METHODISM IN NORWAY

The Social and Cultural Reaction between
the Evangelical Minority and the State Church

by Arne Hassing

The year 1891 is a convenient point of reference in the history of Methodism in Norway. In the pre-1891 period Methodism was a movement; in the post-1891 period it has been an institution. In the former period its relations with the State Church were hostile; in the latter time a respectful, if not altogether friendly, coexistence has prevailed. It was also the year of the passage of a revised Dissenter Law, which was not in principle unlike its predecessor but was at least more liberal. This paper will focus on the period from 1853 to 1891, years when Methodism was a movement of note in Norwegian religious life.

I

Methodism in Norway is the product of the European mission of the former Methodist Episcopal Church, now the United Methodist Church. A Norwegian sailor, Ole Peter Petersen (1822-1901), was converted in America, and in 1849 he returned home to Fredrikstad, where he testified and exhorted. ¹ A following grew around him, and when he returned to America in 1850 its members continued to meet. Petersen's absence was deeply felt, and leaders of the group sent appeals for his return to the Missionary Society of the Methodist Episcopal Church. The desired response came in 1853, when Petersen was sent as the first Methodist missionary to Norway.

At that time Norway was entering two decades of conservative reaction to the labor disturbances inspired by the 1848 revolutions on the continent. Political liberalism maintained a low profile, but a product of its earlier days, the Dissenter Law of 1845, remained in

¹ References have been kept at a minimum in this article. Readers interested in further documentation are referred to my Ph.D. dissertation (Northwestern University, 1973) entitled, "Methodism and Society in Norway 1853-1918." The standard biography of Ole Peter Petersen is Carl Frederick Eltzoltz, Livsbilleder af Pastor O. P. Petersen: Grundlaegger af den Biskopelige Methodistkirke i Norge og Medgrundlaegger af den Norsk-Dansk Methodisme i Amerika (Chicago: Den Norsk-Danske Boghandels Trykkeri, 1903).
effect, opening the way for non-Lutheran Christians to worship and work within the bounds of public order and decency.

Petersen's first adherents had come from among the Haugians, the spiritual descendants of the turn-of-the-century lay preacher and folk leader, Hans Nielsen Hauge (1771-1824). Petersen's appearance as an official representative of the Methodist Episcopal Church closed to him the Haugian ranks. On the other hand, his preaching to the sawmill workers of nearby Sarpsborg led to a revival, and the town became the site of the first legally established congregation in 1856. The arrival in that year of Christian Willerup (1815-1886), a Danish-born Methodist preacher, strengthened the cause, and Methodism, in the face of intense State Church opposition, made continued progress until the end of the decade.

Methodism in the 1850's had been riding a wave of harsh criticism of the State Church from a variety of religious leaders, criticism which in 1859 led to the appointment of a church commission to propose necessary changes. The hopes placed in the outcome of the commission, and the 1861 return to the State Church fold of Gustav Adolf Lammers, until that time Methodism's strongest ally in the free church movement, resulted in a rapid change in the climate of opinion. Critique of the State Church all but disappeared, and Methodism itself, suffering from a lack of effective leadership following the departures of Petersen and Willerup, had only the initiative of lay converts to thank for its geographical expansion, notably into Oslo and Arendal.

The 1866 inspection trip of Corresponding Secretary of the Missionary Society, John Price Durbin, resulted in a number of personnel and administrative changes. Petersen was recalled as Superintendent for a two-year period, providing an immediate upsurge of morale and revival. The leading preacher, Martin Hansen (1826-1907), took the initiative in producing a catechism, hymnal, a translation of Ira Sankey's evangelical songs, a Sunday School paper, and a church paper, all necessary educational and inspirational material for a growing movement. Hansen followed Petersen as Superintendent in 1871, holding the position until 1880, years of rapid growth and intense opposition. Under his leadership a modest theological school was established, and his outstanding administrative, theological, and pastoral leadership throughout the decade marks him as the most
The changes were made just in time to profit from the social ferment between 1870 and 1890. Every aspect of Norwegian society was transformed in these years. Industrialization proceeded apace, luring ever larger numbers of the rural poor into overcrowded urban areas. Industry could not absorb the huge labor force, but the surplus was absorbed by emigration, as thousands in the grip of "America fever" emigrated from unyielding mountain farms to the broad expanses of Wisconsin, Minnesota, and the Dakotas.

The common man was on the move in other ways, too. Johan Sverdrup led the forces of democratic liberalism to victory when, in 1884, parliamentary government was ushered in, with a series of reforms in its wake. In education Hartvig Nissen democratized the system, with more practical subjects introduced into the curriculum and the educational base broadened. Democratic tendencies were also operative in religious life. Attempts to reform the State Church begun with much hope in the 1870's, only to flounder on disagreements within the Church. After the victory of the Liberal Party, the fear of the types of reforms that might emerge from such a body quietened the Church's demands. Nevertheless, Professor Gisle Johnson, who feared the Liberal Party and what it stood for as much as any man in Norway, was the prime mover in the Home Mission movement, and in that capacity he democratized religious life by shifting the locus of active religious life from the edifices of the State Church to the more humble chapels of the Home Mission movement.

Even as revival movements flourished, the cultural dominance of orthodoxy fell to free thought. The tensions between the two views of life were heightened by the orthodox preference for the Conservative party and the free thought preference for the Liberals. Orthodoxy was not, however, monolithic, and in the period 1874 to 1880 theological liberalism made its entry. All the

---2 There is no biography of Martin Hansen. He has written a valuable autobiographical account of the early period of Norwegian Methodism, Dagbraekning i Femti-Aarene (Kristiania: Norsk Forlagsselskab, 1900).
while, Norwegians experienced an upsurge of national consciousness and feeling, nurtured by cultural figures, such as playwright Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson (1832-1910), and the periodic crises with Sweden.

