

Methodist Studies Seminar

Saturday 9th December 2023
Wesley Study Centre, Durham, and Online

The Methodist Studies Seminars were established in 2012 by the Manchester Wesley Research Centre and Oxford Centre for Methodism and Church History, Oxford Brookes University as a biannual seminar series. This collaboration has extended to include the Wesley Study Centre, St John's College, Durham University; Wesley House, Cambridge; Cliff College; and The Queen's Foundation, Birmingham. The seminars provide an opportunity for established and emerging scholars of Methodist Studies to present the findings of their research. We conceive of Methodist Studies broadly and aim to provide opportunities for students of history, theology, literature, art, material culture and other fields related to Methodism.

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| 9.30am | Arrivals, Tea & Coffee |
| 9.55am | Welcome (Rev Dr Liz Kent) |
| 10.00am | <i>Reimagining Outler's Interpretation of Wesley: Towards a New Theological Method</i>
Michael Simants, Durham University |
| 10.40am | Tea & Coffee |
| 11.10am | <i>Engaging Wesley in Post-Apartheid South Africa: A decolonial engagement with Wesley's construction of 'man'.</i>
Lauren Matthew, University of KwaZulu-Natal |
| 11:50am | <i>Ebenezer Blackwell: C18th banker, slave trader and Methodist (?)</i>
Dr Clive Norris, Methodist Church in Britain |
| 12.30pm | Lunch |
| 1.30pm | <i>Mariology among Methodists: An Historical Survey and Analysis</i>
Dr Jerome Van Kuiken, Oklahoma Wesleyan University |
| 2.10pm | <i>The life and ministry of Rev James Buckley</i>
Lord Griffiths of Burry Port, Methodist Church in Britain |
| 2.50pm | <i>Methodists as Messianic multitude in Myanmar</i>
Van Lal Thuam Lian, Luther King Centre, Manchester |
| 3.45pm | Closing Announcements |
| 3.50pm | Tea & Coffee, Viewing of the Methodist Tapestries* (optional) and Departures |

*To co-incide with the Methodist Studies Seminar, the Wesley Study Centre, Durham will be hosting an exhibition of the Methodist Tapestries Project (usually based at The Weardale Museum) [Methodist Tapestries Project \(weardalemuseum.org.uk\)](http://weardalemuseum.org.uk) . There will be an opportunity to view the tapestries over lunch, or at 4pm with a short talk by their curator.

Registration:

There is no cost for attending the seminar, but we ask attendees to register to assist us with planning.

Tea & coffee are provided but we ask attendees to bring their own lunch. For those wishing to purchase sandwiches etc, the nearest shop is 10 minutes walk away (Tesco express in the Marketplace (DH1 3NE), Greggs on Saddler Street (DH1 3NP) or Dunelm Foodstore on New Elvet (DH1 3AL)).

Questions can be addressed to Liz Kent at:

elizabeth.kent@durham.ac.uk .

To receive information about future seminars, you can sign up for the seminars mailing list [here](#).

Venue: Learning Resource Centre, St John's College, South Bailey, Durham, DH1 3RJ

Directions:

If you are joining us in person, we are at St John's College, 3 South Bailey, Durham, DH1 3RJ.

<https://www.durham.ac.uk/colleges-and-student-experience/colleges/st-johns/about/location/>

If you are coming by train or coach it takes approximately 20 minutes to walk from the railway station and slightly less from the bus station. There is a taxi rank at the railway station, and at the Framwellgate Bridge end of North Road. There is also a 'Cathedral Bus' which runs between the railway station and the Cathedral (which is then just a couple of minutes walk to St John's), leaving the station at 20 minute intervals.

If you are coming by car, please note that we are currently unable to offer you parking close to the college.

Parking is possible at:

Prince Bishops multi-storey – good security and 5 minutes walk to college

Durham station – good security and 20 minutes walk to college or use the 'Cathedral bus'

Once on foot in Durham, you should make your way to the Market Place and then along Saddler Street. Keep on this road, which becomes the North Bailey. It leads on to the South Bailey, and you will pass the Cathedral on your right hand side. The main entrance to St John's College, Haughton House, is an 18th century building set

back behind railings on the left-hand side of the road. Keep walking and pass the College Chapel on your right hand side. We are meeting in the Learning Resource Centre – the modern building next to the Chapel and facing the main College.

