
This is a substantial book of 42 chapters, divided into six parts—History of Methodism; Ecclesial Forms and Structures; Worship: Sacraments, Liturgy, Hymnody, Preaching; Spiritual Experiences, Evangelism, Mission, Ecumenism; Theology; and Ethics and Politics. As is probably inevitable, some chapters stand out, whilst others are almost stillborn. Thus in Part I, Richard Heitzenrater on ‘The Founding Brothers,’ John Wigger on ‘Asbury and American Methodism’ and David Hempton on ‘Transitions in Britain and North America’ provide the best short summaries available, each of around twenty pages. Yet if Methodism in Latin America deserves a chapter to itself, why are there not corresponding chapters on Africa and Asia? There is a characteristically stimulating chapter by Lamin Sanneh on ‘Methodism and the Roots of World Christian Awakening’; but this is a general survey (as indeed is the later excellent chapter by Dana Robert and Douglas Tzan on ‘Traditions and Transitions in Mission Thought’).

What is more striking is the almost total absence of any discussion of non-Wesleyan traditions. The book is clearly geared to a North American audience rather than a British one, so perhaps it is not surprising that Primitive Methodism and the traditions which came together in the United Methodist Church of 1907 in the UK receive little attention. But notwithstanding a chapter on ‘African-American Methodism’ in the historical section, in the sections on theology, worship, and evangelism there are scarcely any references to the two major black Methodist churches in the U.S.A. It is possible that those churches have produced no writers of substantial theological works (though it would be surprising), but surely there must have been many published or reported sermons, in which the treatment of the key Methodist theological emphases may be seen. The chapter on ‘Scripture and Revelation’ considers general issues of hermeneutics and revelation (though not inspiration directly), but there is no systematic treatment of the development of higher criticism. A.S. Peake has one reference in the Index, and Kingsley Barrett or Morna Hooker do not even have that; similar American scholars also pass without note. If one argues, as would be possible, that Methodist biblical scholars do not exhibit anything distinctively Methodist in their work, then surely that is a significant comment to make in any discussion of Methodist theology.

There is some good material in the Worship section, particularly, of course, in Geoffrey Wainwright’s chapter on the Sacraments. That this represents one
end of a wide spectrum becomes apparent in the later material on Christian Perfection and Assurance. Nevertheless, it is sad (or astonishing) that in a tradition pre-eminently marked by its contribution to hymnody, the discussion of that should occupy only twelve pages, compared with the average twenty. That chapter provides a valuable discussion of Asian hymnody, but the rest of the world gets short shrift. Charles Wesley, of course, is covered by plentiful quotation in other chapters, but the work of nineteenth- and twentieth-century writers in the West goes without mention.

There is a more general problem about the theological chapters. It is not clear how far they are intended to be essays in historical theology or contemporary essays, outlining significant issues facing Methodists in the 21st century. Some carefully follow the first, whereas others focus entirely on the latter. But the effect of that is that John Wesley becomes a paradigmatic figure, with much more attention paid to him than to the New Testament (or even the Hebrew Scriptures). Although some of this material on Wesley does set him in a new light, it probably exaggerates his personal theological significance in the long run of Christian history (Methodism, like Lutheranism, does suffer in any case from a tendency to a disproportionate emphasis on a single founder figure). Some of the chapters in the Theology section are frankly soporific, rather like those detailed discussions of the intricacies of eighteenth-century New England Congregationalists, who painstakingly tried to show that they were right and their opponents were wrong. Fortunately the last section on “Ethics and Politics” brings the book back to life, with several succinct and insightful summaries of contemporary issues, although questions surrounding human sexuality are generally avoided.

A strong ecumenical theme emerges in several of the sections: it is not confined to the specific chapter on ‘Methodism and the Future of Ecumenism’ (though it would have been helpful to balance the good discussion of the future there with some consideration of the Methodist role in the formation of United Churches, such as those in Canada, Australia, and India in the earlier twentieth century). The most obvious ecumenical theme is the twentieth-century recovery of a Trinitarian emphasis in the doctrine of God, which is more sensitive to patristic categories and does not accept the Enlightenment view that they are nowadays outmoded. One virtue of a historical approach to this subject is that it allows readers to consider such categories on their own terms, without necessarily squeezing them through a rationalist mangle. Yet a similar charity seems to be absent elsewhere, particularly in the case of process theology, where the work of the Methodist, John Cobb, and others of his school is dismissed by several different writers without ever receiving a sympathetic