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The relationship between the Methodist church, slavery and politics, 1784-1844

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**THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE METHODIST CHURCH,
SLAVERY AND POLITICS, 1784-1844**

By

Brian D. Lawrence

A Thesis

Submitted to the
Department of History
College of Humanities and Social Science
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Thesis Advisor: Janet Lindman, Ph.D.

Dedications

I would like to thank my family and my fiancé for supporting me throughout graduate school. This could not have been possible without all of you.

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Abstract

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2017-2018

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The Methodist church split in 1844 was a cumulative result of decades of regional instability within the governing structure of the church. Although John Wesley had a strict anti-slavery belief as the leader of the movement in Great Britain, the Methodist church in America faced a distinctively different dilemma. Slavery proved to be a lasting institution that posed problems for Methodism in the United States and in the larger political context. The issue of slavery plagued Methodism from almost its inception, but the church functioned well although conflicts remained below the surface. William Capers, James Osgood Andrew, and Freeborn Garrettson were influential with the Methodist church, and they represent diverse views on black enslavement. These three men demonstrate that the Methodist church thrived despite controversies about governance, church polity and social issues between 1784 and 1844. Although it was prosperous, the church would split in 1844 over the slaveholding of Bishop James Osgood Andrew. The split was a larger referendum on sectional tensions that had become unbearable in the church in 1844 and would continue to deteriorate in the nation as a whole until the Civil War in 1861.

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Chapter One

Introduction

In 1743, John Wesley said, “Give liberty to whom liberty is due, that is, to every child of man, to every partaker of human nature. Let none serve you but by his own act and deed, by his own voluntary action. Away with all whips, all chains, all compulsion. Be gentle toward all men; and see that you invariably do with every one as you would he should do unto you.”¹ Echoing Jesus from the Gospel of Luke, Wesley asked his followers to treat others the way they would wish to be. Wesley used the golden rule, along with Enlightenment ideas regarding human equality, as a justification for his opposition towards slavery. Spurred on by William Wilberforce’s fight against the slave trade in England, Wesley and the British Methodists tried to influence American slaveholders about the evils of black enslavement before the American Revolution.² Wesley, who took a loyalist position during the American Revolution, scoffed at ideas like “natural rights” or “natural liberties” and the hypocrisy of Americans for believing that their institutions were pure and blameless, while still partaking in the slave trade.³ As historian Christopher Brown said about American patriots: “The apparent embrace of natural rights was purely instrumental. The rebels did not genuinely believe in their own words. They wished to seize power from the British government, not enlarge the dominion of liberty.”⁴ This argument of the natural rights of Africans and African-

¹ John Wesley, *Thoughts upon Slavery* (New York: American Tract Society, 1774). 56.

² L.C Rudolph, *Francis Asbury* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1983), 76.

³ Christopher L. Brown, *Moral Capital: Foundations of British Abolitionism* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2012), 129.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 130.

Americans would never fully materialize in the north and the south, and slavery would remain legal in the United States until 1865.

John Wesley despised slavery, especially the lack of freedom the slaves enjoyed. He believed that the dominion of one man over another, and the cruelty slaveholders inflicted on slaves, made a mockery of God's law. John Wesley set the tone early for the Methodist's attitude towards slavery, but his enthusiasm for the emancipation of slaves would not be fully replicated in the American Methodist church. Wesley was not a particularly "revolutionary" preacher. In his analytical writing of Wesley and the early Methodists in Great Britain, Henry Abelove says, "[p]olitically, Wesley insisted in a conventionally tory style on obedience to 'authority.' As he traveled and preached he sometimes spoke directly of public affairs, almost always defending king and ministers and advising submission."⁵ Wesley's submission to authority was not an ideal American Methodists embraced. Wesley's anti-slavery stance would not be realized in the American wing of the Methodist church until the nineteenth century.

The Methodist Episcopal Church (hereafter the M.E.C.) was built on the rejection of Calvinism, works of piety and sanctification before God through Jesus Christ. Spiritual equality among people was a fundamental belief in the early Methodist church, whether male, female, black or white. Methodists embraced Galatians 3:28 which says, "There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus." Slavery was antithetical to both the political ideals of the new nation and the "soul liberty" of the Methodist church. While British Methodists proclaimed that slavery represented a fundamental lack of freedom and equality,

⁵ Henry Abelove, *The Evangelist of Desire: John Wesley and the Methodists* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990), 98.

American Methodists faltered on this issue. Conversely, while the British church remained hierarchical in terms of governance, the American wing, reflecting American political ideals, granted voting rights to all participants at the church's general conferences. Though slavery was condemned by early American Methodists, it would eventually become engrained into the church even after outcry from northern Methodists who advocated abolitionism in the 1830s.

The ministerial careers of Freeborn Garrettson, James Osgood Andrew and William Capers, the focus of this study, show the difference between the pre-Revolutionary belief regarding slavery and the theory that developed in the early republic. The Methodist church had two distinct periods before the split of the church in 1844: the first from 1760-1800; the second from 1800-1820. Before 1800, the Methodist church was able to metaphorically stand tall against slavery. The issue of slavery plagued Methodism from almost its inception, but the church functioned well although conflicts remained below the surface. William Capers, James Osgood Andrew and Freeborn Garrettson were influential with the Methodist church, and they represent diverse views on black enslavement. These three men demonstrate that the Methodist church thrived despite differing views about governance, church polity and social issues. As slavery became more ingrained into southern society between 1800 and 1820, the Methodists began to generally shrink away from the issue, aside from pockets of abolitionist resistance in the north. The northern Methodist church and the southern Methodist church developed in distinctly different ways from each other by the 1820s. The northern Methodist church would be influenced in the abolitionist movement, and, by 1844, it was ready to pull the church towards its side. The southern Methodist church, as an

embodiment of southern culture, defended the institution of slavery. While these three men are not as well known or written about in Methodist history as John Wesley or Francis Asbury, they are important because they represent the range of positions on slavery and how it evolved over time within the Methodist church.

The scholarship on the Methodist church and its relation to slavery and politics is extensive. Historians like Donald Matthews, John Norwood, Lucius Matlack, Anne Loveland and Mitchell Snay have written about the role of slavery and the Methodist church. While they have addressed the 1844 split in detail, the goal of this paper is to expand on their work, particularly on Donald Matthews' assertion that the problem of slavery was present in the Methodist church from its inception. On the other hand, church historians like Richard Cameron and Norman Spellman look at the Methodist church split as dividing over slavery, but they believe the issues of church governance played a significant factor in the split. This issue did not develop suddenly in the 1800s but was always a looming presence in the church that manifested itself through different church disciplines, different political affiliations and eventually the separation of the church. By focusing specifically on Freeborn Garrettson, William Capers and James Osgood Andrew, the experience of these three men serves as a microcosm on how the Methodist church addressed the issue of slavery. This study begins in 1784 as the starting point because that is when the Methodist church official was formed, while 1844 is the endpoint as that was the year of the split. The Methodist church had a complicated relationship among the bishops and the church, which made the issue of slavery more complicated.

Attitudes toward black enslavement were dramatically different before and after the American Revolution. Before the revolution, slavery was viewed primarily through an economic lens. Though Methodists, along with Quakers, took an early stand against slavery in the late colonial period, their views were not widely accepted throughout the colonies. The American Revolution posed a serious question about the existence of slavery. How could a nation that just recently claimed that all men had natural rights to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness embrace a system that took freedom away from other human beings? The ownership of slaves was not compatible with a republican form of government or the future of the republic. As historian John Patrick Daly argues, many Americans believed slavery would simply die out within their improved political system: “what was good would prosper and what was evil would fail as Providence was given free rein to teach America its moral lessons.” However, white Southerners of the prevented the institution of dying out naturally. Instead, slavery became the singular focus of sectionalism in the nineteenth century.⁶

The American Revolution also brought about the creation of a distinct “church and state” relationship that would change the way new denominations like the Methodists operated. With the onset of religious freedom and the disestablishment of the Anglican church, American Methodists, according to historian Dee Andrews, appeared “rather as potentially devouring offspring” compared to their British counterparts.⁷ Now independent of their “mother” church, the American Methodist church had to create its own church polity within a newly formed democratic society. Part of this environment

⁶ Mitchell Snay, *Gospel of Disunion: Religion and the Rise of Southern Separatism, 1830-1861* (Durham, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1984), 2.

⁷ Dee E. Andrews, *The Methodists and Revolutionary America, 1760-1800 The Shaping of an Evangelical Culture* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010), 70.

included discussions over the morality of slavery. Evangelicals and non-evangelicals alike questioned this institution during the revolutionary era. John Wesley's vehement attacks on slavery utilized natural rights ideology that would be familiar to Americans: "I strike at the root of this complicated villainy. I absolutely deny all slave-holding to be consistent with any degree of even natural justice."⁸ He also condemned all those who participated in the slave trade; he argued that "*men-buyers* are exactly on a level with *men-stealers*."⁹

In the post-revolutionary era, the American Methodist church flourished. Through its itinerant preaching system, it spread from British Canada through the southern states and the western territories. Although the church developed as a single body, sectional tension regarding slavery emerged early. Slavery would become the dividing point between the northern and southern members. This situation would devolve as the sectional tensions in the United States escalated after 1820. Eventually, the relationship between southern proslavery Methodists and northern abolitionist Methodists would be untenable, and the church would split in 1844 over the structure of the general conference and role of bishops.¹⁰ But the real issue would be over whether slavery would be tolerated by the church or not.

The Methodist preacher Freeborn Garrettson represents the moral dilemma of slavery facing Americans during the revolutionary period. Garrettson freed his slaves

⁸ Wesley, *Thoughts upon Slavery* 35.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 54.

¹⁰ The General Conference for the Methodist church met every four years, while the annual conferences met every year. The annual conferences elected delegates to attend the general conference. The bishops (or superintendents before it was changed in 1784), assigned itinerant preaching routes and took care of general church issues. Slaveholders could be delegates but could not be bishops. Anyone could be a delegate at the general conferences.

when converting to Methodism in 1775 from his family's Anglican faith. While the Anglicans had a say in the affairs of the government as the Church in England, the Methodist church did not have the same luxury in America. Methodism quickly outgrew the Anglican church along with all the other pre-Revolutionary denominations, such as the Congregationalists, which was by the far the largest denomination before the American Revolution with over 668 congregations.¹¹ Congregationalists would fall by the wayside as the Methodists and the Baptists surged by them in members and congregations.

William Capers and James Osgood Andrew, who came of age a generation later than Garrettson, represent changing national sentiment towards slavery. For them, it was a solely a political issue. Capers would be a staunch proslavery advocate, while Andrew would be hesitant to fully embrace the southern cause. All three men were southerners, slave owners and prominent leaders within the Methodist church, but radically different perspectives of slavery can be seen in their lives. These three men represent the transition of Methodism from a small sect to a large national church that encompassed people from different economic and social backgrounds. This transition would cause irrevocable differences within the Methodist church.

As the new nation became more established after 1800, slavery moved from being primarily a moral issue to a political one. The American Revolution had caused slavery to be viewed as immoral due to the political ethos of the new nation. Public division over slavery would come to the fore during Congressional debate over the Missouri

¹¹ Roger Finke and Rodney Stark, *The Churching of America: 1776-1990: Winners and Losers in Our Religious Economy* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers Univ. Press, 1997). 23.

Compromise of 1820. This was continued with the Pinckney Resolutions in 1836 that started what was known as the “gag rule,” an attempt to avoid any discussions of slavery in Congress. In 1840, the gag rule was pushed even further with the Twenty-First Rule, which disallowed the House of Representatives receiving any petitions involving slavery. Slavery switched from an abstract concept to a political debate in Congress to a full-fledged sectional battle.

In the wake of the American Revolution, many northern states began to move toward a policy of the gradual emancipation of slavery. Though Vermont was the only state to outlaw slavery in its state constitution in 1777, other states followed suit; Pennsylvania in 1780 and New York in 1799. New England in particular would become the center of abolitionist movement. Conversely, many southern states, particularly those represented by Capers (South Carolina) and Andrew (Georgia) had notoriously strict manumission laws. Slaves could only be freed by legislative acts, which essentially allowed slavery to thrive in these states. In 1790, Maryland enacted a law regarding the freeing of slaves by last will and testament, but it did not have harsh manumission laws as the other two southern states. An 1801 Georgia law prevented the manumission of “negro slaves except by a Legislative Act.” In 1815, last will and testaments were disregarded by the state if they only freed slaves.¹² South Carolina passed laws forcing freed African-Americans to leave the state or they would be enslaved. These slave laws were a legacy of the Stono slave rebellion in 1740 that made the harsh treatment of slaves much more acceptable. Although there were limitations to this treatment, violence against

¹² Betty Wood, "Slavery in Colonial Georgia," *New Georgia Encyclopedia*, September 19, 2012, accessed March 25, 2018, <https://www.georgiaencyclopedia.org/articles/history-archaeology/slavery-colonial-georgia>.

enslaved blacks still continued.¹³ The Stono Rebellion caused manumissions to drop dramatically due to the Negro Act in 1740.¹⁴ By the time of the American Revolution, slavery had been long entrenched in southern society through law, but also through an ideal of paternalism as a way of Christianizing the slaves.¹⁵

The antebellum South was built on the back of African-Americans slaves with wide-ranging reactions in the new nation ranging from silent acceptance to abolitionist outrage. Although gradual emancipation took place in northern states, southern states clung to their system of enslaved labor. The variety of opinions on the institution of slavery differed in the early republic; this diversity was also reflected in the new Methodist church. Slavery would be critically important to southern ideas of economic and religious philosophies.¹⁶ Southerners built their economic and social identity on slavery. Removing slavery from their lives would create an irreplaceable void that would inevitably cause chaos. An issue with the Methodist church in its infancy was the interaction with the wealthy elite. “Methodism, in short, was a movement designed for the lower and middling ranks in society, to be controlled by a missionary fraternity rather than vestry like trustees”¹⁷ Unlike the Anglican church who received money from England, the Methodists had to have a very limited budget in the beginning. The early Methodists were not as concerned with money but more with church activity. Slave owners were usually middle or upper class, which Methodists distrusted. There was a tension between the slaveholder’s wealth and the overall mission of the Methodist

¹³ Peter H. Wood, *Black Majority Negroes in Colonial South Carolina: From 1670 through the Stono Rebellion* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1996), 103.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Brown, *Moral*: 58.

¹⁶ Ibid., 3.

¹⁷ Andrews, *The Methodists and Revolutionary* 159.

church. The Methodist's mission was to evangelize to the slaves, which could lead to outcomes such as an increasing demand for freedom that ran counter to the goal of the slaveholders. The mission to the slaves with oversight by the slaveholder was the compromise made between the wealthy slaveholders and Methodist preachers.

Regardless if it was over pay for itinerant preachers, the structure of church hierarchy, the role of bishops or the legality of owning slaves, the Methodist church experienced significant sectional tension from the beginning. In the history of the early Methodist church, the issue of slavery loomed in the background of any conflict. As the founder of the Methodist Church, John Wesley, was a strong and undeniable advocate for freeing slaves and ending the slave trade. His *Thoughts on Slavery* generally summed this up "Freedom is unquestionably the birth right of all mankind; *Africans* as well as *Europeans*: to keep the former in a state of slavery, is a constant violation of that right, and therefore also of justice."¹⁸ Wesley's antislavery heritage was no doubt an influence on the early American church, but the American church did not respond as emphatically as Wesley hoped. Donald G Matthews attributes this to the lack of resistance towards slavery among Methodists in early America:

They failed partially because as evangelists they hoped to preach to both whites and blacks, an aspiration endangered by their antislavery enthusiasm. They also failed for other reasons, and these reasons are in part the story not only of Methodist but of America, its institutions and its social morality.¹⁹

¹⁸ Wesley, *Thoughts upon Slavery*, 79.

¹⁹ Donald G. Matthews, *Slavery and Methodism: A Chapter in American Morality, 1780-1845* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1965). 3.

Although America's religious heritage developed much differently compared to Great Britain, Wesley tried to maintain the connection between Great Britain and the United States by appointing Thomas Coke in 1784 as a superintendent to oversee American Methodists in the newly founded republic. John Wesley sent over two ministers to organize the early Methodist Church in the United States, Thomas Coke and Francis Asbury, who were polarizing characters in the early Methodist church.²⁰ Although originally from Great Britain, Asbury was relatively well liked by the prominent American ministers due to the democratic processes he installed in the general conferences. Asbury recognized the distinct difference between the Methodist church in America and Great Britain. Much like the new United States, there was no going back to Great Britain for the American Methodist church. Thomas Coke, on the other hand, ruffled some feathers. Coke was determined to make an impact and change the American Methodist church when he arrived in September 1784. Described as "Small of stature, somewhat inclined to corpulency, with ruddy complexion, piercing eyes, and melodious voice," Coke "did not always make the best impression upon the American preachers, who were inclined to consider him effeminate."²¹ In addition, he did not always mesh well with the American preachers due to his stringent antislavery positions. Coke thought the American Methodists were distinctly loyal to Wesley, which proved to be untrue. In the revolutionary spirit, the American Methodists began to separate themselves from their British brothers and sisters, which Asbury recognized but Coke did not. While Asbury allowed the preachers to vote on the separation in 1784 (which marked a turning

²⁰ L.C Rudolph, *Francis Asbury* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1983) 178.

²¹ William Warren Sweet, *The Story of Religion in America* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1983). 17.

point for the American church), Coke attempted to bring American Methodists back into the fold of the British Episcopal church, but this plan was never formulated.

Boke Coke and Asbury were antislavery advocates, but Coke actively antagonized slaveholders, along with pushing for extreme antislavery laws in the church's disciplines, while Asbury was more democratic in nature. Wesley had given both men control over the direction of the church, which inevitably caused trouble and confusion within the early denomination. Coke and Asbury butted heads, and Coke eventually returned to Great Britain. Asbury was ultimately the last vestige of a Wesley connection between the two nations. The American Revolution had unequivocally and permanently divided the British Methodist church and the American Methodist church. As all but two of the British preachers left to return to Great Britain, Francis Asbury was the only one to remain (along with a minister names James Dempster who switched denominations and became a Presbyterian).

