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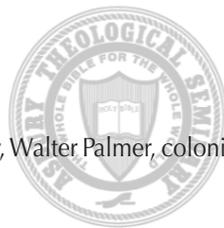
The Missional Colonization of Phoebe and Walter Palmer: Poetry, Letters, and the Young Men’s Missionary Society

Abstract:

Recent studies of Phoebe and Walter Palmer have focused on their efforts to spread “holiness” while criticizing their apparent disdain of abolitionism. The Palmers, however, believed that colonization was the better approach to both assist free African-Americans and recently emancipated slaves and also to help evangelize the continent of Africa. This article will show their support for both colonization and evangelization through Phoebe’s poems, correspondence from Methodist missionaries to Liberia (some of whom were from Manhattan), and Dr. Palmer’s active role in the Young Men’s Missionary Society.

Keywords: Phoebe Palmer, Walter Palmer, colonization, Methodist missions, New York City

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Introduction

Recent studies of Phoebe Palmer and her husband, Dr. Walter C. Palmer, have largely focused on the couple's efforts to spread the "doctrine of Wesleyan holiness" while criticizing their unwillingness to take part in one of the greatest reform movements of their time: abolition. Yet, this criticism has overlooked the fact that the Palmers were strong supporters of colonization from at least the 1820s. The Palmers, however, did not support colonization for many of the highly questionable and racist reasons that their fellow white Methodists did: the fear of "amalgamation" (i.e., integrated schools and intermarriage) and the belief that free blacks were inferior and too "degraded" to ever achieve full equality. Instead, the Palmers, along with many other evangelical Christians, primarily supported colonization as a way to evangelize Africa. This article will show that they supported this missional emphasis through literary means, missionary correspondence, and Walter's personal involvement in the Young Men's Missionary Society (hereafter, YMMS).

Phoebe (Worrall) Palmer

Phoebe Palmer was born in Manhattan in 1807 to Henry and Dorothea Worrall. Her parents were devout Methodists who attended Duane Street Methodist Episcopal Church. As a result of family prayer and church attendance, their children all developed strong personal commitments to the Christian faith. In 1827, Phoebe married Dr. Walter C. Palmer; they moved a short distance to Manhattan's East Side where they became members of the Allen Street Methodist Episcopal Church (hereafter, MEC) for many years. In the mid-1830s, she had an experience of "entire sanctification" or total consecration of herself to God. This led to the sponsorship of the Tuesday Meeting for the Promotion of Holiness in their home. In 1843, she wrote *The Way of Holiness* which was a guide to those seeking "perfection." Besides writing eighteen books, she and Walter also taught at camp meetings and other services throughout the United States, Canada, and England. She also served as the leader of a young women's Bible class, an officer of the Ladies Home Missionary Society, and several other benevolent organizations. She died in Manhattan in 1874 (White 1986: 2-4, 11-21, 28, 217-219; Roberts 2016: 201-213).

Walter Palmer

Dr. Walter C. Palmer was born in 1804 in Middletown, New Jersey. His family moved to Manhattan when he was three months old. Like the Worralls, his parents were devout Methodists who also hosted a class meeting in their home. Walter experienced a powerful conversion in his Methodist Sunday School at the age of thirteen. After his conversion, he began to teach in the Sunday school and thought he might become a Methodist preacher. Eventually, he decided he could help people through the practice of medicine and enrolled in the College of Physicians and Surgeons of New York. In addition to his medical practice, he served as superintendent of a large Methodist Sabbath School, president of the Young Men's Total Abstinence Society, and an officer of the YMMS (Hughes 1884: 18-21, 40, 56, 58; Methodist Episcopal Church Records [hereafter, MECR], "Young Men's Missionary Society" [hereafter, YMMS]. Vol. 127).

The Colonization Movement

The colonization movement sought to return both free blacks and emancipated slaves to Africa. The idea of colonization had been discussed since the early 1800s and, in 1816, the American Colonization Society (hereafter, ACS) was founded in Washington, D.C. Its founders had different ideas about what it could achieve. Some felt it would gradually end slavery, some felt it would allow blacks to escape the pervasive white racism which existed even in the north, and others saw it as a way to rid their states of free blacks. Yet, from its inception, many free blacks opposed it and other white politicians and clergy saw it as impractical, prohibitively expensive, and immoral (Burin 2005: 9, 14-15, 19).

