The selection of an expressionate title for this paper has been a most difficult one, and at best leaves much to be desired. However, it is the writer's hope that the current interest in all phases of black history will allow a deeper study of the paper's intent on the part of students who may be interested in the early development of African Methodist churches.

A great amount of time has been spent in order that full justice can be given to the American bishop, Francis Asbury. To show, for example, his basic intent and convictions and carry these principles through to change and compromise, has not been elementary. Asbury knew that he was writing for posterity, so he infrequently revealed his underlying attitudes. Time after time he receded from some important stand, but only because he was reluctant to lose sight of a long-range benefit. It is my belief, for instance, that preservation and growth of American Methodism was a paramount goal. Many of his convictions stood aside in the light of this ultimate aim.

With an awareness of ultra-sensitiveness on the part of many, it has been necessary to trace several key beliefs of the bishop from unrelenting position to compromise, that all may know that no one issue alone was to suffer this fate. Where Africans were concerned, Asbury had to settle for freedom of the soul instead of freedom of the body.

It cannot be said that the Bishop had a plan of action for the use of black preachers, but his understanding that the best results came when meeting with these people "to themselves" certainly must have led to this conclusion. The organization of classes and societies could have preceded or followed this decision. Another difficult thesis to prove is whether Asbury would have sanctioned African Methodism as a distinct and separate organization or organizations. Bethel African's denominational meeting was called in April, 1816, while Zion African came some four years later. Francis Asbury died in March, 1816.

It is necessary to understand several peculiar features of American Methodism which existed in the time period of this presentation. These, I feel, must be clear if the intent and purpose of this paper is to be known.

The influence of Christian controversy around the world where the institution of slavery was concerned had its bearing upon conversations and writings as well as the total missionary effort beyond Protestantism. In this connection it is my own belief that one of the most important debates of modern civilization was involved
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here. In truth, this is a vast subject and in itself, merely can be mentioned.

As a new livelihood was being hewn out of the American wilderness, a new type of spiritual interpretation was developing. The fertile ground of personal and national independence both at home and abroad, broke down many initial objections and provided for questioning approaches. The criteria of John Wesley with the attendant re-examination of man's spiritual relationship and knowledge of God made such approaches necessary. In a sense, the American version of Wesley's Methodism may have been more stringent in application since the atmosphere in which it was placed was so different. This was true not only of the institution of slavery but of every problem American Methodism faced.

It could be reasoned that the founder of Methodism assumed a well-nigh impossible task as he endeavored to regulate and govern the American society by information gleaned through infrequent letters carried by slow sailing ships, and these letters oftentimes written by persons of limited discerning vision. Of course, John Wesley did have communication through the returning ministers visiting England or those ending permanently their own tour of duty. However, a far more adequate assessment could have been made through a personal visit, no doubt planned, but one which he was never privileged to make.

And, finally, there is the matter of expressive titles. Most people of color were styled Africans or descendants of Africans. The title African was generally used, just as later in succession came Colored, Afro-American, and at the present time, Black. I presume none of these designations has ever really expressed adequately the subject. However, the designation African was used in all the colonies. It referred to black churches everywhere, so the title African Methodist Episcopal was not peculiar to any black Methodist society, North or South. Efforts at the elimination of the confusion eventually took place when the extension of the two major groups brought them in contact with each other. The New York group then added the name of their first society Zion to the corporate title and thereby became the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church.

Perhaps it would be well to suggest one other guideline in this paper, the definition of society. Societies were formed many times with no thought of a permanent meeting place. In truth, if there is one idea which the Methodists brought to America it was the thought that buildings were not essential to Methodist organization. Later the matter of location became more important. It appears that societies met where they could.

On October 27, 1771, Francis Asbury and his traveling companion, Richard Wright, landed in Philadelphia. Asbury arrived with cer-
tain definite ideas in mind. There was no deviation from that which he understood to be the Wesleyan mode, but it appears that changes were to come. Perhaps it was the erasing of all preconceived notions, or the understanding that circumstances alter situations. At any rate Asbury saw many of his early goals changed greatly, and this is not to say that he was weak or vacillating.

In speaking of himself, Asbury wrote, “However, I am fixed to the Methodist plan, and do what I do faithfully as to God.”¹ He continued: “I expect trouble is at hand. This I expected when I left England, and I am willing to suffer, yea, to die, sooner than betray so good a cause by any means. It will be a hard matter to stand against all opposition, as an iron pillar strong, and steadfast as a wall of brass: but through Christ strengthening me I can do all things.”² Almost a year later he himself maintained that he was a strict interpreter of Wesley’s rules, so he insisted that society meetings and love feasts should be limited to the membership and not open to the general public.

While I stay, the rules must be attended to; and I cannot suffer myself to be guided by half-hearted Methodists. An elderly Friend told me very gravely, that “the opinion of the people was much changed, within a few days, about Methodism: and that the Quakers and other dissenters had laxed their discipline, . . .” but these things do not move me.³

Later he added: “My business is through the grace of God, to go straight forward, acting with honesty, prudence, and caution, and then leave the event to Him.”⁴

G. G. Smith states, “Mr. Asbury was afraid of no man; he seems never to have known what fear was; but he was afraid of reckless daring, and of refusing to heed the direction of Providence. . . .”⁵

Francis Asbury was not easily moved from his fixed notions of principle or program, but ultimately some of his earlier convictions were put aside temporarily or even given up. The effect of his rigidity to Methodist rule and principle may be seen in a statement of Pilmore appearing May 17, 1772:

After preaching hastened back to the city to preach in the evening. But O, what a change. When I was here before, the great Church would hardly hold the congregation; now it is not nearly full! Such is the fatal consequence of contending about opinions and the minute

² Ibid.
³ Ibid., 28.
⁴ Ibid., 39.
⁵ George Gilman Smith, Life and Labors of Francis Asbury (Nashville, 1898), 54.
[details] of discipline—It grieves me to the heart to see the people scattered that we have taken pains to gather. . . .

However many of these people later returned.

I have gone into some detail with the hope that my evaluation of Francis Asbury may not be misunderstood. From these examples it may be noted that his experience influenced future actions along other lines. Asbury’s convictions may not have been changed, but time schedules and ultimate results evidently did.

On January 1, 1772, Asbury noted that Pilmore and the local clergy were not much disturbed by the ideas that the ministers should become responsible for people in the outlying districts. He stated that they were unmoved by the Methodist plan. Of course, I am not so sure that Asbury thought too highly of Pilmore. Of him he wrote, “My heart was enlarged towards God. I saw a letter from Mr. Pilmoor, filled with his usual softness. Poor man! he seems blind to his own conduct.” At one time Asbury declared, “I find that the preachers have their friends in the cities, and care not to leave them.” Pilmore wrote in his journal, “Mr. Asbury set off for the Country, and I resolved to lay myself out for the salvation of the Citizens.” He evidently meant townspeople.

