

A Re-examination of American Methodist Ordination

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NO STUDY of American Methodism can fail to take account of John Wesley's contribution to the character of original Methodism. Yet no study which claims to be historical can proceed as though Wesley's views are the only factor in the origin and development of American Methodism. It is true that American Methodist ordination **officially** began when Wesley ordained two elders and a superintendent and sent them to America with the instructions that the latter should ordain as a superintendent a Methodist preacher who was already in America. The word "officially" in this statement suggests that there is also an unofficial or non-wesleyan phase of the history we are examining. Part of this non-wesleyan phase came before the famous ordinations of 1784, and part of it was the result of the fact that American Methodists took issue with several features of Wesley's plans for his followers in America.

There were little groups of Methodists in America almost twenty years before Wesley ordained ministers to provide them with the sacraments. Much of the early strength of Methodism in Virginia was due to the efforts of Rev. Devereaux Jarratt, a Church of England minister who had gone from America to England to be ordained, and who correctly considered early Methodism, in America as well as in England, not a new denomination, but an evangelistic movement within the Anglican Church. However, many of the Methodist societies in America were started, not by ordained ministers,

but by lay preachers. A number of these preachers were Irishmen who were independent in spirit. One of these Irishmen was Robert Strawbridge, who farmed, preached, and started Methodist societies in Maryland. Although he had never been ordained by any one, Strawbridge insisted on his right to administer the sacraments to those whom he had led to a personal commitment to Christ. Even after attempts were made by Thomas Rankin and Francis Asbury to keep any one but ordained Anglican clergymen from administering the "ordinances," Strawbridge persisted in his sacramental administrations.

Another lay preacher serving "on his own" in America was "Captain" Webb. Webb had been licensed to preach by Wesley, but he had come to America with the British army. Responding to appeals from Webb and others, Wesley sent several lay preachers to America. Among those Wesley sent were Thomas Rankin and Francis Asbury, who were designated Wesley's "Assistants." One of the functions of these lay superintendents was to see that Wesley's rules for the Methodists were enforced in America. One of these rules was that Methodists were to receive the sacraments only from ordained clergymen of the Church of England. While Strawbridge refused to conform, as we have already noted, most of the Methodist preachers agreed, at a conference assembled by Rankin in 1773, to conform to the "old Methodist plan" of no sacraments from any one except ordained Anglican ministers.

THE FLUVANNA ORDINATIONS

It must not be supposed that this agreement with Wesley's rules permanently settled the matter. American Meth-

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odists were torn between a desire, felt by many, to be loyal to Wesley, and the need, felt also by many, to have the sacraments from their own preachers. In fact the "question of the ordinances" was one of the chief subjects which "agitated" the American Methodist preachers, gathered in Conference, from the first attempt to enforce Wesley's rules until Wesley finally ordained ministers for America. The best that could be done to keep a semblance of peace was to postpone each year a final decision on the question, with the hope that Wesley would soon provide a permanent solution.

The Conference session of 1779 was scheduled to be held at the Broken Back Church at Fluvanna, Virginia. In our next paragraph we shall discuss the momentous action of this Conference. First we must note that a second Conference was held, ostensibly for the convenience of the preachers in Delaware and other "northern" places, but actually because Asbury could not safely make the trip to Fluvanna. This was because Asbury was a British subject and at this particular time during the Revolutionary War it was deemed best for him to be "detained" at the home of Judge White, in Kent County, Delaware. The Conference which met in Delaware asserted Asbury's right to be "General Assistant" in America. The minutes contain a question and answer concerning the necessity of doing everything possible to "guard against a separation from the Church." This expresses the attempt of Asbury and his followers to get all of the Methodists of America, as a part of the Church of England, to receive the sacraments only from Anglican clergymen.

The preachers who met in Conference at Fluvanna, Virginia were of a different opinion. What happened at that Conference on the question about which we are concerned has been purged from the official minutes by later patriotic editors. Philip Gatch, who was a member of the Fluvanna Conference, reports in his

Journal¹ that the Conference appointed a "presbytery" to which it gave authority to examine and ordain the preachers they should decide were ready for ordination. This presbytery then proceeded to ordain most of the other preachers who had gathered in Conference. The next Conference presided over by Asbury was able, after considerable effort and spiritual persuasion, to get those ordained at Fluvanna to "Suspend their ministrations" until Wesley could solve the problem of the sacraments. This made a permanent solution even more urgent.

