Making ministers, making Methodism: an anthropological study of an English religious denomination

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Summary of Ph.D. thesis

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Making ministers, making Methodism: an anthropological study of an English religious denomination.

This study employs the methods of social anthropology to analyse the social and cultural dynamics of contemporary English Methodism. My initial premise is that a key aspect of Methodism is the holding together of the conflicting values of egalitarianism and hierarchy. By focusing on the making of Methodist ministers, I explore the different ways in which these values are held in creative tension across the institution.

The thesis follows the life-cycle of the minister from the local Methodist church, through the ministerial selection procedures, training and probation and back into the local church. The national arena of the church is also examined. I draw specifically on fieldwork conducted in the Methodist churches of north Bedford, in two theological colleges in southern England and in the national church offices in London.

Methodism is considered here in terms of practice. By employing Pierre Bourdieu's tool of habitus, I depict the core values which Methodists come to embody and outline how these values shape actions and attitudes across the institution. In addition, I argue that, through the ministerial selection and training processes, the Methodist habitus is modified in candidates into a distinct ministerial habitus.

Another main focus is on the nature of power within Methodism. I analyse how ministers come to dominate at local and national levels, arguing that lay people collaborate in the creation of this domination and in turn are often benefited themselves. I also explore the way in which ministry is negotiated in relationships between lay and ordained people. In particular, I propose that the figure of the minister can helpfully be considered as a symbol, which is often differently understood by individuals, but which nonetheless plays an important part in uniting Methodist groups and thereby facilitating coherence and continuity. Thus it becomes evident that, in contributing to the making of ministers, Methodists are contributing to the making of Methodism, and engaging in a sometimes highly generative cycle of cultural reproduction.
Statement of originality of dissertation

This dissertation is the result of my own work, and includes nothing which is the outcome of work done in collaboration.
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Prologue: Experiencing Methodism

The ministers of this church are its members—they are assisted by the Rev. Hamer Savage.

Notice sheet of Castle Street Methodist Church, Cambridge, 1986

In 1986, while in Cambridge, I was taken by a friend to a Methodist service at which I was struck by the way in which ritual roles and general responsibilities were shared between the minister and the church members. This contrasted sharply with my own previous experience of religious life in a Presbyterian Church in Northern Ireland. Something of the arrestingly different Methodist ethos was encapsulated in the epigram, quoted above, which I later discovered was printed on the church notice sheet every week and which functioned as a kind of church motto. In fact this Methodist church seemed to have a life to some extent independent of the minister. Services were often held without the minister present and were taken instead by “local preachers”, who were both men and women. Ordinary members of the church of both sexes also seemed to share equally in the background running of the church. All of this contrasted strikingly with Northern Irish Presbyterianism, and thus triggered my interest in Methodism.

However, over several years of increasing involvement with various Methodist churches I also became aware of the fact that the frequently voiced ethic of a shared ministry, and even the apparent equality of leadership and responsibility within churches, could often hide the fact that control was in the hands of a few. In 1989 I became a lay worker in a Methodist circuit in Leeds, where my position of having “pastoral charge” of two Methodist churches, meant that I became closely involved with the structures of the church while not having been socialised into the role of minister. Here I noticed that while the leadership of the circuit was in theory shared between the ministers and the circuit lay leaders, decisions were largely reached by the ordained staff who always met together separately prior to other mixed meetings. Moreover, the circuit lay leaders were all middle-class men drawn from the more affluent area of the circuit. In these
and numerous other ways I came to see that the rhetoric of equality which I had encountered so frequently in Methodism was not borne out in practice.

The other side of Methodism's rhetoric of equality is an often-voiced anti-clericalism. Methodist members sometimes represent themselves as being pitted against their minister in struggles over the life and future of the local church. For instance, in one of the churches where I worked in Leeds the members told me of one minister: “He came to close us”, and then added with glee: “but he didn’t get away with it”. However, at the same time there was often affection and respect for the minister and I found that even though in my employment I was not meant to be a Methodist minister, most people treated me as one and wanted me to behave as one toward them. All of this prompted me to undertake a more detailed study of Methodist ministry and to answer questions as to how it is that a religious institution can sustain itself when it is riddled by such paradoxes and contradictions.

Alongside these contradictions I had noticed that there was also a great diversity of beliefs and activities practised in the name of Methodism. While living in Lancaster I conducted fieldwork with rural Methodists and discovered there a remarkably close-knit community of interrelated farmers who practised a strongly evangelical and traditional form of Methodism (Topham 1989). Moving from this fiercely conservative area to a council estate in Leeds I was struck by the huge divergences between the Methodist practices in the two locations. In Leeds, services were regularly shared with the Anglicans, and Methodists engaged in rituals with candles, incense and religious leaders adorned in brightly coloured robes. By contrast, one of the Methodist churches in the area around Lancaster had broken away from the denomination when it had entered into talks about unity with the Church of England. These experiences further prompted me to seek to understand the social and cultural dynamics of such a diverse entity.
Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1 Egalitarianism and hierarchy

At the centre of Methodism there is a paradox. With its particular emphasis on the universality and equality of divine grace, this Protestant denomination has fostered a strongly egalitarian ethic, while at the same time maintaining a priestly hierarchy. Much of the history and contemporary activity of this religious organisation can be understood in terms of a constant re-negotiation of these principles of egalitarian democracy and hierarchical ministry to produce a distinctively Methodist balance. This balance and indeed the culture of Methodism have been reproduced across an extensive geographic area since, from its earliest days, this has been a widespread organisation. It is primarily through the hierarchical ministry that control over the far-flung activities of Methodists has been maintained and a recognisable culture of Methodism reproduced. At the same time lay people and even ministers have often challenged the ministerial orthodoxy, and a great diversity of belief and practice has arisen. Yet, despite all the diversity, an institution which is identifiable as Methodism continues. This is a thesis about Methodist ministers and how they are created by and re-create the culture of Methodism. It is also a thesis about how a large and diverse religious institution attempts to maintain and reproduce itself.

Something of the paradoxical combination of principles in Methodism can be traced back to the particular nature of the religion propagated by its founder, John Wesley. While he was ordained as an Anglican priest in 1728, Wesley became deeply influenced by other religious groups outside the establishment (Davies 1963). In particular Wesley was inspired by the religious revival which was occurring in the “Pietism” practised by small groups of Christians, first of all in Germany and America, then also in England (Ward 1993). Wesley embraced many elements of this Pietism and the doctrines of the Dutch reformed theologian Jacob Arminius who, in suggesting that Christ died for all rather than simply for the predestined elect, put forward views opposed to those of Calvin
Drawing on these resources, Wesley preached a message of justification by faith for all, and emphasised an experience of salvation which could be known by everyone. He often went outside of the church into the “field” where he could address the “masses” before setting up societies where devotional life could be pursued. Wesley’s teaching and practice tended to emphasise the importance of the individual, and he promoted some egalitarian expressions of Protestantism such as active lay participation in small groups and lay preaching (Rupp and Davies 1965:230). However, as a committed High Churchman, Anglican priest and Tory, Wesley also maintained an emphasis on hierarchical ecclesiastical authority, collective religion and loyalty to the crown (Heitzenrater 1995:254).

In John Wesley, as in the organization which he engendered, there was a distinctive combination of religious beliefs and practices which promoted both egalitarianism and hierarchy. In the modern world these concepts of egalitarianism and hierarchy have come to have a variety of meanings and are understood differently according to the social context. In common parlance hierarchy is often used loosely to imply any kind of authority structure and within Methodism when individuals talk of the “hierarchy”, as they do occasionally, what they are normally referring to is the bureaucratic, decision-making body of officials who administer the church at a national level. There are, however, other senses of this term which make it, I suggest, particularly appropriate as a way of understanding an important dynamic in Methodism.

Historically, hierarchy has particularly implied a religious order or ranking with each grade subordinate to the one above. According to the Oxford English Dictionary the meaning of the Greek root ἱεράρχης (hierarchus) from which the English words derive was that of the steward or president of sacred rites, and hierarchy was the power or rule of such a hierarchus. In the mainstream of Methodism there have always been ordained ministers, who are ordinarily the sole providers of Holy Communion and who in this way act as priests.

1 John Wesley’s combination of “contrary principles” in both theology and church practice was noted by the historian Elie Halévy ([1905–06] 1971:50–51) who concluded that: “In Wesleyan organization, the
Moreover, within Methodism final authority has almost always been located on some higher, chiefly ministerial level, firstly with Wesley himself and then, after his death, with the corporate body of the Methodist Conference.

However, while I will argue in this thesis that there is almost always an implicit and sometimes even an explicit belief in this kind of sacred hierarchy within Methodism, the term is not generally used in this sense. Instead Methodists talk of “order” as being the principle on which the practice of the ordination of ministers is based. Thus, the making of the religious distinction is rationalised in pragmatic terms for reasons of administrative or bureaucratic necessity. Yet, even the existence of an administrative hierarchy on these grounds is often harshly criticised and challenged.

The challenge to the existence of both sacred and bureaucratic hierarchy comes from the way in which the tenet of egalitarianism has developed in Methodism. Following Wesley, Methodists have, like other Protestants, emphasised the right of individuals to claim a personal knowledge and experience of God, independent of church intermediaries. This belief has tended to accentuate individualism and to promote a stress on the equality of all within the fellowship of the church summed up in the notion of a “priesthood of all believers”. The Methodist doctrine of universal grace, which promotes an emphasis on the equality of all before God, has sometimes fostered anti-clericalism and has more generally created a rejection of any kind of sacred hierarchy in which the ordained are ranked above the laity.² The bureaucratic hierarchy of ministers is also often challenged because it is seen by some to remove decision-making, power and democracy from the local church. Indeed, with regard to their forms of government Methodists talk much of “democracy” rather than specifically of

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² In her anthropological study of Southern Baptists in the United States, Carol Greenhouse (1986:26) has drawn attention to the way in which egalitarianism here involves the “selection and cancellation of specific markers of inequality”. Among English Methodists the markers selected for cancellation are those of spiritual difference and yet at the same time, as I will argue throughout this thesis, these differences are constantly re-introduced.
egalitarianism and by the former they seem largely to mean the conditions of open argument, participatory decision-making and freedom of speech.

In terms of the application of these values to the wider social plane, Methodists’ particular interpretation of Arminianism has often promoted social action outside of the church. This is because this doctrine, which stresses the possibility that all people can be saved, has often been interpreted as meaning that all are equally loved by God and are therefore deserving of equal treatment. However, at the same time Methodists have generally stopped short of radical socialism and have tended to look for social justice within a stratified society.

While the particular combination of the principles of egalitarianism and hierarchy have been highly significant in producing the distinctive nature of the movement, Methodists are not alone in combining such potentially contradictory axioms. Indeed this is a central issue for most modern industrial societies and for many other groups of people and political organisations around the world. Since the eighteenth century egalitarianism has become a prevalent ethic in the West, but it has also been identified as a core value in a wide range of other societies, for example by religious historian Louise Marlow (1997) in her study of medieval Islam and by social anthropologists Sherry Ortner (1989) and Christina Toren (1990) in their respective accounts of Sherpa Buddhists and Fijian islanders. In all three of these studies it has also been argued that hierarchy is present, and while in each case the particular nature of the hierarchy has been elaborated as specifically understood and practised by the particular peoples, hierarchy has generally been regarded as an authority structure based on rank. Moreover, in these studies the combination of these precepts has been described as providing an important means of understanding the social dynamics of the respective societies.

Understanding the nature of hierarchy in certain societies has long been of interest to anthropologists. In his classic study of caste Louis Dumont linked hierarchy to ranking and status in terms of religious functions and claimed that hierarchy was different from power and authority structures since it served to integrate a society by reference to its values. While Dumont also proposed that
egalitarianism was generally contradicted by hierarchy (Dumont [1966] 1980:4), he went on to argue that wherever there was society, hierarchy would always occur (237). Edmund Leach too has argued for the inevitable existence of hierarchy on the grounds that such systems of differentiated status are necessary to keep order and to legitimise culture (Leach 1982:79). Similarly, in his analysis of the different kinds of hierarchy which have existed historically, Roland Mousnier also begins with the suggestion that human social maps have always been constructed of social layers or classes which form an “hierarchical order” (Mousnier [1969] 1973:9). While the inevitability of hierarchy may be disputed, the possible co-existence of the axioms of egalitarianism and hierarchy has been well demonstrated in the anthropological studies already mentioned above and can also be seen in many areas of modern Western life.

Within Western states, where there is generally more talk of democracy than of egalitarianism, hierarchy is often hidden or denied. Instead, what is termed social stratification is legitimised through the tenet of meritocracy, which suggests that all have equal opportunity to gain access to the higher positions according to their ability. However, even within such democracies there are still those who object to the maintenance of such hierarchies, and it has been suggested that “every system of social stratification generates protest against its principles and bears the seeds of its own suppression” (Dahrendorf [1968] 1969:42). In most industrialised states and societies there are frequent calls for greater democracy and ruling groups must find ways to answer these calls, resolve the inherent tensions between democracy and hierarchy and legitimise their own positions. Thus, the resolution of the tension between the principles of hierarchy and egalitarianism, albeit that these principles are differently understood in different societies, is a key dynamic in a world increasingly influenced by the principles of liberal democracy.3 By making a careful examination of Methodist life and order this particular inquiry provides a case study of how a religious group of some size and complexity balances these principles and reproduces itself.

3 The growing importance of liberal democracy as a system of government throughout the world has been strongly argued for by Francis Fukuyama (1992), albeit in a highly generalized, ethnocentric and controversial manner.
This question of how societies which emphasise individualism and egalitarianism manage to reproduce themselves has already been identified as an important one. Edmund Leach (1982:79) has suggested that egalitarian doctrine produces societies that are unstable and transitional. In the specifically religious context, it has been proposed that the assertion in North American Baptist churches of the individual's direct access to God, is a "primary source of a constantly threatening disorder" (Harrison 1959:56). The problems caused by the "anarchic potentialities" of this kind of religion continue for other denominations, including Methodism. There has indeed been great diversity in Methodism in the past, as demonstrated by the numerous schisms in the nineteenth century, and there are now many new sources of divergence. Previous functionalist approaches to the study of society have suggested that cohesion has been maintained through the sharing of beliefs and ritual practices. However, more recent studies of both religious and political life have argued that there is often in fact very little sharing at the level of ideas but rather it is at the level of shared experiences of commitment to certain symbols that solidarity is generated (Stromberg 1986, Kertzer 1988). Yet the question of how it is that societies, or in this case institutions full of diversity generate solidarity remains a significant area of research (Kertzer 1988:6).

Within Methodism what stability and solidarity there is has been generated through a variety of means. Certainly, in the past and to some extent in the present the sharing of symbols and of structure is important. One of the most potent symbols, I argue, is that of the minister. The role of the minister is now variably understood and different people invest the office with different meanings while still sharing a commitment to the office. Another important and related factor in maintaining Methodism is the often deeply invested nature of the relationships which ministers and people have with one another. Moreover, the structure of Methodism has been implemented largely through the ministers, who serve to keep control over the diversity. However, ministers are often uncomfortable agents of this hierarchical control and Methodist people are often uncomfortable with their need for hierarchical ministers. This thesis addresses how it is that ministers and people come to be interdependent.
1.2 Power

Another way of looking at the relationships between lay and ordained is in terms of the power dynamic within the church. Significantly, many Methodist ministers deny that they have any power, thus in part reflecting the egalitarian ethos of the religion. However, there are those within this denomination who claim that the ministers do have power and who are asking that this power be examined and reviewed.⁴

What it means to describe the relationships between minister and people in terms of power is a difficult but rewarding question. It has been suggested that power is "an essentially contested concept" around which there are endless debates (Lukes 1974:26). Assessments of power in the past have frequently emphasised the negative aspects of asymmetrical power relations. This is perhaps in part a legacy of Max Weber, whose classic definition of power as "the probability that one actor within a social relationship will be in a position to carry out his own will despite resistance" (Weber 1947:152) continues to constitute an important starting point for any study of the subject. Likewise, those applying a Marxist critique have often concentrated on the negative use of power to dominate, suppress and control others against their will and/or interests. However, the assessment of what counts as domination or as inequality is itself a culturally charged activity and this approach can also be criticised for its over-emphasis on the powerful actor as a rational agent acting only out of self-interest. Yet, there is still a place for a careful analysis of inequalities within cultural systems and Weber's theory of the way in which domination is achieved through charismatic, traditional and legal-rational means provides a helpful tool for understanding the manner in which the power of ministers to dominate may be achieved (Weber 1947).

⁴ Calls for a review of the power of the Methodist minister were made in 1995 by those representing Methodist young people ("Charter 95: A message to the Methodist Church from Young People") and by a body reviewing the place of women presbyters in the Church ("A cry of the beloved"). See Methodist Church 1995, 2:424-433 and 587-623.
In my understanding of power I to some extent borrow from Stephen Lukes by suggesting that power is the ability to achieve one's own or one's group's interests (Lukes 1986). According to Lukes (1986:6), interests can be divided into two categories: "welfare interests" and "more ultimate goals and aspirations". The former, I suggest, includes food, clothes, shelter, security and self-worth and the latter concerns the fulfilment of cultural aims such as religious and social achievement. Both material and social resources are usually limited and so this places restrictions on the achievement of interests. Consequently a conflict situation is often created whereby, in order to achieve its interests one group may seek to dominate another by controlling access to the material and/or social resources and by influencing or directing the behaviour of others. Particularly invidious, Lukes suggests, are those situations in which powerful individuals or groups influence, shape or determine the very wants of the less powerful by control "of information, through the mass media and through processes of socialisation" (Lukes 1974:23). This kind of power can be observed in the control of the higher members of the church hierarchy over those training to be ministers and to a degree in the relationship between minister and member in the local church situation. However, it is not necessarily the case that the achieving of interests in these cases are mutually exclusive and indeed the achieving of the interests of one group may actually serve to promote those of others.

The mutually beneficial nature of power has been suggested by Talcott Parsons and Hannah Arendt, who have argued that power has positive, generative aspects when it is tied to authoritative leaders who act to further collective goals (cited in Lukes 1974:29). Power, Parsons argued, is not part of a zero-sum order in which if one person or group has power that necessarily limits the amount of power which others can have. Indeed, quite the contrary, the more power that some hold the greater the power which may be generated for others who in consequence will be more able to achieve their interests.

Power can thus be viewed in both negative and positive ways, and as an element in all social relationships. Something of this has also been proposed by Michel Foucault, who like Parsons, suggests that power relations are not merely
restrictive and exploitative. However, Foucault goes further to suggest that any exercise of power also tends to elicit strategies of resistance and that consequently, as Ortner paraphrasing the Foucaultian notion suggests, “everyone is in some sense operating with respect to a matrix of power” (Ortner 1989:152). Indeed, Lukes has noted with regard to power that “we all affect each other in countless ways all the time” (Lukes 1974:26). The challenge then is to consider when such countless effects are significant.

Power within the Methodist Church is certainly not a one-sided relationship and all within the church can be seen to affect each other, although not on an equal basis. As members of a collective religious enterprise lay and ordained share certain goals and, I will argue, mutually empower each other to fulfil these goals. Lay and ordained may also act to empower each other to fulfil goals which are not shared but which are mutually compatible. However, the goals are not always shared or compatible and where such differences of aim occur a struggle between individuals or groups may ensue. Nevertheless what most clearly emerges when power in Methodism is considered is the interdependence between the various actors.

Pierre Bourdieu has identified something of this interdependence of lay and ordained in the church in his study Language and symbolic power (1991). Bourdieu, in writing about the creation of legitimate spokespersons including priests and ministers, has highlighted the fact that at the end of the long process of institutionalization the authorized person “creates the group which creates him” (Bourdieu 1991:106). Elsewhere he describes this in terms of how the representative “receives from the group the power to form the group” (Bourdieu 1990:138). When applied to Methodism, it can be seen that lay and ordained play highly significant roles in confirming each other’s identities as Methodists and as ministers. Both at the significant ritual moments of investiture and on a weekly basis I argue that in making ministers, Methodists are also making the Methodist group, and thus in turn re-making themselves in a highly generative cycle.
However, Bourdieu has also argued that while the power of priests or ministers is dependent on that which is invested in them by the members of their group, these members then fail to recognise their role in creating the hierarchy. This Bourdieu calls symbolic violence, and he describes it as a domination that hides itself beneath “the veil of an enchanted relationship” (Bourdieu 1991:24). Bourdieu is pejorative in the language which he uses to describe the outcomes of such relationships. He argues that an inevitable counterpart of the religious investiture of some is the “slide of the complementary class into Nothingness” (Bourdieu 1991:126) and the dispossession of that class of “the instruments of symbolic production” (169). While certainly for most of the time Methodists do “misrecognise”, to use Bourdieu’s term, the role they play in the making of ministers, they can also be highly reflective and critical on this subject. Moreover, while within Methodism the “instruments of symbolic production” may be largely in the hands of the ordained this is not entirely the case and many ministers in fact see themselves as working to facilitate symbolic production by lay people or as they might put it, teaching their congregations how to think theologically and actively contribute to worship making. Hence, Bourdieu’s theory while providing a way of describing the generative relations of dependence between lay and ordained does not allow for the full complexities of the Methodist situation.

1.3 Practice

In what follows my focus is primarily on Methodist ministers as a group of actors who are both the products of a particular culture and who in turn reproduce that culture. My main concern is with what is done to these actors and with what they do. Thus attention is primarily on practice and not on belief, which is the more usual focus in studies of Western religion. The concern of sociologists of religion, whose domain this most usually is, has often been with belief and with ritual as a kind of enacted belief, a fact which to some extent reflects aspects of Christianity as it has been traditionally understood. As Malcolm Ruel (1997) has well argued, Christianity has placed an emphasis on belief that is in striking contrast to other world religions and local religions in which believing is of comparatively little importance. Ruel further explores the
way in which belief has had a variety of meanings through the history of the church, including both belief as "trust in" and belief as assent to certain propositions (Ruel 1997:40). Believing in both of these senses and in what Ruel identifies as the Reformation sense of an individual's experience of belief or faith remains significant throughout much of Christianity, and the energy of church officials and theologians continues to be largely taken up with clarifying the propositional content of such belief. Yet, it is my contention that the actual propositional content of belief is less significant in understanding the nature of what it means to be a Methodist, or to be a Methodist minister, than are the various practices this religion has tended to engender in people.

However, in concentrating on practices I do not want to deny the place of knowledge or propositional belief, since this remains important and the ability to appropriately articulate "our doctrines" is one of the marks and tests of a Methodist minister. What I do here is to shift the attention on to implicit or embodied beliefs and to the way in which Methodists enact them. In so doing my approach picks up a proposition made by the historian and social anthropologist, Robert Moore, who concluded in his study of Methodists in a Durham pit-village that: "Methodism is not a theology, nor an organisation, but a way of life, a code of ethics which are often unstated and only implicit in people's behaviour" (Moore 1974:228). By depicting Methodism as a "way of life" I have again found some of Bourdieu's key concepts to provide helpful, if not entirely satisfactory tools with which to conduct my analysis.

Bourdieu has suggested that culture is not to be found as a structure or set of rules external to and separate from the members of societies, but rather that such structure is embodied in individuals as a set of dispositions which have been internalised through socialisation into a particular society. Bourdieu has called this *habitus* and suggests that there is an internalised or embodied framework of dispositions which shape actors' practices, perceptions and attitudes. He proposes that the *habitus* is "an acquired system of generative schemas" (Bourdieu [1972] 1992:95) which is endlessly productive and it is this which enables actors to know how to act or gives them what he calls a "feel for the
game", guiding the strategies which they develop for performing within the field of their social relationships (Bourdieu [1980] 1995:66).

Bourdieu chiefly depicts the habitus as an unconscious kind of second nature which is taken for granted and unquestioned and in some places he calls this *doxa* (Bourdieu [1980] 1995:66). Interestingly, in his discussion of this, Bourdieu also talks in terms of belief and he proposes that an inherent part of belonging to any particular social field is what he calls lived belief or practical faith (68). He contrasts this with 'pragmatic faith'—described as “adherence to a set of instituted dogmas and doctrines”—or what might otherwise be called propositional belief. The practical faith is instilled in the body by childhood learning which creates a kind of practical sense and which generates appropriate practices in all kinds of variable situations. The dispositions of the habitus, which he suggests are learnt largely through experience and socialisation rather than through any formalised kind of teaching, have a strongly durable character underlying all future learning and social experience.

While Bourdieu largely talks in terms of the childhood-acquired habitus he also uses the term to describe the socialised changes which occur in those who enter into political, religious, artistic and scientific fields, and who must develop an appropriate habitus (Bourdieu 1991:176). Here the habitus seems to entail the acquiring of appropriate knowledge including “theories, problematics, concepts, historical traditions, economic data, etc.”, and more general skills, which in the case of the politician include oratory. In addition, as with the childhood-acquired habitus the professional must gain a kind of “practical mastery” of the values of their field so that they have an appropriate “feel for the game” and know how to act. Thus, when applied in this way, the habitus appears not only to consist of unconscious dispositions but also of knowledge, skills and values.

It is in this wider sense that it seems more appropriate to apply the concept to Methodists and to Methodist ministers. I propose that there is a Methodist habitus which has traditionally been developed in those members who have been largely brought up inside the Methodist Church. These people have embodied shared Methodist values which have disposed them to act in particular ways
throughout the various areas of their lives. While for much of the time traditional Methodists may be unconscious of these dispositions, I depart from Bourdieu in suggesting that, on occasion some of the values which inform these dispositions may be brought to mind and articulated. I propose that the habitus is learnt both by experience and by explicit teaching and that it is possible to begin to identify some of the central Methodist beliefs or values that have become embodied in practice. This is as true of the ministerial habitus as it is of the traditional Methodist habitus, and I suggest that by using the tool of habitus in this way it is possible to achieve a better understanding of the nature of ministry and the way in which ministers differ from lay members.

Bourdieu has already been severely criticised for placing too much stress on the unconscious character of practical logic and for a model of practice that is unduly deterministic of human action, leaving little room for conscious decision-making (Jenkins 1992:71, 83). In my approach, I am interested to note the existence of an unconscious level but also to attend to that which is conscious. A further problem with Bourdieu’s theory also arises in what has been identified as the functionalist nature of his work, which seems to offer little in terms of understanding how change occurs (Toren 1990:16, Jenkins 1992:82). Moreover, the fact that Bourdieu seems to develop this approach in studies of largely stable and bounded communities such as the Algerian Kabyle means that there are difficulties in transposing it to more fluid, complex societies, such as contemporary England. Methodism in England is only one part of a plural society and is now usually only one element in the lives of its members. In order to understand what it means to talk of a Methodist habitus and of a ministerial habitus it is essential that the contemporary nature of the wider context be considered.

1.4 Methodism and religion in contemporary English society

The religious terrain in England has changed radically over the past thirty to forty years. The drop in church attendance, which has been noted to varying degrees throughout this century, has generally been taken to reflect the growing secularization of English society (Wilson [1966] 1969, Gilbert 1980, Bruce
1995, 1996). In April 1996 the central offices of the Methodist Church announced the triennial figures which showed, yet again, a massive drop in both membership and attendance at Methodist services. Over the three year period from 1992 to 1995 Methodism had lost almost 28,000 members, (that is a decrease of 8.2%), and its total membership stood at 380,269. The drop in the number of children and young people attending services was greater still with almost 20% fewer appearing at the end of the same three year period. The church itself, and the media at large, were not slow to point out that if this decline continued Methodism would have disappeared by the middle of the twenty-first century.

Alongside the decrease in traditional religious activity have come new developments from other quarters. A major aspect of this has been the appearance of other world religions in the faith communities of the various groups of invited migrants who arrived in England largely in the 1940s and 50s. The past twenty years has also seen a significant development of new religious movements, many of which have had their origins or influences in America, but which have taken on their own particular identity in Britain. Within the traditional Christian denominations there have been pockets of revival, particularly among evangelical groups and those influenced by the charismatic movement. Yet, the vast majority of people in Britain have no active religious affiliation, and while research has suggested that religious beliefs have continued to abound in Britain, they are rarely tied to traditional institutional commitment (Davie 1994, Hay 1982). Where people do attend a church they are often less committed to a particular denomination, and may simply visit the one nearest to them, although conversely some travel long distances to attend a church with a style that suits them (Richter and Francis 1998:68).

Despite the apparent decline and change in religious behaviour, Methodism continues to be a large and fairly influential religious organisation. In 1995, the number of people on the Methodist "community roll" (that is, people who have any contact with a Methodist institution through any of its work) was about one and a quarter million. At the same time there were 6,678 churches and 3,660
ministers and student ministers. However, the increasing complexity of English society has meant that there is an ever-increasing number of cultural systems impinging on people's lives. Methodism has become just one such system among many.

Yet, for many people Methodist "societies", as the groups have traditionally been called, continue to be one of the fundamental places where their cultural universe is shaped and constructed. These are the people who most readily call themselves Methodist and who will continue to live out a high proportion of their non-working life in the company of other Methodists. It is with regard to these people that it is most appropriate to talk of a Methodist habitus since the experience of being a Methodist has given them a set of core dispositions or values which affect, mostly unconsciously, the whole of their way of living.

Alongside these there are now others for whom Methodism is no longer the chief source of their cultural dispositions, although it still has an important role to play. These people balance their Methodism alongside other orientations and cultural encounters. They may be people who have been brought up in other Christian traditions and who have come to Methodism late. Or they may be "cradle Methodists" who through marriage or life experiences have come into close contact with other religious groups or cultures. And there are still others who have little of a Methodist cultural disposition but who find themselves drawn at some point, usually of change or crisis, to a Methodist church. These are the people of whom sociologists of religion are thinking when they describe religion in Britain as a "potent cultural resource" to be tapped into, or "a language for representing powerful inspirations, perceptions, sufferings and aspirations even though the users of this language may not necessarily associate with any religious organization" (Beckford 1989:170).

Thus, Methodism can be seen to be different things to different people along a kind of continuum of importance or involvement. Along this continuum it is possible to draw divisions between traditional Methodists and others whose

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5 All figures taken from Methodist Church 1996a, 1:12–25.
involvement is less. The new ideas and values which members and visitors bring to Methodism from their involvement in other societies, which include work, leisure and other not overtly religious activities, provide sources of change and challenge and sometimes of competition. All of this affects the role of the minister, as does the general cultural paradigm of capitalism. With regard to this culture of capitalism, David Martin’s description of how in the United States, the clergy acted as “rival entrepreneurs”, responding to consumer demand and accommodating their religious styles “to the demands of the market” (Martin 1978, cited in Coleman 1989:298) has also been applied to the British situation (Davie 1994:20).

1.5 Ministry at the end of the twentieth century

The nature of religious ministry has undergone many changes throughout this century. Several sociologists of religion who adhere to the secularization thesis have argued that there has been a general decrease in the significance of mainstream Christianity in Britain, and that this has had a negative effect on the status of religion’s full-time practitioners (Wilson [1966] 1969, Bruce 1995:34). While opinions vary as to the precise status of contemporary clerics (Towler and Coxon 1979:31), in my observation ministerial authority is becoming more frequently questioned both inside and outside religious communities. In addition, many of the traditional ministerial roles have been taken over by the development of the “caring professions”, and people often look for those trained in the new skills of counselling and psychotherapy to meet what were once designated as pastoral needs. All of these factors have contributed to a growing sense of a changing ministerial identity within the mainstream churches.

The past decade has been a time of great internal change with regard to ministry in Methodism. Several Methodist leaders have commented on the fact that there has been a veritable “explosion of ministries” in this church. This has included the formal recognition of many “lay ministries”, the re-opening of the diaconal ministry (a kind of serving order whose members do not necessarily preach), the entry of women into ordained ministry, along with the development of ministry in local appointment (that is, the ordaining of people who will only
work in a particular geographical area) and sector ministry (that is, the ordaining of people who continue in their normal work). Increasing numbers of institutions, from hospitals to universities to police stations, are recruiting chaplains to meet the religious needs of their employees as well as their clients. Yet, all of this seeming revival of ministry contributes to a growing uncertainty as to what it means to be a minister and even a sense of identity crisis among some ministers. Indeed, the whole subject is being carefully reviewed within the Methodist church in a series of reports concerning the kind of ministers the church will need in the future and how they will best be trained. In part this discussion is finance-driven, since the church can no longer afford to train the numbers of ministers it has coming forward. Yet, this inquiry also reflects a more fundamental questioning regarding the whole nature of the church and its ministry.

It is striking, given all the change regarding the status of Christianity and religious functionaries, that there are still large numbers of people who want ministers. They are often the last people to be asked what it is that they expect from a minister and what this ministry means to them. Indeed, ministry, like many other professions, has often been treated in a manner perhaps influenced by Erving Goffman's ([1959] 1969) work on the nature of the presentation of self, as a kind of role to be performed before a somewhat passive audience. Previous studies have often focused on the traditional elements of such a role, reflecting in part the Western individualistic pre-occupation with personal identity. In this study I have examined ministry not only as personal and social identity (as it is generally conceived), but also in terms of the relationships

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6 The culmination of these studies can be found in the report to the 1996 Conference entitled “The funding of ministerial training” (Methodist Church 1996a, 2: 879–93) and the report to the 1997 Conference entitled “The making of ministry report” (Methodist Church 1997, 1:209–27). In 1998 a report entitled “Role and place of the ordained minister in a modern church” (Methodist Church 1998, 2:578) was presented, and in 1999 the Conference began a process of consultation on the report “Flexible patterns of Ministry” (Methodist Church 1999, 1:242-264).

7 Carol Greenhouse (1986:48) in her study of Southern Baptists in the United States has identified something of the contrast between the Western emphasis on role and identity, and that on relationships as often noted by anthropologists of other societies. In particular she describes how the family among Southern Baptists is not understood primarily as a set of relationships but as a set of inter-locking roles or identities such as “the wonderful mother” or the “good father” which individuals learn to play.
between different kinds of actors within the church. To facilitate this, I have interviewed fifty-five lay people concerning their experiences and expectations of ministers. I have also interviewed six locally based ministers and ten national level ministers regarding their own understanding of ministry. Drawing on these interviews together with my year-long observations of the ministers acting within their communities I provide an anthropologically informed analysis of the contemporary Methodist minister.

There have been many books already written about the task of the minister. However, the majority of these are either histories or theologies, most are sociologically naive, and they relate in the main to the United States. While there were in the 1960s and 70s a few sociological studies of Anglican clergy and other religious functionaries (Rudge 1968, Towler and Coxon 1979, Russell 1980), there has never to my knowledge been an anthropological study of nonconformist ministers in Britain.8 Anthropologists have largely conducted studies of religious functionaries in less complex societies or have assumed that they understand the nature of ministry or priesthood in Britain and the West without the requirement of fieldwork. There are a number of ethnographic studies of Christian communities in industrialised societies, but these seldom pay much attention to the religious leaders (Clarke 1982, Moore 1974, Jenkins 1999, Greenhouse 1986, Werner 1988, Toulis 1993). A notable exception to this is Simon Coleman’s study of a charismatic group in Sweden. Here, Coleman analyses the role of the leaders in promoting and preserving this particular movement. However, he is somewhat dismissive of what he calls average Swedish (or English) priests, whom he suggests “perceive themselves to be community leaders in an era of anomie” (Coleman 1989:99). The idea that the Methodist minister has a role in promoting community certainly contains some truth, but this is not the whole story. Here, I intend to try to come a little closer to what being a Methodist minister means to the ministers themselves and to the communities in which they serve.

8 Melvyn Shaw (1998), in his recent study of women Methodist ministers, notes the influence which social anthropology has had upon his methodology. However, the research draws significantly upon quantitative methods and there is little evidence of participant observation in the anthropological tradition.
1.6 Structure and methodology

In this thesis I intend to follow the life cycle of the Methodist minister, from the usual starting point for the aspiring minister in the local Methodist church, through the selection procedures, training and probation, and back into the local churches where most work until their retirement or death. As well as taking us into the local church this focus leads to a consideration of the various levels of Methodism since certain points in the life cycle are controlled and managed by officials from higher up in the structure. This approach also provides an opportunity to consider the diversity of Methodism both at the local church level and between the various areas of the national church. Moreover, by examining this variety of interlocking social spheres, including local church, training college and bureaucracy, this enquiry enables a more complete understanding of the culture and differs fundamentally from most previous studies of both church life and the making of professionals where attention has normally been on a single social milieu. However, covering this amount of ground has generated a great deal of ethnographic material and some of the social detail for most sections has had to be placed in appendices.

Before becoming a Methodist minister, it is ordinarily the case that a person will be an active and committed Methodist member and a local preacher. Hence, I begin in Chapter 2, with a consideration of local Methodism and draw on my year-long participation in the seven churches which make up the Bedford (North) Circuit. Encompassing as they do rural, urban and suburban, working-class and middle-class, Methodist only and mixed Anglican/Methodist partnership churches, these seven churches give a good reflection of the diversity of Methodism even within one small geographical area. However, there is much that is shared between the churches in terms of Methodist structure and practices. Moreover, despite a great variety in what Methodism means to the various people who participate in these churches it is still possible to reveal some of the embodied values (habitus) which are largely shared by the more traditional Methodists. As part of this consideration of local church Methodism I will give an initial account of the minister’s role in the churches and of how the ministers relate to the various congregations.
In Chapter 3, by drawing on experiences of some in the Bedford circuit and interviews with student ministers at theological college, I consider how those who normally hold to the traditional Methodist values and practices first conceive of themselves as potential Methodist ministers. Those who do so must learn to tell of their conviction in an appropriate form, normally referred to as the “call”. All are tested through a long and arduous procedure of “candidating” during which the various levels of the church play a role in beginning the socialisation of the prospective ministers. Next, those selected must begin their training and in Chapter 4 I outline the manner in which the student ministers are further socialised into the ministerial role and consider this in terms of the modification of their traditional Methodist habitus. Here I draw on my experience of living in a theological college for an extended period and on visits to one other college.

For the majority of ministers the greatest part of their life is spent working in the local church and circuit. In Chapter 5 I return to the north Bedford circuit and analyse the manner in which the nature of ministry is negotiated between ministers and church members in the local church and the manner in which both ministers and lay people understand the role. While this covers the experience of most ministers, some follow a different life path by making a career in the higher structures of the church. In Chapter 6 I consider those who do so and who are employed at what is termed the connexional level. A three-month period of participant observation in the London offices of the connexional employees and the opportunity to interview various church leaders revealed a contrast in culture between local and national arenas.

By thus following Methodist ministers through the various procedures and into some of the positions which they occupy in the course of their life cycle, I explore how Methodism makes ministers who in turn make Methodism. In each of the various situations I consider the dynamics of power and the maintaining of asymmetrical relations. By attending to these various Methodist cultural contexts and the variety of beliefs, practices and ideas about ministry within them, I show some of the great diversity that is maintained within Methodism. I also demonstrate the role of the minister in maintaining some continuity in
Methodism despite all its diversity. In all this, running as an important and significant cultural thread is the way in which in their activities Methodists constantly strive to reach an appropriate balance between the values of egalitarianism and hierarchy.

1.7 Doing anthropology at home

The nature of my topic has obviously taken me into a variety of different social locations but it has not, as has been traditional in anthropology, led me to travel abroad. Over the last ten years, doing anthropology “at home” has become more widely accepted and valued. The potential problems raised by such approaches have been well discussed in the literature generated by the growing numbers of social anthropologists whose fieldwork does not always take them abroad (e.g. Strathern 1981, Okely 1987, Finnegan 1989, Jenkins 1999). Most particularly, the extent to which an anthropologist is at home with a group is extremely difficult to specify since it depends on the similarity of their own background culture with that of the group. In addition as Marilyn Strathern has pointed out, the “grounds of familiarity and distance are shifting ones” (Strathern 1987:16). Essentially, I suggest, the main issue at stake here is the extent to which anthropologists’ recognised familiarity with the cultures they are studying affects their work. Regarding this, it seems to me that doing anthropology at home can be an extremely productive enterprise when accompanied by a careful and self-reflective assessment of the anthropologist’s place within his or her community.

Something of my relation to the general field of Methodism has already been described in the prologue, where I recounted my initial experiences of Methodism and growing involvement. It may help the reader to know that at the time of conducting this study I am a member of the Methodist Church and a student minister. However, it is too simple to therefore conclude that I am completely at home in conducting a study of Methodism and Methodist ministers. For a start, as I also mentioned in the prologue, I am originally from Northern Ireland and was brought up a Presbyterian rather than a Methodist. While there is much in common between Northern Irish Presbyterianism and the present field of study there are also very many subtle but significant cultural
differences which my particular background has enabled me to observe. Moreover, as I am arguing in this thesis, there is a great deal of variation within Methodism, in particular between local Methodist churches and between the various levels of church organization. Since before commencing this study I had never been to either Bedford or to the connexional church offices I had to learn how to act appropriately in these fields, especially within the connexional arena, just as the more traditional anthropologist must do in more exotic places.

My position in relation to the area of candidating and of theological training is a little more complicated still. Having undergone both of these processes there is an extent to which my experiences form part of the material. In dealing with the candidating process I have tried to limit the extent of the possible unconscious intrusion of my story by actually completing an interview myself and therefore including my experience as a more explicit part of the material to be considered alongside the other stories. With regard to theological training I have tried to gain a critical distance from the experiences by employing a particular theoretical framework and by drawing on interviews and specific periods of observation in both my own college and another. However, there is still the difficulty that I know things about this process because of my particular position within it as an ordinary participant. At times this has probably increased the degree of understanding which I am able to offer while at other times it may have blinded me from making certain analytical deductions. In the end readers will have to make their own judgements about the quality, integrity and consistency of my insights.

Conducting fieldwork in a relatively familiar environment brings its own particular challenges and has not been very popular within England or concerning Christianity. One of the few anthropologists to have conducted an ethnographic study of English religion has been Tim Jenkins (1999), who in his anthropological study of *The Kingswood Whit walk* suggests that it is “the daily experience of misunderstanding, which is the raw material for any account of another society” (1999:80). However, I would contend that misunderstanding is not the only source of data. Given my particular location as someone already familiar with British society in general and with Methodism in particular, I have
had to ask not only why I have made mistakes or misunderstood something, but also why on other occasions I have felt comfortable and at home. This, too, has been a source for gaining raw material. Whatever my personal experiences, I have brought to each situation a set of questions about the meaning of the culture for those people practising it. This is certainly not a piece of autobiographical writing, although my story may at times be in here too. This is about the experiences and practices of other people within Methodism. It may be anthropology “round the corner” but like a growing number of other such studies, it endeavours to make a contribution to our wider understanding of people and culture.
Chapter 2

Methodists and Methodism in the local church

2.1 Introduction

The primary place where contact with Methodism is made is in the local Methodist church. There are few towns, villages or dales in England which do not somewhere contain a brick building bearing the designation “Methodist”. It is largely within these public meeting places that Methodism in this century has been fostered and propagated, new Methodists created and potential Methodist ministers identified and nurtured. Some have suggested that there is much uniformity across this organisation (Ranson, Bryman and Hinings 1977:130), notably the historian E.P. Thompson ([1963] 1981:404), who immortalised the local Methodism of the Napoleonic years in harshly negative terms when he spoke of the “box-like, blackening chapels” where “religious terrorism” was practised on the working class. The extent to which this represents an accurate characterisation of early nineteenth-century Methodism has already been questioned (Best 1965:280-81), and in any case such a reduction of Methodism to one kind of experience, or set of activities is certainly inadequate for the current period. Yet there are nevertheless certain core values which can be seen to underlie much of this diverse movement. The aim of this chapter is to introduce the nature of local Methodism, showing some of the diversity of practices at the local church level, and also revealing elements of the Methodist habitus—that is, the core embodied values which generate so much of traditional Methodist behaviour.

Variations in the practice of Methodism are greatly influenced by the specific social situations of the individual local Methodist churches. Social anthropologists have long been interested in differences in religious practice within the same religious tradition and a number of studies in a volume edited by Leach (1968) contrasted the practical religion of every day living with the theological or philosophical religion of specialists within several of the world
Continuing in this vein, anthropological studies of religious communities in Britain (Moore 1974, Clark 1982, Topham 1989) have tended to focus on remote rural communities and certainly in Britain to stress the contrast between religious orthodoxy and local practices. For instance, in his anthropological study of the way in which Methodist religion was practised in the Yorkshire fishing village of Staithes, David Clark showed how over time the villagers had fused the orthodox religion with elements of their local fishing culture to produce “a blend, a heterogeneous complex of folk and official religion” (Clark 1982:166). Clark, like Moore (1974) in his study of local Methodism in a mining community, suggested that the variations in religious practice were a reflection of the strength of the local communal and familial networks. It is my contention, however, that too much has been made of the difference between rural and urban environments and that communities which are by no means marginal can also be shown to be influenced by the social factors of their specific context. Moreover, too little attention has been paid to examining the cultural factors which affect the making and legitimating of what counts as religious orthodoxy and I seek here to address this issue with regards to Methodism.

This study is consequently based on fieldwork in an area that included Methodist churches of an orthodox nature, in which variations could not be dismissed because the context was in any sense isolated, traditional or simple. I chose Bedford primarily because, with over 71,000 residents in the town and a further 18,000 in the adjacent area of Kempston, it is a well-developed urban area. Moreover, since Bedford has a wide range of employment, much of which is provided by national or international companies, and since it is now home to a large number of people from various ethnic minority groups, the town is a place where, in Hannertz’s (1996) term, “transnational connections” abound. In

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9 For instance, Obeyesekere (1967:21–24) contrasted the way in which the practice of Buddhism in the villages of Ceylon (Sri Lanka), involved rituals relating to the village deities, the existence of whom was denied in orthodox Buddhism.
10 Tim Jenkins’ (1999) study of Christianity in Kingswood, Bristol, provides a recent exception to this trend. Carol Greenhouse’s (1986:74) literature survey of studies of Southern Baptists seems to suggest a similar tendency among anthropologists of religion in the United States to focus on remote rural communities.
addition to this general lack of marginality, Bedford was also selected for the practical reason that it was close enough to Cambridge to allow me to combine participant observation with the demands of caring for a young family. The manner in which my contacts in Bedford developed dictated that I conducted my year-long fieldwork in a group of churches known as the Bedford (North) Circuit.\(^{11}\)

In what follows, I begin by situating the Methodist churches of the circuit within the general social setting of Bedford and then also look at the specific social context of each church. Next, I consider the nature of the structures of Methodism which are broadly shared by all of the churches in the circuit. An important aspect of these structures is shown to be the way in which they express the Methodist values of egalitarianism and hierarchy and I begin to show here how the rhetoric and indeed even the practice of egalitarianism in church structures is often at odds with a practice of hierarchy, whereby control is largely held by the ministers. Something of the way in which the Methodist structures and these particular values may be differently expressed is then demonstrated by focusing on the practice of church life in three of the circuit churches. From this it is possible to see, just as Fortes (1970) showed for the matrilineal Ashanti, how conflicting values within a culture may be differently balanced and find a range of expression across social groups.\(^{12}\)

In addition, by comparing and contrasting behaviour between these churches and also through consideration of the life-stories which various individuals recounted to me, several elements of what might be called a Methodist habitus

\(^{11}\) A circuit is the basic administrative unit of Methodism, usually consisting of several churches in the same locality.

\(^{12}\) In his study of Ashanti dwelling arrangements, Fortes noted how in two different Ashanti villages there tended to be a variation in the kinds of domestic unit formed by groups of kin. He suggested that this variation reflected the different ways in which a balance was reached between the somewhat conflicting values respecting the obligations of marriage and parenthood and the obligations due to matrilineal kin, as well as being affected by various social conditions specific to each village locality. Furthermore, just as the subject of the balance of control between lay and ordained is one which many Methodists talk about a great deal, Fortes noted that the Ashanti often discussed the conflict between their various kin loyalties (Fortes 1970).
emerge. This identification of the usually unconscious elements of the habitus was facilitated by the fact that one of the churches considered is a Local Ecumenical Partnership church (LEP)\textsuperscript{13} in which Methodists have to reach compromises in their church life with Christians from another religious tradition. The experience of having their traditions questioned has led some of the Methodist members to become much more conscious of those aspects of Methodism which they most treasure. On the whole, what emerges as differentiating these Methodists from others in this context and more generally, are the embodied values which result in different practices, rather than particular propositional beliefs.

Since the “making of ministers” starts first with the “making of Methodists” understanding the nature of the structures in the local church community and the Methodist habitus is an essential first step to understanding the culture of this institution. Indeed, before individuals can offer to become ministers they must be able to demonstrate, as will be considered in the next chapter, not only that they have knowledge about Methodism, but also that they embody the ideal of the Methodist person with an appropriate habitus, and that they have a “feel for the game”, with an ability to act appropriately in a variety of situations (Bourdieu 1990:61, 63). Noting the variety in Methodist practice is also an important factor in understanding its ministry, since the minister must be able to relate to these divergent local religious communities. To an extent this creates for the minister the role of maintaining Methodist orthodoxy which is in turn an important element in the dynamic of the relationship between lay and ordained.

\section*{2.2 Putting the local church in its social context}

Compared to other neighbouring circuits which I visited, Methodism in Bedford continues in a relatively healthy and vigorous state. The flourishing here of Methodism in part reflects the general social and economic welfare of the town and the continuing importance of religion and nonconformity in the area. As a

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Compared to other neighbouring circuits which I visited, Methodism in Bedford continues in a relatively healthy and vigorous state. The flourishing here of Methodism in part reflects the general social and economic welfare of the town and the continuing importance of religion and nonconformity in the area. As a

\textsuperscript{13} LEPs have emerged where, often due to limited resources in a particular area, two or more denominations agree to meet in the same building and sometimes also to share ministerial personnel and finances.
county town, Bedford is a key provider of services for the region and contains the usual chain stores, shops and amenities which can be found in any large urban area in England. However, in the town centre some of the Victorian gothic architecture from its historic public schools has been maintained and this, in addition to the prominent statues of Bedford’s most famous nonconformist sons, most particularly John Bunyan, gives some indication of a local sense of identity. Indeed, the development of the public schools in Bedford under the legacy of the Harpur Trust has been a very important factor in shaping the town, encouraging the growth of a middle-class professional element. In addition, the location here of several engineering plants and some light industries means that there is a wide range of employment. Good transport links to neighbouring towns and cities have also led to the development of Bedford as a commuter-town.

The nature of the industrial developments in Bedford, particularly in the early part of this century, promoted here the development of considerable social and cultural variety. The 1991 census indicated that 15% of the town’s population was from Black or Asian ethnic groups, most of whom were originally recruited to work in the brickworks and engineering plants of the area (Bedfordshire County Council 1994a:2). In addition, the answers given to the census question regarding respondents’ country of birth revealed that Bedford’s residents come from over seventy-five different countries.14 However, while Bedford as a whole is a place of great social and cultural variety, that diversity is not equally spread throughout the town and adjacent dormitory villages. A study of the social composition and community life of the area which was conducted in the 1960s described Bedford as the “un-melting pot” (Brown 1970). This was because of the way in which the various ethnic groups tended to live distinct and separated lives within the area, with the more recent immigrants living in the older, slightly dilapidated, Victorian terraced housing of the centre and south, and with the original residents and more recent professional migrants being found in the northern suburbs. In my observation Bedford continues to be something of an “un-melting pot” in which, while there is much intermixing of social groups, 

14 Personal conversation, 2 November 1997, with James Johnston of the Economic Development Unit for Policy Analysis and Research and Intelligence, Department of Environment, Bedfordshire County Council.
distinct clusters have formed around differences of class, age and religion, as well as ethnic difference.

The churches in Bedford act as important centres around which such social clusters form. Bedford has a very ancient Christian heritage with a strong non-conformist element most clearly represented in the life and work of John Bunyan (Godber 1978). This appears to have made it a fertile environment for Methodism, which, after the visit by John Wesley in 1753, developed here in a pattern similar to that in other responsive areas around the country (Anderson 1953, Roddell 1997)\(^1\). More recently, the continued development of the town as an economic and service centre has attracted many, often professional people from other areas of the British Isles, some of whom have been Methodists who have come desiring to join the local Methodist churches. In this way the churches have continued to serve as sources of relationships and community for those who had otherwise lost their ties and support networks, just as Thompson ([1963] 1981:416–17) and Obelkevich (1976:217) described for urban and rural Methodism in the early nineteenth century.

At the time of my fieldwork, the Methodist Church organised the churches in the town in a way that reflected local divisions. There are two circuits in Bedford, which like much else in the town are divided along the west-east line of the Great Ouse River. In social and economic terms the area on the north side of the river is more affluent than that on the south and this is reflected in the style and nature of Methodism in the circuits. Specifically, in the north Bedford circuit there are virtually no members from any of the town's ethnic minorities whereas in the more ethnically mixed southern area, one church has a large proportion of Asian members.\(^2\) However, while the churches of the northern

\(^1\) See Appendix 2.1 for further details.
\(^2\) In the Bedford (South) Circuit, on the Ampthill Road, there is a Methodist church in which almost 50% of the membership is Asian. Most of these members are now second or third generation Bedfordians, but their forebears came from the Punjab. Ten years ago a Punjabi-speaking congregation broke away from the Methodist Church and now meets as the Asian Evangelical Church in the same Methodist premises.
circuit may be almost entirely Caucasian in their membership there are important differences of class and age between these churches.

The north circuit is made up of seven churches, four of which are located in the town and three in the villages (see Fig. 2.1). Three of the churches are located in areas which, according to the 1991 census information, are among the top seven least deprived areas in the whole of Bedfordshire, namely, the suburb of Putnoe, and the villages of Sharnbrook and Oakley (Bedfordshire County Council 1994b:5ff). In contrast to these, two of the churches are in very much less affluent areas, namely the village of Clapham and the ethnically mixed “Black Tom” area where Park Road church is located, and are consequently less middle class in their membership. In particular Park Road was originally a Primitive Methodist church, and was more working class in membership. This background is still evident in the present tenor of the church, but a much more obvious difference between this and the other churches of the circuit is the fact that most of the members are elderly women. This reflects the church’s proximity to an area of sheltered housing for the aged from which the church is constantly recruiting. The remaining two churches of the circuit, Priory and St Mark’s, are both located in the suburbs. Something of the diversity in size of membership, location, and background of members can be seen in Table. 2.1, and in the range of their buildings, as pictured in Fig. 2.2. The older buildings

17 The membership and attendance figures are taken from the agenda for the circuit meeting of the Bedford (North) Circuit, 12 March 1997, and were based on the annual October count of Methodist numbers. The information on the occupation and roles of members comes from the people I interviewed from each church, and, in the case of Priory, from details given in a church questionnaire which members completed in 1994. No interviews were carried out with members of Sharnbrook but conversations were undertaken with a few members. The information about the proportion of people in congregations who had moved to Bedford, and about previous denominational connections, also comes from the interviews.
Fig. 2.1. Map of Bedford showing the location of the seven churches of the Bedford (North) Circuit

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Table 2.1. The seven churches of the Bedford (North) Circuit

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Church name</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>No. of members</th>
<th>Average Sunday service attendance</th>
<th>Occupation/ roles of significant individuals</th>
<th>Proportion of members who have moved to Bedford</th>
<th>Previous church connections</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Priory</td>
<td>Suburban</td>
<td>291</td>
<td>170</td>
<td>teachers, engineers, secretaries, doctors, business, housewives</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>Methodist, Anglican, Baptist, Presbyterian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Park Road</td>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>retired civil servants, engineers, housewives</td>
<td>About half</td>
<td>Methodist, Anglican, Baptist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Putnoe Heights</td>
<td>Suburban</td>
<td>121</td>
<td>156 (74 Anglican members)</td>
<td>librarians, pharmacists, architects, in business</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>Methodist, Anglican URC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St Marks</td>
<td>Suburban / council flats</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>100 (76 Anglican members)</td>
<td>doctors, teachers, social workers engineers</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>Anglican, Methodist, Presbyterian-URC, Independent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clapham</td>
<td>Village (urban edge)</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>painters, hair-dresser, office &amp; shop worker, lecturer</td>
<td>Lower</td>
<td>Methodist, Anglican, Moravian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oakley</td>
<td>Village (dormitory)</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>social worker, senior civil servants, housewives</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>Methodist, Anglican</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sharnbrook</td>
<td>Village with two large employers</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>accountants, radio journalist</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Fig. 2.2. Methodist church buildings in the Bedford (North) Circuit

Clapham Methodist Church

Oakley Methodist Church
Park Road Methodist Church

Priory Methodist Church
Putnoe Heights Partnership Church

St Mark’s Partnership Church
are to some extent a reflection of how previous generations viewed themselves and proclaimed their identity. However, the careful maintenance and preservation of these buildings by present congregations indicates some congruence with past sentiments and thus is also an expression of contemporary identity, as is more obviously the case with the recent buildings.

2.3 The shared Methodist structures

In the basic structures of local Methodism something of both the hierarchical and egalitarian nature of the culture can be seen. Every church in Methodism belongs to a “circuit”, and in this case the seven churches make up the Bedford (North) Circuit. The term “circuit” was originally employed by Wesley to indicate the grouping of Methodist societies around which his preachers travelled and for which they had overall responsibility, under the oversight of Wesley’s “Assistants”, later called “Superintendents” (Rupp and Davies 1965:231). In this way the circuit was a part of the hierarchical system whereby Wesley sought to control local Methodism. In contemporary times the circuit is still presided over by a superintendent minister, but reflecting the Methodist ethic of egalitarianism, leadership is now officially shared with lay circuit stewards, who, in Bedford, together with the other ministers, form the “circuit leadership team”.

To most people whom I interviewed in Bedford the circuit was simply regarded as a “group of churches” or an “administrative unit”. In addition to being about straightforward bureaucratic organisation the circuit is also meant to provide the most important level of government in the local area. In this way Methodism differs from Baptist and other congregational churches, where control is held primarily by the local church. The circuit also provides a level of support, both with regard to finance and personnel, beyond the local church. Important decisions regarding the recruitment and employment of new ministers are made by the circuit leadership team, which is strongly influenced by the superintendent minister. Also, the payment and housing of the minister is the responsibility of the circuit rather than individual churches. With regard to this, both in Bedford and around the country, I have often heard people talk about the circuit as a unit in which the “stronger helped the weaker” and smaller churches
who could not afford to pay a minister by themselves are able to do so because of
the financial contributions made to the circuit by larger churches.

