

Culture Chronicles

a publication of the Francis Asbury Institute

www.francisasburysociety.com

November 2022

LEADING FROM THE SECOND CHAIR: THE INFLUENCE OF LUCIUS C. MATLACK

Steve Stanley, PhD

Dr. Stanley received his PhD from Dallas Baptist University. He pastored Nazarene and Wesleyan congregations from 1987 to 2014 and is an ordained elder in good standing in The Wesleyan Church, as well as the Fundamental Wesleyan Society. This article is adapted from his dissertation entitled, *The Second Chair Leadership of Lucius Columbus Matlack: Creating a Narrative to Liberate the Enslaved and Reform Methodism.*

Ordinary people with tenacious faith sometimes witness the most exceptional interventions of the Lord. Such people are written on nearly every page of Scripture. Often, they are nameless except for their crucial service, like the lad whose small offering of loaves and fish Jesus multiplied to the blessing of thousands.¹ At other times, ordinary people of notable faithfulness are themselves the recipients of those exceptional interventions, people like Dorcas, noted for her many deeds of love and service to others, whom God brought again to life.² Movements are made of such people—people whom God can use.

One of the most difficult things to do is to take a proper, but unpopular, stand

for what is right.

This is especially true when the formal leadership opposes you. Stanley

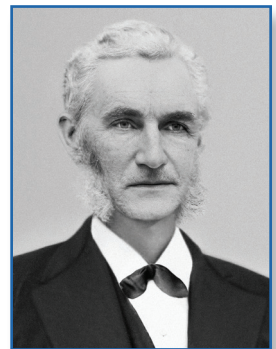
Milgram's

famous experiment on obedience to authority documented an overwhelming human tendency to obey, even when to obey violated one's own belief system.³ However, one man, who received

repeated commands to perform the illicit activity, refused. Milgram singled the man out for special comment.⁴ When Milgram asked why he refused to obey an illicit command, the man pointed to a higher law, his confidence in which gave him the ability to judge the morality and rightness of the command given by one in authority.⁵ Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego possessed the same ability when they refused to join the crowd in worshipping the golden image of Nebuchadnezzar. They had access to a "higher law" than a king's command to bow or comply.⁶ The following account tells of the life of an abolitionist Methodist whose life exemplified costly obedience to the will and Word of God.

On April 28, 1816, a small Quaker family living in Baltimore, Maryland,

welcomed a newborn son whom they named after a great philosopher and a famous explorer. Details of the early childhood of Lucius Colum-



Lucius C. Matlack

One of the most difficult things to do is to take a proper, but unpopular, stand for what is right. This is especially true when the formal leadership opposes you.

1 John 6:1–14.

2 Acts 9:36–42.

3 Stanley Milgram, *Obedience to Authority: The Unique Experiment that Challenged Human Nature* (New York: Perennial Classics, 1974), 36.

4 Ibid, 47–49.

5 Ibid, 49.

6 Dan 3:1–18.

bus Matlack are few, save for one event that occurred when he was about ten years of age. Late in life, Matlack recalled that event: “Fifty-four years ago I stood gazing sadly in my native city, Baltimore, upon chained gangs of men and women, followed by wagons laden with infant children” as they commenced their inhumane journey “toward the great national mart of the domestic slave trade, Washington, the capital of ‘the land of the free and the home of the brave.’”⁷ That soul-scarring sight, combined with “scenes witnessed in the streets and fields of Baltimore, joined with the tales of slavery from the lips of a Quaker-Methodist mother, made indelible by reading the ‘Genius of Universal Emancipation,’ edited by Benjamin Lundy and William Lloyd Garrison at Baltimore,” seared a hatred for slavery upon the young lad’s heart and mind.⁸ An abolitionist was born.

The next year, in January of 1827, prominent slave trader, Austin Woolfolk—the enslaver of the shackled people Matlack earlier saw on the streets of Baltimore—attacked and severely injured the abolitionist publisher, Benjamin Lundy, as Lundy neared the Baltimore municipal post office. The beating was so severe that Lundy was confined to bed for several days. Within the year, the Matlack family removed to Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, a course of action Lundy pursued in 1836 when founding another antislavery paper there, the *National Enquirer*.⁹

Mother Matlack’s influence proved crucial to her son’s spiritual development. Matlack testified to friends that he came to know the Lord Jesus as his Savior at his mother’s knee. His life-long regard for her testified that Louisa Matlack was a continuing source of vital guidance. Matlack’s reference to his mother as a “Quaker-Methodist” was an acknowledgment of the fact that shortly after the Matlacks relocated to Philadelphia, he and his mother joined the Union Methodist Episcopal Church (MEC). The year was 1827 and Matlack was just eleven years of age. At age sixteen, Matlack commenced a course of church service that eventuated in his entry into the Methodist ministry. At age sixteen Matlack became an assistant Sabbath School teacher, and at eighteen he was Sabbath School Superintendent of the junior grades. By age nineteen, Matlack was authorized “to hold public religious meetings . . . for twelve months, visiting the poor and destitute, in the almshouse and suburbs of the city . . . endeavoring to instruct them in the truths and consolations of religion.”¹⁰

In 1837, then nearly twenty-one years of age, Matlack received his Local Preacher’s license and was, at the same time, unanimously recommended to the Philadelphia Annual Conference by the Quarterly Conference of the Union Methodist Episcopal Church as a credentialed traveling preacher. In the weeks between the local church conference and the Annual Conference, Matlack assisted twelve other persons in forming

7 Lucius C. Matlack, *The Antislavery Struggle and Triumph in the Methodist Episcopal Church* (New York: Phillips & Hunt, 1881), 369.

