

BOOK REVIEWS

THOMAS J. OORD, *The Nature of Love: A Theology*. St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 2010; pp 208.

Thomas Oord seeks to contribute to the discussion on a topic close to the heart of Wesleyan theology: love. The book is a vehicle to offer a definition of love that is intended to help guide further discussion in the area. Oord begins by surveying and critiquing antecedent theologies of love before advocating his own proposal of 'essential kenosis.' In fact, roughly two-thirds of the book is dedicated to severe criticisms of some of the most significant thinkers of Western Christianity.

Oord spends his first chapter arguing for the centrality of love. 'God is love' is the closest the New Testament comes to a metaphysical definition of God. However, Oord tells us, there is no biblical definition of love. Oord decides that the evocative depictions of love in 1 Corinthians 13 are not a definition, but sheer poetry. To meet this lack, he proposes his own definition: 'To love is to act intentionally, in sympathetic/empathetic response to God and others, to promote overall well-being' (p. 17). With this Oord seeks to equip the church with a foundation for its discourses on love. This definition put forward, Oord proceeds to demonstrate the need for a new theology of love by critiquing previous attempts.

Oord first sets his sights on Anders Nygren's study of *agape* and *eros*. Oord makes some salient observations regarding the weaknesses of Nygren's work. He helpfully gestures to the more supple and less univocal use of *agape* in the New Testament (p. 56). However, much of Oord's critique is predicated on the acceptance of his as-yet unrevealed alternative of essential kenosis. Moments such as these can be disorienting for the reader.

Oord moves on to critique Augustine arguing that Augustine had an apophaticism without nuance and no understanding of analogy (pp. 71-72). Oord maligns Augustine for both indicating the impossibility of speaking about God, and then for going on to speak about God. (p. 72). This strange methodological habit in which Oord wants his critiques to work both ways continues throughout the book. The level of engagement with Augustine is not always deep. At one point Oord critiques a section heading in *De Doctrina Christiana* by quoting John 3:16 (p. 67). Oord pays no attention to the role of love in Augustine's psychological analogy, and references to *De Trinitate* are sparse. The book would have benefited from a greater engagement with these sources.

When turning to Aquinas, Oord finds himself perplexed by the claim that 'God is not like creatures, but creatures are like God' (p. 73). He does not see this as a statement of ontological priority, but instead concludes that this belies an absolute capitulation to the *via negativa* in which no analogies are possible. Oord seems to think that Aquinas settled with equivocation, rather than seeing analogy as the solution to the problem of equivocation and univocity. Oord's denial of any positive role of analogy in Aquinas – the

quintessential theologian of analogy – is bewildering to this reviewer. Oord desires that love be univocally predicated of both God and creatures, but he never argues why this needs to be the case. His critiques of Augustine and Aquinas reveal that he sees the only alternative to be equivocation and the *via negativa*. As such, the whole argument so far is a practice of *petitio principii*.

We begin to see the real shape of Oord's thinking when he gets to Barth. Barth, who establishes divine love in freedom – specifically the freely given love of the Trinity – is critiqued for claiming that God's love is 'arbitrary' (p. 7, 111). Oord takes issue with the fact that Barth sees the inner-triune love of the Godhead as sufficient, and balks at that fact that 'Barth thinks that God can love and yet have nothing nondivine to which God expresses love' (p. 7). This makes clear that when he speaks of 'love' he means God's love *for us*. Perhaps now we can see the reason for his elision of Augustine's discussion of Lover, Beloved and the Love in the Trinity. Later in the book Oord ties the internal essential love of the Trinity to God's love for creation (p. 131). God has love, Oord asserts, only in that he loves us. His issue with Barth is that Barth is able to think of love as essential to God's being without there being a cosmos. For Barth and many others, this means that God is able to give his love to creatures freely and gratuitously. For Oord, on the other hand, a non-necessary relation *must* be arbitrary. He goes so far as to label this view of gratuitous love as 'capricious' because it is not bound by necessity (p. 110).

Here, the theology becomes murky and troubling. Oord seeks to bind God to creation in a relation of necessary love. All gratuity is lost as God loves us out of the obligation of divine essence, rather than freely out of grace. God, in his existence, becomes a prisoner to his predetermined essence. Transcendent love determines the existence of God and every instance of divine love expressed to creation. Oord asserts that the object of God's love must be external to the triune Persons. If God is essentially love, and this love is directed outward toward creation, then creation must be as eternal as the love. This is the basis for his denial of the 'unbiblical' doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo* (p. 102). Of all of Oord's interlocutors, Pinnock gets the fairest hearing. Though, in the end, he succumbs to the same critique as Barth due to his desire to uphold *creatio ex nihilo* and the possibility that triunity alone might be sufficient to predicate love of God. Oord seems to imagine the life of the immanent Trinity apart from the world as one of isolation, rather than the liveliness of perfect community in mutual self-giving (p. 81).

