

**Study Guide with Questions**  
**A Brief History of the Methodist Movement**  
**-Reformation to present-**  
**Keith Cressman (1988, edits 2024, all rights reserved)**

**Part I: The Reformation in Europe and Methodism in England**

Any discussion of Methodism in England must include the story of John and Charles Wesley. These men are the founders of Methodism. John's simple, direct sermons and administrative prowess along with Charles' eloquent sermons and rich hymns are largely responsible for the success of Methodism. Before we can appreciate what the Wesleys accomplished we must review a very significant period 200 years before John Wesley began preaching in England. That period is the Protestant Reformation.

By 1500 the Roman Catholic Church had been the dominant social and cultural force in Europe for several hundred years. The church had extensive land holdings. There was no separation of church and state. The church was the state and the state the church. This combination determined the culture. The Roman Catholic Church established the ethical principles for society and provided the legal system.

The church provided the only opportunity most people had to learn to read, write, or acquire any sort of education, but this opportunity was not offered to the general population. Scripture was available in Hebrew, Greek, and Latin which were not the languages commonly spoken by Europeans. With no education and no scripture that could be understood, people were forced to trust the church in all religious matters.

The appointment to higher ecclesiastical offices was often a matter of political influence rather than higher calling due to the power and influence of those positions. Often nobility were recruited to fill these regal positions. The bishops and other church officials lived well. In contrast, the local priest lived in poor conditions and was not very well educated. Often a parish had no priest and the less qualified curator would be responsible for the parish.

The Holy Roman Empire was the predominant government. The local government within the Empire that influenced daily life was the city state with the governing council called a diet.

The Roman Church was the only church. Protestants did not exist and, thus, were as much a part of the Roman Church as today's Catholics. It is unfair and inaccurate to single out the Catholic Church for criticism today regarding the abuses prevalent in the 16th century. The pre-Reformation period is as much Methodist history as it is Catholic history.

The church determined many aspects of a person's earthly life, but it was the Church's role as the mediator of salvation that came to trouble a young German monk.

There was a young man in Germany who, after some training in law, decided to be a monk. Like most monks, he spent a great deal of time copying scripture by hand. Like many monks, he read what he wrote. Like perhaps a few more monks, he understood and questioned what he read. Like no other monk, he asked why the church was not abiding by the instruction and teaching of scripture. This Monk's name was Martin Luther.

Questioning for spiritual guidance was expected of a monk. Luther, however, having discovered in his studies that forgiveness of sins is given by grace through faith, plead for the sale of indulgences to stop. (An indulgence was the church-mediated forgiveness of sin). Having received no, or at least inadequate responses to his pleas from the authorities, he posted his question, along with others, on the door of the church where a diet was to meet. His questions are referred to as "Luther's 95 Theses of **October 31, 1517.**"

Luther's questions were not the usual monk-seeking-spiritual-guidance type questions. Luther had reached beyond the spiritual, he had challenged a major revenue source of the church and Archbishop. He also challenged the basic interpretation of Scripture. He cited the Church for improper theological emphasis and worldliness, for a papacy that was too far removed from the people, for clergy that were too greedy, and for maintaining a religion of the people that was too vulgar.

There is only one Church and **Luther probably did not intend to cause another church to be formed.** However, because of the response to his theses, the Protestant Reformation began.

The Diet of Worms, faced with Luther's Theses, charged him with heresy in 1518 and commenced what became a three-year trial on the charge. Due to the availability of the printing press, Luther's Theses were widely distributed and popularly accepted. As a result, the trial became public in nature. Luther called for ecclesiastical reform and deepened spirituality, he stated that monasticism was unbiblical, and that clerical celibacy was wrong. In 1521 the Diet issued the Edict of Worms, excommunicating Luther and taking the extraordinary step of declaring Luther a political outlaw. Remember, the church was the state. Any challenge to the church was a challenge to the state. Thus, a heretic of the church, he could also be a political enemy of the state.

Luther modified his original premise that the church suffered from improper theological emphasis and had concluded that many of the doctrines were theologically in error. Luther fled.

City states generally ignored the Edict of Worms. There was widespread popular support for Luther. There was a growing concern for personal piety, a desire for the religion of the substance rather than form as well as hunger for the pure Word of God. There arose a cry against human traditions and works righteousness. Reformers dropped Latin as the religious language and began to use languages that were understood. In 10 years the 10 million people in Germany were treated to over

1,000,000 tracts calling for reform. The call was for reform, not for the creation of the new church, although new churches began to develop.

Several **splits developed among the Reformers**. The first division involved the doctrine of transubstantiation. Transubstantiation is the term used to describe the theological concept that the communion elements became the actual blood and body of Christ. Luther rejected transubstantiation but believed that Christ was present in the bread and wine. Ulrich Zwingli, a Swiss protestant reformer, asserted that Christ was present spiritually.

A second major split developed over baptism. The Anabaptists insisted upon baptism in adulthood following a personal decision and commitment to Jesus Christ. Luther believed infant baptism was acceptable and adult baptism was unnecessary.

A third major split was brought about by John Calvin who emphasized the majesty of God. Humanity's destiny is reasoned from God's majesty. In other words, a person is predestined by God. In contrast, Luther believed that each person possessed the free will to accept or reject God's offer of salvation.

A Dutch reformed theologian by the name of **Jacob Arminius** responded to Calvin's position of unconditional predestination to develop conditional predestination. This view states that God's predestination of the eternal destiny of individuals is based on God's foreknowledge of the way in which the individual will freely accept or reject Christ, in the context of prevenient grace.

Arminius also taught that salvation was available to all who accepted God's grace rather than to an exclusive selected group. Salvation requires the response of the individual to be effective. He taught that one's personal experience of new birth or conversion is important. He also taught that a Christian may be sanctified by God's grace. These teachings were promoted by John Wesley and the Methodists centuries later.

One group that existed separate from the Roman Church and prior to the Reformation was the "unity of brethren," later coming to be known as the **Moravian Church**. The church was formed in 1458 in Bohemia to establish a distinctively Bohemian church marked with lay involvement in worship and emphasis on ecclesiastical purification. The church emphasized imitating the life of Christ by developing gentleness, poverty, patience, piety, and love for enemies. The church was modeled after the earliest Christian church, relying in part on small gatherings of members into "bands" with the purpose of holding each other accountable for their Christian walk. As we will see Wesley was greatly influenced by both the Protestant Reformation and the Moravian Church.

### "Reformation" in England

England is separated from continental Europe by a body of water. In the 16th century the English Channel formed a much more formidable barrier than it does today. England, however, was not isolated from the Reformation.

England rejected the Roman Church and formed a state church of its own during the reign of **Henry VIII**. Henry wished to annul his marriage to Catherine of Aragon. He claimed that the marriage violated canonical law. He requested a decision from the Church in Rome and was told the marriage would not be annulled. Henry had previously made a public stand in favor of the Roman Church and found himself in a bind.

At the urging of **Thomas Cromwell**, the British Parliament passed a law in **1533** declaring that England was an empire whose sovereign was authorized to adjudicate all spiritual and temporal matters in the realm. Thus, England broke from the Roman Church, the King established himself as head of the church, and subsequently annulled his own marriage. The Anglican Church was established.

While the Anglican Church was not formed on the same ideals Luther had espoused, Henry issued decrees that implemented many of Luther's reforms. Henry dissolved the monasteries. This allowed him to confiscate their property and eliminate the source of his opposition. Henry adopted most of the doctrine of the Roman Church including its view of the sacraments. He permitted the Reformers to freely distribute pamphlets calling for reform. When Henry died in 1547, he had opened England to the Reformation.

**Edward VI** adopted many Protestant doctrines including the Lutheran and later the Zwinglian view of the sacraments. The Book of Common Prayer of 1549 was heavily influenced by the Protestants.

When **Mary** came to power in 1553, she attempted to restore Catholicism as the state church. She persecuted the Protestants and made martyrs of many of them. Her efforts came after England had been separated from the Roman Church for 25 years. Her efforts failed miserably. After her death in 1558, the backlash was so deeply rooted that **England was closed to Catholicism** from that time forward.

**Elizabeth I** followed Mary. She tried to move the Anglican Church moderately toward Protestantism. Parliament insisted on more radical change. The Book of Common Prayer of 1563 was undeniably Protestant.

Some saw the Elizabethan reform as a compromise of principle and sought a "pure" church. Those associated with this group criticized the Anglican Church for being too much like the Roman Church and **advocated a congregational rather than an episcopal form of church government**. Because of their stand for a pure church, this group came to be called the **Puritans**. By 1600 other separatists emerged; the **Quakers, Congregationalist, and Baptists** are examples.

There were some in England who favored revival over reform. They saw the Reformation simply as a replacement of one state church with another. Members of this group **were not reformers** but were critical of the Anglican Church. This **revival-urging** group was known as the "dissenters." They also influenced Wesley.

Things did not become more peaceful in the 17th century. The rivalry within Christendom manifested itself in wars. Most notable was the Thirty Years War (1618-1648) which marked a decline in the Habsburg dynasties of Austria and Spain. Cultural leadership of Europe shifted from the Mediterranean area of Europe to the North, particularly to the area around the English Channel.

