

## FOREWORD

When one lectures in a large class on topics like Methodist history and Wesleyan theology, you frequently wonder what the students are typing (or watching!) on their laptops, or doodling on the paper in front of them. I was never privy to Charlie Baber's doodles during his time in my class at Duke Divinity School, but I hope there was an occasional forerunner of his Wesley Bros comics that are collected in this volume. I hope this because it would mean that Charlie caught from the class not only some information about John and Charles Wesley and early Methodism but—more importantly—he imbibed some of their missional spirit!

As they experienced more fully the “heavenly healing light” of God’s love shed abroad in their hearts by the Holy Spirit, nothing mattered more to Charles or John than inviting others into this “way of salvation.” And nothing united the brothers more than the conviction that this invitation should be offered to *all*. From the earliest days of the Methodist revival, the Wesley brothers had a particular concern to share this invitation with those who were not being reached through the ordinary channels of weekly worship in the established Church. Nudged by the Spirit, their ministry soon focused in “more vile” settings and forms than regular Anglican clergy. They adopted a style of open-air preaching that could gain the attention of passing workers, who rarely had time or a sense of welcome to enter the parish church. They appropriated from Christian groups outside of the Church of England the regular use of communal hymn-singing, enriching this practice with a growing body of their own hymns, so that Methodists were soon known as “the singing people.” And they embraced the newest forms of mass media (cheap tracts and—a bit later—magazines), in hope of sharing God’s “amazing love” in every house and cranny of their contemporary British setting.

I am confident that the Wesley brothers would recognize their missional spirit, with its openness to new forms of sharing God’s saving concern, in this collection of cartoons! To be sure, they would likely be surprised by it as well, since the cartoonists of their day (like William Hogarth) used this form of expression mainly to satirize and dismiss the Methodists. But as they paged through this collection Charles and John would recognize continuing echoes of their deep love for the church (even as they chafed at its foibles and resistance to new winds of the Spirit), their strong conviction that God’s love is offered to *all* (particularly those excluded by the typical church), their central affirmation that God’s saving work reaches beyond what is “vulgarly understood” (forgiveness of sins and going to heaven) to include an *anticipation* of “heaven below” in renewal of our lives and communities, and their hard-won appreciation for the centrality of the means of grace to Christian life.

I also have no doubt that John and Charles (and those of us who are Wesley scholars) could find places in the collection to raise a caveat (for example, I tend to read their brother Samuel in a more positive light). This is due largely to the centrality of caricature to cartooning. Cartoons bring clarity to their specific theme by emphasizing certain traits, acts, or settings at the expense of others. While this may raise concern for some about proper historical nuance, it is precisely what may capture the attention of many others—who dismiss or simply ignore more typical forms of sharing the story and teachings of the Wesley brothers. In particular, it is a promising means for engaging a generation raised on Marvel comics, smart phones, etc.

The genre of cartoons is particularly promising for engaging contemporary youth. It did not take long in my academic life to learn that the audience I had been least prepared to engage was teen groups. They found my clearly outlined lectures boring and my illustrations passe! How I wish I had then a resource like this collection. And how I appreciate the gifts and passion for ministry of Charlie Baber, which are reflected in the collection! I commend it gladly and hope it will find broad use individually, in youth ministry, and among all who are youthful enough at heart to consider what the Wesley brothers and Yoda might have in common!