

THE WORLD METHODIST FAMILY

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The millions of warm-hearted people throughout the world who look to John and Charles Wesley as their spiritual pioneers still remember that in 1739 John Wesley had proclaimed prophetically, "I look upon all the world as my parish." This was written by the priest of the Church of England after he had led a frustrating mission to British immigrants and native Indians in Georgia, been stirred up to his own spiritual shortcomings by Moravian refugees, and returned to England. Here on May 24, 1738, under the influence of Peter Bohler, another Moravian, John Wesley altered his allegiance from stern religious discipline as God's way of salvation to simple faith in Christ and declared: "I felt my heart strangely warmed. I felt I did trust in Christ, Christ alone for salvation, and an assurance was given me that he had taken away my sins, even mine, and saved me from the law of sin and death." Less than three weeks later he made pilgrimage to the Moravians in Germany, seeking (as he replied when asked why he went to Herrnhut) "to see the place where the Christians live."

Returned to England, John Wesley began to preach salvation by faith, now from personal experience and with new spiritual power. The churches in general were not ready for this, and on April 2, 1739, Wesley ushered in an evangelical revolution by agreeing to preach in the open air in Bristol.

The Wesleys gathered their multiplying followers into "societies" for Christian fellowship, striving to keep them within the Church of England community. However, they refused to turn them away provided they avoided moral evil, sought to do all the good in their power, and attended the means of spiritual grace in one genuine evangelical group or another--which usually meant welcoming people increasingly nicknamed "Methodists."

While he strove at first to enroll ordained clergy as colleagues, in 1741 John Wesley deliberately began to accept the assistance of trained laymen as his "sons in the gospel" who proliferated so rapidly that he was enabled to raise Methodist societies throughout the British Isles. In 1769 Wesley sent two of his experienced preachers to train and organize along British lines the societies which had sprung up in Maryland, New York, and Philadelphia, of whom Francis Asbury became the acknowledged leader. With the birth of the United States, Wesley unsuccessfully tried to secure ordained evangelical clergy for his American societies, or the ordination of some of his own preachers.

Eventually in 1784 he authorized (and re-ordained) Dr. Thomas Coke to lead a small delegation to launch the Methodist Episcopal Church, with Asbury ordained as a second "bishop"--though Wesley strongly preferred the term "superintendent," soon discarded by his American followers. This formed the first Methodist Church.

By his death in 1791, therefore, Wesley had two major denominations springing from his evangelical leadership: those in Britain with something like an interwoven presbyterian organization which he termed a "connexion," and those in America whose organization was episcopalian with three orders of ministry, deacons, elders (rather than "priests" or "presbyters") and bishops. In 1791 the British Methodist Conference listed a total membership in Europe of 72,476 and the Methodist Episcopal Church in America, 64,146, though these statistics were inevitably only an approximation. "Europe" really implied the British Isles.

Wales had developed its own form of Calvinistic Methodism under the leadership of Howell Harris (a layman) who began his

evangelism there in 1735. The first English-Welsh Methodist Association assembled under the leadership of George Whitefield (an ordained priest), John Wesley's former pupil at Oxford and Calvinist in outlook, who had taken over Wesley's American mission and continued to tour both America and Wales, as well as England and Scotland. To the general public Whitefield was the main target of anti-Methodist satire.

Charles Wesley was the chief pioneer in Ireland, taking over from his brother John in 1747. The Irish warmed to the straightforward evangelism of the Methodists and multiplied rapidly, eventually furnishing many leaders for American Methodism.

Scotland did not resonate to John Wesley as eagerly as it did to Whitefield, but from 1751 onwards Wesley built up solid societies in the major cities. The Isle of Man became a phenomenal hotbed of Methodism under the evangelism of John Crook (Wesley's lay itinerant preacher) from 1775 onwards.

Sporadic evangelizing visits to the Channel Islands from 1783, including that of John Wesley and Thomas Coke in 1787, had minor success, nurturing both English and French-speaking societies; and in 1791 Methodism trickled over thence into France. Most of Methodism planted in Europe after Wesley's death, however, sprang from America.

