

## BOOK REVIEWS

John Pritchard, *Methodists and Their Mission Societies, 1760-1900*. Surrey, England: Ashgate Publishing, 2013. 318 pp. £63.

*Methodists and Their Mission Societies, 1760-1900*, is the first part of a two-volume series by John Pritchard about British Methodist mission work around the world. The publication of this series marks the two hundredth anniversary of the first meeting of the Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society (WMMS) in October of 1883 in Leeds. Moreover the book updates the 1913 five volume work by G.G. Findlay and W.W. Holdsworth entitled *The History of the Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society* (Epworth). The focus of this work is further broadened and includes the mission work of four other denominations (Primitive Methodists, Methodist New Connexion, United Methodist Free Churches and Bible Christians) under the Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society to become the Methodist Mission Society in 1932.

Pritchard records in great detail the early Methodist mission efforts around the world including the roles of John Wesley, Thomas Coke, Jabez Bunting and other mission proponents. Beginning with the backdrop of sixteenth-century Catholic and late seventeenth-century to early eighteenth-century German Pietist mission work, the book quickly focuses on the British context. The author describes the priority of the Society for the Promotion of the Gospel (SPG) to provide for the spiritual needs of the colonists before evangelizing native peoples. William Caray's 1792 *Enquiry*, which led to the creation of the Baptist Missionary Society, and Thomas Coke's apocalyptic urgency heightened this priority, however the tension between empire and mission to the indigenous remained for several decades—varying from country to country. The charter of the East India Company, for example, declared that nothing stand in the way of commercial interests, although it did provide chaplains for employees. Pritchard intentionally does not enter into the postcolonial debate on the relationship between colonialism and missions, but acknowledges other recent publications that do. Rather, he stays focused on the task of preserving Methodist missionary efforts.

In addition to major Methodist figures, the book lifts up the individual faithfulness of lesser-known uncommissioned laity, such as British soldier, Henry Tice, who established the first Methodist Society in Spain in 1769, or Kitty Dorset, a black Christian slave who introduced Methodism into the island of Montserrat in 1810, to name just two of several intriguing examples of faithful servants. Such are the stories of how Methodism arrived in Africa, Asia, and Latin America by both unplanned, spontaneous immigrants

carrying the faith and the intentional efforts of missionary societies.

The very title of the book: *Methodists and their Missionary Societies, 1760-1900*, appears very inclusive, however American readers should beware of its British bias. The author states that the book only covers American Methodism up to 1784 when the Methodist Episcopal Church was born and it ceased to be a mission of British Methodism—which only commands three pages in the book. This perspective should not be a surprise given the background of the author, who is a minister in the British Methodist Church and General Secretary of the Overseas Division from 1991-1996. Depending on your point of view, this can be a welcome contribution to the field of Methodist studies—given the recent abundance of scholarship on American Methodism.

Readers should also be aware that the work is organized like a history book with short vignettes about a mission work at specific times and places, which makes it difficult to follow a particular narrative or read straight through. It does not have a thesis or a hypothesis—it just shares the stories. This book will be, however, an excellent resource for persons researching one topic. For example some chapter titles and topics are “Into India,” “The Challenge of China,” “Islands in the Sun,” and “Women Workers and Missionary Martyrs of the Nineteenth Century.” For this purpose, the index is helpful for finding specific persons, places and events. Other nice features are a glossary of Methodist terms, list of abbreviations for the acronyms, maps and illustrations. The most personable and inspiring chapter, “The Life of the Missionary,” tells the testimonies of pioneer missionaries whose persistence, sacrifice and hard work are worth the price of the book alone.

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D. Stephen Long and Andrew Kinsey, *Keeping Faith: An Ecumenical Commentary on the Articles of Religion and Confession of Faith in the Wesleyan Tradition*. Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2012. 100 pp. \$24.00.

*Keeping Faith*, the first volume of the Wesleyan Doctrine Series, provides an introductory overview of the primary doctrinal documents of the United Methodist Church (UMC) and suggests what we may expect from the projected series. Regrettably, D. Stephen Long packs the book, a mere 100 pages, with too much theological reflection and too little historical context. This makes it difficult for readers, especially those in the pews to whom the book is particularly addressed, to understand history or recognize links between well-established doctrine and contemporary theological concerns. In addition, his choice to organize the book around ten themes subtly imposes a new ordering of Methodist doctrine, and he calls noncanonical literature into

ecclesiastical question. Nonetheless, the book is not without value. I used it in preparing several sermons this past spring and as a personal resource for confirmation class preparation. It must be read with caution, however, because by taking on so much it succumbs to the trap of giving too little to the basic principals of Wesleyan tradition and doctrine.

