

DIGITAL ACCESS TO SCHOLARSHIP AT HARVARD
DASH.HARVARD.EDU

HARVARD LIBRARY


Authority and Power in Early American Methodism, Highlighting Lorenzo Dow and Francis Asbury

Citation

Miller, Amy Fowers. 2022. Authority and Power in Early American Methodism, Highlighting Lorenzo Dow and Francis Asbury. Master's thesis, Harvard University Division of Continuing Education.

Link

https://nrs.harvard.edu/URN-3:HUL.INSTREPOS:37371556

Terms of use

This article was downloaded from Harvard University's DASH repository, and is made available under the terms and conditions applicable to Other Posted Material (LAA), as set forth at
https://harvardwiki.atlassian.net/wiki/external/NGY5NDE4ZjgzNTc5NDQzMGIzZWZhMGFlOWI2M2EwYTg

Accessibility

https://accessibility.huit.harvard.edu/digital-accessibility-policy

Share Your Story

The Harvard community has made this article openly available.
Please share how this access benefits you. Submit a story

Authority and Power in Early American Methodism,

Highlighting Lorenzo Dow and Francis Asbury

Amy F. Miller

A Thesis in the Field of Religion

for the Degree of Master of Liberal Arts in Extension Studies

Harvard University

May 2022

Copyright 2022 Amy F. Miller

Abstract

Methodism uniquely sought to maintain competing commitments to a religious life of direct personal encounters with divine presence and a religious community of well-structured order. As with any effort to keep two conflicting principles in tension, the pursuers of this balance between spiritual power and institutional authority disagreed with one another on where the fulcrum should be placed. Such debates were intensified in an early American republic where questions of authority and power were the site of profound cultural change. A comparison of Francis Asbury and Lorenzo Dow shows us how two inheritors of the Methodist tension sought to navigate its competing demands in an early national context and how they arrived at different destinations.

Table of Contents

Chapter I. Early Methodism....6

John Wesley....6

Methodism in America....9

Definition of Terms....12

Chapter II. Lorenzo Dow....15

Childhood....15

Characteristics and Reputation....17

Authority from the Methodist Church....23

Calling from God....26

Dow's View of Authority....29

Dow's View of Power....33

Chapter III. Francis Asbury....36

Childhood....37

Characteristics and Reputation....38

Authority from the Methodist Church....43

Calling from God....46

Asbury's View of Authority....48

Asbury's View of Power....49

Chapter IV. Structural vs. Spiritual Power and Authority....54

Structure and Spirituality....55

Power 56

Authority 60

Works Cited 64

Chapter I.

Early Methodism

John Wesley

As the central figure of early Methodism, John Wesley's influence on Methodist members in both England and America was significant. Beginning in 1738 with a simple desire to preach "what true Christianity was" to anyone who would listen, Wesley's preaching quickly developed into a much greater endeavor (Wesley, *Plain Account* 4). Wesley recognized not only scripture as central to the doctrine and theology, but *experience*, including tradition and reason, as the basis for doctrinal decisions. Wesley's beliefs rejected a Calvinistic view of a predetermined few elected for salvation with no ability to choose or influence the outcome. Instead, a combined influence of both God's grace, and the act of choosing it, attracted many converts who were ready to faithfully map out their own destiny rather than it being preset, or to be passively led by an elite few.

The focus on experience within the movement that would become Methodism cannot be overstated in its developmental significance, and ultimately it became a primary characteristic of distinction between Methodism and its leading Protestant Christian counterparts. While truths such as the universality of the fall, the necessity of the atonement, grace, and the freedom of will, stood as assumed foundations for all Protestant Christians, the distinguishing factor of experience was carefully explained and proudly highlighted by Wesleyan Methodists as personal encounters with the witness of

the Spirit and divine power in personal redemption. As quoted by an American Methodist scholar Karen Tucker, complete doctrinal fullness "is to be found in truths which more immediately underlie the Christian experience, by which all that is provisional and relative in God's system of recovering mercy becomes actual and personal" (Tucker 271). Continuing in such description, "These doctrines of experience have constituted the charm of our ministry. They give being and form to our Church. The joy and life which they infuse into every part of our body have redeemed it from all sepulchral tradition," (271). Clearly, experience within Methodism remains central to its influence and identity, and as will be explained, interacts significantly with what may be termed as *spirituality*. Such experience, or spirituality, are effects of a power which Wesley and his followers discovered as revitalizing and reviving compared to their previous beliefs.

Wesley's emphasis on experience led to groups and individuals utilizing their own understanding and skill and placing it daily on the altar of "true Christian" faith. And Wesley, himself, followed the same pattern in his leadership of what grew to be a significant religious movement. Illustrative of his character and leadership, Wesley explained that "we are continually changing one thing after another, it is not a weakness or fault… but a peculiar advantage which we enjoy… We are always open to instruction: willing to be wiser every day than we were before, and to change whatever we can change for the better" (Wesley, *Plain Account* 12). Similarly, scriptural primacy was understood and expected to "give a general rule," but in a particular application of more than a thousand possible ways, "decency and order" were needed to come to the most common-sensical conclusions. Believers in Wesley's doctrine were active and involved

in their religious lifestyle, with an emphasis on the spiritual effects that daily participatory efforts provided.

Wesley highlighted personal choice amidst his view of the Anglican Church's failures, though certainly not forgoing the need for structure and hierarchy. He describes to believers that "they had no need of being incumbered with many rules: having the best rule of all in their hearts" (Wesley, *Plain Account* 20). That being said, Wesley explained briefly the roles of those in particular positions, such as leaders of classes or bands, assistants and stewards, and outlined a few rules for their benefit. Included in these few most "plain" and "clear" descriptions of a Methodist are the foundational characteristics of the rising religion, which identify the further criteria of analysis that this paper invokes for the two leaders considered here. They include, in part, responsibilities to fill each day, each week, and each month—hardly representing an unregulated, free-for-all religion. Rules for assistants are, likewise, telling of particular "gifts" required for such disciples, including seriousness, and diligence—of which the latter prescribes to "never be unemployed a moment," punctuality, never to believe or speak evil of anyone, and concludes with a comprehensive "In all things, [do] not according to your own will, but as a son in the gospel" (22). The responsibilities of an assistant, or preacher, are also outlined, which will be discussed further in this paper. Thus emerges the necessity of both structure and spirituality within Methodism, and a potential tension of joining together such requirements. Wesley's European-born religion was not shaped around or in response to Americans, but as it migrated across the ocean in a literally revolutionary time-period, its message assuredly resonated with them.

Methodism in America

Along with a new nation came a new perspective on work, choice, education, government—and religion. Without a state-sponsored church, the options were left open for individuals to choose what preacher to listen to and which church to attend on Sunday. The numbers speak volumes in response to those choices when looking at the growth of the Methodist church in the latter eighteenth and early nineteenth century in the United States. Beginning in relative obscurity, membership grew to almost 500,000 in 1830. Between the years of 1800 and 1810 in the state of New York, for example, the population itself grew nearly 63%, but the increase of Methodist membership increased in the same area by 215% (Wigger, *Taking Heaven* 200). And Methodism's remarkable growth was not only an effect of that change, but also an influential force of the change itself.

Methodism empowered and ordained the common person as denominational leaders, a move that both reflected and catalyzed the era's transforming views of authority. As historian John H. Wigger explained, "Methodism was both driven and constrained primarily by the needs, hopes, and fears of ordinary people, and almost entirely conducted by those from the middling and lower orders of society" (Wigger, *Taking Heaven* 5). Additionally, the emergent prevalence of republican ideology led to what Nathan O. Hatch describes as ordinary people's "distrust" of elite leadership, and their desire to "shape their own faith and submit to leaders of their own choosing" (Hatch 14).

Described as a "hybrid approach" to defining itself as a religion, the American Methodist church utilized three main sources for their standards of organizational and

behavioral structures, unique to post-Revolutionary circumstances. These three sources simultaneously affirmed a sense of ongoing commitment to Wesley's leadership and a sense of autonomy in building a distinctive American church. First, the express approval from Wesley, dated 1784, for "full liberty" to lead such believers according to the scriptures and the primitive church became necessary, rather than the unsustainable over-seas overseeing by Wesley. Secondly, a compilation of writings consisting of the 1780 version of the Large Minutes from Wesley's British leadership and the "Minutes of Some Conversations between the Preachers in Connexion with the Reverend Mr. John Wesley," were adapted to America and referenced. Thirdly, Wesley's *Sunday Service* compilation of doctrine, inspiration, and practice, written exclusively for the North American Methodist Church leadership and members were included (Tucker 272). Thus, the American United Episcopal Methodist Church became its own entity, fulfilling its own needs, while still maintaining a structure loyal to Wesley's organization of the Methodist church. But even the structure itself allowed for adaptation to the circumstantial needs of a church in a new land, opening up various interpretations and potential tensions.

Possible interpretive contradictions and reconciliations within the movement have proven challenging to historical interpretation, especially considering the primary elements of Methodism which are involved. Tucker explains that Methodists found "holding freedom and form together" so difficult, that "one position—most often that of freedom, encouraged by the American ideals of democracy and individual rights, and by the fear of a Spirit-inhibiting ritualism—was adopted and proclaimed to be the Wesleyan paradigm," leaving the structure as an afterthought (Tucker 273). Inverse illustrations conversely demonstrate an emphasis on structural and liturgic patterns, "reinforcing a

recognizable denominational identity," which place a spiritual freedom and adaptation in the afterthought position. Tucker further explains that "form and freedom have stood together from the beginning, though at any given time, and in any denomination, one of the pair might be emphasized in practice or in discourse over the other" (273). And while, Hatch identifies Christian history as a potential mixture of continual debate between "atomization and authority," and highlights the antebellum time period as the "most centrifugal epoch" of such history (Hatch 15), Tucker believes that "sometimes…the free and the formulated, could, in fact, be found side by side" (Tucker 273). For a church which empowered the common person and placed value on individuals' own spiritual experiences, joining a structural view of Methodism's emerging identity with an exploration of authority in the same time period, presented a lofty goal of balance and opened up a new perspective of power and spirituality.

Such parallels of authority and structure, in addition to power and spirituality, will be examined using well-known Methodist individuals—specifically, a focus on two of the most influential and widely-known figures of that moment: Lorenzo Dow and Francis Asbury. Though different in nearly every outward attribute, each struggled with health problems, was dedicated to his beliefs, and sought diligently to influence others. "Crazy" Lorenzo Dow's appearance, preaching style, and dramatic demeanor broke the mold of a pious and serious religious leader, but his popularity proved that he clearly filled a cultural need. And as much as Dow seemed to write his own rules when it came to style, he spent years trying to be accepted formally into a Methodist preaching circuit with a license, thus demonstrating even *his* respect of structural formality. Asbury demonstrated a rule-oriented manner, but with an uncanny ability to adapt structures to fit

the needs of a specific church's boundaries *and* the spiritual desires of the emerging American Methodists. Additionally, Asbury also intriguingly speaks of *power* in a way which highlights spiritual malleability. A comparative analysis is used to differentiate between the two, highlighting their specific methods of authority as used and valued, in addition to their respective views of power. Also, Methodism, itself, is represented by structural and spiritual components, which sometimes may create a tension of ideals and actions. This paper will discuss that tension in the time period of post-revolutionary fluctuation, and more specifically, by weighing those tensions through the lives of two contemporary opposites in American Methodist history. How might the varying lives and viewpoints of Asbury and Dow give insight into those sometimes-competing influences, and how were their influences and power perceived in their day?

