

SERVING TWO MASTERS: METHODISM AND THE
NEGOTIATION OF MASCULINITY IN
THE ANTEBELLUM SOUTH

by

CHARITY RAKESTRAW CARNEY

A DISSERTATION

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation examines the development of a distinct southern Methodist masculinity from the 1830s to the 1860s. More than a church history, this study explores the relationship between non-religious and religious society, the tensions inherent in to relationship, and the ethical questions that emerged from that tension. As Methodism evolved in the South, it took on regional social practices and affectations while also maintaining a denominational identity that opposed southern culture. Southern Methodists served two masters—the church and society—and both demanded obedience to divergent visions of masculinity and manhood. Although they rejected many manly pursuits, ministers adopted a proslavery ideology and patriarchal practices and reflected southern attitudes in their church doctrine and structure. My study argues that the ethical shift that occurred in the southern Methodist Church in the 1840s resulted from the dual demands of southern and denominational culture, which led them to construct their own vision of masculine identity. This study uses the Methodist Church as an example of the friction caused and questions raised by the intersection of gender, religion, and ethics in a constricted, patriarchal society.

DEDICATION

To my husband, Court Carney

And to my grandparents, R.A. and Juanita Rakestraw

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INTRODUCTION

There is no man on earth, whom I regard with so much reverence, as a Faithful Minister of Jesus Christ. He comes with no splendid retinue, to dazzle the senses; he bears no scepter, to awe me into terror! He possesses none of this world's wealth, or honor, or power; and in the endowments of genius, he is perhaps inferior to a multitude of my acquaintances:--yet whenever I behold his features, hallowed as they are with the light of holiness, I am compelled to be solemn under the impressions which I feel, and humble for the greatness of the contrast between himself and me.¹

Peter died and his master converted. For itinerant James O. Andrew, these two events, although seemingly disconnected, had a very direct relationship. After the burial of "old Peter," a devout Methodist and a loyal slave, his master, H. B. Howard of Wilmington, North Carolina, embraced his former servant's religion. It happened slowly, almost unconsciously, but over the first few weeks after Peter had been lowered into his grave, Howard visited the site and pondered the black man's faith. According to Andrew, who served on the Wilmington circuit at the time and heard the story first hand, the grieving master spoke often of the old slave's "honesty, his humility, his consistent and unobtrusive piety." Howard contrasted this with his own infidelity and the sinfulness that stemmed from his skepticism. At the gravesite, Peter's master reflected on the meaning of salvation and eternal life. Each visit would bring new conviction that Peter had died with a clear conscience and that his soul had undoubtedly entered the kingdom of heaven.

¹ "The Faithful Minister," *Southern Christian Advocate*; July 1, 1837.

Howard knew that he could never enjoy such bliss until he had given himself as Peter had to the Lord. ““Yes, you are dead,”” he exclaimed as he looked down at the earthen mound that held his servant, ““but you are happy.”” This realization forced the master to question his own life. He reasoned that Peter’s belief made more sense than his own unbelief. ““Peter was a Christian, and I have repudiated Christ and the revelations of the Bible altogether,”” he thought, ““if my doctrine is true, how can he be happy? and if he is happy, how can my doctrine be true?”” Howard determined to read the Bible thoroughly and after much thought and consideration decided, ““Yes this is the Book of God.”” He then began attending Methodist meetings and encouraged his family, friends, and servants to unite with him in joining the Church and living a holy life.²

James O. Andrew included this parable in one of his journal entries for 1816, when he received an appointment to the circuit that included Howard’s church. As his story suggests, Andrew believed in spiritual equality and the ability of all Christians (regardless of color, gender, or age) to have a religious impact on their community. He recognized the earthly disparity between Peter and his white master but focused on the slave’s spiritual capacity. This same minister who spoke of Peter’s religious authority, however, also owned slaves and practiced patriarchal government in his own household—two facts that would seemingly detract from his more egalitarian views. Rather than consider the paradox of his life as slaveholder and Methodist itinerant, Andrew spent his time advancing both the principle of spiritual equality and the

² 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* (Nashville: Southern Methodist Publishing House, 1883), 81-83.

importance of maintaining the social hierarchy. Andrew became a powerful patriarch and a humble servant of God, a temporal master and a spiritual egalitarian, demonstrating the strange dichotomy at the heart of early southern Methodism.

Born in Georgia in 1794 to a poor Methodist minister and his devoted wife, Andrew grew up surrounded by conflicting social and religious principles. His father, John Andrew, was devoted to Methodist doctrine and discipline. After John Andrew left his circuit to take a permanent position at a local church he held a weekly Sunday School for the black community. Even as he delivered religious instruction to the slaves, the Andrew family patriarch also became a slaveholder. He bought a few slaves to tend the small farm on which his family lived while he fulfilled his ministerial responsibilities. Thus James O. Andrew received a practical education in southern religion and social relations while living in his father's household. As a boy, he learned to separate the spiritual from the secular and to accept both the necessity of slavery and the truth of egalitarian religion.³

As an adult, Andrew never became a true planter patriarch, but through inheritance and marriage he owned several slaves who mostly worked as house servants. A mulatto slave named Kitty served the Andrews the longest and in his journal and letters he often mentioned her as a special member of the household. Andrew claimed that his first wife, Amelia, had a close bond with Kitty, whom she asked for from her deathbed. "Calling to Kitty, who had nursed her with the affection of a daughter," Andrew reported his wife saying, "Kitty, you have been very kind to me, and I love you as if you were my own child. Be pious, serve God, and promise me that

³ Ibid., 16-22.

you will meet me in heaven.”” According to the minister, Kitty even kissed her mistress before Amelia passed into the next life.⁴ Andrew insisted that he did not purchase Kitty but that a family member left the girl to him in her will so that he could “bring her up and educate her as far as he could” under the stipulation that she could choose to stay with him or to go to Liberia when she turned nineteen. Andrew justified his continued ownership of Kitty by pointing to a contract that stipulated she would rather remain his property than be sent to a strange land. He also professed a great love for the woman who helped raise his children and who cared for his wife, a love that made her “a true and faithful friend” of his family.⁵

James O. Andrew’s dual positions as minister and slaveowner were inherently contradictory but certainly not uncommon. The minister represented the southern Methodist perspective on slaveholding during the 1830s and 1840s: he opposed the brutalities of slavery and the slave market but never came out against the institution itself. And like other southern ministers, Andrew rationalized that slaveholding was not sinful if it conformed to biblical commands. The itinerant made a distinction between slaveowners who purchased or sold slaves and his inheritance of slave property. Like other southern ministers, he viewed the slave trade as an unchristian enterprise and slavery as potentially damaging to the souls of both slaves and masters.⁶ By condemning the trade and urging amelioration of the slaves’ condition, Andrew and

⁴ Ibid., 306-308.

⁵ Ibid., 311-313.

⁶ Ibid., 495.

his southern colleagues granted themselves a reprieve considering the morality of the institution itself. In fact, ministers would often argue that slavery gave them an opportunity to witness to the slaves and that manumission would reduce the spiritual and material wellbeing of their human property.⁷ In early meetings of the South Carolina Conference, Andrew complained that Church leaders placed too much emphasis on freeing the slaves and did not realize the problems associated with this goal. Manumission “had for its basis neither the Bible nor common sense,” he later recollected, and “has produced nothing but evil from the time of its first inception.”⁸ As a young preacher, he pointed out that ministers in the South did not actively seek slave ownership, but many would receive slaves from their family’s estates. Freeing such slaves only created more problems, he explained, and it was better for them to be owned by a Methodist minister than an irreligious master who felt no accountability to God.⁹

⁷ Some of the most well-known arguments for slavery as a vehicle for salvation include Henry Bidleman Bascom, *Methodism and Slavery: With Other Matters in Controversy between the North and the South; being a Review of the Manifesto of the Majority, in Reply to the Protest of the Minority, of the late General Conference of the Methodist E. Church, in the Case of Bishop Andrew* (Louisville: Hodges, Todd and Pruett, 1845); E. N. Elliott, ed., *Cotton is King, and Pro-Slavery Arguments: Compromising the Writings of Hammond, Harper, Christy, Stringfellow, Hodge, Bledsoe, and Cartwright, on this Important Subject* (Augusta, GA: Pritchard, Abbott, and Loomis, 1860); William A. Smith, *Lectures on the Philosophy and Practice of Slavery, as exhibited in the Domestic Institution of Slavery in the United States: with the Duties of Masters to Slaves* (Nashville: Stevenson and Owen, 1857).

⁸ Smith, *Life and Letters of Andrew*, 154.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 153-154.

Northern Methodists did not find the southerner's arguments convincing and when the General Conference elected Andrew as a bishop in 1832, his relationship to slavery came under intense scrutiny. Even though he owned at least two slaves, including Kitty, when he was nominated for the position, most northern ministers consented to his leadership because his connections to slavery were relatively weak.¹⁰ In a conversation with a fellow southern itinerant, Andrew explained that he did not become a bishop by his merit, but "by [his] poverty."¹¹ His relatively meager income and the modest nature of his father's estate meant that Andrew would not own more slaves unless he married a woman who brought them into their union.

But in 1844 he did just that, marrying his second wife, Leonora Greenwood, a woman from Georgia whose former husband had left her with several slaves. Although Andrew saw to it that the slaves would remain in his wife's name, the General Conference seemed dissatisfied and began to discuss his suspension or forced resignation.¹² When he decided to marry Greenwood, the bishop may not have realized the growing pressure of antislavery sentiment in the North or the professional repercussions of his connection to slavery.¹³ It soon became clear that the northern ministers would not compromise on the issue and so Andrew and his southern brethren

¹⁰ Ibid., 229.

¹¹ Ibid., 232.

¹² C. C. Goen, *Broken Churches, Broken Nation: Denominational Schisms and the Coming of the American Civil War* (Macon: Mercer University Press, 1985), 82.

¹³ Smith, *Life and Letters of Andrew*, 336-337.

agreed that separation from the national Church would best serve their interests.¹⁴ Andrew's biographer contended that for southern Methodists, "it was division or death" and although Andrew mourned the division of the denomination, he also regarded it as necessary to preserve the Church in the South.¹⁵

Andrew and his southern cohort recognized that slavery stood at the center of this whole controversy. In his writings on the "Southern Slave Population," Andrew supported slavery as a method to reach lost souls—to, in a sense, liberate the black community. If ministers and masters taught them about the Gospel, he argued, it "will bring them into the enjoyment of freedom of a higher character; freedom from the bondage of Satan, from the control of passions and lusts the most brutal and savage."¹⁶ Although Andrew offered conventional proslavery comments about the uncivilized nature of people of African descent, he combined these with the language of spiritual equality, believing that slaves could receive salvation and spiritual power—even liberation—through religious instruction.¹⁷ "The negro is a *man*," he insisted, "he has an

¹⁴ Ibid., 337-343. Luther Lee and E. Smith, eds., *The Debates of the General Conference, of the M.E. Church, May, 1844. To which is added a review of the proceedings of said conference, by Rev. Luther Lee and Rev. E. Smith* (New York: O. Scott, 1845), 303-304, 390.

¹⁵ Smith, *Life and Letters of Andrew*, 377-378.

¹⁶ James O. Andrew, "The Southern Slave Population. Review" *Methodist Magazine and Quarterly Review* 8 (New York: J. Emory and B. Waugh, 1831), 316.

¹⁷ Andrew's message contrasted with other popular southern proslavery arguments. For a secular source, see George Fitzhugh, *Sociology for the South, or the Failure of Free Society* (Richmond: A. Morris, 1854). For more complete studies of this secular mindset, see also Robert

immortal spirit; and the God who gave him immortality, has adapted the Gospel to his condition, and intends it shall be preached to him.”¹⁸ If ministers rejected slavery, Andrew argued that they would lose access to an entire race of lost souls. By accepting the institution, they could bring their mission to slaves and masters alike.¹⁹ The inclusion of black southerners in God’s grace and eternal life led ministers such as Andrew to craft complex arguments or myths to combine Methodist doctrine with regional mores. Like the tale of “old James,” Andrew wrote of several instances of slaves’ spiritual power over their masters, being sure to cite the slave’s obedience in every situation that did not involve religion. The spiritual slave, in other words, could conform to the southern model of absolute deference except when his master required him to do something against God’s commands.²⁰

William Fogel, *Without Consent or Contract: The Rise and Fall of American Slavery* (New York: W. W. Norton and Co., 1994); Eugene D. Genovese, *The Political Economy of Slavery: Studies in the Economy and Society of the Slave South* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1989); and David Brion Davis, *Inhuman Bondage: The Rise and Fall of Slavery in the New World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006). For more on evangelical defenses of slavery, see John Patrick Daly, *When Slavery Was Called Freedom: Evangelicalism, Proslavery, and the Causes of the Civil War* (Louisville: University Press of Kentucky, 2002).

¹⁸ Andrew, “Southern Slave Population,” 317.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 318.

²⁰ For instance, Andrew recounted the story of Henry Evans, a black man from Fayetteville, Georgia, as a perfect example of the saved slave’s behavior. Evans obeyed his master in every way except when he ordered him not to attend Methodist meetings. According to Andrew, Evans calmly explained to his master, “I am willing to obey you in every thing else, but, master, I must go to meeting; if you correct me, I’ll bear it, but I cannot neglect going to meeting—I must serve God.” In this account, Andrew granted the slave the right to disobey and

This recognition of the equality of souls led Andrew and his fellow ministers to craft a new type of patriarchy in the South—a Methodist patriarchy that both preserved and undermined the social hierarchy. The powerful relationships between master and slave, father and child, and husband and wife all changed in the spiritual realm, where every sinner, regardless of social station, stood before their heavenly Master and Father in judgment. Andrew applied this understanding of spiritual equality to all believers, insisting that, like slaves and their masters, children could convict their parents and lead them to salvation.²¹ According to Andrew, husbands and wives too had equal spiritual standing and should serve as partners in religious instruction in the home. Their union, he argued, should be “mutually productive of happiness.” Although husbands and wives had separate roles, he contended, their ultimate goal should be the same: “to help each other to heaven.”²² Methodist doctrine thus leveled the traditional hierarchy and provided opportunities for women, children, and slaves to escape or even reject patriarchal authority in matters of faith.

Methodist patriarchy not only challenged the very nature of the patriarchal hierarchy of the South but it also transformed the meaning of masculinity for ministers. Andrew’s life served

overturned the traditional master-slave relationship, creating a new arrangement based on their equality as God’s children. James O. Andrew, *Miscellanies: Comprising Letters, Essays, and Addresses: to which is added a biographical sketch of Mrs. Ann Amelia Andrew* (Louisville: Morton and Griswald, 1854), 325-326.

²¹ James O. Andrew, *Family Government: A Treatise on Conjugal, Parental, and Filial Duties* (Charleston: B. Jenkins, 1847), 40, 135.

²² *Ibid.*, 25-35.

as an example of this distinct Methodist version of southern manhood. Southern ministers adopted the concepts of masculinity and mastery from their non-Methodist peers but they did not display their manhood in the same ways as other men. For instance, during his travels as an itinerant, Andrew refused to engage in activities that most southern men regarded as evidence of worth or status. The bishop did not drink alcohol and, in fact, chastised men who did; he refused to become involved in secular politics (even though his career in the Church required him to engage in denominational politics); and he shunned the acquisition of wealth.²³ For most southern men, activities such as drinking, politicking, and making money were what defined *southern men*. Andrew and his fellow itinerants rejected this notion of manhood and created their own definition of masculinity based on piety and perseverance. They did not focus on attaining riches or even providing for their families, but instead prided themselves in subsisting on as little income as possible.

Because they valued poverty, ministers often took wives who could travel with them or who sacrificed a great deal for their husbands' ministries. Andrew advised young itinerants to wait until they felt secure in their profession before they married. He feared they might grow too concerned about worldly affairs to be effective on their circuits. He reminded new ministers that their occupation would require them to travel for much of the year, meaning that they may not be able to properly care for their wife and children. As an itinerant and bishop, Andrew never quit his station as a traveling preacher, even after marriage and fatherhood. For many southern men, this decision would seem irresponsible or dishonorable; they believed that a father should

²³ Andrew, *Miscellanies*, 144, 177, 225.

oversee the family's affairs, provide for dependents, and give them all the comforts he could afford. For Andrew and his colleagues, their primary responsibility was to the Church and their families always came second. They thought that by serving God, they by extension served their wives and children and would see their reward in the next life.²⁴

Despite the tensions between Methodist principles and southern culture, ministers still embraced the region's patriarchal ideals or at least tried to adapt them to their beliefs. Ministers such as Andrew did not fight in tavern brawls or defend their honor in duels, instead they practiced "aggressive" evangelism. The bishop explained that the Church "is, it must always be, decidedly and boldly aggressive."²⁵ One way that ministers could demonstrate the forceful nature of the Church was through disciplining members. Discipline provided Methodist men with the power and authority that they may not have had outside of the connection. Andrew advised young preachers to remember the importance of discipline in the churches. As ministers, "it is necessary not only to preach the gospel fully, earnestly, and powerfully," he insisted, "but it is also necessary that you, as the shepherds of God's flock, maintain the purity of the church by the faithful, kind, and impartial administration of a godly, scriptural discipline."²⁶ True success, he argued, came from the enforcement of discipline through ministerial leadership. Andrew believed that sound discipline not only led to the success of the Church but also to the

²⁴ Ibid., 225, 306, 381.

²⁵ Ibid., 231.

²⁶ Ibid., 345-346.

“greatness” of individual ministers. According to Andrew, ministers deserved more respect than lay or non-Methodist men because they “have more to do than other men: our aims are higher: our work father-reaching and more overwhelmingly glorious in its results.”²⁷

James O. Andrew adhered to southern patriarchy and honor culture but recreated it in a more spiritual image. His life and work represented the culmination of decades of Methodist growth and evolution in the southern United States as ministers sought to save souls by making their religion more palatable to the slaveholding South. In the process, preachers developed their own version of masculinity and formed new standards for relationships based on melding together southern norms and doctrinal standards. The following chapters explore the different aspects of southern Methodist patriarchy in the antebellum period and the consequences of its creation. The ministerial attitude was neither entirely theological nor purely secular; it was the result of both religious and temporal pressures, all of which led to a paradoxical perspective. Methodist ministers advocated both hierarchy and equality, and in doing so promoted worldly and religious principles. This strategy separated them from other white men and bound them together in a common understanding of true and godly manhood. It also allowed them access to plantations and homes—places that had once barred Methodism but became more receptive once ministers made their peace with slavery. Southern Methodism emerged from this compromise, openly praising the supposedly positive qualities of the peculiar institution but without completely conforming to the mainstream mindset regarding slavery and family government. During the late antebellum period, ministers’ writings and publications revealed their uneasiness

²⁷ Ibid., 346-347.

with this delicate balance between spiritual and material aims and, at times, expressed an awareness of the uncertain consequences of their proslavery, patriarchal beliefs and egalitarian doctrine.

The tension inherent with Methodist patriarchy affected all areas of ministerial life, including preachers' identity as southern men, their place in the Church hierarchy, the nature of their home life, and the relationships they had with their dependents. In all of these areas, southern Methodist ministers felt constrained by their religious beliefs when they tried to fulfill patriarchal expectations. This study examines the precarious nature of Methodist manhood in the South and the ways in which preachers (and especially itinerant ministers) adapted their beliefs. This constant desire to balance religious commitments and social norms made the lives of traveling preachers in the antebellum South extremely difficult. During the first two decades of the nineteenth century, before they more effectively adapted their faith to regional demands, Methodist leaders experienced intense prejudice and persecution in the southern states. In the 1830s and 1840s, however, they reevaluated their approach and altered their stance towards patriarchy and slavery to attract white converts, especially wealthy planters and men who had the most influence in their communities.²⁸ An examination of this shift in Methodist principles and practice underscores the transformation of all elements of southern Methodist pastoral life as ministers' values were affected by and existed in tension with temporal mores.

²⁸ Sources that discuss this shift in Methodist policy regarding slavery and slaveholders in more detail include Cynthia Lynn Lyerly, *Methodism in the Southern Mind, 1770-1810* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 22, 36, 49-50 and Donald Mathews, *Slavery and Methodism: A Chapter in American Morality, 1780-1845* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1965).

Methodists were not the only evangelicals to encounter problems with their mission in the South. Historians have described the impact of southern culture and slavery on Protestant churches in the region and the trials and tribulations of witnessing to powerful planter patriarchs and slave communities.²⁹ Scholars have also shown how sectionalism affected evangelical ministers and produced schisms between northern and southern branches of their denominations.³⁰ The idea that Protestant sects experienced significant change in the antebellum

²⁹ In *Southern Cross*, Christine Heyrman pays particular attention to the tension between Protestant preachers and slaveowners who viewed these evangelicals as unmanly or as threats to the social status quo. For her views on how ministers overcame secular male skepticism, see Christine Heyrman, *Southern Cross: The Beginnings of the Bible Belt* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1997), 206-252. Donald Mathews provides a persuasive argument as to the southern evangelical position on slavery and the contradictions inherent to their perspective. “[Evangelical ministers] continued to bring slaves into Christian fellowship,” Mathews contends, “arguing that civil and social condition affected neither the need for salvation nor the responsibility to provide it. Indeed Evangelicals seemed to assume that their having abjured the attack upon slavery in order to convert slaves gave them a special claim upon the conscience of the South.” Thus, by extension, ministers allied themselves with proslavery southerners with the rationalization that slavery was part of God’s plan and was necessary for missionary efforts in the region. Donald Mathews, *Religion in the Old South* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1979), 136-184.

³⁰ C. C. Goen presents the argument that the division of the national Protestant organizations in the antebellum period portended the political crisis that would lead the nation into Civil War. Goen, *Broken Churches, Broken Nation*. Mitchell Snay also provides a comprehensive review of the effects of sectionalism on evangelical church structures. Mitchell Snay, *Gospel of Disunion: Religion and Separatism in the Antebellum South* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993). The Methodist schism has held particular interest for churchmen and historians alike ever since it occurred in 1844. Early studies of the incident include both the northern and southern perspectives. For the northern argument, see Luther Lee and E. Smith, “Review” in *The Debates of the General Conference, of the M.E. Church, May 1844. To which is added a review of the proceedings of said conference* (New York: O. Scott, 1845). For an example of the southern defense, see H. B. Bascom, *Methodism and Slavery: With Other Matters in Controversy between the North and the South Being a Review of the Manifesto of the Majority, in Reply to the Protest of the Minority, of the Late General Conference of the Methodist E. Church, in the Case of Bishop Andrew* (Fankfort, KY: Hodges, Todd, and Pruett, 1945). Later, John Nelson Norwood provided an account of the effect of slavery and ecclesiastical disputes on the separation, John Nelson Norwood, *The Schism in the Methodist*

period as they adapted to an evolving southern culture is not new; historians of American religious life have recognized this transformation and have used it to analyze larger political and social developments in the United States. This study provides a new take on this theory, however, by exploring how one Protestant sect preserved their fundamental religious principles at the same time that they modified their beliefs regarding questionable and unethical social practices. The shift in southern Methodism affected more than ministerial opinions regarding slavery; it reached into preachers' homes and churches and altered the very fabric of family life and church government. Methodist ministers could never be typical southern men; their profession simply prevented it. But they could take on vestiges of southern manhood and become patriarchs in their own right. This story of the creation of Methodist masculinity offers insight into the pervasiveness of southern patriarchal ideals and the resilience of evangelical notions of spiritual equality. These two forces met in southern Methodism and produced a new type of religious standard separate from but deeply connected to conventional social practices.

To the nature and effects of the creation of Methodist manhood, this study focuses less on the reality of ministers' situations and more on the ideas that bound these men to each other and to their congregations. Individual preachers' experiences in the South varied widely depending on their ambitions, the size of their families, and their standing in the Church Conference. Even though their backgrounds differed considerably, southern preachers shared a language of spiritual authority and religious patriarchy that allowed them to connect with their church

Episcopal Church, 1844 (Alfred, NY: Alfred University, 1923). Despite their disparate views on the matter, the authors who studied the subject all agree to one overarching principle: that the Methodist schism occurred because of divergent sectional interests and pitted southern and northern brethren against each other based on their regional associations.

members and clerical cohort. In their sermons and publications, they passed on myths of bold and heroic itinerants who adhered to Methodist notions of personal discipline, holiness, and virtue, defying the traditional southern image of manhood that centered on independence and social status. Through these parables and accounts (whether real or fictional) southern Methodists described both their role as outsiders who nevertheless saw themselves as southerners. This dichotomy reveals the fissures between southern religion and secular society and the way that Methodist ministers tried to bridge the gap between denominational decrees and regional demands.

Initially, Church leaders described their purpose in adapting Methodism to southern culture as purely evangelical. And certainly James O. Andrew and his southern brethren labored to convert as many souls as possible in the South—black and white, men and women, parents and children. At the same time, however, these ministers were the ones who had the most profound and transformative conversion experience. When Methodist itinerants first entered the region, non-Methodists viewed them as radicals, as men who stood apart from the traditions and attitudes of white society. Over time, however, ministers became integrated into the very society that they were trying to save. They owned slaves, spoke of honor and manhood, and longed to become legitimate southern patriarchs. Their mission to the South pushed these men away from the national Church and into their own organization founded on sectional interests and their understanding of religious patriarchy. They became southern men—conflicted and respected, independent yet reliant on the labor of others—and as southern men fought not only for their beliefs but also to justify their behavior. The following chapters expose both the contradictions and accomplishments of a unique group of southerners who were both leaders and followers in an aggressive and evolving slave society.

CHAPTER 1

METHODIST MANHOOD

The perfection of ministerial purity of heart is to merge our honor
in the honor of Christ.¹

Fellow clergymen and congregants might not have deemed John B. McFerrin the ideal minister. He had a short fuse and a firm belief in discipline that led him to rebuke others with unnecessary severity. Yet his obstinate and aggressive personality led his friends and followers to call him the ideal man. According to his friend and biographer, O. P. Fitzgerald, his Scotch-Irish heritage defined his masculine nature: “the best of this blood is very good—the worst is as bad as Satan would have it.”² Born in Rutherford County, Tennessee, in 1807, McFerrin’s presumed predisposition for manliness was encouraged by a rugged frontier lifestyle and a

¹ “Merging our Honor in Christ’s Honor,” *Southern Christian Advocate*, Sept 30, 1837.

² O. P. Fitzgerald, *John B. McFerrin: A Biography* (Nashville: Publishing House of the M.E. Church, South, 1888), 11.

family model that followed the customary gender divisions of antebellum southern society.³ His mother's gentle and nurturing personality contrasted with his father's dominant and willful temperament, providing an example for young John who truly became his father's son. McFerrin's masculine spirit would both propel him into positions of authority in the Methodist Church as well as complicate his relationships with fellow ministers and laity alike. His attitudes and actions reflected an amalgam of southern expectations and Methodist restrictions on masculine behavior that clergymen experienced during the antebellum period. This combination led to the creation of a distinct denominational manhood, one that at once followed and deviated from southern norms.

McFerrin demonstrated his masculine prowess and fiery determination when he joined the Tennessee Annual Conference on trial as a traveling preacher in 1825.⁴ As an itinerant, he channeled the hardy masculinity of his youth and always proved ready to wield his rhetorical power against those who disputed or drifted from strict doctrine and discipline. "Cudgel in hand," McFerrin, according to his biographer, would "drive them back into the beaten path."⁵ He did not always consider the consequences of his quick temper, and often made mistakes when

³ For a comprehensive discussion of evangelical notions of gender and family hierarchy in yeoman and planter households, see Stephanie McCurry, *Masters of Small Worlds: Yeoman Households, Gender Relations, and Political Culture of the Antebellum South Carolina Low Country* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995).

⁴ Fitzgerald, *John B. McFerrin*, 49.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 42.

chastising others, but his directness and martial approach to discipline only contributed to the public perception of his manhood. According to Fitzgerald, “the play of his genius and the intensity of his feeling bore him beyond the barriers where other men of weaker natures and cooler passions paused.” McFerrin’s willingness to confront became evident when he entered into heated battles with other ministers and used, what Fitzgerald described as, “every lawful weapon within reach.”⁶ Unlike other southern adherents to the code of honor, however, McFerrin exhibited the restraint required of Methodist clergymen and did not resort to physical violence to resolve disputes (even though he did enjoy some playful wrestling in his younger years). He never exchanged blows or fought a duel but used the power of the pen and his sharp tongue to defend both his church and himself.

Whatever self-control he demonstrated in avoiding violence McFerrin did not exhibit in his verbal confrontations with other men. The minister never hesitated to go on the rhetorical offensive, whether in his sermons or newspaper publications. Some of his cohort admired his forcefulness, terming it a “gladiator” approach to all opposition. ““What a man McFerrin is!”” exclaimed the Rev. George W. Brush after witnessing McFerrin overpower opponents at a Louisville Conference, ““His resources are inexhaustible!””⁷ In 1840, he became editor of the South Western *Christian Advocate* in Nashville. His new employment provided the opportunity for much verbal sparring over doctrine. He believed that the defense of the Church and its success in the Southwest (then defined by Methodists as the frontier region that began in

⁶ Ibid., 43-44.

⁷ Ibid., 81.

Tennessee) depended on his paper. He saw himself as the primary “Methodist warrior” in an “editorial watchtower” for the region.⁸ McFerrin worked to maintain this martial image, his biographer describing the minister’s position in the army of the Lord as courageous and unyielding. During the sectional schism over slavery in 1844, McFerrin openly defended the southern institution and also spoke out against abolitionism. The editor claimed to desire peace and union with the northern Church, but went to the General Conference ready to fight and not acquiesce to the “Northern conscience.” As the Conference deliberated separation, McFerrin insisted that if they could not resolve the “difficulty” between the sections (i.e. acquiesce to the *southern* conscience), they should “bring in a plan for a peaceable division of the church.” He claimed that he “did not like to be forced to go off and erect a Southern church,” slyly accusing the northern brethren of causing the split and defending the intentions of the southern branch.⁹ Combining his regional devotion to slavery and the language of honor and manhood with his devotion to the Church, McFerrin exemplified the coalescence of southern masculine mores and Methodist social values.

As with McFerrin, other ministers’ biographies and autobiographies used the language of honor and masculinity to describe the clergy’s character and presented these men as spiritual warriors. But the distinction between earthly and religious combat led to a marked contrast between regional and Methodist masculinity. Ministers served in the spiritual army of their

⁸ Ibid., 144.

⁹ Luther Lee and E. Smith, *The Debates of the General Conference, The M.E. Church, May 1844*, (New York: O. Scott, for the Wesleyan Methodist Connection of America, 1845), 292.

Lord—meaning they were not to explore the social practices often associated with manhood in the region. The *Doctrines and Discipline of the Methodist Episcopal Church in America* and the later edition created for the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, (MEC, South) required ministers to act as examples for other believers and to abstain from all activity viewed as immoral. These restrictions included the worldly (and masculine) habits of “laying up treasure upon earth” through seeking fortune or fame, “fighting, quarreling, brawling,” “drinking spirituous liquors,” and “taking such diversions as cannot be used in the name of the Lord Jesus,” including politicking, frivolous socializing, dancing, and gambling.¹⁰ Despite the constraints placed on ministerial social activities, southern traditions and customs influenced the preachers’ lives and experiences. This was especially true as more southerners joined the connection and as the denomination became more entrenched in the region. The combination of cultural influences and Methodist discipline resulted in a distinctive concept of manhood for ministers who were eager to prove both their masculinity and spiritual purity.¹¹

¹⁰ Cynthia Lynn Lyerly discusses the conflict between ministerial and secular mores in her work, *Methodism and the Southern Mind, 1775-1810*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998). Although her focus is on the early period of Methodist growth in the South, the requirements of the *Discipline* did not change drastically throughout the antebellum period. Southern Methodist attitudes toward slavery altered after 1810 to reflect regional mores, but demands against drinking and other so-called vices persisted. Joshua Soule, ed. *The Doctrines and Discipline of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South* (Nashville: E. Stevenson and F.A. Owen, for the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, 1856), 30-31.

¹¹ The gradual absorption of southern cultural attitudes by Methodist ministers reflected a general trend in the United States as Protestant leaders emphasized numbers of converts over moral discipline and theological discussion. As the nation experienced increased sectionalism, clergymen in both the North and the South acquiesced to social pressures to alter their behavior and teachings, which was reflected in the popular press and sentimental writings of the mid-nineteenth century. For one scholar’s interpretation of how this process unfolded in New

Methodists applied the aggressive and confrontational elements of worldly masculinity to their rhetoric, avoiding physical attacks but creating a means to express their manhood through pointed language and in their relationships with other men. For instance, the clergy did not duel with pistols, but with pens on the pages of religious newspapers. They also defended their manhood and reputation before quarterly and annual conferences, fending off assaults on their integrity and criticism from other ministers who questioned their orthodoxy or behavior. Although they could not join in the prototypical male conviviality in taverns or attend dances and other social functions, they created their own fellowship through a clerical brotherhood, maintaining close relationships with each other and providing support for those itinerants undergoing special hardships. In the end, their development of a particular brand of southern manhood led to distinct standards for men within the Church that imitated but did not replicate the prescriptive for mainstream southern society.

This prescriptive (especially as it pertains to the illusive concept of “southern honor”) has long been the subject of historical inquiry, and several scholars have attempted to explain honor culture and how it affected southerners’ actions and attitudes. Important works by Bertram Wyatt-Brown and W. J. Cash offer explanations for the forms and fashion of masculinity in the region and focus on the process by which men who were not religiously active proved their patriarchal fitness. This process included interaction and competition with other men through gaming, gambling, drinking, and violent forms of retribution (including fist fights, dueling, and

England, see Ann Douglas’s *The Feminization of American Culture*, (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1998), 7.

lynching).¹² Through these displays of virility, rituals of deference and authority, and enforcement of accepted mores, southerners maintained a hierarchical system that promoted white male control over the region. Cash termed this model of social behavior the “Savage Ideal”—a staunch belief in consensus that often led to violent punishment of dissent.¹³ According to Wyatt-Brown and Cash, the adhesive that bound southern men together was an unrelenting drive to prove their families’ and their personal worth through aggression and posturing.¹⁴ Wyatt-Brown stresses the importance the “code of honor” to southern men. His analysis of southern religion places the church in opposition to this system of “rigid and sacralized customs” that praised masculinity, patriarchy, and male privilege. He argues that the dichotomy of “pride and piety” defined the Old South and its customs, and many religious southerners were forced to balance or fuse the competing ethics of honor and Christianity in their own lives.¹⁵ Thus, according to Wyatt-Brown, honor culture and religious rhetoric permeated the Old South and served as opposing forces in a region characterized by contradiction and tension.

Recent studies on antebellum southern religion confirm and challenge these notions of honor rituals, masculinity, and consensus. Wyatt-Brown’s concept of southern “honor” has been

¹² Bertram Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor: Ethics and Behavior in the Old South*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 164.

¹³ W. J. Cash, *Mind of the South*, (New York: Vintage Books, 1941), 90-91.

¹⁴ Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor*, 64.

¹⁵ Bertram Wyatt-Brown, *The Shaping of Southern Culture: Honor, Grace, and War, 1760s-1890s*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001), 83-85.

termed as “an empty vessel” because of its all-encompassing explanation of southern culture.¹⁶ The diverse interpretations and definitions of honor offered by ministers in the region supports this criticism but also substantiates the notion that “honor” and its foundational force, manhood, were powerful forces that affected all southerners, including the most religious. Some scholars, such as Beth Barton Schweiger and Nathan Hatch, argue that non-religious social pressures weakened pastoral authority and led ministers to conform to southern conventions. Because of the influence of regional mores and ministerial dependence on congregational financial support, Protestant clergymen instinctively fashioned their social customs to better suit southern culture.¹⁷ By the 1830s, this need to conform caused the Methodist ministry to professionalize and made individual preachers beholden to the needs and desires of their congregants.¹⁸ Several ministers became so in touch with secular customs that they picked up some bad habits themselves, drinking to excess or engaging in irreligious conversations. As Christine Heyrman has argued,

¹⁶ Kenneth Greenberg, review of *The Shaping of Southern Culture: Honor, Grace, and War, 1760s-1890s*, by Bertram Wyatt-Brown, *The American Historical Review*, Oct 2002, 1226-1227.

¹⁷ Beth Barton Schweiger, *The Gospel Working Up: Progress and the Pulpit in Nineteenth-Century Virginia*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 6, 32. The financial dependency of ministers increased after the Revolution with the disestablishment of religion. Methodist and Baptist clergymen always experienced dependence on community and congregational offerings for support, a fact on which the Methodists often prided themselves but society at large often questioned or condemned. For more on the disestablishment and the development of Methodism in the early republic, see Ann Douglas, *The Feminization of American Culture*, 17-43. Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor*, 188.

¹⁸ Nathan Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 202.

however, the Church still promoted its particular concept of morality despite the actions of these wayward clergymen. Its insistence on temperance, nonviolence, discipline, and spiritual equality brought it into conflict with some critics who continued to question whether Methodism jeopardized mastery and patriarchy.¹⁹ Thus, southern ministers embraced certain elements of masculine culture, proving its power, but also demonstrated how varied interpretations of “honor” were in the South through their rejection of violence and insistence on specific moral standards.

As a result of their condemnation of some southern mores, Methodist ministers often became the target of violence. This persecution contributed to the southern Church’s adaptation to some elements of regional culture and acceptance of the proslavery argument. In the first decades of the century, many clergymen suffered from violent attacks and a few died at the hands of angry mobs that viewed the Methodist Church as a threat to order. During the winter of 1800 in Charleston, South Carolina, a mob overtook the preacher George Dougherty and tried to “pump him” (drown him by holding his head under a water pump) in front of the Methodist meetinghouse. “Here was a fine pretext for the young bloods of Charleston to display their chivalry,” a clergyman later noted, and for a young preacher to be publicly disgraced and emasculated. The article alluded to the significance of violence in southern male culture, where physical altercations proved the young man’s masculinity. But by demonstrating their own “chivalry,” the persecutors endangered the perceived manhood of the poor preacher, who could not fight back because of his ministerial oath to follow Methodist discipline. Contributing to the

¹⁹ Christine Heyrman, *Southern Cross: The Beginnings of the Bible Belt*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997), 206-212.

symbolism of the scene, a sympathetic female member of the Church, Martha Coogley, rushed to Dougherty's aid. She tore off her apron and shoved it into the spout of the pump, rescuing the preacher from a likely death. Her efforts ultimately failed to save him, however, for he died a few days later from a cold he caught that night.²⁰ The attempted rescue of Dougherty by a sympathetic woman (who even used her apron, an emblem of her femininity, to save him) only further unmanned the beaten minister. And, unfortunately, Dougherty's persecution was hardly unique. Attacks on ministers were common in the early days of southern Methodism (before and directly after the Revolutionary War) and were often related to the widespread perception of their unmanliness.²¹

Another reason that might have encouraged the Methodist clergy to adopt some version of southern masculinity was the belief that clergymen were effeminate and belonged in the woman's sphere. Dougherty's rescue by a female congregant, for instance, played into the imagery of the general weakness of Methodist ministers and their separation from male society. Historian Kenneth Greenberg's litany of common male behaviors in the antebellum South, such as gambling, lying, and dueling, excluded clergymen beholden to the Methodist *Discipline*. Non-Methodist society often labeled ministers abstainers and moralizers for refusing to participate in typical masculine activities. Methodists contributed to this image by creating a separate sphere of

²⁰ Charles F. Deems, *The Annals of Southern Methodism for 1855* (New York: J.A. Gray's Fire-Proof Printing Office, 1856), 251-253.

²¹ Heyrman, *Southern Cross*, 226.

their own, in which itinerants “rejected the cares, and gains, and hindrances” of worldly interests. In fact, many clergymen believed that if traveling preachers “blend earthly and heavenly functions,” they would “suffer for their sacrilege.”²² But, even if they did not participate in traditional male practices, clergymen still understood the “language of honor” and when it was being used against them.²³ Some southern patriarchs, such as John Randolph of Roanoke, openly questioned the manhood of ministers and was suspicious of their aversion to manly recreation. At the 1829 Virginia Constitutional Convention, Randolph insisted that the clergy belonged in the “domestic circle” with women, arguing that society should limit the divines’ exposure to rough masculine pursuits to protect their sensitive moral scruples.²⁴ But ministers sought to dispel doubts about their status as southern men. They created their own concepts of masculinity that borrowed from worldly standards of manhood but also celebrated their isolation from southern society.

Where the demands of society conflicted with the Methodist *Discipline*, ministers were bound to defend the latter regardless of criticism. In fact, faithfulness in the face of persecution often proved a minister’s worth. Divines “must expect to be hated and despised by all men,” the

²² “Travelling Preachers Should be Preachers,” *Southern Christian Advocate*, Feb. 14, 1840.

²³ Kenneth S. Greenberg, *Honor and Slavery: Lies, Duels, Noses, Masks, Dressing as a Woman, Gifts, Strangers, Humanitarianism, Death, Slave Rebellions, the Proslavery Argument, Baseball, Hunting, and Gambling in the Old South*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), xii.

²⁴ Quoted by Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor*, 102.

Discipline advised, “except the children of God, and those who are seeking so to be.” In explaining the doctrines and discipline of the church, Francis Asbury and Thomas Coke argued that isolation from irreligious society could serve as a necessary buffer from worldly vice. For a preacher experiencing such seclusion, “[t]he wall of contempt which surrounds him, preserves him from a thousand temptations to which other ministers are exposed.”²⁵ As Methodist influence grew in the South and hostility dwindled, ministers faced and at times submitted to cultural expectations of manhood. This adaptation to southern practices did not change the foundational principles of the *Discipline* or Methodist rhetoric regarding the need to adhere to its moral guidelines. In 1859, the *Methodist Pulpit South* published several articles eschewing the honor of man and promoting the higher cause of glorifying God. The Rev. G. F. Pierce of the Tennessee Conference argued that a man could follow “a constitutional impulse” to act morally in order to enhance his reputation or influence and believe himself to be “honorable, moral, refined.” His soul, however, would undoubtedly suffer loneliness and destitution. A good name and wealth are worldly values, he contended, but persecution and salvation are the lot and the reward of God’s true followers.²⁶

Taking this advice to heart, many clergymen felt it their duty to confront other men concerning their social habits, dueling, and political aspirations. Members of the Methodist

²⁵ Thomas Coke and Francis Asbury, *Doctrines and Discipline of the Methodist Episcopal Church in America with Explanatory Notes*, 10th ed. (Philadelphia: Henry Tuckniss, 1798), 94-95.

²⁶ G. F. Pierce, “Devotedness to Christ,” in *Methodist Pulpit South*, 2nd ed., ed. William T. Smithson (Washington, D.C.: William T. Smithson for the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, 1859), 57-78.

connection who engaged in secular politics or frivolous socializing might receive harsh rebukes from their brethren—their position in the church exacerbating the sinfulness of their deeds. In their rhetoric and testimonies, however, most ministers emphasized their separation from secular pursuits that fostered violent or ungodly masculine behavior. As they confronted the sins of temporal manhood, such as politicking, dueling, drinking, gambling, and idle socializing, the Methodist clergy crafted their own standards of masculine behavior and a distinct conception of patriarchy. In a society obsessed with hierarchy and the maintenance of authority, ministers found new methods for expressing their masculinity and demanding respect. As McFerrin’s biographer demonstrated, they spoke in martial and aggressive terms in an attempt to counter assumptions of clerical effeminacy, and created a ministerial society that borrowed from and distorted notions of southern manhood.

Pulpit Politics

Politics swirled around the Methodist Church, but no good minister would ever admit to political motivations. Most Methodist preachers shunned partisan politics and abstained from entering into political discussion or encouraging others to devote their lives to the affairs of state. For other men, public office provided an opportunity to demonstrate their status and independence and to fulfill family expectations.²⁷ In this society of constant competition, politics encouraged harsh words, fighting, and other raucous activities that contradicted Methodist discipline and prevented ministers from engaging in it. Bullying and brutality—and a shared

²⁷ Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor*, 184.

culture of alcohol and swearing—accompanied campaigns across the nation.²⁸ Ministers did not participate in this feting, nor did they wish to sully their religious leadership with political ambition. They instead aspired to leadership positions within the Church, such as the Episcopacy, engaging in a form of politicking supposedly removed from worldly ambition. McFerrin, for example, wielded enough power in his pulpit and through his newspaper to satisfy many southern men’s thirst for authority. According to his biographer, he would have made an excellent politician because of his aptitude for “the art of popularity.” What set McFerrin apart from his sinful counterparts was “a Christian heart, a Christian conscience, and a Christian purpose in life.” After he took his ministerial vows, he “surrendered” any earthly reward or fame that politics would have brought him.²⁹

Many preachers who shared this vision of separating spiritual from temporal authority presented stories and admonitions warning against pursuing popularity and a life in politics. In an article entitled “Piety and Wealth—Contrasted,” one contributor to the *Southern Christian Advocate* praised the poverty of a dying elderly woman who professed ultimate happiness because of her faith. The author compared her satisfaction at the end of her impoverished life with the discontent of a wealthy war veteran and politician. He lived in a picturesque setting and had the respect and honor of the community but was painfully unhappy. “His ambition has always been worried with some fruitless effort to accomplish what he found impracticable,” the

²⁸ David Grimsted, *American Mobbing, 1828-1861: Toward Civil War*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 181.

²⁹ Fitzgerald, *John B. McFerrin*, 84.

article argued, and he never sought piety or salvation.³⁰ The contrast between a devout but humble woman and revered but unhappy man reflected the general Methodist attitude toward the relentless and vain acquisition of earthly riches and political esteem. This example also appealed to the notion that masculine pursuits distracted men from the important task of caring for their souls. During the early nineteenth century, most southerners believed that women's nature made them more sensitive to religious sentiment. Because of this assumption, converted women often served as pious contrasts to unspiritual men in stories related to morality and spirituality.

Bishop James O. Andrew offered a similar account of an older gentleman who wasted his life in politics, foolishly hoping for fame and fulfillment in this world. In the 1840s, during a stay in Little Rock, Arkansas, Andrew witnessed the turmoil surrounding a session of the state legislature and commented on his disappointment with the representatives' behavior. "Alas, for poor human nature," he remarked, "here were men moving heaven and earth to obtain a little earthly distinction, who could, perhaps, scarcely afford to bestow a single day's consideration on the imperishable interests of their immortality." One graying senator caught his eye, a gentleman who held a position of responsibility and respect yet who sought even more power at the end of his life. Andrew cited him as an example of absolute failure. In the weeks following the election, the bishop claimed that the politician lost his position and died without accepting salvation.³¹ As with other didactic accounts provided by ministers, Andrew allowed the politician to remain

³⁰ "Piety and Wealth—Contrasted," *Southern Christian Advocate*, Aug. 19, 1837.

³¹ James O. Andrew, *Miscellanies: Comprising Letters, Essays, and Addresses; to which is added a biographical sketch of Mrs. Ann Amelia Andrew* (Louisville: Morton and Griswald, 1854), 177-178.

nameless (if he existed at all) and used his story as a general warning to men who followed the treacherous political path to worldly distinction and spiritual destruction.

