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## ***The Wayfarer: Early 20<sup>th</sup> Century Foreign Missions Pageantry***

Written by  
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In 1919, over one million people visited the State Fairgrounds in Columbus, Ohio to attend the Centenary Celebration of American Methodist Missions. This twenty-four day Methodist world's fair and Protestant missionary exposition featured international pavilions, live ethnographic exhibits, the latest technology for the local church, and a miniature Midway complete with a Ferris wheel, lemonade stands, and Methodist restaurants. The exposition also included recreated battles between World War One airplanes in the skies above Columbus and the first 'sermon in the air' preached by a Methodist seminary professor from the gondola of a military dirigible hundreds of feet above the racetrack grandstands. Entertainment was a significant component of the missionary exposition as Methodist cowboys rode bucking broncos in the Wild West exhibit, audiences watched silent films on a ten-story motion picture screen, and thousands of Protestants packed the coliseum to attend a theatrical performance called *The Wayfarer: A Pageant of the Kingdom*.

The use of pageantry as religious theater at the Centenary Celebration connected American Methodists with Christian missionaries and political heroes from history. My essay explores *The Wayfarer* as an example of early twentieth-century foreign missions pageantry which closely linked historic Christianity with American Methodist fairgoers in an effort to propagate the spread of foreign missions around the world. When viewed at the missionary festival *The Wayfarer* served as a visual springboard to enhance interconnectedness within the American Methodist community, to motivate audiences toward careers in missionary service, and to garner financial support to assist foreign missionary forces with the spread of Christianity to distant lands.

### **Early 20<sup>th</sup> Century US Pageantry**

In 1905, historical pageantry as a form of popular entertainment and community involvement appeared in the United States with the production and presentation of *The Gods*

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and the Golden Bowl in Cornish, New Hampshire.<sup>1</sup> For over twenty years this type of American theater attempted to instill a sense of community participation and societal reform through the creation of interactive spaces for all classes of society to collaborate together toward social transformation. Everyone in a city or borough could participate in a pageant and local townspeople would often meet together for months to rehearse lines, choreograph dance selections, and practice hymns in preparation for an opening performance. Pageants during this era provided audiences with rousing renditions of American patriotism, community pride, religious duty and inexpensive entertainment. These performances presented audiences with a snapshot of history 'live' on stage – albeit a largely constructed and carefully crafted 'history' based upon who authored a particular pageant.

David Glassberg in *American Historical Pageantry* suggests the use of public orations and pageantry was an attempt to transfer history into a staged "dramatic public ritual" whereby local townspeople or organizations through performance of a particular show helped shape historical narratives into "future social and political transformations" for their contemporary audiences.<sup>2</sup> For Glassberg, early twentieth-century pageants were public celebrations and pageant directors often incorporated material objects and imagery from history to link ideals from the past in order to provide meaning for those watching the performance in the present.<sup>3</sup> When actors reinforced these notions onstage producers and directors of pageants hoped audience members watching historical events unfold before their eyes would replicate these ideals in their own neighborhoods and towns.

The production and performance of pageantry required the creative genius of many people within a local community or national organization. Pageants would range in cost of production from a few thousand dollars to over one hundred thousand dollars and pageant directors or 'masters' often received salaries ranging from \$1000 to \$2000 per event.<sup>4</sup> The ultimate quest of many pageant masters was to use pageantry as a medium to improve societal

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<sup>1</sup> Naima Prevots, *American Pageantry: A Movement for Art & Democracy* (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1990) 4-5.

<sup>2</sup> David Glassberg, *American Historical Pageantry: The Uses of Tradition in the Early Twentieth Century* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1990) 3-5.

<sup>3</sup> Glassberg 44.

<sup>4</sup> Prevots, *American Pageantry* 4.

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conditions and to connect rural and urban communities with various organizations at a national level.<sup>5</sup> Agencies such as the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, the National Women's Party, and the Playground Association of America sponsored pageants across the country in such locations as Grand Forks, North Dakota and Boston, Massachusetts. Thus pageant masters, national organizations, and local communities worked together to improve towns and cities by staging pageants on contemporary issues including racial discrimination, women's rights, and the construction of local playgrounds and recreation centers.

