

SENIOR ESSAY

THE ROLE OF EDUCATION
IN THE
CHRISTIAN METHODIST EPISCOPAL CHURCH

By

Jerry Poole

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Submitted in Partial Requirement
for the Master of Divinity Degree

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Jerry Poole

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Interdenominational Theological Center
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Approved: Charles B. Copher
Dean

Date: April 16, 1970

Approved: A. Murray Branch
Adviser

Date: 16 April 1970

INTRODUCTION

This essay, entitled "The Role of Education in the Christian Methodist Episcopal Church" is presented to the faculty and administration of the Interdenominational Theological Center as partial fulfillment for the Master of Divinity Degree.

I hope to accomplish three main objectives. First, I will deal briefly with a historical perspective of education in the history of the Christian Methodist Episcopal Church. Secondly, I will attempt to set forth present trends in education as they relate to the C. M. E. Church. Thirdly, I will attempt to project myself into the future and see what could and should be the concern of the C. M. E. Church in education.

Within the context of the above three objectives, I will attempt to answer a lingering question in my mind: What was it about education that the Founding Fathers held high?

As this essay develops, the reader will note that the church is referred to as the Colored Methodist Episcopal Church and also as the Christian Methodist Episcopal Church. The first name mentioned was the original name of the denomination and the name borne by the church until it was officially changed to the latter in 1956.

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Historical Perspective

Whenever the question of higher education arises in the Christian Methodist Episcopal Church, the Episcopal address of the second quadrennial session of the C. M. E. Church, delivered by Bishop Lucius H. Holsey in Louisville, Kentucky in August, 1874, is quoted:

The subject of education and ministerial training claims your best attention and deepest consideration. It is eminently "the question" of the session. You are aware of its vast and momentous importance at the present juncture. It enters deeply and minutely into all the operations and relations of the church and ministry; and the cause of Christ is suffering for a better informed, more enlightened and intelligent pastorship. Nothing can be substituted for it, nothing can be taken in exchange or put in its place to answer the universal call of the church; not that education is all in all, but it is one of those mighty and potent means employed by God to make known His will and the revelation of His word to the benighted sons of a degraded and apostate race. As a means, we cannot look upon it as of small moment and of little avail. When the cry comes up to the annual conference, "Send us a good preacher," it is generally understood that they mean an "educated" minister, one that "rightly divides the word of truth." There seems to be a sort of universal and spontaneous consent and willingness among the people to contribute to this great and grand cause, and we believe that we can procure the necessary means to accomplish the end in view. We may not expect to do a great deal at present in educating the masses of our people, but we can educate our young preachers

that may come into the ministry from time to time. An institution of learning under our control and manned by a good competent faculty, and well equipped, would act as a stimulus to the whole church. It would bring into concerted action the energy and patronage of the people, and in a short time we might have a good and respectable school for the young preacher and teacher. The last General Conference appointed the bishops a committee to draw up and mature, as far as they might see proper, a plan of education to be submitted to this session. Accordingly, we have prepared a paper on the subject, and in due time it will be submitted for your examination and re-adjustment. We think it far better to have only one such school at present; and let the whole church center upon that, and thus make it a permanent success before another such enterprise is undertaken. Who does not see that one good school is better than many maimed and broken-down ones?

We trust that wisdom, moderation, and sanctified knowledge will guide you and the spirit of the Lord direct you in all your undertakings in the work of the Lord.¹

This statement by Bishop Phillips is indicative of the attitude toward education of the C. M. E. Church from its inception. This interest was evident even before the formal organization of the former slaves into a separate denomination.

In order to have a clearer perspective of the nature of Bishop Phillips' report in the 1874 General Conference, we need to take a look at history and see the circumstances that led to the founding of the C. M. E. Church.

¹C. H. Phillips, History of the C. M. E. Church, (Jackson, 1898), pp. 91-92.