The social ferment tended to weaken the traditional forms of authority, predisposing Norwegians to turn to new solutions. Methodism expanded rapidly from 1870 until by 1890 it reached from Halden in the east to Bergen in the west, and from Flekkefjord in the south to Hammerfest in the north. Statistically it grew most rapidly from its 896 members in 1870 to 2,823 in 1879, then leveled off slightly until by 1890 its total membership was 4,418. To gain a true perspective on Methodist influence the membership figures must be more than doubled to account for the large number of adherents without formal membership, the large number of converts who preferred to join organizations of the State Church, and the constant drain caused by emigration.

There were, as this paper will show, formidable obstacles to membership in the Methodist Episcopal Church in Norway, which to some extent explains the fact that the Methodist revival was predominantly an urban, industrial working class movement. This class was a new, uprooted, economically, socially, politically and religiously deprived segment of Norwegian society. Their position in society left them, more than any other class, open to new ideologies and at the same time less susceptible to the sanctions of traditional authority, be it legal, political, social, or religious.

Methodism's appeal was primarily religious with important non-religious components. Their leaders defined their movement as one "of power rather than doctrine," the secret of which was "personal holiness" added to "the divine call." This power was clearly

3 Most Methodist leaders mentioned these factors in general terms. In 1889 a report included figures, undoubtedly somewhat inflated, which give some concreteness to the generalizations. See Seventy-first Annual Report of the Missionary Society of the Methodist Episcopal Church. For the Year 1889 (New York: Printed for the Society, January, 1890), statistical tables following p. 133.

the ability to transform human consciousness and life. Methodist preaching emphasized the depravity of man. But conversion did not only entail what God did for one (justification), but what God did in one (regeneration). Added to this was the certitude of being sons, rather than servants, of God (assurance). In the words of Chicago's Black civil and economic rights leader, Reverend Jesse Jackson, Methodists learned that "I am somebody."

The power of transformation of consciousness was required to extend into life, otherwise the Lutheran criticism that Methodism only produced a "feeling faith" would have been justified. Eventually, even Lutherans were compelled to the admission that some remarkable transformations occurred, of which decent citizens out of drunkards was only the most dramatic. To Methodists, these changes were evidence of the power of the Holy Spirit; and in their congregational activity both the life spiritual and ethical were sown and nurtured.

Although Methodism was a religious movement, its success in the last decades of the nineteenth century was tied to a variety of social factors. Its membership was almost exclusively of the urban industrial working class, most of whom were first generation urban dwellers thrown into disorientation and deprivation. For them, Methodism provided new identities, a sense of self-worth and value in a situation where the human indices of worth and value, and therefore identity, were absent. Their lives were lived out in emotional deprivation as

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6 The fact that drunkards were converted and became decent citizens as a result of Methodism was used as an argument in the latter's favor among portions of the Lutheran public. See, for example, the editorial article, Luthersk Ugeskrift, Vol. 2, No. 10 (1877), p. 163.

7 For a revealing survey of Kristiania District, categorized according to professions, see Thomas Ball Barratt's report, Referat af Aarskonferensen for den biskopelige Methodistkirkes Mission i Norge afholdt i Arendal 6-10 Juli 1893 (Kristiania: Den religiøse Traktatforenings Bog- og Nodetrykkeri, 1893), pp. 24-25.
well, which Methodism's acceptance of emotionality served to relieve. Finally, and most importantly for the retention of converts, the Methodist organization and its activities provided a social locus and structure supportive of the new commitments. One not only received spiritual and moral sustenance but a new social circle. In this regard the classes were extremely important, but the combined spiritual and social function was also to be found in the protracted meetings, where several hours of preaching, singing, and prayer were interrupted by what at least one critic thought were far too long refreshment breaks. In summary, Methodism aided the transition to urbanization, and therein lay the secret of its success in these years.

II

Methodism in Norway progressed in the shadow of legal discrimination, which, in turn, determined the nature and effect of its relations with society in general and the State Church in particular. The nature of Methodism's relation to the State Church cannot be understood without first comprehending the legal context as defined by the Constitution and Dissenter Law.

The Constitution of 1814 was forged in the midst of political crisis as Norway declared itself independent rather than accept union with Sweden. As a legal document the Constitution was a product of the Enlightenment philosophy on the rights of man, and in its original draft included a clause guaranteeing religious toleration to non-Lutherans. For hitherto unexplained reasons the clause disappeared unmissed from the final draft. The omission may be partially explained by the pressured circumstances under which the drafting took place, but this only served to reveal the purely theoretical reality it had in the first place. Lutheranism retained its monopoly, and in the Constitution's paragraph 92 was the requirement that the monarch and civil service had to belong to the Evangelical Lutheran State Church.

Paragraph 92 had no meaning as long as everyone was required to be Lutheran anyway, but in the years following

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1814 the issue of religious toleration became more than theory. Returning seamen held captive in English jails during the Napoleonic wars included some who were converts to Quakerism. They were allowed to persist in their religious views as long as they maintained a low profile, but the Quakers' form of passive resistance brought them into sporadic conflict with ecclesiastical requirements of the State Church.

In the end it was the Lutheran Haugians who were to be instrumental in breaking the clerical monopoly that in turn led to religious toleration.¹⁰ Hans Nielsen Hauge himself had been imprisoned under the 1741 Conventicle Law, passed in the heyday of Danish pietism to safeguard the pietist conventicles and insure lay non-interference in the calling of the clergy. Hauge's followers, especially the travelling preachers, throughout the 1820's and 1830's came into regular collision with the clergy and the Conventicle Law. Not surprisingly, when Haugians rose to national power as representatives in the farmers' rise to national prominence in the 1832 Storting, they sought repeal of the Conventicle Law. Haugians introduced the first bill of repeal in 1836, which was passed three times by the Storting and rejected as many by the King, before it became law in 1842, over the third royal veto.

