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WHEN WORLDS COLLIDE:
METHODISM AND THE SOUTHERN MIND, 1770-1810

by

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When Methodists first arrived in the South, they were critics of the social order. They preached in public against slavery and counselled in private against slaveholding. They condemned the code of honor and supported pious women and children who defied irreligious patriarchs. In Methodist churches white women played vocal and leading roles, and in service of their religion, they often defied southern gender conventions. African Americans were also prominent and vocal in early Methodist services, and through Methodism they contested racist assumptions and critiqued their masters. Many free black and slave men exhorted, preached, and led classes and congregations.

Methodists condemned the lifestyles and mores of southern elites and promoted an ethic that prized piety over property. By advocating virtues traditionally deemed feminine, opposing slavery, and preaching against wealth, Methodists challenged southern secular values. In their churches, Methodists created a public space where secular rankings of class, gender and, to a lesser extent, race, were set aside and where southerners who were considered by secular society inferior advanced an oppositional world view.

Opponents of the church, especially elite white men, believed their values, ways, and ideals were under assault by the Methodists. Opposition, including denunciations of Methodist doctrine and enthusiasm, patriarchs' physical assaults of Methodist women and children, and mob violence against slave and free black Methodists, bound Methodists
more closely to one another. The church's beliefs that suffering was salutary and that persecution was evidence of true faith sustained its members in a hostile world.

As Methodism evolved from an outcast sect to a respectable denomination, its opposition to gentry custom, gender conventions, and slavery weakened. Because of the church's intensely individualistic focus, its naive optimism about the ability to change hearts and minds, and its failure to see social evils in other than religious terms, Methodists could not sustain their critique of southern society. Nonetheless, for a few brief decades, Methodists promoted a genuinely alternative world view, and their experience illustrates the possibilities and limits of dissent in the Revolutionary and early national South.
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# Table of Contents

Introduction \hspace{10cm} 1

1. Revolutions Civil and Religious: Methodist Beginnings in America \hspace{10cm} 16

2. The Marrow of the Methodist Self: Doctrines, Values, and Practices \hspace{10cm} 53

3. Slaves and Free Blacks in the Church \hspace{10cm} 103

4. The Poverty of Riches: Methodists and Class \hspace{10cm} 155

5. "Mothers in Israel": White Women in the Church \hspace{10cm} 194

6. Slavery, Racism, and the Master-Slave Relationship \hspace{10cm} 251

7. Turning the World Upside Down: The Stakes of the Conflict \hspace{10cm} 301

Epilogue \hspace{10cm} 361

Bibliography \hspace{10cm} 388

Appendix A \hspace{10cm} 411
Introduction

"I will stop you from going to hear these Methodists; they are turning the world upside down and setting people crazy."¹ --Thomas Hinde, to his wife Mary, 1788

Thomas Hinde failed to make good on his threat to keep his wife from Methodism, and later in 1788, his world was indeed turned upside down by the church. Before his conversion, Thomas Hinde was a quintessential Virginia gentryman. Born into privilege in England in 1737, Hinde received training in surgery and medicine in London. Ambitious and proud, he emigrated to Hanover County, Virginia, at the age of thirty, where he married Mary Hubbard and became the commanding patriarch of a wealthy family. In Virginia Thomas Hinde moved in the "gayest circle of society" and lived ostentatiously, extravagantly, and immersed in the culture of honor. Like many well-educated Virginia men, Thomas imbibed the secular spirit of the enlightenment, prided himself on his rationality, and became a "confirmed deist." In the late 1780s, however, the Methodists converted first his daughter Susanna and then his wife, and after his numerous desperate attempts to reassert patriarchal control had miserably failed, finally the doctor himself.²

Methodism disrupted Thomas Hinde's world view and his predominance within his home. Thomas came to have three strong-willed, assertive, and zealous Methodist women in his family. His daughter Susanna was "fearless and undaunted on all occasions," and "possessing naturally a strong mind and great energy," she "became a bold, intrepid, and courageous soldier of the cross." His precocious younger daughter Hannah converted at age eleven and "was so gifted in prayer at that early period of life, as to excite the attention of her friends and strangers." Thomas's wife Mary Hinde, all of the biographers agree, was the family's spiritual head. When the Hindes moved to Kentucky in 1797 and found Methodists there were backsliding, "the old lady, always the more indefatigable and
persevering of the two, now led the way," and organized a local society and arranged for
an itinerant to serve them. Mary was also intrepid in advancing the cause of Methodism
outside her family; she was said to have "carried the war into the enemy's camp." 3

Although he had previously been a man who delighted in "the fascinating allurements of the fashionable society," Thomas Hinde attempted to live by Wesleyan standards after he became a Methodist. Following his conversion he "released a tenant from a pretty considerable rent" on the sole condition that the man open his house for Methodist "preaching and class meeting." 4 Thomas refused to collect his debts, and some said he became benevolent to a fault. When he was paid money for his medical services, "it was likely that he would throw it into the lap of the first female member he passed in reaching home." 5

Hinde's personal transformation is most evident in the Methodist values he adopted after his conversion. Thomas renounced the pride, ostentation, and stature of his class and cultivated instead the Wesleyan posture of humility. As a Methodist, he became known for being "the humblest of the humble," and his son later recalled how the doctor had once compared himself unfavorably to a family pet: "The humble look,' said he, 'of the dog driven out from the room, pierces me to the heart. I envy the dog his humility." 6

Thomas Hinde was merely one of many who were transformed by Methodism in the South. Although the typical Methodist convert was not, like Hinde, a well-educated, elite white man, Hinde's story illustrates the vast gulf between secular southern mores and the Methodist world view. Few southern men, Methodist or not, would have claimed that pride was the ultimate virtue, but rare indeed would be the white man outside evangelical churches who would have envied "the dog his humility." And in an era where women's religious leadership was still extremely controversial, Thomas Hinde had three female leaders in his own household.

This study explores the psychological, social, and intellectual changes that
Methodism made in its early converts and analyzes the confrontations between Methodists and southern society in the years from 1770 to 1810. Methodists in these four decades were often fearless social critics and embraced a world view genuinely at odds with the dominant secular mindset. While evolving and expanding, however, Methodists were changed by their experiences in the South and by their southern converts. Dating the evolution of white southern Methodists away from social criticism and toward social conformity is, like dating all evolutions in ideas and values, a tricky business. This study ends with the year 1810, when clear signs (discussed in the Epilogue) existed that the church had changed in some ways and was changing in others, but it would be erroneous to see this year as an absolute divide.

The sources used in this study are primarily published and unpublished memoirs, journals, and correspondence. Unpublished correspondence, memoirs, and manuscript journals present several interpretative problems. As is common with such sources, they privilege the literate. Literate ministers and lay people often recorded the testimony and life stories of Methodists who could not read or write, as well as their encounters with people outside the church, but these accounts are not without biases. One major bias was the Methodist world view. Although Methodists could be extraordinarily compassionate and caring, they could also be moralistic, self-righteous, and intolerant of other faiths or beliefs. We cannot, for example, take at face value Methodists' claims that this or that man was a "drunk," for their own policy of abstinence from hard liquor colored their view to the point that what they termed a "drunk" might have only been a man who drank. Methodists tended to put things in religious--especially biblical--terms, and so in order to acknowledge their predispositions and biases, we must understand the scriptural conventions within which they interpreted experience.

The many journals of preachers that are extant present special problems. Methodist clergy kept journals in part to record the "rise and progress" of Methodism in
America. Many seem to have believed that their journals would be read by others, some shared their journals with other ministers and lay people, and a few assumed their journals would later be published in some form. James Meacham, to take one example, occasionally addresses a mythical reader in his journal. When he began courting a woman he wished to marry, he put her name in a simple code. Obviously he expected his journal to be read and wished to protect their privacy. Many ministers, to give another example, protected the names of members who violated the rules and the names of non-members as well by using initials or dashes. In addition, we must remember that preachers were very busy men who sometimes recorded events or conversations days after they occurred.  

Preachers had their individual idiosyncrasies as well. They were not always unified in their opinions and attitudes. Jeremiah Norman, for example, tended to be more conservative than his fellow clergymen. Although a majority of ministers were condemnatory of wealth and ostentation, Norman was not, and he even believed that Methodist preachers needed to be more respectful when dealing with the gentry. Norman was more conservative about gender roles and slavery than most of his counterparts, as well. He should not be viewed, therefore, as typical, but his case does show that there existed a range of opinions among the clergy.

White preachers and members were part of the larger Anglo-American world, and they partook of its racial and gender biases. Even antislavery clergymen occasionally made racist remarks, as did Richard Whatcoat when saying of a black preacher: "he speaks well for a Negro." Ministers who championed women's leadership in the church made comments like "women are weak" or referred to women by their husband's first and last names preceded by "Sister." Another consideration is that most of the extant correspondence of lay people was written by wealthier members, and thus the minority of wealthier members is overrepresented in the sources. Conversely, preachers, most of whom came from working class or yeoman families, were predisposed to believe wealth
was equivalent to ungodliness, and thus we must read their comments about elites with this in mind. The more we understand the Methodist world view and the prejudices of its literate members, the better able we are to interpret their comments.

Published sources present an even greater interpretative challenge. Because of the diligence of historians such as Robert Drew Simpson and Edwin Schell, we know that the published memoirs of Freeborn Garrettson and Francis Asbury were edited in such a way as to minimize conflicts over slavery and race relations between Methodists and their opponents. Moreover, published antebellum church histories erroneously attribute early Methodist antislavery to the overzealousness of "the English preachers." In fact, the most zealous and influential antislavery ministers were men such as James Meacham, southern-born and bred, and Freeborn Garrettson, son of a Maryland slave owner and, before his conversion, a slaveholder himself. I have therefore been much more cautious in using published sources to evaluate the actions of ministers and members on this front. Published memoirs also tend to glorify the clergy, leave out names of people being criticized, and minimize conflicts between Methodists. Some published histories, written when the church was no longer a suspect and despised sect, tried to downplay the plebian origins of their church by overstressing the contributions of the minority of elite members.

One of my findings reinforces the historians' conceit that written histories shape the future by re-inventing the past. After consulting manuscript sources and correspondence, I discovered that the memoirs and histories published by the church not only obscured some of the attacks on slavery but obscured the radicalism of early Methodist women as well. One church historian writing in 1909 made, for example, the claim that in early Methodism, women "were expected, even required, to 'keep silence in the churches,'" a falsehood belied both in manuscript sources and in the author's own pages.

Published sources are critical to understanding the transformation of Methodism, however, precisely because of these biases and revisions. Beginning slowly in the era
covered in this study (1770-1810) and increasing in intensity in the antebellum years, Methodists tried to deny the class composition of the early church and its earlier radicalism on slavery and gender roles. Before the turn of the century, the efforts to obscure were largely defensive; the church was under attack because of its antislavery views, its expanded public roles for women, and its lower-class majority.

In later antebellum years the effort to revise the Methodist past coincided with the transformation of the southern wing of the church into a consciously regionalized body that defended southern institutions. How far some ministers had strayed from their predecessors can be seen in a series of resolutions on slavery passed in Sparta circuit, Georgia, in 1843. Sparta ministers claimed that slavery often resulted in "moral good" to slaves, that slavery was "allowable" by the Bible, and that abolition would result in "moral evil." Even more remarkable were their assertions that slavery came into America through the "wickedness and cupidity of northern traders," and that slaves, "indolent by nature," would if freed "steal, and rob, and murder" until "their race would...become extinct." Precious few--if any--ministers of the early church would have agreed with these statements, yet by 1843 a majority in Sparta had assented to them. By reinventing the past, antebellum southern Methodists obscured the radicalism of their predecessors and blurred the distance between their views and those of the founders. 15

Although I have focussed in these pages on Methodists in the South, my analysis should not always be read as making exclusive claims for southern Methodists. Some of the values and conflicts described herein were unique neither to the region nor the sect. Battles between husbands and wives over religion, for example, were commonly reported by northern Methodists, American Baptists, and others. Methodists were not alone in their beliefs about the salutary effects of suffering, either. Southern Methodists were certainly not the first people to be condemned for their enthusiasm, and they were not the last. And Methodists did not stand alone in their opposition to slavery. 16
This study is not, however, a history of Methodism in the South, comprehensive or otherwise. For important events in denominational history, such as the Fluvanna conference and the O'Kelly or Hammet schisms, readers should look elsewhere. This study does not purport to make exhaustive claims about southern Methodists or to gloss over subregional variations among southern Methodists. The experiences of Methodists in Charleston, South Carolina, were not identical to the experiences of Methodists in frontier Kentucky, and at times I have been explicit about these variations within the region. The strength of Methodism in Delaware, as historians of Delaware remind us, set that state apart from its neighbors in the Revolutionary and post-war era.17

There are several reasons why, despite these warnings, a study of one sect in one region is valuable. The Methodist system of itinerancy--rotating ministers as frequently as every six months and by 1810 at least every two years--meant that a preacher like Thomas Morrell, who spent most of his career in New Jersey and points North, served a tour in Charleston. Many preachers, such as Freeborn Garrettson, Francis Asbury, Richard Whatcoat, John Kobler, Jesse Lee, and Benjamin Lakin, were not limited to a southern ministry, and worked, as did Garrettson and Lee, in New England, or as did Kobler and Lakin, in the Old Northwest, or as did Asbury and Whatcoat, throughout North America.

Because of this rotation system, ministers were often thrust into unfamiliar neighborhoods, and on their first rounds they made note in their journals of the state of Methodism in the area. They based this judgment not on local opinions but on their previous experiences, the church's book of Discipline (which outlined how Methodists should be), and the admonitions of their superiors in the ministry. Methodists everywhere did not behave the same, but itinerants tried to exact some degree of conformity to their preconceived notions and the ideals laid down in the doctrinal literature. They considered their church as transcending city, county, state, and national boundaries.

The rotation of ministers and their predisposition to keep journals allows
modern-day analysts to make comparisons between Methodists in various areas. By far the largest issue that divided some Methodists from others was slavery, with a chasm between those who owned slaves and those who did not and between those who were slaves and those who were not. Initially, slavery was not a regional but a continental institution. But as slavery became increasingly regionalized, Methodists themselves—for reasons we will discuss in subsequent pages—became more regionally polarized.

A regional analysis enables us to see common threads in the experiences of Methodists. Conflict between Methodist wives and non-Methodist husbands, Methodist slaves and non-Methodist masters, Methodist children and non-Methodist parents, for example, was common throughout the region. In plantation belts, of course, different resources could be mobilized against Methodist slaves than could be in cities or on the western frontier. But the persistence of conflicts within households between "superiors" and "subordinates" in diverse localities alerts us to look for those values within Methodism that first, might encourage a "subordinate" to challenge a "superior" and second, might provoke reaction by a "superior" against a dissenting "subordinate."

Pioneering work by many historians enables us to compare Methodist values with those of other southerners. Studies by T. H. Breen, Edmund Morgan, Lacy Ford, Jr., Kenneth Greenberg, Stephanie McCurry, and J. William Harris, for example, have shown that white men of the South tied their own freedom and independence to the enslavement of blacks and dependence of women and slaves. Class conflict between white men was muted by their common mastery over their households and dependents. 18

White men also had in common, as Bertram Wyatt-Brown and others have shown, a code of honor. Although the rudiments of the code varied by class, it, too, revolved around each white man's ability to govern his own affairs free from outside interference. The code of honor emphasized outward appearances and the evaluations of others, and not a man's inner sense of himself. 19
Methodism challenged these southern values and practices on a number of levels. Methodists cultivated an inner-directed morality in opposition to the other-directed ethic of honor. Methodists prized meekness, humility, and docility in a society where meekness, humility, and docility were associated with slaves, women, the poor, and children. They ranked people by their piety and holiness rather than by their race, gender, class, or status. They refused to show deference where, by secular standards, deference was due. Although they did not mount a systemic assault against patriarchy, they did not accept patriarchal authority unquestioningly. Methodism sustained and bolstered pious men, women, and children who were in conflict with impious patriarchs.

For a few decades, Methodists challenged slavery as well. Their attack ebbed and flowed, they alternately advanced and retreated, and they frequently changed their strategy, but nonetheless they were the most persistent and vocal critics of slavery among the evangelical sects; and among all religious groups, were second only to Quakers in their opposition to human bondage. Unlike the Quakers, however, Methodists actively recruited slave and free black members, a more indirect, but no less real, attack on slavery. Many disputes between Methodists and their opponents revolved around this more implicit challenge to slavery, for whites outside the church were frightened that a sect so identified in their minds with antislavery would have such influence on slaves and free blacks. Conversely, non-Methodist whites were equally horrified by the influence blacks, especially black male preachers and exhorters, had within the church, particularly over white women.

One of the problems that historians of the post-revolutionary South face is the temptation to read backwards from the Civil War, and this study frequently succumbs to that temptation. Yet it is equally clear that early southern Methodists were qualitatively different from their antebellum successors. In the church's first decades, its members were cultural critics--not in response to southern secular mores, but as a result of their
Wesleyan heritage. Their notions of women's proper roles were often at odds with dominant southern views, for Methodists promoted women's vocal participation in public spaces and women's religious leadership. They proffered an ideal of manhood vastly at odds with secular norms. Their views about hierarchy differed radically from secular views, for they denied that wealth, power, and status were measures of excellence.

Early Methodism provided an alternative to the dominant southern world view. Methodists' failure to sustain their critique of southern values, their gradual modification of their oppositional world view to a more accommodationist one, and their growing acceptance of and later acquiescence to slavery and patriarchy, does not alter this fact.

Several historians have emphasized how evangelicals differed from other southerners. Rhys Isaac's insightful study of Virginia Baptists explored one important aspect of this challenge--evangelical attacks on gentry customs, mores, and habits. As Isaac shows, Baptists prized humility and in their churches valued piety over property, status, and wealth. Donald Mathews's classic study of southern religion showed how attitudes toward slavery and black converts were equally important in dividing evangelicals from other southerners.20

The role of gender and women in early southern evangelicalism has been less explored than the issue of slavery. Mathews perceptively raised the issue of women and gender conflict in his work, but few, with notable exceptions like Jean Friedman and Richard Rankin, have followed his lead. But along with class, race, and slavery, gender was a pivotal factor in the conflicts over religion and religious authority in the Revolutionary and early national South.21

Southern evangelical women and the gender conflicts that evangelicalism provoked, however, cannot be understood apart from the other conflicts that arose over values, race, class, and slavery. We need a general study of eighteenth-century evangelicals that focuses exclusively on women and gender conflicts, but this is not that
study. Although one chapter focuses exclusively on white women and gender conflicts, I have integrated women into all aspects of this work. Women were not concerned solely with gender-specific issues. They were also the bearers of the word, keepers of doctrine, and for black women consistently and white women occasionally, the defenders of the rights of slaves. To omit women from an analysis of Methodist doctrines or practices would be more than un-inclusive, it would be historically inaccurate.

A word must be said about the nature of power. Historians, either implicitly or explicitly, have assumed that power in early southern churches flowed from the ministers (assumed to be the most powerful) down in ever-diluted fashion to its parishioners. The more I progressed in my study the more inadequate this conceptualization became. The post-Revolutionary era witnessed fierce competition for converts between the sects, denominations, and various forms of non-church belief. After the disestablishment of the Church of England, church membership became voluntary and financial support of southern churches became voluntary as well.

Methodist ministers came to America because Methodist immigrants in the colonies had requested that John Wesley send them. As the first Methodist itinerants fanned out into the South, they had no church buildings, no licenses to marry (a source of potential income), no authority to baptize or administer the sacrament, and no money or land in their "treasury." When itinerants came into a new neighborhood, they most often held services in private homes of men and women who volunteered to host such services. Itinerants' salaries were too meager to support them without donations of free food, lodging, and services (like shoeing horses and tailoring). If no doors were opened to them, circuit riders would move on to neighborhoods where they were more welcome. On the southern and western frontier, the situation was often more precarious, for even men and women who were supportive of the church were frequently unable to contribute much towards its ministers upkeep.
The power that these men had lay primarily in their ability to persuade others—to reach their audiences, to change the hearts and minds of their listeners, to keep their members together and zealous. When men and women became Methodists, they voluntarily ceded religious disciplinary authority to lay and clerical leaders, but at any time they could withdraw from the church. Had the pews not been filled, the moneys not been given, the homes not been opened, and donations in kind not been made, the church would have died. Ultimately, then, the power of Methodism resided in its lay membership.

Besides the voluntary nature of the church, there are other reasons to see power as more diffuse than has been previously thought. For one, the itinerant system was only one part of the church administration. Local lay leaders--class leaders, exhorters, local preachers, and unofficial but no less influential pious men and women who acted in these roles from time to time--ran the church when itinerants were on their rounds. These leaders were black and white, male and female, and they as much as the itinerants were responsible for keeping the church alive and thriving. Often the most powerful member of a local society--the one who commanded the most influence and respect--was a woman.

Secondly, the evangelistic nature of Methodism meant that many conversions were initiated by ordinary lay men and women. Methodists were relentless in pressing, or more accurately hounding, their relatives, friends, and strangers to convert. Methodists remembered their conversions and recited the circumstances of them throughout their lives in the church, testimony that reinforced the role of all members in proselytizing.

Third, Methodists believed in the possibility of direct and individual revelation from God. God could strike believers unconscious, speak to them via dreams, visions, or signs, and direct converts in actions to take or avoid. Preachers are best known for believing themselves under divine inspiration, but lay men and women all across the South reported similar interaction with God. Letters and memoirs of lay men and women show how thoroughly immersed most of them were in Methodist doctrine and culture, and how
supernatural their faith was. For all of these reasons, power was not concentrated in the hands of ministers, much less in those of stewards or trustees. If we want to understand Methodism, we must try to recover the views of its members.

The Revolution ushered in a climate where many inherited traditions and "truths" could be questioned. The success of Methodism in the post-war era is one indication that dissent and change were possible in such a climate. But the growth of evangelicalism was not merely a product of the Revolution; it constituted a revolution in itself.

To understand the multifaceted aspects of this revolution, I have organized this work topically rather than chronologically. We will first examine the earliest American Methodists and their Wesleyan heritage and explore the unique conflicts between Methodists and their opponents that arose before and during the revolutionary war. Next we will analyze the inner world of converts, for without an understanding of the beliefs, psychology, and mentality of Methodists, we cannot hope to understand their response to conflicts or their critics' response to them. Core values and doctrines made Methodists who they were and united them despite social, economic, racial, and gender differences.

Equally important, however, were how race, gender, and class intersected with Methodism and we will also explore the church's attitudes, converts' behaviors, and the unique concerns of poor, black, and white female Methodists. The central moral conflict in the post-war era--the conflict over slavery--is also pivotal. The moral threshold that divided both antislavery and proslavery Methodists also divided most Methodists and other southerners in their attitudes toward racism, slavery, and the master-slave relationship. Finally, we will focus directly on the collision of world views between Methodists and their opponents, and integrate the battles over values, race, class, gender, and slavery as well as analyze the response of critics to the church. In closing, we will suggest how and why the church had by 1810 already begun to change, as well as look at the implications of these changes for subsequent southern history.
Endnotes

8. James Meacham Papers, Special Collections, Duke University, Durham, North Carolina.
14. Samuel W. Williams, *Pictures of Early Methodism in Ohio* (Cincinnati: Jennings and Graham, 1909), 98. But Williams describes numerous early Methodist women who were "silent" neither in church services on the eastern seaboard nor in services they attended after emigrating to Ohio. See 109, 111-12, 121.
15. Charles Elliott, *History of the Great Secession from the Methodist Episcopal Church in the Year 1845, Eventuating in the Organization of the New Church, Entitled the "Methodist Episcopal Church, South."* (Cincinnati: Swormstedt & Poe, 1855), 266.


Chapter 1:

Revolutions Civil and Religious: Methodist Beginnings

A failed and persecuted Irish farmer and a bold, pious woman are credited with founding Methodism in America, a fact less coincidental than it would first appear. Robert Strawbridge, a Methodist who fled his native Ulster because of religious persecution, emigrated to America in 1760, settling on a farm near Baltimore, Maryland. Strawbridge was not successful "as a man of business;" his farm, "had it not been for the toil of his wife and the charity of his neighbors, would have failed to keep himself and family from want." Better at preaching than farming, Strawbridge soon after his arrival in Maryland raised a small society of Methodists who met and worshipped at his home.1

Also in 1760, another immigrant band of British Methodists landed in New York. This group forsook Wesleyan ethics for a few years. Around 1765, one of them, Barbara Heck, "a woman of piety, persistence, and genius for affairs" encountered her male friends and relatives playing cards. Heck was outraged at their irreligion, and "seized the cards, threw them into the fire, and gave her friends a solemn warning against sin." Fearful that she and her friends were on the road to hell, she entreated her cousin, Philip Embury, who had been a Methodist preacher in England, to begin holding services. Word soon spread that Embury's home was the scene of strange goings-on, where "women often prayed, and even stood up and made speeches just like the men;" Heck was likely one of these women. She remained a leading force in this church; it was she, for instance, who directed the male members to build their first meeting house.2

To write about Methodist beginnings in America (a past northern and southern Methodists shared) is to enter a world of both fact and myth. Although the stories seem to be substantially factual, myth is still the more important of the two. The stories that
groups tell about themselves help order and explain experience, and help shape the future. The primary belief shaping Methodists' stories of their beginnings was that of the Providential course of history. All past and present time was oriented to the end time—the second coming of Christ on earth.³

Unlike the Puritans, however, the Methodists had no special place for the New World in their Providential course of history, at least not when they first arrived. The reasons for this are many, but primary among them was their success in England, success they merely hoped to duplicate in the colonies.⁴ Francis Asbury, the minister most responsible for church growth in America, had no sense of the New World as a "city upon a hill." Two weeks into his voyage from England in 1771, he remarked in his diary that he was going to the New World to "live to God, and bring others so to do." Asbury saw himself as a missionary, and he was not overconfident: "The people God owns in England, are the Methodists. The doctrines they preach, and the discipline they enforce, are, I believe, the purest of any people now in the world...If God does not acknowledge me in America, I will soon return to England."⁵

By end of the Revolutionary war, Asbury had come around to a more typically American Protestant opinion. In 1783, he wrote to an English minister: "O America! America! it certainly will be the glory of the world for religion!"⁶ His thoroughly religious sense of American mission, however, still set him apart from ministers of other sects, who were now hoping America would spread both Protestant Christianity and revolution to the world.⁷ Though their visions of God's plan were somewhat different, Methodists shared with other Protestants a view that history was the working out of God's will.

Another component in Methodist myth-making was the lurking fear of decline. This arose in large part from the doctrinal belief that people could fall from grace, that even after conversion it was possible to "backslide" into such a state that one's sins were no longer forgiven. Also contributing to this persistent fear was the Methodists' stark
division of life into "the worldly" and "the godly." Preachers constantly warned
Methodists to "be ye separate" from the world, and saw the world as a force of great evil.
Satan interfered, in Methodist views, in human affairs, yet one gets the distinct impression
that Satan was never as powerful an enemy as the world, or perhaps, he personified the
dangers of the world. The fear of spiritual decline was a central part of American
Methodists' founding myth--witness the fate of Barbara Heck's male compatriots. Only
watchfulness, piety, and community could help members guard against decline.8

A third, and perhaps the most important, part of Methodism's founding myth was
the sense of being a despised, outcast group. R. Laurence Moore has argued that
"outsiderhood is a characteristic way of inventing one's Americanness;"9 if so, Methodists
were from their inception quintessentially American. Methodists' sense of themselves as
outsiders was nourished by their longing for separation from the world, their opponents'
derisive comments, and from the composition of their membership. The stories of
Strawbridge and Heck in this sense are instructive. In admiring a failed farmer and an
outspoken woman, Methodists identified themselves as a popular movement, and
reiterated their central belief that God's ranking and ways were not the same as man's.
Women and the poor brought Methodism to America.

There was a tendency by writers of American Methodism's founding myths,
however, to shift the focus of the story away from lay people and to ministers once
Wesley's missionaries arrived. The circuit rider became the protagonist, and a glorious
one he made. Emulating Christ in his poverty, travels, persecution, and suffering, the lone
itinerant spread salvation to the far reaches of the New World--it reads, as it perhaps was
intended to, like an American gospel or a religious version of the rugged frontiersman.

A. Gregory Schneider, in his recent study of nineteenth century Ohio Valley
Methodists, rightfully points out the didactic nature of the circuit rider's life. He sees the
itinerant as an anti-hero of the secular world, a man without property, status, dependents,
and honor. Clergy were moral exemplars who embodied the Methodist ideal. Later Methodist historians could not thoroughly masculinize these heroes; tears, love, and embraces were all too common a part of the circuit riders' life.

The first official history of Methodism, written by preacher Jesse Lee in 1810, bears out Schneider's analysis. Lee wrote poignantly of the trials and tribulations of the early preachers, even as he concentrated on a Biblical-style chronicle of the places and numbers added to the church in each successive year. What Lee left out, however, was just as important. Lee rarely mentioned women by name in his Short History. Blacks, when mentioned, appear as a nonindividuated mass in the audience or as the objects of church action on slavery.

The narrative movement in early Methodists' histories from Barbara Heck to the circuit rider is symptomatic of many things. Most important is the effort to put the church's development in the hands of its ministers. We, as critical readers, must resist this effort. Methodism was, throughout most of its history in America, a lay movement. Many of the transformations that took place in the church were initiated by members. This is not to say that ministers were unimportant. They were the living models of Methodism. Their sacrifices and heroism inspired others and their organizational and evangelistic skills were critical to church growth. Yet their journals and letters written during this period prove beyond a doubt how dependent they were on the membership.

The itinerant system, a Methodist innovation, enabled clergy to reach a wider audience than other sects. Methodists in the Revolutionary and early national period rarely "stationed" a minister in one congregation. The few preachers who were unable to travel or who had married, were given what Methodists called a "station" that encompassed multiple "societies" (the Methodist term for congregations). Itinerants were frequently rotated between different circuits; in the eighteenth century it was common for preachers to serve both above and below the Mason Dixon line during their careers.
The itinerant system served multiple purposes. First, through it preachers shared the wealth—no preacher was stuck for very long in a poor area. Second, it inhibited alliances between clergy and particular members. In Methodist views, the message and church discipline could be kept purer without such alliances. Third, although the itinerancy vastly increased the amount of people the church could reach, the system also prohibited clergymen from being present in every congregation each week. While preachers were on their rounds, laymen and laywomen carried on the church.

In numerous ways, these first American groups resembled their British forerunners, although Methodism began in a more auspicious setting in the mother country. John Wesley and some of his college friends began to hold special prayer meetings and Bible studies at Oxford. Influenced by Moravian pietism on his earlier trips to America and Germany, Wesley felt that all Christians needed to experience conversion, and then lead a pristine and introspective life aimed at perfection. Because of their strict self-monitoring, he and his followers were derisively labelled "Methodistic." Wesley's small group grew and became a splinter movement in the Church of England, although he never considered Methodism as a separate church.12

Wesley was most successful with women and the working classes and British Methodists were proud of their humble origins. They too had poor heroes and brave heroines in their founding myths, myths which in time became part of the American Methodist story.13 Susanna Wesley, for example, as Linda Kerber has recently argued, was a key figure in Methodism's "mythic past."14 Other women and humble heroes abounded in Anglo-American Methodist mythology.15

Women and the lower classes flocked to the American church as they had the British. But a third group became a key part of the pioneer societies in the New World. In Maryland and New York, the first Methodist congregations had black members—both slave and free. Strawbridge's efforts in Maryland "became the center of attraction to large
numbers of people, both white and black." Mary Switzer and Jacob Toogood were among Strawbridge's black converts. In New York, Betty, the slave of Barbara Heck, and Peter Williams, the slave of a tobacconist, were two of the founding members.

Black New York Methodists contributed money to help build the first church. A sister society formed from this group on Long Island around 1768, and after six months, its members numbered twenty-four, "nearly half of them whites--the rest [N]egroes." Methodism was born in America as a biracial church.

Methodism was also born as a lay movement. Wesley's decision to send missionaries to America came largely because colonists wrote urging him to do so. This pattern would be oft repeated in America, with men and women who had moved west entreating the church to send preachers among them.

Additionally, Methodism came to America with an ascetic ethic and an emotional, participatory style of worship. Although Methodist values and practices had detractors across the colonies, in the South religion, hierarchy, and class combined in a potentially explosive way. Much like the Separate Baptists who preceded them, Methodists held values that sharply contrasted with those of the ruling elite. Rhys Isaac has persuasively shown how by the eve of the Revolution, the battle between the gentry and the New Lights in Virginia had resulted in two largely antithetical and competing world views.

In some ways, Methodism can be said to have entered this setting on the side of the Baptists. Like Baptists, Methodists considered a conversion experience a prerequisite for membership. In conversion, the individual recognized his or her prior sinful life and unworthiness of redemption (termed conviction), sought revelation of God's grace (mourning or seeking), and in a typically dramatic and eventful manner, received evidence that their sins had been pardoned (conversion).

Also like Baptists, Methodists put subjective experience at the center of their beliefs, which again differentiated them from Anglicans. Rhys Isaac argues that Anglicans
drew spiritual strength and sustenance from the shared recital of prayers and liturgy. There was no place in Anglican worship for members to relate subjective experience. Rituals, repetitious and communal, created for Anglicans a sense of "we," while the centrality of conversion and importance of individual testimony in evangelical churches stressed a sense of "I." We need only contrast the differing ways people joined the church. Potential Anglicans were catechized, taught a shared curriculum of doctrine in question and answer form. To become a Methodist or Baptist, the individual needed to give unique (albeit with conventional aspects) testimony of his or her conversion.23

Methodists had a strict set of rules for members and disciplined those who deviated, but unlike the Baptists, whose members decided cases and punishments, Methodist lay and clerical leaders most often executed discipline. Occasionally these leaders polled members on a case; more frequently the preacher or lay leader took whatever action he or she deemed appropriate. Still, the ascetic Methodist ethic more closely resembled that of the Baptists than that of the Anglicans; both sects stressed a sharp division between their churches and the "world."

In another sense, however, Methodism offered a third alternative (and if we consider Presbyterians and smaller sects, one of many alternatives) to the colonists. Methodists, like Anglicans, were Arminians, while New Light Baptists were predestinarians. In Methodist views, salvation was open to all, not just to an elected minority. In practice it seems that by the early nineteenth century New Lights preached and lived an Arminian gospel. Methodists, however, espoused an Arminian doctrine and lived an Arminian gospel, and thus never had to reconcile, as did Baptists during the Great Revival, the apparent contradiction between aggressive revivalism and predestination.24

If we may judge solely by the words of the Methodists, doctrine was critically important. Methodism did not allow congregational leeway in interpreting the scriptures, thus there was remarkable unanimity among Methodists on doctrinal issues. Standard
texts by theologians such as John Wesley and John Fletcher provided the basis of Methodist Bible interpretation. Most clergy knew and used the same arguments on the most controversial issues--free will, falling from grace, and sanctification. Laypeople too knew these arguments and spoke with authority on doctrinal issues.

Although Methodists did sometimes cooperate with Baptists, Congregationalists, and Presbyterians in the colonial and war years, they considered themselves opponents of Calvinism, and were quick to note when their competitors' sermons even hinted at Calvinist dogma. Methodists claimed the doctrine of predestination frequently led to intense psychological despair--occasionally causing suicide, some claimed--as people fretted over whether or not they were elected. By contrast, they painted the doctrine of assurance as comforting and calming. If God had foreordained who would be saved, Methodists claimed, then there was no reason to lead a moral life.25

It may have been the case, as Donald Mathews has argued, that Methodists were not theologically oriented, and as he implies, not theologically sophisticated.26 They, for example, often caricatured the doctrine of predestination. Methodist preacher Thomas Ware made a typical attack in his memoirs. He told of a young man raised a Presbyterian who was caught by his father and his minister playing cards on a Sunday. The two "sharply rebuked" him for his conduct, but the young offender "boldly took refuge under the doctrine taught him from the pulpit," telling the minister that his crime was "from all eternity decreed."27 Such a story bears none of the subtlety of eighteenth century Calvinist theologians' views on agency and responsibility.

Still, we may ask whether Ware's simplistic treatment of Calvinism might have corresponded more to popular, if not learned theological, views. Just because the Methodists were largely unsophisticated in their versions of Calvinism and Arminianism does not mean that they had not seized on the essential difference between the two in the
popular mind. Their painting of predestinarian views in such stark terms illustrates how
critical and wide was their sense of difference between Methodist and Calvinist doctrine.

During the Great Revival, these doctrinal differences became muted. Baptists,
Methodists, and Congregationalists found it difficult to reconcile revival means with
predestinarian theology. As John B. Boles, Donald Mathews, and Paul Johnson have all
pointed out, the message of nineteenth-century revivalists was essentially Arminian. 28
Yet it must be remembered that it was the Baptists and Presbyterians who moved toward
Arminianism in these years. The Methodists had no leaning to do.

A second and less explored doctrinal difference also set the Methodists apart, a
more crucial difference than approval of infant baptism--Methodists believed that converts
could fall from grace. This put them at odds not only with predestinarians but also with
Anglicans, who by all accounts seemed to have believed that attendance at church,
obeisence (but not to excess) to God, and taking the sacraments were enough to merit
believers' salvation. Thus while with one hand the Methodists offered the assurance and
psychological certainty that humans were the masters of their eternal fate, they with the
other hand proffered a stern and demanding God that could revoke a blessing if a believer
failed to meet his standards. We will later explore in detail the implications of the "falling
from grace" doctrine for the Methodist psyche.

