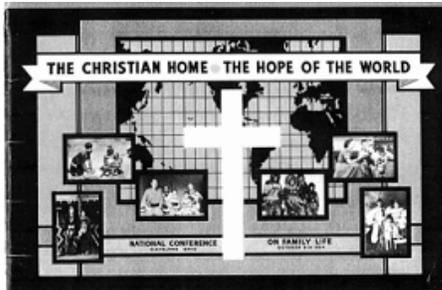


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In the Wesleyan call to serve the present age there is also a call to discern the challenges of the time. As a scholar and an ordained elder in the United Methodist Church, I have sought to discern in particular the challenges posed by emerging reproductive and pediatric technologies.

This work has involved cultural-historical research, research revolving around a theological affirmation of life. My presentation will draw on my forthcoming book *Conceiving Parenthood: American Protestantism and the Spirit of Reproduction* (Eerdmans Publishing).



In 1954, the Methodist Church held a national conference on family life right on the heels of the World Council of Churches assembly in Evanston, Illinois. The theme of the World Council of Churches gathering was “Christ the Hope of the World.” (Methodist theologian Georgia Harkness wrote her hymn by that title for the WCC meeting.) The Methodist conference’s theme was “The Christian Family—The Hope of the World.” “There is no contradiction in these themes,” Bishop G. Bromley Oxnam explained, for the Christian family must serve as that “unifying force” to bring together “the community, the nation, and eventually the world.”

In the imprint of the brochure, a family of four (with gender-balanced children) depicts the “Hope of the World.” The cover of the brochure shows families from around the world, unified around the cross. By one reading, the family of four was *the family* to serve as the template not just of domesticity but of salvation. The family of four is transposed onto the families of other contexts, contexts in which a family might well have been indigenously defined as including aunts, uncles, and certainly grandparents.

How are faithful Methodists today to consider bioethics, the family, and the hope of the world? I will suggest that Methodists should think in creative, probing ways, both historically and theologically, about the emergence of technologies in the United States, marketed in ways that draw on the icon of the nuclear family. How is the bestselling *What to Expect When You Expect* related to the “Fitter Family”

movement of the inter-war period in the U.S., and to mainline Protestant participation in the movement? How is the marketing of reproductive technologies related to concerns about “bad blood” during the eugenic era, concerns that permeated mainline Protestant sermons and book reviews? How might the marketing of what has been called “scientific motherhood” reinforced a divide today between children and families considered well-planned and children and families who are considered accidental? I will suggest that these questions are crucial as Methodists witness that each and every life and each family is worth servant care in the present age.