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8 TO REFORM THE CHURCH: PARISH PRIESTHOOD IN PRIMITIVE METHODISM  
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I. A “METHODIST” PRIESTHOOD?

At our second Oxford Institute of Methodist Theological Studies (1962) Prof. Albert C. Outler declared, “Methodism operates best when it has a Church to operate in” (Kirkpatrick, 28-29). This was at the center of his response to the question he put before the Institute, “Does Methodism Have a Doctrine of the Church?” I think John Wesley’s assertive rejoinder to Dr. Outler would be, “Just so, and a Church operates best when it has ‘the work of God called Methodism’ operating within it!” Recall his conviction as to why God raised up the “Preachers Called Methodists” — “To reform the nation, especially the Church, and to spread scriptural holiness throughout the land. (*Works*, Jackson, 8:299). He might have put it, although less succinctly, “To reform the nation, primarily through the agency of a reformed Church spreading scriptural holiness throughout the land.” (1)

We know how badly the Wesleys wanted the parish clergy, the ordained incumbent pastors in the active practice of *cura animarum*, as allies in their apostolate of a reformed, apostolic ecclesial and national movement. He hoped that first William Grimshaw, perpetual curate of Haworth in Yorkshire, and then John William Fletcher, vicar of Madeley in Shropshire, would succeed him as the leader of Wesleyan Methodism. When both predeceased him he did not identify another priest who might accept Elijah’s mantle from him.

Visits to Haworth and “the little living of Madeley” led me to ask, “Was there — and if so, is there — a distinctive Wesleyan *typos* of ordained parish ministry? Can those who were dubbed Methodist parsons or Methodist priests teach us something of how Methodism operates within a Church, not just Methodism itself being the whole of church? The Methodism I know best has historically modeled its pastoral ministry on the heroic myth of the USA frontier circuit rider. The *gesta* of these heroes continue to inform the tribal self-image of their institutional descendants. Clerical biographies in *The Encyclopedia of World Methodism* consistently record dates of admission to conference membership, but frequently omit any reference to the minister’s ordination. The connectional relationship seems more important than the ecumenical one. Thus I became interested in what it was like to be not a Methodist lay itinerant preacher but a Methodist ordained pastor in primitive (original) Wesleyan Methodism. This question has been recognized but not extensively researched.

This discussion paper is a brief progress report of some of what I have learned to date from major documents of Wesleyan teaching about *parochalia* (the practice of parish ministry) and *pastoralia* (principles regulating the life and conduct of the parish priest), and how some leading Methodist parsons “redeemed the time” in their parishes. These documents and practices point to a Wesleyan style of parish ministry. To “spede the plough,” and limit the number of pages, documentation is severely abbreviated. Two additional chapters — “Anglican Pastoral Tradition” and “Evangelicals and Methodists” are not far enough along to include here.

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3 II. THE WESLEYAN DOCTRINE OF *PAROCHALIA/PASTORALIA*  
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5 Reformed, apostolic, and primitive are the words that characterize the priest or parson of  
6 a Church of England that would have had Wesleyan Methodism operating within it. We have  
7 noted ecclesial and national reform as the stated aim of Methodism. We shall see how the  
8 Wesleyans believed their practice of ministry was the renewal of New Testament apostolic  
9 ministry. Such reformed and apostolic ministry would bring the Church back to the primitive  
10 (original) purity of ancient church faith, doctrine, and life.  
11

12 In each of three letters between January and August 1725 Samuel Wesley, Sr. urged John  
13 to master and digest John Chrysostom's treatise on priesthood. But early Methodism does not  
14 seem to have drawn upon such classics of *pastoralia* as Ambrose's *De Officiis Ministrorum*,  
15 Chrysostom's *Peri Heirosynes*, and Gregory I's *Liber Regulae Pastoralis*. There is one  
16 misquotation by John from Chrysostom about the road to hell being paved with the skulls of  
17 priests whose malpractice causes persons to sin (*Works*, Bicentennial, 25:158, 171, 177; 26:237).  
18

19 The earliest major treatise on the pastoral office that holds a place of high regard in  
20 Wesleyan Methodism is RICHARD BAXTER's *Gildas Salvianus: The Reformed Pastor* (1656).  
21 It was a permanent entry on Wesley's syllabus of pastoral studies. Reformed is not a reference  
22 to the Reformed tradition, the Calvinist ecclesial *typos*. Reform meant correcting clerical  
23 scandal and pastoral neglect. Oliver Cromwell's government sought to punish such ministers.  
24 Reformist clergy such as Baxter worked to organize pastors who would agree together to take  
25 seriously their obligation to catechize their people (Baxter, 51). The major themes of *Gildas*  
26 *Salvianus* are the Christian experience of the pastor and personal contacts with his people.  
27 Preaching is important; more important is the pastor knowing every person in the parish face to  
28 face and one on one. He must teach them individually, and as families in their homes. Visitation  
29 of the sick and evangelization of everyone in the parish are also high on the reformed pastor's  
30 agenda. In addition to personal Christian experience, the pastor must be informed by knowledge  
31 of scripture and the Fathers of the Church. Altogether the tone of *Gildas* is heavily didactic,  
32 rationalistic, and doctrinal. Baxter hardly mentions the sacraments. The reformed pastor is  
33 primarily a teacher of doctrine and morals.  
34

35 Two works by SAMUEL WESLEY, Sr. are next on the Wesleyan bookshelf of *cura*  
36 *animarum*. Samuel was a tough pastor, but one must admire the consecrated professionalism of  
37 the rector of Epworth and Wroote. He always upheld the high principle of his *vocatio* and did  
38 his duty through decades of hard service. In my opinion, John Wesley, like so many ordained  
39 persons reared in a pastor family, got his basic stuff on how to do church from his parents.  
40 Samuel shaped his ideas about parish ministry into two books, *The Pious Communicant Rightly*  
41 *Prepar'd; Or A Discourse Concerning the Blessed Sacrament . . . To which is added, A Short*  
42 *Discourse of Baptism* (1700) and *Advice to a Young Clergyman in a Letter to Him* (ca.1722).  
43 *Communicant* has a sixteen page addendum between its sections on eucharist and baptism, "A  
44 Letter Concerning Religious Societies."