Methodism After Wesley

Both in the British Isles and the United States a similar kind of development took place during the following two centuries. During the eighteenth century there was steady growth out from the original centers, and some missionary activity. During the first half of the nineteenth century there was more growth, more missionary activity, but also some internal policy divisions; during the second half, growth, together with occasional reunions, and many more missionary ventures from the bewildering number of Methodist and Methodist-related churches (especially

from those in the U.S.A.), now scattered over every continent.

The twentieth century has witnessed more reunions, more ecumenical fellowship, some unions with other denominations, and some national unions between Methodist-related "missionary" churches from different countries and Methodist denominations. It is not unrealistic, indeed, to speak of the Methodist Missionary Melting-pot. The global results are admirably documented in the handbook, *WORLD METHODIST COUNCIL* (Biltmore Press, 1992, p. 240), describing the Methodist and Methodist-related churches organized in 96 countries with 29 million members and a constituency of over 60 million. Before attempting to summarize the late twentieth century amalgam in the World Methodist Council, however, it seems wise to sketch the continuing history after Wesley in the "home countries" of Britain and the U.S.A.

Wesley's followers, whether in Britain or America, never split from their parent body because of disagreement over Wesley's basic insistence upon proclaiming salvation by faith, though there were divisions in America because of a lowered emphasis upon Christian perfection, or holiness.

British Isles

In 1797 in England, however, Alexander Kilham led an agitation to secure more democracy in organization, which led to the Methodist New Connexion. Hugh Bourne in the Potteries and William Clowes in Hull sought to revive open-air evangelism, especially in the American form of camp-meetings, and united in 1811 to form the Primitive Methodist Connexion. William O'Bryan's over-eager evangelism in Cornwall and Devon led to his expulsion and the formation in 1819 of the Bible Christians. They accepted women as itinerant preachers, as later did the Primitive Methodists. The Protestant Methodists were formed in Leeds in 1828 because they felt that the installation of an organ would disrupt the spontaneity of their worship, and the Wesleyan Methodist

Association in 1835 opposed a college for theological education.

Unrest in many forms was in the air. In 1848 several reformers were expelled from the Wesleyan Church in Brixton, London, including Catherine Mumford, recently converted, "the mother of the Salvation Army," who in 1855 married William Booth, another expelled reformer who for a time served as a revivalist with the Methodist New Connexion; he became his wife's right hand in the Christian Revivalist Association, which in 1877 took the title, The Salvation Army. Egged on by an anonymous pamphlet campaign against Wesleyan ministerial autocracy, in 1849 the reform movement developed into such a landslide that it split the Wesleyan Methodist Church in two.

The tide began to turn. In 1857 many of the reformers came together in the United Methodist Free Churches. These joined forces with the Methodist New Connexion and the Bible Christians in 1907 to form the United Methodist Church. In 1932 this church reunited with the Wesleyan Methodist Church and the Primitive Methodists to form the Methodist Church. Remaining outside this reunion was a small group of Independent Methodist Churches (formed 1806), with no paid ministry, and the small Wesleyan Reform Union, organized in 1859.

The Primitive Wesleyan Methodists in Ireland were organized in 1818 by Adam Averell, an ordained deacon of the Church of Ireland, who nevertheless sought communion administered by Methodist preachers rather than the parish clergy. The disestablishment of the Irish church in 1869 paved the way for their reunion in 1879 with the parent body which was then renamed the Methodist Church in Ireland. The Irish Conference remained independent of the British Conference but with somewhat ambiguous vestigial links at the presidential level.

Across the Atlantic

Even during Wesley's lifetime two West Atlantic communities with loyalties to their

mother country found themselves increasingly coming under the oversight of the Methodist Episcopal Church of the United States.

Canada

Those in "British North America" were centered from 1785 in the circuits of Newfoundland and Nova Scotia. Laurence Coughlan, an Irishman who went to Newfoundland in 1765, in 1776 published an account of his labors there. William Black, a Yorkshireman, began preaching in Nova Scotia in 1779. James Evans from Hull devised a printed syllabic language for the Cree Indians in the northern territories, and in this century his remains were flown from Hull to rest with them.