The first colored conference of Negro Methodists of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South was called to meet in Augusta, Georgia on January 9, 1869.² As far as we know, this conference was the beginning of the C. M. E. Church. One other source states, however, that the first Negro Annual Conference was organized at Carthage, Texas and was named the Texas Colored Conference.³ For our information and point of view, in this essay, we will lean toward the former date and give Georgia the credit for having organized the first Annual Conference.

It was in Macon Georgia on December 16, 1869 that we find the establishment of the Georgia Colored Annual Conference. It is in this conference that we find the first Committee on Education. The persons involved on this committee were L. H. Hosley, Reubin White, John Phillips and Madison King. They presented a report to the Annual Conference in which the following resolution was offered and adopted:

Resolved, that all the preachers in our connection turn their attention and energies to the education of our people. First, by securing the aid of our white friends in all parts of our work. Secondly, by employing them, if possible, in our day and Sunday schools; and thirdly, by insisting upon the parents the need and importance of instructing their children thoroughly in the ordinary branches of an English education, and not just enough to make them bigots and enthusiasts, thus accom-

²John B. Cade, Holsey--The Incomparable, (New York, 1963), p. 21.

³Gross Alexander et. al., ed., The History of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, (The Christian Literature Company, 1894), pp. 91 ff.

plishing very little in instructing the young of our race.⁴

On December 18, 1870, Negro delegates from the Alabama, Tennessee, Mississippi, Georgia, Kentucky, South Carolina, Florida, and Texas Conferences met in Jackson, Tennessee along with their white brothers and organized the "Colored Methodist Episcopal Church in America."

Shortly following the organizational conference in 1870, the Georgia Conference met in January, 1871 in Augusta, Georgia and submitted the following report from the Committee on Education:

Whereas, we believe that it is next in importance to the Christian religion...
Therefore, Resolved, first, that as a means of elevating the standards of education, we strictly require our ministers, before admission into the traveling connection, to pass an examination in the ordinary branches of an English education.
Resolved, secondly, that we recommend the erection of suitable houses as soon as possible in our several Annual Conferences in which high school privileges may be obtained and where our ministers can be more thoroughly educated in the ordinary branches and in the primary lessons of theology.⁵

Therefore, we can note that just one month following the organization of the C. M. E. Church, the church fathers were eminently concerned with the educational well-being of the ministers and of the church's constituency.

In regard to housing for the educational institutions, the fifth session of the Georgia Annual Conference sensed the need, and

⁴Cade, Op. cit., p. 23.

⁵Cade, Op. cit., p. 26.

In a call session of the General Conference, which met in Augusta, Georgia in March, 1873, Bishop Miles, the only Bishop at the time stated in a message his feeling toward education and the necessity for training among his people:

We must become a reading people if we would acquire influence, overcome opposition, and maintain ourselves respectably among the churches of the land. Next to the maintenance of sound doctrine and Godly discipline (and it will be tributary to these), the most vital point is the education of our people, and especially the improvement of our ministry...⁷

Also in this conference, the Reverend L. H. Holsey, the Reverend Joseph A. Beebe, and the Reverend Isaac Lane were elected to the bishopric. The conference instructed the bishops to take measures looking into the establishment of an institution of learning; to write on the subject of education to the extent of their opportunities; to receive donations and contributions for the benefit of the cause, and to acknowledge these in the Christian Index, the church's paper; that all preachers give this proposition their strict attention, and lecture on the subject occasionally; and that they (the bishops) bring the matter before the Annual Conference for its consideration.⁸

Bishop W. H. Miles, the senior bishop, led the way in carrying forward the wishes of the General Conference. He purchased a

⁷Phillips, Op. cit., p. 59.

