

**“AND ARE WE YET ALIVE”:
A STUDY IN CONFERENCE SELF-PREOCCUPATION**

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And are we yet alive, And see each other's face?
Glory and praise to Jesus Give For his Redeeming grace!
Preserved by power divine To full salvation here,
Again in Jesu's praise we join, And in his sight appear.¹

“Ever since J[ohn] W[esley]’s later years,” notes the Bicentennial Edition of *The Works of John Wesley*, “this has been the opening hymn for the sessions of the British Methodist Conference.”² A similar claim frequently convenes North American conferences: “Now let’s sing as has every conference since Wesley.”³ The latter assertion bears scrutiny; North American Methodists established that ‘tradition’ much later. This essay explores the making of a tradition.

Annual conferences in North America probably did open with a hymn, but they (1) initially did not bother to indicate which one, (2) at least from the time when the secretary bothered to minute the choice, sang a wide selection, (3) did not initially select “And we are yet alive,” (4) rediscovered the ‘tradition’ in the southern church and after the 1844 division, (5) began to employ that hymn around the Civil War, during a period of intense self-preoccupation on the part of conferences, and (6) found heightened liturgical awareness and new hymn books helpful in the making/revival of a tradition.

¹*The Bicentennial Edition of the Works of John Wesley*, 7, *A Collection of Hymns for the use of the People called Methodists*, ed. Franz Hildebrandt and Oliver A. Beckerlegge; Richard P. Heitzenrater, gen. ed., Frank Baker, textual ed. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1983), # 466, p. 649. In *The United Methodist Hymnal* (Nashville: United Methodist Publishing House, 1989), the first stanza is the first half of the above and reads (# 553):

And are we yet alive, and see each other's face?
Glory and thanks to Jesus give for his almighty grace!

²*Works of John Wesley*, 7: 649.

³“From John Wesley’s later years to the present, this piece has appropriately served as the opening hymn for the Methodist annual conferences.” James I. Warren, Jr., *O For A Thousand Tongues. The History, Nature, and Influence of Music in the Methodist Tradition* (Grand Rapids: Francis Asbury Press of Zondervan Publishing House, 1988), 51.

“This is one of the author’s ‘Hymns for Christian Friends.’ It is preeminently the *Conference hymn* of Methodism. It is sung at the opening of Methodist Conferences the world over, and has been so used for a hundred years. All branches of Methodism alike use it for this purpose.” Wilbur F. Tillett and Charles S. Nutter, *The Hymns and Hymn Writers of the Church. An Annotated Edition of The Methodist Hymnal* (Nashville: Smith & Lamar; New York: Eaton & Mains, 1915), 293.

For its first seven meetings, the Ohio Conference did not make note of how it opened. In 1819, the secretary did so remark:

Saturday Morning Bishop McKendree and Bishop George both present, and after opening Conference by reading the Scriptures, singing and prayer, Bishop McKendree being much debilitated, desired Bishop George to attend to the business of Conference.⁴

So also for Illinois in 1824: "Bishop McKendree opened the conference by reading a portion of the Sacred Scriptures, singing and prayer."⁵ For the first half of the nineteenth century, this simple, common ritual opening—Scripture, singing and prayer—served Methodist Episcopal conferences. Similar liturgical patterns pertained for sessions of Methodist Protestant and Methodist Episcopal Church, South conferences.⁶

Christian Fellowship

One reason that conferences did not sing this particular hymn is that it belonged to another part of the organizational economy. It was, in fact, reserved for the family-like intimacies that pertained to close Christian friendship and especially for class meetings. This was actually indicated in early hymnbooks. For instance, the 1837 *Hymn Book of the Methodist Protestant Church* identified "Are we yet alive" as one of twenty hymns

⁴William Warren Sweet, *Circuit-Rider Days Along the Ohio: Being the Journals of the Ohio Conference from its Organization in 1812 to 1826* (New York & Cincinnati: The Methodist Book Concern, 1923), 173. The minutes do not record the opening of the next two conferences. By 1822 a formula emerged:

Thursday Morning Bishop McKendree and Bishop George present and after opening Conference with reading the Scriptures, singing & prayer it proceeded to Business. (216) Compare for the following conferences to 1826: 228, 242, 262, 275.

