

BOOK REVIEWS

Betty Livingston Adams, *Black Women's Christian Activism*. New York: New York UP, 2016. 240pp. \$55.00.

Black Women's Christian Activism is a captivating record of the largely under-studied activism of non-elite black church women in the Long Civil Rights Movement (the period between the *Brown v. Board of Education* U.S. Supreme Court decision of 1954 and The Voting Rights Act of 1965). Adams's study of Florence Randolph and Violet Johnson, two "Black women living at the intersection of religion and society" (12), similarly expands our understanding of the struggle for racial and gender rights by stretching the movement further back to the late nineteenth century and directs our attention to Summit, New Jersey, a suburb of New York City where the "complicated intersections of politics and religions, race and gender, and place, and space" (1) required unique strategies for Black women fighting for social justice.

Adams begins with Violet Johnson's 1897 entry into Summit as a domestic worker, and her organization of a Christian Endeavour Society Bible study group which led to the founding of Fountain Baptist Church, making it the first African American church to exist in the mostly white suburb. Adams describes the location and construction of the church as evidence of the "determination of black women in Summit to claim moral, civic, and physical space" (7) against the resolve of the town's white property owners who refused to rent the vacant Old City Hall to Fountain Baptist.

The women were also challenged by denominational recognition, male church leadership, and the appointment of a pastor from the National Baptist Convention, which did not recognize the ordination of women or their missionary contributions through Missionary Union Bible Bands. This contention ultimately led Johnson to organize the National Baptist Women's Convention in 1900.

Following chapters continue the theme of organizational management and political negotiation as Johnson and Randolph advocated for women's suffrage. Adams reveals that the ratification of the 19th amendment and later key electoral issues depended heavily upon a strategic network which capitalized on interracial, cross-class, intergenerational relationships among and within religious and social organizations. Adams highlights the public discourse of noted orators such as Anna Julia Cooper, Mary Church Terrell, and Ida B. Wells-Barnett, as well as the organizational acumen of Black women in groups such as National Association of Colored Women (NACW), New Jersey Federation of Colored Women's Club, New Jersey State Colored Women's Republican Club, Women's Christian Temperance Union, New

Jersey Federation of Colored Women's Club, Republican Party, NAACP Anti-Lynching Crusade, Federal Council of Churches Women's Committee, and YMCA. Especially challenging is this early glimpse into intersectionality in which Black church women differentiated their political aims in the midst of contestation of their moral character and respectability by White male suburbanites and fellow suffragettes. Black women's political audacity was their demonstration of dignity, citizenship, and duty. "Having formulated an oppositional discourse of civic righteousness, Black women did not bracket their religious convictions or their experience of race, gender, and class upon entering the political arena nor did they confuse political attitude with political behavior" (124).

Adams attacks the notion that Jim Crow segregation was only a Southern problem. The struggle of Northern Blacks for public space and visibility in Summit's city center moved the Black women's club movement from a fight for civic righteousness to a fight for civil rights. World War I, the Great Depression and New Deal era found Black Summit residents in increasingly compromised economic positions, and Black church women increasingly motivated by Christian conviction to organize Black citizens to vote for relief operations and racial justice. In chapter five, Adams elucidates Black women's turn to the Democratic Party in 1936 after Republicans failed to "respond to their demands for just laws and moral institutions" (125). The final chapter captures the legacy of Johnson and Randolph's decades of influence and continued struggles.

Although this book is focused on Baptists more than Methodists, the influence of Methodist women in America's early civil rights discourse is deeply significant. Adams's study is a valuable contribution to historiography of the creation of the suburbs, the Black women's club movement, Civil Rights movement, and American church history. Scholars of twentieth-century feminism, historians of American Christianity, and the general public alike should read this book to understand the historical precedent of working women's grassroots mobilization and the contemporary organizing strategies of Black women in the Black Lives Matter Movement.

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Kristin Kobes du Mez, *A New Gospel for Women: Katharine Bushnell and the Challenge of Christian Feminism*. New York: Oxford UP, 2015. 264pp. \$29.95.