1  
2 Samuel opens *Communicant* with his theology of the eucharist. It is the memorial and  
3 representation of Christ’s death, replacing the Passover. The bread and wine are figuratively,  
4 typically, and sacramentally the body and blood of Christ. For the faithful communicant there is  
5 a real spiritual presence of Christ who, by his Spirit, unites himself to our souls. We receive all  
6 the benefits of his passion, especially the preservation of our souls and bodies to everlasting life.  
7 Both the manner of the real presence and the manner in which the benefits of Christ’s death are  
8 communicated to us remain mysteries. Samuel, then, in Dr. Outler’s phrase did not attempt “to  
9 unscrew the inscrutable.”

10  
11 Next the rector establishes the perpetual obligation of all adult Christians to communicate  
12 frequently. He did not think we can come too frequently to the Lord’s table; the primitive  
13 Christians communicated daily. Fully one half of this fifty page chapter is given to refuting  
14 objections to frequent communion. Upon this foundation Wesley places the superstructure of  
15 personal preparation for and participation in the sacrament. He gives twenty-eight pages of  
16 instruction, drawing his outline from the liturgy. Finally, Samuel provides a pattern for  
17 meditation upon the eucharist just concluded and renewal of preparation for the next one — six  
18 self-examination questions for the morning and eight more for the evening.

19  
20 “Of Baptism” is sixty-one pages long. Thirty-seven pages made the case for, and  
21 answered objections to, infant baptism on the grounds of scripture, reason, and primitive and  
22 universal tradition. Hesitancy over and neglect of infant baptism was a pastoral issue in St.  
23 Andrew’s parish. In 1758 John Wesley reduced his father’s treatise to fourteen pages and  
24 republished it under his own name.

25  
26 “A Letter Concerning the Religious Societies” is unnumbered and inserted between the  
27 sections on eucharist and baptism. Samuel supports the ideas and practices of Josiah Woodward  
28 and Anthony Horneck in establishing parish religious societies comprising only constant  
29 communicants. The societies promote eucharistic devotion and provide pastoral care, especially  
30 of the sick and the poor. They advise the pastor on the spiritual condition of the parish.

31  
32 Samuel’s other work on pastoral care is *Advice to a Young Clergyman in a Letter to Him*.  
33 He wrote this around 1722 for his new curate, Nathaniel Hoole, and it would be used by Hoole  
34 and his successors, John Pennington, John Wesley, and John Whitelamb. Its topics are a pastor’s  
35 intention, converse, demeanor, sacramental administration, and enforcement of discipline. It is  
36 the most comprehensive entry on the early Methodist syllabus for the practice of parish ministry.

37  
38  
39 Intention has two elements — a confident yes to the ordination question about being  
40 inwardly moved by the Holy Ghost to enter this office and ministry, and love of the people of the  
41 parish, be they sick, healthy, poor, rich, friends or enemies. To remain fresh in these  
42 commitments read over the Form of Ordination once a quarter. Pastoral deportment can be  
43 learned from Chrysostom, Polycarp, Ignatius of Antioch, the “Apostolical Canons,” and the  
44 seventy-fifth canon of *Codex Iuris Ecclesiastici Anglicani*. Fully one third of the section on

1 department is instruction on pastoral visitation. Visitation must be systematic, regular, and  
2 universal throughout the parish — house to house. The good shepherd will know everyone in  
3 the parish by name, and their temporal and spiritual condition.. Samuel hoped Nathaniel would  
4 bring the parish’s *Notitia* to greater perfection. Visit the sick as soon as you know of it from  
5 whatever source. Often the first notice you will have is the parting-bell, yet you will be  
6 criticized by the family for neglect. An earlier curate had advised Samuel himself to work for a  
7 well-managed familiarity with the people. He attempted this, but failed. He hoped Nathaniel’s  
8 experience would be happier.

9  
10 The rector’s guidance on reading prayers has to do with how to read and sing the liturgy.  
11 He does not speak of personally prepared or extempore prayer in public worship.

12  
13 Section four — “Your Studies” — fills thirty-three of the seventy-four pages of *Advice*,  
14 the longest section by far. Samuel sets forth a seven year syllabus but a minister must be  
15 learning to the last moment of his life. The Bible is one’s main subject and Origen was correct  
16 in striving to commit most or all of it to memory. The intertestamental books and Christian  
17 apocrypha ought not to be neglected. The first requirement of Biblical study is the languages:  
18 Greek, Latin, and Hebrew. Hebrew is then the key to at least six other ancient Near Eastern  
19 languages.

20  
21 Next come the Articles of Religion and all the fundamentals of the Church of England  
22 which are rooted in the Bible and the Fathers of the Church. For ten pages Samuel reveals his  
23 wide and deep knowledge of both Christian and pagan writers of the second through fourth  
24 centuries. Athanasius, Basil, and Chrysostom are his leading triad, with Augustine, Jerome, and  
25 Ambrose just below them. The ancient ecumenical councils and the Saxon councils need to be  
26 understood. Samuel sorely regrets the dearth of original sources for the Anglo-Saxon centuries.  
27 “Thus have I cut you out work, as I imagine, for about half seven Years among the Antients . . .”  
28 (*Advice*, p. 42).

29  
30 The rector chose not to trouble either himself or Nathaniel with the “palpable darkness”  
31 of the church from Bede to Luther. He mentions only Robert Grosseteste (d.1253) and Thomas  
32 Bradwardine (d.1349) — both Englishmen — and does not suggest they ought to be read. Thus  
33 the second half of the young clergyman’s intellectual apprenticeship may be spent among “the  
34 moderns.” These begin with the Protestant Reformers, whom he appreciates but acknowledges  
35 he does not know as well as he does the ancients. He is better acquainted with Melancthon,  
36 Calvin, and Bucer than with Luther. Bishop Gilbert is his guide to the Reformation in England.  
37 While Erasmus, John Jewel, and Thomas Cranmer are worthy, the best sources are Nicholas  
38 Ridley (his favorite), Richard Hooker, and the *Homilies*. Samuel treats the 1500s in a single  
39 page.

