

PREFACE



The Wesleyan Revival would not have been what it was without Aldersgate. Aldersgate, let us never forget, would not have been what it was without Oxford.

John Wesley wrote to his brother Charles late in his life (December 15, 1772): "I often cry out, *Vitae me redde prior!* [Give me back my former life.] Let me be again an Oxford Methodist! . . . I did then walk closely with God and redeem the time. But what have I been doing these thirty years?"¹

What he had been doing those thirty years was riding the circuit! So Methodism at its best has always managed to combine circuit riding, Aldersgate, and Oxford.

On three occasions now (1958, 1962, 1965) Methodist theologians have come in from their "circuits" all over the world to return to Oxford. Lincoln College has served as the place of living study and fellowship for a hundred such persons at each of the Oxford Institutes on Methodist Theological Studies under the aegis of the World Methodist Council.

Mr. Wesley frequently referred to the founding purpose as stated in the statutes of his college, Lincoln, "*ad propagandam Christianam fidem et extirpandas haereses.*" ("For propagating the Christian faith and extirpating heresies.") It can be stated with certainty that at the Third Oxford Institute no heresies were extirpated. Let us hope none were, however, propagated!

The theme for this study was deliberately chosen to tie in

¹ *The Letters of John Wesley, Standard Edition, VI, 6.*

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with studies currently under way in the World Council of Churches. Thus the Institute not only brought together Methodists from all over the world, but brought world Methodism into vital relationship with world ecumenism. This is intended to be a clue to the manner in which confessionalism and ecumenicity can live together in fruitful tension.

A glance at the list of contributors to this volume will reveal the very high caliber of the entire project. We are grateful beyond ability to express for their faithfulness to the task. Dr. D. T. Niles, of Ceylon, set forth the issues involved in the theme. Miss Morna Hooker specified the biblical base of the claim. The Rev. David Jenkins added immeasurably to the breadth of the discussion by his presence and vivid insight.

What benefit would there be in a group of cloistered Methodists assuring one another regarding the finality of Christ? To put reality into the discussions certain non-Christians were present to challenge us by presenting views held by large portions of the earth's peoples. Our Buddhist monk, The Venerable Dr. H. Ratanasara, is from Ceylon; Mrs. Pamela M. Wylam, Sikh editor, is a British convert to Sikhism.

The Institute was fortunate in the presence of Professor A. J. Ayer, author of *Language, Truth and Logic* and other well-known works, who gave, with verve and brilliance, an informal address, not for publication, on the independence of ethics from theology. It was not possible in planning the Institute to arrange for an address by a Jewish scholar, but this omission has been supplied in this volume by a paper by Dr. Will Herberg on the question of how the Jew looks at Jesus. For this we are grateful.

On this kind of foundation and against this kind of challenge, then, three American theologians set themselves the task of reformulating the Christian claim for the finality of

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Christ, each, of course, from his own particular perspective.

Dr. Gordon Rupp brings the whole to a conclusion by relating the claim to the continuing expression of Christ's person and work as set forth by the church in its ministry of Word and Sacrament. Amply documented by Wesley hymns, Reformation theology, and tied into the current discussions on union between British Methodism and the Church of England, the chapter has all the vitality of its author.

Principal A. Raymond George, with the able assistance of Sister Lillian Topping, served on the British side as joint secretary in the project and made real again Wesley's observation that the Methodist fellowship is no "rope of sand." Dr. Lee Tuttle, secretary at Lake Junaluska, North Carolina, of the World Methodist Council furnished generous and extensive assistance in the handling of a voluminous amount of correspondence necessary to such worldwide undertakings.

Abingdon Press has again made a contribution to the church through its willingness to put the Oxford Institute papers in print, as it did *The Doctrine of the Church*, which was the discussion of the 1962 theme. It is hoped that the use to which that volume and this one is put by Methodists and others in all parts of the world may justify this courage and patience.

As any member of the 1965 Institute takes this volume in hand he will remember first the presence and person of Carl Michalson, whose death in a November plane crash at Cincinnati, Ohio, left a dark vacancy in our hearts. As one who stood with Janet and Carl the night they married, I value the opportunity this volume gives to offer a gesture of affection for them. Carl's own words from p. 172 of this book, as reprinted on the dedication page, are a fitting memorial.

DOW KIRKPATRICK

Evanston, 1965