

## BOOK REVIEWS

Russell E. Richey, Kenneth E. Rowe, and Jean Miller Schimit. *The Methodist Experience in America, a History* (Volume 1). Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2010. 699 pp. \$50.00.

For years, the field of United Methodist studies has awaited a denominational history to replace Frederick Norwood's 1974 text, *The Story of American Methodism*. That goal has largely been achieved by the publication of Russell Richey, Kenneth Rowe, and Jean Miller Schmidt's *The Methodist Experience in America, a History*. Part of a long-term project by the three historians, *the Methodist Experience* textbook is designed to complement their earlier publication of a volume of primary source documents (*Methodist Experience in America, a Sourcebook* published in 2000, as volume 2 of this project). As a companion to the sourcebook, or as a standalone text, the authors have presented a work that covers a gamut of topics, both related to standard histories of The United Methodist Church, and to larger developments exploring a range of North American and pan-Methodist movements. The book's chronology stretches from mid eighteenth-century origins, beginning with the ministry of Philip William Otterbein, and extending through early twenty-first century debates within contemporary United Methodism over theological and ecclesiastical identity, racial-ethnic inclusiveness, and missional ethos.

As a textbook on American Methodist history, and more specifically on The United Methodist Church, the book has many commendable features. Its structure corresponds to three general historical themes that mark Methodism's historical trajectory. First, the narrative begins by examining Methodism's pietism, epitomized by the leadership of Francis Asbury and the early nineteenth-century growth of Methodism into a driving religious force in American Protestantism. Second, it discusses Methodism's ascendancy to middle-class respectability and cultural influence in the latter half of the nineteenth century, what the authors refer to as a nurturing phase, whereby American Methodism built powerful ecclesiastical structures to advance its standing as an institution building church. Finally, the third century of American Methodism is described by its activism, whereby Methodism struggled with how best to adapt to a twentieth-century world marked by the decline of Protestant cultural influence. An essential feature of the book is its three historical "snapshots" of key Methodist geographic centers, beginning with Baltimore in 1816 (the year of Francis Asbury's death); Wilkes Barre, Pennsylvania, in 1884 (the 100th anniversary of the founding of the Methodist Episcopal Church); and Denver in 1968 (the year of the Methodist Church

and Evangelical United Brethren merger). The three snapshots accentuate how specific Methodist congregations embodied and responded to religious and cultural themes within each era, giving the reader a unique vantage point of exploring Methodist history from a decidedly local angle.

The authors stay focused on chronology, and each chapter does a solid job integrating a variety of topics, including evolving theological character, definitions of ministry, and struggles over racial, ethnic and gender inclusiveness. The familiar denominational narratives of nineteenth-century schisms and twentieth-century mergers are covered with a critical eye to how these events relate to larger currents in American religion. Surprisingly, the book contains little discussion of Wesley's life and thought (and the authors assume that their readers are already familiar with the rudiments of Wesley's theology), but the book's topical range, in particular, the priority that the authors give to the history of women in the Methodist tradition, is a wonderful achievement. The book is well referenced, with ample endnotes and a thorough bibliography to aid students, teachers, and researchers. Coupled with their earlier book of primary sources (judiciously referenced throughout this volume), students of United Methodism have two texts that will serve as definitive resources for many years to come.

For all my enthusiasm for this text, there was one aspect I found somewhat disconcerting. In hindsight, one can criticize Frederick Norwood for his too-confident conclusion about Methodism's future prospects in America. But *Methodist Experience in America* leaves the reader unclear about where United Methodism is heading in the twenty-first century. A general theme that the reader gets throughout the text is Methodism's ecclesiastical and missional adaptability to changing circumstances (those familiar with Richey's earlier work, *The Methodist Conference in America* will notice many similar themes in this volume). This point is essential for understanding Methodism's staying power in America, and the authors are careful not to identify Methodist vitality with a particular "golden age" period. (For example, the authors reject a portrait taken by many recent historians who view the early nineteenth century as a high water mark for the movement.)

As historians, Richey, Rowe, and Schmidt are justified about not speculating too much about how their narrative relates to Methodism's future. However, at a moment today when The United Methodist Church is trying to make sense of its place in a post-Christendom, perhaps post-denominational, and, most certainly, post-North American context, the silence of the authors to speculate about where the past might lead us is a bit unsettling. It is easy to criticize Frederick Norwood for being inaccurate about his optimistic assessment of Methodism's future, but he left a benchmark by which later historians could gage Methodism's successes and failures. For all the effort that it took the authors to produce this otherwise splendid book, I found myself wishing that they had taken the same risk.

CHRISTOPHER H. EVANS

*Professor of History of Christianity and Methodist Studies  
Boston University School of Theology*

Nicholas Temperley and Stephen Banfield, eds., *Music and the Wesleys*. Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2010. 274 pp. Cloth, \$80.00; paper, \$25.00

and

S T Kimbrough, Jr. *The Lyrical Theology of Charles Wesley: A Reader*. Eugene, OR: Cascade Books/Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2011. 339 pp. \$40.00.

These two books appear in the aftermath of the 2007 tercentenary of Charles Wesley's birth and complement the renewed interest in the work and times of the Wesley family. While the first focuses more on music and the second on texts, there is significant overlap in the integration and synergy of lyrical theology.

*Music and the Wesleys* originated in a conference, "Music, Cultural History and the Wesleys" held at the University of Bristol in July, 2007, hosted by the Centre for the History of Music in Britain, the Empire and the Commonwealth, and includes papers from the conference and some additional essays. Familiar names to Charles Wesley scholars appear: Martin V. Clarke, Peter S. Forsaith, J. R. Watson, Carlton R. Young, and younger scholar Geoffrey C. Moore. Names familiar to liturgical musicians include Robin A. Leaver and Anne Bagnall Yardley. Some names are better known in Britain and to historians of the period from John and Charles Wesley (b. 1703 and 1707) through Charles' grandson Samuel Sebastian Wesley (d. 1876).

