PARTNERS IN POLITICAL ABOLITIONISM: 
THE LIBERTY PARTY AND THE WESLEYAN METHODIST CONNECTION

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The entire first page of the first issue of the True Wesleyan was devoted to an apologia by three former Methodist Episcopals explaining their secession and their reasons for founding a new abolitionist denomination, the Wesleyan Methodist Connection. The only other item on the page was a notice of “Liberty Party Nominations for Representative.” The specific names of the nine Liberty Party candidates were listed, along with the comment that these persons were “to be supported” by the Wesleyan seceders “on the 14th of Nov.” For perhaps the first time, an American denomination would go on record explicitly supporting a particular political party and its agenda. While secondary sources do not deal with the connection between the Liberty Party and this seemingly politically unimportant ecclesiastical power struggle that resulted in the formation of the Wesleyan Methodist Connection, a study of primary sources reveals a direct relation between these two institutions. Significantly, this linkage offers insight into the conjoining of evangelical religion and social reform in American political abolitionism.

1The Wesleyan Methodist Connection was the first specifically abolitionist denomination. The Free-Will Baptists had promoted a strong anti-slavery stand since 1839, but they were not nearly as one-issue oriented as the Wesleyans, and they had been established as a denomination for decades.
2True Wesleyan, l( Nov. 8, 1842).l.
The Liberty Party and the Wesleyan Methodist Connection were products of the same dynamic—the rejection of "immoral" institutions which failed to take a firm stand for the abolition of slavery. Indeed, the members of both had the same motives for leaving, respectively, the Whig or Democratic Party and the Methodist Episcopal Church: that is, the desire for a pure, uncompromising group with which they could unhesitatingly align themselves against "the sin of slavery." Both organizations had the goal of immediate and "entire abolition of slavery in the United States." The same means of moral suasion and religiously-inspired political abolitionism were embraced and utilized. The party and the denomination were both strong in the same geographical areas: New England, upstate New York, and the Old Northwest of Ohio, Michigan, and Indiana. Most importantly, many of the same individuals were involved at the same time in the formation and promotion of the Liberty Party and the Wesleyan Methodist Connection.

Of course, the Liberty Party was not a church, and the Wesleyan Methodist Connection was not a political party. They differed in their function. And yet, the Wesleyans often operated politically as an extension of the Liberty Party, and the "Liberty men" used the tactics and arguments of an evangelical perfectionist religious group. They were two institutional expressions, one political and the other ecclesiastical, of the same social reform movement.

For one who "more than any other came to symbolize Methodist abolitionism," Orange Scott had an inauspicious beginning. Born at the turn of the nineteenth century to an indigent family in the hill country of Orange County, Vermont, he had meager religious and educational training. Scott spent most of his youth at day-labor employment and did not begin to be religiously inclined until he was twenty-one. He attended a Methodist camp meeting and was converted, immediately uniting with the Methodist Episcopal Church, and began the work of an itinerant preacher. Scott evidently had great confidence and fine oratorical abilities, for within four years of his ordination in 1826 he became presiding elder over all the preachers near Springfield, Massachusetts and was elected in 1832 for the first of three times as a delegate to the quadrennial General Conference of the church.

There is no indication that Orange Scott had any anti-slavery inclinations prior to 1833. At that time, through many influences, including William Lloyd Garrison's *Liberator*, he was convinced of the need for immediate emancipation. From then on, the freeing of slaves became his top priority, preaching repentance for supporting the sin of slavery as he had preached repentance of other sins before.

From the earliest days of the Methodists in America, the movement had been strongly opposed to slavery. Beginning in 1743, Wesley prohibited “buying and selling the souls of men, women, and children, with an intention to enslave them.” American Methodism maintained this conviction at first, calling for the expulsion of any member involved with the slave trade. As the church grew and prospered into America’s largest denomination, however, this vigorous stance was whittled away. By the 1820’s and 30’s the Methodists had largely accommodated to the “peculiar institution,” maintaining a nominal disapproval in the Discipline, but in practice relaxing any firm anti-slavery position for the expediency of continued denominational growth in the South.

In 1834 the newly-awakened Scott began addressing camp meetings and other assemblies from his position as Presiding Elder. That year he became the first preacher to argue for the immediate emancipation of the slaves from the floor of the New England Conference. This fiery agitator, whom John Greenleaf Whittier said was “ranked among the slave’s ablest advocates,” was on his way “to do for the Methodist Episcopal Church what Garrison had already done for the nation.” He began a series of articles on slavery for the Conference’s paper, Zion’s Herald. When that paper decided not to print the arguments of abolitionists any longer, La Roy Sunderland, later a founder of the Wesleyan Connection, started the rival Zion’s Watchman, and within four years it had the largest circulation among Methodist journals. Sunderland and Scott, along with Luther Lee, another future Wesleyan, began periodic speaking tours throughout New England and New York. Out of his own pocket, Scott purchased one hundred three-month subscriptions of the Liberator for his conference colleagues, resulting in the “radicalizing” of a majority of them. At their session preceding the 1836 General Conference, the New Englanders elected a slate of delegates including Scott which, with one exception, was thoroughly abolitionist.