In Bedford, the existence of the circuit was symbolised for many people by the
superintendent minister, whose visits to the local churches were much in demand
for this reason. When asked, most lay people often described the superintendent
as "the boss" and, indeed, according to Methodist law, the other ministers in the
circuit are subject to the superintendent (Methodist Church 1988–96, 2:472).
Moreover, the superintendent has much authority since he or she is designated as
the chair of the circuit meeting, which is officially the place where all-important
decisions concerning the circuit are made, and additionally is entitled to take the
chair at every other meeting in the circuit. A further directing role can be seen in
the responsibility which the superintendent has for making the circuit "plan".
The circuit plan is a long-standing part of Methodist structure. It is a printed
quarterly calendar that indicates which ministers and local preachers will be
present to take the services at churches in the circuit on each Sunday, a copy
being made available to every member of the circuit. Deciding who will go
where to preach is an important and influential task which is now commonly
undertaken in consultation with the other ministers in the circuit, and with
reference to the preferences of the local preachers. This latter group are lay
people who have been trained to lead worship and are accredited to do so in
whichever circuit they reside. They are an important group of actors, not only
because of their role as preachers, but because they are often also circuit
stewards. They thus share both ritual and governmental roles with the ministers,
and express the egalitarian ethic of Methodism.

In addition to the superintendent, the ordinary ministers play a very important
role in terms of incorporating local churches into the Methodist structure. While
some still argue for the historic principle that ministers are "stationed to circuits"
and not to particular churches (Methodist Church 1988–96, 2:208),¹⁸ in practice
most ministers now relate primarily to a particular section or group of churches

¹⁸ See Rupp and Davies 1965:232. This is also stated on the Connexional candidates' typescript
document entitled "Summary of Methodist doctrine and discipline".

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rather than to the circuit as a whole. The relationship between the ministers and the churches for which they have “pastoral charge” is an important one. All of the churches in the north Bedford circuit took a pride in their minister, whose name they painted on their church notice board and whom in worship services they often introduced as “our own” or “our very own minister, Rev. — —”. The main designated task of ministers is to “preach and perform all acts of religious worship and Methodist discipline” in the churches to which they are appointed (Methodist Church 1988–96, 2:472). They also have numerous administrative and organisational tasks concerned with the smooth running of their churches and these tasks often require them to relate to the national church bureaucracy. Ministers, and all others appointed to work in a circuit, are directed to meet together regularly, and in Bedford such a meeting of ministers happened every three weeks, thus providing the ministers with an opportunity to consider together areas of decision making prior to more open discussion in the other levels of circuit government and thereby increasing the ministerial domination of the circuit.

The bureaucratic domination of the circuit by the ministers is enhanced by their knowledge of the church’s rule-book, namely *The constitutional practice and discipline of the Methodist Church* (Methodist Church 1988–96; hereinafter referred to as C.P.D.), which provides the basic pattern of government shared by all the local churches. In the course of my interviewing I discovered that very few members, even those currently involved in the running of the churches, had heard of C.P.D. and knowledge of its contents was largely restricted to the ordained circuit staff and most particularly to the circuit superintendent, who in Bedford had a copy of it on his computer. According to C.P.D., local church government is exercised through the representative bodies of the church council and the general church meeting, and the existence of these meetings is a reflection of the Methodist ethic of egalitarianism. This ethic is also reflected in the appointing of numerous lay office-holders to share in the running of the church—a feature for which nonconformity, and Methodism in particular, has long been renowned (Loudon [1966] 1969:80). In addition to the main bodies of government there are usually numerous other committees to address local concerns, each with a hierarchy of office-holders running from chairman through
secretary to ordinary committee member. In general, however, the stewards and church treasurer are the main office-holders, and, together with the minister, they form an inner core and upper-most level of decision making within the local church.

Since it is always a minister who chairs the main governing bodies at the local church and circuit level, a degree of bureaucratic control is maintained by the ordained and in this way, despite the great involvement of lay people, I contend that the structures are basically hierarchical. This reflects the authoritarian approach originally taken by Wesley who devised a system whereby, through a chain of oversight from small group or "class" leaders, through stewards, preachers and "Assistants", he was linked to the ordinary member and could keep control of local Methodism (Rupp and Davies 1965:230). This system of linking came to be called connexionalism and today continues in the bureaucratic structure whereby, often largely through their minister, local church members are linked to the national governing body, generally referred to as the Connexion. In the contemporary structure circuits are grouped together into districts, and representatives from the circuits are sent to bi-annual district synods which are presided over by district chairmen. Every year the thirty-three synods elect representatives to the annual Methodist Conference. The Conference has also developed a considerable secretariat and has appointed numerous officials who oversee the various branches of the church's work. In the past these church departments appointed officials and sub-committees at district, circuit and local church level thereby creating another series of links between the levels. However, most people in Bedford knew very little about the denomination beyond their own congregation. When I asked one woman what the Connexion meant to her she echoed many others when she replied: "I don't know what it's supposed to do—seems another little box of Methodist hierarchy. I suppose it's supposed to connect".

Wesley's system can be seen as an example of what Foucault ([1975] 1991:176) has described as the "hierarchized, continuous and functional surveillance" which was developed widely in the eighteenth century as a means of control and domination.
In addition to sharing a common Methodist structure there were many aspects of existence which the congregations around the north Bedford circuit held in common. The primary focus of all the churches was the sustaining of the Sunday morning worship of God. In this circuit all the congregations had buildings in which to hold their services and additional halls in which other meetings could be held. The work of fund-raising and maintenance required for the upkeep of these buildings was a key concern throughout the circuit. All of the churches were also anxious that groups within the local community should use their buildings, although the level of this involvement varied significantly between the churches. A fairly standard feature of church life across the circuit was the holding of meetings for both ordinary leisure and more specifically religious purposes, and all of the churches provided communities of people in which emotionally satisfying relationships could be made and important moments in the life cycle celebrated. While largely taken up with their already established communities, all of the churches were concerned to welcome people, especially newcomers, into the building, although the nature of the welcome varied considerably between the churches.

While there was clearly much in common between the churches in terms of structures and concerns, there were also very many differences in the way in which the structures were implemented and Methodism was practised around the circuit. I will demonstrate something of this by providing thumbnail sketches of Priory, Clapham and St Mark’s churches. St Mark’s is an Anglican/Methodist partnership church, in which new patterns of church life combining elements from the parent denominations are being developed, and it provides a striking contrast to the strictly Methodist churches. Moreover, those areas which generate conflict in the partnership serve to highlight the values and practices which are most central to the Methodists. In describing the three churches I will specifically draw attention to those areas which seem to reflect these central Methodist values.

First and foremost these often unconscious but sometimes articulated values include an emphasis on equality between people, especially within the church, as most often expressed in a sharing of ritual and governing roles between lay and
ordained members. At the same time there is often a respect for ministers and in fact a hierarchical practice of government by those of a higher religious order. Linked to the value of egalitarianism are a strong social concern and also an ethic of acceptance, welcome and hospitality, which can be seen in the way in which members of the various congregations relate to the people around them. Another important Methodist value is that of hard work and self-improvement, which again can be observed here in the practice of church life. Related to this, something of an ethic of "respectability" can be seen by the way in which Methodists present themselves in the wider community. Then finally, in respect to their practice of religion Methodists generally tend to emphasise the importance of personal experience. All of these values can be seen to be at work in the activities of the Methodists in the various churches around the circuit and in the lives of the individuals whom I depict in the section which follows. However, both individuals and church groups place differing emphasis on various values, and may practice them in a slightly different fashion.

2.4 The practice of Methodism in three local churches

2.4.1 Priory Methodist Church

Located now in the suburbs, Priory replaced the older town centre church of St Paul's and continues to draw a largely middle-class congregation with many members employed as senior professionals in medicine, law, business and education. Like St Paul's, Priory has remained the largest church in the circuit and its extensive suite of halls is well maintained. In general the tenor of the church is that of neatness, order and formality in every aspect of life.

Priory has continued the St Paul's tradition of having, on the whole, fairly stately and High Church forms of religious ceremony. In my observation at the start of the Sunday morning service a robed choir processed into the church before the minister or local preacher made his or her entry and at this the congregation stood up until after the singing of the first hymn. Robed ministers led the majority of the services, although local preachers led at least a quarter of the total number. The first part of the ritual was led from behind a lectern on the
dais at the front of the church, before the ministers moved into the higher pulpit to preach the sermon, as is High Church practice. Most of the services followed the usual Methodist "hymn-sandwich"—that is, the singing of hymns interspersed with prayers, Bible readings and a twenty-minute sermon. However, on special occasions new orders of service of a highly formal liturgical nature, recently produced by the Methodist Faith and Order Committee, were used.

Many members at Priory stressed the distinctive role of the minister in leading worship, especially Communion services, and in directing the church. In the past the minister of St Paul’s and of Priory has often been the superintendent of the circuit and several members looked for this to be the case again, reflecting the respect in which the ministerial hierarchy is held here, and also indicating a desire for the prestige of the minister to rebound upon the church. Significantly, this congregation has generated a number of new candidates for the Methodist ministry, a record of which the members were very proud.

Yet, despite this emphasis on ministerial hierarchy, lay people also expected to play a role in church government. There was a very full set of Methodist committees here and a large number of lay people gave a great deal of time and energy to local church and connexional affairs. The style of church government reflected the middle-class nature of the congregation. Something of this can be seen from the way in which at the church council, the chairman of the finance committee, himself working in the world of finance, illustrated his financial report on the overhead projector with computer-generated pie charts and graphs. This contrasted sharply with the verbal and sometimes handwritten financial reports traditionally given in smaller Methodist churches.

Several church offices related to the connexional or national work of the church, such as the raising of money for overseas and home missions. There was also a great deal of interest in other areas of national Methodism, such as women's groups and youth clubs, and this often involved trips to connexionally organised events. Priory also hosted more visiting preachers from the connexional level of the church than any other church in the circuit. Another
link with the connexional level had been forged when a previous minister of the church had become a connexional office-holder and had chosen to continue to live in Bedford and to attend Priory. In addition, several members of the congregation were representatives on Methodist charities or organisations at the national level.

However, as in most churches in the circuit, most people at Priory were primarily concerned with the local church level. There was, in contrast to some of the other churches, little interest here in the surrounding non-church community, and few “outside” groups even used the premises, although some people were keen for this to change. This lack of enthusiasm for the surrounding community contrasted sharply with the social concern shown by the enthusiastic raising of money for projects such as the building of a church and kindergarten in Romania, and for the creation and ongoing maintenance of a Methodist hostel for young homeless men in Bedford.

In Priory, as in all the other churches in the circuit, there was a concern to welcome the visitor. In this regard Priory was again extremely well organised, with various stewards being designated to greet those attending services. However, my own experience was that any initial expressions of interest in me were usually quickly replaced by distance and suspicion when my position as a visiting anthropologist was explained. In terms of expressions of hospitality, the ministers were extremely generous, but for the members at Priory it was very much a case of “let’s arrange a date to have dinner sometime”. This distancing behaviour, as with much that I observed here, reflected the middle-class nature of the area and of the people who attended.

2.4.2 Clapham Methodist Church

Clapham is a largely linear village situated along the busy A6 road just to the north-west of Bedford and to some extent it functions as an area of cheaper housing for those who work in the town. The church members are mainly working class, with a higher proportion of people who have lived all of their lives in the area and with a stronger representation of the local Bedford accent.
than can be found in any of the other circuit churches. Several members stressed that they were a “family church” and the smaller membership and the more intimate worship space may be factors in promoting a more informal approach to church life here.

The relaxed tone of the church was evident from the way in which people laughed and bantered informally with the stewards at the start of the religious services, and in the sometimes-noisy presence of numerous young children. There was usually, as in Priory, someone to give out the hymn books before a service, at the entrance to the building, but there was much less formality in this, and on one occasion when I arrived early I was spontaneously asked to do this job.

The minister of the church, who had two other churches in her care, took the main morning service about once a month. Even when the minister was present the service always began with a steward standing at the front to greet the congregation, pass on any important information about the church’s life (that is, the “notices”) and then welcome the preacher. This promoted a sense of the life of the church being in some way independent of the minister, who, like the local preachers, came to them as a welcome visitor. Indeed, the congregation at Clapham included four local preachers and this was a fact of which the members were very proud.

At Priory the Communion services were taken from printed orders and formally regulated with tacit rules about which way the members of congregation should move when they went to the front of the worship space to receive Communion. In contrast, at Clapham the members preferred a more informal Communion service. Once a month there was an early morning Communion at which the whole of the congregation came to stand in a semi-circle at the front of the church around which the minister moved, giving out the bread and the wine, and naming each person as she did so. While at Priory some people complained to me about new forms of service being used, at Clapham the members agreed during a group discussion that with regard to services they liked to do “different things”. Moreover, the church has for several years held an
annual week-long holiday at which the church members have conducted their own Communion service without a minister. This goes against the rules of Methodism as defined in C.P.D. and the minister referred to these services as “love-feasts” or “agapes”. However, to the members themselves they were Communion services. This independence in ritual, as in many other aspects of church life, is in sharp contrast with Priory.

In terms of the government of the church there were fewer offices and committees at Clapham than at Priory and a great deal more flexibility in the interpretation of C.P.D. While the minister did chair the church councils and the annual church meeting there was a greater degree of discussion and dialogue between the members and the chair than at Priory, perhaps in part reflecting the smaller size of the group. In terms of church management, people at Clapham appeared to be largely independent of the minister and with regard to this one older member stated: “Ministers got used to us and let us run ourselves—we’re a bossy lot at Clapham!”

This variation in expectations regarding the minister between Clapham and Priory may in part reflect a previously identified difference in Methodism between the way in which town and country churches relate to their ministers (Currie 1968:30–31). This difference is perhaps related to the fact that ministers in the country often have more churches to care for than those in the town and so are consequently less frequently present in their churches, but it is also a class-related phenomenon. Concerning this latter point, it was significant that Clapham did not have a history of producing candidates for the Methodist ministry but had instead produced a high number of local preachers. In addition to reflecting the lower importance which people from this church may have placed on ministers, this also reflects a perception that working-class people would not be accepted by the national church to become ministers. This idea was often voiced to me by student ministers and, I suggest, is widely held across Methodism.

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20 Love-feasts and agapes have occurred throughout Methodism’s history; the terms are now applied to any kind of formally ritualised meal or consumption of food which does not follow the strict liturgy of the Holy Communion service, or at which a minister is not present.
While at Clapham collections were made for several of the connexional charities and the young people attended national events, there was very much less emphasis on the connexional arena. The Methodist Conference was mentioned on several occasions with regard to rulings about having alcoholic drink on Methodist premises and the permissibility of gambling, but the congregation was generally occupied with its own activities. To some extent members felt slightly on the fringe of the three wider levels of circuit, district and Connexion. One person commented that the district chairman felt “very far away”, and that the Connexion was even further away, “if it existed at all”.

The week-by-week life of the church at Clapham contained many of the same elements as that of Priory. However, whereas Priory was a “stewardship church” in which the necessary income was meant to come from the dedicated weekly giving of members, in Clapham fund-raising was a large part of church life and stimulated a great deal of craft-work, chiefly by the women of the church. Also in contrast to Priory the people of Clapham were very keen to “serve the local community”, which they did through their weekly coffee mornings, and by making the premises widely available for use by local groups. Giving a “warm welcome” to any newcomer was something on which Clapham people prided themselves and my experience was of being welcomed not only into their church but also into their homes. In a significant contrast to this, some of the ministers of the circuit reported that they did not experience such a friendly reception at Clapham.

2.4.3 St Mark’s Anglican/Methodist Partnership Church

As a Local Ecumenical Project (LEP), the existence of St Mark’s Anglican/Methodist Partnership Church in the new northern suburbs of Bedford reflects movements towards unity at a national level within the parent denominations and a desire to share resources at a local level. In tenor, the church is deemed by many of its Methodist members to be more Anglican than Methodist. However, along with its sister partnership church at Putnoe Heights, St Marks has both a Methodist minister and an Anglican vicar assigned to it.
Both churches again draw their membership from the largely middle-class suburbs.

In terms of liturgy, the partnership churches depart from Methodist tradition in being able to have at least one, and usually both of the ministers present at every service. The services begin when the ministers process together to the front of the church and the congregation stands. New orders of service which combine elements from the parent denominations and include congregational responses in the Anglican tradition have been devised, and copies are given to those attending a service. With regard to these printed services I heard some Methodists grumbling about the lack of "free" or "non-liturgical" services which they felt better represented the Methodist tradition. Moreover, many objections were raised, especially among the local preachers, to the fact that local preachers were never "planned" to take services by themselves at St Mark's. This conflict in part reflected a fear that the Methodist balance between egalitarianism and hierarchy was being lost.

While the structure of government within these churches is an amalgamation of the parent structures it bears many similarities to the usual Methodist pattern. However, there was a very marked difference in the way in which the annual congregational meeting was managed here, with the ministers and lay leaders attempting to keep this meeting as brief and circumscribed as possible. This goes against the Methodist tradition of people coming to "have their say" and the fact that they were not, at this meeting, able to express opinions on any aspect of church life which they chose provoked several traditional Methodists to describe the new pattern as "harsh and a little undemocratic". Generally speaking, there was a slightly heavier ministerial presence at "partnership church" meetings than is usual in Methodism, not least because both ministers usually attended the major meetings. Moreover, the ministers, especially the Anglican vicar, were perceived by several of the Methodists to take a more directive role in church government than is common in Methodism. Indeed, one Methodist described the vicar as a "benevolent dictator", reflecting a greater experience of hierarchical control by the minister than is usual for Methodists.
Over the years there have been numerous little areas of tension in the partnership churches. In St Mark's the Methodists have had to get used to drinking the Communion wine out of a shared chalice rather than out of the little individual cups of which they are so fond. Candles, often associated in the past with Roman Catholicism, have also been introduced in the services. However, what concerns the Methodists more has been the fact that the Methodist hymnbook has gradually been replaced by another, non-denominational song book. The importance of hymn singing within nonconformity in general and Methodism in particular has long been recognised (Thompson [1963] 1981, Obelkevich 1987). Moore has argued that it is when singing together that Methodists experience powerful emotions and feel part of a "collectivity which has a higher destiny" (Moore 1974:116). Hence it is not surprising that the perceived threat to their hymnody has caused some in St Marks to talk of experiencing a "loss of identity". Others related this perceived "loss of identity" to a lack of knowledge regarding what was going on in the wider Methodist church. In speaking about the problems of coming together one man explained: "we didn't want to lose things which were important to us—like local preachers and the hymn book as a source of inspiration".

At St Mark's there were fewer people who engaged in giving a "Methodist welcome"—that is, in approaching visitors after the service to engage them in conversation. However, many of the Methodists were extremely generous in their offers of hospitality and in providing me with meals in their homes. It may have been that the Methodists felt more drawn to me and to my topic than the Anglicans, but the Anglicans made no similar offers. Another difference of practice between Anglicans and Methodists was suggested to me by a few church members who with some embarrassment proposed that it was the Methodists who had usually done most of the hard work around the church and who were more willing to get involved in things. This, of course, may reflect a Methodist understanding of what it means to work hard in the church, and I certainly observed a high level of involvement on the part of many Anglican members.
The ministers and lay leaders of the partnership churches often downplayed these differences, stating: "you can't now tell the difference between Anglicans and Methodists". For other people, their experience in the partnership has actually brought home to them how different they are from one another and raised to consciousness the normally tacit aspects of Methodism which they cherish. On one of my first meetings with a woman who was in fact very ecumenically minded, she quickly asked: "are you one of them or one of us?" The things which made the Anglican and Methodism members different from each other were rarely matters of explicit theology but were almost always matters of practice.

2.5 Variety within the local Methodist church

The ethnographic evidence presented here clearly demonstrates that there are very diverse practices of Methodism even within the small geographical unit of the north Bedford circuit. A further dimension of variety exists since Methodism is differently understood and practised by people within local churches and it is to this that I will now briefly turn. In the introduction, I outlined three types of people who may be found within Methodist churches. These were, firstly, "cradle" Methodists or nonconformists for whom the Methodist church has remained the primary force in shaping their living; secondly, those for whom Methodism is just one among several social groups of roughly equivalent importance to which they belong; and thirdly those for whom Methodism is a religious resource to be tapped into on occasions such as at times of need or under family influence. By drawing on life-story and structured interviews with lay people, I will now illustrate the first category of actors, since these are the people who have most clearly embodied Methodist values and thus demonstrate in their lives something of the Methodist habitus. Further details of the other kinds of actors can be found in Appendix 2.2 and in all cases, as throughout the thesis, the names have been changed.

Amongst those in my first category are "sons or daughters of the manse", whose father was a Methodist minister. The group also includes many current and retired circuit stewards, local-preachers and a few others, largely older
women, for whom the church and the circuit have provided much of their social world.

James was a retired teacher and a son of a Methodist minister. He lived with his wife in a comfortable semi-detached house in north Bedford and he invited me to come and talk to them over a mid-day meal. In his earlier years James had taught in Sunday school and worked in a church youth club and he had trained as a local preacher. He had served on various church committees and had been both a local church steward and a circuit steward which he said was the “high point”. He went on to tell me of how he had got tired of committee meetings and preferred now to do more practical tasks such as taking older people to and from church in his car and helping in a local home for the elderly. Until recently he had taught a class in the local retirement centre. When I asked him what were currently the most important things in his life he echoed the sentiments expressed by many such men whom I interviewed when he said: “Using my time in a purposeful sort of way. This is the first time in my life without a job ..... rather than just get old I want to be purposeful”.

Like James, Elizabeth was a child of the manse who now lived in suburbia. She and her husband frequently welcomed me into their home providing both meals and accommodation. In formally telling her life story and in our many conversations it transpired that Elizabeth had had a university education and spent a short while working in a professional job before becoming largely preoccupied with her family. She told me of how life had then become for her a mixture of home and church. However, after she moved to Bedford because of her husband’s job she was determined that she would not be confined to these spheres and consequently began to be involved in her children’s school and in the work of local advice agencies. When the children were teenagers she gradually began to take up more offices in the church becoming a steward and church council secretary. She also became increasingly involved in circuit life and was a member of a circuit committee, eventually becoming a circuit steward. In the recent past she had been “asked to consider being a magistrate” and she was well established in this public role. She has also become involved in the district level of the church serving on committees and regularly attending the
district synod. Both Elizabeth and her husband know a large number of ministers very well, at both local and connexional level. When they refer to connexional offices they generally do so according to the name of the senior officer in charge of the department, thus indicating their greater involvement with this level of Methodism and Elizabeth has attended the Methodist Conference.

At the time of our interview Elizabeth was actively involved in seven areas of the local church’s life and usually attended the services and any extra social events being run by the church. Church and charity committee meetings took up several nights of each week—sometimes with two or more committees in an evening. During an interview Elizabeth recalled that when she was growing up both at her Methodist school and at home the emphasis had been on the “call to serve” and on putting the demands of the call of the church before anything else. While Elizabeth’s life has not been confined to Methodism it is possible to see how in her very involvement in other activities she was continuing to express the Methodist principles which have largely shaped her.

In contrast to Elizabeth, Mrs Howard was a more parochial kind of Methodist, whose strong Bedfordshire accent testified to the fact that she had lived in the area for all of her considerable life. Her days in her small council bungalow were full of visits and telephone calls from her close kin and Methodist church friends. Indeed family and Methodism have been the two main elements of her life. At fifteen she had met her cousin’s brother-in-law and later married him and moved to live next-door to her mother. She gave up paid employment when she married but even when the children were small she managed still to attend the Methodist church and was involved in the choir. When I asked what Methodism meant to her she replied: “Me life—me husband used to say ‘call it her other home’. If anyone asked where I was—‘she’s at her other home’ he’d say.”

Mrs Howard was full of affectionate memories of church life, such as cleaning the church with other women for special events. She has always had a quiet missionary zest to include others in her church. She used to go hospital visiting
and would encourage people to come to her “little chapel”. She started a coffee morning to reach into the wider community and to raise funds for the church and was thrilled to recall: “we’ve had no end of people through the church whose only connection is coffee morning”. Mrs Howard continued to attend as many of the church events as possible and knitted items for fund-raising events. While she has attended circuit services and events in the past Mrs Howard was not particularly concerned with levels of the church beyond the local, although she was conscious of the role which the Methodist Conference played with regard to decisions about alcohol and gambling. She was a pillar of the local church community and had recently been nominated by her church to receive a mayor’s award for good citizenship.

While for these individuals Methodism has been and remains one of the primary influences in their lives, there are now many others in the churches for whom Methodism is just one among several cultural groups of approximately equal importance to which they belong. There is a growing number of such individuals who are not attending church services every week but instead sometimes do other activities on a Sunday. Many go to visit their adult children in another part of the country or engage in some other leisure activity. Examples of these and of others who only occasionally visit the church are presented in Appendix 2.2.

Methodism has long recognised the different involvement of individuals and has its own categorisation of “members”, “adherents” and the “community roll”. The members are those who have formally joined the church and are expected to contribute fully—spiritually, structurally and financially—to the life of the church. The adherents are those who come regularly but have not formally joined. The community roll includes any person who has a contact with the church through any of its activities. However, people do not always behave according to these types and recently it has become difficult to sustain these categories. While there are some similarities between my categories and these traditional classifications, the categories in my model are simply points on a continuum of involvement. It is possible to see how individuals can move along
this continuum in the course of their life depending upon family commitments or other involvements.

Different levels of involvement and commitment are recognised by members of the congregations in Bedford and there is often a desire by those in the core to increase the involvement of those on the periphery. In all of the churches in the circuit there were people with a different level of involvement in Methodism and many brought with them ideas and embodied values from other walks of life. These people have the potential, in time, to challenge and change the traditional Methodist practices.

2.6 Conclusion

In my descriptions of religion in the complex urban area of Bedford I have described how the suburban and middle-class culture of the members at Priory creates a Methodism that is predominantly rigid, aloof, bureaucratic, self-contained (though with an international outlook) and liturgically fairly High Church, with an emphasis on the ministerial role. By contrast, the religion of the working-class members at Clapham was relaxed, friendly, informal, community-orientated with a parochial outlook and liturgically “free” (i.e. generally eschewing a formal written liturgy) with a stress on lay leadership. However, while it is clear that in both congregations there are practices which are influenced by social context, it is also the case that in some senses the religion of Priory, with its more exact interpretation of C.P.D. and its use of the orders of service produced by the central offices, is more akin to official Methodism. One of the most significant reasons why Priory is more “orthodox” is that its members are among those who create this orthodoxy. Several ministers and lay people from the church have gone on to high office in the Methodist bureaucracy and are thus influential in shaping official Methodism. Thus the cultures which affect and shape local Methodism at Priory also play a role in the creation of orthodoxy.

The fact that the creators of official religion are culturally imbued has often been overlooked. As Jenkins has suggested in a different context, it is the case in
Britain that those who perceive themselves to be at the centre do not think that they have a culture; rather, culture is something which belongs to the peripheral areas (Jenkins 1999:81,83). The makers of official Methodism evidently do have a culture and from my observations in Bedford it seems that this is created in part by belonging to middle-class communities such as Priory. I therefore conclude that the processes of religious syncretism occur wherever Methodism is practised, but there are certain places in which the fruits of this process become more authoritative and dominant as part of the official religion.

The depiction of variation in the north Bedford circuit could be multiplied many times over if Methodism in the whole of England was considered. Moreover, in addition to differences between churches, there are often great variations in the way in which individuals within local churches practise Methodism. In part this is a reflection of the different degrees of individual involvement in Methodism, but it is also sometimes a reflection of the existence of parties within the church. In brief, the main parties have for some time been the evangelicals, liberals and radicals with the more recent addition of the sacramentalists. The influence of these parties could be seen within the north Bedford circuit and added another dynamic in the making of local practice. (The nature of the church parties will be more fully addressed in Chapters 5 and 6 and in Appendix 5.1).

Given all of this variety, questions then arise as to what it is that allows many of these people to identify themselves as Methodist and what keeps them together. A related group of questions concerns what it is that makes Methodists different to the Christians in other denominations. I suggest that part of the answer to the first set of questions is found in the sharing of a church structure and also a sense of belonging which is largely based on the relationships that individuals develop with both lay and ordained members. A further aspect of this sense of belonging is the way in which traditional Methodists at least, have had a “feel for the game” and feel at home in a Methodist congregation. This knowledge of how to carry on is a result of their embodying a Methodist habitus. It is the embodying of this particular habitus which provides an important part of
the answer to my second question about what makes Methodists different from others.

It is this holding and enacting, often unconsciously, of certain core values which is the key location of difference between Methodists and others. This was particularly noticeable in the Anglican/Methodist partnership churches where differences between Anglicans and traditional Methodists could not be related to differences in propositional beliefs so much as to differences of practice, both in terms of specific religious habits and more generally with regard to the way various aspects of church life and everyday life were approached. Since the embodied values or dispositions of a habitus are largely unconscious they may take much longer to change than cognitive assent to certain propositional beliefs. Noting the existence of a Methodist habitus is key to understanding why the ecumenical process is often more protracted and painful than has been anticipated by some (e.g. Wilson [1966] 1969), given that many of the main Protestant denominations now share much in common at the level of propositional belief.

In view of their importance, it is worth elaborating further on the main embodied values of the Methodist habitus which have emerged in this chapter. In so doing, I am not suggesting that these dispositions in any sense encompass all that might be said about the orientation of Methodists to life, since for everyone, even those most involved in Methodism, there are other factors entailed in shaping their nature. However, for those most influenced by Methodism, who in turn are often the leading players in local churches, there are at least six key values.

One of the most obvious values is that of an emphasis on egalitarianism, which is most apparent in the Methodist practice of the sharing of the congregation’s leadership between lay and ordained members. This value stems in part from acceptance of the Arminian doctrine of the universality of divine grace. It must be acknowledged that this emphasis on egalitarianism is also exhibited by other nonconformist denominations and by the Low Church or Evangelical wing of the Anglican Church. However, the role of the Methodist local preacher has ensured
that from the beginning lay people have had a very significant part, not just in
government, but also in the leading of church rituals. While the Church of
England has lay readers, these have never had the importance and position within
the local church leadership which local preachers hold in Methodism. In all
areas of local church life attempts are made to share leadership between lay and
ordained and many traditional Methodists believe themselves in this way to be
true democrats.

However, the degree to which Methodism has ever been entirely democratic
has already been well contested and Thompson has described the way in which
eighteenth century Methodist democracy was “strictly superintended and
disciplined” by an overarching hierarchy (Thompson [1963] 1981:42). The
authorising of this hierarchy depended, and still depends upon the existence of a
separated class of ministers. For these ministers there is normally much respect
and often affection shown by the church membership and this reflects another
core value which might be termed a reluctant acceptance of hierarchy. In this
chapter aspects of the bureaucratic dimension of this hierarchy have been
described and in Chapter 5 the sacred dimension of the hierarchy will also be
discussed.

While the manner in which Methodists combine these principles of
egalitarianism and hierarchy has been shown to vary between local churches, in
general the combination has created a certain style of church polity, which in
creating a particular orientation to life has had, as Thompson has shown,
Something of the particular combination of these values was also depicted in
Moore’s study of the Methodism of the Durham miners at the turn of the century
(1974). Moore has argued that the trade union leaders in this area, who were
largely Methodists, combined an understanding of equality based on the
Christian gospel with a deferential attitude to the pit owners, which resulted in a
less radical form of socialism than might otherwise have emerged.

Two further important traits which I observe as being at the core of Methodism
are fundamentally linked to the doctrine of universal grace and its expression in
egalitarianism. These are a strong social concern and an ethic of acceptance and welcome that often results in a particular kind of hospitality. With regard to the former, concern for the poor and for those in prison was one of the first characteristics of the Wesley brothers’ “holy club” in Oxford. Social concern has continued to be a fundamental issue in Methodism and the role of this denomination and other free churches in promoting social welfare and reform has been well documented (e.g. Stromberg 1986:101). Of course, for Wesley and for many Methodists the most important issue has been, without doubt, that of saving souls, as is demonstrated by the repeated waves of evangelical revivalist preaching and the strong support for overseas missions. However, the latter half of this century has seen a movement away from this traditional evangelical preoccupation and a greater emphasis again on social welfare.

In all of the ordinary Methodist churches in the north Bedford circuit I experienced and observed a form of greeting behaviour that might be called “the Methodist welcome”. However, there were different degrees and levels of acceptance shown to individuals and as the material above suggests Methodism does tend to result in the segregation of the socially alike. Yet, I still contend that acceptance of outsiders is something to which Methodists traditionally aspire, although it may be differently practised between church communities. Again, the prominent place of the “warm welcome” for newcomers was something which Moore noted of the Durham Methodists (Moore 1974:126).

Related to this is the expression of hospitality. Offering food and accommodation to visiting preachers has long been an established part of Methodist life. From the earliest days John Wesley and his preachers depended on people in the towns where they preached to provide them with food and shelter. My experience of the willingness with which people invited me to their homes stands in stark contrast to that of Nicole Toulis, who in her doctoral research into Black Pentecostalism in Birmingham noted that she was not able to “translate her involvement in church activities to involvement in member’s private lives” (Toulis 1993:33).
After the combination of egalitarianism with hierarchy, and the various related traits, the next most distinctive feature of the Methodist habitus is the work ethic. It was obvious that around the north Bedford circuit the people I met expended a great deal of productive energy both in their churches and in their every-day employment. In his assessment of the Protestant ethic, Max Weber was somewhat dismissive of Methodism as a slight variation on Pietism and Calvinism arguing that the “aspiration to the higher life [...] served it as a sort of makeshift for the doctrine of predestination” (Weber [1904–05] 1965:142–43). While Weber’s assumption that Methodism like Pietism rested on a “foundation of uncertainty” can be disputed, it is clear, as Thompson has argued, that Methodism played a significant role in the development of the capitalist mode of production. For one thing it served the interests of the owners of the new industries, instilling in their factory workers a “piteless ideology of work”, and elevating the values of discipline, order and moral opacity (Thompson [1963] 1981:390). Methodists still on the whole cleave to an ethic of honesty, reliability and trustworthiness. The material from Bedford shows they are often now to be found working as senior professionals within business, medicine, law and education. Where working-class churches remain the members continue to evince these attributes in their own areas of work and to engender in their children the ideals of hard work and progress that so often result in social mobility.

A further Methodist predisposition which I have not touched upon much in the above description, but which is nonetheless important, is an ethic of respectability. Linked to this is a conservative practice in terms of morals which is also central to the Methodist habitus. This is reflected in the fact that leading Methodists are often iconic figures in the community, whether as hospital consultants, magistrates, charity officials or as winners of the Mayor’s award for good citizenship, as was the case with a more working-class individual. This propensity towards conservative morals is, of course, related to the inherent respect for traditional authority, as symbolised in the person of the minister, and is also common to the members of most other Christian denominations.
With regard to the issues of morals and respectability, it was formerly the case that both insiders and outsiders defined Methodism in terms of negative ethical injunctions. In particular, from around the end of the nineteenth century there was a prohibition against alcohol and a strong condemnation of gambling. While in some places such “negative markers, or restraint” may still define chapel members (Jenkins 1999:173) this is no longer the case for the majority of Methodists in Bedford, although many often voice disapproval of the national lottery.

The fact that much of the emphasis of Methodist religion has changed from the creation of a conversion experience to the exercise of social concern has already been mentioned. However, I contend that even with this change Methodists have maintained experiential religion as a core aspect of their being. What has changed is that, for many, the defining experience is no longer that of joyfully knowing oneself to be saved from eternal damnation by belief in Jesus Christ, but that of having a growing sense of self-worth dependent upon God’s acceptance which is mediated through the experience of being in community. In both, an experience of well-being is central.

This shift in the evangelical understanding of the “gospel message” has been observed in other studies of Western religion. In his analysis of a free church in Sweden, Peter Stromberg has suggested that for modern people the ultimate fear is no longer physical death and an after life spent in hell but rather the threat of anonymity in this life. The churches are responding to this fear, he has argued, by promoting symbols and physical experiences which “allow church members to feel their connection to others” (Stromberg 1986:105–06). Within the Methodist churches in Bedford this shift in emphasis seems to be borne out to some extent by the increasing emphasis on community. Concern to promote community appears to operate on two levels. Firstly, there is the level of the religious community in which members achieve a sense of significance and belonging. Secondly, there is the desire often expressed within Methodist churches of creating a wider focus for some sort of local community. On this issue very few of the Methodists I met talked of wanting to “save” the community; instead they wanted to “serve the community”, and more energy
was spent for example in raising money for social projects than on traditional missionary activities aimed at converting people.

In my observation of the Methodist churches in Bedford, the key religious experience is now one of acceptance, friendship and personal development within a caring community. Thus, in this way, Methodism remains a religion in which feelings are important. Something of this can be seen from the fact that most Methodists greatly value and enjoy corporate singing. Indeed, using the Methodist hymn-book is an immensely important act which symbolizes all kinds of issues of religious experience and identity. Moreover, many of the hymns contain expressions of equality and harmony, for example, Charles Wesley’s hymn “Christ from whom all blessings flow”, ends with the verse:

Love like death, has all destroyed,
Rendered all distinctions void;
Names, and sects, and parties fall:
Thou, O Christ, art all in all.

Not everyone who is involved in a Methodist church equally shares all of the characteristics which I have mentioned here. Moreover, many of the attributes are not unique to Methodists; nor yet to religion in England. Indeed, in his research into religious life in Sweden, Coleman has noted that the free churches there likewise perceive themselves as upholding “participatory democracy (in the religious sphere)” and also as having a concern for the social and spiritual welfare of the wider society (Coleman 1989:95). No doubt the Swedish parallel is not the only one which could be drawn. However, when the elements enumerated above are added together with a generally shared tradition of government, language, religious symbols, hymns and connexionalism this makes up the nature of English Methodism. These distinctive elements are differently expressed both within the small geographical area of the north Bedford circuit and across the country. Yet, it would normally be possible for a traditional Methodist from one of these churches to visit any other in the country and to have in Bourdieu’s terms, a “feel for the game” (Bourdieu 1990:61, 63).
The focus here on practice and embodied values provides a better indication of the nature of Methodism than would the more traditional approach of describing propositional belief or theology. Indeed, it has even been recognised that within Methodism there are now “belongers who don’t believe” in the propositional sense of the term (Morris 1997). In the north Bedford circuit few people ever talked to me of particular religious beliefs or doctrines. When I explicitly asked what Methodism meant to individuals they most often mentioned some Methodist practice such as “free worship” or “the empowerment of lay people” although significantly, several of the local preachers did mention their belief in “the priesthood of all believers”. Officially, there are specific Methodist doctrines which are based on the “fundamental principles of the historic creeds and the Protestant Reformation” (Methodist Church 1988–96, 2:212) but these are largely the preserve of theologians and preachers. However, certain of these beliefs, such as the Arminian doctrine of the universality of divine grace, have become embodied as implicit values which find expression in the practices of egalitarianism. It is by attending to the ways in which individuals embody and practise implicit values that we come much closer to comprehending the making of Methodism, in all its diversity, and furthermore to understanding the making of ministers, as will be discussed in the following chapters.
Chapter 3
Conceiving ministers: the “call” and candidating process in the Methodist Church

3.1 Introduction
Having argued that in the local Methodist church there is both a strong ethic of egalitarianism and at the same time a hierarchical structure, I want next to describe how ministers are made into members of what I propose is both a priestly and bureaucratic hierarchy. The incorporation into this hierarchy begins with the selection of ministers and this chapter considers two aspects of this process—namely what is termed the “call” to ministry and the testing of that call through the “candidating” system. I argue that the candidating process acts to begin the socialisation of new ministers and also that in the tensions which surround it something more of the conflict between certain core Methodist values can be seen.

More specifically I show that, while the experience of a call to ministry is a very personal event, which in emphasising the direct contact of God with the individual appears strongly egalitarian, this focus actually tends to hide the highly hierarchical nature of the testing of the call. This hierarchical nature can be clearly seen by the way in which the ultimate decision about the call’s validity lies with church officials and not with the individual believer or the local community of believers. Thus, the process of selecting potential ministers can also be seen to give an indication of the nature of authority and of power within the Methodist Church. Moreover, in terms of how the language of “calling” is used, the widespread rhetoric of “all being equally called by God” again serves somewhat to camouflage the fact that only some are called to high office.

While the first section of this chapter addresses the meaning of “the call” at a more general level, the body of the chapter is concerned firstly with the accounts of the call given to me by a variety of Methodist ministers and student ministers and secondly with an examination of the contemporary process of testing that call in candidating. Since I argue that it is largely through the process of
candidating that the ministers have learnt to give appropriate and acceptable accounts of their call, there is a sense in which this material is presented out of sequence. However, I follow this order because it allows me to include call stories from those who are at a variety of stages in their ministerial career while ending the chapter at the correct stage in the life-cycle from which to follow the successful candidates through to the next stage in the making of ministers.

An examination of call stories enables us to consider the kinds of people who successfully candidate and the manner in which they have enacted Methodist culture in the course of their lives. Moreover, these stories are a form of life history and are subject to many of the same constraints and dynamics of remembering as have been identified within the highly sophisticated literature on the subject of memory. In particular, it is now generally accepted that both the writing of history and the telling of a life history cannot be simply accepted as straightforwardly accurate accounts of what actually happened, but that both are affected by culturally conditioned processes of "selection, interpretation, and distortion" (Burke 1989:98). Indeed, it has long been argued, both within anthropology and more widely, that memories are socially and culturally determined (Halbwachs, cited in Burke 1989, Gergen 1994, Bruner 1994) and that what is remembered depends very much on what is of significance in the present (Bartlett 1932, cited in Andrews 1991:63, Cohler 1988, Barclay 1993). When this point is accepted, further important questions follow regarding what is of significance within the culture and whom it is that can decide upon what is significant (Burke 1989:107). Furthermore, much work has been done by life-story analysts, drawing on psychology, anthropology and sociology, to show how "recollections are shaped by narrative convention" (Neisser 1994:14), and it has been proposed that there are various "canonical forms" of memory telling within social groups (Gergen 1994, Barclay 1996). I suggest that the telling of the call to ministry has its own narrative conventions shaped by the culture of Methodism and that there is a canonical form to which most accounts must conform.

Within Methodism, I propose that it is the members of the ministerial hierarchy who control the process of candidating and who can be seen largely to determine
what counts as acceptable memories. Moreover, through this process, what is acceptable and significant is not only determined for those who wish to enter the ministry but is reiterated for those who are already members and who witness the adjudication of the acceptable call. Through the telling of appropriate call stories Methodist values and characteristics are identified and reinforced and indeed, throughout the candidating process it is possible to see how the core values of the Methodist habitus, as identified in the last chapter, are tested. In particular, the process examines whether candidates have an appropriate attitude to authority, while also working to inculcate such an attitude. In fact, I suggest that it is largely in submitting to the candidating tests that the potential ministers are taught to submit to the hierarchy, which they often encounter fully in this context for the first time, and to embody correct attitudes. Moreover, the process can be seen to empower those who control it and to set up heavily asymmetrical power relations between the aspiring minister and those already in the system.

Thus, in the apparently simple telling of the call and through candidating, a great deal is being achieved both socially and culturally. Moreover, it has been widely suggested by those writing in the field of memory and life-story analysis that life stories create and express identity (Widdershoven 1993, Linde 1993, Cohler 1988). While this point reflects the fact that much of the work in this field has been carried out in European and North American contexts where there is a particularly strong concern with personal identity, it is possible to see how in the case of English Methodism, telling their life story in a particular way affects candidates’ sense of self and identity. It is also, arguably, as Charlotte Linde (1993:3) has suggested of other contexts, an important means by which that sense of self is communicated and negotiated with others.

Change in the candidate is also achieved through the invasive and lengthy nature of the candidating process that functions as a rite of passage whereby embryonic ministers are created. The nature of this process can be illuminated by drawing on Goffman’s account ([1961] 1991) of how those who are to live in a total institution are prepared for their sojourn through invasive “admission procedures”. The Methodist training colleges to which most successful candidates have ultimately been bound can be helpfully understood as total
institutions, as I will argue in the next chapter. In addition, however, I propose that what Goffman calls the "trimming" or "programming" procedures (26), which normally occur once the individual is inside the institution, are actually already happening in candidating. This, I suggest, helps to explain why all of those who have undergone the candidating procedure, including those who are unsuccessful, feel that they have already undergone a change of identity. Furthermore, as is also found in Goffman's work, it appears that many candidates perceive there to be an ideal institutional identity and they find themselves learning to conform to this identity and perform it as a role. This experience consequently creates a disjunction with their sense of self which continues for many in the following stage of "ministerial formation".

To date, there has been little work undertaken of a sociological or anthropological nature on the selection of ministers in Britain. Nor has there been much social or narrative analysis of the ministerial call although a recent study of conversion narratives by Peter Stromberg (1993) and an analysis of Pentecostal testimonies by Stephen Kroll-Smith (1980) provide for interesting and helpful comparisons. Thus, this chapter offers a somewhat groundbreaking foray into relatively unchartered territory and may consequently provide fresh insights in both life-story analysis and anthropology of religion.

3.2 Contradictory meanings of the "call" in contemporary Methodism

In contemporary Methodism there is a great deal of slippage between the words "call" and "calling" and some overlapping of meaning. These terms are both used to refer to God's purpose for every member of the church and also, in a more restricted sense, the invitation by God of some to be ordained ministers.  

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21 William Pollock's (1984a,b) unpublished study of the Anglican Church's selection procedures is largely a psychological study and is concerned with the effectiveness of the selection. Malcolm Rothwell's (1975) unpublished doctoral research on the selection of candidates for the Church of Scotland draws heavily on comparative statistics and is largely concerned with bias in the selection and also with the effectiveness of the procedure (cited in Pollock 1984b§2.2). Other studies cited in Pollock were conducted in the United States of America, e.g. Bier 1970, Dittes 1962, and Rulla 1976.

22 The various ways in which the "call" may be understood has received some attention from theologians. For example, Richard Niebuhr (1956), cited in Towler and Coxon (1979), has identified
Indeed, I contend that there is now within this denomination a hierarchy of callings, with the ministerial call being in practice regarded as superior or paradigmatic. This can be seen from the manner in which, as I describe below, “the call” in general conversation and in official literature is understood to refer specifically to ordained ministry. However, this hierarchy of callings is to some extent hidden behind the frequent emphasis in preaching and in official documents on the call as belonging to all, a practice which appears to establish an egalitarian basis with all being “equally called by God”. Moreover the term is also often taken and used to contest the superior nature of the call to ministry by some non-ordained Methodists who assert the equality and sometimes even the superiority of their own call to work in less accredited fields of occupation.

Historically, the word “calling” has been used in both broader and narrower senses. According to the *Oxford English Dictionary* (*OED*), the sense of the word “calling” as encompassing an experience of “the summons, invitation or impulse of God to salvation or to his service” was closely related to the sense of “calling” as “position—estate or station in life”. Indeed, the latter was present in the first translations of the Bible into English, specifically in the epistles of St Paul. Furthermore the *OED* presents evidence of “calling” being understood to refer to ordinary occupation in the sixteenth century and cites a clear statement of such a sense in the eighteenth century. Max Weber attributed the origin of this understanding of the term to Martin Luther’s translation of the Bible and to Luther’s rejection of a two-tier moral hierarchy in which the monastic ascetic was the true Christian person. Luther argued instead that God called every one equally to the fulfilment of “duty in worldly affairs”. Thus, Weber proposed that it was the Reformation, which lent “every-day worldly activity a religious significance” (Weber [1904–5] 1965:80). In particular, Weber went on to argue that it was how these ideas were taken up within Calvinism which resulted in the development of modern capitalism (108–09). This inclusive use of the term has continued to be viewed within some Protestant groups as setting them apart from others, particularly Roman Catholics, and as an important aspect of their

four kinds of “call”: the call to be a Christian, the secret call by God to ministry, the providential call whereby a person is equipped for the ministerial office, and the ecclesiastical call by the institution of the church.
religious faith. Some Protestants claim to have been called by God to their particular work, and this belief continues to prompt in many a notable dedication in pursuing their particular occupation.23

Alongside this broader sense, however, a more specific and restricted sense developed in relation to the church’s domain. With regard to the term’s religious provenance the *OED* again provides evidence that in sixteenth-century Scotland the term “calling” was used to express the summoning of a person to a spiritual office or to the pastorate of a church and there are other examples of how in the next few centuries the term was used to refer to office within the church. At some point, probably in the last hundred years, the term “the call” seems to have lost the more general usage in popular parlance of being God’s call to any legitimate occupation and to have become primarily associated with sacred office, although “calling” is still sometimes used in this broader sense. This change, also described by Towler and Coxon (1979), probably reflects the growing separation of the sacred from the secular domains in everyday living. Within the Methodist Church “the call” is now most commonly used with regard to church office.

Within official church literature especially, the term is certainly usually used to refer to the call of God to ordained ministry. The leaflet entitled *Offering for presbyteryal ministry in the Methodist Church*, opens with the more inclusive understanding of the term since it is suggested that: “God’s call comes as God reaches out to all women and men in love and invites them to love in return through worship and service”. However, the leaflet then moves on to the more restricted use of the term with the acknowledgement that “for some this general call to God’s service will become a specific prompting to do so in the church”. Thus, at the national level in Methodism two kinds of calling are officially acknowledged: the calling to general discipleship which is the task of all Christians and the particular calling to “specific Ministries” (Methodist Church Candidates Office n.d.:2).

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23 Further research into the way in which certain Methodist members talk of their call to a particular occupation would provide for interesting comparisons with the call stories of ministers described below.
The official line in national Methodism is that there is an equality of callings. This is enshrined in the “Deed of Union”, the legal document which formed the basis for the unification of the main branches of English Methodism in 1932, codifying the foundational principles of the united church, and which is reprinted in C.P.D. (Methodist Church 1988–96, 2:203–33). This states that the ordained “hold no priesthood differing in kind from that which is common to all the Lord’s people”, and asserts that even the tasks of preaching and pastoring are not the exclusive right of the ordained but that these “ministries” are shared by others. Thus equality is established in principle. However the Deed of Union goes on to state that “in the exercise of its corporate life and worship special qualifications for the discharge of special duties are required and thus the principle of representative selection is recognised”. The first and essential step in this selection of representatives is a particular experience of the call of God, and it is suggested that God “bestows the gifts of the Spirit of grace and the fruit which indicate those whom He has chosen” (Methodist Church 1988–96, 2:213).

By the very fact that so much is written about the call to ministry and so much of the church’s time and energy is spent in assessing this call, a privileging of calls becomes observable in practice and is further reflected and reiterated by the way ordinary Methodists use the term. When, in talking about vocation, Methodists refer to “the call”, they are usually referring to ordained ministry. This is clear from the fact that people always specify the specific area of work they are referring to if they mean anything other than the call to ministry, whereas the call to ministry can go without specification. Even among those who contest the hierarchy of callings the way in which the contest is framed serves to acknowledge the reality of the difference and the primacy of the call to ministry. This was brought home to me by the somewhat independent and anti-clerical rural Methodists in the Lancaster circuit when, during my fieldwork with them in 1989, the farmers often volunteered the opinion that their work as farmers was “as much a calling as the ordained ministry”.

Thus, despite the greater part of the rhetoric of the Deed of Union and of other contemporary documents there is in reality a privileging of callings. This is
paralleled by the ranking of ministries within the Methodist Church and by the use of the term “ministry” to refer paradigmatically to the work of the ordained. In common parlance within Methodism and in C.P.D. ordained ministry is usually referred to as “the ministry”. The persistent use of the definite article establishes the pre-eminence of this area of work. Something of this point has been made recently in a church report on ministry, entitled *The Making of Ministry*, in which it was even noted that the term “ministry” was often used exclusively to refer to the work of the paid religious functionary. The report, reflecting Methodism’s persistent attempts to deny the hierarchical disparity between lay and ordained, went on to suggest that ministry should refer to the work of everyone in the church (Ministerial Training Policy Working Group 1996:12). The disparity is also observable in the Deed of Union which, as noted above, emphasises the equality of ministries and even states that the Methodist Church “holds the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers”, but also argues for an ordained ministry with “special qualifications” and “special duties”.

Many Methodist Church leaders, lay and ordained, are uncomfortable with the situation of hierarchy as practiced. In addition to the ideological qualms which are felt about a two-tier ministry there is an economic aspect. A separated paid ministry is very expensive to train and to sustain. In the past decade several commissions have addressed these issues and the current climate is one in which the “ministry of the whole people of God”, and of general vocation stemming from baptism, are being re-emphasised. Yet, the general Methodist culture remains one in which “the call” to “the ministry” is definitive.

### 3.3 The call as life story within Methodism

Whether it is meant broadly or more narrowly, the call is at its most basic a way of talking about one’s life in relation to God and as such can involve anything from a simple statement to a lengthy discourse. Within certain denominations there is a strong tradition of members having frequent opportunities to tell a kind of life story to each other in which they explicitly recount everyday experiences in terms of their religious belief system. The telling of such life stories or “testimonies” between most Methodists used to be a very important part of
Methodist culture, and functioned, much as Stromberg has identified of conversion narratives among American evangelicals, to give evidence of the otherwise invisible conversion as well as enabling group membership to be proclaimed and performed (Stromberg 1993). However, with the decline of the small group or "class system" the practice of telling formalised life stories in terms of the activity of God has largely fallen away through most of the Methodist Church. Yet it continues as an essential part of the activity of those who feel that they are called to be Methodist ministers.

Indeed, the life cycle of Methodist ministers is punctuated with opportunities to tell their life stories as a call to ministry. After the initial telling of the life story in candidating, probationer ministers must give public accounts of their lives in this way at a special service as part of their official preparation for ordination. Furthermore, once they are established in ordinary church work ministers will often illustrate their sermons with depictions of how God has acted throughout their lives. Thus, for Methodist ministers all of life is often interpreted as the call of God, and the frequent opportunities to tell the story enable ministers to constantly perform and to proclaim their identity.

Ultimately, when Methodist ministers die, their life stories are told at their funerals and formally written as an obituary by their superintendent minister for publication both in the weekly denominational newspaper, the Methodist Recorder, and in the order of service for the Memorial service at the annual Methodist Conference. It has been proposed that the telling of a coherent life story "helps guard against the chilling possibility that one's life is random, accidental or unmotivated" (Linde 1993:6). In the case of the Methodist minister, the great emphasis on the obituary serves to make the point that even this most disruptive of life-story events can be held within the established framework of the minister's life course and is thereby made meaningful. These published life stories can also be seen to act as exemplars of what makes for a good and moral life as a minister, since they emphasize those aspects of the minister's life that reflected the most prized values and aspects of Methodist culture.
3.4 Life-story interviews with Methodist ministers

While the details always differed, most of the stories told to me by the sixteen local church and connexional level ministers whom I interviewed shared a broadly similar structure testifying to the (generally unrecognised) existence of a canonical form for such narratives. My aim here, in addition to giving some details about the kinds of people who become Methodist ministers, is to identify some of the common elements of such narratives. I do this by comparing the various stories told by the ministers and by drawing on the relevant literature in which the most frequently recurrent constituents of life stories as told in European and North American contexts have been outlined. Further details of the nature of the interviews and of how the "assumptive world" (Riessman 1987:190, cited in Andrews 1991:54), which I variably shared with those whom I interviewed may have affected the responses, is included in Appendix 3.2, and details of transcription conventions can be found in Appendix 3.1.

While I never specifically asked anyone to tell me about their call, the majority of those interviewed told the first part of their life story in terms of how various life events led up to their having an understanding that God was calling them to be a minister. Writing of Western societies, K. J. Gergen (1994:91) claims that such a focus on a culturally valued end-point in a story is one of a number of "critical ingredients" of the "well-formed narrative". While something of this is evident with the ministers it might however be more apt to refer to this aspect in the ministers' stories as a pivotal point rather than an end-point, since for most of the ministers whom I interviewed the call to ministry happened at a fairly early stage in their lives and was followed in the life story by more information about their life as a minister. In both leading up to the pivotal point of the call, and in what followed, all the ministers managed to create coherent and continuous stories, and in so doing they were also acting in a manner already identified of other Western narrative conventions (Cohler 1988:553, Bruner 1994:45–46). A further common ingredient of the ministers’ stories was an opening statement of where and when they were born. The establishing of such a temporal and spatial framework has also been more generally identified as a common element in the well-formed narrative (Gergen 1994, Barclay 1996).
These elements can be seen in the following example of a call story as told to me by one of the ministers who now holds connexional office. I have changed the minister's name and some of the details to protect his identity. David Jones told his story in a staccato manner like this:

I was born in the North East in 1939—pre-war baby—lived in a mining town in the North East. There were twenty-eight pubs, twenty-six churches—we were—Baptist.

My mother was an active Christian. Father was alienated during the great depression—not anti—but didn’t want to talk about church.

Went to the local primary school. 11 plus was a way out—security out of the pit. In our town social class was separated—on the upper road and on the lower road.

From when I was fifteen my father was unemployed—with an eye disorder. Money was non-existent.

At grammar school I played cricket and rugby. Left at fifteen—went into industries—wool manufacturers—met the girl now my wife. Her family were into the Methodist youth club. Had to go to church to go to the youth club.

I was earning £4.50—worked in the physics lab. Did part-time education in science field. My life was cricket in the summer and rugby in the winter.

Went on a church trip to ((notes unclear at this point—Christian Endeavour)). Heard a Welsh preacher. That started it really. Went to see our local minister—developed into call to ministry. I

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24 This story is re-told from notes and not from a recorded tape.
was quite bigoted—total abstinence, rigorous ethics. Candidated at nineteen and was accepted. Wouldn’t happen today—got to be at least twenty-five.

From comparing this and the other call stories told to me, several themes emerged as common among the ministers. Indeed, Craig Barclay (1996) has already drawn attention to the way in which those telling life stories often structure their accounts around certain elements or themes. In the story above, David Jones talked of the class divisions in his town and the escape which going to grammar school provided for him. This concern with social class emerged as an often-repeated theme in ministers’ call stories. Several spoke specifically of their families’ movement from the working class to the middle class, and a few commented on the expressed aspirations of their parents to “move up the social scale”. However, little information was usually volunteered with regard to the occupations of parents, and while David Jones mentioned his father, this was only with regard to his religious position and health problems. When I questioned the ministers further concerning their father’s employment, this emerged as varying between skilled and professional employment with evidence again being presented of social mobility.25

In his story, David Jones spoke of his mother and father’s religious affiliations, and this is a theme which repeatedly occurred at an early stage in the other call stories. Another important element was usually some description of the individual’s involvement in the life of the church. As in the case above, this often included a reference to involvement in the youth club and the making of a life partner. For those of a more evangelical persuasion, reference to their church involvement normally included a description of conversion or of “baptism in the Holy Spirit”. The narrating of such turning points has again been identified as a frequent device in life-story narratives (Bruner 1994:50). However, only three of my group of sixteen spoke in terms of a conversion experience and one of these explained how in reality he had invented the story of his conversion in order to

25 For further examples of this and other common elements of the “call” stories see Appendix 3.3.
fit with his peers and with what was expected of those candidating for the ministry.

