?

Ought not the doctrine and discipline of the Methodists, as contained in the *Minutes*, to be the sole rule of our conduct who labour in the connection with Mr. Wesley in America?⁹

With the acceptance of this general approach they came down to six specific rules, of which the first two were:

"Every preacher who acts in connection with Mr. Wesley and the brethren who labour in America is strictly to avoid administering the ordinances of baptism and the Lord's Supper.

"All the people among whom we labour to be earnestly exhorted to attend the church, and to receive the ordinances there; but in a particular manner to press the people in Maryland and Virginia to the observance of this minute." (This was directed, of course, at misguided southern enthusiasm.)

It was, of course, perfectly natural for the two preachers whom Wesley had sent out to America in 1769, and for their successors, to build other societies and to shape other preachers, after the patterns made normal by Wesley—indeed this was the very task for which they had been invited. This implied that their own status, and that of their colleagues, remained that of "extraordinary messengers" of God, who might help the regular evangelical clergy to revive the Church of England,¹⁰ whose public worship would offer the normal ministry of word and sacrament. They were to challenge the sluggish and the sinful in public, and to witness to their personal experience of God in class-meeting and society-meeting. The full range of Methodist activities was speedily embraced in America, including the regular itinerancy of those who were authorized as preachers at one level or another.

The stories of these "extraordinary messengers" in America are reminiscent of the autobiographies which Wesley commissioned from his own preachers, which from 1791 became best-sellers on the American Methodist scene as *The Experience of the Most Eminent Methodist Preachers*.¹¹ William Watters describes his earlier activities with other young converts in Maryland: "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."¹² After such exhorting for five or six months, Watters accompanied Robert Williams into Virginia, was asked by Pilmore to fill in for him at Norfolk while he travelled farther south, and thus became the only native preacher to attend the 1773 Conference, when he came "on trial" for a year. At the 1774 Conference he was not only "admitted" (i.e. into "full connection"), but also appointed an "Assistant." Watters exhibited that essential ingredient in an early

Methodist preacher, whether in England or America, a readiness to sit light to all earthly cares and ambitions as he accepted an arduous and unsettled itinerancy: "Mr. Rankin thought that D. Ruf[f] and I had better change for a quarter, but with the promise that I should then return and stay till the following Conference. I never moved from one Circuit to another but what it reminded me that I was a pilgrim, that here I had no continuing city, that I was a tenant at will, and ought to be always ready."¹³

Freeborn Garretson's autobiography first appeared in the U.S.A. in 1791, but also delighted English readers by its serialization in the pages of Wesley's *Arminian Magazine*. He came from British emigrants who had settled in Maryland and were loyal members of the Church of England. His conscience was awakened by a Methodist exhorter about 1774; he was converted, and speedily sought to share his experience with others. He described his visits to his weekly class-meeting, from which as an exhorter he "began to hold evening meetings in different places several times a week, and united those who were awakened into a kind of society." Two of the British preachers, Rankin and Rodda, encouraged him. Martin Rodda, he says, "forced me into the pulpit . . . I travelled a few days with him, after which he sent me on a circuit alone. This was the Fall after my conversion . . . I was now quite willing to be an exhorter, but thought I would not take a text." (This was the narrow line dividing exhorting from preaching which Thomas Maxfield had crossed to become Wesley's first lay preacher, for expounding Scripture was supposedly the prerogative of the ordained deacon only.) Yet his conscience and what seemed a divine revelation so exercised him that soon he took even that decisive step, and attended the 1776 Conference in Baltimore. Here, he says: "I . . . passed through an examination, and was admitted on trial, and my name was, for the first time, classed among the Methodists; and I received of Mr. T[homas] R[ankin] a written licence."¹⁴ He spent six months in his first circuit, and three months each in two others, at the Deer Creek Conference in May 1777 was "admitted into full connection," and at the Leesburg Conference in 1778 made an Assistant, as a young man of twenty-six supervising the three men stationed in the Kent Circuit. All this, of course, and much more, might perfectly well have been happening on the British Methodist scene, except that the average age of the preachers there was now greater.