We are in a position to see the importance of the Fluvanna ordinations when we realize the place that authorization by the Conference had in these ordinations. This authorization has since become the essential characteristic of American Methodist ordination.

WESLEY'S CHANGE OF VIEW ON ORDINATION

It is well known that Wesley once believed that it is essential for ministers to be ordained by bishops in apostolic succession. He still held this belief for some time after his famous Altersgate experience of 1738. He still held it when he first decided to do "field preaching," and to use lay preachers. Wesley justified the use of lay preachers by making a distinction between preaching and the administration of the sacraments. That is, while Wesley used lay preachers, he did not permit these lay witnesses to administer the sacraments. Even after Wesley gave up the idea of a ministry in apostolic succession he still insisted, as we have seen, that his followers receive the sacraments only from Anglican clergymen.

It was in 1746 that Wesley first shifted away from the idea of the necessity of ordination by a bishop in apostolic succession. Two books helped to bring about this change of viewpoint. The first of these, Lord Peter King's book on *The*

¹ Quoted in Leroy M. Lee, *The Life and Times of Rev. Jesse Lee* (Richmond, Va., 1848), pp. 79-81.

Primitive Church, convinced Wesley that "bishops and presbyters are (essentially) of one order."² The second book which helped to change Wesley's view of ordination was Bishop Edward Stillingfleet's *Irenicum*.³ This book helped Wesley to see that there is a legitimate variety in church governments, according to historical circumstances.

The fact that Wesley's view of the ministry changed as early as 1746, while his ordinations for America did not take place until 1784, is evidence that the ordinations were not the result of the infirmities of Wesley's old age as is sometimes charged. Yet, if the change of view came in 1746, why did Wesley wait until 1784 to ordain ministers for America? We are on the way to discovering the answer when we recall that the Treaty of Paris which ended the American Revolutionary War came in 1783—one year before the ordinations.

Wesley on more than one occasion refused to obey the English bishops when they tried to stop him from preaching in their dioceses. This fact, and the fact that Wesley had come to believe that under certain circumstances prebyters have the right to ordain, must not keep us from recognizing that in general Wesley respected the authority of the Anglican bishops. He did this even though at times he questioned whether some of them had sufficient spiritual concern. As long as an Anglican bishop, namely the Bishop of London, had authority over Anglicans in America, including, according to Wesley, the Methodists in America, Wesley refused to ordain ministers for America. While the Bishop of London was still in charge of the Anglican work in America, Wesley had appealed to him to ordain some of the Methodist preachers for service in America, but the Bishop had refused. By the laws of England in

effect at that time, once the American colonies were independent of England, no Anglican bishop had any authority over the Anglicans who were living in America. Besides, following the granting of independence to America, there was a rather severe shortage of Anglican ministers in America. Wesley's concern for the "lost sheep in North America," coupled with what he interpreted as freedom to act, now caused him to accede to the continued demands of his followers in America for ordained ministers from among the Methodist preachers.

WESLEY'S ORDINATIONS FOR AMERICA AND THE REINTERPRETATION OF ORDINATION BY THE AMERICAN METHODISTS

On September 1, 1784 Wesley, with the assistance of James Creighton and Thomas Coke, ordained first as deacons and then as elders, Richard Whatcoat and Thomas Vasey. The next day Wesley, with the assistance of Creighton, ordained Coke, who was already a priest of the Church of England, as a "superintendent."⁴ The former he sent to America to help supply the need for the sacraments. The latter he sent to America to ordain Francis Asbury as "Joint-Superintendent." If a presbyter under certain circumstances has the right to ordain, then why was Coke ordained a superintendent? The only answer that can be given is that Coke was given this additional ordination in order that he might "stand up to" Asbury, who for a number of years had been superintending the Methodist work in America.

By whose authority were these ordinations administered? It is quite clear that they were done only by the authority of John Wesley, the leader of the Methodists. The Church of England, when it

² J. Wesley, *Journal* (ed. by N. Curnock), III, 232.

³ A Microfilm copy of Stillingfleet's *Irenicum* is in the Taylor Library of the Iliff School of Theology.