With regard to church involvement and religious experience the ministers differed as to where they located agency in their accounts. The locating of agency in the constructing of memories has been identified by Jerome Bruner as an important aspect of life-story narratives. In particular, Bruner has noted how in relating memories speakers may emphasise their own agency and the autonomy of their acts, or may construct a kind of “victim self” by describing themselves as responding to the agency of others or to particular circumstances (Bruner 1994:41). For example, the minister who told me that he only went to a Methodist Sunday school because his parents sent him and it was the “nearest one”, was telling his story in terms of a kind of “victim self”. In contrast to this, another minister located agency very strongly within himself and spoke at length about how at around the age of eighteen he began to “experience an intense feeling of wanting to discover the meaning in life”. This feeling continued, he recounted, until he was in his early twenties, and was resolved when he returned to the Methodist church and experienced a call to ministry. This minister, however, also attributed some agency directly to God, since he ultimately described his call as coming through “social and psychological factors” which “God uses”. Although there was some variation, most ministers talked in terms of individuals or circumstances having influenced them while also presenting a strong sense of personal agency.26

In addition to their religious development, all except one of the ministers gave me an account of their academic background and this emerged, as is clearly evident in David Jones’ story, as an important theme, revealing the Methodist commitment to self-improvement. All of those interviewed evinced a respect for progress through education and for academic studies combined with a commitment to work hard, although there was much variation in the extent to which higher education had been enjoyed. In recounting their academic

26 This may have to an extent reflected the way in which I invited those being interviewed to tell me about “main events and influences”, but I believe that this invitation was in keeping with Methodist ministers’ generally practiced mode of telling life stories.
achievements there was a marked difference between the comments made by men and women, and further details of this can be found in Appendix 1.2.

Gender-related differences in the telling of life-stories have been noted by several life-story analysts (Bruner 1994:48, Gergen 1992, cited in Rosenwald and Ochberg 1992). In the call stories one general area of gendered difference related to the reporting of agency. This was especially the case with regard to agency in reaching the valued pivotal point of the experience of the call to ministry. In particular, the male ministers tended to make greater use of an autonomous first person while the female ministers placed more emphasis on the role of others in directing them at this point. For instance when one minister told of the moment at which he had first thought of ministry he spoke, as quoted here, in terms of "I" seven times in a short space of time:

a group of us went by plane to the Isle of Wight, to a Methodist youth camp, and it was while I was at the Methodist youth camp, which was staffed by student ministers on the whole, mmm that I felt that I ought to be a Methodist minister and when I came back from that holiday I went round to see my minister, who was a fairly young chap and said to him, I want to be a minister

In striking contrast to this, a female student minister, as will be detailed below, told her story of the call completely in terms of the activity of others.

However, having made the claim that male ministers tend to speak more in terms of their independent agency, this did not preclude reference to the effect of others or circumstances upon them. Several of those interviewed made reference to the actions of others—such as particular ministers, local preachers and university chaplains—in playing an active role in prompting them to think about becoming ministers. One man referred to a well-known Methodist minister, stating: "(he) laid his finger on me". By contrast, two of the ministers spoke of having a confused or unwelcome sense of being called, and several gave accounts in which they constructed themselves as a kind of victim self being
pressurised by God. That this is a recognised and respected form of the call was confirmed by the comments of one minister, who in presenting his own call in terms of personal agency felt he had to note that this differed from other accounts in which people spoke of being pursued by God, whom he referred to as the “hound of heaven”.

Thus, for all the similarity in themes and in the pattern of the call stories told to me there were also some significant variations, especially with regard to how the agency of God was expressed. As well as reflecting gender differences, this variety most obviously reflects the different theological parties which had influenced the ministers, with those of a more evangelical persuasion still tending to talk in terms of the direct agency of God upon them and others speaking more specifically of personal agency or of “psychological and emotional factors” as cited above. Several connexional figures whom I have interviewed believe that Methodism has become more divided along party lines in the past few years and this certainly seems to be reflected in the diverse accounts of the call.27 This can be seen further in the stories told me by student ministers.

3.5 Interviews with candidates for the Methodist ministry and student ministers

The manner in which I elicited the information from the seventeen candidates and students whom I interviewed is different from that used with the last group and will no doubt have shaped the material to some degree.28 However, despite the fact that I was more directive in questioning the students regarding their experiences of candidating it is still useful to consider this material here, since, as with the ministers above, the recounting of information about the call to ministry is affected by the individual’s sense of what it is culturally appropriate to include.

Most student ministers tended, like the ministers, to locate agency primarily within themselves but also to relate their actions to the prompting of others and

27 See Appendix 5.1 for further details of church parties.
28 See Appendix 3.2 for further details of this.
to particular circumstances. Similar gender differences to those noted among the ministers were also apparent. In particular, one older woman described how she had experienced a somewhat dramatic confirmation of the idea that she should candidate. She first described how she had become a lay worker and then went on to say:

We were a bit anti-clergy—we felt we had a ministry in our own right and didn't like it when anyone got a "real call". Then it was at a glorious service when I was baptizing a baby and God said: "I want you to do this all the time". Then an African man—from Nigeria—said: "I prophesy that you are going to be a Methodist minister".

Like several others, this woman reported how local preachers said to her: "you must candidate". She commented on this: "God speaks through other people, I realised he was saying to me you should candidate. It was a real call. This was frightfully important for me as I had no confidence". It is notable that she attributed agency in her call firstly to God who spoke to her and secondly to the Nigerian man who prophesied. When she did speak in terms of "I" on one occasion it was to make the self-deprecating statement: "I had no confidence".

Student ministers differed as to whether they indicated that it was positive or negative experiences that promoted their sense of call. One young man told a very similar story to that given by one of the ministers quoted above, in which he described how he was "spoken to" by God on a summer camp. Other students, like the ministers, told their stories in terms of a reluctant sense of a growing pressure that candidating for the ordained ministry was something they should attempt, and this was often related to a feeling of discontent in their current employment. One woman told of this experience by initially constructing a kind of victim self and then going on to construct a more active and controlling self. She stated:

\[29\] A lay worker is an unordained person who is temporarily employed in local churches often to do some or all of the tasks normally undertaken by an ordained minister.
I realised I had to stop running from it—I somehow felt that the particular emphasis of ordained ministry would enable me to offer myself in a way that it was difficult to do when not ....... there were more possibilities.

In this story, as in many others, evaluative points are constantly being made as the speaker seeks to make sense of her actions. Likewise, a few people suggested that ministry seemed to make sense of the "gifts and graces" which they began to see that they had. For many it was as if they were posing the problem: "what would make best use of my life or make it most meaningful" to which the answer given was: "being a Methodist minister". The student ministers' telling of their stories as overcoming a problem again conforms to some of the common narrative practices identified by those working in this field (Barclay 1996:110).

Some of the forms of call story narrated to me appeared to be variations on particular biblical stories or schemata with, for example, those who spoke of "running away" perhaps modelling something of their call on the story of Jonah. Another young woman in her narrative appeared to be modelling her actions and her story on the tale of Gideon who put out his fleece to test God's will. This woman told me of how, having thought about candidating for some time, she decided one night that she would put it to the test by a kind of bargain with God. The bargain was that if her minister telephoned her that very evening and spoke to her of candidating she would do it. In the event, right at the very end of the day, the minister did decide to phone her and she then agreed to candidate. The use of such schemata within life stories has again been identified as a recognisable narrative convention (Burke 1989:103).

When the material from the ministers and students ministers is taken together it does indeed appear that the stories of a call to Methodist ministry usually follow a particular canonical narrative form, and are organised around certain key themes and terms, albeit with variations. Among the ministers, who had greater opportunity to develop their stories, social mobility and an emphasis on progress in education emerged as two important themes, along with religious background
and conversion experience or religious development. Next in the accounts, common to both ministers and student ministers, was the theme of how the idea of being a minister first came through particular religious experiences or through the direct challenge of others. Finally, there is the interpretation of that prompting, which often involves a period of questioning or of testing even prior to the beginning of the candidating process.

In order to be accepted as a minister, candidates have to learn to tell the story of their call in such a canonical form, and by so doing they are taking a step in their socialisation into Methodist ministry. That telling the call could affect behaviour and its interpretation in this way has already been identified to an extent by the sociologist of religion Eric Carlton. In his brief review of vocation within the Free or nonconformist churches, Carlton drew attention to the way in which certain patterns of call or stereotypes affected the way in which “the intending minister interprets his call” (Carlton 1968:107). He then went on to argue that consequently “the expected becomes the experienced”. However, while Carlton also emphasised the predictable nature of the call he too noted some variation between calls (110). With regard to variations between the call stories presented by the Methodists studied here it appears appropriate to suggest that there may be several canonical forms. The differences in forms appear to be related in part to the theological differences which have developed between ministers.

An aspect of most of the call stories which is particularly worthy of note is the fact that reference is often made to the manner in which other people prompt or nurture the individual’s sense of call. This, I suggest, is significant because it highlights the collaborative nature of the making of ministers. It is notable that even those, such as local preachers, who are often most vehement about egalitarianism frequently play an influential part in helping others to conceive of themselves as ministers. However, while a great variety of people may prompt and promote the call, the judgement of whether it is acceptable or not depends finally on the higher echelons of the church. Ultimately, it is the church officials who decide which stories are admissible and which individuals should be allowed to go on to train as ministers, eventually returning to the congregation to

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tell their stories as cultural exemplars. In fact, it is largely through the candidating process, as well as through observing other ministers, that the successful candidates have learnt to craft their stories appropriately, and it is to the mechanics of this that I turn next.

3.6 The power of testing the call in the candidating process

In the Methodist Church literature on the subject, church officials repeatedly emphasise the point that in the bringing into being of potential ministers there are two parties involved: there is the individual who believes that he or she is called to be a minister and the “Church” which tests that individual’s call (Methodist Church Candidates Office). Yet, in both the literature and in the church more widely it is also stated that it is God who is the primary actor in the conceiving of new ministers. This attribution of the agency of the call to God can serve greatly to empower the person whose call is accredited, and in his recent study of power among mainly Baptist ministers Paul Beasley-Murray (1998:88)—himself a minister—has proposed that the call of the minister by God is one of the greatest sources of ministerial power. However, by comparison with the Baptists, in the Methodist Church less emphasis is placed on the individual’s experience of the call and more on the church’s attestation of the call. In the Baptist situation, as described by the sociologist Larry Ingram (1980:44), the minister or pastor still depends on the local church attesting his call and indeed on its issuing a call for him to be their minister. However, this is very different from the highly bureaucratic procedure of the Methodists. This process gives the Methodist officials the primary role and sets them up as possessing the greatest authority. In this way the Methodist approach is closer to that identified by Towler and Coxon for “larger and more formal churches” such as the Roman Catholic Church (1979:58–59).

The judging of a call is at heart a matter of claiming to know God’s will. This knowing of God’s will has been a perpetual problem within Christian denominations. For the Baptists, according to P. M. Harrison’s classic study, it was the local church and even the saved individual who became the ultimate authority in the interpretation of the Bible and the mediation of God’s will.
However, according to Harrison, the "anarchic potentialities" of such "radical individualism" are obvious, and all Protestant churches, no matter how much they proclaim their democratic principles, must find ways of establishing authority in some location other than the saved individual while at the same time maintaining the primacy of the individual's experience of God. While within Methodism there has been an emphasis on the individual's personal experience of God, final authority has always rested elsewhere—initially with Wesley himself and then in the Conference which has also been largely dominated by the ministerial hierarchy (see Chapter 6). Within Methodism, to use Harrison's terms again, the historical mediation of God's sovereignty has not been through the "'spontaneous inspiration' of special individuals" but by "means of an official priestly class which preserves and transmits the oral or written tradition" (Harrison [1959] 1976:54). Nowhere is the authority of this class more clearly established than in the adjudicating of an individual's call to ministry.

The testing of the call actually operates on at least three levels which vary in their degree of significance. The highest and most overarching level is that of the Connexion or national church. On this tier there is a senior church official known as the Candidates Secretary who manages the Candidates Office in the central church offices in London. It is the task of the Candidates Secretary to ensure that all of the requirements of the national church are met in the candidating process and to this end his office produces over twenty forms for the candidates to complete and numerous standard letters and information booklets to guide those involved through the process. At the next level down, a district candidates secretary is appointed in each of the thirty-three districts. This person receives information, direction and forms from the connexional Candidates Secretary. It is the district secretary's responsibility to oversee and arrange those aspects of the procedure which happen at the district level. He must also pass on information to the candidate and liaise with the superintendent minister of the candidate's circuit. The third level, that of the circuit, is the place where the testing of the individual's call officially begins, but while candidates cannot proceed further if they are not recommended by the circuit meeting, a circuit's positive decision can be overturned at district or connexional levels.
The control and knowledge of the procedure which is held by the church's various representatives at the different levels gives them power over the candidates, and in some cases over each other. Furthermore, the procedure serves to introduce the candidates to the various levels of the church. With regard to this, one of the lay people whom I interviewed in Bedford stated that to him the Connexion was non-existent but he added: "if I was wanting to be a minister the Connexion would have much more effect upon my life". Indeed, it is in fact essential that candidates gain knowledge of the Connexion if they are to act appropriately in the different contexts of candidating. For this knowledge they must rely upon the officials who will also guide them through the procedures and upon whom they are dependent for their ultimate acceptance as ministers. Thus, throughout the candidating process those offering themselves to be ministers are in a very vulnerable position. It is to the reflections of the candidates on their experiences of candidating that I turn next.

3.7 Experiences of the candidating procedure

Do I really want to be a 'Methodist Minister' for the rest of my life? Suddenly the commitment seems enormous and the present process like a roller-coaster from which it is difficult to stand aside.

A candidate's written reflection on the process while on a retreat

In their first months at college, student ministers often talk about their candidating experiences, and most whom I met were extremely willing to be interviewed by me on the subject. While, through my fieldwork, I gleaned information and insights from people involved at every level of the candidating procedure my request to the Formation in Ministries Office that I be allowed to observe at a connexional Ministerial Candidates Selection Committee was denied. Significantly, this was one of the few areas in Methodism, either at the national or local church levels, where permission to observe was not forthcoming. This probably reflects both the sensitive nature of the procedure and also the importance of what occurs there, since the recruiting of new
ministers is arguably one of the most powerful ways of influencing the nature of the church. Thus, while I have made attempts to view the process from a variety of perspectives this account is largely informed by the experiences of the candidates and draws much from their often emotional evaluation of the “roller-coaster” experience.

The process officially begins for most candidates when they take the initial step of telling their superintendent minister about their sense of call, and the great majority told me of how they then received a positive and enthusiastic response when they did so. It is quite clear that the superintendent has the power to encourage or discourage an individual’s sense of call and to confirm his or her developing identity. The superintendent is in charge of organising and chairing the circuit meeting at which the candidates must present their call to ministry and be voted upon. The superintendent can also help by preparing the candidate for the procedure and by so directing the circuit events to ensure that the candidate is viewed in the most favourable light.

Both at the circuit meeting and in the local church the identification of a candidate for ministry is often a cause for much excitement and is very affirming for all involved. While some experienced receiving negative votes at the circuit meeting as disheartening, most found the local community supportive of their new sense of identity. One candidate described the way in which he received a round of applause at his church and noted: “there was a sense of others living out their hopes through you”. Moreover, one young woman suggested that the production of a candidate in a local church or circuit acted to validate church members’ faith. In her study of Roman Catholic communities Suzanne Campbell-Jones similarly noted how the entry of young girls into a convent could make their relatives feel they had a closer access to God and also generate pride and happiness (Campbell-Jones 1980:93). From my observations in Bedford, I propose that producing ministerial candidates has the ability to promote the church community’s status and sense of religious well-being, and this in turn gives an indication of the value which is placed on ministers in the local church.
Before appearing in public as candidates at the circuit meeting there is much preparation done in private. Prior to candidating an individual must have already achieved a number of qualifications. This gives an indication that the preparation and socialisation of the Methodist minister, like the making of many professionals as identified by Bourdieu (1991), is a long slow process that actually takes many years to achieve. A ministerial candidate must be a baptized member of the church and a local preacher as well as having a minimum of four "O" or G.C.S.E. levels. For those without the relevant qualifications there is much work to be done even before candidating may officially begin. This means that church affairs become a major pre-occupation for a protracted period of time, often taking over from normal family life, and starting the re-orientating of a candidate’s relationships which is, I suggest, an unconscious aim held by those in charge of ministerial formation.

Other unseen parts of the process include a great deal of form filling and the process is heavily bureaucratised. This form filling can be seen as a kind of invasive admission procedure which in Goffman’s terms ([1961] 1991:32) serves to invade the individual’s informational preserve and so begins to break down the candidate’s personal boundaries and sense of self. At an early stage candidates have to answer questions about their finances, their medical history and their beliefs, especially those pertaining to sexuality. The candidates must also write a thousand word version of their call to ministry, or as the form puts it: "a brief account of significant events in your life, which have shaped your approach to Christian vocation and this offer for ministry". Many of the candidates reported finding this an extremely difficult and demanding exercise.

A further, generally unseen, part of the initial process is that at an early stage candidates are expected to attend a meeting with the district chairman, district candidates secretary and their superintendents. This unofficial part of the candidating procedure was an uncomfortable experience for many candidates who were unsure of its purpose. However, this informal meeting between the

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30 The rules and procedures described here as are they were during the period of my fieldwork in 1996/97. Since then a number of changes, particularly with regard to initial qualifications, have been put in place.
candidates and the chairman of district and superintendents clearly serves to introduce the candidates to some of the hierarchical structures that operate within the church. While recreating the important relationship between chairman and superintendents, it also initiates the relationship between the district officials and the candidates as well as between the candidates themselves who meet one another for the first time. Moreover, since candidates’ spouses are expected to attend, it also functions as an opportunity for members of the hierarchy to check out the compliance of the spouses, and is thereby a reminder of some of the ways in which ministry has traditionally differed from other more individualistic professions.

Most of those parts of the candidating process so far described are timed to occur before the start of the Methodist year on 1st September. It is in the autumn that the candidating procedure begins in earnest, and many candidates feel completely taken over by events such as preparing for and undertaking three time-consuming examinations. For many, the demanding examinations seemed a total irrelevance to the procedure, since even when individuals had not done very well in them this was not referred to in the rest of the procedure. Consequently, several of the candidates expressed a sense that the examinations were just another “hoop” through which they had to jump in order to do what the church wanted. This has parallels with life in a total institution as Goffman describes it, since the inmate there has often to carry out tasks which seem to be pointless, but which according to Goffman are part of the procedure for breaking their will. Like such tasks, sitting examinations is a kind of juvenile activity which undermines the individuals’ sense of themselves as adults who are able to control and construct their lives. Moreover, these examinations can be seen to both objectify those who must submit to them and also to discipline them much as Foucault, in his study of the origins of the modern prison system, has suggested of the techniques of discipline which developed in the eighteenth century (Foucault [1975] 1991:185–91). In his analysis of such techniques Foucault has noted how it was through processes such as examinations, with all their “documentary techniques”, that the individual was constituted as an object of power and knowledge who could be compared and analysed.
A further means by which ministerial candidates are tested in order to be compared and analysed is through the writing of two essays on subjects which are suggested each year by the Candidates Office. Candidates must also provide a book-list and indicate any films, art exhibitions or music concerts which they have attended. All of the examinations, essays and book-lists are marked, and details of these marks are made available to the district candidates committee, the ministerial synod of the district and the connexional Ministerial Candidates Selection Committee. Thus, candidates come to have every aspect of their life invaded and graded. Goffman has suggested of such “admission procedures” that, “in thus being squared away the new arrival allows himself to be shaped and coded into an object that can be fed into the administrative machinery of the establishment, to be worked on smoothly by routine operations” (Goffman [1961] 1991:26). Such a sense of being a “unit in a large machine” was expressed to me by several of those who had experienced the candidating procedure.

In addition to their academic skills and cultural interests, the candidates’ ability in leading worship is also tested. They must perform two services in front of a panel of judges, who grade them on various aspects of their performance. For some this brought into question the skills which they felt they had as local preachers and also shook their sense of self. With regard to these “trial services” one candidate stated that it felt like “going through a wringer”. She added: “One is put in a terribly vulnerable position and there is the danger of feeling totally hopeless and de-skilled”.

Throughout the process, the candidates’ informational preserve is repeatedly invaded. At an early stage a report is made on their suitability for ministry by the superintendents of their circuits, and the references which the superintendents give concerning the candidates’ faith and experience increase the power of the superintendents over the candidates. Candidates must also provide the names of referees, and assessments are made by “circuit lay assessors” who interview the candidates and complete an official eight-page form. There is also a “district assessor”, who makes a more detailed psychological investigation, completing a fifteen page form which covers the person’s family background, personal history,
adult relationships, and religious vocation. Candidates' relationships with their spouses are also assessed, and spouses are interviewed to probe their attitude to their partner's candidature. Here again the candidating process invades those areas of life normally held to be most private and secret.

Through these reports and references the church officials thus gain inside knowledge of the candidates. Since very few of the candidates ever see either the references or the reports, this creates a sense of being at a disadvantage when it comes to being interviewed. All of this contributes to what can be identified as a growing experience of disempowerment.

An important and often traumatic part of the process is reached when the candidate attends the district candidates committee, which is held annually in January. It is at this meeting that the district level of the church comes to life most clearly. The committee provides a role for various actors in that it is organised by the district candidates secretary, is chaired by the district chairman and attended by about sixteen other lay and ordained members from around the district as well as the candidate's own superintendent minister. Throughout the meeting asymmetrical power relations between these actors, and between the committee and the candidate, are negotiated. The negotiating of these power relations was most evident in what the candidates described as the "clever questions" which committee members asked, and which it was felt were more about establishing the status of the committee members rather than finding out information from the candidate. The topics covered by the committee included questions about candidates' emotional make-up, political activity or attitudes pertaining to sexuality.31 Many, especially those who received negative votes, described this event as an "ordeal" and reported feeling emotionally drained and exhausted by it.32 In this part of the process and in the appearance before the ministerial synod which comes next, there are some parallels with the selection procedures for parliamentary candidates which have been described by one candidate as "slow torture" (Leonard [1968] 1991:89). However, in the

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31 See Appendix 3.4.1 for more details
32 In his study of Anglican selection procedures William Pollock (1984a:§6.2.1) also noted that there was considerable "stress" at selection conferences.
Methodist process the district committee does also serve to unite all the candidates who share in this experience. As part of an extended rite of passage, the experience of this event functions to bind the neophytes together in the manner suggested by Turner ([1969] 1974).

Until 1999, candidates were required to appear before the district ministerial synod. This meeting provided another occasion for the public enactment of roles by those officials involved in the candidating process, and since chairmen of district were once again in overall control of proceedings their higher rank was demonstrated and re-enforced. The information so far gleaned about the candidate during the process was sent in advance to all the ministers and at the event further comments were added by the chairman, district candidates secretary and the person’s own superintendent. All the ministers of a district—that is, anything up to one hundred ministers—are expected to attend the synod, and, after listening to the candidates present their call, they used to vote on the acceptability of the candidate.33

At the synod a great deal was done in terms of creating and re-creating Methodist ministry and establishing power relations. The public adjudicating of what was an acceptable call at this meeting served the triple function of policing the boundaries of the ministerial profession and of re-socialising present members, while also socialising prospective ones. Through their performance at the synod the candidates were both proving that they could behave acceptably as candidates and negotiating entry to the ministerial body. That religious stories can function in this dual manner has been suggested by Kroll-Smith in his study of women at different stages of religious development in a Black Pentecostal Church. Kroll-Smith draws attention to the way in which the “performance of a socially appropriate testimony” can not only be used by a “votary”—that is those who have made a commitment to a particular congregation—to specify her location in the group, but also to indicate “her commitment to a more advanced status within the sect” (Kroll-Smith 1980:23).34 From the comments made to me

33 See Appendix 3.4.2 for a fuller description.
34 See Appendix 3.4.2 for a fuller description of the parallel practice within the Methodist context.
by candidates it was very clear that by this stage many were conscious of learning to tell their call in a particular way and to play the role of the acceptable candidate, as well as developing strategies for coping with the demands of the various tests.

The final and most demanding hurdle for the majority of candidates is going before the Connexional Candidates Selection Committee, which is largely made up of ordained connexional officials. Many of those interviewed were conscious that this was where the authority to make ultimate decisions concerning them truly lay. Candidates who have made it to this point visit a theological college for a twenty-four hour period, where they are subjected to a number of psychological and medical tests along with various one-to-one and panel interviews.35 This kind of intensive examination for a twenty-four hour or longer period is also conducted by the Conservative party for the selection of parliamentary candidates (Leonard [1968] 1991:83) and the Church of England in its selection of priests. They are all probably modelled on procedures originally developed by the War Office Selection Boards (Sinclair 1997:73).

At this event, the preserve around the individuals is invaded in a very physical sense and they are made to feel their inferiority. Waiting to be seen by the church officials has been a large part of the district events, and takes up an even greater proportion of the candidates’ time at this meeting. While some reported finding aspects of the event to be positive and "affirming", all whom I interviewed again felt emotionally and physically drained and some described it as a "nightmare". The negative aspect of the experience is, not surprisingly, greatest for those who are turned down. In the year 1995–96, of the 151 candidates who started out on the procedure, only 107 made it past the ministerial synod stage, and another twenty-two were eliminated at the connexional committee stage, leaving eighty-five successful candidates (Methodist Church 1996a, 1:67). For those turned down at the connexional Ministerial Candidates Selection Committee, there is a course of appeal if they

35 See Appendix 3.4.3 for further details.
have received the necessary number of votes up to that point and are supported by their superintendent minister. Other candidates who have dropped out earlier in the procedure can also candidate again the following year.

Several of those whom I interviewed who had taken up this option of re-candidating spoke of how they had learnt to behave differently and to act “humbly” in front of the officials. This is again suggestive of Goffman’s proposal that the new recruit in the total institution must be ready to be “appropriately deferential in his initial face-to-face encounters with staff as a sign that he will take the role of the routinely pliant inmate” (Goffinan [1961] 1991:26). For some of those whom I interviewed, their failure as candidates on first applying can be seen as the kind of will-breaking contest or “obedience test”, which Goffinan has also described as occurring when inmates are being socialised into new institutions. Lesley, an older woman, told me of how on the second time of candidating she had shown her humility to the committees by keeping her “eyes downcast” and by saying to them regarding her previous rejection: “Yes, yes, it looks like that this [i.e. the negative result first time] was the will of the committee and the will of God. Yes, I’ve learnt a lot”. Indeed, for everyone who undergoes the candidating procedure a great deal of socialisation into appropriately deferential relationships with members of the church hierarchy can be seen to occur during these events.

While the Ministerial Candidates Selection Committee makes its decisions at the time it meets, the candidates must again wait, this time for a week, before they receive the news by post. This creates yet more tension and makes further emotional demands. When a positive acceptance is received, it is generally greeted with great excitement and happiness—as I was able to observe on one occasion in Bedford.36 While undergoing the process of candidating has already begun to alter relationships with friends and family, communicating the result marks a further stage in the changing of these relationships, since from this point everyone involved prepares for the candidate to move on. With regard to situations like this, where individuals actually wish to enter a total institution,

36 See Appendix 3.4.4.
Goffinan has noted that the recruit has already “partially withdrawn from his home world”, and that, “what is cleanly severed by the institution is something that had already started to decay” (Goffinan [1961] 1991:25).

3.8 Who has been selected? The institutional ideal

It seems clear that the selectors in the candidating process are operating with a number of explicit and implicit criteria in mind. Working back from the kinds of people who are ultimately selected it appears that some of the implicit criteria favour middle-aged, middle-class, articulate and probably theologically liberal white men and women who are overtly heterosexual. This current ideal candidate contrasts sharply with that of thirty years ago, which, as far as I can determine was a young white male in his twenties with a strong sense of call and an ability to study. The experience in the 1960s of many of the younger ministers leaving the ministry to go into secular professions contributed to a growing preference for older candidates. That something of this preference for older candidates remains is borne out by the fact that the average age of candidates in 1996 was forty-one. It is also substantiated by the negative experiences of candidating reported by many younger candidates (Methodist Church 1996a, 1:67). The Methodist Church’s preference for recruiting those from middle-class backgrounds is substantiated by a study which showed that most Methodist ministers grew up in lower middle-class homes (Ranson, Bryman and Hinings 1977:29), and it is also clear that the skills of articulation and self-presentation necessary in candidating are more likely to be found among the middle classes.

While, since the Conference decision in 1971, women have also been in theory equally acceptable as candidates, there still appears to be some bias against young women, especially those of childbearing years.37 Likewise, while the Methodist Church officially affirms the ministry of celibate homosexual ministers, several of those whom I interviewed had encountered prejudice because of their sexuality. It was also perceived that having a markedly

37 See Appendix 1.3
charismatic theology could be a major stumbling block in being accepted as a candidate.

These implicit criteria are not, of course, specified anywhere. However, in recent years, explicit criteria have been published for the information of both the selectors and the candidates (Methodist Church Candidates Office 1996). While these include knowledge and practice of Methodism, they also relate closely to the values which I have identified in Chapter 2 as being central in a Methodist habitus. The candidates are explicitly judged on their commitment to the life of the local church and their behaviour in everyday life, and in this I believe their work ethic is being implicitly judged. This work ethic is also judged by the way they apply themselves to the various examinations and tests in the process. Candidates, as we know, must be able to speak of their sense of call, but also of their spirituality, and in so doing the value of experiential religion is being tested. They are often quizzed about their sexual ethics and expected to exhibit a conservative morality. The candidates’ understanding of faith and an ability to communicate the gospel is also examined, and in this they are expected to be able to articulate propositional belief in a way which is not expected of ordinary church members. Candidates are also rated according to the way they express social concern through acts of service as well as in more specifically religious activities.

The attitudes of candidates to the values of egalitarianism and hierarchy are also examined, since they are specifically expected to be able to lead by offering an “example of faith” and also to work “collaboratively”. In a less explicit fashion, the candidates’ attitudes to hierarchy are often tested through questions about how they relate to authority, and also through inquiries into their beliefs regarding the celebration of Holy Communion. Their attitude to hierarchy is also implicitly tested through the manner in which they relate to the church officials, as noted above, and the way in which they submit themselves to the candidating process as a whole. With regard to what I have identified as the primary Methodist value of egalitarianism, I can find few ways in which this is explicitly tested. Even so, as good Methodists and as local preachers, it is likely that all of
the successful candidates demonstrate this value in many of their attitudes and much of their treatment of others.

Another area which is explicitly tested is the candidates’ level of education and their ability to learn. This, I suggest, reflects a concern for the Methodist value of self-betterment. Something of this value emerged in the stories of the call told to me by the ministers, as recounted in the earlier part of this chapter. The officials also state in their leaflet on selection criteria that they are looking for a “mature and stable character” who acts with integrity, can cope with criticism, opposition and disappointment and is good at building relationships. Similarly, it has been noted that religious orders in their recruitment of nuns have been careful to “choose girls who had stable personalities and who would succeed in religious life” (Campbell-Jones 1979:74). In general, in addition to those characteristics of the institutional ideal as noted above, the officials are looking to select emotionally and psychologically balanced candidates who have imbibed Methodist values, who are willing to obey the authorities and who will be teachable and malleable.

3.9 Changing through candidating

It was a game and it was about knowing how to play by the rules and get the prize. It had been a pretence—pretending to be the perfect candidate.

A candidate’s reflection on the procedure

Many of those whom I interviewed described with some embarrassment how, having become conscious that there was an institutional ideal, they had learned to play this role. Pollock, in his study of the selection procedures for clergy within the Anglican Church, has noted a similar finding, where candidates admitted that they acted the “role of responsible churchmen rather than reveal themselves” (Pollock 1984a:§6.1.3). Within Methodism, this sense of acting was particularly true of those who had gone on to candidate a second time, and Lesley, mentioned above, spoke specifically of “acting a part”. Others, who had been successful the first time, described how they had been very careful in what they had presented.
As one candidate put it, she had to "box clever" with her answers to the interview panels. Most admitted that at some point they had hidden aspects of their ideas or beliefs from the interviewers or slightly changed the stress of what they were saying to make it more acceptable. One person confessed: "I had to play the system—they want someone centre-liberal". Another shamefacedly admitted: "I lied".

The embarrassment of the candidates in talking about their role-playing reflects the belief, explicitly stated by some, that it was important in this process to "be yourself". With most of the candidates there was a discomfort at what seemed to be a kind of duplicity when they realised that there was a disjunction between their sense of self and the role they had learned to play. I interpret this as being due to the sense that role-playing somehow goes against the Christian values of integrity and sincerity, and also contradicts the idea that ministry is about the whole person. In this way the ideal of the ministerial role or office would appear to differ from the characteristics posited by Fortes of office in general. Fortes argued that individuals are "more than the offices or statuses or roles" which they hold, substantiating this by the fact that rituals are required to confer such roles on them (Fortes 1962:86). That some individuals within Methodism have a strong sense of self as different from the role they play clearly emerged through the candidating process, and in fact was carried on into theological training, as will be discussed in the next chapter. Thus, while the Methodist ideal is different to Fortes' description of office, the practice is much as he suggested.

Fortes' work (1962:64) also reminds us that roles are collaborative and concern engagement in particular social relationships. While the role of the ideal candidate differs from the kind of roles classically described by Fortes, since it is not something which is simply conferred on individuals but must be achieved by them in competition with others, it is still true that these roles require collaboration between those in particular social relationships. In this case the collaboration is between the candidates and the connexional officials. An important aspect of this role-playing is the enacting of appropriately deferential relationships with the connexional officials. Furthermore, Fortes has also suggested that "role is status in action", and indeed the role of the candidate is in
part about learning a new status—specifically it is about being on the bottom rung of the ministerial hierarchy.

Something of this change in status is also evident from the way in which others outside the candidating process begin to treat the candidate. Some student ministers reported that, as soon as they had announced their intention to candidate, the ministers in the circuit began to treat them to a degree as colleagues. Others commented on how some members of their churches began to act towards them as though they were already ministers. This was even more clearly the case for many of the candidates once their acceptance by the church had been announced, and several described how the attitude of those around them changed. Two people mentioned that some of the members, especially the older ones, had begun to treat them with awe and a different degree of respect—standing up, for example, while they were talking to them. In one church a successful candidate’s wife suddenly started being greeted by church members in a way that had not happened before.

Change in status is also evident for those who candidate and fail to be accepted. The plight of people in this category also gives a further indication of the degree to which the candidating process has an effect on a person’s sense of identity. Writing about her experiences in an article in the Methodist Recorder, 2 May 1996, one failed candidate described how her rejection had qualified her for membership in the group of unselected candidates, and she likened the experiences of the members of this group to a kind of bereavement that made some people avoid them because they did not know what to say. Another man wrote in the Methodist Recorder, 16 May 1996, of his sense that having failed in candidating, any other “path of service” would be “only a substitute for what might have been”. From other letters and from the six rejected candidates whom I met in the course of my fieldwork it seems clear that failure in candidating is a deeply traumatic experience that results in a great deal of emotional, psychological and even physical pain, and that some people never come to terms with it. Indeed, in recognition of the upset which the system causes, some changes have been made to it.
3.10 Conclusion

The candidating process brings about substantial changes in all who undergo it. By learning to tell their life stories in terms of a divine call to ministry, candidates have begun to conceive of themselves as having a different identity. This identity has largely been created by the way in which those already ordained have responded to them, and it is confirmed if they are accepted as junior members of the ministerial group. As candidates, their relationships with both ministers and church members have altered, and their status has been increased. Those who are accepted experience a further change in status as they move to take their place among the ranks of the ministerial hierarchy. For the successful, their claim to be called by God has been ratified, and they are empowered by the legitimation of their claim to this paradigmatic calling.

In addition to making potential new ministers, the candidating process creates rejected candidates. These too have already been partially socialised into ministry and must then find a new way of understanding their identity. They must also come to terms with the fact that their claim to know God’s will has been denied. Some criticise the church and, claiming that the church officials have made a mistake, place ever-greater emphasis on personal religious experience. Others deny the superiority of the ministerial call and emphasise the importance of the “call of God” to serve in other walks of life. Thus, rejection can bring about an increase in egalitarianism. Rejected candidates are, of course, still local preachers. Their experience is perhaps one factor in making this group so often vehement in their proclamation of the doctrine of the “priesthood of all believers”, and in fuelling the anti-clericalism which I have observed of some local preachers. The pain of those who have failed in candidating, and the frustration of those who would like to have candidated but for various reasons have felt that they could never try, creates a particular dynamic within Methodism. The intensified religious egalitarianism of these individuals is often expressed in a negative attitude to the ministry and sometimes results in ministers emphasising their position in the ministerial hierarchy in order to counter the attack on their position. Paradoxically, the explicit anti-clericalism
expressed by some can be seen to mask an implicit belief in the superiority of ordained ministry.

Again, somewhat paradoxically, it is often from among local preachers that the suggestion that someone should candidate for the ministry first comes. More generally the positive value which is placed on ordained ministry emerges from the way in which so many lay people play active roles in encouraging individuals to candidate, and in the hopefulness generated when someone candidates and especially when they are successful. In social terms, the conceiving of ministers, or the creating of ministers in embryo, emerges as a collaborative act involving the individual, their local community and the connexional church officials. However, control over the making of ministers at this stage is quite clearly in the hands of the ministerial hierarchy, and this creates frustration in local churches and circuits as well as among the rejected candidates. All of this provides further evidence of the tension between the values of egalitarianism and hierarchy in Methodism.

The strongly graduated and hierarchical nature of the candidating process serves to empower those church officials who control it. By being able to select appropriate candidates, the church officials influence the kind of ministers which the church will consequently produce. Through their control of the process they also have, to an extent, the power to decide what is of significance both in ministerial culture and in the wider culture of Methodism, since ministers often act as exemplars for the larger social group. The successful candidates are the ones who appear best to reflect this culture by acting appropriately and demonstrating their commitment to central Methodist values, most clearly by the telling of their call in the fitting canonical form.

However, the control and the power does not lie entirely with the church officials since their power depends on the co-operation of the candidates, who are in turn empowered if they are successful in their candidature. Moreover, many successful candidates believe that they have remained in control by learning to play the role of the acceptable candidate, and by maintaining a sense of self separate from the role of the subservient individual. In this way, through
the sort of “impression management” which Stephen Pattison, drawing on Goffman, has identified of patients in mental health institutions, some limited informal power remains with those who otherwise appear to be on the underside of asymmetrical power relations (Pattison [1994] 1997:140). Moreover, the effect of the candidating process is so great that by the end of it most of the candidates have already a strong sense of themselves as Methodist ministers, and some feel that once they have been accepted they have no need of further change. All of this may limit the power of the officials to mould the student ministers as they think appropriate. Thus, while the church officials may believe that this has only been a selection procedure, and that the forming of ministers has not yet started, because of the nature of the procedure a great deal of change has already occurred. Not the least important of these changes is the experience for many of the disjunction between self and institutional identity, and this continues as they move through the training process, as described in the next chapter.
Chapter 4

Forming and legitimating Methodist ministers: theological college, probation and ordination

4.1 Introduction

The primary focus of this chapter is on the changes brought about in those Methodists who have been selected to be trained as ministers and who move through the stages of initial training, probation and ordination. Within the Methodist Church, a great deal of time and money is devoted to what is now officially called “ministerial formation”, and the processes involved are often described in terms of the creation of a “ministerial identity”. I argue here that these processes of change can be understood as further incorporating the candidates into the ministerial hierarchy, legitimating the accompanying alteration in status and also empowering the new ministers so that they will be in a dominant position in the local church. Moreover, I contend that the socialisation which occurs should not be seen simply as a change of identity created by the church officials, but must also be understood in terms of the learning of a role and, very importantly, in a change in relationships between the candidate and others. In particular, I contend that lay people often collaborate to a great extent in bringing about the candidate’s change in status. Furthermore, a significant element of the creation of ministers is the altering of the general Methodist habitus to a specifically ministerial habitus in which, most notably, there is greater emphasis on the value of hierarchy. Perhaps not surprisingly, since the candidates are local preachers, and therefore, as I have earlier suggested, often among the most egalitarian members of the local church, these changes do not go uncontested. Indeed, in the conflicts which surround ministerial formation aspects of the tensions between the central Methodist values of egalitarianism and hierarchy can again be seen, and the culture of Methodism further analysed.

There are three main areas of conflict surrounding the making of ministers, with the most notable tensions being expressed during the initial period in training. The first of these areas of conflict arises from the very Protestant belief
that the individual, having been already “called and equipped by God for ministry”, has no need of anything else and in fact should resist the changes to the self which the church officials want to bring about. This attitude has been an issue throughout the history of Methodist training institutions, and reflects the beliefs of those in Methodism who have emphasised religious experience over knowledge (McQuiban 1995). The second area of conflict concerns the exact nature of the desired end-point of “ministerial formation”, since college staff emphasise the importance of making students into theological experts, whereas students often fear the distance this will create between themselves and their congregations. Again these concerns have a long history within Methodism (McQuiban 1995, Johnson 1982, Batty 1988).

The third area of conflict also concerns the nature of the difference which church officials desire to create between ministers and laity. Behind the approach officially taken there appears to lie a belief that lay and ordained exist within the church as two distinct kinds of person and that through “ministerial formation” a radically different kind of person is being created. This involves the creation of a disjunction between the person as he or she was before becoming a minister, so that a difference between ministers and lay people can be established. These radical differences are created through the processes of training and probation, but are finally and irreversibly confirmed at the ritual of ordination. Although it is not officially a part of Methodist doctrine (see Chapter 3), and is often contested, many church officials seem to believe that during this ritual the minister is ontologically altered—that is, changed in his or her very being, and thus created as a very different kind of person to those who are lay.

This overwhelming change to the nature of the individual is most frequently talked about in terms of a radical change in identity. Indeed, traditionally, it appears that being a Methodist minister provided ordained people’s primary identity, and almost completely encompassed their sense of self. While this institutional ideal may have been more or less achievable during the period in

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38 Towler and Coxon (1979:119) have earlier made the point that the use of the term “formation” to describe the training of a Roman Catholic boy at a seminary signified that the experience was designed to “embrace every aspect of his person” and to create a very particular kind of person.
which church officials worked upon relatively unformed, young, single men who were resident together in strictly timetabled monastery-like colleges, recent changes to the clientele of the colleges, and the introduction of alternative forms of training, have radically altered the nature of the changes which are possible. Ministerial students now include a wide range of men and women, many of whom are in their middle years, have already established themselves in a career or profession and are married with families. They have thus a whole range of well-established identities and sets of relationships that their greatly reduced time in colleges or on non-residential courses may not surmount in the traditional fashion. Moreover, as I described for the candidating process, many students and ministers now have a strong sense of self as being different from the institutional role they learn to play and this continues into training and calls into question the old model of the all-encompassing ministerial identity.

Yet, despite the challenges to it, the old model of understanding the process as a change in total identity appears still to be used both by institutional officials and by many students. In this, and also in the description of a disjunction between self and the role played, there are similarities with Goffman’s ([1961] 1991) model of the total institution. There are consequently dangers in using Goffman’s work here, since the folk model and analysis become difficult to separate. However, I find that the latter still provides a useful means of understanding the dynamics of the theological college.

In expounding the model of the total institution, Goffman’s main aim was, by drawing on his observation of life in a mental hospital, to present a theory of how the adult self may be changed to take on a new identity. He viewed total institutions as “forcing houses for changing persons”, and argued that the all-encompassing nature of the institution in which all aspects of life were conducted in the same sphere, was central to how these changes in identity were effected (Goffman [1961] 1991:22). Goffman’s work on total institutions has been soundly criticised on the one hand for being too vague and generally applicable (Perry 1974), and on the other hand for failing to be borne out by the reality of various empirical test cases (Manning 1992:116, Perry 1974:345-47, Davies 1989). Nevertheless, the work, when taken as a Weberian ideal type (as
Goffinan ([1961] 1991:17) himself suggested, can function as a useful heuristic device by which to gain insights into the nature of an organisation such as the theological college, and it has already been used in this way to a limited extent by Towler and Coxon in their study of Anglican clergy (1979).

Goffinan’s work on total institutions has also been heavily criticised because of his often-confused ideas of self and identity (Burns 1992:211). Moreover, while his description of how, through “underlife” activities such as the pursuit of officially illegal activity, some in total institutions maintain a sense of selfhood beyond the grasp of the organisation, bears some resemblance to what may have occurred in the past in the theological college, it provides an inadequate analysis of what is now occurring for many students (Goffinan [1961] 1991:280). From my observations, it emerges that some aspiring ministers, especially older candidates and women, often now regard ministry as one identity or role which they learn to play among many, and alongside this they maintain a sense of self that is far from being residual in the way Goffinan seems to suggest in Asylums ([1961] 1991). Yet, Goffinan himself has provided in an earlier work ideas which can assist in the analysis of these recent developments. In The presentation of self in everyday life Goffinan used an extended theatrical metaphor, and talked more of role playing than of identity, arguing that “everyone is always and everywhere, more or less consciously, playing a role” (1959 [1969]:17). While I join Goffinan’s critics in rejecting what seems to be his idea of the self as a cynical manipulator (Manning 1992:44–45), always consciously acting out roles from motives of personal gain, Goffinan’s earlier metaphor can shed light on various aspects of the Methodist situation. In particular, this model highlights the corporate or team nature of role-playing, which is shared by colleagues in the professions and often learnt through the college experience. In this way, Goffman promotes a consideration of the changes which occur in terms of the relationships which develop, although he does not go far enough in considering the nature of these relationships. I contend that what is occurring at college must be understood in terms of both the learning of a role and the developing of particular kinds of relationships, as well as a change in identity.
Among the most important of the relationships which develop during ministerial formation are those between church officials and ministerial candidates. Goffman's analysis of the echelonic nature of the relationship between staff and inmates in a total institution is useful for understanding how the ministerial hierarchy exercises power over students in an often negative and coercive fashion. However, while the total institution has often been regarded as "essentially oppressive and opposed to the individual" (Davies 1989:79), more positive and life-enhancing experiences have been documented, such as in women's sanatoriums in Japan and Buddhist monasteries in Thailand (cited in Davies 1989). Indeed, as I will show, many find the time in theological college to be empowering, not least because they become incorporated into the ministerial hierarchy.

An analysis of the changes which occur in terms of power can be further facilitated by the employment of Bourdieu's (1991) well-known categories of different kinds of capital. For Bourdieu, there are various kinds of capital or interests over which individuals struggle in order to maximise their possession. While these interests include economic capital, there are also interests in cultural capital (knowledge, skills and other cultural acquisitions), social capital (valued relations with significant others) and symbolic capital (prestige, reputation, and social honour). Although I find this theory to be useful here, the dimension of "conscious, calculative decision-making" it implies in the individual's rational acquisition of capital (Jenkins 1992:87) is not entirely accepted.

Furthermore, the time spent in college, and the rituals of "reception into full-connexion" and "ordination" which mark the final stage of incorporation into the ministry, can also be viewed as rites of passage, which, as Bourdieu (1991:117) has noted, separate off those undergoing them from those who will never undergo them and empower the former. Thus, through the process of training at theological college and the final rituals of "institution", social difference between ministers and laity is, as I show, created and legitimated. Yet, contrary to Bourdieu's description of the dynamic between lay and ordained (see p. 18f), the situation in Methodism is one where the leaders and those led are both actively, and often even consciously, involved in maintaining the office and power of the
minister, and this reality can be seen to be very powerfully expressed in these final Methodist rituals. Indeed, I end by arguing that the role of ministry, which can helpfully be thought of as an office in the sense that it involves restricted access to scarce resources (Goody 1966:171), depends like so many other high offices on the active co-operation and involvement of all the members of the society. In so arguing I return to the older anthropological theories of Jack Goody (1966) and Meyer Fortes (1962).

4.2 Methodist theological colleges as “forcing houses for changing persons”

You stay in the warm womb of Wesley House as long as you can.

Advice from a previous student, herself forced to be “born” as a minister somewhat prematurely

At the present time there are a variety of ways in which Methodist ministers can be trained, including residential training at a theological college, participation in a non-residential training course, and a method which combines time spent working in a circuit with more traditional modes of academic training. With regard to the first of these modes, there are six colleges or residential centres where training occurs in England, and most now have some involvement with or share facilities with the training centres of other denominations. The material presented here is focused entirely on the theological colleges, rather than on any other form of training, and has come largely from the five years which I have spent living and sometimes working in Wesley House, Cambridge. For comparative purposes, and to benefit from the fresh insights which often come from distance, I made a short visit to Wesley College, Bristol, where I spent time observing and interviewing students. In addition to these areas of fieldwork, some additional information and insights have been gleaned from the four hour-long documentary programmes produced by the BBC concerning ministerial training at Queen’s College, Birmingham in 1996. Although I have closely observed numerous members of staff, and spent time talking with a few, my position within the college as a student minister means that the material largely reflects the perspective of the students.
4.2.1 The college as total institution

The theological colleges operate as total institutions in terms of providing the setting for the normally separated spheres of their members' work, leisure and domestic provision (Goffman [1961] 1991:17). While, despite a claim to the contrary (Ranson, Hinings and Bryman 1977:46), the colleges each have their own distinctive atmospheres, theological ethos and identities, there is much in terms of structures which is shared. At both Bristol and Cambridge, new batches of students are received each September and most people are expected to move to live in the colleges. Single students are allocated their own bedrooms but share kitchens, bathroom and often living rooms with other students. Married students and their families live in college flats, likewise becoming neighbours. In several of the colleges all the students are obliged to eat certain meals together and many share most of their leisure interests and social life with college friends.

Members of both the staff and student communities sometimes acknowledge the withdrawn nature of the college life and talk in terms of its being "some sort of unreal world". Indeed, even though in comparison to prisons and mental hospitals there are very few physical barriers or rules separating the members of Methodist theological colleges from the outside world, in reality once all of the timetabled work and other obligatory activities are undertaken, a student is not left with much time or energy for mixing with those outside the college. In a recent anthropological study of medical training (Sinclair 1997), a similar situation for medical students has been noted. Sinclair suggests that, while medical students do not live in an entirely physically bounded institution, their conceptual world is limited by the all-encompassing nature of the task with which they are involved (Sinclair 1997:15)

Goffman ([1961] 1991:17) has described how, in the total institution, all the aspects of life are conducted under the "same single authority" and co-ordinated as part of a "rational plan" which is "purportedly designed to fulfil the official aims of the institution". In the theological college, the single and final authority is held by the "Oversight Committee", which represents the Methodist...
Conference. However, on a day-to-day basis this authority is enacted by the principal and his staff who to a large extent operate in the hierarchical fashion described by Goffman of the echelons in a total institution. In the colleges the oversight committees are “charged with the total welfare of students” (Bristol College, Handbook 1996), and the shared rational plan is, of course, that of producing ministers for the church. The inmates in this case share in this goal, and this generates a motivation to do the work prescribed within the college and to please the staff.

Within the colleges the power of the ministerial staff over the students is based largely on their positions within academic, bureaucratic and sacred hierarchies. Since many of the staff in theological colleges have undertaken doctorates and further degrees, their role is legitimated not only by the church which has appointed them, but also by the academy, and indeed by the wider society. Thus, they can be thought to be of a higher rank than most of the inmates, as Goffman ([1961] 1991:112) has observed of other total institutions. Indeed, new students, who are often acutely conscious of their lack of academic skills and knowledge, must rely on staff for guidance about their courses. As Paul Killworth describes for the parallel situation in the training of army recruits, this can promote the creation of emotional attachments to staff upon whom the often-vulnerable new recruits may come to depend (Killworth 1997:29).

The bureaucratic control of the staff over the students has already been established through their alignment with the church officials who conduct the candidating process. During their time at college students are sometimes made aware of the fact that their suitability is still being tested, and in theory the Oversight Committee, as guided by the staff, has the power to discontinue a student or insist that he or she must remain for further training. However, the basic bureaucratic model of administering the welfare of the students is

39 For details see Appendix 4.1.1.
40 For further details of the Oversight Committee see Appendix 4.1.2.
41 Some, such as Tom Burns and Christie Davies, have since stressed the importance of the rational and bureaucratic nature of Goffman's total institutions, and Davies suggests that it is important to do so in order to distinguish them from other totalising social arrangements, such as the extended family in parts
tempered by a kind of paternalism. This paternalism can be seen to resemble that found in the army, where Killworth (1997:157–58), while noting that the usual sense of the term includes the use of family imagery to control employees, has gone on to suggest that “paternalism can also be seen as a structure that sees some personal rights absorbed by authority in return for a degree of responsibility for the individual being recognised by that authority”. There is only a little family imagery used within the theological colleges, yet the college staff, and especially the college principals, are clearly paternalistic in this extended sense, since they often show concern for students’ financial and emotional needs and the student in turn loses the right to keep such subjects private. The degree of paternalistic power which the staff hold over students is affected by the extent of the students’ resources, both social and financial, which is usually much greater for those who are older and have already had a career or position.

As in the army (Killworth 1997:158), the college staff are responsible for the day-to-day disciplining of students as well as their welfare, and in this case it is they who advise the Oversight Committee regarding the student’s progress. College staff are also concerned for the career development of students again as with training officers in the army and the college principal in particular plays an active and influential role in the finding of future “stations” or postings for the new ministers. The superior position of the academic staff is also enhanced by their membership in the sacred hierarchy as evinced by the fact that they alone administer Communion within the college and preach at the main college rituals. All of this is fundamental to the establishing of the marked echelons and the asymmetry of power relations in the college which, as Goffman stressed, are so important within total institutions in bringing about changes in identity ([1961] 1991:118–19).

However, while to begin with students are often in awe of the staff, using their full titles, treating them with great respect and being anxious to secure their good


42 See Appendix 4.1.3 for further details.
opinion, the echelons in the theological college are not as impermeable as Goffman found elsewhere ([1961] 1991:19–20). In these establishments the academic staff are often also inmates themselves and subject to the institutional rules. Also, unlike the situation in many other total institutions, the staff are attempting to an extent to make the inmates into what they are—that is, Methodist ministers and theologians. Almost all students become ministers, and some even make the move across the echelons to become members of academic staff. Moreover, close relationships often develop between staff and certain students. Furthermore, while information is often held by staff about students, which enhances their power, and while decisions about students are often made between the staff in the student’s absence, efforts are usually made to consult first with the students.43

4.2.2 Challenging and removing the old identity

When you come to Queen’s they take you apart and re-make you.

Comment made by a student in Queen’s College, Birmingham

Initially on entering the college, most students have various experiences of loss and this relates to their changing sense of self.44 As established in the last chapter, the ministerial candidate has already, through the candidating procedure, undergone the “admission procedures” which have invaded their informational preserve and begun to change their identity while also preparing them to take on a new identity in the total institution (Goffinan [1961] 1991:26). In leaving their old homes and communities to move into the colleges, the student ministers have been further removed from the stable social arrangements which enabled them to have a “tolerable conception” of themselves, and they have also been stripped of the roles they played in their home world (Goffinan [1961] 1991:23). This is especially notable with regard to the church communities from which they have come, and many students described to me how they no longer knew how to act

43 Further details of the way in which staff and students relate to each other can be seen in the account of a day in the life of the college in Appendix 4.1.4.

44 The Anglican priest Peter Owen Jones has written an account of his experiences as a student in an Anglican theological college. This account describes experiences of loss and discomfort similar to those reported here of Methodist students (Jones 1996).
when they returned to their home church. It was also reported that church members did not know how to relate to the students, who consequently felt they were “in limbo”.

For many people, entering college entails the painful loss of an old identity and status. One student described how she felt her old identity was being “peeled off” her “like some sort of skin”. Lesley, a candidate who has been mentioned before, observed: “The first few days I was tearful in college. I said: ‘I’ve lost my identity’”. She added: “For a few weeks you are a nothing—feel stupid”. Goffinan has noted how experiences of mortification are often part of the process whereby change is brought about within the total institution, and in the theological colleges some students told me of how they felt embarrassed or upset because they did not “know the rules” or made mistakes. One spoke of how he felt like a “two-year old”, and others described how they found the constant negotiating of their timetable and activities with the staff to be restrictive or invasive. This accords with Goffinan’s ([1961] 1991:47) observation that those in total institutions feel demoted in terms of the “age-grade” and feel humiliated largely because of a loss of “adult” self-determination and autonomy. A further breaking down of the old sense of self in the college comes with what is sometimes referred to by both staff and students as “de-skilling”, whereby the skills which the students have acquired in their previous employment are ignored and treated as worthless by staff and sometimes by other students. Some staff have been heard to stress the importance of leaving behind these old abilities and have seemed keen to create a disjunction with the student minister’s previous role, thus reflecting the idea that they believe themselves to be creating a totally new kind of person.

The response of students to these various aspects of the stripping-off of their old selves differs greatly, with some deeply resenting what they experience as a loss of self-worth and self-control.45 Yet, on the whole, since student ministers are committed to the generally shared institutional goal of becoming ministers, they want to act as the staff would have them do and generally seek to co-operate

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45 Further details of this can be found in Appendix 4.1.5.
with the changes suggested by the staff. In this, the theological college again differs from other total institutions, and Goffman ([1961] 1991:50) himself noted that those entering religious institutions often wished to be stripped and “cleansed of their personal will” and could experience detachment from their old self as a positive release. Something of this is clearly evident in the way in which those entering convents, as described by Campbell-Jones (1979:30), seem to positively embrace their new position and all the aspects of self-denial which go with it. However, the situation in the theological colleges is strikingly different, since most student ministers will usually, at some point, angrily contest the nature of the changes and there is often now great frustration with such aspects as de-skilling. In this, it is possible to detect a valuing of the individual sense of self over and against the institutional ideal, and this in itself provides further evidence of the Methodist balancing of egalitarianism and hierarchy. In addition to reflecting the broader culture of their institutions, the difference between the situation of those in the convent and the student ministers may also relate to the fact that, for the former, the rules and debasements are an end in themselves and part of a permanent role, whereas for the latter the procedures are a means to an end.

4.2.3 Creating and putting-on the new identity

The new identity, which is initially that of “student minister”, is created by a variety of means. Most obviously, a major part is played by the official content of the training, since the attending of timetabled lectures and classes and the reading of academic theology takes up a great deal of the inmates’ time at college. In both Bristol and Cambridge there are a wide range of options which can be taken up by students, depending on their academic ability and the time available in the college, which varies from one to seven years. Students in both places can pursue undergraduate and research degrees through the neighbouring universities, or in-house courses taught by staff from the college and other nearby theological colleges, which are also validated by universities. Subjects include the more traditional ones, such as biblical languages, church history, biblical studies and theology, but there are also newer topics such as mental health, sociology of religion and ecumenics (that is, the study of inter-church
relations). In addition the training includes mandatory courses on the theology and practice of ministry as well as practical work in churches, classes in voice production, preaching and shadowing ministers. However, on the whole, the greatest emphasis is given to academic theology, and students often express anxieties about what they frequently consider an inappropriate bias.

