On October 15, 1924 a group of distinguished religious and political leaders met in Washington to unveil an equestrian statue of Francis Asbury. The principal speaker of the day was the President of the United States, Calvin Coolidge. The President was a great favorite with the Methodists. They were comfortable with him and he with them. They shared a like system of political and moral values which bound together the leader and the led in sacred compact.

This theme underlay much of the President's public speaking and writing during the years of his leadership. He spoke similarly on this occasion. He entitled his remarks, "Religion the Safeguard of a Free Nation." He talked of the greatness and the promise of America, of the evidence he discerned in her history of the favorable disposition of Divine Providence, and of his conviction that government rests upon religion and that democratic government and vital religion constitute the twin supports of an advancing civilization. Then in one remarkable paragraph, cast in the form of a religio-politico litany, responded to appropriately by his audience with cries of "Hear! Hear!" and enthusiastic applause, Coolidge affirmed what they all could profess: "The Government of a country never gets ahead of the religion of a country." "There is no way by which we can substitute the authority of law for the virtue of man." "The real reforms which society in these days is seeking will come as a result of our religious convictions, or they will not come at all." These lessons were written largely across the life of the Republic. The nation's history up to this hour had been permeated "with a reverence for the moral value of life." Francis Asbury had borne pioneer witness to this truth and the church he fathered sustained it. Together they personified America's national existence. Wholly appropriate, therefore, was this visible symbol in the nation's capital.

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1 The text is found in the Christian Advocate (New York), Oct. 23, 1924, pp. 1301-03. It was reprinted in The Francis Asbury Monument in the National Capital (The Francis Asbury Memorial Association, 1924), pp. 25-32.
2 Ibid., p. 30.
3 Ibid., p. 31.
One observer noted that the President's address "was received with marked attention and signs of unmistakable approval." Understandably so, for on this occasion Methodists were not only memorializing their first bishop, they were calling to mind their historic task as the nation's teacher to righteousness, its preeminent moral guardian.

Methodism cast its mission to America in distinctly moral terms. From the outset it was reformatory. Everywhere Asbury traveled he found souls to be reclaimed and a nation to be redeemed, but nowhere were there available resources in men and time sufficient to meet the need. Thus his ministry was impelled by a terrible sense of urgency. He was faced with a dual obligation: to fit men and women for heaven and, by sowing seeds of grace, to prepare ground for the redemption of the nation's children. The longer he lived the larger became his vision. He confided to Thomas Coke that at one time he would have been satisfied "to see preaching established in all the states, and one hundred in society in each." Now, however, he admitted, "I want millions where millions are."

Asbury's dissatisfaction was imparted to his colleagues and successors in the Methodist Episcopal Church. They shared as well his passion for souls and his concern for the quality of the individual Christian life. Methodists were expected to embody the highest standards of personal deportment. To assist them in this achievement they were instructed and exhorted from the pulpit, watched over by class leaders, encouraged and sustained in times of trouble and temptation by their peers and in between guided by one of the many manuals of Christian conduct which the times produced. The purpose of this regimen was explicitly moral. It was to turn out exemplary Christians, representatives on earth of Jesus Christ, having his mind and spirit, and, like him,

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4 Christian Advocate (New York), October 23, 1924, p. 1304.
6 Ibid., III, p. 268.
"perpetually doing good."  

The emphasis here falls upon the exemplary quality of the Christian life. This was the major focus of one of the most representative of all 19th century Methodist books, the work of a member of the British Conference, William Arthur's Tongue of Fire. First published in 1856, it enjoyed an immediate and sustained popularity. Through 1900 it appeared in at least 29 editions or printings on both sides of the Atlantic, but found special favor with American Methodists. Arthur premised his study on the conviction that the power of a good example was ultimately irresistible.

One tradesman converted, and manfully taking ground among his companions against trade tricks once used by himself, casts greater shame upon their dishonesty than all the instruction they ever heard from pulpits; or, rather, gives an edge, a power, and an embodiment to them all. One youth whom religion strengthens to walk purely among dissipated companions, sends lights and stings into their consciences which mere instruction could not give, because it shows them that purity is not, as temptation says, unattainable. And so with all virtues: it is but by embodying them in the persons of men that they become thoroughly understood in the public mind.