The rapidity of the rise to responsibility of the American preachers demonstrates not only their

innate ability but the unsettled state of the nation during the Revolutionary War, even in its opening stages. Their multifarious activities and wide travels, however, had matured them far beyond their years. Those who had been followers had now become leaders, and were preparing themselves for whatever American independence might bring for them and expect of them both in State and Church. It was not unnatural that those who had followed the call in 1773 to dedicate themselves to the unquestioning service of Wesley's brand of Methodism might now be entertaining second thoughts. In the seventies, indeed, there was being re-enacted in America the unrest of the preachers in England during the fifties and sixties, an unrest focussing on their lowly status as preaching "helpers," or even as the somewhat less lowly "Assistants" (i.e. to Wesley), responsible for the oversight of other preachers, rather than the conventionally recognized standing of priest or presbyter, or even of a humble deacon, who could display at least an ordination parchment to confirm his call to proclaim the gospel in the Church of God. If indeed they were expected to urge attendance at the public worship and the sacraments of the Church of England, surely Mr. Wesley could do more for them than furnish a mere preaching-licence! Perhaps in a new country, soon to be under a new rule, they should take matters into their own demonstrably capable hands.

Wesley had faced similar rumblings in the British Conference of 1766, challenged by the question: "But what *power* is this which *you* exercise over the Methodists in Great Britain and Ireland?" The essence of his reply was that this was the burden which God himself had laid upon him through the request of those who originally sought his spiritual direction, nor dare he yet lay it down. He went on to call for "arbitrary power," in that he exercised it alone, but continued: "If you mean *unjust, unreasonable, or tyrannical*, then it is not true." Wesley then called for renewed personal and family religion, more courage in proclaiming God's word, more faithfulness in pastoral practice, closer discipline in study. The 1766 *Minutes* was doubled in size to include this document, which was then incorporated in three blocks of the "Large" *Minutes* of 1770—significantly the manual which formed the background of early Methodist administration in America.¹⁵

Public antagonism against the British Methodist preachers was making it ever more likely that they must soon leave the conduct of American Methodism, if it were to survive, to native Americans. The anxiety of the British preachers

about the future came to a head at the 1777 Conference, assembled in the Deer Creek preaching-house, Maryland. In the intervening years since 1773 the body of preachers had quadrupled, but Methodism's standing still remained precarious because of their comparative youth and inexperience. Added to that was the natural erosion in their ranks, similar to that earlier faced by Wesley. Dozens of preachers entered the itinerancy briefly, and disappeared without trace. Of the eight itinerants sent by Wesley only two remained in America after 1777, and one of these (James Dempster) had left the connection, and later became a Presbyterian minister. Of over fifty native and immigrant preachers given appointments during the years 1773-78, only 28 were listed in the 1778 stations. In 1778 both preachers and membership were down from 1777. Some preachers, like William Duke, were admitted on trial in their teens, and all but three seem to have been in their early twenties.¹⁶

As William Watters and his companions assembled in 1777 with their British leaders, who had so successfully laboured to weld them into a strong preaching brotherhood, he wrote: "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."¹⁷ The group "warmly debated" whether they should continue to take communion with other churches wherever possible, especially in the parish churches of the Church of England, and eventually agreed that it was "highly expedient that the preachers and people pursue the old plan as from the beginning."¹⁸ Then they turned again to the "Large" *Minutes* of 1770, in which Wesley had printed—in addition to his reply to the 1766 challenge against his "power"—a lengthy document prepared in 1769, which sought to secure peace and unity among the Methodist preachers after Wesley's death. And as their British colleagues had done and were to do periodically, they re-affirmed their loyalty to Wesley and the goals and methods of his Methodism:

We whose names are underwritten, being thoroughly convinced of the necessity of a close union between those whom God hath used as instruments in his glorious work, in order to preserve this union, are resolved, God being our helper,

1. To devote ourselves to God, taking up our cross daily, steadily aiming at this one thing, to save our souls and them that hear us.