It was at this conference that the battle lines began to be clearly drawn between the factions of the church, and it was also this conference which pushed Scott forward as the prominent figure in the extended Methodist debate on the slavery issue. Despite several anti-slavery proposals from the New England delegates (Scott being the prime promoter), the General Conference expressed itself as “decidedly opposed to modern abolitionism, and wholly disclaim any right, wish or intention to interfere in the civil and political relationship between master and slave, as it exists in the slave-holding states of the Union.” They also censured two Vermont delegates for speaking at an anti-slavery meeting during the

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*Quoted in Dayton, *Evangelical Heritage*, 74.


*Swaney, 46.

conference. These actions sparked strong denunciations from Scott and his compatriot James Birney, future Liberty Party leader and presidential candidate, a non-Methodist evangelical who observed from the gallery. During the conference, Scott and Birney wrote a pamphlet giving their view of the proceedings, which brought more angry words from their opponents.

Following the 1836 General Conference, the bishops sought to quell abolitionist fervor. Scott was removed from his presiding eldership and many abolitionists were given "hard scrabble" circuits. The bishops also promoted "gag resolutions" to shut off open debate on slavery during conferences. Bitter and acrimonious conference sessions resulted in formal charges being brought against members from both sides. The abolitionists who were charged included Sunderland, and eventually Lee and Scott.

Scott was undaunted. He requested inactive status in the conference in order to spend full-time as one of "the seventy" designated promotional agents of the American Anti-Slavery Society. Travelling from one annual conference to another, much to the chagrin of the bishops, Scott arranged anti-slavery lectures and then formed conference anti-slavery societies which later became the base for a national Wesleyan anti-slavery organization.

Meanwhile, there was trouble brewing within the abolitionist ranks. In the early 1830's anti-slavery advocates had their hands full simply spreading their basic beliefs, but "when a large body of people were convinced of the truths abolitionists had taught them," according to evangelical and Liberty Party leader William Goodell, "the question arose, How shall they best be led to put their principles into practice?" Two major tactical positions emerged; one, led by Garrison, who had become disillusioned with the waffling of American churches, was anti-church, adamant about accepting women into the movement, "non-resistant," and opposed to any organized political strategy. Garrison believed that "political reformation is to be effected solely by a change in the moral vision of the people;—not by attempting to prove that it is the duty of every voter to be an abolitionist." The other position, led by James Birney, was strongly committed to evangelical religious convictions, against the inclusion of women, and favored the use of independent political action to secure desired abolitionist ends.

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8James Gillespie Birney, "Debate on "Modern Abolitionism," in the General Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, May, 1836 (Cincinnati: Ohio Anti-Slavery Society, 1836); see also Lucius C. Matlack, The Antislavery Struggle and Triumph in the Methodist Episcopal Church (New York: Phillips and Hunt, 1881).
The soon-to-be Wesleyans, such as Scott, Sunderland, and Lee, were prominent in this "political abolitionist" wing from the beginning. These three, along with many others, attended various anti-slavery societies to propogate their views on the necessity of political action. About one such meeting, where Garrison debated the issues with the political abolitionists, Henry B. Stanton wrote to Birney that "a very large corps of Methodists were present, and went right [politically abolitionist] and with their whole hearts, almost to a man. Scott told me that the Methodists generally in the State would go against all these distracting isms."12 Luther Lee felt that true abolitionists "hold American Slavery to be wrong, a legalized system of injustice, and a sin. They also hold that slavery is a political evil of un-speakable magnitude, and one which, if not removed, will speedily work the downfall of our free institutions, both civil and religious."13 Scott saw abolition "both as a moral and political duty" and believed that it was certainly possible "for abolitionists, who believe slavery to be a great sin as well as a political wrong, to support such men for Congress as well as vote for the abolition of slavery, without losing sight of the moral bearings of the question." For these Methodist political abolitionists, they saw it as their duty "to adopt all the constitutional and lawful means in our power" to bring about immediate emancipation. Scott asked: "Are the politics of a Christian country so diverse from religion, that the moral and political bearings of the great question of human rights cannot both be kept before the community at the same time?"14

The widening debate over strategy soon became an outright split in the abolitionist ranks. Garrison named Orange Scott as one of Birney's cohorts in a "belligerent crusade" against the nonresistants.15 In 1839, Garrison was able to oust his opponents from the American Anti-Slavery Society, including all the Methodist leaders, even though Sunderland had been one of the Society's founders. The political abolitionists the next year proceeded to form the American and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society, and Scott founded a New England subsidiary, the Massachusetts Abolition Society. Scott optimistically pledged "nine-tenths of the Methodist influence in the state for a new state society." Most Methodist abolitionists did indeed support Scott and Sunderland, and Lee even became the General Agent for the new Massachusetts society.16 Scott was pleased that

