

BOOK REVIEWS

George C. Rable. *God's Almost Chosen Peoples: A Religious History of the American Civil War*. Chapel Hill: U North Carolina P, 2010. 586 pp. \$35.00.

God's Almost Chosen Peoples is the latest addition to a growing corpus of scholarship examining the relationship between religion and the U.S. Civil War. Building on the fine work of Mark Noll, Harry Stout, Allen Guelzo, and others, award-winning historian George Rable offers the most expansive and thorough take on the subject to date. Building on previous scholarship exploring the war's theological and moral debates, Rable frames his study as "a broad narrative that shows how all sorts of people used faith to interpret the course of the Civil War and its impact on their lives, families, churches, communities, and 'nations'"(6).

In spite of the disclaimer that the book is not thesis-driven, the central theme of Providence is emphasized throughout. Utilizing a vast array of primary sources, Rable demonstrates the ways in which men and women, black and white, clergy and laity, Union and Confederate, soldier, civilian, and slave, on the battlefield and at the home front, each saw the hand of God in every shift of the war's course. He also includes in his analysis Mormons, Catholics, and Jews—previously ignored groups who demonstrate the variety of religious voices and church bodies involved in the conflict.

But Protestants are never far from view and loom large throughout the book. Methodists and Methodism feature prominently in Rable's narrative, receiving perhaps more attention than any other group. He notes Abraham Lincoln's own assessment "that the Methodist Episcopal Church . . . [is] by its greatest numbers, the most important of all" the churches involved in supporting the Union cause (336), and the same could certainly be said of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, in supporting the Confederacy. Rable succeeds in analyzing both individual beliefs of disparate figures and the war's affect on churches and denominations. Ironically, as the war reinforced regional denominational divisions, pitting Methodists against Methodists and Baptists against Baptists, it also encouraged ecumenical efforts, especially in military camps, as the always-in-short-supply chaplains ministered to all willing souls, diminishing differences between not only Protestant rivals but in some cases Catholics, too. Believers of all sorts thus alternately competed and cooperated with one another as they each strived to make sense of God's Providence, and its relationship to the conflict in which they found themselves engaged.

In short, *God's Almost Chosen Peoples* offers the most complex and detailed analysis of religion and the Civil War yet written. This complexity

may occasionally cause readers to find themselves lost among the trees of the proverbial forest, but in the end, they will not only better understand religion's role in the Civil War, but also more fully appreciate the complexities of history, especially at moments when personal and public faith and prolonged war intersect.

CHRISTOPHER C. JONES, PH.D. CANDIDATE
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Benjamin L. Hartley. *Evangelicals at a Crossroads: Revivalism and Social Reform in Boston, 1860-1910*. Durham: U New Hampshire P, 2011. 288 pp. \$39.95.

Using city-wide revivals—that of Dwight L. Moody in 1877 and those of Gipsy Smith in 1909 and Wilbur L. Chapman in 1910—as “book-end” events, Benjamin L. Hartley describes the previously underexplored history of “upstart (and often contentious) evangelicals” in post-Civil War Boston and their influence on religious life as well as political life and social reform efforts.

Focusing primarily on the involvement of Methodists, Baptists and Salvationists (the Salvation Army) in the holiness movement, Hartley “emphasizes the revivalistic manifestation of evangelical piety . . . and the roots of their social reform efforts . . .” (13-14). He also looks at the “anti-Catholic and labor organizing of Boston evangelicals . . . as Irish and Boston Brahmins vied for control of city hall and the statehouse”; the role of women as leaders in these efforts (including the interrelatedness of the temperance movement and the women’s foreign mission movement and the invasion of the Salvation Army, led mostly by women); and the leadership role of American-born immigrants.

Hartley further examines many of the “crossroads” faced by these “upstart evangelicals” as he analyzes the conflicts that they experienced as they dealt with “[n]ew intellectual developments in biblical scholarship, differing attitudes toward world religions, and differences in the priority placed on evangelistic efforts and social reform” [which] caused sharp—and sometimes highly nuanced—disagreements among evangelical leaders” (14).

Using Boston’s North End as a case study, Hartley looks at the changes in evangelical ministries over the period in question including the neighborhood’s transition from one of primarily Irish immigrants to one in which Italians and Jews were dominant, as well as the change in leadership from American born immigrants to foreign born immigrants, especially Italians.

Hartley concludes with the change in direction which evangelicals took after the turn of the century which led, in part, to a more secularized view of social reform and social gospel efforts for some and a focus on fundamentalism for others.

Hartley’s book additionally provides a welcome addition to the previously unexplored role of New England Methodists in the holiness movement and their strong anti-Catholic stance at the end of the nineteenth century, as

well as an expansion of the social reform efforts of such persons as Henry Helms, Eben Tourjee, Amanda Clark and others, including the role of both students and professors at Boston University School of Theology.