⁴ The statements by Wesley concerning the ordinations, as given in both the *Journal* and the *Diary* are given in *Journal* (ed. by Curnock), III, 15. Wesley uses the word "ordain" in speaking of the service for Coke as well as when he refers to the other ordinations.

ordained Wesley a priest, certainly had not given him the authority to ordain ministers. In the ordination certificate which Wesley gave Coke Wesley says: "I John Wesley think myself providentially called, at this time, to set apart some persons for the work of the ministry in America."⁵ While Wesley asserts that, in ordaining Coke as a superintendent, he has been assisted by other ordained ministers, these ministers only assisted. By their presence and their participation they gave their sanction, but by no stretching of the accepted practice of the Presbyterian and Reformed churches can the ordinations be called "Presbyterian ordinations." Presbyteries are governing bodies of a Church in a certain geographical area. In a Presbyterian system of church government ordination is done by vote of and by the authority of a presbytery. There was no such presbytery and no such vote in Wesley's ordinations.

Nor did the "Conference of Preachers in Connection with Rev. John Wesley" vote on the ordinations. In fact the Conference was not even consulted in the way Wesley occasionally asked his preachers to discuss some problem. It should be remembered that even when Wesley consulted his preachers who were gathered in Conference, Wesley and Wesley alone made all of the decisions. This system was aptly summarized by Wesley himself in the *Large Minutes* in these words: "I sent for them to advise me, not to govern me," and in the same statement he says that it is impossible for him to accede to the suggestion that matters should be decided by a majority of votes.⁶ As we said the Conference was not even consulted before the ordinations. In fact, it was not until the Conference a year later, i.e., in 1785, that Wesley informed the

Conference about the ordinations. In the 1784 Conference, which was held at Leeds, Coke, Whatcoat, and Vasey were appointed to serve in America, but with no mention that the men who were appointed to go to America were to be ordained before they went.⁷ The absence of any reference to the ordinations in the 1784 English Minutes, the fact that Charles Wesley complained because he was not consulted by his brother about the ordinations, and the fact that the three ordinations were conducted in secrecy at an early morning hour, all of these support our contention that the 1784 Conference at Leeds was not told of Wesley's intention to ordain the preachers who were being sent to America.

The revisions which Wesley made in the ordination services of the *Book of Common Prayer* and incorporated into the forms included in his *Sunday Service for the Methodists in America* are in the direction of a prophetic rather than a priestly conception of the ministry. The prophetic conception of the ministry has remained an important factor in the American Methodist view of ordination.

However much American Methodists may have shared Wesley's conception of the ministry and his religious views in general, they did not agree with his authoritarian view that the ordination of Asbury in America should take place on the authority of Coke alone. It was Asbury who can be given much of the credit, along with proper credit to the Fluvanna Conference, for the American Methodist idea that ordinations are administered only after they have been authorized by the affirmative vote of an annual conference. When Asbury first heard that Coke had come to America with instructions from Wesley to ordain him a Superintendent, he declared he would not take the office unless he was elected by his fellow-preachers.⁸ This

⁵ Coke's ordination certificate is quoted in many places, among them W. W. Sweet, *Methodism in American History* (Abingdon, 1956 revision), pp. 104f.

⁶ *Large Minutes*, in *Minutes of Methodist Conferences* (English), I, 503-507.

⁷ 1784 English Minutes, in *ibid.*, I, 168.

⁸ *The Journal and Letters of Francis Asbury* (Ed. by E. T. Clark; Epworth and Abingdon, 1958), I, 154-158.

was why the so-called "Christmas Conference" was called together. The Conference which met during the closing week of 1784 and the early days of 1785 not only elected Coke and Asbury Superintendents but agreed that the Methodists in America should become a new denomination independent of the Anglican communion. On the basis of strong evidence ably presented by J. A. Faulkner⁹ and W. W. Sweet,¹⁰ we can be reasonably certain that Wesley never intended that the American Methodists should sever their connections with the Anglican communion. That they did so was largely due to two factors: the independence of spirit of many of the American Methodists, and the negative attitude of Dr. Coke toward the Established Church, expressed in a sermon Coke preached on the occasion of the ordination of Asbury.¹¹ Asbury was ordained deacon, elder, and superintendent on three successive days, probably with the use of the "forms" Wesley had sent to America. At the request of Asbury, Philip William Otterbein, a German Reformed pastor in Baltimore and a leader of the United Brethren movement, assisted in the ordinations. We can be reasonably certain that the word "ordain" was used in the third as well as in the first two services. This is attested by early reports of the services, and by the wording of the rituals in Wesley's **Sunday Service**. This apparent fact should not be pressed too far. It should be remembered that, although Wesley retained the word "ordain" in his revision of the third ordination service of the **Book of Common Prayer**, he

changed the word "bishop" to "superintendent."