12The "distracting isms" phrase refers to the wide scope of issues promoted by the Garrisonians, as opposed to the "one-ideasim" of the political abolitionists. Henry B. Stanton to Birney, June 26, 1839, in Dwight Dumond, Letters of James Gillespie Birney, 1831-1857 (New York: D. Appleton-Century Company, 1938), 482.
14Orange Scott, An Appeal to the Methodist Episcopal Church (Boston: David H. Ela, 1838), 118.
16Matthews, Slavery, 174.
no Methodists would “sustain that rotten-hearted, no human government, women's rights institution, called the Massachusetts Anti-Slavery Society,”\textsuperscript{17}

The political abolitionists were initially determined to support anti-slavery candidates of the existing Whig and Democratic parties; Scott stated in 1838 that “the abolitionists have not and will not organize any separate political party.”\textsuperscript{18} However, simultaneously with the establishment of new political anti-slavery organizations came the call for a third party which would secure the election of individuals who were committed abolitionists and directly related to the societies. By 1839, several “new organization” leaders, including Scott and Lee, gave early support for such an uncompromising party. One editor assured his readers that “both politics and religion will gain by it. Politics will be ennobled, and religion will be humanized.”\textsuperscript{19} And so, in April 1840, the Liberty Party was born, soon enough to field candidates for the 1840 general election. Birney, the presidential candidate, received less than one percent of the total votes cast. Wesleyan founder Lucius Matlack was one of the few who supported Birney, saying that he counted it a privilege to be “one of that seven thousand who repudiated Baal worship of America.”\textsuperscript{20}

The future Wesleyan Methodists were in the middle of this third party action. Luther Lee argued so forcefully for political action at the Albany Anti-Slavery convention where the idea of the Liberty Party took shape that he was reputed to have “turned the scale in favor of a political anti-slavery party.”\textsuperscript{21} At this same convention, the seeds were sown for ecclesiastical secession, following the same reasoning used for political secession. The church members who were there gathered at breakfast for prayer and discussion, and decided that if they could not abolitionize their churches, they should withdraw. Soon thereafter, Lee and others established the American Wesleyan Anti-Slavery Society, which had the short-term goal of electing abolitionist delegates to the 1840 General Conference, but which also served in the long run as the organizational base for the Wesleyan secession.\textsuperscript{22}

\textsuperscript{17}Quoted in Ludlum, 161. Ironically, the Wesleyan Methodist Connection was an early promoter of women's rights, and Luther Lee was one of the staunchest supporters of women's participation in abolitionism and the life of the church. Scott's opposition to women's rights in the abolition societies does not seem to have influenced the Connection similarly, perhaps due to the loss of his influence upon his death. See also Sewell, 41n.
\textsuperscript{18}Scott, \textit{Appeal}, 118.
\textsuperscript{19}\textit{Massachusetts Abolitionist}, Oct. 17, 1839, quoted in Sewell, 59.
\textsuperscript{20}Matlack, \textit{Antislavery Struggle}, 204.
\textsuperscript{22}Lewis Perry, \textit{Radical Abolitionism} (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1973), 178. The founders included Cyrus Prindle, a Wesleyan seceder and Liberty Party advocate. Prindle, along with Lee and Matlack, returned to the Methodist Episcopal Church in May 1866.
For the second time, delegate Orange Scott was the focus of abolitionist controversy at the General Conference, and like the 1836 Conference, the more moderate accommodating position predominated. Perhaps the most galling to the abolitionists was a resolution denying the admissibility of black testimony in church trials because such testimony was prohibited by civil laws. Jotham Horton, soon to be a Wesleyan seceder, responded with a typical abolitionist reply that the laws of the state were not above the laws of God. However, the conference decided “that it is inexpedient to express any opinion, or to adopt any measure to control or modify slavery as it exists in the United States,” and the bishops were given almost absolute power to enforce this decision.23

The Methodist political abolitionists became pessimistic. Scott, in poor health and despairing of ever winning the church to abolition, retired to Vermont. Lee was discouraged by the Liberty Party debacle in 1840 and could not keep the Massachusetts Abolition Society from bankruptcy. He tried to promote an anti-slavery paper, the New England Christian Advocate, but it failed after a year. Most Methodist annual conferences reflected the 1840 General Conference attitude and did nothing to further anti-slavery positions. Sunderland was also disheartened and his paper, Zion's Watchman, was sold by 1842 due to lack of subscriptions. A despondent Orange Scott, influenced by Birney's pamphlet on The American Churches the Bulwarks of American Slavery, wrote in 1842: “I have now no expectation that the M. E. Church will ever take action against slavery, so long as it exists in the country.”24