The European world was changing quickly. The countries were involved in colonial expansion and economic development. Political thought began to view the monarchies with less favor. It was the **scientific revolution**, however, that characterized the 17th century most. During this era Newtonian physics and mathematics developed. These advancements were responsible for a fundamental change in how people viewed the universe. Many groundbreaking scientific instruments were developed: the telescope, microscope, thermometer, pendulum clock, and barometer are examples. Much of the previously unknown universe became observable and measurable. Worldviews changed.

Further refinements of the printing press facilitated the widespread sharing of information. Much as Luther's Theses became known to the people a century before due to the printing press, science was captivating the minds of the people by the same means.

People had become **indifferent to religion** by the end of the century. People were war-weary from bitter, fanatical religious conflicts, the rival empires were striving for economic recovery after the wars, and science was providing what appeared to be natural answers to questions and mysteries previously resolved by religion. Science had seemingly undermined the credibility of traditional religious teaching.

**Governments became secular entities** during the century. This placed them in the role of arbiter among the rival religious factions that had previously plunged nations into war. This resulted in a society that was generally more tolerant of different religious beliefs.

When John Wesley was born in 1703, he entered a world that was more secular than had been known in Europe for centuries.

#### The "Methodist Movement" in England

John Wesley was born on June 17, 1703. He was ordained a Deacon in 1725 and was ordained a priest in 1728. After a brief stint as a missionary, he returned to England where he preached renewal for the rest of his life. He died in 1791.

Charles Wesley was born on December 18, 1707. In 1735 Charles was ordained specially to accompany John on a missionary trip to America. He and John worked together for several years in Methodism. During that time Charles wrote about 6000 hymns. He died in 1788.

With a brief biography of these men set forth, let us now concentrate on the influences that formed their faith.

The Wesleys' father and grandfather were both ministers in the Anglican Church. Samuel, their father, was an orthodox, self-disciplined man with a thirst for learning and, eventually, a love for the Anglican Church. Samuel had not always been convinced that the Anglicans followed sound doctrine. This resulted from his education in a Dissenter seminary. Remember, the Dissenters were a group that urged renewal rather than reform of the Anglican Church. Samuel left the Dissenters apparently due to a difference in politics rather than a doctrinal matter.

Likewise, the younger **Wesleys hoped that the Anglican Church could be renewed, not divided.** The Wesleys neither intended to form a separate church and nor leave the Anglican Church. The influence of their father is apparent.

John's and Charles's mother, **Susanna**, was, like most women of her time responsible for the education of her children. She thereby greatly influenced their religious perspectives and faith. However, it is interesting to note that through John's work she came to experience a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. From that time on she often could be seen standing beside or near John to support him as he preached in the commons.

First John, and then Charles, attended Christ Church College at Oxford University. John studied to be a minister while Charles studied Latin and Greek. While John was away from school for a few years to complete his ordination requirements, Charles underwent a spiritual awakening. This was during Winter 1728-29. He began to meet regularly with some fellow students to read and study scripture. This group was called the Holy Club, but those who attended were sometimes derisively referred to as "**methodists.**" This name was permanently attached to the group sometime after John had returned to school and implemented a disciplined and methodical study of the scriptures.

The Methodists made it a point to share in the sacraments often and fasted two days a week. Through the encouragement of a member of the club named William Morgan, the group began activities to assist the needy in their community. They would visit prisoners, teaching them to read and to write, sometimes paying their debts and thus freeing them, and often trying to find them suitable jobs. They distributed clothes, food, medicine, books, and ran schools among the poor and in the workhouses.

Several changes occurred in 1735 that would influence the Wesleys' futures. In that year their father died, they left Oxford, and they departed on a mission trip to Georgia, America. Their mission was to oversee the spiritual lives of the colonists and to establish missions among the Native Americans.

Although Charles proved to be an eloquent preacher, he went back to England physically exhausted and in spiritual despair after only a few months. Perhaps the culmination of the events of that year had taken their toll.

John continued the work in Georgia, but his high churchmanship and legalism caused his message to be poorly received. If this had not caused enough problems, John

suffered an unfortunate run in with the woman of his dreams. It seems he may have courted too slowly and lost her to a rival suitor. John refused to serve communion to her based on some vague moral ground. This event may have eventually passed if the uncle of the woman of his dreams had not been the chief magistrate of Savannah. John was basically put on the next boat to England. This occurred in 1737.

John was frustrated and discouraged by his Georgia mission experience. He felt he was called to preach to Native Americans but was consistently frustrated. He probably considered his efforts a waste and likely fruitless. (Journal, October 7, 22, 1728; April 26, 1738).

Their experience in Georgia was not a total loss however, because it was in Georgia that they encountered the Moravians. **The Moravians**, you will remember from the section on the **Reformation**, were those who emphasized conversion, personal religious experience, and a sometimes-childlike devotion to Christ. Several Moravians were on board ship with John as he returned to England. Amid a bad storm at sea, John marveled at the Moravians' calm and peace.

In England, the Moravians had a reputation for emotional excess. This expressiveness brought criticism from those of the staid church traditions. John could not forget the peace that they demonstrated, however, and began to attend their meetings in London. There he realized that he could be justified freely by grace through faith, recognized the essential nature of conversion, and enjoyed the freedom of assurance of his salvation. One evening while attending a Moravian meeting on the invitation of his friend, Peter Bohler, John discovered this simple faith. The day was **May 24, 1738**. The place was a meeting house on **Aldersgate St. in London**. John described the experience in his journal,

... I felt my heart strangely warmed. I felt I did trust Christ, Christ alone, for salvation; and an assurance was given me that He had taken away my sins, even mine, and saved me from the law of sin and death. (Journal, May 24, 1738).

John's preaching from that time on emphasized the proclamation of salvation by grace through faith. He found it increasingly difficult, however, to find a hearing congregation as they closed their doors to him. They viewed his preaching as "enthusiastic," which was a critical and derisive term.

What is a preacher to do when no one will allow him to preach in their church and there is only one denomination in town? **George Whitefield**, a fellow preacher and friend, suggested that John preach in the "open air" of the **commons**. The idea was initially distasteful to Wesley. He later wrote that it took him a while not to feel as though it was a sin to preach outside the white walls and old wood of the church building. (Journal, September 23, 1758; April 12, 1789.)

John's **outdoor preaching** became an unanticipated success. He preached to thousands at a time. The unusual scene of this white robed cleric standing in the mud

or on a low box-like platform was sure to draw a crowd. Perhaps it was fitting to a casual onlooker that John's first outdoor sermon was delivered on April Fools' Day 1739.

His preaching also got the attention of the bishop. The bishop invited John for a visit during which John was chastised and threatened with excommunication if he did not stop the open-air preaching. Perhaps the white walls and old wood of the church buildings were symbolic of the heart of the church, emphasizing the need for renewal. The Anglican Church expected customs and traditions to be respected and things to be done with as little fuss and excitement as possible.

The Anglican Church resisted excitement and enthusiasm due to the age in which John preached. The 18th century is famous as the **Age of Enlightenment**, a time of enlightened intellect. People's faith was encouraged to be based on reason alone. Spiritual matters, to be accepted, had to be demonstrated by reason. People's hope to reform society, to understand nature, and to improve the human condition hinged upon enlightened human reason. This is not what Wesley taught.

Although England enjoyed social stability, the conditions of the majority were unpleasant. The peasants paid the bulk of the taxes, were subject to forced conscription to maintain the King's roads for the use of nobility and merchants and suffered the most from epidemics. Little was done to improve the lives of the general population, although they did live in better conditions than their counterparts in Europe. The people were interested in neither politics nor religion. Their concerns were with daily existence.

The peasants made their own dishes and fashioned their own utensils. They gathered their own fuel to keep warm and made their own fabric and clothes. The roads consisted of paths along rows of Willow trees that could be followed from one place to another. At night the town bells sounded to guide travelers to shelter, or, in some places, land lighthouses provided guidance. These were the conditions of the people John Wesley addressed in the commons.

John's preaching style had changed since Georgia. It was difficult to practice high churchmanship in the middle of a muddy field. His message had been reshaped by his experiences and he was speaking of what he truly knew in his heart. John used simple words and did not shout or threaten. He did not believe that anyone ever had been or could be bullied into heaven. He avoided pious language and considered the First Letter of John as a fine example of a clear, understandable explanation of the Gospel. John pleaded, loved, and taught the way of Jesus Christ that lay ahead for the Christian.

Wesley took the message to people who would have never darkened the entrance of a church building. In the process he gave up the comforts and benefits of a ministerial parish position with the established church and a career at Oxford. Instead, he took the message where it was most needed and raised an inspiring alternative to the deism of the period. (Deism is a theology that limits God to the role of Creator).



John soon faced a problem. Being practical, he devised and implemented a solution that worked. He was reaching many people with the Gospel, but what could a preacher without a church building or a local parish do to provide training, discipleship, or ministry for those who receive the message? Complicating the matter was the fact that **John's preaching took him all over England**, preventing him from devoting time to the people at any one area. Borrowing from the Moravians and the Holy Club, John established **societies, bands, and love feasts**. These groups provided accountable discipleship.

