

BOOK REVIEWS

Thomas S. Kidd. *George Whitefield: America's Spiritual Founding Father*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014. 325 pp. \$40.00 Hardcover, \$25.00 Softcover.

Thomas Kidd has produced an informative yet readable new biography of the great evangelist of the eighteenth-century Evangelical Revival. Whereas recent studies have sketched the life of George Whitefield (1714-1770) as the first American religious celebrity, as part of the new consumer revolution, or as the central figure in "priming America for its Revolution," Kidd presents Whitefield as the "key figure in the first generation of Anglo-American evangelical Christianity" (3). Even though, as Kidd points out, Whitefield was by 1740 the most famous person in America, his fame has since been eclipsed by others, including Jonathan Edwards and John Wesley (2). For this reason Kidd proposes that a new biography is needed to assess Whitefield's significance as one of the primary leaders of the burgeoning evangelical movement. With this aim in mind Kidd seeks to understand Whitefield amidst the "factious milieu" of early evangelicalism (3).

The book has twelve chapters and a conclusion, fairly even in length, which weave together a narrative of Whitefield's life in relation to his enormous success as an evangelist, his complex relationships with the Wesleys (and other evangelicals), his advocacy of slavery, his personal bond with Benjamin Franklin, and his involvement in politics (e.g. the repeal of the Stamp Act in 1765). One feature this reviewer appreciated was Kidd's repeated notations of the opposition Whitefield received from Anglican clergy.

The first three chapters cover the period from Whitefield's birth up to his first of seven trips to America in 1738, detailing his conversion in 1735 and his rise to celebrity status at the youthful age of twenty-two. The next four chapters cover his return to England when Whitefield's popularity surged with his practice of field preaching. Kidd chronicles the rising tide of Anglican opposition and the controversy with the Wesleys over predestination. Whitefield's famous preaching tour of America that sparked the Great Awakening from 1739 to 1741 receives extensive coverage (three chapters), along with the start of the Bethesda orphanage in Georgia. Chapters eight to ten address Whitefield's ministry in the 1740s, including another tour of America and his advocacy of slavery in Georgia. Because of existing racial tensions in America, Kidd offers an informative analysis of Whitefield's viewpoint on slavery in light of his colonial context.

The final two chapters cover the last two decades of Whitefield's life, including his trips to America, Scotland, and Holland. Kidd details how Whitefield's views moderated during this period, leading him to publish severely

edited edition of his journals. Whitefield's later relationships with the Countess of Huntingdon, the Moravians, and the Wesleys are further addressed. The book concludes with Whitefield's final trip to America and his death on September 30, 1770, followed by some fascinating stories of visitors to his tomb and his legacy as America's spiritual founding father.

Kidd's biography will serve for many years as a primary study on Whitefield's preaching career. As the subtitle informs us, the focus is more on the "American" Whitefield and less on his English context. The biography reflects the best of Whitefield scholarship to date, is balanced in its treatment of the Wesleys, and is written for a broad readership. I highly recommend it to fellow scholars and Methodists.

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Brett C. McNelly. *Textual Warfare and the Making of Methodism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014. 245 pp. \$99.00.

As an historian of the book and one that has dabbled in the history of Methodism, I was happy to discover *Textual Warfare and the Making of Methodism*. Brett McNelly takes a very particular view of the rise and expansion of Methodism. His primary argument is that Methodism was greatly influenced by "a rich textual culture that includes both pro- and anti-Methodist productions" (10). It is this textual culture that McNelly leans on for the entirety of his work and serves as the foundation for his arguments and the evidence he uses to defend them.

McNelly focuses exclusively on the early history of Methodism, restricting his discussion to the period from 1732 to John Wesley's death in 1791. This rather narrowly focuses the work on the development of Methodism from a modest eighteenth century organization to a dominant religion in the nineteenth century. Within this time period, McNelly contends, the internal and external debates that played out in print helped to develop Methodist ideology and identity. These debates, which the author refers to as "textual warfare," resulted from attacks by non-Methodists that led to a coherent and cohesive resilience by Methodists which helped to codify and publicize the movement, to the point where even anti-Methodist publications "may have actually attracted converts" to the cause (55).

McNelly explicitly preferences written culture over oral, a preference that existed among early Methodists as well. The written word was easily accessible to Methodists and had a greater sense of permanence among followers. While sermons could certainly grab an audience and hold its attention for a time, McNelly argues, the feelings it engendered were temporary. Written works, on the other hand, could continuously reproduce those feelings time and again with each reading. With such an emphasis on the long-term impact of written culture, it is no wonder that the warfare was a textual one.