⁸Phillips, Op. cit., p. 62.

eral Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South in Nashville, Tennessee and made an appeal to establish a school where young men could be prepared as ministers and leaders, and young women as teachers. Following this meeting, the bishops of both churches met to formulate plans for the establishment of a school. On January 1, 1883, the school, Paine College, became a reality, with Dr. Callaway Morgan serving as President. Speaking of the school's early stages, Bishop Holsey wrote:

I bought wood and coal, water buckets, bowls, pitchers, soap, and towels. There was a hard fight on me by all the Colored people and especially the leaders for starting a school to put the Negroes back into slavery. But I did not halt or hesitate for a moment. I went over the city daily as far as I could, talking, preaching, and persuading the people to send their children to the school until we had drummed up thirty students. This number constituted the first members of Paine College. I was the first to send a half dozen of my own children; but in three months the children increased to more than one hundred.¹¹

Today, Paine College represents an outstanding monument to the Founding Fathers of the C. M. E. Church and to the co-operative efforts of that church along with the Methodist Episcopal Church, South. This accomplishment points up something that I describe as the "transcendent feeling" of the Founding Fathers toward education, that is, they tended to feel very keenly the necessity for their people to be

¹¹Phillips, Op. cit., p. 580.

educated. Their foresight and perserverance laid the important foundations for the educational program of the C. M. E. Church.

Georgia now had its school with Paine in Augusta, so Tennessee followed with Lane College in Jackson. In 1878, a resolution to establish a C. M. E school in the state of Tennessee was adopted in the Tennessee Annual Conference at Nashville under the leadership of Bishop Miles. But the project required the coming in 1879 of Bishop Isaac Lane as presiding bishop of the Tennessee Conference before it could get underway. Thus, in 1880, with \$240.00, Bishop Lane purchased four acres of land upon which has grown an additional permanent C. M. E. institution of higher learning. The school was first known as the C. M. E. High School or the Jackson High School. In May, 1885, by vote of the Trustees, the institution became Lane Institute under the direction of Dr. C. A. Phillips. It was later changed to Lane College.¹²

In 1898, the Alabama Conference established a school in Thomasville, Alabama, and in 1902, the North Alabama Conference organized a high school in what is now known as Docenia, Alabama. In 1905, the two schools merged in Fairfield, Alabama in what came to be known as Miles Memorial College under the direction of Dr. J. A. Bray.¹³ Since that time, the name has been shortened to Miles

¹²Essie G. A. Perry, Lane College Through the Years of Service, (Jackson, 1957).

¹³W. R. Johnson, Jr. Exploring Our History, (Chicago, 1957) pp. 14f.

College.

Texas was next in line. In 1893, a group of ministers met to organize an institution in the state of Texas. On January 9, 1894, under the administration of Dr. O. T. Womack serving as President, Texas College opened its doors in Tyler, Texas.¹⁴

Under the leadership of Bishop Elias Cottrell, the state of Mississippi organized a school in Holly Springs. On January 11, 1906 with nearly 211 students on a 110 acre plot of land, Mississippi Industrial College was founded.¹⁵

Through the efforts of Bishop J. Arthur Hamlett, Phillips School of Theology had its beginning in the Theological Department of Lane College in 1946. Dr. Joseph A. Johnson, Jr. was elected the first President of the school, which began its initial classes in January, 1954 with eighteen students and seven professors. Today, Phillips School of Theology stands as an integral part of the Interdenominational Theological Center in Atlanta, Georgia bearing evidence of the Center's oneness in Christ and the brotherhood of man.

There were several other attempts made by the C. M. E. Church to establish institutions of learning, but they failed for various reasons, mainly financial in nature. The schools listed below fall into this category.

¹⁴Johnson, Op. cit., p. 14.

¹⁵Phillips, Op. cit., p. 588.

Holsey Normal, an industrial academy, was founded at Lumber City, Georgia in 1892. It was moved to Cordele, Georgia in 1902.¹⁶ The Helen B. Cobb Institution was founded by Mrs. H. B. Cobb in Barnesville, Georgia. The two institutions merged to become Holsey-Cobb Institute.¹⁷

In 1878, the Louisiana Conference organized Homer Seminary on an eight acre tract in Homer, Louisiana. Homer College was founded in the same city in 1880 by private citizens. In 1893, it was purchased for the C. M. E. Church under the leadership of Bishop Beebe. The two schools merged to become Homer College.¹⁸