2. To preach the old Methodist doctrine, and no other, as contained in the *Minutes* [i.e. the "Large" *Minutes* of 1770].

3. To observe and enforce the whole Methodist Discipline, as laid down in the said *Minutes*.

4. 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.

Twenty-five signatures were appended, and the committee was named as Daniel Ruff, William Watters, Philip Gatch, Edward Dromgoole, and William Glendenning.¹⁹

When the preachers re-assembled in Conference in Leesburg a year later they found that not even Asbury was able to be with them. Watters exclaimed: "Having no old preachers with us, we were as orphans bereft of our spiritual parents"; but "though young and unexperienced" they set themselves "to transact the business of Conference."²⁰ As to the administration of the ordinances, once more they stayed with Wesley's plan, deferring any other decision until the following Conference. In 1779, however, the preachers met in two separate conferences, the northern circuits continuing to maintain the *status quo*, while those in Virginia decided to elect a presbytery, who should both administer the sacraments and ordain other preachers by the laying on of hands.²¹ In order to avoid a permanent division, however, in 1780 a deputation consisting of Asbury, Watters, and Garrettson persuaded the Virginians to rescind their previous decision, and once more to wait until Wesley might be able to offer some more orthodox solution to their problem.²² Ordination could be purchased at too expensive a price, it seemed, though Philip Gatch made a note on Asbury's expurgated edition of the *Fluvanna Minutes*: "May 1779, some of the Preachers undertook to administer the ordinances through necessity. It was to keep our societies together. I believe it was of the Lord, for he greatly blessed us."²³

This deferment of ordination for a further year was agreed to on condition that the participants consult Wesley during the interval, and this they did, in spite of the logistical problems of wartime. Asbury wrote on May 12, and several times more during the following months, though all that survives is a transcript of his letter to Wesley of September 3, 1780.²⁴ John Dickins also wrote.²⁵ Wesley's reply came through in time for the Conference beginning

April 16, 1781, which Garretson thus described: "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."²⁶ On October 19 that year Lord Cornwallis surrendered at Yorktown, the beginning of the end of the war. In March 1782 a new government came into power in England, preliminary peace plans were signed in November 1782, and after lengthy negotiations between all the nations concerned, the Treaty of Paris was signed September 3, 1783, to be ratified January 14, 1784. Thus three years passed between the virtual cessation of military activities in America and the accomplishment of Wesley's mission to export an ordained Methodist ministry to America.

Wesley seems to have done little during 1782, lulled by Watters' reassurance that the ordination controversy had died down.²⁷ This was later confirmed by Asbury. Not until April 5, 1783, when Asbury heard (incorrectly) "that peace was confirmed between England and America" did he himself undergo "various exercises of mind" about what the new circumstances might imply for their ecclesiastical situation.²⁸ He believed that so far Methodist sacramental needs had been adequately satisfied by such clergy as "Mr. Jarratt, in Virginia, . . . Mr. Pettigrew, North Carolina, Dr. Magaw, Philadelphia, and Mr. Ogden in East Jersey."²⁹ Wesley's own mind had also been genuinely exercised as he realized that loyal and patient preachers were waiting for him to take the initiative that should transform them into a sacramental society, an independent church having its roots in a Church of England reformed by Methodism. He was not yet sure how to approach the task, however, nor was he convinced that the time was yet ripe. It seemed clear that it would be fruitless once more to approach the Bishop of London to ordain Methodist preachers, as he had done in nominating John Hoskins for Canada in 1780.³⁰ He tried to keep abreast of trans-Atlantic conditions, however,³¹ and in February 1783 informed William Black in Nova Scotia: "Our next Conference is to begin in July, and I have great hopes, we shall be then able to send you assistance."³² (Wesley, of course, was thinking in global terms, the United States forming one field, their northern neighbours another.) On May 23, 1783, Edward Dromgoole wrote from Virginia about the great and effectual door now opened in America, and assured Wesley that the Methodist preachers were so united to Asbury that they wished to keep him there, to which Wesley replied on Sept. 17: "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 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."