In terms of the formal aspects of creating the minister, there is much emphasis on the creating of a new identity. This can be clearly seen in the place given to the discussion of the 1993 report to the Methodist Conference concerning student status and dress (Methodist Church 1993:200–07), which is one of the first items to be discussed in each new academic year at Wesley House. The report also suggests some content for the new identity. It proposes that the student should be given the title of “student minister”, and further advises that the use of the title “Reverend” and of clerical dress are “not a matter of status, or even of privilege: they are rather a mark of identity, both for the individual concerned and for the church and society” and should only be used when students are fulfilling ministerial duties (205). It is significant that the Methodist authorities felt it necessary to deny what is often the social reality—namely, that the clerical collar is a matter of status and of privilege. This, I argue, again reflects Methodism’s ambivalence towards ministerial hierarchy. The fact that clerical dress is an issue for discussion at all is further evidence of the central Methodist tensions.

My own observation suggests that it is usually about a year before student ministers start to wear clerical dress, and it is often related to the student minister’s embarking on an “attachment”. This is an extended period of time spent working with a minister, when the students enter more fully into the ministerial role, as reflected in changes in their dress and deportment.46 During their time in college, students exhibit a variety of attitudes to clerical dress, reflecting the diverse ways in which Methodist student ministers negotiate the central Methodist tension between egalitarianism and hierarchy. The clerical collar is a very clear marker of difference and, as Will Keenan in his sociological analysis of religious dress has suggested, symbolises among other things, the

46For further details see Appendix 4.1.6.
"purified body-self given over to divine service" and also a dualistic world of the sacred and profane (Keenan 1999:392). It is consequently not surprising that those who are uncomfortable with hierarchy question the wearing of it.

At a college discussion in Wesley House on the wearing of clerical dress, several of the students expressed a concern that the wearing of the clerical collar would create an unnecessary barrier between themselves and their congregations and align them with the "establishment", while others were fully supportive of "declaring ministerial identity" in this way. At Bristol, one student told me: "Some wear collars in college and prance about—others think we shouldn’t wear them at all and it’s about status". Then she added, echoing the Conference report: "to me its just a uniform like the police—it’s not something of status". It was perhaps significant that the speaker was in her third year, since it appears to me that most students become more accepting of the wearing clerical dress over their time at college. This indicates what I contend can be described as a movement from a Methodist habitus to the slightly more hierarchical ministerial habitus.

The creation of a ministerial habitus, with its greater emphasis on hierarchy, is also affected by the informal processes of socialisation which occur in the college. In their socialisation, students are greatly influenced by the staff, who often provide the chief role models for ordained ministry. The model of ministry presented by the staff is one in which the ordained figure is the final and most powerful authority within the religious community and the key figure in all the main college rituals. In my observation these rituals tend to be of a "High" liturgical nature with greater emphasis placed on the priestly role of the minister than many of the students have previously experienced in the churches where they have been members. In terms of college government, while there are policies of collaboration between staff and students, the underlying pattern is one of ministerial dominance.47 Since the model of social life which they are imbibing at college is one in which there is a strong asymmetry of power between the echelons, and a semblance of democracy without the reality of it, it

47 See Appendix 4.1.7 for further details.
would seem likely that this is the model which the new ministers will tend to take into circuit with them.

In the embodying of a ministerial habitus, and the development of a new sense of ministerial identity, students may be influenced almost as much by their peers as by the staff. This is a facet in which the theological college departs to some extent from Goffman’s model. While he placed much emphasis on the divided echelons in total institutions, Goffman ([1961] 1991:57), like Turner ([1969] 1974) in his treatment of rites of passage, also put a great deal of stress on the egalitarian nature of neophyte communities. However, in the Methodist theological college and in the Anglican college, as described by Jones (1996), there is much division within the student community. In particular, a degree of competition is introduced when certain students wish to become members of staff or to secure better positions in their future career and so attempt to show themselves as being more intelligent and capable than others. Sinclair (1997:27) has identified a similar element of competition among medical students, and also makes the same criticism of Turner. In the theological college the differences may lead to the development of “informal hierarchies”, much as Killworth (1997:60) describes for the army platoon in the initial training of recruits, and it is clear that in both institutions some recruits try to affect the behaviour of others.

While many students may overtly reject the influence of such hierarchies, it seems likely that ministerial socialisation is significantly affected by peer pressure in general. The very fact of living with other students in the college means that, much as Goffman ([1961] 1991:35–36) has identified for other total institutions, the students’ boundaries are invaded through the sharing of space and through being forced into new, unchosen, social relationships. In both Bristol and Cambridge students spoke to me of their initial feelings of “living in a goldfish bowl” and one person commented: “for the first term or more you feel on view and have to act in a certain way”. More directly, the behaviour of students is affected by peer review. This occurs informally when students take their turn in leading the daily service of prayers in the colleges and receive criticism or approbation from their fellow inmates, and more formally in preaching classes, at which a student’s leading of worship is appraised by groups.
of students and staff\textsuperscript{48}. In such contexts student ministers seek to set up boundaries as to what is or is not acceptable ministerial practice. In so doing they are creating and reinforcing rules for acceptable behaviour which will affect the future practice of prospective colleagues. In this way they are behaving much in the manner generally identified for members of a profession (Russell 1980).

During the time in college, much pressure is placed on the students by the staff and by their peers to adhere to the officially prescribed way of life. Just as Goffman ([1961] 1991:51) described for other total institutions, the theological colleges have their own rules, both explicit and implicit, concerning what it means to be an acceptable member of the theological college\textsuperscript{49}. The explicit rules concern the attending of services and meals and are referred to as the college “discipline” at Wesley House and as the more monastic-sounding “Rule of life” at Wesley College, Bristol. The more implicit rules generally concern what it means to be a good “community member”, and at both colleges there is much emphasis on all students and spouses playing active roles in maintaining the life of the institution. I have, in fact, often heard college staff place much emphasis on the importance of community life in training and use this as an argument against training on non-residential courses, in which, as one principal suggested, “character would not be dealt with”. Significantly, this comment indicates a belief that an important aspect of ministerial formation is making fundamental changes to the nature of the person.

The keeping of both explicit and implicit rules may be rewarded by the obtaining of certain privileges. In the theological college, these “privileges” seem to include the establishing of more positive relationships with the staff, the gaining of opportunities to lead classes, the gaining of access to and financial support for a desired course of study, or the acquiring of a suitable “station” (i.e. ministerial appointments). Goffman ([1961] 1991:51) has proposed that, after the “stripping process”, “it is largely the privilege system that provides a

\textsuperscript{48} Peter Owen Jones (1996:58) has also noted the way in which students scrutinize each other’s leading of worship.

\textsuperscript{49} For further details of both implicit and explicit rules see Appendix 4.1.8.
framework for personal reorganization”. However, while this may be so for
some of the younger students in the theological college, there are many who
manage to maintain a different sense of value. Indeed, while many seem to adapt
to the keeping of the rules and become more compliant over their time in college,
and most at least compromise and keep to the rules for much of the time, some
privately resist the college rules and develop what Goffinan refers to as an
“underlife”.

The nature of the echelons in the colleges, in which staff have a significant
degree of power over the students in terms of affecting both their present and
future quality of life, results in a situation whereby students will often appear
publicly compliant but in private cultivate subordinate ideas and practices. This
is apparent when students find allies within the student body with whom they can
give vent to opinions or ideas of which they would not speak in front of the staff.
Private areas of discussion which are not generally presented to the staff include
sex and sexuality, crises of faith and family relationships. Officially
unacceptable behaviour includes direct criticism of the staff, heavy drinking,
smoking and swearing. I have observed how student behaviour may change
radically when members of staff are around and how students will often say to
each other: “this is what I really believe, but of course I couldn’t say that to the
staff”. Moreover, I have heard several students talk to each other about what
they will or will not tell members of staff or members of the Oversight
Committee.

While all of this activity can be understood in terms of what Goffinan calls an
institutional “underlife”, which in Goffinan’s terms helps the individual maintain
a separate sense of self, it is also helpful to borrow from his earlier work
(Goffinan 1959 [1969]) and to describe it as a kind of back-stage behaviour
which enables the inmate to perform the role of the student minister. It is in the
back-stage that teams of people rehearse together and prepare to give the
presentation that is shown on the public front-stage. In the colleges, it is possible
to see how small teams of people develop who support one another’s way of
playing the role of student minister, which in itself can be seen as a rehearsal for
playing the role of minister. Furthermore, these small back-stage teams of
friends may support the nurturing of alternative ways of playing the role to that which is officially acceptable in the college. These teams or groups of friends are often united either by sharing a phase in life, such as being married with children or single, or by the sharing of strongly held theological allegiances which divide them from other students. The most significant of the theological differences in the colleges is between charismatic evangelicals and liberals, but some also distinguish themselves by their more radical theology, while others have a sacramentalist or High Church allegiance. The sharing together in backstage or underlife behaviour, especially in such officially unacceptable behaviour as drinking or swearing, serves to forge links between certain groups of students, just as has been noted for groups of working-class men whose swearing marks off the boundaries of their group, as well as marking familiarity within the group (Jenkins 1999:111, drawing on Dennis, Henriques, and Slaughter [1956] 1969). Within Methodism, the relationships formed between those of a similar outlook while at college often last throughout life and serve to support the approach which is taken to playing the role of minister.

The existence of alternative ways of being within the college is both counteracted and promoted by the staff. The staff, and indeed most of the more orthodox students at theological college, are quick to ratify their beliefs and practices by reference to the will of God and the decisions of the Methodist Conference, and this makes them difficult to challenge by others with alternative views. As already mentioned, Goffinan has noted the different nature of religious institutions in terms of the collaboration of inmates with the goals of the institution. He even went so far as to argue, with regard to inmates in some political and evangelical groups, that: “In telling him what he should do and why he should want to do this, the organization presumably tells him all that he may be” (Goffman [1961] 1991:165). While there may be an extent to which this is true in theory of Methodist theological colleges, students do vary greatly in the extent to which they accept the institutional identity. There is, in fact, a degree to which staff encourage students to maintain particular interests outside of the institution and facilitate the pursuit of individual courses of study, thereby promoting the growth of alternative ideas within the college. Thus, within certain parameters, the existence of an underlife of unorthodox beliefs and
practices is tolerated, which is a further reflection of the nature of Methodism itself.

In fact, far more threatening to the institutional model than the weak kind of underlife just described, is the way in which so many of the inmates live in family units within the college. As Goffman ([1961] 1991:22) observed: “the formation of households provides a structural guarantee that total institutions will not be without resistance”. While in Goffman’s terms it is possible to see how this promotes the maintenance of a sense of self over and above the institutional identity, it is perhaps also possible to see that the existence of family units within the colleges means that many students maintain their previous roles and relationships. These relationships then compete with the new relationships forged in college and prevent the creation of a totally new kind of person and the taking on of ministry as an all-embracing identity. In very practical terms, this can be seen in the occasions when students with family commitments do not attend mandatory college events and argue that their family responsibilities must come first.

Despite all the variations in how students relate to the college staff and to each other, there is much of the college culture and life which is generally shared, and certain changes which are shared. Both Wesley House and Wesley College are full of in-house traditions, stories and a particular language or use of acronyms which newcomers must learn. Each year group shares a cycle of events and of training and the whole college community moves together through the predictable rhythm of the year from September to June. At both colleges there are special services and social events to mark the beginning of the year and the incorporation of a new intake of students. Each term or “college time” is also marked at beginning and end by special rituals and meals. As already noted, a key time of change which all students experience is that of being on “attachment” and working closely with another minister. A further significant point in the gestation of the minister occurs each year when, in the January before they are due to leave, students are told of their first appointment. Once

50 See Appendix 4.1.9 for further details of the college culture and ritual events.
these “stations” are known and the students have expressed their consent, a map of the British Isles is posted on the college walls indicating where each of the students has been sent. This is a pivotal moment in the life of the whole college: for those who are stationed it marks a shift in their focus away from college and on to their future role, and for those who are still to be stationed it is a strong reminder of their future. The end of a student’s time at college is marked by a special leaving service, and many students often talk of these services as extremely moving occasions on which tears are shed and emotions run high.

4.2.4 The new identity contested

It seems hard to credit that after at least two years of living in the total institution that is the Methodist theological college, some inmates leave proclaiming that they are “still the same” as when they went in. Indeed, some enter college stating that with candidating over “the hard work is done” and they need change little. This attitude to college has been acknowledged as a problem by connexional figures, and one senior official spontaneously recounted to me her own experience of hearing ministers say that theological college “hadn’t changed them”.

Throughout the history of theological colleges, there have been those who have questioned the necessity of change being brought about by such education. Methodism’s first college, the Theological Institution, which was founded in London in 1835, was opened amid much controversy. In the college’s first annual report it was restated that, according to “holy writ, [...] only the Lord the Spirit can make men ‘able Ministers of the New Testament’” ([Anon] 1836:211). The first theological tutor, John Hannah, accepted that he was not in the business of making ministers, since the church had already confirmed the student’s call to ministry. Rather, he proposed, his task was to “train the mind and teach it how to use its own powers” (cited in McQuiban 1995:104).

Further evidence of this Protestant and egalitarian emphasis on the fittingness of the called individual to serve God can be found in the contemporary situation. It seems to be particularly true of those who have already been paid to work full-
time in the church as "lay workers", fulfilling what amounts for many to the role of the minister. Moreover, the resistance of these people to change may even more directly reflect the Methodist emphasis on egalitarianism. Something of this was suggested to me by a student who, having earlier been overheard to state: "theological college won't change me", later told me that since he had already worked as a lay worker he felt that the kind of egalitarian approach which he had taken in that role would be more appropriate for when he was a minister than anything he was likely to encounter at theological college.

College staff are often anxious to make sure that students undergo what they see as the appropriate changes and become different to lay people. This is reflected in the way in which some staff, for example at Wesley House, for a time resisted the pressure to have Methodist lay people study alongside student ministers. This strong view of difference between laity and clergy was powerfully illustrated when one member of staff expressed his anxieties to me that a new intake of students just wanted to remain as local preachers, only now being paid to continue working as they had, rather than changing to become theologians as he thought they should. His conception of the nature of ministry and of training was evident when he added: "Ministers have got to be mediators of transcendence. How are they going to do that if they just think ministry is about mowing the lawn or whatever dirty jobs?" He then went on to add: "If they don't learn to think theologically—to manoeuvre theologically—they'll end up useless to everyone".

As this quotation reveals, and my long-term observations substantiate, learning to "think theologically" is perceived by church officials to be one of the paramount elements in becoming a minister, and it explicitly entails the learning of academic theology. Indeed, many of the students who come to theological college are keen to learn academic theology and to adapt to the orthodox model of the minister as academic theologian and hierarchical priest with which they are presented. However, quite a number are anxious that what they learn in

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51 For details of this, and of how other changes in theological education threaten the old hierarchical model of ministry see Appendix 4.1.10.
college will make them less able to relate to the people with whom they work. One young student commented on the changes in his preaching style which he suggested the experience of college had brought about saying: “Now I’m losing people because of ((my)) training—people wonder, “what’s he on about?”

This problem of the discrepancy between theological expert and lay person is something which has been identified by social anthropologists as existing particularly in those world religions with bodies of sacred written texts. Here, as Gilbert Lewis has expressed it, the elite who are most practised in the reading of the texts “have authority, but they do not speak for the average man or woman, or the folk tradition” (Lewis 1994:568). There are those within Methodism who have struggled to resist such a hierarchical divide. Some of the local church ministers whom I interviewed in Bedford argued that training would be better done in the context of the local church to stop new ministers becoming “out of touch” with their members. Countering the argument that student ministers should become expert theologians from a different angle, I heard students on several occasions propose that ordinary members of the congregation are equally “theologians”, with a right to express an equally valued opinion on matters of belief and God. By so arguing, I suggest that these students are again reflecting the Methodist value of egalitarianism.

Many of the students leaving college who do perceive that they have changed are anxious that they have not changed in appropriate ways. A frequently voiced concern that the emphasis on academic training has not adequately prepared them to “do the job” also reveals the student perception that their role is more about performing specific tasks rather than about ontology. In addition, there is some confusion about the nature of these tasks, since I have also on several occasions heard leavers suggest that they are not even sure what “the job” entails. Here again, concerns regarding the lack of practical preparation for ministerial work have a long history within the Methodist Church (McQuiban 1995, Rowe 1985, Taylor 1979, Methodist Church 1962, Methodist Church 1965), and in my observation they are still often expressed at both circuit and at
One reason for these concerns may be that a significant part of ministry involves being a member of a hierarchical bureaucracy and having certain administrative and management skills, and very little of this is taught at college.

In addition to these criticisms of ministerial training, the old theological college models of the minister as academic theologian and hierarchical priest are receiving a fresh round of criticisms from the many women who since 1973 have been training as ministers. A questionnaire conducted in 1994 of women who had trained in the previous five years, and those still training at that time, revealed that only nine per cent of the women saw themselves as “theologians” or as “priests”, although these models, along with “enabler”, “servant” and “pastor” were the dominant models of ministry presented in the colleges ([Anon] 1995:5–8). It is my observation that many women are searching for new ways of being ministers and are frustrated that such role models are not largely available in the theological colleges.

Moreover, many women are also not able to embrace the role of minister as their overriding identity, and on numerous occasions I have heard women talk about juggling roles and balancing up the calls upon them. Anne, a young woman at Bristol, spoke for a good number of women when she expressed her reflections on the problem in this way:

I find I have to work very hard at balancing roles; I have to work very hard at being student, trainee minister, being wife, being a mum. At times I wonder if you actually spend any time being just you.

Although Anne’s comment seems to point back to Goffman’s suggestion that there is somehow a private self that lies unseen behind the public selves, this statement also indicates that for her, as I suggest for many women, there are

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52 Examples of the concerns expressed are presented in Appendix 4.1.11.

53 Shaw (1996) is too simplistic in arguing that women merely adapt the role of minister to concentrate more upon the pastoral work for which they have a leaning because of their gender.
many identities, or many roles to be played. A good number of men, especially those who are older and have already played a variety of roles, also view ministry as only one part of their identity, or one role among many. This in part reflects changes in the age, and life experience of the people upon whom the college officials are now working. An indication of what it was like to train thirty years ago was given by one of the ministers whom I interviewed in Bedford, who stated: “((When I trained)) I was nearly, not quite, but nearly a blank sheet of paper to work on and I didn’t have much of a personality then”. Moreover, the change to an image of ministry as one role rather than a total identity is also related to developments more widely in the professions. In recent times, there has been a general change in the professions from a situation in which the “distinction between person and occupational role” was minimised (Russell 1980:15), to one in which distance is being created between the professionals and their roles. How this is affecting the practice of ministry is discussed more fully in the next chapter.

Some female Methodist ministers are also very conscious of the fact that the various roles which they play cannot be held completely separately but affect each other. Consequently, they suggest that how they play their role as minister will be influenced by their gender, and by the diversity of other roles which they play, all of which reflect and affect their sense of self. The idea that the person is not just a “mini-agent, standing behind and directing various role performances” has been suggested by Anthony Giddens (1988:259). In countering Goffman (1959 [1969]) on this point Giddens advances an idea of a more integrated self which “consists in an awareness of identity which simultaneously transcends specific roles and provides an integrating means of relating them to personal biography”. While Giddens’s conception of a more integrated self is helpful here, he still, I suggest, places too much emphasis on the highly individualistic concept of identity and ignores the fact that roles are played out in relationships with other people. The model of self with which the college officials are working likewise places too much emphasis on identity and ignores the fact that ministry is largely about relationships. This is yet another reason for the experience of many students being that what they have learnt at college is inadequate for the practice of ministry in the circuits.
4.2.5 So what has changed?

While many students contest the transformations which are officially meant to have occurred at college, there can be little doubt that all have undergone important alterations and had their position within the organisation changed. I suggest that the most significant changes have occurred through the experiences of living in the college as a total institution rather than as a result of the manifest content of the course curriculum. This argument is supported by the fact that, as also observed for Anglican institutions, the actual course content of what is studied varies greatly between students (Towler and Coxon 1979). Furthermore, in theological colleges, in sharp contrast to other training situations, such as in the army as described by Killworth (1997), very few specific skills are taught. Rather, what is taught is the practice of a more orthodox Methodist culture, which includes a greater emphasis on the hierarchical nature of ministry and which results in the embodying of a ministerial habitus.

As was discussed in Chapter 1, Bourdieu has described the changes which occur in those being trained for the professions in terms of the development of an appropriate habitus (Bourdieu 1991:176). In particular, he has described the way in which this works for bureaucratic political parties, who must train their political professionals and endow them with

the specialist skills and competencies which they will require in order to succeed. Above all, these professionals must acquire a practical sense or ‘feel’ for the game, that is a habitus attuned to the specific conditions of the political field (Bourdieu 1991:27).

The value of habitus for understanding the nature of changes which occur through “institutionalisation” has also been urged by Richard Jenkins (1992:179), and illustrated by Sinclair, who has analysed medical training in terms of the development of an appropriate habitus (Sinclair 1997). I contend that, at theological college, student ministers are likewise developing a set of dispositions for reacting appropriately, as church officials regard it, to the myriad practical situations that they will encounter in the course of their work as
ministers. Of course, some of the dispositions learnt are shared across the professions, such as an emphasis on "book learning" (Sinclair 1997:28), while others are specific to Methodist ministry.

Specifying the nature of the dispositions which are learnt in training is an extremely difficult exercise and one which moves us beyond the use of the concept of habitus as described by Bourdieu. In Chapter 2 I attempted to give some content to the Methodist habitus, but identified what I describe as core values rather than dispositions. The ministerial habitus builds on the already existing Methodist values, but involves some subtle though important shifts of emphasis. Of particular note is the greater emphasis placed on the power and authority of the ordained minister and of the priestly or sacred nature of ministry. Also, with regard to the Methodist value of favouring a particular kind of experiential religion, student ministers are likely to leave college with a broader practice of spirituality because of their contact with other denominations through training. The other key values of the work ethic, social action and hospitality remain largely the same. There is, of course, room for variation in how these ministerial dispositions are embodied in individual students since, as Sinclair (1997:20) has noted, this will be affected by each individual's own experience and 'style'. Indeed, while I propose that almost all student ministers will learn to act in a more hierarchical manner through their time in college, some will do so more than others.

While stressing the importance of the habitus and the "feel for the game", Bourdieu, as quoted above, also notes the importance to the professional of learning "specialist skills and competencies", and these too have a role to play in Methodist ministry. Drawing on Bourdieu (1991:14), I suggest that the acquirement of theology and the ancient languages constitutes a kind of cultural capital which can be used to help secure a more dominant position for the minister within the life of the local church. The training in theology clearly provides access to a scarce resource which is usually highly valued within the church. Furthermore, a good number of ministerial students find the time in college to be personally empowering since, often starting with little higher education, they are enabled to pursue university degrees and thus experience a
development in this generally acknowledged academic ranking. In addition, skills such as voice production and the techniques of communication and adult education, which are also taught, can also be regarded as further empowering the prospective ministers for their future role. Few students consciously set out with the rational objective to improve their position in this way. Rather, they are to an extent enacting their Methodist habitus. For, as noted earlier, self-improvement and education are highly valued within Methodism.

The experience of theological college can also be seen to bring about an increase in what Bourdieu calls “social capital”—that is, valued relations with significant others. The student minister makes important friendships with ministerial peers and, possibly more importantly still, also makes acquaintances with significant leaders within the Connexion when such leaders come to visit the college. However, in addition to the social and cultural capital which student ministers may have acquired at college, it is the acquisition of what Bourdieu calls “symbolic capital” which is of greatest importance. Bourdieu (1991:230) has suggested that the efficacy of the ministers’ words depends more on their position as authorised delegates of the institution, rather than on their actual ability with words, and it is this authorization which is meant by “symbolic capital”. Moreover, he has argued that “agents possess power in proportion to their symbolic capital”, which is indicated through clothing and through the ritual investment of the individual by the institution. The time at college can be viewed as a very lengthy ritual, and certainly a rite of passage, at the end of which the students have “been to theological college”, which marks them out from those who have not had this experience and provides a legitimation for their superior position. On leaving college, the student ministers are differently regarded by both local church members and by the connexional bureaucracy, all of whom now identify the leavers as ministers and treat them differently.
4.3 Probation: the total institution maintained in the outside world

Probation is really linked to still being on trial. You are still serving an apprenticeship if you like and you are not accepted fully until ordination.

Local church minister in Bedford commenting on probation

In this brief section on probation I draw upon official church materials, interviews with local church ministers and a limited number of conversations with probationers to illustrate the further changes which occur to candidates through this stage of ministerial formation.

The connexional officials and college staff contend that training and formation is not finished when the student leaves the college, but continues during the two years of probation. While the probationer is meant to have a lighter workload than a normal minister and a considerable degree of support and supervision from ministerial colleagues, many probationers have suggested to me that their “station” is as “heavy and demanding” as that of ordained ministers. Also, most ordinary church members do not understand the difference between a probationer and an ordained minister and so do not treat them any differently. Indeed, once in circuit, many probationers find that so many expectations are thrust upon them by the members of their churches that there is little space or time to develop their “own ideas and ways of working”. This experience of constantly responding to the demands of the lay people provides evidence of the manner in which the ministerial office is strongly determined by the expectations of ordinary church members and the fact that ministry is about relationships as much as about role.

Probation can be seen as an opportunity for the ecclesiastical officials to test whether or not individuals can maintain the official identity outside the walls of the total institution. In many ways the period of probation appears to be as

54 The official Church position is most clearly set out in the document given to student ministers prior to their stationing which is entitled “Probation and continuing ministerial development in the first five years of circuit ministry” (Howcroft and Simmonds 1998).
dominating and determining as the time spent in the college, since the probationer is still observed and assessed by church officials upon whom he or she is also greatly dependent. That individuals could be tightly bounded by a profession outside of the physical walls of an institution was suggested by Sinclair with regard to the training of medical students (Sinclair 1997:15), and applies very much to the experience of the Methodist probationer. Indeed, Foucault ([1975] 1991:211) has observed historically that control through surveillance outside of “closed apparatuses” could be extended by the spread of “disciplinary techniques out of institutions”.

When student ministers begin their transition to probationers, their relationship with the church develops and strengthens. The Methodist Church gives probationers their home, their salary, various payments in kind and a ready-made community in which to belong, as well as a role to play which can easily become all-encompassing. As with the situation in the theological college, this can be experienced as both empowering and disempowering. Many probationers enjoy the provision made for them by the church, especially after having been on student grants in the college. However, this provision makes the minister highly dependent upon the church, and I have been told by a connexional official that this results in some ministers who later wish to leave the ministry feeling “trapped”. Moreover, many find the constant demands of the job to be intrusive and as in the college some probationers struggle to resist the all-encompassing nature of the ministerial identity or role as it is presented to them.

Throughout this period, the appropriateness of probationers continues to be tested and they are very much subject to the authority of the ministerial hierarchy, which is greatly in evidence. In addition to having their competence in the ordinary ministerial work tested, probationers must give formal evidence of their continuing study of academic theology and other subjects, and of their cultural interests. They must submit themselves to the discipline and oversight of their superintendant minister, and appear before the chairman of the district and the district probationers committee, who interview them with regard to their

55 For further details see Appendix 4.2.
faith and ministerial development. They are also questioned and tested at the ministerial synod, and their progress in all spheres is reported to the connessional officials and the Conference.

As probationers, they are on the very bottom rung of the ministerial hierarchy and meet with the other probationers in their area for study and to go on retreat. Bonds form with these probationers, and with other ministerial colleagues, and are enhanced through experiences such as the special district service prior to their ordination, at which probationers must again give their "testimony". This public telling of their story allows them to express their new identity as ministers and also acts to signify their belonging to the category of minister. Finally, before attending the Conference at which they will undergo the rites of "reception into full-connexion" and ordination, all "ordinands", as they are then called, are directed by the connexional officials to attend a retreat of several days duration, where, separated from family and friends, they are again in intimate contact with other ministerial colleagues and together create and share the heightened emotional state of the pre-ordination period.

Over the two-year period as a probationer the individual becomes ever more invested in the role of minister. In terms of the tasks which they perform, there is no difference between the probationer and the ordained minister, since most accept the dispensation given by the Connexion which permits them to preside at Holy Communion, even though they are not yet ordained. This giving of permission for unordained ministers to conduct Communion services is out of keeping with other denominations, most especially with the Church of England, and many probationers who are influenced by ecumenism are coming to question this practice and the length of the probationary period. From my analysis of the situation, I contend that while on the one hand this practice can be seen yet again to reflect Methodism's particular resolution of the tensions between egalitarianism and hierarchy, it also serves as a means by which probationers become ever more committed to the role and are therefore less likely to abandon it. Ensuring the probationer's commitment is important for the church officials, since ordination is believed to be indelible, and should individual's undergo it and then decide they no longer wish to be ministers, this leaves the church in a
rather awkward position, since it blurs the boundaries between the categories of lay and ordained. Also, in pragmatic terms, having already invested so much financially in student ministers, the connexional officials are anxious to ensure that individuals remain as ministers.

The probationary period can thus be seen to strengthen the ministerial habitus and to emphasise the distinction between lay and ordained. As Bourdieu has put it: "The universally adopted strategy for effectively denouncing the temptation to demean oneself is to naturalise difference, to turn it into second nature through inculcation and incorporation in the form of the habitus" (Bourdieu 1991:123). Furthermore, Bourdieu has argued that severe and painful rites of initiation serve to bind individuals' sense of identity more closely with an institution and to make them less likely to leave it. It is possible to see how this lengthy and somewhat ambiguous period of "formation in ministry" functions in this way.

4.4 The final legitimation of the minister: reception into full-connexion and ordination

4.4.1 Reception into full-connexion

At the ceremony of reception into full-connexion, the distinctive and superior identity of the new ministers is confirmed, and they are publicly incorporated into the ministerial hierarchy. The importance of the ritual is made manifest by its place on the second day of the annual Methodist Conference, and is evident in the formal nature of the proceedings and the large numbers attending.56

In brief, the ceremony involves the ordinands coming to sit in serried rows at the front of the Conference hall and standing as the ritual officiant, the Secretary of the Conference, reads each person's name in turn. After this the Secretary proposes to the President that the "Conference resolve by standing vote that the sisters and brothers [...] go forward for ordination by prayer and laying on of hands," and at the appropriate signal the members of the Conference stand to

56 For a more detailed description see Appendix 4.3.1. For a full discussion of the Conference see Chapter 6.
receive the new ministers (see Fig. 4.1). After this, the highest lay official in Methodism, the Vice-President of Conference, gives a lengthy address.

At this ritual there is a gathering together of representatives from the various parts of the ordinand’s life, including family, friends and members of the congregations where the probationer works. This ceremony and the ordination which follows it draw attention to the ministerial identity and can be seen as an attempt to give priority to this aspect of an individual’s identity. It does seem likely that this event will in some sense change the way in which the individuals are perceived by the members of the social groups to which they belong. The social separation of the ordinands from these others is physically represented in their removed position on the stage and in their wearing of the clerical collar. Their raised position on a platform also, I suggest, symbolises their increase in status. Furthermore, since this prestigious ceremony is presided over by the most senior ministers in Methodism, this ritual serves to increase their status as well as to legitimise their rank.

However, while this ceremony acts to exalt and legitimate the position of the ministers the role of the lay people is also important here in both supporting the ordinands and in standing to receive them. On several occasions I have heard the part played by lay people in making ministers publicly acknowledged by senior Methodist officials. Moreover, it is significant that, at the point when the church is emphasising the highly distinctive nature of ordained ministry, it is the lay Vice-President who is invited to speak, and on one occasion which I observed, this officer chose to emphasise the “ministry of the whole people of God”. In this choice of topic a public attempt to satisfactorily balance the Methodist values of hierarchy and egalitarianism can be detected.
Fig. 4.1. The ceremony of “reception into full-connexion”. The ordinands stand at the front of the conference hall, while the members of the Conference stand to receive them.
Fig. 4.1. The ceremony of "reception into full-connexion". The ordinands stand at the front of the conference hall, while the members of the Conference stand to receive them.

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4.4.2 Ordination

The position of the minister is further legitimated and empowered through the ancient ceremony of ordination. The special and superior nature of ministry is again expressed through the size and formality of the ceremony, as well as in the adornment of the buildings and participants. Like the earlier ceremony, ordination is a connexional event and is largely controlled by the connexional officers. A Methodist committee has devised the ordination liturgy, but this is an event in which there are many symbols and actions which are closer to the Anglican tradition than to any generally recognisable Methodist or nonconformist practice. Indeed, the way in which it resembles the ordination ceremony in other denominations can be viewed as an attempt to signify Methodism's status as a church alongside other churches, with ordained ministers who stand equal to those in other denominations.

The service begins when the congregation stands as the ordinands process together to take their seats at the front of the church. They are followed by the ministers whom they have chosen to assist in their ordination and by the connexional officials who will lead the service. Most of the service is led by the President of Conference, or by a recent past President, and it follows a pattern of hymns, prayers, Bible readings and sermon. The core of the service begins when the Secretary of Conference, or a deputy, presents to the President those who are to be ordained presbyters. As their names are read, the ordinands stand in turn. Then the congregation also stands and is invited in the words of a set text to declare the worthiness of the ordinands and to promise to uphold them in their ministry. Next comes what is called the "examination", in which the ordinands are reminded of all that God has called them to do in ministry and they are asked a series of questions about their call and faith. Then, after prayers are made for the ordinands, and the Holy Spirit is invoked by the congregational singing of an ancient hymn, the ordinands come forward one by one to kneel before the President. The President prays for the ordinands and then, with the other

57 See Appendix 4.3.2 for further details.
58 For example, the service includes the saying together of a lengthy creed and the congregation are directed to stand for the reading of the gospel.
ministers, including the one chosen by the ordinand, lays his or her right hand on the ordinand's head. After the lay Vice-President or a deputy has presented each ordinand with a Bible, Communion is celebrated.

At the ordination service the Methodist Church officials are clearly and publicly stamping their seal of approval upon the new recruits. Furthermore, the service symbolises the binding relationship which has now been entered into between minister and church. Indeed, the part of the ceremony called the examination, in which the ordinands are asked a series of questions and must answer, “I will”, somewhat resembles a wedding ceremony. Here, as in a marriage agreement, as Fortes (1972) first identified, there is something of a transfer of rights between the parties involved. Also, just as in marriage, the status of those involved has been changed and in particular their identity as ordained ministers is confirmed. An important part of this identity, which I have heard stressed by connexional officials at the ceremony, is that the minister is now a “connexional person”. Indeed, for many, participation in these ceremonies means that they have attended the Conference for the first time, and this experience increases their knowledge of connexional people and events. It also re-creates and further develops links and relationships with peers from initial training, who are ordained together, and with colleagues and friends from around the Connexion who are reunited at the Conference.

This ceremony not only confirms the status of those being ordained; it also acts to confirm the status of all ministers, most especially those who control it. At the ceremonies of reception into full Connexion and ordination there is both a making and a re-making of ministers since, as one preacher publicly stated, it also recalls to those already received and ordained the “moment” when they were “so admitted”. Through this ceremony, all ministers are marked out as special and distinct, and there is a clear statement of the involvement of divine agency in the creation of their special nature. This divine agency is clearly channelled and to an extent controlled through the connexional officials who perform the ceremony. The ordination service empowers these officiating ministers, who in turn empower the new ministers. Yet, even though the main players are those already ordained and those to be ordained, the event would
have little sense or meaning if it were not for the lay people who declare the
worthiness of the ministers and who, if the minister is to be able to do his or her
job, have an ongoing role to play in constantly legitimating the minister through
all the vicissitudes of life in the local church.

The collaborative nature of the creating and maintaining of such positions was
noted by Goody and Fortes in their studies of various tribal peoples in West
Africa. From his examination of succession to high office among the Gonja of
Ghana, Goody proposed that the category of “office” differed from that of “role”
in that office was a superordinate role, entry to which was by a process of
selection and which then consequently involved access to a scarce resource
(Goody 1966:171). This distinction between role and office is valuable in
elucidating the diverse meanings of the term “ministry” in Methodism. When
the “ministry of the whole people of God” is being talked about within
Methodism, what is indicated is ministry as a role which all can practise. By
contrast, when the ordained ministry is mentioned, what is meant is ministry as
an office to which there is highly restricted access and to which are awarded the
scarce resources of an academic theological education, material benefits and
ecclesiastical honour. For such an office to exist, the co-operation of the people
is required since, as Fortes suggested, office—high or low—needs a ‘mandate
from society’ by which it becomes ‘licensed’ or ‘legitimate’ (Fortes 1962:6).

The collaborative nature of investing individuals in such offices has been
further explored by Bourdieu. As noted above, Bourdieu stressed that the power
of ministers, especially of their linguistic utterances, depended on the recognition
or “symbolic power” they received from their group, especially through rites of
investiture. Building on the well-known ideas of Van Gennep (1960), Bourdieu
argued that rites of investiture create a lasting difference between members of a
group and consecrate or sanctify what is in reality an arbitrary boundary by
making the supposed difference known and recognised. Following Bourdieu, I
suggest that, within Methodism, the rite of ordination, in which the group co-
operates, transforms the view others have of the person consecrated and will also
change their treatment of the ordained person. Likewise, the rite may change the
individual’s self-perception and signify what his or her identity is, consequently
evoking a change in the person’s behaviour and also making him or her less likely to abandon the office (Bourdieu 1991:121–22). Thus, through the construction of a difference in relationships, ministers within Methodism are made into a different kind of sacred person. Bourdieu (1991:126) has further proposed that the rite enables the consecrated individuals to believe that their role is justified. Given the cultural tensions in Methodism this is clearly a very important aspect of the rite of ordination.

Bourdieu also argues that one of the important powers which the representative is given is the power of speaking on behalf of the group. Indeed, he suggests that at the end of the long process of selection and institutionalisation, the representative “receives from the group the power to form the group” (Bourdieu 1990:138). Thus, there is a kind of cyclical process whereby the group creates the representative who in turn creates the group. This suggests something which is pivotal in understanding the dynamic of ordination in Methodism, since I argue that in making ministers at ordination (as on many other occasions), Methodists are in turn making Methodism and thus making themselves. Thus, minister and lay person are jointly engaged in the ongoing activity of making Methodism.

However, Bourdieu (1991:116), as mentioned in Chapter 1, believes that members of the group inevitably fail to recognise their own contribution to the creation of the power of the representative. He argues that people’s “misrecognition” of the arbitrariness of the socially created difference and of their role in creating it, means that they are subject to a “severe domination” or what he calls “symbolic violence”. For Bourdieu, ordination is a naturalising of the socially created difference of a power asymmetry between lay and ordained, and in his terms symbolic violence is done when the hierarchical relations are represented as legitimate and natural. Drawing on Kant, he suggests that this applies just as much to Protestant leaders, who even though they protest against “hierarchical splendour” still seek to dominate their members and conceal their usurpation through the use of modest titles (209). Moreover, Bourdieu argues that this creation of a distinguished class has, “as an inevitable counterpart, the slide of the complementary class into Nothingness” (126). With regard to the
political field, he contends that ordinary people have been “divested of the material and cultural instruments necessary for them to participate actively in politics” (172). Likewise, in the religious field he contends that the “religious division leads to members of the laity being *dispossessed* of the instruments of symbolic production” (169).

This, however, does not adequately represent the situation in Methodism. Although it may be true that for much of the time the difference between ordained and lay is “naturalised” and people “misrecognise” the role which they play in creating the power and position of the clergy, yet, within Methodism, as in much of Protestantism, there is a frequent questioning of this power. Also, at the key ritual moments within Methodism there is a clear and conscious role for the laity to play. Moreover, the question of who is dominating whom within Methodism, is not one which can be so easily answered as Bourdieu seems to assume for Protestantism, since on many occasions a great deal of the power is held by the lay people, as I will demonstrate in the next chapter. Moreover, while the professional clergy in this denomination may have a considerable control over theology as the language of symbolic production, the laity has not been entirely “dispossessed of the instruments of symbolic production”. Indeed, some Methodist ministers consider an important part of their task to be the providing of such competencies for the laity.  

### 4.5 Conclusion

Through initial training, probation and ordination, candidates for the Methodist ministry have been incorporated into a ministerial hierarchy that is built on academic, sacred and bureaucratic difference. An important part of the change of status which this entails is due to their acquirement of further academic qualifications which tend to increase their general social ranking. Furthermore, the particular kind of knowledge acquired in the theological education is closely associated with the divine, and plays a part in establishing their position within

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59 The political ideal of educating the masses so that they might become the leaders was alluded to by Bourdieu (1991:174–75).
the sacred hierarchy. The skills acquired during training in the leading of worship also enhance the minister’s position as a mediator of the divine. This role, and a purported change into a more sacred kind of person, is legitimated by the time spent in college and ultimately by ordination. The part which is played by the church officials in the training and investiture of candidates also further increases their own power and position within the ministerial hierarchy. An important element of this is the administration and control of the procedure of “ministerial formation”. Moreover, the student ministers are themselves incorporated into this bureaucratic hierarchy through their training, although this is perhaps a less successful part of the process.

For the officials “ministerial formation” is about making a new kind of person. This is clear from the belief that ordination is indelible, from the conviction of some college staff that it is important to “deal with character” while in training, and from the emphasis on the importance of a complete break with the past. Together with the often-expressed idea that a new kind of total identity is being created while in training, this puts the control of the procedure very firmly in the hands of the hierarchy. In relation to this, college staff often stress the role of the church in the giving of “authority” to the new minister. By contrast to these official ideas, however, I have noted that for many students the significance of the time spent in college is perceived to lie in learning to play a new role which some regard as being added to a repertoire of already existing roles. While many students are conscious that this new role affects their sense of self some suggest that it does not completely subsume it. Furthermore, I have argued that the process should also be understood in terms of a change in relationships, most particularly those between the minister and the ministerial hierarchy and those between the minister and the laity. With regard to the former, the new ministers are now accepted as junior colleagues and join with peers in producing a front-stage performance of the new role. With regard to the latter, the new ministers are respected and recognised in their new role, which is also shaped and created by the demands and attitudes of the lay people. Moreover, the lay people play a key role in the creation of the minister’s power and authority, contrary to the beliefs of the college staff. Thus, the entire process of the making of new ministers is very much less individualistic and less controlled by the church.
officials than is generally perceived within Methodism, or than might be supposed from Goffman’s work on total institutions.

However, while the making of ministers at this stage is something in which ordinary lay people play a collaborative part, that is not to say that the process invariably goes uncontested. Yet, while some of the changes desired by the church officials may be consciously resisted, many largely unconscious changes nevertheless occur. Indeed I have argued that, through training, some central values and dispositions are altered in the students, who develop a slightly different habitus with a greater valuing of ministerial hierarchy. The changing of the habitus and the empowering of the ministers through their training are sometimes contested by those who place greater stress on egalitarianism. The tensions which result can be seen in the many criticisms of ministerial training which are made both by students and by church members. The nature of Methodism is such that both ministers and people will often question and contest the power and position of ministers, which in some ways they want and in other ways they do not. It is to a consideration of how this negotiation of the power and place of the minister works out in practice in the local church setting that I next turn.
Chapter 5
Ministry in the local church

5.1 Introduction

In this chapter I examine the nature of the ministerial office in the local church and circuit setting where ordained ministry is most usually experienced and expressed. In Chapters 3 and 4 I have argued that candidates have been incorporated into a distinctive hierarchy and here I will describe how ministers behave as members of this hierarchy at the local church level. An important aspect of this is the way in which ministers exercise power over the laity and largely control local Methodism. However, this is only part of the story, and the nature of ministry in the local context is constrained by the Methodist value of egalitarianism.

The tension between the differently held values of hierarchy and egalitarianism can be observed in the interactions between the ministers and those in the local church who embody a traditional Methodist habitus, with its emphasis on egalitarianism. This tension is also evident in the anxieties regarding their office expressed by the ministers themselves. Yet, despite the emphasis on egalitarianism and an often-explicit criticism of hierarchy, it is my contention that most traditional Methodists implicitly want their ministers to be of a different order to them, and indeed to be members of a sacred and bureaucratic hierarchy. Moreover, the laity plays an important part in creating and empowering ministers at the local level and are in turn empowered themselves. Furthermore, I again suggest that ministry must be understood not only as a role played or an identity embraced, but also in terms of the relationships in which it is created. In this way I continue to challenge the balance in Goffman’s theatrical metaphor between the active performing professional and the more passive observing audience (Goffman [1959] 1969:14).

My approach here is strikingly different to that frequently taken in the past by sociologists of religion. Drawing attention to statistical evidence concerning the
decrease in church attendance and in the numbers of ministers, sociologists of religion have generally argued that secularization has left the clergy feeling confused and demoralised and not knowing exactly what their role is meant to be (Towler and Coxon 1979, Ranson, Hinings and Bryman 1977). Others have gone further in arguing that ministers have become marginal to the "mainstream concerns of ordinary people" (Russell 1980:262), a conclusion which has even led some, both in the sociology of religion and in the churches themselves to predict that the end has come for the clergy (Towler and Coxon 1979, Russell 1980).

As a consequence of this perceived "crisis in the Church" (Paul 1964:21), numerous studies and reports on the nature of ministry have been conducted to try to identify what, if anything, is the role of the contemporary minister. These studies have tended to focus mainly on the opinions of those already ordained. A favoured method has been the sending of questionnaires to clergy, who have been asked to rank in importance various presupposed elements of their role. These elements have often included the tasks, for example, of pastor, priest, preacher, teacher and organisser/administrator (Ranson, Bryman and Hinings 1979, Shaw 1996). With the exception of Shaw's recent study of how gender affects the enacting of such roles, most of those working in this area have not examined what is involved in the practice of the role (Shaw 1996). The tendency has consequently been to generalise broadly concerning the widest possible understanding of ministry. For example, several have concluded that, due to the effect of bureaucratisation, ministers have become largely administrators and co-ordinators (Wilson 1969, Rudge 1968, Towler and Coxon 1979, Thompson 1970). Related to this, a number of commentators have made the unduly simplistic suggestion that there has been a decrease in the distinction between clergy and laity in recent years (Paul 1964, Ranson, Hinings and Bryman 1977, Towler and Coxon 1979, Davies 1994).

In contrast to this macro-level approach, which focuses almost exclusively on elements of the role as understood by ministers themselves, I examine in this chapter the nature of ministry at the micro-level, focusing on the relationships between lay and ordained people. By drawing on my anthropological fieldwork
in the north Bedford circuit I show how lay and ordained people have clear expectations of the ministerial office, and know how to act in relationship with each other. This is not to deny that ministers and laity are sometimes struggling to come to terms with changes in ministerial identity. Yet, while these struggles are also documented, it is apparent that ministers and laity still generally know how to perform with regard to the ministerial office, most of the time. Moreover, the expectations concerning ministry include, even in Methodism, an implicit casting of the minister as a member of a sacred hierarchy, and members look to their ministers for a fairly traditional range of spiritual, ritual, emotional and material services. However, I also show that the meanings of ministry vary somewhat between people even within the same denomination, and that, even in a single Methodist circuit, the individual churches and individual ministers often understand ministry differently.

The minister’s position is generally one in which he or she has a considerable power over the members of his or her congregation. Weber’s well-known theory of the three ideal types or bases of power is particularly helpful in understanding the nature of the minister’s dominance. Weber (1947) suggested that “charismatic domination” was based on the personal powers of an exceptionally gifted individual who provided a revolutionary solution at a time of crisis. Such charisma could be controlled or “routinized” by institutions, as in the ordaining of priests by the church. “Traditional domination”, was also rooted in personal relationships between a master and his followers, and occurred where the dominant figure was obeyed out of personal loyalty or pious regard, and because such obedience was part of tradition or custom. In contrast to this, “legal-rational domination” was based on the development of rationalised law-making and involved the impersonal obeying of these rules and the appointing or electing of officials whose task it was to implement the rules. In his analysis of religious functionaries, Weber also developed the ideal type categories of prophet and priest (Weber [1922] 1993). Prophets evinced charismatic domination, while the domination of priests depended on their position within a religious tradition.

60 A similar proposition is made by the authors of the 1998 report to Conference entitled “Role and place of the ordained minister in a modern church” (Methodist Church 1998, 2:578).
Methodist ministers can be seen to combine aspects of both prophet and priest in Weber's terms. More importantly, however, elements of all three kinds of domination, as described by Weber, can be identified in the relationship between ordained and lay in the Methodist Church. A similar analysis of the power of the leaders in a Franciscan order of nuns has been proposed by Campbell-Jones (1979), who argues that the co-existence of these types of power has made that order especially flexible and able to endure changes. Likewise, in the Methodist Church the various bases of power are mutually strengthening and reinforcing.

Yet, for all the force given by the combination of these various sources of power, domination by the Methodist minister is also constrained by the strongly held value of egalitarianism, and the minister's position and teaching do not go without challenge. Moreover, the nature of Methodism is such that the power held by the ministers depends to a great extent on the collaboration of the people. In this chapter I will demonstrate how the empowering of the minister may serve to enable a wide range of people to meet their own and their group's interests. Such a meeting of interests is one way of understanding power as has been proposed by Lukes (1986) and when such a definition is employed, power in the local church can sometimes be seen to be highly generative.

In order to address these themes and issues, I begin by outlining the nature of ministerial practice as I observed it in the north Bedford circuit. I draw on my experiences of staying for short periods with most of the ministers of this circuit and of accompanying them in their work. Next, I delineate some of the views of ministry expressed to me by the fifty-five lay people of a variety of ages and involvements whom I interviewed. In particular I focus on interview material with members of Priory, Clapham and St Mark's—that is the three churches described in Chapter 2—and explore further variations between the members of these churches. Finally, by drawing on in-depth interviews and conversations with the ministers of the north Bedford circuit, I given an account of the way in which these ministers understand their office, and of how they attempt to resolve the tensions which surround it.
5.2 The ministers observed

5.2.1 Patterns of work and the issue of control

She’s researching ministers ... ha ha ha ... and she’s discovered that they work other than on Sundays.

Minister in Bedford explaining my presence to a church member

In employment terms, ministers are categorised as “self-employed”. Indeed, on the surface they appear to have a significant degree of autonomy and to be in control of how they spend their time. However, the reality is that many ministers are subject to a number of claims on their time and do not feel themselves to be in charge of their work. With regard to this Dean, one of the ministers in Bedford told me: “I tend to work according to demand which means I’m not exercising a lot of control”. Indeed, church members often place a high number of demands upon the minister, and sometimes even vie with each other for the minister’s attention. In some cases it is quite clear that lay people, especially church stewards, believe that they are in control of the minister’s work or at least that they should be. This belief was evident at a steward’s meeting at Clapham, where I once heard a steward who had just realised that her minister would not have a single evening free from church work for several months ask: “We’re not working you too hard, are we?” However, in general there is a lack of clarity regarding to whom the minister is accountable. I have heard some ministers defend their autonomy with the claim that they are accountable to God alone.

Indeed, conflicts develop from time to time at stewards’ meetings and in other interactions with ministers if the lay leaders do not approve of the way in which ministers are spending their time. In part, this problem may arise from the fact that a great deal of ministerial work goes largely unseen. Throughout the week, ministers may be with isolated church members or with church groups to which only a small proportion of their congregation belong. With regard to this lack of transparency in their work, I have encountered cases throughout Methodism where ministers have felt it necessary to show timetables and diaries to their stewards in order to demonstrate how it is that they are spending their time.
Such occurrences further reflect the fact that some members feel they should have a degree of influence on the work of their ministers. While the degree to which ministers respond to the comments and criticisms of their lay leaders varies greatly, on the whole I suggest that stewards and lay people do have a degree of power over how their ministers spend their time.

The work undertaken by the minister is also negotiated to an extent with other ministerial colleagues. With regard to making their invisible work visible, ministers may also feel a need to demonstrate to each other that they are performing appropriately. On this subject one minister in Bedford commented to me: “you hear ministers talking diaries—vying for how many appointments in a day or how many visits they might fit in”. This Methodist concern with how much and what is done reflects both the work ethic of Methodism and the fact that the explicit emphasis in ministry in this denomination has been more on the functions of the minister—with the work they do—than on the sacred or ontologically changed nature of the minister. However, in both north Bedford and around the Connexion, I have heard some ministers suggest, albeit in a slightly tentative manner, that ministry in this denomination is also about “being”, and can no longer be judged simply by all that the minister does. This opinion, I suggest, often reflects the involvement of ministers with denominations where a higher or ontological view of ministry is held.

Within the Methodist ministry, the traditional daily pattern has been to work at administration and service preparation in the morning, make pastoral visits in the afternoon and attend the various committees and governing bodies in the evening. While the pattern has changed for some, these tasks, together with the leading of rituals and a range of what might be called community duties, make up the principal part of the minister’s work. In addition to considering these tasks, I also attempt here to delineate something of the special nature of the ministerial office by describing what it means to “live on the job”.

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5.2.2 Ritual practice: the Sunday services

In their role as the chief ritual functionary at the Sunday services the nature of the ministers as members of a sacred hierarchy is most particularly evident. Even though in Methodism many services are taken by local preachers, almost all special services and the two “sacraments” of baptism and Communion which are deemed to be of “divine appointment and of perpetual obligation” (Methodist Church 1988–96, 2:213) are usually led by an ordained person, thus reflecting and contributing to the minister’s special nature and expertise.

The special regard in which the minister is held can be seen even before the service begins. On a Sunday morning ministers attempt to arrive some time before a service is due to start in order to make their final preparations. In most Methodist churches they have their own room or vestry which acts as a kind of back-stage dressing room, and it is here that all of the male ministers in the north Bedford circuit put on their cassocks and robes. During the moments before the service, the stewards normally defer to them and assist in their preparation for the service. Moreover, during this time, troubled lay people often come and speak urgently and quietly to the minister about their personal worries or concerns, in a way which they do not do to local preachers.

Throughout all of the preparations for the services, there is often an air of expectant excitement which builds to the moment when the minister and steward walk into the church and the service begins. The ministers themselves are often slightly nervous before a service and these feelings reflect the sense abroad that the church service is an important event at which serious things happen. The services are removed in time and space from ordinary life, and in most churches there is a sense of the sacredness or otherness of the event, all of which is likely to have an effect on how the minister, as chief ritual functionary, is viewed. The anthropologist and theologian, Douglas Davies appears to have drawn on Clifford Geertz ([1973] 1993) to suggest that since “ritual behaviour is a very powerful source of emotion and mood”, those who are central actors in the ritual may “easily come to serve as symbols of the power and significance generated by the total ritual” (Davies 1986:55).
In all of the churches when the ministers are taking the services they evince a strong degree of control, and even when many lay people are also sharing in the leading of worship the ministers generally direct them. Since a church's own minister is usually the most frequent leader of worship in that place, the minister plays a dominant role in creating the style of service which the congregation come to expect.

One of the parts of the service where the influence of the minister is most obvious is the sermon. While local preachers are also involved in this activity, more is expected from the minister with regard to the quality and scholarly content of a sermon. I encountered church members in the north Bedford circuit attending a different church from their own because their own minister was taking the service there, and they wanted to hear him preach. Moreover, on several occasions church members spontaneously talked to me about how much they valued the sermon. The fact that ministers are regularly listened to in this way, without interruption or discussion, gives them, as Beasley-Murray (1998:91) has also argued, an almost unparalleled opportunity to influence and potentially direct people’s thoughts.

In the sermon, ministers take on something of a priestly role, in that they become mediators between God and the church member. Indeed, in Methodism the sermon has traditionally been viewed as one of the most important moments at which the individual is likely to hear God’s voice and to meet with God. The power which the minister has as preacher can be seen to rest, in Weberian terms, on personal or charismatic abilities as orator and persuader, and also on the tradition that the minister is someone of knowledge and insight to whom members should be listening. Thus, throughout their ritual activities, Methodist ministers can be seen to combine attributes from Weber’s ideal types of the prophet and priest (Weber [1922] 1993, 28, 46).

The minister’s role as the supplier of Communion, while perhaps of less importance within Methodism than preaching, is still highly significant, even for those who do not believe that this is something in which the ordained have the
monopoly. In most of the Communion services which I observed in Bedford the minister was clearly in the controlling position, directing the congregation through the Communion ritual. In almost all of the churches the Communion elements, that is the plate of little pieces of bread and the small cups filled with red grape juice, had been set on the Communion table at the front of the church by the Communion stewards before the service began and covered over with a white lace cloth. The work of the lay people in preparing the Communion goes largely unseen, but the minister has the very visible role of moving to the Communion table and, at the appropriate moment, removing the cloth to reveal the prepared elements. On several occasions, at this moment of revealing the elements, I was reminded of a magician pulling away a cover to reveal the success of his trick. Indeed, even within Methodism, which like other Protestant denominations has emphasised the commemorative rather than the mystical elements of the Communion, there is a degree of mystery around this ritual which may imbue the minister with a certain esoteric otherness.

While the Methodist minister’s role in Communion has traditionally been thought to be of less importance than that of the priest in Roman Catholic tradition, there are points of similarity. In his analysis of the symbolism of the Eucharist, the anthropologist Raymond Firth drew upon the work of his colleague Mary Douglas in suggesting that, for Roman Catholics, the doctrine of the Eucharist is a “statement about power and the source of power” (Firth 1973:425). Douglas, he noted, had suggested that the rite, which was created by the action of the priest, recreated the redeeming sacrifice of Christ and became a channel of grace which was an “effective field of change and an instrument of change” (Douglas 1970:46–49, cited in Firth, 1973:420). Many Methodists also talk of the Communion service as a “means of grace” and even describe it as a “converting ordinance”. In particular, a number of the Methodists with whom I worked in Leeds told me of their experiences of Communion, and clearly regarded the act of taking Communion as bringing about changes in themselves.

61 Within Methodism there is legislation to allow non-ordained members of the church to preside at services of Holy Communion in cases where congregations would not otherwise be able to receive it. In so permitting non-ordained members to conduct Holy Communion Methodism differs significantly from the practice in the Church of England.
There is generally less reliance in Methodism than in Roman Catholicism on the minister as facilitator of that change, or on the minister as mediating the meeting with God at Communion. Nevertheless, the Methodist minister's role is still implicitly one of importance in this event, and the ritual may also empower the minister in Weberian terms largely because of the traditional expectations surrounding the activity. However, in many Methodist contexts the positive moods and emotions created through the Communion, and through other services, come to be associated with the physical place and the mixed community of lay and ordained, rather than simply with the minister.

One aspect of the Sunday ritual in which the minister is clearly of paramount importance is in the greeting of each member of the congregation at the door after the service. Indeed, in my observation, this is one of the most important parts of the Sunday morning service. It is often a time when members of the congregation pass on information to the minister concerning themselves or other church members, and alert the minister to the need for a "pastoral visit". Alternatively, people sometimes use this moment at the door to comment, sometimes critically, on the minister's sermon or service. Perhaps most importantly of all, this is the one time when almost everyone can be assured of being recognised and to some extent valued for their presence. One of the oldest members of Clapham expressed this very clearly to me when he stated that: "ministers should make sure they have spoken to every member of the congregation to make them feel wanted or part of the thing". By so greeting and recognising individuals the minister, as the special representative of the community, reassures the individual that they too are valued members of the community. The fact that ministers are expected to perform this task is further evidence of the special regard in which they are held. Due to the often-unconscious belief in their sacred nature, the ministers are empowered to build up the individual member's sense of self-worth, which in turn empowers the lay member. With regard to this, the power of the minister appears to be highly generative.

