

Book Notes

Matt Tomlinson

In God's Image: The Metaculture of Fijian Christianity

2009. Berkeley, CA: The University of California Press

Reviewed by Michael A. Rynkiewicz

Tomlinson's narrative is called *ethnography* in Anthropology; the description of the culture of a single society, with a focus dictated, in part, by the interests of the people being described. Fiji, as a nation, has a problem. The British colonizers permitted the Fijians to own their own land, but because of that, the Fijians saw no need to work as slaves for the British. The British then brought in Indians from elsewhere in the Empire to work as servants and labourers. Now, fifty some years after independence, the population is about 50 percent Fijian and 50 percent Indian, or Indo-Fijian. Business belongs to the Indians, and the land belongs to the Fijians. The political debate has been punctuated by three violent coups, events unique in the Pacific Islands.

Fiji, in a sea of islands, is intimately linked to Tonga and Samoa, a triangle in which Polynesian culture developed and from which it spread thousands of years ago. All three are predominately Christian, specifically Wesleyan/Methodist, although in recent years the Mormon Church has grown with speed. In local, that is, district and village, settings, there is also a sense of *lega* (pronounced *leng-gá*) or 'trouble'. The trouble is "social disunity, which leads to the loss of power" (5). The conceptual structure of this trouble reveals itself in the analysis of discourse: past/present, *lotu/vanua*, capitalism/communalism, democracy/chieftaincy, Fijian/Indo-Fijian. The theme Tomlinson develops in the book is this: "The metacultural distinction between the *lotu* (Christianity) and the *vanua* (a complex domain encompassing chiefs, their people, land, and tradition) is a profoundly consequential one in Fiji" (6).

Fijians consider the people of the past to have been, at once, pagans and powerful. That makes their spirits still dangerous, and yet their time looms larger than life with a unity that, regrettably, has now been lost. Christianity is perceived to be responsible for this loss of unity, but also to hold the possibility of reconstituting community. Sometimes this hope takes ethnic form: "to be Fijian, the claim goes, one must be indigenous and Christian" (7). So, a culture (linguistic domains and discourse that shapes perceptions and behavior) about culture (interpretations of the past and the present) has developed that wrestles with these dichotomies.

Tomlinson's concluding third section of the book deals with ways that the church has been involved in metacultural debates. "My goal is to understand the context in which riotous and destructive acts can seem to many local observers to be the positive acts of moral Christians" (27). Many in the church are exploring new ways to understand Fijian society and the place of the past, the Indo-Fijians, the processes of modernization, and the enduring chiefs in a new configuration that does not lead to the violence of the coups. Tomlinson tells the extended narrative of a catechist who had a dramatic conversion demonstrating God's power in and over the events shaping his life, and in particular reshaping some of the dichotomies that characterize Fijian metaculture. If the church caused a loss of power in the past, it may be the church that reconnects Fijians with power in the future. However, in an otherwise fine ethnography, Tomlinson fails to help the reader see how a personal conversion and coming into power will affect the larger narrative of how society should operate. A failure shared too often by the church in other eras in other lands.

In the past, doing anthropological fieldwork placed researchers in emerging Christian societies populated with missionaries and indigenous pastors. But, the anthropologist, bent on discovering what this culture was like before the arrival of the missionary, the administrator and the trader, saw the missionary as an intruder seeking to change the culture she wanted to recover. Christianity was in the way of solid anthropological research and that put anthropologists at odds with the missionary enterprise. The result was ethnographies in which missionaries were not even present or ethnographies in which missionaries were the bad guys.

