SOME FACETS OF THE HISTORY OF BISHOPS IN AMERICAN METHODISM

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One of the neglected areas in the historical study of American Methodism is a history of the episcopacy. Much indeed has been written, but it has followed other agenda—polemic, theological, ecclesiastical, biographical. What is still needed is a work of historical scholarship, dedicated not to defend the office of bishop against detractors, to ground the office in scriptural precedent, to define it theologically, to ward off attacks from within, to adapt it to modern conditions or free it from political electioneering, or even to enlarge on the personalities involved—but simply to develop and interpret the history of one of the central features of the church. The other approaches are valuable, but the basic historical task remains to be done.¹

Some Useful Studies

Early on several outstanding works appeared designed to shore up the role of bishops. Bishop Coke set the tone with his scholarly sermon at the ordination of Francis Asbury in 1784. Behind that of course lay the long process by which the founder of the Methodist movement, John Wesley, found his way through the Anglican tradition to an understanding of what he was doing in setting apart Dr. Coke to be a superintendent of the Methodists in America.

James O'Kelly's early opposition to Asbury was a factor in the correspondence which Bishop Coke carried on in 1791 with Episcopalian William White, who had acknowledged the validity of presbyterian ordination under conditions of necessity. Coke hoped that his own episcopal ordination might be in some way regularized. The issues raised were still very much alive in the 1830s, when Nathan Bangs devoted no less than thirty pages to the episode in his history of the Methodist Episcopal Church.

The reform movement of the 1820s and 1830s caused a tract war with the bishops in the middle. Alexander M'Caine's History and Mystery of Methodist Episcopacy (1827) was answered by John Emory's Defense of

¹Most of the data for this article come from conference journals and especially the Daily Christian Advocate.
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Our Fathers the same year. M'Caine came back with A Defense of the Truth two years later. Emory and his son were still at it in 1838 with The Episcopal Controversy Reviewed. All along Nicholas Snethen was busy with his articles in the Wesleyan Repository and Mutual Rights, brought together in one volume in 1835 as Snethen on Lay Representation.

This whole long debate, which went on through the nineteenth century, has been much studied and written about. Did John Wesley know what he was doing? Just what was he doing? Was Coke's ordination as bishop valid? Is Methodist episcopacy a third order or an office? Are bishops subject to the will of General Conference? Is their appointive power unlimited? Some of these questions are still worth asking, but their terms are quite different now.

On a more scholarly, less polemic level there appeared in the 1960s no less than three doctoral dissertations on the office of bishop: J. Hamby Barton, The Definition of the Episcopal Office in American Methodism (University Microfilms, 1960, Drew thesis); Gerald F. Moede, The Office of Bishop in Methodism (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1964, Basel thesis); and Norman W. Spellman, “The General Superintendency of American Methodism” (Yale thesis, 1961). The first dealt extensively with theological aspects; the second cast the topic in an ecumenical context; and the third expounded especially the constitutional issues favored by the southern church. All three offered ecclesiastical and theological interpretations of the development of the episcopal office.

A still more recent flurry of study has gathered around the union of The Methodist Church and the Evangelical United Brethren Church in 1968, when two similar but not identical forms of episcopacy had to be reconciled. And the end is not yet. There is no need here to engage once again in further review of this literature and the issues which dominated it. More important is the need to call attention to neglected facets. A delightful informal approach was made in 1976 by the long-time secretary of the Council of Bishops, Roy H. Short, who has done great service in preserving and ordering the more recent records of episcopal activity and in writing a history of the Council of Bishops. In Chosen to Be Consecrated he gathered in a small space a great deal of interesting information on the persons who have been elected bishop. It amounts to a brief multi-biography and accomplishes what no amount of theological or constitutional debate can: It gives life to the office through the lives of those who have held it.

Periods of Episcopal History

It is one thing to seek the roots of episcopacy in Scripture and tradition and to define the office in theological and ecclesiastical terms. It is quite another to realize that in the first sixty years of the Methodist Episcopal Church, from 1784 to 1844, only fourteen persons were elected
bishop. The church began with two, Thomas Coke and Francis Asbury. In no General Conference were more than two elected. These conferences consisted of relatively few preachers, either the whole number of them or, after 1808, a delegated selection. They could easily gather in a small church, knew each other well, and had little difficulty choosing those for leadership. The bishops in their turn knew well the men they appointed. Moreover, they continued true itinerants, like the rest of the preachers. They were all part of the geographical and social development of American Methodism. From this perspective the early delineation of the office of bishop was an operation of the growth and expansion of the circuits and Annual Conferences which claimed all of the energies of the young denomination.