Evangelicals at the Crossroads is well-researched and well-documented yet is written in language than can easily be grasped by all readers. It is an important book both for those interested in the history of evangelicals as well as those interested in New England Methodism.

THE REV. PATRICIA J. THOMPSON, HISTORIAN
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Diane Leclerc. *Discovering Christian Holiness: The Heart of Wesleyan-Holiness Theology*. Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 2010. 320 pp. \$39.99.

Recent years have seen a growing number of books that attempt to introduce or make summary statements of theology from a Wesleyan perspective. Joining that growing introductory literature in Wesleyan theology is Diane Leclerc's *Discovering Christian Holiness: The Heart of Wesleyan-Holiness Theology*. Leclerc, professor of theology at Northwest Nazarene University and past president of the Wesleyan Theological Society, emphasizes holiness as the core thread of Wesleyan theology, or rather takes Wesleyan theology to be part of a wider holiness theology running from scripture through the history of the Christian church to the present day.

Unlike many other similar introductions, Leclerc did not organize the book by the traditional loci of theology (e.g., God, Christ, Eschatology) or by the thematic emphases of John Wesley's thought, but instead organized her insights into four parts corresponding to the Wesleyan quadrilateral. Part 1, "Biblical Holiness," has two chapters, "How to Read the Bible as a Wesleyan" and "The Whole Holy Tenor of Scripture." Part 2, "Holiness History," has two chapters, "Holiness in History: Late Antiquity to 1700" and "Holiness in History: 1703-2000." Part 3, "Holiness Theology for Today," has three chapters, "The Holy God," "Created and Fallen Humanity," and "Full Salvation." Part 4, "Holy Living for a New Century" has five chapters. As the organization suggests, scripture and Christian history provide an initial one third to two fifths of the book, roughly equal to the focus Leclerc provides in the fourth unit on "Holy Living for a New Century." This final part utilizes five "paradigms" each receiving full chapters. The chapters are "Holiness as Purity," "Holiness as Perfection," "Holiness as Power," "Holiness as Character," and the final chapter of the book, "Holiness as Love." These chapters are uniformly well done, insightful, and, in a word, wise. One might have anticipated a chapter on "Holiness as Hope," but as is, this is the strongest section of the book.

As for its use as a classroom text, *Discovering Christian Holiness* includes a number of helpful features such as an excellent glossary, key words, summary statements, questions for reflection, and suggestions for further reading. It has no index, though Leclerc frequently utilizes end notes for more extended scholarly discussion of particular points. Several of the chapters might

be useful stand-alone supplements for private reading or classroom assignments. Perhaps the best features of the book, however, come from Leclerc's clear and strong authorial voice and consensus-building, pastoral and ethical sensibilities in evidence throughout *Discovering Christian Holiness*.

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The Methodist Societies: The Minutes of Conference, ed. by Henry D. Rack. *The Works of John Wesley*, vol. 10. Nashville: Abingdon, 2011. 848 pp. \$58.00.

This long-awaited volume of Wesley's *Works* is an astonishing feat of textual collation, editing, and commentary. The second of two volumes of the *Works* project gathering documentation of the early Methodist societies, this book assembles minutes of all Methodist conferences conducted during John Wesley's lifetime in England and Ireland. The documents—carefully arranged, meticulously annotated (resulting in over 2,000 footnotes), and demarcated through typesetting devices and tables that show additions and developments over time—offer an invaluable portrayal of Methodist “doctrine, discipline, and practice” (1744 Minutes) in the eighteenth century.

The inclusion of conference minutes among the writings of Wesley may seem puzzling to some. Wesley's voice and personal style rings so clearly and directly through his letters, journals, commentaries, and sermons, that one might wonder why conference minutes consisting of long lists of names, financial reports, and explanations of administrative decisions could be considered even remotely parallel in genre and usefulness. At a daunting 1,046 pages, the volume itself presses the question.

In his thorough and informative introductory essay, volume editor Henry Rack makes a compelling case for inclusion of the minutes in this series. While the record of Methodist conferences was usually written down by others, Wesley was clearly the author and editor of many of the summary texts that were eventually published. Rack delves into the irresolvable question of what actually went on in conference sessions, who got to speak, how much Wesley took advice and counsel from his preachers, and whether Wesley tried to ascertain the sense of the body on difficult issues. Wesley's contemporaries differed widely in their perceptions. But the record that comes down to us is almost entirely in John Wesley's voice, with his distinct directness and force. Who really wanted to know, for example, “why is it that the people under our care are no better?” (887) Who had authority to instruct preachers to avoid “lolling on your elbows” (893) when speaking and to drink lemonade afterwards? Both the questions and the answers reported as “conversations” between Mr. Wesley and others—a format perhaps derived from Wesley's academic training at Oxford—were of his own composition or editing.

