WHEN we consider the background of Methodist union we must deal at some length with two of the major issues in Methodist history—authority and race. These two questions agitated American Methodism from the beginning. They figured prominently in the debates and divisions in Methodism in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. They required serious attention as the three branches of Methodism moved toward union in 1939. They are still more or less vital issues in The Methodist Church.

When the Methodist Episcopal Church was organized in 1784, authority was invested in or was assumed by the General Superintendents. It is not too much to say that from the first Bishop Francis Asbury’s authority was pre-eminent. His power was not challenged until 1790. In that year James O’Kelly, a Virginia presiding elder appointed by Asbury, did not attend the Council meeting called to take care of the general business of the church. At the next General Conference in 1792, O’Kelly presented a resolution which if adopted would have given ministers the right of appeal from their appointments. After heated debate the resolution was defeated. O’Kelly and a few others then withdrew to form the Republican Methodist Church, later called the Christian Church. In the twentieth century this body united with the Congregationalists to form the Congregational-Christian Church. The O’Kelly schism was the first indication of serious opposition to the supreme powers of the episcopacy in the Methodist Episcopal Church.

From 1784 to 1808 all the preachers were members of the General Conference. The General Conference was usually held in Baltimore. As the church spread over more and more territory travel to General Conference sessions was slow, difficult and costly. This meant that increasingly General Conference personnel was made up of preachers living near Baltimore. For example, the General Conference of 1804 had 108 elders in attendance, thirty-seven of whom were from the Philadelphia Conference and thirty from the Baltimore Conference.¹ This meant that these two annual confer-

ences (there were seven conferences at the time) furnished almost two-thirds of the preachers in attendance at the General Conference. At the 1808 General Conference a resolution was adopted making the General Conference a delegated body.

After the O'Kelly schism, the preachers interested in having some say in their appointments began advocating legislation that would permit the preachers to elect the presiding elders. Beginning about 1800 this became a lively issue in the General Conference. In 1820 a resolution was adopted requiring the bishop presiding over an annual conference to nominate three times as many men as were needed for presiding elders from which the conference would elect the necessary number. Joshua Soule, who had just been elected bishop, sent a letter to the bishops saying he considered the General Conference action unconstitutional, adding, "Under the existing state of things I cannot, consistently with my convictions of propriety and obligation, enter upon the work of an itinerant General Superintendent." 2 Later he sent a letter of resignation to the General Conference itself. The Journal does not show that the General Conference accepted his resignation. Presumably the resignation was accepted by the bishops. After these incidents the General Conference voted to reconsider the resolution and suspended it for four years. In 1824, the resolution was referred to the General Conference of 1828 which rescinded it.

Meanwhile there was arising a demand for lay representation in the General Conference. In the strict sense of the word there were no laymen in the Christmas Conference, and there were none in the general or annual conferences of episcopal Methodism until after the Civil War. Asbury, following the example of Wesley in England, maintained close personal control of the Methodist Episcopal Church. It was a hierarchal church with the episcopacy at the top. To allow the election of the presiding elders by the preachers or to admit laymen to the General Conference would limit the powers of the bishops and change the structure of the church as Asbury understood it and wanted it.

The demand for lay representation became emphatic in 1821 when William S. Stockton founded The Wesleyan Repository. The Repository was a publication in which the Reformers called for representation of the local preachers and the laymen in the conferences. 3 By 1824 the organ had been named Mutual Rights. The insistence on lay representation greatly increased between 1824 and 1828; dur-

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The General Conference of 1824 offended many who demanded lay representation by refusing to consider memorials on the subject. The conference said that the idea was contrary to the restrictive rule adopted in 1808 forbidding any General Conference to enact legislation that would do away with episcopacy. The resolution adopted by the General Conference went on to say, “But if by ‘rights and privileges’ it is intended to signify something foreign from the institutions of the Church, as we received them from our fathers, pardon us if we know no such rights—if we do not comprehend such privileges.”

The crisis over lay representation came in 1828. That year the General Conference censured both the Mutual Rights and the Union Societies. Smarting from the rebuke of the General Conference, the discontented brethren met in Baltimore in November, 1828, and decided to form a new church in which they could govern and be governed as they pleased. They first called it the Associated Methodist Societies. On November 2, 1830, at a meeting in St. John Church, Baltimore, the name was changed to the Methodist Protestant Church.

The General Conferences of 1820 to 1828 were pivotal in the evolution of the Methodist Episcopal Church. The question of authority was hanging in the balance, and it seems clear that but for Joshua Soule’s dramatic and strategic declination of the episcopacy in 1820, the General Conference that year would have limited the powers of the bishops by requiring the election of presiding elders. Soule’s move tipped the scales in favor of the unfettered authority of the episcopacy, and the actions of the General Conferences of 1824 and 1828 further confirmed it. This alienated the Reformers and resulted in the formation of the Methodist Protestant Church.

Another factor in the formation of the Methodist Protestant Church was the race issue. It is not without significance that four-fifths of the members of the Methodist Protestant Church were in the South. In the quadrennium 1824-1828, the race issue in Methodism was obscured by the agitation for lay representation and the election of presiding elders. With these two issues out of the way after 1828 the question of slavery came to the fore, resulting sixteen years later in two episcopal Methodisms in the land.

The Christmas Conference of 1784 adopted a rule requiring society members owning slaves to free them within one year on pain of expulsion, but by mid-1785 this rule was suspended. The action was taken at Baltimore on June 1 by the third regional conference.

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of the year. This gathering was comparable to what were later called annual conferences. The first such conference had been held at the home of Green Hill in North Carolina on April 20, and the second at the home of William Mason on May 1 in Brunswick County, Virginia. Nathan Bangs says, “Though the business was transacted in three separate conferences, their doings appeared in the minutes as one, because nothing, except the stationing of the preachers, was considered binding which was done in one conference unless approved by all the rest.” There is no doubt that the other “conferences” approved. Thus by the action taken at Baltimore the question of slavery was shoved under the rug, so to speak, where, except for brief intervals, it remained for more than forty years.

In 1796 the anti-slavery sentiment came to the fore and the General Conference forbade church officials to hold or sell slaves. In 1800 traveling preachers became subject to location if they came into possession of slaves and did not free them. As the agitation continued the South Carolina Conference threatened in 1808 to withdraw from the church if the section on slavery in the Discipline should be applied against it. Shortly afterward the sentiment for lay representation became dominant, automatically relegating anti-slavery sentiment to the background.

We know from secular history that after 1830 the anti-slavery sentiment rose rapidly in the North. It advanced just as rapidly in the northern part of the Methodist Episcopal Church. Methodist preachers, especially in New England, became active in the growing abolitionist movement. This movement carried overtones of anti-Southernism as well as anti-slavery. The General Conference of 1836, concerned for the unity of the church, censured the preachers participating in the movement, but this action seemed only to give impetus to anti-slavery sentiments. The 1840 General Conference was beset with controversy over the issue. The Northern annual conferences demanded action against slavery; the Southern conferences emphasized the fact that the Bible did not condemn slavery. The General Conference of 1840 adopted a resolution that “mere ownership” of slaves was not a legal barrier to the “various grades of the ministry.”

