



PhD thesis

**Conflict and crisis in American Methodism: slavery and
homosexuality, 1784-2022**
Campbell, S.

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CONFLICT AND CRISIS IN AMERICAN METHODISM:
SLAVERY AND HOMOSEXUALITY,
1784-2022

A Thesis submitted to Middlesex University in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

by

Sarah Rose Campbell

Middlesex University

Supervised at London School of Theology

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Abstract

Sarah Rose Campbell

Conflict and Crisis in American Methodism: Slavery and Homosexuality, 1784-2022

Doctor of Philosophy

Middlesex University/London School of Theology

2023

The following thesis, *Conflict and Crisis in American Methodism: Slavery and Homosexuality, 1784-2022*, asks the central question: Can the reasons why the Methodist Episcopal Church experienced schism in 1844 over slavery illuminate the reasons why the United Methodist Church will experience schism in 2022 over homosexuality? Then, the thesis uses the long view methodological framework to investigate its central question. This thesis, as a work of church history, analyses a past event, the Methodist Episcopal Church's schism in 1844, to investigate a current event, the United Methodist Church's schism in 2022. Thus, this thesis utilises its research to search for patterns of commonality and points of intersectionality between two distinct events and time periods within American Methodism and American socio-political culture.

First, the thesis describes and exegetes the events leading to the Methodist Episcopal Church's 1844 schism. Then, the thesis analyses the socio-political context and cultural trends of antebellum America, thereby drawing conclusions about the ways in which antebellum American culture affected American Methodism's theology and polity regarding slavery.

Also, this thesis describes and exegetes the events leading to the United Methodist Church's 2022 schism. Then, it analyses the socio-political context and cultural trends of late twentieth century and early twenty-first century America, thereby drawing conclusions about the ways in which late twentieth and early twenty-first century culture affected American Methodism's theology and polity regarding homosexuality. Therefore, from the above analysis, this thesis will demonstrate that both slavery and homosexuality are presenting issues for much larger cultural conflicts within the intersection of American Methodism and American society.

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Chapter One: Introduction

The Thesis' Description

The following thesis, *Conflict and Crisis in American Methodism: Slavery and Homosexuality, 1784-2022*, describes and analyses two distinct conflicts that led American Methodism on trajectories toward official denominational schism, building its argument over seven chapters. This thesis is located within the field of church history. It demonstrates the ways in which American Methodism navigated and negotiated its way through its historical setting, America in the years 1784-2022. To accomplish this, the thesis analyses how the Methodist Episcopal Church interacted within the American antebellum socio-political context. The thesis, then, takes the above learnings and examines them to ascertain whether past American Methodist conflicts regarding slavery can provide illumination for present American Methodist conflicts regarding homosexuality, paying close attention to the ways in which the United Methodist Church has interacted with shifting American cultural values and sexual mores. Because it is a work of church history, this thesis also draws conclusions about how the history of American Methodism and its interaction with its surrounding culture have exposed inherent weaknesses within American Methodism's polity.

David Steinmetz, author of *Taking the Long View: Christian Theology in a Historical Perspective*, describes how the present church is inextricably influenced by past church history. Steinmetz writes:

I do not think that it is a bad thing for the Christian church in the present to be influenced by the church of the past in its understanding of the Christian faith. Quite the contrary: it is not only inevitable that the church in the present will be influenced by the past, it is even desirable. What is intolerable in a Christian theologian or pastor is a lack of awareness of that influence...The aim of church history as a theological discipline is to provide the church with a more universal and self-critical perspective within which to make responsible theological and pastoral decisions in the present.¹

¹ David Steinmetz, *Taking the Long View: Christian Theology in a Historical Perspective* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 142-143.

As such, this thesis recognises and employs Steinmetz's observations about the influence of the past upon the present. Because of this recognition, the thesis critically examines early American Methodism. Then, it uses the insights gleaned from the critical examination to provide analysis about present-day American Methodism. The research methodology, the long view, used to accomplish this task will be explained more fully later in the Introduction.

Initially, Chapter Two explores the larger American socio-political conflicts surrounding the Methodist Episcopal Church's 1844 schism. Then, Chapter Three describes and exegetes the prominent arguments that are interwoven throughout the slavery debates within American Methodism. Next, for comparison and analysis, Chapter Four examines the larger American socio-political conflicts surrounding the United Methodist Church's 2022 schism. Then, Chapter Five exegetes the prominent arguments that are interwoven throughout the homosexuality debates within American Methodism. Lastly, the Chapter Six scrutinises the prominent arguments given in both the slavery and homosexuality debates by searching for parallels between the conflicts leading to the Methodist Episcopal Church's 1844 schism and the conflicts leading to the United Methodist Church's 2022 schism. Consequently, this thesis pays close attention to the intersection between American Methodism's conflicts over its policies on slavery and homosexuality and the prevailing themes of larger American socio-political culture. Thus, the central question of this thesis can be addressed: Can the reasons why the Methodist Episcopal Church experienced schism in 1844 over slavery illuminate the reasons why the United Methodist Church experienced schism in 2022 over homosexuality?

The Thesis' Delimitations

The study of Methodism is wide-ranging, covering a vast array of potential topics, time periods, and locations. Because of this, to answer the thesis' central

question sufficiently, delimitations were needed to narrow the field of study. Therefore, delimitations provided the boundaries required to research the primary and secondary sources that would best assist in answering the thesis' central question. Recognising the need to focus the thesis' material, the following section will name the thesis' delimitations.

First, the thesis will delimit consideration of John Wesley's writings to those focused on American Methodism. Although Wesley wrote on a variety of subjects, it is outside the scope of this thesis to closely analyse all of Wesley's writings. Instead, to answer the thesis' central question, it is necessary to examine specifically Wesley's writings on the formation of the Methodist Episcopal Church in America and Wesley's writings on slavery. These writings include *A Calm Address to Our American Colonies* and *Thoughts Upon Slavery*. Additionally, it is important to note that Wesley never wrote directly about homosexuality, also recognising the word was not in parlance in the eighteenth century. Therefore, Wesley's opinion on homosexuality cannot be ascertained. Furthermore, as described and analysed in this thesis, the Methodist Episcopal Church in America began to distance itself from John Wesley and British Methodism, both in its theological perspective and in denominational structure, beginning in the late 1780s. Thus, while John Wesley's catalogue of theological writings, sermons, and letters are essential to the study of Methodism, it is unnecessary to analyse Wesley's writings beyond those that address the formation of the Methodist Episcopal Church in America and those that reference Wesley's position on slavery.

Second, the thesis will exclude the study of Methodist denominations found outside America, such as the Methodist Church in Britain. While Methodism was first organised in Great Britain and has a strong presence in many countries, the central question of this thesis speaks specifically to two American Methodist denominations—the historic Methodist Episcopal Church and the current United Methodist Church. Additionally, this thesis analyses the ways in which American Methodism interacts with American socio-political culture, specifically within the context of slavery and

homosexual practice. Furthermore, while the current United Methodist Church has a presence in Africa, Asia, and Europe, homosexuality provides division within the context of American socio-political culture and American Methodism. Thus, to answer this thesis' central question, it is outside the range of this thesis to analyse expressions of Methodism beyond those found in America.

Third, the thesis will exclude conflicts in American Methodism that did not include slavery and homosexuality. For example, because of this delimitation, the thesis will not discuss the the O'Kelly Schism (1792), the Hammett Schism (1792), and the Methodist Protestant Schism (1830. The driving force for these separations were contradictory convictions about lay representation and the episcopacy's power to appoint travelling preachers, not slavery.² Additionally, the thesis does not address more modern American Methodist conflicts, such as arguments about the ordination of women during the 1950s. This delimitation was set because the conflicts over the slavery and homosexuality set American Methodism on a trajectory towards official schism in the primary denominational body. Thus, to answer the central question, this thesis exclusively examines American Methodism's schism over slavery and homosexuality.

Fourth, the thesis will exclude an original biblical exegesis of passages concerning slavery and homosexuality. While understanding the differing biblical interpretations about slavery and homosexuality employed by American Methodist caucus groups and General Conference delegates is important to the thesis' central question, it is outside the scope of this thesis to engage in an original biblical exegesis of passages concerning slavery and homosexuality. In narrowing the thesis' topic, several scholarly works exegeting biblical passages concerning slavery and homosexuality were researched. For example, to understand better conservative

² For a robust exploration of the abovementioned schisms, See: Frank Woodward, "Francis Asbury and James O'Kelly: The Language and Development of American Methodist Episcopal Structure," *Methodist History* 41, no. 2 (January 2003): 17; Frank Baker, *From Wesley to Asbury: Studies in Early American Methodism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1976), 133; Russell E. Richey, Kenneth E. Rowe, and Jean Miller Schmidt, *The Methodist Experience in America: A History*, Vol. I (Nashville: Abingdon Press: 2010), 171.

caucus groups' biblical interpretation about homosexuality, scholarly resources such as *The Bible and Homosexual Practice: Texts and Hermeneutics* by Robert A.J. Gagnon were consulted extensively. Gagnon's book provided a rigorous, academic argument that biblical texts do not condone homosexual practice. Thus, Gagnon asserts, Christians are never to engage in homosexual practice. Additionally, to glean a more complete grasp of progressive caucus groups' biblical interpretation about homosexuality, scholarly resources such as Eugene F. Rogers' *Sexuality and the Christian Body: Their Way into the Triune God*, were examined critically. By examining biblical texts and Christian tradition, Rogers' work advanced a robust argument that same-sex marriages should be included in the Christian community because they are a celebration of God's grace found in another human being. Thus, for Rogers, all marriages are exercises in holiness and transformation. To answer the thesis' central question, however, it is only necessary to analyse the interpretations of biblical passages concerning slavery and homosexuality that were set forth American Methodist caucus groups and General Conference delegates. By doing this, it was possible to undertake an informed examination of the ways in which biblical passages about slavery and homosexuality were used by caucus groups and General Conference delegates to further their agendas and goals.

Fifth, the thesis will not address any developments in the United Methodist Church's trajectory towards denominational schism that occurred after May 2022. While the United Methodist Church's schism over homosexuality continues to transpire, a stopping point must be decided. At the beginning of writing this thesis, it was widely thought that the 2019 special called session of the General Conference would settle the conflict over homosexuality in the United Methodist Church. Instead, the conflict over homosexuality widened after the 2019 General Conference. Then, the coronavirus pandemic postponed the 2020, 2021, and 2022 General Conferences. Thus, it is impossible to state the outcome of the next General Conference. Although the 2022 General Conference did not occur, in May 2022, the Global Methodist Church officially launched, leading some United Methodist Churches to begin the

disaffiliation process. For the purposes of this thesis, the United Methodist Church's willingness to allow churches to depart for the Global Methodist Church is the marker for schism in the primary denominational body.

While the Methodist Episcopal Church's schism is ongoing, research showed that the answer to the thesis' central question could be found by employing the long view research methodology. This was done by studying the intersection between American cultural trends regarding slavery and the Methodist Episcopal Church's policies on slavery. Then, these findings were used to illuminate any parallels with the United Methodist Church's policies on homosexuality and larger American cultural trends regarding homosexuality. Consequently, by scrutinising denominational policies and broader American socio-political patterns, an answer to the thesis' central question could be found although the United Methodist Church's schism continues to transpire. In the future, a scholar could use the research and findings presented in this thesis to continue to examine critically the United Methodist Church's schism over homosexuality after May 2022, the stopping point for this thesis.

Finally, the thesis will delimit any judgements about the conflicts that led to the Methodist Episcopal Church's schism over slavery and the United Methodist Church's schism over homosexuality. This thesis aims to use a past event, the Methodist Episcopal Church's 1844 schism, to provide illumination for a current event, the United Methodist Church's 2022 schism. For example, because this thesis is a historical and sociological comparison of two distinct periods in American Methodism, the thesis will not provide pronouncements about the "correctness" or "incorrectness" of the 1844 Methodist Episcopal Church's schism or the 2022 United Methodist Church's schism. Further, it is not the purpose and goal of this thesis to advocate for unity or separation within American Methodism. Instead, the purpose and goal of this thesis is to determine if the reasons why the Methodist Episcopal Church experienced schism over slavery can illuminate the reasons why the United Methodist Church experienced schism over homosexuality. Because of this, it is

beyond the scope of this thesis to make determinations about the preferred outcomes for past, present, and future expressions of American Methodism.

The Thesis' Long View Research Methodology and a Caution Against Presentism

The research methodology employed in this thesis, the long view, is a little-known methodology. The long view methodology, however, was chosen out of many methodologies because it provides an interpretative lens that enables a robust evaluation of the historical trajectory of American Methodism. In this way, the long view methodology allows this thesis to provide analysis about the present iteration of American Methodism based upon past iterations of American Methodism. It is recognised that utilising different methodologies would have yielded different conclusions. Yet, the long view methodology provided an effective methodological approach to evaluate critically an evolving event in American Methodism. Therefore, the long view methodological approach provided this thesis' framework and influenced the ways in which material was presented and conclusions were drawn.

Again, the long view methodology uses a past historical event, the Methodist Episcopal Church's 1844 schism over slavery, to provide illumination for a current event, the United Methodist Church's 2022 schism over homosexuality. Steinmetz states the usefulness of the long view methodology when analysing and interpreting present-day happenings within Christianity by carefully examining past events within the context of their time and place. Steinmetz writes:

In short, historians must be methodologically humble...They must accept the past on its terms rather than on their own. If they do so, they will find that the past can prove enormously instructive, often in unexpected and boundary-breaking ways. But if they do not, they will hear in their interpretation of the past only the echo of their own voice.³

³ Steinmetz, *Taking the Long View*, 149.

Furthermore, the long view of history research methodology provides insights into historical events, not by simply listing historical happenings, but by interpreting the larger themes that surround and contribute to the historical events being researched and analysed. By utilizing the long view research methodology, this thesis reached its conclusions by engaging in a detailed analysis of two distinct eras in American Methodism.

First, to be able to draw logical conclusions, it was imperative to research, study, and interpret the original, primary sources related to both the Methodist Episcopal Church's 1844 schism and the United Methodist Church's 2022 schism. Then, by using the above detailed analysis, it was possible to view patterns that were present during both schisms. From such a comparison, this thesis was able to use its research methodology to draw conclusions that were wider in scope than conclusions based solely upon denominational disagreements and infighting.

Furthermore, this thesis was careful not to engage in presentism. According to Grady Atwater, Curator of the John Brown Museum and State Historic Site, presentism is "evaluating the cultural ideals and realities of the people of the past by the cultural ideals and realities of the present, which is not intellectually valid nor fair to the people of the past."⁴ This thesis is vigilant about not placing contemporary North American moral, ethical, cultural, societal, or political values upon North Americans who lived in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. For example, this thesis did not assume that any eighteenth- and nineteenth-century American Methodists, even abolitionists, viewed slavery in the same manner as American Methodists today. Instead, this thesis used primary documents written by eighteenth- and nineteenth-century American Methodists to analyse and interpret American Methodism's responses to slavery in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

⁴ Grady Atwater, "Presentism is a Dangerous Way to Judge History," *The Miami County Republic*, January 3, 2018 (http://www.republic-online.com/opinion/presentism-is-a-dangerous-way-to-judge-history/article_434b5e15-adc3-526a-9013-a5ebbe11c721.html; accessed August 3, 2021).

Likewise, this thesis did not attempt to transfer contemporary American attitudes about homosexuality upon Americans who lived in the 1700s and 1800s. Throughout this thesis' extensive research, zero references about homosexuality were found in eighteenth-century and nineteenth-century American Methodist documents. Therefore, it was intellectually invalid to place any contemporary American Methodist thoughts about homosexuality on eighteenth century and nineteenth century American Methodism. Also, as this thesis argues, cultural values can change quickly, even within the span of a decade. Consequently, this thesis also did not assume that American cultural values about homosexuality in 2022 were the same as American cultural values about homosexuality during the latter half of the twentieth-century and the beginning of the twenty-first century. Instead, this thesis analysed and interpreted primary American Methodist sources about homosexuality from the relevant decades, paying close attention to the ways in which attitudes toward homosexuality shifted within American Methodism. Lastly, the thesis' Conclusion further explains and demonstrates this methodology.

The Thesis' Primary and Secondary Sources and Literature Review

This thesis used a variety of primary and archival sources to ask its central question, build its arguments, and draw its conclusions. Primary sources such as eyewitness accounts, personal diary entries, letters, newspaper and magazine articles, and official denominational and governmental statistics gave insights into people's thought processes and behavioural patterns. Thus, informed interpretations of primary sources were used to build the thesis' arguments and draw informed, logical conclusions. For example, to access primary sources from several General Conference proceedings, the author consulted the General Commission on Archives and History at Drew University. Frances Lyons, Reference Archivist, and Dr Ashley Boggan Dreff, General Secretary of Archives and History, were invaluable in procuring archival

primary materials from Drew University and other college and universities. These archival sources are identified in the footnotes and Bibliography.

Furthermore, the 1784-1844 General Conference *Journals* of the Methodist Episcopal Church and the 1968-2019 General Conference *Journals* of the United Methodist Church were key research tools. From these *Journals*, it was possible to analyse delegates' speeches and actions as they occurred, allowing for interpretation from the speakers' own words. Also, primary American civil documents, such as the American Declaration of Independence and the United States Constitution's Establishment Clause, were essential in developing this thesis' arguments. As this thesis demonstrates, American civil documents provided a framework for how early American Methodism structured its theology and practice. The study of primary American civil documents aided in forming the argument that the intersection between American Methodism and American socio-political culture is vital for understanding the reasons why American Methodism has experienced schism over slavery and homosexuality.

Additionally, secondary sources were used to understand further and to complement the insights found through the analysis of primary documentation. Secondary sources include many articles from *Methodist History*, the leading academic journal for study about American Methodist history. Academic journal articles from the fields of American studies, religion, politics, sociology, history, and law are also frequently utilised throughout the thesis. Furthermore, many Methodist history books were consulted to provide fruitful dialogue within the thesis. For example, Russell Richey's work, including *The Methodist Experience in America* and his study of Methodism and race, *A Church's Broken Heart: Mason-Dixon Methodism*, are engaged frequently.

A plethora of secondary sources concerning early American republic and antebellum attitudes toward slavery were consulted to gain a more complete picture of the intersectionality of American socio-political culture and early and antebellum American Methodist theology and practice. These include: Dee E. Andrews' *The*

Methodists and Revolutionary America, 1760-1800: The Shaping of an Evangelical Culture; Frank Baker's *From Wesley to Asbury. Studies in Early American Methodism*; Emory S. Bucke's *The History of American Methodism*; Nathan O. Hatch's and John H. Wigger's *Methodism and the Shaping of American Culture*; Fredrick A. Norwood's *The Story of American Methodism*; Richard Cameron's *Methodism and Society*; and Jason E. Vickers' *The Cambridge Companion to American Methodism*. Each of these tomes provide historical background and analysis of Methodism's legacy and place within American society, aiding in giving the documentation needed for the thesis' argument to be thoroughly examined and leading to the discovery of additional primary sources.

Further, the United Methodist Church's schism over homosexuality is continuing. Because of this, few books or other printed materials about this topic are available for study. Instead, to research successfully the contemporary sections of this thesis, electronic primary sources were analysed and interpreted. These electronic primary sources include internet-based articles, blogs, letters, podcasts, sermons, and videos. For example, *UM News* and *UM Insight* articles were consulted to gain a better understanding of United Methodist events as they were reported. Also, blogs, such as Reverend Jeremy Smith's Hacking Christianity and the Institute of Religion and Democracy's Juicy Ecumenicism, provided expanded understanding on both progressive and conservative United Methodist thought about homosexuality and schism.

Additionally, the thesis' author attended the 2019 General Conference as an observer. Because of her attendance, all descriptions of the events that occurred during the 2019 General Conference are from her eyewitness experience. This gives the thesis a unique perspective. The author does not need to imagine what happened or rely on others' accounts of the 2019 General Conference. Instead, the author witnessed the events that transpired. Also, the author conducted interviews by telephone with contemporary American Methodist leaders, including Reverend Maxie Dunnam, Dr Tex Sample, and Bishop Kenneth H. Carter. These primary sources

were used to understand better the participants' beliefs and, thus, build the thesis' arguments from the actual words of those involved in the United Methodist Church's homosexuality debates.

Further, a myriad of secondary sources about the American civil rights movement, the Sexual Revolution, shifting American sexual mores about homosexuality, the formation of the United Methodist Church, and the United Methodist Church's response to the homosexuality debates were read to gain additional knowledge about the American Methodist religious context and the socio-political milieu of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. These sources include: Mark Tooley's *Methodism and Politics in the Twentieth Century* and Jane Ellen Nickell's *We Shall Not Be Moved: Methodists Debate Race, Gender, and Homosexuality*.

Additionally, this thesis substantially engages Ashley Boggan Dreff's *Entangled: A History of American Methodism, Politics, and Sexuality*. *Entangled* examines the ways in which sexuality is understood in Methodism by comparing how sexuality is understood in American society.⁵ To do this, *Entangled* explores birth control, divorce, sex education, abortion, and rights of persons who identify as gay and lesbian.⁶

While there are some similarities with *Entangled*, this thesis differs in substantial ways. First, *Entangled* does not mention American Methodism's organisation during the American Revolutionary period or the 1844 schism. Therefore, it does not provide commentary about the ways in which America's socio-political involvement with slavery directly led to the 1844 schism. Thus, it does not compare the socio-political factors leading to 1844 schism with the socio-political factors leading to the 2022 schism. Second, *Entangled's* methodology is queer theory. Therefore, *Entangled's* arguments are all seen through the lens of sexuality

⁵ Ashley Boggan Dreff, *Entangled: A History of American Methodism, Politics, and Sexuality* (Nashville: New Room Books, 2018), 1.

⁶ Boggan Dreff, *Entangled*, 2.

and how sexuality builds societies, governments, churches, and civilizations. Boggan Dreff states:

Using queer theory as a theoretical lens, this book will untangle the web of sexuality, religion, and politics. Queer Theory examines different points of history and seeks to understand sexuality at that specific time. Queer Theory's goal is to place the question of sexuality as the center of concern, and as a key category through which other social, political, and cultural phenomena are to be understood.⁷

As mentioned previously, this thesis' methodology is the long view. The long view looks at how a past event can provide clarity for a present event. Therefore, these methodologies ask two very different questions and, because of this, will come to two different conclusions. Third, *Entangled* was written prior to the 2019 special called session of the General Conference. Therefore, it does not consider any happenings in the United Methodist Church or American society after 2018.

Entangled is focused solely on sexuality in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Sexuality, for *Entangled*, is the socio-political issue that determines American society and, thus, American Methodism.

This thesis, however, compares two distinct events in American Methodism, the 1844 schism over slavery and the current schism over homosexuality, and explores the ways in which a past event can illuminate a current event, searching for points of intersectionality. The thesis shows that schisms within American Methodism are indicative of the larger socio-political culture in which American Methodism was created and continues to exist. Unlike *Entangled*, this thesis does not claim that sexuality is the main lens through which American Methodism's interaction with American society should be explored.

Similarly, this thesis differs from Tooley's *Methodism and Politics* and Nickel's *We Shall Not Be Moved*. Tooley implies throughout his book that American Methodism's membership decline is a result of Methodist officials' liberal political

⁷ Boggan Dreff, *Entangled*, 6.

views.⁸ He implies that Methodism lost its political influence in America when its officials embraced a more liberalised political and social ethic. He uses American Methodism's conservative temperance movement as an example. He states that when American Methodists were unified around conservative political/social issues, the denomination was more politically successful.⁹ For example, Tooley states:

Methodism began the twentieth century as a relatively culturally unified force and as America's largest Protestant religious movement. The culmination of Methodist cultural and political impact was Prohibition... an experiment that embodied Methodist hopes for America as a beacon of civic righteousness. Prohibition's ultimate failure perhaps also signalled the ultimate ebbing of Methodist cultural influence...But probably never again after Prohibition did Methodists wield such nation-shaping political force.¹⁰

Through this quotation, Tooley suggests that American Methodism is more unified and politically relevant when it rallies around a conservative social cause, such as temperance. According to Tooley, for American Methodism to increase its influence as denomination and a political entity, it should embrace conservative cultural values.¹¹

However, this thesis differs from *Methodism and Politics*. Tooley does not explore American Methodism's founding during the Revolutionary War or the 1844 schism, instead analysing exclusively American Methodism in the twentieth century. Additionally, Tooley claims that American Methodist elites influenced culture who, then, liberalised American politics, eventually causing backlash amongst the general population over liberalised socio-political ethics.¹² This thesis, however, claims that American political/civil decisions influenced American Methodism's polity.

⁸ Mark Tooley, *Methodism and Politics in the Twentieth Century: From William McKinley to 9/11* (Fort Valley: Bristol House, 2018), Location 576, Kindle edition.

⁹ Tooley, *Methodism and Politics*, Locations 140 and 151.

¹⁰ Tooley, *Methodism and Politics*, Location 151.

¹¹ Tooley, *Methodism and Politics*, Location 4790.

¹² Tooley, *Methodism and Politics*, Location 3753.

Throughout this thesis, it is shown that American Methodism adopts its policies after American civil policies are first changed. This turns Tooley's argument about American Methodist elites changing American socio-political culture on its head.

Nickell's *We Shall Not Be Moved* explores how White, heterosexual men gain leadership positions within American Methodism and control the denomination's power structures.¹³ Nickell's position that White, heterosexual men control United Methodist polity is evident in the following paragraph in which she describes the 1972 General Conference:

All the delegates to speak to this issue [homosexuality] were male, except one, indicating that men still dominated the General Conference body, and the conversation fixated on gay men, largely ignoring lesbians. The fearful tone of the debate, while aimed at the protection of young boys, may suggest that male delegates saw gay men as a threat to their own male identity, a reversal of traditional gender order that privileged them, and a further erosion of their ecclesial power, having admitted women into full leadership just sixteen years earlier.¹⁴

This thesis, however, does not solely emphasize White, heterosexual male power dynamics. Instead, it explores why American Methodism is inherently schismatic because it emerged during a time of social revolution. Additionally, Nickell's book explores racism in the twentieth century, women's ordination, and American Methodism's LGBTQIA+ controversy up until 2014. It does not explore slavery and American Methodism or current happenings in the United Methodist Church regarding homosexuality. This thesis, however, compares the 1844 schism and the 2022 schism, looking carefully at the American socio-political context regarding slavery and homosexuality, including but not limited to White, heterosexual male power structures in both church and state.

¹³ Jane Ellen Nickell, *We Shall Not Be Moved: Methodists Debate Race, Gender, and Homosexuality* (Eugene: Pickwick Publishing, 2014), 2.

¹⁴ Nickell, *We Shall Not*, 95.

As evidenced above, the thesis utilises a variety of primary and secondary sources to construct an original argument. The resources spanned centuries of American socio-political history and American Methodist history, revealing patterns of intersectionality between American Methodism's 1844 schism over slavery and American Methodism's 2022 schism over homosexuality. While other authors, such as Ashley Boggan Dreff, Mark Tooley, and Jane Nickels, have explored similar topics, this thesis engages primary and secondary literature to provide, for the first time, an extensive analysis of the larger cultural factors leading American Methodism into schism over slavery and homosexuality. In presenting a detailed historical analysis, the narratives themselves constitute an original contribution to knowledge that relies upon the extant literature and provides a basis for the further study of this thesis.

The Progression of the Thesis' Central Question and the Progression of the Thesis' Structure, Aim, and Purpose

During the research process, the thesis progressed in structure, aim, and purpose. For example, the initial research proposal indicated that the thesis would investigate the factors that led to the 1844 Methodist Episcopal Church's schism over slavery. Then, the thesis' original proposal asserted it would compare those factors with the 2019 United Methodist Church's schism over homosexuality. Originally, the research proposal asked the following as the thesis' central question: Are the varied factors that led the Methodist Episcopal Church to experience schism over slavery in 1844 the same varied factors that may lead the United Methodist Church to experience schism over homosexuality at the 2019 special called session of the General Conference of the United Methodist Church?

Initially, the thesis' original proposal pursued the above central question because both the 1844 Methodist Episcopal Church's schism and the 2019 United Methodist Church's schism were thought to be significant events that would impact the continuing legacy of American Methodism and the witness of the

universal Church. For example, the thesis' original proposal noted the bitter division that occurred when the Methodist Episcopal Church experienced schism over slavery in 1844. Consequently, two denominations with separate ideals were formed: the Methodist Episcopal Church and the Methodist Episcopal Church South. Then, the thesis' original proposal stated that the Methodist Episcopal Church and the Methodist Episcopal Church South did not reunite as a single denomination-The Methodist Church- until 1939. Because of this, the thesis' original proposal questioned the likelihood of the United Methodist Church's schism over homosexuality, wondering whether new Methodist denominations would be formed. Further, the thesis' original proposal sought to answer its central question by analysing the ramifications of the 1844 Methodist Episcopal Church's schism and by gauging the possible results of the 2019 United Methodist Church's special called session of the General Conference. By researching and formulating responses to these two events, the thesis' original proposal hoped to determine the impact of schism on several generations of American Methodism.

As the thesis' research progressed, however, it was realized that the above structure, aims, and goals were too broad for sufficient academic study and interpretation. Additionally, it was discovered that it was impossible to determine logically the long-term results and ramifications of an event that would only have recently occurred. Therefore, the thesis' central question was narrowed to compare the decisions that led the Methodist Episcopal Church into schism and the decisions that would lead the United Methodist Church into schism. The thesis, however, was forced to shift perspectives when the 2019 General Conference defied most commentators' predictions and adopted the Traditional Plan petition, tightening the United Methodist Church's restrictions on homosexual weddings on United Methodist properties and ministers who openly practice homosexual behaviours. Instead of causing immediate denominational schism, the 2019 General Conference led United Methodist caucus groups to call for the official separation of the United Methodist Church during the 2020 General Conference. Because of this,

the thesis' objectives changed to studying the Methodist Episcopal Church's schism at the 1844 General Conference and the United Methodist Church's trajectory towards schism at the 2020 General Conference. Yet, the thesis' central question was revised when the coronavirus pandemic caused the General Conference's cancellation in 2020, 2021, and 2022. Then, when the Global Methodist Church formed in May 2022, the thesis' central question was modified again. As a result of the shifting dynamics of General Conference and the Global Methodist Church's launch, the thesis adopted the long view research methodology to determine whether the reasons why the Methodist Episcopal Church experienced schism in 1844 over the slavery could illuminate the reasons why the United Methodist Church experienced schism in 2022 over the homosexuality. In this way, it was possible to consider if a past event could provide insights into a current event without knowing the full outcome of a future event.

Finally, the thesis' reformulated central question enabled a deeper analysis of the ways in which American Methodism has continually intersected with American socio-political trends. By restructuring the thesis in this manner, it was possible to avoid making judgements about the appropriateness of schism and its potential impact on the Christian witness within American Methodism and the universal Church, something that cannot be logically proven in an academic context. Ultimately, conclusions were drawn by closely researching, analysing, and interpreting the intertwined relationship between American Methodism and American socio-political culture. Therefore, this thesis will demonstrate that slavery and homosexuality are presenting issues for much larger cultural conflicts within the intersection of American Methodism and American society.

The Thesis' Original Contribution to Knowledge

This thesis will make an original contribution to knowledge by drawing a direct connection and correlation between the reasons why the Methodist Episcopal

Church experienced schism in 1844 over slavery and the reasons why the United Methodist Church experienced schism in 2022 over homosexuality. Additionally, this thesis' research, analysis, and interpretation will demonstrate that the reasons why the Methodist Episcopal Church experienced schism in 1844 are relevant and contributing factors to the United Methodist Church's 2022 schism. Further, for the first time, this thesis will provide a critical, narrative framework that will evaluate the effect of larger American cultural shifts on American Methodism's theology and practice.

By engaging in a long view research methodology with the 1844 Methodist Episcopal Church's schism over slavery, this thesis hopes to contribute to the academy an expanded understanding of the reasons why the United Methodist Church experienced schism in 2022 over homosexuality, changing the present focus in this field from denominational infighting based upon contradictory convictions to larger patterns of intersectionality between American Methodism and American socio-political trends. By doing this, future members of the academy may be able to recognize the theological, historical, political, and sociological patterns that have led American Methodism into denominational schisms. The thesis' Conclusion will also speak to its original contribution to knowledge.

Closing Thoughts

This thesis represents several years of research into two significant time periods in American Methodism. As noted earlier in the Introduction, the thesis' structure, aim, and purpose progressed as events transpired within American Methodism, leading to expanded research, analysis, and interpretation about the intertwined relationship between American Methodism and American culture, especially as they relate to debates about slavery and homosexuality. Consequently, the ever-evolving nature of this thesis challenged previous assumptions about American Methodism and American socio-political culture. Ultimately, these fresh

insights resulted in drawing conclusions that were based upon the thesis' discovery of the emerging intersectionality between American Methodism and shifting American socio-political culture. The remainder of this thesis will provide ample evidence that will answer the thesis' central question.

Chapter Two: Early American Socio-Political Conflicts and Early American Methodism

Introduction

The Methodist Episcopal Church developed a “Plan of Separation” for the denomination’s Northern and Southern branches during the 1844 General Conference.¹⁵ Consequently, the Methodist Episcopal Church experienced a schism, leading to the formation of the Methodist Episcopal Church and the Methodist Episcopal Church South.¹⁶ The 1844 Methodist Episcopal Church schism’s presenting issue was Bishop James Osgood Andrew’s status as an enslaver within the larger context of the institution of slavery in America.¹⁷ Through a robust exploration of the origins of American Methodism, Chapter Two will provide a careful analysis of the emergence of Methodism in America during the American Revolutionary period and slavery’s established place within American society during the years preceding the Methodist Episcopal Church’s schism.

The Emergence of Methodism in America During the American Revolutionary Period

American Methodism in Pre-Revolutionary War America, 1764-1775:

Methodism emerged in America during its Revolutionary period, 1764-1789.¹⁸ In order to understand why American Methodism experienced schism in 1844, it is necessary to examine the ways in which the Revolutionary period shaped early American Methodism’s values, structure, and growth. First, until the end of the Seven Years War in 1763,¹⁹ the vast geographical distance between Great Britain and the

¹⁵ Russell E. Richey, Kenneth E. Rowe, Jean Miller Schmidt, *The Methodist Experience in America: A Sourcebook*, Vol. II (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2000), 279.

¹⁶ Richey, Rowe, and Schmidt, *The Methodist Experience*, Vol. II, 280.

¹⁷ Richey, Rowe, and Schmidt, *The Methodist Experience*, Vol. II, 270.

¹⁸ Dee E. Andrews, *The Methodists and Revolutionary America, 1760-1800: The Shaping of an Evangelical Culture* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 5.

¹⁹ Great Britain and France fought the Seven Years War that ended in 1763. At the end of the war, Great Britain gained control of the French territories in America. Many colonists had fought for Great Britain and expected that they could now settle the lands west of the Appalachian Mountains.

thirteen colonies prevented Great Britain from exerting total control. Consequently, each of the thirteen colonies differed in terms of its cultural background (British, Scots, Scots-Irish, Irish, German, and French), founding purposes, attitudes towards slavery, interactions with Native Americans, religious preferences, and economic development.²⁰

Additionally, until 1763, Great Britain allowed each colony to establish its own form of self-government.²¹ For example, colonies were founded with charters that granted the colonists land and installed a local government with a royal governor or corporate counsel, such as the Virginia House of Burgesses, a White, property-owning male representative government for the colony of Virginia.²² Also, other forms of colonial self-government, including the town hall meeting concept found in the Massachusetts Bay colony's Mayflower Compact, were established.²³ Such differences led to a lack of unified colonial identity for much of the American Revolutionary period. Thus, each colony had different laws, languages, and customs with colonists from various religious and socioeconomic backgrounds.²⁴ Historian Elaine Breslaw described the early American colonies:

The kind of interaction between the immigrant and the environment in which both are changed as a result of contact has been a common experience of newcomers and has ultimately enriched American

However, to prevent conflict with Native American tribes, British Parliament passed the Proclamation of 1763, forbidding colonists to settle west of the Appalachian Mountains. The colonists considered this a betrayal of their war effort. Then, because of Great Britain's war debts, British Parliament began levying additional taxes upon the individual colonists. This act ushered in America's Revolutionary period. See: Andrew Fitzmaurice, "The Seven Years' War, Land Speculation and the American Revolution," in *Sovereignty, Property and Empire, 1500-2000* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 171.

²⁰ John Smolenski, "Becoming Americans: Revisiting Identity and Assimilation in the Colonial Period," *Reviews in American History* 33, no. 1 (March 2005): 29-30.

²¹ Paul Wallace Gates, *History of Public Land Law Development*, Volume 62 (Washington DC: US Government Printing Office, 1968), 1.

²² Thad W. Tate, "The Coming of the Revolution in Virginia: Britain's Challenge to Virginia's Ruling Class, 1763-1776," *The William and Mary Quarterly* 19, no. 3 (July 1962): 325.

²³ William E. Nelson, "The Utopian Legal Order of the Massachusetts Bay Colony, 1630-1686," *The American Journal of Legal History* 47, no. 2 (April 2005): 189-90.

²⁴ Elaine G. Breslaw, *Dr. Alexander Hamilton and Provincial America: Expanding the Orbit of Scottish Culture* (Baton Rouge: LSU Press, 2008), 65.

life...[Colonists]faced unfamiliar and challenging social institutions: the labor system that relied on black slaves, extraordinarily fluid social statuses, distasteful business methods, unpleasant conversational quirks, as well as variant habits of dress, food, and drink.²⁵

It was in this complex social system that American Methodism emerged. Thus, the lack of a unified American colonial identity influenced the ways in which Methodism presented itself throughout the thirteen colonies.²⁶ For example, in 1766, Philip Embury and Barbara Heck, Methodists who had emigrated from Ireland, began a Methodist society in New York City.²⁷ Heck was upset when she saw some of her fellow Irish immigrants playing cards. She encouraged Embury to begin preaching in his home.²⁸ Embury's first service had five persons present, including one of the attendee's African maid servant, Betty. It is unknown whether Betty was an enslaved or free person. Nevertheless, a person of African descent was present at one of the first recognized Methodist worship services in America.²⁹

As the congregation outgrew his home, Embury and a new associate, Captain Thomas Webb, a British Army officer who founded a Methodist society in Philadelphia, began preaching in New York City's barracks and in a sail-rigging loft.³⁰ In 1768, Embury, Webb, and Heck built the first formal Methodist chapel in America, Wesley Chapel. Interestingly, although it is unknown whether they were enslaved or free, several Black persons were listed on the Wesley Chapel roll.³¹ In 1769, John Wesley sent Richard Boardman and Joseph Pilmoor, official British Methodist

²⁵ Breslaw, *Dr. Alexander Hamilton*, x.

²⁶ Jon Butler, *New World Faiths: Religion in Colonial America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 79, 123, 143.

²⁷ Anna M. Lawrence, *One Family Under God: Love, Belonging, and Authority in Early Transatlantic Methodism* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011), 40-41.

²⁸ Vivien Hick, "John Wesley and the Irish Rhinelanders," *Eighteenth-Century Ireland/Iris an da chultúr* 5 (1990): 96.

²⁹ Joseph C. Hartzell, "Methodism and the Negro in the United States," *The Journal of Negro History* 8, no. 3 (July 1923): 301.

³⁰ Kenneth Cain Kinghorn, *The Heritage of American Methodism* (Strasbourg: Editions du Signe, 1999), 28-29.

³¹ Andrews, *The Methodists*, 34.

missionaries, to become the pastoral leaders of the rapidly growing Wesley Chapel in New York City.³² Wesley wrote:

Tuesday, August 1, 1769, our conference began at Leeds. On Thursday I mentioned the case of our brethren at New York. For some years past several of our brethren from England and Ireland...had settled in North America, and had in various places formed societies, particularly in Philadelphia and New York. The society at New York had lately built a commodious preaching-house, and now desired our help, being in a great want of money, but much more of preachers.³³

In 1770, Wesley Chapel was transferred to John Wesley's official connexion.³⁴ At this time, Heck, Embury, and other Irish Methodists moved from New York City. There is evidence that Heck and Embury began other Methodist classes and societies in the upstate New York colony and Canada.³⁵

Also, during this time, Robert Strawbridge, an immigrant from Ireland, formed Methodist societies in the Maryland, Pennsylvania, and Virginia colonies.³⁶ Strawbridge began his ministry by preaching in his home as early as 1764. In 1768, Strawbridge became a lay itinerate preacher.³⁷ After 1770, when Broadman and Pilmoor arrived in America, Strawbridge's societies were included in the official American Methodist connexional system.³⁸ Additionally, although he was never ordained, Strawbridge began administering the sacraments.³⁹ Later, Bishop Asbury was unhappy that Strawbridge was serving the sacraments. Asbury, however, allowed

³² Joseph F. DiPaolo, "That Dear Man of God: Edward Evans and the Origins of American Methodism," *Methodist History* 47, no. 1 (October 2008): 41.

³³ Robert Tuttle, *John Wesley: His Life and Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Press, 1978), 324.

³⁴ John Leo Topolewski, "Mr. Wesley's Trust Clause: Methodism in the Vernacular," *Methodist History* 37, no. 3 (April 1999): 149-150.

³⁵ Frank Baker, *From Wesley*, 44.

³⁶ Rex Dale Matthews, *Timetables of History for Students of Methodism* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2007), 27, 29, 109.

³⁷ Baker, *From Wesley*, 33-34.

³⁸ Kenneth Cain Kinghorn, "Richard Boardman: American Methodism's First Superintendent," *The Asbury Theological Seminary Journal* 55, no. 2 (Fall 2000): 29-30.

³⁹ Frederick Norwood, *The Story of American Methodism: A History of the United Methodists and Their Relations* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1974), 66-67.

him to continue serving the sacraments and formally appointed, not ordained, Strawbridge.⁴⁰ Asbury wrote to Pilmoor:

Will the people be contented without our administering the sacrament?... Strawbridge pleaded much for the ordinances; and so did the people who appeared to be much biased by him. I told them I would not agree to it at that time, and insisted on our abiding by our rules. But Mr. Boardman had given them their way at the quarterly meeting held here before, and I was obliged to connive some things for the sake of peace.⁴¹

There is not any evidence that Embury, Heck, Webb, and Strawbridge were aware of each other's ministries.⁴² Thus, Methodism was first introduced in the thirteen colonies, not by British Methodist missionaries authorized by John Wesley, but by Irish lay Methodists who did not have Wesley's initial approval to begin Methodist societies in America.⁴³ Consequently, this led to practices within early American Methodist societies, such as the administration of sacraments by a lay preacher, that were incongruent with Wesley's vision of Methodism.⁴⁴

In 1771, Francis Asbury was dispatched to America by Wesley.⁴⁵ Wesley instructed Asbury to reorganise American Methodism into the British Methodist connexional system. Asbury began the circuit system in America by preaching in fields, homes, and taverns.⁴⁶ This caused internal conflict between the first unofficial lay preachers and Wesley's newly appointed Methodist missionaries.⁴⁷ Yet, the Methodist Societies convened their first conference in Philadelphia in 1773. At this

⁴⁰ Norwood, *The Story*, 66.

⁴¹ Frederick E. Maser and Howard T. Maag, eds., *The Journal of Joseph Pilmoor Itinerant* (Philadelphia: Historical Society of the Philadelphia Annual Conference, 1968), 17.

⁴² Baker, *From Wesley*, 44.

⁴³ David Hempton, *Methodism: Empire of the Spirit* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), 21-23.

⁴⁴ Paul S. Sanders, "The Sacraments in Early American Methodism," *Church History* 26, no. 4 (December 1957): 359-361.

⁴⁵ John Wigger, *American Saint: Francis Asbury and the Methodists* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 1.

⁴⁶ John Atkinson, *The Beginnings of the Wesleyan Movement in America and the Establishment Therein of Methodism* (New York: Hunt and Easton, 1896), 127.

⁴⁷ Norwood, *The Story*, 77.

conference, the Methodist Societies recorded 1,160 total members in the colonies of New York, Pennsylvania, New Jersey, Delaware, and Maryland out of approximately 2.3 million inhabitants.⁴⁸

Early Methodism was established in colonies that did not share a common identity. Although the thirteen colonies came under Great Britain's rule, the colonies were not uniform in their socio-religious culture.⁴⁹ Thus, Methodism was introduced to each colony's distinct population. Consequently, the people groups present within each colony viewed Methodism through the lens of their circumstances. Because of this, the colonists interposed their already formed religious and civil opinions upon Methodism, which had yet to become an established church.⁵⁰ In turn, especially as Methodism moved into the Southern colonies, this led to different expressions of Methodism.⁵¹ Later, these divergent manifestations of Methodism influenced the debates that preceded Methodist Episcopal Church's schism in 1844.

Also, it is significant to note that Methodism was first introduced in America by Irish Methodists who were not sent by Wesley.⁵² This influenced the ways in which colonists viewed Methodism's theological beliefs and governing structure. Consequently, early American Methodism was a movement of mostly non-theologically trained lay persons who set their own society structure and who did not communicate with other Methodist societies.⁵³ As evidenced above, this concerned Wesley and led him to send official British Methodist missionaries to the American

⁴⁸ John H. Wigger, *Taking Heaven By Storm: Methodism and the Rise of Popular Christianity in America* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1998), 197.

⁴⁹ Joseph M. Torsella, "American National Identity, 1750-1790: Samples from the Popular Press," *The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 112, no. 2 (April 1988): 172-173.

⁵⁰ Nathan O. Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 4, 58.

⁵¹ Russell E. Richey, "The Formation of American Methodism: The Refraction of Wesleyanism," in eds., Nathan O. Hatch and John H. Wigger, *Methodism and the Shaping of American Culture* (Nashville: Kingswood Books, 2001), 191-203.

⁵² William Crook, *Ireland and the Centenary of American Methodism* (London: Hamilton and Adams, 1866), 102-103.

⁵³ E. Brooks Holifield, *Theology in America: Christian Thought from the Age of the Puritans to the Civil War* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 256-257.

colonies to establish the British Methodist connexion.⁵⁴ Such happenings demonstrate that early American Methodism struggled with church governance from its earliest days. Contradictory opinions about appropriate Methodist governance impacted the Methodist Episcopal Church's decision to separate in 1844.⁵⁵

American Methodism During the American Revolutionary War, 1775-1783:

The Battles of Lexington and Concord led to the beginning of the American Revolutionary War in 1775.⁵⁶ The Revolutionary War's outbreak caused all official British Methodist missionaries, except for Francis Asbury who fled to the Delaware colony, to return to Great Britain.⁵⁷ Members of the Methodist Societies were of diverse political opinions, including pacifists, American soldiers, British soldiers and loyalists, and a spy for the British Army, Captain Thomas Webb.⁵⁸ American Methodism, however, suffered when Wesley urged American colonists to remain loyal to Great Britain.⁵⁹ In 1775, Wesley wrote in *A Calm Address to Our American Colonies*:

10. But, my brethren, would this be any advantage to you? Can you hope for a more desirable form of government, either in England or America, than that which you now enjoy? After all the vehement cry for liberty, what more liberty can you have? What more religious liberty can you desire, than that which you enjoy already?...Would the being independent of England make you more free? Far, very far from it...Would a republican government give you more liberty, either

⁵⁴ Russell E. Richey, "Early American Methodism" in ed. Jason E. Vickers, *The Cambridge Campaign to American Methodism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 44-48.

⁵⁵ Charles F. Irons, *The Origins of Proslavery Religion: White and Black Evangelicals in Colonial and Southern Virginia* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008), 198.

⁵⁶ John McWilliams, "Lexington, Concord, and the Hinge of the Future," *American Literary History* 5, no. 1 (Spring 1993): 1-2.

⁵⁷ Andrews, *The Methodists*, 55, 60.

⁵⁸ Atkinson, *The Beginnings*, 127.

⁵⁹ Glen O'Brien, "John Wesley's Rebuke to the Rebels of British America: Revisiting the *Calm Address*," *Methodist Review* 4 (2012): 46-50.

religious or civil? By no means. No governments under heaven are so despotic as the republican ...⁶⁰

In response to Wesley's view on the American Revolutionary War, Bishop Asbury wrote:

I am truly sorry that the venerable man [John Wesley] ever dipped into the politics of America...However, it discovers Mr. Wesley's conscientious attachment to the government under which he lived.⁶¹

Despite the described internal conflicts, the beginning of the American Revolution, and Wesley's support of Great Britain, American Methodism continued to increase in membership.⁶² By 1780, American Methodism's official membership increased to 8,264 members⁶³ out of approximately 2.8 million inhabitants.⁶⁴

American Methodism and the Declaration of Independence, 1776:

The Declaration of Independence, signaling the thirteen colonies' break from Great Britain, was signed in 1776.⁶⁵ Below, it will be evidenced that the Declaration of Independence was an early American civil document that impacted American Methodism's relationship with slavery, a factor leading to the 1844 Methodist Episcopal Church's schism.

The first draft of the Declaration of Independence, written by Thomas Jefferson,⁶⁶ contained a passage that condemned the slave trade. When the

⁶⁰ John Wesley, *A Calm Address to our American Colonies* (London: R. Hawes, 1775), 13-14.

⁶¹ Mark E. Hanshaw, "Wesley and Liberty: Embracing Poles," *Methodist History* 40, no. 1 (October 2001): 57.

⁶² Nathan O. Hatch, "The Puzzle of American Methodism," in *Methodism and the Shaping*, 27.

⁶³ Wigger, *Taking Heaven*, 198.

⁶⁴ Michael R. Haines and Richard H. Steckel, eds., *A Population History of North America* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 752.

⁶⁵ Donald S. Lutz, "The Declaration of Independence as Part of an American National Compact," *Publius* 19, no. 1 (Winter 1989): 41-42.

⁶⁶ Although Thomas Jefferson wrote anti-slavery passages and legislation during his political career, he was also an enslaver. Throughout his lifetime, Jefferson enslaved hundreds. See: Annette Gordon

Declaration of Independence was signed, it was legal to enslave persons in each of the thirteen colonies. If Jefferson's anti-slavery passage had been adopted, it would have made slavery untenable in North America.⁶⁷ The passage read:

He [King George III] has waged cruel war against human nature itself, violating its most sacred rights of life and liberty in the person of a distant people who never offended him, captivating & carrying them into slavery in another hemisphere or to incur miserable death in their transportation thither. This piratical warfare, the opprobrium of infidel powers, is the warfare of the Christian King of Great Britain. Determined to keep open a market where Men should be bought & sold, he has prostituted his negative for suppressing every legislative attempt to prohibit or restrain this execrable commerce...⁶⁸

However, Continental Congress delegates involved in the slave-trade defeated this passage.⁶⁹ Consequently, the passage was struck from the final version of the Declaration of Independence. No records exist of the Continental Congress' debates regarding the defeated passage.⁷⁰ Jefferson, however, wrote:

The clause...reprobating the enslaving the inhabitants of Africa, was struck out in complaisance to South Carolina and Georgia, who had never attempted to restrain the importation of slaves, and who on the contrary still wished to continue it. Our Northern brethren also I believe felt a little tender under these censures; for tho' their people have very few slaves themselves, yet they had been pretty considerable carriers of them to others.⁷¹

Reed, *The Hemingses of Monticello: An American Family* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 2008), 14-18.

⁶⁷ Peter S. Onuf, "To Declare Them a Free and Independent People: Race, Slavery, and National Identity in Jefferson's Thought," *Journal of the Early Republic* 18, no. 1 (Spring 1998): 11-12.

⁶⁸ Thomas Jefferson, "Original Rough Draft of the Declaration," The Library of Congress (www.loc.gov/exhibits/Jefferson/jeffdec.html#039; accessed August 20, 2020).

⁶⁹ Jan Ellen Lewis, *Family, Slavery, and Love in the Early American Republic* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2021), 256.

⁷⁰ David Waldstreicher, *Slavery's Constitution: From Revolution to Ratification* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2010), 46-47.

⁷¹ Thomas Jefferson, *Autobiography, 6 Jan -29 July 1821, 6 January 1821*, Founders Online, National Archives (<https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Jefferson/98-01-02-1756>; accessed August 25, 2020).

Because of pressure from enslaving and slave-trade benefitting Continental Congress delegates, slavery remained a legal practice in America.⁷² As Methodism grew in America, this same pressure was repeated by enslaving members as the Methodist Episcopal Church began to grapple with the institution of slavery.⁷³

By the time of the Declaration of Independence's ratification in 1776, significant debate already existed amongst the colonists regarding slavery. Likewise, early American Methodism also struggled with the institution of slavery.⁷⁴ Because it was a movement that valued itinerate preachers sharing the gospel over wide geographical regions,⁷⁵ Methodism was introduced to the same colonists who were already questioning the morality and economics of slavery. Consequently, slavery became a prominent issue for both church and state.⁷⁶ The next section will show how slavery's established place within American society directly impacted American Methodism. Eventually, this factor contributed to the Methodist Episcopal Church's schism in 1844.

The Treaty of Paris ended the American Revolutionary War in 1783. A unified American government, however, was not immediately established.⁷⁷ During this time, a new form of American government, a democratic republic, was being organised. In this way, the former colonies remained a loosely collected federation.⁷⁸ Significant political disagreement began to occur between those who felt that a new centralised federal government should make and enforce laws, Federalists, and those who

⁷² George Van Cleve, *A Slaveholders' Union: Slavery, Politics, and the Constitution in the Early American Republic* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010), 48-49.

⁷³ Amanda Porterfield, *Conceived in Doubt: Religion and Politics in the New American Nation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012), 172-173.

⁷⁴ Cynthia Lynn Lyerly, *Methodism and the Southern Mind, 1770-1810* (Oxford University Press, 1998), 7-8.

⁷⁵ Roger Finke and Rodney Stark, "How the Upstart Sects Won America: 1776-1850," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 28, no. 1 (March 1989): 27-30.

⁷⁶ Molly Oshatz, *Slavery and Sin: The Fight Against Slavery and the Rise of Liberal Protestantism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 31-33, 38.

⁷⁷ Lawrence S. Kaplan, "The Treaty of Paris, 1783: A Historiographical Challenge," *The International History Review* 5, no. 3 (August 1983): 431-432.

⁷⁸ Donald S. Lutz, "The Articles of Confederation as the Background to the Federal Republic," *Publius* 20, no. 1 (Winter 1990): 55-57.

believed that individual states should dictate their own laws, Democratic Republicans.⁷⁹ Yet, national leaders worked to begin forging a unified government that could function despite political differences.⁸⁰ Patrick Henry, a Revolutionary War veteran and Virginia legislator, urged the newly independent colonists to become more unified. He said, "The distinctions between Virginians, Pennsylvanians, New Yorkers, and New Englanders are no more. I am not a Virginian, but an American."⁸¹

Such sentiment paralleled the creation of the Methodist Episcopal Church at the 1784 Christmas Conference.⁸² Until this time, American Methodism was also a loosely connected federation of societies.⁸³ At the 1784 Christmas Conference, American Methodism attempted to forge a more unified denominational organisation.⁸⁴ In later years, the tension between centralised denominational policy and the rights of annual conferences and individual churches would be one component of the 1844 Methodist Episcopal Church's schism.⁸⁵

American Methodism and Constitutional Politics, 1784-1789:

In 1784, Thomas Jefferson introduced the Land Ordinance of 1784. This bill would have limited slavery in America's new western territories after 1800.⁸⁶ Again,

⁷⁹ Matthew Schoenbachler, "Republicanism in the Age of Democratic Revolution: The Democratic-Republican Societies of the 1790s," *Journal of the Early Republic* 18, no. 2 (Summer 1998): 247.

⁸⁰ Gordon S. Wood, *Power and Liberty: Constitutionalism in the American Revolution* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021), 2-5.

⁸¹ John Adams, "Diary 22A: Notes of Debates in the Continental Congress, 6 September 1774," Adams Family Papers: An Electronic Archive, The Massachusetts Historical Society (<https://www.masshist.org/digitaladams/archive/doc?id=D22A>; accessed May 2, 2022).

⁸² The Christmas Conference and its debates regarding slavery will be explored in greater detail in the next chapter.

⁸³ Tash Smith, *Capture These Indians for the Lord: Indians, Methodists, and Oklahomans, 1844-1939* (Tucson: The University of Arizona Press, 2014), 9.

⁸⁴ Robert H. Craig, "Liberative History and Liberation Ethics: A Case Study of American Methodism and Popular Struggle," *The Annual of the Society of Christian Ethics* 7 (1987): 138, 143-145.

⁸⁵ Douglas M. Strong, *Perfectionist Politics: Abolitionism and the Religious Tensions of American Democracy* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1999), 103-104.

⁸⁶ William G. Merkel, "Jefferson's Failed Anti-Slavery Proviso of 1784 and the Nascence of Free-Soil Constitutionalism," *Seton Hall Law Review* 38, no. 555 (April 2008): 562.

because of the resistance of the Southern states, the proposal was rejected.⁸⁷

Jefferson wrote:

Say [Sic] there were 10. states present. 6. voted unanimously for it, 3. against it [South Carolina, Maryland, and Virginia], and one was divided: and seven votes being requisite to decide the proposition affirmatively, it was lost. The voice of a single individual of the state which was divided, or of one of those which were of the negative, would have prevented this abominable crime from spreading itself over the new country. thus we see the fate of millions unborn hanging on the tongue of one man, & heaven was silent in that awful moment! But it is to be hoped it will not always be silent & that the friends to the rights of human nature will in the end prevail.⁸⁸

The 1784 Christmas Conference also debated slavery's place within the new denomination.⁸⁹ After significant discussion, the 1785 *Discipline* took measures against slavery.⁹⁰

Q. 42. What methods can we take to extirpate slavery?

A. We are deeply conscious of the impropriety of making new terms of communion for a religious society already established, excepting on the most pressing occasion; and such we esteem the practice of holding our fellow creatures in slavery. We view it as contrary to the golden law of God, on which hang all the law and the prophets, and the unalienable rights of mankind, as well as every principle of the Revolution, to hold in deepest debasement, in a more abject slavery than is perhaps to be found in any part of the world except America, so many souls that are all capable of the image of God.⁹¹

⁸⁷ Kenneth Morgan, *Slavery and Servitude in Colonial North America: A Short History* (New York: NYU Press, 2001), 116.

⁸⁸ Thomas Jefferson, "Extract from Thomas Jefferson's Observations on Jean Nicolas Demeunier's article on the United States Prepared for the *Encyclopedie Methodique*," Thomas Jefferson's Monticello, January 24, 1786 (www.tjrs.monticello.org/letter/1656; accessed August 24, 2020).

⁸⁹ K. James Stein, "Baltimore 1784: Historical-Theological-Ecclesiastical," *Methodist History* 23, no. 1 (October 1984): 37.

⁹⁰ Richey, Rowe, and Schmidt, *The Methodist Experience*, Vol. I, 58-59.

⁹¹ Richey, Rowe, and Schmidt, *The Methodist Experience*, Vol. II, 64.

It is interesting to note that the *Discipline's* mandates against slavery were not made by appealing exclusively to scripture. In addition to the "golden law of God," the *Discipline's* anti-slavery sentiments were expressed by alluding to the Declaration of Independence, "the unalienable rights of mankind,"⁹² and the American Revolution.⁹³

The United States Constitution was ratified in 1788.⁹⁴ Of the eleven clauses in the Constitution that have implications for slavery, ten of the clauses protected the powers of enslavers and ensured the enslaved person's status as property.⁹⁵ For example, the Three-Fifths Clause allowed for enslaved persons to be counted as three-fifths of the number of free White inhabitants of a state for taxation and representation purposes.⁹⁶ The Three-Fifths Clause read:

Article I. Section 2: Representation and direct Taxes shall be appointed among the several States which may be included within this Union, according to their respective Numbers, which shall be determined by adding to the whole Number of free Persons, including those bound to Service for a Term of Years, and excluding Indians not taxed, three fifths of all other Persons.⁹⁷

This meant that sixty percent of the total number of enslaved persons were counted to determine the number of legislators in the House of Representatives and votes in the Electoral College. Consequently, the slave states had more population than the non-slave states and, thus, the slave states had more representation in government.⁹⁸ Because of this, slave states had the power to control both state and federal

⁹² Jefferson, "Original Rough Draft of the Declaration."

⁹³ Katherine Carte, *Religion and the American Revolution: An Imperial History* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2021), 315-316.

⁹⁴ Waldstreicher, *Slavery's Constitution*, 153.

⁹⁵ Paul Finkelman, *Slavery and the Founders: Race and Liberty in the Age of Jefferson*, Second Edition (New York: Routledge, 2001), 7-8.

⁹⁶ Howard A. Ohline, "Republicanism and Slavery: Origins of the Three-Fifths Clause in the United States Constitution," *The William and Mary Quarterly* 28, no. 4 (October 1971): 563-564.

⁹⁷ The Constitution of the United States: A Transcription, The National Archives Museum, (<https://archives.gov/founding-docs/constitution-tran>; accessed August 31, 2020).

⁹⁸ Michael L. Rosin, "The Three-Fifths Rule and the Presidential Elections of 1800 and 1804," *University of St. Thomas Law Journal* 15, no. 1 (2018): 165-166.

governments and continue the institution of slavery.⁹⁹ A similar approach was taken by the Southern annual conferences of the Methodist Episcopal Church. Thus, the Southern annual conferences were able to ensure, for many years, that the Methodist Episcopal Church would not officially endorse abolition.¹⁰⁰

The United States of America elected and inaugurated George Washington, an enslaver, as its first President in 1789.¹⁰¹ This marked both the end of the Revolutionary period and the end of Methodism as an emerging religious movement in America. By 1789, the United States of America had become an independent nation. Likewise, by 1789, the Methodist Episcopal Church had become an independent denomination.

By the time they became established as independent entities, both the United States and the Methodist Episcopal Church experienced population growth over large geographical areas. For example, between 1784 and 1789, the United States of America's population grew from 3.2 million persons to 3.8 million persons.¹⁰² During this period, the Methodist Episcopal Church's membership growth far surpassed the rate of American population growth. In 1786, the Methodist Episcopal Church counted 20,681 members.¹⁰³ By 1790, the Methodist Episcopal Church recorded a membership number of 57,858 persons.¹⁰⁴ While both the United States of America and the Methodist Episcopal Church were growing independent entities, they did not possess a completely unified culture. Instead, both political thought and religious practices often differed by geographical region. Ultimately, as has been evidenced, competing regional viewpoints contributed to the Methodist Episcopal Church's schism in 1844.

