





3 1293 01421 6539

This is to certify that the

dissertation entitled


Constructing the Church Triumphant:  
Methodism and the Emergence of  
the Midwest, 1800-1856

presented by

Frank E. Johnson

has been accepted towards fulfillment  
of the requirements for

Ph.D. degree in History

  
Major professor

Date 3/15/96



**PLACE IN RETURN BOX to remove this checkout from your record.  
TO AVOID FINES return on or before date due.**

DATE DUE	DATE DUE	DATE DUE
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____

**CONSTRUCTING THE CHURCH TRIUMPHANT: METHODISM  
AND THE EMERGENCE OF THE MIDWEST, 1800-1856**

**By**

**Frank Everett Johnson**

**A DISSERTATION**

**Submitted to  
Michigan State University  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree of**

**DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY**

**Department of History**

**1996**



## ABSTRACT

### CONSTRUCTING THE CHURCH TRIUMPHANT: METHODISM AND THE EMERGENCE OF THE MIDWEST, 1800-1856

By

Frank Everett Johnson

This dissertation examines Midwestern (Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, and Michigan) Methodism from 1800 to 1856. It does not provide a comprehensive history of Methodism in each state, nor the region itself. Instead, this project investigates antebellum Methodist worship with particular emphasis on the bearing of place to practice.

It is natural to begin such a study by looking at the itinerants who relentlessly canvassed the region. The "methods" of ministry approach utilized here yields a fresh interpretation of itinerancy, one which looks beyond itinerants as merely "defenders of the faith." These preachers were believers first and foremost; as believers, they often wrestled with the very issues their sermons were designed to remedy. The dissertation then turns to death-bed experiences and the centrality of death to successful Christian living. Methodists used the inevitability of physical death to cultivate a worship climate that not only articulated the necessity of eternal life, but which functioned as a measure of spiritual maturity and was an avenue to mystical experience. Finally, this dissertation takes an extended look at the intersections of place and practice. Pioneers

found the Midwest an inherently spiritual place and structured their worship accordingly; moreover, they used the environment to enhance their worship experiences. Place and practice converged in the open-air camp meetings which antebellum Methodists highly prized. Early on, however, Midwestern Methodists faced the troubling paradox of how to balance the sacred and secular.

While Methodists encouraged migration and development, they hoped to maintain the sacredness of the land even as it was transformed. In doing so they constructed a worship environment through which individuals, and the faith community as a whole, participated in a variety of ritual activity. These rituals (viz. works of grace and acts of intercession) were instrumental in the development of both spiritual and regional identity. Methodism in the antebellum Midwest was unique in that men and women shared not only spiritual authority, but at times, agency with God. Above all else, Midwestern Methodism emphasized personal piety, not social activism.

Ultimately, this dissertation seeks to reorient the scholarly discussion away from a single issue perspective and towards a more complex consideration of rural religion in general. Pioneer Methodism was a distinctly rural faith: one in which religious experiences reflected and replaced the transitory nature of secular society. The hallmark of Midwestern rural religion is an experiential faith through which one could regularly encounter the divine. This not only points to the significance of the camp meeting, but--in unofficially adopting the institution as a paradigmatic expression of itself--to antebellum Methodism as well.

Copyright by  
FRANK EVERETT JOHNSON  
1996

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

While I cannot thank everyone who contributed to this project, several people deserve special recognition. The Interlibrary Loan staff at MSU have saved me much time and scarce financial reserves; it was a rare day when they could not locate a lender for me. Likewise, the Methodist archives staffs at Ohio Wesleyan, Illinois Wesleyan, and DePauw University were especially helpful.

Professors Samuel Thomas, Christine Daniels, and Gordon Stewart were sources of constant encouragement and scholarly counsel. David Bailey not only directed this dissertation, but did so in such a way that I am better for it. His gift for cultivating creativity within his students is a lesson I have taken to heart; seven years under David's guidance have transformed my ability to think. I wish Justin Kestenbaum had lived to see this project completed. For people who celebrated the spoken word and who lived in a decidedly oral culture, silence was the highest tribute Methodists offered their fallen comrades. I honor Justin with a line of "silence."

My family have helped as well. Special thanks to: Frankie and Lewis Johnson, Barbara and Clyde Coffin, Frank and Dorothy Bowles. Likewise, Mack and Carol Solomon have been patrons in many ways. My daughters Rachel and Mary have helped by decorating my office with a flood of pictures and notes; their creations have been timely reminders of what truly is important. Finally, I thank my wife Terri for her unconditional love. I trust she will enjoy her new necklace as much as the kids will Disney World.

## **TABLE OF CONTENTS**

<b>Introduction</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Chapter One:</b>	
<b>"Inspired by Grace": Methodist Itinerants in the Early Midwest</b>	<b>21</b>
Physical Characteristics	23
Sermon as Ministry	32
Spiritual Skepticism	41
Itinerant Types	46
Conclusion	72
<b>Chapter Two:</b>	
<b>"'Gazing into the Land of Glory': Reflections on Methodist Death-Bed Scenes"</b>	<b>79</b>
The Process of Death	81
The Purpose of Death	106
Conclusion	122
<b>Chapter Three:</b>	
<b>The Place of Pioneer Worship</b>	<b>132</b>
A Theory of Place	133
The Midwest as Physical Place	139
The Midwest as Spiritual Place	155
Conclusion	178
<b>Chapter Four:</b>	
<b>The Marrow of Methodist Divinity</b>	<b>186</b>
Acts of Intercession	190
Works of Grace	211
Liminal Experiences and the Process of Practice	228

<b>Conclusion</b>	<b>248</b>
<b>Bibliography</b>	<b>256</b>

## **List of Maps**

<b>Map 1. "Western Conference Districts, 1811"</b>	<b>18</b>
<b>Map 2. "Annual Conferences of the Methodist Episcopal Church"</b>	<b>19</b>
<b>Map 3. "The Annual Conferences of Episcopal Methodism That Have Served Michigan"</b>	<b>20</b>



## INTRODUCTION

Martin E. Marty contends that historians of religion in America shifted their focus from center to periphery in the 1980s. He observes that "mainline" Protestant denominations received inordinately less attention than "outsiders." While he celebrates the "considerable vitality" within the profession, Marty argues that mainstream faiths have been marginalized and not the other way around.<sup>1</sup> One of the more intriguing developments within this field is tracing the "outsider" roots of contemporary mainstream religious communities. As a result Methodism, and evangelicalism in general, have enjoyed a virtual renaissance.

---

<sup>1</sup>Marty based his conclusions on an extensive literature review. However, only those books with at least two or more reviews were considered for his bibliography. Martin E. Marty, "American Religious History in the Eighties: A Decade of Achievement," *Church History* 62 (September 1993): 335-377. For an abbreviated, but more richly annotated, account of essentially the same article, see his "The American Religious History Canon," *Social Research* 53 (Autumn 1986): 513-528. In terms of recent developments at least, Marty would take issue with Leonard I. Sweet who maintains that much of American religious historiography has been dominated by "the story of Protestantism's attempt to capture a culture and remake it in its own image." See Sweet's interesting review essay, "'Ringmasters,' 'Blind Elephant Feelers,' and 'Mules': The textbook Literature of American Religious History," in *Critical Review of Books in Religion 1988* (*The Journal of the American Academy of Religion* and *The Journal of Biblical Literature*, 1988), 100.

Since the 1970s, the history of evangelicalism has captivated a growing number of historians. But there is no consensus as to a definition, and the field as a whole lacks balance: segments such as the twentieth century, the South, and intellectual issues are carefully mapped while others remain largely unexplored.<sup>2</sup> The Midwest is one such area needing careful study. The region has been a key artery of the nation's spiritual pulse since the early nineteenth century. One of the reasons the Midwest has not been given a detailed examination is the irregularity of source material.

In archives across the region one can find countless local church histories, but these generally are little more than sweeping overviews (often a brief insert to be included in a commemoration service bulletin). One is hard pressed to find many laity memoirs. Congregational class records are seldom extant (and inconsistent at best, e.g. one might find a class roll for 1830 but not 1850, and so on). Yet, given these limitations, this dissertation asserts that much of the richest source material has been under-utilized by historians. One can circumvent the paucity of sources by incorporating contemporary observations (secondary sources) as primary sources. To

---

<sup>2</sup>Two recent and superb bibliographies catalogue virtually all scholarly study of the subject. Norris A. Magnuson and William G. Travis, *American Evangelicalism: An Annotated Bibliography* (West Cornwall, CT: Locust Hill Press, 1990); and Joel A. Carpenter and Edith L. Blumhofer, *Evangelicalism in Twentieth Century America: A Guide to the Sources* (New York: Garland, 1990). Despite the title, Carpenter and Blumhofer range well outside the twentieth century. See also Leonard I. Sweet's exhaustive bibliographical survey: "The Evangelical Tradition in America," in *The Evangelical Tradition in America* (Macon: Mercer University Press, 1984), 1-86.

be sure, antebellum Methodism, and the camp meeting in particular, made for "good theater;" many people attended these services to watch rather than participate. On the other hand, however, observations by believers were a means of transmitting their faith: they were interpretive guides to the practice of worship. These reminiscences and observations constitute a lexicon of sorts which embody the denomination's evangelical zeal.<sup>3</sup>

### **Historiographic Context: A Selective Overview**

Having criticized US religious historians for neglecting the Midwest, a very brief survey of the scholarly literature is necessary to place this dissertation in a broader historical and historiographical context. One need look no further than Methodist camp meetings to find the pulse of antebellum evangelicalism in the Midwest. Camp meetings were the principal stage upon which Methodism was both performed and created. Finally, camp meetings were indicative of a much broader movement which

---

<sup>3</sup>Donald E. Byrne, Jr. argues this point to a much different conclusion in his published dissertation. He interprets antebellum Methodism through the lens of folklore. Byrne uses countless, and extensive, excerpts to highlight the centrality of oral tradition to Methodism. He argues that itinerants purposely employed these traditions to construct a sub-community (without articulating its function). Unfortunately, Byrne essentially distills faith out of his analysis. One is left with a unique collection of ephemera. Byrne leaves one wondering how this home-spun Methodism dominated the national and regional religious market place. *No Foot of Land: Folklore of American Methodist Itinerants*. With an Introduction by Stuart C. Henry. ATLA Monograph Series, No. 6 (Metuchen, N. J.: The Scarecrow Press, Inc. and the American Theological Library Association, 1975).

this dissertation hopes to illuminate: rural religion. Several historians have reflected on the nature and meaning of camp meetings. Yet since 1955, scholars have engaged Charles A. Johnson's interpretation of camp meetings as much as the historical record itself.

Forty years after its initial publication, Johnson's *The Frontier Camp Meeting* remains a centerpiece of the literature. Johnson traces the development of the camp meeting in the Midwest and upland South between 1800 and 1840. He charts a three-stage progression to this "backwoods institution:" "primitive disorganization" (1800-1805), "orderly regulation" (by the mid-18teens), and "gradual but inevitable decline" (by the mid-1830s-1840s). Johnson argues that "open-air preaching, emotion, and rowdy opposition" epitomize the frontier camp meeting. He contends that early pioneers found a spiritual and social release in the highly emotional "acrobatic" or "muscular" Christianity; such religious exercises included falling, jerking, rolling, dancing, running, singing, and barking. Methodists quickly began to structure their camp meeting activities to correct this stigma of religious burlesque.

Johnson proposes that settlers found religion an antidote for coping with the "inscrutable forces of nature [which] seemed almost to overwhelm man." Echoing Frederick Jackson Turner's frontier thesis, Johnson perceives camp meetings as an instrument of socialization in an environment characterized by a lack of civilization. Ironically, success in imposing moral order on the landscape signaled the demise of the

traditional "forest revival." Johnson finds the post-1840s camp meeting a hollow shell of its former self: "more and more it took on the aspects of a social outing rather than a spiritual awakening." In this new camp meeting format, physical comfort and social accoutrements supposedly took precedence over the conviction of sinners. Moreover, the traditional camp meeting competed with indoor, urban ("protracted") meetings.<sup>4</sup> While Johnson's work lends itself to criticism on several counts, he established three useful lines of inquiry or dialogues concerning antebellum Methodism: institutional development, the significance of gender, and religious practice as ritual.

Russell E. Richey and Nathan O. Hatch have usefully engaged the first dialogue. Richey is concerned primarily with how the denomination maintained its spiritual integrity and heritage in light of sweeping institutional change. Camp meetings and the rural nature of Methodism, however, play a very limited role in Richey's portrait (though his scope extends to 1810, he concentrates on its very early stages). Richey considers the camp meeting a national institution bound by neither region nor time. He seeks, specifically, to explore "why Methodism found the camp meeting congenial." Richey persuasively argues that Methodist leaders used camp meetings to cultivate and maintain spiritual community as the denomination expanded. As the various

---

<sup>4</sup>Charles A. Johnson, *The Frontier Camp Meeting: Religion's Harvest Time*. With a New Introduction by Ferenc M. Szasz (Dallas: Southern Methodist University Press, 1985), 26, 56-62, 69, 86, 246. The reissue of Johnson's work is indicative of his dominance of this literature.

conference meetings of necessity became preoccupied with the "business" aspects of Methodism, camp meetings were the means of on-going revival. Thus, camp meetings were an institutional safety-valve of sorts.<sup>5</sup>

Hatch supports Richey's interpretation. More than maintaining spirituality in an ever-increasing bureaucracy, Hatch adds that the camp meeting was an effective means of building congregations. He suggests that American Methodists were "ruthlessly committed" to the institution. Moreover, camp meetings proved a superb platform from which a variety of individuals could access and address the faith community. In short, the camp meeting proved a "phenomenally successful instrument for popular recruitment."<sup>6</sup>

Joe L. Kincheloe, Jr. was one of the first historians to demonstrate that female believers assumed an active role in the public life of American religion. Kincheloe challenged the notion that antebellum women were "powerless creatures confined to a

---

<sup>5</sup>Russell E. Richey, *Early American Methodism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991), especially 21-32.

<sup>6</sup>Nathan O. Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 55; see especially 49-56. Hatch emphasizes the leading figures in popular religion, as opposed to Richey's institutional approach. "In the era of the Second Great Awakening, the most distinctive feature of American Christianity was not the surge of an impersonal force called revivalism, . . . but a remarkable set of popular leaders who proclaimed compelling visions of individual self-respect and collective self-confidence." Hatch is careful to point out that such leaders were not necessarily clergy; rather they were "religious insurgents," a self-proclaimed vanguard of Christian zealots (56).

life which revolved around their home and the duties it required." He outlined the similarities between camp meetings and political rallies, including intense emotionalism as opposed to reason, "crusading" against evil, and certifying the "worth and integrity of the individual." Ironically, Kincheloe finds that even though social control was the goal of camp meetings and political rallies, each venue provided women an opportunity to circumvent gender discrimination. Women could not escape their domestic burdens; in fact, many women did not desire to do so. But for those who sought greater participation in the public arena, camp meetings and political rallies offered experience which proved invaluable later in the century.<sup>7</sup>

Catherine L. Albanese and Dickson D. Bruce, Jr., engage the third dialogue, speaking to the ritual issues of camp meeting practice. Albanese argues that "wilderness functioned at the center of a kind of myth-ritual system" which nineteenth century Americans thought, felt, and acted out. Almanacs and camp meetings structured reality

---

<sup>7</sup>Joe L. Kincheloe, Jr., "Transcending Role Restrictions: Women at Camp Meeting and Political Rallies" *The Tennessee Historical Quarterly* 40 (Summer 1981): 158, 159, 160-161, 163, 165, 169. I should add that Johnson does include women in his study but relegates them to a servant status: performing domestic and sexual services (within the camp meeting context no less). Kincheloe voices the too common perception that frontier (rural) religion was coercive. This view holds that the leading actors, and preachers in particular, were deliberate in their attempt to manipulate worship services to personal ends. In fact, Kincheloe claims that "the leader often assumed the role of a mass hypnotist, as he acquired the power to move and to mold the crowd in a desired direction and manner" (160). Obviously preachers steered their meetings to a predetermined end (convicting sinners), but this is not necessarily self-aggrandizement.

so that one could "simultaneously conceal and know the inner experience of living on the frontier." Taking the Turner thesis to an extreme, she maintains that the distinction between savagery and civilization was blurred in these cognitive-ritual constructions; thus, participants "acted out the wild situation in nature and used it to exert a new measure of control over themselves and their environment. The wild frontier became, in the end, an ordering structure of consciousness."<sup>8</sup>

---

<sup>8</sup>Albanese, "Savage, Sinner and Saved: Davy Crockett, Camp Meetings. and the Wild Frontier," *American Quarterly* 33 (Winter 1981): 483, 484, 498. Albanese is not clear why one would desire to "conceal" their frontier consciousness. Albanese plainly echoes Kincheloe's coercion thesis. She also raises a critical issue which this dissertation contests. To what end did sinners seek salvation? Moreover, what effect did salvation have on their everyday lives? The standard perception, resonating throughout Albanese and the secondary literature in general, is that Christians (especially those newly converted) were driven to bring moral order to their secular world: that they became spiritual crusaders through Christ's empowerment. While at a fundamental level this is true, I argue that such aggressiveness was secondary to personal piety. Evangelical Christians pledged themselves to a lifetime process of spiritual maturity; their ultimate goal was Christ-likeness, not social perfection. A more plausible version of this thesis would argue that believers engaged their secular world as a means to personal fulfillment.

Albanese posits that religion was one vehicle by which pioneers organized a "frontier structure of consciousness," metaphorically enacting their everyday "frontier" experiences in camp meetings. More specifically, she adds that sinners entered a "strange land in which they knew no control and felt the power of the Other." The notion of going to a "specific," though indeterminate, place is intriguing. But Albanese confuses the issue by contending that in the salvation process, sinners "passed psychologically to a kind of frontier in which they became savage inhabitants of a wild place. Savagery, in effect, was required in the transformation from sin to salvation, control, and civilization" (495). At this "inner" frontier, pioneer believers were able to reverse their complete lack of control into "a technique for achieving or attaining power" (500). This is significant when considering her exploration of the construction of a frontier consciousness. While frontier settlers undoubtedly used the Crockett myths



Bruce argues that "plain-folk" religion initially was a means by which antebellum southerners could cope with the social and economic insecurities experienced by the non-planter classes. Bruce excels in his treatment of camp meeting conversion as ritual behavior. Individuals undergoing this ritual experienced an inverted social hierarchy (empowering women and children with spiritual and social authority) and emerged with a new identity as member of the faith community. Locked in a socio-economic system which hampered the range of opportunity, plain-folk found religion a vehicle by which they could control and facilitate change. In sum, Bruce argues that "camp meeting religion helped to overcome the gap between the plain-folk image of what one ought to be and what conditions made one by altering the image."<sup>9</sup>

---

transmitted through almanacs to "organize reality," Albanese's argument is only partly suited to camp meeting practice. This dissertation argues that rural religious experience presented seekers (this term is used throughout this project to identify any individual actively engaged in the pursuit of evangelical religion) the opportunity to engage an *alternate* reality. Not that believers escaped this world with its troubles, temptations, and persecutors; rather, believers could be empowered to step outside their consciousness and experience a "holy communion"--to personally encounter God.

<sup>9</sup>Dickson D. Bruce, Jr., *And They All Sang Hallelujah: Plain-Folk Camp-Meeting Religion, 1800-1845* (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1974), 133. Roger Robins synthesizes the camp meeting historiography in an incredibly rich presentation. Drawing upon Richey and Bruce among many others, Robins examines the transition to respectability across the nation. Robins finds that "the transition from frontier to Victorian camp meeting illustrates Methodism's ability to restate its own identity in the face of dilemmas created in part by its own successes, in a way that affirmed the past in the very act of departing from it." Robins, "Vernacular American Landscape: Methodists, Camp Meetings, and Social Respectability," *Religion and American Culture* 4 (Summer 1994): 165-192. Not to be overlooked is Kenneth O. Brown, *Holy Ground: A Study of the American Camp Meeting* (New York: Garland Publishing,

One of the key issues resonating throughout this historiography concerns the purpose of gathering as religious community. Was religion primarily a means of social empowerment for the dispossessed? Or, conversely, was religious practice fundamentally an escape mechanism with which to circumvent closed social and economic systems? Even more intriguing is the question directly posed (but left unanswered) by Richey: "What might have predisposed Methodist preachers and people to structure their community in sylvan settings?"<sup>10</sup>

### **Historical Context: A Selective Overview**

Robert T. Handy correctly points out that few historians have captured the essence of nineteenth-century Methodism. Circuit riders not only receive the lion's share of attention; they are typically reduced to one of two images: selfless hero or evangelical fanatic. Handy challenges scholars to "steer between an inflated romanticism and an overcritical realism."<sup>11</sup> Though often criticized for lacking such

---

Inc., 1992). Despite the auspicious title, Brown's survey covers much familiar ground. Brown's exhaustive bibliography is, however, a signal contribution to the literature. He traces nearly 2,000 active camp meeting sites to the present. Brown also wrestles with the date and origin of camp meetings: suggesting that one must look to Georgia and the Carolinas for camp meeting antecedents which he believes predate the Cane Ridge meetings of 1801.

<sup>10</sup>Richey, *Early American Methodism*, 23.

<sup>11</sup>"American Methodism and Its Historical Frontier: Interpreting Methodism on the Western Frontier: Between Romanticism and Realism," *Methodist History* 23 (October 1984): 48. Timothy L. Smith's recent presidential address to the American Society of Church History emphasized the religious diversity of the nineteenth-century Ohio

balance, the work of William Warren Sweet is indispensable to understanding Midwestern Methodism. This overview is based in large part on his work.<sup>12</sup>

---

Valley. Focusing on antebellum Ohio, Smith attempts to correct the "frontier interpretation" of Methodist history (which he claims had been obsolete since the publication of Bishop Francis Asbury's journals and letters in 1958). Despite intentions to articulate a more national perspective, Smith is less than convincing. Smith simply substitutes an "eastern" thesis for a frontier one; he looks to the "events in the former Anglican parishes and the early Methodist circuit of the eastern seaboard" (470) as the defining factor of Midwestern Methodist practice. In fact, Smith carries this to an extreme; in his sweep of the region's religious diversity, one almost forgets that Methodists clearly dominated the religious landscape. On the other hand, Smith's address is valuable in that it calls attention to the Midwest as an understudied region. "The Ohio Valley: Testing Ground for America's Experiment in Religious Pluralism," *Church History* 60 (December 1991): 461-479.

<sup>12</sup>His major works are: William Warren Sweet, ed., *Circuit-Rider Days in Indiana* (Indianapolis: W. K. Stewart Co., 1916); \_\_\_ ed., *The Rise of Methodism in the West: Being the Journals of the Western Conference, 1800-1811* (New York: The Methodist Book Concern, 1920); \_\_\_\_\_ ed., *Circuit-Rider Days Along the Ohio: Being the Journals of the Ohio Conference from its Organization in 1812 to 1826* (New York: The Methodist Book Concern, 1923); \_\_\_\_\_, *Methodism and American History* (New York: 1933); and \_\_\_, ed., *Religion on the American Frontier, 1783-1840*. Vol 4 *The Methodists* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1946). Additional works which are especially useful for constructing a regional overview include: Theodore L. Agnew, "Methodism on the Frontier," in Emory Stevens Bucke, General Editor, *The History of American Methodism* (New York: Abingdon Press, 1964), I:488-545; F. C. Holliday, *Indiana Methodism: Being an Account of the Introduction, Progress, and Present State of Methodism in the State* (Cincinnati: Hitchcock and Walden, 1873); James Leaton, *History of Methodism in Illinois from 1793-1832* (Cincinnati: Walden and Stowe, 1883); Margaret Burnham Macmillan, *The Methodist Church in Michigan: The Nineteenth Century* (Grand Rapids: The Michigan Area Methodist Historical Society and William B. Eerdmans, 1967); Elizabeth K. Nottingham, *Methodism and the Frontier: Indiana Proving Ground* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1941); Elijah H. Pilcher, *Protestantism in Michigan: Being a Special History of the Methodist Episcopal Church* (Detroit: R.D.S. Tyler and Company, 1878); and Samuel W. Williams, *Pictures of Early Methodism in Ohio* (Cincinnati: Jennings and Graham, 1909).

The General Conference of 1796 was a watershed for American Methodism. This assembly created the six original annual conferences. Prior to this change, every district was expected to participate in the quadrennial general conference; the system was further refined in 1808 by inaugurating a representative system whereby general conference business was transacted by delegates from each annual conference. Though organized in 1796, the Western Conference did not convene its first session until October 6, 1800 at Bethel Academy, Kentucky. The Conference boundaries included virtually all land west of the Appalachian mountains in a single administrative district, Kentucky. The circuits of the Kentucky District embraced all or part of what would become the states of Kentucky, Tennessee, Ohio, West Virginia, Indiana, Illinois, and Mississippi.

The meteoric growth of American Methodism is well known. Membership in the Western Conference grew from just under 3,000 in 1800, to some 15,000 in 1804, and nearly 31,000 in 1811. In 1811 there were ten districts as opposed to one; likewise, the nine circuits serviced by ten itinerants had become 69 circuits managed by 100 itinerants. Due to this growth, the Western Conference was divided into two separate conferences by the 1812 General Conference with further divisions determined at each subsequent General Conference (see Map 1). According to John H. Wigger, one out of every 36 Americans was a Methodist by 1812 (as opposed to one out of every 800 in 1775). Barely registering 2 percent in 1775, by 1850 Methodism accounted for 34

percent of total church membership within the nation.<sup>13</sup> (Compare Maps 1 and 2 for development of Methodism in the "West" by 1840 alone.)

The spread of Methodism in Michigan is indicative of this growth throughout the Midwest. Ironically, Methodism came to Michigan by way of Canada. The Detroit circuit was an obscure, western-most assignment within the Upper Canada District of the New York Conference from 1804 to 1810. The Methodist advance into Michigan was nearly derailed by the War of 1812: of the two organized societies in the territory, only the Detroit survived (the Monroe society disbanded). The work was revived in 1815 when the Genesee Conference (the new custodian of the work) assigned Joseph Hicox to the Detroit Circuit. Yet, as late as 1820, there were only 62 Methodists in the area (though Elijah H. Pilcher puts the number closer to 30). There are two key reasons for this sluggish growth: half of lower peninsula was still controlled by Indians in 1820, and the lack of steam navigation on the Great Lakes until 1825.

Michigan fever soon enticed a steady stream of settlers. Correspondingly, the Detroit District was organized in 1825. Within three years the work had grown to four circuits and one city station with a total of 483 members. A second district (Ann Arbor) was formed ten years later. When the Michigan Conference was organized in 1836,

---

<sup>13</sup>Wigger, "Taking Heaven By Storm: Enthusiasm and Early American Methodism, 1770-1820" *Journal of the Early Republic* 14 (Summer 1994): 167-168. Wigger's conclusions support Roger Finke and Rodney Stark, "How the Upstart Sects Won America: 1776-1850" *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 28 (1989): 27-44.

Methodism not only had spread across most of southeastern Michigan, but could boast 4,033 members. By 1839 membership had mushroomed to 8,476. By 1855 Michigan Methodists could boast 21,378 members and 189 itinerants. The following year, the Michigan Conference was restructured with the western half of the lower peninsula labeled the Michigan Conference and the balance (including the upper peninsula) designated the Detroit Conference.<sup>14</sup> (See Map 3)

This dissertation examines the development of Midwestern (Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, and Michigan) Methodism from 1800 to 1856. 1800 marks the beginning of the Western Conference as noted above. I have selected 1856 as an end point because, for all practical purposes, it was the last General Conference prior to the Civil War.<sup>15</sup> This dissertation does not provide a comprehensive history of Methodism in each state, nor the region itself. Instead, this project investigates antebellum Methodist worship with particular emphasis on the bearing of place to practice. This project seeks Handy's middle ground between hagiography and cynicism.

This dissertation is specifically concerned with the practice of religion rather than

---

<sup>14</sup>Methodist expansion was even more explosive in Indiana. Between 1832 and 1843 Indiana membership grew from 20,035 to 67,976 (32,716 members joining between 1838 and 1843 alone). By 1856 the work in Indiana had grown to four conferences with 77,154 members and 399 itinerants.

<sup>15</sup>This is based on Kenneth M. Stampp's argument that the nation reached a point of no-return in 1857. See his provocative *America in 1857: A Nation on the Brink* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990).

the role of religion in antebellum America: it is an intellectual as opposed to a social history of faith. This study purposely limits itself to an "internal view" of Midwestern Methodism, seeking to explore the historical record as antebellum Methodists themselves encountered/assembled it. This is not to imply that Methodists were unconcerned with external or secular relations; on the other hand, personal piety was the cornerstone of a viable faith community, which in turn, was essential to constructing the Church Triumphant.

As the individuals who not only represented the official Church (serving as liaisons between individual congregations and the national body), but who also were expected to model worship, it is natural to begin such a study by looking at the itinerants who relentlessly canvassed the region. The "methods" of ministry approach utilized here yields a fresh interpretation of itinerancy, one which looks beyond itinerants as merely "defenders of the faith." These preachers were believers first and foremost; as believers, they often wrestled with the very issues their sermons were designed to remedy. Next the dissertation turns to death-bed experiences and the centrality of death to successful Christian living. Methodists used the inevitability of physical death to cultivate a worship climate that not only articulated the necessity of eternal life, but which functioned as a measure of spiritual maturity and was an avenue to mystical experience. Finally, this dissertation takes an extended look at the intersections of place and practice. Pioneers found the Midwest an inherently spiritual

place and structured their worship accordingly; moreover, they used the environment to enhance their worship experiences. Place and practice converged in the open-air camp meetings which antebellum Methodists highly prized. Early on, however, Midwestern Methodists faced a troubling paradox: how to balance the sacred and secular in this key corridor to the nation's interior.

While Methodists encouraged migration and development, they hoped to maintain the sacredness of the land even as it was transformed. In doing so they constructed a worship environment through which individuals, and the faith community as a whole, participated in a variety of ritual activity. These rituals (viz. works of grace and acts of intercession) were instrumental in the development of both spiritual and regional identity. Methodism in the antebellum Midwest was unique in that men and women shared not only spiritual authority, but at times, agency with God. Above all else, Midwestern Methodism emphasized personal piety, not social activism.

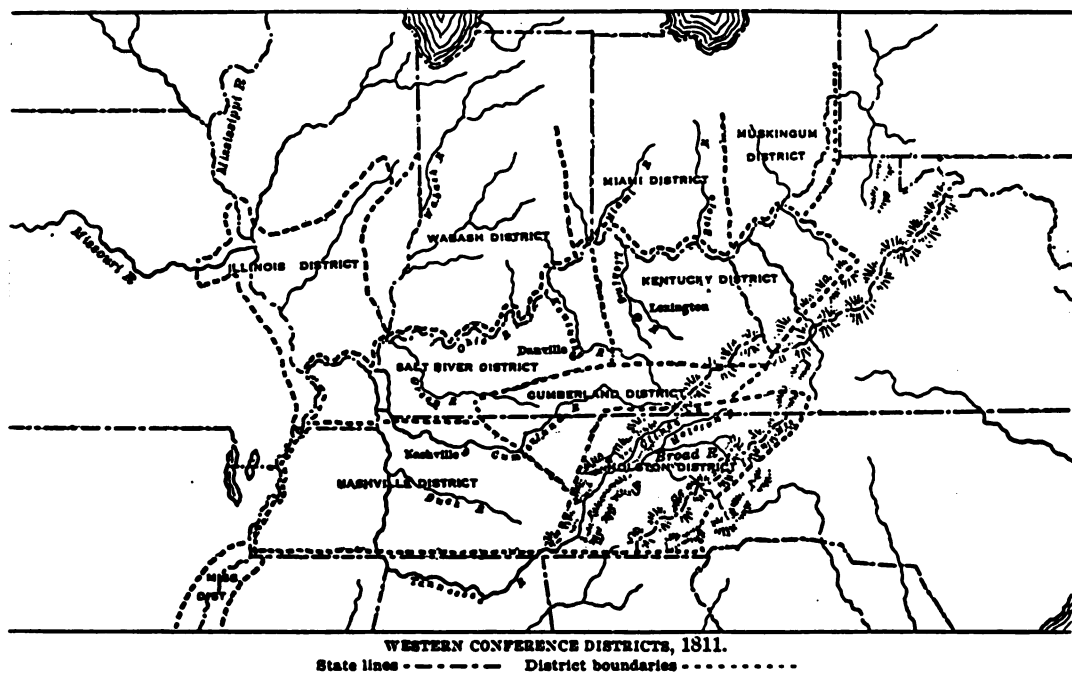
Ultimately, this dissertation seeks to reorient the scholarly discussion away from a single issue perspective and towards a more complex consideration of rural religion in general. Pioneer Methodism was a distinctly rural faith: one in which religious experiences reflected and replaced the transitory nature of secular society. In pledging themselves to a religious community, believers anticipated stability more than any augmented status (whether sacred or secular). Such stability was essential to individuals



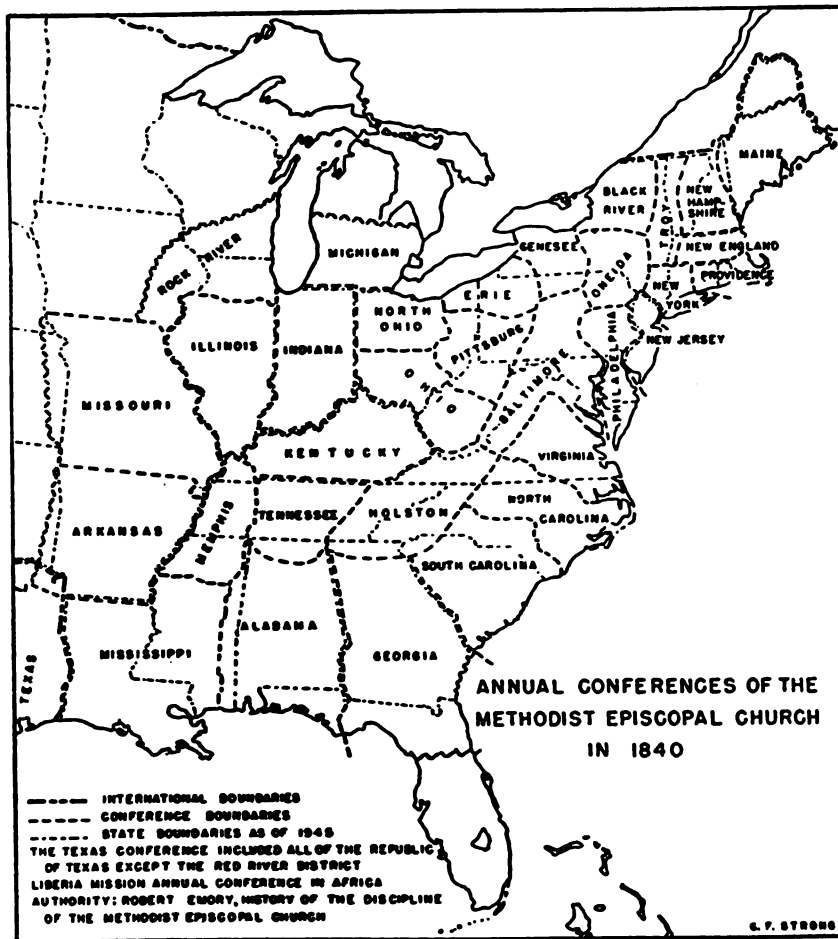
who perceived themselves vulnerable to myriad unknowns.<sup>16</sup> Beyond a sense of stability, however, the hallmark of rural religion is an experiential faith through which one could regularly encounter the divine. This exchange not only points to the significance of the camp meeting, but--in unofficially adopting the institution as a paradigmatic expression of itself--to antebellum Methodism as well.

---

<sup>16</sup>Bruce advances this interpretation. He proposes that believers defined themselves in terms of the religious community, but always with an eye on secular advancement. This dissertation takes issue with Bruce on this point: most believers would see no need to co-opt the process in this fashion. Faith had its own rewards.



Map 1. "Western Conference Districts, 1811." Source: William Warren Sweet, ed., *The Rise of Methodism in the West: Being the Journals of the Western Conference, 1800-1811* (New York: The Methodist Book Concern, 1920), 34.



Map 2. "Annual Conferences of the Methodist Episcopal Church." Source: William Warren Sweet, ed., *Religion on the American Frontier, 1783-1840*. Vol 4 *The Methodists* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1946), 62.



Map 3. "The Annual Conferences of Episcopal Methodism That Have Served Michigan." Source: Elijah H. Pilcher, *Protestantism in Michigan: Being a Special History of the Methodist Episcopal Church* (Detroit: R.D.S. Tyler and Company, 1878), 202.

## **"'Inspired by Grace': Methodist Itinerants in the Early Midwest"**

The Methodist itinerant is a familiar American icon: a solitary circuit rider traveling on his horse to yet another preaching point. Yet, as many Midwestern Methodist clergymen would readily attest, "itinerant" is a deceptive label. At the least it implies order and regularity, as though itinerants operated within fixed boundaries negotiated between themselves, their congregations, and the denomination. Beneath the surface of this familiar routine, however, the everyday lives of itinerants were more chaotic than calm. To succeed in ministry required continuous infusions of physical, emotional, and spiritual energy. In fact, the journals and diaries of Midwestern itinerants often have a ledger-like quality; rather than providing a narrative of personal growth or congregational history, many are inventories of spiritual services rendered.

R. Laurence Moore argues that religion became cultural commodity in the antebellum period.<sup>1</sup> If evangelicalism was a buyer's market, Methodist itinerants were deft salesmen. They owed their success, in part, to the fact that they believed themselves divinely commissioned to their tasks. As a result, they not only were outfitted with the armor of God, but on the authority of Ephesians 5:12 waged an aggressive battle "against principalities, powers, rulers of the darkness of this world, and against spiritual

---

<sup>1</sup> *Selling God: American Religion in the Marketplace of Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994). Roger Finke and Rodney Stark make a related argument in their *The Churching of America, 1776-1990: Winners and Losers in Our Religious Economy* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1992).

wickedness in high places." Fortunately or not, identifying the enemy was secondary to the fight itself.

Added to the pressure of managing multiple duties (e.g. evangelist, pastor, book salesman, occasional sage, and more), itinerants needed to be skilled communicators. Mass appeal was a cornerstone of ministry. Unlike the era of established churches, antebellum congregations measured their minister's tenure every Sunday morning. While quick to profit from this "voluntary" religious environment, Methodists were judged by the same standards. To that end, Methodist ministry was redefined daily as itinerants encountered new challenges and sought fresh solutions to familiar ones. As Nathan Hatch argues, charisma was the central democratizing element of American Christianity.<sup>2</sup> Itinerants that lacked charisma either acquired it (even if only intermittently) or eventually left the ministry.

The notion of manufacturing magnetism seems at odds with being "called" into the ministry. Yet the ministries of Midwestern Methodists illustrate that while God provided desire and raw talent, he especially blessed those who exercised initiative in cultivating their "gifts and graces." In many respects, then, the everyday lives and ministries of Methodist itinerants are analogous to twentieth-century professional

---

<sup>2</sup>Nathan O. Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989). For an interesting study on the relationship of rhetoric, itinerancy, and antebellum Methodism, see Paul H. Boase, "The Methodist Circuit Rider of the Ohio Frontier" (Ph.D. diss., University of Wisconsin, 1952).

athletes: itinerants were empowered/endowed with skills or talents which set them apart from ordinary believers, they kept an extensive travel or speaking schedule that was both physically and emotionally demanding, they were constantly "training" to hone their abilities, and they performed regularly for the edification and enjoyment of others.

### **Physical Characteristics**

One of the most intriguing aspects of Methodist preaching concerns the itinerants themselves. Many have considered the rigorous physical demands on itinerants, emphasizing the long and lonely hours of travel on horseback. In other words, to use the athlete analogy, considerable attention has been given to itinerants' physical training while their equipment as been all but ignored. The most successful itinerants were noted for one or both of two physical characteristics: a penetrating eye and a powerful voice.

Richard Hargrave's "eye was perhaps his most striking feature; of a dark blue color, exceedingly penetrating in expression, and, when he spoke, it lit up with every phrase of thought and feeling." In fact, when at "at his best," his eyes were said to blaze and flash.<sup>3</sup> The same was true for Alfred Arrington; his eyes were like "balls of liquid

---

<sup>3</sup>William P. Hargrave, *Sacred Poems of Rev. Richard Hargrave, D.D. with a Biography of Himself, and Biographical Sketches of Some of His Coadjutors* (Cincinnati: Cranston and Stowe, 1890), 95, 86.

fire when excited."<sup>4</sup> James Havens possessed a "piercing eye," "an instrument of great power among men." J. C. Smith recalls that "no man could look steadily into [Havens'] eye if there was a mote, even, of hypocrisy in his soul. It looked through you and searched you." Smith continued, "through these wonderful eyes, looked out, as through a window, not only an honest, but an earnest man; and, hence, even bad men everywhere yielded to him the tribute of respect and fear."<sup>5</sup>

Few could better appreciate the importance of a penetrating eye for preaching than William Henry Milburn. Milburn lost sight in his left eye due to an accident at age 5. Treatment and a subsequent infection resulted in the virtual loss of sight in his right eye as well. He was confined to a darkened room for nearly two years--from age 5 to 7--as part of his therapy.

In his autobiography, Milburn admitted that his lack of vision hindered his ability to preach effectively.

Men not only see with their eyes, but hear; for the beaming eye and expressive face speak a language that articulate sounds can never express --a language more moving, soft, and irresistible than ever entered the soul through the galleries of the ear. Through the eye, the speaker enters into sympathy with his audience, by it he perceives their capacity, reads their wants, appreciates their conditions; by it they are persuaded of his simplicity, earnestness and faith.

---

<sup>4</sup>J. C. Smith, *Reminiscences of Early Methodism in Indiana* (Indianapolis: J.M. Olcott, 1879), 55.

<sup>5</sup>Smith, *Reminiscences*, 63.



Milburn seemingly describes a bi-directional vision. When a preacher made eye contact with his congregation he personalized his message to the various individuals. However, Milburn also claims that he needed to be able to see the congregation's response: "if the truth be spoken truly, it will be reflected from the souls of the hearers through their faces."<sup>6</sup> Yet Milburn adds another dimension as well. He maintains that itinerants "spoke" with their eyes. Here Milburn cleverly translated handicap into strength. Milburn knew all too well that while the ability to peer directly into the hearts of others was of significant value, a powerful voice was even more highly prized.

Not surprisingly, the ability to speak long and loud was a prime requisite for powerful preaching. Ben Boaz distinctly recalls an early itinerant who visited his pioneer Indiana home. Boaz was most impressed by the Methodist's preaching style. The sermon was a long and carefully crafted crescendo. Beginning slowly and with subdued volume, the preacher "grew louder and faster, till he reached the full compass of his voice; exerting his lungs and vocal organs to the utmost; and ended on a throat spitting key, foaming at the mouth, from the effects of rant and roar like a hard ridden steed." While Boaz undoubtedly over paints his picture, it is not as far-fetched as his hyperbole implies. Such a style was customary for most frontier preachers. As a matter of course, vocal strength appears to have been a common criterion for validating one's

---

<sup>6</sup>William Henry Milburn, *Ten Years of Preacher Life: Chapters from an Autobiography* (New York: Derby and Jackson, 1859), 117.

call to ministry. When Boaz perceived his call as a young boy, he immediately began to test himself. "This impression [call] led me to a more diligent study of the scriptures, and of pulpit oratory. To test my oratorical powers, I often went alone into the woods, and mounting on a log or stump, would take my text, and discourse to the trees. Careful to follow the example set me by ministers of experience, I waxed warmer and warmer, louder and louder, from the commencement to the end of my sermon."<sup>7</sup>

Richard Hargrave blended an intellectually sophisticated structure with prodigious amounts of raw energy. Hargrave's son William recalls his father's sermons being "lengthy, and sometimes, for the first half hour, they seemed to be rather metaphysical or obscure." However, this was just the "warm up." Hargrave literally was changed as he spoke: "his eyes began to flash, and his body to sink and rise, as if about to leap into the air, he would pour upon the congregation such floods of eloquence and pathos as we, in this day, never witness."<sup>8</sup>

Alfred M. Lorrain observed that Russell Bigelow profited from a similar preaching style. Bigelow's introduction tended to run about thirty minutes. "It was a kind of fireside talk, and sometimes tiresome, and some of his hearers would begin to feel fearful forebodings about the length of his sermon." But when Bigelow hit his stride

---

<sup>7</sup>Ben Boaz, *The Winged Chariot: An Allegory*(Cincinnati: A.B. Volney, 1858), 199, 201.

<sup>8</sup>Hargrave, *Sacred Poems*, 113.

he was a new man; consequently, the congregation was thoroughly revived. He then typically would speak for at least two hours. Like Hargrave, Bigelow "would rise-rise-rise, higher and higher . . . till soul and body would seem to be rapt in a mighty conflict of emulation." Lorrain adds that "it would be useless to describe his gestures; they were of all kinds, and indiscriminately applied." Congregations revelled in the affect such elocution elicited because "when the tempest culminated it came down on the congregation with a mighty shout, leaving a shower of tears, and all the congregation on their feet."<sup>9</sup>

James Havens' preaching proficiency was such that he could "drive [sinners] to immediate action."<sup>10</sup> What itinerant would not covet Havens' ability to all but guarantee results? It is no mystery, then, why junior preachers such as Boaz would emulate this delivery style. Midwestern Methodist itinerants sought a delicate balance between histrionics and apathy, between speaking as God and speaking for God. Bigelow is a case in point: "his oratory consisted principally in earnestness of spirit combined with physical energy." He was celebrated as a great pulpiteer; always a servant, never a "showman." Given the fine line separating these two categories, one can appreciate the apprehension ministers surely faced as they sought to mature

---

<sup>9</sup>*The Helm, The Sword, and the Cross: A Life Narrative* (Cincinnati: Poe and Hitchcock, 1862), 310-311.

<sup>10</sup>Smith, *Reminiscences*, 64.

professionally (and give evidence of this to their congregations) without sacrificing their zeal for the gospel or their power in presenting it.<sup>11</sup>

Naturally, many Methodists had neither commanding voice nor charisma; in fact, some evidently possessed little more than a "fog-horn delivery and a bull-doing temperament."<sup>12</sup> Joseph Tarkington recalls traveling to his first assignment on his first circuit in 1824 (Boonville Circuit in southwestern Indiana). He had preached just three times previous. He spoke from Amos 4:12, "Prepare to meet thy God" (which might indicate more of what he was feeling than what he hoped to accomplish). He admits failure. "I was badly scared; but the wife of Rev. J.W. McReynolds shouted and helped me out; for I quit when she commenced."<sup>13</sup> This "mother in Israel" rescued Tarkington from further humiliation.

While Tarkington quickly learned his trade, Resin Sapp did not. For Sapp, effective public speaking proved an insurmountable obstacle to his ministry. He was

---

<sup>11</sup>Katherine L. Dvorak uses the public ministry of Peter Cartwright to address this issue. Dvorak contends not only that charisma must be validated by congregations, but that the most gifted speakers (such as Cartwright) waged an unsuccessful battle to keep the ministry from "routinizing" charisma. See her "Peter Cartwright and Charisma," *Methodist History* 26 (January 1988).

<sup>12</sup>A rather unflattering reference to Peter Cartwright in Elwell Crissey, *Horse Preacher: A Methodist Circuit Rider Travels the Prodigious Tallgrass Prairies of Illinois During the 1830s* (Tigard, Oregon: Blue Water Publishing, 1989), 174.

<sup>13</sup>Joseph Tarkington, *Autobiography of Rev. Joseph Tarkington*. With an Introduction by Rev. T. A. Goodwin (Cincinnati: Curts and Jennings, 1899), 97.

plagued with a "bad manner of delivery," and presented "sermons [which] contrasted greatly at different times." James Watson, one of Michigan's more influential early Methodists (who later gained prominence as editor of the Chicago-based, *Northwestern Christian Advocate*), intimates that, had Sapp been more articulate, he would have been a great minister. Instead, Watson considers him merely "able." In the antebellum religious market place, "able" ministers could not compete. The difference between Sapp and Watson is evidence of this fact. Sapp continued to travel central lower Michigan while Watson moved onto positions of prominence within the region and denomination.<sup>14</sup>

Thomas Eddy appears the rare itinerant whose "weak" voice strengthened his ministry. Early in Eddy's ministry in north-central Ohio, he had a powerful voice. "He was a special favorite at camp-meetings services. His voice was clear and strong, and, when excited, it rang out with unusual power, holding immense audiences completely under control. He had much of that magnetic influence which is not easily described, but which powerfully impresses large congregations." Yet, by the mid-1840s, his voice was reduced to a "tremor." But this debility was no handicap. If anything, Eddy

---

<sup>14</sup>J. V. Watson, *Tales and Takings, Sketches and Incidents* (New York: Carlton and Porter, 1856), 438. This makes for an interesting comparison with another Michigan itinerant, John Newland Moffit. Watson claims that in all but one respect, Moffit was conspicuously ordinary. But as an orator, "he [was] omnipotent." "Men of all professions, minds of all molds and of every degree of mental wealth, have confessed the spell-like power of his eloquence" *Tales and Takings*, 314.

cultivated this defect. With keen stage presence, Eddy dramatized the "peculiar pathos" of his voice so that it--and consequentially he--assumed "a strength which was beyond what his appearance would indicate."<sup>15</sup>

Yet Midwestern itinerants insisted that the most important element of preaching had nothing to do with visual acuity, vocal prowess, or magnetism. In fact, some of the most successful ministers had no "gifts" whatsoever, save one. These ministers had been empowered with the *pneuma*--they had been "born of the Spirit." James Hibben argues that "it was not language that made these men eloquent; nor was it the rhetoric of the schools. It was Sinai's thunder and Calvary's love."<sup>16</sup> A contemporary claimed Jesse Walker's "preaching skill was never better than mediocre, but he had been set on fire by the mysterious flame of God's Holy Spirit. He was never able to interpret theology nor debate the doctrines of the Bible, but his love for Jesus burned with such heat that those who heard him never forgot him."<sup>17</sup>

Without this fire burning within, Methodist itinerants believed no minister could truly build God's kingdom. Of course, this is not to say that some itinerants did not confuse the issue. For some, extraordinary public speaking skills proved a greater curse

---

<sup>15</sup>Charles N. Sims, *The Life of Rev. Thomas M. Eddy*. With an Introduction by Rev. Bishop Simpson. (New York: Phillips and Hunt, 1884), 19, 200.

<sup>16</sup>W. W. Hibben, *Rev. James Havens, One of the Heroes of Indiana Methodism* (Indianapolis: Sentinel, 1872), 208.

<sup>17</sup>Crissey, *Horse Preacher*, 37.

than blessing.<sup>18</sup> On the other hand, Methodists held that any exhortation or sermon not empowered by the Holy Spirit was not only contemptible, but certain to be sterile. As John Collin's biographer makes plain, no preacher's arrow could strike the heart without the Spirit's "unction."

How often is it that we have seen men in the pulpit, with great zeal, and in a vociferous manner, speak for hours without producing any other effect than weariness on their hearers! Such speakers, however zealous, are strangers to those gushing emotions of the heart which, with an electric effect, are imparted to the auditory. Without these, no man may be eloquent. He may be instructive; he may string his sentences together, and embody all the figures of rhetoric, but he can never reach and overcome the citadel of the heart. And unless he can do this, he can never become a successful instrument of reform.<sup>19</sup>

For Methodist itinerants, the pulpit was the primary venue from which they could conquer this "citadel."