A final difference between Methodism and its main Protestant competitors was the
Methodist belief that converts could achieve the "second blessing" of "sanctification";
perfection was possible on earth. Sanctification was, like conversion, primarily a
subjective, intense experience with God--with a twist. The authenticity of conversion was
adjudged by the persuasiveness and vividness of the convert's oral testimony; sanctification
was in the end deemed authentic when the convert lived a perfect life. This doctrine also
met with much opposition by free will and predestinarian sects alike. 29
Methodism had other unique features. One was the class meeting. Classes were groups of half a dozen to several dozen people who met weekly. The class leader examined each member in turn, inquiring about their spiritual trials and triumphs, and disciplining or offering comfort as the case dictated. Another was the love feast, a special service usually conducted on Sunday before worship. Bread and water were served while members "testified"—that is told some personal spiritual story. Love feasts, like classes, were usually closed to non-members. With rituals such as these, the Methodists created strong, cohesive, and supportive communities of believers, creating out of many "I"s the "we." During their years as an outcast sect, these gatherings were critically important, for they reinforced the separation of Methodists from the world, and spiritually buttressed those members who faced the most opposition from family and friends. 

Methodists arrived in the colonies as political tensions with England were reaching a crescendo. Wesley's first missionaries were in a nebulous position. Methodism was not an independent church, but instead a reform movement within the Church of England. No Methodist missionary had been ordained by the King's church, and thus Methodists turned to Anglican clergy for communion, baptism, and marriages.

Methodist loyalties to the Anglican church in America were not strong, however. In the South, some evangelical Anglicans, most notably Deveraux Jarratt and Charles Pettigrew, for a time welcomed the Methodist itinerants, their message, and their methods. In parishes where Church of England ministers were friendly to Wesley's followers, a spirit of genuine ecumenism seems to have prevailed, at least until the Methodists officially formed a separate church. But hostility was the more common response of Anglican parsons toward the unlettered itinerants. Methodist clergy, sometimes unintentionally, sometimes deliberately, antagonized established ministers. Methodists believed most priests were unconverted. They disapproved of parsons' lifestyles and their cozy relationships with the wealthy. They found Anglican clergy guilty of the sin of
"formalism," a term that encompassed liturgical services, rote learning of the Bible, slow singing, sermons or prayers delivered from a written text, and in general, a focus on something other than experiential religion. Thus although American Methodists were technically Anglicans, they were often Anglicans in name only.  

While nominal Anglicanism and ties to founder John Wesley and his British followers gave an English cast to American Methodism, in the New World the church was also influenced by colonial American traditions. During the years of the Revolution, a number of American-born men entered the ministry, and these men, like their followers, were steeped in Revolutionary ideology. Russell Richey has shown that Methodism was infused with the language of republicanism. American born clergy readily shifted between religious and republican idioms, in part because the concerns of the two discourses were similar. As Rhys Isaac has persuasively argued, evangelicals shared with revolutionaries a fear of corruption and a sense that extravagance, profligacy, and immorality characterized their society. Still, for Wesleyans, there was not ultimately a fusion of religion and republicanism; the Methodists did not espouse a civil religion. 

Thomas Ware's experience is once again enlightening. Born in America in 1758, Ware came of age during the crisis. He praised Patrick Henry's speeches "in defiance of the sovereign who was endeavouring to crush us" and believed the colonials "justified in resisting [the British government], and throwing off the yoke." Filled with patriotic fervor, Ware joined the continental army. He was convinced that if the rebellion were victorious, "tyranny and oppression would be overthrown throughout the world." 

Although Ware believed, as he put it, in "the justness of our cause in the sight of Heaven," he did not further meld providence and the war. After he recovered from a debilitating bout of camp fever that followed him into civilian life, Ware turned his thoughts to God. Hearing of the victory at Trenton, he wrote:
From this time I considered my country safe, nor ever after sickened at the thought of wearing the chains of civil bondage. But alas! I wore chains infinitely more galling than any ever forged by an earthly tyrant. My soul was in bondage to sin. Civil freedom I thought I understood, and gloried much in it. But the perfect law of liberty, promulgated by Jesus Christ the Son of God, I understood not.

Though Ware employed the language of the Revolution to describe his spiritual quest, he kept the sharp Methodist division between the divine and earthly realms. And significantly, Ware prized soul liberty above civil liberty. 35

As political language and ideas influenced the sacred, so did religious values and language influence the secular. The meaning of "virtue," for example, changed during the Revolutionary era. Virtue in late colonial America had come to be associated, as Ruth Bloch argues, with civic participation. White male freeholders, colonials believed, should keep vigilant watch over government and cast their votes for leaders who were themselves virtuous. During the war, this ideal was further wed to masculinity through emphasis on martial valor. But by the 1780s and 1790s, another definition of virtue, one associated with women, the home, and Christian piety, became predominant. 36

Methodists participated in the revival of the notion of private Christian virtue. Since the world was corrupt, so too could be public life. Additionally, the pacifism of many Methodist men denied them martial virtue, but the self-denial required by the church enabled all to exercise virtue in private life. When Methodists did link public and private virtue, the stress was on the private. In March of 1777, preacher John Littlejohn chanced on a tavern where people were dancing and playing cards. He first proffered religious reasons for them to desist, but to a stubborn group of card playing men he resorted to a blend of patriotism and religion: "I reminded them of the Country's being at War of the battle of Bunker Hill and West Plains, saying your Fathers, Brothers or Sons have moistened the soil of the Country with their own Blood, and you are bringing the
vengeance of God upon your selves and your Country." Personal Christian virtue, in Littlejohn's mind, could sway the outcome of battles. 37

For most Methodist preachers, though, the Revolutionary War was not an opportunity to exercise virtue, but a distraction from God. Because Methodist laymen and women who lived through the war followed battles and events closely, clergy frequently complained that members were so preoccupied with the war that they had lost sight of God. Francis Asbury noted in 1776 how "many had so imbibed a martial spirit that they had lost the spirit of pure and undefiled religion." 38

Battles remained on the periphery of ministers' consciousness. Although in manuscript journals preachers occasionally noted war news or spoke of refugees and want, the center of their lives was evangelism. When they were threatened by one of the armies, or when one of their members was jailed for refusing to bear arms, they mentioned the war. Yet for the most part this pivotal event was for them decidedly secondary. One reason this was so was that ministers avoided battle areas. The overriding reason for the secondary status of the war was that their primary business was saving souls. Thus the war became almost a nuisance, for it increased death and suffering without a concomitant increase in access to souls. For Methodists, it seemed especially sad that so many would die before they had an opportunity to convert. 39

Methodist reluctance to link the Revolution with their church was doubtless influenced by their precarious position in America. The leaders of the church during the war were Wesley's missionaries, and they were Englishmen, recent immigrants whose loyalties were assumed to lie with the British. They were also suspect because of their itinerating. Having no settled parishes, circuit riders were in a position to spread war news, and perhaps, critical military information.

During the war, the Methodists would face some of the fiercest opposition from civil authorities that they had to endure in America. Fined, imprisoned, beaten, and
constantly threatened, Methodist clergy and some laymen and laywomen suffered for multiple reasons. In the post-war era, the persecution of the war years became a Methodist legend. What is striking, however, is the way that early Methodists interpreted this wartime persecution. Almost to a man, they attributed the wartime persecution to the taint of Toryism.

The persecution of the war years was never solely due to suspected Toryism of ministers and members, yet in early Methodist-authored histories, it is the issue of wartime loyalties that drives the narratives. This fact is key to understanding the church's emerging sense of its relationship with the American state. From Wesley (and the New Testament), American Methodists inherited a belief that obedience was due to civil authority. This obedience was not, however, absolute. Clergy recognized that they had a higher calling—to save souls, and any law or official that stood in the way of saving souls was to be disobeyed. Because they were persecuted during the war, and more importantly because they attributed this persecution to the taint of Toryism, they drew a curious lesson from their wartime experience. It was best, they believed, to stay out of politics. In those situations where choosing sides was unavoidable, it was better to side with the state, for when ministers opposed the state, the cause of God suffered.40

Methodist post-war neutrality on some issues was taken to extremes. To give but one example, in the years after the Revolution, the Baptists tried to enlist Methodist aid in their effort to have former glebe lands sold, a measure that seems quite uncontroversial. In a suggestive comment, one minister noted in his journal that the Methodist clergy decided to remain "Neuters."41 Because of their wartime experience and the lessons they drew from it, Methodists remained hostile to politics, and even more hostile to publicly opposing government.

By the mid-nineteenth century, as Russell Richey observed, Methodists were more at ease in merging Christian mission and nationalism. In the North, Methodists came to
look on their church as the American church. In the nineteenth-century South, Methodist clergy increasingly moved towards a proslavery stance, coming to define the South as a more godly region because of its Christian "stewardship" of slaves. A. Gregory Schneider has noted a similar change in Methodists' views about fourth of July celebrations. Early in the nineteenth century, the church deplored the drunkenness, parades, and revelry of Independence Day. Toward mid-century, however, Methodists were not so reluctant, and instead, tried to purify these holidays by urging celebrants to remain sober, serious, and God-oriented in their festivities.

In all of these efforts, Methodists rather than adapting their religion to the world adapted the world to their religion. Not until they had sacralized the secular could they form a civil religion. One earlier sign of this development is perhaps worth mentioning. When George Washington died, Methodist clergy, like those of other denominations, issued funeral sermons for the fallen leader. In these sermons, Washington became a Methodist. He was portrayed as a praying man who sought God's help during the war. His lifestyle was said to have exemplified proper devotion and deference to God. He was lauded for emancipating his slaves in his will, and thus proving himself a true "friend of liberty." There is more than a little irony evident in the fact that one such funeral oration was delivered by Francis Asbury, a suspected Tory and committed pacifist.

In the troubled years of the Revolutionary War, church leaders could have had little inkling of these later developments. And indeed they soon after the war's end blamed the wartime suffering on the meddlesome loyalist actions of a few ministers and members who deviated from the neutrality that most others tried to maintain.

Modern historians have viewed the wartime suffering with a wider lens than early Methodists did. Robert Drew Simpson, for example, finds the beatings and imprisonment of Freeborn Garrettson due as much to his antislavery stance and his conversions of slaves as to his association with a church tarred as Tory. As this study will subsequently
show, from its arrival in America Methodism challenged the South's gender ideology, especially expanding, as the above comments about the New Yorkers show, the public roles open to women. Rhys Isaac also demonstrates how class conflicts engendered opposition to evangelicals, analysis that the Methodist experience will confirm.\textsuperscript{47} Add to all these the conflicts with the established church and other sects, Methodist asceticism, lively and spontaneous services. The picture was much more complex than it was later painted.

When early Methodists attributed wartime opposition to suspicion they were Tories, their claims were not without basis in fact. John Wesley himself caused much of this when he published an anti-rebellion tract, copies of which made it to America. One Methodist preacher distributed copies of King George's Proclamation. Some Methodists were Tories. Captain Webb, a popular Methodist preacher in the North before the war, was an English officer. A Methodist layman of Maryland, Chauncey Clowe, raised a band of 300 Tories and brought much persecution on Methodists as a result.\textsuperscript{48}

The pacifism of many Methodist clergymen and laymen also contributed to beliefs they were Tories. Since unlike the Quakers, American Methodists had not openly espoused pacifism prior to the war, some colonials suspected that Methodist claims of conscience were opportunistic or worse yet, indicated disloyalty to the revolutionary cause. American Methodists indeed took no official position on military service. They were also equivocal about the war itself. Wars, in general, most agreed, were bad things. Even many of the American-born clergy who valued revolutionary ideals such as freedom and liberty saw war, in principle, as an offense against God.\textsuperscript{49}

The church left the decision about whether to serve up to the individual, although they supported with prayer both those who refused to fight and those who served, and watched over the wives and children of both groups. It does seem odd, however, that a church concerned with such minutiae as the wearing of gold rings—a matter clearly
prohibited in the *Discipline* and reiterated often by clergy--would fail to take a stand on whether "shedding human blood" (in the words of one objector) was likewise prohibited.50 Their position on military service resembles most of all their position on slavery. Most clergy believed that both shedding blood in war and slaveholding were sinful. Yet neither bearing arms nor slaveholding excluded a convert from membership, and the church never linked pacifism or manumission to conversion. The American church was, from its inception, much more concerned with subjective experience than with social policy. One also suspects that Methodists were hedging their bets--whichever side won, they would be ready to Methodize the nation.

Another factor contributed to suspicions of Methodist disloyalty. Because the Revolution was a civil war, states drew up loyalty oaths to determine citizens' allegiance. Many Methodist clergy and laymen refused to swear and sign these oaths; some were taken to court in Maryland as a result.51 The church did not prohibit oath-taking, although pietistic sects in general were hostile to oaths. The Maryland oath linked allegiance to bearing arms, and pacifist clergy thus had double reason not to sign. Military and civil authorities looked with rightful suspicion on men who had refused to swear allegiance to the revolution and yet persisted in traveling about the country and drawing large crowds.

There is a final reason that Methodists believed their persecution during the war was due to imagined Toryism--civil and military authorities accused them of having Tory sympathies. Whether authorities believed that Methodists were pro-British is another question entirely. Many leading men saw charges of Toryism as a convenient way to silence these pesky itinerants. Jesse Lee, himself a conscientious objector, suspected as much. "If a person was disposed to persecute a Methodist preacher," he later wrote of the war years, "it was only necessary to call him a *Tory*, and then they might treat him as cruelly as they pleased."52
Rivalries between sects also seemed to have come into play. William Watters, an American-born itinerant, was assigned to Fairfax Circuit in Virginia in late 1775 and early 1776. On a congressionally appointed fast day, he went to hear the Anglican parish priest give a sermon. The unnamed minister spent most of his time denouncing the Methodists, telling his audience that they were "a set of Tories, under a cloak of religion." He pronounced that "the [Methodist] preachers were sent here by the English ministry to preach up passive obedience and non-resistance." In a patriotic frenzy, the parson finished "by declaring that he would, if at the helm of our national affairs, make [the Methodists'] nasty stinking carcasses pay for [their] pretended scruples of conscience." Perhaps under some suspicion himself as part of the King's church, and certainly under pressure because of Methodist successes, this parson appealed to popular opinion by raising the specter of English conspiracy. Did he believe the sect was full of Tories, or was he trying merely to discredit his rivals? This we will never know. But one additional charge he leveled against the Methodists was patently untrue, and indicates a good deal of dissimulation on his part, considering how well off Anglican ministers were in comparison to their Wesleyan foes. He told the crowd that money, and not souls, was the Methodists' "real object."²⁵³

Other evidence suggests that charges of loyalism were sometimes brought merely to thwart Methodist progress. Joseph Hartley was imprisoned twice for being a non-juror, but other clergy suspected this was a ruse. One wrote that "All that the opposers wanted was to prevent his preaching in the country."²⁵⁴ When in jail, Hartley attracted large crowds to the prison and "frequently preached through the grates, or window," until some people began to fear that "if the preacher was not turned out of jail, he would convert all the town."²⁵⁵ When officials saw the result of their actions, Hartley was promptly released.
With the populace in a war mood, officials could prejudice audiences against Methodism, and thus eliminate the threats to slavery, slave discipline, gentry rule, and gender relations that came with that church. For all of these reasons, Methodist clergy in the Upper South were stained as Tory sympathizers.

During the war, Freeborn Garrettson was twice attacked and beaten. William Wrenn and Jonathan Forrest were among those Methodist clergy arrested during the war. Joseph Hartley was imprisoned more than once during the war. Francis Asbury, who alone of the British missionaries remained in America through the war, believed his life to be in danger on several occasions. He took refuge in Delaware with a wealthy man named Thomas White, who because he housed Asbury, was seized from his home and jailed. On another occasion a mob came after White because they believed him to be loyal to the crown. Some pacifist members were placed under military guard, others were beaten, and some imprisoned. Nelson Reed visited some pacifist Methodist laymen who had not been fed during their two days of imprisonment. Philip Gatch was beaten and attacked several times. Caleb Pedicord was severely beaten in Dorchester county and never fully recovered.56

A careful analysis of events surrounding these beatings, threats, and jailings shows that persecution of Methodists was not solely due to suspected Toryism. Pacifism seems to have been linked by many opponents of Methodism to disloyalty, but it may also have been viewed as a violation of the male code of honor. Historically, pacifists have been charged with cowardice and unmanly behavior, and it seems reasonable to believe that Methodist objectors may have been thus viewed as well. Rhys Isaac shows how manly, martial virtue was celebrated in war-era political gatherings, how the gentry appealed to the "warrior who should be within every free man."57 Needless to say, in such a climate, pacifism would be seen as unmanly.
Jesse Lee was a Methodist who refused to bear arms; he was assigned to drive a wagon for the continentals. Many officers tried to persuade Lee to fight, but he refused. Later, near Salisbury, North Carolina, Lee's unit passed "roads thronged with people, men, women and children, with their property, flying from the face of the enemy." Thinking that such a scene would have shorn up Lee's martial spirit, his colonel rode up and asked him "don't you think you could fight now?" Lee answered in the negative. If the colonel responded, Lee did not record it. We can only wonder what the colonel thought when the "warrior" within Lee could not even be roused to avenge the suffering of women and children.\textsuperscript{58}

Other wartime persecution was not related to the war. In the fall of 1775, preacher Philip Gatch had made an appointment with a widow to preach at her home in Maryland. When he arrived at the house, however, Gatch recalled, a "large man met me at the door, and refused to let me go in. He claimed some connection with the family, from which he imagined his right to act as he did."\textsuperscript{59} We might well wonder why Gatch, born and raised in Maryland, thought this man's right to dictate to women in his extended family was "imagined." His language underscores the gulf between Methodists and their opponents over women's roles.

Soon after this incident, Gatch was met on the road by a man "whose wife had been convicted under the preaching of Mr. Webster" (a Methodist itinerant) and who with some friends "intended to revenge himself" against this affront by attacking Gatch. Gatch was tarred by this mob, and in one of the most horrific scenes of persecution that took place in this period, the last stroke of tar was applied across Gatch's naked eyeball.\textsuperscript{60} Nowhere in describing these events does Gatch mention any charges of Toryism against him. His crime was in subverting a husband's prerogatives.

Other preachers had similar experiences. Freeborn Garrettson preached a sermon in 1778 so powerful that it caused "a great shaking among the people. Among the rest, a
woman was struck, and cried aloud for mercy, till she fell to the ground. Her husband was much offended, and I was informed that he threatened me, as he said, for killing his wife. As we will see later in these pages, the husband who threatened Garrettson was not entirely mistaken. For now, we should merely note that the threats of all these men had nothing to do with the war.

Freeborn Garrettson's experience with slaves and slavery is also instructive. Garrettson converted in 1775, and soon after his conversion, as he tells it, the Lord spoke to him and told him to "let the oppressed go free." He promptly freed all of his slaves. Garrettson began causing trouble for his neighboring slaveholders, proselytizing to slaves and denouncing slavery as a sin.

Garrettson was a pacifist. He refused to join the army or even to pay the objector's fee. He also refused to take state oaths. Accused on more than one occasion of being a Tory, Garrettson was finally imprisoned in Maryland in February of 1780 and charged with being a "Fugitive Disaffected Person" because he had not taken the Delaware state oath of Fidelity or the United States oath, and when asked, refused to take the Maryland fidelity oath as well. Yet despite what his arrest warrant and nineteenth-century biographers and church historians said about his imprisonment, Garrettson himself never believed it was solely due to the war. He once noted that "for a cloak they charged me with Toryism," and later reflected that the reason he was released after only sixteen days was because his jailing had the opposite of its intended effect--he, like Joseph Hartley, attracted larger crowds around the jail than he did before he was imprisoned.

In 1791, Garrettson's memoirs were published for the church. In the published version of his memoirs, either Garrettson or his editor carefully removed some of the most controversial passages that dealt with slaves and slavery. A comparison of Garrettson's printed memoirs and his manuscript journals (made possible in large part because of the
efforts of Robert Drew Simpson) shows why leading men (most likely slaveholders) might have wanted to silence this preacher. 65

The 1791 version, for example, tells of a meeting Garrettson held in June of 1775 where "about forty people gathered." At this service, "the power of the Lord came down in a wonderful manner," many were "struck to the floor" and the cries of these mourners "were heard at a great distance." The next morning, the printed memoir recounts, "a gentleman...came to the house to beat me: soon after he entered he began to swear, affirming I would spoil all his negroes." The slaveholder repeatedly struck the preacher. 66

The excerpts from the manuscript journal make the context of this beating much clearer. Garrettson originally wrote of this meeting that "about forty people (mostly Black people) came together...." 67 The omission of the race of the congregants cannot be coincidental. Again, the same year, the printed version tells of a Sunday service where "a company of Belial's children gathered to prevent the meeting" and "raged and threatened." 68 The manuscript journal supplies the missing link between the service and the threats. In it, this day's events begin with this clause: "One Lord's Day whilst I was holding a meeting among the poor blacks." 69

There are even more glaring omissions in the 1791 text. On September 21, 1778, Garrettson, Thomas Hanley notes, "provided refuge for a slave who had been severely beaten," 70 an incident that is not even alluded to in the printed journal. On November 11, 1779, he preached one of his many antislavery sermons at George Presbury's Maryland home, again an event deleted from the printed memoirs. 71

How then, are we to weigh the reasons--the war and slavery--Garrettson was beaten and jailed? The two might be more closely related than they first appear. As Sylvia Frey has shown, the Revolutionary War was a triagonal war, with slaves forming the third force. British policy and slaves' longing for liberation combined to frustrate the southern colonial war effort, especially in coastal South Carolina. At this time,
Methodism had no foothold in the Palmetto state, but was strong in Maryland and Delaware, where, as Ronald Hoffman has shown, Lord Dunmore's Proclamation created fear and panic among slaveholders. Antislavery men such as Garretson might well have seemed a threat to the war effort because they regularly met with blacks and were known to speak against slavery.\textsuperscript{72}

Several Maryland runaway ads of the war era support this hypothesis. In July 1778, George Fitzhugh advertised for the return of two slaves. One, named Jack, he described as "an artful fellow" who "professes himself a Methodist." In November of the same year, another slave owner of Kent County, Maryland, advertised a runaway named Betty, of whom he said "she is very vicious, yet assumes the marks of uncommon piety, which enables her to impose on the credulous." Betty had run away in July, when perhaps not coincidentally Freeborn Garretson was preaching in and around Kent county. A Baltimore slave owner sought the return of a different Jack in 1782, and noted in his ad that his slave "pretends to be a great Methodist."\textsuperscript{73}

Why a master would mention his slave's religion in a runaway ad is puzzling. Unlike scars, weight, height, or clothing, religion cannot be seen on a person. And all three of these owners seemed to believe their slaves were not as religious as the slaves themselves claimed, therefore it seems unlikely that they expected to catch their slaves at a religious meeting. If, on the other hand, these owners suspected that Methodists and other sects had somehow convinced their slaves to run away, then mentioning the church in these ads might alert other owners to the dangers of the Wesleyans.

Two incidents in particular serve to illustrate exactly how opposition to both the war and slavery combined to make Methodists a frightening body, events that never seem to have made it into any of the histories printed by the early church in America.

Thomas Rankin was among the pre-war missionaries sent to North America by Wesley. He arrived in 1773 and became the leader of the American wing of Methodism.
Nineteenth-century church histories usually described Rankin's mistake, for which he had to escape to England, to have been support of the British. Reverend John Lednum, writing in 1859, claimed that Rankin "had declared from the pulpit of St. George's [a Methodist church in Philadelphia] that he believed God's work would not revive until the people submitted to King George." Preacher Jesse Lee, writing in 1810, lumped Rankin in with all the British emissaries who returned to England and wrote that "some of them were imprudent in speaking too freely against the proceedings of the Americans." There is no reason to doubt that Rankin was a Tory sympathizer. Yet on two occasions he went beyond mere opposition to the rebellion. The first was in July of 1775 in Gunpowder Fork, Maryland. Congress had called for a day of fasting in the colonies, and Rankin tried in front of a large audience "to open up and enforce the cause of all our misery." Rankin informed the crowd that "the sins of Great Britain and her colonies had long called aloud for vengeance and in a particular manner the dreadful sin of buying and selling the souls and bodies of the poor Africans, the sons and daughters of Ham." If Rankin believed the colonies should suffer more than the mother country, he did not record mentioning it this day.

A month later Rankin was in Philadelphia and noted privately in his journal that he was opposed to the rebellion and yet not to the colonists. Here he "had frequent opportunities from the first general congress that was held....till now; to converse with several of its members; and also with many members of the Provincial Congress, where I travelled." Once again, he linked the rebellion to slavery, only this time, he explicitly condemned the contradiction by which the American nation was born: "I could not help telling many of them, what a farce it was for them to contend for liberty, when they themselves, kept some hundreds of thousands of poor blacks in most cruel bondage?" There is little wonder, then, that Rankin had to flee the country and that numerous Methodist clergy and laypeople in the Upper South were persecuted in the war years. As
Edmund Morgan so persuasively argued in *American Slavery, American Freedom*, the slaveholding elite had long before the Revolution grounded the freedom of whites in the enslavement of blacks. The ideological edifice that muted conflict between vastly divergent classes of white men was almost a century old, but material inequality was pronounced enough that elites had reason to fear its structural soundness.\(^7\)

In the Upper South, where lower-class whites were divided in their loyalties, slaveholders faced additional pressures. Ronald Hoffman argues that pro-Revolutionary gentry faced a persistent "fear that the Whigs' rhetoric about liberty and their attacks on royal privilege might come to be used on themselves."\(^8\) Perhaps the fact that over thirty-five Maryland Methodist laymen were indicted for preaching as nonjurors is explicable in light of these fears.\(^9\) As a biracial church that particularly appealed to lower class whites, free blacks, and slaves, and that contained some known Tories, Methodism was undoubtedly perceived to be a threat. When clergy began pointing out logical inconsistencies in the discourse of liberty, the threat had become reality.

Modern historians have noted how the Revolution and its rhetoric brought the paradox of a war for liberty in a land of slavery to the fore. Pioneering Quaker abolitionists had exposed the paradox, yet the Quakers were not an evangelistic sect. Elites certainly had more to fear--at least in potential numbers--from Wesley's followers.\(^1\) The Methodists had, after all, just swept across the mother country decades before, converting thousands away from the Church of England. In the colonies, the Anglican church was weaker in numbers, clerically understaffed, and under attack as part of the English conspiracy to make Americans dependent. The forecast for Methodist success in such a setting had to have seemed positive. If, as many Methodist ministers claimed, their opponents' charges that they were Tories were a ruse to thwart their progress, the strategy of Methodists' foes was sound. Antislavery Methodists were painted as enemies of (revolutionary) liberty, and as part of the British conspiracy to enslave white colonial men.
Methodism's appeal to slaves, free blacks, women, and poor white men, moreover, probably enhanced the sect's reputation as dangerous to white male freedom, linked as it was to slavery, white supremacy, and patriarchal control.

For decades after the Revolution, Methodist leaders were proud of their unjust suffering during the war. They pointed to the call of conscience that led many Methodist men to refuse bearing arms. Those clergy who remained in America could rightly claim that they had not been Tories and had therefore been falsely accused. Some could, as Freeborn Garrettson did, find parallels between their prison preaching and the suffering of Paul and other early Christian martyrs. 82

The "dark days" of the Revolution became part of the Methodist founding myth. Clergymen's published memoirs and church histories frequently noted how, despite the fact that the number of itinerants increased in these years, in many places membership declined. It seems that most early Methodists viewed this era as the trial by fire of the fledgling church, with the church emerging, as did the gold in the scripture, purified. A Virginia minister in 1871 cast the matter in such providential terms: "Sore and great were these afflictions; the infant church was in the midst of the fire. Yet she stood firm, trusting in God, and praying for deliverance. When the storm swept away it was seen that the tree of Methodism, though torn and broken, had struck its roots deeper into the soil, and again budded and brought forth fruit."83

In choosing to focus on charges of Toryism as the primary (and for many the sole) reason for war-time persecution, Methodists obscured the true beginnings of the church. They in effect severed themselves from earlier church radicalism, especially on slavery. It is of crucial importance that most, if not all, church chroniclers before the Civil War neglected to mention Rankin's antislavery arguments against the rebellion. It is likewise important that Freeborn Garrettson's controversial ministry to slaves and opposition to slavery became toned down in the published version of his memoirs.
By re-writing the multifaceted causes of their persecution into a simple tale of political and wartime rivalries, Methodists also learned the wrong lesson. The fact that they had survived the war intact despite charges of Toryism could have been interpreted to mean that their message and style were strong enough to overcome political opposition. The lesson they in fact seemed to draw from their Revolutionary experience was just the opposite—do not interfere with civil government. 84

Southern Methodist historians of the nineteenth century used remarkably similar language to describe two of the most controversial aspects of Methodist origins—loyalism and antislavery. Tory statements by Wesley, Rankin, and others were often called "unfortunate." So too were early Methodist measures against slavery. Jesse Lee, for example, twice termed the British ministers' conduct and words "imprudent." In 1780, the Methodists issued a statement that the "keeping of slaves was contrary to the laws of God, of man, and of nature, and that it was hurtful to society, and contrary to the dictates of conscience and pure religion." In Lee's view, "the preachers in this case went too far in their censures; and their language was calculated to irritate the minds of our people...." 85

One late nineteenth century southern minister called the wartime denunciation of slavery as "unfortunate" and an "unwise action," although he conceded that the authors of the statement "certainly were sincere men" who "believed in their hearts that slavery was a great wrong." Compare this with his assessment of the pacifism of some members: "However we might condemn their principles, we must admire the firmness they displayed in refusing to do what they believed to be wrong." Significantly, he attributed both Toryism and antislavery to the "zeal" of the "English preachers." This was certainly not the whole story, for Freeborn Garrettson was only one of many American-born clergymen who were ardent foes of slavery. As a rhetorical ploy, (even if he believed his words) however, his move was brilliant. In this subtle linking of antislavery and loyalism he
could discount both as English imports, and could continue the tradition of denying southern Methodists access to their radical past. 86

One incident of the war did make it into early church histories, although few details are given. George Rodda was one of the Methodist clergymen later charged with "imprudently" supporting Great Britain in the war. Rodda evidently actively campaigned for King George on occasion, reading his proclamation from one pulpit. Nothing is said about Rodda's position on slavery. We should not, however, be surprised that Rodda was said to have been aided in his escape through enemy lines to the friendly British fleet by slaves. 87
Endnotes


4. Russell E. Richey argues that "Early Methodists gave somewhat hesitant and tentative assent" to the Calvinist notion that America was "God's New Israel" in Richey, "The Four Languages of Early American Methodism," *Methodist History* 28:3 (April 1990), 165. See also Russell Richey, *Early American Methodism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991). Albanese notes how pre-war and war era sermons and speeches stressed the fact that colonists' "fathers" had fled to America to escape religious persecution in *Sons of the Fathers,* 21-23. Although Methodists had faced persecution in Britain, they were ultimately successful there. Because they in no sense fled "oppression," this may in part explain the absence in Methodist narratives of a sense of America as a promised land.


8. Evangelicals' fear of decline and corruption, as Rhys Isaac argues, resembled those of patriots. Rhys Isaac, "Preachers and Patriots: Popular Culture and the Revolution in

9. R. Laurence Moore, *Religious Outsiders and the Making of Americans* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), xi. In his preface, Moore makes an important point about historical terminology, urging scholars to examine why they term certain groups "sects" and others "denominations." To term Methodism a "denomination" in the eighteenth century would be inaccurate. Methodists usually used the word "sect" to describe themselves. For all of these reasons, I use "sect" for this early period.


15. American Methodists printed and sold works by Hester Ann Rogers and Eliza Bennis, for example. In their two eighteenth-century periodicals *The Arminian Magazine* and *The Methodist Magazine*, they printed letters from British women evangelists to Wesley, as well as accounts of pious women such as Mary Fletcher, the wife of John Fletcher. One preacher noted that the two books people on his circuit wanted to buy were the hymnbook and "Mrs. Rowe's Devout Exercises." July 21, 1800, The Diary of Jeremiah Norman, Stephen B. Weeks Papers, Southern Historical Collection.


18. Clark *et al.*, eds., *The Journal and Letters of Francis Asbury*, 1:9, fn.19; Lednum, *The Rise of Methodism in America*, 426-7. Peter Williams was later purchased and freed by New York Methodists. The editors of Asbury's journal call Betty a "servant" and not a slave. Because of the way these terms were used interchangeably, I have listed Betty as a slave, although she may have been an indentured servant or domestic help.


20. Thomas Taylor to John Wesley, April 11, 1768, reprinted in Daniels, *The Illustrated History of Methodism*, 393-396.


23. Isaac, *The Transformation of Virginia*. Isaac also thoughtfully explores the contrast between oral (evangelical) culture and written (planter) culture in "Preachers and Patriots."

24. For a detailed discussion of Arminianism, see Raymond P. Cowan "The Arminian Alternative: The Rise of the Methodist Episcopal Church, 1765-1850," Ph.D. diss., Georgia State University, 1991. There is at least implicit historiographical disagreement over whether doctrinal differences between evangelical sects were important. Some historians claim that evangelicals' Arminian leanings in the revivals of the nineteenth century marked a pivotal change, and argue that the increased insistence on human agency had profound effects on psyches and society: Nancy Cott, "Young Women in the Second Great Awakening in New England," *Feminist Studies* 3:1/2 (Fall 1975): 15-29; Paul E. Johnson, *A Shopkeeper's Millennium: Society and Revivals in Rochester, New York, 1815-1837* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1978); Nancy Hardesty, *Your Daughters Shall Prophesy: Revivalism and Feminism in the Age of Finney* (Brooklyn: Carlson Publishing Inc., 1991) and Linda Kerber, "Women and Individualism in American History." If these authors are correct on this point, as I believe they are, then it would follow that Methodists, who were Arminians from their inception, effected earlier converts in similar ways. Other historians focus on the way that Presbyterians and Baptists were forced to shift to a greater Arminianism to compete with the Methodists--an argument which would seem to support an earlier difference between groups. For this position, see John B. Boles, *The Great Revival, 1787-1805: The Origins of the Southern Evangelical Mind*. 
(Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1972). Both of these conclusions seem to contrast with the work of other historians, who emphasize that doctrinal differences between evangelicals were not significant. For the standard and most persuasive of these, see Donald Mathews, *Religion in the Old South* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1977).


26. Mathews, *Religion in the Old South*, 31-34. Cowan, "The Arminian Alternative," states what Mathews implies. Mathews' contention that southern evangelicals were more alike than different is incontrovertible. I also find his assertions that Methodists emphasized theology less than experiential Christianity and that Methodists rarely searched for theological heretics borne out in my research. I would, however, unlike Mathews, emphasize that the simplified Arminian message of early Methodists represented a sharp break with the popular conceptions and misconceptions about predestination. Methodist doctrine seemed to fit with the felt experience of evangelicals--in conversion human agency was placed front and center--and thus although unsophisticated, Methodist doctrine was readily understood by contemporaries to be vastly different from predestinarian doctrine. The later shift by Baptists and Presbyterians (culminating in separate free will and predestinarian wings of each denomination) towards the "Arminian heresy" was occasioned because they began using Methodist methods.


30. I would argue that we should not see the church solely as individualistic or as communitarian. It was both, and John Boles and Donald Mathews both have cogent points on this matter. Yet there is a difference between being a "community" and having a reformist social ethic, and I read Boles' claim that southern evangelicals were individualistic to mean that they lacked a reformist social ethic and not that they lacked a
sense of community. That community was insular and sometimes exclusive. (The most open ceremonies, such as camp meetings, were designed to bring outsiders inside this exclusive community and to revive the zeal--along with the desire to be separate from the world--that came with initial conversions.) The ambivalence and hostility towards ecumenical groups and political pressure that Anne Loveland documented in the southern temperance movement is one of many signs of this lack of a reformist social ethic. Anne C. Loveland, *Southern Evangelicals and the Social Order, 1800-1860* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1980). The churches all agreed that temperance was the godly way, yet they failed to unite to make law follow their teachings. Instead they focused on changing individual hearts and minds. Although Methodists inherited from Wesley a strong sense of Christian duty that applied to charity, outreach, and concern for the sick, poor, and downtrodden, a few orphanages does not a social gospel make. Even Mathews makes a similar point about slavery--the Methodists failed to make emancipation a test of conversion for slave owners. Instead they hoped by individual appeals to conscience and sermons and exhortations to change individual hearts and minds. Had they made manumission or temperance a test of conversion and thus a requirement for membership, they would have had the beginnings of a reformist social ethic. The Methodist position on combat was likewise a subjective, personal decision, as we will see below.

31. For Pettigrew, see the letters from and to Charles Pettigrew in the Pettigrew Family Papers, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. See the Deveraux Jarratt letters in *A Brief Narrative of the Revival of Religion in Virginia* (London: n.p., 1786) for Jarratt's earlier cooperation with the Methodists. For a sample of his later views of rancor and hostility to the Methodists, see the final letters in *Thoughts on Some Important Subjects in Divinity: In a Series of Letters to A Friend* (Baltimore: n.p. 1806), 75-84, and Jarratt's two vitriolic letters to Edward Dromgoole of May 31, 1785 and March 22, 1788 in Edward Dromgoole Papers, Southern Historical Collection. Francis Asbury did salute Jarratt for his work in the Virginia colonial and wartime revivals, but as Jarratt's letters to Dromgoole make apparent, Jarratt had, by 1788, few kind words for the Methodists. His break began when Methodism split from the Church of England, but it seems to have solidified intensely when the Methodists began disciplining slaveholders and speaking against slavery.

32. Freeborn Garrettson, William Watters, and Jesse Lee all supported the principles of the Revolution. Lee and Garrettson were also pacifists. For republican language in Methodism, see Russell E. Richey, "The Four Languages of Early American Methodism," *Methodist History* 28:3 (April 1990), 155-170. For an argument that early Methodists were nationalists, a view different from my own, see Theodore C. Linn, "Religion and Nationalism: American Methodism and the New Nation in the Early National Period, 1766-1844," Ph.D. diss., Drew University, 1971. Doris Elisabett Andrews persuasively links Methodist views about women's roles and duties to republicanism as well as revivalism in general with republicanism, an argument my research supports. In "Popular Religion and the Revolution in the Middle Atlantic Ports: The Rise of the Methodists, 1770-1800," Ph.D. diss., University of Pennsylvania, 1986, especially 201 and 317. For an insightful discussion of the way evangelicals used republicanism in the early republic,


34. Ware, "Sketches of the Life and Travels of Rev. Thomas Ware," 25, 27, 29. Ware's war fever waned during his service. Ill-fed, ill-clothed, ill-trained, and led by an inept officer, Ware came to believe the soldiers were not getting the support they needed from politicians.

