BOOK REVIEWS


At first glance, the hefty size of this volume seems itself to warrant the dust-jacket’s claim that “this monumental biography is likely to be that definitive study of Wesley for the remainder of the century”. Mr. Rack has certainly produced in his work one of the more important recent studies of Wesley and the beginnings of Methodism. He clearly sets forth his program in the introduction: to write a historical biography that balances narrative with analysis; that allows for paradox and enigma (as typified by the title); that penetrates the Wesley legend and “the smokescreen” that Wesley himself created by his writings; that avoids some of the “misrepresentations of generations of evangelical propaganda”; that looks beyond Wesley and Methodism to the larger religious scene; and that anchors the whole portrait firmly in the original setting, the changing contemporary secular and religious life within which Wesley and Methodism developed.

The strength of this book lies in its analytical approach to the major historiographical issues in Wesleyan biography. Rack has done his homework, as the extensive endnotes reveal: he knows most of the recent studies that have appeared and manages rather deftly to revise many of the old stereotypes (as well as some recent idiosyncratic views) through a careful handling of the various interpretations. He has, however, strangely ignored the women leaders within Methodism, save one brief paragraph on “the phenomenon of women preachers”. He also has overlooked most of the available ten volumes of the new critical edition of Wesley's works (except the two volumes of *Letters*), of which he is an editor of a forthcoming volume (the *Conference*).

Fortunately, Rack pays more attention to historical criteria than Methodist sensitivities when drawing his conclusions. Most valuable is his attempt to deal explicitly with the matter of continuity and development in Wesley’s theology, an area of investigation where much work remains to be done. He is at his best when describing organizational developments in Methodism. Unlike many biographers who focus on the 1730s and 1740s, Rack gives nearly equal attention to the first two periods of Wesley's life, the young Wesley (1703–38) and the rise of Methodism (1738–60), and places notably more emphasis on the last period, the consolidation of Methodism (1760–91). Rack also examines critically and without apology the controversial side of Wesley's character and activities. The dust-jacket warns that “Methodists may feel unhappy at the results of Rack's realistic approach, so different from many of the stained-glass portraits which have been painted in the past”. He has, on the other hand, an appropriate appreciation for the theological and spiritual legacy of
Wesley and his movement, and of Wesley's ability to bring together rationality and enthusiasm, recognizing that "few, if any, of his successors have achieved as much".

The price that is paid for the author's extensive attention to critical evaluation is that his narrative at times gets lost in the sea of topical analysis. The reader is forewarned that Rack's chosen approach will lead to "some repetitions and cross-referencing", but the major problem is the frequent loss of a continuing sense of story [narrative flow?]. The systematic treatment of two or three topics within a given period results in some confusion with the terms "earlier" and "later", some later chronological events have been dealt with earlier in the text. The "prelude" and the explicit "interludes" between three major parts of the book, while useful in their survey of the general scene, are symptomatic of the structural problems of the outline. These sections also represent a tendency, typical among Methodist writers, to see the historical context as a separate story (or perhaps the stage setting) rather than an integral part of the whole Wesleyan drama.

The portrait that emerges from Rack's pen is created by very fine strokes; this is not a picture done in bold and vibrant sweeps. The very real sense of paradox and enigma is not the result of overpowering awe or distant mystery but rather represents the rational remnants of careful investigations that often produce inconclusive results. Quite often, as the author is quick to point out, such findings indicate the need for further investigation. At times, the matter is simply inherently complicated, and Rack is fortunately not willing to simplify hard issues merely for the sake of neatness. This work is really a scholar's study of a complicated subject, where the "warts" are not only portrayed but examined in great detail.

The author is appropriately wary in his use of sources, both primary and secondary. For instance, he recognizes Wesley's Journal as primarily a piece of Methodist propaganda and uses it accordingly; he sees the value of Henry Moore's firsthand contact with Wesley and yet recognizes his inherent biases. He also lays to rest several Wesley myths, such as his purported middle name, Benjamin, and the supposed early recognition of his providential destiny by Susanna. One must appreciate the difficulties entailed in trying to master critically the huge body of Wesley literature, a task that Rack has done remarkably well.

