

William Payne

A Deal with the Devil: Pragmatic Mission and Early American Methodism's Complicity with Slavery

Abstract:

Early American Methodism inherited a staunch abolitionist position from John Wesley. Bishops Francis Asbury and Thomas Coke strongly opposed slavery. Under their leadership, the early minutes and disciplines included a series of rules that required preachers to free their slaves and ameliorate the effects of slavery. They also waged an ongoing “war” with the various state legislatures that allowed slavery. After a strong backlash threatened Methodism’s ability to minister to slaves, enter plantations, and work in the South, the church prioritized the evangelistic mandate over the cultural mandate. The compromise mitigated social hostility and allowed Methodism to become the largest church in the South by 1800. Sadly, the compromise tainted the church, enabled slavery, and created a legacy of racism.

Keywords: Methodism, slavery, abolition, Francis Asbury, Thomas Coke

William Payne, PhD, is Professor of World Missions and Evangelism at Ashland Theological Seminary. His email is: wpayne@ashland.edu

1779	1780	1781	1782	1783	1784
0	0	0	0	0	0
140	196	512	657	1028	963
179	190	361	517	605	560
795	410	1052	1447	1017	982
1873	2129	3382	4294	5122	5308
3937	3928	3839	4082	3699	3449
1653	1411	1393	1492	2279	3443
0	0	0	0	0	99

Sources: Data from Lee, *A Short History*, 1810: 358; MEC, *Minutes*, 1813.

What caused the membership disparity between the northern hub and the southern hub? Starting in 1769, Methodist missionaries controlled and directed the northern work. They did not employ many colonists as preachers. The northern work suffered when John Wesley recalled his missionaries during the Revolutionary War.² By contrast, the southern work did not employ missionaries or answer to Wesley. Instead, it trained and utilized local American preachers. Those preachers became the *de facto* leaders of American Methodism when the missionaries left.³ They were acquainted with revival, pro-American, independent in their thinking, and indigenous to the South.

At the 1779 Fluvanna Conference in Virginia, the southern preachers intended to take American Methodism in a new direction by ordaining themselves so they could administer the sacraments. This would have separated them from the northern work. In a last-minute bargain with Francis Asbury, the southern preachers agreed to hold-off on their plan, pending a solution from Wesley.⁴

In the aftermath of Fluvanna, Asbury, as Wesley's designated general superintendent, took full control of the southern work. To prevent schism, he gave the northern conference the power to approve or reject whatever the southern conference decided. From the perspective of the South, this violated the rules of democracy because the northern conference was under Asbury's control and did whatever he told it to do. Furthermore, southern preachers said that Asbury manipulated the rules to his advantage.

The Slavery Debate

The emerging slavery debate evinces how the northern conference used its privilege to force an unpopular issue onto southern Methodism. Before the reunification of the northern and southern conferences in 1779, the northern conference mandated that traveling preachers must promise to free their slaves. It opined that "Slavery is contrary to the laws of God, man, and nature, and hurtful to society, contrary to the dictates of conscience and pure religion, and doing that which we would not others should do to us and ours."⁵ After Fluvanna, the northern conference unilaterally applied the rule to the southern work. The southern connection did not receive it well. The southern preachers would not have allowed the decision if they would have had equal representation, since they outnumbered the northern preachers.

Jesse Lee, the first historian of American Methodism, captured the southern sentiment. "It is evident that the [northern] preachers in this case went too far in their censures; and their language in their resolves was calculated to irritate the minds of our people, and by no means calculated to convince them of their error."⁶

It should be noted that the southern circuit riders strongly opposed slavery and did all they could to ameliorate the conditions associated with it. However, the southern local preachers were not as resolute as the circuit riders. In essence, the local preachers served as the pastors of the local societies, while the circuit riders traveled large circuits.

When the slave rule was applied to local preachers, a lack of consensus emerged. In 1783, the conference agreed to try slave-holding local preachers for one more year.⁷ In 1784, the traveling preachers determined to suspend the local preachers in Maryland, Delaware, Pennsylvania, and New Jersey who did not emancipate their slaves and to try those in Virginia for another year.⁸ In the aftermath, the local preachers in Virginia formed a powerful lobby that challenged the authority of the conference. As the conferences became more aggressive with slavery rules, the local preachers in Virginia became more vocal in their opposition.