8 *Ibid.*, 370.

9 See Elyce Feliz, “Benjamin Lundy, Born January 4, 1789,” *The Civil War of the United States* (blog), 29 January 2014, <https://civilwaref.blogspot.com/2014/01/benjamin-lundy-born-january-4-1789.html>; Ralph Clayton, “Baltimore’s Own Version of ‘Amistad’: Slave Revolt,” *The Baltimore Chronicle*, 7 January 1998, http://www.baltimorechronicle.com/slave_ship2.html; Jack Lawrence Schermerhorn and Calvin Schermerhorn, *The Business of Slavery and the Rise of American Capitalism, 1815–1860* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2015), 62ff.

10 Lucius C. Matlack, *Narrative of the Antislavery Experience of a Minister in the Methodist [Episcopal] Church, Who Was Twice Rejected by the Philadelphia Annual Conference, and Finally Deprived of License to Preach for Being an Abolitionist* (Philadelphia: Merrihew and Thompson, 1845), 3.

the Wesleyan Antislavery Society for Philadelphia. Almost immediately, a succession of Methodist clergy began to prevail upon him to resign from the Wesleyan Antislavery Society for, as Matlack expressed it, abolitionists “were then more despised than feared.”¹¹ Those clergypersons, including some of the most prominent in American Methodism, had formerly promised to aid the young minister’s ministerial advancement and to be his friends. Suddenly his fortunes changed, solely because of his abolitionist convictions.¹² His own pastor visited Matlack at his place of work and said, “If you are determined to be an Abolitionist, all I have to say is that though I have been your friend, I will be so no longer. I will oppose you on the Conference floor, and I am much mistaken if you can be received as an Abolitionist.”¹³ One after another, the powerful (including a college president, a former chaplain of the United States Senate, and other influential Methodist clergy) warned Matlack to abandon his work for the enslaved or give up his calling as a Methodist minister.

True to the pastor’s prediction, the annual conference denied Matlack the credentials needed for a traveling

preacher in the Methodist churches (although he was permitted to continue as a Local Preacher

for another year).¹⁴ From 1837 to 1839, Matlack’s applications for ministerial credentials were repeatedly denied. Other

consequences soon followed. Methodists who once eagerly sought the company of the young preacher now began to avoid him in public and withheld the social invitations once enthusiastically proffered. Pulpits were closed to him and, in common social settings, he was shunned.¹⁵ This treatment of the faithful young preacher by people whom he truly loved, and by the church through which he was “called from sin to holiness” was truly devastating.¹⁶ Nevertheless, despite all opposition, Matlack remained faithful in the work of Gospel ministry and on behalf of the enslaved and the welfare of the freedmen. The Scriptures and the teachings of John Wesley served as beacons to guide Matlack during those dark days. The Quaker poet, John Greenleaf Whittier, having assumed editorship of Lundy’s recently renamed paper, *The Pennsylvania Freedman*, enlisted Matlack’s help in lecturing throughout eastern Pennsylvania on behalf of the abolitionist cause. Following Matlack’s final ecclesiastical rejection on January 10, 1839, Whittier published an account of the actions of the Methodist Church in regard to the young minister. Whittier prefaced that report with these words:

*Our friend, LUCIUS C. MATLACK, who has been lately deprived of his license as a preacher in the Methodist Episcopal Church, for faithfully advocating the doctrines of JOHN WESLEY, on the subject of Human Rights has given us the following account of his recent labors in a cause so dear to Methodists of the old school of Wesley and Asbury.*¹⁷

One after another, the powerful . . . warned Matlack to abandon his work for the enslaved or give up his calling as a Methodist minister.

11 Matlack, *Narrative*, 3.

12 Ibid, 4, 15.

13 Ibid, 4.

14 Ibid, 6.

15 Lucius C. Matlack, *Secession: A Personal Narrative of Proscription for Being an Abolitionist* (Syracuse, NY: n.p., 1856), 42.

16 Matlack, *Narrative*, 23.

17 John Greenleaf Whittier, “More Agitation,” *Pennsylvania Freeman* (17 January 1839), emphasis in original.

As the fellowship of the church and the friendship of many of its members was increasingly withdrawn, one would not be surprised if Matlack absented himself from his congregation or his detractors. This was not the case. Matlack did not neglect to attend his home church, continuing to faithfully frequent the services of divine worship there. Nevertheless, only in the various African Methodist Episcopal (AME) churches of the area was he still a welcome worshipper. Upon learning that Matlack continued to worship with his friends in the AME churches of Philadelphia, his own pastor threatened to charge him with “insubordination” and expel him from the church.¹⁸ Stunned, Matlack assured the pastor that he was merely trying to fulfill the injunction of the *Discipline* that, like the Scriptures, enjoined all believers to bear witness to Christ and to “do good” to all, clarifying that at no time had Matlack misrepresented himself as operating under the authorization or approbation of the Methodist Episcopal Church. The Sunday following, Matlack again attended the AME worship services where he was requested to preach. As he stood before that congregation, the ultimatum of the Methodist Episcopal Church officials collided with the burden of his divine calling and his cherished Wesleyan principles. Overcome by the thought of his potential expulsion from the Methodist church for seeking the liberation of the enslaved and knowing that he could not forsake the heavenly call upon his life, a weeping Matlack sat down, unable to continue. With one voice the congregation lifted the young preacher in prayer, mingling their tears with his own. Then the pastor stood and, with words of spiri-

tual encouragement, offered strength and solace to the weeping minister. The effect was immediate and profound. Matlack wrote: “His words were as lightning from heaven. My course was decided. From that hour I have never faltered in a changeless purpose of identity with, and devotion to, the cause of the oppressed. The utmost I can do is the measure of my choice.”¹⁹