Asbury was becoming somewhat anxious, however, and warned Wesley on Sept. 20, 1783, that after all "the friendly clergy are located, and do but little for us." He urged that the young hotheads "of our connection" must be forestalled from seeking ordination on their own, so that Wesley ought to move swiftly and decisively if he would prevent disruption. With little disguise he offered his own services to maintain order. Wesley had already acted decisively, on October 3 sending a letter to the American preachers underlining the dangers which might well arise from an influx of unauthorized British preachers, and pleading that they should not receive any "who will not be subject to the American Conference, and cheerfully conform to the Minutes both of the American and English Conferences", or any who would be reluctant to place themselves under the supervision of Francis Asbury as the General Assistant.³³

Further correspondence, interviews with Coke and others in England, inquiries into ecclesiastical law, literary preparations for the new church, the screening of suitable preachers, took up almost another year before Wesley was able to send his long-awaited solution of the ordinance problem in America. It comprised a "little sketch" of a new church, a thoroughly revised Book of Common Prayer, Ordinal, and Articles of Religion, a new *Collection of Psalms and Hymns*, and a commendatory letter addressed "To Dr. Coke, Mr. Asbury, and our Brethren in North America." He also sent two of his trusted preachers, newly ordained as deacons and elders, together with his clerical colleague Dr. Thomas Coke, whom Wesley had commissioned by the laying of hands as his first Superintendent of the whole work in America, with instructions that he should set apart Asbury for the same office. "Superintendent" was the term which replaced "bishop" in his revised Ordinal—a simple translation of that Greek word into ecclesiastical Latin, a title used in the early church and by the Reformed Churches both in Europe and Scotland, which avoided any overtones of pomp and power while underlining the pastoral function of oversight.

The actual content of his "little sketch" had been simmering in Wesley's mind for months, and had been carefully discussed with Coke. As

soon as Coke landed in New York on November 3 he described to John Dickins, stationed there, "our new plan of Church government," and delivered a similar talk to the whole society in Philadelphia. On November 14 he met Asbury at the Quarterly Meeting in Barrett's Chapel, whose reaction was, "It may be of God," but insisted that his own appointment should be left to the preachers.³⁴ He had discussed it with a few of them, and all agreed that the whole plan should be placed before a conference. Freeborn Garrettson was therefore sent off to invite the preachers to Baltimore for Christmas Eve, while Asbury took Coke for a little exercise to work off his fat—a thousand-mile tour of the southern societies. Most of the preachers who assembled in Lovely Lane on Christmas Eve had already had plenty of time to talk over at least some details of the plan with others. Most welcomed it, but not all. Thomas Haskins and his companions felt that Wesley was rushing things too much, and that other clergy should first be consulted.³⁵

The crucial early events of the Conference were the ordination of deacons, elders, and superintendents. These three orders—and no others—are mentioned by Richard Whatcoat (already ordained by Wesley), Thomas Haskins, Jesse Lee, and Asbury himself.³⁶ Yet when the official record of the sessions eventually appeared it was worded somewhat strangely. In reply to Question 3, "What Plan of Church-Government shall we hereafter pursue?" came the sentence: "We will form ourselves into an Episcopal Church under the Direction of Superintendents, Elders, Deacons, and Helpers, according to the Forms of Ordination annexed to our Liturgy, and the Form of Discipline set forth in these Minutes."³⁷