In the first MEC (Methodist Episcopal Church) *Discipline* in 1785, the church, under the resolute leadership of Bishop Thomas Coke, showed a strong resolve to deal decisively with the slavery issue. In order to “extirpate the abomination of slavery from among us,” the MEC added new rules.⁹ First, every member who held slaves had to make provision for their gradual manumission. Second, the traveling preachers had to keep a journal to record the ages and names of every slave and the date when each slave was to be set free. Also, the journals had to list where the signed documents from the slave-holding Methodists were recorded. Third, every member not wishing to abide by the rule could withdraw from the society within the next twelve months. After that period, noncompliant members would be expelled. Fourth, after withdrawing or being expelled, the former members could not participate in the sacrament with the Methodists. Fifth, slave owners would not be admitted to the society or the Lord’s Supper until they signed documents to emancipate their slaves.¹⁰ Nonetheless, this did not keep the leadership of the MEC from preaching against slavery. “Continuing to preach an emancipation ethic, [they] insisted that the piety of a prayerful honest man who was emotionally aware of the love of God should be expressed through opposition to slavery.”¹¹

The disciplinary rules put the MEC in conflict with state laws that forbade emancipation in some southern states. Could the MEC require a Methodist to break a “no manumission” law in order to remain a Methodist or become a Methodist? The conference argued that it was not the province of the church to work contrary to the established legal provisions of the civil authority.¹²

In 1785, the newly minted bishops (Asbury and Coke) conducted conferences in North Carolina (20 April), Virginia (1 May), and Maryland (1 June). During these meetings, Coke used aggressive rhetoric and ecclesial threats to push his antislavery views. While at the North Carolina

Conference, Coke spoke in such a harsh tone that Lee responded. Coke retorted that Lee was “unfriendly to the cause.” Afterward, during the examination of character, Coke objected to Lee’s. When Lee defended his position, Coke cut him off. This led to a heated exchange.¹³

After the intense debate, the North Carolina Conference agreed to send the state legislature a petition asking that residents be allowed to emancipate slaves because North Carolina did not allow for the emancipation of slaves. The MEC sought to maintain its social witness against slavery and show that it respected state laws by attempting to change anti-emancipation laws. Wade Barclay notes:

Methodists at that time were active in circulating petitions to be presented to state legislatures in behalf of emancipation. A petition had been circulated by Methodists in North Carolina praying for the repeal of the law against emancipation of slaves and Coke states that Asbury visited the governor and “gained him over.” The legislature, however, failed to act. In November [1785] at least nine petitions were presented to the Virginia Legislature—four of which were from Halifax, Amelia, Mecklenburg, and Pittsylvania—in the heart of Methodist country. No legislative action resulted.¹⁴

Because the rule in the 1785 Discipline made an exception for Methodists who lived in states that banned the emancipation of slaves, Coke moderated his rhetoric in North Carolina. However, while in Virginia, he boldly preached “liberty to the captives” (Isa 61:1) because Virginia law allowed for emancipation. Evidently, this caused a great deal of internal and external opposition. In reference to this period, Lee said, “[Coke] was much respected in the United States; but he met with some opposition in the south parts of Virginia, owing to his imprudent manner of preaching against slavery.”¹⁵

According to Samuel Hill,

[White Methodists in the South] were not averse to benevolent reform if that meant encouraging personal temperance and helping the orphan or widow, the deaf, the dumb, the blind, the insane. But, if it meant rearranging the social order, tampering with slavery, interfering with state sovereignty, . . . then benevolent reform was totally misguided. It was in fact, un-Christian, since it created political tests for spiritual organizations.

Whether a man held slaves or not was irrelevant to his right to join a church.¹⁶

As a consequence of his preaching against slavery, Coke had many narrow escapes. Cameron provides numerous examples.¹⁷ Asbury offered the following one:

I found the minds of the people greatly agitated with our rules against slavery, and a proposed petition to the general assembly for the emancipation of Blacks. Colonel Bedford and Doctor Coke disputed on the subject, and the Colonel used some threats: next day, brother O'Kelly¹⁸ let fly at them and they were made angry enough; we, however, came on with whole bones.¹⁹

In other cases, Methodist preachers in the South were arrested, fined, and physically hurt. In South Carolina, a preacher was dunked and nearly drowned.²⁰ In particular, carrying conference-sanctioned antislavery pamphlets caused persecution and public rejection.

