Blacks in the History of the Bethel Churches (Methodist) of Charleston, South Carolina

David Myers

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.wofford.edu/methodistbooks

Part of the African American Studies Commons, Christian Denominations and Sects Commons, History of Christianity Commons, and the History of Religion Commons
BLACKS
in the HISTORY of the
BETHEL CHURCHES
(METHODIST)
of Charleston, South Carolina

Rendering of 1797 Bethel Building

By David Myers
Material cited herein under “Fair Use Doctrine” as codified in Section 107 of the Copyright Act.
PREFACE

For the bicentennial of the Bethel United Methodist Church congregation, Ann Taylor Andrus prepared

The Name Shall Be Bethel
The History of Bethel United Methodist Church
1797–1997

Hers was and is a comprehensive and beautiful presentation of the historic and enduring faith of the Christians whose church home has been located at 57 Pitt Street, Charleston, South Carolina, for two and a quarter centuries.

This pamphlet is not so comprehensive as hers. Those looking for a fuller history should look first to Mrs. Andrus’s appreciative and devotionally prepared volume.

My own interest in the much narrower focus of this work was whetted by Mrs. Andrus’s report of 4,367 Black members leaving Bethel in 1818 and of White people leaving over the seating arrangement for Black members in 1834. I was surprised that Black people in 1818 had the agency to decide for themselves to leave the church and that White people might not routinely win any dispute involving them.

Here I’ve tried to find answers by reviewing the “setting in life” of Blacks in the Bethel churches from the late-eighteenth century to the present.

As a word ‘Black’(s) will (to borrow James Baldwin’s ideas) herein reference those for whom “…there has yet arrived no sensibility sufficiently profound and tough
to…”\textsuperscript{1} adequately describe. Nevertheless, Baldwin suggested parameters that encompass “nothing less than the long and painful experience of a people; [that] comes out of the battle waged to maintain their integrity or, to put it more simply, out of their struggle to survive.”\textsuperscript{2}

David Myers

\textit{June, 2022}

\textsuperscript{1} James Baldwin, “Many Thousands Gone” in \textit{The Price of the Ticket} (Boston: Beacon Press, 1985), p. 83.

\textsuperscript{2} Ibid.
In 1785, Edgar Wells became the first resident of Charleston to join that city’s Methodist Society (church). He was converted during the visit of three itinerant preachers\(^1\) who bore a letter of introduction from one of Mr. Wells’s Georgetown relatives. They caught him unawares preparing for an evening at the theater. Instead, the trio of charismatic strangers was soon leading the household in worship. One of the members of that household was a little Black girl—maybe as young as six.\(^2\) She was Rachel, by law owned by Wells and by name identified as his property.

Rachel Wells was the first-known person of color to become a member of that Methodist Society, which met in Mr. Wells’s home. It was in that place that Rachel came to know herself as a child of God, and, thus, in that place, she learned of her true identity.

This narrative is about Rachel and thousands of other Methodist people of color associated with the Bethel churches in Charleston, South Carolina, whose faith sustained a promise of freedom—who, pressing forward toward that “promised land,” nurtured a right to their own humanity, claiming it through passive and active resistance, moral rectitude, Scriptural truth

---

\(^1\) They were Francis Asbury, Jessie Lee, and Henry Willis.

\(^2\) When Rachel Wells died in 1849, she was said to be seventy. If so, she would have been born in 1779.
telling, and lively worship. All the while, they were challenging\(^1\) the White Church to see, to understand, and to serve the cause of Christ.

Rachel “saw the foundation laid of the first Cumberland Street Church,”\(^2\) the first building specifically constructed for the use of the Methodists in Charleston. It’s a convenient place to start, because, as Bishop James O. Andrew put it:

*It gave them an established and permanent character. It was a public declaration that we had driven down our stake and intended to hold on.*\(^3\)

The project, begun in mid-1786, was collaborative. Meticulous records of monetary dis-

---

1 The agenda of the governing bodies of Methodism (called “Conferences”) was organized around a series of questions, for example, in 1787:

Quest. 17. *What directions shall we give for the promotion of the spiritual welfare of the coloured people?*

Ans. *We conjure all our ministers and preachers, by the love of God, and the salvation of souls, and do require them, by all authority that is invested in us, to leave nothing undone for the spiritual benefit and salvation of them,…and for this purpose to embrace every opportunity of inquiring into the state of their souls, and to unite in society those who appear to have a real desire of fleeing from the wrath to come; to meet such in class, and to exercise the whole Methodist discipline among them.*


bursements named specific individuals and the work they did:

To brother Broughton, to buy stones, £1. For cartage of boards, 5s. To brother Hughes, for nails, £1. To brother Seavers, for work, £10. To brother Seavers; for corn for workmen, 10s. 6d.¹

“Corn for workmen” likely references the common mush provided enslaved labor, but such historic markers that “people of color” were involved are hardly necessary. Blacks were too large a portion of the available labor force in the population of Charleston in 1786 not to have been engaged. When a census was taken in 1790, it showed there were 7,684 slaves and 586 free Blacks among the 16,359 counted. The twenty-three “colored members” of the Methodist Society itself were about forty percent of the total membership.

Based on these records of financial distributions, the Rev. Francis Asbury Mood, in his invaluable 1856 *Methodism in Charleston*, concluded: “These entries show the Methodists to have been liberally patronized, and that if a Methodist was engaged in any avocation that could be of any avail in connection with their church building, his services and goods and attention received the preference.”² Though he doesn’t mention any Black person by name, since Charleston’s Black Methodists “constituted the greatest number and densest concentration of black

¹ Ibid., 38.
² Ibid.
Protestants in the world around 1820,”¹ they most certainly were among the laborers.

The building they together built on Cumberland Street was plain. Called derisively “a barn,” its windows had only wooden shutters to cover them; light was provided by a row of glazed panes above each window and the door. The floor was covered with a layer of clean white sand, and the congregation sat on plain pine benches.²

Plain it may have been. Yet, it had a unique feature. Multiple sources³ claim that Cumberland Street Methodist Church built the first separate Black gallery in North America.

From that segregated perch, Blacks defined the worship experience in Charleston’s Methodist

---

churches at the end of the eighteenth century and thereafter. Sunday worship incorporated Black participation into the general flow of the liturgy. “Sonically, the persistent call-and-response of black Methodists made the experience of Sunday service at Cumberland or Bethel [after 1797] unlike any other in town.”

That uniqueness became a source of trouble. Called the “negro church” with the “negro” preachers, White and Black members were persistently harassed. Mood said:

Methodists were watched, ridiculed, and openly assailed…. While the congregation were quietly engaged in worship, a crowd assailed the church, beating open the doors, and breaking open the windows…. The church…was…called to suffer much annoyance from rioters and mobs…. For a long time…, every night the services were interrupted by riotous proceedings outside; and…. while in-doors, and especially when dispersing, were grossly insulted, because their cowardly assailants felt they could do it with impunity.

However, Methodists were not without resolve. An advertisement once promised “that any person, members or otherwise, who attend the congregations, and are suitable persons, who will volunteer in the

---

1 Rose, “The Charleston ‘School of Slavery’,” 59.
2 Mood, Methodism in Charleston, 64, 73, 78.
business, shall be united into a body or society for the purpose of watching and suppressing, by all possible lawful measures, all such riots and disorders.”¹ Not in response to the ad but out of personal annoyance, for a while, they found an unlikely champion in the person of Cranmer, who, “though wicked and thoughtless about religion,…seemed always to find a pleasure in the services.” He became “really a terror to evil-doers.” His authority began with a whisper in the ear of “one the leaders in the church riots,” who apparently was hard of hearing. So, Cranmer propelled him outside and there “gave him the necessary dressing.”²

Looking backward from the quiet respectability Methodists had obtained a half-century later, Mood saw an “unoffending people” whose only “crimes were, that they preached without gowns, sung without organs, and worshipped without a steepled appendage to their church building, and that, though wanting those, people were converted and made better.”³

Though such criticism had indeed been made, it did not propel ruffians into the streets. What propelled them was slavery. As was later observed, “The Charleston public especially was easily excited by any public reference to the subject of slavery, and

---

² Ibid.
³ Ibid., 248.
Methodist preachers were objects of suspicion and dislike.”

Methodists were known to be opposed to slavery. John Wesley, its founding father, abhorred the institution when he encountered it in Charleston in the 1730’s. When home again in England, he joined William Wilberforce in crusading against the trade. But Wesley’s more important contributions lay in the “societies” he established “to promote spiritual holiness.” Members were expected to live a holy life. Through a set of rules, Wesley set forth specifics on how to do that. The rules began succinctly: “Firstly, by doing no harm, by avoiding evil of every kind, especially that which is most generally practiced, such as…” There followed an extensive list that included “slaveholding; buying or selling slaves.” Methodists could not and did not do those things!

Charlestonians heard about that firsthand from one of the two trusted men Wesley sent to superintend the growing Methodist movement in America. Thomas Coke was especially zealous on the subject and was plainspoken on the topic when he visited Charleston. Years later, the Rev. Mr. Mood and others, unable to accept that Coke’s opinion could have been broadly shared, blamed him in particular for fomenting the persecution of Charleston Methodists in the eighteenth century.

---

1 Albert M. Shipp, *The History of Methodism in South Carolina* (Nashville, TN: Southern Methodist Publishing House, 1884), 329, biodiversitylibrary.org/item/71212#page/7/mode/1up.
We do feel astonished that any Methodist preacher would press before the public his notions of reform, at the sacrifice of the peace, comfort and good name of others, and continue his conduct in the face of their sufferings and remonstrances. Dr. Coke did not suit the latitude of the Carolinas; and while we revere his pious zeal and self-sacrificing devotion, we believe it had been better, far better, had he prudently remained away from the city of Charleston.¹

Ever the apologist, Mood exaggerates the singular importance of Coke. In fact, the troubles continued long afterward. Mood himself revealed that as late as 1817–18 “molestation” continued.

The reputation and behavior of Methodists in Charleston so unsettled White people that few became members of the society, whereas, Black membership grew exponentially from twenty-three in 1785 to 903 by 1804.²

If the fact of enslavement was not the only reason Blacks became Methodists, it was certainly an extremely significant one, because Methodism spoke to the denial of the right to claim oneself as one’s own.

The unenslaved can objectify the institution of slavery. They can analyze it from a distance. They can theorize about the best ways to manage slaves to maximize efficiency and profit. But for the enslaved,

² White membership, starting at thirty-five in 1785, barely doubled during the same period.
it is a *state of being*! It is a condition of life. Its connection with the very essence of life is why the Christian Church has always found slavery to be a useful metaphor for the unredeemed life. But, of course, actual slavery is not a metaphor; it is not a parable. Nevertheless, in the evangelical church’s good news of redemption from spiritual enslavement through conversion, Black’s encountered and embraced the spiritual power of a Gospel of Liberation. Thus, for Blacks as well as Whites the conversion experience became ‘a common ground of belief’.

Conversion, for example, was the avenue that led Edgar Wells to be the first Charlestonian to be a Methodist. Francis Asbury (the second and more important of the two Englishmen John Wesley sent to America to oversee the movement) describes a five-day struggle that began on Saturday, September 5, 1785. It culminated Wednesday evening (the ninth), when “the clouds about Mr. Wells began to disperse; in the morning he could rejoice in the Lord. How great is the work of God—once a sinner, yesterday a seeker, and now His adopted child!”

Already in 1785, Francis Asbury was the face of American Methodism. The movement’s English antecedents forced him into retirement during the Revolutionary War. But afterwards, he quickly gathered the American Methodist preachers at

---

Baltimore. There, on Christmas Eve 1784, they formulated a clearly American identity as the Methodist Episcopal Church (M.E.C.). At that same conference, Asbury was made a bishop. Thereafter, with indefatigable energy, Asbury began a well-journalized thirty-two-year peregrination, mostly on horseback. His six-thousand-mile annual circuit along the eastern seaboard and into the frontier spurred the growth and cemented the administrative structure that made the M.E.C. a truly national organization. His stops were so well documented that ever after, cherished associations with Asbury’s name were easily established: Asbury “slept here,” “preached here,” “held conference here,” and so forth. Charleston was a frequent stop.

Asbury often despaired of prospects in the city. So, the conversion of Wells was momentous in Asbury’s view. “Now,” he wrote, “we know that God hath brought us here, and have a hope that there will be a glorious work among the people—at least among the Africans.” The prospect of Black conversions led Asbury to be more circumspect than Thomas Coke had been. A hardline position that “the state of society, unhappily, does not admit of this” meant that “their masters will not let them come to hear us.” “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?” “What is the personal liberty of the African which he may abuse, to the salvation of his soul?”

---

1 Asbury, *Journal*, entry for February 1, 1809, 258.
Like Asbury, Albert Raboteau (1943–2021), in his seminal *Slave Religion: The “Invisible Institution” in the Antebellum South*, found conversion of immense importance. “The conversion experience,” he believed, “equipped the slave with a sense of individual value and a personal vocation which contradicted the devaluing and dehumanizing forces of slavery.”¹

Blacks were Methodists because the Church addressed the condition of enslavement. As with Rachel Wells, the converted knew that no claim of her selfhood could best the claim of Christ and that before the Lord, she stood equal to any other person, White or Black. At the camp-meeting revivals, Blacks and Whites together experienced conversion. The necessity for a conversion experience was a common ground of belief shared by Black and White. And it often happened in a shared space.

Religious enthusiasm was, of course, a feature of revivalist religion, black or white. The spiritism of black worshipers…helped form the very environment in which conversions occurred. Today scholars recognize that black worshipers were a crucial part of the context in which white conversions took place. Conversions during church services or revival meetings were communal rites. An enthusiastic preacher, an emotional crowd with its own cries, songs and movements, and some members gripped by their

---

own mix of Christian beliefs and deeply felt regrets over past sins added up to emotional conversions.¹

Their common affirmation of the importance of a conversion experience enabled an inclusive worship style. It appears to have been an enduring feature (perhaps even a deepening one) across the years of the antebellum Church. Thus, after the Civil War, when the future of the interracial Church was being negotiated, a White member stood in the assembly and “in a feeling manner expressed his pleasure at worshipping with the colored people and hoped to be able to do so in the future.”²

This commonality of worship style, which allowed for “responses and hearty songs,” may also have attracted Blacks into the Methodist Church. While that style cannot perhaps be recaptured, even in the imagination, it may yet be glimpsed in, among other places, William B. McClain’s *Black People in the Methodist Church*:

> The preachers exhorted this fiery message of salvation and hope with personal, emotional appeal, and enthusiasm that often-triggered responses of infectious groans and shouts which spread throughout the meeting place.

¹ Saillant, “Before 1822.”  
² Minutes of the Board of Stewards of Bethel Methodist Episcopal Church, South, on file in the archive room of Bethel UMC, Charleston, SC.
It was not just the message but also the manner in which it was delivered.¹

An additional draw for Blacks to the Methodist Church was the unique opportunity its organizational scheme gave for a measure of Black autonomy. That scheme was the so-called “class” meeting system. This was an innovation of Wesley himself. The success and staying power of the Methodist movement in England is traceable to it. A 2021 U.M.C. website describes it:

Class meetings were small groups of twelve to fifteen members of a Methodist society who met weekly with their class leader. The leader was a mature follower of Jesus Christ who the society leaders discerned could be trusted with the spiritual formation and care of fellow Methodists. They led the weekly class meetings and served as role models for their class, and the other society members.²

Black Methodists in these small groups had Black leaders. They kept their own counsel, their own rolls, and their own records, took their own offerings, maintained their own treasuries, etc. They were, in many practical ways, their own church. There is evidence that they (quite apart from the White members) held a separate governing assembly, which at that time, because of the timing regularity of the

meeting, was called the Quarterly Conference. Of course, the power dynamic being what it was, White people kept a judicious eye open and expected regular reporting from Blacks. When they felt particularly anxious, Whites required Blacks to not meet without a White person present. However, because Black membership vastly outnumbered the White, this was generally impractical. So, there was a decidedly independent Black presence in the Methodist Church.