In the course of public debate the issue of religious toleration also arose. The logic of the liberal arguments used in connection with repeal of the Conventicle Law led in the direction of granting the same rights to non-Lutherans, and in 1843 a commission was appointed to draft a law. Farmers, especially the Haugians among them, revealed their basic conservatism in an abrupt turnaround, providing the most intense opposition to extension of the rights they had so recently won for themselves. Nevertheless, over their objections, and those of a vocal minority of the clergy, the Dissenter Law was passed, receiving royal sanction on July 16, 1845.

The Dissenter Law contained nineteen paragraphs. "Dissenters" were defined as those who confessed the Christian religion.¹¹ Dissenting clergy were required

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 315.
¹¹ A copy of the Dissenter Law of 1845 may be found in Knut Rygnestad, Dissentarspørsmålet i Noreg fro 1845 til 1891. Lovgjevning og administrativ praksis (Oslo: Lutherstiftelsens forlag, 1955), pp. 13-16.
to vow obedience to the laws of the state on a line with the State Church clergy and the civil service; royally prescribed records were to be kept and a membership list annually sent to local authorities. Withdrawal from the State Church could not occur before age nineteen, except by a royal dispensation, and all persons wishing to withdraw had personally to appear before their State Church clergyman in order to receive a certificate of withdrawal. Dissenters continued to support the State Church through a customary Tiende and a property tax, but they were exempt from other contributions. Authorities were to be notified of buildings used by Dissenters, and services had to be held before open doors, with violation subject to fines.

Within a month of births or deaths Dissenters had to inform the State Church clergy, with each week of neglect subject to fines. Dissenting clergy could not perform legally valid marriages; these had first to be performed by a notary public, after which a church ceremony could follow. Mixed marriages could only be performed by a State Church clergyman, and children of such unions remained in the State Church unless explicitly stated otherwise. Children of Dissenters could be exempted from religious instruction in the public schools, but school authorities, usually State Church clergymen, were required to see that proper religious instruction was substituted.

III

As a stage in the transition from religious monopoly to religious toleration, the Dissenter Law represented a liberal piece of legislation, unmatched in other Scandinavian countries at the time. However, if religious liberty is defined as "the freedom of individuals from coercion by the State or by a religious organization and in the equal freedom of religious bodies," then the Dissenter Law represented a good deal less. It represented, rather, a system of privilege and discrimination within a general system of toleration.

The message was not lost on the public. The sting was for the most part quietly borne by people raised to

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defer to authority. In their reports to the Missionary Society, however, Methodist leaders from the very beginning complained about the limitations placed on their work by the provisions of the Constitution and the Dissenter Law. Illustrative is the report from the pastor in Porsgrunn in 1859:

Many who are brought into a good way through our instrumentality remain yet in the State Church for the sake of some temporal things. We have in part religious liberty, but not in the full sense of the word, because if a man is employed as an officer in state affairs, he cannot leave the State Church without being turned away from his office; but we hope that even in this there will soon be a change for the better.13

Ten years later there was still no change as Superintendent Ole Peter Petersen in 1870 complained that it was "quite a cross" to become a Dissenter, so that much of the fruits of Methodist work benefitted State Church organizations.14 In towns such as the naval port of Horten, the effect of paragraph 92 of the Constitution was direct, as is evidenced by the 1873 report of Superintendent Martin Hansen:

The opposition has been strong and persistent, and thus many who have been brought to the Lord by our labors have failed to join our society....A great part of the population of this place are either in the military service, or they labor in the Royal dock-yard, and they are, therefore, influenced to a great degree by their superiors, who do not wish any one to join our Church.15

Methodist preacher Helge Ristvedt asked in an 1879 letter from Brevik, "When will religious liberty be fully realized so that each person decides according to conscience rather than outside pressures?"16

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The constant drain of members through emigration was not unrelated to the status of Dissenters. Although economic motives apparently dominated among Methodists as among other emigrants, limitations placed on them as Dissenters appears to have been a secondary motivation. When the question of revision of the Dissenter Law was before the Storting in 1883, the editor of Kristelig Tidende, Hans Petter Bergh, opined that the question of full religious liberty ought to have been aired. He thought that Norway should have been like America, where there was no special law for Dissenters or persons of other faiths, but all citizens were equal before the law. Shortly thereafter Bergh emigrated.

From America at least one Methodist urged Prime Minister Johan Sverdrup to press on in his liberal policies. Writing from Wisconsin, P. A. Berg noted that he and his wife had found freedom in the United States and enjoyed their Methodist fellowship, adding:

You, Mr. Sverdrup, are fighting the good fight for democracy and freedom in Norway; keep it up, we are for you, for we have three sons and two daughters still in Norway and we want them to enjoy at home the freedom which we could get only by leaving.

Although the felt lack of religious liberty was not due solely to the legal provisions relating to Dissenters, as will be evident later in the paper, the legal provisions went far towards determining the nature of the relations between the religious minorities and the State Church majority. The definition was clear: a Dissenter was legally tolerated and legally discriminated against, a second class citizen.

IV

The general effect of the legal system contained important specifics that placed more or less visible barriers to dissenting churches. Most important, if less visible, was the indoctrination of children. The schools

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were in the latter nineteenth century in the process of emancipation from their earlier functions as exclusively Church schools. The Church, however, still played a dominant role. Disregarding the harassment and ostracism of Dissenters' children by teachers, who were in turn imitated by their pupils, which caused Methodists, poor as they were, to try to keep their own day schools for the first decade and a half, it is enlightening to read the State's authorized texts as they dealt with Methodism.

