

## PETER CARTWRIGHT AND CHARISMA

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Alone in his Boston lodgings, Peter Cartwright struggled to understand the day's events. He had preached and failed that morning, prayed over the experience, preached and failed again that night. How could he be Peter Cartwright from the West, the old pioneer? the people had demanded. "Is it so, that I cannot preach?"<sup>1</sup> he asked himself.

Cartwright had good cause for concern. Not that he was too old. The month before he'd turn a vigorous 67. Over fifty action-packed years had elapsed since his conversion at a Russellville, Kentucky, camp meeting in 1801. He had been exhorting, then preaching, since 1802. In his fifty years of service to the Methodist Episcopal Church his gifts had not failed him. That is, not until today.

Cartwright's gifts, because they were charismatic, required recognition. He was naturally endowed with extraordinary powers, such as mighty speech, great strength, towering faith in God—"primary charisma."<sup>2</sup> Cartwright's charisma set him apart from ordinary persons. Contemporaries and later biographers alike thought his unusual qualities came from God.<sup>3</sup> People looked to him as a leader as again and again his accomplishments pressed upon them the validity of his authority. Somewhat circularly, the validity of Cartwright's charismatic authority depended on this recognition, which was freely given and which rested on his accomplishments as a kind of proof.<sup>4</sup>

He was more like a prophet than anything else. Highly individual and independent yet wholly orthodox, he proclaimed a traditional Methodist gospel in the manner of a "renewer of religion."<sup>5</sup> Reborn himself at age 16 under the preaching of John Page, after some months

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<sup>1</sup>Peter Cartwright, *Autobiography*, ed. by Charles L. Wallis (New York: Abingdon Press, 1956; originally published in 1856), 309.

<sup>2</sup>Max Weber, *Sociology of Religion* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1964), 2. This source will hereafter be cited as Weber, *SR*.

<sup>3</sup>See, for example, Helen Hardie Grant, *Peter Cartwright: Pioneer* (New York: The Abingdon Press, 1931), Sydney and Marjorie Barstow Greenbie, *Hoof Beats to Heaven* (Penobscot, Maine: Traversity Press, 1955), and Philip M. Watters, *Peter Cartwright* (New York: Eaton and Mains, 1910).

<sup>4</sup>The description of charisma is based upon Max Weber, *The Theory of Social and Economic Organization* (New York: The Free Press, 1964), 358-359. This source will hereafter be cited as Weber, *Theory*.

<sup>5</sup>See Weber's discussion of prophetic charisma in *SR*, 46-47, and of the prophet himself, 78.

struggling under conviction of sin, Peter Cartwright soon suspected that he had been called to preach.<sup>6</sup> In that period the preacher was more soul winner than pastor, so Cartwright turned straight to God for confirmation of the call.<sup>7</sup> It was not enough that Jesse Walker had given him, unbidden, a license to exhort, nor that presiding elder Page had authorized him to organize classes and plan a new circuit. When preacher Ralph Lotspeich insisted that Cartwright preach,

I went out and prayed fervently for aid from heaven. All at once it seemed to me as if I could never preach at all, but I struggled in prayer. At length I asked God if he had called me to preach, to give me aid that night, and give me one soul, that is, convert one soul under my preaching, as evidence that I was called to this work.

God came through: Cartwright's charisma was proved, for the first, but hardly the last, time. He commented,

... the congregation was melted into tears. There was present a professed infidel. The word reached his heart by the Eternal Spirit. He was powerfully convicted, and, as I believe, soundly converted to God that night, and joined the Church, and afterward became a useful member of the same.<sup>8</sup>

Sent out on circuit with a more experienced man, in accordance with Methodist custom,<sup>9</sup> Peter Cartwright began his long and legendary career as soul-winner.

### Charisma And Conversion

Conversion—one's own and others'—was the fundamental fact of the circuit rider's life. Methodist preachers, following John Wesley, viewed this rebirth as an inward total turning in which the person cooperated with God's grace. Outward actions expressed and demonstrated the fact of inner conversion. It was a phenomenon independent of baptism and the Lord's Supper.<sup>10</sup>

Early and throughout his career, Cartwright clashed with Baptist preachers on the relationship of conversion and baptism by immersion. His own life had been reoriented by the revolutionary force of charismatic conversion. Now he strove to produce in others a similar "radical

<sup>6</sup>"The assertion of the indispensable 'inward call to preach' characterizes distinctively the Wesleyan Methodist understanding of the ministry ..." Emory S. Bucke, et al., eds. *The History of American Methodism* (New York: Abingdon Press, 1964), 3 vols., I:17.

