

OXFORD **notes**

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organizations



HISTORY AND DEVELOPMENT of the OXFORD INSTITUTE OF METHODIST THEOLOGICAL STUDIES

by Dow Kirkpatrick

The year 1958 saw the initiation of the Oxford Institute of Methodist Theological Studies at Lincoln College, Oxford University. The Institute continues to be a living affirmation of the Oxford roots of the Methodist heritage.

That first meeting was the result of more than a decade of wide-ranging conversations among many interested parties. I spent 1946-47 at Mansfield College, Oxford, on the Pilling Traveling Fellowship in Systematic Theology, awarded by my graduate university, Drew. Post-war conditions made such travel a challenge. My wife and two year old son found a warm reception by the Methodists of Oxford.

Reginald (Rex) Kissack was pastor of the Wesley Memorial Methodist Church and chaplain to Methodist students at the university. He and his family were especially kind to us. It soon became evident that we shared many interests, one of the strongest being our mutual interest in the relationship between the World Methodist movement and Oxford University.

World Methodist Conferences had been held since the late eighteen hundreds. On a cycle of ten years a mass meeting was held alternately in Great Britain and North America. Such a conference was scheduled for Oxford in 1941 but was not possible be-

cause of the war. By the late 1940s, individuals on both sides of the Atlantic were "picking up the pieces." It is a tribute to their foresight that the movement was revived and conferences scheduled on a five-year cycle. More significantly, a council was organized that still ties world Methodism together in the interim between conferences with an agenda of multiple interests.

One of the important activities of the World Methodist Council is to dedicate shrines at historic places. Combining the interest in shrines with the significance of Oxford, we began to suggest a "living shrine" in the form of a center at Oxford where Methodists from all over the world could live, wor-

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comments

*He will save them just as graciously as he will
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This issue of *OXFORDnotes* includes the report of Working Group II (Wesleyan Studies), one of the panel presentations from the last Institute, abstracts of the papers presented at the 1988 annual meeting of the American Academy of Religion, and an abstract of a recently completed dissertation.

We are also happy to feature a short history of the Institute by Dow Kirkpatrick, who has been associated with the work of the Institute since its inception. Every member of the Institute should be aware of and support the drive to raise an endowment fund to make possible the viable continuation of the Institute. For more information, contact Dr. Donald Treese, Division of Ordained Ministry, United Methodist Church, Box 871, Nashville, TN 37202

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(Kirkpatrick, cont. from page 1)

ship, and study together.

At the 1956 World Methodist Conference at Lake Junaluska, N.C., it became obvious that the building of such a center was impractical. The idea of a living community making use of existing buildings found acceptance. What better place for re-experiencing the Wesley revival than Lincoln College where John spent much of his life as a teacher. Nearby is Christ Church where he and his brother, Charles, were students and the place of the beginnings of the Holy Club and the term "Methodists."

The fulfillment of this proposal obviously hinged on whether there would be support from the U.S. side. Mr. Charles Parlin, a layman active in the new World Methodist Council, contributed \$500 from his personal funds. This I used to travel to various Methodist seminaries in the United States to survey the support which might be forthcoming. On that basis, the first Institute was launched in 1958.

An Arena for World Methodist Theologians

Prior to and during World War II, international travel was not widely available to most scholars. In the decade following World War II, it became evident that persons all over the world were devoting their entire lives to theology under the Methodist banner with no established means of communication with each other.

The Oxford Institute was created to furnish a place of meeting. It remains uniquely the only such arena.

Periodically, theologians in the many branches of Wesleyanism from all over the globe spend ten days together at Oxford. The first six were held at Lincoln with a limit of one hundred persons: one-third from Great Britain, one-third from the United States and one-third from the rest of the world. In the early years the U.S. delegation traveled by ship. Each day a paper was presented and discussed on a topic assigned to British theologians. This preparation enabled us to uphold our end of the debates to follow!