Thus far I have stressed the way in which the special nature of ministers is evident through their ritual roles. In addition, however, I want also to draw
attention to the manner in which the expression of this kind of hierarchy is constrained. First and foremost, the minister works closely and collaboratively with a large number of lay people in the production of the service. While the extent of lay involvement in leading the services varied around the circuit churches, it was customary in all except the partnership churches for a steward to lead a prayer for the minister in the vestry before the service. This reflects the Methodist belief that the minister does not have a special monopoly on God or the sacred. Furthermore, lay people in Methodism are often highly critical of ministers' ritual performances and in particular of their preaching, which is not uncritically absorbed. This again attests to the Methodist emphasis on the ability of ordinary individuals to meet directly with God and to know God's mind, and in this way the egalitarianism of the religion can be seen to provide a basis for direct challenges to the position of the minister as part of a sacred hierarchy.

5.2.3 Other rituals

The ministers' role as the chief officiants at highly significant rites of passage such as funerals and weddings also increases the sense of their having a special nature and is a further source of their power. Due to their role in conducting rites of passage, the minister is often associated with the heightened emotions and liminality experienced during these times. As Turner ([1969] 1974:95) has pointed out, "liminal situations and roles are almost everywhere associated with magico-religious properties" and these properties, I suggest, are associated by transfer with the minister. Also, the part played by the minister in helping people through times of change or suffering enables people to cope with the upset and disturbances which such changes provoke. While this is a reflection of the minister's power, it may also, as Davies (1986:6) has suggested, contribute to that power.

Through their role in conducting funerals, ministers have a much greater contact with death and the bereaved than is usual for most people in contemporary English society. A parallel may be drawn with doctors, for whom it has been suggested that their contact with death and illness provides them with a charismatic authority, based on the idea that they can influence the course of
illness and death (Pattison [1994] 1997:119). Something similar may also be present for ministers who, even if they cannot cure the sick, are meant to be fearless of death. Moreover, their association with death and funerals serves as an important and empowering link between ministers themselves, as can be seen by the way in which they joke about the subject when back-stage together.

Methodist ministers have a degree of autonomy in deciding whether to conduct a funeral, baptism or wedding for people, and this is another obvious expression of ministerial power, as well as, a source of power. In being able to decide to conduct such rituals or not, the minister not only operates to an extent as gate-keeper to God's blessing, but also as gate-keeper to the acceptance and blessing of the local community, since the local religious community is often one of the few public forums in which people can celebrate important rites of passage. Furthermore, ministers themselves can be seen to act as symbols of both God and the community, or, if we follow Durkheim's proposal that "God is only a figurative expression of the society" ([1915] 1964:226, cited in Morris [1987] 1994:119), of both at the same time. Carrying this heavy symbolic load again fixes the minister with a certain degree of power and otherness.

Having said this, individuals in the north Bedford circuit, varied across the churches in the extent to which they believed that these rituals could only be conducted by a minister. Especially at Clapham and St Mark's there were people who thought that on some occasions any or all of these rituals could be conducted by a local preacher or other appropriate lay person. Also reflecting their lower view of the nature of ordained ministry, many at Clapham and some at St Mark's appeared to place greater emphasis on the role of the religious community, rather than the minister, in the conduct of rites of passage and in the celebration of key events.

5.2.4 Pastoral visiting

Until recently a significant part of the Methodist minister's duties included the regular visiting at home of all his or her church members and those who attended the church. This was often called pastoral visitation and, as it has been generally
practiced across the evangelical denominations, it has involved general conversation, expression of concern for the welfare of the individual, followed by a prayer. In the north Bedford circuit, as in my observation in much of Methodism, pastoral work is usually shared between ministers and lay people. However, in Bedford many Methodists, especially older members, expressed the idea that they did not feel that they had had a "proper pastoral visit" unless the minister had seen them. Moreover, the tradition that the minister has a right to visit people in their home is a potentially very powerful aspect of ministerial practice not generally enjoyed by other professionals. As has also been noted by Beasley-Murray (1998:90) this serves to bring religious influence and surveillance right into an individual's most private and personal arena.

One of the functions of traditional visiting has been to build up links between the minister and the congregation. It is about "reinforcing club membership", as one of the Bedford ministers described it. Through their appointment to the local church, and by the way they conduct their visiting, ministers are representatives of the local Methodist community, or, in Bourdieu's (1991:206) words, "a substitute for the group". The building up of relationships with them is thus symbolic of the person's relationships with others within the community. Moreover, the minister's position as symbol of the group is an important source of his or her power, since the members of the group depend upon the existence of the group for their identity, and are therefore also dependent upon the minister and consequently more likely to obey him or her (Bourdieu 1991:212). As with being "seen" by the minister at the end of a service, the pastoral visit can function to make the person visited feel valued and of significance. Likewise, the minister is associated, at least implicitly, with the divine, and may have the effect of making the person visited feel closer to God. In providing opportunities for people to talk through their problems and concerns the visit can also act as a kind of low-level therapy. Such pastoral work, as Pattison ([1994] 1997) has noted, is basically of a conservative nature, since it places the focus on a single person and their problems rather on any wider social issues.

The pastoral visit can also serve as a means of exerting moral control and the Methodist rubric actually suggests that one of the duties of the minister is to
exercise discipline. Indeed, when the term “pastoral” is used within Methodism it often has the double meaning of both solicitous care for a person and also of judgement and correction. While few ministers or church members view the pastoral visit as being overtly about such disciplining, the presence of a minister may serve to function as a means of correction at an unspoken level, since the minister represents the church in his or her position. Thus, the pastoral visit can act as an instrument of control over the behaviour of Methodists just as Pattison ([1994] 1997) has suggested pastoral care was used as an instrument for the control of society more generally in the seventeenth century.

As many sociologists of religion have observed, the meaning of pastoral care for all ministers has been affected by the development of various professions specialising in personal therapies (Wilson [1966] 1969, Davie 1994). Some ministers have responded by also specialising in these techniques—as was the case with one of the ministers in Bedford who had undertaken professional training in counselling and psychotherapy—whereas others have chosen to emphasise the more traditional approach. In addition, I have heard Methodist ministers both in Bedford and around the country state that they no longer have time for general home visiting. Rather, as one minister suggested, for some it is now “all crisis and specific request visiting”. Moreover, as the ministers in Bedford suggested, many younger people no longer expect or want such traditional visiting. This may reflect the fact that for these people their important relationships and their sense of self is no longer primarily created through their position in the church community. How this change in pastoral work will affect the nature of ministry remains to be seen. In the past, home visiting has been highly generative and empowering not only for the lay people but also for the ministers. For the latter, being received and welcomed by their members has often provided an important reinforcement of their own position and sense of self-worth.

5.2.5 Church government

The minister’s position as a member of a bureaucratic hierarchy has already been covered to some extent in Chapter 2, where the generally shared structures of
local church government were described. The dynamic of church government is discussed in more detail later in this chapter, where the views of ministers and lay people on the subject are recounted. Here, it is perhaps worth noting that the position of ministers as the full-time employees of the church, and their possession and knowledge of The Constitution and Practice of the Methodist Church, puts them in a position where they can exercise legal-rational domination in Weberian terms. As officers of the wider church bureaucracy, their role in passing on directives, rules and guidelines from the central offices, as well as their knowledge of resources, such as the sources of funding for church projects, is a further source of power. However, having suggested that ministers have a dominant role in church government, it is also important to note that many ministers work very hard to include as many people as possible in the decision making of the church, and to be seen to do so.

5.2.6 Making community

In addition to the more formal and visible elements of their work, most of the ministers in the north Bedford circuit were expected to attend the frequent church social events which are so much a part of church life. For example, at events such as the weekly coffee mornings at Clapham, or the erecting of the Christmas tree at Putnoe Heights, or the autumn bazaar at Park Road, the ministers were present simply to talk to people informally and to be available for people to approach them. On such occasions, their presence clearly added importance or legitimation to the event. The way in which the minister is constantly expected to give his “blessing to all that takes place” has been described in terms of traditional patronage relations between lay and ordained (Rudge 1968:123). In the north Bedford circuit, ministers are often explicitly called upon to give significance, or as one minister put it, to “give some credibility” to events. The minister is frequently invited to attend when people want especially to mark an event. For example, at Clapham the minister is required to give out the thank you cards at the end of the year to the staff who have worked in the adult education scheme which is based on the premises. Again, at Priory the minister is invited to come for the “sit down tea” at the end of the women’s meeting rally or annual gathering, and is placed with his wife at the top table together with the
speaker. That ministers are required to be present and to act in this way reflects the often special regard they are accorded and also indicates an implicit belief in the minister's sacred nature. Indeed, the higher status which ministers are generally accorded is evident in their constant positioning at the front of buildings, or at the “top” in terms of seating at meals.62

5.2.7 Relating to the wider religious and secular communities

The Methodists whom I interviewed often made the point to me that their ministers had an important role to play in representing them to members of the wider community. Recent developments in ecumenism have created an increasing number of local structures and bodies at which ministers are often called upon to represent their own religious denominations. Likewise, they are often asked to represent their churches to the secular community at urban councils, school governing bodies and other community meetings. The increasing role for the Methodist minister as representative of a local secular community reflects the fact that, in the terms of Troeltsch ([1911] 1931) and Weber ([1904–05] 1965), the religious bodies which they serve now function more as churches than as sects, since they deem themselves to encompass the wider community.

Indeed, Methodist ministers often find themselves managing care services for the elderly, disabled or other vulnerable members of society. Grace Davie has related this increase in the range of community functions which ministers may perform to changing government policy, with the retrenchment in the 1980s, in public spending on welfare provision. This retrenchment caused those who consequently found themselves in need to turn again for help to those representing the church (Davie 1994:176).

5.2.8 Living “on the job”: issues around the manse

The implicit Methodist belief in the sacred nature of the minister can be seen not only to lie in the special tasks undertaken by the ordained but also by the way in

62 A parallel could be drawn with certain villagers as studied by Toren (1990), of whom it has been noted that those of a higher status were always seated at what was deemed to be the higher level of the buildings.
which the minister has traditionally been regarded as being permanently “on the job”, and in this way different to ordinary people. Aspects of this are clearly present in attitudes towards the ministers’ homes which are provided for them by the circuit and which are generally expected to be used for various kinds of church work. This work includes pastoral and business meetings and social events, as well as being a place of study or office for the minister. This expectation of the public use of the minister’s home runs contrary to widespread British expectations of the home as a private space separate from work. Moreover, among the more traditional Methodists in some places, the minister’s home still has something of a special aura about it, and I have heard lay people speak in hushed tones of having been “invited to the manse”. This reverencing of the manse provides a further indication of the way in which some Methodists view the minister as “other” or extraordinary. However, many ministers do not wish to be regarded as extraordinary in this way and in Bedford the ministers were beginning to create boundaries between themselves and the role. For example, they used answer machines to field telephone calls at unwelcome times, had a clearly defined “day off” when they were not available and placed greater restrictions on the ways in which the manse was used. Church members did not always welcome such changes and I heard one of the older men complain about this saying:

I’m against ministers having a day off. If I see (it written) ‘never available on a Tuesday’, it makes me shudder. To know I can never ..... on a Tuesday. I don’t like it at all. I think it says something—says like you I want a proper day off—but there is something very different about ministry.

Some ministers feel frustrated that both they and their manses are viewed as constantly available public property, a situation which also prevails in other denominations (Beasley-Murray 1998:39, Rudge 1968:123). Within Methodism, lay attempts to control the manse can be seen as a reflection of lay desire to control the minister. I have heard both probationers and more senior ministers comment on the way in which they feel they are being judged concerning their use of time while at the manse. For example, one probationer
stated that if she did not have her curtains drawn open by a certain time she felt
she would be judged lazy for still being in bed of a morning. Another minister
noted how, if he went outside to wash his car, church members who walked past
would ask: “Oh is it your day off again?” with the implication that he should not
be doing this task.

In Bedford, lay people were perceived by ministers as constantly observing the
behaviour of the ordained, just as I have proposed that the ministers were
supposed to be observing or “seeing” the lay people at the end of the service and
in pastoral care. It is helpful here to draw upon Foucault’s study of the
development of disciplinary techniques in the eighteenth century and to suggest
that in this case, as in the earlier period, the “gaze” of lay and ordained on each
other is mutually disciplining (Foucault [1975] 1991). This supervision of each
by the other has the effect that both ministers and lay people to an extent correct
their behaviour when they know that they are being watched. The ministers
experience this as placing limits on their freedom. On the other hand, such
supervision can be seen to prompt and encourage each to be more fully what
they want to be—that is to be ministers and good Christians or Methodists. The
fact that others are interested enough to watch an individual may promote a sense
of being valued. Over all, we can see again in this how the nature of ministry is
created in the relationship between lay and ordained, and that power is not held
entirely in the hands of the ministers.

5.3 Variations in lay people’s views of ministry across the
circuit

5.3.1 The ritual and symbolic aspects of ministry

Something of the variety around the circuit in expectations concerning the role of
the minister as ritual officiant have already been described in Chapter 2. From
my interviews of lay people it emerged that at Priory most people expected to see
the minister leading services and thought it essential that the minister lead
Communion services and the occasional offices. At Clapham, by contrast, it was
not generally thought that these ritual roles should be restricted to the minister,
but even here several people expressed a preference for having a minister take the lead in this area. At St Mark's there was a noticeable contrast between the Anglicans, who very much liked to see their ministers leading the services every week, and some of the Methodists who emphasised that this was not necessary. The vehemence of some on this point reflected the fact that in the partnership churches, as we saw in Chapter 2, some were feeling that the Methodist culture was being eroded, especially by the heavier dominance by the clergy in both ritual and business aspects of church life.

When asked how “in brief” they would “describe the job of a minister”, members from all three churches tended to put greater stress on the spiritual rather than the administrative and managerial aspects of the role. At Priory several people talked of the minister as pastor and teacher and a number spoke in terms of the minister caring for the “spiritual and physical well-being of the person”. Likewise at Clapham a number of people talked in terms of the minister’s role as being to give spiritual guidance or “to make you think twice about your own commitment to church and the Christian way of life”, while two others spoke in terms of the minister being a “motivator” or “encourager”. Liz, a young mother and lecturer in higher education, suggested that the minister should be “an example”, and this echoes ideas of the minister as exemplar which were suggested in Chapter 3. However, at Clapham there were also more functional views expressed, and the parity between lay and ordained was stressed. As one local preacher simply stated: “The minister does some of the things I do but has more time to do it”. Among the Methodists at St Mark’s there again tended to be an emphasis on some of the functional, rather than sacred aspects of the ministry, but on several occasions the uniqueness of the minister’s position was also mentioned.

In all three churches people commented on the importance of the minister wearing the clerical collar. At Priory, not surprisingly, some members talked of the importance of the clerical collar as marking out the identity and authority of the minister. Interestingly, at Clapham, where the minister did not wear a collar, one member had spontaneously talked to me about the slight disappointment and confusion which this caused among older members. This reflects an implicit
desire for sacred hierarchy even among the staunchly egalitarian Methodists at Clapham.

5.3.2 Pastoral care and relationships between lay and ordained

Across all of the churches there was an almost universal expectation that the minister had a special pastoral role in caring for church members. This was particularly so with regard to times of difficulty or family strife, and for many people relationships with the minister had developed through a time of crisis. However, others also noted that they had come to know the minister when preparing to become a church member or to take up a church office. It was evident that respect and appreciation for the ministers had often grown through the help given by them at these times. Ministers were also of assistance and sometimes gained power through providing references for those applying for employment in the wider community, although this tended to occur to a greater extent in the more working-class church of Clapham.

Friendships or special relationships with ministers were highly valued. This was particularly evident from the complaints made to me by some people who felt that they had not been party to the same special relationships with ministers as others. Thus, while these friendships might on the one hand indicate egalitarianism between minister and laity they are sometimes used as markers of prestige. Significantly, this was much more evident in Priory and at St Mark’s than at Clapham. In part, this may reflect the fact that ministers who tend to be middle class are more likely to develop mutual friendships in churches of a middle-class nature, but it also reflects the differing value which is placed on ministers in the different churches.

Placing a high degree of importance on the relationships of lay people with the minister can have negative consequences for the minister. At Priory, for instance, the ministers were sometimes blamed when members left to attend another church. By contrast, at Clapham, where there was much less stress on the idea that it was relationships with the minister which held the church together, I never heard the minister criticised in this way. Likewise, among the
threatened traditional Methodists at St Mark’s, the opinion was expressed that continuity in the church and links with new members should not depend on the minister but rather should lie with all the members.

5.3.3 Church government and administration

I have already discussed variation between the churches with regard to how the ministers function as members of a bureaucratic hierarchy in Chapter 2, noting that at Priory greater emphasis was placed on this aspect of the minister’s office than at Clapham or among the Methodists at St Mark’s. However, the ministerial role in church government was still respected even at Clapham. The wife of a senior office-holder described it like this: “If you need answers and permission you ask the minister—we regard the minister as the last word when a decision is taken and out of courtesy we keep the minister informed”. Yet, while at Clapham the minister was regarded as a kind of final arbiter, giving ratification to ideas generated elsewhere, at Priory many, especially of the older men, expressed a desire for the minister to take a “strong lead”. Even here, however, there was evidence of a desire for a distinctively Methodist balance between egalitarianism and hierarchy. One man reflected this when he stated with regard to the minister: “Got to be seen to be giving a lead, without appearing to dictate what’s going on”.

At all the churches there was an emphasis on government being carried out by democratic means, with important decisions being taken by congregational vote. However, some anxieties were expressed about the perceived control of ministers over the compiling of agendas and directing of meetings and even at Priory some were concerned about the way in which the minister could “manipulate the meeting” from the chair. It was the members at Priory who talked most about the disagreements which they had had with past and present ministers and in most cases I was told of how the lay people had won in the end. For example, Jim described how one minister had come in “full of ideas” and had disliked the gowned choir, saying “it would have to go”. However, the gowned choir was not disbanded and it was said of the minister: “by the end he had learnt to appreciate it”. Very significantly, with regard to the dynamics in
Methodist churches, Jim went on to add: “ministers are only here for a limited period—you can expect to be a member till you pass on”. Several others echoed this sentiment, thus revealing their expectation that the balance of power is with the laity.

At St Mark’s several of the Methodists expressed frustration at what they regarded as the increasingly Anglican style of church government, which placed greater control in the hands of the minister. However, even here it was felt that the Methodist way had not been completely lost. This was characterised in the statement of one woman who told me: “It’s important for the ministers to recognise ideas that aren’t their own,” adding that the Anglican vicar had had to “learn to cope” with this Methodist practice. Indeed, at St Mark’s instances were described in which the congregation had disagreed with the ministers and “won them round” to their way of thinking. In this, and in the stories from Priory, there is evidence which contradicts Bourdieu’s (1991:126) claim that the laity have undergone a slide into “Nothingness” and are dispossessed of “the instruments of symbolic production”, since the Methodists here are very capable of symbolising their own ideas and arguing for them. Moreover, at St Mark’s, and even more so at Clapham, I was told of how the ministers had encouraged the members to “dream dreams”—that is to express their own ideas about what might happen in the church in the future, and at all the churches the ministers had worked hard to facilitate the enactment of lay ideas. Thus, while on the whole the ministers may have legal-rational domination through their position as members of a bureaucratic hierarchy, this is tempered by the Methodist value of egalitarianism and results in an empowering of lay as well as ordained.

5.3.4 Observations of change in the ministry

Across the churches it was generally recognised that there had been a move away from formality and a decrease in the authority of the minister, and this was related to the wider social change of a decreasing respect for traditional authorities in general. At Priory this change was generally regretted, especially by the older office-holding men, whereas at Clapham this development was generally welcomed. However, while one of Clapham’s local preachers said she
appreciated there being “much more a feeling of ‘priesthood of all believers’,” she also stated: “Its nice to have someone head up the church”. Thus, even in the more egalitarian Clapham, there is still a desire for a ministerial head.

At Clapham it was generally noted that the minister had become far more available and approachable. This was, I suggest related to the fact of their present minister being a woman. In contrast to this, several members at Priory commented on the increasing restrictions which were placed around access to the minister. Here, I believe they were referring to what I have identified as the increasing professionalization of ministry and the restricting of ministry to a role played rather than an all-encompassing identity. Several of the older men at Priory complained about what was perceived as the minister’s increasing interest in personal rights, such as time off, and this was contrasted with the previous situation where ministers were “absolutely devoted to their work”, and “gave of their time very freely”. Related to this, and to the decrease in ministerial authority, was the idea expressed by many that ministers were becoming “more human”, and at Priory there were some who seemed to find this somewhat disconcerting. Thus, at Priory it appears that many do not want their ministers to be just like them; rather they want them to be something different. The taking of a day off, and other boundary creating strategies, tend to send out the signal that the minister is just doing a job like any other, when this is not what many at Priory want to believe. In contrast to the negative attitude at Priory, the Methodists at St Mark’s largely welcomed the increasing “humanness” of ministers.

5.4 The ministers’ views of ministry

5.4.1 How variations reflect “Churchmanship”

The opinions expressed by the ministers in the north Bedford circuit provide further evidence of the tension within Methodism between egalitarianism and hierarchy. The ministers experience this tension at a very personal level and it is evident that most struggle to find a satisfactory compromise between their

63 For a further discussion of gender in ministry see Appendix 1.
hierarchical position and their belief in Methodist egalitarianism. The manner in which they do so contrasts strikingly with that of the Anglican vicar who works with them in this circuit and whom I also interviewed.64

Some variation is evident between the Methodist ministers themselves, in part reflecting their various theological allegiances. Those of a higher or more Catholic “churchmanship” tend to favour a greater expression of hierarchy and those with a lower or more evangelical churchmanship tend to place more emphasis on egalitarianism; the liberals tend to be somewhere in between. A brief summary of the nature of the various theological parties and their positions on this issue is contained in Appendix 5.1. Some have claimed that the parties of Anglicanism are irrelevant in a Methodist context (Ranson, Bryman, and Hinings 1977). However some Methodists now use the language of “churchmanship” to categorise themselves and others. In my observation of the various levels of Methodism, social networks and formal groups have developed around differences in doctrinal theology and ecclesiology, which to some extent parallel the Anglican situation. In the north Bedford circuit some lay members, especially local preachers, described their ministers in terms of such churchmanship. Therefore it is helpful to commence this section with a brief summary of the theological positions of the various ministers of the circuit.

While several of the lay people described most of the ministers as being “liberals”, Anna had in fact been trained at Wesley College, Bristol, which has an evangelical reputation. Something of this evangelical allegiance could be seen both in her theology and her church practice. In contrast to this, Kate had been trained at Wesley House, which places a greater emphasis on a more Catholic style of worship (probably in part due to its close relationships with the neighbouring High Church Anglican college), and so she exhibited a more Catholic style of ministry, and placed a strong emphasis on mystical traditions. The three male Methodist ministers, Dean, Mark and Geoffrey, were of a fairly liberal churchmanship, but as will emerge below Dean had developed a more

64 In addition to the ministers of this circuit I also interviewed one other female minister in a neighbouring circuit, primarily in order to be better able to preserve the anonymity of the one woman who was a member of staff in north Bedford.
Catholic position, probably because of the effect on him of working in the Anglican/Methodist partnership churches. The Anglican minister, Jimmy, came from a staunchly Low Church background and had been trained in an Evangelical college, and yet his ideas of ministry still contrasted starkly with those of the Methodists.

5.4.2 How the ministers viewed the nature of their office

Several of the ministers in the north Bedford circuit commented on the difficulties which they had in defining the nature of ministry. In some respects they appeared to view ministry as being purely functional yet in others they revealed a sense of the ontological nature of the role. Most of the ministers began by emphasising functional aspects of the job, such as “re-interpretating the tradition”, with three speaking of ministry in terms of providing “caring and service”. When it came to describing the difference between lay and ordained, most were particularly uncomfortable and talked again of the functional or practical differences. They justified the existence of ordained ministers in terms of the need for order and the practicalities of running a large institution which required certain people to be appointed to specific roles and to be employed full-time. In these ways the ministers seemed to see themselves more as office-holders in a large bureaucracy than as being ontologically different.

In addition, however, the ministers made reference to aspects of a priestly nature or referred to a “mystical” difference. Mark noted that “there is an ambivalence about who we are—we deny priesthood and yet there seems to be a feel of that about it”. In further musings he went on to express the idea that, even though they may rationalise their position in functional terms, ministers may also feel that they are somehow different. As he put it: “I don’t want to imply I’m somehow better, that God has selected me ..... but I have a feeling that I am called to be this, not merely to do”. Another example of this tension or paradox was also evident with Kate, who, while she emphasised that she did not see ministry as a “class distinction”, at the same time opted to wear a kind of monk’s habit when leading worship and talked of her role in terms of “priesthood”.

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There was much less ambivalence exhibited by the Anglican vicar with regard to the ontological difference between ordained and lay. While he also stressed the idea that everyone in the church had a “ministry” and that all were “equal”, Jimmy emphasised the place of ordination as giving “God’s special blessing” and creating a “priesthood” which was “different from the priesthood of all believers”, chiefly because the minister had undergone an “empowering by God’s Spirit”.

It was also highly significant that Dean, the Methodist minister who worked with the Anglicans in the partnership churches, had begun to talk in similar terms and to confidently suggest that ministry was about “being”, and not just about “doing”. It was noteworthy that, in contrast to his Methodist colleagues, Dean talked of the importance of his ordination and mentioned that it had come to “matter much more” to him. Dean also talked about his current ministry in terms of a priestly role and suggested that this was something which people actually gave to him. As he put it: “it is the role that is put upon you by people to whom you are ministering”. While Dean acknowledged that this change in his understanding of ministry was probably related to the different way of working which he now experienced in the partnership churches, he did suggest that he had “probably always been like that, exercising a priestly ministry”. The difference, he proposed, was that in ordinary Methodist churches it had never been possible to talk about ministry in those terms. Yet, he went on to argue that, despite their emphasis on the “priesthood of all believers”, many Methodists “actually want their ministers to be priests” and to be somebody “who represents God to them”. While Dean’s comments may, in part, reflect a justification of his current practice in terms of a retrospective analysis of previous practice, they again provide an indication that Methodist ministry is also in reality about sacred hierarchy. Moreover, his suggestion that he is made a priest by the people themselves points back to my argument that the creation of the minister and of his authority is something in which the church members play an active and ongoing role.
5.4.3 How the ministers resolve the tension around their role

The comments made by most of the Methodist ministers regarding the meaning of their ministry on the whole reflect a reluctance to claim too great a difference for ministers and thereby to emphasise hierarchy at the expense of diminishing the fundamental Methodist egalitarianism. One of the ways in which they try to express an appropriate balance between egalitarianism and hierarchy is by describing their role in terms of being a servant. The term “servant” evokes many images and ideas within the contemporary church situation, not least the story of Christ washing the feet of his disciples at the last supper. The idea of the lowly place of the minister, which is expressed in the image of the “servant”, is found strongly represented throughout many nonconformist denominations and is much written about in the literature on pastoral care (e.g. Messer 1989, Beasley-Murray 1998). However, in Methodism there is a degree of tension in the use of the term. Something of this is expressed in a story which was told to me by Anna, and which is often repeated in Methodist circles. The story at its simplest is as follows:

A minister was going through a difficult time with his congregation and was once facing a very challenging stewards’ meeting. At that meeting he turned to the church leaders and said to them: “I may be your servant but you are not my master”.

Anna then went on to tell me, with regard to her relationships to lay leaders in the church: “I’ve kept that phrase in mind a lot”. The story indicates something of the often tense balance of power between ordained and lay leaders in the local church. Dean also commented on how there were people in the church who thought that ministers should “do as they are told and live up to the expectations that are imposed upon them”. These comments also serve as a reminder of the fact that the authority of the minister may well be contested within the church and constrained by the ideals and expectations of lay people.

The way in which Methodist ministers resolve this cultural contradiction between egalitarianism and hierarchy calls to mind Ortner’s description of how
Sherpa Buddhists resolve a very similar contradiction in their own culture between "an assumption of the naturalness and desirability of (male) equality, and an assumption of the naturalness and desirability of hierarchy (Ortner 1989:19). Following Levi-Strauss, Ortner suggests that many of the stories, rituals and events in Sherpa culture follow a particular pattern or "cultural schema" which reflects these central tensions and also provides for their mediation or resolution (76–77). Ortner talks of the manner in which the contradictions of Sherpa Buddhism are overcome or made "noncontradictory" by the schema, albeit from the actor's own point of view (78, 61). While parallels can be drawn between this and what happens in contemporary Methodism it is more appropriate to understand many of the Methodist stories, myths and rituals in terms of the reaching of uncomfortable compromises rather than an actual resolution or overcoming of contradiction. Within this denomination, as in much of Protestantism, the central cultural contradictions may, for example, appear to be resolved in stories about the minister as servant, although what is actually portrayed is an uneasy compromise between the values. There will always be those who are unhappy with the compromise and who seek either to make the minister more hierarchical or to deny the authority of the ordained. On a day-to-day, basis ministers and people make and re-make fragile and uncomfortable compromises.

5.4.4 Variation in clerical dress

Some variation in the balance reached between egalitarianism and hierarchy can be seen in ministers’ different attitudes to clerical dress. Reflecting his higher churchmanship and emphasis on the hierarchal nature of the minister, Dean always wore a grey cassock for formal liturgical duties and he had recently supplemented this with a large "pectoral cross"—a cross on a chain hanging around his neck in the Catholic fashion. He perhaps revealed something of a belief in the different status or rank of the minister when he suggested that the cassock added a "dignity" to the role. He also told me that the cassock was a way of showing that "it’s not the person that’s the most important thing, but the office that the person holds as a representative of the Church". This clearly indicated that he understood the role in terms of something allocated by the
church hierarchy, rather than being about individual charismatic gifts. The other two male ministers also wore cassocks, sometimes with the traditional white “preaching bands” or a white stole.\textsuperscript{65} They seemed conscious that they had been influenced in this by Anglican practice and were slightly uncomfortable that it did not seem to reflect their Methodist beliefs.

In contrast to the more clerically attired ministers, Anna explained that she did not even possess a clerical collar. I encountered a similar situation among several other women around the Methodist Connexions, a number of whom had been lay workers before becoming presbyteral ministers. One of the women explained her resistance to wearing the collar in terms of its being “a male item”, but she also indicated that it had to do with her resistance to claiming a distinctive identity. As she put it: “I just want to blend in with everybody else”. In this she conforms to Shaw’s claim that women ministers are more concerned to be part of the laity than to claim a separate priestly identity (Shaw 1996:263). In my observation, however, women and indeed men who do not wear clerical dress often wear smart business-style suits when on formal church duties, and in so doing lay claim at least to the bureaucratic power of their office.

5.4.5 Variation in approaches to church government

Most of the ministers regarded themselves as sharing responsibility for the leadership of both the circuit and their churches with the lay leaders. A striking difference emerged, however, between the Anglican vicar and the Methodist ministers, since the former argued for a more dominant clerical leadership and was heard on several occasions to state: “Everyone knows that the vicar always gets his way”. On one occasion, this difference provoked a heated argument between the vicar and his Methodist colleagues, and since this highlighted several important differences in approach I have reproduced this conversation in Appendix 5.2. At the end of the discussion another Methodist minister present

\textsuperscript{65} The stole is a strip of white or coloured material about 10 centimetres wide and normally about 150 centimetres long. In the Anglican Church it is worn over one or both shoulders in distinctive ways by bishops, priests and deacons (Davies 1986). Within Methodism the stole is normally worn round the back of the neck with the ends allowed to hang down vertically – which is the style of the priest or bishop in the Anglican Church.
suggested that the variation in approach to church government between Anglican and Methodist ministers had an historical root in the different arrangements regarding ministerial employment. This difference has historically been that the vicar has lived in his own home and has had the freehold to remain as long as he wanted, whereas in Methodism the minister has traditionally been moved on every two or three years and has only been temporarily in possession of the house provided for him by the circuit.

Indeed, traditionally, a great deal of the continuity of leadership within Methodist churches has been maintained through the circuit lay leaders, who have had much control over the appointment and re-appointment of ministers. In the past circuit stewards had the responsibility of consulting with church members and reaching a decision as to whether a minister should be invited to continue in his or her position once the initially agreed number of years of appointment had been reached. In Bedford, the Anglican vicar suggested that the Methodist situation made ministers “afraid to push things” because they were dependent on the “say-so of the lay people for their re-appointment” and he compared this with the freedom he had to remain as long as he wanted. He summarised the difference between the Methodist and Anglican systems by stating: “with the Methodists the people act like they own the place, it’s their place and the minister is only passing through”. He concluded: “It’s not like that in the Anglican Church”.

Certainly, lay people hold more power and have a greater involvement in government within the Methodist Church than in the Anglican Church. However, it is my contention that, despite appearances to the contrary, the Methodist minister is now most usually in the dominant position. While some of the ministers were at first reluctant to admit it, all had some consciousness of the power to achieve their own ends which they held through their administrative position. Kate, for instance, described the way she worked in terms of the strategy she used to get her ideas “taken on board”. She noted, for instance, that ministers could use the organisation and structure of Methodism effectively since they “knew it better” and since they were responsible for setting agendas and could consequently include particular items. On several occasions at staff
meetings the Methodist ministers talked about church committee meetings and described how they had either kept them “under control” or had been out-maneouvre by church office-holders. From this it was clear that even the best laid strategies and the most carefully regulated meetings did not always restrain certain voluble lay people.

The sense that in reality the ministers are dominant, despite the democratic processes of Methodism, may be a factor in making some lay Methodists all the more aggressive and critical of their ministers and in creating a dynamic in which there are ever more aggressive contests of authority between ministers and laity. I observed something of this when, during the course of my fieldwork, the circuit embarked on a series of meetings (called the “circuit review”) to discuss circuit policy on matters such as the re-invitation of the present superintendent minister and the issue of whether the ministers should be in their own churches most Sundays or be travelling around the circuit to preach in different churches. One important element in this series of meetings was the wrangle which developed between the more High Church minister of the partnership churches, and the largely older, more traditional Methodists. Exhibiting their traditional Methodist habitus, the older members condemned the minister for his practice of regularly preaching in his own churches and they argued, again reflecting their emphasis on egalitarianism, that continuity of community should be with the people rather than with the minister. Their objections were in part due to the threat they were experiencing to the traditional balance between lay and ordained, since in the new, more Anglican practice, the minister had greater influence in the church. While the circuit review appeared to be a highly democratic exercise, it was quite clear that the ministers, who got their way in the end, were always in the controlling and dominant position. As the Anglican vicar commented to me at the last in the long series of meetings: “Its game, set and match to us”.

In addition to their administrative knowledge, the ministers could sometimes use their theological knowledge and sacred position to secure their dominance in church government. From my observations it appears that both the Methodist and Anglican clergy use their knowledge of theology and the ancient languages to support their dominant positions. On occasion, they preached on the policy
issues that were being debated in the circuit. I also heard some of the ministers use their sense of having been “called” as a means of ratifying their positions. The use by ministers of such piety or their sacred position has been observed in other studies, and described as “manipulation at its worst” (Forbes 1986, cited in Beasley-Murray (1998:77)). In less pejorative language it could also be described as an enactment of the ministerial habitus.

5.4.6 Reflections on power in the relationships between lay and ordained

While several of the male ministers were reluctant at first to admit that they had any power, most referred to the “authority” which had been given to them by their position in the church. However, both Dean and Mark were conscious of the collaborative nature of their power and Dean stated: “In the Methodist Church I don’t think that a minister has any power .... except that which is allowed him by the congregation and by the stewards”. Likewise, Mark suggested that power was negotiated between lay and ordained when he observed: “real authority has to be earned”. This was an opinion which I had heard stated by other Methodist ministers long before I had started my research, and it is perhaps an indication of the Methodist minister’s consciousness of his or her dependence upon the congregation.

The two female ministers were also conscious of a kind of personal power which flowed from the nature of the pastoral relationships which they developed with their congregations. The women spoke of the dependence which members of a congregation might come to place on them and again there was a perception of the co-operative nature of the relationship. Anna suggested that:

You’re entrusted with a lot of confidentialities. You carry around a lot of people’s concerns. Mmm ..... and to a certain extent the old adage that power gives/that knowledge gives power is, is there.

Likewise, Kate observed with regard to the pastoral relationship: “people invest in you and give you enormous power”.

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5.4.7 The minister’s position as part of a wider ministerial hierarchy

All Methodist ministers in local circuit appointments are part of a national hierarchy of ministers which has both a bureaucratic and a sacred dimension. However, most of the ministers whom I interviewed, while referring to the “connexional hierarchy” and being conscious of the power which the connexional officials had to “change things”, did not regard themselves as being part of it. Indeed, several spoke of there being a “suspicion of people at the top”, and it emerged that some thought of there being two kinds of minister—namely, those who were interested in climbing the connexional ladder and those who were not. One of the ministers described the “connexional climber” as the person who liked to go to Conference, who enjoyed synods and who got to know the “movers and shakers”. Certainly, from my observations, there are those in Methodism whose commitment to the institution is closely linked to their desire for higher position within it, just as Bourdieu (1991:197) recounts of the political field.

Despite their denials, it was evident that all of the ministers in Bedford had strong connections to the connexional level through their relationships with other ministers, and quite simply through their position as paid employees of the wider organisation. The local ministers were usually party to information about wider Methodism before other members of their congregations and were used by the Connexion as channels for such information. In this way they all functioned as lower members of the bureaucratic hierarchy, and their knowledge and connections served to empower them.

After the local ministers the next rung on the connexional hierarchy is that of the superintendent minister. Superintendents have generally been recognised as carrying an extra dimension of authority and it is often said that they are the Methodist equivalent of bishops. However, unlike Anglican bishops, they have not been ordained to a different order of sacredness and their increased authority is meant to stem from their position in the bureaucratic hierarchy. Indeed, much of their increased power would appear to arise from the greater number of their links to the connexional offices and their additional administrative knowledge
and responsibility. Nevertheless, there is a spiritual dimension to their power, since they are regarded as being in charge of the pastoral care of all the ministers in the circuit, and they are also often expected to play a symbolic role as figurehead of the circuit. Following Bourdieu’s (1991:208–09) theory that the group needs a representative or symbol in order to exist, it can thus be argued that the circuit depends upon the superintendent as the symbol of its existence. Furthermore, as emerged in the Bedford “circuit review” it appears that a degree of prestige has been attached to the position of superintendent, both for the office-holder and for the churches at which he is minister. Moreover, in the life-story interviews which I conducted with the ministers, it became clear that superintendents play key roles in the recruitment of new ministers to circuits and this gives them a degree of power over other ministers and indeed over the circuit.

The next rung up in the ministerial hierarchy is that of the chairman of district. While, again, the power of chairmen is largely based on their administrative position, since they are meant to be responsible for the pastoral care of all the ministers in their district, there is again something of a spiritual or sacred dimension. Among those who are involved in the connexional level there are those, including chairmen, who are keen to increase the hierarchical status of the chairman. Recent changes in the system of stationing ministers have given the chairmen a greater role and have thus increased their power over the ordinary ministers. Furthermore, there are connexional players who have argued for a number of years that the chairmen should be called bishops and the issue is currently under review. However, while ministers and connexionally involved lay people may defer to them as being of higher status, the chairmen are generally little recognised by ordinary members.

The existence of this ministerial hierarchy becomes most obvious at gatherings such as the district ministerial synods and the Ministerial Session of the Conference. The ministers in the north Bedford circuit evinced mixed feelings towards such ministerial meetings, and their comments again indicate a lack of ease with ministerial hierarchy and even a certain degree of anti-clericalism. In this, it can be seen that Methodist ministers do not form a “complete social
community” as Goffinan has suggested for other professionals (1959 [1969]:189) and consequently they do not have such a “source of moral support” for maintaining the “front” before the lay audience. For instance, while he was conscious of the practical benefits of making links through the meeting together of ministerial colleagues, Mark commented to me: “I’m one of these ministers who feels uneasy when I walk into a room full of dark suits and clerical collars”. Moreover, several of the ministers expressed concern about the “kind of exclusiveness” or “cliquishness” which such meetings could promote, and all were in favour of ending the separate ministerial sessions of synod and Conference for the discussion of church business. While the ending of such sessions has in fact been debated at Conference on several occasions, the ministers have so far voted to retain them. Mark observed that this indicated an unspoken fear on the part of some ministers that their “authority might be lost”, and he went further to suggest that, despite all the emphasis in Methodism on “the priesthood of all believers”, the practice was rather different.

5.4.8 Reflections on changes in the ministry

As with the lay people quoted in section 3.4 above, all of the ministers, including the Anglican vicar, identified a key change to be the increase in informality in the ministry and a decrease in authority and status. This loss of authority in the church has been generally recognised for a number of years. For example, in her study of the celebration of the Catholic Mass, Campbell-Jones (1980:104) observed that all kinds of authority, and especially religious authority, no longer received unquestioned recognition. This change has provoked various responses in Methodist ministers. While some with a lower churchmanship, such as Anna, welcome this change, stating, for example: “I don’t expect anybody to sort of revere me or put me on a pedestal”, others have tended to counter the wider social movement with a greater emphasis on hierarchy and difference. Those within Methodism who take the latter line are generally in the vanguard of ecumenism, and encourage a more Anglican, High Church model.

Another generally perceived change among the Bedford ministers was that there had been an increase in the variety of tasks which the minister was
expected to perform, and a number of the ministers also suggested that there was an increasing awareness that ministers often developed specialised skills. In particular, Mark drew a historical contrast between “years ago”, when the ministers had been trained to be “jack of all trades”, with the current situation, when it was considered appropriate to ask how individual ministers could “best be used”. Significantly, he proposed that some of an “older generation of ministers” might think that such a desire on the part of ministers to specialise was “arrogant” or “selfish”. This comment indicates, I suggest, a growing awareness that the ministerial “self” is somehow different from the traditional all-encompassing ministerial identity.

The separation of the individual’s sense of self from the ministerial identity is reflected in the way in which the ministers indicated that they did not always admit to their office when in casual social situations. For example, one confessed that he had once lied at the hairdresser’s and had said that he was a social worker rather than a minister. Such behaviour may in part be due to a desire to evade the disrespect now often thought to attach to ministers, but it is also evidence that ministers do not always want to be identified with this role. The ministers in the north Bedford circuit had a regular day off, and had adopted other boundary-making strategies between themselves and their office. Traditionally, ministers have tended to have a greater overlap between the various spheres of their lives than is generally recognised to be the case for most people in modern urban contexts (Hannerz 1980). Now, however, many ministers are not entirely comfortable with this overlapping of domains. One minister told me that in order to relax it was necessary to “go as far as possible”, and several talked of the need to go to places where they could be anonymous in order to pursue their leisure interests. Furthermore, it was clear from the way in which they talked about their future that most of the Methodist ministers in the north Bedford circuit regarded ministry in fairly functional terms as something which could be given up or retired from as any other job. In contrast to this the Anglican vicar stated categorically: “Well ((I’ll)) still be a minister because once ordained you can’t be unordained”. The Methodist ministers were conscious that there had been ministers in the past who had not been able to “retire”, continuing to work as ministers long after officially retiring.
The ministers whom I interviewed were all adamant that they would retire and do “different things”, including things not necessarily even connected with the church. Thus, these Methodists clearly viewed ministry, and even church life, as somehow separate or detachable from themselves.

5.5 Conclusion

One of the primary conclusions of this chapter is that contrary to the predictions made by many sociologists of religion, the ministry of the ordained within the local church context, is still a meaningful and desired practice which can best be understood in terms of the relationship between lay and ordained. Quite clearly, ministry is not simply a part played out before a fairly passive audience of church members as Goffman’s model (1959 [1969]) of the enacting of professional roles might lead us to expect. Rather, the office is greatly affected by the demands of lay people, albeit that these demands are to an extent built upon previous experiences of the way in which ministers have enacted the office. In practice, Methodist ministry is negotiated between lay and ordained whose constant watching of each other is mutually disciplining and empowering. Lay people treat ministers as being of a different, more sacred, nature and expect them to live exemplary lives. Furthermore, the minister is made into the representative of the community, and is expected to perform the priestly function of representing God to the people and the people to God. In addition, ministers are also expected to carry out the function of developing the local community which includes administrative as well as social tasks. In this relationship between lay and ordained we can see how Bourdieus’s idea of the way in which the group makes the minister who in turn makes the group can be applied beyond the point of investiture to the ongoing daily situation in the local church, and that this can be empowering for all involved.

However, having had their position as members of a bureaucratic and sacred hierarchy confirmed and developed by the lay people, the ministers are in a position to be able to dominate the laity in several respects. The various ritual and administrative tasks which the ministers perform can be seen in Weberian terms to give them a power that is based on charismatic, traditional and legal-
rational dominance. The use of the minister’s power can perhaps be observed most clearly in church government, where the ministers can be seen to often control committee meetings and, as in the case of the “circuit review”, to affect policy decisions. This is what Lukes (1974:11) has called one-dimensional power, and concerns the prevailing of one person or group over another in situations of conflict. Other aspects of the minister’s power can be understood by employing Lukes’ category of “two-dimensional” power. This refers to all forms of “successful control by A over B”—that is, “A securing B’s compliance”—and Lukes suggests that it can be achieved by a variety of means which include authority, influence, threat of deprivation, manipulation and force (18). In the local church these various means can be observed in the way in which the minister may affect members’ behaviour through their preaching and teaching, by pastoral visiting, by the threat of withholding ritual services and by their patronage. Force is the one means suggested by Lukes which I have never observed in the church.

In addition to these means of exercising power, ministers are in a position to exercise what Lukes describes as the supreme power, which is “to get another or others to have the desires you want them to have”. This is achieved through control of information and through socialization (Lukes 1974:23). A large part of the minister’s task is clearly to socialize church members into being good Methodists and Christians. By dint of their position in working with people at times of crisis, when they are most vulnerable, and through the use of their charismatic skills of rhetoric, charm and persuasion, Methodist ministers can be seen to potentially have the power to shape people’s “perceptions, cognitions and preferences” (Lukes 1974:23). However, while ministers may sometimes attempt to operate in this way, since they offer only one voice among many in a pluralistic society, it will be rare in the contemporary situation that a minister could so completely dominate the wishes and desires of members of their congregations in this way.

In any case, much of this discussion of the more negative aspects of power perhaps assumes too much of an active desire on the part of ministers to achieve their interests over and against the interests of the members of their
congregations. In reality the interests of both these parties are often congruent and can be mutually achieved. Moreover, when ministers act to control or dominate a situation they may be totally unconscious of what they are doing. In fact, the Methodist emphasis on egalitarianism results in an aversion to talking about ministry in terms of priesthood, and to a lack of acknowledgement of the minister's power and dominant position. Ironically, however, this lack of consciousness of their dominant position, and also the lack of acknowledgement of power, may result in ministers often exercising power to a greater degree since the need for limits and controls is not recognised. A similar observation has been made by Paul Harrison of the officials in the North American Baptist convention, whose power is all the greater for not being officially recognised and for consequently going largely unchecked (Harrison 1959:92).

However, having made this claim regarding ministerial dominance, the ministers' enactment of their hierarchical position within Methodism and their use of power is tempered by the Methodist emphasis on egalitarianism. This can be seen both in the way in which lay people criticise and attempt to control the ministers and also from the ministers' own reluctance to claim too much for themselves. It is somewhat paradoxical that while the ministers are reluctant on the whole to claim any ontological or sacred difference for themselves, and instead justify their position in terms of bureaucratic roles, the lay people are most critical of the ministers for the occasions on which they use such bureaucratic power, for example in "manipulating meetings", while implicitly treating the ministers as ontologically different. Whatever the basis of the power, the office of ministry can be seen to empower the laity through the creating of individual and group identity, the creation of supportive communities and in the development of valued relationships. Moreover, far from being deprived of the "instruments of symbolic production", as Bourdieu proposed of such groups, Methodist lay people are often greatly assisted by the ministers to contribute to the creation of both rituals and policy.

Across the Methodist churches in the north Bedford circuit, and between the ministers, variations in how ministry was understood were related to the way in which the values of egalitarianism and hierarchy were balanced. Between the
churches social class affected these differences, with the more middle-class church members at Priory placing greater emphasis on the hierarchical nature of the minister than did the more working-class people at Clapham. With the ministers, those of a more High Church or Catholic theology again emphasised hierarchy and ontological differences, whereas those of a Low Church or evangelical position stressed religious and bureaucratic equality. From my observation in Bedford and around the Connexion, it appears that gender may also affect the way in which these values are balanced, with women tending to be more egalitarian, although this certainly is not universally the case. All of the variations between the Methodists were small, however, when compared to the difference between the Methodist view and that taken by the Anglican vicar and Anglican laity in the partnership churches, all of whom placed a much greater emphasis on the distinctive nature of the minister and translated this into the vicar having a greater dominance in church life.

As ecumenical relationships develop, the Anglican view of ministry is coming to influence an increasing number of Methodist ministers’ understandings of ministry. At the same time, others are being influenced by the more Low Church, charismatic and evangelical movements. This is serving to promote diversity of belief and of practice among ministers. Divergences are also developing between lay and ordained, as some ministers come to view their office as a detachable role rather than an all-encompassing nature, while many lay people still view ministry in this latter sense. While these changes may add some new dimensions to the debates and conflicts concerning the nature of ministry, this has long been a contested area. Indeed, the office of minister has, I suggest, often acted as a kind of religious symbol which can absorb a great variety of understandings. Towler and Coxon’s (1979:46) negative conclusion was that the clergyman’s position was being reduced to “a symbol of the group”. I propose more positively that, as a symbol, the minister has many creative functions, not least of which is to unite the usually diverse church members. What remains to be seen is the extent to which the relationship between lay and

66 Support for this claim is found in Melvyn Shaw’s study of women ministers, in which he concludes that “women ministers prefer an open style of management which seeks to maximize laity involvement” (1996:139).
ordained is affected by the various new understandings of ministry and whether
the symbol can continue to absorb all the differences. A further question is
whether, in the conflicts which ensue from these differences of understanding,
the balance of values reached will be such as to fundamentally change the nature
of Methodism. Anxieties about the future coherence of Methodist ministry have
already prompted a fresh set of reports on the topic of ministry.67

67 A report entitled “Role and place of the ordained minister in a modern church” was adopted by the
ministry” was presented to the Conference in 1999 and sent the district synods for discussion (Methodist
Chapter 6

Connecting the Connexion: creating Methodism and ministry at the national level

6.1 Introduction

The connexional level has already been encountered on several occasions in this thesis. It stands on the one hand for everything in Methodism which is beyond the local church and on the other hand, more specifically, for all those employed as part of the national church machinery of administration. One of the primary functions of the administrative machinery is to create a Methodism that is wider than the local church, or in Methodist parlance to “connect the Connexion”. Following a pattern similar to that outlined for the development of certain kinds of sects into denominations or churches (Wilson [1966] 1969, Coleman 1989:95-96), Methodism has become increasingly centralised and bureaucratised with an increasingly developed administrative machinery. The aim of this chapter is to reveal the particular nature of the Methodist bureaucracy, showing how here, as elsewhere in Methodism, particular compromises are reached between the core values, and how, despite the strong rhetoric of egalitarianism, the main leaders are treated as members of both a sacred and bureaucratic hierarchy and hold considerable power within the denomination. A further goal is to explore how, chiefly through the use of ritual, symbols and the building of particular relationships, the connexional officials attempt to bring about an integration of the central and local levels of Methodism. A very important aspect of this integration is the link made by the ordained ministers, and I argue that the role which they play in the making of ministers is one of the chief ways in which the connexional officials affect the making of Methodism.

The historical development of Methodism can in many respects be seen to conform to Weber’s account of the “routinization of charisma”, with the movement developing from the charismatic leadership of John Wesley, through a denominational structure based largely on religious tradition and into a bureaucratic organisation with legal-rational domination (Weber 1947).
Historically, it is claimed that Wesley had always been highly methodical in the organization of his personal religion as well as of the religion of those who responded to his message. The name “Methodist” may well arise as much from this practice of a methodical religion (Halévy [1906] 1971:36), with its regular fasting, self-denial and frugality, as from any new method of theology as is sometimes suggested (Heitzenrater 1995). As the organisation which he engendered grew in size and complexity, Wesley gradually put in place a legally constituted body of government, which became known as the Conference, and he set about codifying the rules of the organisation (Currie 1968:24, Kent 1966:47). After Wesley’s death, Methodism gradually became more tightly structured with separate departments introduced to oversee various areas of work, such as the missions (Ward 1972:57). At its simplest, therefore, this level of Methodism can be helpfully understood as being a bureaucracy in Weberian terms. However, the Methodist administrative structure, like many others, does not just operate according to legal-rational principles.

Weber acknowledged that bureaucracies do not all function according to the strictly rational and calculable goals which he had identified as part of the nature of the ideal type. He noted that within social systems which were basically bureaucratic there could also be “fundamental elements of irrationality”—that is, elements which did not conform to the principles of calculability on which pure bureaucracy is based (Weber 1947:339). He went on to describe these bureaucracies as evincing a conflict between formal and substantive rationality. Moreover, recent empirical studies have gone further in suggesting that pressures other than the principles of rational calculability and efficiency influence all bureaucracies. Some of these studies have been conducted by social anthropologists, who have argued that, while clearly codified rational rules may be the basis of bureaucracy, such rules are usually open to interpretations and

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68 Heitzenrater (1995:18) notes that in the seventeenth century a few orthodox Calvinists began to write against the Arminians and their “new method” of doing theology, and that this may have provided the terminology for a “derogatory designation of Wesley's preaching at Oxford”, which was in the Arminian “New Methodist mould”. However, Heitzenrater (1995:45) also argues that Wesley never made this connection himself; rather, he drew a parallel with a school of first century Greek medics who “promoted good health through a regimen of diet and exercise”.

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may not be executed as originally intended even in state controlled institutions (Grint 1991, Cullen 1993). Indeed, it has been proposed that in order for bureaucracy to work effectively some “informal processes” or an elaboration of cultural meaning or goals by sub-groups is necessary, since otherwise the “bureaucratic machine becomes cumbersome and inefficient” (Cullen 1993:89 drawing on Merton 1940, Selznick 1949). The connexional bureaucracy must be understood in terms of an interaction between rational bureaucratic principles and the culture of Methodism. In addition, the way in which the Methodist bureaucracy is enacted is affected by the other influences and working practices which its members bring to bear on it.

The effect of bureaucratization on churches has been studied for the Anglican Church in this country (Thompson 1968, 1970, Rudge 1968) and more broadly across the denominations in the United States (Simpson 1965, Fichter 1961, cited in Rudge 1968). However, little attention has been paid to the way in which such bureaucratization is brought about, or to the manner in which individuals make meaning or behave within religious bureaucracies. Furthermore, the story is sometimes told fairly simply in terms of a clash between bureaucracy and the traditions of the church—that is, between formal and substantive rationalities. This is the case with Thompson’s account of the Anglican Church (Thompson 1968), although elsewhere Thompson (1970) goes on to describe more fully the manner in which the particular nature of the Anglican Church, with its great internal diversity, has affected the development of its bureaucracy over the last one hundred and fifty years. To an even greater extent, the administrative machinery of Methodism must be understood to reflect a syncretism between Methodist values and bureaucracy, perhaps reflecting the more centralised nature of its historical development. Moreover, the particular development of bureaucracy within Methodism must have been influenced by the fact that, as John Munsey Turner has pointed out, Wesley’s message had a particular appeal to the artisan classes who played a key a role in the development of bureaucracy more widely in this country (Turner 1998:2). This may go some way to explaining the greater implementation of bureaucratic principles within Methodism compared to Anglicanism.
Several of the existing studies of modern church organisation employ Weber's ideal types of domination in their analysis of the bureaucratized church, but they tend, with the exception of Harrison's study of North American Baptists (1959), to regard the power of the leaders as being based on one kind of ideal type alone (Rudge 1968, Morgan 1963, cited in Rudge 1968). In contrast, I propose that all three methods of legitimating power can be seen to be at work simultaneously in some of the senior officials of the Methodist church. In this chapter, I demonstrate how both the symbols and practices of bureaucracy, together with the roles played in the connexional rituals, empower the connexional leaders and give them considerable influence over the nature of Methodism. While this power, like that of the local church ministers, may also rely upon the collaboration of lay people and in turn empower certain of them, the hierarchical nature of the connexional officials is also deeply disliked by many ordinary Methodists and can be seen to be one cause of a gap which is generally perceived to lie between local churches and the connexional level. This gulf between the levels is also created by the cultural difference between the heavily bureaucratised connexional offices and the Methodism of the local churches.

The connexional officials are greatly concerned to overcome the gulf between the levels in Methodism. A similar problem with the linking up of the various levels has been identified as existing for all the main political parties in Britain, and even for the state (Kertzer 1988:6). In addition, it has been argued that since these bodies often operate at a distance from those with whom they wish to engage they must, in constantly re-creating themselves, find ways to make themselves visible. Likewise, connexional Methodism must be created and demonstrated in such a way that those in the local churches can begin to relate to it. One of the most significant means by which connexional Methodism is made visible is through the annual Conference. The Conference is a major ritual with both religious and secular or practical ceremonies (in the sense defined by Moore and Myerhoff 1977), at which connexional Methodism is symbolised largely through the main office-holders. The Conference can be seen to function to create and express group solidarity and cohesion in the manner suggested by Durkheim ([1915] 1964), and to create group identity in a way similar to that described by numerous anthropologists (Harrison 1992, Cohen 1974, Cohen
1985). The Conference acts not only to proclaim such identity to those outside the organisation but, even more importantly, announces it to those within, illustrating, as Kertzer (1988:2) puts it, that “identification of the local with the national can take place only through the use of symbols that identify the one with the other”. That ordinary Methodist ministers act as such symbols and function to bring about integration between the levels is a further aspect of my argument.

The material for this chapter is drawn from participant observation at two annual Methodist Conferences and from a period spent in the connexional offices in London. At both the Conferences and in the offices I was able to talk to participants informally and also to conduct structured interviews. Access to the connexional offices was granted in part because of my status as a student minister and I was treated as a “student on placement” or work experience, as well as having my research interests acknowledged and accredited as issues pertinent to contemporary Methodism. The story of how I initially made connections with the Connexion is indicative of the manner in which the connexional level operates and I begin this chapter with an account of my first experiences of the connexional offices and then move on to analyse the nature of the administration before finally turning to consider the way in which the officers portray themselves at the annual Conference.

