

## BOOK REVIEWS

John R. Tyson, *Assist Me to Proclaim: The Life and Hymns of Charles Wesley* Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 2007. 356 pp. \$22.00.

John Tyson's biography of Charles Wesley is one of a range of publications released in 2007 to coincide with the tercentenary of the birth of the co-founder of Methodism. Tyson has produced an interesting and readable account of Wesley's life, which will be of value to Methodists wanting to find out more about the lesser-known Wesley brother.

A great strength of *Assist Me to Proclaim* is Tyson's extensive use of Wesley's own writings. Tyson allows Wesley to tell much of his own story, drawing on published and unpublished letters, diaries and hymns. This brings alive the dramatic story of the first half of Wesley's life: the intense formative years at Epworth; spiritual strivings at Oxford, missionary work in Georgia; struggle and conversion in London; and his crucial role in the tumultuous birth of the Methodist movement amidst persecution and factional conflict. A chapter on Wesley's friendships highlights an important aspect of his life and personality.

Tyson also goes beyond many previous biographers in paying serious attention to the second half of Charles Wesley's life, following his marriage in 1749. These years included the birth of his eight children (only three survived), increasingly severe conflict with John Wesley and many of the lay preachers, and his most fruitful years of hymn writing. These years have been neglected by many biographers, partly because of the often mutual hostility between Charles and the lay preachers, who helped write the history of early Methodism. This hostility and its causes have been much more closely examined in Gareth Lloyd's *Charles Wesley and the Struggle for Methodist Identity* (2007) but Tyson highlights some of the main issues at stake.

Surprisingly—though the lack of footnotes makes it difficult to be sure—Tyson does not appear to have consulted the correspondence between Wesley's children in which they discussed their father after his death. This points to one of the weaknesses of the book: it makes use of only a narrow selection of the amazingly rich and diverse unpublished sources available to the scholar of early Methodism. This means that while the book is a good introduction to Charles Wesley for the general reader, it has less to offer the historian or theologian looking for new insights into this enigmatic man.

For example, the extensive correspondence between lay Methodists and Charles Wesley reveals his pastoral skills and concerns. The writings of

many women who corresponded with the Methodist preacher Mary Fletcher illustrate how Wesley was being discussed and described by his female contemporaries. Such sources provide the opportunity to place Wesley within the wider context of the Methodist movement, beyond his relationship with its leaders. Tyson does not appear to have taken this opportunity. *Assist me to Proclaim* is a more significant step forward than many previous biographies, but a serious scholarly biography of Charles Wesley remains to be written.

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Kenneth J. Collins. *The Theology of John Wesley: Holy Love and the Shape of Grace*. Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2007. 423 pp. \$35.00.

After years of attentive reading and wrestling with the various texts and context of John Wesley's theology, Ken Collins has gifted both Church and academy with the vintage of his lifelong scholarship. Following in the footsteps of Albert C. Outler, Collins attempts to build onto what Outler deemed as Wesley's original synthesis of a "third alternative" between Augustinian pessimism and Pelagian optimism. Collins develops this synthesis into an explicit method that he considers to be much more consistent with Wesley's intentional theological style of "practical theology" and calls it a "conjunctive theology" that is "both/and" and is not "either/or."

In many ways, Outler's third alternative is a conjunctive theology that holds together in a carefully balanced tension both divine grace and human response and not an either/or alternative that would dissolve the tension that was etched into the Augustinian and Pelagian debate. Outler maintained that Wesley's composite answer to the Augustinian/Pelagian dispute was an original synthesis of "faith alone and holy living" that consistently held these together in balanced tension and would never think of separating them. While Collins agrees with the conjunctive nature of Wesley's third alternative, he contends that it "lacks the explanatory power of an axial theme." The missing lynchpin, according to Collins, was the axial theme of "Holiness and Love" which determines all the other conjunctives inherent in Wesley's soteriology: law and gospel; grace and works; favor and empowerment; justification and sanctification; instantaneousness and process; divine initiative and human response; initial and final justification—to name a few.

Essentially, Collins' basic thesis is that grace is shaped by God's Holy Love, which is conjunctive and thereby determines the very nature and structure of Wesley's order of salvation. Collins weaves three threads throughout his book to substantiate his thesis. The first basic strand is the subject of the book, i.e., the explication of the soteriological leitmotif of Holy Love drawn from Wesley's primary texts and the eighteenth century Anglican context.

