


to dedicate it to the Service of GOD. What is implied in this, we shall easily see, if we consider 1. What we must, 2. What we may, 3. What we may not do ^{on} of it.

1. We must if we will obey this Com-
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WESLEY
AND
METHODIST
STUDIES



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2023

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Power of
marvellou
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renews the
stores Lost
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in vain,
gether to
n ourselves
is Holy.

Business
to perfect his Image in our souls, To bind
Mercy and Truth about our Neck to write
them deep on the Tablet of our Heart.

Not that our Mind need be every Mo-
ment intent upon this: That might make

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FROM THE EDITORS

GEORDAN HAMMOND AND CLIVE MURRAY NORRIS

This volume of *Wesley and Methodist Studies* has some new features that we hope readers will welcome. It is our first-ever Special Issue with all the articles focusing on a common theme: 'Methodism and Race'. It is a further development of the approach we took in volumes 3 (2011), 4 (2012), and 12/2 (2020), which respectively include papers from the 2009, 2010, and 2018 American Academy of Religion sessions on 'Methodism and the African Diaspora, 1738–1834', 'New Horizons and Frontiers: Evangelical Preachers and Preaching', and 'Health and Healing in Wesleyan and Methodist Perspectives'.

This issue includes four articles based on papers presented at the 14 May 2021 Methodist Studies Seminar hosted jointly by Cliff College and the Manchester Wesley Research Centre, which, due to the pandemic, was held remotely. Two further articles, by Dennis C. Dickerson and by Sègbégnon Mathieu Gnonhossou and Kelly Diehl Yates, explore the same subject. An 'Introduction and Response' by Tamara E. Lewis draws the threads together.

The issue also features our customary suite of book reviews, which range broadly in space and time and cover both history and theology. One of these reports is on an impressive digital resource, and we hope to include further such reviews in future volumes.

INTRODUCTION AND RESPONSE TO SPECIAL ISSUE

TAMARA E. LEWIS

Much has been written about the lives, characters, and theology of John and Charles Wesley, men who helped to shape the ethical compass of the modern age. This issue of *Wesley and Methodist Studies* addresses the relation of the Wesleyan legacy to race and empire. The sciences have refuted what many eighteenth- and nineteenth-century philosophers were so intent to prove: race, the ideology associated with phenotypical difference, has no inherent biological meaning. In this sense, the Wesley brothers were well ahead of their times. As researchers have demonstrated, John and Charles Wesley overwhelmingly rejected racism and enslavement as immoral—injustices to the human spirit. Indeed, Wesleyan scholarship generally regards the totality of their writings and activism as a refutation of Enlightenment constructs of human ‘whiteness’ and ‘blackness.’ This includes what Frantz Fanon would later call the ‘epidermalization of inferiority’, or the perception of persons of African or Asian descent as ontologically subhuman based on racial classification.¹ The Wesleyan theological legacy rejects supremacist religion that undergirds such beliefs as well as structural racism and imperialist exploitation.

However, much like a multiheaded hydra, the systemic manifestation of racist ideologies has proven resilient since the eighteenth-century ministries of John and Charles Wesley. In various forms, race and empire are thriving, their tentacles wild and tortuous, chameleon-like in adaptability. Thus, the time has come for re-examination of the Wesleyan legacy regarding these issues using the subtleties of a contemporary lens. Calls for reflection upon nuanced aspects of the Wesleyan theological tradition are highly relevant at this moment. In today’s climate, when lingering issues of race and empire impact multiple aspects of secular and religious life, what does Wesleyan thought say to us?

Some of the articles in this collection focus on traditional understandings of the Wesleyan tradition regarding imperialism and African agency. These authors explore ways African Methodists incorporated the Wesleyan tradition within their beliefs and identities. These articles demonstrate that various individuals

1. Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, tr. Richard Philcox (1952; repr. New York: Grove Press, 2008).

of African descent were empowered by their understandings and propagation of Wesleyan doctrine while navigating British imperialism, racism, and practice of enslavement. Dennis Dickerson, in 'Building a Diasporic Family', argues that late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Black Methodist women repudiated Protestant supremacist religion cloaked as civilizing missions. The Women's Parent Mite Missionary Society, an evangelical organization of the African Methodist Episcopal Church, exemplified the Wesleyan tradition by transcending racial, ethnic, social, economic, and political hierarchies in building Christian communities devoted to societal transformation. This missionary impulse among African Methodists served as resistance to structural racism within mainstream religious institutions that used racializing and paternalistic expressions and methods to evangelize so-called 'heathen' and 'uncivilized' communities in Africa and the Caribbean. African Methodist resistance entailed stressing familial and communal bonds—the oneness and equality of the human family, exclusive of racial hierarchies or divisions.