The demands for admission have doubled the membership so the two most recent institutes were held at Keble and Somerville. Though these colleges are not directly related to the founding of

Methodism, those attending experience the larger place in which our tradition arose.

Scholars live the common life of the academy—eating, worshipping, reading prepared papers, discussing formally and informally—for the entire ten days.

Themes which have been studied with the papers published are: 1958—Biblical Theology and Methodist Doctrine; 1962—The Doctrine of the Church; 1965—The Finality of Christ; 1969—The Living God; 1973—The Holy Spirit; 1977—Sanctification and Liberation; 1982—The Future of the Methodist Theological Traditions; 1987—The Significance of Methodist Teaching and Practice for Confessing the Apostolic Faith. For 1992, the theme being proposed concerns Methodism and the poor.

Oxford and Aldersgate: The Two Foci of Wesleyan Spirituality

Aldersgate: a cataclysmic moment. A sudden revelation of John Wesley's own salvation. A turning point in his evangelical ministry. It happened in a small group meeting for prayer and bible study.

Oxford: A life of study, teaching, and methodical spirituality, The Holy Club. Long-term intellectual nurturing of the faith of students and tutors of the university.

Oxford and Aldersgate: Methodists must never forget that Aldersgate happened to an Oxford don. They are two birthplaces of the movement which the Wesleys characterized as the union between "knowledge and vital piety."

Global Theology for Wesley's World Parish

In the decades since the formation of the Institute, more than one hundred newly independent nations have evolved. Methodist Churches already existed in a majority of these countries now experiencing a new birth of freedom. Many of these churches chose autonomy from governance by the Methodist Churches in Great Britain and the United States. The current membership of the World Methodist Council consists of fifty-seven churches claiming the Wesleyan tradition.

These churches are doing theology in non-European contexts. Impulses from these vital encounters are essential to achieve a global vision of the

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articles

started as deep hearts, but the single light reflected in many more. Wesley's intellectual attainments are more extensive than generally has been supposed, but influence a of a more general sort than they are supposed to have. They are based upon a knowledge of antiquity and nature, as well as upon a deep acquaintance with the Holy Scriptures and the Principles of the Christian Religion. His writings are more than available to the world through the American Bibles and the Christian Library series. The result was generalists of his father.

The following is one of the panel presentations made at the last Institute on the topic, How important for Methodism is the recovery of Wesley?

THE NATURE AND FUNCTION OF TRADITION

By Richard P. Heitzenrater

I have resisted the temptation to approach the question in one of the first two ways that came to mind: (1) as a question asked by a doctor, if Wesley were the patient (deciding between radical treatment or euthanasia); (2) in terms of recovering Wesley from various forms of scholasticism or sentimentality (especially from those single-issue folks who see him as a panacea to a particular problem, and who tend to read their own thoughts back into him through selective eisegesis). Instead, I took the question posed to be a means of raising the issue of tradition, its nature and function within Methodism (specifically as regards the life and thought of John Wesley).

Tradition, as I understand it, is basically a dynamic and relational process. The primary question to be asked is not what? (which relates to content) but *how*? (which relates to process); not so much when? but *who*?; not where? but *why*? And perhaps after *how*? *who*? and *why*? in the end we could ask *so what*? The content (the what — the customs, forms, etc.) is not the basic element of tradition (like something in a box being passed on). We are not talking about recovering a box of paraphernalia that might have been dropped or lost, like someone's luggage on an airlines or one of the safe-boxes on the Titanic. *Traditio* is as much the passing on as it is what is passed on.

This process involves at the very least a giver, a motive, a gift, and a recipient, all in an active relational process. And the spirit in and by which the giving takes place, as well as the manner of its reception and acceptance, are crucial to the authenticating (if not authorizing) of this process of *traditio*. Authority derives also in part from the author, the origin of what is being passed on. To some extent, that author gives the tradition whatever original authority it might have, both in terms of power and form, spirit and content, process and ideas. In this sense, the basic tradition

that we are (or should be) primarily interested in recovering is not authored by John Wesley, but received and passed on by and through him, and its authority as tradition does not derive from Wesley but is only authoritative insofar as it can be seen as an authentic witness to God's living Word for him and for us.