Livestreaming:

The presentations will be livestreamed on Zoom. All who register will be sent the Zoom link.

Abstracts

Michael Simants

Reimagining Outler's Interpretation of Wesley: Towards a New Theological Method

Instead of offering a formalized Doctrinal Statement to the newly formed United Methodist Church, Albert Outler gave the denomination a means of doing theology that emerged from his reading of John Wesley. This pattern became known as the Wesleyan Quadrilateral and argued for four primary theological authorities: Scripture, reason, tradition, and experience.

Over time this method has been critiqued for a variety of reasons. Some scholars have criticized the "shape" of the model, saying that the quadrilateral made all four authorities equal. Others have argued that the model was too open to religious pluralism. In their view, the model allows for a wide range of thoughts and ideas to be considered legitimately theological. Another set of critiques argues that Outler built the whole enterprise on a mythical understanding of Wesley's writings. They say that one cannot find anything akin to the Wesleyan Quadrilateral in Wesley. Finally, others have argued that the model excludes the work of the Holy Spirit.

In his recent survey of the Quadrilateral, Graham McFarlane argues for adding community to Outler's four authorities. An argument that AN Williams also makes in *The Architecture of Theology*.

Therefore, as a means of responding to these criticisms and adding community as a fifth theological authority, I propose reimagining Outler's original model. This revised model repositions the elements to highlight the importance of Scripture, makes explicit the work of the Holy Spirit as the mediator between authorities, and positions community as the locus within which theologizing happens.

Lauren Matthew

Engaging Wesley in Post-Apartheid South Africa: A decolonial engagement with Wesley's construction of 'man'.

Between 2014 and 2016, across several Southern African Universities, the *Fallist* movements (PatriarchyMustFall/FeesMustFall/RhodesMustFall) swept across the country. This movement, comprising both students and academics, called not only for free education but also the

decolonization of the academy. The movement sought to firstly make visible the persistent reproduction of rampant inequality in South Africa, secondly to expose the underpinning logics that entrench and perpetuate the existence of inequality and anti-blackness within South African societal systems, and thirdly and most importantly, challenge how we continue to invest and reproduce these logics within the academy and our broader societal structures and institutions.

The cries to decolonize triggered old South African racial tropes, by calling for the removing statues and memorials to colonialism. Through these symbolic actions, the epistemological privilege always uncritically granted to Western knowledge systems was intensely questioned. Particularly as it was demonstrated by the *Fallist* movement, that this same 'system of knowing', has devastated black South Africans while claiming to enfold blackness within the universal Western machinery of progress, enlightenment, and modernization. Decoloniality, in disrupting this normalized episteme, problematizes many concepts, among which is 'the (hu)man'. Decolonial thought asks: Whose humanity counts as (hu)man enough, as valid, or authoritative enough, so that their (hu)man experience becomes the standard through which knowledge can be constructed? Whose humanity is considered in constructing the (hu)man? These fundamental questions belie the complex and varied articulations of decolonization that have continually asserted themselves South Africa since 2014-2016.

As I and other Methodist Church of Southern Africa clergy supported and participated in the student protest marches through the Durban city centre at the time, I kept asking myself, "How do I preach from my Wesleyan theological tradition in such a time as this?" John Wesley's life spans the colonial European Enlightenment era. Therefore, the landscape of his theology unfolds within the period in which Europe and, particularly, Protestant Britain was establishing its identity of empire, progress and modernization. His understanding of the 'the human' and salvation are at the same time critical and reflective of this period.

While Wesley understands all (hu)man beings to as descending from Adam (which he asserts in his *Thoughts on Slavery*), and while Wesley understands that both the natural and moral image of God in (hu)man has been distorted during the fall, and that nonetheless the gift of God's prevenient grace is at work in all cultures and (hu)man societies, in varying degrees (Original Sin), he nonetheless is still drawing on the colonial categorizations of (hu)man in developing his anthropology and in his theology of perfection and salvation. Decoloniality is the practice of analytic strategies of resistance that attempt to identify, interrogate, detach from and reimagine Western hegemonies of knowing and being that have been essentialized, naturalized and depicted as normative in human society. This paper seeks to engage with Wesleyan concepts of the (hu)man by situating Wesley within his historical and philosophical contexts and by drawing on the rich heritage of decolonial thought within the Southern African context in an attempt to answer the question: How do I preach the Wesleyan tradition in Southern Africa, at a time such as this?"