During the 1785 Virginia Conference, many petitions were presented asking that the minutes on slavery be suspended. Coke replied that they must be retained and threatened that preaching would be withdrawn from circuits where they could not be enforced.²¹

After the Virginia Conference, Asbury dined with General Daniel Roberdeau.²² They conversed on slavery, the difficulties attending emancipation, and the resentment some of the members of the Virginia legislature expressed against those who favored a general abolition.²³ Afterward, Roberdeau arranged for Coke and Asbury to meet with George Washington. When Coke and Asbury visited Washington, they handed him a petition against slavery.²⁴ They hoped to give the signed petition to the Virginia Legislature. They were received politely and were able to discuss the issue with him. However, Washington refused to sign it.²⁵

Later, Coke met with Devereux Jarratt, an Anglican priest, a leading figure in the Virginia revival, and a mentor of southern Methodist preachers. He and Coke disagreed about the minute on slavery. Coke wrote that Jarratt was "a violent assertor of the justice and propriety of Negro slavery."²⁶ Jarratt disagreed.

The truth is, the little man read the minutes to me, and asked my opinion of them. I told him I was no friend of slavery; but however I did not think the minutes proper, for two reasons. First, the disturbance it would make and the opposition it would meet with in the societies. Second, He [sic] ought not to make a disputable matter a positive term of communion. And as he was a stranger in the land, I told him the spirit of Virginia would not brook force, and probably gave him some advice on the matter, which I suppose the bishop looked upon as an insult.²⁷

Coke clashed with Jarratt because Jarratt did not favor a general manumission of slaves. Jarratt's thinking illustrates the mindset of the Virginian local preachers. That is, he demonstrates an "I am against slavery but opposed to a general abolition" perspective. He states,

Slaves are treated, in America, so inhumanly, in thousands of instances, and by thousands of masters, as must be very abhorrent to every tender, reflecting mind. I hope and believe that the day of their release has begun to dawn; and I lament it as a misfortune that the faults already committed are too strong to admit of any speedy amendment. Their numbers are so great that a general manumission would be the utter ruin of the country.²⁸

The Slavery Rules Suspended

In less than one month, the Baltimore conference did what the Virginia conference would not do. They suspended the rule on slavery. Little is reported on the debate or the rule change. Coke stated, "We thought it prudent to suspend the minute concerning slavery, on account of the great opposition that had been given it, especially in the new circuits, our work being too infantile a state to push things to extremity. . . . Indeed, I now acknowledge that, however just my sentiments may be concerning slavery, it was ill-judged of me to deliver them from the pulpit."²⁹

Coke, Asbury, Lee, and others contended that the suspension of the minute on slavery was the only option open to them because the antislavery rhetoric hurt membership and the viability of the MEC in the South. The Virginia membership figures substantiate this. In 1783 and 1784, while the slavery rules were being applied to local preachers and the people as a whole, Virginia Methodism suffered large declines. Numbers for 1785 are not available. By 1786, a year after the rule was suspended, Virginia Methodism showed a large increase in members.³⁰

In short, the slavery issue inflamed passions in the South and hindered Methodism's ability to grow with the slave and the white populations. When the traveling preachers, who were more intimately connected to the southerners than the bishops, saw the negative effect that the issue was having on membership and the sustainability of the southern portions of the MEC, they begged for relief from the rules. Coke and Asbury remained staunch abolitionists after the suspension of the rule. However, for the sake of institutional viability, contextual stability, and evangelistic success, they buried the slavery issue.³¹

Evaluating the Compromise with Slavery

The slavery compromise was a begrudging attempt to contextualize British Methodism in America. From Fluvanna to 1785, the lack of intentional contextualization led to institutional conflict. During these years, Asbury and Coke were rigid and unyielding. This caused a crisis that demanded a radical response. In essence, the totalitarianism of the missionary bishops led to a compromise that cemented slavery in the southern MEC.

