

Key Points from *The Episcopacy in American Methodism* by James Kirby [Kingswood Books] Abingdon Press (2000).

Introduction:

- “No individual was more significant in shaping Methodist episcopacy than Asbury.” He “personified the office of bishop in American Methodism for the first three decades.” (p. 9)
- Asbury refused to accept Wesley’s nomination as a general superintendent without consent of the body of preachers. In doing so he shifted Wesley’s power to the conference. (p. 9)
- The ME Church, South defended the “‘Asburian’ ideal of episcopacy as a co-equal branch of church government” [alongside the Conference.] The north conceived the episcopacy as an “abstraction to be shaped in literally hundreds of ways to meet changing circumstances.” (p. 10)
- The north and south evolved the episcopacy separately for nearly a century. These forces included movements to limit the scope and power of the episcopacy, and some of these caused divisions. Other changes were driven by the desire to provide episcopacy for the missions overseas. (p. 10, 11)
- The original, unique model of “itinerant general superintendency” has trended toward diocesan and localized episcopacy, especially in the 1939 adoption of the jurisdictional model. (p. 11)

Chapter One: American Episcopacy

- Asbury had “not only the genius to lead, but he had the will to govern.” He forced the preachers out of the comfort of the cities to the rural locations where they would have the most success. (p. 17)
- Asbury coined the phrase “general conference” to describe the 1773 meeting of preachers at St. George’s Church, in order to distinguish it from quarterly conferences and to indicate all preachers were welcome to attend. (p. 18)
- “Nathan Bangs claimed that in in forty-five years of ministry in America, Asbury travelled two hundred seventy thousand miles, mostly on horseback, preached 16,425 sermons, and ordained more than 4,000 ministers.” (p. 23, 24)

Chapter Two: Wesley’s Ordination for America

- Following the American Revolution, the Methodist societies had two marks of the Christian church: (1) congregations of the faithful and (2) preaching of the pure Word of God. Wesley’s ordinations were designed to answer pleas for the other two: (3) Holy orders and (3) the sacraments. (p. 25, 26)
- After several attempts to provide ordination for the American Methodist preachers through bishops of the Church of England, Wesley gradually convinced Rev. Thomas Coke to be the instrument of the needed ordinations. (p. 27)

- Wesley laid hands on Coke in Bristol on September 2, 1784, to exercise leadership as a superintendent in America. Superintendent likely meant “overseer of the whole,” which is how Wesley defined the office of bishop. (p. 28)
- Charles, of course, was livid. Kirby offers various theories on whether Wesley truly intended to start a separate church. (p. 28-30)
- Wesley’s theological rationale for the decision is summarized and is rooted in his understanding of primitive Christianity. (p. 30-37)
- “Ironically, Wesley provided more adequately for the future of the church in America and Scotland than he did for the Methodist Connection in England.” (p. 35)

Chapter Three: American Episcopal Methodism

- Citing Norman Spellman: “Wesley’s plan had not envisioned the creation of a new conference of the American preachers to have authority over the new church. He ‘had intended that his superintendents should ordain whom they chose, and that they should be the sole ecclesiastical rulers, under himself, of both preachers and people in America.’ This meant that the role of those Wesley had chosen was roughly analogous to his own among British Methodists.” (p. 41)
- The preachers in America would not have been content to serve under the authority of Coke alone. Asbury understood the American spirit and became the ‘Wesley of America.’ (p. 41)
- It was highly significant that Asbury called the American preachers together before Coke’s arrival and agreed in advance to lead only with their blessing. Asbury knew that their affirmation was almost certain and having it would enhance his authority and independence from Coke and Wesley. (p. 41, 42)
- The Christmas Conference, surprisingly, called the American conference into existence and established its independence from Wesley and English Methodism. Quoting Richey, Asbury’s power came both from Wesley and from the American conference. (p. 42)
- Question 26 at The Christmas Conference: “What is the office of a Superintendent? A: To ordain Superintendents, Elders, and Deacons; to preside as a Moderator in our Conferences; to fix the Appointments of the Preachers for the service of Circuits; and in the Intervals of the Conference, to change, receive, or suspend Preachers, as Necessity may require; and to receive Appeals from the Preachers and the People, and decide them.” (p. 44)
- The bishop’s consent was originally required for ordination, but this was “later changed so that a UM bishop cannot now refuse to ordain any candidate presented to her or him who has been recommended by the BOM and duly elected by the body of the preachers in executive session at the conference.” (p. 45)
- The first official break with Wesley’s will was the 1787 American conference’s refusal to accept Richard Whatcoat as Coke’s replacement. The conference removed the “binding minute” recognizing Wesley’s authority and removed Wesley’s name from the list of superintendents. [Whatcoat was eventually accepted in 1789 and Wesley’s name returned to the list of superintendents. But the binding minute was never restored.] The 1787 conference also limited Coke’s authority, removing his power to station the

preachers. This left Asbury with sole episcopal power. "All Methodist bishops were equal, but one was more equal than others." (p. 46, 47)