Determined opposition to slavery increased in the church. The Baltimore Annual Conference in 1844 suspended Elder F. A. Harding for owning slaves. He appealed to the General Conference and lost. This action indicated what was likely to happen in that same

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6 Bangs, I, p. 244.
conference to Bishop J. O. Andrew of Georgia who was elected bishop in 1832 and subsequently came, not on his own motion, into the ownership of slaves. The debate on Bishop Andrew’s case was serious, emotional, and prolonged. The Southern delegates maintained that the issue was the power of the General Conference; the Northern brethren insisted that it was the moral question of a slave-holding bishop.

The Southerners maintained that the General Conference could not depose a bishop without preferring charges, bringing him to trial, and convicting him. They insisted that in voting to suspend a bishop without trial and conviction the General Conference was arrogating to itself the power of the judiciary, a power it did not have by the constitution of the church. In voting to depose the bishop the General Conference was both making and interpreting the laws pertaining to its own powers. This meant a fettered episcopacy; it meant that the General Conference would not be restrained by the constitution of the church in regard to legislation affecting the episcopacy.

The General Conference of 1844, after the long debate on Bishop Andrew’s case, voted 111 to 69 that Bishop Andrew should “desist from the exercise of his office so long as this impediment (slave-owning) remains.” Only one Southern delegate voted with the majority; of the 126 delegates from the Eastern, Middle and Western states, only 15 voted with the minority of 69. The majority realized that to force the issue was almost certainly to split the church, but they were determined. A special committee was appointed to see if some compromise could be effected that would maintain the church intact. But before the committee left the floor a resolution was adopted giving it authority “‘to devise, if possible, a constitutional plan for a mutual and friendly division of the church,’” provided no other peaceful arrangement could be made.

The special committee drew up what came to be known as the “Plan of Separation;” it was adopted by the General Conference. The Southern delegates met immediately after the General Conference adjourned and agreed that if the annual conferences which they represented approved, another meeting would be held the following year for the purpose of organizing a separate church. Accordingly delegates from sixteen annual conferences in the slave-holding states met at Louisville in May 1845 and resolved to organize “a distinct ecclesiastical connection to be known by the style and

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9 Ibid., p. 80.
10 Ibid., p. 84.
title of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South.” The first General Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South met in Petersburg, Virginia, in 1846.

There were two very significant features in the Plan of Separation. The first pertained to the Book Concern. According to the Restrictive Rules, the profits of the Book Concern could be used only for traveling, supernumerary, superannuated, and worn-out preachers and their wives, widows, and children. By the Plan part of the assets of the Book Concern were to be turned over to the new organization if it was formed. Since the Restrictive Rules were involved, the Northern brethren felt that this feature of the Plan must be submitted to the vote of the annual conferences. It did not receive the required two-thirds majority. Consequently the Northern General Conference of 1848 repudiated the action of the General Conference of 1844. The Southerners initiated a suit which went to the Supreme Court, and they won. The Court declared that the General Conference had the power to adopt the Plan of Separation and thus divide the church. The Supreme Court decision not only validated the Plan of Separation, it also legally established the General Conference as the supreme body of the Methodist Episcopal Church.

In passing it is interesting to note that the Southern Church obtained its “share” of the Methodist Episcopal Church by virtue of the same argument which the Southerners opposed on the floor of the General Conference of 1844. There they insisted that the General Conference did not have unfettered authority and power, that it could not summarily depose Bishop Andrew. Yet, ironically, before the Supreme Court they argued that the power of the General Conference to divide the property of the church was not limited by the Restrictive Rule pertaining to the profits of the Book Concern. The Court agreed and on that basis awarded property to the Southern Church. According to legal logic, then, it would appear that the 1844 General Conference did have the power to do as it wished with Bishop Andrew and there was no valid moral basis for separation.

The second significant feature of the Plan of Separation pertained to the lines which were to delimit the two churches. In the border states the local churches and the individual preachers were to have the right to decide whether they would adhere North or South. Presumably this procedure would establish a line which neither church would cross. Neither side observed the line closely; and in effect it was soon abrogated by both churches. The result was friction, en-

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mity, persecution, and in some instances martyrdom, particularly during and immediately preceding the Civil War.

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Such was the background for the next ninety years of the separate existence of the three Methodist bodies which were finally united in 1939. At stake in the divisions of 1828 and 1844 was the doctrine of the church. The issue in 1828 was whether the people of the church were to have a voice in the administration of the church's affairs. The majority held to the Asburian view—that the mission of the church was to spread the gospel and that this could be done most effectively by means of a disciplined army of preachers deployed according to the judgment and plans of the episcopacy. The Reformers were so opposed to this view of the church that they split off and formed the Methodist Protestant Church, which had no bishops and no presiding elders and which provided for lay representation in all conferences. In the split of 1844 two issues were commingled. There was the question of who is in the church and how the brethren are to be treated, and the question of wherein the supreme power resides.

At the 1848 General Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church there was another incident which, in addition to the repudiation of the Plan of Separation, was destined to have far-reaching consequences. The 1846 General Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South delegated Lovick Pierce to convey fraternal greetings to the Northern General Conference. But that conference designated the Methodist Episcopal Church, South a "secessionist" church and declined to recognize or hear Pierce. Deeply offended for himself and his church, Pierce drafted a coldly polite letter saying that the Southern Church would never offer to renew fraternal relations and that if such relations were ever reestablished it would be on motion of the Northern Church after that church should recognize and accept the Plan of Separation. The 1850 General Conference of the Southern Church emphatically endorsed the position taken by Pierce.¹²

For twenty-one years the two churches made no move toward fraternization. The separation was aggravated by the Civil War and the order of the Secretary of War Stanton, in 1863, that vacant churches in areas occupied by Federal troops should be turned over to the leaders of Northern denominations. In November of that year a specific order concerning the "captured" churches of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South was issued.¹³ Also, since the

Methodist Episcopal Church had repudiated the Plan of Separation it did not hesitate to "invade" the South to minister to the Negroes and to Northern Methodists residing in the South.

Notwithstanding the situation, the bishops of the Northern Church decided that it was in order for them to send two of their number to a meeting of the Southern bishops in St. Louis in May 1869. The two bishops brought a communication saying that "as the main cause of the separation (slavery) has been removed, so has the chief obstacle to the restoration." The message invited the Southern Bishops to confer on the "propriety, practicability, and methods of reunion."  

The Southern bishops made a long reply rejecting reunion under existing circumstances. They pointed out, however, that the renewal of fraternal relations might help to change circumstances for the better. The reply also harked back to the Northern General Conference's rejection of the fraternal delegate from the Southern Church in 1848, and reminded the Northern bishops of the condition laid down by Lovick Pierce for the renewal of fraternal relations, viz., acceptance by the Northern Church of the Plan of Separation. Furthermore, the Southern bishops denied that slavery per se was the chief cause of the division in 1844, and they therefore affirmed that the main cause of the separation had not been removed. 

The 1868 General Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church authorized a commission of bishops and laymen to confer with a like commission from the African Methodist Episcopal Church looking toward union. The commission was also authorized to confer with "a similar commission from any other Methodist Church that may desire union." This Northern commission appeared at the Southern General Conference of 1870 and frankly said that the Northern Church wanted reunion and saw no reason why it might not be effected. The Southern Conference replied that in its judgment two separate and distinct church organizations were required. However, the conference added that it was willing to see fraternal relations between the churches restored. 