⁹⁹ Rosin, "The Three-Fifths Rule," 165.

¹⁰⁰ Hartzell, "Methodism and the Negro," 306.

¹⁰¹ Kenneth Morgan, "George Washington and the Problem of Slavery," *Journal of American Studies*, no. 2 (August 2000): 296.

¹⁰² Haines and Steckel, *A Population History of North America*, 752.

¹⁰³ Richey, Rowe, and Schmidt, *The Methodist Experience*, Vol. I, 59.

¹⁰⁴ Richey, Rowe, and Schmidt, *The Methodist Experience*, Vol. II, 22.

Section Summary:

Early American Methodism emerged in America during its Revolutionary period. At this time, the colonies were inhabited by people of diverse cultures and socioeconomic backgrounds. Because of this, the colonies lacked a national identity. Likewise, in 1784, as the newly formed United States of America was beginning to build a national government despite regional differences, the Methodist Episcopal Church was also organised despite regional differences. This section demonstrates that, to understand why the Methodist Episcopal Church divided in 1844, the origins of early American Methodism must be understood. American Methodism and, later, the Methodist Episcopal Church, struggled with the same issues the colonists faced, including organisational structure, a diverse populace across a large geographical region, and the morality and economics of slavery. In the end, it is important to remember that American Methodists were colonists who were struggling with such issues in both the church and state.

Slavery as a Foundation of American Society

Slavery's Origins in America:

Slavery was introduced in America as early as 1526.¹⁰⁵ In order to understand the tensions that contributed to the 1844 Methodist Episcopal Church's schism, it is necessary to explore the ways in which slavery became an integral component of American society.

In 1526, Spanish conquistadors brought enslaved Africans to present-day South Carolina. These enslaved persons started an insurrection against the conquistadors and destroyed the settlement, forcing the Spanish to abandon the

¹⁰⁵ Paul E. Hoffman, *A New Andalusia and a Way to the Orient: The American Southeast During the Sixteenth Century* (Baton Rouge: LSU Press, 2015), 102.

outpost.¹⁰⁶ Then, in 1565, the Spanish brought an additional group of enslaved Africans to St. Augustine, located in the Spanish territory of Florida.¹⁰⁷ Additionally, there is some evidence that, in 1586, a sailing fleet captained by Sir Francis Drake captured enslaved Africans from a Spanish ship and brought them to Roanoke Island in the future colony of Virginia. This settlement was also abandoned.¹⁰⁸

Between 1618 and 1620, approximately 50,000 Africans were captured, enslaved, and sold from present-day Angola, then a colony of Portugal, to ports throughout the Western world.¹⁰⁹ In 1619, 350 enslaved Africans were put aboard a Portuguese slave ship, the *Sao Joao Bautista*, that was sailing to the Spanish colony of Veracruz, Mexico. During the voyage, two private ships, the *White Lion* and the *Treasurer*, captured the *Sao Joao Bautista* and transferred a portion of the enslaved persons to the *White Lion*. These ships arrived in the Jamestown settlement, colony of Virginia, in August 1619.¹¹⁰ John Rolfe,¹¹¹ an English settler in Jamestown, wrote a letter to Sir Edwin Sandys of the Virginia Company of London describing the landing of the *White Lion*.¹¹²

About the latter end of August, a Dutch man of Warr...brought not any thing but 20. and odd Negroes, which the Governor and Cape

¹⁰⁶ Hoffman, *A New Andalusia*, 103-104.

¹⁰⁷ Anna Brickhouse, *The Unsettling of America: Translation, Interpretation, and the Story of Don Luis Velasco, 1560-1945* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 27.

¹⁰⁸ Andrew Lawler, "Did Francis Drake Bring Enslaved Africans to North America Decades Before Jamestown?," *Smithsonian Magazine*, August 20, 2018 (<https://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/did-francis-drake-bring-enslaved-africans-north-america-decades-jamestown-180970075/>; accessed August 25, 2020).

¹⁰⁹ John Thornton, "The African Experience of the "20. And Odd Negroes" Arriving in Virginia in 1619," *The William and Mary Quarterly* 55, no. 3 (Jul. 1998): 421.

¹¹⁰ Linda M. Heywood and John K. Thornton, "In Search of the 1619 African Arrivals: Enslavement in the Middle Passage," *The Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* 127, no. 3 (2019): 202, 208-209.

¹¹¹ John Rolfe was the husband of Pocahontas, a Native woman. Pocahontas influenced the Jamestown colonists but was also kidnapped and imprisoned by them. See: Drew Lopezina, "The Wedding of Pocahontas and John Rolfe: How to Keep the Thrill Alive After Four Hundred Years of Marriage," *Studies in American Indian Literatures* 26, no. 4 (Winter 2014): 67.

¹¹² Wesley Frank Craven, "Twenty Negroes to Jamestown in 1619?," *The Virginia Quarterly Review* 47, no. 3 (Summer 1971): 416.

Marchant bought for victualle (whereof he was in greate need as he tended) at the best and easiest rate they could.¹¹³

With this transaction of enslaved Africans for food, the trans-Atlantic slave trade into the colony of Virginia began.¹¹⁴ Yet, as evidenced above, by 1619, enslaved Africans had already been brought to America for nearly a century. Thus, slavery was a present, acceptable practice in America from its earliest days as a European settlement.¹¹⁵

In 1641, the colony of Massachusetts became the first colony in America to legally codify slavery under the Body of Liberties.¹¹⁶ The document read:

There shall never be any bond slavery, villeinage, or captivity amongst us unless it be lawful captives taken in just wars, and such strangers as willingly sell themselves or are sold to us. And these shall have all the liberties and Christian usages which the law of God established in Israel concerning such persons doth morally require. This exempts none from servitude who shall be judged thereto by authority.¹¹⁷

This language was used throughout the New England colonies to justify slavery.¹¹⁸ Furthermore, it is interesting to note that this document explicitly ties Christianity with slavery. Thus, a precedent was set in America concerning the relationship between slavery and Christianity.¹¹⁹ Consequently, the argument that slavery was not

¹¹³ Virginia Records Manuscripts, 1606-1737, The Library of Congress (<http://lcweb2.loc.gov/cgi-bin/ampage?collId=mtj8&fileName=mtj8pagevc03.db&recNum=266>; accessed August 25, 2020).

¹¹⁴ The trans-Atlantic slave trade was banned by President Thomas Jefferson in 1808. The trading of enslaved persons, however, increased between the states. Over 1 million enslaved persons were traded between the states. Additionally, the inter-state slave trading exponentially grew by natural increase. See: Christa Dierksheide, "The Great Improvement and Civilization of that Race: Jefferson and the Amelioration of Slavery, ca. 1770-1826," *Early American Studies* 6, no. 1 (Spring 2008): 166, 183.

¹¹⁵ Don E. Fehrenbacher, *The Slaveholding Republic: An Account of the United States Government's Relation to Slavery* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 15.

¹¹⁶ Lorenzo J. Greene, "Slave-Holding New England and Its Awakening," *The Journal of Negro History* 13, no. 4 (October 1928): 514.

¹¹⁷ William R. Whitmore, ed., *The Colonial Laws of Massachusetts* (Boston: Whitmore, Rockwell, and Churchill, 1889), 125.

¹¹⁸ Greene, "Slave-Holding," 514.

¹¹⁹ Christopher Tomlins, *Freedom Bound: Law, Labor, and Civic Identity in Colonizing English America, 1580-1865* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 424.

a sin as defined by the bible was utilized by members of the Methodist Episcopal Church during the 1844 General Conference debates.

By 1662, slavery became a formally legalised generational institution in the American colonies.¹²⁰ For example, in 1662, the colony of Virginia enacted a law that perpetually enslaved children of enslaved mothers of African descent.¹²¹ The law, *partus sequitur ventrem*, read:

Whereas some doubts have risen whether children got by any Englishman upon a Negro woman should be slave or free, be it therefore enacted and declared by this present Grand Assembly, that all children born in this country shall be held bond or free only according to the condition of the mother; and that if any Christian shall commit fornication with a Negro man or woman, he or she so offending shall pay double the fines imposed by the former act.¹²²

Consequently, this law, codified in many of the thirteen colonies, ensured that all children who were born to enslaved women would remain enslaved. Such enslavement allowed for an ever-increasing human commodity of slave labour in America.¹²³ Likewise, because of the economic value placed upon enslaved persons and their labours, generations of White Americans amassed wealth.¹²⁴

As the American economy became increasingly intertwined with slavery, additional civil laws were passed to control enslaved persons.¹²⁵ For example, in 1740 after a rebellion of enslaved persons in the colony of South Carolina, the South

¹²⁰ William Waller Hening, *Statutes at Large: Being a Collection of all the Laws of Virginia*, Volume XI (Richmond: 1809-1823), 170, 260, 266, 270.

¹²¹ The wording of this law ensured that children of an enslaved Black woman and a White man could not sue or petition for freedom. While interracial sex was illegal in most colonies, this law allowed for White enslavers to rape or impregnate Black enslaved women with little penalty. See: Reed, *The Hemingses*, 46-47.

¹²² Jennifer L. Morgan, "Partus sequitur ventrem: Law, Race, and Reproduction in Colonial Slavery," *Small Axe: A Caribbean Journal of Criticism* 22, no. 1 (March 2018): 1.

¹²³ Morgan, "Partus," 3.

¹²⁴ Melvin L. Oliver and Thomas M. Shapiro, *Black Wealth/White Wealth: A New Perspective on Racial Inequality* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 38-40.

¹²⁵ Thomas D. Morris, *Southern Slavery and the Law, 1619-1860* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 17-23.

Carolina legislature passed the Negro Act of 1740. This law forbade the gathering, education, and movement of enslaved persons. The penalties of violating these laws included lashings, maiming, and death.¹²⁶ Because of such civil laws, a continual cycle of slavery existed in North America until the 1865 Emancipation Proclamation. Thus, the institution of slavery permeated most areas of American society, including religion.

Yet, anti-slavery sentiment also existed in the colonies.¹²⁷ This, too, would impact colonists' relationship with slavery. For example, the colony of Vermont abolished slavery in 1777 when it ratified its first constitution.¹²⁸ Also, by the 1780s some enslaved persons began petitioning colonial legislatures for freedom. Their petitions were based upon the language contained in colonial constitutions.¹²⁹ The Massachusetts Declaration of Rights, included in the Massachusetts Constitution of 1780, read:

All men are born free and equal, and have certain natural, essential and unalienable rights; among which may be reckoned to right of enjoying and defending their lives and liberties.¹³⁰

In 1783, Quock Walker, an enslaved person, sued his enslaver for freedom by appealing to the Massachusetts Declaration of Rights. As a result, the Massachusetts Supreme Court ruled in favour of Walker. Then, the colony's legislature sued Walker's owner for wrongful imprisonment. This ruling effectively abolished slavery in the

¹²⁶ M. Eugene Sirmans, "The Legal Status of the Slave in South Carolina," *The Journal of Southern History* 28, no. 4 (November 1962): 471-472.

¹²⁷ William M. Wiecek, *The Sources of Anti-Slavery Constitutionalism in America, 1760-1848* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1977), 40.

¹²⁸ Constitution of Vermont- July 8, 1777, Yale Law School, The Avalon Project: Documents in Law, History and Diplomacy (https://avalon.law.yale.edu/18th_century/vt01.asp; accessed August 24, 2020).

¹²⁹ Daniel Carpenter, *Democracy by Petition: Popular Politics in Transformation, 1790-1870* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2021), 168-169.

¹³⁰ Massachusetts Constitution, A Declaration of the Rights of the Inhabitants of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, Article I (<https://malegislature.gov/laws/constitution>; accessed August 20, 2020).

colony of Massachusetts.¹³¹ Although enslaving people was illegal in the Massachusetts after 1783, the first large-scale cotton factory was built in the Massachusetts in 1787.¹³² In this way, many New Englanders continued to economically benefit from slavery.

Slavery and the American Economy:

Slavery became a means for political power and economic status during America's Revolutionary period.¹³³ Many free White citizens profited from slavery in each of the thirteen colonies. In addition to the buying and selling of enslaved persons, mostly in the Mid-Atlantic and Southern colonies, White colonists also benefited from the other activities that were needed to perpetuate slavery.¹³⁴ For example, the Northern colonies built the ships that carried the enslaved. Additionally, the Northern colonies made the ironworks that bound the enslaved. Also, the Northern colonies built the factories that spun the cotton and other textiles that the enslaved harvested. Furthermore, Mid-Atlantic, Southern, and Northern colonists bought the tobacco, sugar cane, rice, cotton, indigo, and other products that the enslaved persons produced. In this way, the institution of slavery was perpetuated by each of the thirteen colonies.¹³⁵

Furthermore, in 1794, shortly after the American Revolutionary period ended, Eli Whitney patented the cotton gin.¹³⁶ Cotton could now be manufactured more quickly, allowing cotton products to be marketed from America on a global scale.

¹³¹ Paul Finkelman, "Let Justice Be Done, Though the Heavens May Fall: The Law of Freedom," *Chicago-Kent Law Review* 70, no. 1 (December 1994): 334-335.

¹³² Robert W. Lovett, "The Beverly Cotton Manufactory: Or Some New Light on an Early Cotton Mill," *Bulletin of the Business Historical Society* 26, no. 4 (December 1952): 218.

¹³³ Gavin Wright, "Slavery and the Rise of the Nineteenth-Century American Economy," *The Journal of Economic Perspectives* 36, no. 2 (Spring 2022): 124.

¹³⁴ Sven Beckert and Seth Rockman, eds., *A New History of American Economic Development* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016), 1-5.

¹³⁵ Ira Berlin, *Many Thousands Gone: The First Two Centuries of Slavery in North America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998), 233-234.

¹³⁶ Angela Lakwete, *Inventing the Cotton Gin: Machine and Myth in Antebellum America* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003), 56.

Thus, demand for an enslaved workforce increased as the market for cotton products increased.¹³⁷ For example, in 1794, the cotton crop in America was valued at \$150,000. In 1804, ten years after the invention of the cotton gin, the cotton crop in America was valued at \$8,000,000.¹³⁸ Consequently, the growth of the value of cotton in America led to the growth of slavery in America.¹³⁹ United States census figures show this correlation. For example, the first federal census taken in the newly formed United States of America in 1790 counted 697,897 enslaved persons. By 1810, the federal census counted 1.2 million enslaved persons.¹⁴⁰ This number represented a seventy percent increase in enslaved persons in twenty years. Again, such figures demonstrate that slavery impacted most people in American society. Because of this, many White people residing in the Northern states, the Mid-Atlantic states, and the Southern states, were actively involved or, in the least, complicit in the slave trade in America.¹⁴¹

Eighteenth century poet William Cowper summed up many colonists' attitudes toward slavery when he wrote, in 1788, *Pity for the Poor Africans*:

I own I am shocked at the purchase of slaves,
And fear those who buy them and sell them are knaves:
What I hear of their hardships, their tortures, and groans
Is almost enough to draw pity from stones.

I pity them greatly, but I must be mum,
For how could we do without sugar and rum?
Especially sugar, so needful we see;

¹³⁷ Gene Dattel, *Cotton and Race in the Making of America: The Human Costs of Economic Power* (Lanham: Rowan and Littlefield, 2009), 33-34.

¹³⁸ United States Congress, Senate, and Interstate and Foreign Commerce, *Problems of the Domestic Textile Industry* (Washington: United States Government, 1958), 27.

¹³⁹ Sven Beckert, *Empire of Cotton: A Global History* (New York: Vintage Books, 2015), 103.

¹⁴⁰ 1790-1890 Federal Population Censuses- Part 2, The National Archives (<https://www.archives.gov/research/census/microfilm-catalog/1790-1890/part-02>; accessed August 23, 2020).

¹⁴¹ Joel Long, Anne Farrow, and Jenifer Frank, *Complicity: How the North Promoted, Prolonged, and Profited from Slavery* (New York: Ballantine Books, 2005), xxvi-xxviii.

What, give up our desserts, our coffee, and tea?¹⁴²

American Methodism emerged during the same period in which Cowper's poem was written. Because of this, many White colonists who chose to practice Methodism were already benefiting from the enslavement of Black persons. Consequently, these White colonists would grapple with the ways in which slavery affected most aspects of their daily lives, including their Methodist Christianity. Thus, the tensions present during the 1844 General Conference were borne during the thirteen colonies' earliest days and perpetuated by America's continued economic intertwinement with slavery.

Racism and American Methodism:

Various expressions of American Methodism were influenced by deeply embedded racism. Yet, in Great Britain and America, Wesley, Asbury, and Coke advocated for emancipation and the acceptance of Blacks into Methodist societies.¹⁴³ For example, at the 1784 Christmas Conference, former enslaved persons Harry Hosier and Richard were in attendance.¹⁴⁴ Yet, Hosier and Allen were not allowed to vote and their names were not included in the *Minutes*.¹⁴⁵ Furthermore, in 1790, Blacks, both enslaved and free, comprised twenty percent of the 57,631 American Methodists.¹⁴⁶

¹⁴² William Cowper, *The Negro's Complaint: A Poem to Which is Added, Pity for Poor Africans* (London: Harvey and Darton, 1826), 17.

¹⁴³ Richard J. Boles, *Dividing the Faith: The Rise of Segregated Churches in the Early American North* (New York: New York University Press, 2020), 153-154.

¹⁴⁴ Stephen H. Webb, "Introducing Black Harry Hoosier: The History Behind Indiana's Namesake," *Indiana Magazine of History* 112, no. 3 (September 2016), 235. Harry Hosier, known as Black Harry, often travelled with Asbury. Asbury considered Hosier one of the best preachers in America. Hosier has been credited as the first Black Methodist preacher to speak to a White audience. Yet, Hosier was never officially ordained or allowed to serve in high levels of Methodist Episcopal Church leadership. See: J. Gordon Melton, *A Will To Choose: The Origins of African American Methodism* (New York: Rowan and Littlefield, 2007), 47-53.

¹⁴⁵ Russell E. Richey, *A Church's Broken Heart: Mason-Dixon Methodism* (Nashville: New Room Books, 2021), 6.

¹⁴⁶ Wigger, *Taking Heaven*, 198.

On February 24, 1791, Wesley wrote the final letter of his life to William Wilberforce, an abolitionist member of the British Parliament.¹⁴⁷ In part, the letter read:

...Go on, in the name of God and in the power of his might, till even American slavery (the vilest that ever saw the sun) shall vanish away before it.

Reading this morning a tract wrote by a poor African, I was particularly struck by that circumstance that a man who has black skin, being wronged or outraged by a white man, can have no redress; it being a "law" in our colonies that the oath of a black against a white goes for nothing. What villainy is this?...¹⁴⁸

Wesley influenced Bishop Asbury and Bishop Coke to support stringent measures against enslaving for both its members and its ministers.¹⁴⁹ In a letter to George Washington, Bishop Asbury wrote, "My spirit was grieved at the conduct of some Methodists, that hire slaves at public places to the highest bidder, to cut skin, and starve them."¹⁵⁰ Additionally, Bishop Coke sought for ways to preach against slavery in Virginia without being lynched.¹⁵¹ To do this, he employed the following tactic:

Here [Virginia] I bore a public testimony against Slavery, and found out a method of delivering it without much offence, or at least without causing a tumult: and that is, by first addressing the Negroes in a very pathetic manner on the Duty of Servants to Masters; and then the Whites will receive quietly what I have to say to them.¹⁵²

¹⁴⁷ William Hague, *William Wilberforce: The Life of the Great Anti-Slave Trade Campaigner* (Orlando: Harcourt, 2008), 195.

¹⁴⁸ John Wesley, "Letter to William Wilberforce, February 24, 1791," in ed. John Teoford, *Letters of John Wesley*, Vol. II (London: Epworth Press, 1931), 264.

¹⁴⁹ Manisha Sinha, *The Slave's Cause: A History of Abolition* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2016), 28.

¹⁵⁰ Francis Asbury, "To the President of the United States," in ed. Elmer T. Clark, *The Journal and Letters of Francis Asbury*, 3 vols. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1958), 3: 70.

¹⁵¹ James D. Essig, *The Bonds of Wickedness: American Evangelicals Against Slavery, 1770-1808* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1982), 50.

¹⁵² Thomas Coke, *Extracts of the Journals of the Late Rev. Thomas Coke, LL.D.; Comprising Several Visits to North-America and the West Indies; His Tour Through a Part of Ireland, and His Nearly Finished Voyage to Bombay in the East Indies to Which is Prefixed, A Life of the Doctor* (Dublin: R. Napper for the Methodist Book-Room, 1816), 66.

Bishop Coke both revealed his anti-slavery beliefs while placating the White enslavers by half-heartedly advocating for the enslaved to be obedient to their masters.

American Methodists, however, did hold conflicting views about slavery.¹⁵³ For example, Reverend William Capers of the South Carolina annual conference,¹⁵⁴ later a featured speaker at the 1844 General Conference, believed that slavery could exist as a benevolent life situation for Black persons.¹⁵⁵ Because the enslaved persons would have the opportunity to hear the Gospel from White persons, Capers claimed that slavery could bring salvation to the enslaved.¹⁵⁶ If White persons taught the Gospel to enslaved persons, Capers thought that the enslaved would become more obedient to their enslavers. Likewise, Capers preached a similar message to the enslaved. He claimed that the enslaved would receive eternal life in heaven if they remained obedient to their earthly masters.¹⁵⁷ In this way, Capers and other Southern Methodist preachers perpetuated the continuation of slavery in the name of Christianity.¹⁵⁸

Also, as evidenced in the 1844 General Conference debates, some Methodists in the Northern annual conferences considered themselves anti-slavery, but also wished for a segregated Methodist Episcopal Church legislated by White

¹⁵³ Cynthia Lynn Lyerly, *Methodism and the Southern Mind, 1770-1810* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 7.

¹⁵⁴ Reverend William Capers, 1790-1855, entered the ministry in 1808 in the South Carolina annual conference. In 1821, he founded a mission to the Creek Native Americans. From 1825-1827, he edited the *Wesleyan Journal*. From 1828-1833, he served as a presiding elder and organised missions to enslaved persons. In 1833, he authored the book, *Catechism for the Use of the Methodist Missions*, that was widely used by White ministers to preach to enslaved persons. From 1837-1840, he edited the *Southern Christian Advocate*. During 1840-1844, he served as the secretary of the Southern Missionary Department. In 1846, he was elected as one of the first bishops of the Methodist Episcopal Church South. See: Richey, Rowe, and Schmidt, *The Methodist Experience*, Vol. I, 123, 155, 159, 190.

¹⁵⁵ William Capers, "Editorial," *Southern Christian Advocate*, January 24, 1840, 126.

¹⁵⁶ Capers, "Editorial," 126.

¹⁵⁷ William Capers, "Report of the Missionary Society," in *Minutes of the South Carolina Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church for the Year 1836* (Charleston: J.S. Burges, 1836), 20.

¹⁵⁸ Richey, *A Church's Broken Heart*, 69-71.

superiority.¹⁵⁹ Furthermore, the idea of a White superiority was enforced by the *Discipline*. In 1780, the *Discipline* stated that White persons must supervise Black Methodist gatherings.¹⁶⁰ Additionally, as American Methodism aged, it was unusual for Black and White Methodists to worship together– in both the North and the South.¹⁶¹ This demonstrates that even among those who supported emancipation, a level of inherent racism persisted. Once again, deeply held racism throughout White American society influenced the 1844 Methodist Episcopal Church’s schism.

Other anti-slavery American Methodists supported the colonisation movement. While they believed in emancipation, they did not think that Blacks and Whites could successfully live together in American society, another expression of racism.¹⁶² The Society for Colonizing the Free People of Colour in Africa was founded in 1816.¹⁶³ While not an official Methodist organization, it gained wide support by many in the Methodist Episcopal Church.¹⁶⁴ The Society’s mission statement read:

We say, in the declaration of independence, ‘that all men are created equal’...Yet it is considered impossible...with the present feelings towards black people, that they can ever be placed upon this equality, or admitted to the enjoyment of these ‘inalienable rights,’ whilst they remain mixed with Whites. Some persons may declaim, and call it prejudice. No matter – prejudice is as powerful a motive, and will as certainly exclude them as the soundest reason.¹⁶⁵

¹⁵⁹ Randall J. Stephens, “From Abolitionists to Fundamentalists: The Transformation of the Wesleyan Methodists in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries,” *American Nineteenth Century History* 16, no. 2 (October 2015): 162-163.

¹⁶⁰ Daniel J. Pratt Morris Chapman, “John Wesley and Methodist Responses to Slavery in America,” *Holiness* 5, no. 1 (June 2020): 44.

¹⁶¹ Andrews, *The Methodists*, 146.

¹⁶² David E. Swift, *Black Prophets of Justice: Activist Clergy Before the Civil War* (Baton Rouge: LSU Press, 1989), 96-97.

¹⁶³ Morris-Chapman, “John Wesley and Methodist Responses,” 43. Also, in 1820, the Society for Colonizing the Free People of Colour in Africa began sending freed Blacks, not fugitive enslaved persons, to Africa’s east coast. This colony became known as Liberia. The Society renamed itself the American Colonization Society in 1838. See: Eric Burin, *Slavery and the Peculiar Solution: A History of the American Colonization Society* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2005), 14, 18, 88.

¹⁶⁴ Donald G. Mathews, *Slavery and Methodism: A Chapter in American Morality, 1780-1845* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1965), 88, 91, 109.

¹⁶⁵ Unknown Author, *A View of Exertions Lately Made for the Purpose of Colonizing the Free People of Colour in the United States, in Africa, or Elsewhere* (Washington: J. Elliot, 1817), 6.

The colonisation movement led the Methodist Episcopal Church to raise funds for the gradual emancipation of enslaved persons of African descent.¹⁶⁶ Interestingly, the colonisation movement also encouraged the Methodist Episcopal Church to ordain several free Black persons for the sole purpose of evangelizing freed Blacks and assisting them in establishing Methodist missions in Liberia.¹⁶⁷ Eventually, anti-slavery gradual emancipation proponents caused conflict for both pro-slavery and abolitionist American Methodists. This tension was a contributing factor to the 1844 Methodist Episcopal Church's schism.¹⁶⁸

Additionally, some American Methodists, such as Reverend Orange Scott, New York annual conference,¹⁶⁹ championed immediate abolition, believing the Methodist Episcopal Church should declare itself an abolitionist movement and assume responsibility for combating racism and changing American civil law.¹⁷⁰ Scott wrote:

Spirit of Wesley, where hast thou fled? Who now, in the M.E. Church, except the persecuted abolitionists, cry out for 'instant' emancipation?

Who now put 'all slave holders, of whatever rank and degree, 'EXACTLY ON A LEVEL WITH MEN STEALERS' Who makes slave holders 'partakers with a thief?' Who now charges them with 'blood guiltiness' (Thy hands, thy bed, thy furniture, thy house, thy lands, are at present stained with blood') Certainly not Bishop H., not President F. No, not even the

¹⁶⁶ Ousmane K. Power-Green, *Against Wind and Tide: The African American Struggle Against the Colonization Movement* (New York: New York University Press, 2014), 100.

¹⁶⁷ Sylvia M. Jacobs, "Nineteenth Century Black Methodist Missionary Bishops in Liberia," *Negro History Bulletin* 44, no. 4 (1981): 83.

¹⁶⁸ April E. Holm, *A Kingdom Divided: Evangelicals, Loyalty, and Sectionalism in the Civil War Era* (Baton Rouge: LSU Press, 2017), 41-43.

¹⁶⁹ Reverend Orange Scott, 1800-1847, entered the ministry in 1821. Although he had very little formal education, he was appointed as the presiding elder of districts in the New England annual conference. In 1833, he learned of the abolitionist movement and bought subscriptions for the abolitionist newspaper, *The Liberator*, for each pastor in the New England Conference. At his death, he was publisher of *The True Wesleyan*. See: Donald G. Matthews, "Orange Scott: The Methodist Evangelist as Revolutionary," in ed. Martin Duberman, *The Antislavery Vanguard: New Essays on the Abolitionists* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1965), 71-98.

¹⁷⁰ Kevin M. Watson, *Old or New School Methodism: A Fragmentation of Theological Tradition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 51-53.

abolitionists. We believe with Mr. Wesley; but alas! We have spoken in whisper tones and in soft language compared with his.¹⁷¹

In 1843, after conflict with both the anti-slavery and pro-slavery factions of the Methodist Episcopal Church, Scott left and founded the Wesleyan Methodist Church. Consequently, most staunch White Methodist Episcopal abolitionists joined the Wesleyan Methodist Church.¹⁷² This meant that during the 1844 General Conference many White abolitionist clergy who favored immediate abolition had already departed the Methodist Episcopal Church. Consequently, most of the General Conference delegates did not offer support for immediate abolition.¹⁷³

Further, Black Methodists, such as Reverend Richard Allen, removed themselves from the Methodist Episcopal Church after facing discrimination amongst White Methodists.¹⁷⁴ Although Allen was associated with Bishop Asbury and preached to large crowds and converted many Blacks across the colonies/states, he continually experienced racism.¹⁷⁵ Allen described an experience in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. He wrote:

We felt ourselves much cramped and were considered as a nuisance...We usually attended St. George's Church in Fourth street; when the coloured people began to get numerous in attending the church, they moved us from the seats we usually sat on, and placed us around the wall...we bore much persecution from many of the Methodist connexion.¹⁷⁶

¹⁷¹ Orange Scott, *An Appeal to the Methodist Episcopal Church* (Boston: David H. Ela, 1838), 7.

¹⁷² Chris Padgett, "Hearing the Antislavery Rank-and-File: The Wesleyan Methodist Schism of 1843," *Journal of the Early Republic* 12, no. 1 (Spring 1992): 64. Also, Orange Scott's actions will be further analysed in Chapter Three.

¹⁷³ Richey, Rowe, and Schmidt, *The Methodist Experience*, Vol. I, 178-179.

¹⁷⁴ Paul Harvey, *Bounds of Their Habitation: Race and Religion in American History* (New York: Rowman and Littlefield, 2017), 58-60.

¹⁷⁵ Norwood, *The Story*, 170.

¹⁷⁶ Richey, Rowe, and Schmidt, *The Methodist Experience*, Vol. II, 118-119.

After this experience, in 1794, Allen and other Black members of the Methodist Episcopal Church founded the African Methodist Episcopal Church.¹⁷⁷ Subsequently, Black Methodists founded other denominations, including the African Methodist Episcopal Church Zion.¹⁷⁸ From their denominations' chosen names, it is evident that Methodist theology and polity remained important. Because of the discriminatory practices of the Methodist Episcopal Church, however, many Black Methodists chose to establish other denominations. By the time of the 1844 General Conference, many Black American Methodists had transferred to other denominations.¹⁷⁹ Thus, the 1844 General Conference saw White clergymen debating White clergymen about the practice of enslavement amongst themselves.

Racism and slavery influenced both the theology and the active policies of American Methodism. While Wesley called for abolition, American Methodism emerged in a society that had already established race-based slavery as one of its core practices.¹⁸⁰ Nevertheless, different expressions of Methodism were found throughout the colonies/states. Although racism was often implicit, Methodists called for anti-slavery measures and/or immediate abolition. Some Methodists took a pro-slavery approach. Thus, as was also found in the larger American society, American Methodists did not share uniform belief about slavery.¹⁸¹ Consequently, the tensions present within American society were also endemic in American Methodism. Such conflicts, eventually, helped determine the trajectory of the 1844 Methodist Episcopal Church's schism.

¹⁷⁷ Norwood, *The Story*, 170. Interestingly, George Washington and Thomas Jefferson donated money to Richard Allen for the construction of Allen's Mother Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church in Philadelphia. See: Charles W. Calhoun, *The Human Tradition in America from the Colonial Era Through Reconstruction* (Wilmington: Scholarly Resources, 2002), 128.

¹⁷⁸ Norwood, *The Story*, 172-173.

¹⁷⁹ Richey, Rowe, and Schmidt, *The Methodist Experience*, Vol. I, 143.

¹⁸⁰ J. Philip Wogaman, *Christian Ethics: A Historical Introduction*, Second Edition (Louisville: John Knox Press, 2010), 192-193.

¹⁸¹ David Torbett, *Theology and Slavery: Charles Hodge and Horace Bushnell* (Macon: Mercer University Press, 2006), 27-30.

Section Summary:

Slavery impacted most areas of American life. Thus, slavery became a practice that benefitted most White Americans, both enslavers and non-enslavers. Consequently, slavery drove an economy that was profitable and accepted by many White Americans. Additionally, American Methodism emerged at the same time, the Revolutionary period, when slavery became more commonplace in America. Furthermore, during the years following the invention of the cotton gin (1794), the numbers of Black enslaved persons increased dramatically in America. Such growth caused conflict within American society. Likewise, it was during this period when American Methodism also began experiencing significant growth. In the years that followed, American Methodism struggled with the institution of slavery and deeply embedded racism, leading to different expressions of Methodism. It is necessary to recognise that the people who were struggling with contradictory convictions about slavery's place within American Methodism were the same people who were living with the tension of slavery in American society.

Conclusion

The intertwined relationship between the ethics and values of American society and the ethics and values of American Methodism helped contribute to the Methodist Episcopal Church's 1844 schism. Thus, Chapter Two illustrates that the debates present within American society were also manifest within the Methodist Episcopal Church. Likewise, this chapter demonstrates that the same colonists who were grappling with dilemmas, such as slavery, in the civil realm were also wrestling with these same dilemmas in the Methodist Episcopal Church. Thus, as the different people groupings present within American society became more divided, the different people groupings within the Methodist Episcopal Church also became more

divided. In this way, the 1844 Methodist Episcopal Church's schism was intimately intertwined with American socio-political culture.

Chapter Three: Early American Methodism and Slavery, 1784-1844

Introduction

On May 1, 1844, the General Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church convened in New York City.¹⁸² While the 149 White clergy delegates discussed several denominational matters, including ministerial education requirements, pensions, and oversight of the Church's publishing house, the principal order of business was a six-week debate about slavery in the context of the executive and legislative powers of General Conference as outlined in the *Book of Discipline*.¹⁸³

This is primarily evidenced in the case of Reverend James Osgood Andrew, the bishop of the Georgia annual conference who became associated with the institution of slavery. Differences in opinion about the nature and function of General Conference, held within the wider context of regional attitudes toward slavery, led to the adoption of legislation that would eventually separate the Methodist Episcopal Church into Northern and Southern branches.¹⁸⁴ For sufficient historical context, Chapter Three will survey the Methodist Episcopal Church's official stances on slavery from its 1784 organisational conference until the 1844 General Conference. Then, it will describe and analyse Bishop Andrew's hearing before the 1844 General Conference. Finally, it will exegete three prominent arguments found throughout the 1844 General Conference's debates regarding Bishop Andrew's case. These arguments include old-time Methodism, the Separation of Church and State, and the General Conference's executive and legislative powers.

¹⁸² In 1808, preachers met to write a delegated system into the Methodist Episcopal Church's newly formed Constitution. Prior to this, all preachers attended and voted at an annual meeting held in Baltimore, Maryland. The Constitution stated that the General Conference would meet once every four years. Also, an equal number of clergy delegates were elected to represent their annual conferences at General Conference. See: Nathan Bangs, *A History of the Methodist Episcopal Church*, Vol. II (New York: T. Mason and G. Lane, 1839), 133-134.

¹⁸³ Henry B. Ridgaway, *The Life of Edmund S. Janes, D.D., LL.D., Late Senior Bishop of the Methodist Episcopal Church* (New York: Phillips and Hunt, 1882), 79-83.

¹⁸⁴ Richard M. Cameron, *Methodism and Society in Historical Perspective*, Vol. I (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1961), 175-176.

The Methodist Episcopal Church's Official Stances on Slavery, 1784-1844

The Early American Methodists, 1784-1800:

The Methodist Episcopal Church was organised in Baltimore, Maryland at the 1784 Christmas Conference.¹⁸⁵ Prior to the Christmas Conference, John Wesley ordained Thomas Coke and appointed him as a General Superintendent for Methodism in America. At the Christmas Conference, Coke ordained and appointed Francis Asbury as a General Superintendent of the Methodist Episcopal Church in America. Although it was against Wesley's wishes, the Methodist Episcopal Church's clergy and laity began referring to Coke and Asbury as bishops.¹⁸⁶

As noted in Chapter Two, Wesley, Coke, and Asbury wanted the Methodist Episcopal Church to adopt anti-slavery principles.¹⁸⁷ In 1775, nine years prior to the Christmas Conference, Wesley condemned slavery, not only by appealing to biblical passages, but by declaring humanity's liberty, freedom, and need for natural justice. In *Thoughts Upon Slavery*, Wesley wrote:

...I strike at the root of this complicated villainy; I absolutely deny all slaveholding to be consistent with any degree of natural justice...I deny that villainy is ever necessary. It is impossible that it should ever be necessary for any reasonable creature to violate all the laws of justice, mercy, and truth.¹⁸⁸

¹⁸⁵ The Christmas Conference began on December 24, 1784 and lasted for ten days. All Methodist preachers in America were invited to attend. See: John Abernathy Smith, "How Methodism Became a National Church in the United States," *Methodist History* 20 (October 1981): 18.

¹⁸⁶ Baker, *From Wesley*, 130-131. In a letter dated September 20, 1788, John Wesley wrote the following to Francis Asbury, "How can you, how dare you suffer yourself to be called Bishop? I shudder, I start at the very thought! Men may call me a knave or a fool, a rascal, a scoundrel, and I am content; but they shall never by my consent call me Bishop! For my sake, for God's sake, for Christ's sake put a full end to this!" See: John Telford, ed., *The Letters of John Wesley*, Vol. VIII (London: Epworth Press, 1931), 91.

¹⁸⁷ Kinghorn, *The Heritage*, 93-94.

¹⁸⁸ John Wesley, *Thoughts Upon Slavery*, Fourth Edition (Dublin: W. Whitestone, 1775), 17.

Consequently, because of Wesley's influence and Bishop Coke's and Bishop Asbury's agreement with Wesley's opinions on slavery, the 1785 *Discipline* took measures against slavery.¹⁸⁹ For example, all American Methodist ministers were instructed to emancipate their enslaved persons in states where emancipation was permitted.¹⁹⁰ If they did not, they would be suspended from the ministry. Also, the 1785 *Discipline* decreed that enslaving lay members who did not emancipate their enslaved persons would be denied Holy Communion and would be removed from church membership.¹⁹¹ After six months of denominational unrest led by clergy and laity, these methods were revoked at an additional conference held to address the controversy over the *Discipline's* mandates regarding slavery.¹⁹² Bishop Coke wrote, "We thought it prudent to suspend the minute concerning slavery, on account of the great opposition that had been given it, our work being in too infantile a state to push things to extremity."¹⁹³ The prohibitions were never reinstated.¹⁹⁴ Reverend Jesse Lee declared:

These rules of 1784 were but short lived, and were offensive to most of our southern friends; and were so much opposed by many of our private members, local preachers, and some travelling preachers, that the execution of them was suspended at the conference held in June following, about six months after they were formed; and they were never afterwards carried into full force.¹⁹⁵

¹⁸⁹ Mathews, *Slavery and Methodism*, 11.

¹⁹⁰ Until President Abraham Lincoln issued the "Emancipation Proclamation" on January 1, 1863, it was illegal and criminally punishable to emancipate enslaved persons in many of the Southern states. See: Clayton Jewett and John Allen, *Slavery in the South: A State-by-State History* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 2004), 132, 249.

¹⁹¹ *Minutes of Several Conversations Between the Rev. Thomas Coke, LL.D., the Rev. Francis Asbury, and Others, at a Conference Begun in Baltimore, In the State of Maryland, on Monday, the 27th of December, in the Year 1784, Composing a Form of Discipline for the Ministers, Preachers and Other Members of the Methodist Episcopal Church in America* (Philadelphia: Charles Cist, 1785), 15-17.

¹⁹² Cameron, *Methodism and Society*, Vol. I, 100.

¹⁹³ Coke, *Extracts of the Journals*, 74.

¹⁹⁴ John Lenton, "The Attitudes towards Black Methodists in America and the West Indies of Some of Wesley's Preachers, 1770-1810," *Wesley and Methodist Studies* 4 (2011): 102.

¹⁹⁵ Lee, *A Short History*, 102.

Because of the outcry over the initial slavery restrictions, the General Conference did not make any significant legislation about slavery until 1796.¹⁹⁶ In 1796, General Conference delegates passed a measure encouraging Church members to emancipate the enslaved if state law or case permitted emancipation. Also, the General Conference forbade the buying and selling of enslaved persons by lay members. Further, enslavers were not to be taken in as Church members until they had a frank conversation with the pastor about the *Discipline's* instructions about enslavement. Methodist enslavers, however, were not required to free the enslaved to attain or retain Church membership.¹⁹⁷

Francis Asbury and the Shifting Attitudes towards Slavery and the Role of the *Discipline*, 1800-1820:

At the 1800 General Conference, Bishop Asbury persuaded General Conference delegates to pass a measure instructing annual conferences to have local Methodist ministers and lay leaders write petitions to city and state officials. These petitions encouraged enslavers to emancipate their enslaved persons in states where emancipation was legal. This legislation proved controversial. For example, some members of the South Carolina annual conference printed and distributed pamphlets urging enslavers to free their enslaved persons.¹⁹⁸ In response, Charleston's residents burned the pamphlets in a public demonstration and attempted to drown the city's Methodist minister, Reverend George Dougherty, by holding his head in a bucket beneath a water pump.¹⁹⁹

¹⁹⁶ Lewis M. Purifoy, "The Methodist Anti-Slavery Tradition," *Methodist History* 4 (July 1966): 4.

¹⁹⁷ *The Doctrines and Discipline of the Methodist Episcopal Church* (Philadelphia: Henry Tuckniss, 1798), 170.

¹⁹⁸ Albert Deems Betts, *History of South Carolina Methodism* (Charleston: Advocate Press, 1952), 92, 169-170.

¹⁹⁹ Daniel De Vinne, *The Methodist Episcopal Church and Slavery: A Historical Survey of the Relation of the Early Methodists to Slavery* (New York: Francis Hart, 1857), 59.

Additionally, the 1800 General Conference passed legislation regarding travelling preachers. Later, this legislation would become a point of contention in Bishop Andrew's case before the 1844 General Conference. The legislation read:

When any of our travelling preachers becomes an owner of a slave or slaves by any means, they shall forfeit his ministerial character in the Methodist Episcopal Church, unless they execute, if it be practicable, a legal emancipation of such slave or slaves, agreeably to the laws of the state wherein they live.²⁰⁰

By 1804, the federal government had divided the United States into Southern slave states, Northern free states, border states, and the western territories.²⁰¹ The Church also operated under this paradigm. For example, the 1804 General Conference delegates voted to print two *Disciplines*. The *Discipline* for the Northern annual conferences contained slavery prohibition language. The *Discipline* for the Southern annual conferences did not contain such restrictions. Although this is recorded in the 1804 *Journal of the General Conference*, no copies of these *Disciplines* are known to exist.²⁰² Additionally, the delegates voted to recall the previous General Conference's instructions for Methodist ministers and lay members to petition local and state leaders for emancipation. Further, legislation was adopted that required ministers to instruct enslaved persons to be obedient to their enslavers.²⁰³ Also, the 1804 General Conference delegates voted to retain language that permitted non-itinerate preachers and lay members to enslave others. Yet, because of their federal designation as free states, enslaving was an unlawful practice

²⁰⁰ Mathews, *Slavery and Methodism*, 301.

²⁰¹ Robert S. Hill, "Federalism, Republicanism, and the Northwest Ordinance," *Publius: The Journal of Federalism* 18, no. 4 (Fall 1998): 41-42. Additionally, at General Conferences, the delegates were divided into Northern and Southern delegations. Clergy from the border states and western territories had the freedom to align with the delegation that best fit their belief structure. See: Asa Earl Martin, "Anti-Slavery Activities of the Methodist Episcopal Church in Tennessee," *Tennessee Historical Magazine* 2, no. 2 (June 1916): 99-100.

²⁰² Mathews, *Slavery and Methodism*, 26.

²⁰³ Charles Elliott, *History of the Great Secession from the Methodist Episcopal Church in the Year 1845* (Cincinnati: Swormstedt and Poe, 1855), 40.

for both non-itinerate preachers and lay members in Northern annual conferences. Consequently, enslaving non-itinerate preachers and lay members were not, except on rare occasions, present within Northern annual conferences.²⁰⁴

Unlike non-itinerate preachers and lay members, bishops and travelling preachers were subject to an itinerate policy. They could be appointed to any annual conference located within America, free state or slave state.²⁰⁵ The 1804 *Discipline* continued to forbid travelling preachers from enslaving persons. Thus, this provision eliminated the possibility that enslaving travelling preachers would be appointed to serve in Northern annual conferences.²⁰⁶

The *Discipline* did not, however, specify that bishops could not enslave others. Instead, an informal agreement began at the 1804 General Conference.²⁰⁷ Delegates unofficially decided that bishops, in both free states and slave states, were not allowed to enslave persons. This was seen as a compromise between the Northern and Southern annual conferences.²⁰⁸ In this way, non-enslaving bishops could be appointed to both free states and slave states without controversy. Mostly, the Southern annual conferences were satisfied to forego enslaving bishops in exchange for permission for slavery to exist alongside the Church without further interference from the Northern annual conferences.²⁰⁹ In 1844, this informal agreement led to great debate about the executive and legislative powers of the General Conference and became one of the main arguments that birthed "A Plan of Separation," the legislation that divided the Methodist Episcopal Church into Northern and Southern

²⁰⁴ John Nelson Norwood, *The Schism in the Methodist Episcopal Church 1844: A Study of Slavery and Ecclesiastical Politics* (Alfred: The Alfred Press, 1923), 17-18.

²⁰⁵ Douglas D. Tzan, *William Taylor and the Mapping of the Methodist Missionary Tradition* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2019), 29-30.

²⁰⁶ *The Doctrine and Discipline of the Methodist Episcopal Church* (New York: T. Kirk, 1804), 215.

²⁰⁷ Cameron, *Methodism and Society*, 157.

²⁰⁸ Author Unknown, *History of the Organization of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South* (Nashville: Southwestern Christian Advocate, 1845), 75.

²⁰⁹ Kyle Painter, "The Pro-Slavery Argument in the Development of the American Methodist Church," *Constructing the Past* 2, no. 1 (2001): 41.

branches.²¹⁰ The ramifications of the informal agreement of 1804, as seen through the lens of Bishop Andrew's case, will be analysed later in Chapter Three.

As referenced above, American Methodist policy permits legislative revision at each General Conference by simple majority vote. At the 1808 General Conference, this allowed for a considerable modification to be made to Church policy. While the *Discipline's* ban on enslaving travelling preachers remained, the delegates voted to give the annual conferences the authority to make decisions regarding the buying, selling, and owning of enslaved persons.²¹¹ Thus, this decision moved the Church's slavery policy from national connectionalism to local contextualism.²¹² By this time, Bishop Asbury, who once believed that every annual conference within the Methodist Episcopal Church should strive for emancipation, had revised his views on slavery.²¹³ In 1809, he wrote:

We are defrauded of great numbers by the pains that are taken to keep the blacks from us; their masters are afraid of the influence of our principles. Would not an amelioration in the condition and treatment of slaves have produced more practical good to the poor Africans, than any attempt at their emancipation? The state of society, unhappily, does not admit this; besides, the blacks are deprived by the means of instruction; who will take the pains to lead them into the way of salvation, and watch over them that they may not stray, but the Methodists?²¹⁴

²¹⁰ The Minority Report at the 1844 General Conference read, "The law of the Church on slavery has always existed since 1785, but especially since 1804...as a virtual, though informal, contraction of mutual concession and forbearance, between North and South..." *Journals of the General Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, Volume II, 1840, 1844, Together with the Debates of 1844, Published by Order of the Conference* (New York: Carlton and Phillips, 1856), 208.

²¹¹ Russell E. Richey, "Early American Methodism," 55.

²¹² Cameron, *Methodism and Society*, 155.

²¹³ Wigger, *American Saint*, 385.

²¹⁴ Francis Asbury, *Journal of Rev. Francis Asbury, Bishop of the Methodist Episcopal Church*, Vol. III (New York: Lane and Scott, 1852), 298.

Bishop Asbury's words provide evidence that the denomination had gradually altered its official position on slavery.²¹⁵ Instead of encouraging its annual conferences to work for emancipation, the Church instructed its annual conferences to provide spiritual education and support for enslaved persons.²¹⁶ Once again, *Discipline* precedent would become an area of debate in Bishop Andrew's hearing before the 1844 General Conference. This shift in the Church's policy influenced the pro-slavery, anti-slavery, and abolitionist groupings present within the Church at the time of Bishop Andrew's hearing before the 1844 General Conference.

On March 31, 1816, less than two months before General Conference convened, Bishop Asbury died. In 1814, Bishop Coke died.²¹⁷ The 1816 General Conference was the first General Conference held without Asbury's and Coke's presence or influence. Thus, the decisions made at the 1816 General Conference reflected new leadership within the Methodist Episcopal Church. In discussing slavery, the 1816 delegates voiced a sense of complacency with the present status of slavery within American Methodism.²¹⁸ For example, the delegates enacted what became known as the Compromise Law.²¹⁹ In 1796, delegates voted for legislation that barred enslaving lay members from holding leadership roles within the Church²²⁰ until they had "provided for the emancipation of their slaves, immediately or gradually, as the laws of the states respectively and the circumstances of the case will admit."²²¹ The 1816 General Conference legislated a broader interpretation of this rule. After the 1816 General Conference, White lay members who enslaved Blacks

²¹⁵ Elizabeth Fox Genovese and Eugene D. Genovese, *The Mind of the Master Class: History and Faith in the Southern Slaveholders' Worldview* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 232-233.

²¹⁶ Donald G. Mathews, "The Methodist Mission to the Slaves, 1829-1844," *The Journal of American History* 51, no. 4 (March 1965): 615-616.

²¹⁷ Wigger, *American Saint*, 392, 398.

²¹⁸ Norwood, *The Story*, 187.

²¹⁹ Cameron, *Methodism and Society*, 157.

²²⁰ Richey, "Early American Methodism," 55.

²²¹ *Journals of the General Conference*, Volume I, 22-23.

were ineligible for leadership roles only “where the laws of the state in which he lives will admit of emancipation and permit the liberated slave to enjoy freedom.”²²²

This new legislation had great implications for the Church in the Southern annual conferences.²²³ For example, the civil governments of the Southern states did not allow for enslaved persons to be emancipated except under special circumstances, such as a heroic action. Even then, emancipation for each enslaved person must be petitioned before the state legislature. If emancipation was granted by the state legislature, former enslaved persons would need to leave the state or pay a sum of money to the state legislature.²²⁴ The phrasing of the 1816 Compromise Law would play a vital role in Bishop Andrew’s case.²²⁵

Enter Orange Scott, 1820-1844:

From 1820-1836, the Church did not make any significant recommendations or new laws regarding slavery.²²⁶ The ban on travelling preachers who enslaved others remained in place, albeit interpreted more loosely in states where it was believed that liberated enslaved persons could not enjoy freedom. Then, at the 1836 General Conference, the abolitionist movement gained momentum under the direction of Reverend Orange Scott. From the floor of General Conference, he gave a speech that called for the Church to advocate for immediate emancipation and in defence of two abolitionist pastors who were charged with censure.²²⁷ Subsequently, he was censured by this General Conference for speaking inappropriately and out of order. After this General Conference, Scott became the leader of the Church’s

²²² *Journals of the General Conference*, Volume I, 170.

²²³ Cameron, *Methodism and Society*, 157.

²²⁴ Benjamin Joseph Klebaner, “American Manumission Laws and the Responsibility for Supporting Slaves,” *The Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* 63, no. 4 (October 1955): 443, 446.

²²⁵ Cameron, *Methodism and Society*, 157.

²²⁶ Richard M. Cameron, “The Church Divides, 1844,” in eds. Emory S. Bucke, et al, *The History of American Methodism*, Vol. II (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1964), 14.

²²⁷ Norwood, *The Story*, 195. See also: Lucius C. Matlack, *The History of American Slavery and Methodism, from 1780-1849* (New York: No. 5 Spruce Street, 1849), 118-127.

abolitionist faction. At the 1840 General Conference, Scott was again censured for speaking about the Church's responsibility to end slavery.²²⁸ During the final months of 1842, Scott called for denominational separation and began a movement for abolitionists to exit the Methodist Episcopal Church. In the first issue of *The True Wesleyan*, an abolitionist newspaper, Scott wrote:

That the M.E. Church is a slaveholding church, none will deny. She allows her members and ministers, unrebuked, to hold innocent human beings in a state of hopeless bondage – nay, more, she upholds and defends her communicants in this abominable business! All her disciplinary regulations which present a show of opposition to slavery are known and acknowledged to be a dead letter in the South.²²⁹

After Scott's declaration, the Wesleyan Methodist Church was formed with 6,000 charter members, primarily from former abolitionist members of the Northern annual conferences. Within two years, the Wesleyan Methodists claimed 15,000 members.²³⁰ During 1843, to ward off additional defections to the Wesleyan Methodist Church, the remaining abolitionist members of the New England annual conferences held meetings in Massachusetts, Maine, and Vermont. The New England annual conferences passed anti-slavery resolutions and printed these in Methodist abolitionist magazines.²³¹ For example, the New England annual conferences published the following in *Zion's Herald and Wesleyan Journal*:

Slaveholding is sin; that every slaveholder is a sinner, and ought not to be admitted to the pulpit or the communion; that the Methodist Episcopal Church is responsible for slavery within its pale; and that nothing short of a speedy and entire separation of slavery from the Church could satisfy the consciences of honest abolitionists, and therefore reformation or division is the only alternative.²³²

²²⁸ Ira Ford McLeister, *History of the Wesleyan Methodist Church in America* (Marion: Wesley Press, 1959), 18-26.

²²⁹ J. Horton and O. Scott, eds., *The True Wesleyan* 1, no. 1 (January 7, 1843): 1.

²³⁰ Padgett, "Hearing the Antislavery," 64, 66.

²³¹ Cameron, "The Church Divides," 29, 32-36.

²³² *Zion's Herald and Wesleyan Journal*, 116.

As evidenced above, in the year preceding the 1844 Conference, the Northern and Southern annual conferences were engaged in increased denominational strife regarding slavery's place within church and state. Ultimately, such contradictory convictions helped contribute to the Methodist Episcopal Church's schism.

The Gag Rule:

The United States House of Representatives operated under a Gag Rule concerning slavery from 1836-1844.²³³ Citizen and caucus group petitions regarding emancipation, manumission, and abolition were dismissed without reading, effectively stifling any debate about slavery within Congress.²³⁴ Under the leadership of former President John Quincy Adams, the Gag Rule was challenged. Over the course of several years, President Adams began amassing the votes needed to repeal the Gag Rule. Shortly before the 1844 General Conference, the Gag Rule's proponents lost momentum, only retaining the law by a vote of 88-87.²³⁵ Most Congressmen felt that the Gag Rule would be overturned during the next session of Congress because the political landscape had shifted to favour anti-slavery petitions. This sentiment proved correct when the Gag Rule was officially overturned with little debate, by a vote of 108-80, on December 3, 1844.²³⁶

Likewise, the Methodist Episcopal Church operated under a similar Gag Rule during these same years.²³⁷ The 1836 General Conference gave the Conference

²³³ Robert P. Ludlum, "The Antislavery "Gag-Rule": History and Argument," *The Journal of Negro History* 26, no. 2 (April 1941) 204, 221.

²³⁴ David C. Frederick, "John Quincy Adams, Slavery, and the Disappearance of the Right of Petition," *Law and History Review* 9, no. 1 (Spring 1991): 113-115.

²³⁵ Ludlum, "The Antislavery "Gag Rule," 220.

²³⁶ Ludlum, "The Antislavery "Gag Rule," 221-222.

²³⁷ Russell E. Richey, Kenneth E. Rowe, and Jean Miller Schmidt, *American Methodism: A Compact History* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2012), 83.

president the ability not to address petitions that he felt did not pertain to the Conference's business.²³⁸ The resolution read:

If, in the judgment of the president, the report of said committee shall contain any article contrary to the *Discipline* of our church, or contrary to the advice of the General Conference, as expressed in the pastoral address of that body, bearing date May 26, 1836, it is understood and admitted that he, the said president, is under no obligation to put to vote any motion to adopt said report.²³⁹

As will be seen in the proceeding chapters, however, by the 1844 General Conference, the anti-slavery faction within American Methodism gained prominence. Also, the Methodist Episcopal Church's Gag Rule was repealed, and slavery was once again debated, following the precedent of the United States House of Representatives.

Tension Builds towards the 1844 General Conference:

As seen among remaining Methodist Episcopal abolitionists, momentum was gaining for delegates at the 1844 General Conference to pass legislation that named slavery as a sin. The abolitionist faction within the Church sought to reform General Conference policies on slavery, particularly The Compromise Law, or risk denominational division.²⁴⁰ Previous General Conferences discussed slavery's relationship with sin and evil. While each *Discipline* described slavery as an evil, it did not specifically name slavery as a sin.²⁴¹ In foreshadowing a principal argument in

²³⁸ Daniel Swinson, "Restoring "Mr. Wesley's Rule": The General Conference of 1840 and Its Context," *Methodist History* 60, no. 1 (June 2022): 17, 21-22. Interestingly, this issue was also tied to temperance. Many from the Southern delegation believed that petitions for temperance were a way to also address slavery from a social reform perspective. Because of this, they resisted passing policies about temperance. See: John M. Murrin, Pekka Hamalainen, Paul E. Johnson, Denver Brunsman, and James M. McPherson, eds., *Liberty, Equality, Power: A History of the American People*, Seventh Edition (Boston: Cengage Learning, 2015), 416.

²³⁹ Charles Elliott, *History of the Great Secession from the Methodist Episcopal Church in the Year 1845* (Cincinnati: Swormstedt and Poe, 1855), 175.

²⁴⁰ Cameron, "The Church Divides," 44-47.

²⁴¹ Richey, Rowe, and Schmidt, *The Methodist Experience*, 143-145.

Bishop Andrew's appearance before the 1844 General Conference, William Capers wrote:

Slavery, where it may exist as an element of the constitution of the country, an institution guaranteed by the laws – is not a moral evil. If it was a moral evil the church would be bound to take cognizance of it, but our affirmation is that is not a matter for her jurisdiction, but is exclusively appropriate to the civil government, and of course not sinful.²⁴²

The tension in considering slavery an evil, a sin, or both will be explored in greater detail later in Chapter Three. The 1844 General Conference delegates spent several days engaged in this discussion. The delegates' theological understanding of sin and evil was essential to the decisions made at the 1844 General Conference.²⁴³

For a deeper insight into the dynamics that shaped the 1844 General Conference, it is significant to note that many of the Church's White abolitionists had already withdrawn to join the Wesleyan Methodist Church. Additionally, with the formation of the African Methodist Episcopal Church in 1816 and the African Methodist Episcopal Church Zion in 1821, the Methodist Episcopal Church lost Black membership and Black lay leadership.²⁴⁴ Those who remained were not permitted to be elected as delegates to General Conference. Ordained White clergymen were the only persons eligible to be elected as General Conference delegates. Consequently, any decisions about the Church's policy regarding slavery were made without the input of those for whom the legislation directly impacted.²⁴⁵ By 1844, the Church had already splintered, with slavery as a driving factor, into at least three new denominations. Thus, the Church had experienced a significant amount of

²⁴² *The Southern Christian Advocate*, March 9, 1838, 150.

²⁴³ JD Walsh, "The Methodist Episcopal Church in the South," in ed. JW Mendenhall, *The Methodist Review*, Vol. LXXII (New York: Hunt and Eaton, 1890), 39.

²⁴⁴ Cameron, *Methodism and Society*, Vol. I, 151-154.

²⁴⁵ Richey, Rowe, and Schmidt, *The Methodist Experience*, Vol. 1, 92-93.

denominational disunity before the 1844 General Conference began, affecting the tone and aim of General Conference.²⁴⁶

As evidenced above, John Wesley and Bishops Coke and Asbury began the Methodist Episcopal Church with anti-slavery intentions. Early *Disciplines* employed restrictive measures against the buying and selling of enslaved persons for both clergy and lay members. The delegates at the following General Conferences, however, continually lessened these prohibitions by amending the *Discipline's* language to allow for broad legislative interpretation.

The Case of Bishop James Osgood Andrew, 1844 General Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church²⁴⁷

James Osgood Andrew was elected and consecrated a bishop in the Methodist Episcopal Church in 1832. Because he was a Southern non-enslaver, the delegates from the Northern annual conferences considered his election a good will gesture to foster unity between the pro-slavery, anti-slavery, and abolitionist factions present within the Church.²⁴⁸ In the years following his consecration, Bishop Andrew became associated with slavery when he was bequeathed enslaved persons following the deaths of two persons and when he married a woman who enslaved others. Throughout the 1844 General Conference proceedings, Bishop Andrew argued that he became an enslaver without his consent and, further, that emancipation was impracticable in the state of Georgia. Therefore, he was not in violation of any

²⁴⁶ William B. Lawrence, *When the Church Woke* (Eugene: Cascade Books, 2022), 72.

²⁴⁷ The appeal of Reverend Francis Harding, Baltimore annual conference, also occurs at the 1844 General Conference. Reverend Harding was a travelling preacher who was asked to desist from his position until he freed his slaves. The arguments, replacing the term "bishop" for the term "travelling preacher," are similar in both cases. For brevity, this section describes Bishop Andrew's hearing. The third section of Chapter Three will describe the aspects of Reverend Harding's case that relate to the prominent themes found throughout the 1844 General Conference. See: Robert W. Sledge, "Till Charity Wept: 1844 Revisited," *Methodist History* 48, no. 2 (January 2010): 98-99, 101-102, 107-108.

²⁴⁸ The exact date Bishop Andrew became an enslaver is debated. Additionally, it is debated if the 1840 General Conference Northern delegation knew that Bishop Andrew was an enslaver. See: Mark Auslander, *The Accidental Slaveowner: Revisiting a Myth of Race and Finding an American Family* (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 2011), 70.

