BOOK REVIEWS


This is the first of seven volumes of letters to be included in the Oxford edition of John Wesley's works. These early letters, written in his late twenties and early thirties, clearly reflect Wesley's probing thought. Included in the Appendix is a complete listing of the letters known to have been written or received by John Wesley, whether or not the text is extant, as well as an index to Wesley's correspondents. Dr. Baker has provided a wealth of information in the careful annotations.


The Methodist Union Catalog is a repertory of the cataloged holdings on Methodist subjects of more than 200 libraries, including the major Methodist research collections in the United States, Canada, Great Britain, and several other European countries, along with the more rarely held items in the collections of many smaller and more specialized libraries.

Planned as a twenty-volume set (plus index volumes), the Catalog includes more than 100,000 entries which constitute the most comprehensive bibliography in book form of publications by and about the people called Methodists since their beginnings in Oxford in 1729. Its reference value is increased by the inclusion of special index volumes (subject, title and added entries) and the location of copies in widely scattered libraries.


In light of the evolution of the new Zimbabwe Rhodesia, Rise Up & Walk is helpful in understanding the culture and contains a myriad of insights into the liberation movement and political struggles of Zimbabweans. It is a powerful story of the continuing life journey of Bishop Muzorewa, from boyhood to the episcopacy and political leader of his people. It is obvious as one completes this book that it is an incomplete autobiography with undoubtedly many significant chapters yet to be written. The book is not limited to Muzorewa's life but covers several areas or themes, thus providing the reader with
profound insights into the traditions, customs and heritage of Shona people. There is great pride exhibited in his accounts of the family, Shona hospitality and rural farm life. The description of the courtship of his wife, Maggie, is quite engaging.

The themes of racial oppression and subjugation of a cultural group parallel those that American black people have experienced. His perspective on the status of his homeland is spiced with personal reflections and rich, vivid descriptions of African culture. The role of the family as it responds to oppression in the African culture, its resilience and strength are reflected in his life story as it unfolds.

The quest for liberation and self-determination from over 80 years of colonialism is well illustrated. Whether or not one agrees with the Bishop’s strategies and involvement in the liberation movement, one experiences deep respect for his forthright declaration for independence. He conveys the dilemma of the Church’s involvement in the liberation struggle and comes to terms with violence and warfare as methodologies.

I admit however, that the destruction of life involved in any violent struggle poses a serious dilemma for anyone who would follow Christ’s command to “Love Your Enemy”. (p. 184) Once committed to righteous violence, I found that the dilemma of how to make responsible choices proved to be as great, or greater, than before. (p. 186)

The reader is constantly aware of the importance of prayer in his daily life, in his call to ministry after an eight-year struggle, his involvement in politics, his break with a non-violent doctrine and in the many negotiations with the white regime and other black political groups (ZANU and ZAPU).

Clearly Muzorewa’s family played a significant role in shaping his thinking, theology and philosophical perspectives.

My debt to my father is beyond measure. Through his example I learned that if your conscience is clear you can take a stand on an issue without fear, even against those in political power. (p. 24) My father’s deep religious convictions, and the irrefutable life in which he lived out what he preached on Sundays, left an indelible impression upon me. Like father, my mother is a devout person. Hers, however, was a faith which taught more through persuasion, compassion and example than through formal teaching and discipline. This was effective and long lasting. (p. 5)

The strong influences of parents, the church and various other support systems (e.g. teachers, Bishop Ralph Dodge, preachers, peers, etc.) are important components of his courage, faith, determination and ability to stand up for his beliefs. The Methodist Church is clearly significant in the education and the spiritual nurturance of the country’s new leader. From mission school to the episcopacy, Abel Muzorewa’s base has been the church.