Part I focuses on "Music and Methodism" and works with themes of music, text, hymns, anthems and Eucharistic piety. This section will be of interest to general scholars of Methodism, and the essays are all strong, with occasional thanks to each other for comments, which results in cohesiveness not often found in collections of essays. Leaver's essay is particularly persuasive in its delineation of two strands of Methodist hymnody, with *Psalms and Hymns* reflecting the structure and content of the *Book of Common Prayer* and thus intended for public worship, and *Collection of Hymns for the People Called Methodist* reflecting the concerns of the weekly meetings of Methodist societies and thus intended for personal and society use. Young's essay takes the musical settings of Charles' hymns up to 2008 and thus provides a note of current interest for worship leaders as well as scholars. Pictures, along with musical and poetic examples, enhance all the essays.

Part II focuses on the musical side of the Wesleys, including the Wesley home concert series featuring Charles the Younger and Samuel, the musical lives of Bristol and of London, relationships within the generations, and then two essays on Sebastian Wesley. These essays consider both the effect of the Methodist context on the next generations and that of the Church of England where the younger Wesleys found employment. Closing materials include catalogues of Charles the Younger's compositions and American Methodist hymnals, and an extensive bibliography. Musicians and those interested in

“what happened to the Wesleys after John and Charles” will particularly enjoy this second part.

S T Kimbrough, Jr., the author and compiler of *The Lyrical Theology of Charles Wesley*, is well known as one of the primary editors of Charles’ unpublished poems and for his work in the Global Praise movement and publishing. Kimbrough defines “lyrical theology” as “a theology couched in poetry, song, and liturgy, characterized by rhythm and expressive of emotion and sentiment” (3).

Three of the essays in this collection were adapted from earlier works that appeared on the topics of lyrical theology and Charles Wesley in *Journal of Theology*, *Theology Today*, and the *T. & T. Clark Companion to Methodism*. These essays establish lyrical theology as a subject worthy of study broadly, focus on the lyrical theology of Charles Wesley’s texts and demonstrate the literary and ecclesial sources used in Wesley’s writing. This last topic, the basis for Kimbrough’s fourth chapter, surveys much of the investigations of previous work on Charles’ use of scripture, the *Book of Common Prayer* (1662), the “Thirty-Nine Articles of Religion of the Church of England,” other poets and the early church fathers. The new-to-this-volume essays place Charles in historical, theological, and social contexts suggesting that his context gives rise to lyrical theology that is doxological, reflective, and historically related (chapter 3), and places the poetical sources used in this volume in context through an annotated bibliography of Charles’ collections of hymns and poems (chapter 5).

The majority of this book are unabridged “Poetical Selections” arranged in the same theological and conceptual order as the 1989 *United Methodist Hymnal*. Here are many important and some lesser-known texts of Charles Wesley, ready to be read, studied, and used for devotion. The essays have set the framework for that use, bringing context, theology, sources, scripture, and history to the task. This author has noted that several seminaries are offering courses in “Lyrical Theology” centered on hymn texts; it might also be noted that “lyrical theology” is also being used as a term for “holy hip-hop” and it is this usage that shows up most quickly on website searches.

However “lyrical theology” is being used, whether you are looking for a “good Wesley read” or a textbook for seminary, music history course or a church study group, these two resources continue the excellent recent scholarship on Charles Wesley and broaden its scope musically, theologically and generationally.

ROBIN KNOWLES WALLACE  
*Professor, Taylor Endowed Chair of Worship & Church Music*  
*Methodist Theological School in Ohio*  
*Delaware, Ohio*

### BOOKS BRIEFLY NOTED

Joseph E. Lowery, *Singing the Lord's Song in a Strange Land*. Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2011. 123 pp. \$13.95

and

David W. Brown, *Freedom Drawn from Within: A History of the Delaware Conference of The United Methodist Church*. Valley Forge, PA: Eastern Pennsylvania Conference, 2010. 27 pp. \$15.00

Each addition to the resources in African American Methodist history is welcome. These two works need and deserve mention but would not be within the scope of book reviews in this journal. *Singing the Lord's Song in a Strange Land* is a collection of sermons, addresses, and other statements by Joseph Lowery, a leader of the Civil Rights movement for more than a generation. He speaks "truth to power." The reader is confronted by utterances containing a wide knowledge of social realities which informs and expressed with an eloquence that inspires. While not a history of the Civil Rights movement, one learns of that history from a participant and witnesses the struggle through a lens that no narrative history could equal. Lowery has been a leading United Methodist, perhaps climaxing an extraordinary life with offering the benediction at the inauguration of President Obama, the text of that benediction being included in this collection.

*Freedom Draw from Within* is a brief retelling of the participation of African Americans in the beginnings of the Methodism in America culminating in the formation of the all Black Delaware Conference in 1864. The conference existed for 100 years, with its churches, clergy, and laity becoming part of the geographical conferences in 1964, predating the end of the Central Jurisdiction by three years. It is an attractive publication with numerous images including those of Harry Hoosier, Richard Allen, and Charles A. Tindley. This would serve as good introduction to the history of African Americans in the life of the church and a particular organization for a particular time. Copies may be ordered through the Eastern Pennsylvania Conference, PO Box 820, Valley Forge, PA 19482-0820 or online at [www.epaumc.org](http://www.epaumc.org).

Both volumes leave one asking for more: more collections of the spoken and written words of the shapers of twentieth-century social movements and a comprehensive history of the people and witness of the Delaware Conference. These works are received with appreciation, knowing how under-represented these stories have been in so many publications.