THE REVIVAL OF STEWARDSHIP
AND THE CREATION OF THE WORLD SERVICE COMMISSION
IN THE METHODIST EPISCOPAL CHURCH, 1912-1924

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Bishop Edwin Holt Hughes, who served as first president of the World Service Commission of the Methodist Episcopal Church, resided in the Chicago episcopal area when the Chicago Temple was dedicated. Years later, he remembered the day of the dedication and recalled, as he had entered the building, "a querulous voice, issuing from a man who gazed at the tallest church steeple in the world and said, "'Where [in a certain location] do these [adjectival] Methodists get all their money?'"1

That, in a more analytical form, is the question of this essay, and the answer lies in the creation of Bishop Hughes' own World Service Commission during the early twentieth century.

The World Service Commission of the Methodist Episcopal Church constituted that church's budgetary authority and treasury from 1924 to 1939. It was also the direct ancestor of the General Council on Finance and Administration of The United Methodist Church, and so its establishment in 1924 marked a major beginning of central financial administration in American Methodism.

Like the present-day General Council on Finance and Administration, the World Service Commission formulated a budget for General Conference-level agencies in order to unify their fund-raising appeals to local churches. It calculated the apportionment of this budget among the annual conferences, treasured the funds raised on apportionment, and distributed them according to a budgetary formula to the church's national agencies.

The beginning of such unexceptional activities merits the attention of historians for several reasons. How a major Protestant denomination reorganized itself to deal with the unprecedented wealth of twentieth-century America involved nothing less than a redefinition of the church in its relation to society. The incapacity of a nineteenth-century denominational apparatus to manage millions of dollars consistently with its spiritual purpose raised questions no less serious than those presented by the motives and the means which church members had used to acquire this wealth.

1Edwin Holt Hughes, I Was Made a Minister (New York and Nashville, 1943), p. 123. The brackets are the bishop's.
Furthermore, the creation of the World Service Commission attempted, by giving the church central control over its vastly increased financial resources, to make its national agencies accountable for their actions. Because of this attempt to use money to achieve central control over decentralized decision-making, what happened to the Methodist Episcopal Church in the early twentieth century paralleled much of what was happening to American society at large. Scholars have used the concept of "organizational revolution" to describe the transformation of the United States from a nation of farmers, small towns, and general stores to the industrialized, urbanized national marketplace familiar today.²

The World Service Commission constitutes a chapter in the larger story of this organizational revolution, but it also raises questions about the way the story has often been told. Employing the metaphor invented by Max Weber and others of transformation from "community" to "society," scholars have seen the centralization of finance and the rise of bureaucracy and professions as typical of the modern world. They have also discovered, concurrent with these phenomena, a shift to more "secular" and rational values.

The creation of the World Service Commission suggests instead a story of the persistence of traditional religious values. Management of debt on an unprecedented scale certainly precipitated organizational change in the Methodist Episcopal Church, but the Methodists who changed their organization and redefined the relation of their church to their society drew on a long heritage of approaching church structure as social strategy and of treating the church instrumentally as a means to an


²A good example is John Wesley's use (and subsequent American Methodist use) of the local church trust deed as a legal strategy to enforce the connectional authority of appointing ministers. The intention here was to prevent wealthy local church trustees from controlling
end. This heritage went back at least to John Wesley and belied any recent origin for the values implied by twentieth-century organizational rigor.

This essay attempts to explain why the Methodist Episcopal Church created the World Service Commission. The explanation comes in two parts: (1) the political sources of the World Service Commission and (2) the theology and the piety of the people most actively involved in its creation.

I

Pressure for central financial administration in the Methodist Episcopal Church mounted in the late nineteenth century as General Conferences from 1884 to 1908 tried, on the whole unsuccessfully, to consolidate their national boards. These boards, to which each quadrennium a General Conference would delegate the work of publishing, ministerial pensions, missions in the United States and abroad, and education, constituted the denomination’s church-wide organization. Each board conducted its work independently of the others, and this included financial campaigns directed to local congregations across the country.

As the work of the national boards expanded, their constant and conflicting appeals for money became increasingly unacceptable, especially since they failed to raise enough to realize growing expectations for the church’s role in the world. This failure particularly distressed supporters of missionary expansion who were rapidly emerging as a vocal and nationally organized constituency. They pointed to Methodist students who yearned to cross the sea and spread the gospel but whose hopes were severely constrained by lack of funds. Created by the Student Volunteer Movement, the Laymen’s Missionary Movement sought to mobilize lay support for missions.