Asbury ran into multiple issues while trying to organize the church. The Methodists had trouble developing a large following during these years because of the roots of the Methodist church in Britain. As Robert Simpsons says,

The name 'Methodist' in the colonies designated a set of newly-arrived British preachers who were propagating a British religious society. The Revolutionary mind naturally concluded that all Methodists were Loyalists. John Wesley's own anti-American attitude, as well as the behavior of some of his preachers, only served to justify such feelings.²²

²² Robert Drew Simpson, ed., *Freeborn Garretson: American Methodist Pioneer- the Life and Journals of the Rev. Freeborn Garretson* (Madison, NJ: Drew University, 1984). 4.

As an exceptional organizer, Asbury's strategy and system for the itinerant preachers allowed the Methodist to thrive in the new United States. He was able to shake the perception that all Methodist ministers were British puppets. In 1773, there were 10 Methodist preachers and 1,160 members. When Asbury died in 1816, membership ballooned to 214,235 with over 600 preachers.²³

The small size of early Methodists allowed them to pass stronger resolutions regarding slavery. Without much of a national following, the Methodist membership did not have much investment in slavery. An alternative for the Methodists was to forgo becoming a national church but remain a sectarian group that consistently opposed slavery. This option was much less profitable and would essentially cut the church off from gaining followers in the south; it might even threaten their missions in western territories. As Donald Matthews states, “[m]ore likely, however, such a small sect would have shrunk into obscurity or emigrated from the South, as did many anti-slavery Quakers, Methodists, Baptists, and ‘seceding’ Presbyterians. The Methodist clergy would have to make the choice between purity and popularity.”²⁴

The Methodist Episcopal church was officially conceived in 1784 at the Baltimore Conference dubbed the “Christmas Conference.” Early controversies in the Methodist church ranged from issues of church power structure, to the selection of bishops and slavery, which demonstrate that the church had a troubled beginning.²⁵ There

²³ Charles W. Ferguson, *Organizing to Beat the Devil: Methodists and the Making of America* (New York: Doubleday, 1971), 54.

²⁴ Matthews, *Slavery and Methodism*, 18.

²⁵ James O’Kelly was an influential preacher who disagreed heavily with Francis Asbury over the structure of the church. He advocated a Congregationalist form of church structure rather than the hierarchical episcopal structure. He attempted to reform the system at the 1792 General Conference that would have allowed preachers to petition the conference if they did not like their itinerant route. His attempt failed, and he subsequently started the Republican Methodist church the same year. The schism hurt church

was significant disruption in the issuing of the sacraments in America due to a lack of bishops. When the majority of Methodist bishops returned to Great Britain during the American Revolution, communion was not being distributed because no one was technically qualified to ordain bishops to distribute the bread and the wine. This caused a significant lag in the development of the Methodist church as the membership stalled.

Regardless of problems that seemed small in hindsight, such as the James O’Kelly schism, which would cause trouble in the future, the American Methodist church was plagued by controversy in its infancy that shaped the way the church developed. The issues with splitting from the Methodist church in Great Britain along with growing in membership and itinerant routes after the American Revolution proved to be doable for the Methodists. The Methodist church began to look at slavery differently in a different manner than the rest of the new nation. Asbury faced a problem: if he forcibly challenged slaveholders, they would possibly lose critical members and the wealth that came with them. This came to a head in 1796 at the General Conference. Matthews says about Asbury, “Although convinced that slavery should be regulated and finally abolished, he was determined that the action of the conference should not curtail the preaching of the Gospel. He was more than ever persuaded that Christianity would ‘soften’ the master’s attitudes towards the slaves.”²⁶ Even one of the staunchest anti-slavery advocates would occasionally buckle on the issue of slavery. The Methodist church took a hardened stance

membership by stunting its growth. O’Kelly was also a strong voice for abolitionism. He penned the work *Essay on Negro Slavery*, which condemned slavery and the church for allowing it to spread within their midst. See more in Elizabeth Georgian, “‘That Happy Division’: Reconsidering the Causes and Significance of the O’Kelly Schism,” *The Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* 120, no. 3 (2012):210-235.

²⁶ Matthews, *Slavery and Methodism*, 19.

against slavery in 1780, but by 1808 it allowed their annual conferences to judge for themselves how to deal with the issue. After 1808, slavery would prove to be a very contentious point between the northern and southern Methodists until they eventually split in 1844. The division between the northern and southern Methodists would widen in the mid-1800s due to the political polarization of the nation that would eventually affect the church, but sectional tension existed much earlier than that in the Methodist church.

Slavery, in the view of northern Methodists, was one of the greatest sources of evil, which they addressed in their discipline. In 1796, American Methodists pondered the question: “What regulations shall be made for the extirpation of the crying evil of African slavery?” The answers varied from statements on slavery being a moral evil, admonitions of slaveholders, exclusion of slave owners who sold slaves and reflections about slavery by the preachers and members to be discussed at annual meetings and the general conference. In 1800, a clause was added to the general rules. It says,

When any traveling preaching becomes an owner of a slave or slaves, by any means, he shall forfeit his ministerial character in the Methodist Episcopal Church, unless he execute, it if it be practicable [sic], a legal instrument of emancipation of such slave or slaves, conformably to the laws of the state in which he lives.²⁷

Along with this, a separate discipline was created for the Methodists south of Virginia in 1804.²⁸ There was a massive shift in the ideology surrounding slavery between the end of the American Revolution and the separation of the church discipline in 1804 that

²⁷ Matthews, *Slavery and Methodism*, 300.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 206.

completely removed the “Section on Slavery.” The rest of the discipline was the same, but the hope was to avoid isolating or expelling southerners who had their economic fortune intrinsically tied to slavery. As the church grew, the southerners played a prominent role in not only the financial aspects of the church, but the majority of the Methodist church membership resided in the south.

The Discipline’s reference to slavery would play an integral role in this debate for the next sixty years. In 1790, the Methodist church numbered 57,858 with an American population around 4 million people.²⁹ 57,858 is not necessarily a number to scoff at considering that the United States consisted of 14 states, but Methodism did not play a significant role in political discourse at the time. It was much easier to come down on a moral high ground while staying primarily apolitical. Apolitical, in this situation, was necessary due to the lack of political unity within the church. The Methodists never were explicitly loyal to one political party due to the increasing church size, and as the itinerant preaching routes grew smaller, individual ministers became more associated with regions and different political groups.³⁰ Despite its rapid growth over the next few decades the M.E.C. confronted serious challenges. David Brion Davis says, “The Methodists faced obstacles even greater than those the Quakers had overcome. They were not an exclusive, self-contained sect with intricate ties of communication and endogamous marriage.”³¹ The Quakers were strong in their antislavery beliefs. The Methodists, however, were not

²⁹ "United Methodist Membership Statistics," Archives and History, accessed April 23, 2018, <http://www.gcah.org/history/united-methodist-membership-statistics>. 1.

³⁰ Matthews, *Slavery and Methodism*, 24.

³¹ David Brion Davis, *The Problem of Slavery in the Age of Revolution: 1770-1823* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 206.

a familial sect or lived together in communities; they were spread out, constantly moving, and growing.

This gargantuan growth in membership would undoubtedly cause a relatively apolitical church to begin to splinter under newfound political tensions growing due to issues like slavery. This apolitical nature would reverse itself quickly as the church grew larger, expanded further into the South and took a more prominent national position. The Methodists always wanted to affect change at the national level, but they never endorsed a political party as an institution; members could join whatever political party they wanted. Even during one of the first conference in 1784 in Baltimore, tension grew between Wesley and the American conference over the founder's power. The American Methodists wanted to separate themselves from the British Methodists for good and show Asbury that he was not their unquestioned king.³²

Early Methodism attracted the lowly classes within the church, but this caused issues from the sect's survival. Wealthy men were needed to rent buildings, build new churches and donate funds. Wealthy men in Virginia, Maryland, and Delaware, at least before the manumissions after the American Revolution, were slaveowners or had connections to the slave trade. Freeborn Garrettson would fall into this category, as he was in the upper middle class who owned slaves. Wealthy members were necessary for the early church's survival. As Dee Andrews argues:

For the itinerants, there was always the danger that they wealthy men in the movement would, as Asbury put it, "decrease in grace" and move on to other

³² James E. Kirby, *The Methodists* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1998). 8.

associations, leaving the Methodists with a strong workingmen's contingent but without the material resources that kept churches afloat.³³

The churches needed money to maintain missions, which the Methodists believed was the backbone of their church. Wesley and the other early Methodists did not want to sacrifice their morals for an abundance of wealthy through unsavory practices. In essence, the early Methodist church did not want to trade their moral sanctity for gaining wealth. As the addition of more middle class and rich southerners, like Garrettson and Capers, started to gain prominent positions, the opinions about slavery within the church began to evolve from its earlier positions. This is seen in the 1808 General Conference, which allowed each annual conference to make their own rules regarding slavery, essentially reversing the anti-slavery heritage of the church. The Methodists were growing in the south, which made the language used against slave owners not as harsh as it once was.³⁴

Out of the three major religious denominations emerging in the nineteenth century, Methodist and Baptist both had political diverse congregations, while Presbyterians had a more wealthy, northern pull and appeal.³⁵ The political and racial diversity of the Methodist church played an important role in its struggle with slavery and the rapidly changing and polarizing political landscape of the antebellum United States. Freeborn Garrettson, James Osgood Andrew and William Capers show the difference between pre-American Revolution beliefs regarding slavery and the theories that developed in the early nineteenth century. The Methodists began to generally shrink away from the challenge of addressing this institution aside from pockets of abolitionist

³³ Andrews, *The Methodists and Revolutionary America*, 161.

³⁴ Matthews, *Slavery and Methodism*, 24.

³⁵ Richard Carwardine, "Methodists, Politics, and the Coming of the American Civil War," *Church History* 69, no. 3 (September 2000). 592.

resistance in the north. By the 1820s, the abolition of slavery took a backseat to church unity. By the turn of the nineteenth century, the Methodist church was a growing denomination that had extensive reach in the new nation, but by 1844, it was a massive church that embodied the sectional polarization that the country was experiencing at the same time. The Methodist church would dissolve into bitter section disputes, battles through newspapers and journals, and boycotting preaching in the opposing region.

Freeborn Garrettson represents the first generation of American Methodists, who took a hard line toward slavery before the church did in the 1820s. By the time Capers and Andrew became ministers, conditions had changed significantly in a short period of time. Garrettson lived in a much different world than both Capers and Andrew.

Garrettson was a dedicated minister who spent his entire life preaching and trying to spread the Gospel to people on the peripheral of society. Capers and Andrew came into an established and strong church. Capers and Andrew were not as concerned with itinerant preaching as Garrettson, but instead focused their work on spreading the Gospel to slaves and Native Americans. As a philosophy teacher, Capers was also concerned with preserving the southern way of life. Capers and Andrew did not suffer the same persecutions that Freeborn Garrettson. While slaveowners like William Capers and James Osgood Andrew suffered criticism from northern abolitionists, Freeborn Garrettson suffered persecutions related to his stance on the American Revolution. Garrettson experienced harassment in the form of violence, jail time, and threats, while Capers and Andrew were excluded from northern congregations.³⁶

³⁶ Matthews, *Slavery and Methodism*, 63. Both Methodists and Baptists faced persecution before the American Revolution. Baptists faced persecution for their ties to England in the years leading up to the American Revolution.

The story of these three white, southern ministers fall into the two categories. Garrettson fought against slavery when Methodists were a small sect, while Capers and Andrew accepted slavery and attempted to Christianize their slaves, along with organizing missions to enslaved blacks. While Garrettson is representative of the first phase of the church's development, Capers and Andrew epitomize the second phase of early Methodist history. Garrettson represented a different worldview surrounding the role of the Methodist church mixing with the government to create better and more just laws. Capers (and Andrew to a certain degree) represented the idea that the Methodist church should adhere to civil laws and keep the church and state separate. Slavery, in the eyes of some southerners, was perceived as a civil problem. If slavery was outlawed, the government was overstepping its bounds into a Bible-approved institution. If slavery was legal, the goal of the Methodist church was to preach and spread the Gospel. The true importance of the church was to evangelize and create followers rather than deal in political debates.

The Methodist church, at times, reflected larger themes happening within the America. As the United States gained its independence and began expanding, the Methodists were already working to send preachers around the new nation. As westward expansion began after the American Revolution, the Methodist church saw the opportunity to send missionaries to the western frontier, along with starting mission societies to the enslaved African-Americans as well as Native Americans. Their evangelical vigor would set them apart from their counterparts, such as the Anglicans or Presbyterians. As southern fears flared in response to events like the insurrections of Denmark Vesey in 1822 and Nat Turner in 1831, the church experienced its own

sectional tensions. As the American Congress tried to quell the debate over slavery in the antebellum era, the Methodists had been trying to dissuade abolitionists and avoid the issue of slavery altogether within their own church government. The Methodist church did not necessarily “predict” the national division over slavery, but there is a certain amount of correspondence between the rising sectionalism within the United States and what occurred in the Methodist church (also with the Baptist split that took place one year later). This split was spurred on by southerners who thought the south was superior economically, socially, and morally.

John C. Calhoun, an Episcopalian and prominent southern politician, was representative of southern society. In his infamous “Slavery a Positive Good” speech in 1837, Calhoun says:

I hold that in the present state of civilization, where two races of different origin, and distinguished by color, and other physical differences, as well as intellectual, are brought together, the relation now existing in the slaveholding States between the two, is, instead of an evil, a good—a positive good.³⁷

The slavery as a positive good theory became popular among southerners in response to attacks by northern abolitionists. Many southern Methodists like William Capers were defiantly pro-slavery as a Biblically-based institution. Their views mirrored those other prominent southern politicians like Calhoun and Henry Clay, who took an exceptional notice of the 1844 split. Calhoun even offered to meet with the southern defender of

³⁷ John C. Calhoun, "Slavery a Positive Good" (speech, February 6, 1837). 1.

slavery, William Capers, after the General Conference in New York in 1844, which led to a conspiracy that Calhoun had a hand in the dissolution of the Methodist church.³⁸

The split of the Methodist church in 1844 was not a sudden event, but a gradual process that made the split almost inevitable. Slavery was gradually splitting the church apart. There was no constitutional change or resolution that would solve the sectional crisis. This was not just an isolated event (like the Hicksite schism among Quakers in 1828); it had national repercussions due to the size and pervasiveness of the Methodist church throughout the country. In 1776, the Methodists only 4,921 members.³⁹ The membership exploded in the following decades with membership reaching 65,181 in 1800, 175,088 in 1810, 268,728 in 1820, 501,298 in 1830, and 894,753 in 1840. The church would reach well over a million members on the eve of the Civil War.⁴⁰ The denominational strength and prominence of the Methodist church, and its split, would undoubtedly cause shockwaves throughout the country.

The Methodist church grew heavily in the mid-Atlantic region in its origin, which encroached on southern territories that needed slavery for their economic livelihood. Although states like Pennsylvania and Massachusetts were the first states to institute the gradual abolition of slavery, Maryland and New Jersey lagged behind. New Jersey had instituted gradual emancipation in 1804, but it would take the Civil War to finally abolish slavery. New York abolished slavery in 1827. After the revolution, the laws about slavery began changing, which affected the Methodists. Early Methodist interaction in Maryland

³⁸ John Nelson Norwood, *The Schism in the Methodist Episcopal Church, 1844: A Study of Slavery and Ecclesiastical Politics* (Philadelphia: Porcupine Press, 1976). 183.

³⁹ Finke and Stark, *The Churching of America*, 25.

⁴⁰ "United Methodist Membership Statistics," Archives and History, accessed April 23, 2018, <http://www.gcah.org/history/united-methodist-membership-statistics>.

were not always received warmly. Methodists, due to their British heritage, were not trusted by Americans during the American Revolutionary War. In 1776, there were only sixty-five Methodist congregations in the United States. The Methodists were significantly outnumbered by Congregationalists, Presbyterians, Baptists, Anglicans, and even German and Dutch Reformed Churches.⁴¹ Refusing to sign pledges of oath to the state, the Methodists were tarred and feathered, and chased out of town. Freeborn Garrettson experienced beatings, imprisonment, and was almost hanged by an extremely volatile mob in 1778.⁴² There was no doubt that Methodists anti-slavery stance, along with their non-allegiance to the American cause and spiritual equality with African-Americans, portrayed them in an unfavorable light.

In addition to tension between slave owners and Methodist preachers, there was a palpable tension among members who saw no problem with the institution of slavery and those who thought the peculiar institution was abhorrent. The first group of Methodists believed that slavery adhered to the law and the second group thought slavery was beyond human law and egregious to society. State laws in the United States, did not only allow for slavery to exist, but it protected slave owners from forced manumissions, allowed freed slaves to be re-enslaved, forbade slaves from physically fighting back against their owners, and banned them from learning how to read and write. The institution of slavery was guaranteed by the laws of the early Republic.

One of the fundamental questions confronting Methodists in the early republic was how could a good Christian willingly own another human being? Many prominent

⁴¹ Finke and Stark, *The Churching of America*, 25

⁴² Robert Drew Simpson, *Freeborn Garrettson: American Methodist Pioneer- the Life and Journals of the Rev. Freeborn Garrettson* (Madison, NJ: Drew University, 1984). 4

southerners that rose to prominence before the Civil War, such as John C. Calhoun, Henry Clay, and John Henry Hammond, saw no wrong with “the peculiar institution” and they worked to solidify slavery’s position in American society. They saw this institution as economically superior as well as morally superior, compared to the poor wages and living conditions witnessed in northern factories. Methodist men such as James Osgood Andrew, William Capers and Freeborn Garrettson, represented a range of approaches. Garrettson did not believe a God-fearing Christian could own another human being. William Capers, not only owned slaves, but defended the morality of this institution, and he refused to give up his slaves to become a bishop in the Methodist church. Capers eventually became a bishop in the Methodist Episcopal Church, South in 1844. Lastly, James Osgood Andrew married into a family that owned slaves, thus taking away his ineligibility to become a bishop. Although there is controversy about whether or not he had purchased slaves before his marriage (which will be covered later), Andrew became the focal point of the 1844 Methodist church split that fractured the church into the Methodist Episcopal Church, South and the Methodist Episcopal Church. Although Andrew offered to pull his name out of contention to become a bishop, he became the unintended scapegoat for the sectional fight over slavery in the Methodist church.