Then there came the great division of 1844 and the organization of the M. E. Church, South. It was an important turning point in the history of bishops, first because north and south developed different views, and second because this middle period witnessed tremendous increase in the numbers of bishops. Between 1844 and reunion in 1939, ninety-five years, the northern church elected 114, while the southern church chose 56. At some General Conferences, especially in the north, many bishops were elected at one time, to the confusion of all: eight in 1872, eleven in 1904, ten in 1912, sixteen in 1920 (in this case more than the total number in the first sixty years). The procedure remained much the same throughout: free nomination and continued balloting until the desired number of candidates had received the required percentage of votes (varying from one half to two thirds).

Here was no longer the simple process of looking around the room and agreeing on the best choice. Provision had to be made for introducing a willing candidate to the conference in order that the many delegates might have some idea of whom they were voting for. Frequently inconclusive ballots followed one after another—"no election." Whereas four bishops were elected on the very first ballot in 1852, it took nine ballots to elect twelve new bishops in 1920. But a real endurance contest came in 1912, when twenty-six ballots were required to elect ten bishops.

Although the southern church was somewhat smaller, some of the same complications frustrated weary delegates. Twelve ballots were required to elect three bishops in 1906. The arrival of the twentieth century had little to do with the history of episcopacy.

During the twenty-nine years of The Methodist Church, 1939-1968, 107 persons were elected to episcopal office. That is almost as many as in the 95-year history of the Methodist Episcopal Church after 1844, and seven and a half times as many as in the sixty years from 1784 to 1844. The big change was election by Jurisdictional rather than General Conferences. This constitutional change was part of the long and complex negotiation for reunion of the three branches of the church. It visibly, formally, and effectively embodied the long-standing regionalism which was part of
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Methodist history for over a hundred years, in fact almost since the beginning. The Jurisdictional plan did nothing to simplify election of bishops. It tended to get more complicated as Annual Conference loyalties replaced the larger regional ones. Some of these Jurisdictional Conferences were considerably larger and more cumbersome than entire General Conferences of an earlier day. The North Central Jurisdiction ran up unique records for long-drawn-out elections. Twenty-two ballots were needed in 1948 and twenty-three in 1964.

This all adds up to a total of 293 bishops, counting the two chosen by the Methodist Protestants in 1939.

Elections

One way of approaching the quadrennial experiment in electing bishops is to place the nominees in categories. The first includes those whose qualifications were so superior (or whose political support was so well honed?) that they were elected on the first ballot. This was the case with William McKendree in 1808 and all four candidates in the Methodist Episcopal Church in 1852, and two of the four in Methodist Episcopal South in 1866 (Wightman and Marvin; Doggett and McTyeire came in on the third). In the North Central Jurisdiction in 1964 Dwight Loder was elected on the second ballot, but it required twenty-three ballots to bring in Francis Kearns and Lance Webb!

Hence the obvious second category were those who were elected after the first or second ballots. A few nominees, failing on the first, concluded that the Holy Spirit really had not called them to this high office. Others of course declined to run at all. Some of the most effective bishops were elected only after exhausting voting: Francis McConnell gained the magical number only on the twenty-first ballot.

Then there were those who became bishop only after serving for a quadrennium as heir apparent. More cynical observers called them pretenders to the throne or crown prince. They tended in one conference to fail of election so closely, or perhaps denied themselves in a deadlock situation, that they were almost assured of election the next time around.

There was a small number who were elected but resigned or declined to be consecrated. So with Joshua Soule in 1820 (he accepted four years later when the conditions of his authority were more to his liking). Franklin N. Parker declined consecration in the southern church in 1918 on the ground that he did not feel qualified. E. Stanley Jones was surprised to be elected in 1928 in a sudden shift in balloting, but declined once he had figured out what had happened.

Then there were those who were almost not elected, like some already mentioned. Earl Cranston was a strong-running nominee through sixteen ballots in the General Conference of 1888. But it took sixteen more ballots in 1896 to get him through.
Finally there is a numerous and glorious company of "almost bishops," beginning with Jesse Lee, who tied with Richard Whatcoat in 1800 and lost by the shift of one vote.

