W. B. Pope “stands out as one of the towering figures in all of Methodist theology who with remarkable fidelity recaptured the essence of Wesley’s theology,” according to Robert E. Chiles. In 1809 three Methodist preachers went to Plymouth in England and a revival broke out in the nearby village of Turnchapel. A Methodist society was organized from five young men who were converted there. Eventually, all of them became preachers or missionaries. John Pope eventually moved to Nova Scotia, where his son William Burt was born on February 19, 1822. Later that year the family moved to the West Indies as missionaries.

When John’s brother died, the family had to move to England in 1826 to manage his estate. W. B. was educated in England under John Hannah. Pope would later edit Hannah’s theological lectures for publication as an act of loyalty and generosity. Pope entered the Methodist ministry in 1841 and taught at Didsbury Wesleyan College in Manchester from 1867-1886. He was elected president of the Bristol Methodist Conference in 1877. He was described as shy and retiring. His daily schedule set aside two hours for Hebrew, Greek, and Latin, three hours for theological study, and one hour for mathematics, with German, history, and biography filling in discretionary time.

In 1846 he published an English translation of a German commentary on 1 John by Erich Haupt. In 1859 he translated J. H. A. Ebrard’s commentary on 1 John and Rudolf Stier’s commentary on James. All three were conservative, evangelical German theologians who upheld supernatural revelation against the Tubingen school of rationalists. In 1873 he translated from German, *Doctrines and Confessions of Christendom* by Georg Benedikt Winer. Then from 1875-1876 he produced his greatest work, the three-volume *A Compendium of Christian Theology*.

Thomas Langford wrote, “There is little in the *Compendium* that differs from Wesley, Clarke, or Watson. The same issues are discussed and similar conclusions are reached. The distinctive quality of Pope’s writing lay in his style of expression, his lucidity, and his completeness. He carried out the Wesleyan emphasis and his chief contribution was perhaps his continuation of the doctrine of the universal range of God’s gracious redemptive activity, which is free in all, to all, and for all.

Yet his biographer, R. W. Moss, described Pope as one whose intellectual sympathies were mainly with the past. Pope was not impressed with Charles Darwin nor in the higher criticism which applied evolutionary theory to the development of Scripture. Pope declared that Methodism “preached the testimony of the Holy Ghost in the heart of the believer as the common prerogative; and further, the attainableness in this life of a state of entire sanctification and acceptableness in the sight of God.” It was also reported that during the communion services he led, the spiritual power was sometimes almost overwhelming. Men not easily moved broke down and sobbed aloud. “Dr. Pope taught his men theology, but he led them also into the very presence of God.”

The irony is that while Pope is commonly described as the prince of Wesleyan theologians, nothing he wrote is in print (however Logos Bible Software has eight volumes of Pope for sale in electronic format). Moss said he stood as a theologian at the parting of the ways. While Pope wrote the greatest exposition of Wesleyan doctrine, it came at a time when Methodism was departing from Wesley.

Fred Sanders, a systematic theologian at Biola University, found a dilapidated set of Pope’s *Compendium* at a used book store and bought them “to see what this fellow was all about.” Sanders said that before he was very far into the first volume Pope had made his head spin. He declared that Pope handled theological themes as if they were holy things. He listed it as one of his top ten ranked books. On another website he has asked to finish this sentence, “You haven’t really

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considered Wesleyanism unless you've read . . ." Sanders then referenced Pope and said, "I think is one of the finest theological minds in Protestant history, sadly neglected."

Here is a bibliography of Dr. Pope's major works:
1863 - Discourses on the Kingdom and Reign of Christ
1871 - Discourse on the Person of Christ
1875 - A Compendium of Christian Theology (posted on our college website)
1876 - Memoir of the Late James Hald
1876 - The Prayers of St. Paul
1878 - Sermons, Addresses, and Charges
1880 - Discourses on the Lordship of the Incarnate Redeemer
1884 - A Higher Catechism of Theology
1884 - Commentary on Ezra and Nehemiah in Ellicott's Commentary on the Whole Bible
1885 - The Inward Witness

You will notice that Pope lived another eighteen years after his final book. His final years were wretched years of mental depression during which he took slight interest in passing events and found little consolation in either friends or books. He had nine children. He lost two of them in infancy and never got over it. The sight of a winding funeral was unbearable and any death in the circle of his friends reopened the sore. Every sunset was apt to bring pain.

By mid-life some of these tendencies had begun to surface. On occasions when he traveled he was overcome with a sense of loneliness that lingered for weeks afterward. This feeling tended to master him increasingly. At sixty-three he tried short periods of rest as he neared a breakdown. During these periods of rest he instructed a neighbor who looked after him not to talk of books or sermons. He found relief in observing nature. The depression, encouraged by predisposition and bodily sickness, continued to deepen and thus he retired from active ministry the following year. The rest of his life was spent in quiet seclusion.

His biographer also referred to tendencies which had been inherited and physical disease which did not yield to treatment. He was a shy man and subject to feelings of loneliness. Eventually he lost hold of reality in unbroken spiritual gloom and he retired at sixty-four from active service as a professor of theology.

None of his old haunts knew him any more; intercourse with his friends was avoided, and the solace of books failed him. He took a slight interest in the passing events of the day, and would at times send messages of greeting. To the pages of a small Greek Testament he turned now and again with symptoms of aspiration, if not of relief; but around his soul was drawn a thick curtain, through which no man was allowed to pass, and above his head the light was covered with clouds.

While this seems like such a troubling way to honor so great a theologian, the fact is that we are all earthen vessels (2 Corinthians 4:7). Yes, perhaps Pope studied too hard. But I have not found that to be a very common problem! Some of my students are not taking any chances, however! Seriously, none of us know how our lives will end. But we have today and one of the best things you can do for your heart and your mind is to read after this prince of Wesleyan theology.