

The Clash among Unity, Inclusion, and Covenant

Lessons from History

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Q. 2. What can be done in order to [sic] the future Union of the Methodists?

A. During the life of the Rev. Mr. Wesley, we acknowledge ourselves his sons in the Gospel, ready in Matters belonging to Church-Government, to obey his Commands. And we do engage after his Death, to do every Thing that we judge consistent with the Cause of Religion in America and the political Interests of these States, to preserve and promote our Union with the Methodists in Europe.

Thus responded Thomas Coke and Francis Asbury, as recorded in the “Minutes of Several Conversations” at the Christmas Conference in Baltimore in 1784.¹ Wesley lived until 1791; however, for another seven years, the preachers, through the two bishops, answered directly to him. Unity in Methodism equated with allegiance to its autocratic founder. We can only speculate about the grammatical anomaly in the question that prompted this statement of allegiance, but it paralleled the phrase “to preserve and promote” in the reference to the Union with European Methodists.

Preserving and promoting “Union” among passionately committed, but geographically decentralized preachers became a key responsibility for the bishops as they traversed Methodist territories and called preachers into conference. The second part of the answer, how they would “engage after his Death,” was telling in the linkage they made between “the Cause of Religion in America and the political interests of these States.” This linkage would disturb the unity, challenge views of inclusion, result in schism, and then foster reunification in Methodism.²

This essay explores the lessons that may be gleaned from the major schisms and reunifications in US Methodism in relation to the principles of *unity*, *inclusion*, and *covenant*. These principles are used in current discourse in ways that assume members of The United Methodist Church (The UMC) share a common understanding of their meaning and *should* share an equal appreciation of their value in the life of the church. Each is prioritized in the competing claims of the three vocal groups: *unity* by key leaders of the church and those attempting to hold the church together while finding a way to honor different views about homosexuality and same-sex marriage, *inclusion* by those seeking to obtain equal rights to ordination for LGBTQ persons and the right to celebrate same-sex weddings, and *covenant* by those seeking to prevent changes to the current *Discipline*. This study demonstrates that these three principles have pressed competing claims upon US Methodists in major struggles throughout our history. I assert that they remain inherently competing principles in present discourse. The first two, unity and inclusion, are identified explicitly in the current Constitution. The third, covenant, is not found as

a stated principle in any *Discipline* in Methodist history. It emerges in the *Discipline* of The United Methodist Church in the sections on membership in an order. It is used more liberally in the descriptions of the orders following the historic changes in the processes of ordination in the 1996 *Discipline*. It is, however, implicit in the mere existence of the Constitution and *Discipline* and in the vows that clergy take at ordination.³ This essay will conclude with observations and suggestions that will, hopefully, provide a few options for ways forward.

The Need for Unity in the Earliest Constitutional Elements

Twenty-four years after its founding, the last non-delegated General Conference (GC) of the Methodist Episcopal Church (MEC) gathered. Until 1808, the proceedings of the general conferences were heavily controlled by Bishop Asbury's priorities and personality. Outcomes were determined by the number of preachers who attended and the conferences they represented.⁴

Between 1784 and 1808, most of the preachers formed strong allegiances to Asbury, much in the way they had to Wesley. The importance of unity among the preachers themselves was laid out in section XI of the *Discipline*, entitled "On the Necessity of Union Among Ourselves:"

If we are united, what can stand before us? If we divide, we shall destroy ourselves, the Work of God, and the Souls of our People.

Quest. 1. What can be done in order to [*sic*] a closer Union with each other?⁵

Union was sustained through deeply personal actions that the preachers were expected fulfill: to pray for, be honest with, react to, and support the ministries of one another.⁶ This was the basis of what we would today call a covenantal relationship in the context of the orders of deacon and elder.

Four of the seven annual conferences came to the 1808 GC prepared to support a New York conference memorial⁷ that proposed that the GC become a delegated gathering. This strategy stipulated the equalization of delegates from each of the annual conferences, and this proposal prompted the need for framing regulations for the conference itself. Bishop Asbury called together a "Committee of Review and Inspection," and assigned the task of designing a plan for "regulating and perpetuating General Conferences in future."⁸ The competing issues that emerged were a) whether the GC would have the freedom to make major alterations to the "general itinerant superintendency" (the episcopacy), or whether any changes required the votes of the annual conferences; b) the right of annual conferences to elect presiding elders from among themselves; and c) whether conferences would select GC delegates by seniority or election.⁹ This process brought forth a resolution that began:

Whereas, It is of the greatest importance that the doctrines, form of government, and general rules of the United States societies in America be preserved sacred and inviolable; and,

Whereas, Every prudent measure should be taken to preserve, strengthen, and perpetuate the union of the connection . . .¹⁰

During those first twenty-four years, the young denomination had experienced two major, and two much smaller schisms;¹¹ the walkout of black members from St. George's Chapel in Philadelphia, resulting in segregated congregations that eventually became the core churches of the African Methodist Episcopal Church; and a near revolt by southern Virginia and North Carolina preachers that came to be known as the "sacramental crisis."¹²

The provoking issues that challenged the unity of the Methodists were based primarily on issues we identify today as “inclusion”: of preachers in decision-making regarding their appointments, of laity in leadership, of racial equality in congregations and denominational leadership, of the expulsion of slave-owning members, and of lay access to sacraments. These issues were understood in terms of representation, justice, and access. Clarity regarding the rules and boundaries of the GC had to be legislated in a way that could perpetuate a predictable means of engagement with one another and agreement concerning key defining tenets of the organization. The earliest elements of what would come to be defined as the Constitution were then approved and included as Section III of the *Form of Discipline*.¹³

The resolution risked complete failure, however, over the attempted inclusion of a single amendment that presiding elders¹⁴ be elected from within their annual conferences rather than appointed by the bishops. When the amendment failed, a potential walkout by clergy who believed that they would lose voice and power to the larger conferences nearly shut down the conference.¹⁵

While the motives for the development of these rules were the preservation of the union and the establishment of a dependable polity that would accomplish it, the perpetual struggles over these issues resulted in actions that finally dissolved any covenant-like relationships among clergy in 1828 and 1844.

The election of presiding elders would be raised repeatedly until in 1820, when the proposal passed by a two-thirds margin. It was, however, challenged by the newly elected bishop, Joshua Soule, and overridden by the veto of Bishop McKendree. McKendree viewed the vote as a direct challenge to the Restrictive Rule that protected the episcopacy. No exercise of such episcopal power had occurred since the establishment of the constitutional elements in the *Discipline* in 1808. The shock over the veto resulted in efforts to rescind the election of Soule and block his ordination.¹⁶

From its earliest days, Methodist polity was used to assert unity among preachers from very diverse parts of the country. The formation of the essential elements of a Constitution dictated how the organization would perpetuate itself through legislative processes in the GC, established boundaries for preachers seeking to become or remain a part of the connection, and created procedures for how to change elements with which one disagreed. Given how difficult they might be to change, these procedures laid the groundwork for the GC to become the setting for dissension, argument, and ultimately schism.

