THE REV. DR. JOHN W. E. BOWEN, SR. (1855-1933)
Cover: John W. E. Bowen, Sr., college and university educator, and one of the first African Americans to earn a Ph.D. degree in the United States. He, among others, provided crucial Black leadership in the MEC. See Harris article (pages 14-26). Photo is circa 1880s.
METHODIST HISTORY

Alfred T. Day III, Editor

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EDITOR’S NOTE

*Methodist History* readers are due to receive this issue on or about October 31, Reformation Day. This year, 2017, marks the 500th year since Martin Luther nailed his 95 arguments for ecclesial reform to the castle church door in Wittenberg, Germany.

Methodists’ relationship to Reformation Day is not the direct line which Lutherans, Presbyterians and Baptists can claim. The Reformation in England, coming by way of Henry the VIII and his rows with Rome, set the stage for the Wesley’s “reformation” of the Reformation a few generations later.

At its heart, reformation, whether in with capital or lower case “r” is the process of renewing an institution and its practices, reasserting and clarifying its core beliefs and actions. In the case of the Wesleys’ and Methodism, the Protestant Reformation’s key credo of justification by faith alone becomes more than a mere pardon for sin. Receiving such amazing grace ignites holiness of heart and behavior.

This idea of sanctification was always a doctrine in Christian theology. Across the centuries, institutions and their dogma become official systems more concerned with preservation than transformation. The sparks that once fired reformation and renewal become regulation.

At a Reformation 500 event held in Wittenberg, Germany, sponsored by The Community of Protestant Churches in Europe, Germany Central Conference Bishop Rosemarie Wenner said, “If we make the renewal-power of the gospel work, reformation will happen any time.”

We who are concerned with the work of history are always looking for realigning, renewing, reorganizing, reconstructing, renovating, rearranging, and reforming moments. They are critical markers on the timelines we construct. This and every issue of *Methodist History* is full of such markers illuminating the shifts from past, to present, to future.

Randy Maddox’s essay draws together five manuscript letters of Sarah Wesley, Jr., wherein she describes to a friend the death accounts of her father, Charles Wesley; her uncle, John Wesley; and her beloved aunt, Martha (Wesley) Hall—the last three siblings of their generation, who died within about three years of each other. Several of these letters have not been published previously. Together they shed light on both the dynamics of the Wesley family and the eighteenth-century ideal of the “good death.”

Paul Harris’ essay addresses the post-Civil War Methodist Episcopal Church reentering the South with considerable evangelistic and educational success among freed slaves through their Freedmen’s Aid Society. Simultaneously, Methodists in the North attracted numerous white
Southerners, giving the Church a large biracial membership. Mission was thus torn between a promise to include blacks in denominational life and policy that separated “colored work” under the guise of developing black leaders for their own churches. These leaders lived in tension between a desire to cultivate friendly relations with whites and a determination to assert their rights to equality and recognition.

Joe Super’s essay examines the role of the annual conference in the expansion of in late nineteenth and early twentieth-century Methodism in industrializing West Virginia. Annual conferences were the vital cultivators of the denomination, intermediaries between local congregations and the General Conference, annual hubs around which valuable resources reached unchurched areas. Super shows how annual conferences are overlooked when examining the connection between religion and industrialization. The essay also reveals great diversity in Appalachian Protestantism at the turn of the century cautioning against generalizations about the region and sub-regions within Appalachia.

David Bundy’s essay examines the crisis provoked in Neuchâtel, Switzerland, by a group of young “Methodist” theological students, namely Jean-Henri Granpierre and Samuel-Auguste de Petitpierre, exploring the nature of their “Methodism.” Unsatisfied with the reformed faith of their rearing, these students adopted and adapted the spirituality of Pietists and Moravians they encountered at Tübingen. Were they not sons of the bourgeoisie, they might have been denied education or ordination. The theology demonstrated in the students’ writings reveal parallels with English Methodists without use of English Methodist resources. The essay builds on Bundy’s previous essay about Methodist’s problematic relations with the local religious establishment in Neuchâtel.

Alex Parrish’s essay explores the educational efforts of The Woman’s Home Missionary Society of the Methodist Episcopal Church (WMHS) for indigenous Alaskans during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The WMHS prioritized an educational initiative that attempted to absorb Alaska Native culture into American culture and attempted to “civilize” Alaska Natives. The education included formal classroom instruction as well as industrial school training, and attracted attention and support from both individuals and businesses. The essay was first presented at a meeting of The Historical Society of The United Methodist Church in Anchorage, Alaska.

Good reading to all.

Alfred T. Day III