Bishop Roy H. Short, who well employed his time as long-term secretary of the Council of Bishops, has given some thought to the factors that have entered into the electoral process. He begins with the caveat that each case has been different and few generalizations apply overall.² One continuing force was the influence of existing bishops. Certainly Asbury, and Matthew Simpson and Holland McTyeire later on, exerted considerable pressure.

An important factor was preeminence in preaching. McKendree was said to have moved from last to first place as a consequence of his sermon before General Conference in 1808. On the other hand a would-be bishop had to be careful lest he suffer the negative effect of seeming to be singled out for special privilege in preaching at election time. This could scarcely have affected the overwhelming power of such preachers as William Fraser McDowell and Warren A. Candler. However varied their other gifts, they and others like them became bishops primarily because they were great preachers.

A frequent factor was visibility in debate on the floor of Conference and leadership in the work of committees. Superlative floor leaders like James M. Buckley and J. W. McFerrin, however, were never elected because of other factors. But Paul B. Kern and G. Bromley Oxnam were chosen in large part owing to their presence and leadership in Conference.

Some men rode to episcopal office on the vehicle of some movement or crusade, as with Frederick T. Keeney on the Million Unit Fellowship in 1920 and Robert Cushman on stewardship in 1932.

As the connectional boards and commissions grew in the later nineteenth century, some nominees were drawn from positions of executive secretary or corresponding secretary, which gave them national prominence. This was especially true prior to 1939, when regional influences became more important. In similar fashion editors of church papers and presidents of church-related colleges and universities were often picked. Short reports that fifteen bishops in the Methodist Episcopal Church and seven in the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, had been editors; and twenty in the north and sixteen in the south had been educational leaders. In 1910 six of the seven new bishops in the southern church had been college presidents.³

To have been a presiding elder was a good qualification, but not so much after he became a "district superintendent." Joshua Soule was the only man to move directly from the local pastorate to bishop before 1844.

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²Roy H. Short, Chosen to Be Consecrated (Lake Junaluska, N. C.: Commission on Archives and History, 1976), Chs. 1 and 2.
³Short, 17-18.
Later on many pastors were chosen. Occasionally an influential lay person exerted pressure on behalf of a favored nominee. In one unique case a lay delegate was elected bishop. But then William Taylor was unique in many ways. In 1884 he was one of the lay delegates, but was also an ordained local preacher. At the age of sixty-three he was elected bishop—missionary bishop, please note, to be assigned to foreign parts. This is a measure of the controversy which surrounded this eminent evangelist.

In recent years the politicizing of many aspects of church life has had its effect on electing bishops. Caucuses devoted to particular issues have become a determining factor in some cases.

In this era of women's history one should not neglect the occasionally important influence of women. Sometimes bishops' wives played a significant role in the careers, if not the election, of their husbands. One thinks of Mrs. H. W. Warren in supporting Iliff and Mrs. McTyeire in building Vanderbilt. Others were active in their own right, especially in the field of missions. Mrs. Simpson stood forth strongly as a lay leader and supported lay representation. Some became victims of their husband's episcopal ventures, as with Mrs. J. O. Andrew and her slaves. To mention the personal relationships of Charles Fowler (elected 1884) with Frances Willard would go beyond the purview of this paper.

Detailed study of quadrennial balloting, together with biographical and Annual Conference facets, is necessary for full understanding of how bishops have been elected. In this paper only a few selected items will be illustrative.

In the Methodist Episcopal General Conference of 1896 two bishops were chosen, Charles C. McCabe and Earl Cranston. The first began in second place (after J. W. E. Bowen, Sr., of whom more later), ran first on the next three ballots, went down until the fourteenth, then rose like a meteor. Cranston, who began third (after losing out in an earlier election), ran high until election on the sixteenth and last ballot. The decline of Hamilton and Buttz made the difference.

In 1908 the field was full of candidates. After the early election of John L. Nuelsen and William F. Anderson, the wide distribution of their supporters resulted in a see-saw up and down. On the tenth ballot William A. Quayle was elected. Then five more won as the remaining nominees all slid downhill, including a number of well-known almost bishops. Frank M. Bristol, who began near the bottom, benefited at long last with a steady rise from the eleventh ballot to election on the eighteenth.