40  
41 The eleven pages on the ancient church are balanced by ten on the Caroline authors, both  
42 Divines and Deists, plus some continentals. This brings him to his own day and writers he  
43 knows personally. In these pages he comments on 109 authors or collections. We find works on  
44 pastoral care, preaching, and piety, but the heavy concentration is in theology. The period from

1 the accession of Charles I to the death of Charles II was one of many glorious lights in the  
2 church. *The Reformed Pastor* was one of five Richard Baxter titles he included, regretting very  
3 much that his *Gildas Salvianus* was lost in the rectory fire. There are three canon law related  
4 titles one cannot well be without: William Watson's *Compleat Incumbent*, John Johnson's *The*  
5 *Clergyman's Vade Mecum*, and Bishop Edmund Gibson's edition of *Codex Iuris Ecclesiastici*  
6 *Anglicani*. Though Gibson's work is much too expensive for either Samuel or his young  
7 colleague to own, "the grapes are never the less sweet because we cannot reach them" (*Advice*,  
8 p.54).

9  
10 Of course, divinity is the purpose of all our study, but there is much that can serve  
11 divinity in logic, history, law, pharmacy, natural philosophy, experimental philosophy,  
12 chronology, geography, mathematics, poetry, and music. This magisterial section four closes  
13 with a system of note taking, indexing, and page referencing for information retrieval. To be  
14 sure, all of this study is a great deal of trouble, "but . . . one Soul is worth infinitely more than all  
15 our Pains and Labour" (*Advice*, p.55).

16  
17 Samuel announces the fifth section of *Advice* as dealing with preaching, but  
18 approximately one third of it has to do with catechizing. He thought the ancients distinguished  
19 catechizing from preaching more in name than in substance. Wesley stresses here the necessity  
20 of diligent catechizing in pastoral economy, but does not give a method for it.

21  
22 A preacher should have a course of sermons on the whole body of divinity. Sermon  
23 preparation begins with prayer "and then fall to in the name of God" (*Advice*, p.58). A sermon  
24 has six parts: explication of the text and its context; propositions or doctrines; illustrations;  
25 proofs; motives, and inferences and applications. English preachers depend too much on  
26 reasoning in their sermons and do little to move people's affections. Partisan politics is best kept  
27 out of the pulpit, but civic themes are appropriate every 30 January (execution of Charles I,  
28 1749); 29 May (entrance of Charles II into London, 1660); 01 August (accession of George I,  
29 1714), and 05 November (Guy Fawkes Day, 1604). "You will never forget that you are an  
30 Englishman and a Christian" (*Advice*, p.61). Wesley's bottom line on preaching is, "I do  
31 sincerely hate what some call a Fine Sermon, with just nothing in it . . . a mere polite nothing"  
32 (*Advice*, p.57).

33  
34 Next Samuel gives five pages to sacramental administration. His concerns are practical  
35 rather than doctrinal. In his quarter century plus in Epworth his biggest struggles with his people  
36 had been over neglect in bringing children for baptism and desire for private baptism. They  
37 "will bring such Monsters of Men-Children to the font as will almost break your Arms, and with  
38 their manful Voices disturb and alarm the whole Congregation" (*Advice*, p.66). Many,  
39 especially among the poorer families, never had the child baptized.

40  
41 Wesley's monthly celebration of holy eucharist was more frequent than in most parishes.  
42 His instructions here are taken from the 1711 letter to clergy by William Wake, the then bishop  
43 of Lincoln. It deals with whom to admit to the altar and what to do about persons who  
44 continually refuse to come to the Lord's Table. Also, an offering is taken at this sacrament —

1 three-fourths for the children at the charity school and one-fourth for emergency help for poor  
2 sick persons who come to the sacrament.

3  
4 *Advice* ends with matters of discipline — who is admissible to the eucharist;  
5 excommunications; fornication, and the legal proscription of profaneness, immorality, swearing,  
6 drunkenness, and desecration of the Lord’s Day. The Dissenters in this parish cannot be  
7 reconciled to the Church, but will be inoffensive and friendly if Nathaniel does not repeat  
8 Samuel’s mistake early in his tenure of humoring them with a dispute; “for they always out-  
9 faced me, and out-lunged me; and at the End, we were just where we were at the Beginning”  
10 (*Advice*, p.71).

11  
12 Finally, Wesley hopes he and Nathaniel will enjoy the support of “a Society of the  
13 Clergy,” such as had been recommended by Archbishop Thomas Tenison more than twenty  
14 years ago. The rector of Epworth longed for a fellowship of what Baxter termed reformed  
15 pastors.

16  
17 Professor Frank Baker noted that John Wesley’s 1735 edition of “The *Advice* was well  
18 advertised and seems rapidly to have become very scarce, nor was it ever reprinted, so that it  
19 never appears in Wesley’s later catalogues, nor were any copies present in the Book Room  
20 inventory at Wesley’s death” (“Bibliography,” p.53). As we shall see, however, much of *Advice*  
21 was given by John to priests and preachers alike.

22  
23 Another source for *pastoralia* in primitive Methodism is JOHN WILLIAM  
24 FLETCHER’s *The Portrait of St. Paul or, The True Model for Christians and Pastors*. He wrote  
25 *Portrait* during his 1777-1781 recuperation in Switzerland and his wife, Mary Bosanquet  
26 Fletcher, secured a translator for it after his death (1785). *Portrait* was published in 1790.  
27 Professor Kenneth E. Rowe observes that *Portrait* “stands comparison with Baxter’s *Reformed*  
28 *Pastor*.” The first USA printing came in 1804. It was on the earliest extant syllabus of a  
29 Conference Course of Study, in New York in the 1820s, and remained in print among USA  
30 Methodists until the end of the nineteenth century (“Fletcher,” p. 16)..