- "Spellman contends that 'Asbury is probably more responsible than any other person for the use of the term 'bishop' within The Methodist Episcopal Church.'" (p. 48)
- "The title [of bishop] never caused the concern for Americans that the practical questions of power and practice surrounding the office presented. More than half a century later Leonidas Hamline spoke before the 1844 General Conference and argued that 'our Church constitution recognizes the episcopacy as an abstraction, and leaves this body to work it into a concrete form in any hundred or more ways we may be able to invent.'" (p. 48)
- "The pattern in Methodism, from its beginning in America to the present, has been to alter substance by modifying practice or reorganizing." Although the Third Restrictive Rule instituted in 1808 was designed to protect the Asburian model, the UMC practice bears little resemblance to the original. (p. 49)

Chapter Four: The Bishops and the Conference

- Rapid growth in America rendered government by a plenary group of preachers impossible. In 1789, Asbury proposed the creation of "The Council" that would be composed of the bishops and presiding elders chosen by the bishops. This plan originated the term "presiding elder." (p. 52)
- The Council was to govern by consensus with nothing binding until approved by the various conferences. (p. 52)
- The Council concept was quickly opposed by Jesse Lee and James O'Kelly who were members of it. They did not like (1) that members were selected by the bishops, (2) the requirement of consensus effectively gave Asbury veto power, (3) the decisions of the council were only binding in the conferences that affirmed them. They feared the third objection would compromise unity. (p. 52, 53)
- When The Council met, the 12 members responded to the criticisms by making its work advisory only. The requirement of unanimity was amended to allow for 2/3 agreement if the bishops consented. Not all conferences agreed to the changes and the plan in general, especially those under O'Kelly's influence. (p. 53)
- With 18 conferences in American Methodism by 1792, moves were made toward Lee's suggestion of a delegated General Conference. Asbury was reluctant but agreed when faced with the real possibility of succession in Virginia. But the plan ultimately consolidated Asbury's workload. (p. 54)
- The first General Conference convened in 1792. As an organizing conference, all preachers were invited. Many attended not only because important decisions would be made, but because many realized another like it would never again be held. (p. 55)
- The Council was abolished and the topic of episcopal power in appointment-making became the focus. This power had always been a source of controversy fueled by any preacher unhappy with their post. James O'Kelly introduced an appeal process for preachers unhappy with their appointment. The appeal would be to the conference. The debate raged for 2-3 days. Asbury removed himself as moderator during the debate and

drafted a letter stating: "I am happily excused from assisting to make laws by which myself I am to be governed: I have only to obey and execute. I am happy in the consideration that I never stationed a preacher through enmity, or as a punishment. I have acted for the glory of God, the good of the people, and to promote the usefulness of the preachers." (p. 56, 57)

- The O'Kelly amendment was defeated and he, McKendree, and others left the conference. O'Kelly reviled Asbury as a "pope." O'Kelly started The Republican Methodist Church. McKendree did not follow him, but neither did he return to Virginia. (p. 57)
- The defeat of the O'Kelly amendment cemented Asbury's power as well as the practice of itinerant ministry. (p. 57)
- Other significant work of General Conference 1792: (1) Bishops would be elected at General Conference, (2) bishops would be amenable to GC for their conduct and procedures were put into place for trials, (3) the conference determined that a bishop who ceases to exercise his duties should afterward have no ministerial function in the church. (Bishops would not be returned to service or membership in their annual conference). (p. 58.)
- American Methodism had no models to follow for its episcopacy. The Anglican model would not work. In the spirit of a new nation, however, they felt at liberty to "reintroduce the government of the primitive church as they understood it." (p. 58)
- "In this new organization presbyters and bishops were of the same order with bishops simply being called to a higher office. Bishops like the apostolic evangelists of the early church, were to itinerate throughout the connection in order to give oversight to it. In nearly every way the Episcopal Church government of the American Methodists was framed in the pattern Wesley devised for his societies in England. American bishops served as representative presbyters whose power was derived from and shared with the conference. The locus of power in both was the body of preachers in the various conferences where bishops functioned. Their power gave shape and substance to organization and practice, yet it must be said that the episcopal office as Asbury expressed it developed independence and power specific to it that were not dependent on the conferences." (p. 58)
- "From the beginning itineracy and episcopacy have been joined in American Methodism and the primary task of its bishops has been to ensure the continuation and well-being of the itinerant system." (p. 58)
- In 1800 the General Conference gave Asbury permission for less than full-time service in light of his declining health. Rather than accept his resignation, they asked him to serve "as far as his strength would permit." (p. 60)
- Richard Whatcoat and Jesse Lee were the major candidates for bishop in 1800. There was no election on the first ballot, Lee and Whatcoat were tied on the second ballot, and Whatcoat was elected on the third ballot by four votes. Whatcoat functioned as a "junior bishop:" alongside Asbury. (p. 61)
- There were any number of failed plans to modify the episcopacy in the early 1800's: The New York Conference proposed a conference of seven members from each conference

where bishops would be elected. Coke, his health improved, offered to return to America if he and Asbury would have the conferences permanently divided between them. There were also efforts to establish eligibility requirements for election to the episcopacy and to allow each conference to elect their own presiding elders. “The common feature of all these proposals was their obvious intent to limit the power of the episcopacy.” (p. 63)