All three men played prominent roles within the church before the Civil War. Capers and Andrew were not the only ones who participated in the mission to the slaves and Native Americans, nor was Freeborn Garrettson the only person to free his slaves after converting to Methodism, but these three men played an integral role in the development of sectional controversies within the church.⁴³ While Garrettson was born in

⁴³ There were a number of manumissions in response to the Methodist movement in the late 1700s, along with influence from the American Revolution. Richard Bassett, who was a state senator from Delaware,

Maryland in 1752, Capers was born in South Carolina in 1790, and Andrew was born in Georgia in 1794. The generational difference is important in light of the changing attitudes towards slaves in the early Republic. As Capers and Andrew were coming into adulthood, the attitude towards slavery had shifted significantly in the United States. Capers and Andrew would have had a tougher time freeing their slaves if they wanted to do so. When these two men entered the ministry in 1830, slavery had become deeply entrenched; it had been established and preserved by law to maintain social order.

When Freeborn Garrettson entered adulthood, slavery, as an institution and the national attitude towards it, was changing. By the time Capers and Andrew came of age, attitude towards slavery were viewed through a different lens; one focused more on Christianizing the slaves than trying to obtain political equality for them. Abolitionists, like Orange Scott and La Roy Sunderland, were trying to ensure blacks had the same rights as white men. Abolitionists were a greater danger to the church than the morality of slavery. By the 1830s, abolitionists were seen as polluting the church by making it a political weapon and straying away from spreading the Gospel.⁴⁴ The historian Ann Loveland says, “Another argument which evangelicals offered to explain the doctrine of noninterference had to do with the nature and office of the church. They contended that ‘the root of the error of abolitionists’ was that they made Christianity ‘a scene of revolutions’ and the church its agent.”⁴⁵ Men like Capers and Andrew saw greater evil in the actions of men like Orange Scott (a Methodist minister and staunch abolitionist from

freed his slaves. Methodist ministers Thomas Airey and Philip Gatch were high profile cases of manumission.

⁴⁴ Anne C. Loveland, *Southern Evangelicals and the Social Order, 1800-1860* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1980). 120.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 205.

Vermont) and William Lloyd Garrison than they did in the institution of slavery.

Southern Methodists consistently fought any attempt by the church to make slavery an issue.

The Methodist church was the quickest growing church in the United States during the antebellum period. This growth came an increasing set of problems including growing abolitionism in the north in the 1830s, staunch southern defense of slaveholding that was a problem even before the American church was established in 1784 and increasing sectional tensions that would eventually split the church in 1844. There was antislavery sentiment in the church that could be attributed to the British Methodists like Wesley, Asbury, and Thomas Coke, but southerners would eventually outlast antislavery British Methodists due to the exodus of British preachers during the American Revolution and Asbury's death in 1816. Slavery would be tolerated by the Methodist church but would cause tremendous problems for both the southern and northern Methodists.

Chapter Two

Freeborn Garrettson

Historically, John Wesley, Francis Asbury, and Thomas Coke were strict British anti-slavery advocates and were all integral parts to the American Methodist church in its infancy (to varying degrees), but Freeborn Garrettson played an important role in the development of antislavery thought in the early Methodist church in America. Garrettson was a tireless and persistent worker for the church. He traveled throughout the United States and Canada and held a strong antislavery position on a strict Biblical basis. He was part of the first generation of Methodists that was integral to the rapid growth movement and expansion throughout the colonies. Without formal pastoral training, Garrettson was able to still exert a great influence wherever he preached. He had lived through the early, tumultuous period and began to see the explosion of memberships through the early 1800s. Garrettson helped gather church preachers for the Methodist conference in Maryland, in addition to being highly regarded by the British preachers. He was also important because of his conversion experience and the actions he took almost immediately afterwards. Freeing his slaves would leave a lasting impact on his view on slavery; his persistence on the matter would make him an important figure in the early Methodist church.

The American Methodist church never embraced the anti-slavery sentiments that engulfed the Methodists on the British side to the same degree. Francis Asbury obviously played an important role in the development of the Methodist church, and he especially influenced Freeborn Garrettson's antislavery sentiment. Coming over from Great Britain in 1771 at age 26, Asbury would spend the next 45 years of his life in American

leading the Methodist church. Initially, Asbury was of equal status to newly arrived Thomas Rankin and Thomas Whatcoat, but this all changed during the mass exodus of Methodist preachers during the American Revolution.⁴⁶ Many Americans distrusted Methodists due to John Wesley's loyalty to the crown. Methodists were seen as Tories and potentially dangerous in a war that was trying to push the British out their American colonies. As the only bishop in the new United States, Asbury assumed the highest rank in the United States. One of the early problems for the Methodist church was its reliance on John Wesley and the organizational structure of the church before the revolution. The historian James Kirby gives credit to Asbury's leadership for the prosperity of the Methodist Church: "[p]erhaps the most important single step taken by Asbury in shaping the nature of American Methodism and its episcopacy was calling the preachers together and agreeing in advance to abide by their decision."⁴⁷ The Methodists church used the common lay preacher as an effective tool for growth. William Mckendree expanded Methodist influence during the westward expansion of the nation, while letting young preachers be able to preach as they were called.⁴⁸

Although the General Conference in 1780 at Baltimore issued a denunciation on the issue of slavery, it would lose strength in the next two decades. Asbury wrote a strong antislavery statement that included providing religious instructions and hopefully

⁴⁶ Richard Whatcoat was the third bishop in the American Methodist church. He was appointed elder by John Wesley and he sailed to America with Thomas Coke. He was elected bishop in 1800. Whatcoat, Coke, Asbury and Thomas Rankin were all on equal footing in the American church. Whatcoat died in Delaware in 1806 and Rank returned to England in 1777 after clashing with American Methodists. These four men all had considerable sway within the early Methodist church in America, but Asbury would eventually be the one to stay and oversee the development of the Methodist Episcopal Church.

⁴⁷ James E. Kirby, *The Methodists* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1998), 6.

⁴⁸ William Warren Sweet, *The Story of Religion in America* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1983), 220.

allow for gradual emancipation.⁴⁹ This is important not only for the pressure it put on Methodist slaveholders, but also the direction of the Methodist Church this statement wished to put forward. Asbury's hope for the Methodist church would take a similar path to the British Methodist church in its hatred of slavery but in a milder form than those of radical abolitionists.⁵⁰

Methodist preachers were not as educated as other major denominations in the late 1700s. With no educational requirement to preach, Methodists rapidly spread due to an abundance of clergymen.⁵¹ Without the burden of established colleges to produce a highly intellectual class of clergymen, the Methodists did not face some of the issues other denominations faced. As a bishop, Asbury had the arduous task of corralling Methodist preachers into a structured church, while also trying to preserve the antislavery position of the church. Asbury's antislavery beliefs had both a positive and negative impact on the early preachers in the Methodist church. The antislavery heritage of the Methodist church put it at odds with southerners who thought slavery was Biblically sanctioned. The social order was at stake for many southerners in the mid-1800s who were desperately trying to preserve their way of life. Anne Loveland puts it well regarding slavery and the southern order:

If, as southern evangelicals contended, slavery was sanctioned by the word of God, then the role of the church in the slavery controversy was clear. Evangelicals opposed what they regarded as the scriptural view of the church's role to the

⁴⁹ Matthews, *Slavery and Methodism*, 8.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 7.

⁵¹ Roger Finke and Rodney Stark, *The Churching of America: 1776-1990: Winners and Losers in Our Religious Economy* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers Univ. Press, 1997), 79.

unscriptural one advocated by the abolitionists. They argued that since slavery was not a sin, the church had no reason to take cognizance of it, and since it was established and protected my civil law, the church had no right to interfere with it.⁵²

Southern Methodists continued grasp to the idea of the church not interfering with state affair.

The development of slavery was established well before Methodism was introduced in America. In 1750, there were 236,420 (both free and enslaved) African-Americans in the United States. By 1790, the number of slaves ballooned to 681,777, which was around a third of all Southerners living in the United States. In South Carolina alone in 1860, enslaved African-Americans counted 412,320, while the free white population was only around 291,300.⁵³ Although slave ownership eventually condensed itself into a very small percentage of men and women who owned the majority of slaves, deep south states thrived off the rising cotton industry, which allowed slavery to survive. Slavery was deeply ingrained in the societies that needed the labor for their economic needs during the colonial period. Southerners were very dedicated to preserving their way of life. The Methodists, although they were quickly becoming the largest denomination in the country, were succumbing to the pull of slavery advocates. By 1850, Methodists had a 34.2% share of all religious adherents in the United States, but many within the Methodist church strayed away from its antislavery heritage.⁵⁴ The Methodist church was on the rise, which led to greater national prominence and a greater influence in American

⁵² Loveland, *Southern Evangelicals*, 202.

⁵³ Statistics on Slavery, accessed April 22, 2018, http://faculty.weber.edu/kmackay/statistics_on_slavery.htm. 1

⁵⁴ Finke and Stark, *The Churching of America*. 55.

society the mid-1800s. This national prominence led some to stray from the antislavery heritage. Some, like Freeborn Garrettson, however, did not waver on his opposition to black enslavement.

Freeborn Garrettson was born into a wealthy family. His father's grandfather had been one of the original settlers in Maryland.⁵⁵ His family lineage included owning a profitable business, multiple slaves, and a familiar name, Garrettson's life was much better than a majority of other people within his community. With this traditionally "good" southern life, he had the privilege of attending school and studying a litany of subjects important for a southern gentleman. He would have most likely ended up become an elite plantation owner with multiple slaves. In actuality, it turned out to be rather useless for his life calling. His parents, without a doubt, gave Freeborn every opportunity for a prosperous and well-rounded secular life. The fact that he ended up as one of the disciples of Francis Asbury and to Nova Scotia, Canada, on ministry was extremely surprising. In Canada, Garrettson would become one of the most influential preachers on par with John Wesley and Francis Asbury.⁵⁶ If it were not due to tragedy in his early life, Garrettson's life might have turned out drastically different. The death of his mother, Sarah Merriarter, at age 10 and the death of his father at age 21 guided Garrettson down a path towards the Bible and the ministry. His sister's death in Freeborn's early childhood ultimately pushed him towards the Methodist church. In his journal, Garrettson recalled the scene at her deathbed: "The family were called together and were in a flood of tears: 'Weep not for,' said she, "for I am not afraid to die. I am

⁵⁵ Simpson, *Freeborn Garrettson.*, 38.

⁵⁶ George A. Rawlyk, *The Canada Fire: Radical Evangelicalism in British North America, 1775-1812* (Montréal: McGill-Queens University Press, 2014), 45.

going to my Jesus; who will do more for me than any of you can do.” I believe her soul was happy. And the affecting exhortation which gave will never be forgotten by me.”⁵⁷ The death of sister and the apparent joy in her suffering made a lasting impact on Garrettson. This religious commitment inspired him, even though he was not sure what direction his religious life would take.

Growing up near the Chesapeake Bay in Maryland, his parents were nominally part of the Anglican church, which had been the official church of the colony since 1692. Multiple denominations were at vying for membership in the early colonial period. The Quakers, Presbyterians, Methodists, Baptists, and Anglicans were major denominations within early Maryland, and all had sizeable congregations. His family was religious in the sense that they attended church, which was typical of Maryland gentry. Garrettson’s mother took him to Anglican services, but his continued attendance into did not bring the spiritual awakening. He began to attend Methodist town meetings during in the 1760s. It was the Methodist preacher, Robert Strawbridge, who brought about the spiritual awakening he longed for. In hindsight, it is surprising Garrettson was intrigued by Methodism. His father was strongly anti-Methodist because he felt that it was an “evil manifestation of anti-sectarian enthusiasm.”⁵⁸ The Methodists’ anti-slavery stance, their itinerant style and pastoral method did not necessarily correlate with Garrettson’s wealthy lifestyle. Being a traveling iterant preacher would not sustain the wealth of the Freeborn family. Although Anglican ministers were compensated relatively well, early Methodist preachers struggled financially. As a circuit rider, a Methodist preacher had to rely on

⁵⁷ Simpson, *Freeborn Garrettson*, 39.

⁵⁸ George A. Rawlyk, *The Canada Fire: Radical Evangelicalism in British North America, 1775-1812* (Montréal: McGill-Queens University Press, 2014), 45.

congregants for lodging, meals and financial support. Preaching would be a significant step down compared to the lucrative business ventures that his family possessed.⁵⁹ His family had numerous slaves that helped at their general store and worked in the fields, with whom Garrettson interacted during his childhood. His upbringing around slavery had an impact on the persistence of his ministry. As Robert Drew Simpson says,

The fight against slavery became one of Garrettson's primary crusades. He preached, wrote, and fought for abolition of slavery at great cost to himself.

This issue provided a concrete means of expressing his spiritual conversion and pilgrimage. And his actions on behalf of the black people set the stage for a lifetime of practical, humanitarian service which reached ultimately into many areas of human concern.⁶⁰

Garrettson's conversion experience was extremely important in the development of his antislavery position.

Much like typical conversion stories of this time period, Freeborn Garrettson experienced all-consuming guilt before his conversion. His conversion experience provided a titanic shift in his thinking. In early 1775, Garrettson became the head of his household and experienced the pressures of being a wealthy, young, and slave-owning person.

He longed for a more personal encounter with God. An especially poignant argument with a Methodist triggered a strong reaction from Garrettson:

⁵⁹ Simpson, *Freeborn Garrettson*: 1.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 3.

The Methodist enthusiast asked Garrettson the quintessential evangelical question: was he born again? Garrettson simply and honestly replied, “I had hoped that I was.” “Do you know,” his interrogator then asked, ‘that your sins are forgiven’ ‘Do you know,” his interrogator then asked, ‘that your sins are forgiven?’ “No,” was the somewhat embarrassed response, “neither do I expect that knowledge in his word.” “I perceive,” responded the Methodist, “that you are in the broad road to hell, and if you die in this state you will be damned.”⁶¹

Doubt plagued Garrettson as he lacked the spiritual awakening in early 1775. Freeborn would finally give his life to Christ. In a dramatic fashion, he renounced his former life and chose to follow Jesus. He wrote about how that encounter with the Methodist affected him:

In this state I continued til June 1775. The blessed morning I shall never forget! In the night I went to bed as usual; and slept til day break- Just as I awoke, I was alarmed by an awful voice, “Awake, sinner, for you are not prepared to die.” This was as strongly impressed on my, as if it had been a human voice as loud as thunder. I was instantly smite with conviction in a manner I had not been before.⁶²

It would take a few more months for his full conversion, but this incident had left him shaken and searching for answers. Garrettson’s conversion would ultimately serving as a driving force behind his ministry.⁶³ Garrettson’s life choices had been driven by his interaction with God during his conversion. He had dedicated himself to God and was not

⁶¹ Rawlyk, *The Canada Fire*, 37.

⁶² Simpson, *Freeborn Garrettson*, 43.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 32.

turning back.⁶⁴ While young Garrettson was captivated by Robert Strawbridge, it was Francis Asbury who took Garrettson under his wing, which led to his ultimate conversion and future ministry. Asbury took a specific interest in Freeborn Garrettson for a variety of reasons. Garrettson had an extremely determined personality and a motivated preacher and organizer for the church. Throughout his preaching career, he traveled throughout Maryland, New York, and Nova Scotia, along with traveling 1600 miles in six weeks to gather preachers for the Baltimore Conference in 1784. Garrettson's enthusiasm for his new religion was evident when he found himself in trouble for organizing a meeting without the proper consent of the local itinerant preacher.⁶⁵

Asbury and Garrettson developed a close relationship throughout their lives. Freeborn Garrettson was invaluable to Asbury. He became his right hand during the American Revolution because of Asbury's precarious political position as an Englishman. Garrettson was a pacifist, and he wrote in his journal "It was contrary to my mind, and grievous to my conscience, to have any hand in shedding human blood."⁶⁶ Garrettson, like Asbury, did not want to get involved with the American Revolution. While Asbury hid out in Delaware, Garrettson took on a larger role in the administrative duties of the early Methodist church. Garrettson took the increased workload in stride though and became an integral piece to the Methodist church in its early phase. His leadership was highly regarded by the nineteenth century. Methodist historian Nathan Bangs believed Garrettson to be one of the most competent ministers of the American

⁶⁴ Ibid., 48

⁶⁵ Ibid., 50

⁶⁶ Ibid., 348.

Methodist church.⁶⁷ Garrettson's prominence in the early Methodist makes his position on slavery important because of the spread and influence of his ministry.

Freeborn Garrettson's importance to the early church is most evident in his position on slavery. Freeborn Garrettson believed that slavery was one of the worst injustices in the American colonies. Wherever he would stay on his ministerial trips, he noted if there were slaves and tried to avoid staying with slaveowners altogether.

Garrettson is generally credited for two firsts of the Methodist church. He was the first American Methodist to recount his life in an autobiography that focuses around his conversion experience.⁶⁸ Second, Garrettson was also one of the first American Methodists to free his slaves due to his own conviction.⁶⁹ "[T]he same blessed voice" that told him he was saved also spoke to him about slavery:

- till then I had never suspected that the practice of slave-keeping was wrong; I had not read a book on the subject, nor been told so by any- I paused a minute and then replied, "Lord, the oppressed shall go free." And I was clear of them in my mind, as if I had never owned on. I told them they did not belong to me, and that I did not desire their services without making them a compensation; and I was now at liberty to proceed with worship.⁷⁰

Garrettson's anti-slavery was unique in that it came innately. He was not well versed in the abolitionist literature of that day, nor was he part of any abolitionist society.⁷¹ He

⁶⁷ Simpson, *Freeborn Garrettson*, VIII.