In this venture of widening the responsibility area of the city ministry, Asbury finally succeeded where a partial defeat had to be acknowledged on the doctrine, rules and discipline matter. Asbury’s travels had actually formed an “extensive circuit around” New York, Philadelphia and Baltimore. “Preaching places had been opened, homes for the preachers had been procured, and people of all classes had been prepared to come together under approved guidance, as stated congregations and Societies.” Above all else, Pilmore was now writing: “As we have now got preachers to take care of the people that God has graciously raised up by us in New York and Philadelphia and all the adjacent places, Mr. Boardman and I have agreed to go forth in the name of the Lord, and preach the Gospel in the waste places of the wilderness, and seek after those who have no shepherd.”

Briefly, I would like to touch upon some of the other areas of Francis Asbury’s ideas for America. His plan of organization largely succeeded. One item failed of acceptance and that was the matter of the Council. The plan was originally endorsed by both Coke

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8 Asbury’s Journal, op. cit., I, 133.
9 Ibid., 16.
10 Pilmore Journal, 118.
11 Briggs, op. cit., 65.
12 Pilmore Journal, 129.
and Asbury, but later Bishop Coke changed his mind. Its purpose was: "(1) To preserve the general union; (2) to render and preserve the external form of worship similar in all our Societies through the continent; (4) to correct all abuses and disorders; ... improving our colleges and plan of education." 13

Briggs writes that "so intense was the Bishop's anxiety to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace that, to use again his own words, he wrote to O'Kelly to declare his willingness to take his seat in the Council as (any other) another member, and, on that point, at least, to waive the claims of Episcopacy; 'Yea,' said he, 'I would lie down and be trodden on rather than knowingly injure one soul'." 14 The Council in question was made up of bishops and presiding elders. To calm this controversy with O'Kelly and others, which involved the perogatives of the episcopacy, a General Conference was agreed to (Nov. 1, 1792), before which date Asbury announced his intention of remaining away so that the group could legislate unhampered and uninfluenced by his presence. He wrote:

My Dear Brethren: Let my absence give you no pain—Dr. Coke presides. I am happily excused from assisting to make laws by which myself am to governed; I have only to obey and execute. 15

Francis Asbury, too, was subjected to criticism behind his back. He probably never learned of all that transpired between Thomas Rankin and John Wesley, although the back lash of Rankin's un­friendliness did not go unnoticed. John Wesley had seen fit to reduce Asbury in rank and even urged his return to England. He wrote the following to Rankin on March 1, 1775:

As soon as possible, you must come to a full and clear explanation both with brother Asbury (if he is recovered) and with Jemmy Dempster. But I advise Brother Asbury to return to England by the first opportunity.16

Wesley was more direct in the following letter, written to Rankin from London, August 13, 1775:

I am not sorry that Brother Asbury stays with you another year. In that time it will be seen what God will do with North America, and you will easily judge whether our preachers are called to remain any longer therein.17

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14 Ibid., 254.
15 Asbury's Journal, III, 112.
16 Briggs, op. cit., 102.
17 Frederick C. Gill, Selected Letters of John Wesley (New York: Philosophical Library, 1956), 167.
Asbury made this entry in his journal September 23, 1774:

I set off for New York, and met some of my good friends at Kingsbridge. They brought me a letter from Thomas Rankin, who thought himself injured; but I am determined to drop all disputes as far as possible.¹⁸

Probably as a result of this difference of opinion, Asbury began entertaining the thought of going to Gibraltar when a letter came from a Miss Gilbert in which she requested him to come to Antigua. He recorded:

I received a letter from Miss Gilbert of Antigua; in which she informed me that Mr. Nathaniel Gilbert was going away; and as there are about three hundred members in the society, she entreats me to go and labor amongst them. And as Mr. Wesley has given his consent, I feel inclined to go, . . .³⁹

The editor of Asbury's *Journal* further elaborated on this work in Antigua for it is explained that Nathaniel Gilbert was a half brother of Sir Walter Raleigh. He and three of his servants had been converted by Wesley in 1758 and began preaching to the Negroes of Antigua in 1760, thereby firmly establishing Methodism in the West Indies. At the time of Gilbert's death, there were 300 members in the society, and a great many of these people were probably Negroes. The fact that Asbury even considered transferring his missionary endeavors to a black area such as Antigua is interesting. He gave up the thought of going to Antigua at that time because of the controversy over the Sacraments which was going on within the Methodist societies.²⁰

It should be emphasized again that Asbury came to America convinced of the efficacy of the Wesleyan doctrines and methods, and this conviction carried over into the matter of the Sacrament. The question was put in a quarterly meeting (December 24, 1772): “5. Will the people be contented without our administering the sacrament?”²¹ Asbury insisted that administering the Sacraments was contrary to the Methodist plan, so he could not agree, but later he softened his attitude. In the first regular conference in America (Philadelphia, Wednesday, July 14, 1773), conducted for three days evidently by Thomas Rankin, Rule One stated:

Every preacher who acts in connection with Mr. Wesley and the brethren who labour in America, is strictly to avoid administering the ordinance of Baptism and the Lord's Supper.²²

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¹⁸ Asbury's *Journal*, I, 132.
¹⁹ Ibid., 149.
²⁰ Ibid.
²¹ Ibid., I, 60.
²² Briggs, op. cit., 90.
It was supposed that this prohibition was aimed at the Maryland and Virginia people.

By 1778, the still unsettled question remained. In that year many of the ministers of the Church of England had left their parishes because of the American Revolution, and the conference in that year was made up of “native preachers” only. Asbury was at his retreat at Judge White’s for safety reasons, since he was one of the very few who had refused to take the oath as required by many colonial legislatures. Out of deference to Asbury, the conference decided to “let the question stand over for a year longer.” The war itself had caused the calling of two conferences, one at Judge White’s for the convenience of Asbury, the other at Fluvanna County, Virginia.

Perhaps the reason for no decided action was occasioned by the fear of a permanent rupture in the church, no doubt partially over this issue and partially over the slave question. Asbury wrote to several of the preachers in Virginia and North Carolina, “urging them, if possible, to prevent a separation among the preachers in the south.” The Conference at Fluvanna meanwhile decided that “henceforth the two Sacraments should be administered generally ‘to those who are under our care and discipline’.”

