The evangelization of the American Negro comprises one of the most phenomenal chapters in the entire history of Christian missions. Basil Mathews comments on this:

The millions of slave and free Negroes who entered the Christian Church in the United States between 1790 and 1900 were as numerous as all the converts of Asia and Africa combined during that period.¹

Almost neglected by the churches until the institution of chattel slavery had been securely established, this "largest non-British religious minority in the colonies" proved itself to be one of the most responsive groups in America to the evangelistic labors of Christian missionaries. This was especially true of their response to the preaching of Baptists and Methodists.

The purpose of this paper is to demonstrate that: (1) Wesleyan evangelicalism, which combined personal piety and social responsibility in religion found little place in America's slavocracy and was gradually adulterated to accommodate this nefarious practice; (2) "Wesleyan" evangelicalism, in reference to the Negro, seems never to have taken root in American Methodism but was supplanted early in its development by a narrow pietism and an emotionalistic revivalism; (3) Wesleyan evangelicalism, if claimed and practiced by Methodists, has a unique and timely offering for America today; and (4) black church people, especially black Methodists, could aid in achieving God's destiny in fulfilling this prophetic role.

I. Evangelism Among Blacks in Early American Methodist History

Methodism, from its earliest beginnings in England and America, has considered the world as its parish. It has professed to know no race or class or clan in its all-consuming passion to share and witness to the good news of the gospel. Evangelical in spirit, catholic in view, and missionary in organization, John Wesley and his followers went forth to reach the lowliest and the lost.

wherever they could be found. In Wesley's famous words:

> I look upon all the world as my parish; thus far I mean, that in whatever part of it I am, I judge it meet, right and my bounden duty to declare unto all that are willing to hear the glad tidings of salvation.  

In this first section of the paper, it is our purpose to narrate briefly the evangelistic labors of the founders of Methodism in America, particularly as they are related to the evangelizing of black people. The period that we shall consider begins with Wesley's pre-Aldersgate missionary venture and extends to the end of the plantation missions period about 1850.

It includes the evangelistic labors and concern for blacks of John Wesley, George Whitefield, Francis Asbury, and selected lay preachers and missionaries of early Methodism.

**John Wesley**

During his brief stay in the Georgia colony, John Wesley had several contacts with blacks. He preached and celebrated Holy Communion at a church in Charleston, South Carolina and noted, "I was glad to see several Negroes at church...." Following that service, Wesley talked with a black woman about the state of her soul. He met, conversed with and converted a young Negro woman servant in the home of his host at Ponpon, South Carolina, and instructed a half-black and half-Indian and several Negroes on a plantation at Chulifinny in the same state.

Later he was escorted by a "Negro lad" to Purrysburg, another plantation, on which conditions for blacks were exceptionally bad. The Negro lad impressed Wesley

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5 Ibid., p. 49 (May 27, 1737).
and led him to the thought that the more intelligent blacks could be taught by an itinerant evangelist.  

Wesley's missionary efforts in the Georgia colony were not successful and he left America, not to return. On the voyage back to England he had occasion to evangelize two blacks. The entry in his journal reads, "I began instructing a Negro lad in the principles of Christianity." Wesley must have continued his instruction to this young black. Further on his journal reads, "I began to read and explain some passages of the Bible to the young Negro. The next morning another Negro who was on board desired to be a hearer too."  

After returning to England Wesley, reflecting upon his American experience, refers to his work with blacks in the following journal entry:

All in Georgia have heard the word of God. Some have believed and begun to run well. A few steps have been taken towards publishing the glad tidings both to the African and American Heathens.  

Wesley's interest in America became a life-long concern, especially his compassion for the condition of the slaves. This is reflected in his reaction to a letter sent to him from "a gentleman in Virginia":

I was much affected about this time by a letter sent from a gentleman in Virginia....The poor Negro slaves here never heard of Jesus, or his religion, till they arrived at the land of their slavery in America, whom their masters generally neglect, as though immortality was not the privilege of their souls....These poor Africans are the principal objects of my compassion; and, I think, the most proper subject of your charity. 

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6 Ibid., p. 49 (May 27, 1737). This idea came to fruition, eventually, in William Caper's Plantation Missions (1829-1861). See below.  
7 Ibid., p. 70 (December 26, 1737).  
8 Ibid., p. 72 (January 7-8, 1738).  
9 Ibid., p. 83 (February 3, 1738).  
10 Wesley's Works, II, pp. 337-38 (July 27, 1755). This challenge to confront the slavery issue would not go unheeded by Wesley. For an example in 1774 he wrote his "Thoughts upon Slavery". In 1788 he preached against
Another example of Wesley's evangelistic interest in blacks is in the fact that he sent shipments of books to the slaves in America. A journal entry quotes a letter from a Rev. Mr. Davies in Virginia as saying,

> When the books arrived, I gave public notice after sermon, and desired such Negroes as could read, and such white people as would make good use of them, and were not able to buy, to come to my house....For some time after, the poor slaves, whenever they could get an hour's leisure, hurried away to me, and received them with all the genuine indications of passionate gratitude.

The first instance of Wesley's evangelistic work with blacks in England after returning from America occurs in 1758. In that year he reports in his journal,

> I preached at Wandsworth. A gentleman come from America (Antiqua), has again opened a door in this desolate place. In the morning I preached in Mr. Gilbert's house. Two Negro servants of his and a Mulatto appear to be much awakened. Shall not his saving health be made known to all nations?

Later in that same year Wesley baptized these blacks. He records:

> I rode to Wandsworth, and baptized two Negroes belonging to Mr. Gilbert, a gentleman lately come from Antiqua. One of these is deeply convinced of sin; the other is the first African Christian I have known. But shall not our Lord in due time have these Heathens also "for his inheritance"?

Wesley and the Methodists in England not only evangelized blacks and included them in their "classes" on slavery in Bristol (England). The last letter which he wrote, only several days before his death in 1791 was addressed to William Wilberforce, the British abolitionist, exhorting him to "Go on, in the name of God and in the power of His might till even American slavery, the vilest that ever saw the sun, shall vanish away before it." (Wesley's Works, XIII, p. 153.)

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12 Ibid., p. 433 (January 17, 1758).
13 Ibid., p. 464 (December 29, 1758).
an indiscriminate basis but at least one black, a woman, was a member of a Select Society. In Wesley's scheme of organization Select Societies were composed of persons who in Wesley's estimation were especially serious about their spiritual life. Wesley conceived of these as early as 1736 while still in Georgia.

And we agreed, 1. to advise the more serious among them to form themselves into a sort of little society, and to meet once or twice a week, in order to reprove, instruct and exhort one another. 2. To select out of these a smaller number for a more intimate union with each other.14

It is most interesting to note from Wesley's Journal that a member of this "inner circle" in Whitehaven, England, unknown to Wesley, was a black woman, probably a West Indian Negro.