Discipline mandates.²⁴⁹ This set the stage for the 1844 General Conference's debates about the General Conference's executive and legislative powers as they related to the role of the episcopacy. Also, Bishop Andrew's hearing led to disagreement about the *Discipline's* provisions for decision making abilities within the individual annual conferences. Regional attitudes toward slavery shaped the context of this prolonged General Conference session.

Prior to the 1844 General Conference, Northern delegates learned that Bishop Andrew was an enslaver. They informed the Southern delegation that they considered this a violation of the 1804 General Conference's informal agreement that the episcopacy would remain unconnected with slavery. Because of the episcopacy's nationwide itinerate policy, the Northern delegation stated that it was unacceptable to entertain the possibility of an enslaving bishop presiding in the Northern annual conferences.²⁵⁰ The Northern delegates contended, if an enslaving bishop could be appointed to a free state, that a further exodus of Church members would occur, especially from the New England conferences. Thus, for denominational unity, the Northern delegates demanded that Bishop Andrew free his enslaved persons or resign from the episcopacy.²⁵¹ The Southern delegation, however, persuaded Bishop Andrew to defend his actions before General Conference. The Southern delegates did not believe that Bishop Andrew had violated *Discipline* law. Further, they did not think that the General Conference possessed the ability to remove a bishop from office.²⁵²

When analysing the 1844 General Conference, it is important to realise that conflicting opinions about slavery and the episcopacy's and travelling preachers'

²⁴⁹ Robert Athow West, Official Reporter, *Report of Debates in the General Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, Held in the City of New York, 1844* (New York: G. Lane and C.B. Tippet, for the Methodist Episcopal Church, 1844), 73.

²⁵⁰ Richey, Rowe, and Schmidt, *The Methodist Experience*, Vol. I, 183-184.

²⁵¹ Sledge, "Till Charity," 99.

²⁵² Norman W. Spellman, "Interpreting the Conference: Focusing Agents in the 1844 Debate," in *The History*, Vol. II, 55, 67-69.

participation in enslaving persons were the overarching differences between the Northern and Southern delegations.²⁵³ Donald Mathews, Methodist historian, wrote:

It should be pointed out that prior to the General Conference of 1844 there were no widespread debates over episcopal powers, but there were heated discussions about a slaveholding bishop. And only after the question of Bishop Andrew's slaves came up did anyone raise the constitutional question of who could do what to whom and how. Slavery and slaveholders were much more important to southerners than "constitutionality." The denial that slavery divided the Church is simply unsupported by evidence.²⁵⁴

Additionally, the *1844 Journal* does not show disagreements between the delegations about any Church doctrine, theology, and polity beyond those associated with slavery. For example, J. Gordon Melton, Methodist historian, wrote

...No basic doctrinal issue was at stake...In the heat of the debate at the General Conference, a plan to divide the church was brought forth...there is no doubt that slavery again was the necessary and sufficient issue that led to the split...²⁵⁵

Melton's quotation helps show that the delegations' differences centred on issues surrounding slavery. In this way, American regional political conflicts spilled into the Church to cause crisis within two regional delegations.²⁵⁶ This is further evidenced by Methodist historian George Gilman Smith's description of the formation of the Methodist Episcopal Church South in 1845:

No doctrine was changed, no polity altered, no usages, rites, or customs modified. The same laborers did the same work in the same

²⁵³ Luke E. Harlow, *Religion, Race, and the Making of Confederate Kentucky, 1830-1880* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 61-63.

²⁵⁴ Mathews, *Slavery and Methodism*, 250.

²⁵⁵ J. Gordon Melton, "Schism in American Methodism: Polity, Power, and Property," *Methodist Review* 13 (November 2021): 130-131.

²⁵⁶ Kevin J. Corn, *Forward Be Our Watchword: Indiana Methodism and the Modern Middle Class* (Indianapolis: University of Indianapolis Press, 2009), 138.

fields, just as they had been trained to do. It was hoped that this measure would not only perpetuate Methodism in the South, but that it would also be the end of strife between these sections of the church.²⁵⁷

As evidenced above, when the Methodist Episcopal Church South formed, the *Discipline* remained unchanged except for the recognition that bishops and travelling preachers could enslave others under certain circumstances.²⁵⁸ From such evidence, it can be surmised that American regional political differences regarding slavery was a driving factor for the separation between the Northern and Southern delegations.²⁵⁹

Bishop Andrew's case before the 1844 General Conference began on May 20th. The following resolution was passed²⁶⁰ by the delegates:

Whereas, it is currently reported and generally understood, that one of the bishops of the M.E. Church has become connected with slavery; and whereas, it is due to the General Conference to have a proper understanding of the matter: therefore,
Resolved, That the Committee on the Episcopacy be instructed to ascertain the facts in the case, and report the result of their investigation to this body to-morrow morning.²⁶¹

A robust exploration of Bishop Andrew's argument regarding his roles and both enslaver and bishop is essential in understanding the General Conference's response. After deliberation, the Committee on the Episcopacy reported that they had interviewed Bishop Andrew. The Committee on the Episcopacy read Bishop Andrew's statement regarding his understanding of the accusations against him. The

²⁵⁷ George Gilman Smith, *The Life and Letters of James Osgood Andrew, Bishop of the Methodist Episcopal Church South with Glances at his Contemporaries and at Events in Church History* (Nashville: Southern Methodist Publishing House, 1882), 378.

²⁵⁸ Gross Alexander, *A History of the Methodist Church, South in the United States* (New York: The Christian Literature Company, 1894), 48.

²⁵⁹ Mitchell Snay, *Gospel of Disunion: Religion and Separation in the Antebellum South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2014), 127.

²⁶⁰ A delegate vote count was not recorded in the *1844 General Conference Journal*, nor in *the Report of Debates*.

²⁶¹ West, *Report of Debates*, 68-69.

Committee on the Episcopacy stated that Bishop Andrew reported that he received a mulatto girl in an elderly woman's last will and testament.²⁶² The will instructed him to care for the girl until she turned nineteen years old. At that time, with her consent, the girl was to be sent to Liberia. If she did not agree to go to Liberia, he was to keep her and make her as free as the laws of the state of Georgia permitted. Bishop Andrew claimed that, upon turning nineteen years old, the girl refused to go to Liberia. Thus, the girl remained legally remained in Andrew's enslavement. She, however, lived in her own house on his property. At any time, Bishop Andrew said that he would give her permission to move to a free state. The girl, however, did not want to move to a free state.²⁶³ An example of Bishop Andrew's attitude toward enslaved persons can be found by examining his own words at the 1844 General Conference, "I am a slave-holder for conscience sake...I believe the providence of God has thrown these creatures into my hands and holds me responsible for their proper treatment."²⁶⁴

Further, Bishop Andrew claimed that the state of Georgia's laws did not allow for emancipation within the state. Therefore, he could not legally free this person. In this instance, Bishop Andrew said he had been made a legal enslaver involuntarily without his consent.²⁶⁵ Interestingly, Bishop Andrew believed that he was being honourable by continuing to enslave others in his name.²⁶⁶ An example of this can be seen from Bishop Andrew's words:

I might have avoided this difficulty by resorting to a trick, by making over those slaves to my wife before marriage, or by doing as a friend who has taken ground in favor of this resignation suggested: 'Why did you not let your wife make over these negroes to her children, securing an annuity to herself from them.' Sir, my conscience would not allow

²⁶² Norwood, *The Story*, 198.

²⁶³ George White, *Historical Collections of Georgia*, Vol. 161 (New York: Pudney and Russell, 1855), 576.

²⁶⁴ Richey, Rowe, and Schmidt, *The Methodist Experience*, Vol. II, 271-272.

²⁶⁵ Auslander, *The Accidental Slaveowner*, 82-83.

²⁶⁶ For a further explanation of the honour codes regarding the White elite social class and slavery in the antebellum South, See: Bertram Wyatt Brown, *Honor and Violence in the Old South* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), 49-50.

me to do this thing. If I had done so and these negroes had passed into the hands of those who would have treated them unkindly, I would have been unhappy.²⁶⁷

Bishop Andrew claimed that his former wife, not he, received a Negro boy in her mother's last will and testament. When his wife died, the boy became his legal property. As with the mulatto girl, the boy's emancipation was impracticable in the state of Georgia. Bishop Andrew said that the boy would be free to leave the state of Georgia whenever he felt that he could provide for himself. Andrew went on to say that when he married his present wife, she owned enslaved persons bequeathed to her in her late husband's estate. He stated that he did not wish to become the enslaver of these persons. Consequently, he secured the enslaved persons to his wife by a civil deed of trust. Thus, he considered these persons his wife's property.²⁶⁸

Bishop Andrew ended his interview by declaring that he had never bought or sold an enslaved person. In the cases of the mulatto girl and Negro boy, he legally owned the enslaved persons involuntarily without his consent and, because of the laws of the state of Georgia, emancipation was impracticable. Furthermore, the legally enacted deed of trust meant that he did not own his present wife's enslaved persons. Therefore, he did not have any legal responsibilities and the civil law did not allow his wife to emancipate these persons within the state of Georgia.²⁶⁹ After Bishop Andrew's statement was read, the delegates began debating the points that would, eventually, lead to the "Plan of Separation."

When analysing Bishop Andrew's claims regarding the *Discipline*, it is necessary to understand previous General Conferences' decisions about slavery. As evidenced throughout this chapter, early *Discipline* policies forbidding ministers who enslaved others were gradually weakened as Southern Methodists gained General

²⁶⁷ Smith, *The Life and Letters*, 351-352.

²⁶⁸ West, *Report of Debates*, 73.

²⁶⁹ Sharon Davies, *Rising Road: A True Tale of Love, Race, and Religion in America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 82-83.

Conference delegate control.²⁷⁰ Loopholes were created to allow ministers to enslave persons in states where emancipation was difficult to perform. Because the Southern states had harsh emancipation laws, Southern Methodist delegates were able to enslave people and continue in their ministerial capacities without violating the *Discipline*. These same policies would not apply to the Northern states or Northern Methodist ministers because slavery was illegal in those states.²⁷¹ In this way, Bishop Andrew's claims regarding the *Discipline* and enslaving travelling ministers were technically correct. His claims, however, were valid because loopholes were allowed through a series of Southern majority delegated General Conferences.²⁷² The 1844 General Conference saw a power shift with Northern delegate majority, leading to the debates that would result in schism. Throughout the debates, however, Southern delegates continually claimed that Bishop Andrew had not broken any *Discipline* laws, an accurate statement based upon the 1840 *Discipline's* rules about slavery and ministers.²⁷³

On May 22nd, Bishop Andrew's case was taken as the special order of the day. Reverend A. Griffith,²⁷⁴ a border state delegate from the Baltimore annual conference,²⁷⁵ presented a resolution that stated the Northern annual conferences' argument and desired outcome. The resolution read:

²⁷⁰ Beth Barton Schweiger, "Race, Slavery, and Shattered Churches in Early America," in eds., James Joseph Buckley and Michael Root, *The Morally Divided Body: Ethical Disagreement and the Disunity of the Church* (Eugene: Cascade Books, 2012), 16.

²⁷¹ Donald G. Matthews, "The Methodist Schism of 1844 and the Popularization of Anti-Slavery Sentiment," in ed., John R. McKivigan, *Abolitionism and American Religion* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1999), 130, 134.

²⁷² Holm, *A Kingdom Divided*, 41-43.

²⁷³ Allen Carden, *Freedom's Delay: America's Struggle for Emancipation, 1776-1865* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2014), 139-141.

²⁷⁴ Throughout the *Report of Debates'* text, the delegates are referred to as Mr or Dr and surname. The delegates' names are given after each recorded vote.

²⁷⁵ Reverend Alfred Griffith, 1783-1871, served the Baltimore annual conference from 1806 until his death in 1871. During President James Monroe's administration in 1825, Griffith served as Chaplain of the United States Senate. From a wealthy Maryland family, Griffith rejected his inheritance because he claimed that his conscience would not allow him to accept an inheritance that included land that was maintained by slave labour. See: Abel Stevens, *History of the Methodist Episcopal Church in the United States of America*, Vol. IV (New York: Phillips and Hunt, 1884), 215. See also: W.F. Hemenway,

Whereas, the Rev. James O. Andrew, one of the bishops of the Methodist Episcopal Church, has become a slaveholder, and whereas it has been, from the origin of said Church, a settled policy and the invariable usage to elect no person to the office of bishop who was embarrassed with this 'great evil,' as under such circumstances it would be impossible for a bishop to exercise the functions and perform the duties assigned to a general superintendent with acceptance in that large portion of his charge in which slavery does not exist; and whereas Bishop Andrew was himself nominated by our brethren of the slaveholding states, and elected by the General Conference of 1832, as a candidate who, though living in the midst of a slaveholding population, was nevertheless free from all personal connection with slavery; and whereas, this is of all periods in our history as a Church, the one least favourable to such an innovation upon the practice and usage of Methodism as confiding a part of the itinerant general superintendency to a slaveholder; therefore,
Resolved. That the Rev. James O. Andrew be, and he is hereby affectionately requested to resign his office as one of the bishops of the Methodist Episcopal Church.²⁷⁶

After reading the resolution, Griffith stated that he wished for the Conference's calm deliberation under God's grace with respect for the rich history of the Methodist Episcopal Church. He continued by stating that the 1808 General Conference enacted legislation that would prevent the general office of the episcopacy from being removed by General Conference vote. At the same time, however, the 1808 General Conference reserved the power to end a particular episcopacy when deemed necessary.²⁷⁷ Therefore, bishops were never meant to serve in an episcopal capacity for their entire lives. Further, when bishops were elected, they ceased being members of an annual conference. Their official standing was now an officer of the General Conference. Thus, one of General Conference's functions was to elect and, if necessary, remove a bishop from office. Griffith admonished his colleagues to

Lessons of the Life of Rev. Alfred Griffith: A Memorial Sermon (Alexandria: Gazette Book and Job, 1871), 1-18.

²⁷⁶ West, *Report of Debates*, 81-82.

²⁷⁷ West, *Report of Debates*, 82-85.

remember that the case before them was not related to any immoral conduct on Bishop Andrew's behalf. Bishop Andrew's ministerial character was not in question. Instead, the delegates were to consider if it was appropriate for the General Conference to remove a bishop if the bishop was unable to serve every annual conference without controversy and embarrassment.²⁷⁸

Reverend Peter P. Sandford, a Northern delegate from the New York annual conference,²⁷⁹ presented an additional argument for the adoption of the above resolution. He believed that Bishop Andrew's case held high expediency. He claimed that, in the Northern annual conferences, if Bishop Andrew was not removed, many members would leave the Church. This would hinder the Church's witness and allow other denominations to gain the Church's former members. Sandford was careful to say that he did not believe that a removal from the episcopal office was a judgment on Bishop Andrew's ministerial or moral character. Sandford did not see it necessary to remove Bishop Andrew from all aspects of ministry within the Church. The present issue could be easily resolved, Sandford thought, if Bishop Andrew resigned from the episcopacy and returned to the ministry in Georgia.²⁸⁰

Bishop Andrew, however, would not relinquish his position as bishop to serve in a different ministerial capacity. In a private letter to his wife, he responded to his present situation with both determination and sarcasm:

These good people have found out that I am a slave-holder, and as they are too religious to hold any sort of communion with such a sinner as a slave-holder, they are exceedingly anxious to get clear of me. But the entire delegations from the twelve slave-holding Conferences have met, and through a committee, have earnestly protested against my resignation under any circumstances, as inevitably destructive to the

²⁷⁸ Cameron, *Methodism and Society*, 176-177.

²⁷⁹ Reverend Peter P. Sandford, 1781-1857, entered the ministry in 1807. He served as presiding elder of several districts in the New York annual conference. In 1840, he was elected book agent. From 1841-1843, he served as assistant book agent with Reverend George Lane. See: John Fletcher Hurst, *The History of Methodism*, Vol. II (New York: Eaton and Mains, 1903), 668.

²⁸⁰ West, *Report of Debates*, 87.

Southern Church; and for the sake of that Church I have resolved to maintain this position...²⁸¹

Reverend William Winans, a Southern delegate from the Mississippi annual conference,²⁸² gave his views against the above arguments. He declared that it was erroneous to claim that the official stance of the Church was not to elect an enslaver as bishop. Winans acknowledged that it had been a longstanding custom not to elect an enslaver to the episcopacy. This was not a rule, however, to be found within the *Discipline*. Instead, not electing an enslaver to the episcopacy was an informal agreement.²⁸³ Therefore, the presented resolution asked for something that was not in accordance with the Church's established *Discipline*, a direct violation of Church law. Further, Winans believed that Bishop Andrew had not participated in evil or caused embarrassment in any of his contacts with slavery. From his understanding, Bishop Andrew provided housing, food, and spiritual support for his enslaved persons. Further, Bishop Andrew did not own the enslaved persons his wife inherited from her former husband's estate. Additionally, the laws of the state of Georgia did not allow for emancipation. Because of these things, Winans believed that it would cause the enslaved persons more harm to be emancipated. In his view, Bishop Andrew provided for the enslaved persons' daily needs. This support would cease to exist if they were forced to move to another state or country.²⁸⁴

Then, Winans challenged the resolution's claim that an expedited removal of Bishop Andrew from the episcopacy was needed for the preservation of

²⁸¹ Smith, *The Life and Letters*, 356.

²⁸² Reverend William Winans, 1788-1857, was born in Pennsylvania and moved to Mississippi to minister in 1810. He was elected as the first secretary for the Mississippi annual conference and preached the Pastoral Address at the 1832 General Conference. In 1846, he called the first General Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church South into order. Winans was a leader in the American Colonization Society. See: William Winans Papers, J.B. Cain Archives, Millsaps College, 1-10. See also: Ray Holder, *William Winans: Methodist Leader in Antebellum Mississippi* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1978), 148.

²⁸³ A.H. Redford, *History of the Organization of the Methodist Episcopal Church South* (Nashville: A.H. Redford for the M.E. Church South, 1871), 178-180.

²⁸⁴ Luther Lee and E. Smith, *Debates of the General Conference of the M.E. Church, May 1844* (New York: O. Scott for the Wesleyan Methodist Connection of America, 1845), 210-216.

denominational unity. Winans believed that this argument was a direct result of abolitionist agitation from the North interfering in political and civil governments.²⁸⁵ Winans argued that Bishop Andrew would never be sent to serve in a Northern annual conference. Therefore, the need for Bishop Andrew's expedient removal was moot and an attempt to alienate the Southern annual conferences.²⁸⁶ On the contrary, if Bishop Andrew was forced to resign when he had not broken any *Discipline* laws, the Southern annual conferences, consisting of 1,300 preachers and 450,000 lay members, would find it expedient to separate from the Northern annual conferences.²⁸⁷

To end his argument, Winans asked the General Conference to consider the spiritual welfare of both enslavers and the enslaved. He believed that, if Bishop Andrew was removed from the episcopacy because he was an enslaver, Southern enslavers would become distrustful of any form of Methodism. Because of this, Winans thought that the enslavers would begin to restrict ministers' access to enslaved persons. This would hinder any progress Methodist ministers had made with the enslaved population. Thus, there was the possibility that the enslaved would never hear the Gospel message and experience Christian salvation. Additionally, the enslavers would not be taught the importance of humanely treating the enslaved in a dignified Christian manner.²⁸⁸

At this time, Reverend G.F. Pierce, a Southern delegate from the Georgia annual conference,²⁸⁹ spoke. Pierce's argument was that, while he did not consider

²⁸⁵ Ray Holder, "Parson Winans and Mr. Clay: The Whig Connection, 1843-1846," *Louisiana History: The Journal of the Louisiana Historical Association* 25, no. 1 (Winter 1984): 70.

²⁸⁶ Cameron, *Methodism and Society*, Vol. I, 177.

²⁸⁷ West, *Report of Debates*, 87-90.

²⁸⁸ West, *Report of Debates*, 87-90.

²⁸⁹ Reverend George Foster Pierce, 1811-1881, was ordained in 1831. In 1839, he was elected president of the Georgia Female College (Wesleyan College). In 1848, he became president of Emory College (Emory University). In 1854, Pierce was elected bishop in the Methodist Episcopal Church South. In 1863, Pierce spoke to the Georgia State Legislature, defending slavery and supporting Georgia's secession from the Union. See: Leo Braselton Gorman, "Religion, Segregation, and Voting Rights: Unforgetting the Legacies of Bishops George Foster Pierce and Lucius Henry Hosley in Hancock County, Georgia, USA," *Genealogy* 64, no. 5 (July 2021): 12-16.

himself a pro-slavery advocate, he did not believe that the Church had any authority in legislating civil matters. The Constitution of the United States of America guaranteed the Separation of Church and State. For Pierce, slavery was an issue that should be exclusively addressed by civil government. Therefore, the Church was not called to engage in political debates such as slavery. Instead, the Church was tasked with cultivating people's faith. If the Church voted to remove Bishop Andrew from the episcopacy because of his connection with slavery, the Church would be violation of both the *Discipline* and the United States Constitution.²⁹⁰ Pierce warned that the Church should not set the political precedent of violating the Separation of Church and State. The following is a portion of Pierce's speech to the General Conference:

I affirm, that, so far as religion has been concerned in the south, no question has ever done so much harm to saving godliness as the intermeddling of the Methodist Church with the question of slavery...not because I am a pro-slavery man, but because God did not call me to legislate on these matters.²⁹¹

After Pierce's speech, several delegates, both Southern and Northern, spoke in opposition to the resolution. The delegates agreed with Pierce's assessment of the Separation of Church and State. Also, they proclaimed that the resolution was not in agreement with the *Discipline*. For Bishop Andrew to resign, according to these delegates, it must be surmised that an enslaver should always be disqualified from the ministerial office. Yet, the *Discipline* gave several provisions for enslavers to remain travelling ministers.²⁹² Additionally, the *Discipline* never specifically barred bishops from enslaving others. The following was read from the *Discipline*:

When any of our travelling preachers becomes an owner of a slave or slaves by any means, they shall forfeit his ministerial character in the Methodist Episcopal Church, unless they execute, if it be practicable, a

²⁹⁰ Eugene Portlette Southall, "The Attitude of the Methodist Episcopal Church South Toward the Negro from 1844-1870," *The Journal of Negro History* 16, no. 4 (October 1931): 367-368.

²⁹¹ West, *Report of Debates*, 92.

²⁹² Painter, "The Pro-Slavery Argument," 42.

legal emancipation of such slave or slaves, agreeably to the laws of the state wherein they live.²⁹³

Because of the above section of the *Discipline*, the Southern delegates insisted that Bishop Andrew not resign his office. If Bishop Andrew resigned, the Southern annual conferences would consider his forced resignation an attack on Bishop Andrew's ministerial character and conduct. This would dishonour the Southern annual conferences and cause a disruption in Christian fraternal relations, charity, and trust between the Northern and Southern annual conferences. Therefore, Bishop Andrew's forced resignation would be considered an expedient measure for schism within the Church.²⁹⁴

Reverend J. Spencer, a Northern delegate from the Pittsburg annual conference,²⁹⁵ gave another argument for the adoption of the resolution. He acknowledged that the *Discipline* did not specifically forbid bishops from enslaving people. Yet, he did not believe that the *Discipline's* silence meant that enslavers should be consecrated as bishops. To illustrate his point, Spencer gave the following example:

We ought to remember that the mere silence of the *Discipline* in regard to a particular case is no evidence that action in that case would be contrary to our rules. An illustration will place this in its true light. Suppose that instead of marrying a respectable lady owning slaves, Bishop Andrew had married a coloured woman. Would Southern or Northern brethren say, either that he had broken an express rule of *Discipline*, or that he would nevertheless be well qualified for a bishop in our Church? Neither the one nor the other. They doubtless would depose him at once, though there is no rule to be found declaring, in

²⁹³ West, *Report of Debates*, 94.

²⁹⁴ Spellman, "The General Conference of 1844," in *The History*, Vol. II, 56-58.

²⁹⁵ Reverend John Spencer, 1802-1884, began preaching in 1826. In 1844, he served as a presiding elder in the Pittsburgh annual conference. In 1852, he resigned from the active, paid ministry to become a pioneer in the Oregon Territory. See: John Spencer Papers 1831-1964, Cage 581, Washington State University Libraries Manuscripts, Archives, and Special Collections.

so many words, that no white man shall marry a coloured woman on pain of degradation.²⁹⁶

Spencer furthered his argument by stating that Bishop Andrew, knowing the proper meaning of the rules contained in the *Discipline*, consented to become an enslaver. Bishop Andrew chose to accept the enslaved persons from the deceased's estates. Additionally, although he was aware that she enslaved others, he chose to wed his present wife. Spencer exclaimed that Bishop Andrew was not forced to participate in either action. Thus, in doing these things, Bishop Andrew voluntarily consented to ignore the *Discipline*. For this, Spencer argued, Bishop Andrew should resign or be deposed. Furthermore, the Southern delegation, Spencer said, had threatened schism before the General Conference began its deliberations. While he knew unity was of great concern, Spencer declared that he would rather maintain associated with the true, old Methodism. It was established tradition that the episcopacy would not be connected to slavery. Thus, unity should not be valued over the old Methodist tradition.²⁹⁷

Reverend Nathan Bangs, a Northern delegate from the New York annual conference,²⁹⁸ added to Spencer's argument. He claimed that he loved both the abolitionists and the enslavers. Yet, as had been repeated many times over the course of this General Conference, he thought that nearly everyone, except the few "ultras,"²⁹⁹ believed in the old, conservative Methodist teaching that slavery could always be considered an evil, however, slavery could not always be considered sinful.

²⁹⁶ West, *Report of Debates*, 95.

²⁹⁷ Lee and Smith, *Debates of the General Conference*, 126-128.

²⁹⁸ Reverend Nathan Bangs, 1778-1862, was converted to Methodism in 1800 and spent eight years preaching in the Canadian circuits. He returned to New York in 1808 and became the first executive secretary for the Missionary Society in 1820. Concurrently, he served as the book agent for the Book Concern. In 1840, he published the four volume *History of the Methodist Episcopal Church from its Origin in 1776 to the General Conference in 1840*. He also edited the *Christian Advocate* and the *Methodist Magazine and Quarterly Review*. In 1842, he returned to New York City to write and perform pastoral duties. See: Jared Maddox, *Nathan Bangs and the Methodist Episcopal Church: The Spread of Scriptural Holiness in Nineteenth Century America* (Nashville: New Room Books, 2018), 1-5.

²⁹⁹ The term "ultras" was used to refer to both pro-slavery delegates and abolitionist delegates. See: Richey, Rowe, and Schmidt, *The Methodist Experience*, Vol. II, 252.

Thus, the old Methodism was anti-slavery, neither pro-slavery nor abolitionist.³⁰⁰ The *Discipline* allowed enslavement in certain instances. The *Discipline*, however, banned travelling preachers and, thereby, bishops from enslaving others. Because of this, the resolution before the General Conference should be considered by appealing to the old, conservative Methodism. Methodist tradition was not to connect the episcopacy with slavery. Further, the *Discipline* allowed for bishops to be removed for things other than immorality. Bangs said:

Suppose Bishop Hedding should come out and declare that it was a sin to hold slaves under any circumstances. This would identify him with the ultra-party, and I would vote for his retiring, because it would disqualify him for his work as superintendent over the whole Church. I will suppose another case. Let one of our bishops be unmarried and go into the work, and marry a free coloured woman, would it not, in the sense of the whole community, disqualify him for his office? And yet it would not be an act of immorality...³⁰¹

Attempting to establish unity, Reverend J.B. Finley, a western territory delegate from the Ohio annual conference,³⁰² shifted the first resolution's prescribed consequences. He proposed an amended resolution that read:

Whereas, the Discipline of our Church forbids the doing anything calculated to destroy our itinerant general superintendency, and whereas, Bishop Andrew has become connected with slavery by marriage and otherwise, and this act having drawn after it circumstances which, in the estimation of the General Conference, will

³⁰⁰ Both Northern and Southern delegations used "anti-slavery" to further their arguments. The phrase and the delegates' appeal to Methodist tradition will be exegeted in greater detail later in this chapter. See: Ralph A. Keller, "Methodist Newspapers and the Fugitive Slave Law: A New Perspective for the Slavery Crisis in the North," *Church History* 43, no. 3 (September 1974): 321, 326.

³⁰¹ West, *Report of Debates*, 97-98.

³⁰² Rev. James Bradley Finley, 1781-1857, served the Ohio Territory. In 1801, he was converted at the Cane Ridge Revival. He entered the ministry in 1809. From 1816-1821, he served as a presiding elder. In 1821, he became a missionary to the Wyandotte Native Americans. From 1829 to 1845, he served again as a presiding elder. From 1845 until his retirement in 1849, he served as chaplain of the Ohio Penitentiary. See: Papers of Rev. James B. Finley 1814-1853, Archives of Ohio United Methodism, Ohio Wesleyan University, Manuscript Collection #12.

greatly embarrass the exercise of his office as an itinerant general superintendent, if not in some places entirely prevent it; therefore, Resolved, That it is the sense of this General Conference that he desist from the exercise of this office so long as this impediment remains.³⁰³

Finley told the General Conference body that, after listening to the arguments presented about the matter before them, he believed the amended resolution was a compromise that would help the Church avoid division.³⁰⁴ He claimed that the amended resolution named Bishop Andrew's connection with slavery. It did not, however, disparage Bishop Andrew's moral character. Finley argued that the Northern delegation acknowledged that Bishop Andrew had not committed a sin. On principle, the resolution stated that Bishop Andrew would not be able to execute his episcopal duties in certain areas. Yet, Finley stated that the resolution did not depose Bishop Andrew. It only asked him not to exercise his role as a bishop while he practiced enslavement.³⁰⁵

Delegates spoke to the amended resolution. Reverend Stephen Olin, a former enslaver and a delegate from the New York annual conference,³⁰⁶ believed that the resolution as amended should be accepted. If it was not passed, he believed that the Church faced schism. Upon the Church's separation, he contended that a unified Methodism would prevail in the Southern annual conferences. Bishop Andrew's forced resignation would give the Southern annual conferences an impetus to remain unified. The Northern annual conferences, he claimed, however, would be unable to remain as one body. In the North, the minority abolitionist faction would

³⁰³ West, *Report of Debates*, 100.

³⁰⁴ Douglas Montagna, "God Bless the Methodist Church: The Origins of the Methodist-Republican Alliance Before the Civil War," *Methodist History* 54, no. 2 (January 2016): 142.

³⁰⁵ Charles Chester Cole, *Lion of the Forest: James B. Finley, Frontier Reformer* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1994), 129, 144-145, 152.

³⁰⁶ Reverend Stephen Olin, 1797-1851, was born in Vermont but moved to South Carolina in 1820. In 1824, he entered ministry. From 1826-1833, he served as a professor at Franklin College in Athens, Georgia. From 1834-1837, he served as president of Randolph-Macon College in Virginia. In 1842, he became president of Wesleyan University in Middletown, Connecticut. He held this position until his death. See: Stephen Olin, *The Life and Letters of Stephen Olin: Late President of Wesleyan University*, Unknown Editor, Vol. 1 (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1853), 92, 137, 188.

disenfranchise the majority anti-slavery faction, causing a further separation. Consequently, Olin believed that the old Methodist itinerate system would be replaced with congregationalism. Olin ended his remarks by asking the abolitionists and the pro-slavery supporters to consider the importance of Church unity.³⁰⁷

Olin's statement caused Reverend H. Slicer, a border state delegate from the Baltimore annual conference,³⁰⁸ to rise and state that he was a conservative who would vote for the amended resolution for the enslaved persons' well-being. To explain his reasoning, Slicer said the enslaved would benefit from the amended resolution because it did not concede all to either the pro-slavery faction or the abolitionist faction.³⁰⁹ At this time, Reverend William D. Cass, a Northern delegate from the New Hampshire annual conference,³¹⁰ spoke about the immorality of slavery. Until Cass' speech, this argument had been rarely voiced during the debates. According to Cass, old Methodism was not conservative. He declared that John Wesley, Francis Asbury, and the original *Disciplines* of the Church called for the "extirpation of the great evil of slavery."³¹¹ Cass said that Olin stated that, although he refused to emancipation, Bishop Andrew had not engaged in something that was morally wrong. Cass, however, expressed a different opinion. He said:

Sir, is there no moral wrong in being a slaveholder? A portion of the north believe slaveholding to be a moral wrong. We have nothing to do with slavery in the abstract; but we believe that slavery, as it exists in

³⁰⁷ Norwood, *The Schism*, 59, 63-65.

³⁰⁸ Reverend Henry Slicer, 1801-1874, began preaching in 1821. In 1824, he was appointed to serve the Naval Yard in Washington D.C. In 1837, 1847, and 1853, he was elected to serve as Chaplain of the United States Senate. In 1838, Slicer was influential in writing legislation that banned dueling in Washington D.C. Slicer ended his career by serving as a presiding elder. See: Staff Writer, "Henry Slicer," *The Ladies' Repository* 35, 3rd Series (October 1875), 2: 380.

³⁰⁹ West, *Report of Debates*, 107.

³¹⁰ Reverend William Dyer Cass, 1797-1867, entered the ministry in the Free Will Baptist Church in New Hampshire in 1820. He soon transferred to the Methodist Episcopal Church and served pastorates in New Hampshire, Vermont, and Massachusetts. He served as a presiding elder in four districts. He became president of the New Hampshire Conference Seminary in 1845. See: Fred Andrew Smart, *The Builders of Tilton School: Centennial Record* (Concord: Evans Printing Company, 1945), 9-13.

³¹¹ West, *Report of Debates*, 108.

these United States, and in the Methodist Episcopal Church, is morally wrong.³¹²

Further, Cass gave the argument that it was premature to consider the presented resolutions or threatened Church division without considering the local churches. The delegated General Conference, Cass warned, should not assume that it knew the wishes of the wider Church. At that time, Cass began to read from Wesley's *Thoughts Upon Slavery*. He was interrupted by shouts from several delegates and the Conference adjourned for the day.³¹³

When General Conference convened the next day, Reverend J.T. Peck, a Northern delegate from the Troy annual conference,³¹⁴ gave voice to a concern expressed in the Northern annual conferences. If Bishop Andrew did not resign and the episcopacy became connected with slavery, he feared that slavery would encroach into the Northern annual conferences. He said, "We resist the advancement of slavery... It claims the right to give us a slaveholding pastor! A slaveholding bishop!"³¹⁵ Consequently, Peck asked that the General Conference body to censure, not depose, Bishop Andrew. In this way, the Church could return to its previous arrangement. Slavery would not be connected to the episcopacy and the Northern annual conferences would not interfere with the Southern annual conferences' civil matters. Peck argued that the Conference should pause and return to its previously

³¹² West, *Report of Debates*, 108.

³¹³ Robert Bray, *Peter Cartwright: Legendary Frontier Preacher* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2005), 178-179.

³¹⁴ Reverend Jesse Truesdell Peck, 1811-1883, entered the ministry in 1832. From 1841-1848, he served as principal of the Troy Conference Academy in Vermont. In 1849, he became president of Dickinson College in Carlisle, Pennsylvania. He then moved to California and became a presiding elder in 1860. In 1866, he returned to New York and became one of the founders of Syracuse University. He was elected bishop at the 1872 General Conference and served in this capacity until his death. See: Bishop Jesse Truesdell Peck Papers, University Archives, Special Collections Research Center, Syracuse University Libraries.

³¹⁵ West, *Report of Debates*, 117.

held tradition. If not, he feared that the Church would experience schism and many Americans would not hear the Gospel message of salvation.³¹⁶

At this time, the General Conference body again considered the constitutionality of removing a bishop from office. Reverend A.L.P. Green, a Southern delegate from the Tennessee annual conference,³¹⁷ argued that a bishop was not an officer of the General Conference. An officer of the General Conference, such as an editor or a conference treasurer, is elected for a term and, therefore, accountable to the General Conference. Instead, Green believed that the *Discipline* meant for a bishop to be elected for life. Thus, a bishop is only accountable to the fellow bishops, not the General Conference. Therefore, any General Conference proceedings against a bishop are unjust and extra-judicial. Further, the *Discipline* made provisions for travelling preachers who could not practice emancipation because of the laws of the state in which they resided. This same provision, Green said, should extend to Bishop Andrew, a travelling preacher who was elected bishop.³¹⁸

The Crisis Continues:

The remaining days of the 1844 General Conference were consumed with debates about the proper meaning of the Separation of Church and State and the General Conference's executive and legislative authority to remove a bishop.

Reverend William Smith, a Southern delegate from the Virginia annual

conference,³¹⁹ argued——

³¹⁶ Staff Writer, "Methodist General Conference: The Majority and Minority Reports of the Slavery Committee," *The New York Times*, May 18, 1860, 2.

³¹⁷ Reverend Alexander Little Page Green, 1806-1874, entered the ministry in 1824. In 1832, he was appointed to serve the oldest and largest MEC in Tennessee. In 1835, he was elected vice-president of his conference's Temperance Society. He was an overseer of the Methodist Episcopal Church South's formation and a founder of its publishing house. Green was also a co-founder of Vanderbilt University. See: Staff Writer, "Gone to His Rest. The Venerable A.L.P. Green, D.D., After Great Afflictions, Sinks into the Sleep of Death. Biographical Sketch of One of the Most Eminent Ministers in the Southern Methodist Church," *The Clarksville Chronicle*, July 25, 1874, 1.

³¹⁸ William M. Green, ed. T.O. Summers, *Life and Papers of A.L.P. Green, D.D.* (Nashville: Southern Methodist Publishing House, 1877), 502-503.

³¹⁹ Reverend William Smith, 1802-1870, entered the ministry in 1825. From 1825-1846, he served churches in Virginia. In 1846, Smith became president and professor of Moral and Intellectual Theology of Randolph-Macon College in Ashland, Virginia. In 1856, Smith delivered a series of

that the civil law always superseded the *Discipline*. The *Discipline*, a Church document, did not have the power to forbid something that was legally permitted by civil law.³²⁰ The civil law of the United States allowed for enslaving persons in the state of Georgia. Therefore, Bishop Andrew had the legal right to enslave others. Thus, the Separation of Church and State guaranteed the legality of serving the Church in any capacity while practicing enslavement.³²¹

Because of the amount of time already spent in debate, the College of Bishops presented a letter asking the delegates to consider suspending any further conversation about Bishop Andrew's case until the 1848 General Conference. During this time of discernment, the College of Bishops proposed that Bishop Andrew remain in the episcopal office. The delegates, however, opposed the College of Bishops' request. They believed a postponement would intensify the division present within the annual conferences. Consequently, the Church's witness would be compromised in their respective annual conferences.³²²

After three days of additional debate, the Southern annual conferences conceded that the Northern annual conference delegates held the majority vote.³²³ Finley's amended resolution passed by a vote of 111-69.³²⁴ The Southern delegation also presented a lengthy Minority Report. In this report, the Southern annual conferences protested the amended resolution's constitutionality. They believed that the proceedings against Bishop Andrew were extra-judicial because there was not a formal trial for immoral conduct as outlined in the *Discipline*. Further, they stated, by

lectures, "The Philosophy and Practice of Slavery as Exhibited in the Institution of Domestic Slavery in the United States, with the Duties of Masters to Slaves," that claimed that scripture, philosophy, and natural rights all prove that slavery is a perpetual necessity. See: J.R. Spann, "William Andrew Smith, D.D.," *The John P. Branch Historical Papers of Randolph-Macon College* 4 (June 1916): 347-350.

³²⁰ Norwood, *The Story*, 201-202.

³²¹ Michael O'Brien, *Conjectures of Order: Intellectual Life and the American South, 1810-1860*, Vol. I (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 963-965.

³²² Harmon L. Smith, "William Capers and William A. Smith: Neglected Advocates of the Pro-Slavery Moral Argument," *Methodist History* 3, no. 1 (October 1964), 24, 30.

³²³ C.C. Goen, "Broken Churches, Broken Nation: Regional Religion and North-South Alienation in Antebellum America," *Church History* 52, no. 1 (March 1983): 23-24.

³²⁴ George C. Rable, *God's Almost Chosen People: A Religious History of the American Civil War* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010), 23.

Discipline rule, the General Conference did not have the power to depose a bishop. Additionally, the Southern delegation claimed that the decision set a dangerous precedent. Now, succeeding General Conference majority delegates held the ability to pass any legislation they proposed. Majority opinion would negatively impact future minority delegates. Finally, the Southern delegates claimed that the proceedings and the decision against Bishop Andrew were unjust because they violated the *Discipline*, the United States Constitution's Separation of Church and State clause, the 1804 informal agreement, and the 1816 Great Compromise.³²⁵

On June 6th, six weeks after the beginning of the 1844 General Conference, a resolution was proposed that Bishop Andrew's name remain as a bishop in the *Hymn-Book*, the *Minutes*, and the *Discipline*. This resolution passed 155-17.³²⁶ A second resolution was proposed that guaranteed Bishop Andrew and his family the Church's financial support. This resolution passed 152-14.³²⁷ For the Southern delegation, these votes solidified Bishop Andrew's good standing before the General Conference. For them, it proved that the General Conference believed that Bishop Andrew did not commit a sin by enslaving others and that Bishop Andrew continued to be regarded with honour.³²⁸

Next, William Capers proposed legislation that contained provisions, if deemed necessary, for the creation of a Southern branch of the Methodist Episcopal denomination.³²⁹ The Southern delegates reasoned that denominational division may be necessary if Bishop Andrew was formally deposed by the General Conference body. Additionally, the Southern delegates felt that denominational division may also be necessary if the General Conference passed legislation that would bar all future

³²⁵ Elliott, *History of the Great Secession*, 1087-1088.

³²⁶ West, *Report of the Debates*, 118.

³²⁷ West, *Report of the Debates*, 119.

³²⁸ Charity R. Carney, *Ministers and Masters: Methodism, Manhood, and Honor in the Old South* (Baton Rouge: LSU Press, 2011), 9, 15-23.

³²⁹ Carney, *Ministers and Masters*, 15-23.

bishops from enslaving others. Consequently, this legislation was forwarded to the Committee of Nine on the Division of the Church.³³⁰

After deliberation, this Committee presented a resolution, following Caper's proposed legislation, that would allow, out of necessity, the Church's division into Northern and Southern branches. Capers insisted that the deposition or formal censure of Bishop Andrew by the General Conference would force the Southern annual conferences to secede from the Methodist Episcopal Church. If the Southern annual conferences believed that division was necessary, the separation would occur within the next calendar year. First, however, all annual conferences within the Church must pass this legislation by majority vote.³³¹ Upon a motion to vote on Caper's resolution, the resolution passed 146-23.³³² Many delegates expressed their hope that the Church would remain united after the excitement of this General Conference waned. If unity proved impossible, many delegates said they would seek continued fraternal relations between the Southern and Northern annual conferences.³³³

The Minority Report Protest was the next order of business. The Minority Report Protest expressed dissatisfaction that Bishop Andrew was an enslaver. Additionally, the Minority Report Protest asked him to desist from his duties. It, however, conceded that, if Bishop Andrew wished to continue to execute his episcopal powers, his actions would still be binding as member of the episcopacy in the Methodist Episcopal Church. The Minority Report Protest stated that most delegates believed that Bishop Andrew had violated the *Discipline's* rule that travelling preachers, which by extension included bishops, should practice emancipation.³³⁴

³³⁰ Carney, *Ministers and Masters*, 15-23.

³³¹ Henry Bidleman Bascom, *Methodism and Slavery: With Other Matters in Controversy Between the North and the South; Being a Review of the Manifesto of the Majority, in Reply to the Protest of the Minority, of the Late General Conference of the Methodist E. Church, in the Case of Bishop Andrew* (Frankfort: Hodges, Todd, and Pruett, 1845), 182-185.

³³² West, *Report of the Debates*, 132.

³³³ Richey, Rowe, and Schmidt, *The Methodist Experience*, Vol. I, 186-187.

³³⁴ Spellman, "Interpreting the Conference," in *The History*, Vol. II, 75-76.

The 1844 General Conference adjourned on the evening of June 10th. Although Bishop Andrew was asked to emancipate or resign the episcopacy, the General Conference did not remove Bishop Andrew from office. Thus, a precedent was set that General Conference held legislative powers, not executive power. This meant that bishops were not considered officers of the General Conference. Consequently, bishops could not be removed from office by General Conference vote. Instead, bishops were under the authority of the College of Bishops and could only be disciplined or removed from the episcopacy by a majority vote from the College of Bishops.³³⁵

At this time, it is significant to note that, after six weeks of debate, Bishop Andrew was not deposed by the General Conference. Additionally, it is important to state that an official vote for division did not occur at the 1844 General Conference. Instead, the Plan of Separation gave the Southern delegation the legislative freedom to explore the possibility of forming a separate denomination.

Exegesis of Prominent Arguments, 1844 General Conference

The following section will analyse *three prominent arguments*– old-time Methodism, the Separation of Church and State, and General Conference’s executive and legislative powers– that influenced the delegates’ decisions at the 1844 General Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church. These three interwoven arguments led the delegates to interpret existing *Discipline* law regarding travelling preachers, the episcopacy, and enslaving.

³³⁵ Nolan B. Harmon, “Structural and Administrative Changes: The Divided Episcopacy,” in eds. Emory S. Bucke, et al, *The History of American Methodism*, Vol. III (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1964), 25-28.

Old-Time Methodism:

Differing understandings of the meaning and purpose of old-time Methodism were voiced early during the 1844 General Conference. Along regional lines, the delegates used their assessment of old-time Methodism to further arguments concerning the General Conference's legislative and executive powers. Likewise, delegates employed definitions of old-time Methodism to determine the appropriate relationship between the General Conference and the individual annual conferences. As with many of the 1844 General Conference's debates, enslavement was used as the context for these disagreements. The *Report of Debates* record impassioned pleas for the preservation of old-time Methodism. For example, during Reverend Harding's trial, both the Northern and Southern delegations asked the General Conference to consider old-time Methodism in its assessment.³³⁶ Reverend J.A. Collins, the counsel for the Baltimore annual conference,³³⁷ stated:

The gallant ship – our good old Methodism – has outridden many a perilous storm...We acknowledge, as true conservatives, moral excellence on both sides. Some of the best men and women we have known have been slaveholders...Did they (the General Conference) wish to make another slaveholding conference? Admit one slaveholder, and the Baltimore Conference has no longer the independent position they could now irreproachably assume! Once break down the barrier, and they must admit others! Would they thus humble their fathers in Christ, and thus trample on old Methodism?...³³⁸

³³⁶ The Baltimore annual conference was comprised of both slave states and free states. Thus, its tradition was not to accept enslavers as travelling preachers. Reverend Francis Harding, having acquired enslaved persons by marriage, was deposed at the previous session of the Baltimore annual conference. Harding lost his appeal at the 1844 General Conference, foreshadowing the result of Bishop Andrew's upcoming case. See: Brand W. Eaton, "Jacob Gruber's Place in Methodist Civil Wars," *Methodist History* 50, no. 4 (July 2012): 245-246.

³³⁷ Reverend John A. Collins, 1801-1857, entered ministry in the Baltimore annual conference in 1830. He served several circuits as a pastor and presiding elder. He was an agent for Dickinson College and was elected assistant editor of the *Christian Advocate* in 1836. See: James Andrew Armstrong, *History of the Old Baltimore Conference from the Planting of Methodism in 1773 to the Division of the Conference in 1857* (Baltimore: King Brothers, 1907), 351-352.

³³⁸ West, *Report of Debates*, 39-40.

Old-time Methodism was used by the Northern delegation's representative to lobby for the continuation of the 1816 General Conference's enslaving travelling preacher and bishop compromise amongst the annual conferences.³³⁹ Consequently, Collins claimed that old-time Methodism set the precedent that travelling preachers and bishops would not be allowed to enslave others. Yet, the same appeal to old-time Methodism was used by Reverend Harding's counsel, William Smith. During Harding's defence, Smith used allusions to old-time Methodism and its missionary zeal to further the argument that Harding should be allowed to remain a travelling preacher in the Baltimore annual conference. Smith said:

Go with me to the southern plantation...Converse with the slaves on the subject of religion and you will find thousands happy in the love of God. Their condition is better, a thousand times better, than if they had remained in Africa. I am emphatically a negro preacher. I watch over them, attend their revivals, lead their classes, and labour among them from year to year. The South is not pro-slavery but anti-slavery...We stand on the same ground we have occupied from the foundation of the Church—the grand conservative ground laid by our fathers in the book of Discipline. Slavery, as it exists among us, is "a great evil;" and I will add, to none so great an "evil" as to the master. "It is not however, necessarily a sin." I will add, it is only a sin to those individuals who abuse the institution...³⁴⁰

As Collins' and Smith's words demonstrate, both the Northern and Southern delegations evoked the nostalgia of old-time Methodism to further their arguments. Further, *The Report of Debates* provides documentation that most Northern delegates were not primarily concerned with abolition. Instead, they wished to return to the 1816 Compromise Law. In the Compromise Law agreement, the Northern annual conferences would not attempt to promote anti-slavery or abolitionist views in the Southern annual conferences. In exchange, the Southern annual conferences

³³⁹ Cameron, *Methodism and Society*, Vol. I, 157.

³⁴⁰ West, *Report of Debates*, 30, 44-45.

agreed that the episcopacy and travelling preachers would remain unconnected with slavery.³⁴¹

Conversely, the Southern delegates felt that their old-time Methodist mission was to share the Gospel with the enslaved and the enslavers.³⁴² If Reverend Harding and Bishop Andrew were not allowed to keep the enslaved persons they had inherited through death and marriage, not persons they had purchased, the Southern delegation felt that their old-time Methodist mission would be compromised by the Northern annual conferences' anti-slavery and abolitionist tendencies. Additionally, the Southern annual conferences did not believe that they were espousing pro-slavery views. Instead, by providing ministerial oversight, they considered their actions a form of anti-slavery sentiment, an expression of old-time Methodism.³⁴³ The 1844 General Conference transcript provides corroboration that most Southern delegates believed that consistent Gospel preaching, teaching, and mission work would eventually lead to slavery's end in America.

Likewise, the delegates who saw themselves as abolitionists, or sympathetic to the abolitionist movement, spoke of old-time Methodism from the General Conference floor. In this way, they used the same early American Methodist history to proclaim their worldview. For example, Finley said:

Methodism and the Methodist Discipline have always been and are now, and I hope will be while the world stands, belligerent toward slavery...so that all the world may see it as a great evil. Now, sir, how a grave body of ministers of the Methodist Episcopal Church can hold that this great moral evil can be justified and sanctified by the Methodist Discipline, is a strange paradox to me...I am a Methodist. I stand on the ground that my fathers in Methodism took, the great Wesley, Coke, and Asbury.³⁴⁴

³⁴¹ Walter Brownlow Posey, "Influence of Slavery upon the Methodist Church in the Early South and Southwest," *The Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 17, no. 4 (March 1931): 535-538.

³⁴² Cameron, *Methodism and Society*, Vol. I, 142-145.

³⁴³ Heather Rachele White, "The Glory of Southern Christianity: Methodism and the Mission to the Slaves," *Methodist History* 39, no. 2 (January 2001): 114-116.

³⁴⁴ West, *Report of Debates*, 151.

As seen above, each delegation was able to appeal to old-time Methodism to advance their cause. Thus, early American Methodism can be considered multi-faceted. As evidenced, regionalism largely determined which old-time Methodism narrative was presented at the 1844 General Conference.

Further, an old-time Methodism argument using Wesley's ministry was employed by the various factions. An earlier account in Chapter Three describes the General Conference scene when Cass attempted to read Wesley's *Thoughts Upon Slavery*. The delegate's reading of Wesley's words was met with discord and the session was promptly adjourned. The New England annual conference delegates, however, insisted that Wesley demanded that Methodist travelling ministers not enslave others. Because of this, the New England annual conference's abolitionist delegates believed that all Methodist ministers, across time and place, should never practice enslavement.³⁴⁵ In this way, the Conference's abolitionist faction believed that they were truly following Wesley's old-time Methodism.

The Southern delegation, however, claimed that Wesley instructed his followers not to intermeddle in civil politics.³⁴⁶ This was further proved, the Southern delegation believed, by the Wesleyan British Conference never enacting any disciplinary rules regarding enslaving clergy in the West Indies. The only exception to this, the Southern delegation claimed, was that the Wesleyan British Conference West Indies' missionaries were not permitted, under disciplinary rule, to address slavery because it was considered a civil political matter, not a spiritual concern. Thus, the Southern delegation found no evidence of Wesley imposing disciplinary actions for enslaving British Methodist ministers that transcended British civil law in the West Indies.³⁴⁷ Therefore, because they considered slavery a civil political matter in the

³⁴⁵ John R. McKivigan, *The War Against Proslavery Religion: Abolitionism and the Northern Churches, 1830-1865* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2018), 46-47.

³⁴⁶ Christopher H. Owen, *The Sacred Flame of Love: Methodism and Society in Nineteenth Century Georgia* (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 1998), 53.

³⁴⁷ Michael Craton, "Christianity and Slavery in the British West Indies, 1750-1865," *Historical Reflections/Reflexions Historiques* 5, no. 2 (Winter/Hiver 1978): 142, 144, 147.

United States, the Southern delegation believed that they were truly following Wesley's old-time Methodism.³⁴⁸

This shows the complicated nature of early American Methodism. At the 1844 General Conference, the Northern and Southern delegations were able to present their versions of old-time Methodism. For these delegates, their narrative of old-time Methodism provided the evidence needed to demonstrate that their understanding of the General Conference's legislative and executive powers, within the context of slavery, was correct. As will be seen when examining the Separation of Church and State and the General Conference's executive and powers as outlined by the *Discipline*, old-time Methodism will continue to emerge as a prevailing theme. Each of these arguments are interwoven, framing the delegates' discussions, and shaping the General Conference's outcome.

The Separation of Church and State:

The Establishment Clause, the first clause added to the Constitution of the United States of America's Bill of Rights in 1791, states that "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion."³⁴⁹ Although not specifically named, it has been generally interpreted that this phrase means that the Constitution requires the Separation of Church and State. In 1802, President Thomas Jefferson popularised the Separation of Church and State metaphor when he wrote:

Believing with you that religion is a matter which lies solely between Man & his God, that he owes account to none other for his faith or his worship, that the legitimate powers of government reach actions only, & not opinions, I contemplate with sovereign reverence that act of the

³⁴⁸ For a robust description and analysis of Wesley's political theology and how it has been engaged by generations of Methodists, See: James Thobaben, "Wesleyan Politics at the End of Modernity," in ed., Ryan Nicholas Danker, *Exploring a Wesleyan Political Theology* (Nashville: Wesley's Foundry Books, 2020), 108-118.

³⁴⁹ This is a transcription of the Constitution of the United States of America that is on display in the Rotunda at the National Archives Museum in Washington D.C. See: The Constitution of the United States of America, United States National Archives (www.archives.gov/founding-docs/constitution-transcript.html); accessed on February 2, 2020).

whole American people which declared that their legislature would “make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof,” thus building a wall of separation between Church and State.³⁵⁰

Over the course of United States’ history, the meaning and application of the Establishment Clause has been debated.³⁵¹ The General Conferences of the Methodist Episcopal Church were not an exception. Each General Conference debated matters, including slavery, by employing interpretations of the Establishment Clause. As will be evidenced, the Separation of Church and State was a prominent argument that the 1844 Conference’s delegates employed to frame their understandings of the Church’s responsibilities in American civic and spiritual life.

In both Reverend Harding’s and Bishop Andrew’s hearings, the Southern delegation referred to the Separation of Church and State to further their argument that the General Conference did not possess the power to disallow clergy from enslaving others. For the Southern annual conferences, slavery was a civil matter governed by state and federal legislatures. Because civil law allowed slavery in certain states, any slave state resident, including clergy, had the legal right to practice enslavement of Black persons.³⁵² Further, the Southern delegation argued that the Establishment Clause meant that the Methodist Episcopal Church’s polity could not over-rule civil law.³⁵³

Additionally, the Southern delegation contended that the *Discipline* advocated for the Separation of Church and State in all civil matters, including the practice of enslavement.³⁵⁴ Thereby, if the General Conference decreed that travelling preachers

³⁵⁰ Thomas Jefferson, “Letter to the Danbury Baptists,” The United States Library of Congress, January 1, 1802 (www.loc.gov/loc/lcib/9806/danpost.html; accessed February 2, 2020).

³⁵¹ John C. Jeffries, Jr. and James E. Ryan, “A Political History of the Establishment Clause,” *Michigan Law Review* 100, no. 2 (2021): 281.

³⁵² Joseph H. Taylor, “Review of *Slavery and Methodism*,” *The Journal of Negro History* 51, no. 3 (July 1966): 229.

³⁵³ Matthews, “The Methodist Mission,” 627.

³⁵⁴ Article XXIII-Of the Rules of the United States of America states: “The President, the Congress, the General Assemblies, the Governors, and the Councils of State, *as the Delegates of the People*, are the Rulers of the United States of America, according to the division of power made to them by the

and bishops who lived in slave states were not allowed to enslave, the Southern annual conferences maintained that the General Conference would be in violation of the Constitution of the United States of America's Establishment Clause and the *Discipline*. For example, in his defence of Harding, Smith said:

Surely this body will not give a decision in the teeth of state legislation, and also of an article of our religious faith, acknowledging the authority of the civil legislature, and an express statute in the book of Discipline...The 23rd article of our faith acknowledges the supreme authority of the state in all civil matters. The conference act specifically subjects our rules on slavery to be controlled by state legislation.³⁵⁵

Likewise, a similar argument was used in Bishop Andrew's defence. Throughout the 1844 General Conference, the Southern delegation insisted that the General Conference did not have the ability to supersede civil law.³⁵⁶ Again, for the Southern annual conferences, slavery was considered a civil matter that was to be determined by state and federal governments, not churches. In a speech during Bishop Andrew's hearing, Capers said:

...Those of the north, acting in this General Conference for the whole Church, in all the states, have no more right to run counter to the constitution and laws of the state of Georgia, than we of the south should have to oppose the laws of any of the northern states...South or north, the authority of the laws is the same, and the obligations of the Christian citizen to observe the laws must be acknowledged the same.³⁵⁷

Constitution of the United States, and by the Constitutions of their respective States. And the said States are a sovereign and independent Nation, and out not to be subject to any foreign jurisdiction." See: *The Doctrines and Discipline of the Methodist Episcopal Church* (New York: Published by John Wilson and Daniel Hitt, for the Methodist Connection, 1808), 33.

³⁵⁵ West, *Report of Debates*, 50.

³⁵⁶ Painter, "The Pro-Slavery Argument," 29, 38-40.

³⁵⁷ West, *Report of Debates*, 180.

As seen, the Southern annual conferences used the Separation of Church and State to expound upon their argument that the General Conference did not possess the legislative or executive powers to demand something that was not required by civil law. Thus, the Southern delegation believed that the Church's purpose was to address spiritual needs and leave political matters to the federal and state governments.³⁵⁸

Yet, the Northern delegation also employed the Separation of Church and State to illustrate their argument that the General Conference did have the executive and legislative powers to enforce something that was not mandated by civil law.³⁵⁹ In this way, the Northern annual conferences believed that the General Conference did possess the ability to bar bishops and travelling preachers from enslaving others.³⁶⁰ Additionally, the Northern delegation claimed that civil law allowed its citizens to practice several things, such as selling alcohol and owning theatres, that the Church forbid from its clergy.³⁶¹ Therefore, in the Northern annual conferences' opinion, the Southern delegation's appeal to the Separation of Church and State was invalid. Further, the Northern annual conferences contended that civil law did not require citizens to enslave Black persons. Thus, in opposition to the Southern delegation's description of the Separation of Church and State, the Northern delegation contended that the Separation of Church and State meant that the Church could not require something that civil law did not require.³⁶² An example of these contradictory convictions about the Separation of Church and State is found the Reply to the

³⁵⁸ Richard A. Chrisman, "In the Light of Eternity: The Southern Methodist Church in Illinois," *Methodist History* 37, no. 1 (October 1998): 37-39.

³⁵⁹ Lewis M. Purifoy, "The Southern Methodist Church and the Proslavery Argument," *The Journal of Southern History* 32, no. 3 (August 1966): 325.

³⁶⁰ Purifoy, "The Methodist Anti-Slavery Tradition," 3, 8, 14-15.

³⁶¹ Richey, Rowe, and Schmidt, *The Methodist Experience*, Vol. II, 274-275.

³⁶² In this case, bishops and travelling preachers enslaving Black persons.

Protest of the Minority. Northern delegates Reverends J.P. Durbin,³⁶³ George Peck,³⁶⁴ and Charles Elliott³⁶⁵ wrote:

But, perhaps, it is not so much the law of the Discipline which the Protest claims to cover Bishop Andrew as the law of the land. For it declares, "The rights of legal owners of slaves in all the slaveholding states are guaranteed by the constitution of the United States, and by the local constitutions of the states respectively, as the supreme law of the land, to which every minister and member of the Methodist Episcopal Church, within the limits of the United States government, professes subjection, and pledges himself to submit as an article of the Christian faith, in the common creed of the Church." If by this it is meant that the law of the land *allows* citizens to hold slaves, it is admitted. But so also it allows them to keep theatres and grog-shops, so that this is no ground of argument. But if it means that the law of the land *requires* citizens to keep slaves, it is denied. And until it can be shown that the Methodist Episcopal Church by its action, legislative, judicial, or executive, requires any citizen to do what the law of the land requires him not to do, it is unjust to attempt to get up popular clamour against it, as if it came in conflict with the civil authority.³⁶⁶

³⁶³ Reverend John Price Durbin, 1800-1876, was born in Kentucky, entered the ministry in 1818, and served circuits in Ohio and Indiana. In 1825, he became professor of languages at Augusta College in Kentucky. He became Chaplain of the United States Senate in 1831. In 1832, he was elected editor of the *Christian Advocate*, *Zion's Herald*, *Youth's Instructor*, and *Child's Magazine*. Durbin served as president of Dickinson College from 1833-1844. After retiring from the college, Durbin pastored Union Methodist Episcopal Church in Philadelphia and served as the secretary of the Missionary Society. See: James E. Kirby, Russell E. Richey, and Kenneth E. Rowe, *The Methodists* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1998), 181. See also: John Howard Brown, *The National Cyclopaedia of American Biography*, Vol. II (New York: J.T. White, 1893), 557.

