

SAMUEL WESLEY, SR.: A LATE SEVENTEENTH-CENTURY ENGLISH ABOLITIONIST

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In a recent article, William Cook anticipated the bi-centennial of the abolition of the slave trade in England and in particular, the work of the noted abolitionist, William Wilberforce. He maintained that Wilberforce had become a forgotten name from British memory when he should be remembered as a national figure along with the likes of Nelson and Wellington.¹ However, with the 2007 release of the movie, *Amazing Grace*, Wilberforce is becoming better known. While not a noted national figure in the United States, Wilberforce is remembered within Wesleyan circles (perhaps Wilberforce is better remembered in English Wesleyan circles as well) because he is forever yoked with John Wesley. Wesley's final 1791 letter was penned to that still young man of thirty-one, to steel him early in his opposition against the slave trade.²

There is also another often forgotten person who came out of the Wesley tradition: Samuel Wesley, Sr., the father of John and Charles. Positive contributions of Samuel Wesley, whether familial, intellectual, or societal, have been viewed as few or largely forgotten since his death in 1735. When remembered, he is usually only noteworthy as the father of John and Charles or the husband of Susanna. In this paper I will examine Samuel Wesley's foundational response to slavery and the slave trade. This response has not been explored in relation to Wesley's views as he expressed it in the 1690's periodical, the *Athenian Mercury/Gazette*.³ In it, Wesley countered a number of contemporary arguments in favor of the slave trade, advocated the immorality of slavery and even intimated the abolition of slavery itself.

Wesley was well-versed in the arguments both for and against slavery and represented a socially progressive voice which questioned the legitimacy of slavery at home and abroad. Samuel Wesley responded to the question about the legitimacy of slavery in the *Athenian Gazette*. His response is of interest for a number of reasons. First, it has not been included in any of

¹ William Cook, "Britain's Forgotten Hero," *New Statesman*, Oct. 23, 2006, 34.

² John Wesley also widely distributed his tract, *Thoughts Upon Slavery*, 1774 in England and America under his own name. Actually it is an abridgement of *Some Historical Accounts of Guinea*, published in Philadelphia in 1771 by Anthony Benezet, an American Quaker.

³ Dunton's *Athenian Oracle* can be found on the electronic site, Eighteenth Century Documents. I have cited Wesley from volume one of the 1728 *Athenian Oracle* which was a reprinted compilation of all the decade of the 1690 *Athenian Gazette/Mercury* editions. I have used the names interchangeably in this essay.

the early accounts on which offer an opinion on slavery and Wesley's views were contemporary with the early Friends and the Puritan Richard Baxter. Based on the content and layout of Wesley's reply, he was probably familiar with Baxter's 1673 *Christian Directory*.⁴ Helen Berry noted that Baxter's *Directory* was "One of the most influential didactic works to emerge at this time" and the *Directory* "enjoyed considerable popularity in the last decades of the seventeenth century."⁵ In addition, Wesley was schooled early by Dissenters until he decided to leave Dissent and matriculated at Oxford when he was twenty-one. While Wesley shared a common Dissenter heritage with Baxter, he went beyond Baxter's admonishments to Christian slave holders to be more Christian in their dealings with their slaves.

Second, the arguments which Wesley presented have some similarities to the Quaker George Keith's 1693 pamphlet, *An Exhortation and Caution to Friends Concerning buying or keeping of Negroes*. This pamphlet was initially a sermon Keith delivered in Philadelphia to his fellow Quakers. He subsequently had it published in England prior to his trial and eventual expulsion from the Quakers.⁶

Third, Wesley, as an ordained cleric, represented an abolitionist voice from the Church of England. Wesley's perspective is intriguing simply for the fact there were few abolitionist voices in the late seventeenth century.⁷ Most originated from Quakers who opposed slavery and advocated an inherent equal status of Blacks and Whites particularly when Blacks converted to Christianity. Winthrop Jordan has identified only fifteen examples of abolitionist sentiment before 1750, almost all of them by Quakers.⁸ The earliest objections included the 1688 Germantown Friends' protest, *Remonstrance Against Slavery and the Slave Trade*; George Keith's 1693 pamphlet; and the Puritan Samuel Sewall's *The Selling of Joseph* (1700). Wesley's comments probably were written around 1691 or 1692 in an early issue of *The Athenian Mercury/Gazette*.

