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## Preface

Most of the chapters that follow were presented originally to the Sixth Oxford Institute on Methodist Theological Studies, held at Lincoln College, Oxford, in the summer of 1977. More than ninety theologians, historians, and others interested in theological education, from twenty-two nations of the first, second, and third worlds, assembled under the auspices of the World Methodist Council to reflect on the relationship of the Wesleyan heritage to the liberation theologies of today.

With its ivied walls, manicured lawns, and aura of tradition, Oxford University may have seemed an incongruous setting in which to deal with issues of liberation and revolution. Yet two-and-a-half centuries earlier, when John Wesley was a tutor at Lincoln College, the Holy Club provided the seedbed for another kind of revolution—one not unrelated historically to the yearnings and struggles of the oppressed, as these chapters will demonstrate.

The reader will find in these pages no uniform evaluation of Wesley, his doctrines, or his movement. The comparison with modern-day liberation theologies leads to very real differences of opinion—and these differences have not been papered over but left in their original lively and provocative form, in the hope of stimulating further reflection, research, and discussion.

*Sanctification and Liberation* joins those volumes that have emerged from previous sessions of the Institute under

the able editorship of Dow Kirkpatrick: *The Doctrine of the Church* (1964), *The Finality of Christ* (1966), *The Living God* (1971), and *The Holy Spirit* (1974).

Special attention is called to the bibliography included in this volume, containing a comprehensive listing of secondary materials on Wesley's doctrine of sanctification and its social implications.

The warden for the Sixth Oxford Institute was Rena Karefa-Smart of Boston University; and Brian Beck of Wesley House, Cambridge University, and I served as co-chairpersons. Financial assistance was provided by the Overseas Division of British Methodism, the Board of Global Ministries, New York, and the World Methodist Council. Abingdon, publisher of most of the previous Oxford Institute volumes, cooperated to make publication possible. Special appreciation is due Phyllis Barker, Kathy Henderson, and Clarence Bence for their assistance in preparing the manuscript for publication.

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## Introduction: Wesley and the Theologies of Liberation

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During the decade of the 1970s liberation theologies moved from the periphery of theological attention to its center. Their insistent questions have instigated a re-evaluation not only of traditional understandings of Christianity but of the function and methods of theology. Three types of liberation theology are represented in this volume: black theology, with its concern for the plight of those oppressed politically and economically because of racial barriers; feminist theology, with its sensitivity to male dominance and the shaping of culture to the detriment and disadvantage of half the human race; and Latin American theology, with its use of Marxist analysis to expose exploitation of third-world peoples by the privileged groups, classes, and systems that control economic power.

In spite of their obvious differences these theologies share a common *critical* approach. Their task, as they conceive it, is not to rationalize and justify doctrine and church practice but to ask, on the basis of the biblical vision of the kingdom of God and his righteousness, how Christian theology and practice have been consistent with that vision—or have thwarted it. Aware of the extent to which theology has served as an ideology to legitimize unjust social orders in the past, these theologians have a litmus test that they apply to any claim to theological truth: Does it advance the cause of human freedom? With Jürgen Moltmann, they find that "*the new criterion of theology and of faith is to be found*

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