Christopher Hodge Evans, *Social Gospel Liberalism and the Ministry of Ernest Fremont Tittle: A Theology for the Middle Class*. Lewiston, NY; Queenston, Ontario; Lempeter, Dyfed, Wales, 1996. 400 pp. $60.00.

In this study of a renowned Methodist pastor who served one of the denomination’s prestigious churches from 1918 to 1949, Christopher Evans analyzes the way Ernest Fremont Tittle, a prophetic social gospel liberal, successfully nurtured a politically conservative congregation. His book combines biography, theology, social action, pastoral care, and middle class sociology.

Evans’ primary purpose is to examine a prophetic preacher who was influential in pulpit and pastoral care at First Methodist Church, Evanston, Illinois. Tittle is recognized as one of America’s outstanding Protestant preachers, but Evans argues that he was also the “theologian of the middle class.” By examining the preacher in context of both congregation and American middle class culture, he shows how Tittle stressed God’s judgment upon the middle class. Although many parishioners criticized his ideas, the congregation resolved that he had a “free pulpit” during his pastorate.

With that freedom Tittle endorsed many middle class ideals, but challenged people to affirm economic justice, racial equality, and non-violence. The theology behind his social judgments was neither systematic nor original, but he was a “practical theologian” with the talent to speak the language of the people. His preaching showed how his mind changed; he moved beyond social gospel emphasis on a Christian America to post-liberal recognition of “a pluralistic vision of America’s future.” Evans argues that such ideas were more typical of Tittle’s era than the neo-orthodoxy that major academic historians identify as dominant after World War II.

This book deserves the Jesse Lee Prize it received, although the reviewer wishes Evans included Tittle’s active participation in the Methodist Federation for Social Service, Federal Council of Churches and General Conferences, which he described but did not include in his concluding evaluation. Those activities, as well as his theology and pastoral care, also were part of his Methodist ministry.

DONALD K. GORRELL
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Without either social status or a single institution of higher education, the Methodist Episcopal Church in 1800 was served by a phalanx of
rough-hewn circuit riders, known for their fervid evangelistic preaching and their effectiveness in gathering congregations from among the lower and working classes. Along the expanding frontier of the nation simple Methodist "meeting houses" were being erected in virtually every village and hamlet. By 1880 Methodism had developed into what one national periodical called, "the dominant ecclesiastical fact of the nation," with gothic, cathedral-style churches in urban centers, highly educated and eloquent orators as its bishops and leading spokesmen, influential national periodicals, and a widening web of colleges, universities and seminaries.

Kimbrough has opened a window through which we may view this remarkable period of transformation in the person of the Rev. Joseph Tarkington (1800–1891). Converted at camp meeting near present-day Bloomington, Indiana in 1820, Tarkington began his career as a frontier preacher in 1824. Over the years he, like the church he served, progressed from poverty and obscurity to prosperity and 'respectability.' Tarkington served several times as a presiding elder, became an agent for Indiana Asbury University, and was an intimate associate of such notables as Peter Cartwright and Matthew Simpson. In 1851 Tarkington purchased a 162-acre farm near Greensburg where he raised his family, which in time would become noted for its leadership in Indiana history and culture, contributing among others a two-time Pulitzer prize winning author, Booth Tarkington, Joseph's grandson.

Kimbrough has researched and documented his subject well, his primary source being Tarkington's own autobiography, published in 1899. This has been supplemented by much original research including the use of archival collections of letters and other documents connected to the Tarkington family. The result is a biography that offers an unusually personal glimpse into a 19th century preacher's private world, even as it chronicles the astounding changes occurring in the society and culture around him. There is interesting material on the development of the Indiana frontier, the role and influence of women in the churches, and the attitudes of Hoosier Methodists toward slavery.

There are some minor errors, such as when the author defines being located as "being moved to another circuit" (p. 66), or is unclear about the function and role of the office of presiding elder (p. 105). Nevertheless Kimbrough's book, which includes over two dozen illustrations and photographs, is a fine resource to illuminate a period of transformation that few modern Methodists understand, though it was critical in shaping their church. As such, Reverend Joseph Tarkington will be a welcome addition to the bookshelf of every historically-mind Methodist.

JOSEPH F. DiPAOLO

New Hope, Pennsylvania

The author, D. Michael Henderson, is the founder and Executive Director of African Leadership, an organization which trains African leaders for ministry in Africa. As the title indicates, this book is a study on the origins, development, and effectiveness of the class meeting in early Methodism. The class meeting is placed in the context of Wesley's larger plan which included the society, band, select society, and penitent band. The author contends that these formed a series of "interlocking groups" to provide nurture for the burgeoning Methodist movement in the 18th century and beyond. He claims that the society's "major aim was to present scriptural truth and have it clearly understood" (p. 93). The primary purpose of the class meeting was to influence Methodists' behavior. The band was designed "to improve their attitudes, emotions, feelings, intentions, and affections" (p. 112). Select societies included those whose spiritual maturity made them front-rank in the movement. The goal of the penitential bands was to restore those who had drifted away from Methodist disciplines and needed to be reclaimed for Christ and holy living.