Such analysis revisits the tension of religion's potentially oppositional polarities of structural formality and autonomous spirituality, but viewed more narrowly in time, place, and ultimately, in two individuals. This study employs its own opposing features: the analysis of Dow and Asbury. Their surprisingly similar views of religious authority and structure in the Methodist church ultimately divided to demonstrate their differing avenues of power—a necessary effect of the church's structural boundaries themselves. Both Asbury and Dow lived their lives as dedicated preachers, but with Asbury being accepted by the church's order and Dow being denied, separate sources and influences of power were created early in their lives demonstrating a microcosm of the tensions inherent in early American Methodism.

Definition of Terms

To further clarify the topics of analysis in this thesis, definitions of key terms include:

Power—A dual identification is needed for power in this paper, which categorizes the possible tension between its interpretation and use: first is God's power (assumed or otherwise), and the second is an individual's power. Each consists of the ability and capacity to influence the actions or beliefs of others.

Authority—power perceived as legitimate or socially permitted—by God, by society, or by a church. Once again, a tension may arise within the differing interpretations of authority, based on its assumed authenticity.

Structure—the organization of a system, often with a complex and defined pattern of identification. In this paper, the structure of a religion is described as the identifying organizational systems, doctrines, and cultural norms which give constructive characterization and a rule system for a religion or system of beliefs.

Call—In this paper, a *call* is a reference to a *call from God*. This call assumes an important responsibility or duty which God directly choses for an individual to fulfill. Often changing a life course, a calling from God is spiritually received and a powerfully motivating instigator, for which one may or may not feel qualified. A course of action is assumed, often to bless others, of which God's mercy is sought to satisfy the responsibility given. An example of a calling from God is illustrated by Paul's communication with Timothy, "[Our Lord has] called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace…Whereunto I am appointed a preacher" (*The King James Bible,* 2 Timothy 1:8-9, 11).

Spirituality—as used in this paper, a state of closeness and connection to God, considered individual and personal, and without formal structure or organizational boundaries.

Chapter II.

Lorenzo Dow

Thirty-nine of the fifty-seven years that Lorenzo Dow lived he spent in gospel ministry (Dow and Dow, "Dow's Journal" 6). Dow's ministry challenged the religious culture of his day—surely the religious preacher's culture. As prefaced in the introduction of his widely popular published journals, he is described in the mid-nineteenth century as "a man so eccentric, so poor, so much a stranger and pilgrim" (9). After more than a century and a half of historical comparison and analysis, the same can still be said of him, but with an added perspective of time and cumulative influence. "There is no question," explains Nathan O. Hatch, "that he preached to more people, traveled more miles, and consistently attracted larger audiences to camp meetings than any preacher of his day"—this has been well established (Hatch 36). Hatch also invokes Lorenzo Dow as an example of an emerging democratization in the antebellum United States, highlighting the redefinition of leadership from and for the ordinary people. However, he was never considered an official Methodist itinerant, being repeatedly denied after earnest seeking. Dow's tremendous influence—in spite of his unofficial Methodist preacher status—sets up the relevancy for attention to be placed on Dow's view of authority, who it's from, how it's attained, and the structure by which it operates. As will be explained, Dow must shift his views of authority to adapt to the church's rejection, creating his own pathway of influential power and spiritual fulfillment.

Childhood

Dow was born on October 17, 1777, in Connecticut, as the fifth of six children born to parents whom Dow affectionately described as "very tender" and who sought for their children's best education—both temporally and religiously (Dow and Dow, "Dow's Journal" 11). In reflecting upon his early years, Dow centers his reflections upon two dream experiences, which stand out as possibly the most influential and motivational sources of his life. In the first dream, at about age twelve, Dow saw the Prophet Nathan and inquired how long he should live. Nathan matter-of-factly responded that Dow should live until he was twenty-two, causing Dow great distress in the ensuing years (12).

The second dream, though, left a far greater impact upon him, especially considering the anxiety which decreased after he lived beyond his twenty-second year. In the dream, an old man approached him three times, each time asking if he prayed. Intermittently he was taken to a heavenly place with God, Jesus Christ, and angels surrounding him. He was counseled to be faithful, and that he would be able to return. Dow explained that years later, in 1797, he had another dream with the same old man, telling him that "God has called you to preach the gospel,"—and that old man's name was John Wesley (29). Recognizing Wesley as the central figure of early Methodism, there could have been no greater earthly authority for Dow to have received direction from, and a *dream* of such a call was culturally considered just as legitimate—possibly even more so—than a personal visit from a contemporary leader of the Methodist church. Historian Mechal Sobel, explains that the American culture between 1740 and 1840 was a "dream-infused culture," which written narratives provide "vivid evidence of the change in self-perception" resulting from such dreams (Sobel 4). While individuals were attracted to choice and independence, authority figures within dreams in this time period

were common and powerfully influential, just as Wesley's dream appearance to Dow. The significance of that dream could hardly be overstated for the powerful impression that it had upon Dow from that point in his life forward, and it was delivered by one with clearly recognizable authority both from the Methodist church and a religiously amiable society at large.

Characteristics and Reputation

Dow preached and traveled in a frenzy. For example, he records a summary of eight months of travel and preaching in his autobiography: "having travelled more than four thousand miles, through heat in the valleys…and through cold upon the mountains… after preaching…would travel the chief part, or whole of the night, journeys from twenty to forty miles, to get on to my next day's appointment; preaching from ten to fifteen times a week" (Dow and Dow, "Dow's Journal" 40). His travels included Ireland and England, in addition to sweeping the United States in a "restlessness without parallel in human history," (Hatch 37). It is likely that "more persons have heard the gospel from his lips than any other individual" (Dow and Dow, "Dow's Journal" 6). And not only did Dow preach to a huge audience, but he may well have been the most memorable preacher, as well.

Dow's name came to be prefaced with the word "crazy" not long after his reputation had spread. He wrote in his journal about such a title numerous times, and leaned favorability to it, or at least used it to his advantage. He utilized the status and stated that "it was soon reported I was crazy, which brought many out to the different meetings" (Dow and Dow, "Dow's Journal" 62). For example, when a bystander slung

insults at Dow and challenged the "crazy man" to convert him, Dow was actually intrigued into responding, "faith sprang up in my soul, and I felt a desire to talk to him" (51). This desire led to ever larger audiences, one in which there was an older man,

> who came to hear for himself, and told the congregation that I was crazy, and advised them to hear me no more. I replied, people do not blame crazy ones for their behavior; and last night I preached from the word of the Lord; but when I come again I will preach from the Word of the devil. This tried our weak brethren; however, the people came out by hundreds to hear the new doctrine. (Dow and Dow, "Dow's Journal" 62)

Uproars and scoldings followed him wherever he went, and if judged by the amount of clamored talk surrounding his style, he very well swept his fellow preachers. For instance, after a scheduled time for Dow to preach was published in a local newspaper, a response was subsequently published canceling it and explaining very clearly as to the reasons why: "Mr. Dow's clownish manners, his heterodox and schismatic proceedings, and his reflections against the Methodist Episcopal in a late production of his on Church Government (which are viewed as so many slanders), are impositions on common sense, and furnish the principal reasons why he will be discountenanced by the Methodists" (Dow and Dow, "Dealings of God" 166). Though Dow rebutted the claims, the point is made that his unconventional style surely created a stir—and potentially a bigger crowd at his next appointment to locals curious to see what all the fuss was about.

The reputation of Lorenzo Dow spread, and growing audiences accompanied the curiosity. He wrote in his journal that on his second visit to a certain town, his reputation had spread such that "the people flocked out by hundreds, to hear the strange man preach up his principles" (Dow and Dow, "Dow's Journal" 58). He would arrive just in time to stride to the front of a waiting group, even when the appointment was made months, or

even a year previous. And he would often leave just as suddenly, once diving through an open window and then continuing on to his next appointment (Plyler and Plyler 172). Never wanting to disappoint a waiting crowd, Dow often battled through bouts of serious sickness to travel and preach, even to points of genuine relief that death passed him by (Dow and Dow, “Dow’s Journal” 55, 67).

While audiences were excitedly drawn to his spontaneity and came to see what he might do next, others felt that Dow should be avoided and rebuked for his actions. William Winans, a Methodist leader, sought out Dow by reason of his reputation and expected to see a man of "apostolical dignity and piety," but he was shocked by the crass manner and irrelevant topics Dow used to base his preaching. Winans explained that Dow "vomited three black crows" and "the Fable of the Old Man, his Son and their Ass," and concluded (after listening to Dow preach three more times), that “apart from his eccentricity [Dow] would never have been estimated above mediocrity and that fame was not necessarily a mark of merit or greatness” (Holden 9). As a side note to Winans disapproval of Dow, it is noted that on October 1, 1808, a little more than two months before his introduction to Dow, Winans presented himself to Bishop Francis Asbury at a Tennessee conference and was received on trial and appointed junior preacher under his hand. Winan’s conflicting views of these men suggests stark contrast between Dow’s and Asbury’s characteristics and demeanors.

In addition to Winans, Nicholas Snethen, a traveling Methodist preacher senior to Dow, found ample grounds to criticize Dow’s characteristic preaching. Snethen began his relationship with the young Dow by counseling him to “be more humble, and hear, and not be heard so much” (Dow and Dow, “Dow’s Journal” 26). Over time, though,

Snethen's observations and critiques became sharper until he finally wrote a letter to Methodist leaders in Europe, stating that Dow had "trample[d] Methodism under foot" by his clownish manners, filthy appearance, vulgarity, neglect of scripture and especially by actions such as "pretending to foretell, in a great number of instances, the deaths or calamities of persons"—all in all, insulting the holy ministry to the utmost degree (Dow and Dow, "Dow's Journal" 719). Of course, Snethen is surely more popularly known as the defender of Francis Asbury, as he wrote powerfully *for* Asbury's character and demeanor—which may again illustrate the stark differences between the two men highlighted in this paper.