The Inclusion of Lay Representatives and the Schism of 1828–1830

Simmering alongside the issue of the election of presiding elders, the MEC struggled with the question of lay representation. The battle resulted in a schism in 1828–1830, prompted by the expulsion of laity and clergy and the subsequent formation of what would become The Methodist Protestant Church (MPC). The Historical Sketch in *The Methodist Protestant Discipline 1936* explains the reason for the schism:

The church thus organized was peculiar in several respects, but its most remarkable feature was that the unlimited exercise of the legislative, executive and judicial powers of the church were vested by these traveling preachers in themselves and their successors, to the entire exclusion of all the members of the church, no provision being made for any layman to vote, as such and directly, upon any questions in any church meeting.¹⁷

The Historical Sketch continues to explain the “years of desultory discussion” on the subject until 1821, when a layman, William Stockton, created the “Wesleyan Repository,” a publication that provided a setting “for the more formal examination of . . . ‘the mutual rights of the ministry and laity,’ and also to spread abroad the views of leading ministers and laymen on the subject.”¹⁸ By 1824, pamphlets circulated encouraging memorials to the GC in anticipation of a change, but attitudes had shifted. Immediately following the conference, supporters of the inclusion of laity organized themselves into “Union Societies”¹⁹ that met throughout the connection to “ascertain the number of persons in the MEC friendly to a change in her government” and to unite the “Reformers” behind a memorial to the 1828 General Conference.

Reform and anti-reform arguments were circulated through the official *Methodist Magazine* and the pro-reform periodical, *Mutual Rights*. The core of the anti-reform arguments, framed as the “divine right” of clergy, relied first upon Wesley’s bestowal of authority from himself to the conference of preachers, and second upon the notion that Methodist preachers pre-existed the Methodist laity, sent out to gather laity together and provide oversight for their spiritual development. Throughout this period, threats against reformers escalated to include expulsion, as reformers’ arguments escalated from the issue of lay representation to attacks on the nature of the episcopacy, along with published assurances that division was not their intention.²⁰

Two months prior to a General Convention called by the reformers in November 1827, to develop the memorial, eleven clergy and twenty-five laymen were tried and expelled by a committee of clergy of the Baltimore Conference.²¹ The expulsions were a stern warning to those presuming to convert the GC in its favor. Those who had been charged were variously accused of breaking the General Rule of “speaking evil of Magistrates or of Ministers,” of a regulation of the GC “forbidding ‘inveighing against either our Doctrines or Discipline,’” and of a fabricated violation of circulating material against the *Discipline* because “an Annual Conference has authority to make rules and regulations for its own members.”²² The May 1828 GC debated this one memorial for three weeks and reacted strongly:

The great Head of the Church Himself has imposed on us the duty of preaching the Gospel: of administering its ordinances, and of maintaining its moral discipline among those over whom the Holy Ghost in these respects has made us overseers. . . . [W]e do believe that the divinely instituted ministry are [*sic*] the divinely authorized expounders and that the duty of maintaining them in their purity and of not permitting our ministrations in the respects to be authoritatively controlled by others does rest upon us with the force of a moral obligation.²³

In November, expelled and supportive Methodists met in a convention that established a provisional organization of “Associated Methodist Churches,” until an 1830 constitutional convention could be held to create the Methodist Protestant Church (MPC). In the interim, leaders formed local churches and annual conferences.

A new Constitution resulted in a “church government in harmony with the Republic,” which stood emphatically against any notion of “divine-right hierarchy.”²⁴ The preamble asserts that the “representative form of church government is the most scriptural, best suited to our condition, and most congenial with our views and feelings as fellow-citizens with the saints, and of the household of God” and is followed by a set of eleven principles (originally called a “Bill of Rights”).²⁵ These principles spoke directly to the embattled values that undergirded the argument for lay representation.²⁶ In lieu of bishops, the Constitution established presidential officers for the conferences with annual terms, and outlined clear judicial principles and procedures for accused clergy and members. And yet, while there were both free and enslaved black members

of the churches, suffrage was limited to “every Minister and Preacher, and every white, lay, male Member in full communion and fellowship. . . .”²⁷ The MPC would split temporarily over slavery in 1858.²⁸

The issue of lay representation had been a nagging concern of the MEC since the schism with the O’Kelly faction in 1792. But the proposed change to include laymen in decision making at all levels of the church was such anathema to the leading clergy of the church that the principle of maintaining unity was overridden by their determination to protect the historic character of the clergy and episcopacy. It would take another fifty years, until 1870, for equal representation for laymen to be enacted in the Methodist Episcopal Church, South (MECS) and until 1872, only partially in the MEC.²⁹

So, clearly in early Methodism, unity had its limits. When the inclusion of laity as leaders in the church was challenged by the competing principle of a divinely bestowed clergy character, there was no common ground upon which to base compromise. It took years of maturing democratic principles, rules, and judicial processes before such techniques, utilized primarily by bishops seeking to hold denomination(s) together, would be considered out of order. Unity required unanimity on the core, basic principle of clergy and episcopal responsibility grounded in the bestowal of duty by Jesus and responsibility for oversight by the Holy Spirit. It could not be sustained by prayer, honesty, and mutual support—the characteristics of covenant—as had been laid out in the earliest *Discipline*.

The Inclusion of Black Members, Slavery, and the Schism of 1844

Issues of race emerged early in US Methodism.³⁰ Black Methodists were present in strong numbers in the classes and societies throughout the colonies; several became exhorters and traveled with Methodist preachers.³¹ Early classes and bands had at times included both races, but by the 1784 General Minutes, they appear as racially based classes. Hence, the question,

Q. 40. Are there any directions to be given concerning the Negroes?

A. Let every preacher, as often as possible, meet them in class. And let the assistant always appoint a proper *white person* as their leader. Let the assistants also make a regular return to the conference, of the number of Negroes in society in their respective circuits.³²

Richard Allen had been one of those exhorters and assistants. The walkout from St. George’s Chapel in Philadelphia in 1792, led by Allen, points to the growing ambiguity regarding race and leadership among the Methodists. Allen, whose piety had been acknowledged by his owner, had purchased his freedom in 1783, in Delaware, and traveled with Richard Whatcoat in Maryland. He subsequently moved to Philadelphia and joined the then-integrated St. George’s Chapel where he became an assistant. Due to increasing segregation in congregational life, Allen led a walkout in 1792, and started what would eventually become the mother church of the African Methodist Episcopal Church—Bethel Church. Allen was the first black assistant ordained a deacon in 1799, by Bishop Asbury.³³ Then in 1800, the conference approved the status of local deacon for black leaders, placing multiple conditions on the process. A compromise with southern clergy allowed that while the decision would reside in the General Minutes of the conference, it would not be included in the *Discipline*.³⁴