Thus every Christian witness becomes a vital, living link in the chain of multiple good examples, the end effect of which is the progressive elevation of the standard of personal and communal character. As good examples multiply, the power of moral influence cumulates. In turn cumulative moral influence works to fashion the public mind and makes possible a unified, collective approach to moral, social and political issues.

In this emerging Methodist philosophy of the social order the sense of individual moral liability is central. The individual is the basic social unit. His conduct colors and influences the relationships between

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persons. These relationships taken together form the pattern for social living. The individual finds his place in it and learns to be responsible for it as he is responsible to it. The nature of the social order and ultimately the collective personality, character and purpose of the nation is determined by what a person believes and how he acts. Perhaps nothing testifies so well to the general acceptance of these views as the large number of biographical sketches that were published of ordinary men and women who had no pretensions either to greatness or immortality. In life they exemplified the Christian virtues and were pillars in church and community. In death they witnessed to what they held dear in life. Those who followed were exhorted, not merely to emulate, but to outdo them in the practice of virtue. In this sequential process of matching and surpassing lay the promise and guarantee of continuous moral growth. 9

The genius of 19th century American Methodism was its capacity to mould an organization that embodied this system of meaning. In it the individual had his place. He found himself "connected" to a society of Christians who were bound together by mutual responsibility and accountability. From their interconnection grew that cumulative moral influence that church-wide ceased to be mere influence and became power. Had Methodism been nothing more than a collection of individuals, it would have been inchoate, lacking the capability to act. Its power would have remained potential rather than actual and an immense opportunity would have been lost. That it was not was attributable to the chief feature of Methodist ecclesiology, its centrally organized and controlled government.

Herein lay Methodism's solidarity according to Daniel Dorchester, Methodist apologist and indefatigable collector and interpreter of statistics. 10 Herein, too, did episcopal Methodism, more than any other ecclesiastical system, measure up to New Testament expectations. 11 Dorchester noted that critics of Methodism charged it with being undemocratic. If by this they meant it was not a pure democracy, he would admit it. However, he would point out to them that there

9 Ibid., pp. 190-91.
11 Ibid., 609.
was no warrant for such a system in the New Testament and no historical demonstration of its adequacy in regulating the political affairs of men. The government of the United States, he continued, was not a pure democracy, it was a Republic. Power was vested in the people, but the use of that power was assigned to executive leadership. So much the better then, Dorchester concluded, if the church was not a democracy. Democracy's failing was its inability to act, a liability in religion no less than in government. Indeed, it was worse because it signified a repudiation of the responsibility to do good with the moral power vested in it. It was true that given Methodism's episcopal polity no one, whether minister or church member, was a completely free agent. When he joined himself to the church he voluntarily assigned some of his rights to the organization and to its leadership. But this requirement was nothing more than what was expected of every citizen of the United States. Methodists, as citizens and churchmen, surrendered some personal rights and preferences and sacrificed some of their self-interest and for the same reason, the greater good of the greater number.

No one had a clearer conception of the power at their disposal nor a more certain conviction concerning its use than the bishops of the Methodist Episcopal Church. In their address to the General Conference of 1876 they said:

The connectional character of our Church we regard as of the highest importance and greatest utility. An army in detachments, under independent authorities, would be feeble and ineffective in comparison with the same army moved by one supreme authority, having unity of purpose and action. Germany under the Empire is much more potential among the nations of the earth than when under the government of independent petty sovereignties; so the Methodist Episcopal Church, in the sublime unity of her grand purpose, and under the government and direction of the General Conference as her supreme authority, is much mightier in her actions and influence than she could possibly be in independent divisions. She can better antagonize great errors, contend with enormous vices, over-

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12 Ibid., 613.
throw combinations of wickedness, and forward the triumphs of divine truth and grace in the earth. 13

In this period of its history Methodism was convinced that it had the forces required to do just that. Since 1776 it had grown with the nation until by the Centennial, in terms of membership and influence, it had a commanding position among religious agencies. Abel Stevens, Centennial historian, put it this way:

