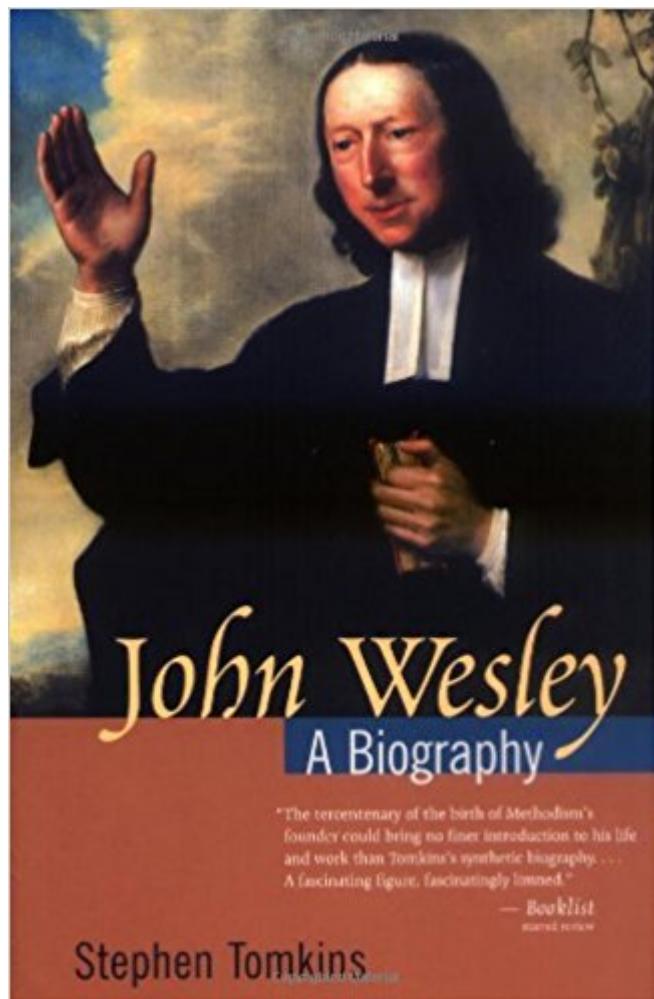


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# John Wesley: A Biography



## Synopsis

A compelling portrait of the father of Methodism. The life and work of John Wesley (1703-1791) has had an enormous influence on modern Christianity, not least for his role as father of the Methodist church. John Wesley is a popular biography of the great figure, which brings his career and ideas alive for a new generation. Written with verve and grounded in thorough research, the book tells the story of Wesley's colorful and dramatic life. Stephen Tomkins chronicles Wesley's family background and early childhood, his school and university career, and his adult life as a religious leader in England. Throughout this engaging portrait, Tomkins pauses to explore a number of key issues in Wesley's increasingly rich religious views, including the renunciation of wealth and the role of women in church life. The volume concludes with an important assessment of Wesley's abiding influence both in his own country and abroad. Superbly crafted, John Wesley will interest those from the Methodist tradition as well as all general readers of church history.

## Book Information

Paperback: 208 pages

Publisher: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company (July 1, 2003)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0802824994

ISBN-13: 978-0802824998

Product Dimensions: 6.1 x 0.6 x 9 inches

Shipping Weight: 9.6 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.2 out of 5 stars 35 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #142,870 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #25 in Books > Christian Books & Bibles > Christian Denominations & Sects > Protestantism > Methodist #866 in Books > Biographies & Memoirs > Leaders & Notable People > Religious #29269 in Books > Religion & Spirituality

## Customer Reviews

The tricentenary of the birth of Methodism's founder could bring no finer introduction to his life and work than Tomkins' synthetic biography. Drawing upon the best previous biographies, Wesley's letters and published journal, and the writings of Wesley's closest associates, Tomkins presents a keenly engaging portrait of a great man full of contradictoriness. Wesley (1703-91) insisted he was loyal to the Church of England yet consented to his followers setting up establishments and engaging in practices that flouted Anglican authority. Perhaps he just didn't see himself as a leader,

in which case it is odd that Methodism was legally a sole proprietorship for most of his life; there were frequent general conferences, but Wesley held the purse strings and organizational reins. He was no hypocrite, especially about money; he allowed himself only the meagerest of livings, giving the rest of what became substantial earnings to evangelism and the poor, and preaching to the end against wealth. His steadfastness against riches stands in stark contrast, however, to his stance about marriage, which vacillated between affirming celibacy and approving conjugality. Of course, his relations with women and his late marriage were fraught with ambivalence and misunderstanding. For all of his Janus-like behavior, he altered the face of Christianity in the West by inspiring modern evangelicalism and Pentecostalism. A fascinating figure, fascinatingly limned.