Dow's theological views generally agreed with the mainstream Methodist believers of his day, though at times, he taught and demonstrated them in characteristic frenzy and theatrics. Dow outlined, for example, his belief that the gospel of Christ is the gospel for everyone—not just an elect few. Typical to the growing approval of such a doctrine in America, Dow expressed his beliefs beginning in ordered sequence: "Christ instead of dying only for a part…positively affirm, that salvation by his merits is possible for all. [Also] that the Holy Spirit doth not strive with a part only…, but strives with every man," he affirmed, complete with corresponding scriptural evidence (Dow and Dow, "Dow's Journal" 366). More characteristic to his growing reputation, though, Dow, for example, quoted poetry to mock his Calvinist theological opponents: "He tells one sinner he's decreed / unto eternal bliss. / He tells another, he can't be freed, / for he is doomed to miss. / The first he bindeth fast in pride, / The second in despair, / If he can only keep them tied, / Which way he does not care," (367). Another specific example of anti-Calvinistic doctrine that characterizes Dow's unpredictable style—complete with

wit, irony, and a taunting feel—Dow worded this way: “You can and you can’t, / You will and you won’t; / You’ll be damned if you do, / And you’ll be damned if you don’t,” (367).

As an illustration of Dow’s continued influence, even today one may hear a portion of his words, “Do what you feel in your heart to be right — for you'll be criticized anyway. You'll be damned if you do, and damned if you don't,” spoken by Eleanor Roosevelt (Carnegie 187). Though she’s not referring to Calvinism or even religious beliefs, it is Dow’s classic witty delivery which she borrows to give her own quote a memorable punch. Such is Dow’s notable influence.

In his own day, a “vast host” of babies were named after Dow (Sellers 258, Hatch 132). Children given the name of Lorenzo Dow as a first and middle name jumped by more than eight times between the recorded census years of 1840 and 1850 (Ancestry). At a time when namesakes were often dedicated to popular preachers, Sellers noted that “in this field Lorenzo Dow scored an undoubted triumph over all competitors” (Sellers 259).

Not uncharacteristic of contemporary Methodist conversion accounts, Dow was a believer in dreams and visions but took that conviction a step further when he was preaching. Dow created and utilized dramatic displays and capitalized on them in the form of masses of curious circuit attendees. For instance, when preaching, Dow allegedly exposed a supposed ax thief by threatening to hurl a stone at the potential robber after turning three times. At the third turn, Dow drew back to expel the stone, only to see one man in the audience duck his head, to which Dow invited the guilty man to promptly return the ax (Plyler and Plyler 198). On another preaching occasion with

the subject being the great judgment day, Dow had a boy with a horn climb a nearby tree and timely blow the horn just at the climax of his sermon, representing the Angel Gabriel, and the end of preparation time. The listeners were thrown into a crying and shrieking display—until the plan was exposed (Plyler and Plyler 200). In another instance, Dow "besought God in public, that something awful might happen in the neighborhood, if nothing else would do to alarm the people." Though he knew that some others did not agree with his tactics, and felt that he "ought to be punished," Dow matter-of-factly followed up by reporting in his journal that, "A company of young people, going to a tavern, one of them said, I will ride there as Christ rode into Jerusalem: instantly his horse started, ran a distance, and threw him against a log. He spoke no more until he died; which was [the] next morning" (Dow and Dow, "Dow's Journal" 59).

Dow cared little about conforming to a visual status quo when it came to his own appearance and grooming. His hair was long and generally unkempt, and he tended to wear what was given to him in charity, resulting in a haphazard style and inconsistent sizing—not to mention the oftentimes sheer inadequacy of warmth and protection from the elements. But more than displaying his personal style (or lack of it), Dow used his style differences to his preaching benefit. For example, Dow approached a man when traveling and casually brought up Methodism, knowing that "from my dress and questions he supposed that I was no preacher" (Dow and Dow, "Dow's Journal" 52). True to Dow's assumptions, the man freely expressed his disapproval of Methodist doctrine, only to be embarrassed and obliged to invite Dow to a shared dinner with friends—and to listen to him pray and preach—after finding out Dow's true identity.

Authority from the Methodist Church

Lorenzo Dow repeatedly sought authorization from the Methodist church to preach, though that status was repeatedly denied. At eighteen years of age, Dow began his itinerant preaching, with a "letter of recommendation concerning [his] moral conduct" as "all the credential [he] had" (Dow and Dow, "Dow's Journal" 29). When questioned "by what authority" he preached, the response was expected to eventually include a written license, as outlined by the *Doctrine and Discipline of the Methodist Episcopal Church* (31). The process to obtain a license from the Methodist church as an official itinerate paid preacher included first obtaining a recommendation from his native preaching circuit, which would then allow him to be presented in the upcoming Conference as a candidate for an official preaching license from the Methodist church. But Dow repeatedly struggled to attain just the initial recommendation needed to even be considered at the Conference.

Yet Dow continued to experience the pull of an internal calling from God, despite—or perhaps, in part because of the disapproval of his family and the opposition of all those in ecclesiastical authority to accept him into the preaching circuit. In an effort to "obtain a letter of recommendation concerning [his] preaching gifts, as well as [his] conduct," so that he could attend the Conference with credentials, Dow dutifully preached under such personal duress as to record the contemplation of taking his own life (Dow and Dow, "Dow's Journal" 38). Dow also felt the weight of his parents' disapproval of his preaching ambitions, who compelled him to reject the idea of preaching "by all means" (25). He explained such stresses in his journal: "my trials were very great, so that many almost whole night's sleep departed from me; I walked the floor

and woods, weeping until I could weep no more, and wringing my hands until they felt sore" (Dow and Dow, "Dow's Journal" 38).

Dow's seeking for proper church credentials continued, motivated by his desire to be formally admitted at the Conference to preach, always under pressure of being sent home or expelled. And in less than two years Dow was sent home four times. He expressed his discouragement and exasperation in his journal:

> [I have] travelled more than four thousand miles, through heat in the valleys, the scorching sun beating down, and through cold upon the mountains, and frequently whilst sleeping with a blanket on the floor, where I could look up and see the stars through the bark roofs. The frost nipping me so that I lost the skin off my nose, hands and feet, and from my ears it peeled three times. [I have] travelled through storms of rain and snow. After preaching in the dark evening [I] would travel the chief part, or whole of the night, journeys from twenty to forty miles, to get on to my first day's appointment; preaching from ten to fifteen times a week, and [I was] oftentimes no stranger to hunger and thirst. (Dow and Dow, "Dow's Journal" 37)

For years of dogged persistence, minor references did not fulfill Dow's desire for the Methodist church's full approval and accreditation, but it did show that he greatly valued the authority of the license from the Methodist church of which he painstakingly sought.

In mid-1797 his persistence moved some of slight influence to present Dow with a certificate, crediting his "usefulness and conduct," so that he could be presented at the upcoming Conference in Wilbraham, Massachusetts (40). But after a particularly pained and lengthy trial process at the Conference, he was denied station and chided that "if' I attempted to travel in the name of a Methodist, without their consent, he would advertise me in every paper on the continent, for an impostor" (41). Dow temporarily "gave up the name of Methodist," choosing to "get [his] character established" elsewhere—but with

the ultimate goal of returning and seeking once again for proper Methodist preacher authorization (Dow and Dow, "Dow's Journal" 41).

Dow did return to seek the credentials to be formally recognized by the Methodist church, and except by the occasional mentions of visiting with family, his personal journal records little else but preaching and traveling with formal credentials or not. But it is during this time that he began to be referenced as "crazy Dow" for apparently preaching unconventionally, at a time when circumstances pushed him into a corner that required him to be just separate enough from the Methodists that he couldn't be disciplined and additionally rejected by them.

Dow popularized Methodist camp meetings by drawing in huge numbers to his dramatic appearances, but it seemed that Dow's popularity may have been an irritant and a deterrent to the more formal Methodist meetings. On one occasion following a Conference in which he was being considered for a license, he wrote what he overheard afterward: "this is the crazy man you have been striving to kill so much" (56).

Dow's eccentric style and preaching manner created a reputation which challenged the Methodist standard of piety, but he never cared to formally attempt association with other denominations. His grave marking stone in the District of Columbia displays this aptly described inscription: "A Christian is the highest style of man. He is a slave to no sect—takes no private road, but looks through nature up to nature's God" (Find a Grave). Charles Coleman Sellers, one of Dow's biographers, would agree with the inscription, saying that Dow's "liberal view of religion" and "freedom from sectarian ties" allowed him a unique influence of respect from a wider audience than might be associated with a single religious denomination. Sellers

concludes that, "his name, in brief, was both loaded with sanctity and available for almost any creed that might choose to use it" (Sellers 260). The irony in Seller's summation of Dow's influence, and Dow's grave marker's words, though, display a man who, for a time, sought not to be a "slave" to Methodism, but to be a fellow preacher with them. Dow reflected in his journal: "I spoke for about two hours, giving the inside and outside of Methodism," characteristically identifying himself with the religion (Dow and Dow, "Dow's Journal" 59, 60). True to the headstone inscription, the title of *Christian* may be one of the few umbrella descriptions that he could share with others, because in so many other ways, Dow did travel his own private road.

Calling from God

Though Dow clearly valued the written credential of license from the church, he began to be internally persuaded that the authority base of his ministry must be his own personal and direct calling from God. Dating back to the dream of John Wesley's words, "God has called you to preach the gospel," Dow was motivated from within for a cause that he felt was independent of outside authorization—or at the least he was compelled to reconcile the rejections he faced in such a way. A verbal challenge of Dow's authority to preach on behalf of the Methodists came in the year 1797, in which Dow recorded that, "I told him it did not belong to J. L., or any other man to say whether I should preach or not, for that was to be determined between God and my own soul" (Dow and Dow, "Dow's Journal" 39). Those who represented the Methodist church found many opportunities to disagree on that point. "God did own the Methodists," Dow recorded in his journal, and he loyally chose not to create a splinter group of *Separate Methodists* when presented with an opportunity, though when pushed, he considered using the name

of "friend of mankind" as his sponsoring group (Dow and Dow, "Dow's Journal" 42, 39). But as far as authority was concerned, Dow was left without a choice. Though he believed in Methodism, if he were to follow his divine calling, he had to create his own credentials as superseding—or at least independent of—the church's, because his calling was given to him directly from God.

In illustration of Dow's inner conviction of fulfilling the calling which he believed came from God, he recorded in his journal a particular instance of circumstantial difficulty. His clothes, including his shoes, were worn down, and he had lost his overcoat. He was without money and without friends to aid him in his destitute condition. Feeling beyond discouraged and nearing a breaking point, he placed his ultimatum upon God: "I came to a wood, and alighting from my horse and falling upon my knees on the wet grass, I lifted up my voice and wept, and besought God either to release me from travelling and preaching, or else to raise me up friends" (44). His plea for a *release from God*, surely suggests the initial *calling from God*, in which Dow's actions illustrate the seriousness in his belief of the divine responsibilities placed upon him. Needless to say, he was quite satisfied with God's apparent response to his petition, when within a few days people had given him the clothing necessities he needed, in addition to a sum of money (44).