Wesley wrote about this woman in connection with a delay, being stormbound, on his way to the Isle of Man:

I was pleased to find that none of them have lost the pure love of God since they first received it. I was particularly pleased with a poor negro. She seemed to be fuller of love than any of the rest. And not only her voice had an unusual sweetness, but her words were chosen and uttered with a peculiar propriety. I never heard, either in England or America, such a negro speaker (man or woman) before.15

A final reference to Wesley's personal evangelization among blacks in England occurs five years before his death at or near Bristol:

On Friday, I baptized a young negro, who appeared to be serious and much affected; as indeed the whole congregation.16

George Whitefield

It is a well known fact that Calvinistic-Methodist, George Whitefield, often referred to as one of the greatest evangelists since the Apostles, introduced mass evangelism

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15 Wesley's Works (Curnock), Vol. VI, pp. 277-78.
16 Ibid., p. 327 (March 10, 1786).
in America. It is not so well known that he had a deep concern for and many significant contacts with blacks in his evangelistic labors. Though a pro-slavery advocate and owner, he did believe in the humane treatment of slaves. He also held to the belief that Negroes were spiritually as perfectible as anyone. In 1740 he wrote for whites about blacks:

Think you, your children are in any way better by nature than the poor negroes? No! In no wise! Blacks are just as much, and no more, conceived and born in sin, as white men are....And as for the grown Negroes, I am apt to think, that whenever the Gospel is preached with power among them, many will be brought effectually home to God.17

In 1741 Whitefield and Wesley came to a parting of ways, theologically. Whitefield's less orthodox but rigid Calvinism and Wesley's opposition to Calvin's doctrine of election and escalating Arminianism seemed to be the root of their separation. Nevertheless, Whitefield's eloquent preaching, open-air meetings, and extensive evangelistic tours went on to contribute much to the first Great Awakening in America, to revivalistic preaching, and especially to evangelization among blacks.

Whitefield's actual contacts with blacks in America began almost as soon as he reached Georgia. Among his first reactions was to note their shameful condition and cruel treatment under chattel slavery. In the belief that the majority of other white Christian Americans did not know of this situation, Whitefield wrote a scathing denunciation of slave abuse. This document, "A Letter to the Inhabitants of Maryland, Virginia, and North and South Carolina Concerning Their Negroes," was published in Philadelphia (1740) by Benjamin Franklin. During the 1740's it was republished in pamphlet and newspaper form throughout the colonies. The "Letter" aroused the ire of the entire slaveholding establishment and led to libelous charges against Whitefield. It said in part:

As I lately passed through your provinces, I was touched with a fellow-feeling of the miseries of the poor negroes....I have no other way to discharge the concern that lies upon my heart,

Black Evangelism in America

This "Letter" reveals much about what later developed as the attitude of evangelists and evangelism toward blacks generally and slavery in particular. It marks the heretical separation of evangelism and concern for basic social change. One wonders how different the American situation regarding the relation of Methodism to slavery would have been if Wesley rather than Whitefield had been domiciled here in those crucial years.

Whitefield's concern to erect a school for the education of slaves in Pennsylvania in 1740 was another instance of his outreach to blacks:

...this day, I bought five thousand acres of land on the forks of the Delaware, and ordered a large house to be built thereon, for the instruction of these poor creatures....

Whitefield had still other contacts with blacks as an evangelist. In these contacts he sought to correct the thinking of many colonists that blacks were "somewhere above the animal, but also somewhat below the human." He effected this witness in his regular visitation of blacks and his contacts with their masters when they were slaves. During such visits he was also consistently impressed with the teachability of Negroes.

...I went, as my usual custom is, among the negroes belonging to the house. One man was sick in bed, and two of his children said their prayers after me very well. This more and more convinces me that negro children, if early brought up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord, would make as great proficiency as any white people's children....

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18 Ibid., p. 495.
19 Ibid., p. 497 (April 22, 1740).
William Seward, a co-worker with Whitefield, leaves a record of Whitefield's evangelization of blacks in prison:

...a free Negro woman came to Mr. Whitefield, who was touched by the free grace of God when he expounded in the prison...and is a good omen that God intends the salvation of the Negroes, while he passes by their despisers, and worse than Egyptian task-masters.21

Generally, Whitefield's preaching was addressed to sinners, black and white. A good illustration of this is found in his sermon, "The Lord of Our Righteousness." Toward the end of this discourse he says:

I must not forget the poor negroes, No, I must not. Jesus Christ has died for them, as well as for others. Nor do I mention you last because I despise your souls, but because I would have what I shall say make the deeper impression upon your hearts....Oh that you would seek the Lord to be your righteousness.... For in Jesus Christ there is neither male nor female, bond nor free....Did you never read of the eunuch belonging to Queen Candace? A negro like yourselves. He believed....He was baptized. Do you also believe and you shall be saved.22

Whitefield's peculiar ability to communicate with blacks was a unique and important aspect of his ministry of evangelism among them. His soul-stirring preaching, use of scriptural narrative, and vivid illustrations endeared him to black congregations wherever he went. An instance of the appreciation of blacks for his preaching is the following occurrence at Philadelphia:

Nearly fifty negroes came to my lodgings, to give thanks for what God had done for their souls. How heartily did those poor creatures throw their mites for my poor orphans. Some of them have been effectually wrought upon, and in an uncommon manner.23

21 Ibid., p. 499.
22 Ibid., pp. 499-500.
23 Ibid., p. 500.
A summary of Whitefield's evangelistic efforts among blacks in colonial America can fairly say that his was the earliest major evangelistic thrust toward the Negro in America, antedating by two or three decades the work of Francis Asbury. One can only wonder what the social impact of his ministry could have been had he chosen to go beyond the relatively safe bounds of advocating the humane treatment of slaves and cried with his powerful voice for the eradication of the evil itself.

Francis Asbury

No Wesleyan missionary had greater influence upon the evangelization of blacks in America than Francis Asbury. One of the two first Methodist bishops in America, his energy and genius for organization together with his introduction of the "extended itineracy" concept transformed Methodism from a group of small societies with a few preachers into a national religious movement of approximately 250,000 members, of which about 50,000 were black.

Asbury, often referred to as "Moses" in the slave song literature of the 18th century American South, had rather extensive contacts with blacks during his 35-year itineracy. Like Wesley and Whitefield he, too, had an appreciation for the capacity of blacks to learn the Christian faith and convey it to others and his contact with them began during the first months of his arrival here.

After preaching to them in John Street Church (1771) he records,

...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."

Itinerating in Maryland in 1773 he converted blacks:

In public worship, at Mr. Gibbs's, a serious Negro was powerfully struck. 26

Again in Maryland (1776), he evangelized blacks who had been allowed to attend one of his meetings:

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.... 27

Evidence of Asbury's cultivating and encouraging black leadership for evangelization among blacks is found in his 1779 journal entry:

A black man who had been liberated...gave an extraordinary account of the work of God in his soul, and withal displayed such gifts in public exercises, that it appears as if the Lord was preparing him for peculiar usefulness to the people of his own colour. 28

Addie G. Wardle, in her History of the Sunday School Movement in the Methodist Episcopal Church (New York: The Methodist Book Concern, 1918, pp. 46-47), relates that Asbury was indirectly related to the establishment of the earliest Sunday schools in America both of which had black scholars. Methodist William Elliott organized a Sunday school in his home in Virginia (1785) for the religious instruction of "bound out" white boys and also "Negro slaves and servants." In 1786 Thomas Crenshaw opened a similar school in Hanover County, Virginia. This Sunday school later produced the black evangelist, John Charleston.

