

Stephen Olin and John Wesley Redfield: A Study in Early 19th-Century American Methodism

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Two influential figures in North American Methodism were Stephen Olin (1797-1851) and John Wesley Redfield (1810-1863). As their dates show, Olin was thirteen years older than Redfield; both died relatively young (Olin at 54 and Redfield at 53); and their ministries were carried out prior to the U.S. Civil War.¹

Olin, a scholar and college president, is better known to Methodist history than is Redfield. Despite a common New England ancestry, temperamentally and culturally the two were poles apart. Both saw Methodism in need of reform and renewal, though they held contrasting visions of what that meant.

Stephen Olin

Stephen Olin was born in Leicester, Vermont, on March 2, 1797. He graduated from Vermont's Middlebury College with top honors in 1820, but without personal faith in Jesus Christ. The son of a county judge, Olin briefly studied law. Though tall and robust-looking, he suffered a physical breakdown during his youth (through overwork as a student, it was thought) that left his health permanently impaired.²

Though a New Englander, Olin spent several years in the South, gaining considerable sympathy with Southern ways and views. His Southern exposure gave him more the aspect of a Southern gentleman than a Northern reformer. After a couple of years in the South he wrote, "I am much reconciled to Southern life. The little invectives in which my Northern friends sometimes indulge wound me almost as much as if I had been born in Carolina."³

It was in the South that Olin was converted and became a Methodist preacher. In 1820 he became principal of Tabernacle Academy in Abbeville, South Carolina. "Here he fought out the battle of his religious difficulties, and emerged with a radiant Christian experience" that changed his life.⁴ Through the influence of a Methodist local preacher's family with which he boarded, he was clearly converted on September 20, 1821.⁵ "It was a glorious moment — a happy moment!" he wrote. "I was filled with speechless exultation, and a considerable time elapsed before I could believe that I was in my right mind."⁶

¹ Though Redfield died during the Civil War, he suffered a debilitating stroke about three years earlier.

² Daniel Wise, *Sketches and Anecdotes of American Methodists of 'The Days That Are No More'* (New York, NY: Phillips and Hunt, 1883), 229; Carl F. Price, *Wesleyan's First Century, With an Account of the Centennial Celebration* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University, 1932), 73; David B. Potts, *Wesleyan University 1831-1910: Collegiate Enterprise in New England* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1992), 27.

³ *The Life and Letters of Stephen Olin, D.D., LL.D., Late President of the Wesleyan University*, 2 vols. (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1853), 1:49 (hereafter cited as Olin, *Life and Letters*).

⁴ Price, 73.

⁵ Olin, *Life and Letters*, 1:42-45, 63, 67, 84.

⁶ Olin, *Life and Letters*, 1:71; cf. 1:82, 87.

Olin initially thought he would become an Episcopalian, feeling that the Episcopal Church was, “on the whole, more congenial in principle and practice with my feelings and opinions” and less tainted with the “peculiarities” he saw among the Methodists.⁷ About a year later Olin wrote to a friend, however, “I have become a Methodist in good earnest, and shall never quit them for the Episcopalians. My prejudices have gradually melted away, and though I still see some things that I deem extravagant, I believe that . . . there is more of the power of godliness among them than any other people.”⁸

Olin joined the South Carolina Conference in 1824 and was appointed to Charleston. Though ill health forced him to quit six months later, his brief ministry in Charleston was very fruitful. He wrote in June 1824, “God’s Spirit has been poured out upon us, and during the last three months we have received between forty and fifty white persons, and about two hundred colored into our Church. . . . I feel my heart especially drawn out toward” the slaves.⁹

In Charleston Olin became acquainted with James Andrew, Methodist pastor and presiding elder. Andrew later was the bishop whose slaveholding triggered the crisis that led to the division of the Methodist Episcopal Church in 1844. Olin and Andrew became fast friends, and during several months of illness Olin stayed in the Andrew home.¹⁰

Forced to give up pastoral ministry, Olin concluded that God wanted him to serve as an educator. He was appointed professor of ethics and belles lettres at Franklin College (later the University of Georgia) in Athens in 1826. The same year he married Mary Ann Bostick, “a distinguished belle” from Milledgeville, Georgia. He was ordained elder in 1828.¹¹

After seven years at the University of Georgia, Olin became in 1834 the first president of Randolph Macon College in Virginia. The college prospered under Olin’s leadership. Poor health forced him to resign after only three years, but his reputation as a scholar and leader grew steadily.¹²

Through marriage, Olin unwittingly became a slave-owner. Though the details are sketchy, Olin apparently did not manumit (free) his slaves but rather accommodated to the system while he was in the South. One writer notes that Olin’s involvement with slavery

was to the last of his life, a source of no little uneasiness; . . . he was “not able to feel that he did wrong,” but at the same time not satisfied that he had done right; for, under the influence of the prevailing customs, he had been induced both to buy and to sell his fellow-men. “All this,” says he, “I have prayerfully reviewed many, many times, and with emotions not to be described, yet have I not been able to feel that I sinned in being the owner of slaves. Yet I the more humbly and patiently endure reproach from a feeling that I may have misjudged in this business.”¹³

⁷ Olin, *Life and Letters*, 1:77f.

⁸ Stephen Olin to J. Merriam, September 19, 1822, in Olin, *Life and Letters*, 1:73.

⁹ Olin, *Life and Letters*, 1:104.