- The General Conference of 1782 established the office of presiding elder and set a term limit of four years for the position. This limited the power of bishops in that it prevented a bishop from retaining a presiding elder indefinitely. When a delegated General Conference was instituted, bishops lost the power to make speeches, make motions, and vote. In 1804, a rule was instituted that no preacher should be stationed in the same place for over two years. This also impinged upon the appointive power of bishops. (p. 64)
- As the church rapidly expanded, it considered assigning a bishop to each conference. Had it been done it would have marked the end of itinerant general superintendency as it had as it had been known and would have dramatically altered the practice in form of itinerant... it became obvious that each [bishop] had to share fully and equally in the power of the office.” (p. 64)
- “By the end of the first decade of the 19th century the church had considered and rejected most of the alternative models of episcopacy in favor of the original idea of itinerant general superintendency and had found a way to protect it with restrictive rules of the constitution in 1808. But the issue remained as to how these officers and leaders of the church were to relate to its now standard policy-making body, the delegated General Conference.” (p. 65)

Chapter Five: The General Conference and the Episcopacy

- The General Conference of 1808 established the pattern Methodists are familiar with today. Among the restrictive rules was the third, that General Conference shall not change or alter any part or rule of our government so as to do away episcopacy or to destroy the plan of our itinerant general superintendency.” (p. 71)
- The conference defeated an effort to allow for the election of presiding elders. (p. 72)
- The first delegated General Conference convened in 1812 according to the 1808 plan. (p. 73)
- “Quoting Bishop William L Harris, Neely describes the powers of general conference “not as a delegation of enumerated powers accompanied by a general reservation, as in the case of the federal government, but a delegation of general and sweeping powers under enumerated and well defined restrictions.” (p. 74)
- “The bishops would now sit in the assembly as presidents but not as members since they were not eligible for election by an annual conference. Asbury and McHenry largely ignored this change in status, continuing to speak and act in the conference. However it was soon established that this change logically meant that bishops were not allowed to make motions, vote ,or to enjoy the privileges of the floor” (p. 74)

- “Bishops now were able to rule on points of parliamentary law but not to decide points of ecclesiastical law, for the General Conference was to be the interpreter as well as the maker of church law.” (p. 75)
- “The bishops were declared subject to the General Conference, a principle that both Coke and Asbury accepted from the beginning, and they were elected exclusively for service in the United States. By the middle of the 19th Century this would create a serious problem as the church was required to provide episcopal supervision for the growing number of missionary conferences outside the continental United States.” (p. 75)

Chapter Six: After Asbury: Redefining the Episcopacy

- Bishop McKendree began the practice of consulting with the presiding elders in the making of appointments. (p. 79)
- McKendree also created the episcopal address to General Conference in 1812. This came as a surprise to Asbury! (p. 79)
- The first reference to a Committee on Episcopacy during General Conference was 1812. (p. 80)
- The issue of electing presiding elders in the various annual conferences raged in 1812 and was nearly approved. (p. 81)
- In 1816, General Conference went from three to five bishops in spite of Asbury’s desire that the number of bishops be kept low. (p. 83)
- “It was further moved that the presiding elders should constitute a council to assist the Bishop in the stationing of preachers. Nathan bangs amended this motion to stipulate that a presiding elder should serve for four years and could not be removed during that time without his consent.” This was defeated. (p. 84)
- “In a historic move, the delegates made it the duty of bishops, or of a committee appointed by them, to devise a course of study to be followed by candidates for the ministry who ‘before being received into full connection shall give satisfactory evidence respecting his knowledge of those particular subjects.’ This was a first in the history of the church and a new responsibility for the bishops. They were now established officially in the traditional episcopal function of being the teachers of the church.” (p. 84, 85)
- “McKendree’s journals report that after Conference was over he met with the two new bishops, George and Roberts, and agreed upon how the work should be divided between them. McKendree, perhaps remembering the way in which he had been initiated into the Episcopal office by Asbury, proposed that they all attend the first three conferences in order to allow the newly elected superintendents to learn the ‘peculiarities and difficulties of the Episcopal duties.’ Afterward they would follow a plan of alternating attendance in the conferences between them. This would make it unnecessary for every Bishop to attend each annual conference. Roberts agreed to go with McKendree but George set out on his own since he said he did not think it was necessary for three men to go and do one man’s work. They met at the Ohio Conference in September and there began to follow the plan agreed upon earlier for meeting the remaining conferences. The work was divided into three parts, but it was agreed that

any one of them was free to attend any conference. McKendree said of this, "Thus was begun the practice of dividing the work of superintending the conferences by the bishops themselves and also of alternating, a method which it is hoped will be perpetuated as most consistent with the genius of our church constitution and best calculated to promote union and perpetuate the itinerancy.' In reality, it was the first step in the creation of a modified form of diocesan episcopacy." (p. 85)