Apparently, large numbers of Negroes were often converted under Asbury's preaching. In 1788 he records in his journal:

Brother Cox thinks that not less than 1,400, white and black, have been converted in Sussex (Virginia) circuit the past year; and brother Easter thinks there are still more in Brunswick.

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26 Asbury's Journal, I, p. 89.
27 Ibid., p. 190.
28 Ibid., p. 298.
Again in North Carolina he records:

At Clayton's there are a hundred blacks joined in Society; and they appear to have real religion among them....

Asbury also recalls a somewhat humorous anecdote about black evangelism, a slavemaster and a slave. Says Asbury in Virginia (1790):

I reprove myself for a sudden and violent laugh at the relation of a man's having given an old Negro woman her liberty because she had too much religion for him.

The need for and response to evangelism is pointed up nowhere more clearly in the early national period of American history than by the content of the following kind of entry in Asbury's Journal:

...the white and worldly people are intolerably ignorant of God; playing, dancing, swearing, racing....Our few male members do not attend preaching...the women and Africans attend our meetings.

An important by-product of Methodist evangelization among Negroes in relation to the society in 18th century America is the provision of education. Eventually the Sunday school movement, general education (as well as higher education), emerged from the need for literacy to enable illiterate blacks to be encountered by God in scripture. A 1795 journal entry of Asbury's is a good illustration of this. The occurrence is in South Carolina:

Last night I spent an hour with the blacks.... It will never do to meet them with the whites.... I exhorted our people to teach their slaves to read...they would then understand preaching much better.

It should be pointed out here that Asbury was not advocating racial separation, though that may have been

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29 Ibid., p. 560 (January 8, 1788).
30 Ibid., p. 574 (June 1, 1788).
31 Ibid., pp. 655-56 (November 4, 1790).
33 Ibid., p. 46 (March 26, 1795).
the custom and practice in the region. Here he is speaking of the great difficulty of preaching and teaching people who cannot read or write. By meeting them alone, time could be taken to rectify this on an individual, tutorial basis.

In reading Asbury's journal one is also struck by the persistent and numerous planned, as well as unplanned, encounters with blacks. For an example, while in South Carolina (1797) he indicates that his schedule at one place had to be limited to serve blacks adequately:

I purpose to go out only every other night, as I am called to duty every morning with fifty or a hundred Africans. 34

In speaking of his ministry to blacks and his desire to render even more time and service to them, he says,

...O, it was going down into the Egypt of South Carolina after those poor souls of Africans I have lost my health, if not my life in the end. The will of the Lord be done! 35

Back in South Carolina in 1800, Asbury again mentions time that he spent among Negroes:

We spent four hours in the private and public meeting; a number of white and black children were to be baptized.... 36

In North Carolina in 1803, Asbury mentions an interracial society composed largely of Africans and probably some freedmen:

I met the people of colour, leaders and stewards; we have eight hundred and seventy-eight Africans, and a few whites in fellowship. 37

Lay Preachers and Missionaries

Wesley's other lay preachers and missionaries played a significant role in the evangelization of blacks in

34 Ibid., p. 116.
35 Ibid., p. 132.
36 Ibid., p. 271.
37 Ibid., p. 300.
Black Evangelism in America

early Methodism. In 1760 Philip Embury, an Irish local preacher, migrated to America, and conducted what was probably the first Methodist service in the country. In that service was "Betty," an "African" servant of Barbara Heck.38

About the time that Embury was organizing the Society in New York, Thomas Webb, a retired British soldier, was preaching and evangelizing on Long Island. In about six months more than two dozen prisoners had been converted, "half of them whites, the rest negroes."39 Webb's most famous converts were Peter Williams (ca. 1747-1823) and his wife, Mollie. These were present when Asbury preached his first sermon in old Wesley Chapel (John Street) shortly after arriving in America. Williams became Methodism's first outstanding black layman and a prime mover in the organization of the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church.40

The founder and organizer of Methodism in the South (Maryland) was Robert Strawbridge, an Irish lay preacher. He settled on Sam's Creek in Frederick County sometime between 1762-1765. A member of the first group to which he preached was a black woman, "Aunt Annie Switzer."41 "Switzer" was a name commonly found among many of the American Irish Palatinate Methodists.

Richard Boardman was moved by the "religious zeal" of the blacks in his congregations. In writing to Wesley in 1770, he stated, "We have a number of black women who meet together every week."42

Joseph Pilmore was one of the first, if not the first, of the early Methodist missionaries to note and practice racial discrimination in the treatment of blacks in America. He records in his Journal (1770) that he "formed a separate class for Negroes." Later in January 1771, he writes, "...I met the negroes apart and found many of them very happy."43 Pilmore also observed racial

40 Ibid., Vol. II, p. 91, note.
41 Ibid., Vol. II, p. 53, note.
42 Ibid.
43 Ibid.
discrimination in a Sunday evening outdoor service in Norfolk, Virginia:

As the ground was wet they persuaded me to try to preach within and appointed men to stand at the doors to keep all the Negroes out till the white persons were got in.  

Plantation Missions

The best organized and most active as well as the most widely supported evangelistic endeavor among Negroes in Methodism in America was the Methodist-oriented "Plantation Mission." This movement had its formal beginning in the South Carolina Annual Conference of 1808 with the appointment of three missionaries to points in the annual conference, to evangelize among blacks, exclusively. Asbury, who was present when this was done makes the following entry in his journal about it:

We appointed three missionaries—-one for Tombigbee (M. P. Sturdevant), one to Ashley and Savannah, and the country between (James H. Mellard), and one to labour between Santee and Cooper Rivers (James E. Glenn).45

Between these first missionary appointments to the slaves in 1808 and 1826 the "plantation missions" were not extensive in their outreach. In 1828, however, several large plantation owners addressed an appeal to William Capers, noted for his interest in evangelizing blacks, requesting that missionaries be appointed by the South Carolina Methodists to their plantations. Their request seemed well founded in terms of the religious condition of the slaves. Conference reports of the period said,

...the moral and religious destitution (of the slaves) was utter. They had no gospel among them, and many of the oldest negroes had never in all their lives heard a sermon preached.46

Capers was appointed to the Superintendency of the
mission in 1829 by the South Carolina Conference. By 1844, under his leadership, the work had enlarged to fifty-nine missions in the South Carolina, Georgia, Tennessee, Memphis, Mississippi, Alabama, Arkansas, and Virginia annual conferences. These missions were served by fifty-four missionaries.