Ministerial abstention from politics, however, did not prevent southern Methodist leaders from defending slavery or combating abolitionism in their church. As sectional tensions grew more pronounced, southern church officials became more vocal rebutting northern attacks on the sinfulness of slavery.³² Many clergymen in the South feared that if they did not counter northern abolitionist rhetoric, they would antagonize their congregations, losing the confidence of slaveholders and irreparably damaging the mission to the slaves.³³ Although the Methodist *Discipline* of 1798 described slavery as a sin and urged conferences and meetings to be careful about admitting members who owned human property, southern ministers increasingly made their peace with the institution as the denomination established a foothold in the region. Many clergymen inherited or purchased slaves (often defending their actions as keeping slave families together or individuals from being sold to an unkind master) and defended the practice as

³² Mitchell Snay, *Gospel of Disunion: Religion and Separatism in the Antebellum South* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 113.

³³ Deems, *Annals*, 1855, 326. In *The Mind of the South*, W. J. Cash offers an explanation of how this mentality was enforced by the savage ideal—slavery mattered more to white hegemony than religion, which held a fragile position in southern esteem. “An atheist might be mocked in the South,” Cash contends, “but when the great central nerve of slavery was touched, there was no such latitude.” Cash gives the example of how this attitude affected two southern preachers, Daniel Worth in North Carolina and John G. Fee of Kentucky, when they spoke out against slavery. The former was jailed and the latter was attacked by mobs twenty two times (89-90). This persecution combined with the slaveholding of some wealthier ministers led southern Methodist leaders to become increasingly vehement in their proslavery position.

biblical.³⁴ The ownership of a plantation and slaves also served to shore up a minister's standing in the community and provide respectability for men whose occupation limited their claims to prototypical mastery and, thus, manhood.³⁵ Their involvement in and defense of the institution seemed to constitute political activity, especially as a national debate over slavery expanded. But ministers perhaps suffered from the same stubborn delusions as other southerners—or what W. J. Cash deemed the “social schizophrenia” and “naïve capacity for unreality” that was so characteristic of the region.³⁶

Southern ministers claimed that their proslavery attitudes did not entangle them with the political world and, in fact, they reasoned that the separation of church and state actually gave them more license to support the peculiar institution. In early 1838 the Georgia and South Carolina Conferences adopted a series of resolutions defending slavery. The Georgia Methodists contended that slavery “is not a moral evil” but a “civil and domestic institution” that the church could use to advance the cause of Christ. As ministers, they should not intervene, “further than to ameliorate the condition of the slave by endeavoring to impart to him and his master the benign influences of the religion of Christ, and aiding both on their way to heaven.” The South Carolina

³⁴ Coke and Asbury, *Doctrines and Discipline*, 169-170. Edward Dromgoole, Sr., a local Methodist preacher in Brunswick County, Virginia, bought many slaves to work on his plantation, “Canaan,” and the sales contracts often state his motive as reuniting separated families. Contracts between Richard Walpole and Edward Dromgoole, Sr., Nov. 29, 1797, and Jan. 3, 1799, Microfilm Reel 1, Edward Dromgoole Papers, UNC-SHC.

³⁵ Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor*, 187.

³⁶ W. J. Cash, *Mind of the South*, 58.

Conference did not include a statement concerning the value of slavery in promoting salvation, but did state that slavery's existence depended on civil authorities who must be obeyed. The editor of the *Southern Christian Advocate* commented about how both conferences had reacted to northern "intermeddling with slavery" and warned against anyone in the church who "would pervert the functions of an Annual Conference into a machine for the propagation of abolitionism." Even as these clergymen engaged in a politicized discussion of slavery and connected the domestic institution to religious goals, they accused the northern clergy of preaching politics.³⁷

At the General Conference of 1844, the minister Judge Augustus Baldwin Longstreet vehemently argued that the conference was an "inquisitorial despotism" that isolated the southern minority "under a proscriptive oppression."³⁸ This mentality led to the sectional schism of the Church in 1844, in which the southern faction insisted that the fanaticism of the North forced them to withdraw from the Conference, the "salvation of the slave" being their ultimate excuse.³⁹ Even after the 1844 schism, southerners blamed their northern peers for the break because they brought politics into the Church. In an article from the *Nashville Advocate* that was reprinted in 1857, one Methodist complained that the northern Church consisted of nothing but abolitionists and hypocrites. Southern Methodists believed that their own church held the

³⁷ "Slavery," *Southern Christian Advocate*, Feb. 2, 1838.

³⁸ Lee and Smith, *Debates of the General Conference, 1844*, 416.

³⁹ Deems, *Annals, 1855*, 326.

original denominational stance on slavery and that northerners had strayed from Methodist policy. “Abolition to the core,” the article accused the northern brethren, “and yet wheedling the South into the belief that it is not abolition.” Northern ministers, he insisted, engaged in politics while southern ministers “occupie[d] the true Wesleyan ground.” Proslavery was not a political choice, but a biblical truth that the state and the Church should both support.⁴⁰

The personal politicking that occurred within the Conference was masked by (sometimes strained) ministerial modesty and a professed concern for the well being of the Church. Although selecting bishops did not generate the fanfare of partisan rallies (nor the alcohol consumption that accompanied election season), politics of a sort appeared as ministers supported friends and colleagues. Many nominees tried at least to feign humility and, after being recommended, these would-be bishops followed a pattern of denying their worthiness and submitting to their friends’ encouragement to accept the post. When William Capers accepted the position of bishop in the M.E. Church, South, in May, 1846, he expressed the appropriate amount of surprise and confessed his unworthiness. Although already a prominent figure in the Church (he had written the catechisms for children and slaves), he expressed to his wife the proper reaction to being chosen:

I left you for the General Conference not knowing what was before me, about my being put into the Episcopacy; and after I came here, up to the hour of the election, the subject was scarcely named except in the most incidental manner. I thought not of being made Bishop. The result took me by surprise. And I am glad that it was so sudden, for the very

⁴⁰ Charles F. Deems, *Annals of Southern Methodism for 1856* (Nashville: Stevenson and Owen, 1857), 305-306.

suddenness of it made it more effectual to rouse me to (what I trust humbly in God's mercy may prove) the final conflict.⁴¹

Such sentiments met the expectations for Methodist leaders who wished to maintain or at least claim detachment from political maneuvering. Capers did not seek election, but once appointed he wielded far more power and commanded far more respect than he had as an itinerant.

Some clergymen inched closer to the political realm, moving beyond the Conference and into influential positions as spiritual advisors to leading public men. In 1817, Henry Bidleman Bascom, a young itinerant in Kentucky and Ohio, formed a friendship with Henry Clay after a chance meeting on a stagecoach. Clay had heard of Bascom's preaching skills and the two bonded over a shared love of oratory. They became close friends and Bascom often wrote to Clay offering spiritual counsel. As a result of this relationship, in 1823 Bascom became chaplain for the House of Representatives. Initially, he did not feel comfortable in this position, let his nerves get the best of him, and embarrassed himself during his first sermon (especially since Clay had boasted of his eloquence beforehand). He soon, however, developed a rapport with many Congressmen and wielded authority not only as their chaplain, but also as a bishop in the Methodist Episcopal Church, South.⁴² Bascom became a notable defender of slavery and an agent of the American Colonization Society (a position which might also have been

⁴¹ William M. Wightman, *Life of William Capers, D.D., one of the Bishops of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South; including an Autobiography* (Nashville: Publishing House of the M.E. Church, South, 1902), 414.

⁴² M.M. Henkle, *The Life of Henry Bidleman Bascom, D.D., LL.D., Late Bishop of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South* (Louisville: Morton and Griswold, 1854), 135-138.

encouraged by Clay).⁴³ Although ministers such as Bascom flirted with political involvement and activism, their rhetoric spurned such worldly aspirations. The Methodist clergy, they argued, should provide religious and moral leadership but never seek a position of honor in the political realm.

“Duelling” and the Religious Press

Henry Bidleman Basom’s spiritual guidance may have influenced Henry Clay in some respects, but it could not prevent him from fighting a duel—a practice long associated with the code of honor. After the election of 1824, and the infamous “corrupt bargain” between Clay and John Quincy Adams, John Randolph (a Virginia Representative) made some insulting remarks about Clay’s character—calling him a “rotten mackerel by moonlight” among other offensive comments—leading to a duel between the two men.⁴⁴ Beholden to the code of honor, but also gentility, Clay grazed Randolph’s coat and the two men parted with both egos and bodies unharmed. Hearing of Clay’s scheduled duel, Bascom hurriedly wrote urging him not to engage in the southern but unchristian practice. The minister’s duty in these circumstances was always to intervene. Clay received the letter a day late (according to the recipient), but the duelist assured Bascom that had it reached him earlier, it could not have prevented the event. “As no injury accrued to either party,” Clay politely noted, “my regrets are limited to the countenance which a pernicious practice may receive from our example, and to the violation of religious

⁴³ Ibid., 110-114, 204.

⁴⁴ Robert V. Remini, *Henry Clay: Statesman for the Union* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1993), 83.

obligation.” The politician also admitted that Bascom was “in pursuit of much higher and nobler objects than any which belong to the party strifes [sic] of this wicked world,” but this acknowledgement did not mean that Clay himself would forsake partisanship or risk his reputation.⁴⁵

Just as ministers nominally refused to participate in politics, they also rejected the more violent expressions of manhood. Methodist periodicals praised men who defended their faith but refrained from bloodshed, claiming that the “Christian is a warrior and must fight, but he is not allowed to choose his own weapons. He must not use ‘carnal weapons.’” The believer should even be cautious with what words he uses when countering an attack.⁴⁶ While Methodist doctrine praised forgiveness and humility, adherents to elite, secular standards of manhood considered meekness a personal failing and the duel “a bulwark against social chaos rather than a form of violence.”⁴⁷ Historian Steven M. Stowe has argued that the principle of the duel became just as significant as the practice; the ritual that it created for the planter class became infused in southern society at large and men adhered to basic notions of mastery, self-control, and self-

⁴⁵ Henkle, *Bascom*, 106-107.

⁴⁶ “Good Policy,” *Southern Christian Advocate*, July 15, 1837.

⁴⁷ Quote of South Carolina Governor Wilson from Stephen M. Stowe, *Intimacy and Power in the Old South: Ritual in the Lives of the Planters* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987), 7.

esteem.⁴⁸ These masculine traits applied to all white men but took on different forms and expectations for members of different classes. For both planters and yeomen, however, the code insisted on the exertion of masculine authority and tied the perpetuation of their patriarchy to the stability of the South.⁴⁹

Deploring the influence of the duel on their society, ministers renounced the practice as barbaric and sinful. They argued that such violence violated Christian moral standards and should be counted among the worst of socially permissible (or at least begrudgingly acceptable) vices (including adultery, drunkenness, prodigality, and revenge).⁵⁰ The Reverend E. E. Wiley of the Holston Conference pointedly remarked that the code of honor destroyed rather than protected southern society. He argued that the way of honor “is marked with the tears and groans of stricken ones—the wail of widowed hearts—the blood of murdered men.” “The ‘code of honor,’ in its teachings, in its spirit, in its practical results, is so abhorrent to humanity, so bold a contradiction of Christianity, and so surely a remnant of a barbarous age,” that it could not

⁴⁸ Stowe, *Intimacy and Power*, 22.

⁴⁹ For an excellent discussion of violence in the South, see Grimsted, *American Mobbing*. In this study, Grimsted argues that the South was a more violent society and the authorities in the region were less willing to stop vigilante acts than in the North. Although other authors relate the duel to southern honor, Grimsted challenges the implications of this explanation as glorifying or justifying such activities. Instead, Grimsted combines his discussion of personal and social extralegal mob violence to offer a more complete and less romantic picture of southern violence. He also briefly describes the Methodist aversion to killings in the South, citing William Winans’s remarks that the high incidents of violence in the region resulted from a lack of punishment for such crimes which “‘licenses the vicious and the violent to act upon the suggestion of their passions’” (86-87).

⁵⁰ “Duelling,” *Southern Christian Advocate*, May 4, 1838.

survive in the progress of civilization.⁵¹ One contributor to the *South Western Christian Advocate* denounced the duelist for his “selfishness” and dismissed him as a “coward” who refused to admit that he could possibly lose his life to another man. This commentator offered an interesting twist in his criticism, however, by alluding to the solution that Frederick the Great offered upon hearing that his best officers had scheduled a duel. The famous military commander had the pair follow through with their plans in front of the entire army, and ordered that the one left standing be executed immediately for the murder of his compatriot.⁵² This minister praised Frederick not for saving another man’s life, but for recognizing and rejecting the extralegal nature of the duel. Frederick had the power to send the winner to his death because morality rested in his civil authority.

Itinerants claimed they tried to prevent duels, offering tales that highlighted both masculine boldness and ministerial piety. The Reverend A. Stevens passed on a story to the *South Western Christian Advocate* told by “Rev. Mr. M,” who traveled on a frontier circuit and unsuccessfully but bravely attempted to end a duel. Mr. M happened to pass by a field known to be the site of many fatal duels and noticed several men gathered there as if preparing for another contest. Interfering might be fruitless, because he “knew too well the tenacity of those fictitious and absurd sentiments of honor which prevailed in that section of the country, and which gave to the duel a character of exalted chivalry.” Despite his misgivings, the itinerant approached the

⁵¹ E. E. Wiley, “The Word of God: The Only Safeguard Amid the Perils of Youth,” *Methodist Pulpit South*, 2nd ed., 351.

⁵² “The Duellist, A Coward,” *South Western Christian Advocate*, Nov 22, 1838.

seconds and urged them to intervene so the combatants could resolve their dispute peacefully. At one point, he stood between the two principles and shouted for them to stop the fight before one of them committed murder. He also accused the seconds of abetting sin: “In the name of the law which prohibits it—in the name of your friends, the principles—in the name of God who looks down upon you in the solitary place. . . [r]etire from the field and refuse to assist in their mutual murder.” Their egos, however, prevailed over the minister’s pleas and the duel ended in the death of one of the principles. Although Mr. M failed to stop the proceedings, he succeeded in proving his worthiness as a minister and contended that he walked away from the affair as the only man with clean hands (and plenty of self-righteousness). His display of courage stood in stark contrast to all of the gentlemen involved—men whom society held in high regard but whom the clergyman considered cowards and murderers.⁵³

Methodists deplored dueling but their doctrine did not exempt them from the rituals of confrontation demanded by southern patriarchy. Clergymen still incorporated elements of the duel in their rhetoric, often defending their manhood through verbal sparring. During his visit to North Carolina, the eccentric and controversial traveling preacher Lorenzo Dow had one such personal encounter with a popular local preacher, Bob Sample. Dow believed that Sample had slandered him, and Dow’s friend “charged his conduct with being unmanly.” Another man invited Sample to present his complaints in a public debate so allow Dow could defend himself and his doctrines in a more honorable fashion. At eleven o’clock in the morning they gathered with members at a neutral location and began exchanging arguments on Calvinist and Wesleyan

⁵³ “The Duel,” *South Western Christian Advocate*, Dec. 1, 1843.

theology. Before Dow could finish his final point regarding the salvation of the elect, Sample had fled, leaving his Bible on the pulpit. The parallels between this ministerial exchange and the duel were readily apparent to all men involved. Dow claimed that those present “compared us to officers fighting a duel—one flung his sword, and ran off, crying, sword fight for yourself!” The Bible in this instance served as the chosen weapon and Dow declared himself victor for his superior fighting skills and for being the last man standing.⁵⁴

In the absence of such face-to-face encounters, many ministers publicized their disagreements and personal attacks in religious periodicals. Methodist newspapers served not only as devices for spreading morality and spiritual advice, they also provided a platform for expressing grievances and for defending a minister’s dignity and reputation. Disputes generally centered on questions of morality or interdenominational differences. By publicizing these conflicts, ministers imitated a familiar cultural practice associated with duels: the airing of private arguments and insults in the press. The language in ministers’ exchanges and in non-Methodist men’s disputes often included sarcastic rebuttals and statements from witnesses to corroborate each sides’ account. The difference was that clergymen had to rely on the strength of their arguments or public support to satisfy their egos. In effect, these religious men were beholden to the same masculine culture that led other southern men to duel, but without the violent trappings.

Reverend James W. Allen saw to it that his dispute with Presbyterian minister A. A. Sowers over the legitimacy of Methodism found its way into both the religious and local

⁵⁴ Lorenzo Dow, *History of Cosmopolite, or The Four Volumes of Lorenzo’s Journal, Concentrated into One*, 3rd ed. (Philadelphia: Rastrow, 1816), 249-250.

newspapers. During the final months of 1827, several periodicals picked up on the argument. The controversy between these two Nashville religious figures began with Sowers's alleged remarks in private conversation that the Methodists did not constitute a "regular church" nor did their ministers qualify as "regular clergymen." In his published letter addressing Sowers, Allen claimed his duty as a "freeman" and "christian watchman" was to defend his church and its ministers. Sowers replied that he had merely repeated his denomination's perspective regarding Methodism and insisted that unless Allen showed "*unequivocal* marks of repentance" for his lies regarding their initial exchange, he "shall be to me as 'a heathen man and a publican.'" Thus the language of honor permeated what amounted to an ecclesiastical controversy.⁵⁵

Some interdenominational disputes involved the character of a single representative of the Methodist Church. These controversies often became a matter of interest for the larger religious community in a particular area. In February and March of 1839, the Methodist Southern *Christian Advocate* and the Baptist *Recorder and Watchman* engaged in an argument over the integrity of the Methodist minister Archibald M'Gilvray of Raleigh, North Carolina. A resident of Raleigh, who identified himself as "B.," accused M'Gilvray of "unchristian behavior" in not allowing a Baptist preacher named Abel King to speak in the Methodist meetinghouse. The editor of the *Recorder and Watchman*, T. Meredith, printed this allegation in February without researching the incident. Editor William Capers of the Southern *Christian Advocate* became

⁵⁵ James W. Allen, "To the Editor of the Nashville Banner," *The Messenger of the Holston Conference*, September 22, 1827, APS Online. In her work, Ann Douglas describes the power of periodicals for exchanging personal attacks. She focuses her discussion, however, on the interaction between northern clergymen and women writers during the nineteenth century and does not include the way southern Methodist leaders used the press as a weapon to defend personal and denominational honor (*Feminization of American Culture*, 227-228).

incensed over what he viewed as an unfair attack on the Methodist Church. “B.” then produced a signed statement from witnesses who claimed to have overheard the conversation between M’Gilvray and King. These three members of the Baptist congregation corroborated the charge of ministerial misconduct and the *Recorder and Watchman*’s accusations. Capers defended M’Gilvray in his own paper and declared Meredith’s conduct slanderous and the evidence presented in the Baptist paper not “sifted.” The editor further insisted on rehabilitating the minister’s good name: “The reputation of a minister of Christ, known to be above reproach, and who is engaged with all humility and simplicity of heart in the most cross-bearing service of his Master, may not thus loosely be consigned to perdition.”⁵⁶ In this instance, the Methodist clergyman and editor used the language of ministerial purity to defend the honor of himself, his friend, and their denomination.

Open rhetorical conflict occurred between southern Methodists to such a degree that the more conscientious ministers requested fellow clergymen to refrain from making public statements against each other. A contributor to the Southern *Christian Advocate* urged ministers to remember their own imperfections and the relative unimportance of many disagreements. When clergymen brought their disputes into public view, this preacher contended, lay people concluded “there must necessarily be alienation of feeling, and a spirit of uncharitableness between them.” “Many subjects as they arise,” he continued, “are conceived to be matters of vast importance,” but “in the lapse of a few days, or a few years, they dwindle into insignificance;

⁵⁶ “Rev. Archibald B. M’Gilvray,” Southern *Christian Advocate*, Mar 22, 1839.

and we can but wonder, on reflection, that they ever excited any interest.”⁵⁷ This author saw many pastoral controversies as trivial, and indeed many dealt with interpretations of theological minutia or minor breaches of the discipline by individual ministers. Yet just as with dueling, relatively small matters could at times generate furious and even dangerous conflicts.

One anonymous minister, “Cigar,” did not heed the calls for restraint. Taking offense at a September 7, 1839, article condemning ministers who purchased and smoked tobacco for showing an “*appearance of evil*,” “Cigar” countered with his own scriptural evidence to defend the practice of Christians enjoying an evening pipe. “Cigar” argued that the Old Testament laws forbidding the consumption of shellfish or the washing of one’s hands and face in the morning had all faded. Thus, prohibitions on smoking that are not even included in the Bible should likewise be considered outdated. John B. McFerrin, editor of the South Western *Christian Advocate* at the time, quickly joined the fray, poking fun at the offended “Cigar” with a brief commentary: “Mr. ‘Cigar’ seems inclined to censure us for bad taste in publishing the article on which he comments. Had we not published *that*, our readers would never have seen *this*; *what a misfortune!*”⁵⁸ McFerrin’s sarcasm would not have gone unnoticed; the use of this rhetorical device often exacerbated disputes between editors and contributors in the secular press. As McFerrin’s harsh rebuke shows, ministers made choices regarding their behavior but could always be censured by other members of the connection for their imprudence or obstinacy.

⁵⁷ “Difference of Opinion,” *Southern Christian Advocate*, Dec 22, 1837.

⁵⁸ “The Example of Ministers,” *South Western Christian Advocate*, Sept. 7, 1839; “A Tobacco Smoking Minister,” *South Western Christian Advocate*, Jan. 13, 1843.

Instances publicized in the religious press and the subsequent defenses of personal righteousness and reputation mimicked the exchanges of other southern men concerned with the protection or redemption of their own manhood.

As the 1844 schism approached, religion and slavery became more entwined for southern ministers and rhetorical dueling sometimes resulted from perceived attacks on the southern church and its clergy. In November of 1837, Gerrit Smith, the editor of Boston's *Zion's Herald*, published a strongly worded condemnation of Methodism in the South after receiving a request from William Winans for contributions to build a church in New Orleans. Smith asserted that "the religion of the South was not the religion of the Bible, and ought not to be supported." An ally of Winans and defender of southern Methodism wrote that Smith had slandered both and accused him and like-minded ministers of being "crazy" and "maniacs." He contended that Winans was an honorable southern minister who had been unjustly attacked by a northern Methodist. Winans, a prominent preacher from Mississippi, did not allow the burden of defending his reputation to fall entirely to others. The southern Methodist position on slavery, he replied, did not go beyond what Christ and the disciples taught about the institution. Regarding his fellow minister's scathing remarks on the status of the church in the region, he accused him of "mental alienation" bordering on moral perversion. Winans described Smith as a fanatic and dramatically ended his letter by "adopt[ing] the prayer of our blessed Savior for his murderers—'Father, forgive *him—he knows not what he does!*'" The rhetorical battle revealed both the political as well as the personal defensiveness of southern ministers as they sought to retain their

honor and seek vindication for the slave South.⁵⁹ Whether they wrote to defend the slave system, denominational standing, or individual mastery, the published exchanges of Methodist clergymen reveal the ministerial adoption of a common practice among southern duelists. Even though they did not follow through with a physical confrontation, and actually condemned those who did, they could not escape the rituals of a dueling culture.

Discipline, Social Limitations, and New Standards

Despite their defense of slavery, Methodist preachers denounced several other forms of patriarchy and white male hegemony that defined the region. They rejected the cultural trappings of manhood that united their southern counterparts and they refused to prove their masculinity and mastery the way that non-Methodist men did. The Methodist clergy believed in the importance of example and also knew that if they lost the respect of their congregations it would limit their authority on the circuit. Asbury and Coke's original requirements for ministers in the 1798 *Discipline* included a poetic description of this role for religious leaders in their communities and churches:

A minister of the gospel should preach, not only by his sermons, but by his actions, his common conversation, his whole example, yea, even by his looks. He should be every where a flame of fire. Wherever he is, the eyes of all are upon him. He cannot be neutral, but in every place will do either good or evil.⁶⁰

⁵⁹ "Abolitionism:--What it is." *Southern Christian Advocate*, Oct. 7, 1837; "The Religion of the South," *Southern Christian Advocate*, Jan. 19, 1838.

⁶⁰ Coke and Asbury, *Doctrines and Discipline*, 62.

Ministers followed this precept not only to lead their congregants by example but also to prove their worthiness as men of the Methodist *Discipline*. Itinerants' livelihoods, in particular, hinged on their churches' support and if congregants doubted a minister's morality, they could significantly reduce his already meager income.⁶¹ To satisfy both the *Discipline* and stultify criticism from other Methodists, this group of southern men distanced themselves from typical displays of manhood in social situations. They established their own standards of masculinity and honor within the constraints of the church's expectations.

The mainstream non-Methodist South defined social interaction in terms of competition and ritual but ministers' existence outside of this world of taverns, gaming, and lighthearted socializing limited their engagement in this masculine culture. Men forged bonds through a shared dram of liquor or a round of cards, but, like the violence and hierarchy embedded in dueling, these men's motives were not entirely congenial. They used these occasions to contest for honor—to prove their place and exchange recognition of shared manhood with their peers.⁶² This notion of complete submission to a singular masculine model echoes W. J. Cash's evocation of the Savage Ideal, in which southern men “became, in all their attitudes, professions, and

⁶¹ Ann Douglas explains this development from a national perspective in *The Feminization of American Culture*. In her study, she finds that the Protestant Church in America adapted to clerical disestablishment from 1820 to 1875 and evangelical church leaders became more reliant on popular support rather than traditional institutional structure for financial support. This dependence and “*ad hoc* organization” affected the power of churches and led to increased cultural influence on religious teachings and activities (24).

⁶² Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor*, 274.

actions, virtual replicas of one another.”⁶³ Regardless of class and station, men of both the gentry and yeomen classes shared a perception of their patriarchal rites and used rituals of the tavern and gaming table to prove their honor.⁶⁴ Thus, the pressures and tensions of performing as a white man in the South constantly preoccupied this group of masters and would-be masters.

Although some ministers experienced this form of fraternity as young men, they forsook common forms of masculine behavior and became isolated from the rest of male society when they entered the Methodist connection.⁶⁵ In their writings, they often reflect on the standards of the *Discipline* regarding male vices and warned against the effects of intemperance or gambling, some claiming to speak from personal experience. Most of these admonitions are directed towards worldly, irreligious men and their wives and cautioned both sexes about the inevitable destruction of domestic happiness that resulted from patriarchal participation in these activities. The demands of the *Discipline* required that preachers not only abstain from alcohol and gaming, but also from loose speech or frivolous socializing. As examples to their congregations, they should exhibit no “evil speaking, unprofitable conversation, lightness, expensiveness or gayety

⁶³ Cash, *Mind of the South*, 91.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 39, 73.

⁶⁵ William Winans is just one example of a minister who claimed to have a typical, rough and indulgent childhood but who gave up drinking, gambling, and flirtation with women upon entering the ministry. For a detailed account of Winan’s conversion experience, see Ray Holder, *William Winans: Methodist Leader in Antebellum Mississippi* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1977).

of apparel.”⁶⁶ These restrictions sharply limited ministers’ social activities and affected the way southern communities viewed them as men. As a result, the Methodist clergy created their own sense of manhood that took root within the fellowship of their conferences and circuits and formed a spiritual fraternity built on shared experience and expectations.

During their evangelizing efforts, Methodist ministers could not confine themselves to separate spaces (as worldly men did in the tavern or at the race track) and often had to mingle with the intemperate. This gave occasion for many to boast of their encounters with a drunken or fallen man who required correction. On their circuits, itinerants often had no choice but to enter into places of male vice—taverns—but these situations provided opportunity to prove their spiritual fortitude by witnessing to drunkards and blasphemers. The tavern represented a place of concentrated masculinity, where men communed or politicked over a stiff drink and could use vulgar language freely, away from the disapproving eyes and ears of mothers, wives, or sisters. Freely, that is, unless a minister happened to be lodging in the room upstairs.⁶⁷ When itinerants could not find a friendly family to take them in, they stayed at a local tavern. The alcohol and profanity at these establishments gave ministers a chance for admonishing and witnessing to

⁶⁶ Soule, *Doctrines and Discipline of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South*, 88.

⁶⁷ Alcohol provided an important basis for much male interaction in the early republic and antebellum periods. Throughout the United States there existed what W. J. Rorabaugh terms a “male drinking cult.” In *The Alcoholic Republic: An American Tradition*, Rorabaugh explores the significance of drinking to most men and also takes a slight jab at the position of the South’s ministers, arguing “southern planter was considered temperate enough to belong to the Methodist Church if he restricted his daily intake of alcohol to a quart of peach brandy” (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979), 14-15. For more on the political circumstances surrounding alcohol consumption, also see David Waldstreicher, *In the Midst of Perpetual Fetes* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997).

irreligious men. Many traveling preachers recorded confrontations that occurred in these places, which (in their accounts) usually led to the repentance of the worst sinner in the company and his apology to the offended Methodist. It seems unlikely that this result would have happened with any consistency. What was constant, however, was the ministerial insistence on their own authority and influence. If only rhetorically, ministers desired to prove their ability to overpower other men and willingness to stand as an outsider in a traditionally male meeting place.

Personal tales of raucous taverns and pastoral rebuke vary in emphasis (some focus on profanity, others on drunkenness or gambling) but all involve the steadfast clergyman boldly standing up for Methodist principles outside of his normal sphere. As a young traveling preacher in 1814, Henry Bascom boarded at a tavern on the way to one of his appointments. He did not complain of drunkenness or disorder during the night, but over breakfast overheard a man utter a string of profanities. According to his biographer, young Bascom “approached the stranger and mildly, but very solemnly, reproved him. The man apologized and desisted.” In this instance, the biographer also refers to Bascom as a “boy,” as if to further celebrate his boldness in reproaching an adult, male stranger.⁶⁸ Despite his youthful appearance, he supposedly commanded the respect of the sinner because of his zeal and direct nature—an example of early manhood in a revered Methodist leader.

As ministers visited taverns and other male preserves, they entered with a sense of righteousness reinforced by the Methodist press. Religious periodicals ran weekly columns

⁶⁸ Henkle, *Life of Bascom*, 56-57.

urging clergy and laity alike to help rid society of drunkenness.⁶⁹ A contributor to the *Southern Christian Advocate* in 1838 compared making and selling alcohol to robbery and murder, the only difference being that civil authority sanctioned the sin of intemperance. The article added that drinkers risked losing their wealth, respect, family, and soul.⁷⁰ The Church argued that any minister who did not condemn such behavior contributed to the sinner's ultimate damnation. The *South Western Christian Advocate* included stories to show how drinking led to other vices and eventually physical and spiritual death. In one of these accounts, Joseph Williams, a grocery owner who had not received necessary parental guidance, began selling liquor and became a "drunkard" as well as a profane gambler. The Methodist paper reported that he died of alcohol consumption and printed an account of his life as a caution to other habitual drinkers.⁷¹

Instead of relying on direct admonition of sinners, which might have provoked rather than convicted the unrighteous, some Methodists chose to follow the *Discipline's* maxim and

⁶⁹ Weekly columns devoted to the cause of temperance are found in the *Southern Christian Advocate* and are also prominent in the *South Western Christian Advocate*.

⁷⁰ "Robbery and Murder," *Southern Christian Advocate*, Apr 6, 1838.

⁷¹ "Joseph Williams," *South Western Christian Advocate*, Aug. 9, 1844. In *Southern Honor*, Bertram Wyatt-Brown contends that men who lost control because of their drinking or gambling were looked down upon by all members of society, not just by religious individuals (279-281). But, as Cynthia Lynn-Lyerly points out in *Methodism and the Southern Mind, 1770-1810*, Methodists and temperance advocates in general had much stricter definitions for "drunkenness" and drunkard, accusing men who consumed any alcohol of being alcoholics. Thus, the clergy's more conservative understanding of so-called vices must be taken into consideration when relating stories such as that of Joseph Williams—who might have engaged in the practices of which the church accused him, but perhaps not to such an over-indulgent degree (7, 89).

simply lead by example. During western travels that took him through Liberty, Missouri, in the 1840s, Bishop James O. Andrew encountered “[s]ome votaries of Bacchus, who had been paying due honor to their divinity.” The next morning many members of the previous night’s party complained of hangovers and severe headaches and inquired if Andrew could empathize with them. The bishop assured them that he could not, that he had never been intoxicated, and resisted their insistence that he “make the experiment, just to know how it felt.” He parted after explaining to them his religious philosophy and politely declining their offer.⁷² This gesture separated Andrew from other southern men, who generally viewed the declining of a drink or gift as dishonorable or insulting.⁷³ Andrew did just that, and walked away feeling proud enough of his sobriety and courage in the confrontation to relate the story to his biographer several years later.

One preacher in northern Alabama used his own momentary fall from grace to bring himself honor instead of shame. In 1829, a fatigued itinerant named David Thompson rode ten miles in a snowstorm to solemnize the marriage of a young couple. When he arrived at the site for the wedding, he had a terrible cold and a member of the party persuaded him to sit by the fire and drink a glass of wine. But the wine had been mixed with a small amount of brandy, and, not being used to liquor, Thompson soon became intoxicated. His friend aided him through the service and all present acknowledged that he had been tricked into drinking ardent spirits, but Thompson felt guilty about his drunkenness and reported his unintentional sin at the next

⁷² Andrew, *Miscellanies*, 144.

⁷³ Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor*, 337; Greenberg, *Honor and Slavery*, 70.

Quarterly Conference. Although the conference pardoned him because of the circumstances, Thompson insisted on suspending himself for three months from the ministry and church sacraments. His actions reflected the common clerical opinion regarding alcohol: although the *Discipline* allowed drinking in cases of medical necessity, ministers should abstain even then to avoid temptation and set a good example.⁷⁴ By rigidly adhering to Methodist doctrine and practicing personal discipline, this particular itinerant demonstrated a degree of humility and morality that brought him honor among other Methodist clergymen.⁷⁵

Just as their teetotaling excluded ministers from male social circles, so did their reactions to gambling. Opportunities to reprove gaming men did not present themselves as often because clergymen were seldom invited to the racetracks or card tables. For many men, gambling served as a sign of manhood, with players engaging in the exchange of honor and deference and exhibiting personal control and sociability.⁷⁶ The strictures of the Church determined that ministers would not gamble and demanded that Methodist leaders never bet on anything or waste time with such worldly pursuits as card playing. Methodist periodicals attacked gambling almost as much as drinking. The Southern *Christian Advocate* labeled such activity “an amusement wholly unworthy of rational beings . . . the cause of infinite loss of time, of enormous destruction of money, of irritating passions, of stirring up avarice, of disgusting people against their proper

⁷⁴ “A Rule of Discipline,” *Southern Christian Advocate*, April 6, 1838.

⁷⁵ Fitzgerald, *John B. McFerrin*, 74.

⁷⁶ Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor*, 331, 342.

employments.”⁷⁷ Like drunkenness, they argued, gambling wasted family income and risked destitution in the vain pursuit of superficial honor.

Bishop William Capers used his own experience as a young boy to demonstrate both the consequences of gambling and how it should be discouraged by responsible parents. In 1796, at the age of six, young William and his brothers obtained toy tops and practiced spinning them. They began competing with each other. William believed that he had become so talented at spinning that he sought to wager against his father, a Methodist minister in Belle Vue, South Carolina. William put up his heifer against his father’s saddle-horse in a test of who could get his top to spin for a certain length of time. To his delight, William won the wager, but his father cautioned, “Honor even among rogues.” “If you turn gambler,” the elder Capers instructed, “you must do it, as they say, honorably. You are not to leave off without giving me a chance to win my horse back.” After another spin, the son lost the horse and within several more rounds lost almost everything he owned. He pined over his losses for several days and became enraged by his father’s indifference until the elder Capers offered one final bargain: if William should promise never to gamble again, all of his possessions would be returned. From that day forward, he never placed another bet and “hated it to such a degree that I would break off from any company I chanced to be in, the moment it was proposed to play at any game for money.”⁷⁸

⁷⁷ “Gambling,” *Southern Christian Advocate*, July 22, 1837.

⁷⁸ Wightman, *Life of William Capers*, 33-34.

Some ministers who encountered gambling men chose to reprove them. Peter Cartwright, a frontier itinerant with a passion for discipline, found himself surrounded by “many profane swearers, drunkards, gamblers, fiddlers, and dancers” as he traveled by steamboat from St. Louis to the 1828 Pittsburg General Conference. Several of the worst ones were United States officers, and Cartwright and his fellow ministers soon felt trapped with no “way to help ourselves.” One of his companions suggested that they scold the officers for their conduct but they could not seem to exert any influence on the rowdy bunch. After several days, Cartwright met privately with some of the men to discuss the sinfulness of their profanity and many of them agreed to desist while in the presence of the ministers. The officers continued to gamble at the card table, however, and insisted that there was nothing wrong with a little innocent gaming to pass the time. They invited Cartwright to join in, but he vehemently refused. “Gentlemen,” he instructed them, “if you are just playing for fun, or to kill time, would it not be much better to drop all such foolishness, and let us talk on some topic to inform each other. Then we could all be edified.” The men agreed to the suggestion and Cartwright led them in a debate regarding the Christian religion, using the situation to his advantage and witnessing for the rest of the evening to the group of irreligious officers.⁷⁹

As illustrated by Cartwright’s story, ministers also admonished men for using language unsuitable for Methodist ears. Preachers viewed profanity as one of the most common and serious sins of male society. Like the clerical belief that any indulgence in hard liquor led to

⁷⁹ Peter Cartwright, *Autobiography of Peter Cartwright, the Backwoods Preacher: The Birth, Fortunes, and General Experiences of the Oldest American Methodist Travelling Preacher* (London: Arthur Hall, Virtue, and Co., 1862), 124-125.

alcoholism, they also thought that even moderate swearing or use of foul language meant backsliding and moral corruption. A contributor to *The Messenger for the Holston Conference* used the language of honor to denounce men who stooped to such vulgarity, deeming profanity “inconsistent with the character of a good citizen,” “patriot,” “man of sense,” “gentleman,” “man of truth,” and “man of any species of religion, or sense of moral obligation.”⁸⁰ When anyone uttered a single profane word in a minister’s presence, under the influence of alcohol or not, it only provided another opportunity to correct the sinner and demonstrate the clergyman’s courage. In 1840, a superannuated preacher gave one example of ministerial bravery to the South Western *Christian Advocate* when he reminisced about travels and past appointments. While making a long journey on his circuit, he encountered a profane man whom he admonished for taking Christ’s name in vain. The guilt-stricken traveler begged for the itinerant’s forgiveness, confessing, “I have done wrong, abhor what I have practiced, and you will be surprised when I tell that while I indulge in this profane talk, I am traveling for my health, and am probably in a decline which will terminate my life.”⁸¹ On another occasion, he happened upon a sailor seemingly addicted to profanity who felt convicted by the very presence of a minister. The seaman admitted that his profession often placed his life in peril and that his cursing constantly put his salvation in jeopardy. In both cases, the author attempted to demonstrate the “fruits of

⁸⁰ “On Profanity,” *The Messenger for the Holston Conference*, July 28, 1827.

⁸¹ The Methodist clergy often raised the specter of death and an eternity in hell when describing sinfulness. This device for convicting readers will be explored in more detail in a later chapter dealing with children.

conviction” that ripened under his ministerial cultivation as the two sinners felt compelled to change their ways because of the preacher’s reprimand.⁸²

At the same time that Methodist ministers condemned overt vices (such as drinking, gambling, or swearing) in other men, they held themselves to even tougher restrictions based on their *Discipline*. The Church required ministers not only to refrain from such explicitly masculine pursuits but to socialize only for the edification and the salvation of others. In a region where men used flattery to demonstrate both gentility and manliness, the denomination instructed preachers to refrain from conversing at length with women or from seeking the regard of other men.⁸³ Both the original American Methodist *Doctrine* and the later *Doctrines and Discipline of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South*, written after the sectional schism, demanded “holiness” in conversation. Ministers were to “[a]void all lightness, jesting, and foolish talking” and to “[c]onverse sparingly and cautiously with women.”⁸⁴ In their 1798 explication, Coke and Asbury admitted that clergymen would have to use “all the sense and grace” they had to follow every point in the *Discipline* but risked public disgrace or expulsion from the Conference if they failed to do so.⁸⁵ A popular minister who entered into frivolous

⁸² “Ministers’ Covenants,” South Western *Christian Advocate*, Feb. 22, 1840.

⁸³ Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor*, 225.

⁸⁴ Coke and Asbury, *Discipline*, 58-59; Soule, *Discipline of Methodist Episcopal Church, South*, 66.

⁸⁵ Coke and Asbury, *Discipline*, 59.

conversation dishonored the Church (and thus himself). In his memoir, the provocatively titled *Confessions of a Converted Infidel*, the itinerant John Bayley explained how a “severe rebuke was administered” to a loquacious preacher with this clever saying: “I think when you are in the pulpit, that it is a pity that you should ever come out of it; and when you are out of it, I think it is a pity that you should ever go into it again.”⁸⁶

Bayley’s warning against loose talk among the clergy echoed the general Methodist stance on proper speech in social settings. In an age of increasing sentimentalism and more religious emotionalism, the clergy found it important to maintain a balance between solemnity and spiritedness in the pulpit and in casual conversation.⁸⁷ Bayley outlined his solution to the problem:

If we could be serious, without severity; if we could be cheerful, without levity; if we could mix with our conversation on religious topics and other subjects that would be interesting to the company; and if, above all, we could so order our conversation as to give every subject a religious tendency, even when religion was not named; our social intercourse would be a mutual blessing, and our hearts would be constantly cheered by the approving smiles of Heaven.⁸⁸

⁸⁶ John Bayley, *Confessions of a Converted Infidel; with Lights and Shades of Itinerant Life and Miscellaneous Sketches* (New York: M. W. Dodd, 1856), 192.

⁸⁷ For a discussion of the effects of sentimentalism on church doctrines and desire for popular appeal, see Ann Douglas, *Feminization of American Culture*.

⁸⁸ Bayley, *Confessions*, 193.

If a minister did not attempt to control his speech and stick to spiritual subjects, as Bayley suggested and the *Discipline* demanded, he risked losing his reputation in the Conference and in his congregation. Methodist periodicals presented anonymous examples of clergymen who became enticed by “popularity” in their communities (a more serious issue among located ministers who had more opportunity to become part of society in a single area).⁸⁹ A good minister did not seek “earthly distinctions, or earthly pleasures” and shunned wealth, society, honors, and distinction.⁹⁰ Individuals who longed for popularity allowed their human aspirations for worldly honor and glory to take priority over their vows to advance God’s kingdom.⁹¹ Ministers or believers who tolerated “practical jests, flippancies and hyperboles” thus doffed the “simple garb of Christianity” simply to please others in conversation, failing in what should be their primary task—the salvation of souls.⁹²

Dances provided the perfect setting for witnessing to both men and women who engaged in playful (and seductive) flirting and flattery. In 1820, the itinerant Peter Cartwright made the long trek from his circuit in Tennessee to his home in Kentucky. Along the way, he seized the

⁸⁹ “Locating,” *South Western Christian Advocate*, June 22, 1839; “Useful Preachers,” *Southern Christian Advocate*, July 6, 1838.

⁹⁰ “The Faithful Minister,” *Southern Christian Advocate*, July 1, 1837; “Self-Denial,” *Southern Christian Advocate*, Oct. 28, 1837.

⁹¹ Bayley, *Confessions*, 265.

⁹² “Levity,” *Southern Christian Advocate*, Sept. 2, 1837.

opportunity to exhort to a room full of revelers. Weary from a long day on the road, the minister stopped at a house for the night and asked for lodging. His host agreed but warned him that there would be a dance there that evening. Cartwright stayed and attended the festivities, sitting by himself in the corner, “quietly musing” and “greatly desir[ing] to preach to these people.” After a while, a young lady approached him and offered her hand for the next dance. He accepted and gracefully led her onto the dance floor, inwardly anticipating what he knew he would have to do next. The itinerant then turned to the fiddler and asked him to stop playing so that he could lead the company in a prayer. Cartwright held the young lady’s hand tighter and insisted that she kneel down with him to pray. She resisted and tried to free herself from his grasp at first, but he overpowered her and she fell to her knees next to him. The daring preacher claimed that as he prayed and exhorted, every man and woman in the room began to weep and his young partner lay prostrate crying for mercy from the Lord. This scene lasted well into night and on the following day, Cartwright organized a Methodist meeting and local society for the new converts. The “Methodist preacher dance,” he called it, sparked a revival in the area and convinced several men to become ministers.⁹³ Cartwright’s decision to intervene that night reflects the general Methodist attitude toward popular society. As the *Discipline* and Bayley’s instruction recommended, he also used this secular situation to provide moral guidance and encourage conversion.

This explicit Methodist rejection of customary social relations (sharing a glass, a game, dance, or light conversation) symbolically separated the clergy from other men in the region.

⁹³ Cartwright, *Autobiography of Peter Cartwright*, 87-88.

Even if they were not of the world, however, they were still in the world and social pressures inevitably shaped their social values. Like their adaptations of politicking and dueling, preachers also crafted ways to prove their manhood and worth from their pulpit and in their conversations, valuing boldness and purity of faith as well as eloquence in speech as evidence of personal honor. Bayley attempted to define appropriate conversation. Like other Methodist ministers, he valued the skill of incorporating spiritual lessons into inane talk as a method for demonstrating commitment to Christ and the Church. At times this instruction could be quite abrupt, as reflected in the reproofs that itinerants gave the intemperate, gamers, profaners, or dancers. The disciplining of others was part and parcel of the preacher being a “useful man” and a strong example to others of faithfulness and valor. “When the men of the world see a minister pursuing a straight forward course,” an article in the *Southern Christian Advocate* proclaimed in 1838, “regardless of the smiles or frowns of the rich or poor, they appreciate him as a man of *moral courage* and *of principle*, and as such, what he says in the pulpit, and everywhere else, has weight and influence with them.”⁹⁴ When ministers’ chastising statements or glances provoked other men to anger or violence, persecution only became further evidence of the preacher’s disciplinary zeal and devotion to the faith. From the Church’s perspective, the more a clergyman fought to preserve morality, the more he should expect to incite the ire of nonbelievers.⁹⁵

Like their manner of speaking, dress also distinguished ministers from their flocks and from the materialism of secular fashion; Methodist clergymen learned to take pride in their often-

⁹⁴ “Useful Preachers,” *Southern Christian Advocate*, July 6, 1838.

⁹⁵ “Difficulties of a Faithful Preacher,” *Southern Christian Advocate*, June 8, 1838.

plain appearance. When a boyish Jacob Young entered the pulpit in Cynthiana, Kentucky, during an 1803 annual conference, a lady in the audience later admitted that she “felt indignant, and said to herself, ‘Why do they put up that fellow to preach? [H]e looks more suitable for mauling rails than preaching.’”⁹⁶ Despite such comments, Young continued to dress in the simple style of his Methodist cohort. Although ministers succumbed to some of the influences of southern male society in the antebellum period, their clothing continued to distinguish them from other men. In 1837, one contributor to the Southern *Christian Advocate* contended that Methodists constituted the “poorest” church because of the limitations of the discipline on ministerial status and wealth. They sought to prove this assertion in their manner of dress.⁹⁷ Clergymen were to display their asceticism through plain cotton clothes and worn-out coats, even if they had access to better clothing. In 1814, Henry Bidleman Bascom struggled to gain an appointment in the Methodist connection because he failed to don the standard, plain pastoral garb. Older ministers on the frontier circuits deemed him a “clerical fop” because of his physical deportment and style of clothing and feared that his popularity among influential members of society was a dangerous sign.⁹⁸ Because “he did not dress like a Methodist preacher of that time, nor look like one,” his elders “doubted whether he would ever become a *real* Methodist preacher.” One of these

⁹⁶ Jacob Young, *Autobiography of a Pioneer: or, the nativity, experience, travels, ministerial labors of Rev. Jacob Young, with incidents, observations, and reflections* (Cincinnati: L. Swormstedt and A. Poe, 1857), 108.

