

**THY GRACE
RESTORE,
THY WORK
REVIVE**

Revival, Reform,
and Revolution
in Global Methodism

*Essays from the 14th Oxford Institute
of Methodist Theological Studies*

SARAH HEANER LANCASTER,
General Editor



Thy Grace Restore, Thy Work Revive: Revival, Reform, and Revolution in Global Methodism

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Thy Grace Restore, Thy Work Revive: Revival, Reform, and Revolution in Global Methodism

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Introduction

Sarah Heaner Lancaster

JOHN WESLEY'S METHODISM BEGAN AS a renewal movement to call people to a fuller experience of being Christian so that through their revival both the nation and the church could be reformed. He expressed this purpose for Methodism by recording in the "Large Minutes" (1763), "What may we reasonably believe to be God's design in raising up the preachers called 'Methodists'? A. To reform the nation and, in particular, the Church; to spread scriptural holiness over the land."¹

Wesley was not the first to recognize the need for revival and renewal in England, and he made good use of practices that were already familiar. Religious Societies, where people could come together under the leadership of a priest to pursue disciplined holiness, had existed in the Church of England since the seventeenth century. These societies were largely located in London, and John's father, Samuel, actively encouraged their organization in less populated areas.² Even if he was not himself the originator of revival and reform, John Wesley certainly was

1 John Wesley, "The Large Minutes, B, 1763," in *The Methodist Societies: The Minutes of Conference*, ed. Henry Rack, *The Bicentennial Edition of the Works of John Wesley* [hereafter *Works*] (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2011), 10:845.

2 Geordan Hammond, "The Revival of Practical Christianity: The Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, Samuel Wesley, and the Clerical Society Movement," in *Revival and Resurgence in Christian History: Papers Read at the 2006 Summer Meeting and 2007 Winter Meeting of the Ecclesiastical Historical*

a successful and central figure in its implementation in the eighteenth-century evangelical revival in England.

Although Methodism began as a renewal movement, over time it became church, and it inevitably took on the structure of an institution. With a deep sense of the energy and focus that can be lost in institutionalization and with sensitivity about the fragility of existing institutions in our time, the theme “Thy Grace Restore, Thy Work Revive: Revival, Reform, and Revolution in Global Methodism” invited the Fourteenth Oxford Institute to explore ways that Methodism can regain a spirit that seeks and participates in renewal. Held in 2018, the Fourteenth Oxford Institute met just one year after global celebrations of the five hundredth anniversary of the Reformation. This meeting, then, provided opportunity to consider Methodism in light of other efforts for reform among Protestants and to consider what specifically Methodist reform might look like.

Revival, Reform, and Revolution

As a central figure in the evangelical revival in England, Wesley interacted with other leaders, and his own ideas and practices were influenced by them. His engagements (both positive and negative) with George Whitefield and the Moravians in England shaped his own view of what was needed for revival. Positively, George Whitefield influenced Wesley to consider field preaching. The Moravians drew him to heart religion that helped him understand faith as reliance on Christ. Their community structure also informed Wesley’s system for organizing Methodists. However, the antinomian tendencies of both Whitefield’s and the Moravians’ theology forced Wesley to think carefully about the role of holiness in Christian life. His own approach to revival was to call people not only to lively experience of God’s forgiving love (justification), but also to a more disciplined life before God that would

Society, ed. Kate Cooper and Jeremy Gregory (Woodbridge, UK: The Boydell Press, 2008), 116–27.

allow them to become renewed as the holy people God had created them to be (sanctification).

Differences in theology as well as personal differences eventually led the evangelical revival to split into groups. Wesley's Methodists thrived under his organizational leadership and theological vision. Despite Wesley's belief that God had raised up Methodist preachers to reform the nation and its established church, Methodism eventually took ecclesial form itself. The break between the American colonies and England in the American War of Independence led to Methodism becoming a church in North America. Methodists in Britain and Ireland also established themselves as churches.

With this change, Methodism had to organize ecclesially, incorporating the practices and lay leadership of the societies with an order of ministry and sacraments. The driving purpose to spread the gospel and scriptural holiness propelled Methodists outside of their own lands to mission around the globe. Methodist churches now exist in many cultures and contexts. This expansion of Methodist churches into other lands means that revival and reform may take different shapes in different Methodist churches.³

It may seem odd to associate the word *revolution* with the words *revival* and *reform* in the theme of the Fourteenth Institute. The oddness may be especially apparent in light of Wesley's opposition to the American Revolution (in "A Calm Address to Our American Colonies") and Élie Halévy's thesis that Wesley's Methodism was the primary factor for preventing in England violent political revolution that was suffered elsewhere in continental Europe in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.⁴ The suggestion to add "revolution" came not in connection with violent revolution, but rather because the pursuit of

3 This point is made clear by the variety of topics and points of view presented in the working groups of the Fourteenth Oxford Institute. Although this book cannot include all the papers presented on the theme, many of them are available on the Oxford Institute of Methodist Theological Studies website, <https://oxford-institute.org/>.