Ray OlsonCopyright © American Library Association. All rights reserved

The life and work of John Wesley (1703-1791) have had an enormous influence on modern Christianity, including his role as founding father of the Methodists, now 33 million strong worldwide. In this lively new biography journalist Stephen Tomkins narrates the story of Wesley's colorful and dramatic life for a new generation. Writing with verve and a light, sure touch, Tomkins follows Wesley from his childhood at Epworth rectory through his schooling and university career at Oxford to his mission to Georgia, his conversion in 1738, and finally his life as a religious leader in England. Preaching in numerous villages, towns, and cities, Wesley and his followers faced intense and savage persecution, but their missions were also accompanied by extraordinary phenomena such as convulsions, laughter, and healings. In the course of his compelling narrative Tomkins examines Wesley's relationships with key people in his life, including his powerful and austere mother, Susanna, and his hymn-writing brother, Charles. Tomkins also explores key issues in Wesley's life, such as his renunciation of wealth and his attitude toward women, concluding with an assessment of Wesley's ongoing influence both in his own country and abroad. Superbly crafted, grounded in thorough research, and published in the 300th year of Wesley's birth, this book will appeal to students of Wesley, people from the Methodist tradition, and general readers interested in church history.

I wanted a thorough insight into the doctrines and life of the John Wesley, the great English man, and founder of the Methodist Church. I wanted it presented through a very objective pair of lenses. In choosing to read about Wesley, I recognized that history already passed its judgment on him, I sought only to examine the facts on which this judgment is based. In selecting a biography, I pointedly tried to avoid biographies from star struck fans of Wesley who could fall into the temptation

of purging their subject of the many human foibles that make extra-ordinary lives attractive to me. I definitely wanted to stay away from those hacks who feel a deep duty to cut greatness to size, and dampen the auspicious aura that history casts on the present with their irreverent pen. After carefully reviewing many, I decided that ROY HATTERSLEY's "John Wesley: A brand from the Burning" fell in the later category, and Paul Wesley's "Recapturing the Wesleys' Vision: An Introduction to the Faith of John and Charles Wesley" may fall too far into the later rank. Stephen Tomkin's *John Wesley: A Biography* was my unfortunate choice. *John Wesley - A Biography* comes across more as a critique of Wesley's life than a biography. The book provides a lot of information in its two hundred pages; only, the information is time after time introduced merely as prelude to many scathing psychoanalysis of the man. Mr. Tomkins seems to prod into his subject's mind (centuries after the fact) for the singular purpose of finding reasons to question the motives behind many of the decisions taken by Wesley (see what the writer wrote about Wesley's ability to distinguish between biography and hagiography in Chapter Seven: The Wilderness Georgia, as one example in a book froth with cynical editorializing.) A few times the writer boldly questions the veracity of some of the categorical claims of his subject, only to offer equally unconvincing reasons that Wesley would lie. The effect of this practice on the book is to effectively inject the writer's thoughts into the narrative in a noticeably intrusive manner. Essentially, it became a book about the fundamental soundness of Tomkins as much as it was about Wesley. This book may appeal to those interested in Wesley in much the same way as a surgeon is interested in his patients. It may appeal to the student of dialectics, but my guess is that few Christians will find the style tasteful. It was neither objective, nor particularly insightful.

Used this book for a class on John Wesley. The author had some good information, but makes reference to modern things such as a Toronto incident, without explaining what it was. If using this book, you have to be ready to do a lot of supplemental research. Also, the author refers to Wesley's wife as Molly, yet every other biography, as well as Wesley's journals, refer to her as Mary. Tompkins seems to want to make his own twist without doing extensive research or referencing.

Since I grew up in the Catholic Church I really did not know anything about John Wesley. I was very surprised how much influence Wesley had on the charismatic movement. His difficulties with women really brought him down to the level of the rest of us! I am mostly impressed with his dedication to what he deemed his "calling." He truly believed that "perfection" was attainable during one's lifetime through diligence and discipline. And Wesley was a great example of both! He often wrote and read

as he traveled by horseback throughout the countryside. It was also interesting to learn the influence that John and especially his brother Charles had on the hymns used even in the churches of today. Wesley was a pragmatist and often decided to use "what worked best" in the work of the Lord. He preached to the common people, valued women, and sought out the underclasses with a saving message. John Wesley is truly one of the shapers of modern Christianity.

Great!

John Wesley biographies are rarely page-turners, but I found this to be a surprisingly entertaining read. I particularly appreciate the focus on Wesley's relationships. The contextualization of "Christian perfection" was particularly helpful.

I purchased for several members of a study group. Thank you for helping us locate copies of this out-of-print book.

May not be in the glowing colours that some might write of John Wesley, but seemingly, bearing in mind the 300+ years from which we are viewing the man, a well researched and honest evaluation of the man, his work, and his faith

Excellent BOOK!!!

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