

JACOB GRUBER'S PLACE IN METHODIST CIVIL WARS

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The history of schism and disruption within the former Methodist denominations that are now part of The United Methodist Church runs deep in the history and social fabric of the United States. The most notable cause for division within the Methodist tradition, division on the basis of race, has yet to be healed and reconciled. This article will briefly review divisions over issues of race, polity and governance within and from the former Methodist Episcopal Church. However, my primary subject will be that which rent Methodism, and the nation, most significantly: slavery. In that regard, we will focus on a landmark court case involving a sermon by a Methodist presiding elder from Pennsylvania at a camp meeting held not far from Williamsport, Maryland.

Early Racial Divisions

Some brief historical background is in order. It was, and is, the painful division along lines of race that continues to haunt American Methodism. The African Methodist Episcopal Church, the African Methodist Episcopal Church, Zion, and the later-formed Christian Methodist Episcopal Church in the American South, testify visibly to the lasting division along racial lines that continues in American Methodism. The formation of these historic African American Methodist denominations evidence the incongruity within American Methodism in proclaiming a theology of “whosoever will,” and being unable to accommodate racially different respondents within a single church.

In colonial Methodist class and society meetings, full integration of white and African American Methodists seems to have been the norm.¹ Joseph Pilmore noted that in the early years of New York’s John Street Church “there were no Negro pews, no back seats, nor gallery especially provided for the dark-skinned members. They were welcome in common with other members to all the privileges of God’s house of worship.”² However, with the formation of the colonies into an independent nation, and the institutionalization of American Methodism as a denominational church, the norm moved from integration to segregation.

In 1787, or shortly thereafter, Richard Allen, Absalom Jones, and others walked out of St. George’s Church in Philadelphia after experiencing

¹ Frederick A. Norwood, *The Story of American Methodism* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1974), 166.

² Quoted in J. W. Hood, *One Hundred Years of the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church* (New York: A.M.E. Zion Book Concern, 1895), 203.

forced segregation in the gallery, discrimination, and abuse. In 1796, African American Methodists at John Street Church in New York, likewise in an effort to escape discrimination, made a formal request to Bishop Asbury for permission to form their own separate society. Allen and his followers would eventually form the African Methodist Episcopal Church in 1816, with Allen as the denomination's first bishop. The experience of African American Methodists at John Street Church in New York led to the later founding of the African Methodist Episcopal Church, Zion, in 1821, with James Varick elected as the Church's first bishop.

In 1866, African American Methodists of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, (MECS) realized that the time was ripe for action that might lead to shaping their own future without white domination and control. African American members petitioned the first meeting of the MECS General Conference after the Civil War for a separate church. The Colored Methodist Episcopal Church was subsequently established in 1870, with William Miles and Richard Vanderhorst elected as the new Church's first bishops. In 1956, the denomination changed its name to Christian Methodist Episcopal Church.

While racial discrimination lies at the core in the case of each of the aforementioned black Methodist denominational foundations, conflict over governance played at least a background role. African American Methodists who were still part of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South after the Civil War desired not only separate congregations, but a separate church in which white churchmen were not making decisions concerning pastoral supply and property.

Richard Allen and his co-religionists who left St. George's initially desired to remain part of the Methodist Episcopal Church, but in segregated congregations where they would not experience the humiliation of discrimination in worship. In 1794, Francis Asbury himself dedicated a building for the use of Black Methodists in Philadelphia. However, African American Methodists chafed over the "trust clause," which vested property rights of local churches in the annual conference. Allen and his fellow Methodists realized they only would be able ultimately to exercise control over their churches and church properties by organizing independently of the Methodist Episcopal Church. The A.M.E. denomination subsequently came to birth.

In New York, African American Methodists who left John Street Church to organize Zion Chapel were at first able to negotiate local control of church property while allowing ministerial control to remain with the annual conference. The history of the establishment of the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church in 1821 is complex, but the failure to grant full elders ordination to African American preachers was a primary issue leading to the eventual break from the Methodist Episcopal Church.³

³ Norwood, 172-173.