Review of the Literature

Somewhat surprisingly, almost all of the studies of the Palmers make no mention of their support for colonization while the most recent studies (1957-2016) have also strongly criticized their lack of involvement in the abolition movement. The earliest study by Richard Wheatley drew upon her letters and diary to show how she emphasized prayer rather than direct political involvement. This was most clearly seen in her views regarding the 1856 presidential election. He also showed that she viewed the growing political crisis over slavery as a spiritual battle and blamed not only the South for its use of slaves, but also the North for tolerating several bad laws such as the Fugitive Slave Act. Next, George Hughes' biography

of Dr. Palmer noted that he was on the Board of Managers of the Missionary Society of the Methodist Episcopal Church (hereafter, MEC) but neglected any mention of his involvement in the YMMS which would explain his support of colonization. Then, in the mid-twentieth century, Timothy Smith viewed Phoebe's lack of "social reform" through the lens of the general "holiness movement" which had begun in the mid-1830s. While noting her opposition to slavery, he criticized her for not joining the other holiness leaders such as Charles Finney who also became abolitionists. He also criticized what he called her simplistic view that God would somehow intervene to end slavery. Smith rendered a harsh verdict: "While early to take part in the relief of the widowed, orphaned, and imprisoned or in any other task which required the exercise of compassion, her New York and Philadelphia coterie were laggards in whatever demanded stern attacks on persons and institutions." Nearly ten years later, Donald Mathews, in his comprehensive study, *Slavery and Methodism* (1965), devoted a chapter to Methodist support for colonization but overlooked Dr. Palmer's involvement. Interestingly, he mentioned David Reese and Gabriel Disosway who were officers in the YMMS yet failed to include Dr. Palmer who also served closely with them as vice-president (see below). One explanation for this may be that Reese and Disosway were more visible since they were also active members of the New York State Colonization Society (later reorganized as the Colonization Society of the City of New York) while Dr. Palmer was probably more absorbed in his large medical practice, growing family, and the "holiness movement." A little more than twenty years later, Harold Raser, in his study (1987), also pointed out Phoebe's more spiritual approach to political and social issues and concurred with Smith's assessment. Like Smith, he criticized her for what he felt was an inconsistent position on slavery: she opposed it "but yet she never raised her hand to combat it in any concrete fashion." In addition, he suggested that her "profound sense of guilt for 'injustice winked at' (i.e., Northern toleration of slavery) may reflect her own regret for being absorbed with other causes and issues and failing to speak out in any way against slavery (Wheatley 1881: 607-608; Hughes 58; Smith 1957: 211-212; Mathews 1965: 96; Raser 1987: 222-225, 233)."

Finally, the last two studies analyzed Phoebe Palmer's anti-slavery efforts in the context of the 1857-1858 revival in New York City. First, Kathryn Long described the split between "socially conservative evangelicals" who favored national unity over an immediate end to slavery and other

evangelicals who supported abolition. She pointed out that Palmer's, "A Laity for the Times," which was published in the *Christian Advocate and Journal* (hereafter, *CAJ*) in the winter of 1857, was a call for personal evangelism and not social involvement. In addition, she felt that Palmer, along with Nathan Bangs and Abel Stevens, "represented middle-class or formalized New York City Methodism." Long asserted that "the genteel atmosphere of the metropolis fostered 'safe' opinions on such subjects as slavery, as well as a general conservative social stance." Similarly, Kyle Roberts, in *Evangelical Gotham* (2016) contrasted what he termed the "conversionist" and "reformist" camps of the Revival of 1857-1858 and viewed her silence on abolition as an abdication of Christian responsibility. He, too, criticized her harshly: "For someone who took very public stands in her career as a theologian, author, and revivalist, the absence of public activism or pronouncements against slavery speaks volumes (Long 1998: 93-96; Roberts 214-216)."

