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AN HISTORICAL STUDY OF THE LAWS OF THE  
METHODIST CHURCH REGARDING THE ADMINISTRATION OF THE  
LORD'S SUPPER BY OTHER THAN ORDAINED ELDERS

By

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Dedicated to my Wife,

MARION,

Whom I Admire and Love

". . . Jesus took bread, and blessed, and broke it, and gave it to the disciples and said, 'Take, eat; this is my body.' And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he gave it to them, saying, 'Drink of it, all of you; for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.'"

Matthew 26:26-28

Gift of the Author

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May 1953

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## INTRODUCTION

AN HISTORICAL STUDY OF THE LAWS OF THE  
METHODIST CHURCH REGARDING THE ADMINISTRATION OF THE  
LORD'S SUPPER BY OTHER THAN ORDAINED ELDERS

INTRODUCTION

A. The Subject Introduced

The desire of the people called "Methodists" for the opportunity of regular attendance at the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper through the years is understandable. As do most other members of the family of the Christian Church, known by various denominational names, the followers of John Wesley hold this Sacrament in high regard. It is cherished as an important part of their worship experience. Bowmer declares that from the beginning the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper was an integral part of Methodist worship.<sup>1</sup>

The wide-spread and effective use of unordained preachers very early in Methodism's history to the present day has resulted in several problems. One of the most important is the question of the power which should or should not be granted to the unordained preacher serving as the pastor of a Church. Shall Communion be served by other than fully ordained elders?

B. The Subject Justified

. . . . .

1. John C. Bowmer, The Sacrament of the Lord's Supper in Early Methodism, p. 69.

Early in the history of Methodism in England there arose the need for ordained ministers to care for the growing numbers of Societies which regularly met in Chapels. Few qualified clergymen offered their services to Wesley and the Methodists. The need occasioned the rise of faithful "lay assistants" who served as preachers. These "local preachers" as they were later called, were not ordained and were therefore forbidden to administer the sacraments. Hence, there arose the problem which Methodists were to face down to the present. Shall many faithful Christians be denied the sacraments, or should Methodism change its established policy and meet that need?

Although the Methodist Church had 25,491 effective ordained ministers in 1952, there was need to assign 6,613 preachers not qualified to administer the Lord's Supper to serve in churches that otherwise would have had no pastors.<sup>1</sup>

Particularly in the past thirty years the subject has been considered repeatedly by the highest policy-making body in Methodism, the General Conference. The law of the Church has been changed several times in an effort to solve this important problem which has existed since the day of Wesley, and threatens to persist in the future.

#### C. The Subject Delimited

The purpose of this study is to examine the laws of Methodism from her birth in eighteenth century England to the present as

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1. The Daily Christian Advocate, May 6, 1952, p. 511.

they relate to the administration of the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper. English Methodism will be considered only as it comes within the span of John Wesley's lifetime and forms a seed-bed for American Methodism.

The three largest bodies of Methodism, The Methodist Episcopal Church, The Methodist Episcopal Church, South, and The Methodist Protestant Church were brought together again at the Uniting Conference of 1939. Up to that year, this study will concern itself with the parent organization, The Methodist Episcopal Church, from which the other two and several smaller branches came. The united Church, the Methodist Church, will be studied from 1939 to 1952.

There are several interesting theological issues involved and related to the subject under consideration. However, it is not the purpose of this study to be concerned with these theological implications.

#### D. The Method of Procedure

It is necessary to go to the very beginning of the Methodist movement to arrive at a full understanding of the history of the problem centered in the administration of the Lord's Supper. The first chapter deals with early English Methodism and her founder, against the background of the condition of the Church of England in the eighteenth century.

The second chapter considers the origin and growth of American Methodism up to the year 1784. Special attention is given to the issues of ordination and the Sacraments which existed during this

period. Included are the results of the various conferences which dealt with the subject.

In the third chapter the successive history of the General Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church rulings on the administration of the Lord's Supper by unordained preachers are presented, which have been preserved in the annals of history. The period covered is from the first General Conference in 1784 to the General Conference of 1936.

The fourth chapter, which begins with the Uniting Conference of 1939 and extends to the General Conference of 1952, considers the arguments offered pro and con on the issue, and the final decisions of the several conferences of the Methodist Church.

#### E. The Sources of Data

The data for this thesis are drawn from both primary and secondary sources which are relevant to the subject. Primary sources are letters and journals, conference minutes, periodicals, disciplines, and original historical works. Sources which are secondary are biographies, selected historical works, and periodicals.



CHAPTER I

ORDINATION AND SACRAMENTS IN THE PRACTICE  
OF EARLY ENGLISH METHODISM

## CHAPTER I

### ORDINATION AND SACRAMENTS IN THE PRACTICE OF EARLY ENGLISH METHODISM

#### A. Introduction

The condition of the Church of England and her reaction to John Wesley and his followers during the years when Methodism was in her infancy fostered the early formulation of innovations which led to the coming of age of the "sect" into a Church which was to have world-wide significance. Holland N. McTyeire says:

A late writer, not prejudiced in favor of Methodism, admits that when Wesley appeared the Anglican Church was "an ecclesiastical system under which the people of England had lapsed into heathenism, or a state hardly to be distinguished from it."<sup>1</sup>

It is not difficult to catch the sense of respect and warmth the father of Methodism had for the Church from whose hand he received ordination. His attitude toward the Sacraments reflects his early training as a churchman, and his desire to remain with that Church.

The history of the early English Methodist Societies is rewarding as a field of study. It is rich in examples of quiet Christian perseverance, desire for the freedom of worship, and the full blessings of a qualified ministry. A highlight is the story of spirit-filled laymen who sought to shepherd shepherdless flocks.

. . . . .

1. Holland N. McTyeire, A History of Methodism, Vol. 1, p. 32.

B. The State of Religion in The Church of England  
in the Eighteenth Century

No attempt will be made in this study to give a complete picture of the Church or of her clergy during this period. Only those facts pertinent to this work will be mentioned.

1. The Church

a. Her Loss of Power

The series of political events which occurred in England just prior to the eighteenth century had far-reaching effects not only in respect to time, but also in the total life of the country and her people. The Established Church was greatly affected. Previously it had profited from its close union with the royal house, and was permitted to persecute those who did not manifest complete sympathy with it. Regarding the change which took place Maximin Piette says, "In revenge, when the two revolutions took place, it suffered likewise the reverse of royal fortune...the Church found herself deprived both defacto and de jure of her spiritual monopoly of souls."<sup>1</sup>

Under William III (1688-1702) the Act of Toleration reduced the status of the Church to the point where it was almost considered on a par with the sects. Her power and authority were seriously limited. Sects were permitted to rise and were given a measure of freedom hitherto denied them.

. . . . .

1. Maximin Piette, John Wesley in the Evolution of Protestantism, p. 118 - 119.

b. Little Concern for Doctrine

In the pre-Wesleyan era the Church was little moved by the doctrinal issues and controversies which occupied the Protestant religious forces in Germany, France, and Switzerland. One historian declares:

The times were little concerned with articles of faith, or with problems which agitated Zwingli, Luther, and Calvin. To avoid giving offence, the dust which lay on all such questions was never disturbed.<sup>1</sup>

c. Lacking in Vital Christianity

The story is told of Sir William Blackstone making the rounds of the London churches in 1750 and hearing the outstanding Anglican preachers of the day. He was distressed with his findings. Not only was there a lack of vital Christianity, but he reported, "Judged by the ideas which they expressed...it would have been impossible to know whether the speakers were disciples of Confucius, Mohammed, or followers of Christ."<sup>2</sup> Barclay aptly sums the situation up by saying, "The religion of Wesley's age was lacking in any sense of immediate contact with the divine."<sup>3</sup>

2. The Clergy

a. The Shortage of Parish Ministers

There was no shortage of Anglican clergymen in the eighteenth century, and yet many parishes were without clerics. These men of ability and learning could be found in great numbers at the

. . . . .

1. Piette, op. cit., p. 138.

2. Ibid.

3. Wade C. Barclay, Early American Methodism 1769-1844, Vol. 1, p. xvi.

universities, the great cathedrals, and the capitol.<sup>1</sup> Their interest was not in being shepherds of souls, but in the gay social life of the city and university.

b. Knowledge of the Scripture

By the standards of their day these men were considered well-educated. Yet their woeful lack of knowledge of the Scripture is pathetically revealed by Bishop Burnet, who witnessed the sad plight. He reports:

The much greater part of those who come to be ordained are ignorant to the degree to be apprehended by those who are not obliged to know it. The easiest part of knowledge is that to which they are the greatest strangers; I mean the plainest part of the Scripture, which they say, in excuse for their ignorance, that their tutors in the universities never mention the reading of it to them, so that they can give no account, or at least a very imperfect one, of the contents even of the Gospels....This does often tear my heart.<sup>2</sup>

There were of course exceptions, but too few indeed. Most preachers succumbed to the desire for public approval and catered to the high-toned society of the day. With little thought to its spiritual values, sermons were carefully scrutinized so as to conform with the current thoughts on deism and philosophy. Preaching became dry, repellent, and theoretic.<sup>3</sup>

c. Moral and Spiritual Condition

It follows quite naturally that the moral and spiritual condition of the clergy was at a low ebb. Patronage, sinecures, and pluralities of parishes were commonplace. Dr. J. Wesley Bready has

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1. McTyeire, op. cit., p. 31.

2. Ibid.

3. Piette, op. cit., p. 137.

likened the religious situation in this respect to that of the rotten and pocket boroughs in Parliamentary corruption. "Primates and prelates lived like princes," he says, "and many a hard-drinking, fox-hunting parson with family and political influence swallowed more livings than he could chew...."<sup>1</sup> McTyeire's opinion is, "The majority of the clergy were ignorant, worldly-minded, and many of them scandalized their profession by open immorality...."<sup>2</sup>

d. Attitude Toward Methodism

The un-cooperative and often hostile attitude of the clergy toward the Methodists resulted for the most part from the instructions of the ecclesiastical hierarchy to the parish clergy. John Wesley was aware of this, for he wrote in one of his letters:

Mr. Corbett said, he would gladly have asked me to preach, but that the Bishop had forbidden him; who had also forbidden all his Clergy to admit any Methodist Preachers to the Lord's Supper.<sup>3</sup>

Though an ordained member of the Anglican Church, Wesley was also refused the use of the parish Church at Epworth in 17<sup>42</sup> by the Rector, Mr. Romley. It was this that drove Wesley to preach for eight days in the cemetery, standing on his father's tomb.<sup>4</sup> In a letter dated March 11, 17<sup>45</sup>, John Wesley wrote:

I have been drawing up this morning a short state of the case between the Clergy and us....1. About seven years since, we began preaching inward present salvation, as attainable by faith alone. 2. For preaching this doctrine, we were forbidden to preach in the Churches. 3. We then preached in private houses, as occasion

. . . . .

1. J. Wesley Bready, This Freedom - Whence?, p. 28.
2. McTyeire, op. cit., p. 30.
3. Ernest Rhys, The Journal of the Rev. John Wesley, A.M., Vol. 4, pp. 101-102.
4. Piette, op. cit., p. 379.

offered, and when the houses could not contain the people, in the open air. 4. For this many of the Clergy preached or printed against us, as both heretics and schismatics....<sup>1</sup>

In rare instances the clergy were sympathetic and cooperative. One such person was the Reverend Thompson, the Rector at Cornwall. Because of his kindly disposition toward Methodism he was denounced by his fellow ministers to Bishop Lavington, who thereupon threatened to remove and degrade him. Mr. Thompson, in reply, laid his preaching gown at his superior's feet and said, "I can preach the Gospel without a gown."<sup>2</sup>

### 3. The Observance of the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper

#### a. The Administration of the Sacrament

It almost seems unnecessary to add anything further to suggest what the position of the Church of England was in respect to the sacraments. It is perhaps best reflected in Wesley's great reluctance to act contrary to that position by permitting laymen and even ordained Methodist preachers to serve Communion. Regarding this McTyeire says, "...the administration of the sacraments by men not episcopally ordained was quite out of the question."<sup>3</sup>

#### b. Frequency

Parishioners in the city churches could attend a service of Communion with some degree of regularity, but this was not typical throughout the Church. In rural parishes it was observed only often

. . . . .

1. Rhys, op. cit., Vol. 1, p. 490.
2. Piette, op. cit., p. 386.
3. McTyeire, op. cit., p. 181.

enough to satisfy the requirements of the Prayer Book or the edicts of Parliament, which was usually about three times a year.<sup>1</sup> When it was served it was frequently regarded with indifference by large numbers of both clergy and laity.<sup>2</sup>

c. Refused to Methodists

As intolerance for the Methodists grew, Piette says:

A number of ministers...came to refuse communion to the members of the Wesleyan bands....In certain parishes they even urged their people to run the novelty-mongers out of town, and to prevent them from preaching in the open air.<sup>3</sup>

There were a few churches where it was possible to attend services because the parish rector was sympathetic. However there was no assurance that his successor would act toward them in the same friendly manner.<sup>4</sup>

C. John Wesley's Conviction on Ordination and Sacraments

This section is not intended to be a biography, for it is not the purpose of this study. Rather, it presents those facets of John Wesley's life which shed light upon a fuller understanding of the problem at hand, and reflects his attitude on specific questions.

1. His Relation to the Church of England

a. Early Training and Views

John Wesley was born at Epworth, Lincolnshire, England, on

. . . . .

1. Bowmer, op. cit., p. 7.

2. Ibid., p. 3.

3. Piette, op. cit., p. 379.

4. Leslie F. Church, More About the Early Methodist People, p. 260.



June 17, 1703, the fifteenth of nineteen children. His father, Samuel Wesley, was rector at Epworth. Most of the credit for John's early training and education has been attributed to his mother, Susanna. At the age of sixteen John was elected to Christ Church College, Oxford, and to the fellowship of Lincoln College when he was twenty-three. He was ordained a deacon of the Church of England in 1725, and became a priest in 1728.<sup>1</sup>

Concerning the early training, Bowmer says:

(Wesley was)...reared in a household where sympathies were with High Church principles; but the churchmanship of the Epworth rectory was neither the ecclesiastical toryism which so often passed for high churchmanship in the eighteenth century, nor the frequent copying of un-Catholic features of Romanism which characterizes some high churchmen today.<sup>2</sup>

It is generally agreed that his attitude toward the Church was one of complete loyalty. He not only endeavored to avoid any action on his part which would be contrary to the laws of the Church, but Piette says: "The founder insisted that his followers attend assiduously all the services of the Established Church. They were to be its most devoted members."<sup>3</sup> Subsequent events brought about modification of this unequivocal stand. Commenting on this change Abel Stevens says, "Bigoted...at the beginning of his career, we have seen him, year after year, reaching more liberal views of ecclesiastical policy."<sup>4</sup>

b. The Compatibility of Methodism and the Church

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1. Francis H. Tees, The Beginnings of Methodism, p. 16.
2. Bowmer, op. cit., p. 21.
3. Piette, op. cit., p. 466.
4. Abel Stevens, The History of the Methodist Episcopal Church in the United States of America, Vol 2, p. 209.