In the public school text (published 1861) of R. Tønder Nissen, Professor of Church History at the University, pupils learned that Methodism's most prominent feature was that it bound the birth and growth of a Christian to a particular, universally binding method. This "method," from which, according to Nissen, Methodism received its name, involved an intense struggle of repentance, followed by the immediate breakthrough of grace, so that each person could give the day and hour of his conversion. The whole purpose of Methodism was to arouse and shock consciences into such a struggle, and for this it required ever more intensive measures. American Methodism had been especially ingenious at discovering these. Like the "papists" Methodism had shown great zeal in evangelization among other Christians and heathens. This had aroused the other branches of Christianity to greater activity, but the result, of course, was that the awakened life had taken on a more or less Methodistic flavor.

Nissen's presentation was the least prejudicial of the texts. Another professor, Volrath Vogt, had witnessed field preaching in Wales in 1851. It was calmer than he had expected, with some exceptions, but eyewitnesses from America told of "unpleasant and terrible outbreaks during services in the forests in the evening," where the preacher resembled a madman, and the captivated listeners fell about in terrible cramps, until

grace broke through and they collapsed in exhaustion, which was called blessed peace. As for the doctrine of "sinless perfection," it could not but lead to hypocrisy or arrogance. A text for elementary schools published in 1890 by A. Tollefsen repeated more of the same.\textsuperscript{21}

These were caricatures of Methodism, but in the minds of school children they passed for the real article. Especially impressive was this in an atmosphere of intense opposition to Methodism from State Church leaders, who warned against mixing with Methodists in schools, confirmation classes, and pulpits. Attendance at Methodist Sunday schools provoked opposition from the clergy. By the time a child completed elementary school society's indoctrinational institutions had firmly implanted the notion that Methodists were dangerous fanatics. In the sphere of religion, Methodism represented a form of madness, not simply because of its nature, but because it threatened established, taken-for-granted realities. One needed, as even Lutherans admitted, a good deal of motivation to join "the sects."\textsuperscript{22}

If a youth survived these pressures and wished to join the Methodist Episcopal Church, a wait until the age of nineteen was required. Inasmuch as Methodism had to expand through proselytism, if it was to expand at all, and large numbers of converts were youth with formal membership in the State Church, the age limit created a number of years during which a variety of forces in family, church, school, and the outside environment could intervene to prevent the final step at age nineteen. The State Church clergy thought it only their duty to break ties with Methodism, with threats if needed, and the Dissenter Law provided some legal options for compelling avoidance of Methodist circles for those willing to use them; few, however, went that far.

In fact, the Dissenter Law provided the State Church clergy with ample opportunity to exert restraining pressure without going to court. If persons escaped direct pressure before becoming members, they did not do so if they wished to withdraw from the State Church. Persons wishing to withdraw were required to personally appear

\textsuperscript{21}A. Tollefsen, Kirkehistorie for folkeskolen (Kristiania: H. Aschehoug & Co., 1890), pp. 54-55.
\textsuperscript{22}Editorial article, Luthersk Ugeskrift, Vol. 2, No. 9 (1877), pp. 139-40.
before the State Church clergy in order to procure certificates of withdrawal. The clergy saw it as their duty to use the opportunity to admonish against such a move, questioning persons on the doctrines of the two churches, the differences between them, and the implications of commitment to one versus the other. To Methodists this was a catechization, and some went as far to call it an inquisition.\textsuperscript{23} It was a common experience to be obstructed by a variety of delaying tactics if one persisted in the request to withdraw, so that, as Ole Peter Petersen put, it took "some courage" to do so.\textsuperscript{24}

More than a little was needed, for several reasons. Fundamental was the deference to authority in persons raised and trained in an authoritarian society. The class to which Methodism appealed was separated from the clergy by a social, educational, and economic gulf. According to a reliable report, both the Methodist preachers and members feared the State Church clergy.\textsuperscript{25} A man might have stood up to them, but the women, of whom there were many more in religious movements, were more threatened. The result was, as Methodist leaders never tired of complaining until the end of the century, that people avoided the confrontation altogether.\textsuperscript{26} They had all the more reason to do so when such a step involved accepting social ostracism and discrimination and a ready solution was either to remain as Methodist adherents without formal membership, or join the Lutheran Home Mission societies.

The Methodist leadership did not accept this situation passively, even if the Corresponding Secretary, John Price Durbin, writing in 1866, thought their efforts lacked the required aggressiveness.\textsuperscript{27} In 1871 six Methodist clergy and lay leaders petitioned the Storting to revise the Constitution's paragraph 92.\textsuperscript{28} They had, they wrote, remained silent in the hope that the Storting's

\textsuperscript{23} The process was characterized as inquisitorial in Kristelig Tidende, Vol. 6, No. 9 (1883), p. 1.
\textsuperscript{24} Fifty-first Annual Report (for 1869), p. 94.
\textsuperscript{25} Forty-eighth Annual Report (for 1866), p. 71.
\textsuperscript{26} For an example see Kristelig Tidende, Vol. 6, No. 11 (1883), p. 2.
\textsuperscript{27} Forty-eighth Annual Report (for 1866), p. 71.
sense of justice would prevail without their voice. Their silence, however, had been taken as an indication of satisfaction with things as they were by those opposing revisions. Inasmuch as all members of society were required to bear the burdens of state, even to the extent of economic support of the State Church and defense of the state with life and property, then it was not building on the sure foundation of justice when adherence to certain articles of religion was required to benefit from civil rights.

The State, which ought not to regard any of its loyal sons as Dissenters or treat them as stepchildren, thereby exercises a coercion which we must feel as less than paternal and just. 29

The acceptance of a paternalistic, authoritarian view of society evidenced in these words does not hide the sense of injustice. The paragraph was broadened in 1880, but the principle of exclusion remained, notably in public education.