Preachers from both Britain and America, representing their varied denominations, expanded the work in Canada, struggled for generations to achieve unity, and at last in 1884, from what had been five separate Methodist denominations, formed The Methodist Church of Canada. In 1925 they joined most of the Presbyterians and the few Congregationalists to form The United Church of Canada--supported by a very active Canadian Methodist Historical Society.

Caribbean

The other West Atlantic area during Wesley's day was that in Antigua which, through the indefatigable energy of Thomas Coke from 1786 onwards, spread to other islands in the West Indies and was regarded as Britain's first "Overseas Mission." In 1758 Nathaniel Gilbert of Antigua had brought his family to London where Wesley baptized two of his black slaves.

In 1778 Wesley sent out John Baxter, a Chatham shipwright and lay pioneer who became Wesley's full-time preacher to the Caribs. The stations organized over the years by the Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society became autonomous in 1967 as The Methodist Church in the Caribbean and the Americas, one of the founding members in 1973 of the

Caribbean Conference of Churches. They join many other groups from American Methodism in several ecumenical ventures. The World Methodist Council now lists twenty groups of islands and twenty distinct Methodist entities.

United States

The huge distances in the United States naturally led to Methodism there being subdivided into many separate conferences, with Bishops Asbury and Coke itinerating among them. They were soon aided by additional bishops, especially as Coke himself shuttled between America and England and became the chief proponent of British missions to the Caribs in the West Indies and also to Africa and Asia.

Within the Methodist Episcopal Church itself divisions arose, especially with the growing self-consciousness of the blacks among them, many of whom were office-holders. Richard Allen had long been a respected preacher at St. George's Church in Philadelphia and its black offshoot, Bethel, when in 1799 Bishop Asbury ordained him deacon. In 1816 Allen gathered together a group of black leaders to form the African Methodist Episcopal Church, and they elected him their first bishop. In 1829 a similar outgrowth from the John Street Methodist Episcopal Church in New York City led to the formation of the African Methodist Episcopal Church, Zion.

The church suffered from other internal problems, as well as being greatly perplexed by anti-slavery agitation. For many years there was agitation for more democracy in organization, focusing on the elimination of the powerful office of bishop. Some expelled members formed a society of "Associate Methodist Reformers" who in 1830 adopted a new Constitution, published in Baltimore, in which they took the name, The Methodist Protestant Church.

At the General Conference of 1844 the northern delegates accepted a "Plan of

Separation" from those of the south where the fact that emancipation was legally forbidden had jeopardized the position of a bishop whose wife owned slaves. This most devastating split (mainly, but not solely, over the issue of slavery) led to the formation of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, which held its first General Conference in 1846.

In 1870 a third black denomination hived off, from the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, taking the title, Colored Methodist Episcopal Church, renamed in 1956 Christian Methodist Episcopal Church. Many blacks nevertheless remained with the parent Methodist Episcopal Church and developed responsible positions within that body.

In 1939 the three major Methodist denominations in the U.S.A.--the Methodist Episcopal Church; the Methodist Episcopal Church, South; and the Methodist Protestant Church--reunited as The Methodist Church, remaining an episcopalian body with about eight million members. Among the terms of the union was the formation of a Judicial Council and the grouping into five regional jurisdictional conferences to meet quadrennially, as well as a sixth "central" jurisdictional conference to incorporate the black conferences. In 1968 all jurisdictions were integrated during a union with the Evangelical United Brethren (which church had culminated in 1946 from a series of unions between Methodist-related churches having German origins) forming The United Methodist Church.

There are also a number of less numerical churches in the United States affiliated with the World Methodist Council. In 1829 English Primitive Methodists from Hull and Tunstall established missions in New York and Philadelphia. In 1840 they separated from their home conference as The Primitive Methodist Church. This spread to Canada where they merged with other Methodist bodies in 1884.