Haygood Seminary was organized in 1883 by the Quarterly Conference in Washington, Arkansas. In 1884, it became a district school and then a conference project. Unfortunately, the dormitories and laundry were destroyed by fire in February, 1915 and the loss was very great. Bishop Cottrell and the leaders of Arkansas decided to select another city for the C. M. E. educational venture in that state.¹⁹

Under the leadership of Bishop Cottrell, Bishop Carter, and finally under Bishop J. A. Hamlett, Arkansas-Haygood Industrial College was built on 300 acres of land in Moten, Arkansas, near the city of Pine Bluff. It officially began operation in 1918.²⁰

¹⁶Phillips, Op. cit., p. 589f.

¹⁷Johnson, Op. cit., p. 16.

¹⁸Phillips, Op. cit., p. 591.

¹⁹Phillips, Op. cit., p. 592.

²⁰Phillips, Op. cit., p. 593.

Other educational ventures included Boley High School in Boley, Oklahoma, and South Boston High School in South Boston, Virginia. There were two other attempts in the Carolinas.²¹

These schools, those that have survived and those that have failed, are living examples of the interest and foresight of the early C. M. E.'s in educating their people. It is my opinion that if each episcopal district had not attempted a school of its own, then the C. M. E. Church would have been able to devote its attention and its finances to one area, thus creating the type of school needed.

²¹Phillips, Op. cit., p. 594.

Present Trends

Let us move now from the historical perspective and look at the present trends in education in the Christian Methodist Episcopal Church. This part of my essay will be primarily subjective whereas the former part was objective.

With the development of so many schools of different description, it was not long before the church leaders recognized the necessity for centralization of their educational endeavors. Therefore, in 1914 at St. Louis, Missouri, the thirteenth General Conference saw fit to establish a Department of Education. This new department was designed to harmonize the work of the several connectional schools and to improve their programs and physical plants materially. From 1914 to 1950 this department of the Church attempted to supervise the educational work of the denomination.

In 1950, the General Conference, convening in Kansas City, Missouri, merged the Department of Education with the Board of Religious Education to form the General Board of Christian Education. Its duties are to "generally superintend" the affairs of all the colleges and schools of the C. M. E. Church; to see that all of them are chartered properly; and to safeguard all property interests of the schools.

In a 1962 message to the General Conference, the Church Fathers, the Bishops, voiced their opinion regarding the future of the C. M. E. schools:

Your chief pastors...face compelling questions; What steps should this General Conference take concerning our schools to support them on the standards set by accrediting agencies? Shall we discontinue some of them? or merge some? or continue some of them on a sub-standard basis? We urge this General Conference to take steps to determine the number of educational institutions that the Church can adequately support.²²

In this regard, the following recommendations were made by the Church Fathers: (1) That the 1962 General Conference approve efforts and plans to begin consolidating our institutions through merger or otherwise to a number which can be adequately supported in meeting the requirements for accreditation and higher standards, and (2) that our educational institutions be made connectional in ownership, administration, and financial support; and that the present support for operational expenses of the colleges from the C. M. E. Church be increased so that all Annual Conferences in the connection share equitably in this operational expense.²³ In the light of these recommendations, the 1966 General Conference, meeting in Miami, Florida, agreed to spend over 45 percent of the general budget on higher education in the C. M. E. Church. From \$36,000.00, the stipend was increased to \$75,000.00. This amount

²²Journal, 25th General Conference of the C. M. E. Church
(St. Louis, 1962), pp. 158f.

