

MS Preachers 1779¹

There was always some tension between the early Methodist lay preachers and the ordained clergy active in the movement. As the movement grew the lay preachers complained that the ordained clergy were given the most desirable appointments, particularly in London and Bristol, because they could provide for the sacraments.

One of the most dramatic instances of such tension occurred in Bath and Bristol in late 1779. Edward Smyth, an Irish evangelical clergyman supportive of the Wesleys, had moved to Bath so that his ailing wife could seek treatment at the spa. John Wesley asked Smyth to preach every Sunday while in Bath. This stepped on the toes of Alexander McNab, a lay preacher for thirteen years, who had been appointed superintendent of the Bristol circuit (which included Bath) at the last Conference. McNab challenged Wesley's authority to change an appointment by Conference.

Charles Wesley was in Bristol in October 1779, in part to address McNab's challenge. His attitude toward McNab and other lay preachers who challenged the authority of ordained clergy is evident in three manuscript hymns he wrote that month—he charges them with “Luciferian pride”! This surely contributed to the rising heat of the debate. By November 28 Charles Wesley was reporting in a letter to his brother that McNab now believed it his duty to pray for John Wesley's death! For more on this confrontation, see *Hymn for John Wesley* (1779). See also the hymns concerning this confrontation in *MS Miscellaneous Hymns*, 241–46.

MS Preachers 1779 is a foolscap sized sheet (8.0 in. by 12.25 in.). Given its large size, we do not try to replicate the original pagination or page breaks in the transcription below. Readers might want to cite by hymn number instead of page number.

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¹This document was produced by the Duke Center for Studies in the Wesleyan Tradition under the editorial direction of Randy L. Maddox, with the diligent assistance of Aileen F. Maddox. Last updated: August 1, 2010.

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[I]²

- [1.] Lord over all, thy people hear
For every favour'd Messenger
Whom thou hast own'd for thine,
For every chosen Instrument
Without our rules or orders sent
To serve the Cause Divine.
2. Sent forth they *were* to prophesy,
Their lack of service to supply
Who sit in Moses chair,
But love the world, and seek their own,
Neglect their ministry, and shun
The gospel to declare.
3. Because the Prophets hold their peace,
The Stones, thy quicken'd³ Witnesses,
Cried out on every side,
In streets, and houses, and highways,
They spread the news of pardning grace,
They preach'd The Crucified.
4. Their Doctrine sinsick spirits heal'd,⁴
The Lord himself their Mission seal'd
With miracles from heaven:
The blind to God their sight receiv'd,
The dead were rais'd, the poor believ'd,
And felt their sins forgiven.
5. By ceaseless toils of humble love
Thy Servants sought their faith t'approve,
They spake, and lived the word,
Simple and poor, despis'd of men
They lived imortal souls to gain
And glorify their Lord.

²Appears also in MS Miscellaneous Hymns, 128–31; and MS Preachers Extraordinary, 20–23.
Published posthumously in *Representative Verse*, 336–38; and *Unpublished Poetry*, 3:37–39.

³Ori., “living.”

⁴Ori., “Distemper'd Souls their doctrine heal'd.”

6. With tears we own, They *did* run well—
But where is now their fervent zeal,
 Their deep humility,
Their upright heart their single eye
Their vows the Lord to magnify
 And live and die for Thee!
7. The love of ease and earthly things,
The pride from which Contention springs
 The fond desire of praise,
Have imperceptibly stole in,
Brought back the old besetting sin
 And poison'd all their grace.
8. They now pre-eminence affect
Eager to form the rising Sect,
 Some better thing to gain:
Like hireling priests they pant⁵ for hire,
And with ambition vain aspire⁶
 Without the cross to reign.
9. The flock they woud in pieces tear,
That each may seize the largest share
 May feed himself alone:
“Come see my zeal” at first they cried,
But now they ask “Who on my side
 Will make my cause his own?”
10. The men who have their savour lost
Themselves against the branches boast
 And dignities despise:
Their greedy hopes the flock devour
As all were left within their power
 To glut their avarice.
11. But O, thou Shepherd great and good,
The sheep redeem'd by thy own blood
 Into thy arms receive;
If still with England's Church Thou art,
True Pastors after thy own heart
 To thy own people give.

