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We May Undertake to Run the Churches: The Stanton-Ames Order and Union Military-Supported Church Confiscation During the American Civil War

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**WE MAY UNDERTAKE TO RUN THE CHURCHES: THE STANTON-AMES ORDER
AND UNION MILITARY-SUPPORTED CHURCH CONFISCATION
DURING THE AMERICAN CIVIL WAR**

A Master's Thesis

Presented to

The Graduate College of

Missouri State University

In Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts, History

By

Todd Sisson

May 2021

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ABSTRACT

During the American Civil War, the Methodist Episcopal Church was authorized and supported by the federal government to take control of Methodist Episcopal Church, South, churches and parsonages in which a loyal minister appointed by a loyal bishop did not officiate. Authorized under the popularly styled “Stanton-Ames order,” northern Methodist agents traveled southward alongside the Union army, and the two parties worked in conjunction to eject southern Methodist ministers from their pulpits and replace them with ministers who were loyal to the Union. These confiscations happened across the South, but they were executed by northern Methodist officials who engaged in the work with differing degrees of enthusiasm. Although their subsequent occupation of these properties was short-lived, the dramatic northern action exposed the powerlessness of southern divines to protect the sanctity of their own sacred spaces. After the war, when northern Methodists believed a reunited Methodism was imminent, southerners pointed to northern actions under the Stanton-Ames order as a reason to maintain their separate and distinct organization. As the northern connection pushed for reunion, southern intransigence, fueled by their contempt for northern Methodist conduct during the war, forced the northern Methodists to become penitents, confessing wrongs and compromising on principles, and allowing the southern Methodists to deflect any criticism for supporting slavery and treason.

KEYWORDS: Stanton-Ames order, Methodist Episcopal Church, Methodist Episcopal Church South, church confiscation, separation of church and state, civil liberties, American Civil War, Edwin Stanton, Edward Ames, Methodists

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In the interest of academic freedom and the principle of free speech, approval of this thesis indicates the format is acceptable and meets the academic criteria for the discipline as determined by the faculty that constitute the thesis committee. The content and views expressed in this thesis are those of the student-scholar and are not endorsed by Missouri State University, its Graduate College, or its employees.

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I dedicate this thesis to my parents, who graciously indulged the fourth grader who made them stop at every monument at the battlefield in Vicksburg, and my wife, whose support and listening ear were always available.

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INTRODUCTION

On January 2, 1863, one day after the Emancipation Proclamation became law, President Abraham Lincoln composed a letter to Major General Samuel Curtis, operating out of Missouri. Lincoln's subject was the ouster of a Presbyterian clergyman in St. Louis, an episode in which Curtis had played a significant part. One's loyalty, or perceived loyalty, was a major topic among the civilian population during the war, and that was especially true in the border region. Ministers, as some of the most prominent and vocal members of local communities, often were some of the first civilians to have their allegiance closely scrutinized. Samuel B. McPheeters, the minister who presided over the Pine Street Presbyterian Church in the city, caused considerable consternation among a segment of his congregation who believed the minister held dangerous southern sympathies. While McPheeters' own beliefs were more subtle and less public, his wife vocally supported the Confederacy, and he committed a grievous wrong in the eyes of a radical minority of his congregation when he baptized a newborn named for the Confederate General Sterling Price.¹ An appeal to military authorities from this outraged contingent served as the impetus for General Curtis's involvement in the affair. Curtis, himself a radical abolitionist, ordered the local provost marshal to eject McPheeters from his pulpit, then placed the church in the charge of a military commission that ensured the loyal members of the congregation assumed control of the building.²

McPheeters had powerful friends, however, and he refused to surrender without a fight. He won the support of Governor Hamilton Gamble and eventually earned a meeting with

¹ Lucas P. Volkman, *Houses Divided: Evangelical Schisms & the Crisis of Union in Missouri* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018), 145.

² April E. Holm, *A Kingdom Divided: Evangelicals, Loyalty, and Sectionalism in the Civil War Era* (Baton Rouge, Louisiana: Louisiana State University Press, 2017), 109.

President Lincoln at the end of December 1862.³ Shortly after this meeting, Lincoln penned his thoughts to General Curtis, clearly and concisely identifying the danger in Curtis's course of action. The President confessed, "After talking with him, I tell you frankly, I believe he does sympathize with the rebels," but he characterized much of the evidence against McPheeters as "general." Lincoln seemed troubled by a sentence as extreme as exile being levied on someone for such dubious reasons as "secret sympathies." Ultimately, the President left the issue in General Curtis's hands, albeit with a powerfully worded caveat:

But I must add that the U. S. government must not, as by this order, undertake to run the churches. When an individual, in a church or out of it, becomes dangerous to the public interest, he must be checked; but let the churches, as such take care of themselves— It will not do for the U.S. to appoint Trustees, Supervisors, or other agents for the churches.⁴

The dispute over the pastorship of Pine Street Church highlighted the critical intersection of politics, loyalty, and faith during the Civil War, but the clash of these powerful forces preceded the war itself. Although ostensibly institutions of peace and fraternity, American churches were not insulated from the rampant sectionalism that plagued the country in the early to mid-nineteenth century.

Nearly two decades earlier, the largest denomination in the country, the Methodist Episcopal Church, split into two sections. Fueled by mutual distrust and matching ambition, the Methodists split into separate denominations, largely along sectional lines.⁵ Significant disagreement existed among the sections concerning the legitimacy of the split; northerners

³ Volkman, *Houses Divided*, 146.

⁴ Abraham Lincoln to Samuel R. Curtis, January 2, 1863, in *Abraham Lincoln papers: Series I. General Correspondence. 1833-1916* (Library of Congress).

⁵ Holm, *A Kingdom Divided*, 20.

maintained the southerners seceded from the true Methodist church while southerners claimed the Methodist church divided into two new and distinct denominations. Despite this fundamental disagreement, many northern and southern Methodists hoped for amicable relationships between the two sections--a prospect that grew increasingly dim as the nation inched closer to civil war. At the outbreak of hostilities, southern states, and even some of those along the border, effectively prohibited any northern Methodist activity within their borders. However, over the course of the war, these states' situations would change dramatically. As northern armies captured more southern territory, the leaders of the Methodist Episcopal Church, supported by the strength of the War Department, seized the moment to re-establish their influence in a territory that had eluded their grasp for nearly two decades.

The Methodist Episcopal Church, South, emerged from the schism as the largest denomination in the southern states, constituting nearly 38 percent of all churches in what would become the Confederacy.⁶ Southern pulpits provided captive audiences to ministers whose messages were draped with the authority of the church. While many ministers used this trust to preach the Gospel, for some the allure of entering the political realm proved too difficult to resist. While ministers on both sides engaged in political debate, when southern-leaning ministers decided to enter the political fray they often became dangerous rhetoricians, strengthening and expanding the causes of slavery and eventually, rebellion. Northern critics argued southern preachers exerted a specious influence over their congregations and were actively steering their congregants, and in due course the South itself, towards secession.⁷ The First Amendment to the Constitution famously forbids the government from prohibiting the free

⁶ Mitchell E. Snay, *Gospel of Disunion: Religion and Separatism in the Antebellum South* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 126-127.

⁷ "Movement Among Southern Churches," in *The Daily Evening Express*, February 4, 1864, Newspapers.com

exercise of religion, but what, asked Union officials, if religious leaders leveraged their position and influence to promulgate secession and treason?⁸

Clergy often filled important and conspicuous roles in local communities, so they, along with newspaper editors and local politicians, often became the first people to feel the scrutiny of authorities hoping to root out and punish treason.⁹ Early in the war, Union leaders discerned the threat posed by disloyal ministers and attempted to neutralize it. When Union forces occupied New Orleans in the spring of 1862, Union General Benjamin Butler placed a price on the head of the famous Presbyterian Benjamin Morgan Palmer for his role in fomenting secessionist sentiment.¹⁰ As the conflict persisted, both local and federal officials shared concerns about the influence enjoyed by southern-leaning churchmen, but even so, Lincoln's message to General Curtis in St. Louis seemed definitive. Regardless of the dangers posed by disloyal ministers, the government would not "undertake to run the churches."

But that was exactly what the government would do. While Lincoln professed a desire to abstain from interfering in church affairs, General Curtis possessed no similar qualms. Lincoln, who often preferred to delegate these types of decisions to local authorities, ultimately left the McPheeters decision to Curtis, who refused to bend. He allowed the Radical contingent to maintain control of Pine Street Church. The subsequent squabble over the pastorship of this congregation continued for more than a year, forcing an exasperated Lincoln to respond to voices from each side of the dispute. Eventually, the Radicals secured their hold on the church, and McPheeters moved out of the state.¹¹

⁸ U.S. Constitution. Amendment I.

⁹ William A. Blair, *With Malice Toward Some: Treason and Loyalty in the Civil War Era* (Chapel Hill, North Carolina: University of North Carolina Press, 2014), 49.

¹⁰ Snay, *Gospel of Disunion*, 179.

¹¹ Volkman, *Houses Divided*, 147-148.

The United States government, however, was far from finished with its involvement in the churches. The Pine Street case foreshadowed future ecclesiastical interference by the federal government. While it is tempting to classify government and military interference in religious institutions as the secular crossing the sacred barrier between church and state, most of these cases of government overreach originated with invitations from church leaders themselves. Even as McPheeters and Curtis lobbied the chief executive for control of the St. Louis church, leaders of the Methodist Episcopal Church were organizing to embark on a bold new missions initiative. Although Lincoln may have been averse to ecclesiastical interference, the same was not true of a number of northern Methodist leaders, nor was it true of members of the President's cabinet. The Pine Street conflict centered on one minister from one Presbyterian church in one city, but the Methodists' efforts would be supported by some of the most powerful figures in the United States government, who bestowed on ministerial leaders sweeping authority to drastically intervene in church business throughout the country. Despite President Lincoln's admonition to "let the churches, as such take care of themselves," the Methodist Episcopal Church harnessed the power of the War Department to occupy Methodist Episcopal Church, South, churches throughout the southern states. Propelled by the industrious Bishop Edward Ames, who embarked with missionary zeal on a venture to absorb Methodists throughout the South back into the "true" church, northern Methodist leaders soon found themselves stranded in southern churches, embodying policies, both political and religious, that were deeply offensive to the southern psyche. Northern Methodist leaders undertook their southern mission, what one southern Methodist dubbed "The Great Ecclesiastical Raid," with a variety of intentions, but one

indelible result was a stain on the veneer of southern honor that hindered postwar attempts at reconciliation between the two branches of Methodism.¹²

The Stanton-Ames order, as the War Department's order came to be called, was a flagrant violation of the wall separating church and state, which makes the surprisingly meager historical coverage of it all the more remarkable. The uninhibited freedom to worship as one chooses was embedded in the foundations of American society. Roger Williams called it "soul liberte," when he established the colony of Rhode Island.¹³ When that wall of separation was threatened in the early years of the republic, James Madison insisted, "The Religion of every man must be left to the conviction of every man."¹⁴ Of course, verbalizing the importance of religious freedom does not guarantee the protection against governmental interference, which makes the study of those violations like the Stanton-Ames order all the more imperative.

The Stanton-Ames order was not always so overlooked. In the decades immediately following the war, both northern and southern Methodists wrestled over their respective denominations' roles in the conflict. One northern Methodist newspaper editor, Charles Elliott, used his 1868 book, *Southwestern Methodism; A History of the M.E. Church in the South-West, From 1844-1864*, to explain and justify northern Methodist efforts in Missouri, Arkansas, and Texas in the decades between the Methodist split and the Civil War. Although Elliott's work certainly contained factual events, *Southwestern Methodism* was written less to inform and more to justify northern actions. The book lacked nuance; southern Methodists were nearly always presented as lawless ruffians and northern Methodists as noble sufferers in a hostile land. Elliott

¹² William Leftwich, *Martyrdom in Missouri* (Saint Louis: Southwestern Book and Publishing Company, 1870), 253.

¹³ Edward J. Eberle, "Roger Williams on Liberty of Conscience," in *Roger Williams University Law Review*, volume 10, issue 2, 294, https://docs.rwu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1327&context=rwu_LR.

¹⁴ James Madison, *A Memorial and Remonstrance*, 1785, <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Madison/01-08-02-0163>.

briefly addressed church confiscation under Stanton-Ames, but he largely withheld any judgement and he wrote largely to instances in which Ames restrained from confiscating churches.¹⁵

Not to be outdone, in 1870, a southern Methodist minister named William B. Leftwich published *Martyrdom in Missouri: A History of Religious Proscription, the Seizure of Churches, and the Persecution of Ministers of the Gospel, in the State of Missouri During the Late Civil War, and Under the Test Oath of the New Constitution*. Leftwich's book was far from an objective account of the war's proceedings, and his depiction of church confiscations by the northern Methodists was as one-sided as his Elliott's. In Leftwich's version of events, the northern Methodists were hungry for plunder and the southern Methodists were innocent victims. Six years later, the northern Methodist editor Erasmus Q. Fuller made his own attempt to justify northern efforts in the South in his work, *An Appeal to the Records: A Vindication of the Methodist Episcopal Church, in Its Policy and Proceedings Toward the South*. Based on the title, Fuller's book seems like a good place to look for a definitive northern explanation of the events surrounding Stanton-Ames, but Fuller focused more on earlier conflicts between the two branches of Methodism. Fuller dedicated a paltry two pages to the "military order" issued in the fall of 1863 without mentioning Ames by name or any specific instance of church confiscation.¹⁶ From denominational histories of individual congregations to memoirs of ministers who passed, southerners exhibited a desire to remember the Stanton-Ames order while northerners seemed eager to forget.

In the early twentieth century, William Warren Sweet, in *The Methodist Episcopal*

¹⁵ Charles Elliott, *Southwestern Methodism: A History of the M.E. Church in the Southwest, From 1844-1864* (Cincinnati: Poe & Hitchcock, 1868), 464-464.

¹⁶ Erasmus Q. Fuller, *An Appeal to the Records: A Vindication of the Methodist Episcopal Church, in Its Policy Toward the South* (Cincinnati: Hitchcock and Walden, 1876), 381-382.

Church and the Civil War, attempted to explore church confiscations, but beyond a few paragraphs about instances in New Orleans and Memphis, Sweet provided only general locations.¹⁷ Hidden in one of his footnotes, Sweet indicated one of the problems with anyone attempting to study Edward Ames: “The writer made an effort to locate the private papers of Edward Ames, but all his efforts proved to no avail.”¹⁸

In the 1950s and 1960s, historians published a few works that touched on events surrounding Stanton-Ames. Robert D. Clark’s *The Life of Matthew Simpson* provides an excellent look into Bishop Simpson’s role in church confiscation in eastern and central Tennessee, but Ames and the other Methodists were of lesser consequence to his subject matter. In 1956, Ralph E. Morrow published *Northern Methodism and Reconstruction*, which probably succeeded the most in illuminating the Stanton-Ames order, but even Morrow struggled to explain the breadth of the order. He touched on confiscations in New Orleans, Charleston, Nashville, and Chattanooga but the remaining instances were relegated largely to lists in the footnotes.¹⁹ In 1969, *The Circuit Rider Dismounts* by Hunter Dickinson Farish addressed the Stanton-Ames order but did so from a dangerously slanted point of view. One of his noted sources was Janie McTyeire Baskerville, daughter of the southern Methodist Bishop, and contemporary of Edward Ames, Holland N. McTyeire.²⁰

In the recent decades, historians have produced a number of excellent works regarding religion during and after the Civil War. April E. Holm’s *A Kingdom Divided* centers on the division between northern and southern religious denominations; Daniel Stowell’s *Rebuilding*

¹⁷ William Warren Sweet, *The Methodist Episcopal Church and the Civil War* (Cincinnati: Methodist Book Concern Press, 1912), 101-103.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 151.

¹⁹ Ralph E. Morrow, *Northern Methodism and Reconstruction* (Michigan State University Press, 1956), 58.

²⁰ Hunter Dickinson Farish, *The Circuit Rider Dismounts: A Social History of Southern Methodism, 1865-1900* (New York: De Capo Press, 1969), preface.

Zion explores the religious reconstruction of the South; Lucas Volkman's *Houses Divided* centers on religious conflict in Missouri, and George C. Rable's *God's Almost Chosen Peoples* serves as a comprehensive religious history of the Civil War. Each of these works has a scope far beyond the Stanton-Ames order, so it should not be surprising that the War Department's order is covered similarly to the earlier religious histories. For the last one hundred and fifty years, historians seem to reference the Stanton-Ames order more than they describe it. Despite the years of scholarship, little is known about how the order was actually executed in the various locales across the South, and whether those methods differed between each of the northern agents.

In the realm of Edwin Stanton scholarship, the Stanton-Ames order is barely a footnote. A 1905 profile of the Secretary of War by Frank Abial Flower failed to note the church order at all.²¹ The same is true of a recent biography written by Walter Stahr. Was the Stanton-Ames order so inconsequential that it does not deserve mention in any Stanton history? Was its brief execution just a fluke of the Lincoln administration's war effort? In 2014, in his book *With Malice Toward Some: Treason and Loyalty in the Civil War Era*, William A. Blair studied the effects of the Lincoln administration's hard war policies against civilians. He revealed how Union officials scrutinized the political feelings of local politicians, newspaper editors, and clergymen across the country, but especially in the occupied South. Federal officials, in an effort to neutralize treasonous sentiment, were willing to stretch the bounds of constitutionality. The Stanton-Ames order undoubtedly fit this bill. Blair, much like recent religious studies of the Civil War, mentions the Stanton-Ames order but neglects to get too specific. The coordinated effort between religious officials and military officials to confiscate southern churches demands further

²¹ Frank Abial Flower, *Edwin McMaster Stanton: The Autocrat of Rebellion, Emancipation, and Reconstruction* (Akron, OH: The Saalfield Publishing Company, 1905).

research. As one critic exclaimed, “Where is the end to be? And what principle of American constitutional law will remain if freedom of religion and of conscience is at the mercy of any commander of a military post?”²² This study attempts to further the study of the Stanton-Ames order by examining the order’s impact on the locales where it was enforced. Any violation of First Amendment rights by the federal government deserves deeper investigation, and this work seeks to unearth greater detail regarding the execution of the order by examining how church confiscations were conducted by various agents commissioned under the Stanton-Ames order in the Civil War South, and how the various affected communities responded.

²² Dennis, K. Boman, *Lincoln and Citizens’ Rights in Civil War Missouri: Balancing Freedom and Security* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University, 2011), 247.

FROM ROOTS TO RUPTURE

In the first half of the nineteenth century, the United States witnessed an explosion of religious involvement. In 1800, one in fifteen Americans belonged to a church, but by 1850, that number had grown to one in seven.²³ Churches could boast about much more than membership. By 1860, church property throughout the country was worth 169 million dollars. American churches were only outpaced by the railroads in regard to capital investment.²⁴ The Methodist Episcopal Church enjoyed their share of this prosperity as much or more than any other denomination.

The ecclesiastical structure of the Methodist Episcopal Church coalesced well with the young, burgeoning country. Although a collection of bishops managed the overall affairs of the church, the foundation of its authority rested within its conferences dispersed across the country. Methodist conferences varied in size--in 1842 the largest was the Baltimore conference, possessing a membership of 73,768, while the Texas conference was the smallest with only 3,738 members.²⁵ Each conference was composed of a number of districts, which themselves were the collection of local Methodist congregations. If districts became too big, the Methodists would simply elevate them to conference status. Similarly, as settlers moved increasingly west, the church could easily establish and incorporate new conferences in places like Wyoming, California, and Oregon.²⁶ These new conferences then elected their own representatives to attend

²³ George C. Rable, *God's Almost Chosen Peoples: A Religious History of the American Civil War* (Chapel Hill, North Carolina: University of North Carolina Press, 2010), 11.

²⁴ Mark A. Noll, *The Civil War as a Theological Crisis* (Chapel Hill, North Carolina: University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 12.

²⁵ *Minutes of the Annual Conferences of the Methodist Episcopal Church for the Years 1842-1843* (New York: G Lane & P.P. Sandford, 1842), 104.

²⁶ *Minutes of the Annual Conferences of the Methodist Episcopal Church for the Year 1851* (New York: G. Lane & L. Scott, 1851).

the Methodist General Conference every four years, ensuring no matter how scattered the conferences became, the central Methodist authority maintained control. Methodist churches ballooned from seven hundred in 1790 to twenty thousand in 1860, nearly twice as many as the next largest denomination, the Baptists.²⁷

Neither should this be surprising. Methodists were always expanding. Their conferences and districts were based on and served by the itinerant, or traveling, preacher. Methodists did not wait for prospective converts to come to them; they sought them out actively and vigorously. When new preachers joined the Methodist ranks, bishops assigned them to circuits. Always mobile, the circuit-riding minister traveled across the countryside, preaching in small villages and on family farms.²⁸ As a matter of principle, itinerants were denied the opportunity of putting down roots even within their circuits, as Methodist leadership frequently re-appointed them to completely new ones. This mobility extended all the way to the highest levels of the Methodist Episcopal Church. Even bishops were denied the opportunity to get too comfortable in one geographic location. The episcopacy divided conferences among themselves so that each one was responsible for four or five different conferences, requiring them to preside over annual meetings and to make appointments to different charges.

The physical toll demanded by these responsibilities was taxing. Bishops traveled extensively from state to state and city to city. These territorial responsibilities shifted on a yearly basis, which over time ensured every bishop exerted a degree of authority over the entirety of the church body.²⁹ Rotating church leaders among various territories extended all the way back to the Methodists' patriarch, John Wesley, who argued the practice protected preachers

²⁷ Noll, *The Civil War as a Theological Crisis*, 27.

²⁸ Robert D. Clark, *The Life of Matthew Simpson* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1956), 30-31.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 168.

from being turned out of their pulpits if their congregants did not like their preaching. Rotating bishops and preachers also provided a means for the church to ensure uniformity of doctrine and preaching across all conferences and circuits.³⁰ The founder of American Methodism, Francis Asbury, was largely responsible for cementing movement as a central pillar of Methodism. The man who loathed the tendency of preachers to locate in one place was determined to set an example; at the end of his life he had traveled two hundred and seventy five thousand miles on horseback and in carriages.³¹ While difficult and taxing, the rotating episcopacy cultivated bishops who were well-traveled and well-acquainted with the sentiments of the people all over the country; this awareness would prove invaluable as the country descended into disunion.

Schism or Secession?

The friction between northern and southern Methodists during the Civil War can only be understood in light of the conflict that severed the Methodist Episcopal Church into two sections—a fissure that preceded the Civil War by nearly two decades. From its founding in America in the late eighteenth century until the 1840s, the Methodist Episcopal Church existed as one unified body spanning the nation. However, much like the country at large, Methodist leaders faced challenges navigating the difficult issue of slavery. In 1784, at the initial organization of the Methodist Episcopal Church in Baltimore, the conference adopted John Wesley’s “General Rules” which forbid “the buying or selling the bodies and souls of men, women, or children, with an intention to enslave them,” and it further pledged to expel any traveling preacher who bought slaves in spite of previous warnings, and to suspend any local preachers who refused to

³⁰ Richard P. Heitzenrater, *Wesley and the People Called Methodists*, 2nd edition (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2013), 309.

³¹ William Warren Sweet, *Methodism in American History* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1953), 174.

emancipate their slaves in states where it was legally possible to do so.³² The 1785 conference was even more explicit in its denunciation of slavery. As a postscript to the conference notes, the delegates declared, “We do hold in the deepest abhorrence the practice of slavery; and shall not cease to seek its destruction by all wise and prudent means.”³³ Two Methodist patriarchs, Asbury and Thomas Coke, urged George Washington to emancipate his slaves in 1785, a sentiment with which Washington reportedly agreed, although he told the men he would only publicize his thoughts if the issue was taken up by the Virginia assembly.³⁴ Coke himself worked and traveled closely with an African-American minister named Harry Hosier, no small thing for a church whose presence was largest in slave states like Virginia and Maryland.³⁵ The Methodist church, it seemed, was launched on an abolitionist trajectory long before the country itself.

But this anti-slavery position of the church slowly eroded as time went on. Condemnations of slavery as an institution gave way to condemnations of only the buying and selling of slaves. By 1804, all members from Georgia, Tennessee, North Carolina, and South Carolina were exempted from denominational rules regarding slavery. Slaveholders could be accepted into full membership after simply speaking to their local preacher “freely and faithfully on the subject of slavery.”³⁶ The Methodist *Discipline* instructed preachers to “admonish and exhort all slaves to render due respect and obedience to the commands and interest of their respective members.”³⁷ By 1808, the General Conference released judgement on the practice of

³² Sweet, *The Methodist Episcopal Church and the Civil War*, 15; “Minutes of Some Conversations Between the Preachers in Connection with the Reverend Mr. John Wesley,” in *Minutes of the Annual Conferences of the Methodist Episcopal Church, 1773-1828, Volume 1* (New York: T. Mason and G. Lane, 1840), 19.

³³ “Minutes Taken at the Several Annual Conferences of the Methodist Episcopal Church,” in *Minutes of the Annual Conferences of the Methodist Episcopal Church, 1773-1828, Volume 1* (New York: T. Mason and G. Lane, 1840), 24.

³⁴ Sweet, *Methodism in American History*, 120.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 109.

³⁶ Donald G. Matthews, *Slavery and Methodism: A Chapter in American Morality, 1780-1845* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1965), 301.

³⁷ Sweet, *The Methodist Episcopal Church and the Civil War*, 18.

buying and selling slaves to the annual conferences.³⁸ This was a far cry from the position taken by the church at its founding just two decades before. Despite its origins, the Methodist Episcopal Church abandoned the antislavery positions of early leaders like John Wesley and Thomas Coke in the name of accommodating the South. Anti-slavery sentiment receded from the denomination at large into the shelter of the New England conference. In 1836, when the General Conference held a vote on a resolution condemning modern abolitionism and “disclaiming any right, wish, or intention to interfere in the civil and political relation between master and slave as it exists in the slave-holding States of the Union,” the resolution passed with a vote of 120 to 14.³⁹ It appeared northern Methodists were willing to let the issue of slavery in the southern Church lie.

However, this position ultimately proved untenable. In the 1830s, a foil for the southern members of the Methodist Episcopal Church emerged. Orange Scott, a presiding elder in the Methodist church and a commissioned agent by Arthur Tappan in the American Anti-Slavery Society, mixed messages of personal salvation and abolitionism into one powerful cocktail, and his message soon gained traction among religious societies in the North.⁴⁰ The Methodist establishment, which had shown itself to be fairly conservative when it came to the issue of slavery, responded vigorously by removing Scott from his position and discharging other abolitionists throughout church leadership.⁴¹ Despite lacking a formal position in the church, Scott remained in the denomination until 1840, when the General Conference buried slavery as an issue.⁴² It gave the President of the conference the authority to determine which questions

³⁸ Matthews, *Slavery and Methodism*, 302.

³⁹ Sweet, *The Methodist Episcopal Church and the Civil War* 20.

⁴⁰ Clark, *The Life of Matthew Simpson*, 53; Lucius C. Matlack, *The Life of Rev. Orange Scott, Compiled by His Personal Narrative* (New York: C. Prindle and L.C. Matlack, 1847), 121.

⁴¹ Clark, *The Life of Matthew Simpson*, 55.

⁴² Walter David Stimple, “Bishop Edward Raymond Ames” (MA thesis., University of Wisconsin, 1947), 37.

would be addressed and even when the conference should adjourn. This empowered church leaders to excise questions they considered outside of conference jurisdiction, one of which was slavery.⁴³ Disgusted, Scott, along with Jotham Horton and LaRoy Sunderland, withdrew from the Methodist Episcopal Church. Upon leaving, the men explained their exit in the *True Wesleyan*, blaming their departure on the Methodist church's allowance and defense of slavery, along with the hierarchical character of the church government.⁴⁴ Scott soon embarked on the establishment of a new ecclesiastical organization, the Wesleyan Methodist Church, in 1844. Within a year and a half of its founding the Wesleyans boasted a membership of fifteen thousand.⁴⁵

Scott and the Wesleyans' withdrawal may have left them outside of the church, but their departure caused long-term ramifications for those who remained. Church leaders had previously remained conservative regarding slavery for the sake of unity, but now with Scott's splinter denomination forming, the Methodists risked losing congregants to the anti-slavery Wesleyans.⁴⁶ Church leaders soon felt pressure from the other side of the slavery controversy as well. While Orange Scott and the abolitionists demanded greater opposition to slavery, southern members advocated a greater denominational embrace of the peculiar institution. Southern slaveholders felt increasingly marginalized by their lack of representation among the church's episcopacy. One southern official argued the church needed a slaveholding bishop "to place the South in her proper position and attitude as an integral part of the M.E. Church," and claimed that any refusal on the part of the church to comply indicated an ecclesiastical approval of "the calumnies of the abolitionists."⁴⁷ Northerners were incensed. Bishops of the Methodist Episcopal Church were

⁴³ Sweet, *Methodism in American History*, 239.

⁴⁴ Matlack, *The Life of Reverend Orange Scott*, 209.

⁴⁵ Sweet, *The Methodist Episcopal Church and the Civil War*, 23.

⁴⁶ Snay, *Gospel of Disunion*, 128.

⁴⁷ Matthews, *Slavery and Methodism*, 242-243.

charged with caring for the entire church, North and South. A slaveholding bishop would be immediately unacceptable to nearly half the country's Methodists. Southerners were asking not just for a greater embrace of slavery, but to compromise the very nature of the itinerancy.⁴⁸ As the 1844 General Conference approached, leaders among the Methodist Episcopal Church, tired of conciliating, prepared to be much more confrontational over the issue of southern slavery.

Southern Bishop James Osgood Andrew was a respected and well-liked figure by many across the denomination, including northerners like future bishop Matthew Simpson, whom Andrew had ordained.⁴⁹ Andrew was elected to the episcopacy in 1832; church leaders wanted a southern bishop, but northerners strongly opposed anyone who was also a slaveholder. Andrew satisfied both desires, as he was a southern churchman who did not own slaves.⁵⁰ Speaking to another southerner, Lovick Pierce, Andrew dejectedly explained, "It is not my merit that has made me a Bishop, but my poverty."⁵¹ Andrew's early episcopal career was generally inoffensive to northern abolitionists. When the Wesleyans seceded from the church, the Indiana conference endorsed a resolution to strengthen the general rule on slavery in the *Discipline* by a vote of ninety-one to eleven--a vote over which Bishop Andrew presided.

However, whether he expected or not, Bishop Andrew was slated to become the fulcrum of the slavery controversy that had plagued the church since its inception in America. Although Andrew did not own slaves at the time of his election, he later inherited a number of them through marriage.⁵² When the General Conference learned of the new development, it asked Andrew to free his slaves or "desist from the exercise of his office" until he was no longer

⁴⁸ Matthews, *Slavery and Methodism*, 243-244.

⁴⁹ Clark, *The Life of Matthew Simpson*, 116.

⁵⁰ Matthews, *Slavery and Methodism*, 70.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 117.

⁵² Clark, *The Life of Matthew Simpson*, 117.

connected with slavery.⁵³ Andrew refused to free these newly acquired slaves, which compelled the delegates of the 1844 General Conference to act. The delegates put forth a motion requiring Andrew either to free his slaves or step down from the episcopacy. The motion passed 110 to 69, split largely along sectional lines. In response, disgruntled southerners proposed another resolution that provided for the separation of the northern and southern church.⁵⁴ The issue was referred to a committee who reported a series of resolutions, dubbed the “Plan of Separation,” which allowed for this division in the closing days of the conference, provided three quarters of the annual conferences assented to it.⁵⁵ When the conference adjourned, southern delegates met to draft an address to their annual conferences and schedule a convention of southern churches to meet the following year. Every southern conference approved of the convention, each choosing their own representatives, and in May of 1845, these southern delegates gathered in Louisville, Kentucky for their own convention. The purely southern assembly voted ninety-four to three to separate from the northern church, and they named the new organization the Methodist Episcopal Church, South.⁵⁶

The reaction to the proposed separation among northern conferences was less sanguine. When delegates returned to their charges following the General Conference in 1844, they found much less enthusiasm for the prospective split. Conferences where abolitionism was more widely embraced largely approved of the split, but more conservative conferences objected strongly.⁵⁷ Northerners recognized they were likely to lose vast amounts of territory and property in any

⁵³ Matthews, *Slavery and Methodism*, 264.

⁵⁴ Sweet, *The Methodist Episcopal Church and the Civil War*, 25.

⁵⁵ Sweet, *The Methodist Episcopal Church and the Civil War*, 25; Erasmus Q. Fuller, *An Appeal to the Records: A Vindication of the Methodist Episcopal Church, in its Policy and Proceedings Toward the South* (Cincinnati: Hitchcock & Walden, 1876), 152.

⁵⁶ Sweet, *The Methodist Episcopal Church and the Civil War*, 26.

⁵⁷ Matthews, *Slavery and Methodism*, 271-272.

potential schism, and they also resented the procedure followed by the southern church. They believed the southern delegates at the 1844 conference had negotiated in bad faith, as evidenced by their decision to call for a subsequent southern meeting in Louisville before appealing to their own annual conferences. Northern Methodists believed the southern delegates violated the sixth restrictive rule of their *Discipline*, which required the concurrence of three-fourths of the annual conferences on such a measure.⁵⁸ By calling for a southern conference before appealing to their annual conferences, northern Methodists insisted southerners intended to split regardless of the wishes of their annual conferences.⁵⁹ Both sides came to view division in very different terms. Southerners believed they had constitutionally divided from the northern connection, while northerners argued the southern church had seceded from the true Methodist church, much like Orange Scott's Wesleyans.⁶⁰

The Non-Renewable Offer

A very different group of delegates composed the next General Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church was held in Pittsburgh in 1848. Some northern conferences voiced their displeasure with the proposed split by only electing delegates who promised to vote against the Plan of Separation.⁶¹ There were one hundred and fifty delegates at the Pittsburgh conference, and only thirty had voted for the Plan of Separation four years earlier.⁶² In Pittsburgh, the two sides' competing visions of the Plan of Separation came to a head. The southern Methodists sent a messenger to the northern conference, Lovick Pierce, with a request to establish formal

⁵⁸ *The Doctrines and Discipline of the Methodist Episcopal Church*, (New York: G. Lane & C.B. Tippet, 1844), 22.

⁵⁹ Clark, *The Life of Matthew Simpson*, 129.

⁶⁰ Daniel E. Stowell, *Rebuilding Zion: The Religious Reconstruction of the South, 1863-1877* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 112.

⁶¹ Sweet, *Methodism in American History*, 256.

⁶² Clark, *The Life of Matthew Simpson*, 139.

fraternal relations between the two branches. Pierce assured the northern body that the southern church sincerely desired “the two great bodies of Wesleyan Methodists, North and South,” to maintain a “warm, confiding, and brotherly fraternal relation to each other.” He professed the hope of the southern church that their northern counterparts would “accept the offer in the same spirit of brotherly love and kindness.”⁶³

The conference responded to the South’s fraternal message two days later. It explained the difficulties that existed between the two branches prohibited any establishment of fraternal relations. Charles Elliott, a northern Methodist newspaper editor, elaborated, “A fraternal recognition would, in effect, go to say that the course of the South was as it ought to be.” He claimed the proposition of fraternal relations was actually asking “*the Methodist Episcopal Church to sanction the entire course of the M.E. Church, South.*” [emphasis in original]⁶⁴

After receiving this response from the northern church, Lovick Pierce drafted a response of his own—one that signified a new relation between the two sides that would persist for decades. The northern church had rejected fraternal relations, and they had rejected Pierce in his official character. As such, Pierce pronounced his response the final communication from the southern church. He promised the northern conference that the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, would “never renew the offer of fraternal relations between the two great bodies,” but should the northern church propose fraternity, built on the Plan of Separation, the southern church might be amenable.⁶⁵ Pierce’s words would resonate through the next three decades. The ball was in the northern church’s court, and the southern church remained true to their word. They would never again offer fraternal relations to the Methodist Episcopal Church. Before

⁶³ Fuller, *An Appeal to the Records*, 226.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 226.

⁶⁵ Fuller, *An Appeal to the Records*, 228.

adjourning, the Pittsburgh General Conference repudiated the Plan of Separation entirely.⁶⁶ The unified body of Methodists became two.

The semantics employed by each side of the disagreement held pecuniary weight. If the two sections had divided on lawful and congenial terms, then the southern church could rightly retain their half of the newly divided church property. If the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, had unilaterally and unlawfully seceded from the church body, then they were holding and congregating in stolen property.⁶⁷ To further complicate matters, the Plan of Separation made no provision for border churches, essentially assuming the division would occur along the lines between slave and free states.⁶⁸ Along this malleable border, local congregations were permitted to vote on their ultimate affiliation. Since there was no defined line, if a congregation in a border state voted to align with the southern connection, the “border” would move one church further north, placing a new set of churches in a position where they would have to vote on affiliation as well.⁶⁹ Increasing problems also arose among congregations within the borders of each side who wanted to affiliate with the other denomination. Bishop Thomas Morris complained about an angry minority of Missourians who hoped to go with the North and angry Illinoisans who wished to go with the South.⁷⁰ At its inception, the drafters of the Plan of Separation had imagined a division where both sides had gotten what they wanted. In reality, Methodist leaders realized that “sides” were much harder to define.

This confusion led to unexpected property disputes even among churches within the jurisdictional lines of the northern and southern connections. A Methodist church in Parkersburg,

⁶⁶ Holm, *A Kingdom Divided*, 45.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 75.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 44.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 44.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 57.

