



OXFORDnotes

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C A L L

THE NINTH OXFORD INSTITUTE OF METHODIST THEOLOGICAL STUDIES

July 28 – August 7, 1992
Somerville College, Oxford

Theme: Good News to the Poor in the Wesleyan Tradition

"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor" (Luke 4:18-19 NRSV).

With these words Jesus announced his ministry in the synagogue at Nazareth. With the same words, John Wesley began the field preaching that proved to be the vanguard of the Methodist revival and one of its most distinctive features.

Methodism has not always been faithful to this Wesleyan tradition of proclamation to the poor. But the need to reappropriate it and live it out has never been more urgent. If the churches that trace their identity to John Wesley's early Methodist societies re-examine their heritage in light of the gospel of Jesus Christ, they may well provide another vanguard for the church of today by proclaiming good news to the poor in the coming reign of God and calling on all peoples to prepare for its coming on earth as in heaven.

The Ninth Oxford Institute will draw on scholarly contributions from around the world to provide theological perspectives for such a reappropriation. These endeavors will point in a number of directions:

to the originative witness of the church in scripture; to those periods in the history of the church when renewed commitment to that witness has been evident; to the particular traditions of early Methodism and its subsequent family of churches; to the realities of our contemporary mission and ministry; and to the challenge of living in the presence of the reign of God in a world of increasing disparity between rich and poor.

Our task will call for integrity of method so that we develop more than an unmodulated echo of secular voices not attuned to the gospel. We shall first need exegetical integrity. What is the gospel we endeavor to mediate to the world, and why is it good news for the poor? This will demand hermeneutical integrity as well, so that the gospel is neither separated from the community of faith that is called into being to embody it nor narrowly restricted to the purpose of "inner-churchly dialogue." Thus we must listen to the poor in order to know what it is about the gospel that the poor themselves find good. How do the poor discern the presence of Jesus among them with power and grace? How can we discern the gospel from the vantage point of the disadvantaged nations and peoples in the world today—the "gospel from the underside"?

It will also be important to be clear about this

particular Wesleyan tradition of proclamation to the poor. Our deliberations will therefore also require historiographical integrity. Who were the poor in Wesley's day, and what was the nature of his ministry to them and among them? What kind of response was there from the poor to his ministry and mission? To what extent did post-Wesleyan Methodism follow Wesley's initiative and identify with the poor; and if not, why not? How would contemporary advocates of justice for the poor assess Wesley's approach and achievements?

Contemporary theological and historical disciplines as well as those of socio-economic analysis will be called upon to provide new insights into these questions. But Wesley must be allowed to speak for himself, no less than the poor of his day – and ours – must be allowed to speak for themselves. We should not look to the eighteenth or nineteenth centuries for blueprints for our contemporary ministry and mission any more than we should impose our twentieth-century hindsight onto early Methodism.

In summary, there are three basic areas of investigation for the Institute:

1. What is the good news of Jesus Christ for the poor? Can we still be messengers of "good news to the poor in the Wesleyan tradition"?

2. How did John Wesley formulate this good news for faith and practice among the poor of his day? How have the churches in the Methodist traditions lived out this gospel among the poor since the time of John Wesley?

3. Who are the poor of today? What are the structural causes of poverty? What is the relation between proclaiming good news to the poor and working to overcome these causes of poverty? What structural changes are demanded of us? How does the gospel inform the type of action to be taken? What are the implications for our own lives as believers and for the church?

Structure of the Institute

The Ninth Institute will be structured to provide focus within academic disciplines together with exchange among disciplines. There will be six Working Groups meeting regularly to discuss the Institute

theme from the perspective of particular disciplines. Six plenary sessions will feature lectures given by persons working out of the same disciplines as represented in the Working Groups. Each major lecture will be followed by a respondent. Following each plenary session there will be further discussion in groups formed on inter-disciplinary lines. Finally, there will be two panels, one at the end of each week, for overall response to the work of the Institute.

Preliminary Consultation

Immediately prior to the meeting of the Institute there will be an opportunity for two-thirds world Institute members from Africa, Asia, the Caribbean, Latin America and the Pacific Rim to meet and consult together on the Institute theme. This Consultation will take place at Somerville College on July 25–28.

Membership

There will be three types of membership in the Ninth Institute; *Full Members* will take part in all of the activities of the Institute; *Associate Members* will be present in Oxford and may participate in plenary sessions but will not be members of Working Groups; *Corresponding Members* will be invited to share in the work of the Institute by correspondence before and after the Oxford meeting. Full membership will be restricted to 180 persons. The number of associate members and spouses will be determined by the availability of accommodation.

Former members of the Institute are invited to make nominations of persons who would make valuable scholarly contributions to the theme of this Institute.

