BOOK REVIEWS


This book is the first in a series which Professor Oden describes as “a reader’s guide to John Wesley’s teaching.” The volume under review is devoted to Christian theology. Pastoral care will be considered in a second volume and ethical and social issues in a third. For *Scriptural Christianity*, Dr. Oden has constructed a grid, formed by major Christian doctrines. These range, for example, from the doctrine of God and the authority of Scripture, through sin and soteriology, to sanctification and the last things. Then Oden has gone through his files, pulled out appropriate references, and inserted them in the proper pigeonholes. Sometimes Dr. Oden simply quotes his source, although the amount of quotation varies from one section to another. More often than not, he paraphrases Wesley’s statements, drawing especially on his sermons. Occasionally Oden will pause to explicate a point, for instance, the doctrine of God stated in the first Article of Religion. He makes little effort to place Wesley’s theology in its social and cultural context. Unfortunately he sometimes resorts to jargon, as in the phrases, “psychosomatic interface” and “intergenerational sociality.”

From one point of view, Dr. Oden has written a commendable book. He has arranged a broad selection of Wesley’s ideas in a meaningful pattern and appended useful bibliographical references to each of his major sections. From another perspective, however, this book is misleading. Oden divides the Christian communions among three groups, Reformed, pietistic, and liturgical. He places Wesley in the pietist category and the Anglicans in the liturgical. This classification is unfortunate. John Wesley was a priest of the Church of England. He received his essential theological formation in an Anglican rectory and an Anglican university. Wesley learned from his mentors the distinctively Anglican style of theologizing, which he employed throughout his life. Anglican theology is “occasional,” not systematic in character. (The only Anglican I know who regretted this lack of system was John Henry Newman, and he became a Roman Catholic.) When the circumstances compelled Anglicans to write “controversial divinity,” they addressed the particular issues which confronted the Church at the moment. But the metier which especially suited them was “practical divinity,” catechetical works, ethics, liturgical theology, spirituality, books designed to build up the Body of Christ. The Anglican style focuses attention upon a few essentials, recognizes the limits of human knowledge, and encourages a spirit of gratitude and reverence. To cast Wesley’s ideas into a form which was not his own is to obscure his intentions and methods.

This book reminds me of the difference between an original painting created by a master and a copy of it produced by a later generation. The
copyist may draw the design, match the colors, and imitate the brushstrokes, but he can never capture what the Chinese call *ch'i*, that vital force which pervades the master's work and brings it to life. Oden's book is short on *ch'i*.

**JOHN ENGLISH**

*Baldwin City, Kansas*

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In this book a quote from a member or ancestor of the Wesley family or a signal event in the life of one of the family is recorded for each day of the year. Some of the quotes are a lengthy description of an event in the family's life. It is a delightful book for the Wesley buff who will enjoy browsing through its pages. The scholar also will find many old friends in the quotes and the events listed. The author is a lay speaker in the United Methodist Church and an actress who has toured the USA, Canada and Britain with her solo enactment of the Mother of Methodism. For twelve years she was Associate Professor and Director of Theatre at Aurora University, Illinois.

The author has not listed the sources for all of her quotes, which would have been a help to the reader. Here and there a humorous quote adds zest to the little volume. The book is generously illustrated. Some of the illustrations are in color and add to the value of the book. Many, however, which are in black and white, are poorly reproduced. One or two are inappropriately placed. For February 13, the author perpetuates the jingle professing to be John Wesley's *Rule*. Dr. Frank Baker explains the inaccuracy on pages 58 and 59 of the October 1994 issue of *Methodist History*.

All in all, the book will prove a delight to its many readers.

