BOOK REVIEWS


As a functionary of the Religious Right and, more recently, as President of the Institute on Religion and Democracy, Mark Tooley has ground his share of political and theological axes over the years. So his relatively evenhanded approach in *Methodism and Politics in the Twentieth Century* comes as something of a surprise.

Tooley bookends his narrative with the presidencies of two Methodists, William McKinley and George W. Bush. After dithering over the United States entry into World War I, Methodists, according to Tooley, became single-issue voters over prohibition: “Many Methodists from all regions and across the theological spectrum saw Prohibition as central to becoming a godly nation” (67). Methodists contributed in no small measure to the election of Herbert Hoover in 1928 over Alfred E. Smith, a Roman Catholic, and the repeal of the Eighteenth Amendment struck a blow to Methodist political activism.

During the Great Depression, some Methodists repeated theological criticisms of capitalism and free-market economics that had been an evangelical staple in the previous century. Albert Day, head of the Federal Council of Churches and a Methodist minister in Baltimore, allowed that “American industry and business ‘stand at the judgment seat’” (101). Fissures within Methodism began to set in during the Cold War, pitting anticommunists against the Methodist Federation for Social Action, a divide that spilled over into civil rights and later to the Vietnam War.

On sexual ethics, Tooley suggests that Methodism’s gradual refusal to condemn divorce led to more permissive stands on other matters. “Liberalizing stances by the church on divorce in the first half of the last century,” he writes, “presaged debates over abortion and homosexuality in the century’s last three decades” (238). By the 1990s, Methodist agencies were on record against the Persian Gulf War, capital punishment, the World Bank, capitalism, and, in Tooley’s telling, prayer in schools.

Tooley concludes by noting that Methodists were far less enthusiastic about the presidency of George W. Bush to open the twenty-first century than they were about McKinley opening the twentieth. “American Methodism was growing, confident, largely unified and politically formidable,” he writes about the McKinley era. “One hundred years later, it had already endured several decades of steep membership decline and accompanying political marginalization as church officials were no longer presumed to speak for most church members” (301).
Tooley clearly regards such marginalization as recompense for slipping the bonds of “orthodoxy.” For others, it is the price of discipleship and prophetic witness.

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Mark Auslander’s eloquently-written book, *The Accidental Slaveowner*, explores the mystery of conflicting memories regarding one of the most infamous moments in American Methodism. It is a mystery with turns that lead readers to discover a racially mixed American family. Methodist historians will be familiar with the incident in which a slave owning Bishop from Oxford, Georgia, James Osgood Andrew, became the catalyst for the Methodist Episcopal Church to split in 1844. And while every comprehensive textbook of Methodist History in North America teaches that Andrews inherited a slave by no desire of his own and was legally bound to keep her, few historians will be aware of the details of that story. Even fewer still, will be familiar with the historical interpretations of white and Black residents in Oxford—interpretations that have divided these communities for over 150 years.

Auslander does not merely recount, or fact-check, Bishop Andrew’s narrative of the 1844 events that led to what some have called “The Methodist Civil War.” Instead, he invites readers to explore that story as the “myth of Kitty.” Auslander’s use of the term myth is in no way meant to discount or invalidate the Kitty-Andrew story. Rather, he explains, “for anthropologists, myths are not simply falsehoods or misstatements of fact but rather are a culture’s continuing, inventive efforts to understand the most fundamental enigmas of the social and natural world around us.” Thus, the “ultimate lesson” of the text goes beyond its attention to scholarly precision to its “appreciation of the intimate, enduring, and ambiguous bonds between us all.”

The book is divided into three parts. Part one considers how various

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redactors use the “myth of Kitty” to support racial policies and perspectives that advantaged the southern white population. Part two lays bare the primary source documents and institutions that comprise the “myth of Kitty,” and it also describes precisely how they veiled the oppressive brutality and sexual violence of American Slavery. In part three, Auslander uses his ethnographic training to trace the genealogy of Kitty’s family, which to that point had been lost to oppositional oral histories.