This system enabled Blacks not only some control over their own affairs but provided a small group for social support. Moreover, it became a necessary place for truth telling. Blacks understood that the liberating Gospel found in the Bible and the consolations of the hopes rooted in Scripture were not welcomed hermeneutics in the White Church. Consequently, separate spaces and secret places were needed.

Students of Gullah Geechee culture have noted evidence on the sea islands surrounding Charleston of distinctive religious practices among enslaved people. Thus, “black-led worship and activity away from whites in the praise house were central to enslaved people’s culture.”¹ The urban culture in Charleston differed from the relative isolation on the sea islands. For most of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, Charleston was the most racially integrated city in British North America.² “Black men and women

² Ibid.
shared streets, houses, grog shops, and workplaces with their white neighbors.” Yet, the need for “black-led worship and activity away from whites” was no less pressing. It was within “the invisible institution,” as Albert Raboteau labels it, that “slave religion” took shape and despite severe persecution and suffering, slave Christians bore witness to the Christian gospel, whose truth they perceived and maintained in contradiction to the debasement of that very gospel by those who held power over their bodies and their external actions, but not their souls.

The White Church failed the Gospel—that is referenced by Raboteau. Its acquiescence to slavery, rooted as it was in evangelism and mission, devolved over time into acceptance and finally into complicity. Dr. G. G. Smith, in his Life and Letters of James Osgood Andrew, described the mindset in 1840 clearly:

They had reached the conclusion that involuntary servitude was good, and that the evils of slavery, as they existed, were not necessarily connected with a system of labor without contract. Condemning all the moral evils which attended the system, they contended that these could be better corrected, and were less in the aggregate, than the evils which would follow emancipation.

1 Rose, “The Charleston ‘School of Slavery’,,” 69.
2 Raboteau, Slave Religion, 349, emphasis added.
3 George G. Smith, The Life and Letters of James Osgood Andrew (Nashville, TN, 1883), 346.
As will be seen, an unresolved tension persisted in the interracial antebellum Church. One side of that tension is expressively put by Howard Thurman in *Deep River: An Interpretation of Negro Spirituals*: “By some amazing but vastly creative spiritual insight the slave undertook the *redemption of a religion* that the master had profaned in his midst.”\(^1\)

For White Methodists in Charleston at the end of the eighteenth century, the tension was an existential crisis. It was about the possibility of Methodism going forward in Charleston. At times, it seemed a matter of life and death!

A. M. Shipp, one of a group of three preachers jointly serving the Charleston churches (one of which was Bethel) in 1842, rather dismissively reports in *History of South Carolina Methodism* what is in fact an act of terror. Given “the insane zeal of…early preachers,”

it is not strange…. [It] should have produced some excitement. A company of wild and reckless young men went to the Methodist meeting-house, determined to give the offending preacher a taste of mob law.\(^2\)

In fact, they waterboarded the guy. They “dragged him to the pump, when they turned a continuous current of water upon him till he was well-nigh drowned.”\(^3\) Indeed, he never recovered and later died.

---

3 Ibid., 329–30.
Believing that their evangelical mission could not succeed in the face of such constant harassment, the membership began distancing themselves from the emancipation rhetoric of the Methodist Episcopal Church. So, for example, when, sometime in 1800, pamphlets arrived filled with what the local minister adjudged to be “undisguised abolitionism,” he “stowed them away.” But, as seems inevitable with tantalizing secrets, soon “the wildest reports about the abolitionists and the Methodist preachers spread over the city.” That prompted a visit from the city’s mayor, in whose presence the pamphlets were thrown into a fire.

These were momentous and fraught times of decision. Black Methodists may have recognized them as necessary, even rational accommodations. This was an unwelcome fact of life, certainly, but because they experienced God at work in their own lives and for their own cause through the Methodist Church, they joined up. There was potential for Black faith to be expressed and practiced. Remarkably, within a couple of decades—albeit briefly—the possibility actually existed in the form of an “African Church.”
**Black Schism**

In 1817, Morris Brown, a class leader at Bethel Methodist Episcopal Church in Charleston, traveled with another man to Philadelphia because in that city there was an independent Black-controlled church. The year before, in 1816, the Rev. Richard Allen had organized the African Methodist Episcopal Church (A.M.E.). Allen, a Black man with deep roots in the Methodist movement, had been in Lovely Lane Chapel on that Christmas Eve Day 1784, when Francis Asbury assembled all the Methodist preachers in America who could get there. By the time they left Baltimore, the Methodist Episcopal Church had come into being and Asbury had ordained the preachers, including Allen, as clergymen of that new denomination. Marginalized because of his color, a disillusioned Allen and others formed the A.M.E. Morris Brown was interested.

White historians later claimed that this trip was part of a secret plot among Black Methodists to facilitate the establishment of an African Church in Charleston. It was alleged that this undercover activity had begun earlier (1815) when the White leadership became alarmed by reports that Blacks were accumulating funds from class collections to purchase the freedom of some enslaved people. Thereafter,
policies designed to limit Black self-regulation were enforced. Moreover, about the same time, the White establishment callously disregarded any consultation with the majority membership when they caused a so-called “hearse house” to be constructed on property the church had originally designated as burial ground for Black members. Eighty percent of Black Methodists in Charleston turned in their class rolls and left.

Now there were thousands of Black people, most of them Methodist, in an independent church in Charleston, South Carolina. The year was 1818. Given that Black people were still being bought and sold in public in Charleston as late as 1856,¹ the very existence of this Black church is remarkable. It didn’t last long. They “dragged out a miserable existence,” according to the Rev. Mr. Mood.² If so, their misery was considerably abetted by the constant harassment they endured. The Black church lasted four years. Then a conspiracy to foment a revolt against slavery was alleged.

Denmark Vesey, a class leader, and others active in the African Church were prosecuted in 1822. The connection between that conspiracy and the Black exodus from the Methodist Church was clear in the mind of one James Hamilton Jr. In his “An account of the late intended insurrection among a portion of

---

¹ The importation of enslaved people was illegal by constitutional mandate after the year 1807. After 1856, the buying and selling took place indoors at a “slave mart.”

the blacks of the city of Charleston, South Carolina,” he reported:

Religious fanaticism has not been without its effect on this project, and as auxiliary to these sentiments, the secession of a large body of blacks from the white methodist church, with feelings of irritation and disappointment, formed a hot bed, in which the germ might well be expected to spring into life and vigour. Among the conspirators, a majority of them belonged to the African church, and among those executed were several who had been class leaders…. However…, after the most diligent search and scrutiny, no evidence entitled to belief, has been discovered against them [i.e., the leadership strata]. A hearsay rumour, in relation to Morris Brown, was traced far enough to end in its complete falsification.¹

Hamilton asserts that “since the late events the [church] has been voluntarily dissolved.” Voluntarily or otherwise, the experiment was over, and the church’s building was destroyed. Many but not all Blacks returned to the galleries in the Methodist Episcopal churches, where they apparently flourished. When there were six hundred or so White people in the three M.E. Churches in Charleston, there were around three thousand Blacks. To make this peaceful reconciliation work, Whites convinced

¹ James Hamilton Jr., Negro plot: an account of the late intended insurrection among a portion of the blacks of the city of Charleston, South Carolina (Boston: Joseph W. Ingraham, 1822), 31, loc.gov/resource/rbcmisc.lst0102/?sp=31&st=text.
themselves first that Blacks had learned their lesson: “Numbers of them—like all real schismatics—found the new scheme did not work as well as they had expected, and returned again to the Methodist Church.”¹ And second, that none were really supporters after all:

Out of the hundreds who were placed under ban, and the many who were tried and condemned—numbers of them members of other churches—not one of them was a member of the Methodist church, out of the thousands then belonging to it.²

Intended or not, this view served as a rejoinder to those arguing that the Vesey incident showed the inherent dangers of the religious indoctrination and education of enslaved persons. As an added appeasement, it was asserted that the Methodists had a very effective system of “management”:

It must be seen at a glance that with such an immense number, of a class with whose lives and Christian deportment it was impossible for the ministers or white members to become acquainted, it required a thoroughly organized and well-maintained system of observation and discipline. Suffice it to say, that the plan developed in the Methodist system has been found completely adapted…, and has been vigorously maintained, and has resulted in amazing good.³

¹ Mood, Methodism in Charleston, 133, emphasis added.
² Ibid., 185.
³ Ibid., 186.
Not all Black members left Bethel M.E. Church in 1818; 323 stayed. And not all the 4,376 who did leave came back in 1822. But all worshipping in Bethel’s little white-framed building (forty by sixty feet in size), then about a quarter of a century old, were accommodated:

1. enslaved people not too aged or infirmed to climb the stairs, in the galleries that ran around three sides of the room
2. “free people of color” in the pews nearest the back on the main floor
3. White people up front

It was true that all White and Black members professed a common faith and bound themselves equally to the strict disciplines of nineteenth-century Methodism, but their segregated seating arrangements reflected distinctions. The most significant and telling differences arose from slavery itself. So, on the one hand, witnesses against Denmark Vesey, the alleged instigator, reported that the Methodist class leader had appealed to Biblical texts to promote and justify the revolt. On the other hand, the White magistrate, who presided at the trial, thought that Vesey had perverted “the sacred words of God into a sanction for crimes of the blackest hue.”

Without doubt, enslavement gave rise to these very different understandings of the same sacred texts. But cultural differences were also in play. Europeans and Africans had dissimilar spiritual inheritances. The Protestant Reformation had tended toward what has been called “disenchantment”—the material world being more or less understood on its
own terms. In contrast, African religion retained a stronger sense that the world was “enchanted” with spiritual forces. This is sometimes referred to as “sacramentalism,” referencing the Church’s view of its sacraments as means of grace—physical things that reveal a divine presence. In short, the European Protestants could see and sustain clearer lines between the heavenly and earthly aspects of life. But for the African, the heavenly vision of a promised land, as extolled in Scripture and their spirituals, could never be exclusively a heavenly vision.

This divergence of understanding is seen in the writings of one of Bethel’s ministers. A. M. Chreitzberg was preacher in 1862 and again in 1872. In his memoir, Early Methodism in the Carolinas, speaking about himself, he wrote that “he” (referring to himself in the third person)

remembers now the cause of the enthusiasm under his deliverances [about] the “law of liberty” and “freedom from Egyptian bondage.” What was figurative they [i.e., Blacks] interpreted literally…. He remembers the sixty-eighth Psalm as affording numerous texts for their delectation, e.g., “Let God arise, let his enemies be scattered”; His “march through the wilderness”; “The chariots of God are twenty thousand”; “The hill of God is as the hill of Bashan”; and especially, “Though ye have lain among the pots, yet shall ye be as the wings of a dove covered with silver, and her feathers with yellow gold.” It is mortifying now to think that his [Chreitzberg’s] comprehension was not equal to the African
intellect. *All he thought about was relief from the servitude of sin*, and freedom from the bondage of the devil…. But *they interpreted it literally* in the good time coming, which of course could not but make their ebony complexion attractive, very.¹

In his *Slave Religion: The “Invisible Institution” in the Antebellum South*, Albert J. Raboteau says of this memory:

What the preacher is describing is the end of a long process, spanning almost two hundred and fifty years, by which slaves came to accept the Gospel of Christianity and at the same time made it their own. It is important to remember that it was a dual process. The slaves did not simply become Christians; they creatively fashioned a Christian tradition to fit their own peculiar experience of enslavement in America.²

---


The seating arrangement previously described was a crucial marker in a bitter struggle that erupted among the Whites in the third decade of the nineteenth century. It became a foundational argument about the essence of Black humanity. What was owed them as human beings? What value could be assigned to their concerns? What deference could be conferred to accommodate their very presence in the church? For some things had already gone too far—the line had been crossed between tolerance and familiarity.

We do claim to have some few grains of common sense; and we have taken counsel, (not of mulattoes to be sure). We...have carefully examined the subject ourselves, and taken the opinions of those whom we regard as having some pretensions to wisdom, and to whose opinions you...would show some deference; and the result is, that decency, propriety, decorum, custom, and everything else, require that a distinct line should be drawn between the whites and mulattoes in our chapels, and that it be done speedily....

If colored persons are allowed to sit among the white members,...what will probably ensue...are men in Charleston...will gladly avail themselves of any thing that may tend to injure the Methodist Church, and bring it into disrepute. Now then, suppose a considerable
number of the members resign, for the avowed reason that they are compelled, contrary to their views of propriety, to associate with a class of persons, between whom and the whites, the law has drawn a broad line of demarcation, and who are regarded by the public authorities with a suspicious eye. Think you it will not be seized on with avidity by the enemies of the church, as a pretext for affording them reason to believe that there is “something rotten in Denmark?” Will not all the charges possible be rung upon it, to make the public believe that the Methodist ministry are designing men, of whom they should beware? How would it read in a public print, that a number of the members of the Methodist Church had seceded from her communion, simply because their feelings as Carolinians would not permit them to sit side by side in their public assemblies, with mulattoes! And then what would become of your black classes? Aye, what would become of your black missions? Think not these are images conjured up from the “vasty deep,” to affright you. They are not the fancied creatures of a distempered brain, nor are they idle imaginings. Think of these things….

For ourselves, we love Methodism. We cherish it in our heart of hearts; and it is because we do so, that we have acted as we have. We believe the vital interests of the church are in jeopardy, and we cannot sit down supinely and indifferent, without raising an arm, and a voice in her defense; however impotent that arm may be,
or however feeble may be the sound of that voice.¹

William Capers, their pastor, perhaps the most esteemed clergyperson of his generation in South Carolina Methodism—memorialized in one of the stained-glass windows in the church building constructed in 1853—pushed back hard. Their proposal to remedy their grievance was, in his mind, wrong. His reason: “Nothing has been said of any effect likely to be produced on the blacks and unfortunately it seems not to have occurred to any brother, that they might be injured by it” (emphasis added). Indeed!

He understood from the beginning of the contentious affair the import of their actions and intentions. “I took occasion,” he wrote, “to make some remarks intended to inculcate Christian charity and kindness towards the people of color, especially those who give evidence of sincere piety, and are otherwise respectable in their station. These remarks gave great offence to some persons.” Capers’s own position in the battle was clear: “I cannot rush forward, and will not be pushed forward, against my own convictions of the right and my duty, and myself do an evil to prevent the apprehended consequences of an evil done by others.” He refers here to the

¹ Excerpts from a letter of September 13, 1833, written to the Rev. Dr. William Capers by members of his congregation, in William Capers, Exposition of the causes and character of the difficulties in the church in Charleston, in the year 1833; up to November 28, of that year (Charleston, SC, 1834), 9–10, archive.org/details/expositionofcaus00meth/page/10/mode/2up.
supposed response of the “men of Charleston” if Bethel failed to literally “keep Blacks in their place.”

The complaints began to be heard when some “free people of color” (a common idiom for a multi-racial person) began customarily seating themselves in pews nominally reserved for Whites. This practice had apparently begun when pews for Blacks in the galleries and in the rear of the main floor in partitioned sections called “boxes” were filled to capacity and beyond. Some who regularly sat forward became reluctant to yield their usual seats even to Whites when their section was otherwise full.

