BOOK REVIEWS


We have much to be thankful for in this volume. The authors have combined their expertise in an impressive bibliographic study which will undoubtedly become the basic reference tool for the study of women and American religion. The volume focuses on published materials, although some important primary sources are included. Titles are divided into logical subjects, and each entry is concise but thoroughly annotated with a clarity and accuracy to which all bibliographies should aspire. Many of the entries have helpful cross-references, a measure of how often research in one area affects study in others.

The subject categories indicate both the strengths and the weaknesses of recent scholarship. For example, Protestantism is by far the largest topic, with subheadings for each of the major denominations as well as studies grouped under various chronological and subject headings. However, little has been published on Native American or Afro-American religions, and there is virtually nothing on other ethnic minorities.

It is also clear that historians need to pursue a variety of integrated topics. Histories of women in various denominations, for instance, rarely have included information about non-white women's role and contributions. More generally, there is a need for a greater emphasis on the role of women in American religion as well as on the role of religion in the history of American women. Although the authors concentrate on historical studies, rather than feminist theology or ethics, they also give some attention to the relatively new field of feminist studies.

This volume will be valuable to a wide audience of students, librarians, academicians, historians, and all others interested in promoting the study of women's role in American religion. The bibliography gives an excellent overview of current scholarship and should serve to encourage research in neglected areas.

— Susan M. Eltscher
Madison, NJ

This is a well written, highly accurate, attractively produced history of Methodism in New York state. It is based on extensive bibliography of both primary and secondary sources and contains a remarkably complete set of indexes of names, topics, schools, churches and bishops related in some way to the subject of the book.

The 312 page volume deals adequately with the development of Methodism in New York from its small beginnings in the home of Philip Embury to the far flung work of the churches and conferences of the present era. It explains, among other things, the reasons for the schisms which caused the organization of other Methodist denominations in the state, and the splits and mergers which changed the Methodist Episcopal Church into the present United Methodist Church. It also highlights the work of the United Brethren and the Evangelical Churches which are today a part of the United Methodist body. It describes the development of institutions for special ministries, work among ethnic groups, and the attitude of the churches and conferences as they faced the challenges of changing times. The work of Methodism is seen in the historical setting of each generation.

Written both for the lay reader and the scholar, the history contains a generous sprinkling of anecdotes and incidents that bring the history to life. On page 191, for example, there is a story concerning Bishop Adna W. Leonard, then resident bishop of the Buffalo area. Because of his concern for greater formality in the worship services the bishop rebuked a pastor for wearing a red tie. "As a not so subtle act of defiance toward the bishop, many red ties reportedly appeared in the conference sessions the next day."

The volume, furthermore, is profusely illustrated with over thirty informative and exceedingly interesting views and portraits.

The history is well worth reading and should be on the shelves of each of our United Methodist seminaries and colleges and on the shelves of every pastor and lay person of the New York conferences.

— Frederick E. Maser
Jenkintown, PA


First the preacher got the young woman (formerly a member of his congregation) pregnant. Then, when she wouldn't consider abortion or fade quietly from the community, he murdered her. Or did he?
The story is not the latest sex-and-religion scandal staring at us from the check-out counter magazine rack. It is the account of a celebrated trial which took place in Newport, Rhode Island, in 1833, painstakingly reconstructed by an anthropologist interested in the early American cotton industry. And it holds special interest for readers of this journal: both the deceased, a mill worker named Sarah Cornell, and the accused, the Rev. Ephraim K. Avery, were Methodists.

The book works on two levels. First, it’s a sensational story—in both senses of the word. From the discovery of the young woman’s body on a farm just south of Fall River, Massachusetts, in December 1832, through all the conflicting testimony to the completion of the trial and beyond, the reader is quickly pulled into the emotional maelstrom which engulfed the community, the region, and indeed, a good part of the nation.

Second, Kasserman provides us with a fascinating look at early 19th-century New England, where mills, Methodists and women in the workforce were all relatively new features. However one reads the facts presented in the trial (this reviewer will not reveal the outcome!), there were deeper forces at work. For industrial Fall River, whose leading citizens organized the case against Avery, a successful prosecution would vindicate the nascent factory system’s healthy moral, as well as commercial, influence in the region. For the New England Conference it was crucial to defend Avery as a way of maintaining Methodism’s tenuous hold on community esteem.

Kasserman knows enough about Methodist practice to follow Avery’s itinerations and to describe how Conference resources were marshalled for the defense. Significantly, ministers of the stature of Timothy Merritt (one of the early promoters of the holiness movement) and Wilbur Fisk (president of the young Wesleyan University) participated in a Methodist-sponsored publication designed to convince the public of Avery’s innocence once the trial was over. There is also interesting light shed on the operation of a New England camp meeting (the one in Thompson, Connecticut, at which the sexual liaison allegedly took place), on the mobility of the mill workers to whom Methodist connectionalism appealed, and on the exercise of church discipline in cases of moral laxity. Surprisingly, Kasserman makes little mention of contemporary reform movements within Methodism, a disquiet about centralized authority in the ranks that matches the surrounding culture’s suspicions so well illustrated in the book. The anti-woman theme is understated but powerful: the fact that the defense’s main tactic was to destroy the dead woman’s character does not speak well of the New England brethren, especially if Avery was guilty as charged.
Fall River Outrage is highly recommended, both as a good read and for its insight into Methodism’s role as an “alien” institution in a pivotal era of New England history.

— Charles Wallace, Jr.
Willamette University


Charles Edwin Jones has already distinguished himself as one of the foremost bibliographers of American religion. His previously published bibliographic guides to the holiness and Pentecostal movements are major contributions to the work of scholars and researchers. He has now published a third volume which is characterized by the same careful research, thorough compilation, and clear organization which have marked his earlier works.

Jones has divided the volume into six parts dealing with: (1) general aspects of black Wesleyan and Pentecostal movements; (2) and (3) classification of works by doctrinal emphasis; (4) those movements which center on a unique founder’s person and insights; (5) schools related to the movements; and (6) biographical materials on the movements’ leaders. There are 2396 separate entries. Also included is a very useful index to authors and subjects.

This volume will be of special interest to every student of American social, cultural and religious history. It has a place in every library where persons are engaging in research on the black religious experience.

— Charles Yrigoyen, Jr.