The respect that is felt and displayed toward women was inherent in
Muzorewa’s chronicle; he credits women with major leadership roles:

Women deserve much of the praise in leading the way to self-reliance in our church. (p. 69) In spite of all that women have done for their local churches, they now face a new challenge. They must assume their full share of leadership in the general Church and in society as well. They must be liberated from that archaic African tradition that allows the relatives of the husband upon his death to take the deceased’s property as their own, leaving the widow destitute. (p. 70)

In summary the name of the book is a simple explanation of Muzorewa’s challenge to his African brothers and sisters, a challenge that he matches with insightful leadership potential. The book is invaluable for its developmental perspective on an ancient human struggle, enriched with original descriptions of African tribal rites and customs. It depicts joy, hope, suffering, fear, success, frustration; but hope stands out above all.

— Trudie Kibbe Precyps
Evanston, Illinois


This is the personal account of the life and times of a Sicilian by the name of S. V. Ravi, who was the organizer of the Methodist Church in Rome, Italy.

That church now is under the auspices of the British Conference. It belongs to British Methodism, and is not a part of the United Methodist Church as we know it. However, many Methodists who live in Rome attend that church. I preached at it at every session of the Second Vatican Council, and on subsequent visits to Rome, I have preached there. Many of the diplomats and prominent business people from this country attend its services.

It is hard to believe that so large and prominent a church and one so highly respected, even by our Roman Catholic brethren, was founded by a dissatisfied Roman Catholic who became a Methodist.

The story takes place in the middle of the Nineteenth Century. Brother Ravi was born in Mirto on the northeast coast of Sicily in 1838.

His major work fell during the time of the Italian Risorgimento, which was a period of social, political, and military tumult in which such prominent figures as Garibaldi, Mazzini, Cavour, and Victor Emmanuel II played such prominent roles. When one stands in the heart of Rome, he stands before the majestic monument to Victor Emmanuel II, who like George Washington was the Founder of his country, for he was the first monarch of modern Italy. Up until his time, Italy had been divided into small city-states, the largest of which was the so-called State of the
Church, presided over by the Pope, himself. Indeed, the Pope's residence was not the Vatican, as we think, but the Quirinal. The Quirinal is the home of the President of Italy. Before that, it had been the home of the Italian King.

Ravi started out as a devout Roman Catholic. He was ordained a Priest and he belonged not to the secular clergy, but to the regular clergy, which means a monastic order. He was a Capuchin monk.

But, like Luther before him, he became enamored of the Bible, dissatisfied with the conservatism and recalcitrance of the Roman Catholic Church, fled his monastery and was actually excommunicated by the Pope.

He was a man of fiery temperament, and was gifted with words. He became an eloquent orator and as a result of his preaching, he added many souls to Christ and to his church. That church was the Methodist Church, not the Roman Catholic.

This book makes fine reading. It is especially important to read it in these days of ecumenical conversations. It also may throw light on the doctrinal rigidity of the church in that day, and may show us a new understanding of the reason for the doctrinal conservatism of the present Pope.

At least, we who are Methodists need to know how our denomination got started in Italy and why it has been so well received in a Roman Catholic country by the Italian people.

— William R. Cannon
Bishop, The United Methodist Church
Atlanta, Georgia


Recently the emphasis in African Christian history has been on the African contribution; this book is something of a "throwback" in which we find pioneers of Western culture and Christianity marching into the interior to do battle with the forces of darkness. The lives and careers of Robert Moffat, David Livingstone, Ludwig Krapf, Henry Morton Stanley, Cardinal Lavigerie, and General Gordon are rather skillfully tied together in one story. We follow them on treks through the wilderness and hear their disgust and frustration with the surrounding "savagery" and "superstition." They manifest a sincere, although paternalistic, concern for Africans. Their activities were closely related to the spread of colonial rule, but they faced as much opposition from Europeans as from Africans, because their gospel "carried with it a challenge to the very assumptions of the colonial state." (213)