The important point concerning the ordinations which took place at the organizing Conference of American Methodism is that the superintendent, the twelve elders, and three deacons who were ordained had this sacred rite performed on their behalf only after the Conference had voted to authorize their ordination. This feature has been a characteristic of Methodism in all of its American branches ever since. In making this rule a part of the first American Methodist **Discipline** and of all subsequent issues of their book of church order, American Methodists have departed from the authoritarianism of John Wesley, and they have demonstrated that they have presbyterian and not episcopal polity.

John Wesley never admitted that the American Methodists had organized themselves into a new and independent denomination. Shortly before his death in 1791 Wesley wrote to the American Methodists that they should never forget that the Methodists in all the world are one people.¹² He also continued to insist, to the end of his life, that the Methodists were and should remain a part of the Church of England. As inconsistent as Wesley's ordination of ministers seems to be with statements of this sort the available evidence gives us no right to say that Wesley intended to start a new denomination.

ORDINATION IN THE METHODIST PROTESTANT CHURCH

The Methodist "reformers" who organized the Methodist Protestant Church were primarily interested in securing representation by laymen and local preachers in the annual and General conferences of the Church. The new Church was organized after the reformers failed to get action on their

⁹ J. A. Faulkner, *Burning Questions in Historic Christianity* (New York: Abingdon Press, 1930), p. 217f.

¹⁰ Chapter by W. W. Sweet in Wm. K. Anderson (Editor), *Methodism* (Nashville, 1947), I, 471f.

¹¹ For a discussion of Coke's influence in the direction of an independent Methodist denomination in America, see the present writers Th.D. dissertation *Ordination in American Methodism* (Iliff School of Theology, 1962), pp. 154-158.

¹² J. Wesley to Ezekiel Cooper, February 1, 1791, *Works of John Wesley* (American Edition, New York, 1856), VII, 237.

proposals at the 1824 and 1828 General Conferences. To modern Methodists the demands for lay representation seem reasonable, but advocates of reform complicated the issue by attacking episcopacy and the presiding eldership. Those on the other side were equally unreasonable in that they brought about the expulsion of members from the Methodist Episcopal Church simply for reading various periodicals and pamphlets advocating reform. The important point as far as this article is concerned is that in all of the bitterness and debate there is no record that any one ever suggested that any Methodist bishop had exceeded his authority with regard to ordinations. In the Methodist Protestant Church provision was made that ordinations be authorized by an annual conference, and that the President officiate at ordinations. When the three major branches of American Methodism prepared to unite no one questioned the validity of ordinations conducted by a president of a conference instead of a bishop.

Many of the reforms advocated by those who organized the Methodist Protestant Church and by others who protested from time to time have since been adopted by The Methodist Church. The reason the reforms were not adopted at first seems to be that the majority of the Methodist leadership was fearful that the itinerant system would be destroyed if it was tampered with by permitting such things as appeal from appointments, lay representation, and the election of presiding elders. The feeling was strong in the church that the itinerant system was a much more effective way of spreading the gospel than the permanent pastorate of other denominations. Many felt that if the itinerant system were altered the effectiveness of the Methodist witness would be hampered.

In the course of its history as a separate denomination the Methodist Protestant Church gradually saw the need of giving its conference presidents

more administrative authority. This, together with the gradual introduction of more democracy into the two large branches of Methodism, helped to prepare the way for the union of American Methodists into The Methodist Church, on the basis of administration by bishops and district superintendents.

At first the Methodist Protestants retained two orders in the Ministry. By 1877 the only order of the ministry to which the Methodist Protestant **Discipline** makes reference is that of elders. Two important changes were made by the Methodist Protestant leaders when they prepared the ordination rituals for their church. One of these was to replace the words "Take thou authority . . ." with the words "We acknowledge thy authority . . ." The second change which the Methodist Protestants made in the ordination ritual was to add "by the election of thy brethern" to the words of ordination. These words express, as we have seen, an important emphasis in Methodist ordination. The only reason they have not been included in the ordination rituals of the larger Methodist bodies has been the force of a tradition based on undemocratic procedures in Anglicanism and in John Wesley. It would seem that the Methodist reformers still have some things to say to American Methodists. The discussion of definite plans for the possible union of The Methodist Church and the Evangelical United Brethren Church would seem to be a good time to re-examine the ordination rituals of The Methodist Church in the light of the corresponding rituals used in the Methodist Protestant Church. Such a study might help to bring the ordination rituals more completely into harmony with the prophetic conception of the ministry and the democratic nature of Methodist polity.