The format of ministry in these missions was interesting. In addition to preaching, holding revivals and home visiting, the missionaries taught the children of the slaves. A typical missionary described his ministry as follows:

I visit each plantation every week, catechize orally, 165 children...pray with the old and sick....

As the work of the plantation missionaries became greater they needed assistance. This became one of the earliest opportunities for the development of religious leadership among the black slave population. Barclay reports:

On some of the missions the missionaries were assisted in their work by Local Preachers, in the Church at large many Negroes having been licensed to preach, even though not receiving ordination.

The work of the Plantation Missions was, generally, well received. There were several restrictions upon the slaves, however, and several reservations on the part of some planters.

In some states slaves could not assemble in numbers for any purpose. In others they could not preach and in still others a white person had to be present at any black gathering. Education beyond the "merest rudiments" was universally discouraged and the consent of slave masters for their slaves to attend was required in many cases.

Summarily, the plantation missions were a mixed blessing. The black membership of Methodism gained more rapidly due to this movement than any other church body in America. Excepting the Baptists, between 1827-1828

47 Ibid., II, p. 270.
48 Ibid.
black members increased from 59,056 to 150,120.\textsuperscript{49} This increase, however, was a costly price to pay for an introduction to Christianity that was truncated and often distorted beyond recognition.

II. Black Evangelism and the Growth of Methodism in America

The founding events of American Methodism co-extend, chronologically, with the birth of the nation, its early growth and the opening of the western regions. Methodism was the first national religious organization to have an indigenous beginning on American soil. Theodore Roosevelt was not unmindful of this when he remarked in 1903,

\begin{quote}
America has a peculiar proprietary claim on Wesley's memory... for it is on our continent that the Methodist Church has received its greatest development.\textsuperscript{50}
\end{quote}

The genius of that development and a primary source of the not inconsiderable influence that Methodism had upon early American culture and history derives from its evangelistic zeal and its periodic though not consistent or comprehensive reformist activity.

Unfortunately, from the early national period onward, original Wesleyan evangelicalism in America (as in England) soon compromised its social ethic. In the words of H. Richard Niebuhr, it became

\begin{quote}
...much more of a religious and less of an ethical movement than were its predecessors. The religious interest preceded the social, and social idealism remained more or less incidental, while the hope of a thorough-going social reconstruction was almost entirely absent... The socially beneficial results of Methodism were never designed, but they accrued as mere by-products of the movement.\textsuperscript{51}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{49} Ibid., p. 271.
This judgment was especially applicable to Methodism's black constituency, North and South, and is reflected nowhere more clearly than in her treatment of the thousands of converts she gained through revivals.

Let us, then, look at Methodist history in the early and later national eras and see what happened to black converts in white churches. Let us also see what black converts themselves did as evangelists.

There has hardly been a time in American Methodist history when the color question has not marred the reality of Christian fellowship. Actually, the story of evangelism among blacks by Methodists is that of a vicious racist cycle: (1) white conversion of blacks; (2) white rejection of blacks as full fellow church members; (3) the rise of black "services" and "churches" in protest and frustration, or (4) continued discriminatory treatment for blacks who chose to remain in predominantly white churches.

As early as 1769 blacks in John Street Church in New York City had a visibly distinctive membership group. During the 1770's this group formed themselves into a black Methodist Episcopal fellowship. Still later, perhaps in the 1780's, this same fellowship took the name Zion Chapel and held services separately from the John Street group, although they maintained their membership there. By 1796 initial steps had been taken by the black members to separate themselves from John Street and become an independent Methodist Chapel. The reason for the separation was not polity difference or doctrine. John J. Moore, an early leader and bishop of the A.M.E. Zion Church (which they later became), states unequivocally "that the great reason for the separation from the mother church was the rapid increase in the Negro membership." One implication here is that there were more black members in John Street Church than the white members wished. A second implication is that the annual conference did not see fit to fully ordain a black local preacher to care for the "Zion" membership, all of whom were black.52

What happened to the relationship between blacks and whites in John Street Church and Zion Chapel is a

repeatable cycle of events in practically all of Methodist history.

By 1787 a similar situation existed between the black and white members of St. George's Church in Philadelphia, necessitating black separation and the establishment of "Bethel" Church and eventually the A.M.E. denomination. In the case of Zoar Church in Philadelphia (1794), Sharp Street Church in Baltimore (1802), and Ezion Church in Wilmington (1805), these black congregations separated from the white parent congregation but not from the denomination. Summarily, by 1824 practically all of the sizeable black Methodist constituencies in white Methodist churches had experienced involuntary separation. They had either become the founding units of all-black Methodist denominations as in the case of "Zion" Chapel for the African Methodist Episcopal Zion denomination or "Bethel" Church for the African Methodist Episcopal denomination, or all-black units in white annual conferences as in the case of "Zoar," "Sharp Street," and "Ezion."

Summarily, evangelism by Methodists among blacks failed to fulfill the gospel's understanding of Christian inclusive fellowship or to generate any real feeling of Christian acceptance on an interpersonal basis.

As church historian Edwin S. Gaustad points out:

As the number of Negroes increased to the point where they became the dominant group in a community or a church, both Negro and white groped for new solutions.53

From the earliest of times in American Methodist history, blacks themselves have evangelized. Slaves, ex-slaves, indentured servants preached and converted across the nation in the name of Christ and Methodism. Many of these black evangelists are nameless and facts about others are scanty. Wesley recognized the eagerness of blacks to receive and share the gospel as did his lay preachers and missionaries. Asbury was persuaded that a liberated black man was being prepared by God "for peculiar usefulness to the people of his own colour." A black converted by Whitefield is said to have "preached to crowded audiences." J. B. Finley reports that a Negro servant named "Cuff" was asked by his brethren to

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lead their religious devotions when no white preacher was available.

In 1788 Asbury encountered a slave in South Carolina named "Punch," who became "a great light among his people, leading many to Christ." Punch later converted his overseer, who became a Methodist preacher. Abel Stevens tells of "Jacob," a black class leader and local preacher on the Western District sometime between 1796 and 1804. In his Life of William Capers, W. W. Wightman mentions several "extraordinary colored men": Castile Selby, Amos Baxter, Tom Smith, Peter Simpson, and others who served as evangelist-preachers among their brethren in South Carolina.

Other black evangelists were ex-slaves or freedmen, as was John Charleston (ca. 1766-18?), a gifted black preacher ordained by Bishop William McKendree. Charleston, a convert of the Sunday school organized by Thomas Crenshaw in his home in Virginia, was reputed to have converted "thousands." Eventually Charleston, failing to receive more than Deacon's orders, left the Methodist Episcopal Church and united with the African Methodist Episcopal Church, where he became an outstanding pioneer preacher-evangelist.