35. *Ibid.*, 30, 46. The distinction between "soul" and "civil" liberty was commonly invoked, most notoriously in dealing with slavery. Francis Asbury's oft-quoted comment of February 5, 1809 is one example: "What is the personal liberty of the African which he may abuse, to the salvation of his soul; how may it be compared?" (Clark, *et al.*, eds., *The Journal and Letters of Francis Asbury*, 2:591) Yet he drew this distinction between civil and soul freedom much earlier than this. In 1778, after applauding Quaker abolition efforts, he noted his concern "that some are more intent on promoting the freedom of their bodies, than the freedom of their souls; without which they must be the vassals of Satan in eternal fire." (June 10, 1778, Clark, *et al.*, eds., *The Journal and Letters of Francis Asbury*, 1:273-4)


39. See, for example, The Journal of Nelson Reed. In Reed's journal the war rarely intrudes. The exceptions are when officials want him to take the oath, when he meets opposition by soldiers, when members are imprisoned for pacifism, and when his horse is impressed. Otherwise, he seems oblivious to the war. He certainly never seems to take any interest in war news.

40. In Matthew Simpson's *Cyclopaedia of Methodism*, 58, the entry on "Articles of Religion" offers a comparison of British and American positions on civil government. There is little difference in principle.


42. Richey, "The Four Languages of Early American Methodism."


47. Isaac, *The Transformation of Virginia*.


49. Both Jesse Lee and Freeborn Garrettson claimed to support the principles of the Revolution, but also were opposed to war.


52. See the authorities quoted in Thomas, "Localism, Evangelicalism, and Loyalism," and Lee, *Short History*, 74-75.


57. Rhys Isaac, "Preachers and Patriots," 149. For linking of war valor and male honor, see also Bertram Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor: Ethics and Behavior in the Old South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982); war valor and virtue, see Ruth Bloch, "The Gendered Meanings of Virtue in Revolutionary America."


60. Gatch quoted in *ibid.*, 148.


63. *Ibid.*, 74, 404-05.

64. *Ibid.*, 95, 391.

65. Simpson, ed., *American Methodist Pioneer*, contains the published 1791 edition of Garrettson's journals and substantial portions of the original as well, which facilitates a comparison. Edwin Schell made a similar comparison between the 1802 and 1821 versions of part of Asbury's journal and likewise found that negative comments about slavery and slave owners were "largely expurgated" from the later published edition. See Frederick E. Maser, ed., "Discovery," *Methodist History* 9 (1971): 34-43.


75. Lee, *Short History*, 60.

76. Rankin's journal excerpted in Frederick A. Norwood, ed., *Sourcebook of American Methodism* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1982), 48. Though Wesley's address to the colonies scoffed at America's claims they were being enslaved by Britain, Wesley did not link chattel slavery with this rhetoric, as Rankin did.

77. Norwood, ed., *Sourcebook*, 49. Given the regional composition of this body and Rankin's wording, which suggests that the delegates he was speaking to were themselves slaveholders, it is likely that many of these men he addressed were southern, even though he was in Philadelphia.
80. Chandler, "Prelude to a Church, 1774-1784," 49. Some Methodists joined patriot societies, as Chandler shows (50).
86. Bennett, *Memorials of Methodism in Virginia*, 129, 132-33, 137-38. William Capers' autobiography in William M. Wightman, *Life of William Capers, D.D. One of the Bishops of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South* (Nashville: Southern Methodist Publishing House, 1859) is very instructive on all of these changes. Capers, for one, spends a great deal of time documenting his family's Revolutionary War service, listing campaigns and units.(13-24) This is markedly different from earlier memoirs, which usually covered pre-conversion life quickly. Second, Capers blames Methodist antislavery on British preachers.
Chapter 2

The Marrow of the Methodist Self: Doctrines, Values, and Practices

"Extatic raptures would creep through my heart, and Heaven slide through my crimson life. I set in the pomp of self-abasement, a-kin to nothing, a-kin to dust, and yet engulfed in love to Christ." ---Sarah Jones

Sarah Jones, like many Methodists, ascended to heights of rapture and sank to depths of self-loathing as she strove to live in what Wesleyans called "the narrow way." Methodists so diligently explored their inner selves that even a single day's soul-searching could cause them to both soar and plummet in tortured self-examination. Jones, in a letter to a friend, described her thoughts on a typical day. During an hour of prayer in which she suffered "acuthe agony," she "plunged in a sea of self-abasement, and self abhorrence; and groan[ed]...for the deepest measure of profound humility," but later, when recalling that Christ was "ointment" "for every sore," she became "buried in wonder, swallowed up in extatic joy and gladness."2

Sarah Jones's psyche, like those of her fellow Methodists, can scarce be understood apart from the church's doctrines, values, and practices. Views about the self, about obligations to others, and about humanity's relationship to God formed the core of Methodist identity and shaped the way members viewed the world around them. Church practices and rituals reinforced these identities and provided models for men and women in the church to follow as they re-fashioned the self and built communities of like-minded believers.

Although factors such as race, civil status, gender, class, and age render analysis of "the Methodist psyche" problematic, Methodists shared a religious identity that transcended these differences. Much of the remainder of this work will explore how
religion intersected with these other key variables, and we will occasionally note those differences here. Yet these diverse people with varied experiences also had at least one important characteristic in common—they were all Methodists.

In the decades surrounding the disestablishment of the Church of England, sectarian affiliations were better predictors of behavior and values than they are today. To identify someone as a Methodist in the late eighteenth century meant to describe a way of life and thinking that were relatively distinct. Doctrinally, Methodists believed in free will, falling from grace, and sanctification, beliefs which expanded the human role in salvation and which exalted human will. Methodists engaged in torturous examination of their psyches in the attempt to live godly lives, alternating between euphoria and melancholy with each success or failure. Ideas about the salutary effects of suffering and the importance of asceticism also shaped church members. So too did Methodists valuation of the heart over head, enthusiasm over sedateness, emotion over reason, love over authority. To critics Methodists appeared monkish, self-absorbed, manic, or depressed, but the exclusive and tight-knit community of the church provided succor and comfort for converts struggling to mold themselves in their image of God in a hostile world.

Conversion to Methodism brought with it a change in perception, which members described as a revolution of their consciousness. Some spoke in terms of seeing "things in a new light from what I had ever had before." One even claimed that "every thing appeared new," "as if I had got new eyes." Most evangelicals described conversions in similar terms, for all believed they had in a sense died to their former selves.

But it is just as important to ask what sort of people converts became after the new birth, and here sectarian differences are important. When men and women called themselves Methodists, they were both distinguishing their beliefs and ways from others, and signifying their acceptance of certain values and practices, some of which were unique
to the church. When men and women chose to become Methodists, they assumed an identity that affected their behavior inside and outside chapel walls.

The church did not arise in a vacuum, and the changes Methodism wrought on people's perceptions must be placed in the context of some broader religious and intellectual currents. One of these is the long-term trend in Protestantism toward increased human responsibility for salvation. A related broader trend is that toward what John Higham has termed "boundlessness," the nineteenth-century stress on the glory and power of the individual. A third is the psychological transformation Jan Lewis describes—the new valuation of inner life and the cultivation of emotions.6

Our analysis of Methodist doctrines, values, and practices will traverse some well-travelled historiographical terrain as we take an in-depth, analytical look at what it meant to men and women in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries to be a Methodist. Historians of southern religion and of American evangelicalism will find some of what is said in this chapter familiar. Readers will find here confirmation of some previous scholarship by Donald G. Mathews, John B. Boles, A. Gregory Schneider, William H. Williams and others.7 We will also shed new light on some less-explored aspects of Methodism.

The inner world of early Methodists is alien to us. They did not recognize what we would call the subconscious or unconscious mind and so believed it possible to control passing thoughts and feelings. The closest they came to such a notion was their belief that Satan could infiltrate a true believer's mind if he or she was not vigilant.8 The practices of Methodists are equally foreign, in large part because they believed that God could reveal himself to humans in direct and immediate ways and could take possession of the body and soul if the believer was faithful.

To explore the impact of Methodism on the self and society, we should begin with converts' religious beliefs. Several doctrines set Methodism apart from other sects.
Although theirs was a piety based more on experience than theology, the evidence indicates that Methodist laypeople and clergy were well aware of their unique beliefs. The shorthand terms that Methodists used for the triumvirate of doctrines that formed their spiritual core were free will, falling from grace, and perfection.

As the first evangelical sect to espouse a free will doctrine, the Methodists were in a good position to capitalize on the growing sense Americans had after the Revolution that men and women could influence and even control the future. The delicate balance that evangelical Calvinists had hoped to maintain between human and divine responsibility for salvation was never an issue for the Arminian Methodists (who in fact seemed to have rarely sought and little valued balance.) God, in their view, had sacrificed his son in a spirit of free grace and love for humanity, and all those who acknowledged their sins, repented, and accepted Christ into their hearts were candidates for salvation.

Although Methodists never lost sight of the awe and majesty of God, they did not have the same sense of his inscrutability that characterized even evangelical Calvinists. A correspondent of preacher John Baldwin, Major John Overstreet, described what separated Methodists from other evangelicals. Overstreet, a Presbyterian critic of Methodism, congratulated Baldwin for preaching a sermon on "the depravity and inability of human nature to do the will of God without the grace of God." Overstreet rued that he had "heard so much of the powers of nature extolled," for he believed that "our hearts are so deceitful & desparately wicked" that it was "rank Pelagianism" to "take part of the credit of our salvation to ourselves!" Those who would do so, Overstreet claimed, "speak of the Almighty as a vile mortal." In raising up humanity, Overstreet felt, Methodists had lowered God.

Wesleyan clergy would certainly have denied that they reduced God to a "vile mortal" or that they "extolled" the "powers of nature," but there was a kernel of truth to Overstreet's charge. Methodists both humanized God and exalted the self.
Methodists, for example, often described God as a mother or a friend. In one of "Dr. Byron's" poems printed several times in Methodist periodicals, the following comparison was made:

What is more tender than a mother's love
To the sweet infant fondling in her arms?....
Now, if the tenderest mother were possest
Of all the love, within her single breast,
Of all the mothers since the world began,
'Tis nothing to the love of GOD to man.

Sarah Jones once depicted Christ as a nursing mother, envisioning herself and her prayer partner as "both spirits on Jesu's breast as twins, swallowing the streams of Love." Others described Christ as a spouse, as Freeborn Garrettson did in a sermon. William McKendree entered a poem in his journal describing Christ as a close confidante:

Did Christ expire upon the cross,
And is he not your friend?
Your Saviour is your real friend
To tell your secrets to...

Although the Methodists' God could be a stern, demanding, and damning one, when men and women wrote about their relationship to God, they most often described it as loving and very personal.

Overstreet had also alleged that Methodists exalted human nature, a charge which was in large part true. If we may judge by the way Methodists thought of the self, they indeed believed nature to be quite powerful. Methodist preacher Thomas Ware acknowledged that early opposition to Methodist doctrine centered on their notions of human ability. Methodists, Ware noted, were charged with "enthusiasm. Our opposers did not blame us for not living up to our profession outwardly, but for professing too
much--more than is the privilege of man in this life, in speaking with Christian confidence of the knowledge of a present salvation by the forgiveness of sins and the witness of the Spirit." Betsy Goodwin clearly was confident. "[L]et me inform you without boasting, and in the fear of God," she wrote to William Spencer,"that I have enjoyed the perfect love of God for near two years."13

Many Methodists claimed even more than knowledge of their salvation; they also purported to know God's will. Methodists were encouraged to lose all self-will and pursue only the will of God. Wesley exhorted his followers repeatedly to "do everything in the spirit of sacrifice, giving up your will to the will of GOD."14 In his widely distributed essay, "The Character of a Methodist," he again stressed that a Methodist's "one desire" was "not to do his own will, but the will of him that sent him." A Methodist was to have a "single eye": "There is not a single notion in his heart, but is according to his will. Every thought that arises points to him, and is in obedience to the law of Christ."15 Of course, to be able to pursue God's will, Methodists had to be able to discern it.

God's will was revealed in the Bible and explicated in the Methodist Discipline. The Discipline broke down Christian obligations into three categories. First came the duty to do no harm "by avoiding evil of every kind." Under this provision came such evils as Sabbath-breaking, violating the Golden Rule, drunkenness, marrying an unbeliever, fighting, buying and selling slaves, wearing "costly apparel," and "laying up treasures on earth." Second came the duty to do good. Methodists were to care for the "bodies" of others by tending to prisoners, the poor, and the sick. To care for others "souls," Methodists were to reprove, exhort, evangelize, and set a good example. Third came the duty to obey "all the ordinances of God"--to attend church, take the sacrament, pray as families and as individuals, read the Bible, and regularly fast.16

Besides the guidance of the Discipline, Methodists had a more controversial way to discern God's will. Methodists believed that God could and often did speak directly to
men and women through possession, dreams, and visions. Direct communication with
God was most evident in the enthusiasm commonly associated with Methodist services. If
ascetic self-control characterized one side of the Methodist psyche--the side that usually
brought despair and self-loathing--complete abandonment characterized the rapturous
side. Methodists were known and faulted not only for their dour brooding, but also for
their expressiveness. More than any other evangelical sect, Methodists were identified
with the way their converts behaved in services--by shouting, clapping, falling, and
weeping. Volume, too, was key. As Russell Richey has noted, early Methodists were
loud.

The physical and emotional outbursts so identified with Methodism were not the
goal of worship, in clergymen's views, but rather evidence that God was touching men and
women in direct and immediate ways. Clergy actively sought evidence of God's presence
in services, and most defended the enthusiasm of their audiences. Many felt it was better
to allow some excess than to dampen the spirit. John Littlejohn, for example, noted in
1778 that "it is more and more clear to me that it is best to bear w[i]th what we judge to
be out of order, than to check it abruptly."

Methodism was theater, and many--both sympathetic and hostile--came to watch
what must have often been the best show in town. The scenes usually followed one of
several courses. Most commonly, one Methodist would become "struck" with the power
of God during a hymn, prayer, sermon, or testimony and would shout aloud or fall. The
contagion would then spread throughout the house or chapel, and others would fall, weep,
and cry out.

A service George Wells led in 1792 service was rather typical. He was talking
with a woman under conviction when "it affected hir I got happy the flame spread to the
other preachers. Bro. C. began to sing and the love of God began to flow like a river of
oile we then went to prayer the power went from breast to breast and it laid hold of a
black girl and shee cried aimain [Amen] for mercy. Wells' description is revealing. First, he interprets the enthusiasm positively, using the words "love" and "happy." Second, he attributes the events to God's "power." Third, he uses the metaphor of fire, as many Methodists did, to describe how God's power spread in the group. Once someone got "happy," it was seen to be almost inevitable that the contagion would, like fire, spread.

Another typical course that enthusiasm could take was to infect people who had no religious inclinations. After a Methodist would cry out or fall, a few of the men and women who had come to observe or to criticize would try to flee the scene--but not before one or more of them were also "struck." As reports spread in the area, the numbers attending services would increase. Criticism and opposition would increase as well, as would the number of scoffers who would mysteriously be drawn against their will into the vortex of enthusiasm.

In a love feast that John Kobler attended, "the Lord broke in upon a dear woman" who "arose and with a loud voice gave praise to the Lord." According to Kobler, "this set the whole house on one flame." Several more women shouted and fell, and soon Kobler could not hear above the ensuing din. The noise alarmed the crowd outside the building, and "the wicked broke the door open and all came in some laughing others crying." Before the service ended, Kobler proudly observed, "the Lord humbled some" scoffers.\footnote{Kobler} Each stage in the process confirmed that God was a real presence on earth. When God touched men and women, Methodists believed, the experience could overwhelm the body and result in physical, emotional, and verbal outbursts.

God could also communicate with humans, Methodists believed, through dreams, signs, and visions. Although the meaning of dreams was sometimes difficult to determine, Methodists did try to interpret them. John Littlejohn's experience with dream revelation began when he was under conviction. This dream, he remarked, was "afterwards almost literally fulfulld" and "its interpretation to me was easy." It probably came as no shock to
Littlejohn when later a Quaker woman who had been attending Methodist services told him her dream. A messenger, she said, had revealed that she must continue with the Methodists despite the opposition of other Friends.22

Methodists also had waking visions and saw signs which they tried to understand. Benjamin Lakin was working outdoors in 1799 when a small bird "came and sat on a saplin" near him and looked attentively at him. Suddenly, Lakin recounted, "A thought struck my mind that if the Bird should light on my head I should see trouble." Soon the bird did just this, and Lakin reported his "feelings ware [were] awfull and my thoughts ware [were] various." Francis Asbury told of a woman who believed her death was imminent because a whippoorwill passed close by her head.23

A Methodist boy provoked heated controversy when he related a vision of death. The boy emerged from a twenty-four hour trance to claim that Christ had taken him "by the hand" on a tour of heaven and hell. In heaven, the boy claimed, he had seen very few people he knew. The boy wanted to stay in paradise, but Christ said "not yet." In hell, he found many people from his community, including one man everyone thought had gone to heaven but who instead had been condemned for "lightness and triffling." Some of the damned sent warnings to the living. When the boy related his vision, he was called a liar and some threatened to whip him, for one of the men he had claimed to see in hell was not yet dead. The boy solemnly predicted that if the man was not yet dead, he would die soon. The man in question died within a week.24

Dreams and visions seem to have been a common part of Methodists' contact with God, and as we can see in this boy's story, Methodist beliefs permeated the nonwaking hours of converts. As clergy so frequently told congregations, more southerners were going to hell than to heaven; even professors could fall from grace and go to hell, like the light and trifling man. Also significant is the fact that the boy was given messages from "inferiors" to "superiors." In his dream, children told him to warn their fathers and
guardians yet living to repent or be damned. Methodist views about death, which we will
explore shortly, likewise infused this dream, for the pious child longed to stay in heaven,
and the quick, predicted death of the neighbor reminded all that life was short.25

Clergy found dreams and visions problematic when they conflicted with Methodist
doctrine and belief. But most preachers did not doubt that God could speak through these
supernatural means. As should be apparent, a belief in immediate and direct revelation
conferred a great deal of power on laypeople, for they could bypass ministerial authority
and interpret God's communications for themselves. For the most powerless members of
southern society, this interpretive and moral autonomy had special significance.

It may seem contradictory to claim that a sect which believed its members should
subsume their will in God's and which exalted the loss of self-control in possession rituals
or ecstatic visions increased the autonomy of many (perhaps most) Methodists. In order
to understand why this was the case, we must broadly differentiate between types of
Methodist converts. For Methodists who were legally and financially independent, the
surrender of control to God did represent a check on autonomy. For men and women
who were dependent on others, possession and direct contact with God had different
implications. God could and often did compete with earthly superiors for authority. In
subsequent chapters we see how "God's will" affected the balance of power in various
relationships. Here we need only recall that many Methodists were considered by secular
standards dependents.

If we may believe what Methodists said, they saw humans as depraved and
worthless. But it is a mistake to focus only on Methodists' frequent laments that they
were unworthy creatures. In this, they were little different from other pietistic sects both
contemporary and antecedent to them. When Methodists described how they compared to
God, they called themselves poor worms, vile, or "mean."26 Sarah Harrison, for example,
believed herself "one of the weekest[sic], and one of the unworthiest, that ever set out in
the service of God. The language of self-abasement was so pervasive among Methodists that it is tempting to dismiss claims of critics that they exalted human nature.

Wesleyans' belief in the insignificance of humanity before God would also seem to contradict scholarly assessments that the "Arminian heresy" expanded peoples' sense of autonomy and agency, and perhaps it would if it were the only or even the most important part of the Methodist psyche. Self-loathing was only one side of the Methodist personality; the other side, the boundless side, was able to achieve complete self-mastery and even to touch the infinite. Sarah Jones was "called on to pray" in front of her "wicked relations" one evening, and felt overwhelming power: "God stept in me; and they [her relations] universally melted...Thus Hell gave back, and devils were subject to me." Jones' claim that God "stept in me" might have been heretical to other Christian groups but was quite normal among Methodists.

Methodist journals, diaries, and letters illustrate well their beliefs in the manipulability of the self. Those men and women who most readily admitted they were weak and wretched were the same who rigorously faulted themselves for not controlling their thoughts, bodies, and minds. Although the church stressed the depravity of human beings, it also stressed that after conversion their temporal and eternal fate was *daily* theirs to make.

The two key doctrines that played a role in this expanded sense of agency were those of perfection and falling from grace, and these doctrines seem to have been as important as the doctrine of free will in contributing to a sense of greater human agency and autonomy. Free will doctrine was the most obvious difference between Methodists and other evangelicals. Methodists' arrival on the scene accelerated the move by other sects to the "Arminian heresy," because of the implicit contradiction between aggressive revivalism and predestination.
Yet if predestinarian sects were by the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries moving towards a tacit acceptance of human agency in the conversion process, they had no equivalents to the remaining two controversial doctrines. To be sure, a Baptist and a Presbyterian could "backslide," but so could a Methodist, and backsliding had a more temporary connotation than falling from grace did. Other sects encouraged their adherents to avoid sin--some even talked of holiness--but none of Methodism's major competitors believed that perfection was possible on earth.

After conversion, Methodists were urged to lead pious lives and to also seek the "second blessing" of sanctification. Francis Asbury even told one audience "that the only security pointed out by the apostles against apostacy, is to go on to perfection." To be sanctified was to be morally pure, perfect, holy. Methodists who became "sanctified" were often said to be in a state of "perfect love." Freeborn Garrettson described Sister Bassett in just such terms. Bassett was "one of the happiest women I have met with," he wrote, and a "living witness of sanctification. Her soul seems to be continually wrapped up in a flame of divine love." Richard Graves was sanctified on July 2, 1799, and wrote that his heart had been "all love" since then.29

Many Methodists experienced sanctification much as they had conversion, instantaneously, although they did try to prepare themselves by various means. What is most important is that they were certain that they were to strive for sanctification and believed it was possible to achieve. In an incidental comment to a Presbyterian correspondent, Sarah Jones made the difference between the two sects clear. According to Jones, the man confessed to a "hard heart:" "He said, whether it is God's will, or his own indolence, he could not tell." "What can you think of such blindness," Jones asked a fellow Methodist, "I intend through grace to give him one bill of exchange, and lash him with my God's will, which is, sanctification[sic]."30 Sanctification, as Jones's comments reveal, was a Methodist duty.
If Methodism held out the possibility of perfection, it also held out the possibility that the converted could "fall from grace"--that is, to so estrange themselves from God that they would be barred from Heaven. Calvinists, in contrast, believed in the "final perseverance of the saints"--that the elected could not fall. Impressionistic evidence strongly suggests that falling from grace was more an object of contention than free will doctrine was.

Laymen and laywomen of predestinarian sects and denominations recognized the doctrine of "falling from grace" as contradictory to their own beliefs. A Baptist of King and Queen County, for example, summarized the Methodist position as being that "a Man might be in heaven to day & in Hell tomorrow." When asked if he had ever heard a Methodist preach such a doctrine the Baptist responded "no, but they preach falling from grace." 32

Methodists felt that the doctrine of the perseverance of the saints--the idea that the converted could not fall from grace--was a dangerous one, for in their minds it led to religious complacency. Jesse Lee disputed with a Calvinist layman named Woodruff on perseverance. Woodruff displayed "a good deal of anger" when he "found out that [Methodists] believed a person might fall from grace and be lost" and insisted that "after a man is converted...he is obliged to be saved whether he will [or] no." Woodruff's deterministic language underscores the gulf between the two men's beliefs. Woodruff told Lee he would rather hear Methodists "curse God at once, as to hear us say that God would give his love to a person and then take it away again." Lee clarified that he was not saying God would revoke a blessing, but that men and women, as responsible agents, "might cast it away." The doctrine of "perseverance," in Lee's mind, did not encourage the level of spiritual vigilance he believed was necessary. 33
Even some Calvinists reluctantly agreed. William Hill, a Presbyterian clergyman who left a journal of his ministry in the Northern Neck of Virginia in the 1790s, made the following observation:

I find that it has a very pernicious effect, especially among ignorant people to be continually preaching up, the doctrine of the perseverance of Saints without enforcing christian duties, or having it clearly understood that the perseverance of saints taught in the bible is a perseverance in holiness & not in sin. This is the error of too many of the Baptists now a days, which brings bible calvinism into contempt, & gives currency to the doctrines of arminianism so industriously circulated by some others.34

We need not conclude that predestinarians were more likely to "sin" but need merely note that, for Methodists, salvation explicitly depended on constant self-monitoring. If Hill, despite his elitist bias, was correct, this was not as obvious to the average predestinarian, who regardless of his or her views about conversion, gave God the larger role in salvation.

The doctrines of falling from grace and sanctification would be far less important if they had not had such a profound effect on Methodists' sense of the possible. In their view, it made eternal difference whether they died in a fallen state or in a perfected state, and thus Methodists often waged daily psychic warfare and put themselves through what can only appear to a modern reader as psychological torture.

Sarah Jones knew the dangers and rewards full well, and so she admitted that "every day is a day of wrestling agony and tears with me." Her great fear was to commit Christian "treason," which she succinctly defined as "to grow dull." Yet to constantly maintain a heightened zeal proved impossible for most Methodists. Elizabeth Anderson believed that if she had the proper mindset in prayer, she could literally be with God: "this night I feel determined to try & get to heaven although I waid thrugh many trying scenes yet Daniels god is able to deliver."35
With many Methodists, as with Sarah Jones, the "agony" they subjected themselves to resembled a military battle or a long, perilous journey. "The good Lord knoweth," Jones wrote on another occasion, "the war is perpetual while here, and I would not give six pence for a soldier that cannot stand bullets; no matter what size...." Daniel Grant agreed, and counselled his children that there would be many trials in this life, "all tending to turn you aside from the strait & narrow way." In another letter he declared that they would all need "steady & constant watchfulness if we desire to enjoy the smiles of heaven." John Littlejohn reminded some members in a letter that "our life is a continual warfare." Methodists saw themselves as soldiers in God's army and expected to war with internal and external enemies.

It is not necessary--or accurate--to claim that Methodists alone faced psychological struggles as they worked to become good Christians. Many Calvinists, if they did not rise and fall as often as Methodists, did undergo times of spiritual despair and rapture. The important difference is that Methodists were taught to believe that they could, should, and indeed must take control of their hearts and minds and bend their own wills into the shape which God desired. When they were unsuccessful, they faulted themselves for being "poor worms." When they succeeded, they believed they could do almost anything to further the cause of God.

Sarah Jones showed how the weak self and the boundless self formed part of a psychic whole, revealing the paradox of the perfectible convert striving to submerge the very will that made attaining perfection possible. "I am imprisoned," she wrote, "Love with golden chains hath bound my head, my heart and hands, and I can truly say 'tis a pleasing pain.--I feel my widening soul a sacrifice to love.--What can relieve the throbbing heart, or slack the glowing flame? Whole oceans cannot quench it." The metaphors and language seems conflicted, but for Jones there was no tension between her prison of love and a soul which was capable of producing an unquenchable
A favorite Bible verse of members and clergy was "in him, all things are possible." When Methodists fully submitted to God by bending the self to his will, they became, as clergy often described them, "living flames" who feared no mortal man or woman and believed themselves capable of "all things." The effect, however theologically expressed, was a self that, once mastered, could then master any cause.

Although it is anachronistic to say so, the term that seems appropriate to apply to the typical Methodist psyche is manic-depressive. The cycle which began in conversion was repeated throughout a believer's life. People would feel their wretchedness and depravity only to soon experience the fulfilling joy of God's blessing. Once converted, they strove for sanctification, or if they were not careful, they fell from grace. Those who had fallen from grace could restore the cycle with another conversion and the sanctified could restore the cycle by being, as Wesley put it, "moved from their stedfastness." 39

Within this larger pattern of conversion-sanctification-falling came the daily effort to master the self that the church taught was possible and necessary. The check to egotism, pride, and spiritual sloth was more self-examination and more self-control. Doctrines and values were wed especially in one area--Methodist asceticism.

Historians have certainly appreciated the extent to which the outward behavior of Methodists, like that of Baptists, was observably ascetic.40 Dress was one of the primary ways evangelicals set themselves apart from others; their plain dress signified a renunciation of the world and diminished the distance between members of different classes. Clergy disapproved of high headdresses, ruffles, laces, gold, and "costly apparel" in general. Non-Methodists of Delaware even joked in 1783 that wool would be cheap that year because of all the Methodist women burning their headdresses. Many Methodists showed this change immediately, as did an Army captain who cut off his ponytail and the ruffles on his shirt right after conversion.41
Abstention from worldly habits also distinguished evangelicals like the Methodists from other southerners, especially from those immersed in the culture of honor. Drinking liquor, card playing, horse racing, gambling, the theater, dancing (both in frolics and balls), and cockfighting were punishable offenses. Had members simply avoided such pursuits, they would have occasioned less criticism. But they took it upon themselves to seek out evil and condemn it, and often boldly imposed themselves and their reproofs where they were unwelcome. Two Methodist women, for example, persuaded preacher Nelson Reed to accompany them to a harvest dance in order to rebuke the dancers. By such means, the reputation of Methodists for avoiding the pleasures of the world was further enhanced, as was their reputation for zeal in the cause of their religion.

But Methodist asceticism was more than a pattern of outward behavior. It was above all a state of mind. God, Wesleyans believed, wanted his followers to avoid sins of omission and of commission, to try to cleanse themselves from all impure thoughts and desires, and to subsume themselves in him.

Methodist beliefs about the need for self-mastery are most evident in their attempts to control unconscious behavior. No sin was too small to be ignored. Methodists felt guilty for what they called variously "levity" or a "light trifling spirit." Daniel Grant chided himself for "coldness" and "formality in my devotions" on one occasion and "listen[ing] to the failings of others" on another. Methodists faulted themselves for laughing, "murmering," "wrong tempers," "worldly conversation," and "impatience." They were ashamed when they committed these "sins" because they signalled a loss of self-control.

Let us briefly look at two of these offenses--levity and laughing. We would be wrong to conclude that Methodists were against joy or happiness, for they heartily approved of ecstatic emotions and behavior in worship, private prayer, or devotions. Levity and laughing were only wrong when they were not God-centered. The church
taught, and members seemed to have believed, that it was possible to bend the self and mold the will into a pure spiritual force. A burst of laughter signalled that the convert was not in complete control.

We can see the dual focus on actions and thoughts when we examine Methodists' attitudes towards sins of the flesh. The ideal for all Methodists was what they tellingly called "mortification"--to completely bring the flesh and the mind's focus on the flesh under subjection. Sins of the flesh, such as gluttony, pride in appearance, and lust, were to be avoided, and the most serious ones could bring expulsion from the church. Even thinking about the flesh, moreover, was seen as impious.

This is one context in which the (bachelor) itinerancy of the Methodists should be placed, for travelling ministers served as living examples of men walking by the spirit instead of the flesh. Clergy often ate what they could scrounge or beg, and not infrequently went without meals. Even those with generous donors ritually fasted, as did their parishioners. Preachers' clothes were simple, common, and usually in need of repair. And, ministers were single men committed, while they remained in the itinerancy, to celibacy.44

Young itinerants' struggles with the flesh and with thoughts of the flesh help illustrate how asceticism involved the mastery of both mind and body. Preacher William Ormond, for example, found desire in and of itself a problem. "My flesh is an enimy to my soul," he noted on several occasions when dreams or thoughts troubled him. So too did Freeborn Garrettson, who one night suffered a temptation, or as he termed it, "the enemy of my soul assaulted me": "For a few minutes I sensibly felt the power of darkness. I rose out of my bed, wrapped myself in my great coat and slept on the floor." "This body must be kept under....," he added, "I am determined to mortify the deeds of the body." The prize for asceticism in the pursuit of a spiritual mind, however, goes to Jeremiah Minter.
Because he wished to live in perfect "purity of mind" and "as a self-denial," Minter, "with the aid of a surgeon became an eunuch for the kingdom of heaven's sake."  

Minter's drastic action illustrates how some Methodists took asceticism to extremes. One couple, desiring to fulfill the biblical command that "old things must be done away, and all things must become new," began to burn all their possessions, including "a large bundle of paper money." Benjamin Abbott wrote of a man ready to cut off his right hand, because scripture said "if thy right hand offend thee, cut it off." Some Methodists slipped over into more pietistic sects; some fasted excessively. And it was not uncommon for men and women, in the throes of conviction for their sins, to think about suicide.  

The line between what church leaders considered the proper ascetic spirit and improper zeal was quite fuzzy. Minter was expelled from the church for castrating himself, but not because he had damaged his body--"the temple of God"--by self-mutilation. The officials who expelled him ended up calling his offense only "a sin of ignorance," which shows how the church was better at encouraging asceticism than in defining its limits. Minter was re-admitted later for a short time as a local preacher, although it is clear from his autobiography that he was mentally imbalanced.  

For every Jeremiah Minter there was probably a man or woman who continued to secretly drink liquor or gamble in spite of church rules. But if these represent the extremes that could be found in Methodism, they also show how ascetic the "normal" Methodist was. The body was merely a "tenement of clay" that temporarily housed the soul and distracted the mind from God.  

Nowhere can Methodist views about the body, asceticism, and self-mastery be better illustrated than in Methodist attitudes toward sickness, suffering, and death--some of which were shared by other evangelicals. Pain, sorrow, and misfortune were used by God, Methodists believed, to remind the unconverted of their mortality and the converted
of their Christian duties. Freeborn Garrettson, for example, visited a sick woman in 1781 who "lay under the afflicting hand of providence." Upon converting, "her bodily disorder was suddenly removed." When Garrettson himself was stricken with fever and ague, he prayed that "this occasion of confinement may be sanctified to me."49

All "afflictions" were really for the good of humanity, as preachers often told their parishioners. Ezekiel Cooper told an ill man that his sickness was the "hand of correction." A woman named Milley was in an "afflicted state of body," but a fellow Methodist remarked that he had "hope that it will in the end prove as blessings in disguise."50

When God punished his flock with illness or misfortune, he was attempting to bring them closer to himself. Suffering was a reminder that all must be ready for death. If the body was afflicted, converts were to remember that the flesh was temporary and the spirit eternal. Many Methodists tried to be content with bodily pain or illness, hoping to heighten the spirit by transcending the flesh. Richard Whatcoat, for example, strived for a "thankful heart a truly resigned will in all things" when he was plagued with an inflamed eye. When Rebecca Ridgely was having trouble with a disrespectful nephew, she, too, tried to turn the situation to spiritual advantage: "the Lord I trust will bear me up through Lifes uneven way, and Bring me at Last to Glory, for this I know is Scriptureal, that thro' [many] tribulations and trials we are to be made perfect."51

A poem published in *The Arminian Magazine* in August of 1790 was only one of many that extoled the blessings of suffering. Entitled "A Funeral Hymn," verse after verse pointed out how men and women were "chasten'd by sharp affliction's rod" and how their "sharpest suff'ring's flow'd" from "love divine":

Long in the fiery furnace try'd
With salutary pain;
In suff'ring's to thy Lord ally'd,
With him triumphant reign!

GOD brought thee low, to raise thee up,

He kill'd to make alive:

Go, bless him for the bitt'rest cup

Thy Saviour's love could give.

As the poem indicates, affliction—"salutary pain"—united believers most of all with Christ, the Suffering Servant. Henry Boehm noted as much when he saw Edward Callahan dying. Although cancer had eaten away much of Callahan's face, he still praised God. "Like his Master," Boehm noted, "he was made perfect through suffering."52

Persecution, too, was seen to be a blessing. Some Methodists courted persecution, for they believed that in order to be pure, they had to suffer, or, as one of their favorite Bible verses put it, to be "as gold tried by fire." John and Charles Wesley had practically urged Methodists to seek out the enmity of others in the Discipline. Part of the good members were to do was "submitting to bear the reproach of Christ, to be as the filth and off-scouring of the world: and looking that men should say all manner of evil of them falsely for the Lord's sake."53

Tales of persecution were such an important part of Methodist testimony that we may well ask if the church's belief that persecution was a sign of proper Christianity predisposed Methodists to exaggerate or invent opposition. These stories bear remarkable similarities—the slave persecuted by his or her master, the wife by her husband, the child by its parent, and the poor by the rich. Should their conventional character cause us to question their accuracy?

Although Methodists do seem to have at times exaggerated opposition, the evidence indicates that criticism, vandalism, and to a lesser extent violence against Methodists were common. Enough of these accounts were corroborated by newspapers or by the "persecutors" themselves to show that Methodists need not have fabricated these
tales to have felt persecuted. The conventional character of stories where godly Davids battled ungodly Goliaths does prove, however, that Methodists had a formula that they used to interpret such incidents. This formula enabled those Methodists who were the least powerful in the world's eyes to bear up under all sorts of harassment, for it allowed them to invert earthly rankings and to view persecution, like all suffering, as a purifying force. The result was that because persecution was a positive sign, some Methodists were emboldened to risk criticism and bodily harm for their religion, which in turn resulted in more of what they called "persecution." So although the extent of opposition may have been at times exaggerated, the Methodist world view practically guaranteed that they would be opposed.

Sickness, persecution, and suffering, if turned to advantage, provoked moments of absolute spiritual clarity for believers who could "humbly kiss the sacred rod." In their most lonely, confused, and trying times, all but God was often stripped away. But these temporary afflictions were merely training for the most important moment of self-denial in a Methodist's life--death.