History amply substantiates that John Wesley never intended to found a new denomination, or to separate from the Anglican Church. Rather, it was his desire to form a kind of religious order within the Church containing fervent Christians.<sup>1</sup>

In reply to the inquiry of a clergyman who asked to know in what points the Methodists differed from the Church, Wesley replied, "To the best of my knowledge, in none; the doctrines we preach are the doctrines of the Church of England."<sup>2</sup>

As late as 1788 the father of Methodism wrote:

...in a course of fifty years, we had neither premeditatedly nor willingly varied from it (the Church) in one article, either of doctrine or discipline....We have in a course of years, out of necessity, not choice, slowly and warily varied in some points of discipline, by preaching in fields, by extemporary prayer, by employing lay preachers, by forming and regulating Societies.... But we did none of these till we were convinced we could no longer omit them, but at the price of our souls.<sup>3</sup>

c. Desire to Remain Within the Church of England

It has been suggested that a significant point of proof that Wesley intended to remain a member of the Church and did not plan to form a Church of his own lies in the fact that he did not draw up a confession of faith for Methodism.<sup>4</sup>

In a letter to a Mr. Hall, dated December 30, 1745, the leader of Methodism reveals his desire to comply with the rules of the Church and the requests of the bishops in so far as he can. His first

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1. Piette, op. cit., p. 384.
2. Rhys, op. cit., Vol. 1., p. 224.
3. Ibid., Vol. 4, p., 445.
4. Piette, op. cit., p. 445.

desire, however, was to act in accordance with the will of God as he knew it. He asserted:

We profess, 1. That we will obey all the laws of that Church... so far as we can with a safe conscience. 2. That we will obey, with the same restriction, the Bishops....But their bare will, distinct from those laws, we do not profess to obey at all.<sup>1</sup>

When accused of being an enemy of the Church, and leading others away from it he retorted, "We are in truth so far from being enemies to the Church, that we are rather bigots to it....I advise all over whom I have any influence, steadily to keep to the Church."<sup>2</sup>

Specific prohibitions were issued to the Methodist lay preachers in an effort to avoid criticism from the Church leaders, and if possible to bring about a working relationship with the Church. In a letter to William Perceval, a fellow Methodist, Wesley, at the age of eighty-one, wrote:

If any of our lay preachers talk either in public or in private against the Church or the clergy, or read the Church prayers, or baptize...require a promise from them to do it no more. And if they break their promise, let them be expelled from the Society.<sup>3</sup>

There is no doubt that the aging patriarch was disturbed by the suggestions and demands that Methodism break with the Church. Especially disconcerting was the news from America where events had reached a climax during his lifetime. Umphrey Lee declares:

...Wesley contended, until his death, that he had not separated from the Church of England; he held to what he considered to be the essentials of Anglican doctrine, and he worshiped, whenever

. . . . .

1. Rhys, op. cit., Vol. 1, p. 542.
2. Ibid., Vol. 3, p. 343.
3. John Telford, The Letters of John Wesley, Vol. 7, p. 213.

possible, in communion with the Church of England.<sup>1</sup>

## 2. His Conviction Regarding Ordination

### a. His Early View

There was great appreciation on the part of John Wesley for the traditions of the Church. His whole background was such that in his early years he, "...laid great stress on ordination at the hands of a bishop."<sup>2</sup> Such ordination, he felt, must be preceded by the standard university training. The thought that he could or would ordain men by the laying on of his own hands was unthinkable.

### b. His Later More Liberal Views

A significant entry was made by Wesley in his Journal for January 20, 1746. He wrote:

On the road I read over Lord King's Account of the Primitive Church. In spite of the vehement prejudice of my education, I was ready to believe that this was a fair and impartial draught; but if so, it would follow that bishops and presbyters are (essentially) of one order, and that originally every Christian congregation was a Church independent of all others.<sup>3</sup>

A new and tremendously important view of ordination began to crystallize in his thinking. The process was to take years before he was to act on these convictions.

The busy years passed, and in 1780 in a letter to his brother Charles, another step is observed in the process of change which John went through with respect to the doctrine of ordination. He wrote:

. . . . .

1. Umphrey Lee, John Wesley and Modern Religion, p. 255.
2. Piette, op. cit., p. 387.
3. Nehemiah Curnock, John Wesley's Journal (Abridged), p. 189.

Read Bishop Stillingfleet's Irenicon or any impartial history of the ancient Church, and I believe you will think as I do. I verily believe I have as good a right to ordain as to administer the Lord's Supper. But I see abundance of reasons why I should not use that right, unless I was turned out of the Church. At present we are just in our place.<sup>1</sup>

Another letter to Charles, sent five years later, after the sender had ordained several preachers for America, stands as the defence of his action. John declared:

...I firmly believe I am a scriptural ἐπίσκοπος as much as any man in England or Europe. (For the uninterrupted succession I know to be a fable, which no man ever did or can prove.) But this does in nowise interfere with my remaining in the Church of England, from which I have no more desire to separate than I had fifty years ago.<sup>2</sup>

The father of Methodism had not lightly discarded the Anglican view of ordination. The distressing need was weighed alongside the basis of the traditional claim for the proper order for ordination. When the change of view was made it was done so with full conviction that it was in order with Scripture.

### 3. His Attitude Toward the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper

#### a. Home Background and Habits

It is Bowmer's thesis that a study of the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper in early Methodism must not begin in the year 1728, when Oxford Methodism was born, but that the foundations go all the way back to the Epworth rectory.<sup>3</sup>

. . . . .

1. Telford, op. cit., Vol. 7, p. 21.
2. George Eayers, Letters of John Wesley, p. 90 - 91.
3. Bowmer, op. cit., p. 17.

At Epworth as a boy, John became accustomed to monthly observance of Holy Communion. This was far more frequent than was found in other country parishes in that day. Samuel Wesley admitted his son to his first service of the Lord's Supper when he was eight years old, after he had been carefully prepared for the experience by his mother. Both parents were anxious that their children should grow up with a high regard for the sacred rites of the Church.<sup>1</sup>

The desire of his parents for him came into full fruition. John began the practice of attending the Lord's Supper at least once a week while he was at Oxford. He wrote to his mother telling of the benefits of the sacrament to a worthy communicant.<sup>2</sup>

b. His Desire that All Methodists Receive the Sacrament

It was Wesley's wish that Methodists attend the Communion Service as regularly as possible under the prevailing conditions of the unfriendliness of most ministers of the Established Church and the lack of ordained preachers among the Societies. He was deeply concerned with the problem thus presented. Bowmer says, "The burden of maintaining regular administration often pressed heavily upon him."<sup>3</sup>

On one occasion Wesley was greatly relieved when Dr. Deleznot, a minister of the French Huguenots, offered to him the use of his chapel at Wapping, London. Filling the building, which seated about two hundred people, on five consecutive weeks, the members of the

. . . . .

1. Ibid., p. 19.
2. Ibid., p. 23.
3. Ibid., p. 68.

London Society were able to attend in relays and receive the Sacrament from Wesley's hand.<sup>1</sup>

c. The Administration of the Sacrament by Unordained Preachers

While it is true that Wesley's view on several points of policy did change with the years, his conviction was essentially the same throughout his whole lifetime in respect to the administration of the Sacraments by unordained preachers. He was able to reconcile himself to lay preaching, which he saw as an absolute necessity, and not contrary to the principles of the Anglican Church, but lay-administration of the Sacraments he did not so consider, and he would have none of it.<sup>2</sup> He refused the request of two of his able assistants, Joseph Cownley and Thomas Walsh, for permission to serve Communion, because they were not ordained.<sup>3</sup> Under no circumstance would the Wesleys allow unordained men to administer the Sacrament.<sup>4</sup>

D. The Ministry and the Observance of the Sacrament  
in Early English Methodist Societies

There are many interesting details of history and organization connected with early English Methodism. Few details will be included here. Only a broad outline is possible within the limits of this study.

1. Origin and Purpose of the Societies

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1. Church, op. cit., p. 256.
2. Lee, op. cit., p. 263.
3. Bowmer, op. cit., p. 73.
4. Ibid., p. 74.

a. The Beginning of Methodism

Historically there are three significant landmarks in the beginning of Methodism. Each makes its particular contribution to the end result, the formation of a world-wide Christian fellowship under the name "Methodist". The first of these important occurrences marks the genesis of the public gatherings which were to characterize the Society. While it is true that the spirit of Methodism goes further back, as far as the Epworth rectory, Tees contends:

The religious movement which resulted in the foundation of Methodism began at Oxford University...sometime in or prior to 1729 with a group of undergraduates who formed themselves into a society to assist and encourage one another in their studies, to read the Scriptures in the original languages and to aid one another in spiritual improvement.<sup>1</sup>

Dr. William W. Sweet suggests another event which marks the advent of the second phase of Methodism. He says:

The Wesleyan revival may be said to have begun in 1737, when a little group of Oxford students, who had formed...a "Holy Club", whose members were nicknamed "Methodists", removed to London and began the work of carrying religion and morality to the submerged classes....<sup>2</sup>

It is doubtful whether the good work of the Holy Club would have been sufficient to accomplish all that the Methodist Movement was to, had the third event not occurred. The Aldersgate experience of John Wesley is of the greatest importance to the beginning of Methodism. May 24, 1738 stands out as a sacred day in the life of the founder. He had gone to bed restless and discouraged. His own

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1. Tees, op. cit., p. 15.

2. William W. Sweet, Methodism in American History, p. 13.



words give us his feeling at the dawn of that significant day. He wrote in his journal:

I continued to seek it (a living faith and the witness of the Spirit) though with strange indifference, dullness, and coldness, and usually frequent relapses into sin, till Wednesday, May 24.<sup>1</sup>

Millions the world over have come to be familiar with the words which Wesley used to describe his experience in the Aldersgate meeting that evening. He wrote, "I felt my heart strangely warmed."<sup>2</sup>

There is an interesting contrast in the feeling of Wesley on the day following this experience with that of the previous morning. His journal for that day reads, "The moment I awaked, 'Jesus Master' was in my heart and in my mouth."<sup>3</sup> This was a new and different John Wesley who from this point on was to be a mighty force for God. In a few months he arrived in London, and immediately began to preach Christ as he had never done before.<sup>4</sup>

b. The Origin of the Name "Methodist"

The name "Methodist" did not have its origin from within the organization so-called. Tees says:

Concerning the epithet "Methodist" John Wesley wrote in 1739: "Let it be well observed, that this is not a name which they take to themselves but one fixed upon them by way of a reproach, without their approbation or consent." It was first given to three or four young men...at Oxford...either in allusion to the ancient sect of physicians, so called from their teaching that almost all diseases might be cured by a specific method of diet and exercise, or from observing a more regular method of study and behavior

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1. Rhys, op. cit., Vol. 1., p. 101.
2. Ibid., p. 102.
3. Ibid.
4. McTyeire, op. cit., p. 145.

than was usual with those of this age and station.<sup>1</sup>

c. Their Purpose

A study of these formative years reveals that Wesley seems to have no plan beyond doing the duty that lay next to him, and waiting on Providence for the next step.<sup>2</sup> By no means does this imply that aimlessness was a characteristic of either Wesley or Methodism as a whole. Barclay declares:

Singleness of aim and certainty of his calling constituted in large part the driving power of his career. It also was an important factor in his influence with his preachers.<sup>3</sup>

The founder, in a letter dated September 3, 1756, expressed his one purpose in life, which well characterizes the ideal of the Society of Methodists over which he kept guard during his lifetime. John declared his purpose to be, "...to promote, as far as I am able, vital, practical religion; and by the grace of God to beget, preserve, and increase the life of God in the souls of men."<sup>4</sup>

d. The First Methodist Society

The first Methodist Society in England was formed in 1739 at the Foundry, London. It came about when, in the words of Wesley:

...two or three persons who desired to flee from the wrath to come...came to me in London and desired me to advise and pray with them. I said if you will meet on Thursday night, I will help you as well as I can.<sup>5</sup>

Their numbers increased, and the first Methodist Society was formally

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1. Tees, op. cit., p. 15.
2. McTyeire, op. cit., p. 146.
3. Barclay, op. cit., p. xv.
4. Telford, op. cit., Vol. 3, p. 192.
5. Tees, op. cit., p. 42.

organized. Others were later started in Bristol, Kingswood, New Castle, and other parts of England.

## 2. Relation to the Church of England

### a. Membership and Attendance

Earlier in this chapter it was shown that John Wesley endeavored to maintain his relationship in the Church. It was his desire in the early years of Methodism that his followers do likewise. They were instructed to rely on the regular clergy for the Sacraments. However, McTyeire points out:

It required uncommon meekness for men after hearing a sermon that railed at them and their teachers, to kneel at the Chancel, with bruises on their bodies, and receive the sacrament from the hands of a clergyman who had set the mob on them.<sup>1</sup>

### b. Avoidance of Competition

Effort was made to avoid friction between the Societies and the Established Church. The Methodist meetings were intended to supplement rather than replace the services of the Church. However, the degree of harmony very often depended on the attitude of the local parish rector. To further the spirit of friendliness, wherever it was possible to preserve friendly relationships with the Church of England no Methodist services were held during the Church hours.<sup>2</sup>

### c. Causes for Criticism

What single action of the Methodists contributed most to the

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1. McTyeire, op. cit., p. 181.
2. Bowmer, op. cit., p. 63.

ill-feeling the clergy of the Church had for them? The answer that Piette gives is, "Preaching in the open air...was the immediate cause of considering the movement as distinctly blameworthy."<sup>1</sup> Wesley, who had indulged in the practice of speaking in the out-of-doors because he had been denied access to the pulpits of the Church, was the recipient of some rather sharp words from Bishop Butler of Bristol who said, "There is nothing for you to do here; no one has authorized you to preach in this diocese. And so I ask of you to take your departure hence."<sup>2</sup>

A second point of irritation, the institution of Methodism's system of lay-preaching, brought disdain from the clergy. The one group looked to tradition, the other to expediency. Commenting on this, Dr. Halford Luccock says:

From the point of view of Anglican Church order the lay preachers of Methodism might be totally irregular. From the point of view of England's spiritual needs they were a help sent of God.<sup>3</sup>

On one occasion when an Anglican clergyman contemptuously told a lay preacher that he was not qualified to preach, the preacher retorted, "Qualified! You say that? Why without your gown you dare na, and without your book you could na, and without your pay you would na; and I do without all three!"<sup>4</sup>

. . . . .

1. Piette, op. cit., p. 379.
2. Ibid.
3. Halford E. Luccock, The Story of Methodism, p. 122.
4. Abram Lipsky, John Wesley: A Portrait, p. 194.

### 3. Methodist Lay Preachers

#### a. John Wesley's Attitude Toward Lay Preachers

##### (1) Opposition

Abram Lipsky says, "Wesley's conservative prejudices had caused him at first to oppose 'lay preaching'."<sup>1</sup> The man who was to be a great champion of the right of any man spiritually qualified to preach, fought against the admission of laymen as preachers until he found himself left with none but laymen to preach.<sup>2</sup>

##### (2) The First Lay Preacher

The innovation of lay-preaching in eighteenth century came into being not because of John Wesley, but in spite of him. A London mason, Thomas Maxfield, is considered by many historians to be the first Methodist lay preacher. As soon as Wesley learned that Maxfield had delivered a fiery speech before a group, he hurried to London intent upon punishing him. Susanna Wesley, hearing of the incident, and her son's intention to discipline Maxfield, said to him: "John, take care what you do with respect to that young man, for he is as surely called of God to preach as you are. Examine what have been the fruits of his preaching and hear him yourself."<sup>3</sup> Fortunately for Methodism, John allowed himself to be convinced. He went to listen to the amateur preacher's discourse and followed his mother's advice.<sup>4</sup> This he thought to be a temporary situation to

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1. Lipsky, op. cit., p. 192.
2. McTyeire, op. cit., p. 36.
3. Piette, op. cit., p. 372.
4. Ibid.

continue only until such time as there were sufficient clergy available to carry on the work.

### (3) Expediency

The expected cooperation of the regular clergy did not materialize. Instead they became his most persistent antagonists. Wesley soon came to ask:

What...was to be done in a case of such extreme necessity, where so many souls lay at stake?...The expedient that remained was to seek some one among themselves who was upright of heart and of sound judgment in the things of God, and to desire him to meet the rest as often as he could, to confirm them, as he was able, in the ways of God, either by reading to them or by prayer or exhortation.<sup>1</sup>

The pressing need of the situation made it expedient that he permit unordained men to carry the Word of God to many who perhaps would otherwise not hear it.

### (4) Recognition of their Value and Success

A short four years later Wesley indicated his complete satisfaction of his change of heart toward lay preaching when he said:

I am bold to affirm, that these unlettered men have help from God for the great work of saving souls from death. But, indeed, in the one thing which they profess to know, they are not ignorant men. I trust there is not one of them, who is not able to go through such an examination, in substantial, practical, experimental divinity, as few of our candidates for holy orders, even in the Universities, are able to do. In answer to the objection, that they are laymen, I reply, the scribes of old, who were the ordinary preachers among the Jews were not priests; they were not better than laymen.<sup>2</sup>

Thus he became indeed proud of his lay-preachers and their ability.