The minutes offer Rack an occasion to probe some intriguing questions, among them, whether Wesley at first envisioned holding his own conferences, how persistent he was in seeking alliances with others such as Calvinist

Methodists or Moravians, and how he determined with what format and frequency his own conferences should be organized. Rack builds on the claims he established in his *Reasonable Enthusiast* biography, namely, that “a separate conference of [Wesley’s] own preachers,” like other aspects of Methodist polity, “was forced upon him” by the circumstance of disharmony with other groups (8). Rack also demonstrates in his introduction what the reader sees through the gradual accumulation of minutes across the years, that Wesley had no “annual conference” plan in view at first, no preconceived format, no practice borrowed from some other group, not even a consistent invitation list of participants. The system evolved over time shaped by Wesley’s character and what he saw as the demands of the current situation.

As they unfold the minutes provide a unique template for grasping the timing and context of some of Wesley’s most important organizational documents—among them the Model Deed of 1763; a list of signatories to a statement affirming the “old Methodism,” that all appointments and all preaching chapels are held in trust for preaching in accord with Wesley’s teaching but without secession from the Church of England (1775 Minutes); the Deed of Declaration of 1784 that established a framework of succession after Wesley’s death; and the letters justifying his ordinations for America printed in the 1785 and 1786 minutes. Viewing such documents in the flow of published minutes of conference sessions brings them to life as responses to living situations that deeply affected the future of Methodism.

The minutes further provide a trail of signposts marking the journey of Wesleyan controversies across the years. As a prime example, Wesley cannot let go of his wrestling match with his Oxford colleague and lifelong friend George Whitefield; the struggle over predestination, antinomianism, and works righteousness pops up repeatedly following his admonition (printed in the 1753 Minutes) to Whitefield “to abstain himself from speaking against” Wesley (261).

While the minutes are a distilled outline that can hardly capture the vitality of an actual gathering of Methodist preachers, they are in some ways profoundly personal. Behind the questions of “what preachers are admitted this year?” and “how are the preachers stationed this year?” with the lists of appointments following, one catches a glimpse of the stories of preachers many of whom stayed with Wesley for forty years or more as he moved them from place to place. Behind the lists of widows and children receiving money is the pain of loss as many preachers fell to illness and early death. John’s close colleague whom he often viewed as his possible successor, John Fletcher, is memorialized as “a pattern of all holiness” (1786 Minutes, 598) and John’s own brother Charles is remembered in a few fond sentences (1788 Minutes, 645-646).

A tome of this scale does not draw the reader to turn page by page through the text. But it does invite dipping in to track a particular issue. For instance, as an American reader I come away from the volume with a freshly poignant and even painful sense of the division in Methodism brought about by the separation of England and the United States. The decision of the editors to

exclude conference minutes from America printed in Wesley's lifetime both illustrates and reinforces this division. The English minutes included the appointments from America, and then more specifically the United States, right up to the 1791 notation that they were not available because Thomas Coke had to leave suddenly for England upon Wesley's death. Meanwhile, the American minutes up to 1791—not printed in this volume—were patterned on the same question and answer format with much the same questions as the English minutes (and annual conference Board of Ordained Ministry reports largely retain the “preacher” questions even today). The first published *Disciplines* of the Methodist Episcopal Church in America were a mirror of Wesley's “Large” Minutes (his summary of minutes helpfully printed here in multiple successive editions over a 30-year period).

But whatever strands of connection were woven across Wesley's lifetime were becoming frayed by the time of his death. Wesley did not visit the American colonies ever again after he organized English Methodism. He developed a Model Deed for English preaching chapels which was adopted in America as well, but set up no clear reporting mechanism for accountability across an ocean. He ordained preachers for America and thereby authorized American ordinations, but made no provision for reconciling what was tantamount to the creation of a new independent church with the continuing practices of English conferences in the context of their national church. The statistics printed in the minutes after 1784 clearly show the growing giant “across the lake” with U.S. Methodist Society membership already 80% of England's by the time of Wesley's death. But even in 1784 no plan was in place for a form of succession to the 81-year-old Wesley that could bind Methodism in a new nation with Methodism in its homeland. After reading this volume, as an American I hear Wesley's letter of 1784 altogether differently: “[the Americans] are now at full liberty . . . they should stand fast in that liberty wherewith God has so strangely made them free” (586). This sounds to my ears now more like a farewell, cutting the lines that hold the ships in tandem, to let them float free and find their own way. The volume's omission of the American minutes only strengthens my sense that for Wesley, (and for English Methodists?) Americans were on their own (in God's hands, of course).

One could quibble with some minor difficulties in the book. The introduction is repetitive at points, with nearly the same sentences appearing twice. The instructions for how to read the codes accompanying the texts require a lot of concentration. The index is by and large very helpful, though not all discussions of an item are included there. But given the scope of this undertaking, this can be asked in Mr. Wesley's way, “What is to be gained by quibbling? Have we not more important work to do?” Much is to be learned from joining in “conversations” with the first Methodists as they—and we—pursue their perennial questions, “1. What to teach; 2. How to teach, and 3. What to do” (1744).

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