The Laymen’s Missionary Movement was largely responsible for the General Conference action in 1912 that established the Commission on Finance of the Methodist Episcopal Church. The Commission on Finance constituted the church’s first attempt at central financial administration. For reasons associated with its origins in the missionary movement, the

what the minister preached and so to preserve the distinction between church and society. This strategy deserves further historical study.


Commission remained during the eight years of its existence only an attempt. It was instructed to unify the budgets of the national boards, with authority to revise those budgets, and to apportion budget askings among the annual conferences. The membership of the Commission included, however, the secretaries of the very boards whose budgets it was supposed to coordinate. Inevitably, the board chiefs, especially S. Earl Taylor of the Board of Foreign Missions, and, after 1916, David D. Forsyth of the Board of Home Missions and Church Extension, dominated the episcopal, ministerial, and lay representatives whose primary church responsibilities lay elsewhere.

The Commission on Finance never became more than an officially sanctioned version of the informal consultations among board secretaries that had preceded it, and so the national organization of the church remained bound to its nineteenth-century roots. During the Commission’s first quadrennium, 1912-1916, accounts separate from its own treasury in Chicago were maintained in New York and Philadelphia, the respective headquarters cities of the foreign missions and home missions boards. General Conference provision for the Commission’s administrative budget to be financed by the boards further guaranteed their control of its affairs.

In spite of this dependence on the national boards, which prevented it from becoming an effective budgetary authority and treasury for the church, the Commission on Finance demonstrated the promise that central financial administration held out. Under John Lowe Fort of New York, its field department made a determined effort to reform local church financial organization by meeting frequently from 1916 to 1920 with district superintendents across the country and helping them to spread the “every-member canvass” and a revised form of Methodist classes, the “unit system,” that emphasized fund-raising in small groups. The department of apportionments and surveys, headed by C. M. Barton, gathered local church statistics never before available to the national boards, and it used this new information to attempt a more equitable apportionment of support for board budgets. The department also found that price inflation during World War I had eaten into the salaries of Methodist ministers. The Commission then began a campaign through the district superintendents to increase local church support for pastors.

In the midst of the Commission’s second quadrennium occurred the organization of the great Centenary fund-raising campaign that dwarfed the Commission’s work and, eventually, subsumed it. With General

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Conference authorization, an ad hoc committee of one hundred church leaders met at Niagara Falls in September 1917 to plan a celebration for the one hundredth anniversary of the Missionary Society of the Methodist Episcopal Church. Two successors of the Missionary Society, the Board of Foreign Missions and the Board of Home Missions, provided much of the leadership and staff support for this conference. The Niagara Conference concluded that the most appropriate celebration would consist in a fund-raising campaign to bring millions of dollars under the control of the national boards. By early 1918 a new organization, the Joint Centenary Commission ("Joint" because of participation by the Methodist Episcopal Church, South), was in place with an impressive list of names on its letterhead.10

Actually, the official organization of the Centenary campaign in the Northern church reflected a complicated series of formal and informal arrangements negotiated principally by S. Earl Taylor and David D. Forsyth with the Commission on Finance and the national boards.11 No one seemed worried that by the time these arrangements were complete the Centenary organization had completely usurped the budgetary authority of the Commission on Finance. During 1918 and 1919 individuals, offices, and organizations worked enthusiastically for the campaign on promises that some of the funds raised would go to their particular church concerns.

An incident at Garrett Biblical Institute in Evanston, Illinois, illustrated the tendency of the entire denomination to get caught up in the prospect of millions of dollars flowing into church coffers. During the summer of 1919, as a new financial organization, the Centenary Conservation Committee, was formed to collect on pledges made in the original campaign, President Charles M. Stuart of Garrett met with Taylor and Frank Mason North from Foreign Missions and Forsyth from Home Missions to discuss funding of a program of religious education for missionary workers. This program would have involved Northwestern University as well, and the secretaries also talked with Dean James Alton James of the university’s graduate school. Stuart understood, however, that Garrett was to receive funding for faculty positions independent of the Northwestern program, and he hoped that this would release other sources of income at Garrett to finance building projects.

