



Reviews

The Gift of a Renewed Diaconate and the Contribution of British Methodism, David Clark (Peterborough: Fast Print Publishing, 2018), 159 pp, £6.95 pbk

The Methodist Conference asked for a report to its 2019 Conference on the theology and ecclesiology underpinning the Methodist Diaconal Order, which re-opened in 1986 as a different but equal order of ministry in the British Methodist Church for both men and women. David Clark's book (largely a collation of his recent papers) is prompted by his fear that the opportunity for pre-Conference public debate will be minimal, a course he sees as markedly at variance with the founding principles of the Order, declaring that 'dialogue is fundamental to the means by which the diaconal church communicates its message' (p. 150). This is a polemical (yet courteous) work from an author so passionate about diaconal ministry and the theological principles on which he believes it rests that he resigned his presbyteral Methodist ministry in order to enter the diaconate.

Clark believes that the church to come will be diaconal in character. The current Order, and its distinctive character, is but a foretaste. He declares 'I believe that the emergence of the church to come, the diaconal church, is both an ecumenical and divine imperative not only for the whole Christian community, but for a world and planet increasingly in danger of self-destruction' (p. 127), this because 'our world faces a choice between chaos and community' (p. 150). Further, 'the social collectives that make up the diaconal church – hearings, groups, networks, the institution as an entity and partnerships – are all communal collectives' (p. 150).

Clark quotes J. McMaster, 'The Wesleyan movement was a commitment to a holiness project' (p. 141) adding, as the World Council of Churches reminded us in 1990, that 'communal holiness is also about the cosmos being made whole'. He elaborates, 'Communal holiness is that divine gift which, embodying the Kingdom communities' gifts of life, liberation, love and learning, transforms humankind into whole persons, whole families, whole institutions, whole cities, whole societies and one world, and points toward the integrity of creation' (p. 145).

Whilst Clark's compilation of writings presents a coherent argument, his use of sources indicates that this falls short of being a carefully reflective academic monograph. For instance, he sources John Wesley's dictum on social holiness from *Called to Love and Praise*, a Methodist Conference report of 1999, rather than the 1739 preface to the Wesleys' *Hymns and Sacred Poems*. He might usefully have drawn from John Wesley's *Plain Account of Christian Perfection* of 1766 (Epworth 1950 & 2007). He fails to say the obvious, that the communal, diaconal holiness church he advocates is also a eucharistic community. He cites the research of Orton and Stockdale (2014) in his bibliography, but makes little, if any, use of their exhaustive, attentive listening to all manner of groups and individuals within the current diaconal order. The 2004 Methodist Conference produced *What is a deacon?* Clark might have referenced the subsequent critique in the report of the Anglican/Methodist consultation presented to the Joint Implementation Commission.

In short, this does not have the coherence of a balanced survey. It is a passionate defence of a radical understanding of 'diaconal', not just for the Diaconal Order, nor just for Methodism, but for the future of the Church of Christ. It is inevitably patchy, but provocative, and timely.

Cedric May is an ecumenist. He taught French and Quebec Literature at Birmingham University (UK) for nearly thirty years. He was ordained deacon in the British Methodist Church in 1991 and served in three appointments. He is now retired.

British Methodist Hymnody: Theology, Heritage and Experience, Martin V. Clarke (Oxford: Routledge, 2018), 220 pp, £110.00 hbk

Clarke's book is very welcome. He identifies the place of hymnody and music in the worship and spirituality of British Methodism, and the theology and practice underpinning them. He charts the tensions within Methodism throughout its historical development and in its contemporary practice. There is plenty to reflect upon. *Lex orandi* and *lex credendi* (how texts are shaped by theology and spirituality, and how worshippers are shaped by texts), is given prominence in this detailed account. There are interesting local case studies.

British Methodism always has veered between recommended connexional hymnals and the recognition that preachers and congregations should be free to determine the content, shape and style of their worship within certain parameters. Clarke's book examines the associated societal and denominational tensions over the (nearly) three Methodist centuries.

