



Reviews

Methodist Heritage and Identity, Brian E. Beck (London and New York: Routledge, 2018), 188 pp, £105.00 hbk; £25.99 e-book

As Principal of Wesley House, Secretary and President of the British Methodist Conference, and Co-chair of the Oxford Institute of Methodist Theological Studies, Brian Beck has occupied a unique position at the intersection of church and academy, theological reflection and ecclesiastical and ecumenical praxis. In *Methodist Heritage and Identity*, Dr Beck has gathered 18 essays, written over two decades, and reshaped them to consider salient themes around the distinctive Methodist way of being Christian, covering Methodist history, polity and discipline. The treatment is incisive, lucid, honest and challenging. Many of the papers were first written for general audiences, and so, although grounded in profound scholarship, they are also eminently accessible to a wide readership.

The volume opens with a tercentenary reflection on John Wesley, 'encounter or embarrassment?', admitting the hagiography, but identifying six key Wesleyan emphases which still repay thought today. Two essays then consider Charles Wesley's hymns, suggesting why they may have fallen from favour in the modern Church, and recommending their use as a devotional resource. A deft summary of 'Methodism after Wesley' leads into a section on connexionalism and Conference *episcopē*, moving from the nineteenth-century exponents of a high doctrine of the pastoral office to the dialogue between connexion and koinonia. A biographical study of the Cambridgeshire barrister Richard Matthews (1796–1854), defender and critic of the Wesleyan hierarchy, and ardent abolitionist, rounds off the first part of the book.

Part Two begins with a consideration of 'the elusive Methodist identity', finding the essence of Methodism in a rich blend of ingredients, from Arminianism and experience to collaboration in ministry and commitment to mission. A Methodist perspective is brought to bear on the idea of a National Church (not the same as an Established Church), on the Porvoo Common Statement and on the Turnbull Report's proposals for restructuring the Church of England. A 1993 paper on 'Unity and Conscience' refutes the simplistic dismissal of all disagreements between Christians as sinful, while also refusing to rest comfortably with division; the companion piece on unity and eschatology insists that Christian unity is not a matter of simple progress, but of patient striving in the light of God's ultimate purpose. The final paper, 'What is a Divinity School for?', holds the tension between tradition and critical evaluation, and emphasises a lifelong commitment to learn.

Most of these chapters began as lectures, addresses or brief articles, demanding concise treatment of big subjects. To summarise without oversimplifying is a rare skill, but it is certainly achieved here. And, although deeply rooted in the traditions of Methodism – its theology, its polity and its hymnody – Dr Beck is willing to reflect critically on the tradition, whether in the light of contemporary culture or from the perspectives of ecumenism or mission. His questions are insightful and prescient, and repay further pondering.

Martin Wellings is Superintendent Minister of the Oxford Circuit, and Co-chair of the Oxford Institute of Methodist Theological Studies. He has served as a member of the Faith and Order Committee and of the Methodist Heritage Committee, and is a Fellow of the Royal Historical Society.

Oxford, UK

Yet Alive: Methodists in British Fiction Since 1890, David Dickinson
(Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2016),
148 pp, £41.99 hbk

The author of this short, intensive study of Methodist literature over the last two centuries enjoyed years of experience teaching English before entering the Methodist ministry. He therefore combines detailed and penetrating literary skills with an intimate knowledge and understanding of Methodists in British fiction.

'Yet alive' is from Charles Wesley's hymn that opens the British Methodist Conference, and each chapter is headed by a line from other hymns, symbolising the importance of Methodist hymnody for his theme. There are full notes, bibliography and index. The book follows two distinct strands of argument, each keeping the other in its sights. First, Dickinson explores and relates the history of novels reflecting Methodism both from 1890, as the subtitle suggests, and earlier in the nineteenth century, before analysing Methodist issues in works, among others, by Quiller-Couch, Arnold Bennett, Howard Spring and, more recently, Peter Hobbs. The other strand suggests ways in which, with Methodist numbers decreasing since about 1920, literature can profitably convey matters of belief that might appeal to non-believers and arouse interest in faith that conventional Methodist means such as preaching and hymnody are failing to achieve. Dickinson believes that in reading a novel he is exploring theology. This second strand of his argument, together with a succinct history of Methodism, features mainly in his excellent Introduction, which is a stimulating study in itself.