The Wesleyan Methodist Church of the United States was formed in 1843 with a strong emphasis on holiness, although for

many its opposition to slavery was the main attraction. Upon union in 1968 with The Pilgrim Holiness Church (itself formed in 1897 and passing through unions with other holiness churches) its title was simplified to The Wesleyan Church.

The Free Methodist Church was founded in 1860 in New York State by Benjamin T. Roberts, mainly to recapture an emphasis on holiness and enthusiastic worship. There is an offshoot in Canada which remains distinct from the United Church of Canada, as does the offshoot of The Wesleyan Church.

After negotiations with many holiness groups having strong sympathies with Wesley's teachings, but disavowing any major emphasis upon "speaking with tongues," the Church of the Nazarene was organized in 1908. It now has half a million members in the U.S.A. and Canada and almost as many in dozens of mission fields on every continent.

Also affiliated with the World Methodist Council are several quite small Methodist-related churches in the U.S.A.: the African Union First Colored Methodist Protestant Church which dates from 1813 but has passed through several changes of title; the Allegheny Wesleyan Methodist Connection; the Bible Protestant Church, extremely conservative; the Congregational Methodist Church, strongly conservative; the Evangelical Methodist Church, ultra-fundamentalist; Holiness Methodist Church formed in 1909; Missionary Methodist Church of America formed in 1913 from the Wesleyan Methodist Church of the United States; Reformed Methodist Union Episcopal Church formed in 1885 from the African Methodist Episcopal Church; Reformed Zion Union Apostolic Church formed in 1869 from the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church; Southern Methodist Church formed in 1934 from the Methodist Episcopal Church, South; Union American Methodist Episcopal Church formed in 1850.

A Worldwide Community

We have traced in outline the histories of the parent body of Methodism in the British Isles and of its much more prolific daughter-church in the United States. Already we have seen something of the missionary urge from both sides of the Atlantic and have realized that Wesley's evangelical enthusiasm, even during his own lifetime, was developing into a worldwide community. This was dramatized and forwarded by the beginning of the decennial World Methodist Conferences in 1881 and the quinquennial World Methodist Councils from 1951.

It is impossible in this brief article to relate in detail the stories behind all the members of this great Methodist family, especially as many of them have merged or are merging their Methodist identity in the greater Church of Christ Universal. What we propose now, however, is to move eastward around the globe, adding to what we have already said about America and the Caribbean to Latin America, then moving from the British Isles to the remainder of Europe, and thence to Africa, Asia, and Australasia.

Latin America

From the United States Methodism moved in 1873 to Mexico where it united in 1930 to form the flourishing autonomous Iglesia Metodista de Mexico with six episcopal areas. Mexican Methodism, like Methodism in most of South America, saw John Wesley as a prototype of liberation theology because of his close ties with the poor and oppressed.

There are also strong autonomous Methodist churches in Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil (founded in 1836 and now supporting a missionary conference in the northeast as well as six regular conferences), Ecuador, Paraguay, Peru, Uruguay, as well as mission churches elsewhere (established especially by the Church of the Nazarene). In Chile Methodism became autonomous in 1969 but has close ecumenical links with pentecostal

and holiness groups with Methodist backgrounds.

In South America there is a total membership of a million and a Methodist community of two-and-a-half million. The total Methodist-related membership in Central America and the Caribbean was 350,000 in 1992, with a community of 680,000.

European Continent

On the continent of Europe Methodism was relatively unsuccessful until the middle of the nineteenth century, and even then the predecessors of the episcopal United Methodist Church in America was the pioneer or dominant church in Austria (where the British had begun work in 1870), Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Hungary, Norway, Poland, Russia (where Bishop Ruediger Minor now supervises from his office in Moscow), Sweden, Switzerland, and Yugoslavia. The United Protestant Church of Belgium also had its roots in The United Methodist Church of the U.S.A.

The tiny beginnings of French Methodism from England in 1791 were revived by the creation of an autonomous conference under Charles Cook in 1852, but in 1939 this became part of the French Reformed Church, except for a few who continued as the Union of Evangelical Methodist Churches. The small group in the Netherlands came from the Church of the Nazarene.