Naima Prevots in *American Pageantry* suggests the citizens of local communities played important roles in the planning, production and performance of pageants. These staged events developed as a "response to the country's problems" and united communities together as one - driven toward social reform and the elimination of "ideological differences and barriers of race and class."<sup>6</sup> While the reduction of racial discrimination certainly did not take place in every community across America, pageantry provoked people toward the betterment of self and society and with the founding of the American Pageant Association in 1913 many hoped these art forms would not only entertain but promote educational awareness which in turn might help reduce the racial and class barriers in place throughout the United States.<sup>7</sup>

During the late nineteenth-century earlier versions of what would become pageantry emerged with tableaux vivants, self-contained staged episodes in which costumed actors posed without movement to recreate a famous painting or moment from history.<sup>8</sup> By the second decade of the twentieth-century American pageants were sweeping in scope, often performed in large open arenas or fields with hundreds of participants reenacting a particular moment or ideal from history. As spectators viewed these performances they better understood the history and current needs of the performers and the organization which produced and presented the pageant.<sup>9</sup> In this way, American Methodists who gathered in the Columbus coliseum were also

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<sup>5</sup> Prevots 59.

<sup>6</sup> Prevots 2.

<sup>7</sup> Prevots 2-3.

<sup>8</sup> Glassberg, *American Historical Pageantry* 16-18.

<sup>9</sup> Prevots, *American Pageantry* 13.

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informed of the historical connection of the Methodist Episcopal Church with missionary movements from history while at the same time the pageant moved persons toward pressing needs concerning foreign missions and the quest to Christianize the world. As a result, *The Wayfarer* provided audiences with a pageant designed and performed as a theatrical performance on American Methodist foreign missions.

### American Methodist Theater

In 1919, *The Book of Discipline*, the official rulebook of the Methodist Episcopal Church, strongly restricted American Methodists from attending performances at a theater. These forms of entertainment were considered "imprudent conduct" and unbecoming Methodist churchgoers supposedly more interested in things not of this world. Yet, a slippage of language in the *Discipline* gave Methodists permission to use such "diversions" as the theater for their own work as long as the performance was used for purposes of honoring "the name of the Lord Jesus."<sup>10</sup> Thus, plays or pageants held within the confines of a Methodist sanctuary, church auditorium, or any public space which had been transformed into a 'church' were often supported by denominational executives. These pageants and plays with a spiritual or religious purpose differed from the shows held at local town theaters and thus found acceptance in Methodist circles.

Officials of the Methodist Episcopal Church believed it was important to use pageants in order to educate and entertain visitors at the Columbus exposition. Throughout the duration of the fair dozens of pageants, from W.E.B. DuBois' celebration of African American heritage *The Star of Ethiopia* to *The Wayfarer* by Seattle minister James E. Crowther, provided audiences with a

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<sup>10</sup> *Doctrines and Discipline of the Methodist Episcopal Church*. (New York: The Methodist Book Concern, 1916): Paragraph 280 titled "Imprudent Conduct" from the 1916 *Discipline* states, "In cases of neglect of duties of any kind; imprudent conduct; indulging sinful tempers or words; dancing; playing at games of chance; attending theaters; horse races; circuses; dancing parties..." were forbidden. If a person was caught a third time participating in any of these offenses they were brought to church trial, and if found guilty "expelled." (195) Methodists were able to weigh excommunication from the Church with the language of Paragraph 30 in the "General Rules" which stated, "It is therefore expected of all who continue therein [as members] that they shall continue to evidence their desire for salvation, by doing no harm, by avoiding evil of every kind, especially that which is most generally practiced; such as, doing what we know is not for the glory of God, as: the taking such diversions as cannot be used in the name of the Lord Jesus." (36) Thus, one might attend the theater for a play or pageant if this "diversion" was held "in the name of the Lord."

form of theater created to connect historical narrative and imagery with contemporary stage performance.<sup>11</sup> Crowther's work was representative of the desire of Methodist exposition organizers to not only entertain fair visitors through pageantry but also to impress upon the minds of those in attendance the current need for American Methodists interested in foreign missions. Through a series of historical scenes, stunning backdrops, and rousing hymns set to Handel's *Messiah* the pageant sought to garner support for the future expansion of Christianity through world missions.