In order to manage both the Articles of Religion (Articles) and the Confession of Faith (Confession), Dr. Long organizes the book around “ten foundational theological themes” (xi) rather than as they are presented in *The Book of Discipline*. These ten themes serve not only as the organizing premise of this book, but also outline the entire proposed series. In so doing, he takes bolder steps than Mr. Wesley did in 1784. In dealing with the Church of England’s doctrine, Wesley’s technique was to edit by elimination, removing that with which he disagreed. He did not, however, reorganize the doctrine in the *Book of Common Prayer* or add more than was needed by a nascent denomination forming in the new United States.

By intermingling parts of the Articles and the Confession and altering the order in which they are presented to meet the structure of his ten-theme outline, Dr. Long subtly re-ranks the doctrinal statements of the UMC’s *Book of Discipline*. Moreover, within each of the ten foundational themes, it is not clear how or why he chooses to emphasize statements either from the Articles or the Confession or to explicitly compare and contrast similar doctrinal themes from each. What gives either priority over the other? In addition, he juxtaposes selections from the Articles with certain statements from the Confession, and in so doing he subtly melds them together. These, of course, were among the challenges Outler and the uniting committee faced in addressing doctrinal issues when the Methodist Church and the Evangelical United Brethren merged in 1968 to form The United Methodist Church.

Dr. Long notes in his introduction that “doctrine depends on the communion of the saints” (xi), but in fact, one of the most problematic aspects of the book is its apparently ahistorical approach to doctrine itself. He gives far too little attention to the ecclesiastical and cultural histories from which specific doctrines have emerged, nor does he consider or explore why these constructs of Wesleyan faith continue today. If the book and the series seek to enlighten both laity and clergy, more attention should be given to the *sitz im leben* of those saints with whom we are in communion. Even if we assume that the doctrine of the church is what is stated as doctrine at any given point in time, such doctrine does not exist in an historical vacuum.

Dr. Long also makes troubling assertions about the liturgical use of non-canonical literature. Regarding today’s growing interest in such literature as the Gospels of Judas, Thomas, and Barnabas, he insists that these first and second century writings are not “listed in the recognized canonical list in our fifth Article of Religion. Therefore, they cannot be used in church” (43). Dr. Long normally uses words with care, but he fails to fully clarify what he means by “in church.” Is “church” limited to the communal worship of God? Does he mean to suggest that we are to exclude these writings only from liturgical or homiletical use in worship? Or, if church is “the commu-

nity of all true believers . . . the redemptive fellowship . . .” (52), as he emphasizes by choosing Article V of the Confession to begin his sixth chapter (aptly, “The Church”), would he approve the study of noncanonical literature in other contexts? Apparently not; as he asserts, “the canonical texts are the only ones that should be read and given authority in our church’s life” (43).

May we not use Augustine, Aquinas, Luther, Wesley, Harkness, Day, King, and so many other wise disciples? Should the *Didache* not be used in adult Christian education groups? Biblical literacy is waning disastrously in our pews and pulpits; should we not take as many opportunities as possible to enhance our understanding of Scripture? Should we not rely on the insight and wisdom of noncanonical writers and scholars? Doctrine should enlighten and edify faith, not cloud it with additional opportunities for confusion.

Andrew Kinsey’s contribution to the book is strong and helpful. At the end of the introduction and each of the ten chapters, Dr. Kinsey lists eight to fourteen thoughtful and thought-provoking “questions for consideration.” I found these most useful. They focused my reflections on the progression of Professor Long’s argument, enabling me to imagine how the material might be used in a local church setting, including from the pulpit and in educational venues.

Perhaps the weaknesses of this first book in the series reflect the reality that there was simply too much material to cover in the hundred-page format. Despite my fundamental reservations about how the doctrinal traditions of Methodism have been reprioritized, perhaps inadvertently but with consequence, and my questions about Dr. Long’s assertions about the use of noncanonical scholarship and literature, the book contributes to elementary discussion of the place of doctrine in the Wesleyan tradition. This little book would be a good guide for a Wesleyan seminarian exploring systematic theology for the first time or as one of several texts in the doctrine portion of a Wesleyan studies program.