A British mission in Italy was begun in 1861 and joined by an American mission in 1870. From 1878 Roman Catholicism claimed to be the state religion and others were barely tolerated. Nevertheless the Methodist witness from both Britain and the U.S.A. remains strong in Italy, even in Rome.

In 1811, during the Peninsular War, Methodism in Portugal was fostered by class meetings held by soldiers in the Duke of Wellington's army. A Cornish layman began a class meeting in 1853. The first missionary

was sent to Oporto in 1871 from which the British work has developed with ecumenical activities and an increasing likelihood of autonomy.

Methodism in Spain developed from the British soldiers in Gibraltar from 1792, though organized evangelism began its slow progress with William H. Rule in 1832, later paralleled by American work organized in 1920 as the Spanish Methodist Mission. Driven underground during revolution and civil war, the various missions were reorganized in 1945 in the new Evangelical Church of Spain.

Africa

The British-based Methodist Church of South Africa is easily the largest on the continent, with a million and a quarter members and a community twice that size. It began from the evangelism of George Middlemiss, a British soldier, in 1806.

There are also other major Methodist communities stemming from both British and various combinations of American churches in Ghana, Nigeria, and Zaire. In Livingstone's area, which became Northern Rhodesia and then independent Zambia in 1964, Methodism begun by the British Primitive Methodists and Wesleyan Methodists was united in 1932, and in 1965 became part of the United Church of Zambia, leaving four small Methodist groups independent.

In Zimbabwe (formerly Rhodesia) Methodist union is still being sought. The first African bishop of The United Methodist Church there, Abel T. Muzorewa, became the first black Prime Minister of Zimbabwe. That church's first Africa University was opened at Mutare in 1992.

Although it is impracticable to name all the countries or missionary societies, an exception should be made in one of the oldest civilizations, Egypt. Here in 1968 the Free Methodist Church united with the Methodist-related Holiness Movement Church of Canada

to form a Methodist movement with a healthy community of thirty thousand. The Church of the Nazarene also has a small church here, as they do in Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, and Syria, and also in seventeen other African countries, the largest being in South Africa and Mozambique. Altogether in Africa there is a Methodist community of over ten million in thirty countries, whose missionary enterprise is shared by dozens of sponsoring societies, mainly from the U.S.A.

Asia

The Methodist community in Asia now numbers upwards of eleven million, possibly a larger proportion on this continent stemming from Britain than from the U.S.A. The father of Methodist missions, Thomas Coke, died at sea on his way to Ceylon (now Sri Lanka) where the Methodist Church became autonomous in 1964. Thence the Methodist Church spread to South India to form part of The Church of South India (1947), while the founding efforts of William Butler of the Methodist Episcopal Church formed part of The Church of North India (1969). Other American Methodist components still work in both areas.

Pakistan is a predominantly Moslem republic formed from India in 1947. Here in 1970 the United Church of Pakistan incorporated sixty thousand United Methodists into this two hundred thousand union.

In Buddhist Burma, now Myanmar, missionary work began from the U.S.A. in 1873 and from Britain in 1887. Both became autonomous in 1965, but they still remain independent of each other. The smaller American body (in Lower Myanmar) also spread into Malaysia and Singapore, and their church in Indonesia became autonomous as Gereja Methodist Indonesia.

In Japan both Canadian and American Methodist missionaries began their successful evangelism in 1873. In 1907 the Japan Methodist Church was organized at Aoyama Gakuin University, Tokyo, a highly influ-

ential institution founded by the Methodist Episcopal Church in 1874. In 1941 most of the Japanese Methodists joined with other Protestants to form Kyodan, The United Church of Christ in Japan, although when World War II ended in 1945 some smaller Protestant and Methodist-related bodies withdrew. Kyodan in return sends out lay missionaries to other parts of the world, both East and West.

The same is true of the autonomous Korean Methodist Church, springing from American Methodism in 1884, which now has a million and a quarter members with over a hundred lay missionaries proclaiming the gospel in forty-three different countries. This tradition of lay missionaries is also true of the Korean Evangelical Church whose teaching on holiness is also rooted in American Methodism.