Regardless of the physical pain and emotional anguish that the dying endured, the church set great store, as A. Gregory Schneider has shown, in converts experiencing a "happy death." Mrs. Woods of Baltimore, for example, was described as being in "exquisite pain of Body" from an "incurable cancer," but, as her fellow Methodist Maddox Andrew observed, "her soul is happy in God." Andrew's wife Pamela concurred, adding that Woods' "love is so strong, and her faith so triumphant, that she longs to be dissolved and to be with Christ."56

To triumph over pain and death was to have complete self-dominion, to fully sublimate the flesh to the spirit. Mrs. Moore, another Baltimore woman, was "like a living flame" on her deathbed, so "filled with GOD, that every word she spoke was peculiarly weighty...." Her minister described her as martyrlike, for "what else," he asked, "could
enable her to triumph over all the decays of nature, and in the agonies of death!" Moore, it was reported, faced death "without either sigh or groan" which confirmed her mastery over "nature."57

Another reason Methodists were supposed to face death like Mary Foyns, who "Died without a struggle sigh or groan," was because death was supposed to represent the moment of transition to a heavenly state and was a believer's last chance to evangelize. Preachers made special efforts to attend the dying, to pray, counsel, sing, and witness the victory over death that normally followed. Schneider rightly argues that the words of the dying were faithfully inscribed and weighted with extreme significance because they were in part already on the other side. William Adams, whose deathbed ritual was enacted over the course of several weeks, had time to warn all the unregenerate around him of the need to convert and to testify that he was "so happy at times that he thought he had rather die" than live.58 In the deathbed ritual, Methodists both affirmed the victory possible over mortality and drew witnesses near to God. It was deemed especially significant if the dying could help the unconverted realize the need for repentance. To this end, men and women like William Adams paid special attention to those who had not yet professed religion and reminded them that their turn could be next.

Ministers, too, tied death to both victory and conversion. Clergy performed burial services over corpses shortly after death, but more important was the funeral sermon, often preached days or weeks after burial. Rarely did ministers center these sermons around the lives of the deceased.59 Typically, preachers briefly eulogized the dead and then moved to their more urgent messages.

Deaths of the faithful were something to be celebrated, for they represented the ultimate triumph of the soul over the body. Preachers used the text "O death where is thy sting, O grave where is thy victory," a verse also shouted by people in their final moments of life. Death was something to be conquered, as other funeral texts showed. "The last
enemy that shall be destroyed is death" was one such sermon; "I have fought the good fight," another.60

Survivors' behavior was equally important. It was not appropriate, the church believed, for Methodists to grieve excessively or for a long period of time. "Why mourn?," one poem in The Methodist Magazine asked, "since death presents us peace, and in the grave our sorrows cease." Ministers often gave advice to the bereaved that seems, to an outside observer, callous. Ezekiel Cooper consoled a new widow with this warning: "Ah Sister let this teach us the uncertainty of all things under the sun. Our life is as a dream or a vapour soon passing away."61

Methodists did mourn, of course, and the vocabulary of feeling and emotion they learned in the church helped them express their grief. Yet they also tried to use grief (another form of suffering) to become better Christians. Edward Dromgoole, at the time an itinerant preacher, returned from his circuit in 1784 to find his young son dead. "O mighty woe[;] how can I sustain the load...," Dromgoole confessed to his journal. He sadly recalled his son's "dear face," "black eyes," "pretty lips," and "innocent ways," until "the Torrent rises too high for all the bounds and breaks out. Now all the springs of sorrow are open in my heart while my distress is unutterable: Groans and cries must supply the place of Speech[.]."62

Dromgoole placed this death in a Methodist context, noting: "How vain is all that is under heaven: how uncertain all that we are fond of in this vale of tears." After imagining meeting his son in Heaven, the grieving father inscribed a prayer reiterating the lesson God had taught him through his son's death: "thou hast been pleased to touch me in the tenderest part and to give me a striking instance of the frailty of human life." Like many Methodists, Dromgoole tried to use this death in a positive way. He begged God to "[sanctify] this visitation of thy Providence and may it be a means of loosening my heart from every thing that is earthly and of drawing my willing soul to the blessed Regions of
everlasting felicity...." Dromgoole closed his prayer by contrasting the bliss of heaven with the "pain or sickness or death or crying" of earth.\textsuperscript{63}

Death was a victory, then, because it represented the triumph of the soul over the body, because it was the moment of transition, and because earthly existence was a "vail of tears." Nelson Reed thanked God for delivering a woman from "a world of woe" in death. Daniel Grant expressed the Methodist view of life as "a clog of mortality." In this, Methodists were much like the Virginia planters Jan Lewis describes, who began to see life as a train of sorrow.\textsuperscript{64}

Also like the "genteel Virginians" of Lewis's study, Methodists sought comfort in the idea that heaven would restore the family circle.\textsuperscript{65} Several notions, however, separate Methodists from the Virginia gentry. One was that the "family" which Methodists envisioned included more than kin. A second was that because of their evangelical creed, Methodists first had to convert all their relations if they wished to be with them in the afterlife--and then had to ensure they did not fall from grace. And third, heaven for Methodists was more than a family reunion--it represented personal religious triumph.

Letters from Methodists to friends and family normally included some mention of the heavenly reunion. For people separated by migration this idea seems to have been especially comforting. When Sally Pelham left her family in Ohio to return to Virginia and become Sally Pelham Dromgoole, her sisters and mother mentioned their hopes "to meet in heaven where parting will be no more" in letters. Chappell Bonner, related by marriage to Sally Dromgoole, also noted that the entire Methodist society she had left behind had similar hopes: "the prayres of your friends not only in private but in the publick congregation, that if we should never meet you in this wourld that we may meet you on cannans happy shore."\textsuperscript{66}

As Bonner's comments show, Methodist societies, classes, and bands functioned as surrogate or extended families. The forms of address Methodists normally used--"sister"
for women and "brother" for men--helped to develop this intimacy, and helped to bridge gaps of class, race, and status. The importance of these titles is illustrated by an offhand comment Peter Pelham made in a letter to a friend. His daughter Sally had "[received] a letter two days past from Betsy Hicks in which she mentioned the death of 'Mrs. Ross,'" Pelham remarked, adding that "we expect it is Sister Betsy Ross."67

Preacher William Ormond faithfully recorded a man named Goodlow's journey from the world into the Methodist family. Ormond, who referred to Methodists as "brother" and "sister" and non-Methodists as "Mr.," "Mrs.," "Miss," and occasionally "Esq.," first preached at "Mr. Goodlow's" home on July 29, 1791. The next day Ormond wrote that "Mr. Goodlow" was awakened "in a powerful manner." On the second of September, Ormond returned to the home to preach and noted that "Mr Goodlow seem[s] very desirous to serve God." On October 7, Goodlow joined the Methodists. Ormond did not return to the home until December 16 to preach--only now, "Mr" Goodlow had become "Bro." Goodlow.68

Goodlow had not only passed from a distant "Mister" to a familiar "Brother," but in Methodist views he had passed from death into (eternal) life and could hope to join his fellow members in heaven. Methodists' aggressive evangelism of their relatives and friends and their penchant for counselling each other to stay in the "narrow way" is easier to comprehend if we keep in mind that getting to heaven was for them not a simple task. Even when converts wrote other converts exhorting them to a heavenly reunion, they often phrased their pleas as "strive to meet me" or "try to meet me," which again shows how Methodists viewed salvation as a lifelong struggle.

Methodist Elizabeth Anderson was none too gentle with her unconverted brother John Owen. Although her evangelism was conducted via the mails, she used high pressure tactics with great skill. "What joy it would afford to heare that you had experianced the forgiveness of your sins," she began, but warned him that he "must be in good earnest it is
not a matter to be trifled with..." Next she tried guilt, telling Owen that she and many others had been praying for him, asking him to "let not the prayers of all your friends be lost upon you." Anderson also tried to strike at his fear, reminding Owen that "life is uncertain and death is sure." Finally, she commanded him to get religion: "I charge you to meet me in heaven where distress and all confusion will end." As her strident appeal shows, a family reunion in the afterlife was contingent upon her family members' conversions. 69

Yet heaven's function for Methodists was not solely to restore the circle of family and friends, and thus they differ from the elites Jan Lewis explores. Lewis argues that for Virginia's gentry, the "peculiar mixture of sentiment and creed confirmed men and women in a despair from which they drew no more heavenly reward than a family reunion in the world to come." 70 For Methodists, who were euphoric as often as they were despairing, heaven also meant personal, and not just familial, reward. In Heaven, they would be free from their earthly persecutors, free from pain and sorrow, free from the temptations of the flesh and the world, all of which, as we have seen, served to torment Methodists on earth.

Heaven was also a reward to the faithful, just as hell was punishment for the wicked. As one favorite Methodist sermon text put it: "many...shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt." 71 The belief in judgment was not just a corollary to other Methodist doctrines, it was the foundation for all of them. Whenever Methodists characterized (and oversimplified) predestinarian views, they always returned to the injustice of the idea that God had predetermined some to Hell and some to Heaven regardless of what they did on earth. Hell meant nothing, in Methodists' eyes, if it was not punishment for disbelief and unrepentant sinfulness. Likewise, they believed free will was meaningless if all humans went to heaven, and they thus also opposed universalism. Francis Asbury used an earthly analogy to express Methodist views, asking
"What should we think of a governor or judge that would pardon all criminals indiscriminately and unconditionally? where would be the exercise of justice?" 71

Consequently, many funeral sermons emphasized the conditional nature of salvation. Preachers proclaimed in funerals that "it is appointed unto men to die, but after this the judgment." Over children's graves, they reminded their listeners that "except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven." Or, as another sermon text pointed out, at death, "they that have done good" would have "the resurrection of life," while "they that have done evil" would have "the resurrection of damnation." 72

For some men and women in the church, the idea that judgment would follow death was critically important, for they could expect little justice on earth. Such was the case with many slaves, as we shall see in a later chapter, but was also true for others who had been persecuted and mocked for their beliefs. Sarah Jones met with multiple trials from other humans in her life--first from an enraged and violent husband whom she afterwards converted, and later from various people who thought her a fanatic. When she died in 1794, Francis Asbury noted that "She has had a painful journey through life; but her persecutions and troubles are now at an end, and heaven will compensate for all." Jones, like many women, chose her funeral text before she died, and it expressed her hope for compensation: "There the wicked cease from troubling; and there the weary be at rest." 73

Death was seen by some Methodists as such a welcome change that they claimed to have longed for it. Many poems printed in The Arminian Magazine and The Methodist Magazine emphasized the joys of death. "A Funeral Hymn," began with a "gracious sufferer" asking God "Why do thy chariot-wheels delay?..Why thus drag on?" and urging him to "haste away, and bear me to the skies." Another poem, "A Farewell to the World,"
proclaimed: "While sickness rends this tenement of clay, Th'approaching change with pleasure I survey..." 74

Thomas Ware received his first religious impressions when he overheard a Methodist preacher singing a popular hymn about the "pleasure" of death. In "Still Out of the Deepest Abyss," the subject sang: "I mournfully cry, And pine to recover my peace, And see my Redeemer and die." This wish was not for death in the distant future, for the hymn mentioned "passionate longings for home" and asked "O! when shall my spirit be there?" A few years later, at the age of 23, Ware had occasion to apply this sentiment. Suffering with "a kidney complaint" and depressed at the news that a friend had died, Ware noted that he "felt a wish, if it were the will of God, that I might follow him." Although William M'Kendree was physically healthy, when he became anxious about whether he had a call to preach, he more pointedly longed for death, and "begged to Lord to take me to heaven, and so put an end to the doubtful case." 75 Perhaps because Methodists often welcomed death, they were more fearless in their religious lives and better able to withstand persecution for their faith.

Equally strange to our modern secular sensibilities is the fact that a major aim of funeral sermons was to convert those who were still alive. In one sense this was just good strategy. Funerals drew people who would never come to hear a Methodist preach otherwise. In other respects, clergy were merely reinforcing their most common message --the need to convert--in a setting conducive to solemn thoughts on the subject. Death reminded the living of their eventual fate, and thus was an apt time, as James Jenkins put it, "to prepare for death and judgment." A favorite funeral text of preacher James Meacham included the warning that "we must needs die, and are as water spilt on the ground, which cannot be gathered up again." Other funeral texts reminded listeners to "be ye also ready, for in such an hour as ye think not the Son of man cometh," or that "Man goeth to his long home." One even cautioned that "this year thou shalt die." 76
The impact such sermons could have on audiences thinking about death is well illustrated by a dramatic incident in Benjamin Abbott's ministry. While in Maryland during the Revolutionary War, Abbott sat through an Anglican funeral service and was not pleased with what he heard. The sermon was "short, easy, smooth, soft," Abbott said, and when the parson invited him to add a few words, Abbott readily agreed. Amid a chorus of lightening and thunder, Abbott "set before them the awful coming of Christ, in all his splendor, with all the armies of heaven, to judge this world and to take vengeance on the ungodly!" To emphasize how precarious life was and hence the need for his listeners to convert immediately, he added, "It may be...that he will descend in the next clap of thunder." Both the storm and Abbott raged for about an hour, during which time many "screamed, screeched, and fell all through the house."77

Not all Methodist preachers had Abbott's showmanship, nor did they all center on hell and judgment in funeral sermons. Yet the thrust of Abbott's effort--"warning and inviting sinners to flee to Christ"--was the same as in most Methodist funeral sermons. Although Methodists did hope to meet family and friends in heaven, their concept of the afterlife was as individualistic as it was familial, for they believed in the horrors of hell and the certainty of judgment.

Methodists' views about suffering and death show how seriously they took the idea that they must struggle throughout their lives, to the moment of death, if they wished to "inherit the kingdom." Outward and inward behavior were supposed to conform to God's will. Methodism was thus much more than a lifestyle, it involved a reorientation of the inner self. Such a transformation cannot just be ordered by decree; it must be taught.

Training for this reorientation began in Methodist class and band meetings where members were disciplined and subject to rigorous examinations. Through the exercise of discipline, the church reinforced key points of Methodist doctrine. As members watched leaders discipline others, they saw how all were capable of sin after conversion and of
redemption after sin, thus reinforcing the doctrines of free will and falling from grace. Second, the threat of being publicly tried for an offense led members to monitor themselves more strictly, further encouraging ascetic behavior.

Thirdly, discipline served as a model for what the self must daily accomplish. Ministers often used one of two metaphors to describe expulsion. One was medical with religious overtones—"purging." In this era, purgatives were common treatments for illnesses and were seen to purify the body by removing "bad" fluids. Thomas Chew noted "an increasing declension of Religion" in his circuit and believed the solution lay in greater discipline: "it is high time to purge the Classes in general, for unless the rubbish is remov'd out of the way we shall travel slowly...." As the church tried to keep pure as a body by purging "bad" members, so did individuals try to purify themselves in body and mind by purging bad thoughts and habits. The second metaphor clergy used for expulsion was "sifting," again a process of weeding out the bad so the good could flourish. The emphasis was always on purifying the converted, and not on reforming the world outside the convert and his or her church.

We should not think of "discipline" solely as a matter of church leaders reproving, suspending, or expelling an offending member. For Methodism to succeed, members had to exercise self-discipline, and the rule book for the church, aptly named the Discipline, offered guidance for individuals as well as pastors. In class meetings, for example, members were expected to subject themselves to intense scrutiny. Behavior and mental disposition were both important; so too was the ability to describe one's feelings and mind. The Discipline directed class and band leaders to ask members "searching questions" and to conduct "a free inquiry into the state of the heart" in order to assure that they were obedient. Members were encouraged to "confess [their] faults one to another," and those faults included those "committed in tempers, words or actions." The Discipline asked members whether they "desire we should tell you whatsoever we think, whatsoever
we fear, whatsoever we hear concerning you?" and whether "in doing this we should come as close as possible, that we should cut to the quick, and search your heart to the bottom?" In these confessional class and band meetings, in the emotionally demonstrative services, in the testimony of love feasts, Methodists learned how to express emotions and feelings.  

The focus of the inquiry was the heart and not the mind. Methodists had little confidence in reason, and although they saw the reasoning faculty as a gift of God, they did not seat religion in the head. Benjamin Lakin faulted himself for having "given way to Philosophy,...seek[ing] therein what alone is to be found in Christ." Ezekiel Cooper argued that reason was not "a standard against revelation," for he believed "revelation" was "true reason itself." He cautioned that "there is a danger, very great danger to substitute reason in its depraved uncertain state as a standard by which we account for things relative to religion."  

Many scholars have noted how groups like the Methodists prized emotion over reason, the heart over the head, feelings over ideas. The contemporary critics of early Methodism were not as kind. They charged Wesleyans with fanaticism, enthusiasm, and irrationality. In the "age of reason," it is understandable that expressive evangelicals would seem out of place, for not only did they appear to exalt feelings and impressions, they even, like Cooper, claimed reason was more "depraved" than feelings and impressions.  

Methodists had words for their critics as well; most often labelling less demonstrative denominations and sects as "formal" or "cold." When clergy detected a lack of zeal in their own congregations, they often used the same terms. Nelson Reed called an audience of 1779 "very formall." James Meacham believed that "if it was not for Class Meeting our dear people would soon become as formal as the old Episcopalians."
Spontaneity, which was most often manifested as enthusiasm, became in many ways the test of true religion for Methodists. 82

Yet it is misleading to say Methodists courted "emotions" or "feelings," because only certain kinds of feelings and emotions were desirable. Consider the case of John Littlejohn, whose horse became restless while Littlejohn was trying to wash it: "I was fretted & tempted to Anger, I cried O Lord from anger set my spirit free. It worketh not thy right[eousnes]s, Cleanse thou me from secret thoughts[.] I do not remember haveing felt anger since my conversion to God before, may I feel it no more. O may I be all love & joy & peace...." Littlejohn's prayer is especially significant, first because his anger was directed at an animal and not at a human being, and second because he seemed to associate conversion with an absence of anger. Littlejohn condemned himself not for his behavior, but for his state of mind. Other Methodists also chided themselves when they felt anger, jealousy, and hatred. John Wesley, as one scholar has noted, saw "anger to be a form of madness." 83

Happiness was, on the other hand, desirable, and in Methodist services, meetings, and private devotions, happiness often reigned supreme. When a class meeting went well for preacher William Ormond, he claimed that "several got happy." Thomas Mann frequently noted that "all appear happy" or "appeared very happy." Methodists used the word "happy" so often that modifiers became important in distinguishing degrees of the emotion. After a successful service, William Ormond noted that "Sinners trembled & the Christians were uncommonly happy." Isabell Owen, too, got "uncommonly happy" as Thomas Mann looked on in an 1805 meeting. Sarah Jones romantically described her mood in similar terms: "My soul is unspeakably happy--Every day is Spring, and every month May." These happy folk provide a useful corrective to scholarly views that evangelicals were always (or primarily) sour and grim. 84
But the emotion that Methodists prized most was love. John Wesley had written that the "whole nature" of Christian zeal was "the love of GOD and man," and American Methodists believed that the essence of God's will was love. Joseph Pinnell described love as "the most noble [passion] of the mind[]. Its soft influence is spread over the believers soul-- & makes every duty sweet--Its rich perfume fills Heaven[]." Sally Eastland was almost overwhelmed with love, and in a letter to a minister wrote: "dear brother the topic is JESUS and his Love, but oh my feeble pen--it fails, it fails; my unskillful hand falls short here; I cant tell much,-- but one thing I can tell I love to be hearing of him; and when I hear from Him, some times my poor [Eastland drew a figure of a heart here] desolves in love...." 85

Love was the standard for Methodists' interactions with one another; they were supposed to be "of one mind and heart." In a class meeting John Kobler presided over, he noted that "our hearts melted and ran together." Benjamin Lakin described his feelings about his fellow Methodists in similar terms: "my heart felt united to them in love...I felt the bonds of love uniteing my heart to the Lords peopel." 86

Discord, greed, disharmony, gossip, and envy were supposed to have no place in Methodist societies. Such an ideal was difficult to achieve, however, and preachers devoted much of their time to healing divisions within local Methodist groups. The most frequent violations of the *Discipline* in Nelson Reed's ministry, for example, were disputes and divisions between the members, and he often "labour'd to set them at one." William Ormond, too, had to work to keep harmony, as when he settled a dispute between a sister Ballard and Brother Jackson on July 19, 1791. Union was so important that breaking harmony became a punishable offense. George Wells, for example, conducted a trial against Methodists Hillburn and Rogers in 1792. Neither had committed an offense worthy of expulsion, Wells recorded, but "yet there was some enmity between [them] therefore all that was required of each party was to forgive or lose a place among us." 87
The same harmony Methodists sought in religious groups was supposed to exist in Methodist families. The standard becomes clearest in the breach—when couples were disciplined for "enmity" or fighting, or when preachers tried to stop domestic violence. Benjamin Lakin even became the intermediary between an eloped daughter and an angry father. Brother Springer had opposed his daughter's marriage and "resolved to keep [the newlyweds] at a distance." Lakin prayed and "used my influence with the old man" until Springer "sent them word to come home," and the family seemed "in a fair way of peace." 88

Occasionally the love Methodists felt could extend outside the circle of fellow church members. "I love every Christian in the world," Sarah Jones once wrote in such a spirit. But Methodists normally felt closest to one another. "Though I feel a nearness of soul to every one that bears the image of our heavenly father of what ever denomination they may be," Daniel Grant noted, "yet such as meet often together and express their tryals and feelings to each other and appears to watch over each other in love and speaks and almost thinks the very same not only as to [essentials] but also in things of a lesser nature I say the union of such and their Christian fellowship will be more dear and tender than to others." 89

The love and happiness that Methodists felt in fellowship with each other was best maintained, they believed, by separating themselves from the "world." Church services were open to all, but class and band meetings, love feasts, watch nights, and prayer meetings were usually reserved for members or those seriously seeking religion. Often Methodists were required to get tickets from their clergy or class leaders in order to gain admittance to love feasts, and it was common for one minister or lay leader to keep out people who were not allowed in. Such vigilance declined during the course of the years under study here, but in the earliest decades of southern Methodism, clergy were rather strict in enforcement of the rules.
Because it was so difficult to become and stay a Methodist, and because
Methodists tried to separate themselves from the "world" as individuals and as a church,
the community that members created was a tight-knit but exclusive one. And more
importantly, even when Methodists were together, the focus was still largely on the self.
Methodists drew comfort and spiritual sustenance from each other, but their destiny, albeit
a common one, was for each member alone to make.90

Preachers understood that laypeople could not completely withdraw from the
world, nor did clergy desire for their members to do so. Yet the church did seek to keep
the line between Methodists and others clear in a number of ways. First, through
mandatory and optional gatherings, the church offered social as well as spiritual comfort.
A variety of meetings were required, such as weekly class meetings and Sabbath services.
Prayer meetings, watch nights, love feasts, weekday worship services, band meetings, and
regional gatherings--such as quarterly meetings, camp meetings, and conferences, were
optional. Both provided alternatives to "worldly" frolics, balls, taverns, and barbecues and
enhanced Methodists sense of difference with other southerners.

Sarah Miller's schedule was crowded with church activities. On July 8, 1809, she
attended a church service. She had a class meeting scheduled during the day on the 9th,
and another service that evening. On July the 10th, she had a funeral sermon to attend,
and she was looking forward to a camp meeting that was to begin on September the 8th.
It is no wonder that some feared Methodists had too many meetings, as did a man who
told preacher Nelson Reed that "he wish'd people would stay at home and make corn for
their families" instead of going to church all the time.91

Second, private and family duties also helped to ensure that Methodists kept
focused on "the narrow way." Members were encouraged to pray as individuals and as
families on a daily basis, and judging by available evidence, most did. Critics felt that
some Methodists were too concerned with prayer. Miles, brother to preacher John
Littlejohn, opposed the Methodists fiercely and told John that "we must not always be at prayers for if so we could not live." 92

Third, Methodists distinguished themselves from many other sects and from the secular-minded by their ascetic habits. In dress, language, and behavior, Methodists called attention to their differences with others. Also their pious conversation (or to critics their obsession with religion) and their urge to counsel, evangelize, and "reprove" others helped to mark them.

Finally, Methodists derived a sense of their separateness from the way they were viewed by others. Because of their exclusiveness, doctrinal peculiarities, asceticism, enthusiasm, and as we will later see, because of the types of people attracted to the church, Methodists were scorned by many. To be a Methodist was to voluntarily align with an outcast and despised sect, and members were acutely aware and even proud of the ignominy with which their church was viewed. Methodists knew they were different because their beliefs, the church, and their critics told them so.

Thomas Lyell, who turned from Methodism to Episcopalianism around 1804, recalled in the mid-nineteenth century his early years as a Wesleyan:

I will not say that as a sect they were even then, everywhere spoken against but they were comparatively a little flock--a poor and despised people in the eyes of men--but in whatever point of light they were viewed by a misjudging world they were the delight and joy of each other.... They began to bear each others burdens, and naturally to care for each other and as they had daily a more intimate acquaintance with, so they had a more endeared affection for each other.... 93

Although Lyell does not overtly make such a claim, it is clear that Methodists in part became the "delight and joy" of each other because they were seen as "poor and despised" by the "world."
Methodists tried to bridge the gap between themselves and the world through evangelism. With the exception of slavery, the early church did not try to force Methodist beliefs on others by influencing legislation. Rather than trying to remake the environment outside their loving communities, they sought to draw more and more individuals into the circle. As A. Gregory Schneider perceptively argued, "the chief questions of evangelical social order became inclusion and exclusion: who was included in the family of God? Who was not?" 94

Our exploration--from Sarah Jones' tortured psyche to the tight-knit affectionate group described by Lyell--has revealed how important the church's doctrines, values, and practices were in forging Methodists' individual and group identities. Because of the doctrines of free will, falling from grace, and sanctification, Methodists believed that they were the masters of their fate and that this fate was daily in the making. Methodism held out the hope of a perfected self and the danger of a fallen self, and charged men and women with negotiating the territory in between the two.

To successfully complete their journeys, Methodists had to reform their outward and inward behavior to conform with what they believed to be God's will. As every choice was meaningful, every action significant, and every thought controllable, even those Methodists most powerless in the secular world were vested with agency. Methodists believed in the power of all individuals to achieve their own salvation and to mold their own psyches. In order to master the self, they tried to sublimate the body to the soul, to heighten spirituality by denying the flesh. Methodism turned the trials of mortal life into sources of possible triumph by viewing suffering as salutary, persecution as chastening, and death as victory.

While men and women wound their solitary paths to heaven or hell, the church offered solace and comfort along the way. Methodists shared their trials and triumphs with one another and tried to urge each other on in their lone journeys. Their destiny as
individuals and as a group was otherworldly, but in order to get to heaven, they had to first re-make themselves on earth.

Sarah Jones had perceptively noted that "the war is perpetual while here." Thus far, we have seen how this warfare was waged internally. Now we will turn to the very real external enemies that Methodists faced, for as much as they abhorred the world, they could not escape it.
Endnotes


8. Indeed, to Methodists, Satan functioned much like we believe the unconscious or subconscious functions for us. Impure passing thoughts or emotions were often blamed on Satan. Methodists, however, believed that Satan could find no inroads into a sanctified mind, and thus they believed they were able to control Satan's advances.

9. One need only compare Jonathan Edwards' beliefs to those that follow to see the difference. See also Richard Rabinowitz, *The Spiritual Self in Everyday Life: The Transformation of Personal Religious Experience in Nineteenth-Century New England* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1989). Rabinowitz identifies three "ideal types" of evangelicalism in New England. He characterizes New England evangelicals around the turn of the nineteenth century as "doctrinalist" or "orthodox," and finds that "the faculty of mind central to their religious enterprise was the understanding, rather than the will or feelings...."(xxix) The second type, exemplified by Lyman Beecher and the moral reformers, he terms "moralism." The moralists, Rabinowitz argues, approved of emotionalism and their God "was inherently more anthropomorphic than the orthodox deity."(89) The moralists' sense of what I would term after Higham "boundlessness" was greater than that of the orthodox. Rabinowitz describes the difference as follows: "But when both men heard the tall clock strike the half hour, one [the doctrinalist] said it was half past the hour, and the other [the moralist] that it was half till the next. The elder leaned back, pondering how to make his peace with God in the time remaining; the younger leaned forward, pulling up his boots, straining toward the door to get a start before a moment more was wasted."(86) He sees the advent of "devotionalism," which he describes as "the increasing tendency in evangelicalism...to inflate the self so that it incarnated the divine within the self" as coming later in the nineteenth century, and becoming dominant after 1840.(xxix) Methodists share some characteristics with "moralists" but southern Methodists resemble most the type Rabinowitz calls the "devotionalists" in large part because of their aversion to social reform.


11. This poem was printed in *The Arminian Magazine* (December 1789) and again in *The Methodist Magazine* (February 1797). Sarah Jones to Jeremiah Minter, n.d, in Devout Letters, 34. Viewing God as Mother instead of as Father has interesting implications for gender ideology, especially in such a patriarchal society as the early national South. The image of God as stern patriarch surfaces most often in Methodist writings when Wesleyans were discussing the way God would handle the unconverted.


18. Russell Richey, *Early American Methodism*, 82-83. Camp meetings produced even stranger behavior, such as barking, dancing, and the jerks. It is difficult to document the extent of enthusiastic behavior, for not every church service produced noise or demonstrative behavior. When clergy came into an area for the first time, they often described their audiences as unresponsive. And clergy did not all agree on the line between acceptable reactions and excessive ones. Nor did everyone in the services where some enthusiasm was evident display equally demonstrative behavior. What may safely be said is that clergy judged themselves successful when they provoked some reaction, that in services attended by Methodists normally some demonstrative behavior was evident, and that Methodists were known by their detractors for this demonstrative behavior. The even more demonstrative behavior of camp meetings suggests that as enthusiasm became more acceptable and Methodists more respectable, converts had to exhibit more extreme behavior to get noticed.

19. August 11, 1778, *The Journal of John Littlejohn*, typescript loaned by Lovely Lane Museum, original at Louisville Conference Historical Society. There is evidence to suggest that southern Methodists were more enthusiastic than their northern counterparts. Preachers Bostwick and McCombs were working in New-London in 1799 when their congregation began to become animated. Bostwick made the following revealing observation: "it happened well that brother McCombs and myself had been formerly favoured with such scenes in the south, and well knew what to do." S. Bostwick to [Francis Asbury], December 10, 1799, in *Extracts of Letters, Containing Some Account of the Work of God Since the Year 1800* (New York: Totten for Cooper and Wilson, 1805), 8-9.


25. Ibid.

26. January 10, 1808, "Diary of John Early, Bishop of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South," The Virginia Magazine of History and Biography 34:4 (October 1926): 311; July 3, 1779, The Diary of Nelson Reed, typescript, Baltimore-Washington Conference United Methodist Historical Society, Lovely Lane Museum, Baltimore, Maryland; Sarah Jones to Edward Dromgoole, n.d., copy, Edward Dromgoole Papers, Southern Historical Collection, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. This sort of language was rather common.

27. Sarah Harrison to Daniel Shine, August 28, 1809, Daniel Shine Papers, Special Collections, Duke University.

28. The literature on the "Arminian heresy" and its implications for an expanded sense of human agency is vast. See, for example, Paul E. Johnson, A Shopkeeper's Millenium: Society and Revivals in Rochester, New York, 1815-1837; Nancy Cott, "Young Women in the Second Great Awakening in New England," Feminist Studies 3:1/2 (Fall 1975): 15-29; Joanna Bowen Gillespie, "The Sun in Their Domestic System: The Mother in Early Nineteenth-Century Methodist Sunday School Lore," in Rosemary Skinner Keller, Louise L. Queen, and Hilah F. Thomas, eds., Women in New Worlds, Volume II: Historical Perspectives on the Wesleyan Tradition (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1982); John L. Thomas, "Romantic Reform in America, 1815-1865," American Quarterly 17:4 (Winter 1965): 656-81. For Sarah Jones, see Sarah Jones to Jeremiah Minter, July 31, 1790, in Devout Letters, 30. Curtis Johnson links white male suffrage and the market to the rise of evangelical individualism in Islands of Holiness, 42-46. While some women also "daily made calculations"(42) for the market, they did not have the experience of voting. Few blacks had experience with either, but certainly black Methodists used the language of agency and free will despite their exclusion from the market and the polity. I would argue that the belief that all actions, great and small, had profound consequences and the religious experience of manipulating the self were more influential in the rise of evangelical individualism.

29. Clark, et al., eds., The Journal and Letters of Francis Asbury, 1:756; Simpson, ed., American Methodist Pioneer, 210; Extracts of Letters, 23. There is some disagreement among historians as to the importance of sanctification for early Methodists. I maintain it was very important. For disputes between Methodists and non-Methodists over the doctrine of sanctification, sermons on the subject, or reports of many achieving sanctification, see, for example, the following: Simpson, ed., American Methodist Pioneer, 178; James Jenkins, Experience, Labours, and Sufferings of Rev. James Jenkins, of the South Carolina Conference (n.p.: for the author, 1842), 135; May 4, 1777, June 11, 1777, June 12, 1777, August 11, 1777, August 3, 1778, August 11, 1778, The Journal of John Littlejohn, Clark, et al., eds., The Journal and Letters of Francis Asbury, 1:388, 1:482, 1:526; 1:756; Paine, Life and Times of William M'Kendree, 50, 63, 106-7, 110, 112. This
is a small sample. Correspondence also reveals that after conversion, Methodists sought sanctification.

30. Sarah Jones to William Spencer, October 25, 1792, Devout Letters, 134. As historians have noted, Wesley spoke of sanctification both as an instantaneous work of grace or "second blessing" and as a lifelong pursuit. See David Leroy Weddle, "The New Man: A Study of the Significance of Conversion for the Theological Definition of the Self in Jonathan Edwards and Charles G. Finney," Ph.D. diss., Harvard University, 1973. The overwhelming experience of Methodists in the sources consulted here was that they strove for perfection for a long time before it instantaneously happened to them. There is little indication that they debated over how sanctification would come to them. As may be apparent, I consider sanctification an integral part of early Methodism. Timothy L. Smith, in Revivalism and Social Reform in Mid-Nineteenth-Century (New York: Abingdon Press, 1957), 115-16, does not see sanctification as an important part of "early" Methodism. John Leland Peters in Christian Perfection and American Methodism (New York: Abingdon Press, 1956), sees the most common sermon thrust to be conversion, and here I must agree. Yet he also argues that "perfection was a well-remembered corollary" to conversion, and that it was not until later in the nineteenth century that sanctification lost its critical place. We must recall that the church in its earliest decades was small and many sermons were before non-Methodist audiences--audiences itinerants assumed were not converted. Before such audiences, conversion would have been the main topic. But it was also critically important to clergy that they not lose the converts they had already made, and they believed the way to keep converts and zeal was to stress perfection. Frank Baker shows that sanctification was always part of the Doctrines and Discipline, and that in 1789, the clergy added a lengthy (almost ninety page) treatise by Wesley on perfection. Frank Baker, From Wesley to Asbury: Studies in Early American Methodism (Durham: Duke University Press, 1976), 163-176.

31. The closest American evangelical Calvinists came to a belief in "falling from grace" was their belief that they could blaspheme against the Holy Spirit, for which offense even the elect could go to hell. See Julius H. Rubin, Religious Melancholy and Protestant Experience in America (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), especially 169-176. The doctrine of "falling from grace" was one of the most consistent sources of tension between Methodists and others sects. For disputes between Methodists and others on the issue, see, for example: Minton Thrift, Memoir of the Rev. Jesse Lee With Extracts from His Journals (reprint edition by Arno Press & The New York Times, 1969), 141-42; September 27, 1779, September 29, 1779, Diary of Nelson Reed; December 8, 1799, The Diary of Jeremiah Norman; November 18, 1790, Ezekiel Cooper Journals, copy courtesy of Lovely Lane Museum, original at Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary; April 10, 1777, October 24, 1777, July 12, 1778; Jenkins, Experience, Labours, and Sufferings of Rev. James Jenkins, 39; Clark, et al., eds., The Journal and Letters of Francis Asbury, 1:437, 1:585.


34. Autobiographical Sketches of Dr. William Hill (Richmond: The Library, Union Theological Seminary in Virginia, 1968), 55.
35. Jones, *Devout Letters*, 66, 74; Elizabeth Anderson to John Owen, October 21, 1810, Campbell Family Papers, Special Collections, Duke University.


42. July 4, 1780, Diary of Rev. Nelson Reed.

43. For trifling, see April 27, 1777, The Journal of John Littlejohn and, "The Diary of Elizabeth M'Kean," *The Methodist Magazine* (May 1797): 228; for Grant's comments, see Daniel Grant to John Owen, August 20, 1789 and November 4, 1792, Campbell Family Papers; for murmuring, impatience, and conversation, see May 13, 1795, July 30, 1795, September 28, 1795, October 17, 1795, "The Journal of Benjamin Lakin," 206, 209, 211; for laughing, see August 5, 1792, Rev. John Kobler's Journal and July 7, 1797, James Meacham Papers; for "worldly conversation," see July 11, 1797, James Meacham Papers; for murmuring, see Thomas Sheredine Chew to Edward Dromgoole, August 20, 1784, Edward Dromgoole Papers.

44. A related argument is made by A. Gregory Schneider in *The Way of the Cross Leads Home*. Schneider shows how Methodist itinerants represented the inverse of men of honor for all these same reasons. I am not disagreeing with Schneider so much as indicating what I believe to be the reasons behind this behavior. They were not models of asceticism because they sought to establish an alternative to the culture of honor. Rather, they were models of asceticism because they believed the flesh to be subordinate and inferior to the spirit. The result (and not the cause) of this behavior was that clergy were the inverse of the culture of honor.

Not all itinerants were single throughout the years from 1770 to 1810. Benjamin Abbott was married, as was Benjamin Lakin. The normal course, however, was for a preacher to "locate" once they married.

46. For the couple burning money and Nicolites, see Simpson, ed., *American Methodist Pioneer*, 111, 86; for Abbott, see Firth, *The Experiences and Gospel Labours, of the Rev. Benjamin Abbott*, 41; for suicide, see, for example, Clark *et al.*, eds., *The Journal and Letters of Francis Asbury*, 1:421. Asbury said that Mrs. Yancey of North Carolina was "sunk into rigid mortification, thinking she ought to fast excessively," in Clark *et al.*, eds., *The Journal and Letters of Francis Asbury*, 1:358. Asbury approved of "mortification"; thus we may conclude that it was Yancey's "rigid" efforts that upset him.

