
This book is produced in cooperation with the Foundation for Evangelism, and is a collection of essays in which writers set out to offer a ‘Wesleyan’ evangelism through the lens and in the spirit of E. Stanley Jones, though there are also some thoughts on Jones’ approach to interfaith work. Each chapter helpfully includes lessons for today.

Much of the material in the book reflects on Jones’ experiences and encounters in India. Jones regarded India as his home. He was in India in the 1920s and 1930s, in the context of the colonial ‘Raj’ years of the British Empire. I would have welcomed a chapter by an Indian theologian among the writers.

It is not helpful to contrast Stanley Jones (an American Methodist, 1884-1973) who was working 100 years ago, with contemporary interfaith theologians like Wesley Ariarajah, as is done in this book, for at least two important reasons. First, Ariarajah’s interfaith theology is that of a person who grew up in an interfaith environment, not something he discovered as a missionary in another nation, and secondly, Ariarajah’s interfaith theology has certainly been a major contribution to ‘Western understandings of pluralism’, but it is a disservice to reduce it to being ‘Western’. Ariarajah’s theology has been immersed in and emerged from the Asian context described by his fellow Sri Lankan scholar Aloysius Pieris as rooted in ‘the many religions and the many poor’ there.

What the writers in this book state clearly is that the heart of Jones’ approach to engaging with people of different faiths was in conversation with them. Jones did this through personal interaction and friendship, round-table conferences, public lectures followed by time for question and answer sessions with him, and in the Indian Christian Ashrams centred not on a guru but on community. In all these methods, Jones held on to the centrality of Christ in the experience of God, while reaching out to others for their wisdom. He left people in no doubt about his motivation and message. This is well stated in the book, and it is acknowledged in the introductory chapter that Jones ‘lived in a tension between the certitude of Christ’s supremacy and a great openness to truth wherever he might find it’.

Stanley Jones first caught my attention when early in my theological journey, over forty years ago, I read his book The Christ of the Indian Road (New York: Abingdon, 1925). I did not find in the book what the title promised, but I discovered the (an?) author who a century ago described how Christ, the centre of Christianity, was becoming naturalised in India.

What I see in Jones is that he wrote of the need for Christlikeness, and pointed to the lack of Christian saintliness in the Western Christianity of his time, citing the resort to war, the dominating styles of leadership, and racist practices. For Jones, the missionary-sending Western churches had no spiritual authority ‘until we deal with racial issues’. Indians were ready to welcome missionaries who came ‘to serve’, and ‘in the right way’, not to exploit.

Jones wrote it is important to ‘treat other nations as we ourselves would like to be treated’. Indians made it clear to Jones and other Christians, ‘every time you call us niggers it is a blow dealt to your religion, for you teach us that caste is sinful, while you Christians are building up a white caste of your own’. Jones acknowledges the Indian criticism and that it is a bit impertinent to come to a nation that can produce leaders like Gandhi and Tagore. Jones however described himself ‘as much a learner as a teacher’ in India and every interfaith encounter.
An important lesson from Jones for Christian practice in the world today is that we bear witness to Christ in dialogue with people of other faiths. Dialogue is not disloyalty or dilution of Christian faith, but an outworking of the command to ‘love your neighbour as yourself’, a method by which we can learn what it is to ‘go and do likewise’.

Inderjit Bhogal

This book is a timely and compelling addition to the growing body of material around pastoral supervision. Within British Methodism, it offers a theological robustness that broadens supervision’s scope beyond being a requirement of the Past Cases Review, to being a central support to the safety and well-being of ministers and those amongst whom they minister. (The Methodist Church’s review into past cases of historical abuse, Courage, Cost and Hope, was published in 2015).

The chapter headings point to the balance of the book’s contents: Ministerial Growth and Flourishing; Supervision and Oversight; Attentiveness to the Gaze of God; Attentiveness to the Self and to the Other; A Supervised Ministry. However, chapter headings don’t do justice to Cameron’s uncompromising passion for ministers to flourish, or to the nuanced journey of transformational change upon which such flourishing is predicated and of which she writes with such conviction.