Second, Collins is constantly weaving into his explication of Wesley's conjunctive theology a strong and mostly irenic critique of the Wesleyan interpreters that deviate from Wesley's deliberate conjunctive theology. The third of these threads is perhaps one of the most delightful strengths of the book. In this thread, Collins attempts to engage the implications of Wesley's "way of salvation" that confronts both the Church and the world for "today and tomorrow."

Beyond question, the most basic contribution that Collins makes to the field of Wesleyan studies is indeed his construct of a conjunctive paradigm that holds in balanced tension the antinomies of grace, while mapping the crucial junctures and transitions in Wesley's "conjunctive way of salvation." And, Collins is absolutely right to insist that these conjunctive tensions must be maintained as a both/and and must never be dissolved by either/or alternatives.

Despite the sheer strength and force of his probing thesis, Collins' paradigm will probably be met with discerning critique and even sharp disagreement over how to best describe the nature and function of these conjunctions of grace, or even where to place the "accent" in the tension, if one is to rightly understand the sophisticated nuances that Wesley intends in his *ordo salutis*. Furthermore, some may wonder if there are not "spaces" in these conjunctives where Collins has attempted to close and resolve the irresolvable "gaps" within these conjunctive tensions for the sake of sharpening the emphasis on the critical junctures and stage like transitions of Wesley's deliberately structured order of salvation. Conjunctions of grace require space to create the tension between the both/and conjunctions of grace, and some may wonder if Collins has closed the gap with a non-conjunctive model of synergism.

The basic contention for some Wesleyan interpreters is not Collins' insistence on the necessary conjunctive of both/and, but on how best to understand and describe the mystery of these tensions. Wesley's axial theme of Holy Love creates necessary space for balanced tension in all the conjunctions of grace. After all, the triune God of Holy Love, who is the author and finisher of salvation, is always giving grace and space that is from beginning to end, for the purpose of participation in the life of God's Holy Love. What would strengthen Collins' thesis and perhaps settle some of his objections to how other interpreters of Wesley describe the nature and function of these conjunctions of grace would be a complete integration and grounding of Wesley's axial theme of Holy Love into the narrative of the triune God that John and Charles deliberately integrated into the way of salvation.

Collins hammers out these conjunctive descriptions embedded in Wesley's the order of salvation on the anvil of scrupulous critique of the Wesleyan interpreters who either dissolve the tension, or do not place the accent on the right place in those tensions. Randy Maddox, for example, seems often to be in the cross hairs of Collins' conjunctive paradigm. Collins takes aim at the

way in which Maddox makes synergistic cooperation necessary for receiving the new birth. At stake for Collins, is Maddox's model of synergism that seems to leave no room for God alone to work before any other response can be given. Collins' point that grace must begin and end with God alone, not only follows Wesley, but resonates deeply with the Gospel. Most critics will not disagree with Collins on that point, but may argue, however, that there seems to be slippage in his model of synergism that may result in an either/or conjunction of grace. In other words, does Collins inadvertently collapse the tensions by insisting on a one dimensional model of synergism which may affect a number of other specific relations between the both/and of these conjunctions? While the aim of this review is not to critique or defend Maddox, the purpose of the disagreement before us, however, is to demonstrate the complexity and nuance of the tensions in Wesley that Collins is attempting to explicate.

Ironically, the divine-human synergism contested in Collins' reading of Maddox seems to echo the same fixed either/or alternative that was expressed in the synergistic impasse between Augustine and Pelagius. This solution leaves one asking, how do I understand the sheer gratuity of God's grace without the human response of faith? Or to push the question farther, what is the meaning and purpose of justification (pardoning favor) without sanctification (empowerment)? And, because the axial theme of Holy Love determines the shape of grace, how can I understand the holiness of God without God's love? After all, Wesley's epistemic soteriology functions only in the necessary spaces of conjunctive of grace. For example, we know God only as we are known by God, we love God only as we are loved by God; and thus, only in the conjunctive tension of both/and can we know who we love and love who we know. This model of synergism suggests that while God alone, from beginning to end, is the author and finisher of our salvation, the salvation that is offered is for participation in the life of God, the life of Holy Love. Outler once described this model of synergism as "pardoned-in-order-to participate."

Perhaps, a truly conjunctive paradigm that is reminiscent of Wesley's synergism of "faith filled with the energy of love" is one that will listen to the rich conversation between Maddox and Collins and affirm "both" Randy Maddox, *Responsible Grace*, "and" Kenneth Collins, *The Theology of John Wesley*. Now in the spirit of Wesley's synergism, as we are known by the God of Holy Love, may we truly know the God of Holy Love in all the conjunctives of grace until our faith is swallowed up by the Holy Love of God.

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