Rejected from ministry, shunned by former friends, and threatened by leadership, a whispering campaign then commenced suggesting that Matlack was guilty of moral failure, that abolitionism was the *public* charge only in order to spare him the embarrassment of the *true* cause of his rejection.²⁰ Whether this was a preemptive attempt to isolate Matlack or designed to act as a cover for the unWesleyan position of the denomination is not clear. The allegations being wholly untrue, one can easily imagine the threat posed to Matlack’s calling by the salacious accusations. A godly Methodist businessperson, a noted Philadelphia silversmith and jeweler by the name of Henry J. Pepper, “stood in the gap” for the young preacher. Pepper quietly began collecting letters and testimonials from the very officials who presided over each inquiry in Matlack’s rejection.²¹ The collected documents proved beyond all question that the only charge against Matlack was that he was an abolitionist, devoted to working for the freedom of his enslaved fellow humans.

As noted at the outset, Lucius Matlack was an ordinary person. With great candor, he described his unsuccessful business ventures.²² Furthermore, prior to entering a mentoring relationship and despite an unquenchable desire for the liberation of the enslaved, Matlack

18 Matlack, *Secession*, 38.

19 *Ibid.*, 40.

20 *Ibid.*, 9.

21 Matlack, *Narrative*, 18.

22 *Ibid.*, 7.

assessed his efforts as an anti-slavery lecturer as “inefficient.”²³ Had Matlack halted his antislavery or ministerial efforts at this point, judging his inadequacies as insurmountable, the loss to the cause of the gospel and emancipation would have been incalculable. In this, Matlack is an illustration of the indispensable value of perseverance for in every difficulty he encountered, knowing his course was pleasing to the Lord, he refused to relent or to quit.

Shortly after Matlack’s initial rejection for ministry, he met the man who, in the providence of God, was destined to become his close friend and mentor. The Rev. Orange Scott, one-time Methodist Presiding Elder and pastor from the New England Conference, conducted an abolitionist lecture in the Philadelphia area. Matlack attended the lecture and was invited to be seated at the platform where he struck up an acquaintance with the charismatic evangelist and abolitionist, Scott.²⁴ An invitation to join Scott as his pastoral assistant in Lowell, Massachusetts, soon reached Matlack, which invitation he joyously accepted.²⁵ Due to his abolitionism, Scott, among the most

highly regarded Methodist preachers in the New England Conference, was removed as presiding elder and transferred from a prosperous parish to a

“hard-scrabble” congregation of some thirty parishioners.²⁶ Robert Black and

Keith Drury wrote that Scott’s “response [to the demotion] was to serve the church so well that it experienced unprecedented growth and had within a year added 120 to its membership rolls.”²⁷ Under Scott’s mentorship, and with the aid of Pepper’s exculpatory documents, Matlack received the ministerial credentialing in the New England Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church that was earlier denied to him in Philadelphia. Nevertheless, Matlack’s time as a minister in the Methodist Episcopal Church was destined to be brief. To many abolitionist Methodists, it became increasingly clear that the doors of usefulness were closed to them within that denomination. Thus, Scott and like-minded Methodists declared:

Many considerations of friendship, as well as our temporal interests, bind us to the Church of our early choice. But for the sake of a high and holy cause, we can forego all these. We wish to live not for ourselves, nor for the present age alone, but for all coming time; nay, for God and eternity. We have borne our testimony a long time against what we considered wrong in the M[ethodist] E[piscopal] Church. We have waited, prayed, and hoped until there is no longer any ground for hope. Hence we have come to the deliberate conclusion, that we must submit to things as they are or peaceably retire. We have unhesitatingly chosen the latter.”²⁸

Although seceding from the Methodist Episcopal Church, Scott and his

They issued a further statement saying, “We wish it may be distinctly understood that we do not withdraw from anything essential to pure Wesleyan Methodism. We only dissolve our connection with Episcopacy and Slavery.”

23 Ibid. Others judged his lecturing abilities more highly, however. See H. R. Torbert, ed., “Then and Now,” *The Cecil Whig* 41:51 (5 August 1882), 3.

24 Matlack, *Narrative*, 7, 10.

25 Ibid, 17.

26 Robert Black and Keith Drury, *The Story of the Wesleyan Church* (Indianapolis: Wesleyan Publishing House, 2012), 28–32.

27 Ibid, 29.

28 Lucius C. Matlack, *The History of American Slavery and Methodism from 1780 to 1849 and History of the Wesleyan Methodist Connection of America* (New York: Lucius C. Matlack, 1849), 309.

fellows made known that they were no less Methodist than any others. In fact, by adhering to John Wesley's antislavery principles, they deemed themselves a more authentic Methodist body. To clarify their position, they issued a further statement saying, "We wish it may be distinctly understood that we do not withdraw from anything essential to pure Wesleyan Methodism. We only dissolve our connection with Episcopacy and Slavery."²⁹ Those abolitionist Methodists, therefore, adopted the name of *Wesleyan* Methodists and called their denominational paper *The True Wesleyan*.