Cameron draws on a range of literature and on her own experience as a senior tutor in the training and formation of student ministers to tease out what is needed for ministerial flourishing: self-reflection, honesty, attentiveness, vulnerability, collegiality, boundaried spaces, and naming of issues of authority and power. She cautions against isolation and promotes intentional and attentive team-building, where difference is valued, not feared.

This is the language of pastoral supervision, a language Cameron develops in a wider context than formal one-to-one supervision, whilst drawing from its vocabulary and discipline.

Part of this wider context is framed in the book’s title. Cameron draws on the work of Greek theologian Yannaras, who, ‘speaks of us learning to love the landscape of others’ lives that we have looked at with God. When we surrender to this gaze, we surrender to God’s purposes and will, and we see, and are seen, afresh’ (53). This powerful call to journey with the Other as part of our discipleship resonates through the book, drawing on diverse works like Macmurray’s insights into the responsibility of individuals to create community; Volf’s suggestion that without the Other we can have no sense of the self; and Pickard’s understanding of relational Trinity that points to ministry as solely reciprocal: ‘My ministry is called forth by the ministry of others. ...There are no autonomous and self-perpetuating ministries’ (83).

In this wider context, ministerial supervision is not a process to support ministry. It is ministry in a profound sense, and will elicit change and transformation if entered into with a sense of being on holy ground, living in the gaze of God.

I appreciate this book and sense its importance to all ministers, not just to those who supervise. I find Cameron’s lofty and aspirational theology of ministry both disconcerting and inspiring, and I suspect I will not be alone. Being reminded of the profundity of the ordinal is both a jolt and a gift. An invitation to reflect on our level of intimacy with the God in whose gaze we live and minister is both daunting and uplifting. Ministers who don’t think this is for them may be helped to reconsider, whilst those who have known brokenness, disruption, and loss may find hope. In all this Cameron reminds us that learning, growth, and transformation cannot be hurried—neither can this book. I commend it.

Gwyneth Owen

As Shane Claiborne remarks, ‘When people hear us talk of casting the mighty from their thrones and raising the lowly … of filling the hungry with good things while sending the rich away empty … inevitably, some will say, ‘That sounds like socialism’. But we will remind them … ‘it’s the gospel of Luke.’

This remark, I think, would have been appreciated by John Trevor, the Unitarian minister who, in 1891, founded the Labour Church. Trevor took the ideas that socialism has overlap with Christianity and that ‘God is in the labour movement’ to a staggering theological conclusion: that socialism was the next and final utopian revelation of God.

Neil Johnson’s book, covering the rise, life, and fall of the Church built upon Trevor’s ideas, is thorough and engaging, systematic and accessible. It tells how the life, experiences, and ideals of Trevor himself helped spark this movement, and how these ideals, including replacing all Christian creeds with socialist principles, somewhat alienated him from the Labour Church as it took on a life of its own. Finally, Johnson appraises the Church in its historical and contemporary ramifications. The story of Trevor and the Labour Church has been largely, and unfairly, forgotten by Christians, socialists, politicians, and even historians.

Given the peculiarity of his theology, it is not hard to critique and dismiss, even to forget, Trevor himself. However, as the book engagingly explores, it is difficult to dismiss ‘The Labour Church’, for it was an influential movement in its day. It is a reminder that lots of Christians were (and are) socialists and lots of socialists were (and are) Christian. For many, ‘The Labour Church’ made a lot of sense, even if they did not put as much stock in its theology as Trevor did. Even the British Labour movement may not have grown as it did without ‘The Labour Church’, given how many influential members of smaller socialist groups found common ground within its structures.

For me, a Christian with a certain fondness for socialism, and a Methodist looking back at their church’s history of supporting workers, it came as a delightfully uncomfortable and stimulating read. Among many things, it reminded me of why, in an imperfect world with imperfect people, the church should always be free to critique power, and not aim to be established within or at the head of it.

