

BOOK REVIEWS

Frederick Dreyer, *The Genesis of Methodism*. Bethlehem, PA: Lehigh University Press, 1999. 138 pp. \$32.50.

Fortunately, book reviews deal with the contents between the book's covers, not what is printed on the dust jacket, even though the latter may tease one to purchase and read the book. Among other claims the jacket of this volume reads that, "Methodism in its origins owes *nothing* to either Anglicanism or dissent" (emphasis added) and "Methodist historians do not read German and what they know about Moravians largely depends on what [John] Wesley tells them." Elaborating on these bold statements, the author, who teaches at the University of Western Ontario, proceeds to lay out his thesis that the origins of Methodism lie in the bosom of Moravianism. Dreyer tries to show that Wesley deliberately made little of the Moravian influence on his own life and thought, especially after the Fetter Lane schism in 1740. It is a provocative argument, to say the least, and one worth contemplating.

There are a large number of questions related to Dreyer's interpretation of Wesley which space forbids treating here. For example, Dreyer is correct in stating that Wesley never developed a systematic theology and did not formulate a distinctive creed. To support his claim that Wesley "possibly disliked" "creedal statements" (p. 31), Dreyer rightly states that Wesley omitted the Athanasian Creed in *The Sunday Service of the Methodists in North America*. However, he fails to note that Wesley did include his revision of the Anglican Thirty-nine Articles, which, although obviously not a creed, was (and is) an official creedal statement of the Church of England. While Wesley believed that doctrinal orthodoxy was not sufficient to make a Christian, it is misleading to argue that for Wesley, "orthodoxy did not matter" (p. 31). Why did the Model Deed make so emphatic that no one was to preach any other doctrine in Methodist chapels than that contained in Wesley's Standard Sermons and *Explanatory Notes Upon the New Testament* which views Wesley obviously thought were orthodox.

Among other points of serious consideration is the underplaying of the Puritan influence on Wesley (p. 108). A number of writers have shown how much Wesley was indebted to the Puritan tradition, not least among them Robert C. Monk whose *John Wesley: His Puritan Heritage* has recently appeared in a second edition.

Dreyer, who writes very well, has called attention again to the Pietist background that informed Wesley in many important ways. He challenges generally held views about the origins of Wesley's evangelical theology. His book is the result of careful research. However, in emphasizing the Moravian contribution, he has undervalued other influences which informed Wesley's

interpretation and practice of the Christian faith from the Epworth Rectory to the end of his life.

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Robert C. Monk, *John Wesley: His Puritan Heritage*. Second Edition. Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 1999. 296 pp. \$65.00.

This is a revised edition of Monk's important work which was first published in 1966. It has become the standard reference for the relationship between Wesley and Puritanism. A new chapter examines the ministry of Wesley and the Puritans to the poor.

William M. Newman and Peter L. Havorson, *Atlas of American Religion: The Denominational Era, 1776–1990*. Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press, 2000. 176 pp. \$49.95.

In 1962 Edwin Scott Gaustad published his *Historical Atlas of Religion in America* (Harper and Row). We were overdue, therefore, for a fresh geographical atlas such as this volume prepared by two scholars from the University of Connecticut. They are not new to this area of study. Together they published *Atlas of Religious Change in America 1952–1990* and two predecessor volumes. As one might expect, Methodists are well represented in the text, maps, and charts. This is a helpful book with excellent visuals.

Paul Leslie Kaufman, *“Logical” Luther Lee and the Methodist War Against Slavery*. Lanham, Maryland and London: The Scarecrow Press, Inc., 2000. 275 pp. \$59.50.

A simple search of a bookstore's webpage for books on American abolitionism yielded a list of seven hundred and sixty-six titles. This overwhelm-

ing number of books may be the reason why Lawrence Friedman wrote the article, “‘Historical Topics Sometimes Run Dry’: The State of Abolitionist Studies.” However, Paul L. Kaufman disagrees with Friedman’s assessment of abolitionist studies. Kaufman thinks there is still plenty of fresh material to be found on the subject, and he offers his book, *“Logical” Luther Lee and the Methodist War Against Slavery*, as proof.

The book, a publication of Kaufman’s 1994 Ph.D. dissertation, argues there are many reasons for considering Luther Lee an important figure in both abolitionism and Methodist history. Kaufman traces Lee’s progression from mildly outraged Methodist preacher to wholehearted abolition activist. As an activist, Lee divided his time between giving lectures, writing articles, and defending pro-abolitionist Methodist pastors at church trials. Lee’s arguments in these various arenas were always carefully thought and adhered to the rules of rhetoric he had learned from such books as George Campbell’s *Philosophy of Rhetoric* and Bishop Whately’s *Elements of Rhetoric*. Lee called his rhetorical style “the chain of iron-linked logic” and it earned him the nickname “Logical.”

This book does not focus solely on Lee’s abolitionist activities. Instead it gives a chronological overview of Lee’s multi-faceted career. For example, one recurring theme is Lee’s numerous debates with Universalists. Lee was not shy about challenging Universalist doctrines and he was frequently challenged to debate. Kaufman seems to suggest that Lee’s logic was so irrefutable he was always the victor of these debates.