The book could be read as an attempt to 'de-hellenise' love. The task is anything but neat, and introduces one of the puzzles of this work: just who are these 'philosophers' Oord keeps mentioning (p. 108)? For Oord, theologians who borrow from the philosophy of ancient Greece are clearly mistaken, and yet much of what is said in this book would not be possible without the philosophy of Whitehead. He might do well to bring other philosophers into the conversation. Heidegger's onto-theological critique

bites when Oord seeks to find 'metaphysical principles that govern all beings' including God (p. 72). Indeed, for Oord revelation is complete and God is known: 'A God who purposely hides and self-conceals would not love perfectly' (p. 117).

Oord identifies love with non-coercion; God is essentially love, and love never flails. God's love toward the creature must allow 'real freedom' (p. 95). This point appears again and again. It is the freedom of the human creature – rather than the risen Jesus, or the cross – which is the basis for Oord's view of love. This is perhaps the most troubling aspect of the book: for Oord, human freedom trumps divine freedom. He critiques Barth and Pinnock for upholding divine freedom over divine love (though this evaluation is dubious in itself) and so posits that it is the very essence of God to love creatures eternally; therefore God does not choose to love creation, but loves it by necessity. Lest we think this is a quirk of language, he invokes those anonymous 'philosophers' to make this claim with the full weight of 'necessity' in its philosophical sense (p. 108). When speaking of God, Oord promotes relations of necessity; when speaking of creatures, he argues for freedom. Oord was concerned that Augustine and Aquinas spoke only with sheer equivocity when predicating love of God and creatures, but his theology of love is far more susceptible to the critique than either of these giants of the church. For Oord, the human has absolute freedom and is undetermined and bound by no necessity, whereas God is fettered by his essence and bound to love according to the relations of necessity. Love cannot be simple non-coercion, for in Oord's account God is coerced by divine essence to love creatures. One might rightly question whether necessary love, robbed of all its extemporaneous gratuity, is really love at all.

The book suddenly reveals a new agenda. It is surprising to discover part-way through that Oord's main concern is the problem of evil. The whole book can be read as a treatise on theodicy. This is clearest in his critique of Pinnock's traditional doctrine of creation. He is unwilling to accept any system which fails to give a water-tight account for the evils of the world (pp. 113-14). Crudely put, the existence of evil must be accounted for by allowing that God is all-powerful but not all-loving, or all-loving but not all-powerful (pp. 106-07). Oord takes the second path: God does not prevent the ills of the world, because absolute power to act unilaterally does not belong to divine essence.

To respond to his motivating concern of theodicy (p. 116), Oord proposes a theory of kenosis. This is not 'voluntary kenosis', in which God contains the potential to coerce by temporarily becoming 'un-self-limited' (p. 124). God's self-limitation is 'involuntary' so that God cannot be accused of standing by idly while evils occur in the world (p. 125). This proposal owes much to process thought, and at many times is difficult to distinguish from it.

Far from being the biblical account of love that Oord claims, this book is driven by a metaphysical agenda focused on human freedom. Here is the anthropocentric theology many have thought classical Arminianism to be, but this is not classical Arminianism: freedom is reserved for creatures, while God is in the service of Necessity. Oord essentialises an idealised

human love and univocally predicates it of God and creatures. God's existence is then bound to this alien essence so that the love of kenotic self-sacrifice is never a choice, but frees up creaturely choices. It is hard not to note the similarities between Oord's depiction of God and Ivan Karamazov's one little child beating its breast in the darkness that secures transcendent harmony. Here, love is no *donum*, nor is it the cup that runneth over. I can hardly think of a more cold and distant deity, alien to the living and spontaneous God of the Bible, than the one who loves only by essential necessity.

Oord sets out to provide a definition of love and concludes by providing a metaphysics. The theological consideration of the topic of love is most welcome, even though this reviewer is troubled by many of the implications of Oord's proposal. A single methodological reversal would have produced an entirely different book. At the beginning of the book, he states that the Bible offers no definition of love and that he must therefore supply one. However, perhaps the case is that 'God is love' is a definition. Oord uses his intuited (p. 17) definition of love to condition God. Instead, perhaps we should allow the revelation of God to condition our definition of love.

Steven John Wright
Charles Sturt University

JOSEPH COLESON, ed. *Care of Creation: Christian Voices on God, Humanity, and the Environment*. Indianapolis, IN: Wesleyan Publishing House, 2010; pp. 208.

There is increasing interest and concern regarding the current health of the planet, its human and non-human inhabitants as well as a marked increase in the number of volumes published from Christian perspectives on related topics. 'Creation care', 'going green' and many other such terms are increasingly used, so much so that the term 'green-washing' has arisen in response to trite and profit-driven usages of these 'green' terms. Thankfully, this collection of essays could not be considered as 'green-washing' the faith, but rather is a positive contribution to the conversations of Christian eco- and social-justice. Joseph Coleson states that the intention for the book is to further elucidate the 'divine mandate to care for God's good creation on this earth' (p. 12). It goes beyond this to blend the two sides of the 'coin of compassion' (eco- and social- justice) that can sometimes be separated in Christian thought when environmentalism is mentioned.