The most outstanding examples of black evangelists are found in the remarkable lives of the early black itinerant preachers of Methodism. Brief sketches of the careers of these men conclude this section of the paper.54

Harry Hoosier

Harry Hoosier, known in the history of American Methodism as "Black Harry," was born a slave in North Carolina around 1750. Little is known of his background. He obtained his freedom, heard Asbury preach, and was converted. "Black Harry" was Asbury's traveling companion. Mention is made of him in Asbury's journal in an entry for June 29, 1780:

Read several chapters in Isaiah. I have thought if I had two horses, and Harry (a

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colored 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.55

Harry was not only a dutiful traveling companion and body servant, he was an excellent preacher. Asbury is said to have remarked that a certain way to insure a large congregation was to announce that "Harry" would preach since more came to hear him than myself! His preaching was fervent, oratorical and thoroughly Wesleyan. Asbury records in his journal after a meeting in Virginia:

I preached in the afternoon....Harry Hoosier 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.56

Black Harry traveled with Asbury in the East and South. He traveled with Thomas Coke on his one-thousand mile preaching mission just prior to the Christmas Conference in 1784. He accompanied Richard Whatcoat and Freeborn Garrettson on the New England tour in 1790.

It is claimed that the first newspaper reference to Methodism in New York is to Harry Hoosier, "an untrained but highly gifted preacher." Hoosier preached his first sermon in New York at John Street Church in 1786.

Probably the greatest distinction that Methodist history will accord him is to say that he, along with Richard Allen, then still himself a Methodist Episcopalian, may have been present at the Christmas Conference. Second only to this is Coke's statement,

I rea-ly believe that he is one of the best preachers in the world--there is such amazing power (that) attends his word, though he can-not read....He is one of the humblest creatures I ever saw.57

56 Ibid., p. 403.
Black Evangelism in America

This is Harry Hoosier, called by some "one of the greatest prodigies of those early days among Methodists."

Richard Allen

One of Methodism's most famous black sons was evangelist, organizer, leader--Richard Allen. His phenomenal rise from slavery to the foundership and first episcopate of what has become the largest independent black Methodist denomination in the world is almost without parallel.

Allen was born in 1760 in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. As a child he and his parents were sold into slavery on a plantation near Dover, Delaware, owned by a "Mr. Stokley." Allen grew up as a slave on this plantation and was allowed to attend Methodist preaching services.

He was converted under the preaching of Freeborn Garrettson and was responsible for having Garrettson invited by his master to preach to the other slaves. As a result of this the entire Stokley household was converted.

After obtaining his freedom Allen went to Pennsylvania and New Jersey in search of work. His ability as a preacher was recognized by the Methodists and for several years he traveled the circuits preaching to black and white audiences. On more than one occasion Asbury asked Allen to travel with him but Allen always refused.

Allen preached to blacks regularly at St. George's in Philadelphia and organized a Prayer Band among the rapidly growing Negro membership there. In 1799 he was ordained a Deacon by Asbury, becoming the first black man in America to be so recognized by the Methodist Episcopal Church.

Between 1786 and 1800 the attitude of the white members of St. George's had been changing gradually. Negroes were forced to sit in the back pews or in the gallery of the church for services or separate hours were set apart for their worship or separate classes were made for them. Whereas some of these "arrangements" were requested by the Negroes and Allen himself, they were accommodations to an increasingly hostile reaction by many of the whites and preachers assigned to St. George's.

In 1787 Allen and certain other black preachers withdrew from St. George's and eventually organized an
independent African Methodist Episcopal Church. By 1816 this had become the mother church of America's first black church denomination.

In 1795 Allen organized the first black Sunday school in America. The first black hymnal was compiled by Allen in 1807 and printed in 1818 at Philadelphia.58

What concluding word can be said about Richard Allen? Perhaps this suffices:

Let us now praise famous men, and our fathers in their generations. The Lord apportions to them great glory, his majesty from the beginning.

Henry Evans

Methodism was introduced in Fayetteville, North Carolina, by Henry Evans, a black local preacher. Evans, a native of Virginia (born about 1740), a freed slave and a shoemaker by trade, was converted in his home state and received a call to preach. After the Revolutionary War, Evans had difficulty finding work as a freedman in the upper South. He decided to go to Charleston, South Carolina. En route he stopped at Fayetteville, North Carolina, "saw the wickedness which abounded" and decided to remain there and evangelize.

The power and influence of his preaching was such that he aroused the suspicion and hostility of the town fathers. Until they saw that his preaching made their servants "better and not worse," he was harassed and threatened. Soon, however, the climate of opinion began to change. Evans was permitted to preach in the town proper. Indeed, few visitors would think of coming to Fayetteville without going to hear Evans preach.

Joseph Travis, later to become a pastor in Fayetteville, relates in his autobiography how Evans "by earnest effort...succeeded in getting a meeting house where he preached to all who would come to hear." Evans preached to both Negroes and whites. Travis says:

He began more and more to elicit the attention

With the assistance of whites a small wood church was erected and dedicated as Evans' Chapel in 1802. At this point, the irony of color-caste presented itself. When the new structure was complete the whites proceeded to occupy the first floor while the Negroes had to sit in the gallery! By 1804 the property was deeded to the church, and a white preacher was appointed to the charge.

Albeit the difficulties that Evans encountered, he was highly regarded by his contemporaries and remembered by all as "the father of the Methodist Church, white and black, in Fayetteville, and the best preacher of his time in that quarter." Evans was said to have been buried under the chancel of the church of which he had been the founder, following his death in 1810.

John Stewart

The final sketch of black Methodist evangelists to be dealt with in this period is preacher-evangelist John Stewart. Born in Powhatan County, Virginia, of free Negro parents (Baptist), he became the founder of Methodism's first successful mission to the Wyandot Indians and the instigator of the formation of the Missionary and Bible Society of the Methodist Episcopal Church.

Stewart received a religious training from his parents and attended such schools as were available at the time. As a young man, he left Virginia for Ohio, met several personal disasters, became discouraged and for a time resorted to drinking. He was converted in 1814 or 1815 by a Methodist missionary, Marcus Lindsay, who served the Marietta Circuit.

After his conversion he became a Methodist, united with the church in Marietta, Ohio, and was subsequently granted a license as an exhorter. A "Father" McCabe, the grandfather of Bishop Charles C. McCabe, signed this license.

Stewart began his remarkable mission to the Indians

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inspired by a "call" received while praying in a field:

It seemed to me that I heard a voice, like the voice of a woman praising God; and then another, as the voice of a man, saying to me, "You must declare my counsel faithfully..."
They seemed to come from a northwest direction. 60

Upon arriving in the "Northwest," Wyandot country, and meeting William Walker, the Indian sub-agent for the United States government, and being encouraged to remain and work, John Stewart began carving a niche in Methodist history that will endure.

Jonathan Pointer, a fugitive black slave and a back-slidden Methodist from Kentucky, who also lived in the general vicinity of the Wyandots (and who may have been kidnapped by them) and was able to converse fluently in both English and Wyandot, became Stewart's interpreter.

