

BOOK REVIEWS

Donald A. Bullen, *A Man of One Book? John Wesley's Interpretation and Use of the Bible*. Milton Keynes, UK: Paternoster, 2007. 260 pp. \$36.99.

In *A Man of One Book?* Bullen crosses disciplinary boundaries to suggest that Reader-Response criticism in biblical studies should be used by Wesley scholars to illumine how John Wesley read Scripture. His contention is that scholars have insufficiently accounted for various influences on Wesley's interpretation of Scripture, relying instead on Wesley's own claim to be a "man of one book." Consequently, they do not see that he found in the Bible what he wanted to find. Not only was 19th century hagiography of Wesley guilty of this oversight, but even scholars today have failed to look beyond what Wesley said to what Wesley actually did.

Bullen's exercise in Reader-Response amounts to saying that Wesley was influenced by family and his early Oxford years to read the Bible as a High-Church Arminian Anglican. The author's point about how this formation influenced Wesley's interpretation of Scripture comes through most clearly when he shows how Wesley and George Whitefield interpreted the Bible to support their respective Arminian and Calvinist positions. Both claimed their theologies to be biblical, but they were using the Bible to support very different ideas. In this way, they were both involved in creating different meanings of the text.

To the extent that Bullen is pointing out the need for scholars to attend more closely to Wesley's actual interpretation of Scripture, the book could encourage work that needs to be done. Bullen's use of Reader-Response, though, is puzzling. He takes a fairly simple point from a vast body of literature on hermeneutics, some of which is better able to handle the complexities of text-reader interaction than others. Bullen is not, then, really engaging Reader-Response criticism. Furthermore, his basic contention about Wesley's formation is a historical judgment not necessarily connected to Reader-Response. In fact, if he were to take Reader-Response seriously, he would have to acknowledge that his own interpretation of Wesley is involved in processes of reading rather than simply disclosing the way things were. Then he would have to admit that the scholarship he considers to be inadequate really consists of different readings, which stand less in need of correction and challenge than simple acknowledgement that they were shaped by readers' interests, just as Bullen's own reading has been.

The most serious puzzle, though, has to do with rather careless stating of the major argument. Bullen claims that scholars have failed to distinguish

what Wesley thought from what he did. At times, though, his criticism of others is directed toward the wrong side of that distinction. In the final chapter Bullen says that the fundamental challenge his book makes to current scholarship is to the idea that “Wesley thought” the Bible was the supreme authority. Bullen himself, though, repeats many times that Wesley *thought* exactly that, so the result is a very confusing picture of what Bullen is up to.

SARAH HEANER LANCASTER
Delaware, Ohio

Joe L. Coker. *Liquor in the Land of the Lost Cause: Southern White Evangelicals and the Prohibition Movement*. Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 2007. 329pp. \$50.00.

One of the latest additions to the *Religion in the South* series edited by John B. Boles, Coker’s significant study investigates the growth and development of the prohibition movement in the South. The South, for historical and social reasons, looked askance at too much governmental power. Yet in 1907, Georgia was the first southern state to enact statewide prohibition and by 1915 nine other southern states had embraced statewide prohibition (2). Coker’s task is to track this evolution in social engineering and to locate the place of religion, evangelicalism in particular, in that transformation.

Coker’s work is more in line with that of Clark and Hohner, who analyze the players in the Prohibition movement more on their own terms. Coker’s work asks how the evangelicals in the South constructed the arguments to help prepare that society to accept prohibition.

Coker’s study focuses on the period of 1880 through 1915 and looks at the movement in Georgia, Alabama and Tennessee. While such an approach does leave out interesting characters and developments in such states as Louisiana and Virginia, other studies have done similar sampling and it can easily be argued that these states are representative of the changing and diverse South (7). Coker’s evangelicals are essentially Baptists and Methodists. While there were other religious groups in the movement and in the South, these two religious bodies were representative in the South, and in the case of the Methodists the major player in the movement in both the North and the South.

Coker’s analysis of how the movement developed and changed southern attitudes is remarkable and fascinating. The reader is allowed to see how the movement grew and spread and how it developed its argument for prohibition. Hopefully similar work can be done on other regions of the country. Coker looks at five ways the movement developed its argument. First he looks at how the churches became interested in prohibition. He notes that while there was a biblical rationale for temperance there was no such rationale for prohibition. That the churches moved from concern about members

being sober to having a dry society is a significant shift. In true American fashion the shift in attitude was brought about by a concern for praxis, consistency and ethics; biblical arguments had little impact on the movement.

The chapter on the political activity in drying up the South sounds very familiar since it covers some ground found in earlier works. But Coker shows here how the churches reframed their tasks in order to justify their involvement in the political process. In short he documents how the church made it alright for a pastor to speak of political things, not just from the pulpit, but at all.