What this means is that tradition has no existence (much less authority) without reception and appropriation (a gift, to use the earlier analogy, is not really a gift until received). The traditioning process is only complete (and the tradition authenticated) if that which is passed on has the ability to shape and empower our lives. Tradition, then, entails not just form but also power. This traditioning is basically theological, since the essential relationship in the process at any stage is to the prime author and giver of the gift, who also provides the motivation that lies behind the process and is the empowering dynamic of the traditioning itself. You might say this is a fully trinitarian view of tradition that in any case includes a vital doctrine of the Holy Spirit, especially in the appropriation and therefore authentication of the traditioning process itself.

This acceptance and authentication of tradition is not just a passive reception (like being hit on the head by a 2-by-4). It entails the use of a critical temper (as Ray Petry used to say) in the practice of tradition (or traditioning). The intellectual questions certainly are important (taken together) in determining whether what is being passed on is understandable and appropriate. We ask, Does this correspond to certain guidelines of veracity and cogency? Does it bring a sense of conviction that this is important and right for us? Does this make sense in the present context as being appropriate to the needs of the day and place? These concerns must be seen together in a balanced approach to tradition, otherwise we fall into the approach of the scholastic, the enthusiast, or the latitudinarian respectively. The crucial factor, however, is whether or not the traditioning process helps shape our life and thought in conformity with the mind of Christ and the way he walked, engaging our faith and drawing us to a central reality beyond ourselves, focused on and grounded in the love of God.

Although Wesley is an important link in this

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(Heitzenrater, cont. from page 3)

process for many of us, he is in some sense incidental to it. But having said that, let me hasten to add, it is important for us to understand the nature of those incidents in the process where *he* fits in, as well as to understand the process itself and how *we* fit in.

The Wesleyan tradition can be authentic (that is to say, can be worth recovering) insofar as it exemplifies for us the gospel of Jesus Christ and works (through our acceptance and appropriation of that gospel) to shape and empower our lives and our experience of God's love and power within and through our communities of believers. This also implies a dynamic understanding even of the content of our "tradition," which is not so much a system of theology or a method of doing things, as it is a witness to the power of God's love in the world. Wesleyan theology in the first instance is inextricably tied to spiritual autobiography. It is not describing a static *ordo salutis* (in the scholastic fashion) but rather a dynamic *via salutis* (in the holy living tradition) — it is not a scholastic exercise but an attempt to describe and understand the pilgrimage of faith by one who is on the way of salvation (the scripture *via salutis* of Wesley) and to see the implications of this endeavor for the life of the pilgrim in the world. This understanding of theology in the Wesleyan tradition lifts the understanding of Catholic spirit beyond the question of which beliefs or doctrines are essential (trying to draw up a list of three, four, or whatever) — the important thing is to recognize those who are experiencing this same pilgrimage in and with the same spirit, acknowledging the same guide, looking to the same source for sustenance. This understanding of theology in the Wesleyan tradition also has important implications for understanding the term "in connexion with John Wesley" and the consequent theme of connectionalism.

The question of recovering Wesley is not so much whether we will thereby become genuine Wesleyans, but whether such a recovery will help us become genuine Christians and perhaps thereby contribute also to a wider ecumenical attempt to exemplify in our own day an authentic witness of the apostolic faith. In this light, there are two ways of approaching the question of the recovery of Wesley: (1) are we being Wesleyan? (2) are we being Christian? The first is basically a historical question, that might at times bor-

der on trivial pursuits. The second is a theological question more pertinent to the question of "importance" as implied in the original question as asked. We must remember to differentiate between the two approaches. The compelling force of tradition cannot be external but must be inherent in the traditioning. And if we open ourselves to the possibilities of the traditioning process in the light of this second approach, then we might not even need to ask the question in the way it was originally phrased, for whatever significance is inherent in the tradition will become self-evident through its effects.