Beginning around 1829, complaints were being raised at the so-called “Quarterly Conference,” the body within the local church having official authority over its temporal and administrative affairs. The Conference appointed a small group to maintain order. Presumably, their work involved affecting some sort of on-the-spot, in-the-moment settlement when seats were contested. When Dr. Capers’s preaching in 1832–33 attracted larger congregations, the occasions for disputes increased. Complaints were made to Capers himself, but he passed, saying seating was not his job, and surely the membership could tend to the matter. They did! One Sunday, a few “people of color” were physically removed, and again the next week. Some Whites (it was said they were the

---

1 For a fuller discussion of the variable meaning of this idiom, see Nic Butler, “Defining Charleston’s Free People of Color,” Charleston County Public Library, February 7, 2020, ccpl.org/charleston-time-machine/defining-charlestons-free-people-color.
older members), having grown accustomed to this arrangement, took offense at this harsh treatment of longtime members and faithful participants in the life of Bethel Church, and Capers, ending his detachment, agreed.

Failing to gain consensus approval, a resolution was brought to the Quarterly Conference to codify segregation. It involved proposed physical changes to the building and grounds of Bethel Church. The boxes, which had been included at the instigation of Bishop Asbury himself, were to be removed. Partitions would be built, and only free people of color could sit on the back pew—and only there. Outside, fences would be constructed on either side of the main entry. Whites could walk between them into the church building. Blacks must go out of sight, around concealing fences, and enter through gallery doors on either side of the main entry.

As has been seen above, Dr. Capers vigorously opposed this proposal, and although it was passed by the Quarterly Conference and referred to committee for action, he managed to prevent its implementation. Petitions were circulated, and letters and accusations were sent and received. Capers collected and printed much of this in a pamphlet he entitled *Exposition of the causes and character of the difficulties in the church in Charleston, in the year 1833*. It should be noted that the opposition also published. In their “To the Public,” they accused Capers of having motives more pecuniary than spiritual.
Dr. C. took occasion to make some remarks which were highly offensive to the Members. He stated, in substance, that many of the coloured members were of high respectability, and had more wealth at their command than most of the whites; inferring very clearly that they were entitled to great consideration on account of their money.

Any ability of Blacks to make an effective monetary contribution may be a surprise but should not be negated. As early as 1797, Bishop Asbury himself confidently asserted that “Africans will collect £100” to put toward the construction of Bethel.\(^1\) More than one source even claims that after leaving Bethel in 1818, Blacks initiated a legal suit to retain ownership of the 1797 building, on the grounds that their gifts for its construction were greater.

These gifts offer additional insight into the nature of the religion practiced by Blacks at Bethel. Certainly, their giving reflects the stewardship principles taught in Christian churches, but that it arises from the enslaved—generally poor and powerless—and flows into coffers controlled by their enslavers begs for reflection.

Albert Raboteau postulates that their giving evinced “slave agency.” Since the enslaved person made the decision to give and then carried out the action of giving, they were—by definition—exercising agency. In the case of giving, the religious life itself provided both the incentive and the opportunity to exercise that agency. Despite the

---

\(^1\) Asbury, *Journal*, entry for February 14, 1797.
asymmetric relationship, “a dimension of reciprocity between slave and slave master” (in the sense of mutual dependence, action, or influence) was achieved. That reciprocity demanded that each party acknowledge the other as a self-directing human being. At the same time, since the givers’ actions were based on an authentic religious experience, it became a form of witness.

The following story seems designed to support Raboteau’s ideas.

Being in Charleston...as we were sitting together..., Maum Nanny entered..., in long-eared white cap, kerchief, and apron of the olden time, with her eyes on the floor, her arms slightly folded before her, stepping softly toward me. She held between her finger and thumb a dollar bill, and curtseying as she approached, she extended her hand with the money. “Will you please, sir,” said she, in subdued accents, and a happy countenance, “take this little mite for the blessed missionaries?” I took it, and pronounced that it was a dollar, and said: “Maum Nanny, can you afford to give as much as this?” “Oh! yes, sir,” she replied, lifting her eyes which till then had been on the floor. “It’s only a trifle, sir. I could afford to give a great deal more—if—I—had—it.”

Albert Raboteau’s analysis helps break open this story of Maum Nanny’s generosity. By not lifting her eyes as she entered, she acknowledged her own lowly

1 Chreitzberg, Early Methodism in the Carolinas, 259, emphasis added.
2 “Maum” and “Marm” were common affectations to show a measure of respect to a Black woman.
status, but the offer of her gift and its acceptance lifted her into a reciprocal relationship with her “better.” It was then that she lifted her eyes to claim a new status and rightly stated that if she’d had more, she’d have given it—i.e., she would gladly continue living in this newfound status.

This business of rectitude as a form of resistance is a complicated one, hard to get a handle on. Raboteau writes:

While some slaves rejected the moral system preached by the master and his preachers, others devoted themselves to a life of virtue, in which they developed both a sense of personal dignity and an attitude of moral superiority to their masters—an attitude that could simultaneously support compliance to the system of slavery and buttress the slave’s own self-esteem.¹

The complication lies in the upside-down nature of it all. To learn of those who offer forgiveness even ahead of another’s repentance is certainly a challenge (maybe even an indicting one) to those whose first instinct is punishment or revenge. Similarly, Maum Nanny’s generosity seen above, as well as that in the following story, left the writers nonplussed—maybe even a little embarrassed. This recollection brings the story of the little Black girl we met on page 1 full circle. Rachel Wells, now aged and infirmed, receives a visit from her White pastor:

¹ Raboteau, *Slave Religion*, 301.
Taking leave of her, she slipped a half-dollar into my hand. “The poor have the gospel preached unto them, and the poor are the principal supporters of the gospel,” said I, as I perceived the piece she had deposited with me.

“I take this the more thankfully for the missions, because, in these hard times, it is very seldom I have money put into my hand unasked, even for so good a cause; and may God repay you manifold in this present life.” [The following is paraphrased from the original rendered in dialect.] “That, sir, if you please, you take for a token of the love I have for you for Christ’s sake. Thank God, I have this other one for the missionary—all for Christ.” *I felt exceedingly humble*…. The missions were worthy [her] half-dollar, I knew; *I felt that I was not.*

Raboteau continues his lesson,

Whether one marvels at [this] attitude as saintly or as neurotic depends upon one’s own religious views, but the significant aspect…is [his] view of himself—what it meant for him, a slave, to feel moral authority over his master, to forgive his master, to have the leverage of moral virtue by which to elevate his own self-worth. The attitude…is as old in the Christian tradition as “Father forgive them for they know not what they do” and as recent as Martin Luther King’s articulation of “soul force” and “redemptive suffering.”

---

At Bethel in 1833, the overt resistance of the people of color at being evicted from their seats in the White section was resented by White people, while the resistance practiced by moral rectitude was quite invisible to them. Consequently, things did not end well. Eventually and surprisingly, nine prominent White men were brought to church trial and expelled from the membership. Thereupon, 165 others followed. White men who subsequently reported these events considered this result a significant failure. Writing two decades later, the Rev. F. A. Mood “regarded [it] as the greatest misfortune that has ever overtaken the Methodist church in Charleston.” For, in his opinion, “the church was deprived of a large body of intelligent young men, who probably combined the larger part of the energy and activity of the membership.”¹ This view had not softened thirty years on when the Rev. John O. Willson, in his *Sketch of the Methodist Church in Charleston 1785–1887*, opined: “Many of those who withdrew from us were just the kind of material a church can least afford to lose—intelligent, active, progressive young men. They had a real grievance, and it certainly now seems to us, might have been more considerately dealt with.”²

Nearly two centuries later (2021), the notion that a White-dominated congregation would have taken the part of its Black members over and against its

---

¹ Mood, *Methodism in Charleston*, 150.
prominent and “promising” White ones, at great cost, itself is astonishing.¹ A decade later (1844), the Methodist Episcopal Church in America voluntarily, if unhappily, broke itself apart because it could not peacefully reconcile within its structure its abolitionists and those who would continue to accommodate enslavement as a cultural institution. The country itself would soon divide over the issue, though not peacefully as had the Church.

Whatever triggered the result of Bethel’s dispute in 1834 was soon forgotten. The dynamics of race relations in Charleston had changed so dramatically that men in the generations of Mood and Willson were perplexed that what happened could have happened. The young men who challenged the seating arrangement at Bethel in 1834 were the *avantgarde* of a generational shift that overturned the racial settlement of the colonial and federalist eras.²

¹ This reversal of the expected outcome of a White vs. Black controversy is likely the reason for a claim that appears on the web page of national historic sites devoted to Old Bethel (nps.gov/places/old-bethel-united-methodist-church.htm), to wit: “In 1834 a schism developed over whether blacks were to be restricted to sitting in the galleries. By 1840 the black members seceded to form their own congregation.” No evidence to support this statement has been found. The claim appears in Old Bethel’s application to be a national historic site. Likely, it represented a misreading of Chreitzberg, p. 159. His cryptic description of the event could easily mislead a researcher not expecting a Black win. Such a reading is belied by: Capers, Mood, Rose, Shipp, Willson, and Wightman.

² This analysis relies heavily on the work presented by Eric Rose in his 2014 doctoral dissertation at the University of South Carolina,
Eric Rose may not be exaggerating when he says, “Charleston was the most integrated city in the United States during the antebellum period,” or in saying that “during the post-Revolutionary decades [in Charleston], the spatial boundaries of race were fluid and permeable, as slaves slept below the beds of their mistresses, black and white artisans shared the same workshops, and black evangelicals shared pews with their white brethren.”

Blacks in post-revolutionary Charleston, of course, had limited freedom. Yet, it seems some, especially the so-called “free people of color”—i.e., mulattoes (some of whom had recognizable kinship to their White relatives)—could use their personal virtues of heritage, character, and accomplishments to improve their status in the city. Methodism’s overt discomfort with enslavement had obvious attractions for this population.

The older generation of Whites at Bethel in 1834 had not forgotten the suffering endured because of the movement’s original anti-slavery impulses. They had grown accustomed to and even comfortable with the presence of those Blacks who had, in a sense, earned through their piety—and yes, their financial contributions—seats on the ground floor, a conclusion with which Blacks naturally agreed. Here’s the story of one of them.

titled “The Charleston ‘School of Slavery’: Race, Religion, and Community in the Capital of Southern Civilization.”

1 Rose, “The Charleston ‘School of Slavery’,” 74.
Richard Holloway was described by the Rev. F. A. Mood in his 1859 *Methodism in Charleston* on his list of notable “colored” Methodists in Charleston as “conspicuous for his intelligence and zeal. His zeal, however, was sometimes ill-judged.” His ill judgment from Mood’s perspective was his choice to sit on the main floor with Whites. It is unclear whether Holloway and his family did this at Bethel or in his home church of Trinity, one of the other Charleston M.E. churches. In any case, since he is a quintessential example and some considerable evidence about his prominent life is available, it will be helpful to take a closer look, with Eric Rose’s help:

Holloway’s life in Charleston embodied the idealist American trope of the self-made man more fully than most of his white contemporaries. Holloway assembled the instruments of his self-making—marriage into the free colored elite, his skill as a carpenter and businessman,…[and] the message Holloway internalized from his seat alongside white Methodist brethren. This was the tradition he sought to preserve amid contrary winds of black separation.

Holloway’s sense of interracial tradition reflects a generational divide along the same lines as those which separated the [“young men”] from their white elders. Richard Holloway was a

---

product of the Old School; his story was a testament to the (opportunities for social mobility inherent in the) early modern climate of social and racial fluidity. Even more so than his white counterparts, Holloway sustained the race-neutral fellowship of Methodist space as a totem of his evangelical identity.¹

The young men’s aim was to wrest control from the fathers who had presided over its former era. For this new generation, standards of respectability or piety, behavior or disposition, were irrelevant criteria for measuring Black humanity. According to Rose, they “sought to reform the traditional fluidity and gradualism that characterized eighteenth-century racial relations into a more rigidly codified system of racial boundaries.” Their motivation, ironically, appears to be rooted in democratizing trends in America that were displacing the old aristocratic elite, who had been in charge, with a more egalitarian culture.

This new egalitarian democracy did not include Blacks. The North had few Blacks and did not want them, which informed their struggles to keep slavery from expanding into new territories. The South had Blacks and took steps to exclude them through apartheid regulations, increasingly strident in form and application. This is what the “young men” had in mind for Charleston’s future.

¹ Rose, “The Charleston ‘School of Slavery’,” 115–16.
Bishops and Believers

If William Capers had not been the preacher in charge of Bethel M.E. Church in 1834, it is unlikely that the outcome of this extraordinary affair would have been the same. Thus, an attempted examination of the relationship of Blacks and Whites at Bethel across time will benefit from a closer look at the man.

William Capers was no stranger to Charleston Methodists. He had in 1825 and 1826 been one in a trio of clergy assigned to jointly serve the three congregations: Cumberland, Bethel, and Trinity. Afterwards, he remained in Charleston as the presiding elder (sort of the general overseer of all the local Methodist churches in the Lowcountry of South Carolina).

Beginning around 1829, he facilitated the creation of Methodism’s missionary work among the enslaved on the plantations of the South Carolina Lowcountry.

According to William M. Wightman’s 1858 Life of William Capers, the catalyst lay in the previous year, when

Mr. Capers was waited on by the Hon. Charles C. Pinckney,¹ a gentleman who had a large planting

---

¹ Apparently not the famous delegate to the Constitutional Convention, who died in 1825, but perhaps his nephew, the son of brother Thomas.
interest on Santee, to ascertain whether a Methodist exhorter could be recommended to him as a suitable person to oversee his plantation. Mr. Pinckney stated, as the reasons for this application, Mr. Capers’s known interest in the religious welfare of the colored population, and the fact that the happy results which had followed the pious endeavors of a Methodist overseer on the plantation of one of his Georgia friends, had directed his attention to the subject.¹

It was ironic that his own renown, exceptional ability, and eloquent preaching, which had filled the little Bethel Church building to overflowing, generating complaints about “colored people” occupying seats that White people wanted, brought him so much grief. Yet, his grief too was ironic, for it was not borne by a man who strove against the institution of enslavement. He was, rather, “the champion of the idea that the Church had no right to ‘interfere in the Civil and political relation between master and slave, as it exists in the slaveholding States of this Union’.”² His stance on the subject was grounded, like Asbury’s before him, in his conviction that

if the Church opposed slavery, it would debar itself from service in the South…. If the Churches wanted to work in the South, they had to go along…. To oppose slavery, so far as the

---

Methodists were concerned, was to bankrupt the phenomenal work of the slave missions, a missionary enterprise that was without parallel in the world at that time.¹

Whatever judgment might be made about this ministry,² Capers himself considered it definitive of his self-understanding. Alternative narratives eluded him to his dying day. They did not, however, elude the enslaved either at the plantation or in the gallery of Bethel Church.

The nineteenth-century histories written by White men report only a few of their interactions with individual Black members. Being men of their time, with patronizing attitudes, unequal power, and prejudicial objectives, their telling of the story—for the purposes of this narrative that wants to be objective—is limited. Yet, these Blacks are known only because of these stories. The stories are used here in trust that, despite the judicial deference of the language used by Blacks of the time, a discerning reader might more clearly perceive these lives than did the White men of the nineteenth century.

Five pages of William M. Wightman’s Life of William Capers, D.D. are devoted to a “venerable African,” Castile Selby, “one of the holiest and best men of the colored charge in the city, a class-leader of long standing, and highly respected by Dr. Capers.” Selby is introduced to Wightman’s readers as he

¹ Ibid., 8.
² Such judgment would certainly include critique of the motivations of pacification and control.
comes into what Wightman describes as “the chamber of death,” wherein all present (doctor, wife, friend) are convinced that yellow fever will soon claim Capers’s life.