The physical characteristics of preaching point to two central ironies of antebellum Methodist ministry. Itinerants believed themselves set apart for service, yet felt compelled to calibrate their call; likewise itinerants believed themselves divinely empowered/inspired when preaching, yet often took matters into their own hands and embellished their sermons with a panache befitting the most secular stage. Thus while many presumed to assist God in unfolding his will for their lives and frequently resorted

---

<sup>18</sup> Alfred Arrington is the clearest example. See "showman" under itinerant types.

<sup>19</sup> *A Sketch of the life of Rev. John Collins, late of the Ohio Conference* (Cincinnati: Swormstedt and Poe, 1849), 49.

to "holy theater" when preaching, Midwestern itinerants seldom were disingenuous. Instead, they recognized, and then mastered, the many challenges confronting clergy within antebellum evangelicalism.

### **Sermons as Ministry**

Methodists believed that a minister derived both his authority and effectiveness from the Holy Spirit. Once empowered, what did itinerants preach? What did they hope to accomplish through their sermons? The papers of Asbury Wilkinson reveal much about Methodist ministry in antebellum Midwest. His journals can serve as a benchmark of sorts; in particular, his record of the conference year 1840-1841 is illuminating. That year Wilkinson was appointed to the Connersville Circuit of the Indiana Conference which included Fayette, Rush, and Wayne counties. Over the course of the year, he made twelve rounds, preaching 191 sermons from 53 separate texts: 44 Old Testament and 147 New Testament. The itinerant, circuit, system embodies Methodism during this period. Wilkinson's year also reinforces the preacher-athlete analogy. Wilkinson justifiably was exhausted by the time his Annual Conference reconvened. Yet, true to Methodist form, he could not imagine a more enjoyable pursuit. His only concern: "that I may be more useful this year than the one that is past."<sup>20</sup>

---

<sup>20</sup>Wilkinson's entries run from November 11, 1840 to October 19, 1841. Quote from October 24, 1841. Wilkinson, Papers, Indiana Historical Society, Indianapolis, Indiana.



Clearly, the central theme of Methodist sermons has always been salvation. Yet this seems to be an implicit objective for Wilkinson, one so obvious that it seldom was the sole focus of his sermons. In fact, despite preaching nearly 200 times in twelve months, he never once used the most succinct and familiar salvation text: John 3:16. While saving lost men, women, and children was fundamental, Wilkinson devoted the majority of his energy to shepherding the existing church. Over the course of the year, Wilkinson, like most itinerants, sought to facilitate growth on two levels: first, converting individuals to both Christ and the Church (but not necessarily in that order); second, increasing the maturity of believers that they might grow in "gifts, graces, and usefulness." Wilkinson understood clearly that *he* could not produce any increase; the church would move forward only when *God* worked through him.

Where Wilkinson concentrated his efforts on augmenting Methodism at the local level, published sermons naturally targeted a broader audience. On the surface, published sermons functioned as didactic instruments. They were to edify the less experienced and enhance pulpit performance. In addition, they were a means to generate revenue for the local Conference.<sup>21</sup> Most significantly, though, these collections allowed ministers to engage in a dialogue with one another. These were not

---

<sup>21</sup>For example, *Sermons on Miscellaneous Subjects, by the Bishops of the Methodist Episcopal Church, and the Senior Preachers of the Ohio and North Ohio Conferences*, (Cincinnati: Methodist Book Concern, 1847) was intended to benefit the theological school at Delaware, now Ohio Wesleyan University.

conversations through which ministers kept "in touch" with one another--correspondence, annual and general conferences could suffice in this regard. Instead, these sermons were a bi-directional means of recognition and power within the itinerant fraternity. Methodist ministers measured themselves against the individuals represented in these sermons. With careful examination and evaluation, the sermons could indicate whether one was keeping pace, professionally, with his peers. Finally, assuming one would only submit his best sermon, they were written as self-assessments. Thus, publishing a sermon (or even attempting to) was comparable to telegraphing a progress report to one's colleagues, i.e. documentation of improvement in any academic subject, homiletics, systematic theology, personal religious experience, and so on.<sup>22</sup>

It is interesting to note that published sermons were nearly identical in scope and content to Wilkinson's manuscript sermons. The exception, is the greater frequency of salvation messages and direct admonitions to preachers themselves in the published sermons. This is perhaps understandable given the multi-purpose nature of these volumes. Thus, Methodist sermons have a deceptively generic quality to them which

---

<sup>22</sup>Typically only veteran preachers were published. In one volume, only 18 of 34 sermons were written by ministers serving in "regular" assignments (i.e. full-time pastorate); of these had all but three had advanced degrees (8 M.A., 7 D.D.). In a work that was supposed to represent the Church across the nation, one is hardpressed to find submissions from "typical" preachers. In other words, such volumes amounted to a professional "show and tell." See Davis W. Clark, ed., *The Methodist Episcopal Pulpit: A Collection of Original Sermons from Living Ministers of the M. E. Church*, (New York: Lane and Scott, 1850).

would prompt one to class them as all the same. Yet this was far from the case. One of the most significant distinctions was the product of human agency: no two people can preach the same sermon in the same way. The delivery of each sermon was unique. A second distinction concerns the complexity of the sermons themselves. The product of folklore and inadequate historical study, the archetypal pioneer Methodist is proudly anti-intellectual and prone to displays of excessive emotionalism (both of which are accurate in some cases). Yet sermonic literature casts a different light on the subject; it is as rich in variety as it is in doctrinal sophistication. Methodist sermons typically conform to one of two themes: salvation and Christian living.

### **Sermons on Salvation**

A veteran of nearly sixty-years ministerial service in Illinois and Indiana, Richard Hargrave's ministry typifies the centrality of salvation for Midwestern Methodist itinerants. John Smith comments that Richard Hargrave "preached the Word. To be sure, like almost all, he had his favorite themes; and most prominent of these, as I recollect, was the Divinity of Christ. Christ the divine and Christ the crucified, he considered the foundation, other than which no man could lay and save."<sup>23</sup> James Watson made the same point in his 1856 guidebook for the "promotion of revivals." Watson maintained that "the polestar of the pulpit is the cross;" he

---

<sup>23</sup>William Graham confirms Smith's recollection: "Christ and salvation chiefly made up the matter of his sermons." Hargrave, *Sacred Poems*, 96-97, 74.

emphasized his point by making it a chapter heading: "preach Jesus."<sup>24</sup>

More often than not, salvific sermons were logical appeals to reason than emotional tirades studded with "hellfire and brimstone." Consider one of Thomas Morris' salvation appeals:

The Gospel is good news, because it is exactly adapted to our condition and wants as sinners, revealing a Savior just such as our pitiable circumstances require. Are we ignorant? In Christ are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. Are we in darkness? He is the light of the world. Are we helpless? He has all power in heaven and in earth. Are depraved? He is holy and harmless, undefiled and separate from sinners. Are we guilty before God? He is our all-sufficient sacrifice for sin. Do we feel that we are ruined sinners? He came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance. And are we afflicted with a sense of our lost condition? He came to seek and to save that which was lost. In short, Jesus is eyes to the blind, ears to the deaf, feet to the lame, clothing to the naked, food to the hungry, medicine to the sick, and life to the dying; and consequently, just such a Savior as fallen, sinful man stands in need of. And to feel the whole force of this argument, we must recollect that Jesus is the only Savior, that no man cometh to the Father but by him, 'neither is there salvation in any other; for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved.' To reject him, therefore, is madness.<sup>25</sup>

While Thomas leaves no doubt that unforgiven sinners will be punished, his thrust is positive. His message was one of "good news." Thomas could envision no situation or circumstance beyond God's ability to redeem. Likewise, his closing is quintessentially

---

<sup>24</sup>J. V. Watson, *Helps to the Promotion of Revivals* (New York: Carlton and Porter, 1856), 53.

<sup>25</sup>"The Privileges of the Poor," in Thomas Asbury Morris, *Sermons on Various Subjects* (Cincinnati: Poe and Hitchcock, 1867), 175.

Methodistic. Antebellum Methodists were baffled at the thought that one would purposely reject salvation. After all, Christ was the only avenue to the Father; Thomas and his co-laborers insisted that there was no other hope for humanity. While others might have been reluctant to characterize Jesus as "harmless," few Methodists failed to emphasize Christ as the sole agent of forgiveness.

John Strange once rhetorically queried his congregation as to the best method to awaken sinners: "Is it to gird the ignited thunder-bolt upon his left arm, and to grasp the sword of wrath, edged with damnation, in his right hand? No! Mercy! mercy! mercy! is the burden of his theme!"<sup>26</sup> Every accountable individual was entreated to plead for God's mercy. Such mercy canceled the sinner's rightfully deserved punishment (not to be confused with grace which is "God's unmerited favor" or blessings given the believer). Seldom did itinerants directly address the consequences of unrepented sin. In fact, only Hargrave preached on the unbeliever's certain destruction. Even so, it is important to notice that he contrasts death with life: "For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord."<sup>27</sup>

---

<sup>26</sup>Hargrave, *Sacred Poems*, 63.

<sup>27</sup>Romans 6:23, "Sin and Its Consequences" in Richard Hargrave *Sermons, Expository and Practical* (Cincinnati: Poe and Hitchcock, 1862), 225. Hargrave devotes 6 of 20 sermons to salvation. He includes sermons on "Justification by Faith" (Romans 4:5), "The New Birth" (John 3:7-8), "Atonement" (Romans 3:24-25), "Believers Admonished" (Hebrews 12:15), and "The Mediation of Christ" (Hebrews 8:25). Instead

Rather than merely prophesying "weeping and gnashing of teeth," itinerants spoke more as holy tutors, docents guiding all with "ears to hear" on a heavenward journey. The process was as simple as the message itself: confess, believe, and enjoy. Matthew Simpson personally challenged those who preached God's wrath exclusively. Rather than "cloth[ing] the Deity with attributes of vengeance," he was "fully persuaded that Love is the great characteristic of the Deity, as revealed through Christ." And as the "prince of pulpit orators," Simpson was a formidable opponent (one wonders just who was preaching damnation alone). He gives an example of proper preaching in a sermon entitled "The Manifestation of the Divine Glory." Simpson posited that the Christian's joy "is not of this world, it is in God." God never changed, nor would his glory every cease.

"Property may vanish, friends may fail, health may be destroyed, but God still is immutably glorious, and from his throne still flows the pure river, clear as crystal, imparting life, and joy to all that dwell upon its banks. It is a river of mercy, a river of grace, and he that drinketh of its water needs never thirst again for the turbid streams of earthly joy."

Like Thomas, Simpson summoned every dramatic skill at his disposal to outline the

---

of detailing the eventual punishment of the unsaved and backsliders, many itinerants emphasized *Christ's sufferings*: how he was punished on their behalf. They would then press the point and inquire why anyone would disregard this sacrifice and its subsequent "free gift." All Scripture taken from King James Version unless otherwise noted. See also "What Must I do to be Saved?" in *The Ohio Conference Offering; of Sermons and Sketches or Sermons on Familiar and Practical Subjects from the Living and the Dead* (Cincinnati: Methodist Book Concern, 1851).

benefits of salvation as opposed to the consequence of sin.<sup>28</sup>

### **Sermons on Christian Living**

Salvation is but one step in the Christian experience. Once an individual made a profession of faith, the itinerant's attention shifted to maintenance and spiritual growth. Christian living, then, constitutes a second major theme of Methodist sermonic literature. While hoping to convert the lost, Asbury Wilkinson targeted the majority of his sermons to those already saved. His favorite texts illustrate the principal sub-themes of Christian living: holiness, perseverance, responsibility or duty, and empowerment. Wilkinson preached 130 of his 191 sermons from just 15 texts.<sup>29</sup>

Wilkinson charged his congregations to assume responsibility for one another as Christians brothers and sisters. It was the duty of every believer to oversee those around them: attending to both material and spiritual needs. Perseverance was the watchword for those in want. God promised to sustain believers through any affliction or adversity. They were to be confident of their salvation. There was a hope that would endure; faith would become sight in the end. They were to tirelessly seek a new

---

<sup>28</sup>Davis W. Clark, ed., *The Methodist Episcopal Pulpit: A Collection of Original Sermons from Living Ministers of the M. E. Church* (New York: Lane and Scott, 1850), 15, 30.

<sup>29</sup>The number in parentheses indicates the times he used that particular text: Psalms 73:24 (5); Ecclesiastes 3:12 (5); Ecclesiastes 12:11 (9); Matthew 7:7 (5); Matthew 18:20 (15); John 5:6 (6); John 9:31 (17); John 14:1-3 (7); John 14:16 (13); 2 Corinthians 8:9 (5); Galatians 5:13 (10); 1 Thessalonians 3:12 (6); 1 Thessalonians 5:19 (9); Hebrews 11:14 (12); 1 John 4:16 (6).

"country." "Wilt thou be made whole?" sums each of these sub-themes. Healing in this case entailed more than physical restoration; it was an inducement to accept freedom, satisfaction, and contentment in Christ. True empowerment, though, required more than a profession of faith. 2 Corinthians 7:1 admonished believers to cleanse [themselves] from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God."<sup>30</sup>

The Holy Spirit figured prominently in every itinerant's ministry. Though not always using the same terminology, most Methodists preached a second work of grace, i.e. sanctification.<sup>31</sup> In conversion, individuals sought forgiveness for past sins through Christ's sacrificial death; in return, they received the promise of eternal life (the process in theological terms: justification, regeneration, and acceptance). Sanctification involved a total surrender to the will of God, a declaration of dependency on his mercy and grace. In relinquishing sovereignty, the individual was cleansed from a *state* of sin-- eradication the "carnal" nature (as opposed to particular sins of commissions or omission pardoned through salvation).

In *Pioneer Experiences; Or, the Gift of Power Received by Faith*, R. H. Crane recalled his sanctification experience. He was attending a meeting at Augusta Michigan

---

<sup>30</sup>"Christian Purity" in *Ohio Conference Offering*, 273.

<sup>31</sup>This is to be distinguished as a quest for holiness as opposed to perfection. For the role of the Holy Spirit in conversion and ministry, see Timothy Merritt, *The Convert's Guide and Preacher's Assistant* (New York: George Lane, 1841), 37-46, 139-140.



when the preacher announced that all present "resolve, by the grace of God, that they had committed the last sin they ever would commit." Crane spent the next several hours in prayer battling himself and his "inbred foes." Though he does not state why, prior to this point he had been skeptical of holiness teachings. He now eagerly sought the experience--regardless of cost or consequence. After a protracted period of prayer, he experienced a powerful infilling of divine presence.

A few moments elapsed; when Jesus, at whose feet I was sitting, rose, and came into my soul. It seemed as though heaven was compressed, and thrust into my expanding, bursting heart. Then my entire being seemed to be filled with, and surrounded by, not merely the love of Jesus, of which I had previously tasted, but His very presence. . . . There is no sin in me now; for Jesus is in every part. I am wholly His. A few hours ago, had one asked me, "What is Christian perfection?" I could not have given an intelligent reply. Now I know it is Jesus; more of Jesus; Jesus filling us with His Spirit, possessing us wholly.<sup>32</sup>

Crane's testimony points to a peculiar dilemma common to many Methodist itinerants: spiritual skepticism or self-doubt.

### **Spiritual Skepticism**

Midwestern itinerants were not immune to the hardships of everyday life. They too suffered illness, financial insecurity, loneliness, etc. Moreover, these obstacles were bound to affect their preaching. An itinerant's humanity was no where more evident

---

<sup>32</sup>Phoebe, Palmer, ed., *Pioneer Experiences; Or, the Gift of Power Received by Faith* (New York: W.C. Palmer, 1868); reprint in "Higher Christian Life" Series, ed. Donald W. Dayton, no. 32. (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1984), 210-211.

than when grappling with his own spiritual well being. Typically these struggles revolved around sanctification issues. At issue: how did the itinerant "minister" to himself?

William Christie was one whose faith never seemed to waver; he exuded confidence.<sup>33</sup> Like Christie, Leroy Swormstedt preached "Christ crucified," but he could generate neither Christie's panache nor certainty of hope. In fact, Swormstedt seems mired in negativism, obsessed with suffering. His sermons were typical in that he calls sinners to repentance, believers to recommitment, and all to vigilance. Yet many of his sermons leave one wondering whether *he* was comfortable with his own spiritual state of affairs; it is as though he occasionally doubts whether his side will win in the end.

Swormstedt admitted that "even the strongest of the saints are ready sometimes to faint under the trials." Yet, he claimed that believers could never exhaust God's supply of mercy; that trials produce blessings. Just the same, he was quick to add that "those who pride themselves on account of never having felt such drearyments" live in "utter ignorance of true religion." Swormstedt seems mired in ambivalence, almost reluctant to enjoy his Christian life. Surely he spoke to himself as much as others when he asserted: "To those who are enjoying the divine life--Be not high minded but fear,

---

<sup>33</sup>Thomas Asbury Morris, *Miscellany: Consisting of Essays, Biographical Sketches and Notes of Travel* (Cincinnati: Swormstedt and Poe, 1854), 194-195.

and be watchful, work out your salvation with fear and trembling. . . . Remember your strength consists in depending on [Christ]--When you are weak in yourselves, then only are you truly strong."<sup>34</sup>

For many years Hooper Crews was synonymous with Chicago Methodism. Yet this fixture of local faith "always mistrusted his own abilities" and was "subject often to feelings of complete discouragement." His condition was so acute that on one occasion, while preaching at a camp meeting, Crews himself went "forward" when he gave the altar call.<sup>35</sup>

For many itinerants, depression as associated with accepting their "call" to ministry. Such was the case for Robert R. Roberts. Until surrendering to full-time ministry, he suffered frequent bouts of "darkness of mind and dejection of heart."<sup>36</sup> While Roberts' stellar career did much to revive his flagging spirit, many others continued to doubt their faith well into active ministry. James Henthorn conveyed such

---

<sup>34</sup>Swormstedt also noted that while "difficulties" are inevitable, "God is an all sufficient helper to those who trust in him--He is pleased to leave his people for a season only that they may be made to feel their own weakness and to rely on him." Despite the tone of reflected in his private papers, Swormstedt gave nearly 25 years service to the Methodist Book Concern. Leroy Swormstedt Papers, Ohio Historical Society, Columbus, Ohio.

<sup>35</sup>A. D. Field, *Worthies and Workers, both Ministers and Laymen, of the Rock River Conference* (Cincinnati: Crantson and Curts, 1896), 146-147. Unfortunately Field omits the place and date of this camp meeting.

<sup>36</sup>Charles Elliot, *The Life of the Rev. Robert R. Roberts* (Cincinnati: Wright and Swormstedt, 1844), 89.

sentiments in a letter to Daniel Hitt dated March 19, 1802.

"I think if I am not deceived, I still feel it my desire & intention to love & serve the Lord; but sound experience teaches me, that the way to Zion is rough & thorny; (and as one observes) through dismal deeps & dangerous snares, we make our way to God. -- I find the world, the flesh, & the devil still are opposed to Grace & the religion of JESUS CHRIST. Daily experience teaches me, that there is a daily warfare; and altho' I am still to make the haven; yet sometimes the floods almost swallow up my soul; -- Sometimes I am ready to lay hold of the hope before me, and while my resolutions are thus forming, I find myself driven back again. O when will this restless mind, find itself at home, & enjoy the sunshine of perfect Love, which casts out all fear and that hath torment? This is what I wish to feel and enjoy."<sup>37</sup>

Henthorn identifies the devil as the source of his trouble; he bears no blame for his skepticism. Though he believed himself to be a Christian and was certain of his eternal destiny, Henthorn admits he lacked joy. He simply thought Christianity would be more fun.

Frederick Merrick's diary resonates with the same quandary. Merrick itinerated throughout central Ohio before serving at Ohio Wesleyan University in a variety of capacities. On Dec. 28, 1844 he admitted, "I am at some loss what to say respecting my experience for the last few days. Something of a cloud has been resting upon my mind." Merrick attributed this to the fact that he failed to exercise "self-denial" on one day, and to "physical depression." He recognized that he had "been laboring probably a little

---

<sup>37</sup>Daniel Hitt, Letters (United Methodist Archives Center, Ohio Wesleyan University, Delaware, Ohio), typescript, No. 222, page 110.

beyond my strength." He concluded that God could very well be "chiding and chastening" him. Merrick resolved to "submit as an obedient and loving child. Yea, I will trust in him, though he slay me, for he doeth all things well."<sup>38</sup>

Sanctification proved a difficult subject for many itinerants because they often were experiencing the same longings for a deeper spiritual commitment that they hoped to awaken in others. For example, though R. H. Crane was wary of holiness, he admits that his spiritual life had been a dissatisfying cycle of sin and repentance--i.e. he was seeking the very work he doubted. John Stewart is another case in point. He entered the ministry 27 years after his conversion. Stewart admits that he "labored more than fifteen years in great weakness, and had some success in my efforts to lead souls to Christ: yet how to lead these on in the divine life, was exceedingly difficult to me." He experienced sanctification in 1846 after preaching (not hearing) a sermon from Matthew 5:48--"Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect."<sup>39</sup>

Two additional Merrick diary entries speak to this issue as well.

"Several remarkably clear instances of providential guidance have occurred in my experience within a few weeks past. Oh what am I that the Lord should consider to notice me? I think I have been growing in grace since my last date. I have had considerable enjoyment and I believe I can truly say, *in God*, he has become the center and source of my bliss as I never before realized him to be. At the same time, I have been made

---

<sup>38</sup>Frederick Merrick, Diary, United Methodist Archives Center, Ohio Wesleyan University, Delaware, Ohio.

<sup>39</sup>Palmer, *Pioneer Experiences*, 232.

to feel my weakness and many infirmities. I believe God is permitting me to be tempted in various ways as I am able to bear the trial that these hidden things--these weak points--may be brought to light that I may be made more sensible of my own nothingness and led to seek more earnestly for divine aid. Oh Lord strengthen me, enlighten and renew until I shall "all thy fullness know." (January 17, 1845)

"How necessary to watch and pray continually and to be constantly employed in *doing the will of God*. Notwithstanding my oft repeated vows, I am sensible of some neglect in these respects, especially for a few days past. As a consequence of this, my faith is not as strong, my love as ardent, or my joy as full, as at some other times. Oh lord I cast myself upon thy mercy, thy hope, and thy word. Oh quicken me according to thy word for I am thy servant. I am thine by sacrifice. . . . the settled purpose of my heart is to be the Lord's and *wholly* his." (February 4, 1845)

For Merrick, the choice was clear: he must completely surrender to God's will or be locked into an endless cycle of spiritual irregularity. He need not lose hope entirely, but neither could he live completely without such a commitment. Finally, success in ministry further complicated the issue; for many itinerants, a permanent condition of submissive dependency was their greatest trial.

### **Itinerant Types**

The antebellum religious market place necessitated an athleticism in ministry. In as much as Midwestern Methodist itinerants were required to master certain common skills, itinerants were innovators. One of the principal means at an itinerant's disposal was altering how he pursued his various charges. In the process of preaching on salvation and Christian living, many itinerants appropriated one or more of the

following types: sojourner, patriarch, pioneer, mystic, or showman. When rescued from shadows of Peter Cartwright and James B. Finley, these men reveal an interesting dimension of nineteenth-century Methodism.

### **Sojourner**

William Swayze proudly claimed membership in "a class of transient sojourners."<sup>40</sup> Most itinerants would concur. Yet these ministers were not just aimless wanderers, meandering from one preaching point to another. They defined their lives and ministries as a solitary pilgrimage. Christ's ministry served as their model, but not everyone could accept the sacrifice. After all, "Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head."<sup>41</sup> Leroy Swormstedt advised fellow sojourners to "maintain a noble detachment from this world. We are strangers and pilgrims on earth dwelling in houses of clay."<sup>42</sup> This raises an interesting issue. Though many itinerants were married, helped raise children, and often owned land, sojourners always were temporary residents in this world.

James Watson goes even further. He celebrates the fact that sojourners have no earthly home. Watson believed that itinerants were "seldom fit for anything else." He

---

<sup>40</sup>William Swayze, *Narrative of William Swayze* (Cincinnati: R. P. Thompson, 1839), 199.

<sup>41</sup>Matthew 8:20.

<sup>42</sup>Swormstedt Papers, Ohio Historical Society.

continues that when circumstances force one from active ministry, "he becomes like a caged lion, restless to move forward again in this homeless mode of life." Yet there is a compelling factor, what Watson terms a "species . . . of holy magic," which invariably draws one back into service. "The preacher who has been once active in the itinerant field, is always panting, even under the greatest embarrassments, superannuation, or what not, to shoulder his crutch, and fight his battles over again."<sup>43</sup> Sojourning provided itinerants with purpose (and occasionally prominence). Yet itinerants would be quick to add that they never chose sojourning; God called them to it.

Like many itinerants, John Strange incorporated his sojourner status into his preaching. His ministry in Ohio was thriving. A veteran of thirteen years and highly esteemed by his colleagues, in 1824 Strange purposely forfeited his popularity and relocated in south-eastern Indiana. In one of his first sermons there he addressed the congregation: "Brethren and fellow-citizens, I am a stranger to you all. I have come here from a distance to enjoy in this quiet grove the precious privileges of social intercourse and Christian fellowship and worship."<sup>44</sup> Despite this posturing, Strange's reputation was based, in part, on his sojourner status. Remaining in one location too long would undermine his ministry and, subsequently, his image (of course, the opposite

---

<sup>43</sup>One wonders if itinerants would endure deprivation and "embarrassment" without the application of this "holy magic"? J. V. Watson, *Tales and Takings, Sketches and Incidents* (New York: Carlton and Porter, 1856), 378.

<sup>44</sup>Smith, *Reminiscences of Early Methodism in Indiana*, 27.



might have been even more important). Moreover, even though he moved "west," relinquishing an established career, he was never all that far from Cincinnati--the hub of Midwestern urban life.<sup>45</sup>

Sojourning, then, was rooted in a self-imposed exile, a forced separation from the world; yet the purpose of sojourning required itinerants to engage the world from which they were exiled in order to reclaim it and thereby inaugurate the New Jerusalem. F. C. Holliday notes that "when [Allen Wiley] joined the Methodists he well knew that his course would subject him to much reproach, which, however, as it is frequently the case, was the very thing that he needed, as it cut him off from the world, and brought him into close intercourse with the people of God."<sup>46</sup> Thomas Eddy made a similar

---

<sup>45</sup>W. W. Hibben recalls Strange's "charm-power:" "The people gathered to hear him by thousands, and he made them laugh and cry, as if they had been but titular subjects, incapable of resistance. All loved him with an ardency which knew no limit, and they consequently listened to his preaching, as if he had been an apostle. No man with a purer spirit, or a greater self-sacrificing zeal, has ever been known among the ministers of the State. *This world was not his home*. Heaven was alone the song of his soul, and the only objective point of all his expectations." Hibben, *Rev. James Havens*, 221, my emphasis.

<sup>46</sup>Holliday, *Life and Times of Rev. Allen Wiley* (Cincinnati: Swormstedt and Poe, 1853), 26. While Strange exudes confidence, for many itinerants, sojourning also entailed isolation, stress, and at times, deep depression. James Havens bounced from one extreme to the other. While regarded as a signal force of Methodism in Indiana, he "frequently felt the darkness of his own surroundings, when there was scarcely a star light upon his path." William I. Fee was another frequent passenger on this emotional roller coaster. A group of unruly Kentuckians pressed Fee to the breaking point when they crossed the Ohio River specifically to disrupt his 1842 camp meeting at Neville, Ohio. Ignoring his charge to convert these infidels, Fee desperately pleaded for order: "I am young, and a stranger here, and alone almost." Oddly enough, his appeal worked.

point in an 1845 letter to his fiancée. "Were I called to be a wanderer over earth, to forsake home, friends, and all the sweet endearments of relationship, to go and proclaim some heartless philosophy, I would say the sacrifice is too great. But to preach Jesus, I feel I have made no sacrifice. I yield God his right, glad that I myself am his."<sup>47</sup> Likewise, John Strange 'bade farewell to worldly prospects, ease, and the pleasures of home" when he accepted his call to itinerant ministry. William Smith notes that "having once shoved off from the shore, he never looked back to the day of his death. For twenty-two years he was a houseless, homeless wanderer, preaching Jesus and the resurrection wherever he went."<sup>48</sup> In short, Sojourners found rest in motion.

### **Patriarch**

A patriarch sired spiritual children; his ministry was one of surrogate fatherhood. Philip Gatch is one of the clearest examples of this type. John McLean recalls hearing Gatch preach during one session of the Cleremont (County, Ohio) Court

---

Hibben, *Rev. James Havens*, 56; William I Fee, *Bringing in the Sheaves: Gleanings from Harvest Fields in Ohio, Kentucky, and West Virginia* (Cincinnati: Cranston and Curts, 1896), 53-54. See also Fee, 64, 189-190, 193.

<sup>47</sup>Letter from T. Eddy to Anna White dated January 13, 1845. Sims, *The Life of Rev. Thomas M. Eddy*, 125.

<sup>48</sup>In fact, one patron gave Strange title to a quarter section of land; Strange found he must return it because it robbed him of his joy at being homeless. He did eventually accept a free lot and furnished home from friends, but only after he superannuated. William C. Smith, *Indiana Miscellany* (Cincinnati: Poe and Hitchcock, 1867), 149, 152-153.

of Common Pleas. Gatch preached with equal measures of earnestness and simplicity.

"He talked to the people as a patriarch would speak to his children. His language was so plain that a child could understand him; and his attitude, leaning toward them with uplifted hands, was so engaging as to rivet the attention of all who heard him." McLean "thought at the time it was more like apostolic preaching than [he] had ever before witnessed."<sup>49</sup>

James Havens frequently employed the patriarch type to great success. But Havens adds a second dimension. Rather than emphasizing his role as father of the newly converted, he incorporates his own status as a parent into salvation appeals. Once he admonished a young man as follows: "I am the father of eight boys . . . and I love them as a father loves his children. I have seen the company you have been in tonight, and witnessed the wicked practices into which they are leading you." Havens further intoned, "You are a respectable looking man, and doubtless have good and pious parents who pray for you every day of their lives. How do you think . . . they

---

<sup>49</sup>John McLean, *Sketch of Rev. Philip Gatch*, (Cincinnati: Swormstedt and Poe, 1854), 179-180. Gatch personifies this type even though he was not an official itinerant. His ministry, though, extends well beyond the bounds of local preacher. While most local preachers only ministered to their home congregations, Gatch was something of a "traveling" local preacher. In fact McLean's passage illustrates the point. He frequently held services while the Court was in session (he served as an Associate Justice of the Court for twenty-one years, 1803-1823). As late as 1818, a circuit rider visited the Methodists in Milford, Ohio just once every four weeks; though 67 years old, Gatch filled the gap by preaching regularly. Elizabeth Connor, *Methodist Trail Blazer: Philip Gatch, 1751-1834* (Rutland, VT: Academy Books, 1970), 227-229.

would feel if they knew the company you have been keeping to-night?" On another occasion, Havens converted a rowdy planning to disrupt his camp meeting by physically cornering the man and verbally reproaching him for dishonoring his parents. Havens not only was able to get the man to sit for the sermon, but to receive a special prayer before the preaching service. He joined the church before the camp meeting closed. This is an intriguing--if unorthodox--technique when one considers the personal nature of salvation in evangelicalism.<sup>50</sup>

A patriarch did not require the sojourner's constant movement; yet he was anything but stationary. In fact the concept of nurturing a spiritual family spanning an entire geographic region requires mobility. On the other hand, a patriarch's ministry

---

<sup>50</sup> *Hibben, Rev. James Havens*, 75, 84. James Quinn also perfected the patriarch type. Quinn played the part of patriarch to successfully bring order to an 1843 camp meeting in Decatur Illinois which was being severely disrupted by rowdies. He claimed that all present knew him as he had traveled the state repeatedly. Moreover, he had stayed in many of their homes.

"I am now an old man, rapidly descending to the grave, and may be addressing you for the last time. If you have any respect for me, or the sacred cause of religion, which I advocate; if you have any respect for the ashes of your pious relatives, or esteem for your pious friends who are living; if you have any regard for your own eternal interest, or respect for yourselves, I pray you never to be guilty of such conduct again; but repent of all your sins, and pray God to pardon you."

John Wright adds that Quinn "continued his address to those young men with great tenderness, till tears rolled down his furrowed cheeks; pious parents trembled and wept." Even the rowdies were crying. There was order from that moment till the close of the meeting. John F. Wright, *Sketches of the Life and Labors of James Quinn* (Cincinnati: Methodist Book Concern, 1851), 225-226.

flowed out of personal experience--his *own* hearth and home. One wonders if the patriarch type offered married men a formula to vicariously fulfill their responsibilities as husbands and fathers. Itinerating cost these men dearly; it took them away from the people they loved most. Again, not all Methodist itinerants were as resolute and hardy as the circuit rider icon suggests. Despite missing family and friends, these men believed they must leave them behind. Joseph Blackburn's papers provide one of the clearest examples of this sacrifice. His letters resonate with a longing for his wife and daughter. Blackburn married in September 1852 and immediately left for his first appointment. He traveled in Kentucky (representing the MEC) for the next three years. A daughter, Susan, was born in August 1853.

July 18, 1853 Kiddville, KY

Now my dear Betty, do not allow yourself to grieve over our temporary and brief separation. Time will soon fly away and we meet again. Try to keep yourself entirely free from all uneasiness as to future events, trusting in him whose loving kindness never fails. Weeping may, it is true, endure for a night but joy cometh in the morning. Just now I wish I was by your side for my thoughts are coming too fast for my pen--well, soon I shall be.

August 23, 1853, Kiddville, KY

Such changes have taken place since I last sat down to pen you a letter. Are you well? I trust you are. How is our little daughter Susan? You have no idea what an abundance of thrilling emotions are awakened by that word DAUGHTER . . . kiss Susan for me and let us meet morning and evening at a throne of grace. We can do it by there remembering each other.

September 7-8, 1854, Cincinnati, OH

I am aware, my Dear Wife, that you are some troubled and afflicted that

we are so long apart and that providence appears to be opposed to us in that matter just now. You know how I feel on that subject but I make no doubt we have saved our child by so doing [there had been a Scarlet Fever epidemic in Brooklyn].

September 13, 1854, Brooklyn, KY

I am rejoicing that the time is coming on when I shall be permitted to gaze upon you and once more converse with you and to take Susan, the compound ourselves, in my arms. A little more than one week and then I hope to be with you. I am ready to exclaim oh! the misery of a single life. . . . [He closes:] Your Husband, and shall I err in adding still a lover as well, for some cease to be lovers when they become husbands. Not so I, thank God.

September 13, 1854, Brooklyn, KY

How much it would rejoice my heart to hear Susan either laugh or cry. Of course, laughing would be preferred but it strikes me I could stand crying for a while.

Blackburn asks his wife to kiss their daughter for him in virtually every letter. He "located" in the Fall of 1855. One can imagine his anticipation at the prospect of spending time with the family he so loved. Tragically, Susan died shortly after he returned home. Blackburn surely was haunted by the fact that she died essentially not knowing him as her father.<sup>51</sup>

---

<sup>51</sup>Joseph Blackburn Papers, United Methodist Archives Center, Ohio Wesleyan University, Delaware, Ohio. Special thanks to Susan J. Cohen, Curator, for her assistance in finding this collection. Blackburn was not alone in pinning for his family. While on his 1843 missionary tour with Edward Ames, Charles H. Titus records missing his wife. Titus, like others turned to prayer as a means to communicate; he claims to have met her spirit while steaming on Lake St. Clair:

"The bright image of one dearer than life, . . . whom I had left behind, & who was so many, many miles distant, in the quiet home of her sister, that had 'blessed me so oft'--now seemed holding communion with my willing spirit, &

### **Persistent Pioneer**

This minister was anti-urbane, reluctant to accept what others labeled social improvement. Persistent pioneers were suspicious of innovation--especially when such change threatened the moral and ethical framework to which they had dedicated themselves. For example, James Havens' unwillingness to refine his social deportment became a badge of distinction. "He made but little pretention to style or polish . . . but this peculiarity only served to open up before him a wider door of personal influence and power among the people wherever he traveled." Shortly before his death (November 4, 1864), Havens was asked to preach on the profound changes of his lifetime. With "scathing sarcasms, and acute criticisms, on what the world calls progress in the Church," Havens indicted his audience for being pretentious. Methodists were becoming too sophisticated, he argued. Instead of the world conforming to their image, Methodists mirrored the world. Unfortunately for those who might have been convicted of an ostentatious lifestyle, he offered no solutions with which to navigate the

---

Oh! how sacred was that hour! Her thoughts, I knew were of her absent husband. And while her prayers ascended to heaven for my safety, I felt that mine were mingling there with hers, in her behalf. Let the skeptic scoff at the idea of this sacred communion, while he knows not & feels not its holy emotion, but while I live I ask no greater blessing, no higher bliss, that such an intercourse with heaven. Never did I more highly prize the blessings of the gospel, its sweet consolation, its enrapturing joy, & its blissful hope, that at this hour. Sweet, sweet, religion! The greatest, dearest, boon to man." Charles H. Titus, *Into the Old Northwest*. Edited by George P. Clark (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 1994), 83.

changing social milieu.<sup>52</sup>

Two additional itinerants especially fit the persistent pioneer category. Russell Bigelow would have welcomed this label. Alfred Lorrain considers Bigelow's death a blessing of sorts. Lorrain conjectures that Bigelow could not have accepted the changes he and other itinerants faced on a daily basis. "If brother Bigelow had lived till now he would be borne down by the progress of this generation, for he would never yield a piece of old-fashioned Methodism as big as his thumb nail."<sup>53</sup> If Bigelow *probably* would have been considered behind-the-times had he lived into the 1840s and 1850s, there was no doubt concerning Allen Wiley. In 1847, Wiley's own congregation at New Albany, IN, dismissed him (with one year left in his assignment). This was no small feat because Wiley's tenure of service was impressive: 27 of his 30 appointments were in Indiana, 11 years as circuit rider, 14 years as presiding elder, 5 years as stationed preacher, and a delegate to no less than four General Conferences. Though still "effective" mentally, morally, and physically, his parishioners found him obsolete. They desired a "new" preacher.<sup>54</sup>

---

<sup>52</sup>Hibben, *Rev. James Havens*, 81, 95-96.

<sup>53</sup>Lorrain, *The Helm, The Sword, and the Cross: A Life Narrative*, (Cincinnati: Poe and Hitchcock, 1862), 313. It should be noted that many itinerants, such as Thomas Eddy, were considered "friend[s] of progress," having a preaching styles always "up to the times." Sims, *Rev. Thomas Eddy*, 39, 200.

<sup>54</sup>Holliday, *Life and Times of Wiley*, 89, 101-103.



## Mystic

Of the Midwestern itinerants, Richard Hargrave was probably the most familiar with "Tabor heights."<sup>55</sup> Hargrave was known for his "realizing faith"--"a faith that made God a real presence"--and spiritual visions: several times seeing Christ and being personally enveloped in a "bright cloud."<sup>56</sup> After one of these experiences Hargrave accosted a friend on the street and, in a voice trembling with fear, claimed: "I can scarcely endure this weight of glory that is resting upon me, and I have asked the Lord to stay his hand, lest I die!"<sup>57</sup>

Nelson Greene, a friend and fellow itinerant, recalls one instance when Hargrave preached from 2 Corinthians 5:7: ("For we walk by faith, not by sight"). Greene insisted that the sermon "was one of the most powerful that I had ever heard, or have heard since then." To Greene, Hargrave "seemed to be walking by faith beyond earthly visions, among the spiritual things of God, and looking upon the unnumbered multitudes who had been redeemed from earth, as they walked the golden streets and gathered about the throne and Him who sat thereon." Greene was not alone in his assessment. "The audience [was] in sympathy with the preacher, and [was] carried to a

---

<sup>55</sup> According to Christian custom, Mt. Tabor is the place of Jesus' transfiguration.

<sup>56</sup> William P. Hargrave, *Sacred Poems of Rev. Richard Hargrave, D.D. with a Biography of Himself, and Biographical Sketches of Some of His Coadjutors* (Cincinnati: Cranston and Stowe, 1890), 135, 104.

<sup>57</sup> Hargrave, *Sacred Poems*, 113.

sublime height of grandeur and of power, where all were overwhelmed by the weight of glory which settled upon them! Such was the immediate effect of the sermon that, when it closed, some of the believers felt like Peter on the Mount of Transfiguration, . . . Some were unable to move from their seats."<sup>58</sup> A. A. Gee claimed that Hargrave was "a heated furnace through which the gospel flowed in molten streams, fusing the hearts of his hearers."<sup>59</sup>

Ben Boaz gives an intriguing account of a mystical experience. One evening he "fell into a singular nervous affection, and experienced mental sensations" which defied rational explanation. That night, while looking at the stars, he became captivated by Venus. More than admiring its brightness, he was gripped with "a strange, wild sensation." Unable to control himself, he ran to the wooded grove on the outskirts of town. He claims to have been in a state of "ecstasy, almost rapture; a kind of transport." Boaz states that his soul literally swelled: "filling boundless space, grasping immensity, and compassing the very outposts of creation."

I imagined it something that would directly pass off; in that however, I was mistaken; the excitement increased, my thoughts constantly grew wilder, and my feelings more extatic. I passed the whole night alone in the grove, wandering to and fro, and occasionally uttering impromptu poetry.

Boaz's consciousness was partially restored the following morning. He assumed these

---

<sup>58</sup>Hargrave, *Sacred Poems*, 121-122.

<sup>59</sup>Hargrave, *Sacred Poems*, 133.

strange sensations would be temporary. Boaz slipped into a deep depression; he labored even to breathe. As this "dismal gloom gathered upon the sky of [his] mind, [Boaz] grew exceedingly unhappy." Soon the wild emotions returned. He recalls that "singular theories came up before me, and wonderful visions full of fantastical imaginings, floated through my feverish brain. When night came on again my wildness and strangeness of feeling returned; and thus I long continued to be alternately elated and depressed."<sup>60</sup>

Boaz suffered two consequences from this encounter: an involuntarily subordination to his emotions and restlessness. He acknowledges "a roving spirit at length came upon me." He began to wander. He resigned from his church in Indianapolis and left for what became a two-year journey. He preached and lectured in Tennessee, Alabama, Louisiana, and pastored for one year in Lexington, Kentucky. He then briefly taught at Franklin College (a Baptist school) and Indiana Asbury before moving on to Iowa. He eventually settled in Cincinnati, studied law and passed his bar exam, but found no fulfillment in this either. Believing himself unsuited for manual labor, and running out of career options, he determined to write a book (*Winged Chariot*).

Alfred Lorrain experienced two mystical encounters shortly after conversion. The first stemmed from his meditating on the nativity. In this experience he was

---

<sup>60</sup>Ben Boaz, *The Winged Chariot: An Allegory* (Cincinnati: A.B. Volney, 1858), 206, ff. All material on Boaz taken from this passage.

"overwhelmed with a most unearthly transport of joy and peace." The other episode occurred just after retiring to bed one evening. He records the incident with apparent fondness.

It seemed as if a flock of happy and invisible spirits were all around me and over me. I was as sensible of their presence as if I had seen them with my eyes, or touched them with my hands, and this was accompanied with a bliss that was all celestial. Then there came to my mind with a definition and clearness that I had never felt before, and may add, have never fully realized since--"*A joy unspeakable and full of glory.*" And I said, "Lord, what is this?" And there came a voice to my soul--bear with me reader--a voice that did not traverse my auditory nerve, and which my ear had nothing to do with--a voice as clear and as distinct to my soul as that of earthly sound to my ear--"The Spirit of the Lord, bearing witness with your spirit, that you are a child of God." Some will say, "enthusiasm!" Well, if it is found so at the last, it has ever been my safeguard from disbelief in the spiritual world. It has established in me the doctrine--not independent of the Scriptures--that the soul possess senses of itself, to which our outward senses are only mediums--mediums between the outward world and the inner man. But God who is a pure and unmixed spirit, can operate on our inward senses, independently of our bodily organs.<sup>61</sup>

Lorrain's mystical encounters occurred very early in his Christian life.<sup>62</sup> They whetted

---

<sup>61</sup>Lorrain, *The Helm, The Sword, and the Cross*, 184-185.

<sup>62</sup>The same was true for Elijah H. Pilcher. Pilcher had his one and only mystical experience while singing a hymn at an 1833 prayer meeting in Monroe, MI (he was just 23 years old and in his fourth year of ministry).

"While the melody filled the room he had such a realization of the presence of [Christ's] sacrifice for him that it was overwhelming. If he had any doubts of the real sacrifice of Christ Jesus for a guilty world before, they would have been dispelled then. He saw Jesus as He hung on the cross, bleeding as clearly as if He had been there present with him. He did not lose his consciousness of surrounding objects, but he saw Jesus the Crucified there among the homely surroundings of that pioneer home. The glimpse at the glory of the Divinity

his spiritual appetite, and left him craving more of the same. Much to his chagrin, Lorrain sought in vain for comparable experiences.

Itinerants perceived their mystical experiences as spiritual milestones, benchmarks of faith, and "safeguards from disbelief." This was even more the case for Boaz; when the world turned against him, he submitted his mystical encounters as divine seals authenticating both his salvation and ministry. Yet these experiences raise the issue of insincerity. Was Boaz's experience less genuine because it lacks the evangelical tenor of Lorrain or Hargrave? While further study is needed to clarify the role of the "sensational" in evangelical culture, it appears that mystical encounters were one means by which believers could circumvent restrictive social conventions. How these experiences were sanctioned by the Church and/or fellow believers is a key issue to explore.

### **Showman**

The showman constitutes a final ministry style or type. Not all itinerants successfully negotiated the challenge they presented themselves as ministers. The ideal itinerant strove to be meek, not in the sense of lacking will or stamina, but submissive and yielding. In attempting to emulate this example, some ministries degenerated into

---

vouchsafed him on this occasion sweetened, strengthened, and rounded out his Christian life to the full" James E. Pilcher, ed. *Life and Labors of Elijah H. Pilcher* (New York: Hunt & Eaton, 1892), 79-80.

obsequious oblivion;<sup>63</sup> others became wholesale quests for fame. Itinerants were forced to walk a fine line. Preaching without animation was destined to be fruitless; yet to preach with flair could easily elicit censure as self-seeking theatrics. A. D. Field notes that "too much 'acting' in the pulpit is a serious fault; but now and then, when the wave of religious feeling is in tune, a little of the dramatic is in place."<sup>64</sup>

Yet theatrics were an integral weapon in the itinerant's arsenal. James Watson recalled grand entrances in which itinerants came to service in a processional.<sup>65</sup> Richard Hargrave was noted for wearing a red bandanna around his head (which he removed just prior to preaching) when he felt he had a powerful sermon in store.<sup>66</sup>

---

<sup>63</sup>Samuel Bright pleads in his diary, "Lord, *save*, me from a man-fearing spirit" after being embarrassed to preach before his presiding elder at quarterly conference (December 27, 1848, Samuel Bright Diary, United Methodist Archives Center, Ohio Wesleyan University, Delaware, Ohio). Though anything but relegated to a position of obscurity, John Hull suffered from the same syndrome. He faced "gentlemen of no ordinary talent, lawyers, ministers, President and professors of Asbury University" every time he preached. Hull demonstrates that the pressure to perform often correlates to the quality of preaching assignment (Autobiography of John Hull, Indiana Historical Society, Indianapolis, Indiana, p. 7).

<sup>64</sup>He adds that "Peter Borein [who traveled in Illinois from 1832 to 1839] was a born dramatist; but he held his power in reasonable check." A. D. Field, *Worthies and Workers, both Ministers and Laymen, of the Rock River Conference*, (Cincinnati: Crantson and Curts, 1896), 134.

<sup>65</sup>He notes one such instance: "The church is nearly filled to its utmost capacity. The old fathers, a little hard of hearing, take their seats directly under the pulpit. The local preachers cluster about it, but no one presumes to enter it. But yonder comes the elder, with the senior and junior preachers in his train." Watson, *Tales and Takings*, 371.

<sup>66</sup>Hargrave, *Sacred Poems*, 100.

William Christie's trademark was to swing his arms above his head in a circular motion when reaching full-stride in his preaching.<sup>67</sup>

Crying was one of the more interesting theatrical devices. John Collins "never preached without shedding many tears . . . and he almost always had a weeping congregation." These tears helped make his sermons "irresistible."<sup>68</sup> But in this category Silas Bolles literally won the prize. Bolles joined the Rock River Conference (Illinois) in 1840. Like Collins, he was a "weeping preacher," and his congregations modeled his behavior. According to A.D. Field, one lawyer claimed he would give five dollars to any preacher who could make him cry. Shortly afterwards he attended a funeral which Bolles officiated. "Remembering his sneer, he nerved himself against the preacher's influence; but in twenty minutes Ed Harvey sat with the tears trickling down his cheeks. After service, he stepped up to the preacher, and said, 'Mr. Bolles, I wish to present you with five dollars.' Brother Bolles thanked him kindly, and took the gift as a special providence, for he had not sufficient money to pay his way back by stage to

---

<sup>67</sup>Maxwell Pierson Gaddis, *Foot-Prints of an Itinerant*, (Cincinnati: The Methodist Book Concern, 1855), 90.

<sup>68</sup>[John Wright], *A Sketch of the life of Rev. John Collins, late of the Ohio Conference*, (Cincinnati: Swormstedt and Poe, 1849), 44-45. John Stewart adds that when Collins "would throw his massive head to one side, and begin to shrug his right shoulder, then those who were acquainted with him expected to hear some of his overwhelming bursts of eloquence" (John Stewart, *Highways and Hedges: Fifty Years of Western Methodism* [Cincinnati: Hitchcock and Walden, 1872], 157).

the city."<sup>69</sup>

By far, "death sermons" were the most compelling theatrical device. On at least one occasion, William Gaddis took 1 Samuel 20:3 as his text: "there is but a step between me and death."<sup>70</sup> James Quinn concluded one sermon with the following: "Beloved brethren, I have delivered to you my last message; for 'time is shaking me by the hand,' and death is near."<sup>71</sup> Death sermons were more than affectionate goodbyes, they were coveted preaching experiences of extraordinary power and "liberty." The week before he died, Moses Crume "pointed a deeply-interested congregation to the Lamb of God as the only hope of a perishing world; and it was remarked by his friends who had long sat under his ministry that he was more heavenly and spiritual than usual."<sup>72</sup> Richard Hargrave preached more than one death sermon. He began one such message "feeling that it was [his] last, and so said to the congregation." Yet he claims to have "never preached with such ease and power." He adds, "there seemed to

---

<sup>69</sup>Field, *Worthies and Workers*, 199-200.

<sup>70</sup>A.D. Field, *Memorials of Methodism in the Bounds of the Rock River Conference*, (Cincinnati: Cranston and Stowe, 1886), 209.

<sup>71</sup>*Sermons on Miscellaneous Subjects, by the Bishops of the Methodist Episcopal Church, and the Senior Preachers of the Ohio and North Ohio Conferences*, (Cincinnati: Methodist Book Concern, 1847), 133.