His study of Methodist literature concentrates very much on the role and importance of preaching. There is, however, a tendency, having related the plots of works in some detail, to repeat himself when he returns later to considering the preaching in the books he has already covered. Some of the novels, such as Quiller-Couch's and Joseph Hocking's, even Howard Spring's *Fame is the Spur*, analysed in detail, are less read today. Nevertheless, the lessons are very profitable for us and should encourage Methodists to read more novels and see faith differently.

Reviews

Dickinson deals well with the snares awaiting preachers, the temptation to self-aggrandisement, self-dramatisation and self-blame, as well as the criticisms from outsiders. He discusses effectively the way critics analyse Christians' failings. A particularly interesting case is that of Peter Hobbs' *The Short Day Dying* (2005) where the story set in Cornwall in 1870 reveals declining numbers of worshippers and an effective analysis of the young preacher's spiritual difficulties. Preaching is so important to the studies in this book that the author includes a most useful 'Analytical Kit for the literary criticism of sermons in fiction'. From fiction one can learn to avoid the pitfalls of personal failure by assuming the role of a critical observer – a useful way of reading and imbibing truths of the gospel for the uncommitted who enjoy literature for what it can teach at second hand about ourselves and God.

Though some of the novels covered are less fashionable today, the book is highly commended for its originality, clear writing, stimulating arguments and incentives to explore faith through fiction.

Dr Gordon Leah publishes on matters of Christian belief reflected in literature. He is a retired languages teacher and Methodist local preacher.

Worcester, UK

Networks for Faith Formation: Relational Bonds and the Spiritual Growth of Youth, Steven Emery-Wright and Ed Mackenzie (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2017), 168 pp, £33.00 hbk; £17.00 pbk

The message of this book is clearly articulated in the Introduction: 'It is ... when teens' family, school, friends, and sports lives and religious congregations somehow connect, intersect, and overlap that teens exhibit the most committed and integral religious and spiritual lives' (Christian Smith and Melinda Denton; p. xiii)

This book reflects on the faith formation of young people within a Christian tradition, although the title does not infer that it reports only one religion. The presentation and layout of this book is clear and easy to follow. It is a pity more attention was not given to the photograph used on the cover to ensure the body language in that picture brought the message of connection and communication that Emery-Wright and Mackenzie strive to convey.

The authors propose eight strands that weave together to form a network that shapes the young person's faith, namely bedroom practices, the church, families, friends, mentors, small groups, events and gatherings, and commission and service. A chapter is devoted to explaining each of these strands, with a concise overview and helpful 'Putting It Into Practice' and 'Further Reading' suggestions in the conclusion of each section. There is also a helpful appendix explaining five principles regarding 'Youth and the Online World'.

In my opinion, a disappointment with this book is that some theological terminology and language used could impede the reader's understanding of the subjects discussed. This is made more cumbersome by the heavy referencing on almost every page.

However, the book is excellently researched, with an extensive bibliography quoting highly respected theologians. Despite this, there are times when conclusions are drawn that needed the authority of other sources.

Unfortunately only one cursory statement is made to safeguarding, without explaining how vital this is. It is a pity that other resources regarding safeguarding are not given in the 'Helpful Reading' section of the 'Mission' chapter.

Reviews

I would have liked to hear more definitively the voices of young people regarding what they perceive is needed for the future.

The most helpful and exciting section of this book is the final 'Way Forward'. My advice would be to read this chapter first because this section is most likely to be the one that will motivate the reader to take time digesting the information presented in each of the different threads. This is a comprehensive piece of work – which at times perhaps would benefit from editing to give it a 'lighter touch' – which, given due study, could significantly impact the life of churches, not only for the young concerned but for the spiritual health of the entire Church. As the authors note, 'When churches and Christians genuinely engage with the youth in their midst, they discover that not only young people mature in their faith, but that all ages benefit from a deepening relationship with God and with each other' (p. 120).