Earlier in Dow's preaching career, and similar to the above example, he writes after a particularly fulfilling preaching experience, "I felt as pure from the blood of the people as if I had never been called to preach," further identifying his "calling from God" as the assumed status by which he operated, and was primarily motivated (57). While this particular example may be open for interpretation as far as if the calling he referred

to was connected directly with the authorities of the Methodist Church or directly from God, the evidence remains that he was clearly motivated by the overarching "calling from God" which he claimed.

While a "calling from God" implied a personal qualifier straight from deity, Dow's preaching counterparts were not as convinced as he of the authentication of such a position. A fellow preacher once asked for Dow to quit preaching and return home, but when Dow refused, he went so far as to list Dow's inadequacies by number: "1st, your health; 2nd, your gifts; 3rd, your grace; 4th, your learning; 5th, sobriety; in all these you are not equivalent to the task" (Dow and Dow, "Dow's Journal" 30). While surely a sting to Dow's emotional state and ego, the point is made that a self-proclaimed "calling from God" holds merit as a form of authority in the Methodist church at that time, and deserves respect—which led his fellow preacher to introduce Dow's disqualifying terms with, "I do not believe God has called you to preach" (30). This preacher did not believe that personal calls from God were not authoritative qualifiers, he just believed that Dow had not interpreted God's communication correctly. Importantly, he felt other church authorities (like himself) could determine the call. Even Dow's own parents credited his "calling from God" to be a temptation, because "it appeared to them an impossibility that [he] should be called to such a work as this" (25). Once again, the point is made that a calling from God—even a self-proclaimed one—meant something to Dow and those surrounding him. Though Dow may have been a lone believer in the authenticity of his own personal "calling from God" experience as far as the church and his family were concerned, audiences continued to support Dow by their attendance and attention to his preaching. Dow may have been picking up on the fact that authentication from the

church, or any other entity, was secondary in necessity to fulfilling his calling, if he somehow filled a need of the people in doing so.

Dow's View of Authority

The antebellum time period in which Dow lived, in addition to his own experiences, created a seamless circumstance for his expression of rights, which may also be looked at from the angle of authority. In 1813 Dow outlined and published three categories of the "rights of man," including personal, social, and moral rights, which respectively explain the rights applying to an individual, to others, and to God. Described as a "radical Jeffersonian" who could combine religion with the contemporary political culture around him, Dow advocated for popular sovereignty and against ignorance and tyranny (Hatch 36). Perhaps Dow's intermingling of religion and politics created an overlap of doctrine, which a reader or listener might have had a hard time identifying where one philosophy ended and another began—or if they should even be separated at all.

Understandably, the subjects of rights and authority were sensitive and emerging within the antebellum United States and Lorenzo Dow developed strong opinions over the course of his preaching career on such subjects. "Religious privileges," explains Dow, "are the graces of God—and as a wise Governor, he expects and requires a proper use of them" (Dow and Dow, "Dow's Journal" 453). Dow chooses titles such as "wise Governor," or "Creator and Governor of the World" for God repeatedly in his writings, which exemplify the use of power and authority in the sociality of the new America. With some distinction between the government's order and God's order, Dow defines the

possible sources of authority: “It must be obtained in one of these three ways. First, it must be the gift of the Creator and Governor of the Universe. Second, it must be delegated by the people. Third, it must be self created or usurped” (430). Again, whether Dow is exclusively referencing a political governance or even the church here is ambiguous, but one must wonder if Dow sought to conflate a political voting in of governing officers, with a similar choice of the people for religious leadership as well. The “religious privileges” which Dow spoke of as being governed by God can be counterfeited and usurped for reasons other than righteousness. Dow believed so strongly in this order of power, that his description of any power taken or assumed contrary to it constituted “stealing” that power, resulting in nothing less than “an unjust tyranny” (Dow and Dow, “Dow’s Journal” 453).

Dow further expanded on the nature of assumed and unjust tyrannical authority, and described its opposite as built upon the foundation of the “divine principle of the equal rights of' man” (431). In contemporary Jeffersonian agreement, Dow considered the equal rights of men to be in opposition to any monarchial power, concluding that “monarchy had its origin in some wisdom which was not divine” (431).

One example of this unjust tyranny which Dow found particularly appalling is religion which was established by law. Not only did he claim that “law-religion will cause people to be hypocrites,” and would bind their consciences, but he grouped them together with the “whore of Babylon,” the "mother of harlots, and ultimately the “abomination of the earth,” in wickedness (425). Fitting perfectly into Hatch’s American democratic Christianity, Dow expressed his belief and praise of God-given rights which should never be infringed upon by a country or government—intentionally drawing

phrases from the Declaration of Independence: “It is a self-evident truth, that all men are born equal and independent; and as individuals, are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights; among which are life, liberty, the use of property, the pursuit of happiness, with the privileges of private judgment” (Dow and Dow, “Dow’s Journal” 421). Dow explains the authority figure to be *nature*, the *divine*, or the *creator*—apparent alternate titles for God, but with an additional element of “that’s just the way it is.” With those rights given by God, Dow then explained the responsibilities of the individual (and then the responsibilities of groups of individuals, making up a social community), which shifted elements of authority from God to one’s own beliefs and conscience.

“Universal right of conscience” is granted from God to individuals, Dow describes, with subsequent responsibilities to act in “toleration” of others to believe and act according to their own consciences. “Suppose that one man believes in one God, another believes in ten, what is that to the first?” Dow hypothetically asks, and then answers metaphorically with a direct quote from Jefferson: “It neither picks his pockets nor breaks his legs" (425). Harsh judgment given, alternatively, would be an example of intolerance, or worse yet, a usurped use of authority, because one only has the rights to his or her own conscience—not others’. Instead, Dow’s “moral” suggestion in responding to one who believes in ten Gods, is a gentle explanation of the issue—done in concern, and with a well wish—to go on to “find the happy road” (425).

The order in which Dow explains the rights of man (“First, it must be the gift of the Creator and Governor of the Universe. Second, it must be delegated by the people. Third, it must be self created or usurped”) are attained is telling if intermingling politics

with the church, for the way which he must have viewed himself as a Methodist preacher with no official authority from the church to claim. His own authority to preach, therefore, is left upon the merit of God's *gift* or delegation to him. Dow is careful to explain that the delegation of power from God cannot be easily distinguished, with his leading source of possible false judgment being that of "antiquity," or generally just doing what has always been done in the past, for the sake of honoring the repetition itself (Dow and Dow, "Dow's Journal" 430). More explanation is given to describe the unjust tyranny than the criteria of God's delegation of authority, which may elicit a definition of the conditions of what God's delegation of authority *is not* based upon. Dow clarifies that "under tyranny and oppression, which prohibit liberty of conscience, and bind the people in eternal ignorance, the mental powers of men are so impaired, and their moral faculties are so darkened, that reason will not do its office" (432). So, in a reverse outlook, the observation of those affected by the proper authority delegation from God would lean toward good sense and reason, including heightened moral capacity and sharp mental ability. Being thus enlightened, a sense of unrestricted awareness and light would attend such Godlike delegation, encompassed by freedom of choice and fulfillment of conscience. Surely the Wesleyan emphasis on the value of experience would have combined with Dow's other beliefs to feel a portion of consistency between his own actions and such a definition, even if some others disagreed with him. Additionally, Dow's investment of greater energy into the threat of illegitimate authority rather than in the promise of genuine authority itself speaks to where Dow's awareness lies.

Dow, at least at times, stood squarely in support of the structural components of the Methodist church, even while his own experiences put him on the outside of the

boundaries which he defended. Considering his continued rejection by the Methodist church, whose doctrine and beliefs he adhered to and preached, he boldly rehearsed the order by which authority is owned by the Methodist church. First clarifying that the Baptist church has no authority because it was "self-created" and "founded on assumption only," Dow clearly outlines the order and succession of the Methodist authority line as follows, beginning with a small matter of business referred to a bishop in the General Conference:

> to the Methodists if they have any respect for "the authority of the Conference, or of us!" Who are us? M. Kendree, Enoch George, and Robert R. Roberts. How came they by this authority? By delegation, order and succession! Who delegated the authority to them? The General Conference! Who is this General Conference? It is composed of delegates from the several District Conferences. Who composes the several District Conferences? The Ministers and Preachers in the Methodist "Travelling Connection;" and these appoint the delegates to attend the General Conference. (Dow and Dow, "Dow's Journal" 545)

Dow continues to outline the authority, moving from Richard Whatcoat, Francis Asbury, and Thomas Coke to John Wesley, who was "the means under God, of the first origin of the Methodist Society, which name was given out of stigma —and said he, 'I use the power, but I don't seek it'" (546). Because of Dow's strong declarations against tyrannical authority, and his consistent endorsement of the Methodist delegation, order and succession, one can assume that he viewed John Wesley's ordination from the Church of England as the authentic apostolic authority dating back to the early days of Christianity, to which he could defend. Dow's defense of such structure stands unique to his own repeated experiences of rejection, from the very authority lines which he protected.

Dow's View of Power

Since Dow lacked formal authority from the Methodist church throughout most of his preaching career, Dow's view of power—and its sources—becomes an important aspect to consider. Two primary foundations of power emerge as qualifiers for his preaching: first, power derived from a personal calling from God, and second, power from the people.

Dow's personal calling from God was clear and impactful, and esteemed as power itself. As described earlier in this paper, Dow had a succession of dreams when he was young which climaxed with John Wesley's appearance in his dream, and declaration that God had called Dow to preach the gospel. Dow clearly called his readers' attention to these dreams as the primary motivators for his future life and decisions by including his detailed dream experiences in the second written page of his journal, after summing up a description of his parents, his birth circumstances, and the first twelve years of his life in the first page. "It was strongly impressed on me, that this dream must be from God," Dow declared, and he immediately sought God's forgiveness and approval of his direction toward salvation (Dow and Dow, "Dow's Journal" 10). Dow's conversion narrative included his calling from God, through John Wesley, in a miraculous dream. According to Christopher C. Jones, power is contained within the personal conversion experience itself. Jones explains that the "religion of the heart," as referenced by John Wesley, is the prominence of "experimental religion", illustrated by Methodist conversion narratives' emphasis on the remarkable. Additionally, "true religion…could—and in some instances, should—include visions, revelation, and other manifestations of the miraculous. *This was the power* they so often spoke of in narrating their experiences" (Jones 98 italics mine).

After Dow's painful rejection at the September 1797 Conference in Massachusetts, it was made clear that he would be exposed as an imposter if he preached under the guise of having authority from the church. Not only did Dow have his initial dream experiences when he was younger to refer back to for reassurance of his preaching pathway, but another dream just earlier that year further strengthened his resolve in the face of rejection. In the dream were two laborers in an endless field of corn needing to be gathered, while birds were actively destroying it. Though the laborers' task seemed impossible and never-ending, their strength would not be exhausted until the harvest was finished. Reassured that God had called him to just such a labor, he recorded that "this dream encouraged me to go on in this work" (Dow and Dow, "Dow's Journal" 40). The power of God's calling superseded the rejection from the church to formally preach. So, Dow adjusted his tactics to appeal to an audience—without a formal Methodist structure.