This essay will present a summary of Baxter's thought on slavery gleaned from his 1673 *Directory*, Keith's 1693 *Exhortation*, and Wesley's response to a questioner on slavery printed in the *Athenian Mercury/Gazette*. Wesley used some commonly-known arguments against slavery but also added some

⁴ Richard Baxter, *A Christian directory, or, A summ of practical theologie and cases of conscience directing Christians how to use their knowledge and faith, how to improve all helps and means, and to perform all duties, how to overcome temptations, and to escape or mortifie every sin: in four parts . . .* (London: Robert White for Nevill Simmons, 1673).

⁵ Helen Berry, *Gender, Society and Print Culture in Late-Stuart England: The Cultural World of the Athenian Mercury* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2003), 109.

⁶ Keith was first disowned by the Philadelphia Quakers and then after returning to England, expelled by the English Quakers. See C. Duncan Rice, *The Rise and Fall of Black Slavery* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State UP, 1973), 188.

⁷ Morgan Godwyn (bapt. 1640 d. 1685x1709) was another. See his *Trade preferr'd before Religion, Christ made to give place to Mammon: Represented in a Sermon Relating to the Plantations*. (London: B. Took, 1685).

⁸ See Donald Petesch's citation in *A Historical Guide to World Slavery*, eds. Seymour Drescher and Stanley L. Engerman (New York: Oxford UP, 1998), 50.

new ones of his own. I believe Wesley went beyond what had already been written by Baxter (who argued for Christian treatment of slaves for the purpose of their conversion), and this argument against slavery preceded Keith's sermon by at least a year.

I

A non-conforming Puritan, Richard Baxter (1615-1691) was an early voice who spoke against some aspects of the slave trade. He wrote two books in which he discussed slavery: *Aphorismes of justification, with their explication annexed wherein also is opened the nature of the covenants, satisfaction, righteousness, faith, works, &c.* (1655)⁹ and *A Christian Directory, or a Summ of Practical Theology and Cases of Conscience* (1673). In the latter book Martin Klein writes that Baxter "condemned the violence of the slave trade and the cruelty of slave masters in the West Indies. Baxter saw their behavior as unchristian greed and covetousness. He urged slave masters to bring their slaves to Christianity and recommended obedience by the slaves."¹⁰

Baxter's intent in this particular directive in *A Christian Directory* was to address the poor treatment and conditions of the slaves. He advocated treating slaves well in "foreign [*sic*] plantations." He also insisted on the slaves being evangelized and counseled against those "that keep their Negro's and slaves from hearing God's word." Baxter wrote concerning "The Duties of Masters towards their Servants." He included six directives using a catechetical model, posing a question and then an answer.

1. Is it lawful for a Christian to buy and use a man as a slave? . . . 2. Is it lawful to use a Christian as a slave? . . . 3. What difference must we make between a free servant and a slave? . . . 4. What if men buy Negroes or other slaves of such as we may think did steal them, or buy them of robbers and tyrants, and not by consent? . . . 5. May I not sell such again and make my mony [*sic*] of them? . . . 6. May I not return them to him that I bought them of?¹¹

These questions and Baxter's answers were presupposed by the first of his seven directives which was to, "Understand well how far your power over your slaves extended, and what limits God hath set thereto."¹² Baxter believed there was a place for enslavement but made some qualifications depending on circumstances. In the case of the slave trade itself, he was opposed to how they were obtained. He objected to the violence which procured the slaves and how they were subsequently treated. "To go as Pirats [*sic*] and

⁹ Richard Baxter, *Aphorismes of justification, with their explication annexed wherein also is opened the nature of the covenants, satisfaction, righteousness, faith, works, &c.* : published especially for the use of the church of Kederminster in Worcestershire / by their unworthy teacher Ri. Baxter (Hague: Abraham Brown, 1655).