“I am glad to see you, Father Castile,” said Dr. Capers: “you find me near my end, but kneel down and turn your face to the wall, and pray for me; and all of you pray.” Castile’s prayer was memorable; full of humble submission to the Divine will, but full of pleading, mighty faith in the great Mediator. He asked of God, the giver of life, that the life of his beloved pastor might be spared to the Church. This prayer was memorable, too, in its immediate results. The first words from the sick minister after its close were: “I feel better.” Shortly after, Dr. Dickson made his morning visit, and pronounced the crisis past. A rapid convalescence ensued, and he was soon in the pulpit again.¹

There follows a narrative in Dr. Capers’s own words of repeated efforts on his part and that of other Whites to make life more comfortable for the “venerable” man. But remarkably, in each instance, their proposals are rejected by Selby. The reason seems to be that in Selby’s judgement, any advantage he received would tend to alienate other Blacks, among whom, to use Capers’s characterization, he was much esteemed. Thus, when urged to dress better, he responds, “These old clothes make me quite comfortable. They just suit my business and so they just

¹ Wightman, Life of William Capers, 306.
suit me…. I *dress for my color.*” When offered help to lay aside his burdensome labor, his view is that “by-and-by they’ll say, ‘Castile is lazy too’; or ‘Castile is turned gentleman, and can’t wet his foot’; and what can I say? If they are negroes, *so am I.* If they ought to work, *I ought to work too.*” Finally, they offered to, in effect, put him on the staff of the church: “‘Now, my old friend,’ said I, ‘we want you to sell your horse and cart immediately, and use the money as you think proper; you shall want for nothing; and let it be your only business to help all the souls you can to heaven.’” Selby, however, recognized that “*the very thing* you would do for me to make me useful, *would hinder more than it would help* me. It would make some envious; some would call me parson, and say the white people had spoiled me; and nobody would take me to be the same Castile I have always been. *There is nothing better for me than this same old cart.***1

A religion that had no exigency in enslavement could have no legitimacy among Blacks. From his point of view, the integrity of his faith compelled Castile Selby to identify himself as and to be known as a member of that community: “I *dress for my color.*” “If they ought to work, I *ought to work too.*” “There is nothing better for me than this same old cart.” Though Dr. Capers and others thought he could be regarded as “my old friend” and perhaps even held up as a model, he denied them the moral ease of their charity.

---

This may also be seen as resistance, for enslavement by its very nature demands resistance from its victims. Like the Hebrews in Babylon, this resistance included clinging to the “old-time religion,” the spiritual heritage and expressions that had come on the Middle Passage, whose manifestations were often derided by the plantation missionaries and the upright members of elite downtown churches.

The appeal of Methodism when it came to Charleston in the late-eighteenth century lay in its own enthusiasm for the spiritualism of the Great Awakening. A derisive remark from that time asserted that Blacks were attracted to Methodism because they were the only people who would be attracted to it. This was not, of course, meant as a compliment to either group. If they found in the Methodist gallery a place to stomp the foot, to clap the hand, or to shout praise or wonder at the Spirit’s aliveness, it was because there was an evangelical fervor on the main floor and from the pulpit as well.

Even so, the enslaved, who need a faith to sustain them in the present and an eschatological1 hope relevant to their life experience, have religious needs and experiences unique to them. Because for them, the boundaries between heaven and earth were absent, spiritual energy flowed freely, so that the faith needful for now and the hope for better times coming could be maintained simultaneously. As one writer has put it, “their hope for paradise was political precisely because it was religious.” Recall the Rev. A.

1 The ultimate destiny of humanity.
M. Chreitzberg’s discovery in 1862 that when he taught “relief from the servitude of sin, and freedom from the bondage of the devil;…they [i.e., Blacks] interpreted it literally in the good time coming.”

This was an inheritance bequeathed by their African ancestors, who came from a world filled with spirits. For men like Gullah Jack Pritchard, an African conjurer, such spirits were still very much present in daily experience. A conjurer, recognizable in distinctive apparel, was thought to be an African native with an innate ability to summon these spirits. Addressing the mysteries of life, the conjurer could call forth harm or good, cast spells (“fixes”) as well as fix fixes. In Gullah Jack’s case, that meant threatening retribution (fixes) against those who did not join Denmark Vesey’s conspiracy, while at the same time promising supernatural protections (to fix fixes) for those who did join. Without any sense of contradiction, he was a Methodist as well, a sect that itself preached the lively presence of the Holy Spirit. An exchange reported by Bishop Capers is revelatory of the point. In 1849, he visited the then-oldest member of Methodist churches in Charleston, who had been injured in a fall. As told earlier, Rachel Wells in her youth was a part of the household of Edgar Wells, a wealthy merchant in whose home Francis Asbury had stayed during his first visit to the city in 1785. She was counted among the earliest Methodists. Asbury may have facilitated her conversion, even as he had Wells’s. His journal entry for February 5, 1785, recounts that he “was happy last evening with the poor slaves in Brother Wells’s kitchen, whilst our
white brother held a sacramental love feast in the front parlour upstairs.”

During his visit, Capers laments Rachel’s inability to come to church, but she responds (paraphrasing a dialect rendering): “I have no need of [the] church any more. Thank God, my blessed Jesus has a shorter way to me now…. What he did for me before at the meeting he does for me now without the meeting; and more too.” Bemoaning family and friends whose deaths have left her alone in her old age, she reports a prayer to God that had been answered: “So he comes to me closer than ever, and I never want for anybody else.” Recalling a beloved deceased pastor, she erases the line between earth and heaven: “Mr. [K] gone, but that spirit [he] had he carried with him. And you think Mr. [K] does nothing in heaven? He did not stand still for God here; and he does not stand still there. He’s ministering spirit. He flies like an angel to help the work on.” Capers does not miss the import of this easy flow between heaven and earth, and earth and heaven. So affected is he by her thoughts about the dead Mr. K carrying on his work in heaven, Capers bursts into a paroxysm of words.

It might be supposed that in the mind of an illiterate African woman, any notion of the employments of the heavenly world must of necessity be very crude and material—rest from labor, abodes of indolent pleasure, the antithesis in the glittering types of sensuous enjoyment to the stern conditions of the earthly lot. Not a word of it in the instance of Rachel Wells. There is
more...grandeur in the thought that the faithful minister of Christ carries with him into the eternal state the spirit which prompted and sustained a life of laborious zeal for Christ. That spirit never faltered here; its wing of active exertion never drooped; a subordinate agent in the plans of the Divine economy, it never stood still for God on earth. Trained into habitual vigor by the preparatory discipline of the present life, that same spirit will not stand still in the celestial world.¹

William Capers and J. O. Andrew were great friends. One was from wealth and the other from poverty, but they were close in age and, more importantly, their careers tracked. Each rising quickly, both eventually became bishops: first, Andrew in the Methodist Episcopal Church, then Capers—after the 1844 split—in the M.E. Church, South.

In 1816, twenty-two-year-old James Andrew was assigned, along with two older men, to serve the Charleston churches. For the first quarter of the nineteenth century, a duo or trio of clergymen was sent to jointly minister to the city churches as a unit, rotating between Cumberland, Bethel, and Trinity in their preaching and other duties. Here was a practical way to apprentice the newly ordained, and for the

¹ Wightman, Life of William Capers, 392–95.
most able, such as Capers and Andrew, to be identified and promoted.

As was customary, the bachelor preacher was housed in the parsonage at Bethel. “That old odd-shaped house, defying all sorts of architectural style, was a house of shreds and patches and stood almost touching Bethel Church.”1 Andrew depicts it surrounded by tombstones. In its “conference room,” the preachers spent one day of each week tending the “business of the station.” But every day, it was a place for morning prayers. The event was so highly prized by Black members, including the aged and infirmed, that they “often walked a considerable distance to be present.” This devotion to devotion is a testament to the integrity of Black faith and its importance to them.

Tellingly, the bishop, reminiscing at an old age about these days of his youth, feels compelled to include two Black women in his account. They are both servants at the parsonage: the housekeeper and a cook. Both are domestics who, in close proximity to the young preacher, do the daily chores necessary to his well-being. He is pleased and has come to admire and respect them for their work, and for their faith, and for themselves. They form in that old house the kind of quiet, mutually beneficial arrangement that is not infrequently encountered. It must be assumed, however, that because they are Black, they share emotions endemic to enslaved persons in all times and places. For them, nonresistance is a strategy that makes sense. Indeed, although nonresistance makes it

1 Smith, The Life and Letters of James Osgood Andrew, 68.
easier for the enslaver, it has legitimacy in Christian tradition.

Nevertheless, in the bishop’s telling, we find a measure of independence in these two that shows an assertion of selfhood not completely restrained by enslavement. Sister Silena Smith, the housekeeper, “took charge” long before Andrew arrived—indeed, she had stories of Bishop Asbury,¹ who may have written to her. She made a daily trip to market “to lay in supplies” and “a good deal of information” (gossip of the city). Bernard Powers, in his Black Charlestonians: A Social History 1822–1885, confirms that the freedom to go about chores, etc., was common on the streets of Charleston. The streets themselves were crowded with Blacks, who were, after all, a majority of the population. Much personal value was found via the social interaction afforded by the daily market visit. “My old friend thought the market the greatest place imaginable to talk secrets,” asserts Andrew. “Kind hearted,” “devoted,” “spent a good deal of the time in visiting the sick and poor,” and “a very useful woman” are quotes from his assessment.

Likewise, the cook is notable for her independent streak. “Old Marm Phillis...had a good deal of African pepper in her character, and said and did pretty much as she pleased, without any fear of

¹ Asbury’s own assessment of the house, newly built in his day, was that it was something of a paradise—a retreat for days at a time from the demands on his time and energy. (Journal entry from Sunday, November 20, 1803.)
housekeeper or preacher.” It might be appropriate at this point to note that seemingly nonresistant persons like these two, who come into the affection of the slaveholder, were the most likely to receive emancipation. This, for example, was true for Rachel Wells. Therefore, nonresistance is not entirely a concession to futility. However, to push the point too far would be to fall into rhetoric characteristic of the sermon of a White missionary on the plantation. “Servants obey your master” may be blasphemy in the mouth of the enslaver’s enabler, but the enslaved has every right to own every stratagem useful to the moment.

The young Andrew, who had stayed one year in 1816, returned to Charleston a decade later to serve as presiding elder over the Edisto District, supervising a vast area covering essentially all of southeastern South Carolina. In 1827, he was again appointed to the churches in Charleston. At that point, he was actually swapping jobs with his good friend William Capers, who, finishing up his own first pastorate there (he came again in 1833–34, as has been seen), became the presiding elder in Andrew’s stead.

In succession, Capers then Andrew had yellow fever, which nearly killed them both. As related, Capers’s recovery was credited to the prayers of the “venerable African,” Castile Selby. Andrew credited his own recover to a bottle of porter, a dark beer. “By morning the bottle was nearly empty, and when the doctor came to visit me, instead of finding me dead, he found me…a great deal better.”
The importance of Andrew’s second stay in Charleston to this narrative is his role in the establishment of a “Sabbath School for Colored People.” In his memoirs, the bishop gives himself considerable credit for initiative and courage in overcoming the impression of some “faint hearts” that the effort would be met with “the hand of violence.”¹ He only gives Blacks in church and city passing acknowledgement of their significant contribution.

A few of the whites came forward to aid me in the work, but my principal dependence for teachers was upon the intelligent blacks themselves, many of whom took great delight in aiding me in the important work upon which I had entered, and very valuable assistance they rendered me.²

Other sources, however, report a salient example of Black agency and enterprise during the early national period (1776–1840). While acknowledging that “the Reverend James Andrew commissioned free colored members…to establish a Sabbath School for ‘the instruction of colored children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord our God’,” it was actually those “commissioned free colored members” who, meeting in Richard Holloway’s Beaufain Street house, outlined the curriculum, drafted a charter, and appointed teachers. Their detailed organizational charts and minute assignment of specific educational

---

² Ibid., 181, emphasis added.
goals (that included literacy as well as catechism) to fifteen male and fifteen female teachers belie any patronizing characterization by Andrew. The school, though held in the Methodist church on Cumberland Street, attracted students from across the city, amounting, according to the bishop, to three or four hundred.¹ It seems unlikely that this particular school retained its existence for two generations, but it is heartening to learn from Bernard Powers that in 1859, complaints were heard about Black “children who throng our streets every morning on their way to school with satchels well filled with books.”²

M.E. Church, South

Selected as a bishop in 1832, James Osborne Andrew is most noticed in the story of American Methodism not for his ministry in Charleston or anywhere else but for being the proximate catalyst precipitating the division of the Methodist Episcopal Church in 1844. From its beginning in 1784, there had been unrelenting tension regarding enslavement. The initial position of the denomination was strongly antislavery and very pro-emancipation. As has been seen, this was a source of trouble for the earliest Methodists in Charleston, quieted by the accommodational stance of Francis Asbury and the strategic censorship of national Church pronouncements and regulations. Tremendous exertion and a little duplicity kept the extremists at bay, but when one of its own bishops became the owner of enslaved persons, an existential crisis ensued.

The two good friends, Capers and Andrew, who had both been clergy at Bethel during the early-nineteenth century, were deeply involved in the breakup: Bishop Andrew because of the enslaved in his household—bequeathed by his first wife—whom he could not in Georgia legally manumit, and William Capers, who defended him and drafted the documents of separation.

At the General Conference itself, William Capers argued passionately that if the M.E. Church adopted an overtly antislavery position, the ministry among plantation negroes—which he himself had initiated,
promoted, cultivated, and expanded across the South—would be delegitimized. Slaveholders would not let such preachers near their enslaved laborers. Indeed, the evangelicals’ entrée onto the plantations was contingent upon their willingness to teach the enslaved dutiful contentment to their lot in life. This price for gaining access to souls in need of salvation was acceptable to the M.E. Church in the slave states, because, as Capers reminded the General Conference, “What shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul” (Mark 8:36)? At least he didn’t go as far as the Rev. Richard Furman, erstwhile pastor at the First Baptist Church in Charleston, who rhapsodized that “the Africans brought to America…‘fell into the hands of white men’ through the grace of God.”

It had become orthodoxy in most of the Southern denominations that the primitive African, nurtured in animism and considered ignorant in mind and backward in culture, was dependent on Whites not only for the salvation of the soul but for every other good. On this “myth of dependency,” as Eric Rose styles it, the Southern Church pinned its sanctity. In protecting Blacks, instructing them, and readying them for emancipation (whenever that might come—always an elusive target), they felt justified in their complicity. This paternalism would be characteristic of the White Church for the next century or more.

---

1 Rose, “The Charleston ‘School of Slavery’,” 184.
In truth, however, Black religion turned out to be the more (1) creative, (2) robust, and (3) authentic expression of the Christian faith:

(1) Creativity. Theirs was a religion that created from the zeitgeist of slavery the *spiritual*, a musical innovation that enabled its practitioners in an instant to enfold and thus transform almost any experience with redemptive possibility. In the spiritual (song) lies further evidence of the belief, that is both African and Biblical, that the supernatural continually impinges on the natural and that divine action is constantly at work in the past, present, and future. Though the genesis of this musical form is most often associated with the rural fields of labor, there is no reason to suppose that the urban Blacks at Bethel were any less attuned to the immanent contact with God to which the spirituals attest. There is then no surprise in J. O. Andrew’s memory of his housekeeper in the days he lived in Bethel’s parsonage: “Even now it seems to me I can see the old lady bustling about the house and kitchen and hear her loud, clear voice as she sang hymns of praise to God.”