The book is divided into three parts: Part 1 is titled 'Creation, Alienation, Redemption' and in four chapters aims to 'lay out the biblical theology of care for creation'. Part 2 focuses on 'Care for Humanity', covering topics such as genetic engineering, abortion, euthanasia, human trafficking and environmental degradation as violence in three chapters. Over the next five chapters, Part 3 covers 'Care of the Environment' through topics such as

land, water, endangered species and general stewardship, and concludes with a call to action on these issues from well-known evangelical creation care advocates Matthew and Nancy Sleeth.

There are numerous constructive and thought-provoking themes conveyed, even within the introductory chapter. However, there are points which could still be subject to some debate. For example, the introduction at one point states that our responsibilities to each other are different in a number of respects from our responsibilities to the rest of creation. Only one difference is noted: that 'we were not given stewardship dominion over each other, as we were over the earth and the rest of its creatures' (p. 12). While the scriptures may point to this, some would posit that the idea of loving, self-giving relationship with humanity and all of creation need not be differentiated with such a human/nature divide. It is acknowledged the comparatively brief nature of the chapters leads to not all terminology and concepts being unpacked in great detail. Nonetheless, I think two areas would have benefited from receiving more attention and clarification. Firstly, mention is made of 'stewardship dominion' (eg. pp. 12, 43) - one of the more well-known Christian ecological responses. However it would have been nice to have seen some more wrestling with terminology as there are other ecological responses which can be expressed in terms such as partnership, sacrament, covenant, celebration, Earth community, or even pastoral care.¹ Secondly, the extent to which Coleson points to equality within humanity, noting '*adam* (humanity) has been created equally (female and male) in the image of God, is admirable. While it may be considered outside the scope of the piece, it would have been helpful to see further attempts to spell out in more detail what actually constitutes being created in the *imago Dei*. For example, to what extent do other created life forms praise and bring forth glimpses of the Creator?

In chapter 2, Kelvin Friebe provides a fairly anthropocentric piece which focuses on issues surrounding humanity's fall, and sees creation 'in such a condition, not by its own action, choice, or volition, but because of what humans have done against God' (p. 33). He also touches on the somewhat thorny issue of God's retribution against human sin, where this sin causes creation to become an agent and/or 'an object of divine judgment, an innocent victim' (p. 37).'

The subsequent chapter has Christopher Bounds introducing the charge that many within the Christian faith today are complicit in a form of Gnostic heresy. This 'virus' takes a dim view of the earthy, physical world, elevates the spiritual nature, also focusing on the liberation from earth and the pure spiritual joy of the heavenly life to come. This can then lead to low levels of concern and care towards God's creation, and attitudes of uncaring domination of the earth and earth community. It is a helpful chapter connecting humanity, salvation and the redemption of all creation through

¹ See Clive Ayre, 'An Approach to Ecological Mission in and through the Christian Community in Australia: Beyond Apathy to Committed Action,' unpublished PhD thesis, University of Queensland, 2008.

Christ, and brings some elements of Wesleyan thought to bear on the matter. However, I am not convinced of Bounds' claim that 'all creation existed in harmonious relationship through the holy leadership of our first parents' (p. 49). It reiterated to me that as humans, we have a tendency to overrate our importance, and too easily slot into a human-centered (*anthropocentric*) vision of reality rather than a God-centered (*theocentric*) one. Thankfully this point is perceptively reflected on in the following chapter titled 'God's Constant Care of the Universe' by Kenneth Gavel.

The complex ethical dilemmas of euthanasia, abortion, and genetic engineering are carefully and considerably tackled in chapters 5 (Burton Webb and Stephen Lennox) and 6 (Christina Accornero and Susan Rouse). The section is rounded off by the compelling and poignant piece by Jo Anne Lyon, which through personal narratives and facts, draws attention to various ways selfish and greedy humanity has found to exploit fellow brothers and sisters. I found this chapter to be one of the highlights of this compilation. Environmental degradation is argued to be equivalent to violence against the poor. This argument is supported by moving stories – stories that must be heard in the current debate on climate change. The potential for climate change to cause pain, suffering, hunger and thirst on a large scale is particularly evident amongst the poorest and weakest. A story is told of a Zambian AIDS widow's futile attempts to grow crops for her family in the increasingly unpredictable seasons in her land. The question is raised – who is our neighbour? Hope is raised through insights from stories of the past work towards justice, particularly of Wesleyan origin, the centrality of prayer and ends with a dare to 'dream of the transformation both of people and of the planet' (p. 119).

Section 3, 'Care of the Environment' begins with Travis Nation and Kenneth Dill focusing on land and water conservation. The importance of land and water conservation is addressed, along with an important factor that can sometimes be conveniently overlooked – self-discipline. The next three chapters: 'Christian Stewardship of Natural Resources' (Richard Daake and D. Darek Jarmola), 'Every Living Creature' (Ronald Crawford and Joseph Coleson) and 'Endangered Species and Habitats' (Martin LaBar and Donald Wood) flow effectively and are all well constructed and written. A great number of topics, from agribusiness to aesthetics, to exotic pets and eating meat, are covered within the chapter's small footprints and are well worth reading. Matthew and Nancy Sleeth's final list of various actions to take is certainly helpful, though certainly not exhaustive.