31  
32 In 238 pages Fletcher wants to show “what were the primitive Christians and apostolic  
33 pastors” (*Portrait*, p. 8). He sees Paul as the model of both. The apostolic pastor is one who  
34 exhibits Paul’s charity and zeal in his ministry. “Christian piety” — the piety Paul possessed  
35 after receiving “the two-fold gift of deep repentance toward God and living faith in Jesus Christ”  
36 — is the distinguishing mark of a true minister (*Portrait*, pp.14, 72, 111). Today’s pastor has  
37 the same Pauline commission found at Acts 26:17-18: open their eyes, so they may turn from the  
38 power of Satan to God, receive forgiveness of sins, and a place among those who are sanctified  
39 by faith in Christ. And, like Paul, they are sent not principally to baptize, but to preach the  
40 gospel. Pastors are suffragans of the first evangelists, witnesses of a secondary order to the  
41 resurrection (*Portrait*, p.20).

42  
43 Fletcher’s work is not as tightly woven as Samuel Wesley’s and his style is hortatory.  
44 His themes recur in varying contexts and have to be separated from moral admonition. What

1 emerges is the profile of the pastor praying, preaching, teaching, visiting, administering church  
2 discipline, and helping the needy — a reformed pastor,  
3

4 Prayer keeps fresh the presence of God in one’s life and nurtures pulpit preparation. This  
5 is “preaching from meditation” (*Portrait*, pp. 30, 107). Preaching from meditation is not to be  
6 abused. Prayer, joined to study and visitation produces preaching that connects the gospel to the  
7 people. “There are pastors . . . who, having acquired a good degree of spiritual knowledge, and a  
8 wonderful facility of expression, unhappily begin to pique themselves upon appearing before a  
9 numerous assembly without any previous study” (*Portrait*, p. 107). But study and sermon  
10 writing must not push visitation off the agenda because pastoral visitation enriches preaching.  
11 Proper time management will accommodate study, composition, and visitation.  
12

13 Like laborers who cultivate the lands of their master, ministers do the work needed on a  
14 specific field. Preaching offers threat or consolation, remedy or nourishment as the spiritual  
15 needs of persons require. The good pastor preaches repentance, faith, hope, and charity. Be  
16 ready to preach at any time. Rhetoric and oratory are aids to preaching, not its universal  
17 requirements. Thus preaching promotes Fletcher’s definition of Christian piety — true  
18 repentance toward God and lively faith in Christ.  
19

20 Catechizing is another major pastoral responsibility. “Let us embrace every opportunity  
21 of exhorting both believers and catechumens. Let us carry, with unwearied constancy,  
22 instruction to the ignorant . . . . Let us be . . . diligent in training up the children of our parish”  
23 (*Portrait*, p. 107).  
24

25 Fletcher seldom uses the noun visitation without its adjective pastoral. The pastor’s visit  
26 is not casual. Visitation keeps him informed of who needs assistance, discipline, instruction,  
27 exhortation, comfort, strengthening. “The most powerful nerve of the sacred ministry is  
28 ecclesiastical discipline,” and pastoral visitation, “vigilant inspection into families,” is the great  
29 means “upon which the discipline of the Church depends” (*Portrait*, pp. 107, 105). Discipline  
30 included both absolving true penitents and fencing obstinate sinners from the Lord’s table.  
31 Holding out tokens of God’s favor to those who are objects of God’s wrath wrongs both God and  
32 them. Fletcher cites Matthew 18:18 and 28:18, Mark 16:15-16, and John 13:20 as giving pastors  
33 this “power which belongs to them of Divine right” (*Portrait*, p.26).  
34

35 The “Shropshire saint,” this “Methodist parson,” discussed how Jesus and Paul cared for  
36 the poor. The pastor who attends the poor merits the name of a faithful minister. A minister  
37 appointed among the poor must be willing to work with his hands, making sure to offer both his  
38 material help and the Word of God.  
39

40 Apostolic pastors — those who take Paul as their model — should expect opposition  
41 from both ecclesiastical and secular leaders. Standing by his convictions will cost him  
42 popularity and revenues in his parish. Expanding evangelical ministry to other parishes will  
43 bring accusations of “new sect, party, conventicle,” from the worldly clergy in those places. But  
44 like his original mentor the Apostle himself, the apostolic pastor is happy amid afflictions.

1  
2       If we take Professor Rowe's suggestion and compare Fletcher's *Portrait* with Baxter's  
3 *Reformed Pastor* we find Fletcher gives a much fuller picture of the pastoral office. Both view  
4 the pastor as spiritual instructor who guarantees this central ministry by diligent, intentional  
5 pastoral visitation, especially in private homes. But Baxter's pastor seems almost exclusively  
6 the catechist and teaching preacher. Fletcher's pastor, on the other hand, is shown in a variety of  
7 settings: private prayer, the study, the writing desk, the pulpit, and the altar, as well as "looking  
8 attentively upon" his people in their hamlets, schools, and homes.(2)  
9

10       What about the writings of JOHN WESLEY himself? Dennis M. Campbell notes that  
11 Wesley "never systematically articulated a doctrine of the ministry" (*Yoke*, p. 52). As usual  
12 with him one has to work through his entire corpus with a specific question in mind. Still there  
13 are some pieces dedicated to *pastoralia*.(3) Here I will lift up his "Address to the Clergy," four  
14 sermons, and selections from both the *Minutes* of Conference and *Explanatory Notes Upon the*  
15 *New Testament*. We shall see that his views are consistent with those of Baxter, his father  
16 Samuel, and Fletcher. Indeed, Samuel's writings appear to be the primary texts for John  
17 Wesley's teaching on *pastoralia*.  
18

19       Wesley's 1756 "Address to the Clergy" speaks mostly to the quality of the ordained  
20 ministry, contrasting the high ideal with the frequently poor practice in Georgian Anglicanism.  
21 He writes about aptitude, preparation, motivation, and application. There is little about what a  
22 minister actually does. Except in the area of academic preparation for ministry, which could  
23 hardly be achieved without a university education, much in "Address" parallels his  
24 characterization of the ideal Methodist lay preacher. On matters of natural gifts and academic  
25 preparation "Address" also reads like a summary of *Advice*, though better organized and much  
26 more succinctly stated. John's favorite ancients were Chrysostom, Basil, Jerome, Augustine, and  
27 Ephraim Syrus. Above all, the minister is to ask himself if he is a pattern for his people. He  
28 closes his "Address" with an exhortation to use the means of grace daily. "Let us continue in all  
29 the ordinances of God . . ." (*Works*, Jackson, 10:499-500).  
30