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1. Stevens, op. cit., Vol. 2., p. 432.
2. Piette, op. cit., p. 373.

b. Local and Traveling Preachers

As increasing numbers of lay preachers set about the task of expounding the Scripture there came to be recognized two main groups of preachers. Both felt called of God to preach, but the one remained in his immediate neighborhood, and did his work there. Hence he has come to be known as a "local" preacher. The other, leaving his occupation and home, devoted his whole life to preaching, traveling from one place to another. Logically, by contrast, he was known as a "traveling" preacher or an "itinerant" preacher. Until 1789 both groups were made up of unordained men. Following this date the latter group was ordained, adding another distinction between them.<sup>1</sup> These two divisions are recognized in essentially the same way today in the Methodist Church.

c. Criticism

Such a radical departure from the established tradition was not to go unnoticed. Criticism came from more than one source.<sup>2</sup> Some critics were fearful of the danger of having simple men who had soiled hands and little formal education preach. Others brought specific accusations against Wesley and his preachers. To the charge that permitting laymen to preach was breaking the laws of the Church, Wesley replied, "We are not clear that this (practice of ours) is contrary to any such law (of the Church of England). But if it is,

. . . . .

1. Church, op. cit., p. 99.

2. Ibid., p. 102.

this is one wherein we cannot obey with a safe conscience."<sup>1</sup> Having once taken his stand, he was bold in defence of his loyal assistants. Wesley declared, "...I do tolerate lay-preaching, because I conceive there is an absolute necessity for it; inasmuch as, were it not so, thousands of souls would perish everlastingly."<sup>2</sup>

Not all criticism was mis-placed. Church says:

That there were some of these part-time preachers who abused their office and, to use a modernism, played to the gallery, is probably true. The great majority of them were too desperately in earnest to have time for artificial posturing....<sup>3</sup>

The empowering of large numbers of laymen to preach was not without its dangers. Wesley recognized this, especially after specific charges against his preachers were sent him. He wrote in his journal:

Having received several letters, intimating that many of the preachers were utterly unqualified for the work, having neither grace nor gifts sufficient for it, I determined to examine this weighty charge with all possible exactness.<sup>4</sup>

The examination of the fitness of preachers, at conferences which came to be held regularly, was a custom which was introduced. This applied not only to those who sought admission as a preacher, but to those who had been already admitted.<sup>5</sup>

#### d. Success

The faith, patience, and loyalty of the lay preachers brought results which more than justified their being entrusted with

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1. Telford, op. cit., Vol. 2., p. 57.
2. Bowmer, op. cit., p. 150.
3. Church, op. cit., p. 116.
4. Curnock, op. cit., p. 361.
5. Ibid., p. 396.



the privilege and responsibility of ministering to the souls of men. The respected historian, Holland McTyeire, has these words of praise for them:

Their self-denial had its reward. The attestation of Heaven not only justified but demanded the measures subsequently taken. By their fruit ye shall know them. Men do not gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles.<sup>1</sup>

Their success was not only evident in the immediate years following, but was to extend to generations to come. Horizons were widened to extend beyond the meridian, the saving of souls, to focus on earthly problems. Of this Leslie Church says:

The next one hundred years saw their successors making violent efforts to expose injustice and to make plain the causes which led to poverty and distress. From pulpit and platform they denounced social evils and quickened the conscience of the nation.<sup>2</sup>

#### 4. The Lord's Supper

##### a. Desire for the Sacrament

The desire of the Methodists for the Lord's Supper was not satisfied by the Established Church. Earlier in the chapter it was indicated that frequently they were refused attendance by unfriendly clergy. This together with the restriction placed by Wesley on Methodist preachers that they not administer the sacrament, brought about a serious problem.<sup>3</sup> John Bowmer says, "It was not only the preachers who agitated for the sacrament, but the people felt deprived and

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1. McTyeire, op. cit., p. 184.
2. Church, op. cit., p. 134.
3. McTyeire, op. cit., p. 181.

demanded it."<sup>1</sup>

b. The Sacrament Administered in Methodist Chapels

Recognizing the seriousness of the situation, Wesley, sometime before the end of 1745, relented and permitted regularly ordained clergymen to serve Communion in consecrated buildings such as the Hermitage Street Chapel, Wapping, and Wert Street Chapel of London. However, this partial or local accommodation only made the dissatisfaction greater in other places. There were not enough qualified preachers.<sup>2</sup>

c. The Movement for Lay Administration

It was not long before a few of the bolder lay preachers began to see a possible solution to the problem in their being permitted, though unordained, to administer the sacrament. Such a suggestion was actually made, according to Bowmer, in 1755, "...when Charles and Edward Perronet, with others of Wesley's preachers, sought permission to administer the Lord's Supper."<sup>3</sup> Wesley did not at all respond favorably to the idea. He expresses his feeling, which he held to the last, in a letter written to Nicholas Norton in 1756, by whom he had been accused of inconsistency in permitting laymen to preach, but not serve Communion. Wesley said:

...I do not tolerate lay administering, because I do not conceive there to be any such necessity for it, seeing it does not appear that, if this is not at all, one soul would perish for want of it.<sup>4</sup>

. . . . .

1. Bowmer, op. cit., p. 79.
2. Ibid., p. 80 - 81.
3. Ibid., p. 147.
4. Ibid., p. 150 - 151.

There was, however, a way in which the problem could be solved, temporarily at least. His lay preachers could be ordained by his hands, which he came to believe were as empowered as those of the Bishop's. In 1789 this step was taken when several select preachers were ordained for service in England. Previously he had ordained some men for America. This will be covered in the next chapter.<sup>1</sup>

### E. Summary

Almost forty years after the founding of the first Methodist Society in England, the attitude of the Anglican Church was such that John Wesley made the following comment in his journal, "...in most places, the Methodists are still a poor, despised people, labouring under reproach, and many inconveniences."<sup>2</sup> This indicates well the spirit which existed between the two religious bodies. The Church was for the most part spiritually sterile, and failed to appreciate the desires of awakened souls for the preaching of the true Word of God and the Rites of the Church. It has been said that, "...the leaders of the Church of England missed their opportunity or obstinately refused even to consider it."<sup>3</sup>

Intent upon keeping the members of the Societies and himself within the Church he loved and respected, John Wesley sought to avoid those actions which would widen the breach between them. He was

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1. Ibid., p. 81.
2. Rhys, op. cit., p. 110.
3. Church., op. cit., p. 260.

both hindered and helped by his Anglican background in making those adjustments in policy which proved necessary. He declared:

I desire to do all things openly and above-board. I would have all the world, and especially all of our society, see not only all the steps we take, but the reasons why we take them.<sup>1</sup>

Seeking spiritual nourishment and fellowship, earnest Christians formed groups which came to be known as Methodist Societies. The shortage of interested and qualified ministerial leadership occasioned the rise of lay preachers, whom because they were not ordained, could not administer the sacrament of the Lord's Supper. However, the development of these lay-helpers into a unique band of traveling preachers led, eventually, to their being set apart, and finally ordained.<sup>2</sup>

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1. Curnock, op. cit., p. 381.
2. Church, op. cit., p. 101.

CHAPTER II  
ORDINATION AND SACRAMENTS IN THE PRACTICE OF  
EARLY AMERICAN METHODISM BEFORE 1784

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A. Introduction

British colonial interest in the new world of the eighteenth century brought English culture, customs, and religion to the American shores. The seed of Methodism germinated in England, but was transplanted while it was yet a tender plant. It soon began to take root and become a hearty dendron which was destined to spread its branches from coast to coast.

In a strange land under an open sky, and in an air sweet with the aroma of freedom, it was almost inevitable that tradition be less revered. Ecclesiastical formality stood in the way of an adequate ordained ministry for an expanding frontier and a growing population. American Methodists were in the mood for action, and were not to be placated by words of explanation. John Wesley, cautious but alert to the need and danger of the situation, tried to alleviate the shortage.

Co-existent with the problem of sufficient numbers of ordained ministers was the wide-spread denial of the Sacraments to Methodists. This was an important contributing factor in the movement for non-episcopal ordination. The impatience and difference of opinion among the preachers of the day regarding this is reflected in the actions of the conferences where after debating the issues, rules were formulated to govern American Methodism.

## B. Origin and Growth

Many pages have been devoted to the history of the Methodist Church in America. What follows here is only an attempt to give the important events relevant to this study, and does not pretend to cover all the significant historical episodes.

### 1. The First Methodists in America

#### a. John Wesley: Missionary

James Oglethorpe, the leader of a group of benevolently minded Englishmen who had founded Georgia as a refuge for English debtors, offered John Wesley the opportunity of going to this colony to minister to the settlers and at the same time do missionary work among the Indians. John was not sure if he should accept the offer, and asked his mother's advice. Dr. Sweet reports, "Her reply was: 'If I had twenty sons, I should rejoice that they were all so employed, though I never saw them again.'"<sup>1</sup> Susanna's influence had its effect, for her son set sail from England on October 14, 1735.

It is generally agreed that John Wesley's missionary service did little immediate good either for those to whom he went or in his own personal life. Concerning this Sweet says:

When John Wesley landed in Georgia, he was a rigid High-Churchman and a strict sacramentarian. He labored the best he knew how for the settlers--for he found little opportunity to work among the Indians--but he was tactless and overly severe in his attempt to enforce High Church regulations in a new and rude community.<sup>2</sup>

. . . . .

1. William W. Sweet, Methodism in American History, p. 32.
2. Ibid., p. 33.

This venture, in spite of its apparent failure, no doubt contributed to the life and training of the progenitor of Methodism.

b. George Whitefield: Forerunner

Strictly speaking, George Whitefield was not a Methodist, but he nevertheless laid much of the foundation of Methodism in America. Francis Tees says:

A belated recognition of Whitefield's outstanding part in the founding of Methodism is found in the inscription on his monument in the "quad" of the University of Pennsylvania. "In veneration of his memory this Monument has been erected by the Alumni of this University who are ministers and laymen of the Methodist Church of which he was a founder."<sup>1</sup>

This fervent man of God made thousands of converts in his ministry in America between the years 1739 and 1770. These new Christians were left to join whatever church they cared to. Many became active Methodists.<sup>2</sup>

c. The First English Methodist Local Preachers

In the light of Wesley's early interest in America, it does seem strange that for years he manifested little interest in sending preachers to the English colonies. Wade Barclay notes, "...that for twenty-four years Methodist Conferences were held annually in England without consideration so much as once being given to the sending of preachers to America."<sup>3</sup>

Unofficial missionaries were instrumental in starting the

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1. Tees, op. cit., p. 76.
2. Ibid., p. 75.
3. Barclay, op. cit., pp. 14-15.



Methodist movement in the colonies. William Sweet says:

The first Methodist work established in America was due to the devotion of men who had not come primarily to preach the gospel. Methodism owes much to the local preachers for the foundations they have laid in countless communities across this broad land, and Strawbridge, Embury, and Webb stand at the head of the long list.<sup>1</sup>

Each of these three men is accorded the honor of having organized early Methodist Societies in America: Philip Embury, the John Street Society in New York, Robert Strawbridge, the Pipe Creek Society in Maryland, and Captain Thomas Webb, the St. George Society in Philadelphia.<sup>2</sup> There have long existed rival claims as to which belongs the distinction of being the first society organized. The historical statement in the Discipline of the Methodist Church for 1952 handles the situation diplomatically by using the phrase "about the same time" in reference to this problem.<sup>3</sup>

d. The First English Methodist Missionaries

At the Leeds Conference of 1769 Wesley appealed for preachers to go to America as missionaries. There was no immediate response. Barclay says:

The hesitation manifested by Conference members may well have been due to a feeling of inadequacy for so great a task. Most of the men were young and comparatively inexperienced. America was an unknown world to them. That they did not lack interest in the great venture they demonstrated by reaching down in their purses and contributing out of their exceedingly slender resources.<sup>4</sup>

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1. Sweet, op. cit., p. 59.
2. Tees, op. cit., pp. 80-81.
3. Discipline of the Methodist Church 1952, p. 4.
4. Barclay, op. cit., p. 25.

However, two preachers did respond, Joseph Pilmoor and Richard Boardman, and they were sent. Sweet says:

When the first official missionaries arrived in Philadelphia... in 1769, Methodism had been planted in Maryland, Delaware, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, and New York, and as Richard Boardman and Joseph Pilmoor stepped ashore Captain Thomas Webb placed in their hands a plan of the American circuit.<sup>1</sup>

Both men were eager to get started preaching, and soon became popular. It is said that great numbers attended the meetings, and many new societies were formed.<sup>2</sup>

Other preachers later responded to the call for missionaries. In 1770 John King was greeted by Pilmoor upon his arrival at Philadelphia as a "new herald of peace." Francis Asbury and Richard Wright were appointed to go in 1771.<sup>3</sup>

## 2. Early American Methodist Societies

### a. Relation to the Church of England

The feeling that existed among the Methodists in England toward the Established Church was basically the same in America. Joseph Pilmoor read a statement which set forth his design in coming to America. Sweet says:

In this statement he assures his hearers "that the Methodist society was never designed to make a separation from the Church of England or be looked upon as a church." He further states that they had not come to make divisions nor to promote schism, "but to rather gather together in one the people of God that are scattered abroad and revive spiritual religion."<sup>4</sup>

. . . . .

1. Sweet, op. cit., p. 59.
2. Ibid., p. 61.
3. Tees, op. cit., p. 120.
4. Sweet, op. cit., p. 63.

b. The English Clergy and the Methodists

Though nominally a movement within the Anglican Church, early Methodism found little encouragement and less cooperation from the colonial Anglican clergy. According to Dr. Sweet there was only one Anglican clergyman who did give full assistance and cooperation. He was Devereux Jarratt of Bath Parish, Virginia.<sup>1</sup> Another historian says that they "treated the Methodist missionaries with scant tolerance--scarcely, if any more, than Methodism had met with in England--limited as that was."<sup>2</sup>

3. Growth from 1773 to 1784

The minutes of the annual conferences reveal the growth of American Methodism. In 1773 there were only ten itinerant preachers and 1160 members of Societies. By 1784 the records show that the itinerant preachers numbered eighty-three, and the membership had increased in these eleven years to 14,988.<sup>3</sup>

C. Early American Methodism and Ordination

The history of Methodist ordination deserves a fuller treatment, and the material is readily available for such a project. However, a cursory treatment will reveal sufficient facts for this short study.

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1. Sweet, Religion on the American Frontier, p. 7.
2. Barclay, op. cit., p. 51.
3. Minutes of the Methodist Conferences Annually Held in America, 1773-1813, Vol. 1., pp. 32 and 86.

1. Self-ordination

a. The Committee on Ordination

(1) Its Inception

The Revolutionary War had its effects upon American Methodism. Among them are two which are particularly relevant to the problem of an ordained ministry. Most of the Anglican clergy fled the country. Barclay tells us that "the Anglican Churches in most communities were without rectors, standing neglected and unused."<sup>1</sup> Secondly, Wesley was separated from close contact with the American Methodists. These factors plus the fact that in the year 1779 the circuits of Virginia and Carolina had successful revivals brought about a situation which moved the southern preachers to appoint a committee on ordination at the Fluvanna Conference held in Virginia, May 18, 1779.<sup>2</sup>

(2) Its Action

The committee, which was composed of the oldest preachers, decided to form a Presbytery of their own, and ordain preachers. However, they were themselves unordained. They therefore first ordained each other, and then laid their hands on the other brethren, ordaining them.<sup>3</sup>

b. The Reaction to Self-ordination

(1) The People

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1. Barclay, op. cit., p. 62.
2. Sweet, Methodism in American History, p. 94.
3. Ibid., p. 94.