(2) Robustness. The very survival of Black religion is itself witness to its robustness. Albert J. Raboteau is so bold as to suggest the enslaved’s tenacity in belief qualifies them to bear the title of confessor and/or martyr. “Like their ancient Christian predecessors, [they] bore witness to the Christian gospel despite the threat of punishment and even death at the hands not of ‘pagans,’ but of fellow
Christians.”¹ In addition, as has been reported previously, a style of worship that engaged the entire person was itself a marker of deep vitality.

(3) Authentic expression. As was seen in Castile Selby’s refusal to be co-opted by White charity, the sacrificial witness of suffering evinces its authenticity. Nevertheless, authenticity gains a greater authority in the light of the inauthentic. Thus, Raboteau’s conclusion: “What the slaves affirmed and the slaveholders rejected was the belief that slavery and Christianity were incompatible—that a slaveholding Christianity was a contradiction in terms, in other words, a heresy.”² Eugene McCarraher, in his heavy tome The Enchantments of Mammon: How Capitalism Became the Religion of Modernity, persuasively argues that in a culture solely driven by the profit motive, secular things will overwhelm sacred things.³ But sacred things are essential to human beings!⁴ Therefore, when sacred things are absent, secular things migrate into the vacuum,⁵ assuming the appearance of the sacred. This process McCarraher styles “the enchantments of Mammon.” He, as others have, shows that slavery at bottom was rooted in pecuniary values. The enslaved were clear about this. McCarraher knows of one who spotted the hypocrisy

¹ Raboteau, Slave Religion, 333.
² Ibid.
³ “For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also” (Matt. 6:21).
⁴ “Man shall not live by bread alone” (Matt. 4:4).
⁵ “When…he findeth it empty,…other spirits more wicked…enter in and dwell there” (Matt. 12:44–45).
of benevolent Christianity: “Money appears to be the object weare carid [we’re carried] to market and sold a heathen or christian.” McCarraher concludes this section of his book: “The sacramental theology of the slaves—inhabitants of an enchanted world bereft of any secular, immanent frame—bore the keenest critique of the enchantments of Mammon before the Civil War.”

After the peaceful completion of the separation at Green Street M.E. Church in New York, delegations representing the White Methodists in the so-called slave states met in Louisville, expunged all abolitionist language from its governing documents, and added the word “South” to the official name. At the same conference, William Capers was one of the first men to be elected a bishop of the new church. On the local level, at least, things continued pretty much as they had been.

How the two hundred thousand or so Black members of M.E.C., South, felt about any of this is speculative but not unimaginable. A clue is found in the reaction of one of Richard Holloway’s sons, who, unlike his father, had given up on the Methodist churches in Charleston and moved north.

The younger Holloway insisted that his family’s national Methodist identity had been secured by a proud history.

---

“The Methodist Church has always been the champion of freedom and equality. Her stand in 1844 against the worst of all iniquities, slavery, shows that she would rather sacrifice territory, members and association than principles and is sufficient reason for me to stand by one that was a friend in time of need.”

The nine White men expelled from Bethel in 1834 were not technically tried because of their efforts to separate Black worshippers from White ones but because they had sued to obtain the church’s property using the pretext of an old corporate charter issued by the State of South Carolina near the end of the previous century. Indeed, their program “to get and keep Blacks in their place” was, with modification, soon adopted at Bethel. By 1838, all enslaved persons were confined to the galleries and free people of color sat on the back pew of the main floor. Even their ideas about how Blacks ought to get into the church building took expression in the wrought-iron fence (still extant) facing Pitt Street, with its centered double gate leading to the main entry and on either side two smaller ones to the doors closest to the gallery stairs. That fence fronted the Greek-revival “simple temple-form building with six large fluted Doric columns

---

1 Rose, “The Charleston ‘School of Slavery’,,” 344. Quote is from James H. Holloway, Why I am a Methodist: A historical sketch of what the church has done for the colored children educationally as early as 1790 at Charleston, S.C. (H. Wainwright, 1909).
supporting a pedimented portico”\textsuperscript{1} the congregation constructed in 1852–53 on the very spot the 1797 building had stood for a half century. Having been moved from its original spot to make way for the new (which more than doubled available worship space), it yet stands, the third-oldest church building in the city.

Blacks’ seating arrangement in the new building remained the same as in the old, but the availability of that old building was quite a boon for them. Thereafter, it was almost exclusively used by Black members of the Bethel churches, old and new, firstly as a meeting space for their classes. Nevertheless, Blacks were monitored and superintended by Whites. Extant minutes of the Board of Stewards from 1859 give a view into its nature. A 	extit{steward} is a lay member (i.e., nonclergy) chosen by their fellow members as a person with sufficient piety and ability to tend to the administrative needs of the church.

March 15, 1859. \textit{Bro C\textemdash brought to the attention of the Board, the propriety of making a change in the time of administering the}

\textsuperscript{1} Jonathan H. Poston, \textit{The Buildings of Charleston} (Charleston, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1997), 546.
sacrament to the Colrd members from a day to night, by dispensing with the night sermon. After a free interchange of opinion advocating the movement, it was agreed to advise the Colrd Leaders as to its propriety.

May 24, 1859. Bro C___ presented a question from the Colrd Leaders whether we would allow them to disburse their Sacrament collection among their pensioners, which after some discussion, was deferred until next meeting.

June 7, 1859. On Motion it was Resolved, the Colrd people be allowed to control their Sacramental collection provided they furnish all the services [referencing the paraphernalia—pitcher, glasses, platters, etc.] and elements [i.e., bread and wine] necessary.

Bro P___ was requested to find out the cost of a new Sacramental service and report at the next meeting.

September 27, 1859. The matter of devising some plan by which our colored members should have some white person to be at their meetings was brot up for consideration. Bro K___ stated he intended to be among them to regulate their
classes and thereby obviate the necessity of appointing any one until December.

On motion it was unanimously resolved that the Church be tendered to the Sunday school Union Society for their quarterly celebration on the 1st Sunday afternoon in Nov. It was then moved that the Galleries be also tendered.

October 11, 1859. Bro P stated he had purchased a Sacramental service for the use of the white congregation which was received as information.

December 20, 1859. On motion of Bro F P it was resolved that the Chairman Bro B is authorized to procure the service of two white persons to prota [illegible] the Colrd people in their meetings at the cost not to exceed one hundred dollars per Anum.

This rather innocuous reflection of the relationship between Blacks and Whites discloses the presence at Bethel of two aspects of that relationship found generally in Charleston and Southern culture on the eve of the Civil War:

(1) the White assumption of Black dependency
(2) a trend toward supervised separation

Methodism, as has been seen, had from its beginning in Charleston afforded Blacks the opportunity to form and oversee their own classes,
and it will be recalled White interference had precipitated the schism of 1818. Now, in the 1850s, Black and White at Bethel, although still worshipping together in the new Bethel Building, in practice operated as essentially two congregations.
And so, the War came!

The “noble cause” for which it was being fought and which would be its justification for a century and more was already being articulated. Few of the many responses were as straightforward as those of the White Methodists who met in Columbia in December 1860:

The secession of South Carolina will settle forever the question of slavery. The vague dreams of abolition-redemption will soon fade away from the mind of the slave, and leave him happy and contented. Satisfied with the condition in which God has placed him, he will the more certainly and rapidly advance in religious enlightenment and Christian morality.¹

As observed above, this rather obtuse and naïve assessment of the cause of and prospects for the critical moment had some purchase. Recall that the Rev. Abel Chreitzberg, pastor at Bethel in 1862, reminisced about meeting with fourteen hundred of his Black members in the Old Bethel building on a Sunday afternoon and making remarks so self-delusional as to appear ludicrous: “Though ignorant of it at the time,” he confesses, “he [referring to himself] remembers now the cause of the enthusiasm [of Black members] under his [my] deliverances anent [i.e., about] the ‘law of liberty,’ and ‘freedom from

¹ Minutes of the SC Conference of the M.E. Church, South, 1860.
Egyptian bondage.’ What was figurative they interpreted literally. He [I] thought of but one ending of the war; they quite another.”¹

Obviously, this group of Blacks did not hide “enthusiasm” about a favorable (for them) outcome of the war. And why should they with a man so dense he didn’t catch on till years later?

Chreitzberg’s words are so revealing of an uncritical acceptance of the mythology of enslavement that they are quoted over and over again in the source material used herein—e.g., McClain, McCarraher, and Raboteau.

Cumberland Church’s first building, whose construction in 1786 was chosen to mark the beginning of this narrative, was taken down in 1839 to make way for a new one. While under construction, it burned in one of the periodic fires that swept away swaths of Charleston. In the year before Chreitzberg’s presentation, the Great Fire of 1861 engulfed Cumberland’s replacement building, along with hundreds of others. Within two years of that fire, the U.S. Navy began bombarding the lower city, forcing the congregants at Trinity Church, then on Hasell Street, to abandon it. Then, the newest Methodist church in the city, at the corner of Spring and Coming

¹ Chreitzberg, *Early Methodism in the Carolinas*, 158.
Streets, found itself without a pastor. With one burned, one abandoned, and one pastor-less, Bethel’s new (1853) building became the worship center for all the Methodists in Charleston.

On February 18, 1865, the Army of the United States entered Charleston, and rapidly in its wake, the ecclesiastical forces of the Methodist Episcopal Church (North)\(^1\) came. That church had persuaded the U.S. Army to allow it to seize abandoned properties of the M.E. Church, South. The Rev. T. Willard Lewis, a Massachusetts native who landed in Beaufort after its occupation by the U.S. Army,\(^2\) followed that same army into Charleston and claimed the property Black Methodists had possession of: the abandoned Spring Street Church and, of course, the 1797 Old Bethel building, as well as Trinity. While the Trinity building on Hasell Street was in danger of bombardment, Black congregants had migrated to the Zion Presbyterian Church on Calhoun Street but had now returned to Trinity. Its White members had not.

Since Zion Presbyterian Church’s unique story is largely forgotten, a brief sketch may help contextualize the immediate post-war events vital to

\(^1\) “North” was never used by the Methodist Episcopal Church but is used here to clearly distinguish it from the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, which was officially its name.

\(^2\) William B. McClain has a near poetic rendering: “As the Northern Army of the Union advanced into the South shouting the battle cry of freedom, following close at hand were the stalwart Methodist soldiers in the Army of the Lord extending the arm of mercy, compassion, love and material help to the newly freed slaves.” (McClain, \textit{Black People in the Methodist Church}, 62.)
this narrative. Unlike Methodists, who practiced in-house segregation, the Presbyterians organized Black constituents into well-supervised separate churches.

Enter John L. Girardeau, scion of a wealthy enslaver on James Island. Nurtured in the affection of the Gullah people among whom he had grown up, he had learned the language, internalized the culture, and affected a rapport in his person and rhetoric that filled the huge building (twice the size of the new Bethel Building) the Presbyterians built at the corner of Meeting and Calhoun Streets in 1858 with not only Black Presbyterians but hundreds of others. The many Whites who wanted to hear dynamic, charismatic preaching were required to sit in the galleries, a reversal of the ordinary arrangement but in harmony with Black eschatological expectations.¹

To attend, Whites had to pledge

that we enter this Church, as white members of the same, with the fullest understanding that its primary design and chief purpose is to benefit the coloured and especially the slave population of this city, and that the white membership is a feature added to the original organization for the purpose of better securing the ends of that organization.²

Though Girardeau had been an officer in the Confederate Army, he remained as acceptable to his majority-Black congregation after the war as before.

¹ “So, the last shall be first, and the first last” (Matt. 20:16).
² Rose, “The Charleston ‘School of Slavery’,” 319.
The aforementioned stewards of the M.E. Church, South, appealed to the U.S. government for relief, which was granted by Special Order No. 142, October 1, 1865, returning Trinity. The Rev. Mr. Lewis was gracious, claiming that he never intended to “acquire any property belonging to the M.E. Church, South.” Rather, he had “done his best to preserve the churches and property…and had succeeded in so doing.” He asked only that Blacks be allowed to stay one more Sunday at Trinity, granting time to find a place to move. The stewards agreed to the request but took the occasion to ask Black people to stay, to “come again to their familiar places in the galleries.” John Curry, in his history, Passionate Journey, admits: “The congregations of color were attached to the old spiritual battlegrounds and to their old pastors.” But Lewis rose to the moment, famously saying, “Brethren and sisters, there will be no galleries in heaven. Those\textsuperscript{1} who are willing to go with a Church

\textsuperscript{1} Those were primarily Black members of Trinity Church who now had no building. They went to the Normal School on Beaufain St. When a beautiful church building on Wentworth Street belonging to Baptists came up for sale, one of the White Methodist missionaries negotiated its purchase, but discovering that a Black congregation would be moving in, the Baptists balked. To thwart the settlement of the contract, they demanded a price of twenty thousand dollars be paid immediately in gold, an amount unavailable in Charleston. White history remembers that the intervention of one George Williams, a wealthy banker and member of Trinity with long acquaintances among Black members of that same church, enabled a draft from the Northern Missionary Society to be cashed.

Interestingly, Black history knows a different story, narrated by the Rev. Warren M. Jenkins on page 6 of his 1967 book
that makes no distinction as to race or color follow me.”

The congregation meeting in the Old Bethel building stayed put but affiliated with the mission conference of the M.E. Church (North). Consequently, buildings occupied by congregations of two different denominations stood on common ground, filled with the bones of their respective ancestors. Chreitzberg claims that the old church building was sold to the “Northern Methodist Episcopal Church,” but White history remembers an 1876 contribution.²

Steps Along the Way: the Origins and Development of the South Carolina Conference of the Central Jurisdiction: “The Negroes sought out their valuables and even dug some of their treasured possessions out of the earth. These were sent North to be exchanged for gold. At the approach of the hours of payment, the ship with the gold docked in the harbor. No one would transfer the gold from the ship to the place of payment. The Negroes, without the help of the Whites, made the necessary arrangements for getting the gold to the shore and to the place of payoff. They used a wagon to carry the load through town and when the clock was striking the hour, they were counting the gold over the the counter. The transaction completed; the property passed over into the hands of the Methodist Episcopal Church April 10, 1866.

2 Extant minutes of the Quarterly Conference(s) have the trustees reporting in Dec. 1872 that the M.E.C. (North) has refused to sign paper admitting our claim and the initiation of a suit to prevent M.E.C. (North) from having it by possession. At the Dec. 1874
Eventually, it was moved almost directly across Calhoun Street.

From colonial times, Methodism appealed to the slaves and free people of color in Charleston. Bishop Asbury himself took note, lamenting in his journal (Wednesday, February 17, 1796) “the superficial state of religion among the white people who are called Methodist. I have thought if we had entered here to preach only to the Africans, we should probably have done better.”

Tellingly, he did not lament that the Africans’ religion was superficial. Whatever “social, historical, and ritual elements attracted Carolinians of African origins to the Methodist faith,”1 it was the Word itself as Methodist evangelists presented it that offered something essential to the African life.

Few put it any better than Eric Rose:

> Whether through the immediate hand of white evangelicals or their proxies, many slaves underwent authentic transformative religious experiences as a result of the slave missions. The messages of grace and salvation that they took from these experiences were messages of universal application— “God is no respecter of

---

meeting, the same situation prevails. However, by the Dec. 1880 meeting, trustees are anxious to get the building moved. The next year, they report having offered M.E.C. (North) one thousand dollars to move it by July 1882. That may not have happened, for in Dec. 1882, they reported Old Bethel had been moved, but M.E.C. (North) didn’t get the thousand dollars—only five hundred dollars from an individual church member.