⁶⁸ Rodger M. Payne, "Metaphors of the Self and the Sacred: The Spiritual Autobiography of the Rev. Freeborn Garrettson." *Early American Literature* 27, no. 1: 31. 45.

⁶⁹ John H. Wigger, *American Saint: Francis Asbury and the Methodists* (New York, NY: Oxford Univ. Press, 2012), 135.

⁷⁰ Simpson, *Freeborn Garrettson*, 48

⁷¹ He became well versed in the issues when he wrote *Dialogue between Do-Justice and Professing Christian*, which came well after he freed his slaves.

believed God spoke to him about this oppressive system and it was his duty as a Christian to free his slaves. In Garrettson's view, slave-owning prevented him from worshipping God and living with a clear consciousness. He lamented the Christians who owned slaves. He wrote:

It was God, not man, that taught me the impropriety of holding slaves: and I shall never be able to praise him enough for it. My very heart has bled, since that, for slave-holders, especially those who make a profession of religion, for I believe it to be a crying sin.⁷²

Garrettson's decision to free his slaves partly influenced his decision to join the Methodist church due to its antislavery stance. In addition, the Methodist church afforded him the opportunity to minister without going through seminary.⁷³

Garrettson drew some of his ideas for a book about slavery from Enlightenment ideals. He believed that slavery violated both God's law and natural law. In 1820, he wrote *A Dialogue Between Do-Justice and Professing Christian*. In this book, Garrettson issued a scathing report on the evil of slavery and how Christianity had been perverted by its allure. He believed that God intended man to be equal with each other through salvation in Christ. The impetus for this publication came from his experience with slaveholders. He served on circuits in North Carolina and Virginia in 1781, where he saw firsthand the impact of slavery on African-Americans. In this book two fictional men, named Do-Justice and Professing Christian, have a lively argument regarding slavery and its involvement with Christianity. Do-Justice takes the position of slavery violating God's

⁷² Simpson, *Freeborn Garrettson*, 48

⁷³ Roger Finke and Rodney Stark, *The Churching of America: 1776-1990: Winners and Losers in Our Religious Economy* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers Univ. Press, 1997), 73.

law and God's word. He speaks to Professing Christian in a kind way but takes a firm position against Christians owning slaves. He says,

My dear friend, no man can vest another with a right which he possesses not himself; and I Shall not hesitate to affirm, that in a state of nature, where all I have is equal rights, no individual can submit himself to the absolute disposal of another, without being guilt of the greatest crime.⁷⁴

Professing Christian responds with typical arguments made by southerners in the antebellum period. He claims that it was biblically sanctioned in the Old Testament, which recounted slave ownership by Abraham and the curse of Ham. Do-Justice reaffirms that all of these positions were misinterpreted by slaveowners. Do-Justice compares slavery to incest. Like slavery, incest happened rather frequently in the Pentateuch, but eventually became condemned and prohibited. By comparing slavery to incest, Garrettson believed slavery would also become taboo. He noted that biblical slavery was not as harsh as its contemporary counterpart. Slaves owned by Hebrews were freed after six years (if the slaves were Hebrew also), were protected from beatings and could run away if the owner was abusive.⁷⁵

Throughout the narrative, Do-Justice invokes many Bible verses regarding the freedom and equality of man before God through Jesus.⁷⁶ Do-Justice says, "From our *Almighty Creator*, we derived our origin, and he alone has a right to an absolute

⁷⁴ Freeborn Garrettson, *A Dialogue Between Do-Justice and Professing Christian* (Peter Brynberg, 1820). 21

⁷⁵ Bible verses in the Old Testament regarding slavery are Exodus 20:10, Exodus 21:2-11, 20-21, 26-27, 32, Exodus 22:1-3, Exodus 23:12, Deuteronomy 5:14, Deuteronomy 15:12-18, Deuteronomy 21:10-14, Deuteronomy 23:15-16, Deuteronomy 24:7. There are some in the book of Leviticus that also have stipulations regarding the treatment of slaves.

⁷⁶ Garrettson, *A Dialogue*, 29.

government over us.”⁷⁷ Owning another individual was a serious offense against God because it defied his omnipotence. Do-Justice also criticizes the notion that the slave’s children are also bound to slavery for their lives. He compares it to a criminal who gets caught. Instead of the criminal just getting life and hard labor, his child also gets life for hard labor. In the states where emancipation was illegal or difficult to attain, he advocated for the proper treatment of slaves in the same manner that slaves were treated in the Old Testament. Garrettson believed that the harsher punishment of African-American slaves was a heinous crime, which would not be inflicted if they were white prisoners. Garrettson had witnessed or heard about slaves suffering abuses, lacking clothes, and occasionally being killed with little consequences, which drove him to be more compassionate and loving towards enslaved blacks. The timing of writing this book is important to note; it was published when antislavery sentiment was on the rise.

Many of Garrettson’s antislavery ideas harken back to the republican ideology of the revolutionary era. Individual freedoms afforded by this new country was clearly contrary to slavery. As Donald Matthews says, “His basic assumption was couched in language that he had learned as an evangelist in revolutionary America: slavery was contrary to natural law and the Christian religion. No man had a right to absolute power over another because only God could have absolute rights.”⁷⁸ A possible reasoning for writing the book was the General Conference in 1820 hosted in Baltimore. At the time of that meeting, slavery had become a pressing issue at this conference, and Garrettson served on the Committee on Slavery.⁷⁹ The conference also discussed colonization and its

⁷⁷ Garrettson, *A Dialogue*, 22.

⁷⁸ Matthews, *Slavery and Methodism*. 54.

⁷⁹ The role of the committee on slavery was to find a solution to the problem of slavery in the Methodist church. At first, they served a real function. As slavery became more and more accepted within the church,

viability.⁸⁰ According to Simpson, “Garrettson effectively argued that slavery was out of line with keeping with the principles upon which our nation was founded.”⁸¹ Slavery represented complete control over another human being that was afforded to God, which violated both God’s law and the spirit of the new American nation. A person could not “own” another person as they belonged to God.

Early in his career, Garrettson suffered for his faith. Being a pacifist, Garrettson refused to join the military and fight for the Americans. His reluctance to fight for the Patriot’s army caused him to attract accusations of being a Tory.⁸² He faced trouble when he preached in Virginia, which had instituted a loyalty oath to the state in 1777. Garrettson refused to sign the oath, which almost cost him his life.⁸³ In 1780, Garrettson he again refused to swear loyalty to the American cause, which was illegal in the state of Maryland. His viewpoints on hotly debated issues like slavery and the American Revolution did not win him many followers in Maryland, but he would find success in the north. Garrettson’s view on slavery was also reinforced by his travels through the north. Although born in Maryland, he spent large parts of his ministry in New York and Nova Scotia. After the Christmas Conference in 1784, Garrettson spent time in Nova Scotia then returning to the Hudson Valley Region in 1788, where he would live the majority of his life as the presiding elder at the New York District for the Methodist church.⁸⁴ Garrettson continued to preach and established the Missionary and Bible

the committee became a symbolic group. Petitions regarding slavery were sent to them between 1820 and 1844. The committee favored colonization over abolition.

⁸⁰ Simpson, *Freeborn Garrettson*, 26.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 25.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 147.

⁸³ Simpson, *Freeborn Garrettson*, 64.

⁸⁴ He married Catherine Livingston, who was from a prominent New York family, in 1791.

Society of the Methodist Episcopal Church in 1819, which was the first missionary society within the Methodist church.

Living in the north had a distinct impact on Garrettson's view of slavery. Although he had freed his slaves after his conversion in 1775, his views on slavery would continue to develop. Slavery in Nova Scotia and New York was not nearly as popular as it was in Maryland, North Carolina, and Virginia, nor did the slave trade exist in the same volume in British Canada before being banned in 1772. Northerners dealt with slavery in political and moral terms, as enslaved blacks were not as economically essential or as demographically dense as they were in the South. This lack of interaction with slavery made some northerners strong abolitionists since they had to compromise less and could be more idealistic about emancipation.

Methodists experienced the problem of slavery throughout its early period. The Methodist church began to increase in membership by 1800, and by 1820, the church was becoming quickly one of the largest denominations, but the Protestant roots of the church still allowed for some individual autonomy.⁸⁵ The southern Methodist churches used this autonomy to keep slavery, along with attempting to Christianize slaves. As one historian argues, "As ordinary people who had created a special community apart from the world, Methodists shared the political and economic beliefs of all Americans whose attitudes on slavery were determined largely by where they lived."⁸⁶ Garrettson was special to an extent in the Methodist church because he transcended the cultural norms of the place that he lived. Garrettson's belief in the necessity of emancipation came from a firsthand

⁸⁵ Finke and Stark, *The Churching of America*, 23.

⁸⁶ Matthews, *Slavery and Methodism*, 60.

experience of lifestyle based on slavery and the evil it caused. Garrettson had a twofold approach to how he thought slavery should be dealt with: colonization and gradual emancipation.⁸⁷ These positions were in line with the majority of other anti-slavery advocates during the antebellum period. Radical abolitionists like William Lloyd Garrison called for immediate and universal emancipation, but Garrettson saw the challenges of immediate emancipation on both the nation and the African-American community.⁸⁸

Garrettson was not ignorant to the fact that some slave states made emancipation impossible. Although the slaves could not be freed, Garrettson thought they should at least be treated on par with slaves portrayed in the Old Testament. Garrettson believed that masters should give slaves every possible chance to read the Bible as well as clothe and feed them adequately.⁸⁹ He was practical about the laws of the land, which led to him believing colonization was a viable solution to slavery. Colonization was very popular among Methodists in the north in the early nineteenth century. Matthews says, “Numerical superiority did enable the Methodists to offer more manpower to the American Colonization Society than any other church.”⁹⁰ The conundrum between emancipation, state laws regarding slavery, and Bible-believing Christians allowed the colonization societies to gain membership and influence as a potentially viable alternative to full emancipation. Founded in 1816, the American Colonization Society was able to gain funding from the United States government, along with support from Quakers and

⁸⁷ Simpson, *Freeborn Garrettson*, 25.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

⁸⁹ Simpson, *Freeborn Garrettson*, 25.

⁹⁰ Matthews, *Slavery and Methodism*, 94.

prominent politicians, who saw it as an alternative to freeing slaves. Colonization provided the best of both worlds for white men; the ability to get rid of African-Americans and create a more racially unified country, while also ridding themselves of slavery. The American Colonization Society was supported by members of the Methodist church who tried to bridge the gap between abolitionists and slaveowners.

Garrettson had a milder view of colonization than some of his contemporaries. He believed that the territory recently purchased from France through the Louisiana Purchase would provide a perfect haven for free and enslaved black people alike. Louisiana still needed a sizable population to inhabit it. Admitted to the union in 1812, it only had total population of 76,556, which was relatively small compared to other states. Garrettson's thinking of sending them to Louisiana was different from the normal conventional beliefs of colonization members. Liberia was the destination of choice of many colonization members including the Society's founder, Robert Finley. Garrettson never attended any colonization meetings, but he did agree with them on certain issues. This compromise would allow African-Americans to gain their freedom but also allow them to stay in the country. The colonization society had many flaws and was accused of racism by African-Americans. Eventually, colonization became implausible due to the lack of funds for black settlers once they were in Africa, and the fact that slaves often did not want to go to Liberia.⁹¹ Garrettson endorsed his plan for black migration and emancipation in *A Dialogue Between Do-Justice and Professing Christian*,

If some plan could be devised to settle several-colonies of blacks, they might become good citizens, and be rendered a blessing to themselves, and the

⁹¹ John Patrick Daly, *When Slavery Was Called Freedom: Evangelicalism, Proslavery, and the Causes of the Civil War* (Lexington, KY: Univ. Press of Kentucky, 2004), 68.

community at large. No doubt, a large proportion of them would rather stay with their white brethren, and be hewers of wood, and drawers of water for them. Let it be so, and let a law be passed for a gradual emancipation, which would open a door of hope, and expectation that the Jubilee trumpet would be sounded through the United States of America.⁹²

This quote embodies Garrettson's opinion about blacks and slavery. He did not think African-Americans were on the same intellectual level as whites, which can be seen in the "hewers of wood" comment. This position of black inferiority was also taken by John Wesley and other abolitionists.⁹³ Africans deserved to be free, but they were not equal to whites. Freeborn Garrettson understood that slavery would have to be abolished politically. His real goal was preaching to the slaves. Garrettson's ministry was more widely known than his abolitionist activities, but he firmly opposed slavery throughout his entire career. Garrettson's beliefs about emancipation also avoided a natural critique that southerners levied against abolitionists. Garrettson did not call for sudden emancipation nor did he involve himself in politics, but he took a strictly Biblical defense for freeing slaves.

Freeborn Garrettson's life was not just solely about antislavery activism. His life would be marked with traveling preaching and serving the Methodist church in whatever method was needed. He served on the Committee on Slavery, he was the presiding elder of the New York District, he served the Methodist church during its rocky origins during the American Revolution, attended numerous annual and general Methodist conferences.

⁹² Garrettson, *A Dialogue*, 54.

⁹³ Brown, *Moral Capital*. 130.

When he first organized the Christmas Conference in 1784, the Methodists were a small sect, but when he died in 1827, the Methodists were a prominent church that had its spread throughout the fast expanding United States. His antislavery fervor is what made Freeborn Garrettson stand out. Coming from an affluent, slave-owning family, Garrettson upset their legacy by freeing his slaves after becoming a Christian. Garrettson would spend his ministry preaching to African slaves and attempting to improve the lives of slaves. Even after a bad fall on black ice, he still continued to preach on one good leg.⁹⁴ Freeborn Garrettson died on September 26th, 1827, at the age of 65. His legacy has been compared as Francis Asbury and Thomas Coke, which shows his importance in the early Methodist church. His antislavery advocacy would continue on to the next generation of Methodist leaders, but the church would seismically change in the next few decades as slavery became thoroughly entrenched in southern society.

⁹⁴ Simpson, *Freeborn Garrettson*, 27.

Chapter Three

William Capers

William Capers was born on January 26th, 1790, to Mary and William Capers near Charleston, South Carolina. Much like Freeborn Garrettson's parents, William Capers' were well-to-do southerners who owned numerous slaves.⁹⁵ With a winter home, a plantation, and a wealthy father, Capers experienced a privileged upbringing that mirrored Garrettson's. Both families owned slaves and plantations and ran religious households. Capers' conversion was not radically different from Freeborn Garrettson's story. Both men would both enter the Methodist ministry relatively shortly after their conversions. However, Capers was the polar opposite of Garrettson in his belief about slavery. A staunch anti-abolitionist, he never considered freeing his slaves, nor did he think slavery was a moral evil.

Capers was greatly influenced as a child and adult by his father's example. He was very proud of his father's accomplishments as an educated man and a veteran of the Revolutionary War.⁹⁶ William Capers Sr. was also part of the first Methodist gatherings in South Carolina.⁹⁷ His choice for choosing the Methodist church after his conversion was rather simple. The Methodists dressed plainly and humbly and were against materialism. Capers saw the lack of jewelry and fancy garments, and he thought this was admirable, which led him to becoming a Methodist.⁹⁸

⁹⁵ William Capers was very young when his mother died. He would have two more stepmothers during his lifetime. After the first Mary died, William, the father, married another Mary.

⁹⁶ William M. Wightman, *Life of William Capers, D.D., Bishop of the Methodist Church Episcopal Church, South* (Nashville, TN: J.B. M'Ferrin, 1858), 13.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 88.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 76.

Capers and his brother were sent off to a prestigious academy to study the subjects important to southern academia: philosophy, religion and Greek.⁹⁹ He would eventually attend South Carolina College in 1805, which was for rich and well-connected young men. He studied law in 1808 and took a prestigious job with the judge John S. Richardson.¹⁰⁰ Capers' father would play a stern role in his life growing up. William Sr. was an educated man who had an abundance of money and influence throughout the state, which allowed his son to climb the ranks of the Methodist church, along with opening up higher education opportunities. Capers would serve the Methodist church in a variety of ways. Throughout his career, Capers held positions as president of the South Carolina Conference Missionary Society, superintendent of the mission to the Creek Indians in 1821, and leader of the new Southern Department of Missionary Work of the Methodist Episcopal Church in 1840.

In 1836, Capers became the editor of the *Southern Christian Advocate*, which allowed him to have a strong voice throughout the south.¹⁰¹ The *Southern Christian Advocate* reported on mission work among Indians and African-American slaves to stave off abolitionist critiques of southern slaveholding. These missionary reports furthered the idea of the "good Christian slaveholder" that was a strong aspect of the southern defense over slavery. Reading success stories proved to be strong propaganda in the war against northern abolitionism. After the Methodist church split in 1844, Capers would become a bishop in the Methodist Episcopal Church, South.

⁹⁹ Ibid., 47.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ Donald G. Matthews, *Slavery and Methodism: A Chapter in American Morality, 1780-1845* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1965), 69.

The events of the Second Great Awakening were an important backdrop to Capers' early life. The Second Great Awakening started in the Cane Ridge camp meetings in 1801, but rapidly accelerated during the next two decades. This series of revival brought religiosity to the forefront of society. This allowed for a massive religious renewal to spread quickly throughout western territories and southern states. During the Second Great Awakening, the Methodists were able to garner more followers and influence due to the informal nature of these camp meetings, along with the influential role of itinerant preachers. They were the lynchpin for success. Their itinerant style of preaching was the perfect counterpart for the new revivalism, which was fast spreading. As the preachers were accustomed to being on the move, the Methodists were ahead of the curve when it came to this new style of evangelizing. Their itinerant preaching style allowed the Methodists to cover large swaths of territories that the Congregationalists, Presbyterians, and Episcopalians were not able to capitalize on in the changing landscape. By the 1810, the Methodists, along with the Baptists, transformed themselves from what Finke calls "sects" into the mainline denominations by the eve of the Civil War. Although the Second Great Awakening was primarily headlined by evangelists like Charles Grandison Finney, Methodists had preachers like Harry Hosier, a black man, who galvanized crowds. The Methodists took advantage of the Second Great Awakening on the western frontier due the presence and leadership of bishop William Mckendree, who, along with a surplus of itinerant preachers moved west after the O'Kelly controversy.¹⁰²

¹⁰² Elizabeth A. Georgian, "'That Unhappy Division': Reconsidering the Causes and Significance of the O'Kelly Schism in the Methodist Episcopal Church," *The Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* 120, no. 3 (2012), 5.