The 1780 collection of hymns selected by John and Charles served both to assist the educational work of the classes and small groups and as a basis for Methodist liturgical worship. It sought to help converts and believers to grow in grace as well as to worship God. The explicitly Arminian tone reinforced Methodist identity. Clarke's first chapter explores whether hymns 'have largely served a doxological function rather than a pedagogical function' (p. 37). The answer (now, as then) is a 'both/and' rather than a 'either/or'.

Clarke explores the decline in the proportion of hymns by the Wesleys themselves from 1780 collection to the present day, and the introduction of hymns from other traditions, notably through Anglican hymn books of the 19th century (both evangelical and catholic) and more popular songs in the modern idiom. Importation is nothing new. The Wesleys borrowed hymns (i.e. words) from Anglican, Reformed and Moravian traditions, and music from secular culture. British Methodism has always been hybrid, drawing from an overtly evangelical heritage but with an eye to ecumenical resources to enrich its practice. Thus 'faith is learned, developed and shared' (p. 63).

Clarke explores language and idiom, taking a detailed look at issues of gender and theology in the editing process, recognising that you cannot please

everyone. The chapter on Musical Repertoire is especially helpful for musicologists and historians. The succeeding chapter brings out the tensions between congregational singing and the development of more formal choir-led worship, with organs and anthems.

The concluding chapters tell how modern Methodism has adopted worship songs of a more Calvinistic flavour from the vibrant, less formal worship of other evangelical and charismatic traditions. Has it thus become a victim of its habit of using hymns as tools for both conversion and doxology? Has Methodism's commitment to inclusiveness led to a diminution of Methodist heritage and identity? Hymns are useful yardsticks. They are, Clarke concludes, 'most commonly encountered as carriers of doctrinal and theological values and concepts in Methodism' (p. 185). They need to be treasured by theological educators and worship leaders to enable the people called Methodists to own their place in the 'order of salvation', that they may 'feel (y)our sins forgiven ... and own that love is heaven'.

Tim Macquiban has been a Mission Partner in Rome and Director of The Methodist Ecumenical Office since 2014. For 17 years he taught in Bristol, Oxford, Salisbury and Cambridge in higher education.

George Whitefield: Life, Context, and Legacy, Geordan Hammond and David Ceri Jones (eds) (Oxford: OUP, 2016), 329 pp, £65.00 hbk

There was a time when George Whitefield seemed to be the forgotten leader of the Evangelical Revival; for Methodists, in particular, he appeared mainly as the man with whom Wesley argued about predestination whilst even those histories which acknowledged his role more fairly often highlighted little more than his abilities in preaching and possibly his travels on both sides of the Atlantic.

One can only welcome, therefore, more recent scholarly attention to this gifted but complex individual. This volume is the result of a conference held on the tercentenary of Whitefield's birth in 2014 and clearly it was a fruitful event. This is a collection of 16 essays by a mixture of scholars, some well known and established in the field and some whose names were new to me. Together, they present a well rounded picture of Whitefield, demonstrating both his considerable gifts and his significant weaknesses with good attention to the areas promised by the title – his life, his context and his legacy.

It is noticeable that the different chapters are of a uniformly high standard, making it difficult to select some for particular attention. Any scholar of the Evangelical Revival will wish to have a copy of this volume, each article in different ways introduces new material and perspectives which contribute to a fuller picture of Whitefield. It is a pleasure to also be able to recommend it to the non-specialist. The first chapter by Boyd Stanley Schlenter gives a very good overview; here we meet the preacher, sometimes carried away by his own gifts and the man who defended slavery and whose involvement with the orphanage at Bethesda "distracted Whitefield to a staggering degree (p. 27)". If anything the picture here drawn of Whitefield, while based on solid research, seems a little overly negative. Mark Olsen contributes a detailed analysis of Whitefield's theological development, showing the influence of Oxford Methodism but also Whitefield's movement to his mature Calvinist position. William Gibson and Geordan Hammond explore Whitefield's at times strained relationships with the Church of England and John Wesley respectively. I particularly appreciated the way in which Hammond was able to show the development of the tensions between Whitefield and Wesley and his

Reviews

persuasive argument that predestination was not the only theological issue between them. Wesley's habit of casting lots also caused Whitefield some concern.