The Northern General Conference of 1872 arranged to send fraternal delegates to the next Southern General Conference, which incidentally met in Louisville, Kentucky, in 1874 where that church was organized twenty-nine years earlier. The Southern General Conference reciprocated, appointing Lovick Pierce and two others as

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15 Ibid., p. 55.
16 Ibid., pp. 57-59.
17 Ibid., p. 60.
18 Ibid., p. 60.
fraternal delegates to the Northern General Conference of 1876. When the time came Pierce could not go because of illness; but the other two went. Thus after thirty years the two episcopal Methodisms established fraternal relations. The 1874 Southern General Conference also established a commission to work with a like commission, should one be set up by the Northern Church, on the problem of conflicts in border states. The Northern Church appointed a commission, and the Joint Commission met at Cape May, New Jersey, August 17-23, 1876.

On August 17, 1876, the Cape May Commission adopted a resolution of far-reaching significance which made possible all subsequent negotiations and ultimately Methodist union itself. Unequivocally the resolution said there was no distinction in the legitimacy of the two churches: “Each of said churches is a legitimate branch of Episcopal Methodism in the United States, having a common origin in the Methodist Episcopal Church organized in 1784. Since the organization of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South was consummated in 1845 by the voluntary exercise of the right of the Southern Annual Conferences, Ministers and members, to adhere to that communion, it has been an Evangelical Church, reared on Scriptural foundations, and her ministers and members, with those of the Methodist Episcopal Church, have constituted one Methodist family, though in distinct ecclesiastical connections.” 19 The 1880 General Conference of the Northern Church adopted a resolution saying the action of the Cape May Commission should be considered as final.20

Meanwhile both episcopal Methodisms had taken action permitting lay representation. The Southern General Conference of 1866 enacted legislation admitting laymen to both General and Annual conferences. In 1872 the Northern Church by the narrow margin of 32 votes over the required three-fourths majority in the annual conference balloting admitted laymen to the General Conference.21

These actions in favor of lay representation marked the end of the conferences as meetings of evangelists to plan the spread of the gospel. Henceforth the conferences were to be church legislative bodies, not mere assemblies of traveling preachers discussing doctrines and discipline, but rather organizations representing established, mature churches.

The 1870 General Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South took a very important step in setting apart its Negro members in a new organization to be called the Colored Methodist Epis-

19 Ibid., p. 65.
20 Ibid.
21 Buckley, Vol. II, pp. 210-211.
copal Church. Two Negro bishops were ordained and the Discipline of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South was adopted by the new church, thus continuing the polity and the theology of the parent body in the new organization. The formation of this separate church for the Negroes was to color negotiations toward union to the end.

The next move toward union came in the Southern General Conference of 1894 when a resolution was adopted setting up a Commission on Federation to deal more adequately with conflicts in border states and on the foreign mission fields. The Northern Church set up a similar commission in 1896. The first joint meeting was held in January 1898. Out of this joint commission came what was called the Federal Council of Methodism, the General Conferences voting for it in 1906 and 1908, respectively.

It should be observed that each successive joint group set up to deal with border conflicts—the Cape May Commission, the Commission on Federation, and the Federal Council of Methodism—was stronger and more authoritative than its predecessor. Even so the Federal Council of Methodism could only recommend, not command. Parties involved in conflict often refused to abide by the Council’s decisions. Moreover, instead of diminishing, the area of conflict spread; the Southern Church moved into the Pacific Northwest and spread across the South Central States. It was soon evident that the Federal Council of Methodism did not function well enough to meet the needs of the churches, and it was dissolved in 1916.

It might be argued that the failure of the Federal Council of Methodism contributed in a way to Methodist union. Certainly the failure of joint efforts of the two episcopal Methodisms to deal adequately with the problems of conflict in border states did not go unnoticed among the church leaders.

Now, through the long process that resulted first in division and then in the building of approaches to one another, there were changes in the understanding of the nature of the church. The early Methodists hardly thought of the church as an organization; they rather accepted the good news of salvation and banded together for fellowship and discipline. They did not regard the church as a world-wide fellowship of the followers of Christ; they focused on their immediate environment, on their local societies.

But as time passed the traveling preachers coming together in General Conferences were more and more aware of the vastness of America and its sectional differences. Witness the threat of the

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22 Moore, p. 68.
23 Ibid., p. 72.
24 Ibid., p. 84.
South Carolina Conference to secede from the church in 1808 if the slavery section of the *Discipline* were enforced in that state. The preachers may not have been fully aware of all that was involved, but they had to struggle with the problems of being a church. Some began to see that the church was not simply an organism, it was also an organ. Evangelism had to be compounded with other elements. The Reformers of 1828 had a different view of the church, as compared with the majority in the General Conference that year. The General Conference adhered to the hierarchical structure while the Reformers sought a more democratic organization through which the laity could speak for themselves.

In 1844 there was a difference in understanding of the nature of the church. The issue was the attitude toward the Christian brother. This issue was involved in the treatment of Bishop Andrew and the attitude toward the Negro.

As the years of alienation continued, some men (most of them in the border states) saw the sin of a divided Methodism. They felt it was wrong to set altar against altar, people against people. This attitude represented a groping for an ecumenical understanding of and approach to the church.

The second act in the drama of Methodist union covers the years 1908 to 1926. It is worthy of note that this phase of Methodist rapprochement began two years before the first world missionary conference at Edinburgh, the ecumenical gathering which initiated steps that led ultimately to the organization of the World Council of Churches in 1948. For Methodists the period under consideration was marked by real efforts looking toward union.

Contemporary as well as preceding events portended a changing view of the church as Methodism moved into the twentieth century. This was especially true for Southern Methodists. The Methodist Episcopal Church, South had been expanding into the North and West since the Civil War. This brought in new blood and a larger view. Furthermore, from 1869 onward contacts with the Methodist Episcopal Church with its desire for a church national in scope influenced the Southerners.

All things considered it may be said that basically the struggle for Methodist union in this period raised questions centering around the doctrine of the church. As conversations and negotiations proceeded the question was whether the proposed united Methodism would be a church national in scope or whether it would be a federation of sectional churches within a national body. Also, it may be said that during these years of struggle for union the main question at a deeper level was: If Methodism unites, how will the local church be related to the universal church? As it turned out Meth-
odist union when it came was more a federation of sectional churches than a national church.