³⁶⁴ Reverend George Peck, 1787-1876, was the brother of Bishop J.T. Peck. He entered the ministry in 1815. He was a founder of Cazenovia Seminary in Cazenovia, New York and became its president in 1835. In 1844, he founded Wyoming Seminary in Kingston, Pennsylvania. From 1848-1851, he served as editor of the *Methodist Quarterly Review*. He was editor of the *Christian Advocate* from 1852-1853. See: George Peck, *The Life and Times of Rev. George Peck, D.D.* (New York: Nelson and Phillips, 1874), 1-10. See also: Darlene Miller-Lanning, "Dark Legend and Sad Reality: Peck's Wyoming and Civil War," *Pennsylvania History: A Journal of Mid-Atlantic Studies* 65, no. 4 (Autumn 1998): 405.

³⁶⁵ Reverend Charles Elliot, 1792-1869, entered the ministry in 1813 and emigrated to Pennsylvania from Ireland in 1814. He served as a missionary to the Wyandot Native Americans in the 1820s. He was professor of languages at Madison College in Uniontown, Pennsylvania from 1827-1831. He served as a presiding elder from 1831-1833. He then became editor of the *Pittsburgh Conference Journal* from 1833-1834 and the *Western Christian Advocate* from 1836-1848. He also served two terms as the president of Iowa Wesleyan University. John Warick Montgomery, *Christ as Centre and Circumference: Essays Theological, Culural and Polemic* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 2012), 435. See also: John Foster Kirk, *A Supplement to Allibone's Critical Dictionary of English Literature and British and American Authors*, Vol. I (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippicott, 1897), 548.

³⁶⁶ West, *Report of Debates*, 234.

As evidenced, the Northern annual conferences were able to use the Separation of Church and State to demonstrate that the General Conference could insist that bishops and travelling preachers remain unconnected with enslavement, even if they resided in a slave state.

Additionally, the Northern delegation believed that the Separation of Church and State gave clergy and lay members the legal right to petition the General Conference and the annual conferences on any civil issue. While most Northern delegates did not demand abolition or emancipation, they believed that one of the Church's responsibilities, under the auspices of the Separation of Church and State, was to address political matters that they believed were detrimental to American society.³⁶⁷

Again, this shows the complexity of the 1844 General Conference's debates. As noted, the Separation of Church and State was a pervasive argument that dominated each delegation's speeches. Additionally, the conflicting narratives accentuated different aspects of the Separation of Church and State and the Church's Twenty-Third Article of Religion. Consequently, the delegations were able to use communal history, including their understandings of old-time Methodism, and shared civil law to present competing narratives of the meaning, purpose and application of the Separation of Church and State.

The General Conference's Executive and Legislative Powers:

The 1844 General Conference delegates spent much time advancing their understanding of the *Discipline's* language regarding the General Conference's executive and legislative abilities. Thus, differing viewpoints about the General Conference's executive and legislative powers impacted the Conference's outcome.

³⁶⁷ Paul William Harris, *A Long Reconstruction: Racial Caste and Reconciliation in the Methodist Episcopal Church* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022), 22-27, 33.

This theme is interwoven within the delegates' understandings of old-time Methodism and the Separation of Church and State.

First, the Southern delegation insisted that the *Discipline* provided a clear executive and legislative framework for the matters under consideration. Bishop Andrew, the Southern delegation claimed, had never behaved outside the parameters of the written *Discipline*. Further, the *Discipline* allowed for enslaving in certain circumstances. For the Southern annual conference delegates, the written *Discipline* transcended the verbal opinions of any General Conference body. Because of this, the Southern delegation contended that the *Discipline* did not give the General Conference the ability to subvert the *Discipline's* authoritative powers.³⁶⁸ For the Southern delegates, the only exception to the written *Discipline's* authoritative powers was if General Conference voted, in accordance with *Discipline* rules, to amend legislation. For example, A.L.P Green said:

If the Discipline of the Church had made provision for the marrying of a coloured woman, and the selling of rum, under certain circumstances; and a bishop had married a coloured woman, or sold rum, under the circumstances provided for in the Discipline, then it would have been unjust and extra-judicial to have deposed a bishop for such an act. But it is said that Bishop Andrew was elected because he was not a slaveholder; and that as he has now become a slaveholder, he ought to be put out of office. Well, sir, I hold that we have no right, according to our book of Discipline, to consider the holding of slaves, where the slaves are held according to the provisions in that book, as in any sort disqualifying a preacher for the office of bishop.³⁶⁹

As evidenced above, the Southern delegation did not believe that the *Discipline* gave the General Conference the executive power to depose of Bishop Andrew.³⁷⁰ Instead, they believed that the *Discipline* gave General Conference legislative powers. However, in the Southern annual conferences' opinion, the General Conference had

³⁶⁸ James E. Kirby, *The Episcopacy in American Methodism* (Nashville: Kingswood Books, 2000), 137, 141-142.

³⁶⁹ West, *Report of Debates*, 124.

³⁷⁰ Douglas M. Koskela, "Discipline and Polity," in *The Cambridge Companion*, 164.

never enacted any legislation regarding bishops and enslaving. Because of this, the *Discipline* did not contain any laws that specifically described removal from the episcopacy because of enslaving. Therefore, the Southern delegates believed that Bishop Andrew should not be deposed.³⁷¹

Conversely, the Northern delegation argued that the *Discipline* assumed that bishops were officers of the General Conference. Because of this, the Northern annual conferences believed that the *Discipline* gave the General Conference the executive power to remove a bishop from office without charges or a formal church trial.³⁷² As noted earlier in Chapter Three, the Northern annual conferences believed the *Discipline* gave the General Conference the freedom to remove a bishop for actions other than immorality. For example, George Peck claimed:

Has *any man* living such a constitutional right to be elected to the episcopal office, or remain in it after he is elected? I never heard of such a thing...Neither the Discipline nor the General Conference has ever said what special qualifications would, or would not, be required in a bishop. It is true, sir, that the Discipline nowhere says that a slaveholder *shall not be a bishop*, and I should be sorry if it did... As to whether a man will do for a bishop, or not, the General Conference is the sole judge, either as to his election, or his retention.³⁷³

This illustrates the Northern delegation's viewpoint that the General Conference was the sole arbiter of the Methodist Episcopal Church's episcopacy. Additionally, it indicates that the Northern delegates believed that the *Discipline* gave the General Conference its authority, including the capability to elect and depose bishops.³⁷⁴ Thus, the Northern annual conferences' understanding of the *Discipline's* legislative content regarding the General Conference's authority over the episcopacy was contrary to the Southern annual conferences' understanding of the *Discipline*.

³⁷¹ Norwood, *The Story*, 197-199.

³⁷² Koskela, "Discipline and Polity," 163.

³⁷³ West, *Report of Debates*, 116.

³⁷⁴ James A. Smith, Jr., "Methodist Episcopacy: From the General to the Specific," *Review of Religious Research* 7, no. 3 (Spring 1966): 163-164.

Peck's words show that the Northern annual conferences were not primarily concerned with abolition or emancipation. Instead, at the 1844 General Conference, the Northern delegation's main concern was that slavery remain unconnected with the episcopacy and travelling preachers.³⁷⁵ Thus, the above comments, along with others that have been highlighted within this section, demonstrate that the 1844 General Conference was an exercise in ecclesiastical governance and maintenance.

Further, the Northern delegates' focus on Church governance and maintenance is evidenced when they attempted to call the question on Bishop Andrew's hearing because they felt it was the delegates' responsibility to address additional Church business. For example, Reverend Peter Cartwright³⁷⁶ cautioned that "some members of the conference had gone home; others were sick and they [the General Conference] must have editors, and book agents, and a missionary secretary."³⁷⁷ Additionally, institutional governance and maintenance are seen when Northern delegates exclaimed that they did not expect additional speeches to alter any delegate's opinion. Instead, most delegates believed that votes had been decided before the General Conference convened.³⁷⁸ For example, Slicer said:

I do not expect to get to the light because the question has been long considered. I very much expect that if the conference should remain until the Fourth of July, they would vote just about as they would then.³⁷⁹

³⁷⁵ Cameron, *Methodism and Society*, Vol. I, 179.

³⁷⁶ Reverend Peter Cartwright, 1785-1872, entered the ministry in 1802 and was given the task of organizing new churches in the Kentucky wilderness. He was an opponent of slavery and moved to Illinois in 1824. He became a politician and served two terms in the Illinois General Assembly, losing his third campaign to Abraham Lincoln. Cartwright pastored circuits in Kentucky, Illinois, Tennessee, Indiana, and Ohio. His *Autobiography of Peter Cartwright: The Backwoods Preacher* became a national bestseller in 1856. See: Samuel J. Rogal, "Lincoln Among the Methodists," *The Asbury Journal* 76, no. 2 (2021): 338-341.

³⁷⁷ West, *Report of Debates*, 213.

³⁷⁸ For an increased understanding of delegates' desire for institutional maintenance, See: Russell E. Richey, "Methodism as Machine," in eds. David A. Roozen and James R. Nieman, *Church, Identity, and Change: Theology and Denominational Structures in Unsettled Times* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 525-527.

³⁷⁹ West, *Report of Debates*, 84.

This illustrates that, while impassioned remarks were given during the six-week Conference, many delegates did not think that the speeches swayed delegates' votes. In this way, the General Conference's outcome remained perpetually static.

Additionally, the Conference record provides evidence that the delegates were often not engaged in mutual conversation or Christian conferencing. Instead, each speaker was allotted fifteen minutes to give his remarks. When the speaker's time expired, the General Conference President called the next delegate to speak for fifteen minutes. Mostly, the speeches were not in dialogue with one another.³⁸⁰ Again, this shows an emphasis on Church governance and maintenance rather than a mutual grappling with controversial issues.

The Southern delegation, however, framed their arguments by describing an alternate view of the General Conference's executive and legislative powers. The Southern annual conferences believed that the *Discipline* ensured that bishops were not merely officers of the General Conference. For the Southern delegation, this was proven by a bishop's consecration to the episcopacy.³⁸¹ The Southern annual conferences contended that, while an officer of the General Conference, such as a book agent or a secretary, was elected to serve in that capacity for a limited term, a bishop was elected by General Conference delegates. Then, a bishop was consecrated to serve the episcopacy for the duration of his life. Consequently, the Southern annual conferences thought that the *Discipline* did not give the General Conference the authority to depose a bishop. Because of this, the Southern delegation argued, bishops could only voluntarily leave the active work of the episcopacy by resignation or retirement. Yet, the Southern delegates thought that the *Discipline* meant for retired bishops to remain members of the episcopacy. In cases such as immorality, the Southern delegation believed the *Discipline* gave the College of Bishops the ability to remove a bishop.³⁸² For example, Green stated:

³⁸⁰ Allen Carden, "Religious Schism as a Prelude to the American Civil War: Methodists, Baptists, and Slavery," *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 24, no. 1 (Spring 1986), 21-25.

³⁸¹ Harmon, "Structural and Administrative Changes," 25.

³⁸² West, *Report of the Debates*, 123-127.

For, if I understand the question before us, it is this: Whether or not we, as a General Conference, have the right to depose a bishop of the Methodist Episcopal Church for having become connected with slavery, the constitution and Discipline of our Church being judge?...In the first place, an officer of the conference is elected for a certain length of time, or number of years. Not so with a bishop. He is elected for life, or during good behaviour...When we make a book agent or editor, do we make him say that he believes that he is moved by the Holy Ghost to take on him the office of book agent or editor? No, sir. But we do a bishop when he is ordained, and we set him apart to the work by the imposition of hands...He is not the officer of the conference, but of the Methodist Episcopal Church in the United States of America.³⁸³

Again, for both the Northern and Southern delegations, denominational governance was a primary concern. The factions present at the 1844 General Conference were able to use their common *Discipline* to advance competing assumptions about the General Conference's executive and legislative powers, denominational governance, and institutional maintenance.

Furthermore, as evidenced, the Northern and Southern delegations employed different narratives of old-time Methodism, the Separation of Church and State, and the General Conference's legislative and executive powers to provide credence for their desired outcome. These arguments are interconnected, providing a framework for the delegates' debates. By the conclusion of the 1844 General Conference, however, the delegates' ideological differences were untenable. Consequently, legislation was passed to allow the Southern delegation to explore denominational separation into Northern and Southern branches.

Conclusion

After six weeks of debates, the General Conference concluded on June 10th, 1844. As evidenced, the Conference's primary focus was determining the executive

³⁸³ West, *Report of Debates*, 124.

and legislative powers of General Conference, as outlined in the *Discipline*, within the wider context of regional attitudes towards slavery. For sufficient historical context, Chapter Three described early North American Methodist history regarding slavery. Additionally, Chapter Three explored Bishop Andrew's case before the 1844 General Conference. By analysing Bishop Andrew's case, Chapter Three demonstrated that slavery was the Conference's presenting issue that, eventually, led to denominational division.

Despite this, Chapter Three also provided evidence that abolition and the slaves' emancipation were not the delegates' primary objective. Instead, the Northern and Southern delegations used three prevailing and interwoven arguments – old-time Methodism, the Separation of Church and State, and the General Conference's executive and legislative powers – to manage denominational governance and institutional maintenance. Therefore, each delegation was able to use competing narratives of their shared history, common law, and established denominational policy to further their arguments about the General Conference's executive and legislative capabilities. In this way, early American Methodist history, the United States' Separation of Church and State clause, and denominational policy are complex entities that will continued to be referenced throughout this thesis.

Chapter Four: Late Twentieth and Early Twenty-First Century American Socio-Political Change and the United Methodist Church

Introduction

The United Methodist Church experienced schism in 2022 over homosexuality. To understand why homosexuality became the driving factor for schism in the United Methodist Church, it is necessary to examine the creation of United Methodism within the context of American culture during the 1960s and 1970s.

The United Methodist Church's Origins in Late 1960s America

The United Methodist Church was formed in 1968 with the merger of The Methodist Church and the Evangelical United Brethren Church.³⁸⁴ A pronounced cultural shift occurred in America in the late 1960s. This cultural shift profoundly affected the creation and policies of the United Methodist Church.³⁸⁵ Thus, the cultural context of the origins of the United Methodist Church was one of turmoil and intense societal change. Consequently, such cultural shifts helped set the United Methodist Church's trajectory into schism.

The Summer of Love, 1967:

The United Methodist Church was founded in 1968 during the height of the Sexual Revolution. To understand why human sexuality, including homosexuality, became an area of immediate debate within the newly formed United Methodist Church, it is necessary to explore significant American events, such as 1967's Summer of Love. These events contributed to pronounced shifts in American culture and ethics during the time in which the United Methodist Church was birthed, aiding division in the early United Methodist Church.

³⁸⁴ Amanda Udis-Kessler, *Queer Inclusion in the United Methodist Church* (New York: Routledge, 2008), 18.

³⁸⁵ Nickell, *We Shall Not*, 15.

During the summer of 1967, 100,000 young people gathered in San Francisco, California.³⁸⁶ Beyond a simple gathering of like-minded individuals, the later named Summer of Love dramatically altered the socio-political landscape of American culture by popularizing liberalised views on civil rights and sexuality, a Sexual Revolution of free love.³⁸⁷ Timothy Leary, Harvard University Professor and LSD proponent, is regarded as a leading instigator of the Summer of Love.³⁸⁸ He proclaimed that young people should “tune in, turn on, drop out.”³⁸⁹ The Summer of Love, however, caused national division between those who adhered to a more conservative socio-political ethic and those who wished for the liberalisation of American culture.³⁹⁰ Robert Cancel, Professor of African and Comparative Literature at the University of California San Diego, noted:

Nationally, the image of the Summer of Love was of a youthful migration to the epicenter in San Francisco. It was seen, from the outside, as either a horrendous getting together of sex-crazed drug maniacs or something new and beautiful that said something important about the new generation...And a lot of those who went to the Bay Area then went back to their hometowns and ‘spread the gospel,’ as it were. That was responsible for the ideology of the Summer of Love spreading around the world.³⁹¹

Yet, many within American Protestantism condemned the Summer of Love as something that ran askew to Jesus’ teachings about sexual self-control and public

³⁸⁶ W. Andrew Achenbaum, “The Summer of Love: From Fantasy to Fallout,” *Generations: Journal of the American Society on Aging* 41, no. 2 (Summer 2017): 6.

³⁸⁷ Anthony Ashbolt, “Go Ask Alice: Remembering the Summer of Love Forty Years On,” *Australasian Journal of American Studies* 25, no. 2 (December 2007): 35, 45.

³⁸⁸ John Robert Howard, “The Flowering of the Hippie Movement,” *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 382 (March 1969): 48-49.

³⁸⁹ W. J. Rorabaugh, *American Hippies* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 63.

³⁹⁰ Mark Lytle, “Making Sense of the Sixties,” *Irish Journal of American Studies* 10 (2001): 1-2.

³⁹¹ George Varga, “The Summer of Love, An Epic Tipping Point for Music and Youth Culture, Turns 50,” *The San Diego Union-Tribune*, May 27, 2017

(<https://www.sandiegouniontribune.com/entertainment/music/sd-et-music-summer-of-love-20170515-story.html>); accessed September 2, 2022).

responsibility.³⁹² For example, evangelist James Gordon Lindsey³⁹³ warned Christians that they should reject the Summer of Love movement and “not start down the street with the protestors and the revolutionaries.”³⁹⁴ Liberalised views of sexuality and the backlash to these liberalised views of sexuality impacted the identity struggles found within the nascent United Methodist Church.³⁹⁵

Additionally, the Summer of Love altered Americans’ perceptions about established social mores, compelling activists to claim that the Summer of Love changed American society and its values.³⁹⁶ For example, fifty years after the Summer of Love, activist Peter Coyote said of the Sexual Revolution:

We lost every one of our political battles. We did not stop capitalism. We did not end the war. We did not stop imperialism...Culturally, however, we’ve changed the landscape dramatically...That is a huge and powerful development that I think will eventually change the political system.³⁹⁷

Underneath the Summer of Love’s ethic of liberated sexuality and civil rights, however, loomed a culture war that sometimes manifested itself in political

³⁹² Camille Paglia, “Cults and Cosmic Consciousness: Religious Vision in the American 1960s,” *Arion: A Journal of Humanities and the Classics* 10, no. 3 (Winter 2003): 65-66.

³⁹³ James Gordon Lindsey was an American Pentecostal revivalist whose emphasis was healing ministries. Lindsey founded the magazine, *Voice of Healing*, which covered the history, theology, and experience of healing. He also supported the healing ministries of prominent evangelists William M. Branham and Oral Roberts. Lindsey led large evangelistic healing revivals in Dallas, Texas and Kansas City, Missouri in 1950. He died unexpectedly on April 1, 1973. See: David Edwin Harrell, Jr., *Things Are Possible: The Healing and Charismatic Revivals in Modern America* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1978), 53, 165.

³⁹⁴ Angela M. Lahr, *Millennial Dreams and Apocalyptic Nightmares: The Cold War Origins of Political Evangelicalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 189.

³⁹⁵ W. Bradford Wilcox and Elizabeth Williamson, “The Cultural Contradictions of Mainline Family Ideology and Practice,” in eds. Don S. Browning and David A. Clairmont, *American Religions and the Family: How Faith Traditions Cope with Modernization and Democracy* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), 41-43.

³⁹⁶ Michael J. Kramer, “Hot Fun in the Summertime: Micro and Macrocosmic Views on the Summer of Love,” *The Sixties: A Journal of History, Politics, and Culture* 10, no. 2 (December 2017): 231-232.

³⁹⁷ David Kupfer, “Against the Grain: Peter Coyote on Buddhism, Capitalism, and the Enduring Legacy of the Sixties,” *The Sun* 37, Issue 426 (June 2011): 11.

violence.³⁹⁸ This demonstrates the ways in which American society experienced and reacted against a profound cultural paradigm shift. For example, historian Sharon Monteith wrote:

Strong moral claims were made by the civil rights and anti-war protestors but the conservative backlash fomenting in the 1950s was heightened in the 1960s...The decline of liberalism was simultaneously the rise of the conservative right...significant both in the faltering of liberal ideals and the success of the conservative opposition.³⁹⁹

Such disparate mores and ethics helped lead to an American populace divided over liberalised sexual values.⁴⁰⁰ The United Methodist Church was officially founded in 1968 during the immediate aftermath of the Summer of Love. Consequently, the cultural battles that enveloped America also infiltrated the United Methodist Church, helping contribute to early division within the new denomination.⁴⁰¹

Racial Uprisings, 1967-1968:

While the Summer of Love redefined America's sexual ethics, American society also underwent a racial reckoning during 1967 and 1968. The events that will be described in this section demonstrate that America experienced a massive cultural shift in attitudes about race during this time. As seen with the aftermath of the Summer of Love's redefined sexual ethics, the redefined racial ethics of 1967 and 1968 caused a backlash in American society.⁴⁰²

³⁹⁸ Mark Abraham, "Sometimes Grotesque, Often Beautiful: Pleasure, Performance, and Protest in the Radical Counterculture, 1965-1969," *Journal of Civil and Human Rights* 4, no. 2 (Fall/Winter 2018): 6, 19-20.

³⁹⁹ Sharon Monteith, *American Culture in the 1960s* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2008), 26.

⁴⁰⁰ Maurice Isserman and Michael Kazin, *America Divided: The Civil War of the 1960s* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 154, 202.

⁴⁰¹ Nickels, *We Shall Not*, 148.

⁴⁰² Jorrit van den Berk and Laura Visser-Maessen, "Race Matters: 1968 as Living History in the Black Freedom Struggle," *European Journal of American Studies* 14, no. 1 (March 2019): 1, 4-5.

When considering issues of race of sexuality within United Methodism, it is integral to employ intersectionality, the recognition that categories of race, class, gender, and sexuality, among others, are interconnected and influence one another.⁴⁰³ For example, the General Commission on Religion and Race invited United Methodists to “consider paradigms that address the multiple dimensions of identity and social systems as they intersect with one another and relate to inequality.”⁴⁰⁴ Thus, for United Methodism, the struggle for liberation in terms of race, gender, sexual orientation, and poverty must be taken into account together, noting that oppressed racial and sexual minorities began demanding equity in the denominational institution during the cultural shift of the 1960s.⁴⁰⁵ Therefore, the events described in this section and their results did not occur in a vacuum. Instead, these events’ effects permeated most aspects of American society, including the 1968 founding of the United Methodist Church, the United Methodist Church’s policies, and the United Methodist Church’s trajectory towards schism.

To begin, the Civil Rights Act of 1964 gave African Americans equal access to education, restaurants, transportation, and other forms of public agencies.⁴⁰⁶ Further, the Voting Rights Act of 1965 guaranteed that African Americans had equal voting rights across the United States.⁴⁰⁷ Then, during the summer of 1967,⁴⁰⁸ race riots enveloped America. In June, July, and August of 1967, 170 race riots occurred in various urban centres across America because of police brutality, unfair and unsafe

⁴⁰³ Patricia Hill Collins and Sirma Bilge, *Intersectionality*, Second Edition (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2020), 1.

⁴⁰⁴ Dan Moran, “United Methodist Anti-Racism Agency Promotes LGBTQ Pride Month,” The Institute on Religion and Democracy Blog, June 23, 2020 (<https://juicyecumenism.com/2020/06/23/united-methodist-anti-racism-agency-promotes-lgbtq-pride-month/>; accessed October 1, 2022).

⁴⁰⁵ Linda Bloom and Kathy L. Gilbert, “Historian Takes Long View of the United Methodist Church,” Michigan Conference of the United Methodist Church, July 13, 2015 (<https://michiganumc.org/historian-takes-long-view-of-the-united-methodist-church/>; accessed October 1, 2022).

⁴⁰⁶ U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 (<https://www.eeoc.gov/statutes/title-vii-civil-rights-act-1964>; accessed April 5, 2021).

⁴⁰⁷ The National Archives, Congress and the Voting Rights Act of 1965, The Center for Legislative Archives (<https://www.archives.gov/legislative/features/voting-rights-1965>; accessed on April 5, 2021).

⁴⁰⁸ The summer of 1967 was also the Summer of Love. Thus, the Summer of Love and race riots occurred across America at the same time.

housing conditions, low wages, and continued unequal access to voting rights for Black Americans.⁴⁰⁹ By the end of the summer, eighty-three people were killed, 2,801 people were severely injured, and 17,011 people were arrested.⁴¹⁰ Additionally, property values in Black urban centres declined by ten percent.⁴¹¹ The media characterised the uprisings as battles between Blacks, Whites sympathetic to Blacks, the police, racist Whites, and the established American societal hierarchy.⁴¹² When the uprisings ended, President Lyndon Johnson commissioned the Kerner Report to investigate the cause of the uprisings.⁴¹³ The Kerner Report broadly stated:

Segregation and poverty have created in the racial ghetto a destructive environment totally unknown to most white Americans. What white Americans have never fully understood – but what the Negro can never forget – is that white society is deeply implicated in the ghetto. White institutions created it, white institutions maintain it, and white society condones it.⁴¹⁴

Although an equal rights housing bill appeared before Congress in the wake of the 1967 uprisings, it repeatedly failed to pass with opposition from most Southern and Northern senators and the National Association of Real Estate Boards.⁴¹⁵ Senator Walter Mondale, author of the Fair Housing Bill, commented:

A lot of civil rights was about making the South behave and taking the teeth from George Wallace...This [fair housing bill] came right to the

⁴⁰⁹ Malcolm McLaughlin, *The Long, Hot Summer of 1967: Urban Rebellion in America* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 6-8.

⁴¹⁰ William J. Collins and Robert A. Margo, "The Economic Aftermath of the 1960s Riots in American Cities: Evidence from Property Values," *The Journal of Economic History* 67, no. 4 (December 2007): 853.

⁴¹¹ Collins and Margo, "The Economic Aftermath," 870.

⁴¹² Aaron Pinnix, "Night of the Living Dead Dissects the News: Race, the 1967 Riots, and "Dead Neighbors," *Journal of Cinema and Media Studies* 60, no. 4 (Summer 2021): 109-110.

⁴¹³ Martin Halliwell and Nick Witham, eds., *Reframing 1968: American Politics, Protests, and Identity* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2018), 9, 303.

⁴¹⁴ The U.S Department of Justice Office, Office of Justice Programs, National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders Report (<https://www.ojp.gov/ncjrs/virtual-library/abstracts/national-advisory-commission-civil-disorders-report>; accessed on April 7, 2021).

⁴¹⁵ Charles McC. Mathias, Jr and Marion Morris, "Fair Housing Legislation: Not an Easy Row to Hoe," *Cityscape: A Journey of Policy Development and Research* 4, no. 3 (November 1999): 24.

neighborhoods across the country. This was civil rights getting personal.⁴¹⁶

Consequently, the American populace became increasingly divided over matters of race and how race affected society.

Furthermore, 1968 brought more racial violence and upheaval, confirming the growing division amongst people groups in American society.⁴¹⁷ On April 4, 1968, civil rights leader Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr. was assassinated in Memphis, Tennessee. King's assassination sparked widespread uprisings across America.⁴¹⁸ For example, author Peter Levy wrote, "During Holy Week 1968, the United States experienced its greatest wave of social unrest since the Civil War."⁴¹⁹ In the ten days following King's assassination, 200 cities experienced uprisings, forty-three people were killed, 3,500 people were severely injured, 58,000 National Guard troops were deployed, and 27,000 people were arrested.⁴²⁰ President Johnson made the following comments about the uprisings:

What did you expect? I don't know why we're so surprised. When you put your foot on a man's neck and hold him down for three hundred years, and then you let him up, what's he going to do? He's going to knock your block off.⁴²¹

During the five days after King's assassination, the previously stalled fair housing bill passed Congress by a considerable margin, 250-172, in the House of Representatives and 71-20 in the Senate, with the name the Civil Rights Act of

⁴¹⁶ The State of Minnesota Legacy Amendment's Arts and Cultural Heritage Fund, Walter Mondale Discusses Civil Rights, Podcast, January 21, 2002 (<https://archive.mpr.org/stories/2002/01/21/walter-mondale-discusses-civil-rights>; accessed April 7, 2021).

⁴¹⁷ Michael Kazin, "Martin Luther King, Jr. and the Meanings of the 1960s," *The American Historical Review* 114, no. 4 (October 2009): 986.

⁴¹⁸ Halliwell and Witham, *Reframing 1968*, 1.

⁴¹⁹ Peter B. Levy, *The Great Uprising: Race Riots in Urban America During the 1960s* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 153.

⁴²⁰ Charles R. Lawrence III, "The Fire This Time: Black Lives Matter, Abolitionist Pedagogy and the Law," *Journal of Legal Education* 65, no. 2 (November 2015): 383.

⁴²¹ Nick Kotz, *Judgement Days: Lyndon Baines Johnson, Martin Luther King, Jr., and the Laws That Changed America* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2006), 418.

1968.⁴²² Most notably, the Civil Rights Act of 1968 prohibited discrimination in the selling, renting, or financing of housing on the basis of race, religion, and nationality.⁴²³ Interestingly, the Civil Rights Act of 1968 also contained Title X, the Anti-Riot Act. Title X made it a felony offence to “travel in interstate commerce...with the intent to incite, promote, encourage, participate in and carry on a riot.”⁴²⁴ Thus, the Civil Rights Act of 1968 both extended fair housing to minorities and attempted, by penalty of law, to quell any future uprisings. Consequently, the Civil Rights Act of 1968 caused further societal division amongst those who did not want to adhere to fair housing practices and those who believed that Title X was limiting their Constitutional rights for free speech and protest.⁴²⁵

The forming United Methodist Church was not immune to racial struggles during the late 1960s.⁴²⁶ For example, The Methodist Church formed in 1939 with the merger of the Methodist Episcopal Church and the Methodist Episcopal Church South under the condition that all Black churches in The Methodist Church be regulated into a segregated episcopal body, the Central Jurisdiction.⁴²⁷ Effectively, the formation of the Central Jurisdiction gave Blacks more leadership opportunities than other Blacks in predominately White denominations while, at the same time, systematically segregating Black congregations from nearly all contact with White congregations. This was a rigid racial constitutional policy not found in most American Protestant denominations.⁴²⁸

The 1964 General Conference’s Commission on Interjurisdictional Relations Report stated, “The Methodist Church is the only church in America which

⁴²² Mathias and Morris, “Fair Housing,” 25-26.

⁴²³ Douglas S. Massey, “The Legacy of the 1968 Fair Housing Act,” *Sociological Forum* 30, no. S1 (June 2015): 571-572.

⁴²⁴ Civil Rights Act of 1968 [Public Law 90-284, 82 Stat. 73]

(<https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/COMPS-343/pdf/COMPS-343.pdf>; accessed April 7, 2021).

⁴²⁵ Steven R. Goldzwig, “LBJ, the Rhetoric of Transcendence, and the Civil Rights Act of 1968,” *Rhetoric and Public Affairs* 6, no. 1 (Spring 2003): 38, 46-47.

⁴²⁶ Tooley, *Methodism and Politics*, Locations 2998, 3011, 3024.

⁴²⁷ Richey, *A Church’s Broken Heart*, xxv-xxvi.

⁴²⁸ Peter C. Murray, *Methodists and the Crucible of Race, 1930-1975* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2004), 51.

segregates, by its constitution, one sector of its membership on the basis of race."⁴²⁹ Reverend Gilbert H. Caldwell, an early civil rights leader and United Methodist minister, expressed his frustration at Methodism's late 1960s segregationist policies by questioning the ways in which the church interacted with the larger American society. He said:

The Supreme Court ruled in 1954 [Brown v. Board of Education] that 'separate but equal' is invalid but our Central Jurisdiction was not officially dissolved until 1968...Martin Luther King, Jr. raised the question, 'Why is the church always the taillight rather than the headlight?'"⁴³⁰

During the 1964 General Conference, W. Astor Kirk, an alternate lay delegate from the West Texas annual conference,⁴³¹ made a motion that stated, "...the Central Jurisdiction structure...not be made a part of the Plan of Merger."⁴³² Kirk's motion would eliminate the Central Jurisdiction. Kirk's motion passed General Conference by a vote of 464-362.⁴³³ The following year, Southern delegates petitioned the Judicial Council to stop the future desegregation of the United Methodist Church. The Judicial Council rejected the Southern delegates' request, leading 9,000 people to join the Southern Methodist Church.⁴³⁴

By the 1968 Uniting Conference, questions about desegregation remained.⁴³⁵ Notably, Alabama Methodists elected former segregationist Governor George

⁴²⁹ General Commission on Archives and History of the United Methodist Church, *Pride, Shame, and Pain: Methodism's History With Racism and Efforts to Dismantle It* (Nashville: United Methodist Publishing House, 2021), 25.

⁴³⁰ Joey Butler, "50 Years On: Central Jurisdictions Shadow Looms," *UM News*, April 18, 2018 (<https://www.umnews.org/en/news/50-years-on-central-jurisdictions-shadow-looms>; accessed April 9, 2021).

⁴³¹ W. Astor Kirk was a lay delegate largely unknown outside of the West Texas annual conference.

⁴³² *Journal of the General Conference* (Nashville: United Methodist Publishing House, 1964), 529.

⁴³³ *Journal* (1964), 534.

⁴³⁴ Gary Scott Smith, ed., *American Religious History: Belief and Society Through Time* (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 2020), 224.

⁴³⁵ Woodie W. White, "The United Methodist Church at 40: How Have We Done?," *Methodist Review* 1 (1999): 58-60.

Wallace to represent them at the Uniting Conference.⁴³⁶ Significantly, the Uniting Conference occurred April 21-May 4, 1968,⁴³⁷ shortly after King's assassination, the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1968, and while racial uprisings were still enveloping the United States.⁴³⁸ These events and their developing consequences affected the delegates' attitudes about merger and desegregation. For example, Reverend Melvin Talbert, an African American clergy delegate from the Central Jurisdiction and future United Methodist bishop stated:

I voted against the merger because it gave the EUB everything they wanted while the black jurisdiction got nothing but a promise. There was no commitment to having a number of delegates. They just did away with it.⁴³⁹

The Central Jurisdiction was officially abolished when the 1968 Uniting Conference passed an amendment stating that the newly formed United Methodist Church must eliminate all racial structures by 1972.⁴⁴⁰ In describing the continued struggle and division within Methodism and the United States, Reverend James S. Thomas, who would later become a United Methodist bishop, said the following:

There were those who thought the Central Jurisdiction would remain a permanent arrangement. We have to remember that every step toward eliminating segregation, from 1877 to 1968, in this nation and in the church was a difficult process. The U.S. didn't do this easily, nor did the church.⁴⁴¹

⁴³⁶ Ian B. Staker, "The Central Jurisdiction," *Methodist History* 54, no. 1 (October 2015), 67.

⁴³⁷ Southern Methodist University, *Methodist History: The Uniting Conference of 1968*. Video: 10:57 (<https://www.smu.edu/Bridwell/SpecialCollectionsandArchives/Exhibitions/Lightboxes/?itm=%7BB8038F-C6BB-4674-B037-CC57F2E9D40E%7D>); accessed September 3, 2022.

⁴³⁸ Murray, *Methodists and the Crucible*, 203, 210-211.

⁴³⁹ Butler, "50 Years On."

⁴⁴⁰ Charles H. Lippy, "Towards an Inclusive Church: South Carolina Methodism and Race, 1972-1982," in Kenneth E. Rowe and Russell E. Richey, eds., *Rethinking Methodist History: A Bicentennial Historical Consultation* (Nashville: The United Methodist Publishing House, 1985), 221.

⁴⁴¹ Heather Hahn, "Amid Tumult of 1968, a Church Came Together," *UM News*, March 29, 2018 (<https://www.umnews.org/en/news/amid-tumult-of-1968-a-church-came-together>); accessed April 9, 2021).

As evidenced, America experienced many racial uprisings in 1967 and 1968 that shifted peoples' attitudes toward previously held racial ideologies and hierarchies in American society. Consequently, changed racial ethics brought widespread cultural change that permeated many facets of American life, including the formation of the United Methodist Church in 1968. Such racial strife did not occur independently from the Church. Instead, the people who organised the new United Methodist Church were also embroiled in the wider cultural context of racial reckonings.⁴⁴² The United Methodist Church was birthed during a time of deep cultural division and was not immune to conflicts that resulted in the racial uprisings during 1967 and 1968, leading to early denominational struggles.

Vietnam War Protests, 1967-1972

During the Summer of Love and the racial uprisings of 1967-1968, American society also experienced dissention over the escalating war in Vietnam. With this dissention came a significant cultural shift in Americans' attitudes toward war and previously established socio-political hierarchies. Additionally, these emerging ethics about America's role in global wars caused considerable backlash amongst some segments of the American population, resulting in an ever-widening socio-political gap.⁴⁴³

Protests against the Vietnam War erupted in New York City after Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr. gave a sermon, "Beyond Vietnam: A Time to Break Silence," at New York City's Riverside Church on April 4, 1967.⁴⁴⁴ In part, the sermon read:

...Somehow, this madness must cease...I speak as a child of God and brother to the suffering poor of Vietnam...I speak for the poor of

⁴⁴² J. Russell Hawkings, *The Bible Told Them So: How Southern Evangelicals Fought to Preserve White Supremacy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021), 11, 122-128.

⁴⁴³ Patrick Hagopian, "The Frustrated Hawks, Tet 1968, and the Transformation of American Politics," *European Journal of American Studies* 3, no. 2 (May 2008): 1-3.

⁴⁴⁴ Adam Fairclough, "Martin Luther King, Jr. and the War in Vietnam," *Phylon* 45, no. 1 (1st Qtr. 1984): 29.

America who are paying the double price of smashed hopes at home and death and corruption in Vietnam...I speak as an American to the leaders of my own nation. The great initiative in this war is ours. The initiative to stop it must be ours.⁴⁴⁵

On June 23, 1967, in Los Angeles, 1,000 California police and 10,000 anti-war protestors violently clashed at a campaign event for President Lyndon B. Johnson.⁴⁴⁶ At this time, a Gallup poll indicated that forty percent of Americans supported sending additional troops into Vietnam.⁴⁴⁷ Yet, public opinion began to turn quickly. On October 21, 1967, the first national protest against the Vietnam War, organised by the National Mobilization Committee to End the War in Vietnam, occurred in Washington D.C.⁴⁴⁸ 100,000 people marched on the National Mall to protest the United States' increasing military involvement in Vietnam and the escalating death toll of United States' service members. An estimated 80,000 protestors continued to the Pentagon with a plan to overtake the building.⁴⁴⁹ Abbie Hoffman, one of the protest's organisers and co-founder of the Youth International Party,⁴⁵⁰ said prior to the protest:

We will dye the Potomac red, burn the cherry trees, panhandle embassies, attack with water pistols, marbles, bubble gum wrappers, bazookas...We shall raise the flag of nothingness over the Pentagon and a mighty cheer of liberation will echo across the land.⁴⁵¹

⁴⁴⁵ Martin Luther King, Jr., "Beyond Vietnam," Audio Speech, April 4, 1967 (<https://kinginstitute.stanford.edu/king-papers/documents/beyond-vietnam>; accessed April 12, 2021).

⁴⁴⁶ Mike Davis and Jon Wiener, *Set the Night on Fire: L.A. in the Sixties* (London: Verso, 2021), 299-301.

⁴⁴⁷ Gallup, "Americans' Views on the Vietnam War in the Late 1960s," (https://news.gallup.com/file/poll/230558/1969_12_18%20College%20Students%20on%20Vietnam.pdf; accessed on April 12, 2021).

⁴⁴⁸ United States Congress, House Internal Security, *New Mobilization Committee to End the War in Vietnam*, Part One (Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1970), 1.

⁴⁴⁹ Denise Levertov, "The Intellectuals and the War Machine," *The North American Review* 253, no. 1 (January 1968): 17. The 80,000 number is debated. Articles from the 1960s claim 80,000 protestors. However, later articles claim 35,000-50,000 protestors. See: James H. Willbanks, ed., *Vietnam War: A Topical Exploration and Primary Source Collection* (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 2018), 343.

⁴⁵⁰ David Joselit, "Yippie Pop: Abbie Hoffman, Andy Warhol, and Sixties Media Politics," *Grey Room* 65, no. 8 (Summer 2002): 63-64.

⁴⁵¹ Brandon LaBelle, *Sonic Agency: Sound and Emergent Forms of Resistance* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2018), 136.

When the protestors arrived at the Pentagon they were met by military police, federal officers, and Army troops armed with rifles, bayonets, and riot gear. Protestors and police fought one another with bottles and batons while tear gas was deployed by the federal officers.⁴⁵² Police arrested 647 people and forty-seven people were injured.⁴⁵³ Interestingly, media newsreels claimed the "Pentagon riots made losers out of both sides."⁴⁵⁴ This demonstrates the national polarisation present about the United States' military involvement in Vietnam.

After the Pentagon protest, other large protests were organised across major American cities and college campuses.⁴⁵⁵ By the end of 1967, President Johnson's approval rating over his handling of the Vietnam War dipped to forty-eight percent.⁴⁵⁶ Harry Summer, United States Army Colonial during the Vietnam War, reflected on why the American public's perception of the war began to change. Summer commented:

Public opinion at home turned when the average citizen perceived that we didn't know what the hell we were doing; that we had no plan to end the war. And we didn't know what constituted victory. By 1968, the public had given us four years, their money, and their sons...⁴⁵⁷

In January 1968, the North Vietnamese began the Tet Offensive, resulting in massive American casualties.⁴⁵⁸ A February 1968 Gallup Poll found that thirty-five percent of

⁴⁵² Levertov, "The Intellectuals," 17.

⁴⁵³ Willbanks, *Vietnam War*, 343.

⁴⁵⁴ Universal Newsreel, "Anti-Vietnam Protestors Storming Pentagon," October 22, 1967 (https://www.washingtonpost.com/video/local/newsreel-covers-anti-vietnam-protesters-storming-pentagon/2017/10/18/79947456-b37b-11e7-9b93-b97043e57a22_video.html; accessed April 12, 2021).

⁴⁵⁵ Melvin Small, "Influencing the Decision Makers: The Vietnam Experience," *Journal of Peace Research* 24, no. 2 (June 1987): 190-191.

⁴⁵⁶ Gallup, "Americans' Views on the Vietnam War in the Late 1960s," (https://news.gallup.com/file/poll/230558/1969_12_18%20College%20Students%20on%20Vietnam.pdf; accessed on April 12, 2021).

⁴⁵⁷ Alan Pollock, *Vietnam: Conflict and Change in Indochina* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 78.

⁴⁵⁸ Doug McAdam and Yang Su, "The War at Home: Anti-War Protests and Congressional Voting, 1965-1973," *American Sociological Review* 67, no. 5 (October 2002): 698.

people approved of President Johnson's handling of Vietnam while fifty percent disapproved.⁴⁵⁹

On March 31, 1968, President Johnson appeared on national television to announce that he was temporarily halting bombing in Vietnam. Also, he made the surprise announcement that he would not seek re-election as the Democratic Party's candidate in the 1968 presidential race, acknowledging the deeply divided American electorate along lines of ideology, race, and class.⁴⁶⁰ President Johnson said:

There is division in the American house now...With America's sons in the fields far away, with America's future under challenge right here at home, with our hopes and the world's hopes for peace in the balance every day, I do not believe that I should devote an hour or a day of my time to any personal partisan causes or to any duties other than the awesome duties of this office – the Presidency of your country.⁴⁶¹

Five days after President Johnson's announcement,⁴⁶² Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr. was assassinated.⁴⁶³ Then, on June 5, 1968, leading Democratic presidential candidate Robert F. Kennedy was shot after a primary win in California.⁴⁶⁴ Once again, this evidences that American society experienced significant cultural chaos in 1967-1968.

Invariably, such chaos led to pushback against protest efforts, resulting in Richard Nixon, the Republican Party's presidential candidate, campaigning on a "law and order" platform.⁴⁶⁵ During his campaign, Nixon promised that he would be able

⁴⁵⁹ Gallup, "Americans' Views."

⁴⁶⁰ Terry H. Anderson, "1968: The End and the Beginning in the United States and Western Europe," *South Central Review* 16, no. 4 (Winter 1999): 3-4.

⁴⁶¹ Lyndon B. Johnson, "Renunciation Speech," Transcript, March 31, 1968

(<https://usa.usembassy.de/etexts/speeches/rhetoric/lbjrenou.htm>; accessed April 10, 2021).

⁴⁶² Three weeks after President Johnson's announcement, the United Methodist Church officially formed.

⁴⁶³ Ron Eyerman, *The Cultural Sociology of Political Assassination: From MLK and RFK to Fortuyn and Van Gogh* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 40.

⁴⁶⁴ Kennedy died June 6, 1968. See: Eyerman, *The Cultural Sociology*, 57.

⁴⁶⁵ Jeremy D. Mayer, "Nixon Rides the Backlash to Victory: Racial Politics in the 1968 Presidential Campaign," *The Historian* 64, no. 2 (Winter 2002): 351.

to manage anti-war protests and racial uprisings better than his Democratic opponent, Hubert Humphrey.⁴⁶⁶ Nixon won the presidency by a small popular vote margin of 502,500 votes and a large electoral college margin of 302-191 votes.⁴⁶⁷ A year later, on November 3, 1969, President Nixon addressed the nation to say that the Vietnam War would not end immediately and to appeal to those who quietly supported the United States' military presence in Vietnam.⁴⁶⁸ President Nixon said:

If a vocal minority, however fervent its cause, prevails over reason and will of the majority, this Nation has no future as a free society... To you, the great silent majority of my fellow Americans – I ask for your support...Let us also be united against defeat. Because let us understand: North Vietnam cannot defeat or humiliate the United States. Only Americans can do that.⁴⁶⁹

According to a Gallup Poll taken shortly after President Nixon's speech, seventy-seven percent of Americans supported President Nixon's 1969 Vietnam War policy.⁴⁷⁰ Yet, as the Vietnam War continued to escalate, protests continued and citizen support for the war began to wane.⁴⁷¹

⁴⁶⁶ Ken Hughes, "Richard Nixon: Campaigns and Elections," Miller Center, University of Virginia (<https://millercenter.org/president/nixon/campaigns-and-elections>; accessed April 6, 2021).

⁴⁶⁷ H.G. Nicholas, "The 1968 Presidential Elections," *Journal of American Studies* 3, no. 1 (July 1969): 12. Also, during the 1968 presidential election, Alabama governor George Wallace ran as an Independent on the platform of racial segregation. See: Michael A. Cohen, *American Maelstrom: The 1968 Election and the Politics of Division* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 222, 335.

⁴⁶⁸ Andrew Z. Katz, "Public Opinion and Foreign Policy: The Nixon Administration and the Pursuit of Peace with Honor in Vietnam," *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 27, no. 3 (Summer 1997): 498.

⁴⁶⁹ Richard Nixon, "The Silent Majority Speech," Transcript, November 3, 1969 (<https://watergate.info/1969/11/03/nixons-silent-majority-speech.html>; accessed April 10, 2021).

⁴⁷⁰ Staff Writer, "Gallup Reports 77% Back Nixon; Telephone Survey Taken After Vietnam Speech," *The New York Times*, November 5, 1969, 11.

⁴⁷¹ Howard Schuman, "Two Sources of Anti-War Sentiment in America," *American Journal of Sociology* 78, no. 3 (November 1972): 513-514.

The United Methodist Church's official policies about the Vietnam War hardened as the war progressed and casualties mounted.⁴⁷² In 1968, the General Conference passed a resolution⁴⁷³ stating:

[We] express a growing concern over the cause and consequences of United States foreign policy, especially in Southeast Asia. The rising toll of casualties among all involved, military and civilian, in the Vietnamese war...confine and compound the tragic situation.⁴⁷⁴

By 1972, however, the General Conference took a firmer stance on the war. The 1972 delegates named the Vietnam War a "crime against humanity"⁴⁷⁵ and charged the United States with guilt and complicity in the conflict's escalation.⁴⁷⁶ The delegates asked President Nixon immediately to end all bombing and withdraw all troops by December 31, 1972. Further, the delegates asked Congress to cease providing funds for any further military involvement in Vietnam by the same date. Additionally, the General Conference urged the United States, through the United Nations, to pay reparations for Vietnamese war victims.⁴⁷⁷

This legislation did not pass without controversy. After lengthy debate, the General Conference defeated a Minority Report that stated, "All the efforts exerted by our nation and its leaders have only fed the appetite of North Vietnam to wage cruel and inhumane war."⁴⁷⁸ The Minority Report's author, Kenneth Cooper, a lay delegate from the Alabama annual conference, stated, "I do not want to indict United

⁴⁷² James H. Smylie, "American Religious Bodies, Just War, and Vietnam," *American Presbyterians* 73, no. 3 (Fall 1995): 193.

⁴⁷³ The General Conference of the United Methodist Church did not record vote totals until 1980. Then, some votes were still only taken by show of hands. See: This information was given to the author by Dr Ashley Boggan Dreff, General Secretary of Archives and History, The United Methodist Church, in a personal correspondence on July 15, 2022.

⁴⁷⁴ Richey, Rowe, and Schmidt, *The Methodist Experience*, Vol. II, 626.

⁴⁷⁵ The United Methodist Church, *Book of Resolutions* (Nashville: United Methodist Publishing House, 1972) 19-21.

⁴⁷⁶ Richey, Rowe, and Schmidt, *The Methodist Experience*, Vol. II, 626.

⁴⁷⁷ *Book of Resolutions* (1972), 19-21.

⁴⁷⁸ Lewis Sorley, *A Better War: The Unexamined Victories and Final Tragedy of America's Last Years in Vietnam* (New York: Harcourt, 1999), 339.

States Presidents as war criminals...The United States is not the only party to be blamed."⁴⁷⁹ This was the final time resolutions about the Vietnam War were discussed at General Conference.⁴⁸⁰ The Vietnam War ended in 1975 when the last United States' military troops were withdrawn after North Vietnamese troops captured Saigon, sealing the failure of United States' military intervention in Vietnam.⁴⁸¹

Section Summary:

As this section demonstrates, American society experienced significant socio-political division during the late 1960s. This era was characterized by shifting cultural attitudes toward sex, civil rights, and war. As a result, protests erupted with, sometimes, violent results. Consequently, by the end of the 1960s, a pronounced cultural change had occurred in America with the liberalisation of previously accepted social norms and mores.⁴⁸² Additionally, as evidenced in the larger cultural reactions to the Summer of Love, racial uprisings, and Vietnam War protests, backlash to these liberalised social ethics occurred, adding to the national division.

Furthermore, the United Methodist Church was organized during the midst of these cultural shifts. Thus, the creation of the United Methodist Church did not occur in a vacuum from the larger cultural shifts happening in America. Instead, the leaders and members of the United Methodist Church grappled with these same ethical debates about sex, civil rights, and war as the church was organised, thereby replicating the tensions of society in the Church. Ultimately, tension between society and church impacted the United Methodist Church's policies and its trajectory toward schism.

⁴⁷⁹ Eleanor Blau, "Methodists Score U.S. Vietnam Role," *The New York Times*, April 26, 1972, 13.

⁴⁸⁰ The next General Conference was not held until 1976.

⁴⁸¹ George C. Herring, "America and Vietnam: The Unending War," *Foreign Affairs* 70, no. 5 (Winter 1991): 104-105.

⁴⁸² Simon Hall, "Protest Movements in the 1970s: The Long 1960s," *Journal of Contemporary History* 43, no. 4 (October 2008): 656-657.

Shifting American Understandings About Homosexuality

American society also experienced a pronounced shift in attitudes about homosexuality during the Sexual Revolution of the late 1960s. Prior to the Sexual Revolution, homosexuality was largely considered a cultural taboo in America.⁴⁸³ Between 1968 and 1972, several watershed moments occurred in American society as it grappled with homosexuality.⁴⁸⁴ Because of events such as the Summer of Love and the Stonewall Riots, open expressions of sexuality, including homosexuality, became more commonplace in American society.⁴⁸⁵ As a result, an ideological division occurred between those who embraced a more liberalised sexual ethic and those who adhered to a more conservative sexual ethic. Thus, American society became increasingly divided about homosexuality during the late 1960s, the founding years of the United Methodist Church.⁴⁸⁶ Consequently, American societal division about homosexuality impacted the ways in which the newly formed United Methodist Church addressed homosexuality. In turn, from its beginnings in 1968, the United Methodist Church also experienced division amongst its members regarding homosexuality.⁴⁸⁷

The Early Gay Rights Movement in America, 1969-1979:

In 1968, when the United Methodist Church was formed, sodomy laws existed in forty-seven of the fifty states in the United States. Homosexual acts were

⁴⁸³ Colin P. Ashley, "Gay Liberation: How a Once Radical Movement Got Married and Settled Down," *New Labor Forum* 24, no. 3 (Fall 2015): 30.

⁴⁸⁴ David Schraub, "The Price of Victory: Political Triumphs and Judicial Protection in the Gay Rights Movement," *The University of Chicago Law Review* 77, no. 3 (Summer 2010): 1446.

⁴⁸⁵ Marc Stein, *Rethinking the Gay and Lesbian Movement* (New York: Routledge, 2012), 79-82.

⁴⁸⁶ Kenneth D. Wald, James W. Button, and Barbara A. Rienzo, "The Politics of Gay Rights in American Communities: Explaining Antidiscrimination Ordinances and Policies," *American Journal of Political Science* 40, no. 4 (November 1996): 1151-1152.

⁴⁸⁷ Boggan Dreff, *Entangled*, 221-224.

considered felonies and were punishable by civil law.⁴⁸⁸ The Stonewall Riots, however, brought national attention to homosexuality in America during the summer months of 1969. On June 28, 1969, police raided the Stonewall Inn, a gay nightclub, in New York City. The police raid ignited six days of protests and violent encounters with police.⁴⁸⁹

On the one-year anniversary of the Stonewall Riots, thousands of people marched from the Stonewall Inn in what was named the "Christopher Street Liberation Day," America's first wide-scale gay rights parade.⁴⁹⁰ Today, the Stonewall Riots are considered one of the major events in the birth of the gay rights movement in America.⁴⁹¹ Because, in part, of increased media attention, public perceptions about homosexuality in American society began to shift from a cultural sexual taboo to a culturally accepted sexual identity and practice.⁴⁹² As a result, the Stonewall Riots helped open conversations about homosexuality to both American society and church. For example, LGBTQIA+ activist Frank Kameny said:

By the time of Stonewall, we had fifty to sixty gay groups in the country. A year later there was at least fifteen hundred. By two years later, to the extent that a count could be made, it was twenty-five hundred. And that was the impact of Stonewall.⁴⁹³

By 1979, twenty-two states had repealed their sodomy laws.⁴⁹⁴ Additionally, Harvey Milk became the first openly gay public official in the United States. He was

⁴⁸⁸ Melinda D. Kane, "Timing Matters: Shifts in the Causal Determinants of Sodomy Law Decriminalization," *Social Problems* 54, no. 2 (May 2007): 213.

⁴⁸⁹ Terry H. Anderson, *The Movement and the Sixties: Protest in America from Greensboro to Wounded Knee* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 317-318.

⁴⁹⁰ Elizabeth A. Armstrong and Suzanna M. Crage, "Movements and Memory: The Making of the Stonewall Myth," *American Sociological Review* 71, no. 5 (October 2006): 740-741.

⁴⁹¹ Cynthia Cannon Poindexter, "Sociopolitical Antecedents to Stonewall: Analysis of the Origins of the Gay Rights Movement in the United States," *Social Work* 42, no. 6 (November 1997): 607.

⁴⁹² G. Mitchell Reyes, David P. Schulz, and Zoe Hovland, "When Memory and Sexuality Collide: The Homosentimental Style of Gay Liberation," *Rhetoric and Public Affairs* 21, no. 1 (Spring 2018): 43.

⁴⁹³ Franklin Kameny, "Stonewall: Myth, Magic and Mobilization," *Public Radio International*, 1994 (<https://www.npr.org/transcripts/736716188>; accessed April 20, 2021).

⁴⁹⁴ Kenneth Lasson, "Homosexual Rights: The Law in Flux and Conflict," *University of Baltimore Law Review* 9, no. 1 (Fall 1979): 48.

elected as a City Commissioner (1976) and City Supervisor (1977) in San Francisco, California. Further, Milk sponsored and passed a bill banning discrimination in public places, housing, and employment based upon sexual orientation. After the passage of this bill, several similar bills were passed in larger cities in the United States.⁴⁹⁵

Societal Backlash to Shifting Values About Homosexuality in America:

The national media coverage about anti-discrimination laws regarding sexual orientation, however, sparked backlash. For example, in response to the media coverage, entertainment personality Anita Bryant organized the "Save the Children Campaign" and led a repeal, by a margin of sixty-nine percent to thirty-one percent of a sexual orientation anti-discrimination ordinance in the state of Florida (1977). Bryant's campaign was also successful in repealing sexual orientation anti-discrimination laws in several American cities.⁴⁹⁶ Additionally, Milk was assassinated in 1978, causing many in San Francisco to believe that homophobia was a motivating factor in his murder. San Francisco's gay community was so angered by Milk's assassination that it initiated a series of protests, culminating in the White Night Riots on May 21, 1979.⁴⁹⁷

Increased LGBTQIA+ national news coverage, however, helped force the United Methodist Church to broaden its communications regarding the nature and practice of homosexuality within both society and church.⁴⁹⁸ Consequently, the United Methodist Church immediately began to openly debate homosexuality in both societal matters and denominational policy, contributing to an ideological gap between its members that widened as the national discourse about homosexuality

⁴⁹⁵ Simon Hall, "Americanism, Un-Americanism, and the Gay Rights Movement," *Journal of American Studies* 47, no. 4 (November 2013): 1117-1118.

⁴⁹⁶ Daniel K. Williams, *God's Own Party: The Making of the Christian Right* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 147-151.

⁴⁹⁷ Jason Pierceson, ed., *LGBTQ Americans in the U.S. Political System* (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 2019), 432-433.

⁴⁹⁸ Guthrie Graves-Fitzsimmons, *Just Faith: Reclaiming Progressive Christianity* (Minneapolis: Broadleaf Books, 2020), 67-69.

intensified.⁴⁹⁹ Eventually, this ideological division helped propel the United Methodist Church toward schism. For example, historian Scott T. Vehstedt wrote:

For much of the twentieth century, American society did not approve of homosexuality...Nevertheless, by the 1970s LGBTQ Americans made themselves visible both in public spaces and in the church, asserting their rights and dignity...Embracing civil rights for LGBTQ Americans without condoning homosexuality in the church [the United Methodist Church] was an attempt at compromise...⁵⁰⁰

Thus, it is demonstrated that major American societal events regarding homosexuality helped push the newly formed United Methodist Church into debates and division about homosexuality, mirroring the debates and division about homosexuality occurring in the larger American society. Shifting cultural understandings about homosexuality directly impacted the United Methodist Church's conversations and policies about homosexuality, leading the denomination in its path toward schism.

The Religious Right and the Moral Majority:

The rise of the Religious Right and the Moral Majority, partly in response to America's liberalising sexual ethics, has been one catalyst for setting the United Methodist Church on a trajectory toward schism.⁵⁰¹ To better understand the ways in which American politics have influenced the United Methodist Church's policies on homosexuality and its denominational schism, it is necessary to analyse the founding, aims, and purposes of the Religious Right and the Moral Majority.

⁴⁹⁹ Udis-Kessler, *Queer Inclusion*, 24-27.

⁵⁰⁰ Scott T. Vehstedt, "Gay Rights Dispute Is Pulling Apart the United Methodist Church, After Decades of Argument," *The Conversation US*, January 27, 2020 (<https://theconversation.com/gay-rights-dispute-is-pulling-apart-the-united-methodist-church-after-decades-of-argument-129606>; accessed on April 5, 2021).

⁵⁰¹ Charles E. Gutenson and Mike Slaughter, *Hijacked: Responding to the Partisan Church Divide* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2012), 1-5.

The Religious Right and the Moral Majority movements were founded during the mid-1970s.⁵⁰² One of the aims of these movements was to offer a response to the changing cultural ethics that permeated late 1960s American life, namely a liberalised sexual ethic.⁵⁰³ For example, Martin Duberman, Distinguished Professor of History at Lehman College, recognized the impetus for the formation of the Religious Right and the Moral Majority. He said:

...Whenever there is a thrust forward for social change, there's always, inevitably, a counter-reaction. This was no less true of the anti-slavery movement, than it is of the Feminist Movement, or the Gay Movement.⁵⁰⁴

As such, the Religious Right and the Moral Majority movements believed that American society would collapse if sexual behaviours, such as homosexuality, became commonplace.⁵⁰⁵ For example, Reverend Jerry Falwell, the founder of the Moral Majority, said:

The gay and lesbian agenda is normalization... In the next five or ten years, the homosexual community will have the same minority status as Hispanics and African Americans and women... There is a huge economic benefit thereto...Add to that family benefits, governmental benefits, and so on...Once the state has legalized same-sex marriage, then a clause in the Constitution requires that all the states honor that...Unless the Supreme Court surprises me, maybe ten years from now there'll be a 5-4 vote at least, saying it's okay. When that happens, we have a modern-day Sodom and Gomorrah. We have a corrupt society where the family is trashed and where everybody loses.⁵⁰⁶

⁵⁰² Richard Heffner's Open Mind: A Half-Century of Public Affairs Interviews, "The Gay Rights Movement and the 'Moral Majority'," Transcript, December 27, 1981 (<https://www.thirteen.org/openmind-archive/public-affairs/the-gay-rights-movement-and-the-moral-majority/>; accessed April 6, 2021).

⁵⁰³ A. James Reichley, "Religion and the Future of American Politics," *Political Science Quarterly* 101, no. 1 (1986): 25.

⁵⁰⁴ Heffner's Open Mind.

⁵⁰⁵ Reichley, "Religion," 25.

⁵⁰⁶ Public Broadcasting Station, Rev. Jerry Falwell Interview, Frontline Interviews, 2000 (<https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/assault/interviews/falwell.html>; accessed April 4, 2021).

Ultimately, such cultural battles over liberalised sexual ethics impacted American Methodism, leading to increased division by helping set the trajectory toward denominational schism.