Conferences were called for Baltimore and Manakintown in the spring of 1780, and Asbury was determined to attend both. When the Baltimore Conference met, a letter was received from Virginia regarding the matter of sacraments. It appears that the Northern wing concluded to renounce the intentions of the radicals. Asbury offered the following compromise: (1) That they (the Southern wing) should ordain no more; (2) that they should come no farther than Hanover circuit; (3) we would have our delegates in their conference; (4) that they should not presume to administer the ordinances where there is a decent Episcopal minister; (5) to have a union conference. According to the account in the Journal these compromises were not accepted, but it was agreed to suspend the ordinances for one year. When the Baltimore Conference met in 1781, all but one of the forty preachers present agreed to give up the ordinances.

If Asbury actually retreated from his original stand on the principles mentioned, it can be concluded that he did so for one simple reason—to preserve the unity of the American societies. At what point he began to shift his several positions it is impossible to say. Certainly by 1774 this trend is to be noted. By then he must have

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23 Ibid., 132.
24 Asbury’s Journal, I, 300.
25 Briggs, op. cit., 133, 134.
26 Ibid., 347, 349, 350.
27 Ibid., 402.
sensed the futility of full accomplishment. If this is true, he turned abruptly to reason and compromise. There is a tinge of bitterness, especially in the matter of the slave issue. In 1798, for example, he wrote:

My mind is much pained. O! to be dependent on slave holders is in part to be a slave, and I was free born. I am brought to conclude that slavery will exist in Virginia perhaps for ages; there is not a sufficient sense of religion nor of liberty to destroy it. . . . I judge in after ages it will be so that poor men and free men will not live among slaveholders, but will go to new lands; they only who are concerned in, and dependent on them will stay in old Virginia. 28

When he first came to America and landed in Philadelphia, Asbury was confronted by a significant number of the Society who were Africans or of African descent. Tarrying only briefly in that city, he went on to New York. Philip Embury, the erstwhile local preacher and school teacher, together with his assistant, Captain Thomas Webb, had wrought well. In the first meeting of that little group in Embury’s house there was present “Betty,” evidently the slave or servant of Barbara Heck. At least two Africans made contributions to the building of the first John Street structure. Tradition credits Thomas Webb with the saving of Peter Williams and his wife, Mollie, a black couple who joined the Society.

According to John Street Church records, no less than twenty-five Africans belonged to the society in 1786. When the several annual conferences of the newly organized Methodist Episcopal Church in America reported in 1786, there were fifty-one areas reporting. Of this number all but fifteen listed African members. Ten of these fifteen churches were located in the North where it was presumed no Africans lived. 29 Later, it was reported that there were 1,890 Negroes in the Church. By 1794, Methodist statistics showed 65,505 whites and 13,813 Africans in the membership.

From the outset of his American ministry Asbury preached to congregations of blacks and whites meeting together and showed deep concern for the spiritual life of the Negro. He wrote in his Journal for November 17, 1771:

. . . . and to see the poor Negroes so affected is pleasing, to see their sable countenances in our solemn assemblies, and to hear them sing with cheerful melody their dear Redeemer’s praise, affected me much, and made me ready to say, “Of a truth I perceive God is no respecter of persons.” 30

28 Ibid., II, 151.
29 Minutes of the Annual Conference of the M. E. Church, 1773-1813, 60, 61.
30 Asbury’s Journal, I, 9, 10.
On Thursday, August 12, 1773, he wrote:

In public worship, at Mr. Gibbs's, a serious Negro was powerfully struck; and though he made but little noise, yet he trembled so exceedingly that the very house shook.  

Joint worship of blacks and whites continued indefinitely. Methodist societies were not large so that it was normal for both races to worship together. Asbury wrote for February 14, 1797:

I met the stewards on the subject of the new house. We have adjourned on the question. If materials fall in their price, and if we can secure £400 shall we begin? . . . The Society has been rent in twain and yet we have wrought out of debt, and paid £100 for two new lots, and we can spare £100 from the stock, make a subscription of £150, and the Africans will collect £100.  

The significance of this account is that Africans were considered a part of the contributing family.

On June 23, 1776, Asbury wrote:

After preaching at the Point, I met the class, and then met the black people, some of whose unhappy masters forbid their coming for religious instruction. How will the sons of oppression answer for their conduct, when the great Proprietor of all shall call them to account?  

Although some critics of Methodism have tried to show that in the beginning only a small minority within the Church held emancipation views, the writer contends that this was not accurate. Methodism had become a forerunner during the eighteenth century in the field of abolition of slavery. Francis Asbury upon his arrival espoused strong abolitionist views.

Lucius C. Matlack in his *History of American Slavery and Methodism* tells of a legislative act passed by the South Carolina legislature which authorized any individual to go to Methodist meetings to disperse Negroes who assembled with or without permission of their owners. This act was "based upon the fact that Methodism at that period, whether at the North or South, was identified with the most deadly opposition to slavery."  

Thomas Coke, who also held strong views toward emancipation of the slaves, indicated in his journal some of the dilemmas that Methodists faced in trying to live up to the Wesleyan vows.

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31 Ibid., 89.
32 Ibid., II, 119.
33 Asbury’s *Journal*, I, 190.
Preached to a most polite congregation at New-Glasgow, and lodged at Colonel M——'s. They gave me great attention. Colonel M—— acknowledged the force of my arguments concerning slavery, but, I saw, did not choose to take any active part, for fear of losing his popularity.35

Three days later he wrote:

Preached to a quiet congregation at brother Key's. He told me, as we rode together, that he was determined to emancipate his slaves, about twenty; though his miserable father, I suppose, will never give him any further assistance if he does. . . . I pushed on in the evening, with the intention of reaching his father's; but at nine o'clock at night was glad to take up my lodgings at a tavern, as I had a dangerous river to cross before I could get to Mr. Key's. Nor am I sorry that I did not go thither; for, when I called the next morning, I found that he had shut his door against the preachers, because he has eighty slaves. . . .36

And on another occasion:

I had now a very little persecution. The testimony I bore against slave-holding provoked many to retire out of the barn, and to combine to flog me, as they expressed it, as soon as I came out. A high-headed lady also went out, and told the rioters that she would give fifty pounds if they would give that little Doctor one hundred lashes. When I came out, they surrounded me, but had only power to talk.37

There were good results from Coke's stand as may be seen from the following notation in his journal:

Our Brother Martin has done gloriously; for he has fully and immediately emancipated fifteen slaves.38

In the minutes of that year, the following question and answer appeared:

Ques. Does this conference acknowledge that slavery is contrary to the laws of God, man, and nature, and hurtful to society, contrary to the dictates of conscience and religion, and doing that which we would not others should do to us and ours?—Do we pass our disapprobation on all our friends who keep slaves and advise their freedom?