The Philippines also constitutes an evangelical stronghold with American roots, the Evangelical Methodist Church in the Philippines being an indigenous offshoot of the Methodist Episcopal Church formed in 1909 which with two other churches, The United Methodist Church and The United Church of Christ (partly Methodist), and the Free Methodist and the Wesleyan Churches, comprise a total community of a million.

In China the American Methodists celebrated their centenary in 1947. Within the following few years, especially in 1950 when Christian missionaries were ejected, the quarter of a million Methodist disciples in mission from both America and Britain (1851) were in turmoil. Many were officially transferred to Taiwan and Hong Kong, but many went underground and relied on lay leadership. Both in China and Hong Kong the Methodist Church had come to rely on the "three-self church--self-governing, self-supporting, self-propagating." Since 1980 7,000 new Protestant churches have been opened, and Chinese Methodists are eager for overseas Methodists to worship with them but not for denominational proselytization.

Australasia

The total Methodist community in Australasia is about three million. The first missionary sent out to Australia by the Wesleyan Conference was Samuel Leigh who landed in Sydney in 1815 with the hope that this would form the springboard for evangelism also in New Zealand and the Pacific islands. In 1902, after the incorporation of other British Methodist churches in 1896, The Methodist Church of Australasia was formed. From this in 1913 The Methodist Church in New Zealand sprung, joined by the Primitive Methodists, and also accepting responsibility for the work in the Western Solomons. In 1983 the New Zealanders made a firm commitment to secure partnership with the Maoris, and thus implement the Treaty of Waitangi made with them by Queen Victoria in 1840. In 1977 the Australian Methodists entered into an ecumenical union with Congregational and Presbyterian churches in Australia under a carefully chosen title, The Uniting Church in Australia, with a community of over a million.

The Methodist Church in Fiji grew from its British Wesleyan roots in 1835 to become a strongly spiritual multi-racial church with a community of 600,000. The Methodist Church of Samoa achieved independence in 1964 from The Methodist Church of Australasia and seeks to be an evangelical missionary church, even with a small community of 70,000.

After initial failures the Australian missionaries to Tonga met great encouragement from the king of Tonga who acknowledged Christianity by taking the name, George Tupou I, and later becoming a Methodist local preacher. Queen Tupou Salote (1918-1965) and her sons continued this strong British Methodist tradition though their title, Free Wesleyan Church, denotes freedom from any link with Australia.

In 1968 The United Church of Papua, New Guinea, and the Solomon Islands took over four areas begun by the inspiration of

George Brown from 1871 onwards, a largely Methodist community of a million.

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Dr. Frank Baker kindly wrote this article at the request of the Editor of the HISTORICAL BULLETIN after it became apparent at the July Cambridge Conference that all would benefit if they were more knowledgeable about the branches of Methodism that developed over the years. As Charles Yrigoyen said recently, "No one in this century has contributed more to our knowledge of the Wesleys and Methodism" than Frank Baker and once again he has demonstrated his willingness to share his knowledge. We are most grateful to him and his wife Nellie who did the proof-reading.

Dr. Baker is the Textual Editor of "The Bicentennial Edition of the Works of John Wesley." The October 1993 issue of *METHODIST HISTORY*, Vol. XXXII, No. 1, gives a complete biographical listing of Dr. Baker's publications. Here are some that might be of special interest to the readers of the HISTORICAL BULLETIN:

"The Origins of Methodism in the West Indies: the Story of the Gilbert Family," *London Quarterly Review*, 185, January 1960.

"The Trans-Atlantic Triangle: Relations Between British, Canadian and American Methodism during Wesley's Lifetime," *Bulletin of the Committee on Archives of the United Church of Canada*, 28, 1979.

"John Wesley and the German Pietists in Georgia," *The Harold Jantz Collection*, ed. Leland R. Phelps. Duke University, Center for International Studies, 1981.

"Methodist Pioneers in the South Pacific," *Wesley's South Seas Heritage: a Report of the South Pacific Regional Conference of the World Methodist Historical Society*, Auckland, New Zealand, May 1987.