In *A New Gospel for Women*, Kobes du Mez undertakes both an act of historical recovery and an analysis of the relationship between Christianity and feminism. Katharine Bushnell, whose work has been largely forgotten, serves as the key figure for this study because she exemplifies how Christi-

anity and feminism once held together. In the late nineteenth century, Bushnell's evangelical Methodist faith fit well with the agenda for women's rights as she and other Victorian women looked to Christianity to support the rights of women. This correlation eventually broke down over differences among women who were working for women's rights about how to think about sex, that is, whether sexual restraint or sexual freedom helped women more. Because Bushnell continued to hold evangelical faith and women's rights together, feminists who were becoming more secular ignored her. Kobes du Mez examines Bushnell's story to see what can be learned positively and negatively for thinking about what Christian feminism might look like today.

While serving in overseas mission, Bushnell learned both how the Bible could be translated to undermine women's rights and how Christian men consistently mistreated non-Christian women sexually for their own pleasure. The discovery of these realities did not lead her to forsake her faith; instead, they produced in her a willingness to criticize Christianity for the sake of women. She devoted years of her life to interpreting the Bible to bring out a positive message for women, which she recorded in *God's Word to Women*. With her knowledge of Hebrew and Greek, she managed an innovative interpretation in support of women without giving up her conviction that Scripture was inspired and authoritative.

Her book arrived on the scene precisely at the time that Christians were self-partitioning into liberal and conservative camps over higher criticism of the Bible and the theory of evolution. Despite its support for women, her book was too evangelical for secular feminism; neither did it have a unified Christian readership. As a result, her ideas were neither well received nor remembered. However, Kobes du Mez claims that Bushnell is finding an international audience today among evangelical women who appreciate her commitment to Scripture.

A New Gospel for Women is a readable account of a fascinating life. Whether this life provides a key to thinking about Christian feminism is a harder thing to judge. Bushnell certainly provides a case for examining the past, but she may not serve well as a model for constructing a new relationship between feminism and Christianity beyond evangelical circles. Although Bushnell's interpretation of the Bible anticipated some of the insights of feminist theology about translation issues, she did not anticipate rethinking inspiration and authority of the Bible that feminists of a later time have found necessary.

Although Kobes du Mez is not situated in the United Methodist tradition, her recovery of a Methodist figure offers something to Methodism. As it becomes increasingly clear that Methodists must reflect on issues of sexuality in a time that no longer accepts Victorian ideals, Bushnell's story may be instructive about the framework for that reflection, even if her story does not itself provide all the answers that are needed.

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Michael Farrell, *Blake and the Methodists*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014. 259pp. \$95.00.

Blake and the Methodists explores William Blake's poetry and illustrations within the context of eighteenth-century religion, specifically focusing on Methodism and John Wesley's teachings and writings. Though others have also discussed Blake's relationship with Methodism, Farrell looks to place Methodism within the broader religious context of the eighteenth century. Farrell argues that William Blake and John Wesley operated in the same doctrinal territory, with many similarities in their religious outlook. However, he also looks at other traditions and the ways in which Blake and Wesley differed on religious opinions.

Farrell uses the Introduction to discuss previous work, which has been extensive, and the ways in which Blake has been previously discussed in different religious contexts. However, Chapter One sets Blake up as a "seeker," or one who oscillates among religious groups. There is no definitive proof as to which denomination of Christianity Blake belonged to, but his theology shows sympathies and agreements with several different denominations and oscillating between religious groups was not uncommon in this time period.

Chapters One and Two place Blake and Methodism within the context of Moravianism and Swedenborgianism, with which Methodism has strong ties. Farrell finds evidence that William Blake's mother, Catherine, was part of the Moravian church during her first marriage, before she married William's father. Though she left the church, Farrell argues that Catherine's Moravian beliefs may have influenced Blake's works and theological outlook. John Wesley first encountered the Moravians in 1735 on his trip to Georgia.

Farrell considers the similarities and differences between William Blake and John Wesley in several ways. Chapter Three focuses on their theological beliefs. Both men believed in a balance between faith and empiricism and were staunchly opposed to natural religion, because "natural religion fosters a narcissistic morality—selfhood—that is deleterious to the spirit and Christian fellowship" (68). Farrell looks beyond the traditional theological looks of Blake and Wesley to explore how each engaged in the literary culture of their time. Both men were prolific writers, edited others' works, and were involved in publishing. Their views on theology were expressed in what they wrote, what they chose to edit, and how they chose to edit, by leaving out or changing certain portions.