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S T Kimbrough, *Radical Grace: Justice for the Poor and Marginalized—Charles Wesley’s Views for the Twenty-First Century*. Eugene, Oregon: Cascade Books, 2013. 150 pp. \$20.

In this volume, S T Kimbrough continues his work of connecting Charles Wesley’s theology of the poor and the marginalized to our everyday lives. Like much of his previous work, this volume continues to give both an evaluation of Charles’s theology and practice, and resources for worship. The major difference between this work and his previous work is that it arranges the discussion around the primary sources of Charles Wesley.

After a brief introduction, which describes the situation of the poor in eighteenth-century England, Kimbrough turns to Charles Wesley’s sermons.

He briefly looks at two of Charles Wesley sermons, (the sermons based on Titus 3:8 and John 4:41). Based on these two sermons he argues that the poor are a part of the Church and that through our care for the poor we become partakers of God's own nature. Kimbrough is once again highlighting the role *theosis* plays in Charles Wesley's theology, that our care for the poor is one of the ways that we participate in the nature of God with a faith that works by love.

In the chapter on the *Manuscript Journal*, Kimbrough shows how Charles was an advocate for the poor and how he related to the poor and the marginalized through several different activities. The "Table of Contents" is a great help here because it provides a list of these activities. One highlight from this chapter is Charles's indication that when in pain he would rather be with his best friends, the poor. Another important insight is the role that the Wesley's may have had in preparing people to become members of the Church of England. John and Charles "understood that those least familiar with its [the *Book of Common Prayer*] words might better be introduced to the worship of God through singing, prayer, and preaching" (19).

In the next section Kimbrough deals with the poetry of Charles Wesley. He beautifully integrates the primary text with comments highlighting their meaning for today. Kimbrough begins this chapter by using the doctrine of *kenosis* to connect the self-abasement of Christ to our ministry to the poor with a quote from Charles Wesley's poetry:

Triumph we, the sons of grace,  
That our God is born so poor,  
Doth his Majesty abase  
Our salvation to secure (30).

After laying out Charles Wesley's view of the poor and the marginalized, Kimbrough presents a theology for the churches' care of the poor and the marginalized for today, which includes both the theology itself and a way implementing this theology of radical grace. In short, implementing a theology of radical grace means living with and for the poor.

A feature that we have come to expect from Kimbrough is an inclusion of resources for ministry, and we are not disappointed in this volume. He ends the volume with three liturgies and sixteen congregational hymns, which include the musical setting.

I would highly recommend this volume for anyone interested in learning how Charles Wesley worked with the poor and more importantly how we can implement his theology and practice today.

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Kenneth J. Collins and Jason E. Vickers, *The Sermons of John Wesley: A Collection for the Christian Journey*. Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2013. 656 pp. \$49.99.

This collection of sixty Wesley sermons is presented as an intentional alternative to the 1991 Abingdon volume of fifty sermons compiled by Albert Outler and Richard Heitzenrater, *John Wesley's Sermons: An Anthology*. The introduction outlines the differences between the two volumes and defends this edition as the better choice for “theological and spiritual formation,” for “serious Christian formation,” and for “active, full-orbed Christian discipleship.” The reason these goals are better accomplished in this edition is that the sermons are ordered “following the way of salvation” thus allowing them to function as a “means of grace.” In contrast, the ordering of the sermons in the Outler-Heitzenrater volume is chronological, which is designed more for academic study than discipleship *per se*.

Interestingly though this volume has ten more sermons than the previous anthology, it is not the previous fifty plus ten more, rather twelve sermons included by Outler-Heitzenrater are left out of this new collection (including: “Spiritual Worship,” “The More Excellent Way,” “Prophets and Priests,” and “On Living Without God”). The largest addition is the inclusion of nine of Wesley’s sermons on the Sermon on the Mount which were not included in the previous volume (Collins-Vickers include all thirteen in the series). Other new sermons include those which specifically address themes such as assurance and Christian ethics. The text of the sermons is taken from the four-volume critical edition of *The Works of John Wesley* and each of the sermons has a helpful brief introduction provided by the authors. While there is no substitute for the four-volume critical edition with its lengthy introductions to the sermons and the invaluable footnotes, the Collins-Vickers volume works well as a textbook, as it leads the reader down a relatively clear soteriological path.