¹⁰ Olin, *Life and Letters*, 1:99f, 2:169.

¹¹ Price, 75; Potts, 27; Simpson, *Cyclopaedia of Methodism* (1882), 680; Olin, *Life and Letters*, 1:92-94, 137-41, 260.

¹² Potts, 27. Middlebury College (his alma mater), Wesleyan University, the University of Alabama, and Yale all gave him honorary degrees (Price, 76; Olin, *Life and Letters*, 1:164, 2:101).

¹³ John McClintock, ed., *Sketches of Eminent Methodist Ministers* (New York, NY: Carlton and Phillips, 1854), 338.

Olin apparently sold his slaves at some point before assuming the presidency of Wesleyan University in 1842. At the 1844 General Conference, where Olin was torn between North and South over his friend Bishop Andrew's case, he freely admitted his slaveholding. He could not agree with the abolitionists, whom he saw as extreme and divisive. Yet in the end he voted with the majority in its request that Bishop Andrew withdraw from the episcopacy because of his slaveholding.

After leaving Randolph Macon College in 1837, Olin and his wife went to Europe for health reasons. For three years Olin traveled in Europe and the Middle East. Though often ill, he produced a book, *Travels in Egypt, Arabia, Petraea, and The Holy Land*. Olin did in a measure recover his health — but lost his wife, who died in Naples in 1839.¹⁴

Sometime after the loss of his wife, Olin entered into a deeper experience with God. He became convinced theologically of the Methodist doctrine of holiness and experienced life in the Spirit to a profound degree, though he still had questions about his own experience. He endorsed the ministry of Phoebe Palmer (with whom he corresponded), feeling that God had called her to an important work.¹⁵

While away in Europe, Olin was elected president of Wesleyan University. He “reluctantly complied” and returned to America in 1840, but due to continued ill health did not actually assume the presidency until September, 1842.¹⁶

By the time Olin began his tenure at Wesleyan University, at age 45, he had “a widespread reputation for extraordinary mental powers” and strong convictions that Christian young men, properly instructed, were to be “agents and co-workers with Divine Providence in all His gracious and benevolent operations.” His health improved sufficiently for him to provide strong academic leadership. During his second year at Wesleyan Olin married Julia Lynch, daughter of Judge James Lynch of Rhinebeck, New York.¹⁷

When Olin arrived at Wesleyan he found morale low, finances desperate, and faculty salaries in arrears. Olin brought needed discipline and direction, raising \$60,000 and streamlining the curriculum. Though “an unusually strict disciplinarian,” he was “loved by his students as [are] few college presidents.”¹⁸

Olin was impressive in both ability and appearance; “his intellectual proportions, like his physical, were colossal.”¹⁹ Over six feet tall, his head was so large that he had to have hats made to order.²⁰ John Quincy Adams, hearing him preach before the U.S. House of Representatives in 1845, described Olin as “framed for a ploughman or a wood cutter with an anxious, deeply thoughtful, not unpleasing countenance, sprawling limbs and great awkwardness of gesticulation. But he preaches without notes, with uninterrupted fluency, plain but very appropriate language, close argument, well-chosen and at times elegant

¹⁴ Olin, *Life and Letters*, 1:208-67; Potts, 27.

¹⁵ See John McClintock, “Stephen Olin,” *Methodist Quarterly Review* (January, 1854), 17f; Olin, *Life and Letters*, 1:353, 2:34-52, 2:91, 2:207f.

¹⁶ Olin, *Life and Letters*, 1:339; Price, 76. Because of his ill health Olin resigned from his initial election to the presidency, but he was reelected and persuaded to serve in 1842.

¹⁷ Potts, 27; *The Works of Stephen Olin, D.D., LL.D., Late President of the Wesleyan University* (New York, NY: Harper & Brothers, 1852), 2:106; Olin, *Life and Letters*, 2:115.

¹⁸ Price, 76f.

¹⁹ McClintock, “Stephen Olin,” 12.

²⁰ Price, 74.

elocution.” His audience was “chained in attention for an hour and a quarter.”²¹ Hearing him preach was “Like standing under Niagara,” one listener remarked.²²

Though stronger than he had been, Olin was repeatedly incapacitated by pulmonary problems and this, together with frequent fund-raising trips, meant he seldom taught or preached on campus. Yet, as Potts notes, “Olin’s informal encounters with students and his occasional sermons and addresses made him ‘eternally influential’ in the lives of many graduates.”²³

Developing mental discipline was the reigning educational philosophy at Wesleyan during Olin’s tenure. “Mental discipline is the fundamental principle . . . of education,” Olin said — more important than specific knowledge learned.²⁴ He decried innovations in which education “instead of being mental discipline, is coming to mean a smattering of all sorts of knowledge” rather than grounding in the classical disciplines.²⁵

In 1846 Olin participated in the founding of the Evangelical Alliance in London, England. He helped defeat abolitionist efforts to commit the Alliance to a strong antislavery stance, which he felt would inject a particularly American issue that would sink the whole effort.²⁶

Olin served as president of Wesleyan University until his premature death in 1851.²⁷

John Wesley Redfield

John Wesley Redfield was a sort of John the Baptist figure within Methodism in the 1840s and 1850s. B. T. Roberts called him “the most wonderful evangelist of his day,” and Wilson Hogue considered him “among the greatest evangelists of the nineteenth century.”²⁸ Yet he was a quixotic and controversial figure.