Divisions in White Methodism Over Governance

Divisions within the Methodist Episcopal Church over issues of polity and governance, lay representation, and the powers of the episcopacy, can be said to have been present before the inception of the Methodist Episcopal Church in 1784. Even the founding Christmas Conference contained the seeds of controversy, as Asbury refused Wesley's appointment as General Superintendent without the consent of the preachers in conference, and then later accepted the title of bishop—much to Wesley's chagrin.

James O'Kelly, who was at the center of a 1770s controversy over lay administration of the sacraments, later led a faction dissatisfied with the appointment process and the growing power of the episcopacy. In 1792, his group broke away and became the Republican Methodist Church. That denomination declined and ceased independent existence after a little more than ten years. The impact of the O'Kelly schism should not be underestimated. However, it was the Reform Movement of the 1820s that finally led to a more far-reaching and lasting split in Methodism.

The Reformers imbibed of the same populist and democratic sentiment that propelled Andrew Jackson to the Presidency. They demanded election of district superintendents rather than their appointment by the bishops, full conference membership for local preachers, and—most importantly—lay representation at conference. Failing to achieve the sought-for reforms at the General Conference of 1828, the very year in which Jackson was elected President, they convened at Baltimore in 1830 to form the Methodist Protestant Church.

The Methodist Protestant Church enjoyed perhaps its greatest success as a denomination in Maryland. Reform-minded Methodists in the Williamsport, Maryland, area played a significant local role in the establishment of Methodist Protestant work in western Maryland. A cryptic letter from Mr. Robert Wilson of Williamsport to Rev. Henry Smith, appointed preacher to the Hagerstown M.E. Circuit, is evidence of the desire of Williamsport Methodists to separate from the Methodist Episcopal Church with the hope of retaining local church property. Following is the text of that epistle:

Rev. Henry Smith
Hagers Town

Williams Port
January 24, 1832

Brother Smith,

Since you left us I have thought that you should have granted the plan suggested by me at our last meeting if you could make the arrangements to do so. That was to call a meeting of the board of trustees in this place—previous to Quarterly Meeting. And I hereby repeat my suggestion. If you can with propriety pay us a visit shortly, or before Quarterly Meeting, I think it the best, as it is the last Quarterly Meeting. And should you after the meeting of the board of trustees find it necessary to have any reference to the official body, you will then have an opportunity to do so and to close the business of the circuit.

However I only mention it to you again. Should you do so, you can drop me a few lines and the time, and I will notify the board accordingly.

I hope, my dear brother, you will not let what has occurred afflict your mind. We are sorry to afflict you in any way. As an individual, were I in your place and seeing

as you see, I would act as you have done. May grace sustain you.
R. Wilson⁴

Wilson was unable to persuade Rev. Smith to arrange the discharge of the church property in Williamsport to the dissidents. Smith made it clear that, no matter how many members wished to unite with the newly organized Methodist Protestant Church, the property was held in trust for the Methodist Episcopal Conference and would not be ceded.

In August, 1832, a large group of members left three churches in the Williamsport area: Prather's Chapel on Clear Spring Circuit, Williamsport on Hagerstown Circuit, and Harmony on Berkeley Circuit. They formed a circuit under the leadership of Wilson, and were received into the Methodist Protestant Church the following year. By 1834, the Williamsport class had erected a church building in Williamsport and named it Rehoboth Methodist Protestant Church. Wilson was later licensed by the denomination, and served as the circuit's pastor from 1836 to 1839.⁵

Ironically, Robert Wilson had been involved in a landmark court case in the Williamsport area sixteen years previous to the formation of the Rehoboth Methodist Protestant congregation. At the center of the case was a camp meeting sermon delivered by a popular preacher and presiding elder in the Methodist Episcopal Church: Jacob Gruber. Gruber's trial and later life bring us to Methodism's divisions over slavery.