31       Wesley distinguished the offices of preacher and minister. Lay persons, including  
32 women, may preach, but only an ordained person, a minister, may "administer the ordinances" of  
33 baptism and the Lord's Supper. In the sermon "Prophets and Priests," also titled "The  
34 Ministerial Office," he separates the order of priesthood from the charismatic gift of prophecy  
35 (preaching). Then he distinguishes between ordinary and extraordinary prophets. Finally, he  
36 differentiates between evangelists and pastors or bishops. His lay preachers are extraordinary  
37 prophets and evangelists. A minister is an ordinary prophet, a pastor, and an administrator of  
38 God's ordinances (*Works*, Bicentennial, 4:75-84).  
39

40       "On Obedience to Pastors" is a shorter sermon, dated 1785. In it Wesley justifies his  
41 authority over the Methodists by defining the term pastor in its "scriptural senses." The text is  
42 Hebrews 13:7: "Remember them that had the rule over you, who spake to you the word of God:  
43 whose faith follow, considering the end of their conversation." He says that the Greek for rule is  
44 also, and more properly, translated "guide." One's true pastor is one's spiritual guide. Few

1 parish ministers are pastors in this scriptural sense, and Christians do not owe obedience to  
2 pastors who merely bear the name and wear the clothing of the office (*Works*, Bicentennial,  
3 3:375, 377).

4  
5 John C. Bowmer identified a section from the Minutes of Conference 1744 as the  
6 foundation of Wesley's doctrine of the pastoral office. The office of the minister is "To watch  
7 over the souls whom God commits to his charge, as he that must give account." Feed, guide,  
8 teach, and govern are the watchwords of the pastor (*Pastor and People*, pp. 198-199).

9  
10 General principles of the ministerial office are found as well in *Explanatory Notes Upon*  
11 *the New Testament*. Pastors are those who watch over their flocks (Ephesians 4:11). Elders,  
12 who are the same as presbyters or bishops, are the most faithful, zealous men appointed to watch  
13 over the rest. They are stewards of God, to whom God entrusts immortal souls (Titus 1:5, 7).  
14 Bishops (pastors) are kind observers, inspectors, overseers of souls (I Peter 2:25). Persons who  
15 give themselves wholly to the gift of feeding the flock "will be little in worldly company, in  
16 other studies, in collecting books, medals, or butterflies; wherein many pastors drone away so  
17 considerable a part of their lives" (I Timothy 4:14-15).

18  
19 Wesley does spotlight some specifics of pastoral ministry. Visitation ranked high. Even  
20 the apostles visited "from House to house" (Acts 20:20) and all who applied for Methodist  
21 conference membership had to promise to do the same (*Works*, Jackson, 8:310); a commitment  
22 still demanded of United Methodist candidates for election to full connection (*Discipline*, par.  
23 336.15). The *Large Minutes* gave specific instructions on spiritual direction of families, and  
24 especially of children (*Works*, Jackson, 8:305-307, 315-316). This too candidates for admission  
25 to full connection were, and still are, required to commit to (*Discipline*, par. 336.14). In 1786  
26 Wesley published a sermon "On Visiting the Sick," as a help to all Methodist visitors, most of  
27 them women. A sick call has three components — inquiry as to the patient's progress; any  
28 feasible action of the moment to make the person more comfortable; conversation about the  
29 person's spiritual condition. A visit with a sick person always concludes with prayer.  
30 Visitation, to look at a person attentively, cannot be done by proxy (*Works*, Bicentennial, 3:387,  
31 389-392).

32  
33 Wesley also lifted up prayer and preaching as basic to apostolic ministry. Indeed, Acts  
34 6:4 and I Corinthians 1:17 show that Paul's ministry was not primarily sacramental ministry, but  
35 the ministry of preaching (*Explanatory Notes*).

36  
37  
38 Wesley's writings on the office of minister do not include a piece on sacramental  
39 ministry but there is ample evidence of the centrality of the eucharist in ordained ministry. He  
40 placed upon Methodists the "Duty of Constant Communion," "the chief means of grace" (*Works*,  
41 Bicentennial, 3:428-439; Rattenbury, "Hymns on the Lord's Supper," #42.4). With his brother  
42 Charles he published 166 *Hymns on the Lord's Supper*. A powerful argument for the better  
43 health of any church which had Methodism operating within it was the increase in the number of  
44 those coming to communion.

1  
2 Here, then, are the salient points of a Wesleyan doctrine of *pastoralia* from these four  
3 writers: 1)Christian piety, meaning faith in Christ working by love, nurtured by prayer;  
4 2)intensive formal education and life-long learning; 3)the Bible, the ancient church, and the  
5 Anglican theologians of the 1600s as the core of this learning, complemented by humanities  
6 studies in general and some science as well; 4)preaching that teaches; 5)diligent catechizing,  
7 especially of children; 6)firm church discipline; 7)compassion for and action in behalf of the  
8 poor, with 8)continual intentional pastoral visitation as the cord of communication binding these  
9 activities together and bonding pastor and people.

10  
11 Thus was *therapeia psyches, cura animarum*, the family practice of the cure/care of souls  
12 to be carried out by priests of the Wesleyan *typos*.(4)  
13  
14  
15  
16  
17

### 18 III. WESLEYAN PRACTICE OF PARISH MINISTRY

19  
20 The nineteenth-century Anglican church historian, Charles J. Abbey, noting the  
21 evangelical sympathies of Queen Anne, thought she would have favored making John Wesley a  
22 bishop (*English Church*, I:383). Had Wesley been given preferment we would have ample  
23 evidence of what “reform the Church” meant to him. But Anne died in 1737 without knowing  
24 the John Wesley whom history remembers. There arose, however, parish priests known as  
25 Methodist clergy. Sometimes Methodist and Evangelical were used synonymously. And  
26 Methodist could mean either the George Whitefield/Selina, Countess of Huntingdon Methodists  
27 or the Wesleyan Methodists. My interest is in pastors “connected . . . with Wesley and his party”  
28 (Abbey, *English Church*, I:317). In this section we will look at seven of them.  
29