Soon Stewart had many converts, including Walker, several Indian chiefs and Pointer. Evangelistic work such as this continued until 1818, at which time objections were raised because Stewart was baptizing and performing marriages. When Stewart learned this he presented himself to a Quarterly Conference held on Mad River Circuit (near Urbana, Ohio). The Presiding Elder of the Miami District, Ohio Conference in 1818, Moses Crume, related to a successor missionary, James B. Finley, in a letter written some years later, what transpired at the Quarterly Conference:

John met me in the town of Urbana; from which place I went to the quarterly meeting accompanied by that man of God, Rev. Bishop George. (Bishop Enoch George). Here we found Stewart with several of his red brethren, the Wyandots, with a recommendation from the chiefs that had been converted, earnestly desiring to have him licensed to preach the Gospel.... 61

Upon such a recommendation and "after a careful examination: John Stewart was licensed as a local preacher."

Apparently John Stewart served the Wyandots for about
six years. In 1820 he married a young Christian woman, Polly, served three more years and died in 1823 at the early age of thirty-seven years.

Matthew S. Davage, a venerated black leader in Methodist Christian higher education, provides the following tribute to Stewart in a historical address at the Uniting Conference (1939):

...remarkable fact: two white congregations in Greater Kansas City—one identified with the Methodist Episcopal Church, the other with the Methodist Episcopal Church, South—trace their origin to the missionary labors of the Negro, John Stewart.62

III. Methodism, Society and Black Evangelism: A Critique

It has been demonstrated thus far that evangelism among "people of color" in American Methodism has devolved from a socially and racially inclusive model to an individualistic and racially exclusive one.

This truncated version has compromised the original intent of Wesleyanism and frustrated the potential and mission of Methodism in America so seriously that United Methodism's continued existence as an authentic witness to Wesley's original view of interrelated personal and social piety is placed in serious jeopardy.

In this section of the paper an attempt will be made to delineate the history and present state of affairs to which this "reductionist" procedure has brought Methodism in reference to its evangelistic ministry with black people.

Wesley's view of evangelism in relation to blacks emerged naturally out of his total theological system. He never consciously developed a social philosophy based upon his theology. He was primarily an evangelist seeking to bring all men under the power of the redemptive love of God.

Wesley believed, firmly, that God acted to redeem

all men and that all redeemed men are accountable for the spiritual and material welfare of their fellows. No Christian stands outside the circle of this responsibility. Here and here alone can one account for Wesley's view of black evangelism.

His not inconsiderable activity in the English movement to abolish slavery in the British possessions including his publication of the influential "Thoughts on Slavery" (1744); his courageous preaching on the subject in the slave-trading power centers; his influence upon Thomas Clarkson, Granville Sharpe and William Wilberforce; all of this gives a basic credence to the uniqueness of Wesley's evangelicalism, namely, that salvation is realized in proportion as the faith which initiates it is expressed in love toward God and man. More simply, growth in grace involves good works. Salvation for Wesley was always more than "ethical" but it was at least that! It was this theological base that gave birth to his phrase, "The Gospel of Christ knows no religion but social; no holiness but social holiness." Here is a Wesleyan meaning for social evangelism. Wesley did not attempt to redeem society through social legislation, primarily, nor did he challenge institutions, directly. But he did command that his followers give some "public and social" evidence of their "personal and inward" faith. He commanded that persons should enact their personal faith in social ways as the times demanded. Outler interprets Wesley at this point to mean that "...evangelism must issue in visible social effects or else its fruits will fade and wither."63

In practice Wesley's ethic was basically individual-oriented and his social views were derived from the ethical principles pertinent to them. Wesley's basic question was--what does this do to a man's soul. This understanding can be documented in Wesley's conduct with blacks before and following Aldersgate. Of particular interest in understanding the racial egalitarianism in Wesley's evangelistic activity is the instance of the unnamed black woman who was a member of the Select Society at Whitehaven (1780).64

The Wesleyan model for evangelism, an integration of evangelicalism and ethics that called for social

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64 Supra, Section 1, p. 4, note 16.
accountability, barely survived the First Great Awakening (ca. 1740-1770). C. C. Goen in a provocative article in Religion in Life says,

...the revival movements inaugurated by George Whitefield and all the pastor-evangelists who followed in his train shifted American religion from the theocratic ideal of God's rule in society to an introspective pietism concerned with little beyond individual conversion. 65

This "shift" is most noticeable as we view Methodist evangelism among Negroes in retrospect. In general terms, Wesley's injunction "Reform the continent, and spread scriptural holiness over these lands," 66 received in successive periods a narrower and narrower interpretation until what prevailed was a major emphasis on holiness and a very minor emphasis on reform. Let the record speak for itself.

Whitefield, in traversing the country in the 1740's preaching indiscriminately to blacks and whites and converting hundreds of both, became a pro-slavery advocate. In a 1751 letter to Wesley he actually affirmed the "legitimacy" of the infamous institution welcoming the presence of slaves as an opportunity "for breeding up their posterity in the nurture and admonition of the Lord."

Whitefield protested, vigorously, the mistreatment and abuse of slaves. He also affirmed their salvability and teachability and made gallant efforts to implement these convictions.

Nonetheless, his position must be remembered as one of the earliest errors in interpreting Wesleyan evangelicalism by implying that it is separate, for any reason, from a social ethic.

Wesley's unofficial lay preachers of the 1760's--Embry, Strawbridge and Webb--and his official missionaries--Pilmore, Boardman and Rankin--preached and evangelized among whites and blacks indiscriminately. The societies which they organized were multi-racial. It

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66 This statement was made first in America at the Christmas Conference in Baltimore, 1784.
must be pointed out, however, that the conditions and circumstances of mass evangelism did not test the acceptance of black converts as members. It was only when the "multi-racial" society developed into a church fellowship requiring social equality and equality in inter-personal relationships that the subtle racism of most Methodist church members became overt.

Asbury, in his contacts and evangelistic endeavors among Negroes, attempted to hold to the high standard of Wesley. In some instances it was possible. Indeed, the winds of freedom and liberty aided this posture in some parts of the nation, especially where the institution of slavery had not insinuated itself, firmly. In any case, for about forty years (1771-1816), Asbury preached and evangelized among blacks, "sometimes together, sometimes separately, but always indiscriminately."

It is on the issue of slavery, however, that the declension of Wesley's high evangelicalism to an emotionalistic revivalism practically devoid of any social ethic can best be seen.

In 1780 the General Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church scored slavery in the most forthright statement ever to be made, calling it

...contrary to the laws of God, man, and nature, and hurtful to society; contrary to the dictates of conscience and pure religion and doing that which we would not others should do to us or ours.67

In 1784, the General Conference advised all slaveholders that they had one to two weeks within which to manumit their slaves or withdraw from membership in the church. As strong as this statement sounded it was climaxed with a final sentence which exposed an adulterating compromise: This action was to be demanded "under and within the laws of the several states involved." Pro-slavery Southern advocates claimed, however, that this action was necessary to "save their work in the South" and to reach the slaves.68

The effect of this legislation upon the church was electric. In six months time, due to the vociferous protest of the South, it was necessary to suspend this rule. From this point onward, the nerve of the ethical expression of Methodism's evangelicalism having been severed at its root, the church began to pursue a course of action involving what amounted to a crusade to press for the "humane" treatment of slaves, education, and more "vigorous" revivalism among them.