John had an accurate way of determining those who had been truly moved by a sermon. He would call them aside and invite them to a *society* meeting for further instruction. This was the purpose of the society meetings; providing more in-depth teaching and exhortation for committed Methodists than could be provided in the field.

Soon John was traveling so extensively that he further innovated by appointing lay members to lead the society meetings in his absence. Those with teaching or preaching gifts were soon utilized to preach at society meetings. Thus, John became dependent on lay preachers early in the Methodist movement.

The **bands** were meetings of no more than five to ten people who had committed to Jesus Christ. Those attending the meetings were separated by sex and marital status. No one was required to attend the band meetings but those who would benefit from more intensive exhortation and more intimate fellowship than the society meetings provided were encouraged to attend. The bands began to meet in 1739, planned by John and based on the Moravian model.

John recorded several advantages of the band meetings:

Advice or reproof was given as needed, required, quarrels made up, misunderstandings removed: And after an hour or two spent in this labor of love, they concluded with prayer and Thanksgiving.... Many now happily experienced that Christian fellowship of which they had not so much as an idea before. (Ask)

Similar meetings, called **classes**, began in 1742. They were not planned as the bands were but were an accidental result of another activity. Societies met in various places, sometimes constructing buildings for their own use. Building debt was incurred by one of the societies. It was determined that each member should contribute a penny per week until the debt was paid. The lay leaders went around every week to collect the contribution. As they went, they found the members in varying states of soberness and enjoying different degrees of domestic tranquility. When this news reached John, he instructed the leaders to inquire as to how the members were getting along each time the lay leader called on the members.

It was soon determined that it would be more expedient if the members stopped by the leader's home each week. When they came by, the leader would inquire as to their well-being. From this the class developed.

The Primitive church celebrated **love feasts**, or agape meals, on a regular basis. The Moravians, in an attempt to practice Christianity as the early church had, also celebrated love feasts. John first experienced the love feast with the Moravians while in Georgia in 1737. John adapted love feasts to early Methodism.

The Methodist love feasts were gatherings of several societies. The feasts included a common meal celebrating the love of Christ in community. During the meal a common cup was passed and all shared bread. Love feasts began when no ordained minister was available to serve communion.

John's **itinerant preaching** may have been inadvertently encouraged by his wife. After having lost the hand of a love in Georgia, he was engaged to another in England. By this time the demands of his ministry were great and time consuming. Charles, afraid that the ministry would suffer if John were to marry, persuaded John's intended to marry one of John's preachers. In reaction to having lost the second love of his life, John may have hurriedly married a third, Mary Vazelle, in 1751. Mary resented the concern and attention John gave the many young women who attended the society meetings. Some speculate that her bitterness may have contributed to John's tendency to travel. It appears John courted too slowly twice and once courted too quickly.

The development of Methodism as a denomination in England was slow and gradual. **Wesley never set out to create a group outside of Anglicanism.** He believed that the Methodist movement would remain part of the Anglican church. He wrote that he taught "the plain, old religion of the Church of England" (Journal, October 15, 1739) Nevertheless, John's actions and those of his followers birthed the Methodist Church.

The Methodists' strong emphasis on the doctrine of salvation by grace through faith differed from the level of emphasis placed on it by the Anglican church. The doctrine itself was consistent with Anglican teaching, but the emphasis differed. There were many religious societies within the Anglican church. The Methodists were not unique in this respect. **The Methodist Movement differed from the Anglicans in doctrinal emphasis and discipleship methodology.**

John began to hold Methodist meetings in the parishes of Anglican ministers without their consent. These large meetings often included loud and noisy singing, religious fervor, and organized societies. John's preaching dared to promote equality of master and common person as siblings in Christ. The parish minister would lose control when John arrived in his parish. This caused resentment.

The people found that **the Anglicans had failed to meet their needs. The Methodists met their needs** and ministered to them. As a result, the people became loyal to the Methodist cause at the expense of the Anglican Church. While all this was occurring, the Anglican Church took no official stance for or against Methodism or the Wesleys.

During the time of growth of Methodism in England, John read a work by Peter King, a Puritan. King advocated a church government modeled on that of the Primitive church. That form of church government set the **bishops** and ministers in the same order. This meant that either could ordain, and, in fact, both had historically ordained persons as ministers or bishops. The Church of England reserved the authority of ordination to the bishops. **John did not contend the Anglican Church government was scripturally incorrect but did determine that other forms of governance were of equal scriptural and traditional validity.** It would be 38 years before John applied this teaching.

In **1784** two significant events occurred that pulled Methodism further from the Anglican Church. The first event concerned the **leadership of the Methodist movement.** The Anglican Church had taken no action concerning Methodism and apparently planned for it to dwindle once John died. John did not concur. At 81 years old, John was concerned with determining who would lead the Methodists and keep the movement alive after his death. John found no single individual suited for the task so, by a legal **"Deed of Declaration"** filed with the Chancery Court, he appointed a conference of 100 specified men. The group of **One Hundred** was to succeed him upon his death. This body came to be known as the "Legal Hundred" or, later, as the **"Conference."** This is how Wesley provided for a succession of leadership and Methodism became an independently governed body within the Anglican Church.

The second significant event of 1784 involved **the ordination of ministers for service in America.** Despite being authorized to do so, the Bishop of London refused to ordain preachers for America. Consequently, the sacraments could be celebrated only infrequently by Methodists in America. Post-Revolutionary War America needed ministers who could administer the sacraments.

In what John considered a desperate situation, **he ordained Richard Whatcoat** and Thomas Vasey deacons on September 1, 1784. On the next day he ordained them as ministers. That same day he consecrated The Reverend **Thomas Coke** (previously ordained by the Anglican Church) as Superintendent for America. John was a superintendent but not a Bishop and, therefore, was not authorized to ordain ministers according to Anglican Church polity.

These actions marked separation, but John seemed to refuse to acknowledge that the schism had occurred. Charles on the other hand saw the schism clearly, maintaining that ordination was separation.

Again, the Anglican church ignored John's actions. **John continued to ordain ministers.** He ordained ministers for Scotland and for the mission field in 1785 and 1786. Methodists could not gain access to communion in some parts of England so John ordained ministers for these areas in 1788 and 1789.

Further separation, or at least drifting apart, occurred when the Conference allowed Methodist meetings to be held at the same time local Anglican services were being held. This created a clear conflict between the churches.

**Charles** served with John throughout the development and growth of societies across England. He would preach and ride the circuit, although his itinerancy decreased after he married Sarah Gwynne in 1749. His hymns were an important part of the various gatherings that were a part of Methodism. He wrote over 6000 hymns before his death in 1788.

**John Wesley died in 1791.** At the time of his death, his work among the poor, his fervor for preaching the gospel, and his organizational skills, along with Charles' hymns had laid the foundation for the success of Methodism.

After John's death, the Methodists themselves were divided regarding the propriety of the Wesley-ordained ministers to serve communion. The struggle continued until 1795 when the "**Plan of Pacification**" was accepted by the Conference. The plan provided that where communion was desired by the majority of leaders of a society, it should be given.

The Methodist Church in England was first called the Wesleyan Methodist Church. There were several schisms between 1797 and 1932. Most notable was the schism of 1797 creating the Methodist New Connexion from which the Christian Mission broke in 1861 leading to the formation of the Salvation Army in 1878. The Salvation Army, USA, was formed in 1880.

Many of the various arms of the Wesleyan Methodist Church, with the exception of the Salvation Army, were reunited in 1932 as the **Methodist Church**. Today, the family of Methodist, Wesleyan, Nazarene, Assembly denominations, and the Salvation Army are some of the groups evolving from the original Methodist movement in England.

## **Part II: An Overview of the History of Methodism in America**

### Methodism in America

In Part I we focused on the Protestant Reformation in Europe and its impact in England. Slowly the Protestant churches cooled spiritually. We saw how John and Charles Wesley and others attempted to rekindle the spiritual flame in the Anglican Church and how the Methodist Church resulted from that rekindling. Just as Methodism in England developed unique characteristics in response to British culture, Methodism in America grew within its culture. If the story were to end with the Wesleys our view would be too narrow to understand the Methodist Movement in America.

### The Eighteenth Century

Many of the best-known events of American history occurred in the 1700s. The population increased, new social classes developed, and the United States became an independent nation. The population increased from 250,000 settlers in 1700 to 5.3 million Americans in 1800, a twenty-fold increase. People tended to settle in urban centers, resulting in rapid growth of the cities. The population in agricultural areas also increased, but not at an equal rate.

While European culture had engendered a strong class consciousness, Americans developed an influential middle class. This socio-economic group was characterized by ownership of real property. Tragically, many people were owned by others as personal property. These **slaves** constituted the lowest 20% of society in terms of freedom and wealth. Race based exploitation was a fundamental part of some sectors of society, especially in the South, and would become the greatest threat to America's future.