<sup>7</sup>William G. McLoughlin, Jr., *Modern Revivalism* (New York: The Ronald Press Company, 1959), 9–10. cf., Watters, 8.

<sup>8</sup>Cartwright, *Autobiography*, 54.

<sup>9</sup>William Warren Sweet, *Methodism in American History* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1976), 167–168.

<sup>10</sup>John R. Parris, *John Wesley's Doctrine of the Sacraments* (London: The Epworth Press, 1963).

alteration of the central system of attitudes and directions of action with a completely new orientation toward the different problems and structures of the world"—Methodist style.<sup>11</sup> His talent for snatching converts from the Baptists was proven on an occasion early in his career. Cartwright pretended to be converted by a Baptist sermon, but when time for baptism by immersion came he declared his belief that he'd already been validly baptized by sprinkling. This heresy forced the Baptist preacher to reject him publicly at the creek's bank and later at the communion table. "This treatment enlisted the sympathies of almost the entire assembly, and they cried out, 'Shame! Shame!'" Cartwright reported. His superior charisma effectively wrested from Baptist clutches converts he had originally won. As one convert put it, "if Brother Cartwright, who has been the means, in the hand of God, of my conversion, and the saving of so many precious souls, cannot come into the [Baptist] Church, I cannot and will not join it."<sup>12</sup>

A contrasting contemporary example helps to illustrate Cartwright's extraordinary gifts. William Winans was born in 1788 and converted on Easter in 1807. Like Cartwright, he later became a presiding elder in the Methodist Episcopal Church. But early in his preaching career as a licensed exhorter,

he walked eight miles to fulfill an engagement where a considerable assemblage was being addressed by another exhorter. William sat down by the pulpit and awaited his turn, only to discover that he had inadvertently intruded upon a Baptist meeting. The two exhorters engaged in a verbal battle concerning Calvinism. The wrath of the congregation fell upon William's artless head, and he barely escaped being mobbed. He resolved never again to engage in public controversy on Christian doctrine.<sup>13</sup>

The sudden transformation of the spirit that occurred in Cartwright's converts was usually accompanied by ecstasy. As a part of the conversion process, ecstasy created a removal or detachment from the person's surroundings. Afterwards a "new person" emerged.<sup>14</sup> Acute ecstasy could take the form of "the jerks." The literature of revivalism is indebted to Peter Cartwright for his famous description of this exercise, in which he describes its whip-cracking effect on long hair.<sup>15</sup> The orgiastic emotional intoxication represented by such physical activity was contagious but transitory; it did not result in the more

<sup>11</sup>Weber, *Theory*, 363.

<sup>12</sup>Cartwright, *Autobiography*, 56–60. Cf., Watters, 72.

<sup>13</sup>Ray Holder, *William Winans: Methodist Leader in Antebellum Mississippi* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1977), 8; see 9 for a similar incident.

<sup>14</sup>Weber, *SR*, 150.

<sup>15</sup>Weber's description of such physical manifestations as "hysterical or epileptoid seizures among those with predispositions toward such paroxysms" is less colorful, *SR*, 157–158; Cartwright, *Autobiography*, 44–45.

lasting kind of conversion Cartwright aimed to produce.<sup>16</sup> He viewed “the jerks” as signs of God’s power and judgment; nevertheless, “It was, on all occasions, my practice to recommend fervent prayer as a remedy, and it almost universally proved an effectual antidote.”<sup>17</sup> Peter Cartwright recognized that the milder, prayerful state of detachment was more conducive to ethical conversion and a systematic repatterning of life. Milder euphoric states “produce a meaningful relationship to the world, and they correspond in quality to evaluations of an eternal order or an ethical god such as are proclaimed by prophecy.”<sup>18</sup>

Cartwright helped his hearers achieve the detachment of ecstasy with a patterned approach: he would sing, pray, take his text and preach. During preaching “animal excitement” spread and sinners came under conviction. Conversions always resulted.<sup>19</sup> Such a conversion ritual is a type of initiation rite. Cartwright’s pattern, in which the sermon played the central role, was typical.<sup>20</sup> Conversion for the Methodist preacher was not the end product of cognitive instruction, it was an “awakening” to charismatic rebirth and the acquiring of a “new soul,” usually by means of highly emotional preaching. “The original sense of ‘rebirth’ as producing either a hero or a magician remains present in all vestigial initiation ceremonies.”<sup>21</sup>