⁹⁷ “Church Aristocracy,” *Southern Christian Advocate*, Aug. 26, 1837.

⁹⁸ Henkle, *Life of Bascom*, 65.

skeptics urged Bascom to put on a round-breasted coat in an antiquated style so as to disguise his lofty appearance. According to Bascom's biographer, an older itinerant donated one such old-fashioned coat but it fit Bascom better than the more modern one that he had been criticized for wearing. The elder preacher discovered that by giving him the old garment, he had "made a dandy instead of a plain Methodist preacher" and declared that there was no hope for Bascom.⁹⁹ By not wearing a typical ministerial uniform of a plain black coat and homespun shirt and also by his deportment, the young and unknowing Bascom appeared to reject his place in the Methodist fraternity—a brotherhood of ministers who shared similar hardships and standards of conduct that separated them from many other southern men.¹⁰⁰

The Brotherhood

The fraternity that the Methodist brethren created helped preserve their doctrines as the denomination prospered in the South and provided its members with support and guidance as they sought to influence southern society through evangelizing and example.¹⁰¹ Despite the success of the Church in the region (or perhaps because of it), the question remains: how much

⁹⁹ Ibid., 98-99.

¹⁰⁰ In *Taking Heaven By Storm: Methodism and the Rise of Popular Christianity in America*, John H. Wigger describes the insistence on a dress code as one way "to promote Methodist solidarity and communal identity (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 101.

¹⁰¹ Cynthia Lynn Lyerly describes the effect of this influence as occurring as early as 1810, when she believes Methodists earned a more respectable position in southern society and gained more converts. While this date is debatable, it is apparent that by this time there were fewer incidents of physical persecution of Methodist ministers and their numbers had increased significantly in the region. *Methodism and the Southern Mind*, 4, 185.

did the clergy alter southern behavior and to what extent did southern values shape ministerial mores? As evinced by their proslavery sentiment and willingness to break away from the northern church, the southern Methodist clergy developed fundamentally southern attitudes over the first few decades of the nineteenth century.¹⁰² As W. J. Cash contended, southern Methodism “was not strictly Methodist any more” but defined by the region and its institutions.¹⁰³ This adaptation of the Church to southern mores stemmed from specific needs and desires. Ministers hoped to appeal to potential converts among the master class and also needed white support and acceptance to preach to southern blacks. Moreover, many ministers were native southerners who, not surprisingly, embraced many regional values even as they altered them. Southern Methodist publications confirmed the development of this regionalism when they promoted the godliness of southern institutions, blasted northern Abolitionists, and cited Scripture to support the South’s proslavery argument.¹⁰⁴ The Church’s *Discipline* prohibited them from making overt displays of white masculinity, but, like their defense of the racial hierarchy, they did surrender to some concepts of southern manhood. These regional influences helped shape clerical interactions and gave their separate male society a sense of fraternity.

¹⁰² Ann Douglas discusses the distinct development of religion in the South and contends that because of the perpetuation of slavery in the region and the lack of industrial development, ministers were able to use their proslavery stance to satisfy and attract white converts. *Feminization of American Culture*, 49.

¹⁰³ Cash, *Mind of the South*, 81.

¹⁰⁴ William A. Smith, *Lectures on the Philosophy and Practice of Slavery, as exhibited in the Domestic Institution of Slavery in the United States: with the Duties of Masters to Slaves* (Nashville: Stevenson and Owen, 1857), 11-30.

Within this brotherhood, however, there still existed a degree of masculine competition that sometimes led to confrontation. Ministers retained notions of martial manhood even as they rejected the violence of the duel or the tavern brawl. To Methodists, McFerrin was a fine example of honorable Christian masculinity: “As a soldier of fortune, he would have made his mark on his time; as a soldier of Jesus Christ, under the Methodist system, his extraordinary powers reached their maximum of development.”¹⁰⁵ These aggressive characteristics paired with moral purity to form the foundation of Methodist manhood. But new standards of manhood created new potential for failure. The Methodist Church in the South adhered to a form of discipline that demanded deference and expelled any minister who violated the prevailing doctrine or moral standards. This disciplinary system protected the separate society of Methodist ministers but at times brought social conflict. The clergy’s social interactions borrowed from both regional customs and Methodist practices, creating a new type of masculinity that was just as southern as it was separate from traditional southern culture. The tension among men in the Methodist connection paralleled that of non-Methodist male society, only ministers replaced violence and struggle for wealth with strict discipline and internal fights over doctrinal interpretation. They found their patriarchal strength in the pulpit and the Conference, proving themselves to their congregations and fellow clergymen. The more honor they could bring to their God, the more honor they brought to themselves and the greater the potential for dishonor if they failed.

¹⁰⁵ Fitzgerald, *McFerrin*, 43.

CHAPTER 2

THE PATRIARCHY OF THE PULPIT

He was thenceforward the patriarch from whom none would take a sign of his office, nor yet of him exact a single requirement, but to whom all rendered unfeigned obeisance of heart. He had given up home and kindred and honors for the people of the South. They gave him in return—
themselves.¹

Bishop Joshua Soule fathered many sons. Although these sons called each other “brother,” none of them shared blood relations and only a few had ever met Soule’s wife, Sarah Allen. In terms of Methodist familial relationships, Soule sired a number of spiritual sons—men who looked to him as their religious patriarch not because he raised them but because he led them to conversion or into the ministry. During his forty-three years as bishop in the Methodist Episcopal Church and Methodist Episcopal Church, South, Soule influenced and guided scores of ministers and congregants through his sermons, strict execution of the *Discipline*, and personal example. His biographer, Horace M. DuBose, memorialized this Methodist leader as a man “who, with Wesley and Asbury, was to complete the triumvirate of mastery in the first

¹ Horace M. Du Bose, *Life of Joshua Soule* (Nashville: Publishing House of the M.E. Church, South, 1911), 268-269.

century of Methodism.”² Soule wielded enormous power in the General Conference, serving as senior bishop before the schism of 1844, and became a leading figure in the MEC, South, in 1846. But belonging to an elite group of church fathers hardly meant that Soule faced no opposition or disobedience from his spiritual offspring. In fact, his Episcopacy often became a hotbed of contention and younger ministers challenged his authority on several occasions on issues ranging from church policy to theology.

Soule’s lofty position and the controversies that swirled around his leadership revealed the problem of patriarchy in the antebellum Methodist Church. Although the denomination was founded with a strong Episcopacy and a strict hierarchy—a hierarchy that Soule fought relentlessly to preserve—church leaders confronted constant challenges to episcopal government and their own authority. The spiritually egalitarian nature of the Methodist faith and the belief in the supreme authority of God caused many ministers to question or defy their earthly superiors and to demand democratic reforms within the General Conference. Southern ministers grew anxious when their peers attempted to force reform on the denomination, arguing that spiritual equality did not overturn the ecclesiastical hierarchy. Southerners often opposed any limitations on patriarchal authority in the Church and instead tried to preserve the power of bishops and elders. This allegiance to the church fathers reflected the social experience of ministers in the South who lived and preached in communities that adhered to a strict hierarchy. Thus the Methodist Episcopal Church contained two competing strains of social organization: a democratic system made up of a community of equals and a patriarchal hierarchy that preserved

² Ibid., 28-29.

the rule of the elite, elder ministers. Southern preachers often stood on the side of patriarchy when faced with the possibility of democratic reform and they demonstrated their devotion to episcopal power and church hierarchy in their rhetoric and their glorification of their own spiritual fathers.³

Although Joshua Soule became a model southern Methodist patriarch, he was neither a native southerner nor originally a Methodist. His spiritual journey began in Bristol, Maine, where he was born into a family with a strong Presbyterian heritage. Despite his upbringing, Soule became attracted to Methodism and in 1793, at twelve years of age, heard a sermon by the famous southern itinerant, Jesse Lee. Lee's message convicted Soule and soon the young convert looked to Lee as his own spiritual father. In doing so, Soule believed that he became an inheritor of the legacy of revered Methodist ministers. He could trace his spiritual lineage through Lee and Lee's spiritual father, Robert Williams, all the way back to John Wesley. "Robert Williams was the spiritual son of John Wesley," his biographer recounts, "Lee was the son of Williams, and Soule the son of Lee."⁴ His conversion experience resembled those of many other leaders of Methodism, North and South, who often saw following the lead of a spiritual father as a prerequisite for becoming a good Methodist patriarch. By attaching themselves to an elder

³ For an excellent analysis of spiritual fatherhood and Methodism, see A. Gregory Schneider, *The Way of the Cross Leads Home: The Domestication of American Methodism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993), 127-129.

⁴ Du Bose, *Life of Joshua Soule*, 28.

religious figure, these men believed they affirmed the Methodist heritage and passed on the purity, passion, and convictions of their spiritual forbearers.⁵

In 1798, Soule announced that he felt called to follow in his spiritual father's footsteps. He requested admittance to the itinerant ranks and entered the connection on trial. As a young man, he seemed especially suited for the pulpit despite declining membership in one of his first circuits. Being a "strict disciplinarian," Soule's willingness to expel unruly congregants likely hurt his popularity. In fact, his serious attention to church trials and expulsion of backslidden members only further demonstrated his Methodist heritage. "He preached and demanded," his biographer contends, "as did Asbury, the observance of 'the Methodist rule.'"⁶ A later bishop of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, Collins Denny believed that for Soule, "duty was even more alluring than peace," and this attitude applied to his handling of church discipline.⁷ Soule's conservative nature combined with his intellectual and oratorical abilities to make him a candidate for ministerial leadership. By 1803 he had been appointed presiding elder for the

⁵ Most biographies or memoirs of Methodist ministers produced in the antebellum period include the story of their conversion and mention the individual preacher (often called the "spiritual father") who led them into the ministry. See for example, William M. Green, *The Life and Papers of A.L.P. Green, D. D.* (Nashville: Southern Methodist Publishing House, 1877), 562; Abel Stevens, *History of the Methodist Episcopal Church in the United States of America* (New York: Carlton and Porter, 1866), I, 85; Holland N. McTyeire, *A History of Methodism* (Nashville: Publishing House of the M.E. Church, South, 1888), 484.

⁶ Du Bose, *Life of Joshua Soule*, 54.

⁷ James Edward Armstrong, *History of the Old Baltimore Conference from the Planting of Methodism in 1773 to the Division of the Conference in 1857* (Baltimore: King Brothers, 1907), 321.

District of Maine and became responsible for the administration of Methodism in the state. Other ministers claimed that his preaching talents ripened during this time and that his physical appearance commanded so much respect that congregants realized his spiritual authority before he even began to speak.⁸

In 1820, the General Conference recognized Soule's accomplishments as an itinerant and elder by electing him to the Episcopacy. Through the democratic, electoral process—a process that Soule would go on to challenge throughout his tenure—he became a leading Methodist patriarch. His acceptance of the esteemed mantle of bishop would have to wait, however, until the Conference could settle a heated debate over the powers of the Episcopacy. Some ministers wanted to limit the authority of the bishops by enhancing democratic representation in the church. This argument, which revolved around the question of whether to elect or appoint presiding elders, would reveal sectional fault lines in the church and would place Soule squarely on the side of the southern brethren—an alliance that would define the rest of his career.⁹

After he was ordained, Joshua Soule moved and as bishop, took charge of the Western and Southern Conferences. In 1824, he relocated his family to Ohio where they lived until he

⁸ Du Bose, *Life of Joshua Soule*, 60.

⁹ For a thorough explanation of the debate concerning presiding elders and the subsequent “suspended resolutions,” see James Kirby, *The Episcopacy in American Methodism* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2000). Kirby argues that the sectionalism that fractured the church in 1844 was present during the 1820 and 1824 arguments over the election of presiding elders. This fact is key to understanding the southern desire to have stronger patriarchal figures in the church by vesting the bishops with executive authority and resisting further democratization of church politics.

took a parsonage in Nashville, Tennessee, in 1846. As soon as he made the move into the region, Du Bose insisted, the bishop “became a Southerner by affiliation and the law of gravity.”¹⁰ The bishop’s conservative leanings and constitutionalist concerns made him an early ally of southern ministers and his move into the region affirmed and strengthened this connection.¹¹ Soule adopted thoroughly orthodox southern views on slavery. He actually defended the slaveholding Bishop James O. Andrew at the infamous 1844 General Conference and embraced the Plan of Separation that divided the southern church from the northern branch. Soule joined the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, in 1846 and proved his devotion to his adopted section.¹² But even before taking these dramatic steps, Soule exhibited a southern style of strong patriarchal leadership that led to personal confrontations with other ministers and criticism from the more democratically minded itinerants.

As a bishop, Soule encountered difficulties exerting his authority and disciplining younger or less-powerful ministers. This conflict was particularly evident with northern itinerants who disagreed with the bishop politically. Throughout his term, other ministers

¹⁰ Du Bose, *Life of Joshua Soule*, 177.

¹¹ A Methodist Protestant historian claimed that Soule represented the southern perspective of church patriarchy. In fact, he was so “consistent with his own principles in adhering to the South” that he “became the exponent of its ideas as to the constitutional powers of a Bishop.” Edward J. Drinkhouse, *History of Methodist Reform, Synoptical of General Methodism, 1703 to 1898* (Baltimore: The Board of Publication of the Methodist Protestant Church, 1899), 1: 547.

¹² Du Bose, *Life of Joshua Soule*, 257.

deemed him authoritarian, questioned his theology, and attacked his integrity. In 1828, for instance, John Emory and Wilber Fisk openly criticized the theology of Soule's sermon, "The Perfect Law of Liberty."¹³ Some of Soule's challengers claimed that the bishop was guilty of heterodoxy and wanted to bring heresy charges against him.¹⁴ Their accusations focused on Soule's statements regarding observing the Sabbath. Soule's sermon suggested that sinners, church members, and ministers alike "have attended the house of God so often without repentance and conversion"—a harsh condemnation for his fellow preachers.¹⁵

Several southern conferences quickly came to Soule's defense. William Capers of the South Carolina Conference published a statement supporting the bishop and the Mississippi Conference also announced their unconditional endorsement of Soule's leadership. At the General Conference, two ministers drafted a resolution to investigate the claims of Emory, Fisk and others. Soule was cleared of the charges but also realized that a large contingent of Methodist delegates supported measures to censure him for his interpretation of Methodist

¹³ A reprint of the sermon can be found in William T. Smithson, ed., *The Methodist Pulpit, South*, 2nd ed. (Washington, D. C.: Henry Polkinhorn, 1859), 149-166.

¹⁴ Jacob Young, *Autobiography of a Pioneer: or, the Nativity, Experience, Travels, and Ministerial Labors of Rev. Jacob Young with Incidents, Observations, and Reflections* (Cincinnati: L. Swormstedt and A. Poe, 1857), 390-391.

¹⁵ Joshua Soule, "The Perfect Law of Liberty," in *The Methodist Pulpit, South*, William T. Smithson, ed., 2nd ed. (Washington, D. C.: Henry Polkinhorn, 1859), 165-166; Du Bose, *Life of Joshua Soule*, 177-178.

doctrine.¹⁶ Although Soule escaped official rebuke, younger preachers continued to rebel against the strong-willed bishop's authority. In 1834, Jacob Young of the Ohio Conference publicly challenged the bishop because he was not happy with his appointment for the upcoming year. Young bypassed Soule's authority and appealed to the Ohio Annual Conference for a different circuit. Taking an uncompromising and arrogant position, Soule declared, "It makes no difference which way you vote, I shall not make the appointment." This blatant abuse of episcopal power angered Young and other Ohioan ministers, who afterwards took to calling Soule "Pope."¹⁷

Soule's opposition to the more democratic elements of the Methodist Church's structure was readily apparent. He attempted to strengthen the Episcopacy and wield despotic power over other ministers and members of his congregations. Soule was stuck between two competing forces—southern cultural attitudes and denominational doctrine—and both claimed supremacy. As growing sectionalism created fault lines within the denomination, Soule and his southern brethren were vocal not only in rejecting abolitionism in the church but also in supporting episcopal privilege and the preservation of the "Asburian ark" of church patriarchy (a rigid

¹⁶ Du Bose, *Life of Joshua Soule*, 178-179.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 185. Ministers often accused their elders or leaders of being "popes." Some accused Francis Asbury of being a "Pope" because of his insistence on retaining ultimate authority in the church. James O'Kelley, for instance, applied this accusation to Asbury during his attempt to wrest power from the bishop in the 1796 schism of the "Republican Methodists." Holland Nimmons McTyeire, *A History of Methodism* (London: Richard D. Dickson, 1885), 410.

church hierarchy created and used by Francis Asbury).¹⁸ These two causes ran counter to northern arguments that Methodist leaders should be beholden to the General Conference and its democratic decisions—including decisions to expel slaveholders. Thus southern ministers and conservative preachers who supported them promoted a different vision of church structure that contributed to their ultimate separation from the national church. This vision was based not only on ecclesiastical beliefs or theological interpretations, but also on their social experience in the southern states and their commitment to a patriarchal system in church and society.

The democratic impulse and spiritual egalitarianism of the Methodist faith challenged Soule and other conservative preachers in the South to combine their desire for a strong patriarchal hierarchy with rhetoric and disciplinary practices that reflected more respect for ordinary ministers and their flocks. This arrangement led to a prescribed role for ministerial patriarchs and redefined paternalism for southern ministers. Although southern society's foundation rested on the rule of the patriarch, preachers presented an alternate vision in which God served as a common master for all mankind and all men were subject to holy discipline. Bishops, such as Joshua Soule, could not claim mastery in any complete sense because they were beholden to the same rules and expectations as all believers. They could, however, provide for, protect, and discipline the spiritual children in their care. Southern Methodist preachers felt the need to prove themselves as powerful patriarchs while also submitting to church discipline. These contradictory expectations and impulses caused the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, to

¹⁸ For a description of the Asburian heritage adopted by southern ministers, see Kirby, *Episcopacy in American Methodism*.

buttress patriarchal (and, by extension, episcopal) authority and gradually push aside debates over democracy and equality.

The southern Methodist attachment to spiritual patriarchy reflected the influence of southern manhood on the ministerial mentality. Authority and hierarchy defined southern society in the antebellum period and the insistence on maintaining a rigid patriarchal system only intensified in the decades before the Civil War. Ministers shared this social experience and, like other white southerners, believed that strong white male authority figures promoted social stability. The clergy observed the southern obsession with hierarchy and how that obsession defined all relationships in the region. Patriarchy was especially emphasized on the plantation and in the home, where the master or father theoretically ruled with absolute control. Eugene Genovese presented one of the most comprehensive analyses of how paternalism, a major component of patriarchy that buttressed male authority, operated in the slave South. His study of slave culture in the region emphasized the role of reciprocity in the master/slave relationship and the status of masters as protectors and providers. Genovese contended that this ideal model represented an attempt by the ruling class to control their human property and morally justify the slave system.¹⁹ This model for paternalism undoubtedly shaped southern Methodist beliefs and behavior as ministers used the imagery of slavery and mastery in their sermons and tried to replicate the reciprocity of paternalism in their congregations. Pastors provided for and protected their flocks as patriarchs would their charges on a plantation, providing discipline and spiritual nourishment to their spiritual children.

¹⁹ Eugene D. Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll: The World the Slaves Made* (New York: Vintage Books, 1976), 4-5.

If paternalism presented one rationalization for slavery, many southerners also justified the institution by citing biblical sanctions. Eugene Genovese and Elizabeth Fox-Genovese described how Christian spirituality and proslavery ideology meshed and how ordinary men and women crafted scriptural arguments to defend their social system.²⁰ Ministers also engaged in this tactic and many Methodist preachers promoted proslavery theology by describing biblical patriarchs as models of godliness.²¹ Although they did not always approve of much less participate in typical masculine culture, ministers avidly supported the rule of patriarchs and spoke of the godliness of patriarchal society. The Methodist Church in the South, while never abjectly labeling itself “proslavery,” became an advocate for what its leaders believed was the scriptural sanction for slavery and the rule of the master class. By associating slave masters with Old Testament patriarchs, Methodists at least in theory held slaveholders to lofty standards of treatment for their slaves, which included providing for the salvation of the slaves’ souls.²² Thus, the Methodist ideal for plantation mastery incorporated the deference of patriarchs to a higher moral code that required them to care for or even love their slaves as children of God. The spiritual recognition of slaves’ souls did not require a temporal commitment to racial equality,

²⁰ Elizabeth Fox-Genovese and Eugene D. Genovese, *The Mind of the Master Class: History and Faith in the Southern Slaveholders’ Worldview* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 505-565.

²¹ For a more complete description of how southerners developed their notions of biblical patriarchy, see Shearer Davis Bowman, *Masters and Lords: Mid-19th-Century U.S. Planters and Prussian Junkers* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 170-171.

²² Bowman, *Masters and Lords*, 170.

however, and despite (or perhaps because of) all the teachings regarding godly patriarchy, ministers continued to contribute to the southern defense of the peculiar institution.

The southern patriarchal ideal also affected interactions between white men and women and their children. Family relationships in the antebellum South centered on the will of the patriarch and protection of his wealth and reputation. Michael P. Johnson contended that planters in the antebellum South, who supposedly served as models for poorer white men, constructed their family life on the authority of fatherhood. The father's ability to act as "source, provider, protector, example, and judge" provided the family stability and respect in southern society. Subordination and obedience became the duty of all family members, including sons who often suffered from conflicting desires to please their fathers and also prove themselves as independent men.²³ These conditions and expectations that existed on the plantation, from reciprocity, protection, and provision, to subservience and obedience, influenced southern ministers' understanding of their own positions in society and the church. Methodist ministers attempted to recreate the family model within the church setting, placing themselves at the head of the spiritual household and demanding obedience from their subordinates (including church members and younger ministers). Methodist patriarchs thus behaved rather like southern men more generally. Unlike other southern patriarchs, however, ministers relied not on their wealth to keep their families beholden to their leadership nor on the whip or the overseer to control their enslaved subordinates. Instead, ministers depended on their ability to convict and spiritually guide their congregants and fellow clergymen as proof of their patriarchal status.

²³ Michael P. Johnson, "Planters and Patriarchy: Charleston, 1800-1860." *Journal of Southern History* 46 (February, 1980): 45-57.

Southern Methodists applied the southern model of family hierarchy to their ministry and promoted the idea of spiritual fatherhood through their denominational structure and rhetoric. After they left the national Methodist Episcopal Church, the southern clergy placed more emphasis on church hierarchy than ever before. By the Civil War, the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, had effectively eliminated the major threats to episcopal authority. They had opposed reforms such as the election of presiding elders and lay representation and had proven their commitment to church patriarchy. In 1854 the MEC, South, took a drastic step to expand episcopal power in church government by granting bishops the right to veto any action of the General Conference.²⁴ In combination with these official actions, ministers made conscious rhetorical efforts to promote an image of patriarchal authority through stories of discipline and pastoral leadership. They presented tales of brave ministers leading their flocks or elder itinerants rebuking unruly brethren. To them, patriarchy was central to their ability to convert sinners and maintain the health and order of the church. Methodist ministers proved their fitness as southern patriarchs by preserving a strict denominational hierarchy and also by demonstrating their personal qualifications as disciplinarians and spiritual guides.

Episcopal Power

Francis Asbury served as the archetype for southern ministerial patriarchy. As the founder of the church in the United States, Asbury confronted the tensions inherent in American Methodism and wrestled to implement strong patriarchal oversight of a religious body that (in theory) rejected such overt control. After being appointed by John Wesley to lead the Methodist

²⁴ James E. Kirby, Russell E. Richey, and Kenneth E. Rowe, *The Methodists* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Publishing Group, 1996), 44.

mission to America, Asbury organized a central national church with himself at the head of a strong Episcopacy. The first thirty years of Methodist growth depended on Asbury's leadership; his personality and vision shaped the Church's original structure.²⁵ In fact, his hold over Methodism in America was so absolute that Wesley accused the American bishop of seeking self-glorification.²⁶ Over time, Asbury became associated with the southern mindset, some even claiming that he became "very much a Southerner in his day." As an early Methodist itinerant stationed in Alexandria, Virginia, Ezekiel Cooper cautioned the British Bishop Thomas Coke in 1791 not to challenge Asbury's authority. The bishop's influence was so great, Cooper warned, that "nothing will touch the majority of our preachers sooner and more powerfully than to seek the unjust injury of him who has served them so long and so faithfully."²⁷ This original patriarchal power still shaped the southern branch of Methodism in the 1830s and 1840s as ministers from the region attempted to maintain the "Asburian ark" of episcopal power and restrict the more democratic functions of church government.²⁸

²⁵ Kirby, *Episcopacy in American Methodism*, 9.

²⁶ Horace M. Du Bose, *Francis Asbury: A Biographical Study* (Nashville: Publishing House of the M.E. Church, South, 1916), 147.

²⁷ Ezekeil Cooper and George A. Pheobus, *Beams of Light on Early Methodism in America: Chiefly Drawn from the Diary, Letters, Manuscripts, Documents, and Original Tracts of the Rev. Ezekiel Cooper* (New York: Phillips and Hunt, 1887), 138.

²⁸ Soule recognized Asbury's original plan for the Episcopacy and Conference to exist co-equally, and southern Methodists dubbed their defense of a stronger Episcopacy as a continuance of the "Asburian ark" of church government. This term is mentioned in Du Bose,

Often viewed as Asbury's heir, William McKendree tried to continue this strong style of episcopal leadership. Although Asbury was responsible for founding Methodism in America and establishing the American Episcopacy, McKendree can be credited with providing stability to the young denomination. He brought his keen administrative skills and diplomatic leadership style to the Episcopacy and gave the church a sense of permanence.²⁹ Born in King William County, Virginia, in 1767, and ordained as the first native bishop of the Methodist Episcopal Church in 1808, McKendree became a model for southern ministers and his views on episcopal power and spiritual fatherhood helped shape the path of the M.E. Church, South.³⁰ Bishops, in McKendree's estimation, should have "the general oversight of the spiritual and temporal concerns of the Church" and should be "of course authorized to attend to any and all matters, small and great, in the execution of discipline." All other members of the General Conference, from presiding elders, assistant preachers, and junior (or helper) preachers, to class leaders should be under the Episcopacy's rather large thumb. In his estimation, presiding elders occupied a position directly under the bishop, but did not act with impunity. McKendree described them as "agent[s] of the Bishop...authorized to exercise episcopal authority within the limits of [their] District[s]" as

Life of Joshua Soule, 55. For more recent discussions of the "Asburian ark" argument, see Kirby, *Episcopacy in American Methodism*, 163, and Kirby, Richey, and Rowe, *The Methodists*, 43.

²⁹ Robert Paine, *Life and Times of William McKendree, Bishop of the Methodist Episcopal Church* (Nashville: Publishing House of the M.E. Church, South, 1922), 7.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 17, 193.

ordered by their regional bishops.³¹ He held to this basic understanding of church hierarchy throughout his episcopal career, fighting to keep the original framework intact during several controversies over the power of presiding elders and lay representation.

Men such as Asbury and McKendree established the foundation for the patriarchy that lay at the heart of southern Methodism. Younger ministers revered these bishops as fathers, a tradition that became central to the denomination's character in the South. The Methodist historian James E. Kirby contends that this level of episcopal power persisted and was enhanced with the creation of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South. Although the *Discipline* retained much of the original language regarding the authority of bishops, the M.E. Church, South, formally and informally made southern bishops the most powerful in the history of American Methodism. Along with granting them the authority to veto conference decisions, the church also tended to elect bishops with strong personalities and a "southern 'style' of leadership," which in turn undergirded the dominance of the Episcopacy.³² Asbury constructed this personal approach to leadership and southern bishops continued in this tradition, establishing their authority as independent leaders of the church and exercising a tremendous degree of control. In many ways, Soule was an episcopal descendant of Asbury and perpetuated the patriarchal authority established by the church father.

³¹ Holland N. McTyeire, *A Manual of the Discipline for the Methodist Episcopal Church, South* (Nashville: Publishing House of the M.E. Church, South, 1870), 67.

³² Kirby, *Episcopacy in American Methodism*, 166-169. Writing from the southern perspective, Horace Du Bose described Methodism as "a personal force throughout." Du Bose, *Life of Joshua Soule*, 58.

Because of their immediate desire to continue the “Asburian ark” of Episcopal authority, the first four bishops of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, were chosen as much for their force of character as for their ecclesiastical experience. In a description of these prominent figures, the minister Richard H. Rivers emphasized the qualities that made these men so fit for the southern Episcopacy. Joshua Soule, for instance, “arose in all the dignity of his high office, and never appeared more a Bishop than at the time.” Rivers also commended James O. Andrew for withstanding the assaults of northern Methodists and assured southern Methodists that “his Episcopal robes were still unsoiled, and that they had not been rudely torn from his manly form.” William Capers seemed the most like the original church father at his ordination, as he “received with meekness the mantle of Asbury, and by the imposition of hand was most solemnly consecrated as an overseer of the Church of God.” The youngest bishop, Robert Paine, took his vows “solemnly,” “with victory already flashing from his dark, expressive eyes.”³³ With the selection of these four men, the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, demonstrated at its very first conference a concerted effort to supply southern Methodism with powerful leadership rooted in strong, patriarchal figures.

Well before the 1840s and the sectional church schism, southern ministers had developed a distinct perspective on the role and authority of bishops that differed greatly from their northern brethren and revealed two irreconcilable visions of religious authority. A culmination of several attempts by mostly northern ministers to overturn the traditional church order, the

³³ Richard Henderson Rivers, *The Life of Robert Paine, D. D., Bishop of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South* (Nashville: Southern Methodist Publishing House, 1885), 83.

controversy at the 1820 General Conference revealed the first serious fissures in the national church and cemented the southern desire for a church with powerful patriarchal leaders. A debate over presiding elders entailed not only questions regarding church polity but fundamental concerns over democratic impulses in church government and limitations on episcopal authority. There had been several earlier attempts to push for the election of presiding elders, but none gained much momentum. Challenges to bishops' authority had occurred since the O'Kelly schism at the 1784 Christmas Conference (considered the first General Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church in America). At that meeting, James O'Kelly offered an amendment to grant ministers the right to appeal an appointment made by the bishop. This act would have transferred a great degree of power from the Episcopacy to the General Conference, something that Asbury would not allow and the amendment was defeated. O'Kelly denounced Asbury as a "pope," and then created a separate Republican Methodist Church under his own leadership.³⁴ From that point on, other resolutions threatened to encroach on episcopal power but none enjoyed much success because many ministers feared that by disrupting the original denominational plan they would risk more schisms in the church.

Given recent experience and fears of dissolution, Methodist leaders entered the 1820 conference with a sense of caution and urgency. The battle lines were drawn immediately, with William Capers of Virginia and Samuel Dunwody of South Carolina speaking at length against the resolution to transfer the power of episcopal appointments to the Annual Conferences and

³⁴ McTyeire, *A History of Methodism*, 572; Kirby, *Episcopacy in American Methodism*, 57.

northerners such as James Smith pressing for its adoption.³⁵ The southern delegates argued that most of a bishop's influence was derived from his ability to appoint presiding elders and that right should be constitutionally protected.³⁶ According to Capers, the debate between the two factions was "vehement, if not angry," as those who favored the election of presiding elders unfairly attacked the Episcopacy. "The power of the Bishops was assailed as incompatible with principles of right government," Capers later complained, "and while no instance was adduced, nor could be adduced, of an abuse of that power to the injury of any one, its curtailment was insisted on with as much earnestness as if heaven and earth had been staked on the issue." To Capers and his southern brethren, the resolutions seemed "radical" and dangerous. The bishops did not represent an ecclesiastical "tyranny," as had been claimed, but represented the very foundation of the Methodist Episcopal faith.³⁷

Although feeble and in poor health, Bishop McKendree used his episcopal influence to cool the heated conflict. McKendree had witnessed the damage caused by unresolved controversy before. He had been present during the O'Kelly schism and had maintained a

³⁵ *Journals of the General Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church* (New York: Carlton and Phillips, 1855), 1:212.

³⁶ In *The Episcopacy in American Methodism*, James E. Kirby explains the southern emphasis on preserving the church's constitution as well as Episcopal authority created by the constitution.

³⁷ William May Wightman, *Life of William Capers, D. D., one of the Bishops of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South; including an Autobiography* (Nashville: Publishing House of the M.E. Church, South, 1902), 225.

relationship with the ousted minister long after his split from the Methodist Episcopal Church. McKendree therefore stepped in to avoid further strife and to preserve the church's hierarchical authority. He and other opponents of the resolution based their disapproval on the constitution's Third Restrictive Rule, originally written by Joshua Soule, which stated that the General Conference could not "*change or alter any part or rule of our government, so as to do away Episcopacy, or destroy the plan of our itinerant general superintendency.*"³⁸ Based on this rule, McKendree promised to strike down any resolution adopted by the General Conference that proved unconstitutional, including the measure to elect presiding elders. To McKendree and other constitutionalists, depriving bishops of their authority to appoint these officials challenged the very existence of the Episcopacy. McKendree's actions not only demonstrated his conservative reading of the Methodist constitution, but also his willingness to exert his own power as senior bishop to force this interpretation on the rest of the General Conference.

Bishop McKendree and Bishop-elect Joshua Soule announced that neither of them would enforce the new resolutions regarding presiding elders. They both believed that the measures went against Methodist law and reduced the Episcopacy's legitimate authority. McKendree intended to declare the resolutions unconstitutional and effectively asserted his power as senior bishop to make such declarations and to void legislation passed by the conference.³⁹ In any case, the patriarchal function of the Episcopacy would be impaired by such measures, because the

³⁸ John J. Tigert, *A Constitutional History of American Episcopal Methodism* (Nashville: Publishing House of the M.E. Church, South, 1908), 341.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 342.

bishop served as the executive authority who protected the “moneyed institution and individual rights” within the church.⁴⁰ At this juncture, one minister observed that the debate was no longer about presiding elders, but “the question was now merged into the more important one whether the Episcopacy or the General Conference was to be supreme.”⁴¹ Because of the gravity of this issue, the conference decided to table the resolutions until their next meeting in 1824, with McKendree and his supporters claiming that the resolutions “tended ‘to destroy the itinerant general superintendency, and very much to injure the itinerancy throughout, if not very much destroy it.’”⁴² The dispute came up again at the 1824 General Conference and, again the resolutions were tabled until 1828 when they were finally defeated.⁴³

Although the debate over the election of presiding elders officially ended, the sectional divisions endured and only became more pronounced. The votes to expand or limit episcopal power indicated this regional split with the South and West largely lining up against the North

⁴⁰ Ibid., 343.

⁴¹ Robert Emory, *The Life of the Rev. John Emory, One of the Bishops of the Methodist Episcopal Church by his Eldest Son* (New York: George Lane, 1841), 147.

⁴² Ibid., 148.

⁴³ Ibid., 149; One historian of American Methodism argues that the presiding elder controversy was “a lightning rod for tension between Episcopacy and the fraternity, for built-up static over authority and its exercise.” Russell E. Richey, *The Methodist Conference in America: A History* (Nashville: Kingswood Books, 1996), 82.

and East.⁴⁴ For southern ministers, protecting the power of bishops and defending and perpetuating the “Asburian ark” symbolized their respect for church patriarchs and the original church father, Francis Asbury. The culture of the region relied on a similar patriarchal ideal and the hierarchical system of the plantation household affected the southern Methodist mentality towards church leaders. Although southern preachers allowed for some debate within their ranks, most expected deference to elders and believed that the Church should punish disrespectful or disobedient ministers.

Their stance regarding the Episcopacy reflected their overall vision of church hierarchy and the necessity for spiritual fatherhood. Southern ministers accomplished their goal of securing church patriarchy with the defeat of the “suspended resolutions” in 1828 and with creation of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, in 1844. At the same time, however, southern Methodists inherited a legacy of denominational democracy and egalitarianism that was not easily reconciled with their hierarchical position on church government and leadership.

Democratic Faith in a Patriarchal Church

Just as Francis Asbury established the precedent of a strong, authoritarian Episcopacy, he also invoked the more democratic ethos of American Methodism. In an attempt to incorporate the republican ideals of the Revolutionary period into the denominational structure, in 1784 Asbury insisted on obtaining the consent of his fellow ministers before he would accept

⁴⁴ Kirby, *Episcopacy in American Methodism*, 98. In his history of Methodist reform, Richard E. Drinkhouse explains the geographical divide that emerged in the 1820s and 1830s over Episcopal authority, with preachers “west and south of Maryland” upholding the senior bishop as father of the church and the ultimate decision-maker. Drinkhouse, *History of Methodist Reform*, 1:303.

ordination as bishop.⁴⁵ John Wesley, the founder of Methodism, had sent word to America that Thomas Coke and Francis Asbury were to be appointed as superintendents of the American Methodist Church. Asbury rejected the notion that a single man, or even a few men, could determine the direction of the entire church. He responded to Wesley's order by holding an election at the Christmas Conference so other Methodist clergymen could approve or disapprove of the decision.⁴⁶ Although the election was not exactly democratic (only some of the ministers were able to attend and it was assumed that Asbury would have their support), it represented a break from Wesley's more rigid governance and a reflection of the Revolution's influence on the American church. Once elected bishop, however, Asbury tried to concentrate as much power in his Episcopacy as possible. He even resisted the formation of a General Conference in favor of a council that would grant the bishop more control over church affairs.⁴⁷ Thus, the birth of Methodism in America was attended by the inclusiveness of democratic election and the

⁴⁵ For a more complete comparison of American Methodist church structure and the political state of the early republic, see Charles W. Ferguson, *Organizing to Beat the Devil: Methodists and the Making of America* (New York: Doubleday and Co., 1971). Ferguson traces the Americanization of the English Asbury's thoughts on church government and provides an analysis of republican pressures on the early Methodist Church.

⁴⁶ Ezra Squier Tipple, ed., *The Heart of Asbury's Journal* (New York: Eaton and Mains, 1904), 227; Ferguson, *Organizing to Beat the Devil*, 3.

⁴⁷ This episode is not well documented but is explained in Frederick A. Norwood, *The Story of American Methodism* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1974), 124.

exclusiveness of an authoritarian Episcopacy—a fundamental tension that would define the church throughout its early history.⁴⁸

The friction that developed between the democratic elements of the denomination and the autocratic rule of its bishops led to conflicts, compromises, and schisms. Some ministers directly challenged episcopal authority and maintained a firm belief in the importance of representation and consent of the governed within the church. Others regarded bishops as the defenders of order and stability, resisting any attempt to deprive the Methodist patriarchs of their rightful power. Often the conferences avoided actual divisions by passing measures that would discourage any open conflict. In 1800, for instance, the General Conference decided that no bishop or single minister should have the right to expel another member of the clergy. Instead, they would be brought to trial before the entire conference, which would then decide the accused minister's fate by a majority vote.⁴⁹ Such decisions upheld the church hierarchy (ministers were still subject to the discipline of their elders and could be rebuked by the church fathers), but provided a more democratic façade for church government. Not all differences over church democracy could be resolved so peacefully, however, and the young denomination had to confront questions about the various restrictions the Church placed on the lives of clergy and laity, all of which related to the power church fathers exercised over church affairs.

⁴⁸ For a detailed discussion of Asbury's election, his original plans for the Episcopacy, and opposition to his power over church government, see John H. Wigger, *Taking Heaven by Storm: Methodism and the Rise of Popular Christianity in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 39-46.

⁴⁹ McTeiyre, *Manual of the Discipline*, 118.

Perhaps the most heated debate over the expansion of democracy in the Methodist Episcopal Church focused on the participation of the laity and local ministers in denominational government. The battle over lay representation put a serious strain on the church, became personal in some cases, and led to the expulsion of several ministers and members. More democratically minded ministers raised the issue of lay representation at the same time that the church was bickering over the appointment of presiding elders by bishops. The Conferences of 1820 and 1824 raised important questions about the extent of episcopal authority and some attendees added to their grievances against the bishops a demand for increased influence by lay Methodists and local preachers. One local clergyman named Nicholas Snethen led a group of Methodist ministers called the Reformers, a party dedicated to the cause of lay representation. Snethen published treatises on lay representation in the *Wesleyan Repository*, *Mutual Rights*, and *Mutual Rights and Christian Intelligencer* from 1820 to 1828 and quickly became a target of ecclesiastical ire. According to Snethen, “The end was to check the power of the hierarchy, the means was lay representation.” The reformer rejected charges of “revolutionary” intent and maintained that he meant simply to correct a fault in Methodist church government.⁵⁰

To many more conservative ministers, Snethen’s views *were* revolutionary and even radical. Snethen and the Reform Party questioned not only the position of the laity within the Church, but they also directly challenged the role of the bishop and the nature of the Episcopacy. Snethen disputed the very idea of church patriarchy and claimed that the “church fathers” were

⁵⁰ Nicholas Snethen, *Snethen on Lay Representation; or, Essays on lay representation and church government, collected from the Wesleyan Repository, the Mutual Rights, and the Mutual Rights and Christian Intelligencer, from 1820-1829 inclusive, and now republished in chronological order, with an introduction* (Baltimore: J. J. Harrod, 1835), ix.

illegitimate. He contended that the Methodist Episcopal Church had only two church fathers: John Wesley and (possibly) Francis Asbury. Aside from them, there could be no patriarchy within the Methodist connection. Snethen made his position crystal clear: “[The Reformers] have no objection to a Methodist Episcopal Church, but to a patriarchal power in succession, in its bishops. Let us have bishops, and if all parties are agreed, a succession of them; but let all their power and authority be strictly legal, and let them be subject to legal restraints.” Accordingly, Snethen argued, ministers could not serve as the spiritual fathers of other ministers because they were all children of the same heavenly Father. “If a brother attempts to assume the authority of father over his brethren,” Snethen warned, “he embraces the principle of tyranny, by the very attempt.”⁵¹ To Reformers, expanding democracy within the church and imposing legal restraints on bishops would prevent a patriarchy from developing within their ranks and, thus, would thwart episcopal tyranny.⁵²

Conservative ministers, or “Constitutionalists,” resented these remarks and embarked on a mission to purge the reform faction. Thomas E. Bond and John Emory (who as a young minister supported reform but by 1832 had become so anti-reform that he accepted a position in the Episcopacy) defended the established system of episcopal control and accused Snethen and other Reformers of attacking the very foundation of church government. Bond’s “Appeal to

⁵¹ Ibid., 47.

⁵² Drinkhouse discusses the reformist mentality, especially regarding the events that transpired at the General Conferences of 1820 and 1824. To Reformers, men like McKendree and Soule were “the essence of paternity,” ignoring the pleas of lesser ministers and exacting their will despite the consequences for the denomination; Drinkhouse, *History of Methodist Reform*, 2:20.

Methodists” and Emory’s “Defense of ‘Our Fathers’” were published in direct response to Snethen’s expositions and dismissed his proposed reforms as dangerous to church government.⁵³ Bond’s tract tried to link the Reformers with other schismatics such as O’Kelly and, with a chiding tone, accused the wayward ministers of misunderstanding the purpose of church government. Such men, Bond claimed, had been wooed by “abstract notions of natural rights” that could not be practically applied to the church. If adopted, Bond warned, the reforms would alter the fundamental nature of the Methodist Episcopal Church and cause it to fall apart.⁵⁴ In an address before the General Conference of 1820, Emory used a similar argument against the resolutions on lay representation. This well-educated and respected minister contended that reform would “subvert the very foundations of the church” and would “overturn all its authorities.” In fact, Reformers helped the “bigoted and prejudiced” and the “enemies of Christianity in general” attack the Methodist Church as despotic, tearing it down from within and without.⁵⁵ To more conservative clergymen, Snethen’s position undermined the foundation of

⁵³ Thomas E. Bond, *An Appeal to the Methodists, in opposition to the changes proposed in their church government* (Baltimore: Armstrong and Plaskitt, 1827); John Emory, *A Defense of “Our Fathers,” and of the Original Organization of the Methodist Episcopal Church, Against the Rev. Alexander M’Caine and Others: With Historical and Critical Notes of Early American Methodism* (New York: Carlton and Porter, 1827).

⁵⁴ Nathan Bangs, *A History of the Methodist Episcopal Church* (New York: T. Mason and G. Lane, 1840), 3:402.

⁵⁵ Emory, *Life of Rev. John Emory*, 155; Emory, *Defense of “Our Fathers,”* 118.

Methodist leadership: the belief that bishops and elders held a position of paternal authority that contributed to church stability and growth.

As the debate intensified, Reform advocates became so devoted to change and outspoken in their criticisms of church authorities that they risked public rebukes or expulsion. Methodist leaders began targeting Union Societies, the leading Reform organizations, as well as contributors to and subscribers to Reform publications. Support for lay representation cropped up across the country in northern and southern cities. The Conference in Roanoke, Virginia, presented one of the first formal demands for changes to the Methodist *Discipline*.⁵⁶ Trenton, New Jersey, hosted the *Wesleyan Repository*, which was founded in 1820 and served as the first Methodist Reform periodical. But the site of the most heated battle over reform became Baltimore, Maryland, where Reformers were severely disciplined for participating in the lay representation movement. There the Methodist Episcopal Church began expelling members and ministers who refused to denounce Reform and to leave the Union Society. The Baltimore Conference had the first and largest Union Society and the city was also home to *Mutual Rights*, the main publication organ of the lay representation cause.⁵⁷

⁵⁶ John Paris, *A History of the Methodist Protestant Church: Giving a General View of the Causes and Events that Led to the Organization of that Church; and a More Particular Account of Transactions in North Carolina, Never before published* (Baltimore: Sherwood and Co., 1849), 86.

⁵⁷ Armstrong, *History of the Old Baltimore Conference*, 214; *The Wesleyan Repository* (1821-24), APS; *Mutual Rights* (1824-28), APS. Paris, *History of the Methodist Protestant Church*, 133-134.

The gravity of the situation in Baltimore stemmed from Conference members' emphatic denunciations of episcopal power and accusations of "spiritual despotism" when discussing the Church's rejection of lay representation.⁵⁸ By 1827, the Church had commenced trials of several ministers and congregants on the grounds that their complaints against the Church threatened harmony and stability. Two ministers who received harsh punishments, Dennis B. Dorsey and William Houston, were accused of writing letters recommending that congregants read the journal, *Mutual Rights*, a publication characterized as undermining the Methodist Church, its *Discipline*, and its leaders. Dorsey refused to stop promoting *Mutual Rights* or desist from Reform activities and was promptly suspended from the ministry. Houston did not appear at his trial, but was still removed from the itinerancy, forced to take a local appointment, and publicly reproved in an official letter from the Church.⁵⁹ Despite risk of punishment, Reformers in Baltimore continued to publish *Mutual Rights* and to make their arguments for lay representation, gathering more followers for their crusade against ecclesiastical tyranny. This resistance only exacerbated the situation and by the 1828 General Conference, a definite rift materialized between defenders of the *Discipline* and opponents of the status quo.⁶⁰ At that conference, the Reformers presented one final statement arguing for lay representation and

⁵⁸ Armstrong, *History of the Old Baltimore Conference*, 214.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 215; A Reformer's perspective on Dorsey's trial and the situation in Baltimore at the time can be found in Samuel Kennedy Jennings, *An Exposition of the Late Controversy in the Methodist Episcopal Church* (Baltimore: John J. Harrod, 1831), 29.