Dow met his rejection with creativity, and became the "crazy Dow" which drew in curious crowds to observe first-hand what all the fuss was about. After preaching in Pittstown, New York, Dow wrote that "some said I was crazy; others that I was possessed of the devil. Some said one thing and some thought another. Many it brought out to hear the strange man, and would go away cursing and swearing saying that I was saucy and deserved to be knocked down" (Dow and Dow, "Dow's Journal" 44). He caused a great deal of talk by his unconventional challenges to individuals in his audience, creating a stir in the name of religion that could have been more like an entertaining (or alarming) demonstration. Dow's reputation spread and his popularity rose, creating a power derived from the audiences themselves. This power from the people allowed Dow to carry on preaching in the manner which he felt called of God to do.

Chapter III.

Francis Asbury

Sharing a commonality of religious commitment and dedicated preaching with Lorenzo Dow, Francis Asbury's time of great influence arose a few decades preceding Dow's. Described as the "Pioneer Bishop," Asbury came to the American colonies in 1771 by assignment from and with the blessing of John Wesley, to establish Methodism in the new land. Asbury was young enough upon his departure to the colonies that, had he foreseen the effects of that decision, he would have seen his entire life—and the Methodist church—significantly altered from that point forward. Upon reflection on Asbury's life and the impact that he made in the Church, William Strickland stated, "His agency in planting, and his influence in promoting the progress and perpetuity of the Methodist Episcopal Church in the United States were primary," also adding that no other man "has contributed so much to the weal of Methodism in America" (Strickland 5). "Among all the preachers," John H. Wigger wrote, "Asbury, by common consent, stood first and chief. While all others were considered brethren, he was acknowledged as American Methodism's only father" (Wigger, *Taking Heaven* 174). Asbury preached widely, traveled extensively, and became the face of the Methodist Episcopal Church for a time in America when the church membership rose from less than 1000 members in 1770 to more than 250,000 in 1820 (3).

This chapter on Francis Asbury will review his unique contribution and influence to the Methodist church in the later eighteenth century and early nineteenth century, noting the authority by which he assumed and the experiential development of power he

adapted to, especially in contrast to Lorenzo Dow. Ultimately, this chapter performs a closer analysis of the wealth—and tension—of the structural and spiritual power within antebellum American Methodism.

Childhood

Francis, or Frank, Asbury was born on August 20, 1745, at Hamstead Bridge, Staffordshire, England, to parents Joseph and Elizabeth Asbury (Strickland 28). As a farm laborer and gardener, Asbury's father provided a basic but comfortable upbringing for their family of four—Asbury's mother, father, himself and his older sister Sarah, who passed away in 1749 at the age of six (Wigger, *American Saint* 15). His mother taught him to read the Bible by the age of five, and he continued reading as a favorite pastime in his childhood and adolescence, reading material such as George Whitefield's sermons. Extending into adulthood, Asbury was a "voracious" reader and an adept writer who kept a journal for more than forty years (19). At the age of fourteen Asbury became a local metalworker's apprentice, quitting his formal schooling to do so.

Asbury was drawn to religious conversation and activities at an early age and was inclined to Methodism by his mother's example and recommendation. The zeal of Methodist preachers impressed and captivated young Asbury to a point of seeking to emulate them by holding prayer meetings in his neighborhood and attending class meetings when opportunities would arise. In 1762 at only seventeen years of age, Asbury received a license as a local preacher from the preacher in charge of the circuit and continued to preach in his surrounding areas from three to five times in any given week (Strickland 39). Asbury finished his apprenticeship when he was twenty years old and

stepped into a traveling preacher's place in the Staffordshire circuit, and in August of the next year Asbury "officially joined Wesley's connection" of traveling preachers (Wigger, *American Saint* 33).

The Conference held in Bristol, on August 7, 1771, marked a significant change in Asbury's preaching career, and life. Described as being "strongly impressed with desire," Asbury had been contemplating a move to America to continue his missionary service for quite some time (Strickland 41). When John Wesley asked for volunteers to carry forward the work in America, Asbury was one of the first to submit his name. He stepped onto American soil later that year, with a conviction that he was fulfilling the will of God in doing so.

Characteristics and Reputation

Asbury's appearance and demeanor matched the well-respected reputation which he possessed in his day. Described as "dignified" and reflecting a "manly eloquence," one biographer who was personally acquainted with Asbury also defined his mannerisms as "solemn and commanding," especially in the way in which he would deliver the sacred ordinances as an official representative of the Methodist church (Strickland 11). Asbury consciously chose his conduct to illustrate the seriousness of his preaching and leadership responsibilities, and he characteristically wrote a plea to God in his journal to "keep me from all superfluity of dress, and from preaching empty stuff to please the ear, instead of changing the heart!" (Asbury, Volume 1, 8). He wore plain and inexpensive clothes, and stuck with knee buckles and gaiters, even when, later in his life, his contemporaries had switched to pantaloons. He chose to travel on horseback because it was easier and

cheaper, and he characteristically chose the least expensive saddles and saddlebags to go with them (Wigger, *Taking Heaven* 174). His "chaste though plain style, his grammatical correctness, without the redundancy of rhetorical figures," struck his listeners in such a way that they knew they were hearing not only a learned man of credentials but a figure of substance and rectitude (Travis and Summers 66). As the Reverend Joseph Travis described it, he had "but few equals if any superiors" (66).

Asbury struggled with an array of restricting health conditions over his lifetime. Within the last ten years of his life, Asbury was plagued especially by rheumatic arthritis, causing especially painfully swollen feet. He was often aided by others in mounting and dismounting his horse, and even in making simple steps. He resorted to preaching while leaning against something to steady himself, and then to preaching while sitting, toward the end of his life (Wigger, *Taking Heaven* 173). Despite these and other physical difficulties, Asbury continued to travel and to preach with remarkable stamina, which is described by Wigger as a "paradox" of an "impossible mixture of fragility and resilience" (173).

Asbury often chose to express himself quite articulately in his journal, especially as his records depict particular church standards and responsibilities. Asbury wrote lists of meeting agendas alongside the outcomes of each topic. For example, on September 6, 1772, Asbury recorded a numbered list of sixteen points covered within the meeting, including brief notations, such as, "VIII. Are we as frugal as we can be? It was thought we were" (Asbury, Volume 1, 41). In other conference examples, "Do none contract debts without due care to pay them?" and "Is there nothing immoral in any of our preachers?"—all numbered and most with responses from the meeting (Asbury, Volume

1, 46). Later in his ministry, he chose to record names and ordinations given. "With an almost intuitive knowledge of men," Asbury was described as "wise and far-seeing, and kept his work planned and mapped out beforehand" (Boehm 439). Asbury clearly valued the organizational and procedural structures of the church.

Somewhat related to Asbury's interest in recording organizational and procedural processes of the church, he was also particularly careful to associate himself with a rule-keeper's reputation in upkeeping the structural foundation of the church. He records simply in his journal a reason for his insistence on a certain point: "From our rules and Mr. Wesley's last letter" (Asbury, Volume 1, 41). Similarly, when dealing with a difficulty among fellow preachers over money donations, he writes of his convictions that "whatever comes, I am determined by the grace of God, to proceed according to the Methodist doctrine and discipline" (42). In situations of leadership, Asbury took his responsibilities seriously, upheld the rules, and defended the structure of the church he represented. Written simply, but characteristically of his beliefs: "Methodism…is as likely to be anything else as that which it ought to be, unless we have great displays of the power of God, and a strict discipline (Asbury, Volume 3, 413)."

Asbury believed that rules applied not only to the preachers and for the establishment of a strict order in the church, but also to those to whom the sermons were given. In Philadelphia in 1772, Asbury heard of people being offended that he was tightening up the standards of the church in that area after slacking indulgence, to which he responded that "while I stay, the rules must be attended to; and I cannot suffer myself to be guided by half-hearted Methodists (Asbury, Volume 1, 28). While some rules were applied pragmatically to manage a functioning church, Asbury believed that certain rules

were apparently God given, and were divinely upheld—for better or worse. For example, Asbury explains three people's circumstances of either threatening preachers, or speaking ill of the church, who each died within days of the offense. Asbury sums up the fateful conclusion to a divine principle: "Thus it seems, when men slight the mercies of God, he visits them with his judgments!" (Asbury, Volume 1, 59). Not only did Asbury believe in and enforce the order of the church, but he observed that God himself did the same!

Asbury considered himself a keeper of the law, and would take a stand on issues which he considered morally based, but he sought to not bring any undue attention to his own style or abilities. After describing friends as "unguarded" and "imprudent" for praising him, Asbury writes in his journal that "Satan, ready for every advantage, seized the opportunity and assaulted me with self-pleasing, self-exalting ideas. But the Lord enabled me to discover the danger, and the snare was broken. May he ever keep me humble, and little, and mean in my own eyes!" (Asbury, Volume 1, 80). In addition to valuing and seeking humility, he sought a pious countenance and demeanor, highlighting what he described as being "watchful." In a moment of considered weakness, Asbury identified the pious character which he sought by pointing out its opposite: "When amongst my friends, my mind inclines to a degree of cheerfulness bordering on levity. Oh for more watchfulness!" (80).

Asbury often switches from his own reflections and thoughts within his journal to a direct written plea to God, suggesting a consistent desire—even anxiety—for Godlike traits. For example, "Lord, keep me ever watchful," "Lord, let it not be as the seed sown by the way-side!" "Oh my God, save me and keep me every moment of my life!" (Asbury, Volume 1, 64, 99, 115). Quite consistent with his personal expressions, which

frequently shift to a direct plea to God—this time in a quoted hymn—is this example: "Am both grieved and ashamed that my soul is not more steadily and fervently devoted to God. 'And shall I ever live / At this poor dying rate? / My love so faint, so cold to thee… / And thine to me so great?'" (Asbury, Volume 1, 93). Amidst the authoritative responsibilities and duties which Asbury performs, he continues to display an unease and awareness of his own weaknesses.

Asbury worked hard, and traveled long, which remained a consistent characteristic throughout his ministry, even amidst poor health. Asbury never married, and described one of the reasons why, as to not put a woman through the difficulty of a nearly constant "doing without:" doing without a husband while he traveled almost every week of the year, or doing without the necessities and comforts that his meager earnings would provide. Wigger records that Asbury "visited nearly every state once a year and traveled more extensively, over a longer period of time, in the trans-Appalachian frontier than any other prominent American" (Wigger, *Taking Heaven* 43). It is estimated that he preached 17,000 sermons, and rode more than 750,000 miles to accomplish it (Wigger, *Taking Heaven* 43). His "astonishing" persistence in travel and preaching set a high bar for other itinerant preachers, who, no doubt, knew exactly what was expected of them, by being chosen by one who knew from experience what work was required.