In contrast, Charles White, in *The Beauty of Holiness*, was the only one to even mention her support for colonization. He described her three poems on colonization as expressing many of the standard reasons that evangelicals supported colonization such as "reparation" for the harm America had inflicted on Africa and evangelization. To be sure, White believed Palmer acted from a desire to help them succeed rather than a desire to rid America of free blacks. Moreover, he indicated not only her active support for colonization but also her neutrality toward or dislike of abolition. White asserted that "when it became obvious that colonization would not work, however, she did not become an abolitionist. She also tried to resist the tendency of other advocates of holiness to identify themselves with abolition. One example may be B. T. Roberts...Phoebe Palmer was quick to stifle any controversy in that meeting, especially anything that smacked of politics. She felt that interest in politics diverted Christians from their real business of promoting revivals" (White 27, 60, 228).

"Conversionist" and Colonizationist

While clearly explaining the Palmers' generally apolitical attitude, their assessments overlooked two key pieces of evidence which revealed their strong support for colonization. First, Phoebe's poem, "Ode for the Fourth of July," which White mentioned, needs to be placed in sharper context. To be sure, it was not something she wrote in the quiet of her study to ideally extol the virtues of colonization, but rather was read at an annual

service in a Methodist church (probably Allen Street MEC) which raised funds for the ACS. These services probably began in 1827, when the Reverend Ralph Gurley, the general secretary of the ACS (and a Methodist minister), had asked all the churches to take up a collection at their Independence Day services. Describing this request, Donald Mathews wrote that "...on every July Fourth Methodist ministers followed the advice of the annual conferences by joining other denominations in praising colonization and taking special collections. How much they collected would depend upon the persuasiveness of individual preachers, the generosity of contributors, and the prosperity of the time (Mathews 92-94)."

These services, however, were initially seen as too "political" and had only been allowed in MECs in Manhattan since 1830. This gradual shift can be seen in the actions of the trustees over a seven-year period beginning in 1826. For example, on October 4, 1826, the trustees had considered a request from the ACS that it be allowed to take up a collection in the churches, but they decided not to grant it "due to present circumstances of the MEC." Again, on July 1, 1829, the board considered the request of Gabriel Disoway, a Methodist layman and member of the New York City Colonization Society, for a collection to be taken up for the ACS at a special Fourth of July service. The board responded that "as sincerely as the Board of Trustees esteem the sentiments of the Declaration of our Independence, the Board cannot consent to have anything introduced into our churches, which might have a political bearing. They, therefore, give their consent that the remainder of the exercises, as noticed from the pulpit last Sabbath, be permitted in John Street Church on the Fourth of July." In 1832, however, as the denomination had come to officially embrace colonization, the trustees granted permission for the agent of the ACS to form an auxiliary society among the members of the MECs in Manhattan. A year later, they allowed Reverend Peter P. Sandford to take up "a public collection for the benefit of the Colonization Society in one of the churches on the West Circuit." Finally, a month later, the YMMS was given permission to again hold their anniversary meeting in John Street Church and take up a collection for the ACS (MECR. "Board of Trustees." Vol. 93; White 27).

Although apparently quite popular in the north, these services put southern Methodist leaders in an awkward position. An example comes from a July 1834, letter to the *CAJ* from the Reverend Dr. William Capers who led the Methodist "Missions to Slaves" in the south. He was responding to an earlier article in the *CAJ* that had asked the question,

“What is the speediest and most effectual method of evangelizing American slaves?” In his letter, he argued that it was unwise for any abolitionists to preach to the slaves since they had upset the slaveholders. Second, he criticized the activities of the ACS and insisted that the “Missions to Slaves” was to be based solely on Jesus’ words to “preach the Gospel to every creature.” Then, he condemned the Fourth of July pro-colonization services held annually in the MECs. Regarding them, he angrily wrote, “And such a miscarriage the society perpetrated when it solicited sermons to be preached by whoever would preach them, throughout the United States, on the 4th of July, and collections then to be taken up for the promotion of its objects...And did you ever see any of these 4th of July sermons? Several of them have found their way to the south...ranting, fanatic, and incendiary.” In response, the *CAJ* simply stated that it had never been their intention to identify colonization with the “Missions to Slaves” and entirely ignored the issue of the July Fourth services.