'Conversion as an Act of Reclamation: John and Charles Wesley's Interaction with Two West African Enslaved Men', by Sègbégnon Mathieu Gnonhossou and Kelly Diehl Yates, challenges scholarship that claims the eighteenth-century historic figures Ancona Robin Robin John and Little Ephraim Robin John, slave traders who had been sold into bondage, returned to their former way of life after acquiring freedom. The authors of this exciting article analyse various primary sources, including handwritten letters (discovered by the authors in the Methodist Archives and Research Centre at the John Rylands Research Institute and Library, University of Manchester) addressed to Charles Wesley by the Robin Johns. Gnonhossou and Yates centre their argument around the notion of thoroughness stressed in Wesleyan conversion theology, in which the believer is completely transformed to live a sanctified life. Deliverance from sin includes the cessation of immoral and unjust practices. The Robin Johns, who were baptized by Charles Wesley, joined Methodist societies in Bristol, England and served in West African Methodist churches once they returned home to what is now Nigeria. The men would have been deeply apprised of the Wesleyan abolitionist stance as part of sanctifying grace. Gnonhossou and Yates also demonstrate that circumstantial documentation suggests that rather than returning to slave trading, the men adopted other economic ventures in West Africa. Two other men of African descent are explored in Colin Haydon's 'Son of a Former Slave, Born into Enslavement: Samuel Barber (1783–1828) and Edward Fraser (1798–1872), Two Mixed-Race Methodist Evangelists'. This article examines the lives of mixed-race men who lived and flourished as Methodist preachers in the late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century British imperial world. Samuel Barber, the son of a formerly enslaved African, became a dynamic Primitive

Methodist local preacher in England. Edward Fraser, born into enslavement in the British Caribbean, became an influential Wesleyan Methodist preacher and missionary. Despite enduring the challenges of racism and enslavement, both men demonstrated resilience and courage while proclaiming the gospel through the evangelical Methodist tradition.

A second set of articles subject the notion of John Wesley as public theologian to contemporary analyses, focusing specifically on Wesley's expressed dedication to anti-imperialism and abolitionism. 'John Wesley and the East India Company', by Clive Murray Norris, evaluates Wesley's apparent failure to condemn the notorious East India Company, known for its abusive colonialist practices, despite public critiques of institutions that exploited foreign lands and peoples. Norris finds that as early as the 1750s, Wesley was aware of corruption in the company. Yet, he chose to broker ethical appeals to shareholders privately. When these entreaties failed, Wesley began publishing prophetic diatribes against the company in the *Arminian Magazine* and other sources.

Natalya A. Cherry offers further examination of the juxtaposition between Wesleyan theology and ethics in 'Was Eighteenth-Century Arminian Anti-Slavery Also Racist?' In contrast to the dominant scholarly narrative, which maintains that Wesleyan thought exclusively champions racial equity, Cherry makes a significant breakthrough. She argues that despite critiquing the harmful effects of empire, John Wesley continued to utilize European racializing frameworks—that is, linguistic and ideological constructs of imperialism—in his writings, particularly in the famous tract, *Thoughts upon Slavery*. To explain her perspective, Cherry helpfully distinguishes between 'racist pro-slavery' and 'racist anti-slavery'—that is, racist ideology regardless of moral posture. The pervasiveness of this racializing paradigm is even evident in the writings of some eighteenth- and nineteenth-century African Americans, who may have also utilized common racist expressions while fighting against structural racism, an important recognition evident in Dickerson's article. Thus, Cherry's analysis complexifies the understanding of Wesley's purported anti-racism and anti-imperialism by highlighting the tendency of linguistic tropes to surreptitiously propagate racialized concepts.

David Field delves even further into the racial contradictions of John Wesley's writings. 'Imaging the "Exotic Other": John Wesley and the People of Africa', shows that despite the use of positive images of West Africans gleaned from various sources in *Thoughts upon Slavery*, Wesley utilized negative stereotypes of Africans in other writings. Specifically, Wesley uses racist and stereotypical images to describe the Khoikhoi, indigenous populations of South Africa, while discussing original sin and human depravity. Field rightly

critiques Wesley's inconsistent rhetorical imaging of Africans to advance specific theological agendas as harmful and problematic.