Stuart thought that Garrett would receive a proportion up to a certain specified amount of all money raised beyond the initial Centenary cam-

campaign goal of $105,000,000. The money would come through the mis-
sionary boards for the purpose of religious education. By the fall, however,
board receipts on Centenary pledges began a decline from which they
never recovered, the nation as a whole taking a business downturn in 1920.
But the lessening amount involved was not the only issue between Garrett
and the boards. Forsyth of Home Missions maintained that Garrett had
never been promised any money apart from the program at Northwestern;
Taylor of Foreign Missions assured Stuart that Garrett was perfectly cor-
rect in its claim on the boards, but he would not raise the matter with For-
syth. When Taylor began avoiding any personal contact with Stuart,
Garrett's Board of Trustees had no alternative but to request Forsyth to
present its case to the Board of Home Missions and Church Extension in
the rather futile hope that the full board would overrule its own secretary.12

The national career of S. Earl Taylor, which was bound up from the
beginning with the fortunes of the missionary movement and early
attempts at central financial administration, ended abruptly soon after
this. Taylor had risen from the Student Volunteer Movement in the first
years of the century to denominational prominence in the Board of
Foreign Missions as a paperwork saint whose negotiating skill and single-
minded devotion to the missionary cause were largely responsible, in con-
temporary opinion, for the initial success of the Centenary fund-raising
campaign. Men around him admired his ability to bring church leaders
together and considered him a self-effacing diplomat who, by means of dis-
cussion, got his point of view and his vision across to subordinates as well
as peers. He won not only the verbal assent but also the hearts and minds
of people who at first disagreed with him.13

The incident at Garrett Biblical Institute suggested, however, a dis-
play of characteristic but naive generosity—an innocence of the financial
dangers inherent in a pledge campaign and an ignorance of the mind of his
colleague, Forsyth. At this point, however, Taylor could hardly have been
expected to confront Forsyth over Garrett because it had become clear
that the missionary boards would have to institute a program of austerity.
Furthermore, in the meantime, the Board of Foreign Missions and a reluc-
tant Board of Home Missions and Church Extension had ventured into the
Interchurch World Movement, an interdenominational fund-raising pro-
ject, and come out after the failure of this effort with a considerable debt to
the banks that had financed administrative expenses. Taylor may well have
felt disgraced. At any rate, his long hours and years of work for the church

12Charles M. Stuart Collection, Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary Library, Box 6,
folder 6.
13"The Stewardship Alliance," Men and Money, 1, number 3 (May 1918): 108-109; Tyler
Dennett, "The Man Behind the Machine," ibid., 2, number 2 (June 1919): pp. 24-26; Wilson
(comp.), "Methodist Centenary Celebration"; "Report of the Board of Foreign Missions," JGC
made him a very sick man. In the spring of 1921, he retired to the desert of New Mexico to recover his health, but he would never again serve the Board of Foreign Missions.

The Methodist Episcopal Church had, nevertheless, to deal with the debt at the Board of Foreign Missions, a figure that eventually ran into the millions of dollars.\textsuperscript{14} The severity of the crisis did not fully appear at the General Conference of 1920, but the delegates certainly perceived the problem of collecting on Centenary pledges. They combined the Centenary Conservation Committee and the old Commission on Finance to form a new financial organization for 1920-1924, the Council of Boards of Benevolence, a very large group of church leaders charged with collecting on the Centenary and performing the duties of the old Commission.

The General Conference of 1920 also directed the new Council of Boards of Benevolence to formulate a reorganization plan for the 1924-1928 quadrennium and submit it to the 1924 General Conference. The Council of Boards proceeded to appoint a committee of twenty-one to accomplish this task. This committee worked for almost two years interviewing the personnel of the various boards and meeting in an atmosphere of increasing urgency as the debt at the Board of Foreign Missions mounted. The Committee of Twenty-One reported to the Council of Boards a plan to preserve the autonomy of most of the boards but subject to the budgetary authority of a commission made up of independent representatives of the church as well as board representatives. The Council of Boards made major changes in this plan but succeeded only in throwing the question back to the General Conference of 1924.\textsuperscript{15}

What had really happened became apparent when the General Conference of 1924 took up the question of reorganization. A controversy had emerged within and around the Board of Foreign Missions. When a majority of the General Conference’s Committee on Temporal Economy, chaired by William B. Farmer of Indiana, reported a reorganization plan similar to the Committee of Twenty-One’s proposal, an extended floor debate occurred. The principals in the debate consisted largely of members of the Board of Foreign Missions. David G. Downey, a board member from the New York East Annual Conference and secretary of the Committee of Twenty-One, seems to have served as floor manager for the ma-


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majority report. Frank A. Horne, another board member and a lay delegate from the same annual conference, delivered a major speech in favor of this report. George Fowles, Foreign Missions treasurer, drafted an alternative proposal to merge all the boards into one "straight commission," and a considerable number of the Committee on Temporal Economy supported this proposal for radical centralization as the minority report.