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Barry W. Hamilton, *The Role of Richard Watson's "Theological Institutes" in the Development of Methodism after John Wesley*. Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 2014. 415pp. \$49.95 (softcover).

Barry Hamilton has written a significant and important work on the development of Methodist thought following Wesley and ending with the work of Richard Watson. The importance of Richard Watson’s *Theological Institutes* in the development of Methodist thought in the nineteenth century has long been recognized since the middle of the last century with the foundational work of Dale Dunlap, Leland Scott and Robert Chiles. Watson’s work

in systematics marked a shift in the theological development in Methodism. The Wesleys had left a significant corpus that revolved around biblical theology as seen in the *Explanatory Notes* on the New and the Old Testament, the body of sermons and the hymnbook. It would not be until the end of the nineteenth century that Methodist biblical scholars would begin to take center stage again. So was Watson's work a natural development within Methodism? Or was it responding to some specific challenge or event within Methodism?

In many respects Hamilton's volume could be called "From Wesley to Watson: Theological Developments." Hamilton's reflections are about the events which lay behind the writing of the *Institutes*—What was the cause of the writing and the purpose of the text in the education of future ministers? What were the issues in the years following Wesley and the opening years of the nineteenth century that "required" such a work as this? Hamilton's primary thesis is that to understand the *Institutes*, both their content and the rationale, one must look at the developments within Methodism, and also that of British society, for the years around the beginning of the nineteenth century. It then becomes obvious that "the nearly four decades between the death of John Wesley and the death of Richard Watson brought on a struggle for power among preachers and laity, with the triumph and consolidation of Conference Methodism" (2). And Watson's work plays an important role in the "triumph."

Hamilton connects the life and work of Watson with that of Watson's friend Jabez Bunting. Bunting is understood as the architect and instigator of a respectable Methodism, one that was not seen as a threat to society or establishment and one which was securely governed by the Conference, allowing little dissent. If Bunting was the architect of this political-social consolidation behind the development of the Conference, then Watson, according to Hamilton, builds the theological and ethical foundation to support the same. In both cases, Bunting's and Watson's world views were developed in the opening decades of the nineteenth century when republican thought was seen as a threat to British society, when Adam Clarke sparked a controversy over the "sonship" of Christ, when there were splits from the Conference over theology and praxis and over such theological and philosophical controversies as rationalism and human wisdom.

Watson's concern was to help stabilize the young denomination. "[Watson's] strategy involved the elimination of the differences between Wesley's theology and the prevalent doctrines of the Church of England" (381). To accomplish this, Watson downplayed, for example, the importance of the Spirit in the life of the individual and church, and also increased the importance of the Conference and the clergy. Watson also wanted to emphasize the connection between Methodism and older theological and social currents within Anglicanism. "The *Theological Institutes* anchored Methodist theological education solidly in the intellectual history of the English Church. Rather than looking to John Wesley as a theological guide, Watson chose leading lights of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century British Christianity . . ." (385).

The analysis of the social and political character behind the *Institutes* is important. It helps in understanding Watson's text in its setting, even if some people of its day didn't recognize it as such. For example, it has long been obvious from a casual reading of the section on ethics or on the structure of the church that Watson was no friend to democratic principles. Watson, writing barely a decade after the fall of Napoleon and a decade before major reform in Parliament, must have still been able to hear the drumbeats of the recently passed Revolution and its perceived dangers to Methodism. Hamilton goes on to argue that Watson still sensed the loss caused by the splits and arguments within the denomination. So the *Institutes* then becomes a conservative text in order to stabilize the young denomination. This is a helpful analysis of Watson. But was Watson a willing or unwitting partner in Bunting's drive to push the denomination toward respectability? Were the two in league, or did Watson just respond to his times in a similar fashion? I am not sure that question is answered here, but it is a very good question to ask. Hamilton seems to cast Watson as willing partner or cohort of Bunting. Watson, in effect, becomes an addition to the Bunting legend. Does the "looming" shadow of Bunting lie over Watson? (386)

Hamilton has done a good service in providing this analysis of the *Institutes*. He has answered some questions on Watson and he has pointed the way for further reflection.

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