

BOOK REVIEWS

Andrew Goodhead, *A Crown and a Cross: The Rise, Development, and Decline of the Methodist Class Meeting in Eighteenth-Century England*. Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock, 2010. 340 pp.

During the last thirty years, increased attention has been given to the Methodist class meeting. Since the early 1980s, various dissertations, articles, and books have sought to show its central importance to Methodism and to suggest reasons for its eventual decline. At the same time, some Methodist scholars, clergy, and laity have issued strong calls for its reintroduction as a way to stop the current membership decline and increase spiritual vitality. One begins to wonder if the class meeting alone can reverse the direction of an entire denomination. Is this call for the class meeting simply nostalgic and misplaced, or is the providential hand of God working in our own time? In a sobering and realistic appraisal of the early British Methodist class meeting, Andrew Goodhead shows how, during John Wesley's own lifetime, it went from being the central spiritual component to a somewhat disregarded requirement.

Before examining how the class meeting functioned as the "crown" of early Methodism, Goodhead describes in Part One the "religious society" movements that preceded it: German Pietism, Anglican "Unitary Societies", and the Fetter Lane Society. Next, in Part Two, Goodhead argues that the class meeting was of central importance to the Methodist movement. After describing its origin and format, he mentions what he considers were the four major elements of the class meeting: fellowship, conversion and discipleship, financial accountability, and discipline.

Finally, in Part Three, Goodhead gives several reasons for its decline during Wesley's own lifetime using the theories of Max Weber, Emile Durkheim, and Ernst Troeltsch, respectively. First, he believes "routinization" in the form of its repetitive format, unsuitability of class leaders, overly large classes, and the movement from personal testimony to catechesis contributed to decline. Second, Goodhead believes that the class had become a "totem" or idealized meeting in which everyone must participate even though its purpose had changed. Finally, he argues that the class meeting was "one-generational" because it was a Christian gathering that had gone from "mysticism" to a "voluntary society".

A Crown and a Cross is a significant addition to the literature on the class meeting for several reasons. First, Goodhead's extensive use of various primary sources puts the class meeting in a more realistic light. Second, it

clearly shows the difficulty Wesley himself had in his personal efforts to have Methodists attend their class meetings regularly. Certainly, some found the class meeting to be spiritually fruitful while others increasingly opted out as Methodists, in general, became more respectable and less inclined to share personal spiritual matters with others. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, this book clearly conveys the difficulty Christians have in transmitting the faith to the next generation, whether to the members' own children or other adults. That last point alone should make scholars, clergy, and laity soberly ponder not only the place of the class meeting in the churches today but also how to carry out evangelism as effectively as John Wesley and the early Methodists did.

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Michael Pasquarello III, *John Wesley: A Preaching Life*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2010. 158 pp. \$20.00

The breadth of research engaged by the author into Wesley's preaching roots and his identity as a homiletical theologian is apparent from the plethora of notes, quotations and sources, and gives this work value in one's study of John Wesley the preacher. His observation regarding the way Wesley as an exemplar of ecclesial theology and ministry has been traced through his successors and his call to review Wesley's antecedents and thus reclaim the tradition of preaching that formed Wesley, for the sake of the present church, is an idea worthy of note and a fitting reason for engaging this research and writing. That such study might lead preachers and the church back to a life of holiness, discipleship that gives witness to the active, transformative presence of God, confession of faith, and good preaching, offer sufficient reasons for this text.

In almost every instance the theologians named and the material cited fit the context in which they are placed, however the quantity of such material limits the service for which it is intended and instead at times becomes a muting force against the author's voice. Placing Wesley's work as a preacher within the context of homiletical history and practice is valuable to Wesleyan scholars and homileticians. However the extent of the treatment of historical figures and their contribution to the development of Wesley's thought and person, at times causes the focus to drift too drastically away from the core of the text. In fact, at times the tangential details wander so far from the central theme as a treatise on Wesley's preaching life, that one is tempted to become so engaged in that figure that it becomes an intrusion into that investigation as one is drawn back to the subject.

However, with this writing the author offers a timely reminder to preachers, through many repetitions that describe Wesley's commitment to a

life of holiness, that the preacher's life is as much an event of proclamation of the presence of God as "good" preaching. Through his treatment of Wesley's development as a preacher, and the contents of his sermons, the author reminds us that "good" preaching, the goal of the church and of individual preachers, should be the repository and source of theological wealth, and the proclamation of their life and their sermons should be considered seriously. It is a commendable effort to call preachers to holiness of life and work.

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Davis, Morris L. *The Methodist Unification: Christianity and the Politics of Race in the Jim Crow Era*. New York: New York University Press, 2008. 208 pp. \$45.00.

The story of how the Methodist Episcopal Church and the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, healed the breach between them that occurred in 1844 has been told in a number of histories. Each version gives some attention to the process while focusing primarily on the product, which notably included the formation of the Central Jurisdiction that effectively segregated the African-American members of the northern Methodist Episcopal Church into a separate and not-quite equal church structure.