The provocative and interesting articles in this edition of *Wesley and Methodist Studies* include traditional perspectives as well as the deconstruction of established narratives in Wesleyan history, theology, and missiology. The twenty-first century is a time of tremendous change and realignment among various institutions that claim the renowned Wesleyan and Methodist heritage—bodies that, in the words of John Wesley, seek to 'reform the nation, and in particular the Church, to spread scriptural holiness over the land'. These exceptional articles aim to broaden perceptions of race and empire in the church and world, offering insights that may assist in developing effective tools to transcend racial divisiveness.

TAMARA E. LEWIS is Professor of the Practice of Historical Theology at Perkins School of Theology, Southern Methodist University. She is an ordained elder in the Tennessee-Western Kentucky Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church. She received her PhD in Church History and MDiv from Vanderbilt University. Dr Lewis also serves as Director of the Black/Africana Church Studies programme at Perkins. She is presently editing a compilation volume on the Black Church and completing a book on Harry Hoosier and early American Methodism.

CONVERSION AS AN ACT OF RECLAMATION

*John and Charles Wesley's Interaction with Two West African
Enslaved Men*

SÈGBÉGNON MATHIEU GNONHOSSOU

KELLY DIEHL YATES



ABSTRACT

This article considers seventeen manuscript letters written by Ancona Robin Robin John, Ephraim Robin John, and Elizabeth Johnson to Charles Wesley in the 1770s regarding these two enslaved men. Once slave traders themselves, they were held captive by a Bristol slave ship captain, but eventually returned to their home in West Africa through the assistance of the Wesleys. The article then considers their conversion to Christianity and whether they returned to the practice of enslavement, as previous scholarship has suggested. We argue that the evidence is unclear and that influence of the Wesleys might have turned them to oppose the practice of enslavement.

Keywords: John Wesley, Charles Wesley, slavery, Robin Johns, Bristol, Old Calabar, Africa

We were digging in boxes in the John Rylands Research Institute and Library on 4 July 2013, when we came across letters written to Charles Wesley in 1774 by two enslaved men: Ancona Robin Robin John and Little Ephraim Robin John.¹ We both read the letters and wept, for we held in our hands original manuscripts written by enslaved persons. In 1773, Little Ephraim Robin John and

1. The correspondence is located at the Methodist Archives and Research Centre (MARC) at the John Rylands Research Institute and Library.

BUILDING A DIASPORIC FAMILY

The Women's Parent Mite Missionary Society of the African Methodist Episcopal Church, 1874–1920

DENNIS C. DICKERSON



ABSTRACT

This article argues that the missionary language of the Women's Parent Mite Missionary Society of the African Methodist Episcopal Church was cast in familial and kinship nomenclature that eschewed the evil of racial hierarchy. Although routine missionary vernacular about heathen Africa and its need for Christianization and civilization appeared in the rhetoric of AME women, they more deeply expressed a diasporic consciousness that obligated Black people on both sides of the Atlantic to resist Euro-American hegemony. The capacious embrace of the WPMMS for Black women—whether in the United States, the Caribbean, or Africa—actualized their vision for maternal and sisterly interaction in contrast to the racial condescension prevalent among white women in their respective American and European missionary groups.

Keywords: African Methodist Episcopal Church, women and religion, missions, women's denominational organizations

Pursuit of a Diasporic Family

The Women's Parent Mite Missionary Society (WPMMS) of the African Methodist Episcopal Church in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries directed its energies to 'the Island of Hayti'. Clara E. Harris, a WPMMS historiographer, added that 'the women cared for work in St. Thomas, Demerara,

JOHN WESLEY AND THE EAST INDIA COMPANY

CLIVE MURRAY NORRIS



ABSTRACT

This article explores why John Wesley was slow to condemn the East India Company for its brutal exploitation of the Indian subcontinent in the late eighteenth century. One reason may have been a hope that the Company would support Methodist missionaries; another his friendship with Ebenezer Blackwell, who was active in Company affairs. A letter sent to shareholders in the mid-1760s suggests that Wesley was supporting efforts to stabilize the Company and secure its long-term partnership with the government. These failed, and the Company entered a period when short-term profit-seeking dominated its decisions, causing Wesley to finally speak out.

Keywords: John Wesley, East India Company, Ebenezer Blackwell, British Empire

The East India Company was one of the most significant players in the eighteenth-century British economy and in British politics. It acquired an enormous territory in Asia, ruling over millions of subjects and helping to propel Great Britain toward global economic and political hegemony. But from the mid-1760s it attracted sustained public criticism, following its conquest of Bengal. It stood accused of systematic and brutal racist exploitation abroad, while its officials were attacked for extravagant living and corruption back home. John Wesley, however, long remained silent on these matters. Why was this?