A man of unwavering determination, such as Matlack, might be expected to seek the upper echelons of the new movement's leadership. But Matlack more nearly resembled the patient and supportive Barnabas of the early church than the bold assertiveness of Peter. His preferred place of service was outside the center of attention, serving in the organization's shadows to facilitate the greater fruitfulness of its most visible leaders. Over time, Matlack acquainted himself with the entire range of tasks necessary to promote the prosperity and effectiveness

His preferred place of service was outside the center of attention, serving in the organization's shadows to facilitate the greater fruitfulness of its most visible leaders.

of the Wesleyan Methodists. He studied the organization's processes and gained intimate knowledge of the most essential denominational roles. He accepted tasks that gave him a "ring-side seat" from which to observe the system-wide operation of the denomination. His usual position was as a secretary or agent under the senior leadership. From that vantage

point, he learned firsthand the core tasks and how best to perform them.

The leadership environment of the Wesleyan Methodists posed special challenges. Wesleyan historian, Lee M. Haines, observed that "the mood of the denomination was against any authoritative leadership, and each could only exercise the leadership inspired by his own character and personality or earned by his power of persuasion."³⁰ This kind of organizational climate is common in reform movements. When acting as dissidents in existing organizations, reformers often encounter harsh opposition from the leadership. When leaving to establish their own groups, there is a typical reluctance to cede substantial power to individual leaders of their new reform group, the tendency being to prefer a flattened organizational structure with highly democratic features. Noted leadership expert, James McGregor Burns, confirmed this observation in his seminal leadership study. Burns characterized reform leadership as "deal[ing] with endless divisions within their own ranks."³¹ In addition, Burns cited the criticality of "moral leadership" in reformative organizations, such that "reformers must not follow improper means in trying to achieve moral ends, . . . [else] the means can taint and pervert the ends."³²

In response to the anti-authoritarian organizational mood identified by Haines and the importance of ethics and morality to reform leadership as cited by Burns, Matlack's use of a non-authoritarian, persuasive leadership approach and the development of an organization-wide narrative expressive of core Wesleyan values and objectives proved wise and effective. In the organizational and

29 Ibid, 315.

30 Lee M. Haines, "Radical Reform and Living Piety: The Story of Earlier Wesleyan Methodism, 1843–1867," in *Reformers and Revivalists: History of The Wesleyan Church*, ed. Wayne E. Caldwell (Indianapolis: Wesley Press, 1992), 69.

31 James MacGregor Burns, *Leadership* (New York: Perennial HarperCollins, 1979), 169.

32 Ibid, 169–70.

leadership research of recent years, much attention has focused on the emergence, development, and operation of reform agencies, typically referred to as social movement organizations (SMOs). A social movement organization “is a complex, or formal, organization which identifies its goals with the preferences of a social movement or a counter-movement and attempts to implement these goals.”³³ Another definition comes still closer to capturing the spirit of the Wesleyan Methodist Connection in which Matlack operated. Donatella Della Porta and Mario Diani, cited that definition of SMOs as “associations of persons making idealistic and moralistic claims about how human personal or group life ought be organized that, *at the time of their claims making*, are marginal to or excluded from mainstream society.”³⁴ Such a definition not only applies to the Wesleyan Methodists of the nineteenth century but reflects the relation of the people of God to the larger society in the present day.

Contemporary organizational and leadership theories provide validation for Matlack’s method of on-the-job growth and expanding skillset. In 2005, Mike Bonem and Roger Patterson, two pastors with extensive experience in training leaders and staff, published a book entitled, *Leading from the Second Chair: Serving Your Church, Fulfilling Your Role, and Realizing Your Dreams*. Bonem and Patterson defined a subordinate leader as “a person in a subordinate role whose influence with others adds value throughout the organization.”³⁵ Throughout their helpful exploration of “second chair leadership,” they dealt with the paradoxical, simultaneous

realities inherent in that role: subordination and leadership, deep expertise and system-wide general knowledge, and a present contentment coexistent with dreams of future advancement. Loyalty to one’s primary leader is the soil in which trusting “first- and second-chair” relationships flourish and flower into ever-expanding influence and a growing sphere of responsibility.

There are lessons to learn from Matlack’s principled resistance to the Methodist hierarchy’s use of coercion to silence his voice regarding the injustice of slavery. Ira Chaleff’s “courageous followership” organizational model provides keen insights applicable to Matlack’s actions. Preeminently, Chaleff identified that both leaders and followers must have an equal adherence to the purposes and principles of the organization. This mutual submission to stated ethics and objectives implies a degree of parity in holding each other accountable to those ethics and objectives. In other words, the organizational accountability flow is multi-directional in healthy leader-follower relationships. Not only are followers accountable to the leader for their adherence to the organizational commitments, but they are accountable to each other, and leaders, too, are accountable to followers for their adherence to those mutually agreed principles. Chaleff further described seven core elements of courage the finest follower’s exhibit. Among these is the courage to challenge leaders and other followers when they betray the primary principles of the organization.

How does one exercise leadership in a leadership-resistant climate? Harvard University’s Marshall Ganz analyzed the

33 Mayer N. Zald and John D. McCarthy, “Social Movement Industries: Competition and Cooperation among Movement Organizations,” in *Research in Social Movements, Conflicts and Change*, vol. 3, ed. Louis Kriesberg (Greenwich, CT: JAI Press, Inc, 1980), 2.

34 Donatella Della Porta and Mario Diani, *Social Movements: An Introduction*, 2nd ed. (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2006), 140, emphasis in original.