The unification process that culminated in the uniting conference of 1939 was a long one. The key features of the final agreement were hammered out between 1916 and 1920 through the work of the Joint Commission on Unification, to which each church sent twenty-five representatives. The commission met six times, and each of its meetings was transcribed. While not at all ignoring the results of the final plan, Morris Davis concentrates on the work of the Joint Commission, critically analyzing the rhetoric used by its members as they struggled to overcome differences and find the common ground upon which a unified church could be built.

In his classic history of American Methodism, Frederick Norwood notes that the Joint Commission comprised "northern radicals, liberals, moderates, and mediators, and southern moderates and conservatives," along with "two Negro voices."¹ In Davis' treatment, these varied voices come fully alive, and are placed clearly within the context of their lives and times. To readers, Norwood's shorthand labels will be seen as concealing more than they reveal, as Davis takes his audience through the particular arguments advanced by individual commission members on the range of views debated. These views included the history and nature of Methodism; the destiny and

¹ Norwood, *The Story of American Methodism* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1974), 360.

responsibility a unified American Methodist Church had in pointing both the nation and the world to true Christian civilization; an appropriate governing structure for the new church; and, most contested, the nature of race, “race consciousness,” and under what circumstances, if any, African Americans would be welcome in the unified church. Under the light Davis shines on the rhetoric used by the commission’s members, it is possible to see clearly what impelled both northern and southern churches towards unification, and how both sides were willing to sacrifice full equality for African-American Methodists.

The great disappointment of the African-American delegates present at the 1939 uniting conference is well known in Methodist histories. Less well known are the two African-American representatives to the Joint Commission who agreed to the changes in status of African Americans in the new church. Although to contemporary observers they may seem to have been out of touch with the black community or otherwise willing to compromise with racism, *Methodist Unification* makes their positioning clear; only a generation or so removed from slavery in the midst of Jim Crow America, their difficult but active roles on the commission and the stances they adopted and accepted defy any easy judgment from the vantage of the twentieth-first century. In fact, the helpful personal backgrounds presented for each of the participants (helpfully compiled in an appendix) makes each of the commission’s members complex and human, and the commission’s meetings a complex drama.

Davis’s work is a critical addition to Methodist historiography and is indispensable for anyone seeking to understand the racial dynamics within Methodism in the twentieth century and the accompanying American nationalism that motivated both northern and southern branches of the church.

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BOOKS BRIEFLY NOTED

Gibson, William, and Geordan Hammond, eds. *Wesley and Methodist Studies*. Volume 2. Manchester, UK: Didsbury Press, 2010. 138 pp. £8.

Didsbury Press has published the second annual issue of its peer-reviewed journal *Wesley and Methodist Studies*. This volume includes articles from scholars in England, Australia, New Zealand, and the United States. Essays in this volume examine Charles Wesley's views on Anti-Catholicism and Perfectionism as well as an analysis of Hugh Borne, William Clowes, and Primitive Methodist historiography. Other contributions include verbal proclamation in early Methodist evangelism and the study of membership in Irish Methodism. The journal also includes a sermon by Mary Fletcher titled "On Exodus 20." D. R. Wilson's transcription of the sermon offers an introduction and helpful annotations for readers. Six book reviews round out the issue.

Park, Sunghye, Judy Chung, and Myungim Kim, eds. *The Holy Seed of Calling: Korean-American Clergywomen's Journeys toward Ordination*. South Korea: National Association of Korean-American United Methodist Clergy Women, 2010.

In celebration of its twenty-fifth anniversary, the National Association of Korean-American United Methodist Clergy Women has produced a collection of thirty personal narratives by Korean women who have obtained elders licenses in The United Methodist Church. The essays reveal the stories of clergywomen who faced multiple challenges toward ordination while at the same time blazing a racial-ethnic path for other women of color who also sense a call toward ordained ministry.

Forsyth, Peter, and Martin Wellings, eds. *Methodism and History: Essays in Honour of John Vickers*. Oxford, England: Applied Theology Press, 2010. 238 pp. £10.95.

The collection of thirteen essays is a *festschrift* from UK and US scholars linked in various ways to the work of eminent British Methodist scholar John Vickers. The volume explores a post-1950 context and analyzes the historiography of British and American Methodism. E. Dorothy Graham's essay, "Personal Appreciation," introduces readers to the life and scholarship of Vickers. Seven essays by scholars from the UK and US examine

methodological approaches toward writing history as well as ways authors talk about history and historiographical issues. Clive D. Field and Hilary Campbell conclude the collection with a bibliography of Vickers' many writings.

Chapman, David M. *Chapel and Swastika: Methodism in the Channel Islands During the German Occupation, 1940-1945*. Jersey, England: ELSP, 2009. 256 pp.

The author offers readers a focused perspective on the state of Methodism in the Channel Islands off England during Second World War. This fascinating regional history analyzes how British Methodists worked within a complicated military context under German Nazi occupation. The book also demonstrates how Methodists influenced the residents of the islands through Sunday schools, worship services, and musical concerts. Chapman posits that British Methodists lived out their lives and faith as an expression of passive resistance to the German war machine. This volume provides readers with a refreshing glance at the study of religion within the broader academic discipline of Occupational Studies.