Therefore, I highly recommend this book, and thank Johnson for his work. It is a window into a unconventional movement. Although we may not be surprised that it did not last, and quickly understand why, the exploration of the topic invites us (and particularly anyone looking to forward a Wesleyan theology) to ask serious and daring questions of ourselves. In a world where even in the richest of countries zero-hour contracts are the norm and where it’s acceptable to pay a person less than a living wage, we need to ask how we engage with faith and politics in a way which might actually cast the mighty from their thrones and fill the hungry with good things.

Daniel Woodhouse

This is a book to savour and be challenged by. Jones and Smith have edited a collection of essays in honour of Jon Gunnemann, Emeritus Professor of Social Ethics at Emory University, U.S.A. His own work is discussed in an opening introductory chapter. In his thinking, Gunnemann sought to articulate the connections between theology and economics. He brought Marxism and the Gospels together, which stood as a critique of the institutional church in the U.S.A.

Jones and Smith comment: ‘Gunnemann’s work challenged economists to make conscious their assumptions about the rationality of markets, their conception of the person and the moral responsibilities of corporations; it also challenged theologians to see the ways the religious institutions were structured by economic realities and that theological concepts were shot through with economic ideas’ (xxii). This, of course, is a considerable challenge, especially in the days of Trump’s America. However, all the contributors in the thirteen chapters that follow certainly rise to the occasion.

There are several things that impress me about this collection.

The first is its ecumenism. There is, for example, Dionne Jr’s discussion of Pope Francis and his relation to Catholic social thought. Notwithstanding the institutional problems he faces, his concern for issues of poverty and inequality takes him closer to the position of liberation theology and provides more than a few waves of trouble in the Vatican. The ecumenism of the book is further evident in a chapter by William Galston relating to Jewish social ethics in the modern world, which discusses Jewish approaches to poverty, inequality, and the market. He points out that the Jewish tradition has always been concerned with issues of wealth and poverty. There is interesting material here, although no discussion of the morality of relations between Jews and Palestinians (who know all too much about poverty and oppression).

The second is the diversity of the contributions. This is helped by the way in which the book is structured. The four sections—Thinking with Traditions, Moral Sentiments, For the Love of the World, and Public Theology and the Common Good—give plenty of space for diversity and different levels of engagement. Thus, we may be surprised to find a chapter on stress by Julie Meadows, but it turns out to be thoughtful and well worthwhile.

This is a volume of high intellectual rigour which calls for respect. It is like a Christmas pudding, where every time you put a spoon in you pull out a plum!

*John Eldridge*

This challenging and stimulating book is very clearly a ‘work of two halves’—or more accurately, as the two are unequal, two parts. In the first part, the psychoanalysts dominate. The author examines recent thinkers who have been intrigued by religion and want to understand how, psychologically, religion works. Julia Kristeva’s key role in recognising that psychoanalysis needed to pay more attention to the imaginative, the intuitive, and the affective, as it explored the unconscious, is highlighted and explored. Margot Waddell’s work is used to explore the concept of goodness, Melanie Klein’s (plus her critics) to examine understanding of early development, and then Klein, Segal, and Kristeva again in a more extended study of symbolism.

The book’s fifth chapter forms a bridge from the studies in psychoanalysis to the specific explorations of the Wesleys’ lives. In many ways it studies in psychoanalytic perspective how religions handle human development. What are religious practices actually doing? What sort of function are concepts and images of God playing? Tillich and the Trinity appear here, in thought-provoking ways.

The book’s second part turns to the Wesleys, beginning with observations about the (Evangelical) culture within and into which the brothers emerged (Chapter 6). The role of Susanna is vital here, particularly her views on education and on moral and spiritual development. It is recognised how tough and demanding the Wesleys’ upbringing actually was.

The book’s longest chapter (Chapter 7) puts the insights from Part One to good use in studying John Wesley. To say the insights are ‘applied’ here is a bit too neat. More accurately, details of John’s life, and biographers’ and scholars’ interpretations of his life and thought, are subjected to critical examination from a psychoanalytic perspective. It is rich material. Many questions about John remain: was he ever truly happy? Did he ever stop trying to earn his own salvation? Why did he never sort out his relationships with women? I won’t spoil things by revealing the author’s answers!

