

The Form and Function of Methodist Autobiography

Michael K. Turner

I. INTRODUCTION

Between 1778 and 1860 a large number of Methodist autobiographies were published in religious magazines, journals, and book formats in both the United States and England. While enjoying a large circulation, the autobiographies were originally intended for an audience consisting chiefly of ministers. The goal of these accounts were to educate preachers and, hence, work toward bringing them into conformity with one another. Instead, as the genre expanded in popularity, it became a vehicle of dissent.

II. THE METHODIST NARRATIVE

The narratives and autobiographical patterns crafted by nineteenth-century Methodists drew and expanded upon the model propagated by the denomination's founder, John Wesley. From 1778 until his death in 1791¹ John Wesley published a series of personal accounts written by English Methodists in his monthly periodical, *The Arminian Magazine*. These accounts were formative in establishing religious biography as an integral part of Methodist devotion.

Wesley created *The Arminian Magazine* as a response to Calvinist periodicals, particularly *The Spiritual Magazine* and *The Gospel Magazine*. The founding intention of this English magazine was, thus, to promote a belief in the universal availability of salvation. As such, Wesley sought to only include those elements in the magazine that contributed to the spreading of this doctrine. The journal, thus, was organized in a four-part format. The first section of the magazine consisted of theological tracts which defended the "grand Christian doctrine, 'God willeth all men to be saved, and to come to

¹ The periodical was published through 1797. It continued the practice of publishing these "accounts."

the knowledge of truth.’’² To meet this purpose, Wesley included in the periodical, carefully edited works of divines who looked, sounded, or could be made to look or sound like “Arminians.”³ The second part of the journal was a biographical account of a “holy” person. These accounts included figures as diverse as Martin Luther and Arminius.⁴ A third part of the magazine consisted of letters from the “experience of pious persons.” Almost all these letters were personal acquaintances of Wesley; many were drawn from his family’s personal correspondence on religious topics. And the final section of the journal consisted of poetry that expressed the universal love of God.⁵ These poems were occasionally original publications; however, more often than not, the poems were reprinted from the works of prominent poets.

The inclusion of the correspondence and biographies was the most curious element in the journal; as the reader was at a loss for how exactly these pieces related to the overarching theme of the periodical. Wesley included personal correspondence and biographies in *The Arminian Magazine* for two related but distinct reasons. In the first place, these biographies and correspondence provided “evidence” for his claim regarding the universal availability of salvation. In Wesley’s estimate, one of the best ways to provide evidence of this universal nature of the salvific plan was to give accounts of persons who experienced this love of God in their lives and ministries. For Wesley,

² John Wesley, “To the Reader,” *The Arminian Magazine: Consisting of Extracts and Original Treatises on Universal Redemption* 1 (1778), v.

³ Wesley had a very distinct idea of what an “Arminian” was; this was an understanding not shared by the remainder of evangelical, secular, or Anglican culture. For Wesley, being Arminian meant that the divine believed in freedom of the will *and* total depravity (something Arminius himself would have had trouble with). This theological dilemma was solved in Wesley’s thinking through a doctrine of a *prevenient* grace. See, Randy L. Maddox, *Responsible Grace: John Wesley's Practical Theology* (Nashville: Kingswood Books, 1994), Theodore Runyon, *The New Creation: John Wesley's Theology Today* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1998).

⁴ *Ibid.*, 9-17, 68-77, 116-27, 165-175, 210-218, 264-273.

⁵ Wesley, iii-viii.

Calvinism presupposed a passive faith, which did not require virulent activity. On the other hand, activity that inspired conversion, such as a revivalism, was distinctively and inherently Arminian. This meant that, for Wesley, the success of any such efforts provided evidence for the universal availability of salvation.

And, secondly, these components of correspondence and biography served the practical function of educating clergy. In Wesley's thought *education* and *edification* were closely related. As such, the biographies and correspondence served a dual function for clergy; the biographies and correspondence simultaneously provided spiritual nourishment and worked toward bringing the ministers into uniformity.

They provided a model for Methodist uniformity through providing approved Christian models. The persons chosen to be in the narratives or to correspond about events in their lives were chosen (or edited) according to certain standards of Wesley. The persons included were deeply pious, they were not preoccupied with the supernatural, they were tireless preachers or witnesses, and they were persons whose preeminent concern was with their Christian witness.

Wesley was thoroughly concerned with bringing his ministers into doctrinal uniformity. He constantly interrogated his ministers at annual conferences⁶ and published libraries of readings for them.⁷ As such, it is evident that the biographies and personal correspondence served the same function the conference interviews and courses of study

⁶ For a longer explanation of Wesley's "interviewing" see, for instance, Richard P. Heitzenrater, *Wesley and the People Called Methodists* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1995), 199-260.

⁷ The most important of the courses of reading he provided was the 30 volume *A Christian Library*. This consisted of various theological treatises, accounts of revivals, and spiritual treatises which Wesley edited and abridged from other authors. Wesley's editorial style included the deletion of any portions of a writing he felt were contrary to Arminian doctrine. John Wesley, *A Christian Library: Consisting of Extracts from and Abridgements of the Choicest Pieces of Practical Divinity Which Have Been Published in the English Tongue* (London: Printed by T. Cordeux for T. Blanshard, 1819).

did. They encouraged doctrinal uniformity through providing a Christian model for emulation, which, in turn, aided his preachers in their path toward spiritual perfection.⁸

As the monthly magazine reached the end of its first year of publication, this latter function became its most significant service. Beginning in late 1778, biography and personal correspondence were established as the most substantial part of the journal. From this, emerged another component of the magazine—autobiography.

In the November 1778 issue, for instance, the first autobiographical account by a preacher was recorded. This “A Short Account of Mr. Jaco” was a solicited autobiographical account of Jaco’s ministries.⁹ In it, Jaco reflected on his childhood faith, his coming to the Wesley connection, his reluctance in becoming a traveling preacher, and some trials and successes since accepting this call. The Jaco piece, properly conceived, grew directly out of the correspondence section of the journal. Jaco had, apparently, written a brief account of his ministry and mailed it to Wesley. As such, it lacked certain elements that other biographies would have.

Soon after the publication of Jaco’s letter, these “Short Accounts” by English Methodist ministers became a regular feature of the periodical. Over the course of the magazine’s run, the autobiographies appeared monthly. The autobiographies were often from prominent Methodist ministers such as Thomas Rankin¹⁰ and Richard Whatcoat.¹¹

⁸ Wesley, it is widely recognized, believed that spiritual perfection (through the ongoing process of sanctification) was possible in this lifetime. As such, the goal of Arminian Christians was to perpetually move closer to this perfection. See, again, the books (previously cited) by Runyon and Maddux.