Chapter Seven: Bishops and Presiding Elders: Limiting Episcopal Power

- "On Saturday morning May 13th at the General Conference of 1820 Joshua Soule was elected a Bishop in the MEC. He was elected on the first ballot receiving 47 of the 88 votes cast. Of the 14 bishops chosen before 1844, Soule was the only one who was a preacher at the time of his election. He was also the only person who was to have the distinction of being the senior Bishop in both the MEC and the MECS. Few individuals had greater impact on the church as a whole. Already known as the author of the constitution of 1808 ,Soule was destined to champion and defend the Asburian form of strong itinerant episcopacy almost single handedly... " (p. 88, 89)
- The 1820 GC considered a process of electing presiding elders from nominees offered by the bishop. The bishop was to nominate three people for each vacancy. Bishop George may have been the originator of this proposal. (p. 89)
- Soule, elected but not yet consecrated, prepared a letter stating that he would not accept the episcopacy if he were so restricted. Bishop McKendree agreed with Soule and thought the measure violated the Third Restrictive rule, authored by Soule. Some criticized Soule for not bowing to the will of General Conference. Ultimately, the issue of electing presiding elders was tabled.
- The question of whether bishops could judge the constitutionality of an act of General Conference was decided: "If the superintendents or a majority of them shall judge it unconstitutional they shall within three days after its passage return it to the conference with their objections to it in writing and whenever a resolution is so returned the conference shall reconsider it, and if it passed by a majority of 2/3 it shall be constitutional and pass into a law notwithstanding the objections of the superintendents." (p. 94)
- "This perplexing issue was finally resolved 119 years later by the creation of a third judicial branch of church government, the Judicial Council." (p. 95)
- "But for now a form of veto power over actions of the General Conference which required a 2/3 majority to override was given to the bishops: "By a majority vote the General Conference of 1820 agreed to the principle of a veto power to be exercised by the bishops over all enactments of the General Conference which in the preamble was acknowledged to be no proper tribunal to judge of and determine such a question." (p.95)
- The bishops' veto was affirmed at GC1824. (p. 96, 97)
- Two parties were apparent in the church. Soule was elected as a constitutionalist. Hedding was a revisionist. "The differences between them were both sectional and political. "In our church, as in our nation, the division was along the line of strict

construction of the powers delegated by the constitution on the one hand and a loose and broad interpretation of those powers on the other.” (p. 98)

- This division would eventually lead to the formation of the Methodist Protestant Church. (p. 99)

Chapter Eight: Modifying the General Superintendency

- By 1824, divisions over slavery made it impossible for the bishops to complete the simple task of naming a delegate to the English General Conference. (p. 105)
- “By the end of the 1824-28 quadrennium the church had been divided North and South by the practice of the bishops and among the bishops themselves. This is not surprising since two of them, Soule and Hedding, had been elected by well-organized party and sectional interests representing the divisions.” (p. 106, 107)
- The debate over electing presiding elders raged on.
- On GC 1832: “When the Committee on Episcopacy in its report to the delegates noted that it was expedient to require each of our bishops to travel throughout the whole of their extensive charges, the bishops asked...the delegates to respond whether it was their intention ‘simply to relieve the bishops from the influence of the resolutions passed at the last general conference on the same subject and to leave them now at liberty on their joint and several responsibility to make such arrangements among themselves as they shall judge most conducive to the general good.’ They also asked in the same communication whether the delegates sought to give them direction or advice whether it be or be not expedient for each bishop, in the course of the four years, to visit each of the annual conferences, should they themselves find it convenient and practicable, and judge it for the good so to do? The committee replied that the bishops had correctly understood their intention was to give them freedom to make whatever arrangements seem best for serving the needs of the connection. In the light of now well established episcopal practice, it is interesting that bishops should have raised the question at all, for they made no changes in what they were doing. They appeared to regard the affirmation of the delegates merely as a vote of approval of that practice. It is nevertheless significant that the bishops clearly assume their work to be under the direction of General Conference. The nature of that relationship was soon to be questioned and sorely tested.” (p. 110, 111)

Chapter Nine: The Road to Division

- Episcopal Methodism approached the General Conference of 1836 in a weakened condition. McKendree’s long tenure as bishop had come to a close with his death on March 5, 1835, marking the end of the second era of the episcopacy in the history of Methodism. Then the tenure of recently elected Bishop John Emery was unexpectedly cut short by his death from injuries suffered in a carriage accident in December 1835. This left four bishops to share the responsibility for overseeing 28 annual conferences, plus a missionary conference in Liberia. It was far more than they could manage. Perhaps coincidentally, 1836 was one of the few years in Methodism’s early history when the church as a whole showed a decrease in membership. Although the decline in

its numbers may not be linked directly to the inadequacy of episcopal oversight, the church realized the need for additional superintendents.”