⁵See "The Journals of the Illinois Annual Conference," in William Warren Sweet, *Religion on the American Frontier 1783-1840: The Methodists, a Collection of Source Materials* (New York: Cooper Square, 1964; reprint of 1946 edition), 263. In 1825: "Bishop McKendree opened the Conference by reading, singing, & prayer . . ." (282) and in 1831: "Conference was opened by reading a portion of the Sacred Scriptures, Singing and prayer." (352)

⁶See *Minutes of the . . . Annual Conference of the Maryland District of the Methodist Protestant Church*, 1840-62. Typically, the Minutes did not initially indicate what constituted religious services; in 1844 the secretary noted "Scripture and prayer;" in 1846, he recorded "Scripture, singing and prayer." Beginning in 1863, specific hymns are noted and for five times in the next fifteen years # 557 was sung.

The pattern in the southern church was similar. The typescript *Minutes of the Holston Annual Conference*, 1824-62, described openings with "religious services." *Minutes of the . . . Virginia Annual Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South*, 1868, indicated that Bishop William M. Wightman "opened with religious services." As late as 1879, the North Georgia Conference, MECS, observed the same formula, "Scripture, singing and prayer." *Minutes of . . . North Georgia Annual Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South*, 1879. Prior minutes that I examined did not indicate what was done. The following year, a specific hymn was indicated, # 533. If that conference used the 1866 or 1880 new MECS hymnal, it did not then sing, "And are we yet alive," which was # 272.

for "Class Meeting."⁷ And "Class Meeting" constituted one of three hymns under the heading of "Social Worship," the other two being "Prayer Meeting" and "Love Feast."⁸ By rubrics, the Methodist Protestants recognized that "Are we yet alive" belonged to Methodism on the local level. So also the Methodist Episcopal hymn books carried the hymn under the rubric of "Christian Fellowship."⁹

In the late 1840s, the Methodist Episcopal Church revised, and the Methodist Episcopal Church, South (MECS) produced, new hymn books. The former kept the hymn under "Christian Fellowship," maintained a category for "Love Feast" and created a new section for "Special Occasions," which included a rubric for Sunday Schools.¹⁰ The latter, the MECS, also established a section for "Special Occasions," and included Sunday Schools under one of its seven subsections, "Education for Youth." Neither mentioned class meetings. The latter featured a very elaborate and detailed index. The index carried an entry for "Conference of ministers." Of the seven hymns so indicated, three carried the heading "Opening conference." They were "And are we yet alive," "Except the Lord conduct the plan," and "Our friendship sanctify and guide."¹¹

In the Methodist economy Sunday schools had displaced class meetings and the special hymn for Christian fellowship would find a new niche at another organizational level. The southern church recognized that first. It also made first use of the hymn for conference opening (discovered to date) but on the general rather than the annual conference level. In 1850, the Methodist Episcopal Church, South General Conference opened its session with II Cor. 6 and the singing of # 272, "And are we yet alive."¹² The 1846 conference had opened with "religious service." In 1858, the MECS returned to sing, "And are we yet alive." But in 1854, they opened with # 261, "High on his everlasting throne," which they sang again in 1866. In 1870, 1874, and 1878, two hymns were chosen, specifically, "Draw near, O Son of God, draw near" and "How rich thy bounty, King of

⁷4th ed. (Baltimore: Book Committee of the Methodist Protestant Church, 1842), 313-27, hymns # 404-23. It was the second hymn, # 405.

⁸There were separate headings for "Public Worship," "The Ordinances," "Admission to Membership," "Revival" and so forth.

⁹See *A Collection of Hymns for the Use of the Methodist Episcopal Church* (New York: N. Bangs & T. Mason for the M.E.C., 1821), 356, # 411 and *A Collection of Hymns . . . Revised and Corrected* (New York: G. Lane & P. P. Sandford for the M.E.C., 1842).

¹⁰*Hymns for the Use of the Methodist Episcopal Church*. Revised edition. (New York: Carlton & Lanahan, 1849), 411, 575-626, 603.