One could argue that the compromise with slavery was a pragmatic response that sought to adapt the MEC to a negative contextual factor in order to grow the church in accordance with the evangelistic mandate. In other words, the mission of the church demanded that the MEC make peace with slavery in order to maintain access to the slaves and grow the church with the white population in the South.³² Donald Mathews captures this notion.

The mission of the [MEC] was to "preach the Gospel to every creature," Negro as well as white. If indignant masters kept them from the slaves, the preachers reasoned, negroes would never know God's love for them. And the master, alienated by harsh rules, would shut himself away, not only from his own salvation, but also from influences that would work ultimately to free the slaves.³³

From a utilitarian perspective, the wisdom of the compromise was self-evident. Many quotes from Asbury affirm this. The following journal entry offers a backhanded justification for the MEC's compromise with slavery.

I am perfectly satisfied with the part I took in the [1796] General Conference relative to the slaves. It is of great consequence to us to have proper access to the masters and the slaves. I had a case, a family I visited more than a year ago, a tyrannical old Welshman. I saw there he was cruel, his people were wicked, and treated like dogs. "Well," say you, "I would not go near such a man's house." That would be just as the devil would have it. In one year I saw that man much softened, his people admitted into the house of prayer, the whole plantation, 40 or 50 singing and praising God. What now can sweeten the bitter cup like religion? The slaves soon see the preachers are their friends, and soften their owners towards them. There are thousands here of slaves who if we could come to them would embrace religion.³⁴

Pragmatism ran deep in early Methodism. For example, a pragmatic John Wesley implemented innovations like field preaching, the class meeting, watchnight services, lay preaching, the circuit system, and the ordination of American Methodist lay preachers because they were profitable and grew Methodism.³⁵ On the surface, it appears that the slavery compromise fits in with the above list.

On closer review, it does not belong on the list. First, Wesley's innovations were allowed by scripture. In some cases, they were rediscoveries of the apostolic faith.³⁶ Contrarily, a close reading of the New Testament shows that the practice of slavery is not compatible with the Gospel. Second, Wesley attempted to reform the church and the nation by spreading scriptural holiness through the land. The compromise with slavery darkened the transforming light of the Gospel and enabled a wretched practice.

Critical Contextualization

Early American Methodism's compromise with slavery points to failed contextualization in that it normalized an unscriptural practice when the MEC baptized slavery and made theological arguments for it.³⁷ Paul Hiebert argues that the missionary church must evaluate the culture and its associated customs in light of biblical truth. In accordance with critical contextualization, practices that align with the gospel and those that are not contrary to the gospel will be kept and affirmed but unbiblical practices will be rejected.³⁸

Rejecting aspects of the culture will impede evangelization if the people being evangelized do not own the process. Hiebert states, "It is

important that the people themselves make the decisions [about what they adopt and reject]... Leaders may share their personal convictions and point out the consequences of various decisions, but they must allow the people to make the final decisions if they want to avoid becoming policemen."³⁹

Without a doubt, the Methodist bishops acted like policemen when they passed rules to force the southern Methodists to reject slavery. They came from monarchial England and were under the autocratic leadership of John Wesley. In their home context, the Methodist preachers debated issues with Wesley while in conference, but Wesley always made the final decision. He was the king of the Methodist connection. Asbury and Coke believed that they were the Wesley of American Methodism. When they attempted to duplicate that leadership style, they met with strong resistance because they did not appreciate the emerging democratic ethos in the South.

Second, the southern local preachers became entrenched in their resistance because the English missionaries did not attempt to conscientize them and lead them to the biblical point of view by means of good-natured persuasion. Ultimately, this sabotaged the bishops' desired outcome.

Third, the biblical teaching on slavery must be nuanced. The conveying of nuanced truth requires conversation and mutual respect. If the bishops would have communicated God's vision for the church instead of confronting the preachers and their political order, the outcome may have been different.