This is not to say, however, that McNelly ignores the non-written aspects of Methodism. He dedicates many pages to discussing the ways in which both supporters and detractors perceived Methodism as a performance. Whether it was Samuel Foote disparaging Methodist preachers as “actors,” or playwrights mocking Methodists on the London stage, opponents were quick to point out the theatrical nature of the movement. Although Methodists routinely condemned plays and play-going in eighteenth-century England, some attended Methodist events (particularly Whitefield’s sermons) for their entertainment value. McNelly wisely explores this paradox and places it within the context of the larger battle between Methodists and their critics.

He continues the discussion of performance with an exploration of Methodist hymnody. Within these chapters, however, McNelly drifts from his original contention that the written word had more impact and permanence than oral culture. The section is well written and strongly supported, however, and adds to his picture of Methodism and its critics. He follows with a section on sexuality and sexual politics that explores the extremes of pro- and anti-Methodist publications as they affected women’s roles in the movement.

Textual Warfare ends with a lengthy discussion of early Methodist infighting. As McNelly writes: “Attacks from within the movement were harder to ignore than the more salacious attacks that came from outside, and responding to one’s internal foes became an urgent and necessary matter” (212). Methodism was born in a world of strife, clashes, and wars, and was created, at least in part, by the forces that sought to sunder it. Brett McNelly’s work serves as a valuable guide to this element of its beginnings. It is a welcome addition to both Methodist history and the history of printing.

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Ryan Nicholas Danker. *Wesley and the Anglicans: Political Division in Early Evangelicalism*. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2016. 304 pp. \$26.00.

The relationship of the Methodist movement with and within the Church of England has been an ongoing topic of study from Wesley’s day until today. A tapestry of interplay has been created with threads which include Wesley’s actions leading to separation in spite of his claims otherwise; letters of Thomas Coke to Episcopal bishops in America seeking rapprochement; twentieth-century efforts of British Methodists and the Church of England for closer relationships; international dialogues between the World Methodist Council and the Anglican Consultative Council; and dialogue between The United Methodist Church and the Episcopal Church in the United States. *Wesley and the Anglicans* is the latest and most welcomed contribution to examining this relationship. The author has also published a study related

to this work, "The Younger Brother Unveiled: Charles Wesley and Anglicanism in Colonial Boston," in *Methodist Review*, volume 6 (2014).

Danker's intent for the book is to understand the relationship between John Wesley and the "evangelical clergymen of the eighteenth-century Church of England" and "the gradual divide that took place between Wesley and fellow evangelicals within the Church of England." His "approach in this book is that social, political and ecclesiastical issues have not been given proper weight in the discussion. When considered in isolation, the theological questions raised by the participants in this slow divide simply do not provide the necessary rationale for a division of English evangelicalism" (13). Later Danker reiterates, "Likewise, their ultimate division would come about by social, political and theological concerns much larger than their particular sphere, a story that unfolds as Wesley's relationship to his evangelical colleagues develops with the continued spread of the revival" (69). He seeks to counter the perceived flaws of previous analyses which interpret the divide solely through theological lenses.

The relationship between Wesley and his Evangelical colleagues in the Church of England was eroded by several factors. Opponents of Methodism and the power of anti-Methodist propaganda made the Wesley brothers a liability to the regular clergy (71). There was the possibility of guilt by association and the censures by the bishops "were part of a theologically charged political environment that created a context in which irregularity was all too easily connected to the practices and politics of earlier enthusiasts and parliamentarians of the previous century" (94). What can be "perceived historically as a theological or religious movement, were seen in their own day as a political challenge A challenge to the Church could easily be seen as a challenge to the state and thus to the Crown itself" (94). Other strains in the relationship resulted from the appearance of dissent, the use of lay preachers (129), methods not in keeping with canon law, and the issue of Eucharistic administration. Any theological differences were not sufficient in themselves to lead to the division. Danker was clear: "My argument here is that though theological differences were apparent between Wesley and many of the Evangelicals, the divide that took place must be seen in a broader context" which included political, social, and ecclesial issues (212). The study concludes in the year 1770 because the divide was clear by that time.

This reviewer is a participant in the Episcopal Church-United Methodist Church dialogue in the U.S. that is seeking an agreement for Full Communion which heightened my interest in the book. This study is another reminder that Wesley was and never ceased to be a priest in the Church of England. Danker himself may have suggested further study that awaits when he wrote that "Wesley's relationship to Evangelical Anglican clergy must be seen within the larger picture of Wesley's relationship with the general clergy and the thorny issue of Methodism's relationship to the Church of England" (110). I would have welcomed a wider lens that did not confine the analysis to just the evangelical clergy but that can await a subsequent study. Danker's work is carefully and thoroughly researched and is rich in detail.