¹⁰ Martin Klein, *Historical Dictionary of Slavery and Abolition* (Lanham, MA: Scarecrow, 2002), 60.

¹¹ Baxter, *A Christian Directory*, 557-559.

¹² Baxter, 559.

catch up poor Negro's or people of another land, that never forfeited life or liberty, and to make them slaves, and sell them, is one of the worst kinds of thievery in the world." They were taken and used "as beasts for their meer [*sic*] commodity, and [masters] betray or destroy or neglect their souls." He considered these kind of masters more "incarnate Devils than Christians, though they [the slaves] be not Christians whom they so abuse."¹³

He responded further against the purchase of slaves resulting from their capture in an alleged, lawful war. "It is their heynous [*sic*] sin to buy them, unless it be in charity to deliver them . . . because by right the man is his own, and therefore no man else can have just title to him."¹⁴ Baxter's issues centered around misuse of property shown by the remaining six directives.

Baxter furthermore believed the status and responsibilities of masters were seen as: 2. "Christ's trustees or guardians of their [slave's] souls;" 3. To be the slave's teachers, and are called to show them the way to heaven since God "cast [the slaves] as lower than yourselves;" 4. Masters were bound to "love them as yourselves, and to do to as you would be done by if your case were his." (This was Baxter's variation on the Golden Rule); 5. To require no more of a slave than a servant. 6. "To not be too hasty in baptizing them when they desire it, nor too slow;" and 7. To buy and use slaves so as to make it your chief aim "to win them to Christ and save their souls."¹⁵ These directives summarized Baxter's understanding of the roles of master and slave.

Baxter questioned the means of slavery and placed limits on the extent of slavery, but not the actual trade or its abolition. He believed masters and their slaves to be equal spiritually, but not temporally, thus they both needed to abide by the divine order for their lives. In this order, the masters were the trustees of their slaves's souls and they were to both live according to God's ordained design as Baxter understood it.

II

The Quakers in Pennsylvania were not of one mind concerning their response to the slave trade in either the colonies or in England. Even though they had previously in 1688 pronounced opposition to the slave trade, this position was not held in common by all Quakers. George Keith's publicly avowed abolitionist views made him a controversial figure among the Quakers. While many Quakers also supported abolition, the very fact that the issue of slavery was divisive made many within that community uneasy. Ultimately unity of one mind prevailed over an individual issue. This decision may have resulted in the disregarding of Keith's abolitionist position. Keith was like a lightning rod inviting lively debate and always loved a good debate over principle. He would eventually face a trial for heresy in London in 1694. Before his ultimate expulsion from the Quakers, he

¹³ Baxter, *Directory*, 559.

¹⁴ Baxter, 560.

¹⁵ Baxter, 560.

made a number of appeals in his sermon, *An Exhortation and Caution to Friends Concerning buying or keeping of Negroes*.¹⁶ In it he argued against the slave trade using theological arguments derived from scripture which included universal justification stemming from on Christ's sacrificial death, unlimited atonement, universality of humanity, and the freedom of all people to choose to believe.

Keith objected to the slave trade for many of the same reasons as Baxter. Keith opposed the poor treatment of slaves. He believed the trade was subject to the Quaker renunciation of buying "stolen goods." Keith also cited the Golden Rule, not as the way to Christianize enslavement as Baxter proposed, but as the rationale for liberating slaves. Keith was in agreement with the 1688 statement of the Quakers and advocated a universal atonement for all people. He embraced a ransom atonement which was extended to save humanity and not "to bring any part of Mankind into outward bondage, slavery or misery." For Keith, salvation was meant to "ease and deliver the oppressed and distressed and bring into Liberty both inward and outward,"¹⁷ by which he meant a soul's inward enslavement to sin and also the physical outward institutional enslavement.