Ans. Yes.39

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36 Ibid.
37 Ibid.
38 Ibid., 148.
39 Minutes of the Methodist Conferences, 1773-1813, 25, 26.
Three years later the slavery question and answer was revised in the conference minutes:

Ques. What shall be done with our local Preachers who hold slaves contrary to the laws which authorize their freedom in any of the United States?

Ans. We will try them another year. In the meantime let every Assistant deal faithfully and plainly with everyone, and report to the next conference. It may then be necessary to suspend them.\textsuperscript{46}

Just how effective this move was is not known, but the conference felt compelled to say in 1784:

Ques. What shall we do with our local Preachers who will not emancipate their slaves in the states where the laws admit it? \textsuperscript{41}

It appears from this statement that there were Methodists, not too poor to hold slaves, who were resisting the movement towards emancipation. The following answer did take into consideration the fact that slaveholding existed in certain areas:

Ans. Try those in Virginia another year, and suspend the preachers in Maryland, Delaware, Pennsylvania, and New-Jersey.\textsuperscript{42}

Just a few months prior to the formation of the Methodist Episcopal Church, the conference of 1784 took this additional action on the slavery question:

Ques. What shall be done with our travelling Preachers that now are or hereafter shall be possessed of slaves, and refuse to manumit them where the law permits?

Ans. Employ them no more.\textsuperscript{43}

With the institution of the Methodist Episcopal Church in late 1784, the Discipline recorded on slavery in general:

Ques. What Methods can we take to extirpate Slavery?

Ans. 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

\textsuperscript{40} Ibid., 41.
\textsuperscript{41} Ibid., 47.
\textsuperscript{42} Ibid., 47.
\textsuperscript{43} Ibid., 48.
and the Prophets, and [to] the inalienable Rights of Mankind, as well as every Principle of the Revolution, to hold in the 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.  

Whereupon it was enacted by the Christmas Conference that:

1. Every member emancipate his slaves between the ages of forty and forty-five within twelve months; and every other slave in a corresponding graduation of time.
2. A register of such manumissions shall be kept in each circuit.
3. Those refusing to obey the rules to be excluded from the church.
4. No person henceforth to be admissible who is unwilling to comply with the condition. Buyers and sellers of slaves to be expelled.

The Virginia Conference of May 7, 1783 met in Ellis' Preaching House, Sussex County. DuBose records the following appraisal:

The question of African slavery, often referred to by Asbury and more than once brought before the Conference, came up in a more pronounced form than it had hitherto assumed. The recently published peace and the settled nationality of the Colonies gave to the subject a new significance.

Francis Asbury wrote, "We all agreed in the spirit of African liberty, and strong testimonies were borne in its favour in our love feast..."  

There is no denial that the Methodist stand on slavery was at first accepted by the majority of its membership and that later this stand ran into increasing opposition. Asbury could not have overlooked this trend. His activities in Maryland and southward brought him into close contact with this growing sentiment and he certainly knew that much of the Methodist strength lay in these areas. He was aware of Coke's experiences and he was clearly concerned with the results. Etheridge, for example, states: "But it is to be lamented that the Methodists of the Southern States have not permitted the action of these (anti-slavery) principles among them..."  

Speaking of Coke, Etheridge wrote:

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45 See Ibid., 14, 15 for complete statements.
47 Asbury’s Journal, I, 441.
48 Etheridge, op. cit., 145.
It required then some amount of moral and physical courage to stand forth as the public opponent of this gigantic oppression; not on the carpets of drawing-rooms, or the floor of the House of Commons in London, but in the presence of the evil itself. . . .

One has to conclude that Bishop Coke was a determined man where the subject of slavery was concerned. He himself states:

Friday, May 13 (1785). Preached at Bent chapel belonging to the Church of England. At night lodged at the house of Captain Dillard, a most hospitable man, and as kind to his Negroes as if they were white servants. . . . And yet I could not beat into the head of that poor man the evil of keeping them in slavery, though he has read Mr. Wesley's "Thoughts on Slavery" three times over. But his good wife is strongly on our side.

Sunday, 15th. Preached in a handsome church. A very large congregation. But when I enlarged to the Society on Negro slavery, the principal leader raged like a lion, and desired to withdraw from the Society. I took him at his word, and appointed that excellent man, Brother Skelton, leader in his stead. When the Society came out of the church, they surrounded Skelton. "And will you," said they, "set your slaves at liberty?" "Yes," says he, "I believe that I shall." 50

By 1785 it was Resolved: to suspend the execution of the rule (of 1783) for the present. This followed the 1783 action when the Methodists were saying it was their "most bounden duty to take immediately some effectual method to exterminate this abomination." In 1784, all legislation on the subject failed of acceptance, and the best the anti-slavery group could do was to persuade the conference to declare that it still held slavery in the deepest abhorrence and would not cease to seek its destruction by all wise and prudent means.51

In 1796 the Discipline of the Church was saying much milder things about slavery:

1. . . . And we do fully authorize all the yearly conferences to make whatever regulations they judge proper in the present case, respecting the admission of persons to official stations in our church.

2. No slave-holder shall be received into society till the preacher who has the oversight of the circuit has spoken to him freely and faithfully on the subject of slavery.52

By 1800, traveling preachers who became the owners of slaves by any means were to forfeit their ministerial character, and by

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49 Ibid., 146.
50 Ibid., 146.
51 Briggs, op. cit., 295, 296.
52 Discipline, 1796.
1816, slave holders were being barred from its order of elders. However, in 1800, when the General Conference had acted on the question, it found that it had aroused great hostility from the Methodists in South Carolina. Smith states:

Asbury indorsed the utterance fully, but felt the embarrassment under which it placed him and his brethren. He advised that by increasing effort and faithful preaching they should live down the prejudice against them.\footnote{Smith, op. cit., 198.}

How deeply Asbury felt the currents of this controversy may be noted in his entry in his journal:

The rich among the people never thought us worthy to preach to them: they did indeed give their slaves liberty to hear and join our church; but now it appears the poor Africans will no longer have this indulgence.\footnote{Asbury's Journal, II, 281.}

One known writer stated that the Methodist Bishop "often doubted the wisdom of a course which produced such a result."