6.2 The connexional offices

6.2.1 Penetrating the connexional level

Having realised from reading articles in the weekly Methodist newspaper, the Methodist Recorder, that my research interests were topics which were currently being considered by members of the connexional level, I began, early in my research, a process of contacting some of those involved. Gradually, I was put in touch with increasingly senior members of the connexional level. Eventually, a meeting was proposed with one of the Co-ordinating Secretaries—that is, one of the most senior managers of connexional affairs. At the meeting which occurred I received my first impressions of the Methodist offices and encountered something of a puzzle in the contradictory ways in which I was treated.
The Co-ordinating Secretaries of the Methodist Church are based in an office building on the Marylebone Road, London, directly opposite the world famous waxwork Museum, of Madame Tussaud's (see Fig. 6.1). With the constant crowds outside Madame Tussaud's and the incessant flow of black cabs and red double-decker buses on the broad and busy road, it feels like this is a central and important place. The seven-story Marylebone office block, which was originally home to the Methodist Missionary Society, has recently been refurbished to accommodate a substantial proportion of the connexional employees. On entering the building there is a large, brightly lit and wooden panelled foyer or hall with a reception desk along one side, behind which sits a rather bored-looking receptionist.

On the morning when I first visited these Methodist Church offices, not knowing where to go, I stated the nature of my business to the receptionist, who acted as a kind of guard to the hidden offices. I was directed to the third floor and taking the lift, I arrived at the office shared by the personal assistants (PAs) of the four Co-ordinating Secretaries. After edging my way into the large open-plan room I explained the purpose of my visit and was told somewhat sharply by the PA with whom I'd negotiated the visit: "I asked them downstairs to keep you down there and not to let you come up—so will you take a seat outside—she's busy". With that I retreated out again into the open central stairwell, where there was a large black sofa on which I sat. While I waited, I had a sense of being constantly scrutinized as a "stranger" by the staff members who frequently passed along the corridor, more often than not carrying pieces of paper.

My experience of entering the Marylebone offices on this and several subsequent occasions was of trying to penetrate something which was carefully bounded and to an extent guarded. The PA with whom I first dealt certainly gave the impression of trying to keep me out or away from the third floor, and it was as if there was something there which I should not see. Yet, all of this preliminary experience was in sharp contrast with the actual response I received from the Co-ordinating Secretary, who, when she emerged from her office, greeted me with a friendly, open smile and a warm handshake. Furthermore, when, during our first meeting, I proposed that I would like to observe in the
Fig. 6.1. The Methodist connexional offices, Marylebone Road, London.
connexion offices for an extended period of time, the idea was enthusiastically welcomed and the attitude of the Co-ordinating Secretary was quite clearly "come and look—we have nothing to hide".

Throughout the three-month period that I spent in the connexion offices my initial experience of being treated very differently by different people of the same and of different status, was repeated many times and remained a puzzle for a considerable period. Some people always treated me as an outsider and appeared to resent my presence, whereas others welcomed me and seemed happy to have me around. Over time I came to see that the explanation for this puzzle lay partly in the combination of contradictory cultural values and practices found in the connexion offices, which its members differently embody. The main cultural forces are those of bureaucracy and traditional Methodism. In addition, as I came also to realise, the business and charity worlds, along with other denominations, all influence behaviour patterns in the Marylebone Road offices.

6.2.2 The bureaucratic nature of the Methodist central offices

The connexion offices can be seen basically to fulfil all the main criteria which characterize Weber's ideal type of legal-rational administration or bureaucracy, although the extent to which the offices operate according to a formal or a substantive rationality varies according to the aspect of the organisation being considered. In general, the ideal features of the formal bureaucracy are tempered by various Methodist practices. However, in the recent past attempts have been made to re-structure the offices according to more efficiency-based principles, and thus to heighten the more formal bureaucratic nature of the organisation.69

In the Weberian ideal type, bureaucracy is based on an abstract legal code of conduct, the rules of which are developed on the grounds of expediency or rational values or both (Weber 1947:73), and it is expected that the rules will be applied impartially, and impersonally, in all cases. Work in the connexion offices is based on a codified system of rules agreed by the Methodist Conference and published annually in C.P.D. Since these rules are based on the

69 Further details of the nature of the re-structuring which occurred in 1996 can be found in Appendix 6.1.
ultimate religious goals of Methodism as much, if not more, than on calculable
efficiency, Methodist bureaucracy can be seen to be what Weber termed
substantive rather than purely formal in its rationality. However, elements of the
latter are also present and can be identified, for instance, in the codes of practice
and employment legislation that have been standardized across the connexional
offices as a result of the re-structuring in 1996. In theory, these standard
employment practices apply equally to all members of the offices.

The connexional work is subdivided according to a pattern of offices or
departments with each unit having a specific area of focus officially determined
by the Methodist Conference. While, since re-structuring, there has been a
policy of stressing that all those employed at the connexional level are members
of a unified “connexional team”, for “administrative purposes” the work has
been divided up into four units and there are some clearly identifiable sub­
categories of concern around which staff have tended to group (See Fig. 6.2).
This manner of working appears to conform to Weber’s model where, within a
bureaucracy, the typical person in authority occupies an ‘office’ and in the action
associated with his status, including the commands he issues to others, he is
“subject to an impersonal order to which his actions are orientated” (Weber
1947:73). However, while it may be true in theory that individuals in the
connexional team are acting out of obedience to the Conference as a kind of
“impersonal order”, in practice the relationships in the workplace take on a much
more personal nature and patronage networks, especially between the many
ministers who are employed, have been, as I will show later, an important
element in the internal dynamics of the institution.

In the connexional offices, especially since re-structuring, each employee is
clearly answerable to a more senior office-holder in a pyramid of management.
An indication of the rank or status of those in the pyramid is given by the number
of employees who are answerable to them and by the number of support staff
appointed to them. For instance, the higher status of the Co-ordinating
Secretaries is symbolised and created by the employment of their PAs as well as
by the large number of employees they oversee. The pre-eminence in status of
the Secretary of Conference, as head of the Conference Office, is clear not only
How the new structures work

Main areas of the Team's work

- Church Life
  - resources/mission
  - worship and faith
  - formation in ministry
  - spiritual care and Christian education

- Church and Society
  - evangelism
  - evangelisation and public issues

- Inter-Church and Other Relationships
  - world church
  - ecumenical
  - other faiths
  - relief & development

- Central Services
  - administration
  - communication
  - finance
  - personnel

Four Co-ordinating Secretaries, together with the Secretary of Conference, manage the day-to-day work of the team, and co-ordinate its many work areas.

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Fig. 6.2. Methodist Church diagram of the connexional team following restructuring
from the nature of the work undertaken by that office, but also from the numerous support staff who work under him.\(^70\) This closely conforms to Weber's characterisation of bureaucracy, in which the staff are organised according to a systematic division of labour and arranged according to the principle of hierarchy, so that "each lower office is under the control and supervision of a higher one" (Weber 1947:331).

Another defining feature of bureaucracy according to Weber is a system of promotion, which maps out a career within the organisation. Staff are remunerated by fixed salaries in money, for the most part with a right to pensions. The salary scale is primarily graded according to rank in the hierarchy, but in addition to this criterion, the responsibility of the position and the requirements of the incumbent's social status may be taken into account (Weber 1947:334). Within the connexional team there are two main ranking systems—one for lay staff and the other for ordained. There is scale of payment which runs, as I understand it, from grades one to ten according to the degree of responsibility of the work. Secretarial and other support staff are ranked up to grade eight, with ordained staff being graded either nine or ten. It has often been stated in Methodism that all Methodist ministers should be paid the same amount of money, and this principle is held up as a factor in "maintaining the unity of the ministry" (Brake 1984:328). A fixed rate of stipend is recommended each year by the Conference as an allowance to which all ministers are entitled. Over the last few years, however, additional sums have been awarded to the senior connexional figures, of whom the Co-ordinating Secretaries and Secretary of Conference receive the greatest increments. In recent years lay staff have also been awarded the higher, ministerial, grades if they are in positions formerly or usually held by ministers. Comparing the remunerative scales is difficult, though, since ministers are paid in kind with the provision of a manse, as well as by stipend. One of the aspects of re-structuring has been to apply the grading

\(^{70}\) A great deal of the life of the Connexion is managed or directed through the Conference office, including ministerial stationing and almost all aspects of a minister's career after training. The Conference office is staffed by another Conference appointed officer, namely the Assistant Secretary of Conference and three administrative and secretarial support staff.
system uniformly across the connexional team and to create more of a career or advancement structure.

Employment in the connexional team, whether of lay or ordained persons, is explicitly stated to be according to fairly rational criteria of skill and the ability to do a specified job. While this is more clearly verifiable for those undertaking more technical tasks, even the ministers, whose appointments must be ratified by the Conference, have to produce “reasoned statements” which describe their appropriateness for their office. This appears to conform to Weber’s (1947:333) characterization of a bureaucracy, in which each office is filled by a free contractual relationship, and there is free selection on the basis of technical qualifications, tested by examination or guaranteed by certificate. In practice, however, ministers are often employed as much for their sacred and esoteric knowledge as for any administrative or technical skill, and they cannot be said to be in a free contractual relationship. In addition, their appointment is also theoretically dependent on a vote taken at the Methodist Conference. Such a mixing of modes of appointment is not exceptional, as Jack Goody has noted. In assessing Weber’s description of bureaucratic office Goody observed that the distinction between appointment and election was not as radical as it might seem. He noted that, whatever the procedure for selecting office-holders, the “human choice” often required the “confirmation of divine authority” (Goody 1966:17). Thus, as Goody has suggested of other circumstances, by having some appointments finally decided on at Conference the Methodists put the onus on God and attempt to remove an element of friction from their own affairs.

One way in which the connexional offices do clearly operate as an ideal-type bureaucracy is with regard to the keeping of careful records of all administrative acts, decisions and rules. It is also a matter of principle in the connexional team that “the members of the administrative staff should be completely separated from the ownership of the means of production or administration” (Weber 1947:331), and that official activity is divided from the sphere of private life (Weber 1978:957). However, here again the employment of ministers complicates this issue since, as I have argued in earlier chapters, the degree to
which a minister may be deemed to have a “private life” separate from his or her role as a minister is a matter of debate.

The extent to which the work of the team can be classed as operating according to formal or substantive rationality varies according to the kinds of task undertaken. The nature of the work varies greatly between those who have tasks of a specifically religious nature to conduct, such as the preparation of spiritual or pastoral materials, and those whose work is largely non-religious and relates for example to finance and investment. Within the organisation, such a basic difference between the kinds of work can be seen in the fact that most of those working on finances and investment are not generally regarded as “team members” and are situated in a variety of separate locations. In contrast to this, those more specifically regarded as “team members” have been largely located in the three London centres of Westminster Central Hall, Chester House (Muswell Hill) and Marylebone Road.

6.2.3 The influence of the business-world on the connexional offices

We are a major employer. We have 6,300 sales outlets and sales representatives (we call them churches and ministers). We are a major landowner and publisher. We are a big outfit.

A connexional team member’s description to me of the Methodist Church

Given that one of the main cultural paradigms in contemporary Britain is that of capitalism, it is perhaps not surprising that, in terms of day-to-day practices, the business world can be seen to be highly influential in shaping the nature of the connexional bureaucracy. This influence can be observed most obviously in terms of the physical lay-out and decoration of the Marylebone Road suite of offices, which has similarities with many of the large corporations in the nearby city of London. Moreover, many of the staff are now recruited from the business world. For instance, Jane, a younger employee, was a business and marketing graduate who had worked for a marketing consultancy and a British corporate bank before joining the connexional offices. There was also Becky, who was trained in design and production and had previously worked in advertising for
British Rail. The business influence is also reflected in the manner in which many of the connexional employees dress—that is, in smart suits and ties for the men and neat, streamlined dresses and jackets for the women. Indeed, for some of the connexional employees, especially the professional lay people, looking businesslike was very important. Jane, a younger employee, confided in me: “I think very carefully about what I wear—I want to look professional—and I always carry a briefcase”.

While there are quite a number of senior employees who are ministers and who have come from working in the circuits, clerical dress is rarely worn. The ministers employed on the connexional level also differ from their colleagues in the way they leave home to conduct their work and talk about going “in to the office”. Generally, they have the air of people who work in the public domain. One of the senior managers was very conscious of the cultural gap the different working practices in the offices created between local and connexional Methodism. In particular, she drew attention to the influence of the business world on the Connexion, stating in a magazine article that in her present post she had had to learn the “language of management, both human resource management and financial accountability” (Richardson 1996:5).

Furthermore, the work in the Methodist offices has all the trappings and trimmings of the business world, with letters on headed notepaper, personal assistants and secretaries carrying out tasks for managers, and middle managers, often called ‘the boss’. At the Marylebone Road site, meetings that went on across lunchtimes were punctuated with corporate, business-style lunches when trays of sandwiches and cakes were brought in to refresh the gathered employees and their visitors. After re-structuring in 1996 I heard much talk from the new Communications Department about the need for the Methodist Church to have a “corporate identity”, and this found expression in the centralising and co-ordinating of all the published material produced by the different departments of the church.

In general, the influence of the business world could be seen to be heightened by the 1996 re-structuring, not least by the fact that a team of management
consultants were employed to advise on the changes. One of the main recommendations of the management consultants concerned the introduction of clearer management structures and a new form of internal government. With regard to government, a body called the Methodist Council was instigated as the official employer of all the lay members on the team and was also given the task of overseeing a unified church policy. The Council delegates work to, and is advised by, the Methodist Council Executive. The members of the executive are largely people who have had particular professional experience in the worlds of industry, commerce and the service sector, and, since I observed a predominant concern with “efficiency” and “making a saving” in the way in which some of the members talked, I suspect that there is a strong leaning in this committee towards business methods.

The practices of the connexional employees are also affected by other cultures of working, since not all of the ministers, or the lay employees, come from the business world and several whom I met had previously been teachers, or had worked in management within the service sector. Moreover, the ways of working in the connexional offices are also influenced by the fact that employees have to be able to relate to other institutions, such as government departments, charities and the other religious denominations (most especially the Church of England). However, these institutions also appear to be affected by the business world and hence the general impression of the culture of the connexional team in 1997 was that it was greatly influenced by the contemporary business culture. Nevertheless, behind all of these other cultural influences, the fundamental nature of the institution is shaped by Methodist values and practices.

6.2.4 The Methodist nature of the connexional offices

6.2.4.1 The ministers

While a number of those employed at the connexional level, especially among the secretarial staff, are not Methodists or indeed of any religious faith, a substantial proportion of staff are committed Methodists, and the majority of

71 For further details about the structure of the Methodist Council, and the Methodist Council Executive see
those in senior and management positions are ordained. The Methodist employees come, in most cases, with a well-developed Methodist habitus and this affects the way they act within the bureaucratic framework.

While pressure is growing to employ more lay people in senior roles, it is still mandatory for the Secretary of Conference to be an ordained person, and in practice three out of the four Co-ordinating Secretaries were ordained. Of all those directly managed by the Co-ordinating Secretaries and Secretary of Conference, and who managed others in the team, twenty out of the total of twenty-nine were ordained. The employment of ministers, who have not been specially trained in the technical skills of management and administration required for their positions, goes against Weber’s description of the ideal type bureaucracy. Additionally, it is possible to detect patronage networks and other cultural biases at work within the connexional offices. For instance, a high number of the ministers employed in London had been trained at Wesley House, Cambridge. In interview, several mentioned the fact that at college they had got to know one particular connexional figure who, it was implied, had been influential in their selection for a connexional post. Indeed, one of the connexional team members actually suggested to me that there was something of an “old-boy network”, in the team with certain members preferring to communicate with those they knew from Wesley House. Another person, from a different patronage network, specifically mentioned how a senior figure had been a “great influence” on him and he told of how this figure had on several occasions telephoned him to ask if he would like a particular post. Theological party or persuasion is also often linked in with patronage networks, since senior individuals can be seen to support those of like minds and sensibilities. Also, when it comes to senior appointments, it is a well-recognised fact among ministers that selection is often made in order to maintain a balance of theological parties, and is not therefore based entirely on personal ability.

The employment of ministers, many of whom had been trained at Wesley House, brought with it a further class bias into the nature of the bureaucracy.

Appendices 6.2.1 and 6.2.2.
Also, the fact that up until relatively recently ministers had to be male has fostered a gender bias in the connexional management. A similar bias is observable in most contemporary businesses and administrative centres, which also have a majority of white middle-class men as senior managers (Connell [1987] 1995:99–101). In the Methodist bureaucracy however, there is a consciousness among senior leaders that gender equality in employment is an ideal to which they should aspire. This is particularly noticeable when Methodism is compared with other denominations, such as the Church of England, where women are still debarred from holding senior posts in the church’s hierarchy. Within Methodism, the idea of gender equality is beginning to affect practice. At the time of my fieldwork one of the senior managers was a woman, and since that time another woman has been employed at this level. In this, the particular concern for egalitarianism within may be detected.

The fact that most of the senior managers are ordained, and are therefore members of a sacred as well as of a bureaucratic hierarchy, does from time to time affect the nature of relationships within the offices. Their training at theological college has provided the ministers with a different discourse, which I occasionally heard employed within the offices. On one occasion, I heard this knowledge of theology used to gain domination over lay colleagues in an argument about connexional policy. The distinct nature of the ordained is also evident at the weekly Communion services which are led by ordained staff at the Marylebone offices. The impact of this is small, however, compared to the large religious gatherings at which the Secretary of Conference and other senior officers may officiate. Participating in prestigious ceremonies, such as the connexional team’s annual New Year service at Wesley’s Chapel, provides sacred legitimation for the Secretary, President and Vice-President of Conference, as does their role in the annual Methodist Conference as detailed below. On a day-to-day basis most of the staff meetings begin with a prayer or small religious ceremony, and although this is not always conducted by a

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72 See Appendix 6.3 for details of gender ratios among staff.
73 See Appendix 6.4 for a description of the New Year ritual.
minister, in most cases an ordained person chairs the meeting and thus prompts the ritual.

6.2.4.2 The problem of making the new structures appropriately Methodist

The Methodist values embodied by many of the connexional staff can be seen in the conflicts which were provoked by many of the “efficiency-based” changes brought in by re-structuring in 1996. In particular, several ordained middle managers seemed very anxious about the introduction of more overt management styles. One man complained to me that the initial designation of a “core management group”, which was to include the Co-ordinating Secretaries and the Secretary of Conference, was the invention of the core management group itself and reflected “a desire for power”. Significantly, the term “core management group” was dropped after six months. In my observation, however, while the name changed the management structures remained largely the same. The strong reaction to what appears to be a more overt practice of hierarchy is evidence of the Methodist emphasis on egalitarianism.

I also encountered numerous criticisms to the effect that the new governing bodies, were not appropriately democratic, and I heard several complaints that they increased the power of the Co-ordinating Secretaries and the Secretary of Conference. As one team member put it to me: “the main purpose of Methodist Council is to gain a wider ownership of decisions already made by the Co-ordinating Secretaries”. These criticisms provide further evidence of the Methodist desire to reach an appropriate compromise between egalitarianism and hierarchy. However, while the new structures were clearly viewed by some in the offices as not being appropriately Methodist, others, particularly the Co-ordinating Secretaries, argued that they promoted greater collaboration and sensitivity to local church needs. In this way, the senior officers were able to argue that the new structures were in keeping with Methodist values.

74 See Appendix 6.5 for further details of the governing bodies.
6.2.4.3 Methodist ways of working in the connexional offices

The Methodist concern for appropriately egalitarian and democratic structures can be seen in the way in which many smaller committee meetings and staff gatherings are conducted on the connexional level. The practice of having committees of lay and ordained members from around the Connexion to work on various issues of concern has continued since the early part of the nineteenth century (Currie 1968). The committees are now made up of connexional staff and specially invited ordained and lay members from the districts. To be on a connexional committee carries with it a certain degree of prestige and the perks of a free trip, usually to London, for meetings and sometimes a nice lunch. Committee membership may also reflect an individual's particular interests and promotes the making of valued relationships with connexional figures. Indeed, the selection of lay committee members for the committees, as far as I observed, is done on a basis of personal acquaintance (i.e. a system of patronage), although appeals for appropriate members are sometimes made through the Methodist press. Members of committees are often wives or close friends of ordained connexional figures and the same names appear repeatedly on a variety of committees. In this way, just as Currie has noted with regard to the composition of the committees when they were first established by Jabez Bunting in the nineteenth century, an inner circle of connexional figures is able to maintain control over the wider work of the Connexion (Currie 1968:33).

In addition to bias in membership selection, many of the meetings are dominated by ordained members, which appears to be far from the Methodist ideal of egalitarian participation. This again provides evidence of an unacknowledged practice of hierarchy.75 Harrison similarly noted, in his study of North American Baptists, how democratic beliefs were not exercised in the practice of denominational life and how, for instance, at meetings of boards, staff personnel tended to dominate the meeting while ostensibly playing the role of resource providers (Harrison 1959:107).

75 See Appendix 6.6 for further details.
The nature of much of the work conducted also reflects the Methodist habitus with, for example, social responsibility being an important area of connexional concern. The areas of Home and Overseas Mission (to use the pre-restructuring titles), with their contemporary emphasis on humanitarian aid, also further illustrate this aspect of the Methodist habitus. Moreover, most of those whom I met in the connexional offices were keenly committed to their work and spent long and unsociable hours in the service of their office. However, it is not clear to what extent this results from the Methodist habitus, in particular the work ethic, or from the practices of the business world, since the latter, if we are to follow Weber, has been affected so greatly by the former. Indeed, in the past, many of the leading figures in the business world, such as Jesse Boot and Joseph Rank have been committed Methodists, as has been noted by Jeremy (1988).

6.3 Power in the Methodist connexional offices

Despite the Methodist emphasis on egalitarianism, the members of the connexional team were all quite clearly members of a bureaucratic hierarchy. Given their senior position in this hierarchy and their membership also of a sacred hierarchy, the ministers consequently had considerable power. Many staff members identified certain aspects of the expression of this power. In particular, several spoke spontaneously of the power of the Co-ordinating Secretaries being about the making of significant budgeting and policy decisions. These decisions were perceived to affect the job security of members of the team. Thus, it appears that power was here conceived to be about control over resources and control of policy. The first of these understandings echoes Lukes’ suggestion, as outlined above, that power is the ability to achieve your own or your group’s interests (Lukes 1986), and indeed the Co-ordinating Secretaries were thought to be able to resource certain individuals or groups who could thereby achieve their interests. The second idea, which relates to the controlling of policy, resembles the approach proposed by Labour historian Lewis Minkin who in his study of the Labour Party Conference defined power simply as the ability to affect policy (Minkin 1978: xiii).
In my observation, it was clear that the Co-ordinating Secretaries, and also the Secretary of Conference, had the ability to influence decision-making and resource management within the connexional level. This power is founded on several things. First and foremost, their appointments have been legitimated by a job selection procedure and also through their election by the Conference, and within the offices there is a tradition of respecting such appointments. Since almost all at this senior level are Methodist ministers, they also have power from their personal charisma, and from the charisma routinized by the church. Moreover their sacred role in religious rituals, especially that of the Secretary, further re-enforces their positions. With regard to legal-rational domination, they are given, as part of their appointment, emblems of seniority in terms of the location together of their rooms in the middle of the Marylebone suite of offices and the quality and quantity of their office space, as well as support staff and other administrative accoutrements.

Furthermore, their role as co-ordinators puts them in a superior position, since, as Michael Mann has suggested, "interaction and communication networks actually centre" on those who hold such supervisory and co-ordinating positions. (Mann 1986:7). Thus, as one of the Co-ordinating Secretaries actually informed me, situations can be influenced by their withholding or passing on of information. Through their positions as chairs of many committees and staff meetings, and through the articles and reports which they write, they can again influence the creation of knowledge and of policy within the team, and even within the Connexion. In addition to this control of information, the Co-ordinating Secretaries' position was enhanced by the knowledge they held of how the new structures worked, and also by the role they had played in devising the system.

The fact that knowledge is an important source of power within a bureaucratic system was well established by Weber. He proposed that basic technical knowledge is supplemented by the "knowledge growing out of experience in the service", since bureaucrats "acquire through the conduct of office a special knowledge of facts and have available a store of documentary material peculiar to themselves" (Weber 1947:339). Within the connexional offices, such
knowledge was particularly held by the Secretary of Conference, rather than the Co-ordinating Secretaries, who were, by comparison, new to their positions. From my observations, and from the comments of other connexional officers, it is clear that the Secretary of Conference had an encyclopaedic knowledge of the laws and procedures of Methodism and he was often consulted in this capacity. His role as secretary to the most important governing bodies within Methodism also gives him a significant and powerful position. Indeed, in many ways this officer appears to have an even greater ability to control policy and resource management than do the Co-ordinating Secretaries.

In addition to the superior procedural knowledge which the Secretary of Conference possesses, he also holds "in confidence" much information about all the ministers around the Connexion, and this is another important source of his power. Furthermore, he plays a very important role at the Methodist Conference when disciplinary cases about ministers are decided, and he may act to direct the Conference on the basis of his secret knowledge. Weber, in writing about the holders of power in bureaucracies, suggested that the "concept of 'official secrets' is certainly typical of them", and he proposed that it is "a product of the striving for power" (Weber 1947:339). While they would no doubt deny that it was part of a strategy to gain power, the senior connexional officials are party to many secrets which are renamed as "confidences", and which if told would usually have power to affect the person concerned. Moreover, the Secretary of Conference appeared to be able to control access to various aspects of the connexional level and to be able to keep certain areas of business private. I encountered this directly when he denied me access to various governing and directing bodies within connexional Methodism.76

While these senior figures hold considerable power within the connexional level, the culture of Methodism is such as to place some constraints on the nature of their hierarchical position. I was told that within the team there had been

76 The Secretary of Conference would not grant me access to the floor of the Conference, nor to the Methodist Council Executive, the appointments body (a group that looks at the re-appointment of ministers in the connexional team), and he was reluctant to grant me access to observe the Methodist Council.
some disputation as to whether the Secretary of Conference's role should be that of the "chief executive", as some felt it had become. The Co-ordinating Secretaries themselves expressed anxiety with regard to their own role and were keen to state that they used their power in an appropriate fashion. One of them made the claim, reflecting the Methodist habitus: "I try to minimise power and to work together and to share decision making and responsibility". Moreover, among senior members of the connexional team I frequently encountered the idea that power did not lie with them but was held either collectively by the Methodist Council or Conference, or was somehow "dispersed" throughout the Connexion. Indeed these bodies are not without influence in shaping the development of connexional policy. In my observation at staff meetings, employees constantly reviewed and adapted their work with regard to how they believed these governing bodies might receive proposals.

However, while the more egalitarian structures, such as these governmental bodies, may act to challenge and even to block ideas generated elsewhere, the main impetus for connexional policy clearly arises from the smaller and less consultative bodies. Decisions taken at Conference and resolutions agreed are largely shaped and directed by the members of the connexional team. Moreover, the same team members may sometimes work to overturn or to adapt decisions agreed at Conference.

One example of this, which is particularly pertinent to this thesis, was the redirection of a decision taken by the Conference to carry out a review of power in the Connexion. The calls for such a review had come from a report submitted by an organisation representing young people in the church, The Methodist Association of Youth Clubs, and by the commission reviewing the place of women presbyters in Methodism (Methodist Church 1995). A decision to postpone the review was taken in 1996 by the Methodist Council Executive, which, it is interesting to note, was able to use its power to delay, if not to absolutely overturn, a decision already taken by the Conference and by the Methodist Council. This resistance to an analysis of power, and also the denial of power which I encountered on several occasions within the connexional
offices, could be taken as attempts by the holders of power to hide or to mystify the situation.

It has been observed by Kertzer that those with power often do not like the sources of their power to be revealed, since this somehow diminishes their position and makes the political hierarchy less stable (Kertzer 1988:48). This is especially the case, Kertzer has suggested, in societies, which espouse democratic principles, and he proposes that in such circumstances, “either the power of the few is denied altogether, or alternatively, it is viewed as an expression of the wishes of the many”. This seemed largely to be the case within the Methodist connexional level, where power, when it was acknowledged, was often renamed as authority or responsibility, which it was claimed had been given by the people. When the possession of power is not acknowledged, or in Bourdieus terms is “misrecognised”, it is much harder to place constraints upon it, and it may consequently be all the greater, as noted by Harrison (1959).

Yet, it is too simple to suggest that in Methodism the senior leaders deny their power in order to increase it since, as I have already noted, many voiced concerns about the nature of their power and were reluctant to be in any way autocratic. The situation with regard to power among the connexional officials is thus extremely complex, since on the one hand they are placed in a position within the religious bureaucracy where they are created as members of a hierarchy and expected to meet formal bureaucratic goals of efficiency, yet on the other hand their behaviour is constrained by the Methodist emphasis on egalitarianism which makes them uncomfortable with their position. Thus, the situation within this level of Methodism is much more complex than that suggested by Bourdieu (1991:164) of symbolic power, since while they may sometimes not want to know that they exercise it, at other times the leaders are all too conscious of their power and are embarrassed by it.
6.4 The Conference

6.4.1 An overview of the Conference

The ten-day annual gathering of the connexional office-holders and district representatives at the Methodist Conference serves a variety of overt and implicit functions. Overtly it acts as a kind of democratic parliament to govern Methodism, as well as being an ecclesiastical court where disciplinary cases are adjudicated. Yet, while in theory it is a highly consultative event, which thus reflects Methodist egalitarianism, in practice it is tightly controlled by the ministerial hierarchy. Indeed, the Conference implicitly functions to legitimate and substantiate the power of the connexional figures as members of both sacred and bureaucratic hierarchies. Moreover, through their position at the Conference, the connexional officials manage to exert control over the making of Methodism as a connexional entity. This creation of national Methodism is in itself an important aspect of the Conference.

6.4.2 Preparing for the Conference

Long before the event itself, domination of it by the hierarchy can be observed in the preparations, which are largely overseen by the Secretary of Conference and other Conference Office staff. It is the Secretary who is responsible for the production of the Conference agenda, which is an immense, two-volume, thousand-page document, largely taken up with reports written by senior members of the connexional team. By the way in which these reports are framed, and by the position in which they are taken at the Conference, a great deal of control over Conference decisions is achieved. A “Business Committee”, which includes the Secretary of Conference and other establishment figures, determines the timetabling of events. This committee is in the powerful position of being able to arrange for a number of items to be voted on en bloc without discussion, and to control the agenda in other ways. As Minkin has identified with regard to Labour party Conferences, control over the agenda “involves a major exercise of power” (Minkin 1978:xvii). With regard to Methodism, I suggest that, throughout the preparations for Conference, the bureaucratic
authority of the Secretary of Conference and of other officials involved is constantly re-affirmed and enhanced.

Since the Conference is held in a different district of Methodism each year, a local district committee is created to oversee the practical arrangements. As this is chaired by the district chairman and involves many other district officials, it serves to emphasise the positions, status and relationships of these officials, and also to create links between them and the connexional officials. The hosting of the Conference involves a great deal of work, which under the direction of connexional and district officials enhances a sense of both local and national Methodist identity.\(^77\)

An important aspect of the preparation for the Conference, which affects all districts, is the election of Conference representatives. This is largely overseen by district chairmen and synod officials, and usually involves the election of those who are already heavily involved at a district level thus again serving to create links between local district officials.\(^78\)

6.4.3 The Ministerial Session

Maintaining the Wesleyan tradition, the ministers continue to meet first in a separate Conference session, in which they conduct various religious rituals pertaining to ministry, and debate and make decisions concerning issues relating specifically to ministry.\(^79\) An important aspect of the business of this session is the finalising of the ministerial appointments, and it is often the case that behind the scenes at this time the largely ordained members of the Stationing Committee may make alterations to the stations. Another important aspect of the Ministerial Session is that it sometimes acts as a kind of court, hearing appeals and disciplinary cases. With regard to this, several ministers told me that the "power of the hierarchy" was clearly evident at these sessions. Indeed, since the Secretary of Conference and other connexional officials largely direct both these

\(^77\) For a further description of the preparations for the Conference see Appendix 6.7.1.
\(^78\) Further details of this can be found in Appendix 6.7.2.
\(^79\) For a more detailed description of the Ministerial Session see Appendix 6.7.3.
courts and the whole of the Ministerial Session, it is clear that their power is both demonstrated and increased through their role in these events.

The persistence of the Ministerial Session, albeit that it has been criticised, debated and shortened over the last few years, continues to draw attention to the difference between ordained and lay in the church and to re-affirm ministerial distinctiveness. Through the formal ritual moments, such as the solemn memorial service for all those ministers who have died in the preceding year, and through the informal renewing of friendships in the coffee bars outside of the conference hall, it seems clear that the bond between ministers and the ministerial sense of identity is strengthened. Moreover, through the way in which it oversees all aspects of the life of a minister from the acceptance of the fledgling student, through the stationing of ministers, to the exit from the ministry by death, the control over the ministers which is held by the Conference, and particularly by the Conference officials, is symbolised and demonstrated.

The fact that the ministers meet first means that they have a chance to rehearse their ideas on contentious issues. Over all, the ministers are in a dominant position due mainly to several factors of representation. These factors operate despite the fact that the Representative Session is meant to consist of equal numbers of lay and ordained and in this way to balance power. Since, for example, there are fewer ministers from which to elect, it is more likely that a minister will be able to attend Conference repeatedly in his or her lifetime. Ministers are thus usually more familiar with the Conference procedures than many lay people, and are consequently better able to participate. Furthermore, any ministers who meet the cost themselves are permitted to attend. Because of this, and because those to be ordained are invited to be present for the whole of the Conference, there are always more ordained ministers than lay members.

6.4.4 The Representative Session of Conference

It is at the Representative Session of Conference that the Methodist "Connexion", in its broadest sense is symbolised and takes on some kind of physical reality. Before the formal sessions begin, the hundreds of people who
are representatives, and a few hundred more who are interested observers, spend time milling around outside the Conference hall, looking out for anyone they know. The air is full of enthusiastic greetings, laughter and the calling out of names, and there is usually much embracing, hugging and kissing as the normally subdued Methodist folk, excited by the occasion, meet up with old and valued friends from around the country. A highly significant aspect of the Conference is this renewing of old relationships and also the making of new friendships between representatives as they meet around the Conference meal table and develop bonds through their shared experiences of the emotionally demanding religious rituals and debates. Also important are the links forged between representatives and the Methodist families in the hosting district, who provide free accommodation for them. In these ways, new connections are made between Methodists from different parts of the country as they talk about common interests and concerns. The Methodist Connexion is, of course, a much larger entity than the few hundred people who meet for the Conference. Nevertheless, at this event, the interactions of the Methodist representatives symbolises in a very physical and visual way the existence of something which is much bigger than that what is usually experienced in the local church and circuit.

As with the Ministerial Session, the main meetings occur in a conference hall, access to the floor of which is restricted to the official representatives and controlled by stewards. The hall is arranged much as for the Ministerial Session, with a stage at the front having been specially decorated with flower arrangements and banners symbolising the hosting district or districts. On the stage, there is a long table behind which the platform party sits, with the Conference President’s red velvet chair taking central position. At this session, ranks of journalists are seated at tables close to the platform, thus adding to the sense of this being an important occasion. Indeed, this is one of the few occasions on which the national media take cognisance of Methodism, thus serving a role in creating Methodism as a national entity. Over all, the effect of the session is achieved partly through its size and formality, something of which may be seen in Fig. 6.3.
Fig. 6.3. The opening ceremony of the Methodist Conference, 1997, Methodist Central Hall, Westminster.
The ceremony of the opening of the Representative Session of the Conference is one of the most highly ritualised points of the ten-day gathering, and serves most clearly to symbolise the hierarchical nature of Methodism in both its sacred and bureaucratic aspects. Kertzer (1988) and Harrison (1992) have both emphasized the role which ritual may play in legitimating the existing political system and in demonstrating power, and indeed the whole of the Conference, but especially the opening ceremony, serves to display the "current state of often changing and contested power relations within the group" (Harrison 1992:225).

On the platform for the opening of the Representative Session there are two rows of dignitaries seated behind the main platform party. The upper (rear) row is made up of past Presidents and Vice-Presidents, almost all of whom are men. The lower (front) row consists of local civic dignitaries and leaders of various other denominations, invited for the occasion by the President, many of whom appear in clerical dress. The power and status of the Methodist hierarchy is further boosted by their alignment with these leaders from other denominations and the civic authorities.

In front of all these dignitaries, the chief place is reserved for the senior Conference figures. At the moment when the Conference is to commence, the Assistant Secretary of Conference rings a bell and, without a word, those present rise to their feet and the hubbub of three thousand people gossiping expectantly and finding their seats becomes a quiet, tense stillness. Those who have a seat at the platform table enter in order of seniority, with the Secretary of Conference, President and Vice-President, all in liturgical dress, entering last.

The opening activities and business almost exactly mirror those in the Ministerial Session. The first hymn is traditionally Charles Wesley's "And are we yet alive?" and is almost always sung unaccompanied with a precentor giving the lead. The hymn is full of traditional Methodist theology and the third verse calls the gathered Methodists to consider:
What troubles have we seen,
What conflicts have we passed,
Fighting without and fears within,
Since we assembled last!

While this hymn acknowledges the difficulties and conflicts which have so often beset Methodism, the overall sentiment of this, and indeed of the whole of the opening session, is one of continuity and cohesion. The creating of a sense of continuity has been identified by Kertzer as one of the ways in which organizations carve out a “distinct identity”, and this is achieved, he argues, through both mythic and ritual means (Kertzer 1988:17). Moreover, as Myerhoff has written, “ritual connects past, present and future, abrogating history and time” (cited in Kertzer 1988:10). In the suitably wide symbolic language of the opening hymn, and in the formal moments of the start of the Conference, the ritual links the past to the present and may build for some of the Methodists gathered a sense of belonging to a much bigger entity. For a few moments, all disunity is overcome in the shared experience of an honoured tradition. As Moore and Myerhoff have argued (1977:6), “Ceremonies that make visible a collective connection with some common symbol or activity can minimize for a ceremonial moment their disconnections and conflicts in a crowd, even while depicting them”. One first-time visitor was quoted in the Methodist Recorder, 29 June 1995, as saying of the opening ceremony, “I found it a moving occasion which made me feel very much part of the whole church—I really became caught up with what was happening”.

Much of the start of the Representative Session is predictable, with the President and the Secretary guiding the Conference through the opening business with traditional prompts and responses. All is peppered with a dusting of in-house humour, which serves again, like the hymn singing, to unite those gathered for the Conference. The main focus of the opening session is the appointing of the new President and Vice-President, and this ceremony serves to affirm their positions in the top level of the hierarchy. However, while being clearly hierarchical in nature, the Methodist compromise with egalitarianism is reflected
in the fact that the appointment is restricted to an annual basis. This, I suggest, again reflects Methodism’s distrust of hierarchy.

The appointment of the President is a crucial act in the making and re-making of Methodism. The President to an extent symbolises both John Wesley and the whole of Methodism. The link with Wesley is most clearly proclaimed in the ceremonial handing over of what is known as Wesley’s “Field Bible” between succeeding Presidents. To some extent, this Bible can be seen to carry with it the charisma of John Wesley, whose mantle falls each year on the newly appointed President (see Fig. 6.4). Presidents are chosen in part for their own charismatic gifts. In addition their power is based both on the tradition of respect for the position and on the special bureaucratic knowledge and roles which come with the office. The bureaucratic tasks include the chairing of certain sessions of the Conference and other important governing bodies. The President also has a leading role in several sacred tasks, the most important of all being the ordination of new ministers.

As with the making of ministers at the rituals of investiture described in Chapter 4, lay people have important roles to play in the creating of the President. In Bourdieu’s terms (1990:138), we can see again how the chosen representative “receives from the group the power to form the group” and how in the ceremony surrounding the new President and Vice-President, in which the members of Conference stand to make the appointment, the necessary “mandate” from society is provided (Fortes 1962:6). Furthermore, the active role played by ordinary Methodists in creating the President and Vice-President is symbolised by the way in which, at the appointment ceremony, items of liturgical dress and other gifts are presented by representatives of the various areas of Methodism in which the new office-holder is already involved.

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80 It is generally thought that the designation “Field Bible” comes from the fact that Wesley took this Bible with him when he conducted his “field preaching”. However, the Secretary of Conference informed me that the name in fact comes from the publisher who was called Field.

81 See appendix 6.7.4 for further details.
Fig. 6.4. The ceremonial transfer of John Wesley’s Bible between the out-going and the in-coming Presidents of the Methodist Church.

Reproduced by kind permission of the Methodist Recorder and Mr Paul Harrington
Moreover, the collaboration of the people in the making of the senior officers continues throughout the year in their deference to the office-holders and the manner of their welcome as the leaders travel throughout the Connexion making special visits. On several occasions I heard retiring office-holders speak of the active participation of “the people” in creating their role throughout their year of office, and one Vice-President said to her successor with regard to the office: “these people called Methodist will carry you through it”. Here again, as with the nature of ministry described in the last chapter, the nature of senior office is not just that of a role played out before a passive audience, but of an active relationship negotiated between office-holder and people.

The willingness on the part of many lay and ordained Methodists to co-operate in the making of the President and other officials is an indication of their desire for the Methodist Church as a national entity to be maintained. The President and Vice-President, through their visits around the country, serve to make connections between the centre of the bureaucracy and the local churches, because in their person they represent the whole of Methodism. Moreover, the President symbolises the well being of the Methodist body and is expected consequently to behave in certain prescribed ways and to avoid any behaviour that would bring the church into disrepute. The senior office-holders are presented as being exemplary persons within Methodism, and at their inauguration short valedictory speeches are made in which the positive virtues and cultural capital of the new officials are displayed. These speeches serve to highlight and reinforce the kinds of skills, morals and personal attributes that the connexional officials regard as being most valuable within Methodist culture.

The creation of the President and Vice-President does not simply serve to increase the power of these individuals, but also serves to reinforce the position

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82 Kertzer (1988:22) has suggested that in ancient kingdoms the rulers sought to secure allegiance from their widespread subjects by means of grand-scale ritual visits, e.g., such as is described by Geertz of fourteenth-century Javanese Kings. A parallel might be drawn with the visits around the connexion made by the Methodist President.

83 Another parallel could be drawn here with what Fortes (1962) has described as being the case among the Tallensi leadership.
and power of the Secretary of Conference. The importance of king-makers in
the ceremonial creation of office-holders, and in the holding of a “ruler to his
commitment”, has been stressed by Fortes of the Tallensi (1962:74). The
Secretary of Conference can be seen to act in just such a way, as both king-
maker and a custodian of the “body of law and custom” (Fortes 1962:71).
Moreover, the Secretary is the person who holds the special ritual knowledge of
how the ceremony should proceed and this, if we follow Harrison (1992), can be
viewed as a special kind of “intellectual property” which serves to increase the
Secretary’s capital and power. It is also significant that the Secretary is the
custodian of Wesley’s “Field Bible”, and while this sacred object is ceremonially
transferred between Presidents, it is the Secretary who stores it.84

Members of the connexional hierarchy also have a significant role to play in
guiding the election of new Presidents and Vice-Presidents. Officially, an open
election is held, in which the Conference members vote in a secret ballot on a list
of persons who have received adequate nomination from a number of lay and
ordained persons. However, it has been suggested to me that voting is heavily
influenced by the chairmen of district, who decide together each year who they
think should be supported in the election. A chairman can then encourage the
representatives from his or her district to vote for a certain candidate. Whatever
the mechanism, it is certainly the case that largely unknown candidates
sometimes receive a much higher vote than could otherwise be explained. In
describing how certain elements from other systems of legitimation might
combine with that of the legal-rational, Weber himself drew attention to how “a
formal election may hide an appointment—in politics—especially by party
bosses” (Weber 1978:960). Such appears to be the case in Methodism. Among
the ministers in Bedford, it was generally suggested that the election of the
President was according to “whose turn” the officials deemed it to be, and turn-
taking was thought to reflect a desire to have members from the various

84 Parallels can be drawn here with the practices of the Gonja as described by Jack Goody (1966), since
the latter have a tradition of having stake-holders or stand-ins who take charge of the regalia of high
office while the transfer of chiefly position is occurring. Additionally, Goody has noted how, among the
Ashanti, the king’s regalia gives legitimacy to the ruler and may be seized by certain important court
officers.
theological parties represented at this senior and prestigious level. Once again, we thus have an instance where a rhetoric of egalitarianism and even a seeming practice of democracy hides the reality of control by the ministerial hierarchy.

However, election to high office does not just depend upon official blessing. I was told by seasoned Conference-goers that those who had ambition for high office could be identified by their enthusiastic participation in the debates, which took place prior to the elections. Indeed, the ritualised debates can also be viewed as occasions on which careers within the connexional level can be won and lost, as certain individuals attempt to present themselves as able orators and potential leaders. Thus, the Conference does not just act to present power relations previously established, it also creates a forum in which these relations can be changed.

6.4.5 Conference gets down to business

After the opening rituals, much of the rest of the time at the Conference is spent in debating the issues on the Conference agenda. In theory, these debates appear to be open in nature and to allow criticism of the connexional level to rise up from the representatives through "notices of motion" and other interventions. In practice, this aspect of the Conference can also be seen to be firmly under the control of the hierarchy. Indeed, by permitting some conflict in this controlled manner, the Conference may act to strengthen the existing social system, just as Gluckman proposed of the rites of rebellion among the Barotse (Gluckman 1954, cited in Goody 1966:24).

The debating sessions are kept within tight bounds. This is achieved in part through the sandwiching of reporting and debating sessions with more formal

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85 With regard to the "rotation of office" between the various parties in Methodism, a parallel may again be drawn with the Gonja and the Tallensi of West Africa, as described by Goody (1966:160). Here, Goody suggests, the circulating of succession to high office between various constituent units serves to "ensure that power is diffused among a wide section of the population, thus increasing the direct support an office receives".

86 Notices of motion are written proposals made by two members of the Conference to amend any aspect of Methodist procedure or to highlight an area of concern within the life of the connexion or the nation.
elements of religious ritual, such as the saying of prayers and the singing of hymns. It has been noted that such mixing of “fixed segments” and “variable segments” serves to add a degree of sacredness to, or to make unquestionable, those aspects of the business that might otherwise seem very uncertain or indeterminate (Moore 1977:153). The debates themselves are also strictly controlled according to very precisely specified rules of interaction.\(^\text{87}\) These rules are enforced by the Conference members themselves and by the President or Vice-President, who chair the sessions, with the Secretary of Conference acting as the final arbiter on procedural matters if these are called into question. The President and Secretary’s positions as members of both a sacred and bureaucratic hierarchy serves to support their power over these sessions. Through their role as chairmen of the sessions, the President and Vice-President can exercise a considerable degree of control over the outcome of any debate.\(^\text{88}\) The rules of debate and the chairmanship of the senior officials can be seen to act as what Kertzer has identified as “strong symbolic forces”, which work to “limit severely the kinds of criticism and alternative ideas that can be expressed” (Kertzer 1988:42). Thus, what may look on the surface like a free and open debate is highly controlled and constrained.

In addition to the control exercised by the chair, several connexional officials spoke to me of the “wheeler-dealing” which goes on between officials in the coffee bars and in other off-stage regions where agreements are reached concerning whether certain matters will or will not be discussed on the floor of Conference. In this there is a parallel with the Labour Party Conference. It has been suggested that a critical part of the activity of Labour Party Conferences is the determining of “non-decisions”—that is, “significant policy alternatives originally from constituent organisations but not presented to Conference for its decisions as a result of the politics or mechanics of the managerial process” (Minkin 1978:xvii). Moreover, within Methodism, as noted above, the way in which a report is framed may greatly influence the outcome of a debate.\(^\text{89}\)

\(^{87}\) See Appendix 6.7.5 for details of the rules of debate.

\(^{88}\) See Appendix 6.7.6 for further details of how the chairing of a session can affect the outcome of a report.

\(^{89}\) See Appendix 6.7.7 for an example of how Conference outcomes are guided by events outside of the Conference.
That political meetings serve to re-enforce and legitimate decisions made elsewhere by members of the hierarchy is a point that has been made by Kertzer, who argues of such meetings that the “subsequent political course has little or nothing to do with the content of the meeting” (Kertzer 1988:42). Likewise, Harrison has suggested, with regard to the convention of North American Baptists, that the business sessions were of little interest to the ordinary members of the convention, and that decisions were largely taken before the conventions by members of the executive (Harrison 1959:184). It would be going too far to say that this is entirely true of the Methodist Conference, but the Methodist rhetoric and the social reality with regard to decision making in this forum are certainly rather different.

While Methodist representatives may be interested in the debates, their participation appears to be restricted because they are unfamiliar with the nature of the event. There is a self-evident Conference culture and even what is described as “Conferenceze”—that is, a Conference language. While pre-Conference sessions are now arranged to try to prepare newcomers for the event, and an introductory booklet complete with a glossary of terms is pre-circulated, the experience of most first-timers with whom I spoke was still that of feeling confused and unable to participate. On several occasions first-timers also spoke to me of how they suspected that there were things going on behind the debates, which they did not understand. In many cases, what they were sensing but unable to articulate concerned inter-party conflict.90 The main areas of tension were between the evangelicals and the more liberal members of the connexional hierarchy and also between radical and more conservative elements.

One particularly important area of conflict for this thesis is between those who hold a higher view of ministry and those who are lower in their churchmanship. In my observation, it was usually those issues where the Methodist balance between egalitarianism and hierarchy was in question that received the most energetic attention from the representatives, thus again providing an indication of how central these issues are to Methodists. At the 1996 Conference, the most

90 Further details of the party divisions at Conference are given in appendix 6.7.8.
energetic debate concerned whether a lay Vice-President could actually be involved in the ordaining of a minister or whether this role had to be restricted to the President and others who are ordained. At the 1997 Conference, the greatest vigour was generated by a call for the chairmen to be designated as bishops, and this again involved a renegotiation of the Methodist balance of egalitarianism and hierarchy.

6.4.6 The effects of Conference around the Connexion

The Conference ends with another traditional act of religious ritual, which again serves to unite the body of Methodists. For most of the representatives, the long, tiring event is then over and they can travel back to their homes, bringing with them a new sense of Methodism. For many in the connexional hierarchy, the work of preparing the amendments to C.P.D. that have been decided by the Conference, is only just beginning. For all of the Connexion, the Methodist wheel of life has once again come full-circle, and the “decisions and psychological impact” of the Conference continue to reverberate through Methodism for months afterwards, just as Minkin has identified for the Labour Party Conference (Minkin 1978: xvi).

However, the impact of the Conference, and of the connexional level, varies greatly between different people within Methodism. Local congregations are usually only directly affected by Conference decisions concerning property matters or the rules for church-based activities, and, as my interviews in Bedford revealed many ordinary lay people are little concerned by the Conference. Yet, for those who had invested in the connexional level, such as Elizabeth, whose story was recounted in Chapter 2, there was some interest in the Conference. Knowledge about it united Elizabeth with others from around the Connexion and was of practical relevance in her offices on the local and district levels.

By contrast, the Conference has a much more widespread impact on ministers, both in terms of their nature as bureaucrats and as members of a sacred hierarchy. With regard to the former, the Secretary of Conference sends a letter

91 Further details of this final Conference ritual can be found in Appendix 6.7.9.
with news of the Conference to all ministers, and all ministers also receive a copy of the amended C.P.D. together with the Minutes of Conference, which give a brief summary of the business and decisions of the Conference. This latter volume also contains the stations and addresses of all ministers for the coming year and is a reminder of the fact that it is the Conference which plays the final role in ratifying the posts that all Methodist ministers will fill. With regard to their sacred nature, ministers may be influenced by the ideas and symbolic practices of the Conference leaders. In Bedford, this influence was evident when two of the local church ministers started wearing a pectoral cross a few years after it had become the practice of the Conference President (see Chapter 5). Moreover, the Conference can be seen to re-enforce the pre-eminence of the ordained class, and I propose that the power of the connexional leaders is to some extent passed on to the local ministers through the ordination ceremonies.

6.5 Conclusion

The bureaucratic nature of the connexional level of the Methodist Church is quite clearly constrained and influenced by Methodist values. In particular, the development of a bureaucratic hierarchy is limited by the desire on the part of many to find an appropriate expression of Methodist egalitarianism. In addition to this fundamental influence, the particular practices and work-place cultures which emerge in the London offices also reflect the other values embodied by the employees, who have been trained and socialised in a variety of working environments before joining the connexional team. The different values and working cultures of the various employees result in an underlying tension within the offices that sometimes erupts in more overt conflict and is likely to mean that the offices continue to experience dispute and dissension.

While the expression of bureaucratic hierarchy may be constrained by egalitarianism, it is still the case that the Methodist ministers who are employed on the connexional level are members of both a sacred and a bureaucratic hierarchy and that their power is legitimated by all three of Weber’s types of domination. This is particularly evident in the case of the Secretary of Conference, who plays the most significant ritual roles on connexional occasions.
and who also holds bureaucratic positions which provide much opportunity to influence the development of connexional policy. Their combined position as leaders of both a sacred and bureaucratic hierarchy enables the Secretary and other senior officials to maintain considerable power over wider Methodism, a power which is paradoxically all the greater because it is often not acknowledged.

A key way in which the connexional officials dominate national church life is through their control over the ordained ministry. As noted in earlier chapters, the connexional officials have a determining role in the selecting and training of candidates for the ministry and this has been identified as one of the most powerful ways in which a denomination can affect the local congregation (Harrison 1959, Werner 1988). Connexional officials continue to maintain a degree of control over ordained ministers through the role which they play in deciding issues of ministerial employment, such as stationing and payment, and through the disciplinary courts at the Conference. Furthermore, the connexional leaders act as exemplars, and by the way in which they write about and practise ministry they can influence practice at the local church level.

The ability of Methodist ministers to dominate the laity through their positions in the administrative machinery and by their control of the Conference has already been identified historically (Currie 1968, Batty 1988). There are many parallels between the way in which Methodists practise hierarchical control in the shaping of national policy despite their emphasis on egalitarianism, and the way in which, according to MacKenzie, real power lies in the hands of the hierarchy in the British Labour party, despite its egalitarian ethos (cited in Wickham-Jones 1996). However, it is too simplistic in either case to conclude that, as a result, all the power is held by the hierarchy since, as Minkin (1978) has argued for the Labour party, there are considerable constraints on the exercise of this power.

In particular, the connexional leaders rely upon the co-operation and collaboration of the local church members for their continued existence. The local churches are essential for the financial support of the connexional level and
to supply the “mandate” for the officers. Hence, it is important that the connexional leaders create links between the levels of the church. Traditionally, this has been achieved in part through the involving of local church members in particular areas of connexional life. For example, the position of “overseas missions representative” in the local church has, in the past, given the lay person an identity and a status as well as creating a whole new set of potentially prestigious relationships with those higher up the connexional levels who are involved in this area of work. This link with the connexional structure has often been both rewarded and confirmed when the lay person has been elected to attend the Methodist Conference, where further relationships are made with other representatives who hold similar interests, and with connexional officials. Attendance at the Conference can be seen to re-enforce a connexional Methodist identity and to increase the status of the representatives who return to their local churches and districts with an increased knowledge of the Connexion and important “connections” upon which they can draw to aid their local church and to support their own status within the church. It is these kinds of lay people, and also the connexionally orientated ministers, who, themselves desiring the persistence of connexional Methodism, collaborate in the creation of the status and power of the senior connexional figures. Indeed, in the way in which the creation of a national Methodism can further the advancement of ministers and lay people in their local situations, the power of the connexional officials can be seen to be generative as well as asymmetrical. It is here, as Bourdieu has suggested with regard to the political field, that all who invest in the game “collude that it is worth playing” and perpetuate it in order that their “investments are profitable” (Bourdieu 1991:180).

The power and position of the connexional officers is arguably essential for the continued creation of connexional Methodism. In his study of North American Baptists, Harrison (1959:78) linked the existence of the denominational structure to the emergence of a powerful leadership which brought about inter-church communication, combined programmes of action and the common symbols around which the Baptist churches could unite. Likewise, in Methodism, the connexional leaders provide the symbols and the structures that make Methodism into a denomination and give it a national identity. However, what is
identified as the increasing gap between local churches and the connexional level continues to be perceived as a problem. Connexional officials are anxious that Methodism is becoming increasingly congregational in nature, with a growing reluctance to support an expensive central bureaucracy. The recent process of restructuring was meant to provide a more efficient and less domineering connexional level, but it is very doubtful that the increased emphasis on more formal bureaucratic and business practices will have created an entity that is acceptably Methodist to most lay people. All the initial signs in 1997 were certainly that the new structures were less successful in terms, at least, of the generation of funds from the church’s membership.
Chapter 7

Conclusion

While the primary aim of this thesis has been to promote understanding of the social and cultural dynamics of contemporary English Methodism, the study also contributes some insights into cultural reproduction more generally. Throughout the thesis, I have argued that Methodists have maintained a hierarchical ministry at the same time as emphasising their belief in religious egalitarianism, and that the interplay between the Methodist values of egalitarianism and hierarchy provides a key to understanding much of its culture. A substantial part of the thesis has been devoted to showing how ministers are created as members of both a sacred and a bureaucratic hierarchy, and I have generally argued that this empowers the ministers who can be seen to dominate Methodism and to be largely responsible for creating cultural continuity and cohesion. However, I also conclude that both within Methodism and more generally, an emphasis on one dominant group of actors makes for too simple a focus, and that the contribution of all parties in a social group to cultural reproduction must be more carefully considered.

Despite the fact that Methodist doctrine declares that there is “no priesthood differing in kind from that which is common to all the Lord’s people” (Methodist Church 1988–96, 2:203–33), I have shown how, through the various stages in the life-cycle of the Methodist minister, a social distinction, and even a priestly difference, is created between lay and ordained people. While hierarchy is often denied within Methodism, subtle, but nonetheless important differences in status and rank between ministers themselves and between ordained and lay have been observed to exist. These differences are arguably all the more potent for the fact that they are not acknowledged. While much of the procedure for the making of ministers has been seen to be under the direction of the senior members of the ministerial hierarchy, at each stage I have also demonstrated that the lay people also have important roles to play. This continues in the local church, where lay people, despite their frequently reiterated belief in egalitarianism, implicitly believe their ministers to be different from them. Lay
people also often explicitly treat their ministers as ontologically different, and desire them to perform various priestly and bureaucratic tasks of leadership.

In concluding that ministry is negotiated between lay and ordained, and that it still primarily concerns the priestly tasks of leading people in worship and meeting their pastoral needs, I diverge from many of the sociologists of religion who have written on this subject. However, I have also noted that the nature of ministry is variously understood by lay people and by ministers themselves. This is not, however, necessarily problematic, since the figure of the minister can also be seen to function as a symbol, which acts to unite a community even though its meaning may be differently understood. Many anthropologists, from Durkheim onwards, have noted that religious symbols act in this way (Kertzer 1988, Stromberg 1986 and Coleman 1989). The nature of symbols is such as to permit individuals to form their own interpretations while appearing publicly to share an understanding of their meaning with others, thus promoting a sense of community.