Isolated congregations in Michigan, Ohio, Pennsylvania, New York and New England had, since 1839, begun to withdraw and to establish societies free from the contamination of slavery. Scott, persistently requested by these groups to consolidate them into a new denomination, finally resolved to leave the Methodist Episcopal Church and stand for “a new anti-slavery, anti-intemperance, anti-everything wrong, church organization.”25 Scott, Sunderland, and Horton published their reasons for leaving in the first issue of the denomination's paper, the True Wesleyan: “We do not withdraw from anything essential to pure Wesleyan Methodism. We only dissolve our connection with Episcopacy and Slavery.”26

At the organizing convention for the “Scottite secession” at Utica, New York, in May 1843, the representatives of six thousand persons from nine states formed a church with an anti-episcopal, presbyterian polity,
and a rejection of any association with slavery. The Wesleyans also took stands against alcohol consumption and secret societies, indicating the generally social reformist character of the new denomination.27

Most significantly, the Wesleyan Methodist Connection emphasized the right and duty of its members to be engaged in moral and political action, according to one's conscience. It was desired that "every member of the Wesleyan Connection should not only be a zealous advocate of every branch of moral reform, but co-workers, even in the front rank, battling side by side with those who contend against the Lord's enemies." Direct political involvement, then, was encouraged. Combining what they called "piety and radicalism," the Wesleyans believed their evangelical faith naturally led to radical reform. According to their Discipline, "every man has an inalienable right to private judgment in matters of religion and an equal right to express his opinion, in any way which will not violate the laws of God, or the rights of his fellow man." Such a stress on freedom of conscience was both a reaction to perceived heavy-handed episcopal restrictions in the former church and an incentive to freely forsake sin and promote godliness. This latter typically Arminian emphasis on freedom from sin was modified by the abolitionist Methodists to include the active opposition to slavery and the promotion of any practical means to ensure its demise.28

The Wesleyan Discipline also stated that "it is the duty of all ministers and members of the Church to maintain godliness, and to oppose all moral evil." They felt that opposition to moral evil came from a godly and holy life, as articulated in the doctrine of Christian perfection. Opposition to slavery, for evangelical abolitionists, was just the specific application of personal and social holiness to the moral evil of the day. For this reason, unlike the Methodist Episcopal, who only took a nominal stand against the institution of slavery, the Wesleyans prohibited "holding as slaves; or claiming that it is right to do so," since "we are required to acknowledge God as our only supreme ruler, and all men as created by him, equal in all natural rights."29

Within one year, so many abolitionist Methodists had joined the Scottites that the membership of the new denomination had more than

27 The Discipline of the Wesleyan Methodist Connection of America (Boston: O. Scott, 1843). Membership in secret societies was not prohibited until the first General Conference in 1844. For an excellent treatment of this issue in the Wesleyan Connection, see William H. Brackney, "The Fruits of a Crusade: Wesleyan Opposition to Secret Societies," Methodist History, XVII (July 1979) 239-252. Brackney deals with the reform-oriented character of the Connection, which included the peace issue and Sabbatarianism. By 1846, the Liberty Party had also broadened beyond "one-idealism" to be a "universal reform party" (Kraditor, 152).

28 Lucius C. Matlack, The History of American Slavery and Methodism (New York, 1849), 343; Discipline, 1843. See also William C. Kostlevy, "Luther Lee and Methodist Abolitionism," Methodist History, (XX, January 1982), 95-6, for an examination of Luther Lee's doctrine of free will and the moral obligation imposed on humanity.

29 Discipline, 1843.
doubled. A surprising and pragmatically expedient change in the policy of many of the bishops and leading Methodist editors, however, reopened abolitionist debate within the church. Fearing further withdrawals, these moderate northern Methodist leaders finally allowed abolitionist sentiments to be freely expressed at the 1844 General Conference. Undoubtedly, this move prevented greater abolitionist secession from the church, especially from the New England conferences which threatened to bolt en masse. However, due to frustration over such increased anti-slavery agitation in the North, the Southerners left the Church in 1844 to form the Methodist Episcopal Church, South. Thus, total ecclesiastical disintegration in the North was averted only by a split of the church into North and South.

Meanwhile, the Liberty Party, whose leadership included prominent Wesleyans, was being actively and openly promoted by the new denomination. Supported also by Lewis Tappan, Gerrit Smith, and other important abolitionists, the party gained appreciably in 1841-44, even winning several local and state elections. Although Birney lost again for president in 1844 by an overwhelming amount, the Liberty Party managed to capture the balance of power in the pivotal electoral state of New York, providing the margin of victory for Democrat James K. Polk, ironically a greater foe of abolitionism than his Whig opponent, Henry Clay. Several thousand New York Wesleyans, otherwise generally Whig, but instead voting solidly for the Liberty Party, may have provided the measure of defeat for Clay. After 1844, however, the failure of the "Liberty men" to be increasingly successful at the polls, plus internal factionalism over strategy and tactics, caused the dissolution of the party in 1848 and its absorption into the more broadly-based Free Soil Party.

