

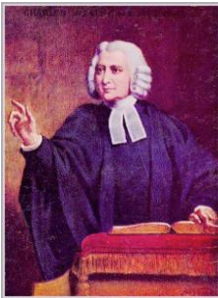
The Founders



John Wesley

The founder of the now global movement known as Methodism. During his lifetime, which spanned almost the entire 18th century (1703-1791), Wesley dedicated his well-ordered intellect, self-discipline and high energy to intense religious activity aimed at renewing the Church of England.

A man far ahead of his time in his thinking, Wesley acts on the conviction that the Gospel is for the whole person and the whole human race, a vision that resulted in the founding of dispensaries for the sick, homes for orphans, schools for persons who were poor, visiting prisoners, opposing slavery, and publishing numerous materials, enough to make a full bookshelf today (and more). Wesley traveled over 250,000 miles in his lifetime as he spread the Gospel. The influence of his persuasive preaching and organizational abilities lead to the creation of Methodist bands, classes, and societies in England, Wales, Scotland, Ireland, and the American colonies.



Charles Wesley

(1707–88), John Wesley's younger brother, gave music, heart, and soul to the Methodist movement. Although overshadowed by his brother, he directly influenced John throughout their lives. Charles began what became the Holy Club at Oxford, went with John to the Colonies, and set up in Bristol to do the work of revival. As energetic in composing hymns as John was in keeping his journals, Charles composed around 6500 hymns, many of which are still sung today. Charles became the "Poet of the Evangelical Revival." One of the

most famous of his works is "Hark, the Herald Angels Sing."¹



Susanna Wesley *(without whom Methodism would've never begun – and not just because she gave birth to the Wesley brothers! Here influence shaped the movement.)*

While her husband was absent in London in 1711, attending Convocation, Mrs. Wesley adopted the practice of reading in her family, and instructing them. One of the servants told his parents and they wished to come. These told others, and they came, till the congregations amounted to forty, and increased till they were over two hundred, and the parsonage could not contain all that came. She read to them the best and most awakening sermons she could find in the library, talked to the people freely and affectionately. There meetings were held "because she thought the end of the institution of the Sabbath was not fully answered by attending Church unless the intermediate spaces of time were filled up by other acts of devotion." Inman, the Curate, was a very stupid and narrow man. He became jealous because her audience was larger than his, and he wrote to Mr. Wesley, complaining that his wife, in his absence, had turned the parsonage into a conventicle; that the Church was likely to be scandalized by such irregular proceedings; and that they ought to be tolerated no longer. Mr. Wesley wrote to his wife that she should get some one else to read the sermons. She replied that there was not a man there who could read a sermon without spoiling it. Inman, the Curate, still complained, and the Rector wrote to Mrs. Wesley that

¹John Wesley—*Revival and Revolution: Christian History, Issue 2*, (Carol Stream, IL: Christianity Today, Inc.) 1997.

the meetings should be discontinued. Mrs. Wesley answered him by showing what good the meetings had done, and that none were opposed to them but Mr. Inman and one other. She then concludes with these wonderful sentences: "If after all this you think fit to dissolve this assembly do not tell me you *desire* me to do it, for that will not satisfy my conscience; but send your *positive command* in such full and express terms as may absolve me from all guilt and punishment for neglecting this opportunity for doing good when you and I shall appear before the great and awful tribunal of our Lord Jesus Christ. Were not these the first Methodist meetings held by the Wesleys?

Can we wonder that Isaac Taylor says that "the mother of the Wesleys was the mother of Methodism;" and that in her characteristic letter, when she said, "Do not advise me, but command me to desist," she was bringing to its place a corner-stone of the future of Methodism." Who can tell the influence those meetings of their mother in the parsonage had upon John and Charles in future years, who were then little boys, and always present!

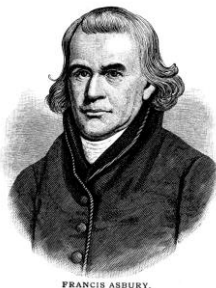


THOMAS COKE.

Thomas Coke

(1747–1814), joining the Methodists in 1771, rose quickly under Wesley to become president of the Irish Conference in 1782 and joint superintendent with Francis Asbury of the Methodist Church of America in 1784. When Coke arrived in America, Asbury, who had refused Wesley's order to return to England before the American Revolution, forced an election and became the first bishop of the Methodist Episcopal Church to be consecrated in

America. Coke with Asbury wrote the *Doctrines and Discipline* for the Methodist Church of America in 1784, but Asbury, not Coke, was the great organizer in America. Coke travelled between England and America frequently, and his commitment to be a missionary among the heathen finally led him to apply for the position of bishop of India—a position which required his return to the Church of England. Failing in this attempt, Coke raised money on his own and embarked on a Methodist mission to Ceylon, but died on the voyage out.



FRANCIS ASBURY.

Francis Asbury

(1745–1816) seized the reins of Methodism in the United States just after its independence and shaped what later became the Methodist Episcopal Church. Riding over 5000 miles each year on horseback, often in bad health, he personally linked up the congregations from Maine to Georgia and set up the method called circuit riding that remained the line of communication for a century. Not always in agreement with Wesley, he was so like him in energy and organizational

ability, he has been called the "Wesley of America."²

²John Wesley—*Revival and Revolution: Christian History, Issue 2*, (Carol Stream, IL: Christianity Today, Inc.) 1997.