<sup>72</sup>Crume died April 1, 1839 at Oxford, Ohio. He was a member of the Ohio Conference and had preached in Miami region since moving to Ohio in 1805. Maxwell P. Gaddis, *Last Words and Old-Time Memories* (New York: Phillips and Hunt, 1882), 37.



be a halo of glory about me, and I was so happy!" He concluded abruptly, "Now I am done, and want to go out home and die."<sup>73</sup>

Two additional itinerants deserve particular attention for their death sermons. In 1831, John Strange was dying of "pulmonary consumption." At a camp meeting that summer, preaching what everyone thought would be his final sermon, he captivated his audience. Though "pale and emaciated" he was "heavenly in appearance." "Everything conspired to the solemnity of that occasion; the still grove, the somber clouds, the hymn, the text, and, above all, the dying minister. The ground on which we stood was holy." His text was Rev. 7:14<sup>74</sup>. J. C. Smith claims to have never seen "a congregation so solemn, so awe-struck." Strange knew his trade: measuring the both the moment and his message, he switched from preaching to participating in his sermon.

Just then, when every heart was full and every eye and face was bathed in tears, he drew himself up to one of his loftiest attitudes and stood in solemn silence for a moment, then said, in a voice and manner that can never be forgotten: "Farewell, world, I leave you in the hand of the Redeemer. Farewell, beloved ministers. Farewell, brethren all; I shall soon be with the blood-washed on that shining shore. Very soon I shall lift these feet, *all dripping*, from the waters of Jordan and set them on the golden streets. Soon I shall be with Paul and John, with Pollycarp and Wesley, and Whitfield, and all the martyrs and sufferers for the testimony of Jesus. But who are *these*? There stands one in the midst of the throne,

---

<sup>73</sup>Hargrave, *Sacred Poems*, 169.

<sup>74</sup>[One of the "elders" had asked the Revelator, "These in white robes--who are they and where did they come from." And I said unto him, Sir, thou knowest. And he said to me, These are they which came out of the great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.

brighter than all. It is the Lamb in his glory; he becks and bids me come." Then stepping forward a little and waving his hand, he said: "Get out of my light, ye crowding multitudes; I must see Jesus, I must take him in my arms."

At this point Strange fell backwards into the arms of a nearby minister. The effect was electric. Smith recalled that "what followed beggars description. The ministers in the stand were bathed in tears and most of them had fallen flat on the floor. Multitudes in the audience lay as dead men, overpowered with intense emotion. Some stood in silence, awe-struck; some shouted for joy, and all wept."<sup>75</sup> Did Strange attempt to die, or to resign his spirit? Was this something like spiritual suicide? He had made it known he preferred to "go directly from the pulpit to the tomb." Was this, as one known for incorporating drama into his ministry, to be his last and greatest act? Moreover, what about the congregation? The picture of hundreds of individuals prostrate on the ground could signify their interest in following Strange to Jordan's "other side." Or were they acting out his death for him? No doubt Strange was disappointed to find himself very much alive at the end of his message.<sup>76</sup>

John McLean records a comparable experience concerning Philip Gatch. The congregation at an Ohio camp meeting sensed something unique about Gatch. Though neither the date nor place of this meeting have been preserved, eye-witness accounts

---

<sup>75</sup>Smith, *Reminiscences*, 42-44.

<sup>76</sup>Strange does a similar routine latter that year at the annual Conference. See Smith, *Reminiscences*, 47-50.

exist. Benjamin Westlake recalls that Gatch appeared as though "he did not belong to this generation. It was as the dead arising to speak to the living, and such seemed to be the impression produced upon the assembly." Gatch was given a special empowerment and delivered a remarkable sermon. Westlake concludes "although there were the whitened locks, the furrowed cheek, the wrinkled brow, the wreck of a trembling frame, under the weight of many years, yet that morning's exercises seemed to impart to him newness of life and a vigor of effort unknown to him in my earlier acquaintance." Another observer recalls that "before the sermon was closed the congregation were on their feet, and were drawn round the stand in a solid body; that saint and sinner were deeply affected, while the flow of tears was great."<sup>77</sup> Again, the congregation played an intriguing role in receiving the death sermon. Through these sermons itinerants could rise to new heights, with their congregations close behind. Stephen R. Beggs notes that regardless of what motivated these sermons, they were an important vehicle for worship. He witnessed a death sermon by Peter Borein in 1838 and concluded: "Who shall dare say that God in that hour did not permit his soul to catch some strain of that heavenly music, in which he was soon to join?"<sup>78</sup>

Itinerant theatrics were not perceived as necessarily detrimental to Methodism.

---

<sup>77</sup>McLean, *Sketch of Rev. Philip Gatch*, 134-135.

<sup>78</sup>Beggs, *Pages from the Early History of the West and North-West*, (Cincinnati: Methodist Book Concern, 1868), 179.

In fact, laity and clergy alike argued that such performances proved of divine origin and edified those who witnessed them. Yet for some itinerants, such displays were nothing short of crass attempts to manipulate an audience. Ezra Lathrop argues that no one can preach a great sermon at every service. He maintains that, more often than not, preachers lacked inspiration and congregations the patience (allowing the minister to warm up to his subject) for great preaching. Lathrop contends that unless these two elements are divinely synchronized, great preaching would only occur on/at great occasions.<sup>79</sup> This raises an interesting question. If mediocre sermons were the norm, how could itinerants regularly enter the pulpit with any measure of confidence? After all, these men were called by God to do a great work.

While some like Hargrave sought mystical experiences to stimulate their ministry, others took matters into their own hands. Most itinerants report at least one instance when they tried preaching on their own power. Customarily, these services embarrassed the preacher for failing to trust God, and proved fruitless besides. Moreover itinerants found that God blessed their efforts most when they were at their weakest.<sup>80</sup> Yet, on the other hand, some itinerants were surprised to find that they

---

<sup>79</sup>Hargrave, *Sacred Poems*, 141.

<sup>80</sup>For the clearest statement of this, see William I. Fee's remarks to an unnamed but "very distinguished" fellow itinerant following a revival at Williamsburg, Ohio ca. 1844. This minister unsuccessfully attempted to awaken a grandson of Philip Gatch. Yet when Fee spoke, the young man came forward and joined the Church. The distinguished minister was incredulous; he claimed to have preached a good sermon.

preached just fine on their own. Such self-assurance never failed enrage more humble itinerants. John Wright warns that vanity is the hardest obstacle for any minister to overcome, especially "gifted" ones: "A more sickening and disgusting exhibition can nowhere be witnessed, than to see a minister of the Gospel, forgetful of his high duties and holy calling, prostituting the pulpit by preaching himself." Wright continues that a minister "stands between the living and the dead. His mission is of the last importance to man; and he should fill it with singleness of heart. If this be the spirit of the preacher, he cannot fail to be eloquent."<sup>81</sup>

Augustus Eddy was told by long-time itinerant John Meek that his quarterly meeting congregation would not allow him to preach from notes. Eddy hid the notes in his Bible and preached as though giving an extemporaneous sermon. "In this style he went on until the congregation was fired and lifted to more than fever heat." Then, suddenly, Eddy pulled the notes from his Bible, waved them in Meek's face, and boasted: "Ah! Bother Meek, I thought you told me this congregation wouldn't stand notes!" "Yes," retorted the old pioneer, "but your Holy Ghost fire has set your notes

---

He asked Fee what his strength was (meaning what technique did he employ to convict Gatch). Fee replied: "Doctor, next to Christ, it is in my weakness." The minister did not understand Fee's word play. He pressed his point: "You speak at times apparently without preparation, . . . while my preparation is carefully made. I want to know where my weakness is." "[Fee] answered 'It is in your strength' and remarked that God was not likely to bless the ablest sermon if we make an idol out of it. [The eminent "Doctor"] said no more." Fee, *Bringing in the Sheaves*, 118-119.

<sup>81</sup>Wright, *Sketch of the life of Collins*, 55-56.

ablaze!"<sup>82</sup> This behavior almost defies explanation. Just as the preacher has the congregation on the verge of significant spiritual breakthrough, he stops in mid-thought to say "I told you so" to both the veteran and the local people. One wonders who Eddy was serving at that moment? It would be hard to find a more clear cut example of "quenching the Spirit."

Yet Eddy was only half the showman of Alfred Arrington. Albeit briefly, Arrington lived every itinerant's dream. He was transferred to Indiana from Illinois in 1830 at age 24. His gift as a revivalist was immediately evident. At one of his first meetings Arrington converted an entire neighborhood, including several men "generally supposed to be absolutely beyond the power of the gospel." John Smith recalls that "this was the beginning of his fame." Afterwards, conferences and congregations besieged Arrington with invitations to preach. Later that year he agreed to speak at a camp meeting near Greensburg as it was on his way to the Annual Conference at Indianapolis. Arrington was the last to climb the crowded preacher's stand; from this venue he "casually" surveyed the crowd. Smith remembers the performance with a tinge of envy, as one who seemingly witnessed the opposite through many of his own sermons:

During the delivery of the discourse there was no loud shouting, no boisterous applause, no sleeping, no walking about or whispering one

---

<sup>82</sup>Hibben, *Rev. James Havens*, 91-92.

with another, every eye fixed on the speaker, and every ear and every thought was chained in rapt and mute attention. The sermon occupied one hour and three-quarters, and at its close most of the audience were standing upon their feet leaning forward, eagerly gasping for more.<sup>83</sup>

Even the distinguished veteran James Havens was absolutely enthralled.

The following day, Arrington, Havens, and Wiley and set off for Conference.

Once there, the assembly virtually demanded Arrington to preach ("he was eyed with no little interest by all the members"). He spoke to yet another packed house--but this time crowded with his peers, presiding elders, and a Bishop. Undaunted, Arrington selected Job 37:16 for his text.<sup>84</sup> The subject in this passage is not Job, nor his three counselors, but the young and zealous Elihu. Elihu rebukes his elders: Job for self-righteousness of all things, and the other three for allowing Job to out-reason them. In a way, Arrington almost taunted his colleagues, asking them if they had the same boldness and power. Smith adds, "I need only say that the effort was fully up to his best, and he captured the whole Conference."<sup>85</sup> Arrington was then assigned to Vevay

---

<sup>83</sup>Smith, *Reminiscences*, 56.

<sup>84</sup>"Dost thou know the balancing of the clouds, the wondrous works of him which is perfect in knowledge?"

<sup>85</sup>Smith, *Reminiscences*, 58. Such enthusiastic preaching was not uncommon at Annual Conferences. In fact, just two years earlier John Strange delivered a powerful sermon.

"While Strange was preaching, the congregation almost involuntarily arose to their feet, and shouted 'Halleluiah!' till their deafening hosannas almost drowned the voice of the preacher. He was in turn affected by their enthusiasm, and sat down, shouting 'Glory to God in the highest!'" (Beggs, *Pages from the Early*

circuit, which according to Smith, was "one of the best in the State at that time." But within six months he is embroiled in some undescribed controversy. He eventually became a eminent lawyer in Arkansas and Illinois and died a Catholic. Smith mourns the loss; Arrington had gifts which, if properly used, could have guaranteed that he would have been one of the most celebrated itinerants of the nation.<sup>86</sup>

## Conclusion

There is much about Methodist itinerancy that belies the familiar circuit rider image. This stereotype, though historically accurate, masks the substantial diversity of ministry styles or types. For example, by the mid-1830s, with the growth of Methodism in cities, many itinerants seldom if ever rode a horse in connection with their clerical duties. These itinerants were not even circuit riders; they were assigned to fixed

---

*History of the West*, 82).

The difference between Strange and Arrington is that Strange stopped his sermon in deference to the Spirit, whereas Arrington would have pressed on in defiance of the Spirit.

<sup>86</sup>Arrington's case came before the newly created Indiana Conference in October 1832. Allen Wiley, Arrington's Presiding Elder, claims that Arrington "withdrew" after "becoming skeptical." One wonders if this is more euphemism than hard fact; Arrington could very well have been forced out of the ministry. At this conference session, Arrington pleads for forgiveness and seeks restoration of his credentials. The conference twice voted against him. After a third motion, he was received back into the conference--but without his "parchments" and with the stipulation that he not be allowed to "exercise the office of Deacon." Arrington transferred to the Missouri Conference the following year. William Hibben claims that Arrington was "one of the most eloquent preachers in Indiana, and was much admired and flattered, and his fall was due to dizzy head, from too much flattery." William Warren Sweet, *Circuit-Rider Days in Indiana* (Indianapolis: W. K. Stewart Co., 1916), 92-94, 110.



"stations." This chapter argues that itinerants utilized several types of ministry as well as considerable complexity to their preaching.

The core message of salvation and sanctification remained constant. On October 8, 1800 Henry Smith preached the funeral of a three year old boy from the Miami Valley. He took 1 Samuel 12:23 as his text: "Moreover, as for me, God forbid that I should sin against the Lord in ceasing to pray for you; but I will teach you the good and right way." Four years later, John Collins pioneers the work in Cincinnati; he used a sermon on the Great Commission (Mark 16:15) to introduce himself to the people there.<sup>87</sup> But in 1851 when holding a protracted meeting in Mt. Carroll, Illinois, Miles Reed was considered a "hell-fire" preacher for delivering "the most plain and pointed sermons the people had ever listened to."<sup>88</sup> Yet, as has been seen, even these messages of spiritual accountability typically were optimistic. If anything, it appears that Midwesterners change more than Methodism. It is likely that Reed's sermon was considered pointed because sin seldom was so specifically addressed. Whether the people grew less amenable to such calls to holiness needs close study especially in the context of urbanization and the "feminization" of American evangelicalism.

Does the fact that most itinerants sought to produce an "electric effect" diminish

---

<sup>87</sup>Henry Smith, *Recollections and Reflections of an Old Itinerant* (New York: Land and Tippet, 1848), 323; *Sketch of the Life of Collins*, 18.

<sup>88</sup>Field, *Memorials of Methodism*, 329.

their holy office? Does this cast aspersion on how they carried out their duties? I think the answer is a resounding no. Historians might struggle to believe the extraordinary nature of eye witness accounts. Professors of homiletics might question the relevance of physical characteristics in the pulpit. Theologians could easily be troubled by the overt manipulation of divine-human continuum by a professionalizing clergy. The fact remains, success in the itinerant connection was predicated on the ability to preach.

Without minimizing the fact that itinerants must stir emotions, Nathan Bangs cautioned young ministers to feel what they believe and preach what they feel.

Why then, it may be asked, is not every man an orator? The answer is obvious. Some are marred through bashfulness, some by unsuccessful efforts to imitate others, some by following those rules which are not founded in nature; and a multitude are ruined by contracting in their youth awkward gestures, affected habits; while others, to avoid the appearance of enthusiasm, restrain those lofty and ardent feelings which the nature of their subjects is calculated to produce. But *no* man can be eloquent on a subject in which he feels deeply not interested. Hence many are criminally defective in genuine pulpit oratory, because their own hearts are not warmed and inspired with the truths which their lips utter."<sup>89</sup>

While Methodism's institutional success owes as much to laity as clergy, these antebellum itinerants were the driving force which revolutionized the spiritual life of the nation and Protestantism in general.

---

<sup>89</sup>"Letter IX," in Adam Clark, *The Preacher's Manual: Including Clavis Biblica, and Letters To Young Ministers of the Gospel, on the Importance and Method of Study* (New York: Phillips and Hunt, 1834), 87-88.

During a powerful 1845 revival in Salem, Indiana, Thomas Eddy desired one thing above all else: "I pray that I may be made useful. I ask not for the meteor flash of fame. I crave not the evanescent adulation of the world."<sup>90</sup> Joseph Tarkington believed pioneer Methodist preachers "were resolute, fearless men, full of power and the Holy Ghost . . . [who] made the breach in the wall of Satan."<sup>91</sup> Perhaps Tarkington's bias (himself an itinerant) causes him to inflate the accomplishment, but he makes a valid point. Regardless of their gifts or graces, Methodist itinerants sought to be useful. Even most "showmen" desired to proclaim the Gospel effectively. In fact, often the best showman delivered the most "plain" sermons.

Most itinerants, according to Elwell Crissey, were after the flock and not the fleece.<sup>92</sup> This was a welcome metaphor within the itinerant community. It signified that they were becoming more Christ-like, modeling their ministries on the one who claimed to be "the good shepherd" (John 10:14).<sup>93</sup> Yet no minister could truly reap the

---

<sup>90</sup>Letter to his wife Anna dated March 1, 1845. Sims, *Life of Rev. Thomas Eddy*, 128.

<sup>91</sup>Joseph Tarkington, *Autobiography of Rev. Joseph Tarkington*, With an Introduction by Rev. T. A. Goodwin (Cincinnati: Curts and Jennings, 1899), 86.

<sup>92</sup>Crissey, *Horse Preacher*, np.

<sup>93</sup>Sheep and shepherd metaphors abound in the literature. For example, at an 1825 camp meeting in Orange County, Indiana, Billy Cravens responded to Richard Hargrave's message on the divinity of Christ by shouting: "That's right, Hargrave; the sheep will eat that!" Hargrave, *Sacred Poems*, 80.

whitened fields without first experiencing a personal--and continuous--work of grace. Edmund S. Janes made this point to all aspiring preachers in 1847: ". . . a man fully imbued with the constraining love of Christ, himself deeply experienced in the things of God, given to prayer, and strong in faith, may labor with astonishing success in winning souls to Christ." As Methodism transitioned from frontier faith to mainstream religion, qualifications for ministry remained constant. Janes adds that exemplary preachers were "efficient and useful, not by their 'might' and 'power,' their learning, and eloquence, and popular regard, but by the Spirit of God."<sup>94</sup> Of course, this charge was not limited to clergy; the emerging evangelical culture licensed all believers to propagate the gospel.

The evolution of the Methodist Episcopal Church from sect to the most powerful denomination in the country is well documented. A less known facet of antebellum religious history is how itinerants were simultaneously victims and agents of this institutionalization: as they assumed greater control over church affairs they became further removed from the heart-felt religious practice which defined Methodism early in the century. How such change altered itinerant ministry types calls for additional study. In reconsidering itinerating in the antebellum Midwest, it would appear that

---

<sup>94</sup> *Sermons on Miscellaneous Subjects, by the Bishops of the Methodist Episcopal Church, and the Senior Preachers of the Ohio and North Ohio Conferences*, (Cincinnati: Methodist Book Concern, 1847), 106.

*where* one served was secondary to *how* one served. Yet place did effect ministry. Did all five ministry types exist outside the Midwest, or did the region allow unique opportunity for experimentation and development of ministry styles? What is certain is that Methodist itinerants do not fit a single mold, let alone the static image of the circuit rider. Pioneer Ohio itinerant James Quinn, rather than Cartwright or Finley, better reflects the commonalities within the Midwestern itinerant core. Though preaching was an exhausting (and at times vexing) vocation with only intermittent spiritual peaks, Quinn excelled as an itinerant. "His oratory was not the result of a studied art, but of nature inspired by grace, leaving a conviction that he was not only one of nature's noblemen, with a clear head and a warm heart, but that he was an able minister of the New Testament, commissioned from Heaven as an ambassador of Christ, beseeching sinners to be reconciled to him."<sup>95</sup> The prospect of such a eulogy propelled many itinerants from one preaching point to the next.

In sum, this chapter has explored how Midwestern itinerants, nearly all of whom truly sought to be used by God, and who, despite the rhetoric of fraternity and fellowship, were locked into a continuous cycle of "one-ups manship." One of the

---

<sup>95</sup>Quinn helped pioneer the work in Ohio. Wright, *Sketches of the Life and Labors of James Quinn*, 113-114. Much the same could be said for William Christie. Thomas Morris Asbury considered Christie "rich in figure, fluent in speech, chaste in language, strong in argument, and mighty in Scriptures, he seldom failed to enchain the attention and affect the hearts of the multitudes that thronged to his ministry" (Morris, *Miscellany*, 194).

paradoxes of antebellum itinerancy is that these ministers were not simply Christian chameleons. Across the region, the people loved these men. Itinerants' mementos became family heirlooms. To be given a Bible or saddle bag was an honor of the highest order. Throughout the antebellum period, itinerants faced mounting pressure to preach effectively. Ironically, they engineered much of this tension. These "soldiers of the Lord" were handicapped by a limited arsenal--they had a restricted number of stories from which to preach in a predominantly oral culture. Itinerants, of necessity, sought innovative packaging for familiar presentations. When such ingenuity eluded them, many resorted to altering themselves rather than their message.

## **"Gazing into the Land of Glory":**

### **Reflections on Methodist Death-Bed Scenes"**

Clergymen were among the busiest people in the nation during the nineteenth century. While this was especially true for the Methodist itinerants in rural and frontier "communities," it also applies, in large measure, to local preachers and stationed ministers.<sup>1</sup> Each minister juggled an assortment of responsibilities: preaching sermons, teaching catechism classes, holding quarterly meetings, selling denominational literature, arbitrating church trials, as well as performing various priestly rites: viz. baptisms, marriages, and funerals. In between, clergymen were expected to find time for personal study, a rich family life, and a side income to bolster the famously inadequate salary system. Compounding these sundry duties, ministers were necessarily drawn into a variety of dialogues: clergy to clergy (jockeying for position within the institution), clergy to congregation (credentialed representative to laity), and clergy to individuals believers within a congregation (Christian to Christian). Scholars have considered the first two exchanges, but the third remains largely unexplored.

The (mis)perception of Methodism as an anti-intellectual and emotionally

---

<sup>1</sup>Though not assigned to formal circuits, local preachers often provided the stability essential to establishing permanent congregations; stationed ministers, freed from a grueling travel regimen, were expected to occupy themselves in an equally taxing schedule of home visitation.

charged frontier faith has undergone a long-needed rethinking in the last decade.<sup>2</sup>

Recent studies illustrate how the Methodist Episcopal Church, as an institution, was radically transformed in its first century (1784-1884). However, death-bed experiences indicate denominational life at the congregational level was a stark contrast; here consistency, not change, was the defining attribute. Throughout the antebellum period

---

<sup>2</sup>John H. Wigger's "Taking Heaven by Storm: Enthusiasm and Early American Methodism, 1770-1820," deserves special mention. Building on the work of Nathan Hatch and Jonathan Butler, Wigger adds a welcome dimension. Beyond acknowledging the role of enthusiasm in antebellum Methodism, Wigger indicates how race, class, and gender converged in Methodist experience(s). Yet, with one exception, Wigger seems reluctant to analyze the "enthusiasm" he argues was one of the defining attributes of Methodist religious practice. Wigger emphasizes how "outsiders" used faith to navigate the social and economic milieu. Early American Methodists seemingly were "taking heaven by storm." But how these same believers sought, and perceived themselves to have encountered, the divine is equally (if not more) engaging than either their explosive numerical growth or the opportunities "hot house" denominationalism provided for improving social status. In focusing on exclusivity, Wigger misses an significant commonality. Enthusiastic experience transcends his analytic frame. Wigger argues that the cut-throat competition characteristic of the antebellum religious free market, was in part fueled by ministers rush to tap a latent mysticism. For clergymen, incorporating folk religion was essential to job security. This oversimplifies Wigger's position, yet it illustrates the implicit presumption of his article--and the historiography in general. Too many historians approach the primary literature with the premise that religion, whether enthusiastic or not, is predicated on coercion at worst and manipulation at best. Historians of American religion seem constrained by an implicit reluctance to seriously consider the more curious elements of nineteenth-century evangelicalism. While I am hardly bold enough to claim to know what these phenomena "mean," the sources speak at length as to what they meant to those who experienced them. Death-bed scenes are but one lens with which to view such experiences. Wigger, "Taking Heaven by Storm: Enthusiasm and Early American Methodism, 1770-1820," *The Journal of The Early Republic* 14 (Summer 1994): 167-194.



(and possibly into the 1880s), grass roots Methodism was decidedly enthusiastic, at times mystical, and always seeking tangible means to articulate the spiritual encounters of everyday religious practice.

To assert the centrality of death to nineteenth-century Methodism is not to insinuate that Methodists were morbid. To be sure, there doubtless were many Methodists who did not share this fascination with death. Rather, this essay argues for a distinct correlation between those who most energetically practiced "heart-felt" religion and those steeped in a mystique of death. Examining this aspect of Methodism helps explain both the relationship between clergy and their congregations, as well as the continuity of religious practice at the local level. Ironically, the very people who boasted "new life" and were driven by an insatiable need to win others to the same, were engrossed with death. Using Midwestern Methodism as a test case, this essay is an preliminary attempt to unravel this paradox.

### **The Process of Death**

Death was as unwelcome in the nineteenth century as it is today. James B. Finley practiced medicine, albeit briefly, prior to becoming a famous itinerant. He left his practice soon after finishing his degree because, as he put it, "to be always with the sick and dying, and constantly to breathe an atmosphere of sighs and disease, was far

from being agreeable to [his] feelings."<sup>3</sup> Finley did not lack opportunities to test his resolve. Sanitation, diet, and a fallacious conception of biological "science," conspired indiscriminately to shorten life. Popular perceptions of death had shifted by mid-century; no longer an irreversible separation, death became an extension of life. One could maintain contact with the dead through a variety of cultural mechanisms including landscaped cemeteries (the "rural cemetery movement" dates from ca. 1830), funeral homes, and mortuary techniques, viz. embalming. But this transition had limited resonance within American Methodism.<sup>4</sup>

---

<sup>3</sup>Basically prodded through by his father, Finley finished his medical training in 1800. Ironically, he determined to become a professional hunter after discontinuing his medical practice. James B. Finley, *Autobiography of Rev. James B. Finley; or, Pioneer Life in the West*, ed. W. P. Strickland (Cincinnati, 1853), 149, 115.

<sup>4</sup>Lewis O. Saum and Ann Douglas provide helpful syntheses of the changing perceptions of death in the nineteenth century. Saum's "Death in Pre-Civil War America" places death in the broader cultural milieu. In many ways an excellent overview, Saum misreads the religious significance of death for evangelicals. He argues that Christians were preoccupied with the spiritual journey itself rather than their eventual "destination;" moreover, Saum finds that death imagery accentuated "what was to be escaped [rather] than on what was to be realized" (494). Undoubtedly, death did bring "release from whatever plagued" antebellum Americans. But in the context of evangelical faith, this position rests on an incomplete understanding of what they believed.

Douglas' "Heaven our Home: Consolation Literature in the Northern United States, 1830-1880," too, has much to commend it. Douglas demonstrates how religious women and "liberal" ministers (which she defines as Unitarian and Congregationalists) sought to manipulate popular perceptions as a means of enhancing social status. Douglas finds that consolation literature "stressed the importance of dying and the dead: it encouraged elaborate funerary practices, conspicuous methods of burial and commemoration, and microscopic viewings of a much inflated afterlife" (497). Douglas shows her bias with the last element, though. She argues that the men and women

---

churning out consolation literature gave little thought to the earthly responsibilities one must fulfill in order to enter heaven. "They depicted and emphasized heaven as a continuation and a glorification of the domestic sphere. The celestial regions and their occupants were to pay, in other words, an intricate compliment to themselves" (502). As with Saum's essay, Douglas' evidence relating to Methodists call into question--if not contradict--her conclusions.

Karen Beth Westerfield Tucker's recent dissertation makes a useful contribution to the literature. She gives particular attention to textual revisions of rites of baptism and funerals by John Wesley and the MEC. Tucker draws excellent comparisons and inquiries of these texts, but does not entirely succeed in placing the findings in a broader--historical--context. Tucker claims that nineteenth-century life was a preparation for death, "a prelude to heavenly habitations." Surprisingly, Tucker posits that "Methodists were encouraged to prepare for holy dying with attitudes of resignation and submission" (386). She maintains that, "since there was no guarantee of an individual's eternal destiny," this was an incredibly stressful process (378). Actually the opposite was true; Methodists were certain of their eternal destiny. This points to a larger misreading of the issue. Tucker places changing perceptions of death in a shifting theological context: "By the end of the nineteenth century, the emphasis among Methodists upon the terror and penalty of death was beginning to wane and was being replaced by a stronger stress upon hope, the mercy of God, and the prospect of immortality" (388). This seems a stark contrast to the sources themselves. Tucker fails to distinguish between believers and non-believers perceptions of death (the former consistently perceived death as a hoped-for experience; the change concerns non-believers--who else would need to manipulate the process/perception?).

Finally, and without question the best study to date, A. Gregory Schneider's "The Ritual of Happy Dying among Early American Methodists," assesses Christian death as a domestic ritual. Schneider present a superb overview of Methodism in the antebellum period. He views Methodist death through the lens of "social religion" (which he describes as the lay-based, communal elements, central to evangelicalism). He probes the parallels between death bed rituals, class meetings, and quarterly meeting love feasts. Schneider's sociological analysis is not entirely convincing. To be sure, there is value in examining group modalities and mentalities. Schneider demonstrates how individual behavior and belief are put to corporate use; but he stops short of fully exploring those individual expressions. A case in point is the limited profile of actual death scenes in this essay. Schneider argues that the "deprivations of the moment" of death foretold heavenly fulfillment (361). The pain and sorrow of death were "gilded" with Christian virtues (esp. patience, resignation, joy). Yet there was no need for a

Death was both a public and private affair. While the MEC held no copyright on consolation, by sheer numbers, it proved a national support agency for the grieving. Methodists redefined their normative life-expectancy through an evangelical faith: vulnerable to, but never victimized by, physical death. Believers took 1 Corinthians 15:51-55 to heart: "We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed--in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet." Methodists collectively exulted "Where, O death is your victory? Where, O death, is thy sting?"<sup>5</sup> Despite the air of confidence,

---

veneer. Instead, first-hand accounts of the experiences themselves indicate that death was an extension of the life which preceded the moment. While Schneider recognizes that Methodists engaged in daily mortification, "dying to the world and living in Christ" (354), he overlooks the fact that many believed themselves to be succeeding. Thus, to take the argument one step further, that transition to heaven was not automatically a great one for many Methodists--they had been experiencing Beulah for some time though still on earth. Finally, it is possible that the communal core of Methodism was not jeopardized by changing perceptions of death or in death ritual itself (363), but in the erosion of heart-felt practice. Worship services are likely a more fruitful venue to measure such change. Sources: Lewis O. Saum, "Death in the Popular Mind of Pre-Civil War America," *American Quarterly* 26 (December 1974): 475-495; and Ann Douglas, "Heaven our Home: Consolation Literature in the Northern United States, 1830-1880," *American Quarterly* 26 (December 1974): 496-515; Tucker, "'Till Death Do Us Part: The Rites of Marriage and Burial Prepared by John Wesley and Their Development in the Methodist Episcopal Church, 1784-1939," (Ph.D. Diss. University of Notre Dame, 1992); and Schneider's "The Ritual of Happy Dying among Early American Methodists," *Church History* 56 (Sept. 1987): 348-363. See also Schneider's *The Way of the Cross Leads Home: The Domestication of American Methodism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993), 143-148.

<sup>5</sup>The complete passage reads: "We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed--in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality. When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality,

this is no vain spiritual boast. No ritual or incantation could exempt Methodists from death or the trauma which it entailed. In fact, the bravado of this passage correlated to one's degree of loss. But for Methodists, and evangelicals in general, bereavement was a small price to pay when compared to the unmeasurable return of eternal reward. Death-bed scenes are rich in irony: for those who remained behind, they were a vital component of the healing process; on the other hand, they were cause for celebration. Thus one could appropriately cry tears of sorrow and joy in the believer's death chamber.

Sallie Caldwell died an exemplary death. Her life and death are detailed in Maxwell Gaddis' obscure volume, *The Sacred Hour*.<sup>6</sup> Gaddis pastored the Green

---

then the saying that is written will come true: 'Death has been swallowed up in victory.  
'Where, O death is your victory? Where, O death, is thy sting?'

<sup>6</sup>Maxwell P. Gaddis, *The Sacred Hour* (Cincinnati: Methodist Book Concern, 1857). Gaddis is an interesting story in his own right. He took his first circuit in Fall of 1835 at age 24. Superannuated in 1842, he toured the South keeping a heavy speaking schedule. He resumed itinerant duties in 1844 only to prematurely withdraw before the close of the 1853 Conference year. Gaddis then traveled to New York, where he underwent surgery for his throat condition (what he termed a "bronchial affection"), and followed this with a "water cure" at a Vermont clinic; he returned home in time for the Conference to again give him superannuated relation. He moved to Dayton, in desperate need of steady income. His best known work, *Foot-Prints of an Itinerant* was finished late that year.

"I need only say . . . that the entire proceeds arising from the sale of this work will be faithfully applied to procure the means of an independent subsistence for my affectionate wife and three children, whose happiness and welfare are as dear to me as life itself."

After twenty-years as an itinerant, Gaddis finally enjoyed financial security. The back cover of *Sacred Hour* advertised *Foot-Prints* for \$1.00 (25 cents extra for gilt edges);

Street station Methodist Episcopal Church in Piqua, Ohio, from September 1851 through May of 1853. While there, he became aware of an extraordinary correspondence between two of his female parishioners: Sallie and a "Sister Amelia." The work contains extensive extracts from Sallie's journal and some 300 hundred letters (24 of which are virtually complete, totaling 190 pages of text) exchanged between the two women. *Sacred Hour* culminates in Sallie's death on August 7, 1855 at the age of 24. Throughout the volume, both women cogently describe their spiritual journeys, including their respective salvation and sanctification. Finally, both suffered from unnamed illnesses. Because of her physical condition, Sallie entered the Crystal Fountain Retreat in Berlin Heights, Ohio, for the water cure on July 13, 1855. She died three weeks later, still a patient at this institution.<sup>7</sup>

Amelia visited Sallie for the last time at her home on July 9, 1855. At Sallie's

---

10,000 copies were issued in the first five months alone. *Foot-Prints of an Itinerant* (Cincinnati: The Methodist Book Concern, 1855), 11-12, 436-468.

<sup>7</sup>I take the liberty of referring to Caldwell as Sallie to better represent the tenor of their relationship. Unfortunately, Gaddis omits any information on Amelia. I have yet to locate any extant records with which to identify her last name. The title refers each woman's pledge to "meet" the other during a prescribed period of private, though separate, prayer. In relation to their sundry illness, Sallie always believed the Amelia would precede her in death. But near her death, Sallie rejoiced that she could introduce Amelia to heaven.

"I have thought that you would be the *first* one to hail me in that bright world above, but now I think I shall be one of the happy escort, that shall hover around your dying couch, until your spirit shall burst from its clay tabernacle, and then welcome you to the courts of bliss" (Gaddis, *Sacred Hour*, 281-282).

request, she read a Scripture passage in preparation for prayer. Amelia selected 2 Corinthians 5 and was astounded by what occurred. "While I was engaged in reading, she appeared as though she had caught a glimpse of the Celestial city. Her face glowed with heavenly radiancy, such as I never beheld on mortal." Amelia then prayed that Sallie's spiritual strength would be commensurate to her "last conflict;" and that if she did have to "pass through the cold waters of Jordan, that she might 'fear no evil,' knowing that his rod and staff might comfort her through,--give her a triumphant departure and a glorious entrance into the courts of endless bliss."<sup>8</sup> To Gaddis, Amelia, and others, Sallie's subsequent death proved tangible evidence of answered prayer.

Sallie struggled to not get discouraged while at Crystal Fountain. She occupied an isolated third-floor room in order that her "religious duties" not be interrupted; she compelled herself to "*sing, read, and pray, and try to keep in a right state of mind.*"<sup>9</sup> Yet the spiritual and physical battles continued. Appraised that her daughter's condition was deteriorating, Sallie's mother immediately left Piqua to offer what comfort she could. She arrived in the early-evening on August 7--just hours after Sallie had slipped into a coma. Fearing her mother would not arrive in time, Sallie wrote a final letter. This shrewd self-assessment serves as a postscript on her earthly life. Her thoughts range from prosaic to profound. She desired to be buried at home, offered

---

<sup>8</sup>Gaddis, *Sacred Hour*, 282-283.

<sup>9</sup>Gaddis, *Sacred Hour*, 289, emphasis in original.

suggestions concerning the disposition of her wardrobe, and extended final exhortations to her friends and fiancé ("preach Christ and him crucified to the world"). But one sentence surely rang in her mother's ear from that moment on: "I do not fear death; I have tried to live a Christian, and think I can die one." Consciously or not, Sallie dictated her own epitaph.<sup>10</sup>

Sallie "calmly waited the coming of her Lord." When informed that she had little time remaining, she turned to her physician and said: "'O, I am glad, I will soon be better off than any of you--free from trouble, free from care. Try to get religion, all of you, and be able to follow me.'" Later she observed, "How strange my hands feel! Is this death?" The Doctor implored her to live until her mother arrived. Sallie replied, "I want to see them; but *they cannot die for me.*" She drifted into a coma shortly afterwards. Mrs. Caldwell found Sallie only able to squeeze her hand lightly in response to elementary questions (a squeeze indicating yes). To everyone's surprise, and Sallie's displeasure, she returned to complete consciousness just before she expired. "'Why did I come back? I was so happy.'" Sallie and her mother shared a brief exchange of good-byes and further exhortations for friends and family to get saved. Then, suddenly, Sallie exclaimed: "Lay me back! let me go! O, How bright! O, How bright! O, How bright!" Gaddis maintains that "living light had touched the brow of death." Sallie had "crossed

---

<sup>10</sup>Gaddis, *Sacred Hour*, 289, 291, emphasis in original.



in perfect safety. The dark curtain of time was drawn aside, and she was permitted, without a veil, to see the smiling face of her dear Redeemer."<sup>11</sup>

For Sallie Caldwell, religion was not a casual pursuit; "with her [it] was an *habitual* thing."<sup>12</sup> William H. Lawder, one of Sallie's former pastors, wrote Gaddis that she:

was more than an ordinary Christian. From the time that the mild voice of religion whispered in her ear and directed her heart by the *effectual energy* of the Holy Spirit, *gradually* in to the possession of peace with God, she constantly labored for higher degrees of holiness. The word of God was her daily companion, prayer her most valued exercise, and praise her heart's delight.<sup>13</sup>

Sallie Caldwell was not alone in her death experience; in fact, when one allows the sources to speak for themselves, it becomes evident that such death-bed scenes were common. Furthermore, when studying the death-bed scenes of Caldwell and others, a process of death becomes apparent.

First, commendable believers patiently bore acute physical pain. Hugh Cull experienced a "gradual descent to the grave," suffering for three-months before his death. Yet this painful process did not prevent his enjoying "heavenly rapture" at the

---

<sup>11</sup>Gaddis, *Sacred Hour*, 292-294.

<sup>12</sup>Gaddis, *Sacred Hour*, 323, emphasis in original.

<sup>13</sup>Gaddis, *Sacred Hour*, 319, emphasis in original.

end.<sup>14</sup> George Walker likewise received a triumphant departure after much pain. Maxwell Gaddis witnessed Walker's death and recalls that "a short time before he breathed his last, during a partial exemption from bodily anguish, I observed an expression of triumph on his countenance, and gathered from his dying lips the significant words of "Victory!--Glory!--Halleluia!"<sup>15</sup>

Though he missed her sorely, Jacob Young never regretted his wife's death; he claimed he "would not call her back if [he] had the power." Ruth Young experienced a "paralytic stroke," in April 1837. Nearly fifty years later, Young still struggled to relate her death: "she suffered; and she suffered much. To make an exhibit of all she endured from April to August would be unpleasant and unprofitable; but during the whole time God never left her for a moment." He adds that "though she had not the lively ecstasies of faith at all times; yet she had the most unshaken confidence in God." She overcame all temptations in her last days. Ruth Young's legacy to her survivors

---

<sup>14</sup>William C. Smith, *Indiana Miscellany* (Cincinnati: Poe and Hitchcock, 1867), 160-161. With the exception of Sallie Caldwell, very limited biographical information is supplied for the subjects represented in this essay. In part, this is due to the paucity of detail in the literature; secondly this is a deliberate device to underscore the analytical potential of these death-bed vignettes. Just the same, I include at least the date of death where possible. A second important consideration which merits attention is the loose chronological frame of this essay. By far, the majority of evidence presented here falls within the antebellum period. On the other hand, it also extends as far as the late-1870s. The consistency of death-bed scenes is one of the most surprising findings of this essay. See note 16.

<sup>15</sup>Maxwell Pierson Gaddis, *Brief Recollections of the Late Rev. George W. Walker*. With an Introduction by Charles Elliot. (Cincinnati: Swormstedt and Poe, 1857), 426.

and the Christian community at large was a testimony that God's grace was sufficient for every need; her death affirmed that God was an "ever-present help in time of trouble." While the circumstances of her death caused her enthusiasm to wane, her faith was never more sure or secure. Paradoxically, death proved the final measure of Young's faith.<sup>16</sup>

Pain served a purpose. Rachel Trimble believed her physical suffering would "only make heaven the brighter." "Sister Meharry" identified Satan as the source of her death-bed anguish: "the adversary struck sore at her, and for some hours darkness thick and painful hung around." Through prayer, however, not only was the adversary "rebuked and repelled," but "the cloud of darkness gave way, and the Sun of Righteousness arose with healing in his wings, to be obscured no more." Thus any challenge to the body was inconsequential when compared to the battle over one's soul: spiritual pain always exceeded physical agony. In as much as death could be a protracted process (lasting several years in Sallie Caldwell's case), many Methodists wholeheartedly welcomed it.<sup>17</sup>

---

<sup>16</sup>Maxwell Pierson Gaddis, *Saintly Women and Death-Bed Triumphs* (New York: Phillips and Hunt, 1880), 240-241. The work highlights the problem in analyzing death-bed scenes for historical context, or change over time. Though not published until 1880, Gaddis issued his first call for manuscripts in 1855. In other words, what historical period do these vignettes depict? Again, there is a remarkable consistency among death-bed scenes from turn of the century through the 1880s.

<sup>17</sup>Gaddis, *Saintly Women and Death-Bed Triumphs*, 402-403, 259.

Conquering fear of the grave is a second commonality among death-bed scenes. Somewhat uncharacteristically, Caldwell used theology to resolve her anxiety concerning death (which only underscores her ability to serve as a role model). For many others, though, despite a life-time of preparation, death induced tremendous anxiety. Ironically, infidels need not fear death; only believers and awakened individuals found immortality an onerous burden, sobered by the prospect of unprepared death and its consequent damnation. What is significant about death-bed scenes is that, without exception, they laud believers' victory over death.

Hester Ann Perry sought to console others as she died: "When we are well we look on death and eternity as being a great way off; and when looking thus upon death it appears as a fearful monster. But now there seems to be only a thin veil between me and eternity, and when death is near it is but a shadow."<sup>18</sup> During her last moments, Mary Dana Dustin also reflected on her imminent death: "The angel of death is spreading his wings over me; but Jesus has taken from me the fear of death. Though I walk through the valley, I fear no evil." Dustin's anxiety gave way to affirmation. "I know that in heaven there is a beautiful place for me. After such suffering will not the rest of heaven be sweet?"<sup>19</sup> The Jordan River was a common metaphor with which to express fear of death. Isaac Owen spoke for many when observing that its "waves are

---

<sup>18</sup>Gaddis, *Saintly Women and Death-Bed Triumphs*, 267.

<sup>19</sup>Gaddis, *Saintly Women and Death-Bed Triumphs*, 324.

dashing around me, but I have measured the depth of the waters; they will waft me to a peaceful shore. . . . The river is cold, deep, and peaceful." It is safe to assume that only those absolutely certain of their faith could find the river so placid.<sup>20</sup>

"Miss J. C." provides one of the most poignant examples of conquered fear. Drawing upon the Jordan metaphor, "her peace flowed like a river." When Gaddis visited her shortly before her death, she said, "I have no fear of death *now*, and I have not had for some time past. I feel no pain, but just as if I was falling into a sweet sleep. O what peace! no tongue can describe it!" She praised God for favoring her with countless blessings. Oddly, she always "desired to die of a *lingering disease*. This God has granted also." Death was welcome because it restored her spiritual health: "Before I was afflicted I went astray; I was becoming fond of the world; but, I bless the Lord, this sick-bed has been the means of saving my soul. *I am now ready*--waiting patiently. I want to see all my friends and class-mates." This points to a third commonality among Methodist death-bed scenes.<sup>21</sup>

Death offered a prime opportunity to exhort the living on the need for heart-felt religion. At the end of his life, George Walker's father "was not only calm and peaceful, but *constantly filled* to overflowing with the love of God." He personally orchestrated

---

<sup>20</sup>Smith, *Indiana Miscellany*, 292.

<sup>21</sup>Miss J. C. died in 1851. Gaddis, *Foot-Prints of an Itinerant*, 454-455, emphasis in original.

his death-bed scene so that it was saturated with exhortations, singing and praying. "He often requested his children not to be anxious about him, or desire to retain him longer on earth. He felt that his work was done, and like a shock of ripe corn, he greatly desired to be gathered into the garner above." Shortly before the end he exclaimed: "'There is no mistake about it, I AM GOING TO HEAVEN.' And again he said, 'There is not a cloud between God and my soul.'" The didactic value of this man's death-bed scene could not be missed: his end was tranquil, he wanted others to experience his joy in death, and his death itself proved a source of "encouragement and hope."<sup>22</sup>

Clergy death-bed exhortations, such as Walker's, were especially meaningful. Shortly before he died, Samuel H. Thompson requested that be allowed to preach one final sermon from his death bed. His room could not accommodate the eager crowd. Peter Cartwright claims "such a sermon hardly ever fell from the lips of mortal man. The power of God fell on the congregation; they wept aloud, and fell in every direction, and many will date their start for heaven to that sermon." When finished Thompson said, "My work is done, and I am ready to go at my Master's bidding."<sup>23</sup> Rev. H.

---

<sup>22</sup>Gaddis, *Brief Recollections of the Late Rev. George W. Walker*, 337-338, all emphases in original.

<sup>23</sup>Thompson was superannuated in 1841 after 31 years of active ministry; he died within a year (March 19, 1842). *Autobiography of Peter Cartwright, the Backwoods Preacher*. Edited by W. P. Strickland. (New York: Carlton & Porter, 1857), 496-497.

Law's death-bed was peculiar in that he died while actually preaching. "With outspread arms, [he] breathed forth the longings of his soul in 'God bless this people!' and suddenly fell upon the altar near which he stood, shouting 'Glory to God!' and 'was not,' for 'God took him.'" Law's wife described the scene as one of complete victory: "Earth faded; sorrow melted; heaven and earth strangely commingled, while with shouts of victory, I joined with the redeemed around the throne, 'Unto Him who hath loved us and washed us in his own blood!'" Yet again, the terror of death was transformed into a scene of inspiration and encouragement. Both Thompson's and Law's death signifies a direct parallel between death-bed exhortations and itinerant death-sermons: both exhibiting an imaginative combination of theatrics (preachers manipulating the congregation) and sincerity (direct result of divine inspiration and power).<sup>24</sup>

Sarah Smith felt no obligation to wait until her death-bed to exhort others. Her exhortations on the resurrected body stemmed from a profound anticipation of death. Despite this reputation as a "mother in Israel," many of Smith's contemporaries could neither understand nor appreciate the "unearthly ecstasy" she enjoyed when discussing death. Witnesses observed that when she spoke or even pondered the subject, her soul "soared" to the "upper sanctuary." Smith died instantaneously, the perfect departure for one who lived a lifetime of "constant readiness." In a sense, then, Smith lived her

---

<sup>24</sup>Law died in September 1866. Mrs. M. E. McAllister, *Sunshine Among the Clouds: Or, Extracts from Experience* (Cincinnati: Hitchcock and Walden, 1873), 129, 127.

entire life anticipating--and on--her death-bed.<sup>25</sup>

Participation of the living constitutes a fourth commonality among Methodist death-bed scenes. Though it is easily overlooked, few people die without others in the room. Perhaps this should be introduced as the first commonality, but I have reserved it to this point because participation is often linked with one or more death-bed attributes. For example, Barbara Griffith's death-bed featured both participation and conquered fear. Just before she died, her husband asked, "How do you feel now, so near to death?" She answered, "I dread it no more than I would to go from one room to another. I do not fear to die; I welcome my release. All is bright--bright and beautiful." Griffith's last words were "Glory! glory! Jesus has come."<sup>26</sup>

Mary Yocum's last hours were anything but idle. From her death-bed she exhorted her husband to be faithful to his duties as father and minister. She then confessed to her friends: "I have been unfaithful, but now Jesus forgives me all. O sweet Savior, how good and merciful thou art. Glory, glory, I shall soon get home to

---

<sup>25</sup>Smith, *Indiana Miscellany*, 129-130, 134. A. P. Mead recalls an accident involving an unidentified sixteen year-old boy in an eastern state who was fatally crushed while working in a factory. As a crowd gathered around him, the boy prays that God would take his spirit; he then looked to heaven and "exclaimed 'Glory! Glory!' and expired." With vivid examples like Smith and this boy in mind, Mead asks his readers: "Would sudden death be sudden glory to us?" A. P. Mead, *Mana in the Wilderness, or, Grove and its Altar, Offerings and Thrilling Incidents*. With an Introduction by J. B. Wakeley. 3rd Edition, (Philadelphia: Perkinpine and Higgins, 1860), 134.

<sup>26</sup>Griffith died in 1876. Gaddis, *Saintly Women and Death-bed Triumphs*, 123.



my dear Jesus, where I shall meet my infant, my father, and all my friends that have gone before me." Yocum then began to sing, raising her hands, gesturing toward heaven. Excitedly, she declared, "Come, Lord Jesus, oh, come quickly." Finally, Yocum posed a significant rhetorical question. "Is this dying? Then it is a glorious thing to die! O my dear friends, I am not going. Do pray that I may have a safe passage." Those with her knelt in prayer as she died. Gaddis notes that "her happy soul exchanged its diseased-worn citadel for a resting place in Abraham's bosom." Yocum blended exhortation, fear, and participation. Her death-bed scene is ironic for two reasons: she loves dying, yet is scared at the prospect (only in experiencing death does her anxiety turn to confidence); and secondly, she claims to be going no where yet desires a "safe passage."<sup>27</sup>

Caroline Russell Bing's death-bed provided the ultimate participatory experience. Hearing the "roar of Jordan" compounded her already anxious demeanor; but Bing persevered and was strengthened. Soon she was delighted to be "near an end of suffering--so near the joys of heaven." In triumph, Bing turned to her husband and said, "you received me into the church, and you have ben my spiritual guide and counselor. *You have shown me how to live, and now I am about to show you how to die.*" At one point she cried out "Don't you hear that music; it is the songs of angels."

---

<sup>27</sup>Yocum died in 1836. Gaddis, *Saintly Women and Death-Bed Triumphs*, 17-18.

She then requested those with her to sing a hymn; "and at different times she seemed filled with ecstasy, clapping her hands."<sup>28</sup>

Methodists held that the Holy Spirit's in-filling presence empowered believers to die in victory. Amanda Blocher approached her death with no small measure of trepidation. Yet she took full advantage of the opportunity to exhort her family and friends. While entreating them on the merits of salvation, her countenance became unearthly. One witness recalled (claiming the scene was forever etched in his mind): "it appeared like the glory of the upper sanctuary had burst upon her enraptured vision, and that she was breathing the very atmosphere of heaven." Asked if she feared death, Blocher confidently replied, "Oh, no, not now. When in health I always thought I would be afraid to die, and looked upon death as something very alarming, but now I feel as if I were starting on a pleasant journey, and that these sufferings are but the beginning of an immortality of happiness."<sup>29</sup> Blocher taught a master class in the art of Methodist death; following her lead, many others also would triumph over their last "foe." She not only conquered pain and fear, exhorted others, and encouraged

---

<sup>28</sup>Gaddis, *Saintly Women and Death-Bed Triumphs*, 47-48, my emphasis. It is interesting to note that participation was not restricted to the death-bed chamber. A Mrs. Crawford of St. Joseph, Michigan, heard an angelic choir just as her friend died. "I heard, as if in the air above our dwelling, angel voices, sweetly singing, 'Homeward bound! homeward bound!' As the last strains died upon my ear, I repeated aloud, 'Home at last! home at last!' The music, together with the influence in my room, was wonderful, thrilling." McAllister, *Sunshine Among the Clouds*, 240.

