

edition reminds us that the Catholic Enlightenment was concerned with more than finance and matters of church and state.

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A Will to Choose: The Origins of African American Methodism.

By **J. Gordon Melton**. Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield, 2006.

xii + 319 pp. \$80.00 cloth; \$29.95 paper.

Of the writing of books on African American Methodism there will be no end, but this book is well worth paying attention to. This book has been a labor of love, the culmination of a forty-two-year project by J. Gordon Melton in searching out and making sense of many scattered and not easily accessible sources. Melton shares with many predecessors a historiographical tradition that reaches back to such nineteenth-century authors as Christopher Rush, Daniel Payne, and Nathan Bangs, a praiseworthy care for detail, and a sense that he has a story that is important enough to tell clearly and vividly. Iconic personalities such as Sojourner Truth and Frederick Douglass are present in these pages, but so are persons who were little known or unknown before Melton's writing, such as Punch, a convert of Francis Asbury's who disappeared into the hinterland of South Carolina where he initiated and patiently nurtured a worshipping community of slave Methodists who numbered in the hundreds before Methodist clergy rediscovered him some decades later, and Jane Lee, a Methodist prayer leader in Louisiana who ministered faithfully to her fellow slaves despite the objections of her Catholic master.

Most writing on African American Methodism focuses on individual denominations, with the largest of the independent black Methodist denominations, the African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church, garnering the most attention of all. Melton's work is an exception. He is interested in the interrelationships of the various forms of black Methodism. Thus, for example, he is not only interested in Richard Allen, the founder of the AME Church, but also Lunar Brown, a black Methodist contemporary of Allen's who worked alongside him in the Free African Society but who remained connected with the Zoar Methodist Church, a congregation with a significant black membership that remained in connection with the Methodist Episcopal (ME) Church. While the Lunar Browns of black church history have received less historical scrutiny than the Richard Allens, in many locations

they were far more numerous. Some of Melton's most interesting writing concerns the many reasons that many black Methodists chose not to break with the predominantly white denomination. His list includes preserving long-term relationships with important patrons; wanting to protect a certain orientation to ecclesiastical power; hoping that white Methodists would return to their egalitarian and anti-slavery principles set at the formation of the church in the 1780s; and refusing to give in to white stereotypes. Melton emphasizes that he is not taking sides in the dispute between the African Americans who stayed in the ME Church and those who left. In fact, "both groups had a prosperous future ahead of them" (71). His purpose is simply to ensure that both stories are told.

Melton is concerned that historical accounts of black Methodism that focus exclusively on independent black denominations will not take adequate account of African American agency. He is at pains to emphasize that African American agency in the development of American Methodism is present from the moment that Methodism first appeared on American soil in the 1760s. What he aims to trace in all of its glory and struggles is a tradition of African American leadership and action that was exercised continuously since that time, sometimes in cooperation with and sometimes in antagonism or opposition to white leadership and action. He succeeds remarkably well.

In his assertively pushing the black Methodist envelope, one finds surprising omissions. While it is mentioned, for instance, that Nat Turner, leader of an 1831 slave revolt, had a Methodist master early in life and preached to a black audience outside a Methodist church a week before he began his revolt, Melton nowhere mentions that Turner was a lay Baptist minister. In more than one place, Melton refers to Frederick Douglass's affiliation with the African Methodist Episcopal Zion (AMEZ) Church shortly after his escape from slavery. But Douglass's growing religious skepticism later in life is not mentioned; his relinquishing ministerial credentials in 1845 is mentioned in one line, without any emphasis or explanation. Melton's consummate skill in relating different kinds of black Methodism to one another is unfortunately not matched with a similar level of skill in relating black Methodism to other varieties of black religious expression.

The chronological and geographical sweep of Melton's work is admirably broad, from the early work by the Moravians with Africans in the Caribbean in the 1730s, switching in the 1760s to the foundations of Methodism, black and white, in North America. He provides full coverage of the 1760s to the 1860s; the endpoint of the narrative looks at the effects of the aftermath of emancipation in the latter half of the 1860s. As one would expect, his treatment is much more thorough in some geographical regions than others; his portrayal of black church growth in the Delaware and Chesapeake river valleys is especially good. His treatment of the Reconstruction period

is more fragmentary than his discussion of the establishment of the African Union, AME, and AMEZ churches between 1813 and 1822; one page on the establishment of the Colored Methodist Episcopal Church in the South, culminating in an 1870 organizing conference, is too little to give a sense of the dynamics of that important period of denominational formation. But his argument and exposition are excellent in the areas where his knowledge and expertise are concentrated.

Occasionally this reviewer wished for a more thorough copyediting job. For example, Richard Allen's birth was in 1760, not in 1780 (46); and Melton variously gives or implies a birth date for the minister Elizabeth of 1776, or a decade earlier (197–9). At the time of Elizabeth's death in 1866, she claimed to be one hundred years old; whether that is credible is another matter, but Melton never takes a clear stand on the issue. Rebecca Cox Jackson left the AME Church to join the Shakers, not the Quakers (195). But let us put these more minor concerns aside.

There is much to recommend this work, including Melton's vivid, clear narrative, his relentless digging in out-of-the-way source materials, his analytical and integrative abilities, and, in particular, his thoroughgoing concern to elucidate the relationships between the various strands of black Methodism. This book is an important advance in black Methodist historiography, and it should be quite useful for scholars of American religion and of early American history.

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Lining out the Word: Dr. Watts Hymn Singing in the Music of Black Americans. By **William T. Dargan.** Music of the African Diaspora 8.

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\$45.00 cloth.

William Dargan's *Lining out the Word* breaks new ground in the scholarship on black sacred music. While there are many now-classic studies of black sacred music such as those done by John Wesley Work, Eileen Southern, Clarence Boyer, and Anthony Heilbut, *Lining out the Word* differs from these in important and contributive ways in terms of methodology, purpose, and focus.

The classic studies were primarily historical, tracing the development and social meaning of black sacred music starting from its African and slave