47. Minter, *A Brief Account of the Religious Experience*, 16. People outside the church found out about Minter's actions, and a Virginia lawyer made it public. Minter was an extremely troubled person. He felt several people had "murderous designs" on him and referred to Asbury as a "worker of magic or sorcery."(vii, 37) Asbury pitied him, but also recognized the scandal his castration brought on Methodism. In 1791, he wrote in his journal that "Poor Minters's [sic] case has given occasion for sinners and for the world to laugh, and talk, and write." Clark *et al.*, eds., *The Journal and Letters of Francis Asbury*, 1:671.


51. July 16, 1795, The Original Journals of Richard Whatcoat; Rebecca Ridgely to Prisey, October 1, 1790, Ridgely-Pue Papers, MS. 693, Maryland Historical Society.

52. *The Arminian Magazine* (August 1790): 413-15; J. B. Wakeley, *The Patriarch of One Hundred Years; Being Reminiscences, Historical and Biographical, of Rev. Henry Boehm*. (New York: Nelson & Phillips, 1875), 156; See also the poem "The Benefit of Affliction," *The Arminian Magazine* (April 1790). Such stoicism must be placed in the context of the very real, intense, and often protracted suffering that disease and illness could cause in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. It seems clear that religion helped Methodists endure the pain that was a normal part of life. By looking for the good that could come of suffering, Methodists could focus their mind on God and inner perfection and consequently off of their pain.


56. Maddox and Pamela Andrew to Ezekiel Cooper, April 23, 1798, Ezekiel Cooper Collection, Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary.
59. The sermons for George Washington were more eulogies than anything else, and they represent the exception to the rule. See, for example, Thomas Morrell, *A Sermon on the Death of General George Washington* (Baltimore: Warren & Hanna, 1800).
61. *The Methodist Magazine* (May 1798): 240; Ezekiel Cooper to Rebecca Ridgely, June 16, 1790, Ridgely-Pue Papers. See also the poem on death by Phillis Wheatly in *The Arminian Magazine* (August 1789): 403. Methodists sometimes believed that the death of a loved one was caused because the survivor had loved the deceased more than God. Benjamin Lakin had persistent fears about his wife's death, and on one occasion noted that he had a "deep impression that God was about to take my wife from me to prevent me from placing my affections so much on her as to draw my heart from God." In "The Journal of Benjamin Lakin," 233.
62. Dromgoole's meditation on his son's death can be found following the entry for July 27, 1784 in his Journal, Edward Dromgoole Papers.
63. See the entry following July 27, 1784 in Journal, Edward Dromgoole Papers.
64. February 15, 1791, Ezekiel Cooper Journals; September 19, 1780, The Diary of Nelson Reed; Daniel Grant to John Owen, June 14, 1792, Campbell Family Papers; Lewis, *The Pursuit of Happiness*, ch. 3.
65. Lewis in *The Pursuit of Happiness* argues of genteel Virginians: "Their peculiar mixture of sentiment and creed confirmed men and women in a despair from which they drew no more heavenly reward than a family reunion in the world to come."(105) The differences between the men and women Lewis describes and the Methodists may probably be accounted for by theological and denominational differences. A major part of Lewis's argument is that even non-evangelicals became influenced by evangelicalism and adopted many of their patterns. Yet non-evangelicals and evangelicals in more traditional sects such as Episcopalians and Presbyterians did not and could not completely share the
views of Methodists on heaven and hell, life and death. It is not surprising, for example, that non-evangelicals would have taken from the evangelical view of heaven only the idea of a family reunion and would have dropped the notions central to sects like the Methodists of heaven as a place of judgment, justice, and the eternal embrace of God.

66. First quote from Martha Pelham to Mrs. Sarah Dromgoole, August 30, 1810, Edward Dromgoole Papers. Similar remarks can be found in other letters: Mrs. Pelham to Sally Dromgoole, July 25, 1810, Mary Pelham to Sarah Dromgoole, September 3, 1810, Elizabeth Pelham to Sarah Dromgoole, October 3, 1810, Edward Dromgoole Papers. Second quote from Chappell H. Bonner to Sarah Dromgoole, September 1, 1810, Edward Dromgoole Papers.

67. Peter Pelham to Edward Dromgoole, 1809, Edward Dromgoole Papers.


69. Elizabeth Anderson to John Owen, October 21, 1810, Campbell Family Papers. Anderson was, needless to say, confident and bold in her appeal, and acted as the leader of the two siblings here.


73. We will see more of Sarah Jones struggles with her husband in a later chapter. For her death and funeral, see Clark, *et al.*, eds., *The Journal and Letters of Francis Asbury*, 2:34.

74. "A Funeral Hymn," *The Arminian Magazine* (August 1790); "A Farewell to the World," *The Arminian Magazine* (May 1789). This does not seem to have been solely a rhetorical death wish. Pain and suffering intensified longings for death, as should be expected in this mentalite. Yet sometimes Methodists longed for death when they were filled with joy and happiness in services or prayer, when the raptures they felt with God seemed so sweet that they wanted never to feel sorrow again.

75. Ware, "Sketches of the Life and Travels of Rev. Thomas Ware", 54, 115; Paine, *Life and Times of William M'Kendree*, 52. The obsession with death could cause strange
behavior. Jesse Lee, in a scene eerily reminiscent of one in William Byrd's life, with some friends opened George Whitefield's coffin to inspect his remains. Lee's biographer summarized "the fearful change which the king of terrors makes upon the most perfect forms" in morbid detail--facial features had fallen off, the body was dessicated, and "his flesh was black." Lee tore off a piece of Whitefield's burial robe "and prayed that he might be indued with the same zeal which once inspired the breast of its wearer." Thrift, *Memoir of the Rev. Jesse Lee*, 156.


78. For "purging," see, for example, July 1, 1798, William Ormond Papers; March 9, 1790, Ezekiel Cooper Journals; Chew quoted in Thomas Sheredine Chew to Edward Dromgoole, March 9, 1790, Edward Dromgoole Papers; for "sifting" see February 18, 1792, George Wells Journal.

79. The Methodists were much less democratic than the Baptists and judging by clergymen's comments, Methodist itinerants alone decided in most instances whether a violation had occurred and what punishment was in order. The procedures for disciplining members did change over the years under study here, with increasing provisions made for the input of members, appeals, and for trials by more than one church leader.


81. Lakin, "The Journal of Benjamin Lakin," 221; Ezekiel Cooper to R. Roy, December 10, 1795, Ezekiel Cooper Collection. Francis Asbury even used the term "heart religion" on one occasion. Clark, *et al.*, eds., *The Journal and Letters of Francis Asbury*, 1:776. My analysis is somewhat at odds with that of Albert J. Raboteau's *Slave Religion* on this point, for I believe that at least in this earlier period, both black and white Methodists sought "heart religion."


83. Littlejohn quote from July 5, 1777, The Journal of John Littlejohn. See also Francis Asbury's comment of December 20, 1790: "My soul has been kept in great peace; and almost in constant prayer: I wish to feel so placid as not to have any acid in my temper, nor a frown or wrinkle on my brow..." in Clark, *et al.*, eds., *The Journal and Letters of Francis Asbury*, 1:658. For Wesley's views, see Holifield, *Health and Medicine in the Methodist Tradition*, 67.
84. March 6, 1792, William Ormond Papers; June 30, 1806, November 18, 1805, Thomas Mann Papers; September 24, 1795, William Ormond Papers; Sarah Jones to Edward Dromgoole, n.d., copy, Edward Dromgoole Papers.

85. Wesley quoted in *The Arminian Magazine* (November 1789): 527; Joseph Pinnell to Daniel Shine, March 16, 1805, Daniel Shine Papers; Sally Eastland to Edward Dromgoole, February 21, 1790, Edward Dromgoole Papers. As is clear from my "transcription" of Sally Eastland's letter, it is often very difficult to properly render Methodists' handwritten letters into typescript. They frequently wrote the words "Jesus" or "God" in large, bold, capital letters that cannot be adequately depicted here.


87. For Reed quote, see April 16, 1779, for other disputes see August 10, 1778, March 20, 1779, April 17, 1779, July 11, 1781, July 15, 1781, Diary of Nelson Reed; July 19, 1791, December 1, 1791, April 9, 1796, March 26, 1797, William Ormond Papers; July 14, 1792, Rev. George Wells' Journal.

88. Jeremiah Norman expelled Mr. and Mrs. Cox for "enmity," December 23, 1800, The Diary of Jeremiah Norman; John Kobler expelled "E. Lacy" for fighting with her husband, November 6, 1797; Thomas Mann took Isaac Knox "up stars and deal with him for whiping his wife," November 26, 1810, Thomas Mann Papers; "The Journal of Benjamin Lakin," 224-25. Methodist clergy had no jurisdiction over non-Methodists. They appear to have intervened in marriages and families only when all parties were in the church.

89. Sarah Jones to Jeremiah Minter, n.d., *Devout Letters*, 22; Daniel Grant to Capt. Chisley Daniel, October 27, 1791, Campbell Family Papers.

90. See also John B. Boles, "Revivalism, Renewal, and Social Mediation in the Old South." Donald Mathews emphasizes the communitarian and social aspects of Methodism in *Religion in the Old South*.

91. Sarah Miller to Daniel Shine, July 8, 1809, Daniel Shine Papers; December 22, 1778, Diary of Nelson Reed.


93. Thomas Lyell, unnumbered autobiographical manuscript, in Albert Smedes Papers, Southern Historical Collection. Thomas Lyell's class bias is made clear in subsequent remarks he makes.

94. Schneider, "The Ritual of Happy Dying Among Early American Methodists," *Church History* 56:3 (September 1987), 351.
Chapter 3:  
Slaves and Free Blacks in the Church

I have lately been much comforted by the death of some poor negroes, who have gone off the stage of time, rejoicing in the God of their salvation. I asked one, on the point of death, 'Are you afraid to die?' 'Oh no,' said she, 'I have my beloved Saviour in my heart.' She continued to declare the great things that God had done for her soul, to the astonishment of many, till the Lord took her to Himself.

--Richard Boardman to John Wesley, New York, April 2, 1771

This was a scene repeated time and again in Methodism. Members of the church strove to be confident and calm in the final moments of life, to die a "happy death." Death has often been viewed as the great leveler, the common fate of the rich and mighty as well as the poor and lowly. For Methodists, death also marked the passage to a joyous life in Heaven, where "no distinction will be seen at [God's] right hand either in colour or seat." This belief in the common humanity of all and the Lord's imperviousness to earthly ranking guided their views about slavery and their receptivity to slave and free black worshipers. And in this black woman's death, the emphasis is on the Methodist universal—her victory.

There is, however, an element in this particular deathbed scene that sets it apart from many others. It is one of the first known instances of a black, probably slave, deathbed ritual recorded by a Methodist preacher. In this poignant story are, then, both the general and specific that make up the experience of free and black Methodists. In her church, this woman shared a common bond of belief and practice with all members, black and white. But her race meant that the life which she was leaving was drastically different from those led by her white Methodist counterparts.
In Methodism many slaves and free blacks found a God who did not see differences in color, caste, gender, or status. In Methodist doctrine, oppressed and victimized African Americans found a value system which prized individual choice and individual agency in a world where they had few choices and where their individuality was often not respected. In Methodist rituals, slaves and free blacks affirmed their sense of self-worth and humanity and openly challenged the racist ideology of their oppressors. By registering support for Methodist values, slaves could express their disdain of their owners' lifestyles and morally invert secular rankings. For slaves, most of whom could expect no justice in this world, the idea of divine justice had special meaning. And when the misery and pain of bondage taxed the human spirit, Methodist slaves found comfort and hope in their religion.

Slaves and free blacks who converted to Methodism did so for many different reasons. Methodists' antislavery policies, the church's stands against cruelty and neglect of slaves, and the doctrines and practices of the church were important factors. Methodists also opened some leadership positions to African Americans. Some black men were respected leaders of biracial groups--leaders who prayed, exhorted, preached, and who also advised, counselled, and disciplined whites and blacks. Outside the evangelical churches, for black men to have such power over whites was unthinkable.

Historians of slave religion often focus on the late antebellum period, in part because of the rich source material contained in the WPA interviews with former slaves. In these interviews, freedmen and women revealed many white ministers to be among slavery's staunchest defenders, men who advanced slave obedience from the pulpit and who often reduced the Bible to a proslavery manifesto. In the late antebellum era, as historians of proslavery thought have shown, southern ministers, Methodists included, spearheaded efforts to religiously justify slavery and to ground the proslavery argument in a Christian framework of benevolence and stewardship.
But such was not always the case. In the late eighteenth century, and to a lesser extent the early nineteenth century as well, when Methodist ministers preached on slavery, they usually denounced the institution. Most sermons, of course, to black, biracial, and white audiences centered on the necessity of conversion, the importance of holiness, or the evils of worldliness, but those sermons that did address slavery and oppression most often condemned the oppressors. Vastly more ministerial effort went into convincing masters to free their slaves than in urging slaves to obey their masters. We cannot hope to understand the nature of black Methodism in the late eighteenth century unless we distinguish the clergy's attitudes in this era from the proslavery stance of later antebellum years.

There were decided limits even to early Methodist egalitarianism, as this and subsequent chapters will demonstrate. But in the midst of what many historians believe to be the nadir of slave treatment, sects like the Methodist's offered more respect for slaves' humanity, more attention to their physical and psychological needs, and more emphasis on what blacks and whites shared than slaves could find in any other arena. The public nature of evangelical activity, moreover, offered slaves and free blacks a forum for expressing their sense of community, their sense of worthiness, and their sense of pride.

If we wish to comprehend what slaves and free blacks found and made in Methodism, we must first look at the position of blacks in the church. Many slaves and free blacks identified themselves as Methodists and in some societies African Americans dominated the membership. The church did not begin giving separate membership statistics by race until 1786, when black members comprised 9 percent of all American members. From that year until 1810, the number of black as well as white Methodists climbed steadily, and so too did the ratio of black to white members. Between the years 1790 to 1810, the percentage of American Methodists who were black remained at about
20 percent (Appendix 1). By 1810, 30,000 blacks were members of the Methodist church and they were overwhelmingly southern and mostly slaves.

These numbers, as significant as they are, do not tell the full story of black Methodism, for they do not represent the number of blacks who considered themselves Methodists and regularly attended Methodist services. Evangelical churches had stiff entrance and membership requirements, and thus some blacks (like whites) affiliated with the church for a number of years before joining. Small children were not counted as members, even if their parents regularly brought them to church. The largest problem with these particular statistics is that an unknown number of slaves were forbidden by their non-Methodist owners from joining the church. Over 300 slaves, for example, who converted at a Virginia revival in 1787 wanted to join the church but were prevented by their masters. 9

The aggregate membership counts also do not reflect the variation in membership in the region. In 1790, Broad River Circuit, South Carolina, reported that almost 1 in 4 Methodists there were black. In western North Carolina's Yadkin circuit, however, only 8 out of 304 Methodists were black. One congregation in Newbern, North Carolina, had 390 black and 30 white members in 1807. There were only 3 black members reported in Savannah circuit, Georgia, in 1790, probably because several all-black, black-led Baptist congregations were well-established before the Methodists arrived in the Savannah area. Many of the predominantly black Methodist congregations were in urban areas, but some were rural. One western Piedmont society had 50 black and 2 white members. 10

Although some slaves were prohibited by their owners from joining the church, the Methodist clergy in this era do not seem to have required any slave owner authorization before admitting slaves as members; at least in the contemporary accounts examined in this study no evidence suggests such a policy or practice. A few Methodist slave owners seem to have forced their slaves to attend services. Slaves were "called in" to hear
Thomas Rankin and "were collected" or "called together" twice to hear Francis Asbury. To join the church, however, was another matter, and all members had to give convincing oral testimony of their conversions and agree to abide by church discipline. Evidence indicates that slaves, apart from those whose owners forbade them to attend or join, united to and withdrew from the church of their own accord.\textsuperscript{11}

White ministers' journals do not, of course, shed much light on what Albert Raboteau has called the "invisible institution"—the secret services blacks conducted away from whites and without consent of their masters. Jeremiah Norman was once stranded in an area without Methodists on a Sunday and was directed to an all-black worship service, but even here, whites knew of this meeting. What the sources do clearly document, however, is the extent to which black Methodism was visible. African Americans were a vocal and prominent part of Methodist services in the South. They were present in homes, barns, chapels, and groves where Methodists met. In cities, towns, and the countryside, they could be seen and heard at Methodist worship.\textsuperscript{12}

Most blacks were in the congregation, but some could be found behind pulpits. Methodists, like the Baptists, opened a number of leadership positions to black men in the years before 1810. Black male leaders did, however, face a glass ceiling until they formed the separate African Methodist Episcopal church. The top of the Methodist hierarchy—the offices of bishop, presiding elder, and elder—were filled by whites. The positions of trustee and steward were normally filled by white men as well. There were exceptions. In Wilmington, North Carolina, to prevent a defection of the congregation from the Methodist Episcopal church, blacks were appointed stewards.\textsuperscript{13}

The central clerical leadership role in Methodism was that of preacher, and a surprising number of black men preached for the church. The most famous of those who worked in the South was perhaps the itinerant Harry Hosier, who traveled with white Bishop Asbury, minister Freeborn Garrettson and others. Hosier was evidently more
popular with audiences than his white counterparts, for several reported him as the main attraction when they preached together. Blacks especially enjoyed Hosier's sermons; one observer reported that "some of [them] came a great distance to hear him."  

Henry Evans founded Methodism in Fayetteville, North Carolina. Evans, a free shoemaker from Virginia, converted to Methodism at an early age. He decided in the late eighteenth or early nineteenth century to open a shop in Charleston, South Carolina. Stopping in Fayetteville on his way south, Evans was reportedly appalled with the lack of religious worship and instruction for blacks there. He began holding services, and despite much persecution, eventually formed a church there.

A Tennessee preacher named Simeon was another black Methodist leader. Simeon had joined the church as a slave in 1790, and soon felt the call to preach. His skills as preacher and "the purity of his life so won the affections" of his master that he freed Simeon and gave him a small farm. Simeon's ministry was primarily to other blacks, and with them "he enjoyed a popularity that belonged to no other man in the community." He also, a white minister wrote, "commanded the respect" of whites for his stellar preaching, "countenance full of the expression of benevolence," and "mind far above ordinary." White families must indeed have admired this man, for Simeon was often called to minister "at the bedside of the sick and dying" whites, to orchestrate the most important Methodist ritual.

Jeremiah, a black minister of unknown civil status, enjoyed great popularity in western North Carolina in the early nineteenth century. He preached throughout his region at black, white, and biracial services. In 1806 an African American named John preached in a Georgia service. A unnamed black man preached at Brother Morris's home in 1795; another at Brother Crawford's in 1800. A black minister named Joe preached in Currituck County in 1799. These and other men occupied positions of public authority that were rarely open to blacks in this era.
Black women, like white women, were not licensed as preachers or exhorters in this era, although they did evangelize, testify, reprove, pray, shout, and exhort. One remarkable woman whose story appeared under the name of "Old Elizabeth" felt a call to preach soon after her conversion in slavery around 1779. In 1808, as a free woman, Elizabeth appointed prayer meetings for black women, and around 1810 began unofficially to preach. She was discouraged by many white Methodist leaders, but she described this discrimination almost solely in terms of gender and not race. Elizabeth persisted in her ministry, and eventually even preached against slavery in Virginia. She was in many ways exceptional; few black women before 1810 were able to follow in her footsteps.21

Black ministers played important roles in the free black and slave community as well as in the church. Often they seemed to have acted as intermediaries between the white ministry and the black community. Black clergymen also had the respect of religious whites, a fact that would not have automatically raised their esteem among African Americans, but that did mean they had freedom of movement and speech not normally allowed blacks in a slave society. Because of their positions as itinerants, these men were able to travel and thus could brings news or information about long lost relatives and friends.

Most African-American church leaders seemed to have emerged in the 1790s.22 During the 1770s and early 1780s, white clergy noted very few black ministers, probably because of fears of slave rebellion during the Revolution. Even in the mid-1780s, the climate could be hostile, especially in the lower South, for black preachers.

In 1785 Francis Asbury tried to persuade Richard Allen, then a free black Methodist minister, to accompany him on a tour of the South. Allen recalled how Asbury warned him that "in the slave countries, Carolina and other places, I must not intermix with the slaves, and I would frequently have to sleep in his carriage, and he would allow me my victuals and clothes." Allen declined going, for he feared that if he fell sick, he
would have no one to care for him; he also needed to begin saving for his old age. Asbury, though for his time a "liberal" man on race and slavery, showed the limits of his empathy with those suffering under the racial caste system, and countered that he, too, only received food and clothes for a salary. Allen repeated his reasons: "he could be taken care of, let his afflictions be as they were...but I doubted whether that would be the case with myself." Allen chose to remain in the Maryland-Delaware area for his ministry.²³

Although the wider secular white community remained suspicious of black ministers after the war, the ideological climate improved somewhat with northern states enacting gradual emancipation and some southern states easing manumission laws.²⁴ Preaching was the only calling a black man could pursue that gave him access to large slave audiences, access that would later be restricted in some areas following the discovery of Gabriel's planned insurrection.

All Methodist preachers rose to their positions by demonstrating an ability to persuade the unregenerate to convert and the converted to persevere. All had to show signs that God had set them apart for ministerial work. The black ministry, by bringing others of both races to God, bore witness to Methodist beliefs that God did not order his world by status, race, education, or wealth.

The persuasiveness and oratorical skill that black clergy demonstrated gave them tremendous influence and even power—in the Methodist sense of the term—over the souls and bodies of black and white congregants. James Finley reported that a slave minister named "Cuff" preached:

> with an eloquence and power none could resist. Often have the hearts of proud and wicked masters, from adjoining plantations, who had been attracted out of mere curiosity to attend the meetings, been made to tremble, while the falling tear from proud and haughty mistresses, who would wonder at the audacity of the negro[sic], would betray the emotions his eloquence had produced.²⁵
Where else could slaves see their mistress bathed in tears at a black oration or their master trembling for mercy before a black man? It takes little historical effort to imagine how it must have felt for slaves to see their owners so affected by a black minister. For a few precious moments, it must have seemed that the world was right side up.

For all their power and authority, black clergy had to be, as Methodists might have said, "wise as serpents and harmless as doves." Eugene Genovese has noted about the later antebellum period that black ministers walked a tightrope in a slave society, and black Methodist preachers were no exception. They were suspected by white authorities of fomenting insurrections or fostering discontent among slaves. Their visibility and freedom to travel made them conduits for possibly subversive information. And last but not least, the crowds of slaves and free blacks they attracted alarmed slave owners and nonslaveholders alike.26

Even from white clergy, black ministers faced racism. All Methodist ministers were urged to be humble and meek, and to avoid pride. A common lament of white clergy was that their congregants had complimented them to their faces, a situation they perceived to be inherently tending to puff up a minister's ego so that he would improperly value himself above God. For black ministers, humility and meekness were likewise expected, but their white counterparts seemed especially sensitive to these sins in black clergy. Francis Asbury, for example, noted the following about Harry Hosier: "I fear his speaking so much to white people in the city has been, or will be, injurious; he has been flattered and may be ruined." James Jenkins, writing in a later era when southern Methodists with rare exception had all but abandoned antislavery efforts, remembered "some difficulties" as he put it, that the Methodists had had with "an influential coloured man, who desired further promotion in the church" in 1802. Jenkins unabashedly claimed next that he had "generally found that these people cannot bear promotion: like too many
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white people, they become proud." For Jenkins, then, pride was a danger to "many" whites, and to most blacks.27

Several historians have noted how white ministers described Henry Evans and his work.28 William Capers, whose autobiography was published in 1859, remarked that no black preacher "was more remarkable for his humble and deferential deportment towards the whites than Evans was....never speaking to a white man but with his hat under his arm; never allowing himself to be seated in their houses; and even confining himself to the kind and manner of dress proper for negroes in general." As with Asbury's comment about Harry Hosier, we see special attention paid to hints of pride, special praise given to signs of humility. Historians also note how Evans was said to have improved slave behavior. Again in Capers's words, whites stopped persecuting Evans when "One after another began to suspect their servants of attending his preaching, not because they were made worse, but wonderfully better." Proof of this, in Capers' view, could be seen by Fayetteville blacks' new respect for the Sabbath and habits of temperance.29

Capers' autobiography was published in 1859, an era when the church had split into northern and southern wings by differing opinions about slavery, and when southern clergy had a vested interest in calming slave owner fears about black preachers. Although his remarks demonstrate the racism of white clergy toward black clergy, they do not accurately represent Henry Evans. We must not take his words about Evans' behavior at face value. Even Capers noted that "Henry Evans was a Boanerges; and in his duty feared not the face of man."30

Henry Evans, a gifted preacher,31 was seen by the authorities of Fayetteville as a menace. The town council refused to let Evans preach in the city limits. The resourceful Evans began holding services in Sandy Hills, an area just outside town. Mobs repeatedly "tried to stop him; but he preached on, and worried them out by continually changing his preaching place." Eventually Evans built a meeting house, twenty by thirty feet, which
was funded—except for five dollars—entirely by the black members. This does not sound like the same humble man described by Capers, who, we should note, had ample reason in the post-Gabriel Prosser era for painting Henry Evans with his hat in hand. It is true that Evans eventually attracted whites to his services, beginning with a white schoolmistress who was expelled from the Presbyterian church for shouting. It may also be true that the fears of Fayetteville slave owners that Evans would promote rebellion and dissension proved groundless. Yet Evans' courageous efforts to keep a venue for black worship open despite threats and official proscription indicate that he was not the tool for white authority that historians have implied he was. The loyalty of his parishioners to him and their church must also be recognized, for had his congregants revealed the shifting preaching places, Evans would have been exposed to the angry white mobs.31

Perhaps Evans did remove his hat when speaking to whites. It seems doubtful that he could have remained a free man very long if he did not obey some of the racial conventions of the slave states. And as is obvious from his persecution, Evans did not acquiesce to all white wishes. It is therefore wrong to read into this gesture any sort of approval by Evans of racism or slavery. Instead, it illustrates how black preachers, like all blacks in this era, lived under a rigid racial caste system. Evans' ability to carve out a space where he and other blacks could worship as they chose is the more remarkable because of this.32

Evans, Hosier, and other preachers were joined by a number of black exhorters and lay leaders. Blacks were class leaders and exhorters in Baltimore, Maryland, and Charleston, South Carolina.33 Sancho Cooper, who died in 1865, was a class leader in Columbia, South Carolina, for more than sixty years.34 Numerous black men exhorted or led prayers in Methodist services.35 Blacks ran a congregation in Oxen Hill, just opposite Alexandria, Virginia, on the Potomac. The Oxen Hill Methodists built a meeting house, ran their own affairs, and handled the same routine disciplinary proceedings that
other local Methodist leaders did. They also voluntarily and regularly contributed to the support of white itinerant ministers.\textsuperscript{36}

Some black men led groups of both whites and blacks. Near Wayne County, Kentucky, a Methodist society was headed by a slave named Jacob. One white itinerant remarked that "every member had been awakened under his preaching." Jacob and two young white women had organized the society in this area, and he was appointed leader at the behest of one of these women. Jacob both preached and handled discipline for this group, and was successful, for the white itinerant "found his society in excellent order." Even in the relatively new settlements of Kentucky, a bondsman who had control over whites must have been an anomaly outside the evangelical churches. Methodist whites continued in the later antebellum era to admire talented black ministers, but the biracial intimacy of the early small groups of believers as well as black male disciplinary power over whites would gradually decline in the nineteenth century.\textsuperscript{37}

Jeremiah, the aforementioned preacher from western North Carolina, was also the leader of his society. His congregation was composed of fifty blacks and two white women who united with Jeremiah because there was no white Methodist group in their area, and they would not join the Baptists. Unfortunately, the white minister who recorded these facts did not elaborate. We can only imagine what local whites thought about both Jeremiah's leadership and about these two white women whose loyalties to their sect overrode racial etiquette.\textsuperscript{38}

As the treatment of black ministers suggests, white Methodists' racial attitudes were more liberal than many others of their day and yet were still rooted in Anglo-American prejudices. In most areas of the South, black Methodists belonged to biracial congregations, but they did not usually worship on terms of complete equality. The extent of segregation had much to do with the age and size of the Methodist society in a locale. The formation of classes shows this development. When Methodists were new to an area,
all the members would be put into a single class. As the society expanded, classes would be divided, sometimes first by race, other times first by gender. In long established areas, it was not uncommon to have a white women's class, a white men's class, and a black class. It does not seem, however, that during the years under study there was any division of black classes by slave or free.

In services, the extent of segregation also varied. As Russell Richey has argued, the common open air services—in groves, fields, or barns—did not allow rigid segregation, and in these services a fluid color line seems to have existed. In a Virginia service held in a barn, for example, there seems to have been little or no segregation. The minister, who spoke to "a stout company of whites and blacks," reported that "several sinners were much convicted and one poor backslider was reclaimed. Some lay on the floor from about dark to midnight like dead persons." In Jesse Lee's published history of the Methodists, he told of a meeting in the woods where "many scores of both white and black people fell to the earth." During this same revival in 1787, Lee reported that "It was often the case that the people in their corn-fields, white people or black, and sometimes both together would begin to sing, and ... pray ... till some of them would find peace to their souls."

In services in private homes, no single system prevailed. Benjamin Abbott preached a service in a private home where blacks were in the kitchen and whites in the parlor. John Kobler preached in a widow's house to a "very lively little company of both black and white...some prostrate on the floor and others wept out loud." In chapels built by Methodists, segregation was more rigid, and services were normally segregated either spacially or temporally. Spacial segregation was enforced by relegating black worshipers to balconies or rear areas of the church; and in some cases, with blacks outside and whites inside. On at least one occasion, whites met outside while blacks met inside the church.
Another common mode of segregating black and white congregants was for special services to be held at different times. Henry Boehm and others regularly reported holding black love feasts inside churches an hour or two before white love feasts. Often special services were held at night specifically for slaves whose owners did not allow them to attend daytime meetings. Temporal segregation may even have been preferred by black congregants to mixed race meetings, for they could worship with other slaves and free blacks in their area without owner supervision and also without the stigma of being relegated to areas farthest from the pulpit.44

The existence of racial separation in Methodist churches and the limits placed on black ministers warn us against portraying early white Methodists as twentieth-century egalitarians even though they seemed radical to others by the standards of their time. And indeed, discrimination by white Methodists was the principle cause of black leaders forming the separate African Methodist Episcopal Church in 1816.

White policies of segregated seating are only one part of the black Methodist story. In ever greater numbers, slaves and free blacks of the South made the decision to become Methodists. To understand why so many blacks found Methodism appealing, we must try to recover their religious actions and beliefs and place them in the context of the times.

One reason why blacks may have joined the church was that Methodist views about the human family were more inclusive than those of other southerners. Some Methodist practices corresponded to those already prevalent in slave communities. In Methodist churches, for example, every female member was a "Sister" and every male, a "Brother." The church community comprised a Christian "family." Herbert Gutman and other scholars of slave families have noted how slaves, deprived of legal authority to keep their biological families together, creatively responded by forming "fictive kin," a practice that Methodist forms of address closely emulated.45
This sense of community could cross the color line as well. David Smith, a free black preacher, described a service he held where slaves and slave owners were "singing, shouting and praising God together. All seemed to be one in Christ Jesus; there was no distinction as to the rich or poor, bond or free." William Colbert referred to the black congregation at Oxen Hill as "my black friends" or "my good black brethren." Mrs. Bassett, the wife of the antislavery legislator from Delaware, when at camp meetings, was said to have been as likely to "embrace a pious dusky daughter of Africa, in her rejoicing as a white sister." Richard Allen felt a familial connection to some of his fellow Methodists who were white. He called Benjamin Abbott a "father and friend to me" and described a white couple who had "bathed [his] feet with warm water and bran" when he was suffering from rheumatism.

White Methodists were racists, but how this racism influenced their views on slavery has been a matter of historical dispute. Some historians have emphasized what Rachel Klein terms the "essentially unegalitarian social outlook" of evangelical ministers. Klein argues that Baptists (and implies the Methodists concurred)--from their introduction into the state of South Carolina--possessed "an organic vision of social order that celebrated slavery as a natural extension of familial relationships." Although we will examine white Methodist racism and views on slavery in depth in the following chapter, since white views are relevant to the present discussion, we should at least begin our discussion of them here.

We must again distinguish between the typical views of early Methodists and those of Methodists in the later antebellum era. The two Methodist clergy that Klein cites are more representative of the views of later antebellum ministers; their autobiographies were published in 1842 and 1859. The unpublished views of a minister contemporary with the period under study here, Jeremiah Norman, are therefore instructive.
Norman was one of the most conservative of the eighteenth century clergy. He did not approve of the immediatist abolitionist views of some of his fellow ministers, and himself was noticeably lukewarm about emancipation. His racism was also more pronounced than that of other preachers. Nonetheless, Norman enforced Methodist rules against buying and selling slaves, rules which required Methodists to write emancipation deeds freeing newly purchased slaves after a period of service and which called for expulsion of members who sold slaves. On March 16, 1799, he required a slaveholder to sign a writ eventually emancipating a slave he had purchased before allowing the man back into the church. On September 23, 1799, October 9, 1799, and March 15, 1800, Norman calculated--per the *Discipline*--the manumission dates for slaves purchased by Methodists. And on February 25, 1800, he expelled a member for selling a slave. Norman's field of ministry was in the Carolinas and Georgia, areas that were not witnessing a declining market for slaves.49

As modern scholars who find slavery abhorrent, we must keep in mind that religious defenses of slavery predated religious attacks on slavery. As short-lived as early Methodist antislavery efforts were, they must somehow be differentiated from overt promotion of slavery. When we consider white Methodists vis-a-vis their white contemporaries, their sense of brotherhood and sisterhood with black members, as well as their opposition to slavery, however limited, were clearly greater than that of many whites. Did Jenny, one of the slaves whose manumission deed Norman recorded, see Norman as a man who "celebrated slavery?" Surely slaves, despite their resentment of the racism and segregation in the church, were sophisticated enough to appreciate the difference between proslavery attitudes and attitudes of preachers like Norman.50

The rhetoric of "brotherhood" and "sisterhood" was a prominent part of Methodism and must have rang truer in a sect whose leaders were in the main against slavery. In an era when other whites were debating whether people of African descent
were human, and when racists were emphasizing the inhumanity of blacks as a justification for slavery, white Methodists viewed blacks as a part of the human family whom God had created and whom, once converted, God would redeem in an eternity without racial distinction. Some African Americans found these views appealing.

Secondly, there were practical reasons that slaves might have been attracted to Methodism. At services, they might be able to meet relatives and friends from neighboring plantations, to find spouses, to spread family and neighborhood news. Camp meetings, which drew owners and slaves from great distances, must have been especially useful in this regard. 51

A third reason that slaves might have been drawn to Methodism was that church values and ideals allowed them to condemn their owners, and as Albert Raboteau has argued, feel morally superior to masters and mistresses. Church polity also allowed any member to report on any other member. One black Methodist of North Carolina informed his minister that a white member drank and swore. Even when their owners were not members, church condemnation of pride, ostentation, gluttony, and greed—"sins" their owners so frequently indulged in—must have appealed to slaves. Methodists, like other evangelical sects, inverted the values of a slaveholding society by lauding the virtues of the weak and powerless. Instead of status, competition, ostentation, material success, and honor, they prized humility, charity, simplicity, piety, and love. To become a Methodist was thus a way for many slaves to reject the lifestyles and values of slave owning whites. 52

It could be argued that because slaves were accepting Christianity, they were in effect accepting the world view of their owners, even if their owners were not Methodists. Yet despite the fact that early Methodists broadly considered themselves Christians, they felt that distinctions between Christians were critically important. Methodists saw Catholicism as a horrid mutation of true faith and predestination as false doctrine. They
drew clear dividing lines between sects that saw conversion as a prerequisite for salvation and those teaching that faith alone was required. The Christians they were most tolerant of were evangelicals (like those who in 1800 became the United Brethren) whose doctrines most closely resembled theirs. In short, they were as assured of the rectitude of their beliefs as they were that all who believed differently were dreadfully wrong. If there were Methodist slaves who believed that they were accepting their masters' faith by accepting Christianity--and there is no evidence that there were--those slaves would have had even more reason to feel morally superior to their masters. Being Methodists, they would have seen themselves as "true" Christians and their masters as "false" ones.