There is now a new movement, beginning around 1990, called The Anthropology of Christianity. The movement reflects the postmodern turn, in which everyone is deconstructed (in this case, the anthropological enterprise) and everyone has a voice (even if Christianity no longer has a privileged voice). Joel Robbins, who worked in the Highlands of Papua New Guinea, has fostered the movement with his *Becoming Sinners: Christianity and Moral Torment in a Papua New Guinea Society* leading a wave of young ethnographers who treat "local Christianities" as a given fact and, with a more neutral pose than their predecessors, proceed to describe the culture and society that exists in the present. Tomlinson's book is one of many in the series Robbins edits with the University of California Press: Webb Keane, *Christian Moderns: Freedom and Fetish in the Mission Encounter*; Matthew Engelke, *A Problem of Presence: Beyond Scripture in an African Church*; David Smilde, *Reason to Believe: Cultural Agency in Latin American Evangelicalism*; Francio Guadeloupe, *Chanting Down the New Jerusalem: Calypso, Christianity, and Capitalism in the Caribbean*; William F. Hanks, *Converting Words: Maya in the Age of the Cross*; and Frederick Klaitz, *Death in a Church of Life: Moral Passion during Botswana's Time of AIDS*.

These ethnographies, and others outside the series, including two readers,¹ provide a new resource for missiology, and, at the same time, provide a challenge for doctoral programs in Missiology and/or Intercultural Studies to do this level of research and writing.

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End Notes

¹ Fenella Cannell, editor, (2006) *The Anthropology of Christianity*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press. Matthew Engelke and Matt Tomlinson, editors (2006) *The Limits of Meaning: Case Studies in the Anthropology of Christianity*. Oxford: Berghahn Books.

S. T. Kimbrough Jr. and Kenneth G. C. Newport, eds.
The Manuscript Journal of the Reverend Charles Wesley, M.A. Vols. 1,2
2008. Nashville: Kingswood Books

John R. Tyson
Assist Me to Proclaim: The Life and Hymns of Charles Wesley
2007 Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans
Reviewed by Kenneth J. Collins

Even though it is now more than two hundred years since the birth of Charles Wesley, research into his life and thought yet remains at a rudimentary stage. Two works that are addressing this issue, each in its own way, are *The Manuscript Journal of the Reverend Charles Wesley* and a new biography, *Assist Me to Proclaim: The Life and Hymns of Charles Wesley*. Although the first work is a fine addition to the primary sources, it is not actually an autobiography of Charles since it does not include the entirety of his life but ends abruptly in 1756. The material that makes up this manuscript was found, oddly enough, “among some loose straw on the floor of a public warehouse in London.” The manuscript was later purchased, along with some other materials, by Thomas Jackson in 1831. However, neither Jackson’s edition of the *Journal* nor the subsequent attempt by Telford was complete and accurate since neither was able to handle properly the shorthand material that was a part of the original composition. Beyond this, Jackson took greater editorial liberties with the text than were warranted with the result that a complete and accurate edition of Charles Wesley’s journal would have to await this twenty-first century effort.

The second work, *Assist Me to Proclaim*, is indeed a birth-to-death biography and it is interlaced with an able discussion of Charles Wesley's poetic genius as expressed in his numerous hymns. For those readers who are unfamiliar with "the younger brother of Methodism," the life and thought of Charles offers a number of contrasts to his older brother, John. To illustrate, Charles, as Tyson aptly points out, was a turbulent personality often moved by passions that John hardly or rarely felt. With his head and heart often out of sync, Charles at times burst onto the scene (the Grace Murray fiasco, for instance) and took bold and irremediable action that his hesitating brother could only regret. Moreover, these differing personalities clashed theologically in terms of the doctrine of Christian perfection, especially as to the manner of its actualization. And Charles, for his part, never shared John's antipathy for the rich but was far more gregarious. Indeed, John Gambold described Charles Wesley as a 'man made for friendship.'

As important as these differences are, the reader of Tyson's narrative is nevertheless struck with the numerous similarities between these brothers who were two of the principal leaders of the eighteenth-century evangelical revival. Both, for example, sought early on to be sanctified before they were justified; that is, they hoped to be saved by "my best endeavours to serve God." Both doubted at one point whether they had ever been a Christian demonstrating how important the Pietist notion of "real Christianity" (as opposed to nominal Christianity) was to them. Both viewed the willingness to die as an key indicator of saving faith. Both had important and memorable evangelical conversions to the proper Christian faith which issued in freedom from the guilt and power of sin. Both engaged in field preaching and confronted the mobs in gracious serenity. Both informed their wives that they would not preach one sermon less or travel one mile less in a married state than in a single one. And both insulted the venerable at Oxford in prophetic sermons that made them the pariahs of the University. To be sure, these similarities are not only numerous but they are also stunning. That is, Charles and John Wesley were not only brothers by birth they were also, in a real sense, brothers in the gospel.