Fourth, a deeply embedded social institution cannot be dislodged quickly. A church without political influence or military power should realize that it must prepare the ground for change by salting the social environment with the truth of the gospel. Over time, the slow growing seed of the kingdom will bring divine transformation to the society if the church waters it and nurtures it by giving faithful witness to Jesus' lordship in word and deed (Matt 13:31-32).

Slavery in the New Testament

Early American Methodism and the people who lived in the South held the Bible in high regard. For example, because of attacks on the unscriptural basis of the MEC, the bishops added 70 pages of biblical references and notes to the 1796 *Discipline*.⁴⁰ If the bishops would have made a compelling biblical case for abolition, the southern Methodist local

preachers would have considered the argument. Others were making a biblical case for slavery.

What does the New Testament say about slavery? In order to answer this question, one must consider the historical context. Rome suppressed a series of deadly slave revolts in 71 BCE. During the revolts, armies of rampaging slaves sent fear through the Roman Senate and the empire. Eventually, the combined strength of eight legions permanently destroyed the slave revolts. In the aftermath, over 6,000 surviving slaves were crucified as a warning to others who might desire to rebel against slavery. Their rotting bodies lined the Appian Way from Rome to Capua. After this, the state did not tolerate slave insurrection or those who favored slave rights.⁴¹

Considering the historical background, one can understand why the New Testament's pragmatic teaching on slavery lacked prophetic bravado and revolutionary rhetoric. First Timothy 6:1 tells slaves to treat their masters with honor and respect so that the name of God and our faith will not be spoken against by the unbelievers. First Peter 2 – 3 and Titus 2:2-4 tell disadvantaged people (persecuted Christians who live under an evil government, slaves, and women who are married to harsh unbelievers) to live exemplary lives for the sake of the gospel and Christ's inbreaking kingdom. Colossians 3 and Ephesians 6 make the same point. They conclude by telling slaves to obey their masters knowing that God is the final judge (Col 3:22-25; Eph 6:8).

Instead of arguing against the social injustice of slavery, the New Testament focuses on the growing kingdom of God that will transform culture as the church evangelizes the nations. A soon-to-be-realized divinely ordained eschaton will fix all injustices when Christ returns. Since the New Testament church held to this blessed hope, it did not challenge the Roman Empire, foment slave revolts, get back at their enemies, or openly challenge the unjust systems of the land. Rather, the New Testament tells the church that it cannot discriminate (cf. Jam 2). As the seed of the new humanity, it must exist as an alternative community that witnesses to God's rule and his just character (cf. Eph 2:15b-16). The new humanity points to and reveals the pending telos to the extent that it embodies the heart of God. Consequently, not discerning poor believers in the Body of Christ is cause for censor and divine judgment (1 Cor 11:17ff).⁴² Likewise, showing favoritism brings judgment (Jam 2: 1-13). Also, *agape* should cause the believers to hold each other in better esteem than they hold themselves

(Phil 2:3). Love is a fruit of the Spirit and evidence that one is mature in Christ (1 Cor 13).

When the Church lives into the New Testament ideal, the social categories that define the world no longer define the believers. Ergo, the binary sets Jew/Greek, male/female, rich/poor, and slave/free are replaced by “children of God” (see Gal 3:28, 5:6, Col 3:11).⁴³ As such, Christian husbands cannot abuse their wives like pagan husbands (1 Pet 3:7, Col 3:19) and Philemon must treat Onesimus like a beloved brother and not like a slave (Phlm 16). Paul reminds slave owners that God will judge them if they do not treat their slaves well (Eph 6:9, Col 4:1). In fact, Christians are to become slaves to each other (Matt 20:27) and to God (John 15:20, Eph 5:6).⁴⁴ In practice, once you become a disciple, you must align your values and practices with the inbreaking kingdom of God by striving to become like Christ.⁴⁵

In this light, one should not argue that the New Testament endorses slavery. Categorically, it does not approve of chattel slavery. Rather, it merely acknowledges the reality of slavery in the Roman Empire. Since slavery was an entrenched institution for the people of that time (a social fact), the New Testament writers tell Christian slaves and slave owners how they should live so they can influence others for Christ. In practical terms, Peter tells believing slaves that those who abuse you will be drawn to you and the Christ in you because of your exemplary behavior. As such, “always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have” (1 Pet 3:15b, NIV).

