Introduction

RANDY L. MADDOX AND JASON E. VICKERS

John Wesley (1703–91) is a prominent figure in the history of Western Christianity. Educated at Oxford University and ordained a priest in the Church of England, Wesley became one of the leading architects of the Evangelical Revival in eighteenth-century England. The "Methodist" wing of the revival that he led became known for their rigorous spiritual practices, their personal piety, and their concern for the poor, the imprisoned, and the uneducated. Although these traits were ridiculed by some in the early years, by the end of his life, Wesley had emerged as one of the most significant religious figures in England.

Wesley's significance within broader Western Christianity is grounded, in part, in the phenomenal growth and spread of Methodism after his death. What began as a meeting of a few students at Oxford who were seeking spiritual accountability has blossomed into a worldwide movement consisting of more than 100 denominations, which minister to more than 75 million people.[1] When one adds to this the Pentecostal and Charismatic churches that trace their heritage from Methodist roots, the number of Christians who can be regarded as Wesley's spiritual or ecclesiastical descendants is staggering. These descendants have made Wesley part of the physical landscape in churches, private homes, and on university and seminary campuses around the world – preserving his memory in the form of paintings, busts, and life-sized statues (see cover and Figure 1). They have also named churches, schools, coffeehouses, campgrounds, retreat centers, and even their children after him.

Transcending this role as founder of a significant Christian movement, John Wesley has come to be regarded widely as a saint of the church. Already in 1769, upon hearing Wesley preach, a visitor to England from the University of Uppsala in Sweden described him as "the personification of piety" and as "a living representation of the loving

[1] Figures given on the website of the World Methodist Council.

Figure 1. John Wesley, ca. 1784, bust by Enoch Wood. This bust was crafted at a live setting in 1781 or 1784. Nearly fifty years later, the artist told Adam Clarke that Wesley had thought this likeness "much the best" that anyone had attempted. Clarke himself considered this bust "the only proper likeness of this illustrious man." Photograph by Richard P. Heitzenrater.

Apostle John."[2] Numerous Christian believers have been similarly inspired over the past two centuries by Wesley's writings and accounts of his life and ministry. His Methodist heirs eventually adopted an annual liturgical commemoration of both John and his brother Charles.[3] In recent years, the Wesley brothers have been added as well to the liturgical calendars of their own Church of England and some other Protestant communions. Less formally, tens of thousands of Wesley's heirs have gone on pilgrimage to see the places where he lived and carried out his ministry.

This veneration of John Wesley has fostered an abundance of hagiographic literature. In addition to book-length lives of Wesley, there are

[2] The visitor was Professor Johan Henrik Liden; recorded in Heitzenrater, *Elusive Mr. Wesley*, 280–81.

[3] On the history of such commemorations, see Randy L. Maddox, "Celebrating Wesley – When?" *Methodist History* 29 (1991): 63–75.

Figure 2. Wesleyan Centenary picture, representing the rescue of the Founder of Methodism from the fire at the Parsonage House at Epworth, by Henry Perlee Parker (1840). Shown as an etching, courtesy of the Oxford Centre for Methodism and Church History, Oxford Brookes University, Oxford, England.

countless pamphlets, magazine articles, and even theatrical and video presentations of his life and ministry. Add to this the frequent retelling of (often mythical) Wesley stories and quotes in sermons, books, and – more recently – online blogs. Although such materials have kept Wesley's memory alive, they generally adopt a highly selective and uncritical focus on Wesley as spiritual exemplar or model religious organizer. This tendency can be illustrated by two of the best-known paintings of John Wesley's life: the depiction of his childhood rescue from the burning rectory in Epworth by Henry Perlee Parker (Figure 2); and the depiction of his final moments by Marshall Claxton, titled "Holy Triumph, The Death of John Wesley" (Figure 3). These are idealized scenes, which reveal as much about the sensibilities of their nineteenth-century artists as they do about the events they depict.[4] They also obscure as much about Wesley as they reveal. The first suggests that Wesley's sense of religious vocation was owed largely to a providential rescue,

[4] See the analysis in Peter S. Forsaith, *John Wesley – Religious Hero?* (2004).