Redfield was a self-taught medical doctor and Methodist local preacher. Like Stephen Olin, he was a New Englander, born January 23, 1810, probably in Claremont, New Hampshire.²⁹ His arrival was portentous: The day of his birth a woman appeared at the Redfields’ door and told the new mother that in a dream an angel told her the baby must be named John Wesley. Mrs. Redfield concurred, and the baby was named John Wesley

²¹ Quoted in Potts, 25, 27.

²² Olin, *Life and Letters*, 2:104.

²³ Potts, 27f.

²⁴ Olin, *Works*, 2:314.

²⁵ Olin, *Life and Letters*, 2:445.

²⁶ Potts, 27; Olin, *Life and Letters*, 2:275-79; 293-99, 304f.

²⁷ Potts, 28; Wise, 246. Within three years of his death, Harper and Brothers in New York published Olin’s *Works* and his *Life and Letters* in matching two-volume sets, edited by Julia Olin, his widow. Not long after Olin’s death, a spiritualist published a book claiming to be from Olin! *Methodist Quarterly Review*, 35 (Oct. 1853), 601.

²⁸ B. T. Roberts, “Introduction,” in Joseph Goodwin Terrill, *The Life of Rev. John Wesley Redfield, M.D.* (Chicago, IL: Free Methodist Publishing House, 1889, 1912), 3; Wilson T. Hogue, *History of the Free Methodist Church of North America* (Chicago, IL: Free Methodist Publishing House, 1915), 1:267. Redfield’s ministry was contemporaneous with that of Charles Finney, though Finney’s revival ministry began earlier, continued much longer, and was more widespread than Redfield’s.

²⁹ Terrill, 17. Terrill gives Clarendon, New Hampshire as the birthplace; probably the correct town is Claremont, as a number of Redfields lived there and there is no Clarendon, NH.

Redfield. “By that unlucky name was I baptized and have been known through life,” Redfield later said.³⁰

As a child Redfield felt called to preach but he wasn’t actually converted until his teen years. At a Methodist camp meeting he heard Willbur Fisk, then the presiding elder, and other Methodist preachers. He sought God at the altar, but the commotion was so great that he was distracted and repulsed—until he saw that many were being saved. He went off into the woods alone and gave himself fully to Jesus. “Instantly, as I ventured on Jesus, my burden was gone,” he recalled. “I was filled with inexpressible delight, and before I was aware of what I was doing, I was on my feet shouting, ‘Glory to God!’”³¹

Redfield didn’t know what had happened to him. When assured that he had experienced conversion, he said to himself, “Well, if this is religion, the world will now soon be converted; for I shall tell it so plain that everybody will certainly believe and seek, and find it.” He began to share his faith “from house to house and from town to town.” Some responded, but many did not want to hear the message.³²

Willbur Fisk was a friend of the Redfield family and took interest in this unusual young man. He suggested that Redfield go to Wesleyan Academy which had just been opened at Wilbraham, Massachusetts, and where Fisk served as the first principal before going on to become the founding president of Wesleyan University.³³ One of the imponderables of Methodist history is what would have happened had Redfield taken Fisk’s advice and gone to Wilbraham, where solid learning was punctuated with periodic revivals. He didn’t, and never received much formal education. Terrified at “the awful responsibility of a Christian minister” and fearful of following human direction rather than God’s, Redfield in fact turned away from God and began to wander spiritually. He abandoned his faith and between the ages of 20 and 30 studied medicine, dabbled in philosophy and spiritualism, and entered into a disastrous marriage.³⁴

After more years of struggle and eventual separation from his wife, Redfield rededicated his life to Christ and began a fruitful evangelistic ministry. He was licensed as a Methodist local preacher in Lockport, New York, despite his forthright declaration, “I am an abolitionist of the strongest type.” If given a license to preach, he said, “I shall certainly use it for God and the slave.” Though never ordained, Redfield was licensed as a local preacher at different times and places. Eventually he divorced his wife and years later, in 1856, remarried.³⁵

Redfield had already proved himself a convinced abolitionist. Around 1840 in Cleveland, Ohio, he defied a mob to give an eloquent abolitionist lecture and organized an antislavery society. He also helped a runaway slave escape to Canada, an act of civil disobedience. “What had I to do with protecting my own freedom and rights,” he wrote, “when there stood my suffering Jesus in the person of this poor outcast. I seemed to hear his

³⁰ Terrill, 17. The principal sources on Redfield are this biography by Terrill (a convert of Redfield’s) and Redfield’s manuscript autobiography (located in the Marston Memorial Historical Center, Indianapolis, IN), Terrill’s main source. I am now preparing a critical edition of Redfield’s autobiography.

³¹ Terrill, 19f.

³² Terrill, 20ff.

³³ Terrill, 21; Potts, 7f, Joseph Holdich, *The Life of Willbur Fisk, D.D., First President of the Wesleyan University* (New York, NY: Harper & Brothers, 1842), 151, 164-70.

³⁴ Terrill, 23-54.