The poem itself which was probably read at the July 4, 1831, Methodist service had two themes. The first theme, which others had made before her, argued that since the Americans had won their own freedom from England, it followed that the slaves, too, should be set free. How could a free people keep others enslaved? Second, she believed, somewhat naively, that Africa missed those who had been forcibly taken and desired their return. Yet, a majority of free blacks had already rejected that thinking and wanted to remain in America as full citizens. Thus, while the poem expressed both a call for emancipation and return, its context shows that Phoebe was not just peripherally or mildly interested in colonization but strongly supportive of the MEC’s efforts to aid the ACS (Palmer 1875: 208-209).

Second, all previous scholars, including George Hughes, Dr. Palmer’s close friend and biographer, overlooked his involvement in the YMMS which had as its preeminent objective the “mission to Liberia.” Although Hughes, writing in the 1880s, mentioned that Dr. Palmer was one of the managers of the Missionary Society of the MEC, he neglected to mention that he was vice-president of the YMMS for most of the 1830s. Hughes’ omission may possibly be explained by the fact that the newly-reorganized YMMS was only active for nine years (1830 to 1839) while the Missionary Society eventually became a permanent agency of the denomination. Interestingly, the minutes of the YMMS also reveal that Noah Worrall, Phoebe’s brother, served as one of its twenty-four managers

indicating additional support for colonization within her immediate family (YMMS. Vol. 127).

Supporting the Missional Aim of Colonization

Yet, their support for colonization did not stem from a belief that whites were superior and that the two races must be kept separate at all costs. Charles White, who analyzed her pro-colonization poems (see above), concurred: “Although rejected by many blacks in its own day and universally disparaged in our own, many people of good faith thought of it as the only realistic hope of bettering the lot of the slave.” Rather, what drove their support for colonization was an intense desire to evangelize which manifested itself in three ways. First, Phoebe supported the missional aim of colonization through a very common way in which she often expressed herself: poetry. Richard Wheatley has noted that “she gave early indications of literary ability.” Indeed, she wrote perhaps her first poem as an eleven-year-old in which she extolled the divine guidance of the scriptures. In addition, like many early nineteenth century Methodists, she kept a spiritual diary. Finally, throughout adulthood, she wrote several widely-read books on “holiness” and an important pamphlet on evangelism which was first published as a series of articles in the *CAJ*. Her evangelistically-themed poem, “Redemption of Africa,” was sung at the ninth anniversary meeting (1829?) of the New York State Colonization Society. The first two stanzas asserted that evangelization depended solely on God’s favor or “grace.” Then, the third stanza acknowledged that God had opened a door into Africa: “Divinely hast Thou cleared the way...” The next stanza described the difficult conditions the missionaries faced: spiritual blindness, sin, and even demon worship. Yet, the missionaries’ efforts have borne fruit since now “the light has spread” and many have been converted to “Israel’s Lord” (Wheatley 17-18; Palmer 206-207; White 60).

Second, Phoebe supported the efforts to evangelize Africa through the colonization movement by her correspondence with Methodist missionaries in Liberia. Most of these lay and clergy missionaries were from Manhattan and some had also participated in the “Tuesday Afternoon Meeting for the Promotion of Holiness” which the Palmers hosted in their home. These letters, in response to her own letters, focus only on the challenging efforts to evangelize the area around Monrovia, the largest settlement in Liberia. An example comes from the letters of W. B. Hoyt who resided at the “Mission House” in Monrovia. His first letter told of his

imminent departure from Baltimore, asked for her prayers, and indicated his desire to keep a “regular correspondence as circumstances will admit.” In his next letter, he mentioned how he and his wife had had the fever which he called “Africa’s scourge.” They had recovered but another missionary married couple had died from it. Four months later, he gave an account of the mission: “Doubtless you are anxious to know something of the state of Religion among us. At present, the Church appears cold and her prospects gloomy. On one or two of the stations there has been a waking up to the subject of religion.” He asked for prayers so “that the little flame just appearing may burn until the entire Mission --- (word unclear) the entire length and breadth of this dark land shall be illuminated and freed from its cruel thralldom to the Prince of darkness” (“Letters.” Nov. 1, 1845; February 10, 1846; June 11, 1846).