Jacob Gruber, Race, and Slavery

Further splits within white Methodism over the issue of slavery presaged the American Civil War. Well before the division of the American states in 1860, the Methodist Episcopal Church in 1844 divided over the slavery issue into Northern and Southern denominations. In 1858, the northern and southern conferences of the Methodist Protestant Church separated from one another after a petition to their General Conference proposing an anti-slavery revision to the constitution was denied.

Prior to the 1830s, a concept of gradual emancipation and prohibition of slavery was the accepted philosophy. But with the establishment of the American Anti-Slavery Society in 1833 by William Lloyd Garrison, and its call for the immediate freedom of all slaves, the abolitionist movement began to come into full flower. It relied heavily upon the right of free speech and—to a very significant degree—the exercise of that right from the pulpit. The case of Jacob Gruber's 1818 camp meeting sermon, preached near Williamsport, Maryland on the Jonas Hogmire farm, was a landmark in defending the right of preachers to proclaim the gospel as it applied to the slavery question.

⁴ Robert Wilson to Rev. Henry Smith, January 24, 1832, Archives of the Susquehanna Conference of The United Methodist Church, Lycoming College, Williamsport, Pennsylvania.

⁵ Milton Loyer, "Tour Notes, Wednesday, May 16, 2012" (Paper presented at the joint meetings of the Northeast Jurisdiction Commission on Archives and History and the Historical Society of The United Methodist Church).

Jacob Gruber was born in Bucks County, Pennsylvania, in 1778. Raised by German Lutheran parents, Gruber converted to Methodism at age nineteen and quickly became a class leader. In 1800 he petitioned for admittance as a traveling preacher in the Methodist Episcopal Church. He was admitted on trial and appointed to Tioga Circuit, which encompassed parts of north-central Pennsylvania and south-central New York. It was a geographically vicious circuit of four weeks travel by horse.

Gruber was one of only two Methodist preachers at the time who could preach in both German and English, the other being Henry Boehm. The significance of his bilingual ability for outreach among the growing number of German immigrants in southern Pennsylvania and northern Maryland did not escape Bishop Asbury. In 1803 Gruber and Boehm were appointed to Dauphin Circuit in the Harrisburg, Pennsylvania area. By 1810, Gruber had been appointed presiding elder over the Monongahela District and Boehm had become Asbury's traveling companion. Gruber served the expansive Monongahela District, extending from Lake Erie into what is today West Virginia, until 1814 when he was given a station appointment in the City of Baltimore. In 1816, Gruber was appointed to Carlisle Circuit in central Pennsylvania. Shortly thereafter, however, the Presiding Elder in Carlisle District fell ill, and Gruber was called upon to fill the vacated appointment.

At the time, Carlisle District encompassed much of south-central Pennsylvania, western Maryland, and northern Virginia—which places Williamsport at the approximate center of Gruber's district. In the August 12, 1818, edition of *The Maryland Herald and Hagerstown Weekly Advertiser* an announcement for a camp meeting, scheduled to begin later that same week, appeared on the front page:

Camp Meeting

On Thursday the 15th day of August next, a Camp Meeting will be held, if the Lord will, on the lands of Colonel Jonas Hogmire, in Washington county, Maryland; at which time and place all serious and well disposed persons, who feel desirous to hear the gospel preached, are respectfully invited to attend.

Tent holders will please take notice, that they must bring with them the necessary materials for erecting their tents.

The public are [sic] hereby notified, that, agreeably to a late act of Assembly, no person is permitted to erect any booth for the sale of spirituous liquors within two miles of any Methodist Camp Meeting; the provisions of which act of Assembly will be rigidly enforced.⁶

The meeting ran from Thursday until Sunday. On Sunday evening, August 16, the preacher scheduled to deliver the featured address, the closing sermon, was physically unable to perform his duties. It became incumbent upon Gruber, as presiding elder, to find someone to preach or take on the responsibility himself. Unsuccessful at finding a willing or able substitute, Gruber assumed the pulpit. It is believed some three thousand whites and

⁶ Ed., *The Maryland Herald, and Hagers-town Weekly Advertiser*, Wednesday, August 12, 1818.

perhaps four hundred African Americans, including slaves and freedmen, were in attendance.