Val Mullally MA, parenting author and founder of Koemba Parenting

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Radical Leadership: In the New Testament and Today, Michael Green
(London: SPCK, 2017), 101 pp, £9.99 pbk

The aim of this little book, stated clearly at the start, is to commend the principles of leadership found among Jesus and his earliest followers within the New Testament. It recognises the existence of a wealth of books on leadership, including Christian leadership, but does not seek to engage with any work other than the New Testament, so there are no footnotes or bibliography. In so far as Green undertakes any kind of critique it is an appraisal of Christian ministerial training institutions and theological seminaries, coloured by personal experience of Anglican ordination training, along with an assumption that most denominations have a similar pattern.

The book provides a basic overview of key material concerning leadership in different strands of the New Testament, comparing today's norms as it does so. The first two chapters, drawing from the Gospels as a whole, explore how Jesus himself led and how he trained his followers. Moving on to the rest of the New Testament the approach is sometimes an exposition of particular passages, so 'Peter on leadership' (Chapter 3) draws seven principles from 1 Peter 5:1–11, while Chapter 6 takes a similar approach to Paul's farewell address to the Ephesian elders in Acts 20. In contrast, chapters on 'Leadership at Corinth' and 'Luke on leadership' gather characteristics from across the Corinthian correspondence and the Acts of the Apostles respectively.

In a chapter on 'Women in leadership' Green offers his understanding of texts that are used to disallow such within some churches. He is evidently addressing a particular audience, the result being a very detailed exegesis (relative to anything else in this book) of 1 Timothy 2:12, resulting in a chapter section six pages long, while everywhere else the text is broken by regular subheadings and/or verbally numbered points within them so that no section extends beyond two pages. The chapter ends by allowing that, while ministry is male and female, leadership might be 'normally male' (p. 80) – a view clearly at odds with the position of the British Methodist Church. Another theme where Green may carry some of his generation but fewer younger Christians is his denouncement of church leaders who advocate 'homosexual marriage' (p. 83) and claim that to regard same-sex marriage as acceptable is to be 'not strong on biblical content' (p. 87).

Reviews

The brief final chapter entitled 'Lessons for today' lists common themes emerging from the different New Testament perspectives and then indicates ways in which current practice of training Christian leaders does not match up well. The author's biggest concern is that shutting students away in college for two or three years with minimal hands-on experience is no way to prepare for ministry or leadership. Many readers may feel that case was won several decades ago, or that their denomination in their country has never followed that pattern.

Those who are used to rigorous scholarship, including Michael Green's in some of his books, might be dissatisfied with the lack of detail in the exposition of texts and the summary nature of conclusions. But the book could be stimulating for people just beginning to think about Christian leadership, and could certainly prompt worthwhile discussion among those involved in it or training for that purpose, even though, to be fair, there is nothing 'radical' here apart from in the title.

Stephen Mosedale is a retired Methodist minister. After training at Wesley House, he served in West Africa and Scotland, subsequently teaching New Testament and Homiletics and Liturgy at Cliff College; he was then a senior connexional secretary for the British Methodist Church, and a circuit superintendent.

Exeter, UK

The Book of Joy: Lasting Happiness in a Changing World, Dalai Lama, Desmond Tutu, Douglas Abrams (London: Hutchinson, 2016), 351 pp, £12.99 hbk; 7.99 pbk; £9.49 Kindle

In April 2015, Archbishop Desmond Tutu visited the Dalai Lama. During the course of a week, they discussed various topics to answer one question: how do we find joy in the face of life's inevitable suffering? This book is the outcome of those meetings.

Although the visit was videoed, the discussions are not presented as transcripts. Douglas Abrams serves as co-writer, and has woven together the conversations on various topics as well as offering many thoughts of his own.

The two religious leaders speak from within their own traditions, namely Buddhism and Christianity. They also draw upon their own experiences of suffering. The Dalai Lama is in exile from his home country of Tibet, having escaped as a young man. Desmond Tutu chaired the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa, set up after the abolition of Apartheid.

The book is structured by day and topics, namely 'The Nature of True Joy', 'Obstacles to Joy' and 'The Eight Pillars of Joy'. A final section offers 'Joy Practices', which do not presuppose any faith.