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(Kirkpatrick, cont. from page 2)

church. Voices from beyond Anglo-U.S. Wesleyanism have been increasingly heard in the three most recent Institutes (1977, 1982, 1987).

Faith Born in the Struggle for Life

Methodists from Third World countries bring new insights from their own perspective to the study of our historical tradition, to our contemporary contribution to ecumenical theology, and to our understanding of the church's mission.

They are experiencing twentieth century "evangelical revivals" unlike revivals in the conventional sense. Theirs arise out of social, political and economic contexts very different from the eighteenth century of Wesley and twentieth century Great Britain and the United States.

Scholars from these younger churches, though warmly received at Oxford, are aware that their message has difficulty penetrating the mentality which they perceive as dominant in World Methodist meetings.

As a "spin-off" of their frustrations, Methodists from Latin America began in 1983 their own theological consultations asking the questions: Does the theology of John Wesley and the Methodist heritage have relevance for Latin Americans in the present reality? If so, what?

Their answers can bring fresh vitality to the spirituality of all of Wesley's World Parish. The principal results of these consultations are recently available in English in an Eerdmans publication, *Faith*

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working groups

REPORT OF WORKING GROUP II WESLEY STUDIES

By Thomas A. Langford

The seminar on Wesley Studies at the Institute drew together a number of scholars who were knowledgeable about John Wesley, who were familiar with his written corpus, who seriously engaged issues of interpretation, and who represented a range of theological positions and interests.

There were several dominant themes: Wesley's understanding and use of scripture, the function of authority in Wesley's thought, the question of "essential doctrines" in Wesley's theology and the status of "Standards of Doctrine" in Wesley and Methodist church traditions. Particular papers and foci of papers sometimes extended in directions beyond these central topics, but discussion of these issues constituted the central activity and made the chief contribution to the discussion.

No effort was made to win consensus about any of the issues; comments often raised questions and suggested further exploration rather than seeking points of agreement; and some of the most interesting contributions were suggestions about research possibilities and unexploited approaches to enduring problems.

The first paper presented by was Scott Jones and was entitled, "John Wesley's Doctrine of Scriptural Authority." The topic was prescient of much of the ensuing discussion. Issues of the primacy of scripture, the relation of scripture to reason, and experience (and to a lesser degree, tradition), Wesley's use of notions of authority, his understanding of "reason," and the meaning of scripture study as a means of grace were ingredients which persisted in importance.

John G. McEllhenney continued many of these themes in his paper, "John Wesley's Principles of Scriptural Interpretation," as did Ted Campbell in his "Tradition as Religious Authority." In each instance, no consensus was sought and numerous comments and criticisms opened further areas of reflection and research. A particularly important historical agenda

was enunciated in the discussion of McEllhenney's paper: namely, how has the primacy of scripture functioned in this tradition? how does it function? and how should it function? This three-dimensional time paradigm helped set some of the questions for the ongoing discussion. Important hermeneutical issues were raised but there was no common agreement about appropriateness and validity of suggested hermeneutical approaches.

A subordinate discussion on questions of Wesley's understanding of the relation of Christian life and thought to social issues, such as slavery, placed some of the more general themes in a concrete historical setting and forced the exploration of the use of words such as "liberation" in Wesley's thought and in present contexts.

Of special interest was the discussion by John Tyson of whether it is permissible or promising to attempt to distinguish Wesley's "essential doctrines." Questions of methodology, imposition of structure, and achievement of balance in recapitulating Wesley's theology were raised along with the basic issue of how systematic can and should one make Wesley's theology.

This issue was carried over and given its unique importance among Wesley's successors as the questions raised in Dick Heitzenrater's, "Plain Truth: Sermons as Standards of Doctrine." The engagement of the ensuing discussion was principally over the theological self-understanding in developing Methodist church traditions. Widely differing opinions were voiced and, once again, questions and concerns for ongoing research were delineated. The same sort of focus was set by James T. MacCormack in his, "New Testament Notes as Doctrinal Authority." The continuation of the persistent points of discussion, namely primacy of scripture, authority, and standards were pursued.