¹¹Pp. 199-200, # 272-74. Another hymn was labelled "Before receiving Appointments" and three "Closing Conference." The one "Before receiving Appointments" was # 275, "Jesus, the truth and power divine"; the three for closing were # 276, "Jesus, accept the praise That to thy name belongs!" # 277, "Bless'd be the dear uniting love," and # 278, "And let our bodies part."

¹²*Journal of the General Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church South*, 1850, 125.

kings"; "Happy the souls to Jesus joined" and "O Thou, who camest from above"; and again "O Thou, who camest from above" and "Try us, O God, and search the ground." General Conference, therefore, did not yet set the pattern for annual conference replication, at least as far as opening with "And are we yet alive" is concerned.¹³ The southern hymnal did not, by itself, a new tradition make. However, the dramatic events associated with the division of the church and the later division of the nation did have their part in the recognition/making of this tradition.

Minutes and Conference Organization

Just before the Civil War, conferences began to show a more intense self-preoccupation, a preoccupation indicated in procedure and structure, in how they preserved and presented their sittings, and in how they opened. This self-awareness derived, as we shall see, from several trends. The sectional crisis induced self-preoccupation by politicizing conferences, by making rules, procedure and structure critical to legislative effectiveness, particularly when presiding bishops resisted conference initiatives. Parties to controversy demanded to be on the record.

Respectability also produced parliamentary awareness. Methodists, especially in the east and in towns and cities, increasingly drew middle class adherents and consequently took their place within the social order. Methodists participated more in common evangelical Protestant efforts to Christianize society, fostering the appropriation of the organizational innovations then beginning to revolutionize American society, but in so doing also creating nostalgia for the simpler Methodism of an earlier day.

Both novelty and nostalgia focused attention on the conference as an entity. So did deaths and the aging of 'brothers,' men made one in fraternity in the early nineteenth century when conferences had stabilized as geographic entities. Concern with itself derived, too, from conference divisions, boundary issues for conferences split north and south, and the transfer of "brothers" out. Conferences made a point of remembering who was still alive and who was not. The passion for remembering produced new histories, arrays of charts and tables, and the conference genre of a semi-centennial sermon. Increased interaction with British conferences also focused attention on the common heritage, including matters of organization and order.¹⁴

¹³The MEC indicated its hymn selection in 1844 (# 461) and did so explicitly thereafter; it also went to two hymns in 1852; and sang a variety of selections, most frequently, "I love thy kingdom, Lord."

¹⁴This came through formal delegates from the English and Irish Conferences at American conferences and vice versa. It also came especially for the Genesee Conference through interaction with British Methodists in Canada, a point to which we return below.

Minutes reflect this greater self-consciousness. In 1851, the New England (NE) Conference diverted from the historic pattern of reporting its work under the Disciplinary questions. It restructured its minutes into chapters, the first of which served as a summary or digest of the workings of conference. It began with an address to the reader:

Will the readers of these "Minutes" permit us to introduce them to the New England Conference, and its attendant religious exercise.

This really quite striking presumption — that the conference enjoyed a reading public — led into a highly self-conscious effort at self-presentation. Chapter I described the rhythm of the week, touching on the structure of the work day, special services, the anniversary of the NE Conference Anti-Slavery Society, the meeting of the Conference Sunday School Union Society, important addresses, including on Saturday Bishop Janes' address to deacon candidates, the evening temperance meeting, Sunday's love feast and preaching, the Monday evening Missionary Meeting and the closing devotional.¹⁵ Chapter II covered the Disciplinary questions; chapter III, Numbers in Society, and Finances; chapter IV, Officers of Conference Societies, General Missionary, Domestic Missionary, Sabbath School, and Anti-Slavery; chapter V, Reports and Resolutions; chapter VI, Appointments; chapter VII, Memoirs; and chapter VIII, Visitors to Literary Institutions, the Course of Study, post office addresses of bishops, the presiding elders and superannuated.¹⁶ These minutes reflected the conference's self-preoccupation; indeed, its presumption that a wider Methodism shared in this preoccupation. This particular set was peculiar in its stage whisper of interpretation. However, the minutes from that period document annual conferences' concern with themselves, their workings and their self-presentation, a concern that had gradually transformed the intense, communal, revival-like affairs of camp-meeting days into a business-like legislative-judicial-executive organization.¹⁷

Ceremonial Opening

Two years later, New England recorded a significant divergence from the historic opening exercises of scripture, hymn and prayer:

¹⁵*Minutes of the New England Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church . . . 1851*, 3-15.