Charles then receives similar treatment (Chapter 8). Psychologically, he had an easier ride, as he was not a ‘replacement child’ in the way that John had been. The chapter is rich in offering perspectives on how and why Charles ended up a poet, and also on where, in very specific circumstances, certain hymns emerged.

Chapter 9 (‘Theological Differences’) presses the differences in explicitly theological terms, acknowledging throughout how the brothers’ respective theological commitments have psychological corollaries. Readers may well rush to read this chapter and the brief conclusion which follows (183–190) in isolation. That would be no bad thing, although finding out ‘how the author got there’ would be a worthwhile journey. Chapter 9 does, though, offer much to mull on, not least about John’s recognition that salvation meant more than escape from hell, being about ‘restoration to health and wholeness’ (173). The enormous significance of this insight, on so many levels and in so many directions, past and present, cannot be overstated.

This is an important and a hugely stimulating text. I doubt it could easily be added, except via digitized excerpts, to all Wesley Studies module reading-lists. But if its insights could at least be presented and discussed wherever the Wesleys are taught and reflected upon, then its value would be recognised and Methodism and other traditions would be sharper in their (psychological and spiritual) understandings of ‘how doctrines actually work’.

Clive Marsh

The first sentence of Williams’ Introduction lauds Austin Farrer’s The Glass of Vision (1948) as ‘unusually original and fertile’. He adds, ‘it is one of Farrer’s decisive insights that provides the starting point for these chapters’ (1). Sadly, Farrer receives no extended treatment in the rest of the book.

Williams’ dense, technical language is often as beautiful as it is impenetrable. One is reminded of Miroslav Volf’s rebuke in his For the Life of the World (reviewed in this issue of Holiness 7.1) of theologians ‘reduced to publishing ever more specialised papers that ever fewer can or wish to read.’ By pricing the book at £25.00 in hardback, Bloomsbury clearly expect many to buy it, if not read it. Hopefully, those who can read it, will read it.

Williams’ book consists of a painstakingly detailed revisitation of the development of Christological thought from St Paul, through Chalcedon, to Aquinas: then on via Duns Scotus and Ockham, to John Calvin, before leaping to the twentieth century, to Przywara, Moltmann, Barth, and Bonhoeffer. Throughout, Williams asks the Chalcedonian question: ‘How can Jesus Christ be divine Word yet fully human, ‘inconfusedly, unchangeably, indivisibly, inseparably?’ To Williams, the Christological claim lies at the heart of creation. It also lies at the heart of salvation.

Williams has interesting things to say at all points, things that can only be said by someone as able as he to master the detail of extremely difficult texts. His knowledge is encyclopedic. His reviewers rightly stand in awe. Probably the passages that will be most noted are those reclaiming the Christology of John Calvin for the Catholic tradition, and those revisiting Bonhoeffer. Viewed from the early twenty-first century, and in particular, viewed post-Holocaust, the Reformation quarrel appears more a question of emphasis than of categorical disagreement.

‘Calvin’s emphasis on Christ’s experience of literally hellish terror goes beyond what most patristic texts directly consider’ (147). There is a continuum from Williams’ material on Calvin to his work on Bonhoeffer’s ethics and death-cell musings on the shape of the Church in a post-Nazi, post-Holocaust Europe. Williams is perhaps at his most intriguing as he explores how it is that in Christ’s total kenotic identification with, and participation in, the pain and depravity of finite humanity, the Word truly and fully becomes flesh. This conviction shapes the entire book.

Williams can be understandably grim. How, he asks, without an adequate theological treatment of the Holocaust, is Christ credibly to be proclaimed to a deeply sceptical twenty-first century? He ends as he began, with Farrer, quoting the astonishing finale to Finite and Infinite, composed in England during the darkest days of WWII. Farrer was as realistic about human depravity as is Williams. Having found so much that is worthy of prolonged (albeit unsettling) contemplation in this book, this reviewer is nevertheless left regretting that the irrepressible joy and hope that the Chalcedonian formulation brought to Farrer’s Christology does not find such explicit expression in Williams’.