Furthermore, the Religious Right and Moral Majority movements were intentional in their strategy to influence American politics by utilising larger socio-political issues to their benefit.⁵⁰⁷ For example, Paul Weyrich, a political activist who is regarded as one of the first leaders of the Religious Right and Moral Majority movements,⁵⁰⁸ outlined his movement's goal. He wrote:

The new political philosophy must be defined by us [conservatives] in moral terms, packaged in non-religious language, and propagated throughout the country by our new coalition. When political power is achieved, the moral majority will have the opportunity to re-create this great nation. The leadership, moral philosophy, and workable vehicle are at hand just waiting to be blended and activated.⁵⁰⁹

Weyrich's "workable vehicle" to achieve the Religious Right and Moral Majority movements' goals was American churches. By using American churches as the primary impetus for the message to reclaim a traditional sexual ethic, the Religious Right and Moral Majority movements influenced a considerable portion of the American electorate.⁵¹⁰ This strategy enabled the Religious Right and the Moral Majority to gain political power while dividing the larger population and, thus, churches on a myriad of socio-political issues.⁵¹¹ Also, such quotations evidence that the larger socio-political cultural shifts of the late 1960s and the counter-reactions

⁵⁰⁷ Seth Dowland, "Family Values and the Formation of a Christian Right Agenda," *Church History* 78, no. 3 (September 2009): 606-608.

⁵⁰⁸ Robert Freedman, "The Religious Right and the Carter Administration," *The Historical Journal* 48, no. 1 (March 2005): 235.

⁵⁰⁹ Paul M. Weyrich, "The Moral Majority," Undated Paper, Box 19, Paul M. Weyrich Papers, American Heritage Center, University of Wyoming.

⁵¹⁰ Doug Banwart, "Jerry Falwell, the Rise of the Moral Majority, and the 1980 Election," *Western Illinois Historical Review* 5 (Spring 2013): 141-143.

⁵¹¹ Williams, *God's Own Party*, 5-8.

they produced were partly responsible for the widening ideological gap found within American Methodism.

General Conference debates about homosexuality after 1972 were, often, in response to an American political event that occurred prior to that General Conference.⁵¹² It is important to note that, up until the coronavirus pandemic, General Conferences always occurred during a United States presidential election year and immediately prior to the national political party conventions that chose presidential candidates. Invariably, the timing of General Conference brought a politically charged atmosphere with each party's platforms in the delegates' minds.⁵¹³ Bishop Kenneth H. Carter, bishop of the Florida annual conference and president of the Council of Bishops, exclaimed, "It's unfortunate that General Conferences have always occurred during an election year in the United States. It has created increased hostility."⁵¹⁴

Carter's observation has been echoed throughout the centuries in American Methodism. For example, in 1882, George Gilman Smith reflected upon the 1844 General Conference, "A presidential election was not far ahead, and political animosities, blinding and embittering, were entering into ecclesiastical affairs."⁵¹⁵ Additionally, Gregory Robbins, Professor of Religious Studies at the University of Denver, explains the intersection between American socio-political issues and American Protestantism:

Protestant denominations [such as the United Methodist Church] are the ones that have not and do not accept ordination or blessing of same sex marriages...But, oftentimes the politics are completely

⁵¹² Charles Yrigoyen, Jr and Susan E. Warrick, *Historical Dictionary of Methodism*, Third Edition (Lanham: Scarecrow Press, 2013), 190.

⁵¹³ Paul F. McCleary, *Reform Movements in Methodism and How They Were Treated, 1784-1830* (Bloomington: Xlibris, 2014), 65-72, 77.

⁵¹⁴ Bishop Kenneth H. Carter stated this in a personal correspondence to the author on April 15, 2021.

⁵¹⁵ Smith, *The Life and Letters*, 340-341.

intertwined. They have been since the 1980s, with the rise of the religious right as a political movement within the country.⁵¹⁶

Thus, American politicians utilised the division occurring in society over such matters as homosexuality to gain votes to legislate their political platforms into law.⁵¹⁷ Consequently, as the General Conference delegates debated and voted on such matters as homosexuality during national election years, they were influenced by the larger socio-political discourse occurring across America.

Yet, despite the prevalence of the Religious Right and Moral Majority movements within American politics, support of homosexuality grew amongst the United States' general population.⁵¹⁸ For example, in 2007, a Pew Research Center study found that forty-nine percent of Americans believed that homosexuality should be accepted by society.⁵¹⁹ By 2019, the same study found that seventy-two percent of Americans believed that homosexuality should be accepted by society.⁵²⁰ David Campbell, political science professor at Notre Dame University and co-author of *Secular Surge: A New Fault Line in American Politics*, spoke to the relationship between political preference, acceptance of homosexuality, and religious identity. He wrote:

Many Americans, especially young people, see religion as bound up with political conservatism...Young people are especially allergic to the perception that many – but by no means all – American religions are hostile to LGBTQ rights. I see no sign that the religious right, and

⁵¹⁶ The University of Denver, "The Methodist Church: How Cultural Clashes Are Changing Religion," Podcast, February 18, 2020 (<https://www.du.edu/news/podcast/methodist-church-how-cultural-clashes-are-changing-religion>; accessed April 2, 2021).

⁵¹⁷ R. Marie Griffith, *Moral Combat: How Sex Divided American Christians and Fractured American Politics* (New York, Basic Books, 2017), 294-295.

⁵¹⁸ Giffith, *Moral Combat*, 308.

⁵¹⁹ Jacob Poushter and Nicholas Kent, "The Global Divide on Homosexuality Persists," Pew Research Center, June 25, 2020 (<https://www.pewresearch.org/global/2020/06/25/global-divide-on-homosexuality-persists/>; accessed on April 12, 2021).

⁵²⁰ Poushter and Kent, "The Global Divide."

Christian nationalism is fading. Which in turn suggests that the allergic reaction will continue to be seen...⁵²¹

Campbell demonstrates the division that Americans experience over religion and politics. Ultimately, such division is also found within United Methodism, impacting the debates about schism in the United Methodist Church.

Caucus Groups in American Methodism

Caucus groups, such as Good News and the Reconciling Ministries Network, formed in the United Methodist Church by the early to mid-1970s. Often, these coalitions were indicative of the socio-political divisions present within larger American society.⁵²² Thus, the cultural divide found within American society was also found within some aspects of American Methodism.

Good News Caucus Group:

On September 6, 1968, *Good News Magazine* was launched as a conservative alternative to emerging United Methodist thought on shifting American social values, including homosexuality.⁵²³ This group was based upon a letter written by Reverend Charles Keysor in the July 14, 1966 issue of the *Christian Advocate*. In "Methodism's Silent Minority," Keysor wrote:

We feel the church has been picking up on the currents of the culture and putting a Christian message on it. Methodism is lax on homosexuality and allows clergy and bureaucrats to run amok with no accountability. Methodism is too lenient on sexual values and is too

⁵²¹ Adam Gabbatt, "Allergic Reaction to US Religious Right Fueling Declining of Religion, Experts Say," *The Guardian*, April 5, 2021 (<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/apr/05/americans-religion-rightwing-politics-decline>; accessed September 5, 2022).

⁵²² Boggan Dreff, *Entangled*, 116-118.

⁵²³ Riley B. Case, "50 Years of Evangelical Renewal," *UM Insight*, September 24, 2016 (<https://um-insight.net/topics/riley-b.-case/>; accessed September 5, 2022).

permissive about abortions. Methodism emphasizes social issues ahead of worship...⁵²⁴

Good News Magazine became a leading proponent for conservative sexual and social ethics within United Methodism.⁵²⁵ *Good News Magazine* organized into Good News, one of the first caucus groups within United Methodism that questioned the authority of the bishops and other ecclesial leaders within United Methodism.⁵²⁶ In the following decades, this mistrust of denominational leadership would become a prominent argument within United Methodism.⁵²⁷ It is important to note that Good News is not the only evangelical oriented group within United Methodism. There are United Methodists who identify as evangelicals and do not belong to Good News or any other organised caucus group.⁵²⁸

By 1979, *Good News Magazine* printed paperback books and pamphlets, published a women's newsletter, conducted revivals throughout America, and organised across annual conferences to elect conservative delegates to annual conferences, jurisdictional conferences, and general conference.⁵²⁹ As a result, Good News was harshly criticised within other United Methodist circles. For example, in 1979, several bishops spoke against Good News' organising efforts and political motivation for conservative causes.⁵³⁰ Also, Reverend George Mclain, executive secretary of The Methodist Federation of Social Action caucus group, challenged Good News' identity and purpose. He said, "They [Good News] claim they are just

⁵²⁴ Charles W. Keysor, "Methodism's Silent Minority," *Christian Advocate* (July 14, 1966): 9.

⁵²⁵ Udis-Kessler, *Queer Inclusion*, 28.

⁵²⁶ Charles W. Keysor, "Coming Out of Exile," *Good News Magazine* (March 13, 1970): 22.

⁵²⁷ Mark Tooley, *Taking Back the United Methodist Church* (Fort Valley: Bristol House, 2012), Location 650, Kindle Edition.

⁵²⁸ Douglas E. Cowan, *The Remnant Spirit: Conservative Reform in Mainline Protestantism* (Westport: Prager Publishers, 2003), 60-62.

⁵²⁹ James V. Heidinger II, "45 Years of Vision for United Methodist Renewal and Reform," *Good News Magazine*, May 22, 2013 (<https://goodnewsmag.org/45-years-of-vision-for-united-methodist-renewal-and-reform-2/>; accessed September 4, 2022).

⁵³⁰ George Vecsey, "Good News Evangelicals Worry Leaders of the Methodist Church," *The New York Times*, April 10, 1979, 11.

being religious, but their political and social views are typical of the new right.”⁵³¹ Such quotations evidence that the tension found within American socio-political culture was also present within American Methodism. In turn, American Methodism grappled with its identity and purpose as it became increasingly intertwined with American culture and politics, leading to early denominational fissures.

Additionally, the presence of the larger American political divide within American Methodist caucus groups is further demonstrated by the Methodist Federation for Social Action’s response to Good News’ efforts. In 1979, the Methodist Federation for Social Action printed an editorial that claimed:

They [Good News] use rigid, traditional fundamentalism... which employs distortions, confrontations, McCarthyism and witch hunts to get its way, and which would align the church with those who rob the poor and crush the afflicted.⁵³²

The above helps demonstrate that American Methodism absorbed the cultural conflicts occurring throughout the American socio-political sphere during the 1960s and 1970s. Ultimately, this furthered denominational division and helped set the United Methodist Church’s trajectory into schism.

Reconciling Ministries Network Caucus Group:

The Reconciling Ministries Network was organized in 1983 to work specifically for justice and the inclusion of LGBTQIA+ persons in all areas of life.⁵³³ The Reconciling Ministries Network’s website states:

⁵³¹ George Vecsey, “Good News Evangelicals,” 11.

⁵³² Staff Writer, “Methodist Activists Call Faction Far Right,” *The Washington Post*, December 29, 1978 (<https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/local/1978/12/29/methodist-activists-call-faction-far-right/1fcfb60-e223-4320-a2b3-eea689477a4a/>; accessed July 24, 2022).

⁵³³ Boggan Dreff, *Entangled*, 246.

...Simply put, we [the Reconciling Ministries Network] work to advance justice and inclusion for all LGBTQ people in the United Methodist Church and beyond.

...RMN has worked to transform hearts, churches, and communities. We do that through grassroots organizing, resourcing and educating, denominational-level-change-making, pastoral care, and working with you: faithful people for a reconciled Church.

RMN began as a faith-based response to institutionalized homophobia braided into the fabric of the United Methodist Church. Now, over 30 years later, the Reconciling movement spans four continents, 1,000+ churches, and 40,000+ individuals. And we're still growing. Love is still growing.⁵³⁴

Additionally, the Reconciling Ministries Network identifies its main purpose – fighting homophobia against LGBTQIA+ people – without specifically stating its theological and doctrinal standards. Consequently, this suggests that the Reconciling Ministries Network valued challenging what it believed to be a homophobic culture that produced an unjust church.⁵³⁵ Thus, it could be surmised that the Reconciling Ministries Network was created, in part, to combat the backlash to the shifting sexual ethics that occurred in both American society and American Methodism.⁵³⁶ Similar to Good News, it is necessary to state that the Reconciling Ministries Network is not the only entity that supports LGBTQIA+ persons in United Methodism. There are United Methodists who support LGBTQIA+ persons who do not belong to Reconciling Ministries Network or any other caucus group.⁵³⁷

Furthermore, the creation of the Reconciling Ministries Network demonstrated the widening ideological differences found within the different caucus groups

⁵³⁴ Reconciling Ministries Network, About Us (<https://rmnetwork.org/about/>; accessed April 15, 2021).

⁵³⁵ Nickell, *We Shall Not*, 109.

⁵³⁶ Kenneth E. Rowe, "How Do Caucuses Contribute to the Connection," in eds. Russell E. Richey et al, *Questions for the Twenty-First Century Church* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1999), 255.

⁵³⁷ Kenneth H. Carter, Jr, *Embracing the Wideness: The Shared Convictions of the United Methodist Church* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2018), 52-54, 126-127.

present within American Methodism.⁵³⁸ These ideological differences were based, partly, on the cultural division present within American society.⁵³⁹ For example, the Reconciling Ministries Network's foundation statement clarifies its identity and purpose in language that evokes political action against perceived harm perpetuated by an inequitable society and church. The Reconciling Ministries Network's Foundational Statement reads:

We celebrate God's gift of diversity and value the wholeness made possible in community equally shared and shepherded by all. We welcome and affirm people of every gender identity, gender expression, and sexual orientation, who are also of every age, race, ethnicity, physical and mental ability, level of education, and family structure, and of every economic, immigration, marital, and social status, and so much more. We acknowledge that we live in a world of profound social, economic, and political inequities. As followers of Jesus, we commit ourselves to the pursuit of justice and pledge to stand in solidarity with all who are marginalized and oppressed.⁵⁴⁰

As evidenced above, the phrasing of the Reconciling Ministries' foundation statement unleashes a vision that includes reforming a world addled with perceived corruption by pursuing elements of justice and equity as followers of Jesus.

Also, like Good News, the Reconciling Ministries Network believes that its mission encapsulates John Wesley's and the early American Methodists' vision for Methodism.⁵⁴¹ For the Reconciling Ministries Network, Methodism's primary function is for its members to help transform the world by being agents of God's justice and

⁵³⁸ O. Wesley Allen, Jr., "How Divided are United Methodists?," *The Christian Century* (June 15, 2004): 10-11.

⁵³⁹ R.W. Holmen, *Queer Clergy: A History of Gay and Lesbian Ministry in American Protestantism* (Cleveland: The Pilgrim Press, 2013), 480.

⁵⁴⁰ Reconciling Ministries Network, How to Affiliate With RMN (<https://rmnetwork.org/get-involved/reconciling-ministry/>; accessed April 15, 2021).

⁵⁴¹ This was stated by Helen Ryde, Reconciling Ministries Southeast Jurisdiction Regional Organizer, at a Reconciling Ministries Network event prior to the 2019 General Conference, February 23, 2019. The author was present at this event.

mercy through intersectional relationships that promote both social and personal holiness.⁵⁴²

Therefore, the Reconciling Ministries Network seeks to recapture their understanding of the early Methodists' vision of societal transformation. For the Reconciling Ministries Network, participating in acts of justice and equity in the larger society would help disengage American Methodism from an overwrought emphasis on a personal faith that lacks commitment to enacting social holiness or that separates social holiness and personal holiness.⁵⁴³

Further, although both the Reconciling Ministries Network and Good News wish to use their political and spiritual influence to enact change in American society, the Reconciling Ministries Network proposes change by challenging established social hierarchies rather than emphasising personal salvation.⁵⁴⁴ In this way, the Reconciling Ministries Network is reminiscent of the counter-cultural movements of the late 1960s that sought to liberalise America's social mores and ethical standards. This provides evidence that American Methodism mirrors the ideological divisions, especially regarding sexual ethics, that are present within American culture.⁵⁴⁵ Thus, American Methodism continues to be explicitly intertwined with American society, holding in tension the cultural elements that have helped propel the United Methodist Church into schism.

⁵⁴² Cynthia B. Astle, "Rooted and Rising to Take Reconciling Ministries Network into the Future," *UM Insight*, September 23, 2020 (<https://um-insight.net/in-the-church/umc-future/rooted-rising-to-take-reconciling-ministries-network-into-/>; accessed September 15, 2022).

⁵⁴³ Morgan Guyton, "Practical Holiness is Wesleyan Orthodoxy," *Patheos*, February 26, 2019 (<https://www.patheos.com/blogs/mercynotsacrifice/2019/02/26/practical-holiness-is-wesleyan-orthodoxy/>; accessed September 1, 2022).

⁵⁴⁴ This was stated by Jan Lawrence, Executive Director of Reconciling Ministries Network, at a Reconciling Ministries Network event prior to the 2019 General Conference, February 23, 2019. The author was present at this event.

⁵⁴⁵ Jennifer McKinney and Roger Finke, "Reviving the Mainline: An Overview of Clergy Support for Evangelical Renewal Movements," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 41, no. 4 (December 2002): 771.

Section Summary:

In closing, this section demonstrated that shifting cultural values and societal ethics influenced the formation of opposing caucus groups within United Methodism, including Good News and the Reconciling Ministries Network, creating division within American Methodism. Therefore, it can be surmised that divergent opinions about shifting cultural values were absorbed and replicated by American Methodists, helping propel the United Methodist Church into schism.

Conclusion

Chapter Four has evidenced that American Methodism closely mirrors American society. Since its founding in 1968, the United Methodist Church has absorbed the socio-political battles that have occurred within the greater American society, intertwining American Methodism with American culture. Additionally, the United Methodist Church was organised during a time of profound civil unrest. As such, it experienced division from its earliest days. The nascent United Methodist Church grappled with the same shifting cultural values that gripped the North American socio-political sphere.

Chapter Five: The United Methodist Church and Homosexuality, 1968-2022

Introduction

On February 23, 2019, a special called session of the General Conference of the United Methodist Church convened in St. Louis, Missouri.⁵⁴⁶ The 833 lay and clergy delegates,⁵⁴⁷ elected by their respective worldwide annual and central conferences,⁵⁴⁸ engaged in a four-day debate about the United Methodist Church's policy regarding homosexuality. This debate led to the adoption of legislation that tightened the denomination's prohibitions against homosexuality and, thus, resulted in eventual schism within the United Methodist Church. For sufficient historical context, Chapter Five will trace and analyse the United Methodist Church's official stances on homosexuality from its 1968 organisational conference until the 2016 General Conference, including the influence of American culture upon American Methodism. Then, it will describe the 2019 General Conference, the events proceeding the Conference, and exegete three prominent arguments- scriptural interpretation, denominational unity, and ecclesial authority- used to debate the United Methodist Church's position on homosexuality.

⁵⁴⁶ The 2019 General Conference was the second General Conference to be convened in addition to the regularly scheduled General Conferences held every four years. The first was a special session of the General Conference to be held in April 1970. Although the United Methodist Church was first formed in 1968, a special session of the General Conference in 1970 was convened for the General Conference delegates and the Council of Bishops to receive progress reports and plans from the commissions created at the 1968 General Conference. See: Richey, Rowe, and Schmidt, *American Methodism*, 201.

⁵⁴⁷ The number of delegates for the 2019 General Conference was set at 864, half clergy delegates and half lay delegates. The number of delegates assigned to each annual conference is based upon that annual conference's membership. The same delegates for the 2016 General Conference were used for the 2019 General Conference. However, thirty-one of these delegates were unable to attend the 2019 General Conference because they could not obtain a visa to travel into the United States. See: John Lomperis, "Was General Conference's Adoption of the Traditional Plan Really That Narrow?," Institute of Religion and Democracy Blog, April 22, 2019 (<https://juicyecumenism.com/2019/04/22/general-conferences-adoption-traditional-plan-really-narrow/>; accessed August 23, 2022).

⁵⁴⁸ Church regions in Africa, the Philippines, and Europe are considered central conferences. Per the *Discipline*, central conferences can adapt the *Discipline* to their cultural contexts. See: *The Book of Discipline* (Nashville: United Methodist Publishing House, 2012), 373-375.

The United Methodist Church's Official Stances on Homosexuality, 1968-2019

The Initial Debates, 1968-1980:

The 1968-2016 General Conferences addressed homosexuality while the United States was experiencing significant cultural shifts in its perception of homosexuality. Often, the debates and the decisions that occurred during the General Conferences mirrored the changing viewpoints of American society. Additionally, as certain segments of the population reacted against more liberalised sexual ethics, caucus groups within American Methodism, such as Good News, were organised to advocate for a return to and/or maintenance of more traditional expressions of sexuality.⁵⁴⁹ Thus, the tensions that existed in American society regarding homosexuality often overlapped into United Methodists' understanding of homosexuality. This included how these doctrines would be implemented for homosexual clergy and same-sex weddings within the United Methodist Church.

1968 General Conference:

The United Methodist Church formed April 23, 1968 when the 10,289,000 member The Methodist Church merged with the 738,000 member Evangelical United Brethren Church at the Uniting Conference in Dallas, Texas.⁵⁵⁰ Up until the late 1960s, The Methodist Church did not address homosexuality in its official communications or have an official policy about homosexuality.⁵⁵¹ This, however, began to shift in the late 1960s as American society began to grapple with the effects of the Sexual Revolution. In *The Religious Crisis of the 1960s*, Hugh McLeod named 1967 and 1968

⁵⁴⁹ Steven M. Tipton, *Public Pulpits: Methodists and Mainline Church in the Moral Argument of Public Life* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2007), Location 1553, 1557, Kindle edition.

⁵⁵⁰ Norwood, *The Story*, 429.

⁵⁵¹ Jeyoul Choi, "Loving My New Neighbor: The Korean-American Methodists' Response to the UMC Debate Over LGBTQ Individuals in Everyday Life," *Religions* 12, no. 8 (July 2021): 3.

as a time of extreme change in Christian identity and practice in America.⁵⁵² McLeod wrote:

In the religious history of the west, these years [1967 and 1968] may come to be seen as marking a rupture as profound as that brought about by the Reformation.⁵⁵³

McLeod demonstrates that the shifting cultural values of the late 1960s also led to a reassessment of previously accepted Christian theology and biblical interpretation.

The emerging United Methodist Church grappled with changing theological and biblical interpretations about human sexuality during its founding General Conference.⁵⁵⁴ For example, the following is taken from a report given at the United Methodist Church's 1968 General Conference's Committee No. 1's meeting. The quotation provides evidence that from its inception the United Methodist Church struggled with America's changing sexual ethics. The report stated:

We recognize that many persons who are troubled and broken by sexual problems, such as homosexuality, suffer from discriminatory practices arising from traditional attitudes and from outmoded legal practices. We strongly recommend that wherever possible such persons be brought under the care of our health and human development services rather than under penal and correctional services. We believe that the ministry of the Church extends to all human beings troubled and broken by sexual problems and they should find forgiveness and redemption within its fellowship.⁵⁵⁵

By stating that homosexuality was a sign of sexual brokenness and that homosexuals experienced discrimination because of an inadequate response from both society and the church, the nascent United Methodist Church attempted to affirm some

⁵⁵² Hugh McLeod, *The Religious Crisis of the 1960s* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 1.

⁵⁵³ McLeod, *The Religious Crisis*, 265.

⁵⁵⁴ John Howard, *Men Like That: A Southern Queer History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), 244.

⁵⁵⁵ Mark A. Smith, *Secular Faith: How Culture Has Trumped Religion in American Politics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015), 112-113.

aspects of both traditional sexual ethics and liberalised sexual ethics. Likewise, in its first words on homosexuality, the United Methodist Church sought to extend civil rights to homosexual persons while naming homosexuality as a sexual problem, thus, seeking to offer compromise in the burgeoning division over homosexuality.⁵⁵⁶

1968-1972:

Between 1968-1972, gay rights advocates hosted forums and officiated same-sex marriage unions within United Methodist congregations.⁵⁵⁷ Because the Church did not have an official stance regarding homosexuality, these activities were not in violation of *Discipline* law.⁵⁵⁸ For example, in 1971, Reverend Roger Lynn of the Minnesota annual conference, officiated a wedding for two men who had procured a marriage license in the state of Minnesota.⁵⁵⁹ Reverend Lynn was not reprimanded by the Minnesota annual conference for officiating the wedding. However, the state of Minnesota revoked the couple's marriage license.⁵⁶⁰ Then, in 1972, the Supreme Court of the United States declined to hear the couple's petition to receive another marriage license "for want of a federal question."⁵⁶¹ The Supreme Court's decision shifted all civil and legal decisions about marriage to state legislatures.⁵⁶²

Additionally, from 1968-1972, although there was not an official denominational stance on homosexuality, annual conferences within the United

⁵⁵⁶ Mark G. Toulouse, "The Muddled Middle," in ed. Dane S. Claussen, *Sex, Religion, and Media* (New York: Rowan and Littlefield, 2005), 45-46.

⁵⁵⁷ These wedding ceremonies were not legally recognised. See: Marc Stein, *Rethinking the Gay and Lesbian Movement* (New York, Routledge, 2012), 105-109.

⁵⁵⁸ Doug Belden, "Gay Marriage Landmark? Minnesota Pastor Who Conducted 1971 Ceremony Thinks So," *Twin Cities Pioneer Press*, August 15, 2012 (<https://www.twincities.com/2012/08/15/gay-marriage-landmark-minnesota-pastor-who-conducted-1971-ceremony-thinks-so/>; accessed August 21, 2022).

⁵⁵⁹ Ian Loveland, "Liberty, Equality and the Right to Marry under the Fourteenth Amendment," *British Journal of American Legal Studies* 6, no. 2 (December 2017): 242.

⁵⁶⁰ Christopher Waldrep, "The Use and Abuse of the Law: Public Opinion and United Methodist Church Trials of Ministers Performing Same-Sex Union Ceremonies," *Law and History Review* 30, no. 4 (November 2012): 964.

⁵⁶¹ Mary Anne Case, "Marriage Licenses," *Minnesota Law Review* 89, no. 6 (June 2005): 1763.

⁵⁶² Michael Boucai, "Glorious Precedents: When Gay Marriage Was Radical," *Yale Journal of Law and Humanities* 27, no. 1 (Winter 2015): 47-48.

States began considering penalties for clergypersons performing same-sex marriages and for clergypersons participating in homosexual relationships.⁵⁶³ An example of this, also in 1971, is Reverend Gene Leggett's suspension by the Southwest Texas annual conference, by a margin of 144-117,⁵⁶⁴ for revealing that he was an openly gay clergyperson. Reverend Leggett was never reinstated as a United Methodist minister.⁵⁶⁵

The 1972 General Conference:

At the 1972 General Conference, the United Methodist Church adopted its first official policy regarding the nature and practice of homosexuality. During a significant American societal shift about acceptable sexual practices, delegates who adhered to a more traditional sexual ethic continued to hold a slim delegate majority.⁵⁶⁶ The Social Principles Study Commission,⁵⁶⁷ attempting to secure civil rights for homosexual persons,⁵⁶⁸ recommended that the General Conference adopt the following language as the United Methodist Church's polity on homosexuality:

Homosexuals, no less than heterosexuals are persons of sacred worth, who need the ministry and guidance of the church in their struggles for human fulfillment, as well as the spiritual and emotional care of a fellowship which enables reconciling relationships with God, with others, and with self. Further, we insist that all persons are entitled to have their human and civil rights ensured.⁵⁶⁹

⁵⁶³ Heather R. White, *Reforming Sodom: Protestants and the Rise of Gay Rights* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2015), 164.

⁵⁶⁴ Robert W. Sledge, "The Saddest Day: Gene Leggett and the Origins of the Incompatible Clause," *Methodist History* 55, no. 3 (April 2017): 160.

⁵⁶⁵ Sledge, "The Saddest Day," 160.

⁵⁶⁶ Waldrep, "The Use and Abuse," 967.

⁵⁶⁷ According to Frances Lyons, Reference Archivist, the General Commission of Archives and History at Drew University does not have the manuscript papers of this Study Commission. This was stated in a personal correspondence with the author on October 12, 2022.

⁵⁶⁸ Boggan Dreff, *Entangled*, 231.

⁵⁶⁹ *Daily Christian Advocate* (Nashville: United Methodist Publishing House, 1972), 484.

The phrase regarding civil rights for homosexuals caused significant debate. Russell Kibler, a lay delegate from the Indiana annual conference,⁵⁷⁰ asked what supporting civil rights for homosexuals meant. Dr Robert Moon, a clergy delegate from the California-Nevada annual conference,⁵⁷¹ responded:

Homosexuals are being persecuted in society. It is unjust for homosexuals to lose their jobs upon employers discovering that they are gay or lesbian. The church supports the oppressed wherever they might be found and it ought to support homosexuals by defending their civil rights.⁵⁷²

After this clarification, Kibler stated the United Methodist Church should not support civil rights for homosexuals because “ensuring the human and civil rights of homosexuals would give homosexuals license to prey on young men.”⁵⁷³ Dr Moon responded that this legislation spoke to protecting the persecuted. Nevertheless, a long debate about sexual norms followed, including the assertion that homosexual men were a grave danger to children.⁵⁷⁴

Seeking to end the debate, Don Hand, a lay delegate from the Southwest Texas annual conference,⁵⁷⁵ motioned that the Social Principles recommendation be amended to include the phrase, “although we do not condone the practice of homosexuality and consider this practice incompatible with Christian teaching.”⁵⁷⁶

⁵⁷⁰ Russell Kibler was a layperson unknown by most delegates outside of the South Indiana annual conference. See: Scott Vehstedt, “Continuity in the Face of Social Change: Demographic Shifts in the United Methodist Church’s Institutional Conservatism on Sexuality,” *Intermountain West Journal of Religious Studies* 8, no. 1 (Fall 2017): 41.

⁵⁷¹ Dr Robert Moon was a clergyperson who was active in the Civil Rights Movement. He marched with Dr Martin Luther King, Jr. He also protested the Vietnam War and nuclear armament. See: Sledge, “The Saddest Day,” 166-167.

⁵⁷² *Daily Christian Advocate* (1972), 705.

⁵⁷³ *Daily Christian Advocate* (1972), 705.

⁵⁷⁴ Nickell, *We Shall Not*, 101.

⁵⁷⁵ Don Hand, an attorney, was a layperson who served as the chancellor of the Southwest Texas annual conference and member of the Southwest Texas Methodist Hospital board of trustees. See: Don Hand, “Homosexuality and the 1972 Social Principles-Did the Conflict Begin with the Language?,” Institute of Religion and Democracy, July 4, 2014 (<https://juicyecumenism.com/2014/07/04/don-hand-homosexuality-and-the-1972-social-principles-did-the-conflict-begin-with-the-language>; accessed on April 5, 2021).

⁵⁷⁶ Udis-Kessler, *Queer Inclusion*, 27.

Bishop O. Eugene Slater, Southwest Texas annual conference, put Hand's amendment before the General Conference body for a vote by show of hands.⁵⁷⁷ Bishop Slater, after seeing the show of hands, exclaimed, "And, I believe, the amendment carries."⁵⁷⁸ This vote by show of hands set the precedent for the United Methodist Church's polity regarding homosexuality for the next fifty years.⁵⁷⁹ Also, the 1972 General Conference voted by show of hands to prohibit homosexual marriage unions by inserting into the *Discipline*, "We do not recommend marriage between two persons of the same sex."⁵⁸⁰ The 1972 General Conference saw delegates who championed a more liberalised view of sexuality trying to pass legislation that would officially support the civil rights of homosexuals. Inadvertently, this desire led to the passage of the incompatibility clause and set the trajectory for denominational schism.⁵⁸¹

Hand reflected upon the anxiety felt at the 1972 General Conference. He said:

This language [the debate] reflected the ideology of the sexual revolution of the late 1960s and early 1970s in its embrace of recreational sexual intercourse as a means of personal gratification and a civil right. As such [the United Methodist Church]...risked... conforming...to the licentious behavior of the world. Many delegates were fearful that the adoption of the proposed statement would result in the immediate division of the four-year-old denomination...My emotions consisted of concern for the viability of the United Methodist Church as a Christian denomination in a rapidly changing world.⁵⁸²

⁵⁷⁷ Throughout the 1970s and much of the 1980s, most General Conference votes were done by show of hands. Delegates had color coded cards that they would raise when voting. The votes were only counted if it was determined that the margin was close. See: Dr Ashley Boggan Dreff, General Secretary of Archives and History, The United Methodist Church, in a personal correspondence with the author on July 15, 2022.

⁵⁷⁸ Sledge, "The Saddest Day," 170.

⁵⁷⁹ Holmen, *Queer Clergy*, 464, 468-469. Also, for the remainder of this chapter, the phrase "incompatibility clause" will be used to refer to the 1972 General Conference's decision about homosexuality.

⁵⁸⁰ Tooley, *Methodism and Politics*, Location 3544.

⁵⁸¹ Vehstedt, "Continuity," 42-43.

⁵⁸² Hand, "Homosexuality."

As evidenced above, Hand expressed that his main purpose in making his motion was to attempt to counteract the shifting sexual mores of America. He was mostly concerned about the social ramifications of a liberalised sexual ethic and the continued existence of the United Methodist Church. He did not exegete scripture passages about homosexuality nor give a detailed theological presentation about homosexuality.⁵⁸³

The debates and decisions about homosexuality at the 1972 General Conference mirrored the larger socio-political conversation that occurred in America during the early 1970s. While division grew in America about liberalised sexual ethics, division also widened in the United Methodist Church, leading many to fear that the denomination would experience schism only four years after its founding.⁵⁸⁴ As evidenced above, the debates regarding homosexuality at the 1972 General Conference centred on how liberalised sexual ethics, including homosexuality, affected the social fabric of American culture. During the 1972 General Conference, specific arguments about biblical precedent and homosexuality were not forefront. Instead, the delegates focused on how homosexuality would impact both church and society if homosexuality became an acceptable sexual practice.⁵⁸⁵

motive magazine.⁵⁸⁶

Additionally, in 1972, the final two issues of *motive magazine*, the official The Methodist Church/United Methodist student magazine from 1941-1972, were published independently of the United Methodist Church Publishing House.⁵⁸⁷ In the

⁵⁸³ Boggan Dreff, *Entangled*, 234-236.

⁵⁸⁴ Phillip F. Cramer and William L. Harbison, *The Fight for Marriage: Church Conflicts and Courtroom Contests* (Nashville, Abingdon Press, 2018), 19.

⁵⁸⁵ Nickel, *We Shall Not*, 100-101.

⁵⁸⁶ *motive magazine* is never capitalised.

⁵⁸⁷ *motive magazine* Digitized Archives, Boston University School of Theology Library (<https://sth-archon.bu.edu/motive/motive.html>; accessed on August 21, 2022).

article, "*motive* Comes Out!," editors Joan E. Biren, Rita Mae Brown, Charlotte Bunch, and Colletta Reid wrote:

Throughout *motive's* history, radical dissension within limits was tolerated with a few slaps on the wrists, but the church fathers really squirmed when the special issue on women [lesbianism] appeared in March-April 1969...The church began to reduce its support for *motive* and *motive* decided it could no longer function under the church. *motive* could not survive without church money, so the staff and editorial board decided to close up shop-using the remaining resources of the magazine to put one final *gay* issue.⁵⁸⁸

The official United Methodist student magazine received criticism when it published an issue in 1969 that discussed lesbianism. Following this issue, churches, mostly in the Southern states, threatened to withhold their apportionments if the United Methodist Church continued to allow such articles in an official United Methodist publication.⁵⁸⁹ In 1972, the United Methodist Church's Board of Education, *motive's* publisher, decided to end its support of the magazine. Without funding from the denomination, *motive* was unable to continue and used its remaining resources to print its last two issues that were devoted to gay rights.⁵⁹⁰

As evidenced, the United Methodist Church struggled with disagreements about homosexuality since its founding in 1968. Further, differing interpretations of proper Christian belief, influenced by a renewed willingness to examine critically Christianity during the late 1960s, contributed to the division found in the larger American society about acceptable sexual practices. Consequently, division also escalated in the United Methodist Church.

⁵⁸⁸ Joan E. Biren, Rita Mae Brown, Charlotte Bunch, and Colletta Reid, "motive Comes Out!," *motive* V, no. 1 (March-April 1972): 1.

⁵⁸⁹ Karen P. Oliveto, *Our Strangely Warmed Hearts: Coming Out into God's Call* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2018). 37.

⁵⁹⁰ Richey, Rowe, and Schmidt, *The Methodist Experience*, Vol. II, 626.

Guidelines Related to Homosexuality Are Debated Relevant to Ordination and Marriage, 1976-2000

1976 General Conference:

The 1976 General Conference continued to debate the Church's position on homosexuality. In addition to upholding the Church's position on homosexuality, the 1976 General Conference delegates voted by show of hands to accept three new guidelines for church funding.⁵⁹¹ The first guideline read, "No agency shall give United Methodist funds to any 'gay' organization or use any such funds to promote the acceptance of homosexuality."⁵⁹² The second guideline said, "The use of resources and funds by boards and agencies only in support of programs consistent with the Social Principles of the Church."⁵⁹³ The third guideline "prohibited funds for projects favoring homosexual practices."⁵⁹⁴ Also, the 1976 General Conference delegates amended the language regarding same-sex marriage unions by adopting the following as *Discipline* law by show of hands, "We do not recognize a relationship between two persons of the same sex as constituting marriage."⁵⁹⁵

1980 General Conference:

At the 1980 General Conference, delegates voted by a margin of 729-225⁵⁹⁶ to retain the incompatibility language. The 1976 language regarding marriage unions was removed by show of hands and, in its place, the Conference delegates voted by show of hands to define marriage as "the union between one man and one woman."⁵⁹⁷ Additionally, a motion was proposed to add a phrase to the *Discipline*

⁵⁹¹ Udis-Kessler, *Queer Inclusion*, 194.

⁵⁹² *Daily Christian Advocate* (Nashville: United Methodist Publishing House, 1976), 492.

⁵⁹³ *Daily Christian Advocate* (1976), 492.

⁵⁹⁴ *Daily Christian Advocate* (1976), 492.

⁵⁹⁵ Tooley, *Methodism and Politics*, Location 3598.

⁵⁹⁶ Udis-Kessler, *Queer Inclusion*, 194.

⁵⁹⁷ Vehstedt, "Continuity," 48.

that would ban the ordination and appointment of practicing homosexuals. After much debate, this motion failed to pass the General Conference body by a show of hands.⁵⁹⁸ Delegates had argued that specific language regarding homosexuality and ordination was not needed because the *Discipline* did not mandate the individual practices that would exclude people from ordination. They claimed that such a list of practices would be endless. Instead, the delegates appealed to the incompatibility clause and the responsibility of annual conferences not to ordain practicing homosexual persons.⁵⁹⁹

1984 General Conference:

By the early 1980s, the gay rights movement had begun to suffer politically with the repeal of some anti-discrimination laws. Additionally, throughout American society, the AIDS epidemic caused fear about homosexuality's role in this developing public health crisis.⁶⁰⁰ General Conferences throughout the 1980s tightened their restrictions on homosexuality.

The 1984 General Conference delegates adopted, as a requirement for ordination, a commitment to "fidelity in marriage and celibacy in singleness by a vote of 568-404."⁶⁰¹ Essentially, because homosexuals were not legally allowed to marry in the United States, this amendment to the *Discipline* forbade any openly gay persons who were sexually active from serving as United Methodist clergy. Also, during the same vote, with a margin of 568-404,⁶⁰² the delegates inserted the following language on homosexuality into the *Discipline*:

⁵⁹⁸ Riley B. Case, "1980 General Conference and the Evangelicals," *Methodist History* 60, no. 1 (June 2022): 41-42.

⁵⁹⁹ Dorothy Williams, *The Church Studies Homosexuality* (Nashville: Cokesbury, 1994), 11.

⁶⁰⁰ Kenneth D. Wald, James W. Button, and Barbara A. Rienzo, "The Politics of Gay Rights in American Communities: Explaining Antidiscrimination Ordinances and Policies," *American Journal of Political Science* 40, no. 4 (November 1996): 1161-1162, 1168.

⁶⁰¹ Boggan Dreff, *Entangled*, 245.

⁶⁰² Udis-Kessler, *Queer Inclusion*, 194.

Since the practice of homosexuality is incompatible with Christian teaching, self-avowed practicing homosexuals are not to be accepted as candidates, ordained as ministers, or appointed to serve in the United Methodist Church.⁶⁰³

The above statement had been defeated at the 1980 General Conference. At the 1982 Rocky Mountain annual conference session, however, a delegate asked the annual conference body if it was permissible for an ordinand to be openly gay. Bishop Melvin Wheatley declared that the *Discipline* did not contain any explicit language that would disqualify an openly gay person from ordination.⁶⁰⁴ In Decision 513, the Judicial Council agreed with Bishop Wheatley saying, "The evaluation of candidates is carried out by the Board of Ordained Ministry based on the specific requirements of the *Discipline*, and these requirements do not refer to sexual orientation."⁶⁰⁵ By the 1984 General Conference, 1,000 petitions had been filed to bar openly gay persons from ordination. These petitions led to the legislation that disqualified openly gay persons from candidacy, ordination, and appointment in the United Methodist Church.⁶⁰⁶

1988 General Conference:

At the 1988 General Conference, delegates retained the ordination ban by a vote of 676-293⁶⁰⁷ and affirmed the incompatibility clause by a vote of 765-181.⁶⁰⁸ In response to the burgeoning AIDS epidemic, the 1988 General Conference kept the funding prohibition with amended language stating:

⁶⁰³ *Daily Christian Advocate* (Nashville: United Methodist Publishing House, 1984), 632.

⁶⁰⁴ J. Michael Clark, Joanne Carlson Brown, and Lorna M. Hochstein, "Institutional Religion and Gay/Lesbian Oppression," in eds. Frederick W. Bozett, Marvin B. Sussman, *Homosexuality and Family Relations* (New York: The Haworth Press, 1990), 274.

⁶⁰⁵ Nickell, *We Shall Not*, 107.

⁶⁰⁶ Boggan Dreff, *Entangled*, 245.

⁶⁰⁷ Udis-Kessler, *Queer Inclusion*, 194.

⁶⁰⁸ Udis-Kessler, *Queer Inclusion*, 194.

The global AIDS pandemic provides a nearly unparalleled opportunity for witness to the Gospel and service to human need among persons many of whom would otherwise be alone and alienated from themselves, other people, and from God.⁶⁰⁹

This legislation passed by a vote of 634-286.⁶¹⁰ A year prior to the 1988 General Conference, many in the Church had been surprised to learn that recently retired Bishop Finis Crutchfield, the President of the Council of Bishops during 1982-1983, had died from complications of the AIDS virus with allegations that he had lived a secret homosexual lifestyle.⁶¹¹ Additionally, Reverend Gene Leggett died on December 31, 1987 from what some believed to be complications of the AIDS virus.⁶¹² It can be surmised that two high profile clergymen's recent deaths from the AIDS virus helped influence the 1988 General Conference's decision regarding AIDS funding and educational events.⁶¹³

The 1988 General Conference delegates also passed a resolution to form a Committee to Study Homosexuality by a two thirds affirmative vote. The Committee was tasked to present a report and its recommendations to the General Council on Ministries prior to the 1992 General Conference.⁶¹⁴ The Committee members were appointed by the General Council on Ministries. The General Council assigned a staff representative to remain neutral during the Committee's discussions. The Committee was comprised of thirteen White males, six White females, two males of colour, and one female of colour. One person from the Central conferences, a male from the Philippines,⁶¹⁵ was appointed to the Committee. Further, seven members were lay

⁶⁰⁹ Earl E. Shelp and Ronald H. Sunderland, *AIDS and the Church: The Second Decade* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1992), 26.

⁶¹⁰ *Daily Christian Advocate* (Nashville: United Methodist Publishing House, 1988), 273.

⁶¹¹ Emily Yoffe, "The Double Life of Finis Crutchfield," *Texas Monthly* 15, no. 10 (October 1987): 104.

⁶¹² Reverend Leggett's cause of death as listed on his death certificate was chronic hepatitis. However, it has also been claimed that Leggett's cause of death was hepatitis resulting from the AIDS virus. See: Sledge, "The Saddest Day," 178.

⁶¹³ Marjorie Hyer, "AIDS is not a Divine Curse, Bishops Say," *The Washington Post*, April 29, 1988 (<https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/politics/1988/04/29/aids-is-not-divine-curse-bishops-say/3c8426be-6cf7-40f1-85a1-57061c0caa81/>; accessed December 15, 2022).

⁶¹⁴ Boggan Dreff, *Entangled*, 248.

⁶¹⁵ This person is also counted as one of the three persons of colour.

persons, while the remainder were clergy persons.⁶¹⁶ Additionally, one member of the above total identified as an LGBTQIA+ person.⁶¹⁷ As will be explored, the lack of additional Central conference representation and lay representation were factors in the 1992 General Conference's decision.

1992 General Conference:

The Committee presented its report at the 1992 General Conference.⁶¹⁸ First, the Committee stated that the seven references to homosexuality in the bible represented ancient culture and not the will of God. Second, the Committee proclaimed that homosexuality is a normal human sexual variant that can be healthy and whole. Third, the Committee stated that covenantal, committed, and monogamous homosexual relationships should be affirmed. Finally, the Committee concluded that its findings were supported by God's grace which is visible in the life of lesbian and gay Christians.⁶¹⁹ Thus, the Committee's Majority Report recommended:

The present state of knowledge and insight in the biblical, theological, ethical, biological, psychological, and sociological fields does not provide a satisfactory basis upon which the church can responsibly maintain the condemnation of all homosexual practice.⁶²⁰

In the report, seventeen members of the Committee voted to ask General Conference to remove from the *Discipline* language condemning homosexual

⁶¹⁶ Eleven of these clergypersons were also seminary professors.

⁶¹⁷ The Committee membership demographics were given to the author by Dr Tex Sample, Commission member, on October 5, 2022. Dr Sample also provided the author with the original Committee member list from his personal files.

⁶¹⁸ According to Frances Lyons, Reference Archivist, General Commission on Archives and History, Drew University, meeting minutes and administrative records for the 1992 Study Commission do not exist. Drew University only has position papers written by the members of the Study Commission. These position papers are book chapters from previously printed books. This information was given in a personal correspondence with the author on September 26, 2022.

⁶¹⁹ Udis-Kessler, *Queer Inclusion*, 32-33.

⁶²⁰ *Daily Christian Advocate* (Nashville: United Methodist Publishing House, 1992), 280.

practice and replace it with an acknowledgment that the church "has been unable to arrive at a common mind."⁶²¹ Four members concluded that the Committee did not find any agreement on the issue. Instead, they recommended that the language condemning homosexual practice in the *Discipline* be retained and one person abstained.⁶²² As a result, the General Conference's Minority Report recommended:

The present state of knowledge and insight in the biblical, theological, ethical, biological, psychological, and sociological fields does not provide a satisfactory basis upon which the church can responsibly alter its previously held position that we do not condone the practice of homosexuality and consider this practice incompatible with Christian teaching.⁶²³

The Committee recommended that Paragraph 71 of the Social Principles be revised to include the following:

G. Rights of Homosexual Persons. Certain basic human rights and civil liberties are due all persons. We are committed to support those rights and liberties for homosexual persons. We see a clear issue of simple justice in protecting their rightful claims in same-sex relationships where they have: shared material resources, pensions, guardian relationships, mutual powers of attorney and other such lawful claims typically attendant to contractual relationships which involve shared contributions, responsibilities, and liabilities, and equal protection before the law. Moreover, we support efforts to stop violence and other forms of coercion against gays and lesbians.⁶²⁴

The 1992 General Conference voted to receive the Committee on the Study of Homosexuality's report by a margin of 767-190.⁶²⁵ The General Conference, however,

⁶²¹ Boggan Dreff, *Entangled*, 250.

⁶²² Boggan Dreff, *Entangled*, 251.

⁶²³ *Daily Christian Advocate* (1992), 280.

⁶²⁴ James R. Wood and Jon P. Block, "The Role of Church Assemblies in Building a Civil Society: The Case of the United Methodist General Conference's Debate on Homosexuality," *Sociology of Religion* 56, no. 2 (1995): 132.

⁶²⁵ *Daily Christian Advocate* (1992), 477.

voted not to approve the report by a vote of 594-372.⁶²⁶ Consequently, the above paragraphs were not included in the *Discipline*. Yet, the General Conference did alter the *Discipline* by a margin of 739-210⁶²⁷ to state the following:

We insist all persons, regardless of age, gender, marital status or sexual orientation, are entitled to have their human and civil rights ensured...The United Methodist Church is committed to support basic human rights and civil liberties for homosexual persons.⁶²⁸

Dr Tex Sample⁶²⁹ reflected upon his experience as a member of the Commission:

The General Conference decision was extremely painful to me. While I understand it politically, we simply never had the votes given the combination of the delegates from the southeast of the US, from Africa, and from some of the other Central conferences. I knew going in we would not change the position of the United Methodist Church...We did not represent the worldview of the UMC, which at General Conference clearly outvoted us...I wish that the committee's majority report would have only gone into the General Conference...We would still have lost, but I think we would've made a far more direct statement and powerful witness.⁶³⁰

Sample's quotation reveals that the Commission's recommendations did not represent the will of the greater General Conference's membership. Sample also alludes to the Southeastern Jurisdiction delegates' vote against liberalising the denomination's stance on homosexuality. In this way, Sample clearly sees a correlation between Southern and Northern regional differences in American

⁶²⁶ Receiving a report means that the General Conference votes to discuss a report before the General Conference body. Approving a report means that the General Conference votes to adopt a report as official United Methodist policy. See: *Daily Christian Advocate* (1992), 482.

⁶²⁷ Udis-Kessler, *Queer Inclusion*, 194.

⁶²⁸ Tooley, *Methodism and Politics*, Location 3699.

⁶²⁹ Dr Tex Sample is an ordained United Methodist pastor and Professor Emeritus of Church and Society at The Saint Paul School of Theology where he taught for thirty-two years. He is the author of thirteen books. See: Tex Sample, About Tex (<http://www.texsample.com/about-tex>; accessed October 4, 2022).

⁶³⁰ Dr Tex Sample to the author in a personal correspondence on September 27, 2022.

Methodism and denominational debates about homosexuality. Additionally, delegates to the 1992 General Conference voted 710-238⁶³¹ to uphold the *Discipline's* incompatibility clause and 696-192⁶³² to continue the ordination prohibition. Consequently, in effect, the General Conference's Minority Report was received and approved. Thus, United Methodist policy regarding homosexuality remained unchanged.⁶³³

1996 General Conference:

During the mid-1990s, the United Methodist Church's policies about homosexuality largely followed the United States' political decisions about homosexuality. In 1993, President Bill Clinton signed into federal law a policy, "Don't Ask, Don't Tell," that allowed homosexuals to serve in the United States military. The caveat to this policy was that commanders could not ask military members about their sexuality and military members could not reveal their sexuality to the commanders. Up until this time, the United States military could ask about a member's sexuality and banned homosexuals from serving.⁶³⁴ Consequently, at the 1996 General Conference, delegates voted to support homosexuals serving in the United States military by a margin of 617-209.⁶³⁵ In effect, the 1996 General Conference (the first General Conference held after the "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" military policy was signed into law) essentially encouraged the same policy in the United Methodist Church.⁶³⁶

⁶³¹ Udis-Kessler, *Queer Inclusion*, 194.

⁶³² Udis-Kessler, *Queer Inclusion*, 194.

⁶³³ Barry A. Kosmin and Seymour P. Lachman, *One Nation Under God: Religion in Contemporary American Society* (New York: Crown Publishers, 1993), 328.

⁶³⁴ Waldrep, "The Use and Abuse," 978.

⁶³⁵ President Barack Obama signed the Don't Ask, Don't Tell Repeal Act of 2010. On September 20, 2011, homosexuals could begin serving openly in the United States military. See: Herbert W. Titus, "The Don't Ask, Don't Tell Repeal Act: Breaching Constitutional Ramparts," *William and Mary Journal of Women and the Law* 18, no. 1 (December 2011): 115.

⁶³⁶ J. Philip Wogaman, "The Social Justice Perspective," in ed. P.C. Kemeny, *Church, State and Public Justice: Five Views* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2007), 235.

The 1996 General Conference voted by a margin of 577-378⁶³⁷ to retain the incompatibility clause. Also, during the mid-1990s, most states passed constitutional amendments to ban same-sex marriage and civil unions.⁶³⁸ Furthermore, the 1996 General Conference voted by a margin of 553-321⁶³⁹ to add the following to the *Discipline's* Social Principles: "Ceremonies that celebrate homosexual unions shall not be conducted by our ministers and shall not be conducted in our churches."⁶⁴⁰ In this way, throughout the 1990s and early to mid-2000s, American politics about homosexuality directly influenced the United Methodist Church's policies about homosexuality. Again, this demonstrates the ways in which American Methodism is explicitly intertwined within American culture.

Additionally, during the 1996 General Conference, eleven active and four retired bishops, out of the combined 130 worldwide bishops, published a statement calling for equal rights for homosexuals, including the right to ordination in the United Methodist Church.⁶⁴¹ The letter stated:

We the undersigned bishops wish to affirm the commitment made at our consecration to the vows to uphold the *Discipline* of the church. However, we must confess the pain we feel over our personal convictions that are contradicted by the proscriptions in the *Discipline* against gay and lesbian persons within our church and within our ordained and diaconal ministers...⁶⁴²

After this statement was released, Reverend Donald E. Wildmon, United Methodist minister and president of the American Family Association, encouraged Methodists to withhold denominational support. He said:

⁶³⁷ Udis-Kessler, *Queer Inclusion*, 194.

⁶³⁸ Gregory B. Lewis and Seong Soo Oh, "Public Opinion and State Action on Same-Sex Marriage," *State and Local Government Review* 40, no. 1 (2008): 44-45.

⁶³⁹ Udis-Kessler, *Queer Inclusion*, 194.

⁶⁴⁰ *The Book of Discipline* (Nashville: United Methodist Publishing House, 1996), 87.

⁶⁴¹ Boggan Dreff, *Entangled*, 257.

⁶⁴² Carl Anderson, "Methodist Bishops Break Ranks on Ordaining Gays," *Religion News Service*, April 20, 1996 (<https://religionnews.com/1996/04/20/news-story-methodist-bishops-break-ranks-on-ordaining-gays/>; accessed August 2, 2021).

The most effective stand which United Methodists who oppose the radical agenda of the homosexual movement in the UM church can take is to withhold their giving to the General Boards and Agencies of the Church until those Boards and Agencies cease promoting an agenda in conflict with General Conference policy and scripture. Such a move by local UM churches will surely create controversy, but UMs who believe in the scripture should not fear controversy.⁶⁴³

2000 General Conference:

The 2000 General Conference delegates voted to retain the previous *Disciplines'* incompatibility language by a vote of 628-337.⁶⁴⁴ Secondly, by a vote of 670-222,⁶⁴⁵ the Conference upheld the legislation that stated that pastors may not conduct ceremonies that celebrate homosexual unions. Thirdly, the delegates voted 650-285⁶⁴⁶ to continue to prohibit openly gay persons from being ordained. Also, the 2000 General Conference delegates rejected, by a vote of 705-210,⁶⁴⁷ a resolution that would have required all United Methodist clergy to sign the following oath:

I do not believe that homosexuality is God's perfect will for any person. I will not practice it. I will not promote it. I will not allow its promotion to be encouraged under my authority."⁶⁴⁸

Further, the 2000 General Conference included protests that ended with law enforcement intervention. For example, a demonstration in support of homosexual inclusion within the Church began by delegates and visitors marching onto the

⁶⁴³ Staff Writer, "Fifteen United Methodist Bishops Call for Ordination of Homosexuals," *The American Family Association Journal*, June 1996 (<https://afajournal.org/past-issues/1996/june/fifteen-united-methodist-bishops-call-for-ordination-of-homosexuals/>; accessed June 20, 2022).

⁶⁴⁴ Udis-Kessler, *Queer Inclusion*, 194.

⁶⁴⁵ Udis-Kessler, *Queer Inclusion*, 194.

⁶⁴⁶ Udis-Kessler, *Queer Inclusion*, 194.

⁶⁴⁷ The United Methodist Church, General Conference 2000, Running Summary Archive (<http://gc2000.org/summaryarchive.htm>; accessed August 10, 2022).

⁶⁴⁸ The United Methodist Church, General Conference 2000.

General Conference's stage. Additionally, protests were held outside the exhibition hall. Over 200 people were arrested, including a bishop.⁶⁴⁹

The Debates Continue, 2004-2016

2004 General Conference:

The 2004 General Conference saw the delegates voting 579-376⁶⁵⁰ to retain the incompatibility language, 674-262⁶⁵¹ to continue the ordination prohibition, and 732-183⁶⁵² to uphold the ban on same-sex marriage. Also, at the 2004 General Conference, delegates voted by a margin of 624-184⁶⁵³ to add a sentence to the *Discipline* that read, "We support laws in civil society that define marriage as the union of one man and one woman."⁶⁵⁴ Interestingly, this vote occurred less than two weeks after Massachusetts became the first state to legalise same-sex marriages on May 17, 2004, setting the precedent for other states to begin to legalise same gender marriage.⁶⁵⁵ The United Methodist Church was the first and only mainline Protestant denomination in the United States to codify this restriction into Church law.⁶⁵⁶ From this evidence, it can be surmised that the General Conference's vote to define marriage as between one woman and one man was, in part, backlash to Massachusetts' decision and the coming legalisation of same-sex marriage in additional states.⁶⁵⁷

⁶⁴⁹ Jason J. Hopkins, "Sacralizing Queerness," in eds. Rita Snowden and Yvette Taylor, *Queering Religion, Religious Queers* (New York: Routledge, 2014), 171.

⁶⁵⁰ Udis-Kessler, *Queer Inclusion*, 194.

⁶⁵¹ Udis-Kessler, *Queer Inclusion*, 194.

⁶⁵² Udis-Kessler, *Queer Inclusion*, 194.

⁶⁵³ Linda Bloom, "Wrap-up: 2004 General Conference, *UM News*, May 7, 2004

(<https://www.umnews.org/en/news/wrap-up-2004-general-conference>; accessed July 24, 2022).

⁶⁵⁴ *The Book of Discipline* (Nashville: United Methodist Publishing House, 2004), 109.

⁶⁵⁵ Renee M. Landers, "What's *Loving* Got to Do with It? Law Shaping Experience and Experience Shaping Law," in eds. Kevin Noble Maillard and Rose Cuison Villazor, *Loving v. Virginia in a Post-Racial World: Rethinking Race, Sex, and Marriage* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 137.

⁶⁵⁶ Tipton, *Public Pulpits*, Location 1715, 1721.

⁶⁵⁷ Tipton, *Public Pulpits*, Location 1715, 1721.

2008 General Conference:

During the 2008 General Conference, international central conferences gained a substantial number of voting delegates because of significant membership growth within the central conferences.⁶⁵⁸ In 2008, 278 of the 992 General Conference delegates were from countries other than the United States. This was an increase of one-hundred international delegates from the 2004 General Conference.⁶⁵⁹

Because of differing global attitudes towards homosexuality, the increased number of international delegates aided conservative caucus groups' efforts to end debate about altering United Methodist polity regarding homosexuality.⁶⁶⁰ This will be an important development for future General Conference votes when the voting margin on petitions regarding homosexuality was nearly split in half. Further, the 2008 General Conference delegates rejected another motion to overturn the denomination's incompatibility clause by a vote of 501-417.⁶⁶¹ After this, a protest was held that delayed General Conference for several hours.⁶⁶²

2012 General Conference:

By the mid-2000s, cultural opinions about homosexuality began to shift again in the United States. States began lifting same-sex marriage bans. In 2011, President Barack Obama declared the Defense of Marriage Act federally unconstitutional. Later,

⁶⁵⁸ Mark Tooley, "African Power: How 192 Delegates Saved Methodists From Madness and Other Stories From the General Conference," The Institute of Religion and Democracy's Blog, October 30, 2008 (<https://juicyecumenism.com/2008/10/30/african-power-how-192-delegates-saved-methodists-from-madness-other-stories-from-the-general-conference/>; accessed August 1, 2022).

⁶⁵⁹ J. Richard Peck, "General Conference Acts on Wide Range of Issues," *UM News*, May 6, 2008 (<https://www.umnews.org/en/news/general-conference-acts-on-wide-range-of-issues>; accessed on July 24, 2022).

⁶⁶⁰ Hendrik R. Pieterse, "A Worldwide United Methodist Church? Soundings Toward a Connectional Theological Imagination," *Methodist Review* 5 (2013): 8-9.

⁶⁶¹ Tooley, "African Power."

⁶⁶² Linda L. Belleville, *Sex, Lies, and the Truth: Developing a Christian Ethic in a Post-Christian Society* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 2010), 54.

in 2012, President Obama endorsed same-sex marriage.⁶⁶³ Importantly, however, because of increased membership growth globally, 372 out of 988 delegates were from countries other than the United States, a ten percent increase from the previous General Conference.⁶⁶⁴ United Methodist historian Jane Ellen Nickel writes:

The influx of African delegates had a significant impact on the discussion and vote on homosexuality...Many of them are theologically conservative, so they were courted by conservative caucuses...Indeed, as the number of overseas delegates increased, so did the margin on votes related to homosexuality.⁶⁶⁵

When General Conference convened in 2012, significant debate about the *Discipline's* restrictions regarding same-sex marriage and openly gay clergy occurred. The 2012 General Conference delegates voted on two additional proposals to alter the *Discipline's* wording regarding homosexuality.⁶⁶⁶ The first proposal stated that the denomination could not form a consensus as to "whether homosexual practices are contrary to the will of God."⁶⁶⁷ This petition was rejected by a vote 507-441.⁶⁶⁸ The second motion acknowledged that the United Methodist Church had a limited understanding of human sexuality. Because of this, the motion stated, the United Methodist Church should "refrain from judgment regarding homosexual persons and practices until the Holy Spirit leads the United Methodist Church into new insight."⁶⁶⁹ This motion was rejected by a margin of 572-368.⁶⁷⁰

⁶⁶³ Sasha Issenberg, *The Engagement: America's Quarter-Century Struggle Over Same-Sex Marriage* (New York: Pantheon Books, 2021), 15-17.

⁶⁶⁴ J. Richard Peck, "High Expectations Will Surround Tampa Gathering," *UM News*, January 16, 2012 (https://www.gcumm.org/news/high-expectations-will-surround-tampa-gathering_1 ; accessed July 24, 2022).

⁶⁶⁵ Nickel, *We Shall Not*, 125.

⁶⁶⁶ Nickel, *We Shall Not*, 126.