The General Conference of 1924 eventually adopted the majority report (with minor amendments) by a considerable margin.16 Coming after three days of debate, this action created the World Service Commission of the Methodist Episcopal Church whose direct descendant is the General Council on Finance and Administration of The United Methodist Church. The World Service Commission constituted a central treasury and truly independent budgetary authority for the autonomous, individually incorporated boards that developed and administered the denomination's programs. Except for bishops, no member of this commission was to have any connection with any other national board or agency.

Such a momentous development in the means by which a major Protestant denomination carried out its work calls for explanation. Tactically, supporters of the majority report had fended off an attempt to amend their proposal from supporters of an independent Board of Negro Education, co-opted the Epworth League (youth work) constituency, made the majority report look more attractive as a prospective means of reunification with the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, and, most significantly, pinned the blame for the debt at the Board of Foreign Missions on its treasurer, George Fowles, and the supporters of his minority report. Fowles' opponents within his board won on the floor of the General Conference.17

The delegates understood this fight, however, as a constitutional debate rather than a personal feud. Some sort of central control had to be imposed on the chaos of independent boards, but the total consolidation proposed in Fowles' minority report seemed to run against the grain of Methodist connectional polity. William Farmer, the Indiana pastor who chaired the Committee on Temporal Economy that submitted the majority report, interpreted the General Conference's desire for change in terms of three criteria: (1) efficiency, (2) accountability or "no dodging of responsibility," and (3) economy.18 Supporters of Fowles' minority report as well as supporters of the majority report claimed the business virtues of economy and efficiency for their respective proposals. Fowles stated that his plan had the approval of leading businessmen: "... for almost three

16Committee on Temporal Economy, Report No. 4, JGC (1924), pp. 561-571, constitutes the majority report. The minority report was tabled 465 to 292, DCA. May 24, 1924, p. 574. DCA does not record the ayes and nays on the majority report, but one infers that the margin was at least as great as the vote on tabling the minority report.
17DCA. May 23, 1924, pp. 542, 543, 546, 559-560; May 24, 1924, pp. 578-581, 582-583. Ibid., May 24, 1924, p. 574.
years I have been checking it up with outstanding business men throughout the United States, and it has been considered by them, with some few additions which have been made, as the best plan ever presented to an ecclesiastical organization." Against Fowles, Frank Horne maintained, "... The minority report violates modern business principles of management and administration. The committee or commission form of management has been tried by big business, and has been abandoned."

Both sides, throughout the debate, appealed to the "business principles" of using resources efficiently and spending money economically. The universality of this appeal leads one to question its power of historical explanation and to regard the appeal to business as a rhetorical convention designed to win the votes of those lay delegates who earned their living as business people. Farmer's second criterion, accountability, proved more critical. Although this, too, constituted a principle of some American business and many reform movements, the source of its value to Methodists lay in traditional ideas of church polity. Raymond J. Wade of Indiana, then running for bishop, insisted,

... the church is not analogous [sic] to big business. Practically every dollar that can be saved by the commission plan [the minority report] is saved by the board plan [the majority report]. [The minority report] is a centralization of power to the extreme. It is a dangerous experiment. It centers everything in the hands of a few.

The criticism of concentration of power and consequent absence of accountability proved to be the most telling argument against Fowles' minority report. The measure of its significance lay in Fowles' own acceptance of an amendment to make his "straight commission" more representative of the whole denomination rather than just the bishops. Furthermore, before Fowles accepted this amendment, one of his opponents on the Board of Foreign Missions and the apparent floor manager for the majority report, David G. Downey, tried to get the amendment tabled. In other words, Downey saw any attempt to decentralize power in the minority report as making that report more attractive to the General Conference while Fowles accepted the amendment for precisely this reason. Downey had concluded his major speech in favor of the majority report with these words: "If you are looking for Boards that will be responsive to your action and amenable to your authority, you will take hold of this idea that has been presented to us in the majority report."

The majority report proved to be defensible on traditional grounds of connectional polity as well as modern grounds of business principles, and,

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19Ibid., May 24, 1924, p. 572.
20Ibid., May 23, 1924, pp. 541-542.
21Ibid., May 23, 1924, p. 560.
22Ibid., May 23, 1924, pp. 560, 566-567. In American Methodist legal vocabulary "amenable" referred to the duty of one person or agency to conform to instructions from another person or agency.
as we will see more clearly in the final section of this essay, religious values provide the more likely explanation for the creation of the World Service Commission. The Methodist Episcopal Church determined that it could achieve central financial control by continuing to decentralize decision-making—that is, by making specific persons and agencies accountable to a central budgetary authority. It made this determination because independent boards subject to the budgetary authority of the World Service Commission constituted a structure that promised to preserve a cherished principle of church polity in a world dominated by industrial wealth. Forced into this world by missionary zeal and the indebtedness of their foreign missions board, the Methodists sought to deal with their constitutional crisis on their own terms.