When the preachers thus ordained returned to their circuits they went about administering the Sacraments which had long been denied the people. The reaction of the people is reported by Jesse Lee, a preacher of that day, who tells us that they "pretty generally fell in with their measures; however, some of the old Methodists would not commune with them...."<sup>1</sup>

(2) The Preachers

(a) Southern

Most of the Southern preachers were in agreement with what had taken place, but there were some who saw the dangers inherent in the situation. Nelson Reed, one of the preachers present at the conference, describing the scene says:

O what a soul rending time it was many herts did Tremble  
many tears was shead and many prayers made to god my very  
soul was made to tremble so, we spent the first day & little  
was done.<sup>2</sup>

(b) Northern

The reaction of the northern preachers was unfavorable to their southern brethren's action. McTyeire quotes Jesse Lee who says:

The preachers north of Virginia were opposed to this step, so hastily taken by their brethren in the South, and made a stand against it, believing that unless a stop could be put to this new mode of proceeding a separation would take place among the preachers and the people.<sup>3</sup>

(3) Francis Asbury

. . . . .

1. McTyeire, op. cit., p. 317.
2. Sweet, Methodism in American History, pp. 94-95.
3. McTyeire, op. cit., p. 317.

The leader of the American Methodists at this time, it is generally agreed, was Francis Asbury. Dr. Sweet's opinion is that Asbury was supposed to have the same power in America that Wesley had in England.<sup>1</sup> Asbury had received a full account of what had transpired at the Fluvanna Conference, and in his Journal expresses his feeling in the matter. He says:

I received the minutes of the Virginia Conference, by which I learn the preachers there have been effecting a lame separation from the Episcopal Church, that will last about one year. I pity them: Satan has a desire to have us, that he may sift us like wheat.<sup>2</sup>

(4) John Wesley

The unorthodox behaviour of the American Methodists was reported to John Wesley. His advice was sought by Asbury, who was trying to avoid a permanent division between the northern and southern preachers. Wesley wrote exhorting the American Methodists to abide by the Methodist doctrine and discipline, and the Minutes of the British Conference.<sup>3</sup>

2. John Wesley and Ordination for America

a. His Recognition of the Need for Ordained Preachers

The father of Methodism was a prolific letter writer, not because he had nothing else to occupy his time, but because of his keen interest in his preachers and the increasing number of Societies.

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1. Sweet, Methodism in American History, p. 94.
2. Barclay, op. cit., p. 65.
3. Sweet, Methodism in American History, p. 102.

He maintained a personal interest and friendship with many persons and groups both in England and America. By this means, and through the verbal reports of those who had been to America, Wesley kept in contact with the progress and problems of American Methodism. Umphrey Lee says:

Wesley knew the American people and what was going on in America better than most people in England knew them. His own experience in Georgia had given point to his warning to Lord Dartmouth and Lord North in 1775, that the Americans were not to be trifled with and that they were devoted to liberty. In England, he had for years been forced to withstand the importunities of his preachers for ordination, and he knew that the Americans, with less patience and with more excuse, were clamoring for a ministry competent to administer the sacraments.<sup>1</sup>

Wesley knew he must act to relieve the situation. He had come to realize that it was wishful thinking to hope that the clergy of the Church of England would offer their services and solve the problem.

b. The Request to the Church of England for Ordination

(1) The Letter to the Bishop of London

Previously, while dining with Dr. Robert Lowth, the Bishop of London, Wesley had requested that the Bishop assign him a clerical helper, but was refused.<sup>2</sup> Three years later, in 1780, he wrote to Dr. Lowth "imploping ordination for a single preacher, who might appease the urgency of the American brethren...by giving them the sacraments."<sup>3</sup> The aged Wesley was pathetically pleading in behalf of souls for whom he felt responsible.

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1. Lee, op. cit., p. 264.
2. Eayrs, op. cit., p. 127.
3. Stevens, op. cit., Vol. 2, p. 213.

(2) The Refusal Criticized

It is evident by his letter to the Bishop of London, regarding the refusal of the Bishop to ordain the man recommended, that Wesley was deeply disturbed. He wrote:

Some time since I recommended to your Lordship a plain man, whom I had known above twenty years, as a person of genuine piety and of unblameable conversation. But he neither understood Greek nor Latin; and he affirmed...that he believed that it was his duty to preach, whether he was ordained or no....He asked the favour of your Lordship to ordain him, that he might minister to a little flock in America. But your Lordship did not see good to ordain him. But...did see good to ordain, and send into America, other persons who knew something of Greek and Latin, but who no more of saving souls than of catching whales.<sup>1</sup>

You gather from this letter that the reasons advanced by the Bishop for not granting the request were considered by Wesley as excuses and indications of poor judgment. To the suggestion that there were already sufficient ministers in America Wesley replied, "...your Lordship observes, 'There are three ministers in that country already.' True, my Lord: but what are three to watch over all the souls in that extensive country?"<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, those who had been entrusted with so many souls were not very highly thought of by Mr. Wesley. He wrote: "They are men who have neither the power of religion nor the form; men that lay no claim to piety nor even decency."<sup>3</sup> He frankly places the blame for this condition on the Bishop. His letter goes on to say:

I have heard that your Lordship is unfashionably diligent in

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1. Eayrs, op. cit., p. 129.
2. Ibid., p. 128.
3. Ibid.



examining the candidates for holy orders; yea, that your Lordship is generally at the pains of examining them yourself. Examining them! In what respects? Why, whether they understand a little Latin and Greek, and can answer a few trite questions in the science of divinity! Alas, how little does this avail! Does your Lordship examine whether they serve Christ or Belial? whether they love God or the world? whether they ever had any serious thoughts about heaven or hell? whether they have any real desire to save their own souls, or the souls of others? If not, what have they to do with holy orders? And what will become of the souls committed to their care?<sup>1</sup>

The heart of this great leader was burdened for the souls of men. He concluded his long letter with a tender expression of this feeling. His pen wrote:

...I mourn for poor America; for the sheep scattered up and down therein. Part of them have no shepherds at all, particularly in the northern colonies; and the case of the rest is little better, for their own shepherds pity them not.<sup>2</sup>

He could not and would not placidly accept the closing of one door without seeking to discover another whereby he might bring relief to his beloved brethren.

#### D. The Administration of the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper

It cannot be said that Methodism became involved in a sacramental controversy. Their differences of opinion in respect to the mode, the ritual, or the theology involved in the Lord's Supper were not especially important. There was a practical problem which arose and which became significant enough to warrant repeated consideration.

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1. Ibid.
2. Ibid., p. 129.

1. The Need

a. The Effects of the American Revolution

The plight of the early American Methodists was indeed a sorry one in respect to the Sacraments. Tees says:

...Methodist Societies in America were not only without an ordained ministry, without the sacraments in their own places of worship, but without the sacraments at all except as they were fortunate enough to receive them from the clergy of and in an established church....<sup>1</sup>

The immediate effect of the American Revolution was to make a bad situation worse. Regarding this Stevens says:

The Revolution had not only dissolved the civil, but also the ecclesiastical relations of the colonies to England. Many of the English clergy, on whom the Methodist societies had depended for the sacraments, had fled from the land, or had entered political or military life, and the Episcopal Church had been generally disabled.<sup>2</sup>

b. Francis Asbury Seeks Wesley's Help

The severity and complexity of the problem is indicated by the fact that urgent letters were sent to England for advice from Wesley. Francis Asbury kept in touch with Wesley and brought to his attention that thousands of American Methodists had not partaken of the Lord's Supper for years, and some had never received it. In addition, few children were baptized.<sup>3</sup>

c. Wesley Convinced of the Need for Action

The English divine was indeed touched by the situation.

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1. Tees, op. cit., p. 149.
2. Stevens, op. cit., Vol. 2, p. 211.
3. James M. Buckley, A History of Methodists in the U. S., Fourth edition, p. 230.

William De Puy says:

The letters which Wesley received convinced him that something must be done, however extraordinary, for the relief of the distant and suffering Societies. He endeavored, nevertheless, to avert the necessity of "irregular" measures.<sup>1</sup>

At last Wesley felt compelled to pursue a course of action long averted, that of ordaining preachers himself.

## 2. The Sacrament Administered by Unordained Preachers

### a. The Demand of the People

There was an incessant request that the preachers serve the Lord's Supper in spite of the fact that they were unordained. In this regard McTyeire says:

The people more and more clamored for the sacraments at the hands of their pastors....Unless the kingdom of heaven were a close corporation, with the Bishop of London, three thousand miles away, at its head, these American Methodists could not see why they should be deprived of a whole gospel....Why must they wait on the pleasure of men who could not understand their distant situation, or sympathize with their wants for the sacraments?<sup>2</sup>

This desire to have the Sacraments administered to them was particularly strong in the South.<sup>3</sup>

### b. Robert Strawbridge and the Right to Administer the Sacrament

#### (1) His Criticism of Regular Procedure

While most of the unordained Methodist preachers chafed under the restriction of not being able to administer the Sacraments, it remained for a few to rebel against a system which denied the

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1. William H. De Puy, The Methodist Centennial Year-Book for 1884, p. 334.
2. McTyeire, op. cit., Vol. 1, p. 315.
3. Buckley, op. cit., p. 182.

people these benefits. Robert Strawbridge was a recognized leader of this insurgent group. The situation is aptly described by McTyeire who says:

The high-souled Irishman did not entertain the current English deference for the State-church. The Lord had called him to preach, and had owned and honored his ministry by the conversion of souls, and he could not see it to be his duty to send them to card-playing and dram-drinking parsons in order to have their children baptized, and to receive the Lord's Supper, --parsons whose only claim to superiority was that the hands of an English bishop had been on their heads.<sup>1</sup>

## (2) His Unordained Administration of the Sacraments

A man of strong convictions and courage, Strawbridge began baptizing and serving the Lord's Supper in the Sam's Creek Meeting House in Maryland. He felt no compulsion to wait for ecclesiastical approval. Barclay says:

For him it was enough that crowds waited upon his ministry, that many burdened souls sought and found to their satisfaction the forgiveness of their sins and came into the fellowship of the Society that he had formed.<sup>2</sup>

When brought to task for the irregularity of his action he refused to admit that what he did was wrong. James Culbreth declares, "Robert Strawbridge kept on insisting that he had the right to baptize persons and administer the Lord's Supper."<sup>3</sup>

## (3) His Success

If the vindication of Strawbridge's action rested upon the

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1. McTyeire, op. cit., Vol. 1, p. 276.
2. Barclay, op. cit., pp. 22-23.
3. James M. Culbreth, Studies in Methodist History, p. 37.

success of his ministry, then the decision would be obvious. Barclay admits: "If a man is to be judged by the fruit of his labor, Robert Strawbridge served the cause of God with as much effectiveness up to the time of his death, as any of the early preachers of Methodism."<sup>1</sup> The effectiveness of Strawbridge's ministry was indeed impressive. Looking retrospectively, Sweet says:

The very fact that colonial Methodism made the most rapid progress in the regions where Strawbridge's influence was the most wide-spread seems to indicate that his "irregularities" as Asbury called them, were more effective than the "regular" procedure which Asbury and the former assistants were attempting to carry on.<sup>2</sup>

c. The Attitude of Selected Methodist Leaders

(1) John Wesley

(a) His Position

Wesley resolutely held to the principle that there should be no administration of the Sacraments without ordination. It was not easy to maintain this position amid the clamor for the Sacraments and the pressure of his preachers for permission to meet this need. Nevertheless, he insisted to the end of his long life that this principle be observed.<sup>3</sup>

(b) The Basis for His Position

The charge of inconsistency was leveled against Wesley for permitting unordained persons to preach, but not to administer the Sacraments. To this charge he replied:

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1. Barclay, op. cit., p. 41.
2. Sweet, Religion on the American Frontier, p. 36.
3. Bowmer, op. cit., pp. 150-152.

My principle is this: I submit to every ordinance of man wherever I do not conceive there is an absolute necessity for acting contrary to it. Consistently with this I do tolerate lay preaching because I conceive there is an absolute necessity for it; inasmuch as, were it not, thousands of souls would perish everlastingly. Yet I do not tolerate lay administration, because I do not conceive there is any such necessity for it; seeing it does not appear that, if this is not at all, one soul will perish for want of it.<sup>1</sup>

(c) His Tolerance in the Matter

It is impressive that though the father of Methodism felt very strongly that his decision was the one best for the Societies, and though he endeavored to have his wishes followed by his preachers, yet he allowed freedom of conscience in the matter. Wesley wrote:

...Some of our preachers who are not ordained think it quite right to administer the Lord's Supper, and believe it would do much good. I think it quite wrong, and believe it would do much hurt. hereupon I say, I have no right over your conscience, nor you over mine; therefore both you and I must follow our own conscience. You believe it is a duty to administer; do so, and therein follow your own conscience. I verily believe it is a sin, which consequently I dare not tolerate; and herein I follow mine.<sup>2</sup>

This does not imply that he would not try very hard to persuade any who might act irregularly from doing so. However, he would condemn or "excommunicate" no one for following his conscience in the matter.

(2) Francis Asbury

The recognized leader on the American scene during part of this period was Francis Asbury. His attitude in the matter is clear. Sweet tells us that Asbury endeavored "to reconcile the preachers and people to be content without the ordinances administered by Methodist

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1. Telford, op. cit., Vol. 3, p. 186.
2. Ibid., pp. 186-187.

preachers."<sup>1</sup> He journeyed South to try to avoid the impending schism and to encourage renewed loyalty to Wesley.

(3) Thomas Rankin

Wesley appointed Thomas Rankin to be his assistant in America to succeed Francis Asbury. Rankin also opposed the action of Strawbridge to secure conference permission for what he had begun without official approval.<sup>2</sup>

(4) William Watters

Not all of the preachers in the South were in agreement with what had been done at the Fluvanna Conference. Barclay tells us that "Watters went away with a heavy heart, deeply disturbed at seeing 'some of the best men that I ever knew so little concerned, to appearance, at what to me was one of the greatest matters in the world.'"<sup>3</sup> He soon after sent a full account of the proceedings to Asbury in the hope that something might be done about this.

3. Conference Action Regarding the Issue

a. The First American Methodist Annual Conference

(1) The Purpose of the Conference

Up to the year 1773 no regular conference of Methodist preachers had been convened. Previously all matters in which they or the Societies were involved were cared for at quarterly meetings at which no attempt was made to have all the preachers in attendance.

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1. Sweet, Methodism in American History, p. 97.
2. Ibid., p. 69.
3. Barclay, op. cit., p. 65.

The first American Methodist Annual Conference met at Philadelphia on July 14, 1773, with Thomas Rankin presiding.<sup>1</sup> Barclay says, "The object of the three-day Conference was clearly disciplinary; it was for the purpose of bringing the Societies into accord with Wesleyan practice."<sup>2</sup> The situation is more specifically stated by Tees who says:

The purpose of the conference was twofold: "To unify the somewhat scattered work and to suppress irregularities that had crept in relative, especially, to proceedings of Robert Strawbridge and Robert Williams, who were employing methods out of order with the practice of English Methodists."<sup>3</sup>

#### (2) The Three Questions and Their Answers

Three "queries" were presented to the preachers. These were:

1. 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? Ans. Yes. 2. 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? Ans. Yes. 3. If so, does it not follow that if any preachers deviate from the Minutes we can have no fellowship with them till they change their conduct? Ans. Yes.<sup>4</sup>

It has been suggested that the form of these questions points to the probability that they were dictated by Wesley and sent with Rankin to the Conference.<sup>5</sup>

#### (3) Rules Agreed Upon

This historic conference, which lasted only two days, formulated a number of rules which were agreed upon. It was decided,

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1. Tees, op. cit., p. 137.
2. Barclay, op. cit., p. 54.
3. Tees, op. cit., p. 138.
4. Barclay, op. cit., p. 55.
5. Ibid.



among other things, that:

1. 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. 2. All the people among whom we labour to be earnestly exhorted to attend the Church, and receive the ordinances there; but in a particular manner to press the people in Maryland and Virginia to the observance of this minute.<sup>1</sup>

The outcome of this first Conference was a pledge on the part of those present not to administer the Sacraments.

- b. The Conference of 1777: A Delay of One Year Asked before Considering the Issue

Although the minutes of the conferences do not reveal that the issue regarding the Lord's Supper came up for consideration at these annual meetings again until 1777, the journals of the preachers who attended the sessions do. They tell us that this matter came up regularly. However, at the fifth session held at Deer Creek, Maryland in 1777, greater pressure was brought to bear to change the existing rules.<sup>2</sup> The record given by McTyeire of one chronicler states:

The question, "What shall be done with respect to the ordinances?" was asked. "Let the preachers pursue the old plan as from the beginning," was the answer. It was further asked, "What alteration may we make in our original plan?" And the answer was, "Our next Conference will, if God permit, show us more clearly."<sup>3</sup>

The decision was postponed until the next conference, where it was to be brought up for further discussion.