A marathon was the race in 1912. Although Homer C. Stuntz, who was one of the strong runners the previous quadrennium, was elected on

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the first ballot (a classic "heir apparent"), twenty-six ballots were required for election of the remaining nine. Perhaps the only real surprise was Frederick D. Leete, who began low; but even he rose on a series of moderate gains to election on the twenty-third ballot. A chart shows the close relation between the rise of certain names as a result of shifts from support of declining ones. In specific cases one notes a shift en masse from one candidate to another. Matthew Simpson Hughes and Ellsworth Hamilton became two more heirs apparent to be elected in 1916.

The 1920 General Conference was a landmark in that two Negroes, Robert E. Jones and Matthew W. Clair, Sr., were elected as full general superintendents (unlike bishop-to-Liberia Francis Burns in 1858). But they were elected on a separate ballot, as provided by the report of the Committee on Episcopacy. It was understood they would serve Negro Annual Conferences. This General Conference also decided that missionary bishops should henceforth be listed along with regular full bishops. Jones, from North Carolina, was editor of the *Southwestern Christian Advocate.* Clair, from West Virginia, was pastor of Asbury Church, Washington, D. C. In 1936 a third black bishop was Alexander P. Shaw.

In 1924 all of the five successful nominees rose rapidly to election—except Wallace E. Brown, who began low, almost disappeared until the tenth ballot, then followed the other four to sudden victory on the fourteenth. The withdrawal of Ralph Ward on the thirteenth and the precipitous decline of Raymond J. Wade provided Brown with the necessary votes. In fact, many elections, especially toward the end of long competition, resulted directly from withdrawal of one or more key contenders. These changes may or may not have developed from "deals." Wade of course was compensated for his failure by election on the second ballot next time.

But the spectacular event of 1928 was the sudden emergence from nowhere of E. Stanley Jones, world-famous evangelist, who between the nineteenth and twentieth ballots appeared and was elected. More on him later. It was getting so you had to work long hours to become a bishop. In 1932 it took nineteen ballots to elect two bishops—J. Ralph Magee and Ralph S. Cushman.

The process was very similar in the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, although fewer delegates and fewer positions were involved. Perhaps a half-dozen significant nominees would contend, and decision was made in three or four ballots. Seven bishops were elected in five votes in 1918. All of them rose in regular fashion, John M. Moore and William F. McMurray being chosen on the first ballot, U. V. W. Darlington on the second, Franklin N. Parker on the third, Horace M. DuBose and William N. Ainsworth on the fourth, and James Cannon, Jr., on the last. In fact, only six bishops were needed; but Parker declined to accept. That threw the General Conference into a constitutional hassle, because the chairman, Bishop Kilgo, ruled that five would do. But the Conference insisted on
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proceeding to elect Cannon, already something of a controversial figure on the southern scene.

In 1930, when several strong contenders either withdrew or declined rapidly, Angie Frank Smith rose from the nadir on the sixth ballot to election on the ninth, thus joining two other influential new bishops elected on the third, Arthur J. Moore and Paul B. Kern.

The story of episcopal elections suddenly becomes more complex with the Jurisdictional system instituted in The Methodist Church in 1939. Now regionalism, which had always been present and sometimes decisive, became manifest in the very structure of the church as that curious and necessary compromise which made possible at that time the union of Methodist Episcopal, Methodist Episcopal South, and Methodist Protestant groups. Powerful forces and personalities were at work in the South Central Jurisdiction throughout. These were complicated by the fact that a "yankee" faction existed in what was predominantly a southern Jurisdiction. In 1944 W. Angie Smith and Paul Martin were elected over a strong field which included Paul Quillian, J. N. R. Score, and Charles Schofield. All of these became disappointed almost bishops. Schofield thought his place as a yankee in this Jurisdiction had a lot to do with the outcome.

In 1948 Gerald Kennedy, after suffering defeat in the South Central Jurisdiction, went on a little later to election by the Western Jurisdiction. Eugene Slater, who withdrew in favor of Eugene Frank in 1956, was almost guaranteed election the next time around. W. McFerrin Stowe ran strongly that year until election of Paul Galloway, who happened to be from the same Annual Conference. That meant Stowe would wait four years.