West Virginia, nestled securely inside the Ohio Conference, had its northern preacher removed by a group of southerners who seized the property.⁷¹ Northern leaders like Matthew Simpson wondered about the legal deeds to properties along the border as well. Many churches had been built largely from funds collected by the local congregations. What would happen to those churches within the southern bounds that wished to stay loyal but were refused the opportunity? Would they have to watch the church they labored to build be appropriated by the southern section?⁷²

A number of northern Methodists clung to this narrative that the southern church had illegally seceded from the true Methodist church. Simpson declared there was “no such church as the Methodist Episcopal Church North;” in his view, there was only the true Methodist Episcopal Church; the church was “not sectional.”⁷³ The fight over the legacy of the Plan of Separation--had the southern section seceded or had the church divided--moved beyond a rhetorical battle to a legal one, eventually coming before the highest bench in the country. In 1853, arguments over the nature of the Methodist split culminated in the Supreme Court case *Smith v. Swormstedt*. The central issue was determining who was entitled to revenue generated by the Methodist Book Concern in Cincinnati. The southern section argued the Book Concern was simply managed by the Methodist Episcopal Church, not owned by it. The publishing house was maintained by a fund created by traveling preachers and “chiefly accumulated by their labor.” Before the division of the church, they claimed, “the founders and the beneficiaries of this fund were scattered over its entire territory, as then constituted, and equally labored in its accumulation, and were equally

⁷¹ Clark, *The Life of Matthew Simpson*, 139.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 142-143.

⁷³ James E. Kirby, “The McKendree Chapel Affair,” in *The Tennessee Historical Quarterly* 25 (winter 1966), 360.

entitled to its dividends, without reference to particular territorial location.”⁷⁴ Southerners maintained the Methodist Episcopal Church, as it had formerly been known, had dissolved into two bodies through the Plan of Separation in 1844, but northerners held that “the same Methodist Episcopal Church” had “continued to exist identical in name, organization, discipline, and doctrine, and under a regular succession of the same officers.”⁷⁵ Northerners argued the southern section willingly departed from the Methodist Episcopal Church and in so doing forfeited their claim on any funds held by the Book Concern.

The court’s decision, delivered by Justice Samuel Nelson, generated widespread disapprobation among disappointed northern leaders. The court upheld the decision of the lower courts, which ruled, “The Methodist Church was divided. It was not a case of the secession of one part from the main body. Neither division lost its interest in the common property.”⁷⁶ Justice Nelson elaborated by declaring “the Methodist Episcopal Church ... divided into two associations, or distinct Methodist Episcopal Churches,” and ordered property compensation be delivered to the southern section.⁷⁷ The southern Methodists celebrated by taking their share of money from the Book Concern and establishing their own publishing house in Nashville.⁷⁸ In contrast, northern Methodists seethed. Matthew Simpson held that the South never demonstrated the necessity of division, which meant they were schismatic, regardless of what the courts declared.⁷⁹ Another northern Methodist, Erasmus Fuller, later maintained the court’s decision only applied to the Book Concern, not all Methodist property in the South. Furthermore, he

⁷⁴ Samuel Nelson and Supreme Court of The United States. U.S. Reports: Smith et al. v. Swormstedt et al., 57 U.S. 16 How. 288. 1853. Periodical. <https://www.loc.gov/item/usrep057288/>.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Volkman, *Houses Divided*, 96.

⁷⁹ Clark, *The Life of Matthew Simpson*, 162.

pointed to the infamous Dred Scott decision and questioned the decision of any court who could rule “that a negro ... had no rights under the Constitution that a white man was bound to respect.”⁸⁰

These sentiments simmered beneath the surface for a time, but with the onset of the secession crisis and the outbreak of civil war, they quickly re-emerged. The Supreme Court may have ruled the church divided and both sides were entitled to their share of the property, but a noisy and powerful segment of the northern connection made clear they did not concur. Parson Brownlow, the famed Unionist and Methodist from eastern Tennessee, delivered a fiery sermon in McKendree Chapel in Nashville in early 1862. To an enraptured crowd, he announced his intention to convene with northern Methodists to develop a plan to “put these seceders and rebels out, and recover the church property, which rightfully belongs to us and not the traitors.” He did not miss the significance of the Nashville Book Concern either, which resulted directly from the Supreme Court’s ruling in *Smith v. Swormstedt*. He identified the publishing house as the source of “so much treason,” and argued it was “not the property of the rebels,” but belonged “to the loyal Methodists, and we mean to have it back.”⁸¹ Matthew Simpson received a report from a chaplain in Nashville who believed they could show “the M.E. Church South as a body was thoroughly disloyal, and more, that every cent of her property belongs to us.”⁸²

⁸⁰ Fuller, *An Appeal to the Records*, 268.

⁸¹ “Parson Brownlow in Nashville,” *Daily Intelligencer*, November 11, 1862, *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*, Library of Congress, <https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn84026845/1862-11-29/ed-1/seq-1>.

⁸² Kirby, “The McKendree Chapel Affair,” 361; Clark, *The Life of Matthew Simpson*, 231.

The Division Deepens

The Civil War created an environment in which northern Methodist leaders could take their strong conviction that the southern Methodist leaders had done wrong – that they had unlawfully seceded from the true church, and on top of that, carried Methodist property off with them – and pursue a course that could secure them the justice they thought they deserved. The time was ripe for action, and if northern Methodist leaders were shrewd and assertive, they could use the confusion sowed by the armed conflict to reincorporate the lost congregations of the South into the true church, overcoming stout and occasionally violent resistance.

Brownlow was one of the most outspoken censurers of the southern clergy, but heated rhetoric had traveled on a two-way street since the denominational schism in the 1840s. Increasingly, southern ministers had come to view their northern counterparts as godless heretics. While that claim may seem dubious to modern readers, southern ministers believed their case was axiomatic. In the great slavery debate, southerners insisted their side of the argument was supported by the Bible itself. Jesus never condemned the practice; the Old Testament fathers participated in it; and Paul urged a runaway slave to return and submit himself to it. Northern abolitionists were left to appeal to the “spirit” of the Bible – essentially, could one imagine Jesus owning slaves himself?⁸³ However, in departing from a literal interpretation of scripture, southern ministers claimed abolitionists discarded biblical authority. Arguments like this led southerners like the venerated New Orleans Presbyterian, Benjamin Morgan Palmer, to characterize the “abolition spirit” as “undeniably atheistic.”⁸⁴ Furthermore, southern ministers considered slavery a political institution, placing it outside of the purview of ministers who should concern

⁸³ Rable, *God's Almost Chosen Peoples*, 14.

⁸⁴ Benjamin Morgan Palmer, *Slavery a Divine Trust: The Duty of the South to Preserve and Perpetuate the Institution* (New York: George F. Nesbitt & Co. Printers, 1861), 11.

themselves chiefly with moral and religious questions.⁸⁵ When northern ministers condemned slavery, southern preachers believed they disregarded scriptural authority and secularized their pulpits.

Furthermore, the nebulous nature of the Methodist schism created an environment in which these opposing forces were bound to find themselves in continuous jurisdictional conflict. Following the Plan of Separation in 1844, some northern bishops attempted to maintain a clear ecclesiastical boundary between the northern and southern sections, but the indeterminate jurisdictional border made any distinction difficult. As time moved on, the northern connection began slowly creeping into the southern Methodist church's territory. Two years after the schism, the northern connection maintained only one conference in a border state – the Baltimore conference. In 1849, following northern repudiation of the Plan of Separation, the *Minutes of the Annual Conferences* noted a newly formed Missouri conference. The next year they added a conference in western Virginia. By 1852, the connection boasted an additional Cincinnati and Kentucky conference, and the Missouri section grew into the larger Missouri and Arkansas conference. In 1856 the Methodist Episcopal Church boasted fully-formed conferences in western Virginia, Kentucky, Missouri, and Arkansas – the Arkansas conference including a Texas district.⁸⁶ The existence of northern conferences among the border states can likely be attributed to the messy nature of the Methodist schism, but the presence of the northern connection in Texas suggests a steady creeping of the Methodist Episcopal Church into southern territory.

⁸⁵ Rable, *God's Almost Chosen Peoples*, 23.

⁸⁶ *Minutes of the Annual Conferences of the Methodist Episcopal Church for the Years 1846-1851* (New York: Carlton & Porter, 1856), 409, 540; *Minutes of the Annual Conferences of the Methodist Episcopal Church for the Year 1852* (New York: Carlton & Porter, 1852); *Minutes of the Annual Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church for the Year 1856* (New York: Carlton & Porter, 1856), 185.

Admittedly, the Methodists had frequently touted an intention to go where providence led. At the genesis of the Methodist movement, John Wesley brazenly defied parish boundaries because he believed God determined where and when he should preach.⁸⁷ Whether all northern and southern Methodist preachers still clung to Wesley's interpretation of providence is impossible to tell, but by the middle of the 1850s, both sides seemed to share his willingness to disregard the ecclesiastical boundaries determined under the Plan of Separation. Bishop Simpson's assertion that the northern church was not sectional has already been noted, but Bishop Pierce of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, likewise proclaimed his connection knew "no North, or South, or East, or West." While advocating church expansion in California, he declared the southern church could go "any where and every-where" because their only focus was to preach the Gospel.⁸⁸ The southern church followed through on this declaration, preaching the gospel, and organizing churches, within the bounds of the Cincinnati district and the Philadelphia conference.⁸⁹

In the 1850s, this mutual antipathy sharpened the divide between the two sections of the Methodist church. Particularly, southerners came to resent any incursion by the northern connection into what they viewed as their jurisdiction. The historian Bertram Wyatt-Brown, in his seminal work *Southern Honor*, argued southern justice emphasized "retention of power in local hands" and resisted "the interference of external and abstract principles of justice."⁹⁰ The northern Methodists, now thoroughly identified, at least in southern eyes, with abolitionism,

⁸⁷ Heitzenrater, *Wesley and the People Called Methodists*, 112.

⁸⁸ Charles Elliott, *Southwestern Methodism: A History of the M.E. Church in the South-West 1844-1864* (Cincinnati: Poe and Hitchcock, 1868), 223.

⁸⁹ Fuller, *An Appeal to the Records*, 205, 219.

⁹⁰ Bertram Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor: Ethics and Behavior in the Old South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 391.

were external threats who subscribed to “abstract principles of justice” that differed from the southern population.

Southerners increasingly viewed northern Methodists’ presence among them as a threat to their sense of honor and justice, which, if left unchecked, would ultimately undermine their institutions and way of life. Lawmakers in Virginia passed a bill that made owning a copy of the northern Methodist *Western Christian Advocate* a felony punishable by anywhere from two to five years in prison.⁹¹ Citizens of Fabius, Missouri resolved that the “peace and best interests of the community require (Methodist Episcopal Church ministers) from this time and forever hereafter, desist from visiting and preaching among us.”⁹² A southern Methodist convention in Rochester, Missouri declared the Methodist Episcopal Church “a nuisance – a stench in the nostrils of our people,” further ordering that there was “no good or satisfactory reason why a southern community should tolerate the existence of a church in their midst, which declares that its members can not hold slaves, that the institution of slavery is against the spirit of religion.”⁹³ A collection of southern Methodists in Texas characterized the northern connection as “a secret foe” who “lurked in their midsts” and entertained “sentiments antagonistic to the institution of slavery.” In their view, northern Methodism served as a guise for those who advocated abolition, and it “ought not ... to be tolerated by the people of Texas.”⁹⁴

If there is anything to be gleaned from the southern Methodist attitude towards northern Methodists in the decade preceding the Civil War, it is that toleration was indeed becoming a rare practice. In a number of southern communities, efforts to prevent or remove the influence of

⁹¹ Sweet, *The Methodist Episcopal Church and the Civil War*, 29.

⁹² “Martyrdom of Bewley,” in *The Methodist Quarterly Review*, vol. 45 (New York: G Lane and P.P. Sanford, 1863), 630.

⁹³ Sweet, *The Methodist Episcopal Church and the Civil War*, 31.

⁹⁴ Elliott, *Southwestern Methodism*, 128.

the Methodist Episcopal Church turned violent. Abraham Lincoln received a letter from northern minister T.B. Bratton who claimed the proslavery party in Missouri had “mobbed and murdered our ministers – they have defamed our character as a church – they have denied us the common hospitality of citizens and our worst foes are those of our own house in the M.E. Church, South.”⁹⁵ The mere presence of northern ministers in southern communities inspired outrage. A lawmaker in Virginia proposed a bill banning all “nonresident, incendiary preachers” from the state.⁹⁶ In Atchison, Kansas, Pardee Butler, a Methodist minister from Missouri, became a target of pro-slavery residents who felt he was too vocal about his anti-slavery views. They forced him down to the river, placed him on a raft, and warned him never to return. Ignoring their warnings, Butler returned a year later to an angry mob who tarred and feathered him.⁹⁷

Complicating matters, proslavery southerners simplified the slavery debate until it was binary. Any degree of antislavery sentiment held by northern preachers landed them clearly in the abolitionist camp – an especially dangerous camp to belong to if one was stationed in the South. Bishop Pierce of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, issued a declaration in the *Southern Christian Advocate* declaring:

Abolitionists cannot and ought not to be tolerated in the Southern States. No quarantine will justify their admission; no fumigation can disinfect them. Rank, rotten with the foul virus of an incurable disease, foes of God and man, spies and traitors to their country and their kind, let them stay where they belong.⁹⁸

⁹⁵ T.B. Bratton to Abraham Lincoln, November 23, 1860, in *Abraham Lincoln papers: Series 1. General Correspondence. 1833 to 1916*, Library of Congress, <https://www.loc.gov/item/mal0461300/>.

⁹⁶ Clark, *The Life of Matthew Simpson*, 211.

⁹⁷ Sweet, *The Methodist Episcopal Church and the Civil War*, 33-34.

⁹⁸ “Martyrdom of Bewley,” in *The Methodist Quarterly Review*, 629.

Even ministers who considered themselves moderate in regard to slavery found themselves increasingly isolated and scrutinized in the southern states. In 1860, the Texas legislature felt the need to take action against those they perceived to be dangerous incendiaries. Their legislature passed a measure authorizing the people to take the law into their own hands in order to chase all suspicious persons from the state. Punishments could be meted out as the people saw fit, even up to and including execution.⁹⁹ Essentially, Texas legalized mob action against anyone deemed dangerous to the state--including abolitionists.

In the midst of this dangerous political firestorm stepped the northern Methodist Anthony Bewley. Bewley had served as a presiding elder in the Texas district under bishops Simpson in 1855, Osman C. Baker in 1856, and Ames in 1857. His antislavery sentiment was considered “of the mildest type.”¹⁰⁰ Although he was not an abolitionist, Bewley simply held, just as the Methodist Episcopal Church held, that slavery was “a great evil and ought to be extirpated.”¹⁰¹ Mild as it may have been, this position was enough to earn Bewley a number of enemies in Texas. In 1860, Bishop Ames re-appointed Bewley as the superintendent and missionary to the Texas district, and the situation in the state was not lost on the new appointee.¹⁰² He planned to remain as inconspicuous as possible, simply holding prayer meetings with German immigrants along the Nueces River. However, persecution still became so intense Bewley felt he needed to leave the state. In July, Bewley and his family set off for Indian Territory. Once they escaped Texas, the traveling party headed east to Benton County, Arkansas, where they soon learned they

⁹⁹ “Martyrdom of Bewley,” in *The Methodist Quarterly Review*, 628.

¹⁰⁰ “Reverend Anthony Bewley,” in *Pomeroy Weekly Telegraph*, November 2, 1860, *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*, Library of Congress, <https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn85038184/1860-11-02/ed-1/seq-1/>.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰² *Minutes of the Annual Conferences of the Methodist Episcopal Church for the Year 1860* (New York: Carlton & Porter, 1860), 4.

had not quite escaped the clutches of the Texas mob. While the family was resting in Elm Springs, Arkansas, a group of men led by a southern Methodist preacher approached and ordered Bewley to leave. The family listened and immediately departed for Missouri. However, they were soon followed by a band of Arkansans who questioned Bewley about his views on slavery. They threatened to hang him. They told him to leave and then stopped him before he could. Eventually they said he should leave immediately for Illinois or Indiana.¹⁰³

Unfortunately for Bewley, he decided to rest in Barry County, Missouri where he thought he was out of harm's way. Yet even in southwest Missouri, the Fort Worth and Sherman committees, empowered by the Texas legislature, propelled the circulation of notices among southern Methodists promising a one-thousand-dollar reward to anyone who returned Bewley to Texas. A mob soon apprehended Bewley in Cassville, Missouri, and hauled him back to Texas for trial.¹⁰⁴ Officially, Bewley was charged with organizing a series of insurrectionary fires in Texas, but northerners held that "the whole and only charge against him" was that "he was a sound member of the M.E. Church, and antislavery according to her principles."¹⁰⁵ Bewley was taken from Missouri by a mob, carried back to Texas, and hung.¹⁰⁶

In the years between the Plan of Separation and the outbreak of the Civil War, the southern church had become increasingly intolerant of ministers belonging to the northern connection. The execution of Anthony Bewley, who one northern Methodist called "our Stephen" in reference to the first Christian martyr, was an extreme example--one that northerners believed exemplified everything that had turned rotten in the South.¹⁰⁷ Regarding slavery,

¹⁰³ "Martyrdom of Bewley," in *The Methodist Quarterly Review*, 633-635.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ Elliott, *Southwestern Methodism*, 357.

southerners' narrow-mindedness was nearly unconscionable, lumping all degrees of antislavery sentiment into one large abolitionist bucket. As the *Pomeroy Weekly Telegraph* stated, "the difference between abolitionists and anti-slavery men ... is not recognized in Texas."¹⁰⁸ Southerners then classified these "abolitionists" as insurrectionists, subversive to southern institutions. And because these people were perceived to be a threat to the southern way of life, mob violence against these northern ministers was sanctioned and, in some cases, authorized by state and local governments. In the northern view, numerous Methodist ministers had fallen victim to increasingly aggressive and unthinking mobs who were bowed in obeisance to the institution of slavery.

The execution of Anthony Bewley, in some respects, served as the *coup de grace* for northern Methodist ministry in the antebellum South. The Arkansas conference, which contained the Texas district, watched its membership decline every year between 1856 and 1860. By 1861, it was no longer able to stand on its own and was incorporated back into the Missouri conference.¹⁰⁹ By the commencement of the Civil War, the Methodist Episcopal Church was not only effectively barred from the deep southern states, its membership in the border states had declined precipitously. In 1844, the Methodist church held 325,016 congregants in border states; by 1861 that number had shrunk to 114,524.¹¹⁰ Still, despite the turbulent division of the church into northern and southern sections, both sections prospered. By 1861, the northern Methodists alone boasted a membership of nearly one million people.¹¹¹ The southern connection, while not

¹⁰⁸ "Reverend Anthony Bewley," in *Pomeroy Weekly Telegraph*, November 2, 1860, *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*, Library of Congress, <https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn85038184/1860-11-02/ed-1/seq-1/>.

¹⁰⁹ *Minutes of the Annual Conferences of the Methodist Episcopal Church for the Year 1861* (New York: Carlton & Porter, 1861), 17.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 241.

¹¹¹ Sweet, *The Methodist Episcopal Church and the Civil War*, 46.

as large, still enjoyed around six-hundred-thousand white and black members.¹¹² The northern connection had continued its numerical growth despite the drastic loss of territory, but the violent opposition to their activities in the southern and border states effectively limited the northern church to the northern states.

¹¹² David Young, Samuel Hart Wright, William Harrison De Puy, *The Methodist Almanac* (New York: Carlton and Porter, 1861), 26.

THE POLITICAL BISHOP

Although the Methodist Episcopal Church was effectively barred from the South, their leadership maintained a keen desire to re-establish a unified Methodist Episcopal Church that blanketed the country, and in the midst of the chaos of the Civil War the northern Methodists appeared to have their chance to reincorporate the South. The structure of the Methodist Episcopal Church, with its itinerancy and rotating episcopacy, created ministers and bishops who held deep and intimate knowledge concerning states and cities all over the country. Federal officials, largely locked away on the east coast, viewed Methodist bishops as increasingly valuable assets. High ranking officials in the Lincoln administration who searched for any barometer on the pulse of the country at large highly prized the Methodists' first-hand knowledge of the country. Lincoln himself was reputed to have praised Bishop Simpson as "a wise and thoughtful man" who "travels extensively over the country, and sees things as they are." For these reasons among others, Lincoln claimed he "could depend upon him for such information" as he needed.¹¹³

Of course, government officials were not the only ones to benefit from this working relationship. Cynically, leading politicians may have seen in the expansive membership of the Methodist Episcopal Church a source of votes, but the northern Methodist leaders also recognized that a close connection with the Lincoln administration provided their leaders greater input on everything from policy to office appointments. Few Methodist leaders seemed to perceive the power of a working relationship between church and state more, nor cultivate it more vigorously, than Bishop Edward Raymond Ames.

¹¹³ G.R. Crooks, *Life of Bishop Simpson* (New York: Harper & Brothers, Franklin Square, 1890), 372.

Rising in the West

Ames was a westerner with ancestral roots embedded deeply in American history. He was from the same Ames' line as the founding father Fisher Ames, and his grandfather had died at Valley Forge while serving as a chaplain in the continental army. His family migrated to the Northwest Territory in 1798, and Ames was born in Ohio in 1806.¹¹⁴ When he turned twenty, he attended Ohio University, and although he did not complete his formal education there, the place was destined to have a lasting impact on the trajectory of his life.

While in attendance, Ames witnessed a Methodist revival that erupted among the student body, led by reverends Henry S. Fernandez and Robert O. Spencer, which seized him and other students with new-found religious fervor. In an episode John Wesley would have been proud of, Ames experienced “evidence of sins forgiven,” and began his association with the Methodist Episcopal Church. In 1828, Ames attended the Ohio conference, which was presided over by Bishop Roberts, in an attempt to “see the mode of operation.” Ames must have made quite an impression; Roberts took notice of the young man, advising him to go further west, where he would find a way open to “extensive usefulness.”¹¹⁵ The young apprentice agreed, accompanying the bishop to the Illinois conference, and beginning his long rise through western Methodism. The Illinois conference sent Ames to Lebanon, Illinois, to launch a denominational high school which later became McKendree College.¹¹⁶ Ironically, the man who did not complete his own formal schooling began his career in Methodism by promoting education.

Nonetheless, Ames felt he was destined for more than a college presidency. Convinced he was “moved of the Holy Ghost to preach the Gospel,” he sought to escape the world of

¹¹⁴ Thomas Eddy, “Bishop Ames,” in *The Ladies Repository*, Vol. 19, Issue 1 (January 1859), 1.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 2.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 2.

education by applying to the Illinois conference to be an itinerant preacher. Ames was simply imbibing the attitude of the church with his shift from education to ministry. The Methodist church, for much of its history, held a bias against ministers going to college. The Discipline of 1784 encouraged prospective ministers, if forced to choose between ministry and education, to “let your studies alone. We would throw by all the libraries in the world rather than be guilty of the loss of one soul.” The famed western Methodist Peter Cartwright described educated preachers as “lettuce growing under the shade of a peach tree,” and another Methodist accused theological schools of forming “learned dunces and second- and third-rate preachers.”¹¹⁷ Methodists believed if one was called to preach, they should preach. Why waste time with education?

Within the conference, however, some believed Ames lacked the fitness to be successful in the itinerancy. Traveling preachers journeyed great distances on primitive roads through trying conditions, and Ames’ detractors believed he “would never face a single snow-storm.” Regardless, his license was approved, and he evidently acquitted himself well because he was elected the Corresponding Secretary of the Missionary Society for the South and West in 1840. Over the four years he held this position, Ames traveled some twenty-five thousand miles, which must have served as satisfying vindication considering the early questions about his fitness for the itinerancy.¹¹⁸ Ames was tireless, and his travels continued even when he attained higher posts in the Methodist church. In 1852, he was elected bishop alongside Matthew Simpson, Levi Scott, and Osman C. Baker, and he soon became the first Methodist bishop to see the Pacific Ocean.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁷ Sweet, *Methodism in American History*, 223-224.

¹¹⁸ Eddy, “Bishop Ames,” 2.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 3.

While noted for his powerful oratory, Ames also distinguished himself through his business acumen.¹²⁰ He served on the committee that decided to launch the *Western Christian Advocate*, a denominational newspaper in Cincinnati that grew to have one of the largest circulations of any of the Methodist advocates by 1864.¹²¹ He also earned a reputation as an exceptional fundraiser; the *Vermont Christian Messenger* claimed he excelled anyone they had ever seen at raising “just the amount he sets out for in the beginning.”¹²² His fundraising prowess earned him an appointment to the Fourth Street Methodist Church in St. Louis in 1837.¹²³ By the end of his first year, Ames’ charge, which had three percent of the Missouri Conference’s membership, increased their weekly offering to the point they contributed 37 percent of the money collected for the conference. Ames accomplished this all while suffering from what was likely malaria.¹²⁴

Ames’ philanthropic efforts were not sectional. In 1840, the Indiana conference selected Ames as one of their representatives at the General Conference in Baltimore. While tensions over slavery simmered between the two sections of the as yet undivided church, Ames attempted to serve as a conciliating force. When Bishop Soule appealed for funds to repair a dilapidated church in Natchez, Mississippi, Ames rose and pledged ten dollars of his own money. Ames frequently employed this technique, pledging his own money to inspire further giving from others, and in this case, it resulted in a five-hundred-and-forty-dollar pledge for the beleaguered church.¹²⁵

¹²⁰ Stimple, “Bishop Edward Raymond Ames,” 31.

¹²¹ Sweet, *The Methodist Episcopal Church and the Civil War*, 111.

¹²² *Vermont Christian Messenger*, March 3, 1863, Newspapers.com.

¹²³ Stimple, “Bishop Edward Raymond Ames,” 28; Volkman, *Houses Divided*, 95.

¹²⁴ Stimple, “Bishop Edward Raymond Ames,” 28.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, 38.

To a segment of northern Methodists, however, the pledge to the Natchez church could have been strong evidence of a conspicuous flaw of the bishop's. Unlike many of his peers, Ames was a Democrat, which left him prone to the accusation that he was too light on the issue of slavery.¹²⁶ This was not the only criticism some Methodists directed towards Ames. His success as a businessman raised suspicions that he was a financial speculator--a perception no doubt reinforced by his tendency to dress finely.¹²⁷ Even those who praised Ames provided descriptions that did not necessarily fit the stereotypical "man of the cloth." The bishop traveled the country extensively with "other than purely ecclesiastical results." His vast knowledge of the country gave him an edge when investing in public lands, which he and his friends did safely and profitably. A saying circulated in Indiana that "a scheme in which the bishop has a hand is sure to succeed."¹²⁸

Ames also attained a reputation for shrewdness supported by a puritanical conviction that his course was the right course of action to take. Even his admirers conceded he could "do a hard thing when he thinks it ought to be done--and perhaps he sometimes thinks so when others would differ from him."¹²⁹ Additionally, he was gifted with such "natural powers of strategy, had he been a politician," he would have "made a formidable antagonist."¹³⁰ One northern Methodist editor even argued Ames "would have long since been a United States Senator" if he had dedicated himself to political pursuits.¹³¹ Perhaps this description of Ames was prescient. Although he was just one of a number of religious officials who straddled the line between

¹²⁶ Clark, *The Life of Matthew Simpson*, 136.

¹²⁷ Clark, *The Life of Matthew Simpson*, 209; Stimple, "Bishop Edward Raymond Ames," 10.

¹²⁸ "Sketches of Methodist Bishops," *Raftsmen's Journal*, May 30, 1860, *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*, Library of Congress, <https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn85054616/1860-05-30/ed-1/seq-1/>.

¹²⁹ Eddy, "Bishop Ames," 1.

¹³⁰ "Sketches of Methodist Bishops," *Raftsmen's Journal*, May 30, 1860, *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*, Library of Congress, <https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn85054616/1860-05-30/ed-1/seq-1/>.

¹³¹ Elliott, *Southwestern Methodism*, 271.

politics and religion, his name would soon become eponymous with a federal order equipping the Methodist Episcopal Church with the power of the national military.

By the outbreak of the Civil War, the Methodist Episcopal Church may have been the largest denomination in the country, but its representation at the highest level of government was sparse. Ames, along with other Methodist leaders, recognized the necessity of cultivating relationships with leading officials in order for Methodism to exert a greater degree of influence on the country at large. This was more than political maneuvering; these men believed strongly that the tenets of Methodism were right, and by leveraging their connections with government officials, bishops felt they were not just furthering Methodism, but working for the best interests of the country.¹³² Methodists were not entirely without connections, however, and they enjoyed special influence with Senator James Harlan of Iowa, one of Bishop Simpson's former students from his time at Indiana Asbury University.¹³³ Harlan, who served twice in the Senate and later as the Secretary of the Interior, frequently represented the Methodist will in government and even leveraged his prestige to bolster fundraising efforts for various ecclesiastical causes.¹³⁴ Despite their influence with Harlan, the leaders of the Methodist Episcopal Church, as the largest denomination in the country, felt they had been denied their proper influence at the highest levels of previous presidential administrations.

In the King's Court

When Abraham Lincoln assumed his place in the White House in 1861, he brought with him a new collection of cabinet officials with whom Methodist leadership hoped to gain

¹³² Clark, *The Life of Matthew Simpson*, 160.

¹³³ Morrow, *Northern Methodism and Reconstruction*, 94.

¹³⁴ "Missionary Effort," *Christian Advocate and Journal*, February 18, 1864.

influence. Early in the war, the radical Governor of Indiana, Oliver P. Morton, afraid of Copperhead interception, utilized Bishop Ames to relay messages to the Lincoln administration.¹³⁵ This gave Ames valuable contact with the highest levels of government--an opportunity he would not waste. Once introduced to the cabinet, Ames, along with Bishop Simpson, cultivated relationships with receptive members of Lincoln's administration. Two of the most responsive officials were also the most radical, and like the two bishops, westerners. Simpson and Ames set out to cultivate working relationships with the Secretary of War, Edwin Stanton, and the Secretary of the Treasury, Salmon P. Chase.¹³⁶ Chase had once praised Simpson's criticisms of the Fugitive Slave Law, and he was even reported to consult Ames when making appointments within his department.¹³⁷ Simpson had known the Secretary of War, Edwin Stanton, since their time in Cadiz, Ohio in the 1830s. Ostensibly religious, Stanton frequently asked clergymen to pray in meetings, and he was convinced God directed the Union efforts during the war.¹³⁸ Simpson, who himself viewed current events as the result of providence, must have felt he had found a kindred spirit.

Every member of Lincoln's cabinet was not as welcoming of these Methodist bishops as were Stanton and Chase. At one point, Bishop Simpson grew concerned that Methodists were being denied positions within Montgomery Blair's postal department. Simpson wrote the Postmaster General and asked for a complete list of postal employees with indications as to which were Methodists. Blair denied Simpson's request and disclaimed any bias by responding he "had servants in his kitchen who were Methodists." Simpson responded by suggesting Blair

¹³⁵ Stimple, "Bishop Edward Raymond Ames," 84-85.; Edwin Stanton to Oliver P. Morton, August 13, 1862, in *The War of the Rebellion: a compilation of the official records of the Union and Confederate armies, series 3, vol. II*, 375.

¹³⁶ Clark, *The Life of Matthew Simpson*, 227.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, 227.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, 226.

believed Methodists were “fit for the kitchen, but not for Office in Washington.”¹³⁹

Despite Blair’s resistance, the relationship between the northern Methodist bishops and Lincoln’s cabinet paid quick dividends. In early 1862, Stanton selected Bishop Ames and future Secretary of State Hamilton Fish to serve on a commission to investigate the status of federal prisoners in Richmond, Virginia.¹⁴⁰ Ames’ appointment generated opposition from a chaplain in the First Virginia Cavalry, Darbey Ball, a long-time Methodist minister from the Baltimore conference.¹⁴¹ Ball, who had resigned his position to offer his services to the Confederacy, wrote to Jefferson Davis to warn him of the dangers in Ames’ appointment to inspect prisons in Richmond. He labeled Ames “an uncompromising anti-slavery man, not to say abolitionist.” Ball also recognized the northern connection’s courting of Lincoln’s cabinet. He explained to Davis that Ames, along with others on the bench of bishops, “sought to impress upon the present President of the United States and his cabinet upon their accession to power the fact the Methodist Church, very numerous in the North and West, had peculiar claims upon the Government for a liberal share of the spoils of office, as they had so largely contributed to Mr. Lincoln’s election.”¹⁴² Ball argued Ames, among others, used his “high position in our Church in the North” to “augment the power of the abolition party.” He concluded by warning Davis “against this astute politician, who in the garb of a Christian minister ... would insinuate himself into the very heart of that Government whose very foundation he would most gladly sap and destroy.”¹⁴³

¹³⁹ Clark, *The Life of Matthew Simpson*, 228.

¹⁴⁰ “The Situation,” *New York Herald*, January 28, 1862, *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*, Library of Congress, <https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn83030313/1862-01-28/ed-1/seq-4>.

¹⁴¹ *Darbey Ball to Jefferson Davis*, February 5, 1862, in *The Methodist Episcopal Church and the Civil War*, William Warren Sweet (Cincinnati, Ohio: Methodist Book Concern Press), 208.

¹⁴² Sweet, *The Methodist Episcopal Church and the Civil War*, 209.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, 210.

Both Ames and Fish conducted themselves shrewdly on this expedition south. Publicly, the two men were turned back at Norfolk by Confederate leadership, but the full story was more complicated.¹⁴⁴ The Confederate Secretary of War, Judah P. Benjamin, hoped to draw the two amateur diplomats into negotiations of a broader character regarding prisoner exchange.¹⁴⁵ Benjamin instructed General Huger to detain Ames and Fish in Norfolk, and sent Charles M. Conrad and James A. Seddon to propose to save the two men time by reinstating all prisoners on fair and equal terms.¹⁴⁶ The two commissioners rightly discerned what was afoot, and quickly wired Stanton that Benjamin had presented “matters not intrusted to us.”¹⁴⁷ The two men conferred with General Wool at Fortress Monroe, who later informed Seddon and Conrad their instructions had been referred to the Secretary of War himself.¹⁴⁸ Wool then sent clarification to the Confederate General Huger that Ames and Fish’s responsibilities had been limited to “providing for the comfort of prisoners if allowed to do so.”¹⁴⁹ Instead of falling into the political trap prepared by Confederate leadership, Ames and Fish exhibited caution and discernment. Rather than moving forward with their mission to provide relief to federal prisoners, they remained within the chain of command and refused to overextend their authority. They waited

¹⁴⁴ “Latest News,” *Union County star and Lewisburg chronicle*, February 11, 1862, *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*, Library of Congress, <https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn85038443/1862-02-11/ed-1/seq-1>; “Return of Commissioners Fish and Ames,” *Cincinnati Daily Press*, February 14, 1862, *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*, Library of Congress, <https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn84028745/1862-02-14/ed-1/seq-3/>; “From Richmond,” *The Camden confederate*, February, 7. 1862, *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*, Library of Congress, <https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn85042595/1862-02-07/ed-1/seq-2/>.

¹⁴⁵ Stimple, “Bishop Edward Raymond Ames,” 81.

¹⁴⁶ *Benjamin Huger to Major General John Wool*, February 2, 1862, in *The War of the Rebellion: a compilation of the official records of the Union and Confederate armies, series 2, vol. III*, 248.

¹⁴⁷ *Edward Ames and Hamilton Fish to Edwin Stanton*, February 9, 1862, in *The War of the Rebellion: a compilation of the official records of the Union and Confederate armies, series 2, vol. III*, 248.

¹⁴⁸ *Major General John Wool to Edwin Stanton*, February 2, 1862, in *The War of the Rebellion: a compilation of the official records of the Union and Confederate armies, series 2, vol. III*, 249.

¹⁴⁹ *Major General John Wool to Major General B. Huger*, February 13, 1862, *The War of the Rebellion: a compilation of the official records of the Union and Confederate armies, series 2, vol. III*, 259.

for word from Stanton and returned from Fortress Monroe immediately upon his instructions.¹⁵⁰

While Ames' first commission south by Stanton was restricted in scope and ultimately unsuccessful, in less than two years he would embark on another endeavor into the southern states, commissioned by Stanton, and supported by the strength of the United States military. Ames acted shrewdly when faced with opposition while on a mission of limited scope, but how would he perform when his authority was much more sweeping and the opposition much weaker?

One Side or the Other

To be sure, Ball's warning to Jefferson Davis about Ames' blending of political and ecclesiastical affairs fit popular southern perceptions of the northern clergy at-large. To southerners, the antislavery position of the northern Methodist church belied an ultimate intention to undermine the economical and hierarchical structures of southern society. While Ball worried about Ames and other northern bishops' impact on political institutions, southern rhetoric increasingly depicted northern ministers as evil villains for their antislavery efforts. Following the hanging of Anthony Bewley in Texas, the southern Methodist *New Orleans Advocate* claimed Bewley and other "incendiaries," as the "advance guard" of the "Black Republicans," had intended to kill men, women, and children, and dedicate the young women to a "far more horrible fate." The writer blamed northern Methodist editors for supporting these revolutionary schemes, and condemned Bishop Janes, a man previously described as "constitutionally careful" and "generally found on the conservative side," for turning the country against southern leaders. After laying the blood for Harper's Ferry, Kansas, and even Saint

¹⁵⁰ *Edward Ames and Hamilton Fish to Edwin Stanton*, February 14, 1862, *The War of the Rebellion: a compilation of the official records of the Union and Confederate armies, series 2, vol. III*, 262.