Keith went beyond Baxter with his suggested remedy for enslavement. He called for "Faithful Friends" to actively relieve the suffering of slaves and "set them free of their hard bondage." He did not believe enslavement was to endure for the entire life of a person nor extend to their children. He deemed the practice as "a great hinderance [*sic*] to the spreading of the Gospel, as the occasion for war, cruelty, oppression and theft and robber." He believed these good works by sincere Christian served "to prepare them to be receptive to the preaching of the Gospel of Christ and embrace the faith of Christ." He appealed to the Friends that the "stealing of people violated the Golden Rule and Law." Therefore, they were "not to buy any slave unless for the express purpose to set them free." If one already owned slaves, then "after some reasonable time of moderate Service" they were to free them, but not before having taught "them to read, and give them a Christian Education."¹⁸

While Baxter's evangelistic goal remained set in the status quo of slavery, Keith believed that the act of freeing helped prepare the slave for the possibility of a Christian life after freedom.

III

Samuel Wesley's response to slavery comes to us via the late seventeenth-century publication, *The Athenian Mercury/Gazette* which was the earliest

¹⁶ George Keith, [sermon] *An Exhortation and Caution to Friends Concerning Buying or Keeping of Negroes. Given Forth by our monthly meeting in Philadelphia, the 13th day of the 8th month, 1693* (New York: Wm. Bradford, 1693).

¹⁷ Keith, 1.

¹⁸ Keith, 2, 3.

pamphlet of its kind.¹⁹ John Dunton's most successful enterprise as a publisher, he with Richard Sault and Wesley²⁰ formed a triumvirate who responded twice a week to the burning questions of their day.²¹ Dunton was not qualified to provide expertise in answering many of the questions submitted to him. His qualifications lay in the printing and promotion of the *Gazette*. Dunton reserved for himself the job of arranging the questions while Wesley and Sault had the responsibilities for a preface and for compiling an index for thirty numbers which eventually would be published separately as one volume. Sault was a mathematician by training who ran a small school in London. In 1694, he would write "A Treatise of Algebra" and he ultimately taught mathematics at Cambridge University until his death in 1702. Wesley had recently graduated from Exeter College at Oxford and was an ordained priest in the Anglican Church. He had expertise in the areas of religion, Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek languages, and poetry, and history.

All three recognized the desire of the London populace for the latest in accurate information. "For the disoriented population of a rapidly growing city, the Athenians knew the newest answers in medicine, law, religion, and etiquette."²² Dunton's stated purpose was:

to endeavour the Answering any reasonable Question which should be proposed, was a thing of such a Nature, as all the Ingenious appeared highly pleased with; nor has the Esteem and Success it has hitherto met with in the World, given us any reason to repent of our first undertaking. There's nothing the nature of Man is more desirous of, than Knowledge; he pursues it to a fault, and will fly even to Hell itself to advance it And the first and most natural way to obtain this knowledge, is by Questions and Answers, into which all Disputations, all Experiments, and every part of Philosophy are easily resolved.²³

There were other reasons for presenting this format, including profit, but also an altruistic desire on the part of Dunton to have a vehicle which contributed to moral reform. Wesley and Sault also sought to use the *Gazette* as a means to change public morals through their writings. This motive was consistent with other societies which were being created, and the *Mercury* anticipated the subsequent creation of the Society for the Reformation of Manners, the Society for the Propagation of Christian Knowledge (SPCK), and the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts (SPG). There was in the background of many of these questions a desire for moral

¹⁹ [John Dunton] Member of the Athenian Oracle, *The Athenian Oracle, Being an entire collection of all the valuable questions and answers in the Old Athenian Mercuries*, 3rd ed. (London: J. and J. Knapton, et. al.), 1728.

²⁰ Wesley had recently graduated from Exeter College at Oxford University and ordained a priest in the Anglican Church. He brought expertise in the areas of religion, oriental languages, i.e. Hebrew, Greek, and Aramaic, poetry, and history. Some contributions were also made by Daniel Defoe and Dr. John Norris who refused payment for their services.

²¹ Urmi Bhowmik, "Facts and Norms in the Marketplace of Print: John Dunton's Athenian Mercury," *Eighteenth Century Studies* 36:3 (2003): 350.

²² C. John Sommerville, *The News Revolution in England: Cultural Dynamics of Daily Information* (New York: Oxford UP, 1996), 104.

