
One of the most remarkable developments in the recent historiography of American Christianity has been the publication of attentive and sympathetic interpretations of religious traditions and figures that stand on the fringes of American society. Although not universally applauded (see, for example, D. G. Hart’s essay in the Spring 2000 issue of the Journal of the Historical Society), the work of Ronald Numbers on Creationism and Paul Boyer on premillennialism; and more to the point, the studies of Nathan Hatch and John Wigger on the nature and spread of early Methodism, have forced serious students of American culture to re-evaluate the role of dissenters in the creation of modern culture.

Barry Hamilton’s sensitive, but thankfully objective, biographical and theological study of controversial and eccentric holiness evangelist W. B. Godbey (1833–1920) is an important contribution to this body of literature. A Kentucky native, Godbey served as a Methodist Episcopal Church, South minister, presiding elder, and teacher before embarking on a full-time evangelistic career in 1884. He was one of the truly memorable figures in a movement that celebrated eccentric characters. He was also noted for his translation of the New Testament text and a multi-volume commentary on the New Testament—which in the spirit of the millenarian revolution he helped create, began with the Book of Revelation. Among Godbey’s other controversial writings were works on topics as diverse as American religious denominations, women in ministry and proposed evangelistic forays to other planets. He was an uncompromising social radical who vigorously attacked the wealthy and educated elite in church and society. Although less well known, Godbey’s real significance may be the role he played in shaping the thought of such important Asian Holiness leaders as Jugi Nakada.

In the work’s five chapters, Hamilton provides a critical overview of Godbey’s life; explores his contribution to the theology of the Holiness Movement; and examines his eschatological and ecclesiological visions. Hamilton, who is an ordained Church of the Nazarene minister, theological librarian with a Ph.D. in church history from Drew University, has done a thorough study of Godbey’s writings. This is no small achievement given the sheer number of Godbey’s published books and pamphlets (about 250) and the fact that he was a weekly correspondent to God’s Revivalist for more than a decade. Equally impressive is Hamilton’s knowledge of and interaction with the secondary literature on Kentucky/southern evangelicalism.

Like any reviewer, I do have several reservations about this important work. As a controversial and colorful figure with notable evangelistic campaigns throughout the US, Godbey was undoubtedly the subject of coverage
in the local secular press. I believe an examination of some of the coverage of Godbey in the local press would have given us a fuller picture of him and his impact on those who heard him. Secondly, following a common Church of the Nazarene, and for that matter United Methodist practice, Hamilton assumes that Godbey and the Holiness Movement had a small and diminishing role in 20th century Methodism. In this view, scholars recognize Godbey’s (and the Holiness Movement generally) significant role in the emerging holiness denominations and Pentecostalism. But they suggest that by the second decade of the 20th century most “second blessing” folks had exited from Methodism for such Holiness denominations as the Church of the Nazarene. In fact, as Delbert Rose demonstrated a half-century ago, the continued very vitality of Holiness impulse in Methodism has continued throughout much of the 20th century. The very existence of Holiness camp meetings; thriving educational institutions, such as Asbury Theological Seminary; and evangelists, such as H. C. Morrison, Arthur Wesley, Charles B. Tillman, E. Stanley Jones, Bishop Arthur Moore and Willia Caffray, tells a story many have chosen to ignore. In spite of these pontifications by this reviewer, this is an important book that needs to be read by all students of the Holiness Movement, American Methodism, Pentecostalism and southern evangelicalism.

WILLIAM KOSTLEYVY
Asbury Theological Seminary


This is an attractive and invaluable research tool for anyone who is seriously interested in the history of Christian theology. The articles have been written by 173 scholars and reflect the best contemporary scholarship on Christian thought from the early church to the present. Methodists will be especially interested in the articles on John Wesley written by Henry D. Rack, the premier Wesley biographer, and AME theologian James Hal Cone. There are many other articles which are very important for understanding Methodism and Wesleyan theology, e.g., the articles on Deism, John Calvin, and Calvinism. Pastors, students, and scholars will find this volume an important reference work.

CHARLES YRIGOYEN, JR.
Madison, NJ
John Sims, Presiding

The minutes of the Society’s 1999 annual meeting were approved with no dissent.

As he noted the death of Life Member John Ness, the increased cost of Methodist History because one issue contained what is commonly referred to as the “Dead Preachers’ Link,” and savings realized by Joy Dodson’s use of Central Methodist College’s bulk mailing permit, Lyle Johnston distributed copies of the Treasurer’s Report and responded to questions.

After discussion about figures relating to the Society’s investments, Gary Ferrell moved to lay the report on the table until questions could be answered. The motion was adopted with no dissent.

Pat Thompson asked if the Society’s drop in membership could be attributed to the raise in dues approved at the Little Rock meeting in 1998. Dan Swinson said that was difficult to determine, and Johnston reported that only four had notified him that they were not renewing membership, and that there had also been a loss of members by death. Sims announced that the Board was about to move on the publication of a color brochure. Thompson suggested giving a 10 per cent discount, instead of the $2 reduction, for members who pay their dues through their local historical society. She added that, it being too late to do so this year, such a policy could begin next year.

Speaking for the Local Church History Section, Thelma Boeder reported publication of two articles in Historian’s Digest, and said there would be a discussion at their afternoon meeting of ways to promote local church history on web sites.
Bob Sledge explained that the focus of the Education and Research Section is identifying and distributing information about who is doing research on United Methodist history and what areas they are researching.

Mary Bakeman said the Genealogy Section would discuss plans for the future.

Reporting for the Commissions and Historical Societies Section, Lois Yost said they would be sharing information about what commissions and societies can do to make their ministry of memory more effective.

At 3:30, the meeting recessed for section meetings.

Respectfully submitted by Nancie Peacocke Fadeley, Secretary
MINUTES
HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH
PLENARY SESSION
ANNUAL MEETING
WESLEY UNITED METHODIST CHURCH
CATONSVILLE, MD
TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 26, 2000
10:00 A.M.

John Sims, presiding

Without dissent, the Society approved a motion to take the Treasurer’s Report off the table.

Responding to questions which had been raised earlier about the Society’s investment account, Lyle Johnston reported that he had, upon checking with the United Methodist Development Fund office, learned that it had given him incorrect numbers and that investments now total $15,749.58.

Without dissent, the Society accepted the corrected Treasurer’s Report.

Sims noted that, in the proposed 2001 budget, there were only two changes from the 2000 budget, a decrease in the costs for Historian’s Digest, and an increase for the 2001 annual meeting. The proposed budget totaled $19,900. When acknowledging the $11,900 deficit for 2000, he opined that it could be alleviated by increasing membership.

Ed Schell reported that the Baltimore meeting had paid its own costs with no subsidy.

The 2001 budget proposed by the Treasurer was accepted by voice vote.

After pointing out that the HSUMC could increase its membership by encouraging the growth of local historical societies, and that that could be done by reducing the HSUMC dues of those who paid through their local societies, Pat Thompson presented the following motion which was approved without dissent: I move that the annual dues for the Historical Society of the United Methodist Church be reduced by 10 per cent when an individual or a family joins the Society through an annual conference, regional (area), or jurisdictional historical society of the United Methodist Church. The dues must be collected by the historical society through which the individual or family joins and sent to the treasurer of the HSUMC.
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