The Second Great Awakening provided African-American slaves with the opportunity for conversion. As Matthews notes, “Before the Baptist and Methodist revivals of the revolutionary generation, Negroes had had very little religious instruction.”¹⁰³ Asbury had made a push to evangelize slaves, and the Methodists were at the forefront of African-American membership with 13,500 members in 1800. The Second Great Awakening helped the religious conditions of African-American slaves and made them the focus of more evangelizing missions.¹⁰⁴ The spiritual needs of black slaves were finally being realized by the churches, even though the Methodists had already begun to preach to the enslaved blacks, but now the slaveowners began to address the spiritual needs of their slaves. The Second Great Awakening would create an opportunity for a full and sustaining mission to the slaves, which would be spearheaded by Capers and James Osgood Andrew.

William Capers’ conversion experience was intertwined with the Methodist church and the Second Great Awakening. However, Capers was initially uninterested in evangelical religion. A “vain, ambitious youth,” he had political aspirations to serve in the state legislature. He only attended a Methodist camp meeting in 1806 to garner political influence.¹⁰⁵ After the meeting, his attitude changed, as Capers wrote, “I became clearly convince that were an actual veritable power of God’s grace in person then before me, and who were known to me, by which they were brought to repentance and a new

¹⁰³ Matthews, *Slavery and Methodism*, 63.

¹⁰⁴ Loveland, *Southern Evangelicals*, 222.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 3.

life.”¹⁰⁶ He was fully converted during a family prayer reading in 1808 and would choose the Methodists very soon after his full conversion.¹⁰⁷

Capers became a missionary to Creek Indians and African-American slaves in 1821. He dedicated much of his adult life to leading this mission, but he also staunchly defended the southern way of life. He wrote *Catechism for the Use of Methodist Missions* in 1852, specifically for enslaved blacks and Indians. Christian education such as this became the alternative to emancipation in the eyes of many Methodists. Educating African-American slaves provided relief to the guilt felt by some slaveholders. Sharing the gospel with and Christianizing slaves allowed masters to rationalize their ownership of slaves. Capers fell into this category.

Capers, who graduated from South Carolina College and also taught intellectual philosophy there, believed slavery did not violate God’s law, but provided order. Capers embodied a traditional southern defense against the abolitionism. His conversion story diverts from Freeborn Garrettson’s in terms of emancipating slaves. Capers did not receive a message from God to free his slaves. Capers and Garrettson would spend their ministries trying to convert slaves. Capers would try a much different approach than Garrettson. Instead of imploring the slaveowners to free their slaves, Capers attempted to make blacks into better and more pious slaves. Capers did not think slavery was a moral evil. In the *Southern Christian Advocate*, he wrote, “Where it many exist as an element of the constitution of the country, an institution guaranteed by the laws--is not a moral evil.”¹⁰⁸ This is the big difference between Garrettson and Capers, but also a symptom of

¹⁰⁶ Wightman, *Life of William Capers*, 54.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 58.

¹⁰⁸ William Capers, *Southern Christian Advocate*, March 9, 1838, 121.

their time period. Garrettson was ministering in a time of great societal change, which was spurred on by the creation of a new nation.

By the time Capers reached age 40 in 1830, slavery was firmly embedded in southern society, maintained by statutes, such as the three-fifths compromise, a fugitive slave law, and the Missouri Compromise of 1820. It was thoroughly defended by evangelicals in the south. By evangelizing to slaves, there were a variety of goals that southerners would reach: create better workers, save slave's souls, secure the southerner's social order, and keep money rolling in from cotton and other cash crops. Slaveowners wanted their slaves to submit to their authority, and Christianity would potentially provide that. Slaveholders believed that Christianized slaves "would be less susceptible to incendiary leadership, more trustworthy, and more willing to work."¹⁰⁹ Although both Garrettson and Capers believed that the slaves should be evangelize, they took dramatically different routes to that goal. Garrettson believed that the slaves should be emancipated, while Capers believed they should be given Christian instruction but not freedom. Garrettson and Capers represented a monumental shift in the thinking about slavery in the Methodist church. John Patrick Daly says,

Slavery and thought about slavery were decentralized. Individuals were conceded the power to determine and shape the meaning of the social system in which they were enmeshed. On a purely contextual and structural level, divorced from the specific issue, this shift between 1784 and 1808 harmonized with the general form of ideological and institutional adjustment growing out of the Revolution.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁹ Matthews, *Slavery and Methodism*, 72.

¹¹⁰ John Patrick Daly, *When Slavery Was Called Freedom: Evangelicalism, Proslavery, and the Causes of the Civil War* (Lexington, KY: Univ. Press of Kentucky, 2004), 45.

Under Asbury's leadership, American Methodists took an anti-slavery stance between 1784 and 1808 in the church discipline. In 1808, the General Conference allowed the annual conferences to craft their own guidelines on slavery. Letting the conferences dictate their own rules, the Methodists church began to decentralize their position on slavery.

By the 1830s, the phrase "We declare that we are more than ever convinced of the great evil of the African slavery," as part of in the church discipline became meaningless. When Capers started his preaching career in the Wateree, South Carolina, in 1808, he was coming into a world that thought about slavery a very different way than when Freeborn Garrettson began his preaching. Freeborn Garrettson's ideas against slavery harkened back to Revolutionary ideas, but Capers lived in a different world than that of thirty years prior. Garrettson was influenced by living in Canada and New York. Capers, who was born in South Carolina, never ventured far. Except for taking an itinerant preaching route early in his career to preach to the Creek Indians, Capers never traveled outside of South Carolina for an extended period of time. Led by prominent South Carolina southerners like John C. Calhoun and John Henry Hammond, South Carolina embraced and defended slavery.

South Carolina was also a central hub for the political defense of slavery during the antebellum period. South Carolina had a very high percentage of African slaves. By 1810, 47.30% of South Carolina's population was black; Capers' mission did not lack a sufficient audience. When Garrettson lived in Maryland and Virginia, he experienced a wave of manumissions that was simply not possible during Capers' era. A law passed in 1820 prevented manumissions outside of legislative approval, along with testimony from

a white man. This law made it extremely hard to for slaves to be freed along with it being impossible for the freed black man or woman to free his or her own children.

Garrettson's ability to free his own slaves would not have been possible for Capers to do even if he wanted to manumit all of his slaves.

Capers would try most of his life to share the Gospel with African-American slaves and Native Americans, while Garrettson would try to obtain justice for blacks and while also preaching to them. Evangelism played an important role in both of their beliefs. As John Patrick Daly states, "Evangelicalism, . . . was primary and technically a style of Protestantism centered on the conversion experience and on a theology that stressed heartfelt individual proximity to God over communal or definitions of piety."¹¹¹ Evangelical Christianity played a critical role in the development of thoughts regarding slavery. It allowed for a "shift toward a less compromised, more ideological defense of slaveholding." This reflected the accommodations made by the founders in constructing the Constitution; they maintained political unity by protecting the rights of slaveholders.

Southern proponents of slavery often used the Bible as a defense against northern agitators.¹¹² Asbury experienced this type of biblical analysis when he first encountered southerners from Virginia, Maryland, and Delaware.¹¹³ When Methodists were gaining modest gains in the 1770s and 1780s, they met with numerous slaveholders.¹¹⁴ There were multiple Biblical defenses against northern abolitionists involving both the Old and New Testament. There were two main justifications for slavery: Jesus never explicitly

¹¹¹ Daly, *When Slavery Was Called Freedom*, 7.

¹¹² Daly, *When Slavery Was Called Freedom*, 31.

¹¹³ L.C Rudolph, *Francis Asbury* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1983), 176.

¹¹⁴ Matthews, *Slavery and Methodism*, 3.

condemned slavery and Paul's New Testament epistles that involved Philemon being returned to his master, along with other chapters regarding slavery. In addition, the belief that Africans were the descendant of Ham placed them under a curse by Noah after the flood.¹¹⁵ Another popular defense of slavery used by southerners was the claim that they as "good" Christian slaveowners would evangelize their slaves. This "Christianizing" slaves argument was crucial to masters' defense of their slaveholding. Without these justifications, a moral argument for the defense of slavery would have tough for evangelical Christians to rationalize. Slaves provided a captive audience for these preachers, but they also pressured the slaveholders to open opportunities for them to evangelize to them. As Matthews asserts, "Methodists pointed out that since the master had assumed complete control over the slaves, he was completely and morally responsible for their care, including religious instructions."¹¹⁶ Methodists were ready and willing to evangelize to enslaved and freed blacks, but the slaveowners were not always as receptive to evangelists as William Capers hoped.

Christianity potentially provided slaveowners better workers, but Christianity also provided spiritual liberty, intellectual stimulation and the potential for freedom from their captors that was threatening to slaveholders. Slaveholders had thought that preaching to the slaves was dangerous and could lead to rebellion.¹¹⁷ The Denmark Vesey conspiracy and Nat Turner's slave rebellion in 1822 and 1831 respectively made slaveowners wary of evangelizing their slaves. Denmark Vesey and Nat Turner were evidence of the dangers of Christianizing slaves. Vesey was educated, a Christian and a business owner.

¹¹⁵ Loveland, *Southern Evangelicals*, 37.

¹¹⁶ Matthews, *Slavery and Methodism*, 72.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 70.

After he was allegedly caught trying to gather slaves for a massive slave revolt, Vesey along with his followers were executed on June 22nd, 1822.¹¹⁸ This latter conspiracy was especially relevant to Capers as Vesey's plan was to slaughter Charleston slaveholders. Vesey's goal was to garner help from other slaves and freed black men and then hijack a ship and go to Haiti. The plot was never actually carried out, but it provided a perfect reason for slaveholders to tighten their positions and doubled down on laws for the treatment of slaves. Nat Turner's revolt, which occurred eleven years after Vesey's, gathered other enslaved and free men in an armed rebellion in Southampton, Virginia. He, like Vesey, was a Christian and prophetic leader. Over 50 white people died with over 100 African men, women, and children killed in retaliation for the rebellion. Nat Turner's rebellion was the final straw for white lawmakers regarding the rights of free and enslaved blacks. There was stoppage of Africans getting an education were taken away from freed blacks in Virginia along with African Methodist churches being shut down or forced to have supervision from white ministers. The significant backlash against African slaves who were not part of the plot shows the severity of the slave owner's reactions. 35 black men were killed that were assumed to be associates of Vesey, and over 135 slaves were killed as possible co-conspirators with Turner. Mob violence was justified by the apparent threat of these plots.

White slaveowners did not want slaves to have any possibility of societal mischief, which education and religious enlightenment provided. Methodists faced this

¹¹⁸ There is a theory purported by Michael P. Johnson that the Denmark Vesey was a made-up conspiracy. Johnson says that the conspiracy was indicative more of white fears than an actual insurrection. He looks at the court testimony and dissects what Vesey actually said and what people wanted Vesey said. See more in his article "Denmark Vesey and His Co-Conspirators". See more in "Denmark Vesey and His Co-Conspirators," *William and Mary Quarterly* Vol. 58, No. 4 (October 2001): 915-976.

problem when they tried to evangelize slaves and were rejected by their masters. Methodists had to “calm suspicion” among southerners about their antislavery stance “and to arouse interest despite their own enervating caution.”¹¹⁹ Vesey sowed distrust because he was a freed black man, but Nat Turner was an enslaved Baptist, who preached to other slaves on his plantation. Turner easily garnered followers through his preaching. As Loveland says, “Investigations of both insurrections had revealed that many of the participants were church members, and that some, notably Nat Turner, had claimed to act under religious inspiration.”¹²⁰ The threats posed by Vesey and Turner convinced southern proslavery advocates they needed to keep slavery around as a deterrent to a full African rebellion. Evangelizing slaves had inadvertently led to slave rebellions. Turner, especially, caused a tremendous amount of fear. According to Richard Cameron, “Many slaveowners began to feel that they had a lion by the tail and the other possible course was to tighten, not loosen, their hold over the entire Negro population.”¹²¹ The Turner and Vesey’s insurrections gave proslavery advocates a seemingly legitimate reason to staunchly continue defending their own interests against an increasingly persistent abolitionist movement fermenting in the north. The church’s priority was to evangelize to slaves, but these rebellions ratcheted up the degrees of pressure from both the abolitionist and the proslavery advocates on the church. In addition to this, the church went through a transition period in the early nineteenth century.

When Francis Asbury died in 1816, the church was firmly in the hands of preachers that were born in America. By this period, the Methodist church in the south

¹¹⁹ Matthews, *Slavery and Methodism*, 68.

¹²⁰ Loveland, *Southern Evangelicals*, 194.

¹²¹ Richard Cameron and Norman Spellman, “The Church Divides,” in *The History of American Methodism*, vol. 2 (New York, NY: Abingdon Press, 1964). 23.

had adjusted to the customs, traditions, and way of life of their members. Southerners began to exert more influence on the church. In so much as the Methodist church tried to change the customary laws in the early American period, the southern Methodists seemed to have changed the Methodist church in the south. Superior in numbers compared to northern Methodists, Southern members were able to integrate slavery into the church, overcoming the resistance of northerners and Asbury's legacy. In addition, northern Methodist's preference towards colonization allowed southern Methodists to shore up their position on slavery. The idea of unity allowed slavery to exist in the Methodist church due to the reluctance of northern Methodists to openly attack southern Methodists.¹²² Between the Methodist reluctance to condone southern slaveholders and the increasing support of the colonization society in the north, enslaved blacks were being disregarded by the Methodist church in support of gradual emancipation, which was set back by the rebellions of Vesey and Turner. These slave rebellions occurred in the wake of the Missouri Compromise of 1820. The admission of Maine as a free state and Missouri as a free state was composed to try and balance the north and the south in terms of representation in the federal government. Southern slaveholders were facing the possibility of slave rebellions along with being outnumbered in Congress. This increased the anxiety of southern slaveholders.¹²³

As polarization over slavery emerged in the nation in the 1820s, the Methodist church began to shy away from discussions about slavery. Richard Cameron says,

¹²² Matthews, *Slavery and Methodism*, 57.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, 48.

The fever of the antislavery principles of the first generation cooled to a discouraged indifference the stands were reduced to a minimum so that is safe to say that being a Methodist made comparatively little difference so far as slaveholding and even trading in slaves concerned.¹²⁴

This lull allowed for slaveowners to prosper and continue in their own ways. The enthusiasm for emancipation after the American Revolution was never embraced in the deep south, and a religious defense of slavery began to form in the 1820s. With the expansion of the United States through the acquisition of the Louisiana Purchase and the removal of the five civilized tribes of the southeast, slavery spread. A plantation economy based on cotton production further entrenched enslaved labor into southern society. The admission of new states to the Union (Louisiana in 1812, Mississippi in 1817, and Alabama in 1819) cemented slavery in the deep south. The tensions between proslavery advocates and abolitionists took new shape during the 1830s. William Lloyd Garrison's *The Liberator* began circulation in 1831, which drew a large following and provided serious agitation to southern slaveholders. Garrison called for immediate emancipation to all slaves, which was a radical position compared to other anti-slavery advocates, such as the American Colonization Society. His and other antislavery newspapers attacked southern society, shed light on the cruelties of slavery, such as beatings, murders, and general ill-treatment, and espouse radical ideas, such as women's rights and rights for enslaved and freed blacks. Garrison, who was born in New England, also started the New England Anti-Slavery Society in 1831. This society would work hard to abolish slavery. Garrison thought that Christianity was anti-Christian for its support of slavery and was

¹²⁴ Cameron and Spellman, "The Church Divides," 14.

worthy of ridicule: “Just as in the South no defense of slavery was complete without the religious sanction, so in abolition circles no attack on it which omitted the religious factor and the services of religious people could have been successful.”¹²⁵ Garrison also attacked the “fallible” founders, who as “sinful and weak” foisted slavery upon the new nation:

By the infamous bargain which they made between themselves, they virtually dethroned the Most High God, and trampled beneath their feet their own solemn and heaven-attested Declaration, that all men are created equal, and endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights—among which are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.¹²⁶

Garrison’s comments certainly agitated southerners who saw themselves as the extension of the principles established by the founding fathers. A radical, Garrison was disliked by other New England abolitionists, such as Orange Scott, who disdained the newspaperman’s call for men to leave denominations that were tainted by slavery.¹²⁷ Although they disagreed, Garrison and Scott used the same critiques on southern men who owned slaves.

The Methodist church was stuck in the middle of this abolitionist crisis. In the north, abolitionists like Orange Scott were gaining prominence in the 1830s as abolitionism came to the forefront during the General Conferences of 1836 and 1840. Religion drove the debate forward as both sides thought their position was morally

¹²⁵ Cameron and Spellman, "The Church Divides," 25-26.

¹²⁶ William L. Garrison, "On Constitution and the Union," *The Liberator*, December 29, 1832,, <https://web.archive.org/web/20070921221830/http://fair-use.org/the-liberator/1832/12/29/on-the-constitution-and-the-union.html>. 1.

¹²⁷ Matthews, *Slavery and Methodism*, 170.

sanctioned by God. Scott was the prominent defender of abolitionism in the northern Methodist church. He would be a foil to many prominent southerners like William Capers. Scott was not rich or well-connected, but he would be well regarded as a minister. He was incensed at the proslavery members of the church and the leadership for seemingly accepting their position. Scott continued to push the church to take more action on slavery until he left the church. He eventually started the Wesleyan Methodist Connexion in 1841. Orange Scott tried very hard to return the church to its early anti-slavery position, but by 1841 slaveholders were far too entrenched in the church.