30 In my opinion, SAMUEL WESLEY, Sr. comes first, again because of his influence on  
31 John’s doctrine and practice of parish ministry. I believe most of John Wesley’s priestly  
32 formation came through his parents. Until age ten their home was his intense *scola animarum*.  
33 Later he was informed by Samuel’s pastoral treatises, and for about two years was his father’s  
34 curate.  
35  
36

37 Studies of Samuel’s ministry show him heeding his own *Advice*. Thirty-nine years in  
38 poor, unpromising Epworth did not break his commitment to his vocation. He visited “from  
39 house to house.” His discipline of the wayward was harsh. He aided the deserving poor.  
40 Diligently he observed the liturgical year, read public prayers, catechized the young, and  
41 preached. His sermons were scriptural and didactic. He celebrated holy eucharist in his church  
42 once a month when quarterly, or even annual, celebration was the majority practice. At Epworth  
43 in 1702 he organized a parish society of the type outlined in his *Pious Communicant*. Through  
44 all vicissitudes of professional and family life Samuel kept up his scholarship, dedicating works

1 to three successive Queens of England. In the end it seems he had some success in “reforming  
2 the church” at Epworth (Heitzenrater, pp. 42-44; Kirk, pp. 110-127; Tyerman, *Samuel Wesley*,  
3 pp. 227-228, 456-457).  
4

5 Both JOHN WESLEY’s writings and his parochial experience show that Samuel was his  
6 model of pastoral ministry, reformed along primitive, apostolic lines. John served nearly five  
7 years as a parish priest. Twice he was his father’s curate, the summer of 1726 and from August  
8 1727 until November 1729. Also, he took charge of the parish from April until sometime in June  
9 1735, the period surrounding Samuel’s death on 25 April. He applied unsuccessfully to become  
10 his father’s successor. John’s only extended period of ministry as priest in charge of a parish  
11 was his nearly two years at Savannah, Georgia. Preaching, catechizing, evangelizing, meeting  
12 with small groups for Christian nurture, visiting from house to house, and rigorously enforcing  
13 Church discipline were hallmarks of his ministry. He celebrated holy eucharist more frequently  
14 than Samuel had. That he spoke of his parish societies as “the second rise of Methodism” shows  
15 he wanted Methodism to operate in the traditional parish church (*Works*, Bicentennial, 9:430).  
16

17 Professor Frank Baker wrote the definitive biography of WILLIAM GRIMSHAW,  
18 perpetual curate of Haworth, Yorkshire from 1742 until his death in 1763, and gave him the  
19 designation “Methodist parish priest.” “He was the first and apart from John Fletcher of  
20 Madeley the most important of those clergymen . . . who successfully combined a parish  
21 ministry with a leading role in the Methodist societies” (*Grimshaw*, pp. 51, 258). Grimshaw  
22 gave Methodism a church to operate in.  
23

24 Grimshaw preached every Sunday, morning and afternoon. The morning sermon was an  
25 exposition of some part of the catechism or Articles of Religion or a reading of one of the  
26 *Homilies*. He offered a Sunday evening lecture, for poor people who might be embarrassed to  
27 come to the daytime services in their mean clothing. In these lectures he expounded a psalm or  
28 other chapter from scripture, on the pattern of the primitive church. He visited from house to  
29 house, provided charitable services, and was especially exemplary in visiting the sick. He  
30 superintended and taught religion in the parish grammar school and catechized the youth. He  
31 instituted monthly visitations around the parish to twelve locations where clusters of families  
32 met him for exhortation. Monthly sacrament days were regular at Haworth, drawing Methodists  
33 from all over the north and crowding the churchyard with thousands. Even before becoming  
34 associated with the Wesleys, Grimshaw started class meetings in the parish.  
35

36 To all this Grimshaw added local itineracy into communities as far as thirty miles away.  
37 He was in Haworth parish Friday through Monday and in his Haworth Round (circuit) Tuesday  
38 through Thursday. He preached, superintended the work of the lay preachers, and visited with  
39 class leaders and individual Methodists. He removed the names of those who did not maintain  
40 Methodist discipline. This is to say he did the “Business of an Assistant,” as outlined in the  
41 *Minutes of Conference 1749*. Over sixteen years what Baker informally referred to as  
42 Grimshaw’s “diocese” grew into nine circuits, covering about 8,000 square miles (*Grimshaw*,  
43 pp. 110, 147, 155).  
44

1 Little wonder, then, that in the 1763 Deed Poll John named as his successor in appointing  
2 preachers to Methodist circuits first Charles Wesley, to be followed by William Grimshaw  
3 (*Works*, Jackson, 8:330-331; *Grimshaw*, p. 161). Yet he survived both of them.  
4

5 So too did John outlive the next priest he hoped would lead the Methodists after him,  
6 JOHN WILLIAM FLETCHER, vicar of Madeley, east Shropshire from 1760 - 1785. When the  
7 Swiss born Fletcher went to Madeley he had been in England for ten years, associated with the  
8 Methodists for six, and a Church of England priest for three. Except for his long recuperative  
9 stay in Switzerland (1777-1781) Fletcher seldom left Madeley. He declined ecclesiastical  
10 advancement, offers of royal favor, and John Wesley's insistence that he prepare to assume the  
11 leadership of Wesleyan Methodism.  
12

13 Madeley became another place where Methodism had the Church to operate in and the  
14 Church had Methodism operating within it, a place where "Methodism was Church, and Church  
15 was Methodism." Madeley came to be referred to as the Mecca of Methodism. Fletcher was  
16 called "the Methodist parson" (Lawton, pp.3, 15). Owing largely to the influence of his widow,  
17 Mary Bosanquet Fletcher (married 1781), what can be called Church Wesleyan Methodism  
18 continued there for a half century after his death. Fletcher's immediate successor, Melville  
19 Horne, was formerly one of Wesley's itinerants, and the priest after him, Samuel Walter, was  
20 Mary Fletcher's choice. Mary (d.1815) was permitted to live permanently in the rectory. Her  
21 adopted daughter, Mary Tooth, continued Methodism's association with the ministry of the  
22 parish church until the 1830s when the relationship broke down completely (Tyerman,  
23 *Successor*, pp. 270-275).  
24

