

## Preface

THE YEARS SINCE WORLD WAR II HAVE SEEN AN UNPRECEDENTED INTERNATIONAL flow of persons and ideas. This flow has been in two directions—one in the direction of the ecumenical church and the other in the direction of world confessional bodies.

There has been a creative tension between the two sufficient to give both movements vitality and to result in productive cross fertilization. The Methodist Church, in fashion similar to other denominations, has sought to enrich its theological contributions to the world Church through a renewed effort of self-understanding.

Twice—in 1958 and 1962—Methodist theologians from over the world have met each other at Lincoln College, Oxford, of which John Wesley was a fellow, for a period of doctrinal inquiry and encounter. The third such theological institute is planned for the summer of 1965.

The results of these studies contribute to an awareness on the part of the denomination itself, of its self. Then, primarily through the participation of the individuals, the stimulation of theological study within Methodism is hopefully expected to contribute constructively to the ecumenical church's thought and life.

The present volume is a symposium on the doctrine of the church, resulting from the 1962 Oxford Institute on Methodist Theological Studies. This contribution from a Methodist source will add greatly to the discussions on the subject by the entire world Church.

It will be immediately obvious that Methodists have no "party line" to offer, even if one were wanted. Perhaps the most helpful result from such a volume as this would be to create widespread discussion and writing as vigorous as the discussions at Oxford which followed the presentation of each paper. All over the world are Methodists whose lifetime vocation is teaching, writing, and preaching theology. Apart from this Oxford Institute they have had little or no personal contact with one another. It is not their remoteness from one another, however, which has produced the variety of their accents. It is rather the mood of the Methodist mind to be independent. It is, therefore, not to be expected that the simple device of bringing these persons together will result in narrow agreements. Rather there is produced that creative ferment which it is hoped will be stimulated in the total church by these present contributions.

There are certain unities, however, which become quite evident in these studies. The major one is the strong biblical context sought for all these inquiries. The general theme of the 1958 Institute was "Biblical Theology and Methodist Doctrine." So throughout 1958 and 1962 there is a constant examination of the biblical basis of the doctrines which have come down to the modern church through the Reformation and the Wesleyan Revival.

This fact gives hope in two directions. Certainly as long as Methodist contributions to the world Church's studies of theology are biblically based, we will be in the best position to offer unifying theology rather than divisive. Further, the biblical milieu may be a more effective ground of communication with the modern world than we have believed, as Dean Trotter points out in Chapter 11.

The manner in which modern Methodist theologians hold John Wesley is instructive. Wesley studies, especially in the United States, have been so accelerated during the past fifteen years as

to amount to a revival of a dead interest. Wesley is studied extensively, genuinely appreciated, but held loosely. The extremes of scathing sarcasm on the one side and canonization on the other are avoided. The more he is studied the more he is seen to be not the accidental historical factor which produced another denominational separation, but one of the true mentors of the whole Christian community along with names well known in the early Reformation Church. Here again Methodist scholars discover an ecumenical ground in his writings which can be as meaningful for any Christian thinker as for a Methodist Christian.

The development of this theme in this volume is believed to be a fresh approach to the subject. The discussion of the opening question by Albert C. Outler goes immediately to the crux of the whole question of Methodist self-understanding and ecumenical relation. C. H. Dodd, C. K. Barrett and E. Gordon Rupp set the biblical and historical perspective of the question.

The direction of the study is then shifted to deal with baptism, confirmation, ordination, the Lord's Supper, and other early Methodist means of grace. The result of this section of the study is that the two Protestant sacraments are studied not as Methodist sacraments, but as Methodist views of Christian sacraments. The questions of confirmation and ordination offer an opportunity for parallel studies of the laity and the ministry.

The volume closes by pointing the theology of the Church off in the two directions it must go to be relevant in our time—church unity and appeal to modern man.

There are obviously many open questions not dealt with here—relations with the Roman Catholic Church, the role of the Church in social redemption, and the Christian Church in a world of non-Christian religions, secular history, and science. Again may the hope be expressed that the appearance of this symposium will generate through the world of Christian thought considerable discussion and reaction.

Extraordinary assistance has been given in getting these chapters into print by Dean William R. Cannon of the Candler School of

Theology, Emory University, Atlanta, Georgia, a member of both the 1958 and the 1962 institutes, and by Dr. Philip Watson, of Garrett Theological Seminary, Evanston, Illinois, a member of both Institutes and author of one of the chapters of this volume. The Rev. A. Raymond George, Wesley College, Headingly, Leeds, not only was a member of both Institutes and a contributor to this volume, but also served with me as joint secretary of the institute committee. To these persons we are indebted, but they carry no responsibility for any shortcomings of the symposium.

Expressions of appreciation to all the authors must include the statement that they have willingly made their contributions to the institute and to this volume freely. An especial word of gratitude is extended to Dr. C. H. Dodd, the only non-Methodist and to Dr. Harold Roberts, Principal of Richmond College, and immediate past president of the World Methodist Council, who served the institute as its warden.

—DOW KIRKPATRICK