In the chapter on race Coker notes the irony of how Progressive Era reforms were often used against the African Americans in order to create the Jim Crow society. The same happened with prohibition. Initially many evangelicals hoped that the African American community would support the movement. In the finally analysis they turned on that community, making them the phantom menace in order to garner support from the white community for prohibition.

Probably the most interesting section of the work is his analysis on how the evangelicals attempted to redefine the cult of honor in the South to work in favor of prohibition. There has been a steady stream of studies which look at the attempted transformation of the class attitudes by evangelical mores from the colonial period to the present. Since there are so many studies, one is left wondering if the transformations were ever really successful? But Coker's real point is that there was the attempt to enlist the cult of honor in the prohibition movement. And finally he looks at gender and the role of woman in the movement. Again, some of this will be familiar ground to students but Coker gives significant analysis on many of the participants and how it affected the men in the South.

Overall this is an insightful and important analysis of the movement and deserves to be on many bookshelves. That said, there are a surprising number of errors, small and large, in the text. In almost all cases, the errors, when checked against his sources, come from poor secondary sources and not a mis-reading of primary sources. And many are in the first and last chapters—chapters not germane to the central thesis of the text. For example, on page 30 he notes that in 1816 all Methodist ministers were not allowed to buy and sell slaves and then a couple of lines down notes that in 1836 the rule was “extended” to elders and deacons. The comment would appear to reflect a Presbyterian polity because for the Methodists, “ministers” are either “elders or deacons.” He also incorrectly identifies that Charles Wesley, instead of his brother John, was the author of the General Rules for the Methodists. On page 26 he refers to the Georgia General Conference, when he meant the Georgia Annual Conference and refers to an 1813 General Conference which surely was an annual conference for one of his three states. He also refers to an 1887 General Conference for the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, when it should have been 1886 (a quick look at his source shows that the source had the year and was a secondary source).

Probably the most significant error, which has small impact on his argument, is the claim that the Methodist Episcopal Church allowed laity rights for women in 1888 (226). This actually did not happen until 1900. Women attempted to be seated at the General Conference in 1888, but were denied. He goes on to document a strong reaction to the event within the South and how it impacted the work of women and prohibition. Again, looking at his source, it turns out to be a Methodist paper in Alabama. That the South believed this to have happened and reacted in such a way is probably more interesting than Coker's mistake.

Overall this is a significant and important work. It shows how the church changed its attitude from temperance to prohibition and then worked to change southern society.

L. DALE PATTERSON
Madison, New Jersey

OTHER BOOKS RECEIVED

Alan Harding, *Selina: Countess of Huntingdon*. Peterborough, UK: Epworth, 2007. 220 pp. £12.99.

While there is a bibliographical note on sources, there is a regrettable absence of footnotes or endnotes. This makes the biography of a contemporary of the Wesleys readable and accessible but limits usefulness as a scholarly resource. Alan Harding is a priest in the Church of England and he previously published *The Countess of Huntingdon's Connexion: A Sect in Action in Eighteenth-Century England* (Oxford University Press, 2003). Selina's relationship with the Wesleys make this a useful lens through which to view the 18th Century evangelical awakening.

James L. Schwenk, *Catholic Spirit: Wesley, Whitefield, and the Quest for Evangelical Unity in Eighteenth-Century British Methodism*. Lanham, MD: The Scarecrow Press, Inc. 2008. 141pp. \$40.00.

This is the 26th volume in the series, "Revitalization: Explorations in World Christian Movements, Pietist and Wesleyan Studies." James Schwenk is professor of church history and dean of Dech Chapel at Evangelical Theological Seminary, Myerstown, Pennsylvania. The relationship between Wesley and Whitefield was both one of friendship and sharp debate. How did the spirit of love and affection between these two live itself out in both theological agreement and disagreement? Schwenk's work is a useful study in the quest to answer that question.

***Methodist History* Subscription Rates**

Within the United States

One year subscription	\$20.00
Two year subscription	\$30.00
Four year subscription	\$50.00
Student rate (one year)	\$10.00

In Canada

One year subscription	\$25.00 (U.S.)
Two year subscription	\$40.00 (U.S.)
Four year subscription	\$70.00 (U.S.)
Student rate (one year)	\$14.00 (U.S.)

All other countries

One year subscription	\$30.00 (U.S.)
Two year subscription	\$50.00 (U.S.)
Four year subscription	\$80.00 (U.S.)
Student rate (one year)	\$18.00 (U.S.)

*Please make payment in a check or money order made out to
"General Commission on Archives and History."*

*Students, please enclose a photocopy of your student I.D. or
other appropriate identification.*

General Commission on Archives and History

P.O. Box 127

Madison, NJ 07940

www.gcah.org

973-408-3189