Like the party, the Wesleyan Methodist Connection failed to continue to grow at its original rate, largely due to the Methodist Episcopal leadership's frightened relaxation of anti-abolitionist policy following the original spurt of secessions. Scott died of tuberculosis in 1847, a severe loss to the fledgling denomination. Sunderland became enamored with phrenology and eventually renounced orthodox Christianity. With the Emancipation Proclamation, the Wesleyans lost their primary issue, and

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30Robert Seager II, *And Tyler Too* (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1963), 239-40, demonstrated the possibility that Polk's victory in New York state was due to Tyler's patronage of the Polk cause in New York City or due to a coattail effect from the Democratic gubernatorial victory. Rather, when one compares the upstate election returns for 1840 and 1844, the most plausible assertion is that it was the Liberty votes which siphoned off enough potential Clay votes to swing the state for Polk (see Lee Benson, *The Concept of Jacksonian Democracy: New York as a Test Case* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1961), 131-139, 208n, 212). That these Liberty votes were largely from Wesleyans seems quite probable. Both Ludlum, 186, and Swaney, 115n, indicate this possibility. More detailed research on county by county election returns and Wesleyan membership records could prove fruitful. Interestingly, considerably more Wesleyans and considerably more Liberty Party members were New Yorkers than from any other state.
125 ministers, including Lee and Matlack, returned to the Methodist Episcopal Church. Left without their original leadership and without their original issue, the Wesleyans began to put greater stress on holiness through a definite, datable experience of entire sanctification, making this emphasis increasingly individualistic, and demonstrating it by a rigid personal moral standard.

The strands of the formative histories of the Liberty Party and the Wesleyan Methodist Connection are clearly interwoven, but an analysis remains regarding the ways in which these two institutions were partners in reform. Both institutions were committed to the abolition of slavery through evangelical Christian moral suasion and political action. Not only were they products of the same ideas propagated by the same people at about the same time, but they also nurtured each other ideologically. It is evident that the Wesleyans owed much of their rhetoric to political abolitionism, and that the “Liberty men” owed much of their political and religious ethos to evangelical perfectionist ideas. Such mutual nurturing is apparent on several fronts.

First, of course, several individuals involved in the early leadership of the Liberty Party were also involved in the Wesleyan secession, and Wesleyans continued to have an active presence in the Liberty Party as long as it existed. Methodists were early supporters of political abolitionism. Theodore Weld warned Birney as early as 1835 not to make his movement too Presbyterian in outlook because the Baptists and Methodists were a great portion of their support. Garrison also thought the Methodist abolitionist activity important enough to follow it extensively in the Liberator, often with derision since they were so politically minded. As has already been seen, Orange Scott was instrumental in founding the “new organization” which led directly to the Liberty Party. Although after 1840 he had to give proportionally more time to his fight within the Methodist Episcopal Church, Scott continued his active support of the party, especially through his editorship of the True Wesleyan. David M. Ludlum states that Scott’s backing gave the Liberty “organization a predominantly Wesleyan Methodist leadership.”

Luther Lee was also prominent in promoting Liberty Party politics from the beginning of the third party idea. Lee stated in his autobiography that he stood in the forefront of the 1840 political fury, “representing political antislavery, and boldly urged men to vote for James G. Birney for President of the United States.” This founder and presiding officer of the Wesleyans referred to the third party as “our Liberty Party.” In his book, Antislavery Struggle and Triumph in the Methodist Episcopal Church, Lucius Matlack lists nine important persons who “gave ample

31 Weld to Birney, Sept. 21, 1835, in Dumond, Letters, I, 246.
32 Ludlum, 177.
33 Lee, Autobiography, 227.
guarantee of large will, strong purpose, and timeless energy” to Liberty Party leadership. Three of those were Methodist Episcopal ministers, all of whom became Wesleyan Methodists, including Lee and Scott.34

The Wesleyan Methodists unapologetically supported the Liberty Party by political advertising and campaigning. Since the Wesleyans were committed to political abolitionism in general, and the Liberty Party as the specific way of achieving their ends politically, they had no qualms about directly promoting the party. Scott and the other leaders had a sort of dual role in the antislavery crusade, that of religious evangelist and political agent. Lee put this bluntly in his autobiography, where he insisted that “I never had any politics which was not part of my religion, and I urged men to vote the Liberty ticket as a religious duty.”35