Michael Wilson

Barton’s work on the history of the Bible is a significant undertaking: to map the journey of the world’s bestselling and most widely distributed book as its writings were penned and assembled into the book we have today. The underpinning theme throughout his discourse is the relationship between the Bible and the Christian and Jewish faiths, although at times with a bias towards Christianity, and his unpicking of the way in which the text maps onto these faiths can be quite unsettling. His challenge to the way in which we read and use the book that is at the very core of our belief is one which shatters any basic assumptions that we might have made if we do not understand the context behind the writing, but it then allows us to rebuild a new way of approaching our study.

Barton’s exploration of the Bible assumes very little prior understanding as he journeys through the Old and New Testaments, giving a broad overview of its story whilst also starting to show some of the specific details (such as the inconsistencies in the number of times Moses is recorded as having gone up Mount Sinai), which then support his calling for a more careful viewing of the biblical text. We learn about the culture which surrounded the writing of various parts of the Bible, the languages in which it was originally written and subsequently translated into and through, and different understandings about how the text is best interpreted.

Barton maintains an open posture, led by his extensive scholarly research across the span of the Bible’s history through to the present day. Sometimes this balanced view can be frustrating to a committed Christian, when a bit more direction as to how to approach the reading and interpretation of a biblical book might be welcomed, but that is not the main purpose of this work. It aims to equip the reader with a critical lens through which to approach the Bible, giving the confidence to question and wrestle with it to discover its truth and meaning. Christian and non-Christian alike will find it liberating to be given permission to acknowledge the fallibility of the words within the Bible whilst also (if so inclined) maintaining belief in its inspiration by God.

The History of the Bible is to be recommended as a book which encourages a fresh perspective on the centrality of the Bible to the Christian faith. It is not primarily a book for theological educators, but it is certainly a book for them to put into the hands of others. Accessible in style, it does not assume anything about the reader, but leads them from basic principles to a significantly deeper-level scrutiny of the pages of the Bible, with extensive further reading suggested in an appendix. This book will shape the approach to Bible study of many thoughtful Christians for a long time to come.

Jonathan Buwert

At a time when the fissures of cultural alienation threaten to ravage our planet, this potboiler of a tome is timely. Holland’s narrative style is vivid, highly accessible, and, at times, racy. Given his aim—the compression of four millennia of cultural history into six hundred pages—he is selective and, inevitably, uneven. (He traverses his first two millennia commendably speedily.) No doubt every knowledgeable reader will consider some of his omissions injudicious.

In The Meaning of the West (2008), Don Cupitt proposed that the influence of Christianity was today more evident in the shaping of the world than in any previous era. Larry Siedentop’s Inventing the Individual (2015) showed how Western secular self-consciousness (and society) was the product not primarily of the Enlightenment, nor of revolution or Darwinian science, but of two millennia of Christian reflection and struggle. Holland popularises what Cupitt sketched out and what Siedentop explored in considerable detail. His easy narrative invites one to believe, whereas Siedentop’s more demanding analysis persuades one that it is indeed true. But Holland’s subtitle misleads. Siedentop’s analytical treatment is indeed about the Western ‘mind’—the distinctively Christian character of the Western understanding of selfhood. Holland’s is more about Western society and the Christian values that the West seeks to impose upon the world. It is a good read.

Holland has sub-themes: He observes, for example, that Westerners who vehemently oppose Christianity (from Voltaire to Dawkins) tend to wield demonstrably Christian critical weapons, and that Nietzsche, noting this, dismissed the Enlightenment as a mere rehash of Christianity. Holland mocks the oft-repeated myth of pagan antiquity as an era of enlightened social tranquillity wrecked by Christianity.

Through story, Holland displays the extent to which the Western world, especially the United Nations, is shot through not with ‘natural’ or ‘self-evident,’ but distinctly Christian values. Fundamentalist Islamic ideology is, he believes, irreconcilably hostile to the Christian West.