No volume on the Revival would be complete without a thorough exploration of those who criticised what was happening and the way in which the key players responded. Brett McInelly demonstrates the way in which Whitefield not only thrived under attack but recognised that even adverse criticism was a form of publicity. Keith Edward Beebe and David Ceri Jones provide a detailed and helpful account of Whitefield's involvement not only in Wales but also in the lesser known events in Scotland and Ireland.

In summary this volume is a highly recommended introduction to the current state of play in Whitefield scholarship for specialist and student alike.

Judith Rossall is a Tutor in Church History and Preaching, Queen's Foundation Birmingham. She is a Methodist Presbyter who served in the Hemel Hempstead and Berkhamsted Circuit and the Guildford Circuit. She taught at the Southern Theological Education and Training Scheme in Salisbury before moving to Queen's in 2013.

A Cultural Theology of Salvation, Clive Marsh (Oxford: OUP, 2018),
253 pp, £60.00 hbk

In this work the author seeks to wrestle with what a contemporary doctrine of salvation might look like and in particular to discern how such a doctrine might be rendered understandable and accessible in the prevailing cultural context. He does this through a lively and lucid interaction with the Christian theological tradition but also with a forensic discernment of contemporary culture. Readers who are familiar with the author's previous work will recognise his obvious passion to read culture and to discern where theological work is taking place so that the theological enterprise is not confined to the esoteric space of the academy.¹

The book is structured around three discrete parts with part one setting the scene by outlining the cultural context and in particular offering a fascinating examination of the cultural references to both *happiness* and *redemption* and an engagement with the theology of Paul Tillich. Part two sets out various cultural case studies in which the author discerns the theological resonances of such diverse works as the Isenheim Altarpiece, Handel's *Messiah*, the film *Crazy Heart*, the TV drama *Breaking Bad* and the TV comedy *The Big Bang Theory*. In part three, arguably the most helpful part of the work, the author distils the reflection from the first two parts and sets out his thinking in terms of the shaping of a contemporary doctrine of soteriology. In chapter seven he outlines a template of salvation and emphasises the need for any doctrine to set out what salvation is 'from', 'for', 'by' and 'into' as necessary parts of any cogent doctrine of salvation. He also suggests seven key considerations that have to be wrestled with if we are to make any headway in terms of articulating the doctrine in a form that is intelligible and credible for the contemporary context.

There is no doubt that the author has made a very significant contribution to soteriology but crucially a contribution that makes sense in the present cultural context. At this level the book poses some fascinating questions to the contemporary church as it seeks to serve the present age. For example, how does the church give appropriate voice to the positive benefits of salvation and what we are saved 'for'? The author is surely right when he argues that in the

Western tradition of Christianity we have laboured too much upon what we are saved 'from'. Does the articulation of the positive benefits of salvation include such notions as *well-being, happiness, health, acceptance and contentment*? If there is a necessary 'affective' and 'felt' dimension to salvation then how is that articulated and experienced in the particular tradition that we inhabit? These are just a few of the tantalising questions that the author provokes and they are questions that we clearly need to ponder if we are going to be faithful to our apologetic task!

The late Robert Jenson once said that part of the purpose of theology '*is the thinking internal to the task of speaking the Gospel, whether to humankind as message or to God in praise and petition...*'² Clive Marsh has made a very lucid and perceptive contribution to the very necessary thinking that the church must engage in as it seeks to both understand the good news of salvation and proclaim it afresh for a new age.