⁹ Peter Jaco, "A Short Account of Mr. Jaco," *The Arminian Magazine: Consisting of Extracts and Original Treatises on Universal Redemption* 1 (1778), 541-44.

¹⁰ Thomas Rankin, "A Short Account of Mr. Thomas Rankin," *The Arminian Magazine: Consisting of Extracts and Original Treatises on Universal Redemption* 2 (1779)182-198.

¹¹ Richard Whatcoat, "Some Account of Mr. Richard Whatcoat," *The Arminian Magazine: Consisting of Extracts and Original Treatises on Universal Redemption* 4 (1781), 190-195.

Still, lesser known itinerants were also included.¹² The entries varied greatly in length; some consumed only a few pages, while others were published in installments because of their length.

All of the autobiographies, similar to the biographies previously published, reflected certain standards. Much like the biographies, the itinerants whose accounts were included were deeply pious men, they were not preoccupied with the supernatural, they were preachers who had a rigorous preaching career, and they were persons who were more concerned with their Christian witness than any secular agenda.

The practice of publishing religious autobiographies enjoyed wide popularity in ensuing decades. In the years following the establishment of *The Arminian Magazine*, it became a common practice for an itinerant to publish an account of their preaching career. Eventually, many of the English accounts were recorded in Thomas Jackson's six-volume work, *The Lives of Early Methodist Preachers*.¹³ This work consisted of accounts taken from *The Arminian Magazine* and some others gathered from English Methodist itinerants during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth-century.

However, it was in the United States that the evangelical narrative experienced the widest success. Following their English founder's example, American Methodists utilized the print media in propelling and supporting their movement. With the explosion in both church membership and itinerant ministers throughout the United States,¹⁴ there was a large audience for these works. American Methodists, like their English

¹² The bibliography with this essay contains references to a few representative entries.

¹³ Thomas Jackson, ed. *The Lives of Early Methodist Preachers*, 4th ed., 6 vols. (London: Wesleyan Conference Office, 1871-1878).

¹⁴ According to Nathan Hatch, by 1850, 1 in 15 Americans were Methodist. For more information on the growth of Methodism in the early republic see Nathan O. Hatch, "The Puzzle of American Methodism,"

counterparts, continued publication of these autobiographies in a variety of forms, including books and in increments in journals, such as the short-lived American version of the *Arminian Magazine*.¹⁵

The very earliest autobiographies published stayed true to the Wesleyan intention, in that they were not intended for an apologetic end. The earliest autobiographies were published not as a means to record history or to promote revivals, but, rather, to provide spiritual edification and education to traveling preachers. George White, for example, made this point very clear in the preface to his autobiography. He writes,

As reading the account of the lives, and religious experience of others, has often quickened and comforted my own soul, and encouraged me in the way of heaven, I feel it my duty to present to the friends of Jesus with a short detail of the dealings of God towards me...¹⁶

In so doing, consciously or not, the earliest narratives reflected the Wesleyan standards of uniformity.

III. NARRATIVE FORM

As has been mentioned, the edifying and cohesive purpose of the early autobiographies was accomplished through the autobiographies sustaining certain standards. The earliest autobiographies published in the United States, seeking to be true to their “Wesleyan heritage” emulated the style and structure of these narratives. Because of this, the ensuing autobiographies published in the United States, at least initially, bore

Church History 63 (1994), 175-189; and John H. Wigger, *Taking Heaven by Storm: Methodism and the Rise of Popular Christianity in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998).

¹⁵ Thomas Coke and Francis Asbury, eds. *The Arminian Magazine: Consisting of Extracts and Original Treatises on General Redemption*, Vols. 1 (Jan. 1789)-2 (Dec. 1790). (Philadelphia: Prichard and Hall, 1789).

a striking degree of uniformity in style and structure. The accounts produced, thus, constituted a distinctive variation on religious autobiography.¹⁷ It was a genre initially modeled after those narratives produced by Wesley in *The Arminian Magazine*.

The autobiographies produced by Methodists were a new variation of a literary genre. As such, the autobiographies shared certain elements in common with one another. The chief form of the expansive autobiographies published in the early nineteenth century was an adaptation of the autobiographical form propagated by such mediums as *The Arminian Magazine*. Most of the accounts in this journal hinged on two events (1) conversion experience and (2) call to preach.¹⁸ It was this emphasis on the career of the preacher, which complicated the existing Puritan religious narratives.

Contrary to scholarship that places the Puritans as the fount of all religious forms in the United States, the Methodist narrative was not merely a derivation of Puritan conversion narrative. This distinction was the result of the transatlantic nature of early American Methodism. In its earliest years, Methodism in the United States and England held certain things in common. In the first place, the churches shared a founder; they shared a founder that many clergy were very proud of and sought to be faithful to his

¹⁶ George White, "A Brief Account of the Life, Experience, Travels, and Gospel Labours of George White, an African," in *Black Itinerants of the Gospel: The Narratives of John Jea and George White*, ed. Graham Russell Hodges (Madison: Madison House, 1993), 51.

¹⁷For a discussion of religious autobiography see Susan Juster and others, "Forum: Religion and American Autobiographical Writing," *Religion and American Culture* 9 (1999),1-29; and William C. Spengemann, *The Forms of Autobiography: Episodes in the History of a Literary Genre* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1980).

¹⁸ See, for instance, John Mason, "Some Account of the Life of Mr. John Mason," *The Arminian Magazine: Consisting of Extracts and Original Treatises on Universal Redemption* 3 (1780) 650-55; Alexander M'Nab, "A Short Account of Mr. Alexander M'nab," *The Arminian Magazine: Consisting of Extracts and Original Treatises on Universal Redemption* 2 (1779), 240-49; Thomas Olivers, "An Account of the Life of Mr. Thomas Olivers," *The Arminian Magazine: Consisting of Extracts and Original Treatises on Universal Redemption* 2 (1779), 77-89, 129-146; John Pawson, "An Account of Mr. John Pawson," *The Arminian Magazine: Consisting of Extracts and Original Treatises on Universal Redemption* 2 (1779), 25-40.

intentions. Furthermore, many American clergy and, especially, leaders were English. As such, they were more influenced by forms contemporaneous with their experience than with those having unfolded in the United States. This meant that Methodists held roots in two soils; both of which were influential in their subsequent development.