As a result of his extensive traveling and presence, Asbury became a recognized figure and along with that recognition came influence. His mail would be delivered to him, even if only labeled with his name and country. A hallmark to the time period was the tribute of naming a child after someone, and more than one thousand babies were

named Francis Asbury at that time (though if gauging influence by that standard, then Lorenzo Dow has him beat many times over) (43).

While Asbury clearly earned his reputation of dedicated and consistent traveling and preaching, it is difficult to distinguish whether his diligence and presence, or his official position of authority in the Methodist church, resulted in the tremendous overall influence he had over others in his day. Realistically, those characteristics in his person cannot be divorced from each other, and they combined to create his own unique contribution to be examined.

Authority from the Methodist Church

Asbury's pathway of Methodist leadership in a new land may have been uncharted, as his title of "Pioneer Bishop" implies, but the means by which he came to such a station was through the time-proven propriety of Methodist discipline and doctrine. Beginning with his first license to preach at the age of seventeen, the authority line within the church was followed, Asbury having received the license from the preacher in charge of the circuit. At age twenty-one Asbury was received into the Wesleyan Conference and appointed to a circuit. Before leaving for America, Asbury had gained a reputation of being "studious, devoted, self-sacrificing and faithful" in his responsibilities, culminating with a characteristic spoken of him by a contemporary of his: obedient (Strickland 40).

In demonstration of Asbury's characteristics, and by fulfilling the order of the Methodist church across the ocean, Wesley seemed to put confidence in Asbury's work in America. Asbury recorded, "I received a letter from Mr. Wesley, in which he required

a strict attention to discipline; and appointed me to act as assistant" (Asbury, Volume 1, 29). And Asbury followed through. When conflict arose regarding doctrine and authority, Asbury responded with reading portions of Wesley's *Plain Account of the People Called Methodists*, reinforced unity, defended their cause, and stated that he had qualified himself "according to the act of toleration, and had a legal right to preach the Gospel" (Asbury, Volume 1, 71).

Asbury's participation in the Methodist church began and extended over the years to be one of respect and obedience to the organization of church-governing authority. In a letter from Wesley on September 10, 1784, addressed to Thomas Coke and Francis Asbury, Wesley defined and sanctioned some organizational differences between England and America as far as ecclesiastical authority was concerned. Because bishops in England had legal jurisdiction, and those in America did not, a crucial point of authority was missing in America for baptisms to be performed and sacrament administration to take place. In a change which would significantly transform Methodism in the United States from this point forward, Wesley explained that in light of those differing circumstances, he thus "appointed Dr. Coke and Mr. Francis Asbury to be joint Superintendents over our brethren in North America" (R. Watson 262). As one whose judgment fully represented Methodist authority, Wesley ended this letter by spreading out the mantle to Coke and Asbury, stating: "They are now at full liberty simply to follow the scriptures and the primitive Church. And we judge it best they should hold fast in that liberty wherewith God has so strangely made them free" (263). The separation established a division enough to seek for a new and identifying designation; thus, the name of *The Methodist Episcopal Church* was established, (the

additional word, *Episcopal*, itself, conveying structural authority). The significance of this move at the oft-described Christmas Conference is underscored by the tremendous growth of the church from 8,500 in 1780 to 57,600 in 1790 (Wigger, *American Saint* 139). As The Methodist Episcopal Church was growing so also was the visibility and influence of Francis Asbury.

In reference to foundational authority of which Wesley referred, Asbury wrote "we must restore and retain primitive order; we must, we will, have the same doctrine, the same spirituality, the same power in ordinances, in ordination, and in spirit. being once again established" (Asbury, Letters). Asbury continued to lead and preach with experience and structural backup from multiple sources to validate those expectations. When challenged concerning his authority later in his ministry, Asbury answered in a succinct and numbered list: "1. Divine authority; 2. Seniority in America; 3. The election of the General Conference; 4. Ordination by Dr. Coke, Rev. W. P. Otterbein, of the German Reformed Church, and Revs. Richard Whatcoat and Thomas Vasey; 5. Showing the signs of an apostle" (Asbury, Volume 3, 191).

While the authority was given to Asbury from Wesley, the *type* of authority differed, in that the creation of such national distinctions made it a new entity and detached it from the original Methodist church. Asbury's role (as well as Coke's) became more independent rather than subject to the Methodism which arose in England. As explained by one of Asbury's biographers, his authority shifted to match the independence of America's Methodism: "Acting as he did in Wesley's stead, his power was almost, if not quite, absolute in the Conference, and the right was conceded to him at any time to stop discussion on-any subject, and decide the question when in his judgment

enough had been said on both sides. From this decision there was no appeal" (Strickland 151).

Calling from God

Authority granted from the church to Asbury to act as bishop, and his other roles preceding, was never in question. Significant to consider, though, is the less-obvious reflection upon what Asbury would have interpreted as his *calling from God*, and the worth which he placed on it. As referenced previously in this paper, Asbury outlined his own authority line when challenged by a critic, beginning with "divine authority." This divine authority, because it preceded his seniority in America as affected by Wesley, suggests that superior to any earthly ordained qualification is what Asbury considered the central qualifier of his work.

Exactly what Asbury considered evidence of his divine authority may be more subtle than one particular grand instance of revelation. Unlike Wesley's Aldersgate experience of his heart "strangely warmed," or Dow's vision in a dream, Asbury's experiences were indirect and progressive, such as generally feeling drawn to religion at a young age, and then continuing to act upon his own longings. In a decision as large as leaving one's native country to live and preach in another, Asbury prayed over the matter, and recorded that his impressions were "deep" and "powerful," enough to consider the matter as fulfilling the "will of God" on the subject (Strickland 41). And evidently Wesley was similarly convinced, as Asbury recorded in his journal that his proposition to preach in America "was accepted by Mr. Wesley and others, who judged *I had a call*" (Asbury, Volume 1, 11, italics mine). One may have concluded that surely, he was called

upon by God to "enter upon the work of the ministry proper" at the age of seventeen, because of the apparent clarity of his desires and abilities (39). Or one may consider that God had called his parents to give up their son to a ministry across an ocean, as evidence of a divine qualifying patent at work. But as far as Asbury's personal journals or records of his works as written by others, there is no particular experience or event which he would have considered the point of God's calling to him, making other elements of validation important for him to consider in identifying his call as divine. He worked, though, with a confidence that he was fulfilling God's will, and that surety was central to his successful working motivations.

Asbury's own surety of his fulfilling the will of God came indirectly and through timely experience. For example, in considering the possible alternatives to a fruitful preaching life in America, Asbury matter-of-factly stated that "if God does not acknowledge me in America, I will soon return to England" (Asbury, Volume 1, 12). He was slightly encouraged as time went on, though not through any particular spiritual manifestations, but because he met with difficulty and indifference in his traveling. In reference to such struggles Asbury wrote, "the more troubles I meet with, the more convinced I am that I am doing the will of God" (13). Asbury may not have even realized that his desire to fulfill God's will was not to be denied if the criteria of judgment included either blessings or trials! Asbury carried on with such optimistic assurances until the more formal church responsibilities came. And considering his favorable approach in evaluating if his life course was in accordance with God's will and calling, the responsibilities themselves must have proved evidence of God's call—otherwise, according to that reasoning, the responsibilities would have never been

extended. Looking back upon his experiences, one of Asbury's biographers captured what the Methodists'—and possibly Asbury himself—believed about a call from God:

> It is not to be presumed that God will call any man to this great work and at the same time not invest him with authority to administer all the ordinances connected therewith. The call is of itself *prima facie* evidence of the authority, and the fact that souls are converted and saved through his instrumentality is proof that the minister is an ambassador for God, invested in plenipotentiary power to transact all business pertaining to the divine vocation. (Strickland 366)

The "deep" and "powerful" impressions in which he followed through for years in the manner which his spiritual conscience guided, in addition to the actual positions of leadership themselves, may have been the most direct explanations that Asbury gave to having a calling given him of God.

Asbury's View of Authority

In addition to whether Asbury considered it necessary to receive a particular calling from God to proceed in his work or not, another important point to consider was the actual line of authority from Wesley, and Asbury's brilliant manner of adapting that authority to fit into the culturally unique antebellum American society. Asbury was a natural when it came to following the order of authority, but he proved himself just as natural in adaptation of that authority when circumstances warranted a shift in procedure. During the unprecedented Christmas conference of 1784 when Wesley established Asbury as superintendent in America, Asbury showed keen awareness of the significant differences in opinion regarding the establishment and recognition of authority within America. First, Asbury masterfully asserted that he be elected by the preachers instead of by a simple transfer of power by Wesley, showing that he "shrewdly garnered a mandate that was not mediated through Wesley or Coke, but came directly from the American

conference" (Wigger, *Taking Heaven* 42). Wigger points out that the previous conferences would have already placed Asbury as the natural leader of Methodism in America, but it would have been the "democratic context of the early republic" which would have placed a stronger and locally binding patent on the authority figure being "voted" into that capacity.

For a man whose authority to lead the church was rarely challenged, Asbury downplayed his role as "elevating" or privileged, and instead placed emphasis on his diligent stream of daily labor. Written in his later years, Asbury explained:

> The Methodists acknowledge no superiority but what is founded on seniority, election, and long and faithful services. For myself, I pity those who cannot distinguish between a pope of Rome, and an old, worn man of about sixty years, who has the power given him of riding five thousand miles a year, at a salary of eighty dollars, through summer's heat and winter's cold; the surest sharpener of his wit, hunger—from fasts, voluntary and involuntary; his best fare, for six months of the twelve, coarse kindness; and his reward, from too many, suspicion, envy, and murmurings all the year round. (Asbury, Volume 3, 139)

In addition to Asbury's seniority and election, he adds another factor of potential authority: faithful service. While the first two criteria depend on the church's jurisdiction, the third criteria are based around personal dedication and exemplary service. This latter authority, which was allowed to him from God, created its own elevating status and particular significance in and of itself.

Asbury's View of Power

A noticeable pattern of Asbury's usage of the word *power* within his journals arises, first by its mere quantity, and then by its meanings. *Power* is referenced hundreds of times within his journals—appearing at least once on nearly every page—in phrases such as, "preached with much power in my own soul," "felt much power," "a time of

power," "preached with power and satisfaction," "favored with liberty and power," "the Lord gave me power to resist [Satan]," and "felt both life and power." While some references to power appear to be clear and direct connections to God's power (such as, "I felt the power of God in our souls"), other references seem to suggest that God's power is granted to Asbury. For example, Asbury describes that the following effect of his heart "wholly devoted to God," is that God "favors me with power over all outward and inward sin" (Asbury, Volume 1, 83).