Julian Pursehouse is Chair of the East Anglia District of the Methodist Church and is currently engaged in doctoral research on the theological theme of happiness in the Wesleyan tradition. He is a trustee of Wesley House and also the Chair of the Academic Committee.

Notes

1. Christ in Practice – *A Christology of Everyday Life*, Clive Marsh (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 2006) & *Christ in Focus*, Clive Marsh (London: SCM Press, 2005).
2. *Systematic Theology Volume 1 – The Triune God*, Robert W. Jenson (Oxford: OUP, 1997).

The Financing of John Wesley's Methodism c.1740–1800, Clive Murray Norris. (Oxford: OUP, 2017), 334 pp, £65.00 hbk

The dust-cover promises 'a *business history* of John Wesley's Methodist *Connexion*, which began small-scale in the late 1730s but by 1800 was a substantial operation' (958 chapels; 109,961 members and a total debt of over £180,000) [p. 117]. Researchers will revel in Norris's book though casual readers could find the copious detail intrusive to the flow of the text. Those interested in the early history of Methodism and have a head for figures or finance will gain the most from this book. There are fewer tables or graphs than might be expected.

Norris shows how growth and a desire to treat God's workers fairly resulted in funds not always being used for the purpose for which they were given or intended and the chapter on *The Preachers' Fund* is particularly clear in this matter. Money was redirected from the Fund (established for 'worn out' preachers and their widows) to support the wives of active preachers [p. 57] and Wesley often raided the Fund to pay off his debts [p. 59] which are believed to have totalled more than £6,000! More significant from our twenty-first century viewpoint, the requirements of the Conference to 'put right' the re-direction of funds were sometimes ignored. The hint is strongly given that in Wesley's view the growing movement needed such freedom if it was going to fulfil its commitments and continue to grow.

The various chapters show where money came from and how it was spent. The final chapter (Education, Welfare and Missions) shows how activities that were 'secondary to the movement's primary focus' [p. 220] were developed and how they were financed. Each of the first nine chapters has a final and helpful section titled 'Conclusions'. The tenth chapter of the same name supplies extensive supporting material.

Readers glimpse the early seeds of many of the things that we take for granted. A pension fund for ministers, local care for property, the responsibilities of membership and the costs of itinerancy (many of which were not financial). Woven throughout are the threads of generosity and growth. The contemporary church is challenged to recognise both its heritage and its responsibility, as we seek to walk the ways of our fore-parents.

Reviews

This focussed and unusual view of the role played by money matters in the growth of Methodism is for both the curious and those seeking to understand many of the drivers of early Methodism. The extensive footnotes indicate the range of source material. Greater control of money was exercised after Wesley's death, and the hint is given that this reduction in pragmatism resulted in reduced growth. If modern Methodism were permitted to be as apparently free and easy with money as the early Methodists were, what difference would it make, and would this be a driver for growth in this generation?

Graham Thomson began training as a Chartered Accountant before responding to God's call to be a minister. He has since served on the Connexional Allowances Committee, the CFB Council and the Methodist Ministers' Pension Fund. He currently serves as Chair of the Plymouth & Exeter District.

Through The Year With John Wesley, Stephen J Poxon (ed) (Oxford: Monarch, 2017), 383 pp, £12.99 pbk

Through the Year with John Wesley offers devotional material for each day of the year drawn from the theological and spiritual writings of John Wesley. It is presented in a succinct pattern with an opening text of scripture, followed by an extract from John Wesley's thought and then concludes with a thematically relevant prayer.

The strength of this volume lies in the variety of sources that Poxon has drawn from – there are extracts from Journal entries, sermons, Christian biographies and even a few forays into the Primitive Physic! The reader might like to check out Wesley's remedy for asthma on July 18th and share the honest spirit of Poxon's baffled prayer:

'Lord to be honest, I don't know what to make of Wesley's advice today!'