On the whole, this change in attitude was slow in making itself evident. However, the Bishop must have foreseen its ultimate arrival. He was turning repeatedly to the task of ministering to these people. He wrote:

Poor Africans brought their blessings and wishes and prayers. Dear souls, may the Lord provide them pastors after His own heart.\footnote{Ibid., 79.}

The first general retreat of Asbury on the slave question appears to have occurred in the concluding years of the eighteenth century. A discerning student can clearly note the presence of a new decision on Asbury's part around this time. The occasion may have been brought about by many contributing forces. American Methodism was in itself changing from the society concept to permanent and stabilized organization. Along with this it faced an intensified struggle where the issue was concerned, particularly south of Maryland. In its overall membership it was taking on an interracial hue, a situation not conducive to rapid growth. The procuring of church buildings may have contributed as well. We should hasten to state that the Church's evangelistic and missionary zeal among Negroes appears not to have lessened. The resolution appearing in connection with the conference meeting two years after the crucial conversations with George Washington is a case in point and one which we will mention later.
One cannot deny that the Methodist system was more easily geared to slave unrest than that of any other denomination as membership carried contacts outside that which I would call the "contained community," so local and traveling ministers had access to a wider forum on vital subjects than those of the strictly ordinance churches. Slave holders evidently saw this and reacted unfavorably. What to do with early Methodist concepts was not easily answered.

It was at this juncture that the germ of the strictly African Society could have appeared. Asbury, for example, wrote in April, 1795:

I had some talk with a few blacks, and was comfortable and happy. We lose much by not meeting these people alone . . . I met the poor blacks by themselves, and was greatly blessed. 56

About a week earlier Asbury reported, "I spent an hour with the blacks in their quarters, and it was well received by them." 57

Still another entry declares:

I was happy last evening with the poor slaves in Brother Wells's kitchen, whilst our white brother held a sacramental love feast in the front parlour upstairs. 58

The Bishop's interest in the slaves and freed people naturally had its result. On one occasion he wrote:

. . . a poor black, sixty years of age, who supports herself by picking oakum, and the charity of her friends, brought me a French crown and said she had been distressed on my account, and I must have her money. 59

Asbury refused the money even though he records that he had only three dollars in his pocket and some 2,000 miles travel before him.

Methodist preachers in many instances were still wrestling with the subject even as their bishop was seeking new thrusts to deal with the matter. One can find grounds for believing that he was actually trying to settle a great question in his own mind—is it not more important to free a man's soul when the efforts to bring liberty to his body are being thwarted? At this point, however, Asbury was unwilling to concede total defeat where physical freedom was concerned. Attending the Virginia Conference, Tuesday, November 25, 1794, he wrote:

56 Ibid., 46, 47.
57 Ibid.
58 Ibid., 77.
59 Briggs, op. cit., 297.
We . . . had great siftings and searchings especially on the subject of slavery. The preachers, almost unanimously, entered into an agreement and resolution not to hold slaves in any State where the law will allow them to manumit them, on pain of forfeiture of their honour and their place in the itinerant connexion; and in any State where the law will not admit of manumission, they agree to pay them the worth of their labour, and when they die to leave them to some person or persons, or society, in trust, to bring about their liberty.60

One of the historic occasions of American Methodism was the meeting of Coke and Asbury with George Washington at Mt. Vernon, Virginia. It is presumed that the following is actually the background of this meeting:

The question of slavery was uppermost with Methodists at this time, the occasion being a petition which the conference was to send to the Virginia State Assembly, asking for the immediate or gradual emancipation of the slaves. It was agreed at the Virginia session that Coke and Asbury should visit General Washington and solicit his aid in presenting this document. On May 26 [1785] they were courteously received and dined at Mount Vernon. Washington readily gave them his opinion on slavery, which was deprecatory; but he declined to sign the petition. This appears to have been the end of the scheme . . . 61

One week later the Baltimore Conference temporarily “suspended the minute on slavery.” It is supposed that the temperate judgment of Washington on this question, expressed at this crucial hour, proved of immense advantage to Methodism. Profiting by his views which were practically those of the Methodists of the South, the church retreated from its adamant position. DuBose continues to say that so long as slavery continued to be an institution, the church entered upon an era of soberer legislation than had been in contemplation and thus was left unhampered in its ministry to both master and slave.62

Two years after the historic meeting with Washington, conferences meeting in Salisbury, North Carolina; Petersburg, Virginia, and Abingdon, Maryland, made no reference to slavery, but did urge “spiritual care of colored people.”63

Question 17: What directions shall we give for the promotion of the spiritual welfare of the coloured people?

60 Asbury’s Journal, II, 33.
61 DuBose, op. cit., 134.
62 Ibid., 134, 135.
63 W. D. Weatherford, American Churches and the Negro (Boston: Christopher, 1957), 87.
Answer: We conjure all our Ministers and Preachers, by the love of
God, and the salvation of souls, and do require them, by all the
authority that is invested in us, to leave nothing undone for the
spiritual benefit and salvation of them, within their respective cir-
cuits or districts; and for this purpose to embrace every opportunity
of inquiring into the state of their souls, and to unite in society
those who appear to have a real desire of fleeing from the wrath to
come, to meet such in class, and to exercise the whole Methodist
discipline among them.

I would call attention to the phrase to unite in society. This and
the several references to meeting with blacks appear to set a pat-
tern for the development of black classes and societies.

As one reviews the life of Bishop Asbury, the question poses
itself as to the influence of these changes in his views and his
ability to keep going at an incredible rate. From his first recorded
opinion on the eradication of slavery to 1813, the Bishop was slowly
moving to a position of reluctant acceptance of the slavery evil.
Bishop Robert Paine states that “two subjects gave trouble” in
the Tennessee Conference, which was in session October 1, 1813—
slavery and the war. He asserts that the conference was stringent
in its application of the rules against the buying and selling of
slaves. He declares that several local preachers had been arrested
and tried, but in most cases the respective quarterly conferences
had suspended the individuals. An appeal was made, therefore, to
the annual conference where the case was considered. The defense
declared that a great deal of harm was being done by the rule
against slavery because of this intermeddling with legal and
private rights, and it was the consensus of opinion of some “that
they could not or would not conform to their views of the rule.”
Bishop Asbury sat in the session saying nothing until Bishop
McKendree reminded him that “he ought to keep the rule or
change it.” The rule was upheld.

One of the great decisions Asbury made concerned the use of
black preachers. In a letter to his parents, January 24, 1773, he
wrote:

Poor Negroes have been deeply affected with the power of God.
We have got one that will be fit to send to England soon, to preach.
Here are Negroes who have astonished master of families, understand-
ing men, when they have heard them pray; and if they were in
England, they would shame their thousands.

We do not know who this black preacher was. The earliest record

64 Minutes of the Annual Conferences, 1773-1828, 67, 68.
on "Black Harry," Asbury's faithful companion, is Asbury's own reference in 1780.

I have thought if I had two horses, and Harry (a coloured man) to go with, and drive one, and meet the black people, and to spend about six months in Virginia and the Carolinas, it would be attended with a blessing.  