Nancye Van Brunt's essay, "Pageantry at the Methodist Centenary" analyzes the use of *The Wayfarer* in Columbus and suggests that by 1919 leadership within the Methodist Episcopal Church realized the popularity of pageantry in the United States and decided to incorporate these art forms at Columbus as venues of entertainment with a purpose.<sup>12</sup> Van Brunt notes the use of pageantry by Methodists at the exposition was a "fitting means of observing both their hundred years of missions work and a motivating force for future work" in global missionary outreach.<sup>13</sup> In this way Methodists used *The Wayfarer* as a memorial and recruitment tool to present usable ideas from the past and to give certain meanings for those in the present in order to motivate people to act in progressive ways for world missions in the future. Thus it was thought the incorporation of a professionally written, produced, and performed pageant within

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<sup>11</sup> *The Star of Ethiopia* by W.E.B. DuBois emphasized the importance of instilling national hope and pride within the African American community and the pageant showcased the impact of the peoples of Africa on America and the world. Eric J. Sundquist, ed., *The Oxford W.E.B. DuBois Reader* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 305-310. Each episode of the pageant identified a 'Gift of the Negro' to the world including: the 'Gift of Iron' for purposes of global industrialization, the 'Gift of the Nile' as evidence the persons of Africa participated in the first ancient civilization, the 'Gift of Faith' as the people of Africa spread Islam throughout the world, and the 'Gift of Humiliation' demonstrating how the people of Africa were able to 'bear even the Hell of Christian slavery and live.' In Episode Five audience members viewed a banner which proclaimed, "The Gift of Struggle Toward Freedom," and identified important persons of African ancestry who contributed in the quest for world expansion and freedom ranging from, 'Alonzo' the black pilot of the ship of Christopher Columbus to Crispus Attucks of the American Revolution to Nat Turner and rebellion within the American slave system. The sixth and final episode demonstrates 'The Gift of Freedom for the World' and shows the work of Frederick Douglass, black soldiers at war and the hope "that lies in little children." The pageant concludes with four black heralds "of gigantic stature" proclaiming, "Hear ye, hear ye, men of all the Americas, ye who have listened to the tale of the eldest and strongest of the races of mankind, whose faces be black. Hear ye, hear ye, and forget not the gift of black men to this world – the Iron Gift and Gift of Faith, the Pain of Humility and Sorrow Song of Pain, the Gift of Freedom and Laughter and the undying Gift of Hope. Men of America, break silence, for the play is done."

<sup>12</sup> Nancye Van Brunt, "Pageantry at the Methodist Centenary," *Methodist History* 35:2 (January 1997): 106-107.

<sup>13</sup> Van Brunt 107.

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the larger missionary exposition might promote an understanding of denominational heritage and historical continuity from early Christian history to the contemporary Methodist Church.

The production and performance of *The Wayfarer* required three thousand professional and volunteer participants including fifteen-hundred actors, one thousand chorus members and seventy-five instrumentalists from the Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra.<sup>14</sup> George A. McCurdy, a chief electrical technician with Broadway experience from New York City, provided illumination for the pageant by choreographing over three hundred spot lights and backlights which showcased scenes of World War One, the crucifixion of Jesus, and the visit by angelic messengers in dazzling shades of blue, red and purple. McCurdy, at times overwhelmed with the scope of the Methodist project, exclaimed to a reporter from a local newspaper that the pageant was "the biggest job he has ever tackled" and compared his experience with *The Wayfarer* to his Broadway work in New York.<sup>15</sup> The scenery for the pageant included hundreds of interconnecting sections which required the original stage to be built in the auditorium of the New York Metropolitan Opera House and later shipped in ten railroad cars to Columbus.<sup>16</sup> Unfortunately for those involved in constructing the stage and scenery at the coliseum many of the props and some of the costumes did not arrive from New York in time for the June 20<sup>th</sup> opening performance.