For further information, please write as follows:

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North and South America and Caribbean:

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1992 WORKING GROUPS

1. Biblical Studies

The basic task of the Biblical Studies Group will be to identify the good news of Jesus Christ to the poor as witnessed in the Scriptures and understood in the tradition of the church. Particular areas of investigation might include: deliberation on the biblical foundations for God's economy of justice and on the validity of claims regarding God's righteous bias toward the poor; the place of the poor in the ministry and mission of the primitive church; the grounds for a hermeneutic of and for the poor. Interdisciplinary subjects might include: Wesley's biblical resources for his mission with the poor and for empowering the poor to carry out their own ministries; the extent to which the judgments of God appear as good news in Wesley's dialectic preaching of law and grace; the need to proclaim Christ "in all his offices"—as prophet, priest, and king ("The Law Established Through Faith," Discourse II); evaluation of Liberation Theology's use of the Bible for Methodism's recovery of its biblical calling with the poor; biblical foundations for initiatives to overcome poverty and increase economic justice.

2. Wesley Studies

The attention of this group will be directed particularly to the questions: What did Wesley understand to be good news for the poor? Who were the poor to whom and with whom Wesley ministered? The group will be asked to make a careful scrutiny of Wesley's understanding of his ministry, the nature and design of his mission to the poor, the extent to which diverse forms (such as field preaching and medical clinics) were sustained as part of that mission, and how the poor in his own time responded to the various ministries of the people called Methodists. This will entail a detailed examination of the historical evidence: the content of Wesley's sermons and other writings; whether the theme of "good news to the poor" remained a central feature; how this influenced the style of preaching, the ordering of the societies, the deliberations of Conference, the deployment of preachers, and the outreach of members; the interrelationship of the poor and the in-

frastructures of holiness maintained by Wesley and early Methodists (e.g., the clinics and dispensaries, the lending societies, the schools, the cottage industries, the Strangers' Friend Society, visitation to the sick and imprisoned, etc.). It will also be necessary to consider how people at the time assessed the impact of Wesley and his followers on the endemic poverty in Great Britain, and what subsequent evaluations need to be taken into account.

3. Post-Wesley History of Methodism

This group will explore the Institute theme as a heuristic device to illumine and interpret the complicated development of the various strands of Methodism since the time of Wesley. Did the Wesleyan turn to the poor pass on to Methodism an ambiguous heritage: on the one hand, prompting a movement with a strong search for respectability rooted in a social aspiration that led to the embourgeoisement of the movement and, on the other hand, spawning a radicalization that could lead to various innovative social practices and new assertions of the turn to the poor? Does this tension illuminate the development of Methodism during the two centuries since Wesley? Do issues of class location and conflict lie behind the theological and ecclesiastical struggles of Methodism? What is the status of the Salvation Army (and other "holiness movements") within Methodism? What was the relation of Methodism to the growth of the Labour movement, the Industrial Revolution, the rise of Socialism, and other currents in Britain? How did Methodism relate to the various ideologies that emerged to interpret and rationalize the growth of wealth and capital? What models of ministry *to* (and especially *with*) the poor does Methodism provide? Is there here a "retrievable history" that can contribute to the renewal of Methodism in the twenty-first century?

4. Social Ethics and Practical Theology

The concern of this group will be the analysis of the church's present relation to the poor and the systemic conditions in which they live. How should the church decide to form itself and its mission in relation to the world's poor and existing economic

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(Working Groups, cont. from page 3)

systems? How can Methodism follow Wesley in combating the image of the poor as slothful, lazy, and deserving of their fate? If Methodism in nineteenth-century Britain was associated with the rise of the Labour Party and socialism, what should be the shape of Methodist economic ethics in the new world economic climate with the presumed demise of socialism and the revival of capitalism and the market economy? What are the resources in the Wesleyan heritage for mitigating the negative effects on the poor and the developing nations of a free-market economy? Interdisciplinary topics might include: Is there an implicit impulse in Wesley toward a "classless society," observable in his efforts to undermine the accumulation of wealth and in the accusations that Methodists were "strongly tinctured with impertinence and disrespect toward their superiors in perpetually endeavoring to level all ranks and do away with all distinctions"? What kinds of government intervention in behalf of the poor are appropriate and necessary in a free-market environment? (Cf. "On the Present Scarcity of Provisions": luxury taxes, restrictions of exports, etc.). How can the Wesleyan notions regarding stewardship, exercised by humanity in the image of God, be applied to the natural environment as victimized by human exploitation?