Domingue on the heads of northerners, the writer concluded, “How a man can reach abolitionist doctrines ... and not be a villain, our casuistry does not enable us to determine. Such a man is logically an incendiary and a murderer, whatever he may be in purpose.”¹⁵¹

Northern Methodist leaders must have considered the labels of incendiaries and murderers tame in comparison to insults levied by W.C. Hazlip in the Washita Conference Journal in February of 1861:

The Methodist, and other Northern religious papers are saturating the mind with the fatal, wicked theories of abolitionism, that spasm of satanic fanaticism ... We do pray God, and shall pray God, in mercy, to deliver them from these doctrines of devils ... Dear brethren, the devil has beclouded you ... You are wrong, as the Lord liveth, you are wrong ... Proclaim a solemn fast, and pray over your past course ... That is what the Church wants.¹⁵²

As is often the case, the problems that plagued the country at large were plaguing the church as well. The rhetoric fired between the two connections of Methodism only intensified as political tensions increased. No longer “just” incendiaries, southerners came to depict northern Methodist actions as guided by the devil himself.

Likewise, northern ministers, who for years attempted to mollify the dispute between abolitionists in the North and slaveholders in the South, increasingly took fortified positions against the southern connection.¹⁵³ One antebellum newspaper described Bishop Morris as one whose “southern proclivities” were “supposed to be pretty strong,” who even had a son who was a southern Methodist preacher.¹⁵⁴ In 1855, Morris had refuted the claim that the northern church

¹⁵¹ Elliott, *Southwestern Methodism*, 221; “Sketches of Methodist Bishops,” *Raftsmen’s Journal*, May 30, 1860.

¹⁵² Elliott, *Southwestern Methodism*, 241.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*, 62.

¹⁵⁴ “Sketches of Methodist Bishops,” *Raftsmen’s Journal*, May 30, 1860.

sent ministers to Missouri to promote abolitionism, claiming, “Our bishops are not abolitionists themselves, and of course they do not seek to make abolitionists of others; neither are we proslavery men.” Yet by May of 1861, this conservative, southern-leaning bishop of the northern connection wrote, “The question before the American is, Government or no Government?” Morris urged “all the friends of God and their country” to “take the affirmative side of the question, and the rest may take the negative side or no side at all ... He that is not for us is against us. There is no middle ground.”¹⁵⁵ Bishop Ames declared to the Genessee Conference in the same month that if he was called to join the Union ranks he would shoot fast and fire into the Confederate army “most benevolently.”¹⁵⁶ A Nashville contributor to the *Central Christian Advocate* dubbed all southern Methodists “skulking rebels,” and labeled the whole Southern Methodist Book Concern as “corrupt.”¹⁵⁷ Just as it did for the southerners, the early months of the conflict only made right and wrong clearer for northern ministers. In their eyes, the leaders of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South were complicit with Jefferson Davis and Alexander Stephens for bolstering the cause of secession.

Northern ministers were buttressed in their patriotic zeal by the fiery denominational press. The *Northwestern Advocate* called on its readers to form one party, “that of devotion to the government, the honor of our flag, and vindication of right.” Not to be outdone, the *Buffalo Advocate* declared, “The time has come when the mind of every citizen must be made up either for or against the government, for maintaining or depressing the honor of the country.”¹⁵⁸

These northern Methodist attitudes toward secession and the South soon took the form of formal resolutions in annual conferences across the denomination. The Missouri and Arkansas

¹⁵⁵ Elliott, *Southwestern Methodism*, 269.

¹⁵⁶ Clark, *Life of Matthew Simpson*, 218.

¹⁵⁷ Elliott, *Southwestern Methodism*, 382.

¹⁵⁸ “The Methodist Press,” *Christian Advocate and Journal*, April 25, 1861.

Conference in 1863, presided over by Bishop Ames, likened governmental authority to ecclesiastical authority when they claimed, “Both are alike of Divine authority and obligation.” They pledged their cooperation and unswerving support to overthrow the rebellion, and declared an “undiminished confidence in the patriotism of the chief executive of the nation,” to whom they pledged their “hearty support in all measures adopted for the restoration of the authority of the government in the rebellious states.”¹⁵⁹ The Missionary Society of the Cincinnati Conference elected Ulysses S. Grant an honorary member, and while Grant expressed his gratitude, it is fair to say his “mission” in the South was a little different than those of Peter and Paul of the New Testament.¹⁶⁰ The New York Annual Conference pronounced it “covert treason” to say one was loyal to the government but not the administration.¹⁶¹ The Central Ohio Conference announced “loyalty to the government is our motto;” Rock River claimed, “as Christian ministers we can only say this rebellion must be subdued; this Constitution must be maintained.” The Cincinnati Conference delivered an imposing pledge to “besiege the Throne of God in behalf of the cause of liberty and good order,” and “to continue our efforts publicly and privately as ministers and as citizens in behalf of our government.”¹⁶²

Some conferences went as far as to welcome civil leaders to administer loyalty oaths to the ministers in their conference. The members of the New York East Conference welcomed a judge to administer the oath to “support, protect, and defend the Constitution and the Government of the United States against all enemies,” and to “bear true faith, allegiance, and loyalty to the same, and to do so “with a full determination, pledge and purpose, without any

¹⁵⁹ *Minutes of the MEC Missouri and Arkansas Conference*, March 4-7, 1863 (St. Louis: Maslin and Stinson Printer, 1863).

¹⁶⁰ “Letter from Major Gen. Grant,” *Weekly Times Democrat*, January 16, 1864, Newspapers.com.

¹⁶¹ James H. Moorhead, *American Apocalypse: Yankee Protestants and the Civil War, 1860-1869*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1978), 153.

¹⁶² Sweet, *Methodism in American History*, 284-285.

mental reservation or reason whatsoever.”¹⁶³ Northern Methodists took pride in their loyalty to the government and relished the opportunity to publicly express it through their conference proceedings and denominational newspapers. Inviting civil authorities to administer a loyalty oath to church officials was advertised as proof of the Methodist Episcopal Church’s dedication to prosecuting the war and putting down the rebellion.

Those who opposed the increasingly political nature of church proceedings found themselves swimming against a tide of patriotic enthusiasm. At the New York Conference in April of 1863, delegates responded to a report denouncing slavery and treason with such wild enthusiasm that Bishop Scott, who was presiding over the conference, was forced to declare his disapproval “of the manner in which members indicated the approval of their report.” Against this cheering, clapping of hands, and stamping of feet, a Mr. Cattell declared he “would not swallow” the conference’s resolutions on slavery. Although “he would support the Government in every just constitutional measure to carry on the war ... he would never give up his right to free speech.” Cattell’s position invited the vocal and enthusiastic disapprobation of the conference who shouted and hissed him down.”¹⁶⁴ The position of the northern church, at least among its northern conferences, had steadily and staunchly become one of loyalty to the federal government and the Lincoln administration, accompanied by a desire to prosecute the war vigorously and seek the extirpation of slavery.

Those not aligned with those objectives were firmly outside the mainstream of northern Methodist sentiments. Bishop Simpson presided over the Philadelphia conference, whose pledge of loyalty to the government passed one hundred and six votes to fourteen. Members of the

¹⁶³ Sweet, *Methodist Episcopal Church and the Civil War*, 71.

¹⁶⁴ “New York Methodist Episcopal Conference--Resolution in Favor of the War--a Stormy Scene,” *Lima Times Democrat*, May 6, 1863, Newspapers.com.

conference urged suspension or location for one of those opposed, a Reverend P. Coombe, because the work along the border “would be injured if he were not suspended.”¹⁶⁵ At the New Jersey conference, a motion was made to display the United States flag in the conference hall. One minister opposed the motion, claiming the procedure was “useless, and an undignified yielding to popular excitement.”¹⁶⁶ The minister himself called the rebellion “accursed,” and advocated shouldering arms and marching to the field, but the raising of the flag he considered an empty gesture. In the end, the motion carried by a large majority, and even the opposed minister voted in favor of it--his reservations to the raising of the flag swept away in a wave of patriotic enthusiasm. Those who opposed overt politicization in the North were frequently overwhelmed by popular sentiment; that was not always true, however, in the border region.

The Plan of Separation in 1844 had created a murky denominational environment in states like Maryland, Kentucky, and Missouri, where the political feelings of Methodists were more likely to be a blend of the country’s population at large. The northern church had a very minimal presence in the state of Kentucky, but the southern church in the bluegrass state, somewhat counterintuitively, leaned strongly towards the Union.¹⁶⁷ A Methodist minister proclaimed to the Missouri conference that “the Methodist minister who does not sustain the Government of the United States is a heretic, and Charles Elliot, the editor of the northern Methodist *Central Christian Advocate* in St. Louis, declared his state was in the Union and would continue in the Union.”¹⁶⁸ Northern Methodists in Missouri worked diligently to make Elliott’s words ring true, and they experienced enough success to fuel continued efforts to organize and strengthen the church in a dangerously divided state. The northern church in St.

¹⁶⁵ “Philadelphia Conference,” *Christian Advocate and Journal*, March 26, 1863.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁷ Sweet, *Methodist Episcopal Church and the Civil War*, 56.

¹⁶⁸ Elliott, *Southwestern Methodism*, 372, 357.

Louis grew rapidly, and new churches were organized in Bowling Green, Danville, Mexico, and Kansas City. In the latter four, loyal ministers from the southern Methodist church crossed the denominational divide to fill their pulpits.¹⁶⁹ The presiding elder of the St. Joseph district reported, “Scarcely a week passes but we receive either written or verbal requests to furnish preaching. Send us a LOYAL MINISTER is the cry on all hands.”¹⁷⁰ These successes fueled the efforts of the Methodist Episcopal Church in Missouri and cultivated the perception in the northern press that the ultimate triumph of the northern connection in the state was inevitable.

But opposition existed along the border regions, taking its form in both mild and extreme acts. In the spring of 1861, an ecumenical assembly of local ministers in St. Charles, Missouri gathered to craft certain resolutions regarding the nascent conflict. They disclaimed war as a “calamity, contrary to the spirit and teaching of the gospel,” and pledged “to abstain as far as possible from all bitter and exciting controversy upon the questions now agitating the public mind.”¹⁷¹ Neutrality had become an increasingly difficult position to maintain in the years preceding the Civil War, but once war erupted, it was virtually untenable. At a time where neutrality was viewed as covert treason, and even conservative Methodist leaders like Thomas Morris argued there was no middle ground, the St. Charles resolutions bordered dangerously close to disloyalty.

Both northern and southern Methodists attempted to assert themselves in the border states, sometimes in the face of violent opposition. In Leesburg, Missouri, a northern minister was forced to flee a weapon-wielding mob in early 1861. One year later, the northern Methodists responded by sending the Reverend Nathan Shumate to reorganize a congregation there. In a

¹⁶⁹ Elliott, *Southwestern Methodism*, 443.

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 430.

¹⁷¹ Leftwich, *Martyrdom in Missouri*, 138-139.

surreal scene, the Leesburg Methodists prepared for their nightly worship meeting by arming themselves and appointing pickets outside of the church. When Shumate assumed the pulpit to preach the nightly sermon, he intentionally placed his revolver where everyone could see it. The northern Methodists' fears were well-founded. A southern-leaning mob assembled outside the church, determined to break up the service. Lucky for Shumate and his congregants, a spy for the mob had staked out the church, and when he returned to his co-conspirators he reported that Shumate had declared that he was ready to preach or fight. He urged caution because Shumate “haint’ got all them guns for nothing.” The mob retreated, and the service continued as planned.¹⁷² Few men had the courage and resolve of Nathan Shumate. He boldly led his congregation through a dangerous night, but events in Leesburg show just how precarious the northern Methodist position could be in Missouri.

While the northern church attempted to solidify themselves along the border, they suffered a critical defection. The Baltimore conference had long straddled the ideological and theological lines that divided northern and southern Methodists. Their conference boundary encompassed both slave and free territory, so prior to the Plan of Separation, they had refused to appoint slaveholding ministers because any slaveholder would immediately be unacceptable to some congregations in their conference. The best way to satisfy all parties was to choose ministers who were non-slaveholders who would be acceptable in all of their charges.¹⁷³ Although this stance bothered southern leaders, the Baltimore Conference’s vow to never make slaveholding a test of membership placated them. Likewise, when the East Baltimore conference passed patriotic resolutions early in the war, a member of the Baltimore conference judged they

¹⁷² Elliott, *Southwestern Methodism*, 326-328.

¹⁷³ Matthews, *Slavery and Methodism*, 244-245.

“had done incalculable harm.”¹⁷⁴ As the ideological divisions became wider between the sections, the Baltimore conference’s ability to bridge the chasm became unworkable.

The Baltimore conference’s position was further complicated by the “new chapter” on slavery. At the 1860 General Conference, the northern Methodists adopted a new rule which declared, “Buying, selling, or holding human beings as chattels is contrary to the laws of God and nature; inconsistent with the Golden Rule, and with that rule in our Discipline which requires all who desire to remain among us to do no harm, and to avoid evil of every kind.” The delegates admonished, “All our preachers and people to keep themselves pure from this great evil, and to seek its extirpation by all lawful and Christian means.”¹⁷⁵ When the northern Methodists insisted non-slaveholding be a condition of membership, the Baltimore Conference withdrew, declaring it “would hold no ecclesiastical connection with any religious body making non-slaveholding a test of membership.” The conference withdrew its pledges from the General Conference and determined to be “separate and independent” of the northern Methodist body. Leveling disparagement at the northern General Conference, the *Baltimore Advocate* taunted the body as “in truth, of no great importance to the Church,” noting it “had secular affairs to manage which the Church would be better without.”¹⁷⁶ Although initially independent, the Baltimore body later arranged to send three fraternal messengers to the next General Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, and expressed the “hope that the time is near at hand when, upon terms equally honorable to both parties, we may meet upon a common platform, whereby we shall become one people and one Church.”¹⁷⁷ The southern Methodists must have been elated; the

¹⁷⁴ “The Baltimore Conference,” *Christian Advocate and Journal*, April 2, 1863.

¹⁷⁵ Sweet, *Methodism in American History*, 263.

¹⁷⁶ “The Methodist Press,” *Christian Advocate and Journal*, April 25, 1861.

¹⁷⁷ “Report on the State of the Church,” *Richmond Christian Advocate*, April 17, 1862, Library of Virginia.

previous fall the *Richmond Christian Advocate* had urged the absorption of the Baltimore conference into the southern connection; “Let preachers, circuits, stations, and even a conference inform the bishops, or any one of them, that they desire to unite with the Southern Methodist Church, and by episcopal authority union will be at once affected.” The paper even promised to assimilate the new charges without molestation, insinuating they would accept the transfer of whole churches as is.¹⁷⁸ The episode of the Baltimore conference is especially interesting in light of later southern complaints about church confiscation. It seems that both sides were willing to absorb churches from the other connection when presented with the opportunity.

Likewise, both sides exhibited a willingness to purge those ministers from their ranks who were perceived as “disloyal.” The northern emphasis on loyalty was widespread, and the Ohio, Illinois, and Indiana conferences expelled thirty ministers for disloyalty to the government.¹⁷⁹ Southerners, despite all their complaints about the northern tendency to carry politics into the pulpit, expelled all unionist preachers from the Holston conference.¹⁸⁰ Unfortunately for the southern Methodists, one of the expelled preachers was the thunderous Parson Brownlow, who afterwards resolved to “resurrect the *Knoxville Whig*, and pour hot shot into their rotten hulks.” Brownlow inaugurated his assault on the southern Methodists in a speech in McKendree Chapel in Nashville, where he testified to the character and service of some of his expelled brethren by noting their patriotic service extended all the way back to fighting alongside Andrew Jackson at Horseshoe Bend.¹⁸¹ Brownlow remained true to his word. He revived the

¹⁷⁸ Elliott, *Southwestern Methodism*, 219-220; Fuller, *An Appeal to the Records*, 305-307.

¹⁷⁹ Rable, *God's Almost Chosen Peoples*, 231.

¹⁸⁰ “Methodist Conference Report,” *Knoxville Whig*, February 13, 1864, Newspapers.com.

¹⁸¹ “Parson Brownlow in Nashville,” *Daily Intelligencer*, November 29, 1862, *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*, Library of Congress, <https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn84026845/1862-11-29/ed-1/seq-1>.

Knoxville Whig and through it directed a steady stream of provocative and disparaging criticism at both southern Methodists and the Confederacy in general.

In the border region, both sides anxiously attempted to draw clear distinctions between sides. Those in the deep South could be reasonably certain of their neighbors' political opinions, and the same could be said for many regions in the North. Border states, however, were composed of a diverse group of residents with competing views on the war. For federal and state authorities, a failure to identify those civilians who were disloyal risked leaving secessionist sympathy unchecked within their borders. Early in the war in Missouri, the state convention passed an ordinance requiring all civil officers to subscribe to an oath of allegiance to the United States, and because of their prominent and influential role within their respective communities, it was required of ministers of the gospel.¹⁸² While in command of the Department of Missouri, General Henry Halleck issued General Orders No. 29, which required employees of the University of Missouri, railroad agents, government contractors, and "all clergymen, professors and teachers, and all officers of public and private institutions for education, benevolence, business and trade" to publicly display their pride and patriotism by taking the oath of allegiance so "they may be distinguished from those who wish to encourage rebellion."¹⁸³

Outward signs of loyalty were not limited to the oath of allegiance. Special Orders 10, directed towards the Methodist Episcopal Church, South meeting in Westport, Missouri, required the American flag to be "conspicuously displayed" in front of the pulpit where the meeting was held.¹⁸⁴ William S. Fish, the Provost Marshal in Baltimore issued a similar order to fly American

¹⁸² Leftwich, *Martyrdom in Missouri*, 143.

¹⁸³ *Ibid.*, 177-178.

¹⁸⁴ Leftwich, *Martyrdom in Missouri*, 337.

flags over every congregation in the city. When one minister responded by ripping the flag out of his church, Fish had him arrested.¹⁸⁵

Measures taken against the churches and ministers in Missouri foreshadowed future proceedings against southern churches in the ever-expanding Union zone of control. Although not a perfect precursor, the interactions between the military and ecclesiastical authorities in Missouri signaled a conviction that the questions of who was preaching, what was being preached, and how it was preached in local churches held dramatic implications for communities, states, and the country itself.

The Stage is Set

By the fall of 1863, war had transformed the South dramatically. The Union army controlled the Mississippi River, anchored by their control of New Orleans, Vicksburg, and St. Louis. Northern forces occupied four southern capitals: Little Rock, Arkansas, Jackson, Mississippi, Baton Rouge, Louisiana, and Nashville, Tennessee.¹⁸⁶ Northerners were further energized by reports like those from John Adams, who upon returning from a trip through Virginia, North Carolina, Georgia, Alabama, and Tennessee, professed to have conversed “extensively” with leaders of the rebellion in those states. He claimed these leaders regarded “their final defeat as inevitable” and expressed “a willingness to accede to any terms which shall not humiliate and disgrace them.”¹⁸⁷

¹⁸⁵ Holm, *A Kingdom Divided*, 101.

¹⁸⁶ “Little Rock Campaign,” Encyclopedia of Arkansas, last modified December 3, 2018, <https://encyclopediaofarkansas.net/entries/little-rock-campaign-517>.

¹⁸⁷ “An Important Letter,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, August 30, 1863, *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*, Library of Congress, <https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn84031490/1863-08-30/ed-1/seq-1/>.

Northern Methodists intensely monitored the country's steadily advancing prospects, and the reports of southern Methodists that filtered their way northward closely resembled Adams' more general account. Parson Brownlow zealously recounted what many northerners considered the southern connection's "moral defection," culminating in its current state as an "apostate Church." Although once united, Brownlow insisted the 1844 schism launched the two denominations on radically different trajectories, and the southern church, after wedding itself to the perpetuation of the institution of slavery, was morally bankrupt. Brownlow concluded that any suffering endured by the southern church was simply God's retribution for their sins of the preceding decades.¹⁸⁸

More specifically, northerners believed God's punishment was directed at the leaders of the southern connection, those who knowingly and maliciously misled their congregations to support secession. As early as 1861, the editor of the *Central Christian Advocate*, Charles Elliot, insisted many southern Methodists were "beginning to see how they were misled by the cotton States' influence in 1844 and since," and were now "for the Union."¹⁸⁹ By 1862, Elliott wrote, "In most of the Southern Methodist Churches there are more or less members who have ceased to attend the ministrations of their Church, and are anxiously waiting an opportunity to unite with our Church."¹⁹⁰ Southern congregants were often exempted from northern condemnation, who generally described them as pliable and suggestable adherents who simply followed the advice and direction of their leaders.

When it came to the leaders of the southern Methodist church, northerners held nothing back. The Nashville Book Concern, the major publishing house of the Methodist Episcopal

¹⁸⁸ "The Methodist Church South," *Knoxville Whig*, April 30, 1864, Newspapers.com.

¹⁸⁹ Elliott, *Southwestern Methodism*, 317.

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 390.

Church, South, and also a possible storage facility for Confederate ordinance, resided in the Tennessee capital. Because the Union army entered central Tennessee relatively early in the conflict, the staff of the Book Concern were some of the first southern Methodist leaders to feel the pressure of approaching troops.¹⁹¹ An army chaplain wrote that many businessmen from the Nashville Book Concern left the city to serve in the Confederate army under Beauregard at Shiloh. They, along with other southern Methodists who abandoned Nashville, left the southern church's "moral, intellectual, and religious operations to languish and die."¹⁹² Parson Brownlow, preaching in McKendree Chapel in Nashville, condemned the southern clergy "who on the approach of the Federal army" abandoned the chapel.¹⁹³ Northern leaders reveled in the newly created church vacancies across the South, albeit under the guise of incredulity, and used the flights of southern clergy to illustrate the cowardly and selfish nature of men who had led the South into the war. Timelessly, ministers have been compared to shepherds, watching over and tending their sheep against outside threats. Northern ministers, and border officials like Brownlow, intended to carry the metaphor through to its conclusion. Southern flocks had been abandoned by their "shepherds," who at the first sense of danger to themselves, fled for safer pastures. How could these men retain any shred of dignity or moral integrity after such failings?

To be sure, southern Methodists along the border found it difficult to avoid controversy. K.J. Stewart was the minister at St. Paul's Church in Alexandria, Virginia. A vocal secessionist, Stewart's life grew more complicated when federal troops marched into his city. When he omitted a prescribed prayer for the President of the United States, a group of soldiers attempted

¹⁹¹ Elliott, *Southwestern Methodism*, 394.

¹⁹² *Ibid.*, 397.

¹⁹³ "Parson Brownlow in Nashville, *National Daily Intelligencer*, November 29, 1862, *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*, Library of Congress, <https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn84026845/1862-11-29/ed-1/seq-1>.

to force him to comply. When he still refused, they had him arrested. Stewart was later released, but his case exposed the vulnerable position of southern-leaning ministers in Union-occupied territory. Their opinions were widely known, and they were expected to share them with their congregations every week. No other group had to worry about publicly praying for the President of the United States, but all eyes were fixed on those ministers whose refusal to comply could generate headlines.¹⁹⁴

Northern Methodists compounded the effect by espousing their own patriotism and pledging their unwavering support to the cause of Union. Bishop Ames presided over the Missouri and Arkansas conference when they pledged their “undiminished confidence in the patriotism of the chief executive of the nation,” and pronounced their support for everything from conscription to the Emancipation Proclamation.¹⁹⁵ With their unwavering support for the President and his policies solidified, the northern Methodists turned their patriotic gaze to southern fields, where they began to see the leadings of providence.

Upon the northern army’s approach, leading citizens, including ministers, reportedly fled southern cities, leaving their churches pastorless.¹⁹⁶ Slavery was struggling towards its dying end at the hands of Lincoln’s Emancipation Proclamation, and northerners believed its death would eliminate the only significant point of division between the two sections. Furthermore, northern Methodist leadership received reports like one from Seth Reed in Nashville, who reported “the prevailing opinion among the Southern Methodists is that their church is disorganized beyond the hope of recovery ... Most of all the churches in Nashville and through middle Tenn. were left

¹⁹⁴ Blair, *With Malice Toward Some*, 115-116.

¹⁹⁵ Missouri and Arkansas Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, *Missouri and Arkansas Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church to Abraham Lincoln*, March 4, 1863, *Abraham Lincoln papers: Series 1. General Correspondence. 1833-1916*, Library of Congress, <http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.mss/ms000001.mss30189a.2227600>.

¹⁹⁶ Kirby, *The McKendree Chapel Affair*, 360.

by the pastors on the arrival of our army ... and they are now standing empty or are occupied by the government.” [emphasis in original]¹⁹⁷ The removal of slavery, combined with the ecclesiastical vacuum caused by fleeing ministers, captured the imaginations of northern leaders, who believed the Methodist Episcopal Church enjoyed an opening to enter and redeem a humbled and disorganized South.

The flight of southern ministers was one sign, but providence evinced itself in other ways as well, specifically through the physical investment made by the North on southern battlefields. Matthew Simpson justified the Methodist Episcopal Church’s interest in the “southern field” as one inspired by the blood that had been shed there, “not the blood of our enemies merely, but the blood of our own sons.”¹⁹⁸ Northerners believed God used their armies to bring his judgement upon the Confederacy, but that judgement came at a cost. Surely God’s purposes extended beyond death and destruction. Northern Methodists saw in the ruins of the southern church an opportunity to rebuild and reorganize one true, national Methodist church.

The remnants of southern civilization, however, also contained a number of destitute and suffering people. The needs of these people were so great they required the efforts of a number of benevolent forces to meet them. The way of providence seemed so evident that Matthew Simpson declared the northern church would be derelict in its duty if it refused to take vigorous action in the South. Although there were needs among both whites and blacks, northern Methodists took a particular interest in the needs of the freedmen.¹⁹⁹

It is a common misconception that emancipation brought immediate contentment and liberty to slaves in southern states. As federal troops marched South and the institution of

¹⁹⁷ *Seth Reed to Matthew Simpson*, November 23, 1863.

¹⁹⁸ “Anniversary of the Missionary Society,” *Christian Advocate and Journal*, February 18, 1864.

¹⁹⁹ “Anniversary of the Missionary Society,” *Christian Advocate and Journal*, February 18, 1864.

slavery dissolved, many former slaves found themselves without any safety net. Those brave enough to escape their masters found themselves in contraband camps or in crowded cities, often in undesirable conditions.²⁰⁰ The historian Jim Downs argued northerners fought for the abstract cause of ending slavery but failed to consider what that process would look like once realized. He estimated tens of thousands of newly emancipated slaves died from the unforeseen, but nonetheless deplorable, conditions that emerged following the dissolution of slavery²⁰¹ Some found new employment as paid manual laborers, but their precarious and vulnerable status often led to exploitation. General David Hunter reported from western Mississippi and eastern Arkansas, where he noted freedmen earned just under three dollars a month for their work, when their labor was probably worth nearly two hundred dollars a month. These men, Hunter lamented, were “compelled to work at these prices or starve.”²⁰²

Although unable to solve the wage problem, private philanthropy attempted to help in other ways. Relief societies organized in major northern cities marshaled their resources to send teachers to the southern states. These people were charged with encouraging, guarding, and instructing the former slaves, essentially filling the social roles that had disappeared with the masters and mistresses of the old plantation system.²⁰³ Those who embarked on these humanitarian and educational ventures in the South did so in the face of certain opposition. A man named Milton organized a school for African American children in the basement of the Beale Street Baptist Church in Memphis. Within two weeks, the school survived an arson attack. Two weeks after that it was assailed by an armed mob. Milton met with General Veatch, the

²⁰⁰ “Letter from Memphis,” *Christian Advocate and Journal*, February 18, 1864.

²⁰¹ Jim Downs, *Sick from Freedom: African American Illness and Suffering During the Civil War and Reconstruction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 7, 16.

²⁰² David Hunter, *David Hunter to Edwin Stanton*, January 27, 1864, *Edwin McMasters Stanton Papers: Correspondence, 1831-1870; 1863; 1863, Nov. 28-1864, Feb. 27*, Library of Congress, <http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.mss/ms010150.mss41202.020>.

²⁰³ John M. Hay and John G. Nicolay, *Abraham Lincoln, a History*, vol. 6 (New York: Cosimo Classics, 2009), 92.

commander in charge of Memphis, who affirmed his legal and moral rights to operate the school but confessed “the expediency was very doubtful.” Veatch reminded Milton that he contended with the prejudices of the entire city and would be in constant danger of public interruption and secret assassination. Veatch conceded that not only could he not protect Milton from assassination, but also that he likely would not even be able to prosecute the perpetrators should the event occur. Although the military placed armed guards outside of the school, the mob soon shifted their tactics to securing the title of the building.²⁰⁴

Many freedmen across the South were vulnerable, exploited, and destitute. Northern Methodist leaders believed they had the potential to cultivate and bring prosperity to the newly emancipated slaves, and they hoped those freedmen would play a pivotal role in the reorganization of the Methodist church in the southern states. Charles Elliott praised the “antislavery character” of the Methodist Episcopal Church and commended its salutary influence “promoting freedom” in the border states. He argued the church had a similar effect in the southern states before being “thrust out.” Elliott maintained the “truly religious colored people” scattered across the South would come to form “the nuclei of the numerous Methodist churches that will yet flourish in the South.”²⁰⁵

²⁰⁴ “Colored Schools in Memphis,” *Daily Gate*, April 17, 1863, *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*, Library of Congress, <https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn83025182/1863-04-17/ed-1/seq-2>.

²⁰⁵ Elliott, *Southwestern Methodism*, 118.

GOING DOWN TO DIXIE

At their meeting in the fall of 1863, the bishops of the Methodist Episcopal Church agreed to “explore” the possibility of establishing operations in the southern states.²⁰⁶ In early November, the northern Methodist Missionary Society resolved to appropriate 35,000 dollars to send missionaries to the southern states.²⁰⁷ The appropriation comprised a fraction of the 400,000 dollars the Missionary Society raised the previous year--it was barely more than the amount allocated for missions in Scandinavia.²⁰⁸ Nonetheless, it indicated, albeit somewhat tepidly, the northern church’s willingness to move southward. Two weeks before any war department communication delineated any official plan for ecclesiastico-military collaboration in the South, reports surfaced indicating Bishop Ames was to go to New Orleans, and Bishop Simpson was to travel to Nashville.²⁰⁹

Some northern ministers suspected a large segment of southern Methodists were loyal to the true Methodist Church and that any venture South would meet quick success. Parson Brownlow, writing to Bishop Simpson from eastern Tennessee, contended two-thirds of the members in his region were loyal and that “only the preachers showed themselves to be traitors.”²¹⁰ In Missouri, loyal members of the southern connection transferred to the northern

²⁰⁶ Kirby, *The McKendree Chapel Affair*, 361.

²⁰⁷ “The Re-establishment of the Methodist Episcopal Church in the South,” *Cleveland Tri-Weekly Leader*, November 17, 1863, *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*, Library of Congress, <https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn83035163/1863-11-17/ed-1/seq-2>; “The South,” *Christian Advocate and Journal*, February 11, 1864.

²⁰⁸ “The Missionary Appropriations,” *Zion’s Herald and Wesleyan Journal*, November 11, 1863; “The Re-establishment of the Methodist Episcopal Church in the South,” *Cleveland Tri-Weekly Leader*, November 17, 1863, *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*, Library of Congress, <https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn83035163/1863-11-17/ed-1/seq-2>.

²⁰⁹ “The Re-establishment of the Methodist Episcopal Church in the South,” *Cleveland Tri-Weekly Leader*, November 17, 1863, *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*, Library of Congress, <https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn83035163/1863-11-17/ed-1/seq-2>.

²¹⁰ Clark, *The Life of Matthew Simpson*, 233.

church in both the town of Edina and Grundy County.²¹¹ The workings of providence must have seemed crystal clear. Disloyal ministers, who had not only divided the church but shouldered considerable blame for splitting the country in an effort to maintain slavery, had fled their congregational charges. Southern Methodist members, now leaderless, destitute, and wise to the folly of their previous course, would be ready and willing to reenter the northern fold. Northern Methodists believed the time had come to retrieve these lost southern sheep, and secular northerners recognized the benefit such a move could provide. It was not just a question of conquering the South militarily, “but the people must be won back to confidence and sympathy.” What better way to restore that confidence than through reestablished religious ties?²¹² If the Methodist Episcopal Church acted wisely, the soon-to-be reunited country could be mended together by a newly reunited Methodist church.

Furthermore, the northern connection’s desire to aid the freedmen resonated with members of both the War Department and the military. Edwin Stanton sent commissioners to the southern states in the spring of 1863 to determine the true condition of the freed population.²¹³ Despite the northern Methodists’ explorations of a missions effort in the south, it was a Brigadier General, John P. Hawkins who reportedly first conceived of a plan to send loyal northern Methodists south. Hawkins was no stranger to the blurred lines between praying hands and shouldering arms brought on by the war. Early in the conflict, while stationed in Ray County, Missouri, Hawkins arrested a southern Methodist preacher for preaching without a license.²¹⁴ In October of 1863, Hawkins hoped to utilize the power of the church for more constructive means.

²¹¹ “Methodist Intelligence,” *Zion’s Herald and Weekly Journal*, November 11, 1863.

²¹² The Re-establishment of the Methodist Episcopal Church in the South,” *Cleveland Tri-Weekly Leader*, November 17, 1863, *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*, Library of Congress, <https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn83035163/1863-11-17/ed-1/seq-2>.

²¹³ *Edwin Stanton to Robert Dale Owen, James McKaye, and Samuel G. Howe*, March 16, 1863, in *The War of the Rebellion: a compilation of the official records of the Union and Confederate armies*, series III, volume III, 73-74.

²¹⁴ Leftwich, *Martyrdom in Missouri*, 320.

He wrote a letter to Bishop Ames that served two purposes. First, he appealed to Ames' pecuniary reputation by asking him to encourage northerners to farm abandoned southern plantations using freedmen as laborers. Second, he discussed the difficult position of many freed slaves, many of whom were Methodists. Hawkins pressed the bishop to provide some sort of relief.²¹⁵ Regardless of the subsequent course taken by the northern Methodists, Hawkins appeared sincere in his desire to aid the freedmen. Later, when describing Ames' mission to a friend, Hawkins said Ames was setting out to determine the condition of the freedmen. He explained, "We have freed these people and must now give them some show for making an honest living, and a chance for their elevation."²¹⁶ Evidently, Hawkins' message resonated; Ames left for Washington D.C. to meet with Edwin Stanton in hopes of enlisting the War Department in the operation.²¹⁷

Upon his arrival in Washington, Bishop Ames conferred with his fellow bishops.²¹⁸ While it is unclear what was covered in those discussions, it occurred just a couple of days before Ames' meeting with Stanton, and the result of the bishop's meeting with the Secretary of War was more clear--a sweeping directive popularly styled after the two men--the Stanton-Ames order. Stanton empowered Ames with sweeping authority:

To the Generals commanding the Departments of the Missouri, the Tennessee, and the Gulf, and all Generals and officers commanding armies, detachments, and corps, and posts, and all officers in the service of the United States in the above mentioned Departments.

You are hereby directed to place at the disposal of Rev. Bishop Ames all houses of worship belonging to the Methodist Episcopal Church South in which a loyal minister who has been appointed by a loyal Bishop of said church, does not now officiate.

²¹⁵ Clark, *The Life of Matthew Simpson*, 231.

²¹⁶ John P. Hawkins to Caleb Mills, December 11, 1863, *Caleb Mills Family Papers*, Indiana Historical Society.

²¹⁷ Kirby, *The McKendree Chapel Affair*, 361.

²¹⁸ Morrow, *Northern Methodism and Reconstruction*, 33.

It is a matter of great importance to the Government, in its efforts to restore tranquility to the community and peace to the nation, that Christian ministers should, by example and precept, support and foster the loyal sentiment of the people.

Bishop Ames enjoys the entire confidence of this Department, and no doubt is entertained that all ministers who may be appointed by him will be entirely loyal. You are expected to give him all the aid, countenance, and support practicable in the execution of his important mission.

You are also authorized and directed to furnish Bishop Ames and his clerk with transportation and subsistence when it can be done without prejudice to the service, and will afford them courtesy, assistance, and protection.²¹⁹

The War Department's order conveyed extraordinary power on Bishop Ames, both explicitly and through its ambiguity. In addition to enjoying "all the aid, countenance, and support" of the War Department, Ames was effectively given the ability to determine who among southern Methodist ministers were "loyal."

Historian George Rable noted Stanton's loyalty requirement effectively brought all southern Methodist churches under the new order.²²⁰ Indeed, if Ames could evict any minister appointed by a disloyal bishop, nearly every southern Methodist officiant was vulnerable. Northerners maintained the southern episcopacy was instrumental in both the denominational and national splits. The southern press assured their readers that even the southern bishops residing behind enemy lines, Joshua Soule and H.H. Kavanaugh, were "thoroughly loyal to the South."²²¹ The Stanton-Ames order authorized northern authorities to remove any southern ministers appointed by disloyal bishops, regardless of their own political leanings. The bishops' "thorough" loyalty to the South only served to jeopardize any appointments made during their tenure.

²¹⁹ "Church and State," in *Weekly National Intelligencer*, February 25, 1864, *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*, Library of Congress, <https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn83045784/1864-02-25/ed-1/seq-3>.

²²⁰ Rable, *God's Almost Chosen Peoples*, 331.

²²¹ "Meeting of the Methodist Bishops," *Charlotte Democrat*, April 19, 1864, Newspapers.com.

Thus equipped, Bishop Ames prepared to embark on what one southern Methodist, William B. Leftwich, dubbed his “Episcopal raid upon the Southern Methodist Churches.”²²² Leftwich described Ames’ southern mission as one that closely resembled those of Grant, Sherman, and Butler. Under the Stanton-Ames order, the bishop was equipped with the authority to “confiscate, seize, and appropriate” church property throughout the South, just as the generals did with civilian property. “What reward for loyalty had been especially set apart for the M.E. Church,” Leftwich asked. He answered his own question emphatically, “Make the M.E. Church a part of the military arm of the Government; invest the Bishops with ecclesiastico-military authority; supply them with transportation, supplies, and military escorts; make Department Commanders subject unto them, and if the great rebellions is not put down, the great national Church will be put up, and the property of traitors will be converted to loyal uses.”²²³ One southern editor condemned Ames’ mission as one that “caps the climax of Yankee despotism and meanness.”²²⁴

Northern perceptions differed considerably from their southern counterparts. The *Chicago Tribune* argued the moral degradation of southern pulpits demanded outside interference “lest the Republic shall suffer detriment from the spiritual advisers.” The influence of religious leaders in the South was so profound southerners did “little thinking for themselves,” so loyal men needed to replace the disloyal, and the property they occupied should be confiscated “when utilized for traitorous ends.”²²⁵ Charles Elliott argued Ames’ mission was in accordance with the law of nations, that rebel property was forfeited to the nation from which

²²² Leftwich, *Martyrdom in Missouri*, 253.