The tone is engaging and conversational. The reader feels as if she were present as the two men tease each other before returning to the serious topics at hand. This makes for easy and enjoyable reading for those who have little exposure to theological discussion. Both the Buddhist and the Christian views are put forward without any expectation that the reader is well versed in either religion.

The very strengths of the book are also its downside. Tutu speaks from a very liberal approach to Christianity, and those of more conservative outlooks might not agree with his views. The Dalai Lama calls into question the long-term value of religious belief, and his optimistic view of humanity's future could be seen as simplistic: 'Human beings, through wider contact and more education, are becoming more mature' (p. 296).

Readers will not find structured arguments on the nature of suffering, evil and death. Personal experience, rather than Scripture or tradition, is often relied

Reviews

upon in order to advance the discussion. Abrams sometimes brings examples into the narrative which did not feature in the conversations, such as the case of Anthony Ray Hinton, who was falsely accused of murder, yet found it within himself 'to hold on to his joy' (p. 262). At times, these inserts served as a distraction from the ongoing conversations.

As an example of how two leaders from two different religious traditions interact and discuss major life questions, this book is highly recommended. The intersections between Christianity and Buddhism (and the points of divergence) are intriguing. Although not a heavy theological tome, there is much here upon which the reader can reflect. The overall tone is hopeful, focusing more on what is good in the world than the evil that is so often highlighted.

The Revd Chrys Tremththanmor left the world of finance to become a full-time priest in the Church of England. After serving ten years in parish ministry, she is now full-time Clergy Training Officer in Peterborough Diocese. Her hobbies include travel, photography and fiction writing (under her pen name Chrys Cymri).

Northampton, UK

There Your Heart Will Be, Gordon Leah (Bracknell: Newbold Academic Press, 2016), 242 pp, £14.50 pbk

Gordon Leah, a retired teacher of modern languages and a Methodist local preacher, greeted his loss of religious belief in the face of family trauma (in 1996) with a sense of relief that he no longer needed to pray or to act out his public roles. God, he felt, having created the world, had left it and him to their fate. Faith returned in 2003, and over the next decade came the 15 essays (all previously published in various theological journals) that comprise this volume. Leah's conviction is that true religion is a heartfelt wish to do what God wishes, beyond all doctrine, dogma and laws. The task is, of course, far beyond our capacity to sustain. Failure and recrimination are inevitable. In these essays, Leah reflects on his understanding of the human condition through his reading of some of the great fiction writers of the last century. Thus he leads us through the likes of Franz Kafka, Winfried Sebald, Graham Green, Thomas Hardy and Evelyn Waugh. Kenneth Grahame's is the only lighter contribution.

These essays are for those who read novels for insight as much as for entertainment. Leah demands of the reader technical knowledge of neither theology nor literary criticism, but only a literary sophistication adequate to read these novels and an enquiring mind. Although he maps out the relevant elements of each plot for us, some knowledge of each novel and its author is helpful.

It is not necessary to agree with Leah to appreciate his work. I find myself at odds over elements of his reading of Grahame's 'The Piper at the Gates of Dawn', for instance. No matter. What is fascinating is how Leah's reading of fiction and his personal faith journey intersect. He bids us read and do likewise.

This is an instinctive tragedian at work. The prevailing mood is sombre. Kafka, Green and Waugh are central. Life is both a deadly serious struggle and a darkly amusing puzzle, a Quixote-like quest. Yet beyond the gloom there lies a reconciled life of moral and spiritual peace and integrity, emerging out of and despite the grim realities of human nature and the perversely obstructive quality of secular and religious structures. Our tilting at windmills is not to be taken lightly.

Reviews

In general, Leah does not over-theologise. He is content to tell us what he finds in these authors, and to let us make up our own minds. He is rather more directive in his handling of biblical material, where perhaps the preacher can be heard at work. The quality is uneven. But one may skip. There is no absolute need to read sequentially.