Again, seven months later, in January 1847, she received a letter from J. B. Benham who also resided at the Mission House in Monrovia. He thanked her for her previous letter and the periodicals she had sent on the Liberia packet. Next, he mentioned his concern about personnel. Although three missionaries had just arrived – Brother Morris, Sister Johnson, and Sister Brush – Brother Floy, who had recovered from the fever, was returning on the Liberia Packet which would leave Benham alone. Apparently, the new arrivals were laypersons while Benham was the only ordained minister in Monrovia. Brother Floy had been Dr. James Floy, a Methodist preacher who had been converted at the great Allen Street MEC revival in 1831-1832 (“Letters.” Jan. 25, 1847; Wheatley 25-26).

Finally, Dr. Palmer’s support for colonization came primarily through his personal involvement with the YMMS which considered itself an “auxiliary” to the parent Missionary Society of the MEC. The YMMS had existed since the early 1820s but had become inactive possibly due to the untimely death of its leader, Reverend John Summerfield. On November 2, 1830, the YMMS held a reorganization meeting in which new officers and a new board of managers were appointed. Dr. David M. Reese, a local preacher and a manager of the “parent” Missionary Society of the MEC, became its new president. Dr. Palmer also attended the reorganization meeting and, like Reese, continuously served as an officer throughout the 1830s as recording secretary (1830-1831), first vice-president (1831-1834) and, finally, second vice-president (1834-1839). As an officer, he was automatically an ex-officio member of the Board of Managers which met monthly. According to the YMMS minutes, he attended regularly and on six

occasions he chaired the meeting in the absence of the president (YMMS. Vol 127).

In addition, Dr. Palmer had a highly influential and respected role in the YMMS. For example, at the reorganization meeting, he was appointed to a committee with two others to revise the constitution and by-laws. He also was appointed to a committee to nominate officers for the coming year and make arrangements for the first Annual Meeting which was held in April, 1831. Then, in early 1832, he was appointed to a committee to prepare a memorial to the 1832 General Conference in support of the mission to Liberia. Finally, on two occasions, he was appointed to collect money from YMMS subscribers at the Allen Street Church where he and Phoebe attended (YMMS. Vol. 127).

Moreover, from the start, the newly-organized YMMS had an extremely close relationship with the ACS. For example, the second article of the new constitution, which Dr. Palmer had helped draft, stated that the YMMS was to assist the ACS to “more effectually extend their Missionary Labors throughout the United States and elsewhere.” Then, less than a month after the constitution had been adopted, the board of managers resolved that “a committee be appointed to seek a representative from this society at the (annual) meeting of the ACS at Washington City.” Reese and Gabriel Disosway, the corresponding secretary of the YMMS, also attended this meeting as delegates of the New York State Colonization Society. Finally, at its second meeting on November 9, 1830, the YMMS resolved that persons whom the committee had appointed would “address each of these meetings and solicit subscriptions and donations especially with a piece to establish a mission to Liberia.” This person turned out to be Rev. Finley, the ACS agent, who happened to be in New York at that time (YMMS. Vol. 127).

Colonization and Evangelization: A Delicate Balancing Act

It is possible that the Palmers may also have harbored other more repugnant views such as believing that blacks were inferior and degraded and that the races must be kept separate to avoid integrated schools and intermarriage. This argument, however, overlooks three key factors. First, her two poems in support of colonization avoided any condescension of the slaves, spoke compassionately of their sufferings, and focused (albeit naively) on the supposed benefits of returning to Africa. For example, in “Ode for the Fourth of July,” (see above), she urged Christians to help

end slavery since they themselves had been set free as a result of the Revolutionary War. In addition, she believed that allowing former slaves to return to Africa would be what they would choose for themselves so that they could then “live unoppressed...joyous, free...” Again, her second poem, “Colonization Cause,” was filled with warnings. For example, she believed that God’s judgment would surely come on America unless the slaves were freed quickly. Slave owners, too, were criticized for profiting unjustly. Finally, she wrote how hypocritical it was to speak of “liberty” while denying it to the slaves. Admittedly, her optimistic view that blacks would want to return to Africa was naïve in the extreme: actual returnees faced poverty, disease, and attacks from tribal chieftains (Palmer 205-209).