In the preface to his 1923 PhD dissertation, J. Nelson Norwood stated that, while other denominations also suffered from the ideological and political struggles regarding slavery, the

MEC had both “the emotional element to which the radical abolitionist movement most appealed” and a

. . . well-knit polity. In it were united explosive material and rigid structure. The result was that while other denominations had suffered in the slavery struggles, nowhere was the issue so clear-cut or the outcome so destructive to the historic church as among the Methodists.³⁵

Norwood continued that “the church crisis is the political crisis in miniature. And it is more.”³⁶ The denominational struggles mirrored the political struggles over “constitutional interpretation,” charges against “the evil designs of a few leading conspirators,” the distinct “inability on each side to understand the opposing point of view,” “the same division into northern radicals, southern radicals, and moderates.” What was “more” was that the Church proceeded with a Plan of Separation that led to the establishment of the MECS.³⁷ Norwood’s analysis identifies the harbingers of the schism in the entries of the earliest *Discipline* and Journals of the church. What Asbury and Coke could not have anticipated, however, was a time when the “interests of the States” stood in direct conflict with each other.

The first action taken regarding slavery shows up in two matters found in the Minutes of the 1780 annual conference held in Baltimore. The first required travelling preachers who were also slave owners, to manumit their slaves. The second established a position of the conference that “slavery is contrary to the laws of God, man, and nature, and hurtful to society; contrary to the dictates of conscience and pure religion and doing that which we would not others should do to us and ours. . . .”³⁸ Local preachers were included in 1783, and members in the quarterly spring meetings in 1784. Those who bought slaves “to hold and use” and who sold them, risked expulsion.³⁹ The consequences of the strong anti-slavery position espoused by Coke and Asbury (following instructions from Wesley), and the expanding abolitionist sentiments in the North resulted in their personal persecution when travelling in the South. Southern preachers also met with violence, the loss of members, more rigorous state-enacted laws regarding the illegality of manumission, and the establishment of laws preventing private teaching with black members. Southern clergy feared that Methodism would be lost from the South completely if an exception for the southern states could not be made.⁴⁰

The 1783–1784 debates reflect the attendance of southern preachers⁴¹ as qualifications were added to exclude from the rule, those living in states where manumission was illegal. This qualification held throughout conference legislation until 1808 when

[F]inding the subject utterly unmanageable, [the GC] abolished all rules respecting slaveholding among the membership of the Church, and authorized “each Annual Conference to form its own regulations *relative to buying and selling slaves*.”⁴²

This tense compromise held until 1820, when the statement was simply removed. Between 1808 and 1820, nuanced changes were made, with the caveat always that restrictions on slave ownership rested in “states where emancipation was legal.” In 1824, the body added a statement that members had the responsibility to teach their slaves to read the Bible and to attend public worship.⁴³

Most likely due to a temporary waning of abolitionist enthusiasm in the North and the challenges brought on by the issue of lay representation, the issue laid low until the early 1830s, when in the New England Conference, a rejuvenated fervor took hold among its preachers. An “Appeal on the Subject of Slavery addressed to the Members of the New England and New Hampshire Conferences of the Methodist Episcopal Church,” published in 1834, encouraged

members to forward anti-slavery memorials to the 1836 GC. It reclaimed the historic Wesley-Coke-Asbury view, that any kind of slaveholding was a sin against God and that emancipation must be immediate and absolute. Citing Scripture, Wesley, Asbury, statements from the British Methodist Conference, and inherent contradictions between the GC and *Discipline*, the Appeal initiated another turbulent decade leading to 1844.⁴⁴

Despite significant vitriolic debate and actions, the conclusions of the 1836 GC seemed to hold a moderate line. Neither abolitionists nor radical pro-slavery delegates could claim success. This second group caucused to consider separation from the North, a sign of the divisions growing further apart. The Conference concluded with a pastoral address to the churches, which stood against “radical movements” mentioning the abolitionists.⁴⁵

The address simply pushed the debates to the annual and local conference levels, where in the New England area, the abolitionists were often subverted by their presiding elders and bishops. This subversion resulted in a series of unofficial conventions, trials, and actions taken by bishops against several abolitionist clergy leaders, and secession by local churches in especially Ohio, New York, Michigan, and Pennsylvania. Meanwhile, the broader abolitionist movements were struggling due to declining financial support and in-fighting.⁴⁶

This was the situation of the church through 1840, citing the impossibility of establishing a rule for the entire country that would in some regions stand against the Constitution and laws of the states:

[A]s it would be wrong and unscriptural to enact rules of discipline *in opposition to the constitution and laws of the State . . .* so also would it not be *equitable or scriptural to confound the positions of our ministers and people*, (so different as they are in different States,) with respect to the *moral questions* which slavery involves.⁴⁷

Oddly enough, the 1840 GC passed a somewhat surprising declaration that simply holding slaves no longer barred a person from various official positions in the MEC. Although it appeared that *radical* abolitionism within Methodism was in decline, this decision would have serious repercussions in 1844.⁴⁸

Between 1840 and 1844, key abolitionist leaders and churches seceded from the MEC and joined together in a constituting convention of the Wesleyan Methodist Connection of America in 1843. The key differences in their *Discipline* included the prohibition of owning slaves and drinking intoxicants, lay representation in the conferences, the election of presiding officers in the conferences, and “stationing committees” that would confirm “arrangements made between pastors and people.”⁴⁹ While bishops and moderates hoped that this would quell the abolitionist sympathies once and for all, MEC clergy in the northeast began scrambling to assure their members that the cause was not lost, in fear of losing them to the new denomination. Another convention was held in Boston in January 1843, this time by the New England Methodists, with the intention of “preserv[ing] the unity and harmony of the church.” Their position was as firm as those who had left, that “nothing short of speedy separation from slavery could satisfy abolitionists and save the church from serious division.” Two conventions followed in March 1843, in Maine and New Hampshire.⁵⁰

Similarly, the more radical pro-slavery proponents were expanding their influence among more moderate southerners. Holding their own convention in Annapolis, Maryland in January 1842, they emerged with a political platform with pro-slavery amendments to their state legislatures that would have placed severe restrictions on the lives of *free* blacks—many of whom were Methodists.⁵¹ As Norwood concludes,

This, then was the situation: The northern secession had brought confusion and fear to that section of the church; pro-slavery radicalism . . . had aroused the moderates and pushed them in the direction of the radical position. The south feared for her disciplinary rights, and all far-seeing lovers of Methodism were trembling for the unity of the church. Truly the General Conference, now but a few months off, would face vast problems and disquieting possibilities.⁵²