²³ Bhowmik, 354.

change within English society and Wesley's response to the question on the legitimacy of slavery fit exactly that purpose. The questions were submitted mostly by the populace at large and answered by one of the three, depending on who had particular expertise in that area. Wesley's specific contribution were his responses to the questions in the areas of history and religion.²⁴

IV

The question posed by a questioner and answered by Wesley was "Whether trading for negroes, i.e. carrying them out of their own country into perpetual slavery, be in it self unlawful, and especially contrary to the great law of [C]hristianity?" Wesley prefaced his response: "Sir, after a mature and serious consideration of the question propos'd, I am for the affirmative, and cannot see how such a trade (tho' much us'd by [C]hristians) can be any way justified, and fairly reconciled to the [C]hristian-law: And here first let me propose my reasons, and then answer such weak pleas as use to be made at it."²⁵

Wesley's objections were threefold. First, it was against "the great law of nature of doing unto all men as we would they should do unto us" (Matt. 7:22). It was much the same as the Quaker argument of adhering to Golden Rule. The specific violation was in the stealing a man "away from his native country, and hurry'd into perpetual bondage." It included having children snatched from a parent's embrace. Neither practice could be reconciled to the Golden Rule. Wesley warned that once they accepted the Gospel, Christian slave owners would be more severely judged than those whom are ignorant of the light they have been given because they "deprived them of that liberty which God and nature had given them."²⁶ [Note: This final question in volume one is misnumbered, following page 544. It must have been added at the end since there were already pages 529-532.]

Second, Wesley used arguments similar to Baxter and Keith's, which agreed that the means of procuring slaves was inconsistent with the Golden Rule. Wesley established his understanding on the basis of biblical passages which offered specific guidance to the Golden Rule; slavery violated various passages from the Word of God as Wesley saw it, citing Exodus 21:16, "He that stealeth a man, and selleth him, or if he be found in his hands, he shall surely be put to death." Wesley interpreted this as all-inclusive regardless of status: "brothers, or stranger, a meer [*sic*] heathen or a pagan." The punishment was death because "Liberty is as dear as life itself." Death was preferable to Wesley, for to "sell a man into some kind of bondage, would do him a greater kindness to free him from a miserable life." Wesley included

²⁴ Adam Clarke, *Memoirs*, "I cannot exactly tell what part Mr. Wesley had in this work (*Athenian Mercury*); but after carefully examining five of the original volumes, with their Supplements, I have been led to conclude that all the questions in divinity and ancient ecclesiastical history, most of those in poetry, with many of those in natural philosophy, were answered by him," 111. It is an assessment with which I concur based on his linguistic style.

²⁵ Dunton, *Athenian Oracle*, 1:529.

²⁶ Dunton, 1:529.

a text from I Timothy 1:10, which placed a “man-stealer” with other grievous sinners: “murderers of fathers and murderers of mother and defilers of themselves with ma[n]kind.”²⁷

Wesley’s third argument reflected slavery’s stain on the good reputation of Christianity. It “makes the name of Christ to be blasphem’d among the Gentiles, and (in all likelihood) hinders the propagation of the [C]hristian faith in the world.”²⁸ He proposed a counter economic argument, “that if a fair and honest trade and commerce had been carry’d on amongst them, and no violence had been done to their persons, [C]hristianity might have gotten as great footing . . . as it has amongst the poor infidels of New England.”²⁹ By not so doing, they hindered God’s design “for which Christ came from heaven . . . to have the mind and will of God known unto the world.”³⁰

Like Baxter and Keith, Wesley shared their concern on how slavery would tarnish the reputation of Christianity as perceived by others. But there were others during Wesley’s time who denied slavery’s taint on Christianity and defended the practice. Wesley believed they were those whose self interest “lies in the balance.” He refuted six contemporary defenses of the slave trade and slavery he had heard. First, the slave trade did not engage in stealing; second, slaves were in fact, prisoners of war; third, they were not equal because they were heathen; fourth, the Old Testament condoned slavery by the Jews; fifth, slavery was (civically) legal; and sixth, slavery improved the slave or humanized the slave. I will now discuss these in detail.