The fact that many slave owners derided the Methodists may also have made the church attractive to slaves. We can see this best in the breach. Francis Asbury frequently commented that slaves held by professing Christians were the least receptive to Methodism, and he also tried whenever possible to meet slaves separately because slaves often were not responsive to his message if their owners were present.53

On rare occasions, slaves followed their owners into the church. Richard Whatcoat told of a slave who was touched by the "narrow way his Master was walking in and also the way his Mistress was in." Many slave owners rejected Methodism, but those who joined the church were more often brought to faith by their slaves than vice versa. The slave preacher "Cuff" brought his owner to Methodism, as did Richard Allen; both were freed after their owners' conversions. Two members of the prominent Gough clan of Maryland were influenced to convert by slaves. As with white wives who brought their husbands into the church, slave evangelists who conquered their masters' disbelief had the satisfaction of being the moral leaders of their owners. Since Methodists frequently told the stories of how they were converted, the leadership of such slaves was therefore publicly asserted and re-asserted in each telling.54
A fourth and undeniably important reason that slaves might have been attracted to early Methodism was its antislavery message. Although we will discuss the church's evolution and retreat on slavery in a later chapter, it must be considered here as a prime motivation for slaves to join the church. Methodist clergy made official pronouncements against slavery, preached against slavery, privately urged numerous slaveholders to manumit slaves, punished men and women who bought and sold slaves, and referred to slavery as "pollution" or as the "bain[sic] of hell." 55

Slaves were well aware of both Methodist antislavery efforts and changing Methodist policies on slavery. A shrewd bondswoman named Alley ran away from her owner in 1790. In his advertisement for her return, her master noted that she had thus far alluded capture by claiming that "her mistress had married a methodist preacher and set her free." 56

The story of Richard Allen's emancipation is likewise instructive. Allen, later famous as the head of the separate African Methodist Episcopal church, was in early life a slave in Delaware. He converted to Methodism before the Revolution, when as he described it, "all of a sudden, my dungeon shook, my chains flew off....My soul was filled." Allen, like all Methodists, saw church values and the world's values as antithetical. He called slavery a "bitter pill" even though his owner "was what the world called a good master." Allen and his siblings were allowed to attend Methodist meetings even though their owner was not converted. This aroused the attention and ire of neighbors, who "said that Stockley's negroes would soon ruin him" with such behavior. Allen and his brother "held a council together," and decided that if they were to ensure the "privilege of attending meeting once in two weeks," they would have to allay white fears "that religion made us worse servants." The Allen brothers decided to work "to keep our crops more forward than our neighbors," and soon Stockley "boasted of his slaves for their industry and honesty." 57
After thus easing his owner's mind about Methodism, Allen took a bolder step. He convinced his owner to host Methodist services. After some months of doing so, noted antislavery minister Freeborn Garrettson preached in Stockley's home on the text "thou art weighed in the balance and found wanting." According to Allen, Garrettson "among the rest weighed the slaveholder." After this sermon, Stockley "could not be satisfied to hold slaves, believing it to be wrong." The indebted Stockley agreed to let Allen and his brother purchase their freedom for sixty pounds gold.58

Richard Allen was a gifted preacher and an able leader, as we know from his later accomplishments. If we closely examine his life in slavery and the circumstances of his manumission, we also see that Allen was quite shrewd. For one, he was aware of the white gossip about his "good" master and chose to be a conspicuously diligent worker so as to protect the limited privileges his owner allowed him. Most Methodist slaves left no autobiographies, yet if we learn from Allen's story, we must revise our notions about religion's effect on slave productivity.

More than one scholar has noted how masters claimed evangelical slaves proved "good" workers and that slave owner distrust and hostility to churches like the Methodists often receded when masters realized that religion did not hinder slave productivity. These circumstances led one historian to conclude that Methodist clergy "served unwittingly as production engineers" for slave owners.59 Yet such analysis leaves slave motivation and slave self-interest out of the equation. As human beings trying to adapt to a repressive and harsh system, slaves may well have sacrificed in one area to improve their lives in another. Perhaps other Methodist slaves emulated Richard Allen and calculated that better work performance would lead to more religious autonomy. The Allen brothers certainly evinced no desire to enhance their master's profits for his sake, and Allen's wording that he and his brother "held a council" suggests that the two carefully considered the consequences of their decision.
Even more significant in Allen's story is his initiative in bringing Methodism to his owner. Richard Allen, like the bondwoman Alley, surely knew of Methodist efforts against slavery. And it is more than happy coincidence that the sermon Garrettson preached in this home was against slavery and that Allen's owner agreed to let Allen and his brother purchase their freedom as a result. The Methodists by the turn of the century had made what historians term a "retreat" on antislavery. But for several decades they were the most persistent antislavery evangelistic body in the South; only the Quakers exceeded their efforts. Quakers, however, were less expansionist and less interested in (and sometimes hostile to) blacks joining their church. A majority of slaves freed in Caroline, Talbot, and Dorchester counties of Maryland, one historian has shown, were freed by Methodists, with a number of these emancipation deeds bearing Freeborn Garrettson's name as a witness.60

Other compelling evidence of slave awareness of Methodist antislavery efforts came in 1800. In the testimony of one of Gabriel Prosser's captured co-conspirators, Prosser's followers planned to kill all whites except Frenchmen, Quakers, and Methodists, because, in his words, these groups were "friendly to liberty."61

Thus, as Allen's story and other evidence suggests, slaves may well have been attracted to the Methodists because of their antislavery efforts. In Methodist churches across the South, though more heavily in the Upper South, slave members worshipped alongside blacks that had been freed by Methodist owners. Despite segregation, despite the fact few blacks were appointed stewards, despite the racism of Methodist clergy, and despite the all-white upper tier of Methodist leadership, Methodist slaves had some hope for freedom, and this fact alone accounts in large part for blacks' receptivity to Methodism.62

For many Methodist slaves, this hope was not to be realized. Francis Asbury's frequent comments about how slaves belonging to Methodist owners were unreachable
are once again illuminating. When owners preceded their slaves into the church, the
Methodists had, however unwillingly, put their imprimatur on slavery. If Asbury was an
accurate reporter, it would seem that slaves were less attracted to churches that would accept their owners as members.

Another reason slaves and free blacks might have been attracted to the church was that it opposed cruelty and neglect of slaves. Methodist clergy often noted how slaves were inadequately clothed, overworked, underfed, and cruelly used, which confirms historians' assessments that the eighteenth century witnessed some of the worst abuses of slaves in American history. Clergy and members denounced such abuses from the pulpit, privately reproved members for maltreatment, and disciplined some slave owners for mistreating slaves.63

Some blacks sought ministerial help to stop slave owner abuse. A free black Methodist woman complained to preacher James Meacham that her child, who was a slave, was being "striped" by the child's Methodist owner, and "she could not bare it." Meacham confronted the man, who took refuge in his slave's age and claimed that all children needed stern discipline, and that he "was more severe with his own [white children]" than slave children. Meacham "begged her to strive to be patient" and told her that he did not think "bro. S. would treat them out of Christianity."64

The mother was determined to have some justice done, however, and countered that this master had also "whiped severely" an adult bondsman (who was enrolled for freedom when he had "repaid" his purchase price via labor.) "Bro. S" then "confessed he did whip him for which he was convicted and felt much distress." Meacham lectured the slave owner about beating "a man, that was a man as well as he was," told him not to "Lord it now as formerly," and "begged him to give himself to God." Without recourse in any other forum, slaves and free blacks with slave relations could at least make limited appeals for humane treatment through the church.65
Slaves and free blacks also had intellectual and psychological reasons for joining the church. Methodist doctrine emphasized the agency of individuals who could freely choose salvation and were personally accountable to God for leading a moral life. Under the shadow of slavery and racial injustice, slaves and free blacks had little opportunity to shape their own destiny. In Arminian religion, they at least were able to make a free choice, and exercise free will, and for some slaves this might have been a compelling reason to choose Methodism.

One need not argue that all slaves were inclined toward free will doctrine or that there was a natural affinity between a yearning for civil liberty and a belief in human agency to recognize that the rhetoric of Arminianism and the rhetoric of liberty were quite similar. Richard Allen described his conversion as a liberation and other black Methodists spoke of conversion as an experience of "power," "liberty," or "freedom." Slaves were aware of Revolutionary rhetoric and the burgeoning antislavery sentiment among whites. The implication of predestination was that whatever was, was God's will. Just as some slaves may have found predestinarian doctrine comforting because it explained their bondage, others may have found Arminian doctrine comforting both because it explained slavery as the willful sin of their masters and because it allowed them to believe that even within the constraints of slavery they were moral agents who had the will to control their lives and make moral choices.

"Old Elizabeth" described her early life as a slave as a series of assaults upon her will. When eleven years old, she was separated from her mother and father (both Methodists) and sent to work on a farm miles away from them. There, "so lonely and sad," she finally asked permission to visit her parents and was "positively denied." She went anyway, was "sent back" the next day and bound and beaten for her disobedience. Elizabeth became depressed and was unable to eat, yet she reported "still I was required to do all my duty." Only in religion was Elizabeth able to do as she pleased. Her free will
was made clear in the form of a question that God asked her in a vision: "Art thou willing to be saved?" Although she lived in an area "where there was no preaching, and no religious instruction," Elizabeth continued communing with her God. 66

Methodism taught that the body was a vulgar shell which housed the immortal soul, and this belief too seems to have helped Methodist slaves cope psychologically with the trials of bondage. Old Elizabeth found in religion the ability to psychically distance herself from her enslavement: "many times while my hands were at work, my spirit was carried away to spiritual things." Richard Allen reported similar feelings. When working for his self-purchase, he testified that "while my hands were employed to earn my bread, my heart was devoted to my dear Redeemer." Even free black Methodists, forced by law and custom into unskilled manual labor or monotonous service jobs, probably found this ability to separate mind and body in religion a coping mechanism. 67

Psychic distancing was crucially important in Elizabeth's life as a slave, and this seems to have been passed in her case from mother to daughter. According to Elizabeth, "At parting, my mother told me that I had 'nobody in the wide world to look to but God.'" At first, her mother's parting words merely deepened her sense of loneliness, but in time, she reported "I betook myself to prayer, and in every lonely place I found an altar." In her world of sorrow, Elizabeth's time with God was her only comfort. In prayer, she "was filled with sweetness and joy" or even when working, she "was often carried to distant lands." 68

In addition to Elizabeth's poignant testimony, we have the story of a slave man named Cuff, who through religion was enabled to survive horrid brutality and assert his will. Cuff was sold to a master who despised religion and forbid Cuff to pray or go to Methodist services. Cuff reportedly replied that while he could obey most of his master's demands, he could not obey this one, for "My Massa in heaven command me to pray." Cuff's earthly master was incensed, and after saying "we shall see whose authority is to be
obeyed in this matter," he administered twenty-five lashes to Cuff's "bare back." Still Cuff refused to quit praying, and the master gave twenty-five more. After this, the bleeding Cuff continued to insist that he would pray, and was beaten until his master had to "give over from sheer exhaustion." 69

In this dramatic contest of wills, Cuff cited God's preeminence over his owner as reason to defy him. His defiance in the face of his beating and his continual statements to his owner that "you may kill me, but while I live I must pray" 70 bear witness to his courage and to the strength he found in his religion. Although not all Methodist slaves had to face what Cuff or Elizabeth did, the comfort religion gave them in these dark moments gives us an idea of how important it was for slaves to have choice in religion, and how their Methodism enabled them to endure, to survive, and to retain hope.

In conversion, Methodist slaves had spiritual autonomy, and in conversion they could psychically redefine themselves as people worthy of God's love and concern. Whites and blacks alike saw conversion as the means to become, in "Old Elizabeth's" words, a "new creature in Christ." The exhilaration that all Methodists felt upon conversion must have been even more intense for slaves, defined by law and society as property. In one service a black woman was "struck down under the power of God" during a prayer meeting. Other black worshipers "got round her on their knees and cried out to the Lord for her" until God "set her soul at liberty." At the meeting's end, her clergyman reported, this woman left "praising God as far as I could hear her." 71

We might well wonder at the meaning phrases like "he set her soul at liberty" had for slaves. David Smith's conversion to Methodism as a bondsman so enraged his Maryland master that he tried to sell Smith into Georgia. Anguished and fearful, Smith recalled "the power [God] had exercised in freeing me from sin....if God was able to deliver me from the corrupt influence of the world and the power of Satan, that he was able to deliver me from this slave-holder." When Smith indeed was liberated, he rejoiced
in being "free--both soul and body." Consider also antislavery minister James Meacham's description of two slaves who were hoping to be converted. These bondsmen belonged to a Brother Howard, who himself had just converted to Methodism, and were described by Meacham as "seeking for a better world." The ideas of liberty, deliverance, and a better world were not merely abstract, otherworldly concepts for slaves. 72

Another aspect of Methodism might have met certain psychological needs of slaves. Methodists urged all members to strive for sanctification, a state of moral purity and heightened spirituality. Because slaves and African Americans in general were defined by wider white society as libidinous and immoral, those who became sanctified were able to define their own "nature" in terms other than those of their oppressors.

The gulf between slave owners' views of slaves and slaves' views of themselves was sometimes immense, which helps explain why when "Black Harry" Hosier told his African-American audiences "that they must be holy," "certain sectarians" were described as being "greatly displeased with him." Several runaway ads underscore the difference between how slaves saw themselves and how their owners saw them. George French advertised for the return of Charles, who had run away on Christmas eve, 1790. According to French, Charles "pretends to be a Methodist, and can deliver many texts of Scripture, which he is fond of doing, but is a sly hypocrite." French did not allege that Charles engaged in activities forbidden by the church, and it is reasonable to assume that for his master, Charles's "hypocrisy" was to steal himself. Slaveholder Thomas Love made more specific allegations about his runaway slave named Jem. Love wrote that the "chief of [Jem's] conversation will be on Religion, as he hath, for some time past made, affectedly, zealous declarations in the Methodist profession." But Love also claimed that Jem was "fond of gambling, and will get drunk"--activities forbidden by Methodists. 73

Both owners believed their slaves' religion to be affected, but both slaves had made professions of religion to their masters, and in this era, such professions were as apt
to anger as to appease slave owners. The slaves had identified themselves as Methodists, and their owners accused them of hypocrisy, an accusation frequently leveled at all kinds of Methodists in this era. We should rightfully be suspicious about these masters' claims, for slaves who violated Methodist rules, like all members, were subject to punishment.

Moreover, evidence suggests that Methodist slaves monitored one another and reported violations by other slaves of the *Discipline*. At least two black Methodist women brought charges against black men for sexual assault, and in both cases a trial was held and evidence on both sides given. One of these women, in her testimony, "gave such strong proof of her Chastity" and used "language so modest" that the man she accused was expelled. The other accused a man of "makeing to[o] free" with her; in this case both accuser and accused were suspended after their testimony. As these two cases show, Methodists could hold all members to a standard of behavior that would condemn "sinful" conduct. And it should be recalled that slaves voluntarily joined the church and accepted Methodist morality. 74

The allegations of the two women also reveal how some Methodist slaves chose to define themselves in terms radically different from white racist ones. In later antebellum years, a well-articulated planter paternalism encouraged some slave owners to respect slave marriages and to promote monogamy.75 But in this earlier period, the slaves and free blacks who became Methodists were advancing their own vision of proper conduct, and this vision contradicted white racists' assessments that blacks were sexually promiscuous or prone to immorality. In conversion, blacks were able to re-make the self as a "new creature," to define themselves as human beings worthy of God's love and concern. In sanctification, black Methodists could build on this newly constructed self to create positive gender identities.

We catch glimpses of these new gender identities in black testimony. A bondswoman told Freeborn Garrettson the story of her sanctification. Shortly after her
conversion, she became "powerfully convinced of the necessity of sanctification and earnestly sought it by day and night." This woman was extraordinarily faithful to her church. As a slave who "hire[d] her time of her master," she chose to spend many hours in worship--Garrettson claimed to have seen her often "at five sermons running." She lived alone in a boarding house, but evidently her religion helped stave off loneliness, for "she rises several times in the night to pray." Her prayers for sanctification were answered when God reportedly told her to "Be clean."76

"Old Elizabeth" had a similar experience. Converted when a slave, Elizabeth had been free twelve years when she was sanctified. In her case, she said it was "revealed to me that the Lord had given me the evidence of a clean heart, in which I could rejoice day and night, and I walked and talked with God, and my soul was illuminated with heavenly light...."77 In an era when black women were commonly called "wenches" and when, as Winthrop Jordan notes, the white press unabashedly referred to black women as lascivious, the testimony of sanctified Methodists takes on special significance.78 In seeking and attaining holiness, these women rejected white society's opinions.

If blacks could find self-esteem and positive gender identities in their religion, they could also participate in Methodist rituals in which they publicly affirmed their humanity and worth before others. Henry Boehm reported many happy and emotionally moving love feasts among black members, which in his district were normally held an hour or two before love feasts for white members. Yet one of July 19, 1800, stood out. It had begun at sunrise, and when Boehm arrived later, "the Dear people was shouting and praising, that God [had] maid them, and redeemd them and converted them, bless the Lord it apeart to me as if the power could sensible be feld as far as sound reacht[.] I dont no, that I ever had such feelings before[--]it apeared as if glory was opend upon earth...." Many black members were "over come with the power of God" and fell unconscious--so many that even though some were "hoisted out through a window" and laid outside, only half of the
whites, when they arrived for their meeting, could get inside the church. The whites were forced to hold their love feast in the woods. 79

Boehm had long been exposed to Methodist enthusiasm, so his assessment that he had never felt such power before must be taken quite seriously. So too must the testimony of the blacks that God "maid them, and redeemd them and converted them." Their sense of being God's people, God's creation was real and powerful and they publicly proclaimed it for all present to hear. Though few whites in the South would have denied that African Americans were divinely created, the treatment slaves and blacks received in the non-Methodist world constantly assaulted their humanity. 80

The idea of a common redemption for whites and blacks was not a Methodist innovation, but the way early Methodists used this idea might have had special appeal to slaves. Antislavery Methodists dwelt on this theme extensively in their efforts to convince slave owners to emancipate. One clergyman appealed to a slaveholder saying that "a Soul as precious as his[,] Bought by the same price[,] redeem'd by the same blood[,] and an heir of the same Kingdom" should be emancipated. The communion ritual reinforced this claim, for as each member was served the bread, the minister paraphrased the New Testament words of Christ that "The Body of our Lord Jesus Christ, which was given for thee, preserve thy soul and body unto everlasting life" and when served the wine, "Drink this in remembrance that Christ's Blood was shed for thee." 81

Likewise in baptism, the only other rite Methodists viewed as a sacrament, the emphasis was on the common humanity of all and the redemption open to all. A slave woman presented herself for baptism at the Hopkins home in the fall of 1790. During the ceremony, "she wept and cryed out for Mercy" and the minister urged her to seek close communion with God "that Jesus might Baptise her with the Holy Ghost and with fire." By the spring of 1791, the Hopkins had freed their slaves, perhaps in part due to observing slaves in rituals like this one that affirmed slaves' connection to God. 82
Slaves had special reasons to treasure the baptism of their children, for this was the only public ceremony in which their parental role was acknowledged. Methodist clergy seemed to have commonly spoken to mothers before baptizing black children, for one noted that when "asking where the Mother" of an infant was, he had his "poor heart touched" when he found that she had been "sold from the child." A New Kent slave mother was so affected during her child's baptism that "the power struck her as also many others then present." A group of slaves witnessing a baptism ceremony for black children heard a short exhortation on "the duties of parents" afterwards and "there were several tears shed" before the minister had finished. Slave parents, through such rituals, affirmed their own sense of obligation to their children. 83

Another central component of Methodist worship that reveals much about Methodist slaves' world view was the emphasis on the living power of the Holy Spirit. Slaves, like all church members, experienced revelation, inspiration, and possession. We have already encountered Methodist slaves who were overcome, who fell, or who shouted when touched by the Holy Spirit in services. Phrases like "some of the blacks were much effected," "great shout among the d[ea]r black people," "Believers praisd Jesus with their tongs, Hands, and feets, Particularly among the poor opresd Africans," "great shakeing among the Blacks," or "a wonderful move among the Blacks" are common in clergy's manuscript journals from this era. 84

For slaves these periods of inspiration or possession fulfilled many functions. On a personal level, as we have seen, divine contact helped ease earthly burdens. Many slaves were described as being "happy" or "carried away with raptures of joy" in services. 85 In Virginia, for example, a bondsman "appeard to be very happy...he began to praise God with such sweet expressions...." 86 Many Methodists had reason to cherish releases from worldly sorrow, yet we still must consider the context of slavery as a unique one. The precariousness of life in bondage, where slaves' fate was dependent on the good or ill will
of their owners, made the Methodist idea of earthly existence as a "vale of tears" a palpable reality. Those moments when slaves could be "happy," whether through religion or otherwise, were thus crucially important to psychological survival.

On a communal level, Methodist rituals helped reinforce a sense of separateness and a sense of a special destiny that historians have found in later antebellum slave testimony and through analyzing, as did Lawrence Levine, slave spirituals.87 Methodist beliefs about the bifurcation of all human experience into the "world's" and "God's" reinforced and, for some slaves, defined this sense of special Christian destiny. Also key were the views of many preachers that slaveholding was inimical to Christianity, views it is likely Methodist slaves shared. One preacher, for example, noted that "I hope to see many a poor Slave [wrapped] up in God and Heaven their cruel bloody oppressive Masters will sink and burn in Hell fire for ever and ever." This inversion in the afterlife also implicitly conferred moral superiority on earth to slaves--at least to slaves who had converted.88

Rituals of possession and inspiration are important clues to understanding blacks' receptivity to Methodism. So too are the sermons that were preached to slaves, for by understanding what message blacks were sent from Methodist pulpits we can better appreciate why so many chose to join the church. Although most sermons to slaves (as to all audiences) centered on the need for conversion or holiness, some reinforced the idea that slaves who were Christians had a special place in God's heart precisely because of their unjust suffering on earth. In 1797 William Ormond preached to blacks on the text "disallowed indeed of men, but chosen of God, and precious." All Methodists would appreciate the distinction in this verse between man's evaluation and God's evaluation, but black worshipers, suffering the oppression of slavery and a racial caste system, had even more reason to feel "disallowed of men."89

Other sermons to black audiences emphasized how God had avenged or delivered another enslaved people, the Israelites. Historians who have studied antebellum slave
religious belief have shown how closely slaves identified with Old Testament heroes whom God stood by and kept safe through slavery and other persecutions. Some Methodist sermons stressed Old Testament stories with themes slaves could especially appreciate. William Ormond spoke in Warrenton, North Carolina, to a mostly black audience from the fortieth psalm, where David said the Lord "heard my cry" and "brought me up also out of a horrible pit." Freeborn Garrettson spoke to a black audience on the travels of the children of Israel. James Meacham preached to blacks on Daniel's delivery from the lion's den. Black minister David Smith linked his conversion with his emancipation in his exhortations, telling "how God had delivered me from the devil and slavery."90

Some sermons to slaves dealt more closely with the idea of divine retribution for crimes against the innocent. James Meacham preached to a black audience on Luke 20:1-18, Christ's parable of a man who planted a vineyard and then "let it forth to husbandmen." The landowner later sent three servants to receive some of the harvest. The husbandmen beat the servants and gave them nothing. The man next sent his son, whom he thought would command their respect, but they killed him. Christ revealed the fate of the unfaithful husbandmen: "[The lord of the vineyard] shall come and destroy these husbandmen, and shall give the vineyard to others." Meacham's sermon text closed with a related parable. Builders reject a stone which becomes the cornerstone, and "whosoever shall fall on the stone shall be broken; but on whomever it shall fall, it will grind him to powder." Not only might his slave listeners have identified with the abused servants and with Christ (the son), but also with the retribution meted out in both stories.91

At a funeral sermon for a black woman in Virginia, the sermon text centered on millennial judgment, when the dead "come forth." "They that have done good" are resurrected for Heaven; "they that have done evil" are cast into "damnation." A funeral sermon for a slave in 1792 centered on the inverted world of the Second Coming, when "those who have wives be as though they had none," and "they that weep, as though they
wept not," and "they that buy, as though they possessed not." The special meaning this might have had for slaves in the audience is self-evident.92

In one of the most direct antislavery sermons delivered by a white preacher before black audiences, slaveholding and judgment were linked. Henry Willis preached the dedication sermon for a black Baltimore church on the text Acts 7: 7: "And the nation to whom they shall be in bondage will I judge, said God: and after that they shall come forth and serve me in this place." This was not the standard Methodist dedication sermon for new meeting houses, and so was probably chosen with the black audience in mind. No whites, it seems, were present with the "nearly five hundred colored people" in this ceremony, except for Willis and his Bishop, Asbury.93

A sermon preached on the fourth of July to a crowd of at least some blacks and some whites stressed the hypocrisy of a freedom-loving nation allowing slavery in its borders. Brother Chalmers reinforced this message with an exhortation designed to show that God might choose to judge slaveholders at any time. He told an anecdote about a slave auction to convince whites present that "he was certain God would send some judgment upon those who were obstinate."94

In Chalmers's tale, a slave up for sale had a free black friend who was determined to buy and emancipate him, but an evil slave owner, who wished to move him to Georgia, kept outbidding his friend. As the situation looked hopeless for the slave, the evil slave owner was "on a sudden...struck with a judicial stroke from God and fell dead on the spot." Slaves in the audience undoubtedly appreciated both the sermon and the story; the reaction of slaveholders was decidedly mixed. Although one slave owner resolved to free his slaves after this service, many area whites were horrified and felt such talk might encourage slaves to revolt.95

It is extremely unlikely that any white Methodist minister ever encouraged slave insurrection, although many noted privately in their journals their hopes that God would
end slavery soon and mete out just punishment to slaveholders. John Kobler, after disciplining a master and his son who had burned a runaway slave with hot irons, noted that he was "awfully made to fear they will be sick of hot irons in a coming day." Later, upset that slaves were not allowed to attend services and instead were forced to work in the fields, he prayed privately for what he called the "revolution:" "O merciful God when will the time and revolution commence to roll away this our reproach. [H]asten, --O hasten it merciful God I most earnestly entreat thee."96

Despite the fact that such thoughts were not normally aired in public, slave owners did fear a link between the Methodist gospel and insurrection. John Littlejohn heard his first Methodist sermon in Norfolk in the early 1770s. Robert Williams, whom Littlejohn believed at first to be a "Crazy fellow," climbed to the top of the courthouse stairs and began singing hymns. The sermon Robert Williams delivered was not preserved, but Littlejohn heard the mayor of Norfolk tell a friend during this event that "If we permit such fellows as these to come here we shall have an Insurrection of the Negroes."97

In the early 1790s, several insurrection scares were blamed on the Methodists. James Meacham, in 1792, noted how after one such scare, "the cursed venom began to fly against the poor Methodists and Quakers...some was for hanging the Preachers on a Tree." In 1793 Jeremiah Norman, puzzled at a light crowd for a Sunday service, discovered that whites "had made avow[sic] against hearing the Methodists any more" because of "the notion of the insurrection of the Blacks."98

In 1800 as word got out of the testimony of one of Gabriel's co-conspirators that Methodists were among those to be spared (with Quakers and Frenchmen) because they were "friendly to liberty," Methodists were again seen to be dangerous to slavery. One of the white men who was accused of harboring the fugitive Prosser was a Methodist, and this may have increased slave owners' fears. Ben Woolfolk, the confessing conspirator, also linked rebellion and slave religion by reporting that he had spoken to the conspirators
of the parallels between their planned revolt and the delivery of Moses and the Israelites from bondage under Pharaoh.99

An editorial in a Virginia paper on Gabriel's revolt described slave insurrections as inevitable because of "the doctrine" of "liberty and equality" which the writer claimed "has been, and is still preached by the Methodists, Baptists and others, from the pulpit without any sort of reserve." South Carolinians, who Winthrop Jordan notes dealt in their press with Gabriel's Plot with "virtually complete silence," did in December of 1800 bar all slave and free black gatherings before sunrise and after sunset whether for "mental instruction or religious worship."100

In 1798 Methodist bishops Coke and Asbury published an edition of the *Discipline* with explanatory notes. Although slavery was deemed to be a "great evil" and an "enormous evil" in this version, the Bishops counseled preachers when visiting from house to house to enforce the "relative duties," a reference to the passage in Ephesians that includes the words "Servants, be obedient to your masters." As both Asbury and Coke were in 1798 ardent foes of slavery, this focus on slave obedience would seem inconsistent. Yet it was part of a two-pronged strategy designed to alleviate slave owners' fears while encouraging emancipation--urge slave owners to free their slaves and urge religious slaves to obey their masters while in bondage.101

Coke had already practiced this strategy. After being physically threatened with violence several times because of his vocal opposition to slavery, he decided to try another tack:

I bore a public testimony against slavery, and have found out a method of delivering it without much offense, or at least without causing a tumult: that is, by first addressing the Negroes in a very pathetic manner on the Duty of the Servant to the Master; and then the Whites will receive quietly what I have to say to them.
We have no record as to the reception Coke received by black listeners on this occasion. Perhaps they were outraged; perhaps they knew of Coke's abolitionism and figured out his strategy. If any of the other antislavery Methodist clergy tried Coke's plan, they left no record of it. 102

Although sermons to blacks on obedience were rare, some ministers did encourage slaves from the pulpit to obedience. Jeremiah Norman preached on the relative duties, "and was unusually pointed on the duty of servants" in June of 1800. Asbury in 1807 preached to a black audience on the Ephesians verses on obedience. Two other sermons to black audiences might also have included references to slaves' "duty" to obey their masters. Whether the passages on obedience in the Discipline and these few sermons alleviated masters' fears of Methodism's pernicious influence on their slaves is doubtful. As late as 1818, after the church had finished denouncing slavery as a national body, a Methodist minister was tried in Maryland for allegedly inciting slaves to rebellion. 103

Eugene Genovese, in his seminal study of slavery, defined the two contradictory impulses of Christianity as quietism and revolution. Although there were few slave rebellions in the American South, the three major insurrections and scares all had a religious component. For the most part, however, slave Methodists seemed to have pursued a course between resignation and rebellion. In an ideological sense, however, their faith was rebellious, for in Methodism slaves refused to see themselves as property or beasts of burden, and instead saw themselves as a people whom God loved, for whom God had sacrificed his only son, and whom God had destined for a world where their suffering would be avenged. 104

Some Methodist free blacks and slaves were openly assertive; a few were even prepared to fight for their church. A "negro woman, armed with a hoe" rescued preacher Richmond Nolley from a mob who were planning to "duck him." Another incident occurred in a Methodist service of 1788. An opponent of Methodism had hired a "fighting
man" to beat preacher John Young. One of Young's black followers "would have floged [the hireling] if it had not been prevented."105

"Old Elizabeth" likewise stood up to white authority. Around 1808, when holding a prayer meeting for black women in Baltimore, she confronted a city watchman who had come to "break up" her meeting. He told her that "people round here cannot sleep for the racket." Elizabeth "soon grew warm and courageous" and boldly asked the watchman why he did not stop the "ungodly" when they were making noise in "dancing and fiddling?" She "laid [her] hand upon him and addressed him with gospel truth," asking him not to persecute people worshipping God. He "turned pale and trembled, and begged my pardon," she related, and he promised never to disturb a religious meeting again.106

We also must take into account the number of black Methodists who fought against slavery after they had been emancipated. "Old Elizabeth" sermonized against slavery in the South. Richard Allen preached against slavery, and as an African Methodist Episcopal Bishop, refused slaveholders admittance to his church, one of the few revisions the A.M.E. leaders made in the M. E. Discipline. Daniel Coker issued a wringing indictment of slavery and of proslavery arguments in 1810.107

Running away was another way to protest slavery, and numerous Methodist slaves, some of whom we have already seen, did just that. The runaway slave Will, his owner claimed, "frequently resorts among the people who call themselves Methodists." Jack, who ran away from George Fitzhugh, was "an artful fellow, and professes himself a Methodist." Solomon Stocksdale's escaped slave Jack, according to his owner, "pretends to be a great Methodist." Another runaway slave named Allick was also said to be "an artful fellow" who "affects to be a Methodist."108

William Ormond recorded an extraordinary event in his journal involving runaways, although he gave exceedingly few details. In 1800 Ormond was awakened from his sleep by three whites seeking runaway slaves. Ormond recounted that "they
attempted to take one, but he cleared himself and gave one of the Men a bad wound."

Whether these runaways were being harbored at this Methodist home is unclear. What is striking is that to these slave catchers, the logical place to look was at this Methodist home, where this night slept a noted antislavery Methodist preacher.\(^{109}\)

We should perhaps leave the general assessment of Methodism's effect on slaves up to a man who had converted while still a bondsman. In 1810 Daniel Coker, who would become a Bishop of the separate African Methodist Episcopal Church in 1816, authored an antislavery pamphlet, *A Dialogue Between a Virginian and an African Minister*, which was published in Baltimore. Besides being a tour de force of African American antislavery literature, and one of the first works by a black leader in the new nation to promote pride in origins by choosing the name "African," this pamphlet also addressed white fears about Methodists. Coker organized the work as a conversation between a Virginia slaveholder and himself and at one point had the "Virginian" saying that the Methodist preachers "are forever preaching against slavery (as I understand) and have been instrumental in bringing about the freedom of some thousands in the United States."\(^{110}\)

Coker used most of this work to refute proslavery arguments based on the Bible, expediency, and fear, and to promote the justice of emancipation. But in one dialogue, he urged the Virginian, if he refused to emancipate his slaves, to at least treat them as human beings. Among the reforms Coker urged on this slave owner was to permit his slaves to attend church services. Those masters who kept their slaves from religion, said Coker's "African Minister": "do it in order to keep them in a state of ignorance, lest they should become too wise to answer their selfish purposes and too knowing to rest easy, and satisfied in their degraded condition."\(^{111}\)

This is indeed a puzzling statement. If Coker was attempting to reach hard-hearted slaveholders, his logic here would seem calculated to do just the opposite, for he seems to be saying that religion will make slaves "too wise" and "too knowing" to wish to
remain in bondage. There is no evidence to suggest what sort of readership Coker was aiming for with his pamphlet. Perhaps he was primarily addressing proslavery ministers or slaveholders who had at some point considered manumission. Perhaps Coker's anger against slave owners who denied their slaves a chance to worship got the better of him here. Perhaps he believed slave owners too dense to analyze this claim. Coker himself, it should be noted, escaped from his Maryland owner to New York soon after his conversion. In any event, Coker clearly believed that Methodism did not make slaves more reconciled to their "lot." 112

As we will shortly see, slave and free black Methodists often came to services at their peril. We must, as a result, take their loyalty to their religion seriously. For thousands of slaves belonging to Methodist owners, the end of the eighteenth century would bring freedom. For many others, the new century would see their hopes of liberty dashed.

Slaves and free blacks who joined the church found solace, comfort, and self-worth in its doctrine. Methodism's denunciations of gentry behavior and its inversion of values meant for slaves and free blacks that at least in God's eyes, they were superior to their oppressors, and in services, slaves found one of the few places they could endorse values so antithetical to the lifestyles of their owners.

Some free black and slave men rose to leadership positions over black and mixed race congregations, further bearing witness to how the church differed from the larger slave society. Despite the segregation in some services by race, churches like the Methodists' offered more equality and more respect for the personhood of slaves than slaves received from their owners or other whites. Churches were also one of the few public places where slaves could assemble together and speak much of what was on their minds.
In Methodist rituals like conversion and sanctification, free blacks and slaves could define themselves as people worthy of God's love and humane treatment, and could publicly assert in these rituals and in testimony their own sense of worth and importance. Even for those Methodists in bondage, religion provided psychological release from the sorrow, toil, and abuse of slavery. For some slaves with Methodist owners, the church actually helped procure better treatment.

Yet Methodist ministers could not or would not prevent some of the most horrific abuses of slaves. Even when the church refused to take action, slaves found in religion consolation and hope for eventual justice. James Meacham witnessed the separation of a slave family in 1789. Their owner had died and the mother and father were willed to a family in the Carolinas, while the children—"one of which a sucking child"—were willed to people in Virginia. Meacham was so horrified that the owner had willed "away with his Sheep and Oxen, the dear purchase of Christ[']s blood" that he lapsed into stream of consciousness later when recording the scene in his journal:

O the crys of the poor captive woman is enough to move the heart of the most obdurate, on her Taking leave of her Children, [']O my Children, my children no more to see my children,['] with her little ones around her crying [']Mamma my Mamma is a going away, I never shall see my Mamma no more['] at last Trembling in the Melting streams of Tears extorts the cry, [']I hope I shall see you again at Judgment Day, whether I am prepared or not I hope to see my children['] and so turned her back upon her tender Plants, for Carolina with her heart[-]renting screams and cryes, without the least shadow or hope of ever seeing them again while life should last.

This mother's parting words contain both comfort and warning--comfort for her family at the idea of a reunion in Heaven and warning for those who would not be so lucky at Judgment. That she spoke in front of white witnesses of "Judgment Day" instead of
"Heaven" is in itself significant. In her grief and anger, the afterlife became a place of retribution as much as a place where parting would be no more. 113

And here again, we can see both the Methodist universal and the slave Methodist particular. All Methodists shared the idea that Heaven would be a place of family reunion. And it was not unheard of for a white Methodist to expect their persecutors or enemies to be found wanting at the bar of Judgment. But no white Methodist ever had to face the horror that this slave mother confronted. Her final words to her children illustrate better than membership statistics, white testimony, and scholarly assessments the importance of religion to Methodist slaves. It is in this light that we should evaluate the testimony of the black woman whose death was recorded in the 1771 letter, who, in her final hours, was not afraid to die.
Endnotes

4. In the South, the deathbed ritual was also important. In central South Carolina, for example, a slave woman belonging to "G. Connor" fell ill in 1798. She was not only "under bodily affliction," "her mind," too, "seemed in great distress." She sent for a Methodist preacher who "visited and prayed for her." See January 18, 1798, The Diary of Jeremiah Norman, Stephen B. Weeks Papers, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.


Sterling Stuckey, in *Slave Culture: Nationalist Theory and the Foundations of Black America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), argues that Christianity was primarily a disguise by which slaves hid their African religious practices from their owners. The question of African versus European heritage is especially complicated when talking of the Methodists. In Britain, the first societies formed by Wesley exhibited many of the traits found in black Methodism—for example, shouting, clapping, spirit possession. As it is difficult to determine the African place of origin of all but a few black Methodists from the sources consulted for this study, any analysis would be so general that it would lack
explanatory potential. It is likely, however, that many blacks were attracted to Methodism because some of its practices were similar to African religious practices, and that once Methodists, blacks put their own imprint and style on the church.

6. Certainly Methodist slaves and Methodist slave owners shared some values. I would maintain, however, that there was one shared level of value, and another level which was not shared. Richard Allen, who claimed he had what was considered a "good" master, and whose description of his life in slavery is noticeably unrancorous, called bondage "a bitter pill." When Allen and his fellow black Methodist ministers seceded from the Methodist Episcopal Church because of discrimination, they named their new church the "African Methodist Episcopal," and kept most of the Discipline and doctrine from their old church. The major changes they made were to bar slaveholders from the church, limit admission to African Americans, and give black members and clergy the same rights and privileges white clergy and members had in the Methodist Episcopal church. All of which shows the loyalty of A.M.E. founders to Methodism as well as the distinct consciousness they had about the injustice of slavery and discrimination. This dual identity exhibited by A.M. E. founders informs my discussion of Methodist slaves and free blacks, the vast majority of whom did not leave their own records and thoughts. Allen's story is found in Daniel A. Payne, History of the African Methodist Episcopal Church (1891; reprinted in New York: Johnson Reprint Corporation, 1968), Allen quoted on 73.