But if “the ‘new birth’ had pangs which cut to the bone,” it was because—as Weisberger points out—the supernatural world was very real to the frontier-reared preacher.<sup>22</sup> Extraordinary faith and personal reliance on God’s providence were part of Peter Cartwright’s charisma. He was a hero, a virtuoso of faith, exceeding any lay person in practical acting on faith. He swam swollen rivers, slept on the ground, accepted crude forms of frontier hospitality in exchange for chances to bring God’s Methodist message to the people. For Cartwright it was true that “in the context of practical action, faith can provide a substitute for magical powers.”<sup>23</sup> At the close of his early labors on the Marietta Circuit, he found that he was,

<sup>16</sup>Weber, *SR*, 158.

<sup>17</sup>Cartwright, *Autobiography*, 46.

<sup>18</sup>Weber, *SR*, 158.

<sup>19</sup>The pattern is apparent throughout Cartwright’s *Autobiography*. See especially 54, 120, and 310.

<sup>20</sup>I am indebted to Jerald Brauer for these insights.

<sup>21</sup>Weber, *SR*, 29, 157.

<sup>22</sup>Bernard A. Weisberger, *They Gathered At The River* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1958), 47–48.

<sup>23</sup>Max Weber points out that in Christianity faith is, “the specific charisma of an extraordinary and purely personal reliance upon god’s providence, such as the shepherds of souls and the heroes of faith must possess. By virtue of this charismatic confidence in god’s support, the spiritual representative and leader of the congregation, as a virtuoso of faith, may act differently from the layman in practical situations and bring about different results, far surpassing normal human capacity.”

five hundred miles from home; my horse had gone blind; my saddle was worn out; my bridle reins had been eaten up and replaced, (after a sort) at least a dozen times; and my clothes had been patched till it was difficult to detect the original ... I had just seventy-five cents in my pocket.

A kind widow donated a dollar, but it was soon gone along with the seventy-five cents. Then a Colonel Shelby gave him three dollars. That plus credit, loud prayers, and lengthy conversation in two lodging houses got him to his parents' house with six and a quarter cents left. In a matter of weeks Cartwright was off again with fresh horse, new clothes, and forty dollars—all supplied by his father's generosity.<sup>24</sup>

Because Cartwright lived for the Methodist cause, acting on an inner calling, often his prophetic charisma was recognized and conversions took place outside of the "formal" conversion-initiation ritual setting.<sup>25</sup> However, on these occasions as in the ritual setting, Cartwright's preaching charisma was instrumental. He reported that he converted persons in unusual situations, such as during a dance in a tavern.

One of Cartwright's most strenuous conquests was the wife of a preacher with whom he stayed. "She was high-tempered, overbearing, quarrelsome, and a violent opposer of religion." When invited to share evening prayers, she responded with curses and refused to be still.

"Now," said I to her, "if you do not be still, and behave yourself, I'll put you out of doors." At this she clinched her fist, and swore she was one half alligator, and the other half snapping turtle, and that it would take a better man than I was to put her out. It was a small cabin we were in, and we were not far from the door, which was then standing open. I caught her by the arm, and swinging her round in a circle, brought her right up to the door, and shoved her out. She jumped up, tore her hair, foamed; and such swearing as she uttered, was seldom equalled, and never surpassed. The door, or shutter of the door, was very strongly made to keep out hostile Indians; I shut it tight, barred it, and went to prayer, and I prayed as best I could, but I have no language at my command to describe my feelings; at the same time, I was determined to conquer, or die in the attempt. While she was raging and foaming in the yard and around the cabin, I started a spiritual song, and sung loud, to drown her voice as much as possible. The five or six little children ran and squatted about and crawled under the beds. Poor things, they were scared almost to death.<sup>26</sup>

At length, exhausted, the woman meekly asked to be let in. Cartwright called her to repent and all knelt in prayer. He wrote,

... in less than six months after this frolic with the devil, [I saw] this woman soundly converted to God, and if there was ever a changed mortal for the better,

<sup>24</sup>Cartwright, *Autobiography*, 77–80.

<sup>25</sup>See Weber's discussion of the charismatic leader's "calling" in *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1946), 79. This source will hereafter be cited as Weber, *Essays*.