The inclusion of both 'Suggestions for Reflection and Action', and 'For Further Reading' sections at the end of each chapter is welcome and encouraging as the questions posed are generally thought-provoking and are quite practical. Mental assent is but one part of the Christian life. Taking action after gaining knowledge is vital to the living out of our faith – an obvious ingredient of the Wesleyan tradition. It is encouraging to see this volume published within the Wesleyan Theological Perspectives series, as

the Wesleyan tradition has a constructive and hopeful part to play in the care of God's creation. Overall, this is a positive contribution to the conversation of Christian eco- and social-justice, and gives a firmly grounded, yet loving and compassionate call to action in and for the earth and also towards our fellow humanity in the current climate of degradation, ecological concern and widespread injustice.

Matthew Seaman
The University of Queensland

JAY RICHARD AKKERMAN, THOMAS JAY OORD, BRENT PETERSON, eds. *Postmodern and Wesleyan?: Exploring the Boundaries and Possibilities*. Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill Press, 2009. pp. 185 + 6

This book has a distinctively 'in-house' flavour as members of the Church of the Nazarene discuss postmodernism and its impact upon the Church. An outside observer, the United Methodist scholar Leonard Sweet, is brought in to interact with this discussion by way of short reflective pieces at the end of each section. Most of the contributors, and presumably the editors, are convinced that the Church must in its present context make adjustments to its way of being and to its presentation of the Gospel in light of the impact of postmodernism on culture and society. To the editors' credit at the end of each section of the book are included the contributions of respondents who are somewhat skeptical about this claim. In its four Parts it deals with Postmodernity as a cultural movement, the Gospel, the Church and engagement with the world.

If you are hoping for any detailed discussion of postmodern philosophy you will not find it here. Throughout most of the book broad generalisations stand in for deeper analysis. For example, Dean G. Blevins, in his chapter 17 on 'The Emerging and Emergent Church' uses an extremely broad brushstroke to define postmodernity, as 'almost every new cultural expression in the Western world' (p. 102). The brevity of each chapter (typically two or three pages) does not help as there is simply not enough space allowed to develop ideas.

Postmodernism as a *philosophy* and postmodernity as a *cultural trend* seem not to be sufficiently distinguished here. Most of what is said by contributors relates to the latter not the former. To me the most penetrating statement in the entire book comes in a footnote citation from Brian Leiter, 'post-modernism is non-existent in all the leading philosophy departments throughout the English-speaking world, where it is regarded, with justice, as sophomoric skeptical posturing.'² Yet we are told that postmodernism has so radically altered our cultural landscape that we can no longer effectively communicate the Gospel unless we adjust to it. Much of what is described

² Brian Leiter, *The Future for Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), cited in ch. 8, fn. 3 on p. 187.

here as 'postmodern' seems to me to be indistinguishable from Romanticism. The preference for nature over the machine, for poetry over facts, for imagination over knowledge and for emotions over thoughts is deeply embedded in western culture. Such preferences do not begin to make their presence felt only in the last fifty years. If one were to attempt to trace this development historically one would do better to begin in the 1860s than the 1960s. Still we have here the oft-repeated claim that the shifting of our cultural landscape in such ways is something very new (p. 182).

In a multi-contributor work of this sort the chapters inevitably vary in quality. One could not respond adequately to thirty-four chapters in a book only 185 pages long. I will reflect here on only one chapter, one critical response, and Leonard Sweet's 'Conversation Igniters' that appear at the end of each section of the book. In ch. 18 on 'The Sensory Side of Being Spiritual' Keith Schwanz pleads for a multi-sensory approach to worship and warns about the rampant hyper-individualism of much evangelical worship. While I am in sympathy with the point he is making, I'm not sure that the overuse of 'I' and 'me' rather than 'you' and 'we' in Gospel songs of an earlier era, as well as in many contemporary songs, should be seen as the fruit of modernity. Certainly such language can be grating especially as it tilts toward the sentimental. Consider, however, the first person personal pronouns that litter Charles Wesley's hymns. 'Died he for *me* who caused his pain? For *me* who him to death pursued? Amazing love! How can it be that Christ *my* God should die for *me*?' Here is the eighteenth century expression of Luther's *pro me* which lies at the heart of the Evangelical concept of grace. Certainly believers are not autonomous individuals; they are part of a holy community. Yet until the believer has grasped the universal love of God in the particular revelation that Christ died 'for me' as well as 'for all' the Gospel has not been fully grasped. Rampant individualism has both ancient and modern forms, but there is a difference between shallow 'feel good' spirituality and a personal appropriation of the grace of God in Christ.