At the exposition *The Wayfarer* was both very popular and highly controversial. Local newspapers proclaimed the success of the pageant as reported by those who attended opening night at the fairgrounds. R. C. Saunders, a reporter for *The Columbus Citizen* acknowledged, "The first nighters fairly gasped with astonishment at the magnitude of the production" and later noted "the spectacular religious drama cannot be compared to anything ever presented in Columbus - or for that matter in any other city in the United States."<sup>17</sup> Based on the reaction of this visitor, Methodists viewed *The Wayfarer* with intrigue - as one of the most impressive religious spectacles ever created for members of the Methodist Episcopal Church.

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<sup>14</sup> Van Brunt 108-109.

<sup>15</sup> "Need Lots of Juice to Make Pageant Go," *The Ohio State Journal*, 29 June 1919.

<sup>16</sup> "Drive to Draw Crowds to M.E. Centenary Begun," *Columbus Evening Dispatch*, 4 June 1919, 11.

<sup>17</sup> "Pageant a Big Expo Feature," *The Columbus Citizen*, 21 June 1919, 2.

While *The Wayfarer* received accolades from persons able to get tickets into the pageant some disgruntled theatergoers expressed dissatisfaction with the circus style accommodations, the seemingly unethical approach to the distribution of coliseum tickets, and the pompous attitudes of the personnel. On more than one occasion Centenary Cadets, the local Methodist militia unit in charge of providing security for the exposition, were called to break up arguments between brawling Methodists or arrest scalpers attempting to sell tickets at twice the face value. Scathing editorials in Columbus newspapers gave voice to frustrated exposition visitors. A man from Delaware, Ohio wrote a letter to the editor of *The Ohio State Journal* and complained, "My memory of the centenary pageant is tainted with the smell of peanuts, ice cream cones, pop and 'whistle,' and the inspired music of 'The Messiah' rings in my ears, accompanied by the crack of pop bottles, rattle of program salesboys and conversation among the disturbed auditors."<sup>18</sup>

The pageant became such a popular draw at the exposition that many Methodists stood in line as early as five in the morning in order to secure a coliseum ticket to the evening performance.<sup>19</sup> This riled many visitors who needed to return to their jobs before the evening show. One Methodist declared to a reporter from *The Columbus Citizen* that he objected having to pay the fifty cent entrance fee to get into the fairgrounds to stand in line to buy a ticket only to have to pay another half dollar to get back into the exposition later in the day for the evening performance.<sup>20</sup> Another dissatisfied Methodist complained to the editor of the *Columbus Evening Dispatch* concerning persons in charge, "The chief usher at the Grand Stand seems to think well of himself. The writer heard him giving orders to his sub-ushers not to permit this or that. It is simply silly. It would be a much better fitness of things if he could only drop that

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<sup>18</sup> "Passion Play Compared with Centenary Pageant," *The Ohio State Journal*, 13 July 1919, 3.

<sup>19</sup> "Season Tickets are Honored for Pageant," *Columbus Evening Dispatch*, 10 July 1919, 3. The *Dispatch* noted the waiting line "began forming at 4:30 in the morning (and) wound its way from the ticket booth for several hundred yards around the China building."

<sup>20</sup> "Ticket Holders in Protest," *The Columbus Citizen*, 8 July 1919, 11; A cartoon image from the July 10<sup>th</sup> edition of the *Columbus Evening Dispatch* reflected the concern and frustration experienced by many attempting to get into the Coliseum to see *The Wayfarer*. Under the title "If Alvin Comes, We'll Have Him Get Our Seats to The Wayfarer" the illustrator depicts a mad rush of Methodists fighting each other and pushing their way toward the ticket booth. In the foreground of the image a man desiring tickets to the pageant is seen presenting World War One veteran Alvin York with two loaded pistols and commissions Sergeant York to "Get two reserved seats!"



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unnecessary job and help some farmer make hay."<sup>21</sup> Yet even though some Methodists complained about the circus atmosphere of the coliseum setting, the lack of financial ethics by exposition organizers, and the dozens of ticket scalpers buying up available tickets only to resell them at prices above cost, the pageant received excellent reviews and played for six weeks from December 1919 to January 1920 at New York's Madison Square Garden.