The GC of 1844 began on May 1st. The initial presenting issue of the schism was an appeal by a Rev. Harding from the Baltimore Conference who had been tried for not manumitting his slaves. Believing himself justified by the 1840 ruling mentioned above, he had subsequently appealed to the General Conference.⁵³ The debate “rambled widely, involving the whole slavery issue and the policy of the church” and concluded with upholding the decision when it was clarified that Maryland had procedures to manumit slaves.⁵⁴

By the end of the appeal, the battle lines were drawn. A committee was appointed to work with the bishops to design a “plan of pacification,” which after four days could not come to an agreement. However, worse was yet to come. Rumors had begun to circulate regarding Bishop James O. Andrew and his ownership of slaves. On May 20th, a resolution was passed requiring an investigation by the committee on episcopacy.⁵⁵ The key points presented were: a) that a bishop “connected with slavery” could not serve effectively in all parts of the connection, b) it was terrible timing to allow such an “innovation,” and c) Bishop Andrew should “be affectionately requested to resign,” which he did not.⁵⁶ Norwood continues:

[T]he real issue—the attitude of the two sections toward slavery—dropped into the background, and the legal, constitutional and practical aspects of the immediate problem—the position of Bishop Andrew—came to the front. Three phases of the legal and constitutional issues were prominent, namely the relationship of the bishops to the Conference, the interpretation of the Discipline, and the nature of the constitutional effect of the rules about slavery.⁵⁷

The debate continued for two weeks, the argument finally reduced to the point that if Bishop Andrew was to serve a northern conference, Methodism would cease to exist in the North; secession, especially in New England, would be inevitable. If he were to resign, Methodism would cease to exist in the South. The bishops met, excluding Andrew, to see if they could find a way to postpone the whole question until the 1848 GC, in the hope that the issue could be resolved in the interim. Two additional attempts to postpone followed. Then a substitute motion was presented asking Bishop Andrew to remove himself from the episcopacy while still involved with slavery. The motion passed 111 to 60. The southern delegates entered “a solemn protest” to which the northern delegates replied.⁵⁸

A plan of “partial separation,” where certain aspects of the denomination could be shared was proposed, to no avail. “The Plan of Separation” that addressed twelve key points outlining complete separation, was presented on June 7th. It was heavily debated, revealing a lack of consensus on the different points, but passed the same day. The conference ended on June 11th. southern delegates met soon after to begin planning for what would become the constituting convention of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South (MECS), held in Louisville, Kentucky in 1845.

Concerned for its very survival, US Methodism adapted to the unique geographies and cultures it encountered as it spread into very different parts of the continent. And, lest Methodism be lost altogether in the various regions it served, the church adjusted to the political realities and adapted to the laws of the states in which it found itself. As Methodism began to

move forward after the war, it could not anticipate becoming a church that would have to face competing interests in entire countries, much less states within a single country.

Unity as Fraternity—The 100-Year Interlude

In the late 1860s, the MEC initiated conversations regarding the possibilities of reunification. The MECS was in no mood. The MECS had suffered mightily, not just because of the war but because the MEC viewed the South as a mission field of its own, “invading” the territory with both white and black new church starts. The MECS would, however, begin to entertain the possibility of “fraternal relations.” During the 1870s, both MEC and MECS general conferences invested considerable energy and time into defining the meaning of and gradually moving toward “fraternal relations.”⁵⁹ The way was cleared for this fraternity at the Cape May consultation of 1876.⁶⁰

At the second Ecumenical Methodist Conference of 1891, delegates from several US and international Methodist-Wesleyan denominations issued a joint statement that cemented fraternity.⁶¹ “Substantial unity” was grounded in Wesleyan theology, Methodist experience, and similar polity. Yet a positive definition of what it meant to be a “federation of churches,” other than to stop the “waste of power and unhallowed rivalry,” was not defined.⁶²

This statement also referred to “the intellectual movement and the social changes” that had led to the divisions between them. Ironically, these “social changes” pointed to ways in which not only the MEC and MECS but also the smaller MPC and other “fraternal” churches had sought to accommodate the shifting attitudes toward race.⁶³ Both larger denominations had established complex ways of containing black members and clergy, while the MPC had reunited in 1877, with its pro-slavery breakaway group from 1858. The MPC had originally moved the question of slavery to the annual conferences. Prior to the end of the Civil War, the MEC began to segregate black congregations—now located in both the North and South—into racially based conferences.⁶⁴ The MEC had conversations regarding unification with the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church (AMEZ) in 1868, which the AMEZ ultimately rejected. The MECS, in response to a significant loss of black members (many who had already become MEC,) helped create and fund the Colored (now Christian) Methodist Episcopal Church (CME) in 1870.⁶⁵ The MECS was now an almost all-white denomination. Most significantly for the two larger churches, the expanded, overlapping territory of MEC conferences into the South, and of MECS conferences into the West, raised significant questions about competition for souls. Their loyalties were deeply held. The “waste of power and unhallowed rivalry” was real.

Realignment with the Interests of the Country: The Reunification of 1939

Neither the Declaration of Union nor the resulting Constitution in the 1939 *Discipline of The (new) Methodist Church* referred to any defining principles of the new denomination. However, the conclusion of the Historical Statement in the new *Discipline* stated,

The three branches that have united to form The Methodist Church have always believed that the only infallible proof of any genuine church of Christ is its ability to seek and save the lost; to disseminate the Pentecostal Spirit and life; to spread Scriptural holiness over all lands and to reform all continents by the Gospel of Christ. And the sole object of the rules, regulations, and usages of The Methodist Church is that it may fulfill in all places

and years its original divine commission as a leader in evangelism, in reforms, and in fraternal relations with all branches of the Church of Christ, with which it gladly confesses its *partnership in the spiritual conquest of the whole world for the Son of God*.⁶⁶

The motive for reunification is identified in the last line of this quote: “partnership in the spiritual conquest of the whole world for the Son of God.” At first blush, this grandiose statement feels very distant from Coke and Asbury’s original assertion that Methodism was to align consistently with the “Cause of Religion in America and the political Interests of these States.” The motivation of the reunification was to align once again with what had become the political interests of the country.

An extended period of negotiations began with the MPC’s Chattanooga Plan of 1910, considered by the other two denominations in 1914 and 1916. The original Joint Commission on Unification, met 1916–1920. Their proposals failed in the early 1920s. These conversations were such a struggle because the fundamental issue upon which they could not agree was “the status of the Negro.”⁶⁷

Consider the US environment during this time, as described by Morris Davis: “southern black migration to the northern urban centers, the continued national horror of lynching, the nationalizing dynamics of the first World War, and the heightened racial unrest of the era culminating in the race riots of 1918 and 1919.”⁶⁸ Consider as well that the U.S. entered World War I in 1917. It ended in 1918. Prohibition became law in 1919, and national women’s suffrage was gained in 1920. The League of Nations was created in 1920, but was basically ineffective at preventing or solving disputes between countries. At the time, there was little consensus regarding the political interests of the country.