Following a prayer, Gruber read his text from Proverbs 14:34: “Righteousness exalteth a nation, but sin is a reproach to any people.” Expounding upon the verse in relation to personal sins, as well as the societal sins of the nation—among which he chiefly named slavery—Gruber preached for about an hour before concluding. On Wednesday, August 19, a warrant was issued for Gruber’s arrest by justices of Washington County.

The warrant could not be immediately served on Gruber, as he had left Washington County following the conclusion of the camp meeting. But two months later, he returned to the Methodist Episcopal Church in Williamsport to conduct quarterly conference and was arrested. Following a hearing in the Washington County Court at Hagerstown, a grand jury handed down an indictment that Gruber be bound over for trial on three separate charges of sedition, instigating insurrection, and inciting a slave rebellion.⁷

Robert Wilson, the later Methodist Protestant dissenter who became a co-founder of Rehoboth Methodist Protestant Church, was one of two local men who pledged Gruber’s bail. Upon the advice of legal counsel, Gruber petitioned for a change-of-venue to Frederick County, Maryland, court. The petition was granted and the trial opened in Frederick on March 10, 1819. Clergy friends procured the services of a team of four attorneys to defend Gruber. The leading member of the four was Roger B. Taney, later Chief Justice of the United States Supreme Court.⁸

Gruber’s Sermon

What had Gruber said in the course of his sermon that so enraged slave-owning citizens present at the Washington County camp meeting? What had he employed as sources for his theology and preaching, and what were the sources of this sermon, in particular? What were Gruber’s greatest influences?

Gruber provided a transcript of his sermon to David Martin, a printer in Frederick, for publication shortly after the conclusion of the trial. The opening movements of the sermon laid down a point-by-point exposition of the Methodist plan of salvation: justification by faith, regeneration or the new birth, and sanctification. These three Gruber identifies in his sermon with the terms “sentimental righteousness”; “experimental righteousness”; and “practical righteousness,” thus making the first phrase of his text, “righteousness exalteth a nation,” fit the designs of this part of his message.

The second movement in Gruber’s sermon picked up on the second phrase of his text: “but sin is a reproach to any people.” He expanded the scope of the text immediately by saying that “sin is a reproach to any people, nation, or person. Sin is a transgression of the Law. The way of transgressors is hard. He that committeth sin is the servant of sin. He that committeth sin is

⁷ *Trial of the Reverend Jacob Gruber* (Frederick, MD: David Martin, 1819), v–vi.

⁸ W. P. Strickland, *Life of Jacob Gruber* (New York: Carlton & Porter, 1860), 140–141.

of the devil. Sin is a reproach to any person, no matter what his rank.⁹

From here, Gruber launched a broadside that covered anyone and everyone among his listeners, for whom sin is a reproach: magistrates, rulers, the rich, the poor, the young, the old, parents, the religious as well as the irreligious. He then briefly attacked the more common personal and individual sins that were favorite targets of American evangelicalism of the time: drunkenness and profanity. But he saved the bulk of his sermon for that which he identified as the most grievous societal and national sin of the time: slavery. His sermon transcript deserves quoting here at length:

And the last National Sin I shall mention is slavery and oppression. This in particular, is a reproach to our nation. We pity other nations who are under the yoke of Emperors and Kings, who tyrannize over, and make slaves of their subjects. We are happily delivered from such bondage; we live in a free country; we hold self-evident truths, that all men are created equal, and have unalienable rights, such as life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. But are there no slaves in our country? Does not sweat, blood, and tears say there are? The voice of thy brother's blood crieth. Is it not a reproach to a man to hold articles of liberty and independence in one hand and a bloody whip in the other, while a Negro stands and trembles before him, with his back cut and bleeding? There is a laudable zeal manifested in our country to form Bible and Missionary Societies to send the Scriptures and the gospel to heathen nations. Would it not be well for some to be consistent? Instruct the heathen at home in their kitchens, and let them hear the gospel likewise. What would heathen nations at a distance think, if they were told that persons who gave money liberally to send them the Bible and the gospel did not read, believe, or obey it themselves, nor teach their own families to read that book; nor allow them time to hear the gospel of their salvation preached?