Asbury also leaned heavily upon the spiritual *feelings* which accompanied his labors, establishing an interpretation of power in and of itself. Such feelings were at the heart of the Methodist spiritual experiences which Wesley originally emphasized as separate from the Anglican church. Asbury writes, "My heart was at liberty, while employed in speaking for God this evening," amidst other written expressions and "desires to be entirely devoted" to God (Asbury, Volume 1, 49). The spiritual feelings which accompany his convictions and preaching appear significant throughout his journal entries. In illustration of this, Asbury writes that his "soul was favored, both yesterday and this morning, with delightful and intimate accesses to God," after describing a particular preaching experience complete with listed scriptural points and details (49). As a leader, Asbury also sought to instill the importance of feelings to those who he mentored, such as this experience observed and recorded by preacher Henry Boehm: "[Asbury] once took hold of the arm of Rev. Samuel Thomas when he rose in the pulpit to preach, and whispered to him, 'Feel for the power, feel for the power, brother.' He often felt for the power himself, and when he obtained it he was a kind of moral Samson. When he did not he was like Samson shorn of his strength" (Boehm 441). Though

impossible to measure, Asbury valued the spiritual power which he experienced through feelings and believed that power could be felt by and influence others toward a lifetime of conversion.

Power has a different meaning when used as a description of Asbury's overarching influence over others rather than as referenced in personal reflections to describe his power from God. And that power of influence in contrast to his authority from the church, was challenged less often than it was respected and elevated. One such challenge, though, came from William Glendinning, whose uniquely strange supernatural experiences and past struggles with lucidity led Asbury to repeatedly deny his circuit appointments (Wigger, *American Saint* 205). Glendinning (like Dow) believed his call to preach was foremost received "directly from God," so when Asbury denied his preaching circuit opportunity, Glendinning took to a strong disapproval of Asbury's use of power. Glendinning expressed: "I think too much power and authority are lodged in the hands of one man, while the people are mere cyphers, not only excluded from all share in government, but deprived even of a right to complain of any misfortune whatever. Passive submission, or actual exclusion is your only alternative" (Glendinning 99).

Building upon the grievances of Glendinning, another example of Asbury's wide power being challenged ultimately resulted in a significant schism from the formal Methodist Episcopal Church. James O'Kelly fought in the Revolution, and was a British captive for a short time. He was also a popular itinerant preacher, who was ordained one of the first elders in 1784 and had acquired quite a following in Virginia. During the 1792 General Conference O'Kelly proposed that annual circuits assigned by Asbury could be appealed by itinerant preachers. To Asbury, appealed circuits represented areas

of people without access to Methodist gospel preaching. Hardly a responsibility which he took more seriously was that of overseeing the itinerant circuit assignments, believing that the flourishing of individual spirituality was achieved by proper structural care of Methodist preaching and collective jurisdictional order. Asbury chose to "send preachers where they were most needed, rather than leaving them where they were most comfortable," which resulted positively for most people (Wigger, *American Saint* 211). But O'Kelly strongly confronted Asbury's use of *authority* as an anti-republic breach of *power*, claiming that Asbury's deliberate and "crafty" actions shifted Methodism "from a confederacy of the districts, to an ecclesiastical monarchy" (O'Kelly 3). O'Kelly continued in his accusations, stating that, "Francis was born and nurtured in the land of Bishops and Kings and what is bred in the bone, is hard to get out of the flesh" (3). Not only was Asbury being accused of shamelessly abusing the influence of power which he had but that abuse was in the form of complete defiance to the American way of life and liberty. O'Kelly's formal motion of objection to these claims, along with a suggested solution in the 1792 Conference, failed in its vote. He rallied a following, including more than thirty preachers, and separated to create the aptly named Republican Methodists.

Various historians' views give insight into the O'Kelly dispute, but from the standpoint of Asbury's *powe*r, the perspective expands. Hatch refers to O'Kelly, and other religious dissenters, as a "motley crew," with nothing in common except for their belief in an "egalitarian religion," who rose up in the popularity of a democratic shift (Hatch 69). Wigger articulates O'Kelly's and Asbury's points on the basis of "appreciating the tension between…local sovereignty on the one hand and traditional Methodist connectionalism on the other" (Wigger, *Taking Heaven* 40). But beyond a

democratic shift or tension of local autonomy versus central control, O'Kelly's challenge put Asbury in a position of using the power of influence he had attained, along with the authority he had been given from God and Wesley, to defend the structural premise of the church he represented—which was granted him based on the same criteria.

Asbury's supporters, such as Nicholas Snethen, appeared to not only agree with the principles he upheld, but to defend his character in using such power and authority righteously. "We think nothing of bare titles," writes Snethen, "but our preference is founded in a knowledge of the man" (Snethen 51). He continues that "in him we see an example of daily labour, suffering, and self-denial, worthy of the imitation of the young preacher" and ultimately, "we have tried [Asbury] in all things and we have always found him faithful to the trust reposed in him by us" (51).

Chapter IV.

Structural vs. Spiritual Power and Authority

While the duality of balancing structure and spirituality was not a new concept in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, John Wesley seemed to foresee its significant role when contemplating the future of the Methodist Church toward the end of his life. "I am not afraid that the people called Methodists should ever cease to exist either in Europe or America," Wesley explained, "but I am afraid, lest they should only exist as a dead sect, having the form of religion without the power" (Wesley, "Thoughts Upon Methodism" 100).

The power which Wesley refers to can hardly be overstated in its importance. The very essence of Methodism began in response to Wesley and others seeking to sift out what he considered the hollow structure and empty formality of the Church of England, leaving the religion of the heart—or that of experience. The goals of this "true Christianity" (ironically called Methodists because of the methodical approach of applying routine religious practices to life), sought to make religion run deep in a personal and emotional way. As with any effort to keep two conflicting principles in tension, the pursuers of this balance between spiritual power and institutional authority disagreed with one another on where the fulcrum should be placed. Such debates were intensified in an early American republic where questions of authority were the site of profound cultural change. Francis Asbury and Lorenzo Dow each demonstrated remarkable commitment to their preaching responsibilities and were each highly influential in early American religiosity. And each claimed deeply personal experiences

of conversion and experience at a defining time in American religious history. Further comparisons and contrasts between these two influential—yet different—figures on the basis of power, structure, and spirituality will add to the conversation of balance and potential tension which exists in Christian religious study today.

Wesley explained his concern that methods of religious formality may push out the power of the religion itself, "unless they hold fast both the doctrine, spirit, and discipline with which they first set out" (Wesley, "Thoughts Upon Methodism" 100). The remainder of this paper will further expound upon those elements as seen in the similarities and differences of Asbury and Dow.

Structure and Spirituality

The polarity of structure and spirituality, or "form and freedom," as Tucker describes it, manifests itself uniquely in the Methodist Episcopal Church, as in other religious denominations, but with the inclusion of John Wesley's view of adaptation to experience hallmarked into the actual structure itself. The 1784 declaration from Wesley for "full liberty" to lead believers according to the scriptures and the primitive church opened up possibilities for new interpretations from people ready to mark their own spiritual journeys. And that direction came from a man who, while not exactly opening the formal scriptural canon itself, when challenged that there was "no scripture for" acting in a particular way, he responded that "there is no scripture against it," and carried on using "reason and experience" as the qualifiers for true religious application (Wesley 13). Answering the necessary requirements of what David F. Holland describes as the "complex and sometimes contradictory needs" of early American religionists' views of a

firmly shut scriptural canon, the "familiar foe" of spiritual enthusiasm presented itself as a primary identifying factor in American Methodism (Holland 46).

The opening of enthusiastic spirituality in a religious community of well-structured order led to Dow and Asbury's differing journeys in Early American Methodist preaching. The stress on experience and enthusiasm may have led Dow to overreach the boundaries he intended to follow, thus, not being embraced by them, he eventually became independent from them.

Power

The Methodist conversion narrative is one way in which the power of religion has been demonstrated. After "crying and wrestling with God," seeing a vision of Christ on the cross, and being granted forgiveness, Sampson Staniforth wrote of his own conversion: "My chains fell off; my heart was free" (Hindmarsh 910). Staniforth's conversion experience led him to loyally dedicate his life to preaching for John Wesley and he was not alone in his transformation. Similar to Staniforth, many contemporary written narratives developed not only into a declaration of meaningful self-change, but as evidence of a new self-perception. Such a transforming narrative in the early nineteenth century United States became virtually a "ritual act," as described by historian Mechal Sobel (Sobel 3). In fact, the conversion experience itself exemplified what Wesley termed as the religion of experience, and could be considered the very source of power itself.

Numerous recorded experiences similar to the one listed above are described by historian Bruce D. Hindmarsh, as claiming its own unique genre, complete with certain

climactic conventions and patterns (Hindmarsh 911). The popular Methodist conversion narrative structure of recording (or telling) such spiritually impactful experiences is insightful. Not only do patterns emerge within the written experiences—such as a sinner going through a powerful experience leading him or her to grace and forgiveness—but each connection is profoundly personal. Salvation becomes a deeply individual and motivating experience for which a standard was established through these written experiences of many whose lives were changed. In early American camp meetings when jerking, shaking, and crying became a regular occurrence, conversion's power, similarly, was an *experience* which displayed itself outwardly. While Dow experienced powerfully influential dreams which fall directly into the category of the conversion narrative, Asbury did not. Yet both men wrote much in their own journals of the *results* that appeared to come from their preaching, as far as observing individuals' responses to their preaching was concerned.

Dow's life transformed following the dreams of John Wesley and Jesus Christ which he had in his younger years, establishing a trusted pattern by which he further sought to be contributory in initiating those experiences in others. A particularly touching instance of persistence to guide just one individual to conversion involved a young woman named Sophy. Having heard of her feelings against religion, Dow sought her out and extended a challenge: "if you'll read a chapter every day till my return four weeks hence, I'll give you this bible." Thinking that Dow was not serious, she responded that she would, to which he immediately gave her the bible. This surprising exchange must have affected her, because on his return to that circuit four weeks later, she reported that she had fulfilled the challenge. Dow subsequently followed up with another

challenge, and yet another one four weeks later when he returned again—each challenge being fulfilled. Dow concluded the written experiences with Sophy by writing that "she was convinced of the necessity of being made holy, and was willing that all the world should know of her resolution to serve God during life. A few years after she died happy" (Dow and Dow, "Dow's Journal" 61). Amidst his relentlessly diligent traveling and preaching lifestyle he records: "I had spared no pains, either by night or day, in public or in private, to bring them to good, and if they did not repent, I should appear against them in a future day, calling the sun, moon and stars, with the fowls of the air and the beasts of the field to witness against them, that my skirts were pure from all their blood" (56). An internal motivation from his own personal conversion experiences surely carried his persistence to ignite such experiences in others throughout his life, though often unconventionally presented.