One distressing characteristic of this otherwise strong work is the prevalence of factual errors and misquotations. One would hardly expect a study that gives the appearance of care in some many ways to make two mistakes in quoting the familiar "Aldersgate" passage from Wesley's Journal or to misquote one of the key phrases in Charles Wesley's account of his conversion (reading "strong" for "strange palpitation of the heart"). Most of the misquotations, such as from the diary, are inconsequential to the interpretation, except in at least one instance concerning Sophy
Hopkey where a pronoun is changed from “me” to “her”, entirely reversing the implication of who was resisting whom. Several significant dates are in error, such as the days of Charles' ordinations, the year of the Wesleys' departure for Georgia, the date of Charles' conversion, the date of Böhler's advice to “preach faith”, the date of Wesley’s visit to Germany. Some names are in error, such as Sir John (not Thomas) Phillips; some names are consistently misspelt, such as Heitzenrater; some persons are misrepresented, such as Dr (not Bp) Chandler; some observations are in error, such as the comment that Wesley never visited the school in Halle. In Part I alone, such mistakes appear every three or four pages, which shakes the confidence of the reader and certainly belies any claims to the work being “definitive”.

In spite of its shortcomings, partly the result of the author's trying to accomplish too much, this work (if used with care) will make a useful contribution to what Albert Outler called “stage three” in Wesley studies, the critical examination of Wesley in the light of his sources, his context, and the large corpus of his own writings. It will be appreciated more by scholars than by the general reader, for whom Mr Rack's own high praise for Vivian Green's short biography, John Wesley, stands as a suitable recommendation.

RICHARD P. HEITZENRATER
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The role and influence of mysticism in the life and thought of John Wesley has been a matter of considerable debate among Wesleyan scholars. In the present study, Robert G. Tuttle, Jr. seeks to wade through Wesley's own ambiguous statements regarding mysticism to discover precisely what it was in mysticism which Wesley abhorred and what he embraced. From the start, Tuttle is careful to note that although Wesley was “never fully committed to the mystic way,” he was nevertheless “deeply influenced by the mystics” (18-19).

One of the major obstacles in determining Wesley's relationship to the mystics lies in defining mysticism itself. In this respect, the work at hand is most helpful. At its fundamental core, Tuttle accepts the position
that “intimate union with God” is the “essence of mysticism” (22). From this general assertion, Tuttle moves quickly to a much more detailed analysis of the three crucial stages of mystical consciousness: 1) the purgative stage, “involving ascetical exercises and roughly analogous to the training of an athlete”; 2) the illuminative stage, wherein all of one’s faculties are concentrated on God (often this is followed by an additional stage in which God removes all “sensible comforts” plunging the initiate into a “dark night of the soul”) where he/she is forced to come to God through “Naked faith”; and 3) the unitive stage which in the more unguarded language of mystical union “has the odor of pathological deification.” As to this final stage, Tuttle hastens to add that for most mystics, complete union was “an almost unreachable ideal” (24-25).

Having charted the mystic way, Tuttle proceeds to document Wesley’s own travels down this path. Ultimately, argues Tuttle, Wesley would recognize the mystics’ dark night of the soul as a detour on the road to salvation, and therefore, after Aldersgate, one finds him substituting justification by grace through faith for the mystical *in orco* (127). Nevertheless, throughout his life, Wesley would continue to abridge the works of the mystics, lifting their lives up as examples to his followers. In this respect, Tuttle points out that the mystics which Wesley found most attractive were those of the Catholic Reformation. Specifically, Wesley admired their stress on a mysticism of service which focused on a life of “pure love” characterized by perfect obedience to the will of God (26-31). Of equal importance to Wesley, these mystics were “especially emphatic about progress in love” so that the command “Be ye perfect” was seen as both a command and a promise (42).

So much for the mystics’ influence on John Wesley; what does the current volume have to say about the continuing influence of mysticism “in the Wesleyan Tradition?” Unfortunately, outside of a very brief mention of John Fletcher, the work fails to deliver what the title advertises. Instead, (and reflecting his pastoral concern), Tuttle makes a quantum leap from the eighteenth century to the present in order to discuss the modern quasi-mystical tendencies of New Age luminaries such as Shirley Maclaine. While this material may prove helpful to some, those seeking a better knowledge of the abiding influence of mysticism on Wesleyanism are left “out on a limb.” This need not have been the case as there is an abundance of evidence that mysticism continued to play a key role in the shaping of Wesleyan history. To cite the most obvious example, the mystical writers (especially Fénelon and Guyon) had a profound impact on the life and thought of the nineteenth-century holiness movement. As it is clear that Tuttle would like to see a new generation of Wesleyans mining the mother-lode of mystic gold, the inclusion of such material would only strengthen his case. Perhaps future editions will include at least one
chapter along these lines. In the meantime, although the scope of the work is not accurately reflected in the title, the ground that the work does cover is masterfully presented.