By 1809, following a series of other compromises, even Asbury admitted that the church's opposition to slavery had collapsed. It is only fair to him to hear his thinking on this matter.

We are defrauded of great numbers by the pains that are taken to keep the blacks from us. Their masters are afraid of the influence of our principles. Would not an amelioration in the condition of slaves have produced more practical good to the poor Africans than any attempt at their emancipation? The state of society, unhappily, does not admit of this; besides, the blacks are deprived of the means of instruction. Who will take the pains to lead them into the way of salvation, and watch over them that they may not stray, but the Methodists?69

Summarily, between 1809 and 1844, the division of the Church, Methodism had compromised her Wesleyan evangelicalism so thoroughly that its principles and policies on united and/or interracial fellowship were indistinguishable from what was occurring in any secular social organization, given the ethic of a bi-racial society. Briefly, that story is as follows.

While blacks were admitted to membership in Methodist societies in America as early as the 1760's, their number was comparatively small. As their numbers grew, however, and the societies became churches, the churches immediately accommodated their ethic to the prevailing customary morality regarding racial discrimination that pertained in the general society.

In the South, Methodism's evangelistic work flourished, at least in quantitative terms. Othal H. Lakey in his *The Rise of Colored Methodism*, suggests several reasons for this:

Such phenomenal growth indicates an abundance of missionary zeal, peer accessibility to the slaves, and an appealing religious message. 70

The question here is not the growth of evangelism among blacks during this period but the motivation for such growth. Lakey points out the "Plantation Missions" were a Southern response to abolitionism as much as anything else. Through these "missions" of evangelism southern Methodism was seeking to "redeem" itself and "atone" for the commission of the sin of enslaving by Christianizing the enslaved.

Another motivation was obviously an expedient one:

...religion, rather than leading to the slaves desire for freedom would actually serve as a spiritual tonic whereby servants would become more subordinate and content with their station in life. 71

Episcopal Methodism's evangelistic work among black people from 1844 to 1939 concludes this section. In the Methodist Episcopal Church (North) the situation is described by Willis J. King:

In the Methodist Episcopal Church the situation was equivocal. This was especially true prior to the Civil War. While holding officially to the traditional position of John Wesley that peoples of every race, class, and nationality were welcome in Methodism, there was

71 Ibid., p. 30.
little effort made to win Negroes to the membership of the church. Following the emancipation of the slaves, however, the leaders of the church as well as the membership in general seemed to feel a moral obligation to help prepare the freedmen both for citizenship in the nation and in the Kingdom of God. With this in mind, the Methodist Episcopal Church launched a vigorous program, both evangelistic and educational. By 1916, when unification began seriously to be considered, the Northern Church had a Negro membership of approximately 300,000.

Another aspect of the anomaly in the Northern Church was the model of race relations between black and white members. Essentially it was a segregated pattern guaranteeing to black members and ministers few of the rights and privileges of Methodism that could be taken for granted by whites. This intolerable situation caused agitation for separate black annual conferences soon after the 1844 division.

In 1848 black Methodists petitioned for annual conferences of their own. Between 1852-1863 they held annual conferences of local preachers and laymen. These were predecessors of the first black mission annual conference.

By 1902, nineteen black annual conferences covered 27 states from New York to Nebraska. Excepting in New England, where blacks were never numerous, and on the West coast where they had not yet become numerous, the Methodist Episcopal Church was divided racially.

The Methodist Episcopal Church, South

While it is true that the Methodist Episcopal Church did much toward the evangelistic, social and educational uplift of the freedmen after the Civil War, it is important to remember that the Methodist Episcopal Church, South

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played a significant part also. As soon as possible following the War it re-instituted as much of its rural evangelism as possible. It also became active in setting up racially separate congregations for its rapidly vanishing black population. This particular program climaxed in the establishment of the Christian Methodist Episcopal Church (1870), an all black Southern Methodist related church denomination presently claiming approximately 500,000 members. In the field of higher education the Methodist Episcopal Church, South was instrumental in establishing two colleges for freedmen in cooperation with the C. M. E. Church: Paine College in Georgia (1882) and Lane College in Tennessee (1882).

In 1939, the Plan of Union was consummated, forming The Methodist Church, comprising the three former Methodisms. The nadir in the divorcement of evangelicalism and Christian fellowship had been reached. Over the protest of black and some few white Methodist delegates, nineteen black annual conferences were instituted, legally, as a part of the structure of Methodism. Racial segregation, long practiced sub-legally in the nation had now been written into the law and Constitution of Methodism in America.

IV. Methodism, Evangelism and the Future: A Black Perspective

America emerged from World War II one of the most powerful nations on earth and one of the moral leaders of the free world. Charter membership in the United Nations related her in a significant way to a new kind of international community. "Declarations of Independence by African, Asian, and Latin American nations climaxing their "coming of age" culturally and politically were among the sobering events of the era.

Other events were shaping our future irrevocably. The launching of Explorer I placed us in the Space Age. Nuclear arms developments signaled the obsolescence of conventional warfare between nations. John F. Kennedy's "New Frontier" and Lyndon Johnson's "Great Society" dealt seriously with the problems of "little people" for the first time since The Great Depression's Franklin D. Roosevelt.

During this period black protest for civil, economic, social and political rights were renewed with an urgency and force heretofore unknown. The decade 1955–1965
In this final section of the paper Methodism's evangelistic response to this era of cyclonic change, particularly its response to the new mood of "black awareness," will be delineated.

Methodist Unification in America occurred less than six months before the German army crossed the Polish border in September 1939, commencing the Great Second War. National preoccupation with this crisis and subsequent involvement in the massive war effort that followed probably precluded American Methodist concentration on its evangelistic mission to a new and segregated church structure. Consequently, in The Methodist Church evangelism was thought of more often as promotional rather than missional. The jurisdictional system with a built-in racial division lent itself easily to rationalizing and defending "neighborhood evangelism" since black and white churches in the same neighborhood would evangelize "their own kind."

Further, evangelism and the issue of racial justice were rarely placed in a posture of confrontation. Methodist evangelism in America refused to motivate itself to deal radically with what had been highlighted by the Brown-Topeka Decision of the United States Supreme Court as the nation's single most important social problem--legal separation of blacks by white people--specifically, in the public schools. Evangelism became a compartmentalized, separatistic bureaucratic unit dealing with personal salvation and "nominal" church membership. Actually, it did not get involved as a change agent in any social political or economic issue. This accommodative stance to the prevailing ethos assumed more than occasionally by Christian churches generally, is commented upon by the late H. Richard Niebuhr:

But on the whole, the sufficient reason for the frankness with which the color line has been drawn in the church is the fact that race discrimination is so respectable an attitude in America that it could be accepted by the church without subterfuge of any type.73

73 Niebuhr, op. cit., p. 236.
In practical terms for the period under consideration, evangelism in Methodism was structured, in effect, to be a-social and a-political.