IMAGING THE ‘EXOTIC OTHER’

John Wesley and the People of Africa

DAVID N. FIELD



ABSTRACT

This article examines how John Wesley described the people of Africa, with particular reference to the people of West Africa and the ‘inhabitants of the Cape of Good Hope’. While Wesley has been rightly praised for his opposition to the enslavement of Africans, his descriptions of African people involved editing material from various sources in order to serve theological and rhetorical purposes directed toward his British readers. This produced distorted depictions that did not justly describe the people of Africa. These depictions exhibited ‘invincible prejudice’ and failed to meet Wesley’s own standards of honouring others as children of God.

Keywords: John Wesley, *Thoughts upon Slavery*, racism, Africa, Anthony Benezet

The second half of the seventeenth and the first half of the eighteenth centuries were profoundly significant in the emergence of (Western) European self-consciousness. The voyages of discovery, exploitation, enslavement, and colonization brought Europeans into contact with diverse peoples with very different cultures. Depictions of these ‘exotic others’ were widely disseminated through travel narratives and contributed to the development of a sense of common European identity that contrasted with this ‘otherness.’¹ Such contrasts provided the ideological justification for enslavement, exploitation, and colonization.

1. See Benjamin Schmidt, *Inventing Exoticism: Geography, Globalism, and Europe’s Early Modern World* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015).

WAS EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY ARMINIAN ANTI-SLAVERY ALSO ANTI-RACIST?

NATALYA A. CHERRY



ABSTRACT

Despite portrayals of John Wesley and early Methodist leaders as proto-proponents of civil rights, their Arminian anti-slavery stance was hardly what scholars Ibram X. Kendi and Anthony G. Reddie term ‘anti-racist’. There remained in their writings evidence of empire that upheld racist constructs. What if, rather than decrying colonists’ desire for independence, Wesley had helped them see that fighting for enslaved persons’ freedom might assist their own efforts at liberation from tyranny? Confronting the persistence of racism even amid anti-slavery in Wesley and early Methodism aids in developing an alternative lens to empire that can help their descendants today.

Keywords: John Wesley, Anthony G. Reddie, Arminian theology, anti-racism, anti-slavery

While Arminian theological anthropology may be evident in John Wesley’s anti-slavery stance toward the American colonies in his *Thoughts upon Slavery*, it does not necessarily follow that his stance and that of the itinerant preachers, whom he sent to America from 1769 on, was anti-racist. Uncritical contemporary championing of Wesley as a proto-activist for civil rights and full racial equity misses the limitations that the lenses of empire and racialization place on theological vision—even vision of the broad availability of grace. By facing these shortcomings head-on, rather than simply laying all blame for racism at the feet of the American South, it is possible to suggest practices of reckoning

SON OF A FORMER SLAVE, BORN INTO ENSLAVEMENT

*Samuel Barber (1783–1828) and Edward Fraser (1798–1872), Two
Mixed-Race Methodist Evangelists*

COLIN HAYDON



ABSTRACT

This article examines the lives of two mixed-race evangelists, Samuel Barber (1783–1828) and Edward Fraser (1798–1872). Born in London, Barber, whose father was a manumitted slave, became a Primitive Methodist lay preacher in Staffordshire. Fraser, born in Barbados, was illegitimate; his mother was enslaved. Freed at the age of twenty-nine, he became a prominent Wesleyan Methodist missionary and minister in Antigua, Bermuda, Dominica, Jamaica, and St Kitts. The article pays particular attention to these men's racial heritage.

Keywords: Samuel Barber, Edward Fraser, Primitive Methodism, Wesleyan Methodism, race, enslavement, Black history, Caribbean, Staffordshire

The subject of early Methodism and race is naturally linked to that of Methodism and enslavement. John Wesley published his forceful denunciation of the slave trade and enslavement itself, *Thoughts upon Slavery*, in 1774.¹ For him, a merchant who profited from 'the horrid trade' was 'a wolf, a devourer of the human species.'² Slavery was 'intolerable tyranny', and, he proclaimed, 'I absolutely deny all Slave-holding to be consistent with any degree of . . . natural Justice.'³

I should like to thank Peter Forsaith, Geordan Hammond, and Clive Murray Norris for their help when I was preparing this article.

1. John Wesley, *Thoughts upon Slavery* (London: R. Hawes, 1774).
2. *Ibid.* 47, 49.
3. *Ibid.* 29, 31.

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