It is generally conceded that it [Methodism] has been the most energetic element in the social development of the continent.... It cannot be questioned that it has been a mighty, if not the mightiest agent, in the maintenance and spread of Protestant Christianity over these lands.... As the leading Church of the country, it bears before God and man, the chief responsibility of the moral welfare of the nation. 14

This was a very large claim. Yet, it was not made without some foundation. For example, in 1888 the General Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church was petitioned by the executive committee of the Sabbath Association and over 600 other persons representing Evangelical denominations to use its great influence and "take the initiative in forming a National Sabbath Committee." 15 The Conference responded with alacrity. As a result the first annual meeting of the American Sabbath Union, predecessor of the Lord's Day Alliance, was held in Foundry Methodist Church, Washington, D. C., in December of that year, with J. H. Knowles, a Methodist minister, as its general secretary. It was multiplied instances of leadership activity such as this that prompted George R. Crooks, editor of the New York Methodist, to describe Methodism as "the chief executive system of American Protestant Christianity." 16

The growing sense of Methodism's responsibility to America paralleled a developing sense of the nation's responsibility to the world. Churchmen and political leaders between them developed the theme that became the nation's leitmotif during the closing decades of the 19th century, that is, it was God's intent that from this focal point of the world's greatest Christian nation would radiate saving and uplifting moral influence.

Two of the most forceful and skilled expositors of this idea were Methodist bishops Randolph Sinks Foster and Jesse Truesdell Peck, both elected to the episcopacy in 1872. Writing in 1884, in observance of the centennial of the organization of the Methodist Episcopal Church, Bishop Foster looked ahead and prophesied that America would determine the future of the world. The corollary, for Methodists, he held, was that they should strive to enlarge their usefulness by becoming "chief among the determining factors of America." Their role, as it had been defined already times without number, was to walk worthy of their vocation as Christians and citizens. Never were they to cease doing good works nor shy away from any opportunity to extend Christian moral influence. That was their reason for existence as, argued Bishop Peck, that was the only reason for the existence of the United States as a Christian power. It had been charged by God with a moral mission to the world. Therefore, he concluded, "no treason in this land is so guilty as moral treason."  

The church would, therefore, be doubly impeached if it failed to move decisively against every appearance of moral wrong-doing. Methodism, sensitive to its responsibilities, capable by virtue of its organization, membership and wealth, determined to fail neither God nor man and in that spirit swept aggressively into the 20th century.

II

It took with it a variety of affirmations and assurances which cohered into an explicit social philosophy.

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17 Centenary Thoughts for the Pew and Pulpit of Methodism (New York: Phillips and Hunt, 1884), p. 68.
First, God is a moral being and the author of moral law. He and his sentient creation alike are governed by it. The God-man relationship is, therefore, basically moral and because of this God is knowable, predictable and reliable.

Second, man is a moral being. He is endowed with the capacity to discern right from wrong and a will free to choose the right. He is sensible of what he ought to be and what he ought to do. Therefore, what a man does is what a man is.

Third, man is responsible, not only to God and to himself, but to the social order of which he is part. His belief and behavior determine, not only the moral quality of his own life, but the moral tone of his community and nation as well. Communities and nations decide and act upon the same considerations and convictions as their constituents. There is, therefore, no difference between individual and corporate morality.

Fourth, there are no such things as necessary social evils. Evil per se has no inherent right to exist. Therefore, given time and the application of sustained effort, it and all its works are capable of reduction and control.

Fifth, a measure of control over the social order is required to guarantee the civil and moral rights of all. Therefore, all are called upon to surrender some individual rights that the greatest good may be secured to the greatest number.

Sixth, the sum of individual convictions and deeds determines the composition of the public conscience. Therefore, the public conscience is what the public does.