Throughout Auslander’s interviews, black and white residents of Oxford found one point of agreement: the Kitty-Andrews story communicated historic truths concerning the relationship between race and “family.” For the white residents, it signified the symbolic kinship created by bonds of “fealty, love, and loyalty” amongst black-white communities in the Antebellum South. For the black residents, the various redactions of the Kitty-Andrew story were part of a white conspiracy to cover-up the “intense white anxiety over sexual traffic across the color line and violent insurrection by the enslaved.” Auslander neither resolves the white-black tension, nor does he ignore it. Rather, he treats these oppositional interpretations with scholarly skepticism and investigative enthusiasm.3

One particularly absorbing chapter, “The Most Interesting Building in Georgia,” details the memorial space known as Kitty’s Cottage. It is a structure that Bishop Andrew built for Catherine Boyd, more often referred to as Kitty, sometime shortly after she reportedly refused to live in the nation of Liberia out of love and loyalty for the Andrew family. For the white community, the cottage was a pilgrimage site for visitors to simultaneously recognize a black mammy figure and venerate southern white male bravado. For many years, the Kitty Cottage Museum curiously housed no images of women or African Americans. Rather, images of Confederate Generals and white southern Bishops decorated the walls of the enslaved woman’s former home. This juxtaposition explains why Auslander presents the Kitty Cottage Museum alongside his study of other utopian social sites, particularly Emory University and the racially segregated cemeteries in Oxford. That is, these social sites were built on exploited labor, but function as reproductive instruments of white kinship that render invisible the black people who made these historical monuments and museums of white communal memory possible.

The timeliness of this book should not be overlooked. As Americans remember the Civil War sesquicentennial, museums, re-enactors, lecturers, movies, and manuscripts are inundating audiences with Civil War history. The Accidental Slaveowner suggests that the interpretation of this history is commonly perceived through the lens of myths and memorials like Bishop Andrew’s apologetic narrative, sanitizing our perception of race relations in America. In this sense, Northern Methodists may have won the economic benefits of the “Methodist Civil War,” but it was Andrew’s Southern apologists who have won the mythology surrounding it. These kinds of

3 Auslander, 62.
corrective information and insights make Auslander’s text a welcome contribution to our understanding of Methodism’s relationship to the Civil War and American race-relations in the past and present.

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“Guide Me O Thou Great Jehovah,” by William Williams has appeared in many Methodist hymnals, and strains of Williams’ most famous hymn is still heard at Welsh International Rugby matches, “Bread of heaven, feed me ‘til I want no more.” William Williams, however, may be unfamiliar to both today’s Methodists and Welshman unless they had read in Welsh an older biography of this early Methodist leader of the eighteenth century Evangelical Revival.

Thanks to Eifion Evans, the obscurity of William Williams is no longer due to the lack of an up-to-date biography in English. Evans’ portrait of Williams’ life and work is important for Methodists to understand for a variety of reasons. Although the familiar genius of the movement in the eighteenth century is fascinating and vitally formative for Methodism, Evans also helps the reader to appreciate the movement’s complexities of region, ethnicity, and theologies. Evans first shows the familiar Methodist themes in Williams’ life and ministry; namely, the Evangelical Revival, the conversion experience, organizational leadership of societies, the production of new hymns, and the challenges of forming a Methodist identity. He describes, next, the unfamiliar aspects of Welsh Methodism with its Calvinistic theology.

William Williams was a Welshman, “of Pantycelyn.” Evans begins by introducing the reader to eighteenth-century Wales, and to Williams’ birthplace, family, and culture near Llandovery in Carmarthenshire. A land of whitewashed farmhouses, used for grazing sheep and horses. It was a time when “rationalism had a devastating effect on Nonconformists as well as Anglicans” (7). It was in this context that the Methodist revival began, and Williams was converted under the preaching of an “exhorter;” Howell Harris. Williams remembered it as “a summons straight from glory” to his soul (13). Williams described his surprising experience in poetic genre:

I’ll not forget the spot, the ground
Where wine flowed to my soul’s foul wounds,
From heaven’s store in endless spate,
My wound to heal, my dread, abate (13).

The Evangelical Revival in Wales and the conversion experience of many
Methodist History

was so transformational that Williams and the Methodist leaders organized the converts into societies, and Williams played a formative role. In order to appreciate Williams’ significant spiritual leadership in the society meetings, Evans takes two chapters in the middle to expound on this. In chapter 27, entitled “A Candle of Heavenly Brightness,” Evans offers a helpful translation and summary of the famous book by Williams with a long title; namely:

The Door of Experience Society fully opened, so that whoever wills may enter: in seven Dialogues, by ways of a conversation between Theophilus and Eusebius, the one in imagination living in Immanuel’s land, and the other in the Land of Sleep. Containing, [after an imaginary account of the religion of the Land of Sleep] the foundation, examples and Scriptural rules of an Experience Society, as the best means to keep believers from growing cold; the disciplines, questions, and arrangements that are to be kept by it; the usefulness and godly edification that accompanies its exercise in the light and fear of the Lord, and the alarming consequences of conducting it flippantly and unwisely.

Evans explains the nature and purpose of the experience meeting in chapter 28. The leaders sensed the need for society meetings not only to discuss their Christian experiences, but also to support one another when they felt disregarded. Methodist historians may be interested in learning more of the origin of their name in chapter five, “The Despised Methodists,” and of the Welsh branch of Methodism’s beginnings in chapter six, “Association No Separation.”