This occurred twelve years before Bethel Society was organized in Philadelphia and sixteen years before the official date of Zion in New York. On Monday, May 21, 1781, Asbury wrote:

I preached in the afternoon at P. Hite's, and had liberty in urging purity of heart. Harry Hosier (Black Harry) spoke to the Negroes, some of whom came a great distance to hear him; certain sectarians are greatly displeased with him, because he tells them they may fall from grace, and that they must be holy.

In his autobiography, Richard Allen records that he was licensed to preach in 1782, after having been converted by Freeborn Garrettson. He was ordained a deacon on June 11, 1799, the first African to receive ordination from the Methodist Episcopal Church. He had begun his traveling ministry as early as 1783 and according to his words was present at the famous Christmas Conference of 1784, along with Harry Hosier.

In 1785, while a traveling companion of Richard Whatcoat, Allen was requested to meet Bishop Asbury at Henry Gough's, where the Bishop made the suggestion that Allen become his own traveling companion. Allen wrote that the bishop told him that

... in slave countries, Carolina and other places, I must not intermix with the slaves, and I would frequently have to sleep in his carriage, and he would allow me viotuals and clothes. I told him I would not travel with him on these conditions. He asked me my reason. I told him if I was taken sick, who was to support me? and that I thought people ought to lay up something while they were able, to support themselves in time of sickness or old age. He said that was as much as he got, his viotuals and his clothes. I told him he would be taken care of, let his affections be as they were, or let him be taken sick where he would, he would be taken care of; but I doubted whether it would be the case with myself. He smiled, and told me he would give me from then until he returned from the eastward to make up my mind, which would be about three months. But I made up my mind that I would not accept his proposals.

According to the accounts, the Bishop was accompanied through

67 Ibid., I, 362.
68 Ibid., I, 403.
69 Richard Allen, The Life Experience and Gospel Labors of (Abingdon), 22, 23.
New Jersey and into New York by “Black Harry” Hosier, whose preaching was commented upon in the New York Packet on September 11, 1786, one of the first references to Methodist preaching in any New York paper. An added statement says that John Street Church paid two pounds for Harry’s traveling expenses.  

Another account states that

This man whose name was Harry Hosier had now been doing valuable service for about ten years. Asbury first took him as early as 1782 when travelling in the South, to preach to the coloured people, and he afterwards attended Dr. Coke in one or two of his excursions occasionally preaching to white as well as coloured congregations. Though very illiterate, he was popular in New England as he had been elsewhere, and contributed to rouse among staid and stately inhabitants of those States an unwonted interest in the Methodist movement. “The different denominations,” said Mr. Garrettson, “heard him with much admiration; and the Quakers thought, as he was unlearned, he must speak by immediate inspiration.” But though they heard the eloquent African Methodist with interest and “much applause” they made no attempt to disguise their strong antipathy to Methodist doctrine.

Harry Hosier was a traveling companion to many of the leaders of early Methodism, including Francis Asbury, Thomas Coke, Freeborn Garrettson, and Richard Whatcoat. In 1790, he was traveling with Garrettson as far as Nova Scotia. It is noted that on at least one occasion he preached to more than 1,000 persons. At another time Thomas Coke stated that, “He (Asbury) has given me his black (Harry, by name) and borrowed an excellent horse for me.” Coke continued to relate an incident involving “Black Harry.”

I had this morning a great escape in crossing a broad ferry. After setting off, Harry persuaded me to turn back and leave our horses behind us, to be sent after me the next day, on account of the violence of the wind. I have hardly a doubt but that we should have drowned if we had not taken that step. We were in great danger as it was.

It is said that Hosier got the “big head” because of his successes and was relegated to work in New Jersey. Later he became a drunkard, but was reclaimed. He died in Philadelphia in 1810 and was buried in Kensington.

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70 John Street Church Records, Book I.
71 Briggs, op. cit., 234, 235.
72 Asbury’s Journal, I, 681, 682.
73 Etheridge, op. cit., 111.
74 Ibid., 112.
75 Asbury’s Journal, I, 413n.
Saturday, Oct. 27, 1781: My soul is drawn out to God to know whether I ought to go to Virginia this winter in order, if possible, to prevent the spreading of the fire of division: I do not look for impulses or revelations—the voice of my brethren and concurrent circumstances will determine me in this matter. Harry seems to be unwilling to go with me: I fear his speaking so much to white people in the city has been, or will be, injurious; he has been flattered and may be ruined.\textsuperscript{76}

However, Harry did go with him. As early as 1781, Asbury was convinced of a ministry to blacks, using, if possible, black preachers. Slavery and cruelty still disturbed the Bishop to the extent that on one occasion he recorded for June 8, 1783:

I went to John Worthington’s; but I beheld such cruelty to a Negro that I could not feel free to stay; I called for my horse, delivered my own soul, and departed.\textsuperscript{77}

With the use of black preachers by the church, evidently the second step in the plan of Asbury was accomplished. However, we also find Asbury turning away from his goal of emancipation. He wearily wrote on February 5, 1809:

Would not an amelioration in the condition and treatment of the slaves have produced more practical good to the poor Africans, than any attempt at their emancipation? \textsuperscript{78}

Three years earlier, according to Smith, the Conference had desired that he should assist in forming a charter on slavery to suit Northern and Southern sections. “Asbury knew the absurdity of the proposition, and decided to have no part in it. A committee attempted it, and egregiously failed.” \textsuperscript{79} This is the first evidence of Asbury’s silence on a slavery matter.

According to the same writer, by 1806, Asbury

\ldots had long since ceased to antagonize slaveholding as much as he disliked it, and realizing the fact that it might be an evil for which the proposed remedy of immediate emancipation was no cure, he contented himself with preaching the gospel to master and slave. The idea that Dr. Coke has so pressed—the sinfulness of slaveholding under all circumstances—he never entertained; as he grew older, and realized more and more the difficulties in the way of emancipation, he was still less disposed to speak positively as to what should be done. Gough, Rembert, Grant, Tait, and many others of his most valued friends, were large slave owners. In their homes he rested, and in their

\textsuperscript{76} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{77} Ibid., 442.
\textsuperscript{78} Ibid., II, 591.
\textsuperscript{79} Smith, op. cit., 220.
piety he had perfect confidence, but he never became reconciled to slavery, and had it been in his power he would have ended it speedily. 80

I suggest that Asbury saw the hopelessness of the struggle and determined that it was best to settle for the slaves' soul rather than lose everything. No doubt he reasoned that the worst kind of bondage was that of sin. Physical labor was desirable, but in lieu of this, the soul's salvation should claim his attention. To pursue this new course, he encouraged the societies to include Negroes to permit spiritual training, and finally he encouraged the establishment of black societies.