1 Rose, “The Charleston ‘School of Slavery’,” 224.
persons, God hath made of one blood all the nations of men.” They joined a community of the converted, as they understood it, where membership was determined both by profession (internal/self-identification) and action (external markers).¹

If Raboteau is justified in his assertion that some of the enslaved should be included in the category of “confessor and/or martyr” to the Christian faith, it is more than ironic that postbellum, some Whites began to see them selves as victims. They reasoned that, often in the face of opposition, they had selflessly devoted themselves to the cause of the enslaved, had advanced the dialogue from “a necessary evil” to “a positive good”—that God had delivered into their care the heathen, primitive African to be saved and improved, though not likely to ever obtain the stature of White enlightenment or ability. Now, emancipation had thwarted God’s plan and negated their sacrifice.

In 1882, William P. Harrison, editor of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, publishing house, wrote an introduction for Albert M. Shipp’s History of Methodism in South Carolina, praising it as “a calm, clear, and absolute vindication of the Southern people in regard to the moral and religious welfare of the African race.... It will enable the present generation to defend the memory of their fathers, which has often been wantonly assailed.”²

¹ Ibid., 257.
² Shipp, The History of Methodism in South Carolina, 8.
Harrison’s defensiveness vis-à-vis “the African race” was part of reckoning with the wreckage of a lost war that could not have been without the presence of African enslavement.¹ Some church leaders diplomatically refused to opine on slavery. Instead, they took credit for inculcating the religious and civic values now on display, and “forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before” (Philippians 3:13), they preached the importance of meeting the pressing needs of here and now.

Certainly, there was a good bit to be tended to at Bethel, including, as late as December 1866, interest among Whites in inviting Blacks to return. However, Trinity Church demurred.

With reference to the encouragement of the Colored people to return to our church,…we do not deem it judicious at the present…. Hereafter, when the people of color who have left us not withstanding our efforts to retain them in the communion of our church shall signify in a proper way their desire to return, then we shall cheerfully unite with our brethren of Bethel Church in giving them a hearty Christian welcome.²

Motivation for this invitation that never was is not explicitly stated. It may lie in a longing to reembrace

---

¹ That had to be the center of any dialogue about the Civil War. Even if one took the position that the war was not about slavery, the ensuing debate was about slavery.
² Quarterly Conference Minutes, December 1866.
the nostalgic romanticism that quickly arose in Southern culture, a charitable impulse grounded in the myth of dependency, or a maneuver to maintain control over the affairs of Black people. At the very least, conditioning reunion, as did Trinity Church, on signifying “in a proper way” reflects an expectation of deference.

Such a prerequisite was unacceptable to newly emancipated Black Christians, for whom church, in the words of Septima Clark, was “the one sign and seal, above all the other aspects of his life, of his emergence from servile dependency to self-respecting independency.” Even so, the breakup was bittersweet. When the physical removal of the old church became inevitable, Blacks remarked: “It will be to us a painful duty to leave a place of religious worship for which we have made so many pecuniary and personal sacrifices, and also to which we are bound by so many cherished associations and pleasant recollections.” Such expressions of lasting affection were mutual. In October 1876, the White trustees wrote:

They are ready at any time. On the removal of the church, cheerfully to render assistance. The kindly relations which have existed between the White and colored people at Bethel prompts us to wish that it was in our power to build a new

---

and commodious church as an expression of our friendly feelings.... We pray the Great Head of the Church that you may prosper and keep the Unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.¹

Clearly, from the time in 1853 when the 1797 building was moved to make room for the new church building, it was intended that Black members would always have use of it. However, when after the Civil War the northern Methodists seized and claimed Old Bethel as their property, the White trustees balked. This dispute remained unsettled for years. By 1876, the M.E.C. had been in possession almost ten years, and, fearing that ownership would be claimed by possession, the White trustees threatened suit.

These claims and counterclaims between the Northern and Southern Methodists cropped up in many places in the South. Finally, the two denominations appointed commissioners who met in Cape May, New Jersey, to settle.² At the White Quarterly Conference meeting on December 5, 1876, the congregation learned that “at a meeting of the trustees of Bethel M.E.C.S. the adjudication of the Joint Commission respecting Old Bethel was presented and unanimously accepted.” The agreement was that the M.E.C. would have to move the building within six months or it would revert to the M.E.C., South. Doubtless, it is this 1876

¹ Minutes of the Board of Trustees, archived at Bethel U.M.C.
² This was the first of many meetings between the Southern and Northern branches of the M.E. Church aimed at reconciling differences and reunion, which did not happen until 1939.
acceptance of the Cape May decision that led later local histories to assert that “it was officially given to that congregation in 1876.”

As it happened, the building was not moved, despite repeated efforts to get it moved, until 1882. The reasons were that the Black congregation (1) could not afford to move it and (2) had trouble finding a place to move it. The White trustees offered one thousand dollars, with the stipulation that it not be placed on any property touching “the lot upon which our Brick Church is situated.” After at least two earlier attempts, a lot was secured, and “the title was handed over to the Trustees of Old Bethel on March 22, 1882,” per a 2018 flyer on Old Bethel letterhead stored at the Charleston County Library’s Calhoun Street Branch.

So let this be the last date when there is a narrative to unfold about Blacks at Bethel Church (as opposed to Old Bethel). Of course, though now largely forgotten, their graves are still there. Interestingly, the

---


2 Minutes of the Board of Trustees, November 7, 1878.
Black cemetery was still intact in October 1897, \(^1\) when the White trustees leased it for use as a plant nursery with the stipulation that a fence be built to separate it from the church campus and that the gravestones, \textit{et al}, not be disturbed. In the meantime, Old Bethel purchased property near Magnolia Cemetery in the “neck” area of Charleston for use as a cemetery.

That slavery was an evil cannot be denied. Rationalizations failed to justify it. Yet, denying the evil and justifying slavery both gained traction in Southern White pulpits. Neither view assuaged the tragedy of slavery or did much to ameliorate the damages to the Black community wrought by the heritage of racism. Indeed, these failures of the moral imagination appeared to give approval to White advantage and permission for Black disenfranchisement.

Thus, was missed the saving vision St. Paul offered to the slaveholding Philemon:

\begin{quote}
For perhaps he therefore parted for a season, that thou shouldest receive him forever; not now as a slave, but above a slave, a brother beloved…both in the flesh, and in the Lord? (Philemon 15–16)
\end{quote}

It would be ninety years (1972) before White and Black Methodists in South Carolina were freed from byzantine ecclesiastical administrative/governing structures wherein they—in their church lives—never dealt with each other face to face.

\(^1\) In 1951, ground was broken in this same plot for the construction of a new educational building. (Andrus, \textit{The Name Shall Be Bethel}, 56.)
The interracial Church gave way to the segregated Church, and separation was perhaps the first step towards religious and social apartheid. This, of course, was not the aim of the proponents of Black Church—just the opposite.  

At the crucial moment of decision the Rev. Mr. Lewis had invited Blacks to leave the gallery of the M.E. Church, South and follow him into a church that made “no distinction as to race and color”.

Lewis may not himself have been disingenuous, but the M.E. Church (North) failed to make good on the vision. Their Black congregations in the South

---

1 Henceforth, in this document, “Old Bethel” refers to the majority-Black Church. This illustration is from B. A. Sayre, “Old Bethel Church.” In *United Methodist Ministers of South Carolina*, bicentennial ed., M. D. Arant, ed. (Columbia, SC: South Carolina Conference of United Methodist Church, 1985).
were organized into “mission conferences” with no voice in the affairs of the national Church. At least one Northern clergyman recognized the import of this decision: “The church was...fixing upon the colored people an ignominious badge of inferiority.”

Assigning a White man, Alonzo Webster, as the first “preacher-in-charge” of the Charleston churches didn’t contradict that observation.

Actually, on the local level, it’s somewhat difficult to discern exactly what was different for Black Methodists at Old Bethel. They had maintained virtual control over that building for a dozen years, only having to get the approval of the board of stewards about some things from time to time. Even that requirement was not always studiously followed.

In May 1857, the trustees are complaining “that a ‘partition’ had been erected in the old church by some of the colored leaders without the knowledge or sanction of the board.” They were admonished but not required to remove the partition and requested not to do it again. If not equality a level of mutuality is revealed the very next month when the trustees requested Blacks help pay church debts. In September, follow-up minutes report that White people had pledged a hundred dollars; and while

---


2 They were, however, connected to the national M.E. Church, which became more and more important as Jim Crow laws isolated the Black community from the proximate social and political power structures.

3 Minutes in the archives of Bethel.
Black members pledged an equal amount, they immediately collected sixteen dollars in cash.

Of course, now constant White supervision could not be enforced, but still being “within spitting distance,” they could hardly ignore or hide from each other. They had no reason to. After all, when urging Blacks to stay with them, the minutes reported that “Bro. N___ and Bro. P___ severally expressed their wish that the utmost kindness be shown to the colored people.” No one supposed that was insincere and not a prelude to an amicable breakup.

Some few Blacks stayed with the Southern church, including a couple of hundred at the now (for the first time in history) predominantly White Bethel.¹ Many of the few were organized into “Negro pastoral charges”…at the request of the negroes themselves,” according to Albert Betts in his History of South Carolina Methodism. In 1870, again according to Betts, the M.E.C., South, “took the needed action in response to their request for a separate church.”³ It is not difficult to believe that Betts is right about the desire for a “separate church.” Black Church had been practiced in the secrecy of the “hush arbor” and “praise houses” of the plantation, where the Lord who proclaimed

¹ A pamphlet prepared in 1953 for the one hundredth anniversary of the building’s construction states: “Finally in 1878 the Quarterly Conference recorded only one Negro.”
² A charge is one or more local churches served by the same pastor(s), administered as a unit.
³ Albert D. Betts, History of South Carolina Methodism (Columbia, SC: Advocate, 1952), 389, 392, emphasis added.
“deliverance to the captives” (Luke 4:18) could be worshipped with whatever expressiveness needful. Black Church, an autonomous place of agency, had—albeit briefly, a half-century before—been a real thing in Charleston. Now, in 1866, the Southern Church’s vaulted raison d’être, the plantation mission, grounded as it was in the myth of dependency, had collapsed, and in the urban areas, the galleries had been emptied of “our colored members.” The White missioners of the Methodist Episcopal Church (North) came into Charleston (and elsewhere) with perhaps too much of that myth of dependency, which rests on the assumption of White supremacy, clinging. John Curry, in his 1980 *Passionate Journey*, relates the eagerness of the Northern Bishop O. C. Baker to get into South Carolina, sending the Rev. T. Willard Lewis to Beaufort in 1862, as soon as the Union Army established a foothold there.

When Charleston surrendered to the Union forces, Brother Lewis came with the army to look for the lost sheep of the house of Israel. The colored Methodists he found worshipping in three churches viz. Old Bethel, St. James and Zion Presbyterian Church on Calhoun St. In 1865, Bishop Baker sent Rev. Alonzo Webster, D.D., a member of high standing in the Vermont

---

1 “The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because He hath anointed Me to preach the Gospel to the poor; He hath sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised.”

Conference, to Charleston, to help Bro. Lewis in his great work of reorganizing the South Carolina Conference of the M.E. Church.¹

Webster was the first pastor at Old Bethel after it became a charge of the M.E. Church. Seven White men in a row were the first ministers of Centenary on Wentworth St., a church founded by Blacks who had left Trinity. Lewis supervised the district, with White men leading the churches in Charleston, on Johns Island, and in Camden, among others. In addition, quoting Curry, “All the presiding bishops of the conference were white until 1926.”

With whatever baggage of the “white man’s burden” they brought to the mission fields of South Carolina, M.E. Church (North) missioners also brought a commitment to Black betterment. In conjunction with the American Missionary Association, a so-called “normal” school, which eventually morphed into the Avery Institute, was staffed with “Northern white missionaries as well as members of Charleston’s antebellum free black community.”² Bishop Baker himself came to Charleston to officially establish an M.E. Church Conference in South Carolina. While in the city, he set-up a theology school to train newly ordained Black preachers.

However, the lure of Black Church was strong. The Methodist Episcopal Church (North) counted

---

¹ Ibid., 3.
² “Avery Institute History,” Avery Institute, averyinstitute.us/history.html.
less than fourteen thousand Black members in its South Carolina churches in 1868. This was a little less than thirty percent of the forty-eight thousand Black persons (as compared to 37,986 Whites) who had been in the Southern church at the beginning of the war.

Some of the rest may have joined no church. This might have been especially true of Blacks counted as members at the plantation missions, who perhaps had only shown up at the slaveholders’ urgings. Others found spiritual homes among the Baptists, etc. Of those who stayed with a Methodist church, the A.M.E. claimed the largest share. Betts says the obvious: “This…[was] due to the desire among so many of our brothers in black to have their own Churches and thus to become wholly autonomous.”

Despite the competition, the M.E. Church (North)’s Mission Conference in South Carolina grew rapidly, numbering about twenty-eight thousand by 1870. The assessment of Albert Betts that the conference was “well organized and doing a high-quality work” is doubtless attributable its high-quality leadership.

John Curry provides “Vignettes of Some Pioneer Preachers of the South Carolina Mission Conference.” Several of those he names were Charleston natives; however, only Abram Middleton

1 Betts, *History of South Carolina Methodism*, 391.
2 Ibid.
3 As an aside, Edmund L. Drago, in his historical narrative of Charleston’s Avery Center, repeats information from another, asserting Abram Middleton to be a son of Thomas Middleton, a
is specifically tied to Old Bethel, where he was converted at age ten. At about that same age, he was being educated by another Old Bethel member of note, Mary Ann Berry, a former slave who “gained acclaim for her school” on George Street, which she operated clandestinely “in spite of all the laws against negro education.”

Middleton, an “expert mechanic and master of carpentry, a noted contractor of South Carolina and builder of many churches,” served his local church as a class leader, steward, trustee, exhorter, and local preacher. After studying at Baker Theological Institute, he organized churches across South Carolina and rose to the level of presiding elder. He was also engaged civically as a member of the South Carolina Constitutional Convention of 1868, a county school commissioner, and a trustee at Claflin University, a school established in Orangeburg by the M.E. Church (North).

As a clergyman and an active citizen, Middleton modeled the important place of Black Church for the newly freed, as well as the equalitarian impulse displayed by Black civic leaders during the Reconstruction years. Church was the primary legacy institution available to Blacks for cooperative betterment. As Robert Rosen has it, the churches

slave said to have learned Hebrew and Greek as valet “with the Middleton boys at Oxford.” However, it’s hard to reconcile the timeline.

2 Curry, Passionate Journey, 13–18.
“were religious, social, political, and educational centers. They were welfare agencies. They were community meeting halls and focal points of organized community efforts.”

In his other role as equalitarian activist, Middleton helped write a “Constitution [that] was more democratic than any before or since (until very recent times).”¹ The lives of others Curry briefly sketches are, likewise, distinguished by their piety, ability, and labors.

By the time the building was moved in 1882, federal Reconstruction was over, replaced by “redemption,” ironically and perhaps not coincidently a cherished word in the emerging Bible belt’s theological vocabulary. It seemed the harder the Bible was thumped, the harsher the regime of segregation, reaching the apex of absurdity when the cross of Christ itself was made to symbolize the burning embrace of the demonic. Thus, the need for Black Church deepened.

The building’s new physical location ended any commonality of interest between the congregations. The minutes of the Bethel Boards of Trustees and Stewards no longer referenced “the colored.” Shortly before the 1886 earthquake, the galleries—no longer needed—were removed. After the 1818 Black schism had emptied the galleries, F. A. Mood lamented that “the absence of their responses and hearty songs was really felt to be a loss to those so long accustomed to hear them.” But now, twenty years after the Civil War, the rhythms of worship that had meant so much had faded to forgetfulness.