As in any good seminar, there were individual papers which set their own course and controlled the discussion. Such was the case with Tore Meistad's paper on "Martin Luther and John Wesley on the Sermon on the Mount," and Leonard Hulley's paper on "An Interpretation of John Wesley's Doctrine of Perfect Love."

No summary of the meetings can be sharply drawn. No conclusions about points debated can be

(Cont. on page 8)

(Kirkpatrick, cont. from p. 4)

Born in the Struggle for Life: A Re-reading of Protestant Faith from Latin America.

An Ecumenical Encounter

Theology true to the Wesleyan spirit cannot be narrowly sectarian. Lecturers and some members of the Oxford Institute are drawn from the ecumenical church. The published volumes have sometimes been linked to the theological agenda of the World Council of Churches and other ecumenical bodies.

One of the three major sections in the volume referred to above is "Evangelization and Ecumenical Vision." The new definition of both "evangelism" and "ecumenism" is fully described there. Some of the chapters are by members of former Institutes.

The Local Congregation

Oxford was merely the base. From it, Wesley and the Methodists traveled to the open air and small society group meetings to preach the good news he himself had experienced at Aldersgate.

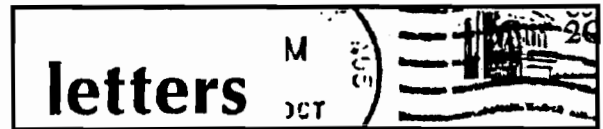
The Oxford Institute includes professors, in seminaries and colleges, who prepare pastoral and lay leadership for local congregations. A balance among Institute members is maintained by the presence of pastors, students, church executives, and lay theologians. The balance of the membership between male and female is a need not yet adequately achieved.

A Permanent Endowment

To achieve more balance in the participation of persons who do not have resources available, participants in previous Institutes are engaged in the effort to secure a permanent endowment of no less the \$500,000.

The income from this endowment would ensure the participation of scholars from churches of the Third World. It would also help bridge the gap between support from various denominational agencies and the rapidly increasing costs which threaten the continuation of this periodic gathering of Wesley scholars.

(For more information about the endowment, write Dr. Donald Treese, Division of Ordained Ministry, Box 871, Nashville, TN 37202 U.S.A.)



We are pleased to include the following dissertation abstract for work done at St. Mary's College, University of St. Andrews.

"Gospel and Culture—Accommodation or Tension? An enquiry into the priorities of the Gospel in the light of Jamaica's historico-cultural experience vis-à-vis Western Christian Civilization."

by Hyacinth Boothe, Jamaica, W.I.

In this thesis we enquire into the essence and mission of Christianity in the light of Jamaican historico-cultural experience.

Chapter one is devoted to a partial investigation into the nature of Western Christianity vis à vis Western Civilization—the modern dilemma, its historical beginnings and development, its response to philosophical ideas and other cultural positions, Church-State relations, its divisions, and its social attitude.

We next identify the major elements in the Jamaican experience as revealed in the impact of the Spanish Conquest on the original Arawak population, the enslavement of African peoples, and the post-slavery repercussions vis-à-vis Western Christianity. In order better to understand the New Testament Gospel, we locate its origin in the Old Testament, examining its relationship with the Law and the Temple, Priesthood and Prophets, observing its social implications, and we follow it en route to the New Testament.

In chapter four we engage in a brief examination of the Hellenistic cultural environment including the Jewish Disapora, in order to have a grasp of the initial interaction between Gospel and Culture.

Our concern in chapter five is to recover the essence of Jesus' proclamation of the Gospel as witnessed in the Synoptics. From this we go on to examine its transmission to the wider Hellenistic milieu, concentrating on the Pauline and Johannine presentations.