Carl Leth, in his Critical Response (pp. 172-76) to Part IV on 'In, With and For the World,' raises some valuable questions. In his view the six essays to which he responds, 'are more helpful in their constructive proposals than in their historical assessments, more useful to inform our exploration of what a Christian postmodernism should move toward than what modernity has been' (p. 172). Like most proposals to adopt something new there is in most of the contributors a failure to appreciate the genuine benefits of what has gone before. There is in fact nothing very new in these proposals though there may be some valuable suggestions about new ways we might consider old problems. I remember asking a student in a 'Theology of Ministry' class whether the following was his viewpoint: Jesus' understanding of how the church should function was lost after he ascended to heaven. The church in the intervening two millennia has been fundamentally flawed in the way that it has structured its ecclesial life, right down to the present time. Now twenty-year-old undergraduates who have

uncovered Jesus' original plan are starting with a blank sheet of paper and getting it right. I did this as a kind of *reductio ad absurdum* argument hoping he would see the silliness in such a claim. To my surprise he replied, 'Yes that is exactly my position.' Against such invincible ignorance it is difficult to argue.

Leth also asks just how 'Wesleyan' this collection is (p. 176). The book would perhaps be more accurately given the title 'Postmodern and Christian'. The contributors are Wesleyans but they do not often reflect self-consciously from a set of Wesleyan theological convictions, except in somewhat superficial ways. For example the 'conversational approach' of the book is said to reflect John Wesley's 'preference for dialogue.' (p. 11) It is true that Wesley published 'Conversations' and 'Conference Minutes' but anyone who has read these knows that Wesley was an autocrat whose own opinion always trumped that of any other participant.

I find Leonard Sweet's contributions at the end of each section particularly unhelpful with their attempt at hip scatological reflections that are often weighed down with excess verbiage. If designed as examples of postmodern discourse they demonstrate that felicity of expression and precision in ideas are not highly valued commodities among postmodernists. Then there are Sweet's oversimplified categorisations. Jean-Francois Lyotard famously defined postmodernism as 'incredulity toward metanarratives.' Yet Leonard Sweet wants to neatly divide the human race into 'Gutenbergers' (modernist rationalist types who read printed material and favour head over heart) and 'Googleys' (postmodern feeling-oriented people who use Google and favour imagination over knowledge). Toward such broad overarching explanations I must confess considerable incredulity.

In Sweet's world, everything 'modern' is bad and everything 'postmodern' is good, because 'modern' people rely too much on their minds whereas 'postmodern' people are feelers more than thinkers and thus better able to negotiate the changing world we live in. Since modernists have attempted to 'deodorize the slime of feeling from every source' we must look to poets like D. H. Lawrence who defines his 'great religion as a belief in the blood, the flesh, as being wiser than the intellect. We can go wrong in our minds. But what our blood feels and believes and says is always true' (p.139). Really? *Always* true? Is it not rather the case that our emotional life, our instinctual life, is as much fallen and in need of grace as our intellectual life? Sweet admits this himself on the following page when he concedes that our emotional state 'may be weird or wonky' (p. 140). His claim, also on p. 140, that the Holocaust was a result of Nazism's 'rationalization and industrialization of [the] emotion [of hatred]' draws a very long bow indeed and is typical of his tendency to perform surgery with a sledgehammer. If Sweet is looking for an affirmation of the value of non-rational capacities why not draw on the Pietist approach to heart religion or theological reflection on *eros* or the Lockean empiricism that informed the Evangelical Awakening, rather than on Lawrence's rampant hedonism?

Can Sweet really be serious in citing John Chrysostom (fn 7, p. 140) in support of the postmodern approach to reason? When Chrysostom condemns the heretics for creating 'a dust-cloud of countless reasonings' in his Commentary on Romans he is not attacking reason as such but the heretics' use of sophisticated reasoning to oppose orthodoxy.³ Plato is usually the bugaboo in popular writing on postmodernism yet Chrysostom was as much indebted to Plato as the rest of the Christian theological tradition of his age. I cannot believe Sweet is not aware of this; his selective use of Chrysostom here is bewildering.

There is a belittling tone in so much of what Sweet writes. Gutenbergers, for example, have spent their lives 'burrowing in rational furrows and learning to flex logical muscles.' They have undergone a heart bypass and are in danger of a 'heart attack.' What they lack is 'attack hearts – lives trained in deep, hard attack thinking but suppressed in wide, compassionate attack feelings that can take on the challenges of life' (p. 140). If I am reading this frustratingly obscure sentence correctly, we seem again to be encountering the simplistic analysis - head bad; heart good.

The inclusion of exactly the same Application question at the end of every single chapter is grating - 'In light of this chapter and its topics, how might you act differently? Think differently? Feel differently? Relate differently?' Some thought should have been given to a different set of application questions for each chapter. Finally, I assume that the decision to eschew the correct use of upper and lower case letters in the chapter titles and author's names is meant to be an example of postmodernity's cavalier attitude toward convention. The result is, in my view, ugly and distracting but perhaps that is my overly modernist aesthetic speaking.