<sup>29</sup>Blocher died in 1859. Gaddis, *Saintly Women and Death-Bed Triumphs*, 149-150.

participation in her death, but, in breathing heaven's atmosphere, Blocher experienced the definitive attribute of Methodist death.

The final commonality among Methodist death-bed scenes was a "transworld experience." Death heightened believers spiritual insight. To be sure, one need not be in the throes of death to experience a profound sense of divine presence or glory; such presence was one of the most compelling traits of frontier revivalism, and antebellum Methodism in general. Yet death-bed scenes give special significance to the enigmatic realm between life and death, between present and future. The "transworld experience" is multi-faceted.

The first characteristic is a sense of "holy triumph." Quite simply, many believers were excited to die. Alfred Brunson once ministered to an unnamed woman on her death-bed who "expected to die and was very happy." Brunson candidly perceived that she might survive her high fever (though it was doubtful), but not the "ecstasy of joy" she exhibited. Robert Worster also "died shouting." Methodists had few doubts as to what was "shouted." Nehemiah B. Griffith died "in holy triumph, shouting with his expiring breath, 'Glory! glory! glory! sweet heaven I am coming!'" Alice Mead was even more succinct: "I don't want to get well, I want to die and go to heaven." Eliza Pitezel's last words speak to the issue as well: "Jesus is precious. Happy! happy!" After a lifetime of preaching that God's grace would be sufficient even in his death, John Collins uttered three words as he died: "Happy, happy, happy!" Believers well knew

the cause of such joy, shouting, and general euphoria. For non-believers death was simply a grim reality of life; for believers, on the other hand, it was the final actualization of spiritual lives.<sup>30</sup>

The transfiguration of physical countenance is a second aspect of this transworld experience. In contrast to those who died in "holy triumph," Bishop Roberts experienced no "outburst of ecstatic joy" during his death. Just the same, he died with a heavenly countenance.<sup>31</sup> Such countenance was not limited to the last moments of life (again, this is complicated by the fact that many sought death throughout their lifetimes); Mrs. Margaretta R. enjoyed a "heavenly radiance" for several days before her death. Though Maxwell Gaddis frequently visited her, attempting to minister to her and her family, she--not Gaddis--proved the counselor. During one such visit, while "her feeble frame shook all over, . . . she began to clap her hands and shout aloud for joy; her countenance beamed with more than earthly brightness, as she continued, with clear voice, to speak of the love of Jesus to her soul." She took full advantage of the

---

<sup>30</sup> Alfred Brunson, *A Western Pioneer: Or, Incidents of the Life and Times of . . .* 2 vols. (Cincinnati: Walden and Stowe, 1880), II: 14-15; Worster in John F. Wright, *Sketches of the Life and Labors of James Quinn* (Cincinnati: Methodist Book Concern, 1851), 34; Griffith in Smith, *Indiana Miscellany*, 208; Mead in Mead, *Mana in the Wilderness*, 66-68; and Pitizel in Gaddis, *Saintly Women and Death-Bed Triumphs*, 173; Collins in [John Wright], *A Sketch of the life of Rev. John Collins, late of the Ohio Conference* (Cincinnati: Swormstedt and Poe, 1849), 40.

<sup>31</sup> H. F. Brown, *The Methodists, A Historical and Biographical Sketch of the Pioneers, Bishops, and Representative Men of American Methodism* (Cincinnati: H. F. Brown, 1867), 124-125.

opportunity to exhort those drawn to her home by the shouting. In between exclamations of "O, happy day!" and "O, sweet Jesus!", Mrs. R. made a signal observation: "religion is the only thing in this world worth living or dying for." And she was very pleased to die for and in her faith. Isaac Hunter also enjoy a "heavenly glow" on his death-bed. Gaddis claims a "fire of ecstatic joy flashed from his eye." Though he could no longer speak audibly, Hunter's ability to communicate was undiminished: "he looked up, raised his right hand as far as he could reach, and with his fore-finger pointed upward."<sup>32</sup>

Maggie Mullenix's death-bed scene was equally impressive. While her husband sang a hymn, "glory came out in unnatural majesty on her face. It was a supernatural brightness which left an impression on those sorrowing hearts never to be effaced." "'I can not bear it,' fell from her lips; and when asked if it was her sufferings that were so great, she replied, 'No. It is my joy; it is too great for the frail frame.'" She then exclaimed, "I am so happy! so happy!"<sup>33</sup> Likewise, Mary Smith she cried out, "Christians, live! Christians, live!" just before she died. Not only did she have an "unearthly radiance," observers noted that "she seemed no longer like an inhabitant of

---

<sup>32</sup>"Mrs. R" died in 1847; Hunter died in 1842. Gaddis, *Foot-Prints of an Itinerant*, 390-391, 307-308.

<sup>33</sup>Gaddis, *Saintly Women and Death-Bed Triumphs*, 270-271.

earth."<sup>34</sup>

The fact that earth seemed alien to Smith points to a third aspect of this transworld experiences. Death-bed scenes provided many believers special revelations of the spirit world. For lack of a better term, this can be labeled "spiritual vision." More examples exists for this than for any other facet of death-bed scenes. Elijah Crane was privileged with such vision in his last days. At one point he turned to his daughter and exclaimed, "I wish you could see it as I see it!" While he provided no description of what he envisioned (beyond "O, delightful! most delightful!"), Crane conveyed his elation. He told his daughter that, while he had never feared death, neither had he sought it out like many other Methodists--until he glimpsed heaven. Then the change was complete: "now there is no spot of earth so attracts as a place beside your mother. I have felt, for weeks past, as though I were more a resident of the spirit-land than of this; am always surprised when I awake and find myself still an inhabitant of earth."<sup>35</sup>

John Stewart's daughter also "saw" something remarkable as she died. Though a Christian just one year, this child had matured significantly. Aware that her present life was near an end, she asked her father to pray. During the prayer she experienced a "tremor." Stewart interrupted the prayer, appraised the situation, and his told his wife that their child would soon be gone. Even Stewart, a veteran itinerant, was not

---

<sup>34</sup>Smith died in 1866. McAllister, *Sunshine Among the Clouds*, 117-118.

<sup>35</sup>McAllister, *Sunshine Among the Clouds*, 165.

prepared for what his daughter experienced.

"Her countenance indicated that there was a struggle within; suddenly her eyes opened, and her whole countenance was lighted up with such a heavenly glow as I had never before seen before in human face, and she exclaimed, 'O what a lovely place! I want to be there!' She seemed to be gazing right into the glory land. After a while a cloud passed over her countenance, and it indicated the return of that inward struggle. Soon the cloud passed off again, and her countenance beamed as before, and again she exclaimed, 'O let me go? I want to go!'"

Stewart adds that "glory seemed to fill the room." This was bitter-sweet religious experience for Stewart as this was his second daughter to die in less than one year.<sup>36</sup>

When illness "brought [her] very near death's door" Mrs. McAllister peered directly into heaven. She boasts that "faith's clear vision" enabled her look "beyond the tide." "O, there were beauties just over the river! There, living waters were flowing, palms of glory waving, raiment white decking the saints!" Yet it was not her appointed time to die, there being "too few stars in her crown." She resumed her earthly life with "renewed courage." McAllister's second husband also saw beyond the land of the living from his death-bed. One morning his attendant asked why he stared out the window as if in a trance. McAllister was incredulous. Couldn't she see the obvious? She asked for a description, even a hint. Without breaking his concentration, McAllister responded, "My Father! my Father! the chariot and the horsemen!" Rev. J. Jennings'

---

<sup>36</sup>John Stewart, *Highways and Hedges: Fifty Years of Western Methodism* (Cincinnati: Hitchcock and Walden, 1872), 214-215.

death-bed also was noted for its "nearness to heaven." His countenance brightened as death approached. Looking out the window, he whispered to his wife "O how beautiful! how beautiful!" Misunderstanding him, she asked if he would like her to open the shutters even wider to increase his field of vision. "O, I see beyond the shutters--far beyond the shutters!"<sup>37</sup>

A few days prior to her death, Catherine Walker "seemed to have a clear vision of the [spirit] land." She shouted repeatedly, "Glory, hallelujah! Glory, hallelujah!" and "Oh, what a beautiful city!" After exclaiming "O precious Savior, Redeemer, come, come!" she drifted into unconsciousness; Gaddis notes that she "died without a struggle,--calm and peaceful."<sup>38</sup> Elizabeth Fisher Keeley's death-bed provides an intriguing alternative: she choose to blind herself to earthly concerns in order to enhance her spiritual vision. Shortly before death, she reflected on her condition: "Hallelujah! the Lord God Omnipotent reigneth. Jesus reigns in my poor heart. Things this morning seem to have an unusual brightness. *When I close my eyes to the world I feel that all is heaven.* Glory to God!"<sup>39</sup> Similarly, George Smith refused to open his eyes because there was nothing on earth he wished to see. Instead, he looked to heaven

---

<sup>37</sup>McAllister, *Sunshine Among the Clouds*, 44, 215-216, 146.

<sup>38</sup>Walker died in 1870. Gaddis, *Saintly Women and Death-Bed Triumphs*, 15-16.

<sup>39</sup>Keeley died in 1847. Gaddis, *Saintly Women and Death-Bed Triumphs*, 293, my emphasis.



by faith. Ironically, yet in keeping with the sentiment regarding death-bed scenes, Smith insisted that death was the happiest experience of his life.<sup>40</sup>

Elijah Hedding's death-bed testimonial underscores the "special revelations of the love of God" he experienced: "I have served God more than fifty years. I have generally had peace, but I never saw such glory before, such light, and such gloriousness, such beauty! O, I want to tell it to all the world."<sup>41</sup> Methodists sought and savored these transworld experiences. They inspired individuals and congregations alike. For James Quinn, the "season of depression and gloom" due to a painful death was replaced with unspeakable joy and anticipation. In fact, John Wright claims that "though the enemy had thrust sorely at him, . . . [Quinn] *soon gained a comfortable view into the upper sanctuary.*" As a result, "his soul caught new fire" and "his eyes seemed to sparkle." As Calvin Ruter's death indicates, the most fortunate did not merely experience an enveloping brightness and joy. Shortly before he died, Ruter shouted to those surrounding his death-bed: "Behold! behold the Lamb!" Elijah might have been taken to heaven in a chariot of fire, but Christ himself escorted Calvin Ruter to his eternal reward.<sup>42</sup>

---

<sup>40</sup>Smith, *Indiana Miscellany*, 142-143.

<sup>41</sup>Brown, *The Methodists*, 307.

<sup>42</sup>John F. Wright, *Sketches of the Life and Labors of James Quinn* (Cincinnati: Methodist Book Concern, 1851), 284-285, 307, my emphasis. Smith, *Indiana Miscellany*, 304.

## **The Purpose of Death**

The fundamental purpose of death as recorded in death-bed scenes was to authenticate Methodist theology and evangelicalism in general. Yet there was additional meaning. For believers, death facilitated unique spiritual exercises: viz. to simultaneously experience the present and future. Christian death also presented one last ministry opportunity, a final occasion to glorify God.

Death-bed scenes would remain shrouded in mystery without at least a rudimentary understanding of Methodist theology. The following overview is but a cursory examination of just one doctrinal component of nineteenth-century Methodist thought. Despite the centrality of life-after death in evangelicalism, historians and theologians have given little consideration to its significance in antebellum Methodism. Unfortunately, one cannot turn to a single study (let alone a definitive one) on the subject of physical and/or spiritual death.

Richard P. Heitzenrater's "At Full Liberty: Doctrinal Standards in Early American Methodism" illustrates the process by which the Church created its constitutional structure. Heitzenrater argues that Church leaders were slow to formulate clear doctrine and doctrinal standards (the administrative process by which doctrine is enforced). He adds that despite a common heritage and mutual evangelical objectives, American Methodists were eager to strike out on their own, a contrast to their British brethren. Heitzenrater distills the constitutional issue to a debate over

Wesley's profile in the American church. In short, American Methodists were reluctant to acknowledge their debt to Wesley, Fletcher, and other British Methodists. Though most ministers read widely in this literature, only Wesley's *Articles of Religion* were formally included in the *Discipline*.

Frank Baker's "The Doctrines in the *Discipline*" underscores Wesley's enduring presence in American Methodist doctrine. But Baker argues that, as his American progeny institutionalized--exercised their "full liberty," to borrow from Heitzenrater, Wesley was inadvertently relegated to obscurity: leaving him a "dominating though unseen influence, a ghost walking the *Discipline* for all succeeding generations."<sup>43</sup> Baker finds the 1812 General Conference a watershed in doctrinal development. This session voted to reduce explicit statement of doctrine to the Articles of Religion. Thus *The Doctrines and Discipline* would no longer include several of Wesley's supplementary writings (a companion volume of various "tracts" was to be published--this volume was not available until 1814). Both Heitzenrater and Baker tether American Methodism to the British flagship. If Wesley has been the silent sentinel of Methodist doctrine, what are his basic teachings concerning death?

Robert Chiles' classic study reduces Wesley's fundamental doctrines to

---

<sup>43</sup>Both essay are included in Russell E. Richey, Kenneth E. Rowe, and Jean Miller Schmidt, eds., *Perspectives on American Methodism: Interpretive Essays* (Nashville: Kingswood Books, 1993). Baker, *ibid.*, 48.

revelation, sin, and grace. According to Wesley, the net result of sin (the Adamic curse) is a fallen humanity destined for "temporal, spiritual, and eternal death." Christ's sacrificial atonement for sin provides the sole opportunity to cancel these certain deaths.

This divine rationale for forgiveness is known as grace. Chiles defines grace as

the disposition of God to pardon and reconcile men in spite of their sin, to declare them just and no longer subject to wrath and punishment. It is also an immanent, subjective healing and empowering word of God in the soul, which stems from divine love applied by the working of the Spirit. Grace for Wesley is both pardon of the guilt of sin by the transcendent favor of God and power to conquer the depravity of sin by the immanent working of the Holy Spirit. The two foci of salvation, justification and sanctification, are rooted in Wesley's understanding of this dual character of God's disposition toward man and reflect his understanding of sin as involving both guilt and depravity.

Finally, Wesley taught that God's grace was "free for all and in all:" both universally available and inherently manifest in all humanity.<sup>44</sup>

While Heiztenrater and Baker point to a growing debate over doctrine in American Methodism, no consensus seems imminent. The Seventh Oxford Conference Institute of Theological Studies (1984) commissioned itself to remember a distinct theological heritage jeopardized by institutional "forgetfulness." Despite this charge, the published volume of papers presented at this conference includes only one specifically addressing the function of grace. Likewise, there was but one mention of

---

<sup>44</sup>Robert E. Chiles, *Theological Transition in American Methodism: 1790-1935* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1965), 28, 121, 146, 153.

any penalty for sin (damnation)--and those in this working group were careful to distance Methodism from such a position.<sup>45</sup> One would expect James V. Heidinger II's *Basic United Methodist Beliefs: An Evangelical View* to thoroughly explore the issues. While "Methodist evangelicals" seem more at ease with the concept of atonement than their "non-evangelical" brethren, even here one must read closely. Steve Harper notes that Christ's sacrificial death was an expression of both justice and mercy. "Justice is served in that sin cannot go unpunished. . . . Mercy is shown in that not only do we not have to bear the full consequences of our sin, but also we are saved from eternal death by Christ's death." This atonement also "distinguishes the promise of everlasting life." Given Wesley's supreme desire of his life, "to know the way to heaven," this catechetical treatise allows just one mention of "heaven"--and this only was to illustrate confusion over the process of salvation.<sup>46</sup>

What, then, was the doctrinal position regarding death in the Methodist Episcopal Church in the antebellum period? How does doctrine intersect with either the process or purpose of death-bed scenes? It is important to bear in mind that, "despite continued and quite variegated theological development, there has been no significant

---

<sup>45</sup>M. Douglas Meeks, ed., *The Future of The Methodist Theological Traditions* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1985), 142.

<sup>46</sup>James V. Heidinger II, ed. *Basic United Methodist Beliefs: An Evangelical View* (Wilmore, KY: Good News Books, 1986), 41, 43, 46.

project in formal doctrinal re-formulation in Methodism since 1808."<sup>47</sup> With this in mind, and in the absence of readily available materials, one must return to the key original sources: *The Doctrines and Discipline* (in fact The Articles of Religion) and the Bible. Reading the antebellum editions of the *Doctrines and Discipline* for a concise doctrinal statement is both frustrating and fruitless.<sup>48</sup> In stark contrast, however, the Bible yields abundant source material on the nature of spiritual life and death. Stripped of its intellectual embroidery, the issue can be recast as follows: to what end is salvation? In other words, how could one avoid the deaths Wesley preached were inescapable for sinners? What credence was there to the Methodist message concerning the merits of heaven and the dangers of hell?

Antebellum editions of the *Doctrines and Discipline* are strangely silent on this central theological issue. The Articles of Religion read more as a theological defense than a positive presentation of Methodism's theological merits. These twenty-five

---

<sup>47</sup>This according to the 1972 General Conference "Theological Study Commission on Doctrine and Doctrinal Standards" as quoted in Baker, "Doctrines in the *Discipline*, 60.

<sup>48</sup>One must credit the "evangelical" Methodists here; they formulated such a statement in their 1975 "Junaluska Affirmation." The following, especially pertinent to this study, comes from their position on salvation:

"The fullness of God's great salvation will come with the return of Christ. This cosmic event will signal the resurrection of the saved to eternal life and the lost to eternal damnation, the liberation of creation from the Adamic curse, God's final victory over every power and dominion, and the establishment of the new heaven and the new earth" (Heidinger, *Basic United Methodist Beliefs*, 111).

articles are Wesley's abridgment of the Thirty-nine Articles of the Church of England. In short, they articulate a triune God, supreme and unending in every attribute; that Jesus Christ was the incarnate God-man, suffered and died as a comprehensive propitiation for sin; that Christ conquered death and resumed his splendor in heaven; that humanity can appropriate salvation and thereby eradicate their inherent depravity by faith or grace alone--though good works are a witness to salvation; that the Holy Scriptures contain all knowledge necessary to salvation and Christian living; and that the Church is a holy institution wherein believers strengthen one another and receive the sacraments of Baptism and the Lord's Supper.<sup>49</sup>

Article III brushes the issue of eternal life and death, but retreats just as quickly. It purports that Christ "ascended into heaven, and there sitteth until he return to judge all men at the last day." Yet this key tenet lacks a single reference to hell or eternal damnation as a consequence for "a nature inclined to evil, and that continually." Conversely, on the merits of this statement alone, there is no guarantee of heaven for the righteous. A propensity to evil no more necessarily dooms one to eternal suffering than leading a "good" life assures eternal reward. According to the General Rules,

---

<sup>49</sup>Several interesting items also appear in the Articles: speaking in tongues as a vehicle of public prayer is forbidden; clergy are allowed to marry; that neither the church nor any believer has title to another's property by right of common possession; that Christians may swear oaths in a court of law; and that Christians must respect the civil authority vested in all government officials or their office.

again direct from Wesley, the sole stipulation for membership in the MEC was "a desire to flee the wrath to come, and to be saved from their sins." The absence of clear teaching on heaven and hell seems at odds with conventional perceptions of Methodism, particularly its evangelical message.

Without question the corpus of Methodist theology draws heavily from Wesley's writings, which are decidedly under-represented in *The Doctrines and Discipline*. At issue is whether or not the laity actually encountered, analytically or otherwise, Wesley's *Sermons, Notes on the New Testament*, etc. These works were integral to the spiritual development of clergy (as part of the course of study instituted in 1816), but what of the laity? The issue extends well beyond a "Wesleyanization" of rank and file Methodists: most memoirs of effective (meaning those regularly preaching the Gospel) ministers indicate that theology was an avocation only. They simply were too busy to pursue systematic theology. More pressing were the everyday concerns of pastoral ministry: hermeneutics, homiletics, and administering the *Discipline*--all of which, by the way, were designed to foster spiritual growth.

This essay argues that typical Methodists "theologically" grounded their faith on a very practical level. The central issues of antebellum Methodism are not found in apologetics or turgid debates with Calvinists, Universalists, and others. Instead, death-bed scenes reveal the centrality of a hell-heaven dichotomy to grass-roots Methodism. Again this appears the rule, not the exception: preachers pitched their Gospel



presentations and believers shaped their faith in terms of the advantages of Christianity and the disadvantages of infidelity/unbelief. This is not to imply that average Methodists could not appreciate theological abstractions; rather that they purposely (if unconsciously) customized the same to more their liking. All the while Methodists maintained their allegiance to the "Wesleyan quadrilateral," constructing a schematic for their faith from Scripture, reason, tradition, and experience. The Bible, especially when coupled with experience, was always paramount in this quadrilateral. That clergy and laity combined to create a folk theology emphasizing heaven and hell compliments Leland Scott's assertion that "to *experience* the living God in all his fullness, . . . was the essential theme in early American Methodism." The crux of such experience was a personal knowledge of grace through salvation. Asbury spoke to this as well: "It is the spiritual and experimental knowledge of repentance, faith, regeneration, and sanctification, producing a holy life, a triumphant death, a joyful resurrection, and a crown of eternal glory."<sup>50</sup>

The Church's reluctance to articulate clearly its position regarding the fundamental conviction of evangelicalism was balanced with explicit instruction in the Bible. Word studies of the key terms associated with the heaven-hell dichotomy underscore its centrality to the antebellum believer. Using an exhaustive concordance

---

<sup>50</sup>Quoted in Emory S. Bucke, ed. *The History of American Methodism*, 3 volumes (Nashville: Abingdon, 1964), I:358-359, emphasis in original.

to the King James Version of the Bible, one finds damnable, damnation, damned used 15 times (all in the New Testament); hell has 53 separate references; eternal and eternity appear 48 times; but more interesting is the prominence of heaven, heavenly, heaven's, heavens: well over 700 references in all. And this is by no means definitive. Additional terms which have relevance but were not researched (due to their multiple meanings) include judgment, death, and life. In sum, Methodists found death meaningful and significant when held in the light of Scripture. While the Bible offered no panacea for grief, it did dispense hope to the faithful.<sup>51</sup>

Antebellum Methodists undoubtedly found two of these Scripture references especially meaningful: "Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints" (Psalm 116:15) and "... to live is Christ and to die is gain" (Philippians 1:21). The Bible provided a clear context for Methodist death. Believers took seriously the injunction "live and die unto the Lord" articulated in Romans 14:8. After all, theirs was a "lively hope." Midwestern Methodists regularly envisioned an "inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven" (1 Peter 1:3-5) so that their pursuit of death through life, and vice versa, would not flag. Finally, each death-bed

---

<sup>51</sup>Nathaniel West, *The Complete Analysis of the Holy Bible*. Revised Edition (New York: A. J. Johnson, 1868) and James Strong, *The Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible* (New York: by the author, 1890). It is worth noting that West's volume was originally published in 1853 and reached a seventh edition in just two years. The work was substantially revised in 1867; the 1868 version was slightly modified from the previous year.

scene corroborated these scriptures; they dramatized collectively the awesome (both dreadful and fantastic) exchange of mortality for immortality.

A second key purpose of death-bed scenes was to exhibit God's sustaining grace. The trauma of death tested the resolve of one's faith like no other experience. At issue: could the individual--regardless of spiritual stature--claim grace sufficiently apportioned for the present trial? This theme surfaces repeatedly in the death process. Believers were all but badgered by participants inquiring "Is your faith secure?" George Walker's death-bed experience was no exception. Once it was evident that he could not recover, he was repeatedly questioned as to the state of his soul. One would think that his thirty years of itinerancy would have made such queries both moot and insulting. On the contrary, they allowed Walker to voice his triumph.

It is worth noting that trials came in various disguises. For example, Bishop Asbury believed he was unable to minister because of his deteriorating physical health; this became his "trial." Only his sense of duty to the Church could compel him to travel into the remote regions of the nation's interior. As his health failed, negotiating the Midwest proved increasingly difficult. In 1810 Asbury boldly states the question which nagged countless elderly Christians: "How may I be useful? I am old, and feeble, and sick, and can do little." Resisting the tide of self-pity, Asbury rehearsed his spiritual life and concluded: "My body, I find is still flesh; [but] my mind enjoys great peace." Asbury knew as well as the next Methodist that physical infirmities were but one

manifestation of human weakness. Asbury surely recalled Philippians 4:13: "I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me." This assurance--and its verification in the life's of countless Christians--alone put his mind at ease. Of course, Asbury had been eminently useful and continued to be so until his death in March 1816.<sup>52</sup>

Death-bed scenes not only authenticated theology and clarified one's spiritual condition, they also presented opportunities for ministry. The death process intrinsically licensed believers to exhort friends and family to salvation. But in as much as one could minister to others, death also was a last occasion to receive salvation. Maxwell Gaddis tells of a "good woman" (i.e. unconverted) who, contrary medical advise, rises from her own death bed to pray for her dying (also unconverted) husband. She prayed fervently, "Lord do not cut him down!" Afterwards, she returned to her own bed, lay down smiling, and whispered "glory." Gaddis notes with satisfaction that both not only recovered, but "that day salvation came to their house."<sup>53</sup> While this couple's return to health was indeed fortunate, they could not escape the fact that only death had brought them "new" life.

One need not read too deeply in the literature to discover that not all endings were happy. Many Methodists' memories were indelibly scarred with images of people

---

<sup>52</sup>Elmer T. Clark, ed. *The Journals and Letters of Francis Asbury* 3 vols. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1958), II:646, 652.

<sup>53</sup>Gaddis, *Brief Recollections of the Late George W. Walker*, 267-269.

who died in the knowledge that their souls were destined for hell. Peter Cartwright recalled an 1842 quarterly meeting in Exeter, Illinois, with mixed emotion. More than "one hundred professed religion, and nearly that number joined the Methodist Episcopal Church" in the revival which stemmed from this assembly; yet one individual (from the "Eastern states" no less) intentionally neglected his conviction to pursue heart-felt religion. By all outward appearances, this man was a complete success: handsome, well-educated, "gentlemanly in all his conduct." But Cartwright could not gloss over the fact that this "good man" was every inch an infidel. Cartwright could have envisioned few scenarios more tragic.

As the Exeter revival waxed hotter, the infidel became more determined to procrastinate. He admitted religion was a "glorious cause," and "that he fully intended at some future time to seek [it]." Cartwright's pleas to seek God immediately went unheeded. In the meantime, Cartwright was called away to assist at another revival in progress. Soon thereafter the "infidel" became violently ill and called for Cartwright from his death-bed. The infidel's lament is gripping. He freely admitted that he was not ready to die and that he squandered an important opportunity. He believed that he would have found salvation had he pursued it. "But now, racked with pain almost insupportable, and scorched with burning fevers, and on the very verge of an eternal world, I have no hope in the future; all is dark, dark, gloomy." He groans on, "through light and mercy I have evaded and resisted God, his Spirit, and his ministers, and now

I must make my bed in hell, and bid an eternal farewell to all the means of grace, and all hope of heaven; lost! lost! forever lost!" Dejected, Cartwright "turned away and wept bitterly" at this "solemn and awful scene;" he was at a loss to understand how one could comprehend right yet choose wrong.<sup>54</sup>

Maxwell P. Gaddis tells of a similar experience from his assignment in Piqua, Ohio. At the urging of several concerned friends, Gaddis visited a local lawyer, Mr. J. M. Esq. This man told Gaddis how he had been convicted of his sin as a young adult, but failed to seek salvation because of a grudge against a member of the church. Now on his death-bed, the man insisted he was a "good man." When Gaddis presented the gospel to him and requested that they pray, the individual replied, "Not yet, sir." Despite repeated calls, the man obstinately refused the much needed prayer *he* recognized was necessary. In his last moments he did call for Gaddis; though both his patience and evangelical zeal were taxed to the limit, Gaddis responded immediately. He recounted the subsequent events with sadness: "I took his right hand in my own and kneeled down to pray for him as well as I could. I had not prayed long before I thought he ceased to breathe. I opened my eyes, and lo! his spirit had fled before the prayer was finished." Gaddis could not miss the significance of the occasion: delay only invites damnation. It is little wonder that Gaddis claims that he would never forget "not yet

---

<sup>54</sup>*Autobiography of Peter Cartwright*, 399.

sir."<sup>55</sup>

A. P. Mead also encountered a man whose spiritual indolence resulted in eternal death. This case, though, is unique. "Mr. Smith" had been released from an asylum shortly before the start of a camp meeting. He attended the services, under family supervision, and was captivated by the singing of the several thousand people present. Just as an itinerant was beginning his sermon, "he and the whole congregation [were] startled by the sudden appearance of 'maniac Smith.'" Without an invitation, Smith entered the pulpit and slowly surveyed the congregation. Mead claims he then spread out his hands and delivered a "thrilling" exhortation.

Smith, still moved by the heart-felt singing, screamed "My soul is dead!" He then briefly outlined how "the Prince of Darkness" enticed him away from his religious sensibilities and to destruction. Smith claimed that the burden of his infidelity grew unbearable. He then described something akin to spiritual suicide. He related that one night he "sought death, and it came." As he climbed up "the mountain of sin," he "came to a chasm, deep and fearful! Death, eternal death, stared me in the face, and I screamed piteously for help!"

"No one came to aid me. . . . Frantically, I grasped each shrub and rocky prominence which lay in my way; but they crumbled in my hands. I

---

<sup>55</sup>This man's personal attendant informed Gaddis that he spent his last day earnestly praying for himself. It is interesting to note that Gaddis refused to find any merit in these prayers. *Foot-Prints of an Itinerant*, 443-447.

reached the edge of the precipice! I glanced into that abyss of death! O! terror! terror! I pleaded with heaven for mercy; but great God! it was too late! . . . I felt myself going over the precipice. I clung with tenacity to everything within my reach; but nothing could save me. I shrieked! I groaned! *Down to perdition went my soul!*"

Smith had the congregation worked into frenzy at this point. Yet having told his story with a mesmerizing passion, he paused for a long moment; when he resumed he spoke with a quiet intensity equally moving as before: "I am living without a soul! You, people of God, may sing your praises, for it is sweet incense to your souls. But you, sinners . . . must repent this day, or your souls will go after mine over that deep, dark, dark, fearful abyss into hell! Will you repent or go with me into eternal perdition?"<sup>56</sup> Mead claims Smith lost his mind due to a severe fever brought on by drunkenness. Yet one wonders if Smith's "insanity" was a sentence mandated by the Christian community?

Francis Asbury Hester held that only a loss of consciousness could extinguish the hope of salvation (he seems to have made no allowance for the fact that some might "consciously" not choose religion). On December 13, 1850, Hester preached the funeral of a Mr. Brown. Hester had counseled Brown to the very end. He adds, with some comfort--and a good dose of exasperation at having to go through such an eleventh-hour ordeal--that Brown "died happy, though he had been irreligious until within a few

---

<sup>56</sup>Unfortunately Mead supplies neither place nor time for this camp meeting. Mead, *Mana in the Wilderness*, 143-144.



hours of his death. I tried to show the people the *uncertainty* of postponing preparation to so late an hour."

Where Brown's death proved the enduring hope of salvation, Julia Ott's represents how itinerants struggled to certify the spiritual welfare of their parishioners. After speaking with her at her bedside, Hester entered the following reflection in his diary: "It seems she once enjoyed religion,--but on her bed of illness she told me--some weeks ago--that she thought she did not still enjoy it. Tho afterwards she spoke with some more confidence, I am not fully satisfied in regard to her case." Despite his best efforts, Ott's eternal destiny remained an enigma to Hester.<sup>57</sup> This helps explain the death-bed interrogation of believers: ministers, family, and friends sought clear affirmations of faith in the face of death. Thus, with great pride Peter Pelham informed Edward Dromgoole that his daughter died "shouting Glory Glory Glory as long as she was heard to utter a word. *She gave us all the hope and belief imaginable that she was*

---

<sup>57</sup>Francis Asbury Hester, *Diary*. Typescript Copy (Archives of DePauw University and Indiana United Methodism. Greencastle, IN. Collection Number: MC 40), December 13, 1850--110 (Brown); March 22, 1854--167 (Ott). Like most itinerants, Hester was disinclined to give up on anyone.

"I was sent for to visit a young man in the country, who it is feared, is about to die, of consumption. He once belonged to the Church and professed religion, but carelessly lost both. He is sparing of his words, but expresses himself as feeling badly, his prayers seeming to be unavailing, &c. I talked to, read the Scriptures, and sang and prayed with him. Hope for good results. May the good Lord be merciful to him!" (January 1855--179).

*going to rest.*"<sup>58</sup>

## **Conclusion**

Many Methodists died didactic deaths. Each death-bed scene filled a vital educational function, providing a venue in which to creatively construct and validate doctrine. This theological structure was a composite of ordinary experiences. It was not difficult to substantiate an emerging theology from everyday society. Pervasive crime and corruption authenticated humanity's fallen nature.<sup>59</sup> Death-bed scenes confirmed that heaven and hell were certain, real places in which to spend eternity. Punishment was inescapable for unbelievers. But the central theme emphasized heaven and the believer's reward: their soon-to be-changed nature, living with God, reunion with loved-ones, etc.<sup>60</sup> Christians were to live lives of constant readiness and

---

<sup>58</sup>Dated May 3, 1812. From "The Edward Dromgoole Letters, 1778-1812" in William Warren Sweet, *Religion on the American Frontier, 1783-1840*. Vol 4. *The Methodists* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1946), 200, my emphasis; see also Pelham's letter dated May 15, 1809--182.

<sup>59</sup>The connection between crime and evangelicalism needs investigating. A public execution functioned as a sacred-secular catharsis: allowing passive mob violence to be meted out on social transgressors, but also serving as a haunting reminder of the dark side of every individual. Methodist ministers were quick to take advantage of such opportunities to deliver searching sermons.

<sup>60</sup>"Horrors of the Death Chamber" is a powerful contrast to this emphasis on eternal reward. Here Gaddis recounts attempting to minister to an infidel who had premonition of his own death; the man arrogantly defied God, even though believing that his forewarning was a providential sign to settle his spiritual affairs. As a result, the individual degenerated into a demon-like being, literally tied to his bed, shouting obscenities and curses. The scene became so foul that even Gaddis would not remain

expectation: death should be neither a surprise nor a mystery. Moreover, one need not postpone celebrating their spiritual inheritance until death. Believers could experience heaven while on earth.

Joseph Ogelsby took this charge to heart. He "died with his armor on, and fell in sight of glory." Ogelsby not only was well prepared for death, but began to experience "eternal" glory while living.<sup>61</sup> Ogelsby was not an exception; he and countless others demonstrate the transworld nature of Methodist death. William Christie correlated his weakening physical condition with his proximity to heaven, remarking several times that he was "almost home."<sup>62</sup> Jacob Young also experienced heaven from his death-bed. "After pronouncing his blessing upon those who surrounded his dying couch, he exclaimed, 'Sweet heaven!, sweet heaven!' and his happy spirit enter[ed] its rest."<sup>63</sup> One woman was so happy in her death that she could not distinguish whether she was on earth or heaven.<sup>64</sup>

---

in the same room. *Foot-Prints of an Itinerant*, 140-143.

<sup>61</sup>James B. Finley, *Sketches of Western Methodism: Biographical, Historical, and Miscellaneous*. Edited by W. P. Strickland. (Cincinnati: Methodist Book Concern, 1854), 249.

<sup>62</sup>Finley, *Autobiography*, 433-434.

<sup>63</sup>Stewart, *Highways and Hedges*, 306.

<sup>64</sup>Gaddis, *Saintly Women and Death-bed Triumphs*, 265.

Mary Walker looked "like an inhabitant of another and better world" at her death.<sup>65</sup> Bishop Enoch George had such "ecstatic communion with heaven and heavenly beings" the day he died that he asked those attending him to leave for the night so as to not interrupt his "communion."<sup>66</sup> "A few days before [Samuel H. Thompson's] death God was pleased to give him *such a view of the heavenly world* as filled his soul with joy unspeakable and full of glory; and he continued until his death glorifying in tribulation, and rejoicing in hope of the glory of God."<sup>67</sup> Augusta Clark Cole exclaimed from her death-bed: "I am free; bless the Lord! Glory be to God. Thanks be unto God, who giveth us the victory through Lord Jesus Christ!" She continued, "How full the room is of light! Don't you see it? Everything is touched with the divine glory." The holy presence which attended Cole's death filled her with the confidence characteristic of Methodist death. She soon boasted, "*If this is dying it is very easy.*"<sup>68</sup>

It would appear that a few enjoyed the rare privilege of this transworld experience without dying.<sup>69</sup> Had he access to the source, Cartwright undoubtedly

---

<sup>65</sup>Gaddis, *Brief Recollections*, 359.

<sup>66</sup>Brown, *The Methodists*, 119-120.

<sup>67</sup>Leaton, *History of Methodism in Illinois from 1793-1832* (Cincinnati: Walden and Stowe, 1883), 136, my emphasis.

<sup>68</sup>Cole died in 1872. *Saintly Women and Death-Bed Triumphs*, 82-83, my emphasis.

<sup>69</sup>While it was more common to eagerly anticipate departure or to "see" into heaven, a few Methodists profess life-after-death experiences. Sallie Caldwell is one of the best

would have paralleled his sketch of the hopeless infidel with James H. Keys' experience "on the very verge of an eternal world." Keys described the contradictory aspects of this experience to Edward Dromgoole. Keys was completely unnerved at the prospect that he was about to "meet an all powerful God, seated upon a throne of justice." Unfortunately, he found the encounter disappointing, even anti-climatic: "I experienced not those overflowings of the spirit of God--those sweet and consolatory feelings,--those beams of heavenly bliss, that so frequently, and so usually evidence themselves to the children of grace, particularly when on the threshold of eternity, about to wing their flight into the presence of God." Keys did draw valuable insights from the experience, however and wanted others such as Dromgoole to benefit them. "I can truly and justly say, that my affliction has been a blessing to me. It has taught me, for ever hereafter, to live nearer to God, more obedient to the will of my master, and more subservient to his holy law."<sup>70</sup>

---

examples here. A nine year-old in Batavia, NY had a similar encounter. Upon regaining consciousness she said: "Glory! Ma, I didn't want to come back here." She goes on to describe in detail her experience in heaven. Mead, *Mana in the Wilderness*, 190. More common was Bishop Robert R. Roberts' experience during his New Year's Eve sermon in 1842. Roberts' text was Proverbs 22:11 ("He that loveth pureness of heart, for the grace of his lips, the King will be his friend"). The congregation was surprised to find the otherwise frail Roberts rejuvenated as he spoke. His discourse on the necessity of holiness and one's ability to attain it, moved the people deeply. Moreover, when he began to speak on friendship with God, Roberts "seemed to lose sight of earth and lay hold of the glories of the heavenly world" (Charles Elliot, *The Life of Rev. Robert R. Roberts* [Cincinnati: Wright and Swormstedt, 1844], 368-369).

<sup>70</sup>Dated Oct. 22, 1805. Sweet, *Methodists*, 158.

Mary Wheeler also regained consciousness after appearing to have died. She claims heaven gleamed "beautifully white." She adds an interesting dimension concerning the believer's reward: "I had supposed the crowns worn in heaven were decorated. But nothing can decorate them. They are beautiful beyond description. They are glory itself!" Observers were astounded at her detail and language used to express her vision; at that point they likened her to an "unearthly being."<sup>71</sup> Wheeler's experience raises an important question: Was the transworld experience open to all believers or just those "with eyes that see and ears that hear?" In other words, did each death afford the same privileges and opportunities to each believer?

Finally, and above all else, if each of these death-bed attributes came together in one grand concert, the believer's death would fulfill its ultimate objective: it would glorify God.<sup>72</sup> This returns us to the theology of death. Death-bed scenes were much

---

<sup>71</sup>Wheeler died in 1837. *Saintly Women and Death-Bed Triumphs*, 102.

<sup>72</sup>One of the ironies here is that in glorifying God, believers also focused considerable attention on themselves. Victorious Christians were celebrated as often as God was praised. Take for example, John Strange's exclamation while preaching the funeral of his close friend and co-laborer Edwin Ray in the Fall of 1831. Strange preached on Christ's return to inaugurate the millennium. Strange explained that Christ would not return alone; instead he would be flanked with all the saints who had died up to that point. Strange then stopped abruptly. After a moment's pause during which he scanned the horizon, he wondered aloud, "Where is Edwin Ray?" "Still looking upward, he exclaimed, 'I see him' I see him!" F. C. Holliday notes that, with hands raised upward, Strange then welcomed his friend's return with a "voice that seemed to reach the heavens." Strange proceeded to shout repeatedly, "Hail Edwin!" According to Holliday, "the effect was thrilling and will never be forgotten by those who heard it" (F. C. Holliday, *Indiana Methodism: Being an Account of the Introduction, Progress,*

more than gospel vignettes. Each death tested the validity of the Methodist theology. Hence, death-bed scenes tell of a little noticed yet vital nineteenth-century ministry. If profession of faith was the sole criterion which licensed laity and clergy, men women and children to active service, death-bed scenes were "evangelical" in every sense of the term. Moreover, they epitomize the antebellum evangelical culture--one could witness even as they exhaled their final breath. This points to a fascinating conundrum: given this perpetual reaffirmation, why did the Methodist theological superstructure erode over the course of the nineteenth century?

This essay operates on the assumption that Methodism and enthusiasm were synonyms in antebellum America. In fact, this holy zeal was Methodism's definitive attribute. This essay, then, is an exploration into the spiritual and intellectual construction of enthusiasm. Many Methodists leaned towards, if not openly embraced, a mystical faith. They communicated directly with God and he with them; death-beds were just one venue for such exchanges.<sup>73</sup> The Methodists represented in this essay

---

*and Present State of Methodism in the State*[Cincinnati: Hitchcock and Walden, 1873], 106.

<sup>73</sup>Two essential scripture references for this mysticism are: "Howbeit we speak wisdom among them that are perfect: yet not the wisdom of this world, nor of the princes of this world, that come to nought. But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, even hidden wisdom, which God ordained before the world unto our glory. Which none of the princes of this world knew: for had they known it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. But as it is written, Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him. But God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit: for the Spirit

were not fringe members but the core constituents fueling the most dynamic component of antebellum evangelicalism. Certainly there would have been voices of opposition. An important issue is how did this opposition gain the upper hand by the end of the nineteenth-century to occasion the holiness and pentecostal factions?<sup>74</sup> Methodists took seriously the charge to share their faith. The Church was the primary conduit by which humanity could be redeemed. But at its core, the evangelical religious experience was confidential, dangerously private (because one could essentially engender their own salvation, it could be more easily feigned). Yet true heart-felt religion was always genuine, "sealed" with various evidences--one of which was a victorious death.

Sallie Caldwell died an exemplary death on many counts: 1) she patiently bore acute physical pain; 2) she allowed others to play a role, i.e. participate, in her death; 3) she knew--yet conquered--fear of the grave; 4) she utilized her death to challenge the

---

searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God" (1 Corinthians 2:6-10); and "Whom having not seen, ye love; in whom, though now ye see him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory: Receiving the end of your faith, even the salvation of your souls" (1 Peter 1:8-9). Mrs. McAllister offers important insight into the mystical aspect of death: "The land of Beulah is no longer in the distance, or a land enveloped in mist; nor is it where we catch but occasional glimpses of celestial light from a clouded sky; but it is a land from whose clear sky a bright steady light shines upon my pathway; an *increasing* light, as I journey onward, permeating my very being" (*Sunshine Among the Clouds*, 34, emphasis in original).

<sup>74</sup>The essay also has resonance in the present. There is a wave of revivals sweeping the world with remarkable phenomena. People are reporting happenings that rival, if not surpass, the touchstone of the Second Great Awakening--the 1801 meetings at Cane Ridge, Kentucky. Richard Riss has electronically chronicled many of these events through his e-mail lists, "New Wine" and "Awakenings."



living; and, finally, 5) in her last moments she occupied a spiritual prominence between present and future. In dying Caldwell enjoyed a "transworld experience" visualizing what others could not see, even by faith. As a result, through her reports on the world beyond, her death-bed served as a travelogue through which others could vicariously experience the joy and glory of heaven. Naturally, no single death-bed scene can serve as a rigid model against which all others are measured; yet, as has been demonstrated, there are commonalities. Such death-bed scenes remain obscured by the sweeping change in the MEC as an institution, which grew exponentially over the course of the nineteenth century. Subsequently, most Methodist ministers were too preoccupied with the mechanics of their profession to effectively engage in a one-on-one dialogue with individual believers. The net result is that they were slowly relegated to role of observer: relating death-bed experiences back to the institution while negotiating their authenticity. As fellow believers, full-time clergy inevitably walked away from these encounters envious that their parishioners were favored with such manifestations of glory.

The most coveted Methodist deaths were didactic, interactive, and truly gala experiences. One of the underlying issues of this essay is to determine what such deaths commemorate. In writing her own epitaph ("I do not fear death; I have tried to live a Christian, and think I can die one.") Sallie Caldwell voiced a sentiment widely shared, but which transcended denominational labels among nineteenth-century evangelical

Christians. Methodist death-bed scenes accentuate the do-it-yourself theological core of evangelicalism. This element of spiritual self-help is an integral component of nineteenth-century evangelicalism and evangelical culture. Death-bed scenes proved an important didactic tool for the Church: they taught believers how to die victoriously; and they also were characteristically evangelical, filling a missionary role by calling sinners to eternal reward rather than punishment. Death was central to nineteenth-century Methodism and the evangelical culture it embodied. Consequently, many Methodists lived to die. While waiting they undoubtedly rehearsed the "Farewell Song to Earth:"

"When for eternal worlds we steer,  
And seas are calm, and skies are clear,  
And faith in lively exercise,  
The distant hills of Canaan rise,  
The soul for joy now claps her wings,  
And loud her Heavenly sonnet sings--  
Vain world adieu.

"With cheerful hope her eyes explore  
Each landmark on the distant shore;  
The trees of life, the pasture's green,  
The golden streets, the crystal stream.  
Again for joy she claps her wings,  
And loud her Heavenly anthem sings--  
I am going home.

"The nearer still she draws to land,  
More eager all her powers expand:  
With steady helm, and free bent sail,  
Her anchor drops within the vail.  
And now for joy she folds her wings

And her *celestial* sonnet sings--  
I AM SAFE AT HOME!"<sup>75</sup>

---

<sup>75</sup>Gaddis, *Sacred Hour*, 364, emphasis in original.

## **The Place of Pioneer Worship**

This chapter seeks to understand the correlations between physical and spiritual geography. The worship environment of antebellum Midwestern evangelicalism was not static; it evolved as the church institutionalized. How, then, does location pertain to worship? Specifically, how did rivers, trees, and open spaces--prairies--affect Methodist worship in the antebellum Midwest? These distinct regional attributes infused corporate worship with a decidedly mystical component. This essay does not reduce causal factors to environmental determinism, arguing that proximity produced practice; rather, I propose that Methodists maximized the variety of meanings associated with the landscape (particularly "wilderness") to their spiritual advantage. Thus, place was a fuel for meaning. In other words, place not only was an intrinsic component of Midwestern Methodist worship, it was central to their identity as antebellum evangelicals.

While this raw energy proved invaluable for kindling the fires of revivalism, an incessant flow of human and animal traffic significantly altered the spiritual potency of these place attributes. In other words, place was bound by time. This produced a paradox: how could Methodists replenish this spiritual energy as the region became more populated, services were increasingly structured, and the venue of worship shifted from groves and private homes to "churches" (buildings designated for worship)? Methodists found that in sacralizing the worship environment, they transcended human

time. Thus they could utilize their sacred spaces indefinitely. (Yet another paradox is that many of these sacred spaces were man-made.) The irony here is that Methodists, having ostensibly solved their dilemma of time and space, chose a more "cultured" worship experience. With a few exceptions, the most notable being the Layman's Revival of 1857, the more mystical-based worship characteristic of Midwestern Methodism from the turn of the century to the mid-1830s, slowly waned until rediscovered in the Holiness controversy of the 1880s. Over the course of the century place became an inactive ingredient of Methodist worship; sacred place became memorialized, celebrated but not experienced as in the antebellum period. As a result, practice became the only avenue by which Methodists could reclaim their heritage of experiential religion.

### **A Theory of Place**

Why place, and not space? Is it possible to "perceive" an environment? This subject seemingly poses more questions than it provides answers; moreover, no single discipline can accommodate the source material. Traditionally, historians have given little attention to the connections between human ideas and institutions and the physical environment. Likewise, geographers have viewed the physical world from a geodetic perspective: mapping landforms and the ways in which humans alter that physical

environment.<sup>1</sup> The two modes of inquiry began to converge in the late-1950s. John Brinckerhoff Jackson was particularly instrumental in charting this course; other key contributors include Yi-Fu Tuan, Roderick Nash, and D. W. Meinig. Nearly four decades later, though, few religious "environments" have been mapped.<sup>2</sup>

One theme or concept dominates this literature: landscape. Scholars have been especially concerned with the "vernacular" landscape: those areas and artifacts which encompass and enrich everyday life. Geographers, and to a limited degree social historians, have been searching to understand the parochial, seriously studying the mundane from highway road signs to popular architecture to dating rituals. A greater sensitivity to labels/terminology is one of the fundamental contributions of this literature. For example, nature is not necessarily synonymous with landscape; human is not the antithesis of nature; environments do not automatically produce scenery.

---

<sup>1</sup>Kent C. Ryden notes that: "the geodetic viewpoint sees the earth not as a collection of places to be experienced but as a surface to be measured, a featureless surface with nothing on it but mathematical coordinates of longitude and latitude. . . . The geodetic view doesn't take into account the multiplicity of stuff that is on the earth's surface, the things that can be thought about, the words that can be said about it; it just looks from survey marker to survey marker, thinks about where one mathematical point is in relation to another mathematical point." *Mapping the Invisible Landscape: Folklore, Writing and the Sense of Place* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1993), 16.

<sup>2</sup>The two best studies are Meinig's "The Mormon Culture Region: Strategies and Patterns in the Geography of the American West, 1847-1964," *Annals, Association of American Geographers*, 55 (June 1965): 191-220; and Jackson's "The Order of a Landscape: Reason and Religion in Newtonian America" in D. W. Meinig, ed., *The Interpretation of Ordinary Landscapes* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979), 153-163.

Landscape can encompass all or none of these attributes. Thus, it is a dynamic (as opposed to static) *mental* construct. Meinig best articulates the "landscape school" axiom: "We regard all landscapes as symbolic, as expression of cultural values, social behavior, and individual actions worked upon particular localities over a span of time."<sup>3</sup> This blending "pure" science and the "subjective" opens intriguing possibilities. Of course, as psychogeography makes plain, the contrary is true as well.<sup>4</sup> Yet the intersection of disciplines has enriched our understanding of both past and present. It also portends well for future inquiries.<sup>5</sup>

---

<sup>3</sup>Meinig, *Interpretation of Ordinary Landscapes*, 6.

<sup>4</sup>One of the most recent and distressing works here is Howard F. Stein and William G. Niederland, eds. *Maps from the Mind: Readings in Psychogeography* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1989). "Psychogeography is the study of how issues, experiences, and processes that result from growing up in a male or female body become symbolized and played out in the wider social and natural worlds, which serve as 'screens' for these inner dramas" (xvii). William Niederland's essays on "River Symbolism" were of particular--but short lived--interest to this essay (13-81). Niederland recounts clinical encounters through which he "helped" patients explore repressed experiences of incest and sexual dysfunctions of various sorts, e.g. fear of castration and "conflicts centering around urethral and anal problems" (76).