All the various aspects of Lee’s career are touched upon including his advocacy for women’s rights and temperance issues; his withdrawal from the Methodist Episcopal Church and his leadership in the Wesleyan Methodist Church; and his short tenure as a college professor. In reading the book one is left with the impression that Luther Lee is a “hero of the church” for Paul Kaufman. There are dramatic flourishes in the book which cast Lee in the light of a heroic champion for justice, for example:

It is impossible to quantify how many men Lee actually won over to antislavery, or even to ascertain the number of opposers who paused to consider their gradualist course in dealing with slavery as a result of his efforts. What we do know, however, is that Lee won for himself the undying enmity of Fisk and his cohorts. Lee’s destiny was sealed at that juncture; only time was needed to reveal the process of his ouster. It was not a question of “if” but “when” (p. 71).

In spite of this tendency to be overly dramatic, I would characterize Kaufman’s treatment of Lee as fair and balanced, both the high points and low points in Lee’s career are covered, but there were times when Kaufman revealed a preference for the Wesleyan Methodist tradition. This was especially clear whenever Kaufman wrote of the heavy-handed leadership style of the MEC Bishops.

The career of Luther Lee is an interesting lens through which to view 19th century American history. While “Logical” Lee may not be a well-

known figure, Kaufman is justified in bringing Lee's contributions to the attention of the Methodist community.

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Michel Kasongo, *History of the Methodist Church in the Central Congo*. Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1998. 188 pp. \$36.00.

Methodism for more than two centuries has played a unique role in the generation of missions and transmission of Christianity from the Western/Northern hemisphere. How Methodist theology and ethos shaped African missions has barely been accounted for. Michael Kasongo's book is an attempt in that direction. What is even more important about this book is its focus on "southern Methodism." *History of the Methodist Church in the Central Congo* employs primary and secondary sources to document how the fourfold missions' strategy (i.e., industrial, educational, medical, and evangelistic) was employed by southern Methodists as they struggled to "found a mission among the Atetela" of Central Congo between 1912 and 1996. The southern Methodists saw themselves uniquely prepared for missions in Africa because they were "born and brought up with black men." Though the northern Methodists had earlier established missions in Kasanga Province of the Congo, the southern Methodists perceived themselves "better fitted and prepared by God to evangelize Africa." This sense of "preparedness" among southern Methodists did not last long as racial prejudice began to hinder any further progress along integrated missions' policy.

Kasongo ably demonstrates the historical relationship between missions and civil authorities, not only those of colonial governments, but those of local chiefs as well. The two institutions accepted or rejected each other in the case of the Atetela depending on whatever was expedient to their often differing objectives. It is this unstable political and colonial fortune which shaped the rapidly changing circumstances surrounding southern Methodist missions in the Congo. The author also succeeds in showing that the translation of biblical/theological concepts into the local Atetela dialect became difficult and was inappropriately done for fear of using "profane and popular language coming from the Atetela culture in a holy book." Comparatively, the social aspect of Methodism in Central Congo excelled, while the evangelistic objective did not become viable. The church was thus established on a "quasi-colonial structure and left with a fragile basis for the future." It is this apparent evangelistic failure which forms the overarching theme of this book.

Kasongo's book is a clear witness to the often ignored intimate relationships between ecclesiological and theological developments in the mission field to those influencing Christianity in the mission-sending countries.

The picture painted here is perhaps pessimistic but it undoubtedly demonstrates that things did not always turn out well as the missionaries tried cross-culturally to communicate the Gospel and as the Africans tried to make sense out of their newfound faith within their culturally determined milieu. South and North tensions in the United States and the issue of slavery in the Methodist Episcopal Church influenced and often adversely affected missionary policies. The Catholic/Protestant ecclesiological and theological fights of the western countries flowed into the mission fields, with the Christians from the "two-third world" countries caught up in the crossfire. In the case of the Congo, Methodists suffered when the Belgian Catholics portrayed them as "heretics" and stood to gain when the colonialists changed their policy and began to see them as "allies." The revivals in North America spilled over to the mission fields as Kasongo notes in the case of the Rev. Gilbert W. Ridout revival of 1932 in the Congo. The emergence of a conservative/liberal rift in the American religious landscape led to parallel outcomes in the mission fields. This ideological polarization played itself into the rise of African nationalism and the emergence of independent African Churches like Vandism which was an offshoot of the Ridout revivals in the Congo.

History of the Methodist Church in the Central Congo is written with an apparent negative tone. Readers will find this book a critique of a missiological methodology rather than a conventional history of Methodism in the Congo. The section dealing with *the decline and fall of Central Congo Episcopal Area* sounds too personal and subjective. This section contains personal vendettas that tend to lend themselves as the orienting concern of the research and threatens to nullify the scholarly nature of the work. While the blame is perhaps rightly placed on the episcopal mismanagement, Kasongo did very little to show the role of political dynamics surrounding the "Mobutu Era" which adversely affected the growth of the church in the Congo. His statement to the effect that "Central Congo Episcopal Conference is dead" sounds much of an overstatement to be true. Aside from these and many editorial errors, the book is a very important contribution to the study of transmission of Christian faith to the non-western world via a unique medium of "southern Methodism." It is also a worthy contribution to the current debate on the "Southern orientation" of Methodism and how this "conservatism" fared cross-culturally.

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