Dr Clive Norris

Ebenezer Blackwell: an eighteenth-century banker, slave trader, and Methodist (?)

Ebenezer Blackwell was a highly successful eighteenth-century banker and businessman. He was a friend of George Whitefield and the Wesley brothers and an active supporter of early Methodism and various philanthropic causes. He adopted a clear ethical framework for his business activities and on his death was eulogized by the Wesleys. However he was also a gambler and participant in

the slave trade. Should we therefore see Blackwell's life as one of contradiction, or was there an underlying harmony derived from his Christian faith?

Dr Jerome Van Kuiken

Mariology Amongst Methodists: An Historical Survey and Analysis

From the Wesley brothers onward, Methodism has been decidedly minimalist in its belief and practice regarding the Virgin Mary. The rise of modern ecumenism has encouraged a variety of attempts by Methodists to reassess, and in some cases expand upon, their received Mariology. This paper surveys and analyzes the history and current state of Mariological reflection within Methodism, concluding with brief constructive proposals.

Lord Griffiths of Burry Port

The life and ministry of Rev James Buckley

James Buckley was born and raised in Lancashire, was converted, became a very young ordained minister and stationed to South Wales. Wesley had visited Llanelli several times (on his way to or from Ireland) and planted the seeds of Methodism there.

Buckley was soon stationed to Leeds where he played a key (though untrumpeted) part in the launch of the Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society. He was then sent to London where he was minister at our City Road church. Here he developed his interests in overseas work, inaugurated the Junior Missionary Association, and was one of the founding general secretaries of the now officially established WMMS.

Then he was sent back to Wales as chairman of the District (not called that at the time). Churches in Brecon and Pentrelifior, built by him, are the only surviving 18th century Methodist churches in the Principality.

By a tragic series of accidents, he inherited the entire business operation of his father-in-law. This included a brewer and Buckleys brewery was the local brand of beer until just a few years ago. You can still buy a pint of "The Reverend James" beer in many pubs across South Wales. One pub, re-named in honour of the 200th anniversary of Buckley's entry into full connexion now sports his name. It's to be found in Loughor, near the spot where Buckley almost died in quicksand as he made his way by foot from Swansea to Llanelli.

Van Lal Thuam Lian @ Thuama

Methodists as Messianic Multitude in Myanmar

Myanmar has been under the domination of the military authoritarianism for over half of a century. The people in Myanmar had a messianic hope with Aung San Suu Kyi who was perceived as a "messianic saviour" in the tradition of *minlaung* (future king) expectation in Myanmar. However, with the last coup in 2021 the military forcibly removed Suu Kyi and other leaders from their offices. Suu Kyi was imprisoned and has been sentenced to overall jail time of 33 years. Given her age and the current political situation, it appears that Suu Kyi has been removed from Myanmar's political scene

and her role is over for good. The expectation the people had in Suu Kyi to overthrow the rule of the military came to an end, and the task of dismantling the domination of the military has fallen on the shoulder of the poor and oppressed people themselves. In the wake of the 2021 coup, the world witnessed the unprecedented, united anti-military movement of the people of Myanmar from different ethnic, religious, and social backgrounds. It can be said that the liberation of the people is not to be expected from a “messianic *minlaung*” (Aung San Suu Kyi or any individual charismatic leader), instead it must be from the anti-military movement of the “messianic multitude,” the poor and oppressed people of different ethnic and religious groups in Myanmar.

Methodism started as a movement among and of the ‘multitude,’ a movement ‘from the least to the greatest.’ In Methodist theologian Rieger’s words, the dynamic of early Methodism “depended on its relation to common people and members of the working class who would become leaders of their own movement and who began to shape their own their own destiny.”¹ Drawing on Rieger and Pui-lan’s ‘theology of the multitude’ in their book “Occupy Religion: Theology of the Multitude” (2012), in this paper I will discuss how Methodists in Myanmar, who are ‘minority of minorities,’ can be part of the ‘messianic multitude’ in their struggle against the domination of military to build a more open, inclusive, and peaceful nation.

¹ Joerg Rieger, *Globalization and Theology* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2010), 44.