25 What did this Methodist parson do? Fletcher's prayer life was legendary in his own time,  
26 as his encomium "the Shropshire saint" attests. And he was the most scholarly of the primitive  
27 Methodists, after John Wesley himself. His *Checks to Antinomianism* and *Portrait of St. Paul*  
28 were read in Methodism for more than a century. He preached twice each Sunday, in the  
29 morning from a manuscript or outline, in the afternoon a reading, with commentary by him, or a  
30 *Homily* or other published sermon. On weekday evenings he preached extempore either at the  
31 church or in colliers' homes. He also preached in the open air. He even used occasional  
32 services, such as funerals, as opportunities to preach evangelistically. He catechized the children  
33 at evensong and saw to the provision of both day and Sunday schools in the parish. It seems he  
34  
35 celebrated holy eucharist weekly at the church, and probably on the red letter days in the  
36 liturgical calendar as well.  
37

38 Fletcher visited faithfully in his parish, and formed and supervised Methodist societies  
39 and class meetings in his own and neighboring parishes. He was known in every household  
40 under his official charge. Visitation was an agency of spiritual direction. References to his  
41 "Helvetic bluntness" testify to his readiness to enforce both Church discipline and Parliament's  
42 acts against swearing and Sabbath breaking. He condemned drunkenness, shows, and bull  
43 baiting. Visitation revealed where best to use parish and personal resources to help the poor.  
44 Fletcher's itineration and Methodist society supervision were much less extensive than

1 Grimshaw's. Wesley criticized his inattention to the societies and urged him to travel more.

2  
3 Patrons of the public houses criticized Fletcher for preaching, lecturing, and celebrating  
4 the sacrament too often. Nevertheless, after six months in Madeley his church could not hold all  
5 the worshipers (Lawton, pp. 23-24, 119; Tyerman, *Successor*, p.64).

6  
7 There was a priest who gladly would have headed the connection, but Wesley, who had  
8 ample experience with him up close, never offered DR. THOMAS COKE this ministry. Coke  
9 did become in 1784 the first (and the first deposed, 1808) bishop of the Methodist Episcopal  
10 Church in the USA, and was president of the British Conference in 1797 and 1805. His parish  
11 ministry — curate at South Petherton, Somerset, July 1771 - March 1777 — is a lurid example of  
12 an Anglican pastor losing his job after becoming a Methodist.

13  
14 Coke credited Fletcher's *Checks to Antinomianism* and *Scripture Scales* with convincing  
15 him of Methodism's apostolate. In late 1775/early 1776 he experienced "instantaneous  
16 assurance of the pardon of sin" (Vickers, pp. 23-24). He instituted a high profile program of  
17 evangelical parish ministry and informed Fletcher that he was preaching to about 1,000 people  
18 every Sunday afternoon. He held weeknight meetings in homes and preached in homes. He  
19 began to preach extempore. He was diligent in catechizing the children. Celebration of holy  
20 eucharist became much more frequent and attendance grew greatly.

21  
22 Coke visited John Wesley on 13 August 1776 and was disappointed when Wesley did not  
23 invite him to travel with him. Instead, Wesley advised him "to go on in the same path, doing all  
24 the good he could, visiting from house to house, omitting no part of his clerical duty; and  
25 counselled him to avoid every reasonable ground of offense" (Vickers, pp. 30-31).

26  
27 From then on Coke was a Methodist priest. He added to his ministry itineration, even  
28 into neighboring parishes, to preach and organize societies. If barred from the church, he  
29 preached in homes. He allowed laymen to preach. He tried unsuccessfully to replace the Psalms  
30 in regular Church services with Charles Wesley's hymns.

31  
32 Coke's intentional Wesleyan Methodist parish priesthood was short lived indeed. Owing  
33 to the vicar's poor health, Coke had been effectively the senior priest for South Petherton for five  
34 and a half years, but his full-fledged practice of Wesleyan Methodism lasted only about a year.  
35 A new vicar arrived in November 1776 and Coke was dismissed in March, probably on Easter  
36 Day (30 March). Without warning, and before the congregation, he was fired. As he walked  
37 away the church bells were pealed. The new curate, who had been waiting, took the pulpit and  
38 preached a sermon directed against Coke. "Meanwhile, those who were so inclined celebrated  
39 their deliverance from this Methodist curate by broaching several hogsheads of cider in the  
40 street" (Vickers, p. 35).

41  
42 The ecclesiastical refugee may have served for a couple of months as curate at Kingston  
43 St. Mary near Taunton under James Brown, who had introduced him to the writings of Wesley  
44 and Fletcher. By 25 June, however, he had joined Wesley in London where he became his

1 mentor's curate, his right-hand man (Vickers, p. 36).

2  
3 For the present, I close the roster of parish priests of primitive Methodism with notice of  
4 VINCENT PERRONET (d.1785) and James Creighton (d.1819). Perronet, vicar of Shoreham,  
5 Kent, was ten years John Wesley's senior and was a charitable person of gentle, quiet piety. The  
6 two met in 1744 and, after overcoming his initial misgivings, Vincent allied himself with Wesley  
7 some four years later. His level of activity did not match Grimshaw, Fletcher, Coke, or  
8 Creighton. He did not preach outside his parish or establish a circuit but put Wesleyan  
9 Methodism into practice in his church, especially through the class leader ministry of his  
10 daughter Demaris. It was as confidant, advisor, and spiritual anchor for the Wesleys that he  
11 came to be called the Archbishop or Umpire of Methodism (Vulliamy, p. 295).