<sup>26</sup>Cartwright, *Autobiography*, 202–204.

it was this said woman . . . she was as bold in the cause of God as she had been in the cause of the wicked one.<sup>27</sup>

Perhaps Cartwright's narration of this and similar incidents is embroidered,<sup>28</sup> but it shows that the frontier prophet evaluated the genuineness of conversion by its visible effects on the person's conduct. That conduct, in turn, verified Cartwright's charisma. He needed repeated proof of his extraordinary abilities.

By its very nature, the existence of charismatic authority is specifically unstable. The holder may forego his charisma; he may feel "forsaken by his God," as Jesus did on the cross . . . pure charisma does not know any "legitimacy" other than that flowing from personal strength, that is, one which is constantly being proved.<sup>29</sup>

Cartwright's colorful comments in opposition to a learned ministry ("downy D.D.'s") often have been cited as expressive of raw anti-intellectualism.<sup>30</sup> However, it is likely that these remarks flow instead from his belief in "the fundamental importance of the conversion experience, the sectarian emphasis on lay leadership, the hostility to a priestly (or professional) ministry, and the deep faith that God never called an unprepared man."<sup>31</sup> Charisma was the decisive factor in prophetic calling and conversion alike.

### Charisma In Cult And Ritual

Peter Cartwright's participation in cult and ritual was shaped as much by charisma as by customary Methodist practice.

One example of this fact concerns the celebration of sacraments. The 1784 Christmas Conference, at which American Methodism took distinctive shape, took pains to define requirements for the Lord's Supper and for baptism. The Methodists' Wesleyan heritage bade them to be attentive to these rituals. Yet Cartwright's *Autobiography* contains innumerable accounts of conversion, while an informal count finds only eleven incidents involving baptism and only three references to the Lord's Supper. Of the latter, two of the three references occur in accounts of conflict with Baptists on the subject of baptism. Moreover, all eleven references to baptism involve conflict with other denominations: nine of them with Baptists, one with a "New Light" minister,

<sup>27</sup>Ibid. Cf., Watters, 62, whose account of this incident highlights Cartwright's charismatic qualities.

<sup>28</sup>Cartwright "was not above the frontier trick of embroidering a story." Weisberger, 34.

<sup>29</sup>Weber, *Essays*, 248; see also 246-247 and Weber, *SR*, 47, 163-164.

<sup>30</sup>A prominent example is Richard Hofstadter, *Anti-intellectualism in American Life* (New York: Vintage Books, 1962), 101-103.

<sup>31</sup>T. Scott Miyakawa, *Protestants and Pioneers* (Chicago: The University Press, 1964), 96.

one with Roman Catholicism.<sup>32</sup> Apparently, for Cartwright the sacraments—especially baptism—were grounds for debate rather than ritual occasions.

It is characteristic of charismatic sanction, some kind of contest must decide the conflict in favor of one of the parties. Only one can be right.<sup>33</sup> One of Cartwright's Methodists, "a fine little widow woman" on the Goose Creek Circuit understood this. A Baptist minister had been trying to win her to his denomination. She countered by offering him a new suit of clothes if he would sit patiently throughout a Cartwright Sunday sermon on baptism. Then she offered Cartwright a suit of clothes, too. She advised him to do his best—"if he runs, the suit of clothes is yours; and if he stands his ground, and you do your very best, you shall have as good a suit, any how."

Sunday came and the Baptist minister appeared at the campground. He asked for the privilege of replying when Cartwright finished his sermon and Cartwright heartily agreed. But the minister lost both patience and a new suit of clothes when Cartwright launched into his favorite argument: infants had first title to baptism and adults could claim baptism only if converted and become like little children.

Finally, I propounded this question: "Is not that Church which has no children in it more like hell than heaven?" I then added, "If all hell was searched, there would not be a single child found in it; but all children are in heaven; therefore, there being no children in the Baptist Church, it was more like hell than heaven."<sup>34</sup>

Both formal debates and informal confrontations tended to authenticate Cartwright's charisma.

The favorite, most meaningful cultic experience for Cartwright was the camp meeting, though camp meetings were "extracurricular activities" as Methodist denominational practices.<sup>35</sup> Charisma rather

<sup>32</sup>References to the Lord's Supper occur in Cartwright's *Autobiography* on 59, 62, 81-82; incidents involving baptism are narrated on 57-58, 81-82, 87, 96, 99, 106, 107, 150, 154-155, 168-169, 230-231.