In addition, after analyzing her poems, Charles White concluded that “it is evident that her motives in supporting the colonization society were not compromised, as were the motives of some. The main themes of these poems are justice and redemption. Nowhere is the slightest hint that the black is unfit for American life or that the slave is inferior in any way.” Further confirmation comes from the Palmers’ visit to the south in 1867. In New Orleans, they first visited a biblical institute for blacks, and later that week, Dr. Palmer preached in a black church to fifteen hundred persons on the subject of heaven where “he reminded his listeners that God is no respecter of persons and that the Lord will seat his servants at his throne and will reign with them forever and ever.” Moreover, Phoebe noted how joyfully they gave their offerings for the purpose of building a school. Regarding this, White wrote, “She felt this display of generosity showed maturity and responsibility, and asked, ‘Who will, in the presence of such facts, dare to repeat that such a people cannot take care of themselves?’” Later, while reflecting on their trip, Phoebe wrote that the black Methodists were much more spiritually responsive and joyful than the white Methodists who did not even attend her meetings (White 60, 98-99).

The second key factor was that many Protestant denominations only began to support colonization in the mid-1820s because of its missionary component, which coincided with the great surge of domestic and international missions in the early nineteenth century. According to Lanneh Samin, this component was present from the very beginning in the thinking of Reverend Robert Finley of New Jersey who first promoted the idea of a national colonization society in 1816. This is illustrated in the two reasons why Finley supported colonization. First, he “felt that the inherent capacity of slaves for self-improvement was being thwarted by the

circumstances of slavery and race prejudice, and that a free colony in Africa would allow their inborn leadership capabilities to emerge and flourish... But another motive for the colonization plan was the view that it would spread civilization and Christianity in Africa..." Of course, many others supported colonization for less laudable reasons: a way to keep the races separate, a belief that blacks were both degraded and inferior and could never achieve equality in America, a solution to the problem of having free blacks in the south, and even a way for the south to move from agriculture to industrialization. Like many other denominations, the MEC initially took a cautious approach to the ACS; this began to change in 1824. According to Donald Mathews, "appeals for support of the Colonization Society were linked from the first with the Christian missionary impulse. Methodists believed that new colonies in Africa would provide a foothold for expanded missionary activity on that continent..." While acknowledging that "anti-Negro bias" motivated some Methodists like David Reese, "others like Wilbur Fisk were motivated by a general concern for Negroes uncomplicated by conscious prejudice. They could all agree that history had created a grave social problem which thwarted outright antislavery preaching previously." Based on all the available evidence, the latter description of Fisk also seems to characterize the Palmers' concern for the slaves' well-being (Sanneh 1999: 191; Burin 13-14; Mathews 98, 109-110).

Moreover, the effort to evangelize Africa through the means of colonization was not just limited to the missionary boards of white evangelical denominations. Sanneh has pointed out that a number of black preachers who were converted in America willingly emigrated to both Sierra Leone and Liberia to preach to the returning blacks and also try to penetrate further into Africa. Those who returned to Sierra Leone included Moses Wilkinson, Cato Perkins, and David George. Perhaps the earliest black preacher who went to Liberia was Lott Carey who was born in Virginia around 1780, converted in 1807, paid for his freedom in 1813, and went to Liberia in the early 1820s under the sponsorship of the African Baptist Missionary Society. Thus, both missionary-minded blacks and whites responded to what they perceived as a providential opportunity (Sanneh 74-75, 86-87, 210-211).

Most importantly, the third key factor that absolves the Palmers of the charge of white superiority was their own intense, lifelong efforts to initiate, finance, and encourage foreign missions (especially through letters) not just to Liberia but to the entire world. An experience that occurred