**FREDERICK E. MASER**

*Scottsdale, Arizona*

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Joseph Rayner Stephens's life was full of paradoxes. He was a Wesleyan minister expelled from the Connexion for advocating disestablishment, who ended his days a staunch supporter of the Established Church in England and Ireland and yet opposed the anti-Catholic bigotry of Protestant Orangeism. He is best known as a popular demagogue whose
sermons were as fitted for gentlemen diplomats in Sweden as for cotton workers in Stalybridge, who was imprisoned as a Chartist yet did not believe in the Charter. This is a life that needs some explaining but Mr. Edwards rises to the challenge. The key to understanding this political preacher is the Bible. Stephens denounced the sins of the new capitalist, industrial world of cotton-manufacturing Lancashire and Cheshire like an Old Testament prophet. The violence he appeared to advocate was the just retribution of God against the Poor Law Amendment Act and the lack of a Ten (later Eight) Hours Act to regulate female and child labor in the factories. He saw himself not as an agitator but a Christian witness, proclaiming and warning against the day of God's impending judgment. After his imprisonment in 1839 he gradually moderated his approach as he drew a distinction between the wrath of God and the wrath of the people but he never wavered from his profound biblical conviction in social justice. His was a social gospel before its time. This interpretation is persuasive and clearly comes out of Mr. Edwards's own convictions and experiences as a Methodist minister. It supersedes the only previous biography, by the freethinker G. J. Holyoake, who warmed to Stephens' compassionate social concerns without appreciating the extent to which religion was central to his being, and it enriches our understanding both of this complex preacher and the movements to which he devoted his life.

Edward Royle
York, England


In the editor's words, these little-known narratives illustrate the "sweeping religious, political, and racial changes of their time" (1-2). Hodges elucidates a significant and troubling era in United States history, as seen in the story of George White, born into slavery in Virginia (1764). His conversion narrative follows the traditional pattern, describing his progress from sin to conversion and a reborn life. Upon receiving his freedom, White settled in New York City where his conversion to Methodism was sparked during a trance. Later, despite his successful preaching and evangelism, the Methodist Episcopal Church turned him down five times before granting him a license as a "coloured preacher."

Perhaps the officials hesitated because they did not understand White's use of African-American preaching methods. Reinforcing the evangelical uses of graphic dream imagery and spiritual visitations, White added such African-American experiences as trances and shouts.

John Jea's narrative also displays the racial climate of the age. Born in Africa in 1773, he was brought to America as a small child with his
entire family. They became slaves in rural New York. Despite his master's displeasure and punishments, Jea converted to Christianity, received his freedom, and became a traveling preacher in Europe and America. This edition includes a collection of Jea's hymns that reveal his antislavery aims and call for racial equality.

Hodges provides valuable information about these two remarkable religious figures who had the courage and talent to write what they believed to be the truth of their lives and of the times in which they lived.

ANGELO COSTANZO
Shippensburg, Pennsylvania
Grace and Responsibility: A Wesleyan Theology for Today, by John B. Cobb, Jr. This book represents the first significant effort at constructive Wesleyan theology since the formation of the denomination in 1968. Cobb draws on and moves beyond the historical, critical, and literary work that has characterized Wesley studies in recent years to propose one way of reconstructing and reappropriating essential elements of Wesley's thought in service of the life and mission of United Methodists today. ISBN 0-687-00769-0 Paper, $14.95

Wesley and the People Called Methodists, by Richard P. Heitzenrater. This survey is the story of the people whose lives and thoughts were woven together in the developing theology, organization, and mission of Methodism — conflict as well as courage helped forge this distinctive denomination. Heitzenrater shows how Methodism nourished "holiness of heart and life" through the development of various organizations and mission ideas, securing itself into the very fabric of British society. ISBN 0-687-44311-3 Paper, $19.95 ISBN 0-687-01682-7 Cloth, $34.95

Methodists in Dialog, by Geoffrey Wainwright. "This timely and important book . . . illustrates the characteristic contribution of Methodism to ecumenical dialogue . . . and ends with a plea that . . . Methodists will be Wesleyan enough to keep walking with historic Christianity."
—Dr. Mary Tanner, Moderator, Faith and Order Commission, World Council of Churches. ISBN 0-687-01133-7 Paper, $16.95

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