⁶⁰ Armstrong, *History of the Old Baltimore Conference*, 216.

urging the Church to expand democracy in the interest of expediency and unity. The majority, however, rejected the motion. This final dispute led to a secession of the Reformers, who formed the Methodist Protestant Church that incorporated the democratic elements they felt were lacking in the Methodist Episcopal denomination.⁶¹

The Reform spirit affected other parts of the South with talk of “spiritual despotism” reaching ministers in North Carolina, Virginia, and Tennessee. Despite a general southern devotion to patriarchal authority, many southern ministers began to question their place within the hierarchy of the Church. In fact, a number of southern ministers favored reform and led the charge against unchecked episcopal power. Most of these men, however, were not itinerants but were disfranchised local ministers who had little voice in church government.⁶² This seemingly anomalous act by a clerical minority relied on a well-worn argument used by southern church officials who supported slavery: that the laws of the Church should reflect those of civil society. In other words, church government should guarantee the rights already established by civil government. A minister from Virginia named John French explained this point in an article published in *Mutual Rights* in 1825. French claimed that the connection was simple—there is no difference between “civil and religious community.” The only distinction was that religious liberty should be even more firmly guarded than temporal rights. “Are men entitled to greater liberty and surer protection for their horses, their cattle, their bodies, and their good name in this

⁶¹ John Paris, *History of the Methodist Protestant Church*, 231; *Journal of the General Conference*, 1:303-360.

⁶² John Paris, *History of the Methodist Protestant Church*, 14.

world,” he asks, “than for their spiritual interest and christian character in the church of Christ?” Because spiritual wellbeing is more valuable than material wealth, Methodists should have more secure defenses for their religious rights than civil liberties—including the right to full representation in the Church.⁶³

Some Reformers clearly understood the parallels between the argument for lay representation and the defense of slavery. In the same treatise in which he demanded democratic church reform, John Paris also noted that “slavery is an institution that is regulated by law in the States where it exists” and the church should not interfere with those laws.⁶⁴ This statement related directly to the stance of more conservative southern churchmen toward the peculiar institution. For instance, in his apologia for the position of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, Henry Bidleman Bascom contended that “any attempt, by the Church, or ecclesiastical authority, to contravene civil law or invalidate civil rights, is not only without warrant from the Bible, but pours contempt upon the word of God, and the admitted obligations of the christian profession.”⁶⁵ Although most southern ministers did not agree with the Reformers on lay

⁶³ John French, “An Essay on the Unlimited Power of the Itinerant Ministry.” *Mutual Rights and Methodist Protestant* 1 (July 1825): 471. John Paris, a minister in the Methodist Protestant Church who later served as a Confederate chaplain, wrote the first history of his denomination and described further the connection between civil and religious authority. From Paris’s (and the Methodist Protestant) perspective, “that which is politically right cannot be religiously wrong.” Paris, *History of Methodist Protestant Church*, 14.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 87.

⁶⁵ Henry Bidleman Bascom, *Methodism and Slavery* (Frankfort, KY: Hodges, Todd and Pruett, 1845), 35.

representation and democratization of the church, there is a common thread in the southern Methodist mentality that stressed conformity with civil authority and conventions.

Another possible reason for the limited southern support for Reform involved the ministers' understanding of their place within a democratic system. The main leaders of southern Reform were local ministers who preached but did not have a significant say in church decisions. Feeling excluded, these local ministers fought back under the banner of lay representation, trying to expand their own role and authority within the Church. This drive may have also emerged out of their larger social and political experience in the South and belief that, as white men with a degree of authority, they should have the same rights as other white men. In his study of race and power in the South, George M. Frederickson argues that southern men participated in a political culture defined by "*Herrenvolk* democracy," where race guaranteed their right to a separate and elevated position in the social hierarchy. In other words, southerners believed in egalitarianism but only as a "white racial prerogative."⁶⁶ When southern Reformers took up the banner of lay representation, they were fighting not only for a voice in the Conference but for their equal rights as white men. These clergymen, who lived in and embraced the *Herrenvolk* system of the South, desired to claim the representation that was rightfully (and racially) theirs.⁶⁷

⁶⁶ George M. Frederickson, *The Black Image in the White Mind: The Debate on Afro-American Character and Destiny, 1817-1914* (Wesleyan: Wesleyan University Press, 1987), 61.

⁶⁷ It is interesting to note that black Methodists were entirely excluded from church government at this time. In 1840, with the support of a committee consisting of George Peck, William Capers, and L. L. Hamline, the Church took another step to insure its compliance with civil law, prohibiting black members from testifying in church trials against white men. The resolution stated "it is inexpedient and unjustifiable for any preacher among us to permit colored

After the creation of the Methodist Protestant Church, the lay representation controversy largely disappeared from General Conference discussions and talk of church democracy took a different form. Using arguments similar to those of the Reformers, southern ministers who remained in the Church began to contend that Methodists should tolerate if not embrace slavery because of the civil government permitted the institution. What set the slavery debate apart from the lay representation debate was that southern ministers were no longer fighting for the rights of the disfranchised. Instead, they sought to defend the most powerful men in the Church—the Episcopacy—from attacks by other ministers. The schism of 1844 occurred because of challenges to a slaveholder’s (James O. Andrew’s) position as bishop. With the creation of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, ministers in the region made a deliberate effort to contain threats to episcopal authority and to create a church government that supported strong patriarchs as well as slavery.⁶⁸

The continuance of the “Asburian ark” of episcopal power in the southern church did not mean that ministers stopped debating the nature of church government, but it did mean that the tone of the discussion changed. After 1844, the focus shifted from limiting patriarchal authority to questions of how much power patriarchs should have in the Church. Contributors to M.E.

persons to give testimony against white persons in any state where they are denied that privilege in trials at law.” Lewis Curts, *The General Conferences of the Methodist Episcopal Church from 1792-1896* (Cincinnati: Curts and Jennings, 1900), 124-125.

⁶⁸ In *History of Methodist Reform*, Drinkhouse argues that the schism of 1844 only crystallized the divisions between North and South regarding Episcopal authority, with the South maintaining a strict hierarchy in line with that established by Asbury, McKendree, and Soule; Drinkhouse, *History of Methodist Reform* (Baltimore: The Board of Publication of the Methodist Protestant Church, 1899), 2:13.

Church, South, periodicals argued at length about these questions, and none of them settled on a democratic system in which ministers had a semblance of equal control over church affairs. Instead, they insisted that the Church was more like a monarchy or a theocracy with a hierarchy that had to be preserved. Reverend Lovick Pierce of Savannah, Georgia, argued that the Church “is a moral and spiritual monarchy” established by the will of God. Pierce considered God to have already answered the question of church government and dismissed “all this mouthing about curtailed rights and privileges” as being nothing “but the whimperings of a political and worldly lust of place and power.” According to Pierce, the “law is absolute” and God appointed executives in the form of bishops to see that the law is followed. Using the Apostles as examples, the southern clergyman explained that God did not select church fathers to act as “presidents” of the Church, but as “the executors of a great and settled law economy” in which they had the power to “execute a sentence passed by law itself, and not by the finding of a jury.” Pierce argued against the distribution of authority and declared that concentrated control is necessary to maintain the morality of a religious body. “[T]he past has proved, and the future will,” he asserted, “that the extension of purely democratic policy and principles is but a popular paternity of moral libertinism.”⁶⁹

Replying to Pierce’s article, the Rev. R. Abbey of Mississippi took a more idealistic approach to church government. Although Pierce may have stumbled upon some valid ideas regarding the original church structure presented in the Bible, Abbey admitted, his hypothesis regarding God’s law was fundamentally flawed. Abbey believed that “church government is

⁶⁹ Lovick Pierce, “The Fundamental Element of Church Government,” in *Quarterly Review of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South* (Richmond: John Early, 1853), 7:16-24.

human government” and, while God laid down commandments for all men to follow, He did not establish a “spiritual monarchy” in the Church.⁷⁰ Instead, He left it to humans to discover what the most expedient form of government would be for their religious institutions. To Abbey, a monarchy would not serve the interests of all church members. Instead, every Christian should take responsibility for spiritual improvement. With a body of moral believers, the Church could move towards a republican form of government with strong leaders at its helm to guide the way.⁷¹ In contrast to Pierce, Abbey believed that a degree of equality could be achieved under the right conditions. These two visions (the Church as spiritual monarchy versus the Church as potential republic) dominated ministerial thought on church government under the Methodist Episcopal Church, South.

Despite these differing southern perspectives on church government, most Methodist ministers in the region agreed that the denomination rested on a firm foundation of patriarchal authority. Bishop Henry Bidleman Bascom summarized what he considered to be the prevailing southern view on patriarchy in the church: John Wesley had created the Episcopacy and, as his rightful descendants, bishops inherited a “superior” position in church government. They were not merely Methodist brethren but instead acted as fathers of the denomination with all of the

⁷⁰ R. Abbey, “A Critique on Dr. L. Pierce’s View of Church Government,” in *Quarterly Review of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South* (Richmond: Stevenson and Owen, 1854), 8:78.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 81.

authority that implies.⁷² This notion of spiritual patriarchy affected not only bishops' standing within the Conference, but it also crept into itinerants' and local ministers' understanding of their own place within the spiritual order. This authority did not have to be accepted by southern communities and many ministers did not look like or act like average southern patriarchs; nevertheless, Methodist leaders attempted to build their (and the Church's) influence in the South through establishing themselves as the paternal authority figures.

Church Fathers and Methodist Myths

Methodists in the South attempted to bolster this image of spiritual patriarchy in their rhetoric, a tactic that created a Methodist myth culture centered on the church fathers. In published stories or sermons, ministers often praised Methodist preachers who exemplified the qualities of religious fatherhood and who acted as firm disciplinarians or able guardians for their spiritual subordinates. By placing ministers in these roles, Methodist writers hoped to convey to fellow Methodists and perhaps to others the authority that these men wielded within the religious community. Many of these accounts focused on bishops, presiding elders, or well-known and respected itinerants, and emphasize not only the ministers' spiritual abilities but also their status within the denomination. Some of the most common stories of Methodist patriarchy involve the disciplining of younger brethren brought to repentance under their spiritual fathers' guidance. The authors of these tales intended them to be read by a broad audience. They appeared in major

⁷² Bascom, *Methodism and Slavery*, 129-130. For insight into the northern perspective on church government after the schism of 1844, see Abel Stevens, *An Essay on Church Polity: Comprehending an Outline of the Controversy on Ecclesiastical Government and a Vindication of the Ecclesiastical System of the Methodist Episcopal Church* (New York: Layne and Tippet, 1848).

Methodist periodicals as well as autobiographies or biographies. Although there are some variations in storyline and emphasis in these Methodist myths, their purpose is clear: to convince the public of the patriarchal fitness and moral power of Methodist ministers and to persuade individuals to follow Methodist leadership.⁷³

The presiding elder became a central character in these Methodist myths. Despite the southern insistence on the appointment of presiding elders by bishops, these officials still held a powerful position in local church government and served as examples of spiritual fatherhood for fellow itinerants. In 1859, one southern minister described the work of the presiding elders as “essential to Methodism” and his brethren would have certainly agreed.⁷⁴ Defining the duties of presiding elders was a long-term Methodist project, but one point was never disputed: the ability of elders to extract obedience from subordinate preachers remained vital to the success of the circuits. In turn, flourishing circuits remained central to the mission of the Methodist Church. A contributor to the Southern *Methodist Itinerant* claimed that strong presiding elders represented the most direct church authority many itinerants and congregants encountered. Although they

⁷³ Cynthia Lynn Lyerly discusses the significance of myth culture to the creation of the Methodist Church in the South. Lyerly argues that myths shaped the Methodist worldview, with church leaders often combining fact with fiction to encourage conversion and commitment to the denomination. Lyerly, *Methodism and the Southern Mind*, 12-13. According to Randi Jones Walker, other Protestant groups used myths as well but Methodist stories had a distinct emphasis, often focusing on the circuit rider and his adventures and trials over other common evangelical themes. Randi Jones Walker, “The Continuing Influence of Religion on American Religious Life,” in *Organized Religion Today*, Vol. 1 of *Faith in America: Changes, Challenges, and New Directions*, ed. Charles H. Lippy (Santa Barbara: Greenwood Publishing Group, 2006), 171.

⁷⁴ Philo Veritas to the Editor, *Southern Methodist Itinerant*, March 15, 1859.

very much remained under the control of the bishop, presiding elders served as both examples and instructors for younger brethren. If these officials followed “in the footsteps of [their] Master” by constantly studying the word, rebuking others when necessary, and holding believers to high standards, they would inspire and encourage the “under graduates in the conference” to work harder.⁷⁵ Presiding elders’ power was also derived from their judicial position on the circuits. If a circuit or district complained about a minister’s conduct, the presiding elder had the right and responsibility to suspend him until the next Annual Conference.⁷⁶ The primary role of the presiding elders was to keep order on the circuits and a watchful eye over the younger itinerants.

Presiding elders and bishops became so valued (or, in some cases, dreaded by) their younger brethren that tales of their ministry and disciplinary style became legendary. A publication dedicated entirely to honoring mostly southern Methodist patriarchs, the unambiguously named *Heroes of Methodism*, offered detailed biographical information as well as anecdotal glimpses into the lives and ministries of important church leaders. Not entirely believable, these sketches were based on information supplied by conference records and reports handed down from friends, acquaintances, and anonymous contributors. The apparent aim of the publication was to relate “anecdotes” in which these men showed their godliness and leadership. The resultant work was not surprisingly a hagiographic collection of unsubstantiated stories

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ MyTiere, *Manual of the Discipline*, 129.

regarding the church fathers.⁷⁷ McKendree, according to one writer, “was looked to by the preachers and the people as the patriarch of the Church; and all seemed willing to be instructed by his experience and piety.” When challenged, he exacted discipline with “firmness” and proved to have an “immovable” character.⁷⁸ On one occasion McKendree openly chastised a young preacher who exhibited “more confidence than prudence” in his conversation with other ministers. The new itinerant had made the mistake of bragging to the bishop about the financial sacrifices he made when he entered the travelling connection. Comparing these grand claims to the life-long struggles of St. Paul, McKendree quickly put the younger man to shame by asking if his privation was greater than that of the famous apostle. All present witnessed the humiliation of the minister who had been singled out for rebuke.⁷⁹ This story is typical of southern Methodist mythology in the antebellum period. Most accounts concerning the church fathers included an anonymous younger minister who received a severe and public rebuke. There was little or no evidence offered to support the veracity of the anecdote. This allowed Methodists to exaggerate or fabricate encounters with patriarchs for the larger purpose of buttressing clerical authority.

⁷⁷ Although the stated purpose of the book is to assemble “truthful” anecdotes, the author admits that much of the book is taken from conversations with elderly ministers or old church members as well as magazine clippings that were pieced together. And the work claims to present the stories of the most famous Methodist patriarchs in general, but the majority of the men included were southerners or were preaching in the Southwest. J. B. Wakeley, *The Heroes of Methodism, Containing Sketches of Eminent Methodist Ministers, and Characteristic Anecdotes of Their Personal History* (New York: Carlton and Porter, 1856), iv-v.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 98.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 134.

Such accounts promoted a common theme in southern Methodist publications by emphasizing the strength of a bishop's position within the church and ability to exact obedience from others.

Some Methodist myths included elaborate tales of ministers taking on gentler paternal leadership roles, providing guidance rather than discipline in order to direct young itinerants with love instead of shame. A story originally printed in the *Southern Ladies' Companion* and supposedly related by the Reverend E. Stevenson, described the efforts of Enoch George to encourage Stevenson during the early days of his ministry. In 1823, George accompanied the new itinerant on his first circuit to a small village in Kentucky. The Methodist connection would often send a veteran preacher with an inexperienced one to a first appointment. This would allow young itinerants to learn from an elder minister and the church to have some oversight over the new circuit riders. This proved to be a good thing for Stevenson, who quickly lost confidence in his abilities to preach and questioned whether he should remain at his appointment. Trying to comfort and encourage the minister, George understood his concerns but advised him to persevere and pray continually about the situation.

After spending more time in the village and experiencing continued resistance from the local community, Stevenson still believed that he did not belong on the circuit. Before George left him alone in the town, the itinerant approached his elder and asked George to release him from his appointment. Stevenson recalled that George replied with "an address fraught with parental feeling and sound wisdom" and asked him to stay for a month on his own and then if he still wanted to be released from the position, the request would be granted. Stevenson agreed and George continued on his journey to another circuit. "The man-angel upon whom he had leaned, was gone," the article reported, "and he was left to grapple with his trail alone. He could have

sobbed like a boy.”⁸⁰ Stevenson, however, stayed at his appointment, became a successful preacher, and later served as a book agent for the Methodist Episcopal Church, South. This story of pastoral parental guidance would have sounded familiar to southern Methodists. The presiding elder, in this case George, acted as a loving fatherly figure to the scared itinerant who looked to him for comfort and guidance. In the wilderness of the circuit, preachers often clung to their spiritual fathers as the only immediate source of stability or authority, and elders like George succored their spiritual children.

Tales of church patriarchy circulated in both the North and the South, but as sectional divisions widened into a full-fledged break, southern ministers laid claim to the early church fathers by presenting their own patriarchs as more legitimate heirs to the Methodist tradition than northern ministers. As in a heated family feud, southern ministers openly fought with their northern brothers, accusing them of rejecting the Methodist heritage that the southern church had created. Western Virginia became the most contested terrain in this fraternal battle, with ministers in both sections claiming jurisdiction over circuits there. An 1858 letter to the *Southern Methodist Itinerant* detailed a running argument with northern preachers over which church should dominate the area. The author criticized one of the local ministers in western Virginia who claimed that he and his church members pledged allegiance to the “M.E. Church, *not North*, and sure *not South*.” Instead of declaring his devotion to sectional religious leaders, he wrote of “traveling home to God in the way and on the soil my fathers trod.” This reference to the church fathers offended southern Methodist sensibilities. In countering this Virginian’s assertion, the

⁸⁰ Ibid., 158-161.

letter in the Southern *Methodist Itinerant* alleged that the minister could not be a true descendant of the church patriarchs because he had begun his itinerancy under false pretenses. The man had not been baptized until after he entered the connection, making him an illegitimate son of the Methodist fathers if he had any claim to them at all.⁸¹ Such displays of ill grace showed how southern ministers became increasingly sensitive about defending the southern roots of the church, especially as they prepared to separate from the national denomination. Although the southern church willingly divorced itself from the northern branch, ministers in the South believed that they had upheld the original intentions of the founders of the church and had the most direct claims to the denominational lineage of Methodist patriarchs such as Asbury and McKendree.

In the midst of confrontation with northern ministers in the presiding elder controversy and running arguments over Methodist heritage, southern preachers committed themselves to preserving a tradition of strong spiritual patriarchs. Spiritual fatherhood and leadership granted these men opportunities to demonstrate their dominance over others and to position themselves at the top of an influential hierarchy. Methodism in America had begun with a reliance on a headstrong and independent patriarchal figure in the form of Francis Asbury. Perhaps southern ministers did follow the path their “fathers trod,” with forceful and charismatic personalities elected to a powerful Episcopacy that set the direction of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South. But it was not only the bishops or the presiding elders who claimed patriarchal authority. Away from the conferences and the watchful eye of the church fathers, itinerants and local ministers

⁸¹ “The Way My Fathers Trod,” *Southern Methodist Itinerant*, Jan. 1, 1858.

adopted paternalist models. In individual churches and in congregants' homes, many ministers—even those at the bottom of the denominational hierarchy—strove to wield power. They disciplined members, reproved sinners, visited the sick, provided spiritual guidance to their communities, and instructed children and parents alike. Without the efforts of hardworking and travel-worn circuit riders and preachers, the construction of Methodist patriarchy would not have existed outside of the General Conference and would have had little impact on southern society.

Protecting, Providing for, and Disciplining Flocks

When the conferences adjourned and the squabbling about church government subsided, ministers returned to their circuits and churches to take up their appointments and carry on the work of converting the wicked and guiding the saved. The image of the minister as spiritual father took on a more intimate form where the itinerant had the responsibility to visit the sick and poor or chasten the wayward. Methodist periodicals carried many stories of preachers caring for their congregants, protecting them from spiritual or even from physical danger, and providing moral instruction. These tales depicted ministers as true spiritual patriarchs who had the backbone to discipline their Methodist children when they went astray and the compassion to visit their sick beds when they were ill. Acting in this role—as leaders of individual congregations—southern itinerants could either become the patriarchs of their pulpits or fail in their quest for spiritual fatherhood altogether.⁸²

⁸² See for example, “A Time to Dance,” *Southern Christian Advocate*, Dec. 15, 1837; “Ministerial Fidelity,” *Southern Christian Advocate*, Aug. 3, 1838; “Minister’s Covenants,” *South-Western Christian Advocate*, Feb. 22, 1840; “An Itinerant Remembrance,” *Southern Methodist Itinerant*, June 16, 1856; “Mr. Cough’s Converts,” *Southern Methodist Itinerant*, Apr. 15, 1857.

Henry Bidleman Bascom did not falter in his duties as patriarch, at least not as he told it. His story of patriarchal triumph, however, did not involve defeating the typical spiritual forces discussed in Methodist folklore. Instead, Bascom defeated a large and ferocious bear. The bear had terrorized a group of people attending one of Bascom's wilderness revivals and was only scared away when one worshiper managed to put a bullet in its arm. Some of the men, including the brave preacher, followed the bear into the woods. Dogs at his heels, the bear turned to face his pursuers and slung the yelping canines into nearby trees. Tromping after the animals into the forest, Bascom said that he entered the fray determined to put an end to all of the excitement that had disrupted his sermon. He had outrun everybody and found himself alone in the middle of the mêlée. The injured dogs having failed to finish off the bear, the young minister raised a club and tried to strike its head "with crushing energy." But the bear bit down on the bludgeon, taking the weapon from the preacher's hands. The pastor reached for his knife and drove it into the animal's side, but it still would not die. As the bear made one final lunge for the minister, a hunter emerged from the woods and put another knife into the bear's heart. It died with the Methodist's pant leg clenched in its teeth.⁸³

According to Bascom, this daring feat occurred in 1814 after his conference sent him to an area called "Botany Bay" on the western Virginia frontier. He further insisted that his preaching improved after the incident, perhaps because of the adrenaline rush and general excitement. And he alleged that after the spirit-filled meeting, the entire congregation dined on

⁸³ M.M. Henkle, *The Life of Henry Bidleman Bascom, D.D., LL.D., Late Bishop of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South* (Louisville: Morton and Griswold, 1854), 65-75.

the “preacher’s bear.”⁸⁴ Regardless of its own peculiar features, Bascom’s tale represents a common theme in southern Methodist rhetoric: ministerial protection of and provision for their congregations. In Bascom’s account the worshippers needed a defender to ward off a physical threat (the bear) and to provide them with spiritual comfort after the frightful event.

Most Methodist ministers might not have performed their duties in such a dramatic fashion, but they did strive to safeguard church members from sin and backsliding. The *Southern Christian Advocate* explained the importance of ministers providing discipline for church members: “As a watchman his eye must be open to the approach of all dangers whether they creep upon the Church with the subtlety and stillness of the serpent, or come with the formidable roar of the lion.” This statement harkens back to Bascom’s dealings with the bear. To the Methodist clergy, however, sinfulness could be even more threatening to the wellbeing of a congregation than the brief intrusion of some wild animal and much more difficult to conquer. The objective for Methodist patriarchs was to “bring our entire membership to a faithful observance” of the rules set out in the *Discipline* and to punish them for failing to comply.⁸⁵ By taking on a disciplinary role, ministers become “protectors of church purity” and of the holiness of their spiritual charges.⁸⁶

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 75-77.

⁸⁵ “Ministerial Fidelity,” *Southern Christian Advocate*, Aug. 3, 1838.

⁸⁶ Pierce, “Fundamental Element,” 19.

Discipline constituted the most powerful weapon ministers could wield against sin. This whole question received much attention in Methodist literature, and many periodicals warned against ministers failing to follow through on this most sacred duty. In the Southern *Christian Advocate*, one clergyman argued that the most “useful preachers” were not the most eloquent speakers but were instead those who expelled the most sinners from the Church and carried out the *Discipline* with the most passion and zeal. “By expelling some,” the writer claimed, “the whole [of the church] may be saved.” Discipline not only protects the church and its members, he went on to argue, it also enhances the minister’s own influence and respect in the community. “When men of the world see a minister pursuing a straight forward course, regardless of the smiles or frowns of the rich or poor,” he observed, “they appreciate him as a man of *moral courage* and of *principle*, and as such, what he says in the pulpit, and everywhere else, has weight and influence with them.”⁸⁷ A preacher’s authority and status in the community stemmed from his willingness to discipline others and correct bad behavior.⁸⁸

In his autobiography, Joseph Travis offered several accounts (all extremely dramatic and mostly derived from rumors) of the disciplinary practices of his fellow ministers. Some of his

⁸⁷ “Useful Preachers,” Southern *Christian Advocate*, July 6, 1838.

⁸⁸ Executing discipline allowed ministers to concentrate more authority in their own hands, especially during the development of Methodism in the South. Over time, church discipline waned as ministers became more concerned with growing the membership and less focused on punishing violators of the *Discipline*. One scholar has argued that as the church focused on its role as “salvation machine,” the nature of religious authority changed. Schneider, *Way of the Cross Leads Home*, 197. Donald Mathews also discusses this change in evangelical discipline in the 1830s and argues that the family replaced the church as the primary unit of moral guidance. Donald G. Mathews, *Religion in the Old South* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), 100.

stories involved physical confrontations between clergymen and unruly congregants in which the clergy proved their manliness before the entire church. According to Travis, an itinerant in western Virginia named Joseph Everett ousted a drunken man (or a “son of Belial,” as Travis characterized him) from one of his meetings. The man tried to attack Everett, who was still preaching, but the minister turned to meet the challenge and, while rolling up his shirt sleeves, shouted at the drunkard, ““Do you think that God ever made this arm to be whipped by a sinner? No, no!”” Everett’s words were so powerful that the man cowered, left the building in shame, and the preacher returned to his sermon as if there had been no interruption.⁸⁹ The Reverend Jesse Lee faced a similar situation and he also bested his opponents and restored order to the congregation. In this case, a large mob that tried to stop the young Methodist from preaching. Lee brought three men to their knees during the fracas, forced the rest to retreat, and concluded his sermon in peace.⁹⁰

Not all of Travis’s tales involved brawls or beatings but most did include some public display of discipline. A minister named Valentine Cook preached a sermon in Harrisonburg, Virginia, where he noticed one of the female church members had donned what he viewed as unchristian attire. The “tawdry-dressed young lady” had the audacity to sit in the front row, directly in front of the pulpit, and Cook decided to make an example of her. In delivering a

⁸⁹ Joseph Travis, *Autobiography of the Rev. Joseph Travis, A.M. A member of the Memphis Methodist Conference. Embracing a Succinct History of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South; particularly in part of Western Virginia, the Carolinas, Georgia, Alabama, and Mississippi. With short memoirs of several local preachers, and an address to his friends* (Nashville: E. Stevenson and F. A. Owen, 1856), 36.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 48.

rebuke, he focused on the most provocative article: a bonnet with a feather in it. To Cook, this bit of vanity could not be excused. In the middle of his spirited sermon, Cook began to discuss the sin of pride, pointed to the woman's hat and said, "'there is not pride in that *little feather*. . . the pride, lies hidden in the breast of the wearer.'" The mortified woman had received a firm scolding in front of the entire congregation, and Travis assumed that she "became convicted of her depraved nature." By chastising the woman in such a public manner, Cook cemented his reputation as a disciplinarian and proved his fitness as a minister of God.⁹¹

Ministers not only wished to establish their authority as spiritual fathers in their churches but also claimed to punish congregants out of love for them and devotion to God. One minister writing in the Southern *Methodist Itinerant* argued that discipline may cause some of the weaker church members to rebel or dislike their preacher, but most of the congregation would remain true. "Even those, who at first were offended," he argued, "will be constrained to say, his labor, truly, is of love." Conversely, if an itinerant followed the *Discipline* in his churches, "he will be esteemed and beloved by all." Much like a father reprimands his children out of care for their safety and wellbeing, a minister should rebuke congregants out of love for them and the church family.⁹²

Attaining respect and love from other southerners proved to be difficult at times, however, and ministers met criticism and resistance from church members and nonbelievers

⁹¹ Ibid., 199-200.

⁹² "To the Itinerants of the Western Virginia Conference," Southern *Methodist Itinerant*, Apr. 13, 1859.

alike. Their position as church fathers was a tenuous one, and they constantly had to defend their status in the community. Any disapproval a minister encountered regarding his habits or preaching style threatened his patriarchal influence. A contributor to the *Southern Methodist Itinerant* warned against church members complaining about awkward sermons or less than eloquent preachers. According to this minister, even bad sermons could convict sinners, especially children, and congregants should not interfere with the Spirit's work by denigrating the preacher.⁹³ This admonition provided a convenient defense for less-than-able preachers and also protected their authority from complaining church members.

The Rev. T. Bissland agreed but also recognized the many ways a minister's reputation could be ruined by discontented or sinful congregants. The clergy inevitably ran into criticism, Bissland conceded, but could combat it by being faithful to their mission and by disciplining those who get in their way. Ministers will encounter "busy-bodies," "tattlers," and "enemies of the truth" who want to "throw discredit on his character." To overcome such obstacles, Bissland advised ministers to "root out erroneous opinions" and "undermine the sandy foundations of the self-righteous." When facing the "sensualist and the profligate," he should caution them that they will not receive salvation or inherit God's kingdom. By standing firm against the naysayers and meddlers, a clergyman can establish himself as a leader for his flock.⁹⁴

⁹³ "Dangers of Criticism," *Southern Methodist Itinerant*, Mar. 16, 1857.

⁹⁴ T. Bissland, "Difficulties of a Faithful Preacher," *Southern Christian Advocate*, June 8, 1838.

Establishing a strong patriarchal identity was central to ministerial success. Claiming that they had God's authority to discipline church members and each other, Methodist clergymen constructed their own version of southern patriarchy centered on spiritual fatherhood rather than temporal mastery. The career of Bishop Joshua Soule exemplified the burdens and fruits of this religious patriarchy: he was attacked for his overbearing and authoritative leadership style by northern brethren and lauded by his southern peers for his unswerving devotion to the *Discipline*. As he continued his ministry in the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, his fellow ministers looked to him for guidance and paternal example. In late 1858, the Reverend George F. Pierce visited Soule's sickbed and later recalled the inspiration that the southern patriarch provided for the church. "It is strengthening to one's faith in the mission of Methodism," Pierce said, "to hear one of the fathers of our ecclesiastical economy [sic], (himself wise, sagacious, far-seeing, all the events of the past fresh in his memory,) descanting, with buoyant spirits, of the days to come and the glory to be revealed [sic]."⁹⁵ Methodist patriarchs offered stability and hope, especially after the southern ministers broke away from their northern brethren. In the MEC, South, ministers rejected the democratic reforms that had stirred so much debate and division in the 1820s and embraced a church structure that promoted patriarchal authority and hierarchy.

This hierarchy mimicked the patriarchal arrangements of southern society (and in some ways the plantation) and provided the clergy with opportunities to prove their manhood and ministerial worth. Spiritual patriarchy became increasingly important to Methodist ministers who could not live up to other patriarchal expectations that southern society at large placed on

⁹⁵ G. F. Pierce, "Notes by the Way," *Southern Methodist Itinerant*, Apr. 27, 1859.

average white men. Itinerants had very little authority at home and often were not able to provide for their families. They existed as “dependents” on their circuits, not as sovereign heads of households.⁹⁶ Although ministers fought for patriarchy within the Methodist Episcopal Church and the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, their status in their own homes withered away, making their status as spiritual fathers, however tenuous, even more vital for maintaining their status as respectable southern white men.

⁹⁶ “What is to be Done?” South Western *Christian Advocate*, June 22, 1839.

CHAPTER 3

SOUTHERN HONOR AND THE MINISTER'S FAMILY

While he was a single man, he found it comparatively an easy matter to provide for his personal wants; but when he became a married man, a new class of difficulties appeared; and his embarrassments multiplied as his family increased.¹

Methodist itinerant John Wesley Childs was not a romantic man. In his own mind, he had wooed Martha Rives for several months and his marriage proposal to her should not have been a surprise. Rives thought otherwise. The couple had met at the house of Rev. John Early, who was an old friend of Childs's and was also Rives's brother-in-law. While both staying with the Early family in Lynchburg, Virginia, the two often spoke of their shared faith and Rives's desire to become a more devoted Methodist. Their conversations had mostly stuck to religious topics and never became personal or intimate in any way. Feeling that their talks were uplifting to his soul and perhaps beneficial to Rives as well, Childs maintained a correspondence with her after returning to his circuit. These letters too mostly dealt with spiritual matters. Eventually Rives began to consider Childs as a "spiritual guide" as she continued to walk the path towards

¹ Thomas O. Summers, *Biographical Sketches of Eminent Itinerant Ministers, Distinguished, for the Most Part, As Pioneers of Methodism Within the Bounds of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South* (Nashville: Southern Methodist Pub. House, 1859), 150.

holiness, but she never thought of him as anything more.² But then in June, 1833, he abruptly proposed marriage. Rives had not even considered the possibility that their previous letters were his method of courtship; nor had he ever intimated any romantic feelings for her. Equally shocking as the proposal itself was Childs' approach. He briefly described his growing affection for her, but also detailed all of the hardships that she would experience as an itinerant's wife. "I am quite poor," he admitted, "and have followed the course pursued by Mr. Wesley, in literally giving away everything over a support." In fact, at the same time that he was making plans to marry Rives, he had given away five of his last seven or eight dollars to a community in his district that wanted to build a church.³ In other words, he had no money and no means to provide for her.

Surprisingly, Rives wrote back that she would accept his offer, but even after she consented he continued to warn her about a Spartan life to come. On August 1, he suggested it might have been unwise for him to ask her to sacrifice so much. "I have again and again thought," he wrote, "it was presumption in me to address you, considering my poverty, my many frailties and imperfections." "When I reflect on the scantiness of means possessed by me," he continued, "unbelief would say, the undertaking is wild." Despite such misgivings, Childs decided that the marriage would glorify God and they could prove the strength of their faith

² John Ellis Edwards, *Life of Rev. John Wesley Childs: for twenty-three years an itinerant Methodist minister* (Richmond: J. Early, 1853), 120-121.

³ *Ibid.*, 122.

together by overcoming their temporal needs to follow God's calling.⁴ At this point, Rives began to reconsider. After discussing the matter with family and friends, she concluded that she could not endure the privations described in Childs' letters. Rives revoked her original agreement to marry Childs and told the impoverished minister that she doubted her constitution would allow her to live in the way that his profession required. Knowing the intense scrutiny that ministers' wives experienced in the Methodist community, Rives decided that she could not bear to embarrass Childs on his circuits and thought it best to speak no more of matrimony.⁵

This change of heart greatly disappointed Childs, although he understood why she had backed away from their arrangement. So he tried a different approach. He promised to provide for her the best that he could and would not expect her to travel the circuits with him. Nor would he require her to walk with him when she did accompany him to appointments, but instead would find more suitable means of transportation for his bride. Although he did not mention how he would resolve any of the other problems, his appeals must have worked because she once again agreed to become his wife. But Childs could not let it rest. After he convinced her to enter into the engagement a second time, he wrote on January 1, 1834, that could not offer her any assurance that she had made the right decision. "[E]ven now," Childs mused, "I sometimes think,

⁴ Ibid., 123.

⁵ Ibid., 132; According to Anya Jabour, southern women in general experienced "engagement anxiety." This anxiety was usually not due to their fiancés' admission of poverty, however, but more connected to the fact that their lives were going to change forever and their identities were to be subsumed by their husbands' authority. Anya Jabour, *Scarlett's Sisters: Young Women in the Old South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007), 163-167.

if you knew how little I think of this world's goods, you would scarcely be willing to put yourself under the care of one so improvident. I still literally give away nearly every thing, and refuse money from various quarters, when it is offered to me.”⁶ Childs also gave no indication that his attitude would change once married, and even reasoned, “The fewer our wants, the more easily will they be supplied.”⁷ He insisted that God would care for their needs and protect them from any serious harm or from complete destitution.⁸

On March 13, 1834, in Lynchburg, Virginia, John Wesley Childs and Martha Rives wed at John Early's home where they had first met. Childs wore his old minister's clothes, having refused to purchase a new suit for the occasion because it would be a frivolous expense. After the wedding, they immediately began the life of sacrifice and privation that Childs had described.⁹ The couple did not enjoy much of a honeymoon because the minister returned to his circuit only a few days after their marriage. He left Martha to stay with a friend in Germantown while he set out to his appointments and did not see her again for several weeks.¹⁰ Their first year together

⁶ Edwards, *Childs*, 132-134.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 138.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 134.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 139.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 141-142; Other southern women experienced what they viewed as “privations” when they married. In her study of women's feelings regarding courtship and marriage in the antebellum South, Anya Jabour describes the “legal and economic powerlessness” that women

followed a similar pattern, with Childs visiting for short periods and then leaving her with his friends for weeks at a time. It was difficult for Martha to get used to her new husband and these arrangements. In July, the minister wrote to apologize for reprimanding her before he left for a camp meeting. She had asked him to stay at home a few more hours before he set out on his journey and he had responded with “roughness and harshness.” The problem, he claimed, was fear, because a minister “knows how liable he is to fail in his duty—he knows that many have failed, occupying the ground he now does (that of a married preacher).”¹¹ Aware of the task before him, Childs reminded his wife that his ministry came first regardless of their love for each other.

This attitude applied to the rest of the Childs’ family as well. Even after his children were born, Childs focused on his ministry and left the care of his dependents to friends and church members. After years of waiting, in 1839 Childs finally received an appointment on a circuit with a small parsonage in Liberty, Virginia—the first in a series of parsonages that the family would occupy. Although they had their own residence, it was the church members on the circuit and not Childs who provided the house for his growing family. His chosen profession required Childs to depend on the charity of the Methodist community for food, clothing, and shelter for

encountered in their relationships with their husbands. They were entirely reliant on their husbands financially and when it came to living arrangements. Although other southern women certainly felt a sense of privation in this period, ministers’ wives were required to endure the privations with no hope of improvement of their conditions. Their social situation was framed by their husbands’ itinerant occupation, which required financial sacrifices as an example of their piety. Jabour, *Scarlett’s Sisters*, 153-154.

¹¹ Edwards, *Childs*, 147.

his wife and children. By 1850, Martha had given birth to six children (five girls and one boy), all of whom the circuit rider left in his wife's care, trusting her to "teach them the way to heaven" while he was gone.¹² Most of his parental instruction he delivered through letters to each of his daughters, trusting that his fatherly influence could be felt even though he had very little actual contact with his children.¹³ He wrote when he could, speaking to them much as he had Martha during their courtship. As a father, Childs's letters rarely strayed from spiritual advice and biblical injunctions to follow a straight and narrow path. He left the practical parenting to his wife and maintained a distant ministerial role in their lives¹⁴

John Wesley Childs left his family for the last time on May 9, 1850.¹⁵ Earlier in the year, he had relocated them to a new circuit that did not have a parsonage prepared. Before he could begin his work on the circuit, his health began to fail and he grew so frail that he could barely get out of bed. Martha realized that his life was at its end and she and the children mourned not only

¹² Ibid., 181.

¹³ Ibid., 232-233. In his study of elite family life in the Old South, Steven Stowe discusses how many absentee fathers kept up a communication with their children through extensive letter writing. These letters often imparted advice or discipline that the children were expected to honor. Childs's letters differ from those of these secular patriarchs because they tend to focus on religious subjects rather than practical instructions. Steven Stowe, *Intimacy and Power in the Old South: Ritual in the Lives of the Planters* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1990).

¹⁴ Examples of these letters are scattered throughout his diary. He wrote to them most when they grew older and went off to school. Edwards, *Childs*, 226-227, 228-229, 232-233.

¹⁵ Ibid., 251.

for their husband and father but also for the circumstances in which he was leaving them. As he lay on his deathbed, he thought about how “soon his wife must be a widow, and his children orphans—that they must be left without a home, and without a means of support.”¹⁶ Martha watched her husband waste away and grew increasingly concerned about what she would do without him. Many times, she went to his bed and asked him, “Do you still feel *confident* that I and the children will be taken care of?” His answer was firm: “*I know my Father and God will take care of you.*”¹⁷ Childs died the next day, leaving his family with nothing but a promise of God’s protection and assurances that they would all meet again in heaven.

Despite the dire financial situation in which he left his family, Childs’s Methodist brethren considered his life to be an example of ministerial fidelity and fortitude. The Reverend John Bayley served with him in the Virginia Conference and wrote of his esteem for the model itinerant in 1860. “If there was any one trait for which he was more remarkable than any other,” Bayley contended, “I should say that it was self-denial, as auxiliary to his benevolence.” The preacher went on to praise his friend’s self-denial even when it came to Childs’s management of his family finances. “With a large family growing up around him,” he continued, “he positively refused to receive any thing more than a meager support; and if he had any thing left at the end

¹⁶ Ibid., 237.

¹⁷ Ibid., 248.

of the year, he devoted it sacredly to charitable purposes.”¹⁸ Like Childs, many itinerants believed it their duty to live humbly and with very little support. Their chosen profession also required them to travel on their circuits for most of the year and to rely on congregants for basic necessities, including clothing and shelter. This lifestyle proved difficult for young, single ministers who were not burdened by family responsibilities; but for married ministers like Childs who had children, providing for their own needs and those of their dependents was almost impossible.

Although he met the requirements of his itinerancy and was lauded by his religious peers, Childs failed to live up to the patriarchal responsibilities viewed necessary by society. For lay southerners, the husband and father’s ability to provide for and protect his family reflected his fitness as a patriarch. Because his wife and children relied on him, the southern man had to fulfill these duties or risk the financial and social ruin of the entire family.¹⁹ According to Bertram Wyatt-Brown, a family’s honor relied on the preservation of wealth, including the passing on of

¹⁸ William B. Sprague, *Annals of the American Pulpit or Commemorative Notices of Distinguished Clergymen of the Methodist Denomination in the United States, from its Commencement to the Close of the Year Eighteen Hundred and Fifty-Five* (New York: Robert Carter and Brothers, 1861), 732.

¹⁹ Michael P. Johnson describes the importance of establishing a family dynasty in antebellum Charleston society. Planters sought to pass on not only their wealth to the next generation but also emphasized the importance of preserving the status of their name. Having a surname connected to property would certainly enhance the value of that name and planters emphasized the importance of the inheritance of maintenance of their names as well as their estates. Michael P. Johnson, “Planters and Patriarchy: Charleston, 1800-1860.” *The Journal of Southern History* (February, 1980), 49.

land and estates on to the next generation.²⁰ Itinerants would never have this opportunity because they devoted their energy and time to the church and the promotion of the gospel, not to acquiring worldly riches. The ideal itinerant eschewed the accumulation of wealth, embraced a life of asceticism and, often, poverty.²¹ This principle of poverty, however, did not mesh with social standards in the South, where men were judged by wealth, status, and honor, all three of which were intimately connected.

This southern emphasis on men as the financial providers for their families and preservers of family wealth led to severe judgment against patriarchs who did not live up to these ideals. This emphasis on acquiring property strengthened in the decades before the Civil War, as did the general condemnation of fathers and husbands who had neither land nor fortune. Lorri Glover, a historian of southern manhood, argues that in the early republic southern men began to adopt new standards for patriarchal fitness. Before this period, a man's lineage or class standing could grant him credibility in southern society. But after the Revolution and throughout the antebellum period, Glover contends, "men needed to prove their worthiness by competing with

²⁰ Bertram Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor: Ethics and Behavior in the Old South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 198.

²¹ In the original *Discipline* crafted by Thomas Coke and Francis Asbury, there is an exposition on the wealth of ministers that argues against Methodists taking part in the "pleasures of the world," including attaining riches. "It is impossible to *enrich* ourselves by Methodist-preaching," Coke and Asbury insisted, because that is not the motive of itinerating. "We require not riches, honours or pleasure, *but a holy people*," as a reward, they went on. Thomas Coke and Francis Asbury, *Doctrines and Discipline of the Methodist Episcopal Church in America with Explanatory Notes*, 10th ed. (Philadelphia: Henry Tuckniss, 1798), 167. See also Christine Leigh Heyrman, *Southern Cross: The Beginnings of the Bible Belt* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997), 113-114, 129.

others for power and wealth.”²² In fact, Glover writes, men who failed to live up to the aggressiveness and self-possession required to gain this wealth forfeited their status as gentlemen.²³ Property determined a man’s social position but also contributed to his ability to provide for his family and offer them at least a comfortable subsistence. Some scholars have described this expectation as the key to paternalism, or “the protective dominion of the father over his family,” that formed the foundation of southern society.²⁴ Like Glover, Joan Cashin provides a generational perspective on this change in masculine values in the early nineteenth century. In her analysis, she observes that men of the Revolutionary generation “believed a man should place the family’s welfare above personal goals. A responsible man, and a good son, was loyal to the welfare of the entire family.”²⁵ But, according to Cashin, male heirs became the planters and farmers of the antebellum years and prized wealth and acquisition over the stability of their own families. Whatever was valued more—attaining property or providing for one’s

²² Glover, *Southern Sons*, 39.

²³ *Ibid.*, 86.

²⁴ Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, *Within the Plantation Household: Black and White Women of the Old South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988), 64.

²⁵ Joan Cashin, *A Family Venture: Men and Women on the Southern Frontier* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 40.

household—itinerant ministers could not live up to either standard and were forced to depend on others in order to survive.²⁶

Ministers were not the only members of their households to defy social norms. Like Martha Rives Childs, ministers' wives often willingly married men who may not have been able to provide for them. Many historians have described the subordinate position of women in the antebellum South and the care that they had to take before entering into a marriage contract. A wife's economic security and social respectability was largely defined by her husband's financial standing and young women were well aware of the consequences of marrying a poor man.²⁷ In her study of southern women, Anya Jabour agrees with this assessment of women's dependency on men. Although women often wanted to marry for love and were influenced by the "compassionate ideal," their friends and families believed that wealth and class should also be taken into consideration when selecting a husband.²⁸ Because a woman's legal existence ended when she married, she became completely reliant on her husband to supply the basic necessities

²⁶ Wyatt Brown discusses the status of ministers in the South who fit this description and were not able to provide for their families. "In the South," Wyatt-Brown explains, "the ministry lacked social standing unless it was coupled with plantation ownership." Itinerants rarely owned their own plantations unless they married a woman who had property or were born into a wealthy family themselves. Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor*, 187.

²⁷ Glover, *Southern Sons*, 125.

²⁸ Jabour, *Scarlett's Sisters*, 158.

of life.²⁹ This dependency limited women's authority in society and the household but also placed a considerable amount of pressure on their husbands to provide. Thus, when a woman decided to attach herself and her fate to an itinerant minister, she rejected these material considerations and declared that she had different priorities than her southern sisters. Even devout Methodists realized the stigma attached to becoming a ministers' wife and living a life of relative poverty. An 1857 issue of the Southern *Methodist Itinerant* included an article titled, "I Wouldn't Be a Preacher's Wife." The piece described a conversation between two eligible young ladies living in the Western District of the conference about an attractive new minister in their circuit. When one of the girls asked the other if she would be interested in becoming better acquainted with the itinerant bachelor, the sensible Methodist lady replied, "Fiddlesticks! do you suppose I would be foolish enough to marry a preacher? I wouldn't marry St. Paul—especially if he were a Methodist circuit-rider."³⁰ The handsome preacher would simply not make a suitable choice because of his lifestyle and financial instability.