²²³ *Ibid.*, 252-253.

²²⁴ Sweet, *Methodism in American History*, 296.

²²⁵ “Bishop Ames and His Mission,” *Chicago Tribune*, February 18, 1864, Newspapers.com.

they rebelled.²²⁶ In the western theatre, General Halleck had ordered Ulysses S. Grant to treat southern sympathizers “without gloves,” and that he should take their property for public use.²²⁷ Why should southern churches be treated any differently? *The Methodist* maintained the need for southerners to be gathered into loyal churches, and that the southern church was “shivered to atoms” and unlikely to ever meet in a general conference again.²²⁸ Ames’ mission by some was described in almost biblical terms. The *Chicago Tribune* urged Ames to “go on quenching the fiery darts of ministerial traitors and elevating the church from its slough of treason, into the pure light of freedom and religion.” The paper pronounced his work “great and noble ... by no means secondary to the cannon and bayonet. The latter will pave the way, the former will improve it.”²²⁹ One of the most tempered endorsements came from a Buffalo newspaper that classified Ames’ efforts as “bold business” before wishfully stating, “May it be successful.”²³⁰

What was Ames’ mission South intended to be? His order from the War Department was markedly vague, and that ambiguity caused broad disagreement over the nature and purpose of Ames’ mission. Some political and religious leaders maintained that Ames and subsequent Methodist officials were simply empowered to place loyal preachers in vacant churches on a temporary basis. Under this interpretation, the bishop was to simply provide religion to those who were deprived of it. Others believed that he would actively eradicate secessionism from the pulpit by scrutinizing the actions and words of Methodist preachers and ejecting those who failed to live up to common notions of loyalty. This more militant interpretation painted Ames as a crusader penetrating enemy territory beside Union arms, restoring the one true Methodist church

²²⁶ Elliot, *Southwestern Methodism*, 462.

²²⁷ *Henry Halleck to U.S. Grant*, August 2, 1862, in *The War of the Rebellion*, series I, volume xvii, part II (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1887), 150.

²²⁸ Clark, *Life of Matthew Simpson*, 231.

²²⁹ “Bishop Ames and His Mission,” *Chicago Tribune*, February 18, 1864, Newspapers.com.

²³⁰ “Bishop Ames’ Visit South,” *The Advocate*, February 18, 1864, Newspapers.com.

just as federal troops worked to restore the Union. Which interpretation was correct? It likely depended on when and where one decided to direct their scrutiny. Whatever Stanton's intentions in issuing the order, the broad application to such a sensitive realm as the religious sphere generated strong opposition. That hostility, at least ostensibly, forced even the venerable Secretary of War to alter his approach. The location of these church confiscations mattered just as much when it came to how they were conducted and the reactions they generated among the local population. Once publicized, the southern press largely attacked the Stanton-Ames order, but the local reactions differed widely from South Carolina to Memphis to New Orleans to Baton Rouge. The one commonality was the obvious weakness of southern Methodist officials to prevent the confiscation and occupation of their houses of worship across the federally-occupied South. The lasting impact of Stanton-Ames lies not so much in the immediate course of events, but in the way those events came to be interpreted after the war.

To be sure, the first church confiscations did not occur under Bishop Ames. Often times, churches were some of the larger buildings in a given location, so the military requisitioned them for use as barracks, hospitals, or temporary headquarters. Sometimes they were even torn down for firewood.²³¹ Because these buildings were already in the hands of the military, little seemed amiss when they were informally availed to military chaplains to conduct services, as was the case in Baton Rouge with N.L. Brakeman.²³² Brakeman's initial use of the southern Methodist church seems to have generated little opposition (outside of his attempts to hold integrated services); it seems likely the local population viewed Brakeman's situation as unofficial and temporary, which made the arrangement much easier to tolerate.

²³¹ Holm, *A Kingdom Divided*, 134; Stowell, *Rebuilding Zion*, 22.

²³² "Religious Intelligence," *New Orleans Times Democrat*, November 5, 1863, Newspapers.com.

Pre-Stanton-Ames property disputes in the border region were more dramatic. In Missouri, some conflicts were initiated by northern Methodist ministers themselves. The congregation in Independence was pastorless when James Lee, a northern Methodist minister, demanded possession of the church property. When he was rebuffed by the congregation, he recruited the military authorities to force the trustees to transfer control of the church to him.²³³ In Louisiana, Missouri, the courts upheld the actions of northern Methodists who maneuvered those sympathetic to their connection on to the board of trustees of the local church.²³⁴ When the southern Methodist minister M.M. Pugh fled from Kansas City, northern Methodists filled his vacated pulpit and organized a new society, one described by a noted southern Methodist as full of “northern fanatics . . . and weak-kneed Methodists.”²³⁵ No doubt the effective absence of Confederate forces in Missouri emboldened these moves, especially in the larger cities. As in the case of Lee in Independence, these northern Methodists may have initiated the move to reclaim southern churches, but they could forge ahead with the confidence that federal troops would support them.

Edward Ames’ expedition, while sharing some similarities to those in Missouri, was more strategic and formalized. Property disputes in Missouri were localized, and the aggrieved parties could appeal to local authorities. Ames’ commission was national, at least at first, and approved by arguably the second most powerful man in the country. Any wronged parties were extremely limited in their avenues for appeal; they had to hope for an adjustment from the War Department, the President, or the Supreme Court. Furthermore, Ames, whether driven by time or

²³³ Leftwich, *Martyrdom in Missouri*, 189.

²³⁴ *Ibid.*, 213.

²³⁵ *Ibid.*, 184-185.

pecuniary considerations, held close to major river and railroad towns. These were exactly the types of locations where federal control was strongest.

The Southern Swing

Ames' ambitious trip southward began in Memphis. By the winter of 1863, this western Tennessee river town had been under federal occupation for nearly eighteen months. Military officials wrestled with the typical questions that come with occupying hostile cities. The commander Grant placed in charge in Memphis, General James C. Veatch, earned a reputation as one who had successfully brought order "out of the chaos and confusion which prevailed in things military and civil in Memphis." His resume was impressive enough that some recommended him for command of the Department of Missouri.²³⁶ All was not peaceful in Memphis, however, and local sentiment was evidenced through General Sherman's regulation of Memphis press. Special Orders 264 forced newspapers published in the city to cease discussion on movements of the army and measures of the government. Sherman concluded his order with a flourish, declaring the papers were not to comment on officers or soldiers within the army because "neither the editors nor the correspondents have the right or the ability to give praise when deserved or to withhold it when undeserved."²³⁷

Although the situation in Memphis was tense, the southern Methodist churches within the city had surprisingly continued unmolested into the winter of 1863. The Memphis conference managed to hold their annual meeting in Aberdeen, Mississippi, and both bishops Paine and Andrew were able to attend, a pretty significant event given the impediments to travel in the war-

²³⁶ *J.A. Goodwin to James C. Veatch*, October 13, 1863, *James C. Veatch Papers*, Indiana Historical Society.

²³⁷ *Special Orders 264*, October 26, 1863, *James C. Veatch Papers*, Indiana Historical Society.

torn South, especially for those who held such prominent positions.²³⁸ Membership across the conference had remained steady, and the congregation of its oldest church, Wesley Chapel, had grown by twenty-five since 1862. The meeting of the Memphis conference meant another year of regular appointments, and the Reverend D.J. Allen was appointed to Wesley Chapel on November 16, 1863.²³⁹ His time in the pulpit was to be very brief.

Just three weeks after Stanton issued the order, Edward Ames arrived in Memphis accompanied by the Assistant Corresponding Secretary of the Missionary Society, W.L. Harris.²⁴⁰ The two men arrived to an impromptu reception of loyal Methodists at the Firemen's Hall. To this group, Ames announced the aims of his southern adventure, to "visit places between Cairo and the Gulf, and to ascertain in these places, as to those who are loyal to the country, and desire the ministry of the M.E. Church, and to send loyal preachers to them immediately."²⁴¹ Ames' statement could be taken a number of ways, and while he did not explicitly state his intention to eject disloyal ministers from churches, others certainly understood that to be his intention. The *Memphis Bulletin* elaborated, explaining that Ames was to take possession of all places of worship whose pastors were disloyal or had been appointed by a disloyal bishop.²⁴² Wesley Chapel, the "oldest, largest, and best house of worship" belonging to the southern church in Memphis became the first case of church confiscation under the War Department's new order.²⁴³

On December 23, General Veatch issued a directive in compliance with the Stanton-Ames order. The General placed Wesley Chapel under the charge of Bishop Ames because it

²³⁸ *The Minutes of the Memphis Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South*, November 11-16, 1863 and October 28-30, 1863, 15, 21.

²³⁹ *Ibid.*, 26.

²⁴⁰ *New York Times*, May 29, 1860.

²⁴¹ "A Move in the Right Direction," *Memphis Bulletin*, December 23, 1863.

²⁴² *Ibid.*

²⁴³ "Church and State," *Weekly National Intelligencer*, February 25, 1864, *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*, Library of Congress, <https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn83045784/1864-02-25/ed-1/seq-3>.

was a property claimed by the southern Methodists and it was not occupied by a loyal minister appointed by a loyal bishop.²⁴⁴ Ames removed D.J. Allen, barely six weeks on the job, from the pulpit.²⁴⁵ In a column originally printed by the *Chicago Times*, one correspondent described Allen as “a man of blameless life, spiritual, and devoted to his work;” he preached, “‘Christ only, and Him crucified,’ and was entirely acceptable to his people.”²⁴⁶ In his place, Ames appointed Rev. J.W.T. McMullen of Indiana, a “distinguished minister and eloquent pulpit-orator” and a man Ames described as “right on the slavery question.”²⁴⁷ McMullen was anything but a moderate; later that same year he delivered a sermon in which he declared, “I say it with reverence. The rebel confederacy must go to hell and be damned.”²⁴⁸ Until McMullen could arrive in the city, H.B. Hibben, a chaplain in the Union army, would fill the pulpit.²⁴⁹ After preaching the first Sunday in the newly acquired church, newspapers announced Hibben would once again preach the following Sunday. The duly-appointed McMullen, they reported, would likely arrive the following week.²⁵⁰

It was almost as if Ames arrived to a sleeping southern Methodist church in Memphis. There had been little public chatter concerning the Stanton-Ames order prior to his arrival, and for the most part, besides the fact that the church was meeting in a now federally-occupied city, the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, in Memphis was conducting business as usual. Ames’

²⁴⁴ Walter L. Fleming, *Documentary History of Reconstruction*, volume I, (Gloucester, MA: Peter Smith, 1960),222.

²⁴⁵ *The Minutes of the Memphis Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South*, November 11-16, 1863 and October 28-30, 1863, 21.

²⁴⁶ “Church and State,” *Weekly National Intelligencer*, February 25, 1864, *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*, Library of Congress, <https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn83045784/1864-02-25/ed-1/seq-3>.

²⁴⁷ “A Move in the Right Direction,” *Memphis Bulletin*, December 23, 1863; *Western Christian Advocate*, January 20, 1864; “Church and State,” *Weekly National Intelligencer*, February 25, 1864.

²⁴⁸ Sean Scott, *A Visitation of God: Northern Civilians Interpret the Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 223.

²⁴⁹ “A Move in the Right Direction,” *Memphis Bulletin*, December 23, 1863.

²⁵⁰ “Wesley Chapel, Corner Second and Poplar Streets,” *Memphis Bulletin*, December 30, 1863.

confiscation of Wesley Chapel shocked the southerners into action. The Reverend J.W. Knott, a mainstay in the Memphis conference and a frequent minister at Wesley Chapel, appealed to the only authorities who could conceivably rectify the situation, Abraham Lincoln and Edwin Stanton.²⁵¹ In the meantime, much of the southern Methodist congregation accepted the offer of the minister of First Presbyterian Church, Dr. Steadman, to meet at their church next door. Southern-leaning Memphians lauded Steadman, who was loyal to the Confederacy but not necessarily vocal, for his response to the Union army hanging a United States flag above the front door of his church. Rather than walking underneath the banner to enter the church, he installed a ladder so he could climb through the back window.²⁵²

The Differing Views of the President and War Secretary

The conflict in Memphis revealed a demonstrable disparity between the President's views on politico-ecclesiastical interference and those of his Secretary of War. Indeed, based on proceedings, it is highly likely that Lincoln was completely unaware of Stanton's intrusions into the religious sphere. On the very day Veatch transferred Wesley Chapel to Ames' control, Lincoln responded to another appeal to once again involve himself in church affairs in St. Louis. Lincoln responded to the request by insisting, "I have never interfered, nor thought of interfering, as to who shall or shall not preach in any church; nor have I knowingly or believingly tolerated any one else to go interfere by any authority ... I will not have control of any church or any

²⁵¹ *Minutes of the Memphis Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, November 14-19, 1894* (Memphis: Memphis Printing Co., 1895), 63.

²⁵² "Religious Notice," *Memphis Bulletin*, January 30, 1864; Paul T. Hicks, *History of First Methodist Church, Memphis, Tennessee, 1826-1900* (Memphis: Memphis Tech High School, 1980), 80. This is a denominational history of the Methodist church in Memphis. While it is not peer-reviewed, it contains descriptions of these events from those who lived through them.

side.”²⁵³ Historians like William Blair have demonstrated the Lincoln administration’s willingness to take strident measures to suppress dissent while retaining a degree of constitutional plausibility, so it is conceivable that Lincoln knew about and approved of Stanton’s order.²⁵⁴ However, the President’s forceful and inflexible use of language, especially on a day when the first major church was transferred to northern control, indicate a chief executive who was likely unaware of the freshly-minted order of his Secretary of War.

The country noticed; one newspaper explained, “The President talks in one way and the Secretary acts in another,” and attempted to make sense of the apparent contradictory approaches. Rumors swirled that Lincoln had learned of Stanton’s order through the press.²⁵⁵ The papers, by and large, circulated the belief that Lincoln had been kept in the dark regarding the movements of Bishop Ames. The *National Intelligencer* asserted the “scheme of taking possession of Southern churches and supplying them with loyal pastors” was “wholly Secretary Stanton’s,” and argued there was “no good evidence that it ... had the approval of the President.”²⁵⁶ Later in the spring, Kentucky Senator Lazarus Powell explained these inconsistencies as evidence that Lincoln was “profoundly ignorant” of the machinations of his Secretary of War. Powell concluded that Stanton was conducting the operation “upon his own authority against the wishes and without the knowledge of the President.” Powell insisted that if Stanton really was acting outside of the President’s authority, Lincoln should quickly and

²⁵³ “Church and State,” *Weekly National Intelligencer*, February 25, 1864, *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*, Library of Congress, <https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn83045784/1864-02-25/ed-1/seq-3>.

²⁵⁴ Blair, *With Malice Toward Some*, 5.

²⁵⁵ “The New Ecclesiastical Polity,” *Weekly National Intelligencer*, March 3, 1864, *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*, Library of Congress, <https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn83045784/1864-03-03/ed-1/seq-4>; Morrow, *Northern Methodism and Reconstruction*, 37.

²⁵⁶ *Daily Intelligencer*, March 5, 1864 *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*, Library of Congress, <https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn84026845/1864-03-05/ed-1/seq-1>.

promptly dismiss him, otherwise the country may come to believe the President was disingenuous when he wrote, “The Government must not undertake to run the churches.”²⁵⁷

Powell’s voice was only one in a chorus of those that rose in denunciation of the Secretary of War. The Senator described Stanton as “unsavory” and a “heartless ruffian.” Powell levied more criticism at Stanton than he did Edward Ames, whom the Kentuckian painted as a “worthy man” whose “sense of justice must have been very much blunted when he undertook this ecclesiastical mission.”²⁵⁸ The *National Intelligencer* qualified Lincoln’s policy of non-interference “as manifestly sensible and right as that of his War Secretary is absurd and indefensible upon any ground whatever.”²⁵⁹ Even those who maintained the constitutionality of Stanton’s church order questioned its expediency. As the Secretary of War, Stanton was charged with overseeing belligerent rights, yet even though the *Weekly National Intelligencer* believed Stanton had license to carry out the order, they questioned whether it was “expedient or practicable to engraft upon the Government, at this late day, an ecclesiastical polity like that which has just been initiated under military authority.” The paper presciently predicted that long term, the policy would become a hindrance more than a help in restoring the Union.²⁶⁰

Inevitably, some criticism targeted the chief executive. The *Daily Register* sarcastically urged Lincoln to live up to his position, noting that “all mighty emperors find it necessary to preside over public worship.”²⁶¹ The *Memphis Daily Appeal* argued the Stanton-Ames order

²⁵⁷ John C. Rivers, *The Debates and Proceedings of the First Session of the Thirty-Eighth Congress* (Washington: The Congressional Globe Office, 1864), 69.

²⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 69.

²⁵⁹ *Daily Intelligencer*, March 5, 1864, *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*, Library of Congress, <https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn84026845/1864-03-05/ed-1/seq-1>.

²⁶⁰ “The New Ecclesiastical Polity,” *Weekly National Intelligencer*, March 3, 1864, *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*, Library of Congress, <https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn83045784/1864-03-03/ed-1/seq-4>.

²⁶¹ “Running the Churches,” *Daily Register*, March 23, 1864, *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*, Library of Congress, <https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn86092517/1864-03-23/ed-1/seq-1>.

evinced the Lincoln administration's approach to the South, and condemned the development that was destined to turn southern churches into "political synagogues." The writer issued a warning that the efforts to confiscate southern churches were destined to fail: "The parasites that may be introduced will find no hearers and no favor, coming by such questionable authority."²⁶² Time would tell whether this warning would prove prophetic or merely rhetorical bluster.

In Memphis, it proved to be the former. The temporary arrangement that placed Chaplain Hibben in the pulpit of Wesley Chapel steadily became more permanent. Ten days after Ames' arrival in Memphis, Hibben was still preaching and the city was still waiting for Reverend McMullen's arrival from Indiana. On December 30, McMullen was reportedly supposed to arrive within the week, but his arrival never came.²⁶³ In early February, the *Christian Advocate and Journal* promised success to any loyal pastor willing to be employed in Memphis.²⁶⁴ Apparently, the northern church encountered an issue in Memphis that would plague them in their work throughout much of the South. The Methodist Episcopal Church, South, as disorganized as it had become, was still the proverbial ecclesiastical home for wealthy southerners.²⁶⁵ Despite northern perceptions that the loyal population was increasing in "magnitude and power" in the Bluff City, that loyalty did not extend to the Methodist Episcopal Church. When Ames took control of Wesley Chapel, the congregation largely transferred to the Presbyterian church next door, and they remained there for weeks.²⁶⁶ In late January, the quarterly meeting for Wesley Chapel convened at the First Presbyterian Church, while their former chapel housed a congregation largely composed of African-Americans and Union

²⁶² "The Pulpit Controlled," *Memphis Daily Appeal*, March 2, 1863, *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*, Library of Congress, <https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn83045160/1864-03-02/ed-1/seq-1>.

²⁶³ "Wesley Chapel, Corner Second and Poplar Streets," *Memphis Bulletin*, December 30, 1864.

²⁶⁴ R. Wheatley, "Missions in the Southern States," *Christian Advocate and Journal*, February 4, 1864.

²⁶⁵ Morrow, *Northern Methodism and Reconstruction*, 107.

²⁶⁶ Hicks, *History of First Methodist Church, Memphis, Tennessee, 1829-1900*, 79.

soldiers.²⁶⁷ McMullen never arrived because he learned there was not much of a northern Methodist congregation to speak of in Memphis.²⁶⁸

The following northern occupation of the southern chapel was short-lived. By mid-March, J.W. Knott was preaching once again in Wesley Chapel. General Buckland, who replaced Veatch in Memphis, returned the building to the southern Methodists, and the *Memphis Bulletin*, which skewed to the Union, commended the move as one that would “be gratifying to all connected with Wesley charge,” with whom Knott had worked and labored for the previous ten years.²⁶⁹ The absence of any condescension or condemnation in the *Bulletin’s* tone is noteworthy; if a Unionist paper could congratulate the southern Methodists on the restoration of their church property, it indicates a more general approval of the move in Memphis.

Ames did not stick around to watch events play out in Memphis. The bishop moved quickly on his southern tour, so he was likely only in Memphis for a few days. The impact, however, of his sweep through the city and his confiscation of Wesley Chapel lingered long after he departed. The Methodist Episcopal Church gained little from his actions. The tiny congregation that assembled in Wesley Chapel was so scant as to dissuade Ames’ appointed minister from even filling the pulpit. Chaplain Hibben lent his efforts to the charge temporarily, but by March he was back in Indianapolis and by the summer he was transferred to the Navy.²⁷⁰ Knott, who was appointed to Wesley Chapel before D.J. Allen, was once again filling the pulpit of Wesley Chapel, and after three months of turmoil all that remained was southern Methodist contempt for the bishop’s actions. Years later, Samuel Watson, the Presiding Elder of the

²⁶⁷ “Religious Notice,” *Memphis Bulletin*, January 30, 1864.

²⁶⁸ Hicks, *History of First Methodist Church, Memphis, Tennessee, 1826-1900*, 79.

²⁶⁹ “Wesley Chapel,” *Memphis Bulletin*, March 13, 1864.

²⁷⁰ “A Grand Ovation,” *Indianapolis Star*, March 23, 1864, Newspapers.com; *Louisville Courier Journal*, July 8, 1864, Newspapers.com.

Memphis district, described Bishop Ames' confiscation of Wesley Chapel as something he "had much rather had never occurred," but he hoped would never be forgotten.²⁷¹

Soon after Ames left Memphis the wheels of the Methodist-military machinery kicked into full motion. On December 9, the War Department gave Bishop Baker authority to conduct similar operations in Virginia and North Carolina, while Bishop Janes was empowered to do likewise in the Department of the South. On December 30, Bishop Simpson was enlisted to conduct a similar mission in Kentucky and Tennessee.²⁷² Ames served as a vanguard for a number of Methodists sent southward, and his qualifications for such a role were espoused by segments of the northern press. The *Vermont Christian Messenger* lauded Ames as "eminently the man for such a mission; much of the ground he knows; the political agitations of the South-west have been familiar to him... He means to gain a thorough knowledge of *the situation*, and he has sufficient power in his hands to move wisely and successfully." Ames launched the movement, but a number of prominent Methodists followed right behind him. In addition to his fellow bishops, Reverend Round was reportedly headed for North Carolina and the eminent New York minister, John P. Newman was rumored to be New Orleans-bound.²⁷³

Unfortunately for Methodist leadership, in the weeks following their departure from Memphis, Harris and Ames became virtually incommunicado. John P. Durbin, the Correspondence Secretary of the Methodist Missionary Society, pleaded with his assistant Harris for any news from the trans-Mississippi. He said he was bombarded with requests for information, but he knew nothing.²⁷⁴ Anyone searching for news of Ames' exploits would have been just as disappointed as Durbin. It is clear, however, that Ames followed the Mississippi to

²⁷¹ Hicks, *History of First Methodist Church, Memphis, Tennessee, 1826-1900*, 77.

²⁷² Sweet, *The Methodist Episcopal Church and the Civil War*, 99.

²⁷³ "The Right Thing," *Vermont Christian Messenger*, January 7, 1864, Newspapers.com.

²⁷⁴ J.P. Durbin to W.L. Harris, January 26, 1864, Letter, *Letters from Correspondence Secretary, 1850-1865*, MEC Missionary Society, Drew University.

the Arkansas River, then headed west to conduct two more church confiscations in war-torn Arkansas. In late January, in a letter to Secretary Stanton, General Hunter mentioned he had heard earlier from Ames who was in Pine Bluff, Arkansas.²⁷⁵ Ames' actions in Pine Bluff, as in other locations served on his journey, were less publicized than his work in larger cities like Memphis. Even so, press frequently included Pine Bluff when they published lists of churches confiscated by the bishop.²⁷⁶

Little Rock fell under Union occupation in the early fall of 1863, so by the time the bishop arrived the state capital had been transformed by the occupying army. The Cherry Street Methodist Church, pastored by Richard F. Colburn of the southern connection, had been requisitioned by federal troops to serve as a hospital, and his congregation was sent searching for another meeting place. As was the case in Memphis, the Presbyterians offered use of their building to the Methodists, but Colburn's nomadic congregation also met for a time in a local theatre.²⁷⁷ One of his congregants blamed Stanton for their building's confiscation, saying the Secretary "seemed to have an especial pique at the Methodist whites." She claimed their church was the first building taken in the city for army use.²⁷⁸ Because the southern Methodist church in Little Rock was already under federal control when Ames arrived, the city was spared the theatrics that accompanied his arrival in Memphis. Colburn's ejection came when the church was transformed into a hospital. Now that it was once again becoming a church, Ames was filling a

²⁷⁵ David Hunter to Edwin Stanton, January 27, 1864, 1-27-64, *Edwin McMasters Stanton Papers: Correspondence, 1831-1870; 1863; 1863, Nov. 28-1864, Feb. 27*, Library of Congress, <http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.mss/ms010150.mss41202.020>.

²⁷⁶ Morrow, *Northern Methodism and Reconstruction*, 34.

²⁷⁷ Kathryn Donham Rice, *A History of the First United Methodist Church in Little Rock, Arkansas, 1831-1981* (Parkhurst-Eaton Publishers, 1980), 28. Rice's work is a denominational history focused on the Methodist congregation in Little Rock. As is the case with Paul T. Hicks' Memphis work, it was not peer reviewed, but it helps fill in the gaps in the official record with accounts from those who lived through church confiscation.

²⁷⁸ Nancy Britton, *Two Centuries of Methodism in Arkansas, 1800-2000* (Little Rock: August House Publishers, 2000), 84.

truly vacant pulpit. He appointed a northern Methodist preacher named Hugh Brady, who took over the church building and organized a northern congregation.²⁷⁹ Ames' Arkansas stops were not extended, but he was in Little Rock long enough to witness the loyalty of black Methodists in the city, who had persisted for two years without the sacraments because they "would not receive them at the hands of rebel clergymen."²⁸⁰ As was the case in Memphis, northerners believed Union sentiment in Arkansas was on the rise and the church should expect corresponding success. The *Western Christian Advocate* rejoiced in signs of increasing Unionism in Arkansas "on all sides ... in Union meetings, in desertions from the rebel army, in taking the oath of allegiance unsolicited, organizing for home defense, and enlisting in the Federal army."²⁸¹ Ames was far from done after Little Rock; he headed back to the Mississippi River to head deeper into the South.

Wider Confiscation Efforts Across the South

While Ames directed Methodist actions along the Mississippi, more northern Methodist agents joined the southern fray. Bishop Janes sent T. Willard Lewis to Beaufort, South Carolina in early December to organize classes of loyal Methodists. Janes provided instructions to Lewis that differed from the methods employed by Ames in Memphis and Little Rock. He urged Lewis to make use of local pastors, church leaders, and teachers as much as possible, and to "write seldom and with much care for the newspapers." Janes seemed to appreciate the delicate nature of Lewis's mission. If local Methodists in South Carolina felt imposed upon or pushed around, Lewis's task would become significantly harder. The bishop reminded Lewis his primary object

²⁷⁹ Britton, *Two Centuries of Methodism in Arkansas*, 85.

²⁸⁰ "Providence Conference," *Christian Advocate and Journal*, April 7, 1864.

²⁸¹ "Unionism in Arkansas," *Western Christian Advocate*, January 13, 1864.

was “to furnish the Christian pastorate to people who are now destitute of the means of grace.”²⁸² Lewis, among all the representatives of the Methodist Episcopal Church who headed south, seemed to grasp the levity of these instructions.

Janes instructed Lewis to first find General Saxton, a man who privately had told Janes that he was not optimistic about prospects in Beaufort, when he arrived in South Carolina.²⁸³ Still, under the authority of Stanton’s order, Lewis’s cooperation with Saxton was critical. Empowered by the military arm, Lewis stood ready to confiscate southern Methodist churches in Beaufort just as Ames had done in Memphis. Ames’ actions were dramatic and resulted in what appeared to be immediate victory, but his heavy-handedness severely alienated the southern Methodists of the city, and because the local Methodists refused to attend church under the guidance of a northern Methodist, his actions were doomed to failure. Lewis understood the importance of cooperating with the local population and he intended to avoid any action that could be perceived as autocratic or insensitive to the local population and the connection they shared with their sacred spaces.

Lewis hoped to avoid any appearance of military confiscation by appealing to the local boards and trustees for control of the churches.²⁸⁴ Later, when Charleston fell to the Union army, Lewis executed the same strategy. He arrived in Charleston just days after the federal occupation began and immediately organized “private and separate interviews with chief men of the Churches,” and at length brought all the men together for a general meeting. Together, the men

²⁸² *E.S. Janes to T. Willard Lewis*, December 9, 1863, *Letters from Correspondence Secretary, 1850-1865*, MEC Missionary Society, Drew University.

²⁸³ *E.S. Janes to T. Willard Lewis*, December 9, 1863, *Letters from Correspondence Secretary, 1850-1865*, MEC Missionary Society, Drew University; J.P. Durbin, *J.P. Durbin to W.L. Harris*, December 17, 1863, *Letters from Correspondence Secretary, 1850-1865*, MEC Missionary Society, Drew University.

²⁸⁴ Sweet, *Methodist Episcopal Church and the Civil War*, 101; Morrow, *Northern Methodism and Reconstruction*, 38.

drafted a message to send to Colonel S.L. Woodford, which declared, “that as our pastors have all left the city, we welcome among us, as preacher in charge, T. Willard Lewis, a regularly appointed missionary of the M.E. Church,” and requested Woodford assign to Lewis the Methodist churches and parsonages in the city. The trustees and stewards further pledged their “aid, sympathy, and co-operation in establishing Methodism among us.”²⁸⁵ The *Christian Advocate and Journal* professed their astonishment: “That any good should be found” in Charleston “would be matter of agreeable surprise, and if it turns out that this town, the first to transgress in secession, shall be among the first in hearty good faith to repent and return, surprise may well rise to wonder.”²⁸⁶ The Methodist property over which Lewis assumed control had suffered the heavy hand of war. Prior to his arrival, the Cumberland church was destroyed by fire in 1861-1862, and Trinity church was damaged by shelling. Bethel church was the only remaining building used for religious services.²⁸⁷ Once empowered, Lewis endeavored to organize a church free of color distinctions. Speaking to a collection of freedmen, he countered the southern Methodist request to “stay with us in the old places in the galleries,” by declaring, “there will be no galleries in heaven ... those who are willing to go with a church that makes no distinction as to race or color, follow me.”²⁸⁸ By the middle of May, Lewis’s responsibilities in Charleston expanded enough that he relocated there permanently. Another New Englander, James A. Deforest of New Hampshire, took his place in Beaufort.²⁸⁹

²⁸⁵ “Methodism in Charleston, S.C.,” *Christian Advocate and Journal*, March 23, 1865.

²⁸⁶ Ibid.

²⁸⁷ Ibid.

²⁸⁸ Morrow, *Northern Methodism and Reconstruction*, 130.

²⁸⁹ “Beaufort, S.C.,” *Vermont Christian Messenger*, June 1, 1865, Newspapers.com.

Ames in Louisiana

Ames possessed none of Lewis's qualms about employing military forces on his mission. The bishop proceeded into Mississippi and Louisiana where the status of the southern church was uncertain. The Louisiana conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South produced no minutes in either 1862 or 1863. The Mississippi conference recorded minutes in 1862 and belatedly in 1863, but their 1863 minutes contained enough irregularities to give any reader pause. In the Vicksburg district, in a year that witnessed the dramatic and brutal Union siege and eventual occupation of their city, the southern church actually grew according to the minutes. A number of circuits within the Vicksburg district reportedly kept the exact same membership from 1862. The Vicksburg, Clinton, Concord, Brandon, North Warren, Warren, and Raymond and Spring Ridge circuits remained exactly as they had been the year before. In an occupied, war-torn city, such a development is a little suspicious.²⁹⁰ The Union army's advance took a severe toll on the southern Methodist church in Vicksburg, contrary to these official minutes. Their pastor left the ministry to write southern denominational newspapers, and many of the prominent members of the southern church fled prior to Grant's siege.²⁹¹ Ames moved swiftly from town to town down the Mississippi River, reportedly confiscating churches in both Vicksburg and Natchez, Mississippi.²⁹² Natchez, a city that reportedly had "not been so maddened by the poison of secession as other places of equal or greater size," had been left relatively untouched by the effects of the war, especially in comparison to Vicksburg. While the white membership of the Natchez district declined from 1862 to 1863, the African-American participation exploded by

²⁹⁰ *Minutes of the Annual Conferences of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South for the Year 1863* (Nashville: Southern Methodist Publishing House), <http://hdl.handle.net/10516/10035>; *Minutes of the Annual Conferences of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South for the Year 1862* (Nashville: Southern Methodist Publishing House), <http://hdl.handle.net/10516/10034>.

²⁹¹ R. Wheatley, "Missions in the Southern States," *Christian Advocate and Journal*, February 4, 1864.

²⁹² Morrow, *Northern Methodism and Reconstruction*, 34.

over 300 percent. Like Vicksburg, the official numbers for Natchez station and a few of its related stations did not change at all.²⁹³ It is hard to imagine congregations would remain so static in a time of such upheaval, and whether the unchanged numbers were the result of clerical laziness or a desire to project the image of a strong southern church, it seems more than likely some district memberships were simply copied from the previous year's minutes. It is difficult to imagine that Ames arrived in Vicksburg and Natchez to two fully-functioning churches. The *Christian Advocate and Journal* reported that Natchez was without any appointed preacher except Reverend William H. Watkins who presided over the smaller Kingston circuit. Vicksburg, in their estimation, was religiously destitute.²⁹⁴ Regardless, in Vicksburg Ames was reportedly forced to once again draw on the force of the U.S. military to secure the southern Methodist church.²⁹⁵

When Edward Ames entered a new city, he was not there to put down roots. He intended to appropriate the local church, peaceably if possible, and appoint a loyal minister he could trust to the new pulpit. Most of the work to establish and cultivate a congregation fell to those officials who remained long after Ames departed for his next destination. Such was the case in Baton Rouge, Louisiana. The previous December, a chaplain with the United States army, N.L. Brakeman, established a makeshift chapel among the garrisoned soldiers stationed there. A man named Dr. Van Norstrand turned the building that had been the Arsenal Hospital over to Brakeman, who finished out the facilities with barrels and kegs for seats.²⁹⁶

²⁹³ *Minutes of the Annual Conferences of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South for the Year 1863* (Nashville: Southern Methodist Publishing House), <http://hdl.handle.net/10516/10035>; *Minutes of the Annual Conferences of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South for the Year 1862* (Nashville: Southern Methodist Publishing House), <http://hdl.handle.net/10516/10034>.

²⁹⁴ R. Wheatley, "Missions in the Southern States," *Christian Advocate and Journal*, February 4, 1864.

²⁹⁵ Leftwich, *Martyrdom in Missouri*, 255.

²⁹⁶ N.L. Brakeman, "An Improvised Chapel," *Western Christian Advocate*, January 13, 1864.

At the time of Ames' arrival, Baton Rouge was home to five thousand convalescent soldiers and contained an impressive white marble Methodist church.²⁹⁷ The bishop arrived equipped with an order from Brigadier General P. St. George Cooke, who placed the Methodist church in the city "at the disposal of Bishop Ames ... in pursuance of instructions received from the Secretary of War."²⁹⁸ Ames took Brakeman's temporary ecclesiastical arrangement and made it official. In a letter to Brakeman, Ames noted that the southern Methodist church in Baton Rouge had been placed at his disposal "in accordance with the letter of the Secretary of War," and the order of St. George Cooke, and by those authorities, he appointed Brakeman "*preacher in charge* of the same," which authorized the reverend "to exercise all the functions pertaining to such appointment, according to the provisions of the discipline of the Methodist Episcopal Church."²⁹⁹ Ames' time in Baton Rouge gave new meaning to the "remarkably rapid" pace of his southern mission. He was only in Baton Rouge for two hours, "yet all the necessary work was accomplished in that time."³⁰⁰ Satisfied, Ames departed Baton Rouge for his southern terminus – New Orleans.

The situation in Baton Rouge was unique for the relatively favorable reports published in the local press regarding N.L. Brakeman, and even more surprisingly, Bishop Ames. The *Baton Rouge Tri-Weekly Gazette and Comet* sounded nearly apologetic, assuring their readers "that neither the Secretary of War, Bishop Ames, or Mr. Brakeman, intend or understand this to give any encouragement or sanction to the preaching of politics in the pulpit." Regarding the actual title to the property, the paper explained that Ames' action was not "intended to raise any

²⁹⁷ R. Wheatley, "Missions in the Southern States," *Christian Advocate and Journal*, February 4, 1864.

²⁹⁸ "Methodist Churches in This Department," *Baton Rouge Tri-Weekly Gazette and Comet*, February 5, 1864, Newspapers.com.

²⁹⁹ Ibid.