A major omission: Is not this last equally true of other world cultures? Holland’s treatment of the Jesuit mission to seventeenth-century China is excellent, yet he makes virtually no mention of modern China’s radical resistance to Western ideology. Similarly, there is no mention of Orthodox Christianity’s separate path—nor of the opposition of modern Russia to distinctively Western Christian values of freedom and truth.

Holland’s final theme (identified by Rosamund Urwin in her The Sunday Times review as a major thread) is, for all its importance, present mainly by implication: Has Christianity finally shot its bolt, or does it yet retain its historic capacity to reinvent itself and radically to reform society? Holland notes Benjamin Franklin’s remark, ‘the surest way to promote Christian teachings as universal [is] to portray them as deriving from anything other than Christianity’ (385). One is reminded of Austin Farrer’s remark that God gives to others ‘over our shoulders and from behind our backs.’ Farrer had in mind individual discipleship. Holland has in mind a crypto-Christian re-formation and salvation of the world.

Michael Wilson

Born in Philadelphia to Palestinian parents, Sr Mary David Totah studied at Loyola and Virginia Universities before taking a DPhil at Christ Church, Oxford. When (of all things) emptying the dishwasher, she had an ‘overwhelming and intense experience of the love of God, and a piercing joy’ (xii) that would define her life. Though seemingly destined for a brilliant academic career, in 1985 she entered St Cecilia’s, an enclosed Benedictine Abbey on the Isle of Wight. From 1996 until her death from bowel cancer in 2017, aged sixty, she was novice mistress. Sr Elizabeth, the infirmarian who cared for her during her final illness, has assembled The Joy of God, from her talks, letters, and personal notes to her charges.

Elegant, honest, accessible, wise, and practical, The Joy of God reveals a remarkable spirit who radiated God’s joy, even, as Sr Elizabeth puts it, ‘when that life was slowly ebbing away’ (173). Sr Mary David transcends the Benedictine spirituality in which she is rooted as she reflects on such themes as living with others, God’s hiddenness, spiritual dryness, staying the course, encountering suffering, finding true joy. Equally a book for a retreat or for daily devotions, this will prove a helpful resource for spiritual direction. It should become a spiritual classic.

This is a spirituality any Methodist should recognise. God ‘calls us to joy, for he is our joy’ (9). Such joy ‘is not an emotion,’ subject to life’s ‘alternating weathers,’ but a choice: to love God and ‘to place one’s happiness where it properly belongs … whether we feel it or not’ (8–9). In the central chapter, ‘Journey to God,’ Sr Mary David reflects on elements of the Christian life: ‘Search,’ ‘Decision,’ ‘Growth,’ ‘Freedom,’ ‘Endurance,’ ‘Mercy,’ ‘Darkness,’ and ‘Light.’

There is much to ponder here. The ‘Christian life is not merely about seeking but about finding’ God (22), ‘in sickness and health, in light and darkness, in strength and weakness’ (28). As with Peter, ‘there’s always a second “Follow Me”—and it comes at the hour of trial … the hour of maturing in love and fidelity’ (37). Our difficulties, ‘whatever they may be, can all be used. They are redemptive’ (85), for ‘sometimes God is better served in our weakness and struggle’ (107). ‘True holiness … has to do with very ordinary things: courage, self-denial, love for others, truthfulness, kindness, contentment with what God sends, dutifulness, etc.’ (136).

All is summarised in Sr Mary David’s advice: ‘Try receiving things as a gift, try to enjoy and give a positive interpretation to whatever you might be feeling resistance to. Believe me, you will become a different person. Go towards whatever is coming, announced—it is coming from God’ (54). It was advice that she not only gave but exemplified. The final chapter is a moving account of how Sr Mary David braved her four-year terminal illness, which she summed up for a friend as ‘Acceptance-with-Joy’ (186). This was her watchword and this book will remain her legacy.

David Mullins

This begins, ‘Academic theology ought to be, but today largely isn’t, about what matters the most—the true life in the presence of God’ (1). It ends, ‘Let us be theologians for the sake of the life, the true life, of the world’ (185). This self-confessed manifesto calls academic theologians to attend above all to the Christian vision of human flourishing.