- “In addition to these changes in personnel the episcopacy was affected by the growing unrest in Methodism and the nation generated by sectional interests, particularly the tensions around the overwhelming presence of slavery in the South and the rising opposition to slavery in other parts of the country. From 1820 until 1836 General Conferences found it easier to ignore than to address the complex issues related to slavery and slaveholders who were Methodists. No significant new legislation on the subject was enacted at any of these conferences. By 1836, however, the level of agitation had risen sufficiently to cause the church to adopt the principle of silence on the subject of slavery and to condemn ‘modern abolitionism.’ There were good reasons for this action. It was now obvious to everyone that the controversy swirling around the institution of slavery had the power to divide the church. Methodists, who cherished their tightly knit organization, were determined to preserve its unity if at all possible. However, many of those opposed to slavery believed that the position of the church, which they regarded as essentially ‘pro-slavery,’ was a direct result of the form of its government and the power of its episcopal leaders.” (p. 115, 116)
- “The requirement of the General Conference for silence on the subject of slavery put the bishops squarely in the middle of the struggles. Not infrequently these encounters raised related questions of power and authority such as who controlled the agenda of the annual conference, the body of preachers or their presiding officer? Although setting the agenda, which was mandated in large measure by the historic disciplinary questions, was a prerogative traditionally granted to the bishops, they could no longer assume it would be honored. Conferences finding themselves silenced by the bishops on the question of slavery sought to claim the agenda for themselves in order to debate the issue. In spite of the protests, the bishops proved to be an effective tool in resisting both the radical abolitionists and the conservative anti-slavery forces.” (p. 117, 118)
- “When the general conference of 1840 opened in Baltimore it was presented with a flood of memorials many of which were designed specifically to limit Episcopal power while others raised questions concerning the rights of annual conferences. The bishops led off in the Episcopal address delivered by Bishop Waugh by condemning the northern and eastern conferences because they were ‘in contravention of your Christian and pastoral counsel’ and the subject of slavery ‘has been agitated in such forms and in such a spirit as to disturb the peace of the church.’ They reaffirmed that the general rule on slavery, which was in the constitution, had ‘stood from the beginning unchanged as a testamentary of our sentiments on the principle of slavery and the slave trade.’ As a result of this Waugh declared, ‘The solemn convictions of our mind that no new ecclesiastical legislation on the subject of slavery at this time’ would be conducive to peace and harmony. But due to the variety of interpretations to which the general rule on slavery has been subject the bishops thought it well to request ‘that a body having legitimate jurisdiction should express a clear and definite opinion on the meaning of the rule is a uniform guide to those to whom the administration of the discipline is committed.’ Battered by their encounters in the various annual conferences during the previous quadrennium, the bishops requested a clarification of the constitutional

powers of the general superintendents and their relation to the annual conferences and in their general executive administration of the government and their rights of the annual and quarterly conferences in their official capacities.” (p. 122,123)

Chapter Ten: Division, 1844

- There was strong backlash among abolitionists to a resolution approved by GC1844 that stated persons of color would not be allowed to testify at church trials if their testimony was not allowed in that state. “The measure highlighted not only the injustice and unfairness of the social system but clearly put the church on a par with civic morality when its very nature committed it to a higher standard.” (p. 127, 128)
- Slavery was the key issue at GC 1844 and a bishop became the flash point for the debate. Bishop James Andrew, not a slaveholder at the time of his election, had inherited slaves through marriage. Emancipation was illegal in the state in which he resided. He had transferred actual ownership to a trustee, but the slaves continued to offer labor from which he and his family benefitted. Francis Harding, a preacher, had been suspended under similar circumstances. (p. 129)
- The Committee on Episcopacy met during General Conference to ascertain a statement of facts on Bishop Andrew. When the Committee on Episcopacy reported the facts to General Conference, a motion was introduced to affectionately request that Andrew resign his office. Objections to this stemmed from the fact that he had not violated the Discipline and no charges had been made against him. A substitute motion was offered that stated he should refrain from exercising his office while the situation persisted. (p. 132-134)
- “Bishop's Soule, who was at the conference when the Finley substitute was offered, asked for the privilege of the floor, then reminded the delegates that many persons would be following their discussion and urged calmness and charity during their debates. ‘I beseech you,’ he said, ‘by a voice from the tomb of a Wesley and a beloved Asbury to let your spirits on this occasion be perfectly calm and self-possessed and perfectly deliberate.’ Soule continued, ‘As far as I know, there is not a sister (Protestant) church in these United States having any legislation on the subject of slavery. I say in this we are unique. We are alone. We therefore stand in our action on this subject before the tribunal of all the Christian churches of our land and our actions will certainly be judged of by that tribunal.’ He concluded by saying he was not without anxiety and deep concern for ‘the perpetual union and undivided interest of this great body’ and urged decorum in the debates. ‘I myself love to hear hard arguments, but I love to hear them in soft words,’ he said. Soule spoke several more times during the debate.” (p. 135)
- A related issue was whether General Conference had the right to ask a bishop to resign without charges and a trial. Church law at the time stated that slaveholding was not a barrier to church membership or church office.
- The Episcopal Address in 1844 highlighted that bishops are amenable to General Conference as officers of the whole church. The decisions of General Conference are without appeal.

- In the debate, the northern delegates highlighted the primacy of General Conference while the southern delegates lifted up the Asburian model of the episcopacy as a co-equal branch. (p. 141)
- J. Hamby Barton: "In the South the episcopacy was an aristocracy providing independent leadership for the church. In the North the republican sentiments of a great middle class church culminated in the General Conference which employed the episcopacy as the chief administrative instrument." (p. 144)

Chapter 11: The Methodist Episcopal Church, South

- General Conference 1844, the longest in the history of Methodism, worked on an amicable plan of separation. (p. 146)
- Peter Cartwright correctly predicted there would be serious conflict in the border regions. (p. 147)
- Dividing the significant assets of the Book Concern became a major sticking point as the use of these funds was guided by a restrictive rule.
- The plan of separation was ruled as "null and void," but the fate was already accomplished. The matter went all the way to the U.S. Supreme Court who ruled in favor of the MECS.
- Bishop Andrew was known to be aligned with the MECS and Bishop Soule also declared his allegiance to the new church. The Committee on Episcopacy of the new MECS recommended the election of two additional bishops when that General Conference convened in 1846. (p. 153)
- Charges were filed in the MEC against Bishop Soule.