Because of the competing forces acting on their lives—the pressures of southern society and the expectations of the denomination—Methodist ministers struggled to satisfy the demands of both the nonreligious and the church communities. Many itinerants did cave to the demands of the non-Methodist South, forfeiting their ministries for the good of their families. But these men appear as cowards in Methodist rhetoric, and often stories of location (when ministers left their

²⁹ Ibid., 153.

³⁰ Nellie, "I Wouldn't Be a Preacher's Wife," *Southern Methodist Itinerant*, Aug 15, 1857.

circuits for a permanent position in a single church or community) or resignation end with warnings to other ministers not to follow the same pathetic path. The Methodist Church in the South wrestled with the concept of family when it came to their itinerants, at first advising them to remain celibate and unburdened and then telling them to only choose wives who could live on little to nothing. This shift in rhetoric occurred in the 1820s and 1830s and reveals the gradual recognition of southern values regarding masculinity and patriarchy and the changing conditions of the itinerancy. At the same time that the church was adapting, however, it was not willing to make many concessions about wealth and status.³¹ The Methodist Church held to its stance that itinerants should not receive a living wage for their work and that they should rely on their circuits for their most fundamental needs. Itinerants were forced to figure out both how to follow denominational commands and meet social expectations if they wanted to remain respectable in the eyes of their brethren and honorable in the eyes of other southerners.

Marriage and Family Life

Early Methodist leaders in America tried to avoid the problem of ministerial marriage altogether, often discouraging itinerants from taking a wife because they believed that caring for a family would detract from their church work. For the first three decades of American Methodist itinerancy, ministers lived on very little pay and the church discouraged taking on

³¹ Kenneth Moore Startup investigates the antebellum evangelical perspective on wealth and concludes that preachers were aware of and rejected the culture of acquisition that pervaded the South. “Present in the very bone and marrow of southerners,” he contends, “the ministers had discerned an evil abroad in the land, the root of all evil, which threatened the very existence of the southern society.” Because they viewed greed as such a detrimental social force, ministers (including Methodist itinerants) glorified poverty as a biblical command. Kenneth Moore Startup, *The Root of All Evil: The Protestant Clergy and the Economic Mind of the Old South* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1997) 8; 78-95.

additional dependents. But this barrier to ministerial marriage eroded over time as the Church became more influenced by regional norms. As southern communities came to expect decent middle-class men to have decent middle-class wives, Methodist leaders began to allow more itinerants the opportunity to start their own families. Even when the Methodist Church began to give in to these pressures and more itinerants insisted on marrying, however, ministers never fully met earthly patriarchal standards.³² They were beholden to elders to approve their decision to marry; afterward they struggled to provide for their families; they were shamed when they took steps to earn more money or afford their families a more comfortable existence. In short, marriage was a tricky business for the first generation of southern itinerants and for their successors. They may have encountered a different constellation of problems preventing them from attaining familial bliss, but they experienced problems nonetheless.

Ministers were never prohibited from marrying, but early on they were strongly discouraged from doing so. When they wrote the *Discipline* in 1798, Thomas Coke and Francis Asbury explained that “ministers of Christ are not commanded by God’s law either to vow the estate of single life, or to abstain from marriage.” In fact, the two patriarchs insisted, ministers should marry according to their “own discretion,” so as to best serve God.³³ This admittance of the legality of marriage for ministers did not mean that the church would sanction it for all itinerants. If a minister read further in the *Discipline*, he would also find this admonition: “Take

³² For a concise discussion of the church’s payment of ministers in the Revolutionary period and early republic, see John H. Wigger, *Taking Heaven by Storm: Methodism and the Rise of Popular Christianity in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 64-71.

³³ Coke and Asbury, *Discipline*, 25.

no step towards marriage without first consulting your brethren.”³⁴ This prerequisite meant that a minister had to ask the elders for permission before entering into a marriage contract or courting a woman. This obstacle undoubtedly reflected the views of Asbury, who from the very beginning did not like the idea of preachers marrying. In 1805, Asbury wrote in his journal a condemnation of Thomas Coke’s own marriage. “Marriage is honourable in all,” Asbury grieved, “but to me it is a ceremony awful as death. Well may it be so, when I calculate we have lost the travelling labours of two hundred of the best men in America, or the world, by marriage and consequent location.”³⁵

Like Asbury, many church elders believed that the success of the itinerancy ultimately depended on the celibacy of the circuit riders and refused to consent to having a married preacher in their conference. Such was the case with Lewis Myers, a minister from Georgia steadfastly opposed to anything that would hamper the success of Methodism in the South.³⁶ The Reverend William Capers listened to Myers’s diatribe on the subject at a South Carolina Conference in 1811. A married man had asked to join the connection and the only objection against him was

³⁴ Ibid., 59; This passage is also included in the separate *Discipline* established for the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, in 1856. Joshua Soule, ed., *The Doctrines and Discipline of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South* (Nashville: E. Stevenson and F. A. Owen, 1856), 66.

³⁵ Francis Asbury, *Journal and Letters* (London: Epworth Press, 1958) 2: 474.

³⁶ More information on Lewis Myers may be found in Christopher Owen, “‘Keep the Way Open for Methodism’: Georgia Wesleyan Neutrality Toward Slavery, 1844-1861,” in *Religion and the Antebellum Debate Over Slavery*, eds. John R. McKivigan and Mitchell Snay (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1998), 109.

that he had a wife. According to Capers, Myers spoke at length against the young man's admittance, arguing that it would set a bad precedent. Myers complained that new ministers constantly ask to marry before they are even fully admitted to the conferences. "[J]ust as we begin to hope that he may make a preacher," the older itinerant contended, "lo, he comes again to us and says, 'I must marry.' We say to him, 'If you marry, you will soon locate: go and preach.'" "No, I must marry, I *must* marry," is always the response. "And he marries," Myers went on, "It is enough to make an angel weep!"³⁷ This episode reveals that many early ministers feared losing their circuit riders and promising young preachers to the massive responsibilities of family life.

Although they disagreed with the notion of ministerial matrimony, some ministers adopted a lighter approach when advising their brethren on the subject. The men of the Virginia Conference became known as the "Old Bachelor Conference" because most of them were older men who joked about their single status. At one meeting in 1808, an itinerant told about deciding to marry a woman who would enhance his ministry rather than undermine it. He let delegates know that he had prayed about the matter continuously, "consulted his elder and judicious brethren," and determined that it was the right thing to do. One of the "old bachelors" countered these claims by saying the newlywed pastor had made a mistake. "I once thought that I ought to marry," the older minister said, "and I thought a great deal about it too. And I thought I must pray about it; but somehow or other I always found myself praying, 'O Lord, let thy will be

³⁷ William M. Wightman, *Life of William Capers, D. D., one of the Bishops of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South: including an Autobiography* (Nashville: Publishing House of the M.E. Church, South, 1902), 144-145.

done—but do let me have the woman!” He admitted that he desperately wanted the woman and asked God to help him get her, “but they both opposed me!”³⁸

But because of cultural pressures Methodist ministers could simply not remain opposed to marriage and by the 1830s most conferences had responded to changes in both society and the itinerancy by loosening their restrictions on matrimony. A stronger national economy and an increasingly stable Methodist government combined to allow the Church to pay its preachers more than it had before.³⁹ This new sense of security was reflected in Methodist periodicals that discussed the biblical reasons for taking a wife and how a woman could be helpful to an itinerant ministry. Writing in the *South Western Christian Advocate*, one minister argued that the church should promote ministerial marriages because the “Scriptures foresaw it was not good for a man to be alone.” This was especially true for an itinerant who needed someone to “sympathise [sic] in his sorrow” and help him on his journey. In fact, the minister argued, if the denomination denied itinerants the joy of marriage and insisted on celibacy, the Methodist Church was actually

³⁸ J. B. Wakeley, *The Heroes of Methodism, Containing Sketches of Eminent Methodist Ministers, and Characteristic Anecdotes of Their Personal History* (New York: Carlton and Porter, 1856), 251.

³⁹ For more on the changes in the national economy in the antebellum period, see Charles Sellers, *The Market Revolution: Jacksonian America, 1815-1846* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991). Although the overall thesis of his work is hotly debated, Sellers provides a framework for the impact of market forces that acted on Americans lives during the decades before the Civil War. Wigger also talks about the effects of economic changes on the church and how the economic and social conditions of the period allowed more ministers to take on families. Wigger, *Taking Heaven by Storm*, 68-69.

espousing dangerous “Papal” doctrines.⁴⁰ These favorable opinions of marriage only strengthened over time. An 1856 article in the Southern *Methodist Itinerant*, was addressed “To A Batchelor [sic]” and compared the single man to a kite. Like a kite, the author theorized, a man needs a string tying him down in order to fly. Without a wife, the he insisted, a man will always be “ffoundering [sic] in the mud. . . . If you want to ascend in the world, tie yourself to somebody.”⁴¹ By the 1850s, then, not only did Methodist ministers believe that marriage was acceptable but perhaps necessary for the wellbeing of both the itinerant and his ministry.

The success of Methodism in the South rested on the ability of ministers to reach out to southern society. Marriage and family stood at the center of that society and ministers gradually conformed to the patterns of respectability that had become cultural norms. Most southerners defined family as a household dominated by a strong, independent patriarch who protected and provided for his dependents. In this role, white men provided the basis of the entire social order of the region.⁴² Southerners also believed that marrying well and having many children would

⁴⁰ “Tell Me What Is To Be Done,” South Western *Christian Advocate*, June 15, 1839.

⁴¹ “To A Batchelor,” Southern *Methodist Itinerant*, February 15, 1856.

⁴² According to historian A. Gregory Schneider, “Family meant a patriarchal household or estate” and also represented the “basic unit of social and political order” as well as “the foundation of an adult male’s rights, liberties, and selfhood.” A. Gregory Schneider, “Social Religion, the Christian Home, and Republican Spirituality in Antebellum Methodism,” *Journal of the Early Republic* 10 (Summer 1990): 167.

ensure a man's dynasty and would promote his status in the community.⁴³ Ministers lived with these general expectations to live as honorable men but also dealt with the additional pressure of appearing reputable within their individual circuits. Single clergymen represented a perceived threat to men in the South who feared that the religious bachelors would prey on their sisters, wives, and daughters. This sexual concern on the part of white male southerners, whether founded or speculative, would have encouraged itinerants to marry so as to avoid any conflict with their congregants.⁴⁴

Because of these forces pressing on minister's lives, the Church adopted a new policy toward ministerial marriage. Earlier debates had centered on whether ministers should be able to marry at all, but in the 1830s the discussion shifted to the question of *when* ministers should marry. Although many church leaders began to reconsider the value of matrimony, there were still very practical concerns to work out before an itinerant "tied himself to somebody." A young circuit rider in this period made more money than ever before but still not enough to adequately support a wife and children. Nor did the nature of the itinerancy change enough to ensure that he see his family on a regular basis unless they traveled with him.⁴⁵ Church authorities therefore

⁴³ Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor*, 205-206.

⁴⁴ Heyrman, *Southern Cross*, 184.

⁴⁵ It is important to note that the circuits did get smaller over time, making the distances that itinerants travelled on a yearly basis much smaller. The travel was still relentless, however, and required ministers to leave their families often during the year. Wigger, *Taking Heaven by Storm*, 64-71.

cautioned ministers to time their marriages according to their ability to provide for their families and also warned them that they should be certain that they could balance the responsibilities of family life with their traveling ministry. The promises of well-intentioned itinerants could not ensure that they would not succumb to the burdens of family life and forsake their ministry. Because of this fear, Methodist leaders often came up with rules for matrimony in an attempt to delay marriages until itinerants were prepared financially and emotionally to start a family.

One contributor to the Southern *Methodist Itinerant* cited Francis Asbury to justify delaying marriage. In 1858, he harkened back to a conversation between Asbury and the Reverend James Quinn in 1803 in which Asbury purportedly said that ministers could marry but should do so prudently. The father of American Methodism believed it wise for an itinerant to put marriage off until he was over twenty-eight, had been preaching for several years, had an established ministry, and could resist the temptation to locate.⁴⁶ In an attempt to force men to follow Asbury's advice, the Tennessee Conference passed a resolution in 1846 asking for young itinerants not to marry until they had served long enough to prove their commitment to the church, which meant becoming an elder on their circuits. A prominent member of this conference, John B. McFerrin reasoned that young ministers did not have the wisdom to make

⁴⁶ "Preachers and Marriage," *Southern Methodist Itinerant*, September 28, 1858. This story is repeated in a diary entry cited in James Quinn's biography. John F. Wright, *Sketches of the Life and Labors of James Quinn, who was Nearly Half a Century a Minister of the Gospel in the Methodist Episcopal Church* (Cincinnati: Methodist Book Concern, 1851), 78.

the best decisions and “more preachers have finally failed from premature matches than from any other cause.”⁴⁷

In this case “failure” meant “locating”—one of the most dreaded of ministerial sins. Churchmen like McFerrin and his Tennessee cohort worried that married itinerants who could not provide for their families would locate and leave the travelling connection altogether. The Methodist Church rested on a foundation of itinerancy and owed much of its success in the United States to the itinerant structure established by Asbury. Without circuit riders, many clergymen thought, the church would lose much of its character and its primary means of conversion.⁴⁸ Because of the importance of itinerancy, “location” became tantamount to defeat for Methodist ministers. But location also improved a preacher’s chances for providing for his family and afforded him the time and stability to care for his wife and children. An itinerant with dependents living in near poverty faced a serious dilemma: the church (and perhaps God) would look down on him for locating but the community and his family might spurn him for not meeting his patriarchal responsibilities.

Whatever the reasons a minister gave for locating, the general sense of disappointment that followed location was widespread. In a series of biographical sketches of prominent

⁴⁷ O. P. Fitzgerald, *John B. McFerrin: A Biography* (Nashville: Publishing House of the M.E. Church, South, 1888), 208.

⁴⁸ Many scholars have cited the importance of the itinerancy to the successful of the Methodist Church in America. For an excellent description of the origins of the itinerancy in the United States and the centrality of the traveling connection to the Methodist character, see Nathan O. Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 82-89.

Methodists, J. B. Wakeley recalled the stigma associated with location during the first decade of the nineteenth century. “The preachers that got married lost caste,” Wakeley explained, “and, as but little provision was made for wives or families, a number were obliged to locate: so to get married and locate were synonymous, and hence the prejudice against ministers marrying.”⁴⁹ The prejudice against marriage may not have lasted, but the opposition to locating remained strong. In 1839 the South Western *Christian Advocate* described the dishonor that accompanied locating and how ministers might avoid this temptation. According to one contributor, a young and poor itinerant married a woman on one of his circuits and quickly became overwhelmed by family responsibilities. Although she had no fortune to help sustain them, he married her anyway and they began having children. Because the man “felt assured he was engaged in the Lord’s work,” he believed the Lord would provide for his family.” But after several years he began to doubt this assumption. In every town he preached in he encountered men of wealth and stature, who were riding in carriages, living in nice homes, and sending their children to college. While he raised his children in poverty, other fathers gave their families the financial and educational means for success. The preacher decided to locate and give up his itinerancy to earn enough money to purchase some property and to give his family a sense of stability. Although it may seem by southern standards that he did the right thing for his wife and children, the South Western *Christian Advocate* dismissed the located minister as weak and willing to give in to temptation.

⁴⁹ Wakeley, *Heroes of Methodism*, 251.

In fact, the article claimed that the preacher actually “confesses he is not as happy as he was an itinerant” because of the shame he felt for locating.⁵⁰

Other Methodists condemned located preachers as “inconsistent” because they had once professed a true calling to minister. This is the term that “Reprover” used in 1843 to chastise men who decided that wealth and social standing were more important than God’s work. To illustrate the contradictions embodied by such ministers, “Reprover” told of a young man who at first seemed “to be filled with itinerating zeal” and who agreed to take on the most challenging circuits in the connection. After several years, the itinerant became an elder and vowed “to take care of all the flock committed to his care.” But not very long after he proved himself to the church and graduated to elder, he located. This all happened after he found a lovely woman to be his bride and his priorities changed. Instead of feeling called to the itinerancy, he seemed “to have a call to make cotton, or some other article of traffic.” The minister did not locate because his health was failing or for some other justifiable reason, but because he sought a little wealth and property for his new family. Like the earlier contributor to the *South Western Christian Advocate*, “Reprover” insisted that the minister’s locating damaged not only the circuits under his supervision but also contributed to his own misery. The tale served as a warning to other itinerants who thought that by locating they could fulfill both their ministerial calling and family

⁵⁰ “Locating,” *South Western Christian Advocate*, June 22, 1839.

duties. This mentality was not only inconsistent, “Reprover” explained, but dangerous to the health of the church.⁵¹

Some Methodists believed that a minister’s locating not only hurt the denomination but could potentially have much more tragic consequences for the former itinerant. Several clergymen throughout the antebellum period indicated that they had witnessed or experienced God’s displeasure after abandoning their circuits. Bishop William Capers confessed that he believed that God had punished him for locating in 1814. Although he knew that his reasons for abandoning his circuits were reasonable (he had just married and did not have enough money to support his bride), he decided it had been wrong to place temporal needs over divine commands.⁵² His wife implored him to remain an itinerant and assured him that they would make ends meet somehow. But Capers placed his duties as husband above his spiritual calling, took a station at a church in Charleston, and began to farm on some of his father’s land. Capers admitted that he “had become too much engrossed with secular things through the week to be very spiritual on Sunday.” In the midst of his transformation from traveling minister to located preacher and planter patriarch, his wife became pregnant and died during the baby’s delivery in December 1815.⁵³ He had disobeyed God and “counted the visitation retributive.” Capers

⁵¹ “Inconsistency in Ministers of the Gospel,” *South Western Christian Advocate*, March 3, 1843.

⁵² Wightman, *Capers*, 181.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 183-185.

quickly determined to reenter the traveling connection and to never purposefully defy the Lord's will again.⁵⁴

Like Capers, ministers often blamed the death of loved ones or their financial misfortunes on their decision to locate, believing that God was punishing them for their disobedience. In 1854, one minister wrote to the *Richmond Advocate* with a sorrowful (and perhaps fictional) tale of an anonymous man that he had met during his travels in the West. The man had been an itinerant for many years but had decided to locate after he married, contrary to his wife's wishes. When he told her about asking the conference for a location, she wept and pleaded for him to follow his calling. He refused and "every step since that act has been taken down-hill," he complained, "with an ever-accelerating velocity, and has but plunged me and my unfortunate, unoffending [wife], deeper and deeper in misery." The former itinerant tried to start a business, but within three years the business went under for no apparent reason. When his wife received three thousand dollars from an uncle, the former circuit rider tried to revive his business but again it failed and he lost the entire inheritance. While he was trying to build his fortune, the couple had two babies; both died in infancy. His wife continued to beseech him to rejoin the travelling connection and blamed the loss of their children on his disobedience. But he continued to try to acquire wealth and property, each of his endeavors leading them further and further into debt. When the author of the article met the located minister, the man and his wife were living in poverty and believed it was because of the minister's sins. The man asked for his story to be

⁵⁴ Charles F. Deems, *Annals of Southern Methodism for 1855* (New York: J. A. Gray's Fire-Proof Printing Office, 1856), 319.

published so that other itinerants would never follow the same path and he implored them to “never locate unbidden by the Master!”⁵⁵

The Life of the Married Itinerant

Despite the threat of eternal damnation, many itinerants chose to locate and risk God’s punishment rather than subject their family to further privations. The pressures of their profession, their family, and society were too great of a burden for these men to bear. But for ministers who chose to resist the temptation of location, to stay in the travelling connection, and to start a family, their lives remained torn between patriarchal responsibilities and pastoral duties. Methodist publications reflected the gravity of this situation for many churchmen who tried to support their families and have a fruitful ministry. Clergymen often cited the problems that they faced in trying to balance their ministry and their personal life—problems that ranged from finding a parsonage for their growing families, to educating and raising their children when they were not at home, and worrying about their wives who struggled to make ends meet. Many clergymen considered these hardships as part of their calling and trusted God to provide for their loved ones. Others fought for more support from the church and from their congregants, asking for increased salaries or housing for married ministers. Although these demands led to some reforms, the experience of the married itinerant remained difficult, especially in a society that expected husbands and fathers to be strong patriarchs.

Many Methodists believed their privations measured their worth as God’s disciples, claiming that the more they suffered or sacrificed the more they had accomplished for the church

⁵⁵ Reprinted in Deems, *Annals for 1855*, 383-385.

and their Master. In his autobiography, *Confessions of a Converted Infidel*, the Virginian itinerant John Bayley explained that earthly adversity faced by Christians, but especially ministers, would never compare to the eternal suffering of the godless. And the pain of the righteous would not be in vain, he claimed, because the sacrifices required of Christians was God's way of preparing them for entrance into his kingdom. "Like a wise and benevolent physician," Bayley insisted, "[God] inflicts momentary pain for the purpose of enduring pleasure" and in order to "*prepare us for a nobler state of existence.*"⁵⁶ The minister followed these general musings about eternal life with a sobering depiction of the sacrifices demanded of the itinerant if he hoped to receive a reward in heaven. He deemed the itinerant a "self-sacrificing hero" who gave up a life of convenience or luxury for the hazardous and often thankless career of circuit riding. One such hero was a poor itinerant who did not have any property of his own. The man married a woman who brought a large house and some land into their union, but the itinerant soon felt torn between "marital bliss" and ministerial duties. In an "illustration of the injunction about plucking out the right eye, or cutting off the right hand," the travelling preacher gave up his (and his wife's) house and property to better serve on his circuit and to resist the temptations of worldly comforts. From that day forward, the minister traveled with his wife accompanying him, moving from town to town with no permanent residence. To Bayley, this man was a perfect example of a godly itinerant.⁵⁷

⁵⁶ John Bayley, *Confessions of a Converted Infidel; with Lights and Shades of Itinerant Life and Miscellaneous Sketches* (New York: M. W. Dodd, 1856), 56.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 69-73.

Bayley's story of sacrifice paled in comparison to the myths that revolved around more prominent Methodist ministers. Although he had briefly located early in his career, Bishop William Capers served as a model of self-denial for many of his brethren. Other ministers viewed his career as the standard by which their own itinerancies would be measured. George F. Pierce of the Tennessee Conference used the bishop as an illustration of pious sacrifice in his 1859 article in the *Methodist Pulpit South*. "Absence from home might entail loss, afflict feeling, tax affection," the minister said of his spiritual brother, but "no matter, he had set his heart within him to finish his course with joy." Because of his intellect, talents, and respect within the community, Capers could have settled in a house in Charleston and become a wealthy and powerful man. He could have provided his family with a comfortable home and financial wellbeing, but he refused. Pierce praised the bishop because by living in privation, "[h]e lived unto the Lord."⁵⁸ Methodists such as Pierce often glorified men who placed their ministry over their families' wants or even needs, a principle that would not be easily understood by the rest of southern society.

One of the most defining characteristics of itinerant life (a characteristic that would directly conflict with prevailing mores of the South) was their dependency on other men and women to supply basic needs. Some ministers accused the church of not properly supporting its itinerants but most Methodists blamed congregants for not paying preachers enough for their

⁵⁸ George F. Pierce, "Devotedness to Christ," in *The Methodist Pulpit South*, William T. Smithson, ed. (Washington, D. C.: William T. Smithson, 1859), 69; Deems, *Annals for 1855*, 33.

work on their circuits.⁵⁹ The pleas of preachers for more money or better housing only enhanced the sense of dependency in the connection, especially as itinerants struggled to care for their children. In letters to the editor or articles addressed to the Methodist public, ministers chided or begged, laying their honor aside in an attempt to get what they needed for their families. This strategy revealed the delicate balance that itinerants tried to achieve between sacrificing all for God's work while still feeding and clothing their wives and children. They could not do this on their own and their stories make it apparent that without someone's aid many of them would be forced to locate or live in abject poverty.

The many articles devoted to increasing ministers' salaries or donations from congregants detail the ways in which ministers were neglected by their communities. In 1827, in a "Circular Letter" addressed to the Jonesboro Circuit in Tennessee, three ministers asked why churchgoers habitually ignored their itinerants' temporal needs. Often lay Methodists forgot that ministers were men who required a steady means of support. Congregants falsely believed that God would provide for their preachers and that they could live off of the Gospel. But, the Tennessee ministers sharply noted, ministers "are not authorized to depend on miracles for food and raiment." If churches failed to support them, "how is it possible for *those* that give themselves up

⁵⁹ Rev. William Redman explained the failings of the individual churches and circuits to support their ministers as a lack of self-denial on the part of the congregants. Redman admits that many members may not have sufficient funds for their own families, but whatever they have they should share with their impoverished spiritual patriarchs. Redman compares the situation of ministers to that of soldiers who returned from the battlefields after the Revolutionary War. The ministers' situation is as if, once he returned from the fight, they were given a bill and asked to pay the community for all that they had done. William M. Redman, "Ministerial Support," *Southern Methodist Itinerant*, Nov. 1, 1856; William M. Redman, "Ministerial Support," *Southern Methodist Itinerant*, Nov. 15, 1856.

entirely to the work, to provide the very necessities of life for themselves and their families—to say nothing of its comforts, and the education of their children.” To illustrate this point, the authors included in the article the salaries for preachers on the Jonesboro Circuit. Although the *Discipline* required that each traveling preacher receive \$100 a year and an additional \$100 for their wives, in 1835 the circuit only allotted a total of \$159.29 for two ministers, and one of them was married. In 1826 that amount decreased to \$140.82. Contrasted with the salaries of other professional men, this pay was wholly unacceptable and the article concluded that if the situation did not improve it would greatly affect the mission of the Church in the region.⁶⁰

This problem persisted into the late antebellum period and preachers continued to complain about tightfisted church members and the effects of low salaries on the ministry. An itinerant writing under the pseudonym “Sigma” in the Southern *Methodist Itinerant* in 1859 chastised lay Methodists who did not support their ministers. Because of these “*stingy* Methodists,” Sigma argued, the poor “preacher must live in a place, and in such as style, that refined society do not associate with them, and the children are placed in schools that will corrupt any child no matter what their religious training may be at home, by their pious parents.” The itinerant explained that many ministers’ children seemed unruly and undisciplined, but this was not necessarily the preachers’ fault. Church members were to blame because they did not provide enough for the minister to supply them with a proper education.⁶¹ To illustrate the

⁶⁰ O. B. Ross, L. Anderson, H. Ruble, “Circular Letter,” *The Messenger for the Holston Conference*, June 16, 1827.

⁶¹ Many ministers mourned the lack of education that their children received. Methodist periodicals discussed this deficiency for both ministers’ sons and daughters and argued that the

miserly attitude of many church members, Sigma gave the example of a minister with a family who had been assigned nineteen appointments with five hundred congregants on his circuit. According to the author, this man rode two hundred miles every four weeks and calculated that he had given between two hundred and three hundred sermons over the course of the year. Despite his labors, however, the minister received little from his congregants on the circuit. At the year's end, the itinerant had paid \$450 out of his own pocket for his family's needs and had received only \$225 from his church members. He found himself deep in debt and impoverished by the time he and his family moved on to their next circuit.⁶²

Although this account was designed to persuade more Methodists to give, it indicates that many ministers realized that they lived in a state of dependency. There is an awareness of this dependency in both Sigma's language and the "Circular Letter" produced by the Tennessee itinerants as they describe the reliance of itinerants on church members for very basic needs such as shelter and sustenance. In 1840, a contributor to the *Southern Christian Advocate* explained the dangers presented by the itinerant system if that dependency became too great. The small allowances furnished by the church combined with individual donations did not adequately support circuit riders with families. This forced many ministers to take up another trade on the side or consider locating. If an itinerant remained in the ministry, the periodical contended, he had no way to save any money for sickness or old age. These circumstances meant that, "a

church and the congregants are responsible for helping to raise ministers' children. See, for example, "Minister's Daughters," *Southern Methodist Itinerant*, Dec 15, 1858; William M. Redman, "Ministerial Support," *Southern Methodist Itinerant*, Nov 1, 1856.

⁶² Sigma, "The Shades of Itinerant Life," *Southern Methodist Itinerant*, Jan 15, 1859.

minister in our church when in this condition, if without private resources, is left to become a burden to any one whose kindness may lead to hospitality.” Or, even worse, the minister could become “a very fit subject for the alms-house.” As for his family, the article concluded, “he can only pray Heaven to take care of them.”⁶³ In a southern society obsessed with independence as a requirement for manhood, this fate would be extremely dishonorable. But itinerants had to confront the very real possibility that they might well leave their families with no inheritance or means of support.

Virginian John Bayley made this connection between the itinerancy and dependency explicit in his autobiography. Bayley emphasized the fluctuating and indefinite nature of itinerant support in the southern circuits and the reality that ministers had to face when it came to their position in society. “Dependent as he is upon the voluntary contributions of the people for a support,” the circuit rider explained with considerable understatement, “it may be expected that there are some lights and shades connected with the state of his funds.” This situation bewildered Bayley and his colleagues, who often compared themselves to other professional men. They saw doctors, teachers, and professors making enough to provide for their families, and their jobs dealt only with temporal matters such as curing diseases or teaching mathematics. But ministers, who labored to improve the “noblest part of man’s nature,” did not make a fraction of the income received by these other professional men. When the itinerant confronts these conditions, Bayley admitted, “it seems strange. . . that in other professions increased ability and greater faithfulness secure a greater pecuniary reward, while the traveling preacher’s salary is always the same.”

⁶³ “Support of Ministers,” *Southern Christian Advocate*, April 24, 1840.

Even more frustrating, the church members on a minister's circuit always determined their salaries and ministers had little say in the matter. To illustrate his point, Bayley told about a congregant remarking at a Methodist meeting that he thanked God for the "free gospel." This layman joked that, although he had joined the church several years ago, it had never cost him more than twenty-five cents to hear the gospel. A preacher at the meeting grew angry and responded to this jest with a backhanded benediction: "'God bless your stingy soul!'"⁶⁴ Other ministers who experienced similar hardships would have probably responded in a similar way. This frustration stemmed from knowing that their wellbeing rested on the shoulders of men and women who often found it easy to ignore or justify their poor preacher's privations.

Dependency stretched into almost every area of a preacher's life, from housing and clothing, to feeding and educating his children. But despite his reliance on others to meet his family's needs, the itinerant minister was still considered the patriarch of his household and was expected to rule over and care for his wife and children. This task proved extremely difficult for several reasons: itinerants often did not have a permanent home; they did not have sufficient funds to provide things like good clothing or education for their children; they were absent from their families for much of the year, making discipline difficult and demonstrations of affection nearly impossible. Methodist accounts recognized these deficiencies and described ways that ministers dealt with these barriers to traditional family life. The very nature of the traveling ministry often prevented itinerants from achieving any kind of normal home life and they

⁶⁴ Bayley, *Confessions*, 86-87.

developed their own justifications for their patriarchal shortcomings or tried to make up for their failings by having a male friend or family member step in to the paternal role in their stead.

Housing presented the most immediate problem for ministers with families. At the turn of the nineteenth century parsonages were scarce. As more parsonages cropped up in southern communities in the 1820s and 1830s, however, ministers complained that they were dirty or cramped and not suitable for their precious wives and children.⁶⁵ James Quinn's experience was all too typical. In 1803, with little money and no parsonage, Quinn was forced to leave his wife with her father for much of the year following their marriage. Fortunately for Quinn, his wife Patience exhibited qualities true to her namesake and waited at her father's house for him to return from his circuits. At the time of their wedding, the Methodist Church still encouraged celibacy in its itinerants and had made no arrangements for housing the families of married preachers.⁶⁶ Later, when ministerial marriage became more acceptable and parsonages more

⁶⁵ In 1816, the General Conference recognized the severe privations that many of its preachers were experiencing their circuits and that the number of locations was on the rise because of these hardships. The conference formed a committee of ways and means to investigate ways to help alleviate the problem and included parsonages in their report. They included in their assessment that the "pittance" paid to preachers is definitely one reason that they locate. In addition to increasing ministers' salaries to \$100 a year and \$100 for their spouses, the committee also recommended that elders and older preachers use their authority to encourage circuits to build or rent houses for itinerants and their families. If the itinerants' family refused to live in these houses, however, they would be denied any money for house-rent and would be making a decision to reject the church's help in finding a home. Thus the conference realized the problems related to the lack of parsonages and tried to rectify the situation, but also implied that the houses provided might not be in the best or most livable conditions. Nathan Bangs, *A History of the Methodist Episcopal Church* (New York: Carlton and Porter, 1857), 3: 42-46.

⁶⁶ Wright, *Sketches of the Life and Labors of James Quinn*, 79.

common, the itinerant Jacob Young had a difficult time finding appropriate accommodations for his wife and sons. In 1830, Young was assigned to circuits on the Ohio frontier where he rented a “dilapidated” house for a while until he could find a better situation. In 1833, he shared a “small and uncomfortable” parsonage with L. L. Hamline (who would eventually become a bishop in the Methodist Episcopal Church). This pattern continued throughout Young’s traveling career. After his first wife died, he remarried in 1841 and moved into a brand new parsonage already inhabited by another itinerant family. The two families lived together because the circuit could not afford another building.⁶⁷ Although Young attempted to secure good housing for his wives and children, he remained dependent on church and community members to provide for them.

As Young was enduring these challenges, another itinerant writing in 1839 pleaded with congregants to rethink their approach to ministers’ families. Members of the Church, he advised, should respect the needs of preachers’ families because their ministers’ wives and children are actually the “family of the circuit.” Thus, circuits should build a parsonage that is suitable enough “that members themselves would be willing to live in it.” Often ministers and their families were overlooked because they were viewed as “*tenants* or *dependants*” instead of as “adopted *son[s]*, or *brother[s]*” and their wives as “*daughter[s]*, or *sister[s]*” of the lay Methodists on the circuits. If ministers’ families became the adopted families of their congregants, they would receive better care and personal attention.⁶⁸ Similar thinking may have

⁶⁷ Jacob Young, *Autobiography of a Pioneer: or the nativity, experience, travels, ministerial labors of Rev. Jacob Young, with incidents, observations, and reflections* (Cincinnati: L. Swormstedt and A. Poe, 1857), 408, 429, 464.

⁶⁸ “What is to be Done?,” *South Western Christian Advocate*, June 22, 1839.

been what convinced Methodists in Plaquemine, Louisiana, to construct a new parsonage for the itinerant family there. A woman who identified herself simply as Kate, a preacher's wife living in the parsonage, was impressed with the home that the church members built for them. The house included conveniences like a nice outhouse and a large cistern, comforts that Kate had never had before in the nine years that she had been married to her minister husband. During that time, they had boarded with eight different families on his circuits. But Kate confessed that she had apprehensions when she discovered that they would be moving into a parsonage. She had heard of parsonages that were poorly furnished and shoddily built, with ovens that had no lids, empty cupboards, and broken chairs. When she arrived in Plaquemine, Kate hardly expected that community to help create a suitable home for the minister's family. Even though they would only live in the parsonage for a year, it was a refreshing change from the transient life Kate and her husband had been living.⁶⁹

Although she appreciated her new situation, Kate's husband must have felt uneasy about the means by which they obtained the parsonage. While their family might have been viewed as the "family of the circuit," only a few individuals contributed to the building of their relatively extravagant home. According to Kate, the house cost between \$2500 and \$3000 and three wealthy female members of the church covered all of the expenses.⁷⁰ Thus, even if ministers' families found homes of their own, they still depended on others to pay for them. In this case, the itinerant relied on the gifts of three women to shelter his family, a fact that would not have gone

⁶⁹ "Parsonage in Plaquemine," in Deems, *Annals for 1855*, 374-375.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 374.

unnoticed in a southern society in which men proved their worth through financial independence.⁷¹ That the minister accepted such a large support from ladies in his church attests to his desperate situation, and one all too common for ministers trying to provide for wives and children.⁷²

No matter where a traveling minister's family lived—with his or his wife's parents or friends, at a boarding house, or at a parsonage—they usually lived without him. This aspect of itinerant life had some parallels with worldly southern society, but the low income on which most ministers' families subsisted made their experience much more difficult. Planters and politicians often left their households for months at a time, placing a relative or some other male

⁷¹ Women often contributed money to the Methodist coffers or opened their own homes to itinerant families. John H. Wigger argues that female church members greatly contributed to the success of the Methodist Church in the United States through their gifts and leadership. This fact, however, must have contributed to the emasculation that Methodist ministers experienced in many southern communities as secular men and women questioned their taking funds from women to help provide for their families. Wigger, *Taking Heaven By Storm*, 160.

⁷² Bertram Wyatt-Brown argues that both men and women in the antebellum South desired “independence” in various forms. Women's subordinate status in southern society dictated that they should exhibit their independence in “subterranean” ways that did not threaten men's authority. If men were made reliant, especially on women, southerners equated this dependency with effeminacy and, thus, dishonor. That a group of wealthy women would insist on providing shelter for a man's family demonstrates their financial independence and their leadership in the community. There is no indication as to how the patriarch felt about receiving such substantial aid from three female church members, but their contributions and his poverty did create a situation that contradicted southern norms in which men were to display more autonomy than their female counterparts. Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor*, 140, 226.

figure (such as an overseer) in charge.⁷³ Itinerants did not have the luxury of hiring an overseer and they might not live close to family. This meant that ministers could not care for or protect their children and that their wives had the primary responsibility for running the household. For ministers who had acquired slaves through marriage, their wives took on the day-to-day management of them.⁷⁴ If his children got sick, the itinerant could do nothing except pray for their recovery.⁷⁵ This degree of distance between the holy patriarch and his household proved difficult, though one itinerant proudly reported his “conviction of mind”: that “amidst all the privations and difficulties connected with [the ministry’s] all-important duties” he could withstand the sentimental desire to return home.⁷⁶ This itinerant’s situation also granted his wife a sense of authority that she might not have attained outside of Methodist culture and tested her abilities to become both father and mother in her husband’s absence.

⁷³ This number grew in the 1850s as the plantation system reached its pinnacle. Eugene Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll: The World the Slaves Made* (New York: Vintage Books, 1976), 13.

⁷⁴ Wightman, *Life of William Capers*, 186.

⁷⁵ Fitzgerald, *McFerrin*, 244-246.

⁷⁶ “Essays on a Travelling Ministry—No. 2,” *Holston Conference Messenger*, Jan 27, 1827.

Becoming the Preacher's Wife

If he expected to be successful, a Methodist clergyman could not marry just any southern woman. He needed to find a special woman whose character traits suited the itinerant lifestyle. Not only did she have to exhibit the godliness required of a minister's wife, but she also should be thrifty, healthy, pleasant, well educated, and submissive. And she had to be willing to marry *him* and follow him into the wilderness if necessary. (Under these circumstances, it is no wonder that so many itinerants remained single.) Ministerial attitudes towards women diverged from social norms because they believed that their wives actively contributed to their profession by supporting their mission in the southern states. But the rhetoric of both sexes—*itinerants* and their partners—also underscored the difficulty that these women encountered in trying to live as typical southern wives and mothers. The expectations that Methodist ministers had of their wives seemed unattainable at times for the women who struggled to balance their righteous sacrifices with real needs and social pressures. When they married, *itinerants'* wives entered a world of enhanced authority because of absent husbands, but this expanded social role was coupled with severe restrictions on their financial and social status. They also faced the prying eyes and ears of community and church members who hoped that she would fail to uphold her religious, wifely, and maternal duties.

Even before they married, ministers had acquired ideas about the perfect wife from Methodist publications describing the ideal woman. Perhaps one of the most famous Methodist writers on marriage and family government, James O. Andrew summarized southern ministerial attitudes on this score. When searching for a good wife, Andrew advised, a man should seek a woman who is “discreet, good-tempered, sober in her conversation, prudent in her associations,

industrious in her habits, an obedient daughter, and affectionate sister, one who can find ample enjoyment at home . . . and, above all, let her be unaffectedly and habitually pious.”⁷⁷ In addition to these traits, Andrew believed that any woman who married a minister must be able to sacrifice, live a meager life, and never complain. “No woman ought to unite her destiny with a Methodist itinerant preacher,” he insisted, “unless she has made up her mind to share his fortunes, and aid him in his work, with all her strength and influence wherever his lot may be cast, whether for weal or woe, for far or near.”⁷⁸ According to the southern bishop, if a minister did not choose wisely and selected the wrong woman, his religious mission might easily fail. An impious or needy wife could cause incalculable damage on a circuit but, conversely, a godly and agreeable wife could actually accomplish more good on a circuit than her husband.⁷⁹

In 1840, an article in the “Ladies” section of the Southern *Christian Advocate* agreed with Andrew’s depiction of the model minister’s wife. Like Andrew, the author emphasized the importance of the preacher’s wife to his ministry. But, unlike the bishop, this Methodist writer recognized the authority of the woman in the itinerant household and, in the process, created a paradoxical argument regarding the role of the ministers’ wife. The Southern *Christian Advocate*

⁷⁷ James O. Andrew, *Family Government: A Treatise on Conjugal, Parental, and Filial Duties* (Charleston: B. Jenkins, 1847), 20.

⁷⁸ James O. Andrew, *Miscellanies: Comprising Letters, Essays, and Addresses; to which is added a biographical sketch of Mrs. Ann Amelia Andrew* (Louisville: Morton and Griswald, 1854), 311-312.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 352.

explained that the preacher's wife should center her life on her husband's labors, keep the home neat, orderly, and comfortable, and patiently wait for his return. She should also be content with poverty and do the best with what she is given, no matter how humble her home or how meager her resources. Thus the minister's wife should do whatever it takes to make her husband happy and content. In addition to this remarkable feat, the itinerant's spouse must also be responsible for all of the discipline and education in the household. Because "the father is engaged in his studies," the article explained, "or abroad in duties of his holy calling," it is the mother's duty to "train the children committed to her charge, for life, for Christ, for God and heaven."⁸⁰ Although the non-Methodist South viewed mothers as important, Methodists went further to give mothers power in the home. While ministers traveled their circuits, they left all of the household authority in the hands of their wives.⁸¹ At the same time, however, these women were told to submit to their husbands and this undoubtedly created a perplexing and frustrating situation for these Methodist matriarchs.

⁸⁰ "A Minister's Wife," *Southern Christian Advocate*, Aug 7, 1840.

⁸¹ Methodist publications include direct references to the power of the mother in the home to guide and instruct children. This emphasis of the mother's connection with her children certainly contributed to the way that ministers viewed their own wives and contributed to the confidence that they had in their spouses to almost solely raise their children. For more on Methodist motherhood, see Schneider, *Way of the Cross Leads Home*, 174-179. Examples of Methodist publications regarding the authority of the mother include "Family Government," *Holston Conference Messenger*, Oct 7, 1827; "Scene in a Christian Family," *South Western Christian Advocate*, May 4, 1839; Frederick J. Jobson, *A Mother's Portriat: Being a Memorial of Filial Affection; with Sketches of Wesleyan Life and of Religious Services: in Letters to a Younger Sister, Especially intended for the Youth of Methodism* (Nashville: E. Stevenson and F. A. Owen, 1857).

The expectations that Methodists had of minister's wives made many women question their ability to fulfill such an important role. Angeline Brooks, for example, harbored serious doubts before marrying the Reverend Clinton W. Sears of the Ohio Conference in June, 1842, because she did not know if she could live up to these standards. Knowing the pressures that the itinerancy placed on ministers and their partners, she asked herself, "Shall I accept for my husband and earthly guide, a friend of my Savior, whose sphere of action will involve many severe trials and privations?" Brooks knew that she could choose another man who would be better able to provide for her, but claimed that it was not the poverty that caused her to question the union. Instead, she doubted her qualifications to become a minister's wife. Having been in the church for many years, she knew that "to the minister's wife the Church looked for an example of purity and devotion; and that every word and action of hers much, in a peculiar sense, affect the interests of Zion." Because of this important role in God's kingdom, Brooks doubted her ability to take on such a responsibility. She decided to push these fears aside, however, and take Sears as her husband, hoping that by marrying him she would better herself and somehow prove that she was worthy of God's kingdom.⁸² Even though she overcame her worries, her thoughts suggest how ministers' wives understood their position in the Church and the dire consequences that could befall their husbands' work if they failed.

One of the reasons why Angeline Brooks was so apprehensive about joining the coterie of ministers' wives was that she did not want to face the severe criticism that often came in southern communities. Methodist publications warned of the pain that church members'

⁸² Melinda Hamline, *Memoirs of Mrs. Angeline B. Sears, with Extracts from Her Correspondence* (Cincinnati: Swormstedt and Poe, 1854), 59-63.

comments caused for ministers' wives and instructed the wives and congregants respectively to uphold and honor the position of the pastor's spouse. Church members often overlooked the difficulties that accompanied the itinerant life and openly criticized preachers' wives for not fitting in with the community. In 1859, an anonymous female church member wrote to the *Southern Methodist Itinerant* about how several women in one church persecuted the minister's wife. They claimed that the wife neglected her church duties, that she did not attend all the women's meetings, and acted as if she had better things to do than contribute to her husband's ministry. These "leading ladies" in the community determined to set the preacher's wife straight regarding her obligations to their fellowship. They visited her humble but immaculate home and very plainly described how she had shirked her social responsibilities by not teaching Sunday school or joining the Missionary Society. One of the women placed a heavy burden on the wife's shoulders, saying that "[u]nless our minister's wife takes the lead in the temporalities of the church; nothing will prosper."

To this accusation, the accused responded with an offer: if the church would like to pay her, she would be happy to serve them. As the congregation had hired her husband and not herself, they had no special claims on her time or energies. The young minister's wife explained that she had duties far beyond those of average housewives, even if they did not directly pertain to the congregation. "That the minister's wife is expected to keep her house and clothe her children upon the lowest range of income, that will not allow her competent help" is work enough without having to "spend half of her time in gossiping around among the idle or well-to-do ladies of the congregation—take part in their sewing circles, and attend all their various

meetings for good or doubtful purposes.”⁸³ This pointed argument may or may not have changed the skeptics’ minds in her community but it certainly suggests the frustration of many itinerants’ wives.

Around the same time, a female author wrote to the Southern *Methodist Itinerant* to offer her own criticism. In a fictional account, the woman described the potential trauma that ministers’ wives experienced at the hands of critical congregants. The story centers on a nineteen-year-old woman who was condemned by church members on her itinerant husband’s circuit. The church members criticized everything she did, from sitting or not sitting to speaking or remaining quiet. The author explained that the young wife had been traumatized by their judgmental comments and glances, leaving her with “a constant sensation of walking on eggshells and I have never been able to overcome the guarded manner I then acquired.”⁸⁴ This tale reflected a reality that women who married traveling preachers knew all too well—a reality that often left them feeling friendless in a strange land.