Such direct support for the Liberty ticket was amply evident in the pages of the True Wesleyan. Some reference to the Liberty Party appeared in practically every issue. Liberty addresses by Birney and Stanton were described as “powerful and convincing,” and Liberty votes were highlighted in election results. Party and church meetings were evidently held concurrently, for a Liberty convention in Buffalo was announced with the comment that “this will be just the time to accommodate those who wish to attend that, in connection with the Wesleyan convention at Utica.” One article encouraged the reader to vote for the third party so “that the poor down-trodden slave may be well represented at the ballot box.” The editors also promised that the Wesleyans would continue to stand by both “the noble Birney” and the Liberty Party. Wesleyans were urged to distribute Liberty Party tracts in order to “enlist thousands of votes at the coming election [1843], for Equal Rights and Liberty . . . without distinction of color whatever.” And, while Scott was usually vituperative in the True Wesleyan toward anything associated with the Methodist Episcopal Church, he admiringly published an account of a Methodist Episcopal preacher who used “his influence to induce all, especially the members of his church, to vote the Liberty ticket.” Thus, support was given by the True Wesleyan to the Liberty Party even if such support implied a favorable view of the church from which they seceded.36

Although it has been demonstrated that the Wesleyan leadership encouraged Liberty votes by newspaper promotion and by example, less discernable is the actual political support of the Liberty Party at the polls by the average Wesleyan Methodist. However, it does seem evident that the Wesleyans who voted cast their ballots for the Liberty ticket37 and that many, if not most, Liberty Party supporters who were Methodist seceded

35Lee, Autobiography.
36True Wesleyan. I(March 25, 1843)47; (Nov. 4, 1843)174; (Nov. 18, 1843)183; II(April 6, 1844)55; (Nov. 9, 1844)179.
37See Hammond's statistical study of an “empirical connection” between areas affected by revivalistic religion and political abolitionist voting patterns (69ff).
to be Wesleyan. The latter affirmation, that most Methodist "Liberty
men" became Wesleyan, seems especially true in New York state. All the
Liberty Party editors who were members of the Methodist Episcopal
Church (one-third of the Liberty editors) joined the new Wesleyan
Connection.\textsuperscript{38} Also, over half of the original Wesleyan Methodist churches
were in New York and the Liberty Party was strongest there. Whitney
Cross has shown how their areas of influence overlapped considerably.\textsuperscript{39}

Not all Methodist third party people were Wesleyan, however. Some
Methodist "Liberty men" lived too far from an organized Wesleyan
Methodist Church. There were also Methodist Episcopalists (non-Wesleyan)
from Michigan and New Hampshire who ran for Congress under Liberty
auspices.\textsuperscript{40} In 1838, Scott estimated that there were 50,000 abolitionists in
the Methodist Episcopal Church,\textsuperscript{41} a number which the Wesleyans never
reached in his lifetime. Obviously there were Methodist Episcopalists who
did not become Wesleyan, and Scott berated them for remaining in the
"slaveholding church."

Many of our brethren in the old church are zealous Liberty Party men . . . where is the
consistency of coming out from pro-slavery political parties because they are corrupt,
and still clinging to a pro-slavery church?\textsuperscript{42}

The same argument for consistency was also used in the other direc­
tion, intended for those Wesleyan Methodists who were not yet Liberty
voters. In reporting on the necessity for political action, a writer to the True Wesleyan hoped that "our Wesleyan friends will see the inconsist­
cy of leaving a pro-slavery church, and still holding on to political parties
who are sold to slavery." It seems that most Wesleyans already were
Liberty supporters, though, for one Liberty Party contributor wrote to
"all true antislavery Liberty Party men, and such, I hope, all readers of the
True Wesleyan are or will be soon."\textsuperscript{43} Garrison disregarded the Wesleyans
because of their adherence to the American and Foreign Anti-Slavery
Society, the forerunner of the Liberty Party.\textsuperscript{44} According to Matlack, the
former Methodist Episcopalists "were perhaps more numerous than any
other class in that band of [1840 Liberty Party-supporting] political
pioneers."\textsuperscript{45} Vermont Wesleyans "consistently supported politicians run­
ing on an antislavery ticket."\textsuperscript{46} Thus, it does seem that rank and file
Wesleyans supported the Liberty tickets promoted by their
denominational leaders.

\textsuperscript{38}True Wesleyan, I(Oct. 21, 1843)166.
\textsuperscript{39}Cross, 227-8, 266. See also Benson, Concept of Jacksonian Democracy, 212.
\textsuperscript{40}Matthews, Slavery, 220-21.
\textsuperscript{41}Scott, Appeal, 135.
\textsuperscript{42}True Wesleyan, I(Dec. 23, 1843)203.
\textsuperscript{43}Ibid., II(Feb. 5, 1844)19; I(Nov. 4, 1843)174.
\textsuperscript{44}Matthews, Slavery, 232-3.
\textsuperscript{45}MatJack, Antislavery Struggle, 204.
\textsuperscript{46}Ludlum, 162.
The "consistency" plea was used to persuade Methodist Episcopalists to become Wesleyans, and Whigs and Democrats to become "Liberty men." Because they had already "come out" of one corrupt organization, it was only consistent that they leave the other. From their days as Liberty advocates who seceded from "Old Organization" Garrisonians, the Wesleyans received practical training and a model for seceding from their own old organization—the Methodist Episcopal Church. Since the Methodist "Liberty men" had left the traditional parties, the next logical step was to leave the traditional church.