Among the book's strong points are the descriptions of how each of these components of Methodist organization worked and how they contributed to Wesley's view of "Christian conference." The final chapter attempts to explain why this system of Wesleyan organization was so effective.

There are a couple of regrettable errors. The year of Wesley's death was 1791, not 1793 (p. 72) and the Kingswood School was founded in 1748, not 1738 (p. 157). Furthermore, it is questionable whether one should refer to the select society as an "elite corps of . . . enthusiasts" (p. 121), a term ("enthusiast") which means one thing to us, but something very different to 18th century English Protestants and an epithet which Wesley used with much care and qualification. It is curious why the author did not refer anywhere to David Lowes Watson's classic study, *The Early Methodist Class Meeting* (1985). Despite these minor quibbles, the book is worth reading and study, not only for its historical content, but because it raises the question of whether the class meeting has a role for our day.

CHARLES YRIGOYEN, JR.
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These are the first three volumes in a six-volume major reference work. The Editor, Samuel J. Rogal, Chair of the Division of Humanities and Fine
Arts at Illinois Valley Community College, Oglesby, Illinois, is well-known to the readers of this journal. He has written extensively on John Wesley and British Methodism.

The purpose of this reference work is to provide brief articles on men and women who touched, or were touched by, Wesley's life and ministry. Most of them were Wesley's contemporaries, but some, e.g., St. Augustine, John Calvin, and Jacob Arminius, were figures who pre-dated him and were known to Wesley through his reading, study, or in other ways. The entries are alphabetical by last name, give the dates of birth and death (or approximations), and factual biographical information. Each entry ends with listing of some of the sources where basic information about the person may be found.

The task of compiling, editing, preparing the manuscript for publication must have been daunting. There are hundreds of entries in each of these volumes (173 under the letter A) and there will be thousands of entries when the set is complete. Undoubtedly, this is an indispensable reference work which libraries and historians of 18th century Methodism must have.


Methodism came to Smith Island, Maryland, one of only two inhabited islands on Chesapeake Bay, early in the 19th century. Joshua Thomas brought it from the mainland, nine miles away, soon after his conversion. Today, Methodism is the only official religious entity on Smith Island. The island's three villages, Tylerton, Rhodes Point, and Ewell, all have their own churches, supplied by pastors from the mainland. A tabernacle in Ewell is used exclusively for the summer revivals that continue to attract mainlanders.

About five hundred people populate the three villages. Overwhelmingly, they earn their livings one way or another from the water. With oystering all but extinct and crabbing a hard if sometimes lucrative life, the island struggles to maintain its population. In this world of flux and decline, Methodism is the spiritual backbone of Smith Island.

Tom Horton is the environmental columnist for the *Baltimore Sun* and author of four other books on the Chesapeake. He and his family lived for three years in Tylerton, and the result is journalism in a meditative, probing, and contemplative mood. Horton provides the voice, but the underlying spiritual vocabulary and texture belong to Methodism. Explicitly reported on in but a fraction of the book's pages, Methodism nonetheless exerts its influence throughout.

Isolated geographically and in some ways culturally, Smith Island is yet significantly mainstream. What we observe is ordinary people exercising
ordinary choices that would be little different on the mainland. Should Santa Claus be banned from the church Christmas party? Alcohol may be consumed, but discreetly. Should it be sold on Smith Island? The traditional answer of “no” may be changing.

Methodism merges with the “rugged individualism” that is expected of watermen. Occasionally, harvesting the bay for all it is worth wins out over community responsibility and ecological stewardship. The church even becomes a sanctuary to flee a pursuing game warden. One man confesses both Christianity and that he “never felt bad about breakin’ any law that forbids you to make a living.”

Some old-time Methodist traditions live on in these three churches. Class meetings, attended largely by watermen, are held on Sunday mornings before church and Sunday School. Sunday evening services are still convened, and the summer revival is one of the year’s highlights islandwide. Smith Island has no official government, having decisively voted against this possibility not long ago, which lends an almost theocratic air to those prominent church members who seem largely to control the island’s interactions with the mainland on such issues as a centralized waterworks. One middle-aged islander, who is outside of the ecclesiastical power structure, complains that “if you aren’t one of the Christians, then it’s almost like you’re denied the vote sometimes.”

The Delmarva region in which Smith Island is situated is known as “the garden of American Methodism.” Horton’s inviting “memoir” shows continued Methodist vitality amidst aquacultural decline, diminished population, and cultural uncertainty.

RODERICK T. LEUPE

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