Plea #1. We deny the charge, we do not steal them, but make a lawful purchase of them.

Wesley dismissed the denial of stealing equating their purchase “(for toys and baubles)” because those who have sold them “do steal them, or take them away by violence.”³¹ He quoted a Cornish proverb: “The healer is as bad as the stealer,” meaning the receiver is as bad as the thief.³² He fortified the argument with a similar passage from Proverbs 29:24, “Whoso is partner with a thief, hateth his own soul,” as well as Psalms 50:18, “When thou sawest a thief, then thou consentedst with him.” He also cited Bishop Hall’s *Decade of Cases of Conscience* which rendered judgment against those who buy goods known to be stolen, thereby becoming an accessory to the theft.³³

Plea #2. But most of them are taken prisoners of war by one petty prince from another and sold by the conqueror.

Wesley cited personal sources and refuted the war argument because the war had been started because of bribes made to one of the princes of the land. “tis usual for the traders in this unlawful commodity, to send presents

²⁷ Dunton, *Athenian Oracle*, 1:529.

²⁸ Dunton, 1:529.

²⁹ Dunton, 1:529-530.

³⁰ Dunton, 1:530.

³¹ Dunton, 1:530.

³² www.ling.upenn.edu/~kurisuto.germanic/mode-jennings.txt. Accessed April 25, 2007.

³³ Bishop Joseph Hall (1574-1654) was Bishop of Exeter and Norwich.

to some petty prince among them, to make war with his neighbouring prince, to take such prisoners, and furnish their cargo.”³⁴

Plea #3. *Those men are more heathens than pagans.*

Wesley challenged the cited differences between people and emphasized common rights “which an indulgent creator has given them as well as we.” Treating humanity so differently was not the example set by “our Lord and master’s example” nor the apostle Paul who “bid us do good unto all men, and especially unto the household of faith” (Gal. 6:10). He conceded that “we ought to be kinder to our brother [C]hristian, yet surely he ought to do good, or at least to do no wrong to meer [*sic*] pagans and infidels.”³⁵ Wesley had a universal understanding of humanity stemming from his believe in God as Creator of all people.

Plea #4. *Did not the Jews b[u]y slaves? How often do we read of the bond servant bought with their money in the Jewish law, and may we not do what God’s own people did?*

Wesley then addressed a commonly used text from the Hebrew Bible. First he made the interpretive distinction between the Hebrew canon and the New Testament. Using a supercessionist view of the Bible, “the judicial law of Moses is made void, and no rule for [C]hristians to walk by, who are not under the law, but under grace.”³⁶

Even setting aside the theological point, Wesley pointed out that the advocates for slavery do not even treat slaves the way the Jews were mandated. “They were obliged to bring them up in the true religion,”³⁷ as God commanded Abraham, “he that is born in thine house, or bought with money of any stranger which is not of thy seed, such an one must needs be circumcised, and brought into covenant with God” (Gen. 17:12-13). Secondly, he cited Exodus 22:21, “Be kind unto strangers, for you your selves were strangers in the land of Egypt.”

Plea #5. *The law of our land allows it.*

The civil law is then used to support the case. At that time, in England proper, the conversion of a slave meant manumission. “As soon as he can give an account of the [C]hristian faith, and desires to be baptized, any charitable, lawful minister may do it, and then he is under the same law with other [C]hristians.”³⁸

However, Wesley was well aware that manumission was not guaranteed in the colonies. “As for our islander abroad, from whence they came, what kind of [C]hristians the most of them are, I need not inform you: Tis their great *Diana*, [Acts 19:24] by this case, he that will do any thing that the law, (which can never provide in all cases) does not plainly forbid, would be but

³⁴ Dunton, *Athenian Oracle*, 1:530.

³⁵ Dunton, 1:530.

³⁶ Dunton, 1:531.

³⁷ Dunton, 1:531.