In April 1908 the Baltimore Conference Social Union of the Methodist Episcopal Church, a lay organization, held its annual banquet. Methodist Protestant laymen were present. Afterward some of the participants raised the question of possible union of the two denominations. They agreed to broach the issue at their respective General Conferences scheduled to meet the next month. In consequence the Methodist Episcopal General Conference sent a committee of three to Pittsburgh to propose union with the Methodist Protestant Church. The credentials of the committee included the following statement:

Such has been the growth of the Methodist Episcopal Church and of the Methodist Protestant Church along the lines of their individual development, each gradually modifying its policy and practice to meet the enlarging demands confronting it, that providentially the radical differences of policy which occasioned their separation have been so nearly eliminated that many among the most godly in both churches are convinced that there is no longer sufficient cause for the maintenance of two distinct ecclesiastical organizations. Having a common origin, holding a common faith, possessing so much of discipline and policy in common, and above all, the deep-rooted and growing conviction that the union of the various Methodisms would strengthen the local churches, secure economy of resource, make for aggressive evangelism, and hasten the kingdom of our Lord, they earnestly desire that the Methodist Episcopal and Methodist Protestant Churches shall become organically one.25

The Methodist Protestant General Conference cordially welcomed the committee and “heartily” accepted the proposal but asked at the same time that it be widened to include the Methodist Episcopal Church, South “and other Methodist Churches in this country” so as to effect in so far as possible “the reunion of Methodists in America.” 26

Among fraternal delegates who returned the Methodist Episcopal Church’s visit and presented the response of the Methodist Protestant General Conference. Lewis made a stirring address on the subject of Methodist union which brought the Methodist Episcopal General Conference to its feet “cheering and singing.” 27

26 Ibid., p. 380.
years later Lewis made a similar speech at the Southern General Conference. But the Southerners were cautious; they did not respond with a commission on unification, though they did agree to enlarge the powers accorded the Federal Council in 1906.

A meeting of the Federal Council was held in July, 1910, with President Lewis of the Methodist Protestant Church present, and apparently unification was discussed. The first meeting of the commissions on unification set up by the Northern and Methodist Protestant Churches convened in December 1910, and though the Southern Church had not appointed a corresponding group, its commissioners on federation were present with authority from the General Conference “to further, as far as is consistent and practicable, a closer relation between ourselves and the Methodist Episcopal Church, the Methodist Protestant Church, and other Methodist bodies.”

Out of this meeting came a proposal for a committee of nine, three from each church, “to consider the causes which produce friction and waste and injury rather than promote the common cause . . . and . . . to bring to this joint commission a plan for submission to the General Conferences and people of the respective churches, said plan to provide for such unification, through reorganization of the Methodist Churches concerned, as shall insure unity of purpose, administration, evangelistic effort, and all other functions for which our Methodism has stood from the beginning.”

At the next meeting of the Joint Commission, May 10, 1911, the committee of nine presented its historic “Suggestions.” After five days of discussion they were adopted as revised:

1. We suggest, as a plan of reorganization, the merging of the Methodist Episcopal Church, the Methodist Protestant Church, the Methodist Episcopal Church, South into one Church to be known as the Methodist Episcopal Church in America or the Methodist Church in America.

2. We suggest that this Church shall have throughout common Articles of Faith, common conditions of membership, a common hymnal, a common catechism, and a common ritual.

3. We suggest that the governing power of the reorganized Church shall be vested in one General Conference and three or four Quadrennial Conferences, both General and Quadrennial Conferences to exercise their powers under constitutional provisions and restrictions, the General Conference to have full legislative power over all matters distinctly connectional, and the Quadrennial Conferences to have full legislative power over distinctively local affairs.

We suggest that the colored membership of the Methodist Episcopal Church, Methodist Protestant Church, and such organizations of col-

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28 Moore, p. 88.
29 Ibid., p. 89.
ored Methodists as may enter into agreement with them, may be con-
stituted and recognized as one of the Quadrennial or Jurisdictional
Conferences of the proposed reorganization.

4. We suggest that the General Conference shall consist of two houses,
each house to be composed of equal numbers of ministerial and lay
delegates. . . . All legislation of the General Conference shall require
the concurrent action of the two houses.

5. We suggest that the Quadrennial Conferences shall name the
bishops from their several jurisdictions, the same to be confirmed by
the first house of the General Conference. . . .

6. We suggest that the Annual Conferences, whose boundaries shall
be fixed by the Quadrennial Conferences, be composed of all travelling,
supernumerary, and superannuated preachers within their prescribed
boundaries, and that the principle of lay representation in the Annual
Conferences be recognized.

7. We suggest that neither the General Conference nor any of the
Quadrennial Conferences be invested with final authority to interpret
the constitutionality of its own actions.a0

When the Methodist Protestant General Conference met in 1912,
it declared that the main issues concerning unification lay between
the two episcopal Methodisms, and it therefore declined to pass on
the merits of the “Suggestions.” And though this General Confer-
ence continued the Methodist Protestant Commission on Union,
the Methodist Protestants did not participate again in negotiations
looking toward Methodist union until 1929. Apparently the Meth-
odist Protestants felt that there was little they could do about
Methodist union until the two episcopal Methodisms could, as their
General Conference resolution said, “discover a form of General
Conference organization under which they can live harmoniously
together.” A meeting of the Joint Commission in St. Louis in 1918
noted that the Methodist Protestant Church was no longer par-
icipating.

The 1912 Northern General Conference did not act on the “Sug-
gestions,” probably because they were tentative and because they
were in opposition to that church’s conception of a supreme General
Conference. However, its Commission on Federation was main-
tained with authority to continue negotiations. The 1914 General
Conference of the Southern Church adopted a resolution saying that
unification was “feasible and desirable” and that while the “Sugges-
tions” were tentative they nevertheless contained “the basic prin-
ciples of a genuine unification of the Methodist bodies in the United
States.” Also, for the first time this church gave its commissioners
authority to work for organic union, with one recommended reser-

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a0 Ibid., pp. 96-97.
vation, viz., that the “colored membership of the various Methodist bodies be formed into an independent organization holding fraternal relations with the reorganized and united Church.” In approving the “Suggestions” and adopting a resolution favoring Methodist union the Southern Church had come a long way from its position in 1870.

In 1916 the Northern General Conference approved the “Suggestions” which it merely received in 1912. This was a historic step because it committed the Methodist Episcopal Church to union by reorganization and settled the question of reunion. The General Conference then set up a twenty-five member Commission on union—five bishops, ten clergy, and ten laymen.

The Joint Commission met December 18, 1916, to January 2, 1917, and set up four major committees: (1) General and Jurisdictional Conferences; (2) Judicial Council; (3) Status of Negro Membership; (4) General Reference. Bishop John M. Moore said that the next meeting of the Commission in June 1917 was “one of the most important that was ever held.” Much attention was given to the reports of the committees on conferences and Negro membership since the two were necessarily related. The latter committee presented majority and minority reports. The majority report favored Associate General Conferences, one of which would include American with African continent Negroes. Members of the Methodist Church in other continents would also be set off in Associate General Conferences. The minority report, in keeping with the recommendation of the Southern General Conference of 1914, suggested a completely separate organization for colored members. There was no action on either report, but a sub-committee was appointed to try to work out an acceptable plan.

The Joint Commission met again in Savannah in January 1918, spending most of its time on the Negro problem. It was difficult, and as A. J. Lamar, a Southern commissioner, said, “We all know and we have known from the beginning that the crux of the situation is the Status of the Colored Membership in the Methodist Episcopal Church. We can arrange everything else, and . . . if we can’t arrange that, if we come to a deadlock on that, it renders null and void everything that we have done before.” But no matter how crucial the Negro question was, the Commission spent eight

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31 Moore, p. 116.
32 Ibid., p. 117.
33 Ibid., p. 133.
34 Ibid., p. 138.
days considering the Judicial Council before it began eight more days of work on the Negro problem.36

Unable to come to agreement, the special sub-committee on the Status of Negro Membership submitted a preferential and an alternative report. The preferential report placed the Negro membership in one of five Associate Regional Jurisdictions. Each such Jurisdiction was to have five ministerial and five lay delegates to the General Conference.37 The alternative report provided for an Associate General Conference “which shall comprise within its jurisdiction the Negro membership of the church in the United States and Africa, and which shall have complete legislative, judicial, and executive powers in the ecclesiastical government of said Negro membership in harmony with and subject to the Constitution of the unified church. Said Associate General Conference shall have the power to elect the bishops, constitute the boards, and elect their general administrative officers, for the said Negro Conferences and membership.”38 The outcome of these preferential and alternative reports was the appointment of a special Committee of Eight, composed of members of the Committee on Conferences and the Committee on the Status of the Negro, to consider suggestions and reports on the problem.