Seventh, the church, as the nation's moral tutor and guardian, is most suited to define and to monitor socially acceptable conduct. The church is, therefore, a vast moral ligature and its mission is to hold the nation together in purpose, obedience and hope.19

19 The credo as here outlined is found in no one source. It is built from the books, articles and statements cited in this paper plus many others not cited. Two additional works are recommended for further reading. An important contemporary statement is Benjamin Franklin Tefft, Methodism Successful and the Internal Causes of Its Success (New York: Derby and Jackson, 1860).
The practical effects of this ideological program, as Methodists assessed them, were convincing proof that it constituted a divinely sanctioned and workable approach to the social order. But it was neither sociological abstractions nor theological or ethical statements that engaged their energies. It was people. As the bishops of the Methodist Episcopal Church advised, the church's largest contribution to the social millennium was not social theories but Christian men. 20

For the century just passed the church had had remarkable success in producing and nurturing them by the million. In 1800 there were just under 65,000 Methodists in the country; by 1900 that figure had swollen to nearly six million. 21 In ten decades national population had grown 14 times; the number of Methodists had increased 97 times. 22 It was acknowledged that figures alone could not measure Christian commitment or effectiveness. But neither could they be discounted. While religion was primarily spiritual, its membership and other records offered tangible and measurable proof of continuing vitality. 23 They displaced mere speculation about past and present conditions and provided a reliable foundation for predicting the future. 24 On this basis the church had before it the most promising century of any since the Resurrection.

Even so Methodists were not so naive as to believe that all was going to be clear-sailing. There were very real problems to be faced and denominational leaders had been watching their development with growing concern since the Civil War. One of these was the blatant paganism of a literate and vocal minority who dissented

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22 "Episcopal Address" (1900), p. 52.
24 Ibid., p. 516.
openly from the reigning values of a Christian democracy. In the 1890s and the early years of the new century it was believed that unless checked they would corrupt American civilization and overthrow its social values. The other and more vexatious problem grew out of the increasing numbers of foreign immigrants. Methodists had been warned as early as 1867 of the potential danger to church and state which these newcomers represented. When they were spoken of, it was not their possible contributions that were contemplated, but their probable degenerating and mongrelizing influences. As one contemporary alarmist voiced it, they would not be "the educated, the refined, the religious, lovers of social order and morality, understanding our institutions and upholding our liberties; but in large part rude, vicious, ignorant, slaves of lower passions, and fit tools for the uses of political demagogues."25 Those 600 and more petitioners to the General Conference of 1888 based their plea for an interdenominational, nation-wide Sabbath organization on the urgent need they perceived to fortify the country against the rapid influx of a population foreign to American habits and historic traditions.26

Methodism responded in the emergency with characteristic vigor. Modifications were introduced into the home missions program to Americanize as well as Christianize the foreign-born. Church work in the cities where they settled was intensified and in other ways the church adjusted its institutional structures. But in the main it continued to rely, as many Methodists were wont for years to come, on revivals and conversions as the most promising and acceptable modes of transforming social dislocation.27

III

The severest test of these multiform assumptions and strategies came in the days following World War I as the nation drifted into the turbulent waters of the 1920s. There was a pervasive and disquieting sense that

27 See, for example, Warren A. Candler, Great Revivals and the Great Republic (Nashville: Publishing House of the M. E. Church, South, 1904), particularly chapters 9 and 10.
the nation was rudderless. President Woodrow Wilson was gravely ill and withdrawn from executive leadership. For a time the country seemed to be in a state of uneasy rest between what had been and what was to come. The question of the nation's future was uppermost in the minds of thoughtful men. It was manifestly a time of searching internal examination. Too, it was the time when the symposium came of age. Business, religious and civic groups and intellectual leaders everywhere organized public discussions on topics of current interest and invited the best minds from a variety of fields and pursuits to lead them in their thinking. In 1919 the City Club of Chicago published a volume of addresses that had been read before it during the three previous troubled years. In his introductory essay the secretary of the Society summarized what was undoubtedly the foremost concern of the day:

There certainly exists in many minds a distinct, not to say alarmed, feeling that as a people we have no mastering aim; that instead our active life is marked by disorder and drift, rather than by organization and design; that we lack coordinated and directed movement; that the events of our social existence happen as a vast medley, rather than as consecutive parts of an intelligently laid plan, moving forward in stages of intended and far-sighted advance. This disorganization in action - wasting effort and retarding progress - betrays a prior moral drift, to which it is due. We lack clear convictions as to what the proper ends of society are - and this lack necessarily precludes a unified and progressive social life directed toward the attainment of such ends....There is an unusual sense of society's being without compass or goal. 28