⁶⁶⁷ Yrigoyen and Warrick, *Historical Dictionary of Methodism*, 190.

⁶⁶⁸ Joey Butler, "May 3 Wrap: Gay Rights Protest Closes Morning Session," *UM News*, May 3, 2012 (<http://ee.umc.org/news-and-media/may-3-wrap-gay-rights-protest-closes-morning-session>; accessed July 24, 2022).

⁶⁶⁹ *Daily Christian Advocate* (Nashville: United Methodist Publishing House, 2012), 270-271.

⁶⁷⁰ Butler, "May 3 Wrap."

In opposition to the vote, protestors favoring the resolutions disrupted the session by walking to the Conference stage, singing, and serving communion. When the protestors refused to stop singing, the chairperson abruptly ended the session. Discussions about homosexual clergy were slated for the final day of the 2012 General Conference. Because of the contention, however, all further legislation regarding homosexuality was postponed and referred the Agenda and Calendar committee. No further petitions addressing homosexuality were considered at the 2012 General Conference.⁶⁷¹

2015 Federal Legalisation of Same-Sex Marriage:

Despite contradictory convictions on homosexuality, however, it was not until the 2016 General Conference that the United Methodist Church's General Conference delegates began to formally consider schism.⁶⁷² When analysing why the 2016 General Conference experienced enough disruption to warrant conversations about schism, it is necessary to examine the impact of the federal legalisation of same-sex marriage on American Methodism.⁶⁷³

⁶⁷¹ John Lomperis, "Why Was the 2012 General Conference So Unproductive and Dysfunctional?," Part 3, Institute of Religion and Democracy Blog, December 12, 2012 (<https://juicyecumenism.com/2012/12/12/why-was-the2012-general-conference-so-unproductive-and-dysfuctional-part-3/>; accessed July 24, 2022).

⁶⁷² Diane L. Moore, ed, "Sexuality and the United Methodists: Christianity Case Study-Gender," Religious Literacy Project, Harvard Divinity School, 2018 (https://hwpi.harvard.edu/files/rpl/files/gender_christianity_0.pdf?m=1597334481; accessed July 24, 2022).

⁶⁷³ Shannon Craig Straw, "Will Same-Sex Marriage Split the United Methodist Church?," Religion and Politics: A Project of the John C. Danforth Center, Washington University, June 2, 2015 (<https://religionandpolitics.org/2015/06/02/will-same-sex-marriage-split-the-united-methodist-church/>; accessed July 24, 2022).

With the Supreme Court's decision in *Obergefell v. Hodges*,⁶⁷⁴ same-sex marriage was federally legalised in the United States on June 26, 2015.⁶⁷⁵ Immediately after the decision became public, various United Methodist leaders addressed the Supreme Court's decision in the context of the upcoming 2016 General Conference. For example, Reverend Sky McCracken, a district superintendent from the Memphis annual conference,⁶⁷⁶ said:

I think it [*Obergefell v. Hodges*] will have a bearing [on General Conference], and I think it will put a lot of people in the middle. I think it will be difficult because people will have a hard time deciding between what the law of the land says and what the doctrine of the church is.⁶⁷⁷

Likewise, Reverend Thomas Lambrecht, editor of *Good News Magazine*,⁶⁷⁸ decried the Supreme Court's decision. In his "Statement on Supreme Court Decision," Lambrecht stated:

While not surprising, the Supreme Court's decision to broaden the definition of marriage to include same-sex couples is still dismaying. Its decision redefines an institution that has been part of the bedrock of human civilization for millennia, and it runs counter to the teaching of nearly all world religions, particularly Christianity... We also believe the court has overstepped its bounds by usurping a function properly left to the people and legislatures of the various states...United Methodists

⁶⁷⁴ As Reverend Jerry Falwell predicted in 2000, the Supreme Court decision was a 5-4 vote. For further understanding of the intersection between American religious identity and the *Obergefell et al v. Hodges* decision, See: Luke Perry, *Religious Responses to Marriage Equality* (New York: Routledge, 2018).

⁶⁷⁵ Supreme Court of the United States, Syllabus, *Obergefell et al. v. Hodges*, Director, Ohio Department of Health, et al, Decided June 26, 2015 (https://www.supremecourt.gov/opinions/14pdf/14-556_3204.pdf; accessed April 6, 2021).

⁶⁷⁶ Reverend Sky McCracken is largely unknown outside of the Memphis annual conference.

⁶⁷⁷ Heather Hahn, "Same-Sex Marriage Ruling Adds to Church Debate," *UM News*, June 26, 2015 (<https://www.umnews.org/en/news/same-sex-marriage-ruling-adds-to-church-debate>; accessed April 4, 2021).

⁶⁷⁸ Reverend Thomas Lambrecht is also the vice president and general manager for *Good News Magazine*. He is a member of the Wesleyan Covenant Association's Leadership Council. See: *Good News Magazine*, Tom Lambrecht Biography, *Good News Magazine* (<https://tomlambrecht.goodnewsmag.org/bio/>; accessed August 24, 2022).

are well aware that our unwavering commitment to biblical truth does not depend upon judicial affirmation by the Supreme Court of this or any other nation.⁶⁷⁹

Good News' response to the Supreme Court's decision is an example of the tension between changing American cultural values/civil legalities and their relationship to denominational decisions and doctrines. It is evident that the Supreme Court's decision to legalise same-sex marriage caused a swift reaction amongst American Methodists as they considered its implications for the 2016 General Conference. Again, this demonstrates how strongly American Methodism is intertwined with the larger American culture.⁶⁸⁰

Because *Obergefell v. Hodges* expanded the legal definition of marriage to include two persons of the same gender, the United Methodist Church was forced to address the *Discipline's* mandates about the ordination of practicing homosexuals and same-sex wedding ceremonies.⁶⁸¹ Prior to the Supreme Court's decision to expand the definition of marriage, the United Methodist Church could debate ordaining practicing homosexuals and same-sex marriage ceremonies without being in danger of contradicting the *Discipline* or civil law.⁶⁸² For example, the *Discipline* states that "self-avowed practicing homosexuals"⁶⁸³ cannot be ordained. Yet, the *Discipline* also states that all ministers are to be "celibate in singleness and faithful in marriage."⁶⁸⁴ Because it was illegal for homosexuals to be married, the *Discipline's*

⁶⁷ Thomas Lambrecht, "Good News Statement on Supreme Court Decision," *Good News Magazine*, June 26, 2015 (<https://goodnewsmag.org/2015/06/good-news-statement-on-supreme-court-decision/>; accessed on July 11, 2020).

⁶⁸⁰ Dale McConkey, *United Methodists Divided: Understanding Our Differences Over Homosexuality* (Rome, GA: Global Parish Press, 2018), Locations 232, 246, 258, Kindle edition.

⁶⁸¹ Keith A. Roberts and David Yamane, *Religion in Sociological Perspective*, Seventh Edition (Los Angeles: Sage, 2021), 278-279.

⁶⁸² David L. Barnhart, Jr., *Living Faithfully: Human Sexuality and the United Methodist Church* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2019), 33-36.

⁶⁸³ *Book of Discipline* (Nashville: United Methodist Publishing House, 2012), 220.

⁶⁸⁴ *Discipline* (2012), 220.

mandate was singleness, thereby assuming celibate singleness for any unmarried minister, heterosexual, or homosexual.⁶⁸⁵

Likewise, the *Discipline* forbade its clergy from performing same-sex wedding ceremonies. However, same-sex marriage was illegal in the United States. Therefore, it was legally impossible for its ministers to conduct a same-sex wedding.⁶⁸⁶ Thus, when same-sex marriage was legalised in the United States, the United Methodist Church's theoretical arguments about the ordination of practicing homosexuals and same-sex wedding ceremonies morphed into debates about how the *Discipline* could be interpreted through a legal lens that included the expansion of civil rights.⁶⁸⁷ For example, after the Supreme Court's decision, Bishop Ough, president of the Council of Bishops and bishop of the Dakotas-Minnesota annual conference, released a statement stating:

While the United Methodist Church does not engage in partisan politics, we welcome all people and believe all have sacred worth. Today's legal decisions by the Supreme Court will undoubtedly increase the call for change from a sizeable segment of our church membership and clergy that finds our official policy unjust.⁶⁸⁸

In this way, the Obergefell v. Hodges Supreme Court case, a secular political event, opened the United Methodist Church to more intense debates about

⁶⁸⁵ Adam Hamilton, "Same Sex Marriage and the Future of the UMC," Adam Hamilton Blog, May 6, 2015 (<https://www.adamhamilton.com/blog/same-sex-marriage-and-the-future-of-the-umc/#.YwluCSUpAWM>; accessed August 3, 2022).

⁶⁸⁵ *Discipline* (2012), 220.

⁶⁸⁶ Thomas C. Berg, "What Same-Sex-Marriage and Religious-Liberty Claims Have in Common," *Northwestern Journal of Law and Social Policy* 5, no. 2 (Fall 2010): 209-212.

⁶⁸⁷ Scott A. Merriman, *Same-Sex Marriage: Exploring the Issues, Religion in Politics and Society Today* (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 2022), 81.

⁶⁸⁸ This statement about the United Methodist Church and partisan politics is Bishop Ough's opinion. As evidenced throughout this chapter, although the institutional United Methodist Church does not endorse partisan political candidates, the author disagrees with Bishop Ough's assessment about the United Methodist Church and partisan politics. Staff Writer, "Bishop Ough Sees Supreme Court Decision Influential to Denominational Debate, The Dakotas Annual Conference (<https://www.dakotasumc.org/news/bishop-ough-sees-supreme-court-decision-influential-to-denominational-debate>; accessed April 5, 2021).

homosexuality.⁶⁸⁹ Therefore, these denominational debates led to the United Methodist Church's increased scrutiny within the larger American culture, marshalling further division within the church that resulted in calls for formal denominational separation.⁶⁹⁰ From the above evidence, it could be surmised that the United Methodist Church would not have seriously considered schism during the 2016 General Conference if same-sex marriage had remained illegal in the United States.

2016 General Conference:

The 2016 General Conference found itself deadlocked and unable to decide about the *Discipline's* language concerning homosexuality. By the end of the General Conference, the Commission on the Way Forward was formed to study future denominational options. Additionally, a special called General Conference was set for February 2019.⁶⁹¹ It is important to note that 360 out of the 864 delegates to General Conference were international delegates, nearly forty-two percent of the total delegates.⁶⁹²

After three days of contentious debate, the 2016 General Conference voted not to accept Rule 44, a proposed change to the way General Conference was ordered.⁶⁹³ Rule 44 would have altered the way General Conference addressed homosexuality by using fifteen-person small groups instead of the legislative committees found under Robert's Rules of Order. In this way, every General Conference delegate would have the opportunity to discuss all petitions and come to

⁶⁸⁹ Elizabeth L. Flowers and Karen K. Seat, "Gender, Sexuality, and Marriage," in eds. Jason E. Vickers and Jennifer Woodruff Tait, *The Cambridge Companion to American Protestantism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022), 213-214.

⁶⁹⁰ George Yancy and Ashlee Quosigk, *One Faith No Longer: The Transformation of Christianity in Red and Blue America* (New York: NYU Press, 2021), 88, 258.

⁶⁹¹ McConkey, *United Methodists Divided*, Location 207.

⁶⁹² The United Methodist Church, "How General Conference Works," <http://ee.umc.org/who-we-are/gc2016-how-general-conference-works>; accessed July 29, 2022.

⁶⁹³ Chris Ritter, "Moving Ahead in the UMC: A Distributed General Conference," *Firebrand Magazine*, February 8, 2021 (<https://firebrandmag.com/articles/moving-ahead-in-the-umc-a-distributed-general-conference>; accessed July 29, 2022).

a consensus. Then, each small group's recommendation would be referred to another group who would create petitions based upon the small group's recommendations. These petitions would, then, be referred to the General Conference body for discussion and vote under Robert's Rules of Order.⁶⁹⁴ The proposal, however, failed by a vote of 477-355.⁶⁹⁵ Additionally, adding to the dissention, was a claim found on several social media channels that the Council of Bishops was secretly meeting to discuss a denominational schism.⁶⁹⁶ When this claim was voiced, General Conference delegates voted by a margin of 428-364⁶⁹⁷ for the Council of Bishops to intervene by providing a non-binding suggestion for the Church to move forward in the homosexuality debate.⁶⁹⁸

In response to the General Conference's request, Bishop Ough said:

We accept our role as spiritual leaders to lead the United Methodist Church...to step back from attempts at legislative solutions and to intentionally seek God's will for the future.⁶⁹⁹

George Howard, a lay delegate from the West Ohio annual conference,⁷⁰⁰ filed a motion to accept the Council of Bishops' recommendations. Per the *Discipline*,

⁶⁹⁴ Heather Hahn, "GC2016 Delegates Say No to Rule 44," *UM News*, May 12, 2016 (<https://www.umnews.org/en/news/gc2016-delegates-say-no-to-rule-44>; accessed July 29, 2022).

⁶⁹⁵ Hahn, "GC2016."

⁶⁹⁶ Joey Butler, "May 17 Wrap-Up: Schism Rumors Quashed," *UM News*, May 17, 2016 (<https://www.umnews.org/en/news/may-17-wrap-up-schism-rumors-quashed>; accessed July 29, 2022).

⁶⁹⁷ Michelle Boorstein, "As United Methodists Talk of Splitting Over Gay Equality, Top Bishop Pleads for Unity," *The Washington Post*, May 17, 2016 (<https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/acts-of-faith/wp/2016/05/17/united-methodist-church-to-respond-to-rumors-that-is-about-to-split>; accessed July 27, 2022).

⁶⁹⁸ Rob Renfroe and Walter Fenton, *Are We Really Better Together?: An Evangelical Perspective on the Division in the UMC*, Revised Edition (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2020), Location 168, Kindle edition.

⁶⁹⁹ Heather Hahn and Sam Hodges, "GC2016 Puts Hold on Sexuality Debate," *UM News*, May 18, 2016 (<https://www.umnews.org/en/news/bishops-ask-for-hold-on-sexuality-debate>; accessed July 30, 2022).

⁷⁰⁰ George Howard was the Executive Director of Global Coaching for the United Methodist Church's General Board of Global Ministries. He works closely with Africa University. See: The Howard Coaching Group, About George Howard, PCC (<https://howardcoachinggroup.com/about-george.html>; accessed August 31, 2022).

bishops cannot make a motion to the General Conference body.⁷⁰¹ Thus, while the Council of Bishops wrote the motion to create the Commission on the Way Forward, Howard presented the motion. Before the vote, Howard commented, "Our church is struggling. What I'm afraid of is that if we don't pause and allow the Holy Spirit to fill the space, then we will fracture."⁷⁰² Howard's motion passed by a vote of 428-405.⁷⁰³ It read:

Next Steps: We recommend that the General Conference defer all votes on human sexuality and refer this entire subject to a special Commission, named by the Council of Bishops, to develop a complete examination and possible revision of every paragraph in our Book of Discipline regarding human sexuality...

We believe that our unity is found in Jesus Christ; it is not something we achieve but something we receive as a gift from God. We understand that part of our role as bishops is to lead the church toward new behaviors, a new way of being and new forms and structures which allow a unity of our mission...⁷⁰⁴

This action tabled all discussions of human sexuality until the next General Conference session.⁷⁰⁵

⁷⁰¹ As the above motion signified, bishops only have a voice if specifically asked by the General Conference delegates. See: *Discipline* (2012), 352.

⁷⁰² Chiqui Guyjoco, "United Methodist Put Gay Ordinations on Hold, Vote for Moratorium on Homosexuality Debate," *The Christian Times*, May 22, 2016 (<https://www.christiantimes.com/amp/united-methodists-put-moratorium-on-homosexuality-debate.html>; accessed August 3, 2022).

⁷⁰³ Oliveto, *Our Strangely Warmed*, 64.

⁷⁰⁴ Western North Carolina Conference of the United Methodist Church, "Statement from the Council of Bishops: 051816," May 18, 2016 (<https://www.wnccumc.org/detail/9256037>; accessed August 30, 2022).

⁷⁰⁵ Renfroe and Fenton, *Are We Really?*, Location 1021.

Karen Oliveto's Election as Bishop:

Per the *Discipline*, openly gay and partnered clergy are not eligible to serve as United Methodist clergy. In July 2016, however, the Western Jurisdiction⁷⁰⁶ elected Reverend Karen Oliveto, pastor of Glide Memorial United Methodist Church in San Francisco, California, as the denomination's first openly gay and partnered bishop by a vote of 88-0.⁷⁰⁷ Although the *Discipline* continues to uphold the ban on self-avowed practicing homosexuals serving as clergy, Oliveto was elected and continues to serve as a bishop.⁷⁰⁸ Because of United Methodist policy, only the committee on episcopacy of a jurisdiction or central conference can process a complaint against a bishop within that jurisdiction or central conference.⁷⁰⁹ Complaints have been lodged against Bishop Oliveto by both clergy and laity from several annual and central conferences.⁷¹⁰ The committee on episcopacy of the Western Jurisdiction, however, refuses to process complaints against Bishop Oliveto. She remains in good standing as a clergyperson and a bishop.⁷¹¹ Proceeding Oliveto's election, Bishop Ough, on behalf of the Council of Bishops, released the following statement:

Any elder in good standing is eligible for election as a bishop of the church...Being a self-avowed, practicing homosexual is a chargeable offense for any clergyperson in the United Methodist Church...There are those in the church who will view this election as a violation of church laws and a significant step toward a split, while there are others who will celebrate the election as a milestone toward being a more

⁷⁰⁶ The Western Jurisdiction consists of the Alaska, California-Nevada, California-Pacific, Desert Southwest, Oregon-Idaho, Pacific Northwest, Rocky Mountain, and Yellowstone Annual Conferences.

⁷⁰⁷ Richard Marsh, "Commentary: Attorney on Confusion over Oliveto's Status," *UM News*, May 3, 2017 (<https://www.umnews.org/en/news/commentary-attorney-on-confusion-over-olivetos-status>; accessed on August 8, 2022).

⁷⁰⁸ Shannon Craigo Snell, *Disciplined Hope: Prayer, Politics, and Resistance* (Eugene: Cascade Books, 2019), 58.

⁷⁰⁹ *Discipline* (2012), 327-330.

⁷¹⁰ Matt Brodie, "COB President Addresses Western Jurisdiction Episcopal Election Results," The South Carolina Conference of the United Methodist Church, July 16, 2016 (<https://www.umcsc.org/cob-president-addresses-western-jurisdiction-episcopal-election-results/>; accessed April 25, 2020).

⁷¹¹ John Lomperis, "A Legal Case for Removing Karen Oliveto as UMC Bishop (Part 1 of 2)," The Institute on Religion and Democracy's Blog, April 24, 2017 (<https://juicyecumenism.com/2017/04/24/legal-case-removing-karen-oliveto-umc-bishop>; accessed August 23, 2022).

inclusive church...We invite your constant and ardent prayers for the witness and unity of the United Methodist Church...⁷¹²

The Formation of the Wesleyan Covenant Association:

After the 2016 General Conference, the various conservative caucus groups, such as Good News, the Confessing Movement, and the Institute of Religion and Democracy, coalesced into one umbrella group, the Wesleyan Covenant Association.⁷¹³ The Wesleyan Covenant Association was organised to maintain the *Discipline's* incompatibility clause about homosexuality or form a new conservative Methodist denomination.⁷¹⁴ Further, the founding of the Wesleyan Covenant Association exemplifies how American Methodism is intertwined with the larger socio-political divides present within American culture.

In its founding documents, the Wesleyan Covenant Association stated its motivation. From its founding documents, it is evident that responding to a continually shifting American culture was an important theme for the Wesleyan Covenant Association.⁷¹⁵ According to its official website, the goal of the Wesleyan Covenant Association is the following:

Pastors and congregations have expressed an interest in creating a "place" where traditional, orthodox UM churches can support and resource each other – both for the ministry to our changing culture and for facing the challenges presented by a denomination that is unclear about its commitment to Scripture. We are a hopeful people who

⁷¹² Brodie, "COB President."

⁷¹³ Jeremy Smith, "The Wesleyan Covenant Association: How Did We Get Here?," *UM Insight*, November 11, 2019 (<https://um-insight.net/perspectives/jeremy-smith/the-wesleyan-covenant-association>); accessed August 1, 2022).

⁷¹⁴ The Wesleyan Covenant Association, Frequently Asked Questions. (<https://wesleyan covenant.org/faqs/>; accessed April 14, 2021).

⁷¹⁵ Bill Arnold, "Why the Wesleyan Covenant Association?," *Good News Magazine*, October 26, 2016 (<https://goodnewsmag.org/why-the-wesleyan-covenant-association-2/>; accessed July 28, 2022).

believe God can still use a faithful Wesleyan witness for the salvation of souls and renewal of our culture.⁷¹⁶

The Wesleyan Covenant Association expressed a desire to influence a shifting American culture before it explained its theological and doctrinal standards. This action suggests that the Wesleyan Covenant Association valued challenging what it considered a corrupt surrounding culture by witnessing for personal salvation.

Additionally, many of the Wesleyan Covenant Association's supporters blamed American socio-political culture for the divide found within the Church.⁷¹⁷ For example, Mark Tooley, president of the Institute on Religion and Democracy caucus group and supporter of the Wesleyan Covenant Association, expressed his disdain for what he considered an intensely partisan institutional Methodism. Tooley wrote:

In the twentieth century, much of institutional American Methodism derailed from Christian orthodoxy and forgot its heritage of personal and social righteousness...Over the last several decades, most of institutional Methodism...degenerated into an often strident faction in America's polarizing culture wars...Soon it was instead subsumed into sexual liberation and identity politics, solidifying institutional United Methodism's role as an often extremist partisan faction...⁷¹⁸

Tooley demonstrates a dissatisfied view of a changed American sexual ethic. According to Tooley's reasoning, institutional Methodism had been lured away from its primary identity and purpose – personal and social righteousness – to participate in the enduring politics of the Sexual Revolution. In this way, Tooley thinks American Methodism has adopted American cultural values.

Additionally, the Wesleyan Covenant Association advances that it recaptures the original essence of Methodism as set forth by John Wesley and the early circuit

⁷¹⁶ The Wesleyan Covenant Association, Frequently Asked Questions.

⁷¹⁷ Jeremy Smith, "Catering to Culture: The Real Foundations of the WCA. 01: Partisanship," Hacking Christianity Blog, October 19, 2016 (<https://hackingchristianity.net/2016/10/catering-to-culture-the-real-foundations-of-the-wca-01-partisanship.html>; accessed July 5, 2022).

⁷¹⁸ Mark Tooley, "Wesleyan Politics in a Divided USA," *Firebrand Magazine*, April 3, 2020 (<https://firebrandmag.com/articles/wesleyan-politics-in-a-divided-usa>; accessed April 12, 2021).

riders. According to the Wesleyan Covenant Association, early Methodism's main purpose was to save souls. Then, because of personal salvation, the greater society could be reformed with traditional Christian values. Therefore, the Wesleyan Covenant Association posits that institutional American Methodism has strayed from early American Methodism's main purpose and has disregarded personal salvation, thereby weakening the individual, the society, and the Methodist movement of its purpose and power.⁷¹⁹ For example, Reverend Donald Haynes, in *Firebrand Magazine*,⁷²⁰ stated:

Throughout the twentieth century, the United Methodist Church...lost membership and attendance inside the institutional church, as well as muscle and influence at the table of the public square...In 1968, the new United Methodist Church set sail on its highly touted adventure with the same blindness to reality as the Titanic. The die is now cast for the division of the United Methodist Church...Its identity is being sacrificed on the altar of social justice, political correctness, and loss of Wesleyan heritage.⁷²¹

This suggests that a return to an emphasis on personal salvation would benefit American Methodism. However, the Wesleyan Covenant Association believes that institutional Methodism will not recover such an emphasis and will, instead, continue to espouse identity politics without recognising the individual and communal transformation that personal salvation brings.⁷²²

Furthermore, throughout their official documents and editorials by their leadership team, the Wesleyan Covenant Association carefully outlines its opposition

⁷¹⁹ Jay Therrell, "Holy Boldness," Wesleyan Covenant Association Blog, August 30, 2022 (<https://wesleyancovenant.org/2022/08/30/holy-boldness/>; accessed September 2, 2022).

⁷²⁰ Reverend Donald W. Haynes is a retired pastor in the Western North Carolina annual conference. He is the author of three books. See: Donald W. Haynes, "Methodism: How We Went Wrong," *Firebrand Magazine*, October 3, 2020 (<https://firebrandmag.com/articles/methodism-how-we-went-wrong>; accessed April 15, 2021).

⁷²¹ Haynes, "Methodism."

⁷²² Jeff Greenway, "Time to Go: Why We Must Pass the Protocol," *Firebrand Magazine*, July 27, 2021 (<https://firebrandmag.com/articles/time-to-go-why-we-must-pass-the-protocol>; accessed September 2, 2022).

to what is perceived as institutional United Methodism's engagement with America's shifting culture and sexual ethics.⁷²³ For example, Thomas Lambrecht shares his thoughts about institutional United Methodism's embrace of American society and culture. Lambrecht writes:

Over the past ten years, there has been a dramatic shift in the U.S. and Western Europe toward acceptance and even affirmation of same-sex relationships...A significant percentage of United Methodism in the U.S. and Western Europe has made this same shift...

The vision of special-interest caucuses such as "UMC Next" and "Uniting Methodists" is to be "on the right side of history" and to support the cultural shift toward affirmation. They seem to desire...to be in step with the liberal culture of our time and place. They take it for granted the UM Church should change its position to endorse same-sex marriage and welcome practicing gays and lesbians as ordained clergy...⁷²⁴

The ideological gulf that exists in American Methodism is apparent. Further, these ideological differences stem, partly, from the profound socio-political shifts, including the Sexual Revolution, that occurred during the late 1960s and early 1970s, the United Methodist Church's founding years. Thus, American Methodism's doctrinal standards are held in tension with the changing sexual mores of American culture. Consequently, such tension has helped propel the United Methodist Church's path toward schism.

⁷²³ Walter Fenton, "Bishop Plans to Allow Defiance of United Methodist Church Standards," Wesleyan Covenant Association Blog, December 7, 2021 (<https://wesleyancovenant.org/2021/12/06/bishop-plans-to-allow-defiance-of-united-methodist-church-standards/>; accessed August 29, 2022).

⁷²⁴ Thomas Lambrecht, "A Crisis of Identity," *Perspective: A Message from Good News* (<https://myemail.constantcontact.com/A-Crisis-of-Identity.html?soid=1108936514096&aid=Ukna7uR25t8>; accessed April 15, 2021).

Section Summary:

In closing, the United Methodist Church began with less restrictive measures on homosexuality. For example, at its formation in 1968, the Church did not have any policy regarding homosexuality. The delegates at the following General Conferences, however, continually tightened prohibitions on homosexuality by amending the *Discipline's* language. The above section has demonstrated that the United Methodist Church is intimately intertwined with American socio-political culture. As evidenced, American culture's shifting sexual ethics, along with the counter-reactions to a liberalised sexual ethic, have heavily influenced the United Methodist Church's policy decisions about homosexuality. Likewise, the evidence given suggests that American political events, such as the Obergefell v. Hodges Supreme Court case, accelerated the United Methodist Church's trajectory into schism.

2019 General Conference

The 2019 General Conference of the United Methodist Church convened on February 23, 2019 in St. Louis, Missouri with the same delegates as the 2016 General Conference.⁷²⁵ Prior to discussing the General Conference's business matters, the delegates spent six hours in prayer led by the Council of Bishops. By noon, the guided prayers had not referenced the LGBTQIA+ community. LGBTQIA+ caucus groups, such as the Reconciling Ministries Network, raised their concerns about the LGBTQIA+ community's lack of recognition.⁷²⁶ Dorothee Benz, a lay delegate from New York annual conference and a member of the LGBTQIA+ community,⁷²⁷ said:

⁷²⁵ Renfroe and Fenton, "Are We?," Location 1045.

⁷²⁶ While not a delegate to the 2019 General Conference, the author was an observer at all 2019 General Conference sessions. This description of the 2019 General Conference is taken from the author's eyewitness account.

⁷²⁷ Dorothee Benz is the founder of Methodists in New Directions, a caucus group that advocates for full inclusion of LGBTQIA+ persons in the United Methodist Church. She planned and led protests at the 2016 General Conference. She left the United Methodist Church in June 2019. See: Dorothee Benz, "Out and Out the Door! Leaving the Methodists," June 10, 2019

I wish that the bishops would have acknowledged the harm done to LGBTQIA+ people this morning by their silence. I wish that cisgender heterosexual bishops had come down from the stage to pray with us...⁷²⁸

On February 24, 2019, the General Conference began its legislative business. Usually, General Conference delegates divide into several legislative committees. These committees decide which submitted petitions will be brought to the General Conference body for discussion and vote. The Commission on the General Conference determined, however, that there would only be one legislative body, comprised of all delegates, for the 2019 General Conference.⁷²⁹ In this way, all the delegates would become a single legislative body debating the same portions of the *Discipline*. Thus, this single legislative body would be entrusted to prioritize the submitted petitions, discuss the ranked petitions, and vote which petitions to send to the plenary session. Then, the single legislative body would be adjourned and the plenary session, consisting of the same body of General Conference delegates, would be convened.⁷³⁰ Bishop Carter exclaimed:

The Commission on the General Conference was wise in developing a process for this special session. We are a church on four continents... We bring all of this to the complex relationships between LGBTQ identity, the unity of the church, and our interpretation of scripture. The prioritization process helps us to focus...⁷³¹

(<https://religioussocialism.org/out-and-out-the-door-leaving-the-methodists>; accessed July 31, 2022).

⁷²⁸ Kathy L. Gilbert, "Sweet Hours of Prayer Begin GC2019," *UM News*, February 23, 2019 (<https://www.umnews.org/en/news/sweet-hours-of-prayer-begin-gc2019>; accessed August 24, 2022).

⁷²⁹ Ritter, "Moving Ahead."

⁷³⁰ Diane Degnan, "Single Legislative Committee to Allow for Full Delegate Participation," *UM Insight*, October 8, 2018 (<https://um-insight.net/general-conference/a-way-forward/single-legislative-committee-to-allow-for-full-delegate-part/>; accessed September 2, 2022).

⁷³¹ Staff Writer, "Pensions, Traditional Plan Top Priority Votes," *UM News*, February 24, 2019 (<https://www.umnews.org/en/news/pensions-traditional-plan-top-priority-votes>; accessed September 2, 2022).

Next, the delegates ranked the submitted petitions as low or high priority. Because of the suspension of the *Discipline's* multiple legislative committee rules, the delegates were instructed that they would debate, in order, the petitions that received the most votes. Over the course of one hour, the delegates ordered the submitted petitions.⁷³² First, the petition submitted by Wespath, the United Methodist Church's pension and benefit entity, received 518 high priority votes.⁷³³ Wespath's petition addressed the pension liabilities of departing churches and the accrued pension benefits of clergy.⁷³⁴ Second, the Traditional Plan petition received 459 high priority votes.⁷³⁵ The Traditional Plan petition strengthened restrictions for clergy officiating same-sex weddings and clergy who identify as self-avowed practicing homosexuals.⁷³⁶ Third, the Taylor disaffiliation petition received 412 high priority votes.⁷³⁷ This petition outlined the ways in which churches could leave the United Methodist Church with their property.⁷³⁸ Fourth, the Boyette disaffiliation petition received 406 high priority votes.⁷³⁹ This plan outlined the ways in which church could leave the United Methodist Church with their property.⁷⁴⁰ Fifth, the One Church Plan petition received 403 high priority votes.⁷⁴¹ The One Church Plan

⁷³² Author's eyewitness account.

⁷³³ Staff Writer, "Pensions."

⁷³⁴ Wespath Benefits and Investments, "General Conference 2019 Update," April 20, 2019 (<https://www.wespath.org/retirement-investments/quarterly-newsletter-hark/042019002>; accessed on September 1, 2022).

⁷³⁵ Staff Writer, "Pensions."

⁷³⁶ Commission on a Way Forward's Report to General Conference, 55-57 (https://s3.amazonaws.com/Website_Properties/council-of-bishops/news_and_statements/documents/Way_Forward_Report_-_Final_-_ENGLISH.pdf; accessed September 2, 2022).

⁷³⁷ Staff Writer, "Pensions."

⁷³⁸ Historically, American Methodist churches have legally operated under a trust clause. United Methodist properties are held in trust by a congregation. If a United Methodist congregation closes or wishes to leave the United Methodist denomination, its properties and assets revert to the denomination. See: Topolewski, "Mr. Wesley's Trust Clause," 149.

⁷³⁹ Staff Writer, "Pensions."

⁷⁴⁰ For further information about the Taylor and Boyette Disaffiliation Plans, See: David W. Scott, "What Are the Differences Among the Five Exit Plans?," *UM Insight*, February 19, 2019 (<https://um-insight.net/general-conference/a-way-forward/what-are-the-differences-among-the-five-exit-plans/>; accessed September 1, 2022).

⁷⁴¹ Staff Writer, "Pensions."

petition, supported by most bishops, allowed individual clergy and local churches to make their own decisions regarding officiating same-sex weddings. Likewise, the One Church Plan petition gave individual annual and central conferences the ability to accept or deny self-avowed practicing homosexuals as clergy.⁷⁴²

The results of the prioritization vote brought mixed reactions amongst the delegates. The prioritization vote was used by some delegates and caucus groups to state their expectations for the General Conference's eventual outcome. For example, Reverend Rob Renfroe, a delegate from the Texas annual conference and President of Good News,⁷⁴³ said:

We're very happy the Traditional Plan received the majority of the votes. In spite of the efforts of the groups and the bishops, the church remains committed to a scriptural understanding of sexual ethics.⁷⁴⁴

Other delegates, however, were disappointed by the General Conference's prioritization vote. For example, members of the LGBTQIA+ community stated their dissatisfaction with the 2019 General Conference's early decisions. Reverend Alex da Silva Souto, an openly gay delegate from the New York annual conference,⁷⁴⁵ said:

Today's results are not the first time we as LGBTQIA+ United Methodists have been hurt by our church, and not the first time that our denomination contradicts its mission, and still we are here...⁷⁴⁶

⁷⁴² Commission's Report, 11-18.

⁷⁴³ Reverend Rob Renfroe retired as Pastor of Discipleship at The Woodlands United Methodist Church, a 14,000-member church, in 2022. He has been the president and publisher of *Good News Magazine* since 2009. He has served as president of the Confessing Movement. He is a member of the Wesleyan Covenant Association's Leadership Council. Renfroe has written twenty-five books. See: *Good News Magazine*, Rob Renfroe Biography (<https://goodnewsmag.org/staff-bio-photos/>; accessed August 30, 2022).

⁷⁴⁴ Staff Writer, "GC2019 Daily Update: February 24," *UM News*, February 24, 2019 (<https://www.umnews.org/en/news/gc2019-daily-feb-24>; accessed August 30, 2022).

⁷⁴⁵ Reverend Alex da Silva Souto is the co-convener of the UM Clergy Caucus and serves on the executive team for UM-Forward. They (preferred pronoun) are the co-author of *The Simple Plan*. See: Ministry Matters, Alex da Silva Souto Biography (https://www.ministrymatters.com/all/author/alex_da_silva_souto; accessed August 21, 2022).

⁷⁴⁶ Staff Writer, "Seeing a Way Forward Series," *UM News*, February 24, 2019 (<https://www.umnews.org/en/news/seeing-a-way-forward>; accessed August 21, 2022).

After the prioritization vote, the legislative sessions of the 2019 General Conference began. To begin, the delegates heard the Commission on a Way Forward's report. First, the Commission described the Council of Bishops preferred One Church Plan.⁷⁴⁷ The One Church Plan's purpose, according to the Commission, was to maintain Church unity.⁷⁴⁸ Reverend Jasmine Smothers,⁷⁴⁹ a member of the Commission from the North Georgia annual conference, advocated for the One Church Plan. Smothers said, "The cost of division is high. The cost of disruption to the mission is beyond what we can quantify."⁷⁵⁰

Then the Commission described the Connectional Conference Plan. According to the Commission, this plan's purpose was to form unity around shared goals. Thus, the Connectional Conference Plan valued space, different perspectives, and new expressions of church.⁷⁵¹ Ultimately, the Commission did not recommend this plan to the Council of Bishops because of the constitutional amendments that needed to be added to the *Discipline* for its implementation.⁷⁵² Constitutional amendments to the *Discipline* require a three-fourths majority vote of every global conference.⁷⁵³ Because of this high voting threshold, the Connectional Conference Plan was deemed impracticable.⁷⁵⁴

⁷⁴⁷ Author's eyewitness account.

⁷⁴⁸ Commission on a Way Forward's Report, 55.

⁷⁴⁹ Reverend Jasmine Smothers is a co-convenor for the UMCNext caucus group. She has served as a board member of the United Methodist Church's Commission on Religion and Race and is the author of several books. See: Jasmine Rose Smothers, About Jasmine (<https://jasminesmothers.org/about/>; accessed September 4, 2022).

⁷⁵⁰ *Daily Christian Advocate* (Nashville: United Methodist Publishing House, 2019), 372.

⁷⁵¹ A Conversation within the Commission on a Way Forward: The Connectional Conference Plan (<https://mainstreamumc.com/documents/WayForwardReports/COWF-p26-54-ConnectionalConferencePlan.pdf>; accessed August 27, 2022).

⁷⁵² Emily McFarlan Miller, "United Methodists Vote Pension, Traditional Plan as Top Priorities," *Religion News Service*, February 25, 2019 (<https://religionnews.com/2019/02/25/united-methodists-vote-pensions-traditional-plan-as-top-priorities/>; accessed August 22, 2022).

⁷⁵³ *Discipline* (2012), 41-42.

⁷⁵⁴ Miller, "United Methodists Vote."

Lastly, the Commission outlined the Traditional Plan. Reverend Jessica LaGrone, a Commission member from the Texas annual conference,⁷⁵⁵ described the Traditional Plan as a mechanism to restore unity through shared uniformity in the *Discipline's* polity.⁷⁵⁶ LaGrone said, "The Traditional Plan is an attempt to value unity in doctrine, consistency in practice, and mutual accountability. The growing chaos in the UMC has overtaken our lives."⁷⁵⁷ After the Commission's report, Bishop Carter adjourned the legislative session until the following day when debates regarding the Traditional Plan petition were scheduled to begin.⁷⁵⁸ Prior to adjournment, he instructed the delegates. Bishop Carter said:

If you watch and listen for the good in progressive, centrist, and conservative, you will find it... I ask all delegates to make every effort to make unity your passionate concern.⁷⁵⁹

On February 25, 2019, delegates began debating the Traditional Plan petition. Reverend David Livingston,⁷⁶⁰ a delegate from the Great Plains annual conference, motioned to postpone the Traditional Plan petition, based upon questions about the constitutionality of several of the Traditional Plan's sub-petitions. Rather, Livingston motioned to debate the One Church Plan petition.⁷⁶¹ Livingston said:

Two-thirds of U.S. delegates have refused the Traditional Plan. Children frequently don't hear the love part of Christ's message, but only the

⁷⁵⁵ Reverend Jessica LaGrone is the Dean of the Chapel at Asbury Theological Seminary. She is the author of several books, served as a member of the Wesleyan Covenant Association's Leadership Council, and is a member of the Global Methodist Church's Transitional Leadership Council. See: Jessica LaGrone, About (<https://jessicalagrone.com/about>; accessed September 2, 2022).

⁷⁵⁶ *Daily Christian Advocate* (2019), 374.

⁷⁵⁷ *Daily Christian Advocate* (2019), 374-375.

⁷⁵⁸ Author's eyewitness account.

⁷⁵⁹ *Daily Christian Advocate* (2019), 376.

⁷⁶⁰ Reverend David Livingston serves on the advisory board of the Mainstream UMC caucus group. See: Mainstream UMC, Advisory Board, David Livingston (<https://mainstreamumc.com/advisory-board/david-livingston/>; accessed July 27, 2022).

⁷⁶¹ David Livingston, "A Glimpse Behind the Curtain: GC2019," *UM Insight*, March 2, 2019 (<https://um-insight.net/a-glimpse-behind-the-curtain/>; accessed July 27, 2022).

judgment part. We can't let that happen because of a legislative process that doesn't allow us to talk about it.⁷⁶²

Conversely, Reverend Stephen Wende, a delegate from the Texas annual conference,⁷⁶³ spoke against Livingston's motion. Wende exclaimed:

Most of us thought the spirit shared among the delegates was awfully positive. Most thought the voting went fairly well. Let's not start by trying to torpedo Christian conferencing.⁷⁶⁴

Ultimately, after inquiries about proper parliamentary procedure, the Conference delegates voted to reject Livingston's motion by a vote of 488-334.⁷⁶⁵

Then, the delegates resumed their legislative debates about the Traditional Plan petition. Reverend Maxie Dunnam, a delegate from the Kentucky annual conference,⁷⁶⁶ began the debate on the Traditional Plan petition by stating that he had been attempting, unsuccessfully, to distribute to the delegates a thirty-page packet that explained modifications to the Traditional Plan's sub-petitions. Dunnam claimed that these modifications would assuage any constitutionality problems found in the Traditional Plan petition. In response, the General Conference secretary, Reverend Gary Graves, stated that he had never received a packet from Dunnam.⁷⁶⁷ The delegates, then, debated if the *Discipline* allowed for materials to be distributed

⁷⁶² Kathy L. Gilbert and Heather Hahn, "GC2019 Daily Update: February 25," *UM News*, February 25, 2019 (<https://www.umnews.org/en/news/effort-to-delay-traditional-plan-debate-defeated>; accessed August 29, 2022).

⁷⁶³ Reverend Stephen Wende served as the pastor of First UMC in Houston, Texas, one of the largest churches in the Texas annual conference. He retired in 2016 but continued to serve as a delegate at the 2019 General Conference. See: Staff Writer, "Pastor of One of the Largest Churches in Houston will Retire on June 30, 2016," Texas Annual Conference, December 3, 2015 (<https://www.txcumc.org/newsdetail/pastor-of-one-of-the-largest-churches-in-houston-will-retire-on-june-30-2016-3136128>; accessed July 25, 2022).

⁷⁶⁴ *Daily Christian Advocate* (2019), 418.

⁷⁶⁵ *Daily Christian Advocate* (2019), 379.

⁷⁶⁶ Reverend Maxie Dunnam is president emeritus of Asbury Theological Seminary. He has served as the president of the World Methodist Council and the Methodist World Evangelism Committee. He is the author of forty books. See: Maxie Dunnam, About Me (<https://maxiedunnam.com/about-me/>; accessed July 28, 2022).

⁷⁶⁷ Author's eyewitness account.

to the delegates after the General Conference convened. Finally, the Conference's Committee on Standing Rules determined that Dunnam's packet could be distributed to the delegates after it was translated into the four official languages of the General Conference, English, French, Portuguese, and Swahili.⁷⁶⁸ After deliberations, the delegates voted to send the amended Traditional Plan to the next day's plenary session by a vote of 461-359.⁷⁶⁹

Further, the single legislative committee voted not to send the One Church Plan petition to the plenary session by a vote of 436-386.⁷⁷⁰ Additionally, the delegates voted to reject the Simple Plan petition, which removed all language regarding homosexuality from the *Discipline*, by a vote of 494-323.⁷⁷¹ Finally, to end the legislative session, the delegates voted by a margin of 405-395⁷⁷² to refer the approved legislation, the Traditional Plan petition and the two disaffiliation petitions, to the Judicial Council for a review of their constitutionality.⁷⁷³

On February 26, 2019, the General Conference's plenary session convened. The day's debates began with the Minority Report, a substitution for the legislative's committee's report. The Minority Report was the final effort of some delegates to pass the One Church Plan petition.⁷⁷⁴ In presenting the Minority Report, Reverend Tom Berlin, a delegate from the Virginia annual conference,⁷⁷⁵ stated:

Approving the One Church Plan does not force any pastor or church to perform same-sex marriages, nor does it force anyone to change what they believe about the bible. But, the plan would allow conferences to

⁷⁶⁸ Gilbert and Hahn, "GC2019, February 25."

⁷⁶⁹ *Daily Christian Advocate* (2019), 440.

⁷⁷⁰ Gilbert and Hahn, "GC2019, February 25."

⁷⁷¹ Gilbert and Hahn, "GC2019, February 25."

⁷⁷² Gilbert and Hahn, "GC2019, February 25."

⁷⁷³ Kathy L. Gilbert, Heather Hahn, and Joey Butler, "2019 General Conference Passes Traditional Plan," *UM News*, February 26, 2019 (<https://www.umnews.org/en/news/2019-general-conference-passes-traditional-plan>; accessed July 15, 2022).

⁷⁷⁴ Author's eyewitness account.

⁷⁷⁵ Reverend Tom Berlin served as a member of the Commission on a Way Forward and is the author of four books. He was the Virginia annual conference's candidate for bishop in 2022. In 2023, he will begin serving as the Florida annual conference's bishop. See: Tom Berlin, About Tom (<https://revtomberlin.com/sample-page/>; accessed September 3, 2022).

ordain LGBTQ pastors, as well as allow the church to host and the pastor to officiate at same-sex marriages...If the Traditional Plan is voted in, it will be a virus that will make the American church very sick...However it is intended, the Traditional Plan will be perceived as an overt act against gay church members and others.⁷⁷⁶

Other delegates, however, spoke against the Minority Report by referring to scripture. Reverend Jerry Kulah, a delegate from the Liberia central conference,⁷⁷⁷ said, "The Traditional Plan is not only traditional but biblical. It ensures God's word remains foundational to the life and growth of the UMC."⁷⁷⁸

Ultimately, the delegates voted to reject the Minority Report by a vote of 449-374.⁷⁷⁹ Although individual votes are not tracked by the General Conference,⁷⁸⁰ Reverend Mark Holland, a delegate from the Great Plains annual conference and president of the Mainstream Methodist caucus group,⁷⁸¹ responded to the failed minority report vote by claiming, "We were very solid on our U.S. numbers...We needed fifty votes in Africa. Clearly, we didn't come close to that."⁷⁸²

Then delegates began to debate the Traditional Plan by appealing to young adults as the future of the Church. Nathan Ble Leon Ake, a young adult lay delegate

⁷⁷⁶ *Daily Christian Advocate* (2019), 488.

⁷⁷⁷ Reverend Jerry Kulah is the West Africa Central Conference Coordinator of the UMC Africa Initiative, a caucus group affiliated with Good News and the Global Methodist Church, and the dean of the Gbarnga School of Theology at the United Methodist University in Liberia. He also serves on the Wesleyan Covenant Association's Leadership Council. See: Mark Tooley, "African United Methodists Won't Trade Bible for Dollars," Institute of Religion and Democracy Blog, February 23, 2019 (<https://juicyecumenism.com/2019/02/23/african-united-methodists-wont-trade-bible-for-dollars/>; accessed September 2, 2022).

⁷⁷⁸ Gilbert, Hahn, and Butler, "2019 General Conference Passes."

⁷⁷⁹ *Daily Christian Advocate* (2019), 493.

⁷⁸⁰ Staff Writer, "Change Coming to General Conference Voting," Mississippi Conference of the United Methodist Church, February 9, 2016 (<https://www.mississippi-umc.org/newsdetail/change-coming-to-general-conference-voting-3850467>; accessed August 14, 2022).

⁷⁸¹ In addition to serving the caucus group, Reverend Mark Holland also served as a City Commissioner and Mayor of Kansas City, Kansas. See: Mainstream UMC, Advisory Board, Mark Holland (<https://mainstreamumc.com/advisory-board/mark-holland/>; accessed September 1, 2022).

⁷⁸² Jacob Comello, "United Methodist Delegates Maintain Ban on Same-Sex Marriage, LGBT Pastors," *The Boston Pilot*, February 28, 2019 (https://www.thebostonpilot.com?AMP/amp_article.php?ID=184464; accessed August 7, 2022).

from the Cote d'Ivoire central conference,⁷⁸³ shared, "I am a young adult...We have many youth in Africa and the whole world who support the Traditional Plan."⁷⁸⁴ Other young adult delegates, however, expressed their frustration with the Traditional Plan. For example, Shayla Jordan, a young adult lay delegate from the Great Plains annual conference,⁷⁸⁵ said that she did not believe that the Traditional Plan represented how United Methodists will feel about homosexuality in future years. She exclaimed:

The Traditional Plan doesn't reflect the attitudes of younger people toward homosexuality. People speaking here don't represent the church that will be for years down the road.⁷⁸⁶

To delay the Conference's vote on the Traditional Plan petition, delegates opposed to the Traditional Plan began to introduce amendments to the Traditional Plan. These proposed amendments were designed to embroil the Conference in discussion until the Conference was forced to adjourn without voting on the Traditional Plan.⁷⁸⁷ Holland said, "We're going to amend until the monster trucks roll in."⁷⁸⁸

Ultimately, the attempts of postponing the delegates' vote on the Traditional Plan petition were unsuccessful. Reverend Tim McClendon, a delegate from the South Carolina annual conference,⁷⁸⁹ made a motion to vote on the Traditional Plan

⁷⁸³ Nathan Ble Leon Ake is a lay delegate largely unknown outside of the Cote d'Ivoire central conference.

⁷⁸⁴ *Daily Christian Advocate* (2019), 495.

⁷⁸⁵ Shayla Jordan is a lay delegate largely unknown outside of the Great Plains annual conference.

⁷⁸⁶ *Daily Christian Advocate* (2019), 494.

⁷⁸⁷ The 2019 General Conference had a strict adjournment deadline of 6:30pm on February 26, 2019. The venue was had to be vacated because of a truck rally that was scheduled by the venue. See: Emily McFarlan Miller, "United Methodists Pass Traditional Plan, Keep Ban on LGBTQ Clergy, Same-Sex Marriage," *Religion News Service*, February 26, 2019 (<https://religionnews.com/2019/02/26/united-methodists-pass-traditional-plan-strengthens-ban-on-lgbtq-clergy-same-sex-marriage/>; accessed September 1, 2022).

⁷⁸⁸ *Daily Christian Advocate* (2019), 426.

⁷⁸⁹ Reverend Tim McClendon was the South Carolina annual conference's nominee for bishop in 2016. He was not elected. See: Jessica Brodie, "Delegation Taps Tim McClendon as Episcopal Nominee," *South Carolina Methodist Advocate*, September 24, 2015 (<https://advocatesc.org/articles/delegation-taps-tim-mcclendon-as-episcopal-nominee>; accessed September 4, 2022).

petition as amended. The delegates voted to accept the amended Traditional Plan petition by a vote of 438-384.⁷⁹⁰

The Traditional Plan petition as amended consisted of the following. First, Petition #90032 clarified the definition of self-avowed practicing homosexual. Now, the *Discipline* stated that anyone who is living in a same-sex marriage, domestic partnership, or civil union or who publicly states that she or he is a practicing homosexual would be denied clergy person status.⁷⁹¹

Second, Petition #90044 stated that bishops cannot dismiss complaints against clergypersons unless the complaints have no basis in law or fact. Additionally, when a bishop dismissed a complaint, the bishop must give a written explanation of why the complaint was dismissed to the person who filed the complaint. These same rules, according to the newly passed Traditional Plan petition, also applied to bishops.⁷⁹²

Third, Petition #90046 reformed the just resolution process. By doing this, the filer of the complaint against a clergy person must be an active member of the just resolution process. The just resolution process, according to Petition #90044, required that every effort shall be made to have the complainant(s) agree to the resolution before it may take effect.⁷⁹³

Fourth, Petition #90045 further reformed the just resolution process. In this petition, all just resolutions must state all harms identified by the complainant(s) and how they shall be addressed. This was designed to ensure that clergy who have violated the *Discipline's* rules on homosexuality address the complainant(s)' concerns.⁷⁹⁴

⁷⁹⁰ *Daily Christian Advocate* (2019), 515.

⁷⁹¹ The Greater Northwest Area of the United Methodist Church, "What Did General Conference 2019 Do?" (<https://greaternw.org/just-the-facts-what-did-general-conference-2019-do/>; accessed September 1, 2022).

⁷⁹² Chris Ritter, "#GC2019: Update 5," People Need Jesus Blog, February 27, 2019 (<https://peopleneedjesus.net/2019/02/27/gc2019-update-5/>; accessed July 21, 2022).

⁷⁹³ Greater Northwest, "What Did?"

⁷⁹⁴ Ritter, "#GC2019."

Fifth, Petition #90042 set mandatory penalties for clergy found in a church trial to have violated the *Discipline's* rules banning same-sex weddings. For the first offense a clergyperson must face a minimum penalty of a one-year suspension. If the clergyperson, performs another same-sex wedding, the person's clergy credentials must be terminated. Additionally, this section of Petition #90043 set an appeal process for the complainant(s) who believed a church trial refused to enforce *Discipline* law. For this, an appeal could occur if egregious errors of church law were present in the church trial.⁷⁹⁵

Sixth, Petition #90043 required district committees and annual conference boards of ordained ministry to conduct a thorough examination into each ministry candidate's compliance with all portions of the *Discipline*. Any candidate who did not meet all *Discipline* requirements could not be recommended as a candidate for ministry. Further, this petition meant that bishops were required to dismiss candidates who violate any *Discipline* standards and ensure that these candidates were not approved at the clergy sessions of their annual conferences.⁷⁹⁶

Seventh, Petition #90036 stated that bishops must refuse to ordain or commission clergy candidates who are openly gay. Additionally, bishops must not ordain clergy candidates not certified as meeting all *Discipline* requirements by the annual conference's board of ordained ministry. Also, openly gay candidates cannot be consecrated as bishops.⁷⁹⁷ Interestingly, the word "practicing" was omitted from this sub-petition.⁷⁹⁸ Additionally, Petition #90037 stated that, before a clergy person can be appointed to the annual conference board of ordained ministry, he/she must be willing to certify a commitment to the *Discipline's* standards for ordination.⁷⁹⁹ Finally, the Traditional Plan petition, as amended, was voted by a margin of 507-

⁷⁹⁵ Ritter, "#GC2019."

⁷⁹⁶ Greater Northwest, "What Did?"

⁷⁹⁷ Greater Northwest, "What Did?"

⁷⁹⁸ Author's eyewitness account.

⁷⁹⁹ Ritter, "#GC2019."

310⁸⁰⁰ to become *Discipline* law on January 1, 2020 in the United States and May 1, 2021 in the central conferences.⁸⁰¹

When the vote was announced that the Traditional Plan petition was adopted as *Discipline* law, some delegates and observers began singing the hymn, "Blessed Assurance." Other delegates and spectators began chanting, "Stop the Harm," in protest of the vote. Some observers attempted to gain entrance to the Conference floor. These observers were removed by the venue's security. The venue called the St. Louis Police Department to guard the venue's exits with dogs. Additionally, some delegates marched a cross and a rainbow flag to the Conference stage. The bishops allowed the delegates to place the cross and flag without removal by the venue's security.⁸⁰² Then, in response to the General Conference's vote, JJ Warren, a member of the LGBTQIA+ community and a lay delegate from the Upper New York annual conference,⁸⁰³ said:

To see a global body of countries where homosexuality is still illegal only vote traditionally by fifty-four votes – I mean that's pretty amazing to me...We are the Church. The General Conference is not the Church.⁸⁰⁴

Finally, the Conference passed the amended Taylor disaffiliation petition by a vote of 402-400,⁸⁰⁵ requested a declaratory decision by the Judicial Council on the

⁸⁰⁰ Ritter, "#GC2019."

⁸⁰¹ Historically, central conferences are allowed a year after the adjournment of General Conference to decide to implement or not to implement legislation passed at a General Conference. This allows for greater flexibility within the cultural contexts of the central conferences. See: *Daily Christian Advocate* (2019), 482.

⁸⁰² Author's eyewitness account.

⁸⁰³ JJ Warren was lay delegate largely unknown outside of the Upper New York annual conference. Because of the popularity of his General Conference speech, however, he has since embarked on speaking tours and has authored a book. See: JJ Warren, *About Me* (<https://www.jjwarren.org/about>; accessed October 1, 2022).

⁸⁰⁴ James Michael Nichols, "LGBTQ United Methodist Leaders Gutted by Church's Anti-Gay Decision," NBC News, March 23, 2019 (<https://www.nbcnews.com/news/amp/nca986516>; accessed August 21, 2022).

⁸⁰⁵ *Daily Christian Advocate* (2019), 521. The amended Taylor disaffiliation petition contained the following stipulations. First, to disaffiliate, a local church must hold a church conference and two-

constitutionality of the Traditional Plan petitions by a vote of 405-395⁸⁰⁶ and closed the plenary session with an omnibus motion not to discuss any remaining petitions by a vote of 482-314.⁸⁰⁷ The Conference abruptly ended at 6:30pm on February 26, 2019. In adjourning the Conference, Bishop Carter said, "may you experience the peace of the Lord in the midst of all you have experienced."⁸⁰⁸

Following the Conference's adjournment several bishops released statements. For example, Bishop Carter wrote, "We are now and will be doing a lot of outreach to our progressive communities to say we love you, we care about you, we see you, we hear you."⁸⁰⁹ Additionally, Scott Jones, bishop of the Texas annual conference, wrote:

This vote resolves a long-standing debate.. This decision is consistent with our denomination's historic stance on human sexuality, outlined in the *Book of Discipline* since 1972...We will continue to welcome lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered, and queer persons to our churches and affirm their sacred worth. I pray we, as a denomination, can now move forward...⁸¹⁰

Likewise, after the adjournment of General Conference, Mike McKee, bishop of the North Texas annual conference, stated:

It is important to say that the full implications of the Traditional Plan and other petitions passed at General Conference this week remain to be seen. It will take some time for the dust to settle... My deepest hope

thirds majority of the church's professing members present at the church conference must vote to disaffiliate. Second, the local church must pay all apportionments for twelve months prior and twelve months post the disaffiliation date. Third, the local church must pay its pro rata share of any unfunded pension liabilities as determined by the annual conference. Fourth, the local church must satisfy any debts to its annual conference. Fifth, the annual conference can set further disaffiliation stipulations. See: *Book of Discipline* (Nashville: United Methodist Publishing House, 2019), 764.

⁸⁰⁶ *Daily Christian Advocate* (2019), 523.

⁸⁰⁷ *Daily Christian Advocate* (2019), 523.

⁸⁰⁸ *Daily Christian Advocate* (2019), 524.

⁸⁰⁹ Holly Meyer, "United Methodists' Decision on Same-Sex Marriage, LGBT Clergy," *The Tennessean*, February 26, 2019 (<https://www.tennessean.com/story/news/religion/2019/02/26/united-methodist-church-lgbt-vote-gay-marriage/2995838002/>; accessed June 4, 2020).

⁸¹⁰ Gilbert, Hahn, and Butler, "2019 General Conference Passes."

is that this is a story that we – progressives, evangelicals, and centrists– will write together.⁸¹¹

From such statements, it is evidenced that some bishops wished to work towards an outcome that provided for the preservation of the United Methodist Church.

Post 2019 General Conference of the United Methodist Church

Liberation Methodist Connexion:

After the 2019 General Conference, progressive caucus groups began working together to advance their vision for the future of American Methodism, and justice and equity for all persons separate from the institutional United Methodist Church. In turn, these caucus groups combined to create the Liberation Methodist Connexion.⁸¹² The vision of the Liberation Methodist Connexion is wide-ranging. For example, the Liberation Methodist Connexion states its purpose in its founding document. The founding document states:

We are a grassroots denomination of former, current, and non-Methodist faith leaders working on unfolding the kin-dom of God. We intentionally invite the full participation of all who are living out their God-given identities and expressions...We are journeying toward being followers of Christ that refute the imbalance of powers, principalities and privileges that has plagued Methodism: colonialism, white supremacy, economic injustices, patriarchy, sexism, clericalism. We trust God's presence and our collaborative labors will guide us toward a new, more liberative way of answering our calling and being in connexion together.⁸¹³

⁸¹¹ Michael McKee, "Bishop McKee Shares His Message After General Conference 2019," North Texas Annual Conference, February 27, 2019 (<https://ntcumc.org/news/bishop-mckee-shares-his-message-after-general-conference-2019>; accessed June 4, 2020).

⁸¹² Heather Hahn, "New Progressive Methodist Denomination Starts," *UM News*, December 2, 2020 (<https://www.umnews.org/en/news/new-progressive-methodist-denomination-starts>; accessed August 24, 2022).

⁸¹³ Liberation Methodist Connexion, About the LMX (<https://www.thelmx.org>; accessed April 13, 2021).

As evidenced above, the Liberation Methodist Connexion's vision is indicative of shifting American cultural values, focusing upon justice and equity imperatives rather than a personal salvation experience through Jesus Christ to reform American society.

The Global Methodist Church:

The Global Methodist Church launched on May 1, 2022. It is a denomination that formed from the Wesleyan Covenant Association. The Global Methodist Church seeks to enact social change by reacting against shifting cultural values and by returning to traditional mores through personal salvation in Jesus Christ.⁸¹⁴ For example, the Global Methodist Church's mission and vision states:

God is calling us to move into a new day as people called Methodists. Established in the faith entrusted to us by our forebearers, the Holy Spirit is reviving the Methodist movement in a new work – the Global Methodist Church – coming into existence...Our Mission is to make disciples of Jesus Christ who worship passionately, love extravagantly, and witness boldly...Our Vision is to join God in a journey of bringing new life, reconciliation, and the presence of Christ to all people, and to helping each person to increasingly reflect the character of Christ. Through our ministries, we desire to share the whole counsel of God with all people and to advance the presence and fulfilment of the Kingdom of God in every part of the world and at all levels of society.⁸¹⁵

Both the Global Methodist Church and the Liberation Methodist Connexion desire to transform society. Yet, they disagree on how to achieve cultural transformation. Importantly, the Global Methodist Church espouses personal salvation through Jesus Christ as a means for cultural change. Conversely, the Liberation Methodist Connexion does not emphasise personal salvation as a vehicle for societal

⁸¹⁴ Keith Boyette, "A New Beginning," Global Methodist Church, April 27, 2022 (<https://globalmethodist.org/a-new-beginning/>; accessed September 3, 2022).

⁸¹⁵ Global Methodist Church, Mission and Vision (<https://www.globalmethodist.org>; accessed April 15, 2021).

transformation. Instead, the Liberation Methodist Connexion stresses reaching out to all persons through equitable acts of justice to transform society. In turn, this difference, also manifest in the shifting cultural ethics of the late 1960s, has helped propel the United Methodist Church's trajectory into schism.