While the symbolic nature of ministry is of much significance, a point to which I will return, the actual content of ministry as defined by the way in which lay and ordained relate to one another must not be forgotten. My observations of the significant part which lay people play in creating the nature of ministry has prompted the conclusion that the making of ministry should not be understood in individualistic terms. It does not simply involve a change in identity, nor is it only about learning to play a role. Rather, in addition, the making of ministry also involves the forging of new kinds of relationships between people. This has led me to suggest that while Goffman's (1959) theatrical model of the role-playing carried out by professionals has its uses, it suggests too passive a role for the audience, or those around the professional. Instead, I propose that in ministry, as in many other professions, the nature of what is done depends not only on what the professional has learned to do, but also on how others, including both colleagues and clients, respond to him or her. Such an observation not only has implications for the manner in which training for certain professions may be undertaken, but it also affects the way in which responsibility

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for decisions may be understood to lie between professionals and clients and not just on the side of the professional.

In arguing that the making of ministers is a constantly collaborative exercise between lay and ordained I am building on the earlier suggestions made by Fortes (1962) and Goody (1966) about the nature of social roles and offices, and also developing the more recent proposal made by Bourdieu (1991:106) about the generative manner in which the “representative creates the group which creates him”. However, while I largely follow Bourdieu in this, and also borrow his concept of habitus to suggest that culture can be helpfully understood at the level of embodied values and dispositions, I also diverge from him in important ways. In particular, I suggest that the Methodist case challenges Bourdieu’s suggestion that the socially created nature of distinction between divisions, such as I take lay and ordained to be, will be “misrecognised” and seen as self-evident and undisputed, because it is part of the doxa or habitus (Bourdieu [1972] 1992:164). Furthermore, while Bourdieu has proposed that, through what he calls “symbolic violence”, the creation of a symbolic distinction such as that between lay and ordained will disempower the laity and remove from them the instruments of symbolic production, I contend that the situation in Methodism is more complex than this.

In part, the differences between my conclusions and those of Bourdieu may arise because Bourdieu is trying to create a general theory. Moreover, his proposals in Language and symbolic power (1991) are based largely on his knowledge of the political field, and where he does use religious material it seems to be drawn chiefly from a study of changes in the Catholic Church in France. In contrast to the Catholic Church, Methodists in particular, and Protestants more widely, possess much more obviously within their cultures the resources for challenging their tradition and thus for creatively changing it. In particular, while Methodist lay people may often be unaware of their role in the

\[92\] While Bourdieu (1991:168–69) in a footnote suggests that orthodoxy and heterodoxy should be distinguished from doxa, which is that which remains undisussed, I do not think that the introduction of such a not-to-be-discussed “black box” can completely take away from the fact that in Methodism normally unconsciously maintained beliefs are sometimes brought to consciousness and discussed.
creating of ordained ministry, they sometimes draw upon the embodied value of egalitarianism in Methodist culture to challenge the position and power of the minister. Moreover, the fact that Methodist ministers have themselves embodied the value of egalitarianism, even though their training leads them to place a greater emphasis on hierarchy, means that they often wish lay people to be able to play active roles in the creation of Methodist culture and work to ensure that lay people are in possession of the instruments of symbolic reproduction. Consequently, while I have proposed that there is a Methodist habitus, which creates and constrains Methodist behaviour, I place greater stress than Bourdieu on the way in which aspects of this habitus can be raised to consciousness and articulated. I also suggest that it is possible for the habitus to contain within it contradictions which can promote change.

The static nature of Bourdieu’s model of culture has already been robustly criticised. In her study of Fijian ideas of hierarchy and egalitarianism, Toren notes that Bourdieu has characterized the habitus in such a way that makes it virtually impervious to change, except that which is generated by forces outside the group within which the habitus is formed (Toren 1990:16). In contrast to this, Toren argues that the contradictions inherent in a construct, such as the different applications of the principle of hierarchy which occur across gender among certain Fijian islanders, can generate conflict which can be an internal cause of change (235). More generally still, she suggests that “cognitive differences” are caused by a “unique integration” of each person’s habitus, and these differences are “potentially sufficient to generate the conditions necessary for calling what is taken for granted into question” (16). Within Methodism, I have argued, there are quite clearly conflicting values which may be differently interpreted and emphasised by individuals. This leads to a social dynamic of constant tension between differing individuals who place greater stress on one value rather than another resulting in a culture which is not static, but in which the members constantly have to reach compromises and find new balances between the values. Thus, I propose a more dynamic model of culture than that which seems to be contained in Bourdieu’s notion of habitus.
Having made this claim, however, it is worth reflecting that what most needs to be explained about Methodism is perhaps not so much the causes of change and challenge, as how some degree of continuity and cohesion has been achieved despite the inherently dissentious nature of the culture. I have argued that, at the local level, continuity is largely achieved through the ministers, who, having been socialised by the senior members of the ministerial hierarchy, act as exemplars of good Methodism, and also have the power to direct the local community in both the religious and bureaucratic spheres, thereby functioning to maintain Methodist orthodoxy. Cohesion also depends to some extent upon the often deeply invested relationships between lay and ordained, with the ordained, as I have argued, symbolising the local Methodist community. However, in many rural and more working-class communities, cohesion has primarily been promoted by the strength of relationships between lay people themselves and has depended upon their commitment to the local expression of Methodism, which has in many cases shaped and given meaning to their lives. It is perhaps not surprising that in these situations the Methodism practised has often been described by members of the ministerial hierarchy as being less than orthodox.

Links between local and national levels have again been promoted primarily through the ministers and ordained connexional figures who have acted as symbols of wider Methodism. Important connections have also been made with lay people who have become involved in various areas of the national church’s life and who have invested in the connexional level and in turn been empowered by their commitment. All of this has helped to overcome the gulf between the central bureaucracy and local churches. In comparison to some other denominations, such as the national Swedish church as described by Gustafsson (Gustafsson 1981, cited in Coleman 1989:89), the Methodist church appears in the past to have been fairly successful in transmitting ideas down to the local churches and raising funds for certain areas of work, and in thus maintaining itself as a wider entity.

Although the maintenance of Methodism at all levels has depended upon the dominance of the ministers, it has also required the co-operation of lay people, who have themselves been empowered. While I have argued that ministers have
a great deal of power in the local church, based, in Weberian terms, on their charismatic, traditional and legal-rational domination of lay people, I have also proposed that this power can be seen to be generative for others in the church. Lay people who have invested in Methodism are often enabled to meet their religious and social interests, and involvement in the local church can bring all kinds of rewards in terms of support from a community, status and psychological benefits. Similar benefits also accrue to those who are involved on the national level. For those to whom being a Methodist is an important part of their identity, the making of ministers, who in turn make and maintain Methodism, and the empowering of ministers who in turn empower lay people, is a very important activity. Thus, ministers and lay people can be seen to need each other. While, as I have argued throughout this thesis, Methodist egalitarianism may constrain hierarchy, ministerial hierarchy also creates the environment in which Methodists may practise their culture, and thus in a sense the ministerial hierarchy can be seen to promote Methodist egalitarianism.

While the collaboration of lay and ordained in the making of ministers has served to maintain Methodism, there have also been many changes in recent years. Most particularly, the decreasing numbers of members and the increasingly close relationships between various denominations has often lead to the establishment of new kinds of united churches or LEPs. The nature of the ministerial office is also affected by these changes, with some ministers feeling demoralised by the dwindling of Methodism, and others establishing a new sense of ministerial identity in colleagueship with the clergy of other denominations. All of this has consequences for the practice of Methodism, and more work remains to be done in analysing the effect which having fewer and more ecumenically influenced ministers is having on the nature of Methodism.

In this thesis I have noted, albeit in a preliminary fashion, two of the most obvious changes that have occurred in the Methodist ministry in the past twenty years. These have been the accepting of women for ordination and the move to train older candidates. As I have argued at several points, these new kinds of candidates have challenged the traditional understanding of ministry. In particular, individuals in candidating, at college and in the local church have
countered the view of ministry as being about a complete change of identity and the encompassing of the whole person. The material presented here gives some limited insights into the way in which these ministers understand themselves as persons, with a sense of self separate to that of the role played. However, much more work remains to be done on this in terms of the anthropological understanding of person, self and identity in the European context. Also, further studies are required to gain understanding into the way in which the ordaining of women is affecting the nature of ministry, and such a focus could contribute insights concerning the nature of gender-relations more widely.

Unlike Coleman (1989) and Stromberg (1986) in their studies of religious institutions in Sweden, I have not attempted to address in any significant manner the interrelations between Methodism and the wider social context. Yet, as with nonconformity in the Swedish situation it is clear that Methodism has made an important contribution to the development of British culture. In the sphere of social history, this subject has already received thorough investigation, and the purported effects of Methodism in promoting the industrial revolution and in preventing a social revolution are well known. Perhaps less acknowledged has been the influence of Methodism in the shaping of modern political and social life, although the out-cry created by the media on the announcement in the spring of 1996 of the vast decrease in the number of Methodists, revealed something of an awareness of this contribution. In particular, a report in the Independent, 22 March 1996, emphasised the importance of Methodism when it claimed:

A pillar of British identity is crumbling. Methodism’s tradition of outward-going, practical-minded faith has been a vital source of our political values and social ideals. How will the springs of civic action and social concern be replenished once Methodism is no more?

Methodism’s contribution to the shaping of important British institutions, such as the trade unions and the Labour party, has already been noted (Thompson [1963] 1981, Moore 1974, Turner 1998). In my study of the Methodist Conference, I was able to draw out further parallels between Methodism and the
Labour party, since both arguably emphasise egalitarianism, while at the same time practising hierarchy. This is, in fact, an important feature of many Western institutions and societies, and the Methodist case presented here may provide some comparative insights for understanding the social dynamics across a wide spectrum of political and social movements. Unlike Labour, however, Methodism has not of late managed to revive itself. Why Methodism is dwindling so rapidly at the end of the twentieth century has already created the impetus for a recent research project on church leaving (Richter and Francis 1998), and what this tells us about the contemporary nature of British society, could form the subject for another thesis. What I have done here in describing the nature of Methodism at the end of twentieth century, although not quite qualifying as salvage ethnography, may nonetheless in time prove to have captured a pivotal moment in British religious and social life.
Appendices

Appendix 1 Methodism and Gender

Much of the inspiration for this thesis arose from my interest in the way in which relations within the Methodist Church were affected by gender. While overtly expressing an ethic of equality with regard to men and women, I observed that there was often within the church a practice of male dominance in terms of decision making and control over policy. Although the Methodist Church agreed to the ordination of women in 1971, the majority of ministers are still men, and most of the senior positions at the connexional level are still held by men. The picture is less clear at the local level, but there has also been a tendency here for women to be less involved in the main decision-making bodies. This appendix contains information concerning my observations of the gendered nature of Methodist practice at the various levels of the church, and particularly with regard to the making of ministers.

Appendix 1.1 The local church and circuit

While all the roles in the local church are theoretically equally open to both men and women, many aspects of church life in the Bedford (North) Circuit were, in my observation, heavily gendered. This was particularly noticeable at Priory and St Marks. Here, since there was such a strong emphasis on the ministerial leading of worship, and since the ministers were all men, the highest and holiest aspects of the church’s life were still a male preserve. By contrast, the women controlled the church kitchen. This impinged on the Sunday morning services in Priory where, during the last hymn of every service, two women usually left their seats and rushed out to make the coffee. Similarly, two female stewards agreed to come to an important meeting at Priory, not because they felt they had something to contribute to it in terms of ideas, but because they were needed to make the refreshments. In terms of other committees, men were more involved with property issues, while women dominated the pastoral committee. In my observation, the larger and more formal the church meeting, the less likely it was that women would participate verbally.
The situation was rather different at the more working-class church of Clapham. Here, since the minister was a woman and most of the stewards were also women, the day-to-day management of the church was largely directed by women. However, at the more formal and public meetings, men’s voices and opinions again tended to dominate the proceedings.

At the circuit level, all offices are open to men and women equally. However, there had not been a female circuit steward in the north Bedford circuit until six years before I conducted my fieldwork. During the period of my fieldwork, the circuit leadership team was still largely male, with only one female minister to three male ministers and one female circuit steward to three male stewards. The majority of local preachers, from whom circuit stewards are often drawn, were also men.

Appendix 1.2 The gendered nature of call narratives

In the course of my interviewing of ministers, I observed several differences between male and female ministers in the recounting of their life stories. Most notably, several of the male ministers recounted their academic achievements, giving details of having gained the highest marks in certain examinations, or of doing particularly well in certain subjects. By contrast, all of the women talked of feelings of inferiority or areas of disappointment in their education. The gendered nature of recounting academic experiences, in which girls tend to play down their success, has been noted by Bruner (1994:48).

Differences in accounts of agency according to gender were also noticeable among the ministers whom I interviewed, with women tending to emphasise the influence or agency of others in creating their call, while men had a much stronger sense of their own agency. It seems likely from my interview material that it is part of the canonical form of the call that stories are told in terms of what “I” did and that this reflects a more male way of talking. This has been noted more generally of life-story telling in the Euro-American context. Mary Gergen has observed that while men’s stories concentrate on the pursuit of single goals and are most often career orientated, women’s stories, by contrast, are built
around the "significant relationships in their lives" and are "digressive and complex" (Gergen 1992, cited in Rosenwald and Ochberg 1992:12). Since ordinary women have been traditionally less likely to view themselves as separate agents acting independently and to speak of themselves in this way, it is not surprising that many Methodist women have found it difficult to tell their story in the canonical manner, leading to a gendered bias in the selection of ministers.

A member of the Ministerial Candidates Selection Committee with whom I discussed this issue confirmed that something of a gendered bias exists in the selection of ministers. This member told me of cases where women had not, when they first candidated, been able to tell their stories in terms of an active "I", but who, after candidating a second or third time, had learnt to tell their call in this way and had consequently been accepted. Indeed, since some women have been selected over the last twenty-five years to be ministers, they must have learnt at some stage to tell their call in the acceptable fashion. This subject of the gendered nature of the call is an area which would profit from further research.

Appendix 1.3 Gender and the candidating procedure

The candidating procedure was designed to assess young men and is still largely managed and conducted by older men. In the course of my interviewing I encountered cases where the gender of candidates was taken into account when they were given advice about strategies for coping with the procedure. A few of the female candidates were advised that at the stages of the circuit meeting and synod they should expect negative votes because of their gender, and this expectation was realised. Others mentioned sexist remarks which were made to them at the district candidates committee.

For the year 1995–96 the Candidates Office, in its report to the Conference, drew attention to the fact that "for the first time the numbers of men and women offering for the itinerant ministry are almost the same". However, the report went on to state: "The message at the moment appears to be, 'It is all right for a woman to consider offering for ministry once there is no question of having to
bring up children" (Methodist Church 1996a, 1:67). The officials omitted to explain who was giving the message, and so failed to challenge this prejudice against women in childbearing years, which still appears to exist within Methodism. This prejudice, I suspect, is based on the perception that such women will be less able to subsume other aspects of their identity under the new identity of Methodist minister, and this, as I argue in Chapter 4, has been an important aspect of the tradition of ministerial training. William Pollock likewise noted a gender bias in his analysis of the selection conferences for the Anglican priesthood, observing: “conference exercises are weighted to a male model of leadership” (Pollock 1984a:§3.4.2).

Appendix 1.4 Gender and local church ministry

Despite the fact that the Methodist Church agreed to the ordination of women in 1971, it is still possible for a local church never to have had a female minister and for male ministers never to have worked with a female colleague. This had been the case in Bedford until the arrival of the first female minister one year before the start of my fieldwork. It was perhaps significant that this minister had been stationed at Clapham, along with two other country churches, rather than at the more middle-class and conservative church of Priory.

When I questioned church members concerning their views on the ordaining of women, the most positive response came from the members at Clapham, which may reflect both their greater experience and their greater emphasis on the value of egalitarianism. At Clapham, even those of a more evangelical position, who had been reluctant at first on theological grounds to accept a woman minister, were, by the time I conducted my fieldwork, extremely enthusiastic about their current minister. With regard to a different feminine way of working, the female minister was praised for her ability to “fit things in” and to act in a caring way. One member said:

a woman is far more used to doing more than one thing—a man can only do one thing at a time. No way a man could look after a family and do a job. Anna has a husband, family, a home and is a
minister—the things she does like taking people to the garden centre, popping in to the youth club and coffee morning.

Furthermore, they related several valued changes in their experience of ministry to the fact that the current minister was a woman. Specifically, they talked of the increased “approachability” of ministers and several women mentioned that they saw the present minister “all the time” since she regularly “popped into things”. This change of experience may well reflect both the present minister’s gender and her style of ministry. This minister behaves in the way expected of women in the village, in that she collects her children from the school playground and attends the mother and toddler group. Her style of ministry is to be companionable while engaged in such everyday activities, as well as in the routine life of the church. It may be this availability and approachability that led one of the oldest church members to comment of ministers that in the past “the ordinary congregation didn’t know them like we do now”.

The female minister herself, when interviewed, talked to me of her different ways of working. She drew attention to the way in which, as a woman with a family, she brought “a different style of daily working and juggling of responsibilities that is so different”. She suggested that, for her, “ministry” occurred in the course of her attending to various duties which were primarily part of her other roles as wife and mother. She explained: “For me a lot happens in incidental conversations at the play-park or picking the children up after school”. Thus, in a sense, she was suggesting that somehow ministry could encompass these other roles which she played. Yet, at the same time, she was careful also to create boundaries between her work and her private life.

In her exercise of ministry the minister at Clapham was able to include some of the routine tasks of caring for a family. In his analysis of the development of the clerical profession over the last two centuries Russell has suggested that, since the work of the clergy was traditionally based around the home, it came to be associated with women and children. In this respect, ministry became separated from the male sphere of work, since men normally left the home environment to go out to work (Russell 1980:282). Recognising this point helps to explain why
it is possible for some women to feel comfortable in combining ministry with the practice of an ideal type of gendered behaviour, as demonstrated by the minister at Clapham.

Appendix 2 Additional materials to Chapter 2

Appendix 2.1. A brief history of Methodism in Bedford

The presence of a strong dissenting element in eighteenth century Bedford seems to have made it a fertile place for the spreading of the "new dissent" of Methodism. In the seventeenth century the town had fostered several independent religious preachers, the most famous of whom was John Bunyan. Arguably the most influential Protestant dissenter in seventeenth century England, Bunyan became a popular preacher in an independent congregation in Bedford during the 1650s, but he was later imprisoned, when he wrote his famous and highly influential allegory of the Christian life, The Pilgrim's Progress. With Bunyan and the independent meeting-house which he initiated, nonconformity became well established in the area and its adherents were influential in the town's local government and commercial development. In 1753 the town was affected by the new evangelical revival, when John Wesley was invited to come and preach in Bedford by the local resident William Parker (Anderson 1953).

The establishment of Methodism in Bedford followed a pattern which has been identified for other areas. After hearing Wesley preach, Parker, who was a grocer, and later Mayor of the town, hosted a group meeting in his house where the members considered, as was the case with all societies started by Wesley, how best "to flee the wrath to come". In 1762 a preaching-house was established where John Wesley and "such person as he shall appoint" could "preach God's holy word" (Anderson 1953:15). A few years later the Bedfordshire "circuit" was established, around which Wesley's appointed preachers would travel, meeting with the leader or steward of each of the Methodist societies and overseeing the finances and spiritual state of each member. By the 1790s there were in the town around fifty members of the Methodist "classes"—that is, the small groups or cells who met weekly to
inquire into each other’s spiritual welfare. This number grew rapidly in the early years of the nineteenth century so that by 1830 there were two hundred members and it was thought necessary to build a new chapel. The new building was called St Paul’s after the main Anglican church of the area.

This growth in Methodist numbers parallels the growth of Bedford itself. Until the nineteenth century Bedford had remained a market town with a fairly static population. In the first half of the century the population trebled from 3,948 in 1801 to 11,693 in 1851 (Brown, 1970:20) and this growth was associated with the industrial development of the town. It was in fact the local Methodist, John Howard, who developed Bedford’s first major industry—a factory for the making of farming instruments. In the period which followed, the town developed both its industrial and commercial nature and its educational establishments, the latter being built on a sizeable charitable trust established by the bequest of one William Harpur in 1506. As has been well documented for other places, the development of Bedford’s industrialised urban areas was in the nineteenth century accompanied by the rapid expansion of Methodism. Just as leading industrialists fostered Methodism elsewhere, so in Bedford John Howard spent some of his newly acquired wealth in building chapels for his workers to attend.

Not only did the already established branch of Methodism continue to grow during this period, but also a new and more politically radical wing made substantial converts in the county (Roddell 1997). This new movement was called Primitive Methodism and its proponents were distinguished from the pre-existing organisation, now called Wesleyan Methodism, more by their social background, the style of their government and their passion for evangelism, than by the content of their beliefs. Although not without their set-backs, both types of Methodism continued to grow and by 1875 the Bedford Wesleyan circuit had so increased in numbers that it could be divided into three geographically smaller units (Anderson 1953:30). In dividing up the area, the Methodists of this period were following an already existing social division in Bedford that was based on the natural barrier of the river. The amalgamation of the
Wesleyan and the Primitive Methodist circuits after Methodist union in 1932 followed this pattern and Bedford now has two circuits, north and south.

Christianity continues to be a recognised and respected cultural force in Bedford. Membership of the churches, including the Methodist ones, continues as a marker of status and on occasion provides important economic connections for both professionals and for tradesmen. Thus, belonging to a Methodist church in Bedford is one way among many others of creating community and meaning in a large and diverse urban area.

Appendix 2.2 Categories of involvement in the local Methodist church

Examples of category 2: those for whom church is only one of their many commitments

Mike was a man in his thirties with two young children. At the time of being interviewed he ran his own small company in Bedford. He had a break from the Methodist church when he was a teenager but rejoined the church when he moved for a short time to another area of the country. Currently, he had a few roles in the church but for him the most important area of his life was his family. Church, work and his sporting interests came after this. Likewise, Elaine, a woman of similar age in another church in the circuit, told me that her young family was the most important thing in her life, followed by her sporting activities and the church. In the past she had attended both Methodist and Anglican churches and she went with her family to the Methodist church at present because “it was friendly, so close and suited the kids”. She regularly played sport on a Sunday morning and consequently missed the service. She attended the mid-week coffee morning at the church and sometimes a Bible-study group but did not participate in the “nitty-gritty” of church meetings. To Elaine, Methodism was “just a branch of Christianity".

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Examples of category 3: those who only occasionally visit a Methodist church

Mrs Clark was a “semi-retired post-woman” who had recently moved into the area. She had never been a regular member of a church but used to attend coffee mornings and sales in her local Anglican church. Her most significant contact with the church was when her husband died and the minister visited her. When I asked her, she understood nothing at all of the Methodist structures and language, but she told me that she did enjoy coming to the Methodist coffee morning and had made friends there. By contrast, Rhona, like many other women, has made contact with the church because of her children’s involvement in youth activities. She had been brought up in the church but had stopped attending regularly when she got married. After the birth of her two daughters her mother had started taking the children to church and sometimes she went along with them. Rhona thought that the church was “all quite nice” but had no idea whatsoever about what any of the structures or terms of Methodism meant.

Appendix 3 Additional materials to Chapter 3

Appendix 3.1 Conventions of transcription

To a large extent I have followed the conventions of transcription suggested by Stromberg (1993:xvi) who was largely following Moerman 1988; representation of pause length was following Varenne 1992.

{} bounds speech spoken softly
CAPS indicates speech spoken loudly
..... noticeable pause too short to be accurately timed
........ pause of one second (each dot represents a tenth of a second; thus 5 dots represents 0.5 seconds, ten dots 1.0 seconds, thirty-six dots 3.6 seconds and so on)
((() bounds transcriber’s comments
underlining indicates words spoken with emphasis
[...] indicates that a portion of speech has been omitted

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Appendix 3.2 Details of the life-story interviews with Methodist ministers and student ministers

All of my interviews with ministers had two parts. The first was a life-story section in which I invited them to begin by "telling me their life story, covering the main events and influences", and in which I made little or no interruption. The second part was a structured interview which involved specific questions about their ministerial practice and understandings. In total, I conducted sixteen interviews of this kind: six were with local church ministers, principally in Bedford but also in a circuit of the same region, and ten interviews were with ministers involved at the connexional level. With this latter group, I wanted to interview a variety of kinds of Methodist church leader and in the event I interviewed four people who were or had been chairs of district, three who were or had been Presidents, and six who were currently employed in management roles within the connexional team. Only three of the sixteen whom I interviewed were women. Ten of the ministers were in their fifties or sixties, three were in their forties and three were in their later thirties. All of the interviews of circuit ministers took place in their homes, whereas most of the interviews with connexional leaders occurred in their offices. Most of the interviews were taped and later transcribed.

All of those whom I interviewed were very articulate and able to tell their stories smoothly and with little hesitation. This reflects at least two points: firstly, that Methodist ministers are selected for their ability with words in both the written and spoken medium, and secondly, that they have had much practice in telling their stories to other Methodist ministers and to lay people. Furthermore, I noted that those who had had reason to tell their story on a recent occasion were even more fluent and sequential in their story telling than those who had not done so for some time.

The manner in which I elicited the information from the candidates and students was different from that with the ministers. In this case I had arranged an interview specifically to ask about their experiences of the candidating procedure. These interviews occurred either in the individuals' homes or in
rooms in their theological colleges, and took between one and three hours to conduct. In total, I interviewed seventeen students and candidates, eight of whom were men and nine of whom were women. After a few preliminary inquiries I began these interviews by asking when the person had first thought of becoming a Methodist minister, what their role had been at the time and what had made them think about it. The questions which I asked mirrored questions repeatedly asked throughout the candidating procedure.

In my interviewing of Methodist ministers and student ministers I never specifically asked anyone to tell me about their call. Several of those whom I interviewed chose to use this language to describe their story and overtly talked about God's involvement in their lives. Others rarely, if ever, mentioned God. The degree to which the various persons of the Trinity were referred to largely reflected whether a minister or student was more evangelical or liberal in theological orientation. Those of a more liberal bent only occasionally talked of God by name. I suspect that the way in which those interviewed responded to me was influenced by their sense of whether we shared the same theological approach. It would have been possible for them to place me theologically because of the nature of my research, since the subject is not one which would normally be undertaken by a student with an evangelical or perhaps even a High Church theology. Thus, I suggest that the liberals would unconsciously assume that I would believe with them that God was somehow involved in all of their living, but since the exact nature of this involvement was unknown there was no need for us to discuss it. In other words, to borrow Riessman's phrase, there is an extent to which it is possible to suggest that I shared an "assumptive world" with all of those whom I interviewed, but this was probably more the case with the liberal ministers than with others (Riessman 1987:190, cited in Andrews 1991:54).

The nature of my relationship with those interviewed is an important issue, and I felt that in every case my position as a Methodist student minister helped me to build rapport and trust quickly with those who were interviewed. While there may be those who feel anxious about the degree to which this may bias or dilute what I was able to learn from these interviews, I follow Molly Andrews in
proposing that “sympathetic understanding” between interviewer and interviewee is an aid to “mutual comprehension” which might even “improve the quality of the data” (Andrews 1991:51). It is nevertheless important to bear in mind how those interviewed perceived me, since as Bruner has suggested, “self-depiction varies as a function of the interlocutor to whom the account is given” (Bruner 1994:43). With regard to this, I suspect that on most occasions I was perceived as a representative of the Methodist Church, albeit as a fairly inconsequential representative, and that most of those interviewed presented their story much as they would do in other church forums, but perhaps in a slightly more relaxed manner.

Appendix 3.3 Further examples of common themes in the life-story narratives

The ministers’ temporal and spatial frameworks

Quite a number of the ministers came from northern industrial or mining areas; a few were from the Midlands, including villages as well as pottery towns and the larger conurbations. Only one of the ministers whom I interviewed came from the Home Counties and two were originally from London. Only one person missed out any account of early origins and started his account with his ministerial training.

References to class and employment background of parents

While most of the ministers made some reference to class this varied according to whether it was implicit or explicit. For example, one man said: “I was brought up in the biggest council estate in Birmingham”, while another commented that he had been “brought up in a working-class area by working-class parents”. Yet a third commented on the matter at some length:

I was brought up in an industrial town. My father was an unskilled worker in the engineering works in Chesterfield. My mother was a housewife. She’d been trained as a tailoress but gave that up to rear the family. We were usually short of money
so we had a grandfather who was a bit of a benefactor who kept us living in a house which was not really consistent with our station in society. We were working class and we lived in a middle-class area thanks to living in a house which grandfather owned. So I was brought up a curious mixture of working class and a mother especially who aspired to the middle class.

This last interviewee was unlike most of the ministers in that he volunteered details of his parents' occupation without being asked. Usually, I had to wait until interviewees had completed their story before I could elicit information about their parents' occupations. Five of the ministers told me in the course of their life story that their father had been ill for much of their childhood, or had been a shadowy figure, or had died when they were young. Most of the mothers had given up paid employment outside of the home once they had had children. Two fathers had been engineers, two were involved in teaching, one had been a bank manager, one had been in insurance and another had worked in a factory. One of the ministers, who now has a senior connexional position, told me of how his father had started as an “office boy and worked his way up to company secretary”, thus again reverting to the theme of social mobility.

The religious affiliations of parents

With regard to the religious affiliations of parents, only three of those whom I interviewed had a straightforward Methodist background. Most mentioned some other element such as an Anglican mother or a Presbyterian father, and many had been brought up in some other nonconformist denomination such as the Baptist or Congregationalist Churches. Of the traditional Methodists, one minister described the religious affiliation of his parents in this way:

My parents were staunch Methodists—they were very much in the thick of everything. I grew up in that atmosphere. My father was a local preacher—for seventy years and Sunday school superintendent. My mother was a Guide leader.
By contrast, another began the interview by stating: "I'm neither ...... don't come from Christian or Methodist background. My parents were conscious of having opted out of church".

**Descriptions of religious experience**

Some variation in the religious experience described by the ministers was evident. One minister who explained how he had invented elements of his religious experience spoke in the following way (I have changed the exact dates to protect his identity):

I candidated for the ministry on that conservative-evangelical ticket. I hadn't had a religious conversion but I invented one—March the 20th 1955 and that was my testimony throughout my candidature and everyone believed it and I think I believed it eventually. I could tell you who the preacher was, what time of day it was, where it was at. I fabricated it because I needed a testimony to be acceptable to my peer group.

Three others described their earlier movement towards a Christian faith but did not use the specific term "conversion". One minister reported it thus:

I can talk in terms of highlight moments. There was a big inspirational event. I made a decision in 1949; I was about 11 or 12. I can remember the challenge of the Sunday school teacher inviting people to come. It was the visit of the President of Conference to the circuit church at Newark. I can remember clearly going back home and making a further commitment.

**Education and career before entering the ministry**

A much repeated element of the stories was of passing the "eleven plus exam" which led to the attending of a grammar school. These events often resulted in individuals being separated from most of the rest of their neighbourhood.
Several of the older men had left grammar school at sixteen and gone into industry for a few years before candidating. They had then gained a university education while at theological college or as part of their probation studies once working as ministers. Four of the ministers had undertaken first degrees at Cambridge University and three of these were now in senior positions within the connexional church. Another two of the connexional figures had completed first degrees in other places. All three of the women had undergone higher education and two had undertaken degrees before candidating to be Methodist ministers. Two of the women had worked both as teachers and as church lay workers before candidating and the third had been employed in a different area of the Methodist Church before offering for full-time ministry. One of the male ministers had also worked in education before candidating and two others had been involved in scientific research, one completing his Ph.D.

*Reaching the valued end point of the call to ministry*

One minister, Dean, built up to telling of his call by recounting the following experiences:

I joined a small manufacturing company er in the office, really to learn the whole process of taking orders, dealing with orders, processing all the rest of it. And I’d been there about three or four years, three years, when the company secretary walked up to me while I was in the gent’s toilets and asked me if I was intending to make my future with the company. And that was a big question to me because I had never actually thought where is my life going. And that question brought the issue out to the front. And I suddenly realised that I couldn’t see myself in that company when I was sixty-five. I suddenly realised that there was more to my life than that, but I had no idea what. We had a fairly strong youth fellowship at the church and we used to go round together. And group of us went to Coventry Cathedral the year it opened which was 1962 or {63 or whenever it was} and I had never been in a church like that—it was so different—and I
can still remember seeing the baptistry window and the tapestry—the tapestry I didn’t like, the baptistry windee ((sic)) I thought was absolutely wonderful. That obviously made me think, but I don’t know what about..... I realised that perhaps what I ought to be doing is teaching. But I don’t actually know why I thought that ‘ause I didn’t like school.

[...] A group of us went by plane to the Isle of Wight, to a Methodist youth camp, and it was while I was at the Methodist youth camp, which was staffed by student ministers on the whole, mmmm that I felt that I ought to be a Methodist minister and when I, when I came back from that holiday I went round to see my minister, who was a fairly young chap and said to him, I want to be a minister expecting him to say, go away you silly lad, but he didn’t.

Further examples of what prompted the call to ministry, as told by the student ministers and candidates

The student ministers tended, like the ministers, to locate agency primarily within themselves but also to relate their actions to the prompting of others and to particular circumstances. Most of those whom I interviewed indicated that they had thought about becoming Methodist ministers for a good number of years before doing anything about it. For many of those who had been in their twenties when they candidated the idea that they would like to be a minister had first come to them when they were young teenagers. Two of the women attributed this directly to friendship with the first woman minister in their church, or with a deaconess. Two people told me of how as young teenagers they had sat in church listening to the minister thinking “I could do better than that” and there was no great leap from this to thinking “I wouldn’t mind being a Methodist minister”. Another student told me of how his conversion experience at thirteen was followed by a sense that being a minister was something he could do. As he said to me, “it felt right—it was the niche in life for me”.

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In contrast to this, while Pete, a younger male student, also referred to the actions of God, here as Holy Spirit, and to another person's prediction, he spoke repeatedly in terms of himself as "I". When asked if he could remember when he first thought of becoming a Methodist minister, he replied in this way:

I have to say it was when I went on a Rob Frost\(^{93}\) mission, at eighteen. I had just left school and just started work. At the end the minister said: "have you thought of Methodist ministry?" and something resonated and I felt I really did have to take it seriously. At the time I felt filled with awe, the Holy Spirit was speaking and I felt genuinely that this was something I had to discover—I couldn't put it down when I left and went back ..... I think you are definitely called to think about it. On that last night of the mission he had said: "I look forward to seeing you at your ordination—you have the gifts and graces". I had a feeling like when I was converted. I don't know what happened—something happened. My conversion and call to ministry—I can't think rationally.

In contrast to this, two other interviewees told me of how negative experiences had prompted their sense of call. One man spoke of how his dissatisfaction with his accountancy work had prompted him to think about ministry. He reported that he felt dissatisfied "with not doing something worthwhile—just fiddling numbers". Another woman spoke very movingly of how it was after losing a longed for pregnancy that the sense that she should be a minister came to her, clearly and consciously. She reported how she had not at first acted on the feeling because she felt that it was largely a response to loss. But later when other children came and she still had a sense that she should be a minister she realised that it was not just about compensating her loss of the child. One young man told me that he realised at twenty-seven that he was having to work very

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\(^{93}\) Rob Frost is the name of a leading evangelist who has his own evangelical organization within the Methodist Church.
hard and long hours in his profession and that he had thought that he might as well work very hard in something which he “felt called to do”.

Appendix 3.4 Further aspects of the candidating process

Appendix 3.4.1 The district candidates committee

From my fieldwork in Bedford I know that membership of the district candidates committee is often valued by lay people. Elizabeth, whose story was told in Chapter 2, told me of how her membership of the committee helped her to “feel in touch with Methodism more widely”, and others spoke of how being involved helped to create a sense of “Methodist identity”. Membership of this powerful committee also gives a certain status within the local church and circuit communities. The relationships between committee members, as they sometimes strive to establish their own position and status, appears to affect the way in which the interview is conducted.

The interview usually takes place in rooms within a Methodist church somewhere in a candidate’s district, and several candidates mentioned that they had experienced long or difficult journeys, thus adding to the overall sense of ordeal. Most candidates are usually invited to attend the committee for the period of a day. What usually happens is that the committee meets in one room and all the candidates from the district must endure long periods of waiting together in another part of the church building, before being called in to be seen one at a time. This experience of waiting is a frequent one throughout the procedure, which gives a very physical expression to the asymmetrical power relations and emphasises the candidates’ lack of “normal” autonomy.

The committee provides yet another occasion on which the informational preserve of the candidate may be invaded. This time there is the added dimension of it being a fairly public event and of candidates having to think on their feet. Many of the candidates felt embarrassed or humiliated by the experience of being asked difficult questions, and some candidates felt they were insulted or provoked by committee members. One young woman told me that
the panel had indicated to her that they thought she was "too academically minded to be any earthly use". Another young woman was asked as the opening question: "How is it that an attractive girl like you isn’t married?" Other young people were frequently asked: "what does someone in their early twenties have to offer the Church?" with the felt implication being that the questioner thought that people in their twenties had little to offer. Indeed, several interviewees commented on how aggressive the committee appeared. One man said: "it was all very strange—they picked up on any mistake and would fly straight back in on any aspect of it—it was very awkward."

Given the nature of the event, it is not surprising that at the end of it many candidates report feeling emotionally drained and exhausted. However, the sharing of this intense experience contributes to the bonding which often appears to occur between the candidates. One woman described the event as follows:

It was a full day. We had to be there from 9.30 until 4.30. The six candidates sat in the minister’s vestry which was really a nasty little hole ..... It was a nice little group and we knew each other from end to end ..... It was very hard really I needed to be alone, but we sat and timed each other ..... we came back and talked about the questions we’d been asked.

Although in a few cases the interviewees reported feeling very different from the others either in terms of age, gender, theology or personality type, most remarked on the positive relationships which developed at this point.

A final aspect of this particular event is the receiving of the result. For many, this again proved an occasion of embarrassment, frustration or disempowerment. Candidates felt particularly “under attack” when they received negative votes or were voted out altogether. On interviewing one candidate a year after his experience of receiving some negative votes at this stage, he said: “I got a negative vote—I’d still like to know what it was about and why”. For those being voted out at this stage the process was often very traumatic, with cases of failed candidates returning to their fellow candidates in tears.
Appendix 3.4.2 District ministerial synod

Like the district committee, the internal dynamics of this event affected the experience for the candidates. It is mandatory that all Methodist ministers resident within a particular district attend the district synod, and dispensation for any absence must be sought from the chairman. In addition, those present are required to answer a roll call and thereby to indicate their continued conviction of a call to ministry and their agreement with the Methodist Church’s doctrine and acceptance of its discipline. All of this is dramatically enacted through the ministers sharing together in a Communion service.

In addition to interviewing the student ministers concerning their experiences of synod, I was given leave by the chairman of district to attend one ministerial synod. It is my observation that every part of the ministerial synod is an opportunity for reinforcing the bonds between ministers and re-emphasising their identity. Ministers from the same circuit tend to travel together, and once at the local church which is hosting the synod, the ministers tend to meet up with former colleagues and renew old bonds. The business of assessing the candidates who appeared before the ministers can be seen as yet another element in the re-emphasising of the ministerial identity, although divergent understandings of that identity also emerged during this process.

The status of the district officials was increased through this event, as was that of all the ministers present, since they could express their opinions and vote on whether the prospective candidates were acceptable. Reflecting their position and role, all the ministers present were sent a summary of the information so far gleaned about the candidates. This again served to put the candidates at a disadvantage and one person commented on it thus:

it gave me a very funny feeling that Greg and all the other ministers in the London North East District should be sent information about me, some of which is quite personal and some of which I have not seen. It gives me a sense of powerlessness and vulnerability that I am not sure I like. It also is not at all
conducive to any sense of mutuality about the selection process. It is as though I am often left out of the process whilst others decide things about me and then I am asked to appear from time to time to assist them in their decision-making.

Candidates were usually asked to wait outside while the synod was given a summary of their examination and interview results, and then one by one they were invited back in and asked to tell their story, or as the chairman at the synod I observed put it: “We would like you to share, reasonably briefly, what God has been doing in your life which has brought you to this place”. Most candidates then spoke for three or four minutes. In my observation these presentations contained many of the elements which I have already analysed in the stories of the call told to me in interview by ministers and students. Several of the candidates told of their conversion experiences, as well as the opportunities and experiences which had led them to the point of offering as ministers.

At the synod which I observed, members of the synod questioned all the candidates. These questions revealed as much about the questioners as they did about the candidates, since liberal ministers tended to cross-question the more charismatic/evangelical candidates, and the more evangelical ministers cross-tended to cross-question the liberal candidates. For instance, a candidate who was charismatic in the expression of her faith was questioned by a more liberal minister concerning her use of the categories “church-goer and Christian” since, in a sectarian fashion, she had seemed to suggest that churchgoers were not necessarily Christians. Another candidate who had given a less dramatic account of his growth in faith was challenged by the more evangelical ministers to state what he thought a Christian was, with the implication being that he was too broad in his understanding of the category. Through these questions some of the ministers at the synod were drawing attention to the issues and beliefs which they thought were important and were thus attempting to re-draw the boundaries of faith and of ministry. Following discussion of the candidates among the ministers, the chairman invited the relevant superintendent minister to nominate him or her after which the ministers voted by raising an arm.
When they had heard all of the candidates and voted on them the district chairman called the candidates back in and openly commented on the stressful nature of the event by saying: “sorry you’ve had this ordeal really”. That it was an “ordeal” was commented on to me by many of the candidates whom I interviewed. Given that there can be between fifty and one hundred ministers present at district synod, it is not surprising that several candidates admitted to being nervous. One young candidate described her experience like this:

I remember walking out of the vestry and into the church and the first thing that struck me was just a sea of dog-collars and I couldn’t see a single woman at all, there must have been seventy, seventy-five men. In the [...] district there would only be about five women; I remember searching around, but then I saw some I did know, I could see my Super, I could see my own minister ....... and the chairman introduced me. I didn’t have any notes. I had rehearsed very carefully what I was going to say and I said it and I made a joke early on and they got the gag, I was winning the audience over and I relaxed quite a bit after that and that was fine really.

The performative nature of the telling of the call was particularly obvious at this event. The candidates were being tested as to whether they could perform the role appropriately. Body posture, facial expression and tone of voice were as important in this as the actual content of what was spoken. It was indeed very noticeable that the body posture of the candidates contrasted sharply with that of the ministers who later occupied the pulpit at the synod. At this event, in addition to hearing the accounts of those who wish to enter the ministry, the ministers also listen to those who wish to retire and who must make a speech in which they “ask to sit down”. These ministers, who had reached the penultimate point in their ministry, had a very different body posture to the candidates, since they tended to lean on the front of the pulpits, to grasp the pulpit as if they owned it, or to loll back casually as if they did not take it all too seriously. Their addresses were full of jokes and in-house humour. By comparison, the candidates stood still and kept their hands by their sides so that they did not
touch the pulpit. Thus, the speaker's position inside or outside of the ministry was physically reflected in the way in which the pulpit was touched.

Appendix 3.4.3 The Connexional Candidates Selection Committee

This committee consists of over sixty people, the vast majority of whom are ministers, and many of whom have an automatic place because of their connexional office. The committee never meets as a whole but operates on two separate sites at two theological colleges. The work of the committee is conducted over three days, but the individual candidates each have to be present for only a twenty-four hour period.

At this event the candidate must again undergo many of the same tests and examinations which have occurred throughout the process. Once they have arrived at the appointed theological college, their autonomy and personal freedom is greatly reduced, since they are told that they must never leave the site without first informing a "student helper" of their whereabouts. During the twenty-four hour period there are a variety of exercises and interviews which must be completed. In addition, the candidate must eat and worship with members of the committee and the other candidates, and a great deal of time is spent sitting around with other candidates waiting to be seen. Thus, at this event, the preserve around the individual is invaded in a particularly physical way, and they are again made to feel their inferiority.

The first formal activity in which all participate is a group discussion exercise in front of the connexional psychologist. After this event, some people are called out to have a private conversation with the psychologist. Here again, several people informed me that they had worked out for themselves, or had had suggested to them by ministers, a strategy for performing in the group discussion in front of the psychologist. Next, the connexional doctor examines all of the candidates. Some were angered and embarrassed by the way in which they had to strip for medical examination and to produce a urine sample in a jam jar (probably to test for diabetes) while a doctor, nurse and student minder were all waiting outside for it. Thus, even a physical stripping and an invasion of the
normal preserves around the body is required in addition to all the psychological and emotional stripping which has already gone before.

A further spiritual stripping is demanded when all of the candidates are partnered with a member of the committee and asked to go for a walk on which they discuss issues of faith and their "call to the ministry". While some candidates commented that they enjoyed this one-to-one "chat", others found it "incredibly tiring" because it "gave the impression of being a casual chat but you had to think very carefully". After this, the students are called in to be interviewed by a panel of eight people. The candidates' experiences of being interviewed by the panel of eight varied immensely. At one end of the spectrum a candidate said that he felt "really affirmed" because the committee had "looked at ((his)) strengths". However, many of those I interviewed reported having very difficult experiences. One said of the interview: "it was very strange, not what I expected, it was a bit of a put-down, there was the most awful questions—nothing straightforward". Again, as with the district candidates committee, there is sometimes an attempt to provoke or insult candidates, and several recounted feeling humiliated or "broken", as one person put it to me.

When the panel of eight cannot reach a unanimous decision about candidates, they must also go before a panel of three and be re-interviewed. In some instances the candidate is also asked to go before the whole of the committee on that site. Those who had to be seen by the panel of three found this a rather traumatic prospect. One person spoke of his experience of the committees like this:

It was a total nightmare from beginning to end. It was one of the most negative experiences I've had in my life. I wouldn't wish it on anyone. The panel of six ((interviewees mistake)) savaged me. They were showing off—asking clever questions. There was no one sympathetic to my theological point of view. I felt alone and under attack. They had made their minds up from the paperwork and they were in for the kill. They asked bizarre questions that were impossible to answer .......... Then there was
the three—the triumvirate—utter savaging. ((He named the members of the committee)) ((So and so and so and so)) were in for the kill. They asked me whether I thought Jesus turned water into wine. It was late in the evening..... I was very churned up ..... Then the next day they hauled me in front of everybody and continued to ask bizarre questions like: “How does God deal with his anger?”

Appendix 3.4.4 Receiving the result

On the day on which two of the candidates in Bedford received their results I was present at a lunchtime prayer meeting which they attended. The atmosphere at the meeting was jubilant, with the successful candidates being hugged and kissed repeatedly by their friends and supporters amid shrieks and cries, laughter and tears. A bottle of champagne was opened and glasses shared all round. The candidates and a candidate’s spouse talked repeatedly of the moment in which they had received the result and of their feelings of jubilation. They also talked of moments of difficulty and despair in the candidating procedure. The friends and supporters shared the joy of the candidates stating that: “At last the Methodist Church has got something right”. This indicated their previous frustration that one of the candidates who had previously been supported in the circuit had been rejected as a candidate at a higher level of the church process. After the initial euphoria, the group members quite quickly started to bemoan the fact that they would be losing their friends, who would soon be moving off to theological college.

This event of celebration demonstrated the way in which the candidating process had operated to create a sense of bonding and then of separation between friends and church members. It was very clear that the relationships between the candidates and others were already changing as they all prepared for the candidates to leave and move on.
Appendix 4 Additional materials to Chapter 4

Appendix 4.1 Further details about the colleges

Appendix 4.1.1 A description of the distinctive nature of the Bristol and Cambridge colleges

Built up over the last fifty years, and replacing an earlier college in Leeds, Wesley College in Bristol is situated in the affluent, leafy suburb of Westbury-on-Trym and is set back from the road in its own extensive grounds and with playing fields. In addition to administrative offices, a library, classrooms and a dining hall, the main building provides residential accommodation for around fifty people and with its long echoing corridors and common rooms it has a very institutional feel. As one new student commented: “it’s like an old folk’s home”.

By comparison, Wesley House, which is situated right in the centre of Cambridge, was built to emulate the Cambridge colleges, with its own wooden-panelled chapel, principal’s lodge, library, dining hall and accommodation (in sets) built around the four sides of a grass court. It is generally acknowledged that Wesley House was founded by men who desired that Methodist ministers be able to benefit from an education in association with the prestigious University of Cambridge (Rowe 1985:25), and its existence clearly reflects the increasingly middle-class nature and aspirations of Methodism around the turn of this century. Although there are now many non-graduates in the college, Wesley House still has something of a reputation of exclusiveness and many of the students express surprise that they have been “allowed in” to the college. It has certainly continued to be the case that many of the senior leaders of Methodism have been trained at Wesley House, and the comment has been made to me that there are “two types of minister: those who have been to Wesley House and the rest”.

At Bristol I encountered several students who would have preferred to have trained at Cambridge or elsewhere, but who were sent to Bristol, which has its own reputation for being of a more evangelical character. This is borne out among other things, by the extra Saturday night “praise events” organised by the students, and by the fact that many of the students have spent a year at
Methodism's evangelical lay training college, Cliff College, before coming to Bristol.

Bristol is much the larger community with about eighty-five students and staff plus their families, compared to Cambridge's forty, and as such it can provide a more complete social world for its inmates. However, in both colleges there are numerous in-house social events, many of which are conducted with the express purpose of raising money for charity. In Bristol, the men play football together, and in Cambridge some sporting activities are shared with members of the other theological colleges in the city.

**Appendix 4.1.2 Oversight committee**

At each of the colleges an oversight committee meets bi-annually to discuss the progress of every student. In theory, the Methodist Church Probationers' Oversight Committee (MCPOC) appoints the committee, but in my observation members tend to have been suggested by the college staff and to be well known to the staff. Appointment to a college oversight committee carries a degree of prestige, and the ability to suggest the appointment is part of the patronage operated by the college staff.

At Wesley House the practice is for the committee to meet together first with the college staff in the Principal's lodge and to hear brief reports on the students. Individual members of the committee are then appointed to meet with individual students and to discuss their situation with them. The committee then reconvenes for a session without the staff before the staff finally rejoin it. At Bristol the tradition has been that a student does not meet with the committee unless there is a particular problem with their progress. The committee then has the power to recommend to the Conference whether a student should continue in training.

The oversight committee is sometimes party to information and reports not seen by the student. The degree of consultation over the implementation of any sanctions which the committee may enforce varies greatly. For instance, in
Bristol one woman told me of how she had not even known that she was to be discussed by the committee, and was deeply shocked to be simply informed the next day that she must stay on for an extra year's training. In contrast to this, at Wesley House, when particularly grave difficulties have arisen with regard to a student, such as the breakdown of a marriage or an extra-marital affair, a meeting is usually held between the student and three or so members of the committee. At these meetings I have been told that the circumstances of what is regarded by the committee as the student's misdemeanour are closely questioned. The content of these sessions is largely kept secret and an instance of a student being discontinued is usually an extremely painful experience for everyone concerned. The small committee will normally attempt to reach some decision and then give a recommendation regarding the student's welfare to the full committee. While discontinuance is rare, the knowledge of its possibility serves as an impetus for students to behave acceptably in front of the staff, whose role in both influencing the appointing of the members of the oversight committee and in the ongoing assessment of students is well known by the students.

Appendix 4.1.3 The paternalistic nature of the relationship between staff and students

The role of the college principal is often quite clearly paternalistic, with, for instance, the beginning and end of term or "college time" at Wesley House being marked not only by religious ceremonies in the chapel, but also by a visit to the principal's lodge, where special refreshments are served. This event functions to enhance the sense of the principal's benevolent paternalism.

Those charged with overseeing the development of theological students are perceived to have the right to enquire into any aspect of a student's life, including personal relationships and financial status. Meetings called "tutorials" are held regularly between staff and their tutees at which inquiries will be made concerning the students' progress and well-being. Students may also seek help from staff if they are encountering particular problems with their relationships or in other areas of emotional difficulty. The staff and the Oversight Committee have a pastoral concern for the welfare of every student.
With regard to finances, grants are now paid directly to students by the central Methodist Church offices, but some bursars and staff like to inform students that if they are in difficulties they can always apply to them for help. In one of the colleges the principal advised students at the start of the year to make economies telling them, “don’t eat out so much”, and also adding, “but remember there is the principal’s fund—don’t lie awake at night worrying about finances”.

Appendix 4.1.4 A day in the life of the college

For academic staff and students at Wesley House the day starts with everyone together for a short service of prayers in the chapel. The students and staff are not now distinguishable by age or dress, since all are normally attired in casual clothes and students can look as old as the staff and sometimes older. However, beneath the appearance of similarity lies the difference that it is generally known that staff are observing, as part of their disciplinary role, who is present at prayers and who is not.

After prayers students often try to “grab” a member of staff to ask for an appointment or to obtain particular information. Staff then usually rush back into their offices where they teach students or deal with matters of pastoral concern. By contrast, the students amble along to the common room to check their pigeon holes for post and talk to each other before some return to their rooms to read and others start out for classes or lectures held in various venues around the theological colleges or in the university. Those students around the college at mid-morning often go the common room to drink coffee and talk together, where they are occasionally joined by some staff members. Then, almost all staff and students are united together in the dining hall for lunch. Again at the meal table, the staff members may be repeatedly asked for information or asked for assistance by students. In the afternoon, all return to the timetabled pursuits.

While there are points during the day at which staff and students are united by an activity, on close examination their participation can be seen to be significantly different. Much of the work of the staff is hidden, since they largely work behind closed doors in their studies and they can be seen hurrying between
one activity and the next. Students, by contrast, are much more obvious and
open to one another, since many spend much time in public spaces, such as the
common room and library, and they are also willing to have lengthy
conversations with those whom they meet around the college. Often certain
students can be seen to spend much more time with members of staff, visiting
their homes or engaging in leisure pursuits with them. As a consequence, other
students may regard these students warily.

Appendix 4.1.5 Positive and negative experiences of entering college

Many people experience moving into a college as a huge upheaval. For most
older people it involves shedding some possessions and for a number it requires
the often heart-wrenching selling of a house. On entering the college the
students are allocated new quarters, and for the single students or those without
furniture this also means being supplied with college furniture. For everyone, it
involves a move away from old sources of identity, such as work or local
community, and for quite a number this also entails a large drop in financial
standing and in status.

The students at Bristol varied in their responses to these changes. One man
who had recently moved into the college spoke of the experience in terms of
“losing pay and losing space”, while a young woman stated conversely that
becoming a theological student had provided a “gain in money” for her. Like
many older students, one woman observed of her changing situation: “I feel I’ve
lost control—I have much less space than in my own home”.

Another significant area of change for students is the way in which members of
their home churches relate to them after they have moved into college. Some
students have written and spoken of the concern and practical support which
their home church communities have shown towards them. Most, however, told
me of negative experiences which had resulted from the changing attitude of
members of their home churches. At Wesley House, Lesley, an older student,
spoke regretfully of this stating:
the biggest problem was that my church were wonderful—they backed me up, collected money for me and forgot about me. I was heartbroken—they don’t realise what it is to go through college. The rest of the church have given you up—you have nothing to do when you go back.

Another student, Ellen, again spoke sadly of her home church saying, “the church has no positive interest in what I’m doing—it’s quite disappointing”. Others, expressed a sense of being in an anomalous state especially with regard to their previous church communities and one student in Bristol told me: “Local churches don’t treat you as if you were a normal person—you feel in limbo”.

Kate, a younger student, expressed her experience of coming into college in contrast to her experience of candidating: “you go from being the centre of attention in your circuit to being centre of attention in district and now ((in college)) you are just a first year and must get on with it”. Again, with great vigour, after talking about his difficult experience of candidating, Rob stated: “you feel like you went through all this SHIT ((candidating)) and then you feel like a two year old when you turn up here—it’s as if last year didn’t happen.”

As Goffman ([1961] 1991:46) has identified of total institutions, new inmates in theological colleges sometimes live with a “chronic anxiety about breaking the rules” and the possible humiliation or worse which may result. In Bristol one new student commented about her initial experience: “there’s a lot to take in—you need to have things explained—you make mistakes. I overslept and was embarrassed to come in late to prayers”. However, while some find this experience of being childlike again uncomfortable and embarrassing, others relish the opportunities which it brings. One woman in her mid-fifties described how, when she started at Wesley House, she felt young again, as if she “didn’t have any cares”.

Moreover, a sizable number of people coming into theological college are pleased to be able to leave behind an old identity and to take on a new. After all, this is what they have been working towards for the previous year or longer.
One woman in Bristol told me, with regard to coming into college: “I feel I have gained things—the security of knowing where I am and what I’m going to be doing”.

With regard to the process of “de-skilling” students, I overheard a telling dinner conversation in Wesley House. Some first year students were told by a fifth year: “it’s a process of formation—being turned into ministers—((you’ve)) got to leave other stuff behind—make the break”. To this one newcomer responded, “I feel put off enough as it is”. Another student, then in her second year added: “you will feel de-skilled but it’s just that your skills are not used—they are put away for later on.” The she added: “you won’t realise what you’ve lost till half way through the first term, by then you are beginning to work through it”. In Bristol, in the college handbook, mention is made that the college staff “wish to draw on people’s own experience and gifts”(Wesley College 1996), but there, as in Cambridge, people also spoke of feeling de-skilled, and Malcolm put it to me like this:

Officially it is claimed that different insights and skills are noted but in reality it can feel you are being put through a sausage machine. We’re not all starting from the same point but you are treated as if you are.

Thus, it is clear that some students feel that they are being treated as part of a batch and many quite clearly mourn the loss of their old identity while, in the early stage of college, not feeling they have anything substantial with which to replace it.

Appendix 4.1.6 Changes in dress and deportment

Normally, during their second year students are placed on “attachment” with a minister in a local church, and this provides a further opportunity for an extended experience of working in the role of the minister. I have observed how this often brings about significant changes in a student’s dress and deportment. When they first come into college the students often take up what could be described as
casual student attire, since they usually wear jeans and training shoes and in Wesley House often purchase sweatshirts sporting the college name and crest. In contrast, when they go out on their attachments the men will often put on a suit, or at least a jacket, and the women will tend to wear a smart skirt and consequently shoes with a raised heel. In both cases the clothes contribute to an overall change in body posture since the fairly relaxed and informal bearing of the first year becomes a stiffer and more formal carriage with swifter and more purposeful movement when on placement and acting as a minister. It is often when on placement or attachment that the students first wear the clerical collar, especially for the conduct of official church business, and several have commented how, when they wear the collar, they “act differently”.

Appendix 4.1.7 Embodying the ministerial habitus through experiences of college government

It is sometimes explicitly stated and often implied that life in the colleges is a model for how life should be in the local Methodist church. One practical expression of this is found in the way in which students are asked to take a turn at chairing the college meetings as a good preparation for the common ministerial role as chair of church committees. Here again, though, the underlying pattern is one of ministerial dominance, despite the colleges’ explicit policies of collaboration, which give an appearance of democracy.

