

BOOK REVIEWS

Ralph H. Jones. *Charles Albert Tindley: Prince of Preachers*. Nashville: Abingdon, 1982.

Over fifty years have passed since death presumably silenced one of the great preachers, hymnists, and pastors of modern Christianity. That Methodism can claim him as one of its great exemplars of the faith is indeed a blessing. Charles Albert Tindley (1851?-1933) loved his denomination; but he was not a denominational ideologue. He preached Christ "and him crucified" to an American people whose own experience of Calvary came in a land that has had the audacity to refer to itself as "The Kingdom of God." This Protestant superciliousness that pervaded church and state was bronzed in a profane white racism that constantly exacerbated the shameful social and economic legacy of American slavery. Over three hundred years of black slavery in the New World came to an abrupt conclusion with the shedding of blood in the worst war of the 19th century, with the slaves themselves denied the fresh start that reparations would have afforded.

The nearly constant decennial economic woes which besieged the American republic during Tindley's own lifetime constantly posed the tragic dimension of life. His faith was neither cheaply bestowed nor cheaply held. His great hymn, "Some Day," is pregnant with a faith resolution that is both brooding and poignant. Just as majestic prose, this hymn prods and plows its way toward "the Throne of Grace": "Beams of heaven, as I go, Through this wilderness below, Guide my feet in peaceful ways, Turn my midnights into days; When in the darkness I would grope, Faith always sees a star of hope." Then he closes this stanza with that realistic, not realized, eschatological note that characterizes the finest statements of Black faithfulness: "And soon from life's grief and danger, I shall be free some day."

This is not "pie-in-the sky" religion. This is an expression of pain that seeks temporary relief in the bosom of hope. Tindley knew how to preach in words, songs, and deeds to the tragic pathos of being black and poor in America. He tapped the resources of an Afro-American spiritual praxis as old as the peculiar misery engendered by chattel slavery. His ministry symbolized the successful merger between the best of black urbane spirituality with the agrarian toughness and wisdom of southern Black folk Christianity. The effect was cathartic and lasting. A fresh liturgical tradition emerged which dignified Black evangelicalism without sacrificing its African or its slave tendrils. In the period of Black history which Rayford Logan called, "The Nadir," this astounding combination slaved the psychic and spiritual wounds of a downcast people.

Ralph Jones's labor of love gives us a sorely needed booklength introduction to this liturgical dynamo in Afro-American church history who

is barely mentioned in Carter G. Woodson's classic 1921 study on *The History of the Negro Church*. In fact only two historical accounts give an adequate indication of Tindley's importance. They include Wendell Phillips Whalum, "Black Hymnody," *Review and Expositor* 50 (Summer 1973): 341-355; and the section on "The Emergence of Gospel" in Eileen Southern, *The Music of Black Americans: A History*, 2nd ed. (New York and London: W. W. Norton & Company, 1983), pp. 444-456. Although Jones's biography of Tindley contributes immensely to redressing our knowledge of this period through the eyes of Tindley, the pastor of what we now know as Tindley Memorial United Methodist Church (Philadelphia), his book is weakened because he does not help us to see the importance of Tindley as a national figure in Afro-America.

Many will undoubtedly be disappointed that Jones makes no attempt to give us any depth perception of Tindley, the human being. Jones is primarily concerned with Tindley, the pastor of what was then called East Calvary Methodist Church. But Tindley's world was larger than the Methodist Church. Jones does indeed give us asides into these larger connections, such as Tindley's relationship with John Wanamaker, the famous Philadelphia department store magnate and philanthropist. He teases us with bits and pieces of information about Tindley's influence at city hall. But we have an unclear view of his social and political convictions and praxis. He mentions an evaluation of "Tindley's community and political involvement in Philadelphia" given to him by John Summers. But with the exception of Chapter 8, which consists of five pages, there is very little evidence that Jones really has a sense of the tremendous power which Tindley wielded.