By the 1840 General Conference, the Methodist church was at a breaking point over slavery.¹²⁸ Cameron says, “Abolitionism grew at an equal pace with the institution of slavery, and a defense of slavery kept pace with the attacks on it.”¹²⁹ As a political solution to the emancipation of slaves stalled in Congress, both antislavery and proslavery advocates continued their fight through newspapers, elections, pamphlets, and books. The Methodist church became a battleground over slavery that was spearheaded by northern abolitionists like Orange Scott. Unlike Garrettson, Scott did not think the colonization was plausible. According to Matthews, “The plan of the American Colonization Society was, he said, impracticable, unjust, and morally ‘blind’ to slaveholding as it really was: ‘falsehood in theory’, tyranny in practice, a violation of God’s law, and the parent of all abominations.”¹³⁰ Scott wrote to the Methodist church to appeal for emancipation. He wrote, “The Methodist Episcopal Church holds a large share of the moral power of this nation. It is therefore of the greatest importance that she be

¹²⁸ Matthews, *Slavery and Methodism*, 40.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, 22.

¹³⁰ Matthews, *Slavery and Methodism*, 123.

right on all moral questions. She cannot be neutral on any great question of moral reform. This is utterly impossible.”¹³¹ He went to say, “The early American Methodists church warmly opposed to slavery, however mistaken they might have been in Church policy on this subject.”¹³² Scott’s efforts would ultimate fail, but he shows the mindset of Methodist abolitionists.

A foundational difference between the antislavery advocates and slaveholders like William Capers was the idea that slaveholding was a sin, which meant that slaveholders were living in a state of sin. Abolitionists called upon slaveholders to repent and emancipate their slaves, but the southerners believed there was nothing to repent for, as slavery was not a sin. Capers wrote in the *Southern Christian Advocate*, “If slavery was a moral evil, the church would be bound to take cognizance of it, but our affirmation is that is not a matter for her jurisdiction, but is exclusively appropriate to the civil government, and of course not sinful.”¹³³ Capers knew that this statement would infuriate northern Methodist abolitionists; that slavery was of no concern to the church. The relation between church and state was a complicated issue for the Methodist church. Freeborn Garrettson and earlier Methodists thought that the church should positively influence the laws of the country. This fundamentally changed with Methodists like Capers, who believed that the state would deal with political issues, and the church should deal with morality. Bringing political issues into the church meant corrupting its purity.

Capers took the position of the letting Providence ultimately determine what was right and what was sinful. Daly relays this sentiment: “Slaves and opponents of slavery

¹³¹ Orange Scott, *An Appeal to the Methodist Episcopal Church* (Boston, MA: David H. Ebla, Printer and Publisher, 1838), 2.

¹³² *Ibid.*, 9.

¹³³ Capers, *Southern Christian Advocate*, January 26, 1838, 125.

would do well to stop bellyaching and workout their own salvations with the materials afforded them by Providence, which was all their masters had done.”¹³⁴ This quote embodied a typical slaveholder response to northern complaints against slavery. Abolitionism was criticized as potentially destroying the church due to the natural agitation that abolitionists provided.¹³⁵ Matthews says, “High Methodist officials, however, were not prepared to accept the morally explosive vision which abolitionists preached. They were dedicated to their own vague philanthropy -- the colonization cause -- as well as to the Church’s national unity.”¹³⁶ Like Garrettson, many bishops within the Methodist church thought colonization was a perfect halfway solution between slavery and full emancipation. However, the problems of colonization society were ignored in favor of trying to squash the issue of slavery in the church. The clash between abolitionists and slaveholders would eventually tear the Methodist church apart.

The idea that slavery was not a sin was the most divisive issue the Methodist church faced before its split in 1844. “Ecclesiastical unity” was the underlying reason why the leadership of the Methodist church did not initially take action against the slaveholders. Methodist leaders like Nathan Bangs, Wilbur Fisk, Samuel, Elijah Hedding and Samuel Luckey often subverted the actions of abolitionists in favor of church unity.¹³⁷ These men saw the evils of slavery but thought that colonization and church

¹³⁴ Daly, *When Slavery Was Called Freedom*, 42.

¹³⁵ Lucius C. Matlack, *The History of American Slavery and Methodism from 1780 to 1849* (Freeport, NY: Books for Libraries Press, 1971), 92.

¹³⁶ Matthews, *Slavery and Methodism*, 124.

¹³⁷ William Fisk was president of Wesleyan University and introduced numerous measures within the church to promote the colonization society. He was popular among the Methodist preachers and saw colonization as an extension of the anti-slavery beliefs in the 1790s. Elijah Hedding was born in New York, and he was a Methodist bishop who also saw the colonization movement as a positive idea. He supported the American Union for the Improvement of the Colored Race. Nathan Bangs was a Canadian-born Methodist historian and the founder of the Methodist missionary society. Samuel Luckey was the editor of the *Christian Advocate and Journal* and defended church unity as a way to preserve morality. These four

unity would provide a greater impact on the institution of slavery than provocative messages from both the north and the south. Matthews says, “Through 1838 and 1840 Northern churchmen watch with apprehension as Southerners counteracted everything that Hedding, Fisk, Luckey, and Bangs had done for the sake of ecclesiastical unity.”¹³⁸ These men had tried to find a middle ground for the church in the 1830s, but southern Methodists passed the Few Resolution in 1840 that prevented African-Americans (both free and enslaved) from testifying in church court against white men in the state of Georgia. The resolution passed, which horrified northerners. The Methodist general conferences were able to hold off the impending tidal wave of reactions regarding slavery, but the Few Resolution accelerated the split in the Methodist church. Church unity had been strained from nearly the beginning due to slavery, but it would take a few decades for the split to be irreconcilable, thanks to men like Capers and Scott who were unflinching in their beliefs.

William Capers spent years of his life as a minister traveling throughout nearly acquired western territories and Indian country.¹³⁹ He died on January 26th, 1855 at age 65 so he never saw the destruction of the Civil War.¹⁴⁰ Capers fully embraced the Methodist church and served in it in various regions, but he was primarily focused in South Carolina. The mission to the African-American slaves and Native America was his defining mission for the Methodists. He wrote instructions for educating them, he

men were all influential among the church and all shied away from fully embracing abolitionism. They were criticized for trying to preserve the unity of the church by appeasing the south.

¹³⁸ Matthews, *Slavery and Methodism*, 186.

¹³⁹ Wightman, *Life OF William Capers*, 508.

¹⁴⁰ William Capers had nine children between his two wives: Mary, Henry, Ellison, Theodosius, Francis, Susan, William, Sarah, and Harriet. He would also have two wives throughout his life: Anna and Susan.

attempted to persuade the slaveowners to give him more access to them and he pleaded for more church funds to accomplish these goals. Regardless of this, Capers thoroughly defended slaveholding in the south. Capers represented the typical, well-to-do southern Methodist. Capers would be a prototypical southern Christian defender of slavery, but he would feel conflicted about the 1844 split.

Chapter Four

James Osgood Andrew

James Osgood Andrew represents two different aspects of the early Methodist church's relation to slavery. James Osgood Andrew was born on May 3rd, 1794, in Washington, Georgia. Andrew's father was a well-known minister in Georgia and one of the first Methodist preachers in the state.¹⁴¹ Like Capers, James Osgood Andrew spent many months a year away from home traveling for his ministry. Andrew was a second-generation Methodist preacher, which was reflected in letters to his father about his frustrations and anxieties about his itinerant assignments.¹⁴² In a similar fashion to the families of William Capers and Freeborn Garrettson, Andrew's family was deeply religious. Andrew's conversion took place at a camp meeting in 1809, when "he felt the pangs of guilt he repented, went to Christ, received the holy ghost as a witnessing renewing power, and went away in peace."¹⁴³ There were questions later about the persuasiveness of Andrew's conversion, but real controversy came when he married his second wife, who owned slaves.¹⁴⁴

James Osgood Andrew married three wives: Ann Amelia MacFarlane in 1816, Leonora Greenwood in 1844, and Emily Sims Childers in 1854. His first two wives, MacFarlane and Greenwood, both owned slaves under their own names.¹⁴⁵ Though he

¹⁴¹ Richard Cameron and Norman Spellman, "The Church Divides," in *The History of American Methodism*, vol. 2 (New York, NY: Abingdon Press, 1964), 48.

¹⁴² George Gilman Smith, *The Life and Letters of James Osgood Andrew: Bishop of the Methodist Episcopal Church South: With Glances at His Contemporaries and at Events in Church History* (Whitefish, MT: Kessinger Pub., 1882), 78.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, 507.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁵ James Osgood Andrew had three wives and nine children: Ann Amelia, Elizabeth, Mary, Sarah, Henrietta, Mary, Octavia, Katherine, and James Jr.

had never technically owned slaves, his slaveholding through marriage became a contentious issue at the General Conference in 1844.¹⁴⁶ Andrew differed in his belief system about slavery from William Capers. He was not as active in the defense of southern society. These two men were very different southerners. George Smith says,

Capers was scholarly in taste and fastidious in manner; Andrew was bold in thought but careless and almost blunt in manner. The one was the child of wealth and luxury, and the most fashionable and wealthy had been his associates; the other was from the people, born and brought up in a cabin in the backwoods.

While Capers was in the college, Andrew was in the corn-field, and while Capers entered the Conference from a college, the first of his conference who had done so, Andrew came from his humble home without even academical training.¹⁴⁷

Capers and Andrew would be associated with each other throughout their lives, and their demeanors, education backgrounds, and wealth would make their position on slavery different. Yet Andrew and Capers had more in common with each other than they did with Garrettson. Garrettson, and especially Capers, represent the dramatic gulf between two generation of Methodist preachers, but Andrew represents a sort of middle-ground between the two positions.

Andrew grew up and ministered in the south, but never owned slaves on his own accord. Andrew did not defend the southern way of life as staunchly as Capers did; he was more focused on evangelism than on defending southern slaveholding. At one point in his life, Andrew even considered becoming a missionary in Africa.¹⁴⁸ Andrew's early

¹⁴⁶ Smith, *The Life and Letters of James Osgood Andrew*, 337.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 106.

¹⁴⁸ Cameron and Spellman, "The Church Divides," 48.

life revolved around religion.¹⁴⁹ Andrew's father was a preacher, and the family struggled with poverty and making do. Andrew's passion was education. Throughout his ministry, he would always be involved with education whether it would be formal education for whites or educating Native Americans and African-American slaves. He served as a trustee at the Methodist Manual Labor School and Central University, which would eventually become Emory University and Vanderbilt University respectfully. Andrew's obtained his license to preach in 1812, became a presiding elder in 1829, and finally became a bishop in 1832 at age 38.¹⁵⁰

Andrew would be instrumental in the Capers' mission to the Creek Indians and the African-American slaves between 1821 and 1844.¹⁵¹ Although Capers was the superintendent, Andrew would be a positive force for their mission. His preaching would take him throughout South Carolina, North Carolina, and Georgia. Andrew varied from Capers on a few key aspects. Andrew was not as seeped in southern slave ideology than Capers. Another big difference is how slavery was displayed by these two men. Andrew never defended his slaveholding as a positive good, but he believed slaveholding was not wrong. He wrote to the conference,

Strange as it may seem to you, brethren, I am slave-holder for conscience sake. I have no doubt that my wife would, without a moment's hesitation, consent to the manumission of those slaves, if I thought proper to ask it. But how am I to free

¹⁴⁹ Smith, *The Life and Letters of James Osgood Andrew*, 31.

¹⁵⁰ Cameron and Spellman, "The Church Divides," 48.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 400.

them. Some are too old to work and only an expense to me, and some are little children. Where shall I send them?¹⁵²

Andrew would have manumitted his slaves if they were of proper age and if the state allowed manumissions. Capers would not have freed his slaves given the choice.¹⁵³

Andrew did not openly announce his slaveholdings and was accused of abolitionism. As one scholar argues in regard his support of missions: "A particular champion was Bishop Andrew, who braved accusations of abolitionism to denounce repeatedly the irresponsible treatment of those who could not speak for or defend themselves."¹⁵⁴ Andrew was not rich by all any means, he did not own slaves, nor had the education as Capers did. Andrew's wealth came through marriage, which his wife and the slaves she held ended up being the scapegoat for the split of the Methodist church. Bishop Andrew was even reluctant to become a bishop, but his candidacy was promoted by other southerners.

Andrew obtained his license to preach in 1812, became a presiding elder in 1829, and finally became a bishop in 1832 at age 38.¹⁵⁵ He was primarily known for being the spark that unintentionally split in the Methodist church in 1844, but his ministry was impressive before his infamous role. Although slavery was firmly in place in the Methodist church, bishops were still not allowed to own slaves. Ownership of slaves was grounds for the removal of that position.¹⁵⁶ William Capers would not be a bishop until he would be appointed one after the split of the church. John Norwood says,

¹⁵² Smith, *The Life and Letters of James Osgood Andrew*. 352

¹⁵³ Wightman, *Life OF William Capers*. 399

¹⁵⁴ Matthews, *Slavery and Methodism*. 82

¹⁵⁵ Cameron and Spellman, "The Church Divides," 48

¹⁵⁶ Richard Cameron and Norman Spellman, "The Church Divides," in *The History of American Methodism*, vol. 2 (New York, NY: Abingdon Press, 1964). 11

By 1830 the old-anti-slavery spirit seemed to have spent its force. The voice of the churches was no longer heard in protest, the old anti-slavery societies were languishing, there was hardly an abolitionist militant in the field, the Colonization Society absorbed most of the public interest in the subject, and it apparently as doing but little for the slaves.¹⁵⁷

Before the Andrew controversy regarding slavery, there was a sharp decline in the discussion of slavery during the general conferences between 1820 and 1840.¹⁵⁸ The one rule that was constantly upheld in the discipline was the rule regarding bishops owning slaves. This was not a major problem previously because most bishops were not wealthy. Andrew fit the bill for a typical Methodist bishop. James Osgood Andrew did not own slaves until marriage netted him a slave. The southern aspect of the Methodist church, especially men like Capers, saw this rule as arcane and needless as slave ownership was not a sin. The atmosphere of the annual meetings between 1836 and 1844 was tense. As the sectional conflict heated up nationally, the Methodist church began to feel the brunt of it. Matthews says, “The situation in 1844, however, was such that some Methodists in the far South thought that the Baltimore Conference was tinged with abolitionism and that a slaveholding bishop was a necessity.”¹⁵⁹ Abolitionism had been gaining strength and prominence nationally, which started to change the dynamic of the general conferences. Much like the southerner politicians such as John C Calhoun, who proposed

¹⁵⁷ John Nelson Norwood, *The Schism in the Methodist Episcopal Church, 1844: A Study of Slavery and Ecclesiastical Politics* (Philadelphia: Porcupine Press, 1976). 23

¹⁵⁸ John Nelson Norwood, *The Schism in the Methodist Episcopal Church, 1844: A Study of Slavery and Ecclesiastical Politics* (Philadelphia: Porcupine Press, 1976). 22

¹⁵⁹ Donald G. Matthews, *Slavery and Methodism: A Chapter in American Morality, 1780-1845* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1965). 245

a concurrent measure for the federal government, southern Methodists wanted to protect their economic interests and way of life. The rule of the Methodist church also clashed with the manumission laws in Georgia. Andrew nor his wife could not even emancipate the slave if they so choose.

James Osgood Andrew's role in the 1844 split takes an interesting path. Although Andrew did technically own slaves, he put them legally under the ownership of his wife to avoid being removed from office. Andrew offered to resign as a way of mending the sectional difference.¹⁶⁰ Norman Spellman says,

Resignation was the solution which Bishop Andrew himself had proposed. When he arrived in Baltimore on his way to the General Conference, Andrew learned of the intense excitement caused by the news that he was a slaveholder, and that the matter would probably be investigated by the General Conference.¹⁶¹

Andrew knew the rules of the Methodist church, but he did not know that he would become a rallying point for southern Methodists railing against abolitionism. Southern Methodists thought that this was potentially the tip of the iceberg for northern abolitionist aggression on southern social structures. There was also debate between how Andrew gained ownership of his slave. The discipline for the Methodist church states that a Methodist Bishop cannot buy and sell slaves, but Andrew received his slave through marriage. Along with this, Andrew put the possession of the slaves in his wife's name and she could do with them how she saw fit (besides emancipation).

¹⁶⁰ George Gilman Smith, *The Life and Letters of James Osgood Andrew: Bishop of the Methodist Episcopal Church South: With Glances at His Contemporaries and at Events in Church History* (Whitefish, MT: Kessinger Pub., 1882). 343

¹⁶¹ Richard Cameron and Norman Spellman, "The Church Divides," in *The History of American Methodism*, vol. 2 (New York, NY: Abingdon Press, 1964). 55

He tried to absolve his own personal slaveholding. This did not really matter for Methodists in Maryland and New England, who brought a resolution calling for his resignation in 1844. Andrew became a scapegoat for the southern cause to fight the northern abolitionists, even though he had no real interest in becoming a bishop in the first place.

Part of the issue revolving around the 1844 debate over Andrew as a slaveholder was a proposed compromise between the north and the south. Both sections thought it would be impossible and destructive to compromise; the north would not accept a slaveholder as a bishop; the south would not allow a slaveholder to be disqualified from this office. Either solution would cause irrevocable damage. As John Norwood says, “If one alternative would ruin the North, the other would wreck the South.”¹⁶² The abolitionists had gained strength nationally and within the Methodist church in the 1830s. Influential northern Methodists like Orange Scott thought that the church should be an advocate for abolitionism.¹⁶³ As noted in the last chapter, southerners clearly disagreed with this line of thinking. Men like Capers and Andrew were in the same position that Freeborn Garrettson was during the slavery debates in 1796, 1800, and 1808. Andrew and Capers had been around the metaphorical block. The popularity of missionizing slaves and Native Americans wavered. Funding was especially hard at times because some southern slaveholders did not see the need to Christianize their slaves. Capers and Andrew struggled to gain funding from the church, to obtain access to the slaves from the slaveholders and to quell fallout stemming from the rebellions of Nat Turner and

¹⁶² Norwood, *The Schism*, 75.