³⁵ Terrill, 60f, 165f, 292f; Hogue, 1:266f.

voice ringing in my ears, ‘Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren ye have done it unto me.’”³⁶

Shortly after this, Redfield began earnestly to seek entire sanctification. Becoming very ill with “consumption,” he spent several months in New York City, recuperating at the home of a friend (probably during the winter of 1841-42, though the chronology is uncertain). Struggling both with illness and his duty to preach, Redfield finally received the word from the Lord, “You may live while you preach, but no longer.” He consecrated himself fully to do God’s will. “This single sentence has kept me moving for more than twenty years at my own expense to toil in the face of all opposition,” he later wrote.³⁷

Despite his illness, Redfield was induced to preach in the local Methodist Church (probably the Bedford Street ME Church on Manhattan’s west side). The pastor insisted that Redfield exercise his local preacher’s license, and God used this insistence to confirm Redfield’s renewed dedication. Redfield’s health improved, and soon he was preaching in various New York City Methodist congregations with “great manifestations of divine power.”³⁸

Redfield was still seeking holiness. He was warned, however, not to attend Phoebe Palmers’ Tuesday Meeting across town, “for they will tell you to believe that you already have the blessing.”³⁹ But that summer Redfield attended a camp meeting where the Palmers were ministering. Here he heard Phoebe Palmer for the first time. Mrs. Palmer “showed the reasonableness of believing that God meant what he said,” Redfield noted, “and that our faith must rest mainly on his promise.” God has promised holiness, Mrs. Palmer said, “and faith consists in taking him at his word.”⁴⁰

Well, Redfield thought, “I have tried everything else but faith; I will now go out and make an experiment.” Redfield finally received the blessing of holiness by faith alone. He gave public testimony to what God had done for him and this “seemed to settle and establish” him in his experience.⁴¹ From this point on Redfield “was marvelously used of God in the conversion of sinners, in the sanctification of believers, in the quickening of the Church, and in the general promotion of the work of God.”⁴²

Redfield’s Revival Ministry

Redfield began conducting revival meetings throughout New York State and New England. He was actively engaged as a revivalist from the early 1840s to about 1860. His revivals were often attended by such phenomena as shouting and seekers being slain in the Spirit. In this sense his revivals resembled those of frontier Methodism and of Methodist camp meetings a generation earlier. In fact Redfield was often unwelcome in larger city churches which were becoming more urbane and wanted to distance themselves from what they saw as earlier Methodist excesses.

One of Redfield’s more remarkable revivals brought him into direct contact with Stephen Olin. The revival was at Middletown, Connecticut, home of Wesleyan University, in 1846.

³⁶ Terrill, 52-65, 71, 11.

³⁷ Terrill, 81-87.

³⁸ Terrill, 88.

³⁹ Terrill, 92.

⁴⁰ Terrill, 95f. Redfield later carried on some correspondence with the Palmers.

⁴¹ Terrill, 97, 99, 75.

⁴² Hogue, 1:267.

Redfield began revival services at the local M.E. Church on Sunday, February 15, and preached almost daily for two weeks.⁴³ “The church was crowded, and the people seemed amazed,” B. T. Roberts, then a Wesleyan student, later wrote. “For some eight or ten weeks, the altar was crowded with penitents — from fifty to a hundred coming forward at a time.”⁴⁴ Roberts was mightily impressed by Redfield’s “deep-toned piety” and his “unearthly, overpowering eloquence.” “Dr. Redfield’s preaching created a profound sensation,” he wrote. Both town and campus were stirred as the revival continued for several weeks after Redfield left.⁴⁵

In fact, a religious quickening was already stirring before Redfield arrived. Phoebe Palmer had visited Middletown in the fall, and a number of people in the university community were affected by her visit.⁴⁶ Faculty members discerned “a sensible increase of [religious] interest” among the students, some of whom held special prayer meetings for revival. As the winter term began, religious fervor increased.

Within a week of Redfield’s arrival, a powerful revival was underway. Though physically weak, President Olin went to the Sunday morning service on February 22, only the second time he had been able to attend since the previous August.⁴⁷ He wanted to hear Redfield for himself, as some were criticizing the revival. His conclusion was that this was a genuine work of God. Olin’s “candid hearing satisfied him both of the sincerity and the soundness of the preacher,” Roberts noted, and he remembered Olin saying, “This, brethren, is Methodism, and you must stand by it.” With Olin’s endorsement, “The faculty, the official members, and the church received and endorsed the truth.”⁴⁸

Despite his delicate health, Olin did what he could to encourage the revival. Thursday, February 26, was the annual concert of prayer for colleges,⁴⁹ and Olin decided to attend. Most of the campus community were present, including students and faculty with their families. Olin intended to speak only briefly, but his heart was full and he continued for well over an hour. To Prof. Joseph Holdich, Olin’s talk was “a deeply-thought, clearly-conceived, and well-reasoned oration, full of religious as well as intellectual power, that profoundly moved the entire company,” leaving “few dry eyes.”⁵⁰ In a letter to his brother Olin wrote,

Several of our students profess to have found peace while I was speaking. Twenty of them have become professed converts within the last ten days, and more are inquiring the way. Nearly fifty converts are also numbered in our town congregation. It is truly a wonderful time. About three fourths of our students profess religion, and I never saw a more hopeful company of young men.⁵¹

⁴³ Terrill, 4, 162; Mrs. Julia Olin to Mary R. Garrettson, Mar. 11, 1846 (Wesleyan University Archives).

⁴⁴ B. T. Roberts, “Dr. Redfield’s Labors,” *The Earnest Christian and Golden Rule* 7:2 (Feb. 1864), 37.

⁴⁵ Roberts, “Dr. Redfield’s Labors,” 37.