It is hard to tell whether the author shares the outlook of his heroes
or whether he uses their terminology in order to recreate the atmosphere of their time. Actually, most of them probably understood Africans better than their contemporaries; Murray-Brown’s use of such words as “savagery,” “superstition,” “fetish,” and “native” (as synonymous with “African”) suggests that he is behind most of his scholarly contemporaries in understanding and sensitivity. He shares the all too common ignorance of and prejudice against Islam. Human success is the “essence” of the message of Islam (186), while Muslims are “worshippers of the prophet” (200). They are referred to as “Muhammadans”; today this is a sign either of ignorance or of discourtesy. Most amazing is the statement that the Swahili people’s faces showed “a cruel Semitic streak.” (118)

There are several errors of fact; for example, the Mazrui Arabs were not of “Persian origin.” (107) There are also clichés: The Sultan of Zanzibar was a “tin-pot oriental ruler” (135), Livingstone “knew his Bible backwards” (144), and Dar-es-Salaam was in danger of “reverting to the jungle” (215).

Although the book is generally well-written and provides a fascinating account of an important era, its flaws outweigh its virtues. Readers unfamiliar with African culture will have their prejudices confirmed while those familiar with it will be annoyed by the half-truths, errors and discourtesies.

— Newell S. Booth, Jr.  
Miami University  
Oxford, Ohio

The Athens of the Panhandle, A History of Clarendon College, by Ethel Harvey. Nortex Press, Box 178, Burnet, Texas. $7.95.

Methodists have optimistically started many colleges across the years — and just as regularly have allowed many of them to die. The Athens of the Panhandle, A History of Clarendon College is the story of one such college sponsored by the Northwest Texas Conference at Clarendon, Texas in 1898. It filled a real need in its day and helped to nurture such Methodists as Ansil Lynn, Hubert Sone, M. Leo Rippy, Sam Hilburn, Charles W. Ferguson, Cecil Peeples, P. W. Walker, and Bishop W. Kenneth Pope. Pope made his decision to enter the ministry while at Clarendon. The book might have included more data on social, economic, and religious currents of the times that influenced the college. We are also left uncertain about the influences that caused the college to close in 1927, except for the bare fact that “someone” felt it could move and thrive in Amarillo, a much larger town. The college closed, with negotiations unsettled for moving to Amarillo, but
the plans to build a new campus in the larger city and to reopen the college never materialized.

— Walter N. Vernon
Nashville, Tennessee


"God hates divorce (Mal. 2:16) and so do I," says author Helen Kooiman Hosier in a new Abingdon book The Other Side of Divorce.

Hosier, who has personally experienced divorce, goes on to say that while divorce is "painful and tragic (it) can lead to the ultimate rebirth of an individual, a new relationship with Christ, a closer walk, leaning on him for direction and support, a rediscovery of meaning in living and personal growth."

The book, based on the Scriptures and Hosier's personal encounters and interviews, responds to the questions many Christians encounter when a marriage turns sour and ultimately ends in divorce. Hosier queries, "Does divorce mean suicide for a career Christian?" She answers: "No!"

One of the reasons for today's high divorce rate, Hosier states, is because God's counsel is not sought before marriage to ensure a mate one can love and live with the rest of one's life. Then, God's word is not fulfilled during the marriage.

When a couple is on the verge of breaking up their marriage Hosier counsels, "If you have any shred of love left for that man or woman, by all means build on it. Seek the help you need — professional counseling and spiritual help. Whatever it takes, if there's love left, work to build and repair it. God can take even that little shred, magnify it, and give it back to a couple in full bloom."

Helen Hosier describes compassionately how Christians struggle with their beliefs about marriage and their need to not live "a lie causing (one) to live as a hypocrite, maintaining a false front, a facade of happiness when inside there is nothing but unhappiness, unease and turmoil."

Out of the turmoil of her own marriage Hosier concludes, "God saw my heart. I wasn't fooling him... God saw the marital situation as it really was. I may have fooled our friends and the church;... but God knew. I wanted to live as openly before the world as I was living before God... Rom. 9 assured me that God's blessings are not given just because God takes pity on those he wants to."

— Ellen Thomas
United Methodist Publishing House