By the mid-1700s, **Colonists** achieved a significant level of self-governance. This turned out to be somewhat of a surprise and a disappointment to the British. The century began with France the dominant world power. Britain challenged that power for control of America in what became known as the Seven Years War. The war ended with a British victory in 1763. When Britain attempted to extract taxes from the American colonists to pay the war debt incurred in "defending" the colonies the settlers refused to pay. The Americans felt that they were being taxed without representation in Parliament. Attempts to reconcile the situation failed. The colonists' expectation of self-governance along with taxation without representation precipitated American's move toward independence in 1776.

During these tumultuous times, leaders within the Methodist Movement presented the gospel to Americans. Many listened. The first Methodist missionaries were John and Charles Wesley.

**George Whitefield**, who first persuaded John to preach in the open air, was sent to Georgia as John's replacement. He traveled back and forth between America and England thirteen times and played an influential role in the evangelism of America. He did not form believers into classes and societies as Wesley had done in Georgia and was doing in England. This meant little organization remained to disciple the new believers.

By the close of the century, three important church organizations had formed: **The United Brethren in Christ, the Methodist Episcopal Church, and the Evangelical Association**. These are three of the five denominations we are focusing on.

The United Brethren in Christ

A colonist named **Philip William Otterbein** arrived in America as a missionary on July 28, 1752. He experienced a personal spiritual crisis when he realized his lack of peace and joy. Through this trial he experienced the reality of divine forgiveness and the assurance of salvation. With renewed urgency and vigor, he began to preach

throughout an expansive geographic area including Pennsylvania and Maryland. In 1774, Otterbein became the pastor of a German Reformed Church in Baltimore where he remained for nearly 40 years.

Martin Boehm was an American born Mennonite of Swiss ancestry. His call to the ministry took the form of selection by lot, which was the Mennonite custom. Feeling ill at ease with his calling and his personal worth, he began to study scripture and pray in earnest. He was touched by the Holy Spirit, and he experienced an assurance of salvation. He then began to preach in Pennsylvania. As one might suppose, these two evangelical, German speaking preachers, Otterbein and Boehm, met and formed a fellowship with other preachers. The fellowship was based on common language and religious experience. Methodist-type **societies** were formed in Pennsylvania, Virginia, and Maryland by 1773.

Otterbein, Boehm, and six lay leaders formed the United Brethren Church in Christ in 1789. The church held its first annual **conference** in 1800 at which time Otterbein and Boehm were elected bishops.

#### The Methodists

John Wesley sent the first Methodist preachers and missionaries to America in 1769. These volunteers were **Richard Boardman** and **Joseph Pilmore**. When they arrived, they were greeted by an organized Methodist Movement. Laypeople had been organizing **societies** for about 10 years prior to the preachers' arrival.

Three laymen were particularly active: **Robert Strawbridge** in Maryland, **Phillip Embury** in New York City, and Captain **Thomas Webb** in Philadelphia. This immigrant farmer, immigrant carpenter, and retired British soldier, respectively, had enjoyed Methodism in England and had quite naturally brought it with them to America. The preachers from England built upon the work of the laymen and encouraged their work. It was stressed that no new church had been formed but that Methodism was a renewal movement within the Anglican church.

In 1772, two more preachers arrived in America. The more influential, **Francis Asbury**, just 26 years old, immediately took charge. He provided the impetus to spread the gospel by Methodists across a greater geographic area.

Wesley sent two more preachers who arrived in **1773**. **Thomas Rankin**, one of these preachers, was appointed to succeed Asbury as leader of the American work. Almost immediately he called a conference for all Methodist preachers. Ten preachers attended that first conference in Philadelphia. The purpose of that meeting was to formulate rules for and organize the Methodist missionary movement. The group made **several important decisions**: 1. John Wesley was recognized as the leader; 2. Attendance of love feasts was restricted to society members; 3. Preachers were to file semiannual accounts of their work; 4. Unordained preachers were not to administer the

sacraments; and 5. John Wesley's writings were not to be reprinted in America without his permission.

These decisions had limited effects among some of the lay preachers. One of the original lay preachers, Robert Strawbridge, had been administering the sacraments throughout the time of his ministry. The decision did not stop him. However, the decision to limit publications did stop independent reprints of Wesley's writings by some lay preachers. The decision laid the foundation for the Methodist publishing business.

Two more preachers were sent to America before 1775 when the direction of travel reversed. While Wesley had advised his preachers to take a neutral course regarding the question of American independence, he himself published a pamphlet favoring the **taxation of the colonists**. This alienated the allegiance and respect of the Americans and caused troubles and difficulties for Methodist preachers. All of Wesley's preachers, except Asbury, retreated to England. Despite, or perhaps because of the persecution, the membership of Methodist societies tripled to 13,740 between 1776 and 1783.

One of the decisions of the **conference of 1773** was to limit those who were allowed to serve communion to ordained preachers. With the return of the ordained preachers to England, Asbury was the only ordained preacher left among the Methodists to serve communion. This was a major crisis which the lay preachers tried to solve on their own. Some of the lay preachers, led by **James O'Kelly**, ordained each other and served communion. Asbury opposed this and worked out a compromise in **1780** to follow the 1773 decision until Wesley could be consulted. Strawbridge kept serving communion.

Four years later, influenced by the writing of Peter King, Wesley himself ordained Richard Whatcoat and Thomas Vasey elders and **Thomas Coke** Superintendents for the Americas. Wesley called for Coke and Asbury to be joint superintendents, prepared **liturgy** and provided **articles of religion** for use in America.

Upon arriving in New York, Coke called a conference of the preachers. The conference met at Baltimore in the Christmas season of 1784 and came to be known as the **Christmas Conference of 1784**. Several important actions were taken. First, a new church was formed, the **Methodist Episcopal Church**. Second, Asbury was elected Superintendent along with Coke. Third, Wesley's articles of religion were adopted, adding one more recognizing the United States of America. Fourth, preachers were forbidden from using intoxicating liquors. Finally, the conference condemned the practice of buying and selling **slaves**.

Asbury ruled the Methodist Episcopal Church as an autocrat. Consequently, if a preacher had a difference with Asbury he would have to choose to submit or to leave the church. Several left. William Hammett wished to remain at one church for a longer period and therefore was at odds with the **itinerancy system**. Asbury insisted he relocate. He did relocate, outside the Methodist Episcopal Church, in 1791. The next year, James O'Kelly, who had previously disagreed with Asbury concerning independent ordination and service of communion, challenged Asbury's **authority to appoint**

preachers to churches. O'Kelly thought every preacher should have the right to appeal an assignment if he were dissatisfied. He formed and appointed himself to a new congregation called the Republican Methodist Church in 1792.

#### The Evangelical Association

A successful, American born, 37-year-old businessman began preaching in Pennsylvania in 1796. The evangelical preaching of this man, **Jacob Albright**, emphasized the need for a change of heart rather than simple participation in the forms and ceremonies of the church.

In 1803 a group referring to itself as "**Albright's People**" declared itself an ecclesiastical organization and ordained Albright as its pastor. The first **conference** was held in 1807. The conference adopted a **discipline** based on the discipline of the Methodist Episcopal Church. Albright's People adopted the name The **Newly-Formed Methodist Connection**. Albright was elected Bishop in 1807. Albright died within months of his election. John Driesbach became the next presiding elder. In 1816 the Connection changed its name to the **Evangelical Association**.

Each of the three churches, the United Brethren in Christ, the Methodist Episcopal Church, and the Evangelical Association, were originally based on the personal experiences of their founders. Each of those experiences had been similar. Each denomination proclaimed a similar evangelical message. **They held these four doctrines in common:** 1. Persons need to be saved from sin; 2. They can be saved through the justifying work of Jesus Christ; 3. Through faith by grace they can receive a personal assurance of salvation; and 4. They can continue to perfection in Christ through the work of the Holy Spirit.

None of the churches were heavily involved in social or political issues. Perhaps they were still feeling the sting of involvement during the Revolutionary War or perhaps the emphasis on saving souls, justification through faith, and striving toward Christian perfection were all-consuming. The closest the Methodist Episcopal Church came to politics was to congratulate George Washington when he became president of the United States in 1789. On two occasions, Coke and Asbury met with President Washington.

The 1700s ended with these three churches related by common religious experiences and evangelical missions. They were all striving to reach the spiritual needs of an ever-growing and independent people in a new and energetic nation. These three churches are forerunners of the United Methodist and Global Methodist churches. Through schisms that occurred during the 1800's these three churches became five forerunners of today's Methodism.

#### The Nineteenth Century

The 1800's in America are characterized by territorial expansion, continued population growth, and industrial development. Territorial expansion is exemplified by the increase



in the number of states from 16 in 1800 to 45 in 1900. America made expansive land acquisitions: the Louisiana Purchase in 1803, the Florida Purchase in 1819, and the Alaska Purchase in 1867. Hawaii was annexed in 1898. As a result of the Spanish American war in 1898, America became increasingly involved in the Caribbean and Philippines. While new land areas were acquired, great western expeditions such as that of Lewis and Clark in 1804 were under way. People came to live in America. The population grew from 5.3 million in 1800 to 76 million in 1900.