ORDINATION IN SOUTHERN METHODISM

Without discussing in detail the division of American Methodists into north-

ern and southern Churches, beginning in 1844, we can say in summary that the occasion of the division was the "trial" of Bishop Andrew for slave-holding, which had come about through his marriage. In the course of prolonged debate in the General Conference of 1844 delegates of the southern conferences argued that the episcopacy of the Church was coordinate with the General Conference, and that a bishop therefore could not be disciplined by the General Conference. On the other side of the question, the delegates from the northern conferences declared that, because the bishops were elected by the General Conference, their actions should come under the scrutiny of that body and appropriate disciplinary action could be taken. After it was not possible to reconcile the two viewpoints, and two major branches of the Church resulted, leaders of the northern church tended to regard the bishops as servants of the General Conference who were amenable to it. Those of the South tended to regard the bishops as something like a third order of the ministry. This is reflected in the retention during practically all of the southern Church's history of the "ordain" in the ritual for the consecration of a bishop. The person presenting the bishop-elect for consecration said: "We present unto you this holy man, to be ordained a bishop." These words remained a part of the southern Methodist rituals until 1934—five years before Methodist union went into effect.

However, we must not suppose that the southern Church changed in any way the rule that ordination of ministers shall take place only after ordination has been authorized by vote of an annual conference. Being more traditional and aristocratic in their views the ministers and members of the southern Church believed there were positive values in giving "honor to whom honor is due." No matter how much southern leaders have tended to treat bishops as though they were a third order, and at times have said they

were in effect a third order,¹³ it is a fact that the Methodist Episcopal Church, South never gave bishops greater authority with regard to ordinations that was the case before the division of the Church. It was still true that a bishop could ordain a minister only after ordination had been authorized by affirmative vote of an annual conference.

ORDINATION IN RELATION TO PROPOSED CHURCH UNIONS

American Methodists have tended to defend their ministry against the conception of the ministry held by the Protestant Episcopal Church in the United States. Even so there have been occasional proposals for the union of American Methodists and Episcopalians. One of these was discussed secretly in 1791 by Thomas Coke and Episcopal Bishop William White.¹⁴ These discussions never got beyond the personal level. They are hard to understand in the light of Coke's earlier critical attitude toward the Anglican Church and his part in the organization of an independent Methodist Church in America. At any rate the proposal never got very far. In general American Methodists have had little interest in their Anglican heritage and have regarded John Wesley not as an Anglican but as the "founder" of a new and separate denomination which was more "spiritual" in its emphasis than the more "formal" and socially liberal Episcopal Church. While there have been those in various periods who have stressed the relationship of Methodism to Anglicanism, it has only been in recent years that there has been sufficient appreciation among American Methodists of the Anglican heritage of Christian worship and the sense of continuity with the one universal church of the early centuries to

¹³ For a recent statement of this sort, see Nolan B. Harmon, *The Organization of the Methodist Church* (Nashville, 1953 edition), p. 56.

¹⁴ See W. W. Sweet, *Methodism in American History* (1953 revisions), pp. 117f.

make serious discussions possible. In 1952 joint meetings of commissioners of the two denominations resulted in the publication of a small volume of addresses and papers given at joint church union commission meetings.¹⁵ During the 1956-60 quadrennium there were again joint meetings of the two commissions on church union. At the 1960 Methodist General Conference Bishop Robert Gibson, Jr. of the Episcopal Church reported that the two denominations were no closer together than they were previously. He reported that Methodists and Episcopalians had learned to know each other better, but that they still had considerable fear of each other. He also reported that a conference between Methodist and Episcopal bishops, ministers and laymen had been held in Rhode Island, with the result of better understanding of differences in the thinking of the two groups, but again producing no tangible plans for church union.¹⁶