As a book designed for the average lay reader who hears the term 'postmodern' bandied about in the church but is not sure what to make of it, this book may prove helpful. This is indeed the book's intended audience so perhaps some of my criticism is misplaced. Certainly the Church of the Nazarene is to be commended for publishing a book that tackles the question of how the Church is to respond to new cultural trends and which expresses a range of views within its own constituency. A more scholarly work which allows for substantive development of the ideas canvassed here would be a welcome accompaniment.

Glen O'Brien
Booth College

MARK A. NOLL, *Christians in the American Revolution*. Vancouver: Regent College Publishing, 2006.

This is a welcome reprint of a work originally published in 1977 by Christian University Press. Noll's PhD thesis was in this field and this may be a

³ *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers* II: 349-50.

reworking of his doctoral work. It belongs to the plethora of works that appeared around the Bicentennial year of 1976, though it is here updated and provides an insightful survey of the role of the Christian churches during the American Revolution. Though the book itself is thirty-five years old, there is an impressive review of more recent literature given in an Afterword (pp. 93-113), which helpfully traces more recent trends and indicates 'pressing areas' that remain for historians of the period immediately following the Revolution.⁴ The addition of this essay makes the book all the more valuable for current readers and researchers.

Earliest histories of the American Revolution tended to be heroic interpretations describing good men overthrowing tyrants, an approach that eventually gave way to a Whig interpretation that stressed America's destiny and the inevitability of historical progress. The canons of early twentieth century historiography soon put paid to what it considered such flights of fancy and sought to apply objective, unbiased, scientific analysis, leading to a variety of approaches, most focusing on the dimension of social struggle inherent in the events. Recent decades have included a focus on previously neglected participants such as Native Americans, slaves and women. The religious dimensions of the conflict, however, remain relatively unexplored. It is increasingly recognised that the Revolution was a global war, one phase of Britain's war with France as well as America's first civil war, fought between fellow Britons. The fact that these Britons were an eminently religious people is hugely significant in understanding the motive causes of Rebels and Loyalists alike. Anyone seeking to understand the religious responses to the conflict cannot afford to overlook Noll's book.

Ch. 1 nicely sets out the causes of unrest over the 'Intolerable Acts' from both the British and American sides of the question. Noll makes it clear that in addition to the colonists seeing the British administration of the American colonies as a threat to hard won English liberties, there was also 'a deep vein of religiously charged discourse' consistently mined by colonists in their move toward independence (pp. 25-27). While Jefferson's pronouncements on the purposes of the Divine Being were decidedly Deist, those who heard him had often been profoundly shaped by the Evangelical doctrines of the Great Awakening. The rhetoric of liberty received a less distinctively Evangelical hearing in Britain because the revival did not touch the centres of political power there in the way that it did in America.

The second chapter turns to a survey of the religious history of the colonies defined by Noll as "the story of Puritanism" (p.29). It is helpful in distinguishing between the New Divinity, New Lights, Old Lights and Old Calvinists that emerged in response to the revivalism of Jonathan Edwards. Noll suggests that the itinerant nature of inter-colonial evangelism pointed toward an emerging national consciousness. To read newspaper reports of Gilbert Tennent's inter-colonial preaching tours led people to begin to think

⁴ This is a reprint of 'The Evangelical Surge and the Significance of Religion in the Early United States, 1783-1865,' an essay first published in Melvyn Stokes, ed. *The State of U.S. History* (Oxford: Berg, 2001).

of themselves as 'American Christians' rather than, for example, 'New Jersey Presbyterians.'

After establishing the political and religious background Noll moves in chapters 3 through 6 to the Patriotic, Reforming, Loyalist, and Pacifist responses in turn. Chapter 7 provides a helpful Thematic Summary (pp. 149-62). Noll argues that Christian convictions, in particular the Puritan concept of covenant, undergirded the political thinking of the age. God establishes sovereign rule over humanity and expects human governments to function according to his covenant. The connection between Christian theological convictions and the Whig conception of government was very strong, providing fertile soil for revolutionary ideas. The Puritan pulpit, especially in New England, was highly educated and articulate and provided a regular setting forth of the idea that reason and revelation alike demonstrated that there was a divinely sanctioned form of government. Of course clergy differed over exactly what that form of government looked like, but all had an opinion one way or another, and their influence over the population was not inconsiderable.

Noll warns against assuming that the Christian response to the Revolution was uniform. Republican and Loyalist voices both made explicitly Christian claims in support of their stances. Some turned the War into a holy crusade; others took a prophetic stance, warning against the immorality and injustice that armed conflict inevitably brings. The Deism of America's Founding Fathers is thought by many to have resulted in a kind of civil religion without any specifically Christian narrative. Samuel Hopkins author of *A Dialogue Concerning the Slavery of the Africans* (1776) is cited by Mark Noll as an example of those New Lights who supported the Revolution but directed those engaged in the struggle for liberty to grant the same privilege to their slaves. Such prophetic voices maintained a distinctively Christian voice and resisted the idolatry of creating a merely civil religion (pp. 92-98).