³⁰⁰ "Bishop Ames' Visit South," *The Advocate*, February 18, 1864, Newspapers.com.

question of, or right in, property ... The House of Worship still belongs to the M.E. Church South, and is simply turned over to Bishop Ames for temporary occupation – and this by *military*, not by civil or ecclesiastical authority.” It is fair to say Ames rarely received the benefit of the doubt from the southern press, yet the *Tri-Weekly Gazette and Comet* seemed to take extra pains to frame and justify Ames’ actions in Baton Rouge. While Ames was often depicted as a tyrant at worst, or the unthinking tool of a tyrant at best, this paper described him as “a sound, discreet, conservative man, in Church and state,” who “for *these reasons* was sent on this important mission.” The final sentence of the article pointed to a possible reason for their generous treatment: “The members of the M.E. Church South in Baton Rouge, are greatly indebted to him for their elegant House of Worship.”³⁰¹ It can be easy to forget that Ames traveled and labored in the old southwest before the Methodist split in 1844. His reception in Baton Rouge is a reminder that he had spent his early years in the ministry traveling and laboring in the old southwest, organizing and building societies that would one day split from the Methodist church to join the southern connection. In Baton Rouge, southern Methodists, at least initially, were willing to credit the bishop for his early work on their behalf.

As the officially-appointed Methodist minister in Baton Rouge, N.L. Brakeman began the work of organizing a congregation.³⁰² Despite the initial favorable press coverage, Brakeman soon encountered, and became an astute critic of, the challenges facing any northern Methodist organization in the South. In a February letter to the *Western Christian Advocate*, Brakeman described the prospects of reorganizing in the South as “not very promising.” His reasoning indicated strong community pressure to avoid the northern Methodist church. The reverend

³⁰¹ “Methodist Churches in This Department,” *Baton Rouge Tri-Weekly Gazette and Comet*, February 5, 1864, Newspapers.com.

³⁰² *Baton Rouge Tri-Weekly Gazette and Comet*, January 30, 1864, Newspapers.com; *Times-Picayune*, February 4, 1864, Newspapers.com.

recounted conversations with residents who claimed if they were found at a Union church or with a Union pastor they would be ruined. He related the story of two women whose homes were burned because they described federal officers as “gentlemen.” Families told their near relatives that if they continued attending church with federal chaplains they would be disowned forever. One man told Brakeman that he would come to his church, “but it would be known and my house fired in my absence.” Brakeman feigned optimism in these conversations, telling them “to be hopeful, that these things can not continue much longer, that their redemption draweth nigh,” but wearily explained, “We have been telling them that for more than two years, and they have grown skeptical, and we ourselves are less confident than we were then of a speedy overthrow of treason.”³⁰³

Brakeman also recognized the nebulous and complicated nature of loyalty in the southern states. “We require in the members a twofold loyalty, to God and to the Government of the United States,” the reverend wrote, but the northern church struggled to attract even those in the southern church who had taken the oath of allegiance to the government. To make sense of this apparent incongruity, Brakeman expressed a skepticism shared by many across the South, noting “some who have passed as loyal I find to be insincere; they took the oath to save their property and their stomachs, and in heart are yet rebels.”³⁰⁴

Loyalty oaths were not a perfect fix, but Union officials needed some way to distinguish the loyal from the disloyal. When William S. Rosecrans received criticism for requiring clergy to swear their loyalty, he said without the practice Sterling Price’s Confederate soldiers could just claim religion and join together to plot treason.³⁰⁵ But how much power did these oaths of

³⁰³ N.L. Brakeman, “Religious Prospects in the South,” *Western Christian Advocate*, March 9, 1864.

³⁰⁴ Ibid.

³⁰⁵ Hay and Nicolay, *Abraham Lincoln: A History*, vol. 6, 335.

allegiance actually have? Could they really transform someone from rebeldom to loyalty? In the eyes of many Unionists in the South, the answer was a clear no. A Nashville correspondent classified taking the oath as “a very convenient way to save one’s bacon.”³⁰⁶ A southern minister named James D. Armstrong was witnessed taking the oath of allegiance with another man who, as soon as they had left the building, exclaimed he would like to spit on Yankees.³⁰⁷ In Beaufort, South Carolina, Helen E. Luckey related the practices of the city’s “secesh” residents, who took the oath just to secure their property.³⁰⁸ Parson Brownlow characteristically condemned duplicity among southerners who “cloak their pretensions with an oath” only to plot and scheme to overthrow the government, but he optimistically believed theirs was a game “that has about played out.”³⁰⁹

To be sure, some southern ministers refused to take the oath, even under pressure, like a man named Richardson in Alabama, but the smoother path was swearing the oath halfheartedly.³¹⁰ This created an obvious hurdle in the quest to reorganize northern Methodist congregations in the South. Swearing the oath paved the way for southerners to return to political respectability, but it did not require them to alter their ecclesiastical allegiance. Even those who truly wished to see the war ended and the Union reestablished were not bound to abandon their affiliation with the southern Methodist church. It was much easier to swear allegiance to the government, even if begrudgingly, and then continue on as before. This must have exasperated northern ministers, who believed true loyalty to the Union would require shedding one’s affiliation with a church so associated with secession. Over time, the profundity of the challenge

³⁰⁶ “A Letter from Nashville,” *Memphis Bulletin*, December 2, 1863.

³⁰⁷ “A Disloyal Clergyman,” *Memphis Bulletin*, March 26, 1864.

³⁰⁸ “Letter from Beaufort, S.C.,” *Christian Advocate and Journal*, June 16, 1864.

³⁰⁹ “Brownlowisms,” *Memphis Bulletin*, March 10, 1864.

³¹⁰ “A Pugnacious Methodist Preacher,” in *Documentary History of Reconstruction*, vol. I, ed. Walter Fleming (Gloucester, MA: Peter Smith, 1960), 228.

faced by northern Methodists became more apparent. The *Christian Advocate and Journal* diagnosed the central problem of religious reconstruction in the South. “The minds of the southern people must be relieved of prejudice of deep and long standing,” a columnist named “N” wrote, but “the pulpit, the press, and the rostrum have thoroughly educated these people in the principles of slavery.”³¹¹

Simpson in Tennessee

At the same time Ames commenced work in Baton Rouge, he was joined in the southern effort by another northern bishop, Matthew Simpson. Simpson was the only other member of the northern episcopacy who even attempted to match Ames’ enthusiasm for the southern work, and even then, he was less sanguine of their ultimate prospects.³¹² One of the most impressive orators in not only the church but the country at large, Simpson commenced his mission with a sermon at the state Capitol in Nashville that drew an impressive crowd. The *Nashville Daily Union* credited Simpson’s objective as one which they believed would “be of inestimable importance in the loyalisation of the State.”³¹³ Despite the fanfare, however, Simpson held strong reservations. In a letter to his wife written two days before his inaugural sermon he wrote, “As yet nothing very promising occurs in church matters. The field will open very slowly, but it may open.”³¹⁴ It is difficult to compare Simpson’s tepid enthusiasm with the rhetoric produced by Ames on his southern swing. Could they really have had such different perceptions of the southern work? The

³¹¹ “Church Reconstruction,” *Christian Advocate and Journal*, May 25, 1865.

³¹² *Nashville Daily Union*, January 17, 1864, *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*, Library of Congress, <https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn83025718/1864-01-17/ed-1/seq-3>.

³¹³ *Nashville Daily Union*, January 17, 1864, *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*, Library of Congress, <https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn83025718/1864-01-17/ed-1/seq-3>.

³¹⁴ *Matthew Simpson to Ellen Simpson*, January 15, 1864, *Matthew Simpson Papers*, Drew University Methodist Collection, Drew University.

two men had grown through the Methodist ranks together, and although they were rivals at times, they were largely friendly. It seems incredibly likely that, embarking on such a daunting venture as the reorganization of the Methodist Episcopal Church in the South, the two men would have conversed. Perhaps the major difference, however, is one of sourcing. Simpson presented a brave face in public, and it was only through his private correspondence that he revealed his doubts. Ames left behind very little private correspondence, so historians are left to deduce his opinions largely from his public words.

By the spring of 1864, one correspondent dubbed Nashville “one grand military depot,” where nearly every large, public building was used for military purposes, including churches.³¹⁵ Federal troops had also taken control of the vaunted southern Methodist Book Concern, which had been abandoned by much of its staff. What had once been a “pestilent secession concern,” and a makeshift arsenal was repurposed as a government printing office.³¹⁶ With his typical bombast, Parson Brownlow declared, “If it were not for the money its proceeds would yield the Government after confiscation, we should advocate the blowing of it into the Cumberland river.”³¹⁷ Federal occupation proved unable to alter southern sentiment, however. Seth Reed described Nashville’s residents as “bitter in their prejudices” who offered very little help. As the army marched into the city, one woman spit upon a Union soldier, and the officer in charge told her, “Madam I will occupy your house as a hospital in a few hours,” and he did just that.³¹⁸ With the city firmly in Union control, Simpson’s situation in Nashville resembled Ames’ in Little

³¹⁵ M.J. Cramer, “Letter from Nashville, Tenn.,” *Western Christian Advocate*, March 30, 1863.

³¹⁶ *Evening Star*, January 28, 1864, *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*, Library of Congress, <https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn83045462/1864-01-28/ed-1/seq-4>; “The Methodist Church South,” *Knoxville Whig*, April 9, 1864, Newspapers.com.

³¹⁷ “The Methodist Church South,” *Knoxville Whig*, April 9, 1864, Newspapers.com.

³¹⁸ Seth Reed, *The Story of My Life* (Jennings and Graham, 1914), 72.

Rock. He simply had to appoint loyal ministers to the church buildings vacated by their military occupants.

Simpson appointed three men to different charges in central and eastern Tennessee, among them was Michael J. Cramer, the brother-in-law of Ulysses S. Grant. Simpson placed him in charge of both the German Methodist church and McKendree Chapel in Nashville. He appointed Calvin Holman to lead the church in Chattanooga, a small congregation Holman described as mostly “poor” and “ignorant,” because the “rich were rebels.” Lastly, he appointed a military Chaplain, H.A. Pattinson to Murfreesboro. The southern minister in Murfreesboro reportedly protested Pattinson’s appointment to General George H. Thomas, who responded that the chaplain was a Methodist, and if that was not good enough for rebel Methodists “they could go without worship.”³¹⁹

Simpson’s Tennessee movements elicited swift opposition from remaining southern Methodists. The War Department committed to restoring McKendree Chapel, which required significant cleaning and repairs following its military occupation, before delivering it to the northern Methodists for religious use. One southern Methodist, Reverend S.D. Baldwin, aimed to repossess the church for the southern connection in the interregnum.³²⁰ Baldwin’s position was not unique. A number of southern Methodists appealed to higher authorities to recover their church property, and even more would find themselves doing so in the future. A more significant source of opposition came from Mordecai J.W. Ambrose, an unexpected mix of Union chaplain and Methodist Episcopal Church, South, congregant. Ambrose himself believed the southern church was due for major changes, and he confided to a northern Methodist that the southern church

³¹⁹ *Western Christian Advocate*, March 9, 1864; Stowell, *Rebuilding Zion*, 30; Clark, *Life of Matthew Simpson*, 232; Morrow, *Northern Methodism and Reconstruction*, 107.

³²⁰ *Nashville Daily Union*, February 16, 1864, Newspapers.com.

would likely have to reorganize under a new name and constitution.³²¹ He objected not to the government confiscation of church property, which was an expected development in wartime, but to the confiscation of southern Methodist property for northern Methodist use. In a letter to President Lincoln, Ambrose explained his position by insisting “if the Government confiscates these Southern Churches, and sells them to the highest bidder, and those venerable Bishops buy them, it is all right, and I will say, Amen!” His quarrel was specifically with the Methodist Episcopal Church bishops directly confiscating churches from the southern connection. “What right has a Bishop of the Methodist E. Church,” Ambrose questioned, “to take the property of the Methodist E. Church, South, and appropriate it to his use?” Drawing from the President’s own formative years, Ambrose compared the situation to the boys and the frogs, “it may be fun for the Bishops, but it is death to us.” [emphasis in original]³²² Ambrose claimed to be one of many loyal southern Methodists who had persisted as rigorous Union men. In retrospect, Ambrose’s very existence seems paradoxical. With all the discussion of treason in the ranks of the southern Methodists, how is it that a Union chaplain could be such an avowed member of the denomination? Why would he take the step of writing to the President to restore church property to a denomination of rebels?

Unionism in the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, if not prevalent, still existed, illustrating the imperfect correlation between denominational affiliation and political loyalty. The Holston conference of the southern connection famously expelled a number of ministers in 1862 for disloyalty to the Confederacy, one of whom was Parson Brownlow.³²³ Brownlow later maintained that he was only “one of thousands of old Methodists, South, who never can or will

³²¹ *Seth Reed to Matthew Simpson*, November 23, 1863.

³²² *Mordecai J.W. Ambrose to Abraham Lincoln*, February 2, 1864, *Abraham Lincoln papers: Series 1, General Correspondence, 1833-1916*, Library of Congress, <http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.mss/ms000001.mss30189a.3008100>.

³²³ “Methodist Conference Reports,” *Knoxville Whig*, February 13, 1864, Newspapers.com.

come under the control of the men who have disgraced the Church, and sought to ruin the country.”³²⁴ Many of the Holston ministers ultimately joined the northern church following the war, but their affinity for Union was shared by other southern ministers in the border region. A convention of ministers from the St. Louis, Louisville, western Virginia, Tennessee, Memphis, and Kansas Mission conferences, all belonging to the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, met in Louisville in the spring of 1864. Their number included Samuel Watson, the presiding elder in Memphis, and S.D. Baldwin, the southern Methodist who was jockeying with Simpson for control of McKendree Chapel in Nashville. They expressed concern that the northern connection was attempting to absorb the southern church, and in the course of their discussions, they addressed the Stanton-Ames order. In their estimation, the measure was “unjust, unnecessary, and subversive alike of good order and the rights of a numerous body of Christians.” The men believed President Lincoln disapproved of the steps taken under the order, and they requested he “restrain and prevent its enforcement.”³²⁵ The Louisville conference showed unionism certainly existed within the southern connection, but those who fell into this category were fighting an uphill battle against northern perceptions. Those missionaries in the south charged with the execution of the Stanton-Ames order rarely believed southern ministers who claimed to be unionists.

Despite protests from Baldwin and Ambrose, the northern occupation of McKendree Chapel in Nashville moved forward. Cramer, Simpson’s appointment, embarked on his new mission with gusto. He informed Simpson of “a fine church in Clarksville,” before he asked, “Shall I go and inspect the ecclesiastical affairs there?” He raised the issue of a southern

³²⁴ “The Methodist Church,” *Knoxville Whig*, January 30, 1864, Newspapers.com.

³²⁵ “Convention of Ministers of the Methodist E. Church, South,” *Nashville Daily Union*, April 14, 1864, *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*, Library of Congress, <https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn83025718/1864-04-14/ed-1/seq-2>.

Methodist church in Edgefield and asked, “Shall I have the church turned over to me or shall I leave it for the present?”³²⁶ In late April, Baldwin once again appealed for control of McKendree Chapel to both Cramer and Simpson and was denied by both. Cramer warned Simpson, that “Mr. Baldwin and Bishop Soule do not represent loyal Methodism in Nashville ... but they do represent disloyal Methodism.” [emphasis in original] He said the men would petition President Lincoln for control of the church, and that Simpson “would be the proper person to influence President Lincoln not to revoke the order of Secretary Stanton.”³²⁷

Two months later, Cramer opened McKendree Chapel for worship. The *Nashville Daily Union* advertised the upcoming service and deemed McKendree “a thoroughly loyal church.”³²⁸ Cramer celebrated the event in another letter to Simpson but admitted his disappointment in the notable absence of every Methodist bishop. In fact, Cramer grumbled about the flagrant silence he had received from the bishop during his time in Nashville; he had written Simpson three times and telegraphed once but had received no reply. Simpson’s silence was all the more striking considering the urgency of Cramer’s letters. Baldwin was still attempting to wrest control of the church from him, and although the military had largely supported Cramer, he was not confident that would continue. He urged the bishop to write to Secretary Stanton or General Webster to not return the church to the southern Methodists. Cramer insisted the northern church could “gain a strong foothold” in Nashville and even establish a good society; Simpson had not been so optimistic. Cramer closed his letter with an appeal for funds; he had been in Nashville three months but had only received fifty dollars from Simpson.³²⁹ Finally, in July, Cramer notified

³²⁶ Holm, *A Kingdom Divided*, 136.

³²⁷ *Michael J. Cramer to Matthew Simpson*, April 25, 1864, Letter, *Matthew Simpson Collection*, Drew University Methodist Collection, Drew University.

³²⁸ “Religious Notice,” *Nashville Daily Union*, June 18, 1864, Newspapers.com.

³²⁹ *Michael J. Cramer to Matthew Simpson*, June 14, 1864, Letter, Drew University Methodist Collection, Drew University.

Simpson of his resignation from McKendree Chapel. Inspired by his strained financial situation and his family's need for him to be closer to home, he accepted a chaplaincy in Covington, Kentucky. It was an appointment Cramer claimed he did not ask for, but as the brother-in-law of the Lieutenant General of the U.S. Army, that seems unlikely. Cramer urged Simpson to personally appoint his replacement to McKendree Chapel, so the appointment would carry weight with military authorities in Nashville.³³⁰

Ames' Southern Terminus

Loyal religion had been a popular topic in New Orleans ever since it fell to federal forces in 1862. Benjamin Butler famously exiled a number of Episcopal ministers for omitting the prescribed prayer for the President of the United States from the benediction at the end of services. When the ministers protested that including the prayer would force half of their congregants to perjure themselves, Butler responded, "Well, if that is the result of your nine years' preaching; if your people will commit perjury so freely, the sooner you leave your pulpit the better."³³¹ By the time Edward Ames arrived in January of 1864, there were thirty vacant churches in the city.³³² The southern Methodist churches were desolate; there was not a single regularly appointed minister in any of their five houses of worship. A man named Dr. Walker officiated in the Carondelet Street Church for six weeks after Butler's arrival, but in time he fled the city. Afterwards, a Protestant Episcopalian agent of the American Bible Society preached there occasionally, but eventually the church was closed.³³³ Ames' arrival in New Orleans would

³³⁰ *Michael J. Cramer to Matthew Simpson*, July 29, 1864, Letter, Drew University Methodist Collection, Drew University.

³³¹ "An Exciting Scene in a New Orleans Church," *Western Christian Advocate*, February 3, 1864.

³³² Sweet, *Methodist Episcopal Church and the Civil War*, 96.

³³³ R. Wheatley, "Mission in the Southern States," *Christian Advocate and Journal*, February 4, 1864.

soon shake the somnolent ecclesiastical scene from its slumber. Southern Methodist churches may have been largely vacant, but by this point in Ames' travels cities knew what to expect, and the southern church intended to do what it could to hold onto its property.

The *Daily True Delta* announced the imminent arrival of Bishop Ames, who was to preach at Carondelet Street Church on the morning of January 17.³³⁴ When Ames arrived at the church, however, the congregation had already assembled, and a minister was in the pulpit. The bishop seated himself in the chapel along with the rest of the congregation. Some of the congregants present that morning knew Bishop Ames, but it had been decades since they had last seen him. The minister who assumed the pulpit looked taller and thinner than they remembered, but as his "sermon was so appropriate to the occasion," the congregation concluded this man must have been Ames. The military chaplain even sat in the pulpit to listen to the minister's preaching. He was so convinced that this man was Ames that after the sermon he approached the minister, shook hands, and called him Bishop Ames.³³⁵

The strange scene that occurred at Carondelet Street Church in New Orleans shows the southern Methodists comprehended the stakes involved in the Stanton-Ames order and were proactively responding to the threat. When Ames entered the church, the man he saw preaching was not the properly appointed minister for the Carondelet charge, but the preacher from McGhee Methodist Church, a Mr. Davis.³³⁶ Less sympathetic papers referred to Davis more colorfully as "an overseer, a negro driver, who was also a local preacher." When the southern church learned that Bishop Ames was drawing closer to New Orleans, they placed Davis in the

³³⁴ "Special Notice," *Daily True Delta*, January 17, 1864, Newspapers.com.

³³⁵ "Bishop Ames in New Orleans," *Christian Advocate and Journal*, February 11, 1864; "The Drum Ecclesiastic," *Columbia Democrat*, February 27, 1864, Newspapers.com.

³³⁶ *Louisville Courier Journal*, February 1, 1864, Newspapers.com; "From New Orleans," *Chicago Tribune*, February 1, 1864, Newspapers.com.

pulpit, so the church would no longer be vacant and vulnerable to Ames' confiscation.³³⁷ New Orleans was not the only instance of this maneuvering by the southern Methodists. Later in the war, one Texan Methodist, E.W. Kennon, warned O.M. Addison about their church in Galveston. The regularly appointed minister had not returned from a trip to collect Bibles, and the federal army was due to arrive within the week. Kennon believed there would be "Yankee Methodist preachers" with the arriving troops and if no minister was present they would "walk into," the Galveston church. Kennon urged Addison to take charge of the Galveston church until the appointed minister returned, and concluded, "We may or may not unite with the Northern Methodists, but I think we ought to protect our interests until the time comes."³³⁸ The potential property concerns injected a dose of urgency into the southern Methodist response. Any minister in the pulpit was better than a vacant church left for the taking.

William B. Leftwich, a southern Methodist minister from Missouri, published a detailed account of subsequent events in New Orleans, and while he retained his own biases, his description provided greater detail on events following Davis's sermon. Bishop Ames appealed to the church's trustees for control of the property, who denied him on the grounds that the bishop "had no ecclesiastical jurisdiction over them." Ames did not pretend to have any ecclesiastical authority over them, but he insisted he was empowered by Secretary Stanton's order and the subsequent order from General Banks, and "by that authority he demanded the surrender of the churches." The trustees continued their refusal, maintaining they could only give up the church "under the stress of a compulsion they had no power, civil or military, to resist."

³³⁷ "Methodist Episcopal Church at New Orleans, *Chicago Tribune*, February 10, 1864, Newspapers.com; "Bishop Ames in New Orleans," *Christian Advocate and Journal*, February 11, 1864.

³³⁸ *E.W. Kennon to O.M. Addison*, June 4, 1865, in *History of Early Methodism in Texas* by Marcum Phelan, https://archive.org/details/MN5075ucmf_0.

Ames obliged; he obtained a military force and took control of the southern Methodist churches in New Orleans on January 18, 1864.³³⁹

Ames' confiscation of the New Orleans churches was arguably the most dramatic incident that occurred under the Stanton-Ames order. Unlike Memphis, the southern Methodists were not caught sleeping. The presence of Mr. Davis in the Carondelet pulpit suggests a formulated plan to hold on to their churches under the new order. First, they needed to ensure the pulpit was not vacant, so they pulled one from their ranks to serve as a warm body. Secondly, they needed a minister who could be considered loyal. It is difficult to know where Mr. Davis's sympathies truly resided, but it is not so difficult to imagine why he would preach a sermon so devoid of any political controversy. The southern church would have recognized that any minister who hoped to hold on to their pulpit needed to avoid any ostensible support for the Confederacy. The *Columbia Democrat* reveled at this deception; after all, how could a minister be disloyal enough to be removed from his pulpit when his sermon was so thoroughly appropriate that a Union chaplain did not know he was not Bishop Ames?³⁴⁰

Critics also pointed out that even vacant pulpits were not enough reason to justify northern occupation. The *Columbia Democrat* explained, "It is easy to make vacancies when the 'fundamental law of the State is martial law' ... The provost marshal makes the vacancy, and Bishop Ames fills it."³⁴¹ Contextually, it made little sense for a church left vacant by fleeing ministers to now host a lively congregation led by a minister so thoroughly inoffensive to Union officials. It seems much more likely that Mr. Davis's sermon was a last-ditch effort by the southern Methodists to retain their New Orleans property.

³³⁹ Leftwich, *Martyrdom in Missouri*, 255.

³⁴⁰ "The Drum Ecclesiastic," *Columbia Democrat*, February 27, 1864, Newspapers.com.

³⁴¹ "The Drum Ecclesiastic," *Columbia Democrat*, February 27, 1864, Newspapers.com.

Backed by the military, Ames quickly took control of the southern Methodist churches throughout the city. He assigned military chaplains to each of the charges until the regularly appointed ministers could arrive.³⁴² Then he appointed Franklin Jones to Moreau Street church, J.L.G. McKown to Felicity Street church, and the famous New Yorker, John P. Newman to Carondelet Street.³⁴³

In November, Ames had set out to travel down the Mississippi river to establish loyal Methodist congregations all the way to the Gulf of Mexico. Initiated in Memphis, Ames' work reached its conclusion at the mouth of the Mississippi. His efforts resulted in various degrees of success, but generally speaking he had established congregations, even if fledgling, in Memphis, Pine Bluff, Little Rock, Vicksburg, Natchez, Baton Rouge, and New Orleans. Northern papers believed Ames' work was only the beginning of an emerging loyal church in the South. The *Christian Advocate and Journal* reported that "the prospect is very favorable. The Methodists who favor the Union are leaving the M.E. Church, South, which they regard as a hotbed of secession, and are desirous of finding other Church connections."³⁴⁴ The *Chicago Tribune*, presented a more tempered outlook, noting Ames described the prospects for reorganization "fair."³⁴⁵ While it is tempting to attribute these predictions to the rosy glasses worn by ministers seeing what they want to see, there were likely other forces at play.

In the eyes of northern ministers, especially those willing to travel into the war-torn South, northern Methodism was synonymous with loyalism; southern Methodism was tantamount to disloyalty. This led to an easy conflation of unionism with sympathy for the Methodist Episcopal Church. Correspondents wrote raving accounts of unionism emerging in

³⁴² *Nashville Daily Union*, February 2, 1864, Newspapers.com.

³⁴³ "M.E. Church in the South," *Christian Advocate and Journal*, February 4, 1864.

³⁴⁴ Ibid.

³⁴⁵ "Methodist Episcopal Church at New Orleans," *Chicago Tribune*, February 10, 1864, Newspapers.com.

places like Memphis, Little Rock, and New Orleans, and it must have been tempting to imagine that unionist sentiment would lead people directly back to the “loyal” church. The *Daily Evening Express* argued Ames’ mission, along with those of the other major denominations, “will go hand in hand with the Free State movements in the Slave States.”³⁴⁶ Free statism and loyal Methodism could grow hand-in-hand.

In actuality, lay people could be unionist in political sympathies yet settle into the southern church for less sacred considerations. The southern church retained the moneyed class, and the financial influence that came with them, in the South through the Civil War.³⁴⁷ Southern Methodists could and did pressure community businessmen to attend “southern” churches if they hoped to receive any patronage.³⁴⁸ Some congregants changed allegiances based on location. Northerners who moved South may have attended southern Methodist churches just because that was the Methodist church available to them.³⁴⁹ Some southern churches simply removed the word “South” from their signs, a practice northern Methodists believed was meant to hoodwink northern immigrants.³⁵⁰

When looked at objectively, the ultimate ecclesiastical associations of southern laypeople should not be that surprising. The Methodist Episcopal Church exerted substantial effort explaining how the only issue dividing the two sections was slavery. Once slavery was erased, northerners believed the two connections could be reunited. However, that interpretation just as easily points to the needlessness of putting up with the stigma and danger of associating oneself with the northern connection. Once slavery was erased, the two denominations should have been

³⁴⁶ “Movement Among Southern Churches,” *Daily Evening Express*, February 4, 1864, Newspapers.com.

³⁴⁷ Morrow, *Northern Methodism and Reconstruction*, 120.

³⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 111.

³⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 110.

³⁵⁰ Morrow, *Northern Methodism and Reconstruction*, 110.

virtually identical, and if that was true, why risk social and financial destitution, or even physical violence, to attend the northern church? It was risky enough to be a unionist; why invite more criticism by being a northern Methodist? If the northern and southern churches really were destined to be so similar, it follows that those of financial standing would go where the money and influence was located--the southern church.

It is an interesting development that only the Methodists energetically confiscated the property of their southern counterparts. Secretary Stanton issued similar orders to the Baptists in January of 1864 and the Presbyterian Board of Missions a month later.³⁵¹ Each order invited greater criticism of the unyielding Secretary of War. The *Holmes County Farmer* facetiously praised Stanton who they believed was “getting hopefully pious” and that he had designs to “constitute himself Director General of all the Churches.” The writer judged, “He is making rapid progress in that direction.”³⁵² Bishop Soule of the southern connection complained, “It seems that the Secretary of War at Washington has become an archbishop.”³⁵³ But if he was anything, Stanton was one who could withstand criticism. After the ambitious Ames completed his trek down the Mississippi, Stanton must have hoped for comparable results from the Baptist and Presbyterian orders. Such success, however, never came.

Southern Methodists tended to praise the Baptists and Presbyterians for showing restraint after being empowered to confiscate churches. The absence of widespread church appropriation by these denominations provided the perfect backdrop to heap scorn on Ames and his

³⁵¹ Sweet. *Methodist Episcopal Church and the Civil War*, 99; “Southern Churches,” *Western Christian Advocate*, February 17, 1864; “Southern Churches,” *Brownlow’s Knoxville Whig*, February 20, 1864, Newspapers.com.

³⁵² “The Head of the Church,” *Holmes County Farmer*, February 18, 1864, *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers* Library of Congress, <https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn84028822/1864-02-18/ed-1/seq-2>.

³⁵³ “Visit to a ‘Grayback’ Conference,” *Nashville Daily Union*, May 26, 1864, *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*, Library of Congress, <https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn83025718/1864-05-26/ed-1/seq-4>.

compatriots. The *Nashville Christian Advocate* claimed Ames urged Bishop Wittingham of the Protestant Episcopal Church to practice similar confiscations, but the bishop rejected his overtures “with contempt.” A Dutch Reformed minister in New Orleans similarly rejected the opportunity to occupy the pulpit vacated by the famed Benjamin Morgan Palmer. Fifteen years after the events from 1864, the *New Orleans Advocate* explained that although similar orders were given to other denominations, only Bishop Ames and the northern Methodists actually took churches, so to Ames and the Methodists “belong the credit and glory of the measure, and they should be permitted to remain in possession of their laurels. No other Northern Church, so far as we have heard, ever stooped so low as to avail itself of ecclesiastical spoliation in New Orleans.”³⁵⁴ The absence of comprehensive actions taken by other denominations became evidence of northern Methodist amorality. Any true Christian minister would have understood the odium attached to such maneuverings, yet northern Methodists had plowed ahead when no other denomination would.

But absence of action was not indicative of differing sentiments. Surely there were Presbyterians and Baptists who found southern church confiscation distasteful, just as there were northern Methodists. There were plenty of indications, however, that other denominations hoped to replicate Ames’ mission among the southern churches connected to their own denominations. Two ministers from the United Brethren of Ohio called on Attorney General Edward Bates concerning “Bishop Ames’ monopoly of churches in the South.” Bates confided in his diary that the two men had a “hankering after a share of the plunder.” The Attorney General told the men “there was not a shadow of law for what was done,” and “there was little display of christian principle in thus coveting their neighbor’s land.” He predicted, “The proceeding would break

³⁵⁴ Hunter Dickinson Farish, *The Circuit Rider Dismounts: A Social History of Southern Methodism, 1865-1900* (New York: De Cap Press, 1969), 26.

down Bishop Ames, even with his own people.”³⁵⁵ A New Orleans correspondent wrote to the *Christian Advocate and Journal* in the summer of 1864 that “our loyal Presbyterian brethren are beginning to appreciate the Methodist policy in regard to the Southern work,” and he hoped that soon “at least one of the eight or ten Presbyterian churches of this city will be occupied by a loyal minister.”³⁵⁶ In December of the same year, the Provost Marshal in New Orleans appointed a committee to investigate Baptist and Presbyterian churches in the region. After canvassing the churches, the committee reported that nearly every church in the city was vacant, and they recommended the “immediate occupation of these Churches” by certain persons specified in an order from the Lincoln War Department.³⁵⁷ One Presbyterian even explicitly defended the northern Methodist strategy, which he argued was to preach the Gospel to those who would be without. The Stanton-Ames order, in his estimation, was nothing more than a permit providing government sanction to their actions.³⁵⁸ There certainly appeared to be a degree of willingness among other denominations to engage in similar practices to the northern Methodists; so why did they ultimately sit the southern venture out?

While some explanation may come from the emphasis on movement within the Methodist ministry, the inaction of other denominations can likely be explained by a tried and true aphorism--timing is everything. Stanton commissioned Ames at the end of November of 1863, and the bishop did not confiscate his first church until he arrived in Memphis in late December. Ames, who by all accounts moved swiftly, still took a month from the day he was commissioned to act on Stanton’s orders. The Baptists were much less centralized than the

³⁵⁵ Edward Bates, *The Diary of Edward Bates 1859-1866* (Washington: United States Government Printing Office, 1933), 351.

³⁵⁶ “Letter from New Orleans,” *Christian Advocate and Journal*, July 29, 1864.

³⁵⁷ “New Orleans Churches,” *Southern Christian Advocate*, December 8, 1864, University of Florida Digital Collections, <https://ufdc.ufl.edu/UF00102121/00019>.

³⁵⁸ Sweet, *Methodist Episcopal Church and the Civil War*, 109.

Methodists, so it is probable it would have taken them even longer to execute a southern strategy following their order in the middle of January. Stanton did not authorize the Presbyterians until February 14, and by that point the ecclesiastico-military partnership was facing a very different reality. The window to loyalize southern churches by placing loyal ministers in their pulpits in a concerted effort was remarkably brief. Ames could not have known it when he left New Orleans to return to St. Louis, but Stanton's boss was becoming aware of just what the Secretary had appointed the bishop to do.

The Stanton-Ames order became even more incendiary in the public eye when General Benjamin Butler joined the fray. Under the War Department's order, Bishop Baker sent Reverend Round to North Carolina to reorganize loyal Methodism there. Round immediately ran into difficulties because he appealed to Butler's "underlings" instead of the General himself. Whether Round faced opposition from Butler's lieutenants or the General was upset because he was not consulted himself, any future success in North Carolina depended on mending the Methodists' relationship with Butler.³⁵⁹ Apparently, Round also erred by urging the provost marshal in New Bern to get the trustees to turn their church over for the exclusive use of the African Methodist Episcopal Church. Round's situation was challenging enough that the Correspondence Secretary of the Missionary Society, J.P. Durbin, urged Bishop Baker to smooth things over with General Butler personally.

Still, prospects for a loyal church in North Carolina appeared promising. A correspondent for the *Christian Advocate and Journal* visited New Bern, North Carolina in 1862, and he described the presence of a substantial number of unionists who remained following the federal occupation. He also noted the presence of "the unquestionably loyal blacks in sufficient numbers

³⁵⁹ *JP Durbin to Osman C. Baker*, February 19, 1864, Letter, from *Letters from Correspondence Secretary, 1850-1865*, MEC Missionary Society, Drew University.

to fill more than one church edifice.”³⁶⁰ Northern Methodists had already begun to organize the African American population surrounding New Bern, and in early February boasted a membership of five hundred.³⁶¹

General Butler’s unwillingness to help Reverend Round certainly did not indicate an unwillingness to get involved. In fact, Butler issued an order regarding churches in Portsmouth and Norfolk, Virginia, that was even more broad in scope and more specific in its definitions of disloyalty than the Stanton-Ames order. On February 11, Butler placed “all places of public worship in Norfolk and Portsmouth” under the control of his provost marshals, regardless of denomination. He authorized his provost marshals to “see the pulpits filled properly by displacing, when necessary, the present incumbents, and substituting men of known loyalty and the same sectarian denomination.” The General ordered his lieutenants to ensure churches be “open free to all officers and soldiers, white or colored, at the usual hour of worship,” and that “no insult or indignity be offered to them, either by word, look, or gesture on the part of the congregation.”³⁶² Butler’s order extended far beyond the ambiguous prescriptions of the Stanton-Ames order. The General’s order was ecumenical; it brought all churches in Norfolk and Portsmouth under his jurisdiction and then prescribed specific behaviors to their congregations.³⁶³

Unsurprisingly, Butler’s order generated marked opposition from the press. While southern condemnations of Ames were sometimes tempered by acknowledgements that he was a godly man who was just misled, “beast” Butler was condemned across the South. With his reputation already established following the occupation of New Orleans, any order given by him was certain to invite criticism. Of course, it did not help that his order was more specific and far-

³⁶⁰ R. Wheatley, “Missions in the Southern States,” *Christian Advocate and Journal*, February 4, 1864.

³⁶¹ *Ibid.*

³⁶² Fleming, *Documentary History of Reconstruction*, volume 1, 223.

³⁶³ Blair, *With Malice Toward Some*, 143.

reaching than Stanton's. The *Charleston Mercury* decried Butler's goal to integrate churches and the draconian measures authorized to accomplish it. Under Butler's order, only those ministers who had sworn the oath of allegiance were allowed to preach, which thoroughly upended the clergy in the two coastal cities. Any minister who refused to officiate would be replaced by northern chaplains and their congregations would be taxed for their support. A Reverend Mr. Wingfield refused the oath and saw his pulpit turned over to a Union chaplain, and the Methodist minister in Portsmouth, George M. Bain, was arrested and imprisoned at Fort Norfolk.³⁶⁴ The *Daily Intelligencer* of Wheeling, West Virginia sarcastically proclaimed, "We read of a time when kings shall be nursing fathers and queens shall be nursing mothers in Israel, but in this latter day it was reserved for our happy land to present to an admiring world the illustrious example of a Major General who combines with his military character ... the sacred functions of a missionary bishop." General Butler was "a man whose zeal in destroying the bodies of rebels is excelled only by his pious care for their souls."³⁶⁵

³⁶⁴ "The Fate of the Conquered," *Charleston Mercury*, February 25, 1864, Newspapers.com.

³⁶⁵ *Daily Intelligencer*, March 5, 1864, *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*, Library of Congress, <https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn84026845/1864-03-05/ed-1/seq-1>.