There is some difference even in this country. We Pennsylvanians think strange, and it seems curious to read the public prints or papers from some states and find—*For sale, a plantation, a house and lot, horses, cows, sheep and hogs—also, a number of Negroes; men, women and children—some very valuable ones—also, a pew in such and such a church—For sale, for life, a likely young Negro, who is an excellent waiter; sold for no fault—or else for want of employment.* These are sold for cash—for four, five, six, seven, or eight hundred dollars a head; soul and body together—ranked with horses, etc., etc. Look further and see—*Fifty dollars reward—One hundred dollars reward—Two hundred dollars reward.* What for? Has an apprentice run away from his master? No—perhaps a reward for him would be six cents. A man that ran off has, probably, gone to see his wife, or child, or relations who have been sold and torn from him; or to enjoy the blessings of a free country, and to get clear of tyranny. In this inhuman traffic and cruel trade the most tender ties are torn asunder, the nearest connexions [sic] broken. That which God has joined together, let no man put asunder. This solemn injunction is not regarded. Will not God be avenged on such a nation as this?¹⁰

Perhaps the last line of this section is exactly that which incensed Gruber's slave-holding listeners. We pause to note a couple of elements in this section of the sermon.

First, Gruber references the Declaration of Independence as the foundation of freedom for all people in America, including slaves. He exposed the self-contradictory and hypocritical nature of slavery in a nation founded

⁹ *Trial*, xv.

¹⁰ *Trial*, xvii-xix.

upon the principles of the United States. Inconsistency between profession and practice was always a target of Gruber's preaching and public discourse, whether in matters of morality or religion. This same rhetoric is found in the early abolition sermons of Luther Lee and others who followed Gruber by twenty years.

Secondly, Gruber carried his accusations of inconsistency beyond the civil foundations of the nation and laid them as well at the feet of American Christianity. This was the era in which voluntary societies were beginning to form in the life of American evangelicalism. Gruber commended the sentiment behind their formation, but called attention to the paradox of providing resources for foreign missions while disobeying gospel injunctions at home.

If the last phrase in the previously quoted section of the sermon incensed the slave owners in attendance upon Gruber's sermon, the following section became the grounds cited for the charges brought against him. Witnesses for the prosecution quoted—and misquoted—this segment most often in their testimony:

But some say, we use our slaves well; better than they could use themselves if they were free. Granted. But what assurance have you, or what security have they that your children, or those you will them to will use them as you do? May they not tyrannize over them after you are dead and gone, and may they not (the slaves thus abused), rise up and kill your children, their oppressors, and be hung for it, and all go to destruction together? The Lord have mercy on their souls. Such alarming and dreadful consequences may attend and follow this reproachful sin in our land and nation.¹¹

The majority of prosecution witnesses admitted to leaving the camp meeting at this point, too enraged to listen to Gruber any longer.

The sources of the first movement in Gruber's sermon are easily identified as his own well-formed Methodist theology. In this second movement, Gruber employed a technique of borrowing from secular books, documents, and writings to make a sermon speak to the surrounding culture. In his closing argument for the defense during Gruber's trial, Roger B. Taney demonstrated how Gruber had not said anything that a prominent American legislator had not said. Recall that part of Gruber's sermon following his reference to the Declaration of Independence and compare it to a speech given by Congressman Talmadge in the U.S. House of Representatives during the debates over Missouri's application to the union as a slave state, which Taney quoted in his closing argument:

You boast of freedom in your constitution and your laws; you have proclaimed in your declaration of rights that all men are created equal; that they are endowed with certain unalienable rights; among these life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness; and yet you have slaves in your country.... This is a subject upon which I have great feeling for the honor of my country. In a former debate upon the Illinois territory I mentioned that our enemies had drawn a picture of our country, as holding in one hand our declaration of rights and with the other brandishing a whip over our