After his marriage to Sarah Gwynne in 1749, Charles Wesley effectively settled down and travelled much less. He was therefore, as Tyson puts it, "less amenable to his older brother's requests and demands for evangelistic assistance." But the key tension that emerged between the brothers as their careers progressed had to do with the issue of ecclesiology in general (would Methodism remain within the Church of England?) and with lay preachers in particular (Charles would fire the lay preachers almost as fast as John would hire them). Tyson offers a helpful and extensive discussion of this issue and thereby reveals the theological trajectory of Charles that was distinctively his own. Overall, then, Tyson's work is a faithful guide to a complex and

sophisticated figure, one who deserves significant treatment in his own right out from under the shadow of his far more famous brother.

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Brian Stanley

The World Missionary Conference, Edinburgh 1910

Studies in the History of Christian Missions

2009. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans

Reviewed by Marcella Hoest

In anticipation of the 100th anniversary of the World Missionary Conference, Edinburgh 1910 this excellent book by the Director of the Center for the Study of Christianity in the Non-Western World, University of Edinburgh, is most welcome. Using mainly primary sources the author presents a fine panorama of people and events of the lively processes that took place in the eight commissions that made this Conference so important in church history. The book notes that the modern ecumenical movement began with Edinburgh 1910, even though the word “ecumenical” was abandoned due to differences in how “ecumenical” was understood. In that context, an enlightening detail is the mention of the Roman Catholic Bishop Bonomelli of Cremona who sent a letter of greeting to the Conference (Roman Catholics were not represented). The Bishop was a friend of Angelo Roncalli, who was to become John XXIII, the architect of the Second Vatican Council.

Chapter V ‘*Give Us Friends!*’, words taken from the address by V.S. Azariah (1874-1945), an Anglican clergyman from southern India, gives much food for thought of the major issues facing churches today, such as race, imperialism, inculturation, dependence on foreign aid, spirituality. (Roland Allen’s classic, *Missionary Methods, Ours or St. Paul’s?* (1912) readily comes to mind.)

Chapter 10, *Missionary Co-operation*, gives an excellent distillation of the proceedings of Commission VIII, ‘*Co-operation and the Promotion of Unity*,’ so vital as we await Edinburgh 2010. As the author notes: “The promotion of unity between Christians was a means to the end of co-operation in mission, rather than the other way around” (279). Briefly referred to (317f) the Department of Mission at Selly Oak Colleges, Birmingham, England was a remarkable cooperative endeavor of the six major British Missionary Societies in Britain for many decades, and also for a number of European societies including several from the United States—an ecumenical story yet to be written.

Photos, footnotes at the bottom of each page, a full bibliography add to the readability of this book. It will serve well as a learning and teaching tool for church historians, missiologists, ecumenists, all persons who wish to understand the movement of the churches to this day, what we can learn from probing the past, and with hope for the future of the ecumenical movement.

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Geordan Hammond and David Rainey, eds.

Wesley & Methodist Studies. Volume I

2009. Manchester, UK: Didsbury Press

Reviewed by *Howard A. Snyder*

This attractive peer-reviewed journal is the fruit of the new Manchester Wesley Research Centre, created in 2003 at Nazarene Theological College, Manchester, in collaboration with several other Wesleyan-oriented institutions. Cliff College in England and Asbury Theological Seminary are among the collaborating institutions. The journal is linked as well with The Oxford Centre for Methodism and Church History, Oxford Brookes University. The coeditors are both associated with Nazarene Theological College.

The Manchester Wesley Research Centre was created “to support research in the life and work of John and Charles Wesley, their contemporaries in the eighteenth-century Evangelical Revival, their historical and theological antecedents, their successors in the Wesleyan tradition, and contemporary scholarship in the Wesleyan and Evangelical tradition.” The journal’s press release makes the point that examining Wesleys’ contemporaries means “proponents or opponents.”