²³Ibid.

was given to each institution with the exception of Lane College which received \$100,000.00 because of its accreditation and because of the requirements of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools. Paine College, on the other hand, would receive more because of its affiliation with the United Methodist Church. This was one way in which the General Conference sought to make the schools more connectional and to relieve some of the burdens of financing them from the sections or regions in which they are located. In May of 1967, Dr. L. H. Pitts, President of Miles College, sought to improve upon this by offering a proposal to the General Board of Christian Education, meeting in Saint Louis; Dr. Pitts recommended a connectional drive to raise one million dollars for all of our schools under the Educational Commission (college presidents). It was the opinion of this group that a better response from corporations would be had if a concerted effort were made in the name of higher education of the C. M. E. Church rather than in the name of each individual school. Little information, if any, is known of the progress of this idea for the schools. We do know that this year, 1970, one of our schools, Miles College, received its accreditation. It is not certain that Dr. Pitts' proposal had anything to do with this recent achievement of Miles College, but it is certain that the idea has opened new horizons for more and better opportunities.

In the area of scholarship funds and recruitment for higher

education, the C. M. E. Church stands face to face with two problems and is seeking to do something about it. In the 1966 General Conference, attention was focused upon these problems. As far as recruiting is concerned, the General Conference agreed to continue to co-operate with the Hazen Foundation and other denominations in developing joint enlistment materials; they agreed to launch a program for the effective distribution of these materials among high school students; and proposed that pastors and their congregations be made aware of their responsibilities in enlisting young people to full-time service in the church. As far as scholarships are concerned, the Conference voted to continue the \$10,000.00 scholarship fund, both for college and for seminary students.

These may seem to be small steps made in these areas, but for the C. M. E. Church, these are gigantic ones which continue to reflect the attitudes and values that our present church leaders have in regards to education and the role which it must play in today's world.

A Look Toward the Future

We have looked at the role of education in the Christian Methodist Episcopal Church from two perspectives. Let me now use these two perspectives as a launching pad to project myself into the future and see what ought to be some of the continuing roles of education in the C. M. E. Church. I do not profess to be an authority in this area, but I do have some thoughts on the subject that I feel are worth sharing.

In terms of meeting accreditation standards, I am of the opinion that the C. M. E. Church must face facts. It cannot successfully operate the number of schools it has with such a limited budget and, at the same time, meet the standards set up by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools. Bishop W. H. Miles said in 1874 that it is far better to have one or two excellent schools to our credit than five or six "maimed and broken-down ones." Therefore, I am suggesting that the C. M. E. Church take a serious look at Mississippi Industrial College and Texas College, schools that provide a constant headache to the church, and seek to do something about them. Either close them or bring them up to acceptable standards. This is a choice which the church must make.

In terms of connectionalizing our schools, history has shown that the C. M. E. Church has made a drastic mistake. That is, when it developed schools, they became an episcopal district financial burden

rather than a connectional one. Thus, in times like these, I think that the C. M. E. Church must rise up to defeat the forces that seek to destroy it, namely financial matters.

What about theological education? Since I have been a student at the Interdenominational Theological Center, I have become aware of the ever increasing need of our church to improve its financial support for those students seeking a theological education. Our ministerial ranks are fast becoming depleted. More men are dying and more are retiring; more are leaving the ranks to seek other areas of endeavor which promise greater lucrative reward. We cannot spread the Gospel as we should because we are unable to send men into uncharted territory; we need them too badly in the areas already developed. With these thoughts in mind, the C. M. E. Church must make some important decisions. It must be willing to support young seminarians to a point where they will not have to seek further employment in order to supplement their income. With this support, they can better apply themselves to the preparation for the ministry of God's Word.

In conclusion, I wish to say that the Christian Methodist Episcopal Church has wrought well in these one hundred years of its existence. It has tasted of the fruits of its labor. To sit down now and say that we have made it would mean sudden and sure death. Therefore, we must be ready to make the necessary change in our educational system whereby we can be an active part of the overall educational process of our nation. If we see the need to maintain all of our existing institutions, then let us see the need to assure that all of them meet the required standards of excellence. If, on the other hand, we see that we cannot maintain all of them, then let us be mature Christians to admit this fact to ourselves and proceed to weed out those we feel that we cannot in all honesty bring to the level we must demand of ourselves. Let us also maintain that spirit that our forefathers had in seeing that education continues to play a dominant role in the Christian Methodist Episcopal Church.

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