John Wesley edited "Night Thoughts," by Edward Young, the most important English religious poem since Milton. He significantly revised the poem, changing it, deleting lines and passages, and subtly altering Young's theology. While Blake did not edit "Night Thoughts," he illustrated the text and used the illustrations to insert his own theological views. He gave corporeal form to abstract figures like Nature and Death, which was a personification technique often used by Methodists. Blake incorporated scientific imagery to portray the unity between science and spirituality present in the text.

While Blake and Wesley have many similarities, Farrell presents a bal-

anced and fair view of his subject. Farrell's use of literary criticism and analysis of Blake's illustrations allow him to go beyond standard theology and to look more deeply into Blake's work and the ways that his theological outlook pervades his works. He analyzes Blake and Wesley side-by-side, giving readers a better view of the similarities and differences between them. This book provides insight into the founding of the Methodist tradition, Wesley's theological views, and Blake's relationship to them.

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S T Kimbrough, Jr., *The Lyrical Theology of Charles Wesley: A Reader* (Expanded Edition). Cambridge: The Lutterworth Press, 2013. 404pp. £27.50.

While "one of the primary purposes of this volume is to bring together a collection of hymns and sacred poems representative of Charles Wesley's theological thinking," *The Lyrical Theology of Charles Wesley* is far more than merely "A Reader" (11). As S. T. Kimbrough Jr. elucidates that "theological thinking," he develops a distinct field of "lyrical theology," which "is more than words . . . It is an experience!" (22). Valuable as is the collection of poems and hymns, his vital aim to recapture their "spiritual ethos and . . . cultural context" is achieved by Kimbrough's own essays that make up Part I of this expanded edition (40).

Kimbrough, in the first two chapters, identifies seven defining characteristics of lyrical theology, calling Charles Wesley's particular brand of it both doxological and deeply reflective, as well as historical, a claim supported by his sketch of the issues and events giving rise to the theological issues of the Wesleys' eighteenth-century British context in the third chapter. Kimbrough identifies literary influences on and ecclesial sources of Wesley's poetry in Chapter Four. Here Kimbrough makes effective use of a famous hymn, "Hark! How all the Welkin rings," to illustrate Wesley's theological development—rather than mere setting to music for catechetical or liturgical purposes—of sources such as the Thirty-Nine Articles (78). With this notion of development, Kimbrough problematizes abridgement of hymns for publication or congregational singing, which strips them of layers of theological meaning (93-94). The fifth chapter is an annotated bibliography of the sources in which Wesley published the largely unabridged poems and hymns that comprise Part II.

Wesley's impact beyond Methodism appears as Kimbrough addresses the "worship wars" between traditional and contemporary sacred music (26). His set of questions by which to evaluate every twenty-first-century hymn or song (28) encourages liturgists and scholars to identify layers of theological meaning conveyed through hymn and song (34). He examines the obscuring effect that tunes selected for congregational hymn-singing can have on Wesley's lyrics' theological meaning, offering as effective example "And

Can It Be That I Should Gain” (39). Contributions to the field of United Methodist Studies include Kimbrough’s attention to often overlooked elements of Charles Wesley’s poetry, such as tension between conformity and non-conformity; the sweet singer’s “familial poetic heritage” (42-43); and the original context of Wesleyan hymn-singing—not parish churches, but Society meetings and informal gatherings (71). He also raises the troubling question of why so few of Wesley’s numerous poems about the poor were published in hymnbooks (48).

Kimbrough makes excellent use of sources from across boundaries of geography and genre, drawing into the conversation contemporaries like Mercy Oduyoye (36) and George Mulrain (38), as well as Wesley’s poetic predecessors and successors, such as Horace (44) and William Blake (74). The fifth chapter needs more concise presentation, with a separate, clear sub-heading for each source named, as a quick-reference companion to Part II. There is no such weakness in the meticulous organization of the poems and hymns themselves. They are well-prepared to be studied as lyrical theology, though Kimbrough is clear that, “By no means should one consider the placement of any text of Wesley in a specific category as the only option, since he frequently addressed many themes and issues within a single text” (xi). Kimbrough does justice to his subject, addressing many themes and issues in his own text, which will be useful to students of United Methodism, hymnody, and even Wesley’s poetical and ecclesial sources themselves, for years to come.

