"We are the church": the Romanization of United Methodism, 1945-1988

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Abstract
In his 1994 Presidential Address to the American Society of Church History, Nathan O. Hatch described the puzzling lack of attention given to American Methodism by religious and general historians. Methodism in early American history has received considerable attention and, more recently, nineteenth-century American Methodism has been drawing more attention. But recent American Methodism is still largely unexplored. Frederick A. Norwood published the last comprehensive survey of American Methodism in 1974, which included the first three-quarters of the twentieth century. Although he included a discussion of the impact of the ecumenical context, Norwood could not have predicted the changes to occur in the practice of Methodist worship. This dissertation is a study of the changes in Methodist worship in the twentieth century in theological and ecumenical context. While other works have explored the current context of Methodist worship, this work explores the theological and ecumenical factors driving liturgical change. A focus of this study is on the committee processes, the debates in the denomination's quadrennial general conference, and the persons leading the reform efforts. Its thesis is that American Methodism was "Romanized" in the process of liturgical reform, so that Methodist worship in 1988 intentionally looked more like Roman Catholic worship than like nineteenth-century Methodist worship. Of the persons who epitomize the changes in American Methodism, Robert E. Cushman is a prime focus of this dissertation. Dean of the Divinity School of Duke University through the 1960s, observer at Vatican II, and founding member of the Wesley Works project, Cushman rejected the liberal evangelical theology of early twentieth-century Methodism and constructed a neo-Wesleyan theology. Cushman emphasized liturgy and sacraments and supported the process of liturgical reform. This subject of this dissertation begins with Methodist merger in 1939 and ends with the publication of the 1988 United Methodist Hymnal. Divided chronology into periods that correspond with the publication of hymnals and worship books, this work looks only at the body of American Methodism that became the United Methodist Church.

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