Similar competition was characteristic in the Southeastern Jurisdiction, and also in the North Central. Two bishops were elected in the Southeast in 1944, Costen J. Harrell on the sixth ballot, and, after the decline or withdrawal of several contenders, Paul N. Garber on the fourteenth.

Delegates in the North Central Jurisdiction were frustrated in 1952 when after ten ballots no one had yet been elected. Then D. Stanley Coors forged ahead to election. Finally Edwin E. Voigt and Francis G. Ensley, both of whom had begun way down the list, were chosen as others deadlocked. In 1964 there was a confusing crazy-quilt of voting (after Dwight Loder was elected on the second ballot). Thomas Pryor came from below to win on the eleventh. Carl Bracy was on the verge of victory at that time, but fell precipitously. The same thing happened to Eugene Smith and Byron Stroh, leaving the field to Francis E. Kearns and Lance Webb, both elected by exhausted voters on the twenty-third ballot. In this Jurisdictional Conference fortuitous circumstances, such as temporary health problems of Stroh, were determining factors. As Roy Short said, each situation is different.
Again it must be said that exhaustive research in each electoral episode and in the individual situations of the nominees is necessary for definitive treatment of a very complex operation.

The Almost Bishops

An even more neglected part of Methodist history is the story of those able ministers, beginning with Jesse Lee, who were nominated in episcopal elections but failed to reach the magic number. Lee is the archetype. In 1800 he tied with Richard Whatcoat, who had already three years before been “appointed” superintendent by John Wesley. Now the members of General Conference were ready to give consideration to his “nomination.” A report circulated that Asbury did not favor Lee. This was quite likely true, for Lee would not fit into Asbury’s idea of an “assistant bishop.” That Lee nevertheless received the votes of half of the preachers is a measure of his stature. A shift of one vote on the next ballot gave victory to Whatcoat, who, quiet and non-aggressive, was a little embarrassed by the whole thing.6

Jesse Lee had entered the itinerant ministry in 1783, after making an impressive pacifist witness during the Revolution. He was assigned to open the work in New England, still the stronghold of Calvinism and the widely established Congregational Church. This kind of challenge was exactly what Lee wanted. He invaded the field and became the first Methodist to preach on Boston Common. He stalwartly stood by Asbury in the troubles over James O’Kelly, but he opposed him on election of presiding elders. After 1800 he was able to survive defeat and carry through a vigorous ministry. On the afternoon after the consecration of Whatcoat he preached in the Market house to a large congregation. He became an honored elder statesman in the church, and for three years was close to Asbury as his traveling companion.

In 1836 Wilbur Fisk, first president of Wesleyan University in Middletown, Connecticut, was one of three bishops elected. But he was in Europe at the time, and when he returned he declined the office. As he wrote to Nathan Bangs, “There are circumstances, as in the present case, which would justify me, I think, in declining, at least for the present, a consecration to the office of bishop in the Methodist Episcopal Church.”6 Among those circumstances were his precarious health, and especially his continuing sense of responsibility to give educational and theological leadership in the culture of New England. He was an effective Arminian spokesman against New England Calvinism. Thus Fisk became one of a small but significant subcategory of almost bishops: the chosen but unwilling.


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Eight bishops were chosen in 1872. Left out even with eight prizes were John M. Reid and Thomas M. Eddy—in addition to Erastus O. Haven, who went on to be elected the next time. But Reid and Eddy, both of whom attracted a little over half the votes needed, permanently joined the ranks of almost bishops. Both went on to fine careers as secretaries of the Missionary Society.

Toward the end of the nineteenth century elections became more complicated, both in the number of candidates and in the number of ballots. In 1884, 1888, and 1896 several unsuccessful candidates were briefly on stage, and then gave up. Henry Anson Buttz spent most of his career as professor of Greek New Testament and president of Drew, and was a delegate to eight General Conferences. Albert Sanford Hunt had a degree from Wesleyan University and taught there until his health weakened. Another was conservative James M. King, who later became corresponding secretary of the Church Extension Society and helped organize the Board of Home Missions. In 1888, however, a most persistent almost bishop, Charles H. Payne, ran very strongly. On the sixth ballot (out of sixteen) he was third from the top. This widely known educator was in his thirteenth year as president of Ohio Wesleyan University. One of his students reported, "He wanted to be a bishop." Later he became secretary of the Methodist Episcopal Board of Education.