With regard to college structures of government, there is in Wesley House a separately constituted student body known as the common room, which in title follows the style of Cambridge colleges. There is also a college meeting which consists of all the staff, students and their spouses, and the college policy is that “those who are affected by decisions should participate in making them, subject always to the constraints imposed by the constitution and discipline of the Methodist Church” (Wesley House 1996:11). In both colleges student presidents are elected and, along with other student representatives, they are meant to liase with the staff.
At Bristol it is stated that the staff aim to manage “through processes which are consultative, participatory and collaborative in style and implementation” (Wesley College 1996:1), and there are student representatives on every level of the college’s government. Yet, there was frustration among the students at the lack of collaboration experienced in reality. One of the students, who was highly involved in the running of the college, told me of how he had worked together with the staff to organise an important part of the college’s life and at the last moment it had been changed by the staff without consultation. He concluded: “the aim of collaboration is a facade”. Other students were less critical of the way in which the college was managed, stating with regard to the staff: “they are in charge—they have responsibility”. In general, there is a perception among the students that, while they may be involved in the making of smaller decisions, they have little real power. A previous bursar had on occasion informally expressed this to students, warning: “don’t think you have any real power”.

Appendix 4.1.8 Explicit and implicit rules in the colleges

In both colleges there are explicit rules concerning attendance at a daily service and certain prescribed events such as the community evening in Cambridge and the daily lunches at Bristol, together with other events, such as committees and plenary sessions. With regard to the implicit rules in both Bristol and Cambridge there is much emphasis on the concept of “community”. The term, which is given a theological rationale, is greatly used in the college literature and in common parlance. One of the reasons for the emphasis of the staff on community appears to be that it is an aspect of life in theological college which can be used to justify the existence of the colleges.

On the whole the students at the theological colleges embrace the concept of Christian community and are often even more idealistic about it than the staff. At Bristol several people spoke to me of working hard to create community. One student commented: “the students are a big family”, and several others spoke warmly about the level of pastoral care and support which members of the student body provided for each other. Not everyone, though, found the college community to be such a positive experience and some complained to me of
finding the corporate emphasis falsely intense. One woman mentioned that there was a perception that the college would be an "ideal Christian community—like Acts 2", although she added emphatically: "its not like that". In fact there is a great deal of pressure exerted by the students upon each other to act as acceptable community members and often the loudest criticisms against those who do not do so are made by other students. Concerning this one inmate complained of student "vigilante groups".

As part of their commitment to community, students are also expected to play a role in the college maintenance and administration. This reflects the reality that, due to financial stringency, the maintaining of a certain quality of life for everyone depends on as many members of the community as possible taking an active role in these various areas. Thus, for students and staff, having a sense of common identity and shared objectives is an extremely important aspect of the college life, and when this starts to break down it is the cause of much conflict and distress.

Appendix 4.1.9 Further details of the college culture and pattern of ritual events

Both Wesley House and Wesley College are full of in-house traditions, stories and a particular language or use of acronyms which newcomers must learn. In Wesley House the most intriguing of these terms is the use of "pubs" for the nightly supper-time (usually non-alcoholic drinks), which members host for each other in their rooms. Some aspects of college practice are generally shared, while others are particular to the students. An example of the latter is the way in which stories are told among the students about the times when the staff have lost their temper with special terms being used to invoke the memory of those occasions. There are also particular acronyms used to describe those staff practices of which the students are critical. Staff also have their own stock of stories and practices which remain largely private within their group.

Both colleges have a regular pattern of rituals with distinctive practices at the most important ceremonies of the year. At Bristol, the opening service of the
year includes a ceremony in which each new student comes to the front after his
or her name is called to sign the college book. Wesley House has its own special
ceremony of welcome for new students and staff, at which vows are taken and
promises made to the community. The leaving services at the end of the year are
also important, and at Wesley House those students who are leaving are anointed
with oil by the Principal and sent out on their way as ministers with the prayers
of the college.

In addition to religious rituals, most of the pivotal moments are marked also
with secular rituals, such as special dinner parties and theatrical events, including
college reviews when college staff may be imitated and lampooned. Outside
supporters and friends are often invited to attend these events, at which the
college, like many of the other total institutions which Goffman ([1961] 1991:95)
describes, presents a united front to the outside world. The role of the staff at
these potent times as the leaders of worship and principal speakers, as well as the
main butt of many of the jokes, strengthens and further legitimates their position
of authority within the college, while serving to further incorporate the inmates
into the institution.

Appendix 4.1.10 Changes in the patterns of theological education

While the basic model of training in theological colleges has remained largely
unchanged for more than one hundred and fifty years, reflecting continuity in
concepts of ministry, several developments are now bringing this model under
threat. Following decreases in membership, most of the denominations in
England have experienced financial pressures which have often led to the closure
of colleges. Within Methodism, those colleges which remain are having to
diversify. In the case of Wesley College, Bristol this has meant allowing lay
people to join the courses. Where this happens, and also where ministers are
trained on the job in circuit, as now sometimes occurs, the distinction between
lay and ordained is decreased. It is therefore perhaps not surprising that some
college staff have sought to resist such moves.
Another threat to the colleges has come from the establishment of non-residential training courses. These have been welcomed by many women, and by those prospective ministers with family and other commitments in a particular area, who would not find it easy to move into a college. I have observed tension between those who work on non-residential courses and staff of traditional theological colleges, and the latter often emphasise that without a residential community "character will not be dealt with", thus again stressing the total nature of the changes which they believe should be brought about through training. By contrast, staff on the non-residential courses encourage students to build on their previous skills rather than emphasising difference and, for instance, attempting to de-skill students. It is possible to see how such training is in harmony with the sense of ministry as an additional role or identity, which I have suggested some student ministers are starting to espouse. The battle over the making of ministers is only just entering this new phase and will be affected by changes in ideas about the kinds of minister which the church wants to create and by the changing nature of the church itself.

Appendix 4.1.11 Concerns about the academic nature of the training

Those students who spend their time on academic university courses sometimes question the appropriateness of such courses. Richard, an older student who already had a strong academic background and professional training suggested with regard to the theological training: "it's very easy to immerse yourself in the academic side and the people skills and spirituality can get pushed out—that's not as effectively monitored as the academic which seems to be top priority". I even heard a member of staff at one of the colleges warning one of the students that the training she was receiving would have no bearing on her future work, and many of the students are aware that there is a large difference between thinking about being a minister and actually doing the job. The ministers whom I interviewed in Bedford often bemoaned their time in college, and one of them gave the following example of the inadequacy of her training saying: "The course was O.K., but at the end of the day, in that first fortnight in circuit, when I had a wedding, I had no idea what to do.” Others lamented the lack of training which they had received in pastoral work. In the connexional offices, too, one of
the senior managers commented that there was too much “emphasis on theological education and not enough acquiring appropriate skills”. A middle manager told me of how he had heard ministers complain that at college but they had not been given enough practical training. These criticisms have been made repeatedly over many years, but they have become increasingly insistent as the ministry and the church face crises of identity, finance and a falling membership.

Appendix 4.2 Financial and other provision in probation

In 1998 new probationers were each provided by the church with the home where they were to live rent free, a grant of almost £2,000 for furniture, an interest-free loan of £5,000 for a new car, payment of their community charge, a stipend of about £13,000 per annum, a pension and the promise of retirement accommodation. The payment made to the minister is called a stipend rather than a salary, since it is argued that the stipend is what is required to meet the basic needs of the minister and to “free them up for ministry”. In this way, the different nature of the minister from other professionals is again reiterated. At the present time, the rate of pay is similar to the starting salary of a newly trained nurse, but in the case of the minister it is augmented by payments in kind, which are again a reminder of the different nature of the role.

Appendix 4.3 Further details of reception into full-connexion and ordination

Appendix 4.3.1 Reception into full-connexion

The ceremony of “reception into full-connexion” is a large, highly formal and extremely significant event within the Methodist Church. Most years there are between eighty and a hundred ministers who are received, and each brings a large number of guests who, together with the Conference representatives, make up a congregation of around 3000 people. The great majority of people attending this ceremony dress in their very best clothes, with many people wearing suits and women additionally dressing in hats and high-heeled shoes as they might do for a wedding. Many people travel great distances to be present at this ceremony, and before it commences there is much hugging and kissing and
shouting of greetings as guests meet up with the people they have come to support, and also as old friends renew acquaintances.

In both the ceremonies which I observed—one in Blackpool and one in London—the ordinands were seated in serried rows upon a platform at the front of the hall and were thus physically removed from the rest of the people and placed above and in front of the gathered crowds. The ordinands are requested to wear a clerical collar. Most wear formal suits with clerical shirts and small dog-tooth clerical collars. This similarity of dress, along with sitting together with their fellow ordinands and sharing the experience, probably acts to help bind the ordinands ever closer to their ministerial peers. However, as well as being a communal act, the reception into full-connexion also has an individual aspect, since each of the ordinands must stand as his or her name is called by the Secretary of Conference.

The main connexional and Conference officials play key parts in conducting this ritual. The connexional officials with responsibility for overseeing ministerial selection and training are seated upon the platform throughout the ceremony, so that their role is acknowledged and ritually reinforced. However, the main actors are the President and Secretary of Conference—who, unlike the other ministers involved, are attired in clerical cassocks and robes—and it is the Secretary of Conference who is primarily in control of the occasion. When the time comes for the key moment of the reception of the ministers it is the Secretary who states:

Mr President and Conference I present to you candidates for the diaconal order (or presbyteral ministry) who have now completed their probation.

It is also the Secretary who reads out the names of each of the candidates and says:
Mr President, I move that the Conference resolve by standing vote that the sisters and brothers [...] go forward for ordination by prayer and laying on of hands.

After naming the churches where that evening the ordinands will go forward for ordination the Secretary states: "I do so move", at which signal the members of the Conference rise to their feet to show by standing vote that they support the reception of these ordinands and the recommendation that they be ordained.

The impact of this ceremony appears to be variously experienced. For some, it is a solemn and moving moment. This was expressed by Edward Rogers, one-time President and regular reporter of Conference, who stated in his "Conference Notebook" in the Methodist Recorder, 29 June 1995: "It is always deeply moving when the ordinands rise one by one as their names are called". In contrast to this, some of those involved in this ceremony told me that they felt it lacked religious significance and one ordinand commented: "it felt like being part of a business meeting—an item on an agenda". Yet, whatever they might feel about the ceremony, whether it has emotionally moved them or not, it seems clear that by ritual action and significant words the ordinands are moved a step further in their taking on of a new identity.

Appendix 4.3.2 Ordination

Ordination services are held in large, aesthetically pleasing churches around the district or districts where the Conference is being hosted, and the churches are specially cleaned and adorned with flowers to enhance the sacred nature of the event. Ordinands are ordained with those from the same stage at the college or institution which provided their initial training and, since each person again invites close friends and family members to support them, the church buildings are usually filled to a capacity of around 600 people.

The service follows a formal liturgy and the printed order, with words spoken by the president and responses to be given by the people, is available for all members of the congregation to see. The service begins when the ordinands
process together to take their seats at the front of the church, often in the choir stalls, where they can be observed by the whole of the congregation. The ministers whom they have chosen to be involved in the “laying-on of hands” part of the ceremony usually follow them in. The congregation stand, and are respectfully quiet as the ordinands enter and remain standing while the ministers and those who will lead the service also enter and take their places at the front of the church. The ordinands are still dressed in suits and clerical collars, as for the previous ceremony, and the leaders of the service are usually in their finest robes, with white stoles if they have them. In the liturgical symbol system of the Anglican and Roman Catholic Churches white signifies those moments of greatest importance. There is a strict dress code for those who are assisting in the ordination, who must wear only black cassocks without bands.

The service is led by the President of Conference, or the person deputising for the President, who will have recently been a President, and follows a pattern of hymns, prayers and Bible readings. There is a lengthy sermon, often upon the nature of ministry, which is usually given by a recognised Methodist orator. At this, and at other points in the service, the role of the Connexion, or national Methodism, in making the minister is often stressed. The core of the service begins when the Secretary of Conference, or the person deputising for the Secretary, presents to the President those who are to be ordained presbyters and states that “the Connexion has resolved that they be ordained by prayer and the laying on of hands”. The Secretary then reads the names of the candidates for ordination, each candidate rising as his or her name is called and remaining standing. The people also stand, as is the case in Methodism when anything is to be marked out as serious or important. The President addresses the congregation and states the intention to ordain the persons before them, noting that their call has been tested and they have been “found to be of sound learning and faithful to their vocation”. The President then proceeds to address the congregation and to invite them to play their part in asserting the appropriateness of the forthcoming act according to a set text, saying:

We ask you to declare your assent to their ordination. Do you believe and trust that they are, by God’s grace, worthy to be ordained?
The people are directed to acclaim: “They are worthy”. The President then asks: “Will you uphold them in their ministry?” to which the people are directed to answer: “We will uphold them”. This appears to be a very moving moment for all involved and some ordinands react physically, either blanching or reddening in their faces.

After the presentation comes the examination, when the ordinands are reminded of all that God has called them to do and of the demands of the ministry, and they are directed to take as their example the “Good Shepherd who laid down his life for us all”. Finally, they are asked to declare their lifelong commitment to presbyteral ministry and asked a series of questions about their call and faith. To each of these questions they must answer: “I will”.

After prayers are made for the ordinands, and the Holy Spirit invoked by the congregational singing of an ancient hymn, the ordinands come forward one by one to kneel before the President, who prays for them. Then, the President and the other ministers—including the one chosen by the ordinand—lay their right hand upon the ordinand’s head.

Next the lay Vice-President has a role to play, going around the circle of ordinands and saying, as he or she presents each one with a Bible: “((N)), receive this Bible as a sign of the authority committed to you to preach the word of God and to celebrate the sacraments”. After this, the congregation again stands and the President declares the ordinands ordained as “Presbyters of the one holy catholic and apostolic church of Christ”, again reminding them of their call and tasks. At this point all the people applaud the new ordinands, which is a further expression both of affirmation and of their own participation.

The ordination is followed by the celebration of Communion, which is administered by the President. The ordinands come up in turn with their supporters, who take Communion together at the front of the church. Even by Methodist standards the ordination service is extremely lengthy and wordy and it is with great enthusiasm that the congregation leaves the formal part of the ceremony for the refreshments which form the final part of the event.
Appendix 5 Additional materials to Chapter 5

Appendix 5.1 The origin of differences in church party with particular regard to ministry

The increasingly organized ecclesiological parties which developed within the Anglican Church during the nineteenth century have had a significant impact on other denominations, notably Methodism, within which party allegiances have developed along similar lines. Within Methodism, there are two clearly identifiable parties: the evangelicals and the High Church or sacramentalists. Less clearly distinguishable are the liberal, radical and charismatic parties. Each of these groups has its own party organs with particular societies, magazines and literature as well as patronage networks. Party members also tend to differ in certain of their religious beliefs and some of the most obvious of these differences concern the nature of ministry. The differences of belief between members of the main Methodist parties generally parallel those of the older Anglican parties.

The Anglican High Church party emphasises the ontological nature of ministry and draws on insights from the Oxford movement. In the first half of the nineteenth century those who became part of the Oxford movement re-emphasised the doctrine of "apostolic succession" (Chapman 1997:9). This doctrine suggests that there has been an unbroken line of ordination going back to the first disciples and ultimately to Christ and that only those who have been ordained according to this line are part of the true church leadership. Closely related to the idea of apostolic succession is the notion of the indelible sacramental character of ordination, whereby the ordained person is ontologically changed. Those within this party have also encouraged a revival of sacramental worship in which the ordained are given the key roles. This party has also been referred to as the Catholic party and continues to have a recognisable organisation.

The Anglican Evangelical or Low Church party developed out of the evangelical revival in the eighteenth century. In the early nineteenth century,
impetus for this development was given by a group of evangelical Anglicans known as the “Clapham sect”. Noted for their activism, Anglican Evangelicals became heavily involved in missionary work and the associated religious publishing in such organizations as the Church Missionary Society, the British and Foreign Bible Society, and the Religious Tract Society (Bebbington 1989). They developed a strong patronage network and endowed parishes so that Evangelical clergymen could always be appointed in certain posts. Evangelicals emphasized mission and personal conversion. With the Evangelicals, the Bible was given a primary place as the “rule of faith” and the preaching of “the word” was the central feature in a worship style that is simpler than that of High Church adherents. In principle, Evangelicals tend to espouse a lower view of ministry and to emphasise the “priesthood of all believers”.

When the Anglican Church started to create its own theological colleges, members of the Evangelical and High Church parties often endowed these. Anglican colleges continue to be distinguishable along such party lines. In addition, in the mid-nineteenth century what came to be recognised as a Broad Church position emerged (Thompson 1970). Those who were described in this way had largely liberal views, embraced the new biblical criticism and had a special concern for the close connection between the church and cultural life. Many of the proponents of this party were key agents in the reform of the Church of England during this period (Thompson 1970:52).

Traditionally, Methodists have been thought to be entirely evangelical (Ranson, Bryman and Hinings 1977). Methodism was, of course, an important part and product of the eighteenth century evangelical revival. In the present century, however, many Methodists have also been affected by developments such as biblical criticism and other new religious ideas. Such Methodists have been called, firstly, “modernists” but more recently, have been designated as “liberals”. In contrast to the liberals there are those who have embraced a more traditional evangelical position. The evangelicals have a much more clearly defined party organisation and patronage network than do the liberals.
Within each of these parties a further sub-grouping is observable. There are those liberals who have taken on the designation “radical” and have their own organisation in the “Alliance of Radical Methodists”. This group was especially strong in the 1960s. In recent years those who hold to an overtly feminist position, in particular the members of the Methodist Women’s Forum, have aligned themselves with the radical wing. Members of these groupings tend to hold to a collaborative view of ministry in which there is much less emphasis on the traditional trappings of ministerial hierarchy.

Evangelicals, both in Methodism and more widely, have often been closely associated with those who have been influenced by the charismatic renewal movement of the last thirty years. Members of this movement have sought to reintroduce the “charismata” or gifts of the Holy Spirit into the church. Charismatic Methodists have their own networks, events and hymnody. The content of their belief is very close to that of the evangelicals and members of this alignment are often called charismatic evangelicals.

There are also those Methodists who emphasise the more High Church elements of Methodism. This group also has its own meetings and network, largely through the Methodist Sacramental Society. Those who align themselves with this party tend to emphasise ministerial difference as expressed by “apostolic succession” and sacramental worship. In contrast to this, those aligned with the evangelical wing tend in principle, like their Anglican counterparts, to place much less emphasis on the differences between lay and ordained.

Appendix 5.2 The contrasting views on church government held by the Anglican vicar and Methodist ministers in the north Bedford circuit

The following conversation, which illustrates differences between the Anglican and Methodist ministers of the north Bedford circuit concerning their views of church government, was overheard at a social event at which only the ministers were present. I repeat the conversation here as accurately as possible but notes were not taken at the time.
Anglican: Everyone knows that the vicar always gets his way.

Methodist: I've always tried not to work in this way. I try to work with the people, to listen to their opinions and to bring them along with me. But if they all turned round and said 'no' I would need to think about going somewhere else.

Anglican: Or they would. The minister is there to lead—they are appointed by the church—they have had their call tested and confirmed. There is nothing wrong with being autocratic.

Methodist: Well, it goes against democracy. Hitler had his point of view—he was autocratic.

Anglican: But there are checks on ministers. We are accountable to the church.

Methodist: Oh, I thought there might be a difference between Hitler and a minister. ((Coming back to earlier argument and referring to the situation in church councils)). But there is a difference between one person and thirty people.

Anglican: But that one has the authority of the church. They are the appointed person to give a lead and direction. We are the shepherds—they are the sheep—they have got to be led.

Appendix 6 Additional materials to Chapter 6

Appendix 6.1 Re-structuring the connexional offices

When I was first taken on a guided tour around several of the offices on the Marylebone site, many of the conversations with employees immediately turned to the changes to their work or location that were due to occur in the succeeding months as a result of “re-structuring”. At the same time, the Co-ordinating
Secretaries and several members of the team were visiting the Methodist districts, giving presentations to circuit and district officials about the nature of the forthcoming changes. In brief, “re-structuring” involved the re-organisation of the church’s work from a situation where it had been divided up between seven departments called “divisions” to one where it was carried out by one team divided into four units.

Re-structuring was nothing new to the Methodist Church, since it was an act of re-structuring in the early 1970s which had originally produced the seven divisions. This earlier re-organisation is interesting because it foreshadows the current activity in several ways. Re-structuring in the 1970s had come out of a need to rationalise the thirteen or so departments of the church which had come into being after the three branches of Methodism had united in 1932. According to George Thompson Brake, a Methodist minister who has charted the constitutional development of Methodism from union until 1982, there has within Methodism always been a suspicion of an “administrative hierarchy”. Brake argues that the reforms in 1973, and those which came previously, were in part an attempt to introduce some control over the departments and their links with the circuits. In the early 1970s, a general appeal was made to the Methodist people for ideas about restructuring. In addition, however, a qualified specialist in organisation and method was employed and the cultural model for change clearly came from the business world. That this is so is evident from the fact that the minister in charge of the working party established to plan the re-structuring publicly argued for the economic wisdom of the changes saying:

If you make a set of seven units out of thirteen units, you cannot but in the end get economy. Ask the business management departments of any industrial firms that are doing this and making a success of life, and you will find this is the road to economy (Brake 1984:87).

However, Brake reports that the resulting change from thirteen departments to seven divisions was criticised for being “based on business efficiency methods which did not necessarily apply to the Church”, and for also producing leaders
who were civil servants rather than the polished and charismatic performers who had previously been seen at the Methodist Conference (Brake 1984:84, 89).

The divisions nevertheless remained, and in the course of the next twenty-five years developed their own ways of working. They also developed a way of communicating with local churches which was based on a pyramidal structure. That is, at both district and circuit levels there were committees corresponding to the main divisions, and in most churches there was also a corresponding representative or a committee. In this way many individuals in the local churches came to hold particular offices with particular responsibilities for a certain area of the connexional church’s work. Often, although not always, these individuals invested a great deal of time and effort in the furtherance of the particular area of work for which they had responsibility. A major focus of the representative’s work was usually fund-raising, and many of the divisions earmarked particular Sundays on which information about their work was presented in church services and special collections for the work taken. This was in fact a reversion to a previous practice which the re-structuring had meant to replace by generating a central fund raised by assessment on the districts. Funds were meant to be centrally controlled, and Brake recounts that one of the functions of the newly established governing body called the President’s Council was to receive budgets from the divisions and to decide what funds would be allocated each year. However, some of the divisions were able to generate significant funds by themselves and they had a great deal of autonomy over their ever-increasing areas of work.

It appears that in the 1980s some of the Methodist people again became restive over the size and cost of the Methodist central offices. In giving me a brief account of re-structuring Jim, one of the middle managers, put it like this:

In the mid-eighties there were rumblings across the church that all was not well. We were making appeals to the local churches—there were always appeals from the divisions and there was competition for money between the divisions with the churches always being asked for money for this and that. The
divisions also had expectations about what the local church should be doing and were saying ‘why doesn’t your church engage locally on this level?’

Jim and others told me that the problem with the divisions had been that there was too much competition for scare resources and that the divisions had tended to become too directive of the local churches. He observed: “The divisions are the servants of the church; in practice they had become the servants of Conference”. He spelt out that what he meant by this was that the divisions had not been helping local churches to act in ways that were most appropriate to the local situation, but rather had become concerned with following the directives of Conference. Likewise, in describing the reasons for re-structuring to me, one of the Co-ordinating Secretaries suggested that “there was a sense of unease that the divisions were able to set their own agendas, which were not the agendas of the local church”. Thus, from what these and others said to me, it seems that the reasons for change were both due to financial constraints—with an ever-decreasing membership facing ever-growing assessments—and were also related to the need to relocate the centres of power within the church, which was in part an attempt to heal the widening gap between central offices and local churches.

The main body responsible for overseeing this latest re-structuring was the President’s Council. This was a body of thirty-two members which had itself been a product of the previous re-structuring and which was meant to give a dimension of continuity and co-ordination to the development of policy across the church and the central offices. Significantly, the creation of the President’s Council was highly controversial, as Brake recounts, because its highly selective membership, most of whom were “establishment figures”, was regarded by many as not reflecting “the democratic principle which is evident in the Conference” (Brake 1984:151). From the way in which Brake describes the reaction to the President’s Council, I suggest that we see here an historical example of what I have suggested is the central tension within Methodism between egalitarianism and hierarchy.
It was within the President’s Council, several people informed me, that concerns over the structure of the church were first voiced. This, it is reported, is what led to the Secretary of Conference preparing a questionnaire which was sent to all district policy committees. From the results of this questionnaire a report was then presented to the President’s Council which concluded that the divisions should be replaced. In addition to their own in-house research, discussions and working party, the President’s Council also employed a firm of management consultants to help with their plans for re-organisation and, as one senior official put it, to “sharpen up bits of the structure” and “bring some business thinking”.

The most important aim of re-structuring, as several team members expressed it to me, was to bring about an “end to the internal divisions within the church”. One of the Co-ordinating Secretaries summed up the heart of re-structuring when she said: “It’s a one team approach—policy, finance and human resources to be held together so that local needs can be considered”. Similarly, others of the Co-ordinating Secretaries and connexional officials repeatedly stressed that the focus was now on providing services for the local churches and, as one put it, to be “local church led”.

While the rhetoric is of one team where all work together collaboratively, the practical reality is that, as C.P.D. puts it, for “administrative purposes” the connexional team is divided into four units, with each unit overseen by a Co-ordinating Secretary (Methodist Church 1988-96:370). This re-organisation has variously affected the different divisions, with some being absorbed almost intact into one of the units, while others, for example the Home Missions Division, have had parts of their previous work allocated to different units. This has obviously meant the breaking up of old working groups and the demise of patterns of working. Yet, as Cullen observed in her study of the re-structuring of Unemployment offices, old loyalties and informal patterns of working can be carried on long after the formal structures have been changed (Cullen 1993). This, I suggest, is certainly the case within the connexional offices, and explains the presence of much tension and conflict around the connexional offices in the early years of re-structuring.
Each of the old divisions was reported to have had a very particular way of working, and on several occasions I heard individuals, especially those who had been removed from previous locations or colleagues, mourning the passing of that culture. Several people spoke of how the autonomous divisions had been “allowed to build up their own identity”. Becky, who had previously worked in advertising, told me of how Chester House, the location of the Division of Education and Youth, had had a very traditional “sixties feel”, which had been largely engendered by the fact that the head of the division had worked within that division from when he was a boy. She suggested that in this division there had been a very pastoral kind of atmosphere, and in this way it had had a traditional Methodist feel to it which reflected the fact that many of those who worked there were ministers who had come into administration from the circuits. This contrasted noticeably with the Division of Finance, where the General Secretary had come from the management world and had brought that kind of feel to the offices. Another contrast was drawn between the office culture of Marylebone Road, where those staff who worked for the Methodist Church Overseas Division often met and talked together, and that in Westminster Central Hall, where the employees—who, it was suggested, were predominantly ministers—stayed mainly in their separate offices and did not come together. The atmosphere of Westminster Central Hall was affected, it was suggested, by the fact that it was a public building. Certainly, its location opposite Westminster Abbey and the House of Parliament, and the fact that outside conferences are held in one of its central areas, means that it has a much less corporate feel than the offices on Marylebone Road. There were also some theological differences between the divisions, the most obvious of which was the strongly evangelical nature of the Home Missions Division, lodged in Westminster Central Hall. Many employees had a very strong loyalty to one division or other, and one of the Presidents spoke to me of how, while he welcomed restructuring, he feared that “something of individuals’ loyalties to certain divisions may be lost”. This concern applied not only to the connexional employees but also to the church members, who identified with and supported the work of particular divisions and whose identity as a “Home Missions Rep.” or an “Overseas Mission Rep.” was in danger of being lost under re-structuring.
One very obvious area where this concern had immediate practical implications was in terms of fundraising. Re-structuring brought with it a proposal that there should be only one fund—the Methodist Church Fund, out of which all the work of the church would be supported. However, it was also proposed that there should be four “feeder funds” by which church members could earmark which of the areas of the church’s work—that is, overseas missions, home missions, property or training—they wanted to support. This new unified system of fund raising caused a great deal of anxiety and conflict during the first year of re-structuring and illustrates how loyalties to old office identities and informal ways of working can remain after the formal structures have changed.

In addition to the unifying of funding, there were several other ways in which re-structuring aimed to produce a more streamlined and unified central body. From members of the Communications Department I heard much talk of the need for the Methodist Church to have a “corporate identity”. This was to be expressed through the centralising and co-ordinating of all the printed materials relating to the different areas of the church’s work. Whereas, previously, the divisions had produced their own materials and publications, all of this was to be overseen by the new design and production team within the Communications Department. Where the divisions had communicated separately with their particular representatives in local churches, these communications were now to be centrally co-ordinated and sent to one person, to be called the “connexion link”, who was to see that all the appropriate materials were given to the relevant people. To facilitate this, the separate databases of the divisions were to be centrally co-ordinated. Many of the above changes were described to me in terms of meeting “budget cuts” or facilitating economic constraints. Whereas the divisions had previously each had their own symbols and emblems, after re-structuring all officials, with the notable exceptions of the President, Vice-President and Secretary of Conference, were to use paper with the same “Methodist Church” heading and design. Another unifying move was made by co-ordinating and centralising the auditing of accounts, and the well-known accountancy firm, Price Waterhouse, was consulted with regard to constructing a
policy and procedures manual for such processes as handling cheques and invoices.

An important aspect of unifying the team and ending the divisions had been the adoption of common sets of rules with regard to the employment of team members. A member of the Methodist Council Executive told me of how each of the divisions had had different rules with regard to payment, retirement and pensions, and that as part of re-structuring they were putting in place a common employment code and making sure that they met regulations on health and safety. Evidence of this could be seen in the newly established connexional team newsletter, itself replacing previous divisional in-house newsletters. In this newsletter I noticed how new team policies on issues such as time off in lieu were being standardised across the team. Another feature of rationalisation was the bringing together of as much as the team as possible under one roof at the Marylebone Road site, which had just been refurbished and took on the generic name of “Methodist Church House”, signifying its new position within the Methodist connexional organisation.

Appendix 6.2 The connexional governing bodies

Appendix 6.2.1 The Methodist Council

This body of approximately sixty people was set up to be a kind of conference between Conferences. The Council membership is annually appointed or ratified by the Conference and includes as ex officio members the current, immediately previous and forthcoming President, and Vice-President of the Conference, and also the Secretary of Conference, the Assistant Secretary of Conference, the general connexional treasurer and three other treasurers of connexional funds, six district chairmen, ten circuit ministers, seventeen lay people, the Co-ordinating Secretaries and four other representatives of specified connexional offices. As I understand it the chairmen, circuit ministers and lay people are changed every three years, giving different districts an opportunity to send representatives.
The Council is chaired by the President of Conference, with the Secretary of Conference acting as secretary to the meeting, preparing the business to be considered and overseeing the production of the Council minutes. The Council has power to act on behalf of the Conference between Conferences and is charged in Standing Orders with the “responsibility to keep in constant review the life of the Methodist Church” and to report annually to the Conference those matters deemed to demand urgent attention (Methodist Church 1988–96, 2:354). The Council is also directed among other tasks to “ensure that the decisions of the Conference are fully implemented”. In this function, the Council to some extent mirrors the task of the Secretary of Conference and can be seen at one level as an attempt to make this responsibility a collaborative and consultative exercise. The Methodist Council is also empowered to “supervise the general work of the connexional team and report thereon to the Conference”, and has the power to recommend on various important issues, such as the minimum stipends to be paid to the various kinds of ministers in the church. The Council is also designated as the employer of every member of the connexional team who is serving under a contract of employment—that is, all those who are not ordained. This important body is scheduled to meet not less than four times a year and in practice meets something like every two months for a twenty-four hour residential session in various retreat houses and conference centres.

Appendix 6.2.2 Methodist Council Executive

The Methodist Council Executive is a group of nineteen persons, appointed or ratified by the Conference, who meet more frequently than the Methodist Council and whose constitutionally specified tasks are concerned primarily with the “examination of the financial statement” of connexional funds which must be presented to the Conference, and with the proposing of a budget for the Methodist Church Fund, out of which are met the expenses incurred by the connexional team (Methodist Church 1988–96, 2:356). In reality, several members of the executive with whom I spoke understood the executive to have a wider brief, which included the management of the connexional team and in particular the Co-ordinating Secretaries, the provision of a source of expertise on employment procedures and practices, and the making of decisions which the
Methodist Council chose to delegate to them. The executive includes, as non-voting members, the Secretary of Conference and the four Co-ordinating Secretaries, along with the Assistant Secretary of Conference who acts as secretary of the executive. The executive might be likened to a kind of cabinet of government which meets to agree policies and which is also responsible for the management of the church’s civil service. One of most senior members of the executive described the function of this body as being to “manage the team and the Co-ordinating Secretaries and to take responsibility for their performances”.

During the period of my fieldwork, the chairman of the executive was a retired senior executive in ICI, and there was also a former deputy director of social services, a lawyer, an architect, a surgeon, a former financial director of British Coal and a director of a large pharmaceutical company, in addition to several ministers with their own areas of expertise.

Appendix 6.3 On Gender in the connexional team

In addition to being ordained and middle class, the majority of the employees of the team who are in senior positions are also male. In terms of the gender of its connexional staff, the Methodist Church again to a large extent follows the cultural patterns of the business world, and while there were more female than male members of the connexional staff, women were under-represented within management. At the senior level of management, that is the Co-ordinating Secretaries and Secretary of Conference, there was one woman among a group of four men. At the next level there were only four women who were managers and this contrasted with twenty-five men. At the next level women were better represented, with seventeen managers, but since there were twenty-six male managers in this group this was still disproportionate. Yet, according to my examination of the staff map (which is limited by guessing gender according to name), there was a total of approximately 117 women and ninety-two men.
employed by the Methodist Council as team members. Thus, two-thirds of the women did not manage anyone, whereas over half of the men were managers.

The majority of women in the connexional team worked as personal assistants and secretaries. They operated to some extent as what have been called “office wives”, servicing the managers (Cullen 1993:181). The female secretaries and PAs also often had another very important role in mediating between the policy makers and the outside world. This was particularly the case with PAs to the Co-ordinating Secretaries. While the women involved in secretarial tasks had little role in the formation of policy and the making of significant team rules, they played a significant role in making sure that the rules became practised reality, and this usually involved some creative adaptation. In reality, they were key creators of work-place cultures. By and large, however, they were quite clearly in lower structural positions.

The variable representation of women on the committees and staff groups which I observed is also detailed in Table 6.3. There tended to be a greater number of women present at committees which had a pastoral or family orientation, whereas at those committees where important decisions of the allocation of funds or the making of policy, such as the World Church grants group, or the Special Sundays group there were noticeably fewer women. At many of the committees and staff meetings men, even where they were fewer in numbers, spoke more frequently than the women. In many of the committees, as detailed in Table 6.3, there was a male chair and a female secretary.

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94 I am not including here those on the part of the staff map labelled “Methodist Council—Non Team Members” and “Non Methodist Council”.
Table 6.3. Gender composition of observed committees

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Committee</th>
<th>Men</th>
<th>Women</th>
<th>Chair</th>
<th>Secretary</th>
<th>Comment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>male</td>
<td>female</td>
<td>Tea was served by a young woman who then left.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ecumenical Development</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>male</td>
<td>female</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NCH Action for children forum</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>male</td>
<td>male(?)</td>
<td>All male leadership seated behind a table at the front.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>World Methodist Council British Committee</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>male</td>
<td>male</td>
<td>Several of the women present remained silent for most of the meeting.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family and Personal Relationships</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>female</td>
<td>female(?)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Appendix 6.4 The connexional team’s New Year service

By custom, the employees of the Methodist central offices are invited early in the new year to a service at Wesley’s Chapel, London, at which the President, Vice-President and Secretary of Conference officiate. Wesley’s Chapel is one of the oldest and most prestigious buildings in world Methodism, having been built in 1778 on John Wesley’s instructions and augmented in Victorian times with a classical portico front, making it a somewhat grand historical site and also one of Methodism’s most sacred spaces.
Wesley’s Chapel is on the City Road, close to London’s centre of international banking and commerce. That the Methodist bureaucracy is heavily influenced by the business world is immediately evident from the way in which their flagship site on Marylebone Road is arranged in a similar style to other offices and businesses, as I describe in Chapter 6. In the connexional New Year service which I observed, many of the members of the congregation were dressed as for the business world, albeit slightly more shabbily, with most of the men in jacket and tie. However, unlike their counterparts in the business world, these Methodist bureaucrats were out of the office in a sacred space, engaging in a religious ritual.

The arrangement of the sacred space in Wesley’s Chapel reflects the Anglican origins of the Methodist movement. The chapel is more Anglican than most Methodist chapels, with a high front pulpit on an ornate white and gold stand, and for this service there were two candles burning brightly on the Communion table at the front. On the occasion of the service, the chapel was light and bright, with freshly painted woodwork and gleaming brass and a highly skilled musician playing a first-class organ. The style of the ritual also evinced High Churchmanship, since it began with the Secretary of Conference, in black cassock, preaching-tabs and gown, ringing a bell at the back of the chapel. At the ringing of the bell the congregation all stood, and the Secretary led in the procession of the President and Vice-President, who were also in full liturgical dress.

While the opening and formality of the ritual were a reminder of the Anglican influence, once the President had spoken to welcome the connexional team members and the first hymn had been announced the Methodist nature of the evident became evident. The hymns were sung with gusto and without announcement. At the end of the hymn, those present sat down and prepared for prayer, bowing heads and hunching shoulders in the accustomed manner of Methodists and other nonconformists. The lay Vice-President preached the sermon, the longest single element in the service, from the lectern on a level with the congregation, in modern Methodist low-church fashion, and those present were still and attentive.
Initially, the expression and demonstration of hierarchy at this ritual was strong, with the Secretary of Conference, as so often happens, in a key ritual role, initiating the commencement of proceedings and leading the President and Vice-President to their places. The emphasis, through the shape and grandeur of the building and the ritual action, was upon the importance of those at the front. In a fairly obvious fashion this ritual served not only to constitute the connexional team, for whom it was ostensibly conducted, but it also functioned to legitimate the position of the Secretary, President and Vice-President of Conference. Yet, to an extent, this emphasis on hierarchy—specifically ministerial hierarchy—was undermined by the fact that it was the lay Vice-President who gave the address. The hierarchical nature of the event was also to an extent undermined by what the Vice-President said, since in her opening remarks she sought to prick the bubble of the pretensions of the place by describing how a woman in her home church in the north of England, on learning of the Vice-President’s nervousness about preaching in Wesley’s Chapel, had commented that it was “just another chapel”. Thus, I suggest that in the middle of all the splendour of aspiring Methodism, with its ritual re-emphasising of the Methodist hierarchy, there was a reminder of the egalitarian ethic held by so many Methodists—that this was “just another chapel”, not significantly different to all the other barns and preaching halls of Methodism.

The main influences which I identified in Chapter 6 as being at work in shaping the nature and working of the connexional team can also be observed in this significant ritual. Firstly, and most evidently, there is the London business world in which most of the offices, and also Wesley’s Chapel, are situated. Secondly, there are the historical and contemporary links with the Anglican Church, which can be seen in the High Church nature of the connexional team’s New Year ritual. Thirdly, but certainly not least importantly, there is Methodism’s own unique culture as an independent movement with strong nonconformist aspects, as can again be observed in the style and content of this particular ritual. The central Methodist tensions are also evident here, especially, in this case, in the comments made by the lay Vice-President. Thus, on this special occasion, as in the routine working within the offices, the particular
nature of the culture of connexional Methodism and the main sources of its culture can be identified.

Appendix 6.5 Criticism about the nature of the new governing bodies

During my fieldwork I heard many people complain about the nature of the new governing bodies and in particular that of the Methodist Council. To a large extent, the Methodist Council was meant to take over the making of policy from the various boards which had met to govern the divisions. The boards had been made up of a number of connexional employees and representatives from the districts and these bodies were meant to engender consultation and collaboration between the two levels. Different connexional actors perceived the degree to which they succeeded in this aim differently. Those in favour of the new structures, such as the Co-ordinating Secretaries, regarded the Methodist Council as being essentially a more just and representative decision-making forum, whereas some of those previously involved in the old boards suggested that the Methodist Council had taken power away from districts and made the procedures much less consultative.

During my fieldwork I encountered several members of the Council who were also anxious about the way in which it was managed. One member indicated that he was worried about the district representatives’ lack of knowledge on many issues about which they were asked to decide. Much greater knowledge about the work of the connexional team and much greater familiarity with the procedures of the Council was held by the senior connexional figures who sat more permanently on the Council. Further worries were also voiced about the highly influential role of the Secretary of Conference in the setting of the agenda and the sequencing of items of business. For instance, one member told me of how he thought that an important decision had been heavily influenced by the way in which certain items had come after each other on the agenda. Furthermore, with regard to the way in which decisions are made in this body, in my (albeit brief) observation, the voices of the women present were seldom heard in plenary sessions and there was only one black person present.
Appendix 6.6 Ministerial domination of staff and committee meetings

While many of the committees and staff meetings which I attended had as many or more lay members than ordained members the more senior the committee the higher was the proportion of the ordained. Certain of the committees have a very high number of ordained members and these include prestigious bodies such as the World Methodist Council British Committee and important bodies such as the Faith and Order committee and the Ministerial Candidates Selection Committee (see Table 6.6a, below).

The nature of staff groups, also varied widely in my observations of the team with some offices having a similar number of ordained and lay members and others a minority of ministers (see Table 6.6b, below). However, ordained people chaired virtually all the meetings I attended, both of committees and staff forums. Even where there was a majority of lay people attending ordained male voices usually took up most of the talking time. At the end of one connexional committee meeting the male chair was obviously very conscious of the fact that the women and the younger people present had largely remained silent. He commented, “there must be something wrong with the way we do business—there is more value and experience around the table than we have heard from today”.

Table 6.6a. Ordained/lay composition of committees not observed

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Committee</th>
<th>Presbyteral ministers</th>
<th>Deacons</th>
<th>Lay</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Faith and Order</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ministerial Candidates Selection Committee</td>
<td>(At least) 36</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Methodist Council</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

55 Information taken from Methodist Church 1996b and Methodist Church 1996a, Vol. 2.
Table 6.6b. Ordained/lay composition of observed committees and staff meetings (not all members were present)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Committee/Staff group</th>
<th>Ordained</th>
<th>Lay</th>
<th>Men</th>
<th>Women</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Education Committee</td>
<td>4/5</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pastoral Care &amp; Christian Education</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>World Church Action Group</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Methodist World Council British Committee</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family and Personal relationships</td>
<td>4/5</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Formation in Ministries</td>
<td>3 (+4 deacons)</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special Sundays (ad hoc group)</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>World Church (grants body)</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Appendix 6.7 Further details of the Conference

Appendix 6.7.1 Preparing for the Conference and the creation of local and national Methodism

Each year the Conference is held in a different district of Methodism, serving to create new links between the connexional and local levels of this denomination and to spread the cost of the event around Methodism. The practical arrangements are undertaken by a committee set up in the hosting district or districts which are also responsible for covering the cost of the event. Until 1998, the Conference was a ten-day event with around 600 members and special ceremonies at which around 3,000 people gathered. To accommodate these numbers the meeting is sometimes held in venues favoured by the main British political parties for their own conferences, such as Blackpool’s Empress ballroom, and these prestigious venues add to the sense of this being an
important national occasion. The Conference makes a significant impact on the Methodists in the hosting district, since accommodation and other supporting services must be arranged for all the Conference representatives.

For every Conference, the hosting district produces an image which symbolises the area and becomes the Conference emblem, being printed on all Conference materials. Many Methodists from the hosting districts will travel in to visit the main Conference rituals or to attend an ordination service in their locality, and they are thus introduced to the connexional level of Methodism. In addition to symbols of the hosting districts, emblems and images of connexional Methodism are hung in prominent places outside the conference rooms, thus serving to mediate the existence of this level to those who are not normally involved in it. Thus, the hosting of the Conference helps to create a stronger district identity at the same time as also promoting the idea of connexional Methodism.

A further link between the local churches and the connexional level at Conference is generated by the attention given to the Conference proceedings by the *Methodist Recorder*. Connexional officials and partisan leaders attempt to promote interest in the forthcoming business by writing articles for the newspaper. In addition, by printing summaries of the business and related correspondence, and also by giving prominent reportage of the districts in which the Conference is to be held, the *Methodist Recorder* helps to raise the prominence of the Conference within Methodism, while also acting to raise the temperature of its debates.

Important connections are also made between the local and district church levels and the Connexion by the way in which “memorials” or questions are submitted to the Conference. Memorials are messages which have been sent from district synods and circuit meetings which question various areas of the church’s life. They are a means by which ordinary church members may call the connexional figures to account, and may on occasion instigate debate at the Conference and bring about change. When they are being prepared in the home circuits or districts, memorials must be voted on by the members of the appropriate meetings at local level and district and they are printed in the
Fig. 6.7. The Methodist flag flying outside the Methodist Central Hall, Westminster, in honour of the presence of the Conference there in 1997.

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Conference agenda, along with the replies which have been drafted by appropriate connexional officials and agreed by the Memorials Committee. During the Conference, there is further opportunity for comment to be made on the memorials and the replies they have received, and when a memorial is presented to the Conference the reply is either confirmed or amended, or the Conference may agree to an alternative proposed reply. Memorials can be given greater prominence by the issue with which they are concerned being presented in the form of a notice of motion, which must be brought separately by two members of the Conference.

**Appendix 6.7.2 The Conference membership**

Since the Conference membership comprises the connexional officials and representatives from the thirty-three districts, it provides an opportunity for people from the various levels and areas of Methodism to have contact. In 1996, of the 576 members of Conference, 417 were district elected, the rest comprising the Conference officials, secretariat, connexional officials and representatives from other Methodist Conferences.

Until 1997, the specified membership of the Representative Session consisted in the current President and Vice-President and ex-Presidents and ex-Vice-Presidents from the previous four Conferences; the Secretary of Conference and his secretariat of seven (the Assistant Secretary of Conference, the Record Secretary, the Assistant Record Secretary, the Journal Secretary, the Convener of the Committee of Scrutineers, the Convener of the Memorials Committee and the Precentor); the chairmen of each home district, amounting to thirty-three; representatives to and from the Irish Conference nine and representatives from other named, autonomous, Conferences twenty-two and one from the Opera of the Evangelical Methodist Churches in Italy; Conference elected representatives (eighteen ministers and eighteen lay); representatives of connexional divisions (offices) thirty-three and other committees, funds and institutions ten; and members elected by the representative sessions of synods (for most districts not less than four ministers and four lay persons, but allocations of seats being
proportionate to district memberships and calculated annually by Conference) numbering, 417 in 1996.

While any member of a synod can be nominated and elected, and attempts have been made to make the membership more representative of Methodism’s ethnic, age and gender mixes, on the whole the representatives are mainly those middle-aged white people who are already heavily involved in the district, and even in the connexional levels of Methodism. The election of representatives may to an extent be guided and influenced by the synod officers who oversee the procedures. Coming to Conference is for many a confirmation of their Methodist identity, and marks them out as special within their district, serving potentially to enhance their relationship with the chairman of district and the other district and connexional players in their area.

**Appendix 6.7.3 On the Ministerial Session**

Each year the Conference begins with the Ministerial Session. As a condition of union in 1932, the Wesleyan Church, with its greater emphasis on the ministerial office, insisted that its practice of having a separate Ministerial Session of Conference, in addition to the mixed session of lay and ordained, be continued (Currie 1968). From my interviewing of both local church and connexional level ministers, I surmise that many of those who attend feel uncomfortable with the idea of a separate Ministerial Session, and it has gradually been reduced over the years. However, there are still those who justify its existence on the grounds of the distinctiveness of the ordained ministry as legitimated by “apostolic succession”. The issue of whether the Ministerial Session should be abandoned is debated at Conference from time to time, and two reports were taken as part of the Conference agenda in 1987 and 1988 (Methodist Church 1987, Methodist Church 1988). However, calls to abandon the separate session have so far been resisted.

Like the Representative Session, the Ministerial Session begins with an act of religious ritual led by senior figures of the Conference, before turning to debate matters of business. Many items of business at this meeting will also be
discussed by the Representative Sessions, but the Ministerial Session has exclusive jurisdiction over matters of the continuance or discontinuance in training of probationers and students, and it recommends to the Representative Session those candidates who are to be accepted for training for the ministry and those ministers who are to be permitted to become supernumerary. Resignations, re-instatements and stationing are all also reported to the Ministerial Sessions.

The deaths in the last year of all ministers are noted at both sessions of the Conference, but the Ministerial Session approves obituaries and a solemn memorial service is held at which the names of all those who have died are read out. With regard to this event, one of the ministers in Bedford told me that when he had first attended this ceremony he had felt profoundly moved by the realisation that one day his name would also be called on that roll of honour.

Appendix 6.7.4 Description of the ceremony of the appointing of a new President and Vice-President

In my observations of this ceremony, the Secretary, standing, directs the Conference to the relevant pages of the Agenda where the words of the ceremony are printed and then he announces: “it is by standing vote that we accepted the President”. The Conference representatives stand as directed to receive the new President who duly enters the platform to be met by the now previous President. The ex-President addresses him:

Do you trust that God who has called you into the Ministry of His Church will grant you wisdom and humility to undertake the wider responsibility of the President of this Conference?

To which the President responds, “I do so trust”. He is then addressed again:

Will you endeavour so to lead the Church under your care in unceasing mission that Christ’s name may everywhere be proclaimed and that many may be brought to salvation and built up in that holiness without which no one shall see the Lord?

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To which the President replies as is stipulated: "I will so endeavour the Lord being my helper". After a short prayer the ex-President then hands John Wesley's Field Bible to the new President. A black or grey gown may be placed over his cassock and preaching tabs and the ex-President takes off the recently instigated presidential cross and hangs it around the new President's neck. The new President then addresses the ex-President, paying tribute to the contribution which he has made to Methodism over his previous year of office.

Appendix 6.7.5 The Conference rules of debate

The Conference business session is highly ritualised and formalised, with strict rules of participation and record keeping. Early on in the meetings of the Representative Session the "attestors of the daily record of the journal", are appointed. A record of all the business and decisions is kept in a journal and a summary record is printed and available to members of Conference on the next day. The printed record does not include reference to items deemed confidential and discussed in the closed sessions of the Conference. At the end of the Conference a short ceremony takes place in which the attestors sign the journal as witnesses to the fact that it is a correct record. There is a precise legal language concerning this aspect of the Conference and, to aid the representatives' grasp of the procedures, they are given three differently coloured sets of papers each day. One of these papers is the daily record, which gives a summary of the main points of business decided on the previous day. Another is an order paper, listing the items from the agenda and notices of motion in the order they are due to come and giving an approximate time at which the motions will be taken. The third is the daily notices, giving details of other information likely to be of interest to the Conference member.

At an early stage in the procedures, the Secretary of the Conference reminds the representatives of the rules of debate and on occasion, if these rules are not observed, members of the Conference will intervene to correct individuals. Speakers at a tribune are meant to give their name and the capacity in which they are present at the Conference and if they forget to do so, the seated representatives imperiously usually call out: "NAME". There are strict time
limits for speakers and a system of lights is employed to indicate to people when they have one minute left to speak with a red light appearing beside them when they must finish immediately. Should a speaker continue after the red light has shown, members of the Conference may begin to call “time”, or the chairman of the session will intervene.

Appendix 6.7.6 Control by the hierarchy: debates pertaining to human sexuality at the 1996 Conference

The progress of a report or a notice of motion depends to some extent not only on the skill of its authors, but also on the way the Conference hierarchy views it. Much depends on scheduling of the note of motion within the Conference timetable, since in my observation the interest and energy of the Conference representatives ebbs and flows throughout the week. The attention which an item of business is given will also be affected by the amount of time which is allocated for its discussion and whether it comes after or before another important item of business. It is clear that the Conference Business Committee, without doubt guided by the Conference hierarchy, allows some important pieces of business to slip to the end of the timetable and then to be postponed to another occasion on the grounds that there is not time to discuss them properly at the present Conference.

The way in which a debate is chaired can also have a considerable effect on the outcome. At the Conference a system now operates where those who wish to speak to a motion form orderly queues beside the tribunes at the front of the hall and wait to be called by the President. The President may stop the debate before all the speakers have been called, and he may call forward those from the back of the queue if he thinks they will add more significantly to the debate. Moreover, the person chairing the session may collude with other members of the hierarchy in allowing particular interventions which may greatly influence the outcome of a debate.

This was particularly noticeable at the Blackpool Conference in 1996, where the issue of the Methodist Church’s attitude to gay ministers and gay “mission
partners” (the new name for missionaries) was discussed. At the 1993 Conference in Derby the Methodist Church had, after the preparation of a lengthy report, produced a series of statements which on the one hand re-affirmed the church’s traditional stance on marriage and family life and on the other hand affirmed and celebrated the “participation of lesbians and gay men in the church”. Many Methodist people regard these statements as a “fudge” which permits a great deal of flexibility of interpretation. At the 1996 Conference, there were those from among the evangelical wing who wished to force the church more clearly to reject the ministry of gay people and there were those of a liberal persuasion who were extremely anxious that such a position should not be taken.

The division and anger which this issue causes within Methodism should not be underestimated, and many of the early speakers at the tribune in the debate on these issues talked of how people were resigning their membership because of it, or “withholding money from the Connexion”. One person spoke of how “the Connexion is breaking down—the net is under great strain—holes are appearing—this will tear it into pieces”. The frustration of many over this issue was clearly evident, but before the debate in 1996 could progress too far towards a situation where most of the representatives were on the side of those demanding a clearly anti-gay policy, the chairmen of the distinct intervened. In advance of this debate, the chairman’s meeting had prepared a statement claiming that the chairmen of the district were in the course of their duties ensuring that the current standing orders of the Methodist Church were being followed on this issue and that, since between them they knew all the ministers, circuits and churches in the Connexion, the Conference should trust them to exercise their duties in this area. This, of course, was yet again another fudge, since the chairmen of district often interpret the standing orders on sexuality rather differently than might an ordinary church member or specifically an evangelical Methodist. However, it was a powerful intervention, and when supported by the comments of other senior connexional figures, such as charismatic ex-Presidents, the argument was won and the Conference representatives agreed in essence not to pursue the matter any further, but to trust the hierarchy in their interpretation of these matters.
The debate on these matters had been of great importance to the life of the national church and had shown the Methodist Church to indeed be under great strain. Hence, it is not surprising that, before the end of the Conference, the President himself made an appeal to the Conference “to draw back from the chasm” and to trust the chairmen in their interpretation of the Methodist Church’s approach to human sexuality.

Appendix 6.7.7 Manipulating the agenda: the case of the report on women presbyters at the 1996 Conference

Another example of how the hierarchy may affect the outcome of debates at Conference can be found in the way in which the report on the role of women ministers (presbyters) in the church, entitled “The cry of the beloved”, was treated at two Conferences. The first time this report was presented to the Conference in 1995, instead of having its various resolutions adopted the report was simply received. When a report is simply received rather than adopted this means that its proposals will not be have to be taken on as part of the policy of the Methodist Church. This receiving rather than adopting of the report was taken as a heavy blow by the small feminist wing of the church. The failure of the report was put down to the way in which certain women, who were seeking to be elected to higher positions, spoke out against the report as part of their campaign for personal advancement.

Certain members of the connexional hierarchy were not happy with the way this debate had gone and in the intervening year before the next Conference some of those who had been most involved in the writing of the report were invited to speak about it at the Methodist Council. The Methodist Council then re-submitted the report’s resolutions, this time separately, to the following Conference and all the resolutions were this time unquestioningly adopted by the Conference. I was told that a senior connexional figure had commented of the previous year that he had “misread the mind of Conference”. This statement is an interesting indication in itself that there are those who attempt to read the mind of Conference prior to the actual meeting. It is also an indication that the
hierarchy may sometimes get it wrong, but that on those occasions it may simply take them a little longer to get the business passed by the Conference.

Appendix 6.7.8 Party divisions

As mentioned earlier in the thesis, it is often at the Conference that the divisions within the Methodist Church become most vitriolic and obvious. The deepest divide is probably between those of an evangelical and those of a liberal theological persuasion and some debates fall roughly into two sides, with evangelicals pursuing a more traditional, conservative argument and the liberals taking a more progressivist, accepting approach. These divisions become most obvious over issues such as the primary goals of the Methodist Church, the place of the Bible, the church's attitude to couples living together and divorce. The most divisive issue of late, as in the Church of England, has been that of the presence of gay ministers within Methodism.

On other issues, such as those of social concern, the divide appears to be more between radicals and conservatives, and this emerges most strongly in debates about areas of spending within the church. Another important division, which relates most clearly to what I have identified as the primary Methodist values of egalitarianism and hierarchy, is that between those of a Low and High churchmanship within Methodism. This comes to the foreground in the debates which generally energize the Conference representatives, such as those concerning the changing of the name of chairmen of district to that of bishop, as already mentioned in Chapter 5.

Many of these various positions are now supported by what resembles in some cases party machinery. The evangelicals are perhaps the most clearly organised, with obvious leaders, and an evangelical magazine and organisation. The radicals also have their own alliance and party materials, and have links with the small group of Methodist feminists. In addition, in recent years, support has grown for the Methodist Sacramental Fellowship, whose members have a higher churchmanship than that of the average Methodist. These, and many other groups and organisations, have their own stalls in the Conference exhibition area,
and throughout the ten days of the Conference, fringe activities are also organised by the various groups, which act as opportunities for each to rally support among the Conference representatives. Many of the largest groups have issues of business or notices of motion in which they have a special interest and, two or more members from a particular group will often co-operate in the presentation of an argument.

**Appendix 6.7.9 Bringing the Conference to an end**

In addition to all the serious business over the ten-day period there is much laughter and merriment as certain individuals emerge as the Conference jesters. There is also usually a spoof notice of motion which is debated towards the end of the Conference. All of this helps to relieve the tension generated by the divisive debates, as does the joining together in acts of religious ritual. At the very end of the Conference, on the last Saturday morning, there are various formal acts to be performed, such as the signing of the record of the Conference in the journal by the Secretary, Vice-President, President and the Attestors. Another important act is the acknowledging by all the districts that the stationing of the ministers for the coming year has been settled. Then, in the final moments, the President of Conference announces where the Conference will meet in the following year and states: “I so move”, at which point the people rise to their feet. The traditional Methodist hymn, “Captain of Israel’s host and guide” is then sung, before the President dismisses the people with the final blessing.
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