The apparent helplessness of the State Church in the face of the "sect" threat in the mid-fifties had also called forth pressures for the revision of the entire State Church system, including the Dissenter Law. A commission was appointed in 1859, but by the time it produced proposals the climate had markedly quietened, and the government, no longer fearing for the State Church, let the matter drop.

In the early 1870's the reform movement within the State Church received new wind in its sails, as did political liberalism. On November 29, 1879, a commission was charged by the government with drafting a new Dissenter Law. No Dissenters were on the five-member commission, which otherwise included two State Church clergymen and one Haugian farmer, from whom few concessions could have been expected.

The commission's proposals did not arise for discussion in the Storting until 1883, and the Methodist reaction to the government's proposals was that what was given with one hand had been taken away with the other. 30

The age of withdrawal was proposed lowered to eighteen,

29 Ibid.
but added was a six-week delay between notification of withdrawal from the State Church and the issuance of withdrawal certificates. Methodists objected to the latter because it merely provided State Church clergy more time to exert pressure against withdrawal, and, in addition, was unjust, in that no such delay was required of persons withdrawing from a dissenting church to join the State Church.

Note was taken of the Methodist proposals in the course of the Storting debate, but the proposed law stranded. Methodists were not sorry. Wrote Hans Peter Bergh, editor of Kristelig Tidende, "No, let us rather keep the little Dissenter Law we now have...."31

Prior to the 1888 elections, when a split between the "moderate" and "pure" liberals was evident, veteran Methodist pastor, Anders Olsen, called for Dissenters to stand united in the elections and vote for representatives who stood on the same principles of religious liberty as Johannes Steen and Viggo Ullman, two members of the "pure" liberals and vigorous spokesmen of religious liberty.32 The "moderate" Liberals, supported by Christians of western Norway and led by State Church clergyman, revival preacher, newspaper editor, Storting representative, and, incidentally, anti-Methodist polemicist, Lars Oftedal, were not to be trusted to give Dissenters any liberty that weakened the State Church; what they gave on one point, they would take back double on the next, more important point.

The elections weakened the Liberal forces, and in 1889 a Conservative government took over. Proposals for a new Dissenter Law came up for discussion in 1890. The proposals were not different in substance from those which failed to come to final vote in 1883. Methodists had sent in a copy of their views in reaction to the 1883 proposals, and these were once again taken up in the debate. But when the revised Dissenter Law received royal sanction on June 27, 1891, Methodist reaction was unchanged from what it had been in 1883. Even less than the old one, the revised Dissenter Law was not in tune with the demands of the times.33

31 Ibid.
32 Ibid., Vol. 11, No. 27 (1888), p. 215.
33 Rev. Hans Petter Bergh did not believe the proposed law that was voted down in 1883 was in tune with
The revised law was, in fact, an improvement in its specifics. Withdrawal certificates, for example, could be procured either in person or in writing, thus eliminating a constant source of conflict, and the age of withdrawal was lowered to fifteen. When Methodists still greeted the new law with cynicism it was because above all they resented the principle of a Dissenter Law, or any law which limited or aided a particular Church over another. The State, they felt, ought to have been neutral in religious affairs, and Methodists resented the temporal sacrifices that had to be made in order to follow conscience in matters of religion. As late as 1902 Anders Olsen continued to feel the burden of discrimination. Equality before the law, he thought, was the only just arrangement:

And the fact that a portion of the citizenry of the same nation are placed in a classification that requires a special law, "Dissenter Law," is only a remnant of Catholicism's darkest era, when the Church through the secular power tortured and killed everyone who did not blindly conform to everything it pleased the mighty prelates to dictate.34

Methodists saw what the State Church majority preferred to ignore, if they understood it at all, that the Dissenter Law was not merely an instrument of religious differentiation but also of social differentiation—discrimination and segregation. As they became more middle class, Methodists resented all the more the social price to be paid for following religious convictions, and quite rightly perceived that the Dissenter Law was the root of the problem. The Dissenter Law functioned as the instrument of social control by legally isolating non-Lutherans in the law, thus setting a precedent for the same in social practice.

Had the Dissenter Law functioned in a society for which religion and religious distinctions lay on the periphery of the scale of values, the law might never have generated much heat on either side. In the period under consideration, however, religion was very much at

the demands of the times, Kristelig Tidende, Vol. 6, No. 9 (1883), p. 1; in 1891 then editor Rev. Christian Torjussen saw no important progress over the proposals made earlier, Kristelig Tidende, Vol. 20, No. 22 (1891), p. 174.

the defining center of personal and social life. This was so not only in the sense that even today a Norwegian Methodist is a rare specimen in a sea of Lutherans, but in the sense that the power of religion and religiously inspired sanctions was immeasurably greater than at present. Legal systems may define the limits of toleration, but, as M. Searle Bates observed:

Many forces of family, custom, pressure of opinion, type and method of education restrict or protect religious liberty, not least those of religious institutions themselves.\footnote{Bates, op. cit., p. 300.}

The "not least" of Bates' generalization was the State Church. As the bearer of state and civil religion, with all the prestige and authority such systems command in purely temporal ways, the State Church, in the nature of its response to Methodism, determined the degree to which the legal limits of toleration were to be narrowed or broadened in social practice.