Elections reached an exciting peak at the end of the century; 1896 was the General Conference in which Charles C. McCabe and Earl Cranston were elected. A glance at the chart of voting displays the crazy-quilt pattern of alternating winners and losers. At the outset in first place was John W. E. Bowen, father of the Bowen elected in 1948. As a black minister born in Louisiana in 1855, he was unique for that day in aspiring to episcopal office. He was a professor at Gammon Theological Seminary for forty years, including four as president. No Negro in fact was elected bishop until 1920 (except one for Liberia in 1856). There he was that day in the first place on the first ballot. Close behind was McCabe, and then Cranston. Way down was the perennial candidate, Buttz, who this time made a spectacular rise to first place on three successive ballots before he precipitously—and permanently—declined. And J. W. E. Bowen remained among the almost bishops.

The General Conference of 1904 set the stage for a dramatic episode which involved James R. Day, Chancellor of Syracuse University. He had been ordained by the New York Annual Conference in 1872, and had begun his service at Syracuse in 1893. Everyone expected him to be elected bishop in 1904. But when, after several inconclusive ballots which brought him low in the fifth, news broke in the Los Angeles Examiner that he was under attack for financial mal-administration at Syracuse, he took the floor in his defense and remained a candidate. He was elected on the

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1Henry Clyde Hubbart, *Ohio Wesleyan's First Hundred Years* (Delaware, Ohio, 1943), 73.
fourteenth and last ballot. Thereupon, having been already escorted to the platform as bishop-elect, he decided to resign, and did so over the weekend. He thus joined the select company of Joshua Soule and Wilbur Fisk. Day remained at his post at Syracuse until 1921.

General Conference 1908 was the scene of another major battle. For the first time appeared another perennial almost bishop, David G. Downey, who also received significant votes in 1912, 1916, and 1920. This Methodist minister had been born in Ireland but came early to the United States and joined the New York East Conference. In 1912 he was named book editor of the Methodist Publishing House and was credited with devising the trade name Abingdon Press. Short and friendly, he must have looked something like the first bishop, Dr. Coke. In spite of successive rebuffs in the voting, he remained very active and influential, particularly in the tough union negotiations during and after World War I, and later opposed the idea of Jurisdictions.

The most noteworthy item for 1928 was the last-minute appearance on the ballot and election on the twentieth of E. Stanley Jones, the reluctant candidate. This world-renowned preacher and evangelist already had behind him a long missionary career in India. In 1924 he had published his best seller, *The Christ of the Indian Road*. Now once again he was pushed forward, and in that final vote was chosen, as Ralph Cushman, Lewis O. Hartman, and J. M. M. Gray withdrew. No doubt bewildered by this sudden bolt of lightening, Jones was led, according to tradition, to the front, where he was greeted as bishop-elect, and pronounced the benediction. Soon, however, he recovered his wits—or his global commitment—and declined to be consecrated. Cushman went on to election next time and Hartman in 1944. That leaves J. M. M. Gray as a persistent unsuccessful nominee and almost bishop. He had a fine ministry in Baltimore and other cities before he became chancellor of American University. He was a delegate to General Conferences from 1920 through 1939.

The story of Oscar Thomas Olson is one of repeated frustrated episcopal aspirations. In many ways he was born to be a bishop. His education and intellectual background, his service as pastor, and his wider service to the church all qualified him. He was well known through his active participation in General Conferences and his roles in preparation of the Joint Hymnal of 1935-36 and as chairman of the Commission on Rituals and Worship. Several times in the thirties and forties he was a strong candidate, but he never secured the right combination. He looked like a bishop. He was occasionally *de facto* bishop presiding at Annual Conference. That was as far as it went. Political factors and such considerations as balance of Annual Conferences worked against him.