The conclusion of this story of the political origins of the World Service Commission occurred immediately after the General Conference of 1924 with the first meetings of the new body. One of the most significant decisions taken at these meetings consisted in the election of a treasurer. This office did not, perhaps, appear so important at first, but, under Orrin W. Auman, the treasury became the center of staff responsibility and power, especially as the educational and promotional activities originally contemplated for the national board secretaries were phased out during subsequent General Conferences. The new treasurer of 1924 did not retire until 1944, five years after the denominational union of 1939 that created The Methodist Church.

Auman may strike us as a new figure on the national Methodist scene, and, of course, the members of the World Service Commission may have chosen him for this reason. A little exploration sheds another light, however. Elected episcopal area representative for Denver to the World Service Commission, Auman had served on the World Program Committee for the Centenary, the Council for Boards of Benevolence, and the latter's Committee of Twenty-One. His most conspicuous work had occurred as district superintendent for the Denver district of the Colorado Annual Conference. Before coming to this position, Auman pastored a large church in Denver.

Back in 1912 Auman had joined, as an original member, the Colorado Annual Conference Social Service Commission, a local ancestor of today's Methodist Federation for Social Action. His associations here have great relevance for understanding his election as treasurer of the World Service Commission twelve years later. The other members of the Social Service Commission in Colorado were Bishop Francis J. McConnell, resident bishop of the Denver episcopal area from 1912 to

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28 This combination of central financial control and decentralized decision-making resembled the development of multi-divisional corporate structure in some large American business during the 1920's and 1930's. See Chandler, *Strategy and Structure*. I have found, however, no evidence for influence in either direction.
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1916; Harris Franklin Rall, President of Iliff School of Theology from 1911 to 1916; and David D. Forsyth, district superintendent of the Denver district from 1909 to 1915.

Together, these men commended various social causes to the annual conference, most notably favoring collective bargaining during the Colorado Coal Strike of 1914. Of the original members, Forsyth moved on to the Board of Education and later, as we have seen, to the Board of Home Missions and Church Extension, and McConnell appointed Auman as district superintendent in his place. Auman and Forsyth served together again on the Committee of Twenty-One that originally proposed establishing a World Service Commission. Rall became a professor at Garrett Biblical Institute. McConnell himself continued to live a life of controversy in the Pittsburgh episcopal area, heading a nationally publicized investigation into the Steel Strike of 1919. In 1924 the Board of Bishops appointed him to the new World Service Commission, and here, one suspects, he played a role in the election of his former district superintendent, Orrin Auman, as treasurer.24

Auman's career reveals, therefore, another force in the church, in addition to the missionary boards and the Laymen's Missionary Movement, working for some kind of central financial administration. Except for the membership of Auman and Forsyth on the Committee of Twenty-One, it is not clear whether McConnell or his associates influenced the General Conference of 1924 in its decision to establish the World Service Commission. They did, however, have a great deal to do with the shape that body took over the rest of its corporate life to 1939.25 This knowledge will assist us as we try now to understand the theology and the piety of the Methodists who created the World Service Commission.

II

Although we have been looking at church politics on the national level and have, because of the nature of the readily available documents, dealt primarily with the activities of a few church leaders, the World Service Commission grew out of the lives of many thousands of Methodists across the country. For example, 60,000 laymen participated in the Centenary

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24Methodist Episcopal Church, Colorado Annual Conference, Minutes (1912), pp. 50-51; Minutes (1913), p. 207; Minutes (1914), pp. 327-328; Minutes (1915), p. 383; Minutes (1916), p. 11; Christian Advocate (New York), March 15, 1923, p. 337; JGC (1924), pp. 136, 1803-1804; World Service Commission, Annual Report (1924), pp. 77-96. The minutes of the first meetings of the World Service Commission in 1924, included in this last citation, suggest some delay in the election of a treasurer but give no hint as to the reasons.