Wesley and the Anglicans deserves a careful and disciplined reading.

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Alison Collis Greene. *No Depression in Heaven: The Great Depression, the New Deal, and the Transformation of Religion in the Delta*. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2016. xvi + 317 pp. \$ 34.95.

A model of readable, engaging, substantive scholarship, Greene's book charts organized religion's efforts to deal with the economic and social chaos of "the Great Depression" and the religion-depressing effects of the New Deal. Or to reframe the latter point: she shows how the New Deal took on, indeed took over—through President Franklin D. Roosevelt's huge array of socially redemptive programs—the care of the poor, the dispossessed, the hungry, the jobless, and the homeless for whom religious communities had aspired to care. Churches and synagogues had to rethink their societal purposes and to do so amidst the programmatic clutter of vastly expanded federal and state programs.

A study of American Methodism this is not. Indeed, aside from the reformer, Will Alexander, founder of the Commission on Interracial Cooperation and early among southerners working across racial lines and for reconciliation, no Methodists receive more than passing notice. And Alexander who did not make it into the two huge volumes of *The Encyclopedia of World Methodism* (we do deal with him in our *The Methodist Experience in America: A History*) receives just four or five pages of attention. To be sure, throughout the volume, Greene mentions Methodists of the several black and white varieties found in the Delta (Arkansas, Mississippi, and Memphis, TN). But so she also covers the array of religious bodies—from Pentecostals to Catholics, Eastern Orthodox and Jews—which worked that rough terrain.

What makes the volume of great interest to today's United Methodists is the way her portrayal and analysis explains mainline Protestantism's chaotic array of current institutional purposes and loss of a sense of its vocation in American society. The book then seemingly treats a limited geographical region but, in fact, addresses issues central to American history, its racism, and especially its religious life. President Franklin D. Roosevelt reshaped the federal government, "miraculously" gave it the cure of souls, and took over a/the central ecclesial mandate. Eleanor Roosevelt, Greene shows, helped him explain government's churching offices. (I will leave to the reader the question of whether her explosive eight pages of "Epilogue: The Myth of the Redemptive Depression," carrying us from FDR to Barack Obama and Affordable Care have the exacting, explanatory power of her pre- and post-Depression analysis.)

Aside from that last half century jump from President Franklin D. Roosevelt to President Obama, Greene guides us carefully through the turmoil

of Depression-swept rural and urban America and then into the New Deal as experienced on the ground. At several points she gives a face to these larger patterns through engaging portrayals of actors and their roles in the Depression and New Deal dramas. In chapters 2, 3 and 6, they take the stage. For two of these she provides pictures; throughout, the reader feels pulled into the play and back into the agonies of the day.

One indicator of her orienting professionalism is the incredible appeal to scholarship on American politics, regional dynamics, economic disaster, and the changing religious scene. "Notes" takes up a third of the volume. Chapter 5 and its notes provide but an illustration of Greene's probing. An example—"14. Josiah Crudup, Belzoni, Mississippi. October 10, 1935. Mississippi Folder, Box 16. CL."—one of the thousands of clergy responses to Roosevelt and his letters mailed personally to them appealing for their "counsel and advice" on the Works Progress Administration and Social Security.

"Many churches and clergy," she observes "felt their power in their communities dwindle. . . . [S]ome clergy now worried that the federal government was winning more hearts than they were, and everywhere they saw evidence that people revered the distant president more than any local official" (149). This book is a must-read for folks who wish to understand the UMC's malaise.

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NEW AND NOTEWORTHY

Thomas S. Kidd. *American Colonial History: Clashing Cultures and Faiths*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2016. 319 pp. \$20.00.

Thomas Kidd's latest offering meets a critical need for an accessible, yet thorough accounting of the various ways in which Christianity was introduced to North America. It is not the usual Puritan-centric, City-on-a-Hill, seekers-of-religious-freedom version offered to generations of American schoolchildren. Instead, as might be anticipated from a scholar of his repute, Kidd discusses the well-developed Native American religions encountered by European explorers, traders, missionaries and colonists. He devotes as many pages and as much energy to the Spanish and French Roman Catholics who preceded the Puritans by several generations, acknowledges the Virginian Anglicans and others who traveled to this continent hoping for economic gain, and thoughtfully addresses the west African religious traditions of those who were enslaved. His recounting of George Whitefield's American career is helpful; otherwise, his treatment of Methodism is fair but limited, as the book ends with the French and Indian (Seven Years') War. This would be an excellent textbook for use with undergraduate, graduate, or seminary students. One can only hope for a second volume that extends the narrative to the present.

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