Figure 3. "Holy Triumph, The Death of John Wesley," by Marshall Claxton (1844). Original painting in the Museum of Methodism, Wesley's Chapel, City Road, London, England. Copyrighted photograph by Graham Portlock, with permission.

invoking the biblical text "Is not this a brand plucked from the burning" (Zech. 3:2). The second epitomizes the Methodist ideal as a "good death," surrounded by family and fellow believers, in anticipation of heavenly blessing. Although there is an element of truth in each, these paintings portray Wesley in isolation from the broader social and religious forces that shaped his life and ministry. Likewise, they neglect many dimensions of Wesley's impact upon his contemporary context and later history.

A central goal of this *Cambridge Companion to John Wesley* is to counter such selective and uncritical presentations of his life and work, by introducing readers to the range of Wesley's writings and activities, placed in historical context. One implication of this goal is that we could not begin directly with Wesley. Instead, the opening chapter (by Jeremy Gregory) is devoted to a summary of recent scholarship – and some

significant new emphases in this scholarship – about Wesley's context: the "long eighteenth century" in Britain. Against this backdrop we turn to a brief survey of Wesley's life and ministry, by Kenneth J. Collins. This is followed by David Hempton's analysis of Wesley's stance, and the impact of early Methodism, on some of the central dynamics of eighteenth-century British life. The core of this *Companion* is then devoted to surveying major dimensions of Wesley's activity and writings. In each case, there is a joint concern to place Wesley's practice in context and to note the impact of his engagement upon the broader context. The focus of each chapter is readily apparent from the titles in the Table of Contents. Perhaps the main thing worth commenting on at this point is the range of the activities included – from the long standard consideration of Wesley as revivalist to the analysis of his lesser known (but equally passionate!) concern to offer medical advice. The final section of the volume provides a sense of the global range of Wesley's impact and some of the current debates over his legacy among his progeny.

HISTORY OF WESLEY STUDIES

The dedication of a *Cambridge Companion* to John Wesley reflects not only a positive estimation of his significance for understanding religious and cultural life in eighteenth-century Britain and beyond, but also recognition of the academic field of Wesley Studies. Popular hagiographic literature related to Wesley has flourished ever since the commemoration of his death in 1791. Scholarly and critical studies have been much rarer. Through the nineteenth century, even those scattered studies that rose above the popular level remained largely parochial in nature – by Methodists, for Methodists. With the transition to the twentieth century, biographical, historical, and theological studies of Wesley tended to become a little more critical, moving beyond reverential recounting of the founder's life or teachings. Moreover, whereas most remained internal studies for Wesleyan traditions, they began to view Wesley within the larger context of Christian history.[5] But, through mid-century, serious study of Wesley continued to be the occasional avocation of a few isolated scholars. This changed dramatically through the second half of the twentieth century.[6]

[5] See the survey of these earlier periods in Heitzenrater, *Elusive Mr. Wesley*, 344–86; and Randy L. Maddox, *Rethinking Wesley's Theology for Contemporary Methodism* (1998), 213–26.

[6] Cf. Albert C. Outler, "A New Future for 'Wesley Studies': An Agenda for 'Phase III'," in M. D. Meeks (ed.), *The Future of the Methodist Theological Traditions* (1985),

An important marker of this emerging change was the volume on *John Wesley* that Albert C. Outler published in 1964, as part of Oxford University Press's Library of Protestant Thought. The book was mainly a representative sampling of Wesley's writings, but it contained critical introductions and notes, which were more advanced than anything that had preceded it. It also sold more copies than any other volume in the series. These combined attributes demonstrated strong interest in rigorous Wesley scholarship, in Methodist circles and beyond. The importance of the volume is underscored by the fact that it remains in print today.

Several other strands contributed to the maturation of Wesley Studies as a scholarly field through the second half of the twentieth century. The Oxford Institute of Methodist Theological Studies began gathering scholars for periodic conferences in 1958.[7] A new scholarly journal on *Methodist History* was launched in 1962. The Wesleyan Theological Society was formed in 1965, issuing its own *Wesleyan Theological Journal*. A Wesleyan Studies Group was organized at the American Academy of Religion in 1982. And, in 1988, Abingdon Press launched the Kingswood Book series, dedicated to Wesleyan and Methodist scholarship. Chairs of Wesley Studies have also been established at such universities as Duke, Southern Methodist, and Vanderbilt, as well as several research centers.[8] In short, the structures of a scholarly field have been put in place.