VI

The State Church responded to Methodism out of a difficult context. The Dissenter Law was the most important event in Norwegian church life since the Reformation. From the security of religious monopoly the State Church was thrust out into the challenges of pluralism. A pluralistic religious situation is, for better or worse, a competitive one, as loyalties that once were enforced by law have to be won by persuasion.\footnote{An illuminating discussion on religion in a situation of pluralism is provided by Peter Berger, The Sacred Canopy: Elements of a Sociological Theory of Religion (Garden City, N. Y.: Doubleday and Co., Inc., Anchor Books, 1969), pp. 48-51.}

The history of the State Church in the nineteenth century may be viewed from the perspective of the attempt to adjust to and confront the challenges of pluralism, and this may be seen in three main developments of the period: the rise of confessionalism, the rise of low church revivalism, and movements to reform the State Church.

Professor Gisle Johnson, whose pulpit appearances in 1851 in Oslo led to a revival that eventually permeated the whole country, especially the middle class,
was a confessionalist before the free churches made their influences felt in the mid-1850's. Nevertheless, in the struggle against the free churches the confessions were raised as the vessels of truth with an intensity unimaginable without the presence of the free churches.37

The rise of the low church revival movements, especially the Home Mission movement, may also be attributed in part to the free church threat. In several towns Methodism's presence prodded concerned Lutherans into organizing local Home Mission societies in order to counteract their influence, and when the Luther Foundation was established in 1868, the threat from the "sects" was explicitly stated as a factor in its formation.38

The third movement in nineteenth century State Church history was the reform movement. The free churches' rapid success in the 1850's showed the more perceptive of the State Church clergy and other leaders that reforms had to be made in order to meet the new challenges. The State Church was still organized for a situation of religious monopoly, and its leaders found that in order to counteract the free churches it had to be freer from state control and have more clergy. The result was the formation of the church commission of 1859, which, as was noted earlier, came up with minor reforms but otherwise let the matter drop. The reform movement continued with increased intensity in the 1870's, but stranded on the failure of churchmen to come to agreement on the type of reform needed. When the Liberal party came to power in 1884 churchmen were too suspicious of it to entrust reforms of the State Church to such a body. In brief, the reform movement was a reaction to religious pluralism, a movement to provide the State Church with the structure adequate to meet the competitive situation. It failed, and the low church revival movements, the sectarian alternative within the State Church, were left to set the tone of Norwegian religious life.

As confessionalists, Lutherans of all parties judged Methodism by its doctrine, which was found wanting on three main counts: (1) the sacraments, because Methodism interpreted them symbolically; (2) regeneration, because Methodism tied it to God's Word alone rather than Baptism; (3) sanctification, because Methodism's superficial analysis of sin led it to believe sin could be overcome in this life. All of these objections could be charged to the general "subjectivism" that was said to characterize Methodism.

The practical consequences of this subjectivism were almost as objectionable as its doctrinal errors. The doctrine of assurance was said to lead to the demand for a universally binding "method" of conversion, the content of which included high volume shrieking, sobbing, and convulsive cramps at the "mourners' bench," until, instantaneously, conversion took place and the individual "felt himself" to be saved. Their proselytism was aggressive, offensive, and "American," and they did not refrain from preying upon and disturbing the peace of congregations. Their whole tendency was "to fish in troubled waters," concealing their confessional identities until the confidence of the unsuspecting was won.

There was truth to the charge that Methodist preachers did not reveal their identities immediately before preaching, though deception may be too strong a word. Identifying themselves as Methodists was tantamount to shutting off any approach to their message, so strong was the prejudice towards "the Methodists." There was another side to this also, as Lutherans also recognized, and that was the definite similarities between Methodism and the Lutheran revival movements.

If Methodists were more emotional and adhered to a stricter ethical code than the Haugians, it was more a difference of degree than kind. Methodist critiques of the State Church, centering on the bondage to the State and the "ungodly" preachers, were all to be found

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39 The two most influential tracts are cited in footnotes 46 and 50.
40 This was recognized as early as 1859 by Bishop Jens L. Arup, *Til Christiania Stifts Geistlighed* (Christiania: Carl C. Werner & Co., 1859), p. 12.
in shriller tones from within the State Church itself. Like the Home Mission movement Methodism emphasized the conscious life of faith, while with the Rosenians of western Norway Methodism preached the present availability of God's grace. Methodism even emphasized a "joyous Christianity" and general optimism on the possibilities of man with the more cultured, educated Grundtvigians, who otherwise were as opposed to Methodism as their chief opponents in the Home Mission movement.

The State Church, unable to exile Methodists from Norway's shores, had to turn to other ways of self-defense and counter-offense commensurate with the rights of religious toleration. It was not always a simple adjustment. The Halden clergyman, folk song collector, and hymnologist, Magnus Brostrup Landstad (1802-1880), immediately after the establishment of a Methodist congregation in his parish, burst into print with an attack on the Dissenter Law. In a letter to the chief of police and made public in the local newspaper, Landstad argued that if the Dissenter Law allowed the Methodist pastor to hold services at the same hour as his own, then the law was coercive with respect to the State Church. Such a law forced the State Church to accept into its midst non-Lutheran religious teachers who subverted, scorned, and opposed its teachings. To his dismay and disgust, Landstad was politely informed that such was indeed the case. Turning to more appropriate forms of defense, Landstad produced and circulated one of the earliest pamphlets against Methodism, entitled Advarsel (Warning). After delineating the Methodist heresies, including a highly critical description of Methodist meetings in America from the pen of a German-American Lutheran pastor, he admonished his parishioners to remain faithful to "the pearl of great price," the purest, clearest, truest expression of Scripture, the Evangelical Lutheran confession, and to avoid having anything to do with Methodists.

Landstad's public conflict with the Dissenter Law revealed that he still operated with the mentality appropriate to the days of religious monopoly, but
through the publicity it received, most importantly in the Oslo newspapers, it served to clarify for the clergy and the public the implications of religious toleration. The opposition to Methodism was nonetheless extremely intense in the latter half of the 1850's, when Methodism and the Lammers movement threw a sense of panic in the State Church leadership.