The souvenir program for *The Wayfarer* included a preface written by pageant director James E. Crowther indicating he created the show for "pageant-loving folks" with the purpose to "exalt Christ, foster the love for great music, and further the presentation of truth in dramatic form."<sup>22</sup> Crowther hoped his pageant would encourage more Methodists to embrace forms of pageantry by opening wide the doors of the church for future theatrical productions. To make this a reality Crowther wrapped the entertainment element of the pageant with a distinctly progressive "heart-gripping" and "soul-refining" Christian and Protestant expansionist message.<sup>23</sup> The world was emerging out of the chaos and destruction of the Great War and many Protestant Americans, including Reverend Crowther, believed distant nations affected by global turmoil needed the assistance of Christians and more specifically the Methodist Episcopal Church to help reconstruct the destroyed landscapes of the world and offer a sense of hope and direction for humanity. For Crowther and Methodist executives *The Wayfarer* demonstrated this approach through the use of significant characters from the history of Christianity and by informing Methodists how they might help reconstruct the world and bring order from chaos through the spread of Christianity and American democracy to foreign nations.

Crowther grouped the individual scenes of *The Wayfarer* into three larger episodes. Van Brunt indicates the first scene of *The Wayfarer* was set during World War One and included a bombed-out landscape scene of Flanders which emphasized for audiences the destruction and futility of war. By the end of the three hour pageant audiences witnessed a final scene of jubilee as children from countries impacted by Methodist missionaries, U.S. military soldiers, and

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<sup>21</sup> "The Methodist Centenary," *Columbus Evening Dispatch*, 7 July 1919, 4.

<sup>22</sup> J.E. Crowther, *The Wayfarer: A Pageant of the Kingdom* (New York: The H.W. Gray Co., 1919) 3.

<sup>23</sup> "Business Organizations are Considering the Possibility of Permanently Establishing 'The Wayfarer' in Columbus," *The Ohio State Journal*, 30 June 1919.

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actors playing the parts of ex-U.S. presidents including George Washington and Abraham Lincoln gathered onstage in a climactic interweaving of nation, military and Christian missions.<sup>24</sup> To help us better understand what *The Wayfarer* might have meant for early twentieth-century exposition visitors an assessment of the pageant is necessary at this juncture.

### **Framing Foreign Missions Onstage**

In the opening minutes of the pageant Crowther established a connection between the chaotic global conditions created by the recent world war and popular memory of the war as understood by audience members sitting at the performance. The first scene of *The Wayfarer* exhibited a destroyed World War One battlefield which gave spectators an opportunity to visualize the battle-torn landscapes of Europe familiar to many Americans from published reports on the war in periodicals and local newspapers. In the first episode Methodists experienced "the crash of the world war and all its brutal horror" which illustrated the desolate conditions of the world and demonstrated the need for someone or some organization to take up the "task of reconstructing the world."<sup>25</sup> This "world" created onstage by Crowther for a largely Methodist audience included men, women and children fighting in the streets, dead and wounded soldiers scattered throughout the scene, and the "roar of guns" and the "scream of shells."<sup>26</sup> The scenes established a picture of death and chaos from the ravages of war. As a result, an organizational redeemer was needed to bring restoration and order to a war-torn world.

Episode two removed the audience from the destruction of Flanders by taking them into a series of historical contexts which included the captivity of the Hebrew people in ancient Babylon and the staged representation of the birth, death and resurrection of Jesus.<sup>27</sup> Viewers were also introduced to two main characters of the pageant. The first character was named 'The Wayfarer' while the second was christened 'Understanding'. Exposition executives hired

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<sup>24</sup> Van Brunt, "Pageantry at the Methodist Centenary" 107.

<sup>25</sup> Crowther, *The Wayfarer: A Pageant of the Kingdom* 6.

<sup>26</sup> Crowther 7.

<sup>27</sup> The personage of Jesus Christ never appears onstage and is only described by actors in *The Wayfarer*. The absence of an actor playing the role of Christ might reflect early twentieth century aversion by many Protestants concerning a human playing the role of a 'sinless' Savior.

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Broadway and silent film actors Henry Herbert and Blanche Yurka to play the roles of *The Wayfarer* and *Understanding*.<sup>28</sup> Both characters represented ideals, 'The Wayfarer' as a person or group seemingly lost and looking for direction, 'Understanding' as a person or organization leading 'The Wayfarer' out of the disorder and confusion of the world and into the attractive ideals of stability and order offered by America, Protestant missionaries and the Methodist Episcopal Church.