¹⁶³ Matthews, *Slavery and Methodism*, 168

Denmark Vesey. Matthews says, “The Mission was never much more popular among average Southerners than abolitionist ideas were among average Northerners.”¹⁶⁴ These two extreme positions, although rather small in the general public perception, came to the forefront of discussion during the Methodist General Conference in 1844.

The lack of compromise between northern abolitionists and southern slaveholders mirrored the heated debates over slavery and the election of 1860 more than decade later. Norwood says,

There is a striking boiled up into this general conference parallelism, as regards the fundamental issue, between the situation in the church in 1844, and in the nation half a generation later. In the church the northern Methodists were opposing the extension of slavery to an office hitherto free from it and with the strict law perhaps against them, and just before the Civil War we had the Republicans opposing the extension of slavery to territory hitherto free, with the law again perhaps actually on the side of the South.¹⁶⁵

Both southern Methodists and slaveholders shared a significant propensity for self-preservation. Whether it was Calhoun’s attempt to shore up slavery through legislative change, southern Methodists splitting from the north or the Confederacy splitting from the Union, southerners were prepared to do whatever was necessary to preserve their economic system and their lifestyle. Although the intention of the mission to the African-Americans was pure in the sense that its focus was to improve the spiritual life of the slaves, the mission was propped up by magazines like the *Southern Christian Advocate* as

¹⁶⁴ Matthews, *Slavery and Methodism*, 191.

¹⁶⁵ Norwood, *The Schism*, 78.

a religious justification for slavery. The church believed that the slaves needed the gospel, too.

On the other side, abolitionism was not especially strong in the church prior to 1844. The first antislavery society was only formed in 1834 by La Roy Sunderland. Sunderland, who was a northern abolitionist from Massachusetts; he later joined Orange Scott in forming the Wesleyan Methodist Church in 1841.¹⁶⁶ On the British side, however, abolitionism was rampant throughout the church, but it a moot point when Great Britain abolished slavery in 1833. Abolitionism was not popular within the American Methodist church by any measure. Although agitation against slavery picked up in the early part of 1830 and into the 1840s, “[t]here was no anti-abolition societies, for there was no need of them. The great weight of the official machinery of the church- most of the conferences, administrative officials, the church press- was arrayed against abolitionism.”¹⁶⁷ Some northern Methodist leaders, like Elijah Hedding and southern ones like William Capers, saw abolitionism as “agitation” that was poisoning the conferences.¹⁶⁸

The ironic part of the 1844 split was that it was the Baltimore Conference delegates – not northern abolitionists -- who insisted on Andrew’s resignation. Two men put forth a resolution to that Bishop Andrew should resign: Alfred Griffith and John David of the Baltimore Conference.¹⁶⁹ The actions of the Baltimore Conference against slaveholders began with the case of Francis Harding. Harding was a traveling preacher

¹⁶⁶ Matthews, *Slavery and Methodism*, 120.

¹⁶⁷ Cameron and Spellman, "The Church Divides," 32.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 48.

¹⁶⁹ Alfred Griffith was the chaplain Maryland state senate. He was prominent Methodist who served in the church from 1806 to 1876. John David was also a senior member of the Baltimore Conference. Both men were not abolitionists but disliked slavery within in the church.

who had obtained slaves through marriage and lived in a state where emancipation was impossible. He had caused a firestorm regarding his slaveholding.¹⁷⁰ The Baltimore Conference suspended Harding for holding slaves and refusing to free them. He appealed his suspension through the Maryland Annual conference; a decision would be issued at the New York Conference in May 1844. His case became a test run for the split over slavery. Harding's suspension was hotly debated in New York, and the dominance of the Baltimore conference in instigating this crackdown was evident to the participants: "During the General Conference a Southern member reportedly asked an abolitionist why he and his brethren had so little to say. 'Oh!' he replied, 'we have nothing to do now. The Baltimore Conference is doing our work for us. And they will get the odium; and we all the benefit.'"¹⁷¹ There was an impetus at the 1844 conference to take action against slavery by the northern abolitionists, and conservative northerners and southerners were caught in the crossfire. Conservative northern Methodists were in the toughest positions at the 1844 conference. They did not agree with slavery being flaunted by the south nor their staunch defense of keeping it within the church. They were also against the abolitionists provocative statements towards the south.¹⁷²

Francis Harding's appeal was denied by the General Conference 117 to 56, and he was suspended from the church in 1844. William Smith, who was a prominent southern Methodist defender of slavery, stated that

A fair decision of this conference has not been given. And I wish my protest to go forth to the American Church, and American people, to serve as a beacon-light

¹⁷⁰ Peter Douglass Gorrie, *Episcopal Methodism, as It Was and Is, Or, An Account of Origin the Methodist Episcopal Church in the United States, Europe, Canada.* (1852), 106.

¹⁷¹ Cameron and Spellman, "The Church Divides," 57.

¹⁷² Matthews, *Slavery and Methodism*, 263.

to warn the Church against the movements of a majority who can obliterate justice, and trample on the rights of a minority.¹⁷³

The warning shots fired by Smith over the General Conference decisively voting to reject Harding's appeal opened up the floodgates with the case against James Osgood Andrew. The Harding affair became the ground on which both sides clashed at the conference. Harding would become the dress rehearsal for the north to attack southern slavery.¹⁷⁴ This became the opening act for the real fight that would over Andrew's case.

The question surrounding James Osgood Andrew did not just solely revolve around his ownership of slaves, but also in the role of the general conference's role in the church. Part of the problem was the power of General Conferences and its relation to both the northern and southern churches. Southern Methodists, like William Winans of Mississippi, argued that the General Conference did not have the power to regulate the bishops; that power resided in the annual conferences.¹⁷⁵ The constitution of the Methodist church came into question during the 1844 General Conference. Southerners always believed that the bishops were beyond control of the conference. The conference and bishops were co-equal but the latter still answerable to the conference. The northern Methodists believed that the bishops were equal to the conference, while the southerners believed that the bishops were not controlled by the general conference.¹⁷⁶

The two factions split into the "Constitution Party" and the "Conference Party". The Conference Party was mostly northerners who believed that the general conference

¹⁷³ Cameron and Spellman, "The Church Divides," 52.

¹⁷⁴ Norwood, *The Schism*, 62.

¹⁷⁵ Matthews, *Slavery and Methodism*, 259.

¹⁷⁶ Norwood, *The Schism*, 74.

was “to serve as its executive, presiding officers”¹⁷⁷ The general conference was the highest authority and its decisions should be respected as the final arbitrator. The Constitution Party believed that the general conference was coequal with the bishops. The two disagreements mainly focused over the role of the general conference. The Constitution Party believed that the bishops were equally important as the general conference. The bishops oversaw the pastors, while the general conference served as the representative branch of the church.¹⁷⁸

Arguing about the merits of church power shielded the argument from outright attacks against slavery and slaveholders in particular. Southern Methodists feared that the majority of northerners would impede their access to slaves. The dynamics regarding the church discipline, the bishops and the General Conference was the southern attempt to change the argument. Debating the morality of slavery would underscore their main point about slavery not being immoral. Slavery was beyond reproach and any discussion around slavery was not something southerners wanted to address; they focused the debate on the power relations in the church. Most Northern Methodists believed that the general conference had created the job of the bishop, therefore, it would be able to rid itself of a bishop if need be. The southern Methodists thought the opposite. The general conference had no power to remove a bishop without a trial or for a crime committed.

The basis for the 1844 split began with the development of church polity in the eighteenth century. The Methodist church of the late eighteenth century was structured very differently than the church in 1844. The church structure could be easily changed in

¹⁷⁷ Cameron and Spellman, "The Church Divides," 72.

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 79.

the early days of the Methodist church. A large majority could essentially change the entire structure. 1808 marked a new constitution, which put bishops and the general conferences on a level playing field. Southerners wanted to return to the system Francis Asbury, and the wide degree of power he delegated to bishops in the church's formative years. The structure of the church changed after 1808, which allowed Annual Conferences to make their own rules on slavery.¹⁷⁹ The constitution allowed the general conference to punish the bishops if they were caught in a crime, but this was debatable to the southern Methodists who believed slaveholding was not a crime.

The debate would eventually veer in the direction of slavery due to both the presence of anti-slavery advocates and slaveholders. Abolitionists began to talk about the Andrew's case as a test for whether or not the Methodist church would truly endorse slavery.¹⁸⁰ "The North claimed the right to depose a bishop for any cause whatever that rendered him unacceptable to any part of his Episcopal district. The south denied this right. The North said it was expedient to ask this resignation- the South denied it."¹⁸¹ This defense clearly favored the southerners as it would take away the northern Methodists' ability to deal with slavery within the church. Andrew wanted to resign from the office of bishop, but southerners believed that this would be caving to northern pressure.¹⁸² The General Conference of 1844 created an extremely volatile situation for both northerners and southerners, who were pushed to the extremes of their respective positions.

Negotiating between the two sides was hard because a middle ground had become non-

¹⁷⁹ Cameron and Spellman, "The Church Divides," 74.

¹⁸⁰ Matthews, *Slavery and Methodism*, 263.

¹⁸¹ Smith, *The Life and Letters of James Osgood Andrew*, 348.

¹⁸² Matthews, *Slavery and Methodism*, 258.

existent.¹⁸³ Until the 1844 General Conference, compromise was possible. But the passage of the Few Resolution polarized the sides so much that the middle ground disappeared. The actions of the Methodist between 1808 and 1840 escalated sectional tensions. The Few Resolution forbidding the testimony of African-Americans against white Methodists in 1840 led directly to the split the 1844. The Methodist church could no longer toe the line between trying to appease both slaveholders and antislavery advocates.¹⁸⁴ They had reached their breaking point; southerners would scoff at any attempt to remove slaveholders from power, while northerners refused to move forward without removing slaveholders.

The debate over Andrew's slaveholding became contested in different arenas. Andrew was generally a well-liked and respected member of the Methodist church. He had been part of the Methodist church since 1812, rose through the ranks, and traveled throughout the south and the western frontier. The debate between the north and south vacillated being the South claiming innocence and the North "refusing to speak of guilt." "Southerners emphasized Andrew's purity and William A. Smith of Virginia even went so far as to deny that Andrew was a slaveholder in any 'offensive' or 'actual' sense because he had never intended to be one."¹⁸⁵ Many within the church, like Capers, wanted church unity. Andrew also wanted to maintain harmonious relations between the two regions, which was part of the reason he offered his resignation. He wrote in a letter to his daughter, "In fact, I believe that are solemnly pledge, if I resign, that they will to a mean secede from the Conference. I would most joyfully resign, if I did not dread the

¹⁸³ Smith, *The Life and Letters of James Osgood Andrew*, 345.

¹⁸⁴ Matthews, *Slavery and Methodism*, 253.

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 261.

influence on the Southern Church.”¹⁸⁶ Andrew was surprised as events unfolded. He had been a slaveholder for some time, and it was not a secret that he had slaves. The dilemma over Andrew’s leadership role would have been ignored in 1824, but not in 1844. The abolitionist movement within the church had gained strength and had leadership both inside, and increasingly outside, the church.

The split of the Methodist church over slavery was not a forgone conclusion. There were many attempts after the split to reconcile, along with the looming question over whether the split was permanent. After the southern church lost the vote over James Osgood Andrew 111 to 60, he was stripped of his bishop status.¹⁸⁷ William Capers offered a compromise solution in which the Methodist church would have two separate conferences that were “to be equal and co-ordinate” with publishing and missions activities shared.¹⁸⁸ This resolution was not popular enough to be brought into fruition, but it shows Capers’ practicality about separation. In the wake of the split, a new southern Methodist church was not automatically formed. There would sectional tensions among southern delegates over slavery. Just as the Baltimore Conference had led the fight against Harding and Andrew, Methodists in the upper south fought with those in the lower south over slavery. The decision to split and the resolutions that attempted to reconcile both regions failed easily. The northern Methodists found zero common ground with southern Methodists over the split. Norwood says, “While a multitude of such plans

¹⁸⁶ Smith, *The Life and Letters of James Osgood Andrew*, 355.

¹⁸⁷ The Finely Resolution was submitted by Joseph Trimble and James Finely of the Ohio Conference in 1844. The resolution stated that Bishop James Andrew should resign because his slaveholding impeded him from doing his job in the northern territories. The resolution was softer in language than one submitted by Alfred Griffith, who demanded the resignation of Andrew and was generally more antagonistic towards slavery. Both resolutions called for Andrew’s resignation, but Finely’s was the one that had a larger chance at passing through the General Conference.

¹⁸⁸ Norwood, *The Schism*, 83.

was offered and old plans appeared again and again in slightly different dress, they had no chance if acceptance. If received favorably by one side they were inevitably rejected by the other.”¹⁸⁹ Each plan was rejected because they either catered to one side specifically or a plan was too impractical for any side to accept. Regardless of upper south states like Virginia not completely wanting to separate from the church, slavery still existed there, and it remained the dividing factor between the northern and southern Methodists. A slaveholding bishop would solidify slavery within the church, but abolitionists could never accept that. If the northerners condemned Bishop Andrew, it would isolate roughly 13,000 preachers and 450,000 members.¹⁹⁰ The stakes were very high for both the northern and southern Methodists, but the north won the vote handedly and the fate of the southern church was sealed.

After the General Conference in New York in 1844, it would take almost a year for the southern Methodists to form their own separate church. The southern General Conference would take place in 1845 that would official decree the new church, which was called the Methodist Episcopal Church, South or M.E.C.S. It replicated much of the same structure as the original church. There were serious tensions between the two sides over territories that fell on the border between the north and the south. There was a resolution after the church dissolved for “for fraternal intercourse between the two churches” that passed without negative votes, but this appeared to be only for show.¹⁹¹ Although the plan for separation seemed final, many issues arose over potentially rejoining the northern church. The “Plan of Separation” became the southern way of

¹⁸⁹ Norwood, *The Schism*, 96.

¹⁹⁰ Lucius C. Matlack, *The History of American Slavery and Methodism from 1780 to 1849* (Freeport, NY: Books for Libraries Press, 1971), 173.

¹⁹¹ Norwood, *The Schism*, 100.

seceding from the church. Although the church split became contentious when property and funds came to be divided, the conference ended without threats of retaliation towards southern congregations who wished to join the new Methodist church.¹⁹²

A difference in the southern church was the importance of the mission to the slaves. While the northern Methodists were not as keen on funding the missionization of slaves, the southern church saw it as their duty.¹⁹³ Abolitionists thought this mission was redundant because there was no point in Christianizing the slaves if they were barely viewed as human. Methodist abolitionists would rather see the slave be freed from bondage. This can be seen in the goals of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South. The M.E.C.S. would hold its first official meeting in 1846. It established the same structure as the old church, including use of the same hymnals, emphasis on missions to slaves and Native Americans, and the focus on higher education. Southern Methodists received the news of their split with general relief. In the north, the news was received differently. Opinions ranged from relief that the plague of slavery was finally out of the church to grief that the church was split.¹⁹⁴ The Louisville Convention in 1845 would show the resolve of the southern church. All southern states sent delegates to this conference, and the resolution of bishops was dealt with in short order.¹⁹⁵

Outside of the church, the results of the Methodist church split were of interest to antebellum political leaders. Around the same time as the split of the Methodist church occurred, debate over the annexation of Texas, began in the early 1840s. Norwood says,

¹⁹² Arthur E. Jones, "The Years of Disagreement: 1844-61," in *The History of American Methodism*, vol. 2 (New York, NY: Abingdon Press, 1964), 148.

¹⁹³ Matthews, *Slavery and Methodism*, 94.

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 149.

¹⁹⁵ Nolan B. Harmon, "The Organization of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South," in *The History of American Methodism*, vol. 2 (New York, NY: Abingdon Press, 1964), 112.

“The news of the failure in the National Senate of the Texas Annexation treaty, and the whole background of the Texan controversy in the political life of the time added to the fervor of opposition to the Conference action in the Bishop Andrew case.”¹⁹⁶ The annexation of Texas was a hot button political topic throughout the country. President John Tyler wanted to expand slavery into Texas, which was fiercely opposed by the northern anti-slavery faction of the Whig party, and it denounced as a ploy to increase southern power. Slavery was popular within Texas, which made northerners wary of southern intentions. The annexation of Texas was not directly related to the split of the Methodist church, but it shows how it spilled over into other conflicts over slavery.¹⁹⁷ The affairs of the state collided with the affairs of the church. Arthur E. Jones says, “The slavery question was not merely a political issue separating citizens into political parties. It was a moral or ethical issue, and the church, by its very nature, was more sensitive to moral issues than was the nations.”¹⁹⁸

Although southerners wanted to keep the state affairs to the government, there was little question about the political importance of southern Methodists seceding from the northern church. The southern Methodists were not ignorant of the events going around them. The split of a southern institution from a northern one over the issue slavery caused a shockwave throughout the church. Although the northern and southern churches attempted to still be “brothers in Christ”, any good feelings quickly evaporated over land and money disputes. The total membership of the Methodist church was at 1,184,064 in 1844, the Methodists took up 6.94% of the 17,069,453-total population of the United

¹⁹⁶ Norwood, *The Schism*, 87.

¹⁹⁷ Mitchell Snay, *Gospel of Disunion: Religion and the Rise of Southern Separatism, 1830-1861* (Durham, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1984), 115.

¹⁹⁸ Jones, "The Years of Disagreement," 145.

States taken during the 1840 census. The Methodist church was large, but it was relatively decentralized and regional in political association and belief. The 1844 split would be a culmination of five decades worth of sectional tension within the Methodist church that seemed almost inevitable. National politics had sacrificed abolitionism for national unity, and the church had little leverage to force the southern slaveholders to free their slaves. As the country became more and more polarized, the church reflected that increasing polarization. Whether it was the Missouri Compromise in 1820, the annexation of Texas and the Mexican-American War in the early 1840s, or the Kansas-Nebraska act in 1854, the church reflected the political tension mounting in the country.