<sup>5</sup>I mention pure science as this has been a point of contention within the social science community. It appears that geographers in particular have had to justify their use of the subjective. Two works especially address this theme. Robert David Sack's *Conceptions of Space in Social Thought: A Geographic Perspective* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1980) is a challenging work geared to "scientists" stubbornly wedded to empirical data. Sack builds on this hard science foundation to push the field toward a more subjective approach. He concludes that historians and geographers need to combine energies to better map the meaning of space and place. Sack advocates chorological synthesis to distinguish between generic (any place sharing a common set of variables) and specific (subsets of generic places based on shared

Landscape is perceived and interpreted through what Yi-Fu Tuan calls the "mind's eye." Dennis E. Cosgrove concurs. He argues that "landscape is not merely the world we see, it is a construction, a composition of that world. Landscape is a way of seeing the world." This notion of visualizing landscape (the process of recognizing the "intricate intimate intermingling of physical, biological, and cultural features which any

---

variables--what Sack labels "spatial linkages") areal places. "The sense of place that comes from chorological analysis is similar to the sense of time (such as era, epoch or biography) that comes from the study of history" (86-87). Ryden offers a helpful perspective: "if geographers make maps and formulate interpretations of the physical landscape, chorographers are mappers and interpreters of the invisible landscape. . . . In grasping the basic difference between geography and chorography we are back at the basic conflict between the cartographer and the storyteller, between map and memory, between the outsider and the insider, between tourist and native" (*Mapping the Invisible Landscape*, 50). William Norton's *Explorations in the Understanding of Landscape: A Cultural Geography* (Contributions in Sociology, Number 77 [New York: Greenwood Press, 1989]) also places geography within a more "scientific" framework. He synthesizes, with incredible detail, the entire scope and history of cultural geography. Yet Norton emphasizes the theoretical underpinnings of geography, implicitly highlighting the scientific and quantitative over subjective. Actually, Meinig put the issue to rest in 1979: "Landscape is . . . the impressions of our senses rather than the logic of the sciences" (*Interpretation of Ordinary Landscapes*, 2).

One of the more interesting "scientific" works which ventures into the subjective is J. Douglas Porteous' *Landscapes of the Mind: Worlds of Sense and Metaphor* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1990). Porteous combines literary analysis, metaphor, and humanistic geography to explore--not always convincingly--the psychology of landscape. Like Stein and Niederland, though, Porteous seems to push well beyond the believable. For example, he advocates "an exploration of sexscape, ranging from deeper penetration of bodyscape and pornotopia to land-use studies of the sex-related districts of cities and, perhaps, an attempt to classify landscapes psychiatrically as oral, anal and genital" (196). Given these limitations, Porteous makes a significant contribution; he challenges practitioners of geography--of any variety--to accommodate a broader vision. In this regard, his material on smellscape and soundscape is especially intriguing.



glance around us displays")<sup>6</sup> is central to humanistic, historical, and cultural geography, as well as social and environmental history. Roger M. Downs and David Stea have labeled this process *cognitive mapping*. A cognitive map is the collective imprint of a spatial environment: knowledge of "whereness" (the ability to locate places or processes within a given place) and "whatness" (the ability to distinguish between objects or people at a given location). Downs and Stea maintain that a cognitive map merely "reflects the world as *some person believes it to be*," it need not be correct."<sup>7</sup>

Though landscape is constructed on an individual basis, Jackson observes that it is a "shared experience."

A landscape should establish bonds between people, the bond of language, of manners, of the same kind of work and leisure, and above all a landscape should contain the kind of spatial organization which fosters such experiences and relationships; spaces for coming together, to celebrate, spaces for solitude, spaces that never change and are always as memory depicted them. These are some of the characteristics that give a landscape its uniqueness, that give it style. These are what make us recall it with emotion."<sup>8</sup>

Such shared experience(s), the commonality rooted in individual perceptions, accentuates the plasticity of landscape. Again, Jackson's distills many years of debate

---

<sup>6</sup>Meinig, *Interpretation of Ordinary Landscapes*, 2; Tuan, "Thought and Landscape: They Eye and the Mind's Eye," in *Interpretation of Ordinary Landscapes*, 89-102; Cosgrove, *Social Formation and Symbolic Landscape* (London: Croom Helm Ltd., 1984), 13.

<sup>7</sup>Roger M. Downs and David Stea, *Maps in Minds: Reflections on Cognitive Mapping* (New York: Harper and Row, Publishers, 1977), 6, 39, 43, 54.

<sup>8</sup>Jackson, *Necessity for Ruins*, 16-17.

to a few well crafted thoughts:

"Landscape is not a natural feature of the environment but a *synthetic* space, a man-made system of spaces superimposed on the face of the land, functioning and evolving not according to natural laws but to serve a community--for the collective character of the landscape is one thing that all generations and all points of view have agreed upon. A landscape is thus a space deliberately created to speed up or slow down the process of nature [i.e. time]."<sup>9</sup>

One can neither understand nor appreciate the significance of the various perceptions of the Midwest without this abstract frame of reference. Richard Rhodes posits that "the Middle West was a land before it was people, a broad inland ground. . . . Only slowly settled, and not settled yet. A place of many places." These distinct places formed a constellation of meaning; place served as the source of a synergistic structure of identity and utility.<sup>10</sup> The sense of place, then, as opposed to space, stems from a concatenation of images. Ryden claims that "a sense of place results gradually and unconsciously from inhabiting a landscape over time, becoming familiar with its physical properties, accruing a history within its confines."<sup>11</sup> What is the "accrued" history of the antebellum Midwest as a distinct place, and, in particular, its religious

---

<sup>9</sup>Jackson, *Discovering the Vernacular Landscape*, 8.

<sup>10</sup>Richard, Rhodes, *The Inland Ground: An Evocation of the American Middle West*. Revised Edition. (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 1991), 3.

<sup>11</sup>Ryden, *Mapping the Invisible Landscape*, 38. He adds that whereas place has assigned meaning as a result of habitation, space "is abstract, geometrical, undifferentiated" (37). Tuan provides a detailed theoretical analysis of this issue in *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1977).

environment?

### **The Midwest As Physical Place**

Three attributes dominate antebellum Midwestern topography: rivers, trees, and prairies. Whether from a temporary or permanent resident, or one of the many travellers passing through, these features almost intrinsically elicited comment. As natural and cultural resources, each, ironically, was an agent of prosperity and privation; these attributes proved a signal influence on the course of regional settlement and development. In many respects then, rivers, forests, and prairies helped make the Midwest a distinct region. While prairies clearly were given less notice, it is difficult to determine whether rivers or the vast expanse of hardwood forests most captivated those who witnessed them.

### **Rivers**

Rivers have histories. Walter Havighurst's *River to the West* is a history of the people who settled the Ohio River Valley. Though he devotes relatively little attention to the river itself, the Ohio looms large on every page.<sup>12</sup> Typically, those who write

---

<sup>12</sup>Havighurst, *River to the West: Three Centuries of the Ohio* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1970). R. E. Banta had taken much the same approach a generation earlier. For Banta, though, the Ohio was a highway of culture by which "civilization" triumphed over savagery. Yet this civilization was, to a degree, dependent upon the "natural" state which it redeemed. In this way Banta highlights the central paradox of the Midwestern landscape: while it evoked "rural" place images, it was a gradually urbanizing environment. *The Ohio in Rivers of America* Series ed. by Harvey Allen and Carl Carmer. (New York: Rinehart and Company, 1949).

about rivers see them as an extension of themselves. River histories are intimate narratives often written with a first-person perspective implicitly if not outright. For example, writing about the Kankakee, Fay Folsom Nichols contends that "he who has not been moved by a river, has missed one of life's greatest thrills. Real America pours out from rivers, as surely as their waters go to the sea."<sup>13</sup>

What makes these waterways unique? Many Midwesterners found meaning and order through their relationship to the region's rivers. The Wabash provided a source of personal identity for William E. Wilson. Despite repeated efforts at resolution, Wilson could not account for the river's hold on him. Unable to reach a conclusion, he submitted to the notion that rivers invariably attract those who live near them. "Perhaps it is the river's beauty. Perhaps it is the current's symbolism of eternal change within eternal changelessness." Wilson notes that the Wabash not only offered reassurance, but provided "permanence and stability" with which to order his world. Even if he cannot comprehend why the river captivates him, Wilson accepts his dependency: "for the river is his first and natural boundary, and he knows that a strange place, without a river from which he could take his bearings, would seem to him

---

<sup>13</sup>Nichols, *The Kankakee: Chronicle of an Indiana River and Its Fabled Marshes* (Theo. Gaus' Sons, Inc. 1965), ix-x.

strange indeed--shapeless, confusing, and without reason for being."<sup>14</sup>

Timothy Flint's *Condensed Geography and History of the Western States* made the same point in 1828. Flint notes that the lure of becoming a "boatman" proved difficult to resist. Though he cautioned that river life was anything but glamorous, Flint was not surprised that many young men left their farms at the first opportunity.<sup>15</sup> Scott Russell Sanders puts it plainly: "I am one who is drawn to water. . . . The river I have come to know most deeply, the river that winds through the center of my imagination as it winds through my region, is the Ohio." "The transformation from natural river to human artifact" was endlessly repeated in the Midwest. And yet, as Robert L. Reid posits, "this flow, flux, [and] transformation has given the Ohio River

---

<sup>14</sup>Wilson, *The Wabash* (New York: Farrar and Rinehart Inc., 1940), 6. One of the most recent examples of these "river narratives" is B. C. Hall and C. T. Wood's *Big Muddy: Down the Mississippi through America's Heartland* (New York: Dutton, 1992). Infatuated with Twain and all things with any semblance, however distant, to Huck Finn, Hall and Wood journey the entire river via U.S. Highway 61. This work is a personal notebook, the combined mental journal of two men on a personal quest (though what they seek is not entirely clear). Two key themes emerge: 1) the river is a source of life which compels people to ponder their relationship with it, and 2) humans are driven to control this vital energy. "If we had a design in mind for our journey, it was to see what life on the Mississippi is like today and how people are treating the river; we also meant to keep in mind some important aspects of history and see how they have affected the river, and maybe how the river has affected them" (4).

<sup>15</sup>Flint, *A Condensed Geography and History of the Western States or Mississippi Valley* 2 volumes (Cincinnati: E. H. Flint, 1828); Reprint with an Introduction by Bernard Rosenthal (Gainesville, Florida: Scholar's Facsimiles and Reprint, 1970), I:233-234.

and its basin a paradoxical--but somehow abiding--sense of place."<sup>16</sup> The same could be said of every river in the region.<sup>17</sup>

Rivers served to bond people to place; the meaning of "Midwestern" would be much different without them. It is interesting that the myriad fresh water lakes seem overlooked: in particular, the Great Lakes drew little mention. Only occasional notice was given to some water-related phenomena. For example, Zadok Cramer advertised the curative powers of the Yellow Springs near Xenia, Ohio, in his very popular travel guide.<sup>18</sup> Beyond this, however, travellers and residents directed their comments to rivers alone. Yet this is not surprising as many made their way to the region by river. Much of this river dialogue concerns the first sighting of a river and the unique sensation of river travel. Charles Fenno Hoffman speaks for the majority of individuals who ventured West in the early nineteenth century: "No man will ever forget his first

---

<sup>16</sup>Robert L. Reid, ed. *Always a River: The Ohio River and the American Experience* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991), 1-2, xv-xvi.

<sup>17</sup>A selective index of the rivers (from East to West):  
 Ohio: Muskingum, Scioto, Sandusky, Great and Little Miami, Maumee  
 Michigan: Grand, St. Joseph, Saginaw  
 Indiana: Whitewater, White, Wabash, Kankakee  
 Illinois: Embarrass, Kaskaskia, Sangamon, Illinois, Rock,  
 And of course, the two sentinels: the Ohio and Mississippi.

<sup>18</sup>Zadok Cramer, *The Navigator; Containing Directions for Navigating the Monongahela, Allegheny, Ohio and Mississippi Rivers*;... (Pittsburgh: Cramer, Spear and Eichbaum, 1814); Reprint in March of America Facsimile Series, Number 61. (Ann Arbor: University Microfilms, Inc., 1966), 233-234.

view of the Ohio." The anticipation of seeing and then traveling on the rivers was intense. Rivers journeys in autumn were especially memorable. Timothy Flint argued that there is no place in the country more beautiful than the "western country" during this season. There was something unique about river travel, the motion of the boats on water often left a lasting impression. John A. Clark recalled getting underway with fondness: "the luxury of the moment was worth travelling four hundred miles to enjoy!"<sup>19</sup>

For this period in the Midwest, the Mississippi did not serve the crucial psychic function of the other rivers. In fact, as with the Great Lakes, it seems to belong to a different place entirely. The primary sources consulted for this essay were most attentive to the Ohio. William Oliver notes that the "Mississippi very much differs from

---

<sup>19</sup>Hoffman, *A Winter in the Far West*, (London, 1835), 48; Timothy Flint, *Recollections of the Last Ten Years Passed in Occasional Residences and Journeyings in the Valley of the Mississippi* (Boston: Cummings, Hilliard, and Company, 1826); reprint, With an New Introduction by Robert F. Berkhofer, Jr., (New York: Johnson Reprint Corporation, 1968), 19; Clark, *Gleanings by the Way* (Philadelphia: W. J. and J. K. Simon, 1842), 50. Frederick W. Thomas put these sentiments to verse in *The Emigrant, or Reflections While Descending the Ohio* (1833; reprint Cincinnati: J. Drake, 1872):

We both are pilgrims, wild and winding river!  
 Both wandering onward to the boundless West--  
 But thou art given by the good All-giver,  
 Blessing a land to be in turn blest:  
 While, like a leaf-borne insect, floating by  
 Chanceful and changeful is my destiny;  
 I needs must follow where thy current lave--  
 Perchance to find a home, or else, perchance a grave (Stanza 1, p. 9).

the Ohio in its natural features. There is a solitary desolation that strikes one with a sense of melancholy." He says the region is marked by an "uninteresting sameness." The Mississippi valley has "a grandeur, but it is the grandeur of desolation."<sup>20</sup>

Comments on the Mississippi often concerned its confluence with the Ohio. Catherine Stewart was surprised that "for a considerable distance, these two majestic bodies roll along, side by side, retaining their distinct hue; and seem proudly reluctant to the union; until, at length, the [Ohio's] clear, translucent stream is lost in Mississippi's dark and turbid wave."<sup>21</sup> Timothy Flint made a similar observation (most likely in 1816). He notes that "a sharp point, almost at right angles with either river, mingles their waters in the midst of deep and ancient forests, where the eye expatiates over vast and swampy woods, perhaps fifty miles in extent." The Mississippi, "rolling down his mass of turbid waters," was a stark contrast to the "limpid and greenish-coloured waters of the Ohio." Flint was impressed with the Ohio's near "milky whiteness." Even if Flint intended no biblical parallel, many of his readers would have made the connection: surely one could find ample honey in a region literally flowing with "milk."<sup>22</sup>

---

<sup>20</sup>William Oliver, *Eight Months in Illinois* (Newcastle upon Tyne: n.p. 1843); reprint, in March of America Facsimile Series, Number 81 (Ann Arbor: University Microfilms, Inc., 1966), 18.

<sup>21</sup>Catherine Stewart, *New Homes in the West* (Nashville: Cameron and Fall, 1843). Reprint in March of America Facsimile Series, Number 68 (Ann Arbor: University Microfilms, Inc., 1966), 87.

<sup>22</sup>Flint, *Recollections of the Last Ten Years*, 85-86.



The region's rivers and lakes, then, are not the natural boundaries they seem. Prior to the advent of steam navigation in the late-1820s, the Great Lakes belong to a distant place, far removed from the heart of the region. Likewise, the Mississippi was more foreign than familiar. It was "turbid" and possessed an inherent danger/violence unlike the Ohio. In both metaphor and fact, the Ohio was an avenue west; while caution was always prudent, the Ohio functioned as a shield during the perilous voyage.<sup>23</sup> Eventually, the Ohio River and the Great Lakes formed a protective rim with the "Midwest" nestled in between. One actually exited the Midwest somewhere in western Illinois--reaching the Mississippi only confirmed the fact that one had been in Iowa for some time.

Not all perspectives on Midwestern rivers were favorable. Writing from Cincinnati, Jan. 6, 1819, John Stillman Wright reported that Miami and White River Valleys were ripe with fertile land and good water. But he would not recommend settlement there because the inhabitants were "a meager, sickly, spiritless and

---

<sup>23</sup>Timothy Flint is even more explicit on the safety of traveling the Ohio in his *Condensed Geography*. He asserts that the "Ohio far exceeds [the Mississippi] in its calm, unbroken course, which seldom endangers the boats on its bosom, except by mismanagement, or storms" (*A Condensed Geography and History of the Western States*, II:298). Of course, the Ohio was every bit as dangerous as the Mississippi. Peak travel occurred during spring flooding. Thus, not only was navigating the river perilous, but so too were the thieves and rogues who stole or financially plundered travelers. For permanent residents, occasional flooding served to remind that the Ohio remained the vital force that brought them to the region.

unenterprising race." In other words, the Ohio Valley was good place going to waste.

Wright refines his assessment after three additional months of travel throughout the region. He finds a larger and, in his estimation, more disturbing issue: unscrupulous river town speculators colluded to deny aspiring men and women equal opportunity to obtain land and economic independence. Moreover, these land-jobbers "were wealthy when they came here." Wright draws attention to fact that these profiteers were outsiders. According to Wright, these individuals jeopardized the Ohio Valley's potential success: "These men . . . reside in towns along the river, they are at the head of all great business, they build elegant mansions, live in style, and diffuse an air of business, life and activity all around them. These circumstances give to the river towns an appearance of wealth and business, which has been the means of deceiving thousands."<sup>24</sup> Wright advised against settling in the Midwest, then, not because of the physical environment per se, but because the men and women established there were depreciating the place. Contrary to Wright's counsel, Midwestern Methodists accepted the challenge of changing the people and thereby protecting/improving place.

### **Forests**

Few encountered the Midwest and failed to comment on its vast expanse of

---

<sup>24</sup>John Stillman Wright, *Letters from the West; or a Caution to Emigrants* (Salem, N.Y: Dodd and Stevenson, 1819); reprint in March of America Facsimile Series, Number 64 (Ann Arbor: University Microfilms, Inc., 1966), 45-46, 21.

forests. It was nearly impossible to imagine the place without them. Samuel R. Brown lists the rich variety of trees in the region: oak (at least ten different species), honey locust, black walnut, butternut, hickory, pecan, mulberry, plum, sugar maple, elm, basswood, beach, buckeye, sycamore, white pine, spice wood, sassafras, haws, crab apple, wild cherry, and papaw. Of these, though, travelers and residents gave the sycamore and oak particular attention. One of the stock stories of Ohio Valley lore is of the great sycamore which accommodated thirteen men on horseback and had room left over. Morris Birkbeck was even more impressed by the white oak--the "glory of the upland forest;" he estimated that many rose 80 to 90 feet before the branches. One oak, "at four feet from the ground, was six feet in diameter; and at seventy-five feet, it measured nine feet round, or three feet in diameter."<sup>25</sup> It is little wonder that these leviathans compelled comment. In his geographic guide to the region, J. W. Foster contends that "trees are the noblest manifestations of vegetable life. Like men, they flourish best in communities, and are dependent on one another for support. Their infancy must be sheltered beneath the outstretching arms of the parent, until they

---

<sup>25</sup>Samuel R. Brown, *The Western Gazetteer; or Emigrant's Directory, Containing a Geographical Description of the Western States and Territories*, . . . (Auburn, N.Y.: H. C. Southwick, 1817), 24-26; Morris Birkbeck, *Notes on a Journey in America*, 4th Edition (London: James Ridgway, 1818); reprint in March of America Facsimile Series, Number 62 (Ann Arbor: University Microfilms, Inc., 1966), 71.

acquire the strength and vigor to shoot into the upper air, and become self-supporting."<sup>26</sup>

People became attached to the trees which covered the land. People spoke of trees with unabashed affection. This is not to say that many did not see nature as an impediment to "progress." Zadok Cramer was glad to see the forest "recede" and proposed that the entire region would soon be "one continued village." But in the mid-1830s, Henry Caswall, from Madison, Indiana, was surprised to find that the forest still dominated the landscape: "the axe has been busy for fifty years, and yet the forest maintains an undisputed right to nineteen-twentieths of the soil."<sup>27</sup> Birkbeck recalled one woman's fondness for the forest:

---

<sup>26</sup>J. W. Foster, *The Mississippi Valley: Its Physical Geography* (Chicago: S. C. Griggs and Company, 1869), 159-160.

<sup>27</sup>Cramer, *The Navigator*, 24-25; Henry Caswall, *America and the American Church* (London: J. G. & F. Rivington, 1839); reprint in *Religion in America*, ed. Edwin S. Gaustad (New York: Arno Press and the New York Times, 1969), 44. Timothy Flint makes an assertion which adds an interesting perspective to Cramer prediction. Flint argues that though the region remained forested, people "rush" out of the woods to participate in village activities.

"To an eye, however, that could contemplate the whole region, from an elevated point, it would even yet exhibit a great proportion of unbroken forest, only here and there chequered with farms. Yet in the country towns, and better settled districts, any spectacle, that collects the multitude, a training, an ordination, an election, or the commencement of any great public work, causes a rush from the woods and forests, which, like the tenanted trees of the poets in the olden time, seem to have given birth to crowds of men, women and children, pouring towards the point of attraction" (Flint, *Recollections of the Last Ten Years*, II:295).

"As we sat for breakfast we heard a report like the discharge of a cannon. It was a sycamore, one of the largest and most ancient of the forest, which had just then arrived at its term, and fallen under the weight of age. It formed one of a venerable group, about a quarter of a mile from our cabin, *and our hostess missed it instantly.*"<sup>28</sup>

William Nowlin remembers an oak and elm near his Michigan childhood home. "How familiar still their appearance to me, as they stood with their arms stretched out bidding me the most graceful salutations. They seemed almost like friends, at least there was some companionship about them, their forms were very familiar to me."<sup>29</sup> Nowlin considered this great oak, the "monarch of the clearing," a vital life form. "If that oak could have talked, what a wild, wild story it might have told."<sup>30</sup>

As was the case with rivers, not all who commented on the forests admired them. Forests were as oppressive as it they were impressive. Nowlin was glad when a clearing was cut in the forest; "the deep gloom of the forest had shaded us so long and was now

---

<sup>28</sup>Birkbeck, *Notes on a Journey in America*, 70, my emphasis.

<sup>29</sup>William Nowlin, *The Bark Covered House, or Back in the Woods Again* (Detroit: by the Author, 1876); reprint in March of America Facsimile Series, Number 74 (Ann Arbor: University Microfilms, Inc., 1966), 140-141. He underscores the point: "Is it any wonder that I claim some companionship to trees, since I passed so many years of my youth among them?" (145-146).

<sup>30</sup>Nowlin, *The Bark Covered House*, 144. "But few came into our clearing without seeing his majesty's presence" (142). Nowlin might have easily stated "sensing" for seeing.

removed."<sup>31</sup> On July 25, 1817, Birkbeck and his companions emerged at Mount Vernon (on the Ohio River) after many days travel through the woods. He recalls the thrill of open space.

"The view of the noble expanse was like the opening of bright day upon the gloom of night, to us who had been so long buried in deep forests. . . . To travel day after day, among trees of a hundred feet high, without a glimpse of the surrounding country, is oppressive to a degree which those cannot conceive who have not experienced it; and it must depress the spirits of the solitary settler to pass years in this state."

Birkbeck adds that many settlers must endure an "impaired vision:" "his visible horizon extends no farther than the tops of the trees which bound his plantation--perhaps, five hundred yards. Upwards he sees the sun and sky, and stars, but around him an eternal forest, from which he can never hope to emerge." It is little wonder he experienced "delight inconceivable to the inhabitants of open countries" upon reaching the Ohio River.<sup>32</sup>

Like Birkbeck, D. Griffiths, Jr. found the predominance of trees in the Midwest unfamiliar and troublesome.

"Instead of the open country to which he has been accustomed, the Englishman feels as if he were imprisoned in woods. On either side of the road nothing is to be seen beyond the length of a single farm but woods!

---

<sup>31</sup>Nowlin, *The Bark Covered House*, 45. "Father's farm was rescued from the wilderness and consecrated to the plow and husbandry through sweat and blood." He adds that pioneers "fought with the forest;" the wilderness was made to "blossom like a rose" (142, 204, 186).

<sup>32</sup>Birkbeck, *Notes on a Journey in America*, 111.

woods! Not like the groves and copses of his native land, rising from the banks of some meandering river, or crowning the top of some verdant hill, but, in consequence of the general flatness of the country, presenting to view a front row of trees only, relieved by the dark forest behind."

Yet for Griffiths, the hardwood forests represented the Midwest's promise. The natural environment was designed to satisfy human needs. In other words, where John Stillman Wright believed that people were ruining place, Griffiths considered their actions essential (if not redemptive) to constructing place.<sup>33</sup>

### **Prairies**

Prairies, too, were the focus of much reflection. Like the forests, prairies were not uniform. Different types of prairies covered the Midwest. Samuel Brown corrects the misperception that they were devoid of trees. Most, he claims, were bordered by groves of timber and often contained copses, or islands, of trees within them. "In the spring and summer they are covered with a luxuriant growth of grass, and fragrant flowers, from six to eight feet high, through which it is very fatiguing to force one's way with any degree of celerity. The soils of these plains is often as deep and as fertile as the best bottoms."<sup>34</sup> The extent of these prairies is hard to comprehend. There was some

---

<sup>33</sup>D. Griffiths, Jr. *Two Years Residence in the New Settlements of Ohio* (London: Westley and Davis, 1835); reprint in March of America Facsimile Series, Number 73 (Ann Arbor: University Microfilms, Inc., 1966), 33-34.

<sup>34</sup>Brown, *The Western Gazetteer*, 45. Parker Gillmore, who lived near Vincennes, Indiana, in the mid- to late-1850s underscores this point.

"From external appearances of the neighbouring states of Ohio and Pennsylvania, Eastern Indiana does not naturally differ, for the same

125 distinct prairies in Illinois alone as late as 1850.

Seeing the Grand Prairie of Illinois for the first time, Scott says, was "like contemplating infinity."<sup>35</sup> Solon Robinson recounts a similar experience of when he entered the Grand Prairie on October 31, 1834.

"It was about noon of a clear, delightful day, when we emerged from the woods, and, for miles around, stretched forth one broad expanse of clear, open land. . . . Except for those of my own household, *I stood alone, wrapped in that peculiar sensation that man feels only when beholding a prairie for the first time--it is an undescrivable, delightful feeling.*"

Robinson set his course on a grove of trees ten miles away. He and his family camped near the grove that evening. "What could exceed the beauty of the spot? Why seek farther?" Robinson concluded with the fact that four days later they "moved into to our 'new house.'"<sup>36</sup>

---

densely wooded swamps and rolling wooded lands are in all to be found; but when its western limits are reached, the broad boundless prairie, occasionally broken by islands of woodland, becomes its characteristic feature, while Illinois situated still further westward, can most justly, from the prevalence of open grass-land, be called the Prairie State. It must not however for a moment be imagined that there is no timber in Illinois, for wherever there are water-courses, and these are numerous, a more or less deeply fringed edging of trees will be found" (*Prairie Farms and Prairie Folk* 2 vols. [London: Hurst and Blackett, Publishers, 1872], 7-8).

<sup>35</sup>James Leander Scott, *A Journal of a Missionary Tour*(Providence: by the Author, 1843); reprint in March of America Facsimile Series, Number 80 (Ann Arbor: University Microfilms, Inc., 1966), 74.

<sup>36</sup>Nichols, *The Kankakee*, 72-73, my emphasis.



When Catherine Stewart first encountered the Midwestern prairies, she, too, "seem[ed] under some magic influence."<sup>37</sup> James Leander Scott took careful notice of the region's prairies during his missionary tour. His journal entry for April 15, 1842 is telling: "We came in sight of Terra Haute, situated on the margin of a prairie which skirted the Wabash river. *The prairie was enchanting in its aspect.* It was unlike the low marshy prairies in Ohio, which are interspersed with shrubbery. It was completely adapted to the plough, and its black soil bespoke its richness and strength."<sup>38</sup> These natural wonders were well suited for human habitation; they embodied fecundity. But they also were more than ripe resources waiting to be shaped by human hand.

D. Griffiths was not alone in feeling "imprisoned in woods." Many found prairies a welcome change from the forest. As Birkbeck makes plain, an absence of open space could jeopardize one's mental health. John Clark underscores this point; Clark claimed to be invigorated, vitalized, when emerging from the woods while travelling on the Mississippi. He notes that the view "was an object of thrilling interest, and the more so because hitherto we had seen scarcely nothing upon either side of the river but unbroken and boundless forests, stretching away as far as the eye could reach to the distant horizon." He was confronted by the absence of obstruction: "here was a vast expanse in which no tree, nor stump, nor stone was visible. Naught met the eye

---

<sup>37</sup> Stewart, *New Homes in the West*, iii.

<sup>38</sup> Scott, *Journal of a Missionary Tour*, 73, my emphasis.

but the tall grass, waving in the breeze, bending, rising, and rolling to and fro like the waves of the ocean after a tempest; and this grassy surface interspersed with wild flowers of every color, hue, and form." Yet the same scene troubled Clark. He compares standing on a prairie to not being able to see the shore when at sea: "These vast prairies, though bearing a luxuriant growth of grass, would impress one with a sense of desolateness, were they not beautified with flowers, and animated with the songs and the sight of the feathered tribes."<sup>39</sup> William Oliver concurred. After traveling through southern Illinois in Bond County, he concluded that "the solitude of the forest is not half so oppressive as that of the ocean-like prairie."<sup>40</sup>

Prairies were simultaneously fertile and barren; they were home to myriad plant and animal species, rich sounds and smells. At the same time, though, they elicited a foreboding in those unfamiliar with them. Comments range from loneliness, abandonment, and desolation. While forests could give rise to similar emotions, these ill-feelings were considerably stronger in prairies. One of the most significant aspects of prairies as they relate to those who encountered them was their "boundlessness: they extended to the horizon, hardly interrupted by trees or hills. Onto such blankness each

---

<sup>39</sup>Clark, *Gleanings by the Way*, 93, 117.

<sup>40</sup>Oliver, *Eight Months in Illinois*. 96.

visitor could project his own interior landscape."<sup>41</sup> The process of interiorizing the landscape raises important issues; for many Midwestern Methodists, this was a process by which the landscape was sacralized.

### **The Midwest As Spiritual Place**

Thus far, this essay has examined three physical attributes of the Midwest. But what bearing did rivers, trees, and prairies have on pioneer Methodism? In other words, what were the spiritual dimensions of place? How did the profane become sacred? Though virtually unexplored by historians, there is a undeniable correlation between place and religious practice.

To be sure many contemporary observers would be surprised to learn of the

---

<sup>41</sup>Rhodes, *The Inland Ground*, 4. The perception of boundlessness or emptiness points to a fascinating incongruity. Throughout the antebellum period, Indians waged a futile custody battle with the federal government to retain their title to much of what became the Midwest. Ohio is a case in point. It was first state created out of the Northwest Territory (1803); and while the final major treaty was negotiated in 1818, the last Wyandots were not forced from the state until 1842. In Michigan, Indians never were driven from the state and remain a cultural and political presence nearly 200 years later. Yet with few exceptions, Indians are all but absent from Methodists' contemporary accounts. While Indians were fixtures of the landscape, they were not part of the cognitive map (they were included in space but not place). Frederick Jackson Turner is often charged with the same error. Richard White posits that "on Turner's frontier Indians were not so much absent as peripheral; they were not essential to the meaning of his narrative." While White's analysis of Turner is not always convincing, especially Turner's place in the current historiography, he raises many crucial issues (e.g. the significance of gender and the frontier). See White's "Frederick Jackson Turner and Buffalo Bill," in *The Frontier in American Culture*, ed. James R. Grossman (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), quote from 27.

region's inherent spirituality, or at least its ability to facilitate spirituality. For these individuals, the Midwest was a "promised land" only in the sense that it conferred a title to prosperity on all who were willing to subjugate the environment to human needs. For Parker Gillmore, southwestern Indiana was a "place to imagine, seldom to see." When inspecting a piece of property he was about to purchase near Vincennes, he was struck by how the natural beauty of the region had been economically harnessed without sacrificing its splendor. Not only was his site well watered by the Wabash River, but it had a stand of "primitive" trees along with ornamental and fruit trees, and ample pasture for cattle. The "air of repose and thrift that surrounded all, spoke of peace and plenty."<sup>42</sup> Morris Birkbeck was encouraged to find the Ohio Valley a "beautiful and fertile" country, "affording to a plain, industrious and thriving population, all that nature has decreed for the comfort of man." There were places where the region had been enhanced by taking wild out of the wilderness.<sup>43</sup> Zadok Cramer best voices this more secular perspective. He describes the region in Edenic terms, as being perfectly suited to accommodate a new society. Here one could enjoy

---

<sup>42</sup>Gillmore, *Prairie Farms*, 47-48.

<sup>43</sup>Birkbeck, *Notes On a Journey*, 50, 71-72. Alexis de Tocqueville echoed this sentiment: "The valley of the Mississippi is, upon the whole, the most magnificent dwelling-place prepared by God for man's abode." At issue here, many perceived nature was home to man, not God. (quoted in Dorothy Anne Dondore, *The Prairie and the Making of Middle America: Four Centuries of Description* (New York: Antiquarian Press, 1961; reprint of 1926), 205.

"safety, having plenty of all the necessities, and many of the luxuries of life, where their children's children may enjoy the rich and prolific productions of the land, without an over degree of toil or labour, where the climate is mild and the air salubrious, where each man is a prince in his own kingdom, and may without molestation, enjoy the frugal fare of his humble cot; where the clashing and terrific sounds of war are not heard; where tyrants that desolate the earth dwell not; where man, simple man, is left to the guidance of his own will, subject only to laws of his own making, fraught with mildness, operating equally just on all, and by all protected and willingly obeyed."<sup>44</sup>

Thus, the Midwest was laden with rich resources; the region itself symbolized prosperity. In as much as it was a place of plenty, it also promised contentment: here all needs could be satisfied. Yet most pioneers would not have stopped at this point: The Book of Exodus taught them that there was a qualifier to such prosperity. According to Moses, the Israelites wandered the desert for forty years because they failed serve and worship God exclusively. The Children of Israel frequently lapsed into paganism and idolatry. Fears of repeating this cycle animated Midwestern Methodism. For this reason, all that was associated with, and connoted by, nature could be--and often was--sacralized. This was a form of environmental opportunism, an attempt to "profit" (to find advantage or benefit rather than financial gain) from the physical environment. Few blended the secular and sacred more directly than J. W. Foster.

"Our ideas of rural felicity are,--a country of sufficient relief and depression of surface to admit of perfect drainage, divided in proper proportions between woodland, pasture, meadow, and field; with springs gushing out from

---

<sup>44</sup>Cramer, *The Navigator*, 28.

the shaded recesses of the forest, and furnishing perennial water to the streams which flow through the lowlands; with the rising knoll crowned by a neat painted farm-house and ample barns, protected by locust groves or fruit-bearing orchards, alike from winter winds and summer heats; with fields enclosed by well-trimmed hedges, and pastures dotted with clumps of trees, to which cattle can resort for shelter from the mid-day sun or the drifting storm; while, as a conspicuous feature in the landscape, should stand out in bold relief, the village church and village school house, a sign and symbol of the morality and intelligence of its inhabitants;--and such a landscape can be created almost everywhere in the fertile prairie-region of the West.

What makes Foster unique is that he concludes with the subtle challenge, "God bless, then, the man who plants a tree!"<sup>45</sup>

Spirituality of place was a key issue for antebellum settlers and travelers. The commingling of human and divine made these places unique. Yet these two elements are not fused together in the sense that they become one. Instead, there is opportunity for new experiences/sensations. The environment did automatically elicit comment on cosmology, but those with "ears that hear and eyes that see" could discern religious significance from spatial environment. Catherine Stewart declared that the West offered hope for the "wrecked in fortune." It is a "sanctuary, whose Sabbath loveliness will, once, more, reconcile him to life."<sup>46</sup> Many others echo this "sanctuary" theme. J. W.

---

<sup>45</sup>Foster, *The Mississippi Valley*, 164.

<sup>46</sup>Stewart, *New Homes in the West*, 13. Stewart makes an interesting observation: "The time cannot be far distant, when the deep solitudes of the trackless wastes spread far away, will be enlivened with the hum of busy enterprise, and covered over with a hardy industrious population; when science and the arts will move hand in hand over this great western empire; and incense will arise from a thousand sacred altars. . . .

Foster insists that "no one can wander 'through the dim vaults and winding aisles' of a primeval forest, amid the 'venerable columns' which support the 'verdant roof,' and listen to the sound of the 'invisible breath' that 'sways at once all their green tops,' without acknowledging, with all-reverent spirit, that here he verily is in the sanctuary of Nature."<sup>47</sup>

Timothy Flint asserts that nature is timeless and unchanging, where humanity is ephemeral. "The features of nature have received from their Divine Author the impress of his own immutability." Not surprisingly, Flint found that travel through the region induced "solemn thought and heavenly musing."<sup>48</sup> Charles Titus admits he had serious misgivings about the region prior to his two years residence in Indiana. "My former errors, in regard to this magnificent country, had become corrected, & many of my former prejudices set aside. I could now enjoy worship in the sanctuary of God, if

---

But though imagination may thus spring away in vision of the future, it returns chastened, and quietly folds its wings, to the contemplation of the pristine beauty that revels over these shores, which can never be more touchingly attractive than in their unpruned, wild luxuriance along the borders of the Fox river" (104-105).

Stewart never lost sight of the interdependence of humans and nature. Unlike most of her contemporaries, she pondered the consequences of what Frank R. Kramer labels "humanizing the natural; naturalizing the human." *Voices in the Valley: Mythmaking and Folk Belief in the Shaping of the Middle West* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1964), 74.

<sup>47</sup>Foster, *Mississippi Valley*, 159.

<sup>48</sup>Flint, *Condensed Geography*, I:14; Flint, *Recollections of the Last Ten Years*, 28.

everything was not conducted precisely *a la New England*."<sup>49</sup>

One key attribute of the environment was that it revitalized mind, body, and soul. James Leander Scott discovered this while on his missionary tour. On February 28, 1842 he wrote in his journal that he felt imprisoned by "gloom." Yet, the change of seasons, revived him: "Nature was however clad in her most gorgeous robe--the fruit trees, both indigenous and exotic were in perfect bloom, and appeared to declare the praises of Him who bade the Spring return." He continued, "the rippling brook, as it murmured from the mountain forest to the meadowy plains below, mingled its rumbling voice with the shrill notes of the feathered choir, all of which, combine, could but cheer the depressed spirits of the wandering pilgrim."<sup>50</sup>

Many travellers and settlers found that nature not only could rejuvenated one physically, but it also increased mental capacity. Joseph Hilts comments that "commun[ing] with nature, is, to a devout mind, a precious privilege. . . . To hold converse with nature, tends to expand the intellect and quicken the sensibilities. . . . And

---

<sup>49</sup>Titus, *Into the Old Northwest*, 47.

<sup>50</sup>Scott, *Journal of a Missionary Tour*, 47-48. Traveling from Toledo to Detroit via lake steamer in 1843, Charles Titus makes a similar observation:

"The gently agitated water of the vast lake lay spread before me; the cool invigorating air, after the hot sultry day, refreshed my languid body, & in the far off distant horizon the bright fleecy clouds seemed mingling with the forests that skirted the lake--and, altogether, it was a scene of loveliness, such as I have seldom beheld. My heart seemed in unison with the beauties of nature around me, & for many hours I sat fully absorbed in the scene" (Titus, *Into the Old Northwest*, 76).



to commune with God purifies and exalts our whole nature, and inspires us to holier and loftier aims and a fuller consecration to the service of God."<sup>51</sup> In his journal entry of June 20, 1837, from his cabin aboard the *Elk*, John Clark recorded these reflections on the scenery between Wheeling and Marietta. Clark found that "one acquires as he proceeds westward, largeness and expansion to his ideas: his mind is carried out of its former habits of thought, and swells away into the vast dimensions of the majestic rivers, and boundless tracts of country, over which his eye expatiates." He underscores his point:

"As one sits in a sheltered nook in the cabin, gliding down such a stream, with such a scenery around him, and feeling the cool refreshing breeze fanning his fevered brow, and imparting vigor and new elasticity to his enervated frame, he must be very stupid, or very depraved, if his heart is not drawn upwards and made to throb with gratitude to the glorious Framer of this garnished and goodly scene!"<sup>52</sup>

---

<sup>51</sup>Joseph H. Hilts, *Experiences of a Backwoods Preacher, or, Facts and Incidents Culled from Thirty Years of Ministerial Life*, 2nd ed. (Toronto: William Briggs, 1892), 97.

<sup>52</sup>Clark, *Gleanings by the Way*, 53-54. Again Titus captures this sentiment as well; this time he is sailing on Lake St. Clair to Sue St. Marie.

Air, earth, & water, every thing, seemed combining to render the scene delightful, & never, in all my journeying, have I felt such unalloyed pleasure, such real enjoyment in the beauties and loveliness of nature, as I did this day. The hand of man had never marred the prospect, it was nature in all its primeval beauty. *He that could look on such a scene, and not feel emotions of a noble nature springing up within him, and, yielding to the influence of that spirit that speaks through nature, not feel that he is becoming a wiser and a better being, deserves not the name of man*" (Titus, *Into the Old Northwest*, 82, my emphasis).

Clark was distressed that many fail to observe the "tokens of a wonder-working Deity." He cites the prevalence of profanity, "one of the crying sins of this western world," as a case in point; this was all the more inappropriate because of his sacralized setting. Attempting to absorb all the "tokens" he sees and hear while sailing on the Ohio, Clark is forced to restrain himself from shouting praises to God (which, for him, would be very atypical behavior). Clark shows his true colors and waxes Episcopalian, a reaction which reflects his denomination's inability to translate spiritual fervor into numerical growth.

"And yet looking at the matter, aside from the native depravity of the human heart, one would think that the spontaneous effusion of every intelligent mind whose attention was directed to this scene, would be, as he looked around, 'Surely this is the teaching of the mighty God! May lessons be impressed upon my heart by the outspread volumes before me, which no mutations of time, no excitement of passion, no fascinations of the world, no devices of the Evil one will ever efface. Eternal Creator, here amid this green, boundless, majestic temple of thy works I renew the consecration of myself to thee, soul, body, and spirit. While these rivers roll their waters towards the sea--while a spear of grass grows in these fields--while a tree on these wooded banks is clothed with foliage in the vernal months--yea, while the solid earth lasts, and the cycles of eternity move on, with thy grace will I live only to serve and glorify Thee.'"<sup>53</sup>

Did Clark use this oration to remind himself of who he was? Did he feel as though he was losing control? What better way to reclaim his emotions than shift into automatic and begin speaking in a thick academic prose? Most Methodists would have skipped

---

<sup>53</sup>Clark, *Gleanings by the Way*, 78, 77.

the discourse and simply praised God's handiwork with more direct animation.

To Clark, and many others, drifting along the Ohio was a religious experience. Yet he provides an additional insight: as a place was sacralized one could be transcend the present. He recalls "when the sun began to decline, and we again found ourselves gliding as by enchantment over the surface, and sweeping through the midst of the beautiful scenery of the Ohio, I felt that I had passed into a new world." Augustus Eddy's (Thomas' father) had the same sensation when converted in 1817: "O, what a delicious moment! I seemed to be in a new world; I wept, I praised God, I thanked his people for receiving me into the fold."<sup>54</sup> Frederick Thomas uses poetry to convey his experience:

Who has not felt, in such a night as this,  
The glory and greatness of a God,  
And bowed his head, in humbleness, to kiss  
His merciful and kindly chastening rod?  
The far off stars! how beautiful and bright!  
Peace seems abroad upon the world to-night;  
And e'en the bubble, dancing on the stream,  
Is glittering with hope,--a dream--a very dream!<sup>55</sup>

---

<sup>54</sup>Clark, *Gleanings by the Way*, 77; Charles N. Sims, *The Life of Rev. Thomas M. Eddy*. With an Introduction by Rev. Bishop Simpson (New York: Phillips and Hunt, 1884), 25.

<sup>55</sup>Thomas' *The Emigrant*, VIII (p. 13). In this dream state, Thomas celebrates the pioneer heritage. The Ohio River prompts him to recall men like Boone who entered the forest alone, and conquered it. This triumph was attributable as much to the presence of God as to the "civilization" which humans produce or recreate. What is interesting here is not the fact that "pathfinders," to use Henry Nash Smith's term, blazed any trails west; rather Thomas indicates that, at a very fundamental level, his

One must place Thomas, Clark, and others in their contemporary intellectual and cultural contexts. One easily imagines a series of canvasses by Cole to accompany Thomas' epic poem. Henry May argues that the transition from Enlightenment to Romanticism (roughly 1800-1815) was most noticeable in politics and religion. In churches across the nation, the faithful worshipped in an atmosphere of egalitarianism, experimentation, and above all emotion. Yet this transition is ripe with irony. The

---

generation cannot relate to these solitary pioneers. Unlike Boone and company, Thomas was no "forest king" wielding a "scepter of the wild" (a gun). Yet, he finds parallels. "Alas! I am a wanderer and all alone" (VII, p. 15). Thomas makes this point in verse XX where he begins an extended reflection on the Indians who lived in the region; Thomas is surprisingly sober and critical of the white man's role in this relationship. Thomas hinges his reflection on the following stanzas.

XLIII (p. 23)

Built o'er the Indian's grave, the city, here,  
 To all the pomp of civic pride is giv'n,  
 While o'er the spot there falls no tribute-tear,  
 Not e'en his kindred drop--the dew of Heav'n.  
 How touching was the chieftain's homily!  
 That none would mourn for him when he should die;  
 Soon shall the race of their last man be run--  
 Then who will mourn for them? Alas! not one--not one!

XLIV (p. 23)

They have all passed away, as thou must pass,  
 Who now art wandering westward where they trod--  
 An atom in the mighty mass,  
 Who live and die. No more. The grave-green sod,  
 Can but be made the greener 'er the best,  
 A flattering epitaph may tell the rest--  
 While they who come, as come these onward waves,  
 Forget who sleep below, and trample on their graves.

same social and intellectual current that prized feeling over rationality was credited with helping bring order to the a raucous West, where "muscular" Christianity matured into evangelicalism.<sup>56</sup>

Antebellum Methodism, obviously, was not just a variation on a Romantic theme. To be sure, there were elements of Romanticism in Midwestern Methodism; but for most Methodists, Romanticism was a compliment to, rather than substitute for, faith. Therefore, one must not read Clark's river experiences solely as metaphor. He and others attributed the sensations associated with their encounters of the environment to divine origin. They contemplated the meaning of such experiences from an evangelical perspective. For these believers, the notion of crossing time was anything but an illusion; however fleeting the moment, they, like Clark, used their "mind's eye" to travel to "new worlds" not bound by human time. Not surprisingly, the liturgically-conscious Episcopalian was agitated by his drift toward mysticism. Such encounters also agitated many Midwestern Methodists--but to a much different end. For them the sense of agitation was less confusion than excitement: they utilized their emotional response as a catalyst to accelerate the intensity of the sacred moment. Midwestern Methodists, not only pioneered the nation's interior; throughout the antebellum period their place consciousness helped them blaze new trails into the region's spiritual

---

<sup>56</sup>Henry F. May, *The Enlightenment in America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976), 308-324.

geography. Where Romantics pined for a mythic past, many Methodists practiced a mystic present.

The sensation of crossing the boundary of time and through experiencing place was a hallmark of Midwestern Methodism in the antebellum period. Maxwell P. Gaddis recalls a powerful sermon by John Meek at an Adams County, Ohio, camp meeting in the 1830s. Meek's gift was in picturing the impending damnation of the unsaved. He would so move his audience that "they would cry out with terror and when by this earnest preacher they were pointed to the only way of escape would with streaming eyes and outstretched hands plead for mercy as a man pleads for his life." At the end of a sermon from John 12:48, Meek read a hymn as a preface to the closing prayer (Gaddis claims hearing the hymn alone more than compensated for any hardship incurred in attending the meeting). But then Gaddis makes a fascinating observation: "the prayers that followed brought heaven and earth close together, and opened the heart for the reception of the good seed of the kingdom--precious seasons in the wilderness, never to be forgotten."<sup>57</sup> As will be seen in the subsequent chapter, prayer was a key bridge between heaven and earth, present and future.

While many commented on the other world dimension of sacred space, it was more common to concentrate on--remain in--the present. In this respect, worshippers

---

<sup>57</sup>Gaddis, *Last Words and Old-Time Memories* (New York: Phillips and Hunt, 1882), 409.

were satisfied to briefly encounter and/or occupy the holy. For example, in 1831 Rev. John Strange was preaching what many thought would be his final sermon (he was in the last stages of tuberculosis). Yet he rose to the occasion and captivated his audience one last time; though "pale and emaciated" he was "heavenly in appearance." Witnesses recall that "everything conspired to the solemnity of that occasion; the still grove, the somber clouds, the hymn, the text, and, above all, the dying minister. The ground on which we stood was holy."<sup>58</sup> When William McKendree preached on the Miami (Ohio) Circuit in 1802, "the whole place appeared to be shaken by the power of God."<sup>59</sup> The same was true for Elizabeth Roe; she recalls her frontier camp meeting conversion with relish. "The whole camp ground seemed sacred on account of the presence of the Lord."<sup>60</sup> At an 1844 camp meeting near Danville, Indiana, "God signified his presence and acceptance of the place and proffered services by many infallible signs." J. C. Smith recollects that God's presence was unusually tangible.

"Many were cut to the heart; many were converted, and all were renewed in the spirit of their minds. On Sabbath the whole encampment was a mercy-seat, and the Divine Shekinah rested over it in a silent awe. The spirit of joy and weeping seemed almost universal. . . . The might power

---

<sup>58</sup>J.C. Smith, *Reminiscences of Early Methodism in Indiana* (Indianapolis: J. M. Olcott, 1879), 40-43.

<sup>59</sup>Conner, *Methodist Trail Blazer*, 198.

<sup>60</sup>Elizabeth A. Roe, *Recollections of Frontier Life* (Rockford, IL: Gazette Publishing House, 1885); reprint in *Signal Lives: Autobiographies of American Women* (New York: Arno Press, 1980), 44.

of God rested over the place, and all who came within those sacred precincts felt that the ground on which they stood was holy."<sup>61</sup>

Roe's makes plain that God's presence was not limited to outdoor worship. When attending a quarterly meeting held in a court house, she observed the presence of the Lord: "The house, for the present at least, seemed to be sacred on account of the presence of the Lord."<sup>62</sup> John N. Clement wrote Asbury Wilkinson "we have meetings every day and every night almost, sometimes in the woods, sometimes in the fields and sometimes in . . . houses[;] it appears to be but little difference where we are if our harts are right."<sup>63</sup> Clement states the obvious: the presence of God, however manifested, was the factor which made worship a religious experience. However, many undoubtedly did not come to worship adequately prepared to meet God (meaning, to borrow from Clement, that their hearts were not quite "right"). Consequently, place could be as much a factor in creating a conducive worship atmosphere as preaching or music.