Alternatively look at the entry for May 5th that deals with the notoriously difficult area of friendships and liaisons with the opposite sex. It is generally accepted by historians that this was a deeply complex and profoundly sad aspect of John Wesley's experience. Again Poxon's concluding prayer is refreshingly honest and candid:

'Lord, friendships and relationships can be complex!...'

It is the thematic breadth of Poxon's sources that makes this such an entertaining and thought-provoking resource for personal prayer and reflection. The patient reader who stays with the task will be rewarded with a fascinating glimpse into both the brilliance and the frailty of this remarkable saint. A man of staggering spiritual tenacity who was capable of great acts of kindness but by turns irascible, foolish and utterly belligerent. Perhaps it is a timely reminder that the most remarkable of saints have feet of clay.

I fully imagine that this devotional treasure will naturally appeal to those who have any affinity with the churches that owe their existence to the Wesleyan tradition but it will also prove fruitful for the discerning Christian who wants to learn new things from one of the spiritual giants of the past. At its best it

Reviews

enables the Wesleyan tradition to be a living tradition that speaks to the experience of modern day disciples.

Julian Pursehouse is Chair of the East Anglia District of the Methodist Church and is currently engaged in doctoral research on the theological theme of happiness in the Wesleyan tradition. He is a trustee of Wesley House and also the Chair of the Academic Committee.

In Search of Ancient Roots: The Christian past and the evangelical identity crisis, Kenneth J. Stewart (London: IVP, 2017), 278 pp, £17.99 pbk

Stewart perceives the modern evangelical movement to be caught in a deeply damaging paralysis of self-doubt and introspection. In his *In search of Ancient Roots*, he suggests that the evangelical movement must do more than trace its historical roots to the late medieval religious movements of the sixteenth century as is its wont. He suggests that for it to recover from its current malaise, it must engage more fully with the entire Christian historical tradition.

He highlights three causes of self-doubt and uncertainty:

- (i) The distance in time from the rise of evangelical Christianity – the original ideals and principles are, quite simply, losing their impact.
- (ii) Unresolved fundamental questions on the reliability of scripture and the unique saviourhood of Jesus Christ which encourage a drift to other, more sure-footed traditions.
- (iii) The new, relaxed stance of Roman Catholicism that has emerged steadily ever since Vatican II that renders Catholicism a more realistic option for uneasy evangelicals.

Stewart perceives the evangelical tradition to be falling between the two stools of Catholicism and Pentecostalism. On the one hand, the liberated, non-historical stance of Pentecostalism is attractive to those who weary of the endless rehearsing of the niceties of the Reformation. On the other hand, he believes that the sure-footed, unbroken thread of theological development from apostolic times that is Catholic theology is attractive to those evangelical believers uncomfortable with contemporary developments and uncertainties within their own tradition. He wants to address the charge that evangelicalism is a freakish late-comer to Christianity, rooted in a late-mediaeval (and today, anachronistic) phenomenon that obsessively dominates its theology.

Stewart has no time for a current misconception that Pentecostalism is the new Evangelicalism. Pentecostalism tends to short-circuit historical development in favour of the simple formula of bible (then) and Holy Spirit (now). On the

other hand, Evangelicalism, he believes, needs today urgently to embrace the full story of its twenty centuries of evolution.

Evangelicalism is rooted in Christian antiquity. For Evangelicalism to have a strong future, Stewart argues, it must strengthen its past. (He argues for example the clause 'we believe in one catholic church' in the creeds is vital and that evangelicals must have a point of connection with this 'catholic' church.) He usefully reviews the old areas of disagreement and division: the Lord's Supper, biblical authority, monasticism, infant baptism, and the role of faith in salvation. Stewart argues that the current disturbance, movement and breakup being experienced in protestant tradition is due to the perceived disconnect between the Protestantism and ancient Christianity.

Intriguingly, Stewart argues that evangelicalism, rather than being a one-off event in the history of the Christian church, is a perennial and recurring feature of Christian history, a necessary component of its ongoing renewal.