35 Mike Bonem and Roger Patterson, *Leading from the Second Chair: Serving Your Church, Fulfilling Your Role, and Realizing Your Dreams* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2005), 2.

organizational behavior of successful reform groups and found that of critical importance to every aspect of their success is the effective narration of a three-fold story. Ganz described the three stories as a story of self (what we used to refer to as our “testimony”), a story of us (the history, values, and mission that motivate our movement), and a story of now (the immediate, urgent issue prompting our present action).³⁶ Although the three stories overlap, to some extent everything begins with and touches on the story of self. That story states the leader’s personal journey, the motivations, challenges, values, sacrifices, and outcomes of one’s personal commitment to the cause. In a way, one’s story of self constitutes the credentials that legitimate the leader’s role within the movement or organization. The story of self says, “I have a personal investment in the outcome. This is more than just a job or opinion position to me.” Writing is a relatively unobtrusive way of exercising leadership. It gives space for the reader’s own thoughts and discussions with others regarding the author’s content. Writing allowed Matlack to communicate the stories of the movement, stories important to the mission and reform it sought.

Matlack knew how to write and began to do so. With each new publication, his skill in relating his story and the story of Methodist abolitionism increased. In using what he had where it was most needed, Matlack became the chronicler of the new movement of Wesleyan Methodism. The story of Matlack’s rejection and ostracization and

the personal price he paid as an abolitionist proved the depth and sincerity of his commitment to the cause. Anticipating Ganz’s model of social reform leadership, Matlack engaged in a writing campaign that aligned closely with Ganz’s three-story concept. Matlack’s literary project spanned the years 1845 to 1856. The first and last books in the series related his story of self and was his introduction to others in the movement.³⁷ His second, third, and fourth books related the story of us, the “us” being the abolitionist Wesleyan Methodists.³⁸ Although each of the books contained the story of now (the urgent call to a slavery-free Methodist witness to God and against human trafficking), it was Matlack’s *History of American Slavery and Methodism* and the 1856 account of the story of self that most powerfully urged the Wesleyans to specific continued action and invited outsiders to join the movement and assist in the work.³⁹

Matlack’s actions demonstrated that, in terms of his African American friends, he had no “messiah complex” but merely deemed himself as one among equals, a friend among friends, and a brother among siblings. This provided a visible and coherent moral strength to his advocacy. In short, Matlack lived by the values and principles he professed. When his self-emancipated friend and formerly enslaved abolitionist, Henry Bibb, was attacked on suspicion of exaggeration and untruthfulness (even by some noted abolitionists), Matlack solicited the aid of a judge and other prominent antislavery persons in Detroit, Michigan. Documentary evidence was secured proving the

36 Marshall Ganz, “Leading Change: Leadership, Organizations, and Social Movements,” in *Handbook of Leadership Theory and Practice*, eds. Nitin Nohria and Rakesh Khurana (Boston: Harvard Business Press, 2010), 527–68.

37 The story of self (Matlack’s personal account) involved his *Narrative* (1845) and *Secession* (1856).

38 The story of us (the Wesleyan Methodists) was shared through *The Life of Rev. Orange Scott* (1847), *The History of American Slavery and Methodism from 1780 to 1849* and *History of the Wesleyan Methodist Connection* (1849), and the *Life and Adventures of Henry Bibb* (1850).

39 The story of now (the urgent, immediate need) was contained in the closing sections of his two-in-one *History* and the closing pages of his *Secession*.

veracity of Bibb's story of self and, at Bibb's request, Matlack himself wrote the introduction to Bibb's autobiography. Matlack's introduction laid out the evidence for Bibb's narrative and even included a letter supporting Bibb's account, a letter written by a man who had formerly enslaved Bibb. (The man thought he was communicating with bounty hunters and slave catchers.)⁴⁰

Christianity is a lived reality.⁴¹ To be a Christian implicates the individual in living out the principles and ethos of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.⁴² Dr. Timothy Tennent, president of Asbury Theological Seminary, in a recent charge to doctoral graduates, emphasized the commitment of both historic Christianity and classical Wesleyanism when he said:

The gospel must be embodied in a redeemed community and touch the whole of life. That is why the Wesley brothers set up class meetings, fed the poor, wrote books on physics, gave preachers a series of canonical sermons, catechized the young, preached at the brick yards, promoted prison reform, rode

250,000 miles on horseback, preached 40,000 sermons, superintended orphanages, were avid abolitionists, and wrote theologically laden hymns for the church, etc. You see, they were capturing every sphere with the gospel. . . . If Wesley teaches us anything, it is that salvation is not something which is merely announced to us, it is something which God works in us. As Patrick Reardon has put it, [it is] "the forceful intrusion of his holiness into our history"—with implications profoundly personal, as well as societal.⁴³

Five years before his death, John Wesley spoke prophetically to his fellow Methodists. What he then said to them needs to be heard by every group claiming some lineage from those mighty people of faith:

I am not afraid that the people called Methodists should ever cease to exist in either Europe or America. But I am afraid lest they should only exist as a dead sect, having the form of religion without the power. And this undoubtedly will be the case, unless they hold fast to both the doctrine, spirit, and discipline with which they first set out.⁴⁴

To be a Christian implicates the individual in living out the principles and ethos of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

40 Lucius C. Matlack, "Introduction," in *Narrative of the Life and Adventures of Henry Bibb, An American Slave, Written by Himself*, 3rd ed. (New York: Henry Bibb, 1850), vii. No publisher (beyond the author's name) appears on the title page. However, the place of publication may be deduced from two facts in evidence. First, the address given, "5 Spruce Street," was the address associated with the book concern and publishing concern of the Wesleyan Methodist Connection of Churches. Secondly, the book agent administering the book concerns affairs at that time was none other than Lucius Matlack. Later, when Bibb relocated to Canada and started a periodical there, he asked Matlack to be among his agents representing that publication in America [see Afua Ava Pamela Cooper, "'Doing Battle in Freedom's Cause': Henry Bibb, Abolitionism, Race Uplift, and Black Manhood," PhD diss., University of Toronto, Toronto, (2000), 304, accessed 3 June 2021, retrieved from <https://www.collectionscanada.gc.ca/obj/s4/f2/dsk2/ftp03/NQ53758.pdf>].