By the 1930s, there was a growing political consensus. The Great Depression hit in October, 1929. Prohibition was repealed in 1933. The country was hopeful, with Roosevelt’s New Deal. Concerns were emerging regarding the rise of fascism in Europe. The mid-1930s signaled a turn toward the restoration of the economy and expanding global leadership. As Davis states,

America and the principles they understood it to stand for were at one with the Methodist spirit. . . . [A] united church that did not waste its energies in inefficient division, offered the nation unique capabilities. Methodists had a central role to play and had been given abundant resources to carry the torch of American (Protestant) Christian civilization to the world.⁶⁹

The basic plan⁷⁰ was “revived a little more than a decade later [the early 1930s] and approved in 1935 as the Plan of Union.”⁷¹ The intransigence and inability to see a way forward toward reunification from 1910 to 1930, and the quick decision making in the early 1930s, reflect that struggle to align consistently the “cause of Religion in America” and the “political interests of these States.”

After years of what Davis identifies as strained, racialized discourse in the Joint Commission process, an agreement falls into place. A segregated jurisdiction for African Americans fit with severely segregated Jim Crow America.⁷² The overriding value that justifies a new kind of unity at the expense of an inherently unjust structure and treatment of persons is the opportunity to position the church in alignment with powerful, imperialistic philosophical and political goals of the country that will serve to expand the mission field farther beyond the nation (now pretty thoroughly Methodized), and provide for the “spiritual conquest of the whole world.”⁷³ It is Coke and Asbury’s commitment at its imperialistic extreme.

In the 1939 *Discipline*, there is not an utterance of the long, protracted debates over whether and how African American churches would be included in the new denomination. The institutionalization of a radically segregated church is found in two very short paragraphs: 1) the establishment of the Central Jurisdiction, *in the Constitution*, defined as “The Negro Annual Conferences, the Negro Mission Conferences and Missions in the United States of America”⁷⁴ and in the cryptic ¶1009 that established the “Department of Negro Work,” buried within the general agency defined as the Board of Missions and Church Extension:

The Division [of Missions and Church Extension] shall organize a department for work among Negroes which shall co-operate with the Boards and agencies of the Central Jurisdictional Conference; and with the several agencies and Boards of the Colored Methodist Episcopal Church as authorized in the Plan of Union.⁷⁵

This paragraph ostensibly applied to the work of establishing new missions among African American populations, but any explanation of cooperation with the Colored Methodist Episcopal Church (CME) “as authorized in the Plan of Union” is absent from the *Discipline*.⁷⁶ The only other reference that points to this segregated reality is found in ¶¶1118–1119, “Education for Negroes.” The way that membership on the Board of Education was constituted as defined in ¶1082, ensured white paternalistic oversight of the Historic Black Colleges. Power assigned to “local Boards of Trustees” would happen only when the Division and Board were “assured that their support will be adequate and that their property will be conserved and perpetuated.”⁷⁷

The few ethical statements of the GC are found in appended resolutions. Sandwiched between the “Preparations for the General Conference of 1940” and “Courses of Study of the Three Uniting Conferences,” the “Resolutions of the Uniting Conference” begin with the Social Creed, followed by attention to patriotism, war and peace, conscientious objection to participation in war, intoxicants, practice of the Sabbath, support for Chinese civilians in the face of their protracted civil war, and other administrative topics. None speak to issues of race.

The Social Creed, inherited from all three denominations, begins with a commitment to “equal rights for all men and complete justice for all men. . . .”⁷⁸ In item 13, it claims, “We stand for the rights of racial groups, and insist that the above social, economic, and spiritual principles apply to all races alike.”⁷⁹ The contradiction between the claims of the Social Creed and its institutionalized segregation of African Americans is buried in the official record of the reunification.

Hence, the ultimate drive for unification aligned “unity” with its potential for a major role in a shared goal of the “spiritual conquest of the whole world.” It was a means to an end, for which any forward-looking investigation and stand on the ethical issues of race and segregation—of true inclusion—would be sacrificed.⁸⁰ The race issue had been contained, by a literal structure defined in the Constitution itself, making it nearly impossible to eliminate. It also allowed the now huge majority of white members to sustain a temporary sense of comfort with their ecclesiastical Jim Crow system.

The new denomination sealed its new way of being in the world with an interesting legislative attachment to the Articles of Religion. Submitted as an attempt to replace Article XXIII, “Of the Rulers of the United States of America,” the provision speaks to

the duty of all Christians, and especially of all Christian ministers, to observe and obey the laws and commands of the governing or supreme authority of the country of which they are citizens . . . and to use all laudable means to encourage and enjoin obedience to the powers that be.⁸¹

This paragraph remains in the 2016 *Discipline*, which means that it has survived as a disciplinary expectation for over seventy-five years, through periods of major social unrest and war in US political life, an explicit link to Asbury and Coke's assertion regarding consistency between the "Cause of Religion" and the "political Interests of the States." A strict interpretation of the rule would have required steps to eliminate the Central Jurisdiction much sooner than happened.

The Methodist Church would exist for twenty-nine years. During its short history, the existence of the Central Jurisdiction (CJ) became an ongoing source of dissension within the church. By 1960, the church's bishops proclaimed in their Episcopal Address:

[We] are apt to forget, in the midst of our concern for a more adequate solution of the race problem in our Church, that the reality that creates this problem is actually one of the most important assets in it. We already *are* an inclusive church. We intend to remain one. We have come to the time when we must confidently declare to ourselves and to the world that the interracial character of The Methodist Church is one of our greatest sources of strength and opportunity.⁸²

There was again a sense of anticipation that the GC would begin serious work to eliminate the structure. W. Astor Kirk describes how "the interests of the country" shifted in the twelve years prior to 1960; the Supreme Court had eliminated seven major secular forms of institutionalized segregation. The 1960 study commission (the third in twenty years) had the opportunity to build on the positive political momentum. It, however, supported a previously recommended process of voluntary action to be taken by white annual conferences to incorporate black churches and CJ organizations into their own structures. As Kirk states, the process "allowed control of fundamental change to remain with groups in the denomination who had an interest . . . in maintaining the status quo."⁸³

Another official study commission was formed. But in response, the CJ created its own Committee of Five to evaluate any progress with the voluntary approach to the elimination of the CJ, monitor the proposals of the Commission of Thirty-Six, and develop their own proposals. The ecclesiastical commission attempted to propose a plan in 1964, which would basically have reestablished overlapping segregated annual conferences within the five geographical jurisdictions and tolerated continued involuntary segregation—a relapse to the original MEC structure! The Committee of Five and members of the CJ College of Bishops scuttled the proposal. It failed at the 1964 General Conference. Yet another Commission of Twenty-Four was appointed and the Committee of Five continued its work. Two jurisdictions and five CJ annual conferences began to desegregate voluntarily. In the meantime, multiple appeals to the Judicial Council followed.

