

R. Matthew Sigler. *Methodist Worship: Mediating the Wesleyan Liturgical Heritage*. London and New York: Routledge, 2019. 248 pages. \$103.20.

R. Matthew Sigler's *Methodist Worship: Mediating the Wesleyan Liturgical Heritage* adds to the burgeoning Routledge Methodist Studies Series. To date, with the exception of hymn studies by Martin V. Clarke and Julie A. Lunn, Sigler's monograph offers the most sustained examination of Methodist worship in the bunch. Yet practices are not his focus; intellectual history is. The book begins with an historical artifact—an advertisement for a 1970 contemporary worship service “designed with today's young adult in mind”—and discusses how its concerns and hopes still ring true for many Methodist worship leaders two generations later. Sigler builds upon that observation to explore an understanding of how Methodist worship balances “form and freedom” and “distinction and inculturation” by tracing the development of Methodist liturgical scholarship—what Sigler calls “liturgical biographies”—from three key figures: 1) Thomas Osmund Sumners (1812-1882), 2) Nolan Bailey Harmon (1892-1993), and 3) James F. White (1932-2004). Therefore, the subtitle of the book is a key preview of what lies within its pages.

I cannot think of a Methodist worship book that crafts a scholarly genealogy like Sigler has. The synthetic work of *Methodist Worship* is a notable achievement, and it belongs on the shelf of any serious student or researcher of Methodist worship. For example, I can imagine the book included in doctoral exam bibliographies and within upper level seminars of Methodist liturgical thought. For readers more broadly interested in Protestant liturgy and worship, *Methodist Worship* provides a focused, chronological portraiture of three leading white men who helped to define what Methodist worship has been, is, and should and can be. Sigler's attention to Sumners as an overlooked foundational figure of Methodist worship scholarship is thorough and illuminating as a historical touchpoint for students and teachers of Methodist liturgy looking for an ally who takes a moderate stance with regard to form and freedom in Methodist worship. Sigler's retrieval of Sumners also challenges earlier claims from Russell E. Richey, Kenneth E. Rowe, and Jean Miller Schmidt that Methodist liturgical scholarship began with Nolan Harmon's *Rites and Ritual of Episcopal Methodism* in 1926 (24). Sigler writes, “Sumners embodies the tension between form and freedom in Methodist worship...yet he also made plain his desire for flexibility in the use of those forms” (70). Sigler also reminds readers familiar with the titanic scholarship of White that White was not doctrinaire. From the 1990s onward, White began to relax his earlier stances and “suggest that it is better to speak, phenomenologically, of underlying ‘spiritualities’ within American worship tradition” (163). Drawing from interviews with Don Saliers as well as White's own later writings and speeches, Sigler states of White:

The tension between his own liturgical preferences and his appreciation for vast liturgical variety was a perpetual one within White. He was enough of a liturgical theologian to have strong sensibilities about worship but the stronger side—the liturgical historian in him—would not allow him to overlook the multiplicity of forms within Christian worship. He maintained this conviction through to the end of his career (164).

Sigler concludes *Methodist Worship* by embracing the plurality of Methodist worship, and locating it within what seems like a “growing liturgical crisis” that can be addressed by the work of Sumners, Harmon, and White. Their writings point toward a liturgical piety that emphasizes the importance of knowing Methodist liturgical heritage, the necessity of

inculturation, the delicate balance of personal and corporate dimensions and desires of worship, and envisioning form and freedom as two sides of the same coin, all anchors for expressing recognizably Methodist worship in any age (200-210).

Still, liturgical scholarship related to large-membership Methodist church worship and other traditions of Wesleyan heritage such as the Christian Methodist Episcopal Church, African Methodist Episcopal Methodist Church, the Korean Methodist Church, and the Hispanic/Latino and Native American Ministries of the United Methodist Church is missing. Granted, such scholarly resources are scarce. Sigler even notes that his work would “look different” if laity, women, or persons of color” were featured more prominently (210). That said, it still seems like *Methodist Worship* also indicates how badly we need more varied Methodist liturgical scholarship. That is not only a matter of production, but also institutional and peer reception. *Methodist Worship* privileges John Wesley’s *Sunday Service of Methodists in North America* and its subsequent interpreters. Yet congregational use of the *Sunday Service* is hard to determine. Arguably, scholars cherish it most.

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