This was also the century of monopolies and business barons. Standard Oil Company was organized by Rockefeller in 1870, and Vanderbilt bought the railroads that same year. Andrew Carnegie led the expansion of the steel industry. Well known, non-industrial names of this period include Florence Nightingale, Brigham Young, and William Booth.

Among all the societal changes a new theology emerged: **modernism**, also known as **liberal theology**. This theological perspective was, and is, based on a systematic historical and scientific inquiry of scripture. Biblical writings were critically reviewed in light of historical records and archaeological discoveries. As a result, the authorship of the Pentateuch, presumed biblical chronology, and the accuracy of the Gospel of John were all called into question. While some accepted these changes as part of the natural evolution of thought and understanding, others viewed them as deconstructionist.

Liberalism existed in tension with Christian **Orthodoxy** which was divided into two segments, Evangelical Protestantism and Traditionalism. Evangelical Protestantism was based on the Bible, was very Wesleyan, and geared toward moving individuals to salvation in Jesus Christ. It was individualistic, emotional, and addressed the problem of sin. The traditionalists stressed the importance of Holy Communion, corporate worship, liturgy, and the church as a sacred institution. Thus, there were three groups within the Methodist Movement. One group believed the bible to be the word of God, a second that placed less emphasis on the bible relative to archaeological, scientific, and historic discoveries, and a third that emphasized the sacraments, liturgy, and pageantry of worship. It was in this crucible that the Methodist Episcopal Church, Evangelical Association, and United Brethren Church were formed.

By **1808** the Methodists had a Confession of Faith, ordained clergy, a Discipline, and an organizational hierarchy. The Quadrennial General Conference was the governing body consisting of representatives from each Annual Conference. The United Brethren and Evangelical Association developed governance systems similar to the Methodist Episcopal system.

By the end of 1816, the four great founders of the churches we are studying were dead. Jacob Albright, of Lutheran heritage, the founder of the Evangelical Association, died in 1808. Martin Boehm, the Mennonite from Pennsylvania, died in 1812. Philip William Otterbein, the missionary of the German Reformed Church who, with Boehm, founded the United Brethren in Christ, died in 1813. Francis Asbury, the first Methodist

Bishop in America, having been sent as a missionary by John Wesley himself, died in 1816. By the time these men died a historic phenomenon known as the Second Great Awakening was well under way. New leadership and new directions were to come.

The **Second Great Awakening** is known for fervent evangelical preaching by well-known revival preachers such as Charles Finney. The Awakening carried with it an aspect that had been overlooked earlier - **social reform**. Thousands of volunteer organizations were organized to represent whatever cause could gather support. These independent religious groups crossed denominational lines to address issues such as temperance, aid to the poor, women's rights, and the abolition of slavery.

The Awakening was also punctuated by frequent **camp meetings**. Camp meetings lasted several weeks. People would live in wagons and tents near the central meeting area. These meetings provided an opportunity for fellowship and teaching and were often highly emotional; people fainted, got the "shakes," and many came to a saving knowledge of the Lord.

The success of the movements can be attributed to the dedicated service of the clergy and laity, the organization structures which facilitated meeting the needs of the membership, the growing use of English as the standard language, popular and meaningful worship services, the establishment of publishing houses to facilitate the use of church curriculum, and the founding of many colleges. The churches, which had been mission churches themselves 75 years earlier, began to sponsor **foreign mission programs** to Liberia in 1833 and to South America in 1835. Mission work sent members around the world and contributed to the growth of the churches in the United States and globally.

Growth was not painless. By 1850 both the United Brethren and the Methodist Episcopal churches had survived movements by laity for greater lay involvement in the governance of the churches. However, one significant group broke out of the Methodist Episcopal Church in 1830 with an initial membership of about 5000. This group called itself the Methodist Protestant Church. This is the fourth denomination we will study.

The greatest threat to the churches came in the realization that an ingrained aspect of society was wrong. Americans recognized the contradiction within a society that expounded on one hand that all persons were created equal while, on the other hand, permitted slavery. The United Brethren tended to avoid open, public discussion of the issue within the church until 1821 when it adopted legislation prohibiting its members from participating in ownership or activities supporting the ownership of slaves. The Evangelical Association prohibited the buying and selling of people in 1816.

The Methodist Protestant Church and Methodist Episcopal Church included membership throughout the States and territories. Thus, they were forced to deal with the slavery issue in regional terms. It became apparent that adversaries were **divided by region, North versus South**. John Wesley's position had been clear. His tracts, published as early as 1774, condemned slavery, judging it among the worst institutions devised by

human beings. The Church adopted Wesley's position during the Christmas Conference of 1784. However, over time, efforts were made to moderate differences, back away from this moral principle, and appease both sides. During the General Conference of 1844 the issue could no longer be avoided.

One of the duties of delegates to a General Conference was to adjudicate cases involving the suspension of membership in the Church. During the Methodist Episcopal General Conference of 1845, the delegates were called upon to decide the fate of two members who were in violation of Wesley's and the Church's belief about slavery. Francis Harding and Bishop James O. Andrew challenged the Church.

Francis Harding's appeal for reinstatement of his membership was denied. He had failed to free slaves who he had acquired as property via marriage. The second case was somewhat like the first. Bishop James O. Andrew was suspended from the exercise of his Episcopal duties. He had argued that he had neither bought nor sold slaves, having been devised two slaves upon the death of his first wife, and having acquired no ownership interest in slaves who were owned by his second wife.

Only a few days after the decisions on these cases were reached, the southern delegates presented a **plan for separation**. Pursuant to this plan, each local church could choose whether to become a part of a new church. The delegates approved the plan. A new church, called the **Methodist Episcopal Church, South**, was formed. The first conference of the southern churches was held in 1846 and, as one might have guessed, Bishop James O. Andrew was elected Bishop along with Joseph Sewell. The delegates expressed their desire to maintain friendly relationships with the Methodist Episcopal Church. Hence, the fifth church we are studying formed. The Methodist Episcopal Church, now a northern denomination, retained its original name.

The membership of the Northern church, however, took a dim view of what had occurred. In response, only one-third of the delegates to the 1844 Conference were re-elected in 1848. In 1848 the delegates refused the Southern churches' olive branch, defeating a resolution to enter friendly relationships with the Southern church. For almost 20 years the churches grew more bitter toward each other as they fought all the way to the United States Supreme Court over **property rights** and then on the battlefields of the **Civil War**.

In 1858 the Southern church removed the provision of the general rules that prohibited the buying and selling of slaves. The **delegates reasoned** that slavery was a political rather than a moral issue and was thus more appropriately addressed by the government than by the church. The Northern church continued its opposition to slavery, believing it both a **moral and political** issue.

The division in the Methodist Episcopal Church was representative of the division of the population of the nation. The Confederate States began to secede from the United States in March 1861. Less than a month later the war between the Confederate States of America and the United States of America began. Each church supported the war

efforts of its government and members of each church died believing that their side enjoyed God's blessing. The Civil War ended with the surrender of General R. E. Lee in 1865.

Although Reconstruction began after the war and was intended to reunite the nation, it was a brutal time for the South. People with good intentions were poisoned with revenge, animosity, deceit, and misunderstandings. The churches struggled with many of these problems and suspicions. Some desired reunification but the churches chose to maintain separate identities. One of the first acts of the Southern church in 1870 was to form a new denomination called the **Colored Methodist Episcopal Church**, and to forcibly transfer its Black members to the new denomination. Today this denomination is known as the **Christian Methodist Episcopal Church**.

Each of the five churches which eventually became the United Methodist Church continued to develop. Each grew rapidly for the remainder of the 19<sup>th</sup> and on into the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The churches continued to use printing houses to produce periodicals, books, educational materials, and tracts for evangelizing, nurturing, informing, and educating their members. Education of the clergy was increasingly emphasized. By the end of the 1800's **each of the five churches had opened at least one seminary**. As the clergy became more educated, the worship services became more formal, and a more orderly liturgical structure was adopted.

Another schism developed after the Civil War. John Wesley taught that a Christian could be sanctified through a gradual process of God's grace and/or instantaneously as a gift from God. However, Methodists divided over the issue of how quickly a person could be sanctified. This difference resulted in the formation of another branch of the Methodist Movement's family tree, including the Church of the Nazarene and the Pilgrim Holiness Church, which emphasized the instantaneous gift of sanctification.

By 1870 the churches participated in **foreign and home missions**. Foreign missions were established largely through the work of women's societies to places such as Germany, the Scandinavian countries, Japan, China, Cuba, Italy, Mexico, and India. The home missions included work among the American Indian nations, the considerable number of immigrants, and the poor.

Home missions began to address **social issues**. As the needs of an exploited and oppressed working class gained the attention of the churches, a difference in opinion as to the most effective means to bring Christ to the world emerged. Some believed that society would be reformed as individuals were converted. Others believed that reform of social institutions would bring about individual reform. The five churches that became the United Methodist Church represented both approaches. A movement of social reform began which became known as the **Social Gospel Movement**.