With this growing network of supportive structures, the field of Wesley Studies has come of age. Over the last two decades, an average of ten new scholarly books or dissertations have appeared annually, as well as numerous journal articles.[9] These studies have covered everything from Wesley's politics and theology to his dietary habits and family life. They have witnessed a number of debates about and increasing sophistication in interpretation of Wesley's writings.[10] Most importantly, there has been an increase in interdisciplinary and contextual studies, as well as a growing interest in Wesley on the part of non-Methodist scholars.[11]

34–52; Henry Derman Rack, "Some Recent Trends in Wesley Scholarship," *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 41.2 (2006): 182–99; and Heitzenrater, *Elusive Mr. Wesley*, 387–94.

[7] For the history and archives of this group see http://www.oxford-institute.org/.

[8] A convenient list of these centers can be found on the web site of the Duke Center for Studies in the Wesleyan tradition: http://www.divinity.duke.edu/wesleyan/research/index.html.

[9] Cf. http://www.divinity.duke.edu/wesleyan/docs/Recent_Dissertations.pdf.

[10] See Randy L. Maddox, "Reading Wesley as Theologian," *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 30.1 (1995): 7–54.

[11] For example, Wesley featured prominently in J. C. D. Clark's landmark work, *English Society: 1660–1832*.

The present *Companion* draws upon and is intended to contribute to this interest.

EDITIONS OF JOHN WESLEY'S WRITINGS

The long standard, and still broadly used, collection of Wesley's *Works* was edited by Thomas Jackson, and released in 1829–31. There are many limitations to this edition. In the first place, it is not complete. Not only was Jackson unaware of some of Wesley's writings, he omitted portions that might reflect badly on Wesley. For example, in the setting after Methodism had separated from the Church of England, Jackson omitted items where Wesley stressed his connection to the Church (such as his extract from the *Homilies*). Secondly, Jackson is not consistent in which edition of various Wesley publications he prints, nor does he indicate variants between editions. Thirdly, Jackson only rarely indicates the sources from which Wesley drew many of his publications. Finally, Jackson's edition provides little introductory material or annotations to set Wesley's writings in context.

One of the most significant expressions of increased scholarly focus on John Wesley in the last half century was the launch in 1960 of the Wesley Works Project, dedicated to producing the first truly critical edition of his writings.[12] It addresses all of the shortcomings of the Jackson edition, and much more. Sixteen of the projected thirty-five volumes are now in print as *The Bicentennial Edition of the Works of John Wesley* (detailed listing in the Select Bibliography). They have become the clear standard for scholarly study of John Wesley.

Until the *Bicentennial Edition* is complete, however, it will be necessary for students to draw as well on the Jackson edition of Wesley's *Works*, as well as some other resources listed in the Select Bibliography. Readers should be aware that there is a CD-ROM version of the major sections of the *Bicentennial Edition* that are in print.[13] For convenience, this CD-ROM also includes the complete Jackson edition, but in a format that is not paginated. Providence House Publishers sells a CD-ROM of the Jackson edition that reflects the pagination of the print format. Readers can also find the Jackson edition online in several locations.[14]

[12] See Frank Baker, "The Oxford Edition of Wesley's Works and Its Text," in K. E. Rowe (ed.), *The Place of Wesley in the Christian Tradition* (1976), 117–33.

[13] The current CD-ROM does not include every volume published, only completed sections, so it contains the four volumes of *Sermons*, the seven volumes of *Journals*, and the *Collection of Hymns* (vol. 7).

[14] The best organized site for this and other public-domain Wesley texts is the Wesley Center at Northwest Nazarene University: http://wesley.nnu.edu/.