25See G. Bromley Oxnam, "Ethical Standards for Investment of Church Funds," in [Orrin Auman (ed.),] Annuity Agreements: Their Promotion and Management (Chicago, 1926); and World Service Commission, Annual Report (1928), pp. 48-50, a set of organizational charts in the treasurer's report that points to Auman's role in conceptualizing the work of the World Service Commission.
campaign as "Methodist Minute Men" and accomplished the door-to-door and local church meeting work that actually raised money. In fact, the events of 1912 to 1924 constituted nothing less than a revival of Methodist understanding of and conviction about "stewardship."

Since the term "stewardship" has become part of the vocabulary of American Christianity generally, its meaning for early twentieth-century Methodists should be recalled. The "stewards" of a local congregation constituted the lay officers of the church and were charged with taking care of the temporal resources of their congregation. They raised funds, for example, to pay the pastor's salary.

This semantic background suggests an important point: that the theology and the piety emerging in the early twentieth century around the word "stewardship" constituted an essentially lay theology and piety. Although articulated principally by ministers, the notion of stewardship at its roots concerned the life of the laity in Methodism. So, we need to gain at least an impressionistic sense of what stewardship came to mean for Methodist laypeople in the years immediately preceding the creation of the World Service Commission.

The periodical literature of the Centenary campaign—*Missiles for Methodist Minute Men*, for example, with model five-minute speeches on the mission of the church and individual responsibility to donate money—gives a flavor of lay participation in fund-raising. Harvey Reeves Calkins' little magazine, *Men and Money*, allowed for thoughtful expression by laypeople as well as ministers. A serial novel, "The Centenary at Old First," by Calkins himself, appeared throughout the two-year life of this magazine and portrayed various laypeople in a local urban congregation—the pastor's best friend, a banker; the banker's wife whose quest for a spiritual high led her to abandon Methodism for the "Church of the Reality"; and a missionary, returned from India, with whom the pastor fell in love. The reader saw these characters from the perspective of their warm-hearted pastor who did youth work in a poor Italian neighborhood and was trying his best to raise money and persuade his ailing downtown congregation that they were stewards of the church, not owners of it.

Two plays by women authors appeared in *Men and Money*. "Thanksgiving Ann" by Kate W. Hamilton opened at the Columbus, Ohio, Centenary celebration in 1919. The plot concerned a prosperous young white couple whose fondness for worldly pleasures made them scoff at the idea of tithing their income to the church. They rejected the calculation and lack of spontaneity involved in tithing as unspiritual and legalistic. The direct but apolitical sarcasm of a poor black woman,

26See the periodical, *Missiles for Methodist Minute Men* (1919-1920).
"Thanksgiving Ann" (played by a white woman in blackface), made them see their hypocrisy. Ada Luella Woodruff’s “The Transformation of Mabel Morris” told a similar story of a rich young woman mainly worried about where her next fancy dress was coming from. The song of a little child about missionaries changed her heart, and she decided immediately to lay aside a tenth of her income for the church. The curtain fell as the characters began the Doxology.

Reading these plays today, one senses the ethos of a white middle class struggling to establish wealth as a virtue and projecting its own conscience onto two of the most exploited groups in early twentieth-century American society, blacks and children. It is interesting, too, that, on the eve of ratification of the Nineteenth Amendment granting women the right to vote, the Calkins novel as well as the two plays portrayed a materially wealthy but spiritually empty white female who eventually, through religious conversion, achieved maturity and self-understanding. On one occasion the editorial section of Men and Money addressed the role of women directly. “Can a Woman Tithe?” insisted that a wife ought to participate equally with her husband in the disposal of his income. “He may earn it; but he earns it because she keeps house; . . .” The spiritual struggle of Methodist women at this time, seen as the struggle of the Christian, received articulate expression in “The Steward’s Strength,” a poem by Mabel C. Falley and a theologically perceptive statement about prevenient grace.

All of this literary evidence suggests the conclusion that the wealth acquired by many Methodist businessmen during the early years of this century precipitated an inner crisis for these laymen and their families. They resolved the crisis with the piety of stewardship. Of the two alternatives generally proposed in the early twentieth century for America’s future, capitalism or socialism, Methodist advocates of stewardship tended to reject both. They refused to say that their newly acquired wealth constituted a sign of divine favor, and yet neither did it convict them of sinful profiteering. Rather, whatever one’s financial resources, God had given them in trust to be used for good, and the test of a Christian lay in the end achieved by the means of wealth.