Episode three of the pageant, titled "The Conquest," challenged members of the audience to lead the peoples of the world out of global chaos through the work of home and foreign missions. Scene one began with an angel declaring the biblical mandate of the 'Great Commission' to the audience,

Go ye therefore and make disciples of all  
The nations, baptizing them  
Into the name of the Father,  
And of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

Once provided with this biblical directive from the gospel of Matthew, *Understanding* provokes *The Wayfarer* to consider his role in the task of world evangelization and asks,

How sayest thou, Wayfarer,  
Having seen the Saviour's triumph  
Can'st thou take His Great Commission?  
Wilt thou undertake the task?

When given the biblical task as interpreted through the character of *Understanding*, *The Wayfarer* responds to these questions with the language of Christian foreign mission,

Lead me onward to the conflict,  
Lead me forward to the task;  
Let me share the warrior's guerdon,

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<sup>28</sup> Van Brunt, "Pageantry at the Methodist Centenary" 108. During her career Blanche Yurka starred in over twenty-five films, forty Broadway shows, and a number of television episodes. Henry Herbert starred in over fifty films and over twenty-five Broadway productions. For Methodist churchgoers the opportunity to watch New York actors perform live at a missionary exposition might indicate why the pageant was such a popular attraction.

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Christ and heaven are all I ask.  
Give my soul a vast horizon,  
Fill my heart with purpose true,  
Let me bear a brave man's burden,  
Give my hands a task to do.<sup>29</sup>

The narrative of *The Wayfarer* made audiences aware of the tasks required for the spread of Christianity. The summons or "brave man's burden" involved the material and religious reconstruction of the world, and Methodist audiences were invited to participate in this endeavor.

Yet before joining this Christian task force audience members realized they were not alone on this journey. Crowther developed within the script of *The Wayfarer* a link to the past through the lengthy staged parade of important individuals from the history of Christianity. St. Paul lead the procession followed by others including Protestant reformer Martin Luther, Methodist founder John Wesley, Anglican missionary David Livingstone, African American Methodist missionary John Stewart, Salvation Army founder William Booth, urban photographer Jacob Riis, and three US presidents including George Washington, Abraham Lincoln and the current president Woodrow Wilson.<sup>30</sup> When the actor representing President Wilson appeared onstage as the last participant in the procession of Christian and governmental dignitaries a voice off stage proclaimed,

Hail to the man whom God hath called  
To voice the cry of a weary world  
For peace that is born of right,  
For justice in place of might.  
He stands mid the ruin of sacred things,

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<sup>29</sup> Crowther, *The Wayfarer: A Pageant of the Kingdom* 103.

<sup>30</sup> Crowther 112-114. Crowther staged the scene to have the representation of a person or persons influenced by or led to Christianity in front of each Christian reformer or US president as they appeared onstage. Thus, Paul followed a Roman soldier, Martin Luther followed a Catholic monk, Wesley trailed a man in collegiate attire, Livingstone followed an African boy and girl holding hands, and John Stewart followed a Native American Christian convert. George Washington followed a colonial soldier, Lincoln a Confederate and Union soldier, and Wilson followed a representation of Columbia holding an American flag.

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And all the welter that warfare brings,  
The graves of a myriad uncrowned kings.  
Come, let us found a world emprise  
After the fashion of Christ, he cries;  
An order wherein every ill shall die  
That threatens the world's goodwill.<sup>31</sup>

Spectators seated in the coliseum watched as the call to Christian missions was made apparent before their eyes. These viewers, initially challenged by a rendition of the biblical 'Great Commission' to 'Go!' throughout the world with the message of Christ, now gazed at the parade of significant Christian and political leaders one of which was John Wesley, the Methodist link to the historical lineage of Christian leaders and Protestant missionaries. The representation of forbears who converted people to Christianity brought the memories of history alive for those present in the coliseum. Before Methodist audiences stood a variety of important Christian and political missionaries, some taking Christ to the world others taking freedom and democracy to those around the globe. During the final moments of the scene Methodists heard the directive, in the presence of a representation of the current US President Wilson, to "found a world emprise after the fashion of Christ." This command beckoned American patriots and Methodist missionaries forward and positioned other Protestants to join the mission in progress of taking America and Christ to the world.