<sup>33</sup>Weber, *Theory*, 361.

<sup>34</sup>Cartwright, *Autobiography*, 155-156. The same argument about the Baptist church can be found on 107. See also Peter Cartwright, *Fifty Years as a Presiding Elder* (Cincinnati: Hitchcock and Walden, 1871), 169. This source will be cited hereafter as Cartwright, *Fifty Years*.

<sup>35</sup>Sweet reports, "the camp meeting was never recognized as an official Methodist institution. There was never any legislation concerning it; the name *camp meeting* does not occur in any of the General Conference *Indices*. There are no rules in the *Discipline* to govern it. It was widely used, but always as an extra occasion in the economy of Methodism. Preachers never answered any formal questions concerning it in the Quarterly Conference. Gradually, there grew up certain ideas as to how Camp meetings could best be organized and regulated and camp meeting manuals came into circulation, but none of them was ever officially adopted by any church body." Sweet, *Revivalism in America* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1944), 131-132. Cf., Miyakawa, 166.

than church regulations shaped Cartwright's preaching and the people's response.

"Preaching . . . collective instruction concerning religious and ethical matters, is normally something associated with prophecy and prophetic religion."<sup>36</sup> Unfortunately, evidence concerning the content of Cartwright's charismatic sermons is elusive and at best indirect. Weisberger speculates that itinerant sermons were "short and pungent, aimed at holding crowds which were quick to show scorn or boredom."<sup>37</sup> But Cartwright seems to have held forth at length *and* effectively. Posey guesses that frontier sermons were graphic;<sup>38</sup> there is little doubt that Cartwright's preaching was vivid and nonintellectual.

Indirect evidence points to three characteristics of Cartwright's style: his sermons were extemporaneous, anecdotal, and participatory. He described a camp meeting in summer of 1823 on the Roaring River Circuit in which these three characteristics contributed to his success. First, he calmed a large and unruly crowd "by relating several short anecdotes . . . well calculated to excite their risibilities." A man shouted that he should make them cry, not laugh. Cartwright responded with a moving defense of the divinity of Christ, then called for those who did *not* believe in Jesus' divinity to raise their hands.

I then paused, but not one hand went up. It was an awful solemn time; every soul seemed to feel that the supreme Divinity brooded over the assembly. I then said, I wanted one triumphant testimony of our holy religion that should overwhelm all the legions of devils that rose from the stagnant pools of Arianism, Unitarianism, and Socinianism. I then desired that everyone in that vast crowd that believed that Jesus Christ was justly entitled to supreme honor and glory, and expected to get to heaven through his merits alone, to give me a sign by raising their right hand; the hands went up by the thousand, and with hands, triumphant shouts of glory ascended by hundreds, and many sinners were seen with streaming eyes, and even exulting shouts, giving glory to Jesus Christ. The vast multitude fell in almost every direction, and I sat down under a deep sense that God was there.<sup>39</sup>

Cartwright was a master of charismatic domination. He drew on "highly robust motives of fear and hope," motives which determine obedience to such domination as exercised by the prophet.<sup>40</sup> He used these motives as well as group pressure and group involvement to motivate the meeting's ultimate outburst of ecstasy. The ecstasy itself gave the people an orgiastic emotional social experience—an escape into a new religious community, much more fulfilling than getting

<sup>36</sup>Weber, *SR*, 74–75.

<sup>37</sup>Weisberger, 48.

<sup>38</sup>Walter Brownlow Posey, *Religious Strife on the Southern Frontier* (Louisiana State University Press, 1965), 9.

<sup>39</sup>Cartwright, *Autobiography*, 149–151.

<sup>40</sup>Weber, *Essays*, 78–79; cf., Posey, 9.

drunk on frontier whiskey. Social ecstasy mediated charisma, the orgy being “the primordial form of communal religious association.”<sup>41</sup> Cartwright skillfully created an unstructured situation. With extemporaneous spontaneity, he helped boundaries be broken and *communitas* was achieved.<sup>42</sup>

Thus the “exciting, inexplicable hysteria of the camp meetings”<sup>43</sup> can be understood as the achievement of charismatic ecstasy in ritual community. Peter Cartwright was extraordinarily adept at making it happen—perhaps the best on the frontier.<sup>44</sup> Charismatic domination is guided by inspiration and revelation, not reasonable rules and time-honored traditions. It is irrational and revolutionary.<sup>45</sup> Cartwright often shocked those around him with unconventional but charismatically consistent behavior.