The Committee of Eight accepted the plan of Associate Regional Jurisdictions, each with five ministerial and five lay delegates to the General Conference, with the proviso that the delegates would be allowed to speak but not to vote. Also, the plan provided that any Associate Regional Conference could, with the permission of the General Conference, constitute itself an Associate General Conference. Another clause provided that when a Regional Conference grew to 600,000 members it must become an Associate General Conference.39 After deliberating two days both Commissions accepted the report in principle as a basis for further negotiations. This meant that the groundwork had been laid and that the biggest hurdle had been cleared.40

The next meeting of the Joint Commission was in St. Louis in April 1918. Regional conferences were discussed, most of the members favoring six. The majority of the Northern Commission were not agreeable, and since the Southern General Conference was only three weeks away, the Commission adjourned before resolving the question.41 At its General Conference the Southern Church expressed appreciation for the work of the Commission, “reaffirmed

36 Ibid., p. 25.
37 Ibid., pp. 100-102.
38 Ibid., p. 102.
39 Ibid., pp. 437-440.
40 Moore, p. 140.
41 Ibid., p. 143.
the action of the General Conference of 1914 . . . recommended close cooperation . . . endorsed the publication of the proceedings of the Joint Commission, and voted to continue the Commission.”

The Commission did not meet again until July 7-10, 1919, in Cleveland. Once more there were extensive negotiations on the question of Negro membership. Five Northern commissioners along with one Southerner who made up the majority of a Special Committee on Conferences presented a majority report suggesting that the colored membership be placed in a Quadrennial or Regional Conference with proportionate representation in the General Conference. The four remaining Southern members on this Committee presented a minority report favoring the Regional Conferences as suggested in the Savannah meeting, with one significant change—they were for proportionate representation in the General Conference with no limitation on the right to vote. Also, the minority report limited the proportion of General Conference representation from each of the five suggested Regional Conferences to five per cent. Later the Committee on Conferences was enlarged and the matter was again referred to it. Again there were two reports, the seven Northerners favoring what had been the majority report and the seven Southerners voting for the other one.

Then Bishop Edwin D. Mouzon, on instructions from his fellow Southern Commissioners, made a motion that the report signed by the Southerners be regarded as a definite proposal and that an ad interim committee be set up to consider the whole question of unification. A fourteen-member Joint Committee of Reference was appointed to work out a plan of union with a constitution for the reorganized church. This Committee met November 4-7, 1919, in Richmond, Virginia, and made its report to the Joint Commission at Louisville, January 15-20, 1920, where the Plan was adopted with no major revisions. The Joint Commission decided to transmit the Plan to the General Conferences without endorsement or recommendation. The Plan more nearly satisfied the Southern Commissioners than the Northerners.

Although the Methodist Protestants, as already indicated, had no part in working out the Plan of Union, 1920 was a significant year for their church. The Methodist Protestant General Conference that year made its President a full-time administrative officer. This

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42 Ibid., p. 146.
44 Ibid., p. 231.
46 Ibid., p. 363.
47 Moore, p. 148.
was a marked change in Methodist Protestant polity; it grew out of a felt need for continuity in organization and administration, and it meant that Methodist Protestants were moving toward the acceptance of Methodist episcopacy.\footnote{Straughn, p. 86.}

At the 1920 General Conference of the Northern Church a special committee worked on the Plan for more than two weeks and found it unacceptable primarily because of the provision for Regional Conferences. The committee recommended a Joint General Convention of the two churches where some mutually agreeable Plan might be worked out. The General Conference, anxious not to give the impression that it was rejecting the desirability of union, adopted a resolution affirming its conviction that the two episcopal Methodisms should be one.\footnote{Moore, pp. 161-162.}

To many the action of the Northern General Conference seemed to spell defeat. But when the Southern General Conference met in 1922 it approved the principle of unification by reorganization as expressed in the Plan submitted by its commissioners. Also, it continued the Commission on Union and empowered the College of Bishops to call a special session of the General Conference when and if the Northern Church adopted a plan of unification.\footnote{Ibid., p. 163.}

The Joint Commission returned to its task at Cincinnati in January 1923. A Committee of Sixteen was appointed to work out a new plan. The Committee submitted the results of its work at the next meeting of the Commission in July 1923. Essentially the Committee proposed union by federation—separate jurisdictions along the lines of the two churches. Also, the General Conference was to meet in two houses, all legislation being required to pass both houses. The General Conference was to legislate on the hymnal, ritual, missions, schools, periodicals, transfers of ministers and property, and it was to recommend action to the jurisdictional conferences. The Joint Commission adopted the Plan 39 to 3.\footnote{Ibid., pp. 166-169.}

The Northern Church General Conference of 1924 voted for the new Plan 802 to 13. The Bishops of the Southern church then issued the call for a special session of the General Conference. Four of the thirteen Southern bishops—Candler, Denny, Darlington, and Dickey—objected on the ground that the General Conference of 1922 had no constitutional right to instruct the bishops to issue such a call. However, the special session convened in Chattanooga in 1924. The Conference spent the first few days arguing the legality of the call. Then there was extended debate on whether the Plan
was in harmony with principles laid down for union by previous General Conferences. Some declared that the proposed Plan abrogated the principles of the Plan of Separation of 1844. The final vote favored the Plan 298 to 74.52

The Annual Conferences of the Northern Church overwhelmingly endorsed the Plan 18,140 to 935.53 But in the South it met strong, even bitter, opposition. Committees favoring and opposing unification were formed on annual conference, district, and local church levels. A rash of pamphlets pro and con were privately published. Ministers and laymen jockeyed for the control of votes in annual conferences. Bishop Mouzon wrote, "Certain presiding elders and pastors who are opposed to unification are having delegates elected to the district conference and having the quarterly conference instruct them, no matter what their private opinion may be, to vote only for delegates to the annual conference who are opposed to unification. (At that time in the South lay delegates to the annual conference were elected by the district conference.) Bishop Mouzon's correspondence shows that he tried to sway opinion in favor of unification, saying in one letter, typical of many he wrote, "I have been much surprised at information that has come to me from Bristol to the effect that certain members of our Church there have been busying themselves in agitation and political organization with a view to defeating the pending Plan of Unification. . . . The leaders of the Anti-Unification movement . . . have appealed to the reactionary and destructive forces of the Church." The letter goes on to ask for support of the Plan.54

Some letters received by Bishop Mouzon reveal the nature of the objections to the Plan: "I believe I have read everything for and against it [the 1925 Plan] and I am becoming very much disgusted with the arguments of many of our men that have been considered prominent churchmen because it seems to me that all their objections are based upon a lack of confidence in the religion and religious sincerity [sic.] of the people of the North, together with a deep-seated racial antagonism [sic.]." 55

A pamphlet issued by some Missourians gives their attitude along with an interesting analysis of the Chattanooga General Conference vote:

We want to be brothers in one Church as we are neighbors and friends in business and social life. We feel that Christ calls us together and

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52 Ibid., pp. 174-177.
53 Straughn, p. 94.
54 Letter from E. D. Mouzon to R. B. Pennington, Bristol, Tenn., April 21, 1925.
that ecclesiastical authorities are keeping us apart. . . . We are tired of strife, financial strain and anemic Churches. . . . Three Gulf states, Alabama, Mississippi, and South Carolina cast forty votes against the plan. These states with only 370,689 members, or 15 per cent of the membership of our Church cast fifty-four per cent of the total votes that the General Conference gave against the plan.