While the narratives were certainly related to the conversion narratives popular in the era of the Great Awakening, they were not directly a product of that genre. They bore some striking dissimilarities from those earlier accounts.¹⁹ There are several pivotal distinctions between the two types of literature. In the first place, the Methodist narratives were not as consumed with death and the fear of damnation as the Puritan narratives. While a formulaic experience of dread and anxiety after the experience of conviction occurred in the Methodist narratives, it was the dominant experience of the Puritan constructs.²⁰ Secondly, the Methodist narratives were aimed at a different audience than the Puritan narratives. The latter form of narrative was aimed at the community as a whole. Furthermore, the desired intention of the authors was to inspire conversion. Contrary to this, the Methodist narrative—at least initially—was directed largely to other Methodist itinerants. As such, the intention of the narratives was not as dramatic as the other genre. But perhaps, the most significant difference was that while conversion was the dominant experience of the Puritan narrative, it was only a substantial

¹⁹An intriguing (and the most significant in recent years) look at the Puritan conversion narrative is Patricia Caldwell, *The Puritan Conversion Narrative: The Beginnings of the American Expression* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1983). See also, John Owen King, *The Iron of Melancholy: Structures of Spiritual Conversions in America from the Puritan Conscience to Victorian Neurosis* (Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 1983). Still, the most significant work on the place of conversion in the Puritan tradition is, Edmund S. Morgan, *Visible Saints* (New York: New York University Press, 1963). For an interesting look at one version of the conversion narrative see Daniel E. Williams, "'Behold a Tragic Scene Strangely Changed into a Theater of Mercy': The Structure and Significance of Criminal Conversion Narratives in Early New England," *American Quarterly* 38 (1986), 826-47.

²⁰As was evident in Puritan preaching from the First Great Awakening, as well.

element in the Methodist narrative. The Methodist narrative was as equally consumed with a preaching career, often set off by a dramatic call into the ministry (a call that was as significant as the conversion experience to the writer), as it was with the conversion experience.

Still, the literary genre that developed was distinctive in its structure. The majority of the autobiographies surveyed shared four components, (1) a dramatized conversion experience, (2) a call to a career as a preacher, (3) evidence of a prosperous and faithful preaching career, and (4) illustrations for color, they always reflect the marvelous power of God.²¹

Almost all of the accounts were prefaced by an explanation of the author's life before being made a Christian. Rarely are heinous sins recorded in the narratives. Instead, the author usually attempted to establish their sinfulness by recounting their affinity toward frivolity, indulgence, or vanities; these included such things as dancing and alcohol. In some cases the author's heinousness was established through a recounting of their unpleasant disposition and their consistently taking the Lord's name in vain. The female Methodist itinerant Zilpha Elaw recorded, "Sometimes I resolutely shook off all my impressions, and became more thoughtless than before...I was talking very foolishly and even ventured to take the name of God in vain, in order to cater to the sinful tastes of my companions."²²

²¹ See also the gender-centered analysis of the structures of these memoirs (though focused on later narratives) by Catherine A. Brekus, *Strangers and Pilgrims: Female Preaching in America, 1740-1845* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1998), 162-193.

²² Zilpha Elaw, "Memoirs of the Life, Religious Experience, Ministerial Travels, and Labors of Mrs. Zilpha Elaw," in *Sisters of the Spirit: Three Black Women's Autobiographies of the Nineteenth Century*, ed. William L. Andrews (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986), 54.

The first substantial element of each of these autobiographies was a distinct conversion experience. The conversions followed a similar pattern: conviction of sinfulness, period of spiritual distress, salvation. The events were often separated by a matter of day. Meaning, one usually suffered with conviction for a number of days before finding salvific peace. The African itinerant George White fits this pattern perfectly. He recounts that during the preaching of a Rev. Mr. Stebbens he “fell prostate on the floor,” then spent several days “²³ under the same weight and burden of sin,” before attending a camp-meetings where he was made the subject of “saving grace.”²⁴ The colorful itinerant Peter Cartwright was convicted by a realization of his depravity after attending a wedding where he engaged in profuse dancing. He retired to a cave to deal with his feelings of depravity before “an impression was made on my mind, as though a voice said to me, ‘Thy sins are all forgiven thee,’”²⁵ at the Cane Ridge Revival in Kentucky some days later.²⁶

In some cases, a dramatized conversion experience occurred twice in evangelical autobiographies. It often occurred once for an initial conversion and one for the initiation of sanctification. Many Methodist itinerants believed that the experience of justification was eventually followed by a dramatic experience that signified the beginnings of a process of sanctification, where they would begin the process of being purified. White’s search for sanctification consumes a significant portion of his narrative. He remarked that,

²³ White, 53.

²⁴ White., 54.

²⁵ Peter Cartwright, *The Autobiography of Peter Cartwright* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1984), 38.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 36-42. Cane Ridge remains one of the most significant revivals in American history. Though, Methodists were quick to point out that it was an outdoor meeting, not a camp-meeting per se.

I could not rest till God should sanctify my soul, and thereby, the better prepare me for his service. ...I fell prostrate upon the floor, like one dead. ...and an increasing scene of glory, opened upon my ravished soul.²⁷

Richard Allen, the African Methodist Episcopal Church founder, had a similarly dramatic sanctification experience. After an initial experience of justification, Allen goes through a long period of spiritual distress and uncertainty. Finally, he recounts that,

One night I thought hell would be my portion. I cried unto Him who delighteth to hear the prayers of a poor sinner; and all of a sudden my dungeon shook, my chains flew off, and glory to God, I cried. My soul was filled.²⁸

A second substantial element that many of these memoirs contained was a call to the ministry. This call ranged in levels of intensity. For some ministers, such as Richard Allen and Peter Cartwright,²⁹ the entrance into ministry was not particularly dramatic. However, for most Methodist itinerants the call to ministry was precipitated by a dramatic event. For example, the calling of the southern minister Joseph Travis into ministry strongly resembled a conversion experience. It began in a state of solemn reflection; this reflection eventually escalated into despair. He wrote, "In the course of a few months, I became seriously concerned about preaching, but resisted the thought, fearing that it originated from pride...This impression followed me for more than two years."³⁰

Eventually, much like the conversion experience, the minister heard a dramatic call, which freed him from his despair. In Travis' case this occurred through the

²⁷ White, 58.

²⁸ Richard Allen, *Life, Experience, and Gospel Labours of the Rt. Rev. Richard Allen*. (Philadelphia: Martin and Boden, Printers, 1833), 6. This experience is often quoted as being Allen's "conversion experience." A closer reading, however, indicates that Allen claims justification earlier in the narrative.