No better demonstration of the resulting attempt to sanctify the social and economic life of the world may be found than in the early twentieth-century ritualization of the collection of money during Methodist worship. The Discipline of 1920 encouraged pastors to highlight the role of the offering plate in the Sunday morning service, and a column

28 Men and Money, 2, number 6 (October 1919): 23-27.
29 Ibid., 2, number 7 (December 1919): 22-28.
30 Ibid., 1, number 6 (October 1918): 7. This editorial was initialed and so represented something less than an official position of the magazine.
31 Ibid., 1, number 4 (June 1918): 168.
in one of the first issues of *Men and Money* compared the offering to the
elevation of the host during Mass, calling for a sacramental silence
throughout the congregation as the minister spoke the offertory prayer.^{32}

The religious sources of the revival of stewardship were also reflected
in the development of Methodist doctrinal understanding. Sometimes, the
wind of doctrine blows out in the distance before it ever disturbs the realms
of theological glory. Just so, the vitality of the concept of stewardship for
early twentieth-century Methodist understanding of Christian doctrine
may be observed in the velocity with which that understanding moved
from the problem of collecting membership dues to the problem of defining
the Church in the twentieth century. A comparison of the emphasis
placed on tithing in the stewardship section of the 1912 *Discipline* with the
adumbration of a doctrine of creation in the similar section of the 1920
*Discipline* shows how quickly this movement occurred.^{33}

Who were the official theologians of stewardship? The circle of
associations around Bishop Francis J. McConnell bore responsibility for
much of the intellectual content of Methodist fund-raising propaganda.
Harris Franklin Rall produced a pamphlet, *A Christian's Financial Creed*,
in 1914 for the Colorado Annual Conference which he revised that same
year for the Commission on Finance. A reading of this document
alongside Rall's "A Stewardship Creed" of 1920 reveals a movement of
thought similar to that of the *Disciplines* of 1912 and 1920: from a focus
on money to a broader conception of stewardship that included but was
not limited to the Sunday-morning collection plate.^{34} Another significant
work, Harvey Reeves Calkins' *A Man and His Money* (1914), cannot be
associated easily with McConnell; as a missionary and official propagan­
dist for the Commission on Finance, Calkins drew on many sources for his
biblical scholarship and economic thought. By the time of the Centenary in
1918, however, his theological statements were showing the influence of
McConnell and McConnell's teacher at Boston University, Borden Parker
Bowne (1847-1910).^{35} McConnell himself, apostle of Bowne's "per­
sonalism," expressed his views in *Church Finance and Social Ethics*

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^{32}Committee on Temporal Economy, Report No. 9, *JGC* (1920), p. 560; "Was the Organist
Irreverent—or Was It the Minister?" *Men and Money*, 1, number 4 (June 1918): 164.

^{33}Committee on Temporal Economy, Report No. 19, *JGC* (1912), pp. 630-631; Committee
adopted in 1920 conflated Methodist Episcopal Church, *Doctrines and Discipline* (1916),
paragraph 71, and "The Principles of Christian Stewardship," *Men and Money*, 1, number 1
(December 1917): 47.

^{34}Harris Franklin Rall, *A Christian's Financial Creed* (Chicago, [1914]), especially pp. 9-10;
William J. McCutcheon's bibliographical study in his *Essays in American Theology: The
Life and Thought of Harris Franklin Rall* (New York, 1973), p. 239, cited the Colorado im­
print as the original of *A Christian's Financial Creed*. The Harris Franklin Rall Collection,
Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary Library, Box 3, folder 9, contains a copy of the
Commission on Finance imprint with the words, "revised edition," printed on the title page.
The Revival of Stewardship

(1920), a small book whose acceptance of large amounts of money in the organized church and simultaneous sensitivity to the resulting problems almost let us see his hand in the founding of the World Service Commission four years later.

The books by Calkins and McConnell reveal in detail the development of Methodist doctrinal understanding of stewardship. Calkins began in 1914 with the problem of defending tithing against the charge that concern with money was essentially unspiritual. In the course of his argument, he expounded a theory of value that located the economic worth of things in the collective estimation of human minds rather than in the things themselves. Since human evaluation of things consisted in estimating their utility as means to an end rather than concern with the things themselves, spiritual life could include money and the material world it represented. “That men themselves demand value, and are not content with things, shows, indeed, that they are made in the very image of God.”

Writing six years later in light of the accumulation of wealth within the church, McConnell moved boldly into the theological territory that Calkins had just managed to penetrate. McConnell believed that creation was potentially good because the incarnation—God taking on a material body in Christ—had made its goodness actual. Given such a presupposition, money could not, at its root, constitute evil, and yet, as the present distribution of wealth in American society and recent Methodist experience demonstrated, money lay at the root of a great many real and possible evils.

