JOHN WESLEY AND THE FAITH FORMATION OF CHILDREN:
LESSONS FOR THE CHURCH

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Dissertation Abstract

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Abstract

John Wesley, an eighteenth century pastor, practical theologian, and founder of Methodism, offered teachings and writings on child faith formation. Research suggested that there is a lack of literature on Wesley’s teachings and practices that specifically relates to child faith formation. This dissertation seeks to recapture Wesley’s teachings and practices on child faith formation through an historical qualitative study of Wesley’s primary sources that addressed child faith formation. This study focused on answering the three questions Wesley and the first Methodist conference of ministers considered worthy of consideration - what to teach, how to teach, and who shall teach. A four step coding process was completed on the document’s text that includes descriptive, topical, and analytical coding. The data analysis resulted in responses to the three research questions and an additional question, why teach. The findings revealed Wesley saw the purpose of Christian education to right the wrong of human nature, parents were seen as the primary “instructors” with the responsibility of child faith formation on everyone within the Methodist societies, and the “instructors” were to have the teachings of Christ in their own minds, hearts, and lives. The findings also revealed that instruction was to be early, frequently, on the child’s developmental level, building on the child’s previous knowledge, relational, experiential, and holistic; and the instruction should include insights into who is God, who are we, what has God done, and how are we to respond. The analysis results presented by document and by code revealed a summation to the questions based on the primary studies, implications for today, and opportunities for further research.

Keywords: Wesley, child, faith, formation, Methodism, religious instruction