In sum, first-century slaves did not have the ability to oppose slavery. However, they could lay a foundation for evangelism by living a life that was beyond reproach in terms of the cultural categories that existed in the Roman society. In time, as the social influence of the church blossomed, the culture would grow to reflect kingdom values. Furthermore, since God will fix the fallen order when Christ returns, Christian believers need to remain focused on witnessing and right living. This is why Paul compromises his personal liberty by becoming all things to all people in order to win some to Christ. Figuratively, he has made himself a slave to all so he can win a few (1 Cor 9:19-27). In both Paul and First Peter, the evangelistic mandate requires that Christians live so they do not discredit the gospel or impede their ability to influence others for Christ.

When applied to southern Methodism, the teaching of the New Testament and the practice of the MEC do not align. A simplified example

will illustrate the broader issue. Research shows that people from kinship-based societies rarely cross-cultural, social, and linguistic boundaries when they come to faith.⁴⁶ This is a sociological fact, not a theological affirmation. That is why missiology emphasizes E-1 evangelism.⁴⁷ As such, if you were to build a chapel in a socially stratified village and seek to evangelize all the people without considering their system of social organization, the various groupings would resist intermingling in the chapel. This would stymie evangelism. However, if you started with class-specific evangelism, you would be able to evangelize each of the social groups without forcing the people to cross social boundaries.

After you evangelized the various groups, you would tell them that the Bible does not permit Christians to practice radical social stratification. In fact, faithfulness to Christ requires that the new disciples reorient themselves so that they no longer affirm radical social stratification. In the aftermath, the emerging church would become a place where people from various classes come together as one people united by Christ. If the church continued to grow, it would begin to influence how the larger society imagined and practiced social stratification.

This is how the kingdom seed slowly leavens the society. In truth, one does not have to renounce radical social stratification to be evangelized. However, once a person is discipled, he or she must own the biblical vision of the new humanity and reject unbiblical forms of social stratification.

In the American South, Methodism made peace with slavery when it decided that it would ignore slavery in order to emphasize the evangelistic mandate. After it became the largest church in the South, it did not teach its people to deconstruct slavery and live into the new humanity that Christ mandated. Instead, it interpreted the Bible in a way that justified slavery. In this regard, it did not function as salt and light, give a clear witness to the New Testament's guidance on slavery, or follow the commandment to love one's neighbor. For this reason, racism was enabled in the church and continues as a legacy issue into the present time. Early American Methodism sinned when it did not discern the Body of Christ!

Conclusion

The future shape of southern Methodism was determined between 1770 through 1785. During that time, southern Methodism had no political power, social standing, or means to end southern slavery. The political activism, authoritarian rule, and abolitionist rhetoric of Asbury and Coke

inflamed passions, alienated southerners, threatened the long-term viability of southern Methodism, and clashed with the democratic values of the emerging republic. This disturbed most of the southern preachers. The resulting institutional conflict threatened to rupture southern Methodism. A compromise was needed. A good compromise would have emphasized evangelism, acknowledged the evil of slavery, created congregations that lived into the New Testament ideal of the new humanity, and taken a long view to the elimination of slavery.

Early American Methodism did not have to fight against slavery in order to evangelize in the South for the same reason that the New Testament did not argue against slavery. However, after it established the church in the South, it should not have ignored the evil of slavery or permitted the church to make excuses for it. Disciples cannot affirm slavery or practice racism.

In the end, the MEC greatly erred when it made peace with slavery in order to minimize institutional turmoil and social opposition in the South. Ultimately, the gospel that it preached did not transform the people in the church, create a new humanity, or change the culture. Instead, it baptized the institution of slavery and enabled the continuation of racism. This is the enduring legacy of early Methodism's compromise with slavery.

End Notes

¹ For more information on the numerical increase and decline of the hubs, see Payne "Without a Parallel," 105-164.

² Starting in April 1778, Francis Asbury remained at Judge White's home in Delaware, Asbury, *Journal*, 1:267.

³ Payne, *American Methodism*, 68.

⁴ Originally, they agreed to wait one year. Four years later, Wesley's solution was the formation of the MEC and the ordination of many circuit riders. For a complete understanding of the Fluvanna problem, see Payne, "Without a Parallel," 234-240.