JOHN AND CHARLES WESLEY

One of the challenges of this project has been to avoid extended treatments of Charles Wesley (1707–88) in this study of his brother John. The brothers were personally close, and worked together closely in the Methodist branch of the Evangelical Revival, particularly from 1739 to 1749 (when Charles married and restricted his traveling).[15] There were also broad areas of agreement between the brothers on matters of doctrine, so that hymns of Charles are often the best illustrations of theological points that John makes in sermons.

Precisely because they were so close, consideration of Charles is particularly helpful on points where the brothers stood in some tension. A good example is their difference concerning the potential of a split between Methodists and the Church of England. Charles was clearly the stronger "Church Methodist."[16] He was committed to the revival of *the Church of England*, whereas John was committed to the *revival* of the Church of England. This difference played over into their disagreements on other topics, such as the use of lay preachers.[17] Another area of growing difference between the brothers was their reaction to claims of instantaneous Christian Perfection or entire sanctification, particularly after the controversy of the 1760s.[18]

Given these important points of agreement and tension, readers will find many passing references to Charles Wesley in this volume. But, we have resisted extended treatment, precisely because Charles deserves study in his own right. For too long he has been reduced to John's sidekick. This is turning around, with the organization of the Charles Wesley Society (in 1990) and growing publication of his writings in scholarly editions.[19] We look forward to the day when a similar *Companion* to Charles Wesley is produced.

[15] See John A. Newton, "Brothers in Arms: The Partnership of John And Charles Wesley," in K. G. C. Newport & T. A. Campbell (eds.), *Charles Wesley: Life, Literature, and Legacy* (2007), 58–69.

[16] This is the thesis of Gareth Lloyd, *Charles Wesley and the Struggle for Methodist Identity* (2007).

[17] Richard P. Heitzenrater, "Purge the Preachers: The Wesleys and Quality Control," in Newport & Campbell, *Charles Wesley*, 486–514.

[18] See particularly John R. Tyson, *Charles Wesley on Sanctification* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986); and S. T. Kimbrough, Jr., "Charles Wesley and the Journey of Sanctification," *Evangelical Journal* 16 (1998): 49–75.

[19] Kenneth G. C. Newport. (ed.), *The Sermons of Charles Wesley: A Critical Edition with Introduction and Notes* (2001); and S T Kimbrough, Jr. & Kenneth G. C. Newport (eds.), *The Manuscript Journal of the Rev. Charles Wesley, M.A.*, 2 vols. (2008). For an online critical edition of his poetry, see: http://www.divinity.duke.edu/wesleyan/texts/index.html.

THE CONTRIBUTION OF RICHARD P. HEITZENRATER TO WESLEY STUDIES

It remains only for us to explain the dedication of this book to Richard P. Heitzenrater. Readers will find his name recurring in discussion and notes throughout the volume. This is because no one in the present generation has contributed more to the rigorous study of John or Charles Wesley, or the establishment of the field of Wesley Studies. It is no accident that Dick (as all soon learn to call him) has held the chairs in Wesley Studies at both Southern Methodist University and Duke University.

Heitzenrater is perhaps best known for "breaking the code" of Wesley's private diaries, opening this rich resource to scholars. His textual expertise is reflected in his selection as general editor of the Wesley Works Project. His networking and organization skills are reflected in his roles as the organizing chair of the Wesleyan Studies Working Group of the AAR and as a co-convener of the Wesley Studies working group of the Oxford Institute for Methodist Theological Studies. These skills are also appreciated more broadly, as reflected in his election in 2009 as President of the American Society of Church History.

In addition to his editorial contribution to *John Wesley's Sermons: An Anthology* (with Albert C. Outler) and the seven volumes of Wesley's *Journal & Diaries* in the *Bicentennial Edition* (with W. Reginald Ward), Heitzenrater has published several influential secondary studies of John Wesley and early Methodism, including *Wesley and the People Called Methodists*, *The Elusive Mr. Wesley*, *Diary of an Oxford Methodist*, *Mirror and Memory*, and *The Poor and the People Called Methodists*.

The specific occasion for this dedication is Dick's seventieth birthday and retirement as a William Kellon Quick Professor of Church History and Wesley Studies at the Divinity School, Duke University. All students of Wesley will join us in celebrating his career and his contribution.

Part I

Wesley's context