The **Social Gospel Movement** was associated with the more liberal groups in the churches. However, there were exceptions. The Salvation Army, a traditional and revivalistic denomination, formed to help meet the needs of those in society who were

oppressed. William Booth, a Methodist preacher, formed the Salvation Army in 1878 at London, England. The Social Gospel Movement included causes such as women's rights, the plight of workers, and the promotion of abstinence from the consumption of alcohol.

The Social Gospel Movement helped the Church become more aware of the plight of other persons in their world. As a result, the General Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church adopted a social creed in 1908. A form of that creed is still available today in the United Methodist Hymnal.

Discussions regarding reuniting the Methodist Episcopal Church were attempted in the late 1800s. Friendly relationships developed, not only between the North and South churches, but also between the related Methodist churches overall. The churches favored ecumenical action, and a worldwide Methodist family grew closer together as the early 1900s arrived.

### The Twentieth Century

Christian churches faced much different social and political dilemmas in the 20th century than Wesley might have envisioned. Yet **the spiritual nature and needs of people remained the same**. The challenge for the Methodists throughout the 20th century was to continue to proclaim God's word in a way that spiritual needs would be revealed, ministered to, and met. To meet these needs the Methodist churches focused on **clergy education**, formed large **bureaucracies**, and **mobilized to support missions**. None of this happened easily or at one time.

For centuries following the beginning of the Reformation there were wars and struggles between nations as each promoted and defended a particular brand of Christianity. The governments and churches moved apart from each other and people enjoyed more religious freedom as the secular governments began to moderate and arbitrate differences. The Twentieth Century was characterized by conflict between the secular governments and the churches. Governments began to persecute people for their religious beliefs. This differed from previous persecutions in that it was not an effort to promote the national denomination over other denominations but, instead, an **effort to promote the State over the Church and religion**. Germany drove Lutheran and Catholic priests from their parishes and imprisoned them. Later in the 20th century, Hitler ordered the murder of millions of Jews. After coming to power in 1917, the Communist Party in Russia suppressed the Russian Orthodox Church. It confiscated the Church's land and wealth and persecuted clergy. After World War II Christians in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union were deprived of legal rights enjoyed by other citizens. Some communist countries in South America banned Christianity as well as its teachings and morals. The innovative idea of separation of Church and State of the 1700's had evolved into persecution of the Church by the State.

Western Culture became much more materialistic and secular in the 1900's. A worldview referred to as "**secular humanism**" became ingrained. Secular humanism is

characterized by a philosophy dependent on the laws of nature, science, materialism, and rationalism. This philosophy denies or excludes the activity of or existence of a transcendent God. Any supernatural explanations of miracles are rejected. It is a lifestyle limited to the natural and offering a non-Christian interpretation of biblical writings.

The **Methodist churches began to lose the characteristics of the Wesleyan societies and became more like the churches they had worked to renew.**

Liberalism gained control of the theology of the Methodist churches. A very significant change from the teaching of Wesley, Otterbein, Boehm, and Albright occurred. The concept of God working in us through the Holy Spirit, and the role of grace, were **replaced with an optimism based on what people can do apart from God.** This was reflected in worship which changed dramatically between 1910 and 1935.

In 1922 the Evangelical Association and a group that had split off in 1891 over whether to use German or English, were reunited. The **Evangelical Church** resulted.

Other efforts of reunification were not immediately successful. The Methodist Episcopal churches had been sporadically discussing reunion for years before they got serious about it in 1916. The churches did not agree on one significant issue: Black members of the Northern church. The Southern church had no Black members, having transferred their memberships to the Colored Methodist Episcopal Church in 1870. The Northern church had over 250,000 Black members. The North refused to throw Blacks out and the South refused to accept them. The parties gave up in 1924. Slavery had been eliminated but not racism.

About 1930, Methodist Protestant Church leaders proposed a conference to discuss a three-way union among the Methodist Episcopal Church, the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, and the Methodist Protestant Church. In 1935 a plan for union was proposed. The plan provided for the creation of six conferences. Five based on geography, one based on race. The all-black **Central Jurisdiction** was proposed.

The Methodist Protestant church approved the plan in 1936. The Methodist Episcopal Church approved the plan after debate over the obvious segregation involved. However, since the Northern church was already segregated the plan merely required them to formalize its existing practice. **Whites voted in favor of the plan, but Blacks overwhelmingly opposed it.**

The Methodist Episcopal Church, South, approved the plan in 1938. Few Southern Whites were enthusiastic about uniting with a church including Black members and Black ministers but, because of the segregation provided through the Central Jurisdiction, they found the plan acceptable. In the **Spring of 1939, in Kansas City, Missouri, the Methodist Episcopal Church, Methodist Episcopal Church, South, and the Methodist Episcopal Church came together to form the Methodist Church.**

Meanwhile, the Evangelical Church and United Brethren Church had been discussing a plan of union. In **November 1946, these churches joined resources to become the Evangelical United Brethren Church.**

An important and influential development of the 20th century was ecumenism. **Ecumenism** can be described as emphasizing the universality of Christian experience and fellowship while minimizing doctrinal distinctiveness. A form of ecumenism had been practiced in societies for years, but it became a generally accepted philosophy. The champion of world ecumenism was a Methodist layperson, **John R. Mott**. His work around the world earned him the Nobel Peace Prize in 1946 and led to the formation of the World Council of Churches in 1948. The tension inherent in ecumenism is between the desire for unity in Christ and resistance to surrendering a denomination's traditions, institutions, and beliefs.

In a climate of ecumenical cooperation, the Methodist Church and Evangelical United Brethren Church began to discuss the possibility of a merger in 1956. Ten years later a plan for a merger was proposed. In 1967 the annual conferences of the churches approved of the plan.

During a decade of questions and divisions in the country including the Vietnam War and the assassinations of a U.S. President, a presidential candidate, and a popular Civil Rights leader, representatives of the Methodist and Evangelical United Brethren churches met to discuss merging. These discussions resulted in the **formation of The United Methodist Church on April 23, 1968.**

Many challenges of union remained. The focus of the general conference returned to the role of the church in the world. It would be difficult to define that role, or to have an opinion or understanding of the role of United Methodist Church without some understanding of its origins. The Church was a product of compromised doctrine and social principles that were seeds of division and misunderstandings for decades. By the beginning of the Twenty-first Century, those seeds rooted and grew.

### **Part III: A Brief History of Blacks in the Methodist Movement**

The resolutions from the 1988 General Conference of the United Methodist Church encourage education and awareness of the history of Black people in the church. The church promoted the development of a body of knowledge relating to the history of Blacks in the church and encouraged equal treatment and understanding of all people of all races. However, while Wesley had denounced racism, racism was the basis for several significant events in the history of the church.

Blacks in America experience more frustration and systemic social bias than an otherwise similarly situated White. Early White settlers chose to come to this country seeking opportunity and freedom; most Blacks of that era came in chains. White church members of the mid 1700s welcomed Blacks into membership but when there was a shortage of seating, Blacks stood outside or worshipped separately. When the

Methodist Church was formed emphasizing unity in 1939, it became apparent that White unity was intended as Blacks were segregated to the Central Jurisdiction. The struggle continues to become one body in Christ that worships together. Blacks endured a history that often minimized their value, limited their contributions, and pushed them into certain roles in society.

When we read scripture, we understand it in the context of our own experiences and traditions and as revealed by the Holy Spirit. The experience of many Blacks in America can be quite different than the experience of many Whites. Thus, Blacks and Whites may understand and apply scripture differently.

When White Christians read of God's deliverance and freedom, they may primarily think of freedom from sin's bondage as Paul writes at Romans 6:18, "You have been set free from sin and have become slaves to righteousness." (NIV). However, many Black Christians, having a different life experience, history, and societal context, may think first of earthly deliverance as expressed at Psalm 146:17, "He upholds the cause of the oppressed and gives food to the hungry. The Lord sets prisoners free..." (NIV). As one might expect these worldviews and interpretations lead to differences in practice and theology.

John Wesley was uniquely sensitive to both interpretations of scripture. He witnessed the abuse of people caught in slavery while in Georgia. That experience, later encounters with racism in England, and the writings of Quaker authors spurred him to advocate for the end of slavery on the basis that it was immoral. He believed slavery reduced an infinitely valuable human being to an economic unit, who was bought or sold. Where God freely offers grace to all people and Jesus Christ died for all, slavery is indefensible.

Many disagreed with Wesley. Among them was his friend and fellow evangelist George Whitefield. Whitefield, unlike Wesley, agreed with the Calvinist doctrine of predestination. He reasoned that Blacks were predestined to be slaves and that the institution of slavery was, therefore, a reflection of God's will. Whitefield owned slaves and petitioned the authorities in Georgia to sanction slavery. Issues of **predestination and slavery** led to the discontinuation of the Wesley-Whitefield association.

In 1764 Robert Strawbridge formed the first Methodist society in America since Wesley's earlier attempt in Georgia. Its charter members included Anne Sweitzer, a slave woman. As the movement grew, more slaves and free Blacks joined societies. Slavery was known and already on accepted practice in parts of America. Thus, Methodists were immediately faced with the irony of preaching to slaves about a God who freed God's people from slavery.