¹¹ *Trial*, xix.

affrighted slaves.¹²

A “Sheriff’s Sale” notice appearing on the front page of the same issue of *The Maryland Herald and Hagerstown Weekly Advertiser* in which the subject camp meeting was advertised listed a confiscated twenty-four-year-old slave among the property to be auctioned. It is surely only one example of what Gruber noted in his sermon and found strange to read. He more than likely read the notices of slaves for sale as he noted the announcement for the upcoming camp meeting, and the inconsistency of the two appearing together was certainly not lost on him.

Another undeniable source for Gruber’s personal morality and preaching would have been his own Pennsylvania German roots. The Pennsylvania German communities of southeastern and central Pennsylvania had a strong democratic ethic in religion as well as politics.¹³

Gruber’s ministerial experience among an all-black Methodist Episcopal congregation in Baltimore during 1814 likely also was an influence. Sharp Street Methodist Episcopal Church was the counterpart to the all-white Light Street Church—both of which Gruber served in his Baltimore appointment. He once wrote in his journal that preaching to the Sharp Street congregation was a more rewarding task than preaching among the whites at Light Street, complaining that the aristocratic whites found it difficult to deny themselves, and were greedy, materialistic, and vindictive.¹⁴

Verdict and Post-Trial

The prosecution case against Jacob Gruber was perhaps as weak as his camp meeting sermon had been strong. The Frederick County District Attorney who prosecuted the case, Franklin Anderson, concluded with a statement indicating he found no fault, personally, with Gruber, but that the jury should not allow this to influence their decision. The Methodist preachers present at the camp meeting were all called in defense and their testimonies of exactly what Gruber had said and what had happened at the camp meeting on Sunday, August 16, 1818, all very closely agreed. Taney’s one-hour closing argument for the defense was eloquent. The jury deliberated only briefly before handing down a verdict of “not guilty.”¹⁵

The decision in the Gruber trial set a precedent for freedom of discourse in the pulpit, which was a decisive element in the attacks of later abolitionists upon slavery. It was the issue of slavery that was grounds for Methodism’s most noted and bitter division. However, Gruber’s activities that would be mirrored later in the slavery struggle within Methodism were not over.

Following his acquittal, Gruber and Bishop McKendree agreed that his

¹² *Trial*, 76.

¹³ See Stephen L. Longenecker, *Democracy’s Pulpit: Religion and Egalitarianism Among Early Pennsylvania Germans* (Ann Arbor: UMI Dissertation Services, 1990).

¹⁴ Jacob Gruber, *Journal*, quoted in W. P. Strickland, *Life of Jacob Gruber* (New York: Carlton & Porter, 1860), 308.

¹⁵ *Trial*, 21-139.

return to Carlisle District as presiding elder would not be advisable. McKendree desired to appoint Gruber to the Missouri territory, whose application to the Union as a slave state was pending. Bishop Roberts intervened, suggesting that Gruber deserved less strenuous duty. He was subsequently appointed to Frederick Circuit. A year later, Gruber made a surprise request for transfer to Philadelphia Conference. His colleagues were puzzled, but Gruber had personal motives known only to one other person beside himself.

Francis Asbury had desired a corps of celibate itinerant ministers. In an 1810 letter to Gruber, Asbury bemoaned the growing tendency of Methodist preachers to marry and locate. "The rich are coming in," wrote Asbury, "they bring their daughters, Methodist preachers marrying, falling! Oh Lord help the locating, leaving the work, never counting the cost preachers."¹⁶ Gruber respected Asbury's wishes as long as he lived. But Asbury died in 1816, and Gruber experienced much hardship in the succeeding four years. As soon as he knew his request for transfer would be granted and he would be appointed to Dauphin Circuit, Gruber departed for Harrisburg where he rented a house. He then returned to Maryland and married Miss Sally Howard. It took a day to pack the couple's belongings and then they moved to Harrisburg. Among Sally's belongings was a personal slave: a twenty-year-old woman named Susey.¹⁷

