

BOOK REVIEWS

Kenneth G. C. Newport & Ted A. Campbell, eds. *Charles Wesley: Life, Literature and Legacy*. Peterborough: Epworth Press, 2007. xvii + 573 pp. \$49.90.

The 300th anniversary of Charles Wesley's birth has spawned a plethora of special meetings and several publications. Among the publications, none will make a more significant contribution to scholarly study of Charles Wesley than the present collection of essays.

It should be noted up front that six of the twenty-eight essays are not original to this collection, so scholars may have seen them before. But their inclusion is justified. The six essays treat important topics that might otherwise have been absent. They are recent enough for their scholarship to be current. But just as important, they go back far enough to allow two significant pioneers in the renewal of scholarly attention to Charles Wesley to be part of the collection: Frank Baker (to whom the book is dedicated) and Oliver Beckerlegge.

When these six essays are combined with the twenty-two produced just for this volume, the result is a very effective survey of the growing vitality of scholarship on Charles Wesley. They can also serve as an entry point for those who are just beginning to study the life, ministry, convictions and impact of Charles Wesley.

For example, the reader will find helpful introductions to the "resources" for studying Charles Wesley—his sermons, his letters, his journal, his poetry—in essays by Gareth Lloyd, Kenneth Newport and others.

This orientation is complimented by essays that place Charles in his eighteenth-century context as a high-church Anglican committed to the Methodist renewal movement. The contributions by Jeremy Gregory, Henry Rack, Peter Nockles, and Geoffrey Wainwright are particularly helpful in this regard, drawing on the recent scholarly reassessment of the eighteenth century church in England.

Then there are several essays that probe the dynamics of important relationships in Charles Wesley's life. These include fine studies by Charles Wallace of Wesley's relationship with his mother, Anna Lawrence on his relationship with his wife (and his views of married life), Philip Olleson on his relationship to his children, and Peter Forsaith on his relationship to John Fletcher. Many of the essays touch on Charles's relationship to his brother John. The most intriguing is Richard Heitzenrater's analysis of the tensions

between the brothers in the early 1750s over lay preachers. Heitzenrater draws on manuscript and shorthand documents to fill in the details of Charles's drive to purge the movement of the inadequate preachers that he believed John was too easily admitting.

Naturally there are essays that explore Charles Wesley's hymnody. J. R. Watson provides insights into how Wesley's poetic language and imagery were influenced by the broader poetic tradition of 17th and 18th century England. Turning the scope around, Andrew Pratt explores how contemporary hymnists were influenced by Wesley. Several authors reflect on specific themes in Wesley's hymns—such as the prominence of imagery of healing (Robert Webster), the role of sympathizing with the suffering (Joanna Cruickshank), the nuances of the language of faith (Paul Chilcote), and the centrality of Christ's death on the cross in bringing redemption (John R. Tyson). A very interesting addition to this general topic is Carlton Young's survey of Charles Wesley's relative lack of *musical* talent, underlining Charles's insistence that his musical children drew their talent particularly from their mother!

The remaining essays probe general themes in Charles Wesley's spirituality and theology. Ted Campbell emphasizes that Charles dealt with a wide range of theological themes, not just soteriology. Jason Vickers highlights Wesley's highly developed Trinitarian hymns and the resource these offer for today. S T Kimbrough suggests resonances between Wesley's theology and that of the Christian East, while Susan White explores resonances with contemporary theological concerns.

In general, the contributions are evenhanded treatments of their topic. They avoid the triumphalism of an earlier generation, as well as the reactionary tendency to focus on debunking prior myths. Together they help recover a sense of Charles's distinctive personality and his particular contributions to the early Methodist movement. Newport and Campbell are to be congratulated on the coherence of the collection, the scope of the topics covered, and the quality of the contributors recruited.

RANDY L. MADDOX
Durham, North Carolina

Rex D. Matthews, *Timetables of History for Students of Methodism*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2007, xiv + 276 pp. \$30.00.

When less than half of the undergraduates in a recent upper level religious history class knew the decade in which the conflict known in the northern part of the United States as the Civil War took place, I knew that the challenges for all religious historians, including those who teach Methodist histories, would only grow greater. Undergraduates grow up to become church members or

even seminary students, many of whom have only rudimentary remembrance of U.S. or world history.

In this reality, Rex Matthews' *Timetables of History for Students of Methodism* has an important place, not just for seminary students but also for clergy and lay alike who would like to see Methodism in the larger context of history and culture. A resource that makes it easy to look up events and people is much needed, in the classroom as well as for discussions in adult education or planning for confirmation classes.

Matthews set his boundaries as the years 1700-2005 and arranged the material into eight columns: world history and politics; American history and politics; science, medicine and technology; daily life, popular culture and entertainment; education, literature and the fine arts; religion, theology, philosophy and psychology; American and United Methodism; and British and World Methodism. In essence, this means that the majority of the time in using the book, one is looking down a narrow column only one and a half inches wide to find information. One could wish for fewer columns and more brevity in material so that the Methodist information, for which most readers have presumably chosen to own the book, is adequate and easy to access.

The range of the material is helpful. Predecessor bodies of the UMC are well covered. Actions from General Conferences, addition of annual conferences, and major personalities all receive good coverage. Major developments in other Methodist bodies are also included.

In his preface, Matthews makes clear that he knows he has made inclusions that will be debated and that not all material is covered. With this disclaimer, it may seem unfair to hold him accountable for some inconsistencies, but it was impossible not to notice, for example, that the founding of some educational institutions was noted but not that of others. Equally uneven were the references to founding and development of other church related institutions and organizations and changes in board names. Since these are the very questions that people ask and find hard to answer, including other charts might have increased the usefulness of the book.

I decided to give the book a test drive by using it as the basis for a lecture in 20th century United Methodist history. With the help of a highlighter, I went down the columns noting the material I wanted to use, the vast majority from column 7, some from column 8 and a sprinkling from a few of the other columns. Surprisingly little came from the theology column. On the other hand, the census materials found in the US history column were included and considered extremely helpful.

Because my previous lecture had been thematic material on the late 19th century, students had an analytical framework in which to hear a chronology. I did not use all the material, perhaps less than a third, from the Methodist column, but what I chose provided a strong backbone on which to then append stories and other "color commentary", as the class called it. When we debriefed this strictly chronological form of lecture at the end of class, a

form that many have called old-fashioned, students reported that they really appreciated hearing it presented that way, as well as enjoyed the stories and extra detail that I added, which were not in the *Timeline* text.

Included with the book is a CD that would allow one quick reference to the materials without having to carry the book. However, given the large number of columns, it does not appear easy to just project and use in a classroom.

Timelines is a useful addition to a Methodist bookshelf. It is not, as the cover promises, the “definitive guide to the major events of Methodist history,” a claim even Matthews himself does not make, nor does it contain some of the charts and details one often wants. Nonetheless, it gives ready access to a wide range material and supplies context for the more specialized historical offerings already available.

LINDA J. GESLING
St. Paul, Minnesota