Southerner Methodist slaveholders continuously stood firm in their belief about the morality of their slaveholding. Any apparent attack on the Methodist church was seen as anti-southern. The size of the Methodist church undoubtedly made their separation national news. Although the Methodists were centralized in the mid-Atlantic and the south in the late 1700s, by 1844 they were spread throughout the country and into Canada. The southern split drew the ire of northerners who thought there was something foul going on with the southern side. There was a rumor that John C. Calhoun had helped orchestrated the split through William Capers.¹⁹⁹ Calhoun was a very powerful politician in the nation before the Civil War and rumors of his involvement would have drawn political opinion towards the church split. Stirring up sectional tensions would have been beneficial for southern politicians later in the 1850s who were looking to separate from the union and needed a legitimate reason. Matthews says, “The division of the Methodist

¹⁹⁹ Norwood, *The Schism*, 191.

Episcopal Church however, neither portended that war nor ‘snapped’ a bond of union: it merely became of many events which contributed to increased sectional antagonism.”²⁰⁰

James Osgood Andrew became a casualty of war between two drastically different sides that had very little hope for reconciliation. He would eventually become a bishop in the new Methodist Episcopal Church, South, but he would be removed from his post by a large majority. The southern church, much like the south in general, was being dwarfed in size by the north. This scenario had never happened for the Methodist church because traveling bishops were never wealthy enough to own slaves. The cause of the Methodist church split was hardly his fault even though his role in the church was questioned, but at that point in Methodist church history, it could have been Francis Harding or even all southern slaveholders in general. Colonization did not provide the answer for the Methodist’s problem with slavery, although many Methodists from the north and the south wished it. Slavery was a deep-rooted problem in the church since its inception in 1784. The James O’Kelly controversy highlighted the issue of slavery in its infancy, but O’Kelly’s main issue was focused around church power. The Methodist church tried to subvert the issue of slavery by supporting colonization, encouraging mission activities to slaves and Native Americans, and passed the buck to the next general conference until it became unmanageable. Relations soured after the Few Resolution of 1840 that declared that slavery not a moral issue and that the testimony of African-Americans would not be allowed. These actions would prove futile as slavery inevitably caused the church to fracture.

²⁰⁰ Matthews, *Slavery and Methodism*, 282.

Chapter Five

Conclusion

Since its inception in North America, Methodism has been affected by politics, whether the persecution the faced from colonial authorities, surviving the American Revolution, or the impact of sectional politics in the 1844. The Methodist church was clearly not immune to political problems happening outside of the church. The church was influenced by the American Revolution and the founding of the United States in 1784 when it split from their British counterparts. It was influenced by the increasing sectional tensions happening between 1820 and 1844. The church was still ultimately made of up of ordinary people that had their own personal beliefs regarding slavery that was dependent on where they lived. The political problems between the north and the south were brought into the church. Southern preachers would preach against abolitionists decrying slavery from the pulpit, while also endorsing slavery.²⁰¹ Politics would be impossible for bishops from both the north and the south to avoid as they both viewed the distinctions between church and state differently.²⁰² As Richard Carwardine argues, “[b]etween the Revolution and the Civil War Methodists sought to define their political responsibilities and a proper code of political engagement. Their contributions to the forms, functioning, and ideologies of party and electoral politics were complex, shifting, and shaped by more than simple denominationalism.”²⁰³ The Methodist church struggled to define their relation to the state. The Annual and General Conferences were

²⁰¹ Snay, *Gospel of Disunion*. 10.

²⁰² *Ibid.*, 11.

²⁰³ Richard Carwardine, "Methodists, Politics, and the Coming of the American Civil War," *Church History* 69, no. 3 (September 2000), 579.

never had political issues on the docket (until slavery), but this did not mean these conferences did not turn political.

The General Conferences were influenced by larger national events. The Missouri Compromise in 1820, the gag rule in the 1830s, and the debates over the annexation of Texas in the early 1840s all had effects on the church. The membership was composed of people who had political beliefs and affiliations they brought into the church. The members did not have to swear allegiance to a party, and they were free to vote however they pleased. The political belief of a Methodist church member was more dependent on where they lived than the fact that they were a Methodist member.²⁰⁴

Southern Methodists had a different worldview than their counterparts in the north, which manifested itself in their political viewpoints. The tension existed early in the birth of the Methodist church, but it would turn regional as the political world went through sectional tensions. These political views would be easily seen during the General Conference in 1844 where church politics met national politics. The Methodist Episcopal Church, South would be a more united church politically due to their shared worldview, while the northern church would still be more politically involved. Northern Methodists would have no problem supporting Abraham Lincoln's president bid in the 1860 presidential election, seeing as a chance to finally rid themselves of slavery.

What started as a small, apolitical sect of the larger Anglican church, had blossomed by 1860 to a powerful American national church. Some historians attributes the Methodist church split as a potential underlying reason for the Civil War due to its strength and influence. The Methodist church was large, spread throughout the nation and

²⁰⁴ Carwardine, "Methodists, Politics, and the Coming of the American Civil War," 585.

expanding territories and had an efficient system of itinerant preaching. A church split had political implications that would have a far-reaching impact and tightened up political allegiances within the church. Politicians like Calhoun and Clay took interest in the one of the largest churches in the nation splitting over a sectional issue.²⁰⁵

The Methodist Episcopal Church, South (hereafter MECS) was a slight delineation away from the ideals that John Wesley had established in the British Methodist church. John Wesley had advocated for more church involvement in social issues like slavery and advocated for positive treatment of everyone regardless of race, color, and gender. Social issues were important for southern Methodists, but slavery was something different. Southern Methodists wanted to deal with how slaveowners treated their slaves, not slavery itself. Wesley's had a strong belief in submitted to authority, and he told his followers to respect as authority as it was installed by God.²⁰⁶ Southerners used a similar argument in distancing themselves from trying to influence the government. The M.E.CS was, in the view of southern Methodists, a return to a more appropriate form of church and state relations. Abolitionism had no place in the new church. Southern Methodists came into conflict with British Methodists like Coke and Asbury, and for a time, they ordained themselves and subsequently gave out the sacraments. Tensions were present from the very beginning between British Methodists and their American counterparts over little issues like handing out the sacraments along with larger issues such as slavery.

²⁰⁵ Matthews, *Slavery and Methodism*, 280.

²⁰⁶ Henry Abelove, *The Evangelist of Desire: John Wesley and the Methodists* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990), 78.

The M.E.C.S would be steadfast in its opposition to joining political debates, even as sectionalism escalated with the Kansas-Nebraska Act in 1854.²⁰⁷ Maryland, Missouri, Kentucky, and the western part of Virginia especially became hotbeds of sectional strife in the years immediately before the Civil War. The border states had sizeable populations of churches that were divided. Missouri especially became contested to the point of violence. James W. May says, "The struggle on the border comes into intelligible perspective only as it falls into place in the larger conflict between two churches of common heritage now further alienated by the warfare that tore the nation asunder."²⁰⁸ After their split, Methodists were unable to stop the escalation of sectional tensions in the country that were quickly spiraling into civil war.

Both the southern and northern churches threw their support behind their respective sides during the Civil War. Northern Methodists saw the war as the golden moment to defeat slavery, but southerners were more apprehensive about it. Both sides would provide chaplains for their respective sides. The Emancipation Proclamation especially worried southern Methodists fearing the violence similar to a slave revolt.²⁰⁹ An ideal of spiritual purity permeated the speeches and attitudes of the churches. Northerners could feel morally vindicated after the destruction of slavery, while southerners saw purity in the plight and mission of their brothers fighting in the war.²¹⁰ God had finally proved slavery was wrong because of the south's defeat in the Civil War.

²⁰⁷ James W. May, "The War Years," in *The History of American Methodism*, vol. 2 (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press), 209.

²⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 214.

²⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 232.

²¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 233.

The southern church suffered heavier losses but had no problems taking advantage of the devastation by encroaching on southern territories after the war. Northern troops had occupied southern churches, the church had cancelled annual conferences and the war had devastated Southern infrastructure. The occupation of troops allowed for the spread of northern bishops into the southern border churches, which had been disputed during the Plan of Separation.²¹¹ The Civil War did bring the prospect of reconciliation, but southerners maintained that the war did not solve the issues of church polity in 1844. An address by the influential southern bishop Holland McTyeire, who was backed by the other southern bishops, emphatically stated that the southern church would live on and not merge with the northern church.²¹² Southern membership took a large hit, falling from 748,985 to 498,847. This decrease in numbers would be from former slaves leaving the church, members killed in the Civil War or absorbed into the northern church, and migration west. Regardless of these obstacles, the southern church would bounce back after the Civil War thanks to leaders like James Osgood Andrew. Andrew would be important in the post-Civil War era for steady leadership and an emphasis on brotherly compassion as the church went through numerous structural changes. Modern revisions to the General Conference occurred in 1866, including term membership for pastors, lay representation, and constitutional changes.

The American Methodist church came a long way from the 1784 Baltimore Conference, and the church's relation to slavery had evolved with it. The Methodist church looked for alternative ways to deal with slavery, such as the American

²¹¹ Ibid., 250.

²¹² Nolan B. Harmon, "The Organization of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South," in *The History of American Methodism*, vol. 2 (New York, NY: Abingdon Press, 1964), 149.

Colonization Society that Garrettson supported.²¹³ Freeborn Garrettson was in the category of early American Methodists who wished to rid society of the evil of slavery. The early Methodists believed emphatically that slavery was equivalent to soul snatching, which made the issue a spiritual as well as a social evil.²¹⁴ Freeborn Garrettson was passionately anti-slavery, but he also saw the importance of the work he was doing within the church. Garrettson had never sought to excommunicate himself fully from other southerners, but he tried to reform their actions that he believed violated God's law. He would be unflinching in his preaching to the African-American slaves and fearless when facing persecution from slaveholders who did not want him preaching to their slaves. He would also be unflinching when he was persecuted by other Americans for not swearing an oath of allegiance to the state of Maryland.²¹⁵ Garrettson represented the more typical anti-slavery Methodist before 1808. This changed in 1808 when the General Conference decided that the annual conferences should devise their own rules on slavery. This benefitted southern societies tremendously because it meant less interference on the issue of slavery from the General Conference. It would take thirty-six years for it to finally explode, and the damage was irreconcilable until the church united again in 1939.

Freeborn Garrettson voluntarily emancipated his slaves because of a calling from God, and although his family was rich and well-known, gave up his plantation lifestyle to become an itinerant preacher. Garrettson was heavily involved in the Methodist church before its American conception, and the national notoriety it received in the following

²¹³ Matthews, *Slavery and Methodism*, 88.

²¹⁴ Lucius C. Matlack, *The History of American Slavery and Methodism from 1780 to 1849* (Freeport, NY: Books for Libraries Press, 1971), 29.

²¹⁵ James D. Essig, *The Bonds of Wickedness American Evangelicals Against Slavery, 1770-1808* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1982), 50.

decades. Garrettson would be an important piece to Asbury's goals for the church, while also espousing revolutionary-era ideas about the equality of all men and the personal freedoms granted to them through natural rights. Garrettson would mix these revolutionary era ideas with Protestant tenets like equality of humans before God and personal accountability. Simpson says about him, "In all the movements of Garrettson's dramatic life, there is one note clearly struck. It is the note of dedication. In all matters temporal and spiritual he strove after perfection. This and this alone brought him satisfaction, peace."²¹⁶ This dedication spread to his antislavery work, never ceasing until he died in 1827. By this time, however, slavery had become well established in the church due to the General Conference in 1820 that allowed any official or minister to be a slaveholder if the state that they lived in did not allow emancipation.

As the southern economy grew on the backs of slaves in the nineteenth century, white southerners going wanted to keep slavery around at all costs. This cost came in the form of a civil war that happened seventeen years after the Methodist church split in 1861. Southern Methodists also attempted to keep slavery, even at the peril of their own unity. Ann Loveland says in her introduction,

Southern evangelicals saw themselves as guardians of the religious and moral purity of the southern people and felt that it was their duty to concern themselves--even, in some cases, to the point of engaging in political action--with issues and problems relating to the social order.

As Methodism spread throughout the country, it became popular in southern states. White slaveholders would feed, clothe, house their slaves, and give them Christian instructions

²¹⁶ Simpson, *Freeborn Garrettson*, 32.

as they were perceived as incapable of learning Christian doctrines, slaves would willingly submit to their masters and be good workers.²¹⁷ Keeping the proper order was of utmost importance to a southern like William Capers but for a different reason that just power. He wrote during the 1844 split, “When we tell you that we preach to a hundred thousand slaves in our missionary field, we only announce the beginning of our work--the beginning openings of the door of access to the most numerous masses of slaves in the South.”²¹⁸ The idea of northern separation from the south worried him, but the destruction to the southern social order and the ties of brotherhood with the north worried him more. He was more willing to defend the latter than the former. Capers thought slavery was not a moral evil, but he did desperately want to provide Christian instructions to the African-American slaves.²¹⁹ The 1844 split did not happen because of theological reasons as members of the north and south agreed theologically, but because of the division over slavery.

Each of these three men had their own personal stories that involved differences in their wealth, birth, upbringings, and where their ministries would be located. These factors would prove to be decisive in their views on slavery. They were all born into slave states, but Garrettson was born during the colonial era and saw the development of Enlightenment era ideas during the American Revolution. Capers and Andrew were born in the antebellum era and after the firm establishment of slavery in these states by law and economic necessity. Garrettson faced violence throughout his preaching in the south due to his views on slaveholding. Capers and Andrew had similar experiences in the deep

²¹⁷ Brown, *Moral Capital*, 35.

²¹⁸ Wightman, *Life of William Capers*, 406.

²¹⁹ Loveland, *Southern Evangelicals*, 240.

south states in terms of potential violence. Church services could be disrupted, fights and violence would break out, and the pay was barely worth the trouble even as the Methodist church grew.²²⁰

These men showed the progression of the Methodist church and its relation to slavery. Slavery was a complicated issue for the church, which naturally led to a variety of different positions. These three men beliefs about slavery were not entirely uncommon. There were men like Orange Scott who hated slavery as much as Garrettson did, William Winans who thought slavery was perfectly acceptable to society like Capers, and Bishop Elijah Hedding who wanted to quell the sectional tension over slavery and was in favor of a more productive and unified church, such as Andrew endorsed. The thoughts and actions of these individual men show the immense pressure on the church as a body to act on slavery. Although it would ultimately be up to the government to abolish slavery for good, many people believed that they could usher in a new era by ridding societies of moral evils, which including slavery.

James Osgood Andrew was the middle ground between the Capers and Garrettson in terms of the Methodist church and its relation to slavery. Garrettson wanted to fully abolish slavery, while Capers wanted to preserve slavery's position in the church and ultimately the state. Andrew was from Georgia and could not legally free his slaves, but he attempted to preach to enslaved blacks and Native Americans. He was a bishop and well-regarded by his peers, but he when push came to shove, his northern brethren ousted him when his association with slavery became known. He did not fight the Finley

²²⁰ Ibid., 44.

Resolution that called him for to resign his position until he became dissociated with slavery, but he tried to reconcile both sections and maintain church unity.

Andrew's relation to slavery would be the technical reason that would split the church. While Capers and Garrettson were both wealthy and grew up in plantation lifestyle, Andrew did not. Of the three men, only Andrew served as a bishop. Andrew's thoughts about slavery were complex. He did not want slaves under his name, but there was a record of him buying a slave to free. While historical records show that Andrew did own numerous slaves, knowledge of this was not known by most people.²²¹ Andrew had not been as defiant or bombastic in his defense of slaveholding as Capers had been. Capers and Andrew were friends during their ministries, worked with each other, and Capers gave the eulogy at his second wife's funeral.²²² Andrew's life was most known for his role in the split of the church, but that had very little to with Andrew himself but more of the sectional controversy.

Both abolitionists and slaveholders believed they had the moral high ground compared to the other side. Garrettson believed that slaveholders were distorting Christianity, while Capers believed abolitionism would indirectly lead to slaves dying without converting to Christianity. Each man's goal was to ultimately share the Gospel and potentially convert African-American slaves to Christianity, but they saw slavery through different lens. Garrettson saw emancipation less threatening to the social order

²²¹ These debates surrounded James Osgood Andrew and his relation to slavery. Andrew claimed in his 1844 letter to the General Conference that he had never bought or sold slaves. There was a record of him purchasing a slave named Kitty, who was treated poorly by a former master. Kitty apparently had no desire to leave Andrew and was essentially free but under his legal ownership. For a historical debate if Andrew had purchased Kitty or if Kitty existed, see Mark Auslander, *The Accidental Slaveowner: Revisiting a Myth of Race and Finding an American Family* (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 2011).

²²² Wightman, *Life of William Capers*, 382.

than Capers did. The mighty disconnect over slavery between Garrettson and Capers emphasizes the distinct difference the two opposing viewpoints of Methodism had. Both men had a desire to preach and convert the African slaves but took their beliefs in two distinct ways. Capers established a mission to the slaves in 1829.²²³ Garrettson preached to the slaves during his ministry, but he worked in Nova Scotia and settled in New York. Capers would be appointed Secretary of the southern Missionary Conference to the South in 1840 in the midst of trouble between abolitionists and slaveholders.²²⁴ Capers had a deep desire to preach to the slaves, but no desire to fight for their emancipation. Capers and Garrettson were both products of their time in regard to slavery. Capers embraced the typical antebellum southern position regarding slavery, while Garrettson embraced a revolutionary era idea of slavery. They both shared similar beliefs in regard to the doctrines and theology of the Methodist church, but they ultimately differed on slavery. They were a microcosm of the development of the Methodist church and its relation to slavery.

The split of the Methodist church is an example of the antebellum sectional tensions becoming untenable between the north and the south. The split of church ultimately proved ominous for the unity of the nation. If brethren of the church who agreed with each other on almost every subject except slavery could not figure out to properly situate slavery within the church, how could the nation? Southern slaveholders would not move an inch on defending slavery from northern aggression, and abolitionists would not compromise with slaveholders. Slaveholders formed their religious and

²²³ Ibid., 291.

²²⁴ Ibid., 379.

economic identities around their slaveholding, and the threatening of southern religious identity would cause the Methodist church split in 1844 and the larger southern secession in 1861.

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