Familiarity with the phraseology disguises the strange mixture in this Brunswick stew. Each ingredient calls for careful scrutiny: neither fish, flesh, nor fowl predominates, but together they form an exotic conglutination of Scripture, episcopalianism, and presbyterianism, strongly seasoned with Wesley's Methodism. Perhaps strangest of all is the intrusion of the word "Helpers," for though such persons appear in the *Discipline*, they are there as unordained pastor-preachers.³⁸ Clearly they held a lower status than the new deacons. It seems, however, that this category was not intended as a kind of glorified Local Preacher, but as a continuation of the regular itinerant preachers of 1769-84—in the 1789 *Discipline*, indeed, "Helpers" is altered to "Preachers." Apparently, in the urgent and overriding need to ordain sufficient Methodist preachers, all the ramifications of such a decision

had not sufficiently been thought through—as Thomas Haskins had complained so that the members of the Conference were faced with the danger of having disenfranchised those preachers not present, those who might prefer not to be ordained, or those who were not sufficiently proven in the work to be considered ready for ordination. What was their status, those untidy remnants of the previous all-embracing brotherhood of preachers termed Wesley's "Helpers"? Here was fertile soil for ecclesiastical envy! There was another anomaly, of course. Was being a deacon, ordained to preach only, really more important, more definitive, than being received into Full Connection by the Conference as a Helper? In embracing ordination as the solution for their problems, were the preachers forfeiting a rich element in their heritage, the brotherhood of the preaching itinerancy? Had their repeated vows of loyalty to Wesley's "old plan" been sabotaged by the "new plan," even though it apparently originated with him?

In spite of complaints about Wesley's autocracy and lack of understanding of their unique circumstances, they owed to him, under God, much of their spiritual heritage, and many of them—probably most—still wished to retain the familiar setting of the methods of Methodism, always provided that their ecclesiastical status was improved. They were content to remain under orders, so long as they were in undisputable Holy Orders. But *how* were these to be secured? It seemed that the essence of the new form of imported episcopalian government remained similar to Wesley's Methodism, except that a benevolent ecclesiastical monarchy was being replaced by an ecclesiastical oligarchy, a rule by superintendents. The actions of Wesley, Coke, and Asbury in this are fairly clear, but their ultimate intentions remain a matter of speculation. As Bishop Tigert suggested, the superintendents alone were probably intended to retain all appointive powers, but by Asbury's appeal to the Conference this power was partially stripped from them, and the preachers themselves in general gained at least *elective* powers over all appointments.³⁹ Wesley himself had readily separated the functions of ruling priest and serving prophet, but now the prophets—the preachers—came to have a voice in their own standing. Wesley's expedient vicarious ordination of only a few of them—surely to have been appointed by the superintendents—had become a few ordinands elected by the preachers themselves, with the implication that others similarly would eventually be elected and ordained, including most of those now omitted.

In the meantime, what? Surely the time-tested fellowship of Wesley's lay "Helpers" should be preserved! And so, apparently after the close of their founding Conference, its decisions were patched up by the addition of their old title, in a context which made it quite clear that this was not an unimportant vestigial appendix, but that the whole new church was to be "under the direction" of "Superintendents, Elders, Deacons, and Helpers"! By this action, probably initiated by Asbury—witness his initial response to Coke's outline of Wesley's plan, "It may be of God"⁴⁰—they moved a step nearer to democracy in American Methodism. The Christmas Conference had sown the seeds of a general ordained status for Wesley's lay "Helpers" in America, which after many days and much uprooting of troublesome tares, eventually bore a bountiful harvest.

After 1784, and far beyond Wesley's death in 1791, apart from the enhanced status of the preachers, and the fulfilling of their sacramental ministry, things continued much as they had been, church or no church. The term *Circuit* continued in use, though steadily reduced in importance with the diminishing number of societies encompassed. The societies themselves were increasingly called charges, or stations, while the Circuit Quarterly Meeting, from covering a huge area, gradually dwindled to a Quarterly Conference for a restricted charge or charges, and was renamed in recent years the Quarterly Charge Conference. The quarterage, or quarterly allowances paid to the travelling preachers at the Quarterly Meeting, became simply allowances, though for a time they were referred to as his "salary," almost as if professionalism were creeping in—even though the sums allowed were small enough to offer little inducement to transform a vocation into a profession. The term *Assistant* gradually became quite redundant in Wesley's technical sense of the preacher in charge of a circuit, as did the practice of preachers itinerating around a circuit, though itinerating from circuit to circuit remained an issue constantly refuelled by official pronouncements. The importance of Methodism as an integrated system, a connectional organization, remained paramount, however, and being received into Full Connection by the Conference was by some regarded as of equal importance with being ordained. The Annual Conference, of course, remained the major structural feature linking Methodists throughout the world, though the new idea of a quadrennial General Conference was introduced in America in the