The evidence is abundant that those who organized camp meetings preferred forest settings. Even when outdoor worship was impossible, "rural" settings seem to have priority over "urban" areas. Again, Roe is helpful in understanding this preference. She convinced her husband, a physician, to give up a successful "city"

---

<sup>61</sup>Smith, *Reminiscences*, 82-83.

<sup>62</sup>Roe, *Recollections of Frontier Life*, 86.

<sup>63</sup>MSS Letter dated 5-31-1839, "Blooming Grove," IN, in Asbury Wilkinson Papers, Indiana Historical Society, Indianapolis, Indiana.



practice and move to rural Rock Island in 1836. She was "willing to endure any privation that could be expected in moving to a new country, if I could only rear my boys on a farm." After all, Dr. Roe was "worn down with medicine." Though they moved to a farm, Roe "had run unavoidably into a heavy practice--there were scarcely any physicians in the country--and it was impossible to get rid of it."<sup>64</sup>

The veteran itinerant James B. Finley, addresses this issue in his autobiography. His lifetime of experience led him to conclude that there was an unmistakable difference between urban and rural worship settings: "Alone in the deep solitude of the wilderness man can commence with himself and Nature and her God, and realize emotions and thoughts that the crowded city can never produce."<sup>65</sup> James V. Watson admits to having been assigned the most isolated and frontier circuits in Michigan. But he also has enjoyed many "well-regulated circuit[s], the station of the beautiful rural village, the more responsible one[s] of the city." He makes several positive references to "rural" appointments. It is as though he prefers to work outside of the "cities," yet recognizes that urban areas have some prominence over rural counterparts.<sup>66</sup>

John Collins did not hesitate to voice his dislike of "city" religion. In fact, he

---

<sup>64</sup>Roe, *Recollections*, 114, 148.

<sup>65</sup>*Autobiography of Rev. James B. Finley; or, Pioneer Life in the West*, ed. by W. P. Strickland (Cincinnati: Methodist Book Concern, 1853), 158.

<sup>66</sup>J. V. Watson, *Tales and Takings, Sketches and Incidents* (New York: Carlton and Porter, 1856), 382.

writes that ". . . often have I wished that I could blot from my life that unprofitable period I spent in Chillicothe. I hope God, in his goodness, will never permit me to pass another such a year." While he pledged to pray for the work in Chillicothe, there was not hint of remorse about his being ill-suited to a "city station."<sup>67</sup> Thomas Asbury Morris echoes this penchant for rural religion in his collection of sermons. "A silent grove, when the weather is mild and calm, is the best place for preaching the word." Morris uses Romantic overtones to emphasize his point: "The forest and the open heavens are friendly to the spirit of devotion; while the sound of prayer, of praise, and of instruction, from the pulpit, spreads in open space without the obstruction of walls, like the circular wave on smooth water."<sup>68</sup>

To prepare for a worship service to be held in his home, Robert Dobbins retreated to the woods to "hold communion with Holy One;" he returned "with [a] countenance all aglow with Christian love." This "fresh baptism from the Divine altar"

---

<sup>67</sup>Letter dated July 27, 1824, Piqua, Ohio. *A Sketch of the life of Rev. John Collins, late of the Ohio Conference* (Cincinnati: Swormstedt and Poe, 1849), 114-115.

<sup>68</sup>Thomas Asbury Morris, *Sermons on Various Subjects* (Cincinnati: Poe and Hitchcock, 1867), 179. Elsewhere he describes the ideal preaching scenario. The "Church in the wilderness" in this case is a rural meeting house (187). What is fascinating here is the linkage between Gillmore Parker and others who claim to be able to "manage" the environment without sacrificing its pristine elements. Where some labored to take the wild out of wilderness, Morris goes a step further: he places it in a new spatial context--manufacturing an indoor "wilderness."

yielded high dividends during the subsequent service.<sup>69</sup> Caddy's behavior was not unusual. Panicking at the thought of preaching his first sermon, in 1842 Thomas Eddy also escaped to the woods to pray for strength. After "throwing himself on his knees beside the trunk of a fallen tree, [he] poured out his soul before God in an agonizing prayer for help." Eddy claims "the hush and peace of the Holy Spirit were given and a joyful trust in the Lord filled his soul." To Eddy, both he and the place were changed: "he arose from his knees with the most perfect realization of the presence of the Master." Eddy was transformed; all anxiety about the service had vanished. More interesting however, Eddy lost track of time while savoring this experience. "His devotions had continued till the moment for beginning the services, and he went directly from that forest altar to the pulpit, as if borne thither by the Spirit itself."<sup>70</sup>

While more work needs to be done to explore further the significance of these experiences, the fact that many Midwestern Methodists retreated to the forest for religious encounters is undeniable. John Kobler understood this dynamic as early as 1799 when he organized a group Bible study which met in the woods.<sup>71</sup> Finley likewise often "retreated" to the woods for prayer in his autobiography. Why did pioneers

---

<sup>69</sup>Charles Caddy, *Life and times of Rev. Robert Dobbins* (Philadelphia: J. W. Daughaday and Company, 1868), 67.

<sup>70</sup>Sims, *Life of Eddy*, 66.

<sup>71</sup>March 25, 1799, Dayton, OH, Gaddis, *Footprints of an Itinerant*, 525.

regularly go to the woods for spiritual renewal or retreat? Let me suggest one very obvious reason for the affinity between Methodists, their heart-felt religion, and Midwestern woods: forests symbolized the transcendent.<sup>72</sup> Things occurred in the woods that defied logic. It was a place of dread and devotion, fear and security, a place of instability which could simultaneously engender absolute confidence. Settlers attempted to harness the natural environment through worship as much as hunting, felling trees, agriculture, or building water-powered mills.

Sandford Cox found God manifested in the natural world. While this was plain to believers, God at times used extraordinary means to make his presence known to all. This was the case on the evening of November 12, 1833. That night Cox claims "the heavens were literally filled with blazing meteors, darting about in every direction from the zenith to the horizon, resembling falling stars, presenting a sublime and terribly grand spectacle." Many interpreted this as the end of the world and the beginning of judgment foretold in the Bible. Cox notes with some satisfaction that "serious consequences resulted to many on account of the brilliant display of aerial fire-works." "According to accounts given in the newspapers, [people] fainted and fell to the earth, others became insane, and a few sickly and nervous individuals died of the fright

---

<sup>72</sup>Again, the Romantic connection is intriguing, especially the work of Emerson and Thoreau. See in particular Catherine L. Albanese's Introduction and notes to their selected works in her *The Spirituality of the American Transcendentalists* (Macon, Georgia: Mercer University Press, 1988).

produced by this supernal illumination."<sup>73</sup>

Incidents like this meteor shower served only to confirm Cox's perception of place. Many, if not most contemporaries would readily concur with Cox's understanding of the natural environment. Amasa Washburn, a pioneer settler in the Kankakee Valley, believed that God placed an "extraordinary" light in an empty sky to guide and protect his company as they traveled. Washburn, too, interprets the incident from a Biblical frame of reference. He was reminded of the pillar of fire which "led the children of Israel through the wilderness." Like John Clark travelling on the Ohio River, Washburn is uncertain how to process his emotional response: "If it would not be thought enthusiasm of me, I should think that this light was shown us as a favour, for without it the darkness would have been so great that we could not have seen to steer our boats at all, . . ." Without this divine intervention, Washburn and company would have had to float with the current over a series of rapids that he found "dangerous accompanied by all the light the sun affords."<sup>74</sup>

Likewise, an 1834 two-week exodus of grey squirrels threatened the crops and storehouses in the Wabash Valley. Sandford Cox draws parallels between this freak migration of "hungry invaders" and "the locusts and frogs of Egypt." It is interesting

---

<sup>73</sup>Sandford C. Cox, *Recollections of the Early Settlement of the Wabash Valley* (n.p., 1860; reprint Freeport, N.Y.: Books for Libraries Press, 1970), 152-153.

<sup>74</sup>Fay Folsom Nichols, *The Kankakee: Chronicle of an Indiana River and Its Fabled Marshes* (Theo. Gaus' Sons, Inc. 1965), 37-38.

that nature seems to have held the residents of the Wabash Valley in some form of bondage, but Cox does not elaborate.<sup>75</sup>

Perceiving the spirituality of the woods was not restricted to believers. William Copper Howells recalls an "experience" (actually a place, and a "strange place" at that) that was beyond his ability to comprehend. While he stopped short of saying that a valley near Steubenville, Ohio, was haunted, he intimates that evil spirits lived there. What else could elicit such emotional response?

"Whenever I entered this valley, at either end of it, I was invariably affected by great dejection of spirits, which lasted until I passed out of it, and whether alone or in company this was always the case. The distance through it was a little less than two miles. There was nothing about this valley, of tradition or peculiarity of situation, that could call up associations, to me at least, of an unhappy kind. But to me it was always a place of melancholy shadows, and it was the only locality that ever so affected me."<sup>76</sup>

To Midwesterners, however, God seemed most noticeable in thunderstorms. Henry Caswall, provides one of the most graphic and accurate descriptions of these "tremendous" storms. "The sky, previously clear, quickly becomes overcast with black clouds; the lightening flashes with terrific brilliancy; the thunder instead of venting itself in half suppressed murmurs explodes at once with a crash like that of a hundred cannon

---

<sup>75</sup>Cox, *Recollections of Early Settlement*, 153.

<sup>76</sup>William Cooper Howells, *Recollections of Life in Ohio From 1813 to 1840*. With an Introduction by his Son, William Dean Howells (Cincinnati: The Robert Clarke Company, 1895; reprint with an Introduction by Edwin H. Cady. Gainesville, Florida: Scholar's Facsimiles and Reprints, 1963), 102.

simultaneously discharged." He adds that the wind "howls" through the forests, that trees often are uprooted, and that "the clouds discharge their contents in cataracts rather than in drops."<sup>77</sup>

James Leander Scott speaks for believers when he recounts traveling with his family during a severe thunderstorm. Where unbelievers would have been scared, Scott had no reason to be alarmed. In fact, he claims that "we were as composed as if we were in the palace of a King." Scott's confidence was rewarded. As the storm enveloped their carriage, a miracle occurred: "the winds divided the cloud and the clear sky appeared over our heads, and the storm raged before and behind us for a long time. While the lightening was playing, thunder rolling, and rain falling before and behind us, we were unmolested." Scott reflected, "though this division of the cloud might have been only the effect of the contending elements, yet never did I more forcibly feel the watchfulness of my Heavenly Parent that at that time." He continued,

"I listened to the roaring tempest all around--I watched the streaming lightening as it opened the black curling clouds, and admired the falling water as it gushed forth in torrents, while over our heads all was calm. I could but adore, and with my companion sing praise to God for his wonderful kindness to us poor unworthy creatures. I had a consciousness within that the object of my mission was the glory of God. But why should he pour so many of his special blessing upon us. It is all

---

<sup>77</sup>Caswall immigrated to America in 1828, and helped found the Episcopal church in Indiana. *America and the American Church* (London: J. G. & F. Rivington, 1839; reprint in *Religion in America*, ed. Edwin S. Gaustad. New York: Arno Press and the New York Times, 1969), 31.

revealed in this, 'God is Love.' O what a sweet reflection it was, that the God of heaven and earth was ours, and we were his."<sup>78</sup>

Charles Titus had a similar encounter while teaching school in Madison, Indiana. In a letter to his wife dated May 14, 1843, he related how a severe storm heightened his awareness of the holy which inhabits the natural environment. "For a while I stood at the open window and enjoyed the angry scene, but soon I felt an indescribable awe creeping over me, a sense of the majesty & power of God, that I have rarely felt before." As a believer, Titus relished the moment. Ironically, however, Titus' communion with God served to heighten his sense of separation. Immediately after this profound moment, Titus "threw himself upon [his] bed." He continued to his wife, "I felt more keenly your absence than I had before at any time since you left."<sup>79</sup>

These descriptions of thunderstorms raise one final issue: the aural environment.

Winthrop Jordan writes that sound is indispensable to the historian, all the more so when faced with scant evidence. Jordan distinguishes sound from voice. He argues that

---

<sup>78</sup>Undated journal entry most likely early June, 1842. *Journal of a Missionary Tour*, 167-168. Not all encounters prompted such praise. Believers often perceived storms as a form of heavenly theater, dramatizations of the apocalypse. This was the case for Scott on March 3, 1842 when he made the following entry in his journal.

"There was a heavy thunder tempest, which threatened on every hand; the rain fell in torrents, and the thunder tolled tremendously. This reminded us of that day of trial to men's souls, when the thunders bellow shall astound the lost souls of men, and the streaming lightening, as it plays across the broad expanse, shall startle the guilty crowd. May the Lord prepare us for that awful day in which the dead shall be judged" (Scott, *Journal of a Missionary Tour*, 33).

<sup>79</sup>Titus' wife was in Greencastle at the time. Titus, *Into the Old Northwest*, 162.



one can hear without listening; while written documents make no audible sound, they speak clearly to those willing to listen. Midwestern Methodists understood this fine distinction. They were expert listeners, discerning God's voice from noise and silence.<sup>80</sup> William Oliver notes that some thunderstorms last several days; "during these times the sound, near or remote, never ceases." But the Midwestern soundscape extended well beyond storms.

Timothy Flint was impressed by the volume of sound the wilderness produced. William Howells claimed that the aural environment so affected him that decades later "the song of one thrush by the side of a field is ringing in my ears yet." William Nowlin, too, was struck by the volume of the forest. Absorbing the total environment caused him to contemplate what he was encountering. "Nature seems to smile upon us and the evening, when it comes in its beauty, seems to offer us quiet and repose, rest and security." Yet one of the most distinctive sounds Nowlin heard in the forest was human. "There was a voice of one often heard in prayer in the wilderness, where we first settled, and that voice was my mother's."<sup>81</sup> As John Clark posits, one cannot appreciate the spirituality of the Midwest as a distinct place without including the aural landscape.

---

<sup>80</sup>Winthrop D. Jordan, *Tumult and Silence at Second Creek: An Inquiry into a Civil War Slave Conspiracy* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1993), 2-3.

<sup>81</sup>Oliver, *Eight Months in Illinois*, 63; Flint, *Recollections of the Last Ten Years*, 55-56; Howells, *Recollections of Life in Ohio*, 91; Nowlin, *The Bark Covered House*, 187, 250.

"Nature has a voice to instruct, as well as charms to please." He adds, "no one can walk over the surface of this earth, and gaze upon the objects and scenes that every where cluster around him, and not hear her instructive voice echoed upon his ear from ten thousand points, unless stupidity, or sin have sealed up his senses, and made him deaf."

Clark himself emphasized his point: "Providence, too, has a voice, that speaks with trumpet tongue in the ear of those who watch the movement of human events--*who regard the work of the Lord, and consider the operation of his hands.*"<sup>82</sup> Midwestern Methodists not only were attentive listeners, they had a keen aptitude for spiritual sounds.

## **Conclusion**

Taming the wilderness typically was the first priority to those pioneering the Midwest. John Rennie Short distills perceptions of wilderness to two schools of thought. The classical perspective defines itself in opposition to wilderness. The most meaningful activities occur within human society; wilderness, i.e. desolation and waste, is to be feared and avoided because it destroys social conventions. Romantics, on the other hand, reverence wilderness which is inevitably depreciated by the evolution of human society. Romantics are driven by the need to recapture a lost paradise; "classical" individuals are future oriented with little regard for the past. Short believes

---

<sup>82</sup>Clark, *Gleanings by the Way*, 2, emphasis in original.

that western society turned from the classical to romantic position in the early nineteenth century. Since that time, westerners have struggled find some sense of equity between the two perspectives. "For the romantics, contact with the wilderness brought about not a bewilderment but a renewed contact with deeper psychological truths and a more pronounced spiritual awareness. Contact with the untamed meant a rejection of imposed social values and a return to the moral authority of a self closer to god. In the wilderness lay individual redemption and universal truths."<sup>83</sup> The romantic view corresponds with Yi-Fu Tuan's concept topophilia ("the affective bond between people and place or setting"). In other words, topophilia is an individual's response to the environment. It is a perception rooted in an awareness of the past, a history of place.<sup>84</sup>

Forests were central to the concept and place of wilderness. However, it is important to bear in mind that trees were not necessarily synonymous with forest. Forest was the unbroken and unmanaged expanse of trees which blanketed much of the region. John Brinckerhoff Jackson proposes that "everywhere and at all times humanity has been emotionally affected by the immensity and mystery of the forest. We have feared it as the abode of everything dangerous. We have worshipped it as the most perfect of God's creations." Thus, the forest was a place of fear and a place to fear; yet,

---

<sup>83</sup>Short, *Imagined Country: Environment, Culture and Society* (London: Routledge, 1991), 6, 10.

<sup>84</sup>Tuan, *Topophilia: A Study on Environmental Perception, Attitudes, and Values* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1974), 4, 93, 99-100.

in stark contrast, it also was a refuge--a place of protection. Midwestern Methodists took full advantage of the forest as a perfect sanctuary.<sup>85</sup> Trees, on the other hand, as William Nowlin illustrates, had history, purpose, and inherent dignity. Jackson adds that the desire to plant trees stems in part from an attempt to "express a variety of basic emotions: the need to celebrate the home, the need for beauty, the need for some living thing to protect and transform, the need to pass on to the future some sign of our existence." We value trees not just for the self-serving ends such as shade, fuel, and so on, but because they "give us a sense of responsibility and sometimes a kind of parental pride."<sup>86</sup> Trees represented the individuals; forests represented society as a whole.

Early in the nineteenth century, forests became a national treasure, living texts documenting the American experience. Yet the American forest was *different* than any other. It told a particular story, juxtaposing rural and urban: the former illustrating its preeminence over the latter.

"When artists and poets praised the forest, they were implicitly praising the forest home of the pioneer, thoroughly isolated from the city. The irony was that establishing such a home inevitably meant the destruction of part of that same forest, the resumption of the age-old conflict between forest and open outdoor space. But the sanctity of the home was well worth the cost, and an essential characteristic of the American forest was its privatization, its fragmenting into countless small private holdings. As the destruction of the immense common forest proceeded, it became

---

<sup>85</sup>Jackson, *A Sense of Place, A Sense of Time* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994), 82, 74.

<sup>86</sup>Jackson, *A Sense of Place, A Sense of Time*, 105, 95.

customary for every homestead to reserve a portion--usually a quarter--of the land for a woodlot, a source of wood, of course, for fuel and lumber, but also a place for private hunting . . . . The woodlot nevertheless was a genuine miniature forest, visible on the farm landscape of American until about a half-century ago."<sup>87</sup>

Leo Marx notes that antebellum Americans sought "a middle ground somewhere *between*, yet in a transcendent relation to, the opposing forces of civilization and nature."<sup>88</sup> Arthur Moore purposely mixes his metaphors and rechristens Marx's middle landscape an "earthly paradise:" "a projected haven from the harsh demands of the social order and nature and an existence which without toil or trouble satisfies desires of every fundamental kind."<sup>89</sup> Methodism, at times, transformed the Midwest

---

<sup>87</sup>Jackson, *A Sense of Place, A Sense of Time*, 83. Anne Farrar Hyde addresses this issue from a different perspective. She uses travellers accounts of the Far West to trace the development of a national culture. Hyde posits that not only was the West unfamiliar, but it proved difficult to describe. In fact, witnesses found conventional language an inadequate vehicle with which to relate their impressions of the landscape. To Hyde, the untamed expanse beyond the Missouri River was a fertile ground the American imagination--a needed contrast to the "civilization" found along the eastern seaboard. This "apotheosis of the American landscape" was rooted in perception rather than reality; it is the story of how many Americans defined themselves in relation to other regions (in particular, easterners looking outward). Unfortunately, Hyde gives little notice to the Midwest. It was a place in between the two extremes: a domesticated version of the Far West complete with "high" culture of New England. *An American Vision: Far Western Landscape and National Culture, 1820-1920* (New York: New York University Press, 1990), 4-7, 19, 51.

<sup>88</sup>Leo Marx, *Machine in the Garden: Technology and the Pastoral Ideal in America*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964), 23.

<sup>89</sup>Arthur K. Moore, *The Frontier Mind: A Cultural Analysis of the Kentucky Frontiersman*, (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1957), 31.

into such a place. Pioneers generally, and Methodists in particular, merely had to come to terms with the "wild" in wilderness. Wilderness emerged as a positive place when it "lost some of its threat and could be viewed sentimentally from safe and civilized oases."<sup>90</sup> These oases were rural villages and, even more so, family farms. Thus, Yi-Fu Tuan argues that over the course of the nineteenth century, wilderness came "to be associated with the frontier and pioneer past, and so with the qualities that were thought to be characteristically American; and it was an environment that promoted toughness and virility." He concludes that "the growing appreciation of wilderness, like that of the countryside, was a response to the real and imagined failings of city life."<sup>91</sup>

Ironically, as late as the 17th century, the city was considered a transcendental representation of the heavenly order. By the mid-nineteenth century, however, it could not compete with the agrarian myth. Tuan posits that "the dominant myths of America

---

<sup>90</sup>Tuan, *Man and Nature*, 34. Jackson maintains twentieth-century Americans would not recognize this rural landscape; moreover, we would labor to appreciate its beauty. Yet the nineteenth-century landscape was pleasing in its own right.

"No doubt the background of forested hills and clear rivers, the proximity of the wilderness and of the lonely seacoast with its marches--all in their pristine freshness--compensated for much. Yet the clearings littered with decaying trees, the gaunt, shadeless villages, the muddy roads, the abandoned fields with fences in disrepair--these are certainly not the accepted ingredients of landscape beauty. Nevertheless, it is clear not only that the inhabitants thought their country pleasant and inviting but that many foreigners enjoyed traveling through it" (Ervin H. Zube, ed. *Landscapes: Selected Writings of J. B. Jackson* [Amherst: The University of Massachusetts Press, 1970], 46-47).

<sup>91</sup>Tuan, *Topophilia*, 111.

are nonurban. They are often anti-urban: the image of paradisiac New World stands against the image of European sophistication and corruption." The New Jerusalem was no longer a city, but a country village.<sup>92</sup> Ironically, until the American "wilderness" was domesticated, forests offered sanctuary from industrialization and urbanization. Moreover, in terms of religious expression and experience, many "argued that one's chances of attaining moral perfection and knowing God were *maximized* by entering wilderness."<sup>93</sup> In as much as many Midwesterners were undoubtedly uncomfortable with their environment, many others found it a place of spiritual regeneration, of ecstasy, which enabled them to survive the danger and drudgery of everyday life. Retreating to the wilderness, viz. forests, as a means of escape corresponded with a signal development in antebellum evangelicalism: the rise of camp meetings. The temporary sacralization of the profane made these religious festivals unique within antebellum evangelicalism. This process distinguished open-air revivals from services

---

<sup>92</sup>Tuan, *Topophilia*, 193. He elaborates this point elsewhere: "Out of the primordial chaos or wilderness man created the garden and city. The garden is humanized order close to the earth; the city is the heavenly cosmos transposed to earth. The course toward civilization (i.e., complex urban life) is marked by the rise of the garden at the expense of the wilderness, and the rise of the city at the expense of the garden. . . . Wilderness is profane space, pervasive and boundless. The garden is the area redeemed from the wilderness, a particular spot where primeval nature has been reshaped to accommodate human needs. The city is a symbol of the stability of the universe; as such it makes use of mineral matter that resists decay and that may have to be transported to the location of the city from great distances" (*Man and Nature*, 24-25).

<sup>93</sup>Moore, *The Frontier Mind*, 86, emphasis in original.

conducted in private homes, public meeting houses, and church buildings.

Methodist preachers were charged to "explore and occupy the country." And they did so.<sup>94</sup> On February 22, 1845, while making one such journey near Athens, Ohio, Frederick Merrick made an intriguing entry in his diary.

"Having reached the summit of a hill surrounded by an unbroken forest, something seemed to whisper in my heart, "*pray, pray*." Taking my Bible from my pocket, I seated myself upon the trunk of a fallen oak, and began to read "the word of God." . . . I knelt to pray, and as I prayed the heavens were opened, and the Spirit descended upon my heart, until I felt that I was become filled with the Holy Ghost. All my restless anxiety--passed away, and was succeeded by a great calm. Light was shed upon my understanding, peace and joy inexplicable filled my heart. . . . It was fast a *mount of transfiguration*; and good was it to be there. At length came the thought of leaving the hallowed spot, to mingle again with the world; to look at its misery, to combat its errors, and to labor for God in the great work of its subjugation to Christ. I asked myself if I was willing to do this; the answer seemed to come up from my inmost heart, "Yes, I will reach down into the thicket of the battle; a hand unseen shall guide and protect me; the Holy Spirit shall strengthen me; and though at times I may be enclosed in clouds God will direct the arrow and through grace I shall yet, gain rich spoils for my master." To labor and to suffer for Christ appeared delightful. My soul seemed anxious to bound away and mingle in the strife. May the impression of that hour long remain."<sup>95</sup>

As with most Methodists, place was central to Merrick's faith. While he recognized the sacred moment was just that, he undoubtedly "revisited" such temporary places and times throughout the remainder of his life.

According to Maxwell Gaddis, Methodism underwent a perceptible change

---

<sup>94</sup>A.D. Field, *Memorials of Methodism in the Bounds of the Rock River Conference* (Cincinnati: Cranston and Stowe, 1886), 147-48.

<sup>95</sup>Merrick Diary, United Methodist Archives Center, OWU.



during the antebellum period. "Simple, earnest worship" was as much a casualty of progress as the pioneer world he knew so well. "Quarterly meetings and camp meetings in those days were occasions of unusual interest to the Methodist Israel, as they met from many and distant points to hold communion with God, and make the forest vocal with the voice of prayer and praise." Gaddis charges that "there is not the same amount of self-sacrificing devotion exhibited as then, nor are the means of grace peculiar to Methodism as fully appreciated. Methodism has peculiar distinctive characteristics, to which she must adhere, or lose not only her hold upon the public mind, but her aggressive power."<sup>96</sup> A rural environment was central to Gaddis' Methodism. For Midwestern Methodists, the familiar landmarks of their spiritual geography became increasingly remote as settlers modified the actual landscape. By the end of the antebellum period, the landscape Gaddis knew best existed only in his memory. Thankfully, he could overcome this handicap (i.e. transcend human time) through faith. His faith truly "was the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen" (Hebrews 11:1). As a result, regardless of what happened to the world in which he lived, through faith he could simultaneously re-live the past as well as glimpse the future.

---

<sup>96</sup>Gaddis, *Foot-Prints of an Itinerant*, 533.

## **The Marrow of Methodist Divinity**

This chapter continues to examine antebellum Methodist worship and the significance of place in constructing, maintaining, and participating in that faith community. By specifically analyzing the process of pioneer worship, this chapter explores the symbol system which Methodists employed to negotiate their Christian identity. The marrow of Methodist divinity is a complex arrangement in which men and women shared not only spiritual authority, but at times, agency with God. As a result, Midwestern Methodists dominated the regional religious landscape while simultaneously creating a distinct niche within both the national church and evangelicalism in general.

As we have seen, Midwesterners relished the region's rivers, trees, and open spaces that made it unique. Methodist settlers found these attributes inherently religious, a reflection of God's image. This was never, however, a simple, sentimental connection--creation was dynamic. Nature was an animate place where one could encounter the spirit world, both good and evil. In addition to His omnipotence, omniscience, and omnipresence, God was changeless. Methodists encountered the same I AM who spoke to Moses through a burning bush countless generations earlier. By the nineteenth-century, however, God typically ignited hearts rather than shrubbery. In the process, entire regions such as the Midwest and western New York were "burned-over." Not only did these pioneer Methodists envision space in remarkable ways, they

also came to have an increasingly complex sense of time. While Methodists encouraged migration and development, they hoped to maintain the sacredness of the land even as it was transformed.

Place and practice converge in camp meetings. The camp meeting arguably was the driving force of antebellum Methodism: a stage on which actors created, experienced, and memorialized the "Methodist economy" central to nineteenth-century evangelicalism and the rural religious milieu. Camp meetings registered the pulse of antebellum evangelicalism in the Midwest. Moreover, they were a leading indicator of rural Christianity in the region (possibly in the nation). Victor Turner's pioneering work in ritualistics is useful for interpreting camp meeting practices.

Ritualistics has blossomed into a cottage industry since Turner's initial studies of the *Zambian Ndembu* were published in the 1960s. Of his many publications, however, *The Ritual Process* was a catalyst unlike any other in the field. Turner's genius is in creating a filter from extrapolated Ndembu rituals and social structures through which he passes non-Ndembu cultures and practices. This multi-contextual frame of reference allows Turner to draw far reaching conclusions.<sup>1</sup> Turner defines

---

<sup>1</sup>*The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* (Chicago: Aldine Publishing Company, 1969). Both ritualistics and the three primary analytic lenses to religious practice (anthropological, sociological, and psychological) have elaborate theoretical frameworks which this essay purposely does not engage. The literature in these and related fields is vast indeed. Instead, one finds here a single common concept best articulated by Victor Turner. For further access into this complex literature see: Robert

ritual as "a stereotyped sequence of activities involving gestures, words, and objects, performed in a sequestered place, and designed to influence preternatural entities or forces on behalf of the actor's goals and interests."<sup>2</sup> Turner found Arnold van Gennep's work on rites of passage central to understanding the ritual process. This essay likewise also employs rites of passage as an analytic device with which to examine camp meetings.<sup>3</sup>

Turner asserts that Ndembu society was comprised of multiple sub-structures signifying function and status. At predetermined intervals, typically corresponding with changes in one's life-cycle, children and adults were expected to transition between these

---

S. Ellwood, Jr., *Introducing Religion: From Inside and Outside* (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc. 1978); Peter Donovan, *Interpreting Religious Experience* (New York: The Seabury Press, 1979); Ronald L. Grimes, *Beginnings in Ritual Studies* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1982); Felicitas D. Goodman, *Ecstasy, Ritual, and Alternate Reality: Religion in a Pluralistic World* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988); Hans-Gunter Heimbrock and H. Barbara Boudewijnse eds. *Current Studies on Rituals: Perspectives for the Psychology of Religion* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1990); Alan Morinis, ed. *Sacred Journeys: The Anthropology of Pilgrimage* (Westport: CT, Greenwood Press, 1992).

<sup>2</sup>Arthur C. Lehmann and James E. Meyers, *Magic, Witchcraft, and Religion* (Palo Alto: Mayfield Publishing Company, 1985), 55.

<sup>3</sup>Dickson D. Bruce, Jr. took up this theme in his work on plain-folk religion. Although I differ with elements of his interpretation (e.g. religion as a social, as opposed to spiritual, pursuit), my intent is to compliment, not challenge, Bruce's work. Many of his findings were of a preliminary nature and call for corroboration. Beyond interpretive quibbles with Bruce, this essay proposes to give the laity more voice and emphasize the bearing of place on rural religious practice. See *And They All Sang Hallelujah: Plain-Folk Camp-Meeting Religion, 1800-1845* (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1974).

various "structures." Thus, not only were there several planes to Ndembu society, each of which was collectively determined and never divorced from the whole, community operated on its own life-cycle of sorts. Transition rites validated both the structures themselves and the process of constructing them. This concept of community as continuous process and specific place/entity is helpful in understanding rural religion and camp meetings in particular.

Camp meetings were fluid spiritual environments in which sinners were saved, believers sanctified, and the faithful generally renewed. Turner outlines three distinct phases in the cultural transition process. First, one is symbolically separated from a group or position within a social structure. One then enters a marginal or "liminal" phase, "pass[ing] through a cultural realm that has few or none of the attributes of the past or coming state." Finally the initiate is reaggregated into society, assuming new status or function.<sup>4</sup>

Historians seldom have ventured beyond conversion when studying camp meeting ritual practice. Without question, conversion was the primary goal of camp meetings and its most visible ritual. But it was just one of several rituals celebrated at these open-air gatherings. In fact, one can find two distinct categories of rituals: acts of intercession and works of grace. These two sets of rituals, each with its own liminal

---

<sup>4</sup>Turner, *The Ritual Process*, 94-95.

attributes, not only were central to evangelicalism, but typify rural religious practice in general.

### **Acts of Intercession: Proclamation**

Camp meetings and open-air preaching were synonymous in the antebellum period. Preaching, along with exhortation and testimony, constitute the principle means of proclamation characteristic of Midwestern Methodism. Proclamation was an act of intercession in that official agents of the faith community declared truth based on Scripture and personal experience. Naturally, proclamation was the fundamental purpose of ordained clergy. However, laity, too, could function as the community's advocate before God, and His emissary in return. Proclamation was the cornerstone of Methodist identity--continuously articulating the criteria for successful Christian living, as well as symbolizing the community itself.

Elsewhere this dissertation has reexamined types of itinerant ministry, concluding that the antebellum Midwest was home to a diversity of Methodist ministry styles. Preaching, as an act of intercession, however, raises again (yet differently) the issue of human agency in religious experience. John Stewart provides one of the best examples of preaching as intercession. In 1819, at Paoli, Indiana, Samuel Hamilton, the presiding elder, allowed a Presbyterian missionary to speak following the love feast at one of his quarterly meetings. Much to Hamilton's surprise, Bishop Robert R. Roberts arrived soon after the service began.

By all accounts, the visitor gave a "cold, dry, theorizing disquisition." Roberts recognized an opportunity when he saw one. As he prayed, "the congregation felt shocks of divine power, and realized that they were in the presence of God." After reading his text, he stated: "You have just had a theoretical discourse, and I now propose giving you a practical one."

"Immediately every eye and every ear was under his control, and the audience was spell-bound for an hour and a half. The court-house was crowded, and such overwhelming power attended the Word that the audience rose *en masse* and stood with open mouths each to receive his portion."

One must make a critical distinction here: *Roberts* decided to give a homiletics clinic; the Bishop, not God, had a message for this people. Yet, as the congregational response indicates, God blessed the sermon just the same.

Just entering his third year of ministry, Stewart was duly impressed. "The effect was wonderful and never to be forgotten." Stewart adds that the Presbyterian missionary left with a better understanding of the "power of the pulpit." Robert's sermon gets to the heart of preaching as intercession: while Roberts drew upon his skill as a "showman," he did so as an offering of service, an expression of his own faith. While the Spirit empowered men and women to deliver the Word, human agency was an inescapable reality--even of Methodism's most holy office.<sup>5</sup>

---

<sup>5</sup>John Stewart, *Highways and Hedges: Fifty Years of Western Methodism* (Cincinnati: Hitchcock and Walden, 1872), 63-64.

The same was true for exhortation and testimony. Exhortation is a term loosely applied to two similar activities. Typically, only licensed ministers delivered formal exhortations. This duty was perceived as inferior to preaching and, consequently, often was assigned to located or junior preachers. In this format, exhortation customarily followed a preaching service, with the exhorter making direct references to the sermon (it could be based upon a printed sermon in the absence of an itinerant). A second category of exhortation refers to personal testimony (more commonly referred to simply as testimony). Here the speaker needed no credentials save the witness of the Spirit. While exhortation included elements of personal reflection, such sentiment comprised the essence of testimony. Testimonies often were statements of praise, recollections of how God had worked in one's life. The value of testimonies is that, to a limited degree, they allowed the subject to re-experience the blessing, and the congregation to vicariously experience them as well. But not all testimonies were corporate celebrations; testimonies also could charge a congregation to greater spiritual accountability. At this point, testimonies become works of grace.

Preaching, exhortation, and testimony were extemporaneous expressions which served to articulate and authenticate Methodist theology. Emanating from the hearts and experiences of individual believers, all were divinely inspired. Finally each medium provided opportunity to assess the spiritual condition of the faith community (whether personally, of a fellow believer, or corporately). Harvey Reeves Calkins maintains that



Methodism could not exist without this personal identification: "the genius of Methodism is inseparable from the speaking that we do know, and the testifying of what we have seen."<sup>6</sup> Preaching, exhortation, and testimony, provided they were sanctioned by the Spirit of God, were equally legitimate spiritual expressions--effectively bridging the clergy-laity disjunction.<sup>7</sup>

Interestingly, Midwestern women often assumed leadership roles in the Church through acts of intercession. A. P. Mead tells of one woman known as "the Presiding Elder' because of her masculine voice and numerous and successful efforts at camp meetings." Her "efforts" presumably were exhorting, testifying, and praying. Mead recalled one meeting at which she took advantage of a pause in the sermon to stand and shout "glory to God" three times. "The congregation rose instantly to their feet, and the sister added sundry words of exhortation." When the minister in charge of the meeting began to object, William Wyatt (the one preaching) defended the woman--he was out

---

<sup>6</sup>Harvey Reeves Calkins, *The Mind of Methodism--A Brief* (Cincinnati: Jennings and Graham, 1905), 38. See Calkins 33-38 for material on the purpose and formula of testimonies.

<sup>7</sup>Not surprisingly, from the 1830s onward, exhortation gradually became obsolete as more and more itinerants were assigned city-based stations as opposed to rural circuits. While stationed assignments presented their own tribulations, they were considerably less rigorous than traveling vast circuits. Subsequently, fewer itinerants "located" (withdrew from full-time ministry). This raises a fascinating question for further study: why were stationed preachers were less willing to share their pulpits with non-regular clergy? I conjecture that this was due to increasing competition from other evangelical faiths and clergy attempting to convert spiritual authority into social status.

of breath and welcomed the break.<sup>8</sup> The congregation's swift response indicates that this woman's action was not at all out of order. In fact, the primary literature abounds with similar instances. For example, Susanah Sanderson Atkin frequently exhorted in the absence of a "preacher." Likewise, Fanny Church's prayers and exhortations became her legacy to Canefield, Ohio. Gertrude Van Renesselear Wickham claims that those who heard these exhortations and prayers never forgot them. Sarah Smith was famous for her exhortations on the resurrection, which "she contemplated with the most triumphant emotion."<sup>9</sup> These examples raises the intriguing possibility of a quid pro quo arrangement between preacher and congregation. Interjections such as the one by the female "presiding elder," could very well have been a means by which preachers maintained the driving intensity to their sermons which congregations expected: in other words, when the preacher's energy began to flag, a believer in the congregation could come to the rescue.

Acts of intercession could be private as well as public. While traveling the White Oak Circuit (southwestern Ohio) in 1809, a Mrs. Baker proved uniquely adept at

---

<sup>8</sup>A. P. Mead, *Manna in the Wilderness, or, Grove and its Altar, Offerings and Thrilling Incidents*. With an Introduction by J. B. Wakeley. 3rd Edition, (Philadelphia: Perkinpine and Higgins, 1860), 295-296.

<sup>9</sup>Gertrude Van Renesselear Wickham, ed. *Memorial to the Pioneer Women of the Western Reserve*, 2 vols. (Cleveland: The Woman's Department of the Cleveland Centennial Commission, 1896-1924; reprint, Jefferson, Ohio: Ashtabula County Genealogical Society, Inc., 1981), Atkin, I:83; Church, I:391; Smith in J. C. Smith, *Reminiscences of Early Methodism in Indiana* (Indianapolis: J.M. Olcott, 1879), 129.

exhorting both her non-Christian husband and her community. On one of his rounds, John Johnson preached to a single parishioner--Mrs. Baker. He determined to conduct the service despite the poor turnout, and soon their "souls grew happy." Imbued with a praise to match her gait, Mrs. Baker repeated "glory" every few steps the entire way home (a ten mile walk). Relating the service to her husband, Mrs. Baker claimed Johnson was a "strange-looking man;" moreover, he spoke like no one she had ever heard before. Mixing invective and profanity, Mr. Baker pressed her for clarity. She responded, "Well, I don't know: he talked just like heaven and earth were coming together!" Curiosity got the best of Mr. Baker and he attended the next service, along with "the rest of the ---- fools" (Mrs. Baker's description of Johnson had piqued interest throughout the community). Mr. Baker was convicted as the "old cuss" preached.

On the way home he admitted his error of judgment. A mile or so later he confided, "Wife, there is something the matter with me!" Recognizing the symptoms, Mrs. Baker gingerly probed: "What do *you* think it is, Mr. Baker?" His response is classic: "Dogged if I know; but I'm sick--heart sick." Nothing more was said at the time; later that evening Mrs. Baker noticed that her husband was taking longer than usual to feed the horses. Upon investigation, she "heard cries and groans of distress" coming from the stable. There she found "the hardened persecutor upon his knees, pleading in deepest agony for mercy." Long anticipating this moment, she immediately went into action. "She shouted a while, and then prayed a while, then tried to instruct

him in the way of salvation." Nearly three hours later Mr. Baker received assurance of his salvation, and out-shouted his wife. The Baker home soon became a preaching point, and Mr. Baker was appointed leader of a class that also met in his home.<sup>10</sup>

Each of these women took their spiritual authority within the faith community for granted. They never doubted their license to leadership. Furthermore, each congregation sanctioned their spiritual authority by submitting to their ministries. The significance is as fascinating as it is obvious: these ministries reveal a means of credentialing outside the formal ordination process. For example, Mrs. Baker was an itinerant in all but salary (which was notoriously meager anyhow). She canvassed her neighborhood, and--with the aid of the Spirit--converted her husband. In addition, she educated others in the practice of faith by modeling behavior appropriate to the various works of grace. Mrs. Baker was not unique.

Charles Sims recalled a female convert who completely changed her neighborhood when "she began to work for Christ." Though no minister was in the area, she persuaded her father to open their home for worship. Her abilities more than compensated for the lack of a formal minister. When the house could no longer contain the congregation, she launched subscription drive to build a church. After construction

---

<sup>10</sup>Susannah Johnson, *Recollections of the Rev. John Johnson and His Home: An Autobiography* (Nashville: Southern Methodist Publishing House, 1869), 58-61, my emphasis.

was complete, she organized and taught Sunday School. This community went through two building campaigns under her leadership. Sims adds, "she long continued the leading spirit of the Church in that community."<sup>11</sup> Likewise, John Stewart's wife often spoke and prayed at class meetings and love-feasts; she also played a role in family visitation. In short, she was a vital extension of Stewart's ministry.<sup>12</sup> Despite the obstinence of the national church to officially endorse antebellum women as religious leaders, Midwestern Methodists welcomed women at least to the platform if not the pulpit itself.

#### **Acts of Intercession: Prayer**

Prayer was another act of intercession. Based on their involvement in proclamation, it is not surprising that women were key participants "around the altars of prayer, where the erring and penitent come to get counsel and help."<sup>13</sup> Of course, gender was secondary to authenticity. Men, too, were gifted in prayer. When Mr. Miller prayed, "the heavens were opened and streams of salvation came down upon the congregation." John Clark, likewise, "had a gift of prayer quite uncommon."

---

<sup>11</sup>Charles N. Sims, *The Life of Rev. Thomas M. Eddy*. With an Introduction by Rev. Bishop Simpson (New York: Phillips and Hunt, 1884), 82-83.

<sup>12</sup>Stewart, *Highways and Hedges*, 124. Minister's wives were expected to sing, testify, exhort, pray, teach, and participate in "pastoral" visits. For more on this see Leonard I. Sweet, *The Minister's Wife: Her Role in Nineteenth-Century American Evangelicalism* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1983).

<sup>13</sup>Smith, *Reminiscences of Early Indiana Methodism*, 75.

"His language was simple, chaste, solemn and dignified, devoid of all cant, and peculiarly expressive. He seemed to hold converse with the Lord of heaven, as with a familiar friend. His prayers were singularly fervent and effectual, and remarkably adapted to the occasion and circumstances. He used no repetition of vain words, and despised all high sounding phrases and incongruous imagery, which some persons of inflated minds and heated imaginations employ in prayer."<sup>14</sup>

Yet, given the special nature of gender-relations in Methodism, one must note that--even if men and women were equal before the throne of grace, there was something unique when women assumed positions of public leadership.

Shortly after recognizing "Mr. Miller's" gift in prayer, William Smith adds that he has "heard some women pray with an eloquence and power surpassing any thing that ever fell from the lips of man." Mother Dunbar falls into this category. "When she arose in her seat in the church or class-room, an expectant hush fell upon the listeners. . . . and when she extended her hands benignly and said, 'Let us pray,' she became as one inspired." Dunbar's pastor claimed "Mother Dunbar's prayers take us into the seventh heaven."<sup>15</sup>

It is possible that women's public ministries were given special notice because they were unpredictable; unlike male ministers, they were not constrained by

---

<sup>14</sup>Miller in William C. Smith, *Indiana Miscellany* (Cincinnati: Poe and Hitchcock, 1867), 101; Clark in J. M. Peck, *Father Clark, Or, The Pioneer Preacher*. New York: Sheldon, Lamport and Blakeman, 1855), 82.

<sup>15</sup>Miller in Smith, *Indiana Miscellany*, 105; Dunbar in Wickham, *Memorial to the Pioneer Women*, I:464.

convention. An observer/participant never knew quite what to expect when a woman took the lead. For example, a fine line separated praying from preaching when a woman led prayer. Henry Smith relates how one woman preach-prayed at a 1799(?) Miami Circuit quarterly meeting at the home of Philip Gatch. Sitting directly behind the presiding elder (and future Bishop) William McKendree, this woman spoke "in a low and mournful manner."

"Lord, I have heard about these people, and walked a long way to hear them. Yesterday, while the man was preaching, I felt very bad, and thought I should fall down; so I was about to get into the woods and hide myself, for I did not know that it was the Lord; but I could not walk. I fell down among the people, and all my shame went away; and now I am happy. Bless the Lord, he has converted my soul! O how light my heart is now; glory, glory to King Jesus! But, O Lord, my husband is wicked, my children are wicked, and there is no religion in our neighborhood, and no one to tell them how to get converted. Lord, send some of these preachers that have the Spirit of God in their heart into our neighborhood, to my house, to tell the people the way to heaven!"

Why would the woman vocalize these very personal sentiments if not to be heard by those near her? Thus, prayer was a preaching technique.<sup>16</sup>

Nearly fifty years later, little had changed. Though the issue remained controversial, women had gained freer access to some pulpits. Joseph Tarkington allowed a woman to preach at an 1843 Centerville Circuit (Indiana) Quarterly Conference. Though he did not interfere, Allen Wiley, the Presiding Elder, refused to

---

<sup>16</sup>Henry Smith, *Recollections and Reflections of an Old Itinerant*, (New York: Land and Tippet, 1848), 340-341.

be associated with the services in any way. As often was the case, the dispute was moot. God, not the institutional structure, tested this woman's authenticity. This was a two-sided coin: did she have the requisite gifts and graces to communicate the Gospel, and would the Holy Spirit attend her ministry? Tarkington infers she more than qualified on both counts, thus effectively negating any challenge.<sup>17</sup>

As can be seen, the issue of women not just in the pulpit, but assuming public roles in antebellum Methodism was divisive. Many high-profile male leaders, such as J. B. Finley, were staunch opponents. While Finley acknowledged that women could occasionally exercise spiritual authority over men, such instances were rare and unique to a particular circumstance or situation. For example, in 1816 while preaching at a quarterly meeting, a women interrupted Finley's sermon. She "commenced delivering her mind at the top of her voice." Finley told her to sit down and wait for him to finish. The woman complied with Finley's order (he failed to note if she resumed her discourse at the end of his sermon). Finley admits that the congregation opposed his position, but his resolve never wavered. Had the woman pressed her case with the congregation, she likely could have unseated Finley as the spokesperson of the hour. Ironically, Finley believed himself vindicated because "after this I was not again interrupted by a female

---

<sup>17</sup>Joseph Tarkington, *Autobiography of Rev. Joseph Tarkington*. With an Introduction by Rev. T. A. Goodwin (Cincinnati: Curts and Jennings, 1899), 141.



prophet."<sup>18</sup> James R. Gilruth recalls attending a service at which the "radical" Hannah Reeves preached. Gilruth was seemed very uncomfortable with a woman preacher and begrudgingly admitted that he was impressed. "She spoke distinctly & to pretty good effect I have heard many men that did not equal her."<sup>19</sup>

Yet many others welcomed participation by anyone--regardless of gender or age --provided their actions were directed by the Spirit. J.C. Smith maintained that, "having had something to do in putting man out of paradise," it was only appropriate and natural that a woman, would "take her full share of labor in putting him back."<sup>20</sup> A. P. Mead echoed this sentiment in a conversation with a Presbyterian on the issue. The Presbyterian believed no woman could exercise religious authority over man. Mead unloaded on the man; in part he argued: "God employed a dumb ass to rebuke the Prophet, a dunghill fowl to send conviction to the heart of backslidden Peter; and I see no reason why woman should not reprove sin. . . . Woman has as good a right to the privileges of the Gospel, as you or I. She was last at the cross, and first at the

---

<sup>18</sup>James. B. Finley, *Autobiography of Rev. James B. Finley; or, Pioneer Life in the West*, edited by W. P. Strickland. (Cincinnati: Methodist Book Concern, 1853), 286-287; see also Finley's, *Sketches of Western Methodism: Biographical, Historical, and Miscellaneous*. Edited by W. P. Strickland (Cincinnati: Methodist Book Concern, 1854), 531-536.

<sup>19</sup>James Gilruth Manuscripts, 1831-1834 (Microfilmed Typescript copies), 33.

<sup>20</sup>Smith, *Reminiscences*, 298.

sepulchre." The Presbyterian replied that Mead spoke "pretty plain."<sup>21</sup>

Oddly enough, Peter Cartwright proved one of the more persuasive advocates of women's right to spiritual leadership.

"I have often seen our dull and stupid prayer-meetings suddenly changed from a dead clog to heavenly enjoyment, when a sister has been called on to pray, who has reverently bowed and taken up the cross, and utterance was given her that was heavenly, and she prayed with words that burned, and the baptismal fire rolled all around, while the house and all the praying company were baptized from heaven, many sinners, tall and stout-hearted sinners, have been brought to quake and tremble before God, and have cried for mercy, and while crying, have found peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Many weeping mourners in those prayer-meetings have found the blessed pardon of sins; the members of the Church have also been greatly blessed, and have gone on their way rejoicing in the Lord."<sup>22</sup>

One is left to conclude, based on these accounts, that congregations responded differently to different preachers. Some such as Finley and Wiley, made it plain that certain behavior would not be tolerated within their ministries. On the other hand, the woman Finley squelched might have been given considerable latitude by Cartwright or Mead. This "flexible response" raises many intriguing questions about Methodist worship practices. Most importantly, it underscores the "acts of intercession" thesis presented here: human agency was a significant factor in the antebellum Midwestern Methodist economy.

---

<sup>21</sup>Mead, *Manna in the Wilderness*, 240.

<sup>22</sup>*Autobiography of Peter Cartwright, the Backwoods Preacher*. Edited by W. P. Strickland (New York: Carlton & Porter, 1856), 517-518.

### **Acts of Intercession: Singing**

Singing is another work of intercession. Congregational singing was a hallmark of antebellum Methodist worship. Gifted singers were in constant demand for their ability to prepare congregations for proclamation. In this sense, singing was an invaluable complement to, and in many ways an extension of, preaching. One need not be a believer to participate in song services; moreover, as in prayer, singing also allowed both saint and sinner to directly communicate with God.