The acute social malaise described so memorably by this writer was at least in part caused by the derangement which afflicts a nation at war. The churches suffered too. In 1919, the same year this bit of social analysis appeared, the Methodist Episcopal Church was precipitated into a minor emergency by the greatest drop

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Still there was no loss of confidence either for short-term or long-range prospects. There was no question of the basic soundness of the church or its ability to lead the nation in repairing and shoring up its moral foundations. Quite otherwise. For the years 1919 to 1924 were characterized by an optimism which at times reached such a pitch that extravagant is the only adequate word to describe it. "It is not too much to say," wrote the editor of the New York Christian Advocate,

that under the impulse of the Centenary movement that branch of the Christian Church called Methodist has, in the past five years, grown, in spirit, in vision, and in power, as much as it had grown in a half century previously. And one does not need to be told that the world's conscience is aroused to such a degree that its increasing sensitiveness is creating new problems every day. It may not be daybreak everywhere, but the world is moving into light.

If the war years brought with them a whole range of problems for the church to deal with, they also released a moral and reforming energy such as the country had not seen since the days following the Civil War. And the reasons were very much the same. Each period witnessed, or so it was thought, the end of a grave moral debacle. With the Emancipation Proclamation and the ratification of the Thirteenth, Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments to the Constitution, slavery and its attendant evils was pronounced dead and buried. On January 16, 1920, following ratification of the Eighteenth Amendment and the

passage of the Volstead Act, national Prohibition went into force and into oblivion, or so it was thought, passed alcohol and all its attendant evils. For Methodists it was the blossom on a century plant of moral reform which they had planted and assiduously tended. It was the necessary and inevitable next step in an advancing civilization and, as they saw it, vindicated their long-held conviction "that only a sober people can make a growing, progressive, and Christian nation."32

Of all the social evils Methodism had fought, alcohol had been the most truculent and resistant to reform. For decades Methodists had been involved in every phase of warfare upon it. They preached and witnessed against it. They produced some of its most single-minded and resolute foes. They agitated and persuaded. They organized. They founded the Prohibition Party and supplied its first, and several successive, candidates for president and vice-president. They scrutinized the behavior and activities of government leaders and supported "drys" of both political parties for public office. They participated actively in campaigns to keep Methodists in numerical superiority in the United States Congress. They conceived and stood behind the Anti-Saloon League, the most aggressive and successful of all cooperative agencies engaged in the struggle to secure Prohibition. Every president from its founding was a Methodist and in 1917, the year the resolution proposing national Prohibition was introduced into the House of Representatives, not only was a Methodist its president, so were the general superintendent, general manager of publishing interests, chairman of the National Legislative Committee and nearly half of all the state superintendents, including those for the key states of Maryland, Virginia, North Carolina, Tennessee, Kansas, Indiana, Ohio, Pennsylvania, New Jersey and New York.33 In the Board of Temperance, Prohibition, and Public Morals they had the most vigorous denominational contender presided over by a secretary who was the


epitome of muscular Christianity. In their bishops they had skilled apologists who successfully elaborated Prohibition policy before congregations, audiences and investigating committees of the Congress. In short, they had been under a moral compulsion to bring Prohibition to pass and invested treasure and energy prodigiously in its achievement.

The victory when it came was widely hailed and celebrated. Apocalyptic visions of a new heaven and a new earth where dwelleth righteousness were evoked. It was now possible to talk seriously, as some did, of retiring all reform and instead concentrating on the prevention of evil rather than its cure. In his report to the General Conference of 1924, Dr. Clarence True Wilson, Secretary of the Board of Temperance, Prohibition, and Public Morals, was euphoric:

We are saved to serve and as we march through the next decade we will see the 18th Amendment enshrined in the affections of a people who have embedded it in their Constitution now. We will see the Volstead Act kept intact and enforced and amended only to make it stronger where experience shows the need. We will see the wet and dry map of Europe, Asia, Africa and the Islands as speckled as a Plymouth-Rock hen. We shall see our own country swing back from its lewdness and looseness, its filthy literature and its dirty stage life, its corrupted movie incentives to vice and crime, to a nation that has a public sentiment enforcing its laws. The prize-fight will be outlawed, the stage cleaned up, the moving picture films regulated, gambling under the ban of law and public sentiment, the mails and the express will be closed to the indecent and the impure, a sanctity of child life which will ultimately give us the 20th Amendment to the Constitution, forbidding the filching of play-time from the little ones in interests of corporate greed through child labor. A wave of Americanism which has receded will come back enthroning the Bible in the Public Schools and the American Sabbath on its American foundations again as it was before the German-American Alliance and the Brewers'