²⁹ Cartwright claimed to have been virtually drafted into the ministry. Being singled out by a Bishop or minister was a fairly common way of being brought into the ranks of the Methodist itinerancy.

preaching of Lorenzo Dow. After praying that he would receive a sign at a service being led by the minister, Travis claimed to be singled out. Pointing to the young man, Dow allegedly stated, “There stands a young man that the Lord intends to make a preacher, if he will but go home and get more religion.”³¹ This type of experience was echoed by a plethora of other itinerants. White, for example, believed himself called to preach after experiencing a vivid dream.³²

A dramatic call to the ministry was particularly characteristic of women who entered the ministry.³³ For many of the female preachers in this period there is an increasing turn toward the authority of the Holy Spirit or some other divine communication directly from God. This reliance on an extrabiblical revelation for legitimization was important as it largely removed these women preachers from having to deal directly with attacks from male ministers who assailed their “call to the ministry” on scriptural grounds. Hence, the experiences of being “called” to ministry were often very spirit-centered and very dramatic. Jarena Lee, for example, recounted hearing a distinct voice from heaven calling her to preach. She wrote,

Between four and five years after my sanctification, on a certain time, an impressive silence fell upon me, and I stood as if some one was about to speak to me, yet I had no such thought in my heart. –But to my utter surprise there seemed to sound a voice which I thought I had distinctively heard, and most certainly understand, which said to me, “Go preach the Gospel!” I immediately replied aloud, “No one will believe me.” Again I

³⁰ Joseph Travis, *Autobiography of Rev. Joseph Travis, A.M.* (Nashville: E. Stevenson and F.A. Owen, 1856), 29.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 30.

³² White, 55-6. In this dream he visits hell. He is commissioned by a guide to proclaim what he has seen.

³³ For a fuller exploration of women conversion experiences and calls to the ministries see Brekus, *Strangers and Pilgrims*; Catherine A. Brekus, “Female Evangelism in the Early Methodist Movement, 1784-1845,” in *Methodism and the Shaping of American Culture*, eds. Nathan O. Hatch and John H. Wigger (Nashville: Kingswood Books, 2001), 135-174; and Susan Juster, ““in a Different Voice”: Male and Female Narratives of Religious Conversion in Post-Revolutionary America,” *American Quarterly* 41 (1989), 34-62.

listened, and again the same voice seemed to say –“Preach the Gospel; I will put words in your mouth, and will turn your enemies to become your friends.”³⁴

Lee’s experience was not unusual. It was echoed in the writings of other women; particularly in the writings of black women (who wrote in much more visceral terms than their white counterparts).³⁵

A third component of these Methodist autobiographies was the establishing of preaching credentials. This was accomplished in two substantial ways. In the first place, the preachers devoted substantial portions of their autobiographies to outlining their perseverance in the ministry. This included giving a substantial description of their preaching career, highlighting the circuits served. As such, geography plays an important role in the narratives. William Burke, Peter Cartwright, and Joseph Travis recounted their involvement and travels through circuits in the south; Jarena Lee, George White, and Richard Allen gave accounts of their travel in northern and middle states; and figures such as Lorenzo Dow and John Jea gave accounts of their transatlantic ministries.

The credentials, however, were not merely enforced by the ministers’ demonstration of tirelessness as itinerants. These ministers also attempted to give accounts of the success of their ministries. For example, John Jea found the ultimate legitimacy for his ministry in his popularity. He contended that, “...wherever I went to preach the meeting-

³⁴ Jarena Lee, *Religious Experiences and Journal of Mrs. Jarena Lee* (Nashville: AMEC Sunday School Union, 1991), 12.

³⁵ See, for example, Rebecca Jackson, *Gifts of Power: The Writings of Rebecca Jackson, Black Visionary, Shaker Eldress*, ed. Jean McMahon Humez (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1981). Jackson, who was an A.M.E. exhorter for an extended amount of time before her decision to join the Shakers, write of a variety of potent visions. See also, Nell Irvin Painter, ed. *Narrative of Sojourner Truth* (New York: Penguin Books, 1998). Truth, also an A.M.E. member for some of her life, had her great mission in life revealed to her through an extraordinary encounter with Jesus. While this encounter with Jesus, who addressed her particularly as an intermediary between God and her, it foreshadowed her special calling in life (p. 45-46).

houses could not hold the people.”³⁶ Other ministers, such as Francis Asbury’s associate William Burke, found his ministry to be a great success when their preaching was successful enough to cause hundreds of people to fall “prostrate to the ground.”³⁷

The final significant commonality between the Methodist autobiographies was use of providential illustrations. The majority of the content of the texts were filled with stories of distress solved by providence. These stories could be conceived of as three types: (1) conversion of infidels, (2) God’s work in the everyday, and (3) God’s extraordinary aid. The majority of the narratives contained at least one of these types of stories, many of the autobiographies contained all three.

The conversion of infidels was a very common type of story. Cartwright’s autobiography, for example, devoted an entire chapter heading to the conversion of an infidel doctor.³⁸ Consistently the narratives of itinerants, ranging from Jarena Lee to Lorenzo Dow, tell the stories of ruffians who have come to disturb the revivals but are rebuked or converted under the sway of the fervor. Cartwright recorded one such story. When a “remarkable preacher” by the name of Wilson Pitner convinced Cartwright to allow him to preach. Pitner announced that many of the rowdies and persecutors would be converted that day. After the sermon, “There was a general rush for the altar, and many of our persecutors and those who had interrupted and disturbed us in the forpart of the meeting, came and fell upon their knees....”³⁹

³⁶ John Jea, “The Life, History, and Unparalleled Sufferings of John Jea, the African Preacher,” in *Black Itinerants of the Gospel: The Narratives of John Jea and George White*, ed. Graham Russell Hodges (Madison: Madison House, 1993), 130.

³⁷ Burke was involved at Cane Ridge. William Burke, *Autobiography of Rev. William Burke* (Cincinnati: Methodist Book Concern, 1855), 28.

³⁸ Cartwright, 329-332.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 214. See also White, 70. White recorded, “I was appointed to preach in the woods...before I went to the place where the people assembling for meeting, the friends told me that a company of ill-disposed

God's providential work in the midst of the ordinary was also a common element in these narratives. Much of Richard Allen's account is centered on God's aid in the raising the money for a building.⁴⁰ Zilpha Elaw spends some time recounting how God preserved her through sickness.⁴¹

Stories regarding the radical power of God are found chiefly in some of the more radical itinerants. John Jea, for instance, recounted a boat rescue while stranded at sea.⁴² Others, such as Lorenzo Dow professed to have miraculous powers provided by God which enabled him to see the secrets of a person's heart and to foretell their fate.⁴³

Thus, the early autobiographies published by Methodist itinerants bore some striking similarities in form. Indeed, the form of the autobiography provided for striking parallels between the autobiographies produced by male, female, black, and white itinerants. However, as the genre's popularity increased it moved increasingly away from the function for which it was originally established.

IV. EXPANSION OF THE GENRE

The autobiographical form crafted by Methodists in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries underwent some significant changes as it took root in the United States. While much of the style and structure remained, the function of autobiographies underwent

people, had collected for the purpose of attacking me on the ground; however I went to the place of appointment, with no other weapon for my defense but the Christian armour, willing to hazard my life thus panoply'd. ... While I was speaking, the company of opposers approached the place of worship, I raised my voice as high as possible, in order that they might hear me; and cried with all my might, "Satan is near the camp;" and exhorted all present, who loved the Lord, to unite in prayer that the designs of the enemy might be defeated."