Despite the harsh words and the physical privations, many ministers’ wives expressed a sense of satisfaction in their chosen path and took to heart the idea that they were helping their husbands accomplish God’s work. In 1859, an “Itinerant’s Wife” contended that even though she and other ministers’ wives had to “renoun[ce] the right of choice . . . forsaking the home of our youth, and the loved society of our kindred, leaving all the heart clings to on earth,” they did so

⁸³ “The Wife of Our New Minister,” Southern *Methodist Itinerant*, April 13, 1859.

⁸⁴ Alice Cary, “A Minister’s Wife,” Southern *Methodist Itinerant*, March 2, 1859.

“cheerfully.” They focused on “obeying the mandate of heaven” above all else and helping their partners to further the good work. This obedience gave her solace in times of need and assured her that, even though her children were without a home, she was participating in something that transcended worldly pleasures and financial stability. As a minister’s wife, she considered it her duty to visit the poor, the sick, and the dying, to counsel sinners to turn away from their vices, and to “share the wanderings of the ‘Watchman of Zion,’” giving her husband comfort and consolation after his long journeys.⁸⁵ This notion of sharing in the ministry of their husbands kept many minister’s wives from collapsing under the pressures of poverty and other hardships.

This notion of partnership in the minister’s household is mentioned in both men and women’s writings and recognizing the wife’s special role in the itinerancy gave Methodist clergymen a justification for what many would have considered a stunted home life. The South Western *Christian Advocate* described this partnership in 1843 as a “state of mutual guardianship for God, and a nursery for the Church and the skies.” Both husband and wife had the responsibility to contribute to the Christian spirit of the household and to provide for each other’s happiness.⁸⁶ An earlier issue of the Methodist periodical explained how this “mutual

⁸⁵ “Itinerant’s Wife,” “Our New Home,” *Southern Methodist Itinerant*, Feb 1, 1859. Other women wrote to the same periodical about enjoying their lives as itinerants’ wives and believing that they were contributing to the success of the church. See “Ministers Wives: The Other Side,” *Southern Methodist Itinerant*, June 22, 1859; “I Wouldn’t Be A Preacher’s Wife,” *Southern Methodist Itinerant*, Aug 15, 1857.

⁸⁶ “Rules for Conjugal and Domestic Happiness,” *South Western Christian Advocate*, Sept 29, 1843. McMillen describes this idea of partnership as having permeated the larger American society, as periodicals started using terms like “parental” instead of “maternal” in reference to the rearing and caring of children; McMillen, *Motherhood in the Old South*, 161-163.

guardianship” worked, with husband and wife sharing “reciprocal” duties, especially when it came to the religious upbringing of their children. The partners should not have separate interests, but should be “united in a sacred work confided to them conjointly.” This depiction of an equitable rather than absolutely hierarchical family granted ministers a justification for leaving their wives in charge of their children and homes with no male guidance. If women had the joint responsibility of educating and disciplining children and they were in a partnership, then their husbands could count on them to fulfill the parental duties even when left alone. To preserve the patriarchal authority in the home, however, the South Western *Christian Advocate* also made clear that, when the husband was present, he had held the reins of family government.⁸⁷ This precarious balance between parental equality and southern patriarchy made it possible for ministers to maintain their claims to authority and allow their wives control over their households in their absence.

Women’s enhanced authority in ministers’ homes reflected practical realities but also revealed that ministers valued religious principles over social norms. In theory and often in practice, they rejected temporal desires or pressures in favor of spiritual goals. Itinerants faced serious financial problems that greatly affected their families and led to hardship and privation, but they described their adversity in terms of a spiritual sacrifice that would be rewarded in heaven. To receive God’s blessing, many itinerants believed that they had to live an austere and transient life like that of John Wesley Childs. Single ministers could achieve this task with little worry—their only concerns were making it to their appointments on time, finding a decent

⁸⁷ “A Happy Family,” South Western *Christian Advocate*, July 6, 1839.

boarding house for the night, and making sure that they would have enough to eat in the meantime. But for married itinerants such concerns multiplied. They had to consider how they would provide for their dependents, who was going to raise and educate their children, and, perhaps most importantly, how they would maintain relationships with their families while they travelled on their circuits for months at a time. The only way that itinerants could hope to meet these needs was to rely on their wives, churches, and communities to discipline, house, feed, and clothe their loved ones.

Traveling from town to town, sometimes with their families in tow, looking for a place to lay their head and for a warm meal to feed their infant son or daughter hardly followed the traditional rhythms of southern family life. Although some lower-class southerners experienced similar hardships, the nature of the itinerancy kept ministers and their families in a perpetual and voluntary state of poverty and want. Southerners expected patriarchs to provide for and protect their families and establish an estate and a reputation in their community that could be passed on to the next generation. In no way could itinerants achieve these goals and also meet their commitments to the Church. Thus their neglect of family fortune and their absence from home directly challenged ministers' status as traditional patriarchs. A refusal to abide by accepted norms in their homes, however, implied that ministers saw patriarchy in a different light. To itinerants, the church's success was more important than their own and their families' success. This placement of the church and God over family created an exceptional situation in preachers' households, where they emphasized spiritual health over temporal needs and religious authority over patriarchal power. It also meant that, in many ways, these men ceased to be the heads of their households as they had to turn to the community and their family members for their most basic needs.

CHAPTER 4

CHILDREN, OBEDIENCE, AND AUTHORITY IN THE METHODIST HOME

God's law is of paramount importance, and must be first regarded. Should your parents unhappily be irreligious, and require you to do what God has forbidden, or forbid you to do what he has commanded, in such case their commands are of no authority.¹

“My child, my child, where are you?” Joseph Travis beseeched the wayward Christian. An itinerant from Virginia, Travis used the image of a lost child to represent the lost soul of the hesitant believer. But the analogy was imperfect. A parent searching for his or her lost child, Travis maintained, should not worry as much as the sinner because the child would undoubtedly be saved if he died. The sinner, however, would surely perish if he did not find his spiritual home through God's forgiveness. “Sleep has departed from your eyes,” the minister counseled, “slumber from your eyelids; your stomach loathes food; you are all agitation; every nerve becomes unstrung; nature feels like yielding to the weight of parental grief.” Despite this

¹ James O. Andrew, *Family Government: A Treatise on Conjugal, Parental, and Filial Duties* (Charleston: B. Jenkins, 1847), 135.

sadness, however, parents should “know that were your child to die, it would go straight home to heaven.” While if the “indolent professor of religion” died, he would not have such assurances.²

Travis and his Methodist brethren often employed this theme of childhood salvation and holiness to prod adults toward recognizing their own corruption and their need to repent. The implications of this argument (that children were models of piety and spirituality) ran counter to the dominant understanding that children held a subordinate position in society, this idea could eventually subvert the southern home’s traditional hierarchy.³ By holding up the spirit of the child as a model of holiness, ministers implied that children could surpass their fathers and mothers in spiritual wisdom and could actually instruct their parents on religion. This Methodist

² Joseph Travis, *Autobiography of the Rev. Joseph Travis, A.M., A member of the Memphis Methodist Conference. Embracing a Succinct History of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South; particularly in part of Western Virginia, the Carolinas, Georgia, Alabama, and Mississippi. With short memoirs of several local preachers, and an address to his friends* (Nashville: E. Stevenson and F. A. Owen, 1856), 321-322.

³ Orville Vernon Burton has examined antebellum white family life in Edgefield, South Carolina, and concludes that, although fathers wanted to be loved by their children, they also “demanded to be the undisputed heads of their families.” Orville Vernon Burton, *In My Father’s House are Many Mansions: Family and Community in Edgefield, South Carolina* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1987), 105. Stephanie McCurry extends this argument to include lower class southerners (yeomen farmers) who relied on family governance to achieve independence. Although mothers did contribute to the regulation of the household, fathers were the recognized head and children were required to obey them at all times. According to McCurry, “it was, for the most part, fathers who were held responsible for lapses in the moral discipline of dependents, including children.” Stephanie McCurry, *Masters of Small Worlds: Yeomen Households, Gender Relations, and the Political Culture of the Antebellum South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 186-187, 217. In his study of how patriarchy affected the legal culture in the South, Peter W. Bardaglio explains how children and wives had enhanced individual rights in the decades before the Civil War but that the “patriarchal tradition” remained a strong influence in the home, Peter W. Bardaglio, *Reconstructing the Household: Families, Sex, and the Law in the Nineteenth-Century South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998), 79-114.

preoccupation with childhood spirituality led ministers such as Travis to offer stories that inverted the hierarchy of the white household and placed elders in an inferior position to children. Ministers thus reconstructed the established relationship between parents and children and built a new, more spiritual relationship on a foundation of spiritual equality. Spiritual equality allowed ministers to recognize the religious potential of children and grant them a degree of authority largely unknown elsewhere in southern society. Thus this religious rearrangement of family relationships caused many ministers, including Travis, to challenge the ideal household structure in favor of a more flexible organization that gave the most pious family member more power.

Unlike some of the children discussed in his *Autobiography*, Joseph Travis had been born into a devout family. In fact, while he was growing up in Rock Town, Virginia, both parents and all thirteen of his brothers and sisters attended a Methodist church. His mother taught him to pray and his father held family worship three times on Sundays.⁴ Because of their guidance, Travis learned the difference between right and wrong at a very early age and followed their teachings for the rest of his life. (He even claimed that he had never used profanity because that would disappoint his mother.) But Travis insisted that he did not learn about the grace of God from his pious parents. Instead, his conversion came about after the death of two young classmates. He described the deaths of these boys as an awakening experience because they presented opposing examples of childhood religion. To Travis, the two death scenes represented what happened to sinners and to saints when they faced the afterlife. One of them, who Travis referred to as “Mr.

⁴ Travis, *Autobiography*, 14-16.

G,” misbehaved in school and rejected religion. One afternoon, Mr. G jokingly remarked that there “was not a word of truth ” in the Bible. Several days later, the young boy entered into a fit of madness and became suicidal because of the guilt that he felt for uttering those careless words. When no one was watching, he went into the woods, found a grapevine, and hanged himself. Travis was certain that the boy “landed in an awful eternity.”

At the same time that Mr. G sealed his terrible fate, another young man in the community named William Steward became afflicted with a serious disease. Unlike Mr. G, the sixteen-year-old Steward had led a moral life and believed in God. Travis went to visit him but did not expect the dying boy to speak. The young man had been unresponsive to both his parents and the doctor for days. But, with Travis in the room, the boy sat up in bed and, clapping his hands, shouted “Glory! Glory! Glory to God! I am going safe home to heaven!” With these last words, he slipped away from this world and, according to Travis, “winged his happy flight to the regions of endless bliss.” The examples of these two children—one doomed for hell and the other destined for heaven— convinced Travis at the age of fifteen to pray for salvation. He wanted “the religion of William Steward” and promised to serve the Lord forever if he would only be spared from Mr. G’s fate.⁵ The young Travis insisted that the example of these two children led to his final conversion.

Over the next few years, Travis continued to grow in his faith and in 1806 decided that God had called him to the ministry. He joined the Methodist connection in South Carolina and

⁵ Ibid., 18-20.

began a long career as a traveling preacher.⁶ As an adult, Travis had several other experiences with children who exhibited the spiritual power of a William Steward. In one instance, a girl named “Elizabeth” defied her parents’ rules to seek salvation. One of Travis’s itinerant colleagues had visited Elizabeth’s home several times in order to catechize the children but during one of the lessons Elizabeth hid upstairs so that she would not have to participate. Later on that evening, after a few harsh words from her mother, the girl felt guilty, left the house, and could not be found for the rest of the day. Her parents searched frantically and they even drained the pond near the house because they feared that she had drowned. Finally, in the middle of the night Elizabeth knocked on her parents’ bedroom door and asked to be let in. Exhausted from a long search and furious at Elizabeth’s misbehavior, her mother scolded her, and asked, “Elizabeth, why did you serve us thus?” But Elizabeth had a ready answer: “Ma! if you only knew what the Lord has done for my poor soul, you would not blame me.” She had been praying under the woodpile in the yard all day long, asking God for forgiveness. Elizabeth insisted that her disobedience to her parents was acceptable because God sanctioned it. She needed to make amends with him, she said, before she could speak to her parents.. “My soul is now happy in the Lord,” Elizabeth cried, “Mother, don’t blame me.” With these words, the girl claimed that she was God’s child first and that his commands came before her parents’ peace of mind. Because her disobedience led to her salvation, it should be excused and Travis suggested that her parents could learn from Elizabeth’s devotion.⁷

⁶ Ibid., 31.

⁷ Ibid., 324-326.

Others cases that Travis reported centered on the disobedience of children forced to rebel against impious parents to follow God's law. Travis describes these acts of disobedience as appropriate, even though disobedience was a sin. If children did not obey their parents in a desperate effort to preserve their faith, it was not a sin but proof of their devotion to God. Travis told the story of Martha, who was the daughter of a wealthy and irreligious man living in London. The girl had converted to Methodism and her new-found faith led her to defy her father. The father disapproved of the Methodist Church and tried to distract his daughter by insisting that she attend balls, but she refused. One night, because of his persistence, she agreed to attend a party with him but did not dance and turned down several invitations from young men. Her father urged her to join in the festivities and, near the end of the evening, asked her to play the piano and sing a song. Martha complied but when she went over to the piano and placed her fingers on the keys, she softly began to sing Wesley's hymn: "No room for mirth or trifling here/For worldly hope or worldly fear/If life so soon is gone/If now the Judge is at the door/And all mankind must stand before Th' inexorable throne." With tears streaming down his cheeks, her father went to her and embraced her, saying, "'My dear daughter, you have conquered me.'"⁸ Martha's defiance of her father's worldly demands not only protected her faith but led to his conversion as well.

Even ministers received instruction from their children's words and actions. In an extreme case of childhood authority, Travis claimed that one of his fellow clergymen actually received a soft rebuke from his five-year-old son. The anonymous minister had been called from

⁸ Ibid., 231-232.

his conference in South Carolina to take over a circuit in Mississippi and he moved his family to the frontier. But the move placed a strain on family worship and the preacher stopped praying with his children as he struggled with his new appointments. The young boy noticed this and “innocently” asked, “Pa, where is that God you used to be talking to?” This remark so convicted the minister that he began to hold family worship again and told everyone at the love feast that his son had become his “spiritual father.”⁹

The itinerant confessed that he had encountered a similar situation in his own home when his daughter rebuked him for his lack of faith. In 1846, only two years after his wife died, Travis’s only child, Mary Ann, fell fatally ill. Mary Ann had lived her entire life in the church and had officially converted to Methodism when she was twelve years old. The itinerant visited his dying daughter and stayed with her for weeks, sitting at her bedside and grieving over the loss of his sweet child. Hearing her father’s agonizing prayers, Mary Ann quietly asked him to stop asking God to let her live. She said that she knew that she was supposed to die and was ready for the next life. To the minister’s surprise, she chastised him for wanting her to survive. “Pa, I am astonished at you,” she exclaimed, “You ought rather to rejoice that I am going home before you. It will not be long before we meet again, never, never to part.” Travis suddenly realized that his prayers had actually come from his own selfish heart. He stopped

⁹ Ibid., 226-227.

pleading for God to save his daughter but instead followed Mary Ann's wishes, holding her hand as she shouted "'Glory, glory, glory to God'" while breathing her last.¹⁰

Tales of disobedience that Travis presented reflected the distinct Methodist attitude towards the relationship between children and their parents or elders. This belief that children could have more wisdom or power than the older generation fit with the Methodist theology of spiritual equality but directly challenged the southern understanding of the patriarchal household.¹¹ Southern fathers provided a foundation for southern society and, according to regional mores, their authority should never be questioned, especially by their own offspring. In some cases children did rebel and it is difficult to discern the actual extent of paternal control; but, despite these factors, the ideal southern family placed the father in a position of absolute power over his dependents.¹² The way that the father ruled his children depended on their gender; southern men often treated their daughters as a prize to be protected and granted them less autonomy and independence than sons. Daughters ideally followed their guardians'

¹⁰ Ibid., 186-187.

¹¹ For a discussion of the contrast between secular and Methodist family relationships see, Cynthia Lynn Lyerly, *Methodism in the Mind of the South, 1770-1810* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 163-165.

¹² In his analysis of life in antebellum Edgefield, South Carolina, Orville Vernon Burton explains this emphasis on paternal authority as central to southern culture and describes the obedience of children within this patriarchal model. *In My Father's House*, 9, 104, 114.

instructions and tried to please their elders.¹³ Sons, too, were to be obedient to their parents, but they were also to develop a healthy sense of assertiveness even as they deferred to their fathers' authority.¹⁴ For many young men, this balancing act proved difficult and they either failed to become fully independent or to fulfill their fathers' commands.¹⁵ Although the expectations for

¹³ Anya Jabour describes the characteristics that southerners tried to develop in their daughters, which included "cleanliness, neatness, patience, industry, kindness, cheerfulness, modesty, politeness, respect for elders, and obedience." For young women, their primary objective was to "*please others*," and their parents perhaps most of all. Anya Jabour, *Scarlett's Sisters: Young Women in the Old South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007), 36. James O. Andrew's thoughts on the education of daughters reflected this southern attitude. Andrew argued that daughters were to be guarded by their parents because they were "particularly exposed to injurious and fatal influences where a proper guard is not thrown about them." Andrew, *Family Government*, 88.

¹⁴ Methodists challenged the traditional concept of manhood in the South by disapproving of masculine pursuits such as drinking, gambling, swearing, and dueling. This mentality extended to younger men and boys, who, according to Methodist standards, were not supposed to demonstrate the assertiveness or violence of their irreligious peers. For instance, the South Western *Christian Advocate* included an article called "The School Boy" in one of its issues that praised young men who had enough self-control to avoid violence. In the article, a boy named Charles Edwards was being bullied by his classmates, who pushed him and laughed at him and when he ran away they called him a coward. The school children all expected Charles to run off crying, but instead he simply went into the woods and began to pray. When asked why he did not fight back, Charles replied that in the Bible it says to "turn the other cheek" and so that is what he did. This example lauded the boy's passivity, a lesson that did not conform to secular southern standards that praised aggression and confrontation. "The School Boy," South Western *Christian Advocate*, Apr 4, 1840.

¹⁵ Michael P. Johnson, "Planters and Patriarchy: Charleston, 1800-1860," *The Journal of Southern History* 46 (February, 1980), 57-64.

sons and daughters differed, southerners taught both sexes to respect and obey their elders to protect the family's reputation and make their parents happy.¹⁶

Many southern parents suspected that the influence of the church and its egalitarian teachings threatened hierarchy at home, and rightly so. Methodists grounded their faith in a firm belief in spiritual equality, meaning that God cared for all souls equally and could reveal himself to any person (man or woman, master or slave, parent or child).¹⁷ This doctrine did not mean that Methodists rejected patriarchy or social hierarchy; in fact, Methodist leaders spoke at length about the necessity for patriarchal authority in the church and in the home. But spiritual equality complicated the structure of the household and limited the father's power. In 1839, the editor of the Southern *Christian Advocate* described the effects of spiritual equality on a believer's

¹⁶ Lorri Glover explains this phenomenon when it came to children's prescribed gender roles. According to Glover, "families in essence tried to raise sons who were at once deferential to societal expectations and assertively autonomous." By contrast, girls were instructed to be "deferential and docile." Lorri Glover, *Southern Sons: Becoming Men in the New Nation* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 2007), 23, 25. All southern men, despite class, shared the desire for patriarchal authority in their own households. Stephanie McCurry examines the position of the father in the yeoman household and describes the parent-child relationship as reciprocal: "parental responsibility was to be met with filial obedience and devotion." And this obedience did not end when a son or daughter became an adult but merely adjusted to the new circumstances. Stephanie McCurry, *Masters of Small Worlds: Yeoman Households, Gender Relations, and the Political Culture of the Antebellum South Carolina Low Country* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 183.

¹⁷ This doctrine of spiritual equality had serious implications in the South where society was built on a belief in inherent inequalities. Sylvia Frey, "Inequality in the Here and Hereafter: Religion and the Construction of Race and Gender in the Postrevolutionary South," in *Inequality in Early America*, ed. Carla Gardina Pestana and Sharon Vineberg Salinger (Hanover: University Press of New England, 1999), 88. For more on the relationship between spiritual equality and slavery in the South, see Christopher H. Owen, *The Sacred Flame of Love: Methodism and Society in Nineteenth-Century Georgia* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1998), 22.

obedience to temporal authorities. A child's obligations to his or her parents could not "be carried to the extent of impiety towards God." God's law "is the original, the first and highest, of all our obligations" and if a parent rejects it and asks his child to ignore God's commands, he "forfeits in every instance his right to be obeyed."¹⁸ The Methodist Church sanctioned the defiance of ungodly parental commands, an allowance that went against the worldly South's insistence on complete childhood obedience.

Many non-Methodist men feared such teachings because they threatened mastery and in many ways "unmanned" the heads of southern households. Once people committed themselves to a Methodist congregation, their loyalty to the family patriarch became subsumed by their faithfulness to God and the Church. This meant that the Church became the ultimate source of authority and theoretically overruled the believer's temporal father. White men had to submit to discipline just as their children and wives did, and often the churches disciplined men more harshly and more often than their dependents.¹⁹ All Methodists were expected to worship and develop a filial fear and love of the Lord, who ruled all members of the household from the oldest to the youngest in equal measure.²⁰ The Church represented God's will and exacted his

¹⁸ "The Sabbath for Servants," *Southern Christian Advocate*, Dec 27, 1839.

¹⁹ Christine Leigh Heyrman, *Southern Cross: The Beginnings of the Bible Belt* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998), 214-215.

²⁰ Travis, *Autobiography*, 301.

punishment on earth. Disciplinary practices, therefore, combined with a message of spiritual equality to upend traditional patriarchal models in southern Methodist families.

The spiritual equality that ministers promoted in the Christian home hardly marked the end of family government or hierarchy. Instead the doctrine incorporated a higher authority into the household who would hold all members accountable. One of the most famous southern Methodist writers, James O. Andrew published articles in denominational newspapers and an entire book on the subject of family government. In an 1845 tract, Andrew, a slaveholder from Virginia and Methodist minister, discussed family hierarchy in familiar and traditional terms. He placed the father at the head of the household and the children in a subordinate position, even insisting that parents “*must* conquer” their children. Andrew’s depiction of the family was grounded in patriarchy and included hints of southern mastery. Although he promoted this traditional structure, Andrew also stated that every family member had the same father, and he did not mean the slaveowning planter. Instead, the Virginian instructed patriarchs to teach their children that God is their Father. By placing God at the top of the household hierarchy, Andrew admitted that religion limited southern patriarchs’ authority in the home.²¹

For Andrew and his Methodist brethren, family government and patriarchal power remained important but could crumble at any moment under the weight of God’s will. And at times the Lord required children to lead their parents rather than submit to them. Many Methodist ministers saw children as more sympathetic witnesses for Christ and knew that these young believers could reach their parents with God’s message more easily than could a circuit

²¹ Andrew, *Family Government*, 39-48.

rider. The *Discipline* discussed children as potential missionary aids, making certain that itinerants knew to visit with the girls and boys on their circuits as much as possible because these young folks might soften their parents' hearts or even convert them.²² According to the experiences of one itinerant, the lessons children learned from the Methodist Church would often stay with them into adulthood, giving them the tools to instruct their own children in religious values.²³ Ministers thus hoped to exploit temporal family ties as much as possible to enlarge God's spiritual family. This strategy caused them to describe the family as a spiritual system in which both children and parents acted on each other's souls and pushed one another towards eternal life or damnation.

Defining the family as a spiritual system caused Methodists to view the home as a place that could either nurture or retard a child's spiritual growth. Ministers developed an understanding of family government that balanced the law of God with the law of man and advised fathers especially to create an environment that fostered godly behavior. As the patriarch, the father was responsible for holding family worship, punishing wayward children, and ensuring that his dependents attended church and class meetings. If the father lived up to these responsibilities, he should certainly be obeyed by his offspring. But if the father failed in his spiritual duties or if he or their mother encouraged bad or ungodly behavior, children had not

²² Thomas Coke and Francis Asbury, *Doctrines and Discipline of the Methodist Episcopal Church in America with Explanatory Notes* (Philadelphia: Henry Tuckniss, 1798), 104-105.

²³ Thomas O. Summers, *Biographical Sketches of Eminent Itinerant Ministers, Distinguished, for the Most Part, As Pioneers of Methodism Within the Bounds of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South* (Nashville: Southern Methodist Publishing House, 1859), 144-145.

only the right but the responsibility to resist their parents' commands. Although Methodists promoted obedience in children as a general rule, they also sanctioned disobedience in irreligious households and against ungodly guardians. When the patriarch's will clashed with God's authority, the only option for a true believer was to disregard parental teachings and follow God the Father, who reigned over the entire family.

The Problems of Methodist Parenting

Although parents were beholden to the same divine authority as their children, Methodists believed that in carrying out household duties they still they represented God's will on earth.²⁴ This responsibility automatically granted a degree of power to parents who took their religious role seriously. It also led to severe criticisms of parents who refused to follow through with religious instruction. Parents appeared in Methodist literature as either holy mothers and saintly fathers or as sinful and corrupt influences on their children's lives. This dichotomy allowed ministers to uphold the southern social structure in the home yet undermine parental authority when it ran counter to the Church's religious standards. This coming together of temporal and spiritual models of family government created a tension between the Church and the South's patriarchal society. Although the Church supported parental authority, it also undermined the absolute power of the father when it chastised men who did not live up to doctrinal standards. By openly rebuking parents in sermons and periodicals, ministers showed that fathers and mothers did not have supreme control over their children and that their commands could be questioned or disregarded by their offspring.

²⁴ James O. Andrew described the father as "God's representative, God's deputy, so far as his own household is concerned." Andrew, *Family Government*, 128.

Methodist ministers' understanding of parenting stemmed not only from their belief in spiritual equality but also from a broader Protestant emphasis on pious households. Some historians have suggested that the focus on the home as the center of an individual's spiritual life coincided with the emergence of the middle class in the decades before the Civil War. This Protestant middle class family ideal encouraged parents to care not only for their own salvation but also to recognize the spiritual needs of their children. One of the most well known writers on the subject of the Christian home, Congregationalist Horace Bushnell described the family as the dominant influence on a child's spiritual development. In *Christian Nurture*, Bushnell explained that every child's soul began as a blank slate that their parents could then fill for good or ill.²⁵ This belief placed a considerable weight on parents' shoulders because they became the primary source of Christian instruction for their children. Although Methodists did not share all of Bushnell's theology, they did accept the model for the Christian home that many Protestants adopted in this period and they, too, accepted the mentality that parents should provide a Christian upbringing and education for their children.²⁶

²⁵ Horace Bushnell, *Views of Christian Nurture and of Subjects Adjacent Thereto* (Hartford: Edwin Hunt, 1848), 8-9. Religious leaders of various new sects held similar views and described children as "blank slates" who could learn to love God through education. According to this antebellum belief, then, the love of God was not natural but was taught by parents and preachers. For a detailed analysis of attitudes regarding childhood in the early republic, see Todd M. Brenneman, "A Child Shall Lead Them: Children and New Religious Groups in the Early Republic," in *Children and Youth in a New Nation*, James Marten, ed. (New York: New York University Press, 2009), 108-126.

²⁶ Stephen Olin, a minister who served in South Carolina and Georgia and president of Wesleyan University, echoed Bushnell's theories regarding children. Like Bushnell, Olin contended that children were born with a "blank" mind and had "no reason, no conscience, no moral or immoral habits, no religion, no opinions, no ideas." In fact, Olin declared that an

By the same token, southern Methodists saw family government as vital to their denomination's success. Because southerners felt strongly about family life and the autonomy of their households, Methodists had to conform the Church's practices to gain entrance into southern homes. This meant that the denomination had to give more disciplinary power to family patriarchs and the ministers had limit intrusions into the private sphere. Historian Christine Heyrman described this process of replacing denominational authority with parental power as the Church tried to assuage southern fears that Methodists were a threat to the traditional family ideal. In the 1830s, Methodist ministers realized that efforts at disciplining parents and children weakened paternal authority and made many white men wary of the Church. Southern Methodists increasingly granted the biological family more religious significance and transferred a considerable degree of authority from the church family to the home. The term "family religion" came into vogue around this time to describe this new focus and encourage southerners to view their households as small churches that required both worship and holy discipline.²⁷

infant's heart was "a mere organ for the performance of an animal function. Because of the nature of children's hearts, Olin concluded that "pious example and associations, reinforced by sound teaching and parental faithfulness" were the things that would produce "a character as neither time nor eternity will have cause to regret. But if this type of instruction did not happen, children could be lost forever because of their parents' neglect of their spiritual needs. Stephen Olin, "Religious Training," *Methodist Quarterly Review* 31 (1849): 303-321.

²⁷ In her analysis of this shift in southern evangelical religious thought, Christine Heyrman explained that the use of the term "family religion" "denoted a new spiritualization of the household" and caused the family to become an "object of veneration." This new language suited the southern mindset, Heyrman argues, because southerners already saw the home as vital to the health of their society and "family religion" only expanded the importance of patriarchy in their lives. Heyrman, *Southern Cross*, 154-160.

As they granted fathers and mothers more power within the “sacred circle” of the home, however, ministers still hesitated to grant them full control over children. Many Methodist leaders viewed the home as a potentially dangerous place for young souls. In 1838, one minister foreshadowed Bushnell’s theory of Christian education in his own warnings about parental influence. “The parent cannot live to himself,” he claimed, “for his children, if not benefitted by his example, must be greatly injured by it.”²⁸ According to this preacher, parents could train their children to serve God or to reject religion and fathers especially should be aware of their impact on their children’s beliefs and behavior. Although he was a northern Methodist minister, H. A. Boardman’s writings echoed the sentiments of his southern brethren. Boardman’s *The Bible in the Family: or, Hints on Domestic Happiness* revealed the general Methodist emphasis on the home and explained how a parent’s religious failings could affect the next generation. “The youth who goes out into the world from a bad home,” he warned, “lacks the best of all restraints and safeguards, next to those of personal religion.” Not only does this young man receive no godly instruction, Boardman explained, but he “has no *past* to appeal to, or only one whose influences accelerate his downward course.”²⁹ The irreligious parent would only reduce the child’s chances of receiving salvation and leading a life that honored God.

²⁸ “No Man Liveth to Himself,” *Southern Christian Advocate*, Apr 6, 1838.

²⁹ H. A. Boardman, *The Bible in the Family or, Hints on Domestic Happiness* (Philadelphia: Lippincott, Grambo, and Co., 1854), 142.

In many ways, mothers and fathers served as gatekeepers of their children's salvation and many ministers equated the parent's religious position in the home with the clergy's role in the Church. Like other evangelicals, Methodists compared the home to a small church, with all of the regulations, discipline, and worship practices associated with a congregation.³⁰ In 1827, Tennessee's *Holston Conference Messenger* published an "Address to Parents" that described fathers and mothers as the "formers of their [children's] present and eternal happiness." "Under your roofs," the article explained, "they take their coloring for active life and eternity: As you sow unto them you shall reap."³¹ James O. Andrew recognized this connection between children's salvation and godly parenting, but Andrew contended that the Church and the parents should work in concert to bring about the conversion of young southerners. Ministers could discuss spiritual matters and godly living with the youth, and parents should carry that message to their children "round the domestic fireside." This partnership, Andrew insisted, would lead to

³⁰ Heyrman, *Southern Cross*, 158-160 and Margaret Lamberts Bendroth, *Growing Up Protestant: Parents, Children, and Mainline Churches* (Piscataway: Rutgers University Press, 2002), 13-37. In some cases, Methodists refer to family government as similar to "Divine government" and take the analogy between the home and the church further, comparing parental authority to God's authority over mankind. "Rewards and Punishments," *South Western Christian Advocate*, Mar 3, 1843.

³¹ "Address to Parents," *Holston Conference Messenger*, Jan 20, 1827.

the “conversion of the lost” in families where morning and evening devotions instructed children in the ways of the Lord and lifted their spirits.³²

Ministers advised parents to follow certain guidelines for leading their children to salvation and ensuring proper spiritual upbringing. For Methodists, prayer was one of the best ways that parents could influence their children’s religious outlook. One minister reached out to mothers and assured them that if they would just “hold on” to their hope that their sons would some day convert and if they would keep praying for that day, it would undoubtedly come.³³ Methodists often emphasized the power of women’s prayers, especially when directed at their sons’ salvation. Boardman gave a sentimental depiction of one mother’s spiritual influence over her son, describing how her “hand pressed upon his infant head, as he kneeled at her feet in prayer.”³⁴ But combined with mothers’ prayers, family government also had to include consistent and firm discipline from the father. Boardman noted how “an affectionate father rises up to

³² Andrew, *Miscellanies: Comprising Letters, Essays, and Addresses; to which is added a biographical sketch of Mrs. Ann Amelia Andrew* (Louisville: Morton and Griswald, 1854), 229-230.

³³ “Hold On Mother,” *South Western Christian Advocate*, May 30, 1840. This plea to mothers represents the larger evangelical trend to rely on women’s influence in the home as a means to convert their male relatives. Another article published in 1859 made this argument explicit by stating “Who shall ever know the covenant power of parents, and perhaps especially of mothers, in bringing their sons to Jesus, and in introducing them as preachers of the cross into the waste places of the earth?” Ministers often referenced the influence of their own mothers in their own conversion and in their decision to accept the calling of the Church. “Ministers and Mothers,” *Southern Methodist Itinerant*, Nov 2, 1859.

³⁴ Boardman, *The Bible in the Family*, 142.

admonish [his son] against the specious temptation with which he is dallying.”³⁵ Fathers’ discipline and mothers’ prayers, then, worked in tandem to both correct and inspire their dependents on their spiritual journey.

Despite the spiritual authority that parents wielded in the home, Methodist ministers reminded their congregants that children were merely on loan to them—that they were caring for God’s charges and that the Lord was a “better friend and parent” to their sons and daughters.³⁶ The notion that parents did not have total ownership over their children complicated Methodist descriptions of family government and caused ministers to focus on the faults of fallen parents rather than righteous parents’ power in the home. A tension existed in Methodist rhetoric between parental authority and parental failures because ministers recognized that mothers and fathers held the reins of the family and that these men and women were anything but infallible. Because of this tension, ministers spoke of the mistakes made by both believing and irreligious parents and reminded them that they would have to answer to God for their shortcomings.

According to the Methodist clergy, faults of southern parents ran the gamut from overindulgence to cruelty. Ministers believed that many mothers and fathers gave their children whatever they wanted and this practice usually led to the complete ruin of not only the child, but also the parents. In 1839, the South Western *Christian Advocate* implored all southerners to “rule your child.” In one example of how an absence of discipline affected family government, a

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ “Address to Parents,” *Holston Conference Messenger*, Jan 20, 1827.

widow gave an only son everything that he ever wanted and never tried to restrain his passions. When he grew older, he dominated his mother and became her “bitterest curse.” One day, the son became angry and burned down her house, leaving her impoverished and homeless. He was arrested, put in jail, and became so insane that he plucked his own eyes out of their sockets. Because of his mother’s indulgences, “[h]e now lies in perpetual darkness, confined by the stone walls and grated bars of his dungeon, an infuriated madman.”³⁷ A contributor to the *Messenger for the Holston Conference* offered a similar admonition to parents and insisted that if “correction is not administered at home, their children will not escape it when they go abroad into the world.” And the world will not be as kind as the indulgent parent.³⁸ So children could not only lose their chance at eternal salvation because of their parents’ faults, they could also lose their freedom in this life because their parents did not properly discipline them at an early age.

Dancing seemed to epitomize the overindulgence of children’s worldly impulses. A Methodist minister wrote to the *Holston Conference Messenger* in 1827 condemning parents (and specifically fathers) who allowed their daughters to dance. The writer criticized any activity that caused young girls to lose their sense and sacrifice their virtue. The ball signified the most scandalous of social engagements, seducing women into giving up their religious commitments in order to participate in frivolity and revelry. To heighten the sense of danger that fathers should feel when seeing their daughters on the dance floor, this Methodist used imagery that undeniably

³⁷ “Rule Your Child,” *South Western Christian Advocate*, Dec 14, 1839.

³⁸ “Indulgent Parents,” *Messenger for the Holston Conference*, Jul 14, 1827.

connected white women to slavery. He claimed that as these southern daughters were passed from partner to partner they became “the property of every man in the room.” It was the duty of the parent to “remove serpents” that “lie in the path” of their children, and dancing was one of the most obvious and avoidable threats to a daughter’s innocence. If the father failed to protect his daughter from the dangers of the ballroom, he allowed her to sin against God and forever lose her purity.³⁹

Just as fathers should protect their daughters from the dangers of dancing, ministers also believed that parents should avoid showering their children with material luxuries that could corrupt their souls. Lavishing money on children appeared especially irksome to itinerants who waged their own battles against the temptations of Mammon and who often brought up their own children in poverty. To see children raised in households where their father’s only aim in life was to accumulate wealth ran contrary to the most fundamental Methodist social beliefs. James O. Andrew (a slaveholding minister, but a man still beholden to the Methodist way of life) argued that the love of money brought eternal sadness. In many places, Andrew observed, “men, even Christian men, so called, set their hearts on getting rich . . . that they may leave their children rich.”⁴⁰ This sin must have been prevalent because most southern men viewed success in terms

³⁹ “On the Impropriety of Dancing,” *Messenger of the Holston Conference*, Aug 11, 1827.

⁴⁰ Andrew, *Miscellanies*, 306-307.

of accumulation and establishing an estate for their sons.⁴¹ Itinerant John Bayley described the fate of children raised in wealthy households, where parents were more concerned with making their sons and daughters happy than caring for their souls. “Many toil to give their children purple and fine linen, and sumptuous fare every day,” Bayley feared, “but few toil to give them spiritual bread, and the garment of salvation.” Because of this deficiency, the minister contended, there are many lost souls in the “regions of despair.”⁴² Likewise, another Methodist argued that parents should “[b]eware of arraying [children] in the fashions, frippery and gewgaw of vanity fair.” Instead, “[i]nnocence, virtue, truth and grace, are the robes of richer dress.”⁴³ If parents would consider their children’s spiritual needs over their temporal desires, their children would find eternal happiness and reward instead of temporary pleasure in this life.

Although overindulgence concerned ministers, they did not argue that parents should demean their children or use harsh punishments. In fact, Methodist advice literature included many stories of fathers and mothers obtaining obedience from their children in inappropriate ways: by beating them, lying to them, or cursing them. Preachers believed that parents should exact obedience from their children, but illegitimate methods would only lead to worse behavior if not outright rebellion. Andrew insisted that parents must conquer their children, but the first

⁴¹ Bertram Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor: Ethics and Behavior in the Old South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 198.

⁴² Bayley, *Confessions of a Converted Infidel; with Lights and Shades of Itinerant Life and Miscellaneous Sketches* (New York: M. W. Dodd, 1856), 233-236.

⁴³ “Address to Parents,” *Holston Conference Messenger*, Jan 20, 1827.

step in that process “is to conquer yourselves.” “[I]t is the *certainty* and not the *severity* of punishment which is effective,” he argued. According to Andrew, bad parents “think of nothing but the hickory” when it comes to discipline, but good parents do not need to use corporal punishment to make their children obey. Instead, by sending children to church where they can be trained and by teaching them God’s law, parents may best gain the respect and submission of their sons and daughters.⁴⁴

The most despicable parents, by Methodist lights, were those who gained obedience by using the “rod of reproof.”⁴⁵ One preacher told of a mother who mistreated her son for destroying the vines in her garden. The boy did not realize that he had done anything wrong but the enraged woman beat him anyway, “without mercy.” The clergyman used this story as an example of how parents who use corporal punishment (especially in the heat of the moment and without restraint) teach their children to “exercise the baneful passions of malice, revenge and cruelty.” The son will likely grow up to be an abuser as well, the preacher claimed, because he has been taught that rage is an appropriate response.⁴⁶ Another Methodist encouraged parents to work on developing their child’s sense of conviction or guilt. The object, according to this minister, was to “[a]im always at producing a right state of feeling, as well as an outward

⁴⁴ Andrew, *Miscellanies*, 48-63.

⁴⁵ “On Family Government,” *Messenger for the Holston Conference*, July 11, 1827.

⁴⁶ “Family Government,” *Holston Conference Messenger*, Mar 17, 1827.

obedience.”⁴⁷ In 1837, a contributor to the Southern *Christian Advocate* explained that to make children obedient, a parent must also practice “self-command” and not strike an offending child out of anger. “Authority,” this commenter argued, “to effect the desired purpose, must be unshaken, administered with affection, and free from fretfulness and ill temper.” If proper discipline can be attained, then the child will not need correction as often because he or she will know right from wrong.⁴⁸ The rod and hickory switch can force momentary obedience, but the child’s internal understanding of good and bad behavior should be every parent’s goal.⁴⁹

Corporal punishment may have received much condemnation from disapproving ministers, but Methodist leaders also chastised parents for using other kinds of coercion. In 1827, an article in the *Holston Conference Messenger* deemed all parents who told lies to their children hypocrites. Most mothers and fathers, it said, whipped their children for telling falsehoods but

⁴⁷ “Rules for Family Government and Instruction,” South Western *Christian Advocate*, May 5, 1843.

⁴⁸ “Brief Hints to Parents,” Southern *Christian Advocate*, Sept 16, 1837.

⁴⁹ In *The Protestant Temperament*, Philip J. Greven analyzes the various modes of discipline that evangelicals used to gain their children’s obedience. There were several different models for family government in early America, ranging from corporal punishment to inculcating a sense of guilt or shame of sinfulness. Greven argues that because of the “extraordinary strictness” of their original doctrine, Methodists were very structured in their approach to punishment. Antebellum southern Methodists did emphasize routine and careful monitoring of children, but they deterred their followers from resorting to physical measures out of anger for their children, claiming that this method was counterproductive. For more on childrearing in early America, see Philip Greven, *The Protestant Temperament: Patterns of Child-rearing, Religious Experience, and the Self in Early America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), 142.

many of these same parents lied to obtain their children's obedience. "With many [parents]," the article argued, "the whole business of managing their children is a piece of mere artifice and trick." A mother, for instance, will tell her son that his medicine will taste good so that he will drink it without complaint. Or she will convince him that the doctor will come cut off his ears if he does not do as he is told. Other parents made promises to their children that they never intended to keep. They might pacify their sons and daughters and secure their good behavior by agreeing to give them something in return for their obedience but never follow through with the promise. According to the periodical, sons and daughters who grow up in such an environment would adopt the same habits of deception based on the example of their elders.⁵⁰

So too parents could corrupt their children by cursing or yelling. One minister maintained that such behavior would produce a "slavish fear" in children "begotten by sternness and severity."⁵¹ Any comparison of children to slaves would, of course, alarm southern parents who would never want their sons or daughters to be degraded to that low state. Methodists pleaded

⁵⁰ "Parental Falsehoods," *Holston Conference Messenger*, Mar 10, 1827. Another contributor to the *Holston Conference Messenger* claimed that he had heard of a woman named Mrs. Johnson who constantly lied to her children and who could never gain their respect. Her tactic was to "[take] them by their throats and shut them in the cellar, where she told them the 'booger' was." The children did not feel any affections towards her and did not trust her, so they never obeyed. The article advised readers to always be honest and consistent when executing parental discipline so that their children will trust and obey them. James O. Andrew summarized the moral of these articles and the Methodist attitude towards lying to children in his treatise on family government. "Don't only speak the truth to [children]," he advised, "but also exhibit it and never lie to your children." If parents like Mrs. Johnson failed to be honest with their sons and daughters, if "children are not taught to love the truth," in other words, Andrew insisted, "they will be corrupt and untrustworthy adults." "Family Government," *Messenger for the Holston Conference*, Oct 7, 1827; Andrew, *Family Government*, 41-47.

⁵¹ "Brief Hints to Parents," *Southern Christian Advocate*, Sept 16, 1837.

with parents not to demean their children with harsh comments and cited examples of how such discipline would corrupt instead of educate. In 1839, a contributor to the *South Western Christian Advocate* told of an encounter in which a mother lost her temper and threatened a girl, saying she would “knock [her] brains out!” if she did not obey. The mother did not “consid[er] [the rebuke’s] baneful effects, not only in corrupting [the child’s] manners, but in familiarizing [her] with barbarous ideas and sentiments of cruelty.”⁵² Because a child was born with no inherent compassion or knowledge of good behavior, many Methodists believed that the child would pick up the parent’s bad habits, including cruelty and foul language.

Godly Disobedience

Accounts of poor parenting especially by irreligious mothers and fathers often ended with the death or destruction of their children—the ultimate price for not raising them in godly homes. At times, however, Methodist ministers recognized that children could overcome such bad influences and resist immoral examples.⁵³ In effect, ministers suggested that the youngest members of southern households could reject their elders’ commands in order to follow God’s law. In this way, preachers contradicted the established ideal that children should always obey their parents, a principle that helped to maintain the South’s patriarchal hierarchy. Ministers

⁵² “Rebuke,” *South Western Christian Advocate*, May 25, 1839.

⁵³ By suggesting that sons and daughters could withstand parental impiety, preachers seemingly went against the prevailing notion that children were a blank slate to be filled by their elders’ teachings. But preachers provided an explanation for this seeming contradiction of Bushnell’s theory. In cases of religious children living in ungodly households, Methodists replaced parental influence with that of the Church. The traveling preacher guided the boy or girl instead of his or her father and mother and the Church taught them proper behavior.

placed holiness above hierarchy when children would be spiritually damaged by their parents' rule. And for some children, realizing the failures of their parents and the supremacy of God led them to become their families' spiritual leaders. Whether Methodists encouraged children to follow God by disobeying their parents or by becoming the religious heads of their families, such advice clashed with social norms. Thus Methodist ministers promoted spiritual values over social stability and directly challenged the traditional parent-child relationship.

Although they often spoke of children's special spiritual power, ministers generally extolled obedience in children as long as subordination to parents conformed to the teachings of the Church. In *Family Government*, James O. Andrew described obedience as "children's main duty" because learning submission to parents would help them find their place in society. To the Virginia preacher, mere obedience was not the objective, but "cheerful" deference to parental authority should be the primary goal. Even though Andrew recognized that children should follow their parents' rule, he also described the limitations of the father's authority in the household. According to Andrew, "God's law is of paramount importance, and must be first regarded." Because of this overarching principle, the bishop advised children of irreligious parents to resist their fathers and mothers' demands. If they "require you to do what God has forbidden," he argued, "or forbid you to do what he has commanded, in such case their commands are of no authority."⁵⁴

To Andrew, children not only had the right but a duty to defy their irreligious parents and reject ungodly demands. Children cannot "excuse [themselves] from obedience to God by

⁵⁴ Andrew, *Family Government*, 127-135.

pleading the contrary authority of [their] sinning parents.” If children were confronted with this situation, they should disobey but still treat their parents with “affectionate veneration.”⁵⁵ Like Andrew, a writer for the *Messenger of the Holston Conference* suggested that any obligation to obey depended on the nature of the command. “Children,” he said, “if you would bid your parents farewell with tranquility on the shores of Jordan, love them obey them; imitate them, if they be followers of Christ.” But, if they are not Christians, “affectionately pray for them, and warn them if they be followers of the world.”⁵⁶ This exception—to care for but not emulate irreligious parents—was an important one, and one that many southerners would find unacceptable.⁵⁷

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ “A Family Around the Bed of Death,” *Messenger for the Holston Conference*, Sept 1, 1827.