Inclusion Through Merger

Looming on the horizon was the merger with the Evangelical United Brethren Church (EUB). These conversations began in 1958. However, along with several other difficult issues to overcome, the most troubling was that the EUB practiced the election of their district superintendents, who served for much longer terms (yes, *that* historic conflict!) and a term episcopacy in which the bishops had far less power.⁸⁴ In addition, the issue of racial segregation continued to arise in their discussions. One goal of the Committee of Five *did* pass at the 1964 GC, an amendment to the merger proposal with the EUB that stated that no involuntary segregated structures would be a part of the structure of the new denomination.⁸⁵ In addition, an important tenet was added that all racially segregated organizations, carried over into the new

denomination, would be dissolved by the 1972 GC. So, to retain segregated structures, one would have had to vote against merger.

In direct response to the struggle over the elimination of the CJ, the Uniting Conference of 1968 took major steps to eliminate the vestiges of involuntary segregation. The new The United Methodist Church identified *in the body of its Constitution*, three core commitments: to unity, to racial and economic inclusivity, and to ecumenical relations. Except for the original 1830 Methodist Protestant Church Constitution, no value-laden commitments had been included in any other Constitutions. In addition, a “Commission on Religion and Race” was established to review and monitor the entire denomination’s practices that advanced racial inclusiveness. The key reason for identifying core principles of the organization *within* the body of its Constitution was to ensure that exclusion and segregation based on race, ethnicity, and economic class would never happen in The United Methodist Church.

With the formation of The United Methodist Church, the principles of unity and inclusion aligned with each other and were named in the Constitution itself. The principle of covenant would begin to emerge in disciplinary language regarding the nature of ministry, and especially in 1996, with the establishment of the two orders of ordained ministry—deacons and elders. Not until the controversies regarding the inclusion of LGBTQ persons in the ordained ministry began to escalate and conferences and clergy began to participate in civil disobedience against rules they considered to be unjust, would the principle of covenant become a part of the public debate.

Conclusions and Suggestions

Our forebears strove “to do everything . . . consistent with the Cause of Religion in America and the political Interests of the States.” Attempts to both preserve and promote unity took place amidst strident disagreement regarding issues of inclusion. In both major schisms in our history, a break in covenantal relationship between clergy was instituted through the official procedures of the church, either through the process of expulsion and voting on the one hand, or an institutionally agreed upon split on the other. The need for consistency at both regional and national levels of the country resulted in conflict over an expansion of democratic principles into Methodist procedures, conflicting views on the “political Interests of the States,” entanglement with issues of race, and alignment with the hope of a new powerful place in worldwide economics and politics.

US Methodist history has shown, however, that throughout its existence, the larger denominations have sought moderation between Coke and Asbury’s original “Cause of Religion” and “political Interest of the States,” just as the two bishops initially fought vehemently against slavery, and then slowly found ways to accommodate the practice so as not to lose Methodism from the South. Today the struggle is how not to lose Methodists from the most conservative and most progressive ends of our spectrum. So, let us proceed to conclusions.

First, *sustainable* unity *requires* unanimity in the essentials of Wesleyan theology. Wesleyan theology has held Methodists together despite significantly different practices and mores in diverse contexts. Historically, issues of inclusion were debated on the basis of scriptural authority and interpretation, but not the essential elements of Wesleyan theology. If the debates are now grounded in conflicting views of Wesleyan theology, a path toward “amicable” separation may be necessary.

Second, sustainable unity *cannot* equate to unanimity in culturally based mores and practices. If unity *is* an essential principle of The UMC, then a way must be made for broader, more

diverse expressions of mores and practices. Two aspects of current US reality require this kind of change: a) the dramatic increase in diversity throughout the country. Diverse views are no longer geographically defined. While our jurisdictions do exhibit historical cultural differences, diverse perspectives are now everywhere. b) The laws regarding LGBTQ rights and the right to marry are now federal law, despite a lack of ideological consensus. This is *not* 1844. Despite the stereotype of the Western Jurisdiction, there is no geographical consensus about the ordination of LGBTQ persons or about same-sex marriage.

Third, sustainable unity can be achieved with a less rigid polity. The tighter and more rigid the polity, the greater likelihood of dissension, especially as the denomination tries to absorb more countries. Also, it is more likely that what appear to be small changes in polity have major political consequences. Only in its smallest organizations, most homogeneous cultures, most regulated political spheres, and most geographically contained locations can unanimity of mores and practices be sustained as a qualification for unity.

Methodism has already adapted to less rigid polity on a global scale, giving central conferences the flexibility to make changes in parts of the *Discipline*. Greater flexibility is now necessary within the U.S. The terms of a clergy covenant would then be grounded in our commitment to not engage in practices that directly harm the ministry of another within his or her context of ministry rather than in whether one has upheld every jot and tittle of the *Discipline*. Finally, a less rigid polity raises the possibility of allowing a clergyperson to exclude oneself from a practice that is in accordance with the law of the state.

Fourth, sustainable unity is possible when differing views of inclusion can be accommodated structurally, though not geographically, in the US church. Our only current constitutional limitation is no more jurisdictions based on race. Eliminate geographical jurisdictions and replace them with two or three overlapping jurisdictions or new types of organizations, each with their own views regarding LGBTQ inclusion. While this option may *feel* like a step backward, consider that the geographical jurisdictions (which are increasingly becoming obsolete) were a means to help justify the Central Jurisdiction. This approach would allow for “fraternal relations” among divided groups that would still share in the same pension program, mission institutions, and other work of the general church that we “do well” together. Yes, conferences, churches, clergy, and members would have to make arduous decisions as to which jurisdiction they belong. But any way forward is going to have its pain and complex decisions.

Fifth, sustainable unity can be created when differing views of inclusion can be accommodated structurally—on the global level. This raises questions about the scope and range of a *General Book of Discipline* that purports to speak for United Methodists worldwide. Like the second point above, the more that is included, the narrower the lens of mores and practice for all United Methodists, and the more exclusive and smaller the denomination will become. For example, read ¶104, “Of the Duty of Christians to the Civil Authority” added to the Articles of Religion during the Uniting Conference of 1939. Read it in the context of today’s US reality and our understanding of ourselves as an international church. This paragraph calls us, in each of our own countries, to uphold the law. Well, what does that mean? What are the implications of this paragraph worldwide? What would be the implications when the *rule* of a state does not match with what United Methodists would consider the *interests of the state* to be?

So, context has huge implications for the ways in which Methodism can be lived in different parts of the U.S. and the world. Just as in 1844, when each side was afraid of the disappearance of Methodism if accommodation to the local laws was not made, the same is worthy of concern

today both within and beyond the U.S. If Methodism cannot evolve in such a way that it can accommodate the complex reality in which it currently lives, it risks eventual disappearance.