The Conference itself seemed to have recognized this shift to separate worship and organization when in 1780 it raised the question:

Question: Ought not the Assistant [Mr. Asbury] to meet the coloured people himself, and appoint as helpers in his absence proper white persons and not suffer them to stay so late and meet by themselves?

Answer: Yes. 81

Briggs indicated that as early as 1795, Asbury was using "every opportunity available to him, of ministering to coloured congregations." 82 Asbury in his journal, May 30, 1795, while in Maryland, wrote: "I met the Africans, to consult about building a house, and forming a distinct African, yet Methodist Church." 83 Two years later, June 25, 1797, while in Baltimore, he pursued his intent of organizing the Africans:

I obtained the liberty of the managers of the African academy [school for black children] to congregate the fathers as well as to teach the children. We had nearly five hundred coloured people ... I am trying to organize the African church. 84

Around this same time the Africans who were worshipping in St. George's Church, Philadelphia, and who had helped in the purchase of that church building, were refused admittance to seats on the main floor and relegated to the balcony. In addition they were not allowed to receive the communion sacrament until after

80 Smith, op. cit., 237.
81 Minutes of the Annual Conferences, 1773-1813, 26.
82 Briggs, op. cit., 297.
84 Ibid., II, 128, 129. Because of white opposition, the academy was changed to a church.
the whites had been served. This brought about dissension.\(^{85}\)

After an incident at St. George's in which Absalom Jones was involved, the Africans in Philadelphia withdrew and began holding prayer meetings and meetings of "exhortation." The group had the sympathy of a good many citizens, among them Dr. Benjamin Rush and a Mr. Ralston, who became treasurer of a special fund the Africans raised through a "subscription paper." The elder in Philadelphia, who appeared to be John McClaskey, objected both to the organization and to the collection of funds. He ordered the names to be erased and the subscription paper turned over. Unless this were done, the group would be read out of the Methodist society. They persisted, whereupon McClaskey called for them to meet with him, at which time he wished them well. He declared that he was their friend and was only trying to prove that they were wrong in building a separate building.\(^{86}\)

The Africans appointed a committee to purchase a church lot. After the purchase had been made, the committee found what seemed to be a more suitable lot. They wished to abrogate their former agreement. Richard Allen kept the original lot for himself, while the committee took possession of the second one and built a church. At this point, without any encouragement from the Methodist elder, who had nothing to do with them even though he was still expected to preach to them, the Society met to determine their denominational affiliation. Jones and Allen alone voted to remain with Methodism. The majority approved joining the Church of England, later known as the Protestant Episcopal Church.\(^{87}\)

Richard Allen remained a Methodist, but he protested that too frequently the elders in Philadelphia acted "without discipline." In instances members were turned out of the Society without the benefit of trial. He conceded that the Methodists "were the first people who brought glad tidings to the colored people," so they should receive the Africans' loyalty.\(^{88}\)

In 1793, the African Protestant Episcopal Church sent a committee to Allen inviting him to become their minister. At the time there was no other colored minister in Philadelphia, but he rejected the offer. He still held title to the lot at Sixth and Lombard Streets, so he bought a blacksmith shop and moved it to the location. On June 29, 1794, Bishop Asbury opened the African Church, called Bethel.

\(^{85}\) Although Francis Asbury was not closely related to the St. George Church problem, it is essential that we relate this dispute from which ultimately Bethel African, the mother society of the African Methodist Episcopal Church, was formed. Asbury was evidently not consulted in the formation of this congregation, but he did give his blessing as will be indicated in the developing story.

\(^{86}\) Allen, op. cit., 26.

\(^{87}\) Ibid., 29.

\(^{88}\) Ibid., 30.
"I preached at the new African Church. Our coloured brethren are to be governed by the doctrine and discipline of the Methodists." Only Negroes were to be admitted to membership.

Relations between St. George's and the Bethel African societies were strained from time to time, but Asbury continued to visit this congregation with apparent regularity:

Oct. 11, 1795: I preached in the morning at the African Church ...  
June 8, 1800: I preached at the African Church ...  
March 19, 1808: I preached at St. George's twice, at the Academy, at Ebenezer, and at Bethel, African.

Samuel Royal was appointed to Philadelphia and demanded the repeal of the "Supplement" which was not agreed to. Subsequently Richard Allen evidently was requested to minister to Bethel African. While the sequel of events is not clear, it is reasonable to suppose that the action of the elder may have produced the following paper:

The Memorial of the Trustees of the African Methodist Episcopal Church called Bethel, to the Philadelphia Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, ministers assembled.

Greeting.

To prevent any misconstruction and to guard against a wrong understanding of our motions and designs in the late strife we have taken in procuring a Supplement to our act of incorporation.

We judge it prudent to declare to you in your official capacity in the most explicit manner as follows Viz.

1. We have no purpose or intention whatever of separating ourselves from or making ourselves independent of the Methodist Conference and the Disciplines of the Methodist Episcopal Church.

2. Our only design is to secure to ourselves our rights and privileges, to regulate our affairs, temporal and spiritual, the same as if we were white people, and to guard against any opposition which might possibly arise from the improper prejudice or administration of any individual having the exercise of discipline over us.

3. We wish and expect that the minister having the charge over us should preach and exercise discipline among us as formerly they have been accustomed to do, in conformity to the Discipline

89 Asbury's Journal, II, 18.  
90 Ibid., II, 64, 235, 567.  
91 The Supplement was a protective document to place full property and congregational control in the hands of the African Society. See Allen, op. cit., 31-33.
and the act and supplement of our incorporation, and it is our purpose to contribute toward the support of the ministers.

4. We do advise you of our cordial attachment to the Methodist Connection and of our full and entire purpose to continue Methodists in the future as heretofore.

Signed in behalf of the Board of Trustees
Philadelphia, April 8, 1807
Richard Allen, Pastor

The Philadelphia Conference answered this communication the following day, April 9, 1807:

To the Trustees of the African Methodist Episcopal Church:

Your memorial of the 8th instant was laid before the Philadelphia Conference and provided the supplement to your act of Incorporation which you allude to, be not contrary to the allowed usages, customs, and privileges of the Methodist Episcopal Church according to the established principles and government of the said church, admitted of in case of incorporation among our white brethren for the protection and security of their rights and privileges, the Conference accepts your memorial and entertains a confidence that our African brethren will evince their unshaken stability and firmness as Methodists according to our Discipline from time to time. And we cordially wish you prosperity, unity, holiness and happiness.