Chapter Twelve: The Methodist Episcopal Church, South: Defending the Asburian Ark

- The MECS saw the matter of Bishop Andrew as case of the powers of General Conference run amuck and planned for an authoritative episcopacy in the Asburian model.
- "Asbury had... never known a bishop when he became one." (p. 160, 161)
- McKendree, though he did not have the force that Asbury had, was also a strong individual leader. "With ego strength there is always the potential for autocratic behavior." (p. 161)
- "Asbury's episcopacy was characterized primarily by his devotion to the enhancement promotion and defense of the itinerant form of ministry. Episcopacy in the Asburian mode can never be understood apart from its role in the itinerancy." Asbury led by example by taking the hardships of itinerant ministry on himself. This fact also enhanced his authority. (p. 162)
- "If the General Conference can create a bishop, Leonidas Hamline argued in New York, it can depose one too for the good of the church." (p. 162)
- The MECS saw itself protecting a strong episcopacy and preserving itinerancy. (p. 165.)
- "Building on its determination to limit the power of the General Conference, the third General Conference of the MECS in 1854 gave its bishops power to object to any action of the General Conference... but the General Conference of 1854 also established a

procedure that checked the authority of bishops by giving the General Conference a means to override an Episcopal veto.” (p. 167)

- “The practice of episcopal authority in the daily life of the church resulted in a southern ‘style’ of leadership that gave to them, as it had with Asbury, power based on individual charisma and authority that sometimes went far beyond anything bestowed formally by the Discipline.” (p. 168, 169)
- The South tended to elect bishops out of educational institutions and did not elect a significant number of pastors to the office until after the reunification of 1939. (p. 170)
- “Both branches of Methodism faced the problem of providing episcopal supervision for missionary conferences overseas and solved it in a different ways. The southern church stationed its general superintendents overseas while the MEC, consistent with its understanding of a limited episcopacy, met the need by creating an entirely new form of the office called the ‘missionary bishop.’ Although the southern practice of appointing bishops overseas created considerable hardship for them and their families it also provided a unique opportunity for service in which several of them flourished... Despite the hardship and inconvenience of requiring service from its bishops both in the United States and overseas, the MCS preserved the distinct features of an itinerant general superintendency and did not confuse its commitment to the Asburian understanding of the office by creating a new class of bishops who were limited in power and jurisdiction.” (p. 171, 172)

Chapter 13: The Methodist Episcopal Church: Evolving the Form of Episcopacy

- Both denominations retained the language of the Third Restrictive rule against altering the episcopacy, but both also felt free to modify its form and practice as needs arose. (p. 173)
- “The families of bishops have always been forced to cope with the added inconvenience and stress created by a spouse or parent in the office. That was exasperated when the available modes of transportation necessitated being away for long periods of time in order to fulfill their the assignments, but extensive travel is still required of bishops today.... It is little wonder that election to the episcopacy was viewed by families as, at best, a mixed blessing.” (p. 175, 176)
- “A 1964 study of the episcopacy commented: “The role of the bishop in the Methodist Church has historically been shaped more by the acts of the men after election than by formal legislation period.” (p. 177)
- The Liberia Conference requested to be furnished with service by a bishop, but none of the six active bishops was willing to go. GC1854 decided to wait until Liberia was strong enough to become its own church and elect its own bishop.
- Coke was forbidden from exercising his office outside the United States. “Beginning with Asbury, general superintendents were understood to be elected for service in the United States and in 1852 it was affirmed that “no Bishop of the Methodist Episcopal Church should be placed in the foreign field as a permanent resident.” (p. 179)
- GC 1856 affirmed the need for a bishop in Liberia but considered it an embarrassment at home to have an African bishop sharing in the general superintendency. They considered

(1) sending an American bishop to organize the work and return, (2) let Liberia organize itself as a church and elect their own bishops, and (3) to appoint a missionary bishop to take charge of the work. Landing on the third option, they concluded they were not in violation of the 3rd Restrictive Rule as long as they did not eliminate the episcopacy. Francis Burns, an African American was consecrated in 1858 as a session of the Genesee Conference. A second African American was elected in 1866, John Wright Roberts, after Burns' death. William Taylor, the first Anglo to be elected as a missionary bishop, was elected in 1884 and assigned to Africa. (p. 180, 181)