Sixth, sustainable unity is more probable when we are not debating key elements of the Constitution. When main principles of the denomination are defined in the body of the Constitution, controversy regarding those principles strikes at the identity of the organization itself. Because “inclusion” is a constitutional principle, placed there to preserve a key characteristic of The UMC, our very UM identity is what is at stake in the current debate. It is much more painful to debate core elements of our identity, than it is to debate ethical values that may evolve over time. Thus, throughout the life of The UMC, there have been an historic number of attempts to change the Constitution, requiring vote after vote of all annual conferences, many that focused on the types of person the denomination should “include.” So, currently, factions are fighting over the core identity of the denomination, not “just” how United Methodists respond to shifting mores and laws of the U.S.

Seventh, sustainable unity can be created when we engage in a process that defines a set of over-arching principles against which both the Constitution and the *Discipline* are measured, as our MPC ancestors demonstrated. Throughout MEC/MECS history, the value of each of these principles has always been weighted differently, depending on a person or group’s location in the denomination.

As we have seen in our history, equal tension among the three principles cannot be sustained over an extended period of time. From Coke and Asbury onward, the principle of unity has been most defended by leaders who hold the most power and who continue to benefit from the existing rules. The conditions under which the principle of *unity* is overridden must be severe enough that the challenge threatens to destroy the identity of the church itself. Several smaller Methodist churches are better than one destroyed. The principle of *inclusion* is usually espoused by those seeking equal access to the privileges of the institution. Inclusion has taken place through slow, evolutionary processes that were grounded in growing comprehension of democratic principles of representation and justice. The principle of *covenant* has been used explicitly, only in the current debates regarding LGBTQ inclusion in ordination and same-sex marriage. It has been espoused most often by those who stand against the possible changes in rules that seek greater representation and access to the goods of the institution against those who break the current rules. A way forward out of the current denominational morass can happen only if all sides determine if “sustainable unity” becomes an overriding principle that includes, not subsumes, the principles of inclusion and covenant.

The Clash among Unity, Inclusion, and Covenant: Lessons from History—Anne L. Burkholder

¹ Charles Cist, printer, *Minutes of Several Conversations Between The Rev. Thomas, LL. D, The Rev Francis Asbury and Others, at a Conference, Begun in Baltimore, in the State of Maryland, on Monday, the 27th Of December, in the Year 1784*, (Philadelphia: Charles Cist, printer, 1885), 3.

² Methodism would experience twenty-eight divisions in the US Methodist family prior to the reunification of 1939.

³ One might argue that it is also implied in the membership vows, but there is nothing in the vows that leads a member to commit to the *Discipline*.

⁴ John Wigger, *American Saint: Francis Asbury and The Methodists* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 35.

⁵ *Form of Discipline for the Ministers, Preachers, and Members of the Methodist Episcopal Church in America, Considered and Approved at a Conference Held at Baltimore, in the State of Maryland, On Monday, the 27th of December, 1784*. (New York: W. Ross. 1787), 20.

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- ⁶ Ibid., 21. “Answ. 1. Let us be deeply convinced of the absolute Necessity of it. 2. Pray earnestly for, and speak freely to each other. 3. When we meet, let us never part without Prayer. 4. Take great care not to despise each other’s Gifts. 5. Never speak lightly of each other. 6. Let us defend each other’s Character in every Thing, so far as is consistent with Truth. 7. Labor in Honour each to prefer the other before himself.”
- ⁷ *Memorial* is the historic term for what we call a petition today.
- ⁸ James M. Buckley. *Constitutional and Parliamentary History of the Methodist Episcopal Church*. (New York: The Methodist Book Concern, 1912), 101.
- ⁹ Wigger, *American Saint*, 360–61. Embedded in these debates are the seeds of what would become the schism of 1828.
- ¹⁰ Ibid., 104–106, emphasis added.
- ¹¹ With groups that became the Primitive Methodists and the Republican Methodists.
- ¹² Wigger, *American Saint*, 114–19. These clergy began ordaining one another so that they could provide sacraments to the people following the exodus of the Church of England and the rejection of Methodists by Protestant Episcopalians.
- ¹³ The key elements of this resolution—how the General Conference is formed, when it meets, who and how they preside, its legislative role, and what came to be known as the Restrictive Rules—have been maintained in only slightly modified form throughout Methodism.
- ¹⁴ This position would eventually evolve into the district superintendent.
- ¹⁵ Buckley, *Constitutional and Parliamentary History*, 108–109.
- ¹⁶ Edward J. Drinkhouse. *History of Methodist Reform and the Methodist Protestant Church, Volume II*, (Norwood, MA: The Board of Publication of the Methodist Protestant Church, Norwood Press, 1899), 7.
- ¹⁷ C. E. Forlines, ed., *Constitution and Discipline of The Methodist Protestant Church*, (Pittsburgh: The Board of Publication of The Methodist Protestant Church. 1936), 7.
- ¹⁸ Ibid., 8.
- ¹⁹ The close linguistic relationship to the term “United Societies” was intentional.
- ²⁰ Drinkhouse, *History of Methodist Reform*, 106–114.
- ²¹ Ibid., 77–79.
- ²² Forlines, *Constitution and Discipline*, 10–11.
- ²³ Ibid., 9–10.
- ²⁴ Ibid., 13.
- ²⁵ Drinkhouse, *History of Methodist Reform*, 258.
- ²⁶ Forlines, *Constitution and Discipline*, 13–14. They included the “right to private judgment in matters of religion; and an equal right to express [one’s] opinion;” a prohibition against ministers as “lords over God’s heritage or to have dominion over the faith of the saints,” and the power to form rules of the church that rested with both ministers and members.
- ²⁷ Drinkhouse, *History of Methodist Reform*, 257–67.
- ²⁸ Reunited in 1877.
- ²⁹ Rex D. Matthews, *Timetables of History for Students of Methodism* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2007), 101.
- ³⁰ Absent from modern summaries of the Methodist story was the presence of slavery in the northeast (established by Puritans in 1606, and the slave-ship building industry in Massachusetts) especially in the colonies of Massachusetts, New Amsterdam, and New Jersey. The institution certainly existed on a smaller scale, with far more complex statuses and opportunities for manumission and the purchasing of one’s freedom. Slavery was abolished in the northern colonies/states between 1771 (Vermont) and 1804 (New Jersey).
- ³¹ W. Astor Kirk, *Desegregation of the Methodist Church Polity* (Pittsburgh: RoseDog Books, 2005), 2. According to Kirk, by 1786 there were 1,890 Blacks in Methodist membership.
- ³² *The General Minutes of the Conferences of the Methodist Episcopal Church in America, Forming the Constitution of Said Church* (London: Frys and Couchman, 1786), 335, italics in the original.
- ³³ Matthews, *Timetables of History*, 53.
- ³⁴ Wigger, *American Saint*, 294.
- ³⁵ John Nelson Norwood, *The Schism in the Methodist Episcopal Church 1844* (Alfred, NY: The Alfred Press, 1923), Unnumbered first page of the preface.
- ³⁶ Ibid., preface, second page.
- ³⁷ Ibid.
- ³⁸ *History of the Organization of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South*. (Nashville: Publishing House Methodist Episcopal Church, South, 1925), 9. Reprint of the 1845 text.
- ³⁹ Ibid., 11–12.