During the Tennessee Conference in Nashville in 1818, Cartwright had just begun to preach one Monday night when General Jackson strode into the crowded church and leaned against a post. In an insistent stage whisper, the host preacher informed Cartwright of the great man’s presence. Indignant at the preacher’s interruption, Cartwright asked the congregation out loud, “Who is General Jackson? If he don’t get his soul converted, God will damn him as quick as he would a Guinea negro!” The preacher was horrified, but Jackson expressed delight at the circuit rider’s independent spirit.<sup>46</sup> Cartwright’s unpredictable behavior was not mere eccentricity; it was consistent with the Gospel message as he understood it. In this case, he meant to show that God was democratic in dealing with sinners. Typically, as a charismatic leader, he consciously opposed the social standards recognized by the

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<sup>41</sup>Weber, *SR*, 3.

<sup>42</sup>Jerald Brauer argues that the revival service can be understood in this fashion, with categories developed by Victor Turner; see Turner, *The Ritual Process* (Chicago: Aldine Publishing Company, 1969).

<sup>43</sup>McLaughlin’s phrase, 22.

<sup>44</sup>Grover C. Loud suggests that he was at least the most popular; *Evangelized America* (New York: Lincoln MacVeagh. The Dial Press, 1928), 126–133.

<sup>45</sup>Weber, *Essays*, 296. Cf., Watters, 84: “He justly resented the imputation of being a ‘bundle of eccentricities and singularities.’ He was too honest and too earnest to be in any sense a charlatan. Yet a large element of his power lay in the fact that he was constantly surprising, frequently startling his hearers. His thought and his language had a coloring all his own, and so could not fail to be original; and his habitual contempt for the conventional, wherever it tended to cramp and suppress genuine life and action, freed him from many a limitation of the ordinary man. But even with this quaint naturalness there was united the skill of a consummate strategist. He studied men and studied situations; and with swift and keen intuition he saw the weakness of positions, and with startling suddenness he broke in upon them by new ways overwhelming opposition.”

<sup>46</sup>Cartwright, *Autobiography*, 133–134. Cartwright was passionately anti-slavery but blatantly racist by today’s standards. Cf., *Fifty Years*, 68–72.

host preacher, invoking Christian standards and his own moral authority to apply them.<sup>47</sup>

Because Cartwright delivered his message with charismatic authority rather than the authority of rules and reason or tradition, his preaching at the frontier camp meeting reveals a paradox. Normally, “the importance of preaching stands in inverse proportion to the magical components of a religion.”<sup>48</sup> But Cartwright and the frontier circuit riders in general were very successful with lower class elements of the population and with economically unstable groups. Such people were not likely to attend a camp meeting for the rational conceptions contained in the sermons there. Rather, they came seeking the emotional dimensions of the message. In the case of Peter Cartwright, sacraments were de-emphasized while preaching encouraged the *communitas* of orgiastic group conversion ecstasy. In a way, sermons substituted for magic in proportion to the preacher’s charisma.<sup>49</sup>

### Context For Charisma: Associational Form

“I am a sound old Episcopale [sic] Methodist Preacher and am fully opposed to all innovation. Peter Cartwright.”<sup>50</sup> The frontier prophet chose to characterize himself thus during the Baltimore General Conference of 1824. He was 39 years old.

At first it would seem that Cartwright had changed. Could this be the same charismatic man who from the pulpit boldly put General Jackson in his place only eight years before? A second thought says yes—he was the same man; only American Methodism had changed. In the twenty years of his travelling since being admitted on trial to the Western Conference in 1804, one Conference had become eight, 32 travelling preachers were now 400, serving a membership more than ten times more numerous.<sup>51</sup>

The kind of innovation Cartwright opposed was anti-charismatic, routine. He wanted to hang on to the forms in which he had used his gifts so successfully. Ironically, his own success and that of frontier Methodism in general led to an inevitable pressure to guarantee the gains, to “routinize.”

<sup>47</sup>Weber, *Theory*, 64–65.

<sup>48</sup>Weber, *SR*, 74–75.

<sup>49</sup>This analysis uses Weber, *SR*, 101 (where, incidentally, he refers to “soteriological orgies of the Methodist type”) and Weber, *SR*, 74–76. These pages contain implications for Christian nurture which are worthy of consideration but beyond the scope of this article.