¹⁶The latter section included also Bishop Janes' remarks spelling out reasons why he continued the four (rather than three) districts and presiding elders, apparently a recent innovation — essentially because of work-load and despite appears to return to three.

¹⁷On this character of early conferences, see my *Early American Methodism* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1991). A further work focussing on the history of conference is in progress. It should be noted that the processes that we label "self-preoccupation" had begun in the very early nineteenth century and the focus on mid-century captures only a portion of the larger saga.

Bishop Janes was present, and opened the Conference by reading the scriptures, singing, and prayer. After which the sacrament of the eucharist was administered.¹⁸

The 1853 eucharistic opening did not an immediate tradition create, but beginning in 1860 New England did find that an appropriate ceremony.¹⁹ And by 1867, New England recognized that it had established a tradition. Under the heading of "Opening Session" the secretary noted:

The sacramental service, by common consent, has come to supersede the more formal mode of introducing the business of our Conferences (reading Scripture selections, singing, and prayer) which was in vogue so long, — and the effect of the change in undoubtedly for the best. On these occasions, ministers and people unite in commemorating the sufferings of our 'blessed, blessed Master,' with great spiritual profit.²⁰

Still New England made no note of singing "And are we yet alive." Indeed, in the 1860s it began to note which hymns were sung and that one, # 421, was not among them.²¹

The East Genesee Annual Conference went to a more discursive style of minutes in 1855, with paragraph summaries of each day's major actions (though modest in comparison with New England's). In that year, Bishop Beverly Waugh presided. He "conducted the opening religious service by reading 2d Tim., 2d Chapter, singing the hymn commencing, 'Except the Lord conduct the plan,' and prayer,"²² The following year, East Genesee made no indication of its initial hymn. The conference did receive an Irish delegate and took a special offering for that church. In 1857, again with an Irish delegate present and again with Waugh presiding, the conference opened with a reading of a selection from 1st Peter, "And are we yet alive," and prayer. One suspects that the international Methodist presence, perhaps reinforced by the British Methodist patterns so close by in Canada may have been influential. At any rate, the following year, East Genesee introduced the sacrament and made no mention of its hymn

¹⁸*Minutes of the New England Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church . . . 1853*, 3.

¹⁹*Minutes of the New England Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church . . .*

1860: "Bishop Janes, assisted by Rev. G. F. Cox, introduced the religious services, by reading the Scriptures, singing, and prayer, after which the holy sacrament was administered." (3)

1862: Introduction . . . "The religious services were opened with the reading of the Scriptures by the Rev. Bishop Janes, who presided at the Conference, and the singing of a hymn; after which Rev. Chas. Baker offered prayer.

The Holy Sacrament was then administered to the members of the Conference, a large number of whom were present, and also to the members of the church who were in attendance." (3)

1863: "Levi Scott, presiding . . . Scripture, hymn, communion."

1866: "The Holy Sacrament" administered, "several of the preachers assisting therein" (3).

²⁰*Minutes of the New England Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church . . . 1868*, 8.

²¹*Hymns For the Use of The Methodist Episcopal Church*, revised edition (New York: Nelson & Phillips, 1849). New England noted the singing of # 280 in 1865 and # 218 in 1867.

²²*Minutes of the Eighth Session of the East Genesee Annual Conference of the M. E. Church*, 1855, 3.

selection. This set a pattern; the sacrament seems to be thereafter a tradition. No hymn choices are indicated again until 1876. In that year, Western New York and East Genesee met separately on October 4th and 5th, the former opening with # 266, the latter with # 700. Then they met as a reunited body and sang, "And are we yet alive."