The Methodist Episcopal Church formed during the **Christmas Conference of 1784**. Two Blacks, Harry Hosier and Richard Allen, attended that conference. During the Conference the delegates made strong **anti-slavery statements**. The records indicate that both Blacks and Whites attended society meetings and love feasts together. Six



years after the formation of the Methodist Episcopal Church Blacks represented 20% of the church membership, about 11,682 people. This percentage was about equal to the percentage of Blacks in the general population.

A mere three years later, during a service in 1787, **Richard Allen** and several of his friends were asked to move to a part of the church building designated for Black members. They were asked to move while on their knees in prayer. When the prayer ended, Allen and his friends walked out of the church building in protest. From that time on Allen and associates worshiped separately, even building their own worship house. They remained part of the Methodist Episcopal Church until 1816 when they formed the Mother Bethel Church in Philadelphia. That same year Allen hosted a meeting of all historically Black church groups that were interested in forming one denomination. The groups that merged at the meeting became the African Methodist Episcopal Church. Allen was elected its first Bishop.

Other groups of Black Americans remained part of the Methodist Episcopal Church. These church members, however, often met in segregated groups.

Revivalistic camp meetings were well underway by the early 1800s. While both Blacks and Whites attended these gatherings, the people were divided by race much as they were in church. The Whites met in one area and the Blacks in another. This was particularly true in the South. Worship services typically featured singing and praising well into the early morning hours. Many of the celebrated spirituals were sung.

Separation by race during worship reflected segregation in society. With separation often comes suspicion and fear. Slave riots and rumors of slave riots in the early 1800s triggered fear in the hearts of many Whites. A leader in the African Methodist Episcopal Church named Denmark Vesey led a slave revolt during this period. After he was hanged in 1822 and the role of the church in the uprising was discovered, the church was banned from South Carolina.

Various "solutions" to the slavery issue were offered by leaders of both races. In 1816 some Whites formed the American colonization society. They proposed to solve the conflict by repatriating Blacks to Africa. The justification offered was that relocated Blacks would make excellent missionaries and Africa could be Christianized. Echoes of such "ship them home" ideas were heard again in the 1960's. Clearly those who propose such a "solution" viewed separation rather than oneness in Christ a desired recipe for peace.

The formation of the African Methodist Episcopal Church under the leadership of **Richard Allen** has already been discussed. That was not the first Black church formed from within the Methodist family. The first separate Black denomination was formed under the leadership of Peter Spencer in 1813. The denomination was named the African Union Church, later renamed the Union Church of Africans was located in Wilmington, Delaware. In 1821 the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church formed.

Methodists in the South published literature between 1820 and 1860 supporting slavery. Social and biblical authorities and rationales were given. Some argued that **slavery was part of the natural order and hence ordained by God**, the Creator of nature.

Lest we conclude that every White favored the enslavement of Blacks, the work of many Whites needs to be mentioned. Whites engaged in the cause of abolition. England, with some motive to stir things up in America, declared all slaves in its empire free in 1833. The Civil War was fought to reestablish the Union and to free slaves. White Methodists, Mennonites, and Quakers were involved in smuggling escaped slaves from the South to Pennsylvania, Canada and other northern destinations through the "underground railway."

Before the **schism over the slavery in 1844**, there were several debates at previous General Conferences. **The General Conference of 1840** heard an appeal from the church trial of Silas Comfort. He had been convicted and censored based, in part, on the testimony of a Black man. The conference reversed the conviction and passed a resolution banning testimony in church trials offered by Blacks in states where the testimony would not be admissible in a civil court of law. This was one of the many compromises granted over the years to the South by the North to prevent the schism that inevitably occurred in 1844.

Most of the Southern ministers were slave owners when they convened **General Conference in 1844**. Some criticized these ministers for being Southern loyalists first, family farmers second, and Christians third. The speed with which a plan for separation was offered to the Conference after the decisions against slavery had been issued, indicates that Southern churches came prepared to separate.

In the period following the Civil War, the South neither welcomed nor accepted Blacks. Even though the **North enforced equal treatment, attitudes were not changed by Reconstruction policies**. In fact, a new, virulent racism that was unknown before that time emerged. It fully manifested after the North's 10-year Reconstruction Era occupation ended. It took the form of various "Jim Crow" laws. These laws more extremely enforced segregation than was known even in times of slavery. These legal walls of segregation were not pulled down until the 1950s and the 1960s.

Church congregations serve as powerful bonds in a community. Even before emancipation, Blacks owned the church property where they worshiped. Churches of all denominations remained an important part of Black communities. In times of persecution and of celebration the church served as the central meeting hall and as the focus of identity. Not surprisingly many Black leaders came out of the church. Martin Luther King, Jr. and Jesse Jackson are examples.

**After the Civil War the Methodist Episcopal Church tried to improve the situation of Blacks in the South.** It formed the Freedman's Aid Society in 1866 to facilitate the establishment of colleges and universities for the education of the newly freed men and women.

While the Northern church hoped to attract new members, the Southern church was stubbornly trying to find ways to separate Blacks from Whites. The membership of Blacks dropped from 208,000 in 1860 to 79,000 in 1866 to 20,000 in 1869. To assure separation, the Southern church formed the Colored Methodist Episcopal Church in 1870. The membership of Blacks was transferred to the new denomination. The first bishops were **William H. Miles** and **Richard H. Vanderhorst**. The name of the church became the **Christian Methodist Episcopal Church in 1954**.

Blacks served in leadership positions within the Methodist Episcopal Church. The first Black bishops were **Mathes W. Clair, Sr.** and **Robert E. Jones**, both elected in **1920**. The next bishop was **Alexander Preston Shaw** elected in **1936**. These bishops presided over predominantly Black conferences while involved in the entire spectrum of church responsibilities.

Some conferences were **segregated by race in the North**. By 1939 there were nineteen segregated Black conferences in the Methodist Episcopal Church. Societal involvement and emphasis on justice were the same as in White conferences. **Lynchings** were fought by Blacks at conference level and in society because, as history has shown, Blacks were far more often the victims of these "trials" and mockeries of justice.

When the North and South churches reunited in 1939 the unity of the historic merger was celebrated. Amid this talk of unity, however, separation occurred. The Central Jurisdiction was created to appease the South. By forming this segregated jurisdiction, the **South compromised by allowing Blacks to be members** of the same denomination and the **North compromised by formalizing a segregated worship policy** they had accepted for many years.

**Robert E. Jones** and **I. Garland Penn** represented the Black conferences during the reunion conference. **The consensus of most of the representatives was to accomplish what good they could, reunite the church, and put off what they could not do, reweave the social fabric that injected racism into the church.** The devotion and self-control of Blacks who were placed in the Central Jurisdiction and insulted by the separation should be remembered and admired. Their desire for the unity of the church was profound.

The membership of the separated Black Methodist churches increased in the 1900's. The largest, the African Methodist Episcopal grew from 688,000 in 1900 to 1,166,000 in 1950. The African Methodist Episcopal Church Zion grew from 536,000 in 1900 to 940,000 in 1970. The Colored Methodist Episcopal grew from 20,000 in 1870 to 400,000 in 1950. **Most of the churches continued to meet in classes and societies long after the White churches had stopped those Wesleyan practices.** The class leader was an influential leader in the congregation and community.

Church members and conferences **began to question the morality of a racially determined Central Jurisdiction**. Finally, in **1955** the South Carolina conference went on record condemning the concept of the Central Jurisdiction, calling it a moral sin and an insult to Blacks. They called for the Central Jurisdiction to be abolished.

In 1956, the General Conference condemned racism and called for absorbing the Central Jurisdiction into the other conferences. However, it was the United States **Supreme Court decision in 1956** that began to force the reworking of the social fabric and bring about a more equitable society. The Court ruled that the segregation policy of **"separate but equal" is inherently unequal**. Separate drinking fountains, public restrooms, dining areas, railway cars, and areas for pedestrian traffic were all on the verge of becoming illegal.

While most people, Black and White alike, **viewed the Central Jurisdiction as ethically problematic**, a majority agreed that it was the best alternative **at the time** it was initiated. In practice, the Central Jurisdiction granted Blacks a stronger voice in church politics than they experienced before. The Central Jurisdiction functioned to protect the interests of Black members. Through its 12 bishops elected in 20 years, 320,000 Blacks had a voice in church governance and had developed leadership within the Methodist Episcopal Church. The Jurisdiction provided a platform to protest segregation in church and in society. Given the advantages that Blacks developed through the Central Jurisdiction, one may understand why many Blacks resisted its elimination.

The 1956 General Conference provided Central Jurisdiction congregations with the option of affiliating with other conferences. **The 1964 General Conference** determined to **dissolve the Central Jurisdiction by 1968**. Only four out of sixteen Black Annual Conferences had integrated with White conferences by 1968. The uniting documents of the United Methodist Church omitted any reference to the Central Jurisdiction and thus eliminated it.

Having lost a united voice provided through organizational structure, Blacks formed a caucus group called Black Methodists for Church Renewal. Since its inception, it represented the interests of Black church members in church government.