In the crucially important southern General Conference of 1866 there were three prominent almost bishops. John B. McFerrin was born in Tennessee and had come along the classic path to ministry. In 1840 he
entered on his life-long career as editorial "physician" and publisher for the southern church, including eighteen years as editor of the Nashville Christian Advocate and General Book Agent. Why was he never elected? Probably because his work in reconstructing the southern publishing house was so crucially important that he could not be spared. He almost single-handedly saved it from complete collapse—more than once. It was nevertheless said that, had his health been stronger, he would have been elected in 1866. He was glad not to be chosen.8

Just one vote behind McFerrin (and ahead of Doggett and McTyeire) on the first ballot was E. W. Sehon, from Kentucky but a member of the Ohio Conference who transferred to Tennessee after separation. His chief service was as Missionary Secretary from 1850 to 1868. He never approached the standing of McFerrin. He dropped out on the second ballot. Among notable unsuccessful runners in the next decades were James A. Duncan, N. H. D. Wilson, Robert N. Sledd, and O. P. Fitzgerald.

In the twentieth century a new crop came along. Franklin N. Parker joined the Louisville Conference in 1886. In 1911 he began a professional career at Trinity College (Duke University) in biblical literature and systematic theology. He served as dean from 1919 to 1938, and taught until 1952. He was a delegate to seven General Conferences. Now, in 1918, he was the fourth bishop elected, on the third ballot. Facing this prospect, he declined to be consecrated "solely on the ground that he deemed himself not qualified to serve in the office to which he had been elected."9 In spite of this, however, he made a strong showing early in the next Conference. He therefore becomes one of the shining stars among the almost bishops of Methodism.

The General Conference of 1922 contributed no less than four almost bishops. Probably the most notable was Thomas David Ellis. He came from Georgia, and was a figure in southern General Conferences from 1910 through 1940. He was Church Extension Secretary from 1922 to 1942, but he probably became best known for his participation in the reunion of 1939. He was impressive, tall and active, a strong debater. He said of himself, "I have never knowingly dodged an issue."10 Another nominee was John Stewart French, usually known by his second name. He was born in Tennessee, was a member of the Holston Conference, and served churches in Georgia and Tennessee. He then became president of Emory and Henry College, and went on to more pastorates. In 1922 he came on late in the balloting, ran strongly on the last three, but appeared too late to stop the rush to Hiram A. Boaz.

The General Conference of 1930 witnessed a wildly gyrating episcopal election. In choosing three bishops the Conference also raised to near-

8O. P. Fitzgerald, John B. McFerrin, a Biography (Nashville, 1893), 290.
9"Parker" in Encyclopedia of World Methodism.
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episcopacy two men who had already won wide recognition throughout the southern church. One of them was Thomas D. Ellis, who had already been a candidate in 1922. He ran with strong support all the way through the nine ballots, and was top contender in four of them. Meteoric rise and fall describes the experience of Forney Hutchinson, evangelistic preacher at St. Luke’s, Oklahoma City. His support rose sharply to surpass Ellis on the sixth ballot. Thereupon he suddenly withdrew and left the race. The result is clearly marked in the vote for A. Frank Smith, a meteoric fall and rise. Hutchinson came from Arkansas via Hendrix College and the Little Rock Conference. But his most outstanding pastorates were in Oklahoma. After his exciting run in 1930 he went on to become minister of Boston Avenue Church in Tulsa.

There were many almost bishops produced by the several Jurisdictional Conferences of The Methodist Church. Only a sampling can be given. In the Southeastern Jurisdiction fourteen ballots were necessary for election of two bishops in 1944. One of the also rans, W. Aiken Smart, had already had the experience in 1938. Now once again he led off in first place and remained there until the fourth ballot. Not until the ninth was he overtaken by another aspirant, Robert Z. Tyler. Support for both of them declined as the Garber “bandwagon” built up pressure. Smart was born in South Carolina in 1883, and became a member of the Virginia Conference. As World War I approached he began a teaching career as professor of theology at Emory, which lasted till 1954. In both 1944 and 1948 he received support from over fifty percent of the delegates, but not the sixty percent needed for election. Tyler was also known outside the Jurisdiction. He came from Georgia, and served several churches in Florida. After his failure in 1944 he became executive secretary of the Joint Division of Education and Cultivation of the Board of Missions. These two men became almost bishops as a result of a classic stand-off or deadlock in balloting.

We have already noted the unsuccessful nominees in the South Central Jurisdiction in 1944—Schofield, Score, and Quillian. The latter was especially disappointed because he had good reason to believe he would be elected.