The White Church quickly built a new activity building, bigger than the old church itself, on the spot where the 1797 building had rested for thirty years. Meanwhile, the congregation in the old building labored to repair the ceiling that had collapsed during the earthquake, but—more importantly—to provide the spiritual and physical support, protections, and encouragement demanded by the Black community’s deteriorating situation in the Jim Crow South.

A way forward amidst the knee-jerk racism of the post-Reconstruction South that sought to limit every
opportunity for Black betterment was suggested most famously by Booker T. Washington. He and “prominent Black Charlestonians” organized a “Negro Building” at the South Carolina Interstate and West Indian Exposition, at what is now Hampton Park, in 1901\(^1\) to foster his “racial-advancement philosophy,” which Washington saw as the only escape from the morass of discrimination. This avenue toward equality, often touted by Whites as well (though seldom delivered), was embraced by people of color both before and after the Civil War. Some agreed with the brother of Old Bethel’s pastor Henry Cardozo that the development of separate schools and colleges, etc., would be best “until some of the present prejudice against their race is removed.”\(^2\)

Therefore, institutions like Claflin, the M.E.C.’s college in Orangeburg, and Avery Normal, started by the American Missionary Association, to which the M.E.C. looked to provide the educational needs of the newly freed, surfaced to address pressing needs. Avery, in its 1867 building only a few blocks south of Old Bethel, richly contributed to these betterment goals. An outstanding example is their 1916 graduate Septima P. Clark, an Old Bethel member. To outline her career in Charleston between 1947 and her death in 1987 would be to review the entire struggle for civil rights waged in those years. Here the focus is on her educational work because it reflected the self-help,

---

\(^1\) Rosen, *A Short History of Charleston*, 128.
\(^2\) Ibid., 120.
social-uplift philosophy Avery instilled in its students. Widespread use of education was seen as a key to cracking the Kafkaesque literacy barriers disenfranchising large numbers of Black voters. The Citizenship Schools she developed to teach basic reading skills helped countless Black Southerners push for the right to vote. Such skills also developed leaders across the country who would help push the Civil Rights Movement long after.

While segregation marginalized their contributions to the larger community, the sheer vibrancy of Black life continued as it always had done, and still does, to permeate American culture. The music, the language, the cuisine, the dress, the dance, the drama, the literature, as well as its spirituality, flowed steadily across artificial constructions of race. The proximate situation, however, necessitated the “development of a complex and multi-layered society of their own.”

Churches like Old Bethel were vital. So, it’s not surprising then that when the walls began to fall, there were talented and able persons like David Mack, a lay speaker at Old Bethel, available.

Some Black Methodists may have stayed with the Methodist Episcopal Church (North) simply out

---

of habit or loyalty to the familial congregation at Old Bethel. But the invitation of the Rev. Willard Lewis into a church that made “no distinction as to race and color” contained the vision of an equalitarian community that perhaps seemed more attainable in an interracial Church than in an exclusively Black one. Families who were successful entrepreneurs, educated and socially sophisticated, like those who in the 1830s felt comfortable moving into seats in the church usually reserved for Whites, had longed not only to assume a rightfully earned place of equality but to be acknowledged. The Methodist Episcopal Church modeled, at least theoretically, an institution that would afford that possibility’s realization. It certainly seemed in a city where, as “one Black person said, ‘freedom was free-er in Charleston,’” the vision of a functional interracial community might not be impossible. As it happened, that was not to be, even within the confines of the M.E. Church itself. Yet, as one Methodist historian put it, Blacks remained members, “patiently waiting the day when they would be fully recognized as members equal with all others.”

Blacks wept, it was reported, on the floor of the General Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church when delegates voted favorably on the “plan of union” that formed a denomination with an explicitly segregated structure. That was The

---

1 Rosen, A Short History of Charleston, 116.
Methodist Church with a capital T. At its formation in 1939, it was the largest Protestant denomination in the United States. Some who bemoaned the capitulation to racism demanded by the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, as the price of its participation in the merger charged that it was only this ephemeral bragging right that sealed the deal.

On Calhoun Street, it meant the two Bethels that had styled themselves as Bethel M.E. Church, South, and Old Bethel M.E. Church, members of two separate denominations, put up new signage signifying their membership in the same denomination. Even so, Old Bethel Methodist Church and Bethel Methodist Church did not change their nearly three-quarters-of-a-century way of relating to each other. Black Methodists in their so-called “central jurisdiction” did not meet in any church structure on equal terms except perhaps at the quadrennial General Conference, at which the representatives of nine million White members vastly outnumber those of three hundred thousand Blacks.

This arrangement endured for thirty more years, but for theological and societal reasons, it could not and did not last. In the meantime, however, the post-World War II liberalization of American culture, including the rise of a determined and energetic Civil Rights Movement, fostered a resistance from hidebound members of White Bethel. Ugliness ensued! Pompous official-sounding resolutions asserted opposition to membership for “negroes,” stating that their attendance at worship or Sunday
School would be unwelcome.¹ Some, adamant in their recalcitrant behavior, sought to spread their disapprobation to other local White Methodist churches, but a measure of resistance to the harshest actions is perhaps evident in the resolution passed by the official board on July 1, 1963, after it was reported that “four [Black] men and a woman showed-up” the day before.

Resolve, to preserve and protect the spirit and reverence of worship…instruct NOT to forcibly oppose any persons who insist upon entering such service, after clearly demonstrating to such persons that they are violating the official policy of the Board and not to call for police assistance unless such person breach the peace by boisterous action.

This obstructionist behavior continued until the end of the decade, when six Black people seeking to worship on January 5, 1969, were turned away. The next day, “after a lengthy discussion, it was moved that the Board rescind any previous instructions or policies and instruct the ushers to seat anyone who wishes to enter to participate in worship services. The motion was passed with opposition.”²

By then, new signage was going up pronouncing the Bethel Churches to be “United Methodist”

¹ Oct. 7, 1963, Quarterly Conference minutes on file in church archives.
² Andrus, The Name Shall Be Bethel, 116.
churches. *United*,\(^1\) as a word, had little to do with the demise of the racist structure in The Methodist Church, but in practice came to represent a Church committed to interracial equality. Bethel and Old Bethel continued as they had been for another couple of years. Then, in 1972, the White and Black South Carolina Annual Conferences merged. Thereafter, it was theoretically possible for a White and/or Black person to serve in any ecclesiastical position (including as pastor of any local church) available in either of the merged conferences. This has been essentially the case regarding positions outside of local churches. However, in the local churches themselves, there have been few examples of it. One exception was Old Bethel, which briefly did have a White man as its pastor.\(^2\) Interaction between the two congregations that share such a deep and rich history in Charleston has, over the intervening fifty years, been spotty.

---

\(^1\) This was in recognition of the Evangelical United Brethren Church, which merged with the Methodist Church.

CELEBRATION OF UNION

The South Carolina Conference ’85
and
The South Carolina Conference ’66
creating
THE SOUTH CAROLINA CONFERENCE
THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

MONDAY, JUNE 5, 1972
7:30 P. M. O’CLOCK

SPARTANBURG MEMORIAL AUDITORIUM
SPARTANBURG, SOUTH CAROLINA
BISHOP PAUL HARDIN, JR., PRESIDING
CONCLUSION

It has been the contention of this narrative that during the interracial years of Bethel’s history, Blacks made immeasurable contributions. The primary emphasis has been on those that enriched the spiritual life of that community of faith:

- **Conversion**: a necessary ingredient of evangelical faith (White as well as Black), facilitated by the emotional underpinning provided by Black engagement in worship
- **Worship**: music, especially spirituals, that enlivened worship. “The ancient African dictum, ‘The spirit will not descend without song,’ was made manifest.”¹
- **Generosity**: actually, more materially significant than is generally recognized, but, more importantly—since it was by choice—as a *witness* to a genuine faith in need of material expression as well as a generator of reciprocity (“we’re in this together”) with the one on the receiving end of the generosity
- **Praxis**:² that is to say, how one lives out one’s faith:

---

² “...combining in an incarnational way, our salvation history and our ‘human’ history” (Jon Sobrino). “To be followers of Jesus requires that [we] walk with and be committed to the poor; when [we] do, [we] experience an encounter with the Lord who is simultaneously revealed and hidden in the faces of the poor”
o Castile Selby, who deliberately chose to identify with the poorest Blacks in order to be most helpful. “And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us” (John 1:14).

o Faithful in their thousands in their enslavement, suffering, persecution, and oppression, “they created a faith that met their own needs as blacks experiencing a particular kind of oppression in America.”¹ “And they stepped into a grand Christian narrative, demonstrating the movement of God’s spirit against malevolent forces.”²

- Theology: Black enslavement in and of itself propelled spiritual truth telling in the face of a lived lie and, consequently, was an unrelenting challenge in a Christian communion, especially a Methodist one.

o Nat Turner, in his visionary responses at his trial, “raised the iniquity of slavery to the level of cosmic outrage.”³

That slavery was wrong was seldom admitted. Nevertheless, that the slave was wronged became Southern Methodist orthodoxy. The Methodist preacher was duty bound to tell the “Christian” enslaver what was owed to those said to be owned, and then demand that government proscribe “wrong”

(Gustavo Gutiérrez, We Drink from Our Own Wells: The Spiritual Journey of a People).
² McClain, Black People in the Methodist Church, 35.
³ Harvey, Paul, Christianity and Race in the American South (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2016), 127.
and enforce “correct” treatment. A Methodist bishop preaching at their invitation to the Georgia State legislature in the midst of the Civil War rather incongruously said, “One of the moral ends of this war is to reform the abuses of slavery.” Even more incredible are the words, “If the institution of slavery cannot be maintained except at the expense of the black man’s immortal interest, in the name of heaven, I say—let it perish.”1 The bishop is almost there.

Blacks in the interracial Bethel offered the gift of truth-telling grace. Blacks in Old Bethel who have endured the Black Codes, Jim Crow apartheid, and the Civil Rights struggle have a truth to tell as well. James McBride Dabbs, a White South Carolinian whose writings Martin Luther King, Jr., call “eloquent and prophetic”, articulated a characteristic of the larger civil rights struggle which was also present at Old Bethel during those years: patience. Dabbs asserted that the “freedom movement’s reliance on nonviolence was possible because blacks in the region exhibited a Christian patience”.2 His insight revealed that while White stressed love without justice; “black protestors had rejuvenated the ‘religiously committed heart of the South’”. Therefore, “Whites should look to the southern black Christians, because they understood what ‘whole-soul’ commitment meant: to lay ‘one’s life on the line, one’s body in the jailhouse;
and most creative of all, they understood the Great Prophets and the ideal of social justice.”

Charleston icon Septima P. Clark (1898–1987), member of and at times trustee of Old Bethel, recognized this truth’s existence in Charleston and articulated it beautifully in undated handwritten notes she prepared for a lecture titled “Christianity Among Blacks in the United States,” preserved by Avery Institute, now associated with the College of Charleston. Of these believers she writes:

The race…knows now that it can endure all things…. The patience of this people is a rebuke and an example to much of the well-meant but short-sighted…impatience…. It is not apathy; it is not indifference; it is not servility; it is a kind of spiritual vigil, as of those who watch for the morning and wait for the consolation of Israel [Psalm 130]. If any one in our impatient America is fitted by his history to understand that majestic phrase in the Apocalypse— “the kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ” [Revelation 1:9], it is the Black man.²

And so, the lesson is that, like John of Patmos, Blacks at Bethel remain for Whites at Bethel…Your brother, and companion in tribulation, and in the kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ,…for the Word of God, and for the testimony of Jesus Christ. (Revelation 1:9)³

---

¹ As quoted in Paul Harvey, 181.
² Clark, “Christianity Among Blacks,” 8.
³ The author’s reflection: While it is possible, as Septima Clark imagines, that the Black Church can save the White Church, it’s not
Afterword

Blacks in the History of the Bethel Churches of Charleston, South Carolina, attained a moral victory.

In 1855 an editor at the Nashville Christian Advocate (a Methodist periodical of that city) was in Charleston. He was astonished to find that at least a third -- some five or six thousand -- of the Black population of Charleston were (in the aggregate) congregants of one of the four Methodist churches there. With wonder and condescension, he describes “large crowds of colored people coming into the house of God well clad, and many of them with their Bible and hymnbooks in hand.” He reported to his readers that, “They are orderly and pious, and many of them very intelligent.”

For him the scene is evidence of the salutary benefits of slavery. But in truth it’s instead evidence of the formation by these Black members of a community and a culture in spite of slavery. Perhaps Dr. McFerrin, the Advocate’s reporter, was being coy when he wrote that “they worship in the same congregations with the whites, occupying the spacious galleries, which are set apart for their exclusive use” (emphasis added), when he surely knew that the

yet possible outside our eschatological imagination to know whether it can grasp it.

segregated galleries were physical markers of inferiority and not a bestowal of privilege (exclusive). Yet, he seems to have, at least inadvertently, understood that the occupants of the galleries were themselves the authors of their extraordinary presence as people of God. Yes! they worshipped “in the same congregation”. But it was the uses that Black believers made in their exclusion that birthed the people of faith now, collectively, referred to as the Black Church.

Albert Raboteau’s assertion in Slave Religion: The “Invisible Institution” in the Antebellum South that “slave Christians bore witness to the Christian gospel” is worth repeating here. For it is in this witness to the truth of the Christian gospel that the promise of redemption abides. To endure Blacks always had to live beyond reality into the future. They did that by faith and, consequently, they by faith transcended the despair, the resentment, the hate, which they as sentient human beings could not otherwise have avoided.¹

The story of Blacks in the history of the Bethel churches in Charleston, of course, did not end with

¹ “I’m often asked what gives me hope to go on, given the evil I see in the world. I find encouragement in a set of images more powerful than the photos, videos and funerals chronicling Black death; the vision of all those Black bodies, who trusted in God called back to life, free to laugh, dance and sing. Not in a disembodied spiritual state in a heavenly afterlife but in this world remade by God.

“This is the hope that had Black Christians throwing their bodies at wave after wave of racism so that their children, even if only for a moment, might rest awhile on the shore. For them, belief in God’s power over death fueled their resistance. It may be a fool’s hope, but I believe that their struggle was not in vain. I trust that all those bodies engulfed in the sea of hatred will one day play with their descendants on a beach, singing the songs of Zion with no more waves to threaten them.” Esau McCaulley What Easter Says About Black Suffering in “Review” Section of The New York Time, Sunday, April 17, 2022, page 7.
slavery. The greater part of that story (from say 1882 when the Old Bethel building was moved) has been lived-out in the Charleston described with dispassionate objectivity by a Black pharmacist, Dr. John A. McFall, in his autobiography. In 1878 he was “born in freedom” but “by the time he reached manhood, African American men were being disenfranchised and all Black people were essentially designated second-class citizens.”

That is: McFall was witness to the betrayal of emancipation and the subsequent loss, for example, of Black jobs at the port and in construction, as well as, the collapse of those businesses/services that had catered successfully to White patrons in Charleston. He outlines the frustrations and absurdities of Jim Crow from the perspective of a Black professional trying to maintain the viability and security of the Black community in Charleston. Their success in doing so with equanimity is impressive.

The success of the Black Community in securing and retaining ethical and betterment values has been attributed by James Baldwin, who can rightly be regarded as a public intellectual, to the Black Church. “…[I]t is through the creation of the black church that an unwritten, dispersed, and violated inheritance has been handed down.”