Elsewhere also conferences evidenced similar self-preoccupation. In 1857, Baltimore²³ changed its style of recording and remembering its work. Instead of following the historic questions, it also adopted the minute form and identified actions day-by-day. The same conference called for historical sketches of the rise of Methodism. It still opened in the traditional fashion and with no indication of selections:

The Conference was opened with appropriate religious exercises, consisting of reading the Scriptures, singing and prayer, conducted by the president.²⁴

Two years later, the Baltimore secretary specified the scripture and opening hymn, # 237, "I love thy kingdom, Lord." The actual minutes, including the above notice, were prefaced by list of "Names of Preachers and Date of Their Admission on Trial in the Traveling Connection":

Joshua Wells	1789
Henry Smith	1794
Alfred Giffith	1806
Etc.	

continuing up to 1859.²⁵ Recollection of the names served perhaps to soften some of the pain caused by the division of the fraternity—the prior year conference had once again divided itself, this time into Baltimore and East Baltimore. Some of the enumerated brothers belonged now to a new fraternity.

Two years later, with the nation also dividing, the conference meeting in Virginia, heeded a memorial from the "Convention of Laymen which assembled in Baltimore in December last, relating to the action on Slavery by the General Conference . . . 1861," and effected yet another division.²⁶ These minutes were much more dramatic and detailed and still reverberate with the tension over slavery. The secretary reverted to an older format, with rules first, then Minutes, though the latter continued to be laid out in minute fashion. He did report the scripture text and the actual hymn, # 218, "Except the Lord conduct the plan." The plan they hoped 'blest' declared the new General Conference chapter on slavery unconstitutional

²³On the Baltimore conference(s), see Gordon Pratt Baker, ed., *Those Incredible Methodists. A History of the Baltimore Conference of the United Methodist Church* (Baltimore: Commission on Archives and History, The Baltimore Conference, 1972).

²⁴*Annual Minutes of the . . . Baltimore Annual Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, 1857.*

²⁵*Annual Minutes of the . . . Baltimore Annual Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, 1859.*

²⁶*Annual Register of the Baltimore Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, 1861: 5.* "Register" represents a reversion to an earlier name for the minutes.

and declared itself as a conference “separate and independent . . . still claiming to be, notwithstanding, an integral part of the Methodist Episcopal Church.”²⁷

The next year, in 1862, the Baltimore Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church met as two bodies, one in Harrisonburg as “separate and independent” and the other in Baltimore proclaiming loyalty to the MEC, disavowing the actions of the prior year, and regarding those not present as withdrawn.²⁸ The body meeting in Harrisonburg enjoyed a “separate and independent” existence through the war and thereafter voted to align with the MECS. In its first (1862) meeting, and apparently only then, it opened with, “And are we yet alive.”²⁹

This the second use as an opening hymn (that I have yet discovered) was probably not known by other conferences and in itself could not have been all that influential. It does, however, nicely situate what would result in a “new” tradition, amid the crises that called into question the very existence of things like “conference.” Slavery, the continuing sectional crisis, war, and subsequent “religious” border warfare over turf accelerated conference preoccupation with itself, as conferences naturally cared for themselves in caring for the state of the church. In this context, the new tradition emerged.

The New England Conference of 1864 accounted for itself with an eight-page “Abstract of Daily Proceedings,”³⁰ a number of elaborate reports, including a long one on Temperance, a List of “Deceased Members of the New England Conference,” another listing of Sessions of the New England Conference, a Retrospective Register of the NE Conference (alphabetical indicating successive appointments of each minister), and another Alphabetical List of Members.

The regular Baltimore Conference (MEC) continued to record the names of preachers, date of admission, post offices. In 1864, (which conference incidentally opened again with “I love thy kingdom, Lord”), it registered its work in far more formalized fashion: Contents, Rules, Officers, Synopsis of the Minutes (including the opening exercises of scripture and hymn # 237), Introductions, Committees of 1864, Resolutions (including a request that William Prettyman preach a semi-centennial sermon), Visit to the President, Resolutions of Thanks, Fast Day and Reports of Committees.³¹ By 1869, Baltimore *Minutes* had become highly schematized.

²⁷ *Annual Register of the Baltimore Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church*, 1861, 49.

²⁸ *Register of the Baltimore Annual Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church*, 1862, 22–23. These actions came in the adoption of the report of a Special Committee of Seven.

²⁹ *Minutes of the Sessions of the Baltimore Annual Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church*, Held at Harrisonburg . . . 1862, Churchville . . . 1863, Bridgewater . . . 1864, Salem . . . 1865, Rev. John S. Martin, Sec. (Staunton: Stoneburner & Prufer, 1899).