From 1944 to 1968, the "aim" of evangelism stated in The Book of Discipline not only failed to speak of racial inclusiveness, it did not mention social responsibility, generally. Its main thrusts were pietistic, moralistic, spiritualistic, more converts and reaching the "unchurched." Ostensibly, the latter injunction would have meant any and all unchurched persons regardless of race. Given the "Jurisdictional" system of that time, however, the unreached were constitutionally defined as the unreached in the "jurisdiction." And that meant, tacitly, blacks were to seek the black "unreached" and whites were to seek the white "unreached."

In 1968, a major policy breakthrough occurred. In reporting to the General Conference meeting that year in Dallas, Texas, the Board of Evangelism, responding to four years of minority discontent, stated:

The evangelism we advocate is that which involves the proclamation of the word and the doing of the deed in faithful response to the demands of the Gospel. The personal and the social are two aspects of the same Gospel. Whatever involves the life of man is the concern of God and must be the concern of those who as evangelists speak the name of Christ who came to reveal the nature of God....

This long overdue affirmation of a holistic view of evangelism was re-enforced further by the General Conference which acted for the first time in 20 years to revive its evangelistic aim. On the recommendation of the Board of Evangelism the following wording was adopted:

Evangelism is the winning of persons to Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord. It is an attitude, a spirit, and a living faith that finds expression in a continuous cooperative effort on the part of the Holy Spirit and man to bring the individual into vital relationship with God and his fellowmen through faith in Jesus Christ, God's Son. It results in a definite personal experience of salvation, a growing sensitivity...

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to the social relevance of the gospel, and a
progressive building of Christ-like character. 75

The phrase, "a growing sensitivity to the social
relevance of the gospel is arresting. Hopefully, this
is a firm step toward reclaiming our Wesleyan evangeli-
cal heritage of "social religion" to meet the insistent
demands of those crying for liberation, especially in
the black community. For it is these demands that must
reshape the content and context of the entire evangeli-
istic enterprise.

Again, the words of Outler give voice and support
to this hope as he speaks of a "Third Awakening":

Evangelism in the next Awakening will surely
have to be social-action oriented--and this
ought not to seem unprecedented. In its own
way, the camp meeting was where part of the
social action of that day was "at". Nowadays,
the evangelist must also find where the action
really is and go there: in patterns and forms
of witness and services that may yet have to
be invented. 76

The Board of Evangelism's report to the 1972 General
Conference meeting in Atlanta, Georgia, indicated that
this new look in evangelism had also influenced Key '73,
a continent-wide interdenominational evangelistic effort.
The third objective of Key '73, affirmed and accepted
by Methodists, reads as follows:

To apply the message and the meaning of
Jesus Christ to the issues shaping man and
his society in order that they may be resolved. 77

The wording of the legislation concerning evangelism
that appears in the 1972 Book of Discipline, unfortunately,
seems to lose the impact of this new direction. Struc-
tural reorganization reconstituted the Board of Evangelism
in a Division of Evangelism, Worship and Stewardship under
a new Board of Discipleship. The "aim" of the new
Board borrowed heavily from the "statement of purpose"
of the former Board of Education, now a Division of

75 The Book of Discipline (1968), Par. 1120, p. 321.
76 Outler, op.cit., p. 77.
77 Quadrennial Report, The United Methodist Church,
1972, pp. 72, 135.
Education of the Board. While this "aim" is valid and admirably suited to the general purposes of the new Board of Discipleship, it affords low visibility for the heritage of Wesleyan evangelism's concern for social and racial inclusiveness.

In practical terms what does this new situation mean? It is clear that there has been some effort to take the data of the past decade seriously. Evangelism, generally, and Methodist evangelism, specifically, seem to have found a new identity and a new mission. In this concluding section of the paper, this will be evaluated from the perspective of a black Methodist.

First, Methodist evangelism in the light of Wesleyan concerns must be a continuing witness to the love of Christ for all men in "all sorts of conditions." The central imperative of the Church, "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations...." (Mt. 28:19), is basic. Second, there must be a new recognition of the action-orientation of love--Christ's love for persons. Outler is helpful in projecting the image of such a church:

Give us a church whose members believe and understand the gospel of God's healing love of Christ to hurting men and women. Give us a church that speaks and acts in consonance with its faith--not only to reconcile the world but to turn it upside down!

Third, from a black perspective, Methodism must clearly recognize what happened in its history that brought it to its present state of near-bankruptcy as the guardian of souls and the givers of life--as evangelists.

Basically, American Methodism never really accepted Wesley's radical evangelicalism. Therefore, it did not so much recede from an originally holistic view of

78 "...to win persons as disciples of Jesus Christ and to help those persons to grow in their understanding of God that they may respond in faith and love, to the end that they may know who they are and what their human situation means, increasingly identify themselves as children of God and members of the Christian community, to live in the spirit of God in every relationship and to fulfill their common discipleship in the world."

79 Outler, op.cit., p. 56.
While Evangelicalism in general, with its stress upon feeling rather than doctrine tended to undermine the theological foundation of a self-consciously formulated social and cultural ethic, the "romanticism" of popular evangelicalism denied the necessity for such an ethic.  

From a black perspective, the original purposes of evangelicalism are providential—not problematic. The black condition demands a union of piety and practice, faith and action, belief and being. The black community agrees that:

A church continues to be evangelical only by being constantly and unanxiously reformed—and this means change—constant updating, constant new ventures, as history and human destinies unfold. The People of God are a Pilgrim People. The Holy City is forever receding on history's horizons.

Fourth, if the nascent power, insight, fervor and energy of Wesleyan evangelicalism, broadly conceived, can be recovered and actualized in, by or through the Church, it is altogether possible that our nation, as was England of the 18th century, will be brought to a new sense of its identity, integrity and destiny.

Methodist evangelism's challenge today is to "grasp the essence of Wesley's legacy and update it, suitably, in our time and place..." and to understand the vocation of every Methodist Christian to be an evangelist, that is "...one who sees Christian commitment and involvement in all the issues and problems of the world as essential to an authentic expression of Christian faith...with a new motivation to be a real agent for change in the world."

Finally, from the perspective of a black Methodist,
given the erosion of purpose and confidence, the accommodation to secular culture and its morality, scripture may be speaking to the Black Church generally and to Black Methodists, specifically, in saying:

...who knows whether you have not come to the Kingdom for such a time as this (Esther 4:14c).

Could it be that black evangelism will be the saving remnant in Israel? Toynbee's remark about this is worth pondering:

It is possible that the Negro slave immigrants who have found Christianity in America may perform the greater miracle of raising the dead to life...If this miracle were indeed to be performed by an American Negro Church, that would be the most dynamic response to the challenge of social penalization that had yet been made by man.83

This is the challenge of historic Wesleyan evangelicalism to the Church—to Methodism and to black Methodism. This is the power unto salvation.