The Protocol for Grace and Separation:

During the autumn months of 2019, sixteen United Methodist leaders, including bishops and representatives from liberal, centrist, and traditionalist caucus groups met with an outside mediator, Kenneth Feinberg,⁸¹⁶ to develop a compromise that was to be presented to the 2020 General Conference body for ratification by the delegates.⁸¹⁷ Although the conservative Traditional Plan petition prevailed at the 2019 General Conference, the compromise plan, entitled "Protocol of Reconciliation & Grace Through Separation," allowed for traditionalist congregations and conferences to separate from the United Methodist Church to form a new denomination. Additionally, any conferences or churches who chose to separate from the United Methodist Church would be allowed to retain their properties. Also, any clergy who wished to become ministers in the new denomination would have their ordination transferred to the new denomination and would be eligible to keep their accrued pensions. Further, the new denomination would be given 2 million U.S. dollars from the United Methodist Church's coffers.⁸¹⁸ The 2020 General Conference, however, was postponed until September 2022 because of the coronavirus

⁸¹⁶ Kenneth Feinberg is an American mediation attorney who was appointed to administer the federal 9/11 Victims Compensation Fund. He was also the Special Settlement Master of the Agent Orange Victim Compensation Program. See: FDIC, Kenneth Feinberg (<https://www.fdic.gov/analysis/cfr/bank-research-conference/annual-9th/bio-short--ken-feinberg42709.pdf>; accessed September 1, 2022).

⁸¹⁷ Bishop John Yambasu, Sierra Leone central conference, who provided critical leadership in organizing advocating for the "Protocol of Reconciliation & Grace Through Separation," died in a car accident on August 16, 2020. See: Jeremy Steele, "Died: John K. Yambasu, Methodist Bridge-Builder and African Leader," *Christianity Today*, August 18, 2020 (<https://www.christianitytoday.com/news/2020/august/bishop-john-yambasu-dies-sierra-leone-umc-africa-protocol.html>; accessed August 19, 2022).

⁸¹⁸ Heather Hahn, "Negotiators Urge Hold on Trials, Closures," *UM News*, January 28, 2020 (<https://www.umnews.org/en/news/negotiators-urge-hold-on-trials-closures>; accessed June 26, 2020).

pandemic.⁸¹⁹ The coronavirus pandemic also postponed the 2022 General Conference. The next General Conference is scheduled for May 2024.⁸²⁰

Yet, although the 2020 General Conference was postponed, the sixteen signers of the “Protocol of Reconciliation & Grace Through Separation” also pledged to uphold, on behalf of their annual and central conferences and caucus groups, two aspects of the mediated agreement until the next General Conference convenes. First, the signers agreed to hold in abeyance complaints related to the United Methodist Church’s bans on same-sex weddings and openly gay clergy. Second, the signers vowed to delay church closures unless a church is unable to pay its financial obligations. While the mediated agreement is not binding upon the wider United Methodist Church, the signers expressed hope that United Methodists would adhere to the agreement.⁸²¹ For example, Reverend Keith Boyette, president of the Wesleyan Covenant Association and a protocol signer,⁸²² said, “In a highly charged, conflicted situation, anything that can lower the temperature in the environment assists in creating a scenario where resolution can be achieved.”⁸²³ Likewise, Reverend David Meredith, a member of the LGBTQIA+ community and protocol signer,⁸²⁴ said, “It’s a form of relief that can start now. To say to the entire denomination that if we really are going to separate and try to be two distinct new denominations, then we can start now by not hurting people anymore.”⁸²⁵ Thus, although the Traditional Plan is

⁸¹⁹ Heather Hahn, “Tentative General Conference Dates Publicized,” *UM News*, April 21, 2020 (<https://www.umnews.org/en/news/tentative-general-conference-dates-publicized>; accessed June 26, 2020).

⁸²⁰ Jeremy Smith, “Relief or Ruin? General Conference Postponed to 2024,” Hacking Christianity Blog, March 3, 2022 (<https://hackingchristianity.net/2022/03/relief-or-ruin-general-conference-postponed-to-2024.html>; accessed August 14, 2022).

⁸²¹ Hahn, “Negotiators.”

⁸²² Reverend Keith Boyette surrendered his United Methodist Church clergy credentials and became the chief executive of the Global Methodist Church on May 1, 2022. See: Boyette, “A New Beginning.”

⁸²³ Hahn, “Negotiators.”

⁸²⁴ Reverend David Meredith serves on the executive committee of the Reconciling Ministries Network. He has had three charges brought against him for being openly gay. All charges have been dismissed. He unsuccessfully ran for bishop in 2016. See: Kathy L. Gilbert, “Appeals Committee to Rule on Charges Against Gay Elder,” *UM News*, March 12, 2018 (<https://www.umnews.org/en/news/appeals-committee-to-rule-on-charges-against-gay-elder>; accessed August 14, 2022).

⁸²⁵ Hahn, “Negotiators.”

now official United Methodist Church polity, the bishops and caucus groups who signed the mediated agreement have vowed not to press charges or hold church trials against openly gay clergypersons or clergypersons who perform same-sex marriages, thereby disregarding the Traditional Plan's place within the *Discipline*.

United Methodist bishops, however, have had different reactions to the mediated agreement's calls for abeyance. Bishop Ough stated that he would abide by the proposed abeyance. Further, he urged "all United Methodists to join him by voluntarily ceasing complaints."⁸²⁶ Yet, Sharma Lewis, bishop of the Virginia annual conference, communicated that she did not intend to abide by the proposed abeyance. She discouraged the Virginia annual conference's clergy from presiding over same-sex wedding ceremonies. She went on to write, "However, if clergy preside over same-sex weddings and a complaint is filed about such conduct, I will process the complaint."⁸²⁷ As evidenced by the above comments, although the Traditional Plan petition is the official United Methodist polity regarding homosexuality, bishops have made their own decisions about administering this portion of United Methodist polity.

Before the next General Conference, some annual and central conferences will process complaints against openly gay clergy and clergy who preside over same-sex weddings while other annual and central conferences will not process such complaints. For example, Bishop Lewis has processed complaints against Reverend Drew Ensz, campus pastor at George Mason University in Fairfax, Virginia, and a second unnamed Virginia annual conference clergyperson for performing same-sex wedding ceremonies. As of December 2022, these complaints are open and active.⁸²⁸ Conversely, Bishop Carter has refused to process complaints⁸²⁹ against Reverend

⁸²⁶ Hahn, "Negotiators."

⁸²⁷ Hahn, "Negotiators."

⁸²⁸ Brenda Capen, "AC 2022-Friday Morning, June 17, 2022," Virginia Conference of the United Methodist Church (<https://vaumc.org/ac-2022-friday-morning-june-17-2022/>; accessed August 19, 2022).

⁸²⁹ Western North Carolina Conference of the United Methodist Church, "Bishop Carter's Pastoral Response to the General Conference Announcement," March 5, 2022

Andy Oliver, pastor of Allendale United Methodist Church in St. Petersburg, Florida, for performing several same-sex wedding ceremonies.⁸³⁰

Exegesis of Prominent Arguments, 2019 General Conference

The following section will analyse three prominent arguments that influenced the delegates' decisions at the 2019 General Conference. First, the delegates' debates about scriptural interpretation regarding homosexuality will be scrutinized. Secondly, the delegates' debates about denominational unity will be examined. Lastly, the delegates' debates regarding ecclesial authority will be exegeted.

Scriptural Interpretation:

The late 1960s reassessment of Christian identity and purpose has affected how American Methodists interact with the biblical record.⁸³¹ For example, Reverend Adam Hamilton, a delegate from the Great Plains conference,⁸³² utilising a biblical hermeneutic that allows for a reassessment of scripture's meaning and purpose,⁸³³ explained why he thinks United Methodists grapple with biblical passages about homosexuality. Hamilton stated:

Most conservatives, moderates, and progressives that I know in the United Methodist Church seek to be biblical Christians. They read their

<https://www.wnccumc.org/detail/bishop-carter-pastoral-response-to-the-general-conference-announcement-16384698>; accessed August 19, 2022).

⁸³⁰ Waveney Ann Moore, "No Resolution Yet for St. Petersburg Methodist Pastor Who Performed Same-Sex Weddings," *Tampa Bay Times*, May 29, 2019 (<https://www.tampabay.com/news/religion/no-resolution-yet-for-st-petersburg-methodist-pastor-who-performed-same-sex-weddings-20190529/?outputType=amp>; accessed August 19, 2022).

⁸³¹ Boggan Dreff, *Entangled*, 108-109.

⁸³² Reverend Adam Hamilton is the senior pastor of the largest United Methodist church in America, the 25,000 member Church of the Resurrection in Kansas City, Missouri. Hamilton is the author of over thirty books and is a member of the UMCNext caucus group's convening team. See: Adam Hamilton, About (<https://www.adamhamilton.com/about>; accessed September 2, 2022).

⁸³³ Adam Hamilton, *Making Sense of the Bible: Rediscovering the Power of Scripture Today* (New York: HarperCollins, 2014), 265-266.

bibles, study the scriptures, and seek to live them. Where they disagree is whether a handful of scriptures condemn same sex sexual activity....Do these passages describe God's heart and timeless will, or might they have been addressing specific forms of same sex activity in ancient Israel and in the first century Greco-Roman world, or perhaps they may not have captured God's heart and will at all?⁸³⁴

Yet other United Methodist scholars decry a reassessed Christian identity and purpose. Instead, these scholars claim that a liberalised interpretation of Christian identity and purpose has led to the devaluing of scripture and, consequently, division within American Methodism.⁸³⁵ For example, Timothy Tennent, president of Asbury Theological Seminary,⁸³⁶ stated:

What we actually have is a group (however imperfectly) which is committed to historic Christianity. The second group (however imperfectly) is committed to a re-imagined church...Thus we actually have two groups: one orthodox and one heterodox...The orthodox groups stands with the Apostles, the prophets, the martyrs and the biblical witness as revealed in Scripture...The heterodox come and go with every generation. They rise up, make a big noise, cause a huge stir, and tell the church that we are no longer relevant...We are now over 2,000 years into the Christian proclamation. The orthodox message is still here.⁸³⁷

Both Hamilton's and Tennent's quotations suggest that the division present within American Methodism is rooted in two groups who have vastly different

⁸³⁴ Adam Hamilton, "Homosexuality, the Bible, and the United Methodist Church," Adam Hamilton Blog, May 11, 2014 (<https://www.adamhamilton.com/blog/homosexuality-the-bible-and-the-united-methodist-church/#.YHnkiX3bDs>; accessed April 5, 2021).

⁸³⁵ Tooley, *Taking Back*, Location 3483, 3490, 3947.

⁸³⁶ Timothy Tennent has served as the president of Asbury Theological Seminary since 2009. He is the author of several books and signed a church planting partnership between Asbury Theological Seminary and the Global Methodist Church on May 10, 2022. See: Asbury Theological Seminary, Dr. Timothy C. Tennent (<https://asburyseminary.edu/faculty/timothy-tennent/>; accessed September 2, 2022).

⁸³⁷ Timothy Tennent, "Orthodoxy vs. Heterodoxy: The Fundamental Divide in the United Methodist Church," Blog, May 7, 2014 (<https://timothytennent.com/2014/05/05/orthodoxy-vs-heterodoxy-the-fundamental-divide-in-the-united-methodist-church/>; accessed April 15, 2021).

understandings of the purpose of the Christian experience.⁸³⁸ Additionally, for Tennent, it is a re-imagined view of Christianity that is built upon addressing socio-political issues, not an adherence to a traditional understanding of scripture and Christian tradition, that has caused irreconcilable division in the United Methodist Church.⁸³⁹

As evidenced, when viewed from a larger socio-political lens, Hamilton's and Tennent's views about scripture's place within American culture are located within the larger division found within competing ideologies. Consequently, scriptural interpretation was a prominent argument that the 2019 General Conference's delegates employed to express their understandings about the appropriateness of homosexuality within a biblical context.⁸⁴⁰ The nexus of the 2019 delegates' observations about homosexuality mostly addressed whether homosexuality was a justifiable identity and practice for Christians based upon scriptural interpretation.⁸⁴¹ Yet, as evidenced below, although scriptural interpretation was a prominent argument, the debates lacked a detailed exposition or exegesis of scripture.⁸⁴²

For Traditional Plan petition supporters, any acceptance of homosexuality was incongruent with their interpretation of scripture. Thus, Traditional Plan petition supporters believed it was the General Conference's responsibility to address homosexuality within the context of biblical teaching.⁸⁴³ Further, Traditional Plan

⁸³⁸ William J. Abraham, "United Methodists at the End of the Mainline," *First Things* (June/July 1998): 29-30.

⁸³⁹ Timothy Tennent, "The Next Methodism," Timothy Tennent Blog, February 1, 2022 (<https://timothytennent.com/next-methodism/>; accessed August 12, 2022).

⁸⁴⁰ Various Authors, "Fault Lines in United Methodism," The University of Chicago Divinity School, March 4, 2019 (<https://divinity.uchicago.edu/sightings/articles/fault-lines-united-methodism>; accessed August 12, 2022).

⁸⁴¹ Author's eyewitness account.

⁸⁴² William B. Lawrence, "Four, Three, Two, One: Four Words, Three Rules, Two Standards, One Grace," *UM Insight*, August 19, 2019 (<https://um-insight.net/perspectives/four-three-two-one/>; accessed July 29, 2022). Also, for a thorough exploration of the ways in which scriptural interpretation is employed at General Conferences, including the General Conferences' failure to exegete scripture well, See: D. Stephen Long, "Inhabiting Scripture: Wesley's Theopolitical Reading of the Bible," in eds. Daniel Wade McClain and Matthew A. Tapie, *Reading Scripture as a Political Act: Essays on the Theopolitical Interpretation of the Bible* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2015), 241-261.

⁸⁴³ Rob Renfroe, "Through a Glass Darkly," *UM Insight*, February 1, 2019 (<https://um-insight.net/general-conference/a-way-forward/through-a-glass-darkly/>; accessed August 12, 2022).

petition advocates believed that the other plans before General Conference departed from biblical mandates and, thus, were unacceptable.⁸⁴⁴ For example, Nancy Denardo, a lay delegate from the Western Pennsylvania annual conference,⁸⁴⁵ said:

The One Church Plan does not agree with the words of our Savior. It deceives young persons into believing that same-gender marriage is OK with God – when it is clearly not. The word became flesh – not the flesh becomes the word. I’m truly sorry if the truth of the Gospel hurts anyone.⁸⁴⁶

Likewise, Reverend Beth Ann Cook, a delegate from the Indiana annual conference,⁸⁴⁷ used scriptural interpretation to explain why Traditional Plan petition supporters voted to retain and strengthen *Discipline* prohibitions against homosexuality. Cook said:

I’m convinced that one of the problems is that progressives and centrists do not understand what motivates those who voted for the Traditional Plan...We are setting the official teaching of the denomination. One day we have to stand in front of God and be held accountable for our actions.⁸⁴⁸

⁸⁴⁴ Tooley, “African United Methodists.”

⁸⁴⁵ Nancy Denardo is a former lay leader of the Western Pennsylvania annual conference. In 2011, she brought charges against Bishop Daniel Wandabula, West Africa central conference, for \$3,000 US dollars owed to the Western Pennsylvania annual conference by the West Africa central conference. The matter was resolved when Bishop Wandabula paid the amount owed. See: Baltimore-Washington Conference of the United Methodist Church, Archives, “In Split Decision, Church’s Top Court Rules on Western Pennsylvania/East Africa Dispute,” April 24, 2013 (<https://www.bwcumc.org/archives/in-split-decision-churchs-top-court-rules-on-western-pennsylvaniaeast-africa-dispute/>; accessed August 12, 2022).

⁸⁴⁶ Bill Chappell, “United Methodist Church Votes to Keep Bans on Same-Sex Weddings, LGBTQ Clergy,” NPR, February 26, 2019 (<https://www.npr.org/2019/02/26/698188343/united-methodist-church-votes-to-keep-bans-on-same-sex-weddings-lgbtq-clergy>; accessed August 12, 2022).

⁸⁴⁷ Reverend Beth Ann Cook is a member of the Good News’ Board and is a member of the Wesleyan Covenant Association’s Leadership Council. See: St. Paul’s United Methodist Church, Pastor Beth Ann Cook (<https://www.stpaulsumcposeyville.org/pastor>; accessed August 12, 2022).

⁸⁴⁸ Beth Ann Cook, “Of Millstones and Misunderstandings,” Institute on Religion and Democracy Blog, March 6, 2019 (<https://juicyecumenism.com/2019/03/06/of-millstones-and-misunderstandings/>; accessed August 12, 2022).

Traditional Plan petition supporters insisted that their interpretation of scripture provided ample evidence that homosexuality is against the will of God as revealed through the bible. Because of this, the Traditional Plan petition supporters argued that homosexuality is always an unacceptable practice for Christians. Thus, they believed the United Methodist Church had the responsibility to strengthen existing *Discipline* laws concerning homosexuality.⁸⁴⁹

Yet, One Church and Simple Plan petition supporters also employed their interpretation of scripture to advance their belief that homosexuality is an acceptable practice for Christians.⁸⁵⁰ An example of this was offered by Adam Hamilton.

Hamilton said:

I have heard many tell us that this debate is about the authority of the bible. I'd suggest the debate is not about the authority of the bible, but about biblical interpretation. Paul says more about the role of women...than he says about same-sex acts. The WCA has said that they support the ordination of women. I'm grateful. But in doing so, you have set aside the clear teaching of Paul: women keep silent in the church...How did you come to set aside the clear teaching of scripture? You interpreted the scriptures in the light of their cultural setting and by reasoning theologically in the light of more important themes in scripture.⁸⁵¹

One Church and Simple Plan petition supporters used their interpretation of scripture to demonstrate that homosexuality was an acceptable practice for Christians,⁸⁵² likening it to Methodism's changed scriptural interpretation that

⁸⁴⁹ Cara Nicklas, "A Lay Delegate Perspective on #GC2019," People Need Jesus Blog, March 4, 2019 (<https://peopleneedjesus.net/2019/03/04/cara-nicklas-a-lay-delegate-perspective-on-gc2019/>; accessed August 12, 2022).

⁸⁵⁰ Adam Hamilton, "The Bible Says It...That Settles It," Adam Hamilton Blog, February 22, 2019 (<https://www.adamhamilton.com/blog/the-bible-says-it-that-settles-it/#.YxpEsCUpAWM>; accessed August 12, 2022).

⁸⁵¹ Adam Hamilton, "A Speech Against," Adam Hamilton Blog, February 26, 2019 (<https://www.adamhamilton.com/blog/a-speech-against-?#.YxpaDSUpAWM>; accessed August 12, 2022).

⁸⁵² Hannah Adair Bonner, "We Queer Clergy Begged Our Fellow Methodists to Love Us; They Voted No," *The Washington Post*, March 1, 2019 (<https://www.washingtonpost.com/outlook/queer-clergy->

allowed for women's ordination.⁸⁵³ Additionally, some delegates believed the passage of the Traditional Plan petition by the 2019 General Conference harmed the United Methodist Church because the decision was in opposition to Jesus' teachings. This demonstrates the delegates' divergent viewpoints about the correct interpretation of scripture's teachings on human sexuality.⁸⁵⁴

Denominational Unity:

The 2019 General Conference delegates also debated whether it was feasible for the United Methodist Church to continue as one denomination despite differing scriptural interpretations about homosexuality. For some delegates, their interpretation of scripture's teachings about homosexuality did not allow for contradictory convictions about human sexuality to coexist in one denomination. A unified sexual ethic was preferable to continuing as one denomination with divergent doctrines about homosexuality.⁸⁵⁵ For example, Maxie Dunnam said:

The Traditional Plan seeks to put in place ways to make clear whether or not someone has violated the *Book of Discipline*...It is not true that conservative United Methodists don't embrace diversity. We favor diversity. What we don't favor is a notion that you can believe anything you please to believe and still be a Methodist....⁸⁵⁶

[begged-our-fellow-methodists-to-love-us-they-voted-no/2019/03/01/ac1a232c-3b87-11e9-aaae-69364b2ed137_story.html](https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2019/02/united-methodists-fracture-lgbt-plan-rejected/583693/); accessed August 12, 2022).

⁸⁵³ Emma Green, "Conservative Christians Just Retook the United Methodist Church," *The Atlantic*, February 26, 2019 (<https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2019/02/united-methodists-fracture-lgbt-plan-rejected/583693/>; accessed August 12, 2022).

⁸⁵⁴ J. Philip Wogaman, "Flawed #UMC Arguments Against Changing LGBTQ Policies," Hacking Christianity Blog, March 20, 2019 (<https://hackingchristianity.net/2019/03/flawed-umc-arguments-against-changing-lgbtq-policies.html>; accessed August 12, 2022).

⁸⁵⁵ Straw, "Is Schism Inevitable?,"

⁸⁵⁶ Maxie Dunnam, "Seeing a Way Forward," *UM News*, January 17, 2019 (<https://www.umnews.org/en/news/seeing-a-way-forward-the-rev-maxie-dunnam>; accessed August 16, 2022).

Other delegates, however, were willing to accept contradictory convictions and denominational practices about homosexuality for the United Methodist Church to remain a single entity. The desire for denominational unity was used by One Church Plan petition supporters to lobby for a change in the *Discipline* that would allow the United Methodist Church to continue to exist as one denomination with different beliefs and practices about homosexuality.⁸⁵⁷ Consequently, by permitting individual pastors, churches, and annual/central conferences to come to their own conclusions about homosexuality, based upon scriptural interpretation, some delegates claimed that denominational unity could be established.⁸⁵⁸

Yet, a different appeal using denominational unity was made by Rob Renfroe. Renfroe used *Discipline* compliance as a mechanism to achieve denominational unity. For those who favoured the Traditional Plan petition, adherence to and enforcement of the *Discipline's* mandates regarding homosexuality could bring denominational unity.⁸⁵⁹ Renfroe said, "I think it's obvious that the delegates favor the Traditional Plan...Live by our covenant...You have to live by it, or then the church has to enforce it."⁸⁶⁰ Delegates who supported the Traditional Plan petition felt that denominational unity relied upon obeying established *Discipline* law that is based upon their scriptural interpretation about homosexuality.⁸⁶¹

Conversely, centrists and progressives expressed their fear of official denominational division if the Traditional Plan petition passed the General Conference body.⁸⁶² Adam Hamilton predicted what he thought would occur if the Traditional Plan petition was adopted. He said:

⁸⁵⁷ *Daily Christian Advocate* (2019), 371-372.

⁸⁵⁸ *Daily Christian Advocate* (2019), 497-498.

⁸⁵⁹ David W. Scott, "On the Uses of Law in the UMC," *UM Insight*, April 30, 2019 (<http://um-insight.net/in-the-church/umc-global-nature/on-the-uses-of-law-in-the-umc/>; accessed August 16, 2022).

⁸⁶⁰ Hodges, "Key GC2019 Votes."

⁸⁶¹ Nicklas, "A Lay Delegate Perspective."

⁸⁶² Jeremy Smith, "Traditionalist Plan: More of the Same for the #UMC," Hacking Christianity Blog, October 4, 2018 (<https://hackingchristianity.net/2018/10/traditionalist-plan-more-of-the-same-for-the-umc.html>; accessed August 29, 2022).

Centrists and progressives never wanted a divorce...We were looking for a little more space. Those who voted for the Traditional Plan have not only alienated progressive United Methodists, but also those in the middle. You have inspired a number of people who hadn't been engaged in the debate but are now hurt, angry, and energized.⁸⁶³

As evidenced, some delegates felt that a unified sexual ethic based upon their scriptural interpretation was more important than continuing as a single United Methodist Church. Other delegates, however, valued one expression of the United Methodist Church with divergent opinions about homosexuality. For these delegates, this understanding was also based upon their interpretation of scripture. Additionally, as evidenced, delegates disagreed about how to establish denominational unity. Some felt that denominational unity could be obtained by allowing for divergent sexual ethics. Others believed that denominational unity could only occur if the *Discipline's* mandates on homosexuality were followed and enforced. Each group asserted that United Methodist Churches and members would leave if the other viewpoint prevailed during the General Conference. Consequently, these statements caused additional unofficial divisions between delegates who held divergent beliefs on homosexuality.

While the delegates debated their understandings of denominational unity, the bishops had advocated for over a year for denominational unity through one United Methodist Church.⁸⁶⁴ Per the *Discipline*, working for unity within the United Methodist Church is one of the main objectives for those who serve as bishops.⁸⁶⁵ Throughout the 2019 General Conference, the Council of Bishops, with a few exceptions, championed a form of denominational unity, the One Church Plan, that

⁸⁶³ Hamilton, "A Speech Against."

⁸⁶⁴ LaTrelle Easterling, "A Word from the Bishop: We Can Remain Together – Why I Support the One Church Plan," Baltimore Washington Conference of the United Methodist Church, October 9, 2018 (<https://www.bwcumc.org/news-and-view/a-word-from-the-bishop-we-can-remain-together-why-i-support-the-one-church-plan/>; accessed August 29, 2022).

⁸⁶⁵ *Discipline* (2012), 317.

would allow for divergent beliefs about homosexuality.⁸⁶⁶ The episcopal leadership's public support of the One Church Plan led to further debates about the role of ecclesial authority in the United Methodist Church.⁸⁶⁷

Ecclesial Authority:

As evidenced, the 2019 General Conference delegates disagreed about the proper application of ecclesial authority. Some delegates thought that episcopal leadership should be given the authority to make specific recommendations to the General Conference body regarding homosexuality. In turn, these delegates believed that the General Conference body should accept the episcopacy's guidance.⁸⁶⁸ Conversely, other delegates mistrusted the episcopacy's intentions about enacting Church policies regarding homosexuality. Thus, they believed denominational leadership should have a diminished role within United Methodism.⁸⁶⁹ These disagreements about the United Methodist Church's ecclesial authority helped frame the delegates' debates.

Per the *Discipline*, bishops do not vote on any General Conference matters. Instead, they are to provide meeting oversight and spiritual support during the General Conference proceedings.⁸⁷⁰ In describing the episcopacy's work during General Conference proceedings, Bishop Yambasu said, "A major responsibility of the

⁸⁶⁶ Grant J. Hagiya, "GC2019 Bishop's Reflection," California Pacific Conference of the United Methodist Church, February 25, 2019 (<https://www.calpacumc.org/general-conference-2019/gc2019-bishops-reflection-monday-february-25-2019/>; accessed August 30, 2022).

⁸⁶⁷ Walter Fenton, "The One Church Plan: Calm and Rational?," Wesleyan Covenant Association, February 12, 2019 (<https://wesleyan covenant.org/2019/02/11/the-one-church-plan-calm-and-rational/>; accessed September 1, 2022).

⁸⁶⁸ Jim Miller, "A Way Farther Apart," Jim Miller Blog, February 27, 2019 (<https://jimblog.com/2019/02/27/a-way-farther-apart/>; accessed July 29, 2022).

⁸⁶⁹ Rob Renfro, "Be Forewarned," *Good News Magazine*, July 5, 2022 (<https://goodnewsmag.org/editorial-be-forewarned/>; accessed July 24, 2022).

⁸⁷⁰ *Discipline* (2012), 352.

Council of Bishops is to make sure we create the kind of space for trust in order to enable the delegates to do their work."⁸⁷¹

Prior to the 2019 General Conference, however, several leading denominational figures published opinion pieces about United Methodist episcopal leadership.⁸⁷² These writings were meant to influence General Conference delegates in their decision-making process about the United Methodist Church's response to homosexuality. For example, in a letter published prior to the 2019 General Conference, Timothy Tennent wrote:

Our episcopal leaders regularly cite that they also promised in their consecration as bishops to uphold the unity of the church...Our unity is not found in ecclesiastical structures, but in the Gospel...The fact that the majority of the bishops have embraced the One Church Plan and even launched a website and videos to promote it shows just how formidable our pathway back to orthodoxy truly is.⁸⁷³

Likewise, Jan Lawrence expressed her dismay with the United Methodist episcopal system. She stated:

There are elements in the structure and governance of The UMC that are broken. You cannot have a global denomination modeled after something that sort of worked over a century ago in the US...It is clear that, in developing the (unnecessary) language of contextualization, the COWF [Commission on the Way Forward] did not prioritize LGBTQ lives. Instead, it gave priority to those who demand the status quo at the threat of schism. The plan goes out of its way to accommodate bishops who don't want to ordain LGBTQ people...⁸⁷⁴

⁸⁷¹ Heather Hahn, "Bishops Urge Trust in GC2019 Delegates," The United Methodist Church, January 15, 2019 (<https://www.umc.org/en/content/bishops-urge-trust-in-gc2019-delegates-ef>; accessed July 9, 2020).

⁸⁷² Jeremy Smith, "The UMC is Hanging by a Thread from the Bishops' Robes," Hacking Christianity Blog, March 2, 2018 (<https://hackingchristianity.net/2018/03/the-umc-is-hanging-by-a-threat-from-the-bishops-robos.html>; accessed September 1, 2022).

⁸⁷³ Timothy Tennent, "One Church Plan: Key Issues to Think About Before You Vote," Timothy Tennent Blog, January 2019 (<https://timothytennent.com/2019/01/>; accessed July 11, 2020).

⁸⁷⁴ Jan Lawrence, "Do Not Rashly Tear Asunder: RMN's Statement on Plans, Reconciling Ministries Network, July 25, 2018 (<https://rmnetwork.org/do-not-rashly-tear-asunder-rmns-statement-on-plans/>; accessed July 13, 2020).

Other United Methodist leaders, however, urged delegates to support the bishops' recommendations, claiming they would bring stability to all areas of the United Methodist Church.⁸⁷⁵ For example, Mark Holland wrote:

The One Church Plan offers a working solution for all constituency groups. It allows more conservative bishops, conferences, churches, and pastors to continue their current practices. It allows more progressive bishops, conferences, churches, and pastors to fully include LGBTQ persons in the life of the church...The One Church Plan holds the denomination together...⁸⁷⁶

Before the 2019 General Conference began, United Methodists held different opinions about how the episcopacy addressed homosexuality. As a result, there was an intentional effort to sway delegates' perception of the United Methodist Church's ecclesial authority.⁸⁷⁷ Often, ecclesial authority was intertwined with scriptural interpretation and denominational unity. Consequently, during the 2019 General Conference, ecclesial authority became a prominent argument as the delegates debated homosexuality.⁸⁷⁸

Proponents of the Traditional Plan claimed that the episcopacy did not represent or adequately serve United Methodist membership.⁸⁷⁹ For example,

⁸⁷⁵ Jim Patterson, "Backers Say One Church Plan Preserves Unity," *UM News*, January 28, 2022; (accessed <https://www.umnews.org/en/news/backers-say-one-church-plan-preserves-unity>; September 2, 2022).

⁸⁷⁶ Mark Holland, "Introduction to the One Church Plan," *Mainstream Methodists*, Summer 2019 (<https://mainstreamumc.com/resources/one-church-plan/>; accessed July 11, 2020).

⁸⁷⁷ Since the formation of the United Methodist Church, it can be argued that caucus groups have used their communication channels to sway General Conference votes. See: James Rutland Wood, "Leadership, Identity, and Mission in a Changing United Methodist Church," in ed. David A. Roozen and James R. Nieman, *Church, Identity, and Change: Theology and Denominational Structures in Unsettled Times* (Grand Rapids, Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2005), 550.

⁸⁷⁸ Author's eyewitness account.

⁸⁷⁹ Scott Kisker, "A Spirit of Tyranny: The Abuse of Episcopal Authority in the UMC," *Firebrand Magazine*, April 27, 2021 (<https://firebrandmag.com/articles/a-spirit-of-tyranny-the-abuse-of-episcopal-authority-in-the-umc>; accessed August 23, 2022).

Reverend Walter Fenton, Greater New Jersey annual conference delegate,⁸⁸⁰ said of the Modified Traditional Plan:

The measures some bishops now decry as “harsh” were included in the plan because these very same bishops failed to uphold the church’s existing standards in the first place. The TP is the General Conference’s way of saying, “We are not going to allow a minority of clergy and bishops to accomplish their agenda via bullying tactics and acts of defiance...The vast majority of United Methodists sincerely believe the church’s sexual ethics, teachings on marriage, and its ordination standards are grounded in Scripture and Christian teaching. They believe the church has openly and fairly arrived at these teachings, reaffirmed them-repeatedly- and now rightly expect its clergy and bishops to abide by and embrace them.”⁸⁸¹

Fenton exhibits deep distrust of ecclesial authority in the United Methodist Church. He also used scriptural interpretation and denominational unity to further his argument that the episcopacy is not representative of the United Methodist Church’s membership.

Yet, other delegates were supportive of the episcopacy’s efforts, urging the General Conference body to honour ecclesial authority. For these delegates, a greater acceptance of ecclesial authority could bring their form of denominational unity- one United Methodist Church with contradictory convictions about homosexuality.⁸⁸² For many of these delegates, the Traditional Plan petition usurped

⁸⁸⁰ Reverend Walter Fenton is the Director of Strategic Resources for *Good News Magazine*. He is the Deputy Transitional Connectional Officer and Secretary of the Transitional Leadership Council of the Global Methodist Church. See: Beth Caulfield, “Walter Fenton on the New Methodism,” Wesleyan Covenant Association of Greater New Jersey, July 10, 2021 (<https://newnj.church/category/global/>; accessed August 23, 2022).

⁸⁸¹ Walter Fenton, “No Apologies for the Traditional Plan,” Wesleyan Covenant Association Blog, March 26, 2019 (<https://wesleyan covenant.org/2019/03/25/no-apologies-for-the-traditional-plan/>; accessed December 5, 2022).

⁸⁸² Tom Berlin, “#1Church4All,” Tom Berlin Blog, March 13, 2019 (<https://revtomberlin.com/1church4all>; accessed July 27, 2022).

ecclesial authority and invited denominational division.⁸⁸³ An example of this observation is found in a speech by Reverend Jeremy Troxler, a delegate from the Western North Carolina annual conference.⁸⁸⁴ Troxler said:

This non-traditional plan treats the Church as if it were made for the *Discipline*, rather than the *Discipline* made to serve the Church. It tramples upon the traditional rights and freedoms of the annual conferences, forcing them to become serfs to the will of this body, threatening to turn the Boards of Ordained Ministry into sanhedrins, and clergy session not into gracious discernments, but into hostile inquisitions... I believe this plan, with its harsh provisions, is a boot on the neck of LGBTQ people, and a General Conference boot on the neck of our bishops, churches, and its ministers.⁸⁸⁵

Troxler's disdain for the Traditional Plan petition is evident. He claims that that the Traditional Plan will severely compromise ecclesial authority and force the bishops to support legislation they do not want to enforce. Troxler goes on to argue that the Traditional Plan petition does not hold with many delegates' scriptural interpretation and will prohibit denominational unity, one United Methodist Church with contradictory convictions on homosexuality. Such evidence demonstrates that arguments about ecclesial authority are intertwined with arguments about scriptural interpretation and denominational unity.

Conclusion

The 2019 General Conference delegates, influenced by shifting American cultural attitudes towards homosexuality and various caucus' groups writings,

⁸⁸³ Jeremy Smith, "Rage Against the UMC: The Traditionalist Plan," *UM Insight*, July 20, 2018 (<https://um-insight.net/perspectives/jeremy-smith/rage-against-the-umc-the-traditionalist-plan/>; accessed August 21, 2022).

⁸⁸⁴ Reverend Jeremy Troxler is a clergyperson largely unknown outside the Western North Carolina annual conference.

⁸⁸⁵ Jeremy Troxler, "I Speak Against the Traditional Plan," *Uniting Methodists* (<https://unitingmethodists.com/responses/i-speak-against-the-traditional-plan/>; accessed July 7, 2020).

debated about the general acceptance of homosexuality as a legitimate Christian identity. To do this, the delegates employed the intertwined arguments of scriptural interpretation, denominational unity, and ecclesial authority. Depending upon their viewpoints about homosexuality, the delegates used each of these arguments to advance their cause. While the Traditional Plan petition was adopted during the 2019 General Conference, the United Methodist Church has continued to debate its policy on homosexuality, leading to schism after the formation of the Global Methodist Church. American Methodism will likely continue to debate a response to homosexuality through the lens of scriptural interpretation, denominational unity, and ecclesial authority.

Chapter Six: Comparison

Introduction

The preceding chapters have described and analysed American Methodism's 1844 and 2022 schisms. By providing a robust exploration of Methodism's interaction with American societal trends, this thesis has shown that American Methodism has a historic and enduring pattern of emulating American socio-political shifts. This pattern has led American Methodism into two major schismatic periods, the 1844 schism over slavery and the 2022 schism over homosexuality. Chapter Six will compare the prominent arguments undergirding each schism by analysing the similarities and differences found within the core debates of the 1844 and 2019 General Conferences. Such analysis will demonstrate that disagreements about changing cultural values have impacted delegates' opinions about ecclesial matters and structures, resulting in denominational schism.

American Legal Decisions:

Prior to the 1844 and 2019 General Conferences, monumental legal decisions about slavery and homosexuality occurred in the United States. These decisions changed the landscape of American civil law and, therefore, directly impacted the ways in which General Conference delegates grappled with slavery and homosexuality. Ultimately, this led to schism in both 1844 and 2022.

As described in Chapter Two, the 1844 reversal of the Gag Rule allowed for petitions against slavery to be considered before Congress. From 1835 to 1843, Congressional delegates overwhelmingly voted to ban discussions about slavery. In 1844, however, political momentum shifted to favour those who championed the hearing of anti-slavery petitions.⁸⁸⁶ The 1844 General Conference occurred during the height of the Congressional debates concerning the repeal of the Gag Rule. The

⁸⁸⁶ William Lee Miller, *Arguing About Slavery: John Quincy Adams and the Great Battle in the United States Congress* (New York: Vintage Books, 1998), 476-481.

Methodist Episcopal Church had been operating under its own Gag Rule since 1840. At the 1844 General Conference, however, the denomination's Gag Rule was rescinded to allow debates about slavery.⁸⁸⁷ The proximity of these two events shows a link between a sweeping 1844 American legal change about anti-slavery petitions and the 1844 General Conference delegates' willingness to repeal its prohibitions about anti-slavery petitions, contributing to the Methodist Episcopal Church's schism. Methodist historian William Warren Sweet acknowledges this tendency. He writes, "The church does not lead public opinion on such matters as the slavery issue, but, rather, tends to follow public opinion."⁸⁸⁸ Likewise, a major shift in American legal precedent concerning homosexuality occurred prior to the 2019 General Conference. As analysed previously, same-sex marriage was federally legalised throughout the United States on June 26, 2015. This civil decision forced General Conference delegates to reconsider homosexuality's place within the United Methodist Church.⁸⁸⁹

The Discipline forbids same-sex marriages and openly gay pastors. However, because same-sex marriage was illegal in the United States, pastors could not legally perform gay marriages. Additionally, because the *Discipline* states that pastors are not to engage in sexual activity outside of marriage, sexually active gay pastors were not allowed because homosexuals persons could not legally marry. Once same-sex marriages were federally recognised, however, debates about homosexuality became less abstract in the United Methodist Church. Now, General Conference delegates were propelled to make decisions about homosexuality in relation to changed civil law, exacerbating tensions within American Methodism.⁸⁹⁰ Then, the 2016 General Conference, the first Conference after the federal legislation of same-sex marriage,

⁸⁸⁷ Harris, *A Long Reconstruction*, 22.

⁸⁸⁸ William Warren Sweet, *Methodism in American History* (New York: Abingdon Press, 1953), 246.

⁸⁸⁹ Ivey DeJesus, "Pastor Once Defrocked for Gay Marriage Says SCOTUS Decision Ushers in New Day," *Pennlive*, June 26, 2015 (<https://www.pennlive.com/midstate/2015/06/supreme-court-gay-marriage-rul-2.html>; accessed December 1, 2022).

⁸⁹⁰ DeJesus, "Pastor Once Defrocked."

advocated for official schism over homosexuality.⁸⁹¹ Again, the proximity of the federal legalisation of same-sex marriage and General Conference's subsequent debates about homosexuality and schism denotes a link between American civil laws and increased denominational strife.

Participants in the debates about slavery and homosexuality within American Methodism recognized the connection between the debates and trends in wider American society. During the 1844 General Conference, Stephen Olin spoke about the rise of anti-slavery sentiment in the Northern annual conferences. Olin posited that newspapers, election campaigns, and political literature had contributed to the anti-slavery movement gaining momentum in the Church.⁸⁹² He said:

The difficulties of this question, then do not arise chiefly from its relation to abolitionism in the church, but from the general condition of feeling among the people of non-slaveholding states.⁸⁹³

The relationship between American societal trends and General Conference debates were also recognized by the 2019 General Conference delegates. Reflecting upon his experience as a delegate, Maxie Dunnam said:

I believe the whole tension is around this point. American culture is really determining the prominent position that people have on sexuality, not only on homosexuality but on human sexuality in general. This is expressing itself in the Methodist debates about the ordination and marriage of homosexual persons. We saw this at General Conference 2019...The 2015 federal legalization of gay marriage sped up the Methodist debates about homosexuality because it forced people to make marriage into a justice issue. I do not believe marriage is a justice issue because it's a personal issue, not a societal issue. When something is made into a justice issue, people are encouraged because they are given the freedom to do what they please to do.⁸⁹⁴

⁸⁹¹ James Calvin Davis, *Forbearance: A Theological Ethic for a Disagreeable Church* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2017), 2.

⁸⁹² West, *Report of the Debates*, 55.

⁸⁹³ West, *Report of the Debates*, 55.

⁸⁹⁴ Maxie Dunnam stated this in a telephone conversation with the author on October 10, 2022.

The above quotations provide insight into the ways in which the 1844 and 2019 General Conference delegates were influenced by changed American civil law and shifting American societal trends, contributing to denominational schism.

Northern and Southern Regional Differences:

Additionally, regional differences between the Northern and Southern states impacted both the 1844 and 2019 General Conferences. Much has been written in this thesis about the regional differences concerning slavery and their contribution to the Methodist Episcopal Church's schism. A close study of the United Methodist Church's debates about homosexuality also demonstrates how Northern and Southern regional differences helped set a trajectory towards denominational schism.⁸⁹⁵

According to the Pew Research Center's "Views About Homosexuality by State: 2022," the acceptance rate of homosexuality amongst the general population of the Southern states ranges from forty percent to sixty-one percent.⁸⁹⁶ The same study demonstrated that the acceptance rate of homosexuality amongst the general population of the Northern states ranges from sixty-two percent to eighty-two percent.⁸⁹⁷ Historian Scott Vehstedt shows that demographics in American Methodism have continually favoured the Southern annual conferences which traditionally practice more conservative opinions about homosexuality.⁸⁹⁸ In 1972 when the incompatibility clause was inserted into the *Discipline*, Northern annual conferences comprised 476 of the 988 delegates.⁸⁹⁹ Since then, because of membership loss, the Northern annual conferences' delegate count has decreased.

⁸⁹⁵ Northern annual conferences also include the Northwestern United States annual conferences.

⁸⁹⁶ Pew Research Center, "Views About Homosexuality by State: 2022," <https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/religious-landscape-study/compare/views-about-homosexuality/by/state/>; accessed November 30, 2022).

⁸⁹⁷ Pew Research Center, "Views About Homosexuality."

⁸⁹⁸ Vehstedt, "Continuity in the Face of Social Change," 28.

⁸⁹⁹ Vehstedt, "Continuity in the Face of Social Change," 30.

By the 2012 Conference, the Northern annual conferences only held 251 of the 953 delegates.⁹⁰⁰ At the 2019 Conference, the Northern annual conferences delegate count continued to dwindle, comprising only 196 out of 864 delegates.⁹⁰¹ These statistics show a link between less support for the acceptance of homosexuality amongst the Southern states' general population and the continued support of the incompatibility clause amongst Southern delegates who outnumber Northern delegates.⁹⁰²

Additionally, some within the Southern annual conferences have long feared that the United Methodist Church's bishops, agencies, and boards place undue emphasis on the more liberal values about homosexuality that prevail in the Northern annual conferences.⁹⁰³ For example, conservative delegates believed that study commissions about homosexuality would celebrate the cultural norms found in cities such as San Francisco and underrepresent the cultural norms found in places such as Mississippi.⁹⁰⁴ Because of this, Adam Hamilton believes that the majority of American United Methodist Churches who choose to disaffiliate will be located in the South.⁹⁰⁵ Currently, Hamilton's predication is correct. As of December 2022, 1,619 churches from the Southern annual conferences and 395 churches from the Northern annual conferences have disaffiliated under Paragraph 2553.⁹⁰⁶ The Taylor Disaffiliation Petition became Paragraph 2553 in the 2019 *Discipline*. In November

⁹⁰⁰ Vehstedt, "Continuity in the Face of Social Change," 30.

⁹⁰¹ *Daily Christian Advocate* (2019), "Voting and Reserve Delegates by Conference," 73-113.

⁹⁰² The Southern annual conferences have also lost delegates due to membership decrease. Their delegate loss, however, is not as profound as the Northern annual conference's delegate loss. For example, in 2019, the Southern annual conferences had 302 delegates. The remaining 366 delegates were from the central annual conferences. See: *Daily Christian Advocate* (2019), "Voting and Reserve Delegates by Conference," 73-113.

⁹⁰³ Tod Palmer, "Local Pastor Responds to Methodist Church's Separation Plan," Kansas City: KSHB 41, January 3, 2020 (<https://www.kshb.com/news/local-news/local-pastor-responds-to-methodist-churchs-separation-plan>; accessed November 30, 2022).

⁹⁰⁴ Schreiber, *Journal* (1976), Volume I, 502.

⁹⁰⁵ Palmer, "Local Pastor Responds."

⁹⁰⁶ "Disaffiliations Approved by Annual Conference," *UM News*, <https://www.umnews.org/en/news/disaffiliations-approved-by-annual-conferences> (accessed December 1, 2022).

2022, the Judicial Council ruled that Paragraph 2553 is the only option for disaffiliation for matters of conscience about homosexuality.⁹⁰⁷

Also, although the *Discipline's* incompatibility clause continues as Church law, some Southern conservative leaders feel that a Northern minority has imposed its more progressive will on the denomination and has ignored *Discipline* mandates.⁹⁰⁸ Northern annual conferences have now elected two openly gay and partnered bishops⁹⁰⁹ and have launched conference-wide trainings on the “impact of homophobia, transphobia, and heterosexisms within United Methodist Churches.”⁹¹⁰ As of December 2022, the Southern annual conferences have not elected nor put forward an openly gay candidate for bishop. This evidence helps determine that Northern and Southern regional differences about homosexuality, like regional differences about slavery, have contributed to schism in American Methodism.

Methodist Tradition:

The 1844 and 2022 schisms also saw intense disagreements about which groups could claim better adherence to Methodism as practiced by John Wesley and the early American Methodists. As noted in Chapter Three, both anti-slavery and pro-slavery delegates used examples from early American Methodism to advance their causes. By evoking images from early American Methodism, each faction believed that they were following historical precedent and championing Methodist tradition. For example, both the Northern and Southern delegations used Bishop Asbury's

⁹⁰⁷ Heather Hahn, “Church Court Makes Impact,” *UM Insight*, September 28, 2022 (<https://um-insight.net/in-the-church/umc-future/church-court-makes-impact>; accessed December 3, 2022).

⁹⁰⁸ Thomas Lambrecht, “Charting a New Direction for the UMC (Part 1),” Good News Magazine Blog, November 18, 2022 (<https://goodnewsmag.org/charting-a-new-direction-for-the-umc-part-1/>; accessed December 1, 2022).

⁹⁰⁹ Reverend Cedrick D. Bridgeforth, an openly gay married clergyman, was elected bishop in the Northwestern Jurisdiction in 2022. Reverend Jay Williams, an openly gay married clergyman, was twenty votes short of being elected bishop in the Northeastern Jurisdiction in 2022. See: Lambrecht, “Charting a New Direction.”

⁹¹⁰ John Lomperis, “United Methodist Leaders Further Support White Supremacy,” The Institute on Religion and Democracy Blog, November 18, 2022 (<https://juicyecumenism.com/2022/11/18/united-methodist-white-supremacy/>; accessed December 1, 2022).

opinions on slavery to further their arguments.⁹¹¹ The Southern delegates claimed that early American Methodism stressed separation from political matters, including slavery.⁹¹² The Northern delegates, however, thought that early American Methodism sought to combat political systems of oppression, including slavery.⁹¹³

In the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, both conservative and progressive delegates also employed Methodist tradition to claim that they were practicing a purer vision of Methodism. Unlike the 1844 delegates, twenty-first century delegates wished to demonstrate that they were closely following Wesley's writings.⁹¹⁴ More conservative delegates and commentators claimed that Wesley and early American Methodism advocated for a conservative sexual ethic.⁹¹⁵ For example, Kevin Watson, Methodist historian, reflected upon the 2019 General Conference and proceeding schism:

[Twenty and twenty-first century American] Methodism often compromised on its most deeply held convictions in order to maintain influence. The original vision of Methodism was different. Wesley's followers in the United States saw themselves as part of a movement raised up by God in order to spread scriptural holiness...[American Methodism] grew because it had a detailed plan for helping members grow in holiness...People who were unwilling to live according to Methodism's standards and instead lived according to the ways of the world were removed from membership...This vision was not hostile to the dominant culture for the sake of hostility. It was loyal to Jesus Christ and him crucified. The agonies of the United Methodist Church and

⁹¹¹ As described in Chapter Three, Bishop Asbury was an early opponent of slavery but later modified his beliefs to include religious instruction of enslaved persons. See: Wigger, *American Saint*, 152-154.

⁹¹² Smith, *Capture These Indians for the Lord*, 25.

⁹¹³ Owen, *The Sacred Flame of Love*, 53-55.

⁹¹⁴ As described and analysed in Chapter Three, while early American Methodism was repeatedly referenced by 1844 delegates, Wesley was only mentioned in one speech. Many of the 1844 delegates still felt that Wesley's writings were British centric and did not uphold the aim of the American Revolution. This attitude faded amongst American Methodists. During the 2019 Conference debates, many delegates voiced a desire to emulate Wesley. For a thorough analysis of Wesley's politics during the American Revolution and the ways in which they impacted American Methodism, See: Glen O'Brien, *John Wesley's Political World* (New York: Routledge, 2023), Locations 289, 297, 304, 319, 327, Kindle edition. See: Author's eyewitness account for the 2019 Conference.

⁹¹⁵ W. James Antle III, "In Search of a Wesleyan Political Theology," *Firebrand Magazine*, May 11, 2021 (<https://firebrandmag.com/articles/in-search-of-a-wesleyan-political-theology>) (accessed December 3, 2022).

their roots in Methodist history teach an important lesson...We need an approach to cultural engagement and sexual ethics that is anchored by Methodism's founding mission to spread scriptural holiness rather than one that drifts along with and is determined by the prevailing culture.⁹¹⁶

Watson's quotation demonstrates conservative American Methodists desire to claim their understanding of Wesley's vision for Methodism as a motivating factor to separate from more progressive United Methodists.

Progressive delegates and commentators also used their understanding of early American Methodist history to strive for increased acceptance of homosexuality within United Methodism.⁹¹⁷ These persons believed that the Wesleyan tradition complemented a liberalised stance on homosexuality. For example, JJ Warren shared that early Methodist heritage supported a liberalised sexual ethic in today's Methodism. Warren said:

Today, the fruits of The United Methodist Church have been soured by continuous debate in which LGBTQ+ persons are structurally marginalized. If we are to claim the heritage of Wesley, to take grace, and therefore salvation seriously, then United Methodists are called to embrace and affirm LGBTQ+ persons. If the telos (inner aim) of our lives as Methodist Christians is to grow in the love of God and neighbor, for love to fill our hearts and the whole capacity of our souls, then the systematic exclusion of LGBTQ+ Methodist Christians is antithetical to the very foundation upon which our tradition has been formed. By embracing the grace upon which Methodism was built, we can find our way forward.⁹¹⁸

Warren's quotation shows that progressive delegates also employed Methodist tradition to advance their understanding of the necessity of a liberalised sexual ethic.

⁹¹⁶ Watson, "Methodism Dividing."

⁹¹⁷ Osinski, *Queering Wesley*, 1-3.

⁹¹⁸ JJ Warren, "Jack-O-Lantern Grace: How Wesley's Means of Grace Can Lead the UMC Toward LGBTQ+ Affirmation," JJ Warren Blog, October 29, 2021 (<https://www.jjwarren.org/blog/jack-o-lantern-grace-how-wesleys-means-of-grace-can-lead-the-umc-toward-lgbtq-affirmation>; accessed December 1, 2022).

This difference in understanding and implementing Wesleyan tradition has helped contribute to the United Methodist Church's schism.

It is evident that competing factions of Methodism, in both 1844 and 2019, have used arguments about Methodist tradition to further their desired outcomes. An examination of the written record reveals that each group has a valid but different understanding of Wesley's writings and early American Methodist practice. Ashley Boggan Dreff stated:

Both of these Methodisms have histories that are true but they're very different understandings of theology. They're very different understandings of how we as Methodists relate to God and how we as Methodists relate to each other. John Wesley can be as easily cherry-picked as scripture.⁹¹⁹

Boggan Dreff's observation provides substantiation that competing understandings of Wesley's works and early American Methodist history have been used to support different expressions of Methodism, propelling schism.

The Separation of Church and State and *Discipline* Mandates:

This thesis has shown that American Methodists have used their understanding of the Separation of Church and State in conjunction with *Discipline* mandates to support their views on slavery and homosexuality, contributing to schism in 1844 and 2022. During the 1844 Conference, Southern delegates argued that the Separation of Church and State meant that the *Discipline*, a church document, did not have the ability to forbid something that the United States government deemed legal. Since slavery was legal in the Southern states, Southern delegates thought that the *Discipline* did not have the authority to forbid its ministers and members from enslaving Black persons.⁹²⁰ Southern clergypersons, such as William Smith and William Capers, believed that Methodists should submit to

⁹¹⁹ Straw, "Is Schism Inevitable?"

⁹²⁰ Painter, "The Pro-Slavery Argument," 39-41.

the rules of the State's governing body, allowing for the *Discipline* to condone slavery.⁹²¹

Northern Methodists, however, used the Separation of Church and State and *Discipline* mandates to contend that the Methodist Episcopal Church had the ability to ban its ministers and members from enslaving others.⁹²² Anti-slavery advocates, such as Nathan Bangs, claimed that the Separation of Church and State gave the Church the freedom to operate independently from government rules.⁹²³ Furthermore, the Northern Methodists argued that the government allowed for people to participate in activities such as gambling and buying, selling, and drinking liquor. These delegates, however, stated that the *Discipline* rightly forbade such practices amongst its ministers and members.⁹²⁴ They thought that slavery, named as an evil in the *Discipline*, should be treated in the same manner as the above practices.⁹²⁵ These competing understandings about the Separation of Church and State, in conjunction with *Discipline* mandates, helped set the 1844 Conference on a path of division.

Delegates and pundits for the 2019 Conference also used arguments about the Separation of Church and State and *Discipline* policy to further their claims about the appropriateness of the practice of homosexuality within the Church. This was particularly evident after same-sex marriage was federally legalised in 2015. More progressive delegates claimed that the Separation of Church and State guaranteed that all persons had the legal right to marry or hold an employment position without discrimination based upon sexual orientation. Further, because the *Discipline*

⁹²¹ Painter, "The Pro-Slavery Argument," 29.

⁹²² Sarah Barringer Gordon, "The First Wall of Separation Between Church and State: Slavery and Disestablishment in Late-Eighteenth-Century Virginia," *The Journal of Southern History* 85, no. 1 (February 2019): 63.

⁹²³ Richard Carwardine, "Methodists, Politics, and the Coming of the American Civil War," *Church History* 69, no. 3 (September 2000): 599-600.

⁹²⁴ Richard Cameron, "New Church," in eds. Emory S. Bucke, et al, *The History of American Methodism*, Vol. III (New York: Abingdon Press, 1964), 256-261.

⁹²⁵ Lucy B. Armstrong, January 4, 1849. Lucy B. Armstrong Papers, Indian History Collection. #590, Box 7 Folder: Wyandotte. Kansas Historical Society.

acknowledged the sacred worth of homosexuals, homosexuals should not be barred from ordination or marriage.⁹²⁶ In this way, more progressive 2019 delegates held a similar position as the Southern 1844 delegates. They contended that the Separation of Church and State ensured that *Discipline* did not have the power to forbid something that the federal government considered legal.⁹²⁷ For example, after the 2019 Conference, Reverend Tom Berlin reflected upon federal marriage equality and *Discipline* mandates against homosexuality. Berlin said, "Some churches will begin to do what they desire. They will test this new legislation by performing marriages and some conferences will ordain gay clergy."⁹²⁸

More traditional delegates, however, believed that the Separation of Church and State and *Discipline* mandates gave the Church the ability to forbid practices that were legally accepted.⁹²⁹ As such, more conservative 2019 delegates' opinions about the Separation of Church and State can be compared to Northern 1844 delegates. They posited that the Separation of Church and State guaranteed that the *Discipline* had the ability to restrict practices that the federal government considered legal.⁹³⁰ For example, clergy delegate Reverend Tony Alstott, Indiana annual conference,⁹³¹ shared his belief that civil law and church law are different entities. He said:

⁹²⁶ Karen P. Oliveto. *Together at the Table: Diversity without Division in the United Methodist Church* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2018), 7-9.

⁹²⁷ Cynthia Astle, "Here's Why the United Methodist Church is at Odds with Recent Supreme Court Decisions," Baptist News Global, July 12, 2022 (<https://baptistnews.com/article/heres-why-the-united-methodist-church-is-at-odds-with-recent-supreme-court-decisions/#.Y5KbXy1w2qA>; accessed December 1, 2022).

⁹²⁸ Katharine Jackson, "United Methodist Church Strengthens Ban on Same-Sex Marriage, LGBT Clergy," Reuters, February 26, 2019 (<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-religion-lgbt-united-methodist/united-methodist-church-strengthens-ban-on-same-sex-marriage-lgbt-clergy-idUSKCN1QG022>; accessed December 1, 2022).

⁹²⁹ Brooke McAfee, "Local Pastors Discuss Potential Separation of United Methodist Church," *News and Tribune*, January 8, 2020 (https://www.newsandtribune.com/news/local-pastors-discuss-potential-separation-of-united-methodist-church/article_b51f5dea-31ac-11ea-b062-03df6b244630.html; accessed December 1, 2022).

⁹³⁰ Astle, "Here's Why."

⁹³¹ Reverend Alstott is largely unknown outside of the Indiana annual conference.

In our culture in the United States today, our definition is definitely marriage between two people. That's the law of the land, so I'm not opposed to how the law of the land is in the United States, but when a church makes a decision, we have to base it based on what the bible says.⁹³²

As evidenced, arguments about the Separation of Church and State, in conjunction with *Discipline* mandates, have been used by American Methodists to justify their positions on slavery and homosexuality. This has led to increased division amongst American Methodists and has contributed to schismatic actions during both the 1844 and 2019 General Conferences.

The General Conference's Power:

Furthermore, both the 1844 and 2022 schisms saw debates about the General Conference's power to control the episcopacy and to enact legislation. Delegates and commentators utilised these disagreements to advance their views about the denominations' ability to regulate slavery and homosexuality. Such disparate opinions helped set American Methodism on the path of schism in both 1844 and 2022.

As analysed in Chapter Three, the 1844 Conference spent much time hearing speeches about the General Conference's power to forbid bishops and clergypersons from enslaving Black persons. The Southern delegates believed that the episcopacy had the power to operate outside the will of the General Conference unless the General Conference passed specific legislation about a matter.⁹³³ Because the General Conference had not enacted concrete rules banning bishops from practicing the enslavement of Black persons, the Southern faction did not think General Conference possessed the power to depose Bishop Andrew. Additionally, the Southern delegation contended that the episcopacy was regulated by each bishop's

⁹³² McAfee, "Local Pastors Discuss Potential Separation."

⁹³³ Norwood, *The Schism*, 62.

annual conference, not the General Conference.⁹³⁴ Therefore, the Southern delegates believed that bishops, by virtue of their consecration, held a lifetime position and were coequal to General Conference.⁹³⁵ As the debates continued, Southern leaders claimed that the Conference had overreached its authority by majority rule. For example, William Smith said:

A fair decision of this conference has not been given. And I wish my protest to go forth to the American Church and American people, to serve as a beacon-light to warn the Church against the movements of a majority who can obliterate justice, and trample on the rights of a minority.⁹³⁶

When the Methodist Episcopal South was formed in 1845, the episcopacy's power was broadened to give bishops the ability to govern themselves and act in opposition to the General Conference unless specific legislation was passed.⁹³⁷

The Northern delegates, however, thought that the *Discipline* gave the General Conference power over the episcopacy. For them, the General Conference's role was "to serve as its executive, presiding officers."⁹³⁸ This interpretation allowed the General Conference to overrule the episcopacy and depose bishops. The Northern delegates believed that the General Conference held the final decision for the Methodist Episcopal Church's policy and possessed the power to enforce penalties for bishops and clergypersons who acted in opposition to the Conference's will.⁹³⁹ Because Bishop Andrew defied the will of the General Conference by enslaving others, the Northern delegation contended that the General Conference

⁹³⁴ Mathews, *Slavery and Methodism*, 259.

⁹³⁵ Cameron, "The Church Divides," 72.

⁹³⁶ Cameron, "The Church Divides," 52.

⁹³⁷ Nolan B. Harmon, "The Organization of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South," in eds. Emory S. Bucke, et al, *The History of American Methodism*, Volume II (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1964), 112.

⁹³⁸ Cameron, "The Church Divides," 72.