early in their marriage helps explain this deep commitment. A call had been issued for medical missionaries and Phoebe thought that Walter would want to answer that call. She struggled with the idea of leaving New York but ultimately resigned herself to doing God's will. Although Dr. Palmer did not feel God calling him to that work, Phoebe sensed God still wanting them to work for the missions from their home in New York. In her diary she wrote: "If you will do so, the Spirit of Holiness is the spirit which will tell upon missions, and the Lord will make you instrumental in working upon minds which tell on missions, and you may, for the present, do more service in aiding missionary work here, than if you were in China." In response to that inspiration of the Spirit, she wrote: "I thought of the absorption I should feel, in the work of saving souls, if thus wholly given up, and I resolved to make the work of the Lord as absorbing here, as though I were on missionary ground, and my career has ever since been influenced by these resolves." Several factors assisted them in carrying out this resolution. First, Dr. Palmer was one of the Board of Managers for the Mission Society of the MEC and could easily make recommendations for new missions. Also, since the Missionary Society was located in New York City, the Palmers had easy access to the secretary of the Missionary Society and practically all of the managers who were mostly laymen in the New York Circuit. To cite one example, Nathan Bangs, who served as secretary for some time, was also a close personal friend of the Palmers and regularly attended the Tuesday Afternoon Meeting for the Promotion of Holiness. Finally, the Palmers most likely attended all the anniversary meetings of the Mission Society and at least some of the regular monthly "missionary meetings" of the society (Wheatley 230-232).

This deeply personal commitment to foreign missions in general is illustrated in their attempt to start a new mission to China in the 1830s. They first had conversations with Bishop Janes, other bishops, and many of the managers of the Mission Society. The board, however, felt a mission to China would be extremely difficult to undertake and would not see results for many years. The day of the anniversary meeting of the Mission Society (most likely the one held in April 1835), Phoebe suggested a new idea to Walter: would he be willing to give a specific amount for ten years to finance the mission to China if nineteen others would give the same amount. Walter said he would not only do that but that he would double the amount given each year. She also asked him to make this suggestion at the meeting that evening, to which he agreed. When he made the offer that

evening, Bishop Janes and eighteen others quickly said they would pledge the same amount. This was sufficient to stir the Board of Managers into action. At their next meeting, they passed the following “preamble” and “resolution” which was then sent to Bishop Hedding and Bishop Emory. “Whereas there were collected and pledged at the late anniversary of this society in Greene Street Church, upwards of fourteen hundred dollars for the support of a mission in China, therefore: Resolved, the bishops be and they are hereby are recommended and especially requested to select some person or persons, as soon as practicable for the purpose of opening a Mission under the patronage of this society in the Empire of China.” Again, on another occasion, they convinced Reverend Durbin, secretary of the Mission Society, to begin a mission to Palestine. This time, Dr. Palmer offered to give one hundred dollars a year for ten years. Nineteen others also pledged their support but, due to certain difficulties, the mission did not go forward. To sum up, the Palmers were sincere and avid supporters of all missions, including Liberia, and not driven primarily by racist desires to rid America of its black population (Wheatley 230-234; Board of Managers. Mission Society of the Methodist Episcopal Church. May, 1835).

Conclusion

The colonization movement stirred controversy from its inception. Although it tried to appeal to various constituencies in order to garner support, the majority apparently saw it as a way of removing the black population rather than granting them full rights as citizens. In contrast, the Palmer’s supported colonization as a way to repair the damage done to the slaves and also as a way to evangelize Africa. This insight is significant because it sheds new light on a dedicated subgroup who worked within the movement while distancing themselves from its less admirable objectives. To be sure, a clear solution to the problem of emancipating the slaves seemed nearly impossible in the mid-1800s since Congress refused to even discuss it. Thus, this small group of “missional” colonizationists contradicts the prevailing historical assessment that only white superiority drove colonization.

While this article has sought to more correctly place the Palmers in the context of the abolitionist-colonizationist debate, more could be done to show how and why various Methodist individuals and institutions took the positions they did, especially in the highly charged period of the 1830s. Using Donald Mathew’s chapter on Methodists and colonization in

his landmark study, *Slavery and Methodism*, as a starting point, a number of in-depth studies could be made. These might include an analysis of the publications of David Reese, president of the YMMS and a leading national apologist for colonization. In addition, it would be useful to explore the extensive writings of Reverend Nathan Bangs who served as editor of the *CAJ* and *Quarterly Review* and secretary of the Missionary Society. Both men advanced the cause of colonization with more stridency and less admirable aims than the Palmers, yet they were all apparently close friends and colleagues. Another avenue to explore is the role of the *Commercial Advertiser*, a pro-colonizationist newspaper with significant Methodist involvement. Francis Hall, a leading Methodist layman, was its publisher for a number of years. Finally, it would be extremely helpful to examine the powerful role of the New York Annual Conference in the 1830s when it effectively prevented any clerical support for abolition.