4 Élie Halévy, *A History of the English People in the Nineteenth Century*, trans. E. I. Watkin (New York: P. Smith, 1952).

scriptural holiness in this life has sometimes led to changes in social systems that seem revolutionary. The word opens reflection not only on the personal and the ecclesial, but also on the social relevance of Methodism.

The Plenary Papers from the Fourteenth Oxford Institute

Because the Fourteenth Oxford Institute named three dimensions of renewal in its theme, the plenary presentations engaged the theme in different ways. The presentations included not only lectures by a single speaker, but also panels that explored an aspect of the theme from different perspectives. All of the presentations are concerned with the way Methodists may be enlivened to make a difference where they are.

This book begins as the institute itself did with the panel that locates Methodism in relation to the Protestant Reformation. This volume's first chapter, consisting of three panel presentations, examines Wesley's reform in light of other reformers. Prof. Dr. Ulrike Schuler, a Methodist in Germany, reflects on the celebrations in Germany of the five hundredth anniversary of the Protestant Reformation. Although her paper covers Martin Luther's influence on Wesley, it also reconsiders history's focus on the Reformation as a period with towering figures. When the church is in need of reform, reformers rise to do God's work, even though they may be forgotten by others. Looking closely at the way Scripture was understood in the period of the Protestant Reformation, Dr. G. Sujin Pak compares Wesley's understanding of the soteriological message in Scripture to that of Luther and Calvin. She finds common commitments but suggests that Wesley was "protestant" in a different way. The Rev. Dr. Jonathan Dean looks at Wesley in relation to the English Reformation. He reminds us that the Church of England itself contains many elements from many reformers and Wesley's thinking about which elements the Church of England needed to recover changed over time.

The next five chapters were given as lectures. In chapter 2, the Rev. Prof. Pablo Andiñach considers the challenges of being faithful to the

gospel. He highlights the lives of four women from very different backgrounds and from different times and places in order to fire our imaginations to face new challenges. These women can serve as models for Methodists as we seek an identity that helps us to be faithful so we can take our place in what he describes as the “unfinished” Bible.

In chapter 3, Prof. Priscilla Pope-Levison also looks to women as models, in this case Methodist deaconesses. She sees in the deaconess movement an unrealized potential that might still provide a map for revival in global Methodism. Her work identifies five core elements in the movement that could spark revival if put into practice across Methodism today.

To seek revival in global Methodism, we must bear in mind the needs of different contexts. In chapter 4, the Rev. Dr. Albert Jebanesan considers how mission might be reformed in light of global, contextual realities. The spread of Methodism provides an opportunity to think in fresh ways about how we share the gospel, and he focuses on Sri Lanka as an example of how we can rethink mission. He sees the need for a theology of mission that can allow for Indigenization, or contextualization.

In chapter 5, the Rev. Prof. Nichole R. Phillips pursues questions about self-understanding. If Methodism wants to bring life to people, it must understand how those people understand themselves, and Rev. Prof. Phillips’s work provides insight into how people frame the narrative of their collective identity. She uses three examples (two involving working-class whites in East London and Youngstown, Ohio, and one involving working-class Blacks in the United States) to explore how people remember, respond, and interpret their collective experiences. Concepts of “selective forgetting” and “disremembering” illumine how these groups understand and tell their group history. If Methodism wants to respond to the plight of traumatized and marginalized groups, it would do well to consider the role of memory in shaping collective identity.

With a focus on The United Methodist Church in chapter 6, the Rev. Prof. Sarah Heaner Lancaster considers how revival might be different for a church than for early Methodism as a movement. Using

Wesley's image of "spiritual respiration," this paper thinks about the importance of constantly calling people who are marked by baptism to life with God, not just to dramatic conversion experiences.

Chapter 7 also consists of three panel presentations that examined connexionalism in flux. Connexionalism is such a deeply Methodist way of being that pressures on the connexion can either threaten the life and work of Methodism or present an opportunity for revival and reform. The Rev. Nicola V. Price-Tebbutt examines the way connexionalism is embodied in British Methodism, as explained in the report adopted by the Methodist Church in Britain titled *The Gift of Connexionalism in the 21st Century*. Her description shows that the understanding of connexionalism has changed over time in the face of challenges, but the importance of connexion has always been affirmed. The Very Rev. Dr. Chinonyerem Ekebuisi gives an account of how the principle of connexion took unique form in the Methodist Church Nigeria after it gained autonomy from the British Conference. The Methodist Church Nigeria shares the value of connexion but expresses it in distinctly African ways. Bishop Kenneth H. Carter Jr. reports on the state of connection (the US spelling) in The United Methodist Church as of the time of the meeting of the Fourteenth Oxford Institute. Speaking from his position as a moderator for the Commission on a Way Forward, Bishop Carter explains the process the Commission used to explore possible ways to address the threat to connection posed by different views within The United Methodist Church on the issue of same-sex relations.

Chapter 8 is the sermon preached at the close of the Oxford Institute in Wesley Memorial Methodist Church. The Rev. Prof. Peter Storey calls us to be the revolutionary church that breaks itself open so that the world can be mended.

The publication of these presentations from the Fourteenth Oxford Institute invites others into further reflection on revival, reform, and revolution so that this tradition may continue to pursue God's design for raising up the people called Methodist.