³⁰ *Minutes of the New England Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church* . . . 1864, 3–11.

³¹ *Register of the Baltimore Annual Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church*, 1864.

Included were: a more elaborate Table of Contents; a whole page of Officers; three pages listing members, in tabular display, including date of admission, present relation, appointment and residence; committee lists for both 1869 and 1870; Questions of the General Minutes; also one page indicating Appointments for 1869; then Journal, day-by-day, which indicated the opening as still scripture, singing of # 707, prayer, # 409 and another prayer; motions of regret and blessing for seven persons being transferred out; also a resolution of welcome to members of East Baltimore now reunited with Baltimore; and an Appendix, Benevolent Societies of the M.E. Church, general statistics on the church, and receipts of various denominational and voluntary agencies.³²

That year, amid all the formalization, Baltimore sang "And are we yet alive."

Baltimore sang the hymn again in 1872, in 1874, in 1875, in 1878 and by then it looked like a tradition. Or almost a tradition, for it was not to be unbroken. Baltimore sang "Draw near, O Son of God, draw near," in 1880 and again in 1884 and would select other hymns than, "And are we yet alive," as late as 1890 and 1891.

In the 1880s, specifically in 1886, Baltimore began New England's practice of celebrating the Lord's Supper at the opening. And in 1893 the tradition well established, it adopted a specific order prescribing "The Conference Session shall be opened with the administration of the Lord's Supper."³³

New England apparently began singing, "And are we yet alive," in the same year, 1872. Like Baltimore, New England settled in to that as a tradition only gradually, singing different hymns in 1874, 1878, and 1882. They soon recognized it, though, as "that most appropriate and touching hymn."³⁴

Rubrics in the Hymnal

The recognition of the hymn as "most appropriate and touching" came amid a surge of Methodist reclamations. The northern church geared up for the 1866 centenary. The 1864 General Conference authorized a gigantic, national financial drive, calling for two "departments of Christian enterprise . . . one connectional, central, and monumental, the other local and distributive." It connected fund-raising with denominational spiritual improvement achieved "by reviewing the great things God hath wrought for us, the cultivating of feelings of gratitude for the blessings received through

³²*Minutes of the . . . Baltimore Annual Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, 1869.*

³³*Minutes of the . . . Baltimore Annual Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, 1893, 15, 80.*

³⁴*Minutes of the New England Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church . . . 1879, 5.*

the agency of Methodism.”³⁵ It called each annual conference to “provide for the delivery of a memorial sermon”³⁶ and for “appropriate celebration” in principal churches.³⁷ It charged Abel Stevens with the task of producing a *Centenary of American Methodism*. Thus began a connection-wide season of remembering and reclaiming, a process that continued really through the 1884 centennial. Methodism went about the making and recovery of traditions. Histories and portraits of Methodism with a historical argument abounded. James Porter published his *Compendium of Methodism*.³⁸ Bishop Matthew Simpson produced his *A Hundred Years of Methodism*³⁹ and monumental *Cyclopaedia of Methodism. Embracing Sketches of its Rise, Progress and Present Condition, with Biographical Notices and Numerous Illustrations*.⁴⁰ Similar remembering went on at conference level. Annual conferences called for semi-centennial sermons. Volumes appeared like *The Bishop’s Council: With Reminiscences of an Annual Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church*.⁴¹ Baltimore produced *Crowned Victors. The Memoirs of Over Four Hundred Methodist Preachers, Including the First Two Hundred and Fifty Who Died on the Continent*.⁴² The church looked ahead by looking back. “And are we yet alive” epitomized the church’s mood.

The new tradition doubtless derived from a variety of influences—the southern example, interaction with the British conference, the dissemination of new and good ideas by the itinerating general superintendents, an increased interest in liturgy. A change in the northern hymnal, both reflected and facilitated, the new tradition of singing, “And are we yet alive.”⁴³ The hymnal in use as the conferences became more conscious of their opening was *Hymns For the Use of The Methodist Episcopal Church*.⁴⁴ Its Index of Subjects, listed two batches of “Conference Hymns,” # 203–222 and # 1119–1129. The latter were “Close of Worship” hymns. The former deserve listing:

³⁵Abel Stevens, *The Centenary of American Methodism: A Sketch of Its History, Theology, Practical System, and Success. Prepared by Order of the Centenary Committee of the General Conference of The Methodist Episcopal Church* (New York: Carlton & Porter, 1865), 248.