Dow drew large crowds because of his often dramatic and entertaining displays. And one clearly "experienced" a preaching appointment with Dow, rather than passively "heard" it. But Asbury reflected in his journal almost daily of the power which he either felt of God or observed in others as moved by the preaching of God's word, such as "the power of the Lord has been displayed here to great purpose" (Asbury, Volume 2, 60), and "truth came in power to the hearts of the people" (Asbury, Volume 3, 440). Asbury additionally reflected negative reactions to those whom he observed to be unmoved or unchanged to his preaching of the word of God, such as "I had power in preaching, though the people were dead and stupid," (Asbury, Volume 1, 38). Both preachers sought an experiential change in those whom they connected with, which would be observable in their daily living.

Reflecting generally, Asbury often wrote of the fruits which came in response to his preaching, like "the people here seemed to be quiet and in good order," and "divine truth reached the hearts of the people," (Asbury, Volume 1, 30). In further illustration of Asbury's view of the power of the conversion experience, though, he recorded preaching from 1 Corinthians 4:20, which states, "For the kingdom of God is not in word, but in power," (*The King James Bible*). While Asbury spent much of his life preaching first "in word," the emphasis which he places "in power" are reiterated again and again in his personal journals: The "power of the Lord was present," (Asbury, Volume 1, 74, 59) we were "favored with liberty and power," (76) the "power of God was eminently present; one person fell under it, (66) "many people felt the power of God," (43) "zeal and power in my public exercises," (25) "felt power and life in my soul," (32) "I had power in preaching," (29) "the power of God was felt in the hearts of many, (32) it was "a time of power," (44) "the word reached the hearts of many, with divine power," (53) "how great is the power with which the Lord blesseth me," (57) –and dozens more examples. Much of the power which Asbury refers to is the effect of God *on others*, possibly through his own preaching instrumentality. Asbury clearly identifies with a *power* of God which affects feelings, alters actions, and changes hearts—to the degree that a modified and spiritually elevated life represents exactly what Wesley described as a religion of experience. Asbury never recorded his own conversion narrative, in the same manner which many others were contemporarily recorded, but his lifetime conviction to instill those reforming experiences in others demonstrates his commitment to that *power* of transformation.

Connected closely to the power Asbury referred to are the *feelings* by which they were identified. While Asbury's personal writings are filled with clear examples of language describing his positive feelings as an effect of God's power, Dow's expressions of feelings are not as specifically acknowledged. Dow does identify, though not in daily examples as Asbury, a description of feelings coming from God: "tenderness and solemnity, and in following them there is great peace and content in the mind, which affords a joy and happiness that is very sweet and full of love" (Dow and Dow, "Dow's Journal" 89). But as a whole, Asbury's words illustrate a continuity of strength and power which he *felt* from God so consistently, that one can observe the steady confidence in which he carried out his responsibilities from God—who he believed called and authorized him to the work. While Asbury appeared to demonstrate and *experience* power, Dow found himself defining and defending his interpretation of power.

Authority

Both Dow and Asbury esteemed God's authority as the ultimate mark of qualification, which is a significant similarity considering the differences of their character and actions throughout their lives. The assumption then followed that authority from the church *was* the authority from God and was given through ordination as in the primitive church. The structure and "discipline" of the Methodist church, as developed from Wesley, was the accepted form of guidelines which led to spiritually empowering experiences. As Wigger described it, "only by upholding disciplinary standards could Methodists maintain the community cohesion necessary to nurture the radical spirituality" described by Wesley (Wigger, *American Saint* 53). So while Dow and Asbury may have initially agreed upon God's ultimate authority qualification, its

interpretation could quickly be broken down into divergent methods of criterion and attainment.

Both Dow and Asbury expressed authority from God as the first qualifier for their work, and both secondly esteemed the Christian line of authority to come from John Wesley in the Methodist church—at least they both agreed on this point until Dow was unable to receive formal church representation as a preacher (or any other position). While Dow loyally never disavowed the Methodist church, the conflicting ideals appeared to shift as he focused a great deal of his later writings to a detailed description of the rights of man. Active in the energy of a new "government of the people," Dow's political and religious systems appeared to converge such that the people's opinions in a majority could bear the same weight in propriety as God's own placement of authority. But interestingly, the votes of the people ultimately were to exemplify the will of God itself, according to Dow's reasoning, because any rights unjustly taken were usurped, or self-created, marking the most grievous tyranny possible. Even Asbury, who had unopposed authority from the church, was careful to make sure that his own appointment as superintendent in America by Wesley, had a double potency by insisting that he also be elected by the preachers.

As a calling from God or a written personal conversion experience could not be "proven," a secondary qualifier of authority seemed to be sought by both Dow and Asbury. Asbury's fell in line with the church's view of authority from the ancient church, in addition to his own strong spiritual feelings, and Dow's did not. Therefore, Dow gave alternatives for authority than that from the church—out of necessity—to that of being chosen by the people. Ultimately, being chosen by the people represented a

valid source of authority to Dow as he had explained in his writings, because being chosen by the people was a God-given authentication in and of itself. Of course, this criterion was defined by himself, and in the end, exemplified by himself at a time when being chosen "by the people" demonstrated a highly respected standard of legitimacy and freedom. But regardless of the needs which Dow's preaching filled for the people in antebellum America, the structural base of Methodism would not open its doors wide enough to accept Dow in. For Dow, the fulcrum between spirituality and structure within the Methodist church left him on the outside of the religiously authoritative channels he sought within.

Both Asbury and Dow revered Wesley as the authority in bringing the primitive church's power back into practice, and both sought to uphold the criteria he established. One of Wesley's most identifiable changes from the Anglican church was his emphasis upon *experience* as the key to collective spiritual power in Methodism and the defense against existing only as a "dead sect, having the form of religion without the power" (Wesley, "Thoughts Upon Methodism" 100). And amidst a strong collective spiritual power within the religion stood thousands of individuals whose daily encounters with the divine created the essence of the whole, and the spiritual power to move forward in righteous conviction. But in addition to daily spiritual experiences to combat a potential "dead sect," Wesley also identified that Methodists must "hold fast [to] both the doctrine, spirit, and discipline with which they first set out" (100). Wesley's "doctrine" and "discipline," even open to individual spiritual experience as it was, carried a form and structure which excluded Dow's interpretation of it, and welcomed Asbury's view. While Tucker observed that the differences of spiritual power and institutional authority

in early American Methodism “could, in fact, be found side by side” (Tucker 273), when demonstrated by the two individuals of Dow and Asbury, those differences must have each ultimately been on distinct and vastly distant sides.

Works Cited

Ancestry. https://www.ancestry.com/search/collections/8054/?name=Lorenzo+Dow&name_x=ps.

Asbury, Francis. "The Journal and Letters of Francis Asbury." "A Valedictory Address to William McKendree." http://wesley.nnu.edu/other-theologians/francis-asbury/the-journal-and-letters-of-francis-asbury-volume-ii/francis-asbury-the-letters-vol-2-chapter-13/.

—. "The Journal of the Rev. Francis Asbury, Bishop of the Methodist Episcopal Church, from August 7, 1771, to December 7, 1815." Sabin Americana 1500-1926, vol. 1-3 N. Bangs and T. Mason, 1821.

Boehm, Henry, and J. B. Wakeley. *Reminiscences: Historical and Biographical, of Sixty-Four Years in the Ministry*. Carlton & Porter, 1866.

Carnegie, Dale. *How to Stop Worrying and Start Living*. Simon & Schuster, Inc. 2004.

Dow, Lorenzo, and Dow, Peggy. "The Dealings of God, Man and the Devil." Sheldon, Lamport & Blakeman, 1849.

—. "History of Cosmopolite, or, The Four Volumes of Lorenzo Dow's Journal Concentrated in One." Sabin Americana 1500-1926, 5th ed., Joshua Martin; (Printed by John B. Wolff), 1848.

Find a Grave. https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/36902111/lorenzo-dow.

Glendinning, William. *The Life of William Glendinning*. Printed for the author at the office of W.W. Woodward, 1795.

Hatch, Nathan O. *The Democratization of American Christianity*. Yale UP, 1989.

Hindmarsh, D. Bruce. "'My Chains Fell Off, My Heart Was Free': Early Methodist Conversion Narrative in England." Church History, vol. 68, no. 4, Cambridge UP, 1999, pp. 910–29.

Holder, Ray. *William Winans: Methodist Leader in Antebellum Mississippi*. UP of Mississippi, 1977.

Holland, David F. *Sacred Borders: Continuing Revelation and Canonical Restraint in Early America*. Oxford UP, 2011.

Jones, Christopher C. “The Power and Form of Godliness: Methodist Conversion Narratives and Joseph Smith's First Vision.” *Journal of Mormon History*, vol. 37, no. 2, Mormon History Association, 2011, pp. 88–114.

The King James Bible. Project Gutenberg.

Methodist Episcopal Church. *The Doctrines and Discipline of the Methodist Episcopal Church.* New York: J. Emory and B. Waugh, for the Methodist Episcopal church, 1829.

O’Kelly, James. “A Vindication of the Author’s Apology.” Printed for the author by Joseph Gales, 1801.

Plyler, Marion Timothy and Plyler, Alva Washington. “*Men of the Burning Heart: Ivey-Dow-Doub.”* https://archive.org/details/menofburninghear00plyl.

Sellers, Charles Coleman. Lorenzo Dow, *The Bearer of the Word*. Minton, Balch & Company, 1928.

Snethen, Nicholas. “A Reply to an Apology for Protesting Against the Methodist Episcopal Government. Compiled Principally from Original Manuscripts. By Nicholas Snethen. [Two Lines from The Epistle of James].” Eighteenth Century Collections Online, Printed by Henry Tuckniss, 1800.

Sobel, Mechal. *Teach Me Dreams: Transforming the Self in the Revolutionary Era.* Princeton UP, 2000.

Strickland, William Peter. *The Pioneer Bishop, or, The Life and Times of Francis Asbury*. Carlton & Porter, 1858.

Travis, Joseph, and Thomas O. Summers. *Autobiography of the Rev. Joseph Travis, A. M., a Member of the Methodist Annual Conference*. E. Stevenson & J. E. Evans, Agents, for the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, 1856.

Tucker, Karen B. Westerfield. *American Methodist Worship*. Oxford UP, 2001.

Watson, Harry L. *Liberty and Power: The Politics of Jacksonian America*. 1st rev. ed., Hill and Wang, 2006.

Watson, Richard. *The Life of the Reverend John Wesley*. United States, E. Stevenson & F.A. Owen, agents, for the Methodist Episcopal church, South, 1857.

Wesley, John. *A Plain Account of the People Called Methodists: In a Letter to the Reverend Mr. Perronet, Vicar of Shoreham, in Kent*. The eighth edition., Printed by J. Paramore; and sold at the new chapel, City-Road; and at the Rev. Mr. Wesley's Preaching-Houses in town and country, 1786.

—— . "Thoughts Upon Methodism." *The Wesleyan-Methodist Magazine*, vol. 10, 1787, pp. 100–02.

Wigger, John H. *American Saint: Francis Asbury and the Methodists*. Oxford UP, 2009.

—— . *Taking Heaven by Storm*. Oxford UP, 1998.