

**Timetables of History for Students of Methodism**

by Rex D. Matthews (Abingdon Press, 2007  
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Rex Matthews, Visiting Assistant Professor of Historical Theology at Candler, has compiled a fascinating compendium of dates and facts, three hundred and four years worth, to be precise. From 1700 through 2004, Matthews' timetables document developments in eight categories: World History and Politics; American History and Politics; Science, Medicine and Technology; Daily Life, Popular Culture and Entertainment; Education, Literature and the Fine Arts; Religion, Theology, Philosophy and Psychology; American and United Methodism; and, British and World Methodism. And if you don't think that sounds fun, you're not paying attention. Modeled on Berhard Grun's classic "Timetables of History", this new work provides teachers of Methodist history and church life a wonderfully concise, usable, and accessible treasure chest of data. The book comes with a searchable CD-ROM to facilitate exploration of names, events and themes.

These seemingly simple and straightforward charts reveal a myriad of intriguing patterns and relationships. Coincidence? Providence? Happenstance? Grand scheme? Cause and effect? Matthews' purpose is neither to interpret nor to inter-relate, but to present--and

in so doing, provide rich contextualization in multi-layered historical frameworks. And while scholars may debate whether or not we suffer greater historical amnesia now than in generations past, students of all ages and interests will be rewarded and intrigued by this work.

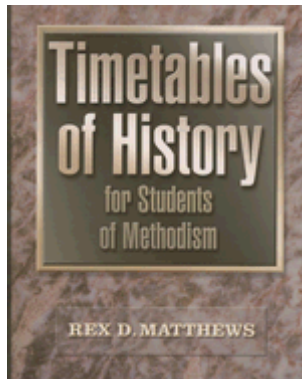
All major developments within Methodism can be seen in the larger historical, social, political and cultural contexts in which they occurred, including, for example, the abolition of slavery, the ordination of women, race relations within the UMC, and so forth. The reader quickly realized that these contexts shape not only developments within the denomination at large, but how ministry is conducted on the local scene. For example, as a pastor constantly exploring how to work with new forms of technology in the ministries of the local church, I was astonished to be reminded that direct-dial coast-to-coast telephone service in the US began in the year of my birth. What is often blithely referred to as “the increasingly rapid rate of change” is made graphically evident—with all the subsequent challenges that entails.

Matthews’ aim in this text is to be illustrative rather than comprehensive. Items included are, by their very nature, dependent in part on the interests of the author. And in an increasingly global church and globalized world, subsequent or additional volumes might benefit from a broader cultural scope and perspective. Yet this is a book that by its very nature invites additions and amplification. Its intriguing lists propel the inquisitive reader towards further research and exploration.

This is a book for college and seminary professors, for high school teachers of religion, for Sunday School teachers of children, youth and adults. It is a book for preachers and church musicians. It should be in every church library. This is a book for people who think history is boring as well as for those who delight in rich historical detail and story. It is a book to be savored and returned to again and again. And this is a book for all who love the church and yearn to be part of perfecting its mission and its life.

Most importantly, this is a book for those who take seriously the purpose of The United Methodist Church: “to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.” To be effective transformers of the world, we United Methodists must know ourselves to be part of and participants in this world in which we live and serve, in all its marvelous complexity, contradiction, heartache, achievement, failure, promise, and generative creativity. Matthews’ “Timetables” leave you peering into the future, straining to see what

the next pages will document, and vowing to make the items to be listed in subsequent church columns worthy and bold.



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