⁴⁶ Richard Wheatley, *The Life and Letters of Mrs. Phoebe Palmer* (New York, NY: W. C. Palmer, 1881 [Garland, 1984]), 273f.

⁴⁷ ⁴⁷ Stephen Olin to J. R. Olin, Mar. 1, 1846, in Olin, *Life and Letters*, 2:272.

⁴⁸ Roberts, “Dr. Redfield’s Labors,” 37.

⁴⁹ About 1815, students at a number of New England colleges began holding “concerts of prayer for a revival of religion” in America’s educational institutions. This grew into something of a movement, sparking a number of collegiate revivals. Clarence P. Shedd, *Two Centuries of Student Christian Movements: Their Origin and Intercollegiate Life* (New York, NY: Association Press, 1934), 81f, 164f.

⁵⁰ Joseph Holdich, “Dr. Olin at the Wesleyan University,” Chap. 3 in vol. 2 of Olin, *Life and Letters*, 2:89.

⁵¹ Stephen Olin to J. R. Olin, Mar. 1, 1846, in Olin, *Life and Letters*, 2:272.

Overall, Redfield's ministry in Middletown was well received. Joseph Holdich found Redfield's ministry "very acceptable and useful, both in the city and the University," with "nothing of what any one could call extravagance." Many were sanctified, as well; "the doctrine of entire holiness has not been overlooked, and several students have been made happy partakers of this high privilege in Christ Jesus," noted Holdich.⁵²

By the time the revival ended, 400 people had reportedly been converted, about 300 from the city and 100 in the university community—26 of whom became preachers.⁵³ Prof. Holdich, a veteran of many revivals, said "this is certainly the most remarkable revival of religion I have ever seen."⁵⁴

After Middletown, Redfield went on to conduct revivals in many Methodist churches and holiness camp meetings. Gradually his ministry extended into western New York and on to Illinois and the St. Louis, Missouri, area. Some of his most stirring revivals were held in towns west of Chicago in the 1850s.

One of Redfield's revivals coincided with Charles Finney's meetings in Rochester, New York, in 1856. Redfield's meetings were held at Rochester's First M.E. Church. Despite opposition from the presiding elder and some of the other Methodist preachers, Redfield had a moderately successful meeting.⁵⁵ Meanwhile Finney, then 63, had returned to Rochester for his third revival there. His first, in 1830-31, was one of the most remarkable in American history and helped spread Finney's fame. The 1856 meeting was also a dramatic success; "The number of converts was incredible," a Presbyterian pastor wrote exuberantly.⁵⁶

Finney's meetings began on December 30, 1855, and continued until late April 1856, when Finney became ill.⁵⁷ He worked mostly among the Presbyterians, Congregationalists, and Baptists, noting in his *Memoirs* that "the Methodist churches went to work in their own way"⁵⁸ — referring to the Redfield revival. In contrast, Redfield's meeting was of shorter duration and was confined mostly to one Methodist congregation. Redfield was in Rochester for just three weeks toward the end of the four-month Finney revival.⁵⁹ After two weeks Redfield reported very large crowds and "some strong conversions," but also opposition. "I never saw a greater chance for a great work in any place," he wrote. "But as soon as we get to a boiling point, the moderators put the fires out, and we have to start anew."⁶⁰

Redfield's efforts included afternoon services, and Terrill reports that Finney occasionally came to hear the Methodist evangelist. "The two men seemed to enjoy each others' society," notes Terrill, and "[bade] each other Godspeed in their mission of calling souls to Christ."⁶¹

⁵² Holdich, "Revival in the Wesleyan University" (Letter to the Editors), *Christian Advocate and Journal* 20:33 (Mar. 25, 1846), 130.

⁵³ Terrill, 4, 163f; Roberts, "Dr. Redfield's Labors," 38.

⁵⁴ Joseph Holdich, "Revival in the Wesleyan University."

⁵⁵ Terrill, 296f.

⁵⁶ J. H. McIlvaine, quoted in Keith J. Hardman, *Charles Grandison Finney, 1792-1875: Revivalist and Reformer* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1987), 430.

⁵⁷ Garth M. Rosell and Richard A. G. Dupuis, eds., *The Memoirs of Charles G. Finney: The Complete Restored Text* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1989), 551.

⁵⁸ Rosell and Dupuis, 548.

⁵⁹ Terrill, 293, 296-99.

⁶⁰ Terrill, 299.

⁶¹ Terrill, 297.

Redfield lived only another seven years. He died in 1863 near Marengo, Illinois, where had been staying since suffering a stroke three years earlier. In announcing Redfield's death in *The Earnest Christian* B. T. Roberts wrote:

Dr. Redfield was one of the most remarkable men of the day. . . . For over twenty years he has devoted his time to the promotion of revivals of religion, receiving no compensation for his unremitting labors. As a revival preacher, he had no equal in this country. . . . Vast audiences were wrought to the highest pitch of religious excitement under his awful appeals, and wherever he held meetings the country was moved for miles around, and hundreds of converts were added to the church of God.⁶²

Redfield was a radicalizing influence within Methodism in the 1850s. When the Free Methodist Church was organized in 1860, many of its earliest congregations appeared in places where Redfield had held revivals.

Olin's Analysis of Methodism

What was Olin's vision of Methodism? In late 1834 and early 1835, shortly after beginning his presidency at Randolph Macon College, Olin published a series of articles in the (New York) *Christian Advocate and Journal* in which he discussed "the condition, prospects, wants, and duties of the Methodist Episcopal Church."⁶³ Among Methodism's "delinquencies" he cited its relative ineffectiveness in Bible and tract distribution, though he said nothing about slaveholding.