The final scene of *The Wayfarer* included two parades involving a 'Procession of Nations' and a 'Procession of Americans.' As the thousand-voice choir sang Handel's 'Unto Us a Child is Born,' scores of actors identified in the program as 'baptized native Christians,' appeared onstage representing the men, women and children of many foreign lands in native costumes bearing palm branches in search of peace. Over one hundred flags of countries from around the world carried by persons in native dress also appeared on the stage. This parade of nations identified which countries and peoples were impacted by Methodist missionaries and foreign missions agencies. Immediately after the parade of foreign nationals a second entourage entered representing the peoples of the United States impacted by Methodist home missions. Following a woman dressed as 'Columbia' - who held and waved an American flag - dozens of Native

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<sup>31</sup> Crowther 114.

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Americans, African Americans, immigrants, farmers, Centenary Cadets, US soldiers and Methodist laity paraded before the audience to demonstrate the past and current work of the home missionary societies of American Methodism.

In the final moments of the performance, hundreds of actors representing the results of Methodist missionary agencies stood adorned in wardrobes of the world and presented an unfolding picture of world reconstruction and Christian renewal. As the mammoth organ chimed out the final notes of the Christian hymn 'All Hail the Power of Jesus Name' the audience joined as one Methodist community inside the coliseum. The task of converting the world to Christianity was at hand, and the pageant identified Methodists as the chosen ones to teach the world about Jesus.

### **Conclusion**

The production and performance of *The Wayfarer* was important for American Methodists because the pageant linked the denomination to significant religious and political figures from the past. The representation of these historical figures onstage confirmed that one could trace the missionary impulse of American Methodism through Methodist founder John Wesley, the Protestant Reformation, and ultimately back to Jesus. When the curtain fell on the last scene the audience better understood the task ahead for Methodist foreign missions. The pageant beckoned Methodist audiences forward and helped motivate American churchgoers to join the Columbus exposition mandate of world reconstruction and Christian service in foreign missions.

Following the opening night performance of *The Wayfarer* a reporter for the *Columbus Evening Dispatch* recorded, "When the great curtains of the Coliseum stage swung together for the first time Friday night, the audience left with the quietness of people who have seen a great vision. They had. Superlatives are entirely inadequate to convey the startling impression of the 'Wayfarer,' its size, its brilliancy, the total overwhelming effect of music, costuming and scenery."<sup>32</sup> This report from inside the coliseum by the *Columbus Evening Dispatch* provides some insight into how Methodists responded to the pageant. For audience members and more

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<sup>32</sup> "Great Pageant Thrills Crowd at Centenary," *Columbus Evening Dispatch*, 21 June 1919, 5.

particularly for American Methodists the pageant represented "a great vision" a symbolic call to duty for the conquest of the world for Christianity.

As noted earlier by Glassberg, the use of imagery, narrative and objects in historical pageantry connected events from the past with the present. *The Wayfarer* served as a tool to link Methodists to early Christian reformers including Methodist founder John Wesley. Viewing these significant characters from the history of Christianity onstage gave the past meaning for Methodists in the present. Watching hundreds of actors on parade representing Christian reformers, US Presidents, Protestant missionaries and converted peoples suggested the need for the continuation of future world transformation. This renovation reflects the arguments noted earlier from Prevots who confirms early twentieth-century pageantry responded to local and national "problems" by offering examples of societal transformation for participants and for viewers. *The Wayfarer* offered Methodist audiences a solution to the problem of global chaos by presenting Christianity as the driving force of social, political and religious renewal. This solution confirms the comments of Van Brunt who indicates the pageant identified the historical work of reformers and missionaries for those in attendance at the Centenary Celebration while at the same time motivating viewers for future missionary work and Christian expansion. The performance of *The Wayfarer* provided Methodists with a theater experience all their own. Once the audience left the coliseum the formidable task to take Christianity to the uttermost parts of the earth was at hand.