Not only was the Revolution influenced by Christian thought; the reverse was also the case, as the Churches were influenced by the rhetoric of liberty in making their own case for toleration. Baptists in New England and Presbyterians in Virginia argued against Congregational and Anglican hegemony respectively. How could freedom from British rule be fought in the political sphere if the tyranny of Established Churches be left standing? Such thinking would lead inevitably to the disestablishment of religion and the remarkably successful free market religious economy of the new republic. The place of the Churches in post-Revolutionary society would be less central. Where previously the leading intellectual figures had been church leaders, it would now be political leaders who would have the greater influence. The Great Awakening had ensured that religious interests would be at the heart of cultural and intellectual discourse. The American Revolution ensured that political theory would now take centre stage. One of the most significant outcomes of the Revolution for the Churches was that

the long-standing fear of Anglican establishment was finally removed leaving Baptists and Methodists to become the religious success story of the ensuing age, outstripping all other competitors.

Noll's book is strong on Presbyterians and Congregationalists but provides a less detailed analysis of Methodism, considering it only in his broader discussion of the Loyalist response. The interested reader would do well to supplement Noll with Dee E. Andrews, *The Methodists and Revolutionary America, 1760-1800: The Shaping of an Evangelical Culture* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000). John Wesley's opposition to the American Revolution, set out in his 1775 pamphlet, *A Calm Address to Our American Colonies* is well known. Noll claims that John Wesley took a 'specifically biblical approach' to the conflict and sees this as strangely out of step with loyalist rhetoric and more in keeping with Whig politics (p. 116). This claim needs some nuancing. Acquaintance with Wesley's political tracts shows that he rarely appealed to the Bible in setting out his case in support of the king and the parliament. Wesley's political tracts consistently reject on historical and pragmatic grounds John Locke's social contract theory with its idea that nations govern only by the consent of the governed. He saw no need to reform the political system of constitutional monarchy since its finely-tuned balance of power between king, parliament, and people needed only to be preserved in order for genuine liberty to prevail.

Of course the absence of explicitly biblical material in Wesley's political tracts does not mean that there was no theology at all behind Wesley's politics. Jason Vickers has argued that in the eighteenth century context of a 'confessional state,' Wesley's ecclesiastical, political and theological commitments are 'interrelated, mutually enforcing and generally of a piece with each other,' so that in interpreting Wesley every political statement must be 'monitored...for its theological and ecclesiastical implications.'⁵ Certainly, for Wesley human liberty is derived from the natural image of God bestowed at creation rather than from any contingent political condition.⁶ This would be but one of many possible examples of the way in which Wesley's political statements, are underpinned by theological convictions, notwithstanding the absence of any explicit appeal to the Bible.⁷

It is only perhaps an aesthetic matter but I find the indents overly deep, probably twice what they should be. This is the kind of formatting problem that occurs when a book is not freshly typeset but simply reproduced untouched from an earlier book. Publishing conventions have changed since the 1970s and this gives this present edition a slightly dated look. Of course this is a small criticism and should not deter any reader needing a solid

⁵ Jason Vickers, *John Wesley: A Guide for the Perplexed* (London: Continuum, 2009), 108.

⁶ John Wesley, Sermon 60, "The General Deliverance," in *Sermons II*, ed. Albert C. Outler, in *Works* 2:439.

⁷ For more detailed discussion of Wesley's political writings see Glen O'Brien, 'John Wesley's Rebuke to the Rebels of British America: Revisiting the "Calm Address,"' *Methodist Review* vol. 4 (2012): 31-55.

introduction to the role of the churches in British America and in the early republic that replaced it.

Glen O'Brien
Booth College

RICHARD WAUGH, *A New Church for a New Century: East City Wesleyan's Early Story*. Auckland: East City Wesleyan Church, 2010. pp. 160. ISBN 978-0-473-17448-4. NZ\$29.90 (from PO Box 82-363 Highland Park, Auckland 2143)

Professional historians often rely on local histories to gain a 'history from below' that recounts the stories of ordinary people in their local parish setting. These are not always exciting reading as they have a tendency to focus on events and circumstances of little interest beyond the immediate participants. While this local history does have its share of such content it benefits from placing the congregation that is its focus into the context of an emerging new movement within New Zealand evangelicalism. It also benefits from its author's experience and skill as an established aviation historian.

Waugh states on p. 6 that 'the publishing of New Zealand church history needs to be more creative and include a new dynamic analysis of people-focussed mission.' He has succeeded in producing just this kind of history. Well designed (in landscape rather than portrait orientation), the text is enriched by a very generous selection of photographs, about half of which are in full colour. Each chapter includes a sidebar of 'Some Learnings' that attempts to identify principles illustrated by the particular period of the Church's history that has been reviewed. There are also sidebars on 'New Zealand and World Events' for each year of the congregation's life which place developments at East City Wesleyan into a national and global context. There is a strong oral history element in the testimonies of congregational members, as well as longer biographical essays on each of the church's team leaders. These participant-observer narratives make the text come alive.