Signed in behalf of the Philadelphia Conference. Francis Asbury

As we have stated before the title African Methodist was given to all these racial churches. The work of Asbury, Garrettson and Harry Hosier bore fruit in New England, New York and New Jersey as well. The same motivating spirit of opposition to slavery was a special invitation to Africans everywhere. Speaking of the New York group, Joseph Pilmore in his Journal writes the following for January 27, 1771:

After preaching, I met the Negroes apart, and found many of them very happy. God has wrought a most glorious work on many of their souls, and made them witnesses that he is no respecter of persons.

While it is an assumption to state that the establishment of the African Zion Chapel was a less difficult undertaking in New York than that of Bethel African in Philadelphia, the course of events appears to substantiate this. The difference may have existed for

94 Pilmore's Journal, 74.
several reasons. The twenty-five years (1771-1796) of intermittent meetings may have contributed to this relationship. John Street Church had an integrated membership from its beginning. That membership had known depression and oppression. The action of the Board of Trustees of the church in purchasing the freedom of Peter Williams early demonstrated the Methodist tradition of opposition to slavery. Perhaps it should be said that African Zion had a unique relationship between the groups which appears not to have been available to the Africans in Philadelphia. Peter Williams and Mollie (Mary) took care of the elder and the visiting ministers of John Street Church and, at times, entertained these ministers' guests. So the growth from class to society was not only smooth but logical.

Little is actually known of the beginning of African Zion. The periodic flight of the owner class to estates up the Hudson River appears to have given rise to prayer and praise services both on these estates and in New York and well could have formed a background for the establishment of the society.95

Christopher Rush stated that a small group decided to approach all who might be interested in the venture of an African society and “for this purpose they called a meeting of some of the most respectable and intelligent religious colored men of the city in order to consult upon the best method to proceed in this great undertaking for colored people of the city of New York.” 96

Conversations with Bishop Asbury concerning the permanent establishment of the African Chapel in New York may have taken place as early as August 1796. According to his Journal, Asbury was in New York in September as well. An early church writer states that one such meeting occurred in that year. At this meeting with the Bishop the following Africans represented the proposed chapel: Francis Jacobs, William Brown, Peter Williams, Abraham Thompson, June Scott, Samuel Portier, Thomas Miller, James Varick, and William Hamilton.97 There evidently were others present, but Rush could not recall them.

The African class appeared to have had little difficulty in securing approval to meet as a society. Rush states that they were to meet “in the interval of the services at John Street” and were then “to conduct their services in the best manner they could.” According to early writers only three local African preachers—Abraham

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95 In times of epidemic the white owner class would flee to their estates along the Hudson River, taking a portion of their servants. The help that remained looked after the property, the ill, the dead, as well as the continuation of the class.
96 Christopher Rush, A Short Account of the Rise and Progress of the African Methodist Church in America (New York, 1843), 10.
97 Ibid.
Thompson, June Scott, and Thomas Miller—and one exhorter, William Miller, were residents of the New York area.

Two significant matters should claim our attention in the establishment of Zion Africans: the activity of its laymen (this has carried through the entire history of the denomination) and the relationship with John Street Church.

In a matter of three years the society had so grown that the suggestion of a church building was made. No opposition to this plan from the membership of John Street Church appeared to have arisen. This seems strange in view of the interchange in the appointment of elders to St. George's and John Street Churches. John McClaskey, who appeared so opposed to Bethel African in Philadelphia, was appointed by the General Conference to work out an agreement with Zion African in New York. The approved agreement gave to the Zion African trustees a congregational authority which many of the Methodist Episcopal chapels of the city desired for themselves, a matter which led to the Stillwell Secession. This agreement was mutually desired in order to keep the two societies in union with each other.

Two years before the agreement with the Methodist Episcopal Church, the board of trustees of Zion African had moved to secure a more permanent place of worship. The old cabinet maker's shop which had been used for society meetings had been outgrown. The board authorized Thomas Miller to secure a plot of ground. Following their direction and utilizing money raised for the project, a deed for the land was drawn in Miller's name. The ruling elder advised the trustees against securing this property, so deeded. They then proceeded to purchase land at Church and Leonard Streets and build thereon.

In a letter from Charleston, South Carolina, February 11, 1797, Bishop Asbury wrote to George Roberts, the elder in New York at the time: "... I am pleased to hear that the house is about [completed] at the 2 mile stone [one of the churches in the New York area]; more so to hear that the Africans are about building one; help them all you can. ..." 98

The Bishop again referred to Zion African Society when he arrived in New York City and wrote in his Journal, May 25, 1802: "My first public appearance in the city was in the African church, ... a very neat wooden house, but by far too small: my text was Ephes. ii, 11-14." 99 Encouraged and advised by McClaskey, the group proceeded to raise funds for their additional new building and purchased more land.

McClaskey was succeeded by John Wilson, who went ahead

according to Rush "with the progressive program of the group." The elder was a very busy man, but his schedule called for his preaching in Zion African Church every Sunday afternoon and on every Wednesday night, except, as Rush puts it, "on the days of the administration of the Lord's Supper, then his appointment was on Sunday morning, and was agreed upon to be the second Sunday of every month, because the first Sunday of the month was the time for the administering the Sacrament in his own church." 100

Jesse Lee in 1801 offered additional comment concerning the Zion African Church:

The churches of New York consisted of John Street, old church, Bowery, North River, Two Mile Stone and the African Church, erected by people of colour for themselves to worship in; yet they are to be governed by the Methodists in all their spiritual matters but they, themselves are to settle their temporal affairs. 101

At the time of this notation there were said to be 645 white members of the Methodist Episcopal Church in the area and 131 colored.

For some years Zion African continued to be the only black society in New York. In 1813 a second African Chapel was founded and took the name "Asbury." Phineas Cook, then the ruling elder, and Thomas Ware met with the Zion African trustees, who, after a long discussion, agreed to the continued existence of the new chapel. This chapel and Zion African became a separate charge in the New York Conference in 1818, when William Stillwell was assigned as pastor. 102 On his last journey to New York City, June 20, 1815, Asbury referred to a visit to the African Chapel (Zion). "I spoke a few words at the African Chapel, both colours being present." 103 Even in his last year he did not forget his friends of the African societies.

As one examines the extant records of these two branches of Methodism, one is struck by the relationships of these churches to the mother organization. While at present there are no known documents to undergird the belief, all indications point to a definite right-about-face in these intra-church approaches. Could it be said that the principle of compromise prevailed where Zion African was concerned? If this is true one can perhaps see the hand of the great bishop of American Methodism, Francis Asbury. This contribution to the church may have been his final supreme gift to American Christianity—the birth of African Methodism in the new world, which gave rise to the African Methodist Episcopal, African Methodist Episcopal Zion, and those African churches that remained with the Methodist Episcopal Church.

100 Rush, op. cit.
102 Minutes of the New York Conference, 1818.
103 Asbury's Journal, II, 782.