- Missionary bishops were not allowed to exercise episcopal functions outside their place of service and were to be returned to their annual conference of origin if they ceased to serve the location for which they were selected.
- A Neely Report in 1888 sought to answer questions about missionary bishops. The adopted report declared that "missionary bishops were true bishops but elected for service in a specific foreign mission field. While there they enjoyed full episcopal powers but limited jurisdiction. A missionary bishop could function only in the area in which he was elected to serve. Although not general superintendent, missionary bishops were co-ordinate with them in authority while serving in their assigned areas. A missionary bishop could not become a general superintendent unless elected to that office, but they, like the general superintendents, received their support from the Episcopal Fund. They also had a co-operative relation with the missionary society. Upon the death of a missionary bishop a general superintendent assumed responsibility for the bishop's work. Transfer of preachers from the supervision of a missionary bishop to a general superintendent, or vice versa, was permitted by mutual consent. The same was true when the move was from an area of one missionary bishop to that of another." (p. 183)
- The matter was complicated further when two African American bishops were elected in 1920 but with jurisdiction limited to black churches. "The church now simultaneously had an episcopacy that contained (1) missionary bishops with full episcopal authority but limited jurisdiction, elected exclusively for service in foreign mission fields; (2) African American general superintendents with their jurisdiction limited to African American conferences in the United States; and (3) general superintendents with unlimited jurisdiction assigned overseas and in the United States." (p. 186)
- "The almost unlimited possibility for confusion was forestalled only when every mission field in the MEC was organized into a central conference. This was completed by 1924." (p. 186)

Chapter 14: Localizing Episcopacy North and South

- "Eventually both branches reorganize their missions into autonomous central conferences and gave them power to elect indigenous leadership this was a more satisfactory arrangement for all concerned." (p. 189)
- The MECS, feeling the strain of travel on U.S. bishops, eventually elected missionary bishops, too. They were general superintendents, but with limited jurisdiction. (p. 189, 190)

- The MEC, in 1928, amended the Third Restrictive Rule to allow the organization of Central Conferences and the election of leaders within those territories rather than at General Conference. (p. 192)
- The Committee on Judiciary was called upon to define terms. They said, in essence, that the church has both a general superintendency and a limited superintendency (central conference bishops). African American bishops were limited in jurisdiction in practice, but not in law.
- An MEC Board of Bishops and MECS College of Bishops formed over the years. Questions of the status of bishops arose from these gatherings. In 1912 the MEC allowed central conference bishops to preside at General Conference.
- “The movement toward localized episcopacy flourished in the United States as well as overseas and it sometimes was a logical and obvious answer to a problem. For example, from the organization of the church at the Christmas conference in 1784 until 1872 bishops in the MEC determined where they would live. The choice of residence was entirely their own... But in 1872 the General Conference designated specific cities in which a bishop was to reside. The purpose was to ensure that bishops were not all clustered in one section of the country, making it difficult to serve the entire church... The General Conference did not direct the individual bishops where to live, but it did rule that, beginning with those newly elected, a bishop would reside at or near San Francisco, St. Louis, Boston, Atlanta, Chicago, Cincinnati, Council Bluffs or Omaha, and Saint Paul.” (p. 195, 196)
- “In logical sequence the next step was taken toward diocesan episcopacy when it was proposed that general conference should not only assign the bishops to a specific place of residence but assign them for a determined length of time.” (p. 198)
- “What is clear is that the system of local area episcopal administration with limits on service came through a series of unrelated changes passed by general conferences in response to practical concerns and in the attempt to do what was best for the church and its mission. Yet the practical implications are surely apparent. The church was in the process of abandoning itinerant general superintendency... and reached full fruition when the jurisdictional system was created in order to form the Methodist Church in 1939. The effects of that organizational change on episcopacy were the most far reaching and significant in the history of American Methodism.” (p. 201)

Chapter Fifteen: Limiting Episcopal Power

- The most common early strategy for limiting Episcopal power was to “argue the right to appeal the decision of the Bishop particularly in regard to the stationing of the preachers.” (p. 203)
- “The second common strategy to place limits on the episcopal office has been somewhat indirect it involves legislative proposals focusing on the presiding elders. In a study made in 1960 this office, under the modern designation of district superintendent, was described as ‘the alter ego of the bishop.’ It has been understood as an extension of episcopal power and presence since 1792. The legislative proposals have typically tried to limit episcopal power by making the office of presiding elder one elected by the

preachers. There has also been concern to restrict their term of office and limit their eligibility to serve in consecutive assignments.” (p. 203, 204)

- “A third strategy for limiting the power of bishops more common in recent years has been to challenge the life tenure of bishops by proposing that they be elected to serve a fixed term of years. Although life tenure of bishops has been the rule since 1784, proposals to change it to term episcopacy have come before many general conferences.”
- “A story is told in the biography of Bishop A. Frank Smith that he and fellow southern bishops Paul Kern and Arthur Moore were discussing their future at one General Conference where the sentiment to establish term episcopacy was especially strong. All agreed they would resign if the proposal passed but were considering the more practical question of how each of them would occupy their remaining years if they were forced to leave the episcopacy. Bishop Kern, a former faculty member and dean, said he would return to teaching. Bishop Moore, the great missionary leader and preacher, proposed to return to the evangelistic work he loved so well and said he would hold revivals. Bishop Smith, after suitable reflection, said ‘Well, I don't have enough religion to hold revivals and I'm not smart enough to teach school. I'll just have to stay in and be a bishop.’” (p. 207)
- Mandatory retirement and limiting how long a bishop can serve in a particular area are also ways to limit episcopal power.
- Bishop McConnell: “Conditions in America were primitive and the bishop was really the only church official who had a chance to know the whole field. In the nature of the case the pioneer system was autocratic, and in the human nature of the case the bishops were very likely to manifest autocracy in their bearing.” (p. 211)
- Seniority has also affected the way that bishops relate to one another and the church. (p. 214)
- “There can be no doubt that few changes in the life of Methodism in America have influenced it more than the introduction of laypersons into the government of the church. Especially as delegates of General Conference and as members of boards and agencies, laypersons’ presence created a new climate for administration and directly influence many changes.” (p. 215, 216)
- “There can be no doubt that the increased power and influence of the boards and agencies of the denomination have provided yet another means by which episcopal power has been limited. The names of general secretaries of boards and agencies who have given long and honorable service to the church are as familiar as the names of all but the most prominent bishops.” (p. 218, 219)