⁵⁷ Christine Heyrman has argued that southerners were “taught from childhood to accept that their primary identity and duty lay with the lineal family” and they could “only regard with uneasiness, at the very least, any church that demanded an individual’s ultimate loyalty.” “Not only evangelical teaching,” she explains, “but church practice called upon southerners to subordinate family allegiance to religious duty.” Because of this placement of the church over the family, many men and women in the South held suspicions of ministers who considered God’s law to be primary, over that of the patriarch and parents. Heyrman, *Southern Cross*, 129, 136. Cynthia Lynn Lyerley makes similar observations in her study of early Methodism in the South. She contends that Methodism seemed threatening to parents because ministers instructed children to forsake all for Christ (including their parents, if necessary). Lyerly, *Methodism in the Southern Mind*, 163.

Because of the primacy of God's authority, ministers often coupled obedience to parents with obedience to God.⁵⁸ But in instances where the two demands clashed, Methodist preachers encouraged children to choose God's law over that of their parents. In many cases, such justifiable disobedience actually increased children's spiritual influence. According to an 1839 article in the *Southern Christian Advocate*, "of the few instances in which men become pious in advanced life, very many of them are affected through the direct or indirect influence of their children, who have found the pearl of great price and brought it home to their parents." To prove this point, the writer included a story of a little girl who attended a Methodist meeting in spite of her father's explicit warning not to go. He later threatened her, "If you ever go to that meeting again, I will turn you out of doors." The girl cried and replied, "When my father and my mother forsake me, then the Lord will take me up." The pitiful sight of his little daughter convicted the father and he promised that he would not deprive her of such a religious privilege again. Soon after this incident the parents reportedly began attending church and the "child [became] an angel of light and salvation to her parents."⁵⁹

Many Methodist preachers had experienced these moments of discord with their own parents, especially when it came to entering the ministry. Fathers usually complained that they had spent too much money and time on their sons' education and that their sons had too much

⁵⁸ In his catechism, Bishop William Capers listed children's duty to God first, before their father and mother. This detail implied that loyalty to God the Father had precedence over loyalty to parents in the hierarchy of the household. William Capers, *Catechism for the Use of the Methodist Missions, First Part*, 3rd ed. (Charleston: John Early, for the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, 1853), 14.

⁵⁹ "Influence of Children," *Southern Christian Advocate*, Apr 19, 1839.

talent to waste it on an itinerancy. According to James O. Andrew, fathers often believed that their sons were “choosing a direct route to *beggary*” and that they would disgrace the family. Mothers too disapproved of their sons’ decisions to become ministers. Andrew suggested that if a father could not get through to his converted son that the mother might try to prevent the young man from leaving home. At this point, “all the appliances of maternal love are enlisted against the call of God.” Even mothers and fathers who professed to be Christians demanded that their sons choose between their wishes and God’s plan for their lives. Thus the convicted sons would have to disobey (and, in their parents’ mind, disrespect) their elders in order to follow their calling.⁶⁰

Jacob Young’s conversion almost tore his family apart. Born in 1776 to a rigidly Anglican father and gentle Presbyterian mother, Young did not attend a Methodist meeting until he was a young man. His father was “an overbearing man” who “violently opposed” the Methodists. When his father found out that Young had gone to a Methodist service, he grew extremely angry. Worse still his son had been convicted by the message and had determined to embrace the Methodist faith. Hearing all this, the father raged that “his son, whom he had raised with so much tenderness, should disgrace him and his family.” Young did not know how to handle the situation with his father who believed that his son had disobeyed and dishonored his parents. So, in response, Young simply picked up the family Bible and began to read from it and pray. This made every family member realize the depth of his feelings. All of them, his brothers and sisters, mother, and father, then listened to the Word of God. Because of his steadfast

⁶⁰ Andrew, *Miscellanies*, 307-309.

commitment to Methodism, even in the face of his father's anger, Young successfully converted his entire family.⁶¹

Like Young, Peter Moriarty of the Maryland Conference stood up to his Catholic parents despite their threats to disown him. At sixteen, Moriarty defied his parents by going to see a traveling preacher. He became convinced that the Catholic teachings he learned as a boy were false. Moriarty fell into a deep depression because he no longer felt that God would save his soul. He did not eat or sleep for days and his family and their neighbors all believed that he had gone mad. Stung by the community gossip, his father "charged him with bringing disgrace upon the family by his bitter lamentations over his sins." And his father added, "if [Moriarty] persevered in his offensive course" he would "turn him away from the house." Yet Peter continued to seek out the Methodist message because he felt that "he had broken away from the trammels of a false, hereditary faith" and he determined to "consecrate his life to the honour of Him who had thus called him to glory and virtue."⁶²

These instances of godly disobedience illustrated the devotion of Methodist ministers to spiritual equality. At the same time, however, they encouraged parents to become more spiritually responsible for their households. The objective of Methodist preachers was not to

⁶¹ Jacob Young, *Autobiography of a Pioneer: or, the nativity, experience, travels, ministerial labors of Rev. Jacob Young, with incidents, observations, and reflections* (Cincinnati: Swormstedt and A. Poe, 1857), 42-45.

⁶² William B. Sprague, *Annals of the American Methodist Pulpit or Commemorative Notices of Distinguished Clergymen of the Methodist Denomination in the United States* (New York: Robert Carter and Brothers, 1861), 76-77.

undo the traditional hierarchy of the home but to insist on the importance of religion and particularly of family worship.⁶³ If a parent raised a child according to Methodist standards there would be no need for the child to disobey. But if the parent had no religion, practiced a “false” religion, or did not enforce a Methodist family government, the child could righteously reject the parent’s authority. This argument would have startled southerners devoted to patriarchy but served as a reminder to parents that God’s law superseded their own, including the father’s authority over the household.

Children as Spiritual Authorities

Methodist ministers also deconstructed the mainstream patriarchal model by presenting stories of children who guided their parents in matters of faith. Ministers’ accounts of children’s spiritual wisdom often echoed the Scriptural sentiment: “Verily I say unto you, Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven.”⁶⁴

⁶³ Methodists paired instructions to disobey irreligious parents with firm commands to obey Christian parents. In one Methodist periodical a writer calling himself the “The Moralist” insisted that “filial affection is a duty” designed by “the Deity” and children who failed to fulfill this responsibility would be “consigned to infamy and contempt” both by society and by God. Likewise, “Old Ben. Poor” in the Southern *Methodist Itinerant* urged children to obey their parents, not simply because their parents deserved deference but because God demanded it. “Remember, too, that you have a ‘Father which is in heaven,’” Ben Poor reminded his young readers, “a Father who searched your little hearts and cleanseth them of sin, if you will only ask him. God sees all you do, or even think.” He also argued that if children obeyed their parents on earth, they also “obey[ed] [their] great Parent in heaven.” This connection between parental authority and God’s authority provided a vital link between this world and the next for children, giving them added incentive for proper behavior. “The Moralist,” *Messenger for the Holston Conference*, Jul 14, 1827; “A Letter to Children,” *Southern Methodist Itinerant*, June 1, 1859.

⁶⁴ Matt. 18:3 (King James Version).

Children, ministers believed, represented absolute purity and innocence, and their faith should serve as an example, even to believing parents. Reverend John C. Granbery of Virginia explained how a religious child could instruct parents. Many times, he observed, adults complained that they do not understand the Bible—that the Word’s meaning is too elusive. But, Granbery claimed, they could “go to the child of seven summers in the Sabbath school” and receive a simple and true explanation. “Those things,” he went on, “are hid from none except those foolishly wise in their own conceit, or willfully resolved to exclude the light, or wickedly careless about instruction; they are revealed unto babes.”⁶⁵ Because their hearts had not yet been tainted by the world or hardened by pride, children possessed a spiritual clarity that no adult could attain. This gift granted children a degree of authority in Methodist literature that they did not normally receive in society and further distinguished ministers’ perception of family relationships.

Some ministers believed that children deserved their parents’ attention and consideration because God had created them with a special purpose. A contributor to the Southern *Christian Advocate* described how children could be used by God to convert their parents—how they could become the instrument of their parents’ salvation. The basic idea was simple: “there is no medium of approach to parents . . . for the purpose of extending either instruction, reproof, or exhortation to them, more likely to be successful, than *through their children*.” The parents’ love for their child could lead them to realize how much their household needed a godly family

⁶⁵ John C. Granbery, “Christianity Reasonable in its Doctrines and Demands,” in *The Methodist Pulpit South*, ed. William T. Smithson (Washington, D.C.: William T. Smithson, 1859), 182-183.

government. The article recommended that ministers exploit this bond between parent and child to bring about the parents' repentance.⁶⁶

Itinerant John Bayley put forth a more abstract theory regarding children's spiritual significance. In his view, children provided instruction through their natural behavior, especially when they cried. God had created children to be entirely dependent on their caretakers just as every person relied on their heavenly Father. Children reminded their parents of "*our own unreasonable complaints and murmurings,*" "*the universality of earthly sorrows,*" "*the transitory nature of earthly sorrows,*" "*the injustice of mankind,*" and, most importantly, they showed adults "*our dependence upon God.*" Although children's behavior signified the larger sorrows and trials of mankind, adults could learn from them. "[Infants] indulge in a resolute paroxysm of grief, and soon forget all about it," Bayley explained, "but adults cherish their sorrows, until, like a cankerworm, they eat up all the comforts of life." "Well would it be for us," he concluded, "if we could become as little children in this respect, so that neither the good nor the evil of this moral life could make any lasting impression upon our minds." Not only did children impart this wisdom through their instinctive behavior but they also served as examples of forgiveness and perseverance.⁶⁷

Ministers presented children as spiritual leaders in several contexts: some children prayed or preached, others disciplined their parents, and many children convicted parents without saying a word. Despite the means by which children reached parents or elders, their wisdom and

⁶⁶ "Parents Reached Through Their Children," *Southern Christian Advocate*, Apr 12, 1838.

⁶⁷ Bayley, *Confessions*, 239-243.

guidance appeared to contradict the relatively low status of young people in southern society. In citing examples of children's authority, however, ministers made certain that they did not attempt to overturn the patriarchal hierarchy of the home. Children corrected their parents in these stories but after doing so, they quickly returned to their subordinate status and acknowledged their parents' authority. Or, in some cases, the child exhibited spiritual leadership in the home and then immediately acknowledged deference in all other matters. This careful balance between contradicting cultural norms and upholding social mores made stories of spiritual children useful tools for Methodist ministers eager to chastise and convert irreligious southerners. It also helped assuage non-Methodist fears that the Church sought to overthrow the social order.

An article first printed in the Southern *Christian Advocate* employed this tactic in describing the efforts of a "baby preacher" to get her father to hold family worship. A little girl living in Kentucky had asked her father why he did not lead family prayers. The family attended a Methodist church regularly and professed to be Christians, but the father neglected his duties as the head of the household to bring his wife and daughter together around a family altar. Her father told the girl that if she would go to the parlor and get the Bible for him to read, he would. He said this knowing that the book was too large for her to carry and that it was too dark in the parlor for her to find it. The five- or six-year-old-girl was scared of the dark and not very strong, but she started to make her way to the parlor as her father listened from the adjoining room. He heard her stumble over the parlor chairs as she fumbled in the darkness and, feeling guilty, he finally stood up, shouting, "Merciful God! Is that my child, groping about in the dreaded dark, for the Light of Life, wherewith to guide my erring feet into the path of duty?" He went into the parlor and saw "his baby preacher" with her arms around the family's Bible, which he took from

her and carried into the light to hold a family prayer. “Just see what a child can do,” the article exclaimed, “by the blessing of God!” She convicted her father who then fulfilled his duties as the head of the family.⁶⁸ The Methodist writer also made certain that the girl led her father without showing insubordination and the patriarch was able to maintain his temporal authority even if she possessed more spiritual righteousness.

Another minister claimed that children’s spiritual understanding came not from their knowledge of Scripture or from practical education, but from their natural comprehension of God’s love. These young believers “are destitute of literary information,” he said, but they are “the most refined scholars” when it came to speaking God’s truths. One young Methodist girl, whose name “might have been” Mary, brought a deist into the Church. Mary’s friend, “Sally,” had a father who heard of Mary’s gift for prayer and wanted to witness it himself. When Sally brought Mary home, she asked if Sally’s father would kneel with her in prayer. He complied and as she began to speak to God, the man’s heart softened. Mary prayed that he “might bring up [his] children in the fear of the Lord; and spoke of the awful consequences of a father’s neglect in these things.” These words shamed him and after that day, he gave up his deism. The moral of the story was to encourage “little readers” of the “boldness in a discharge of christian duties, firmly relying on the grace of God for that assistance by which alone they can be useful in this

⁶⁸ Charles F. Deems, *Annals of Southern Methodism for 1856* (Nashville: Stevenson and Owen, 1857), 163.

way.” Mary and Sally did not directly condemn the father’s deism, but Mary’s prayer awakened him.⁶⁹

Although children’s prayers received much attention in Methodist literature, sometimes ministers focused on children’s actions instead of their words to demonstrate their potential for spiritual leadership. A boy named “Little George,” for instance, proved his spiritual maturity when he offered his entire savings to support slave missions. The story of “Little George and his Guinea” was submitted to the *Messenger for the Holston Conference* in 1827 and told of a British child who attended a Methodist meeting without his parents and was so impressed by the preacher’s sermon that he wanted to give all that he could for a mission to the “heathen children.” He asked a lady sitting nearby in his pew if he could borrow a guinea and he promised that he would pay her back when he got home. The woman did not loan him the money because she thought it would be best to ask his mother first. When George went home to ask his mother she warned him: “My dear, your feelings are all warm now, but perhaps by and by you will be sorry you have given so much. Suppose you give half of it.” But George insisted and his mother finally agreed to give him a five-pound note. This did not satisfy the boy, though, who asked his mother for the guinea instead. His mother did not understand why he would not accept the note instead of a coin but George replied that the note would seem like a lot for a boy to give, but he could hide the guinea coin in between two pennies and no one would notice. This thoughtfulness

⁶⁹ “Article 3—No Title,” *Messenger of the Holston Conference*, Nov 17, 1827. Other examples of the influence of praying children include “Anecdote of a Child,” *Southern Methodist Itinerant*, Aug 24, 1859; “A Happy Child,” *South Western Christian Advocate*, May 26, 1843.

impressed George's mother, who was humbled by her child's compassion and modesty.⁷⁰ Even though the author wrote this story to promote missions, he used a young boy as an example of godly giving and contrasted his piety with the practical wisdom of the mother. This model overturned the accepted relationship between parent and child, justifying George's challenge of his mother's advice with the concept of spiritual equality.

The story of John Fletcher, a three-year-old boy from Fayette County, Tennessee, taught the same general point, but in this case the young boy became the spiritual leader of his entire family. Even though Fletcher grew up in a Methodist home with religious parents, his spiritual knowledge greatly surpassed theirs; his parents even boasted that he could recite every catechism, a feat that no one else in his family had ever accomplished. The article claimed that John Fletcher's spiritual growth proved the equality of all souls and that "all of any mind at all, may be improved." One day the pious boy fell deathly ill. He gathered his parents and siblings around the bedside and assured them he was going to heaven where they would all meet again. "Little J. took leave of all the family," the minister claimed, "as one of a more mature age would have done, going to take an ordinary journey, and breathed his last more like a sage or philosopher, than a child."⁷¹ The author intended for children to learn from John Fletcher, who died nobly and with a clear conscience and who also served as an example to all of his family members, including his parents.

⁷⁰ "Little George and his Guinea," *Messenger for the Holston Conference Messenger*, Sept 8, 1827.

⁷¹ "No Title," *South Western Christian Advocate*, Nov 29, 1844. For other examples of children's death scenes see "An Interesting Anecdote," *South Western Christian Advocate*, Dec 6, 1844.

Ministers traced the wisdom of children such as John Fletcher to the Sabbath Schools. Such schools built a religious foundation that their parents often lacked and thus made children capable of instructing their elders. Ministers often described these children as the persecuted members of their households. Their parents would not allow them to attend church or openly mocked their religion. In 1859, the Southern *Methodist Itinerant* recounted the tragic story of a boy named Charlie, whose one desire was to go to Sabbath School. Charlie loved going to Sabbath School, but his mother forbade his attendance, calling him a “naughty boy” and adding, “they don’t teach you to mind what your mother says there.” Following her rebuke, the boy met an awful death while saving his baby brother from a runaway carriage. His mother became despondent and said that she wished that she had allowed him to go to Sabbath School.⁷² Unfortunate as her son’s death may have been, in the end it proved to be the mother’s salvation. She began to read her son’s little Bible and became a Christian. “God took Charlie,” the author

⁷² Methodist ministers argued that Sabbath Schools helped children save both themselves and their parents. In 1856, another article appeared in the Southern *Methodist Itinerant* that praised a child who loved her Sabbath School even though her father hated Methodism. A little girl who lived in London had gone to a Sabbath School for three years without her father’s knowledge. Her father was a professed infidel and hated Christianity. Knowing that her father’s soul was in danger, the girl gave him a Bible. She knew, however, that he had burned every Bible that he had found in the house and she did not want to risk that happening again. One night she prayed in her room for her father, that God would soften his heart and make him more open to salvation. Her father overheard her prayer and realized that he had deprived her of something that she desperately wanted. Because of her prayers and of her strong faith, her father decided to allow Bibles in the house and also took his wife and nine children to church the next Sunday. He publicly renounced his previous beliefs and over the course of two or three weeks asked for God’s and his daughter’s forgiveness. In this case, the little girl’s attendance of Sabbath School and her spiritual guidance led to her entire family’s deliverance, “The Infidel’s Child,” Southern *Methodist Itinerant*, Dec 15, 1856.

reasoned, “that he might lead her to him.”⁷³ The boy’s love of Sabbath School and of the Lord served as an example to his grieving mother, whose heart changed dramatically after his death.⁷⁴

In other accounts, a child’s admonishments could not save their parents. Such was the case with Ralph Cecil, a drunkard and bad father. “The world had gone wrong with Ralph Cecil,” the South Western *Christian Advocate* reported in 1839. His wife had begged him to stop drinking and to start caring for his family, and Ralph had promised to try. Despite her admonitions and his vows, the temptation overpowered him one day when he took their six-year-old son, George into town and ended up at the “Plough” tavern. He entered and drank heavily until nightfall, when George asked him, “*Father, dear father, don’t drink any more or the horses will run away and kill us.*” Ralph did not heed this warning and continued to drink. After a raucous evening, he lost control of the horses on the way home. The wagon fell on top of Ralph and crushed him. According to the author, George sat beside his father’s dead body until they were found the next day. In this instance, the boy knew better than his father but was not able to save him from a terrible fate.⁷⁵

In the process of promoting slave missions, Sabbath Schools, or (as in the case of Ralph and George Cecil) temperance, Methodists created an inverted hierarchy in which young Christians proved their own spiritual power over the authority of their parents. At times,

⁷³ “The Boy Who Loved to Go to the Sabbath School,” Southern *Methodist Itinerant*, Aug 31, 1859.

⁷⁴ “The Infidel’s Child,” Southern *Methodist Itinerant*, Dec 15, 1856.

⁷⁵ “The Child’s Warning,” South Western *Christian Advocate*, Sept 7, 1839.

ministers took their message of spiritual equality even further and included slaves (the lowliest members of society) in stories that condemned southern patriarchs for their spiritual blindness. In 1856, as the national debate over slavery in the territories reached a fever pitch, the *Southern Methodist Itinerant* published an account that implied that a wealthy Kentucky planter had less spiritual wisdom than his son or even his slave. The slaveholder's son had wanted to become a Methodist itinerant, but the patriarch forbade it, and bristled at the very idea that his oldest son would become "a squalling fool of a Methodist preacher." "My consent you never can have," he warned, "if you go, you will go with my curses resting upon you." The son continued to attend the Methodist meetings, however, and he brought his father's slave, "Uncle Sam," and his sister, Caroline, along. All three converted to Methodism and wanted to share their newfound joy with the family patriarch. When the planter heard that his daughter and slave had also converted, he reconsidered his original condemnation of the Church and decided to give Methodism another chance. His son, daughter, and slave all became instruments of his conversion.⁷⁶

On the eve of the Civil War, Reverend John Granbery preached a sermon arguing that the faith of children and of slaves was evidence of God's mercy and love for all mankind. He told southern men, even the most educated, to "go to the child of seven summers in Sabbath school" or "to the pious old negro at your father's home" and ask them to explain the Gospel and the revelations of God. They know the answers, he claimed, because their minds were not tainted by the cares of worldly wealth.⁷⁷ Although this argument compared slaves to children (a technique

⁷⁶ "A Tale of Real Life," *Southern Methodist Itinerant*, May 1, 1856.

⁷⁷ Granbery, "Christianity Reasonable," *Methodist Pulpit South*, 182.

common in the South, especially in justifying the continued enslavement of African Americans), it also lifted up the two individuals at the bottom of the plantation hierarchy as models of righteousness and spiritual wisdom. The rhetorical strategy that Methodist ministers used to convict and convert those at the top of southern society theoretically empowered the planter's son and his slave, a fact that would not have gone unnoticed by southerners clinging to a rigid patriarchy. In Methodist literature, spiritual equality carried uneasy implications—implications that would ultimately reach beyond the white household and into the slave quarters to a class of southerners who were deprived of authority in every other way.

CHAPTER 5

THE SPIRITUAL SLAVE

[The Church] found that, by trying to release the bodies of the slaves, she was hindered from using the means to save their souls, and that instead of removing their burdens, she was made the occasion of increasing them.¹

In 1845, Henry Bascom published a lengthy apologia on Methodism and slavery. Soon to become a bishop in the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, Bascom sought to justify the sectional schism of 1844 and specifically defend the southern Methodist faction. Like his other-denominational and secular counterparts, Bascom argued that slavery benefitted the slave in many ways—materially, intellectually, and spiritually—provided that both master and slave followed God’s commandments. Southern Methodists had preached this message for many years, emphasizing obedience in slaves and kindness in masters.² According to the New

¹ Henry Bidleman Bascom, *Methodism and Slavery: With Other Matters in Controversy between the North and the South; being a Review of the Manifesto of the Majority, in Reply to the Protest of the Minority, of the late General Conference of the Methodist E. Church, in the Case of Bishop Andrew* (Louisville: Hodges, Todd and Pruett, 1845), 27.

² In 1836, itinerant and slave missions advocate William Capers was asked by the General Conference to present a report that gave the Conference’s official position on abolition. In it, he argued “We believed that the Holy Scriptures, so far from giving any countenance to this

Testament, Bascom contended, a slave should “render service to his master ‘as unto Christ.’” Conversely, a master was responsible for the slave’s wellbeing and just as accountable for following biblical commands. After explaining these points, the venerable southern preacher offered a very Methodist, and very complex analysis of masters and slaves that had paradoxical implications. “The cruel, unjust, and even *unkind* master,” Bascom claimed, “should be disowned by the Church, as also the *faithless* slave. The humane and considerate master and the faithful slave, have as good a right. . . to membership in the Church of God, other things being equal, as any class of mankind whatever.”³ Bascom defended the inequalities of the slave system while still proclaiming the religious equality of masters and slaves. Although the southern Methodist preacher supported the very institution that kept Christians in bondage, he also professed a belief in the equality of all souls.

Bascom’s position increasingly defined that of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, but Bascom himself did not own slaves nor was he a native southerner. Born in 1796 to a poor, hardworking family in New York, he did not come into contact with slavery until he joined the Methodist Church as a traveling preacher. He first attended a Methodist conference at sixteen after his family moved to Maysville, Kentucky, where he decided to become a minister. He was young, inexperienced, and broke, but had a talent for exhorting. Seeing Bascom’s potential, an

delusion, do unequivocally authorize the relation of master and slave: 1. By holding masters and their slaves alike, as believers, brethren beloved. 2. By enjoining on each the duties proper to each other. 3. By grounding their obligations for the fulfilment [sic] of these duties, as of all others, on their relation to God.” William May Wightman, *Life of William Capers, D.D., One of the Bishops of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South; including n Autobiography* (Nashville: Publishing House of the M.E. Church, South, 1902), 295-296.

³ Bascom, *Methodism and Slavery*, 64.

established preacher offered him a place on his circuit until he could prove himself worthy of full membership in the connection. At the same time he served as a junior minister, Bascom formed his ideas about slavery. He was most impressed by Francis Asbury's argument on slavery and incorporated the bishop's stance into this own position. In 1812, he heard Bishop Asbury speak on slavery, which, his biographer insisted, "settled Bascom's principles, on that subject, for life."⁴ Asbury and Bascom both considered slavery a civil institution outside of the Church's jurisdiction. Any criticism of slavery, they argued, would hamper the Church's work and perhaps even taint it with abolitionism. In other words, it was impractical for a minister to both condemn slavery and preach to slaves.⁵

Bascom's views made him a target for antislavery Methodists. Many of them already disliked the young minister because he appeared "proud," a "clerical fop," and "ambitious and aspiring," all traits that the clergy despised.⁶ His first solo preaching assignment was in "Botany Bay," Virginia, an area rife with disease and other dangers, a place most ministers avoided. According to his biographer, the Conference often sent "the refractory or unpromising" ministers

⁴ Moses Montgomery Henkle, *Life of Henry Bidleman Bascom* (Nashville: Publishing House of the ME. Church, South, 1984), 32-38. [Charles W. Ferguson explains Asbury's leanings when it came to slavery. According to Ferguson, Asbury believed that "work for the amelioration in the treatment and condition of slaves would produce more practical good to the Africans than any attempt at their emancipation," A sentiment that Bascom adopted. Charles W. Ferguson, *Organizing to Beat the Devil: Methodists and the Making of America* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1971), 205.

⁵ Bascom, *Methodism and Slavery*, 22, 125-126.

⁶ Henkle, *Life of Bascom*, 65.

there in the hopes that it would either “break them in” or “drive them off.”⁷ But Bascom persevered and continued to preach. He also maintained his position on slavery despite extreme opposition. In 1818, his proslavery views almost cost him election into the Conference. He narrowly escaped rejection by the Conference (winning by a single vote) and became increasingly bitter towards the antislavery brethren and more open about his proslavery beliefs.⁸

As the national slavery debate heated up in the 1830s and 1840s, Henry Bascom became more strident on the subject. Serving in 1840 on a standing committee on slavery, presented a report that declared that “the simple holding of slaves, or mere ownership of slave property . . . constitutes no legal barrier to the election or ordination of ministers to the various grades of office, known in the ministry of the Methodist Episcopal Church.”⁹ Bascom became a major voice for southern ministers in the General Conference and by 1844 they chose him to write the fateful protest against the suspension of Bishop Andrew. A year later he met with the southern delegates in Louisville, Kentucky, to chair the committee on separation from the national Church. Because of his loyalty to his southern brethren, they made him a bishop of the southern branch in 1850.

⁷ Ibid., 81.

⁸ Ibid., 112. In 1819, Bascom wrote the minority opinion in the Tennessee Conference protesting the ousting of a minister named Gilbert Taylor because he owned slaves. Bascom and his compatriots argued that slaveholding was allowed by the *Discipline* and the new doctrine that disallowed it broke not only the Methodist code but also the state laws of Tennessee that prohibited manumission. Ibid., 117-120.

⁹ Ibid., 288.

Bascom presented both legal and moral justifications for a hands-off approach to slavery. Using the power of church patriarchy, Bascom often claimed that the Church founders (including American Methodism's father, Francis Asbury) would have supported the southern branch in their stand on slavery. He used the statements from Bishops William McKendree, Elijah Hedding, and Francis Asbury to demonstrate that the denomination's leaders did not want the Church to interfere with slavery. For instance, Bascom cited Asbury's 1815 funeral sermon for Thomas Coke in which he claimed Coke's "usefulness had been 'curtailed in the South'" because of his opposition to slavery. Bascom also noted that both Asbury and Coke had "thought we could kill the monster at once, but *the laws and the people* were against us, and we had to compromise the matter, or lose the South."¹⁰ Bascom also maintained that Bishop McKendree had opposed any church restrictions on slaveholding because this would "shut up our access, not only to the slave holder, but also to the slave, so that we could not them no good, soul or body, for time or eternity."¹¹ Even the northern Bishop Hedding, Bascom argued, worried that the Church's meddling with slavery would hinder its work in the South. "The civil government of that country, (the South,) is not in the hands of the Methodists," Hedding purportedly reasoned, "and further, if they were so disposed, to attempt to control it on this subject, would only hinder their great work, and bring heavier afflictions on 'God's suffering poor.'"¹²

¹⁰ Bascom, *Methodism and Slavery*, 6.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 10.

¹² *Ibid.*, 27.

Bascom did not leave the argument there, however, and went on to insist that the civil institution of slavery could be considered a holy institution as well.¹³ The Bible, he contended, supported slavery and provided a set of guidelines for slaves and their masters to follow. “Any critical student of the New Testament,” Bascom sharply remarked, “is well aware that there is not in it a single sentence, nor any series of them, from which induction can logically deduce the inference, that the simple owning or holding of slaves, is inconsistent with the word of God, or christian character.” In order to gain “Divine approval,” he argued, slaves obeyed their masters and their masters cared for them in return.¹⁴ According to Bascom, this arrangement created a benign relationship between master and slave, who lived together in harmony and with the same love and respect of family members. In the South, he insisted, “the children of the two races grow up together, and, as a general rule, cherish for each other . . . interest and attachment. Similar reasoning applies to the household circle, as it regards adults.” Like many of his peers in the South, Bascom argued that masters took far better care of blacks than northern employers

¹³ Although he borrowed these ideas from Church patriarchs, the southern bishop expanded his discussion of slavery beyond the conventional Methodist case for the Church simply staying out of the matter. Although Bascom’s defense of slavery and the southern Methodists centered on the notion that the Church could not alter civil institutions, he included standard secular reasons for perpetuating the system. In an 1845 treatise, *Methodism and Slavery*, he explained that “any attempt, by the Church, or ecclesiastical authority, to contravene civil law or invalidate civil rights, is not only without warrant from the Bible, but pours contempt on the word of God, and the admitted obligations of the christian profession.” And civil law, to Bascom, included the laws that protected slavery. In fact, he argued, the Church deprived its ministers of their rights if they forced them to manumit their slaves in a state that did not allow it. “The laws of nearly all the Southern States,” he opined, “*forbid* emancipation; it is the *civil duty of the citizen not to attempt it*; and in many of the States, as in Georgia, severe penalties accompany the prohibition.” By Bascom’s reasoning, the civil and religious should be kept separate and the Church and its ministers had no authority to interfere with the policies of the state governments. *Ibid.*, 35-39.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 62-64.

did. “There is a natural sense of obligation and kindness, on the one hand,” he contended, “and of dependence and gratitude on the other, leading to many of the kinder offices of human intercourse, without which the heart must be utterly desolate.”¹⁵ Not only had Bascom embraced a quite conventional paternalism, but he also endorsed the idea that slavery suited African Americans more than freedom.¹⁶

Yet as he joined the ranks of proslavery advocates, Bascom maintained a firm commitment to the Methodist idea of spiritual equality. In a sermon dealing with God’s judgment of man, Bascom revealed his continued belief in the equality of all souls. He described the judgment seat in heaven: once men met their Maker, “for the first time, a tribunal may be seen before which the prince and the peasant, the king and the slave, are equal, and whose adjudication will fix and necessitate their doom upon the ground of absolute equality: for here man stands denuded of every thing else, and character alone attracts the attention of the Judge.”¹⁷ To the minister, slaves may have unequal status in this life and absolute equality in the next—the body could be held in bondage but the soul was completely and eternally free.¹⁸

¹⁵ Ibid., 45.

¹⁶ Bascom did have an interest in the colonization movement in the late 1820s and early 1830s, and even served Agent of the American Colonization Society. Over time, however, as talk of colonization faded, he became more staunchly proslavery. Henkle, *Life of Bascom*, 204-105.

¹⁷ H. B. Bascom, *Sermons from the Pulpit* (Louisville, KY: Morton and Griswold, 1850), 336.

¹⁸ Ministers were not the only southerners to use religion to justify slavery. When secular southerners rationalized the enslavement of millions of African Americans, they focused on the

In keeping with their spiritualized view of the master-slavery relationship, ministers adopted the idea of slaveholder paternalism but combined it with an egalitarian religious ideal.¹⁹ Like Bascom, southern Methodist leaders continued to support both white superiority and spiritual equality, two concepts suspended in fundamental tension within the Methodist worldview. This conflation of chattel slavery and spiritual equality defined Methodist rhetoric in the antebellum South and led to unintended challenges to the dominant patriarchy in temporal

“Curse of Ham” as God’s sanctioning for slavery. This biblical justification presented blacks as innately inferior because God had cursed them for previous sins. Some southerners also presented the idea of polygenesis as a defense of racial inequality and slavery, the notion that whites and blacks were two separate species created by God and that they did not share the same Creation story. For a thorough discussion of these arguments, see David Brion Davis, *Inhuman Bondage: The Rise and Fall of Slavery in the New World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 187-191.

¹⁹ Bascom and other southern ministers crafted an argument that both relied on and refuted the dominant secular defense of the peculiar institution. Many southerners relied not only on scriptural arguments but also on economic and social justifications for slavery. Some scholars point to the profitability of slave labor as one of the leading reasons that southerners continued to rely on the institution long after other Western nations condemned the practice. Proslavery intellectuals believed that the entire world profited from the South’s slave system, making criticism of that system entirely hypocritical. In 1860, a group of slavery apologists explained this point in *Cotton is King, and Pro-Slavery Arguments*. “Nine-tenths of the cotton consumed in the Christian world,” they argued, “is the product of the slave labor of the United States.” And that the South’s monopoly on cotton production “has given to slavery its commercial value; and, while this monopoly is retained, the institution will continue to extend itself wherever it can find room to spread.” This economic explanation of the value of cotton production by slave laborers reflected the depth of the South’s reliance on African American slavery in the antebellum period. E. N. Elliott, ed., *Cotton is King, and Pro-Slavery Arguments: Compromising the Writings of Hammond, Harper, Christy, Stringfellow, Hodge, Bledsoe, and Cartwright, on this Important Subject* (Augusta, GA: Pritchard, Abbott, and Loomis, 1860), 56. For a comprehensive discussion the development of proslavery arguments in the secular South see Larry E. Tise, *Proslavery: A History of the Defense of Slavery in America, 1701-1840* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1987) and James Oakes, *Slavery and Freedom: An Interpretation of the Old South* (New York: W. W. Norton and Co., 1998). Mark Smith also provides an excellent analysis of how economy and hierarchy affected the development and maintenance of plantation slavery. See Mark Michael Smith, *Mastered by the Clock: Time, Slavery, and Freedom in the American South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997).

society.²⁰ Because of their belief in both the righteousness of slavery and the doctrine of spiritual equality, Methodist ministers often presented stories of devout slaves and irreligious masters that conveyed conflicting messages. Although they demanded obedience in every other instance, these ministers excused and even glorified the disobedience of Christian slaves when their acts of insubordination were religious in nature (such as attending church meetings). Many tales of disobedience are anonymous or obviously fabricated, and it is doubtful that ministers would have openly encouraged slaves to defy their masters' authority. What they reveal, however, are the problems arising from the adaptation of Methodist theology to southern mores. Methodist publications and periodicals often overturned the master-slave relationship to promote religious conversion—positing the spiritual slave as the holy authority and the irreligious master as the sinful persecutor. This inverted hierarchy contrasted with the dominant southern image of the slave. Without directly questioning the slave's subservient position, ministers were able to grant the Christian slave an unusual degree of influence.²¹

²⁰ According to Monica Najar, a historian of evangelicalism in the South, this tension between spiritual equality and slavery existed in Baptist churches as well. She contends that evangelical churches actually provided a space in which black and white Christians could confront the contradictions of their faith. "White and black evangelicals," she argues, "together faced the contradictions between their theology, which emphasized the equality of all souls, and the institution of slavery, which reified inequality. Churches became the arenas in which southerners debated what slavery meant in an evangelical society and what religion meant in a slave society." Monica Najar, *Evangelizing the South: A Social History of Church and State in Early America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 138.

²¹ There are some similarities between these anecdotes and other southern stories about wise older slaves or friendships between masters and slaves. What separates the Methodist accounts from secular stories is the open depiction of cruel masters and masters who needed guidance from their slaves.

The Evolution of Proslavery Methodism

Methodists did not come to the South to become slaveholders or proslavery advocates, nor did they come as antislavery reformers. At the turn of the nineteenth century, ministers made their way into the southern states with one mission: to save as many souls as possible. But they quickly encountered opposition from southerners who viewed them as outsiders or as threats to the slave system. Because of this image, the first Methodist itinerants to enter the South did so at their peril. They faced persecution in places where the local community doubted their religious motivations and worried about the egalitarian nature of their message. These problems led Methodists to adapt their approach to suit the tastes of their slaveholding audiences. Over the first few decades of their mission in the South, ministers assumed a more proslavery outlook and learned not to question the dominant practices of the region but to try to make those practices more humane. Thus the Methodist mission underwent a noticeable change in the 1830s and 1840s when ministers went from merely tolerating slavery to vocally supporting the institution. In order to reach both masters and slaves and to gain a foothold in southern society, ministers adjusted their views and their rhetoric to better reflect the mores of the region.

During the first few decades of its existence, the Methodist Episcopal Church held that slavery was a sin. In these early days, any ministers actively worked to end slavery in the South and scolded southerners for not realizing the hypocrisy of maintaining slavery in a free republic. In 1785, for instance, on the heels of the Revolution, Methodist ministers initiated a campaign to get state legislatures to pass laws that would make slavery illegal.²² The campaign went nowhere

²² For a comprehensive account of these petitions and the responses to them, see Eugene D. Genovese and Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, *The Mind of the Master Class: History and Faith in*

and had little real effect except to complicate the Church's evangelizing efforts in the South as potential congregants responded violently to any calls for manumission. In 1798, in the *Doctrines and Discipline of the Methodist Episcopal Church in America*, Francis Asbury and Thomas Coke established regulations regarding slavery and insisted that slaveholders connected with the Church emancipate their slaves if they could. According to the Church fathers, preachers and members should discuss slavery and take measures to ameliorate its more brutal elements. They described slavery as an "enormous evil" and demanded that their followers consider the damage that the institution inflicted on slaves and society.²³ At the same time, however, ministers also recognized the hazards of their continued opposition to such a fundamental part of southern society and culture.

The shift in the southern Methodist attitude towards slavery followed a series of violent episodes in which ministers either lost their lives or felt that their lives were threatened. Such was the case in Charleston, South Carolina, where several early Methodist ministers ran into trouble for preaching to racially mixed congregations. In 1807, a group of young men assaulted William Owens, a preacher who had just finished delivering a message at a large prayer meeting held at Cumberland Church. Some members of the rowdy mob dragged Owens from the church where they wanted to put him under the water pump and "pump him" until he drowned.

the Southern Slaveholders' Worldview (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 231-232.

²³ Thomas Coke and Francis Asbury, *The Doctrines and Discipline of the Methodist Episcopal Church in America: With Explanatory Notes by Thomas Coke and Francis Asbury* (Philadelphia: Henry Tuckniss, 1798), 170-171. Cynthia Lynn Lyerly provides a helpful discussion of the dual (and often contradictory) objectives of the early Methodists in America to both end slavery and to reform the institution. For more on this see Lyerly, *Methodism and the Southern Mind*, 140-143.

Fortunately for Owens, the rioters began to argue about the best way to handle the preacher and he made his escape in the midst of all of the confusion.²⁴ Owens suffered few injuries and hoped that the city guard and officials would help prevent future attacks. But, on a Sunday afternoon not long after the ill-fated prayer meeting, the guard showed up at another Methodist assembly and prepared to put an end to the meeting. Owen's colleague, Jonathan Jackson, and his biracial congregation were forced to flee after the captain of the guard charged into the sanctuary with his sword raised and ordered that the slaves in attendance be taken into custody. Charleston residents (especially large landowners living in the city) feared that Methodist preachers encouraged their slaves to rebel and to think of themselves as equal to whites, a matter that no white southerner, regardless of social status, would take lightly.²⁵

These events in Charleston revealed a deep-seated distrust of Methodist ministers. Francis Asbury recognized the problem in the city and expressed dismay over the small white membership in the Charleston Methodist congregations, a problem that he believed encouraged the public perception of ministers as opponents of slavery. "I doubt if in Charleston we have joined more than 18 members of the fair skin in twenty years," he complained, "and seldom are there more than 50 or 60 returned; death, desertion, and backsliding; poor fickle souls, unstable as water, light as air, bodies and minds." Even though white Charlestonians would attend

²⁴ Charles F. Deems, *Annals of Southern Methodism for 1855* (New York: J. A. Gray's Fire-proof Printing Office, 1856), 251-253.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 251-253.

Methodist revivals on occasion, they would not associate with such a controversial religion as Methodism and so they joined other churches.²⁶

Over time, southern Methodists divorced themselves from any antislavery or abolitionist leanings, citing their mission to the slaves and the conversion of masters as their primary reason for the shift. By 1828, the South Carolina Conference (which encompassed the Charleston churches) had expanded to include over 11,000 congregants, including a large number of slaves and a growing white membership. The missionaries in the state claimed that whites had warmed to the idea of bringing religion into the slave quarters. In fact, they believed that “public opinion in South-Carolina is decidedly in favor of the religious instruction of the negroes, both as a dictate of duty and a matter of policy.” But it was not South Carolinians who had changed; instead it was the Methodist ministers themselves who had adopted a new approach to slavery. Church leaders heaped praises on slaveholders who allowed them onto their plantations and contrasted the benevolence of slavery to the poverty and deprivation experienced by free laborers in the North. “Had slaveholders in the South been the merciless despots which Northern fanatics of high and low degree, unite in representing them to be,” one missionary argued, “had they justified the wretched and false calumnies, which it is the fashion of the Northern American press to heap upon them, by showing that they either hated or feared the spread of religious influence among their slaves,” then the missionary work would have been fruitless. With the

²⁶ Ibid., 253.

cooperation of masters, however, the mission prospered and proved to these Methodist men that slavery provided the means to a slave's salvation instead of acting as a deterrent.²⁷

Despite changes in the perception and reception of ministers, Methodists had to remain vigilant against southern skeptics who still believed that the religion would undermine the slaveholders' regime. In 1830, for instance, a deacon accused Mississippi itinerant Joseph Travis of being an abolitionist. He cited Travis's advocacy of missionary and temperance societies, which partook of the same reform spirit as the antislavery movement. Travis publicly confronted the deacon and reminded him of the dangers of spreading such rumors. He asked "if he did not believe that if said report was credited, it would subject me to a speedy death at this juncture of Abolition excitement?" He forced the deacon to sign a *libel* declaring that the insinuation was false, which ended the controversy.²⁸ But Travis's fear of being connected with abolitionism revealed the continued pressure placed on southern preachers to renounce any antislavery views.

Although Travis forcefully declared his antipathy towards abolitionism, he and his Methodist colleagues still viewed slaves as spiritual beings and not simply as property. In the mid-1830s, Travis learned that whites on his circuit wanted to limit the slaves' exposure to religion. Travis defied this local prejudice and continued to preach to the slaves, believing that the "colored society was truly as a sheep without a shepherd" and that they needed spiritual guidance. His white church members warned him that if he did not end his missionary work in

²⁷ Ibid., 226-228.

²⁸ Joseph Travis, *Autobiography of the Rev. Joseph Travis, A.M., a Member of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South; Particularly in Part of Western Virginia, the Carolinas, Georgia, Alabama, and Mississippi, with Short Memoirs of Several Local Preachers, and an Address to his Friends* (Nashville: E. Stevenson and F.A. Owen, 1856), 158-159.

the slave quarters that he would be incarcerated. The Committee of Vigilance marched into one of Travis's meetings with the intention of putting an end to his preaching. But they sat through his sermon and determined that he did not constitute a threat, so they allowed him to stay in the community and preach to the slaves.²⁹

Travis did not mention what message he delivered that day, but if he adhered to southern Methodist policy it probably focused on the value of servitude and the necessity of obedience. Even though they believed in spiritual equality, ministers molded their message to conform to dominant proslavery thought and argued that religion helped slaves work harder and to accept their lot in life. In 1854, well after southern ministers had changed their minds on slavery, James O. Andrew presented his case for the religious instruction of slaves—instruction that still required the consent of masters and the southern community. Andrew intended to demonstrate the necessity of slave religion to both ministers and masters, but in the process he also revealed an inherent contradiction in the southern Methodist mindset. Religion, he insisted, should “bring the slave to feel that he is a man, redeemed by Jesus Christ, and capable of enjoying communion with God.” If the mission is successful, “the negro, in his most degraded situation, can be brought to feel the powerful influence of gospel principles, and can exhibit in his life, the most conclusive evidence of the reality of his religious experience.” In order to accomplish this goal, however, the master as well as the preacher must minister to the slaves, who required both of

²⁹ Ibid., 164-165.

their help to achieve salvation.³⁰ The bishop simultaneously acknowledged the slave's humanity and spiritual equality and accepted the notion that the slave needed to be in chains in order to receive the full benefits of religious instruction.

Ministers such as Andrew took great care in the religious instruction that slaves received, emphasizing qualities that would appeal to masters and would reflect southern racial mores. Methodist leaders used catechisms as a way to indoctrinate slaves and train them to be more submissive on the plantation. In 1856, the Missionary Society of the Methodist Episcopal Church complained that the Tennessee Conference did not properly catechize the slaves there but instead relied on an unproductive, emotional approach to conversion. The society claimed that "the mode of instructing the negroes should be somewhat peculiar" because of their unique status in society. "The need to be *taught*," the missionary group advised, "Merely rousing them to excitement is not sufficient—they must be indoctrinated into the elementary principles of our holy religion."³¹

Similar problems arose in Georgia, where inexperienced itinerants did not relieve the "poverty and sin and ruin of the black race." The Missionary Society argued that the slaves in the state required "preaching, catechizing, pastoral oversight, and special moral teaching, to insure

³⁰ James O. Andrew, *Miscellanies: Comprising Letters, Essays, and Addresses; to which is added a Biographical Sketch of Mrs. Ann Amelia Andrew* (Louisville: Morton and Griswold, 1854), 321-325.

³¹ Charles Deems, *Annals of Southern Methodism for 1856* (Nashville: E. Stevenson and F.A. Owen, 1857), 190-192.

their spiritual elevation.”³² William Capers, a popular South Carolina minister and advocate of slave missions since 1829 (and a slaveholder himself), wrote the society’s catechism.³³ Capers crafted it to “suit [the slaves’] capacities,” avoiding any lofty theological language or complex subjects, and demonstrating his belief in the supposedly inferior intellect of blacks. Yet Capers included the Methodist notion of spiritual equality in the catechism and presented the idea that all men (black and white) were born sinners and that “none are born good; no, not one.” This egalitarian spirit was broken, however, by the list of the “Particular Duties” of the Christian, which included the “servant’s duty to his master and mistress”: “To serve them with a good will heartily and not with eye-service.”³⁴ Thus, the catechism simultaneously promoted obedience and submissiveness and the concept of spiritual equality.³⁵

With the mission to the slaves in mind, ministers began to defend slavery on the grounds that it bettered black people. When Bishop John Early visited the Savannah River Mission in 1856, he witnessed what he considered the fruits of the Church’s labors. He praised the ministers there and “saw, with [his] own eyes, the improvement now being made in the social and moral

³² Ibid., 201.

³³ Wightman, *Life of William Capers*, 290-302.