³⁸ Dunton, 1:531.

a bad subject, and I'm sure a worse [C]hristian."³⁹ Wesley believed the good citizen went beyond the letter of the law and should endeavor to embrace the spirit of God's expectations.

Plea #6. [We] *make them, those useless creatures, to become greatly advantageous to mankind, bring them into a happier condition, and many of them become good [C]hristians, &c.*

The last plea argued that slavery improved the condition of the enslaved person. Wesley challenged the very system and order of slavery as counter to God's order. "How dare we pretend to order things better than and All-wise law-giver has plainly commanded us, or think to put those poor wretches to better uses than an All-wise Providence seems as yet design'd them for?" Wesley noted poignantly that they did not come freely, but had to be forcibly "carried to purchase 'em.' Why the need for "chains and bolts and fetters."⁴⁰

Wesley sympathized with the slaves plight and noted how they "endeavour to starve or destroy themselves, or leap overboard" rather than submit to perpetual slavery. Further, he asked that if the enslaved were happy, then why "when one of their fellow-slaves dies, all the rest sing and rejoice, and dance about him, as foolishly concluding he is happily return'd to his own country?"⁴¹

Finally, even if they did become Christian, it in no way justified the practice of slavery for either the buyer or the seller of the person. A converted slave did not compensate for slavery's means. "'Tis more than the seller knows or any way obliges the purchaser to, neither can atone [*sic*] for the rest."⁴² This position is remarkable for Wesley who was a committed evan-

³⁹ Junius Rodriguez gives some pertinent examples which include Maryland's 1664 law "stating that Christian baptism did not affect the slave status that was imposed upon Black servants within the colony—effectively, Blacks were considered servants for life. This measure was necessitated because certain precedents in English common law allowed for the emancipation of slaves who became converts to Christianity and then established a legal domicile within the colony." Rodriguez's *Chronology* offers the most detailed listing of state laws dating between 1664 and 1720. Junius P. Rodriguez, *Chronology of World Slavery* (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 1999), 199.

The Duke of York's 1665 law for New York which "recognized the legality of slavery within the colony and did not prevent the enslavement of Native American peoples or Christian Africans" (200).

In 1667, England's Parliament which passed the Act to Regulate the Negroes on the British Plantations and described persons of African descent as possessing a "wild, barbarous and savage nature, to be controlled only with strict severity" (200).

In 1669, "Virginia's House of Burgesses repealed an earlier law which gave freedom to converted slaves, a precedent that Maryland would follow. More devastating was Virginia's statute which acquitted a slave-owner of murder if he 'destroyed his own estate' which set the precedent that a slave's value as an item of property superseded a the slave's value as a person" (200).

Also Maryland's similar legislation in 1671 which stated that conversion did not affect condition of slaves (200).

⁴⁰ Dunton, *Athenian Oracle*, 1:532.

⁴¹ Dunton, 1:532.

⁴² Dunton, 1:532.

gical. He was not willing to accept slavery as a means to convert those not Christian.

Wesley believed these rebuttals were convincing or at the very least “rendered the case extraordinary dubious.” He encouraged the reader to choose “the safer part,” because if later, one found oneself to be in the wrong, “we can never make them restitution.”⁴³

Wesley’s responses reflected experiential examples where the pathos of the suffering of slaves were made clear to the reader. His empathic approach elicited sympathy for the plight of the slave. He was unwilling to accept Baxter’s Christianizing the institution of slavery and his arguments preceded Keith’s by at least a year.

While all three men were sympathetic to the cries of the enslaved, they differed to the degree or extent they responded to those cries. Samuel Wesley’s arguments would have sufficient force to be included in two editions of the *Athenian Oracle* and more significantly merited inclusion *in toto* the New Jersey Quaker John Hepburn’s 1715 *The American Defence of the Christian Golden Rule or An Essay to Prove the Unlawfulness of making Slaves of Men*. But with Wesley’s appointment to the rural parish of Epworth he would be removed from the major centers of slavery. Samuel Wesley should be remembered for his pioneering opposition to the evil of slavery and his admonition: “We can never make them restitution.”

⁴³ Dunton, *Athenian Oracle*, 1:532.