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1. Minutes of the Methodist Conferences Annually Held in America 1773-1813, Vol. 1, p. 5.
2. McTyeire, op. cit., p. 315.
3. Ibid.

c. The Conference of 1778: The Decision Again Postponed

For the first time, a native American, William Watters, presided at the Sixth Annual Conference held on May 19, 1778, at Leesburg, Virginia. Watters was the senior native itinerant though he was only twenty-seven years old. The issue was discussed on the floor of the session. Culbreth says, "...the extreme view of Strawbridge was plainly the popular one."<sup>1</sup> However, "the subject was again prudently postponed...."<sup>2</sup>

d. The Conference of 1779

(1) The Quasi Conference: Affirmation of Leadership and Loyalty

Aware of the fact that the issue could probably not be postponed any longer, and that at the next conference there would most likely be great pressure from the South, Asbury called a quasi conference just a month before the regular conference was to convene. The minority group which met in Delaware in April 1779 was, with one exception, composed of northern preachers. The right of Asbury to the leadership of Methodism and the desirability of avoiding schism with Wesley were voted for. A letter was composed to be sent to the southern brethren to influence them to remain loyal to their tradition.<sup>3</sup>

(2) The Regular Conference: Self-ordination and Virtual Schism

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1. Culbreth, op. cit., p. 38.
2. Stevens, op. cit., Vol. 2, p. 212.
3. McTyeire, op. cit., p. 316.

One month later at Manakintown, Virginia, the regular meeting, which has become known as the Fluvanna Conference, was held. Philip Gatch, Ruben Ellis, and James Foster were appointed a Presbytery and proceeded to first ordain themselves, and then laid their hands on the other approved preachers.<sup>1</sup> As was previously mentioned, a few were apprehensive about the implications of what was being done. Barclay says, "Whether they realized it or not the preachers had in effect formed a Church of the Presbyterian order."<sup>2</sup> This virtual schism between the North and South brought tribulation during the year that followed.

e. The Conference of 1780

(1) The Northern Conference Held at Baltimore

(a) Unordained Administration of the Sacraments  
Disapproved

Just two weeks prior to the next scheduled conference, which was to be held in Virginia, the northern preachers met. The avowed purpose was to request the southern brethren to desist from their irregular practice in respect to self-ordination and the Sacraments long enough to consult John Wesley and get his advice in the matter. With Francis Asbury in charge, the group met on April 24, 1780 at Lovely Lane Chapel in Baltimore.<sup>3</sup> The Conference decisions were in the form of questions, proposed by Asbury, and answers,

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1. Barclay, op. cit., p. 65.
2. Ibid.
3. McTyeire, op. cit., pp. 317-318.

given by the group. The more pertinent ones were:

20. Does this whole Conference disapprove the step our brethren have taken in Virginia? Yes. 21. Do we look upon them no longer as Methodists in connection with Mr. Wesley and us until they come back? Agreed. 26. What must be the conditions of our union with our Virginia brethren? To suspend all their administrations for one year, and all meet together in Baltimore.<sup>1</sup>

(b) Appointment of a Delegation to Attend the Virginia Conference

A committee, composed of Francis Asbury, Freeborn Garrettson, and William Watters, was chosen by the Conference to inform the southern preachers of the actions taken and to influence them to reconsider their steps which had caused a breach in American Methodism. The days until the meeting of the Virginia Conference were indeed anxious ones.<sup>2</sup>

(2) The Southern Conference held at Virginia

(a) Initial Disagreement

On May 8 in the same year the southern preachers met at Manakintown, Virginia. Asbury and the northern delegation came to the meeting with expectation, but soon sensed that the spirit of separation was noticeable not only in practice, but in heart as well. When he was permitted an opportunity to speak before the group, Asbury read Mr. Wesley's letter regarding separation, his instructions from Wesley, and the sentiments of the northern brethren.<sup>3</sup> The reception of the message is indicated by Mr. Asbury who says:

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1. Minutes of the Methodist Conferences Annually Held in America 1773-1813. Vol. 1, pp. 12-13.
2. Barclay, op. cit., p. 67.
3. Ibid.

...the preachers appeared to me to be farther off....When we... could not come to a conclusion with them, we withdrew, and left them to deliberate on the conditions I offered, which was, to suspend the measures they had taken for one year. After an hour's conference, we were called to receive their answer, which was, they could not submit to the terms of union. I then prepared to leave the house...under the heaviest cloud I ever felt in America.<sup>1</sup>

There was a sense of defeat as they prepared to leave for home the next morning.

(b) Final Agreement to Suspend the Administration of the Lord's Supper for One Year

With a heavy heart Asbury returned the next morning to say good-bye to the Conference, but found to his great surprise that there was a changed attitude prevailing. Not only had they come to an agreement on the terms he offered, but they had also voted to have him superintend their work. There was great rejoicing as the Conference adjourned, agreeing to meet together a year later. Methodism's breach was healed.<sup>2</sup>

f. The Conference of 1781: Agreement to Follow Wesley's Counsel

The Ninth Annual Conference first convened at Delaware on April 16, 1781, and then was moved to Maryland on the 24th for the convenience of those preachers who could not attend the former. Asbury, in his account of the meeting, says, "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."<sup>3</sup> However, it must be noted that some of

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1. Ibid.
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid., p. 68.

the leading preachers were not present at this meeting, perhaps explaining the ease with which the resolution was adopted.

g. The Conference of 1782: The Question Erased

Among the items that came before the Conference which met at Ellis Chapel, Virginia, on April 27 (and later adjourned to meet at Baltimore on May 21) was one that attempted to settle further the issue of the Sacraments. The Conference Minutes read:

Shall we erase that question proposed in Deer Creek Conference respecting the ordinances? Undoubtedly we must. It can have no place in our Minutes while we stand to our agreement signed in Conference: it is therefore disannulled.<sup>1</sup>

By no means was the issue a closed one, in spite of this proclamation. The problem could not be so easily erased, for it was indelibly stamped upon Methodism.

E. Summary

The beneficial effects of transplanting extend beyond the realm of plant life. The growth of Methodism in the fertile soil of America is a case in point. From a slender shoot of a plant raised under the watchful eye of the head gardener, Wesley, it found root in an entirely new environment. That its hardy variety withstood the hardships is well attested to by its growth.

The absence of adequate numbers of ordained preachers to assist in meeting the needs of the growing Society, and the widespread use of lay preachers led to the problem of ordination. Some

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1. Minutes of the Methodist Conferences Annually Held in America 1773-1813, Vol. 1, p. 17.

of these lay preachers, not without compunction, ordained themselves. To avoid such irregularities John Wesley had asked for, but was refused traditional ordination by the Established Church for Methodist preachers he deemed worthy.

The movement for ordination was an effect, the cause being the desire on the part of the people for the Sacraments. In the absence of an ordained clergy, the lay preachers administered the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper. This aroused criticism, not the least of which came from within Methodism. The Annual Conferences attempted to solve the problem, but there soon developed two conferences which acted differently in the matter. A fissure in American Methodism was developing and narrowly avoided becoming a clear break. The basic problems were not satisfactorily resolved, and like a volcano were apt to erupt at any time.

CHAPTER III

THE SUCCESSIVE HISTORY OF METHODIST EPISCOPAL GENERAL CONFERENCE

RULINGS ON THE ADMINISTRATION OF COMMUNION



### CHAPTER III

#### THE SUCCESSIVE HISTORY OF METHODIST EPISCOPAL GENERAL CONFERENCE RULINGS ON THE ADMINISTRATION OF COMMUNION

##### A. Introduction

In the period from 1784 to 1936 the Methodist Episcopal Church held many General Conferences, but not all dealt with the subject of this thesis. Of those Conferences which did, only the ones leaving some indication of their action in a written record of minutes or relevant change of Discipline can of course be studied and included in this work.

There will be no attempt to report all of the items of business which came before the various Conferences. Only such action which is related to the problem under consideration will be reported, and as briefly as possible.

It has seemed wise not to follow the chronological order of the conference session, but to organize the material so as to facilitate an understanding of the issues involved and the ultimate decision of the conference.

##### B. The First General Conference of 1784

This conference marks the beginning of a new era for American Methodism. In order to understand the transition it will be necessary to include in this chapter the events which led up to the calling of this first conference.

It will also be noted that by comparison with subsequent conferences this one will be dealt with in more detail. This extra attention is warranted because of the nature and prominence of this meeting.

1. The Action of John Wesley Leading up to the Conference

a. Wesley Faces the Issue of Ordination

Convinced at last that he could expect no help from the Established Church either to send their clergy to the assistance of the American Methodists, or to ordain his preachers, he took a course of action he long hesitated in taking. He recognized that the future of American Methodism was in grave danger. Her people needed a validly ordained clergy. Wesley therefore resolved not only to ordain men himself, but to confer upon his preachers in the United States the authority to ordain others to administer the Sacraments.<sup>1</sup> Commenting on this decision, Henry Carter says:

It is clear . . . that John Wesley in resolving to ordain preachers for America was acting, not impulsively, but in accord with convictions long and strongly held . . . The deliberateness of the step is emphasized by the knowledge that his brother Charles would be doggedly opposed thereto.<sup>2</sup>

b. Ordination of Methodist Preachers for America

Dr. Thomas Coke, a Presbyter in the Church of England, met with Wesley in London in February 1784, and was told of the plan to ordain preachers for America. Coke was asked to consider accepting ordination by Wesley to empower him to go to America to ordain the

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1. Buckley, op. cit., p. 231.

2. Henry Carter, The Methodist Heritage, p. 148.

Methodist Preachers there.<sup>1</sup> Coke did not give an answer until some six months later, when he finally agreed to accept Wesley's plan. Stevens tells us that "Coke met him (Wesley) . . . on the second of September 1784, and was ordained superintendent or bishop of the Methodist Societies in America."<sup>2</sup>

At the same time Thomas Vasey and Richard Whatcoat were ordained deacons one day, and elders on the following day. In his letter commending them to the American Methodists Wesley wrote:

I have, accordingly, appointed Dr. Coke and Mr. Francis Asbury to be joint superintendents 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.<sup>3</sup>

Recording this event in his Journal, Wesley says: "Being now clear in my own mind, I took a step which I had long weighed in my mind, and appointed Mr. Whatcoat and Mr. Vasey to go and serve the desolate sheep in America."<sup>4</sup> Others were later ordained and sent across the ocean to fill the pressing need for preachers.

c. Wesley's Claim of the Right to Ordain

In a letter to "Our Brethren in America", written a few days after he had ordained men for America, Wesley wrote:

Lord King's Account of the Primitive Church convinced me many years ago that bishops and presbyters are the same order, and consequently have the same right to ordain. For many years I have been importuned from time to time to exercise this right by ordaining part of our travelling preachers. But I have still refused, not only for peace' sake, but because I was determined as

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1. Sweet, Methodism in American History, p. 103.
2. Stevens, op. cit., p. 215.
3. Tees, op. cit., p. 153.
4. Curnock, op. cit., p. 393.

little as possible to violate the established order of the National Church to which I belonged. But the case is widely different between England and North America. Here there are bishops . . . in America there are none, neither any parish ministers. So that for some hundred miles together there is none either to baptize or to administer the Lord's Supper. Here, therefore, my scruples are at an end; and I conceive myself at full liberty, as I violate no order and invade no man's right . . .<sup>1</sup>

Another time Wesley wrote, "I verily believe I have as good a right to ordain, as to administer the Lord's Supper."<sup>2</sup> Thus the Reverend Wesley felt that he had the power to ordain, and was not in any way acting hastily and without due regard.

## 2. The Calling of the First General Conference

### a. Arrival and Reception of Thomas Coke and His Associates

On November 3, 1784, Coke, Vasey, and Whatcoat landed in New York and were met by John Dickins, the Methodist preacher of the city.<sup>3</sup> The arrival of these men was hailed with great joy. Dr. Sweet says, "Everywhere he (Coke) was greeted by throngs, the Methodists flocking from all directions to receive the Sacraments from the first Methodist preachers in America who had the right to administer them."<sup>4</sup> The people were encouraged by the arrival of the first regularly ordained preachers.

### b. Agreement to Call a General Conference

After a few days the representatives from Wesley traveled to Delaware where, on November 14 they met Francis Asbury for the

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1. Telford, op. cit., Vol. 7, p. 238.
2. Rev. L. Tyerman, The Life and Times of the Rev. John Wesley, M.A., Vol. 3., p. 430.
3. McTyeire, op. cit., p. 345.
4. Sweet, Religion on the American Frontier, p. 19.

the first time. This dramatic meeting is described in Asbury's Journal where he says, "I came to Barratt's chapel; here, to my great joy, I met these dear men of God, Dr. Coke and Richard Whatcoat. We were greatly comforted together."<sup>1</sup> Coke presented the instructions of Mr. Wesley, and outlined the plans for the future. The reaction of Asbury is recorded in his Journal. He wrote, "I was shocked when first informed of the intention of these my brethren in coming to this country; it may be of God."<sup>2</sup> Later he goes on to state the disposition of the group as a whole upon hearing of the plans. The record reads: "The design of organizing the Methodists into an independent Episcopal Church was opened to the preachers present, and it was agreed to call a general conference, to meet at Baltimore the ensuing Christmas."<sup>3</sup> And so Freeborn Garrettson set out to inform as many of the preachers as he could of the convening of the first general conference in America.

### 3. The Meeting of the Christmas Conference

#### a. Attendance

This historic meeting, which took place at Lovely Lane Chapel, Baltimore, has come to be known as the Christmas Conference. It began on December 24, 1784, and lasted for about ten days. Out of the eighty-three preachers in active service at the time, about sixty eventually arrived at the meeting.<sup>4</sup>

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1. Barclay, op. cit., p. 96.
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid., pp. 96-97.
4. Sweet, Methodism in American History, p. 109.

b. John Wesley's Letter Read

One of the first acts of Dr. Coke, who presided at the conference, was to read the letter to them from Wesley. This message was important because of its effects upon those present and the future of the Methodist movement. It explained Wesley's attitude and action in respect to the Established Church and the ordinations for America.<sup>1</sup> In a sense it was the defense of his ordaining and sending preachers to assist them. Wesley wrote, "If any one will point out a more rational and Scriptural way of feeding those poor sheep in the wilderness, I will gladly embrace it. At present I cannot see any better method than that I have taken."<sup>2</sup> He concluded his epistle to them with an astonishing bit of advice, words which seem strange coming from his pen. He, referring to the American Methodists, declared:

They are now at full liberty simply to follow the Scriptures and the primitive Church. And we judge it but that they should stand fast in that liberty wherewith God has so strangely made them free.<sup>3</sup>

c. Formation of a Church

(1) Decision to Separate from the Church of England

The reaction to the letter was favorable. Tees says, "Acting on Wesley's suggestion it was unanimously agreed that circumstances made it expedient for the Methodist Societies in America

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1. Minutes of the Annual Conferences of the Methodist Episcopal Church for the years 1773-1828, Vol. 1, pp. 21-22.
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid.

to become a separate body from the Church of England."<sup>1</sup>

(2) Adoption of a Name

One of the members of the conference, John Dickins, proposed that they be known as "The Methodist Episcopal Church". This met with the full approval of the group.<sup>2</sup>

(3) Type of Church Government

Their agreement to include the word "Episcopal" in the name of the new Church indicated what form of government they leaned toward. At this point there seems to be no distinction between the two names "bishop" and "superintendent".<sup>3</sup>

(4) Choice of Leaders

Asbury was reluctant to accept the position of superintendent as an appointment from his good friend Wesley. He insisted that the preachers present express their will in the matter. Both he and Coke were unanimously elected by the conference as Superintendents. Only then did Asbury agree to accept ordination by the hand of Coke, first as deacon, then elder, and then superintendent --on three consecutive days.<sup>4</sup>

(5) Adoption of a Discipline, Articles of Religion and a Liturgy

Space does not permit the inclusion of a detailed presentation of the agenda of the conference, nor is it necessary for an understanding of the subject at hand. It seems sufficient to men-

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1. Tees, op. cit., p. 153.