⁵“Serve” is written above “pant” as an alternative.

⁶Ori., “And all ~~ambitionaly~~ aspire.”

12. Thy flock out of their hands redeem
Who of their own importance dream⁷
As God had need of Man:
Send whom thou wilt, in mercy send,
Thy cause and gospel to defend,
Thy glory to maintain.
13. And O their faithful hearts inflame
With love of our Jerusalem,
Thy Church establish'd here:
Still may they cry, and never rest,
Till Glory in thy face exprest
Throughout our land appear:
14. Till Thee, the Glory of the Lord
In truth and righteousness restor'd
All Flesh together see
And hail thee on thy great white throne,
And sink in speechless raptures down,
For ever lost in Thee.

II.⁸

- [1.] Yet hear us, thou all patient God,
For those who once with grace indow'd
Confess their faith's decay,
Renew'd unto repentance, Lord,
Send them again to preach thy word,
And lengthen out their day.
2. Able Thou art the proud t' abase;
The men who love the highest place
In mercy cast them down,
And let them, groveling in the dust,
Own thy severest sentence just,
And tremble at thy frown.

⁷Ori., "Who seek themselves themselves esteem."

⁸Appears also in MS Miscellaneous Hymns, 131–33; and MS Preachers Extraordinary, 23–25.
Published posthumously in *Unpublished Poetry*, 3:40–41.

3. If Thou the word of truth revoke,
And blot their names out of thy book,
 And leave them in their fall,
Out of the deep regard their cry,
“Left, in our sins we justly die,
 “Our sins deserve it all.”^{9]}
4. Them let thy Spirit now convince⁹
Of sin (the root of all their sins)
 Which nature fain woud hide
Which turn’d the Seraph to a fiend—
From every heart the covering rend,
 And show the worms their pride.
5. Now let them to the dunghill look
From which thy will mysterious took
 The meanest of the croud,—
Envious to mock at Levi’s Sons,
To rail at Bishops on their thrones
 And hate¹⁰ the Church of God?
6. No: but thou caldst them forth to be
A pattern of humility
 Poorest and least of all:
In mercy then, not wrath, chastise
And let them sink in their own eyes
 And into nothing fall.
7. Repentance true on each bestow,
Tormenting fear, distracting woe
 Unutterable shame,
The anguish of a broken heart
Which only Jesus can impart,
 We ask in Jesus’ Name.
8. When prostrate in the dust they grieve
And meek their punishment receive,
 Thy people’s prayer attend,
The humbled penitents restore,
Give back with faith their peace and power
 And love them to the end.

⁹Ori., “~~But chiefly the vain worms convince.~~”

¹⁰“Spurn” is written under “hate” as an alternative.

III.¹¹

- [1.] O Thou who dost the proud withstand
While those that stoop beneath thy hand
Thy hand sets up on high,
Behold the men whose load we bear
Who sprung out of the dunghill dare
Themselves to magnify.
2. The self-exalting worms abase
Ambitious of the highest place
Into the lowest thrust,
Compel'd to feel thine angry frown;
Their Luciferian pride cast down
And humble to the dust.
3. Down to the dust, but not to hell
Abase the men who long have fell
From their humility
Who now at wealth and honors aim
Audacious for their own to claim
The sheep redeem'd by Thee.
4. Wild havoc of the flock they make
For power and filthy lucre's sake
And into parties rend,
Unless thy mercy interpose
And save thy people from their foes
And save them to the end.
5. Our gracious and almighty Lord,
According to thy faithful word
In which thy Church confide
Stand Thou before the poison spread
Betwixt the living and the dead
And stay the plague of pride.
6. Now, now the dire contagion stop
The source of bitter strife dry up,
The stumbling block remove
That all may think and speak the same
And breathe the Spirit of the Lamb
In meek and lowly love.

¹¹Published posthumously in *Unpublished Poetry*, 3:77–78.