
This most recent conference history, of one of the oldest conferences of American Methodism, is the product of an editorial committee composed of seventeen different writers—including two bishops, clergy, laymen and women. It is a masterful summary of innumerable facts, names, dates and places. Despite its diverse authorship it has unity, careful organization, and only a minimum of necessary duplication.

Probably one of the most important aspects of this study, or at least the most talked about, will be its definitive proof that Robert Strawbridge's class meeting really was the earlier Methodist development (as contrast to the Old John Street, New York, claim). Incidentally, the primary sources used in this documentation are not only Methodist, but Quaker records, which seem to indicate that a John England left the Quaker group to join the Methodists in the Spring, 1766. Beyond this, the work begins with a sketch in some detail about Methodist beginnings to the first conference in Philadelphia in July, 1773.

The Conference covered many different areas at different times. In 1796 the General Conference defined six conferences, of which Baltimore was one. Although there was a Virginia Conference, the Baltimore Conference included a portion of that state, while the Baltimore and the Philadelphia divided the state of Pennsylvania. The border between the Baltimore and the ill-defined "Western" Conference was not clear. Baltimore Conference included work in what is now West Virginia and even in time, in Ohio. Consequently, for a quarter of a century there were constant changes, each one adding a new conference and limiting the Baltimore Conference's geography. By 1824 most of the changes were made and the bounds remained relatively constant for many years.

Another part of the complexity of this study concerns the many developments which took place in areas at one time included in those conference bounds. For example, the Revolutionary War caused many hardships here, and many ministers returned to England; Robert Strawbridge urged freer Methodist observance of the sacraments as contrast to Asbury's close following of Wesley before the 1784 Christmas Conference; the original leader in the German movement resulting in the United Brethren in Christ (later part of the Evangelical United Brethren organization) was in Baltimore. The decade following 1820 saw the agitation for more freedom and for lay representation resulting in the Methodist Protestant Church, centered largely in the Baltimore area. The section on this last controversy is thoroughly documented.

Further complications came with the concerns over the slavery issue. The Harding case arose in the Baltimore Conference, and when the split came between the north and south branches of the Church, both
overlapped in the Baltimore area. Furthermore, during the Civil War a segment of the Baltimore Conference refused to associate with either the north or the south branches of the church. At the end of the war the Washington Conference (Negro, related to the northern church) also overlapped the Baltimore Conference. Add to this the fact that the Methodist Protestant groups were strongly organized in this area, and the tension of much Civil War fighting in Maryland, and the complexity is clearly indicated.

The study gives wide coverage to mission activities, not only overseas areas such as Africa, the Far East and South America, but earlier missions to western areas of the American frontier—many financed by the Baltimore Conference, and in many cases, Baltimore Conference personnel were the missionaries. There are separate chapters on the women's contributions, on educational institutions, and on various social concerns not only of our era, but in the previous century. Much consideration is given to the concept of the church's place in the larger society. In addition to the slavery and abolition discussions there are references to the church's distress with big business exploitation late in the 19th century, the part Maryland men played in the development of the Methodist Social Creed and the Federal Council of Churches, the war-peace issues of World War I, the place of the church in the depression, the controversy between their own Bishop Oxnam and the House Committee on Un-American Activities, and the continuing discussion of Baltimore leaders in COCU, among many other major social, cultural and ecumenical interests.

The work concludes with 87 pages of appendices, charts, tables, footnotes and indices. Very thorough research in the primary documents is evident on every page, and relevant sources are quoted copiously. Only three minor evaluations—not criticisms—seem obvious. First, since this reviewer is not familiar with the geography of the area, the counties and all but the major cities are unknown. Consequently there is danger that the reader from somewhere outside this particular Conference will tend to get lost in the details as the narrative shifts rapidly from town to town and circuit to circuit within the same paragraph. Second, there is such an array of names and dates that many of them surely have meaning only to one who has deep roots in this Conference. Third, although there is a major attempt to elaborate the real feeling— theological, social, spiritual—of the two-centuries-long movement, often one has the feeling instead that the places, buildings, number of members and the financial figures are more important than real people.

While I include these evaluations, I am not sure how the history could have been written any other way to include so many places and people over 200 long years. The great heritage of this conference, and the central place it has played in the development of the total Methodist movement is spread before us. I highly recommend the book even for those far removed from the geographical area with which it is most concerned.

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Professor Boles' book is an impressive study of the revival which swept the South in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Making extensive and effective use of memoirs, journals, diaries, letters, sermons and church records, he portrays not only the nature and extent of the revival but, more important, examines carefully its origins, tracing its sources back to intellectual currents which were present in the American South, not only in religion but in political theory and secular thought as well. His most important contribution is that he goes beyond the often oversimplified views of the revival current in most studies, namely, that the revival can be explained on the basis of frontier conditions. Professor Boles demonstrates clearly that the revival grew out of careful planning by ministers, particularly James McGready, who were very much aware of what they were doing, out of common assumptions held by the Presbyterians, Baptists, and Methodists, the most important of which was that the purpose of the revival was to save individual souls rather than to change society.

Though Professor Boles cannot be faulted for his scholarship, particularly in his industry and care in making use of primary material not used before, his book would have been even more worthwhile had he also used novels which so often give a greater sense of the feel of a movement than historical documents do. Furthermore, greater attention to documents written by those who found the revivals both distasteful and even harmful to the religious and cultural life of the period are not cited. There is very little in the book which tells us about the views of outsider—Deist, Atheist, the more traditional churchmen—regarding the revival and its effects.

But Mr. Boles' study is, on balance, a careful, objective, descriptive, carefully documented, and balanced appraisal of the sources of the great revival and of the central ideas shared by the revivalists: a simple, uncomplicated world view; a religion appealing to the heart rather than to the head; a strong belief in a future day of judgment and the necessity of individual salvation. In spite of all this apparently heavy scholarship and extensive documentation it is a readable book, not only for the specialist, for whom it is primarily intended, but for the educated laymen interested in the place of religion in American life, particularly in the South.

The major objection to *THE GREAT REVIVAL*, however, is that Professor Boles draws sweeping and unwarranted conclusions from his material. It seems rather presumptuous—to take just one example—to say categorically that "it has been one of the tragedies of southern religion that it never progressed intellectually or in social awareness past that orthodoxy which solidified several decades before the Civil War." Even if the statement were true—and I am not convinced that the southern religious mind is as narrow, monolithic and stereotyped as Professor Boles pictures it—no evidence is offered to support it and other similar
sweeping generalizations. An analysis of the modern religious mind of
the South will need to be written by someone else than Professor Boles,
though his description of what that mind once was before it became
what it will presently cease to be (to borrow Carl Becker's definition
of history) will have to be considered in writing such an analysis.

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