In 1948 Ralph Sockman withdrew in the Northeastern Jurisdiction after a high vote on the first ballot. He indicated that he did not really want to be bishop. His long-term position as minister of Christ Church, New York City, from 1916 to 1961 and his fame in the National Radio Pulpit for thirty-six years would have assured him of election. In the North Central Jurisdiction in that quadrennium Oscar Olson and Harold F. Carr of Lakewood Church, both “favorite son” candidates in the North East Ohio Conference, canceled one another out because they came from the same Annual Conference.

In the same Jurisdiction in 1960 the men who were elected were all surpassed at first by Harold Bosley, Russell Humbert, and J. Otis Young,
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all of whom ended up almost bishops. The first two of these announced their withdrawal after the first ballot. Bosley was reported as stating that if one was not elected on the first ballot, that was evidence that the Holy Spirit was not calling him to episcopal office.

Changing Character of Episcopacy

The fact that so many leaders of such superior qualities were not elected to the episcopal office is in itself a clear indication that the process has been far from perfect. Probably no system for choosing bishops would be free from flaws. Minor tinkering with either the elective process or the status of bishops may oil the machinery, but it will have little effect on the problems inherent in a very large structure divided into regional "jurisdictions" subject to the pressures of modern American society. Nor will any attempt at redefinition of the office on biblical or theological grounds do much to solve the problems, though such attempts may help to clear our thoughts.

The dominant theme over the last two hundred years, according to which the episcopal office developed in the context of authoritarian-democratic tensions, applies properly to an assessment of episcopal history. But it does not suffice for understanding the role of bishops in United Methodism in the later twentieth century. The problems run deeper than authority versus democracy. Many issues have entered the story from time to time. There was the original conflict over Wesley's appointment of Whatcoat in 1787. There was Asbury's idea of an "assistant bishop," which was laid to rest by 1800 but still survives in bishops for Central Conferences. The Restrictive Rule on episcopacy has served well to prevent extreme positions.

The great debates of the 1820s dealt with fundamental issues still much alive. The lines run clear from Asbury through McKendree, Soule, and McTyeire down to Warren Candler, Arthur J. Moore, and the Smith bishops of Texas. They run equally clear from Cooper and Snethen through Emory, Hedding, and Hamline down to the McDowells, McConnells, and Altons of the north. Recent trends have tended to give the edge to the democratic anti-authoritarian side, if only because all authority in the present generation has been under suspicion and subject to challenge.

Are strong bishops no longer needed? Is a parliamentary process sufficient to guarantee "pulpit supply" and the maintenance of the connectional system? Will episcopal authority be able to stand against the powerful influences of caucuses in the Conferences and administrative bureaucracy throughout the church? What bishop today, confronted with the problems of stationing ministers whose spouses are pursuing independent careers of their own—let alone the problems of making arrangements for clergy couples, is able to follow in the footsteps of Francis Asbury, who wanted all of his preachers single in order that they might go where sent?
Methodist History

Should local pastors resent encroachment by their bishops and bishops’ lieutenants on the autonomy of the local church? What autonomy? Or should they yearn for the powerful support of episcopal authority standing behind them in difficult situations proclaiming unpopular messages? McKendree and McTyeire, where are you?

American Methodism may well live to rue the day it allowed episcopal leadership to dissolve before the complications occasioned largely by trends in modern society at large. Probably nothing short of basic realignments such as abolition of the Jurisdictional system, so that bishops will not “settle down on their own plantations,” as Asbury feared, will suffice. It is not enough that bishops be general superintendents only in their College of Bishops.

There are storms ahead for humanity, and that means for the United States, and that means for The United Methodist Church. The long tradition of the Methodist Episcopal Church offers lessons in leadership that dare not be abandoned in the face of these storms. Bishops have never been universally popular, not even Asbury, who was sainted only by the passage of generations. But they sure have come in handy in times of trouble. From McKendree and Roberts on the frontier through Simpson and Haygood in middle America to McConnell and Oxnam in a powerful industrial nation they have served, and mostly served well. Better, anyway, than committees.

“Moravians and Methodists:
From Zinzendorf and Wesley to American Denominations”

A conference in celebration of American Methodism’s Bicentennial will be held October 26-27, 1984, at Moravian Theological Seminary, Bethlehem, Pennsylvania. Papers dealing with any aspect of the relationship between these two traditions are invited. Proposals for papers and requests for registration information should be addressed to:

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