Born a son of a Pentecostal preacher in Harlem, Baldwin was

---

1 Morna Lahnice McFall Hollister, in the Foreword to Resisting Jim Crow: the Autobiography of Dr. John A. McFall, by John A. McFall (Simpsonville, SC: Kittawah Press LLC, 2021).
himself a teenage prodigy in the pulpit; and, although he left the institutional church, all his life he credited the Black Church with the multiple and varied resources -- spiritual and mundane -- that formed and nurtured Black “life as a continuing and complex group reality,”¹ which, according to Baldwin “testifies to nothing less than the perpetual achievement of the impossible.”² For Baldwin and many others the importance of Black Church for Black lives in America can hardly be overstated.³

Black Church *had to be! And was.* For Blacks in the history of the Bethel Churches in Charleston, the Black church was nurtured, firstly, in Black led and managed ‘class meetings’ in the nascent Methodist church of the late eighteenth century. For a brief period (1818-1822) that Church could be practiced openly in the independent African Church at the corner of Hanover and Reid Streets. Even in the

¹ James Baldwin, “Many Thousands Gone” in *The Price of the Ticket*, p. 87.
² James Baldwin, “The Fire Next Time” in *The Price of the Ticket*, p. 388. “I have great respect for that unsung army of black men and women who trudged down back lanes and entered back doors, saying “Yes, sir” and “No, ma’am” in order to acquire a new roof for the schoolhouse, new books, a new chemistry lab, more beds for the dormitories, more dormitories. They did not like saying “Yes, sir” and “no, ma’am,” but the country was in no hurry to educate Negroes, these black men and women knew that the job had to be done, and they put their pride in their pockets in order to do it. It is very hard to believe that they were in any way inferior to the white men and women who opened those back doors. It is very hard to believe that those men and women, raising their children, eating their greens, crying their curses, weeping their tears, singing their songs, making their love, as the sun rose, as the sun set, were in any way inferior to the white men and women who crept over to share these splendors after the sun went down.” P. 384.
³ The writing of James Baldwin (1924-1987) so powerfully evokes from a Black perspective my intentions here that I’ve chosen to freely reproduce herein quotes which seem to me to lyrically deepen my own.
‘exclusive’ galleries ‘set apart’ for them in the original white-frame building of 1797 (and after its construction in 1853 in the brick church) until the end of the civil war, Black worship took expression. But, importantly, after 1853 the essentially exclusive use of the Old Bethel building provided a unique opportunity for Blacks at Bethel. It is in this very building built with Black hands in 1797 that Blacks continue to be Church until this day.

Methodism in Charleston in the late eighteenth century understood the need for Black Church and provided the opportunity for it at great cost to the congregation’s peace. It was an opportunity that the Black population of Charleston grasped with alacrity. But the exigence of enslavement was the spoiler! It demanded mythologies of inequality and dependence, as well as, myths about race (Whiteness and Blackness) to give it moral authority and political justification. However, these myths could not ultimately be theologically justified; and people of God could never accept them as truthful definitions of their humanity.¹ Consequently, whatever good-will [one might even say ‘love’²] may have accrued, a

¹ James Baldwin, “Many Thousands Gone” in The Price of the Ticket, p. 89. Here Baldwin speaks in the voice of a White man: “Our good will is thin, passionless, strident: its roots, examined, lead us back to our forebears, whose assumption it was that the black man, to become truly human and acceptable, must first become like us. This assumption once accepted, the Negro in America can only acquiesce in the obliteration of his own personality, the distorting and debasement of his own experience, surrendering to those forces which reduce the person to anonymity …”

² Ibid., 87. “It is not simply the relationship of oppressed to oppressor, of master to slave, nor is it motivated merely by hatred; it is also, literally and morally, a blood relationship, perhaps the most profound reality of the American experience, and we cannot begin to unlock it until we accept how very much it contains the force and anguish and terror of love.”
certain spiritual tension could never be overcome in the antebellum interracial church.

Sadly, the postbellum separation of the congregations, necessitated by the lingering mythologies of enslavement, deprived the White church clarity about Black life and its struggles after Jim Crow claimed White Southerners’ allegiance\(^1\). Thus, an understanding of the power of Black theology, spiritualism and praxis that propel that community to its moral victory was absent. The cost to the White church was an easy retention of the myths of White supremacy that led, for example, to the barring of its doors to the ‘Negro’ in the 1960s.\(^2\)

Because Old Bethel stayed with the Methodist Episcopal Church in 1866, it and Bethel now share in the common communion of the United Methodist Church. The need for Black Church is still present; but, even in our lingering divide we faithfully sing: “Blest be the tie that binds/ Our hearts in Christian Love/ The fellowship of kindred minds/ Is like to that above.”\(^3\)

---

1 Ibid., 86. “The privacy or obscurity of Negro life makes that life capable, in our imaginations, of producing anything at all.”

2 James Baldwin, “Stranger in the Village” in *The Price of the Ticket*, p. 101. “the perpetual challenge posed by this problem was always, somehow, perpetually met.”

3 The Rev. Dr. John Fawcett, 1740-1817, Yorkshire, England.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


Capers, William. *Exposition of the causes and character of the difficulties in the church in Charleston, in the year 1833; up to November 28, of that year*. Charleston, SC: 1834. archive.org/details/expositionofcaus00meth.

Chreitzberg, Abel M. *Early Methodism in the Carolinas*. Nashville, TN: Publishing House of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, 1897. archive.org/details/earlymethodismin00chre/page/156/mode/2up.


Wightman, William M. *Life of William Capers, D.D.*
archive.org/details/lifeofwilliamcap00wigh_0/page/n11/mode/1up?view=theater.

digitalcommons.wofford.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1000&context=methodistbooks.
APPENDIX

Following is approximately one-half of a monograph prepared by the Rev. Jerry L. Gadsden a former pastor of Old Bethel. The first part of his work related the shared history of the two current congregations: Old Bethel at 222 Calhoun Street and Bethel at 57 Pitt Street. Since this interracial narrative has been the burden of *Blacks in the History of the Bethel Churches of Charleston, S. C.* to which this appendix is attached, it will not be repeated here.

As noted in the preface to *Blacks in the History…* Bethel’s subsequent history through 1997 has been more thoroughly told by Ann T. Andrus in her *The Name Shall Be Bethel*. Interested readers are referred there. The Rev. Mr. Gadsden provides a similar service for the reader seeking additional information about Old Bethel’s postbellum history.

David Myers
March, 2022
Excerpts from…

An Historical Account
Of
Old Bethel United Methodist Church
Written By
Former Pastor Reverend Jerry L. Gadsden
May 3, 2000

1866 Conference

On April 2, 1866, the Missionaries of the Southern Department of the Methodist Episcopal Church met at the call of Bishop O. C. Baker at nine o’clock in the morning. Bishop Baker led services. He read from John chapter 17. Hymn 237 was sung and he led the conference in prayer.

After he called the Missionaries of the Southern Department for consultation and canvassed the matter fully, Bishop Baker read a resolution adopted by the previous General Conference. This resolution gave authority to the Bishops of the church to organize, when they deemed it wise, an annual conference. The resolution set forth certain rights, powers and privileges with certain exceptions and limitations. In accordance with this authority, Bishop Baker recognized T. Willard Lewis, Alonzo Wester, Joseph C. Emmerson and Dudley P. Leavitt as members of an annual conference under the name of the South Carolina Mission Conference, embracing the states of South Carolina, Eastern Georgia, and Florida. On motion of J. E. Emmerson, Alonzo Webster was appointed secretary of this first session of the Conference. The second day, April 3, Samuel Weston, W. O. Weston, J. A. Sasportas, Francis Smith, and
Thomas Philips, all black ministers, were admitted having been ordained the previous day. Two additional white ministers, W. J. Cole and Henry Owens were also admitted.

When the business of the conference continued that day the following appointments were fixed by Bishop Baker. T. Willard Lewis was appointed Presiding Elder of the Charleston District (embracing the state of South Carolina). Dr. A. Webster was appointed Pastor of the Charleston Charge, which included Old Bethel Church.

The white members of Bethel were anxiously wanting to expand their physical plant. They were somewhat hindered because of Old Bethel. The building was officially given to black members on August 22, 1876. Bethel urged Old Bethel to move its building. Land was purchased across the street on Calhoun. The building was officially moved in the year 1882 at the present site. By this time all black members had left Bethel and joined Old Bethel and the African Methodist Episcopal Church.

Originally a gabled meeting house style church, the white clapboard building has been altered by the addition to the façade of a gabled portico supported by four fluted Corinthian columns. This addition came after it was moved for the second time across the street to this present site, 222 Calhoun Street. The church is a visual document of changing styles, from a simple meeting house to a building with pediment and Corinthian columns.

At the time of the organization of the 1866 South Carolina Mission Conference, the churches in Charleston, including Old Bethel were on a circuit. This arrangement continued until 1874, when T. J. Abbott was sent to
Centenary, B. J. Roberts to Wesley and J. A. Sasportas to Old Bethel. Through the years Old Bethel has been in four different districts within the annual conference.

On the evening of August 31, 1886, the earth shook. A great earthquake devastated the people of Charleston. It destroyed buildings, peace, and lives. The extensive damages to the building during this earthquake are not known. It is said that the present pews on the main floor of the sanctuary were added after this earthquake. Also, the light fixtures that are now in place were added following this disaster.

In 1891, the South Carolina Annual Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church met in Old Bethel Church, celebrating the twenty-fifth anniversary of the organization of the conference. These were special services with appropriate addresses, which called attention to the steady growth and increasing influence of the Conference.

A pipe organ was installed in Old Bethel in 1919 under the leadership of E. B. Burroughs. The current organ was purchased by members and friends of Old Bethel in 1978 under the leadership of E. H. McDowell, Jr. A committee of three-Sadie Brown, Bernice J. Hicks, and Fletcher Robinson spearheaded the project.

Prior to the year 1944, a man by the name of Magee died leaving some property in Charleston to the denomination, specifying that it be used for missionary work. The bequest was known as the “Magee Estate.” A house at 40 Beaufain Street belonging to the estate became the parsonage for Centenary Church in 1874. All of the Magee estate was ultimately given to Old Bethel, Centenary and Wesley churches. One house belonging to
the estate burned during the pastorate of J. C. Barr (1956-8). Each church received $500, with $500 being reserved for upkeep of the property. In 1965, under the leadership of J. W. Taylor, the “Magee Estate” was disposed of and the price received for it was divided between the three churches.

The structure of the church remained the same until the 1944. The addition in the rear, was obtained in 1944 by Mrs. Geneva L. Myers, Mr. David J. Mack, Sr., and Mr. Henry Reid. They were assisted by the trustees of the church. A donation tentatively promised by the General Board of Missions of the Methodist Church was not forthcoming because Old Bethel was not able to meet the requirements.

The parsonage was once located at 21 Felix Street. It was a part of the congregation for many years. The present parsonage, 513 Huger Street, was purchased in 1967. Mr. Joseph Miller and Mrs. Septima P. Clark along with other trustees were instrumental in this project. The amount of the purchase was $14,000.

Under the leadership of George W. Watson in 1973, the church began to make plans to repair and renovate its structure. The work was to be extensive. David J. Mack, Sr. served as Chair of the Board of Trustees. The building was brought up to date with accords with codes at the time. The entire building was refurbished. The H. A. DeCosta Company were the General Contractors. The total cost of the project would be more than $73,000. The church had raised half of the funds needed and expected to borrow the rest.

Some of the work included: installation of a heating and cooling system, improvements of roofing, electrical,
plumbing, and insulation, and the replacing of doors, windows and flooring. Because of its historical significance, an article was written in the News and courier by Bobby Issac with headline: Refurbishing to begin on Old Bethel. The city was happy to know that the exterior of the building was not going to be affected.

With great pride, the congregation held a Service of Consecration and Holy Communion on Sunday, May 4, 1975 in its newly refurbished sanctuary. The Reverend O. F. Newman, District Superintendent, brought the morning message. Bishop E. L. Tullis, Resident Bishop of the South Carolina Conference led the worshippers through the Act of Consecration. The congregation worshipped under the theme: Restored For The Service of Mankind.

The membership of Old Bethel across the years included many people that were leaders in the community. They were unsung heroes of their time. They labored for justice for all and worked hard to bring about a change within society. They were good Methodist. They lived to change hearts and the help the community progress. Namely two, Mrs. Septima P. Clark and Miss Bernice Robinson were shakers in the Civil Rights Movement. They marched with the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and others.

On September 21, 1989, the dreaded storm called Hugo, rocked the city of Charleston. Damages were sustained at Old Bethel. Services were held in the educational building until repairs were made to the damaged sanctuary. This was the life of many churches within the city.
The 1990 session of the South Carolina Conference was an important conference in the life of the church. Bishop Joseph B. Bethea, Resident Bishop of the Columbia Area, made several cross racial appointments. This made news across the church and denominational lines. Old Bethel and Centenary Churches were to be a part of this historic move.

At the close of the session at Wofford College in Spartanburg, R. C. Monson, a white pastor, was appointed to Old Bethel. Of course, early pastors of Old Bethel following the Civil War were white. This was to be the first of such since reconstruction and certainly the first since the merger of the 1866 conference (black) and the 1785 conference (white) in South Carolina. Reverend Monson came at a time when the church was recovering from the effects of Hurricane Hugo and led the church through this time of healing and repairs. Extensive repairs to the church and parsonage began under his leadership. His stay was only for one year.

In 1991, the conference met again at Wofford College in Spartanburg. Bishop Bethea again was to make an historical appointment to Old Bethel. Old Bethel was to receive its first woman pastor. The Reverend Kay Adams Best became its first female pastor in the history of the church. The church had now been in existence for 194 years and had never been led by a female.

Under the leadership of Reverend Best, the church in 1997 celebrated its Bicentennial with events throughout the year. The highlight of the year came on Sunday, February 16, when a celebration service was held and the Resident Bishop, J. Lawrence McCleskey was the preacher.
Since 1874, Old Bethel had been a station church. The early years, as I mentioned, were years on a circuit. In 1998, Bishop J. Lawrence McCleskey, place Old Bethel on a charge with Centenary Church. His was to be called the newly formed Peninsula Charge. The Reverent Jerry L. Gadsden was appointed as Senior Pastor along with the Reverend Lorenzo Moses as Associate. This was a new situation for many. It came with some opposition for many from both congregations.

Since the split over racial lines in 1876, Old Bethel has never really had a membership over 450. It has been a relatively small congregation but one of strength and influence in this annual conference. Its members have served on conference boards and agencies throughout its time.

It has been a hall of preparation for a least three ministers within the United Methodist Church, the late Reverend Lorenzo Nimmons, the Reverend Helen McKune, and the Reverend Michael A. H. McKinney. Reverend McKune eventually left and joined the African Methodist Episcopal. Reverend McKinney is now a member of the Western New York Annual Conference in the Northeast Jurisdiction of our church. He is serving as pastor of the Disciples United Methodist Church.

Today approximately 150 persons claim Old Bethel as its church. The congregation in partnership with the South Carolina Department of Archives and History and the National Historic Trust will soon underwrite extensive needed repairs to its historic building. As the congregation continues to strive towards this goal, it continues to be in ministry to the church and its communities.
The church may look dusty but it is not just sitting by collecting dust. The church is active in many ways. The members give of their time and efforts to work in the many areas of opportunities the church provides. We are in ministry. We are doing ministry.

With the help of Almighty God, the work will grow and become even stronger as the church looks toward the 21st century in this house of prayer called Old Bethel.
Across the South, we have a deep appreciation for history. We haven’t always had a deep appreciation of each other’s history.

Clementa Pinckney

Justice grows out of our recognition of ourselves in each other.

Barak Obama