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When the projected three volumes of *The Unpublished Poetry of Charles Wesley* are completed (Volume 2 is due out in the fall of 1990), all of his poetry and hymns will have appeared in print. Out of a total of approximately 9,000 poems and hymns, 4,000 were published in his lifetime. George Osborn, in *The Poetical Works of John and Charles Wesley* (London, 1868-72), added another 3,000. The remaining will now be published when this project is completed.

The first half of the volume is devoted to poems on the American War and patriotic poems occasioned by that conflict written by Wesley in his middle and late seventies. This section is prefaced by a most helpful essay by Philip O. Beale providing the context of the poems and identifying the various public figures referred to in the poems. Section II is made up of six "Epistles," a popular eighteenth-century poetic form for satire popularized by Alexander Pope. Written in 1755 when Wesley was in his late forties, these poems reflect the conflicts and differences, the frustrations and disappointments at that point in the Wesleyan Movement. Although some of these are apparently unfinished, they contain some of Wesley's best writing in strictly poetic terms. This "Neo-classical" Wesley, writing in heroic couplets, is largely unknown until now. The remaining sections, Courtship and Marriage, Family Hymns and Poems, and John Wesley's Marriage, are primarily of biographical interest. Those on his brother's marriage and for and on his son Samuel reflect an angry and unforgiving tone that may surprise and trouble some who have not seen this side of Wesley before.

There are limitations to the volume that must be noted. Most readers will wish for more explanatory footnotes to identify various figures generally unknown except to Wesley scholars. The decision to place the poems Wesley wrote late in his life before those written earlier may create confusion for some readers. The editorial decision to include only those poems not included in Osborn's *Works* has meant in several instances that a needed poem or two in a sequence is missing and must be sought for in Osborn. Those volumes have become increasingly rare and few libraries...
and individuals have them. What this problem suggests, of course, is the pressing need for a modern and fully edited publication of the works of Charles Wesley in some affordable and generally accessible form.

We must all be grateful to Kimbrough and Beckerlegge and Kingswood Books for undertaking this publishing project and for making these texts available at a reasonable price.

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The history of women in the Methodist Protestant Church has received little attention compared to the other predecessor denominations of The United Methodist Church. The Women's Division has tried to rectify this omission with the publication of Ethel Born's *By My Spirit*. Although the Methodist Protestant Church is remembered for its ordination of Anna Howard Shaw and other early clergywomen, the history of its laywomen has been neglected. Born's book uncovers the history of the laywomen in the MPC—those who organized mission societies, went overseas as missionaries, and supported social service projects in the United States.

*By My Spirit* reveals the startling fact that although the Methodist Protestant Church had organized a mission board at its founding conference in 1834, by 1879 it had yet to send out a single overseas missionary. The women organized their own mission society in 1879 and quickly arranged to send a missionary to Japan. Foot-dragging by the men of the MPC turned to jealousy and hostility as the women not only pursued work in Japan, but opened MPC missions in China by sending a male missionary in the early 1900's. Despite leading the denomination in missions, the Woman's Foreign Missionary Society shared the fate of most other women's mission boards when it was forcibly merged into the denominational board in 1929, the year of its golden anniversary.

The forced merger of the MPC women meant that at the time of denominational union in 1939, the women were already accustomed to working together, rather than maintaining independent women's groups for tasks such as foreign missions, home missions, and ladies' aid. The MPC women were thus prepared for the loss of further programs and financial control experienced by Methodist women at the creation of The Methodist Church.

*By My Spirit* is organized into topical chapters, each beginning with an illustrative anecdote. There are chapters on home missions, foreign mis-
sions, and home base organizations, including several brief histories of branch auxiliaries. Born is at her best in her chapter on "Mountain Missions" when she describes in detail the evolution of a specific mission project, the "Alvan Drew School" in Pine Ridge, Kentucky. The book is enhanced by numerous photographs of MPC women and by helpful appendices.

With her decision to proceed topically rather than chronologically, Born has made the narrative hard to follow for those previously unfamiliar with the history of the women's missionary movement. But By My Spirit will be greatly appreciated by all who have a stake in the Methodist Protestant heritage or who are interested in the contributions of women to the church.

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