2. Ibid.

3. Barclay, op. cit., p. 97.

4. Sweet, Methodism in American History, p. 110.

tion that at this Christmas Conference a Discipline, modeled after Wesley's Larger Minutes, was adopted. The thirty-nine Articles of Religion of the English Church were reduced to twenty-four and also adopted. The "Sunday Service and Hymns", prepared by Wesley, was made a part of the liturgy of American Methodism.<sup>1</sup>

d. The Pattern of the Methodist Ministry

(1) Presiding Elder

The account of the election and ordination of Coke and Asbury as Presiding Elders or Superintendents has already been given. By popular vote they were chosen to preside over all the Methodist work in America.

(2) Traveling Elder

From among the preachers present, all of whom were unordained, except Dr. Coke, twelve were elected to be first ordained deacons, and then on the day following to be ordained elders.<sup>2</sup> These men were thereby to be recognized as fully qualified ministers, and were assigned to travel a circuit. Hence they were known as traveling elders.<sup>3</sup>

(3) Deacon

. . . . .

1. Ibid., p. 111.
2. There are two basic ways to qualify for elder's orders today:
  - a. Seminary students who have been deacons for one year, who have been admitted on trial, and who have completed the required studies.
  - b. Local preachers who have been local deacons for four consecutive years (two years for a deacon serving as pastor), and who have completed the prescribed studies. 1952 Discipline, pp. 130-131, Paragraph 402.
3. Tees, op. cit., p. 154.



The conference elected three preachers to be ordained deacons, which is a rank one below that of elder.<sup>1</sup> The deacon was limited as to his powers, and could only baptize and perform the marriage ceremony in the absence of an elder.<sup>2</sup>

(4) Local Preacher

The unordained lay assistants, commonly known as "Local Preachers," served as preachers in the absence of an ordained minister.<sup>3</sup> Stevens says:

They were men who usually pursued their secular employment, and preached at night and on Sundays in their own neighborhoods; but many traveled extensively. They became more numerous than the itinerant force.<sup>4</sup>

e. Provision for the Administration of the Lord's Supper

With the ordaining of regular Methodist ministers, provision was made for the administering of the Lord's Supper. However, it must be noted that this privilege was granted only to the ordained elder.<sup>5</sup> This is a significant landmark in the history of Methodism.

. . . . .

1. There are two basic ways to qualify for deacon's orders today:
  - a. Seminary students who have been local preachers for two years, and have completed one third of their seminary training.
  - b. Local preachers who have been licensed for four consecutive years, and who have completed the prescribed studies. 1952 Discipline, p. 129, Paragraph 393..
2. Discipline of the Methodist Episcopal Church in America, 1784, p. 8.
3. Today a person may be licensed annually to preach after receiving the required local church and district approval, and passing an oral and written examination. 1952 Discipline, p. 105, Paragraph 304.
4. Stevens, op. cit., vol. 2., p. 471.
5. Discipline of the Methodist Episcopal Church in America, 1784, p. 8.

### C. General Conferences from 1792 to 1892

#### 1. The General Conference of 1792

Eight years elapsed before the second General Conference was convened. No copy of the official Journal of this meeting, which took place at Baltimore, has ever been found, but much of what transpired was recorded by individuals who were present.<sup>1</sup>

##### a. Only Ordained Preachers Invited to Attend

It appears that unlike the first conference, only those "traveling preachers who were in full connection at the time" were invited to attend the meeting.<sup>2</sup> This greatly limited the influence and expression of the unordained preachers in this and subsequent conferences.

##### b. The Quadrennial Conference Established

Among the important legislation passed was that of creating a Quadrennial Conference to be known as the General Conference.<sup>3</sup> Thus a regular time was established for the gathering of the highest governing body of Methodism.

#### 2. The General Conference of 1808: A Rule Adopted to Elect Delegates to Conference

It was apparent by 1808 that a system of choosing delegates to attend the General Conference sessions was necessary. By that year there were 540 ordained clergy spread far and wide entitled

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1. Tees, op. cit., pp. 156-157.
2. Ibid., p. 157.
3. Ibid., p. 159.

to attend conference. However, only 129 attended. Of this number eighty-two were from Baltimore, New York, and Philadelphia. This was hardly a true cross-section of American Methodism. Consequently, a rule was passed stating that for every five ministerial members of an Annual Conference, one shall be elected to attend the General Conference.<sup>1</sup> This plan of allocating delegates theoretically assured each of the several geographical areas of Methodism a voice in conference proportionate to the number of preachers in the area. This would only be true, however, if all delegates attended. A safe-guard against sectional pressure for a change in policy or discipline was thereby set.

3. The General Conference of 1892: A Request to Permit Unordained Preachers to Serve the Lord's Supper Denied

The first memorial on record requesting permission for unordained ministers to administer the Lord's Supper came from the Columbia River Conference in May 1892. This request was referred to the Committee on Revisals. Though there is no record of the action of the committee on this memorial, the rules were not changed to grant the request.<sup>2</sup> The Discipline remained unchanged since its adoption in 1784. Only ordained Elders were permitted to serve Communion.

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1. Tees, op. cit., p. 166.
2. Journal of the General Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, 1892, p. 156.

#### D. General Conference Rulings from 1920 to 1936

1. By the General Conference of 1920: A Memorial Regarding the Serving of the Lord's Supper by Unordained Preachers Rejected

The Local Preacher's Association of the New York East Conference sent a memorial to the General Conference of 1920 requesting that they, "amend (if not inconsistent with modern Church polity) . . . the present Discipline in such a manner that they will include among the authorizations the Lord's Supper."<sup>1</sup> This suggestion if adopted would permit Local Preachers to serve Communion as well as to baptize.

The memorial was considered by the Committee on Itinerancy. They recommended non-concurrence by a unanimous vote.<sup>2</sup> There was no further consideration of the memorial by the conference.

2. By the General Conference of 1928: A Vote Against Adopting Four Memorials on the Issue

- a. Memorials Considered

The next conference to be petitioned to change the existing rules regulating the administration of the Lord's Supper was the General Conference of 1928. Four requests were sent in for consideration.

- (1) Deacons

The Lay Electoral Conference which met at Atlantic City voted unanimously to send a memorial to General Conference asking

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1. General Conference of 1920, Memorial No. 183.
2. Journal of the General Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, 1920, p. 511.

that paragraph 175 of chapter three be changed to include the right of Deacons to administer the Lord's Supper.<sup>1</sup> The memorial was received by the conference.

(2) Laymen

Another memorial was sent which expressed concern for the problem of the large Churches in a service of Communion where several hundred were to be ministered to. The ordained pastor, it was felt, was working under a handicap having to serve the elements without any assistance. The memorial suggested that, similar to other Churches where laymen assist by passing the elements, permission be granted to select "some godly person . . . who shall be authorized to assist the pastor in passing the elements . . ."<sup>2</sup>

(3) Local Preachers

Two memorials were received by the conference which were in behalf of the Local Preachers. They requested that the existing laws be altered to permit Local Preachers, while serving as pastors, to serve the Lord's Supper.<sup>3</sup>

b. The Action of the Conference

The four memorials were sent to the Committee on Itinerancy for their recommendation. All seventy-one votes cast were against all of the proposals. The conference accepted the report.<sup>4</sup>

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1. General Conference of 1928, Memorial No. 126.
2. Ibid., Memorial No. 503.
3. Ibid., Memorials Nos. 51<sup>4</sup> and 1090.
4. Journal of the General Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, 1928, p. 542.

3. By the General Conference of 1932: Six Memorials Considered, but Failure to Adopt Them

When the General Conference again convened in 1932, six memorials on this issue were sent to it for consideration.

a. Memorials Considered

(1) All Regularly Appointed Pastors

The Michigan Annual Conference voted to memorialize General Conference to amend the Discipline, making it possible for all regularly appointed pastors to administer the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper.<sup>1</sup>

(2) Deacons in the Mission Field

The Norway Conference requested, "that the function of a deacon be extended to the performance of the Lord's Supper in missionary fields due to the long distances on the territory."<sup>2</sup>

(3) Unordained Local and Supply Pastors

It was asked in four other communications to conference that the unordained local and supply preachers be granted the power to serve Communion, only while assigned to a charge.<sup>3</sup> One of these memorials, from the New York East Conference, pointed out that, "the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, has for several years granted this permission, and found it helpful to the interests of the Kingdom."<sup>4</sup> The students of Drew Seminary, in their petition which was sent by unanimous vote, stated their conviction in the matter.

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1. The General Conference of 1932, Memorial #82.
2. Ibid., Memorial #178.
3. Ibid., Memorials #279, 441, 599, and 683.
4. Ibid., Memorial #279.

They said, "We believe it necessary to the spiritual life of the local church, a. that the Holy Communion be received regularly, b. that it be administered by the local pastor."<sup>1</sup>

b. The Action of the Conference

For the first time the Committee on Itinerancy, to whom these six memorials were sent, did not bring back a unanimous decision. The majority vote, ninety-four, was for non-concurrence, but five cast ballots disagreeing with them.<sup>2</sup> Once again a General Conference refused to change the existing rules of the Discipline on this issue.

4. By the General Conference of 1936: Three Petitions received Votes of Non-concurrence

The meeting of the General Conference in 1936 gave three groups an opportunity to express their views once more on the restriction unordained pastors were working under.

a. Memorials Considered

(1) Accepted Supply Pastors

The Newark Annual Conference and the Kansas Lay Conference sent similarly worded memorials which suggested the Discipline be changed to read:

When a Local Deacon or Local Preacher is appointed by a Bishop or District Superintendent as an Accepted Supply Pastor and is placed in charge of a church, during such incumbency only, that person shall be authorized to administer the Lord's Supper.<sup>3</sup>

. . . . .

1. Ibid., Memorial #599.
2. The Journal of the General Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, 1932, p. 583.
3. The General Conference of 1936, Memorials #76 and 198.

## (2) Local Preachers

A third memorial was received from the New York East Annual Conference which, though resembling the previous memorials, was considered separately.<sup>1</sup> It appears that the emphasis was on the term "Local Preacher", used in a broad sense, and not in the restricted sense in which they may be "Accepted Supplies". Not all Local Preachers are Accepted Supplies.

### b. The Action of the Conference

The Newark and Kansas memorials were voted against by the Committee on Itinerancy, forty-five to two.<sup>2</sup> The third memorial lost by the same number of votes.<sup>3</sup>

## E. Summary

The Methodist Episcopal Church was officially established by the first General Conference, held in 1784, when American Methodism separated from the Church of England. The conference adopted a liturgy, order of service, and a Discipline. The Discipline restricted the administration of the Lord's Supper to ordained elders.

From 1784 to 1892 there is no available record of any formal request to a General Conference to change the law of the Church on the issue of the Sacrament. The first request to relax this rule came in 1892, but was denied.

. . . . .

1. Ibid., Memorial #547.
2. The Journal of the General Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, 1936, p. 364.
3. Ibid., p. 482.



During the years 1920 to 1936 a number of requests were made in the form of memorials to General Conference to revise the law to permit unordained preachers to serve Communion, but none of these were voted adopted. Conferences from 1784 to 1936 refused to grant this privilege.

CHAPTER IV

THE SUCCESSIVE HISTORY OF METHODIST GENERAL CONFERENCE

RULINGS ON THE ADMINISTRATION OF COMMUNION

## CHAPTER IV

### THE SUCCESSIVE HISTORY OF METHODIST GENERAL CONFERENCE RULINGS ON THE ADMINISTRATION OF COMMUNION

#### A. Introduction

The reunion of Methodism in 1939 began a new era in the history of the issue of the unordained preacher and the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper. The scope of this thesis does not include a detailed presentation of the background of this problem in the Churches uniting with the Methodist Episcopal Church. Only a brief mention will be made of their position.

This study will be restricted to those arguments presented at the General Conferences by the delegates. Comments made outside the conference will be omitted.

#### B. The Uniting Conference of 1939

##### 1. Methodist Reunion

The Historical Statement in the Discipline of the Methodist Church makes this explanation for the divisions and subsequent reunion in Methodism. It says:

In the history of Methodism two notable divisions occurred. In 1828 a group of earnest and godly persons, largely moved by an insistence on lay representation, separated and became the Methodist Protestant Church. In 1844 there was another division, the cause being construed by some as the question of slavery, by others as a constitutional issue over the powers of the General Conference versus the episcopacy. After years of negotiation a Plan of Union was agreed upon.<sup>1</sup>

. . . . .

1. Discipline of the Methodist Church, 1952, p. 6.

On May 10, 1939, these three main divisions of Methodism, The Methodist Episcopal Church, the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, and the Methodist Protestant Church, united to form The Methodist Church.

## 2. The Report of the Committee on the Ministry

A Committee on the Ministry was formed which included delegates from each of the three uniting Churches. One of the reports which they made to be considered by the Uniting Conference related to the granting of the right to administer the Lord's Supper to unordained preachers. Their report said:

In the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, and in the Methodist Protestant Church they grant to an Accepted Supply . . . the right to administer the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper in the bounds of his own charge. There are many Churches and many pastors who have this privilege at the present time. To take it away from them would cause a great deal of difficulty. We are asking that this privilege be granted in the Methodist Church.<sup>1</sup>

## 3. Arguments Advanced for the Adoption of the Report

### a. In Harmony with the Present Laws of two of the three Uniting Churches

#### (1) Granted by the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, and the Methodist Protestant Church

A member of the Southern Church pointed out that this has been no new question in the Methodist Episcopal Church, South. Some years ago they allowed the young (unordained) pastor to have the right of administration of the Lord's Supper.<sup>2</sup>

#### (2) Issue Reviewed and Still Granted

. . . . .

1. The Daily Christian Advocate, May 10, 1939, p. 407, J. M. Potts.
2. Ibid., p. 408, J. W. Moore.

The Reverend J. Moore further declared that the next conference was asked to take this right away from the unordained preachers. However, he said:

The General Conference almost unanimously reenacted the legislation which they had enacted before. The reason for it was this: that the pastor in charge has no more sacred function than that of preaching, and if we give him the right to preach, we should also grant to him the right of the administration of the Lord's Supper.<sup>1</sup>

(3) Experience Vindicates the Decision

A Presiding Elder spoke of his own experience in facing the problem. He said, "I was as heartily opposed to it as those who have spoken against it today. However . . . I . . . have been observing its practice . . . I favor it heartily, though I was opposed to it in the beginning."<sup>2</sup>

(4) Changing the Law Would Cause Difficulty

If the existing privilege in the Southern Church were taken away it would cause an unhappy situation, a delegate warned. He said, "To go back and tell them that our practice had been changed would cause many difficulties."<sup>3</sup> This was of particular importance in view of the fact that this was a Uniting Conference.

b. The Priestly vs. the Prophetic Office

It was pointed out by a representative from Georgia that if an unordained pastor is permitted to preach, and thus exercise his prophetic office, then he should be given authority to exercise what

. . . . .

1. Ibid.
2. Ibid., p. 410, J. M. Potts.
3. Ibid.

may be termed the priestly functions.<sup>1</sup> He felt that to deny the one involved making a distinction between the two, and placing the priestly element above the prophetic element in a preacher's ministry.<sup>2</sup>

c. Relative Value of the Two Sacraments

An interesting outline was given of the history of the arguments used in the Southern Church in the past which involved the relative sanctity of the Sacraments of Baptism and the Lord's Supper. The Reverend W. King related how there was an effort to take away the traditional right of the unordained to baptize on the basis, ". . . that it was such a very sacred thing that it should not belong to them."<sup>3</sup> Later it was claimed, in an effort to deny the unordained the right of Communion, that the Lord's Supper was "superior in sanctity to the right of baptism."<sup>4</sup> Then in an effort to take both functions from the unordained pastor, ". . . the contradictory statement was made that they were entirely equal in sanctity and should not be separated."<sup>5</sup> It is King's opinion that, ". . . it is impossible to make any distinction as touching the relative sanctity of these two Sacraments."<sup>6</sup>

d. Sacraments not less Valid when Served by an Unordained Preacher

A lay representative to the conference expressed the view

. . . . .