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- ⁴⁰ Wigger, *American Saint*, 384–85.
- ⁴¹ At the time “the South” implied mostly the states of Virginia and North Carolina.
- ⁴² *History of the Organization*, ix, italics in the original.
- ⁴³ Norwood, *The Schism . . . 1844*, 21.
- ⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 28–29.
- ⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 33.
- ⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 34–44.
- ⁴⁷ *History of the Organization*, x, italics in the original. This selection is part of an official statement sent to the British Wesleyan Conference by the General Conference of 1840.
- ⁴⁸ Norwood, *The Schism . . . 1844*, 32–33.
- ⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 51. According to Norwood, the WMCA began with six conference, six thousand members, and stretched from Maine to Michigan and south to the border with the slave-holding states.
- ⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 55.
- ⁵¹ *Ibid.*.
- ⁵² *Ibid.*, 57.
- ⁵³ *Ibid.*, 61–62. Note that at the time, there was no judicial process for appeal other than appealing to the General Conference. The judicial procedures that we now enjoy were rooted in the Methodist Protestant insistence in the protection of those brought to trial to due process.
- ⁵⁴ *Ibid.*
- ⁵⁵ Bishop Andrew had considered resigning from the episcopacy while meeting with confidants on May 10th. They encouraged him not to do so, believing that his resignation would lead to secession by many of the southern churches. An earlier interchange between him and a small committee of northerners led by Nathan Bangs had already taken place, so the official investigation was begun based on information that was already known in private.
- ⁵⁶ Norwood, *The Schism . . . 1844*, 69–70.
- ⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 73.
- ⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 75–81.
- ⁵⁹ Russell E. Richey, *The Methodist Conference in America* (Nashville: Kingwood Books, Abingdon Press, 1996), 150–151. Note: Beginning in 1869, the two Colleges of Bishops exchanged “fraternal delegates” between their sessions. Eventually “fraternal delegates” were seated at their general conferences. In 1874, the MECS General Conference initiated a proposal to establish a joint commission to attempt to rectify issues that stood “in the way of fraternal relations.” The commission met at the end of the 1876 General Conference of the MEC in Cape May, NJ, during which the MEC acknowledged the southern church as a “legitimate branch of Episcopal Methodism in the United States having a common origin in the Methodist Episcopal Church organized in 1784.” It also settled nine property conflict cases to the satisfaction of the MECS and established rules for evaluating other cases.
- ⁶⁰ By the 1939 reunification, both churches had regularly appointed fraternal delegations, jointly celebrated the 100th anniversary of Methodism, coordinated their foreign mission work, and participated together in Methodist Ecumenical conferences. As they moved into the twentieth century, shared projects such as the 1907 Standard Catechism, a project of a joint commission, emerged.
- ⁶¹ *Proceedings of the Second Ecumenical Methodist Conference Held in the Metropolitan Methodist Episcopal Church, October 1891, Washington, D.C.* (New York: Hunt and Eaton, 1892), 594. The statement said in part, “We rejoice to recognize the substantial unity which exists among the various Methodist Churches. Its firm basis is a common creed. We are all faithful to the simple, scriptural, and generous theology which God, through the clear intellect and loving heart of John Wesley, restored to his Church. The intellectual movement and the social changes of our time may have led to some change in the form of expression, or some shifting of the emphasis of our teaching, but they have not led us even to reconsider that living theology which has abundantly proved itself upon our pulses. . . . And there are other grounds of unity. . . . the same spiritual ancestry; . . . the same holy hymns; our modes of worship . . . the type of religious experience . . . Our ecclesiastical principles. . . . [W]e think that the time has come for a closer co-operation of the Methodist Churches, both at home and abroad, which shall prevent waste of power and unhallowed rivalry; . . . in each land where it is planted, Methodism shall become, for every useful purpose, one, and . . . shall be a close and powerful federation of churches for the spread of the kingdom of Christ.”
- ⁶² *Ibid.*
- ⁶³ Richey, *The Methodist Conference in America*, 152–54.
- ⁶⁴ Morris Davis, *The Methodist Unification: Christianity and the Politics of Race in the Jim Crow Era*. (New York: New York University Press, 2008), 4. Though not all of the northern conferences cooperated with this effort.

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- ⁶⁵ John W. Langdale, Alfred F. Smith, T. Leroy Hooper, eds., *Doctrines and Discipline of the Methodist Church, 1939* (New York: The Methodist Book Concern, 1939), 8.
- ⁶⁶ Davis, *The Methodist Unification*, 5, emphasis added.
- ⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 7.
- ⁶⁸ *Ibid.*
- ⁶⁹ *Ibid.*
- ⁷⁰ The original proposals tended to reflect the terms of “partial separation” from 1844.
- ⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 5.
- ⁷² *Ibid.*, 1.
- ⁷³ The relationship between American cultural imperialism, our own drive for spiritual conquest, and our current ministrations of trying to become a non-culturally imperialistic “worldwide church” is most worthy of a study.
- ⁷⁴ Davis, *The Methodist Unification*, 28.
- ⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 29.
- ⁷⁶ There is no reference in what was finally approved as the Constitution to the CME Church.
- ⁷⁷ Langdale, et.al., *Doctrines and Discipline of the Methodist Church*, 340–341.
- ⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 694.
- ⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 696.
- ⁸⁰ Note that as of the 1948 *Discipline*, the tone of this statement had changed dramatically. Tempered by the end of World War II, and now facing the Cold War, the Historical Statement ends with a quote from Wesley, “I desire to have a league, offensive and defensive with every soldier of Christ. We have not only one faith, one hope, one Lord, but are directly engaged in one warfare.” *Doctrines and Disciplines of The Methodist Church 1948* (Nashville: The Methodist Publishing House, 1948), 6.
- ⁸¹ “Of the Duty of Christians to the Civil Authority,” *The Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church* (Nashville: The United Methodist Publishing House, 2016), 72.
- ⁸² Kirk, *Desegregation of the Methodist Church Polity*, 19.
- ⁸³ *Ibid.*, 58.
- ⁸⁴ David Oberlin, “Two Separate Unions Formed One Church” (1979), 30, <http://www.lycoming.edu/umarch/chronicles/2004/oberlin.pdf>.
- ⁸⁵ Kirk, *Desegregation of the Methodist Church Polity*, 181.