Both the religious and the secular press used the "consistency" argument. The True Wesleyan addressed itself to some ministers and members of the Methodist Episcopal Church, who manifest a strange inconsistency . . . I refer to those who are active and leading members of the liberty party, and who at the same time are loud in their denunciation of the "new movement" . . . They secede from a pro-slavery party, and remain in a pro-slavery church; we secede from a pro-slavery church, and in most cases I believe, from pro-slavery political parties also.47

The Liberty Standard, a Maine Liberty Party paper, asked: "Ought slaveholding to be a disqualification for religious fellowship?" To the argument of some people that church membership did not imply religious fellowship with slaveholders, the Liberty Standard responded that such a membership relation was "an open acknowledgment to the world of fellowship with the slaveholders as good Christians."48 The Liberator agreed, and asked the Liberty Party to "take a more consistent course, in regard to the ecclesiastical organizations of our country . . . Let them be consistent, and take the same course in regard to the church as they do in regard to the state."49

The consistency demanded of "Liberty men" and Wesleyans to be mutual "come-outers" was based on a common understanding. The Wesleyan Methodists had no difficulty being so closely aligned with the Liberty Party because the latter did in fact have an explicitly evangelical ideology, used religious means to effect their ends, and appealed forthrightly to religious interests and religious people. After all, political abolitionism developed in order to "urge political action as a Christian duty" to rid the land of the sin of slavery, while concurrently urging persons to promote "religious influence upon which alone all consistent political action and righteous legislation are based."50 The True Wesleyan called this the "anti-slavery gospel," which had "not spared the church or the state" because "the dearest interests of the church and state requires the immediate abolition of slavery in both."51

47True Wesleyan, I(April 8, 1843)155, (Dec. 23, 1843)203.
48Quoted in True Wesleyan, I(April 8, 1843)156.
49Ibid., I(Dec. 16, 1843)200.
50Quoted in Sewell, 30, 73.
51True Wesleyan, I(April 15, 1843)57.
Along with their use of evangelical rhetoric and their stress on the need for religious influence and moral suasion as well as political action, the Liberty Party also used an interesting religious contrivance—the antislavery prayer meeting. Luther Lee attended one weekly. Many objected to these prayer meetings as "nothing more than political clubs in disguise" which were "merely one of many means employed to elevate the liberty party to power."

Lee Benson argues that Liberty voters shared a common set of "radical religious beliefs" and came from a common activist religious tradition. He sees political abolitionism as only one manifestation of "religious ultraism," which was a desire to bring about the ultimate perfection of humanity in this world as a mandate of God's will. Ultraists corresponded their activist religious doctrines to activist political doctrines, believing that "the state must act to purge society of moral evils."

Alan Kraut expands this idea to speculate that these persons experiencing a profound transformation desired a political group to which they could identify and through which they could help make the world holy. Kraut then asks why some people living in a revivalistic atmosphere came out for the Liberty Party while most others did not. He feels the clue is to be found in the common occupations and regional background of the Liberty voters. Benson, however, emphasizes party differences in ethnocultural moral attitudes and ways of life, and then incorrectly sees the Liberty voters' motivation coming from a Calvinist tradition.

Perhaps a more accurate understanding of Liberty Party ideology can be ascertained by studying the significance of their close association with the Wesleyans. If, as some have suggested, the religious faith of mid-nineteenth century America approached a measure of integration in an increasingly Arminian and practically-oriented piety, then the two institutions were part of the new evangelical consensus. More specifically, the Wesleyans and the "Liberty men" may have been mutually influenced by the resurgence of emphasis on holiness among American evangelicals. This concept, which stressed the necessity of living an entirely sanctified life by grace through willful obedience to God, was expressed in the call for moral and political purity. Evangelical salvation was not enough for this reform-minded generation; a second conversion was needed which would

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52 Lee, Autobiography, 180-1.
53 Dumond, Letters, 779ff.
dig away the very root of sin. There was a strong ethical imperative within the revivalistic rhetoric. Thus, merely denouncing slavery was not sufficient; slavery was described as sin, and as such required repentance through activism.

The doctrine of Christian perfection as developed by John Wesley had been somewhat neglected in the early years of American Methodism. However, by the 1830’s, a modified, "new school" Calvinism among Reformed revivalists (spurred on by Oberlin perfectionism, which was highly reformist), corresponded with a reinvigorated holiness emphasis among Methodists. Combined with antebellum revivalistic fervor, the holiness crusade became a potent agent for social change. Through personal consecration, individuals were called to ethical responsibility that would manifest itself in social as well as personal transformation. Contrary to holiness promotion later in the century which narrowed the scope of sanctification to individual conduct, the holiness renewal of the 1840’s consciously related personal purity to social and political purity.