When we consider the history of social justice and moral compromise made by the denominations, we must promote action that faithfully reflects God's love for all. Perhaps it would be helpful to remember how Martin Luther King, Jr. viewed our responsibility when he criticized the established churches **for "... standing as a taillight behind other community agencies rather than a headlight leading men to higher levels of justice."** (Letter from Birmingham, Jail April 16, 1963).

## Prologue

October 2024

By the end of the 1900s, differences widened in the United Methodist Church. Many were thinking that the desire for unity had led to unacceptable doctrinal compromises. Many others felt that the command for Christian unity was ignored. The factors of the quadrilateral of scripture, tradition, experience, and reason were not being applied in relation to each other in ways that satisfied the membership or, as some would argue, in accordance with the doctrine of the UMC. Renewal groups were at work, but growing increasingly frustrated at the perceived ineffectiveness of their efforts.

By the twenty-first century, political and cultural divisions and polarization widened in civil society. These divisions influenced church members, further separating groups within the church. Each of the groups was seen as more or less compromising with one or the other side of the cultural wars. Culture reflects the effectiveness of the witness of the church and then the culture seemed to shape the witness of the church. The church came to a dividing moment during the General Conference in 2019. It was a moment of explosive distrust and suspicion. The presenting issue of the many deep, underlying differences that had festered for decades was, singularly, human sexuality.

Many differences were further delineated. Resolution became improbable when leading negotiators walked away, frustrated and disappointed. Schism was unavoidable. It came.

Those who desired to seek relevance with perceived cultural norms and adapt to the contextualized mission field, remained in the United Methodist Church. Those who understood the history and doctrine of the Wesleyan Movement as society-changing rather than conforming, **formed a new denomination, the Global Methodist Church, in May 2022.**

For further information on the history of the GMC see: Fenton, Walter B, *A Very Brief History of the Global Methodist Church*, <https://globalmethodist.org/a-very-brief-history-of-the-global-methodist-church/> Accessed October 13, 2024.

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## Study Guide Questions

*BDD = Book of Doctrine and Discipline*

### Part I

1. What areas of doctrine, polity and/or church structure did Luther questions publicly on October 31, 1517? (2)
2. Did Luther or Wesley intend to split the institutional church? What were their intentions? What lessons might be learned by present day reformers from their efforts? (2, 6, 10)
3. What issues divided the Reformers as the Reformation developed? Are these differences like the issues within the Methodist movement before 1865? Elaborate. (3)
4. In what ways did Jacob Arminius and, later, the Moravian Church shape John Wesley? (3, 7)
5. Why did England become "closed to Catholicism?" Is this historical divide articulated in the Articles of Religion on the Global Methodist Church? How and where? (4, BDD)
6. What is an episcopal form of government? How does it differ than a congregational form? Who were among the first to differ from the Anglican Church on this matter? (4, BDD)
7. What are the differences between "revival" and "reform?" What term was used within the Anglican Church to refer to revivalists? (4)
8. Reflect on the impact the scientific revolution had on the role of church in society as well as the structure and polity of churches. (5, worldview)
9. By 1700, how had the nature of the church-state relationship changed from before the Reformation? (5)
10. What is the origin of the term "methodist?" Do you suspect that it was meant derisively or as a compliment? (6)
11. What conclusions and realizations of Wesley seem to parallel those of earlier reformers? (7)
12. Wesley changed his preaching venue due to a suggestion by George Whitefield. What was the change? Why do you think this change helped spread the gospel? (7)
13. In what ways did the Age of Enlightenment shape the predominant view of religion? (8)
  - Are there parallels with the ways religion is broadly viewed today?
  - How did Wesley's preaching practice take advantage of this change?
  - Did Wesley's preaching practices help or hinder the effectiveness of his communication?
  - Is there anything we might learn today from Wesley's success or failure?



14. What factors led to the formation of societies, bands, and love feasts? (9, 10, 27)  
Who led these groups?
15. What was the purpose of the love feasts? Were they effective?
16. John Wesley practiced an unparalleled itineracy. He traveled and preached broadly, much as the Apostle Paul had. What factors and circumstances encouraged or required the itinerancy? (10) Discuss whether the itinerancy benefited the local churches. Discuss whether the itinerancy benefits the local congregations where you live.
17. What attracted people to the Methodist Movement? (10) Are similar variables at play today? Discuss your response.
18. Did Wesley disagree with the Church of England regarding the role of bishops and the authority to ordain? (10-11) Discuss.
19. How did the concept of a "conference" develop? (11)

## Part II

20. The 1780s included several decisions that separated Methodists in America from the Church of England. Involved were issues of polity, theology, and practicality. Explain and discuss these factors. (11-12)
21. Wesley has been called a leader, theologian, missionary, pragmatist, evangelist, and organizational genius. Select two of these roles Wesley filled and explain why you would support those descriptions.
22. Who was Phillip Otterbein? How did he contribute to the Methodist Movement? (13)
23. What history, discipleship methods, organizational structures, and methodologies did the United Brethren, Methodists, and Evangelical Association have in common? (14-16)
24. Discuss the contribution lay leadership made to the expansion of the Methodist Church in America. Who were the key leaders? What did each contribute? (14...)
25. What is the importance of the conference held at Philadelphia in 1773? (14) How did the decisions reached there impact lay leadership? (15)
26. What were some of the immediate results of the Revolutionary War on the expansion of the Methodist Church in America? (15)
27. What is the significance of the Christmas Conference of 1784? (15, BDD)
28. What did these denominations hold in common: United Brethren, Methodist Episcopal, and Evangelical Association? (16)
29. Define Nineteenth century "modernism," "liberalism" and "orthodoxy." (17)
30. What elements of church polity were in place by 1808? (17)
31. What two aspects were unique to the Second Great Awakening as compared with previous awakenings? (18)
32. When did the Methodist denominations begin to form mission sending agencies and send missionaries around the world? Where were missionaries first sent? (18) When and to which countries were Methodist missionaries later sent? (20) If your part of the world received Methodist missionaries, when did they arrive?

33. We are following the development of five denominations (United Brethren, Methodist Episcopal, Evangelical Association, and Methodist Protestant churches). The UB and EA prohibited slavery. The ME and MP did as well but were not unanimous. Why did this difference become more divisive for the ME and MP than the others in the 1800s? (18) The fifth denomination was formed due to racism. What is the name of that denomination? (19)
34. What were the events in the 1840s that split the Methodist Episcopal Church and what were the primary doctrinal and social reasonings for schism? (18, 26)
35. What were the circumstances and causes for the formation of the Colored Methodist Episcopal Church in 1970? Was the decision to form the new denomination agreed to by all effected parties? (18, 20, 26, 27) The name of this denomination changed in 1954. What is the new name? (27)
36. How do the doctrines of predestination and freewill shape racial struggles through the centuries? (24, 26)
37. In what ways was the equality of all people in God's Kingdom evidenced in the Methodism Movement? In what ways was racism perpetuated? (24-25)
38. Who is Richard Allen and what did he contribute to the Methodist story? (25)
39. Who were the CME's first bishops? (27)
40. What did the Methodist Episcopal attempt in the South during the Reconstruction era to improve the lives of Blacks living there? (26-27)
41. In the late 1800s, was the Methodist Episcopal Church (north) free of racism? In what ways was racism apparent or institutionalized? In what ways was desegregation accomplished? (27)
42. Which five denominations united to form the United Methodist Church? (18, 20)
43. What characterizes the "social gospel movement?" Discuss whether this movement biblical, political, liberal and/or orthodox. (17, 20-21)
44. The Social Creed was first adopted by the Methodist Episcopal Church in 1908 and is included in the discipline of the United Methodist Church. Do you find evidence of the Social Creed and social gospel movement in the BDD?
45. During the 1900s, further separation of church and state continued. The separation manifested differently than in earlier periods. What notably changed in the relationship? (21) In what ways do you experience this 20<sup>th</sup> century shift in church-state relations? Compare and contrast this aspect of your Christian walk with those of earlier followers of Jesus.
46. What characterized the worldview called "secular humanism?" (21-22)
47. Worldview is often reflected in a denomination's practices, doctrine, and polity. What influence did secular humanism have on the Methodist denominations? (22) Are there mitigations attempted in the Global Methodist Church and apparent in the BDD?
48. What major event took place at Kansas City, MO, USA, in 1939? What major compromise, memorialized in the resultant structure and polity of the denomination, perpetuated institutional racism? (22) Why do you agree or disagree with the compromise?

49. What important event took place in 1946? (23)
50. What is "ecumenism?" Who is John R. Mott and what was his role in ecumenism? (23)
51. What happened in 1968? Where did it occur? (23, 28)

### Part III

52. The evolving church-state relationship seems to have applied pressure on the church to address endemic racism within the church. How was this pressure applied? What happened? (28) Would there have been more ideal ways for the issue to come to the forefront in the church? As the struggle against racism continues, what methods would you suggest toward resolving the tensions and increase understanding and respect? Could your ideas be incorporated into the polity of the church in some ways?
53. What happened in 2022? (29) What parallels and distinctions do you find in the events leading to this schism and previous church splits of the Methodist family tree?
54. Additional questions regarding this topic are imbedded within questions found under Parts I and II.