Olin's first article, on "The Obligations of the Church," scolded the denomination for being "positively deficient in missionary zeal" and, in general, in its ministry to society, despite its over 600,000 members. Olin felt the M.E. Church lacked "vigorous and well directed efforts . . . [for] the prosecution of those comprehensive and enlightened plans of Christian benevolence which aim at the improvement, the extension, and the final and speedy triumph of the Redeemer's kingdom."⁶⁴

Olin's analysis gives some sense of his vision for Methodism—and thus of his conception of the new creation promised by the gospel. The goal was "the improvement, the extension, and the final and speedy triumph" of the Kingdom of God. Olin's second article spoke of Methodism's calling to exert "efficient influence in the promotion of enlightened and saving piety in this great country, and in carrying the Gospel to the heathen world." Methodism's concern should be "the happiness and salvation of the human race." Methodism possessed great resources which if "properly directed" could "accomplish the noblest objects of Christian benevolence" in the interests of "the Redeemer's kingdom." The M.E. Church should be engaged effectively "in the work of evangelizing the world." The task of Methodism was to "promote the great objects of Christianity—personal holiness and the salvation of the species."⁶⁵

In his third article, titled "Duties and Delinquencies of the Church," Olin wrote:

⁶² [B. T. Roberts,] "Death of Dr. Redfield," *The Earnest Christian* 6:6 (Dec., 1863), 184.

⁶³ Olin, *Life and Letters*, 1:164.

⁶⁴ Stephen Olin, "The Obligations of the Church," *Christian Advocate and Journal* 9:14 (Nov. 28, 1834), 53.

⁶⁵ Stephen Olin, "Obligations and Resources of the Church," *Christian Advocate and Journal* 9:17 (Dec. 19, 1834), 67.

The spirit of the Gospel is essentially aggressive. Perfection is the Christian's goal, and he knows no resting place but heaven. Christ is a "prince" and a "conqueror." He is "straitened" and will not be "satisfied," until he "see the travail of his soul," until "the heathen become his inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth his possession" [cf. Isa. 53:11 and Ps. 2:8]. In proportion as the Church has the spirit of Christ, . . . it will chiefly value internal strength and prosperity as they may be made the instruments of subjecting other individuals and other nations of this revolted world to their rightful potentate. The great purpose of the Christian dispensation, and the objects of Christian duty, are summarily expressed in Titus ii, 14: "Who gave himself for us, *that he might redeem us from all iniquity, AND PURIFY TO HIMSELF A PECULIAR PEOPLE, ZEALOUS OF GOOD WORKS.*" Our own safety requires that we be holy. "Our heavenly Father is glorified if we bear much fruit." Enlightened selfishness might offer motives for working out our own salvation. Benevolence, gratitude to God, "the love of Christ, constrain us" to seek the conversion of the world. It is true, these interests are intimately connected. The man who has learned to care for his own soul will be anxious for the salvation of others. The missionary zeal of a Church is commonly a true index of its spiritual condition.⁶⁶

In his fourth article, entitled "Duties of the Church—Tracts, Sunday Schools," Olin noted the good work being done, but called for more successful efforts. For lack of effective educational enterprises, Olin argued, the Methodists were losing some of their most promising youth—"often the children of our most useful and respectable members." He added, "It is our glory as well as our duty to preach the Gospel to the poor; yet God has been pleased to mingle together in society the unlettered and the learned, the poor and the rich, and that Church is the strongest and readiest for every good work in which these elements, sanctified by grace, are combined."⁶⁷

In his fifth article, Olin focused especially on missions. "The great enterprise of 'preaching the Gospel to every creature'" has often been neglected by the Christian church, he noted. And yet "The spirit of the Gospel is essentially missionary"; the "primitive Church was little else than a missionary camp." "The missionary enterprise" is "the conspicuous theatre for the exhibition of our love and loyalty to Christ," calling Christians "to merge self and selfish ends in the higher interests of the Redeemer's glory and the world's salvation."⁶⁸

Like John R. Mott half a century later, Olin was confident that the task of world evangelization could be completed in short order if the church were properly mobilized:

Judging of the probabilities of the future from past experience, no sober-minded Christian . . . can doubt that [with sufficient prayer and mobilization] the world may be converted in thirty years. Ten years would suffice for the establishment of schools and churches, and for the translation of the Scriptures into every human dialect. . . . Fifteen or twenty years would raise up a native ministry . . . fully competent to do whatever might remain to be done toward uprooting idolatry and subjugating the nations to Christ.⁶⁹

⁶⁶ Stephen Olin, "Duties and Delinquencies of the Church," *Christian Advocate and Journal* 9:21 (Jan. 16, 1935), 81 (emphasis in the original).

⁶⁷ Stephen Olin, "Duties of the Church—Tracts, Sunday Schools," *Christian Advocate and Journal* 9:22 (Jan. 23, 1835), 85.

⁶⁸ Stephen Olin, "Duties of the Church—Missions," *Christian Advocate and Journal* 9:23 (Jan. 30, 1835), 89.

⁶⁹ Olin, "Duties of the Church—Missions," 89.