THE TIPPING POINT

The Stanton-Ames order somehow remained off the President's radar during its first two months of enforcement, but events in Nashville, New Orleans, and Virginia made it increasingly difficult for the chief executive to remain unaware. Mordecai J.W. Ambrose, the southern Methodist chaplain in Nashville, raised the issue in a letter to the President on February 2.³⁶⁶ Lincoln responded to John Hogan, a former Methodist minister and a fellow Whig who had served with the President in the Illinois General Assembly, regarding Stanton-Ames on February 13, so it seems likely Hogan had voiced his own concern as well.³⁶⁷ What is certain, is that while Ames was on his return voyage to St. Louis, the President sent a stern rebuke to his Secretary of War. He repeated for Stanton the words he had written O.D. Filley regarding the McPheeters case, specifically his pledge to "not have control of any church on any side." One has to wonder what went through Stanton's head when he read the final paragraph of Lincoln's letter:

After having made this declaration in good faith, and in writing, you can conceive of my embarrassment at now having brought to me what purports to be a formal order of the War Department, bearing date Nov. 30th 1863, giving Bishop Ames control and possession of all the Methodist churches in certain Southern Military Departments, whose pastors have not been appointed by a loyal Bishop or Bishops, and ordering the military to aid him against any resistance which may be made to his taking such possession and control.³⁶⁸

³⁶⁶ Mordecai J.W. Ambrose to Abraham Lincoln, February 2, 1864, Letter, *Abraham Lincoln papers: Series 1. General Correspondence. 1833-1916*, Library of Congress, <http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.mss/ms000001.mss30189a.3008100>.

³⁶⁷ John Hogan to Abraham Lincoln, February 13, 1864, Letter, *Abraham Lincoln papers: Series 1. General Correspondence. 1833-1916*, Library of Congress, <http://www.loc.gov/resource/mal.3050200>.

³⁶⁸ Abraham Lincoln to Edwin Stanton, February 11, 1864, Letter, from Library of Congress, *Edwin McMasters Stanton Papers: Correspondence, 1831-1870; 1863; 1863, Nov. 28-1864, Feb. 27*, https://www.loc.gov/resource/mss41202.007_0208_0455/?sp=224&r=-0.444,0.454,1.379,0.579,0#.

The President posed to the Secretary a piercing question: “What is to be done about it?”³⁶⁹ Stanton surely understood this was no empty question. The swiftness with which he adjusted his order shows he understood that he had stretched the bounds of constitutionality beyond which Lincoln could justify or accept. As fate would have it, Edward Ames arrived in St. Louis at the headquarters of General Rosecrans on February 12, one day after Lincoln’s rebuke of Stanton.³⁷⁰

Establishing connection with the General in charge was Edward Ames’ *modus operandi* in Memphis and New Orleans, so his stop at Rosecrans’ headquarters indicated St. Louis was slated for a similar fate. Armed with his order from the War Department, Ames asked that the General assist in beginning the process of placing churches that fell under the order in the hands of loyal ministers. Rosecrans immediately issued a circular to the commanding officers in his department that “they furnish Bishop Ames every facility and assistance compatible with the interests of the service” under the Stanton-Ames order.³⁷¹ The bishop received swift support from military officers on his trip down the Mississippi, but Rosecrans may have been the most enthusiastic. Earlier in the war, he had issued an order requiring religious professionals to certify their loyalty before they could congregate in groups, so he shared the view that disloyal ministers could pose a threat. He ordered his officers to catalog which houses or worship fit the criteria of the Stanton-Ames order and report them to his headquarters.³⁷² As far as coordinated occupations of southern Methodist churches go, St. Louis looked to be business as usual.

³⁶⁹ *Abraham Lincoln to Edwin Stanton*, February 11, 1864, Letter, *Edwin McMasters Stanton Papers: Correspondence, 1831-1870; 1863; 1863, Nov. 28-1864, Feb. 27*, Library of Congress, https://www.loc.gov/resource/mss41202.007_0208_0455/?sp=224&r=-0.444,0.454,1.379,0.579,0#.

³⁷⁰ *William S. Rosecrans to Edwin Stanton*, February 28, 1864, in *The War of the Rebellion: a compilation of the official records of the Union and Confederate armies*, series 1, volume xxxiv, part 2, 452, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/coo.31924077730251>.

³⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 452.

³⁷² *William S. Rosecrans to Edwin Stanton*, February 11, 1864, in *The War of the Rebellion: a compilation of the official records of the Union and Confederate armies*, series 1, volume xxxiv, part 2, 311, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/coo.31924077730251>.

But for the Secretary of War, Lincoln's letter changed the equation. Stanton may have been the busiest person in the country throughout the war, so the church order was just one of many demanding his attention, but he quickly endeavored to align his order with the President's wishes. He first explained to the President that his intention with the order had only been to rally loyal Methodists where the rebellion had disorganized them.³⁷³ Lincoln was not completely satisfied with Stanton's explanation, and he confessed to John Hogan that even under Stanton's more narrow application the order was "liable to some abuses." Still, he admitted, "it is not quite easy to withdraw it entirely, and at once."³⁷⁴ Although he elected to let the order stand, Lincoln's message to Stanton altered the church order in both letter and spirit.

In St. Louis, the day after General Rosecrans issued his circular calling on officers to assist the bishop in occupying disloyal pulpits, John Hogan arrived at the General's headquarters with another letter from the War Department, endorsed by the President himself, clarifying that the Stanton-Ames order was:

Designed to apply only to such States as are designated by the President's Proclamation as being in rebellion, and is not designed to operate in loyal States, nor in cases where loyal congregations in rebel States shall be organized and worship upon the terms prescribed by the President's Amnesty Proclamation.³⁷⁵

Rosecrans must have been baffled. On Friday, a bishop arrived with an order from the War Department authorizing him to take control of southern Methodist churches presided over by

³⁷³ *Abraham Lincoln, Endorsement to John Hogan*, February 13, 1864, *Abraham Lincoln papers: Series 1, General Correspondence, 1833-1916*, Library of Congress, <http://www.loc.gov/resource/mal.3049600>.

³⁷⁴ Hay and Nicolay, *Abraham Lincoln: A History*, vol. 6, 338.

³⁷⁵ Leftwich, *Martyrdom in Missouri*, 263.

disloyal ministers, and on Saturday another order arrived explaining that the first order did not apply to Missouri.

That Sunday, Ames preached to the largest crowd ever assembled at the Methodist Episcopal Church in the city. His sermon focused on the rising tide of unionism he encountered in the South and the growing number of southern slaveholders who were ready to free their chattels.³⁷⁶ When Ames preached to this large crowd, it is easy to wonder if he was aware of the new restrictions placed on his commission. Did Rosecrans contact him immediately upon receiving notice from Lincoln? Or was Ames still of the belief that he would be able to occupy St. Louis churches as he had in other cities along the Mississippi? Judging by a letter he sent to the Secretary of War in late February, it seems likely that Rosecrans was a little slower to restrict Stanton-Ames than he was with its initial enforcement. Rosecrans explained that he had no copy of the official letter shown to him by Hogan on February 13, and he expressed confusion as to the policy the War Department really intended to take toward church property. He closed his letter with a request “that more definite instructions be furnished to enable me to carry out the views and intentions of the Government.”³⁷⁷ Rosecrans’ confusion is understandable. He received two contradictory orders from the War Department on back to back days. This confusion resulted at least partly from the fact that Lincoln himself had no official policy regarding church confiscation, but instead dealt with ecclesiastical issues as they arose.³⁷⁸ In some ways, this sentenced him to playing a game of catch-up regarding the War Department’s order.

³⁷⁶ “Loyalty in the South,” *Nashville Daily Union*, February 16, 1864, Newspapers.com.

³⁷⁷ William S. Rosecrans, *William S. Rosecrans to Edwin Stanton*, February 28, 1864, in *The War of the Rebellion: a compilation of the official records of the Union and Confederate armies*, series 1, volume xxxiv, part 2, 452-453, <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/coo.31924077730251>.

³⁷⁸ Hay and Nicolay, *Abraham Lincoln: A History*, 333.

After Hogan delivered the revised order accompanied by the Lincoln endorsement, events in Missouri fell into a brief stasis. The press reports resembled those from New Orleans and Memphis, absent any specific details. The *Memphis Daily Appeal* guessed that Rosecrans and Ames intended to “cram the gospel according to Lincoln into the hearts of the people with Abolition bayonets” in Missouri, and the *Chicago Tribune* promised Ames would supply Missouri pulpits with ministers who would preach “first from the Bible, second from the Federal Constitution.”³⁷⁹ Conspicuously, there were no dramatic accounts of Ames confiscating St. Louis churches and no appeals from disaffected southern Methodists who were turned out of their buildings. It seems that Ames, just like Rosecrans, wanted someone to resolve the confusion surrounding the church order before proceeding.

The President obliged on March 4, 1864. In an official memorandum on the churches, Lincoln repeated himself, “I have written before, and now repeat, the United States Government must not undertake to run the churches.” Of course, blanket statements like this had created the space for the current confusion, so the President elaborated, “When an individual in a church or out of it becomes dangerous to the public interest he must be checked, but the churches as such must take care of themselves.” Lincoln recognized the danger posed by disloyal ministers in the South, and he understood that those men may have to be ruled with a heavy hand. What he disagreed with, however, was federal authorities regulating what occurred in a pulpit following a disloyal minister’s ejection. That was a responsibility that should remain with the churches themselves. As far as church property was concerned, Lincoln maintained it would not do “for the United States to appoint trustees, supervisors, or other agents for the churches,” and “if the

³⁷⁹ *Memphis Daily Appeal*, March 1, 1864, *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*, Lib. of Congress, <https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn83045160/1864-03-01/ed-1/seq-2>; *Chicago Tribune*, February 15, 1864, [Newspapers.com](https://www.newspapers.com).

military have military need of the church building, let them keep it; otherwise let them get out of it, and leave it and its owners alone except for causes that justify the arrest of any one.”³⁸⁰ The President differentiated between confiscation for military needs and confiscation for ecclesiastical needs. His memorandum came as close as anything to an official presidential policy regarding churches.

Lincoln’s memorandum marked a clear end to Bishop Ames’ southern exploits. A nineteenth century writer noted it was “not ... generally known,” but the President’s order prevented the confiscation of Centenary and First Church in St. Louis.³⁸¹ A number of churches exchanged hands in the following years, but it was no longer done with the coordinated brazenness that characterized the Stanton-Ames order. By and large, the northern Methodist focus shifted from taking to holding the churches obtained under Stanton-Ames and using those properties to reorganize the northern church in the South. By the middle of March, Ames was back in the North, presiding over the Philadelphia conference in Wilmington, Delaware, and those he appointed to southern charges assumed the responsibility of the religious reconstruction of the South.³⁸²

Bishop Ames certainly seemed to respond to the President’s memorandum, so it is curious that Lincoln’s clarification received so little press. Critics pointed to Lincoln’s previous statements regarding the McPheeters case and used those to indicate the President’s true position regarding church interference. The *Fayetteville Semi Weekly Observer* claimed Lincoln may have once opposed the occupation of southern churches, but “as in the case of negro emancipation, he has changed.”³⁸³ Other pundits believed Lincoln was just playing politics. The

³⁸⁰ Abraham Lincoln, *Abraham Lincoln: Complete Works*, vol. 2, (New York: The Century Co., 1907), 491.

³⁸¹ Thomas Finney, *Life and Labors of Enoch Mather Marvin: Late Bishop of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South* (St. Louis: James H. Chambers, 1880), 544.

³⁸² “Methodist Episcopal Church,” *Western Christian Advocate*, March 16, 1864.

³⁸³ “Freedom of Religion,” *Fayetteville Semi-Weekly Observer*,” March 28, 1864, Newspapers.com

Cadiz Democrat Sentinel rightly noted the Stanton-Ames order was still a standing order despite the President's objections. Lincoln, the "sly old fox," refused to withdraw the order because "he don't intend to interfere with preacher or churches," so he left Stanton's order "untouched to be interpreted by his tools in their own way and to suit their own purposes."³⁸⁴ Lincoln's public disapproval could put him on the right side of the issue in the press, but the substance of the order remained, allowing the War Department to continue the practice so condemned by the President. Others maintained Lincoln let the order stand in order to placate the Methodists, who he himself declared "sent more soldiers to the field and more prayers to heaven."³⁸⁵ Critics argued Lincoln's refusal to rescind the order belied his true feelings, but the President's simple revisions of the original order created confusion in Missouri, how much more disruptive would a complete reversal, applied to the entire southern states, have been? Communication across the war-torn South was dreadful and military commanders were burdened enough; why muddle the situation further?

Because the Stanton-Ames order remained in effect, some attributed the lack of church confiscations in Missouri to the prudence of Bishop Ames. When the Missouri and Arkansas conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church met on March 2, it praised Ames for "not acting under the authority conferred upon him by the War Department." The conference hoped other bishops would pursue the same course because it did not desire "either the occupancy or possession of any property to which we have no legal title."³⁸⁶ If they knew about the restrictions Lincoln advocated, the ministers gave no signal. It is interesting to note, that while the Missouri and Arkansas ministers appeared to show restraint in opposing any extralegal occupation of

³⁸⁴ "Running Churches as Political Machines," *Cadiz Democrat Sentinel*, March 9, 1864, *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*, Lib. of Congress, <https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn84028794/1864-03-09/ed-1/seq-1/>.

³⁸⁵ Finney, *Life and Labors of Enoch Mather Marvin*, 546.

³⁸⁶ Elliott, *Southwestern Methodism*, 464.

churches, the state had seen its fair share of church property disputes throughout the war. Perhaps that is why the conference specified “property to which we have no legal title” as opposed to simply saying “southern Methodist churches.”

Armed with their new knowledge of southern conditions, northern Methodist leadership returned to normal business. The bishops’ visitation schedule in the spring included only northern charges; no bishop traveled further south than Jefferson City, Missouri.³⁸⁷ Bishop Simpson was scheduled to be in New York for the anniversary celebration of the Missionary Society on February tenth, two days before Lincoln limited the Stanton-Ames order.³⁸⁸ Ames’ itinerary appeared downright antebellum. He presided over the Philadelphia conference in Wilmington, Delaware on March 9, the East Baltimore conference in Altoona, Pennsylvania on March 16, and the Providence conference on March 23.³⁸⁹ The bishops’ role shifted to one of raising awareness and public support for the southern effort; the grunt work of reestablishing the Methodist Episcopal Church in the South fell to those ministers they appointed to southern charges.

The New Guard

Of the twenty-one regularly appointed northern Methodist ministers who went South in the final two years of the war, few had the stature of John P. Newman of New York.³⁹⁰ Ames appointed Newman to take charge of the Carondelet Street Church in New Orleans, a task for which the *Western Christian Advocate* deemed him “fully competent.” He was “an able and

³⁸⁷ “Plan of Episcopal Visitation,” *Western Christian Advocate*, March 2, 1864.

³⁸⁸ “Anniversary of the Missionary Society,” *Christian Advocate and Journal*, February 4, 1864.

³⁸⁹ “The Philadelphia Conference,” *Western Christian Advocate*, March 16, 1864; “Providence Conference,” *Christian Advocate and Journal*, April 7, 1864.

³⁹⁰ Sweet, *The Methodist Episcopal Church and the Civil War*, 100.

earnest man” who went South not “after brick and mortar, but after the souls of men.”³⁹¹ Two months passed from Newman’s appointment to the time he could assume his position at the head of Carondelet Street Church. When he finally arrived on March 20, he announced his platform, what the *Christian Advocate and Journal* described as “loyal Methodism,” that claimed the “right to go unchallenged wherever the wants of humanity demand it.”³⁹² Newman repeated the words of John Wesley, “The world is my parish and heaven is my home,” and he rejected the claim that the Methodist Episcopal Church was strictly northern. Echoing Bishop Simpson, he maintained, “There is no such church as the Methodist Church North. Ours is the Methodist Episcopal Church. We are not sectional.”³⁹³ The Methodist church thrived through expansion; it had always been that way. The southern field, to Newman, was no different than those in Scandinavia, Bulgaria, or Constantinople. He promised the Methodist Episcopal Church would follow their parishioners “whatever mountains they may climb, into whatever valleys they may descend, on whatever plains they may spread themselves, or whatever seas they may cross.” He claimed the Methodists in New Orleans were especially vulnerable because their ministers either fled or were imprisoned, and it was “the solemn duty of the Mother Church to send shepherds to these deserted and scattered flocks.” Newman insisted, “A shepherd should never leave his flock though all of Uncle Sam’s guns were turned against him.”³⁹⁴ A good way to rhetorically kill two birds with one stone, Newman simultaneously condemned southern ministers who abandoned their congregations and pledged the northern church to steadfastly meet the religious needs of southern Methodists.

³⁹¹ “Dr. Newman in New Orleans,” *Western Christian Advocate*, April 20, 1864.

³⁹² “Letter from New Orleans,” *Christian Advocate and Journal*, September 8, 1864.

³⁹³ Fleming, *Documentary History of Reconstruction*, vol. 1, 238.

³⁹⁴ “Dr. Newman in New Orleans,” *Christian Advocate and Journal*, April 7, 1864.

If Newman had only belonged to the southern denomination his words would have been met with wide approbation. The Methodist Episcopal Church, South, in New Orleans was largely isolated from the rest of their parent body. The Louisiana conference of the southern church lamented its condition as “cut off from all communication with the Parent Board.” Their conference persisted through the previous years without the benefit of a bishop, which left it unable to confirm and ordain new ministers. The conference pledged itself to any southern Methodist bishop who would take up residence in the city and conduct the necessary functions of the episcopacy.³⁹⁵ The southern Methodists in New Orleans lacked more than bishops. Linus Parker had been stationed at Felicity Street Church but by the end of 1864 was appointed to the Shreveport station. William C. Young served at Moreau Street but became a chaplain in the army. In fact, besides the Presiding Elder of the New Orleans district, John C. Keener, the conference minutes show no regularly appointed officials in the city.³⁹⁶

Newman recognized and seized upon the ecclesiastical destitution of his new charge. In his initial address he justified the northern church’s southern movement by “the present disorganized and destitute condition of the southern Churches.” He admitted, “The question of property confronts us. We are denounced as Church robbers; are charged with having robbed the people of the South of their Church property,” but he dismissed this criticism by insisting “the right of Church property has never been disturbed, so far as we are concerned.” For Newman, the southern Methodist churches were not seized by the Methodist Episcopal Church but by the federal government who initially confiscated the churches. Furthermore, these seizures were not robbery because the federal government understood “these churches were occupied (so far as

³⁹⁵ *Missionary Report and Minutes of the Nineteenth Session of the Louisiana Annual Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South*, Mount Lebanon, Louisiana, 1865, 15.

³⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 9.

they were occupied at all) by congregations united by disloyal sympathies and by teachers disposed to inculcate treason.”³⁹⁷ The government knew the danger they risked by placing southern Methodists back in their pulpits, so they turned to the northern Methodists who “hold and teach that loyalty is a religious duty, as truly obligatory as prayer itself.”³⁹⁸

Newman concluded his sermon with a final promise. He looked up toward the gallery which was filled with African Americans and promised, “If the Caucasian should reject the Gospel and refuse to fill the churches, we turn to the sons of Africa.”³⁹⁹ Whether Newman understood or not, his promise raised two critical concerns for the northern Methodist work in the South; could the northern Methodists attract enough white southerners to the reorganized church, and would they be willing to share a pew with former slaves. Some northern Methodists envisioned a church in the South filled by both races, overseen by ministers both white and black. But these visions soon encountered the opposition of local southerners, and in the interest of accommodation, revealed just how flexible the northern Methodist concept of equality could be.

“The Sons of Africa”

Historian Ralph Morrow argued that Newman’s concluding remarks at Carondelet Street Church signal the “enigma” of the northern Methodist strategy in the South. When General Hawkins urged Ames to embark on a southern mission it was to help the freedmen, not to reorganize a white southern church.⁴⁰⁰ Yet Newman prioritized whites in his introductory sermon. Much like the Lincoln administration, this contradiction is likely due to the absence of any

³⁹⁷ “Dr. Newman in New Orleans,” *Christian Advocate and Journal*, April 7, 1864.

³⁹⁸ Ibid.

³⁹⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰⁰ Morrow, *Northern Methodism and Reconstruction*, 125.

official policy regarding the freedmen. Over a year after Newman's sermon, N.L. Brakeman, writing from Baton Rouge, pleaded, "How long must we wait" to know "the policy of the Methodist Episcopal Church with reference to the colored people of the South? Has it a policy or a purpose?"⁴⁰¹ Without official direction, northern agents reacted to the exigencies of their unique situations. Morrow argued northern agents were either unprepared or undirected to meet the needs of the freedmen in the South.⁴⁰² Good intentions did not always translate to good actions.

To be sure, many northern Methodists hoped to alleviate the suffering and improve the lives of the newly freed population in the South. Bishop Simpson, while raising funds for the Missionary Society, insisted that "God has thrown on our Church a tremendous responsibility" in reference to the freedmen.⁴⁰³ New England Methodists became some of the most outspoken advocates for racial equality in the South. Gilbert Haven believed segregation in the church based on race was "a stench in the nostrils of the Almighty," and professed, "the church above all things must do right."⁴⁰⁴ However, these intentions encountered practical realities which compelled compromise from northern officials. Reverend Brakeman described the black church in Baton Rouge by saying there was "not a more intelligent, spiritual, thriving colored congregation in the state," but followed with a sentence that carried more meaning than he likely intended, "they worship in the basement of our excellent church."⁴⁰⁵ Northern Methodists inevitably encountered opposition to their vision of racial equality from white southerners, but

⁴⁰¹ N.L. Brakeman, "Letter from Louisiana," *Western Christian Advocate*, April 26, 1865, Internet Archive, <https://archive.org/details/westernchristian00reid/page/n1/mode/2up>.

⁴⁰² Morrow, *Northern Methodism and Reconstruction*, 126.

⁴⁰³ "Anniversary of the Missionary Society," *Christian Advocate and Journal*, February 18, 1864.

⁴⁰⁴ Morrow, *Northern Methodism and Reconstruction*, 183.

⁴⁰⁵ N.L. Brakeman, "Letter from Louisiana," *Western Christian Advocate*, April 26, 1865, Internet Archive, <https://archive.org/details/westernchristian00reid/page/n1/mode/2up>.

for all their noble philanthropic aims, the Methodist Episcopal Church battled paternalistic racial biases of their own.⁴⁰⁶

The *Christian Advocate and Journal* lamented the “sinful prejudice against colored people” that “grievously afflicted” the northern church, but in an explanation for why the races required segregated services, betrayed the very prejudice they condemned. The will for racial separation, according to the journal, was mutual. The freedmen knew “that in any possible union with the whites they will occupy but a few of the chief positions--not because they are colored ... but for lack of culture and general intellectual qualifications.”⁴⁰⁷ Any separation was explained through the freedmen’s own sense of racial inferiority. The paper maintained, “The petition ... of the universal equality of all men in the Church, irrespective of race or color, is the correct one, but it is rather an *ideal* to be aimed at and labored for, than a practical *reality* to be suddenly effected. Yet it should be steadily kept in view and striven for, and though not at once attainable, it may be steadily approximated.”⁴⁰⁸ This belief pervaded the more conservative corners of the Methodist Episcopal Church. Racial equality in the church was the goal, but it was impossible in the immediate context. So religious reconstruction, in light of this impossibility, needed to be done pragmatically, not idealistically. If that meant compromise in the racial composition of their ministers or the congregations they led, then so be it. Those compromises would only be temporary expedients, destined to adjustment at a future, more enlightened time.

Publicly at least, there was a degree of enthusiasm for appointing black ministers in the Methodist Episcopal Church. Edward Ames, two months after his government-ordained trip down the Mississippi, spoke to the Providence conference on the condition of the black

⁴⁰⁶ M French, “The End of the War,” *Christian Advocate and Journal*, June 1, 1865.

⁴⁰⁷ “Reconstruction,” *Christian Advocate and Journal*, May 25, 1865.

⁴⁰⁸ *Ibid.*

population of the South. He deemed a supply of black ministers to the southern states a “prime necessity” that, if mobilized, would be “a most effective method of serving this people with the Gospel and of building up among them a strong and efficient ecclesiastical body.”⁴⁰⁹ However, when Daniel Curry of New York suggested the appointment of black ministers to all conferences at the 1864 General Conference, he was “feebly applauded.”⁴¹⁰ Granted, measuring applause levels is hardly a scientific process, but when, at the same conference, the bishops’ address proposed banning slaveholders from the northern church, applause escalated to shouts of “Amen” and “Glory to God” before culminating in a collective rendition of “Praise God, from whom all blessings flow.”⁴¹¹ In comparison, the “feeble” applause for appointing black ministers to all conferences was telling. The northern Methodists could support black preaching serving black congregations, but they were not quite ready to support black ministers serving all congregations.

Gilbert Haven’s fight to earn an appointment for John Newton Mars, a prominent African American minister, illustrates the challenges advocates faced in cultivating a racially egalitarian clergy. By the outbreak of the Civil War, Mars possessed an extensive and ecumenical ministerial record; he had labored in the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church and later as a missionary to fugitive slaves in Canada with the African Methodist Episcopal Church. In 1859, he was recognized as an elder by the New England conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church.⁴¹² When Lincoln signed the Emancipation Proclamation, Mars, who by then was fifty-

⁴⁰⁹ “Providence Conference,” *Christian Advocate and Journal*, April 7, 1864.

⁴¹⁰ “The Negro and the War Question in the Methodist General Conference,” *Memphis Daily Appeal*, May 20, 1864.

⁴¹¹ “Fourth Day – May 5,” *Pittsburgh Daily Commercial*, May 7, 1864, Newspapers.com.

⁴¹² “The Church and the Negro,” *Christian Advocate and Journal*, November 17, 1864; Martin McLee, “The Reverend John Newton Mars (1804-1884): New England Cleric and Celebrated Standard Bearer in the Wesleyan Tradition,” in *Methodist History* (October 2015), 77, <http://archives.gcah.org/bitstream/handle/10516/9810/Methodist-History-2015-10-McLee.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>.

nine years old, volunteered as a chaplain with the Union army, serving in both New Bern, North Carolina and Portsmouth, Virginia.⁴¹³ It is hard to imagine anyone with a resume better built for ministry among the freedmen of the South--a fact not lost on Gilbert Haven.

In June of 1864, Haven wrote to Edward Ames, urging the bishop to champion a southern appointment for Mars. Dumbfounded, Haven explained how Bishop Scott had rejected his appeal for a Mars appointment despite an endorsement from Ames' himself. Haven pressed Ames, insisting Mars "could do more for our Church than any of our best preachers ... I cannot see ... why he can't be appointed like Bro Rounds, or Lewis or Dr. Newman. He would be worth more than any of them to our cause."⁴¹⁴ Four months later, Haven once again appealed to the episcopacy, promising that if the church wanted God's blessing, they would need to conform to His will, which included a ministry blind to color.⁴¹⁵ Eventually, Haven went public with his frustration. Mars had earned the respect of the New England conference, where many "hoped that he might labor, as others of their brethren were doing, in the rich field of the emancipated South. He had marked success in that section as a chaplain and a missionary for the American Missionary Association ... and they felt that he would be ... an important instrument in the renewal at once of the Church in the South and in the North."⁴¹⁶ Such was not to be, however. Bishop Scott needed skilled ministers for some of the larger African American churches in the South, and he, together with Ames, convinced Mars to take charge of the nascent Washington Missionary conference.⁴¹⁷ Haven perceived the move as "proof that the work of our national

⁴¹³ McLee, *The Reverend John Newton Mars*, 77.

⁴¹⁴ *Gilbert Haven to Edward Ames*, 1864, Letter, *Papers of Bishop Gilbert Haven*, The General Commission on Archives and History of the United Methodist Church.

⁴¹⁵ *Gilbert Haven to Levi Scott*, October 11, 1864, Letter, *Papers of Bishop Gilbert Haven*, The General Commission on Archives and History of the United Methodist Church.

⁴¹⁶ "The Church and the Negro," *Christian Advocate and Journal*, November 17, 1864.

⁴¹⁷ *Christian Advocate and Journal*, November 17, 1864; McLee, "The Reverend John Newton Mars," 73, 74-77.

regeneration is not yet completed,” but the *Christian Advocate and Journal* defended the appointment as one of necessity; the church needed a “suitable man for that old and large church and congregation.” The writer insisted that black missionary conferences were “indeed designed to be temporary, but they may be eminently useful as stepping-stones” for new ministers to reach “that higher level to which Brother Haven has attained.”⁴¹⁸ Temporary or not, southern prejudice against racially integrated conferences and churches was implacable. One southern minister wrote a friend in the North, “You need never come to us with a proposition that the blacks are to be members of the same Annual and General Conferences, to be the pastors of our families, and the suitors of our daughters. No Methodist in the South, reputable for piety, culture, or position, will submit to it.”⁴¹⁹

Mars’ relegation to the Washington missionary conference was even more surprising given the lack of skilled ministers willing to travel South. A correspondent from Memphis promised there would be no problem building up two or three large Methodist churches if only they had ministers and places to meet. He forwarded a report from a man in Vicksburg who insisted it was “now necessary a missionary should be sent there at once.”⁴²⁰ So why not send the experienced and well-known Mars to one of these posts? Like John Newton Mars, Gilbert Haven was a bleeding heart. His advocacy for racial equality in the church was nearly unparalleled among the northern Methodists. Although he believed strongly that Mars could make a difference in the South, he was insulated from the reality of southern opposition. Over time, as the southern sentiment better materialized, Haven apparently came to better understand the southern climate. In October of 1865, in response to Bishop Ames’ request that he personally fill

⁴¹⁸ “The Church and the Negro,” *Christian Advocate and Journal*, November 17, 1864.

⁴¹⁹ C.F. Deems, “C.F. Deems D.D., to Abel Stevens L.L. D.,” *The Daily Standard*, July 25, 1865, Newspapers.com.

⁴²⁰ Lucius Hawkins, “Methodism in the South,” *Christian Advocate and Journal*, June 22, 1865.

the post in Vicksburg, Haven said, “I am willing to do my duty wherever God calls,” but “too identify oneself with that downtrodden people may result in speedy martyrdom.”⁴²¹ If Haven felt fearful for himself, a white northern minister, it is not hard to imagine the danger posed to an African American abolitionist minister.

In fact, Methodist ministry in the South proved to be a hazardous undertaking. During the outbreak of racial violence in New Orleans in 1866, H.G. Jackson, appointed to Ames Chapel in the city, was violently attacked. The Mississippi Mission conference regrettably reported “the wounds he received that day ... compelled him to return to the North.”⁴²² Another northern missionary, J.R. Tamblyn, was attacked by disaffected residents in Lynchburg, South Carolina, because he had “too much influence with the n*****.”⁴²³ Tamblyn was lucky; he was saved by a nearby group of freedmen and lived to tell the story. African American ministers in the South were not always so lucky.

An assailant shot and killed Lymus McCloud, a local preacher for the black Methodist congregation in Lynchburg, while he “peacefully” traveled down the road. One reporter speculated McCloud’s “offenses,” as far as he could tell, were “his church relations” and “his participation in a Republican meeting.”⁴²⁴ In Texas, an African American Methodist named J.E. Brooks served in a local militia who had been called out to quell some violence around Millican. On his way there, he was followed by men who pretended to be officers. The men drug him away from the group and tried to force him to “recant his political opinions.” Brooks refused, and then men broke his legs, cut out his bowels, and then hung him. In the *Christian Advocate*

⁴²¹ *Gilbert Haven to Edward Ames*, October 2, 1865, Letter, *Papers of Bishop Gilbert Haven*, The General Commission on Archives and History of the United Methodist Church.

⁴²² *Proceedings of the Second Session of the Mississippi Mission Conference*, 1866, Centenary College of Louisiana Archives and Special Collections, 9-10, <https://archive.org/details/proceedingsof1865meth>.

⁴²³ “Murderous Assaults on Our Ministers in the South,” *Christian Advocate and Journal*, May 23, 1867.

⁴²⁴ *Ibid.*

and Journal, an astonished Matthew Simpson remarked, “His murderers have not been punished, nor has there even been a serious effort to arrest them.”⁴²⁵ To be sure, the violence seemed motivated by more than the victims’ association with northern Methodism, but to angry southerners, loyal Methodism and Republicanism were one and the same. Southerners suspected a primary goal of northern missionaries was to marshal the black vote in the South.⁴²⁶ In fact, northern Methodist missionaries were so active in southern politics they earned the moniker “Republican Methodists.”⁴²⁷ Whether that was true or not, and in some cases it likely was, was a moot point. Southerners believed it was true, and they were willing to use violence to stop it. Gilbert Haven was not necessarily wrong when he speculated heading South could result in “speedy martyrdom.” Southern opposition to the type of racial progress espoused by Haven was a reality the northern church had to confront, and it made expansion among southern whites difficult. How could you convince people to attend a church whose racial composition was offensive to them?

Compounding that problem, the Methodist Episcopal Church was not the only ecclesiastical option for southern freedmen, and the church’s ambivalence toward settling racial inequalities hindered their efforts to expand in the southern field. The membership of black churches in Baltimore grew increasingly dissatisfied with the arrangement that placed white ministers over their churches.⁴²⁸ The *Christian Advocate and Journal* complained that the African Methodist Episcopal Church was anticipating the northern Methodists “in the occupation of the country, and the colored Methodists of the South are much more inclined to them than us.”⁴²⁹ One

⁴²⁵ Matthew Simpson, “The Texas Conference,” *Christian Advocate and Journal*, February 18, 1869.

⁴²⁶ Morrow, *Northern Methodism and Reconstruction*, 223.

⁴²⁷ Farish, *The Circuit Rider Dismounts*, 140.

⁴²⁸ “Colored Methodists,” *Christian Advocate and Journal*, February 4, 1864.

⁴²⁹ “Reconstruction,” *Christian Advocate and Journal*, May 25, 1865.

writer argued it was the duty of the church to “make all men equal in civil and religious privileges.” He urged Methodism to take the lead in asking the question: “How shall we receive into our Church communion our colored brethren at the South?” In his opinion, with the African Methodist Episcopal Church welcoming the freedmen on equal terms, there was nothing “more preposterous than to talk of inviting the colored people to unite with us in a membership where they have no voice or influence in the councils of the church.”⁴³⁰

But just as the country would discover during political reconstruction, the opposition to racial equality in the South was stringent and deep-seated. The Methodist Episcopal Church, regardless of intentions, was forced to decide between smaller integrated churches, or larger segregated congregations. Time after time, even those white ministers who advocated racial equality caved. T. Willard Lewis previously convinced a group of freedmen to join the northern church by declaring “there will be no galleries in heaven [and] those who are willing to go with a church that makes no distinction as to race or color, follow me,” but even Lewis bowed to local pressure.⁴³¹ He eventually settled for segregated churches, providing the opportunity for one Georgian critic to rejoice “the brethren ... who have tried to set up a mixed arrangement have signally failed.”⁴³² When N.L. Brakeman initially procured a church in Baton Rouge, he preached to mixed congregations, and “as a consequence, the attendance of white citizens had dwindled away to just nothing at all.” A writer for the *New Orleans Times Democrat* satisfyingly concluded, “Now, however, the darkies have the basement, and the white the auditorium, and the citizen Methodists of Baton Rouge are returning to their allegiance.”⁴³³

⁴³⁰ George Lansing Taylor, “Our Colored Brethren,” *Christian Advocate and Journal*, June 22, 1865.

⁴³¹ Morrow, *Northern Methodism and Reconstruction*, 130.

⁴³² *Ibid.*, 187.

⁴³³ “Religious Intelligence,” *New Orleans Times Democrat*, November 5, 1863, Newspapers.com.

Race was not the only issue facing the northern church in the South. Segregating services may have temporarily placated racial prejudices, but the Methodist Episcopal Church still had to determine what to do about a larger and less receptive group--white southern Methodists. Northern Methodists had long considered the southern church a hotbed of secession. They maintained southern Methodist ministers knowingly and strategically supported slavery and the Confederacy, compromising the existence of the country and defiling the laws of God. As the war neared its final conclusion, northern Methodists believed the time would soon come when southerners would realize the errors of their ways and begin to think about rejoining the true church. After all, the war brought God's judgement not only on the Confederacy but on the southern church. By April of 1865, the *New York Tribune* could confidently report, "The Southern Methodist Episcopal Church is manifestly becoming disorganized in all the slave States which are now within the Union lines."⁴³⁴ Southern bishops, whose presence was required for ordaining and appointing ministers, were largely immobile during the war. Bishops Soule and Kavanaugh had been stuck behind Union lines, largely relegated to ministry in the border states.⁴³⁵ The Texas conference did not see a southern Methodist bishop for five years, the Louisiana and Arkansas conferences for four years, and the Memphis conference for three years.⁴³⁶ The churches and conferences themselves were on life support in the border states. One Cincinnati correspondent visited a meeting of the Tennessee conference outside Nashville in the spring of 1864. Bishop Soule presided, but he was joined by just thirteen ministers. The same conference three years prior boasted three hundred attendees. Soule himself claimed to "have not had a word

⁴³⁴ "The Methodist Churches in the South," *Memphis Bulletin*, April 2, 1865. Newspapers.com.

⁴³⁵ *Daily Confederate*, April 8, 1864. Newspapers.com.