The summary went on to show that the annual conferences west of the Mississippi River voted 28 to 1 for the Plan, while east of the Mississippi the vote was 6 to 1 in favor, and the foreign conferences voted unanimously for it.56

In the Southern annual conferences the vote was 4,528 in favor and 4,108 against the Plan, considerably below the three-fourths majority needed.57 The opponents of union won the round. Desiring to forget the bitterness, heal the wounds, and restore harmony within the fold, the Southern General Conference of 1926 resolved “that there be no agitation, discussion, or negotiation concerning unification during the ensuing quadrennium.” 58

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The long negotiations for Methodist union ended in what appeared to be futility in 1925. Why? There was the issue of the national church as opposed to a sectional church. It was a serious but not an insurmountable obstacle. A more important issue was the enduring Southern memory of humiliation, suffering, and defeat in the Civil War and during Reconstruction Days. It is not without significance that some of the strongest leaders in the Methodist Episcopal Church, South—Bishops Warren A. Candler and Collins Denny—who were unalterably opposed to Methodist union in the 1920s, were born before 1860 and had vivid recollections of the tragic war and its aftermath. Because of defeat in the war there was a felt need or desire in the South in after years to justify “the Southern way of life.” For some churchmen this became a felt need to justify “the Southern Methodist Church” and its policies and practices. In this connection some Southern Methodists were sure to remember that the Methodist Episcopal Church, whatever its attitude in the 1920s, had been arrogant and aggressive toward Southern Methodism in the 1860s. Indeed, the four Southern bishops who opposed the Plan of union presented a minority Episcopal Address at Chattanooga in which, among other things, they cited what the Methodist Episcopal Church had done in the past and

56 “An Appeal: From Methodists Living on the Border and in the West to Methodists Living in the Gulf States or Lower South” (Nashville: Friends of Unification, n.d.), p. 3.
57 Straughn, p. 94.
58 Moore, p. 180.
warned that if the Southern Church should vote for the Plan of union it would “weaken the foundation of our social structure and impair the fabric of our Southern civilization.” Excerpts from the Episcopal Address to the General Conference of the Northern Church in 1864 also are pertinent:

The progress of Federal arms has thrown open to the loyal churches of the Union large and inviting fields of Christian enterprise and labor. In the cultivation of these fields it is natural and reasonable to expect that the Methodist Episcopal Church should occupy a prominent position. She occupied these fields once. . . . For nineteen years they have been in the occupancy of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, to the wrongful exclusion of the Methodist Episcopal Church. But her days of exclusive occupancy are ended. . . .

The address went on to speak of the Northern Church’s responsibility to evangelize the area abandoned by the Southerners, and added, “Yet it is our solemn judgment that none should be admitted to her fellowship who are either slave-holders or are tainted with treason.” Also, the address denied that there was any legality to the separation of the churches in 1844. Such facts of history may explain in some measure the cautiousness of the Southern commissioners during the decade 1914-1924, and they may account for some of the strong opposition to the Plan of union in the Methodist Episcopal Church, South in 1924 when the General Conference warmly debated and then voted for the Plan, and in 1925 when the Annual Conferences argued the issues and failed to give the Plan the three-fourths majority needed for adoption.

As already indicated, the question of the status of the Negro in the united church was the biggest hurdle for the cause of Methodist union. In all negotiations the Southerners generally stood firmly for segregation in the united church. In the long commission meetings and in all the suggestions regarding plans of union, they never yielded on this point. Some of the most ardent Southern advocates of union frankly said they favored segregation in the united church. They believed it would be difficult enough to get the Southern Church to go into a united church that would include 350,000 Negro members set off in an Associated or Jurisdictional Conference of their own; they felt sure that the Southern Church would not vote for an integrated church. Bishop Edwin D. Mouzon, the outstanding leader in favor of union in the South in the 1920s, wrote:

I will speak with perfect candor, however, and say that if we of the South had your negroes, I believe we could do more for them; and

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60 Ibid., p. 279.
it is evident that the presence of a Northern Church at work among Southern Negroes does have a tendency to make the negro believe that you are his friends and that we are not, and thus the chasm between negroes and white people in the South is kept open. This is certainly an anomalous situation and one fraught with considerable danger for the future. If our two Methodisms could come together and together work for the salvation of the Negro race, what work for God and humanity we could accomplish! For the sake of the negro we ought to get together.

I think that before we go further in our negotiations you and other leaders on the commission ought to know that the Southern church cannot be brought to agree that the Negro take the same place in the reorganized church that he now has in your church. . . . And even in the Southwest and Middle West where the feeling is not so strong as in Georgia and Mississippi, southern Methodism will not consent to have negroes on the same footing with themselves. Individuals can be found who might consent to it, but the rank and file will not do so. As I see it, the reasons for this settled conviction are about as follows:

1. We will consent to nothing that looks in the direction of social equality. Our fathers, in post bellum days, at cost of infinite toil and sorrow, saved our Southland from ruin. Ours is a white man's country. That question is settled; and we will consent to nothing that seems to have a tendency to unsettle that question.\(^1\)

The Negro is not in point of morals, or education, or religion, the equal of the white man, and to place him in the church on a position of equality would be a wrong to the negro and to the church. It would be to do a thing that would be wrong in the sight of God and man.\(^2\)

My own opinion is that if the A.M.E. Church and the A.M.E.Z. Church should enter into a union with the C.M.E. Church and the negroes of the Methodist Episcopal Church it would be a menace to American civilization.\(^3\)

Bishop H. M. DuBose, another Southern Methodist who was for Methodist union in the 1920s, wrote:

I am only frank . . . in saying that the Negro membership provision in the Constitution almost staggers me. It is so absolutely beyond anything I ever supposed possible from our viewpoint; it reverses our traditions and puts our history in pledge. A more serious possibility is that it may also embarrass the future of our people in more than a sentimental sense. . . . \(^4\)

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\(^{1}\) Letter from E. D. Mouzon to F. D. Leete, July 13, 1917.


A. J. Lamar, a clerical member of the Southern Commission on Unification and one who opposed the Plan in the Chattanooga General Conference in 1924, said on the floor of the Conference:

The Southern people have decided definitely, and finally and irrevocably that it is best for civilization that has been built up in this Southern land that these two races should not be brought into contact with others on terms of equality. . . .