⁵ Lee, *Short History*, 69-70.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 72.

⁷ MEC, *Minutes*, 25.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 47. Virginia is singled out because it permitted manumission. Other southern states did not permit it.

⁹ Payne, *American Methodism*, 178.

¹⁰ Barclay, *Early American Methodism*, 73.

¹¹ Matthews, *Slavery and Methodism*, 13.

¹² Cameron, "The New Church Takes Root," 253.

¹³ Payne, *American Methodism*, 179.

¹⁴ Barclay, *Early American Methodism*, 74.

¹⁵ Lee, *Short History*, 120.

¹⁶ Hill, *The South and the North in American Religion*, 80.

¹⁷ Cameron, "The New Church Takes Root," 254.

¹⁸ James O'Kelly was a Methodist leader in the South. He opposed slavery and bishops. In 1792, he led a rift in the MEC.

¹⁹ Asbury, *Journal*, 1:488.

²⁰ Payne, *American Methodism*, 185.

²¹ Barclay, *Early American Methodism*, 73.

²² Daniel Roberdeau was a founding father, brigadier general in the Revolutionary War, and a member of the Continental Congress. He represented Pennsylvania. After the war, he relocated to Alexandria, Virginia.

²³ Asbury, *Journal*, 1:498.

²⁴ Coke, *Journal*, 63.

²⁵ "Upon my return Found Mr. Magowan, and a Doctr. Coke & a Mr. Asbury here—the two last Methodest [sic] Preachers recommended by Genl. Roberdeau—the same who were expected yesterday," Washington, *Diaries*, May 26, 1785.

²⁶ Asbury, *Journal*, 3:82n.

²⁷ Jarratt, *The Life of the Reverend Devereux Jarratt*, 84.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 82.

²⁹ Coke, *Journal*, 65.

³⁰ Payne, *American Methodism*, 181.

³¹ Even though the MEC stopped promulgating rules in 1785, the slavery issue did not go away. For example, Asbury asked the Virginia preachers to sign a statement that they opposed slavery in 1798. In 1800, the General Conference sent the state legislatures an address about slavery. The address raised suspicions and hurt Methodism's work with slaves. Methodist preachers were not of one mind. As late as 1798, 30 percent of Virginian local preachers owned slaves. Ultimately, the slavery issues caused the MEC to split in 1844 when the General Conference attempted to censor Bishop Andrew of Georgia because he acquired two slaves and would not sell them because he feared they would be mistreated by a new owner.

³² See Pinn, *Introduction to Black Church History*, 29-30.

³³ Mathews, *Slavery and Methodism*, 13.

³⁴ Asbury, *Journal*, 3:160. When viewed through the lens of Marxist critique and critical theory of religion, Asbury's comments reflect how the oppressors used religion to mollify slaves so that they accepted oppression. As such, Pinn states, "The notion of common redemption or spiritual freedom for all did not mean freedom on earth. Methodist preachers reconciled their concern for enslaved Africans with the demands of slaveholders by emphasizing the soul irrespective of the physical body's fate." *Black Church History*, 29-30.

³⁵ See Wesley, "A Plain Account of the People Called Methodists," *Works* 8:248-268.

³⁶ For a fuller understanding of this, see Hunter, *To Spread the Power*.

³⁷ "I am brought to conclude that slavery will exist in Virginia perhaps for ages; there is not a sufficient sense of religion nor liberty to destroy it; Methodists, Baptists, Presbyterians, in the highest flights or rapturous piety, still maintain and defend it," Asbury, *Journal*, 2:151.

³⁸ Hiebert, *Anthropological Reflections*, 89-90.

³⁹ Hiebert, *Anthropological Insights*, 187.

⁴⁰ Payne, *American Methodism*, 172.

⁴¹ Bradley, *Slavery and Rebellion*.

⁴² In First Corinthians 11, the phrase "Body of Christ" has a double meaning. It refers to the communion elements and the community of saints.

⁴³ Going back to Tertullian, people have argued that Christians are neither Jew nor Gentile. Rather, they are a third race (Gruen, 2017).