³⁶For an example see the Appendix of George R. Crooks, *The Life of Bishop Matthew Simpson* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1891).

³⁷*The Life of Bishop Matthew Simpson*, 256.

³⁸*The Revised Compendium of Methodism. Embracing The History and Present Condition of its Various Branches in All Countries; with A Defence of its Doctinal, Governmental, and Prudential Peculiarities* (New York: Hunt & Eaton; Cincinnati: Cranston & Stowe, 1875).

³⁹(New York: Phillips & Hunt, 1876).

⁴⁰(Philadelphia: Everts & Stuart, 1878).

⁴¹By an Ex-Presiding Elder (Saint Louis: P. M. Pinckard, 1867).

⁴²Compiled by J. W. Hedges (Baltimore: Methodist Episcopal Book Depository, 1878). A Baltimore Conference compilation that subsumed episcopal Methodism in its own history.

⁴³Please note the discussion above, describing the southern church’s earlier recognition of, “Are we yet alive,” as a conference hymn.

⁴⁴Revised edition (New York: Nelson & Phillips, 1849).

- # 203 "The Saviour, when to heaven he rose"
- # 204 "Go, preach my Gospel, saith the Lord"
- # 205 "How beauteous are their feet Who stand on Zion's hill"
- # 206 "Let Zion's watchmen all awake"
- # 207 "Lord of the harvest dear"
- # 208 "Jesus, thy wand'ring sheep behold!"
- # 209 "Comfort, ye ministers of grace"
- # 210 "Jesus, the word of mercy give"
- # 211 "Thus saith the Lord—'tis God commands"
- # 212 "Sow in the morn thy seed"
- # 213 "Draw near, O Son of God, draw near"
- # 214 "Jesus, thy servants bless"
- # 215 "Father of mercies, bow thine ear"
- # 216 "Now, Lord, fulfil thy faithful word"
- # 217 "High on his everlasting throne"
- # 218 "Except the Lord conduct the plan"
- # 219 "Jesus, the Name high over all"
- # 220 "Lord, if at thy command The word of life we sow"
- # 221 "And let our bodies part"
- # 222 "O happy, happy place, Where saints and angels meet!"

Not included in these "Conference Hymns" was # 421, "And are we yet alive." The hymnal prescribed, and conferences would sing as conference, a variety of hymns. Focus did not fall on the one special hymn.

Hymnbooks did find such a focus and did feature the one special hymn after the Civil War. The MECS produced a new hymnbook in 1866.⁴⁵ It retained under its Index of Subjects, the entry for hymns # 272-78, namely for "Conference of ministers," and the three for "Opening Conference," including # 272 "And are we yet alive." The northern church revised its hymnal in 1878.⁴⁶ "And are we yet alive," # 798, carried the heading "Meeting, after absence," but under Index of Subjects, it was listed as "Conference Hymn" and was the only entry for that category. The tradition was "born."

Organization and Memory: A New Tradition?

In 1884 the Baltimore Conference met in a celebrative mood. Methodism was celebrating yet another anniversary and was doing so in a highly organized fashion. Bishop Edward G. Andrews made a statement on the centennial.⁴⁷ Lyttleton F. Morgan preached, his semi-centennial

⁴⁵I refer to *A Collection of Hymns for Public, Social, and Domestic Worship* (Nashville: Southern Methodist Publishing House, 1880; but apparently a reissue of 1866 edition).

⁴⁶*Hymnal of the Methodist Episcopal Church* (Cincinnati: Hitchcock & Walden, 1878; also New York: Nelson & Phillips, 1878).