Finally it is argued that the Gospel in its transmission across cultures should be proclaimed, as far as

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organizations



A.A.R. Abstracts, 1988 Annual Meeting,
Wesleyan Studies Working Group

"Experimental Method in the Practical Theology of John Wesley," by Donald A. D. Thorsen

Some contemporary Wesley scholars suggest that the emerging paradigm of practical theology offers a helpful way of describing the unique theological contribution of Wesley. If practical theology offers a helpful paradigm for describing the theology of Wesley, then the experimental character of his writings best describes the methodology he employed in reflecting upon and in formulating his theology.

Wesley inherited a rich tradition of theology and theological method from seventeenth century Anglicans. From them he received a concern to practically apply his theology to the immediate needs of the Church and to theoretically apply his theology analogously to the experimental philosophy prevalent at the turn of the eighteenth century. We discover this dual concern in the preface to his *Sermons on Several Occasions*. Here Wesley stated his intentions to present "plain truth to plain people" in description of "the true, the scriptural, experimental religion."¹

Scholars recognize that Wesley intended to be a biblical theologian. But few scholars have tried to understand what Wesley meant by "experimental religion." In this phrase we discover a clue to Wesley's theological method—a method which Wesley applied theoretically to his theology and practically to his life and ministry.

In this paper we will elucidate what Wesley meant by experimental religion. We will begin by tracing its dual roots in the experimental philosophy of the British empirical tradition and in the practical divinity of seventeenth century British theology. From the British empirical tradition Wesley received the concern to apply his theology to the theoretical aspects of our knowledge of true religion—knowledge that comes from our empirical experiences of the world as well as from our religious experiences of God. From British theology Wesley received the concern to apply

his theology to the practical needs of people in the areas of salvation, holy living, and social responsibility. Wesley combined in this theological method an approach to religion which he believed would "unite the pair so long disjoined, knowledge and vital piety."²

NOTES

1 John Wesley, preface, §§3, 6, *Sermons on Several Occasions*.

2 Here a phrase is borrowed from a hymn by Charles Wesley in *A Collection of Hymns for the use of the People called Methodists*, 1780, hymn 462, l. 5.

"John Wesley—Practical Theologian," by Randy L. Maddox

Concerns being expressed in a variety of contemporary theological arenas—such as Ecumenics, Feminist Theology, Liberation Theology and Liturgical Theology—have begun to coalesce into a new emerging understanding of theological reflection, that of "practical theology." For some, this new model or genre of theological reflection is seen as supplementary to other dogmatic and metaphysical models. For most, it is seen as a more embracing and adequate alternative to these former models.

The first task of this paper will be to provide an overview and summary of the distinctive concerns of this emerging model of practical theology. Special attention will be devoted to the aspects of this model that are seen as advancements over existing alternatives and to the unique problematics that arise within this model itself.

In light of the understanding of practical theology thus developed, we will turn our attention to John Wesley. In terms of previously-dominant models of theological reflection it has been agreed that Wesley does not qualify as a serious or systematic theologian. But, what would be the verdict about Wesley as a serious "practical theologian"? We will argue that Wesley's theological shepherding of his revival movement embodies the type of reflection now being conceptually expounded and defended as practical theology.

Moreover, we will argue that Wesley's model helps to highlight an issue that requires more attention in the current discussion of practical theology; namely, the value and nature of systematic coherence in one's various contextual theological reflections on Christian life and practice.

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(Boothe, cont. from page 6)

possible, without cultural accretions; that the prevailing categories and symbols understood within the indigenous Jamaican culture be appreciated and, where possible, appropriated for purposes of communication; and, fundamentally, that in all circumstances the Church should faithfully guarantee a synchronization between its message and action, and Jesus' Gospel of the Kingdom of God, described in terms of Good News to the Poor.

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presented. Rather, as is often the case in good scholarly discussion, the meetings ended with participants provoked to further consideration, some rereading and new formulation.

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