⁴⁰ Allen, 15.

⁴¹ Elaw, 110.

⁴² Jea.127-128.

⁴³ Lorenzo Dow, *The Dealings of God, Man, and the Devil as Exemplified in the Life, Experience, and Travels of Lorenzo Dow*, 2 vols. (Cincinnati: Applegate, Pounsford and Co., 1874).

revision. While much of the form was retained, the autobiographies shifted their focus from an interest in spiritual nourishment to either a historical or apologetics focus. Rather than serving as tools for unification, the autobiographical accounts often became part of a sectarian agenda.

The autobiographies were modified to serve a plethora of apologetic tasks. Among these were, as follows: (1) a defense of African Methodism, (2) a defense of women's right to preach, (3) a defense of radical religion, (4) a defense of rational religion.

Surprisingly, the modifications of this genre by the Black Methodist churches may have been the least significant of those made.⁴⁴ For the most part, neither the African Methodist Episcopal Church nor the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church (nor any of the smaller African Methodist bodies) published a large number of anti-slavery works or utilized the evangelical autobiography in any way that supported that struggle.⁴⁵

Still, African Methodists, intentionally or not, utilized the existing evangelical narrative in a defense of their own denominational formation. This becomes most apparent in Richard Allen's short autobiography, *Life, Experience, and Gospel Labours of the Rt. Rev. Richard Allen*. Allen, one of the founders and the first bishop of the African Methodist Episcopal Church, adopted the form of the Methodist autobiography throughout his brief account. In it, he attempted to provide a justification for the

⁴⁴Although, one could make the argument that Nat Turner's *Confession* was actually built on the evangelical narrative. Nat Turner, *The Confessions of Nat Turner, the Leader of the Late Insurrection in Southampton, Va.*, ed. Thomas Gray (Baltimore: T.R. Gray, 1831).

⁴⁵It is important to note, that there is a scholarly debate regarding whether the African Methodist churches were more or less active in the anti-slavery struggle than the Congregational and Presbyterian Churches (where many of the published black abolitionists were). Despite not publishing many anti-slavery works, the African Methodist denominations gave significant support to the anti-slavery movement. For instance, they were a significant force behind the underground railroad.

withdrawal of his denomination from the Methodist Episcopal Church. He couched this withdrawal in the terms of his personal religious experience.

Allen even went so far as to conceive of the split in theological terms. Allen's eventual separation from the Methodist Episcopal Church came as an attempt to reform it. Allen believed that after the 1784 Christmas Conference, American Methodism had begun to fall away from its Wesleyan heritage. It was becoming too much like other churches; it was embracing class and luxury. Its racial attitudes were another symptom of its fall from grace. He remarked,

December, 1784, General Conference sat in Baltimore, the first General Conference ever held in America. The English preachers just arrived from Europe, Rev. Dr. Coke, Richard Watcoat, and Thomas Vasses. This was the beginning of the Episcopal Church amongst the Methodists. Many of the ministers were set apart in holy orders at this Conference, and were said to be entitled to the gown; and I have thought religion has been declining in the church ever since.⁴⁶

As Dennis Dickerson has argued, "For Allen, the founding of African Methodism represented an opportunity to rescue the authentic Wesleyanism that American Methodism had despoiled."⁴⁷

A second modification of the evangelical narrative was that by female preachers.⁴⁸ Female Methodists, such as Julia Foote,⁴⁹ Zilpha Elaw, and Jarena Lee, all wrote autobiographies. While their autobiographies conformed to the existing form of the Methodist autobiography, the genre was, again, pushed toward a different function. The

⁴⁶ Allen, 10.

⁴⁷ Dennis C. Dickerson, "Richard Allen: A Quintessential Wesleyan," *Evangelical Journal* 18 (2000), 57.

⁴⁸ See Brekus, *Strangers and Pilgrims: Female Preaching in America, 1740-1845*, Brekus, "Female Evangelism in the Early Methodist Movement, 1784-1845," Jean Miller Schmidt, *Grace Sufficient: A History of Women in American Methodism* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1999).

underlying purpose of the narratives were to make a significant case for the right of women to be ministers. Jarena Lee made this point clear in the narrative. She stated,

If a man may preach, because the Saviour died for him, why not the woman? Seeing he died for her also. Is he not a whole Saviour, instead of a half one? as those who hold it wrong for a woman to preach would seem to make it appear.⁵⁰

As a result of this intention for the autobiographies, they took on some different emphases. The principal difference was that the narratives were less “biblical” than their male counterparts. While these women certainly respected the Bible, they sought to be motivated by extrabiblical sources, such as the Spirit. This, thus, enabled them to remain on somewhat more even terms with their accusers.

A third modification of the religious autobiography was by those who sought to promote a radical form of Methodism.⁵¹ These figures, including John Jea and Lorenzo Dow, expanded the scope of the narrative to promote a version of evangelicalism that recognized limited denominational barriers and was distinctively aware of the supernatural.

Dow and Jea’s autobiographies were absent of significant reference to circuits or conferences. They had little need for being licensed by the Church. In fact, the Methodist Church seemed quite unimportant to these figures. Methodism was functional because of its belief in a freedom of the will. In general, however, it was permeable home base.

⁴⁹ Julia Foote, “A Brand Plucked from the Fire: An Autobiographical Sketch by Mrs. Julia A. J. Foote,” in *Sisters of the Spirit: Three Black Women's Autobiographies of the Nineteenth Century*, ed. William L. Andrews (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986), 161-234.

⁵⁰ Jarena Lee, *The Life and Religious Experience of Jarena Lee*, 36.

⁵¹ See Nathan O. Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989). While spending a great deal of time on Asbury, Hatch’s thesis is best illustrated by these radical elements of Methodism. It is for that reason that he is uncomfortable with Dow’s rational contemporaries like Nathan Bangs and Joshua Soule.

They believed that a preacher should proclaim the gospel wherever they were called, regardless of bureaucratic orders.

Also, characteristic of their narratives are distinctively supernatural conceptions of reality. Dow, as mentioned earlier, believed firmly that he had supernatural gifts from God. Unlike Dow, Jea did not believe he had supernatural powers. His account, however, is centered around some extraordinary events. The most significant of these is his petitioning of God to teach him to read. According to Jea, God literally sent an angel down to him to teach him to read. Jea wrote,

...thus the Lord was pleased in his infinite mercy, to send an angel, in a vision, in shining raiment, and his countenance shining as the sun, with a large bible in his hands, and brought it unto me, and said, "*I am come to bless thee, and to grant thee they request*"...and then he taught me to read the first chapter of the gospel according to St. John...⁵²

For Dow and company, the most important thing was to be true the Spirit of God and where it leads you. Hence, their narratives were permeated by references to the guidance of the Spirit. For instance, Dow writes,

Therefore *attend* to the influence of the *Spirit* of GOD on the *mind*; and be careful to obey its dictates, that you may be under its guidance, and so be renovated and regenerated, as to become the New Man in *Christ Jesus*, walking in the Light to Life Everlasting.⁵³

Hence, the function of their narratives were to reach lay audiences and proceed to convince these audiences of a radical supernaturalism.