41 Matt 10:25; Luke 6:4. See also John 17:13–23; 1 John 4:17.

42 Matt 5:16; 1 Pet 2:9.

43 Timothy C. Tennent, "Charge to the 2022 Graduating Doctor of Ministry Students," (blog), May 20, 2022, accessed 21 May 2022, <https://timothytennent.com/charge-to-the-2022-graduating-doctor-of-ministry-students/>.

44 John Wesley, "Thoughts upon Methodism (1786)," § 1, in *The Methodist Societies: History, Nature, and Design*, ed. Rupert E. Davies, *The Bicentennial Edition of the Works of John Wesley* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1989), 9:527. Wesley's words had as their object the seductive power of the accu-

From its inception in the eighteenth century, the Wesleyan movement pledged not to be a “dead sect,” but to “reform the nation, and in particular the Church, to spread scriptural holiness over the land.”⁴⁵ Vic Reasoner rightly asserted that “there is more to Methodism than its doctrine. Methodism is a disciplined lifestyle.”⁴⁶ A reformed *people*, alone, can constitute a reformed *nation*. Further, as Southern Methodist, E. M. Bounds, expressed it, while “the church is looking for better methods . . . God is looking for better men.”⁴⁷ To that end, early Methodists proclaimed the work of the Holy Spirit in regenerating and perfecting human hearts and lives, submitting themselves to a process of accountability through the class and band meetings. Increasing Christlikeness demonstrated through loving God and one’s neighbor was central to their mission. Slavery pointedly failed the test of loving one’s neighbor and was, therefore, incompatible with a lifestyle consistent with the stipulations of Scripture and Methodism. John Wesley had named “American slavery the vilest that ever saw the sun.”⁴⁸ Wesley pointedly declared that “liberty is the right of every human creature . . . and no human law can deprive him of that right . . .”⁴⁹ Recounting a slave raid conducted on behalf of English slave traders in which 4,500 Africans were said

to have perished, Wesley commented, “Thus the Christians preach the Gospel to the Heathens!”⁵⁰ Christian involvement in the slave trade contradicted the ethical principles of the Gospel and provided the world with a disfigured representation of God. In some sense, co-mingling the gospel with American slavery approached the threshold of heresy for the God it portrayed bore little similarity to the God made visible in Jesus, the One who sets captives free.⁵¹ American Methodism early declared the incompatibility of slavery with Christian ideals, condemning slave-holding and specifying the steps members must take in “eradicating this enormous evil from that part of the church of God to which they are united.”⁵² Rules intended to give newly converted slaveholders the time and space to amend their unscriptural ways became a pretext for the increasing tolerance of the practice. Methodist historian James M. Buckley stated, “the tone of condemnation [in the *Discipline*] was softened in 1804, and in 1808 all that relates to slave-holding among private members was stricken out, and no rule on the subject has existed since.”⁵³ Black and Drury noted that “beginning in 1804, two versions of the *Discipline* were issued—a standard edition for most of the church and another with antislavery statements deleted for the states south of Virginia.”⁵⁴

mulation of wealth, yet he also included specific reference to the set of Methodistic spiritual disciplines and the care of the needy. The core reality is that *anything* militating against the essence of Methodistic belief and practice in the manner described by Wesley—including the loss of the early Methodist view of slavery—may be included in his warning.

45 John Wesley, “The Large Minutes, 1753–1763,” in *The Bicentennial Edition of the Works of John Wesley*, ed. Henry D. Rack (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2011), 10:845.

46 Vic Reasoner, *Fundamental Wesleyan Systematic Theology* (Evansville, IN: Fundamental Wesleyan Publishers, 2021), 3:1162.

47 Edward M. Bounds, *Power through Prayer*, (1907; Reprint, Grand Rapids: Baker, 1977), 5.

48 John Wesley, *Letter to William Wilberforce*, 24 February 1791.

49 John Wesley, *Thoughts upon Slavery* 3rd ed. (London: R. Hawes, 1774), 27.

50 *Ibid.*, 12.

51 Luke 4:14–21.

52 Thomas Coke and Francis Asbury, *Doctrines and Discipline of the Methodist Episcopal Church in America*, 10th ed. (Philadelphia: Henry Tuckniss, 1798), 169–71.

53 James M. Buckley, *A History of Methodism in the United States*, vol. 2 (New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1898), 1.