12  
13 Henry D. Rack calls, JAMES CREIGHTON, who was ordained a priest in the Church of  
14 Ireland in 1765, a Wesleyan Methodist minister (*ODNB*, 14:132). He began to preach in the  
15 Church of England around 1776. For the next seven years he advanced Methodism in his own  
16 parish and beyond, in 1781-82 preaching in seven counties and walking 4,000 miles. Wesley  
17 was unable to persuade him to become Fletcher's curate at Madeley. He entered Methodist  
18 itineracy in 1783 and in October of that year Wesley brought Creighton to London to be his  
19 assistant at City Road Chapel. Wesley, Coke, and Creighton comprised the presbytery which  
20 ordained Richard Whatcoat and Thomas Vasey in September 1784 as elders for the wilderness  
21 Methodists of America. Though Creighton did not head the connexion after Wesley he  
22 continued his service at Wesley's Chapel until shortly before his death. "He was a diligent  
23 pastor, especially among the poor" (*ODNB*, 14:133).

24  
25 Finally, notice should be taken of the pastoral ministry of Wesley's full-time lay  
26 itinerants. He called them "extraordinary ministers;" "In the absence of the Minister to feed and  
27 guide and teach and govern the flock" (*Works*, Jackson, 8:309). In addition to preaching, the  
28 circuit preacher's duties included meeting the members weekly; visiting the classes quarterly;  
29 hearing and deciding all differences; disciplining the disorderly, and studying every morning,  
30 followed by visiting from house to house each afternoon to catechize according to Richard  
31 Baxter's plan, giving special attention to the children (*Works*, Jackson, 8:261-261, 309-310, 315-  
32 316).

#### 33 34 35 36 37 IV. A WESLEYAN STYLE OF PARISH MINISTRY

38  
39 John Wesley's vision was a reformed Church reforming the nation by spreading  
40 scriptural holiness throughout the land. The primary agents of Wesleyan reform would have  
41 been the parish priests. I think a study of Wesleyan Methodist teaching and practice of  
42 *parochalia* and *pastoralia*, and remembrance of the expectations of a Wesleyan "extraordinary  
43 minister," show what a Wesleyan reformed parish priesthood would have been. Here, for our  
44 discussion, are what I see as the identifying marks of parish priesthood in primitive Methodism.

1  
2 EXPERIENCE, *VOCATIO*, RELATIONSHIP. Personal experience of God's forgiving  
3 grace through Christ Jesus. Leadership of a congregation as one's response to God's call to such  
4 ministry. Personal relationship with God kept fresh through devotion, study, and work.  
5

6 STUDY. The best available formal education, equipping one for life-long learning.  
7 Scripture as the perpetual authoritative metanarrative of the church. Knowledge of how the  
8 apostolic message has been interpreted and handed on. Respect for the humanities and science.  
9

10 BIBLICAL PREACHING. A gospel of grace which all may receive.  
11

12 HOLY EUCHARIST. Celebration of holy eucharist every Sunday and on special days in  
13 the liturgical year.  
14

15 VISITATION. A pastor and a parish who attentively nurture and guide people one on  
16 one.  
17

18 GROUPS FOR ACCOUNTABLE DISCIPLESHIP. Mutual support in a disciplined  
19 economy of the means of grace, especially prayer, scripture, holy eucharist, fasting, the group,  
20 and ministry. The primary agency for the practice of Methodism.  
21

22 CHILDREN. The pastor's personal involvement in their Christian formation.  
23

24 THE POOR. Immediate help and long term change of both persons and systems.  
25

26 ITINERATION. Establishing new communities of faith in new places.  
27

28 CONNEXION AND OPENNESS. Sense of Methodism as a particular "work of God,"  
29 producing solidarity in conference. Affirmation of other discipleship *typoi* within the *ecclesia*.  
30

31 MINISTRY OF ALL CHRISTIANS. Encouragement of "extraordinary ministers."  
32

33 This is not all there is to being church. Methodism indeed operates best when it has a  
34 Church to operate in. And if history shows that the church operates best when it has Methodism  
35 operating within it, then how do we practice Methodist parish ministry in contemporary idiom?  
36 Can Methodism still be a *typos*, a continuing identity, in the global church, not just a surviving  
37 label? And as Methodist Churches enter uniting Churches around the world how can Methodism  
38 bless the union?  
39

40 What do you think?  
41  
42  
43  
44

NOTES

1  
2  
3 1. I use Church to designate denominations and church to mean the church at large.  
4

5 2. Latin *visere*, to look at attentively.  
6

7 3. Essays: "Address to the Clergy;" "On Preaching Christ;" "Thoughts Concerning  
8 Gospel Ministers;" "A Roman Catechism, faithfully drawn out of the allowed writing of the  
9 Church of Rome: With a Reply Thereto."

10 Sermons: "A Caution Against Bigotry;" "The Duty of Constant Communion;" "On  
11 Obedience to Pastors;" ""Prophets and Priests" (also titled "The Ministerial Office"); "Of the  
12 Church;" "On Schism;" "On Laying the Foundation of the New Chapel, Ner the City Road,  
13 London;" "On the Death of the Rev. Mr. John Fletcher."

14 *Minutes* of Conference.

15 Letters to: James Hervey (or John Clayton?), 20 March 1739; Samuel Walker, 24  
16 September 1755; Thomas Adam, 31 October 1755; James Clark, 3 July 1756; the Earl of  
17 Dartmouth, 10 April 1761; Charles Wesley, 19 August 1785.

18 *Explanatory Notes Upon the New Testament*: Matthew 10:5, 18:18, 28:18; Mark  
19 16:15-16; John 13:20; Acts 6:4, 20:17&28, 26:16-18; I Corinthians 1:17, 4:1, 12:18;  
20 Philippians 1:1; I Timothy 1 - 3; Titus 1:5; I Peter 2:25.  
21

22 4. I omit Thomas Coke's *Four Discourses on the Duties of a Minister of the Gospel*  
23 (London, 1798). Coke's minister is hardly more than a moralistic preacher and personal role  
24 model of piety for lay persons. Coke did stress the importance of visitation and spiritual  
25 ministry to the poor. He was totally silent about the sacraments. Altogether he substitutes the  
26 lay preacher model for a full-orbed parish priesthood. *Discourses* 1 - 3 are on the six articles of  
27 II Timothy 4:1-5: preaching; being instant; watching; enduring; doing the work of an evangelist,  
28 and making full proof of one's ministry. The fourth discourse, on prayer from Acts 6:4, was  
29 added to his original design for the treatise.  
30  
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