The final significant adaptation of the narrative was by those Methodists who were reacting against the radical supernaturalism in the works of persons such as Dow. The editors and chief contributors to the periodical *The Methodist Magazine*

⁵² Jea, 113.

⁵³ Dow, 159.

best represented these “rationalists.” In their introductory address, the editors— (future Bishop) Joshua Soule and Thomas Mason—stated this agenda. They wrote,

We are aware, that by many readers, no periodical work will be approved, unless it is replenished with curious tales, wonderful narratives, or miraculous phenomena. With such readers we apprehend this work will meet a cool reception...If the Governor of the universe recognises man as a subject of reason, it follows that faith must be grounded in evidence...It should never be forgotten that the age of miracles is passed...and that any pretended addition to them rather weakens than strengthens the evidence they afford of the truth and excellency of the christian revelation.⁵⁴

Soule and Mason sought to utilize the *Magazine* as a tool to combat the increasing radical supernaturalism that was gaining popularity in the Methodist Church.

The Methodist Magazine considered itself the heir to Wesley’s *Arminian Magazine*.

As such, it organized itself around a similar format. However, instead of publishing autobiographical accounts and letters, the editors designed to publish more eminently “controllable” materials. So, biographies of itinerants⁵⁵ and, then, obituaries⁵⁶ became a regular part of the periodical.

⁵⁴ Joshua Soule and John Mason, "Address of the Editors of the Methodist Magazine, to Its Patrons and Friends in the United States, and Especially to the Members, of the Methodist Episcopal Church," *The Methodist Magazine* 1 (1818), 4.

⁵⁵ Some representative accounts: "Account of Elijah R. Sabin," *The Methodist Magazine* 1 (1818), "Account of John Wesley Bond," *The Methodist Magazine* 2 (1819), W. Hubbard, "Death of the Rev. James Roger," *The Methodist Magazine* 1 (1818), "Memoir of Mr. John Man, Missionary in Nova-Scotia," *The Methodist Magazine* 2 (1819), "Memoir of the Rev. Jason Walker," *The Methodist Magazine* 2 (1819), Andrew Monroe, "A Short Account of the Life, Character, Labours and Death of Richard Pope, a Minister of the Gospel in the Methodist Episcopal Church," *The Methodist Magazine* 4 (1821).

⁵⁶ Some representative accounts: "Account of the Death of the Rev. Dr. Coke," *The Methodist Magazine* 1 (1818), "Account of the Death of the Rev. Thomas Taylor," *The Methodist Magazine* 1 (1818), "Anthony Senter," *The Methodist Magazine* 1 (1818), Nathan Bangs, "Death of John Davies," *The Methodist Magazine* 2 (1819), Laban Clark, "Death of Mr. B. Treadwell," *The Methodist Magazine* 3 (1820), J. Crawford, "Account of the Death of Mr. Andrew Mckenna," *The Methodist Magazine* 1 (1818), "Death of Henry Thomas Fitzgerald," *The Methodist Magazine* 3 (1820), "Death of Miss Frances Evans Carey," *The Methodist Magazine* 4 (1821), "Death of Mrs. Mary Hyde," *The Methodist Magazine* 3 (1820), "Death of the Rev. Joseph Hill," *The Methodist Magazine* 2 (1819), Hubbard, Lewis Myers, "Death of Stephen Bass," *The Methodist Magazine* 4 (1821).

The biographies fashioned, however, were very similar in criterion to those Wesley had crafted. The concern was to present the picture of a pious yet not superstitious itinerant. The obituaries served the function of moving away from exaggerated death accounts being published during this time. The accounts presented were of persons who were faithful to God unto their death.⁵⁷ The editor's hope was to move away from the radical supernaturalism beginning to hold such sway in Methodist circles. Despite receiving criticism in recent scholarship from proponents of a declension thesis,⁵⁸ it is important to understand that these men were early contributors to Methodism who did not enjoy the *new* radicalism beginning to characterize portions of Methodism. In fact, they envisioned themselves as returning to distinctively "Wesleyan" emphases.

As such, *The Methodist Magazine* envisioned its task as one similar to *The Arminian Magazine*. The *Magazine* was to provide sources that would educate. Ultimately, the redaction of autobiographies into the form of obituaries and biographies was helpful in *The Methodist Magazine* achieving its desired effect. The *Magazine* successfully contributed to an increased "intellectualizing" of Methodist tradition. Although, it began publication in 1818, this "maturation" of Methodism occurred somewhat later.

V. CONCLUSION

So, the religious autobiographies that appeared in Methodist circles in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, ultimately, constituted a new and distinct variation of a literary genre. This genre, as conceived by Wesley, sought to unify

⁵⁷ For an interesting analysis of death accounts, see A. Gregory Schneider, *The Way of the Cross Leads Home: The Domestication of American Methodism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993).

⁵⁸ Namely, Hatch and Wigger.

Methodist clergy by providing a proper model for emulation. A historical survey of the life of the form, however, reveals a deep irony. As the genre grew in popularity and took greater root in American soil, uniformity in function was lost. Persons who manipulated it to meet the needs of a variety of other ends subsumed the autobiographical form. Because of this, this autobiographical form became a tool for divisive ends.

Bibliography

I. GENERAL REFERENCE

- O'Brien, Elmer J. *Methodist Reviews Index 1818-1985: A Retrospective Index of Periodical Articles and Book Reviews*. 2 vols. Nashville: Board of Higher Education and Ministry, The United Methodist Church, 1989.
- Pilcher, Elijah H. *Index to the Methodist Quarterly Review, Including the Methodist Magazine, and the Methodist Magazine and Quarterly Review, 1818-1881*. New York: Phillips & Hunt, 1884.
- Rowe, Kenneth E. *United Methodist Studies: Basic Bibliographies*. 3rd ed. Nashville: Abingdon, 1992.
- _____, ed. *Methodist Women: A Guide to the Literature*. Vol. no.2, United Methodist Bibliography Series. Lake Junaluska, N. C.: General Commission on Archives and History, 1980.