As in many US course books, Stewart supplies questions for discussion after every chapter. His book is intended primarily for those in Protestant ministerial training, but his case would be of interest to anyone who places themselves in the evangelical tradition. His treatment is suitable for a general readership.

Alice Muthoni Mwila is a presbyter in the Kenyan Methodist Church, and Bishop of the Nyambene Synod. Currently, she is also a PhD Research student with Anglia Ruskin University UK through Wesley House, Cambridge.

Voices from the Margin: Interpreting the Bible in the Third World, 25th Anniversary Ed. R.S. Sugirtharajah (ed) (New York: Orbis Books, 2016), 623 pp, £23.99 pbk

This is a latest revision of the *Voices from the Margin* of twenty-five years ago. Four of the six sections contain new material – in all thirty-eight essays from contexts as varied as South Korea, Aboriginal Australia, Malawi and Brazil. There are forgivable occasional imperial echoes, like the use of the term ‘third world’ in the title which is repeated elsewhere. Nevertheless, this is a book that can only be welcomed.

The book’s premise is that western Christianity was not always easily accommodated into the cultures of the different parts of the world in the form it was preached by western missionaries. (See, for example, John Pritchard’s *Methodists and their Missionary Societies* (2013) reviewed in *HOLINESS* Vol 1:2.) The argument is that theology must discover and deploy hermeneutical methodologies that address the contexts, cultures, traditions, languages, and even levels of literacy of those among whom it is actualised (e.g. Kalilombe, p. 545 – *Literacy and Illiteracy: Example of Malawian Catholics*). Sugirtharajah gives dire warning of the price of failure.

All these essays are insightful. Some are startling: not least Engineer’s, ‘*On Developing Liberation Theology in Islam*’ (p. 495) on the reinterpretation of the Qur’an from the perspective of Liberation Theology in Islam, this at a time when religious pluralism and respect for the other cannot be over-emphasised. However, Kalilombe’s ‘*A Nicaraguan Example: The Alabaster Bottle*’ (p. 557) disappoints if only because the dramatized style unnecessarily obscures the point.

Sugirtharajah surveys the last 25 years. Then, ‘there was the realization that theology was meaningless if it left the lives of the people untouched’ (p. 597). Then, ‘Hermeneutical activity meant keeping the powerful awake at night’ (p. 605). Not so now! In his view, young authors have dropped the baton of their predecessors. ‘Marginality was [then] essentially a space for those who struggled against authority and power, not [as now] a space for venting narrow, venomous religious and ethnic ideology’ (p. 600). ‘Once the mainstream took over liberation, it was stripped of its emancipatory potential and became a

supine concept. What happened to liberation hermeneutics might well happen to post-colonialism' (p. 603). Christianity itself, lacking theological leadership in its hermeneutics, has surrendered to such horrors as narrow regional world views, accusations of one another among African and diasporic biblical interpreters on issues of being poor or sound modern biblical interpreters (p. 604). Too much of the new marginal theology comprises 'appalling academic writing, exemplified in high-blown theorizing, spurious specialization, and the growth of jaw-breaking jargon' (p. 606). Non-western biblical scholarship, he fears, like its western counterpart, is primarily concerned with itself.

These are harsh and challenging words from a Sri Lankan scholar who has been monitoring and publishing on post-colonial Christianity for three decades. Challenging for all, but particularly for those engaged in post-colonial Christian leadership and preaching. The question must be, 'Is he right'?

Charles Lungu, of the United Church of Zambia, holds MAs in Contextual Theology, Church Ministry, and Human Resource Management. Currently, a doctoral student at Wesley House and Anglia Ruskin University, he teaches Practical Theology and Religious Studies at the United Church of Zambia University.