Yet a broad programme is discernible. The collection begins with Kenneth Grahame's Mole and Ratty discovering that (of necessity) the beatific vision fades, and that life has to be lived with only its dim echo. It ends with Waugh's Julia Flyte raging at the sheer inescapability of the crucified Christ, and Chesterton's Father Brown fishing with his 'invisible line which is long enough to let [his quarry] wander to the ends of the world, and still to bring him back with a twitch upon the thread'. Between those two, we must find our way through our world, obeying as best we can our heartfelt wish to do God's will.

Michael Wilson is a retired Methodist minister. He has taught in various British universities, specialising in philosophical theology. He publishes in the broad area of body theology.

Sawston, UK

Spirituality in Photography: Taking Pictures with Deeper Vision, Philip J. Richter (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 2017), 120 pp, £9.99 pbk

This slender volume comes across as a labour of love by the author. Richter is both a keen amateur photographer and a Methodist minister. His book attempts to combine both an appreciation of photography with spiritual insights about vision and perspective.

The format is structured like a workbook or a journal. Each chapter opens with the author offering several pages of reflection on an aspect of photography, such as 'Framing' or 'Sunrise'. He provides suggestions on how to approach the topic with a camera or camera phone. Then the chapter will move on to musings about what our photography can tell us about our spiritual life. For example, in the chapter on 'Framing', he goes on to write: 'You might find yourself regularly excluding from the frame particular things and people, and even aspects of yourself, that you tend to shy away from.' Each chapter provides a section on how to use a camera phone, then provides a challenge, a list of questions with space for answers, and a page on which a photo taken by the reader can be affixed.

The author provides examples from his own photos (reproduced in black and white). At other times he refers to famous photographs which are not reproduced in the book, although the notes at the back provide the necessary web links.

The book is an easy read, and would benefit anyone who is new to photography or who has only recently started to explore spirituality. The attention given to the use of a camera phone would frustrate someone who uses a high-level SLR for photography, and might have wanted technical insight into camera settings or the benefits of shooting in RAW. Similarly, those who have already spent a number of years deepening their relationship with God might find rather obvious such statements as, 'In your own spiritual journey you may not always be what you seem to be', or 'One of the reasons why we lose a sense of perspective is that we are not always good at managing our time.'

Those who are interested more in images than the technical knowledge required to take better photos would enjoy this book. The connections

Reviews

between aspects of photography and spirituality might appeal to anyone who is happy with insights rather than sustained theological thought. Readers looking for more profound instruction, however, would be better off looking elsewhere.

The Revd Chrys Tremththanmor left the world of finance to become a full-time priest in the Church of England. After serving ten years in parish ministry, she is now full-time Clergy Training Officer in Peterborough Diocese. Her hobbies include travel, photography and fiction writing (under her pen name Chrys Cymri).

Northampton, UK

Blue: A Memoir – Keeping the Peace and Falling to Pieces, John Sutherland (London: Weidenfeld & Nicholson, 2017), 275 pp, £16.99 hbk

Television companies regularly feed viewers with new police series. Often the characters will face a major crisis, and how they deal with it is part of the attraction. Rarely will a central character go into total meltdown and be sidelined for months. They need to be back in action for the next episode, or at least the next series. Since the demise of *The Bill*, television no longer shows us the stresses and strains for the ordinary copper working on the streets of London. This is what John Sutherland has done in his memoir, *Blue*.

This is the story of his life, how he became a policeman, how he handled the experience of working in the Metropolitan Police, how he rose through the ranks, and then how he handled the moment in April 2013 when everything fell apart. The significance of that moment is stressed in the way in which it forms the introduction to the book. As the Borough Commander for Southwark, he was in the Control Room and suddenly thought, 'I don't know if I can do this anymore.' He had literally fallen to pieces. What then follows is his exploration of what had brought him to that moment. He shares his memories of family life BC, 'before coppering', as well as his own marriage and family.

There are many books written by soldiers, sometimes as a way of coming to terms with what they have had to face and the things they have been asked to do. This is a book about operating on a different front line. The police memorial in The Mall is a reminder of the fact that for some the sacrifice is total. At one point in the book, Sutherland lists the 20 members of the Met who have died on duty between the date he joined in 1992 and 2013. It does not include PC Keith Palmer, murdered outside the Houses of Parliament on 22 March 2017. There is a high probability that in any one year more police will die because of terrorist acts than soldiers will be killed on operations. The average police officer in London is more likely to be involved with a violent death, tragically all too often a victim of a teenage knife attack, than a member of the armed forces. It is Sutherland's experience of that world that makes this book worth reading.