One result of that panic was greater cooperation between the clergy and the laity and a stimulus to greater activity, not merely to oppose Methodism, but to constructively evangelize among what even State Church leaders admitted to be a quasi-Christian populace, where Christian is defined as a "revival Christian." Methodism, as we saw, entered a period of withdrawal in the 1860's, but the dramatic geographical and numerical expansion of the Methodist movement in the 1870's and 1880's invited renewed opposition. Without exception Methodism's appearance in new towns provoked a combination of anti-Methodist lectures, newspaper articles, house to house warnings, threats against attendance at Methodist meetings, harassment of Methodist children, obstructions to obtaining certificates of withdrawals, threats of the loss of employment, and, in one case at least, a threatened cut-off of poverty relief. Most of the opposition was borne silently as far as history is concerned, because of the elementary level of education among the class Methodists recruited from and the prevailing "fear" of the State Church clergy in persons molded by an authoritarian society.

The extent to which Methodism threatened the State Church in the 1870's may be gauged by the intensity of the opposition. Anti-Methodist lectures were common, but a record of sorts was set in Stavanger, in southwestern Norway. On Friday, September 4, 1874, E. Welhaven, one of the State Church clergymen, began a series of lectures "with respect to Methodism." In an early lecture he had stated that Methodism was bound to be short-lived, inasmuch as it had cut itself off from the life producing nutrition of the true vine, and his listeners were invited to remain within the State Church, with the reminder that extra ecclesiam nulla salus. The series concluded on March 9, 1876, a year and a half and 68 lectures after the first, earned its author a footnote in history as an example of the ridiculous, but

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44 The report of Welhaven's first lecture may be found in Stavangeren, Vol. 23, No. 2930 (1874).
he succeeded admirably in his purpose: Methodism in Stavanger lay in the doldrums for years thereafter.

The tone of the polemics was not charitable, judged by present standards, though some were not without respect for Methodism, especially on practical grounds. The two most important works against Methodism were, however, representative of the worst in the tradition of Lutheran polemical literature. Both appeared in 1875. The first was translated by the State Church clergyman and school teacher, Theodor C. Bernhoft, and was written by German-American Lutheran pastor and co-founder of the Missouri Synod, Wilhelm Sihler. Sihler's booklet was written shortly after his arrival in Pomeroy, Ohio, in 1844, and is as much a product of reaction to his American surroundings as to Methodism, as well as a reflection of the tension between Lutherans attracted to the use of Methodism's "new measures" and those, chiefly confessional German-Americans, opposed to both "new measures" and the use of English. In dialogic form Martin (Luther), Sihler's mouthpiece, goes about informing the naive Philip (Melanchthon) of the dangers of Methodism. Thirty years later and four thousand miles away this document was translated and circulated in the 1880's by the Home Mission Society to inform Norwegian Lutherans on Methodism. Needless to say, Norwegian Methodists hardly recognized themselves and protested the caricature.

Sihler's booklet circulated in eastern Norway. In the west the Rosenians predominated, and among them the many-sided State Church clergyman and revivalist, Lars Oftedal, was the outstanding leader. His booklet first published in serial form in his Stavanger newspaper, Vestlandsposten, was stimulated by what he termed as the many requests for literature in places where Methodism had forced its way in. It was also written in the form

46 Ibid., pp. 90-98.
47 Wilhelm Sihler, Methodismens Vildfarelser: Samtale mellem two Lutheranere, trans. by Theodor C. Bernhoft (Kristiania: Den norske Lutherstiftelsens forlag, 1875).
48 Lars Oftedal, En Samtale mellem Kristen og Ukyndig om Methodismen (Stavanger: Privately printed, 1875).
of a dialogue, between "Christian" and "Ignorant," and, if anything, exceeded Sihler's effort in arrogance, contemptuousness, and caricature. Pastor H. P. Bergh's comment, that the Lutherans' characterization of Methodism was of the order of the Roman Catholics' characterization of Luther and Lutheranism, was an accurate parallel.49

Methodist leaders were not, for the most part, equipped to counter the more theologically-sophisticated productions of the State Church clergy, and it was rare for them to do so. One who did with effectiveness was pastor Martin Hansen, who, as Superintendent, delivered a series of lectures to correct what he regarded as Lutheran misrepresentation. These were faithfully transcribed in the Oslo liberal newspaper, Verdens Gang, and thus received widespread publicity.50 No important anti-Methodist literature appeared after Hansen's production, and the work of Christen Brun, a book on Methodism based on scholarly research and published in 1893, may be taken as the end of polemic and the beginning of dialogue.51

VII

The year 1891 has been noted as a symbolic watershed in the internal, legal, and ecumenical context of Norwegian Methodism. It marked Methodism's evolution from a movement into an institution, the beginning of a less discriminatory legal and social context and, finally, the transition to peaceful coexistence in relations with the State Church.

The influx of large numbers of converts during the revival years led to a less enthusiastic and less disciplined membership. Attendance at classes declined, disciplinary expulsions were less frequent, and growth assumed natural proportions. A clerical estate developed, symbolized by the transition to the use of the term "pastor" from the earlier designation of "missionary."

The collapse of the classes knocked the kingpin out of the organizational structure that had so success-

50 The series ran from March 30, 1876 until May 16, 1876, Verdens Gang, Vol. 9, Nos. 38-57 (1876).
fully utilized all energies towards the single purpose of saving souls. In the place of classes there were youth groups, women's groups, and an anti-clerical laymen's organization. The proliferation of subsystems extended to a nursing order, hospitals, orphanages, and homes for the aged.