⁴³⁶ Stowell, *Rebuilding Zion*, 17; *Missionary Report and Minutes of the Nineteenth Session of the Louisiana Annual Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South*; *The Minutes of the Memphis Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South*, November 9-12, 1864.

or a line from my respected colleagues for eighteen months.” He claimed he did not even know if his fellow bishops were still alive.⁴³⁷ The *Memphis Bulletin* could explain the paltry attendance at the Tennessee conference; most of their ministers were rebels who “have fled South, and dare not return, because of the indictments against them in the Federal Courts.” The *Bulletin* claimed the southern Methodist churches in Missouri and Kentucky were virtually disbanded, their Methodist features “ruined.”⁴³⁸ The minutes from the Memphis conference deplored the fact that eleven church edifices had been burned to the ground and that some of their remaining charges were without pastors, “a sad dispensation to the churches so afflicted-leaving the fold to be uncared for, or scattered as the winds may blow.”⁴³⁹

Loyalty Not Optional

In the spring of 1864, the leaders of the Methodist Episcopal Church convened in their quarterly General Conference in Philadelphia, and their southern work was destined to be a central point of discussion. Northern Methodist leaders needed to ensure religious reconstruction in the South was done right. The *Western Christian Advocate* insisted, “We can not afford to build up another Church in the South, to turn traitor to God and the country just so soon as a small aristocratic minority of slaveholders fail to have every thing in Church and State their own way.”⁴⁴⁰ In the months leading up to the meeting of the General Conference, numerous annual conferences passed resolutions aimed at creating a reborn church free from slavery and loyal to the Union. The Baltimore conference passed a resolution pledging its “exclusive allegiance to the

⁴³⁷ “Visit to a ‘Grayback’ Conference,” *Nashville Daily Union*, May 26, 1864, *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*. Lib. of Congress, <https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn83025718/1864-05-26/ed-1/seq-4>.

⁴³⁸ “The Traitor Church,” *Memphis Bulletin*, May 15, 1864. Newspapers.com.

⁴³⁹ *The Minutes of the Memphis Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South*, November 9-12, 1864.

⁴⁴⁰ “A Change of the General Rule on Slavery,” *Western Christian Advocate*, April 20, 1864.

Government of the United States,” and insisting loyalty was no longer “optional, or a matter of taste, sympathy or preference, but one of Divine injunction.”⁴⁴¹ Led by this belief, the conference resolved to prohibit the appointment of ministers who were “of known disloyalty.”⁴⁴² Loyalty to the federal government was only one half of the new emerging criteria for membership within the northern church. The Philadelphia conference urged any clergy with proslavery sentiments to retire from the ministry and rejoiced “in the prospect of the speedy and entire abolition of slavery in this country.”⁴⁴³ The *Western Christian Advocate* stressed, “The time has fully come when slaveholding should be unconditionally forbidden by the Discipline of the Methodist Episcopal Church. Whatever possible excuse may have existed at one time for tolerating the evil, such excuses exist no longer.”⁴⁴⁴

Northern Methodist ministers carried this enthusiasm for change into the 1864 General Conference in Philadelphia. The country was in a far different place than it was during its last meeting in 1860, and the leaders of the church were ready and willing to respond to the new circumstances with drastic changes. Bishop Scott read the quadrennial address from the episcopacy, which included the northern Methodist vision for their southern work. The bishops urged the Methodist Episcopal Church to reclaim “her unchanged title as the ‘Methodist Episcopal Church of the United States of America.’” Providence, they contended, had “opened her way” to reoccupy southern territory. The bishops insisted the northern return should be done “preaching Christ and him crucified, to all classes of people ... welcoming back such ministers as were cut off from her communion without their voluntary act.”⁴⁴⁵

⁴⁴¹ “Baltimore Conference,” *Western Christian Advocate*, March 16, 1864.

⁴⁴² “Baltimore, Md,” *Memphis Bulletin*, March 13, 1864, Newspapers.com.

⁴⁴³ “Philadelphia Conference,” *Western Christian Advocate*, March 23, 1864.

⁴⁴⁴ “A Change of the General Rule on Slavery,” *Western Christian Advocate*, April 20, 1864.

⁴⁴⁵ *Nashville Daily Union*, May 20, 1864, Newspapers.com.

But what about those ministers who fueled the schism? The bishops' largely conciliatory message retained some stipulations for any possible reunion, namely that "none should be admitted to her fellowship who are either slaveholders or tainted with treason."⁴⁴⁶ When Scott read this portion of the address, the conference hall erupted in cheers and applause.⁴⁴⁷ The bishops' address lent the approval of the episcopacy to establish both antislavery and loyalty as requirements for church membership.

Slavery was attacked by more than just the bishops at the 1864 General Conference. A member of the British conference was met with wild applause when he told the conference his own delegation wished for both "an honorable and abiding peace," and "the extinction of the blot of slavery from the escutcheon of a people called Christians."⁴⁴⁸ The conference obliged their British counterparts; with a vote of one hundred and ninety yeas to eight nays, the General Conference voted to exclude slaveholders from church membership. Commenting on the vote, the *Nashville Daily Union* soberly noted the church was not leading the reform but following what was already inevitable. Still, with this change, the church now rightly treated slaveholding "as a crime to be punished, not as a misfortune to be deplored."⁴⁴⁹ Antislavery sentiment expanded beyond the bounds of the General Conference as well. When the annual conferences voted to add a new antislavery rule to the Methodist *Discipline*, all but three conferences sent in their votes. The ministers passed the new rule by a vote of one-hundred-and-forty-eight to one.⁴⁵⁰

Of course, all this talk about abolitionism and loyalty was bound to spark outrage from those who had frequently accused the north of being too political, but northern leaders did not

⁴⁴⁶ *Nashville Daily Union*, May 20, 1864, Newspapers.com.

⁴⁴⁷ "Fourth Day - May 5," *Pittsburgh Daily Commercial*, May 6, 1864, Newspapers.com

⁴⁴⁸ "Mr. Thornton at the Methodist Conference," *Knoxville Whig*, May 24, 1864, Newspapers.com

⁴⁴⁹ "The Methodist Church and Slavery," *Nashville Daily Union*, May 24, 1864, Newspapers.com

⁴⁵⁰ *Memphis Bulletin*, March 3, 1865.

believe they were asking much of their southern counterparts. As the *Central Christian Advocate* saw it, “the doctrines, discipline and usage of the M.E. Church South are like our own, except as to slavery--that, we hope, is dying. It is fair to conclude that men who persistently reject all offers of reconciliation are yet deeply guilty concerning the recent rebellion. If they are unwilling to unite with their own church on the terms of loyalty and anti-slavery, what could we do to bring them back or please them?” The writer insisted, “We most anxiously yearn over our unfortunate brethren; we ask them to come back to us; we make the conditions so easy that we can not conceive how any reasonable man can object.”⁴⁵¹ The newly appointed northern Methodist bishop, D.W. Clark, assured a Tennessee audience that rebuilding the Methodist church in the South could not succeed “by excluding all who have been in any way connected with this rebellion ... You can not lift up your banner and say, we will have no member or minister that has been swept away in this fearful tide of secession, this whirlwind of desolation, that has passed over this land.” Clark urged the northern Methodists to have grace for those southerners who supported secession and rebellion, “that when such persons become convinced of their error, that they were mistaken, that they were led astray by the leadership of others ... you should receive them and press them to your breasts.”⁴⁵² Clark favored second chances for any southerners ready to admit their wrongs and move forward. It was a reasonable enough position, but one that required southern repentance to be effective, and that was a step many southerners were not ready to take.

Bishop Clark was adamant that loyal southerners would repent and return, insisting “with the dawning of the signs of the times, there must come a conviction that they were mistaken,

⁴⁵¹ *Weekly Arkansas Gazette*, July 29, 1865, Newspapers.com

⁴⁵² Fuller, *An Appeal to the Records*, 339.

were in the wrong, and with that conviction, if they were good men and true men, that they will be with us in these matters of loyalty and slavery.”⁴⁵³ The early returns were promising. Bishop Clark organized the Holston conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church from a large group of disaffected southern Methodists. The conference contained a number of ex-slaveholders, at least one of whom described abolition as “the great blessing.”⁴⁵⁴ A southern Methodist minister in Louisville dissolved the connection between his church and the southern connection and transferred his congregation to the northern church.⁴⁵⁵ One of the most prominent defections from the southern Methodist church was John H. Caldwell. Caldwell was stationed in Newnan, Georgia, when one night he was struck by the “new life and light from above” while contemplating slavery and its role in sparking the war. He resolved, “during that night of agony and penitence,” to preach “plainly to the consciences of the people on a long-forbidden topic--the evils of slavery.”⁴⁵⁶ Caldwell preached two sermons on the topic, admitting his own error in assuming God had favored the South. He asserted, “We have sinned, and God has smitten us,” and boldly proclaimed, “God has destroyed slavery because of our sins in connection with it as a system.”⁴⁵⁷ Here was a southern Methodist, in the heart of Georgia, repenting of his past involvement with slavery and the Confederacy. As was the case with the Holston conference, Caldwell’s repentance was everything the northern church could have expected.

Unfortunately, Caldwell’s congregation held differing opinions, and they were not thrilled with their minister’s change-of-heart and the condemnation that came with it. They immediately requested his removal by the district’s presiding elder, and although Caldwell was

⁴⁵³ Fuller, *An Appeal to the Records*, 328.

⁴⁵⁴ “Holston Conference,” *Christian Advocate and Journal*, June 22, 1865.

⁴⁵⁵ *Evansville Daily Journal*, January 5, 1865, Newspapers.com; *Nashville Daily Union*, January 7, 1865.

⁴⁵⁶ John H. Caldwell, *Reminiscences of the Reconstruction of Church and State in Georgia* (Wilmington, Delaware: J. Miller Thomas, 1895), 3.

⁴⁵⁷ Stowell, *Rebuilding Zion*, 60.

able to hold on to his pulpit for a time with the support of military authorities, he was eventually compelled to resign from the Georgia conference when his peers condemned the content of his sermons.⁴⁵⁸ Caldwell may have been willing to admit the evils of slavery and repent of his own complicity, but his congregation in Newnan, and the Georgia conference at large, were not.

Refusal to Repent

It should not be surprising that a southern church, composed of southern members, retained southern prejudices. Sentiments that pervaded the white southern population at large would be just as likely to pervade congregations across the region. The Secretary of the Navy, Gideon Welles, reflected on the southern psyche in his diary following a meeting with Edwin Stanton. Welles was apparently apprehensive about a statement from Stanton, who claimed, “The rebels are not yet prepared to return to duty to become good citizens.” Welles maintained, “They have not ... been humbled enough ... Their pride, self-conceit, and arrogance must be brought down. They have assumed superiority ... and brought themselves to believe they were a superior class.” Welles wisely portended, “They may submit to what they cannot help, but their enmity will remain.”⁴⁵⁹ For northern Methodists who hoped for a repentant South, these would have been ominous words.

Welles’ words, although referring to the southern population at large, were just as applicable to the southern church. In retrospect, what better time for a period of solemn reflection than when their armies were defeated, their cities were occupied, and their churches were scattered? Unfortunately, the actions of the northern Methodists in the South generated

⁴⁵⁸ Stowell, *Rebuilding Zion*, 61.

⁴⁵⁹ Gideon Welles, *The Diary of Gideon Welles* (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1911), 230, <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=mdp.39015033853519&view=1up&seq=8>.

intense condemnation from the southern church. Southerners lambasted the northern church for its political preaching, church confiscation, and a stated intention to disintegrate and absorb the southern church. Southern leaders hardly had time to judge themselves; they were too busy judging the Methodist Episcopal Church.

In the final years of the Civil War, the Methodist Episcopal Church may not have disintegrated, but it was definitely splintered. Some northern Methodists believed that when the northern church entered the South they needed only to absorb the remaining pieces of the southern church. In April of 1864, the *Western Christian Advocate* described the “loyal Methodists of the South” who were “earnestly desirous of returning to the bosom of the Methodist Episcopal Church.” The paper pledged to “absorb the loyal Methodism of the South,” and leave the southern church to die with the rebellion, “which she, more than all others, has helped to inaugurate.”⁴⁶⁰ The *Ladies’ Repository* argued all the northern church needed to do in the South was “watch this process of disintegration,” and gather “the fragments of the crumbling church.”⁴⁶¹ Daniel Curry, a northern Methodist editor, eventually packaged this policy into three words: “disintegration and absorption.”⁴⁶² The curt nature of the phrase alone generated outcry from southern ministers. John H. Caldwell, one of the few southern Methodist ministers to publicly repent for supporting slavery, believed the northern message of disintegration and absorption generated greater hostility to northern church’s presence in the South. Caldwell labored to convince the northern clergy that the southern church was far from extinct. He told a gathering in New York “the M.E. Church South could not be disintegrated ... it would soon recover its former position and be as compact and strong as ever.”⁴⁶³ Caldwell ought to have

⁴⁶⁰ “A Change of the General Rule on Slavery,” *Western Christian Advocate*, April 20, 1864.

⁴⁶¹ Moorhead, *American Apocalypse*, 200.

⁴⁶² Morrow, *Northern Methodism and Reconstruction*, 66.

⁴⁶³ Caldwell, *Reminiscences of the Reconstruction of Church and State in Georgia*, 7.

known. Being penitent for slavery was not exactly a popular position in the southern church, and Caldwell's public repentance essentially ended his career in the southern church. When he ultimately left the Georgia conference, his words sounded similar to those of Lovick Pierce's, decades before, "I will never come back to you, but you will come back to me."⁴⁶⁴ Caldwell knew disintegration and absorption was a foolhardy hope, but he, like Bishop Clark, believed the southern church might repent and reunify with the northern body.

In June of 1865, the bishops of the Methodist Episcopal Church gathered in Erie, Pennsylvania and passed a series of resolutions regarding religious reconstruction in the South. They rejoiced that slavery, which they regarded as the main cause of separation for both the Wesleyan Methodists and the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, was eliminated, and they hoped the day was not far "when there shall be but one organization which shall embrace the whole Methodist family in the United States."⁴⁶⁵ They hoped it would be possible to hold a unified meeting at the next General Conference in 1866, and they extended a "cordial welcome" to any minister from any branch of Methodism who would be willing to unite with the northern church "on the basis of our loyal and antislavery Discipline."⁴⁶⁶ Those were simple enough terms, but affirming doctrines of antislavery and loyalty to government required southerners to exercise humility and repentance.

Southern repentance, however, continued to look less and less likely. One southern minister, C.F. Deems, wrote to the prominent northern Methodist, Abel Stevens, that the first wish of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, was to be left alone, but if the northern church continued to press for reunion, he could provide some conditions. He insisted neither side should

⁴⁶⁴ Caldwell, *Reminiscences of the Reconstruction of Church and State in Georgia*, 6.

⁴⁶⁵ "Action of the Bishops," *Zion's Herald and Wesleyan Journal*, June 28, 1865.

⁴⁶⁶ "Action of the Bishops," *Zion's Herald and Wesleyan Journal*, June 28, 1865.

come to the other requiring them “to yield convictions in regard to certain questions which have heretofore been the subject of contention between us,” and specifically rejected any overtures based on loyalty to government and adherence to an antislavery doctrine. Deems assured Stevens “you will waste your time with any such overtures. *They will never be accepted by our Church* ... for the simple reason that they involve political issues with which the Church ... has no concern.” [emphasis in original]⁴⁶⁷ Deems sounded less like a prodigal son and more like, as Gideon Welles described southerners, one whose “pride, self-conceit, and arrogance” had yet to be brought down.

⁴⁶⁷ C.F. Deems, “C.F. Deems D.D. to Abel Stevens L.L.D.,” *The Daily Standard*, July 25, 1865, Newspapers.com

THE SOUTHERN METHODISTS RALLY

Paradoxically, as the war drew to a close, the southern Methodist church rallied. A northern Methodist chaplain in Charleston lamented “the return of the paroled soldiers of the rebel army” because it had “emboldened greatly the leading citizens.” Previously, the southern Methodists in his region had accepted northern Methodists cordially, or at least “labially,” but following the soldiers’ return, those same people insisted on setting terms “as to the sitting of the people in the same sanctuary, dictate doctrines to be taught, and assert the absolute necessity of the return and settlement of former ministers.”⁴⁶⁸ This shift was all the more striking because northern actions in South Carolina, guided by the respected T. Willard Lewis, had been relatively successful and free from southern condemnation. If northern efforts in South Carolina suffered from the return of Confederate soldiers, other locations that enjoyed even less success and goodwill were especially vulnerable.

Furthermore, the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, on a local level, still enjoyed the support of the leading residents. The *Christian Advocate and Journal* warned readers that the southern church owned “all the Church property, and they have the favor of the ruling classes” through most regions of the South.⁴⁶⁹ The ruling classes were nearly always resistant to northern encroachment. Northern churches in the South were regularly composed of freed slaves, Union soldiers, and poor whites. Scattered as they may have been, elite white Methodists, strengthened by their returning sons and husbands, formed viable opposition to northern work in the South, and southern leaders quickly delivered the needed rhetoric for their scattered sheep to rally around.

⁴⁶⁸ M. French, “The End of the War,” *Christian Advocate and Journal*, June 1, 1865.

⁴⁶⁹ “Church Reconstruction in Rebeldom,” *Christian Advocate and Journal*, February 9, 1865.

One of the first concerted movements made by the southern church to reaffirm their sovereignty was made by the Missouri conference at their meeting in Palmyra, Missouri in June of 1865. The conference insisted that maintaining their own distinct organization was of “paramount importance” and an “imperative duty.” They passionately refused to yield to another church that was “the same priority of age,” and they characterized any claims of the “old church” as “specious” and deceptive. Northerners maintained the two sections of Methodism split over slavery, but the writers of the Palmyra Manifesto denied the charge. The disagreement that led to schism was not whether slavery was right or wrong “*per se*, but whether it was a legitimate subject for ecclesiastical legislation.” The Missouri conference refused to bend; the rightness or wrongness of slavery was irrelevant; the northern church expected them to become “political hucksters,” so they were forced to separate.⁴⁷⁰

In light of that, the Missouri conference argued, reunion of the two sections was not, and should not be entertained. The conference determined to maintain its own organization “without embarrassment or compromise” because its ranks were filled with a large number of “people who oppose the prostitution of the pulpit to political purpose,” and because “every principle of self-respect, and ecclesiastical propriety” demanded it.⁴⁷¹ The Methodist Episcopal Church believed eliminating slavery removed the only barrier between the two sections; the Palmyra Manifesto revealed deeper fissures and provided a glimpse into the white southern psyche. The southern Methodists refused to submit to the northern connection because they could not respect themselves if they did.

⁴⁷⁰ “M.E. Church, South, in Missouri,” *Southern Christian Advocate*, August 31, 1865.

⁴⁷¹ *Ibid.*

The Palmyra Manifesto was just the first drop in a flood of enthusiasm for saving the southern Methodist church. Within the month, the bishops of the southern church published a pastoral address to be circulated among their ministers. In an indication of how long southern memories could be, the bishops addressed the plans for reunion proposed by the northern bishops in Erie by looking back on the 1848 General Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church. They recalled the message of their delegate, Lovick Pierce, who approached the northern Methodists with an offer “to establish fraternal relations and a closer intercourse” between the two branches of Methodism, and they reminded their readers of his rejection by the northern church. Pierce subsequently vowed to never renew the offer but promised if the northern church chose to make the same offer at any future time the southern church would consider it. Seventeen years passed, and the bishops informed their readers the northern church had yet to make such an offer. The southern leaders maintained, “There the matter rests,” and they “would be well excused from any further reference to it.”⁴⁷²

But “reference” it they would; the rest of their address served as a laundry list of perceived wrongs by the northern church. Harkening back to the initial split, the bishops blamed the Methodist Episcopal Church for misrepresenting them as “secessionists and schismatics.” They lamented the radicalization of large numbers of the northern church who taught “the doctrine commandments of men” and preached “another gospel.” They condemned the northern church’s emphasis on loyalty and antislavery as incorporating “social dogmas and political tests into their church creeds,” and claimed the Methodist Episcopal Church imposed “conditions upon discipleship that Christ did not impose.” Northern pulpits were “perverted to agitations and questions not healthful to personal piety; but promotive of political and ecclesiastical discord.”⁴⁷³

⁴⁷² “Pastoral Address of the Southern Methodist Bishops,” *Southern Christian Advocate*, August 31, 1865.

⁴⁷³ *Ibid.*

The southern bishops believed the northern church had strayed from “those ends for which the church of the Lord Jesus Christ was instituted,” and until there was a correction, the southern branch should “preserve our church in all its vigor and integrity, free from entangling alliances with those whose notions of philanthropy and politics and social economy are liable to give an ever varying complexion to their theology.”⁴⁷⁴ The problem, according to the southern bishops, was not the role their church had played in supporting slavery and fomenting secession, but the northern church’s own radicalization. The southern bishops were not only unrepentant; they essentially demanded repentance from the northern church.

Edward Ames likely had no problem identifying his own appearance in the bishops’ message, even if it was not by name, when the bishops’ complaints extended beyond theological disputes to the actions of “certain Northern Methodist bishops and preachers” during the war. They denounced those northern clergymen who took “advantage of the confusion incident to a state of war to intrude themselves into several of our houses of worship,” and continued to occupy these properties in spite of the wishes of the “congregations and rightful owners.”⁴⁷⁵ The bishops argued the situation demanded an appeal “to the justice of those in authority,” which “could defeat such scandalous designs and secure to us the full restoration of all of our rights.”

The bishops concluded their address with one final grievance. They warned their followers “of a systematic attempt, already inaugurated ... to disturb and if possible disintegrate and then absorb our membership individually.” They claimed the northern Methodist policy was “evidently our division, and ecclesiastical devastation.”⁴⁷⁶ These were not the words of church leaders ready to surrender. Their pastoral address delineated each of their overriding concerns

⁴⁷⁴“Pastoral Address of the Southern Methodist Bishops,” *Southern Christian Advocate*, August 31, 1865..

⁴⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁷⁶ Ibid.

with the northern church, and they used these perceived wrongs to rally their ministers and members to the southern Methodist banner. The southern bishops argued the Methodist Episcopal Church's rejection of fraternal greetings in 1848 commenced a long string of offenses against the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, and the three most recent offenses: the emphasis on loyalty and antislavery doctrine, the confiscation of southern property, and the pledge to disintegrate and absorb the southern church, all occurred during the Civil War.

Reunion Hopes Fade to Resignation

Northern Methodist leaders recognized this rising tide of southern animosity, and their visions of a glorious reunion slowly faded to resignation to southern intransigence. A columnist in the *Christian Advocate and Journal* held out little hope for redeemed southerners, believing the work of reconstruction should be entrusted to those who did not "believe slavery divine" and had not been "traitors to their country." Trusting reconstruction to southern men, the columnist argued, would be as foolish as the government raising a regiment of South Carolinian traitors "to quell the rebellion and reconstruct the southern states."⁴⁷⁷ Later, a writer lamented the spirit of a new southern Methodist paper in Richmond, which routinely advocated the "continued isolation of Southern Methodism and its continued antagonism to Northern Methodism." This spirit, the writer feared, was "characteristic of the South generally."⁴⁷⁸ A native Virginian wrote to *Zion's Herald* that southerners still had the "secesh" virus in them, and they conformed to the current realities only because the military made them, "but morally they are just as disloyal as ever."⁴⁷⁹ John W. Adams, a chaplain from New Hampshire, explained that among southerners, it was "a

⁴⁷⁷ "Church Reconstruction," *Christian Advocate and Journal*, May 25, 1865.

⁴⁷⁸ "The Spirit of the South," *Christian Advocate and Journal*, August 10, 1865.

⁴⁷⁹ "Intelligence from the Churches," *Zion's Herald and Wesleyan Journal*, August 30, 1865.

matter of almost supreme satisfaction, that in Church, if not in State,” they remained free from “northern contamination.”⁴⁸⁰

The prevalence of these southern sentiments made prospects for reunion especially dim. George Lansing Taylor argued that any reunion required “two voluntarily contracting parties.” In the case of the two Methodist sections, one stood ready while the other demurred “haughtily and hatefully.”⁴⁸¹ Another northern minister warned that even if the southern church decided to rejoin the Methodist Episcopal Church, their ministers would demand “the suppression of discussion, by pulpit and press, of the great issues involved in the rebellion.” Even T. Willard Lewis had become convinced white southern Methodists, and especially their ministers, were lost causes. He spoke with “a number of ministers” in the South Carolina conference who “to a man” loathed “our Northern idea of liberty and equal rights in Church and State before the law.”⁴⁸² Bishop Clark, seasoned by a year in the episcopacy, warned a Nashville audience that a large proportion of those southern Methodists still in the city were “traitors *at heart*, no matter how many times they may have taken the oath to secure amnesty privileges.” He cautioned his listeners that there was no hope “in winning back the old rotten and ruined slave aristocracy of the Church.”⁴⁸³ If the Methodist Episcopal Church was to progress in the southern work, it would not be from an energized, repentant, and freshly loyal southern white base.

The Methodist Episcopal Church did not have a clear policy, efficient manpower, or plentiful funds for reorganizing the church in the South, but as the war moved into its closing months, northern Methodists still seemed to believe that churches confiscated under the Stanton-Ames order would continue to serve as nuclei for the southern work. Although President

⁴⁸⁰ John W. Adams, “Letter from Chaplain Adams,” *Zion’s Herald and Wesleyan Journal*, August 30, 1865.

⁴⁸¹ George Lansing Taylor, “Methodist Reconstruction,” *Christian Advocate and Journal*, June 8, 1865.

⁴⁸² T.W. Lewis, “Letter from T.W. Lewis of Charleston, S.C.,” *Christian Advocate and Journal*, June 8, 1865.

⁴⁸³ “Church Reconstruction in Rebeldom,” *Christian Advocate and Journal*, February 9, 1865.

Lincoln's reprimand seemed to halt the confiscation of new churches under the Stanton-Ames order, he had largely allowed northern Methodists to persist in the property they had already confiscated, so northern ministers' holds on the newly-acquired property seemed secure.

In December of 1864, the trustees of McKendree Chapel appealed to Andrew Johnson, who was then the military governor of Tennessee, for control of their church.⁴⁸⁴ Johnson explained to President Lincoln that Bishop Soule, the appointing bishop, was loyal to the government and that the trustees had all taken the amnesty oath. In his estimation, McKendree Chapel no longer fell under the terms of the Stanton-Ames order, so he ordered the property to be returned until it could be "disposed of by regular proceedings in the Court under the Confiscation Acts of Congress."⁴⁸⁵ Lincoln responded a week later, "Let the matter of the McK--- Church remain as it is, without further action, until you see me."⁴⁸⁶ This letter was destined to be Lincoln's last recorded thoughts on Methodist actions in the South. Assassinated two months later, the fate of property confiscated by northern Methodists came to rest in the hands of Andrew Johnson.

Initially, northern Methodists believed the new President would be an ally in their southern work.⁴⁸⁷ At their meeting in Erie, the northern bishops tendered President Johnson their "confidence and hearty support in such measures as shall restore harmony to our Union, give equal rights to all, and honorably preserve peace with all nations."⁴⁸⁸ Regarding the conflict between Methodisms, Johnson had reportedly told Bishop Clark, "Tennessee will tolerate no two

⁴⁸⁴ Holm, *A Kingdom Divided*, 148.

⁴⁸⁵ *Andrew Johnson to Abraham Lincoln*, January 23, 1865, Letter, *Abraham Lincoln papers: Series 1, General Correspondence, 1833-1916*, Library of Congress, <http://www.loc.gov/resource/mal.4018700>.

⁴⁸⁶ *Abraham Lincoln to Andrew Johnson*, February 6, 1865, Letter, *Abraham Lincoln papers: Series 1, General Correspondence, 1833-1916*, Library of Congress, <http://www.loc.gov/resource/mal.4022400>.

⁴⁸⁷ Clark, *Life of Matthew Simpson*, 248.

⁴⁸⁸ "Action of the Bishops," *Daily Arkansas Gazette*, July 25, 1865, Newspapers.com.

sects of the same denomination, one founded upon slavery and treason, and the other loyal.”⁴⁸⁹ Northern Methodists had hopes for Johnson just as northern Republicans did, and just like the Republicans, the Methodists were destined to be disappointed. Whereas Lincoln had mostly upheld the status quo, Johnson sympathized with southern ministers attempting to retrieve their property. The leaders of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, recognized that the change in the White House created an opening for them to retrieve their confiscated property. Dr. Keener, a southern Methodist from New Orleans, traveled to Washington D.C. to urge the President to return the churches in Louisiana to the southern church. Keener spent four months pushing for this change, and eventually Johnson complied. Keener’s success inspired applications for other churches across the South.⁴⁹⁰ This probably explains why, in December of 1865, Bishop Early of the southern church could confidently state that he would bring every case of church confiscation before President Johnson “without doubt of the grievance being redressed.”⁴⁹¹

Northern and southern Methodists felt their attitudes toward the presidential office shift dramatically from the Lincoln to Johnson administrations. Southern Methodists expressed confidence that Johnson would accommodate their grievances just as northerners grew apprehensive about future presidential support. As a result, northern Methodists began to grip their property even tighter, despite presidential orders. The minister occupying McKendree Chapel in Nashville told a southern Methodist he would not give up the chapel even upon direct order from the President.⁴⁹² Both John P. Newman and Parson Brownlow argued the northern church should hold onto the properties and force President Johnson to push them out.⁴⁹³ As the

⁴⁸⁹ D.W. Clark, “Letter from Bishop Clark,” *Christian Advocate and Journal*, February 16, 1865.

⁴⁹⁰ Leftwich, *Martyrdom in Missouri*, 265.

⁴⁹¹ “North Carolina Annual Conference, Methodist Episcopal Church, South,” *Raleigh Daily Standard*, December 13, 1865, Newspapers.com.

⁴⁹² Clark, *Life of Matthew Simpson*, 251.

⁴⁹³ Morrow, *Northern Methodism and Reconstruction*, 40.

relationship between northern Methodists and the President became more contentious, they looked to other authorities to maintain their hold on property in the South. In a column for the *Delaware State Journal*, Bishop Ames claimed the only way the property could be returned was by the authority who initially took it--the Stanton-led War Department. Ames argued the ultimate decision on rightful occupancy should fall to the Supreme Court, where “Chief Justice Chase shall decide the question of title to the property referred to,” and “all shall abide by his decision in the premises.”⁴⁹⁴ This was the pinnacle of all name drops. Chase and Ames developed a solid rapport while Chase served as Lincoln’s Treasury Secretary, and when Roger B. Taney died, Lincoln selected Chase to fill his seat on the Supreme Court. Ames went from having an ally in the President’s cabinet to having one on the Supreme Court, and this at a time where legal questions were due to envelop the country. Southern Methodists took note. William Wightman cautioned, “It would not be safe to allow ... property to go into courts ... nor would it be safe in the hands of the Chief Justice.”⁴⁹⁵ It is no wonder Ames exuded confidence. If the Methodist Episcopal Church could get a property case to come before the Supreme Court, the Chief Justice would surely be sympathetic to the bishop he had previously consulted about cabinet appointments.

Southern Property Returned

But a dramatic Supreme Court challenge never developed, and the fate of southern Methodist property was generally decided in more quiet and mundane ways. The *Christian Advocate and Journal* described the southern Methodists in Charleston as being some of the

⁴⁹⁴ Edward Ames, “The Southern Methodist Church - A Suggestion from Bishop Ames,” *Delaware State Journal*, September 9, 1865, Newspapers.com.

⁴⁹⁵ Morrow, *Northern Methodism and Reconstruction*, 86.

most open to northern Methodism but complained that even their openness was marked by caution and restlessness. By May of 1865, southern Methodists in Charleston were ready to end the experiment with the northern church “in favor of a resumption of the old order of things,” which included the resettlement of their former ministers.⁴⁹⁶ Gilbert Haven complained that despite the intense labors of northern missionaries, they had very little success both among the white and black population. He argued this failure was due to the Methodist Episcopal Church’s refusal to “do right ... to entirely ignore the idea of color in the organization of our Churches and conferences.” In an effort to appeal to southern whites, northerners compromised on the issue of race, and doing so, Haven contended, were dropping “the divine substance in snapping at the Satanic shadow.”⁴⁹⁷ T. Willard Lewis was preaching three times a day in Charleston to both white and black audiences, but all was not well in the coastal city. Despite the turnout to his sermons, the military had to halt the night meetings “on account of the rioters.”⁴⁹⁸ Within weeks, Lewis’s audience was more racially homogeneous. He devoted “his time and energies to three colored churches” he had organized in the spring, which he described as “flourishing.”⁴⁹⁹

Lewis continued to labor among the freedmen in South Carolina, although he faced challenges for the property he utilized for ministry. Southern Methodists sued for control of one house of worship in Charleston that had been largely occupied by African Americans for decades. The church became affiliated with the Methodist Episcopal Church, but a large portion of the membership remained the same as it always had been. The attorney arguing for the northern connection concluded, “The party who would deprive my clients of this property are not

⁴⁹⁶ “Reconstruction,” *Christian Advocate and Journal*, May 25, 1865; M French, “The End of the War,” *Christian Advocate and Journal*, June 1, 1865.

⁴⁹⁷ Gilbert Haven, “How Shall Our Church Go South,” *Christian Advocate and Journal*, May 25, 1865.

⁴⁹⁸ T Willard Lewis, “The Third Class of Missions,” *Vermont Christian Messenger*, August 17, 1865.

⁴⁹⁹ T Willard Lewis, “Intelligence from the Churches,” *Zion’s Herald and Wesleyan Journal*, August 30, 1865.

the true representatives of the chivalrous and generous sons of the South, who are justly famed for an untarnished honor and a noble and magnanimous treatment of a race who have been ... their faithful servants.”⁵⁰⁰ The case for the Methodist Episcopal Church and their African American congregants was full of logical arguments, but it is noteworthy that their legal team ended with an appeal to honor. When T. Willard Lewis arrived in Charleston, he assigned Old Bethel, Spring Street, and Trinity churches to black members, but by June of 1866, white Methodists once again possessed Trinity Church.⁵⁰¹

The northern Methodist occupation of Wesley Chapel in Memphis was extremely short-lived. Ames’ appointee refused to come to Memphis when he learned there was scarcely much of a congregation there, and when the pulpit continued unfilled, the military gave control of the church back to the southern Methodists. Writing from Memphis in early 1865, C.C. North claimed there was “no loyal Methodist ministry here, except what comes from chaplains and agents of the Christian Commission.” He conceded that taking violent possession of churches might be “doubtful policy,” but maintained the real failure was the northern church’s inability to fill the pulpits they took.⁵⁰² Another Memphis source, Lucius Hawkins, described the situation as promising, specifically with the freedmen. He urgently requested more missionaries to help him organize the African American population of Memphis into “two or three large Methodist churches.” Ominously, however, he conceded building congregations among the white citizens of Memphis would be slower because “a good many have prejudices and jealousies which will take some time to cure.”⁵⁰³ Although Hawkins spoke specifically of racial prejudice, he could have easily addressed biases against northern ministers. Meeting a year later, the Memphis

⁵⁰⁰ “Methodist Church in Court,” *Charleston Daily News*, January 23, 1866, Newspapers.com.

⁵⁰¹ “Superior Provost Court,” *Charleston Daily News*, June 12, 1866, Newspapers.com.

⁵⁰² C.C. North, “Memphis,” *Christian Advocate and Journal*, February 23, 1865.

⁵⁰³ Lucius Hawkins, “Methodism in the South,” *Christian Advocate and Journal*, June 22, 1865.

conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South warned of northern missionaries whose presence could “but be the cause of strife.” They noted the practice “in other Conferences” of northern Methodists using “fraudulent means” to take control of southern property and warned their people “of the danger of admitting” northern ministers “to preach in our churches.” They concluded southerners should “refuse to fraternize with such teachers.”⁵⁰⁴

The northern church in Mississippi was still desperate for missionary help in the summer of 1865. Ames had hoped Gilbert Haven would assume the pulpit in Vicksburg but Haven refused; apparently, Ames then placed the church in the “hands of a brother” who still urged the need for “a missionary be sent there at once.”⁵⁰⁵ The same was true in Natchez, where the northern church had no building and suffered from “the want of a man for the work.” In fact, by 1866, the Methodist Episcopal Church in Mississippi not only no longer possessed the churches confiscated by Ames, they had to scrounge for any property that could hold their services.⁵⁰⁶

Following Johnson’s aborted order to return McKendree Chapel to the southern church, events in Nashville settled into a holding pattern. A new northern minister was appointed to the charge, W.H. Norris, who assumed his post in early February of 1865. As in other places around the South, local southern Methodists largely rejected this northern-led body. Bishop Clark complained to Nashville Methodists that “few of the Methodists of the Church South in Nashville give any countenance” to McKendree Chapel, much less “enter it as a place of worship.”⁵⁰⁷ S.D. Baldwin continued his quest to regain control of the chapel. He approached Norris with a copy of President Johnson’s amnesty order in June and said he wanted the chapel

⁵⁰⁴ *The Minutes of the Memphis Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South*, November 14-20, 1866.

⁵⁰⁵ Gilbert Haven, *Gilbert Haven to Edward Ames*, October 2, 1865, Letter, from Methodist archives; Lucius Hawkins, “Methodism in the South,” *Christian Advocate and Journal*, June 22, 1865.

⁵⁰⁶ N.L. Brakeman, “Our Work in the Southwest,” *Christian Advocate and Journal*, April 19, 1866.

⁵⁰⁷ “Church Reconstruction in Rebeldom,” *Christian Advocate and Journal*, February 9, 1865.

back. Norris brazenly rejected the overture, insisting that Johnson's policy did not supersede Stanton's order. Furthermore, he would not surrender the church even if Johnson were to issue a special order requiring it.⁵⁰⁸ Baldwin reported the interaction to President Johnson, who called a meeting with Matthew Simpson. The President pushed the bishop to vacate the church, but Simpson refused. The two men wrestled over the issue for two months, until August, when Simpson finally agreed to transfer the church back to the southern Methodists. Simpson's surrender disappointed the trustees of the church who had hoped to force federal authorities to eject them.⁵⁰⁹

In July of 1865, Richard Colburn, the ejected southern minister in Little Rock, told the local military authorities he was considering suing for control of the Methodist church there. The officer he spoke with told him "there was no use for that as it belonged to the church," and although it should be returned to the southern Methodists, since the confiscation of it had been ordered by the Secretary of War, he was not sure he could return it himself. He promised Colburn he would look into the matter, and if he could not restore the property, he would write to Washington to get an order.⁵¹⁰ By August, the newly appointed northern Methodists were church hunting. Their newly-appointed minister, J.W. Alderman of Toledo, reportedly needed "liberal assistance" to build a church "worthy of our cause" in Little Rock.⁵¹¹

The postwar situation in North Carolina looked somewhat different for northern missionaries. The stubborn loyalty to the Confederacy that marked much of the rest of the country was subdued among members of the southern North Carolina conference. One

⁵⁰⁸ Clark, *Life of Matthew Simpson*, 251.