<sup>50</sup>John Scripps’ Autographbook, unpublished. Garret Theological Seminary Archives, Evanston, Illinois.

<sup>51</sup>Cartwright, *Autobiography*, 163.

Charisma is a phenomenon typical of prophetic religious movements . . . in their early stages. But as soon as the position of authority is well established, and above all as soon as control over large masses of people exists, it gives way to the forces of everyday routine.<sup>52</sup>

Even in the early days, American Methodist forms were shaped by both traditions and rules derived from Wesley's Methodist experience. But frontier necessity acted as an anti-traditional, anti-bureaucratic force. Cartwright's Kentucky favored charismatic movements because it lacked organization and established routines and clear expectations and symbols. "This creates widespread psychological insecurity which in turn is susceptible of reintegration in terms of attachment to a charismatic movement."<sup>53</sup> Mobility, lack of structure, sheer physical danger all helped to create the kind of cultural stress that is so conducive to revivalism. The situation called for a natural leader like Cartwright, someone with unusual—believed to be supernatural—gifts.<sup>54</sup>

When Cartwright first entered Methodist structure, it had an emotional, communal base. He was "called" by men who knew him and chose him for his charismatic qualities. In less than eight years he reached the second highest rank in Methodism's spare hierarchy. As a circuit rider, he was assigned to a two or three month circular tour of Methodist congregations (classes). Methodist classes constituted an emotional form of communal relationship. As an elder, Cartwright presided over circuits that were gathered into districts. Being a presiding elder added no new sphere of competence, no extra powers. In keeping with the organization of corporate groups under charismatic authority, it simply extended the territorial limits in which Cartwright was expected to exercise his authority.<sup>55</sup>

Whether circuit rider or elder, Cartwright pursued a calling, not a profession. Proof of his talents, not education, gained him admission to the ministry. A contemporary student of preachers' styles remarked that

If the mass of Methodist preachers have been less favoured in respect to intellectual culture than those of most other denominations, it cannot be denied that there has been, in many instances, an offset to this in the rugged working of great natural powers, and in a spirit of heroic adventure that was schooled and developed amid the perils and hardships of the Western and Southwestern wilderness.<sup>56</sup>

<sup>52</sup>Weber, *Theory*, 370. Compare McLoughlin's analysis, 7.

<sup>53</sup>Talcott Parsons in Weber, *Theory*, 71.

<sup>54</sup>Weber, *Essays*, 245.

<sup>55</sup>Weber, *Theory*, 360–361.

<sup>56</sup>William B. Sprague, D.D., *Annals of the American Pulpit* (New York: Robert Carter & Brothers, 1861), Vol. VII, p. ix. This volume contains two letters written by Cartwright.

Cartwright's calling separated him from the world. Some separation from this world, outside of its ties, its routine occupations, and obligations of family life, is unavoidable for those who partake of charisma.<sup>57</sup> For some men, circuit riding and celibacy went together; married preachers were likely to "locate."<sup>58</sup> Though he married in 1808, Cartwright continued on the circuits and maintained a household as well. How he managed financially is a mystery. He stated,

When I started as a travelling preacher, a single preacher was allowed eighty dollars per annum, if his circuit would give it to him; but single preachers in those days seldom received over thirty or forty dollars, and often much less; and had it not been for a few presents made us by the benevolent friends of the Church, and a few dollars we made as marriage fees, we must have suffered much more than we did. But the Lord provided; and, strange as it may appear to the present [1856] generation, we got along without starving, or going naked.<sup>59</sup>

Cartwright's dependence on irregular, unsystematic methods of getting financial support is characteristically anti-economic. Charismatic authority typically rejects systematic remuneration in the everyday routine world and tends toward voluntary gifts as the most appropriate form of support.<sup>60</sup>

It is not surprising then, that Cartwright complained about development of a settled, salaried, educated ministry—"innovations" inevitable in the pressure to preserve charisma by transformation into a permanent routine structure.<sup>61</sup> In vain he pointed out that "the illiterate Methodist preachers actually set the world on fire, (the American world at least,) while they [more routinized Protestant bodies] were lighting their matches!"<sup>62</sup>

Circles of supporters helped sustain these prophetic renewers of religion with food, lodging, gifts of money and the like.<sup>63</sup> "These men were native timber, with the bark on," Weisberger observes, "undistinguishable in dress, manner or rhetoric from the rest of the pioneers" except for their mission of converting sinners.<sup>64</sup> With his support groups, Cartwright fit into the egalitarian associational form that is

<sup>57</sup>Weber, *Essays*, 248.