In words remarkably similar to the famous “watchword” of the Student Volunteer Movement fifty years later, Olin wrote: “*The Church must familiarize itself with the stupendous apprehension that the world is to be evangelized before another generation shall perish.*”⁷⁰ To this end the M.E. Church must devise workable plans and deploy the necessary resources.

In his final article, “Wants and Duties of the Church,” Olin recognized that Methodism might not be up to such a task. He quoted Bishop William McKendree: “There are now symptoms of spiritual decay abroad. The love of the world. The work of the Lord is not now attended to. Discipline is neglected. The classes are not watched over by the preachers. The standard of holiness is not raised.” Olin felt that “while as a denomination we neglect our duties, no extensive religious improvement may be expected.” He called therefore for “speedy reformation.” How was this to be accomplished? Olin had a specific proposal:

If each conference would appoint one or a few preachers, chosen with strict reference to qualifications, to travel at large throughout their boundaries, to arouse the ministry and its membership, to diffuse the missionary spirit, and aid the preachers in the formation of Sunday schools, and of missionary, Bible and tract societies, it would be the dawning of a new era. If, in addition . . . , one or two general secretaries were appointed, who should devote their time to the correspondence and other interests of the parent societies in New-York, and to visiting the annual conferences and principal stations, . . . it is reasonable to conclude that the fruits of our benevolent exertions would be doubled in a single year.⁷¹

Olin added that key to any such “speedy reformation” would need to be substantial increase in the number of genuinely called and adequately trained preachers.⁷²

Over the next few years Olin continued to urge the priority of evangelism. In 1839 he wrote to Nathan Bangs,

I think it is the first duty of our Church to be more zealous and diligent in saving souls. This is its proper work; and in proportion as it is lost sight of, the Church will become useless. Let us remember that Christ died, not primarily to establish schools and colleges, and Bible and missionary societies, but to save souls from hell. . . . We are bound before God, as we love Christ, to spread the Gospel at home and in heathen lands. We must become more and more aggressive and missionary. We can do it. We are numerous and rich, and Christ will hold us responsible for the souls of a perishing world.⁷³

Olin believed that God had established the church to be the agent of “the Redeemer’s kingdom” on earth, and that its work was to be carried out primarily through evangelism and missions, the preaching and experience of Christian holiness, and a broad range of benevolent enterprises. Carried on with sufficient zeal and empowered by God’s Spirit, Olin felt, the church should and must fulfill its mission for the sake of Christ’s Kingdom.

⁷⁰ Olin, “Duties of the Church—Missions,” 89 (italics in the original).

⁷¹ Stephen Olin, “Wants and Duties of the Church,” *Christian Advocate and Journal* 9:24 (Feb. 6, 1835), 93.

⁷² Olin, “Wants and Duties of the Church,” 93.

⁷³ Olin to Nathan Bangs, Aug. 6, 1839, in Olin, *Life and Letters*, 1:314.

Redfield's Vision of Authentic Methodism

What was Redfield's vision of new creation? I have not discovered that he anywhere used the phrase "new creation" or "new creature," though one may presume that in his preaching he may have referred from time to time to 1 Corinthians 5:17 ("Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature" [KJV]) and that "new creation" would have meant for him, primarily, the conversion of sinners and sanctification of believers. He would no doubt have agreed with this formulation by his younger colleague B. T. Roberts: "One may belong to the church and be zealous for its prosperity and yet not belong to Christ. *To be in the Lord*, is to have him dwelling in the heart. It is to be born of the Holy Ghost. It is to be a new creature. It is to become a partaker of the divine nature."⁷⁴

Redfield had a passion for the poor and was committed to abolitionism, simplicity, and the right of women to preach. He "labored to bring all to the gospel level by noticing the poor, and especially the colored poor."⁷⁵ For him, genuine Christianity meant commitment to these values, which suggest some of the dimensions of "new creation" in Christ.

Redfield was explicit about God's call to the church of his day: A return to the purity and power of primitive Methodism. His essential message was one of conversion and sanctification as understood and emphasized in the early Methodist movement. He was convinced that the way to effective evangelism was to preach holiness.

Redfield saw his evangelistic mission in terms of Christ's commission to preach the gospel everywhere, and especially to the poor. He felt that God had directed him explicitly to Mark 16:15, "Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature" (KJV), as well as to Luke 4:18, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor" (KJV).⁷⁶

Redfield felt that Methodism must be faithful to its original message and dynamic. He spoke of bringing Methodism "back to its primitive simplicity and power" and of the need for "preaching and pressing full salvation, the primitive doctrines of the Methodists."⁷⁷ After a revival in which many "professed to have obtained the blessing of holiness and the work of God among sinners broke out in great power" resulting in some 300 conversions, Redfield "was sure that the Methodist Church would rapidly return to their primitive power and glory and the world will soon be redeemed. The redemption of the world . . . through the M.E. Church was the theme of my day labors and night dreams." But, he said, "I was again doomed to disappointment . . . [for there was] a deep seated hostility to holiness [even among] Methodist preachers and an evident leaning in them towards a system of worldly policy and a desire to prune Methodism of all the objectionable features."⁷⁸ Redfield spoke of "the grand scheme of relaying the foundations of primitive Methodism on the cornerstone of holiness,"⁷⁹ but he also saw that he was fighting a losing battle.

As revealed in his journal, Redfield's vision may be summarized as follows: God had granted Methodism a message of holiness (Christian perfection) capable of enlivening the church and winning the world to Christ. Methodism was called to be faithful to this message.