⁹³⁹ Norwood, *The Schism*, 74.

could vote to censure, depose, or remove Bishop Andrew from the episcopal office.⁹⁴⁰

Additionally, the Northern annual conferences saw the episcopacy as a creation of the General Conference. Therefore, bishops were not guaranteed lifetime appointments and operated under the will of the General Conference.⁹⁴¹ To illustrate this viewpoint, Reverend Leonidas L. Hamline, Ohio annual conference,⁹⁴² said:

I argued that a bishop may be displaced at the discretion of the conference, when, in their opinion, it became necessary on account of improper conduct, and I, might have said, without improper conduct on his part as far as constitutional restrictions are concerned...The administrative powers of this conference...are supreme...Supreme means that, while acting within its constitutional limits, its decisions are final and all-controlling.⁹⁴³

Such contradictory convictions about the General Conference's power to regulate the actions of the episcopacy helped propel the Methodist Episcopal Church into schism. It is important to note that schismatic activity occurred when the General Conference addressed a bishop's enslavement of Black persons. In this way, slavery was the overarching issue that forced disagreements about the General Conference's power.⁹⁴⁴

Likewise, the 2019 Conference saw debates about the General Conference's power to control the episcopacy's behaviour and enact legislation.⁹⁴⁵ Disagreements

⁹⁴⁰ Norwood, *The Schism*, 74.

⁹⁴¹ Smith, *The Life and Letters of James Osgood Andrew*, 348.

⁹⁴² Until his speech at the 1844 Conference, Leonidas L. Hamline, 1797-1865, was largely unknown outside of the Ohio annual conference. Hamline's speech outlining the Northern delegation's understanding of the General Conference's power, proved popular and led to his election as bishop. See: Sledge, "Till Charity Wept," 104.

⁹⁴³ F.G. Hibbard, *Biography of Rev. Leonidas L. Hamline, DD: Late One of the Bishops of the Methodist Episcopal Church* (Cincinnati: Walden and Stowe, 1881), 132.

⁹⁴⁴ Anne H. Pinn and Anthony B. Pinn, *Fortress Introduction to Black Church History* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2002), 30.

⁹⁴⁵ Joe DiPaolo, "United Methodism, Global Methodism, and the Future: Two Different Trajectories," Wesleyan Covenant Association Blog, October 10, 2022 (<https://epawca.org/2022/10/10/united-methodism-global-methodism-and-the-future-two-different-trajectories/>; accessed December 7, 2022).

about the ways in which the General Conference and the episcopacy interacted caused increased division amongst the delegates and contributed to the United Methodist Church's schism. Like the 1844 schism, one encompassing issue pushed debates about the General Conference's power. Now, homosexuality served as the issue that questioned the General Conference's power over the episcopacy.⁹⁴⁶

2019's more conservative delegates believed that the General Conference possessed the ability to regulate the episcopacy and set Church policy. Furthermore, these delegates thought that all bishops and clergypersons should adhere to General Conference legislation or be penalized.⁹⁴⁷ For more conservative delegates, the election of openly gay bishops, the refusal of some bishops to process complaints against openly gay clergypersons, and the failure of some bishops to punish clergypersons who performed same-sex marriages pointed to an episcopacy that had usurped the General Conference's power.⁹⁴⁸ This sentiment is expressed by John Lomperis:

The liberal American leadership of the Council of Bishops (COB) have effectively changed United Methodist polity by largely nullifying the authority of General Conference...Increasingly, bishops are stepping into this vacuum to do what they want, disregarding their obligation under the Discipline to uphold church laws legislated by General Conference...Thus United Methodist polity has fundamentally changed, concentrating unchecked power into the liberal American leadership of

⁹⁴⁶ DiPaolo, "United Methodism, Global Methodism, and the Future."

⁹⁴⁷ Timothy Williams and Elizabeth Dias, "United Methodists Tighten Ban on Same-Sex Marriage and Gay Clergy," *The New York Times*, February 26, 2019 (<https://www.nytimes.com/2019/02/26/us/united-methodists-vote.html>; accessed December 2, 2022). Also, during the 2019 Conference, it was rumoured that legislation would be enacted to remove Bishop Karen Oliveto from the episcopal office. These rumours, however, never materialized. See: Author's eyewitness account.

⁹⁴⁸ John Lomperis, "Ruling: NCJ Bishops, Others Must Still Fully Comply With the UMC Discipline," Institute on Religion and Democracy Blog, December 15, 2021 (<https://juicyecumenism.com/2021/12/15/ncj-bishops-must-fully-comply-umc-discipline/>; accessed December 1, 2022).

the Council of Bishops, nullifying the authority of legislative bodies to effect changes...⁹⁴⁹

Lomperis' words demonstrate that the more conservative delegates viewed much of the current episcopacy as renegades who violated the General Conference's will. In this way, these delegates were aligned with 1844's Northern delegates. Both considered the General Conference the final arbiter of Church law and called to limit the powers of the episcopacy.

Additionally, like 1844's Northern delegates, 2019's more conservative delegates believed that the General Conference had the power to enact policies that the entire denomination, regardless of geographical region, should follow.⁹⁵⁰ Because General Conferences continually upheld the incompatibility clause, the more conservative delegates contended that bishops did not possess the ability to ignore mandates about homosexuality. These delegates believed that if bishops disregarded the Conference's will, a dangerous precedent would be set that allowed a minority opinion to control the United Methodist Church.⁹⁵¹ To remedy such a situation, the Global Methodist Church will limit the episcopacy by setting twelve-year term limits and providing for increased oversight of the bishops by boards comprised of clergy and laity.⁹⁵²

2019's more progressive delegates, however, posited that the General Conference did not have the power to regulate the bishops' and clergypersons' actions.⁹⁵³ Instead, they believed that the episcopacy could determine which policies

⁹⁴⁹ John Lomperis, "Liberal Bishops Have Redefined United Methodist Polity," Institute of Religion and Democracy Blog, August 29, 2022 (<https://juicyecumenism.com/2022/08/29/bishops-redefine-united-methodist-polity>; accessed December 1, 2022).

⁹⁵⁰ Kisker, "A Spirit of Tyranny."

⁹⁵¹ This argument is reminiscent of charges made by 1844's Southern delegates. They believed that Bishop Andrew's deposal would set a dangerous precedent by allowing majority rule to control the Methodist Episcopal Church. See: Kisker, "A Spirit of Tyranny."

⁹⁵² Thomas Lambrecht, "Reasons for Affiliating with the Global Methodist Church," *Good News Magazine*, October 7, 2022 (<https://goodnewsmag.org/reasons-for-affiliating-with-the-global-methodist-church/>; accessed December 7, 2022).

⁹⁵³ Staff Writer, "United Methodist Division Declares Itself a Safe Harbor for LGBTQ Clergy," NBC News, November 6, 2019 (<https://www.nbcnews.com/news/amp/ncna1077845>; accessed December 1, 2022).

it wished to follow and provide its own internal oversight.⁹⁵⁴ For example, the Michigan annual conference delegation released the following statement after the 2019 Conference:

We, therefore, refuse to accept the United Methodist stance that homosexuality is incompatible with Christian teaching...We can no longer abide by the restrictions the Book of Discipline has placed on inclusion of LGBTQIA people in the full life of the UMC. We will take our authority as clergy to perform marriages per our conscience for our congregants and our communities, wherever they are...We affirm your authority as a Bishop, to consecrate, commission, and ordain all qualified and elected candidates for ministry-Bishops, Deacons, Elders, Local Pastors, Mission Personnel-whosever they are.⁹⁵⁵

The above quotation demonstrates that more progressive delegates felt that the General Conference's legislation about homosexuality was unjust. Therefore, bishops and clergy had the ability to disregard General Conferences' actions about homosexuality. Reverend Tom Ogletree, United Methodist minister and retired dean of Yale Divinity School, shared his views about the Church's mandates on homosexuality:

These are unjust laws, and therefore they do not really have the authority of the law, even though technically they are established in the Discipline.⁹⁵⁶

⁹⁵⁴ Currently, the United Methodist bishops are considered members of the episcopacy for the duration of their lifetimes and may continue to attend Council of Bishops meetings and preside at annual conferences and General Conference after their retirements. See: Staff Writer, "United Methodist Division."

⁹⁵⁵ Cynthia B. Astle, "Bishops Hold Information Sessions as Defiance of General Conference Action Strengthens," *UM Insight*, March 14, 2019 (<https://um-insight.net/germany-central-conference-rejects-traditional-plan/>; accessed December 2, 2022).

⁹⁵⁶ Public Broadcasting Network, "Methodist Gay Marriage," *Religion and Ethics Newsweekly*, November 29, 2013 (<https://www.pbs.org/wnet/religionandethics/2013/11/27/september-20-2013-methodist-gay-marriage-controversy/20249>; accessed December 1, 2022).

In this way, 2019's more progressive delegates were aligned with 1844's Northern delegates. The 1844 Northern delegates believed that previous General Conferences' decisions about slavery were unjust. Because of this, the Northern delegates thought that Church law could be circumvented to disassociate slavery from the episcopal office.⁹⁵⁷

Additionally, more progressive delegates and commentators contended that the 2019 Conference's legislation was ungovernable and, therefore, void.⁹⁵⁸ Because United Methodist policy about homosexuality was thought to be unpopular in the United States, these delegates thought it did not need to be followed. Instead, those who created and supported the Modified Traditional Plan should depart the denomination.⁹⁵⁹ For example, Tex Sample wrote:

The right wing created a church it cannot govern. They have made all of these coercive policies they cannot enforce, especially by millions of people who refuse to go along. If someone must leave, let them do so.⁹⁶⁰

This argument is like debates made by delegates at the 1844 Conference. As described in Chapter Three, Southern delegates did not believe that policies antagonistic to slavery would be followed by their annual conferences. Therefore, they contended that any legislation forbidding slavery was non-binding.⁹⁶¹ Likewise, Northern delegates did not think that their annual conferences would support rules connecting slavery to the episcopacy. As such, they posited that any pro-slavery legislation was null.⁹⁶²

Furthermore, 2019 delegates also employed arguments about the General Conference's purpose and power into their statements. For example, Jill Wondel, a

⁹⁵⁷ Carden, "Religious Schism," 21-22.

⁹⁵⁸ Tom Gjelten, "After Disagreements Over LGBTQ Clergy, US Methodists Move Closer to Split," National Public Radio, June 26, 2019 (<https://www.npr.org/2019/06/26/736344079/u-s-methodists-meet-to-consider-what-comes-next-after-disagreements-over-lgbt-cl>); accessed December 1, 2022).

⁹⁵⁹ Gjelten, "After Disagreements Over LGBTQ Clergy."

⁹⁶⁰ Astle, "Bishops Hold Information Sessions."

⁹⁶¹ Sledge, "Till Charity Wept," 98-99.

⁹⁶² Sledge, "Till Charity Wept," 98-99.

lay delegate from the Missouri annual conference,⁹⁶³ argued that the Traditional Plan did not speak to the role of this called Conference.⁹⁶⁴ She said:

The Traditional Plan does not address the main issues before the body...We are not voting on whether homosexuality is a sin or not. We are not voting yes or no if the bible is true.⁹⁶⁵

Other delegates also spoke of the General Conference's power. Sky McCracken said, "I believe General Conference has become an intractable body. We have legislated ourselves into ineffectiveness and lessened our witness."⁹⁶⁶

During both the 1844 and 2019 Conference debates, each faction threatened schism if their understanding of the General Conference's powers was not upheld. In 1844, the Southern annual conferences left the main body, in part, when they realised that the bishops and laity of the Northern annual conferences would not uphold the General Conference's 1816 Compromise.⁹⁶⁷ In 2019, the more conservative faction separated from the larger denomination, in part, when they surmised that some bishops and clergy would continue defying the General Conference's incompatibility clause.⁹⁶⁸

As evidenced, both the 1844 and 2019 delegates debated the General Conference's power to control the episcopacy and to enact legislation. These disagreements heightened division within American Methodism. Such disparate understandings of the General Conference's role in setting policy and governing bishops and clergy helped contribute to American Methodism's schisms about slavery and homosexuality.

⁹⁶³ Jill Wondel is a layperson largely unknown outside of the Missouri annual conference.

⁹⁶⁴ Christy Thomas, "GC2019: Sleepless, Grieving Night at the Conservative Takeover," *UM Insight*, February 25, 2019 (<https://um-insight.net/c-gc2019-sleepless-grieving-night-at-the-conservative-takeov/>; accessed June 28, 2022).

⁹⁶⁵ *Daily Christian Advocate* (2019), 422.

⁹⁶⁶ Hodges, "Conflict Defines."

⁹⁶⁷ Fred J. Hood, "Methodist Bishops and Abolitionism," *Border States: Journal of the Kentucky-Tennessee American Studies Association*, no. 1 (1973): 13-14.

⁹⁶⁸ Kisker, "A Spirit of Tyranny."

Lack of Biblical Exegesis:

Furthermore, lack of biblical exegesis characterised both the 1844 debates about slavery and the 2019 debates about homosexuality. Partly, this is a result of the General Conference's organisational model. Conference speeches are time limited and do not offer an opportunity for extended conversation with other speeches.⁹⁶⁹ In their speeches, however, delegates did little to exegete scriptures concerning slavery and homosexuality. Instead, they often made claims about the bible's positions on slavery and homosexuality without offering much commentary regarding history, language, and context.⁹⁷⁰ This caused the opposing factions to assert biblical positions about slavery and homosexuality that fit their belief system, contributing to a cycle of scriptural claims without communal exegesis. For example, Northern delegates argued that slavery was denounced in the bible because it was a sin of oppression.⁹⁷¹ Immediately after making this claim, the Southern delegates replied that the Old Testament recognised slave ownership and that the New Testament did not forbid owning or purchasing slaves.⁹⁷² Such use of the biblical record heightened the tensions present during the Conferences, helping contribute to schism.

As analysed in Chapter Three, the 1844 Southern delegates did not focus their arguments upon biblical exegesis about slavery, centring instead on arguments about the Separation of Church and State and the General Conference's powers.⁹⁷³ For example, Christopher H. Owen, Methodist historian, claims:

⁹⁶⁹ In 1844, once recognised by the presiding bishop, delegates were permitted to speak for fifteen minutes. West, *Report of Debates*, 9. In 2019, once recognized by the presiding bishop, delegates were permitted to speak for three minutes. Darryl W. Stephens, "Who Really Has a Say at General Conference," *UM Insight*, March 28, 2016 <https://um-insight.net/general-conference/gc-archive/who-really-has-a-say-at-general-conference/>; accessed December 2, 2022).

⁹⁷⁰ Kyle Borg, "A Church in Crisis: Reflections on the UMC," *Gentle Reformation Blog*, March, 8, 2019 (<https://gentlereformation.com/2019/03/08/a-church-in-crisis/amp>; accessed December 5, 2022).

⁹⁷¹ Matlack, *The Antislavery Struggle*, 123.

⁹⁷² Matlack, *The Antislavery Struggle*, 123.

⁹⁷³ Matlack, *The Antislavery Struggle*, 155-157.

[Southern] Methodist defenses of slavery were directed more against abolitionists than in favor of slavery per se; argued for church non-involvement in politics;...favored a literalist reading of scripture;... and argued that the bible allowed, not that it commended, slavery.⁹⁷⁴

Owen's quotation demonstrates that the Southern delegates' arguments were more focused upon issues in the American secular political realm, mostly abolitionism. Scripture was regulated to a literal interpretation without much additional discussion. Reverend Henry Bidleman Bascom provides substantiation for this observation. Bascom said:

We do not mean to say that the bible favors slavery, or that slavery is not an evil; what we insist upon is that the bible treats it as a jural arrangement in human governments, which the Church has no right to assail or disturb, beyond proper efforts to bring master and slave into the fold of Christ.⁹⁷⁵

Bascom's quotation provides evidence that the Southern delegates did not offer a robust exegesis about the bible and slavery. Instead, more emphasis was placed upon the Church's interaction with civil laws about slavery.

Moreover, the Southern delegates accused the Northern delegates of not following the bible properly. The Southern delegates argued that Northern Methodists pushed antislavery rhetoric by ignoring scriptures that directly approved slavery.⁹⁷⁶ For example, Reverend Lovick Pierce, Georgia annual conference,⁹⁷⁷

⁹⁷⁴ Owen, *The Sacred Flame*, 62.

⁹⁷⁵ Fox-Genovese and Genovese, *The Mind of the Master Class*, 477. Later, Bascom extended this position. He believed that God ordained slavery and, therefore, it did not need to be argued by General Conference delegates. He wrote, "Slavery as a question of morality can only be settled by an appeal to the revealed will of God." See: Fox-Genovese and Genovese, *The Mind of the Master Class*, 542.

⁹⁷⁶ John R. McKivigan and Mitchell Snay, *Religion and the Antebellum Debate Over Slavery* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1998), 115

⁹⁷⁷ Reverend Lovick Pierce, 1785-1879, entered the Methodist ministry after being converted by an itinerate evangelist. He served churches in Georgia before temporarily stopping to earn a degree in medicine. Pierce led the Georgia delegation to General Conference until his late eighties. He supported lay representation at General Conference and longer pastorates for travelling preachers.

contended that Northern Methodism placed “modern innovations into the bible.”⁹⁷⁸ Yet, despite these allegations, the Southern annual conferences did not provide an exegetical framework detailing the ways in which the Northern wing of the Church disregarded scripture.

Likewise, the Northern delegates did not exegete biblical passages when debating slavery. They too relied on the Separation of Church and State and the General Conference’s power to make anti-slavery arguments. For example, historian Allen P. Stouffer writes:

The 1844 Conference...had not debated the fundamental issue of slavery or questioned its sinfulness. Rather, Northern Methodists had acted on the basis of precedent and expediency to remove a slaveholding bishop whose ministrations would have been disruptive in the North, where episcopal duties were likely to take him.⁹⁷⁹

Stouffer’s quotation shows that biblical exegesis about slavery and its sinfulness was not an overarching concern for the Northern delegates. Instead, to accomplish their goal, they used arguments that focused upon Church law and tradition. For example, the Northern delegation contended that a slave-holding bishop was a “dangerous innovation.”⁹⁸⁰ Northern leaders such as Nathan Bangs and George Peck claimed that it was the Southern delegates who had forgone the Methodist position on slavery.⁹⁸¹

Moreover, although an overwhelming majority of their delegates were anti-slavery or abolitionists, Northern leaders refused to name slave-holding a sin, calling it evil and immoral but not necessarily sinful.⁹⁸² As evidenced, scripture was used in passing reference to decry the immorality of slavery. It, however, was not extensively exegeted. George Peck provides evidence for their claim. Peck wrote:

Pierce was the father of Bishop George Foster Pierce. See: William R. Cannon, “The Pierces: Father and Son,” *Methodist History* 17, no. 1 (October 1978): 5-7.

⁹⁷⁸ McKivigan and Snay, *Religion and the Antebellum Debate*, 115.

⁹⁷⁹ Allen P. Stouffer, *Light of Nature and the Law of God: Antislavery in Ontario, 1833-1877* (Ontario: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1992), 159.

⁹⁸⁰ McKivigan and Snay, *Religion and the Antebellum Debate*, 352.

⁹⁸¹ McKivigan and Snay, *Religion and the Antebellum Debate*, 352.

⁹⁸² McKivigan and Snay, *Religion and the Antebellum Debate*, 352.

Where it [slavery] is authorized and regulated by law, it is, of course, partly "civil and political," but it is not wholly so, because the relation involves the principles of moral justice and Christian charity. The church may regard slavery as a moral question, and even in slave-holding states, treat it as such, so far as her Discipline legitimately extends, without interfering with the "civil and political relation..." Indeed, so far as her own members are concerned, she is bound to do this by the plainest examples in the New Testament.⁹⁸³

In describing the Northern position, Peck mentions biblical values such as justice and charity. It is important to note, however, that he does not exegete the New Testament passages he references. Instead, Peck uses the *Discipline* to speak about the interaction between church and state.

Additionally, the Northern delegates also accused the Southern delegates of not upholding biblical principles. The Northern delegates believed that the Southern delegates ignored clear biblical mandates not to hold others in bondage.⁹⁸⁴ For example, the Northern delegates' Majority Report stated:

But how can it be shown that those Christians, those Methodist ministers, love their neighbors as themselves when they have had slaves in their families and on their plantations for years...It does really seem...as one of the strangest inconsistencies...when a professing Christian attempts to defend the system of slavery from the bible!⁹⁸⁵

Yet, while such claims about Southern slave-holding ministers were voiced, the Northern delegates did not provide an in-depth exegesis of biblical support for their assertion that Southern ministers were not adhering to the bible's call to love your

⁹⁸³ George Peck, *Slavery and the Episcopacy: Being an Examination of Dr Bascom's Review of the Reply of the Majority to the Protest of the Minority of the late General Conference of the M.E. Church, in the Case of Bishop Andrew* (New York: Lane and Tippet, 1845), 31-32.

⁹⁸⁴ Mark A. Noll, *America's Book: The Rise and Decline of a Bible Civilization, 1794-1911* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022), 329.

⁹⁸⁵ Elliot, *History of the Great Secession*, 859-860.

neighbour. Instead, as shown in the above quotation, they used scripture to make broad claims about anti-slavery sentiment.

While the 2019 delegates placed more emphasis on scripture than their 1844 counterparts, the 2019 Conference also saw a lack of biblical exegesis amongst the delegates' speeches. Instead of explaining the history, language, and context of referenced biblical passages and themes, many delegates simply quoted scripture verses or alluded to biblical principles and concepts. This was done without presenting much in-depth exegesis of the biblical passages.⁹⁸⁶ Such an approach led the opposing faction to immediately reference additional scripture verses that supported their views on homosexuality.⁹⁸⁷ Similar to the 1844 Conference, this led the 2019 delegates to continually hurl biblical verses, principles, or concepts at one another without engaging in communal exegesis. For example, Reverend Jody Flowers,⁹⁸⁸ South Carolina annual conference, said:

I believe the Modified Traditional Plan is the best way forward because it is true to the words of Jesus and to the overall witness of the scriptures as related to issues of human sexuality.⁹⁸⁹

Flowers did not provide any exegesis of Jesus' words. Countering Reverend Flowers words, Lyndsey Stearns,⁹⁹⁰ West Ohio young annual conference lay delegate, spoke in favour of the One Church Plan. She said:

We have witnessed the incredible ways that God is working...Before I came to General Conference, I read John 17 and it ruined me because I could not unhear the words of Jesus...Please do not ignore our voices. I hope you are able to hear us...⁹⁹¹

⁹⁸⁶ Author's eyewitness account.

⁹⁸⁷ Wogaman, "Flawed #UMC Arguments."

⁹⁸⁸ Reverend Jody Flowers is largely unknown outside of the South Carolina annual conference.

⁹⁸⁹ Kathy L. Gilbert, "Outcome of General Conference Bittersweet," *UM News*, April 11, 2019 (<https://www.umnews.org/en/news/outcome-of-general-conference-bittersweet>; accessed December 1, 2022).

⁹⁹⁰ Lyndsey Stearns is largely unknown outside of the Ohio annual conference.

⁹⁹¹ Christa Meland, "Traditional Plan Passes; MN Delegates Respond with Sadness, Urge Continued Focus on Ministry," Minnesota Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church, February 26, 2019

Stearns did not elaborate on Jesus' words. These quotations show that delegates with contradictory convictions about homosexuality referenced scripture to support their worldviews without providing exegesis. Such an approach increased division and aided in denominational schism.

Moreover, like the 1844 Conference, delegates accused each other of improperly following the bible without providing proper exegetical evidence for their claims.⁹⁹² These accusations heightened tensions amongst the delegates. For example, Nancy Denardo charged more progressive delegates to reassess their understanding of the gospel. She said:

Friends, please stop sowing seeds of deceit. I'm truly sorry if the truth of the gospel hurts anyone. I love you and I love you enough to tell you the truth.⁹⁹³

In response, Tom Berlin chided more conservative delegates for not following the whole of scripture. He said:

Be consistent and modify the Book of Discipline to eliminate all the divorced, all those who cohabit before marriage and apply those standards to yourself first. There are clergy and bishops who would have to surrender their credentials for violating those scriptures, but I don't think that's the church you want.⁹⁹⁴

These quotations demonstrate that many of the 2019 delegates did not believe that delegates with contradictory convictions about homosexuality were properly following scripture. Commentators for both factions commented on this

<https://www.minnesotaumc.org/newsdetail/traditional-plan-passes-mn-delegates-respond-with-sadness-urge-continued-focus-on-ministry-12763432>; accessed December 7, 2022.

⁹⁹² In 1844, Northern leaders did not debate the Southern claim that slavery was not necessarily sinful. In 2019, more progressive delegates did argue against the more conservative delegates' claim that homosexual practice was always sinful. See: Author's eyewitness account.

⁹⁹³ Gilbert, Hahn, and Butler, "2019 General Conference Passes." Also, when this was said, an audible gasp was heard from observers in the arena. See: Author's eyewitness account.

⁹⁹⁴ Gilbert, "2019 General Conference Passes Traditional Plan." Also, when this was said, applause was heard from observers in the arena. Author's eyewitness account.

phenomenon, providing evidence for this observation. For example, Adam Hamilton said, "I've listened to a lot of people talk about the bible as though the rest of us don't love the bible, read the bible, interpret the bible, understand the bible..."⁹⁹⁵

From a different viewpoint, Carla Nicklas articulated her concerns. She said:

This General Conference has not been an environment conducive to a meaningful discussion on church doctrine. How can we discuss the authority and interpretation of scripture in the midst of name-calling and accusations? Proponents of the One Church Plan argued simply that their plan promoted love for one another, implying the Traditional Plan did not...No mention of scripture regarding the evidence of love or sanctification. Folks, I'm a lay person; yet even I know how Wesley abhorred proof texting.⁹⁹⁶

It is evident that some delegates from each faction did not believe that the opposing faction regarded scripture properly. Yet, as seen above, the delegates also did not provide a robust biblical exegesis explaining why they came to this conclusion.

As evidenced, both the 1844 and 2019 debates contained a lack of biblical exegesis. Because of contentious accusations regarding biblical beliefs without attempting communal exegesis, the debates became more acrimonious. This helped led to division within American Methodism. Ultimately, aiding in setting a trajectory toward schism.

Unity or Division

Additionally, both the 1844 and 2019 Conferences experienced intense debates about the potential ramifications of unity or division. In many ways, these debates were connected to American socio-political trends. During both Conferences, American culture was grappling about whether to continue in relationship and dialogue with those of differing social stations and political

⁹⁹⁵ Green, "Conservative Christians."

⁹⁹⁶ Nicklas, "A Lay Delegate."

beliefs.⁹⁹⁷ Subsequently, contradictory convictions about the possible results of unity or division helped led to schismatic activities in American Methodism.

During the 1844 Conference, both Southern and Northern delegates conjectured about the results of denominational unity or division.⁹⁹⁸ Some feared that denominational division would heighten the already fraught American sectional battles over slavery. John McKivigan writes:

The schism was one of the most important events leading to the Civil War. The news of the split was spread throughout the United States...In the process, loyalties, shaped primarily by geographical position and social experience, were expressed in self-justifying moral terms...More specifically, the loyalties and differences were bound to arouse feelings about slavery and slaveholding.⁹⁹⁹

Delegates attempted to convey their worries about the potential impact of schism.

For example, Stephen Olin said:

Stations and circuits will be so weakened and broken as in many instances to be unable to sustain their ministry...There will be distractions and divisions ruinous to souls, and fatal to the permanent interests of the Church. I feel, sir, that if this great difficulty shall result in separation from our Southern brethren, we lose not our right hand merely, but our very heart's blood.¹⁰⁰⁰

Olin's fears about schism were also present amongst some Southern leaders. For example, William Smith relayed the Southern annual conferences desire to remain unified. He said:

⁹⁹⁷ As analysed in Chapter Three and Chapter Five, one purpose of the episcopacy is to uphold the unity of the Church. Bishops made statements encouraging unity at both the 1844 and 2019 Conferences. Ultimately, these pleas were disregarded when delegates discerned that compromise was impossible. See: Carwardine, "Methodists, Politics," 580-583. See also: Bonnie Kristian, "What the Methodist Split Tells Us About American Political Polarization," *Reason Magazine*, August 10, 2022 (<https://reason.com/2022/08/10/what-the-methodist-split-tells-us-about-american-political-polarization/>); accessed December 7, 2022.

⁹⁹⁸ *Journal* (1844), 177.

⁹⁹⁹ McKivigan, *Abolitionism and American Religion*, 136-137.

¹⁰⁰⁰ *Journal* (1844), 55.

So deeply do I sympathize with the feeling now prevailing in the conference, that I could never for one moment...cherish the desire for division. The South does not desire it...I know in saying this I am expressing the common sentiment of the whole Southern church...Our course is dictated by a sincere desire to preserve the union...I have too much confidence in the fidelity and justice of my Northern brethren to cherish the conviction for one moment they would force division upon the South. What, sir, divide! Never!¹⁰⁰¹

These quotations demonstrate that some Church leaders valued denominational unity during the 1844 Conference. Although it did not come to pass, these delegates wanted to negotiate a compromise that would preserve the national influence of the Church. This desire, however, became untenable.¹⁰⁰² L.M. Lee, editor of the *Richmond Christian Advocate*, summed up the delegates' quandary. He wrote:

Secessions, divisions, strifes innumerable and uncontrollable as a summer storm stare them [the delegates] in the face...But what a dilemma for good men to be in. If they move forward, they destroy the unity of the Church; if they sit still, they destroy themselves.¹⁰⁰³

Soon, it became evident that neither delegation would wholly capitulate to the other's demands. This helped lead the Church away from unity and into division.

The 2019 delegates also strongly debated the potential ramifications of Church unity or division. Both conservative and progressive delegates were fearful of a schism's possible results upon a denomination polarised by American cultural shifts. Ted Campbell, Methodist historian at Perkins School of Theology, affirmed some delegates apprehension about schism. Campbell said:

As a church historian, this has been fascinating to watch. But, as a church member and church leader, it's very upsetting. We don't want to

¹⁰⁰¹ *Journal* (1844), 57.

¹⁰⁰² Bray, *Peter Cartwright*, 169.

¹⁰⁰³ Norwood, *The Schism*, 66.

see the church divided. But, US society is polarized, and the more polarized we become, the more we can't avoid division.¹⁰⁰⁴

Some delegates shared their fears about the effects of division on the worldwide United Methodist Church. For example, Reverend Hilde Marie Movafagh, Norway central conference delegate,¹⁰⁰⁵ said:

Breaking...connection is unhealthy both for Americans and people from the central conferences. We need each other because we bring different perspectives to the table. We do ministry together...and we interpret what our Methodist heritage is in our different contexts, and therefore we form a Methodist identity together for our time.¹⁰⁰⁶

Similarly, more conservative delegates also worried about the cost of schism. Mark Tooley said, "A lot of churches will be irreparably harmed as they divide."¹⁰⁰⁷

The 2019, delegates, however, were conflicted about how to achieve denominational unity. Supporters of the One Church Plan, such as Reverend Rey Hernandez, Philippines central conference,¹⁰⁰⁸ believed that the ability to determine Church policy based upon context would foster unity. Hernandez said, "The One Church Plan is beautiful in our unity. With the help of the gifts of the Holy Spirit, I believe what we are trying to agree on is to spread the Gospel." More conservative delegates, such as Jessica LaGrone, however, claimed that the Traditional Plan, would bring unity because it would hold Church leaders to a higher level of accountability. LaGrone said:

¹⁰⁰⁴ Bill Miller, "Disunited Methodists," *People Newspapers*, June 20, 2019 (<https://www.peoplenewspapers.com/2019/06/20/disunited-methodists>; accessed December 9, 2022).

¹⁰⁰⁵ Reverend Hilde Marie Movafagh is well known in European Methodist circles.

¹⁰⁰⁶ Heather Hahn, "Delegates Offer Proposal for Church Unity," *UM News*, December 19, 2019 (<https://www.umnews.org/en/news/delegates-offer-proposal-for-church-unity>; accessed December 9, 2022).

¹⁰⁰⁷ Staff Writer, "United Methodists are on a Path Toward Breakup Over LGBTQ Policies," *Los Angeles Times*, April 20, 2019 (<https://www.latimes.com/nation/nationnow/la-na-united-methodists-lgbt-20190420-story.html>); accessed December 2, 2022.

¹⁰⁰⁸ Reverend Rey Hernandez is a delegate largely unknown outside of the Philippines central conference. See: Gilbert, Hahn, and Butler, "2019 General Conference."

Our unity is broken by principled disobedience on the part of some bishops and clergy. The establishment of additional accountability is vital. The Traditional Plan both enhances the current accountability in the *Book of Discipline* and closes the loopholes currently being used to break our shared covenant.¹⁰⁰⁹

Like in 1844, these quotations suggest some 2019 delegates experienced conflicting emotions about schism. While unity was valued, delegates differed on how to best achieve unity. When it became evident that supporters of the One Church Plan and the Traditional Plan would not make concessions, schism was thought to be inevitable.¹⁰¹⁰

As evidenced, both the 1844 delegates and the 2019 delegates argued about the possible impacts of Church unity or division. In both time periods, these debates were connected to the polarisation already found within the American socio-political system. Ultimately, while delegates continually expressed a desire for unity, American Methodism's division occurred when delegates could not reach a common understanding of the meaning and purpose of unity.

Race:

Much has been written in this thesis about the role of race during the 1844 debates. While the 2019 debates concentrated on homosexuality, race continued to serve as prominent, if underlying, theme. Race and sexuality intersected to become a vehicle for schism. Again, this mirrors the contention about race and sexuality that exists within the American socio-political sphere.

During the 2019 Conference, charges of colonialism were leveled at both the more conservative delegates and the more progressive delegates. This caused tensions to heighten. It also demonstrates how race and sexuality intersect to

¹⁰⁰⁹ Jessica LaGrone, "For the Traditional Plan," East Ohio Wesleyan Covenant Association, March 21, 2019 (<https://eowca.org/post/for-the-traditional-plan>; accessed December 5, 2022).

¹⁰¹⁰ David F. Watson, "On Separation, Schism, and Seasons," *Firebrand Magazine*, August 30, 2022 (<https://firebrandmag.com/articles/on-separation-schism-and-seasons>; accessed December 4, 2022).

become a factor for schism. Carlene Fogle-Miller, a more progressive lay delegate from the Florida annual conference,¹⁰¹¹ accused more conservative American delegates of bribing African delegates with money, cell phones, and food.¹⁰¹² Fogle-Miller said, "I have heard rumors, and I have heard other delegates have heard them too, that there has been bribery. There has been the giving of money in exchange for votes!"¹⁰¹³ Such an accusation angered more conservative delegates. They believed that claiming bribery of African delegates was a form of colonialism itself.¹⁰¹⁴ Jerry Kulah expressed this sentiment. He said:

We Africans are not children in need of Western enlightenment when it comes to the Church's sexual ethics. We do not need to hear a progressive US bishop lecture us about our need to grow up...A fixation on money seems more of an American problem than an African one...So, if anyone is so naïve or condescending as to think we would sell our birth right in Jesus Christ for American dollars, then they simply do not know us.¹⁰¹⁵

Yet, more progressive delegates placed blame on a colonial mindset for the Traditional Plan's passage. For example, Karen Prudente, a lay delegate from the New York annual conference,¹⁰¹⁶ also offered insights about how colonialism impacted the 2019 Conference. Prudente said:

They [central conference delegates] have been told that a vote for the One Church Plan or the Simple Plan is a vote for homosexuality, and

¹⁰¹¹ Carlene Fogle-Miller is a delegate largely unknown outside of the Florida annual conference.

¹⁰¹² Chris Ritter, "Examen: Our Dirty Floor, Part Two," People Need Jesus Blog, March 1, 2019 (<https://peopleneedjesus.et/2019/03/01/examen-our-dirty-floor-part-two-comment-page-1/>; accessed December 7, 2022).

¹⁰¹³ Ritter, "Examen." Also, a later investigation found that four delegates voted improperly. Yet, evidence of bribery was unsubstantiated. See: Heather Hahn, "Improper Voting at GC2019 Voids Key Vote," *UM News*, August 10, 2019 (<https://www.umnews.org/en/news/improper-votin-at-gc2019-voids-key-vote>; accessed December 1, 2022).

¹⁰¹⁴ Rob Renfroe, "Colonialism in Glass Houses," *Good News Magazine*, January 26, 2022 (<https://goodnewsmag.org/colonialism-in-glass-houses/>; accessed December 7, 2022).

¹⁰¹⁵ Tooley, "African United Methodists."

¹⁰¹⁶ Karen Prudente is a delegate largely unknown out of the New York annual conference.

that is not true. Missionaries really pounded in a colonial mentality that we then spread throughout the world.¹⁰¹⁷

Such quotations demonstrate that some delegates, both progressive and conservative, used colonialism and race to further their arguments in the homosexuality debates. In this way, race and sexuality intersected to become a component of the 2019 schism.

Additionally, scholars recognised that race was a factor in the ways in which homosexuality was debated during the 2019 Conference. For example, Barry Bryan, associate professor of United Methodist and Wesleyan studies at Garrett-Evangelical Seminary, said:

There has never been an issue that's more central to our [American Methodism] history, doctrine, and policy than the issue of race. Race even looms in the background of the way we talk about sexuality. Because a lot of the hermeneutics that were created to defend slavery have been applied to the exclusion of LGBTQ individuals. Biblical verses that seemed to condone slavery were once applied to uphold that institution, and biblical verses are now used to condemn homosexuality.¹⁰¹⁸

Bryan's quotation provides evidence that American Methodism's problematic history of racism continues to influence the homosexuality debates.

United Methodist author and scholar Grace Imathiu noted that racism provides a lens in which to investigate the homosexuality debates. She contended that Christ calls Christians to make disciples of all nations, including the LGBTQIA+ nation. She went on to say that Methodism's failure to include the LGBTQIA+ community stems, in part, from its racist past. Imathiu stated:

¹⁰¹⁷ Jeffrey Walton, "LGBTQI Delegates: "Shut Down United Methodist General Conference Before Traditional Plan Considered," The Institute on Religion and Democracy Blog, February 24, 2019 (<https://juicyecumenism.com/2019/02/23/lgbtqi-delegates-shut-down-united-methodist-general-conference/>; accessed December 11, 2022).

¹⁰¹⁸ Straw, "Is Schism Inevitable?"

Unity means holding people to account for sins including tribalism, racism, sexism, and homophobia...Making disciples means getting your hands dirty. The baptism of those called LGBT+ has not been honored. We have been refusing to get into the 21st century.¹⁰¹⁹

Again, the above quotation demonstrates that American Methodism's problematic history with racism intersects with debates about homosexuality. For American Methodism, race helps define the ways in which homosexuality is regarded and discussed.¹⁰²⁰

Further, after the conclusion of General Conference, the General Commission on Religion and Race recognised the intersectionality of race and homosexuality by providing resources about these topics.¹⁰²¹ This caused more conservative commentators to accuse the General Commission on Religion and Race of using the intersection of racism and homosexuality to capitalise on the racial strife enveloping the United States. For example, United Methodist commentator Dan Moran wrote:

In a time when unity is as difficult as ever to find in the UMC, and when the entire country is riveted by questions regarding race, particularly with discrimination and violence against African Americans, GCoRR is diverting some of its energy to promote LGBTQ liberationist ideology, which both contradicts church teachings and alienates many United Methodists from a broader anti-racist coalition...¹⁰²²

As seen, Moran believed that linking racism with homosexuality would perpetuate racism because it would cause some people to disregard anti-racism instruction.

As the United Methodist Church's schism continues to unfold, many scholars and delegates believe that race will continue to impact the Church's decisions. For

¹⁰¹⁹ Walton, "LGBTQI Delegates."

¹⁰²⁰ Gilbert H. Caldwell, "LGBT Prejudice Mirrors Racism and Sexism," *UM Insight*, October 24, 2014 (<https://um-insight.net/in-the-world/advocating-justice/lgbt-prejudice-mirrors-racism-and-sexism/>; accessed December 8, 2022).

¹⁰²¹ Moran, "United Methodist Agency."

¹⁰²² Moran, "United Methodist Agency."

example, Miguel A. De La Torre, professor of social ethics at Iliff School of Theology, stated:

You can't begin to have a conversation about anti-racist work as long as there is this conversation about splitting the church over sexuality issues. If our queer brothers and sisters are not part of the liberationist movement, we cannot have any type of church that's anti-racist.¹⁰²³

More conservative delegates, however, contend that more progressive delegates will continue to employ racism and White supremacy to change Church policy about homosexuality. John Lomperis said:

They [progressive White delegates] were not remotely shy or humble in their attitude, as Americans representing an overwhelmingly white constituency, that they were going to proudly assert their supremacy...We also saw the well-worn colonialist and white supremacist tactic of amplifying very selective, non-American United Methodists while rudely disregarding more representative perspectives from these regions.¹⁰²⁴

Again, this evidences that both more progressive and more conservative United Methodists saw race as a component of the homosexuality debates. Additionally, it demonstrates how closely American Methodism is intertwined with American society. Issues surrounding race and human sexuality are at the forefront of American socio-political debates. In turn, American Methodism has also brought these subjects into prominent debate with intersectionality present.¹⁰²⁵

¹⁰²³ Jim Patterson, "Panel: Racial and Sexual Parity Linked," *UM Insight*, October 29, 2020 (<https://um-insight.net/in-the-world/advocating-justice/panel-racial-and-sexual-parity-linked/>; accessed December 1, 2022).

¹⁰²⁴ Lomperis, "United Methodist Leaders."

¹⁰²⁵ Alex Joyner, "Chaos, Sexuality, and Politics in the UMC: An Interview with Ashley Boggan Dreff, Part Two," Alex Joyner Blog, April 3, 2019 (<https://alexjoyner.com/2019/04/03/chaos-sexuality-politics-in-the-umc-an-interview-with-ashley-boggan-dreff-part-2/>; accessed December 9, 2022).

Conclusion

Chapter Six has compared the arguments undergirding the 1844 and 2022 schisms. By analysing the similarities and differences found within the core debates of each schism, this chapter has shown the ways in which American socio-political culture is intertwined with debates about slavery and homosexuality within American Methodism. Arguments about American legal decisions, Northern and Southern regional differences, the Separation of Church and State and *Discipline* mandates, Methodist tradition, the General Conference's powers, lack of biblical exegesis, unity or division, and race have all interacted to become drivers of American Methodism's schisms.

Further, Chapter Six has evidenced that debates about American cultural shifts have influenced how General Conference delegates regard ecclesial matters and structures. Taken together, the core arguments of the 1844 and 2019 Conferences have evidenced that American cultural shifts about slavery and homosexuality have directly impacted the ways in which delegates employ General Conference arguments, ultimately leading to schism.

Chapter Seven: Conclusion

Introduction

As evidenced throughout this thesis, American Methodism has experienced protracted debates about slavery and homosexuality. Consequently, these debates led the Methodist Episcopal Church and the United Methodist Church into schism. From its earliest days, the Methodist Episcopal Church grappled with the denomination's position on slavery, including church members' and ordained ministers' participation in slavery. Likewise, from its founding, the United Methodist Church has wrestled with the denomination's policy on homosexuality, including same-sex wedding ceremonies and ordained ministers actively participating in homosexual relationships. Furthermore, because of a deep analysis of primary materials and a thorough exploration of larger American cultural trends, this thesis demonstrated that the 1844 Methodist Episcopal Church's schism and the 2022 United Methodist Church's schism are results of American Methodism's intertwined relationship with American socio-political culture. The remainder of this chapter will provide a summary of each of the thesis' chapters, exegete the conclusion that American Methodism's policies about and its division over slavery and homosexuality are intimately intertwined with North American socio-political culture, explain the methodology used to ascertain the thesis' conclusion, and provide a framework for how this thesis makes an original contribution to knowledge that reassesses current understandings of American Methodist history.

Chapter Summaries

Chapter Two:

Chapter Two explored the socio-political context of early America, analysing the larger national happenings that influenced early American Methodism. Chapter Two provided a careful analysis of the emergence of Methodism in America during

the American Revolutionary period and slavery's established place within American society during the years preceding the Methodist Episcopal Church's schism. From this analysis, Chapter Two concluded that the 1844 Methodist Episcopal Church's schism was a result of American Methodism's tenuous relationship with shifting American socio-political culture.

Also, Chapter Two demonstrated that American Methodism experienced conflict, especially about slavery, from its beginning. Mostly, this conflict reflected socio-political divisions within American society. Thus, as these divisions became more exacerbated within American society, divisions also increased within American Methodism. As a result, the tenuous relationship between the ethics and values of American society and the ethics and values of American Methodism led to the Methodist Episcopal Church's schism in 1844.

Chapter Three:

For sufficient historical context about the debates that led the Methodist Episcopal Church into schism, Chapter Three described early American Methodist policies regarding slavery from its 1784 organisational conference until the 1844 General Conference. Additionally, Chapter Three explored Bishop James O. Andrew's case before the 1844 General Conference. By analysing Bishop Andrew's case, Chapter Three demonstrated that the Conference's debates were held within the wider context of regional attitudes towards slavery. Further, this chapter illustrated that slavery was the issue that, eventually, led to denominational division.

Additionally, Chapter Three provided evidence that the abolition of slavery was not the delegates' primary objective. Instead, the Northern and Southern General Conference delegations used three prevailing and interwoven arguments – old-time Methodism, the Separation of Church and State, and the General Conference's executive and legislative powers – to manage denominational governance and institutional maintenance over slavery. Therefore, each delegation

was able to use competing narratives of their shared history, common law, and established policy to further their arguments. Also, Chapter Three showed that an important focus of the 1844 General Conference was determining the executive and legislative powers of General Conference as outlined in the *Book of Discipline*, discussing primarily if General Conference held the power to remove Bishop Andrew from office. Thus, a precedent was set that General Conference held legislative powers, not executive powers.

Chapter Four:

Chapter explored the socio-political context of late twentieth and early twenty-first century America, analysing the larger national happenings that influenced American Methodism. To do this, Chapter Four examined the 1968 founding of the United Methodist Church within the wider context of American shifting cultural values during the late 1960s. Chapter Four, then, analysed the United Methodist Church's intertwined relationship with American culture in the decades following the United Methodist Church's formation.

Additionally, Chapter Four evidenced that American Methodism closely mirrors American society. Since its 1968 founding, American Methodism has reacted to the socio-political battles that have occurred within the greater American society, intertwining American Methodism with American culture. Additionally, the United Methodist Church was organised during a time of profound civil unrest that manifested in societal dissention about shifting sexual mores, racial equality, and wartime ethics. As a result, from its earliest days, the United Methodist Church grappled with the same shifting cultural values that gripped the American socio-political sphere. Consequently, for both church and society, a backlash to shifting cultural values occurred, causing division amongst those who advocated for more liberalised cultural ethics and those who sought to adhere to more traditional cultural ethics.

Thus, Chapter Four analysed the larger societal shifts that have contributed to divergent interpretations about homosexuality within the United Methodist Church. Chapter Four concluded that it has been American political events, such as the federal legalisation of same sex marriage, that have pushed the United Methodist Church into schism. Because of this, Chapter Four posited that infighting factions within the United Methodist Church are not the underlying cause of the denomination's schism. Instead, the United Methodist Church's trajectory into schism is indicative of the larger American culture in which it was created and continues to exist.

Chapter Five:

For sufficient historical context about the debates that have led the United Methodist Church into schism, Chapter Five traced and analysed the United Methodist Church's policies about homosexuality from its 1968 organisational Conference until the 2016 General Conference. Chapter Five, then, described and exegeted the prominent arguments presented at the special called 2019 General Conference session regarding homosexuality. These prominent arguments included scriptural interpretation, denominational unity, and ecclesial authority.

Chapter Five also evidenced that the 2019 General Conference delegates, influenced by shifting American cultural attitudes towards homosexuality and various caucus' groups writings, debated about the overall acceptance of homosexuality as a Christian identity within the United Methodist Church. To do this, the delegates employed the intertwined arguments of Scriptural interpretation, denominational unity, and ecclesial authority. Chapter Five proved that the delegates were able to use each of these arguments to advance their cause. Chapter Five demonstrated that, because of increased polarisation amongst its members due to shifting cultural values about homosexuality, the United Methodist Church experienced schism in May 2022 when

the Global Methodist Church launched, and some churches began disaffiliating under *Discipline* provisions about homosexuality.

Chapter Six:

Chapter Six compared the 1844 and 2022 schisms. It analysed the ways in which American culture influenced American Methodism's debates about slavery and homosexuality. To do this, it compared similar arguments and themes found at the 1844 General Conference and the 2019 General Conference. These included American legal decisions, Northern and Southern regional differences, the Separation of Church and State and *Discipline* mandates, Methodist tradition, the General Conference's powers, lack of biblical exegesis, unity or division, and race. Chapter Six showed that each of the above entities have intersected within American Methodism to create polarisation and drive denominational schism.

American Methodism and American Socio-Political Culture

As stated above, the research undertaken for this thesis has led to the conclusion that the 1844 Methodist Episcopal Church's schism over slavery and the 2022 United Methodist Church's schism over homosexuality are results of American Methodism's intertwined relationship with American socio-political culture. For example, both the slavery and homosexuality debates within American Methodism followed the emergence of shifting attitudes and changing civil laws about slavery and homosexuality within the greater American socio-political context. Mostly, General Conference decisions about American Methodism's policies about slavery and homosexuality were a response to larger American socio-political events about slavery and homosexuality. In this way, American Methodism's emerging policies about slavery and homosexuality were related to shifting American cultural trends and changing civil laws about slavery and homosexuality.

Additionally, for the validity of this thesis' conclusion, it is important to recognise that both the Methodist Episcopal Church (1784) and the United Methodist Church (1968) were founded during times of intense social change in America. As analysed in Chapters Two and Four, the early Methodist Episcopal Church was organised during the American Revolutionary period (1764-1789) and the early United Methodist Church was formed during the Sexual Revolution period (1965-1975). Because of this, the socio-political changes that permeated American culture also affected American Methodism. As a result, both the larger American society and the membership of American Methodism became increasingly divided about slavery and homosexuality, setting trajectories for political division and denominational schism. When examining the ways in which American Methodism and American society are intertwined, it is necessary to remember that the American electorate contains the same people who comprise the membership of American Methodism. Thus, when American society began to grapple with slavery and homosexuality, American Methodism also began to struggle with slavery and homosexuality.

Next, this thesis concluded that American Methodism was deeply influenced by the socio-political contexts in which it was founded. It is important to recognise that socio-political revolutionary periods are inherently schismatic. For example, the preamble to the American Declaration of Independence (1776) reads, "When in the course of human events, it becomes necessary for one people to dissolve the political bands which have connected them with another..."¹⁰²⁶ Such language demonstrates the schismatic desire to separate from a previous lived experience and create a new reality. As this thesis proves, American Methodism was organised during the American Revolutionary period. Because of this, the impact of American revolutionary ideals upon the formation of American Methodism cannot be overlooked. Notably, the 1785 *Discipline* celebrates "the unalienable rights of

¹⁰²⁶ Jefferson, "Original Rough Draft."

mankind, as well as every principle of the Revolution..."¹⁰²⁷ From such language, it is evidenced that the American Revolution's principles were extremely salient to those who organised the Methodist Episcopal Church. Because North American Methodism was founded during the American Revolutionary period, it imbibed a revolutionary identity, resulting in a form of Methodism that distanced itself from John Wesley's original vision for Methodism on the American continent. This partly resulted in the Methodist Episcopal Church moving away from Wesley's condemnation of slavery and into a denominational policy about slavery that was more consistent with American civil law. In later years, the tenuous relationship between slavery in American socio-political culture and slavery in American Methodism caused further schismatic rifts, resulting in the formation of the Methodist Episcopal Church and the Methodist Episcopal Church South.

Likewise, the Sexual Revolution, an American socio-political revolution of the late 1960s, influenced the nascent United Methodist Church by introducing liberalised sexual values into open conversation. For example, up until the late 1960s, homosexuality was not debated on a denominational level within American Methodism because it was still considered a social taboo. The Sexual Revolution's cultural shift regarding acceptable sexual behaviours, however, allowed the newly formed United Methodist Church the opportunity to discuss homosexuality's place within the denomination. As a result, the late 1960s United Methodist Church reacted to the revolutionary ideals of the Sexual Revolution. Consequently, both church and society experienced tension as they grappled with emerging liberalised sexual ethics, notably sexual ethics regarding homosexuality. The tension resulting from such a seismic cultural shift caused deepening divisions between those who wished for a return to previously held societal norms about human sexuality and those who advocated for a newly expanded understanding of human sexuality as seen through the lens of the Sexual Revolution. For American Methodism, as evidenced

¹⁰²⁷ *Minutes of Several Conversations*, 15-17.

throughout this thesis, accelerating American socio-political disagreements about liberalised sexual ethics, including homosexuality, set the United Methodist Church on a trajectory towards schism. In sum, the intertwined relationship between changing attitudes about homosexuality within the American socio-political sphere and the reaction to changing attitudes about homosexuality within American Methodism helped set the United Methodist Church on a trajectory towards schism.

Also, American Methodism's influence on American culture cannot be discounted. American Methodism and its theological perspectives have and do affect culture. Because American Methodism, however, is intimately intertwined with American culture, America's ethical dilemmas, most notably slavery and homosexuality, became American Methodism's ethical dilemmas. To understand this claim, it is necessary to examine how tightly paired American Methodism is to American culture. From such an analysis, it is evident that American Methodism's schisms resemble American political polarisation. For example, as described earlier in the Conclusion, this thesis has demonstrated that American Methodism saw itself complementing the emerging ideals of the newly independent United States of America. The first *Discipline's* mandates about adhering to the "principles of the Revolution" show that American Methodism sought to attach itself to American culture from its earliest days. As a result, the pronouncement that American Methodists were to follow "the principles of the Revolution" shaped the ways in which American Methodism began to interact with the larger American socio-political culture.

In another attempt to align American Methodism with American culture, it is significant to note that American Methodism's organisational structure (Bishops, General Conference, Judicial Council) follows that of the United States government (President, Congress, Supreme Court) with executive, legislative, and judicial branches. Again, the organisational structure of American Methodism clearly demonstrates a desire to emulate the American civil realm, influencing the intensity of American Methodism's relationship with American culture.

Additionally, American Methodism's insistence on championing the Constitution of the United States' Establishment Clause, also known as the Separation of Church and State, is yet another example of how early American Methodism sought to partner with the larger American culture. Lastly, although each caucus group infers different meanings into the Establishment Clause, it is interesting to observe that present day American Methodist caucus groups cite the Separation of Church and State as integral in its arguments about the United Methodist Church's policies on homosexuality and the resulting trajectory into denominational schism. Once again, this demonstrates how American Methodism is entangled within American civic culture. In sum, this thesis demonstrates that American Methodism has an intertwined relationship with the North American socio-political culture. Because of this close relationship, American Methodism tends to experience schism when ideological polarisation occurs within the larger American culture.

In closing, as analysed throughout this thesis, theological differences exist within American Methodism. These differences, however, are magnified by the evolving socio-political atmosphere of American culture. Because American Methodism has been closely intertwined with American socio-political culture from its earliest days, American Methodism grapples with ethical dilemmas as they emerge within American culture. Ultimately, as evidenced in this thesis, the Methodist Episcopal Church's schism over slavery in 1844 and the United Methodist Church's schism over homosexuality in 2022 are a result of American Methodism's tenuous relationship with American socio-political divisions, beginning with the American Revolutionary War and antebellum politics and continuing to the Sexual Revolution and the legalisation of same-sex marriage in the United States.

Methodology

To draw conclusions from relevant primary materials, this thesis employed a deliberate methodology. First, this thesis was constructed by utilising a long view of

history methodology. According to Dr Richard Crouter, Professor of Religious Studies Emeritus at Carleton College, the long view of history methodology analyses “past cultural, political, and religious experience to illumine events of the present day.”¹⁰²⁸ As a result, by using the long view of history methodology, this thesis was able to analyse the 1844 Methodist Episcopal Church’s schism and its larger socio-political context so that the 2022 United Methodist Church’s schism and its larger socio-political context could be better understood.

Pursuant to this, a goal of this thesis was to determine if the 1844 Methodist Episcopal Church’s schism could illuminate the issues surrounding the 2022 United Methodist Church’s schism, thereby assisting in determining the root causes of schism in American Methodism. Thus, the long view of history methodology enabled research that clearly demonstrated a connection between the 1844 Methodist Episcopal Church’s schism and the 2022 United Methodist Church’s schism, concluding in recognising the perpetually intertwined relationship between American socio-political culture and American Methodism. For example, while the slavery and homosexuality differ, the long view of history methodology showed that both schisms were a result of American Methodism’s emergence and organisation during periods of profound societal change in America. As such, the long view of history methodology demonstrated that American Methodism has grappled, usually after the occurrence of a significant socio-political event, with shifting American cultural values. Consequently, the long view of history methodology determined that, in both early and contemporary American Methodism, the trajectory towards denominational schism intensified as the American populace became increasingly polarised in the socio-political sphere.

In this way, the long view of history methodology provided the framework needed for a critical analysis of two distinct periods in American Methodism that are

¹⁰²⁸ Richard Crouter, “Taking the Long View of History,” Oxford University Scholarship (<https://oxford.universitypressscholarship.com//mobile/view/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780195379679.001.0001/acprof-9780195379679-chapter2>; accessed on July 21, 2021).

marked by conflict and division. By employing a long view of history methodological framework, the intertwined relationship between American Methodism and American culture became readily apparent. As such, the long view of history methodology demonstrated that infighting factions with contradictory convictions about slavery and homosexuality are not the underlying cause of schism within American Methodism. Instead, beyond the narrative of the presenting issues of slavery and homosexuality, the long view of history methodology enabled research that placed its focus on American Methodism's engagement with the United States' social and political realms. By doing this, the long view of history methodology provided the vehicle necessary to conclude that schism in American Methodism is indicative of the shifting American socio-political cultural context in which it was organised and continues to exist.

Original Contribution to Knowledge

This thesis makes a 'substantial original contribution to knowledge' in its field of church history by analysing the ways in which the 1844 Methodist Episcopal Church's schism over slavery and the 2022 United Methodist Church's schism over homosexuality were driven by American Methodism's intertwined relationship with American cultural, political, and religious values. It does this by offering substantial exegesis of original and primary material related to both situations. For example, this thesis demonstrates that America, from its founding, grappled with the institution of slavery. Likewise, the Methodist Episcopal Church, from its inception, struggled to formulate and administer policies regarding slavery. Furthermore, this thesis provides evidence that American society's shifting attitudes toward the nature and practice of homosexuality directly impacted the United Methodist Church's policies on homosexuality. In both instances, as American society and culture became increasingly divided over slavery and homosexuality, American Methodism began to fracture, ultimately leading to denominational schism. The thesis, then, critically

examines the above conflicts to reveal that the claim that American Methodism's polity has an integrity of its own is weakened by its intertwined relationship with American socio-political trends, a form of cultural conditioning.

Also, this thesis shows that the 1844 Methodist Episcopal Church's schism and the 2022 United Methodist Church's schism were not merely the results of infighting factions within American Methodism. Thus, this thesis provides evidence that apart from contradictory convictions about Scriptural interpretation, orthodoxy, denominational administration, and varying perceptions of John Wesley's intentions for the Methodist movement in America, American secular culture greatly impacted both schisms. Consequently, these two schisms are products of greater cultural, political, and religious divergences within the context of American society. This thesis constructs, for the first time from a comparison of the 1844 and 2019 debates, a critical account of American Methodism's relationship with its prevailing culture. From this analysis, conclusions regarding American society's characteristic influence upon American Methodism were drawn.

Additionally, this thesis makes 'a substantial original contribution to knowledge' in the field of church history by providing evidence that the 1844 Methodist Episcopal Church's schism over slavery and the 2022 United Methodist Church's schism over homosexuality are deeply influenced by the shifting values of American culture. Thus, by refocusing the attention of scholarship from the 'presenting issues' of these schisms to deeper characteristics of Methodist public and social engagement, this thesis concludes that the 1844 Methodist Episcopal Church's schism and the 2022 United Methodist Church's schism are results of American Methodism's intertwined relationship with North American society. As American society grapples with issues such as homosexuality and slavery, American Methodism also struggles with these same issues. Consequently, this thesis has demonstrated that the major conflicts and schisms in American Methodism have mostly followed changing cultural, political, and religious attitudes within American society, showing

the ways in which American Methodism is intimately intertwined with American culture.

Also, this thesis could impact future research in American Methodism by providing a new framework for understanding the larger North American socio-political contextual connection between the 1844 Methodist Episcopal Church's schism and the 2022 United Methodist Church's schism. For the first time, this thesis proved that slavery and homosexuality are driving factors for schisms that are indicative of American Methodism's unique public engagement with the American socio-political cultural sphere. As the 2022 United Methodist Church's schism evolves, the conclusions made in this thesis will assist future researchers in determining the ways in which American Methodism continues to be affected by shifting American cultural values. From this, it could be surmised, given the role of cultural tension in schism, that schism becomes more inevitable within denominations, such as the United Methodist Church, whose values are closely intertwined with its larger socio-political culture.

Further, future researchers could use the conclusions made in this thesis to exclusively study how future versions of American Methodism are organised and function within an increasingly polarised American society. Therefore, future researchers could test the hypothesis that, because of American Methodism's intertwined relationship with American socio-political culture, American Methodism will recreate the divisions present within the American electorate. Also, if utilised, the conclusions made in this thesis could impact future research in American Methodism by providing the critical analysis needed to assist American Methodism in recognising its propensity to experience schism during times of profound socio-political change. Consequently, this could help American Methodism engage more deeply with contradictory convictions, thereby allowing a better understanding of how American Methodism's cultural context affects its theological perspective.

Finally, this thesis currently makes an original contribution to knowledge in its field of church history by demonstrating that decisions made in American

Methodism have largely followed wider American trends. In this instance, using the long view research methodology has allowed the socio-political, cultural, historical, and theological similarities between the Methodist Episcopal Church's debates about slavery and its subsequent 1844 schism and the United Methodist Church's debates about homosexuality and its 2022 schism to be clearly seen. By doing so, this thesis has revealed an endemic weakness in American Methodist polity. When a weakness is discovered using the long view methodology, a work of church history has the responsibility to state and critically examine that weakness. This thesis has shown that, despite its good intentions, American Methodist polity does not stand independently. Instead, it is culturally conditioned by subsequent American socio-political trends. This does not mean that American Methodist history and polity should be condemned. Rather, it is an acknowledgment of the role culture plays in humanity's experiences, including humanity's religious experiences. Consequently, the conclusions drawn in this thesis may lead to further work researching a more complete understanding of American Methodism's historical roots and how these roots continue to interact with American culture. In the end, this thesis' importance is that it provides a new model of critical examination that the academy may use to view and analyse American Methodism.

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