Gruber's marriage to a slaveholder drew immediate fire from his ministerial colleagues. Accusations of the worst hypocrisy were made in letters printed in *The Christian Advocate*. However, he soon silenced his critics through a published rebuttal:

The fact is, my wife never had but one slave, and that one got free two days after we were married by getting into Pennsylvania; so, instead of getting any slaves in marriage, I got two slaves free in that family, namely, Sally Howard, who worked more than any slave in the house, and her girl, Susey.¹⁸

Gruber's marriage is significant because it was the issue of slaves acquired through marriage that finally ignited the conflict resulting in the division of the Church into two denominations, one based in the south and one based in the north.

In the early years of American Methodism, emancipation was a common practice among those coming into membership, but the practice waned after 1800 as slavery became more deeply institutionalized and economically entrenched.¹⁹ At the 1844 General Conference, the case of Francis Harding was presented to the delegates. Harding, a member of the Baltimore Conference, had been suspended for failing to emancipate slaves acquired in marriage. He appealed to the General Conference for reinstatement, but his ap-

¹⁶ Bishop Francis Asbury to Rev. Jacob Gruber, January 26, 1810, Archives of the Baltimore-Washington Conference of The United Methodist Church, Lovely Lane Museum, Baltimore.

¹⁷ Strickland, 269.

¹⁸ Quoted in Strickland, 270.

¹⁹ See Fred J. Hood, "Methodist Bishops and Abolitionism," *Border States: Journal of the Kentucky-Tennessee American Studies Association*, vol. 1 (1973). Accessed online at spider.georgetowncollege.edu/htallant/border/bs1/hood.htm.

peal was denied. Directly, the General Conference demanded Bishop James O. Andrew of Georgia manumit two slaves who had been bequeathed to him by his first wife. Andrew argued that Georgia law forbade him to do so. The General Conference then demanded that he suspend his episcopacy until the “impediment” of his slave ownership was resolved. Southern delegates protested, but the die was cast. A reticence to resolve the issue prevailed among the majority of delegates. Within days a Plan of Separation, allowing annual conferences in slaveholding states to form their own denomination, was presented and adopted.

While slavery was the paramount issue of division in Methodism’s biggest civil war, as in the case of the American Civil War, it should not be supposed that questions of government, power, and constitutionality were not also involved. The issue of episcopal power was again in question in the Bishop Andrew case. The majority of delegates to the 1844 General Conference maintained that the General Conference was the final authority for the Church. General Conference elected bishops therefore their power was derivative. Southern opposition argued that the constitution of the Church coordinately placed shared power in the General Conference and the episcopacy. They maintained that disciplinary action by the General Conference against Bishop Andrew was unconstitutional.

In closing it needs to be pointed out that Jacob Gruber was probably not so much an intentional rabble-rouser as he was a reluctant-but-ready antagonist. After his 1820 marriage to Sally Howard, he spent the next ten years quietly located first in Harrisburg and then in Germantown, Pennsylvania. He returned to Baltimore Conference in 1833, in order to move his ailing wife closer to her family. She died the following year, and Gruber remained an unmarried widower until 1837, when he married Rachel Martin, a widow from Lewistown, Pennsylvania. He spent his last thirteen years in ministry itinerating in Pennsylvania’s Juniata Valley, founding new meetinghouses, and advancing Methodist Episcopal work in the area. Ironically, much of his ministry was exercised in opposition to mounting efforts by the Methodist Protestant Church in that region. Gruber died in Lewistown on May 25, 1850.

The breaches in white Methodism caused by its civil wars were generally mended in the 1939 merger. Jacob Gruber would be gratified to know that slavery was abolished and his riven church eventually mended. The 1968 merger of the Methodists with the Evangelicals and United Brethren might further gratify him, being a German speaker himself.

Despite his strong stand against slavery, Gruber seems to have uncritically accepted racial segregation in the church. However, the continuing reality of segregation we must, in Gruber’s words, call a national sin.