Celebrating the Reformation: Its Legacy and Continuing Relevance, Mark D. Thompson, Colin Bale and Edward Loane (eds) (London: IVP, 2017), 409 pp, £19.99 pbk

This new contribution has something defiantly positive to say about the Protestant legacy. Its unapologetic tone is refreshing. That said, I find the general tone with which Catholicism is treated, mainly anecdotal asides about the contemporary Roman Catholic church, uncharitable in nature.

The introduction tells the Reformation story fascinatingly but includes some very grand and unsubstantiated claims, not least about modern politics, Brexit, the protestant work ethic and secularism. Accordingly, I would be cautious to whom I gave this book for fear that they might take some of the bolder claims too much at face value. That is not to say there is no value to this section. It is particularly good on what the reformation was not and the danger of anachronistic readings – especially in relation to freedom of conscience, individuality and conformity.

There are some strong essays in this collection. Cranmer, Zwingli, Calvin and Luther all get helpful treatments. On the whole the collection demonstrates sympathies on the conservative end of the evangelical spectrum. For example, Chase Kuhn's essay on the modern legacy of the priesthood of all believers is in many ways admirable. Its review of patristic attitudes and of modern dissent to Luther are helpful. But the theologically conservative complementarianism which restricts analysis of modern ministry of word and sacraments to men and admits women only to complementary roles doesn't add much to the main argument and feels a little crowbarred in as a statement of values.

Most promising and most disappointing to me was Andrew Bain's chapter on 'Discipleship in all of life'. This is becoming a major topic in Christian ethics, mission and evangelism. Bain rightly highlights the Reformers' emphasis on the disordering effects of sin for ethics and the need for divine grace acting on us. However he under-emphasises the manner in which within the Reformed tradition Christians are genuinely participants, even double agents, in this work. Anxious to set Reformed theology against Mediaeval Catholicism, he completely ignores the intense, regulatory practices and regimes of reformed

Reviews

spirituality put in place by Calvin which are no less pedagogical – whilst also being responses to grace.

The chapter by Jane Tooher (the only female contributor) on Katherine Zell justifies the entry price alone. The role of women in the reformation is frequently an under-developed and under-appreciated topic. The particular strength is that she offers an assessment of clerical marriage from the woman's side, through a figure who was clearly a well-informed and thoughtful exponent of the reformation in her own right. Clerical marriage is thus revealed as an embodiment of the priesthood of all believers, and no less controversial for it among protestants.

For all the important theological and social contributions within these pages, a bit more confession and humility would have been appropriate. As it is, the results are mixed and their usefulness vary according to context.

Andrew Hayes is tutor of Historical Theology at the Queen's Foundation for Ecumenical Education where he teaches in Church History, Doctrine and Ethics.

The Great River: Primitive Methodism till 1868, David M Young (Stoke-on-Trent: Tentmaker Publications, 2016), 234 pp, £6.50 pbk

Change and Decay: Primitive Methodism from Late Victorian Times till World War I, David M Young (Stoke-on-Trent: Tentmaker Publications, 2017), 318 pp, £6.50 pbk

Primitive Methodism developed as a revival movement and a breakaway in the second decade of the nineteenth century from the movement John Wesley and others had begun in the eighteenth. *The Great River* traces its rapid spread through the villages of North Hampshire in the 1830s, drawing extensively on the standard histories and the memoirs of the leading characters in primary sources such as the *Primitive Methodist Magazine*. The title of the book derives from the meaning of the village name Micheldever, one of those at the centre of the movement, and aptly characterises its speed and breadth. After describing the movement area by area and giving brief details of the leading figures involved, Young discusses the factors which contributed to its success. Sociological factors such as the extreme poverty of the area and the tensions between landowners and clergy on the one hand and the labouring poor on the other are taken account of. Negative features, such as the movement's puritan and judgemental character, are not ignored. Overall however it is a positive picture that is offered. 1868 is chosen as the cut-off date because the original leaders had died or reached retirement age and the movement nationally was changing its character. The writer ends on a nostalgic note, 'I... had learned to my sorrow that Methodism had changed beyond recognition, abandoning much of its heritage of belief, ethos and passion' (p. 223).