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Embracing the Past—Forging the Future: A New Generation of Wesleyan Theology, edited by Wm. Andrew Schwartz and John M. Bechtold. Eugene: Pickwick Publications, 2015. 176pp. \$22.00.

In recent decades, various books and articles have been written on the current state of Wesleyan theology. *Embracing the Past—Forging the Future*, edited by Wm. Andrew Schwartz and John Bechtold, contributes to this dialogue by promoting several adaptations. The principal essays that comprise the work are written by junior scholars, with senior scholars contributing brief introductions and the conclusion.

Embracing the Past—Forging the Future is divided into three parts. The first part examines how Wesleyans should address the “post” generation. According to John Bechtold, this begins with John and Charles Wesley, who believed that persons are rational, autonomous individuals. This belief enabled Wesleyans to defend and spread a European metanarrative under the guise of *a priori* truth. Bechtold calls on the tradition to relinquish this metanarrative so that other means of interpreting and embodying the tradition might be affirmed and celebrated. Orlando Serrano, Jr., describes how the blues can contribute to this process. The blues challenges the relationship

between church and state, emphasizes hope amid sorrow, and energizes an alternative consciousness. Serrano contends that adopting this art form and epistemology will help the tradition develop post-colonial ministerial practices. The final essay on the “post” generation, by Nell Becker Sweeden, documents why the “nones” have rejected organized religion. Based on her analysis, she implores Wesleyans to rediscover and re-appropriate their identity, mission, and ministry by renewing their commitment to individual and social transformation.

The second part of the book discusses Wesleyanism in a pluralistic context, beginning with comparative theology. In his essay, Schwartz proposes that comparative theology can help Wesleyans take seriously their faith and the faith of others. He demonstrates its merits by comparing the Zen understanding of not-self with the Wesleyan doctrine of holiness, the latter of which he describes as being emptied of oneself and filled with divine love. The essay by Dick Eugenio surveys what constitutes Wesleyan unity. After assessing the strengths and weaknesses of several theories, he proposes Eucharistic Wesleyanism, since the Eucharist gathers persons in Christ and with one another without requiring symmetry or uniformity. Ben Boeckel concludes the second part with an account of how Wesleyans tend to interpret scripture. Drawing on the hermeneutics of John Wesley, he states that most Wesleyans understand and interpret scripture as being soteriological and a means of grace, while employing the analogy of faith.

The third and final part advocates for the renewal of classical Wesleyanism. For Andrew Wood, this renewal requires that Wesleyans acknowledge the importance of their shared polity, which delineates how they make decisions, enact and further visions, and spread and alter doctrine. Rusty Brian emphasizes the need to further understand the life and theology of Jacob Arminius. Arminius influenced Wesley’s doctrines of sin, grace, and predestination. Brian connects these doctrines to the missional and evangelical zeal of Wesleyan theology. In the last essay, Tamara Lewis documents Wesley’s opposition to slavery, with specific reference to how he challenged the racial ideologies used to justify transatlantic slavery. By reclaiming his uncompromising approach, she declares, Wesleyans can further tear down racial constructs.

Embracing the Past—Forging the Future challenges United Methodist scholars, pastors, and laity to reaffirm their theological heritage while adapting their doctrine and practice. This challenge is integral to the mission and ministry of the church. Nevertheless, there are two sources of tension within the book. First, there appear to be varying assessments of what doctrines and practices are essential to the tradition and which must be reformed. Second, it is unclear whether every Wesleyan denomination is in need of the same reform. Since most of the authors are members of the Church of the Nazarene, their essays reflect concerns and convictions characteristic of the holiness branch of the tradition; this is most evident in their views of Wesley. Hopefully, their contribution will lead other Wesleyans to engage in simi-

lar analyses, so that the entire tradition might renew its commitment to the spread of scriptural holiness.

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Roger Olsen and Christian T. Collins Winn, *Reclaiming Pietism: Retrieving an Evangelical Tradition*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2015. 204pp. \$18.00.