Another event which has brought about church union discussions in which both The Methodist Church and the Protestant Episcopal Church are involved is the proposal made by Stated Clerk Eugene Carson Blake of the United Presbyterian Church in the United States of America. In a now famous sermon at the Grace Episcopal Cathedral in San Francisco on December 4, 1960, Dr. Blake suggested that the Presbyterian Church and the Episcopal Church discuss the possible union of the two churches along lines which he discussed in his sermon.¹⁷ Bishop Pike added his own remarks to those of Dr. Blake, and the proposal was soon enlarged so that The Methodist Church and the United Church of Christ were added to the list of denominations who were to be asked to join in the discussions. Later the Disciples of Christ

and the Evangelical United Brethren Church were included in the discussions. Two meetings to discuss the Blake-Pike proposal have been held, one early in 1962, the second in 1963. Although progress has been reported, it is doubtful if the discussions will result in the union of all six of the denominations now engaged in the conferences on church union. Reactions of Methodists to the Blake-Pike proposal have varied considerably. Many have been vitally interested; others are indifferent, while still others are definitely opposed to any union which would involve acceptance of the Anglican version of apostolic succession.

In England the relations between the Methodists and Anglicans have been somewhat different than in the United States. English Methodists have always been more conscious of their Anglican heritage than have American Methodists. This has not kept English Methodists from emphasizing their distinctive tenets and methods of work. In recent years there has been an apparently growing feeling on the part of some British Methodists that their "connexion" has performed its function as a life-giving force in English religious life, and that the future of British Methodists lies in the direction of a more definite relationship with the Church of England.

Considerable progress has been made in the direction of intercommunion and possible union of British Methodists and Anglicans. The recent discussions in England grew out of a proposal made by the Archbishop of Canterbury, Geoffrey Fisher, in a sermon at Cambridge University on November 3, 1946.¹⁸ The report of the Anglican-Methodist discussions, which are only one among several discussions resulting from the Archbishop's sermon, shows a willingness on the part of some of the English Methodist leadership to adopt episcopacy while at the same time wishing to

¹⁵ *Approaches to Unity* (Nashville, 1952).

¹⁶ *Daily Christian Advocate*, May 3, 1960, p. 216.

¹⁷ Dr. Blake's sermon was published in pamphlet form by Grace Cathedral in San Francisco.

¹⁸ *In Church Relations in England* (London: S P C K, 1950), pp. 10f.

further distinctive Methodist emphases. The church and secular press in America occasionally gives reports of the discussions in England. Those who are interested in the discussions should get from a British bookstore the following report: **Conversations Between The Church of England and The Methodist Church: An Interim Statement.**¹⁹

In America church union discussions between commissioners of The Methodist Church and of the Evangelical United Brethren Church have been making considerable progress toward the union of the two churches. One of the latest official actions has been the authorization by the Evangelical United Brethren General Conference for its commissioners to work with commissioners of The Methodist Church in preparing a Basis of Union to be submitted to the governing bodies of the two denominations. This action came in spite of the fact that there is considerable opposition to the proposed union in the E U B Church, especially in the Pacific Northwest Conference (Oregon and Washington) and the Montana Conference.

Both the Methodist Church and the Evangelical United Brethren Church have a prophetic conception of the ministry. In both ordination takes place only after it has been authorized by vote of the annual conference. Both churches designate their highest administrative officers as bishops. As work on the Basis of Union progresses there are a few problems related to the ministry which will need to be solved. One of these is whether bishops in the united church are to be elected for life as in The Methodist Church or for a term as in the Evangelical United Brethren Church. Another problem is whether district superintendents are to be appointed by the bishop as in The Methodist Church or elected by the annual conference as in the E U B Church.

A further problem is the question as to how many ranks there are to be in the ministry of the new church. The Methodist Church has, principally: licensed (local) preachers, and deacons, and elders. The Evangelical United Brethren Church has two ranks: probationers and elders. These problems will probably be solved satisfactorily. This is possible because the churches have similar background and polity.

Those interested in the ministry and ordination should very carefully study what has happened regarding church union in India. Because American Methodists were not involved in the negotiations which resulted in the Church of South India we will not discuss that union. We will discuss the Plan for Church Union in North India and Pakistan. In this plan American Methodists as well as Christians of very diverse types are involved. One of the problems to be worked out in developing the North India and Pakistan plan was that, contrary to what was true in South India, it was necessary to attempt to bring together two diverse types of episcopacy. The plan has been worked out and has been approved by a number of groups including the Southern Asia Central Conference of The Methodist Church. As far as American Methodists are concerned the plan still has to be approved by the 1964 General Conference.