Change and Decay charts the progress of those changes from the 1860s to about 1918 on a broader canvas, with particular reference to doctrine. As background, changes in later Victorian society and the early twentieth century are broadly described. The central chapters concentrate on changes in theology, from the Evangelical conservatism of the beginnings to the liberalism of the period before the first World War, generally summarised in the slogan of the time as 'the Fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man'. The closing chapter asks whether the original faith has now been extinguished and whether it can be reborn.

The reader will find much to appreciate in this book. It is copiously illustrated from primary sources (to the point of excess for this reader). No future scholar will need to repeat Young's research. But it is not, and does not pretend to be, a comprehensive history of Primitive Methodism in all its aspects. Little is said, for example, about wider constitutional change or overseas mission.

This reviewer however has reservations. The book is confessedly written from a conservative evangelical standpoint. The key tests applied to theological change are (i) the supremacy of 'biblical teaching' over against 'human reason' and (ii) the doctrines of the special creation of humankind (over against evolution), the fall and original sin, the penal substitutionary theory of the atonement, the bodily resurrection, the last judgement and the eternal punishment of the unredeemed. Young points out that they are to be found in the denomination's doctrinal standards and they are indeed echoed in John Wesley's sermons. From this standpoint all later developments are deemed by Young to be a 'tragedy' (p. 152).

Surely no one today after two World Wars and the impact of Barth and others, would wish to return to the simplistic slogan of 'the Fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man'. In a period of great social and intellectual change could any church remain untouched and still expect to maintain its earlier impact? It is surely naive to point to the Continuing Primitive Methodist Church, a diminishing number of small chapels in East Yorkshire, which did not go with the rest of the Primitive Methodist Church into the union with other branches of Methodism to form the current Methodist Church in 1932, as a hopeful sign for the future (p. 307)?

Chapter 6 in fact is devoted to illustrating the conservative resistance to the changes in the denomination as a whole. It is difficult to assess just how widely those changes in theology reached. No doubt village congregations were more conservative than those in the towns. No doubt much was disseminated from the pulpit by college-trained ministers and by articles in the magazines (although, as Young shows, the magazines contained articles expressing a variety of views). The Wesley hymns continued in use (but, as today, what gloss was being put on the words sung?).

A. S. Peake is singled out as the villain of the reformist movement, along with J. D. Thompson and Sir William Hartley. From 1892 Peake was Tutor at the Primitive Methodist Hartley College in Manchester, founded by Sir William Hartley to prepare students for the ministry, and from 1904 also Professor of Biblical Exegesis and Dean of the Faculty of Theology at Manchester University,

until his death in 1929. Peake's influence spread through the articles he wrote, his *Commentary on the Bible*, and the ministers he taught. He did not support a literalist interpretation of the Bible but did seek, fruitfully for very many, to show how the tools of contemporary biblical criticism could illuminate its message. He did not seek to reduce that message to a simplistic slogan. But, as Young shows, the changes had begun well before Peak's appointment. Peake was unanimously reappointed by the Conference year by year, but this should not be dismissed, as Young tries to do, as merely the action of 'the leadership'. It would be some years before the ministers trained by Peake would be in the ranks of the Conference in any numbers, and in any case two thirds of the Conference were lay officers elected from the circuits. Young ought not to gloss over the fact that at local level there was clearly support for (as well as opposition to) what Peake stood for.

Overall, then, these two volumes are to be welcomed as giving readers a detailed picture of the heart of Primitive Methodism in its first century and the way it changed, but they will wish to make their own judgement of those changes.

Brian Beck is a former Principal of Wesley House, and now a Life Fellow. He served for fourteen years as Secretary of the Methodist Conference, and in 1993–4 as its President. He has published work both on the New Testament and on Methodist history and theology.