I am afraid of them (the Northern Methodists) on the settlement of the colored question in the same church. I am afraid of them, not because I believe they are bad men, not because I believe that they are not trustworthy men, but because I believe that they are good men, conscientiously convinced that they are right and disposed to stick to their views on that account.65

To be sure, there were some in the Southern Church in the 1920s who were more moderate in their views on the Negro question. They did not speak for an integrated church but they did affirm that the church had to go forward and that to vote against union on the ground that they desired to maintain segregation was to go backward. A Georgia pastor wrote:

I am deeply concerned to know whether we of the Southern Methodist Church have always lived up to the clear implications of Christ's gospel in our attitude toward our brother in black. . . . What is it we really fear? . . . It is the mingling of the blood of these two races, to the utter degradation and elimination of both! . . .

The one place upon all this earth where the two races can meet together without friction or possible misunderstanding is at the foot of the cross of Jesus Christ.66

George R. Stuart, pastor of First Methodist Church, Birmingham, and noted evangelist, said to the General Conference:

I want to say that in our attitude sectionalism and provincialism have passed out into a bigger and broader vision. . . . We have to go out when we have a world vision, when we are looking to the salvation of the world. Brothers, the United States of America must be saved, North and South, and we are interested in it. Europe must be saved, and Latin America, and India, and Africa, and if we have not a great broad, world vision . . . your missionary movements are all jokes. I want to say that in this age, when we are looking to the salvation of every race on earth, anything that would create race prejudice is out of the spirit of a great Christian Church of every denomination. . . .

65 The Daily Christian Advocate, General Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, July 2-4, 1924, p. 28.
Jesus Christ and his gospel must be given to all his people, and we must express to them brotherly love and brotherly consideration; and any false things that will create unfair prejudice are beneath our great Southern Methodist Church.  

The issue was most clearly drawn by Charles C. Selecman (later Bishop), President of Southern Methodist University, on the floor of the General Conference:

I think we might as well confess that two things confront us. Either swing out into a bigger destiny, with broader affilations and sympathies, or be shut up to the destiny of a narrow and narrowing provincialism. . . . The challenge thrown out to Southern Methodism today is, shall (we) be subjected to the spirit of provincialism? May I say that this is the spirit that is cursing the world and America today? . . . We may just as well confess it, that the radical conservatism in politics is bad, and a radical conservatism in society is worse, but the worst kind of radical conservatism that has cursed the world and has divided our Christian Church is the radical ecclesiastical conservatism to the voice of which we are to listen here today. . . Now, then, there are two paths. One leads out toward conventionalism and isolation; and the other accepts the challenge of the day.

Such was the temper of the Southern Church on the Negro question in the 1920s. Even though Bishops Mouzon and DuBose spoke for the Plan of union, when they expressed their views on the Negro question they were articulating the attitude of the great majority of the membership of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, and most of the members who held that attitude were hesitant about, if not opposed to, Methodist unification.

But though the long negotiations for Methodist union ended in seeming futility in 1925, still Methodist union, like most worthy ideas, was to have its day, and that day was to come sooner than some expected or dared to hope. The two powerful bishops in the South, whose memories extended back to Reconstruction Days and whose inflexible opposition contributed to the defeat of union in 1925, were soon to pass from active leadership in church affairs. Time and the processes of change in the land were eroding away some of the prejudices of an earlier age. The new leaders did not object to entering a united church with a Negro membership, albeit most of them still wanted the Negroes in a separate Jurisdiction. They believed that at the foot of the Cross of Christ all men are equal and all men can have Christian fellowship.

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* Daily Christian Advocate, p. 25.
* Ibid., p. 27.
The third act in the drama of Methodist union covers the period from 1925 to 1939. Notwithstanding what happened in the Southern Church in 1924 and 1925, the Methodist Episcopal Church's General Conference of 1928 appointed a Commission on Interdenominational Relations. Then in December 1929, after an absence of twenty years, the Methodist Protestants entered again into the discussions on union. Two of that church's ministers, A. J. Allen and J. W. Hawley, went to Bishop Herbert Welch, Pittsburgh Area of the Methodist Episcopal Church, and suggested the unification of the Methodist Episcopal and Methodist Protestant Churches. Bishop Welch referred the matter to Bishop William F. McDowell, Chairman of his church's Commission on Interchurch Relations. In March 1930, Bishop McDowell, Bishop Charles L. Mead, who was Chairman of the Sub-Committee on Union of the Northern Church, and President John C. Broomfield (later Bishop) of the Methodist Protestant Church, issued a joint call for a meeting in July of Bishop Mead's Committee and the Methodist Protestant Commission on Union. With this as background, the General Conference of the Southern Church met in Dallas in May 1930. The Episcopal Address to that Conference expressed the belief that the recent failures of plans for unification were only temporary and cherished the hope that in time union would be achieved. The Conference appointed a Commission on Interdenominational Relations with instructions "to cultivate the spirit of fraternity with the Methodist Episcopal Church looking toward the ultimate union of these two great branches of Episcopal Methodism and the answer of Christ's Prayer that all his disciples may be one." 

The Joint Commissions of the Northern and Methodist Protestant Churches met in July 1930 and took no significant action. Feeling that the Southern Church should participate, the Joint Commissions of the other two Methodisms issued an invitation to the Southerners to join in the next meeting in June 1931. Bishop W. F. McMurry, Chairman of the Southern Commission, attended the session but declared that his group had no power to discuss organic union.

In January 1932, the Methodist Protestants and the Northern Methodists met again. Bishop Frederick D. Leete of the Northern Church held that another effort should be made to bring in the Southern Church. But the Commission proceeded to appoint a sub-committee to work out a Plan for uniting the Methodist Episcopal and Methodist Protestant Churches. In May 1932 the General

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60 Straughn, p. 96.
61 Ibid., p. 99.
62 Moore, p. 181.
63 Straughn, p. 99.
Conferences of both churches instructed their commissions to do nothing more until after the meeting of the Southern General Conference in 1934.\textsuperscript{73} When it met, the Southern Conference gave its Commission on Interdenominational Relations and Church Union authority to negotiate toward union.\textsuperscript{74}

The Joint Commission of the three churches convened in Chicago in August 1934 and set up a Committee on Plan composed of six each from the two larger churches and three from the smaller one.\textsuperscript{75} In four meetings this Committee worked out a Plan which was submitted to the Joint Commission in Louisville, March 13-14, 1935. Here the arrangement of six Jurisdictions, one of them Negro, was worked out.\textsuperscript{76} In August of the same year, the Joint Commission met to consider the Committee’s Plan and in December the Commission unanimously approved the Committee’s final draft. With some variations, the 1935 Plan was similar to the one of 1920. The principal differences were:

1. The 1935 Plan gave the General Conference power to change the boundaries of Regional Jurisdictions at the end of twelve years but prohibited it from taking territory away from a Jurisdiction without its consent except by the concurrent vote of two successive General Conferences. Also, a new Jurisdiction would be required to have a minimum of 500,000 church members.

2. The 1920 Plan gave the General Conference power “to retire them (bishops) for inefficiency or unacceptability after due notice and proper hearing, provided that it shall require a two-thirds vote to retire a bishop without the concurrence of the . . . . (Jurisdictional Conference) in which his official residence is fixed.” In 1935 this became, “to provide for the discontinuance of a bishop because of inefficiency or unacceptability.”