II. PRIMARY WORKS:

A. EARLY HISTORIES AND ACCOUNTS

- Asbury, Francis. *The Journal and Letters of Francis Asbury. Volume I., the Journal, 1771-1793; Volume II., the Journal, 1794-1816; Volume III., the Letters.*, eds. Elmer C. Clark, et. al. Nashville: Abingdon, 1958.
- Bangs, Nathan. *A History of the Methodist Episcopal Church*. 4 vols. New York: T. Mason and G. Lane for the Methodist Episcopal Church, 1838-1842.
- Dixon, James. *Methodism in America: With the Personal Narrative of the Author During a Tour through a Part of the United States and Canada*. London: John Mason, 1849.
- Finley, James B. *Sketches of Western Methodism*. Cincinnati: Methodist Book Concern, 1855.
- Lee, Jesse. *A Short History of the Methodists*. Baltimore: Magill and Clime Booksellers, 1810.
- Soule, Joshua, and John Mason. "Address of the Editors of the Methodist Magazine, to Its Patrons and Friends in the United States, and Especially to the Members, of the Methodist Episcopal Church." *The Methodist Magazine* 1 (1818): 3-7.
- Wesley, John. "To the Reader." *The Arminian Magazine: Consisting of Extracts and*

Original Treatises on Universal Redemption 1 (1778): iii-viii.

B. AUTOBIOGRAPHIES

- Allen, Richard. *Life, Experience, and Gospel Labours of the Rt. Rev. Richard Allen*. Philadelphia: Martin and Boden, Printers, 1833.
- Atlay, John. "A Short Account of John Atlay." *The Arminian Magazine: Consisting of Extracts and Original Treatises on Universal Redemption* 1 (1778): 577-581.
- Burke, William. *Autobiography of Rev. William Burke*. Cincinnati: Methodist Book Concern, 1855.
- Cartwright, Peter. *The Autobiography of Peter Cartwright*. Nashville: Abingdon, 1984.
- Dow, Lorenzo. *The Dealings of God, Man, and the Devil as Exemplified in the Life, Experience, and Travels of Lorenzo Dow*. 2 volumes. Cincinnati: Applegate, Pounsford and Co., 1874.
- Elaw, Zilpha. "Memoirs of the Life, Religious Experience, Ministerial Travels, and Labors of Mrs. Zilpha Elaw." In *Sisters of the Spirit: Three Black Women's Autobiographies of the Nineteenth Century*, ed. William L. Andrews, 49-160. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986.
- Foote, Julia. "A Brand Plucked from the Fire: An Autobiographical Sketch by Mrs. Julia A. J. Foote." In *Sisters of the Spirit: Three Black Women's Autobiographies of the Nineteenth Century*, ed. William L. Andrews, 161-234. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986.
- Jaco, Peter. "A Short Account of Mr. Jaco." *The Arminian Magazine: Consisting of Extracts and Original Treatises on Universal Redemption* 1 (1778): 541-544.
- Jackson, Rebecca. *Gifts of Power: The Writings of Rebecca Jackson, Black Visionary, Shaker Eldress*, ed. Jean McMahon Humez. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1981.
- Jea, John. "The Life, History, and Unparalleled Sufferings of John Jea, the African Preacher." In *Black Itinerants of the Gospel: The Narratives of John Jea and George White*, ed. Graham Russell Hodges, 89-164. Madison: Madison House, 1993.
- Lee, Jarena. "The Life Experience and Religious Experience of Jarena Lee." In *Sisters of the Spirit: Three Black Women's Autobiographies of the Nineteenth Century*, ed. William L. Andrews, 25-48. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986.

_____. *Religious Experiences and Journal of Mrs. Jarena Lee*. Nashville: AMEC Sunday School Union, 1991.

Mason, John. "Some Account of the Life of Mr. John Mason." *The Arminian Magazine: Consisting of Extracts and Original Treatises on Universal Redemption* 3 (1780): 650-655.

M'Nab, Alexander. "A Short Account of Mr. Alexander M'nab." *The Arminian Magazine: Consisting of Extracts and Original Treatises on Universal Redemption* 2 (1779): 240-249.

Olivers, Thomas. "An Account of the Life of Mr. Thomas Olivers." *The Arminian Magazine: Consisting of Extracts and Original Treatises on Universal Redemption* 2 (1779): 77-89, 129-146.

Painter, Nell Irvin, ed. *Narrative of Sojourner Truth*. New York: Penguin Books, 1998.

Pawson, John. "An Account of Mr. John Pawson." *The Arminian Magazine: Consisting of Extracts and Original Treatises on Universal Redemption* 2 (1779): 25-40.

Rankin, Thomas. "A Short Account of Mr. Thomas Rankin." *The Arminian Magazine: Consisting of Extracts and Original Treatises on Universal Redemption* 2 (1779): 182-198.

Travis, Joseph. *Autobiography of Rev. Joseph Travis, A.M.* Nashville: E. Stevenson and F.A. Owen, 1856.

Turner, Nat. *The Confessions of Nat Turner, the Leader of the Late Insurrection in Southampton, Va.*, ed. Thomas Gray. Baltimore: T.R. Gray, 1831.

Whatcoat, Richard. "Some Account of Mr. Richard Whatcoat." *The Arminian Magazine: Consisting of Extracts and Original Treatises on Universal Redemption* 4 (1781): 190-195.

White, George. "A Brief Account of the Life, Experience, Travels, and Gospel Labours of George White, an African." In *Black Itinerants of the Gospel: The Narratives of John Jea and George White*, ed. Graham Russell Hodges, 51-88. Madison: Madison House, 1993.

Wightman, William May. *Life of William Capers, D.D., One of the Bishops of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South*. Nashville: J. B. M'Ferrin, 1858.

C. ACCOUNTS AND OBITUARIES

"Account of Elijah R. Sabin." *The Methodist Magazine* 1 (1818): 278-280.