Chapter Sixteen: “Unification: The Methodist Church and The United Methodist Church”

- “The church was reunited in the most traditional Methodist manner -- by being reorganized. The key to the plan of reorganization was the jurisdictional structure that was adopted in 1939 and that continued with modifications into the UMC when it was organized in 1968. The proposal for a jurisdictional organization was made in 1916 at a meeting of the Joint Commission on Unification.” (p. 222)

- “The Plan of Union which so obviously affected African American Methodists also had significant, though perhaps less obvious, implications for the form and practice of episcopacy. In fact, nothing in the history of American Methodism so changed its episcopacy.” (p. 223)
- The general superintendency was effectively abolished, while the title continued. But this was actually the end of a longer road in that direction. (p. 224)
- “Methodist bishops had not been elected by their peers since laypersons took their places in the General Conferences in the 1870s. “Localized episcopacy was de facto in places and accepted. Bishops had first been assigned to cities and then to areas. Within those areas they rotated among the conferences and sometimes even alternated with other bishops in adjacent regions. But the trend was for bishops to remain exclusively within their areas and for the number of annual conferences they serve to be reduced.” (p. 225)
- “The Plan of Union called for establishing a Council of Bishops to meet at least once a year. This gave the organization of bishops constitutional status for the first time. The council became the formal place where bishops hold membership in the church since they are ineligible to be members of local congregations or annual conferences. The council was charged in the Plan of Union to ‘plan for the general oversight and promotion of the temporal and spiritual interests of the entire Church’ and to carry ‘into effect the rules regulations and responsibilities prescribed and enjoined by the General Conference.’” (p. 225, 226)
- “One of the clearest concessions to regionalism in the Plan of Union was to transfer the election of bishops from General Conference to jurisdictional conferences with newly elected bishops having immediate authority to serve only in the jurisdiction where elected. Provisions in the Discipline do allow for the transfer of bishops between jurisdictions but no active bishop has ever been transferred.” (p. 227)
- “The most striking change in the episcopacy that came out of the 1939 merger was not in the number of bishops elected, although many more joined the ranks of the episcopacy, but in the type of person chosen. The process used in the selection will always influence the kind of person who will be chosen. If a person desires different results one sure way to achieve them is to change the process.” (p. 228)
- “The preferred route into the episcopal office changed dramatically with the adoption of jurisdictions particularly in the South. The MECS had seldom elected bishops from its pastors until the years just prior to unification. By contrast the southern jurisdictions of the MC elected seldom anyone but pastors.” (p. 229)
- Candidates had to be suitable to delegations and it was understood that a conference must be willing to receive them. This tended to eliminate the more controversial characters that occupied the episcopacy in earlier times. (p. 230)
- “The greatest modification related to episcopal authority came in 1976 and concerns the making of pastoral appointments. The presence of the EUB with their pattern of more democratic practices was influential in this development as well as a strong long term sentiment favoring the change... Methodists intended to radically revise the episcopal office and make it more accountable... while affirming the historical role of the Bishop to

make and fix appointments,... a number of significant changes that were adopted by the general conference of 1976. This legislation created a process by which assigning clergy to their stations was enlarged to require a consultative interaction between a bishop cabinet district superintendent clergy and congregation.” (p. 236

Chapter 17: The Episcopacy in Today's Church

- Bishop Thomas: “Today's Methodist Bishop is seriously in danger of suffering an identity crisis .” “Is the bishop's role that of a General Superintendent with responsibility for a Global Church or a diocesan executive expected to attend to and promote local issues? What has become of the traditional role of Methodist bishops to promote and defend an itinerant system of ministry that now has changed and threatened by circumstances over which the Bishop has no control? Is the bishop today only a facilitator in the process of appointment making and in the UMC?” (p. 242)
- “It has become clear within the Council of Bishops that an integral part of strengthening their teaching office is developing a more effective structure for accomplishing its work. For most of its existence since the 1939 merger the de facto defining purpose of the council has been to provide a warm fellowship for the member bishops. The dinner that opens its regular session, one to which spouses are invited ,is informally known as the Family Dinner. This provision of support and encouragement is a significant function since the council is the place in which bishops hold their membership in the church. But its family tone fosters a very specific style of operation. It is considered best not to make family disagreements public, thus it was expected that the members of the council would always speak publicly with one voice.” (p. 245)
- Plans for adding a full-time presiding bishop are discussed on p. 247.
- Subheadings: The challenge of general superintendency in a global church, The challenge of focus in an expanded office, The challenge of addressing timely issues, The challenge of finding an effective structure, The challenge of the appointment process, The challenge of weakened connectionalism, The challenge of diminished public influence, and The challenge of the jurisdictions.