3. The 1920 Plan allowed the General Conference to review the decisions of the Judicial Council on constitutional questions. By a two-thirds vote of the General Conference and a three-fourths vote of the several Annual Conferences such decisions could be reversed. This feature was dropped from the 1935 Plan.

4. In the 1935 Plan the Constitution could be changed by a two-thirds majority of both the General and the Annual Conferences, except in the case of the First Restrictive Rule which would require a three-fourths majority in the Annual Conferences and two-thirds in the General Conference.

\textsuperscript{73} Moore, p. 184.
\textsuperscript{74} Ibid., p. 186.
\textsuperscript{75} Straughn, p. 103.
\textsuperscript{76} Ibid., p. 104.
The 1936 General Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church adopted the Plan 470 to 83, and the annual conferences voted 17,239 for and 1,862 against it. The Methodist Protestant General Conference met the same year and accepted the Plan 142 to 39, and the twenty-five annual conferences of that church approved it by a four-fifths majority.

In view of the overwhelmingly favorable votes in the other two churches, 25 of the 38 annual conferences of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South petitioned the bishops for the privilege of voting on the Plan in their sessions in 1937, because this would save one or two years, as compared with the usual procedure of routing the matter through the General Conference before submitting it to the annual conferences. The bishops complied, and the ministers in the annual conferences voted 7,650 for and 1,247 against, thus giving the Plan considerably more than the three-fourths majority required by the constitution. In only one conference, North Mississippi, did the Plan fail to get a majority of the votes cast, and even there it lost by a narrow margin—117 for and 125 against.

In a way the prior favorable action of the annual conferences of the Southern Church made the vote of the 1938 General Conference anti-climactic, and yet a favorable expression by that body was necessary before victory for the Plan could be assured. The General Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, meeting in Birmingham, approved the Plan of union 434 to 26. The historic date was April 29, 1938.

Opponents of the Plan of union in the Southern Church immediately contested the legality of the action of the General Conference. At the request of the required number of bishops, three days later the Judicial Council in session at the seat of the General Conference rendered an epochal decision in favor of legality, thus forever settling that question.

Once the Plan of union was adopted the Joint Commission had the responsibility of preparing for a Uniting Conference to be held within twelve months. A Special Committee of two hundred was appointed. This body was divided into eight subcommittees and given the task of preparing the prospectus of a new Discipline. The Uniting Conference, composed of 400 delegates from each of the episcopal Methodisms and 100 from the Methodist Protestant Church, met in Kansas City, Missouri, April 26, 1939. The Declara-
tion of Union, the final act of the Conference by which the three churches became The Methodist Church, was adopted May 10, 1939.83

The structure of the new church provided for six Jurisdictions—five of them geographical and one made up of the Negro Annual Conferences in the United States. Also, there was a Judicial Council similar to the one that existed in the Southern Church. These two features of the united church were considered important by most Southern churchmen as they negotiated for union. The Judicial Council feature meant that the General Conference could not be the interpreter of the constitutionality of its own actions, thus precluding in the future such incidents as the one that caused the division of the church in 1844. Members of the Judicial Council could not be delegates to General or Jurisdictional Conferences and could not serve on general boards or in connectional administrative offices. The General Conference had powers over all connectional matters. Each Jurisdictional Conference elected its own bishops, determined the boundaries of its annual conferences, set up Jurisdictional boards as auxiliary to the general boards of the church, and promoted evangelism, education, missions, and benevolences, and provided for interests and institutions within its boundaries. In effect the constitution made the Jurisdictions the prime cogs in the machine.

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What has happened since unification? Has the Plan worked as its architects intended? There is some evidence that in the last twenty-five years the Jurisdictional system has not fulfilled expectations. Bishop James H. Straughn, one of the Methodist Protestant ministers elected to the episcopacy at the time of union, said in 1958:

The Northern Church gave an overwhelming vote on the Plan of union, which carried the Jurisdictional system, but at no time has it taken seriously the full meaning of it. . . . But one thing perfectly clear is that the Jurisdictional system is so interwoven in the total structure of the church that to eliminate it in whole or in part would require the rewriting of a large part of the constitution. A hurried run through it shows that a minimum of twenty amendments would have to be made, plus additional changes in other areas to accommodate the transfer of duties and activities of the Jurisdictions. It would mean opening up practically the whole question of union and if so, with very problematical results.84

83 Ibid., p. 217.
84 Straughn, pp. 141-142.
In effect Bishop Straughn's statement means that if the Jurisdictional system has failed in some sections it is because it has not been tried.

Obviously the major problem since union has been the Central Jurisdiction. With the passage of time social conditions in the land have made the problem more acute. The Central Jurisdiction *per se* means at least partial segregation, and segregation is rapidly becoming an anachronism in the United States. But the Central Jurisdiction also gives three per cent of the membership of The Methodist Church representation out of all proportion to numerical strength in the Council of Bishops, in the General Conference, and on all general boards and agencies of the church.

There seems to be general agreement, except in some areas of the South, that the Central Jurisdiction should be abolished, but the question is how. The 1956 General Conference adopted Amendment IX with only two dissenting votes. When submitted to the annual conferences the vote on the Amendment was 21,148 for and 1,623 against. It was hoped that this Amendment would gradually do away with the Central Jurisdiction, but after seven years it shows little promise of achieving this end. The Amendment provides for the voluntary transfer of local churches into other annual conferences, and annual conferences into other Jurisdictions. A few Central Jurisdiction local churches have transferred into other annual conferences, but no annual conferences in the Central Jurisdiction have transferred to other Jurisdictions, though they have had invitations to do so.85

At present a study of the Central Jurisdiction is in progress. A preliminary "Study Document" has been issued suggesting that annual conference lines in the Central Jurisdiction be re-drawn so that no one of its annual conferences will include territory in more than one geographical Jurisdiction. With this arrangement it is expected or hoped that the Northeastern and North Central Jurisdictions will absorb the Central Jurisdiction annual conferences within their bounds. What will happen in the South is not known. The "Study Document" intimates that the Central Jurisdiction does not favor any of its annual conferences transferring to geographical Jurisdictions unless the territory of the annual conference lies within the bounds of the geographical Jurisdiction. The "Study Document" adds: "The fundamental goal which all Methodists must seek is a Christian fellowship completely uncircumscribed, at all levels of church life, by distinctions based on race or color." 86

85 Class notes, May 1, 1963.
What is the future of the Jurisdictional system in The Methodist Church? A proposed Amendment XII that would have vitally affected all the Jurisdictions passed the General Conference in 1960 but failed when submitted to the annual conferences. It called for a General Conference of 1,400 delegates, and provided that the Jurisdictional Conferences should meet at the time and place of the General Conference, or if elsewhere not more than sixty days prior to the meeting of the General Conference.87

One cannot say what will happen to the Jurisdictions in the days ahead. But with the Northeastern, North Central, and Western Jurisdictions making little or no use of the Jurisdictional system, except to elect bishops, and with the Central Jurisdiction presenting problems that have not so far lent themselves to resolution, the future of the Jurisdictional system in the united church is, to say the least, uncertain.

Considering the history of Methodism in America, the issue of race is likely to be prominent in the 1964 General Conference. Since history shows that the matters of episcopal authority and General Conference powers have to a degree been settled, it is to be hoped that in time The Methodist Church can reach a measure of agreement in regard to the Negro problem and the Jurisdictional system.