³⁴ William Capers, *Catechism for the Use of the Methodist Missions. First Part* (Charleston: John Early, 1853), 3, 7, 14.

³⁵ For a more complete description of slave catechisms and their purposes, see Janet Duitsman Cornelius, *Slave Missions and the Black Church in the Antebellum South*, (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1999), 124-158 and Albert J. Raboteau, *Slave Religion: The “Invisible Institution” in the Antebellum South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 161-162.

condition of the benighted sons of Africa in those low grounds.” But the progress of which he spoke did not only pertain to the salvation of the slaves’ souls. Early professed another motive for these missions. “I am more than ever surprised,” he admitted, “that any planter who sees the improvements in knowledge, in morals and in discipline, made by our mode of visiting and instructing their servants, should hesitate to invite our missionaries to their plantations, and afford them all the facilities necessary and proper to successfully carry on their work.”³⁶ Early promoted the missions for two reasons: to bring the Gospel to the slaves and to control them on the plantation. Like most southern ministers, the bishop wanted to free their souls by binding their bodies even tighter to the institution that enslaved them. This contradiction lay at the heart of missionary efforts and caused most southern preachers to accept and even adopt many standard defenses of slavery.

As Early’s account suggests, by the 1840s and 1850s Methodist ministers had become absorbed into southern culture and many of them became just as fervent in their support of slavery as the congregants that they served. In 1845, an itinerant named John Bayley defended the slaveholders of Virginia during one of his trips to London. Bayley was born in England, but had left for Virginia as a young man to join the ranks of the itinerants there. During his visit to his home country, he encountered a “genuine runaway slave, from Virginia” begging on the streets of the city, and trying to garner sympathy from passersby with tales of abuse and mistreatment at the hands of his former master. In Virginia, he claimed, men “did not think as much of a slave as they did of a horse.” Bayley challenged the runaway’s accusation, arguing

³⁶ Deems, *Annals for 1856*, 207.

that masters took care of their slaves in Virginia, if not for moral or ethical reasons then simply to protect their investment. The former slave's story did not conform with the preacher's own experiences in Virginia, where he contended "some of [the slaves] fare very badly, but others lead a lazy, jolly kind of a life, and fare much better as far as mere sensual pleasures are concerned, than the honest and industrious poor."³⁷ In this example, Bayley felt compelled to defend the earthly mores of his congregants in Virginia and used the standard paternalistic arguments.

Other ministers defended slavery with Scripture, using the New Testament as a basis for their support of the institution. Methodists often cited a verse from 1 Peter: "Servants, be subject to your masters with all fear; not only to the good and gentle, but also to the forward."³⁸ Ministers concluded that this passage revealed God's sanction for slavery, no matter how a master treated his slaves (although ministers also argued that masters would be held accountable in the afterlife for abusing their dependents). In 1856 and 1857, a series of articles in the *Southern Methodist Itinerant* focused on the Scriptural sanctions for slavery. The New Testament generally and Peter specifically, the article claimed, upheld slavery as a benign relationship between two Christians, a "believing master" and a slave who was "commanded to obey" him.³⁹ Another article contended that "the Scriptures nowhere prohibit [slavery]" but

³⁷ John Bayley, *Confessions of a Converted Infidel; with Lights and Shades of Itinerant Life and Miscellaneous Sketches* (New York: M. W. Dodd, 1856), 126-128.

³⁸ 1 Peter 2:18 (KJV).

³⁹ "A Dilemma," *Southern Methodist Itinerant*, Jan 3, 1840. In order to make the separation between southern Methodists and northern abolitionists clear, ministers often openly

instead “expressly recognize it and enjoin both master and servant to discharge the duties which their relation involves.”⁴⁰ A minister published a sermon in the periodical that used both the Old and New Testaments to prove the godliness of slavery, citing the verse in I Peter as a direct expression of the divine will. “What an important doctrine is [that in I Peter 2, 11, and 18]!,” he exclaimed, “Enjoining political subjection to *governments of every form*, and Christian subjection on the part of servants to their masters; whether good or bad; for the purpose of showing forth to advantage, the glory of the gospel, and putting to silence the ignorance of foolish men” (perhaps a sly reference to abolitionists).⁴¹

Although some ministers maintained that God approved of slavery whether masters loved their slaves or beat them, many Methodist preachers were determined to sanctify the institution by promoting the better treatment of blacks in the South. According to William A. Smith, a minister and Professor of Moral and Intellectual Philosophy, the Church had a responsibility to enforce “*right principles*” on the plantation. These principles did not include emancipation, he reasoned, because slavery protected African slaves from themselves. Slavery, Smith insisted,

declared their antipathy towards abolitionism. An 1836 contributor to the *Southern Christian Advocate* claimed abolitionism to be an “evil” and a “sin.” This was because, “abolitionism hardens the heart, distempers the mind, brutalizes the holder, corrupts the moral sense, inflames the evil passions, and turns men into cruel monsters.” Ironically, the proslavery commenter goes on to argue that abolitionism “reduces man to a beast—a thing.” “The Tree of Abolitionism,” *Southern Christian Advocate*, December 6, 1839.

⁴⁰ “The Gospel and Slavery,” *Southern Methodist Itinerant*, Apr 15, 1856.

⁴¹ Rev. R. F. Sedwick, “Slavery,” *Southern Methodist Itinerant*, May 15, 1857. Donald G. Mathews provides a thorough description of the evolution of these proslavery biblical arguments in *Slavery and Methodism: A Chapter in American Morality, 1780-1845* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1965), 62-87.

was right because “the conditions and circumstances (essential and relative) of the African race in this country” justified it. In other words, slaves could not provide for or lead themselves and needed masters to direct them towards God and heaven.⁴² Some southern ministers tried to act on these “right principles” well before the national schism of the Church. In 1838, the Georgia and South Carolina Conferences passed resolutions that stressed the level of the Church’s commitment to slavery in the South and stated their intended goals in the region. The Georgians declared that slavery was not a “moral evil” but, instead it constituted a “civil and domestic institution, and one with which as ministers of Christ we have nothing to do, further than to ameliorate the condition of the slave by endeavoring to impart to him and his master the benign influences of the religion of Christ, and aiding both on their way to heaven.” The South Carolina Conference refused to “intermeddle” with slavery and would instead focus on the salvation of souls and better treatment of the slaves⁴³

The Image of the Slave in Methodist Literature

As ministers made their peace with slavery, they also wrestled with the strange paradox of preaching a spiritually egalitarian religion in a hierarchical society. The doctrine of spiritual equality in a society committed to racial inequality complicated the southern Methodist worldview and led to contradictory and confusing representations of the master-slave relationship. Ministers created a myth of the Christian slave that emphasized submission and

⁴² William A. Smith, *Lectures on the Philosophy and Practice of Slavery, as exhibited in the Domestic Institution of Slavery in the United States: with the Duties of Masters to Slaves* (Nashville: Stevenson and Owen, 1857), ix-30.

⁴³ “Slavery,” *Southern Christian Advocate*, Feb 2, 1838.

subordination but, like the tales of religious children, also encouraged appropriate disobedience. Although southern Methodists were just as attached to slavery and just as adamant about defending it as non-Methodist slaveholders, recognizing the spiritual equality of all believers shaped their image of the slave. The slaveholder was ultimately committed to the law of man and the Methodist maintained a commitment to the law of God—a God who respected the servant and the ruler as equally deserving of eternal salvation. Whether it was their intention or not, this deviation from southern orthodoxy gave ministers an opportunity to humanize and empower the slave, an odd and potentially dangerous idea in a South committed to white supremacy and racial hierarchy.

Ministers often presented slaves as sympathetic figures whose social status had deep religious meaning; slavery became a symbol of man's fallen state. Methodists knew their southern peers well enough to realize that these images would resonate so they endowed slavery with spiritual significance. John Bayley (the same itinerant who defended Virginia slaveholders in London) used the image of the slave as a symbol of man's sin. Since man's initial misstep in the Garden of Eden, Bayley explained, he has "wandered about in galling chains . . . and the whole of creation has groaned and travailed in pain." "When, in the fulness [sic] of time, grace and truth were offered to the world by the Lord of heaven and earth," he continued, "the blind slaves of folly rejected the precious boon and murdered their great Benefactor." To Bayley, all of mankind was enslaved by sin and corruption and the "fetters" of wrongdoing bound them tightly to each other and to their sad fate. In this analogy, the proslavery minister examined spiritual slavery as a common problem for all souls (black and white) and admitted that slavery in this

sense trapped men in sin.⁴⁴ Martha Rives Childs (the wife of itinerant John Wesley Childs) also compared sin to enslavement. Southerners, she argued, spent so much of their time trying to please each other that they had little time to praise God. A man's neighbor "has bound thy hands, and thou had fettered his feet," she explained, "it were wise for both to snap the imaginary bonds, and walk onwards unshackled." But men refuse to do this, "so they . . . remain slaves" to their sinful socializing and endless flattery of each other.⁴⁵ These accounts presented a paradoxical view of slavery: at the same time that Methodists denounced spiritual slavery as a sin they upheld temporal, racial slavery as a necessary foundation for society and religion.

Even though they accepted southern slavery as a righteous and beneficial institution, ministers did not adhere to typical southern ideas regarding the nature of the slave. They formed their own archetype of the slave that emphasized his or her spiritual knowledge of that of the master. The image of the spiritual slave produced unintended challenges of the slave system. Despite their subordinate social position, slaves who received salvation would theoretically have more spiritual authority and knowledge than their unenlightened owners, which was a tricky proposition for southerners obsessed with social hierarchy.⁴⁶ According to Methodist ministers,

⁴⁴ Bayley, *Confessions*, 65-66.

⁴⁵ Martha Rives Childs, "What Will Other People Say?," *South Western Christian Advocate*, Nov 15, 1844.

⁴⁶ Many scholars of the antebellum South stress the importance of patriarchy in southern society. Bertram Wyatt-Brown argues that patriarchy was central to honor culture and white men proved their worth through controlling their dependents (including their families and slaves). Bertram Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor: Ethics and Behavior in the Old South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982). Eugene D. Genovese explores the role that patriarchy played in the construction of black life on the plantation. He contends that although slaves depended on

slaves could be active agents of religious change—they are presented as sympathetic martyrs, clever missionaries, wise older Christians, or model servants of God. Older slaves and slave children were the most common figures used in Methodist rhetoric, in part because their disobedience presented less of a perceived threat than the witness of a strong, young male slave. Through fictional and purportedly actual accounts, ministers maintained the slave’s spiritual autonomy and authority, thus inverting the traditional master-slave relationship and weakening the foundation of the very system many of them claimed to support.

A Tennessee Methodist periodical revealed this contradiction in the story of a ten-year-old African child who had been attending missionary services without his master’s consent. Although the master swore to whip the child to death if he continued to attend the meetings, the young slave felt compelled by God to return to the services. The writer maintained that “he never let it interfere with his master’s business” (an example of the subservience still present in these stories of slave spirituality), but the child would still attend Methodist meetings and left his fate in God’s hands. The master, identified as a “cruel wretch,” had the “poor child” whipped twenty five times and then twenty five more when the slave refused to renounce his God. The whipping continued, as the slaveowner watched with “savage delight,” until the child was near death. The master purportedly asked ““What can Jesus Christ do for you now?”” and his slave replied

their masters for necessities, the relationship was in many ways reciprocal. In other words, slaves provided their masters with wealth and obedience and in many cases obtained a certain sense of independence in return. Eugene D. Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll: The World the Slave Made* (New York: Vintage Books, 1976). See also Wyatt-Brown, “The Ideal Typography and Antebellum Southern History: A Testing of a New Approach,” *Societas*, V (Winter 1975), 1-29.

(“meekly”), ““He enabled me to pray for you, Massa.””⁴⁷ This tale is representative of the rhetorical juxtaposition of young converted slaves and vicious masters. The writer emphasized the obedience of the slave in every other way and underscored the willingness of the child to receive his punishment. But this tale did not uphold the master as the righteous authority. Instead, the slave was depicted as the wiser, more knowing, and more empathetic character because of his faith and martyrdom.

There are many other examples that did not end so tragically but instead provided a more encouraging picture of slaves affecting their masters’ hearts and perhaps leading them to salvation. Such was the case with “Jack,” a black Methodist preacher whose devotion to God convicted his master. Jack held Sabbath meetings on the plantation contrary to direct orders from his master. Consequently, Jack was whipped every Monday morning for a year and a half. One day, Jack began to preach to his master as he received the lashes. Later, the master asked Jack to pray for him so that his soul might be saved too. Jack then became his master’s spiritual father and when his master grew deathly ill, he repaid Jack for his guidance by granting him freedom. The author of this story claimed that Jack never loved any person as much as his master, whom he hoped to see in heaven. These Methodist stories that granted slaves a sense of religious authority made certain to separate the temporal relationship between master and slave from the spiritual relationship. Jack remained his master’s slave until the man’s death, despite his position as his master’s religious guide.⁴⁸ Methodists employed this rhetorical strategy to demonstrate the

⁴⁷ “The Youthful Martyr,” *The Messenger of the Holston Conference*, August 18, 1827.

⁴⁸ “An Affecting Story,” *South Western Christian Advocate*, Jan 13, 1843.

potential for spiritual growth and understanding on the part of slaves without directly attacking the slave system and its hierarchy.

At times, ministers shared credit with spiritual slaves for the conversion of prominent white southerners. James O. Andrew, a slaveholder and Methodist bishop at the center of the 1844 schism, gave his own account of slave disobedience that attempted to satisfy the demands for slave submission and notions of spiritual equality. Andrew published the story to promote slave missions and prove the effectiveness of Methodist preaching in the South. But the language that he employed provides insight into Methodists' complicated (and paradoxical) logic regarding spiritual slaves. Andrew told of a black man named Henry Evans whose master insisted that his slaves never attended a Methodist meeting. Evans had earlier converted to Methodism and so disobeyed his master by continuing to go to the services. When his master demanded an explanation for this act of defiance, Evans replied that since becoming a Methodist he had been an "obedient and faithful servant." In fact,' Evans argued, "religion has made me no worse, but has made me more obedient to you." Despite this heightened submissiveness, Evans declared, "I am willing to obey you in every thing else, but, master, I must go to meeting; if you correct me, I'll bear it, but I cannot neglect going to meeting—I must serve God."⁴⁹ This last statement revealed the crux of the southern Methodist ministerial argument regarding the deferential slave-master relationship. Andrew presented the spiritual slave as an obedient slave and did not desire to overturn the traditional social hierarchy. But when a master's rule interfered with God's law, God's law should prevail, thus implying that the spiritual hierarchy superseded the social structure of the plantation.

⁴⁹ Andrew, *Miscellanies*, 325.

Although ministers often used these stories to justify slave missions, they certainly had other motives behind their illustrations of inverted hierarchy. Methodist leaders often employed this rhetorical strategy in their efforts to shame unbelieving or immoral white southerners. The argument behind many of these spiritual slave stories was simple: if a slave (of supposed limited intelligence and personal control) can understand the gospel and behave as a Christian, why can't his master? In many of these accounts, Methodists depicted slaves as the givers of moral advice or as humble examples of righteous living. According to the *Southern Methodist Itinerant*, a slave, Cato, led his young master, George, to repent of his sinful ways. George had gone away to college and returned with a hardened heart. Cato spoke to George about religious matters and tried to lead him from his sinful ways. Eventually, Cato convinced George to attend a camp meeting where George became convicted and converted to Methodism. At this moment, the author contended, the two men became more than master and slave. "Brothers in Christ and heirs of the same immortal hope," the article proclaimed, "their affections twined about each other, and cemented their hearts together."⁵⁰ In this account, Cato was presented as an inarticulate, but kindly, old slave, and his master as a highly knowledgeable and rational young man. The contrast is intended not only to play on stereotypes but also to demonstrate that a simple slave could exhibit more spiritual wisdom than his educated master. This story, in other words, might

⁵⁰ Rev. C. B. Parsons, "Who Knows But He Will?," *Southern Methodist Itinerant*, Mar 1, 1856; Mar 15, 1856; Apr 15, 1856.

convince a reasonable young master that his slave has something that he lacked and should obtain—that most precious possession, salvation.⁵¹

Some Methodist writers took this representation of the sage-like slave even further, showing how slaves could provide spiritual guidance for even the most devoted Christians, including itinerant ministers. One itinerant told of an encounter with a slave named “Old Jeddy” who attended a camp meeting and traveled with the minister back to his master’s home. During the journey, Jeddy told his conversion story and they wept together for joy. Jeddy told the minister of his unbelieving master who had sold the elderly slave’s wife and children. But Jeddy did not worry about never seeing them again in this life, because he believed that they would “meet in dat home where be rest.” This statement inspired the itinerant to travel his circuit with renewed vigor. “What thought I,” the itinerant remarked, “are my sufferings compared with those of this poor, sorrow-stricken servant of my Master!”⁵² In this story, Old Jeddy served as an example of a true servant of God and his status as a slave only heightened the imagery. Although the minister presented Jeddy as an obedient slave (he did not try to interfere with his master’s selling his family), he also made clear that Jeddy was the model Christian and that his master, by contrast, was not.

⁵¹ Some of these stories of spiritual slaves bear a resemblance to the trickster tales that developed in the black community in the South. Although trickster tales often involved deceit, they also included acts of disobedience similar to those of the spiritual slave. For more on the slave trickster, see Lawrence W. Levine, *Black Culture and Black Consciousness: Afro-American Folk Thought from Slavery to Freedom* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), 121-132.

⁵² “Old Jeddy—There’s Rest At Home,” *South-Western Christian Advocate*, December 13, 1844.

Ministers often presented slaves as childlike and their naïveté made these moments of wisdom even more impressive. Many southern Methodists believed that slaves could understand the gospel better and apply it more ably because their mind was like that of a child—simplistic and impressionable. Slaves were also depicted as ignorant and unable to think for themselves.⁵³ These assumptions gave stories of slave disobedience and the inverted spiritual hierarchy between master and slave a chiding tone. Masters and white southerners were presented as more intellectually mature (this was made clear by the crude use of slave vernacular in the articles’ dialogue) but spiritually immature, a severe condemnation for individuals who saw themselves as members of the ruling race.

What these Methodist stories make clear, however, is that while ministers may have condemned irreligious masters, they did not condemn slavery itself. Some accounts actually used the image of the spiritual slave to promote not only the Church but also slavery as an institution. The tale of a slave named “Sancho Cooper” who lived on a plantation in South Carolina exemplified the supposedly special relationship between master and slave. In 1855, Sancho Cooper led church meetings for slaves near Columbia, South Carolina. He was the slave of Dr. Thomas Cooper, a Deist and intellectual who disapproved of the Methodist religion. But Thomas Cooper “entertained great respect for the zeal” of his slave, mainly because his religious fervor “bore testimony to his uniformly correct and upright deportment.” Because Sancho’s faith strengthened his obedience to his master, Thomas Cooper gave him the family Bible and provided him with a little money each year for the slave missions. Sancho reportedly loved his master and his life in America and “has been often heard to give praise and thanks to his

⁵³ Charles F. Deems, *Annals for 1855*, 228.

Heavenly Master that he was translated from the darkness and cruelty of heathenism to the ‘glorious light and liberty of the Gospel and the Son of God.’”⁵⁴ Even though Thomas Cooper was not converted, he encouraged his slave’s faith because it ensured Sancho’s loyalty and made him a more contented slave.⁵⁵

Not all masters were as supportive as Thomas Cooper. In fact, in 1839 a contributor to the Southern *Christian Advocate* complained of masters who had required their slaves to directly disobey biblical commands. Slaves were required by many masters to work on the Sabbath in direct violation of the Fourth Commandment. Missionaries told slaves to follow their masters’ commands but to keep “their thoughts in the meantime employed in holy and profitable subjects” and to “remember that God searches and knows the heart, and if they are prevented from serving Him as faithfully as they would, it is not their fault, but that the sin will be at the door of those under whose authority they act.” In turn, planters complained that slaves were taught “to think of [them] as one condemned of God, and unworthy of [their] respect.” But if slaveowners did not interfere with their slaves’ religion this problem would not arise.⁵⁶ Ministers occupied a tricky

⁵⁴ Deems, *Annals for 1855*, 219.

⁵⁵ According to an 1918 biography, Thomas Cooper “had a tender consideration, too, for the religious feelings of his servants around him that was not a mere courtesy.” Sancho purportedly insisted that Cooper allowed the slaves to go to meeting even when he had invited company over. Sancho always insisted that he would stay to tend to the guests, but his master simply replied that he should go to his meetings instead. Cooper also gave Sancho a Bible as the slave tended to him and prayed for him before his death. The Bible was inscribed “Thomas Cooper to his faithful servant, Sancho.” Charles Francis Himes, *Life and Times of Judge Thomas Cooper: Jurist, Scientist, Educator, Author, Publicist* (Carlisle, PA: Dickinson School of Law, 1918), 59.

⁵⁶ “The Sabbath for Servants,” *Southern Christian Advocate*, Dec 27, 1839.

middle ground between masters and slaves, fighting for the slaves' right to religious instruction but also understanding the masters' ultimate control over their slaves' bodies and labor.

Although southern Methodist leaders did not intend to challenge the slave system itself, they presented an image of slavery that often ran against many slaveholders' views and practices. A belief in spiritual equality provided ministers with an opportunity to convict white southerners with stories of spiritual slaves and irreligious masters. In these accounts, Methodists presented slave disobedience as admirable so long as it was religiously motivated, making possible an inverted hierarchy between master and slave when the slave possessed more spiritual wisdom than the master. Ministers used this rhetorical device with care—never intending to upset or directly challenge the dominant racial hierarchy—but, in the end, produced a paradoxical image of the master-slave relationship. Slaves, for instance, could disobey their masters and attend church meetings, but they should follow their masters' orders in all other respects. Or a slave's childlike nature could grant him or her more spiritual wisdom than their educated master. Balancing these arguments for white patriarchy and spiritual equality proved difficult and created a precarious situation for ministers who preached an egalitarian message in a rigidly hierarchical society.

Reconciling Methodism with Southern Culture

Methodist talk of spiritual equality and the righteous slave did have its limits. Although they developed a distinctive perspective on slavery and presented stories that inverted the master-slave relationship, ministers continued to subscribe to and were influenced by established notions of proper racial arrangements. Slaves may be equal to their masters in heaven, they believed, but on earth there was a natural hierarchy that demanded submission and subservience. At the same time that they provided Scriptural arguments for the equality of all souls, Methodist

preachers maintained that the Bible required inequality on earth, especially when it came to the black and white races. Many southern Methodists spoke of the “Curse of Canaan” and of God’s desire to make an entire race of people (descendants of Abraham’s son, Ham) servants to his favored race.⁵⁷ This religious justification for slavery had real effects on Methodist government and social perspective. Just as their message of spiritual equality confronted the dominant southern worldview, it also challenged the reality of race relations in the Church and created a fundamental tension in denominational policy and doctrine.⁵⁸

Ministers living in the South could not escape the atmosphere of anxiety and fear that pervaded the region.⁵⁹ Just as they borrowed widely accepted southern views regarding the

⁵⁷ For examples of this argument, see D.S. Dogget, “The Scriptural Argument for Slavery,” in *The Quarterly Review of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South*, D. S. Dogget, ed. (Nashville: E. Stevenson and F.A. Owen, 1857), XI: 31; Thornton Stringfellow, *Scriptural and Statistical Views in Favor of Slavery* (Richmond: J.W. Randolph, 1856). Many scholars have studied this particular evangelical argument in defense of slavery and have concluded that the secular South and its religious leaders shared a preoccupation with the story of Ham as justification for the enslavement of blacks. Davis, *Inhuman Bondage*, 187. Mitchell Snay, *Gospel of Disunion: Religion and Separatism in the Antebellum South* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 56.

⁵⁸ The problem of race relations in the Methodist Church existed beyond the antebellum period and notions of equality complicated denominational structure especially after the Civil War. For a thorough explanation of this issue, see Morris Davis, *The Methodist Unification: Christianity and the Politics of Race in the Jim Crow Era* (New York: New York University Press, 2008).

⁵⁹ Anxiety over slavery existed for as long as a white southerners felt outnumbered or overwhelmed by a large black population. For a discussion of how this mentality developed, see Kathleen M. Brown, *Good Wives, Nasty Wenches, and Anxious Patriarchs: Gender, Race, and Power in Colonial Virginia* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996). This fear only heightened in the years before the Civil War and made southerners increasingly paranoid and watchful as they believed that abolitionists from without and blacks from within would

defense of slavery, they shared southern paranoia about slave rebellions and resistance. In 1843, a year before it published the story of “Old Jeddy,” the South Western *Christian Advocate* reported the murder of a Tennessee man at the hands of his slaves. According to the article, dramatically titled “A Man’s Foes Shall Be They of His Own Household,” two teenage slave boys purportedly killed their master, “Brother” Thomas Branch. The minister who reported the incident claimed that the slaves “savagely” attacked the man with axes while he was sleeping and then strapped him to a horse that dragged him into the woods to die. “Revenge could not have prompted the deed,” the minister insisted, “as the deceased is said to by all to have been kind and even indulgent to a fault.”⁶⁰ This story of vicious and ungrateful slaves offered a striking contrast to accounts of loyal, spiritual slaves presented in the same periodical and underscored the dual nature of Methodist attitudes towards slavery.

Further evidence of the racial perspective of southern ministers appeared in the Southern *Methodist Itinerant* in 1857. A minister claimed that slaves intended to revolt in communities in Tennessee, Kentucky, and Missouri on Christmas Day, but that the white community there discovered the plans and put an end to the plot. The minister also claimed that white outsiders, “men destitute of principle” (presumably abolitionists), encouraged the slaves to participate in the conspiracy. “What a pity that the slaves,” he concluded, “who are so well cared for, and who enjoy so many privileges as they do in the Southern States, should be made miserable by the interferences of those who are no better than thieves and murderers at heart!” In his view, naïve

overthrow their society. Manisha Sinha, *The Counterrevolution of Slavery: Politics and Ideology in Antebellum South Carolina* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000), 210-211.

⁶⁰ “A Man’s Foes Shall Be They of His Own Household,” South Western *Christian Advocate*, June 30, 1843.

slaveholders “have ever been confiding in those coming among them from other states or countries” and “have not observed sufficient caution.”⁶¹

Because of such incidents and the resulting fear, southern Methodist leaders instituted controls in the Church that paralleled those on the plantations.⁶² In addition to slave catechisms and sermons on obedience, ministers also promoted the slaves’ subordinate position through the segregation of blacks and whites in church meetings, careful oversight of black preachers, and by forbidding black testimony at church trials. The most visible sign of this racial hierarchy was the separation of masters and slaves in meetings and services. Although some gatherings made it difficult to enforce segregation, ministers attempted to protect the color line as much as possible.⁶³ In many churches, the Methodists built balconies or “Boxes” in the back of the sanctuary for black congregants. In the 1830s, this separation caused controversy in Charleston, South Carolina, congregations, where black worshipers objected to the arrangement. The churches in the city had established a balcony for the slaves and “Boxes” on the floor for elderly or infirm blacks who could not climb the stairs. Having internalized the message of spiritual equality and been told by white ministers that their souls were just as valuable as those of their masters, slaves began to ignore the proscribed seating arrangements and moved into the white pews. This episode led to a heated controversy in Charleston and a series of church trials that

⁶¹ “Insurrection Among the Slaves,” *Southern Methodist Itinerant*, Jan 15, 1857.

⁶² Orville Vernon Burton, *In My Father’s House Are Many Mansions* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1985), 184-185; David Brion Davis, *Inhuman Bondage: The Rise and Fall of Slavery in the New World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 196-199.

⁶³ Lyerly, *Methodism and the Southern Mind*, 50-51.

divided the congregations and pushed many black members out of the churches.⁶⁴ Though an isolated event, the conflict in South Carolina reflected the larger racial tension in the denomination and the uneasy relationship between Methodists' egalitarian religious principles and their discriminatory practices.

A similar dilemma emerged over the ordination of black preachers. The Church did not allow African Americans to have complete authority over their congregants nor were they considered full-fledged members of the General Conference.⁶⁵ Southern Methodists realized that black ministers might be valuable in the slave missions, where they could preach to their own race and hopefully encourage more conversions. But, even though the Church used their services, it did not consider black preachers equal to white itinerants. The qualifications for becoming a minister differed for blacks and certainly were designed to ensure that their ministry would conform to white racial norms. Even before the Methodist schism and the emergence of proslavery Methodism in the South, the General Conference of 1800 passed a regulation that allowed blacks to be ordained as deacons. This measure would enable blacks to exhort and to preach without granting them the same degree of power as the white ministers. "The bishops have obtained leave," the Conference announced, "to ordain local deacons of our African brethren, in places where they have built a house or houses for the worship of God." But there were also strict requirements for blacks aspiring to become deacons: "*Provided*, they have a person among them qualified for that office, and he can obtain an election of two-thirds of the male members of the society of which he belongs, and a recommendation from the minister who

⁶⁴ Deems, *Annals for 1856*, 215-218.

⁶⁵ Lyerly, *Methodism and the Southern Mind*, 59.

has the charge, and his fellow-labourers in the city or circuit.”⁶⁶ As deacons, African Americans could deliver the message of the Church but could not administer the sacraments or provide other official services for their congregations.⁶⁷

Racial inequalities affected the very fabric of Methodist Church government. Even though they claimed that black souls were just as important as white souls, Methodists treated the two races very differently when it came to discipline. In 1840, for instance, the General Conference passed legislation that prohibited black testimony in church trials in states where “black laws” forbade African Americans from testifying in court. The measure followed an appeal from a minister who had been chastised for his handling of discipline on his circuit. The Missouri Conference had charged Silas Comfort with maladministration of a church trial in which he had allowed a black church member to testify against a white congregant. The Methodist Church theoretically permitted this, but the state of Missouri’s criminal and civil courts did not. Missouri had laws that limited black testimony to cases involving other blacks

⁶⁶ *Journals of the General Conference* (New York: Carlton and Phillips, 1855), 1:44.

⁶⁷ Donald G. Mathews, *Slavery and Methodism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1965), 64-66. Perhaps the most famous black preacher of the time, Henry Evans, founded a church in Fayetteville, North Carolina. Even though Evans was lauded by Church leaders like William Capers as an excellent preacher and a testament to the accomplishments of the black race, his church in Fayetteville experienced racial problems. Evans’ preaching attracted large audiences of blacks and whites and eventually the white congregants took over all of the seating in the church, thereby excluding the black members. His case is unusual in that he became the primary preacher for a large congregation of white southerners, but typical in the sense that the segregation in his church favored white members to the detriment of black believers. Wightman, *Life of William Capers*, 125-127.

and did not allow blacks to testify against whites.⁶⁸ Because of the inconsistency in church law and civil law the General Conference revised its stance on black testimony to declare “that it is inexpedient and unjustifiable for any preacher among us to permit colored persons to give testimony against white persons in any state where they are denied that privilege in trials of law.”⁶⁹

The Conference tempered this decision with a statement that tried to reassure black members of their importance in the church. “It is not the intention of the Conference,” they asserted, “to express or imply any distrust or want of confidence in the Christian piety and integrity of the numerous body of colored members under our pastoral care.” Members, the Conference insisted, “to whom we are bound by the bonds of the gospel of Christ, and for whose spiritual and eternal interests, together with all our fellow men, of every color and in every relation, and condition in life, we will never cease to labor.”⁷⁰ Like Henry Bidleman Bascom, the southern ministers who pushed through these resolutions underscored the contradictions inherent

⁶⁸ In 1829, the Missouri law regarding the testimony of “Negroes and Mulattos” was as follows: “no negro or mulatto, bond or free, shall be a competent witness, except in pleas of the state against negroes or mulattoes, bond or free, or in civil cases, where negroes and mulattos alone shall be parties.” *Laws of the State of Missouri: revised and digested by the authority of the General Assembly* (St. Louis: E. Charles, 1825), 2:600.

⁶⁹ Lewis Curts, ed., *The General Conferences of the Methodist Episcopal Church from 1792 to 1896* (Cincinnati: Curts and Jennings, 1900) 125. For northern responses to both the civil and the church laws regarding black testimony, see William Goodell, *The American Slave Code in Theory and Practice: Its Distinctive Features shown by Its Statutes, Judicial Decisions, and Illustrative Facts* (New York: American and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society, 1853), 300-301.

⁷⁰ Lucius C. Matlack, *A History of American Slavery and Methodism, from 1780-1849: And History of the Wesleyan Methodist Connection of America* (New York: n.p., 1849), 217.

in their image of the black believer. Black Methodists may not have the same rights as their white brothers and sisters in the church family, and they may have been helpless under church law, but in spirit, ministers reasoned, their souls had the same worth and spiritual potential as any other Christian.

As sectionalism ripped the Church and the nation apart in the 1840s and 1850s, belief in spiritual equality became even more significant. Southern Methodists joined with other evangelicals in rejecting the notion that spiritual equality undermined slavery. But northern critics could not help but point out the inconsistencies of evangelical doctrine and the biblical defense of slavery. The northern Presbyterian minister Albert Barnes questioned the spirit of the South's proslavery principles, arguing that God's law required Christians to love one another, not enslave one another. "One of the most *certain* ways of mitigating the evils of servitude," he contended, "is an arrangement which will show to master and servant, as a practical matter, that they are on an entire equality before God." Churches could demonstrate this, he insisted, in the way they conducted their services and dealt with their congregants. "If [master and servant] may approach the same altar," Barnes suggested, "if they may sit, without distinction, in the same sanctuary, and partake of the same ordinances of religion; if they may be made to feel that they are alike sinners; and if they can be made to realize that God looks as much in favor upon one as the other." Then, he believed, "one of the most important steps is taken effectually to abolish the institution."⁷¹

⁷¹ Albert Barnes, *An Inquiry into the Scriptural Views of Slavery* (Philadelphia: Perkins and Purves, 1846), 130. This antislavery tactic and other northern views on slavery are discussed in Mark A. Noll, "The Bible and Slavery," in *Religion and the American Civil War*, edited by Randall M. Miller, Harry S. Stout, and Charles Regan Wilson (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 44.

Although blacks and whites were segregated in southern Methodist churches, the message they heard contained the same egalitarian spirit that Barnes preached from his northern pulpit.⁷² Southern ministers tried their best to resist the implications of their belief in spiritual equality by pushing black worshipers into the balconies and by reading them passages that commanded obedience. Despite their best efforts, however, they could not deny that their racial outlook did not entirely mesh with mainstream southern beliefs. Methodist preachers such as James O. Andrew may have owned slaves, and like Henry Bidleman Bascom they might have argued that God sanctioned slavery, but none of them could deny that their faith leveled many of the distinctions between master and slave. They still argued that slavery provided social stability to the South and that it could be a benevolent institution if southern patriarchs cared for the material and spiritual wellbeing of their dependents. But because of their core belief in spiritual equality, Methodists crafted a distinct racial perspective that gave authority to the religious slave and denied the irreligious master complete control of his human property.⁷³ Masters might have owned their slaves' bodies, but, according to Methodist doctrine, they could never own their

⁷² There was also segregation in Methodist churches in the North. For instance, the racialized approach to church government and social interaction caused Richard Allen and fellow African American Methodists to break away from the white church to form the Methodist Episcopal Zion Church in Philadelphia, which gained its independence in 1816. Alvaro L. Nieves, *This Side of Heaven: Race, Ethnicity, and Christian Faith* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 119-120.

⁷³ Because of the message of spiritual equality, many slaves and free blacks demanded their own churches and wanted to be free from white oversight. They internalized the notion that their souls were their own and acted on this belief before emancipation. After the Civil War, this mindset led to the separation of black and white Methodist congregations as black believers fought for their own religious space in the Methodist community. For a detailed discussion of black religion in the South after emancipation, see William E. Montgomery, *Under their Own Vine and Fig Tree: The African-American Church in the South, 1865-1900* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1994).

slaves' souls. Similar to the Methodist stance on children's authority in the home, this complicated and paradoxical perspective on slavery combined proslavery ideology with a powerful egalitarian theology. Their perspective both promoted patriarchy while stripping it of its most fundamental component: absolute and unquestioned control.

CONCLUSION

Christianity loves the home fireside and cheers its households with the prospect of final triumph over death and the grave; and as the father and mother look on the smiling little ones around them, while they feel that death shall dissolve the earthly ties which unite them to those loved ones, a voice from the most excellent glory bids their faith and home look up to an eternal reunion in their Father's house above.¹

[T]he great leaders of the Church, who, being knit together as one soul in life, were now to finish together in their sleep of death.²

James O. Andrew died at night while his wife, children, and grandchildren were sleeping. After his second stroke left him partially paralyzed, the bishop knew that he would soon leave his family and friends behind. In the days before his death, he left parting messages for his earthly family and for his spiritual brethren in the Conference. He gave final instructions to the young preachers under his care and advised the other southern Methodist bishops to keep a strict discipline and to “live in peace and harmony, as they have always done.” Then, in the eerie silence of a humid March night in Mobile, Alabama, Andrew blessed all of his loved ones and

¹ 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* (Nashville: Southern Methodist Publishing House, 1883), 265.

² Horace M. Du Bose, *Life of Joshua Soule* (Nashville: Publishing House of the M.E. Church, South, 1911), 281.

told them to go to bed, kissing his young granddaughter goodnight. He died shortly thereafter. A fellow bishop visited his bedside and noticed how the dead man's face looked younger and more at ease than it had in many years. "How beautiful is death!" he exclaimed, observing how Andrew's countenance reflected the "dignity and goodness" of his spirit. The Methodist patriarch whose career had taken him from humble beginnings in rural Georgia, to a position of authority in the Methodist Episcopal Church, and finally to the center of a controversy that caused the division of that Church, thus died in 1871, mourned by both his biological and spiritual children.³

Bishop Andrew's death scene was hardly unique or even unusual. Often southern Methodists chose to memorialize the Church patriarchs with full accounts of their final days. These descriptions contained so much detail (including private dialogue between ministers and their family members) that surely many of them were embellished to add drama or to romanticize the event. Yet such accounts also revealed how leading lights of the Church wielded their authority as religious patriarchs, using their images even in death as an example of spiritual courage and manhood. Reverend John B. McFerrin, for instance, had a painful death, but his biographer made sure to note that he bore the misery like a man, never questioning God's grace and plan. During his illness, he had a private conversation with his son, who had followed his father's example to become a traveling preacher. McFerrin encouraged him to continue in the ministry and to leave for his circuit, assuring him, "If while you are away, John, I should happen to slip off, you know where to find me." On May 10, 1887, his biographer and friend reported, the "great commoner of Southern Methodism" died without complaint or struggle and "burst into

³ Smith, *Life and Letters of Andrew*, 549-550; "Obituary: Bishop James O. Andrew," *New York Times*, Mar 5, 1871.

the mystery and glory of immortality.”⁴ According to the church community left behind, his final moments testified to his character as a minister and the reward that he would receive in heaven.

For ministers such as Andrew and McFerrin who proved the power of their leadership in life, death became their final test of manhood. Bishop Holland T. McTyeire witnessed Joshua Soule’s death in 1867 and commented that the dying minister seemed “[l]ike a ship, brave and stanch, that has weathered the storms and buffeted the waves, the voyage has ended.” He had finished his life of labor and the “night had come when no man can work.”⁵ Soule remained a manly and honorable preacher to the last and his friends and colleagues recognized the authority of his example even in death. Another celebrated preacher, John Wesley Childs realized the extent of his influence in the Church and in 1850, on the verge of death, refused to take a sip of brandy or wine to ease the pain. The doctors even insisted that a drink would keep him alive for a few more hours. But Childs responded, “I am not afraid [to die]; I am in the hands of God.”⁶ He remained obedient to the Methodist Discipline (including its restrictions on alcohol) to the end.

Like his brethren, Henry Bidleman Bascom was reported to have endured his illness with courage; his colleague and close friend Abel Stevenson claimed that the bishop “bore his afflictions throughout with that manly fortitude, patience and resignation to the Divine will, for

⁴ O. P. Fitzgerald, *John B. McFerrin: A Biography* (Nashville: Publishing House of the M.E. Church, South, 1888), 424-425.

⁵ Du Bose, *Life of Soule*, 279-280.

⁶ John Ellis Edwards, *Life of Rev. John Wesley Childs: For Twenty-Three Years an Itinerant Methodist Minister* (Richmond: J. Early, 1853), 250.

which he had so long been pre-eminently distinguished.” With Stevenson and his wife by his side, Bascom calmly breathed his last in September 1850. “Bascom, the prince of pulpit orators, was dead!” his biographer cried, “Death had triumphed over a noble specimen of physical manhood; but grace had enabled a nobler spirit to triumph over death, and had made his dark prison house but a subterranean passage from ‘gloom to glory.’”⁷

When these models of Methodist manhood departed this life and entered the next, they believed that they would meet each other along with their friends and families in heaven. Joseph Travis speculated that Methodist brethren would know each other in the afterlife and would even meet other religious patriarchs: “Indeed, I hope to become acquainted in heaven with many I never knew on earth. It will assuredly add to my joy to say to a Mr. Wesley, a Mr. Fletcher, a Martin Luther, ‘I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear, but now mine eye seeth thee.’”⁸ Even if a believer had never met Church leaders such as Asbury and Soule or Methodist patriarchs like McFerrin and Bascom, they still had their words and their examples to admire and emulate. Through their lives, laymen and ministers alike found influence and inspiration. These tales presented an alternative to steadfast southern patriarchy and offered new prescriptions and practices for a group of southern men who needed an alternative standard of masculinity.

⁷ M. M. Henkle, *The Life of Henry Bidleman Bascom, D. D., LL. D., Late Bishop of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South* (Louisville: Morton and Griswold, 1854), 311, 314.

⁸ Joseph Travis, *Autobiography of the Rev. Joseph Travis, A.M., A member of the Memphis Methodist Conference. Embracing a Succinct History of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South; particularly in part of Western Virginia, the Carolinas, Georgia, Alabama, and Mississippi. With short memoirs of several local preachers, and an address to his friends* (Nashville: E. Stevenson and F. A. Owen, 1856), 220.

Even though they emphasized patriarchal leadership and manhood (ideas with which most white southerners would certainly agree), ministers continued to live outside of mainstream society and culture. These men existed between secular and spiritual worlds, eventually finding an uneasy place in southern society as they encouraged denominational growth in the face of serious cultural challenges. Methodist ministers contributed to and negotiated with mainstream society, sacrificing basic tenets of their faith to become more appealing to potential converts. In the process, these men adopted the language and mentalities of southern patriarchs. They also struggled to balance denominational doctrine and discipline against the cultural pressures that would undermine their faith. The combination of regional social practices and Methodist beliefs led ministers to create their own definitions of correct social behavior. They abstained from traditional masculine pursuits and remained separate from male society, but they also adopted southern attitudes towards slavery and hierarchy. Trapped between two competing masters—the church and southern society—ministers compromised their faith and gradually combined Methodist values with cultural prejudices, giving spiritual force to secular principles.

The development of a distinct Methodist manhood in the South from 1830 to 1860 reveals intense conflict between ethical and behavioral norms. Southern society might deem Methodist ministers as feminine and as unworthy patriarchs because of their inability to provide for their families and their unwillingness to participate in traditional masculine culture. To counter this image, these religious men had to infuse their own lifestyles and rhetoric with secular masculine values. As a group, clergymen followed a specific moral compass as defined by church discipline, which contrasted with the standards of the non-Methodist South. Methodists had to reconcile their theology and doctrines with the social structure of the South, with the demands of patriarchal culture, and with the institution of slavery.

Their shared belief in spiritual equality, the church's moral requirements, and the denomination's disciplinary process clashed with the prevailing mores of the region. If they participated in traditional masculine behavior that was violent or profane, ministers risked punishment by church authorities and could be expelled from the Methodist connection. In spite of these challenges, Methodist preachers sought to maintain their standing as southern patriarchs by creating their own code of honor based on holiness and personal authority. By crafting a viable but separate code of honor and masculine culture, these ministers demonstrated the dynamic created by temporal and spiritual expectations and the potential for diverse gender constructions in a constricted society.

The Methodist Church in the South reflected the ethical shifts brought about by competing religious principles and social practices. Methodist ministers in the 1840s could claim a dual heritage—they were descendants of a church tradition but they were also southern men (with all of the pressures and privileges that entailed). As ministers adopted regional attitudes towards masculinity and patriarchy, they embraced the culture and institutions of the region and struggled to maintain their commitment to Methodist theology. Despite attempts to preserve their Methodist identity, southern ministers became so disconnected from their northern brethren that in 1844 they finally broke away from the national church. This marked an ethical transformation within southern Methodism as the clergy openly adopted proslavery sentiments and condemned the northern church for supporting abolitionism. The rhetoric surrounding the schism indicates not only a sectional divergence over slavery, but also a regional separation over the meaning of ministerial manhood. Southern ministers criticized their northern counterparts for political preaching, even as they employed political rhetoric in their spiritual arguments in support of slavery. This approach (of denouncing politicians but engaging in political debate) continued

into the Civil War and served as a primary method for proving ministerial manhood, the superiority of the southern denomination, and the morality of southern culture.

This ethical shift symbolized an uneasy coming together of spiritual and worldly influences. The discrepancies between religious belief and secular culture are often difficult to overcome, as Methodists in the South readily discovered. Religious leaders (especially evangelical preachers who subscribed to the spiritual equality of all believers) could not promote southern institutions without some rhetorical sleight-of-hand. In their publications and sermons, Methodist ministers revealed a complicated and contradictory worldview that resulted from combining their theology with patriarchal institutions. This amalgamation led to rhetorical inversions of hierarchy, especially in asserting the potential spiritual wisdom of subordinate classes over that of their respective masters. Clergymen told stories of women, slaves, and children overcoming the oppressive or sinful treatment of their husbands, masters, or fathers. Methodist periodicals often encouraged children to disobey or oppose irreligious parents and praised slaves who resisted unsaved masters. These accounts never challenged the slave system or the rule of the patriarch, but they exposed the methods implemented by religious leaders to balance their beliefs with the regional power structure.

Methodist rhetoric and practice revealed a complex discourse surrounding masculinity and hierarchy. At the center of this discourse were questions and concerns over moral behavior, ethics, and gender standards. Although ministers remained separate from male society, they adopted southern male attitudes, such as white supremacy, the defense of slavery, and patriarchal rule, and they applied these ideas to their own lives and rhetoric. Methodist ministers were outsiders who openly supported mainstream mores, often constructing biblical arguments upholding proslavery and patriarchal principles. They thus contributed to the hegemonic social

structure of the region, even as they stood against it. Most of these ministers could not embody these fundamental masculine qualities in their own homes, but nonetheless preached the importance of social order and patriarchal control.

Methodist rhetoric in the late antebellum period simultaneously upheld cultural notions of the subservient status of children, slaves, and women and the potential for these individuals to have more spiritual insight than their patriarchal superiors. In most of these embellished or fictional accounts, the intention was to demonstrate the equality of all believers. Through myth and hyperbole, Methodist writers crafted a complex dialogue that questioned the ultimate power of southern patriarchs while presenting the patriarch as vital to social and religious order. Through their behavior and rhetoric, these ministers shaped and reshaped ethical norms for the religious community by grounding earthly practices in religious principles. Their efforts might not have always been successful, but the attempt to serve two masters—to live up to the expectations of society and the church—ultimately helped define religion in the South.

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