⁴⁷*Minutes of the . . . Baltimore Annual Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, 1884, 52-55.*

being also "The Centennial of the Methodist Episcopal Church, A Sermon." The conference produced and incorporated into the minutes a "Centennial Historical Manual of the Baltimore Conference M.E. Church."⁴⁸ The conference made a point of incorporating also the "Proceedings of the Baltimore Electoral Conference of Laymen of the Methodist Episcopal Church: Fourth Quadrennial Meeting." The church was feeling its way on the incorporation of the laity. It was also feeling its way on its own incorporation. The inclusion of the lay organization's meetings was entirely apt. The lay business 'men' would not have found conference structure unfamiliar. It, too, had become business-like—with 'corporate' officers, an array of distinct financial systems, an elaborate committee structure, rules, auxiliaries and societies through which the business of missions and higher education and Sunday school and church extension could be conducted, complex accounting systems that measured performance of churches, circuits, ministers, Sunday schools, directories arrayed by mailing addresses, and a pension plan. Conference drew on its organizational capacities also for memory. It completed the various charts and statistical sections with a "Roll of the Baltimore Conference."⁴⁹ It covered the period from 1797 to the present and used codes to indicate year of departure by:

d	death
e	expulsion
w	withdrawal
l	location
t	transfer;

also admission by:

a	on trial
re-a	readmitted
t	transfer.

The roll looked forward from 1797. A "Conference Roster" looked backward from the present. It listed the successive appointments of 1884 members.⁵⁰ So with two elaborate charts, covering forty pages, Baltimore organized its memory.

Organization and memory went together. Indeed, Baltimore was well organized for memory, having established for itself and the denomination,

⁴⁸*Minutes of the . . . Baltimore Annual Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, 1884.* It follows p. 106 but is freshly paginated as 3-16 and was "Published by the American Methodist Historical Society."

⁴⁹*Minutes of the . . . Baltimore Annual Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, 1884,* 136-50.

⁵⁰*Minutes of the . . . Baltimore Annual Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, 1884,* 151-75.

“the American Methodist Historical Society.” In its memory, conference and particularly the Baltimore Conference, loomed larger in the Methodist saga:

Here, then, in the Colony and State of Maryland, within the present Baltimore Conference, without doubt, was the first Apostle of Methodism in America; the first Society, the first Chapel, the first General Conference, which in 1784 organized the Church, the first school, Cokesbury College, the first native local preacher, Richard Owen, and the first native itinerant, William Watters. Moreover this was the field where its first fruits were most abundantly reaped, for the earliest statistics given (1773), show that it yielded more than half of the whole membership in America.⁵¹

When so highly organized for memory as for work; when organization delivered a detailed and ‘scientific’ past; when the ‘fathers’ and old Methodism lived through ceremony and charts; when elaborate Sunday schools and Akron plan buildings squeezed out class meetings; when organization transformed Methodism, threatening what it could now more clearly remember — then it became very important to create traditions to preserve as much as possible.⁵² In 1884 Baltimore did not actually sing, “And are we yet alive.” But it had done so the previous three years and it would do so frequently thereafter.⁵³

As they sang, the preachers’ memories cut through all the organized self-preoccupation to recall the fraternity into which they had been inducted, the covenant that had bound them together even as it had dispersed them to travel, the great relish with which they had gathered after a hard year, the ‘brothers’ who had dropped from traveling or who had been dropped by death, the joy now in being with those “yet alive.” A “conference hymn” indeed, “And are we yet alive” could not arrest time or time’s toll on conference. It could not stop the dramatic, organizational revolution that swept away the simpler Methodism the hymn recalled. It could not bring back the old days or those not “yet alive.” It could not by legislation or exhortation recreate the love feast and class meeting in which this hymn had once resonated. But it could provide a moment when with lusty voice and teary eye conference could step outside of time.

⁵¹*Minutes of the . . . Baltimore Annual Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, 1884, 127.*

⁵²It is worth note that the hymn became established as a conference hymn at the point when the love feast and class meeting, its former locations, had become really memories. With this hymn, conference perhaps sustained the memory of its own intimacies, its earlier class-like character, even as it jeopardized such intimacies with the new organizational apparatus.

⁵³*Minutes of the . . . Baltimore Annual Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, 1884.* The hymn that year was # 815, “Draw near, O Son of God, draw near.” “And are we yet alive” was sung in 1885, 1888, 1889, and 1892; the hymn was not indicated for 1886; other hymns were sung in 1887, 1890 and 1891.