Reviews

Early in his career Sutherland was taught Locard's Principle of policing: 'Every contact leaves a trace.' Throughout the book this was not only a guiding principle in his work, but also something that he carried over into his understanding of life. It is this idea of connectivity that gives anyone interested in theology the opportunity to find traces of Sutherland's spiritual journey, even when he is not able, or perhaps willing, to make such connections as he explores his life. Written out of a broadly Christian background, it is an honest, painful, challenging and thoughtful book. The last chapter is entitled 'The Long Road Back'. It is a different road from the one Sutherland expected to tread. As such it offers us all an insight into how to cope with a moment when life suddenly become too much.

Peter Howson is a supernumerary presbyter who spent 25 years in military chaplaincy. After returning to circuit work he studied for a PhD in the development of army chaplaincy in the late twentieth century. He has several authored articles and books on military chaplaincy. He is currently a Methodist Research Fellow at Oxford Brookes.

Andover, UK

Being Disciples: Essentials of the Christian Life, Rowan Williams (London: SPCK, 2016), 86 pp, £8.99 pbk

In his introduction, Rowan Williams describes this as ‘a little book’. It is certainly brief, but within it lies a depth of wisdom that rewards slow, careful reading.

The book has its origins in addresses given at different times to a wide variety of audiences, but its six chapters are all concerned with aspects of Christian discipleship: ‘Being Disciples’, ‘Faith, Hope and Love’, ‘Forgiveness’, ‘Holiness’, ‘Faith in Society’ and ‘Life in the Spirit’. Each chapter begins with a biblical passage and ends with questions which would be suitable for both private reflection and group discussion.

It is impossible in a brief review to do justice to the range and depth of these essays, so it may be helpful to look more closely at the chapter that gives the book its name.

It begins with the statement that ‘Discipleship, as the title of the book implies, is a state of *being*’ (p. 1, my italics). It is not about ‘turning up from time to time’ but about *staying*, and we are called to stay with Jesus in an attitude of awareness and expectancy. But, Williams argues, this also requires us to have a similar expectancy in the way we regard other Christians (‘What is Christ giving me through this person, this group?’, p. 8). Moreover, staying close to Jesus will also mean staying, like Jesus, close to the Father, so that the heart of discipleship is bound up with the life of the Trinity. This closely argued writing pulls us gently from seemingly straightforward beginnings to the suggestion that being disciples will involve a totally transformed perception of our relationship with others and with God: ‘our discipleship in the company of Jesus is a Trinitarian mode of life’ (p. 17). After reading this I feel the need to go back to the beginning of the chapter and start again; and this, I would argue, is precisely the attraction and challenge of Rowan Williams’ writing: that it requires us to wrestle with ideas to which a response will actually cost us something, will make a difference to the way we see and live out our faith.

One minor quibble: some of Rowan Williams’ smaller books originate in series of addresses given in a particular context – in Lent, for example, or a retreat. This book, however, is a stylistically varied collection of talks given at different

Reviews

times to different audiences, where some chapters are more immediately accessible than others. Does this matter? Not really; but readers expecting a new book from Rowan Williams may feel a tinge of disappointment to discover that this is essentially a reworking of past addresses which do not naturally belong together.

That said, there are great treasures to be found throughout this book and it deserves to be read and reread. Rowan Williams expresses the hope that these addresses 'may be a starting point for exploring ways in which we can go on growing in the life that Jesus shares with us' (p. x). In this intention, the book succeeds wonderfully and it will prove a rich resource for anyone seeking to reflect upon what following Jesus means.

The Revd Judy Davies is a Methodist minister. She trained at Wesley House, Cambridge, and has worked in circuits in South Wales and Reading. For over 20 years she has been a full-time health care chaplain, specialising in palliative care within the NHS and latterly in an independent hospice.

Reading, UK