A full discussion of the North India and Pakistan Plan is impossible in the small amount of space we can give to the subject. A few observations, based on an examination of the Plan as printed at Madras, India, will be listed.²⁰ The plan, while incorporating features of both the Anglican and American Methodist conceptions of episcopacy, does not require ministers and members to accept one particular theological interpretation of episcopacy. The pastoral

¹⁹ London: S P C K and Epworth, 1959.

²⁰ *Plan of Church Union in North India and Pakistan* (Madras: The Christian Literature Society, revised 1957).

rather than the administrative function of bishops is emphasized. Careful provision is made for the laity in the church, including their place in the process by which a person becomes an ordained minister. Presbyters are to be associated with bishops in an ordination service. Provision is made for the sort of local, yet ordained, ministry needed in many situations in India and Pakistan. The plan attempts to work in the direction of making the diaconate in certain circumstances a permanent office so as to "set other ministers free for the functions which more properly belong to their distinctive calling."²¹ The Plan seeks to maintain a proper balance in the life of the church among: episcopacy, the Diocesan Council, and the local congregation. It deserves wide study by all Christians seriously interested in making the work of the church more effective in our day.

A study of American Methodist ordination in the light of its history rids us of the misconception that "every elder has the inherent right to ordain." Since, according to the Methodist conception, there is no magic in ordination, every elder has as much power, in the sense of ability, to ordain as a bishop has. However, as we believe we have made clear, no minister, not even a bishop, has the right to ordain unless ordination has been authorized by a conference. This principle, if not this exact rule, is the basis of ordination in any church. Ordination is authorization by a church expressing itself through the governing bodies of the church. It is not the arbitrary act of an individual person who cares nothing for the peace and unity of the church.

Another misconception which needs to be removed is the notion that John Wesley, being an ordained priest of the Church of England, by ordaining ministers for the Methodists somehow passed on the Anglican apostolic conception.

Methodists properly believe that Wesley as a gospel preacher and a leader of gospel preachers was a part of a succession of those who have preached "the unsearchable riches of Christ." But Methodists must not make this succession dependent, in a manner which is true neither to Methodist nor Anglican conceptions, on Wesley's standing as a priest of the Church of England.

In our day, when ecumenical discussions have been the means for deep searching concerning the meaning of the gospel, it is important for Methodists to realize that Anglicans are beginning to voice an apparently new emphasis with regard to apostolic succession. Anglicans are beginning to say that apostolic succession is a **doctrinal** rather than a **historical** proposition. Statements leading in this direction can be found in the resolutions of the various Lambeth Conferences, and in the writings of Anglican theologians. Bishop James Pike's defense of his re-ordination of Methodist George Hedley should be studied for the light it throws on the newer trend in Anglican thinking on the ministry and ordination.²² The best statement the present writer has found, which illustrates the newer trend in Anglican thinking, is in an article in the *Christian Century* by Professor Casserley of Seabury-Western Seminary. After stating that it is not possible to settle the argument about apostolic succession on historical grounds, Professor Casserley says that the question is theological rather than historical.²³ Statements of this sort ought to make us aware that it is possible for those of diverse viewpoints to have fruitful discussions even on the subject of the ministry.

Of far greater importance than a solu-

²² James A. Pike, "That They May All Be One," *Christian Century* 77:46-48 (Jan. 13, 1960).

²³ J. V. Langmead Casserley, "The Apostolic Ministry," *Christian Century*, 78:419-21 (April 5, 1961).

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 16.

tion to differences concerning the ordained ministry is the subject of the ministry of the laity. Giving laymen their proper place in the ministry of the church is something more than having active organizations of laymen (including women) in the church. It is something more than having the church fully organized as prescribed in the Methodist **Discipline** or a similar manual of church organization. Organizations of laymen and a fully organized and functioning official board can be effective means for making the message and spirit of Christ regnant in every area of life. But it has to be admitted that a fully organized church does not automatically have a concern for bringing about transformed individual lives and group relationships through the witness of the

gospel. The ordained ministry will have an important function in the deepening of the life of the laity. The ordained ministry of the new day must be more skilled, not less, in preaching, teaching, and counseling. But the work of the church is done effectively only when there is a spiritually concerned laity. The laos is not a second rate part of the church who help the pastor do the work of the church. The laos is the church, and it must be not only the church at worship on Sunday but also the church at work during the week, standing for what Christ stood, showing his compassion and concern for people with various sorts of needs, and teaching the way of Christ more effectively to those outside as well as those inside the fellowship.

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