Pioneer hymnologist George Pullen Jackson found that camp meetings and revivalism generated its own musical genre, the spiritual song. These spirituals constitute "a body of song which is the largest and most definitely American variety of religious folksong."<sup>23</sup> Complex, poetic, and introspective hymns were out of place in these rural settings. As a result, traditional hymns were customized through a process of "text simplification." James I Warren, Jr. notes that choruses were added to hymns to encourage participation by those unfamiliar with its stanzas; soon refrains were inserted after half-stanzas (known as interrupted refrains). Other modifications included independent choruses which could be appended to various hymns or be sung

---

<sup>23</sup>George Pullen Jackson, *Another Sheaf of White Spirituals* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1952; reprint, New York: Folklorica Press, Inc., 1981), 22.

as separate entities.<sup>24</sup> The net result, according to Jackson, was that singing "became not a hindrance to general participation but an irresistible temptation to join in."<sup>25</sup>

Several scholars have analyzed hymns as for their didactic utility. Sandra Sizer concludes that through form and metaphor, gospel hymns "articulate[d] a structure of the world and simultaneously create[d] a community with its own specific identity." Dickson Bruce evaluates hymns as showcases for Methodism's theological structure. In short, hymns were didactic in that they guided seekers through the works of grace and confirmed that theological structure in the process. Singing was both carefully planned activity and spontaneous; song leaders enjoyed considerable flexibility in selecting hymns and/or fitting new choruses to familiar hymn tunes. Frontier singing was characterized by antiphonal calls and responses: with the leader typically "lining" a spiritual statement to which the congregation would respond in unison.<sup>26</sup> A fine line separated singing as work of grace and act of intercession. Some undoubtedly never sang, others likely found it a drudgery, but the primary literature indicates many eagerly

---

<sup>24</sup>James I Warren, Jr., *O for A Thousand Tongues: The History, Nature and Influence of Music in the Methodist Tradition* (Grand Rapids: The Francis Asbury Press, 1988), 98-99.

<sup>25</sup>George Pullen Jackson, *Spiritual Folk Songs of Early America* (New York: J.J. Augustin Publisher, 1937), 7.

<sup>26</sup>Sandra Sizer's *Gospel Hymns and Social Religion* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1978), 18-19. Sizer compliments Bruce while providing a more thorough treatment of similar issues. See Bruce, *And They All Sang Hallelujah*, 96-122 for an excellent textual analysis of choruses.

participated because singing offered a unique religious experience. Singing, then, takes on new meaning in this context of intercession.<sup>27</sup>

The focus here is the practice of singing as an expression of its purpose. Methodists wanted to hear others sing as well as sing themselves. Even when one listened to another sing, it was a participatory experience. More than articulating an intellectual construction of faith, singing (and acts of intercession in general) intrinsically brought believers into contact with their faith. In fact, Warren claims that Methodists "sang their faith." They used hymns to articulate "felt religion, personal

---

<sup>27</sup>Warren outlines the basic technical aspects of camp meeting spirituals as follows:

"A main characteristic of camp meeting melodies and rhythms was their considerable use of the upbeat and accent on the second note instead of the first. Another quality was their greater concern for melody than for harmony and their using modal systems that frequently used only five or six of the seven available tones. A third trait was the predominance of 'short gaps' between notes and an avoidance of long gaps. Fourth, more than half the tunes appear to be ionian (major). Last, they were generally sung to a fast tempo, although some ballad and testimonial types of songs were sung slowly and in a minor key" (*O for A Thousand Tongues*, 103).

See also Ellen Jane Lorenz, *Glory Hallelujah!: The Story of the Campmeeting Spiritual* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1978). Lorenz's work has limited value due to heavy doses of fiction and extreme bias (e.g., she claims camp meeting song texts "are often shallow in their thought, never clever; they are seldom poetic, seldom oversentimental, always naive and vigorous" [57]). Yet her section "Campmeeting Spirituals: How They Happened" does contain a useful overview. See especially 40-70. Two recent works which demonstrate the connections between sacred music and rural worship are: Beverly Bush Patterson, *The Sound of the Dove: Singing in Appalachian Primitive Baptist Churches* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1995) and William Lynwood Montell, *Singing the Glory Down: Amateur Gospel Music in South Central Kentucky, 1900-1990* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 1991).

assurance, grace available to all, and lives aimed at perfect love of God and loving service to neighbor."<sup>28</sup> Seekers could understand faith only by practicing it. In short, singing was a vehicle through which seekers immersed themselves in the faith process. Such actions, alone, enlightened: bringing clarity of thought and purpose.

While singing was a participatory experience, paradoxically, one could participate even when silent. Samuel Parker "possessed a voice of unusual melody, and was excelled by few, if any, in the power of song." His vocal artistry drew large crowds; "many were attracted to the Church to listen to the divine strains which he would pour forth upon his enraptured and weeping audiences." James Finley adds that Parker "was not only gifted with a remarkable voice, but he had brought it under a high state of cultivation, and it was said he was a perfect master of music." Finley also recalls an 1809 camp meeting at which Robert Manley preached with unusual power. What really caught Finley's attention, though, was when Manley deviated from custom: he abruptly stopped in mid-sermon and began to sing. Finley claims that by the fourth verse the people were so agitated that they swelled and surged like the "sea in a storm."<sup>29</sup>

Such a response was not uncommon. Maxwell Gaddis, like countless others, had often been "entranced" by John Strange's singing. Strange "possessed a voice of unusual

---

<sup>28</sup>Warren, *O for A Thousand Tongues*, 66.

<sup>29</sup>Parker in Finley's, *Sketches of Western Methodism*, 205; Manley in Finley, *Autobiography*, 228. Finley refers to Manley as "a flaming herald of the cross, and pioneer of the Gospel in the West."

sweetness, compass, and power." Gaddis describes it as "silvery tones [which] would rise and swell and fall upon the ear like strains from heaven." Even ministers could be mesmerized by singing. Wesson Miller, member of the Rock River Conference, notes a interesting experience which occurred on April 4, 1845. The service was held in a chapel designed for 150. Miller notes that it was full--with an additional 100 standing. Just his second year in the ministry, he was quite alarmed at the size of the congregation.

"Opening the services with great perturbation of spirit in the presence of so vast a crowd, I proceeded with difficulty until the people arose to sing. Instantly I was at ease. I was not a stranger to good singing, for my surroundings had always been fortunate in this particular, but, I am free to say, that, up to that hour, my ears had never been so thrilled by Christian melody. The tones were not as mellow as those of the African, but they were more deep and thrilling. Inclined rather to a high key, and disposed to be sharp and piercing, yet the voices of the vast congregation swept through every note of the gamut with equal freedom. *I was thoroughly entranced.* And, on coming to myself, I found my perturbation had left me and my soul was on a plane with the responsibilities of the hour."<sup>30</sup>

In this spellbound state, participants experienced a type of spiritual release.

Once "captivated," seekers were free to encounter the sacred. John Collins led a song

---

<sup>30</sup>Gaddis, *Last Words and Old-Time Memories* (Cincinnati: Walden and Stowe, 1880), 427; W. G. Miller, *Thirty Years in the Itinerancy* (Milwaukee: I. L. Hauser and Company, 1875), 22-23, my emphasis. A.P. Mead relates a humorous incident in which an itinerant sang himself out of a supper: those in the house were so blessed by his singing that they began to jump and shout. This proved problematic as the woman preparing supper kept hold of the frying pan as she was exercised, "scatter[ing] the ham and gravy about the room" (*Manna in the Wilderness*, 200-201).

at an 1809 camp meeting on Eagle Creek, Ohio, in such a way that Finley was indelibly impressed. Finley recalls that once the congregation gathered for the preaching service, Collins "arose and gave out a hymn." People could sense something special about the moment.

"From the manner of his reading it all could tell that his heart was filled with emotions too big for utterance. It was sung as only the Methodists in early times could sing at camp meetings. It seemed as if the souls of the entire encampment was in the sound, and went up to heaven as an offering of praise. When the last strains died away upon the solitudes of the surrounding forest, the man of God fell upon his knees, and poured out his full heart to the God of heaven. An awful stillness reigned, interrupted only by an occasional sob, or a suppressed amen. Presently the Holy Spirit was poured out, and like a rushing, mighty wind it came down upon the encampment."

Finley claims that some 500 fell, instantly smitten by the Spirit. "The preacher's voice was lost, and God was all in all."<sup>31</sup>

Women's roles in music as a ministry are a hallmark of Midwestern Methodism.

Mrs. Clark Davis was noted for her singing: "she had a strong, clear, falsetto voice, . . . and keeping time with both feet, she used to sing 'We are going over to Jordan' with the fervor of one being transplanted to that happy land." Sarah Ann Wheeler, was "ever ready to start a hymn or lead in prayer, with credit to herself and edification to all."<sup>32</sup>

As noted earlier, though dominating membership roles, women's contributions seldom

---

<sup>31</sup>Finley, *Sketches of Western Methodism*, 324-325.

<sup>32</sup>Wickham, *Memorial to the Pioneer Women*, Davis, I:608; Wheeler, I:645. See also I:436 for several Ohio women "gifted in prayer and song."



were recognized by the church or historians. John C. Smith witnessed first hand the contributions of women to the success of Methodism in Indiana. Smith defended Methodist women by demonstrating that they served as able missionaries and as authors of serious literary merit. As a result they were entitled to the right--and respect --of ordination. Smith also devoted an entire chapter to one Indianapolis luminary, Lydia Hawes. In Smith's estimation, Hawes not only was the greatest vocalist in Indiana or the Ohio Valley, but that he ever heard. Though Hawes never preached a single sermon, Smith claims she had a "ministry of fire."<sup>33</sup>

Hawes possessed "a magnetic power and fascination rarely equaled and never excelled." She, too, captivated seekers; "she never failed to entrance whole audiences." Smith witnessed Hawes repeatedly "lift whole audiences from their seats, amidst shouts and songs of triumph." Hawes sang at an 1844 camp meeting near Danville which Smith was conducting. As she sang, her voice rose higher and higher until "she seemed to stand in the presence of the heavenly choir and challenged them to sing." It would appear, according to Smith, that heaven accepted. "There came down from the throne such a baptism of love and power that the whole encampment seemed to be filled with the glory of God." Smith adds that anyone who heard her that day never forgot it; in fact, Smith relished the memory: it remained fresh, filling him with "awe and praise,"

---

<sup>33</sup>Hawes' "name was the synonym of song." J. C. Smith, *Reminiscences of Early Methodism in Indiana* (Indianapolis: J.M. Olcott, 1879), 93, 99.

34 years later.<sup>34</sup>

Francis Asbury Hester corroborates Smith's assessment. Hester notes in his diary that Hawes participated in one of his protracted meetings at Franklin in March, 1853; she "sang beautifully and pray[ed] powerfully." The fact that she visited the Hesters later that year at their home in Edinburg intimates that she traveled widely. Based on her reputation, one can conclude that Hawes often took part in services when traveling. Hawes maintained an active ministry until her death in 1874 at age 74. Smith claims she "was called in every direction," ministering throughout Indiana and neighboring states. "It was often remarked that she was equal to one Bishop and three preachers."<sup>35</sup> One can appreciate this comparison only when realizing that Ira Sankey, Homer Rodehaver, and others in the 1870s-1880s are recognized as the first song evangelists. Hawes' ministry challenges this perspective; she had filled such a role throughout the Midwest since the mid-1830s. In comparing her with a bishop and several ministers, Smith acknowledges Hawes as the first song evangelist--and subsequently her spiritual authority and political stature within Midwestern Methodism. In pioneering this mode of ministry, Hawes help chart new opportunities

---

<sup>34</sup>Smith, *Reminiscences of Early Methodism in Indiana*, 87, 94-95, 100-101.

<sup>35</sup>Francis Asbury Hester, *Diary* (Typescript copy, Archives of DePauw University and Indiana United Methodism. Greencastle, Indiana), 151, 155; It is interesting to note that Hawes chose celibacy as a token of complete consecration to her vow of service. Smith, *Reminiscences of Early Methodism in Indiana*, 96, 98-99.

for evangelical women across the nation.<sup>36</sup>

### **Works of Grace: Conviction**

Works of grace include conviction, conversion, sanctification, and spiritual renewal. Each of these components represents a distinct development in the seeker's religious life-cycle. Conversion most neatly fits Turner's three-stage rite of passage: conviction separated penitents from the community; one advanced to the liminal phase by entering the camp meeting "pen," going to the altar and engaging in fervent prayer; and, finally, one was reaggregated upon profession of faith.

Conviction is the point at which sinners are spiritually awakened. Once awakened, these individuals become paralyzed by the thought of their eternal torment in hell. The only recourse is effectual prayer. While saint and sinner alike can plead for mercy, as the initial step in the salvation process, conviction cannot be cultivated or engendered. Ironically, the person awakened by the Holy Spirit becomes secondary to the process itself. Conviction elicits a simple response from the individual:

---

<sup>36</sup>Additional acts of intercession could include activities difficult to document but vital nonetheless to camp meeting religion. I label these camping-related acts of intercession. Many participated by clearing sites for services, through cooking, serving on guard duty to police the camp meeting, housing visitors, providing financial support, caring for the ill, and some, of necessity, remained at home to perform routine chores. These mundane assignments constitute deliberate acts of Christian service: each was as important to the success of a camp meeting as preaching, singing, and other high-profile responsibilities. The majority of "mothers in Israel" earned the respect of the Christian community through such acts of hospitality and service.

acknowledgement or rejection. One signifies acknowledgement by seeking the subsequent work of conversion. Yet conviction is more subtle than this dichotomy implies. For example, few who believe in hell aspire to spend eternity there. The fact that the awakening process might require several years to reach fruition further complicates the issue. Whether such an awakening was instantaneous or the cumulative effect of a protracted period, it always manifested itself in a spiritual crisis. Specifically, conviction is the point of either/or decision in the seeker's spiritual life cycle.

Peter Cartwright provides a clear first-hand description of conviction, one which helps explain its meaning. By his own admission, Cartwright was "wild, wicked boy." He was convicted in 1801, at age 16 after attending a raucous wedding reception; the fact that he danced a great deal weighed heavy on his heart. Returning home late at night, he sat by the fire and began to reflect on "the manner in which [he] spent the day and evening." He "felt guilty and condemned." Agitated, he paced the floor. "It seemed to me, all of a sudden, my blood rushed to my head, my heart palpitated, in a few minutes I turned blind; an awful impression rested on my mind that death had come and I was unprepared to die. I fell on my knees and began to ask God to have mercy on me." He remained under conviction for over three months.<sup>37</sup>

James B. Finley came under conviction while observing the Cane Ridge meetings

---

<sup>37</sup>Cartwright, *Autobiography*, 34.

of 1801. He attempted to escape the sensation by retreating to the woods. He claims: "my hair rose up on my head, my whole frame trembled, the blood ran could in my veins, . . . . A sense of suffocation and blindness seemed to come over me, and I thought I was going to die." At this point he determined to fortify his resolve at a nearby tavern; but on arriving, he felt "near to hell" and found the spectacle inside offensive. Despite pretensions of disgust, however, Finley managed to have a "dram" of brandy just the same. He recalls that the liquor only increased sensation of conviction. He makes an intriguing Pauline analogy: scales fell from his "sin-blinded eyes" when he realized the "awful truth, that if I died in my sins I was a lost man forever." Ironically, this utter hopelessness was a spiritual watershed. As Finley put it, "he was a ruined man." This recognition was the first step to recovery, i.e. conversion.<sup>38</sup>

Maxwell Gaddis was convicted at a camp meeting in the summer of 1824. Like Cartwright and many others, he attended purely out of curiosity. Yet as he stepped onto the camp site Gaddis began to feel "solemn." He perceived the place was different, somehow holy. Gaddis was convicted when he saw his brother go forward for prayer. Gaddis decided he, too, should seek religion. Certain that his hard heart would damn him to hell, Gaddis describes three distinct physical/spiritual sensations of his conviction: unconsciousness of surroundings, bitterness of spirit, and a "deep mental

---

<sup>38</sup>Finley, *Autobiography*, 167-168.

agony of [his] soul." After six hours of fervent prayer, Gaddis' heart became "as insensible as stone." In stark contrast to the mix of feelings earlier, he now felt nothing. At this point Gaddis claims Satan lured him away from the altar, telling him that lack of conversion only proved that his conviction was never genuine; besides, at just under 13 years old, Gaddis had a lifetime in which to make a profession of faith. Gaddis decided to go to bed and reconsider his options in the morning.<sup>39</sup>

### **Works of Grace: Conversion**

The transition from conviction to conversion often was an ordeal which believers relished--after the fact. As the evidence indicates, the process itself was as painful as it was disorienting. Where conviction was both a moment of decision and a prerequisite condition to subsequent works of grace, conversion exclusively was a crisis point. In conversion, individuals sought forgiveness for past sins through Christ's sacrificial death; in return, they received the promise of eternal life (the process in theological terms: justification, regeneration, and acceptance). Technically, the point of conversion is not the sinner's prayer; rather it is the assurance that forgiveness has in fact been granted, what is known as the witness of the (Holy) Spirit.<sup>40</sup>

---

<sup>39</sup>Maxwell Pierson Gaddis, *Foot-Prints of an Itinerant* (Cincinnati: The Methodist Book Concern, 1855), 70-74.

<sup>40</sup>For a general survey of conversion as a process, see: Joe Alton Jones, "The Conviction and Conversion Experiences of American Methodist Preachers from 1775-1825" B.D. Thesis, Southern Methodist University, 1938; and Byron Lee Lovelady, "The Conversion Experience: The Experiences of Some Early Methodists and the

Elijah Hedding experienced conviction on December 27, 1798. Soon thereafter he received the witness of the Spirit. He claimed that the "light of the Spirit broke in upon my mind clear and perceptible as the light of the sun when it comes from behind a cloud, testifying that I was born of God." Leonidas L. Hamline was not so fortunate. He was convicted of sin in 1813; he believed to have been himself converted "but for the want of evangelical instruction, he fell so far short of it as not to feel the witness of the Spirit." He went on to become a lawyer and was not fully converted (blessed with the witness of the Spirit) until fifteen years later.<sup>41</sup>

In his third month of conviction, Cartwright attended the Great Revival of 1801 at Cane Ridge, Kentucky. At one of these camp meetings, he went forward when the call was given for seekers. One of the "weeping multitudes," Cartwright at last found what he had earnestly sought.

"In the midst of a solemn struggle of soul, an impression was made on my mind, as though a voice said to me, 'Thy sins are all forgiven thee.' Divine light flashed all round me, unspeakable joy sprung up in my soul. I rose to my feet, opened my eyes, and *it really seemed as if I was in*

---

Modern Conception" B.D. Thesis, Southern Methodist University, 1934. Jones and Lovelady find that a pattern emerges: conviction and sense of loss/doom, followed by period of depression and searching for fulfillment, and, finally, the moment of conversion. Jones determines that conversion induces a state of mental confusion and loss of physical powers prior to sense of profound relief and joy. Both note that many new "converts" doubt their salvation but do not explore this fascinating irony.

<sup>41</sup>H. F. Brown, *The Methodists, A Historical and Biographical Sketch of the Pioneers, Bishops, and Representative Men of American Methodism* (Cincinnati: H. F. Brown, 1867), 114, 170.

*heaven; the trees, the leaves on them, and everything seemed, and I really thought were, praising God."*

What is especially interesting here is that Cartwright experienced heaven while on earth. He had no doubt about his conversion because the event was marked by radical alteration of both place and time. He had entered what Victor Turner calls "communitas." In many ways, Cartwright's sensation of heaven was not uncommon. We will return to the correlation of heaven and earth later in this essay.<sup>42</sup>

Finley and a companion began their return journey from the same series of meetings crying "bitter tears," barely able to keep from "screaming aloud" in their anguish. Finley bargained in prayer that he would turn from his wickedness if God would spare his life that night. He awoke the next morning and immediately retreated to the woods--but this time to meet God, not flee him. He fell prostrate and began to cry so hard that he had convulsions. In fact, he cried so loud that neighbors came to investigate. One of the bystanders, a German Christian, found Finley, took him home, and put him to bed. This man prayed and sang for several hours on Finley's behalf. Finley notes that around nine o'clock "the direct witness of heaven shone full upon my soul." He was overcome with joy, so much that he thought it might kill him. "I cried, I laughed, I shouted." Only the German understood Finley's conduct. Onlookers (another crowd gathered at the immigrant's home) concluded Finley had lost his mind--

---

<sup>42</sup>Cartwright, *Autobiography*, 37, my emphasis.



that he literally was "deranged." Finley would have been the first to agree. Yet he was more than unbalanced; he was not himself at all. In keeping with 2 Corinthians 5:17, the old Finley was gone; he was becoming a new creation.<sup>43</sup>

Maxwell Gaddis enjoyed a similar experience. Having lay in bed nearly an hour unable to relax, let alone sleep, he returned to the altar (which had been a scene of constant activity) determined to pray until successful. Though he "cried and prayed to God for pardoning mercy" the despair hung heavier around his soul. Gaddis found "efficacy in prayer" only when his newly converted brother reminded him of his mother's many prayers. Gaddis' despair suddenly gave way to hope. He recalls: "I then looked to the cross by faith, and in a moment my burden was gone. The Sun of righteousness shined into my heart, and I arose and shouted aloud for joy." He continued shouting until day break.<sup>44</sup>

Many seekers found the place at which they experienced conversion especially sacred. For example, Gaddis sensed that the camp ground near the Ohio River where he was converted was enveloped in an unusual holiness. Finley makes a similar observation. He claims "a strange supernatural power seemed to pervade" the place and people. As noted earlier, Cartwright found the "power of God [so] wonderfully

---

<sup>43</sup>Finley, *Autobiography*, 169. 2 Corinthians 5:17 reads: "Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new."

<sup>44</sup>Gaddis, *Foot-Prints of an Itinerant*, 75.

displayed" that he felt he had gone to heaven.<sup>45</sup> While such sacred space was hardly unique to the Midwestern Methodism, it is a key component of rural religion which typifies nineteenth-century evangelicalism. The regional variation on this theme is the way such sacred space was perceived to become an extension of heaven and hell, microcosms of eternity--on earth. See "Liminal Experiences" elsewhere in this essay.

### **Works of Grace: Sanctification**

Conversion, was one but step in the process of seeking heart-felt religion. Sanctification constitutes a third distinctive work of grace. Sanctification entailed complete submission of self to God. Through this work the state of sin, humanity's legacy of the fall from grace in the Garden of Eden, was removed.<sup>46</sup> The source of much controversy, those who ascribed to this doctrine disagreed as to whether humanity could be fully restored to its pre-fall nature. Most Midwestern Methodists, however, believed that sanctification, like conviction, was both a specific event and a process. Moreover, one could not attain full membership in the faith community without pursuing sanctification (even if one never received assurance of the gift). Historians

---

<sup>45</sup>Gaddis, *Foot-Prints of an Itinerant*, 71; Finley, *Autobiography*, 167; and Cartwright, *Autobiography*, 37.

<sup>46</sup>Silas Miller, itinerant in the Rock River Valley and central Wisconsin in the mid-1840s, likens the difference between conversion and sanctification to felling a tree and removing the stump. Phoebe Palmer, ed., *Pioneer Experiences; Or, the Gift of Power Received by Faith* (New York: W.C. Palmer, 1868; reprint in "Higher Christian Life" Series, ed. Donald W. Dayton, no. 32. New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1984), 102.

have found the issue controversial and the subject deserves a more careful re-examination than this essay can afford. Scholars acknowledge that sanctification was central to the message of early American Methodism. Yet they maintain that Methodists neither consistently sought nor practiced the work.

John L. Peters argues that sanctification had become a "denominational curiosity" by the mid-1830s. This doctrine was revived in part through the writing and speaking ministries of theologians (Adam Clark, Richard Watson), popular authors (Phoebe and Walter Palmer, Nathan Bangs, and Timothy Merritt), and educators (Charles G. Finney, Asa Mahan). Peters perceived the doctrine of sanctification ill-suited to frontier society; "it had simply not seemed the appropriate message." Instead, "conversion" was "the pressing and primary task." Yet Peters argues that sanctification also languished in urban centers because aspiring Methodists were cautious about appearing too peculiar to their mainline brethren: "perfection seemed somehow too exotic a doctrine."

Timothy L. Smith agreed with many of Peter's conclusions. In one of the most thorough treatments of the subject, Smith argues that sanctification did not figure prominently in antebellum Methodism. "The moral needs of rural and Western America directed attention to the more elemental work of saving sinners." Smith contends that sanctification essentially was an urban phenomenon which gathered momentum after 1825 and reached its zenith in the Lay Revival of 1857-1858 (what he

earmarks the "Annus Mirabilis" of American Protestantism between 1840 and 1870).<sup>47</sup>

*The History of American Methodism*, the official history of the denomination, echoes Smith's position. Citing the "Nazarite" controversy of the 1850s as key evidence, it purports that leading figures within the connection charged the faithful to return to their historic holiness roots. The "Nazarites," who preferred to call themselves Free Methodists, argued that Methodism's unparalleled success "caused a repudiation of the Wesleyan birthright of entire sanctification." In other words, by 1830 the church had drifted from the Wesley's teachings. Peters contends that the doctrine languished from "the absence of any considerable effort to make personal appropriation of the experience." Undoubtedly, the desire for respectability (especially social, but theological

---

<sup>47</sup>Peters, *Christian Perfection and American Methodism* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1956), 120; see especially 90-132; Smith, *Revivalism and Social Reform: American Protestantism on the Eve of the Civil War* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1957; reprint with a New Introduction by the Author, Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980), 115-116, 140-141.

Whitney R. Cross also all but overlooks the Methodist connections to holiness; he turns instead, to Finney and others at Oberlin from 1839 onward. See Cross, *The Burned-Over District: The Social and Intellectual History of Enthusiastic Religion in Western New York, 1800-1850* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1950), 159-160, 250. Donald W. Dayton makes an interesting point in claiming that early Methodism maintained a Christocentric holiness as opposed to the Baptism of the Holy Spirit characteristic of post-bellum holiness/pentecostal movements. One wonders when Methodists, and evangelicals in general, began to perceive triune agency in their triune God? ("From 'Christian Perfection' to the 'Baptism of the Holy Ghost'" in *Perspectives on American Methodism: Interpretive Essays* Russell E. Richey, Kenneth E. Rowe, and Jean Miller Schmidt editors [Nashville: Kingswood Books, 1993], especially 294).

as well) is a critical factor.<sup>48</sup>

The sources consulted for this dissertation challenge the Peters/Smith thesis. According to this camp, the most vocal advocates of restoring holiness to "Methodism" operated from urban bases: Merritt from Boston; the Palmers from New York City; and Finney (a complicated case to be sure) from New York City via Oberlin. My evidence reveals that Midwestern Methodists, rather than deviating from established practice, pursued sanctification with consistent vigor. Moreover, in this region it was linked with rural, not urban, worship.

Henry Smith praised God for favoring a 1799 quarterly meeting with His presence. During the love feast "many spoke with life and power, and we had a great shout. Three spoke feelingly of the sanctifying love of God, and we had no reason to doubt this testimony. Thank the Lord for witnesses of perfect love in the wilderness!" In 1803, John McColloch wrote Daniel Hitt from the Ohio country that, whether meeting in public or private, "the Lord has manifested himself to the people." McColloch boasts that the services were marked with such displays of exultation that "we have almost a pentecost every time we meet to worship God." Bishop Francis Asbury supported Smith and other itinerants cultivating this "second" blessing. On July

---

<sup>48</sup>Emory Stevens Bucke, General Editor, *The History of American Methodism*. 3 volumes (New York: Abingdon Press, 1964), II:339, see also 609-610; Peters, *Christian Perfection and American Methodism*, 121.

20, 1806, Asbury wrote Smith:

"O, purity! O, Christian perfection! O, Sanctification! It is heaven below to feel all sin removed. Preach it, whether they will bear or forebear. Preach it. You have never experienced the realities of heaven or hell, but preach them. Some have professed it, [perfect love] but have fallen from it; others profess, but do not possess it. They trifle away life. They seldom use the gift God hath given them. I think we ought modestly to tell what we feel in the fullest. For two years past, amidst incredible toils, I have enjoyed almost inexpressible sensations. Our Pentecost is come, in some places, for sanctification."<sup>49</sup>

Stephen R. Beggs believed in the doctrine of sanctification because he found it confirmed in Scripture and in the hearts and lives of the men and women to whom he ministered in Illinois. Based on this evidence, he began to preach the doctrine and seek it for himself. He received what he termed the "deep experience" while holding a camp

---

<sup>49</sup>Smith. *Recollections and Reflections of an Old Itinerant* (New York: Land and Tippet, 1848), 337; Hitt Letters, Dated Ohio Country, March 9, 1803 (United Methodist Archives Center, Ohio Wesleyan University, Delaware, Ohio), No. 246, typescript page 120; Elmer T. Clark, ed. *The Journals and Letters of Francis Asbury*. 3 vols. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1958), III:351. Asbury was consistent in this theme. He advised James Quinn, P.E. of the Muskingum District, Ohio Conference, to "know men and things well. See sanctification, feel it, preach it, live it" dated September 24, 1812, III:466. Yet within two years, Asbury adopted a defensive posture. He confided to David Young, then P.E. of the Muskingum District,

"Some of our people complain we present preachers, do not preach our own experience; that we do not preach sanctification as a distinct work, that we have changed sanctification into justification, and do we want to change our Episcopal form of church Government into Presbyterian? as well as change the Doctrine?"

Though Asbury does not directly identify who leveled such charges, one can conclude he was referring to critics in Virginia, not Ohio (the letter bore a Norfolk postmark). Regardless, Asbury took the charge of diluting the doctrine seriously (Feb. 16, 1814, III:503).

meeting near Pakota (most likely in the early 1820s). Beggs asserts that "God's will became my will, and I learned to live in him continually." Michigan itinerant Elijah Holmes Pilcher was sanctified at 10:00 p.m. on February 8, 1831. This happened while reflecting on his need for a deeper work, on his need to "trust all to Christ." "In a moment a flood of light and unspeakable joy filled his soul and he felt that he loved God with all his heart; indeed, his whole being overflowed with love."<sup>50</sup>

Traveling southern Indiana in 1844, after two years of itinerant labors, Thomas Eddy wrote his fiancée (Anna White) that now he was "fully persuaded that it is our privilege to live without sin; to be made perfect here below." He found that the "blessing may be obtained when we make a *full* surrender, and claim the promises." Eddy asserts that a William Christie sermon helped him attain sanctification.<sup>51</sup> Elijah H. Pilcher preached that "God demands of every man love with the whole heart, and what he demands he grants power to give, but it remains for man to use the power he receives." James Pilcher claimed that "the work of holiness prospered in all [his father's] charges, and it was a matter of constant surprise to him that anyone should doubt the possibility

---

<sup>50</sup>Beggs, *Pages from the Early History of the West and North-West* (Cincinnati: Methodist Book Concern, 1868), 52-53; James E. Pilcher, ed. *Life and Labors of Elijah H. Pilcher* (New York: Hunt & Eaton, 1892), 78-79.

<sup>51</sup>Dated August 2, 1844. Charles N. Sims, *The Life of Rev. Thomas M. Eddy*. With an Introduction by Rev. Bishop Simpson (New York: Phillips and Hunt, 1884), 98, 156.

of perfect love as a distinct experience."<sup>52</sup> Beggs claims that the doctrine of sanctification was central to Methodism's success: "We probably owe the success of the Church, in a great measure, to is Arminian doctrines of regeneration, the witness of the Spirit, and sanctification, together with its systematic organization of a Church government, so perfectly adapted to the wants of a ruined world."<sup>53</sup>

Richard Hargrave experienced sanctification in 1864, in his 47th year of ministry.

"Suddenly faith seemed to grow massive and strong; and I said, " I will never give up my confidence in God." There was a power in that resolve more than mine: *but all my soul was in it*; and my weakness consciously joined itself to the divine strength, and an aspiration went up equal to the attainment of the blessing. Coincidentally, a current of heavenly love streamed through my whole being; like fire, it permeated soul and body. My rapture was unutterable. A weight of glory came on me, and I felt as if my physical powers would be entirely prostrated under it. I sank to the floor; and the unearthly emotions gradually merged into 'the peace of God that passeth all understanding,' 'keeping my heart and mind through Christ Jesus.'"<sup>54</sup>

Hargrave was unusual only in that sanctification was so long in coming. Unlike other regions, sanctification was a mainstay of Midwestern Methodism. Urban conscious New England Methodists sought social respectability at the expense of established doctrine. Southern Methodists could not accommodate sanctification with the

---

<sup>52</sup>Pilcher, *Life and Labors of Elijah H. Pilcher*, 80-81.

<sup>53</sup>Beggs, *Pages from the Early History*, 243. Beggs goes on directly after this to add a comment from a Baptist deacon--"What the Methodist Episcopal Church can not do no one else needs try."

<sup>54</sup>Palmer, *Pioneer Experiences*, 120, emphasis in original.



prevailing practice of chattel slavery. Midwestern Methodists, on the other hand, held fast to the doctrine. Continuity of this doctrine and its practice not only distinguishes Midwestern Methodism on the national scene, but furnishes a critical missing link to the burned-over district of western New York.

### **Works of Grace: Spiritual Renewal**

Spiritual renewal was a fourth work of grace. Whereas conversion signified a profession of faith, renewal was a profession of failure. Spiritual renewal was the means of grace available to those who had, or were perceived to have, strayed from the faith. Such "back-sliders" were exhorted to renew their commitments, lest their estrangement become an eternal condition. There were institutional mechanisms in place to minimize the need for renewal. In particular, Methodists used class meetings and testimonies as effective means by which to stay faithful. Ironically, renewal was integral to the antebellum Methodist ethos. Only radical perfectionists believed that Christians could lead sinless lives. In contrast, sanctification entailed relinquishing the desire--not the capacity--to not sin. Therefore, renewal was as inevitable as it was necessary. Author of the leading how-to manual for Christians, Timothy Merritt advised young converts that their "surrender must be perpetual."<sup>55</sup> No believer could hold Wesley's standard of holiness unblemished. Renewal, then, was Methodism's rudimentary ritual. It was

---

<sup>55</sup> *The Convert's Guide and Preacher's Assistant* (New York: George Lane, 1841), 49; Merritt devotes an entire chapter to the subject, 47-58.

widely practiced by both clergy and laity. Henry Smith fondly recalled an 1802 quarterly meeting (convened at Philip Gatch's home on the Little Miami, Ohio) at which William McKendree preached one of his "soul-stirring and heart-searching" sermons. Smith recalls, "it was a time of power and love--a soul-reviving season: some shouted for joy." Preaching was the most obvious means to induce such seasons of refreshing.<sup>56</sup> But, as Jacob Pontius' renewal illustrates, this work of grace often overlapped with several acts of intercession.

Jacob Pontius was eager to help prepare a grove for a camp meeting. Thomas Hudson, one of the Ohio Conference itinerants, had advertised a meeting near Glade Run (most likely held in the early 1820s). Hudson notes that Pontius was a man of "wealth and influence" in his community. Though he remained friendly to ministers and believers, he had drifted away from the Methodist Episcopal Church. Furthermore, Pontius claimed to have lost his assurance of conversion and subsequently, his identity within the faith community. Yet, his religious disposition was not as contrary as it at first appeared. Despite his impiety, Pontius was one of the driving forces in clearing the grove--ensuring not only that a camp meeting would be held, but it would occur where it did. With the task complete, Pontius erected a tent for himself on the grounds and determined to "observe" the proceedings. Hudson recalled that "all his actions indicated

---

<sup>56</sup>Smith, *Recollections of an Old Itinerant*, 339.

a want of confidence in himself to withstand the power of religion if brought into immediate *contact with it*, and also a want of desire to be religious at that time." According to Hudson, reminiscent of conviction, Pontius acted confused and disoriented despite his familiarity with both place and people.<sup>57</sup>

Before the meeting closed, Pontius was dramatically reclaimed. At one point he jumped from the chair outside his tent, and sprinted for the woods (away from the meeting). But he only ran a few yards before he fell on the ground screaming; "such terrific yells as [Hudson] uttered had never before heard proceed from the mouth of man."

"His limbs were stiffened as if in death. The brethren carried him to the altar, and as he entered it I heard him exclaim, 'My Lord, they have got me at last!' The people were awe-stricken, and there was no more preaching that night; but all united in prayer for the penitent man, whose cries for mercy excited the commiseration of all who heard him. He continued prostrate on the ground all night in agony and prayer, but the next morning, just as the day began to dawn, the Lord spoke pardon and peace to his soul, and he rejoiced with joy unspeakable. He returned to the bosom of the Church."<sup>58</sup>

Pontius' renewal raises many questions. How does one come into "contact" with religion? Why did he yell as if deranged, yet instantly become lucid at the altar? Why did he express resignation when "captured" when it appears that this was his objective

---

<sup>57</sup> *Life and Times of Rev. Thomas M. Hudson* (Cincinnati: Hitchcock and Walden, 1871), 48.

<sup>58</sup> *Life and Times of Hudson*, 49.

all along? Moreover, why was the congregation dumb-founded by the spectacle? The answer, at least in part, to these questions is that renewal was both an individual and corporate ritual--with Pontius and the congregation giving a stellar performance in this case. This insinuates no insincerity whatsoever: Pontius remained an active member in the Church for the rest of his life. Just the same, the highly orchestrated nature of these various scenes clearly indicates some degree of premeditation and collusion. Like sanctification, renewal is an attribute in many ways unique to the region. Transient population was an intrinsic feature of the antebellum Midwest. Faith often was a casualty of migration. In this ever-changing milieu, one can easily account for the resonance of spiritual renewal.

### **Liminal Experiences and the Process of Practice**

Having explored at length acts of intercession and works of grace, how do they reveal the ritual practices within rural religion? The analytical significance of camp meeting rituals become clear when one considers their function within the faith community, when placed in a "process of practice" context. Victor Turner's insights regarding rites of passage help illustrate how grace and intercession were instrumental in fashioning and maintaining a viable community of believers.

As with any formula, Midwestern Methodist practice does not entirely conform to Turner's model. For example, only those believers making an initial profession of faith truly exchanged one identity within their social structure for another. Yet even

this is problematic as newly minted Christians could neither be reaggregated to the secular community, the world they ritually forsook, nor the Methodist community in which they had no previous membership. Instead, during works of grace and acts of intercession, Methodists claim to experience an alternate structure (sacred reality) within the existing social structure (secular reality). Sanctification most closely follows Turner's model. Here believers temporarily leave this alternate structure and return to the same faith community not only empowered, but able to claim enhanced status. Despite these limitations, Turner's discussion of liminality is especially pertinent to antebellum Midwestern Methodism.

Both works of grace and acts of intercession included distinct liminal phases. By definition liminality is restricted to the act of being "betwixt and between." Turner claims that "liminal entities are neither here nor there;" in fact, they are passengers from one state or condition to another. During the liminal stage, seekers entered an unstructured reality characterized by the absence of fixed social conventions and mores. The ambiguity of place and time come to characterize the individual initiate as well. Initiates were stripped of "self" and remade in the collective image of their group--they enter as individuals, become "blank slates," and emerge with new identities. Liminality transformed initiates; they were "fashioned anew and endowed with additional powers to enable them to cope with their new station in life." This notion of faith as a coping mechanism does not exactly fit the Methodist community. To be sure, believers used

their faith to ameliorate stress associated with social or economic change. But relieving such anxiety was not the purpose of their faith: Methodists were empowered to provoke change, not negotiate it. Moreover such empowerment was a permanent, not a temporary, condition.<sup>59</sup>

During transition rites, initiates were subject to the authority of their community. "This community is the repository of the whole gamut of the culture's values, norms, attitudes, sentiments, and relationships." Turner argues that, among the Ndembu, transition rituals returned the initiate to the original social structure with new status, responsibilities, or privileges.<sup>60</sup> Thus these ritual dramas were significant both in the lives of individual initiates and the community itself. Turner's insight here is that liminality does not signify a social vacuum; it is a collectively created alternate space in which the community moderates the life cycle transitions of its constituent members. Such transition rituals constitute a process through which the community creates a living record of its history and purpose. Methodists typically did not attempt to re-experience liminality (although spiritual renewal comes close); they did however

---

<sup>59</sup>Turner, *The Ritual Process*, 95. My interpretation of ritual activity in light of the faith community is based in part on John H. Westerhoff, III and Gwen Kennedy Neville, *Generation to Generation: Conversations on Religious Education and Culture*, Revised Edition (New York: The Pilgrim Press, 1979). There are interesting parallels between Turner's model and Frederick Jackson Turner's Frontier Thesis. Though Frederick Jackson Turner emphasized place over process, both articulate a similar ritual activity.

<sup>60</sup>Turner, *The Ritual Process*, 103, 129.

continually seek *communitas*: the "even communion of equal individuals who submit together to the general authority of the ritual elders." *Communitas* was a corporate liminal experience.<sup>61</sup> Turner conjectures that *communitas* is perceived as a sacred experience "possibly because it transgresses or dissolves the norms that govern structured and institutionalized relationships and is accompanied by experiences of unprecedented potency." Ironically, while Methodists could, and did, seek to re-experience *communitas*, believers were, to a degree, never without it (i.e. it was not a transitory "state").<sup>62</sup> Works of grace liminal experiences routinely were expressed in "muscular Christianity;" likewise, various mystical experiences signified liminality and *communitas* during acts of intercession.

Charles A. Johnson contends that "rampant enthusiasm and animal excitement" distinguished pioneer Methodism in the Midwest. Early camp meetings were noted for displays of "muscular" or "acrobatic" Christianity. When the moved by the Spirit, people involuntarily participated in one or more of the following spiritual "exercises:" falling, jerking, rolling dancing, running, singing, laughing, and barking. Johnson maintains that this supra-emotionalism faded by 1815, arguing that Methodist practice matured along with the camp meeting as institution. My research indicates that while the emotional intensity did subside, it hardly disappeared. Throughout the antebellum

---

<sup>61</sup>Turner, *Ritual Process*, 95-96.

<sup>62</sup>Turner, *The Ritual Process*, 95, 128.

period, Midwestern Methodists cultivated an emotional, or what contemporaries labeled heart-felt, faith. While few "treed the devil" through barking or jerked uncontrollably in a moment of rapture, falling, shouting, and singing remained common to rural worship (running would be rediscovered in the late-nineteenth century holiness movements).<sup>63</sup> Highly controversial at the time and typically dismissed by historians since, muscular Christianity reveals the liminality of works of grace. Seekers ritually used muscular Christianity to declare their marginality as they transitioned from unbeliever to believer.

In the mid-1850s, Joseph H. Hilts encountered a familiar camp meeting worship scene during which an unidentified individual uttered a "loud shout." When he investigated the source of the shout he found the "people all in confusion. Some were weeping, some were laughing, and some were singing; others were lying on the ground as if they had been stricken down by an electric shock; many of them were insensible." A half-century earlier, Henry Smith watched people fall during a powerful quarterly meeting sermon preached by William McKendree. Smith claimed that "the very place

---

<sup>63</sup>Charles A. Johnson, "Early Ohio Camp Meetings, 1801-1816" *Ohio State Archaeological and Historical Quarterly* 61 (January 1952): 33; Charles A. Johnson, *The Frontier Camp Meeting: Religion's Harvest Time*. With a New Introduction by Ferenc M. Szasz (Dallas: Southern Methodist University Press, 1985), 56-61; and Earnest Lee Carter, "The Early Camp-Meeting Movement in the Ohio Valley" (M.A. Thesis, Ohio Wesleyan University, 1922), 54-70.



appeared to be shaken by the power of God."<sup>64</sup>

Alfred Brunson was astonished to witness men and women "fall" and "shout." Yet he came to recognize these experiences as spiritually significant and empowering. Provided one was sincere, no harm could come from otherwise dangerous experiences--ranging from falling onto benches to landing in fire. In fact Brunson only ever encountered one fraudulent case. He threatened to denounce publicly a woman who had been injured repeatedly while "falling." John Stewart made no attempt to mask his skepticism about such behavior. When he discussed the subject he distanced himself from these "mysterious" manifestations. Muscular Christianity apparently disturbed him deeply. His doubt likely stemmed from an 1819 quarterly meeting at which he witnessed even animals seized by jerks. The fact that Bishop Robert Roberts preached several sermons indicates that order, not bedlam, prevailed at this meeting. Yet Stewart seemed confused if not outright vexed by the fact that the jerks were "not confined to the people, but dogs and hogs took them."

Peter Cartwright's position on the issue is likely indicative of most Methodists. He acknowledged that muscular Christianity was an effectual means of grace, but

---

<sup>64</sup>Though Hilts entered the itinerancy in rural Ontario in 1856, his observations speak to the endurance of muscular Christianity. Joseph H. Hilts, *Experiences of a Backwoods Preacher or, Fact and Incidents Culled from Thirty Years of Ministerial Life* 2nd. ed. (Toronto: William Briggs, 1892), 111; Henry Smith. *Recollections and Reflections of an Old Itinerant* (New York: Land and Tippet, 1848), 339.

frequently employed prayer as an "antidote" against it. Cartwright believed that the jerks were "judgment sent from God, first to bring sinners to repentance; and, secondly, to show professors that God could work with or without means, and that he could work over and above means, and do whatsoever seemeth him good, to the glory of his grace and the salvation of the world."<sup>65</sup>

Two further examples help explain muscular Christianity as liminal experience.

Smith L. Robinson was converted in an 1825 camp meeting in Madison County, IL.

A witness recalled that Robinson came to the altar in obvious "agony."

"All at once he became perfectly calm, and remained in that condition for about an hour and a half, lying on his back and not moving a muscle. His eyes were closed, and he was seemingly unconscious. Suddenly he sprang to his feet, caught hold of a small tree, and sprang up in it about ten feet, crying in a loud voice, 'Hello Jesus!' Then he fell back in the altar, where he lay for some time, apparently dead, and as cold as a corpse. Finally he sprang to his feet and praised God for pardoning

---

<sup>65</sup> Alfred Brunson, *A Western Pioneer: Or, Incidents of the Life and Times of* . . . 2 vols. (Cincinnati: Walden and Stowe, 1880), I:62-66, 175, 226; John Stewart, *Highways and Hedges*, 67; Cartwright, *Autobiography*, 51. Brunson articulates the Methodist perspective on falling succinctly:

Indeed, I do not believe that any person who thus falls, under the influence of the Good Spirit, could be injured by fire or water, or by coming in contact with any other substance. Skeptics, semi-skeptics, or those 'Rationalists' who reduce the works of God to their capacity and understanding, may not believe in what *they* cannot comprehend; but nothing can be more reasonable and philosophical, that persons under the divine or supernatural influence, would not, nay could not, be hurt by it, or by any contact with other substances while their own volition is thus suspended" (*A Western Pioneer*, 176).

mercy."<sup>66</sup>

Jacob Young gives an even more detailed, first-hand account of the falling exercise. He was convicted at a Methodist service at which he witnessed "a glorious display of Divine power" (which he likened to "a storm of wind"). He was surprised to find himself feeling "uneasy" as the meeting progressed. An alert bystander began to speak with him about what he was observing--both in his mind and heart. Young claims, "I attempted to reply, but had lost the power of speech--my tears flowed freely, knees became feeble, and I trembled like Belshazzar; my strength failed and I fell upon the floor." Despite the prayers of those around him, Young received no assurance of salvation. He spent much of the following "dark and dreadful" day wandering the woods, alternately crying, praying and "moaning like a dove that has lost its mate." Eventually he returned to the house where the services had been conducted the night before. After taking a seat near the fire, he told the mother of Israel who answered the door that prayer and song would ease his discomfort.

"Without any ceremony, she arose and commenced giving out a hymn, and while they sung the first verse, my physical powers gave way. I fell upon the floor, and there I lay many hours, having no recollection of any thing that passed, only that my mind was dark and my soul greatly distressed. Toward midnight, the light appeared to shine from the south part of heaven, and God, in mercy, lifted up the light of his countenance upon me, and I was translated from the power of darkness into the

---

<sup>66</sup>James Leaton, *History of Methodism in Illinois from 1793-1832* (Cincinnati: Walden and Stowe, 1883), 273.

kingdom of God's dear Son, and rejoiced with joy unspeakable and full of glory. I arose from the floor praising God with a loud voice."<sup>67</sup>

Both Robinson and Young purposely "fell." As with each act of muscular Christianity, falling was a physical manifestation of the spiritual process. Falling dramatized the act of surrender necessary for conversion. Based on these accounts, it would appear that the more one struggled to submit to God's authority the harder one fell, barked, jerked, etc. This ritual act of submission was an important milestone in one's spiritual life cycle. While some believers fell from grace and needed to reconvert through spiritual renewal, for most Methodists conversion was a once-in-a-lifetime event to be savored. In fact one's conversion was memorialized each time the individual testified, and with each new accession to the faith community (one could vicariously use another's conversion experience to recall their own). Robinson's salutation "Hello Jesus" surely became a part of the oral tradition within his local congregation: he could mark the very moment he said "yes" to God. Across the Midwest, Methodists emulated the experiences of Young, Robinson, and countless others as they negotiated the marginal phase which separated saint from sinner.

Acts of Intercession liminality are evident in various mystical experiences common to Midwestern Methodists. Intercession liminality is complex in that seekers

---

<sup>67</sup>Jacob Young, *Autobiography of a Pioneer; or, The Nativity, Experience, Travels, and Ministerial Labors of Rev. Jacob Young* (Cincinnati: L. Swormstedt & A. Poe, 1857), 41-43.

could have both an individual and communal response to group activity. In other words, proclamation, singing, and prayer were simultaneously offered by individuals and groups. When Lydia Hawes sang, for example, she expressed her own faith as well as represented congregations before God and unbelievers. Thus there is an individual dimension to *communitas*.

Ironically, shouting was a common expression of *communitas* as well as works of grace liminality. Peter Cartwright tells of a Campbellite minister's family that was converted at one of his camp meetings. The husband/father denounced muscular Christianity as a spiritual "delusion;" moreover, he believed that shouters were disingenuous, if not outright sacrilegious. Cartwright implored the minister to come to the altar that he "may get religion, and be happy, too." While the idea of becoming "shouting-happy" did not appeal to this Baptist preacher, his wife and daughter sought it eagerly. Cartwright notes that the man joined them at the altar, but "would not yield to the Spirit of God." His stubborn display was a first step "into the whirlpool of doubt and unbelief." The man compounded his tragedy by committing suicide shortly afterwards. Part of what initially disturbed the Campbellite minister was the din of holy noise by emanating from the believers present at the camp meeting. One is left to speculate whether the minister would have "submitted," i.e. joined the Methodists, had

it not been for the commotion.<sup>68</sup>

Cavey Lambert was one of Cartwright's contemporaries, albeit nearly 25 years younger than the veteran. Lambert participated in a two-day revival (near Simpson, Illinois?) at the end of July 1850. He notes in his journal entry dated July 30, 1850, that 88 year-old "Grandfather Monical" preached on the benefits of salvation "with a countenance expressive of the happiness of his soul." Lambert makes an important point--Monical sought to make sinners tremble and saints shout for joy. The case of Mrs. and Mr. Baker noted earlier in this chapter helps illustrate the difference. Mr. Baker shouted because his sins had been forgiven. Mrs. Baker shouted as a means of instruction and intercession; she constituted the faith community in this particular situation. When Mr. Baker received his witness of the Spirit, both he and his wife shout with holy delight, savoring this mystical moment. The Baker's response was common to Midwestern Methodism.<sup>69</sup>

Orceneth Fisher's "shouting joy" lasted well after the series of meetings he had

---

<sup>68</sup>*Autobiography*, 356-357, all quotes from 357. In stark contrast to the noise and emotional intensity of camp meetings, one of the highest tributes paid to a deceased ("fallen") colleague was complete silence during the conference roll call. See the tribute given to A. E. Phelps in J. J. Fleharty, *Glimpses of the Life of Rev. A. E. Phelps and His Co-Laborers; Or, Twenty-five Years in the Methodist Ministry* (Cincinnati: Hitchcock and Walden, 1878), 358.