⁵⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 251.

⁵¹⁰ Rice, *A History of the First United Methodist Church in Little Rock, Arkansas, 1831-1981*, 30.

⁵¹¹ "Our Work in the South-west," *Christian Advocate and Journal*, August 10, 1865; "Rev JW Alderman," *Perrysburg Journal*, May 31, 1865, Newspapers.com.

correspondent believed “the leading men of the North Carolina Conference, those upon whose judgement the church has been accustomed to rely,” were open to the more moderate plans of reunion. Although he believed many of the North Carolina Methodists had hoped the rebellion would be successful, the conference itself never passed resolutions supporting it, and while they may not have been willing to admit holding slaves was a sin, they acknowledged it was “a very poor system in an economic point of view.” Still, he was careful to qualify, “the Southern Methodist preachers or members here” were not likely to leave their church; they were simply open to a “formal union of the two organizations,” should it be fairly presented.⁵¹² By late December, while presiding over the North Carolina conference of the southern church, Bishop Early commended a southern minister for his “wise and prudent conduct” when the military authorities turned his church over to the freedmen. Early also professed confidence that his appeal to President Johnson would resolve any lingering property questions within the conference.⁵¹³

The return of Louisiana churches occurred with nearly as much drama as their initial confiscation. Initially, northerners expected New Orleans to be a scene of great success. At the second session of the Mississippi Mission Conference, one committee predicted the city would be “the great rallying point of our church in the South.”⁵¹⁴ In the spring of 1865, a writer for the *New York Tribune* anticipated the return of “the entire Southern Methodist Church of the State of Louisiana” to the fold of the old church.⁵¹⁵ The situation changed dramatically as spring turned to summer, however. John P. Newman lamented the condition of preachers and laymen in

⁵¹² J.F.R., “Letter from Newbern, N.C.,” *Zion’s Herald and Wesleyan Journal*, July 12, 1865.

⁵¹³ “North Carolina Annual Conference,” *Raleigh Daily Standard*, December 13, 1865.

⁵¹⁴ *Proceedings of the Second Session of the Mississippi Mission Conference*, 1866, 13.
<https://archive.org/details/proceedingsof1865meth>.

⁵¹⁵ “The Methodist Churches in the South,” *Memphis Bulletin*, April 2, 1865.

Alexandria who suffered hardships because they had taken the oath and were prepared to join the northern church. As a result, “the whole of Western Louisiana” was closed off to the northern Methodists. Newman boasted of the Methodist Episcopal Church’s ability to keep pace with the military forces, and he pledged “never to abandon this field,” and declared it their “purpose to occupy it till the end of time.” Although Newman acknowledged the northern connection was occupying churches that formerly belonged to the southern Church, the potential of losing them “did not necessarily affect the permanency of our work. If we lose these churches we shall build new ones.”⁵¹⁶ Newman’s resolve was tested soon after this writing. That same month, John Keener, the presiding elder of the New Orleans district, convinced President Johnson to return the Louisiana churches to the southern Methodists.⁵¹⁷ President Johnson’s order to evacuate Louisiana churches was executed by the War Department. General Canby, headquartered in New Orleans, issued Special Orders No. 119, which ordered Carondelet, Moreau, and Felicity street churches “be turned over to Rev. J.C. Keener, representing the Methodist Episcopal Church South.”⁵¹⁸ In the eyes of southern Methodists, the northern Methodist exit from New Orleans churches was anything but graceful. Bishop Holland McTyeire remarked, “These violent pastors ... had to be ousted ungracefully and reluctantly.” Newman, who he characterized as an “intruder” was barely removed before the southern General Conference met in 1866.⁵¹⁹

Although northern Methodist property gains made under the Stanton-Ames order were effectively wiped out, the church still retained its foothold in the southern states by shifting its focus to the freedmen. Except for the Holston conference, the conferences organized by the

⁵¹⁶ John P. Newman, “Southern Methodism,” *Christian Advocate and Journal*, June 22, 1865.

⁵¹⁷ Leftwich, *Martyrdom in Missouri*, 265.

⁵¹⁸ “The Methodist Churches in Louisiana; Gen. Canby’s Order,” *New York Times*, December 3, 1865, <https://www.nytimes.com/1865/12/03/archives/the-methodist-churches-in-louisiana-gen-canbys-order.html>.

⁵¹⁹ Albert Theodore Goodloe, *Some Rebel Relics from the Seat of the War* (Nashville: Publishing House of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, 1893), 38

Methodist Episcopal Church in the South were mission conferences to the freedmen. In late December of 1865, Bishop Thomson presided over the first meeting of the Mississippi Mission conference of the northern church, encompassing parts of Louisiana, Mississippi, and Texas. Their membership of 2,216 contained only eighty-eight white people.⁵²⁰ In 1865 the northern church organized the South Carolina Mission conference, encompassing portions of South Carolina and Florida.⁵²¹ In 1867 the Methodist Episcopal Church expanded their organizational presence in the South considerably. They added mission conferences encompassing Virginia, North Carolina, Texas, Tennessee, Georgia, and Alabama, and held a membership of 84,728 across all their southern conferences.⁵²²

These conferences suffered from two competing forces: northern ambivalence and southern prejudice. At the close of the Civil War, Lucius Hawkins had written from Memphis that “no half-way measures of scattered men and meager appropriations” would “satisfy the demands of our awakening religious judgement and conscience.” He urged northern bishops and missionary secretaries to tour the major cities in the South so they could understand the vast needs.⁵²³ Writing months later, Hawkins pleaded the case of the freedmen in Memphis, who suffered “under the great embarrassment for the want of a house of worship.” To make due, Hawkins’ church was meeting in an “unsuitable hall” and “paying an exorbitant rent.” He described the impossibility of the freedmen paying for their own church, because they had “worked all their lives for other people for nothing,” and though they were free, they had been kicked off of their masters’ plantations “without enough of this world’s goods to cover their

⁵²⁰ *Minutes of the Annual Conferences of the Methodist Episcopal Church for the Year 1866* (New York: Carlton & Porter), 5-6.

⁵²¹ *Ibid.*, 61-62.

⁵²² *Minutes of the Annual Conferences of the Methodist Episcopal Church for the Year 1867* (New York: Carlton & Porter), 5-6.

⁵²³ Lucius Hawkins, “Methodism in the South,” *Christian Advocate and Journal*, June 22, 1865.

nakedness.” Hawkins insisted it was “clearly the duty of the M.E. Church” to “provide for the colored people in this city suitable places of worship,” and promised that if they did, his congregation would “cut loose from the Missionary Society and take care of ourselves.”⁵²⁴

“Duty” required money--a fact rightly discerned by members of the Methodist Episcopal Church. At the close of the Civil War, the missionary fund of the northern connection enjoyed a surplus of nearly a half million dollars.⁵²⁵ In June of 1866, Bishop Janes boasted about the solid financial footing of the Missionary Society. Its fiscal appropriations had grown from 239,540 dollars to one million dollars in 1866. Janes confidently expected similar growth in the coming years, predicting a missionary appropriation of sixteen million dollars in 1878.⁵²⁶ The missionary business of the Methodist Episcopal Church was booming at the end of the war, and their leaders confidently believed the trend would continue.

The impressive financial funds possessed by the northern church make their sparse allocation for work in the South even more puzzling. The church typically allotted one hundred thousand dollars for domestic missions, which included churches and circuits within the bounds of annual conferences who needed financial assistance. In 1865, the Missionary Society designated funds for two other kinds of mission work within the United States--twenty thousand dollars for work in the territories of Arizona, New Mexico, Idaho, and Montana, and thirty-five thousand dollars for work in the southern states.⁵²⁷ These appropriations were relatively paltry sums, but they are instructive in revealing how much the northern church really wanted to emphasize the southern work. The Methodist Episcopal Church was not myopically focused on the former Confederacy; they wanted to expand, just as they always had, and both the southern

⁵²⁴ Lucius Hawkins, “The M.E. Church and the Negro,” *Christian Advocate and Journal*, August 10, 1865.

⁵²⁵ Morrow, *Northern Methodism and Reconstruction*, 50.

⁵²⁶ “Address of Bishop Janes,” *Christian Advocate and Journal*, April 19, 1866.

⁵²⁷ “Our Missionary Work,” *Christian Advocate and Journal*, February 23, 1865.

states and western territories offered that opportunity. The western appropriation was smaller, but relative to the populations present in the two areas, not dramatically so.

How far could thirty-five thousand dollars extend in the southern work? One northern Methodist in St. Louis purchased a church “in an excellent location for a great missionary enterprise,” for over thirty thousand dollars.⁵²⁸ The southern Methodist church secured a new house of worship in Charleston, South Carolina for twenty thousand dollars in gold.⁵²⁹ The Methodist Episcopal Church occupied major cities throughout the South, just like St. Louis and Charleston. These were the types of places they would have been looking for church buildings, so these prices are representative of what they would have expected to pay. The thirty-five thousand-dollar missionary appropriation would barely afford them the opportunity to purchase two properties in major southern cities.

The southern work required not just buildings but ministers, and ministers required salaries. John P. Newman offered any African American pastor who signed on to work in the lower Mississippi region four hundred dollars a year, which was decent money for a freedman at the time.⁵³⁰ Four hundred and fifty dollars was enough money to support a teacher for the freedmen for a year. If the entire northern Methodist allocation for the southern work had been committed just to ministers to the freedmen, they could have supported eighty-seven southern missionaries.⁵³¹ The southern need, even if just targeted at the freedmen, was greater than eighty-seven ministers could fill, and congregations were incredibly hindered by the lack of a building. The thirty-five thousand dollars was surely inadequate, and it indicates an ambivalence from the northern leadership toward the southern work. Perhaps even more telling, when northern

⁵²⁸ “Methodism in Missouri,” *Christian Advocate and Journal*, February 23, 1865.

⁵²⁹ “Southern General Conference Proceedings,” *Christian Advocate and Journal*, April 19, 1866.

⁵³⁰ Morrow, *Northern Methodism and Reconstruction*, 131.

⁵³¹ “Teacher for the Freedmen,” *Christian Advocate and Journal*, January 24, 1867.

Methodist leaders gathered to plan celebrations for the one-hundred-year anniversary of the church in America, they allotted thirty thousand dollars for the construction of the “Centenary Mission” building in New York City.⁵³² Thirty thousand dollars for one building in New York City, while the entire southern work only received five thousand dollars more? The priority placed on southern missions seemed pretty clear.

The Methodist Episcopal Church also saw their vision for Methodism in the South fall victim to southern prejudice, despite northern ministers’ pledge to build a racially egalitarian church. The Mississippi Missionary Conference in 1867 asserted their conference was “organized on the great principles of equal rights, the common brotherhood of man, the oneness of believers in Christ, and the perfect equality of all men before the altar of God,” and they resolved to “remain unalterably opposed to all distinctions made in the house of God on account of race or color.”⁵³³ In South Carolina, Bishop Baker ordained a number of deacons whose “shades of complexion” included “white, colored, and black,” but who “all stood side by side in the same class.” One member promised the Methodist work there would “ignore all of those artificial distinctions in society founded in ungenerous prejudice and fostered by ignorance and self-conceit.”⁵³⁴ But the spirit of caste was aggressive in the South, and the high ideals of the Methodist Episcopal Church crumpled under it. A racially diverse group of deacons may have been ordained together in South Carolina, but their churches were already segregated.⁵³⁵ Even some northern Methodist editors believed segregated churches were for the best.⁵³⁶ Dividing southern churches on race was not the official policy of the northern church, but it occurred in

⁵³² “The Centenary Committee--Full Report of Proceedings,” *Christian Advocate and Journal*, March 9, 1875.

⁵³³ *Minutes of the Third Session of the Mississippi Mission Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, 1867*, <https://archive.org/details/proceedingsof1867meth>.

⁵³⁴ “South Carolina Mission Conference,” *Christian Advocate and Journal*, April 19, 1866.

⁵³⁵ Morrow, *Northern Methodism and Reconstruction*, 187.

⁵³⁶ *Ibid.*, 185.

practice across the South. Northern Methodist congregations were filled by poor southerners; nearly 80 percent of whom were freedmen.⁵³⁷ Daniel Curry was one of many northern Methodists who believed if the southern effort was to succeed, they would have to attract the moneyed class in the South, and the moneyed class refused to attend integrated services.⁵³⁸

Additionally, the northern work was hampered by a shortage of skilled ministers. Many northern clergymen found the southern work unappealing, an unsurprising development considering the scarcity of resources allotted for it. M.J. Cramer left his appointment in Nashville to take a job as a chaplain in the army because he was “strained by financial circumstances.”⁵³⁹ Lower pay was only one of the factors dissuading ministers from engaging in the southern work. Bishop Thomson recognized that ministers wanted “appointments, reputations, support, and success,” none of which “were possible in the South.”⁵⁴⁰ Success was certain to be difficult for any northerner laboring among a population who mostly disdained their presence. The *Christian Advocate and Journal* maintained “of all the southern people, the Methodists are probably the most bitterly hostile to everything northern, and especially to northern Methodists.”⁵⁴¹ George Lansing Taylor moralized, “The effect of affliction received without humility and grace is to harden,” and after spending time in Richmond he conceded he had seen “few tokens of repentance.”⁵⁴²

⁵³⁷ Morrow, *Northern Methodism and Reconstruction*, 245.

⁵³⁸ *Ibid.*, 120.

⁵³⁹ *Michael J. Cramer to Matthew Simpson*, July 29, 1864, Letter, *Matthew Simpson Collection*, Drew University Methodist Collection, Drew University.

⁵⁴⁰ Morrow, *Northern Methodism and Reconstruction*, 54.

⁵⁴¹ “Reconstruction,” *Christian Advocate and Journal*, May 25, 1865.

⁵⁴² George Lansing Taylor, “Methodist Reconstruction,” *Christian Advocate and Journal*, June 8, 1865.

ONLY ON HONORABLE TERMS

Hardened or not, some northern Methodists remained convinced that an ultimate reunion with the southern branch was possible. Mansfield French, writing from South Carolina, guessed the southern Methodist people would return “more joyously ... than the ministers,” if the northern church could offer terms “they should deem honorable.” French had been struck by the destitute condition of the southern church, and he believed the northern body should take back any Methodists into their membership that the government had taken back into their membership. He maintained, “They cannot do the church any harm. Our church may do them a great good.”⁵⁴³ A writer from New Bern, North Carolina was convinced “a large majority” of the southern Methodists “would favor a *formal union* of the two organizations,” but he warned that radical southern ministers carried copies of the New England Conference Report on Church Reconstruction and wielded it as a campaign document “in their warfare against any union of the churches.”⁵⁴⁴ This was savvy politics. The New England conference consistently positioned themselves in opposition to any conciliation of the southern Methodists. While leaders like John P. Newman and Abel Stevens believed reunion was possible, New England Methodists refused any alliance with “that spiritual Babylon ... until they repent before God and the nation in sackcloth and ashes.”⁵⁴⁵ One New Hampshire chaplain argued the southern Methodists should only be added through “absorption ... not by union.” He urged the northern church to “let the South ferment by itself until it is purged of treason, and is baptized with that Spirit which obliterates the distinctions of color and caste.”⁵⁴⁶ The *Christian Advocate and Journal*, typically

⁵⁴³ Mansfield French, “The Methodist Church in the South,” *New Berne Times*, June 28, 1865, Newspapers.com.

⁵⁴⁴ “Letter from Newbern, N.C.,” *Zion’s Herald and Wesleyan Journal*, July 12, 1865.

⁵⁴⁵ Morrow, *Northern Methodism and Reconstruction*, 68-69.

⁵⁴⁶ John W. Adams, “Letter from Chaplain Adams,” *Zion’s Herald and Wesleyan Journal*, August 30, 1865.

more moderate than the Boston-based *Zion's Herald*, concurred, "If individuals will come out from her and *purge themselves* we will receive them; otherwise we can have no fellowship with them." [emphasis in original]⁵⁴⁷

Of course, the conciliationists within the northern church knew this was no way to attract new members. D.D. Whedon insisted reunion could be achieved through "reasoning appeals, made as a reasonable Christian man." If northerners could commit to this course "kindly and generously ... for a few brief years," Whedon believed they could win back "the whole catalogue."⁵⁴⁸ One southern minister seemed to request exactly this type of approach when writing to Abel Stevens. He urged northerners to remember "we are not seeking you, you are seeking us, and should approach us at least not offensively." The northern church should "come amongst us, not as emissaries, but as visiting brethren, and you will be received."⁵⁴⁹ Southern intransigence appeared to be paying off. When the war drew to a close, northerners had imagined southerners penitently and humbly approaching the old church and asking for readmittance. By and large, however, southerners did not repent. They determined to hold to their separate and distinct organization, and northerners increasingly saw themselves cast as the supplicants attempting to reunite with their lost brethren. What would it cost for the northern church to offer what the southern church wanted--honorable terms offered kindly as coequal brethren?

In 1982, the historian Bertram Wyatt-Brown examined the concept of honor in southern society. Honor was not a convention unique to the South, of course, but it held unique sway among southern communities, especially in the nineteenth century. Wyatt-Brown defined honor as "the cluster of ethical rules, most readily found in societies of small communities, by which

⁵⁴⁷ "Reconstruction," *Christian Advocate and Journal*, May 25, 1865.

⁵⁴⁸ Farish, *The Circuit Rider Dismounts*, 47.

⁵⁴⁹ C.F. Deems, "C.F. Deems, D.D., to Abel Stevens, L.L., D.," *Daily Standard*, July 25, 1865. Newspapers.com.

judgements of behavior are ratified by community consensus.”⁵⁵⁰ Honor was cultivated and upheld by the local community; neighbors collectively determined which behaviors were acceptable and even commendable. Wyatt-Brown argued honor was “self-regarding;” individuals looked at others in the community as they would look at a mirror. When one person saw similarities between themselves and a neighbor, it affirmed who they were and how they fit in the community.⁵⁵¹ This begs the question, were southern and northern Methodists neighbors? Could they see themselves as part of a shared community? Many northern ministers would have said yes. Their doctrines and *Discipline* were nearly identical. They shared nearly eighty years of history preceding their split in 1844. They shared common ancestral heroes: John Wesley, Thomas Coke, and Francis Asbury. To southerners, these similarities made northern condemnations of the southern church all the more problematic. What was the southern church to do when northern ministers condemned their role in slavery and rebellion? How should they react when criticized for their lack of integrity, respect, and piety? The reflection southerners saw in the mirror became one of judgement and condemnation, and southerners saw in northern criticism accusations that they were less holy than their northern “neighbors.”

When the northern church spoke of reunion, northerners believed they were proposing reunion with neighbors; southerners felt these overtures came from outsiders. The northern Methodists were not just any outsiders, but ones who had back-handedly condemned southern piety by requiring adherence to doctrines of antislavery and loyalty for readmittance into the northern church. Southerners at large refused to repent for slaveholding because, as Wyatt-Brown put it, “would have violated southern honor and collective self-esteem.”⁵⁵² Southern

⁵⁵⁰ Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor*, xxxiv.

⁵⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 15.

⁵⁵² Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor*, 28.

Methodists viewed reunion in like terms. The *Episcopal Methodist* declared reunion as “the most intolerable calamity that could befall our Southern Zion.” To agree to reunion on the northern church’s terms was to:

abjure our principles, sacrifice our position of usefulness, consign the memory of our brethren and fathers to infamy, pronounce the sentences of self-condemnation upon our whole communion, and accept a feature in the moral discipline of a dominant church which dooms to death and damnation all who have been connected with what it denominates ‘the great evil’ ... the detested sin of slavery.⁵⁵³

Wyatt-Brown argued, “If an honor-centered person” was “guilty of some wrong,” their priority became escaping the “implications of weakness and inferiority” that came with “the lash of contempt.”⁵⁵⁴ It appeared that was exactly how southerners intended to deal with northern criticism.

Northern leaders insulted more than southerners’ piety through their efforts in the South; they exposed their weakness and powerlessness to prevent the northern onslaught. When Edward Ames confiscated churches in Memphis, Little Rock, and New Orleans, southern ministers were, in the plain view of their local populations, forced to stand idly by as their pulpits were assumed by northern outsiders. The northern intention to “disintegrate and absorb” the southern church further sparked southern indignation, effectively placing them in the same stand-by position they held when the northern bishops first came South under the Stanton-Ames order. Southern ministers had to counteract the “lash of contempt” because it signified weakness, a state all too familiar to the southern connection in the waning years of the Civil War.

⁵⁵³ “Religious Intelligence,” *Cleveland Leader*, August 26, 1865, *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*, Library of Congress, <https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn83035144/1865-08-26/ed-1/seq-2>.

⁵⁵⁴ Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor*, 155.

Southerners determined to reject any northern overtures for reunion that implied weakness, impiety, or inferiority on the part of their part. In March of 1866, the *Southern Advocate* commented regarding the southern Methodist bishops' Columbus meeting, "We abhor conflict, but we can not consent to cowardly surrender."⁵⁵⁵ C.F. Deems told Abel Stevens northern Methodists would be received if they came "as visiting brethren," not as "emissaries."⁵⁵⁶ The Missouri Conference publicly stated in their Palmyra Manifesto that, "facts will not permit us to yield to any other church of that same priority of age," and insisted the Methodist schism occurred not over the rightness or wrongness of slavery, but over the more mundane debate concerning which issues were appropriate for ecclesiastical legislation..⁵⁵⁷ The southern church refused to see themselves as subordinate to the northern church, either in piety or influence, and they demanded the northern church view them similarly.

The Political Test

Southern criticism of the "political" nature of the northern church proved to be a particular sticking point. In 1866, when the General Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, was finally able to convene again, it received an irregular message from the New York Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church. The northern conference expressed "the hope, desire, and expectation that, at no distant day, the bodies unhappily severed would be united." The northern conference hoped the two sections could be rejoined into one by the General Conference of 1868, a fitting way to the begin the Methodists' second century in America. The southern conference first insisted, rightly, that any messages proposing reunion

⁵⁵⁵ Fuller, *An Appeal to the Records*, 282.

⁵⁵⁶ C.F. Deems, D.D., to Abel Steven, L.L. D.," *The Daily Standard*, July 25, 1862.

⁵⁵⁷ "M.E. Church in Missouri, *Southern Christian Advocate*, August 31, 1865.

should come from the northern General Conference, but it further explained that any talk of reunion was impossible until the northern Methodists removed “the offensive political test from its Discipline.” Anything before that the southerners considered “a delusion and a snare.”⁵⁵⁸

In 1868, the northern church conceded to southern demands, rescinding the political test from their *Discipline*.⁵⁵⁹ In 1869, Bishops Janes and Simpson, delegated by the bishops of the Methodist Episcopal Church, approached the southern Methodist bishops’ meeting in St. Louis to explore the possibility of reunion. While the southern bishops pledged an earnest desire for peace between the two sections, they noted “difficulties and obstacles” that prohibited reunion. Before the two connections could come together, the South wanted “fraternal feelings and relations between our two churches.” The southern church wanted both denominations on an equal footing; they were not going to return to the northern church as an inferior body, but they might be willing to entertain reunion between coequal branches. They once again hearkened back to the 1848 General Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, when the southern emissary, Lovick Pierce, extended fraternal relations to the northern church. Rejected by the northern body, Pierce had told the northern ministers, “You will therefore regard this communication as final on the part of the M.E. Church, South. She can never renew the offer of fraternal relations between the two great bodies ... But the proposition can be renewed at any time, either now or hereafter, by the M.E. Church,” if the northerners would make the offer according to the 1844 Plan of Separation.” The southern leaders of 1869 affirmed Pierce’s words: ‘the words of our rejected delegate have been ever since, and still are, our words.’⁵⁶⁰ The

⁵⁵⁸ Fuller, *An Appeal to the Records*, 296.

⁵⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 379.

⁵⁶⁰ “Correspondence between Bishops of the M.E. Church and Bishops of the M.E. Church, South,” *St. Louis Christian Advocate*, May 12, 1869, *St. Louis Christian Advocate Newspaper Collection*, Central Methodist University, <https://mdh.contentdm.oclc.org/digital/collection/christadvoc/id/13189/rec/275>.

southern leaders in St. Louis refused to yield to reunion proposals on northern terms. If one side was going to bend, it was not going to be the South.⁵⁶¹

Once again, Ames' efforts in the South earned mention; the bishops closed their response with a condemnation "of some of your missionaries and agents" who came into the South and "their course in taking possession of some of our houses of worship." This practice "inflicted both grief and loss on us," and bore the appearance of "an invasion of the plainest rights of property." The Stanton-Ames order, though short lived in actuality, lived on rhetorically. Southerners' resentment towards the northern effort still inhibited the relationship between the two sections over five years later.

The Non-Renewable Offer (Repeated)

In 1870, Bishop Janes once again led overtures to the southern church, this time with Dr. William L. Harris as his co-delegate. The two men arrived in Memphis during the General Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church. They were received cordially, but at the end of the conference the southern Methodists determined to remain independent.⁵⁶² The conference responded to the two delegates by affirming the bishops' response to Simpson and Janes in St. Louis in 1869, and pronounced the platform on which southern Methodism stood as "propounded by Dr. Pierce in 1848, confirmed by the General Conference in 1850, reasserted by the bishops in 1869, and again confirmed *unanimously* in 1870 by a full General Conference of lay and clerical delegates; namely, her foundation, as a separate ecclesiastical organization, was,

⁵⁶¹ "Correspondence between Bishops of the M.E. Church and Bishops of the M.E. Church, South," *St. Louis Christian Advocate*, May 12, 1869.

⁵⁶² Morrow, *Northern Methodism and Reconstruction*, 78.

by authority, laid in the Plan of Separation.” [emphasis in original]⁵⁶³ In short, the southern church had not changed since the Methodist split in 1848. If the northern Methodists hoped to reunite, they needed to return to and affirm the southern position of decades past.

The southern Methodist strategy began to take effect. While the southern Methodists refused to admit wrongdoing, northern ministers began apologizing for their course of action during the war. In March of 1870, L.C. Matlack addressed northern Methodist property confiscation in the *Central Christian Advocate*, “Did we not wrong our brethren in this? Is not a confession of wrong better than a defense of wrong?” Matlack confessed, “No other denomination did as we did in that matter. Temporary occupancy of pulpits in some instances occurred with others; but our ministers stood in the attitude of conquerors ... It did not so appear to them. It did so appear to the Church, South. It is so esteemed by them now.” The southern church “may stigmatize it with wonted severity,” Matlack admitted, “but their ox is gored by our bull, and we do not feel the pain.” He maintained “if our occupancy of the pulpits of the Church South, had been only the for purpose of suffering the preaching of the word to deserted congregations” and abandoned when southern pastors returned, “it would have been better for the peace of the Methodist family.” That did not happen, however, and it was time that the northern Methodists’ “attitude ... toward the South, both ecclesiastically and politically ... be examined.” Daniel Curry, the source of the “disintegrate and absorb” mantra, even confessed, “Wherever we have taken churches the policy has proved bad.”⁵⁶⁴

In 1872, the General Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church moved beyond apologies to action; it met the southern demand and sent fraternal delegates to the Methodist Episcopal Church, South’s General Conference in 1874. The southern church had held tightly to

⁵⁶³ Fuller, *An Appeal to the Records*, 380.

⁵⁶⁴ Sweet, *Methodism in American History*, 307; Farish, *The Circuit Rider Dismounts*, 39.

their request for fraternal relations since the northern church made their first overtures for reunion, and the northern connection finally responded, conveying with them the equal standing of the two branches. The northern Methodists were willing to let bygones be bygones, insisting they were “content to let past events go into history or be forgotten ... recognizing that Church and its people as a portion of the great Christian Methodist family.”⁵⁶⁵ They added no qualifiers to the all-encompassing phrase “past events.” In an effort to forget their own efforts to confiscate southern Methodist property, the northern Methodists seemed willing to forget the southern contributions to slavery, secession, and civil war. The southern church could have hardly asked for more.

When the General Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South convened in Louisville in 1874, it was met by northern Methodist delegates commissioned to deliver these fraternal greetings. When the southern conference moved to compose a response, there was some debate surrounding the wording. One delegate, Judge Jackson, declared he was “utterly indifferent as to language. I desire simply to show the world that we let nobody be above us in courtesy and fraternal love.”⁵⁶⁶ The conference proved to be ready and willing to appoint a delegation to meet and consider fraternity with the northern Methodists, but it took care to note the concerns and obstacles that remained in the way. The southern conference insisted any adjustment must hold to the Plan of Separation of 1844, by which it held “church-houses, cemeteries, school-buildings, and other property.”⁵⁶⁷ Another related concern, unsurprisingly, was “the course pursued” by northern Methodist agents and the property they had confiscated. Yet another concern, however, was new. The southern conference had launched their black

⁵⁶⁵ Fuller, *An Appeal to the Records*, 386.

⁵⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁶⁷ Fuller, *An Appeal to the Records*, 401.

congregations off into their own denomination, while the northern Methodists “pursued a different plan” in having “mixed conferences, mixed congregations, and mixed schools.” The southern ministers insisted, “We do not ask them to adopt our plan. We could not adopt theirs.”⁵⁶⁸ So in order for reunion to occur, the southern Methodists demanded the northern church abolish the political test for membership and initiate the establishment of fraternal relations, and the northern church agreed to take both steps. In Louisville, the southern Methodists stated any reunion could not occur until the Plan of Separation was validated, and unless northerners decided to do something about their integrated church services in the South. The southern church “could not” adopt the northern practice. Like Wyatt-Brown argued, honor demanded the Methodist Episcopal Church, South see a reflection of themselves in the northern Methodist church. The southern church did not want to share communion with men who judged them for their support for slavery and secession; they did not want to sing hymns beside men who demanded repentance from them, and they did not want to submit to a more racially egalitarian religious structure. The southern church may have been powerless during Ames’ mission through the South, but they certainly were not anymore.

The stubbornness of the southern church was reinforced by years of custom in the southern states, and at the General Conference of 1876, the Methodist Episcopal Church finally yielded. The Committee on the State of Church described the predicament facing racially mixed conferences in the southern states by reporting, “There is not a single church of white members with a colored preacher; nor a single district of Churches of white members with a colored Presiding Elder. Nor is such a state of things desired by any of the parties concerned.” Membership numbers mattered, and the committee noted increases in each conference where

⁵⁶⁸ Fuller, *An Appeal to the Records*, 400-401.

clear racial divisions emerged while more mixed conferences decreased. Members from these conferences attributed the decline to “the embarrassments arising from their being mixed Conferences.” The committee resolved to permit division in conferences where both a majority of the black and a majority of the white members agreed to it. The General Conference, with little debate, adopted the report.⁵⁶⁹

Finally, Fraternity

With political tests removed and the rules surrounding mixed services left malleable, the two branches of Methodism agreed to meet in Cape May, New Jersey, in September of 1876, to settle their differences in an attempt to establish official fraternal relations. The northern delegation consisted of a number of prominent men, including John P. Newman, Erasmus Q. Fuller, and General Clinton B. Fisk; the southerners were led by Dr. E.H. Myers, editor of the *Southern Christian Advocate* during the war.⁵⁷⁰ The conference addressed competing property claims brought to them by dissatisfied parties, and created a process to resolve any property claims left open. First, the disputed church property should be placed into the hands of whichever body held the property at that point in time. In any place where disagreements persisted, the Cape May delegates urged local officials to “without delay ... amicably compose their differences irrespective of strict legal title and settle the same according to Christian principles.” If even this was not possible, the two sides would submit their case to an

⁵⁶⁹ *Journal of the General Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, May 1-31, 1876*, (New York: Nelson & Phillips, 1876), 331.

⁵⁷⁰ “The Episcopal Methodists North and South ‘Shake Hands Over the Bloody Chasm,’” *The Deseret News*, September 13, 1876, Newspapers.com; Mason Crum, *The Southern Christian Advocate: An Historical Sketch*, (1945), 31, <http://digitalcommons.wofford.edu/methodistbooks/3>.

independent arbiter.⁵⁷¹ With persistent property disputes resolved, the Cape May conference released its message to the country. After a “full and free conference and interchange of views,” the men had “the satisfaction to declare that our aspirations for harmony of views on vital points” were realized. Through “frank interchange” and “prayerful endeavor” the two sides arrived “at the desired consummation of an unanimous agreement to complete fraternity.”⁵⁷² The Cape May conference ended religious reconstruction for the Methodist Episcopal Church.⁵⁷³ The southern Methodists could relax; Dr. Myers believed the establishment of fraternal relations guaranteed the southern church against any further northern attempts on their property.⁵⁷⁴ The old church could take satisfaction in being one step closer to their antebellum reality of a Methodist church that spanned the country. Disapproval erupted from the New England conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church and northern ministers stationed in the South, one of whom remarked, “We met the enemy and we surrendered.”⁵⁷⁵

William Warren Sweet, writing in the early twentieth century, described the northern Methodist motivations under the Stanton-Ames order as “not entirely holy and unselfish ... and ... ill calculated to further either the cause of the Union or religion.”⁵⁷⁶ It is difficult to discern individual motives, but northern Methodist ministers did not stand to gain much by engaging in missionary work among a hostile and unappreciative population. They went South to revive Methodism in the southern states. They believed the church was on the verge of reunion and they would serve as conciliating agents. When white southern Methodists refused reunion, the

⁵⁷¹ “Report of the Commissioners on Fraternal Reunion,” *The Daily Dispatch*, August 25, 1876, *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*, Library of Congress, <https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn84024738/1876-08-25/ed-1/seq-2>.

⁵⁷² *Ibid.*

⁵⁷³ Stowell, *Rebuilding Zion*, 174.

⁵⁷⁴ Morrow, *Northern Methodism and Reconstruction*, 87.

⁵⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 88-89.

⁵⁷⁶ Sweet, *The Methodist Episcopal Church and the Civil War*, 110.

northern Methodists remained in the South to minister to the freedmen. Northern Methodist motives may not have been entirely unselfish, but they certainly regarded them as holy.

Sweet's second criticism is more poignant. The actions of northern agents under the Stanton-Ames order undoubtedly hindered the cause of religion following the war. Any time the northern church proposed reunion with the southern connection, they were met with criticisms generated by northern actions under Stanton-Ames. Fifty-five years later, in 1920, the two sides moved closer to formal reunion, but the southern church still bristled at northern actions taken during the Civil War. Southerners' long memory, along with the more racially integrated nature of the northern church, proved too objectionable to the southern annual conferences, who rejected formal reunion.⁵⁷⁷ The two sections would not officially reunite until the spring of 1939.⁵⁷⁸

Northern Methodists who engaged in the confiscation of southern churches were all too eager to forget. Erasmus Q. Fuller published *An Appeal to the Records: A Vindication of the Methodist Episcopal Church, in its Policy and Proceedings Toward the South* in 1876. In the entire four-hundred-and-twenty-page work, Fuller dedicated two pages to occurrences under Stanton-Ames. Even then, he claimed all properties were returned as soon as hostilities ceased. After the Cape May Conference in 1876, any mention of northern church confiscation only served to inflame the passions of the two sections, a development that could only hinder the peace and goodwill slowly emerging among Methodists. Ames' postwar opinions on his role in the whole affair are a mystery. Matthew Simpson published *One Hundred Years of Methodism* in 1876 in which he hoped to illustrate Methodist accomplishments from the previous century. Unsurprisingly, the Stanton-Ames order went unmentioned.⁵⁷⁹

⁵⁷⁷ Sweet, *Methodism in American History*, 395.

⁵⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 399.

⁵⁷⁹ Matthew Simpson, *One Hundred Years of Methodism* (Cincinnati: Hitchcock & Walden, 1879).

Perhaps the greatest instance of southern Methodist introspection came from Atticus G. Haygood, President of Emory University, in 1880. He reflected on the state of the southern Methodist church and admitted, “The rather Pharisaic attitude that many public men at the North have assumed towards us has greatly embarrassed and arrested our efforts to discover our faults and to amend them.” Haygood characterized the “chief obstacle” to southern Methodist success as “their own sensitiveness to the Northern criticism.”⁵⁸⁰ Historian William Garrott Brown defined the southern concept of liberty as “nothing less than the right of himself and his community to be free from all interference by the peculiar outside world.”⁵⁸¹ When northern Methodist agents confiscated churches across the South, they assumed a long-established place in the southern psyche--one that everyone from John C. Calhoun to Atticus Finch would have recognized--northern intruders imposing their sense of morality and justice on an unwilling but overpowered southern populace. These northern Methodist agents certainly did not set out to violate the southerner’s sense of honor and liberty, but that was exactly what their presence in southern pulpits did. Southerners were so aggrieved at this perceived affront that, rather than examining the log of slavery and treason in their own eye, they focused on the speck of church confiscation in the northern eye. Southern Methodists latched onto the actions taken by Bishop Ames and his compatriots, then inflated them to the point they became the ultimate Methodist sin from the period surrounding the Civil War. Repentance for supporting slavery and rebeldom would have to wait for another time.

⁵⁸⁰ Farish, *The Circuit Rider Dismounts*, 190-191.

⁵⁸¹ Wyatt-Brown, *Southern Honor*, 113.

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