⁷⁴ B. T. Roberts, "Stand Fast," *The Earnest Christian* 46:1 (July 1883), 6 (emphasis in the original).

⁷⁵ Terrill, 259.

⁷⁶ See Redfield's manuscript autobiography, pp. 23 (Terrill, 30f) and 99 (not found in Terrill).

⁷⁷ Redfield, manuscript autobiography, pp. 136, 144.

⁷⁸ Redfield, manuscript autobiography, p. 148f.

⁷⁹ Redfield, manuscript autobiography, p. 190.

The new creation was primarily the cleansing, empowering presence of the Holy Spirit in the lives of believers, and through this the empowering of the church for winning people to Christ. Redfield's concern was "trying to win a lost world to Jesus."⁸⁰ He spoke of the salvation or redemption of the world and felt that "Methodist preachers needed only to see the workings of their own doctrines applied and with such success and they would at once return to them . . . and then the world would soon be redeemed."⁸¹ Redfield is not very explicit as to what the world's redemption would mean, but apparently he hoped that the conversion and sanctification of a substantial portion of the world's population would usher in a millennial reign of justice and righteousness.⁸²

Olin and Redfield: Two Visions of New Creation?

Both Redfield and Olin saw Methodism in danger of decline spiritually and in missional effectiveness, but their diagnoses and prescriptions differed. For Redfield, the issue was the preaching and experience of entire sanctification. For Olin it was the faithful enlistment of all the denomination's energies in world evangelization. These represent somewhat different, though not necessarily conflicting, visions of what new creation in Christ means.

Redfield was always an "immediatist," whether the issue was revival, the abolition of slavery, or reform in the church. Redfield "generally encountered, wherever he labored, fierce opposition from ecclesiastics" because of his call for radical discipleship and opposition to "the gospel of expediency."⁸³ Olin on the other hand was more urbane and patient, though no less concerned. And though he despised slavery, Olin was never an abolitionist, feeling that abolitionism did more harm than good.

In contrast to Redfield's meager schooling, Olin affirmed education. As early as 1834 Olin argued that the Methodists "must educate our ministry better, or sink. We may boast of preaching to the poor, but without the due intermixture of the rich and influential, we can not fulfill our destiny as a Church. Nothing can save us but an able ministry, and this can not be had but by thorough education."⁸⁴ Redfield would have sharply disagreed with this analysis.

Olin wrote in 1842, shortly before going to Wesleyan University, "I believe that our system has not worked well in large cities," where Methodism seemed to be "losing strength." Olin wasn't sure of all the reasons, but he conjectured that "the general adoption of pewed churches and an abandonment of class-meetings, especially the former," were factors.⁸⁵ Here Redfield would have agreed. Olin felt Methodism needed reform and renewal, and it is not surprising therefore that he endorsed the Redfield revival at Middletown four years later, telling the students, "This is Methodism, and you must stand by it."

Although Olin no doubt had a broader cultural understanding than did Redfield and a greater appreciation for education and learning, yet in many ways their visions of authentic Methodism were more similar than different. Redfield was more "radical" and Olin more

⁸⁰ Redfield, manuscript autobiography, p. 5.

⁸¹ Redfield, manuscript autobiography, p. 124.

⁸² Terrill, 110, and Redfield, manuscript autobiography, p. 132 suggest that Redfield's views of the millennium were those of Adam Clarke.

⁸³ B. T. Roberts, "Introduction" in Terrill, 5.

⁸⁴ Stephen Olin to the Rev. Mr. Landon, Sept. 4, 1834, in Olin, *Life and Letters*, 1:182.

⁸⁵ Stephen Olin to "the Rev. Dr. —," Mar. 27, 1842, in Olin, *Life and Letters*, 2:55.

“progressive” in terms of the Methodism of their day, yet the two were agreed on the necessity of conversion and holiness and the priority of evangelization.

Probably the greatest difference between Olin and Redfield concerns the relationship of Christianity to culture, a difference that can to a some degree be explained by differing cultural background and experience. Redfield was for the immediate abolition of slavery; Olin took a gradualist approach and was prepared to tolerate slavery in the short run. Redfield championed the gospel for the poor and saw wealth as a snare; Olin felt the church needed both the poor and the prosperous. Olin saw education as one means for the advancement of authentic Methodism; Redfield was at best distrustful of higher education. Redfield’s main accent was the preaching of entire sanctification; Olin affirmed the emphasis on holiness but had a broader agenda, including the organizational effectiveness of Methodism and its involvement in a range of benevolent enterprises.

In terms of H. Richard Niebuhr’s categories, Olin tended more toward the “Christ transforming culture” model while Redfield represents a more “Christ against culture” stance.⁸⁶ In terms of “new creation,” Redfield put more stress on the personal transformation that comes through entire sanctification while Olin put relatively more stress on Christianity’s broader cultural impact. Yet both hoped to see eventually, and finally, the coming of the Kingdom of God in its fullness.⁸⁷

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⁸⁶ H. Richard Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture* (New York, NY: Harper & Row, 1956).

⁸⁷ In terms of the models outlined in the book *Models of the Kingdom*, both Redfield and Olin would have affirmed the model of the kingdom as “future hope.” Redfield however represents primarily the model of “inner spiritual experience” and to a lesser degree the “countersystem” model, whereas Olin combined the “inner spiritual experience” and “Christianized culture” models. See Howard A. Snyder, *Models of the Kingdom* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1991).