<sup>58</sup>William Warren Sweet, *The Rise of Methodism in the West* (New York: The Methodist Book Concern, 1920), 44–45.

<sup>59</sup>Cartwright, *Autobiography*, 338. Cf., Sweet, *The Rise of Methodism in the West*, 46–47.

<sup>60</sup>Weber, *Theory*, 362. Perhaps a sense of what kind of support is characteristic of charismatic religious figures undergirds criticism of systematic techniques for fund-raising by present-day revivalists. According to Weber, charisma "always rejects as undignified any pecuniary gain that is methodical and rational . . ." *Essays*, 247.

<sup>61</sup>Weber, *Theory*, 369.

<sup>62</sup>Cartwright, *Autobiography*, 64. Cartwright employed this refrain frequently.

<sup>63</sup>Weber, *SR*, 60.

<sup>64</sup>Weisberger, 21.

typical of revivalist groups. Differentiation was based on charisma.<sup>65</sup> The Methodist class as religious community provided for the permanence of preaching. It was constituted partly by the ironic process of the routinization of charisma.<sup>66</sup> However, the Methodist classes also served social needs as they had from the time of Wesley, and they supported members' systematic pursuit of holiness. These family-like groups functioned separately from the travelling clergy, and class leaders were empowered to hold the sacramental meal.<sup>67</sup> Implicit in this structure were two simultaneous developments. The charismatic preaching clergy (prophets or revivalists) became separated from a more everyday ritual clergy (pastors or priests). The development of local leadership was favored by the natural tendency toward the routinization of charisma.

It is not surprising, then, that 39-year-old Peter Cartwright declared himself old and opposed to innovation—nor that in 1824 he and his family moved to Illinois. He was disgusted by denominational strife over church structure and by the spreading stain of slavery.<sup>68</sup>

The move to Illinois provided temporary relief for Cartwright's feelings of alienation. His charismatic calling was reconfirmed in the face of familiar frontier hardships and risks and in conflicts with camp rowdies and Mormons, too.<sup>69</sup> However, he soon enlisted his energies in the fight to keep slavery out of Illinois. In 1828 he was elected to the State Legislature. Thereafter, he fought slavery in political and religious arenas until he was defeated by Abraham Lincoln in the 1846 race for Congress.<sup>70</sup> Southern Methodists had already seceded from the church in 1844. Regional tensions ran high.

Cartwright struggled to preserve the church context that had ratified his charismatic gifts. But the hostile elements seemed to multiply: not just slavery and secession, but educated, settled, salaried ministers and pews and organs and choirs and congregations that did not sing or kneel.

By 1852 changes in Methodist structure and ritual that had been incipient in Illinois were dominant in Boston. After much prayer and a night of fretful sleep, Peter Cartwright came to understand the reason for his failure in the eastern pulpit:

almost all those curious incidents that had gained currency throughout the country, concerning Methodist preachers, had been located on me and ... when the congregations came to hear me, they expected little else but a bundle of eccentricities and singularities ...<sup>71</sup>

<sup>65</sup>Brauer's analysis, based on Wach and following Weber, Zimmer, Troeltsch.

<sup>66</sup>Weber, *SR*, 60–61.

<sup>67</sup>See Sweet, *Revivalism in America*, 133–134, and Weber, *SR*, 162–163.

<sup>68</sup>Cartwright, *Autobiography*, 111–116.

<sup>69</sup>See, for example, Cartwright, *Autobiography*, 169–170, 221, 212 ff., 225 ff.

The following sabbath Cartwright treated the Boston congregation to a dose of his legendary charisma.

I took my text Matthew XI, 12: and after a few commonplace remarks, I commenced giving them some Western anecdotes, which had a thrilling effect on the congregation, and excited them immoderately, I cannot say religiously, but I thought if I ever saw animal excitement, it was then and there. This broke the charm. During my stay after this, I could pass anywhere for Peter Cartwright, the old pioneer of the West.<sup>72</sup>

Encapsulated as legend in the inevitable forces of everyday routine, revivalist, charisma would just as inevitably break out full force another day—but not in Peter Cartwright's lifetime.

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<sup>70</sup>Grant, 148–168.

<sup>71</sup>Cartwright, *Autobiography*, 309.

<sup>72</sup>*Ibid.*, 310.