Like John and Charles Wesley, Williams was an itinerant and outdoor preacher, an author, and a hymn writer. Towards the end of Williams’ life he calculated that in over forty years of preaching, he had travelled 111,800 miles, the equivalent of four times around the world. Williams was more than a preacher, he was an author of books, poems, and hymns. For example, in The Life and Death of Theomemphus, Williams used fictional characters to portray the trials and triumphs of a Methodist. As a poet, Williams published an epic poem of 1,360 verses, A View of the Kingdom of Christ, which sets forth the supremacy of Jesus in creation, history and redemption.

Significant attention is also devoted to Williams the hymn writer. Evans explains how these hymns were admired during and after the Evangelical Revival in Wales for being steeped in biblical doctrines and themes that reflect a believer’s deep experiences of one’s communion with God. Enriched by the author’s knowledge of the language, Evans offers fresh translations of some of Williams’ lesser-known Welsh hymns (lesser known at least to English speaking people) throughout the book.

Forming the Methodist identity had its challenges. Evans offers the readers a picture of the various controversies occasioned by the revivals, which included a defense in favor of the awakening against detractors and corrections offered by Williams to those prone to “enthusiasm” (chapter 20), to “Sandemanianism” (chapter 17), and to other major world religions (chapter 18).

Finally, Evans describes a form of Methodism that may be unfamiliar to most readers; namely, “the Welsh Calvinistic Methodists.” Williams, along
with Rowland and Harris, eventually began their own denomination separate from Methodism in general. Evans shows the way the Welsh leaders kept the theological heritage of the Anglicans and the Reformation. Evans wrote that “the Thirty-nine Articles of the Established Church served to define their doctrinal position as “orthodox, Protestant, and as they insisted, Calvinist” (287-288).

This is highly recommended for the contribution it makes to Methodist studies, and the differentiation of the Welsh. Although Evans mentions the interaction Williams shared with John Wesley at Trefeca College, the reviewer would have preferred more of Wesley’s perspective of Williams.

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Branstetter’s text provides a critical sketch of the life and work of Aaron Merritt Hills, a Congregationalist minister educated at Oberlin College and Yale University. Hills would join the nineteenth-century American and British Holiness movements and travel throughout the world as a revivalist and founder of several institutions of higher education. The text provides a helpful review of the interlacing of Pentecostal and Social Gospel activities while providing readers with access to an understudied minister from the history of U.S. Christianity.


The edited collection of manuscript sermons provides readers with information to primary documents from Maryland, Georgia, South Carolina, North Carolina, and Virginia. The volume includes bibliographic data for 1660 manuscript sermons located in U.S. and U.K. repositories ranging from Harvard University to John Rylands University Library to the Newberry Library in Chicago. The publication includes sermon entries on Methodists John Allen, Thomas Coke, William Duke, James Meacham, George A. Reed, and John Young, Sr. The bibliography is available in print or as a free PDF document online at http://www.newfoundpress.utk.edu/pubs/lofaro/.


The fourth volume of the annual peer-reviewed publication *Wesley and Methodist Studies* includes articles from scholars in Australia, England, Ireland, and the United States. Several impressive essays examine William White and John Wesley’s understanding of ecclesiology, a historiographical review of revivals and revivalism in nineteenth-century New York, an investigation into Samuel Leigh and the Colony of New South Wales, a sketch of John Thomas and the 1837 Civil War in Tonga, as well as an examination into the World Council of Churches and the work to combat racism in Irish Methodist missions. The editors also provide a selection of papers titled “New Horizons and Frontiers: Evangelical Preachers and Preaching” from the 2010 Annual Meeting of the American Academy of Religion. Several
book reviews and book notes conclude the volume.


Shaver offers a fascinating study on the use of nineteenth-century periodicals by women as spaces for meaning and influence. The author particularly examines essays and memoirs from Methodist periodicals and newspapers including *Methodist Magazine*, *Christian Advocate*, and *Ladies’ Repository*. These publications evidence how U.S. women used the press to initiate and participate in debates on religion, politics, and science among other topics.


Weir has produced a self-published electronic book examining the life and work of Irish itinerant Methodist Robert Strawbridge. The author provides a detailed genealogical sketch of the Strawbridge family using archival materials unavailable or not accessed in prior biographies on the Irish minister. The e-book also investigates and suggests a possible earlier date of the arrival of Strawbridge in the American colonies. The publication is available for download at Amazon.com will be useful for readers interested in early Irish and American Methodist history.

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