

# The Itinerant Minister\*

“The most prominent peculiarity in the economy of Methodism is the itinerancy of her preachers, an arrangement by which all her ministers in the pastoral work can remain in the same place or over the same Church but a limited term of years, and yet by which every minister is supplied with a Church, and every Church with a preacher. This system has been adopted with a view or design of meeting a want that is not met by a settled or permanent pastorate, namely, of supplying regularly and by system those portions of the country not supplied with the Gospel, of gratifying as far as practicable the several tastes and wants of the general Church in the systematic distribution of ministerial talent to as many people and places as possible, and of keeping both the ministry and the membership in a state of religious activity.

“The tendencies of this arrangement are to prevent permanent local attachments and worldliness in the ministry and man-worship in the membership.

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“This itinerant system is eminently scriptural. The Evangelists and Apostles and their helpers were traveling ministers. That it was carried out on a system complete and organic we do not affirm, but it was an itinerancy of great power and gigantic proportions. (a) Our Lord was the original itinerant of Christianity, who ‘went about doing good.’ The Gospels are a minute detail of his travels, ministry, and miracles for the good of the people. Not only so, he sent his message-bearers from place to place, from city to city, with no pecuniary stipulations other than a supply of immediate wants. (b) In a manner somewhat similar are Methodist ministers traversing the continents and islands of earth. From the Acts of the Apostles, an authentic history of the primitive Church, we learn to how great an extent the Apostles and their assistants the Deacons, and Barnabas, Timothy, and Titus traveled and preached in founding and confirming Churches.”

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\* Quoted from *Manual of Methodism; or, The Doctrines, General Rules, and Usages of the Methodist Episcopal Church*, by Bostwick Hawley, D.D. (New York: Hunt & Eaton, 1868), pp. 169-171.

We are deeply indebted to Dr. Elmer T. Clark for his generous permission to use his excellent article on Francis Asbury in this issue of *The Asbury Seminarian*.

The article first appeared in an official publication of The World Methodist Council and of the Association of Methodist Historical Societies. At that time Dr. Clark was serving as secretary of both of these influential organizations.

Dr. Clark is a native of Randolph County, Arkansas. He attended Birmingham-Southern College (A.B.), George Peabody College (A.M.), and Temple University (S.T.B., S.T.D.). He was ordained to the Christian ministry by the St. Louis Annual Conference of the former Methodist Episcopal Church, South. For a decade he served as pastor of churches within Missouri.

Most of Dr. Clark's ministry has been devoted to denominational and ecumenical activities. He has served as editorial secretary of the Missionary Centenary and Christian Education Movement, assistant secretary and editorial secretary of the Board of Missions, M. E. Church, South, as editor of *World Outlook*, and editorial secretary of the Board of Missions of The Methodist Church. He served as secretary of The Association of Methodist Historical Societies, the World Methodist Council, and the International Methodist Historical Society, until his retirement in 1961.

He is the author of many books. In more recent years he has limited himself mainly to writing within the area of Methodist history. He was the editor-in-chief of *The Journal and Letters of Francis Asbury* (Abingdon), published in 1958. He is responsible for the excellent historical library and museum in the World Methodist Building at Lake Junaluska, North Carolina.

Dr. Clark is an international leader in the Methodist ecumenical movement and in the area of Methodist history. Though officially retired, he continues his daily work of research, editing, and writing.

Frank Bateman Stanger