54 Black and Drury, *The Story of the Wesleyan Church* (Indianapolis: Wesleyan Publishing House,

The denomination turned a progressively blind eye to the slave-holding of members and increased its resistance toward those abolitionists heralding the original Wesleyan antislavery position.⁵⁵ Like the two Greek city-states of Athens and Sparta in the days leading to their civil war, the abolitionists and the anti-abolitionists shared a common language (Wesleyanism), but they lacked a common understanding (the embodied implications of Wesleyan doctrine).⁵⁶

Those abolitionist Methodists who read and embraced John Wesley's bold condemnation of slavery believed that the business of Methodism was to uphold the highest ethical and moral principles as a part of their mission to "reform the nation." The doing unto others what you *would not* have them do to you was a betrayal of that Christian Perfection and that perfect love to which every Method-

ist was to aspire. Treating the subject of slavery as something beyond the scope of the church's p r o p h e t i c

voice, as something belonging solely to the realm of the political powers, was spiritual unfaithfulness to that Gospel of Jesus Christ that speaks to *all* of life.⁵⁷ In essence, mid-1800s Ameri-

can Methodism had ceded its ability to speak prophetically on cultural issues, a condition now rampant in many places. Matlack, among others, stood with the first-century believers who declared "we ought to obey God rather than men."⁵⁸ As Abraham Kuyper famously said, "There is not a square inch in the whole domain of our human existence over which Christ, who is Sovereign over all, does not cry: 'Mine!'"⁵⁹ Recognizing Christ's reign over all of life was a core tenet of the message proclaimed by John Wesley and the early Methodists.

Consistent with that view, Matlack proved himself a thoroughgoing Wesleyan Methodist. No job was too small, no distance too far, no danger too great, no mission too difficult, if the cause of Christ and the enslaved were advanced thereby. From secretary to book agent, from book agent to publisher, from publisher to editor, from editor to the president of Illinois Institute (now Wheaton University), from the president of Illinois Institute to president of the 1860 General Conference of the Wesleyan Methodist Connection of Churches, Matlack faithfully served wherever he was needed. At the onset of the Civil War, Matlack first served as Chaplain for the 8th Illinois Volunteer Cavalry Regiment, active in the first field battles of the war in Virginia. Within a year, Matlack went

Recognizing Christ's reign over all of life was a core tenet of the message proclaimed by John Wesley and the early Methodists.

2012), 26.

55 Buckley, *A History of Methodism*, 1.

56 Laurie M. Johnson Bagby, "Thucydides and the Importance of Ideology in Conflict," in *On Oligarchy: Ancient Lessons for Global Politics*, eds. David Edward Tabachnick and Toivo Koivukoski (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2011), 110–39. In regard to the increasing ideological disparity between Sparta and Athens, Bagby stated: "The way that each nation *thought*, their way of looking at the world, influenced what they *did* in the years leading up to this imbalance" [emphasis mine], 114.

57 Methodist Episcopal Church, "Review of the Proceedings of the late General Conference, held in Cincinnati, OH, May 1, 1836," in *The Methodist Quarterly Review*, vol. 20, 1838 (New York: T. Mason and G. Lane, 1838), 32–54, 40ff. In this volume, the MEC excused themselves to their fellow British Methodists (who had already led the fight to outlaw slavery in the empire) saying, "it cannot be unknown to you that the question of slavery in these United States, by the constitutional compact which binds us together as a nation, is left to be regulated by the several state legislatures themselves; and thereby is put beyond the control of the general government, *as well as that of all ecclesiastical bodies*" [emphasis added].

58 Acts 5:29.

59 Abraham Kuyper, *Abraham Kuyper: A Centennial Reader*, ed. James D. Bratt (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 488. Kuyper was a neo-Calvinist theologian and prime minister of the Netherlands, 1901–1905.

back to Illinois to enlist more soldiers for the 17th Illinois Volunteer Cavalry Regiment, in which regiment he served as a Major, fighting bushwhackers, William Clarke Quantrill, and brothers, Jesse and Frank James, in Missouri. From January 1865 until its close at the end of July, Matlack was “Provost Marshal of St. Louis city and twenty-two counties, with the administration of justice committed to my hands.”⁶⁰

At the close of the Civil War, Matlack and other Wesleyan Methodists, considering the work of abolition concluded, returned to the Methodist Episcopal Church. The Philadelphia Annual Conference rescinded its earlier proscription of Matlack and other abolitionists and the Bishops warmly welcomed “home” those who had been the foot soldiers of Wesleyan abolitionism.⁶¹ Matlack was assigned to New Orleans, Louisiana, where he became the presiding elder and served on the public school board alongside former Confederate General James Longstreet.⁶² There they desegregated the public schools and opened institutes to train teachers of every race. Suffering the lingering effects of yellow fever, in 1872 Matlack transferred back to the east coast where he served out the remainder of his days as presiding elder, pastor, and a warrior for the unity of the church without respect to race or class. Stricken with an apparent heart attack as

he and his six-year-old son were walking home from visiting a condemned man in prison, Matlack died at about midnight, Saturday, June 24, 1883, the sermon for the next morning neatly prepared and resting beneath his spectacles.

Three tributes given at the time of Matlack’s decease best express how others regarded him. The first was a comment made by his wife, who said, “The doctor not only talked of his Master abroad [but] walked with him at home.”⁶³ The second tribute came from the African American Delaware Conference of the MEC. The conference was in the midst of its annual session when word of Matlack’s death reached them. The delegates immediately issued a resolution in which they referred to Matlack as “not only a heroic worker in Methodism, but a life-long friend of the oppressed of our race and all other races.”⁶⁴ They further stated that, “in the decease of Dr. L. C. Matlack, Methodism loses a bright and shining light; the Wilmington Conference will miss from its ranks a faithful, earnest worker; the [African American] race will lose a devoted advocate of their rights, and a sufferer for principles in which those rights were involved, and his family a kind, loving husband.”⁶⁵ The third comment relates to the sanctified character of Dr. Matlack in regard to his relationship as a presiding elder with

60 Lucius C. Matlack, *The Antislavery Struggle and Triumph in the Methodist Episcopal Church* (New York: Phillips & Hunt, 1881), 371.