1. Ibid., p. 408, W. P. King.
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid.
4. Ibid.
5. Ibid.
6. Ibid.

that essentially a preacher must be set apart by character and life. He could not see why a godly man, though giving only part of his time "breaking the bread of life from the pulpit should not be authorized to administer the elements of the Sacrament in time of need."<sup>1</sup> He further said:

I have not yet heard an argument that any one taking the Sacrament from the hand that has toiled in the garden, from one who has worked in the mine, or the carpenter during the week day, will not be as exalted, receiving the high benefits he could have received from one who had passed the Course of Study.<sup>2</sup>

A case was cited by Roy O. Hills of a supply pastor in Wyoming who worked with his hands through the week, but who was effectively serving his people whom he loved. Of him Hills said, "His hands, I submit to you, are just as sacred as the hands of any man who never toils through the week. I am reminded just now that the hands that were nailed to the Cross were the hands of a carpenter."<sup>3</sup>

e. Increases the Minister's Influence

A natural outcome of empowering all preachers to administer both Sacraments was suggested by A. S. Bennett. He said, "In addition, when the minister is given the privilege of administering this Sacrament, it increases his influence in the community, among the membership."<sup>4</sup>

f. Effects Upon the Layman

After listening to the discussion pro and con a delegate

. . . . .

1. Ibid., p. 410, Fred B. Noble.
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid., p. 409, Roy O. Hills.
4. Ibid., p. 411, A. S. Bennett.

made several pertinent observations. He said:

. . . One would almost be forced to the conclusion that this Sacrament was instituted solely for the benefit of the preachers. The discussion here has hinged almost entirely on the question of the right of the minister. I believe the Sacrament was instituted for the benefit of the layman as well as the minister.<sup>1</sup>

(1) Many Laymen Denied the Sacrament

The existing difference in need among the Churches was conceded by Roy Hills. He agreed that there is apt to be little necessity for the use of unordained preachers in a metropolis, but he pointed out, there are vast rural areas where this issue raises practical problems.<sup>2</sup> Further testimony to this was given by A. S. Bennett who said, "I know sections where members of Churches have not had the opportunity to take this Sacrament more than once a year."<sup>3</sup>

(2) A Source of Christian Fellowship

Moore declared the Sacrament is held in high regard. Why, he asked, should these people be denied that which, ". . . brings them in such close fellowship with their Lord, simply because their preacher has not been ordained?"<sup>4</sup>

4. Arguments Advanced Against the Adoption of the Report

a. A Departure from the Custom of the Methodist Episcopal Church

Speaking against granting the unordained preacher the right to serve Communion, Thomas S. Brock said, "This is a very great

. . . . .

1. Ibid.
2. Ibid., p. 409, Roy O. Hills.
3. Ibid., p. 411, A. S. Bennett.
4. Ibid., p. 408, J. W. Moore.



departure from the usual custom of the Church of which I have been a minister for a number of years."<sup>1</sup> He lamented the fact that though the Methodist Church laid great stress on the necessity of ordination, they were considering such a course of action. He reiterated, "This seems to me to be a very great departure from what would be the ordinary position of the Church."<sup>2</sup>

b. Loss of Respect for Ordained Clergy

(1) Plea for Exaltation of the Pastor

Not being a pastor, Daniel L. Marsh felt he could speak in behalf of the pastor's position. He said, "I want to plead for an exaltation of the pastor, for a magnifying of his office. Let us not make the line of demarcation so dim that nobody can see it."<sup>3</sup>

(2) Loss of Respect by the Laity

Concerned with the effect upon the laity of the adoption of this report, J. M. Gray said:

I suggest to you that the spectacle of a man himself only a layman administering the holy exercise of our Christian faith does not greatly impress the laity of the Church. They are hungry for the unseen; they are hungry to maintain that separated character of the ministry in the past; and the great preaching influence of the past, and the great . . . Churches of the past have not grown from the likeness of the laity and the ministry in the exercise of worship functions, but in the separate quality of the ministry which made the layman call him a man of God.<sup>4</sup>

c. Loss of Reverence for the Sacrament

Harold P. Sloan cautioned the conference not to act hastily.

. . . . .

1. Ibid., pp. 407-408, Thomas S. Brock.
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid., pp. 408-409, Daniel L. Marsh.

He said, ". . . the people feel a peculiar sanctity and reverence connected with the Lord's Supper . . . If we take this attitude we will diminish its impact upon our people."<sup>1</sup> A similar view was expressed by Daniel Marsh who stated:

The part-time local supply may be doing something else during the week, just the ordinary common labor of the parish, and then on Sunday the people see him administer the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper . . . they cease to have their really sacred and solemn significance.<sup>2</sup>

d. Destroys Impetus to become a Fully Qualified Minister

(1) Ordination of Less Value

Since the preacher will be granted every privilege by this legislation, Harold P. Sloan felt that the goal of ordination would be less important and practically valueless.<sup>3</sup> D. W. Jacobs concurred in this opinion. He said, "What impetus is there for that fellow to go on and secure his ordination if you give him the privilege . . . granted to a regular ordained minister?"<sup>4</sup>

(2) Need for Education Diminished

Another effect that would be noticeable, according to Sloan, would be a diminishing number of men who would seek the necessary education to become fully qualified members of conference.<sup>5</sup>

e. Need to Test Preachers

Appreciation was expressed by Nolan B. Harmon, Jr., for the position and work of the unordained preacher, but he recommended

. . . . .

1. Ibid., p. 410, Harold P. Sloan.
2. Ibid., pp. 408-409, Daniel L. Marsh.
3. Ibid., p. 410, Harold P. Sloan.
4. Ibid., p. 408, D. W. Jacobs.
5. Ibid., p. 410, Harold P. Sloan.

" . . . that it is wiser to wait. Let the men be tested, and in time let the church, through the service of ordination, put its book into their hand and give them authority to administer the Sacraments.<sup>1</sup> When this has been done, he feels, a better church will result from a better preacher.

#### 5. The Final Vote of the Conference

A number of amendments to the original report were suggested, but none prevailed. It is therefore felt that these might be dismissed without further comment.

By the vote of the conference the report, as read by the Committee on the Ministry, was adopted.<sup>2</sup> The rule of the Methodist Church, for the next four years at least, was to be, "Unordained Local Preachers, only while serving as regularly appointed Pastors of Charges, shall be authorized to administer the Sacraments of Baptism and of the Lord's Supper . . . "<sup>3</sup> Thus for the first time in the history of the Methodist Church the law regulating the serving of the Lord's Supper was relaxed.

#### C. The General Conference of 1944

It does not appear as though any memorials were sent to the General Conference of 1944 regarding the issue. However, the Committee on the Ministry saw the need of a change in the wording

. . . . .

1. Ibid., p. 409, Nolan B. Harmon.

2. Ibid., p. 411.

3. The Doctrines and Discipline of the Methodist Church, 1939, p. 286.

of the Discipline dealing with the authorization of the Sacrament.

1. The Report of the Committee on the Ministry

The chairman of the Committee on the Ministry presented to the conference a report entitled, "Duties of Unordained Local Preachers." It read:

An unordained local preacher, only while serving as a regularly appointed pastor of a charge, may, upon recommendation by his district superintendent and written consent of the resident bishop, be authorized to administer the Sacraments of Baptism and the Lord's Supper . . . Such authority shall be valid only within the bounds of his charge.<sup>1</sup>

The suggested change was the need to make it necessary to secure the recommendation of the district superintendent and the written permission of the bishop. Not all the Committee was in favor of the report. Ten voted against it, but seventy-six voted for it.<sup>2</sup>

2. Substitutions and Amendments

a. Confining Authority to Preachers on Trial

A motion was made by Sammmuel C. Rice to replace the report of the committee with another proposal. His read:

When an unordained preacher on trial in an Annual Conference is regularly appointed to a Pastoral Charge, he shall be authorized to administer the Sacraments of Baptism, the Lord's Supper . . . Such authority shall be valid only within the bounds of his charge.<sup>3</sup>

An amendment was made to strike out the sentence limiting the authority to the preacher's charge. Both the amendment and the sub-

. . . . .

1. The Doctrine and Discipline of the Methodist Church, 1944, Paragraph 308.
2. The Daily Christian Advocate, May 1, 1944, p. 68.
3. The Journal of the General Conference of 1944, pp. 294-295.

stitute were lost by the vote of the conference.<sup>1</sup>

b. An Amendment

An amendment was offered that would change the restriction to read, "Any exercise by him of his authority outside the bounds of his Charge shall be sufficient cause for the revocation of his authority . . ."<sup>2</sup> The chairman of the Committee on the Ministry accepted the amendment.

c. Retain wording of the 1940 Discipline

It was moved that the wording of the 1940 Discipline be substituted for the report. The motion lost by a vote of 215 to 287.<sup>3</sup>

3. The Final Action of the Conference

The original report recommended by the committee with the accepted amendment was adopted.<sup>4</sup> Hereafter, the unordained preacher had to secure the recommendation of his district superintendent, and the written consent of his bishop, before he could exercise the right to serve the Lord's Supper.

D. The General Conference of 1948

Once again the issue came up for consideration at a General Conference. The Committee on the Ministry was not able to present a unanimous report, for there were developing two definite

. . . . .

1. Ibid.
2. Ibid., pp. 668-669.
3. Ibid., p. 346.
4. Ibid.

opinions in the matter.

1. The Report of the Committee on the Ministry

a. The Majority Report

Thirty-two of the forty-six voting members of the Committee on the Ministry recommended that the words in paragraph 308 of the 1944 Discipline which specifically granted the right to the unordained local preacher to serve Communion be deleted.<sup>1</sup> This would reverse the prevailing law, and again limit the power of the unordained preacher.

b. The Minority Report

The remaining fourteen members of the Committee who voted requested that the rules be permitted to remain as they were. The unordained preacher would thereby continue to administer the Lord's Supper.<sup>2</sup>

2. An Amendment and a Substitute

An amendment to the majority report was proposed,<sup>3</sup> and a substitute was offered.<sup>4</sup> Both are relatively unimportant and will not be presented in detail. Neither one was adopted, so the report stood as read.

3. Reasons Advanced for Adopting the Majority Report

. . . . .

1. The Journal of the General Conference of 1948, p. 670.
2. Ibid., p. 671.
3. Ibid., pp. 423-433.
4. The Daily Christian Advocate, May 10, 1948, p. 426, John B. Yoak.

The Episcopal Address, which is the official pronouncement of the Council of Bishops, set the stage as it were for the presentation of the Majority Report. The address was delivered in advance of the report. It said:

The Uniting Conference adopted legislation by which unordained ministers of our Church may be authorized to administer the Sacraments of Baptism and the Lord's Supper. After observing the operation of this practice for these nine years, we are now more than ever convinced that it involves us in an unsound and illogical position with respect to the meaning of the Sacraments and the purpose of ordination.<sup>1</sup>

These words were requoted by the chairman of the Committee on the Ministry, John R. Score, in the preface to his reading of the recommendation of the majority of the committee.<sup>2</sup> The record does not indicate that there were any other remarks made in behalf of the report.

#### 4. Reasons Advanced for Adopting the Minority Report

There was a singular defence of the Minority Report by George M. Davenport, a member of the committee who had voted for it.

##### a. Competition of Small Denominations

In his address Davenport said:

There is a new church growing up in our country, a new denomination. We can plan to unite all we please, but there are Holiness sects, Pentecostal sects, Nazarenes, and others who are out reaching the common people, and in twenty-five years you are going to hear from these churches. They have ordinary preachers, uneducated preachers, but they are reaching very

. . . . .

1. The Journal of the General Conference of 1948, p. 670.
2. The Daily Christian Advocate, May 7, 1948, p. 271.

great masses of people that we don't reach.<sup>1</sup>

He was fearful that any limitation on Methodist preachers would make them less able to face this competition.

b. Urgent Need of the People

He pointed out the urgent need which existed for the continued employment of fully empowered local preachers. He declared, "Our people who have no opportunity to have any preacher except perhaps an unordained preacher . . . are left without the Sacraments unless there is a special provision made for them to have the Sacraments."<sup>2</sup>

c. Deference for the Unordained Preacher

There seems to be great empathy in this committeeman's plea that the plight of the unordained preacher be seriously considered. Davenport went on to say, "I plead with you tonight to give our people in the country and these unordained preachers a chance to function as Methodist Preachers in the fullest and most acceptable sense of the word."<sup>3</sup>

5. The Final Vote of the Conference

The Conference voted on the two reports as originally presented, and adopted the Majority Report.<sup>4</sup> The rule of the Methodist Church was thus changed once again. None but fully ordained elders were now permitted to serve the Lord's Supper. The many un-

. . . . .

1. Ibid., pp. 425-426, George M. Davenport.

2. Ibid.

3. Ibid.

4. Ibid., May 10, 1948, p. 426, John B. Yoak.



ordained supply preachers were required to discontinue this part of their ministry.

#### E. The General Conference of 1952

Like a piece of unfinished business, the issue appeared on the agenda of the General Conference of 1952. The decision of the Conference of 1948 was not satisfactory to many. The Committee on the Ministry was charged with the responsibility of finding a solution, if possible, and presenting it in their report to the conference.

##### 1. The Report of the Committee on the Ministry

###### a. Majority Report

The Majority Report, which received forty-eight votes for, and thirty-three against, would grant the unordained preacher the right to administer both Sacraments while serving under appointment of a bishop provided:

He has passed the course of study of Admission on Trial . . . And each year, thereafter, passes one full year of the course of study looking to full ordination. Failure to complete one full year annually shall cause suspension of this privilege.<sup>1</sup>

This would restrict the right to those preachers who were meeting the required course of study.

###### b. Minority Report

The Minority Report would withhold the power of administering the Sacrament from all unordained preachers. Oscar T. Olson

. . . . .

1. The Daily Christian Advocate, May 1, 1952, p. 309.

gave in substance what the report suggested. He said:

The substance of the minority report is that we require full ordination for all ministers to administer the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper, and that we reduce the time required for ordination as an Elder. In practical effect it will reduce the time by one year.<sup>1</sup>

## 2. Arguments Presented for Adopting the Majority Report

### a. Propriety vs. Need

A delegate from Georgia, William R. Cannon, spoke in behalf of the majority report. He said:

In an evangelical denomination liturgical propriety must give way before spiritual need. Form and circumstance must not be allowed to impair or even to impede the force and effectiveness of the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ.<sup>2</sup>

#### (1) Examples in History

##### (a) Wesley and Lay Preaching

The innovation of lay preaching disturbed John Wesley, Robert Goodloe pointed out. However, he said, "Wesley surrendered the inherited idea that only an ordained man can expound the truth of Scripture . . ."<sup>3</sup>

##### (b) Wesley and Sacraments for America

Cannon called attention to the fact that "John Wesley did not allow any liturgical nicety to get in the way of the effectiveness of his work."<sup>4</sup> He cited the example of Wesley's sending Vasey and Whatcoat to America to administer the Sacraments to

. . . . .

1. Ibid., May 5, 1952, pp. 495-496, Oscar T. Olson.
2. Ibid., May 6, 1952, p. 508, William R. Cannon.
3. Ibid., May 5, 1952, p. 495, Robert Goodloe.
4. Ibid., May 5, 1952, p. 508, William R. Cannon.

a people greatly in need of them. This was done, he said, with the full knowledge that it would cause offense to some.<sup>1</sup>

(c) The Christmas Conference

Reference was made by Goodloe to the Christmas Conference at which time American Methodism made historic changes. They acted independently, accepting from Wesley only those suggestions they thought best suited to them. Goodloe said, "We today would be less than faithful to our trust if we failed to make the adaptations of our heritage necessary to serve the distinctive needs of our Methodist people."<sup>2</sup>

(2) Present Need

(a) Shortage of Ordained Preachers

The seriousness of the shortage of ordained preachers was cited by William S. Evans. He said, ". . . half of my district is served by accepted supply ministers. Sixty-seven out of one hundred-eight Churches are ministered by these accepted supply pastors."<sup>3</sup> He went on to say that he just did not have the ordained men available to staff these Churches, and that the use of local preachers was a necessity.<sup>4</sup>

(b) Affect the Service of Local Preachers

It was the conviction of L. Rumble that the emphasis on evangelism across the nation would arouse some men, not young in

. . . . .