34 "Report of the Committee on Reforms," St. Louis Conference, Methodist Episcopal Church, Official Minutes, 1918.... (n.p.), p. 305.
Association trampled this institution of our fathers into the mire, and the Puritan principles about the cleanness of home life, the freedom of the ballot box, the little red school house teaching morality and respect for religion as well as the principles of education, will be pedastled in triumph.35

All this to come to pass in ten years. All these hopes rekindled and expectations raised because Prohibition had become the law of the land. And, Methodists were assured, there it would stay. They were told by their bishops that there was "as much prospect of returning to the practice of human slavery as of resuming the legal sale of rum."36

Not many months previous to this declaration, an interdenominational gathering of political and religious leaders had said much the same. In mid-October 1923 a national Citizenship Conference was held to evaluate the state of Prohibition. Methodist representatives included Dr. Clarence True Wilson and Dr. Ernest H. Cherrington of the Board of Temperance of the Methodist Episcopal Church and Bishop James Cannon, Jr., chairman of the Commission on Temperance and Social Service of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South. They joined with William Jennings Bryan, Rabbi Stephen S. Wise, Gifford Pinchot, governor of Pennsylvania, and Senators William E. Borah of Idaho and Carter Glass of Virginia in concluding that Prohibition was working well.37 So then, Methodists were not the only ones carried along by the high tide of optimism. If there was something delusory in the situation Methodists were not alone in confusing what they wanted with what actually was. For Prohibition forces the unfolding realities of the next several years came as a painful and unpleasant revelation.

But on October 15, 1924 in Washington a different future was envisaged. The Francis Asbury monument was dedicated to the nation while the Methodists present at

36 "The Episcopal Address," ibid., p. 185.
the event rededicated themselves to carry forward Methodism's mission in the spirit of their first bishop. Nothing said that day suggested that the future would be anything other than what Methodists wanted it to be. But below the surface, undeniable, contrary forces were working that would ultimately destroy expectations for a moral utopia.

IV

The achievement of legal Prohibition raised hopes for the adoption of a wide range of social reforms. Its demise, despite an abundance of brave talk, deflated those hopes, narrowed expectations and badly impaired the church's moral witness. Society linked Methodism inseparably to Prohibition, an identification the church had encouraged. Society was also disposed to blame Methodism for the unfortunate consequences that accompanied Prohibition, an imputation the church resisted and denied. From 1925 until the repeal of the Eighteenth Amendment in 1933, however, it struggled and whatever it did to right itself, the church only succeeded in enmiring itself deeper in public controversy. As it did so criticism mounted and public esteem declined.

Methodism was no stranger to critical attack. It had formed part of its history since the days of the Wesleys and the sentiment was often voiced that the amount of criticism was in direct proportion to the church's faithful witness. This was a plausible defense so long as the criticism Methodism sustained came from distinctly enemy quarters. But what of its validity if criticism originated in the household of faith? This appears to have been an eventuality unforeseen by Prohibition strategists. They spoke and acted in the confidence that they represented the united sentiment of Evangelical Protestantism. When it came the realization that they did not was disconcerting, although only temporarily so, for it served to fire rather than dampen their determination. Nevertheless, from 1925 onward the most penetrating and unsettling questions about Prohibition and its enforcement came from American Protestant churchmen, some of whom were not only Prohibitionists but Prohibitionists and Methodists.