Holiness doctrine was integral to Wesleyan social reform attitudes. If not their first concern, because of the pressing slavery issue, the promotion of holiness was nonetheless a central emphasis. Scott wrote in 1845 that "deep experiences in the things of God are essential to the peace and usefulness of all Christians, especially to any class of Christian Reformers" of which the Wesleyans were a part. He wrote constantly on the subject in the True Wesleyan, stating that Christ came "to purify unto himself a peculiar people zealous of good works." Scott insisted that it was "unspeakably necessary that the ministry and membership of the new Wesleyan Church should be sanctified to God" in order to be "a rare example of purity." The founding convention closed with an exhortation to "holiness of heart and life . . . that will give you moral power to oppose the evils and corruption in this world, against which we have lifted up a standard." Even their "Articles of Religion" contained a new clause affirming that "all men are bound so to order all their individual and social and political acts, as to render to God entire and absolute obedience, and to secure to all men the enjoyment of every natural right."
Since slavery was considered a sin, obedience to God required political emancipation immediately. If political abolitionism is interpreted as "an attempt to give the regenerate an opportunity to set their moral record straight" and influence the community likewise, then Liberty Party immediatism can be seen as the reaction of evangelical abolitionists to be wholly consecrated to God. For the reformer, acceptance of immediatism was a sign of a sort of deeper immediate transformation within oneself, not unlike the experience of sanctification. Immediate abolition was furthered by both the Wesleyans and the Liberty Party and was understood by opponents as "the application of perfectionism to politics." Lee and Scott often preached immediation as an urgent call to conversion, with an emphasis on the willful decision to reject sin now. The Liberty Party rhetoric also demanded such repentance of sin, resulting in a sanctified life, as an abolitionist who was now more obedient to God. The abolitionists' desire for greater holiness demanded expression in concrete moral and political activism, which came to be interpreted as support for independent political action.

Most significantly, the sanctification idea stressed purity of life. This included the purity of social institutions, such as political parties and churches. Lee declared that it was his "love for the church which impelled me to seek her purity by the removal of slavery from her communion," and to save "the church from its pollution and rottenness."

Political and ecclesiastical secession was a way of purging one from the sinful taint of the old organization. The True Wesleyan criticized the inconsistency of "Liberty men" who used the idea of purity but did not leave the Methodist Episcopal Church.

One of the reasons assigned for forming the liberty party was, that the other political parties of the country were so corrupted and controlled by slaveocratic influences, that a purer and better party was needed, in order to carry into successful operation the anti-slavery principals. Now to form such a party, there must needs be secessions take place for the purpose of forming a purer political party, how can those abolition seceders, with any show of consistency, find fault with us? . . . These persons complain because we do not remain in the M.E. Church, and try to have her purified; but why did they not continue with their favorite political party until it was purified?

"Come-outerism" was an attempt to purify oneself and one's social associations by separation from sin. Liberty Party members were concerned about escaping the "polluting infection" of national parties which included slaveholders; Wesleyans desired to be free of the contamination of a slaveholding church.

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63 Perry, 187; Matlack, American Slavery and Methodism, 248-9.
64 Quoted in Dayton, Five Sermons, 20.
67 True Wesleyan, I(April 8, 1843)155.
Gerrit Smith said in 1845 that the Liberty Party was "incomparably purer than other political parties." Likewise, the Wesleyans believed that "the purification of the professed Christian church" was the "first efficient step in the work of reform," and that their withdrawal was part of their duty to "preserve the purity of Christianity." Luther Lee felt that "purity should not be sacrificed to union." In this vein, the Liberty Party could have just as easily taken the same motto for itself as the Wesleyans: "First pure, then peaceable."

On the surface, the small Methodist secession of Wesleyans and the "pathetic residue of antislavery organization" called the Liberty Party seem of little consequence. Politically, however, these secessionist movements set the stage for a much greater secession that would come in a few years. Also, with the Wesleyan Methodist and Liberty Party alliance came a close association of evangelical religion with a straight-forward espousal of a particular political position. This leads to an understanding of political abolitionism, then, as the application of evangelical revivalistic perfectionism to a particular social evil. Luther Lee felt that such political and religious intermingling was justified, for "the Gospel is so radically reformatory, that to preach it fully and clearly, is to attack and condemn all wrong, and to assert and defend all righteousness." For these radical evangelicals, the quest for individual and social purity had direct implications for reform.

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68Quoted in Sewell, 83. While many prominent Liberty Party leaders were not Wesleyan Methodists, Thomas, 249, 263, demonstrates that Birney, Gerrit Smith, and others were supporters of religious perfectionism.
69Matlack, American Slavery and Methodism, 10, 323.
70Lee, Autobiography, 140.
72Dayton, Five Sermons, 11.