Phoebe Palmer's Colonization Poems

"Colonization Cause"
(*Mother's Gift*, 205-6)

Oh! send them back, so say our inmost hearts;
From bondage most oppressive, set them free;
Before like mercy from our land departs,
And just-bought vengeance hasten infamy.

The shameless coffers fill'd with such vile spoils,
Speak loud in heaving groans beneath the weight
That have been gathered from the pains and toils
Of nature's kindred; and the cry is great!

Hark! justly incensed heaven demands it back,
At perils mighty you the call evade,
The means must come, that will retrace the track,
Which by your vile oppression has been made.

Christian! if thou dare answer to the name,
That in this land of freedom claims thy store,
With liberty, thy boasted star of fame,
Shall *slavery* thus eclipse its lustre o'er?

Oh, rather haste! oh haste! to wash the stain
Forever from those annals; -erst so pure,
Nor let a cause so just e'er plead in vain,
Thill this last act immortal fame secure.

“Ode for the Fourth of July”
 (*Mother’s Gift*, 208-9)

(Written in Reference to African Emancipation)

Peace spreads her wings, and shadows thee,
 From despot’s sway that pressed thee long:
 And Liberty bends pliantly,
 When thou dost will, O people strong;
 Then raise thy notes, land of the free,
 The Lord hath done most valiantly.

His power hath wrought thy liberty,
 His own right arm avenged thy wrong:
 And now He asks returns of thee,
 For those who groanings, have been long.
 His ear hath heard, O people free,
 Of those long bonded held by thee.

‘Tis Ethiopia’s vented sigh,
 Heard in that grief-imploring moan;
 Hear, Christians, hear her anguished cry,
 “Restore, restore to us our own;
 Oh! land with sons and daughters free,
 Make our long captive ones like thee.”

Offended Justice, sword in hand,
 Tells of her claims and bids you give,
 As stern atonements quick demand,
 The price that says lo’n Afric live!
 Live unoppressed, live, joyous, free,
 And cease to mourn our wrongs to thee.

Ah! can the parent heart forget
 Its torn-away returnless ones?
 Nor can a tearful Afric yet
 Cease sighing for her long lost sons;
 ‘Till clasped again, from slavery free,
 Loosed by the voice of charity.

Doth liberty stand mountain-strong,
 And view such claims unsatisfied,
 When she hath cried so loud, so long,
 And *Freemen* have her call denied?
 Wake! PATRIOTS wake, cry, *now* be free!
 Rise Afric, hail thy liberty.

“Redemption of Africa”
(*Mother’s Gift*, 206-7)

Sung at the Ninth Anniversary of the New York State Colonization Society

God of all grace! O Lord of Hosts!
Behold us met in Thy great name;
In Thee alone we make our boast,
And all Thy wondrous works proclaim.

Ae schemes of love and mercy wrought,
Is good devised by man for man?
His schemes are blest, or brought to naught,
Just as Thy grace succeeds the plan.

Fountain of wisdom, power and light!
Divinely hast Thou cleared the way,
And Africa’s dark sons of night
Have, joyous, hailed a brighter day.

There many gloomy terrors reigned;
There blinded savage mortals dwelt;
There death, and sin, its slaves enchained;
There even men to devils knelt.

To those dark shores the light has spread;
There hundreds kneel to Israel’s Lord;
and Israel’s triumph song is heard,
Rising to Heaven with sweet accord.

Hosanna! let the swell of praise
Bound through the earth and rend the skies;
Afric, unite the song to raise;
Redeemed, enlightened Afric, rise.

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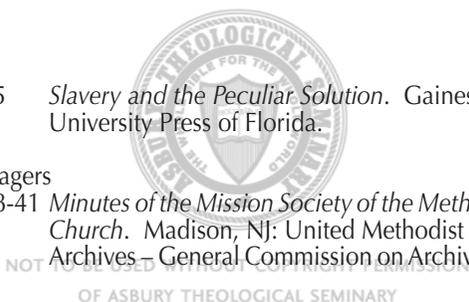
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