The fact that a history has been written of a church only ten years old is an indication of the missional outlook of the author. Waugh is clearly convinced that something of importance has happened at ECW that is worth recording. Perhaps another indication of the concern for the contemporary mission of the church is that the book's first chapter, rather than beginning with the church's origins, provides a snapshot of the church at the time of publication in 2010. Ch. 2 then returns, more traditionally, to Samuel Leigh's first visit to New Zealand in 1819 and the establishment of a Wesleyan Mission in 1822 before tracing the developing disputes in New Zealand Methodism between evangelicals and liberals.

East City's spiritual roots can be traced back to the Methodist Revival Fellowship established in 1961 (renamed Aldersgate Fellowship in 1984) and

Methodist Affirm established in 1994 and associated with similar renewal movements within New Zealand Anglicanism and Presbyterianism. The Evangelical Caucus Network founded in 1996 became part of the Wesleyan Methodist Movement established in 1997. Finally in 1999 the attempt to establish an evangelical synod within the Methodist Church was defeated when a group of Gay and Lesbian Methodists claimed that such a synod would be hurtful to them. This issue became one of the contributing factors that led to the formation of the Wesleyan Methodist Church of New Zealand in 2000 which has, through links with the Wesleyan Methodist Church of Australia, aligned itself with the International Wesleyan Church as well as becoming a member in its own right of the World Methodist Council. East City Wesleyan originated in a schism from Trinity Methodist Church in Howick, the bulk of whose congregation under the Rev. Richard Waugh's leadership would become the flagship of the new Wesleyan Methodist Church of New Zealand.

The emergence of this new evangelical Methodism is the latest chapter in the much longer story of Methodism in Aotearoa/New Zealand where throughout the twentieth century Methodism became predominantly liberal in spirit and evangelicals were made to feel increasingly marginalised. The Methodist Church increasingly felt less obligated in ordering its ecclesial life either according to the Bible or a received theological tradition. This is illustrated well in the issue of the appointment of openly gay clergy where the Conference has taken its stand on the basis of natural justice, aligning itself with the Human Rights Act of 1993 whose intention is to abolish discrimination of all kinds on the basis of sexual orientation. The Conference of 1993 opted to order its life and practice within the intent of this Act and the issue was vigorously debated at several Conferences, and shown to be far from resolved at the grass roots level. In November 1997 the Conference received the recommendation that the former Baptist, the Rev. Dr. David Bromell (not named in this book), an openly gay minister not yet in full standing in the Conference, be stationed as Superintendent of Christchurch Methodist Mission. This was an important Connexional appointment, and in spite of strong opposition from sections of the Conference, and through overriding consensus decision making procedures, Bromell was received into full connexion and appointed. We see in this instance the familiar pattern of Methodist disruption focused not primarily on a theological debate but on an issue of justice and human rights (though of course there are certainly theological dimensions to the sexuality debate).⁸

The author has a strong Methodist heritage with family connections stretching back to the eighteenth century. The pain involved in leaving the Methodist Church is quite evident, not only for him but for many other congregational members. Waugh did not become involved in evangelical

⁸ Dr. Douglas Pratt provides a detailed discussion of the significance of this debate in 'An Ecclesial Dilemma: Homosexual Affirmation and Church Process,' *Colloquium* 39:1 (2007): 36-57. See also his 'Homosexuality and the Theological Crisis: A Doctrinal Critique,' *Colloquium* (2008): 75-95.

Methodist activity until the late 1990s and then only after 'being appalled by the strident attitude of liberal church leaders' toward evangelicals whose views differed from their own (p. 32). In a conversation I had with a prominent liberal Methodist in Auckland around the time the Wesleyan Methodist Church was formed, he expressed how 'unthinkable' it would be for New Zealand Methodism to be without a strong evangelical element. Alarmed that the disruption had occurred, he felt considerable sympathy for those who felt forced out of the church only as a last and long resisted final resort.

It is interesting to note that those baptised as infants are not 're-baptised' at ECW but instead make an adult affirmation of their faith (pp. 12-13). This, as well as the use of the clerical collar, a high view of Holy Communion, strong ecumenical involvement (Waugh currently chairs the Auckland Church Leaders Meeting and now the National Church Leaders Meeting) and the ordination of women in ministry indicates that Wesleyan Methodists in New Zealand (at least those at ECW) have a genuine sense of connection to Methodist theological and liturgical heritage, something not always present among evangelical renewal groups, where 'bapticostalisation' is often evident.

The story of the establishment of East City Wesleyan provides a fascinating account of evangelical Methodist resurgence in Aotearoa/New Zealand. It provides a case study in the capacity of a Christian tradition to undergo renewal leading to fresh, creative impulses that result in effective mission. This book will be of interest not only to historians who want to examine an innovative local church history but also to those interested in church planting and renewal. I hope it receives the reading audience it deserves.

Glen O'Brien
Booth College