Methodism's relations with the world entered a new phase. Laymen became involved in local politics, trade unions, cooperatives, and the temperance movement, and both the laity and the clergy provided outstanding leadership in the local campaigns against "King Alcohol." Methodist zeal for the prohibition movement was so great in the 1890's that the historian is easily left with the impression that the excitement generated over another town gone dry far exceeded the joy over another soul saved.

The energies that once were directed towards exclusively religious goals were thus widely dispersed in the 1890's. For a Church that prided itself on existing for the primary purpose of saving souls, an inevitable tension arose. On the one hand, the attempts to meet the challenges and problems of the day were laudable and necessary. On the other hand, the energy spent in fulfilling the stated primary purpose of saving souls was a fraction of what it had been in earlier decades. Frustration arose as the rhetoric of revival continued without any sign of revival. With fewer withdrawal certificates to issue to persons wishing to join the Methodist Episcopal Church, the State Church clergy's attitude toward Methodism improved markedly.

Even if withdrawals had increased in the 1890's, a number of forces led to an altered State Church perception of Methodism by that time. Orthodoxy's intellectual hegemony was broken at the close of the 1870's. The battle with the forces of positivism and political liberalism crested in 1883, when approximately four hundred State Church leaders, headed by Professor Gisle Johnson, issued a summons to the "friends of Christianity" to resist the attempts of the Liberal Party and its unbelieving supporters to introduce parliamentary government.52 The summons failed to elicit the desired support,

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52 For the events surrounding the summons, see Carl Fredrick Wisløff, Politikk og Kristendom: En studie omkring oppropet "Til Christendommens Venner i vort Land" (Januar 1883) (Bergen: A. S. Lunde & Co. s. forlag, 1961).
but it revealed that the State Church had turned its attention away from "the sects" to confront non-Christian ideologies.

From 1880 theological liberalism and biblical criticism entered Norwegian church life to further complicate the picture. The Lutheran lay movements were not much affected, but over the years the theological faculty of the university added a number of theological liberals. A prominent defender of orthodoxy, Bishop Johan Christian Heuch (1838-1904), joined battle in a book entitled \textit{Mod Strømmen} (Against the Current), published in 1902. The issues became acute until the appointment of a liberal over a conservative at the theological faculty led in 1907 to the establishment of the Congregation Faculty, a conservative institution for the training of State Church clergymen, supported through private contributions. For Methodists the struggle meant that attention was once again directed away from them.

The tensions of earlier years were also eased by a partial levelling of differences through mutual influences. Methodism was less critical of the State Church. With few exceptions, its greatest offense to Lutheran sensibilities, the doctrine of entire sanctification, was no longer prominent in either its preaching or its experience. Methodism's intellectual mentors were increasingly orthodox Lutherans, as the translation of serious Methodist theological works ended with the 1888 translation of Samuel Wakefield's \textit{A Complete System of Christian Theology}, originally published in 1862 and outdated a quarter of a century later.\textsuperscript{53}

Perhaps more important in levelling differences was Methodism's influence on the Home Mission movement. This was especially marked in the style of revival.\textsuperscript{54}


\textsuperscript{54} For an acknowledgment of Methodist influences see Nils Bloch-Hoell, \textit{Pinsebevegelsen: En undersøkelse av Pinsebevegelsens tilblivelse, utvikling og saerpreg med saerlig henblikk po bevegelsens utformning i Norge} (Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 1956), pp. 113-14. Bloch-Hoell is the only Lutheran church historian to have thoroughly studied and acknowledged the extent of non-Lutheran influence in nineteenth century Norway.
VIII

Three factors governing the relations between Methodism and the State Church must be highlighted in conclusion. The first was the transition from religious monopoly to pluralism. Where confrontation between persons of differing religious commitments is unavoidable, the threat to accepted realities is deeply disturbing until an attitude of toleration is developed. Religious toleration is not learned until there is religious confrontation, which sets in motion the forces that lead from a sense of threat and hostility to a sense of respect and toleration. In nineteenth century Norway, particularly until the mid-1880's, Methodism functioned as the prime agent of religious toleration, enduring a period of hostility as Norwegians learned to deal with the presence of divergent religious commitments.

The rise of Lutheran confessionalism determined the duration of the transition to toleration. When the Methodist pastor, Martin Hansen, stated that Methodism's only mistake was that it was not Lutheran, he was not exaggerating the priority given to Luther and the Lutheran confessions within the State Church. The confessional stance was doctrinally exclusive, abjuring cooperation of any sort with non-Lutherans. Only when the confessional consciousness began to wane at the turn of the century could a less hostile attitude towards non-Lutherans prevail. A situation of religious pluralism

\[55\] The adjective is used by Oscar Handeland, Norsk kristendomsforkynnning (Bergen: Lunde & Co.s forlag, 1918), p. 18.

\[56\] This generalization assumes that all other things are to some extent equal, as a Northern Ireland delegate to the conference at which this paper was presented reminded me.
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Finally, class antagonism aggravated relations. Methodism was an urban lower class movement; the State Church and the Home Mission movements were middle and upper class. Leaving aside the tendency of the legal system and social practice to confine Methodism to the lowest class, it is also true that Methodism had a particular appeal as an ideology of transition. The first-generation urban working class, the disinherited of Norwegian society, found in Methodism a community and an identity that enabled persons to reconstruct their lives in an unfamiliar urban setting. When political, economic, and social issues came into the fore among the working class in the 1880's, the radical stance Methodists had taken in religion translated itself into radical positions in those areas as well. This was not so for those members of the urban low class who belonged to the Home Mission movement. Thus, Methodism's critique of the State Church Christianity was also a critique by the dispossessed of the middle and upper classes' religious establishment. Only when Methodism began to include middle class members, chiefly persons who had risen to the middle class as Methodists, was this note of social antagonism eliminated.