One of these was Dr. F. Ernest Johnson, Secretary of the Department of Research and Education of the

38 As, for example, James R. Joy in the Christian Advocate (New York), April 17, 1922, p. 508.
Federal Council of the Churches of Christ. In September 1925 he released Research Bulletin No. 5, a harmless looking document, but one which exploded with the impact of a bombshell and sent Prohibition defenders to the battlements. With considerable restraint, Johnson first questioned the honesty of much of the existing Prohibition literature, citing his concern over what he judged were inadequate methods of research, false and misleading data and unwarranted conclusions. In effect he accused Prohibition agencies of dealing in propaganda. Second, he questioned the legitimacy of using the law to enforce Prohibition, or for that matter any reform, in the face of widespread public opposition. He acknowledged that if the question were again put to a vote the chances were good that it would be upheld. At the same time he was convinced that a mere majority in so hotly contested an issue was not enough. He reasoned that determined minority resistance would lead to disobedience on a scale the Federal government would find itself incapable of handling. Practically speaking, the law would be nullified.

Third, he questioned the morality of basing an appeal for observance of Prohibition laws upon a general duty to obey the law. Here he touched the most sensitive spot of all. For over the years since the implementation of the Eighteenth Amendment, Prohibition leaders had relied less and less upon a moral vindication of their position and more and more upon an appeal to law. They argued that once written into the Constitution the issue was no longer that of temperance or Prohibition, but obedience to the law. Even more, at stake was the whole future of democratic government. Bishop William Fraser McDowell, president of the Board of Temperance, reading from a statement before the Senate Subcommittee on the Judiciary, said it was the recorded judgment of the church he represented that the vital question before the American people was "whether after a century and a half of trial this government of, for, and by the people is able to secure obedience to its own mandates and thus perpetuate itself." 39

41 Zion's Herald, April 28, 1926, p. 525. This part of Bishop McDowell's statement was taken from an
Johnson urged Prohibition leaders not to tie the stability of government to the enforcement issue. He maintained that they would never be able to convince the public that their government would collapse if one law, and a controversial one at that, was not everywhere observed. However, they paid him no heed. In violent and abusive language he was repudiated and with him his report and the position he typified. Simply, there was to be no drawing back, no compromise.

The leaders who were so affronted by Research Bulletin No. 5 were highly placed in American Protestantism. By the hue and cry they raised Johnson was put on the defensive. He did not have to stand alone, however, for he had powerful allies who rallied to support him. One of these was the Christian Century which in the fall of 1925 gave him an opportunity to answer his critics. He did so, but unlike them, cleaved to issues and avoided all personal references. Perhaps the most important thing he did in the series of articles he wrote was to urge the church to reconsider its role in society and to reappraise the means it used to achieve social and moral reforms. Specifically, he recommended that it eschew the policy of moral intimidation, engage in less corporate political activity, and instead give more attention to the fundamental task of moral education.

V

In the middle of the 1920s the past and the future of Methodism met in vigorous contention. The occasion was national Prohibition but the real issue was of vastly greater consequence than that. Prohibition leaders were both right and wrong in their analysis of the situation. They were right in seeing that the issue was not only Prohibition, but they were wrong in presuming that the vitality, not to say the life, of democratic society depended upon its enforcement. This


much can be said, that for their vision of a Christian democratic society, Prohibition was a strategic necessity.

They contemplated the world, the church and its possibilities from the perspective of the century in which they were born. They were 19th century men who held on to the Victorian assurances and the optimism they engendered. They still entertained the Methodist version of Evangelical Protestantism's conception of one people united under God, motivated by a sense of national purpose, adhering to one universally applicable set of moral values, guided by a political and legal system that incorporated those values, and presided over by a church that was fulfilling a divine mandate to monitor the nation's conscience. There were those in Methodism who continued to speak in these terms until well into the 'twenties and 'thirties. But what they said did not carry conviction.

There were new voices in the church which did. Primarily this was because they spoke from a realistic grasp of the current situation. The 19th century hope of a unified nation measuring up to the expectations of Evangelical Protestantism could no longer be embraced. Even the hypothesis of the melting pot was under siege. A new definition of America, not as a nationality, but as a "trans-nationality" was emerging.44 In light of these undoubted realities, for increasing numbers in the church the old vision was dissolving into phantasy.

Bishop Francis J. McConnell, writing in 1924, said that the events of the past ten years had "opened many questions which we had thought settled for all time."45 Not the least among them was the question which would agitate American religion for the next generation and beyond: How is the church to carry on its moral mission in a society of pluralistic values and commitments?