<sup>69</sup>Cavey Lambert, *Autobiography* (typescript of original manuscript by W.A. Briggs in the Archives of the Central Illinois Conference United Methodist Church, Illinois Wesleyan University, Bloomington, Illinois), 7-8.

conducted in Indiana circa Christmas 1822. He claims: "My own soul overflowed with the love of God incessantly day and night. Sometimes in walking out by myself my soul was so filled with the love of God that it seemed impossible to keep from shouting at the top of my voice."<sup>70</sup> On April 18, 1803, Benjamin Lakin admits the he had "liberty" while preaching "and the Lord was with us in class." In fact, "one woman got so happy that she hung upon her husband in raptures of Joy. Then she ran through the house. But the house could not hold her [and] she rushed out at the dore [sic] to invite others to come to Jesus. . . . Others were shouting and some in tears, God was with us of a truth."<sup>71</sup> These outbursts of joy were one of the key characteristics of the Methodist worship tradition: shouting was a tangible acknowledgement/ expression of God's presence.

In 1816 Mary Gaddis, Maxwell's mother, completely disrupted worship at her Lancaster, PA, "Seceder Church" (Presbyterian) church when she began to shout uncontrollably. The minister sat down when she would not stop. "A part of the congregation fled from their seats toward the door, with great fear and trembling; the services were speedily brought to a close, and as the congregation returned home, they said, 'We have seen strange things to-day.'"

---

<sup>70</sup> *Letters of Orceneth Fisher, Methodist Preacher on Three Frontiers: Indiana, Texas, Oregon* in William Warren Sweet, *Religion on the American Frontier, 1783-1840*. Vol 4 *The Methodists* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1946), 472.

<sup>71</sup> *Journal of Benjamin Lakin, 1794-1820* in Sweet, *Methodists*, 226.

News of a "Methodist fire" at the at the Presbyterian church attracted a large congregation the following sabbath. Midway through the service, Gaddis, again, began to shout her praises. The minister refused to proceed until order was restored. Gaddis claims that, as the "ecstasy of my mother was very great," she shouted for some time. Yet he makes an important observation about the congregation which witnessed these scenes: "The excitement in the audience was indescribable; all present seemed to be overwhelmed with a sense of the majesty of and power of God."

On the third Sunday the largest crowd yet assembled to see the spectacle repeated. The minister, again, demanded order in his house of worship. But, being "girdled with gladness," Mary Gaddis continued as before. Unable to endure such disrespect, the minister then required the elders to remove her, but no one even stood. The minister had good cause to be concerned: Gaddis "continued to shout till the whole congregation was melted to tears. After she had desisted, the minister arose and dismissed the congregation, which retired hastily, in the greatest possible confusion; some crying, others scoffing, etc." Gaddis did not necessarily want to shout, but when "filled with the Spirit" she claimed to have no control over herself. She was brought to trial for disrupting services, but only her husband would testify. The charge against her was dropped and she was "advised" to make no further outbursts. She not only complied, she did so in such manner that speaks to the power of her conviction: she joined the Methodist Episcopal Church.



Though he would not admit it, Robert Gaddis, Mary's husband, seemed envious of his wife's joy. He joined the MEC shortly after moving to Ohio in 1817--even though there were several "seceder" families living near by. Ironically, while Lancaster Presbyterians kindled no "Methodist fires" in their faith community, many seemed delighted at the opportunity to extinguish one. Though they opposed such expressions of faith, they were willing to set creed aside in order that they might be moved by the Spirit as well. This ambivalence within the community raises the possibility that Mary Gaddis could have easily used her spiritual authority to redefine local Presbyterian worship.<sup>72</sup>

John Strange could inspire shouting as well as any itinerant. But even more than animating congregations, his ministry was notable for its power to induce *communitas*. As was customary, a huge crowd turned out to hear him speak at an Indiana camp meeting. James Finley provides an excellent description of Strange's role in this Indiana Pentecost, which most likely occurred in the 1820s.

"His manner and shrill, soul-searching voice had raised with his feelings till they seemed to have reached their climax, and with his pale, upturned face and streaming eyes, he stood for a moment as if wrapped in the presence of the Lord; and then, as if the heavens were opened to his steadfast gaze, he exclaimed, with startling energy, 'Glory, glory, glory be to God, who giveth us the victory!' It seemed as if the enchained attention of the audience was broken up by an electric shock, and the

---

<sup>72</sup>Maxwell Pierson Gaddis, *Foot-Prints of an Itinerant* (Cincinnati: The Methodist Book Concern, 1855), 57-58, 60-62.

Spirit of the Lord seemed to fasten on every heart like cloven tongues of fire, and glory, glory, glory was echoed back from every part of that worshiping assembly."<sup>73</sup>

Strange did not disappoint this congregation; he not only worked them into a frenzy, he did so in such a way that the ordinary became extraordinary. The antiphonal exchange between Strange and the congregation is a verbal expression of *communitas*. Again, despite Strange's facility for cultivating such experiences, God's presence, not people, made this worship moment mystical. Seekers not only were in the presence of the divine, the Alpha and Omega, they were on holy ground. This consolidation of presence and place was the unmistakable manifestation of *communitas*. *Communitas* was highly desired because of this contact with the Holy. Seekers yearned for *communitas* for one primary reason: more than contacting the Holy, it was to be immersed, subsumed, by the Holy.

Seekers often expressed "*communitas*" through visions of heaven. Such visions were invariably linked to a worship service--whether the point of origin or the venue through which the experience was related to the community.<sup>74</sup> Two visions are of particular interest here.

Alfred Brunson met a woman who had a "most remarkable vision of the spirit

---

<sup>73</sup>Finley, *Sketches of Western Methodism*, 404.

<sup>74</sup>This is the key distinction between death-bed experiences and *communitas*. The Methodist quest for death represented a life-time objective. *Communitas* was fleeting and worship related.

world." This unnamed individual "fell" at a quarterly meeting and awoke the following afternoon. She was lucid long enough to say that she would again lose consciousness and that no one was to attempt to give her food or water, to touch her, and "especially not to feel her pulse." The woman's prediction was accurate; she remained in this unconscious state for nearly three full days. Brunson adds that "the people in the town became very much excited" and that a constant traffic of onlookers paraded through the house to see "the woman."

On the third day the woman awoke just as one of these witnesses attempted to touch her. She claimed to have "fall[en] like a dead body from heaven the moment she did so." At this she said she would be gone another two days and repeated her previous injunctions concerning nourishment and contact. "On Friday the house was filled with an anxious people to see the rising up." As if on cue, the woman sat up and began repeating what people had said about her, even those not in the same room. Brunson makes a critical observation about this woman's experience: "these revelations prepared the people to believe what she had to say about the spirit world." Thus *communitas* held additional value to women: providing another opportunity to exercise spiritual authority within the faith community. Because *communitas* was a temporary license, it was incumbent upon these "mothers in Israel" to do all they could to cultivate such

moments.<sup>75</sup>

Eliza Hankins had a similar experience while returning home from an 1810 worship service near Newark, Ohio. James Finley claims she had been convicted at this meeting. Her unconverted friends, not certain what to do in such cases, took her back to the meeting house where she remained unconscious for 32 hours. In the meantime, "the whole neighborhood came together" to watch--and participate. As believers sang and prayed, "the power of God came down upon them, and many were smitten by the Divine influence." At this development "excitement spread in every direction; and great multitudes, from a distance, flocked together to see this wonderful thing." Finley uses a peculiar choice of terms here; many thought Hankins was dead. She did regain consciousness, however, at which point she "sprang instantly to her feet, and commenced singing and shouting." Hankins seemingly is secondary to the events transpiring around her. Her experience sparked a ten-day revival through which some one hundred people were converted.

Yet Hankins was a drama within a drama. As she recounted her experience through shout and song,

"her face seemed lighted up with an unearthly radiance; and as she spoke of Jesus and heaven, in strains of the most inimitable eloquence and sweetness, the whole congregation was overwhelmed, and we felt ourselves in the presence of a superior being, rather than that of an

---

<sup>75</sup>Brunson, *A Western Pioneer*, I:67-68.

artless, unsophisticated country girl."<sup>76</sup>

Hankins' remarkable encounter allowed her to speak with authority to a community to which she had not previously belonged. As a result, paradoxically, she occupied a position of prominence within the communion of equals (residents within the faith community sought to model the experience of this former stranger). Together, Hankins and members community sought to extend the moment indefinitely.

The principle difference between acts of intercession and works of grace is that the latter were wholly dependent upon divine intervention to produce a radical change. The former were means of worship, petition, and service which often lead to works of grace. Each work required the Holy Spirit's agency, yet in different ways. Seekers presented themselves to God to experience redeeming grace. Intercession, on the other hand, involved believers assuming joint-agency with the Holy Spirit. Empowered by their own experiences, Christians worked with the Spirit to reconcile unbelievers to God and to further grow in grace.

This reflects the bi-vocality of antebellum Methodism. One could "minister" within this community without seminary degree and without the express sanction of the denomination. Women especially benefitted from this arrangement: though no woman was ever licensed to preach by the MEC prior to the Civil War, women regularly

---

<sup>76</sup>Finley, *Autobiography*, 231.

performed clerical duties. Moreover women could establish immediate authority in world of constant transition by articulating their religious experiences at camp meetings. Yet there were clear limits to lay authority. After all, the two primary functions of every itinerant were regulating behavior and mediating practice. This transitional authority within the faith community is a paradox: laity simultaneously submitted themselves to and circumvented the institutional mechanisms of authority. For example, even in remote settlements, no unordained "minister" cavalierly administered the sacraments. The religious community abstained until a official representative could lead the celebration.

One must exercise a good deal of caution in exploring the concept of shared agency. In fact, most Methodists would be uncomfortable with the concept as it is presented here. This is not to imply that they would disagree with the analysis per se, but that they would chose to not speak of the issue. Methodism was a heart-felt faith; at its core was a series of common encounters with God: all aspects of the life of the community ranging from conviction to congregational singing. These experiences were common, but never ordinary. Each person perceived his or her encounter(s) as unique. Methodism was an evangelical, yet highly personal, faith. Believers were compelled to doggedly share their "good news," but only because they had been radically changed. Members of the faith community often played a role in this transformation. This is not to downplay the divine; rather it recognizes human agency as a contributing factor.

God, through his Spirit or presence, always inspired, motivated, and enabled. At issue here--people *wanted* certain individuals to pray, exhort, sing, etc. because of their gifts. Seekers employed these people as spiritual devices to bring themselves into contact with God. Without God, Methodists were helpless; with God they could do all things. In fact, the practice of faith itself could become sacred when infused with God's presence. Based on the experiences explored in this chapter, it is no surprise that Methodists eagerly desired to transpose marginal encounters into permanent empowerment.

## Conclusion

A personal and experiential faith was the defining attribute of Methodism in the antebellum Midwest. The denomination itself was, in a sense, a casualty of the Civil War. After 1865, the Methodist Episcopal Church, like the nation as a whole, turned its attention to consensus building. A distinct theological and worship heritage was weighed against social compatibility and respectability. Without going so far as to say that antebellum Methodism was the denomination's golden age, it never again so dominated the national religious landscape. Thomas A. Morris warned against this demise in an 1867 published sermon entitled "The Glory of the Church." Serving as Bishop for 31 years, Morris had reason to be concerned--he was a first-hand witness to the changes that troubled him so deeply. He used his sermon to rhetorically ask "what is able to hinder Methodism?"

"Nothing but ourselves. If we ever fall as a people, generally, we shall fall under our own weight; opposition from without cannot hurt us, otherwise we should have been devoured long since. If Methodists will attend strictly to their doctrines, experience, and discipline and usages, according to the original system received from their fathers, so as to maintain a pure ministry, and a holy membership, they have nothing to fear."

Morris' attempt to redirect the denomination back to its "original system" indicates that apprehension was swiftly becoming reality.<sup>1</sup> In fact, had he lived, Morris would not

---

<sup>1</sup>Thomas Asbury Morris, *Sermons on Various Subjects* (Cincinnati: Poe and Hitchcock, 1867), 237-238.



have even recognized his church thirty years later.

Charles Edwin Jones maintains that the lack of "holiness" preaching was a key concern for disconcerted Methodists near the end of the century; critics bluntly charged that the fire had gone out in the church's furnace. "The diversion of enthusiasm from the salvation of souls to the building of institutions had sidetracked the church from its true purpose. The church hierarchy was bent on "'keeping the glory down.'" William McGuire King goes even further and criticizes the laity as well. King claims that established evangelical denominations had become "dissatisfied" with their traditional modes of ministry by the late nineteenth century. He argues that ministry was redefined during this period. It "was no longer restricted to the vocation of the itinerant minister or to the promotion of revivals and conversion experiences." Whereas antebellum Methodist ministry contested "worldly values," a half-century later it championed the "*assimilation* of social and cultural life to religious ideals." As a result, evangelicalism experienced a new-found satisfaction and fulfillment within the world, not apart from it. In other words, ministry became a service vocation operating for the benefit of--not in opposition to--secular society. Evangelicalism had become genteel. Ironically, when confronted with break-away holiness sects in the 1880s and 1890s, Methodists turned to social activism as a means to reinvigorate the denomination.<sup>2</sup> Methodism did not

---

<sup>2</sup>Edwin Jones, "The Holiness Complaint with Late-Victorian Methodism," in Russell E. Richey, and Kenneth E. Rowe, eds., *Rethinking Methodist History: A Bicentennial*

really come to terms with this mixed legacy until the mid-1960s.

The 1968 merger of the Evangelical United Brethren Church and The Methodist Church was a watershed event even though it occasioned few if any changes in grass-roots religious practice. The newly created United Methodist Church brought to fruition a dialogue dating from 1803. This merger stimulated much introspection. What distinguished "United" Methodism? its mission? its history? its doctrine? Bishop Odd Hagen's 1966 presidential address to the World Methodist Council captures the essence of this reflection. He claims Methodism is as much "spirit" as doctrine or ecclesiology. This spirit transcends its generic New Testament roots. The core of Methodism was not just a message of repentance, faith, and holiness, knit together with missionary zeal. Hagen claimed one must look beyond the bustle of conference activities to locate the people called "Methodists." Failing to search further--deeper--results in an incomplete picture.

Hagen argues that Methodism regenerates with a synergistic power; in essence,

---

*Historical Consultation*, (Nashville: The United Methodist Publishing House, 1985), 63; William McGuire King, "The Role of Auxiliary Ministries in Late Nineteenth-Century Methodism," in Richey, *Rethinking Methodist History*, 167 (emphasis in original), 170. The retreat to social activism was complete by 1908 when Methodist Episcopal Church adopted a "Social Creed." All three Methodist "branches" had adopted this document by 1916. See Richard M. Cameron, *Methodism and Society in Historical Perspective* (New York: Abingdon Press, 1961), 265-267, 326-329; and A. Dudley Ward, *The Social Creed of the Methodist Church*, revised edition (New York: Abingdon Press, 1965), 22.

it is an entity apart from itself. To Hagen and many others, the illusive spirit of Methodism is its adaptability to every circumstance and culture. "This has given Methodism a flexibility necessary to meet new situations, and steadfastness so that we can always tell what we stand for."<sup>3</sup> Hagen was not the first to define Methodism in the abstract. Henry Bett locates the spirit of early American Methodism in a "sense of wonder and joy . . . which sprang, like their evangelism and their fellowship, out of the deep certainty of a real experience of the redeeming love of God in Christ."<sup>4</sup> Merrill R. Abbey agrees that a spirit, as opposed to a system, defines Methodism. According to Abbey, the ebb and flow of this Methodist spirit is the history of American Methodism: a dialogue between preachers and congregations, between the institution and its constituents, between the church and non-believers. He notes that these dialogues are simultaneously an articulation of, and search for, denominational identity.<sup>5</sup> Whether the driving force of Methodism is theology, pragmatism, or experience, it cannot be understood without an allowance for this "spirit" which binds the whole. This spirit is

---

<sup>3</sup>Ironically the Bishop's address was a motivation to reclaim the traditional Methodist heritage, to revive the spirit of Methodism. This is an interesting appeal in light the impending Union within Methodism as he claimed that Methodism could not be extinguished: "Methodism will continue to exist and we will be one people." Hagen implored Methodists to covet spiritual renewal, not ecumenism. Hagen, "The Spirit of Methodism," *Methodist History* 5 (January 1967): 4-6, 8.

<sup>4</sup>Henry Bett, *The Spirit of Methodism* (London: Epworth Press, 1937), 249.

<sup>5</sup>Merrill R. Abbey, *The Epic of United Methodist Preaching: A Profile in American Social History* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1984), xiii-xiv.

no where more noticeable than in the antebellum Midwest.

Two word pictures capture both this elusive spirit and the contradictory nature of Midwestern Methodism prior to the Civil War. Alfred Brunson recalls a rebuke he received from James B. Finley when he tried to evade a preaching assignment. Finley, with equal mixture of indignation and encouragement, charged Brunson to "whet up [his] old Jerusalem blade, and go at it."<sup>6</sup> Duly checked, Brunson did not miss the meaning: while the Christianity would endure any trial, the work would not (only the Church, not Methodism, was permanent). Methodism had no hope of "spreading scriptural holiness across the land" if believers lacked evangelical resolve. Moreover, this zeal was to first germinate in Brunson's heart. Finley's image of itinerant as holy crusader slaying infidels, is a familiar one; historians have accentuated this almost to the point of caricature. A second image, however, seems closer to grass roots Methodism. Samuel Bright spoke for fellow clergy like Brunson as well laity when he expressed his greatest spiritual desire in his diary on July 6, 1843. Above all else, Bright sought to "be swallowed up in [God's] love;" to become completely "lost in him." This is an honest reflection of the heart-felt quest for grace typical of Midwestern Methodists. Moreover, antebellum Methodists actively cultivated these sacred moments. Leroy Swormstedt admonished Methodists to "maintain a noble detachment from this world." According

---

<sup>6</sup>Alfred Brunson, *A Western Pioneer: Or, Incidents of the Life and Times of . . .* 2 vols. (Cincinnati: Walden and Stowe, 1880), I:205.

to this itinerant and editor, Midwestern Methodists were "strangers and pilgrims on earth dwelling in houses of clay." He encouraged believers to "live as dying creatures in a dying world." In short, they sought to be overshadowed by "the Most High."<sup>7</sup>

Much more remains to be said concerning Methodism in the antebellum Midwest. Of the many issues left to explore, the bearing of faith on regional identity is perhaps the most intriguing. As Bright and others make plain, Methodists never stopped "seeking" religion. For Midwestern Methodists in the antebellum period, this on-going quest was intrinsically linked to a rural place. William Swayze noted that "city-folk" recognized something special about rural religion. He claims "they would turn out by thousands to hear those backwoods preachers, as they were then called, notwithstanding some of them appeared much weather-beaten and war-worn."<sup>8</sup> James B. Finley could envision little value in practicing religion in an urban environment. He claims the city

"is a desert of depraved humanity, where every one is wrapped up in selfishness, and guards himself against his neighbor while his heart rankles with envy at his prosperity, or his wild, unbridled ambition urges him on the reckless course of outstripping all his competitors. Not so in the woods. There pride, envy, selfishness, and ambition have no abode."

---

<sup>7</sup>Samuel Bright, Diary, (United Methodist Archives Center, Ohio Wesleyan University, Delaware, Ohio), typescript 2; Leroy Swormstedt, Papers, MSS 23, Ohio Historical Society, Columbus, Ohio; Maxwell Pierson Gaddis, *Foot-Prints of an Itinerant* (Cincinnati: The Methodist Book Concern, 1855), 245.

<sup>8</sup>William Swayze, *Narrative of William Swayze* (Cincinnati: R. P. Thompson, 1839), 189.

While Finley overstates his case, it resonates with an earnestness that demands attention. Regardless of any criticism, his resolve for rural religion--and camp meetings in particular--never wavered: "Much may be said about camp meetings, but take them all in all, for practical exhibition of religion, for unbounded hospitality to strangers, for unfeigned spirituality, *give me a country camp meeting against the world.*"<sup>9</sup>

Writing in 1867, William Smith provides one of the clearest defenses of pioneer, i.e. rural, worship:

"In simplicity, sincerity, and earnest Christian zeal--not fanaticism, as some have called it--they met, and sung, and prayed, and shouted for an hour or two, in some humble, but honored private habitation. The services having been concluded, while the fire of unsophisticated, soul devotion yet glowed in their hearts, and while their eyes were yet moist with the waters of pure, spiritual joy, they gave each other a frank, hearty, and friendly greeting, *ardent enough to singe the mossy faces of the fossilized Christians of the latter days.*"<sup>10</sup>

Peter Cartwright would be the first to agree. He pointedly states "I have never tried to feel that pasteboard religion that will not allow a man to say amen or shout glory. I have no friendship at all for that kind of Christianity." He reasoned, "a Christian still-born into the family of heaven is an anomaly." He delighted in the fact that Methodism was a "religion that a man can feel and know for himself, that can support us under

---

<sup>9</sup>James. B. Finley, *Autobiography of Rev. James B. Finley; or, Pioneer Life in the West*, ed. W. P. Strickland (Cincinnati: Methodist Book Concern, 1853), city 159; camp meetings, 315 (my emphasis).

<sup>10</sup>William C. Smith, *Indiana Miscellany* (Cincinnati: Poe and Hitchcock, 1867), 140, my emphasis.

trials, that can bear any thing and every thing while God gives us his love in our hearts."<sup>11</sup> Cartwright's sentiments define Midwestern Methodists and their worship style in the antebellum period--a people who believed their faith was the catalyst to inaugurating Christ's return and his Church Triumphant.

---

<sup>11</sup>Peter Cartwright, *Fifty Years as a Presiding Elder*. Edited by W. S. Hooper (Cincinnati: Jennings and Pye, 1871), 219.

## **BIBLIOGRAPHY**



## BIBLIOGRAPHY

### **Manuscript Collections**

Blackburn, Joseph. Papers. United Methodist Archives Center, Ohio Wesleyan University, Delaware, Ohio.

Bright, Samuel. Diary. United Methodist Archives Center, Ohio Wesleyan University, Delaware, Ohio.

Gilruth, James. Manuscripts, 1831-1834. Microfilmed Typescript copies.

Hester, Francis Asbury. Diary. Archives of DePauw University and Indiana United Methodism, Greencastle, Indiana.

Hitt, Daniel. Letters. United Methodist Archives Center, Ohio Wesleyan University, Delaware, Ohio.

Hull, John. Autobiography. Indiana Historical Society, Indianapolis, Indiana.

Lambert, Cavey. *Autobiography*. Typescript of original manuscript by W.A. Briggs. Archives of the Central Illinois Conference United Methodist Church, Illinois Wesleyan University, Bloomington, Illinois.

Merrick, Frederick. Diary. United Methodist Archives Center, Ohio Wesleyan University, Delaware, Ohio.

Swormstedt, Leroy. Papers. Ohio Historical Society, Columbus, Ohio.

Wilkinson, Asbury. Papers. Indiana Historical Society, Indianapolis, Indiana.

### **Contemporary Sources, Memoirs, and Reminiscences**

- America and the American Church*. London: J. G. & F. Rivington, 1839; reprint in *Religion in America*, Edwin S. Gaustad, ed. New York: Arno Press and the New York Times, 1969.
- Bangs, Nathan. *The Preacher's Manual: Including Clavis Biblica, and Letters To Young Ministers of the Gospel, on the Importance and Method of Study*. New York: Phillips and Hunt, 1834.
- Beggs, Stephen R. *Pages from the Early History of the West and North-West*. Cincinnati: Methodist Book Concern, 1868.
- Birkbeck, Morris. *Notes on a Journey in America*. 4th Edition. London: James Ridgway, 1818; reprint in *March of America Facsimile Series*, Number 62. Ann Arbor: University Microfilms, Inc., 1966.
- Boaz, Ben. *The Winged Chariot: An Allegory*. Cincinnati: A.B. Volney, 1858.
- Brown, H. F. *The Methodists, A Historical and Biographical Sketch of the Pioneers, Bishops, and Representative Men of American Methodism*. Cincinnati: H. F. Brown, 1867.
- Brown, Samuel R. *The Western Gazetteer; or Emigrant's Directory, Containing a Geographical Description of the Western States and Territories, . . .* Auburn, N.Y.: H. C. Southwick, 1817.
- Brunson, Alfred. *A Western Pioneer: Or, Incidents of the Life and Times of . . .* 2 vols. Cincinnati: Walden and Stowe, 1880.
- Caddy, Charles. *Life and times of Rev. Robert Dobbins*. Philadelphia: J. W. Daughaday and Company, 1868.
- Autobiography of Peter Cartwright, the Backwoods Preacher*. Edited by W. P. Strickland. New York: Carlton & Porter, 1856.
- Cartwright, Peter. *Fifty Years as a Presiding Elder*. Edited by W. S. Hooper. Cincinnati: Jennings and Pye, 1871.
- Caswall, Henry. *America and the American Church*. London: J. G. & F. Rivington,

1839; reprint in *Religion in America*, Edwin S. Gaustad, ed. New York: Arno Press and the New York Times, 1969.

Clarke, Adam. *The Preacher's Manual: Including Clavis Biblica, and A Letter to a Methodist Preacher. Also Four Discourses on the Duties of a Minister of the Gospel by Thomas Coke*. New York: Phillips and Hunt, 1820.

Clark, Davis W. ed. *The Methodist Episcopal Pulpit: A Collection of Original Sermons from Living Ministers of the M. E. Church*. New York: Lane and Scott, 1850.

Clark, Elmer T, ed. *The Journals and Letters of Francis Asbury*. 3 vols. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1958.

Clark, John A. *Gleanings by the Way*. Philadelphia: W. J. and J. K. Simon, 1842.

Cox, Sandford C. *Recollections of the Early settlement of the Wabash Valley*. N.P., 1860; reprint Freeport, N.Y.: Books for Libraries Press, 1970.

Cramer, Zadok. *The Navigator; Containing Directions for Navigating the Monongahela, Allegheny, Ohio and Mississippi Rivers; . . .* Pittsburgh: Cramer, Spear and Eichbaum, 1814; reprint in *March of America Facsimile Series*, Number 61. Ann Arbor: University Microfilms, Inc., 1966.

Crissey, Elwell. *Horse Preacher: A Methodist Circuit Rider Travels the Prodigious Tallgrass Prairies of Illinois During the 1830s*. Tigard, Oregon: Blue Water Publishing, 1989.

Elliot, Charles. *The Life of the Rev. Robert R. Roberts*. Cincinnati: Wright and Swormstedt, 1844.

Fee, William I. *Bringing in the Sheaves: Gleanings from Harvest Fields in Ohio, Kentucky, and West Virginia*. Cincinnati: Cranston and Curts, 1896.

Field, A.D. *Memorials of Methodism in the Bounds of the Rock River Conference*. Cincinnati: Cranston and Stowe, 1886.

Field, A. D. *Worthies and Workers, both Ministers and Laymen, of the Rock River Conference*. Cincinnati: Crantson and Curts, 1896.

Finley, James. B. *Autobiography of Rev. James B. Finley; or, Pioneer Life in the West*. Edited by W. P. Strickland. Cincinnati: Methodist Book Concern, 1853.

Finley, James B. *Sketches of Western Methodism: Biographical, Historical, and Miscellaneous*. Edited by W. P. Strickland. Cincinnati: Methodist Book Concern, 1854.

Flehart, J. J. *Glimpses of the Life of Rev. A.E. Phelps and His Co-Laborers; Or, Twenty-five Years in the Methodist Ministry*. Cincinnati: Hitchcock and Walden, 1878.

Flint, Timothy. *Recollections of the Last Ten Years Passed in Occasional Residences and Journeyings in the Valley of the Mississippi*. Boston: Cummings, Hilliard, and Company, 1826; reprint with an New Introduction by Robert F. Berkhofer, Jr. New York: Johnson Reprint Corporation, 1968.

Flint, Timothy. *A Condensed Geography and History of the Western States or Mississippi Valley*. 2 volumes. Cincinnati: E. H. Flint, 1828; reprint with an Introduction by Bernard Rosenthal. Gainesville, Florida: Scholar's Facsimiles and Reprint, 1970.

Foster, J. W. *The Mississippi Valley: Its Physical Geography*. Chicago: S. C. Griggs and Company, 1869.

Gaddis, Maxwell Pierson. *Foot-Prints of an Itinerant*. Cincinnati: The Methodist Book Concern, 1855.

Gaddis, Maxwell P. *The Sacred Hour*. Cincinnati: Methodist Book Concern, 1857.

Gaddis, Maxwell Pierson. *Brief Recollections of the Late Rev. George W. Walker*. With an Introduction by Charles Elliot. Cincinnati: Swormstedt and Poe, 1857.

Gaddis, Maxwell P. *Last Words and Old-Time Memories*. Cincinnati: Walden and Stowe, 1880.

Gaddis, Maxwell Pierson. *Saintly Women and Death-Bed Triumphs*. New York: Phillips and Hunt, 1880.

Griffiths, D. Jr. *Two Years Residence in the New Settlements of Ohio*. London:

Westley and Davis, 1835; reprint in March of America Facsimile Series, Number 73. Ann Arbor: University Microfilms, Inc., 1966.

Hargrave, Richard. *Sermons, Expository and Practical*. Cincinnati: Poe and Hitchcock, 1862.

Hargrave, William P. *Sacred Poems of Rev. Richard Hargrave, D.D. with a Biography of Himself, and Biographical Sketches of Some of His Coadjutors*. Cincinnati: Cranston and Stowe, 1890.

Hibben, W. W. *Rev. James Havens, One of the Heroes of Indiana Methodism*. Indianapolis: Sentinel, 1872.

Hilts, Joseph H. *Experiences of a Backwoods Preacher or, Fact and Incidents Culled from Thirty Years of Ministerial Life*. 2nd. ed. Toronto: William Briggs, 1892.

Hoffman, Charles Fenno. *A Winter in the Far West*. London, 1835.

Holliday, F. C. *Life and Times of Rev. Allen Wiley*. Cincinnati: Swormstedt and Poe, 1853.

Holliday, F. C. *Indiana Methodism: Being an Account of the Introduction, Progress, and Present State of Methodism in the State*. Cincinnati: Hitchcock and Walden, 1873.

Howells, William Cooper. *Recollections of Life in Ohio From 1813 to 1840*. With an Introduction by his Son, William Dean Howells. Cincinnati: The Robert Clarke Company, 1895; reprint with an Introduction by Edwin H. Cady. Gainesville, Florida: Scholar's Facsimiles and Reprints, 1963.

Hudson, Thomas. *Life and Times of Rev. Thomas M. Hudson*. Cincinnati: Hitchcock and Walden, 1871.

Johnson, Susannah. *Recollections of the Rev. John Johnson and His Home: An Autobiography*. Nashville: Southern Methodist Publishing House, 1869.

Leaton, James. *History of Methodism in Illinois from 1793-1832*. Cincinnati: Walden and Stowe, 1883.

- Lorrain, Alfred M. *The Helm, The Sword, and the Cross: A Life Narrative*. Cincinnati: Poe and Hitchcock, 1862.
- McAllister, Mrs. M. E. *Sunshine Among the Clouds: Or, Extracts from Experience*. Cincinnati: Hitchcock and Walden, 1873.
- McLean, John. *Sketch of Rev. Philip Gatch*. Cincinnati: Swormstedt and Poe, 1854.
- Mead, A. P. *Manna in the Wilderness, or, Grove and its Altar, Offerings and Thrilling Incidents*. With an Introduction by J. B. Wakeley. 3rd Edition. Philadelphia: Perkinpine and Higgins, 1860.
- Merritt, Timothy. *The Convert's Guide and Preacher's Assistant*. New York: George Lane, 1841.
- Milburn, William Henry. *Ten Years of Preacher Life: Chapters from an Autobiography*. New York: Derby and Jackson, 1859.
- Miller, W. G. *Thirty Years in the Itinerancy*. Milwaukee: I. L. Hauser and Company, 1875.
- Morris, Thomas Asbury. *Sermons on Various Subjects*. Cincinnati: Poe and Hitchcock, 1867.
- Nowlin, William. *The Bark Covered House, or Back in the Woods Again*. Detroit: by the Author, 1876; reprint in March of America Facsimile Series, Number 74. Ann Arbor: University Microfilms, Inc., 1966.
- The Ohio Conference Offering; of Sermons and Sketches or Sermons on Familiar and Practical Subjects from the Living and the Dead*. Cincinnati: Methodist Book Concern, 1851.
- Oliver, William. *Eight Months in Illinois*. Newcastle upon Tyne: n.p. 1843; reprint in March of America Facsimile Series, Number 81 (Ann Arbor: University Microfilms, Inc., 1966).
- Palmer, Phoebe, ed. *Pioneer Experiences; Or, the Gift of Power Received by Faith*. New York: W.C. Palmer, 1868; reprint in Higher Christian Life Series, ed.

- Donald W. Dayton, no. 32. New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1984.
- Peck, J. M. *Father Clark, Or, The Pioneer Preacher*. New York: Sheldon, Lamport and Blakeman, 1855.
- Pilcher, James E. ed. *Life and Labors of Elijah H. Pilcher*. New York: Hunt & Eaton, 1892.
- Roe, Elizabeth A. *Recollections of Frontier Life*. Rockford, IL: Gazette Publishing House, 1885; reprint in *Signal Lives: Autobiographies of American Women*. New York: Arno Press, 1980.
- Scott, James Leander. *A Journal of a Missionary Tour*. Providence: by the Author, 1843; reprint in *March of America Facsimile Series*, Number 80. Ann Arbor: University Microfilms, Inc., 1966.
- Sermons on Miscellaneous Subjects, by the Bishops of the Methodist Episcopal Church, and the Senior Preachers of the Ohio and North Ohio Conferences*. Cincinnati: Methodist Book Concern, 1847.
- Sims, Charles N. *The Life of Rev. Thomas M. Eddy*. With an Introduction by Rev. Bishop Simpson. New York: Phillips and Hunt, 1884.
- Smith, Henry. *Recollections and Reflections of an Old Itinerant*. New York: Land and Tippet, 1848.
- Smith, J. C. *Reminiscences of Early Methodism in Indiana*. Indianapolis: J.M. Olcott, 1879.
- Smith, William C. *Indiana Miscellany*. Cincinnati: Poe and Hitchcock, 1867.
- Stewart, Catherine. *New Homes in the West*. Nashville: Cameron and Fall, 1843; reprint in *March of America Facsimile Series*, Number 68. Ann Arbor: University Microfilms, Inc., 1966.
- Stewart, John. *Highways and Hedges: Fifty Years of Western Methodism*. Cincinnati: Hitchcock and Walden, 1872.
- Swayze, William. *Narrative of William Swayze*. Cincinnati: R. P. Thompson, 1839.

- Sweet, William Warren, ed. *Circuit-Rider Days in Indiana*. Indianapolis: W. K. Stewart Co., 1916.
- Sweet, William Warren, ed. *The Rise of Methodism in the West: Being the Journals of the Western Conference, 1800-1811*. New York: The Methodist Book Concern, 1920.
- Sweet, William Warren, ed. *Circuit-Rider Days Along the Ohio: Being the Journals of the Ohio Conference from its Organization in 1812 to 1826*. New York: The Methodist Book Concern, 1923.
- Sweet, William Warren. *Methodism and American History*. New York: 1933.
- Sweet, William Warren, ed. *Religion on the American Frontier, 1783-1840*. Vol 4 *The Methodists*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1946.
- Tarkington, Joseph. *Autobiography of Rev. Joseph Tarkington*. With an Introduction by Rev. T. A. Goodwin. Cincinnati: Curts and Jennings, 1899.
- Thomas, Frederick W. *The Emigrant, or Reflections While Descending the Ohio*. 1833; reprint Cincinnati: J. Drake, 1872.
- Titus, Charles H. *Into the Old Northwest*. Edited by George P. Clark. East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 1994.
- Watson, J. V. *Helps to the Promotion of Revivals*. New York: Carlton and Porter, 1856.
- Watson, J. V. *Tales and Takings, Sketches and Incidents*. New York: Carlton and Porter, 1856.
- Wickham, Gertrude Van Renesselear, ed. *Memorial to the Pioneer Women of the Western Reserve*. 2 vols. Cleveland: The Woman's Department of the Cleveland Centennial Commission, 1896-1924; reprint, Jefferson, Ohio: Ashtabula County Genealogical Society, Inc., 1981.
- [Wright, John.] *A Sketch of the life of Rev. John Collins, late of the Ohio Conference*. Cincinnati: Swormstedt and Poe, 1849.



Wright, John F. *Sketches of the Life and Labors of James Quinn*. Cincinnati: Methodist Book Concern, 1851.

Wright, John Stillman. *Letters from the West; or a Caution to Emigrants*. Salem, N.Y: Dodd and Stevenson, 1819; reprint in March of America Facsimile Series, Number 64. Ann Arbor: University Microfilms, Inc., 1966.

Young, Jacob. *Autobiography of a Pioneer; or, The Nativity, Experience, Travels, and Ministerial Labors of Rev. Jacob Young*. Cincinnati: L. Swormstedt & A. Poe, 1857.

### **Secondary and Related Sources**

Abbey, Merrill R. *The Epic of United Methodist Preaching: A Profile in American Social History*. Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1984.

Albanese, Catherine L. "Savage, Sinner and Saved: Davy Crockett, Camp Meetings, and the Wild Frontier." *American Quarterly* 33 (Winter 1981): 482-501.

Albanese, Catherine L., ed. *The Spirituality of the American Transcendentalists*. Macon, Georgia: Mercer University Press, 1988.

Banta, R. E. *The Ohio in Rivers of America Series*. Hervey Allen and Carl Cramer, eds. New York: Rinehart and Company, 1949.

Bett, Henry. *The Spirit of Methodism*. London: Epworth Press, 1937.

Boase, Paul H. "The Methodist Circuit Rider of the Ohio Frontier." Ph.D. diss., University of Wisconsin, 1952.

Brown, Kenneth O. *Holy Ground: A Study of the American Camp Meeting*. New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1992.

Bruce, Dickson D. Jr. *And They All Sang Hallelujah: Plain-Folk Camp-Meeting Religion, 1800-1845*. Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1974.

Bucke, Emory Stevens, General Editor. *The History of American Methodism*. 3 volumes. New York: Abingdon Press, 1964.

- Byrne, Donald E. Jr. *No Foot of Land: Folklore of American Methodist Itinerants*. With an Introduction by Stuart C. Henry. ATLA Monograph Series, No. 6. Metuchen, N. J.: The Scarecrow Press, Inc. and the American Theological Library Association, 1975.
- Calkins, Harvey Reeves. *The Mind of Methodism--A Brief*. Cincinnati: Jennings and Graham, 1905.
- Cameron, Richard M. *Methodism and Society in Historical Perspective*. New York: Abingdon Press, 1961.
- Carpenter, Joel A., and Edith L. Blumhofer. *Evangelicalism in Twentieth Century America: A Guide to the Sources*. New York: Garland, 1990.
- Carter, Earnest Lee. "The Early Camp-Meeting Movement in the Ohio Valley." M.A. Thesis, Ohio Wesleyan University, 1922.
- Chiles, Robert E. *Theological Transition in American Methodism: 1790-1935*. Nashville: Abingdon, 1965.
- Connor, Elizabeth. *Methodist Trail Blazer: Philip Gatch, 1751-1834*. Rutland, VT: Academy Books, 1970.
- Cosgrove, Dennis E. *Social Formation and Symbolic Landscape*. London: Croom Helm Ltd., 1984.
- Cross, Whitney R. *The Burned-Over District: The Social and Intellectual History of Enthusiastic Religion in Western New York, 1800-1850*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1950.
- Dondore, Dorothy Anne. *The Prairie and the Making of Middle America: Four Centuries of Description*. New York: Antiquarian Press, 1961; reprint of 1926.
- Donovan, Peter. *Interpreting Religious Experience*. New York: The Seabury Press, 1979.
- Douglas, Ann. "Heaven our Home: Consolation Literature in the Northern United States, 1830-1880." *American Quarterly* 26 (December 1974): 496-515.

- Downs, Roger M., and David Stea. *Maps in Minds: Reflections on Cognitive Mapping*. New York: Harper and Row, Publishers, 1977.
- Dvorak, Katherine L. "Peter Cartwright and Charisma." *Methodist History* 26 (January 1988): 113-126.
- Ellwood, Robert S. Jr. *Introducing Religion: From Inside and Outside*. Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc. 1978.
- Finke, Roger and Rodney Stark. "How the Upstart Sects Won America: 1776-1850." *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 28 (1989): 27-44.
- Finke, Roger and Rodney Stark. *The Churching of America, 1776-1990: Winners and Losers in Our Religious Economy*. New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1992.
- Gillmore, Parker. *Prairie Farms and Prairie Folk*. 2 vols. London: Hurst and Blackett, Publishers, 1872.
- Goodman, Felicitas D. *Ecstasy, Ritual, and Alternate Reality: Religion in a Pluralistic World*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988.
- Grossman, James R., ed. *The Frontier in American Culture*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994.
- Grimes, Ronald L. *Beginnings in Ritual Studies*. Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1982.
- Hagen, Odd. "The Spirit of Methodism." *Methodist History* 5 (January 1967): 3-9.
- Hall, B. C., and C. T. Wood. *Big Muddy: Down the Mississippi through America's Heartland*. New York: Dutton, 1992.
- Handy, Robert T. "American Methodism and Its Historical Frontier: Interpreting Methodism on the Western Frontier: Between Romanticism and Realism." *Methodist History* 23 (October 1984): 44-53.
- Hatch, Nathan O. *The Democratization of American Christianity*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989.

- Havighurst, Walter. *River to the West: Three Centuries of the Ohio*. New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1970.
- Heidinger, James V. II, ed. *Basic United Methodist Beliefs: An Evangelical View*. Wilmore, KY: Good News Books, 1986.
- Heimbrock, Hans-Gunter, and H. Barbara Boudewijnse, eds. *Current Studies on Rituals: Perspectives for the Psychology of Religion*. Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1990.
- Hyde, Anne Farrar. *An American Vision: Far Western Landscape and National Culture, 1820-1920*. New York: New York University Press, 1990.
- Jackson, George Pullen. *Spiritual Folk Songs of Early America*. New York: J.J. Augustin Publisher, 1937.
- Jackson, George Pullen. *Another Sheaf of White Spirituals*. Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1952; reprint, New York: Folklorica Press, Inc., 1981.
- Jackson, John Brinckerhoff. *The Necessity for Ruins*. Amherst: The University of Massachusetts Press, 1980.
- Jackson, John Brinckerhoff. *Discovering the Vernacular Landscape*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984.
- Jackson, John Brinckerhoff. *A Sense of Place, A Sense of Time*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994.
- Johnson, Charles A. "Early Ohio Camp Meetings, 1801-1816." *Ohio State Archaeological and Historical Quarterly* 61 (January 1952): 32-50.
- Johnson, Charles A. *The Frontier Camp Meeting: Religion's Harvest Time*. Dallas: Southern Methodist University Press, 1955; reprint, With a New Introduction by Ferenc M. Szasz, Dallas: Southern Methodist University Press, 1985.
- Jones, Joe Alton. "The Conviction and Conversion Experiences of American Methodist Preachers from 1775-1825." B.D. Thesis, Southern Methodist University, 1938.

- Jordan, Winthrop D. *Tumult and Silence at Second Creek: An Inquiry into a Civil War Slave Conspiracy*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1993.
- Kincheloe, Joe L. Jr. "Transcending Role Restrictions: Women at Camp Meeting and Political Rallies." *The Tennessee Historical Quarterly* 40 (Summer 1981): 158-169.
- Kramer, Frank R. *Voices in the Valley: Mythmaking and Folk Belief in the Shaping of the Middle West*. Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1964.
- Lehmann, Arthur C., and James E. Meyers. *Magic, Witchcraft, and Religion*. Palo Alto: Mayfield Publishing Company, 1985.
- Lorenz, Ellen Jane. *Glory Hallelujah!: The Story of the Campmeeting Spiritual*. Nashville: Abingdon, 1978.
- Lovelady, Byron Lee. "The Conversion Experience: The Experiences of Some Early Methodists and the Modern Conception." B.D. Thesis, Southern Methodist University, 1934.
- Macmillan, Margaret Burnham. *The Methodist Church in Michigan: The Nineteenth Century*. Grand Rapids: The Michigan Area Methodist Historical Society and William B. Eerdmans, 1967.
- Magnuson, Norris A., and William G. Travis. *American Evangelicalism: An Annotated Bibliography*. West Cornwall, CT: Locust Hill Press, 1990.
- Marty, Martin E. "American Religious History in the Eighties: A Decade of Achievement." *Church History* 62 (September 1993): 335-377.
- Marty, Martin E. "The American Religious History Canon." *Social Research* 53 (Autumn 1986): 513-528.
- Marx, Leo. *Machine in the Garden: Technology and the Pastoral Ideal in America*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1964.
- May, Henry F. *The Enlightenment in America*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976.

- Meeks, M. Douglas ed. *The Future of The Methodist Theological Traditions*. Nashville: Abingdon, 1985.
- Meinig, D. W. "The Mormon Culture Region: Strategies and Patterns in the Geography of the American West, 1847-1964." *Annals, Association of American Geographers* 55 (June 1965): 191-220.
- Meinig, D. W., ed. *The Interpretation of Ordinary Landscapes*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1979.
- Montell, William Lynwood. *Singing the Glory Down: Amateur Gospel Music in South Central Kentucky, 1900-1990*. Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 1991.
- Moore, Arthur K. *The Frontier Mind: A Cultural Analysis of the Kentucky Frontiersman*. Lexington, KY: University of Kentucky Press, 1957.
- Moore, R. Laurence. *Selling God: American Religion in the Marketplace of Culture*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1994.
- Morinis, Alan, ed. *Sacred Journeys: The Anthropology of Pilgrimage*. Westport: CT, Greenwood Press, 1992.
- Nichols, Fay Folsom. *The Kankakee: Chronicle of an Indiana River and Its Fabled Marshes*. Theo. Gaus' Sons, Inc. 1965.
- Norton, William. *Explorations in the Understanding of Landscape: A Cultural Geography*. Contributions in Sociology, Number 77. New York: Greenwood Press, 1989.
- Nottingham, Elizabeth K. *Methodism and the Frontier: Indiana Proving Ground*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1941.
- Patterson, Beverly Bush. *The Sound of the Dove: Singing in Appalachian Primitive Baptist Churches*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1995.
- Peters, John L. *Christian Perfection and American Methodism* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1956.

- Pilcher, Elijah H. *Protestantism in Michigan: Being a Special History of the Methodist Episcopal Church*. Detroit: R.D.S. Tyler and Company, 1878.
- Porteous, J. Douglas. *Landscapes of the Mind: Worlds of Sense and Metaphor*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1990.
- Reid, Robert L. ed. *Always a River: The Ohio River and the American Experience*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991.
- Rhodes, Richard. *The Inland Ground: An Evocation of the American Middle West*. Revised Edition. Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 1991.
- Richey, Russell E. and Kenneth E. Rowe, eds. *Rethinking Methodist History: A Bicentennial Historical Consultation*. Nashville: The United Methodist Publishing House, 1985.
- Richey, Russell E. *Early American Methodism*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991.
- Richey, Russell E., Kenneth E. Rowe, and Jean Miller Schmidt, editors. *Perspectives on American Methodism: Interpretive Essays*. Nashville: Kingswood Books, 1993.
- Robins, Roger. "Vernacular American Landscape: Methodists, Camp Meetings, and Social Respectability." *Religion and American Culture* 4 (Summer 1994): 165-192.
- Ryden, Kent C. *Mapping the Invisible Landscape: Folklore, Writing and the Sense of Place*. Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1993.
- Sack, Robert David. *Conceptions of Space in Social Thought: A Geographic Perspective*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1980.
- Saum, Lewis O. "Death in the Popular Mind of Pre-Civil War America." *American Quarterly* 26 (December 1974): 475-495.
- Schneider, A. Gregory. "The Ritual of Happy Dying among Early American Methodists," *Church History* 56 (Sept. 1987): 348-363.

- Schneider, A. Gregory. *The Way of the Cross Leads Home: The Domestication of American Methodism*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993.
- Short, John Rennie. *Imagined Country: Environment, Culture and Society*. London: Routledge, 1991.
- Sizer, Sandra. *Gospel Hymns and Social Religion*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1978.
- Smith, Timothy L. *Revivalism and Social Reform: American Protestantism on the Eve of the Civil War*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1957; reprint with a New Introduction by the Author. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980.
- Smith, Timothy L. "The Ohio Valley: Testing Ground for America's Experiment in Religious Pluralism." *Church History* 60 (December 1991): 461-479.
- Stamp, Kenneth M. *America in 1857: A Nation on the Brink*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1990.
- Stein, Howard F., and William G. Niederland, eds. *Maps from the Mind: Readings in Psychogeography*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1989.
- Strong, James. *The Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible*. New York: by the author, 1890.
- Sweet, Leonard I. *The Minister's Wife: Her Role in Nineteenth-Century American Evangelicalism*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1983.
- Sweet, Leonard I. "The Evangelical Tradition in America." In *The Evangelical Tradition in America*. Macon: Mercer University Press, 1984.
- Sweet, Leonard I. "'Ringmasters,' 'Blind Elephant Feelers,' and 'Mules': The textbook Literature of American Religious History." In *Critical Review of Books in Religion 1988*, 89-118. *The Journal of the American Academy of Religion* and *The Journal of Biblical Literature*, 1988.
- Tuan, Yi-Fu. *Man and Nature*. Resource Paper 10. Washington: American Association of Geographers, 1971.



- Tuan, Yi-Fu. *Topophilia: A Study on Environmental Perception, Attitudes, and Values*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1974.
- Tuan, Yi-Fu. *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1977.
- Tucker, Karen Beth Westerfield. "'Till Death Do Us Part:' The Rites of Marriage and Burial Prepared by John Wesley and Their Development in the Methodist Episcopal Church, 1784-1939." Ph.D. Diss. University of Notre Dame, 1992.
- Turner, Victor. *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure*. Chicago: Aldine Publishing Company, 1969.
- Ward, A. Dudley. *The Social Creed of the Methodist Church*. Revised edition. New York: Abingdon Press, 1965.
- Warren, James I, Jr. *O for A Thousand Tongues: The History, Nature and Influence of Music in the Methodist Tradition*. Grand Rapids: The Francis Asbury Press, 1988.
- West, Nathaniel. *The Complete Analysis of the Holy Bible*. Revised Edition. New York: A. J. Johnson, 1868.
- Wigger, John H. "Taking Heaven by Storm: Enthusiasm and Early American Methodism, 1770-1820." *The Journal of The Early Republic* 14 (Summer 1994): 167-194.
- Williams, Samuel W. *Pictures of Early Methodism in Ohio*. Cincinnati: Jennings and Graham, 1909.
- Wilson, William E. *The Wabash*. New York: Farrar and Rinehart Inc., 1940.
- Westerhoff, John H, III and Gwen Kennedy Neville. *Generation to Generation: Conversations on Religious Education and Culture*. Revised Edition. New York: The Pilgrim Press, 1979.
- Zube, Ervin H. ed. *Landscapes: Selected Writings of J. B. Jackson*. Amherst: The University of Massachusetts Press, 1970.

MICHIGAN STATE UNIV. LIBRARY



31293014216539