7. Although the term "biracial" may connote more equality and integration than churches practiced, the alternative term--"white"--is also unsatisfactory. Methodism was white-controlled, but it was only a "white" church in a few areas. In 1790, for example, the circuits reporting no black members were Ohio, Botetourt (in west-central Virginia), Pittsburg, (western Pennsylvania) New Rochelle, Cambridge, Fairfield, and New Haven (all in New England), and Limestone (in Kentucky). The southern circuits with less than 10 black members tended to be in the upcountry regions of the states, such as Cherokee and Saluda (South Carolina), Yadkin and Lincoln (North Carolina) and Greenbriar (Virginia.) Only Savannah circuit was in a black belt area and reported few black members--probably because of the strong black Baptist presence there. For these numbers, see Minutes of the Annual Conferences of the Methodist Episcopal Church, for the Years 1773-1828. Volume I. (New York: T. Mason and G. Lane, for the Methodist Episcopal Church, 1840).

8. For proslavery Christianity and the concomitant emphasis on slaveholder paternalism and stewardship, see, for example, Mathews, Religion in the Old South; Genovese, Roll, Jordan, Roll; Drew Gilpin Faust, "A Southern Stewardship: The Intellectual and the Proslavery Argument," American Quarterly 31 (1979), 63-80. Drew Faust's introduction, "The Proslavery Argument in History," in Faust, ed., The Ideology of Slavery: Proslavery Thought in the Antebellum South, 1830-1860 (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1981), 1-20, provides a wonderful and concise portrait of both the historiography of proslavery and the evolution of proslavery in the Antebellum South. Rachel Klein, in Unification of a Slave State, argues that evangelical Christianity was from the outset proslavery and patriarchal. Larry E. Tise, in Proslavery: A History of the Defense of Slavery in America, 1701-1840 (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 1987), emphasizes that proslavery beliefs had a long pedigree, but even he sees a growing

Although early eighteenth-century slavery was harsher than that of the post-Revolutionary era, Methodist itinerants encountered cruelty, abuse, and neglect of slaves throughout this era.


10. Statistics from 1790 are found in Minutes of the Annual Conferences. The numbers from Newbern in 1807 are from the Virginia Conference Minutes, Methodist Church Papers, Special Collections, Duke University. The numbers for the western Piedmont society are found on July 21, 1805, Thomas Mann Papers, Special Collections, Duke University.

11. For Rankin, see Lednum, A History of the Rise of Methodism in America, 154; for Asbury, see Clark et al., eds., The Journal and Letters of Francis Asbury, 1:57 and 2:622. For a black woman's withdrawal from the church, despite ministerial entreaties for her to stay, see January 19, 1798, The Diary of Jeremiah Norman.


13. Clark et al., eds., The Journal and Letters of Francis Asbury, 2:325. Richard Allen was evidently, in 1799, the first black to be ordained a deacon, and this ordination was said to have caused considerable controversy in the South. See Carol V. R. George, Segregated Sabbaths: Richard Allen and the Emergence of Independent Black Churches, 1760-1840 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973) and Reginald F. Hildebrand, "Methodist Episcopal Policy on the Ordination of Black Ministers, 1784-1864," Methodist History 20:3 (April 1982): 124-142.


15. For Henry Evans, see William Capers, "Autobiography," in William M. Wightman, Life of William Capers, D.D. One of the Bishops of the Methodist Episcopal Church,


17. For Jeremiah, see entries in 1806 and 1807 in Thomas Mann Papers, Special Collections, Duke University.


22. Of course, as we saw in chapter 1, even white Methodist clergy risked their physical safety during the Revolutionary War. Perhaps the hostile climate, which would have been even more hostile to black ministers, explains why black ministers did not emerge earlier. Methodists did not ordain any clergy until after they organized as a separate church in December of 1784. Or the racism of white leaders may be the cause.

23. Richard Allen's autobiography, transcribed by his son, can be found in Daniel Payne, *History of the African Methodist Episcopal Church*, 71-83. See also George, *Segregated Sabbaths*.

24. Works which discuss the improved climate for abolition and antislavery sentiment in the South and nation after the war as well as the South's rapid retrenchment include Winthrop Jordan, *White Over Black: American Attitudes Toward the Negro, 1550-1812* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1968), David Brion Davis, *The Problem of Slavery in the Age of Revolution* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1975), Duncan MacLeod, *Slavery, Race, and the American Revolution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1974), and Ira Berlin, *Slaves Without Masters: The Free Negro in the Antebellum South* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1974). Historians of Delaware argue that one of the main reasons that state did not follow the course of its slave-state neighbors was because of the strength of Methodism there and the leadership of Methodist legislators. See John A. Munroe, "Reflections on Delaware and the American Revolution," *Delaware History* 17:1 (Spring-Summer 1976): 1-11; William H. Williams,

25. James P. Finley, *Sketches of Western Methodism: Biographical, Historical, and Miscellaneous.* (Cincinnati: for the author, 1855), 380. Finley is known for his colorful descriptions and hyperbolic rhetoric, but no historians to my knowledge have challenged the veracity of the basic facts in his accounts. The story of "Cuff" bears the form of a morality tale, for Cuff eventually converted his wicked master. Cuff, according to Finley, obtained his freedom upon his master's conversion.


27. Clark *et al.*, eds., *The Journal and Letters of Francis Asbury,* 1:413; James Jenkins, *Experience, Labours, and Sufferings of Rev. James Jenkins, of the South Carolina Conference* (n.p.: for the author, 1842), 110. It is impossible to tell whether Jenkins' racist remark was originally made in 1802 in his journal or inserted later when he wrote his autobiography. Manuscript accounts from 1770-1810 that were consulted for this study contain few statements as sweeping. It is also difficult to evaluate the extent to which racism motivated Asbury's remark about Hosier. Asbury often expressed concern about how urban ministries were the most dangerous to the pride and disinterestedness of the clergy. Many white ministers were praised for their meekness and humility, as well. Still, because Asbury specifically mentions Hosier's preaching to whites, it is apparent that race was a factor in his evaluation. Henry Boehm, in comparison, wrote about Hosier's "fall" with no mention of his white audiences: "poor Harry was so petted and made so much of that he became lifted up." In Wakeley, *The Patriarch of One Hundred Years,* 92.

28. Klein, in *Unification of a Slave State,* 288-289, sees Capers' remark about Evans as symptomatic of white ministerial attitudes towards black clergy and blacks in general. Richard Rankin, in *Ambivalent Churchmen and Evangelical Churchwomen: The Religion of the Episcopal Elite in North Carolina, 1800-1860* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1993), uses Capers remarks about Evans' supposed deference to help argue that "African-American Methodists accommodated themselves to the master class as well. Henry Evans, the gifted free black Methodist minister who founded the black Methodist church in Fayetteville, epitomized the deferential attitude by 'never speaking to a white man but with his hat under his arm....'" (29)


32. Albert Raboteau, in *Slave Religion,* 238-39, makes the following insightful statement: "The weight of slave testimony suggests that the slaves knew and understood the restrictions under which the slave preacher laboured, and that they accepted his authority,
not because it came from the master but because it came from God…. For a black man and a slave to stand and preach with eloquence, skill, and wisdom was in itself a sign of ability and talent which slavery's restrictiveness could frustrate but never stifle." Even free black preachers worked under adverse conditions of which their black audiences, slave and free, were only too well aware. One wonders which would have meant more to Evans' black listeners—his doffing of the hat to whites or his refusal to shut down his ministry despite official proscription and mob threats? As we know from scholarship concerning slave behavior, deferential behavior by a slave did not signal the slave's approval of white authority, but instead was often a survival mechanism or dissemblance.


39. Richey, Early American Methodism.


42. See, for example, May 10, 1789, James Meacham Papers, Special Collections, Duke University. Meacham was distressed by this segregated arrangement.

43. October 4, 1801, Henry Boehm Journals, Original at Drew University Library, Madison, New Jersey, typescript loaned by Rev. Edwin Schell, Lovely Lane, Museum.
44. Henry Boehm Journals. See also The Original Journals of Richard Whatcoat. For
night meetings, see William Colbert Journals.
46. See, for example, September 4, 1794 and October 11, 1794, William Colbert
Journals. For the sermon by David Smith, see Biography of Rev. David Smith, 24. For
the story of Mrs. Bassett, see Lednum, A History of the Rise of Methodism in America,
275. For Richard Allen, see Daniel Payne, The History of the African Methodist
Episcopal Church, 74-5.
48. Jenkins, Experience, Labours, and Sufferings was published in 1842. Capers'
autobiography (which goes up to the year 1820) was published in Wightman, Life of
William Capers in 1859. There is even a difference in tone about slavery and black
congregants between these two books, which might be in part explained by the fact that
Jenkins entered the ministry in the late eighteenth century and Capers not until the first
decade of the nineteenth. Also, Jenkins's book was published before the church split over
slavery. Jenkins, whose racist comment about black leaders in the church we have already
seen, did reprove a "negro speculator" from the pulpit for his "inhuman traffic" in
1803.(137) As we have seen in chapter 1, published accounts are already more suspect on
antislavery.
49. March 16, 1799, September 23, 1799, October 9, 1799, March 15, 1800, and
February 25, 1800, The Diary of Jeremiah Norman. Norman's gradualist views on slavery
and his racism will be discussed in more detail in the next chapter.
50. Jenny's manumission was worked out on September 23, 1799, The Diary of Jeremiah
Norman.
51. See, for example, Allan Gallay, "Planters and Slaves in the Great Awakening," in John
B. Boles, ed., Masters and Slaves in the House of the Lord: Race and Religion in the
52. Raboteau, Slave Religion, stresses the moral superiority many slaves felt towards
their owners, especially chapter 6. The black who reported on the white member is in
June 30, 1805, Thomas Mann Papers.
54. September 6, 1789, The Original Journals of Richard Whatcoat; Finley, Sketches of
Western Methodism, 384-385; Payne, History of the African Methodist Episcopal
Church, 72-73. For the Gough family members who were influenced by their slaves to
convert, see Lednum, A History of the Rise of Methodism in America, 154 and Francis
Asbury to Ezekiel Cooper, August 4, 1801, in Clark et al., eds., The Journal and Letters
of Francis Asbury, 3:218.
55. Clark et al., eds., The Journal and Letters of Francis Asbury, 2:591; June 26, 1791,
James Meacham Papers.
56. Lathan A. Windley, compiler, Runaway Slave Advertisements, Volume 2: Maryland,
186-87.
57. Quoted in Daniel Payne, History of the African Methodist Episcopal Church, 71-73.
151

58. Ibid., 73. David Smith's biography strongly supports my reading below of Richard Allen's story. Smith noted that both in the Baltimore area and in the rural plantation areas nearby, when slaves became Methodists they worked harder as slaves. But that is not all. About slaves in Baltimore, he wrote: "religious reformation made this class of men and women better servants, and by their good behavior many of them became free." About the rural slaves, he observed: "many of the slaves were converted to God, and naturally they became better servants, and afterwards obtained their freedom." In Biography of Rev. David Smith, 20, 23. Smith links conversion with liberation; the intermediate step included working harder and "good behavior," but the goal was obviously worth both. 59. Ronald W. Long, "Religious Revivalism in the Carolinas and Georgia, 1740-1805," Ph.D. diss., University of Georgia, 1968, 202.


62. Black membership continued to grow even after the church's antislavery efforts ended, but this does not mean that emancipation was unimportant to slaves and free blacks. Other changes contributed to the continued growth of black membership. First, the closing of the slave trade meant that slaves would thereafter be predominantly American-born, and hence language would be less of a barrier in evangelism to slaves. The second and most important factor in the continued growth of black membership was family and community evangelism--always as important as clerical evangelism. Those slaves and free blacks in the church convinced their families and friends to become Methodists; the more Methodists in a family, the more influence exerted on the unconverted. Additionally, it is reasonable to assume the free blacks and slaves who were Methodists tried to raise their children as Methodists.

63. See the next chapter for references to such discipline.

64. March 4, 1790, James Meacham Papers.

65. March 4, 1790, James Meacham Papers. This woman might have belonged to "bro. S." and been emancipated by him. The fact that the adult male slave spoken of was enrolled for freedom indicates this owner may have been following the Methodist recommendations for manumission, in which slaves' ages (or for newly purchased slaves, their purchase price) were used to calculate their dates of manumission. As this incident also shows, Methodists were not opposed to corporal punishment for children.

66. Memoir of Old Elizabeth, 4 and 6.

67. Memoir of Old Elizabeth, 7; Richard Allen quoted in Payne, History of the African Methodist Episcopal Church, 74.

68. Memoir of Old Elizabeth, 4 and 8.
69. Finley, *Sketches of Western Methodism*, 382-384.
70. Finley, *Sketches of Western Methodism*, 383.
78. See, for example, the ads in Lathan A. Windley, compiler, *Runaway Slave Advertisements, Maryland*; Winthrop Jordan, *White Over Black*, 150-151.
80. Few theologians were, by this time, claiming that blacks were a separate creation. Still, as Winthrop Jordan, in *White Over Black*, reminds us, there was a persistent tension between the idea that blacks were inferior to whites (as in constructs such as the "Great Chain of Being") and the idea that humans essentially differed from beasts in that they alone could attain salvation. When Methodist clergy described the mistreatment of slaves, they frequently made references to the fact that slaves were being treated by their owners as if they were beasts, which seemed inconsistent, in ministers' views, with the universal salvation they believed bought for all men and women who converted by the crucifixion. The frequent opposition by whites to black Methodists and to evangelism to blacks may in part have stemmed from the lingering, if rarely articulated, belief that blacks and whites were separate creations.
81. August 5, 1790, James Meacham Papers. The communion service can be found in *The Doctrines and Discipline of the Methodist Episcopal Church in America* (Philadelphia: for John Dickins, 1792), 231-232.
82. September 9, 1790 and May 28, 1791, James Meacham Papers.
83. September 2, 1790, February 23, 1792 and March 23, 1800, James Meacham Papers.
84. October 4, 1792, James Meacham Papers; June 14, 1789, Myles Greene Journal, Special Collections, Duke University; January 3, 1802, Henry Boehm Journals; December 3, 1791, George Wells' Journal; June 8, 1794, The Original Journals of Richard Whatcoat.
85. May 11, 1794; William Colbert Journals.
86. October 18, 1790; Myles Greene Journal.
87. Levine, *Black Culture and Black Consciousness*; Raboteau, *Slave Religion*;
88. August 21, 1792, James Meacham Papers.
89. July 20, 1797, William Ormond Papers, Special Collections, Duke University.
90. For identification with Old Testament personae and the Israelites, see, for example, Levine, Black Culture and Black Consciousness; Raboteau, Slave Religion; Genovese, Roll, Jordan, Roll; Sobel, Trabelin' On. Sermons found in January 8, 1797, William Ormond Papers; Simpson, ed., American Methodist Pioneer, 190; October 11, 1791, "A Journal and Travel of James Meacham, Part II, 1789-1797," [Trinity College] Historical Papers Series X (1914): 91; Smith, Biography of Rev. David Smith, 15.
91. September 14, 1792, James Meacham Papers.
92. August 31, 1794, William Colbert Journals; June 3, 1792, James Meacham Papers, emphasis added.
94. July 4, 1790, Ezekiel Cooper Journals.
95. July 4 and July 7, 1790, Ezekiel Cooper Journals.
98. June 5, 1792, James Meacham Papers; October 30, 1793, The Diary of Jeremiah Norman.
99. The white man accused of harboring Gabriel was Richardson Taylor. Gerald Mullin claims Taylor was an "anti-slavery Methodist" who had to have known about the insurrection and therefore was not, as Taylor himself claimed, unaware of what he was doing. His story is found in Mullin, Flight and Rebellion, 149-54. Ben Woolfolk's testimony as to the religious content of the rebellion is found in Jordan, White Over Black, 393. Unlike Jordan, I see no "irony" in this fact. For an interpretation of Gabriel's rebellion that does not view religion as a significant factor, see Douglas R. Egerton, Gabriel's Rebellion: The Virginia Slave Conspiracies of 1800 and 1802 (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1993).
100. Quoted in Jordan, White Over Black, 395, 396, 399.
103. June 29, 1800, The Diary of Jeremiah Norman; Clark et al., eds., The Journal and Letters of Francis Asbury, 2:530. Brother "I. West" "lectured" to an audience from Ephesians 6, although Meacham, who recorded the incident, does not give the verse. Meacham did note, however, that "some of the blacks were much effected." One popular verse from the sixth chapter of Ephesians was the 11th: "Put on the whole armor of God," and it is possible this or other verses were used. It is also possible that West read and explicated the entire chapter. In Methodist parlance, the term "effected" is used to indicate a positive reception to a sermon, which makes the exact verses of this sermon even more difficult to ascertain. Meacham was a zealous antislavery man, though, and it could be that the black audience for West's lecture, at which Meacham was present, were "effected" because of Meacham's presence and not because of West's sermon. Ezekiel
Cooper spoke "pointedly" to blacks on their "duty," although here too it is unclear what "duty" Cooper chose to "pointedly" enforce. October 4, 1792, James Meacham Papers; December 11, 1791; Ezekiel Cooper Papers. For the trial of Jacob Gruber and the context surrounding it, see John B. Boles, "Tension in a Slave Society: The Trial of the Reverend Jacob Gruber," *Southern Studies* 18 (1979): 179-97.

104. Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll*, 162-168. John Jentz points out the following about Genovese's assumptions of the potential for religious rebellion: "his account makes the planter regime so powerful and pervasive that there appears to be no possibility of revolutionary politics at all....historians should look, not at the ideology of the slaves, but at the social structure of the ante-bellum South to explain their lack of a revolutionary tradition."(169) John Jentz, "A Note on Genovese's Account of the Slaves' Religion," in Paul Finkelman, ed., *Religion and Slavery* (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1989), 307-315.


111. *Ibid.*, 34.

112. Although Coker ministered to an all-black Methodist congregation in 1810, he was a member and clergyman in the Methodist Episcopal Church when he wrote this work. He gives the number of "African Methodists" in the United States for 1809 as 31,884. This number is taken from the Methodist Episcopal Church Minutes. Coker does however use his own term "Africans" rather than the term used in the Minutes of that year, "colored." See *Minutes of the Methodist Conferences Annually Held in America. From 1773 to 1813, Inclusive, Volume I* (New York: Hitt and Ware for the Methodist Connexion in the United States, 1813). Coker also had to know that when he wrote about allowing slaves to hear Methodist preachers, the vast majority of itinerant ministers in the church, especially in the non-urban areas, were white. The fact that former slaves like Coker and Allen left the Methodist Episcopal Church to form a body where blacks would have more rights and privileges indicates not only the limits of white Methodist egalitarianism but also suggests that Methodism did not teach these men to be content with second-rate status. This is yet another indication of the different ways blacks and whites interpreted the Methodist message.

113. January 12, 1789, James Meacham Papers.
Chapter 4:  
The Poverty of Riches: Methodists and Class

--At Colonel Robert Carter's Nomini Hall, December 24, 1789: "I exhorted in the Evning the famaly how hardly Shall a Rich Man Enter the Kingdom."

--Near Baltimore, Maryland, July 12, 1793: "Visted Mary Davis poor in circumstance rich in grace...."¹

--Richard Whatcoat

In these two terse entries of Richard Whatcoat's journal, we see laid bare one of the Methodists' inversions of values. In the stately mansion of Nomini Hall, perhaps provoked by the grandeur and display around him, Brother Whatcoat warned one of the oldest wealthy southern families that their salvation would be well nigh impossible. Would that we only knew the Carter family's reaction. Did they perceive this preacher as impudent and ill-mannered, or did they feel duly chastened? We can, nonetheless, place this incident in the broader context of the period and acknowledge that, in general, southern gentry were unresponsive and hostile to early Methodism. Whatcoat's exhortation at Nomini Hall helps illustrate one primary cause of this hostility.²

Mary Davis's gender and class make her a typical early Methodist. Perhaps Mary was one of the Baltimore-area Methodists who received charity from the clergy.³ If so, she would have been spared the earlier humiliating ritual of applying to local vestries for relief.⁴ Methodist preachers were able to relate to poor members like Mary as fellow sufferers. Ministers visited, lodged, and supped with numerous plain folk. They chose lives of poverty and depended on the donations of others for their food, clothing, and shelter. Methodist preachers were also directed to avoid the arrogance Anglican parsons had exhibited towards their middling and lower-class parishioners. "Do not affect the
gentleman," the 1784 Discipline cautioned, for "A preacher of the gospel is the servant of all." A subsequent rule counseled preachers to "Be ashamed of nothing but sin: not of fetching wood...or drawing water: not of cleaning your own shoes, or your neighbor's." For all Methodists, humility was deemed a virtue, and ministers were to set the standard for the membership.

Southern Methodist clergy privately and publicly made numerous comments about the sinfulness of riches and the riches of grace. Basing their views both on their experience and Wesleyan precepts, Methodists fashioned an ethic that contrasted sharply with the gospel of wealth. They often flouted secular rituals of deference, and ministers directly confronted elites about their lifestyles and values. Methodism taught that men and women must seek to do good in all aspects of their lives and that every choice was vested with moral consequences. This ethic expanded the sense of agency of poor men and women by enabling them to view themselves with self-respect and dignity although they lived in a world where poverty was viewed as failure. Methodists also created in their churches a place where secular rankings of class were set aside, and dictated among their members a new standard of mutual respect for interactions between people of different classes.

Attitudes toward wealth and poverty, class and hierarchy were in flux during the Revolutionary and early national period, and Methodists, like their contemporaries, participated in the effort to overthrow traditional notions about status and rank. Most historians agree that both the Revolution and the evangelical insurgency challenged ideas about social hierarchy, but there is still debate over whether gentry hegemony survived these challenges. In his pioneering analysis of the Baptists in eighteenth century Virginia, Rhys Isaac concluded that by 1790 there were two competing value systems--the gentry's and the Baptists'. Jan Lewis, in her study of the Virginia gentry, found that some evangelical values, such as a stress on love and affection in interpersonal relationships,
parents' emotional dependence on children, and a view of the world as such a cruel and harsh place that the family circle became idealized as its counterpart, seeped into even non-evangelical discourse and mindsets, fundamentally altering the way the gentry viewed the world.  

Other works, such as Rachel Klein's on the South Carolina backcountry and Allan Kulikoff's on the Chesapeake, claim instead that gentry values survived the evangelical onslaught. Klein sees more commonalities than differences between evangelical and gentry values, arguing that both groups shared a racist ideology, a common quest for order, views about the importance of hierarchy, assumptions that patriarchy--specifically the subordination of women and slaves to the household head--was the best family government, and finally, a shared belief that slavery was compatible with Christianity. Kulikoff argues that evangelicals were a small minority of Virginians, and that, as for the Baptists, "numerous yeomen and some wealthy planters joined their ranks during the 1780s and succeeded in civilizing the more unruly members."  

Some modern historians, such as Paul Johnson, have expanded on Max Weber's foundational study and have argued that evangelical Arminianism served the class interests of petty capitalists and the new bourgeoisie. Frightened by their loss of control over workers, the middle class embraced a theology of individual control and self-restraint. Others argue that evangelicalism served to inure the working classes to their substandard lot and to legitimate capitalist exploitation.  

In order to explore in depth Methodist views, and to determine how they might illuminate the debate, we must look at both statements of principle and at actual practices in the early church. As Whatcoat's 1789 quotation of Christ makes clear, the Methodists' were by no means the first to caution that wealth and salvation were incompatible. American clergy and members drew on a number of Biblical teachings to support their views. More immediately important, however, were John Wesley's many sermons and
Methodists brought Wesley's theology to the New World; they did not fashion their views of wealth in reaction to the society they confronted in the South. We cannot therefore fully employ Rhys Isaac's paradigm to understand Methodism's position relative to southern society. Isaac portrays the Baptists as an indigenous, countercultural opposition that fashioned their ideology in reaction to the southern gentry. Methodist missionaries to America, however, came to the New World already steeped in Methodist doctrine, values, and theology. Their positions on wealth were part of what made them Methodists and were not merely reactionary. The southern setting did present fresh problems for the Methodists, especially since slaveholding and wealth were so interrelated in this period.

Wesley wrote copiously about wealth and its bearing on salvation. The inaugural 1789 issue of the American Methodist periodical, *The Arminian Magazine*, published a Wesley sermon on "They that will be rich, fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful desires, which drown men in destruction and perdition."(1 Timothy 6:9) Wesley strictly defined riches as "more than food and coverings," although he considered this verse particularly aimed at those who "lay up treasures on earth."11

Wealth, in Wesley's eyes, lead to three sorts of sins--sins of the flesh, sins of the eye, and the greatest sin of the three--pride. He spoke against gluttony, "elegant epicurism," and against taking "supreme delight" in learning, but most of his discourse was against pride. To seek the "esteem, admiration, and applause of men" was to turn from God. The rich, in Wesley's view, missed out on the trials by which God chastened humanity. In "avoiding every cross, every degree of trouble, danger, difficulty" men and women could not be made perfect. Wesley cautioned the rich that wealth insulated them from suffering, and thus from the spiritual blessings which came with suffering.12
In addition to the temptations to sin and ease which came with riches, Wesley also counseled that wealth was intrinsically wrong because it led to an imbalanced distribution of God's material gifts. Wesley believed that life was a series of choices between good and evil, and he believed that faithful Methodists should make every decision--even the most routine ones--carefully and introspectively, with the good and God's will in mind. In his essay on dress (which was often reprinted in America), for example, he stressed that even ordinary choices had moral consequences. Like other pietists, Wesley and his followers believed that ornamentation and "superfluity" of dress were anathema to God. Members were barred from wearing "gold or costly apparel," such as "high heads, enormous bonnets, ruffles, or rings."^13

Methodism's founder offered many reasons why dress should be simple. Among them were beliefs that finery and fashion engendered pride, vanity, and lust. But Wesley's most passionate arguments linked plain dress to benevolence, and posed the issue in terms of choice: "the more you lay out on your own apparel, the less you have to clothe the naked, to feed the hungry, to lodge the strangers, to relieve those that are sick and in prison, and to lessen the numberless afflictions to which we are exposed in this vale of tears." To illustrate, Wesley recounted an incident from his days at Oxford. His college maid was working in a thin cotton dress and winter fast approached. Wesley reached in his pockets for money to give her for a coat, but none was there--he had spent it on pictures for his walls.^14

He then imagined a conversation at the bar of Judgment about this very incident. The Lord, in Wesley's vision, berated him: "Thou hast adorned thy walls with the money which might have screened this poor creature from the cold!" Wesley enjoined his followers not to make the same mistake: "Are not these pictures the blood of this poor maid! See thy expensive apparel in the same light: thy Gown, Hat, Head-dress! Every thing about thee which cost more than Christian Duty required thee to lay out, is the blood
of the poor!"15 In Wesley's view, Methodist prohibitions on costly apparel were closely linked to wider Christian duties to care for the less fortunate.

Benevolence was central to Methodism, and undergirding Wesley's and southern Methodists' views about charity were important assumptions about moral agency and self-conscious action. In Wesley's imaginary conversation with his creator, God had causally linked the suffering of Wesley's maid to his unthinking decision to buy pictures for his wall. As Wesley's discussion shows, Methodists were encouraged to reformulate their notions of direct and indirect causation. The wealthy were responsible, in the Methodist world view, not only for the direct suffering they might cause others, but also for the indirect consequences of their possessions and spending.

To Wesley, wealth was bad because it led to sin, for the earthly suffering it caused others, and also because it was a violation of God's trust. Wesley saw himself, and urged Methodists to see themselves, as temporary sojourners on earth. Everything on earth, in his view, belonged to God, and "he only lends them to us: or to speak more strictly, entrusts them to us as stewards...."16 Yet the stewardship Wesley envisioned was much more than mere disinterested benevolence.

Wesley was at his ascetic best when describing God's injunctions on wealth. God allowed men and women to feed, clothe, and shelter their own household, to retain enough funds to carry on their businesses, and to leave a modest inheritance for their children. All else of this world's goods, in Wesley's ethic, were to be given to others. He counselled Methodists to "look upon yourself as one of a certain number of indigent persons, who are to be provided for out of that portion of his [God's] goods, wherewith you are entrusted."17 The rulebook for American Methodists, the Discipline, spelled this out in no uncertain terms: Methodists were forbidden from "Laying up treasures upon earth."18
Wesley's ideas, formulated decades before Methodists came to America, are critical to understanding southern Methodists' positions on class. Because of their founder's views, Methodist missionaries were predisposed to be critical of the southern gentry. Southern elites, like those in Britain, with their conspicuous consumption, ostentation, idleness, code of honor, and pride, were a countermodel of Methodist piety. Much of what set the southern gentry apart from their poorer neighbors--horse-racing, fancy clothes, mansions, imported luxuries, fox-hunting, and the ubiquitous balls--was deemed by Methodists sinful. In short, the Methodist ethic was a polar opposite of the values of southern elites.

The fact that most wealthy southerners depended on the labor of slaves for their lifestyles compounded, in Methodists' views, the danger. Slavery was for most southern clergy sinful, and the idleness, pride, and dissipation (evil in themselves) which ministers believed was a result of slave ownership appeared even more evil as a result. Ministers' views were most evident when contrasting free states and territories to the slave South. John Kobler noted in 1799 how in the Northwest Territory, because slavery was prohibited, "every man is his own Jack and Tom." Similarly, James Smith remarked a few years later that in Ohio, all were "on an equality; pride and slavery are equally strangers; industry is seen in all." 19

American Methodist clergy, in addition to condemning the wealthy, further echoed Wesley's ethos in the New World. Freeborn Garrettson, when collecting donations for a poor widow, told Methodists that those who "give to the poor lend to the Lord" and many ministers connected wealth, idleness, and dissipation with sin. In the South, Methodist beliefs may have had special significance. The southern gentry typically, as Bertram Wyatt-Brown has shown, judged themselves by the way others of their class saw them, or as Wesley might have put it, sought the "esteem, admiration, and applause of men." Jesse Lee delivered a sermon in Delaware that denounced both wealth and gentry values. He
warned his audience first against "honour," and described those bound by honor as people desiring "the praise of men; to be esteemed, admired, beloved, or flattered." Honor was related in Lee's mind to riches, for "men may be bewitched by the world" and "those persons who are in affluent circumstances, are more likely to be drawn aside from following the Lord by the love of the world." Methodists were urged to obey their inner moral voices and to look only to God for confirmation of their worth, and consequently, their values contrasted sharply with the gentry's code of honor.  

Two of the more popular Methodist sermons involved condemnations of wealth and further show how Wesley's ideas were applied in the South. The first was the parable of Lazarus and the Rich Man from Luke. This cautionary fable told how a man rich in life received hell's torment in death, while Lazarus, a sore-ridden beggar who ate crumbs that fell from the rich man's table in life, was "comforted" in "Abraham's bosom" in death. This passage in no way faults the wealthy man for indifference or lack of charity, it merely posits an afterlife where earthly conditions are reversed. When the wealthy man cried to Abraham for water to cool hell's flame, the Patriarch replied: "Son, remember that thou in thy lifetime receivedst thy good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things: but now he is comforted, and thou art tormented." Perhaps the implicit sin was lack of charity, yet the explicit sin was having wealth.

For those rich congregants looking for a sermon a bit less condemnatory, there was always the moralistic New Testament query "What is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?" This sermon, which does not preclude gain per se, was preached all through the South by various clergy.

There is evidence to suggest that this sermon was, on occasion, effective in reaching the wealthy. Jesse Lee spoke on this text on March 30, 1788 in Petersburg, Virginia. He noted that "a woman finely dressed" near the preaching stand "trembled and
shook as though she had an ague." Several "young" women rushed to the wealthy woman's side, and prayed for her until she was converted.23

At least one wealthy woman overcame her class prejudice against Methodism by recalling this verse. Rebecca Dorsey Ridgely, daughter of the wealthy Dorseys and wife of the rich and powerful Captain Ridgely, went to hear a Methodist preach in 1774. The sermon touched Rebecca, and she found herself kneeling to pray, even though, she later recalled, "it then was a shame to kneel before the people" (especially, we might add, for the gentry.) Yet Rebecca was so moved by the Methodists that she overcame her "shame to kneel," comforting herself with Christ's question: "But o I thought what is all the world to me if I must lose my soul[.]" Ridgely interpreted the popular sermon text precisely as ministers intended--earthly riches were meaningless without piety.24

Just as important as sermons were clerical attitudes hostile to wealth, such as those Whatcoat evinced at Nomini Hall. Freeborn Garrettson's wry comment in eastern Virginia was typical. He noted on March 26, 1782 that he had preached "to an audience of what is called the better sort," taking care, as many clergy did, to distinguish worldly terminology from religious. Five years later Garrettson offhandedly compared religion in Worcester, Maryland, where people were "poor, but blest" with that in the Sound, where they were "richer, and have less religion." In western Virginia, minister John Kobler made similar remarks. He noted that in one audience were several well-dressed women "which called themselves Laides[sic-Ladies]," and later commented how in a group of wealthy Methodists "some of them has bowed greatly but not far enough yet."25

Ministers often reminded the gentry that earthly wealth was transitory. Preacher William Chandler was staying at the home of a wealthy man named Major Kerr, who had shown unusual hospitality and kindness to the Methodists "though he was emphatically a man of the world." Walking with Kerr in his parlor, Chandler turned and told him, "'Well, major, this mansion is too beautiful to leave behind you, and yet you will soon have to
leave it and go to that narrow house appointed for all living." Ezekiel Cooper, on a visit to the wealthy Captain Ridgely (Rebecca Ridgely's husband), found himself fearing for Ridgely's eternal fate: "How dangerous it is to possess such buildings and riches! Very apt to draw the mind from God--we had better be like Lazarith[sic], here to beg crumbs[sic] of bread, and hereafter to go to glory...."26 It is unlikely that such strong disapproval went unnoticed by wealthy men and women.

Lay people as well were steeped in Wesleyan ideology. In a letter from a poor cousin, Eleanor Dorsey, to one of the wealthiest Methodist men in early America, Harry Dorsey Gough, we can see many of the clergy's arguments put to use. Dorsey had moved to Lyons Town, New York, and wrote her cousin Gough for money to build a chapel there. Dorsey was a master of Methodist ideals and rhetoric, and she alternatively pushed and pulled Gough for a contribution. She began by asserting that she hoped to meet her cousin in Heaven, a typical sentiment in letters between separated Methodist kin. "But," she cautioned, "let us first do all the good we can on earth."27

"[T]he Lord has given you an abundance of this worlds goods," Dorsey reminded Gough, "and when I tell you your poor Breathren[sic] in this wilderness have need, hope you'll not shut up your Bowels of compassion." She appealed to the idea of an extended family of all Methodists ("your poor Breathren") and to New Testament teaching, paraphrasing Saint John's first epistle: "But whoso hath this world's good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him?" In the "wilderness," Dorsey continued, "money is very scarce[sic] and most of the people poor." She was apologetic, although by no means deferential, about asking him and the other "ritch Breathren[sic]" of Maryland again for money, but she was begging for God's work.28

Eleanor Dorsey had not yet exhausted her arguments. She lectured Gough on Christ's maxim that "it is more Blessed to give than to receive," and in language so close
to John Wesley's that there is little doubt that she had read or heard read his sermon, she counseled "in those things it is only lending to the Lord." Unfortunately, we do not know if the bowels of Squire Gough and his rich Maryland Methodist brethren were shut up or not. What is clear is that Dorsey's language and reasoning closely followed that of Methodism's founder, an indication that Wesleyan views on wealth were accepted by American members. At least once prior to this, Dorsey had convinced rich Marylanders to donate money to their poor Brethren. Thus, we might conclude that she used arguments that she had cause to believe would work.\textsuperscript{29}

In an era when property was an intrinsic part of liberty, it is questionable whether wealthy Methodists truly believed that they were merely borrowing their goods from the Lord. Few rich Methodists made the level of sacrifice encouraged by Wesley. Yet, as one minister noted, the early church's survival was heavily dependent on wealthy members, whose contributions were distributed among the poorer districts.\textsuperscript{30} Because most of their members were slaves, lower class or yeoman whites, and women, Methodists financially depended on the minority of wealthy male members to keep the church, the publishing concern, and its few schools and charities afloat. Clergy were uncomfortable about this dependence, which may in part account for the seeming rudeness they exhibited among the wealthy.

Southern Methodists, as had Wesley, saw the wealthy as responsible for the direct and indirect consequences of their spending habits. Ezekiel Cooper, for example, a Methodist preacher working in Maryland, railed against ornate funerals with "parade, equipage, and pomp" attendant. Money would be better spent, in his view, to "cloath and feed a number of poor widows and orphans for some time; or school several poor children."\textsuperscript{31} As in Wesley's college story, Cooper posited a stark choice--either funereal pomp, or orphanages. For Methodists, constantly urged to seek not their own, but God's
will, every action involved such stark choices. And as Wesley and Cooper believed, God always wanted them to use their money to do good.

Methodist views about the evils of wealth help explain why the church was unpopular among the gentry, but they do not fully explain why so many middling and poor people embraced the church. We cannot assume that poor and middling southerners seethed with such class resentment that they were ready to embrace any ideology that condemned elite ways. Moreover, republicanism offered a secular version of Methodists' views on wealth, one which did not require intense introspection or the renunciation of the code of honor.