year after Wesley's death. The annual "Stations" of the preachers eventually became their "appointments," and the double choice of *Minutes* and *Discipline* for Methodism's administrative handbook was resolved in favour of the latter title. Strangely enough the preachers themselves were called preachers still, even after ordination, not "ministers"—a title which Wesley himself had reserved for the ordained clergy of the Church of England. "Priest" and "presbyter" were never used, and even the term "elder" (except in certain contexts, as in "presiding elder") was of limited currency. The fullest justification for having deacons seemed to be that Wesley had clearly recommended a three-fold order of ministry, but the office has caused problems to this day. Even before Wesley's death "superintendent" was replaced by "bishop," to Wesley's disgust, but the discarded title refused to die: not only did it remain in later years as an integral part in the title of the presiding elder's successor, the district superintendent; even in the present United Methodist Church the third restrictive rule prohibits "doing away with our plan of itinerant general superintendency"—i.e., of course, the episcopacy, in Wesley's own interpretation of that office. Indeed Wesley's deliberate delay, combined with Asbury's patient persistence, had secured as much as could have been hoped for in adapting an old ecclesiastical model to a new environment, while at the same time greatly enhancing the status of its hitherto lay preachers.

Perhaps of equal importance to the ecclesiastical status gained in 1784 through Wesley's initiative was the greatly improved democratic status gained for the preachers by Asbury's unexpected stubbornness. As noted above, it seems almost certain that both Wesley and Coke envisaged, and expected Asbury to embrace, government by the two bishops in America, who would ordain and station the preachers largely in accordance with their own judgment, though subject during his lifetime to Wesley's approval. What Asbury did by his appeal to the conference was to secure for the preachers what would otherwise have been regarded as an episcopal prerogative, the election of subsequent bishops, and their answerability to the preachers in conference. For this kind of government in England *after his death*, Wesley had of course made provision in his Deed of Declaration in 1784, but here also, as in declaring themselves an autonomous Church, the American preachers were ahead of their greatly respected British mentors.