The fact that Tindley amassed 10,000 parishioners who he really never could seat at one time, ran for the episcopacy of the Methodist Episcopal Church several times, and had a powerful, contagious spirituality is certainly not as distinctive as Jones would like us to believe. In fact what we need now is a comparison of Tindley with other black clerical giants of his day. Nonetheless, we can indeed say without hesitation that Jones is quite correct to accent Tindley's musical achievement. But it is unfair to the full range of Black Church History to do this without understanding that this was a time of great creativity in this area.

The scholarly and church community owe a deep debt to Ralph Jones for providing a good introduction to Charles Albert Tindley. He still lives in the large Black church world through his great gospel hymns. Before Jones's pioneering biography we had next to nothing to help us remember this great pastor, preacher, and hymnist, except as one of those odd names that appears above certain hymns.

James Melvin Washington
Union Theological Seminary (New York)

Don W. Holter, *Flames on the Plains, A History of United Methodism in Nebraska*. [Lincoln:] Commission on Archives and History, Nebraska Conference; Nashville: Printed by Parthenon Press, c1983. [xv], 500 pages. Map, chart, illustrations (some portraits). Index. \$9.50 (cloth), \$6.00 (paper).

Amid the diversity of Methodist Bicentennial observances—bronze bells, conference dramas, one-person shows—a category certain to endure is the history of some administrative unit of a celebrating denomination, sponsored by that unit's Commission on Archives and History. In this sweepstakes the Nebraska entry will rank high. Backed by Bishop Monk Bryan, edited by the Conference Historical Center's curator C. Edwin Murphy, advised by a professional committee, the project wisely chose a church historian who had served as Nebraska Area bishop, 1972-1976.

Don Holter has worked well. Seeking to "open the door to a greater knowledge" of United Methodism in Nebraska and its growth "within the total history of the nation" (p. xi), he has presented many facts and figures. Yet it is not only a bare-bones social history, for Holter sketches backgrounds, offers interpretations, generally expounds his own tempered liberal position. His sixteen chapters are inclusive—Blacks, Germans, Swedes, Bohemians; Methodist Episcopal, Methodist Protestant, Methodist Episcopal South; United Brethren and the several varieties of Evangelicals; organized women, ordained women, organized youth; hospitals and homes, Epworth Assembly, city missions, colleges, town and country efforts, a variety of recent programs; the several unifications of Methodists, of EUBs, of the United Methodist Church.

Likewise Holter's work is soundly based. Older histories, dissertations, files at the Historical Center, some Conference periodicals, above all the Minutes and Proceedings of the twenty-two annual conferences whose story is part of Nebraska United Methodism—these are sources used. Local church foundation makes up much of the story, highlighted by detailed accounts of ten "unusual" churches; leading individuals receive special attention, at least 48 "Personalities of the Period" being profiled at intervals. More than a hundred illustrations add interest, as do symbolic vignettes at each chapter head. Statistical tables appear frequently, culminating at the end of Chapter 14 with a virtually complete list of 1980 Conference appointments, ministerial salaries, and local church property valuation. Appendixes list general conference delegates of the eight denominations involved, and the bishops who presided at the 616 annual conference sessions.

Inevitably questions occur. If no bibliography is furnished, why not list first references in the index? Why no dates and sources for the illustrations? Why so much general and denominational background, especially in Chapters 1, 2, and 7—five pages to camp meetings but only one of them Nebraska camp meetings; several citations, including a portrait,

of Peter Cartwright on early Methodist usages but no mention of his 1870 lecture tour which included Nebraska City. If the tables invite browsing, they also invite one to wonder what the Nebraska United Methodist story meant to people in the pew, the kitchen, the office, on the farm—the “grass roots” so recently hallowed. Rather little “new social history” comes through in this essentially institutional and administrative account.

Yet why quibble? Let us compliment sponsors and authors for their solid achievements. Not the least of these is the acquaintance with Nebraska United Methodist personalities—from Angie Newman to Yvonne Ferris, from W. P. Caldwell to Ebb Munden, from William H. Goode to Emmett Streeter, from Henry T. Davis to Alan Dunlap, from Matthew T. Maze to Kenneth W. Hicks to C. Rex Bevins. And throughout one senses the genial good nature and gentle humor, the industry and modesty, the balanced Christian optimism, of Don W. Holter.

Theodore L. Agnew
Oklahoma State University

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