61 Cyrus Prindle, Luther Lee, and Lucius C. Matlack, *Reunion with the Methodist Episcopal Church Defended* (Syracuse, NY: Masters & Lee, 1868); Lucius C. Matlack, Cyrus Prindle, Luther Lee, and John McEldowney, “An Address,” in *The Wesleyan Manual or History of Wesleyan Methodism*, Joel Martin, ed. (1889; Reprint, Middleton, DE: University of Michigan Library, 2017), 152–57.

62 “Meeting of the Board of School Directors,” *New Orleans Republican*, New Orleans, LA, 11 March 1871; “Louisiana Methodist Conference—Fifth Day’s Session,” *New Orleans Republican*, New Orleans, LA, 14 January 1873; “Union Normal School,” [ad], *New Orleans Republican*, New Orleans, LA, 12 November 1870.

63 N. M. Brown, [Eulogy] “Lucius C. Matlack,” Lucius Columbus Matlack (1816–1883), Boston University Manuscript History Collection: Subject (L-R), The Boston University School of Theology Library, Boston University Libraries, Boston, MA.

64 William C. Jason, Jr., *A Methodist Trail: Through Slavery and Before, During and Since the Colored Local Preachers and Delaware Annual Conferences of the Methodist Episcopal and Methodist Church*, vol. 1, ed. Cherritta Laws Matthews (Columbia, SC: n. p., 2014), 319.

65 Ibid.

his ministerial brethren. Rev. Robert W. Todd wrote of Matlack:

At the last conference, during the fourth session of the Council, when most of the preachers except the outgoing Presiding Elders had been stationed, Bishop Simpson inquired of Dr. Matlack as to his wishes for himself. The answer was characteristic. It was, in substance: "You know, Bishop, what I told you thirteen years ago. It is not for me to choose. I have one thing to say, however: I want no appointment for myself, until we provide suitably for all the brethren on my District."⁶⁶

Prophets are rarely the pets of the powerful. But, as ambassadors of God's Kingdom, they need not be rude or pretentious, either. One may speak prophetically to his or her generation without losing the "dew of Hermon" or the gentleness of Jesus.⁶⁷ Many of the experiences of Lucius Matlack's life were of a kind that frequently engendered bitterness in others in similar circumstances. Spending so many years of his life fighting for the minority opinion on the issue of slavery, it might be expected that he became a man of hardened disposition and forceful expressions. In fact, the adverse circumstances he encountered

That determination "to do right" that brought him into the struggle for spiritual and human liberty was nurtured unto the end of his life.

might well have affected him in that way, were it not for his lifelong determination to live a praiseworthy life for the glory of God. Neither adversity nor notoriety altered his quest to honor the Lord. Matlack soon became a popular preacher on the Methodist camp

meeting circuit. Men in the limelight sometimes develop a patina, a veneer, a protective image. Among the most notable of the Methodist camp meetings was the one held at Vineland, New Jersey. Led by Bishop Matthew Simpson, it was considered by many as a birthplace of the American Holiness movement. On the third night of the camp, as Dr. Matlack was preaching on the subject, "Looking unto Jesus"—exalting the peerlessness of Christ—he paused and confessed his personal need for a new effusion of God's Spirit. "The strong man, with athletic frame, bowed himself. He laid his face upon the stand and wept; others wept with him. A thousand hearts were at once in a praying attitude, pleading for the restoration of the light."⁶⁸ Lesser men might have quenched the Spirit, thinking that reputation was more important than obedience. But that determination "to do right" that brought him into the struggle for spiritual and human liberty was nurtured unto the end of his life.

The Methodist bishops could be excused had they doubted whether a man so long in the opposition could then act for the spiritual and organizational harmony of the church. Yet that was precisely the testimony others gave concerning Matlack. A fellow Methodist pastor and historian stated:

In these [Bishop's] council sessions such was the harmony; the brotherly courtesy; the entire willingness to consult the general good of work and workers; and the mutual voluntary concessions and helpful suggestions and adjustments; that two of the Bishops were prompted to remark that the exhibition, in its degree, was both anomalous and most grateful. To the existence of

66 Robert W. Todd, *Methodism of the Peninsula or Sketches of Notable Characters and Events in the History of Methodism in the Maryland and Delaware Peninsula* (Philadelphia: Methodist Episcopal Book Rooms, 1886), 328–29.

67 Psalm 133:3.

68 George Hughes, *Days of Power in the Forest Temple* (Boston: John Bent & Co., 1874), 112.

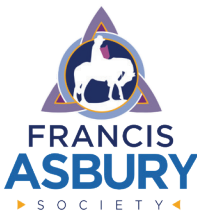
*this pleasant state of affairs, none contributed more, if indeed so much, as Lucius C. Matlack.*⁶⁹

When the end was imminent, although his body was deeply afflicted, Matlack's soul was at rest. Long years before, when deciding to follow the will of God rather than the promised induce-

ments of the denomination, Matlack had published his mission statement: "To [God] I owe my all, and in return, I am resolved to live to his glory and in the work of saving souls expire."⁷⁰ Having expired "in the work of saving souls," God thus granted his servant the desires of his heart.

⁶⁹ Todd, *Methodism of the Peninsula*, 321.

⁷⁰ Matlack, *Narrative*, 23.



PO Box 7
Wilmore, KY 40390

Executive editor: Ronald E. Smith
Managing editor: Vic Reasoner
Editing/Layout: Jennie Lovell