NOTES

1. Davies, Rupert, and Gordon Rupp, eds. *A History of the Methodist Church in Great Britain*, Vol. I, London, Epworth Press, 1965, pp. 220-1.
2. Wesley Historical Society, *Proceedings*, Vol. XXVII (1950), pp. 7-15.
3. Wesley Historical Society, *Publication No. I, The Manuscript Minutes, 1747*, p. 48.
4. *Ibid.*, Supplement (1904), pp. 61-6.
5. Baker, Frank, *From Wesley to Asbury*, Durham, NC, Duke University Press, 1976, p. 80.
6. *Ibid.*, pp. 84-98.
7. *Ibid.*, pp. 33-4.
8. Watters, William, *A Short Account of the Christian Experience and Ministerial (sic) Labours of William Watters*, Alexandria, Snowden, nd, p. 30.
9. Methodist Episcopal Church, *Minutes of the Methodist Conferences, annually held in America, from 1773 to 1794 inclusive*, Philadelphia, Tuckniss, 1795, pp. 5-6.
10. Wesley Historical Society, *The Manuscript Minutes, 1746*, p. 34.
11. Baker, Frank, *A Union Catalogue of the Publications of John and Charles Wesley*, The Divinity School, Duke University, Durham, NC, 1966, No. 368B.
12. Watters, op.cit., p. 19.
13. *Ibid.*, p. 43.
14. Garrettson, Freeborn, *Experience and Travels*, Philadelphia, Hall, 1791, pp. 26, 37-41, 44, 47, 52, 55.
15. Methodist Church (United Kingdom), *Minutes of the Methodist Conferences*, Vol. I (1744-98), London, Mason, 1862, pp. 60-70, 638-48, 472-8, 516-22, 523-4: in the 1766 original, pp. 9-23, and in the 1770 original, pp. 49-53, 7-15, 33-5, 22-5.
16. According to his MS Journal he was born in Baltimore Sept. 15, 1757, and his MS Minutes of the Philadelphia Conference beginning May 25, 1774, note his admission on trial. (For both these documents I am indebted to Edwin Schell.)
17. Watters, op.cit., p. 57. Cf. Asbury, Francis, *Journal and Letters*, ed. Elmer T. Clark et al., 3 vols, Nashville, Abingdon, 1958, I, 238, and Rankin, Thomas, MS Journal (at Garrett-Evangelical Seminary, Evanston, Ill.), May 20, 25.
18. Duke, William, MS Minutes of the 1774-7 Conferences, transcribed by Edwin Schell, 1964.
19. This document is not present in the printed *Minutes*, but see the MS Minutes prepared by Philip Gatch, Question 11. These are preserved in the Methodist Theological School in Ohio, Delaware, Ohio, and were published in *The Western Christian Advocate*, May 19, 26, 1837, and reproduced by Edwin Schell for the Baltimore Conference Historical Society; cf. Elizabeth Connor, *Methodist Trail Blazer*, Creative Publishers, Cincinnati, Ohio, 1970, pp. 75-7. The document was based on one appearing in the British annual *Minutes* for 1769, 1773, 1774 (and signed on other occasions), which was also reproduced in the "Large" *Minutes* of 1770.
20. Watters, op.cit., p. 68.
21. Gatch, MS Minutes; cf. Garrettson, op.cit., p. 176, etc.
22. Watters, op.cit., pp. 71-3, 79-81; Garrettson, op.cit., pp. 176-8; Connor, *Methodist Trail Blazer*, pp. 97-112, 118-25; William Warren Sweet, *Virginia Methodism*, Richmond, Whittet and Shepperson, 1955, pp. 79-86.
23. Connor, op.cit., p. 109.
24. Asbury, *Journal*, I, 350; III, 24-6.
25. Watters, op.cit., p. 102; Garrettson, op.cit., p. 177.
26. Garrettson, op.cit., p. 207.
27. Cf. John Wesley, Feb. 22, 1782, to Watters: "It is a great blessing that there is an end of that unhappy dispute, which otherwise would have torn you all in pieces. Again and again it has been set on foot in England and Ireland, but it never came to any height. We always took care to suppress it at the very beginning, so that it could not do much mischief."
28. Asbury, *Journal*, I, 440.
29. Cf. Asbury's letter of August 1783 to George Shadford in England, *Journal*, III, 28. "Mogden" in the (misread?) original clearly refers to the Rev. Uzel Ogden: cf. Wesley's letter to Asbury of Oct. 31, 1784, and Asbury, *Journal*, I, 442.
30. Baker, Frank, *John Wesley and the Church of England*, London, Epworth Press, 1970, pp. 259-70.
31. Cf. his letter from Dublin, written May 2, 1783 to his brother Charles in London: "Tell me all you know of the good Congress, the loyalists, and the colonies."
32. From the original in Victoria University, Toronto, Feb. 26, 1783.
33. Lee, Jesse, *A Short History of the Methodists*, Baltimore, Magill and Clime, 1810, pp. 85-6.
34. Asbury, *Journal*, I, 471.
35. Sweet, William Warren, *Men of Zeal*, New York, Abingdon, 1935, pp. 170-2.
36. Sweet, *Men of Zeal*, pp. 166-7, 173; Lee, op.cit., pp. 94-5; Asbury, *Journal*, I, 474.
37. Tigert, John J. *A Constitutional History of American Episcopal Methodism*, 6th ed., Nashville, Smith and Lamar, 1916, pp. 534-5.
38. *Ibid.*, pp. 550-2 (Questions 32-4).
39. Tigert, op.cit., pp. 192-4.
40. Whoever pointed out the oversight, it was probably Coke who was responsible finally for setting it right: see Baker, *From Wesley to Asbury*, p. 155n.