1. Ibid.
2. Ibid., May 5, 1952, p. 496, Robert Goodloe.
3. Ibid., May 6, 1952, p. 509, William S. Evans.
4. Ibid.

years, with a desire to preach. They would have a vital contribution to make for the Lord. He pleaded, "We are going to want them as supply pastors; we must make it so that the total Church where they serve shall have the Sacrament."<sup>1</sup>

b. Effects on the Church

(1) Past

Recalling the history of Christianity through the years, Goodloe made several observations.

(a) Wycliff and Transubstantiation

The Church did not lose the value of the Sacraments when it followed the teachings of Wycliff that the bread and wine are not changed into flesh and blood.<sup>2</sup>

(b) Two instead of Seven Sacraments

Nor did the Church give up the value of the Sacramental ceremony when it changed from the traditional theory that there are seven Sacraments to a two-Sacrament position.<sup>3</sup>

(c) Salvation and the Priesthood

The acceptance of Luther's teaching that forgiveness of sins need not be sought through an official priesthood did not hinder the salvation of men's souls.<sup>4</sup>

(d) Regular vs. Irregular Ordination

Methodism, when it accepted ordination from Wesley, did

. . . . .

1. Ibid., May 5, 1952, p. 493, L. Rumble.
2. Ibid., p. 496, Robert Goodloe.
3. Ibid.
4. Ibid.

not lose its effectiveness. His preachers were as validly ordained as those who had received ordination from the Church of England.<sup>1</sup>

(e) The Methodist Episcopal Church, South, During 1926 to 1939

The permitting of unordained preachers to serve the Lord's Supper in the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, during the period of 1926 to 1939 did not make that Church any less of a Church, nor did it adversely affect its spiritual vitality.<sup>2</sup>

(f) The Methodist Church during 1939 to 1948

There is no clear evidence that the Methodist Church was any less a Church during 1939 to 1948 when it allowed both Sacraments to be administered by unordained men. These Sacraments did not have any less means of grace.<sup>3</sup>

(2) Present

(a) The Denomination

It was the contention of Goodloe that, "the Church does not become less the Church by granting such temporary privilege."<sup>4</sup> Referring to those who feared that Methodism might have the word "sect" applied to her in derision, Goodloe said:

American Methodists were called by that same name when they began their work under Mr. John Wesley . . . I hope we never lose the ability which was possessed by that sect to foreward the Kingdom of God here in the world.<sup>5</sup>

(b) The Ecumenical Church

. . . . .

1. Ibid.
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid.
4. Ibid.
5. Ibid., May 6, 1952, p. 512.

In answer to the objection that the adoption of the majority report would endanger the ecumenical movement it was pointed out that the World Council of Churches says, "If you really believe in Jesus Christ, come in."<sup>1</sup> And, while the Methodist Church was allowing unordained preachers to provide the Sacraments, it helped write the constitution of the World Council. Further, no objection was made because of this when the Methodist Church applied for membership in that organization.<sup>2</sup>

c. The Nature of Ordination

(1) Ordination and Spiritual Power

The Methodist concept of ordination, Goodloe suggested, did not agree with the idea that spiritual powers were derived from the process of ordination. With or without ordination a preacher could be effectively used of God. However, he did not deny the value of ordination as an acknowledgement of the preacher being set apart for his task. Though there is no magical grace in the ceremony, he would agree there is a moral benefit.<sup>3</sup>

(2) No Theological Necessity for Ordination

The intimation that there is a theological necessity for ordination brought a reply from William R. Cannon. He said:

That is tomfoolery, anybody who knows Protestant theology knows it to be just that. To insist that ordination is necessary theologically is to go back to the position of the Roman Catholic Church which says that grace operates in and of itself, Ex opere operato.<sup>4</sup>

. . . . .

1. Ibid.

2. Ibid.

3. Ibid., May 5, 1952, p. 496.

4. Ibid., May 6, 1952, p. 509. William R. Cannon.

Cannon insisted that ordination of the Spirit takes precedence over any other form or ritual devised by man.

(3) Permanent vs. Temporary Privilege

The nature of ordination is such that it bestows permanent privileges to the preacher, while what is being asked is a temporary right for the unordained preacher, to be voted annually. Such use of temporary privilege, according to Goodloe, is not new. Methodists in Australia, Argentine, and other Latin American countries have been using such a plan.<sup>1</sup>

It was his belief that the present high standards of education and experience for ordination and full membership in the Annual Conference should be kept. He would also have the laws enforced which require that the local preacher advance in the Conference Course of Study each year.<sup>2</sup>

d. Survey Facts

(1) Memorials: Pro and Con

Lester Rumble brought to the attention of the conference that out of the eighty-seven memorials sent in dealing with this question, eighty-four were for relaxing the law governing the unordained preacher and the Sacraments.<sup>3</sup>

(2) The Attitude of the District Superintendents

A survey of district superintendents in all Jurisdictions except the North East, was reported by Rumble. It revealed that

. . . . .

1. Ibid., May 5, 1952, p. 496, Robert Goodloe.
2. Ibid., p. 499.
3. Ibid., p. 493, Lester Rumble.

120 district superintendents favored keeping the restriction on the administration of the Sacrament, and that 264 said there must be a change.<sup>1</sup>

### 3. Arguments Presented against Adopting the Majority Report

#### a. Against Tradition

It was brought to the attention of the conference that they were a part of the world body of the Methodist Church, and as such they were called upon to have due regard for tradition. In this regard, Oscar T. Olson said:

Through the history of Methodism, particularly in its main stream, both in Britain and in America, permission to administer the Sacrament has not been allowed advantageously, simply because a man was a preacher. To be sure . . . there have been exceptions, but the main stream has been in the opposite direction.<sup>2</sup>

#### b. A Serious Issue

Lynn Radcliffe pleaded that the issue be seen as a serious one. He said:

We are not considering a matter of passing importance now, nor a matter of general legislation. We are dealing with something that goes to the very heart of our Church. It should be considered with the utmost seriousness, for it is one of the supreme issues which we shall ever be called upon to face.<sup>3</sup>

#### c. Importance of Ordination

A warning was given to "treat not lightly, dismiss not casually, the high moment of ordination into the blessed ministry

. . . . .

1. Ibid., p. 498.
2. Ibid., p. 499, Oscar T. Olson.
3. Ibid., p. 498, Lynn Radcliffe.



of the Methodist Church."<sup>1</sup> The speaker indicated his view of the importance of ordination. He said:

The Church itself . . . is the priestly body whose corporate function can be performed only by persons especially authorized for that purpose . . . I am speaking not for a special privilege, but for a high ordination of the Holy Spirit of God upon men who have gone through a discipline.<sup>2</sup>

d. Line to be Drawn Somewhere

Somewhere, suggested F. Bringle McIntosh, you have to draw a line as to who shall be given the right to administer the Sacrament, and who shall not. He illustrated his point by calling attention to the fact that Universities would not employ teachers who lacked educational qualifications. Neither would a surgeon be permitted to operate upon a member of the family if he did not have certain training.<sup>3</sup>

e. ~~Problem~~ ~~not~~ ~~Solved~~ Problem

Attention was called to the limitations of the majority report. It permitted only preachers who had been accepted on trial to serve Communion under certain conditions. Leonard D. Slutz pointed out that this therefore did not solve the problem because there are many Churches being served by men who have not been admitted on trial. Instead of solving the problem, he felt that this would only be a compromise.<sup>4</sup>

f. Four Basic Choices

. . . . .

1. Ibid., Oscar T. Olson.

2. Ibid., p. 499.

3. Ibid., May 6, 1952, p. 509, F. Bringle McIntosh.

4. Ibid., pp. 508-509, Leonard D. Slutz.

In an effort to clarify the situation, Lynn Radcliffe said, "I would like . . . to sharpen the choices which are now before us."<sup>1</sup>

(1) Expediency or Principle

He granted that there exists a real problem, and that every Church member is entitled to enjoy the fellowship of the Sacrament, even those pastored by unordained preachers. The first choice in the solution of problem is between expediency and principle. Either the ordained ministers can arrange to assist his unordained brother minister by offering to serve the Sacrament for him, or a principle must be sacrificed and the right to administer be given all preachers.<sup>2</sup>

(2) An Ecumenical Church or a Sect

The second question is whether the Methodist Church is to be considered a Church or a Sect. In reference to this Radcliffe said:

Through the ages, the universal testimony of the Church of Christ has been that only those men, set apart in the highest way that the Church can conceive, can administer the highest Sacrament of the Christian Church. If we are a part of the Christian Church . . . where the Sacraments are duly administered according to the age old tradition of the Church, then we are a Church and a part of the great Universal Church.<sup>3</sup>

To deviate from the traditional position, he contends, will put the Methodist Church more in the class of a sect.

(3) Lower the Bars or Raise the Standards

. . . . .

1. Ibid., May 5, 1952, p. 498, Lynn Radcliffe.
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid.

Whether the bars should be lowered to accomodate some, or whether the standards of the ministry should be raised is the third choice. Radcliffe declares, "We are trying to raise the standards of the ministry."<sup>1</sup>

(4) Sacrament or Ceremony

Finally, are we dealing with a Sacrament or a ceremony?

The speaker asked:

Are we concerned with something which is the highest thing that the Church has conceived, ordained of Jesus Christ, to be received only at the hands of those men who have been approved, trained, consecrated, ordained, for that holy purpose?<sup>2</sup>

His feeling was that the Sacrament is degraded, and becomes a mere ceremony when not properly administered.

g. Substitutes Offered

(1) The Ordained to Assist the Unordained

A solution was offered by Leonard D. Slutz which would not involve a compromise of principle. He suggested that a plan could be arranged whereby the ordained elders would make themselves available to serve the Sacrament in those Churches served by unordained preachers. This, he pointed out, was the way the early Church and the pioneer Church functioned.<sup>3</sup>

(2) The Minority Report

It was the conviction of Olson that the proposal of the minority report was to be preferred to the majority report. He

. . . . .

1. Ibid.

2. Ibid.

3. Ibid., May 6, 1952, p. 508, Leonard D. Slutz.

suggested that it be considered instead of the majority report.<sup>1</sup>

#### 4. The Final Action of the Conference

The substitution of the minority report made by Olson was seconded, came before the conference, was voted on, but not adopted. The Slutz substitution was not formally presented to the conference. At the conclusion of the discussion, the majority report was put to a vote, and was accepted.<sup>2</sup> The right to administer both Sacraments was again granted unordained preachers admitted on trial, under the specific restrictions mentioned previously.

#### F. Summary

The Uniting Conference of 1939 brought together three divisions of Methodism. The two uniting with the Methodist Episcopal Church permitted unordained preachers to serve Communion. The first major conference action on the issue took place in 1939. This conference marked the turning point in the history of the Sacramental problem in the main body of Methodism. The Discipline was changed in favor of the unordained preacher.

A minor amendment was made in the Discipline in 1944 which required that before the unordained pastor assigned to a charge could serve Communion he must receive permission from the district superintendent and the bishop of the area.

The law of the Church was reversed in 1948 to prohibit

. . . . .

1. Ibid., May 6, 1952.

any except ordained ministers from administering the Lord's Supper. This took away the privilege the unordained pastors had enjoyed for nine years.

The General Conference of 1952 devoted much time to this issue. A list of arguments were arrayed on each side by keenly interested delegates. When the smoke of battle cleared and the count was taken, it was seen that the weight of opinion was for the majority report of the Committee on the Ministry. This was adopted, and once again granted the power to serve Communion to unordained preachers. However, this was restricted to only those preachers who had been admitted on trial, with a proviso that they continue yearly to advance in the course of study outlined in the Discipline, with a view to securing full ordination. Thus for the third time the law of the Methodist Church in this matter was reversed.

CHAPTER V  
SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

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#### A. Summary

This study has attempted to trace the history of the laws of the Methodist Church as they relate to the administration of the Lord's Supper by other than ordained elders. To achieve an adequate understanding of the issues involved it was necessary to go back even beyond the beginning of Methodism. Without an appreciation of John Wesley and his day one is limited in his understanding of the rise and growth of this problem.

The first chapter outlined the background for the rise of Methodism in eighteenth century England. A brief history of John Wesley and his relation to the Church of England was presented, together with his attitudes on ordination and the Sacraments. A short account was included of the rise of early English Methodism, and its experience with the problem of ordination and the Sacraments.

The second chapter dealt with American Methodism before 1784. The origin and growth of Methodism in the Colonies was surveyed. The major portion of the chapter dealt with the early American Methodist's struggle for an ordained ministry and the regular administration of the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper. Methodism was traced from its incipient form to the point where it held Annual Conferences and faced these issues in an effort to preserve the unity of Methodism. The outcome of these meetings as they related

to the problem was studied.

The third chapter almost entirely confined itself to an examination of the rulings of the successive Methodist Episcopal General Conferences from 1784 to 1936 on the administration of the Lord's Supper. The exception occurred in the first section, which attempted briefly to point out the factors which led to the final separation of American Methodism from the Church of England, and the formation of the Methodist Episcopal Church which held formal General Conferences. The petitions, or memorials, to the successive General Conferences were examined.

The fourth chapter studied the arguments presented pro and con at the General Conferences from 1939, when Methodism united, to 1952. The final action of each of these conferences and its effect upon the administration of the Sacrament was given.

## B. Conclusion

The problem of whether the unordained preacher should or should not be permitted to administer the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper is not a simple one. Valid arguments can be presented on both sides of the question. The issue is not a new one, its history goes back many years. In the light of this study it is evident that there are advantages and disadvantages to be listed for the law enacted at the General Conference of 1952 which regulated the serving of this Sacrament. Many of these points may of course be claimed to be a matter of opinion. Others, it must be admitted were based on



facts and figures.

On the basis of this study a list of both the advantages and disadvantages have been drawn up with as much objectivity and impartiality as possible.

1. Advantages of the Ruling of the 1952 General Conference

a. It is helpful to those unordained supply preachers who have been admitted on trial, and who are serving a charge. They are granted the right to administer both Sacraments.

b. Those Churches which are being served by these men are thus enabled to have their people receive the Sacraments from their own pastor.

c. The meaning and significance of ordination is maintained. The distinction between the ordained and the unordained is not destroyed. One is granted permanent, unlimited powers in respect to the Sacraments, while the other is given temporary, limited powers.

d. It logically follows that this rule does not destroy the impetus to secure full ordination, but rather makes a positive contribution toward that end. The unordained supply pastor in order to be empowered under the provisions of this law must come to the place in his training where he is admitted on trial. Then he is obligated to continue to fulfill the requirements for ordination each year in order to retain his privilege.

e. The Sacrament of the Lord's Supper is given more meaning by insisting that certain qualifications be met before one can administer it.

f. Every preacher has the opportunity to qualify eventually under this law by securing the required seminary training or by following the course of study outlined in the Discipline.

g. The number of unordained preachers who do not or will not qualify under this rule can be steadily diminished each year by the proper encouragement and guidance of the district superintendents and bishops.

## 2. Disadvantages of the Ruling of the 1952 General Conference

a. It is doubtful that the problem was solved by adopting this policy. It is very likely that the issue will again arise at subsequent General Conferences, for the right of the Sacrament is neither denied all unordained preachers, nor is it granted to all.

b. Many lay people are still denied the Sacrament from their own pastor. There are numerous small churches which are served year after year by unordained preachers, not on trial.

c. The many unordained preachers who for one reason or another do not qualify under this law work under a hardship. The Methodist Church employs numerous pastors who do not have the necessary educational requirements, and who will not have them for years, and who therefore will be handicapped. One example might be a man led into the ministry late in life who is willing and capable of effectively serving his Lord and the Methodist Church as a supply pastor.

d. By implication the priestly office is hereby held to be a higher office than the prophetic office.

### 3. Final Conclusion

When the advantages are weighed over against the disadvantages, the scale would seem to tip in favor of the law as it was established by the 1952 General Conference. Though there are valid weaknesses in it, the beneficial aspects more than off-set these.

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