Chapter One denounces secular universities and theology faculties for being ‘more about helping students live the kind of life they want than about discerning the kind of life that is worth wanting’ (31). In Chapter Two, the authors denounce their specialising colleagues. ‘Many today do not [even] recognize all these disciplines as “theology”; historians in theological faculties, in particular, often resist being described as theologians’ (35). To survive, they are reduced to publishing ever more specialised papers that ever fewer can or wish to read. Gone are the days of Paul Tillich’s *The Courage to Be* (1952), read by millions, and still selling two copies a week on Amazon.

Chapter Three seeks a renewed theological vision that ‘fits well with a plausible, overarching theological interpretation of reality’ (81). Chapter Four, *The Challenge of Universality*, includes, as one might expect from the author of *Exclusion and Embrace*, discussion of how Christianity’s world vision can and must coexist collaboratively in a pluralistic world.

Chapter Five is the passionate heart of the book. Theologians’ lives, the authors suggest, ‘need to align, in some sense at least, with the way of life they seek to articulate’ (116). Astrophysicists may live as they please. True theologians may not.

Chapter Six provides an analysis of St Paul’s ‘partly realized eschatology’ of ‘spirit-led improvisation’ leading to ‘life led well’, ‘life going well,’ and ‘life feeling as it should.’

Croasmun describes his and Volf’s damascene experience when forming a ‘church—a community in which Bible scholars, ethicists, philosophers, and, yes, a stray “theologian” proper, have done theology as we have lived theologically’ and in which ‘graphic designers, poets, musicians, sociologists, and even lawyers and medical doctors have become “accidental theologians”’ (4). There, the authors grasped how the academic machine had blinded them. Eyes reopened, they now proclaim their gospel to the world.

The cynic might dismiss this as a sales pitch for the Life Worth Living Program at Yale (Volf the founder, Croasmun the director) which aims ‘to revive critical discussion in universities and the broader culture’. But maybe the wider hope is that others will be fired to plant such ‘churches’ in their own university contexts, thus creating neo-Student Christian Movements in which academics and students excitedly engage radically in issues of personal faith, worship, and the state of the world, as they did half a century ago.

Without doubt, these authors have identified something seriously awry with much of today’s academic theology. Their strange, uneven, largely technically undemanding, yet exciting little book might yet prove an important milestone.

*Michael Wilson*

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

Julian Pursehouse
Reviewers

Inderjit Bhogal is a retired Presbyter of the British Methodist Church and past President of Conference.

Jonathan Buwert is a Lead Youth Development Worker with Romsey Mill in Cambourne, Cambridgeshire. He is a member of Cambourne Church, a Local Ecumenical Partnership, with whom he also worked as a Youth Worker for eight years.

John Eldridge is Emeritus Professor of Sociology at the University of Glasgow and a Methodist local preacher.

Clive Marsh has been Vice-President of the Methodist Conference (2019/20) and was until recently Head of the Vaughan Centre for Lifelong Learning at the University of Leicester. In September 2020 he became Principal of the Queen’s Foundation in Birmingham, UK.

David Mullins is a supernumerary Methodist Presbyter who has served in London, Hull, York, and Hertfordshire. In 2019 he was awarded a DThMin by King’s College, London for his research on the origins, demise, and potential recovery of the Wesleyan holiness tradition.

Gwyneth Owen recently retired as a Methodist Presbyter. She chaired the Past Cases Review Implementation Group and is a Connexional trainer in supervision. She has a growing number of supervisees in this country and further afield, including America.

Julian M. Pursehouse is the Chair of the East Anglia Methodist District and has exercised a ministry of Word and Sacrament as a Methodist presbyter for the last twenty-three years. He holds degrees in English, Law, and Theology and is currently researching the theme of ‘happiness’ within the theological anthropology of John Wesley. He is also a member of the Methodist Law and Polity Committee and a member of the Methodist Conference. In January 2017, he was made an Ecumenical Canon of Norwich Cathedral.

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

Daniel Woodhouse is a Presbyter in the British Methodist Church. He is also an anti-arms activist and looks after a small community house in Brighton where he is currently stationed.