Part of the reason that Methodism was successful among the lower and middle classes lay in the timing, for Methodist ideals fit in many ways with republican ideals of the Revolution. In the late eighteenth century, inherited values and traditional ways became open for discussion, among them the cultural and social hegemony of elites. Secular political rhetoric of equality and democracy dovetailed nicely with Methodist beliefs. For those living in the settled areas of the South, who had long watched wealthy neighbors parade in carriages, build elaborate mansions, dress in the latest European fashions, and lord it over them in courthouses, town squares, and Anglican churches, the leveling tendencies of the Methodists, much like those of the Baptists analyzed by Rhys Isaac, must have seemed an extension of democratic ways from the political to the religious world.32

It is perhaps worth recalling the customs of Anglican churches so well described by Isaac. Pews were filled by rank, with the wealthiest and most prominent families seated nearest the parson, and symbolically, closer to God; the rear-most pews were reserved for the parish poor. The gentry paraded into Sunday church services at the last moment and were also the first to leave. Local vestries controlled much of the content of the parson's sermon, as also the distribution of charity to the "deserving" poor of the parish. Anglican
clergy were separated from the poor by their education, salary, and clothing, with their black priestly gowns symbolizing their erudition and status in the congregation. 33

Early Methodists, in contrast, met as often in barns, private homes, or out-of-doors as they did in meeting houses. Their churches, when built, were architecturally simple; windows were often a luxury. Ministers dressed in plain clothes, usually made of homespun, and the average Methodist preacher was self-educated, if he was educated at all. Inside church buildings, Methodists did often divide their congregants by gender and race, but white women and white men did not fill the pews in order of wealth. As Methodists, common whites could come together with each other and create a loving and supportive community, and one free of the arrogance, ranking, and status-laden rituals of the secular and Anglican world.34

Common folk may also have been attracted to the church for other reasons. Their ministers often engaged in debates and confrontations with the wealthy, and perhaps more importantly, acquitted themselves well in these encounters. Methodist clergy, as we have seen, railed against wealth and ostentation from the pulpit. They also frequently refused to show deference where by secular standards deference was due. Itinerants were not dependent on local credit networks or on the services wealthy planters provided their poorer neighbors; they could speak for their lower-class parishioners without fear of economic retribution.

Jeremiah Norman was the exception to the rule, but his attitudes reveal how most ministers behaved. Norman believed that his fellow preachers were not deferential enough or genteel enough to reach the wealthy. "There is a kind of humble politeness necessary for the accomplishment of a preacher--in this refined age," Norman wrote, "but there is few that attend to it and therefore offend unnecessarily which makes them unprofitable among the better sort in the world." It was probably easy for a minister risen from the lower class to "offend" in numerous ways, as, for example, William Ormond did when
eating at a North Carolinian's. Ormond found his host a "curious Old Man!" because "you must not make a noise with your lips when you sup at his table."35

Most often, however, preachers gave conscious offense to the wealthy. In 1806, Bishop Asbury had the following encounter with a southern judge which led him to think about deference in general. His description shows how the term "gentleman" had a pejorative meaning to him, and also shows how the posture of humility, required in all member-to-member dealings, did not necessarily apply in other settings:

I visited Charles Tait, a judge; I did not present myself in the character of a gentleman, but as a Christian, and a Christian minister: I would visit the President of the United States in no other character; true, I would be innocently polite and respectful--no more. As to the Presbyterian ministers, and all ministers of the Gospel...to humble ourselves before those who think themselves so much above the Methodist preachers by worldly honour, by learning, and especially by salary, will do them no good.

On another occasion, Asbury behaved in a similar fashion. "I spent the evening with one of the great," he noted, "the Lord and his own conscience will witness that I did not flatter him."36 We can see how the Bishop's attitude might have, as Norman said, made him "unprofitable among the better sort."

There is another reason why lower class whites might have found Methodist ideology attractive. As John Boles has so eloquently written about the Baptists, evangelicals "implicitly challenged the all-inclusive hegemony of the ruling establishment by offering alternative measures of the good (and the bad) life."37 Using these "alternative measures," a poor Methodist would outrank unconverted elites, morally inverting the secular hierarchy. And to join the Methodists would to some degree have meant registering dissent against gentry lifestyles, values, and standards of success. In these many ways, Methodism enabled lower class members to retain a sense of pride, self-
worth, and dignity, and to at least rhetorically and ideologically turn their misery into victory.

There was also a more subtle benefit that accrued to non-elite Methodist converts, one closely linked to the alternative value system referred to by Boles. In a Sussex county, Virginia revival of 1787, a strange series of events took place. First, this revival involved an unusual level of enthusiasm. To be sure, converts laying "as if they were dead," was not atypical. But in Sussex, hundreds, both blacks and whites, "fell down, and lay helpless on the floor, or the ground," a high level of participation indeed. The whole audience "roared and screamed" so loud during one service that the preacher could not finish his sermon. What deserved special comment in this revival, however, was the reaction of the gentry: "Many of the wealthy people, both men and women, were seen lying in the dust, sweating and rolling on the ground, in their fine broad cloths or silks, crying for mercy."38

What a picture this must have made for their poor neighbors! How gratifying it must have been to see the great and powerful struck down by God, convinced of their wretchedness, and crying for mercy. As the minister observed, these wealthy men and women were wearing uniforms of class distinction, clothes that clearly identified them as rich. For the poor who observed this scene, the leveling judgment of God would have been made evident as bondsman and master, bondwoman and mistress, all gained awareness of their sinful state. Such a display of leveling would not, we should note, have compensated for the vast inequalities of wealth and power in a substantive way, yet in an important psychological sense, these hours of writhing and crying must have demonstrated that God's ways and Virginia's ways were not the same.

Another reason common folk might have been attracted to the church was that Methodists tried to help their needy members, and did so in ways that allowed the poor to retain self-respect. Methodist charity was often handled informally, by gifts from
preachers to needy members, as we saw with Richard Whatcoat in the Baltimore area. Since the clergy frequently lodged with the poor, they could directly assess need. Henry Boehm remembered how whenever he and Asbury, who were traveling together in the early 1800's, were given money, the Bishop quickly gave it away to the poor, as "he was restless until it was gone." When a grateful convert insisted that Freeborn Garrettson take eighty continental dollars for saving his soul, Garrettson that same day gave the money to a needy man. Sometimes lay members were just as benevolent. Doctor Hinde of Kentucky, we will recall, was charitable to a fault. He reportedly never tried to collect his debts, and if someone did pay him "it was likely that he would throw it into the lap of the first female member he passed in reaching home." These informal donations must have left the recipients with more self-respect and personal dignity than previous Anglican relief methods. 39

What is even more striking is how often the poor contributed their meager monies to the church. A poor elderly black woman of Charleston who "support[ed] herself by picking oakum, and the charity of her friend" tried to give Bishop Asbury a french crown because "she had been distressed on [his] account." Slaves and free blacks near Cumberland, Virginia "bestowed their presents of pears and apples" to one preacher. During a hot and barren 1796 summer, when many people in Sampson, Cumberland, and Bladen counties of North Carolina were "very near Perishing," one "kind sister" shared a dung-hill fowl with her preacher for supper. These contributions strongly suggest that the poor of the church believed benevolence to be a universal duty; all could support God's work, each within their means. 40

James Finley remembered a "poor old Irish woman," Jane Craig, who insisted on donating regularly to the church. When he suggested she was "too poor" and "too old" to contribute, she practically rebuked him, saying: "Bless God for poverty. I have none of the world, and there is nothing to take my mind off of Jesus, my blessed Savior. I should
feel very unhappy and ungrateful if I did not give something to help on the cause of my blessed Master." Her words echoed those of the clergy, who since their arrival in America had been preaching that wealth and the "things of the world" were impediments to true Christianity. Did Craig literally believe poverty was blessed, or did she find in Methodism an inverted value system that enabled her to feel superior to the gentry despite her poverty? Being poor, old, female, and probably widowed, Jane Craig had little chance for upward social mobility. In Methodism, she rejected self-pity and resignation and was instead able to translate her earthly lot of misfortune into a virtue. By sharing what little she had with the church, she could feel a vital part of Methodist progress.41

Poor people who contributed to the church could be assured that their monies did not go to support ministerial estates or lavish church fixtures. Ministers routinely gave charity or goods to the poor despite their own circumstances, and when ministers at year's end had collected more than their paltry salary, they were required to give the extra funds to preachers in poor districts.42 Most importantly, however, the poor who gave to the church were exercising the same choice that Wesley had argued came with all such decisions. In their cases, the level of sacrifice was undoubtedly much greater, but in Methodist views, the greater the level of sacrifice, the greater the goodness of the choice. Even Jane Craig and Methodist slaves felt a responsibility to give something to others, and they obviously took pride in furthering what they saw as the Lord's work.

We can better understand the attraction of the church for the common folk if we look at the way the church transformed the minority of rich Methodists. For elites, to become a Methodist was to in many ways reject the values of their own class, and to embrace values promoted by the common folk. The import of joining the church is clearer if we consider what was at stake in such a decision.

The case of William Weems is instructive, and suggests that instead of wealthy and middling members "civilizing" lower-class Methodists, lower-class Methodists humbled
and changed the wealthy. Weems was born into a Maryland family of "good circumstances" and as a young man, he became a naval officer. He returned from one of his tours of duty to find that his brothers and sisters were "turning fools" by joining the Methodists. Weems was horrified that his "relations shood so degrade themselves, as to Sociate with such [despicable] people." In 1784, Weems married, and he and his wife were "fully engaged in the Poms and Vanitys of this world" until she converted. Weems also wanted to convert, but he refused to do so with the Methodists because he thought them too "mean a people for me to be advised by, as there [sic] preachers were men not acquainted with the Languages." But Weems did eventually join the Methodists. It was a decision that changed his perceptions about class and worth. As he described it, "I praise God that My Lot is cast among the poor and Dispised, [surely] it was a [miracle] that I ever came from among the Rich and Honourable, to become a dispised follower of the Lord." Weems had come a long way from his earlier concerns about appearances, honor, and status. As his story suggests, for elites conversion signalled a rejection of the pretensions of class and a new mode of interaction with non-elites.

Men and women who owned slaves were especially effected. Their workers were not free, but enslaved, and thus any positive effect of Methodists' inculcations of diligence, sobriety, and industry on slaves had to be weighed against a host of values subversive to slavery and slave discipline. Most slave owners who sought to put these contradictory effects in the balance found Methodism wanting. Additionally, early Methodist leaders' opposition to slavery, coming as it did mostly from poor men who owned no slaves and little property, must have seemed a bit like class warfare to the gentry.

In addition to facing antislavery sentiment from their clergy, upper-class members rejected symbols of status by joining the church. Methodists condemned one of the clearest badges of status in the South--dress. In Methodist services symbolic
renunciations of rank were commonplace, with some members ripping frills off their shirts or removing their elaborate hats immediately upon conversion.

The church also denounced certain lucrative pursuits. Distilling, a common way to supplement income, was forbidden by the church. There is the case of John Ryall Bradley, who at his conversion had to part with "a stud of race horses." A Kentucky man had cultivated a "splendid orchard of peaches," intending to turn the fruit into brandy. After converting, "he turned a drove of hogs into the orchard," for brandy-making was forbidden by the church. And finally, there were the Methodist masters that freed their slaves, sacrificing not only their investment in human beings, but also their status and identity as slaveholders. 44

Upper-class men stood to lose more than money and symbols of status. Methodist values challenged ideals at the core of upper-class identity. Southern men of the Revolutionary era prized the peculiarly regional ideal of "independence." To be independent meant to control one's estate, white dependents, and slaves with as little interference from government and outsiders as possible. Francis Asbury perceptively remarked that for elites, "riches" even tended to "[produce] a spirit of independence towards God." 45

Wealthy men who became Methodists, however, faced immediate, persistent, and invasive interference in their life from the church. They were told how (and how not) to dress, what recreations were acceptable, what language was appropriate, and even under what circumstances they could go to court. They were repeatedly warned against pride or arrogance, and exhorted to be humble and meek. They might even be sanctioned for actions taken in their household, such as abuse to a slave or white dependent. And all of this advice could be given by the poorest and lowliest fellow member.

The church's requirements, enforced by clergy predominantly from the lower classes, sometimes were just too demanding for the gentry. James H. Keys, a slaveholding
Virginian, and a Methodist since at least December 1806, left the church in August 1810 when his wife was expelled for wearing a gold ring. Keys was incensed that a lower-class preacher, John Early, deigned to correct his upper-class spouse. He described Early (who was later made a Bishop of the church) as "an ignorant, stubborn coxcomb's[sic] whose place would be best filled at the tail of a plough, than as a guide or director to civilized people." Keys's insult was linked to both class and race, for on Keys' plantation, it is probable that most plowmen were slaves.46

Keys's remarks should be placed in the context of the Revolution. In gentry views, the Revolution had replaced a hierarchy of birth with a hierarchy of talents, leading to a quasi-religious belief that those who attained wealth were, in the new republic, deserving of it. Now an upstart denomination composed mostly of common and middling folk had the audacity to assert that financial success shut them out of Heaven. Such was the theme of a favorite Methodist scripture--"It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God."(Matthew 19:24) No wonder that when the rich sought spiritual comfort, they turned most frequently to the Episcopal church, where such attitudes were less common.47

But some elites, albeit a minority, chose to join the church. Perhaps for these few rich members, Methodist warnings about wealth functioned like the Lost Cause jeremiad described by Charles Reagan Wilson--a public ritualistic confession of sin that alleviated anxiety and yet allowed those confessing to persist in their sinful behavior. Here too, political developments would have coincided with Methodist strictures. As T.H. Breen has shown, many Virginia planters linked excessive spending and ostentation with their indebtedness to British merchants, and formed non-importation groups designed to promote more austere lifestyles. For those few planters that became Methodists, church membership may have served both as admission of guilt and a means to alleviate continued anxiety about their expenditures and indebtedness.48
Such might partially explain why Richard Bassett, a wealthy Delaware planter with 6000 acres of prime land, three homes, and many slaves, joined the Methodists. One minister remarked of Bassett that after his conversion, "though princely rich, he lived plainly, without display or extravagance." Bassett was a Revolutionary leader who served in Delaware's Constitutional ratification convention, and in the early republic as a senator and Governor. Perhaps Bassett's austere lifestyle came from both Methodist and Revolutionary sources.49

A second reason some elites might have joined the church is generational. Many historians have noted that in the settled tobacco growing regions of the Chesapeake (where most wealthy Methodists resided), soil exhaustion and population growth combined to limit the prospects of young men and women. Jan Lewis found that the children of Revolutionaries in Virginia's planting class modified their expectations and sought "small ambitions" in this climate inhospitable to amassing estates the size of their parents'. Whereas earlier generations had made their wealth, later Virginians inherited it, and this produced some anxiety, for their parents feared that along with inherited wealth came sins of idleness and dissipation.50 Harry Dorsey Gough and Richard Bassett, for example, both fit this basic profile, for they inherited, instead of made, their estates.51 Perhaps men like Bassett and Gough found Methodism an antidote for similar generational anxiety.

Yet another reason that some elites joined the church was psychological. Methodism seems to have satisfied their spiritual needs in ways Anglicanism, Deism, and rationalism could not.52 There were evangelical churches, such as the Presbyterians, that were less controversial and less enthusiastic than the Methodists, churches that did not expel members for dancing or wearing gold jewelry, churches that did not object to an occasional elaborate funeral or the purchase of objets d'art. Had the elites who became
Methodists been seeking only an outlet for their anxieties about diminished economic prospects, they could have chosen another church.

Richard Bassett's Methodism would be inexplicable if we did not consider psychological and spiritual factors. His commitment to Methodism was deep and unselfish. Bassett emancipated his many slaves before 1787. He led the fight to make it illegal to sell Delaware slaves beyond state boundaries and tried unsuccessfully to abolish slavery in the state, positions that undoubtedly alienated him from most Delawareans of his class. Bassett had some fellow gentrymen who joined him in the church, but his church membership also expanded his social circle to include Methodists of all classes. He regularly attended Methodist quarterly meetings, class meetings, and later, camp meetings. He frequently housed a number of Methodists who were attending nearby services; one minister remembered seeing over a hundred guests at Bassett's home on one such occasion. Bassett, as all this suggests, was not a nominal member, and his Methodism cannot wholly be explained by political, economic, or social factors.53

In renouncing the world, Bassett gained a spiritual community with other like-minded believers, and by all reports, he delighted in their company. Bassett wrote fervent letters to Bishop Asbury describing services he attended, and these letters indicate that Bassett's beloved community embraced both rich and poor, white and black members. In June 1801, he exclaimed "glory to God, he has done wonders. About one hundred and thirteen white and black were joined in society yesterday..." A year later he reported in detail the events of a five day meeting in Dover. He lovingly recalled both "a precious time" he had while attending "the black peoples' love-feast" and a communion service where over 1200 "white and coloured people" took the sacrament. During this extended meeting, several dozen people were converted in Bassett's home. Bassett the lawyer, senator, Revolutionary leader, and Governor modestly signed his letter "Your brother in
Clearly, Bassett's decision to unite with the Methodists was a turning point in his life.

When elite men like Richard Bassett, William Weems, or Thomas Hinde (who after his conversion envied the "dog his humility") joined the church, they were rejecting the values of their own class and accepting the values of a predominantly plain folk church. When rich men and women became Methodists, they were required to abandon jewelry, ruffles, laces, and fancy clothing. They were examined weekly for evidence of the sin of pride. They were exhorted not to "lay up treasures on earth," and counseled to visit, tend, and pray with the sick and needy of their congregation, a duty which meant actually going into the homes of the poor. And at least for several decades, these potential converts were united to a church that believed slaveholding inconsistent with Christianity. Methodism did not erase all distinctions of wealth, but it did bridge the gulf between rich and poor by forcing a more modest lifestyle and more humble behavior on the wealthy who joined the church.

Elite Methodists were governed by the same rules as poorer members, rules which discouraged showing deference to the secular great and which forbade rituals of pride by the wealthy. Had Methodists required only symbolic renunciations of gentry values, as the church did with its rules on dress, then the inversion would have been merely ornamental, and would perhaps have supported the standing order. But the church required a new mode of interpersonal relations between elites and the common folk, a mode governed on one side by Methodist views about charity and benevolence, and on the other by Methodist views about humility and the irrelevance of earthly rankings to God.

The Richard Bassetts in the church, however, were a minority. Clergy commonly noted how the rich were largely unresponsive or hostile to their message. Freeborn Garrettson, for example, noted how in Maryland his preaching "was too hard for some of the rich." Francis Asbury remarked after a service in North Carolina: "Alas for the rich!
They are so soon offended." Another circuit rider made a similar observation: "Among the wealthy and refined very bitter opposition to the Methodists exist, consequently our homes are among the poor."55

The most common encounters between Methodists and elites were hostile ones. One incident which illustrates the class conflicts surrounding the church occurred in or near Prince Georges County, Maryland. A white tenant of a slaveholding magistrate named Barns was hosting services in his home, services presided over by the antislavery preacher William Colbert. Barns rode up with a team of slaves and ordered them to begin "fixing blocks under the hous[sic]," making noise so loud that Colbert was forced to stop the service.56 As a master of slaves and landlord to poor whites, magistrate Barns had plenty of reasons to oppose a minister who often brought poor whites and slaves together in worship. His too coincidental arrival surely showed his tenant his strong disapproval of this Methodist preacher. Numerous men who were considered by the world to be "gentlemen" found great sport in attending services and laughing, mocking, or otherwise disrupting worship. Whether this particular disruption had more menacing undertones, we can only speculate.

Sometimes poor Methodists won such battles. A wealthy lawyer named Smith was "fond of criticizing religious people," especially what he termed Methodists' "unskilled ministers and ignorant members." One of Smith's rich friends, Brother Browning, was a Methodist, and Browning asked Smith if he thought he could preach and pray better than "ignorant" Methodists. Smith replied that he "would be very sorry if he could not." Browning arranged for the lawyer's comeuppance by having a poor working-class Methodist, a man gifted in prayer, pray in front of Smith. As "a man of deep piety," the "force of [the poor man's] prayer was felt by all," but especially by Smith, who was duly chastened.57
Most of the gentry living through the Methodist challenge certainly did not perceive the Methodists as allies, evidence which brings into question the "social control" thesis as it applies to this sect. One problem with "social control" analyses of this era's evangelicals is that the distinction between types of "social control" are not drawn clearly enough. It is true that the Methodists had a strict set of rules and a vision of the proper social order. In their class meetings and disciplinary proceedings, Methodist leaders tried to control the social behavior of their members. Because of Methodist doctrine and values, however, elites who joined the church were subject to more "social control" than were poor and middling members. The issue is not one of control, but of who was controlling whom.

In the minds of Methodists and in the minds of their upper-class opponents, there was an immense and unbridgeable chasm between Methodists' and unchurched gentry visions of the proper order. To the gentry, the Methodists seemed the epitome of disorder. In elites' view, Methodists were "rabble" or at least "enthusiasts" whose "meetings were noisy, with wild displays of enthusiasm." For most upper class men (and some upper class women as well), Methodism was a lower class religion, or worse yet—in their racist view, the Methodist church was a "Negro church."58

Not all opponents of Methodism were elites. Some lower-class southerners also joined Methodism's detractors. The differences between the kinds of criticism leveled by elites and by plain folk, however, illustrate once again the way class helped define peoples' responses to the church. The contests between poor itinerants and poor "sinners" were sometimes comical. Preacher William Ormond was staying in a tavern in 1792 and encountered men he described as "drunks." After some harsh words were exchanged, Ormond realized no one wanted him to pray for them, and Ormond went to bed. He awoke to find that his shoes had been "nastied" by the hooligans.59
Typically, lower-class opposition came from men who were not willing to surrender their few pleasures of the world. "Drunks" and "drunkards," in preachers' descriptions, constituted a majority of such opponents, labels we should not take literally. Gamblers, amateur musicians, and people who enjoyed other amusements condemned by the church likewise found Methodists too preachy and otherworldly. With the Anglican and later Episcopalian church weak and understaffed, "sinners" who had not flagrantly violated the law had been tolerated by clerical and lay authorities. To some of these non-evangelical or unchurched common folk, the Methodist custom of publicly rebuking sin must have seemed intrusive and unwelcome, even if those rebukes came from preachers and laypeople of their own class.

Just as Methodism offered the poor a standard by which they were superior to the gentry, it also offered poor converts a standard by which they were superior to the unconverted poor. As William H. Williams noted, Methodists "preached not 'hope' but 'certainty'" of salvation. Methodists carried this same certainty with them in their face-to-face encounters, where they readily rebuked others or told them they were headed to Hell. We can easily imagine how self-righteous some converts, sure of eternal life, must have appeared to their neighbors. Additionally, the exclusiveness and insularity of certain Methodist rituals must have been viewed with some hostility. Love-feasts were often closed to non-members; preachers stood at the door barring admittance to everyone who did not have a ticket from a Methodist minister. When we recall that love feasts, like other Methodist services, were loud and demonstrative, we can better envision what it might have felt like to be shut out, only to hear or perhaps peek in through the windows at the happenings inside.

Conversion changed those who experienced it. People who only days before might have played cards or drank whiskey or danced were, after conversion, refusing to do so. Even more annoying must have been the common Methodist practices of reproving sin,
and of proselytizing at every opportunity. Once members, Methodists were urged to "be separate" from the world, and the frequent class meetings, prayer meetings, and services offered alternatives to old social gatherings. To some lower class observers, as Donald Mathews argued, it undoubtedly seemed that their old pals were not just setting themselves apart, but setting themselves above, their neighbors.61

Only rarely, it seems, did lower-class and upper-class opponents of Methodism forge an alliance. In one case, a preacher supposed that a mob had been roused "under the connivance of their superiors." Other preachers occasionally noted that rich men headed up mobs that were out to harm or harass Methodists.62

Common folk and gentry shared in their complaints about ascetic Methodist standards, and they also often agreed, as we shall see, that Methodism had a pernicious influence on women, and sometimes, children. Leaving gender, race, and denominational disputes aside for the moment, a comparison of gentry and common folk complaints against the church does reveal one important difference. Lower class opponents of Methodism rarely objected in principle to the church's style of worship; elites often complained of the noise, emotionalism, and physicality of Methodist services. While elites most feared that Methodists promoted disorder with their enthusiastic worship, poorer detractors seemed to have feared most the ascetic standards of the church. Elites, too, thought Methodist prohibitions on dancing, duelling, and gambling were excessive, yet most of their voiced complaints centered on the "vulgar" displays.

Methodists' hostility to wealth and the class conflicts surrounding the church tell only one side of the story, however. Methodists also had a vision of the proper model of economy. When Methodist leaders envisioned the perfect way of life, they saw an artisan or yeoman household. On one level, such an alliance was natural, for the small farmer, craftsman, or merchant would have shared many habits and values with the preachers.
Clergy, for example, were to rise at four o'clock, cautioned to "never be unemployed" or "triflingly employed," to "be serious," and always be punctual.63

The church urged many of these same guidelines on laypeople as well. Wesley's teachings once again formed the basis of these values. *The Arminian Magazine* reprinted a Wesley sermon on first Corinthians 12:31, "Covet the best gifts and yet I shew you a more excellent way." (American clergy also sermonized on "the more excellent way," or "the narrow way" to their parishioners.) Christians, per Wesley, could chose two paths. One, the less excellent path, was to avoid sin, but otherwise conform to the world. The alternative way, and the one he urged Methodists to take, was to strive for perfection.

The more excellent way began with self-denial. Methodist men were to sleep no more than seven hours a night; Methodist women, no more than eight. Next, Wesley counseled all members to pray sincerely and frequently. After this, Wesley noted, Christians must proceed to their earthly business, for "it is impossible that an idle man can be a good man." Yet he urged them to do so with diligence, prayer, and with no eye to their own will. At meals, Methodists were to avoid gluttony and conduct only "edifying" conversations. This model of life would doubtless have suited common and middling folk better than the rich, and consequently would have made and did indeed make the yeoman household appear more Christian, to Methodists, than those of their wealthy neighbors.64

If we read these strictures with no eye to time or place, they do indeed seem to enforce a bourgeois standard of morality and to support Paul Johnson's linking of evangelical and bourgeois values. Yet we must consider the dearth of manufactures, the low level of industrialization, and the minority of free laborers, as well as the presence of slavery. There were few southerners who could qualify even as protobourgeois in this era. Therefore, the notion that these values were bourgeois is difficult to apply here unless we wish to use the term so loosely that it loses any connection with "free labor" and hence
with bourgeois control of free laborers. There was, however, one place where southern
Methodists migrated that would become as protobourgeois as any in America--Ohio.

As the territory of Ohio opened for settlement, those lands became, for many
reasons, the American Methodist Canaan. Southern Methodist emigres primarily
envisioned Ohio as the promised land because it prohibited slavery and for them, "free
labor" meant working for oneself. As a free soil territory, Ohio became, in Methodist
minds, a yeoman paradise. One lay preacher waxed rhapsodic upon his first sight of Ohio.
He praised God that Ohio was a free territory, a land "where human blood is not shed like
water by the hand of the merciless and unfeeling tyrant." "Here the honest and industrious
farmer cultivates his farm with his own hands," he proudly noted, and "the young man
(instead of a cowskin or some other instrument of torture) takes hold of an ax, or follows
the plough." The yeoman wife of Ohio, he observed, trained her daughters in the "distaff
and the needle" and "the ruddy damsel thinks it no disgrace to wash her clothes, milk her
cows, or dress the food for the family." In Ohio, hard work was "no disgrace," and as a
result, Ohioans "live happy and their end is peace."65

The southern Methodist men who moved to Ohio became not only yeomen, but
also millowners, storekeepers, lawyers, judges, and Congressmen. They went to Ohio to
establish a virtuous community, one free of slavery and free of the vices associated with
slaveholding wealth. Already possessing Wesleyan attitudes, many of them prospered.
And here indeed, lies the kernel of doubt about the applicability of Johnson's thesis to the
Methodists, who unlike Finney's parent church, began as Arminians. Methodists believed
in the power of their own agency, and that their individual decisions had direct and
indirect consequences--consequences which a reflective person could control. Such causal
thinking, along with the Wesleyan habits of sobriety, diligence, frugality, and saving,
constituted a recipe for success in the new lands of Ohio. These values were brought to
the frontier by Methodists, they did not wait for the development of small manufactures
and industry to adopt them. There was no sense of unease about free labor discipline when Methodists arrived in Ohio, for most Ohio immigrants worked for themselves. If these values became bourgeois values, it is because the men and women who held them ascended into the middle class.

And what of the non-free labor South? Lacy Ford, in his study of antebellum South Carolina, argued for a complex relationship between evangelicals and class structure. Egalitarian rhetoric and values, in Ford's view, helped forge a republican consensus among white South Carolinians of all classes. White men's democracy, per Ford, was strengthened by a shared religious world view and by common participation in cotton culture. Yet, as Ford so thoughtfully notes, first generation evangelicals recruited largely from the poor and yeoman classes were succeeded by second and third generation evangelicals--their children and grandchildren--that grew more and more wealthy, although the attraction of the poor to evangelical churches, we might add, remained fairly constant throughout the antebellum period.66

Johnson's insights might thus be applied, with modification, to the non-free-labor South. It is highly likely that some yeoman farmers who closely adhered to Methodist values succeeded because those values coincided with the habits needed to gain wealth. Sobriety, thrift, industry, saving, and long-term causal thinking for example, were certainly as useful for the cotton farmer as for the free northern laborer.67 If, however, evangelical values helped the self-employed southern farmer succeed as much as they benefited the former masters of Rochester in labor control, we might well question the extent to which such values, rather than their application in a particular setting, can be linked to labor control.

Beyond encouraging thrift and hard work, early Methodists did have regulations on business and credit that together constituted a loosely defined economic policy. The most curious of these rules was designed to prevent fraud and haggling; the Discipline
prohibited "the using many words in buying or selling," although members seem to have rarely been punished for this offense. Perhaps more important, in a society where most credit was extended in face to face encounters, Methodists had strict rules about credit. The *Discipline* forbade "borrowing without a probability of paying: or the taking up goods without a probability of paying for them" as well as "the giving or taking things on usury, i.e. unlawful interest." 68 Thomas Haskell argued that the development of contract law was evidence of a larger trend in Anglo-America towards the development of long-range moral responsibility. 69 In Methodism, we see contractual obligations explicitly linked to morality, and in Methodism we also see the geographical expansion of moral responsibility to include, as we saw with Gough and Dorsey above, other Methodists living far from one's neighborhood.

One final aspect of Methodist policy is worth noting. The church urged members to look out for one another, "employing them preferably to others, buying one of another, helping each other in business." 70 To what extent members followed this advice cannot be ascertained. Yet there would be some advantages in hiring and doing business with fellow members. A fellow Methodist would share the same ethic. He would more likely repay his loan on time, or work diligently and not overcharge for services. And although the church did not allow members to take one another to civil courts, members did bring economic disputes to the church for arbitration. For Methodist laborers, artisans, employers, and merchants, then, the church disciplinary process supplemented the courts. An ascetic Methodist who disliked worldly conversation, cursing, and other "ungodly" habits, would also be less exposed to such behavior from a fellow member.

In Methodist views, wealth made one work harder for salvation and small freeholding was the ideal, yet the church had interesting views about poverty as well. The exemplars of morality in early Methodism, as A. Gregory Schneider has shown, were the
itinerant preachers. These clergy had no land, no dependents, no wealth, and no status in secular culture. In the circuit rider, poverty was a virtue. 71

Methodists often equated poverty with virtue in their members as well. George Reed preached a sermon where he claimed that if his listeners were poor it was because God "sees poverty best for you; he sees prosperity might prove your ruin." Many Methodist preachers in this era believed that the poor were by nature more receptive to Christianity, a belief their experience seemed to confirm. Some felt they were specifically sent to the poor. Francis Asbury's attitude was typical. In 1780, he remarked that "to begin at the right end of the work is to go first to the poor; these will, the rich may possibly, hear the truth." Again in 1804, while observing an "elegant church" that the once outcast Baptists had built in Georgetown, South Carolina, he noted that the Baptists "take the rich; and the commonalty and the slaves fall to us: this is well." 72

The equation of poverty with receptivity to Christianity, and its corollary—the equation of wealth with sin—seems to have blunted Methodists' assault on the inequalities of wealth in their time. There was radical potential in the idea that every economic choice should be made with the good in mind, but southern Methodists did not exploit this potential beyond urging wealthy Methodists to alter their own behavior. Here, as elsewhere, Methodists believed that change began with the individual and his or her conversion. In their fully religious outlook, the contrast between poverty and wealth was almost synonymous with the contrast between converted and unconverted. While such a notion helped the common folk who converted feel worthier and more righteous, it did not address the social system which produced economic inequality and its attendant ills. It was only natural, Methodists believed, that the rich would ignore their message and the poor take heed.

John Kobler, for example, thought there was biblical precedent for the attitudes he encountered. In 1795, he preached "to a very delicate congregation" and bemoaned to
himself "O how hardly can they that have riches enter into the Kingdom of God." His analysis of why this audience was not interested in Methodism shows his understanding of the code of honor: "it is too far for proud nature to stoop from the top of honour so high, down to the low degraded cross of Jesus." Kobler comforted himself with the thought that "Thus it was when the [Messiah] was upon the earth[---] while the nobility rejected the council[sic] of God against themselves--the common people heard him gladly." In Kobler's mind, Christianity inherently warned the "nobility...against themselves" while common folk lived naturally more Christian lives. The agenda for change in such a world view was clearly limited to the individual, leaving structures promoting inequality untouched. For Methodists, the remedy for this situation was to convert the wealthy and change their attitudes. The unconverted wealthy would be sanctioned at judgment.73

Despite the limits of Methodism's reformist vision, the church held, as we have seen, ample attraction to the plain folk. By joining the church, common men and women united, as did the wealthy Richard Bassett, to a family of like-minded believers. Within the church, distinctions of class were much less important than in society at large. The universal address of "brother" and "sister" replaced hierarchical forms of address. The leaders of the church visited and stayed in members' homes, ate what they ate, wore what they wore, and slept on the same rough beds. If members grew old or infirm, the church would provide for them and clergy and fellow Methodists would visit and care for them. In the church, members heard sermons proclaiming that as Christians their lives were important and that their pains and sorrows were shared by God.

In condemning gentry culture, warning that wealth was a bar to salvation, and urging charity, Methodists fashioned an ethic which was at odds with that of the southern gentry. The wealthy men and women who did join the church had to sacrifice many of their symbols of status to remain members and had to relate to poorer members on terms of mutual respect. Through sobriety, diligence, and thrift, and by long-term causal
thinking, poor and middling Methodists improved their lot. In its rules, the church regulated credit and business between members in a way that mitigated conflict and encouraged economic cooperation between members. In their "alternative measures of the good (and the bad) life," Methodism helped the widow, the infirm, and those just down on their luck hold their heads high and retain self-respect. By condemning conspicuous consumption and ostentation, Methodism changed the habits of wealthy members, bridging the gap in lifestyles and values between the rich and poor.

Although rich and poorer opponents shared an aversion to Methodist asceticism, the wealthy more vigorously protested the leveling tendencies of the church and what they called the "vulgar" displays common in Methodist services. The humility and modesty required by the church, as well as the clergy's hostility to wealth in general in large part explains why so few gentry joined the church. For those opponents of lesser means, it seemed that the exclusivity, insularity, and self-righteousness of Methodists set members above their neighbors and friends.

Especially for the Methodist poor, church policies, doctrines, and ministerial behavior must have been a welcome change from Anglican practice. And if they were reduced by circumstance to a beggar's life or the poorhouse, they could be assured that their clergy would not shun them. When a "poor beggar, a traveling man" happened by where preacher James Meacham was staying, Meacham "joined hands with him" and they prayed together. On a visit to a poorhouse in Virginia, preacher William Colbert "pray'd with one of the ghastliest looking objects that ever I beheld with my eyes: His face was much eat away with the venereal disease." Perhaps here, too, is where we should locate Methodism's popularity with the poor and common folk—in such small but important acts of kindness.
Endnotes


5. The 1784 Discipline is quoted in Jesse Lee, A Short History of the Methodists in the United States of America (Baltimore: 1810), 99.


10. Isaac, *The Transformation of Virginia*.


27. Eleanor Dorsey to Harry Dorsey Gough, September 17, 1802, Gough-Carroll Papers, Maryland Historical Society.

28. Ibid.

29. Ibid.

30. Thomas Lyell, Unnumbered Autobiographical Manuscript, Albert Smedes Papers, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

31. April 3, 1790, Ezekiel Cooper Journals.


35. October, 1795, (page 106), The Diary of Jeremiah Norman, 106; October 4, 1795, William Ormond Papers.


42. Thomas Lyell, "Unnumbered Autobiographical Manuscript."

43. William Weems to Ezekiel Cooper, March 15, 1795, Ezekiel Cooper Collection, Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary.


46. James H. Keys to Edward Dromgoole, August 3, 1810.


52. Rankin, *Ambivalent Churchmen and Evangelical Churchwomen*.


Richard Rankin in *Ambivalent Churchmen and Evangelical Churchwomen* argues that elite women were more receptive to Methodism than elite men.

February 15, 1792. William Ormond Papers.


Mathews in *Religion in the Old South* states that it is possible that "Evangelical attempts to set themselves off from others of their own class and background appeared to push the latter even farther down the scale of power, status and prestige." (36)

Clark, *et al.*, eds., *The Journal and Letters of Francis Asbury*, 1:432. For mobs led by the wealthy, see, for example, John Harper to Ezekiel Cooper, [1800], Ezekiel Cooper Collection.


*The Arminian Magazine* (April 1790), 170-175, quotation on 170.

"Tours into Kentucky and the Northwest Territory," *Ohio Archaeological and Historical Publications*. Volume 16 (1907), 377. T. Scott Miyakawa describes the success of many Methodists in Ohio in *Protestants and Pioneers*.


A point previously made by William H. Williams, "Delaware and the Methodist Revolution." I disagree with Miyakawa, at least vis-a-vis the Methodists, for he sees the western sects as materialistic. Although Methodists did not deem business success a bad thing, they also did not tout success as a measure of worth. Also, the anti-revivalistic Quakers seem not to fit his model, for they, as David Brion Davis has shown, had bourgeois attitudes. See Miyakawa, *Protestants and Pioneers*, especially 216-220 and Davis, *The Problem of Slavery in the Age of Revolution*.


A. Gregory Schneider, *The Way of the Cross Leads Home*.


Which brings us back to Max Weber. Weber, unlike contemporary historians, was reluctant to assign a causal connection between Protestantism and capitalism, preferring to use the phrase "elective affinity" to explain how the values of Protestantism and capitalism relate.

February 16, 1790, James Meacham Papers.