- "Account of John Wesley Bond." *The Methodist Magazine* 2 (1819): 284-289, 324-329.
- "An Account of Sarah Whiskin." *The Arminian Magazine: Consisting of Extracts and Original Treatises on Universal Redemption* 4 (1781): 198-201.
- "Account of the Death of the Rev. Dr. Coke." *The Methodist Magazine* 1 (1818): 36-39.
- "Account of the Death of the Rev. Thomas Taylor." *The Methodist Magazine* 1 (1818): 76-79.
- "Anthony Senter." *The Methodist Magazine* 1 (1818): 199-200.
- Bangs, Nathan. "Death of John Davies." *The Methodist Magazine* 2 (1819): 77-80.
- _____. "Memoir of the Rev. Thomas Thorp." *The Methodist Magazine* 2 (1819): 175-177.
- Brown, Morris, and David Ware. "Minutes of the New York Annual Conference, 1840." In *New York Annual Conference of the A.M.E. Church*, 1840. [Obituaries of Asa Jeffrey and Jeremiah Miller]
- Clark, Laban. "Death of Mr. B. Treadwell." *The Methodist Magazine* 3 (1820): 437-440.
- Crawford, J. "Account of the Death of Mr. Andrew Mckenna." *The Methodist Magazine* 1 (1818): 399-400.
- "Death of Henry Thomas Fitzgerald." *The Methodist Magazine* 3 (1820): 475-77.
- "Death of Miss Frances Evans Carey." *The Methodist Magazine* 4 (1821): 40.
- "Death of Mrs. Mary Hyde." *The Methodist Magazine* 3 (1820): 399-400.
- "Death of the Rev. Joseph Hill." *The Methodist Magazine* 2 (1819): 358.
- Hubbard, W. "Death of the Rev. James Roger." *The Methodist Magazine* 1 (1818): 319.
- "Memoir of Mr. John Man, Missionary in Nova-Scotia." *The Methodist Magazine* 2 (1819): 13-18.
- "Memoir of the Rev. Jason Walker." *The Methodist Magazine* 1819 (1819): 257-261.
- Monroe, Andrew. "A Short Account of the Life, Character, Labours and Death of Richard Pope, a Minister of the Gospel in the Methodist Episcopal Church." *The Methodist Magazine* 4 (1821): 79-80.
- Myers, Lewis. "Death of Stephen Bass." *The Methodist Magazine* 4 (1821): 279-280.

Wightman, William May. *Life of William Capers, D.D., One of the Bishops of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South*. Nashville: J. B. M'Ferrin, 1858.

I. SECONDARY MATERIALS

A. CONTEMPORARY MANUSCRIPTS

Andrews, Dee. *The Methodists and Revolutionary America, 1760-1800: The Shaping of an Evangelical Culture*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000.

Campbell, James T. *Songs of Zion: The African Methodist Episcopal Church in the United States and South Africa*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1995.

Dickerson, Dennis C. *Religion, Race, and Region: Research Notes on A.M.E. Church History*. Nashville: AMEC Sunday School Union/Legacy Publishers, 1995.

Hatch, Nathan O. *The Democratization of American Christianity*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989.

Heitzenrater, Richard P. *Wesley and the People Called Methodists*. Nashville: Abingdon, 1995.

Heyrman, Christine Leigh. *Southern Cross: The Beginnings of the Bible Belt*. New York: Knopf, 1997.

Kirby, James E. *The Episcopacy in American Methodism*. Nashville: Kingswood Books, 2000.

Kirby, James E., Russell E. Richey, and Kenneth E. Rowe. *The Methodists*. Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1996.

Lyerly, Cynthia Lynn. *Methodism and the Southern Mind, 1770-1810*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1998.

Maddox, Randy L. *Responsible Grace: John Wesley's Practical Theology*. Nashville: Kingswood Books, 1994.

Richey, Russell E. *Early American Methodism*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991.

_____. *The Methodist Conference in America: A History*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996.

Runyon, Theodore. *The New Creation: John Wesley's Theology Today*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1998

Schmidt, Jean Miller. *Grace Sufficient: A History of Women in American Methodism*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1999.

Schneider, A. Gregory. *The Way of the Cross Leads Home: The Domestication of American Methodism*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993.

Wigger, John H. *Taking Heaven by Storm: Methodism and the Rise of Popular Christianity in America*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1998.

B. EDITED VOLUMES

Hatch, Nathan O., and John H. Wigger, eds. *Methodism and the Shaping of American Culture*. Nashville: Kingswood Books, 2001.

Richey, Russell E., and Kenneth E. Rowe, eds. *Rethinking Methodist History: A Bicentennial Historical Consultation*. Nashville: Kingswood Books, 1985.

Richey, Russell E., Kenneth E. Rowe, and Jean Miller Schmidt, eds. *Perspectives on American Methodism: Interpretive Essays*. Nashville: Kingswood Books, 1993.

_____, eds. *The Methodist Experience in America*. Vol. 2. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2000.

C. CLASSIC MANUSCRIPTS

Baker, Frank. *From Wesley to Asbury: Studies in Early American Methodism*. Durham: Duke University Press, 1976.

Bruce, Dickson D. *And They All Sang Hallelujah: Plain-Folk Camp-Meeting Religion, 1800-1845*. Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1974.

Bucke, Emory S., ed. *The History of American Methodism*. 3 volumes. New York: Abingdon Press, 1964.

Maser, Frederick E. *The Dramatic Story of Early American Methodism*. New York: Abingdon Press, 1965.

Mathews, Donald G. *Slavery and Methodism: A Chapter in American Morality, 1780-1845*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1965.

_____. *Religion in the Old South*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1977.

Norwood, Frederick Abbott. *The Story of American Methodism: A History of the United Methodists and Their Relations*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1974.

Richardson, Harry Van Buren. *Dark Salvation: The Story of Methodism as It Developed among Blacks in America*. C. Eric Lincoln Series in Black Religion. Garden City, N.Y.: Anchor Press, 1976.

Sweet, William Warren. *Methodism in American History*. Cincinnati: The Methodist Book Concern, 1933.

D. LITERATURE ON RELIGIOUS NARRATIVES

Bassard, Katherine Clay. *Spiritual Interrogations: Culture, Gender, and Community in Early African American Women's Writing*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999.

Brekus, Catherine A. *Strangers and Pilgrims: Female Preaching in America, 1740-1845*. Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1998.

_____. "Female Evangelism in the Early Methodist Movement, 1784-1845." In *Methodism and the Shaping of American Culture*, eds. Nathan O. Hatch and John H. Wigger, 135-174. Nashville: Kingswood Books, 2001.

Caldwell, Patricia. *The Puritan Conversion Narrative: The Beginnings of the American Expression*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1983.

Collins, Kenneth J. and John H. Tyson. *Conversion in the Wesleyan Tradition*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2001.

Douglass-Chin, Richard J. *Preacher Woman Sings the Blues: The Autobiographies of Nineteenth-Century African American Evangelists*. Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2001

Juster, Susan. "'In a Different Voice': Male and Female Narratives of Religious Conversion in Post-Revolutionary America." *American Quarterly* 41 (1989): 34-62.

Juster, Susan, John D. Barbour, Gary Comstock, and Richard Rabinowitz. "Forum: Religion and American Autobiographical Writing." *Religion and American Culture* 9 (1999): 1-29.

King, John Owen. *The Iron of Melancholy: Structures of Spiritual Conversions in America from the Puritan Conscience to Victorian Neurosis*. Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 1983.

Spengemann, William C. *The Forms of Autobiography: Episodes in the History of a*

Literary Genre. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1980.

Taves, Ann. *Fits, Trances, and Visions: Experiencing Religion and Explaining Experience from Wesley to James*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1999.

Williams, Daniel E. "'Behold a Tragic Scene Strangely Changed into a Theater of Mercy': The Structure and Significance of Criminal Conversion Narratives in Early New England." *American Quarterly* 38 (1986): 827-47.