McConnell’s major contribution lay in defining the church’s relation to money and the material world it represented. The church’s task consisted in sanctification, in “teaching truth by incarnation.” The church in the twentieth-century United States possessed a high calling to use money properly in order that the world might learn how to employ wealth. The church’s stewardship of wealth would bring ecclesiastical organization to perfection as the church brought the world to perfection. The ethical handling of money by the church provided a practical means to the ultimate spiritual goal.

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A hymn by Ralph Cushman, "My Temple" (1919), also attempted to embody theological insight in language but in a form more characteristic of the Methodist heritage. Just as Methodists followed their political tradition of fighting about organizational strategy when they created the World Service Commission, so Cushman drew on his heritage of praying, preaching, and singing to write a poem about stewardship for Calkins' magazine, *Men and Money*.

Cushman, one of the original members of the World Service Commission in 1924, directed the stewardship education programs of the Joint Centenary Commission and the Interchurch World Movement and helped to found the United Stewardship Council of the Churches of Christ in America in 1920. Until 1932 when the General Conference elected him bishop, he served churches in western New York, assisting his congregation in Geneva to pay a large debt with a very successful tithing campaign.

Both this active interest in the details of church finance and appreciation for the beauty of the land the Iroquois once controlled found expression in Cushman's hymn, the incongruity of the two concerns held together by his belief in stewardship. It seems fitting to conclude this essay with an example of the piety as well as the ideas of the stewardship revival because, perhaps incongruously to the eyes of later observers, the World Service Commission itself would begin its discussions of finance by singing Methodist hymns.

There's a Temple I know in the heart of the woods,
Where the wood bird sings its sweet song,
And a silence, aware with the fragrance of prayer,
Is lingering all the day long.

There wood flowers worship in reverence profound,
In this living cathedral of pine,
And the winds wafting by lift their prayer to the sky,
To the God of the Temple divine.

A brook tumbles down through this temple I know,
O'er its altars of moss and of stone,
And it chants all the day in its soft solemn way,
To the God who is Lord there alone.

Sweet music is here in the heart of the woods;
And he who is listening hears
A breathing of peace, a soul's sweet release,
And the thoughts that lie deeper than tears.

O hie me away to the heart of the woods,
Where the temples are made without hands,
Midst the birds and the breeze and the tall tow'ring trees,
Let me worship—my heart understands.88

A dialogue took place here between the inner and the outer, which became symbols for the spiritual and the material, respectively. Ostensibly, "My Temple" described an imaginary scene "in the heart of the woods" where, with full poetic license, "the birds and the breeze and the tall tow'ring trees" became sanctuary and congregation combined. A closer look at the geography of the poem reveals, however, something besides charming anthropomorphism. "Heart of the woods" carried a double meaning: the midst of an actual forest and the inner being and life of that forest. Cushman's temple looked like an actual forest complete with birds, flowers, trees, and brooks, but the essential activity of these woods consisted in the worship of God. Knowing what we do about the notion of stewardship, we have to conclude that Cushman intended to describe a real forest and also to assert the glory of God as the ultimate purpose of that natural and material world.

Cushman saw the physical world of his woods and tried to penetrate to its spiritual heart, its value as Harvey Reeves Calkins would have said. The resulting vision of all creation as a temple included, of course, human beings themselves who, at their hearts, could understand the purpose of creation and deliberately participate in its fulfillment. In this participation Cushman found a resolution of the spiritual and the material, symbolized respectively by the spatial categories, inner and outer. In other words, the thought of the poem involved an introjection of landscape—the conceptualization of spiritual life in terms of geography—and a projection of values onto the material world. Furthermore, this concurrent introjection and projection constituted the role of humanity in the universe, the simultaneous impinging of a material world that did not belong to the human being and acceptance of responsibility for it which together defined "stewardship." From such a perspective, money itself functioned as a means of projecting and sharing Christian values.

The conclusion of a historical essay is not the place to engage one's own thoughts and those of his readers in a final judgment on the piety or the aesthetic sensibility of a previous generation. Nor is it the place to refine the theology of stewardship and church administration. Nevertheless, we might imagine a man and a woman standing under a tree in the heart of the forbidding vastness of America. They reach out to pick some of its luscious, untouched fruit. We would be justified in concluding that the Methodist Episcopal Church did not have much to say about the impulse that led this couple to want the fruit. But the Methodists surely said a lot about what these people should do after they have the fruit and, in 1924, created the World Service Commission to help them do it.