Four of the five essays in this first annual issue are by research students at Nazarene Theological College or the University of Manchester. Their topics hint at the range of current Wesley research. John Cunningham writes on “Pneumatology Through Correspondence: The Letters of John Wesley and ‘John Smith’ (1745-1748).” J. Russell Frazier’s essay considers “John Wesley’s Covenantal and Dispensational View of Salvation History”—apparently part of his larger research on John Fletcher’s doctrine of dispensations. Randall McElwain writes on “Biblical Language in the Hymns of Charles Wesley,” and D. R. Wilson on “‘Thou shalt walk with me in white’: Afterlife and Vocation in the Ministry of Mary Bosanquet Fletcher.”

The lead article by Henry D. Rack, emeritus senior lecturer at Manchester and author of *Reasonable Enthusiast: John Wesley and the Rise of Methodism*, is titled “A Man of Reason and Religion? John Wesley and the Enlightenment.” Rack notes recent reassessments of the Enlightenment, then revisits the question of John Wesley’s reasonableness or credulity. “Wesley was nearer than has often been allowed to the centre of a spectrum stretching from deists and sceptics at one end to claimants to divine inspiration at the other,” Rack concludes, seconding David Hempton’s assessment that Wesley embodied “creative tension between enlightenment and enthusiasm.” However Rack notes Alexander Knox’s caveat that Wesley “was prone to find supernatural explanations where natural ones were more plausible.”

Rack summarizes Wesley’s views on toleration, education, politics, social reform, and church order. Commenting on Wesley’s ecclesiology, Rack points out the paradox that in forming a voluntary society (largely) within the Church of England, Wesley “was unwittingly organizing a religious body on ecclesiastical principles quite different from those of most existing English churches” and those he himself formally espoused.

Cunningham’s essay concludes that “perceptible inspiration was the essence of John Wesley’s economic pneumatology.” For “since inspiration is perceptible, the nature of the Holy Spirit is self-revelatory. God seeks self-disclosure.” Cunningham sees a practical implication: “In order to be faithful to its namesake, Wesley studies (especially those in theology) must always be framed by his commitment to the relational nature of God’s Holy Spirit.”

J. Russell Frazier examines John Wesley’s understanding of history, particularly his use of the themes of providence, covenant, and dispensation. Wesley’s emphasis on history was part of his case against predestination, providing a “cogent view of history against the Calvinist doctrine of decrees.” Calvinism “seemed to bypass the significance of personal histories of conversions due to its emphasis on divine fiat,” whereas “Wesley’s theology authenticated salvation experiences” embedded in real history. “Wesley developed a theology of history which gave meaning to personal histories as well as the history of salvation within the world.”

In his essay McElwain says the biblical language in Charles Wesley’s hymns was “both the natural outflow of a lifetime of biblical study and a deliberate effort to ‘preach’” through hymnody. The article is part of a larger project examining Charles Wesley’s biblical interpretation.

D. R. Wilson explores Mary Bosanquet Fletcher’s fifty-year ministry in terms of both her spiritual journey—particularly her “belief in the afterlife and concern for the unconverted”—and the complex of liberties and restrictions facing Methodist women. Mary Fletcher’s ministry included “establishing a religious community of women” (on Pietist precedents), “founding an orphanage, becoming one of the first female Methodist

preachers, and playing a central role in the ministry of a local Anglican parish.” Wilson notes correctly that “Neither the Established Church nor Methodism as a movement with the Church, offered the opportunity for women to [fully] pursue a call to either lay or ordained preaching.” In Methodism, restrictions actually increased over time (a familiar pattern in new movements). The essay adds to the growing body of research on Mary Bosanquet Fletcher and other early Methodist women preachers.

The welcome appearance of *Wesley & Methodist Studies* is another sign of the international flowering of Wesley studies today. Where I teach in Toronto half a dozen of competent younger Canadian scholars are pursuing doctoral work in Wesley studies, and similar things are happening elsewhere. Growing international collaboration as represented by this journal speaks well for the future of Wesley studies in the new century.

Wesley & Methodist Studies is now accepting submissions for future publication. Information is available at www.mwrc.ac.uk/wesley-and-methodist-studies/

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