⁴⁴ English translators showed a bias when they routinely translated the term *doulos* as servant. Many recent translations have corrected that

mistake. For example, the American Standard Version only translated *doulos* as slave one time, but the New American Standard Version translates it as slave 126 times. In fact, the New Testament says that God is our master, and we are his slaves. The parables repeatedly make this point. The idea of slave and son are not mutually exclusive in the ancient world since a son was under the full authority of his father in the same way as a slave (cf. Gal 4:1).

⁴⁵ Payne, "Biblical Interpretation."

⁴⁶ McGavran, *Understanding Church Growth*, 69-71.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 47-51. Missiologists measure the culture distance between the evangelist and the people that are evangelized. Evangelism is most effective when it is completed by a person who is culturally aligned with the people being evangelized. This is E-1 evangelism.

Works Cited

- Asbury, Francis
1958 *The Journal and Letters of Francis Asbury*. Edited by Elmer Clark. 3 vols. Nashville, TN: Abingdon.
- Barclay, Wade Crawford
1950 *Early American Methodism, 1769-1844*. 2 vols. New York, NY: Board of Missions and Church Extension of the Methodist Church.
- Bradley, Keith
1989 *Slavery and Rebellion in the Roman World, 140 B.C. -70 B.C.* Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press.
- Cameron, Richard
1964 "The New Church Takes Root." In *The History of American Methodism*. Edited by Emory Bucke, 241-90. Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press.
- Coke, Thomas
2005 *The Journal of Dr. Thomas Coke*. Edited by John Vickers. Nashville, TN: Kingswood Books.
- Gruen, Erich S.
2017 "Christianity as a "Third Race:' Is Ethnicity at Issue?" in *Christianity in the Second Century: Themes and Developments*, edited by James C. Paget and Judith Lieu, 235-249. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Hiebert, Paul
1985 *Anthropological Insights for Missionaries*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books.

- 1994 *Anthropological Reflections on Missiological Issues*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books.
- Hill, Samuel S., Jr.
1980 *The South and the North in American Religion*. Athens, GA: University of Georgia.
- Hunter, George, III
1987 *To Spread the Power: Church Growth in the Wesleyan Spirit*. Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press.
- Jarratt, Devereux
1806 *The Life of the Reverend Devereux Jarratt, Rector of Bath Parish, Dinwiddie County, Virginia*. Baltimore, MD: Warner & Hanna.
- Lee, Jesse
1810 *A Short History of the Methodists in the United States of America Beginning in 1766 and Continued till 1809*. Baltimore, MD: Magill and Clime.
- Mathews, Donald G.
1965 *Slavery and Methodism: A Chapter in American Morality, 1780-1845*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- McGavran, Donald A.
1990 *Understanding Church Growth*. Edited by C. Peter Wagner. 3rd ed. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans.
- Methodist Episcopal Church
1813 *Minutes of the Annual Conferences Annually Held in America from 1773 to 1813 Inclusive*. Nashville, TN: Daniel Hitt and Thomas Ware for the Methodist Conexion in the United States.
- Payne, William P.
2001 "Without a Parallel: Reasons for the Expansion of Early American Methodism." PhD dissertation, Asbury Theological Seminary.
- 2013 *American Methodism: Past and Future Growth*. The Study of World Christian Revitalization Movements in Pietist/Wesleyan Studies. Lexington, KY: Emeth Press.
- 2021 "Biblical Interpretation, Gender Equality, and the Evangelistic Mandate," edited by David W. Scott. *UM & Global*, January 1, 2021. <http://www.umglobal.org/2021/02/william-payne-biblical-interpretation.html>.

Pinn, Anne H. and Anthony B. Pinn

2002 *Fortress Introduction to Black Church History*.
Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress.

Washington, George

1978 *The Diaries of George Washington, 1784 – June
1786*. Edited by Donald Jackson and Dorothy Two
hig. 4. 6 vols. Charlottesville, VA, University Press
of Virginia.

Wesley, John

1991 "A Plain Account of the People Called Methodists."
Vol. VIII in the *Works of John Wesley*. 3rd ed. Edited
by Thomas Jackson. 248-268. Grand Rapids, MI:
Baker.