2018 will commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of a union that brought together traditions whose founders were located in four separate (occasionally warring) sixteenth-century Reformation confessions. In 1968, The Methodist Church, with its founders' roots in Anglicanism, The Evangelical Association whose founder was Lutheran, and The United Brethren, whose leadership had united Reformed and Anabaptist traditions, joined together in the United Methodist Church. Indeed these American churches had considered union as early as the first decades of nineteenth century. What they held in common theologically and practically, long before 1968, was not sixteenth-century confessional Protestantism or a commitment to twentieth-century ecumenism. Instead they each shared roots in a movement that renewed every form of Protestantism in the seventeenth century, namely Pietism.

Despite its importance, Pietism is ignored by most Methodist academic theologians and even by a number of Anglophile Methodist historians. Lay United Methodists have likely never heard of Pietism. The reason for this neglect is also the motivation for this book. Roger Olson and Christian Collins Winn seek to redress the misunderstanding and the marginalization of this movement in the church and academy. In this volume they present a concise account of this movement, mainly within a German Lutheran context, and present its contemporary import for evangelical Protestantism.

Chapter One, "Defining and Redefining Pietism: How a Good Word got a Bad Reputation," lays out many misconceptions of Pietism, defending the movement against its use as a "pejorative epithet." The charge of slandering Pietism is laid in at the feet of liberal theologian Albrecht Ritschl and his treatment of the movement in his late nineteenth-century history. Since Ritschl, Pietism has been derided as regressive, other-worldly and anti-intellectual. Karl Barth, though no friend of Ritschl, continued the attack on Pietism in the twentieth century as hyper-individualistic and proto-liberal.

Chapter Two covers the prehistory of Pietism beginning with its connections to late-medieval mystical traditions through early modernity. The authors focus predominantly on Germany with the exception of the French convert to Reformed Protestantism Jean de Labadie. Curiously absent is the reformer of Strasbourg, Martin Bucer, who has been referred to as the "Pietist among the Reformers." Chapter Three covers the history of "classical Pietism" in which Phillip Jakob Spener, who studied in Strasbourg, and August Hermann Franke are the central figures. Chapter Four is a helpful short

history of further developments including radical Pietism, Moravianism, and Württemberg Pietism, all of which strongly influenced the development of Methodism.

Chapter Five describes Pietism characteristically. The authors list ten hallmarks that will sound familiar to any Methodist. Pietism is broadly orthodox, experiential, and focused on conversion and regeneration. It is strongly devotional through an ongoing personal relationship with Christ, expects holy living as a visible sign of transformed character, and is Bible centered as the main medium for the believer's immediate relationship to God. Pietists live out community through small groups. They work for world transformation toward the kingdom of God through social reform and missions. Pietism's final hallmarks are its irenic broad ecumenism and recognition of lay authority as part of the common priesthood of believers.

Chapter Six shows the influence of the Spener-Halle movement on Christianity in America and England and especially on what is commonly referred to as evangelicalism. Chapter Seven describes the challenges and transformations within Pietism in the nineteenth century, including the emergence of liberalism, the revivals commonly called awakenings, and the "Bloomhardt movement." Chapter Eight looks at four recent pietistic theologians: Donald Bloesch, Richard Foster, Stanley Grenz, and Jürgen Moltmann. The book concludes with an appeal for Pietism as a way of doing contemporary evangelical theology.

The main weakness of this very helpful book is its concentration on one expression of Pietism, German Lutheran. This focus misses the very aspect of Pietism that makes it central to the discussion of United Methodism. While the name "Pietism" comes from its German Lutheran manifestation, using Olson's and Collins Winn's own taxonomy in Chapter Five would have made the interconnections among Reformed, Anabaptist, and Anglican circles more apparent. Many scholars of Pietism, including the late Methodist F. Ernest Stoeffler, locate the origins of Pietism in Dutch and Puritan Reformed Protestantism. High Church Anglican Pietism began roughly the same time as the publication of Spener's *Pia Desideria*. The first corresponding member of the S.P.C.K. (the Anglican Pietist society that recruited John and Charles Wesley for Georgia) was August Hermann Franke. Contrary to the impression given by Olson and Collins Winn, Reformed, Anabaptist, and Anglican Pietisms were Spener-Halle siblings, not dependents. With that caveat as an encouragement for deeper study by United Methodists into this crucial area, this book is a needed corrective to derisive treatments of Pietism and a necessary read for United Methodism's own self-understanding and identity.

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