5. Evangelism

The work of the Evangelism Group will focus on a dialectic honing of the gospel: on the one hand, by examining the message and mission of Methodism to and among the poor, beginning with the ministry of John Wesley; and on the other hand, by asking how the poor themselves continue to be a source of evangelistic grace and power in a world being made ready for the reign of God. Key areas of concern for this two-fold enquiry will be soteriology, eschatology, and ecclesiology: the scope of God's salvation in Christ that forms the heart of the gospel; the extent to which God's justice for the poor is foundational or consequential to the gospel message; the significance of Wesley's preaching of law as well as grace for the prevailing gnosticism of our time; whether a gospel

of present grace and future hope is indeed good news for the poor; the perennial evangelistic problem of ecclesial centripetence and scriptural eschatology; the relevance of Wesley's polity of accountable discipleship for the conscientization of rich and poor in announcing the reign of God. Interdisciplinary subjects might include: the ethical imperatives of the gospel for ministry and mission with the poor; the mis-traditioning of Aldersgate and Wesley's "Pelagianism," and the way the severing of the evangelistic priorities have impacted post-Wesleyan Methodism's understanding of the "good news to the poor."

6. Systematic/Contemporary Theology

The purpose of this group will be to consider how major doctrines are redefined and realigned when they are viewed as components of good news to the poor. Wesley's analogy of faith provides a distinctive context for this discussion, presupposing as it does the intention of God in creation as this intention is disclosed in the anticipated order of the kingdom of God. In this light a number of related issues will be examined: How the "preferential option for the poor" is to be grounded theologically, e.g., as a response to a biblical mandate/bias, as a response to the teaching of Jesus in a concept of discipleship, or in the christological condescension of God in the incarnation; to what extent poverty is endemic in the fallen and corrupted order; how prevenient grace works in the life of the poor and in the institutions that determine their circumstances; the nature of repentance called for under these conditions; the question of whether, to be most meaningful, Christology must be class-specific; the impact of justification and assurance on the sense of worth and identity of the poor; the implications of this "rightwising" for the individual and for social, political, and economic institutions; and the significance of the process of sanctification for increasing the solidarity, quality of life, and empowerment of the poor.

M. Douglas Meeks, for
Brian E. Beck, Nora Q. Boots, Emilio J.M.
de Carvalho, and Christopher D. Wiltsher

working groups

METHODISTS ON THE BIBLE: A SELECT BIBLIOGRAPHY

Compiled by Alan G. Padgett

As secretary of Working Group I (Biblical Studies) I undertook the task of compiling a list of publications by Methodist theologians on topics of concern to our Group. These topics include the authority of the Bible, its unity and diversity, hermeneutics, and the Bible in Christian ethics. The list below is selective, and limited to what I have (for the most part) been able to uncover haphazardly on my own. Methodist theologians do not always advertise their Wesleyanism! I am grateful to members of the Institute who have sent me publications and/or lists: Randy Maddox, David Palmer, Bruce Birch, Walter Klaiber and Dagoberto Ramirez F. I have excluded from the list any articles circulated at the last meeting.

If any reader has corrections, additions or comments please send them to me. If there are enough, I will make a new list for the next Oxford Institute. Please note my new, American address: Alan G. Padgett, Department of Philosophy, Bethel College, St. Paul, MN 55112, USA.

The term "copies" after an item in the list indicates that copies of the article are available from the author, for those who do not have access to large libraries and Inter-Library Loan services. A list of such authors' addresses is appended.

The list is arranged by subject, and then alphabetically by author. Some books could have been listed in more than one subject (e.g., Birch and Rasmussen); while only sections of other books are of relevance to the subject (e.g., Cone).

Abbreviations:

BzGEmK	Beitrage zur Geschichte der EmK.
CVS	Christliches Verlagshaus, Stuttgart (West Germany).
EmK	Evangelisch-methodistische Kirche.
EQ	Evangelical Quarterly.
H&R	Harper & Row, San Francisco, London, etc.
OUP	Oxford University Press, Oxford, New York, etc.
WsnTJ	Wesleyan Theological Journal

I. The Normativity and Authority of the Canon. The Unity and Diversity of the Bible.

- Abraham, William J. 1981. *Divine Inspiration of Holy Scripture*. OUP, 1981.
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- Ringe, Sharon. "Luke 9:28-36: The Beginning of an Exodus." *Semeia* 28: 83-99. [copies] Prof. Ringe is a UCC member, but also a member of our Working Group.
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Addresses of authors for copies of articles:

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**Wesleyan Theological Society
Call for Papers, 1992 Annual Meeting
Ashland Theological Seminary, Ashland, Ohio
November 6-7, 1992**

The Program Committee is soliciting papers which will explore the interaction between Wesleyanism and modernity. We are defining modernity as a mindset embodying Enlightenment ideas such as individualism, rationalism, naturalism, skepticism, systematization and optimism. (Modernism and fundamentalism are theological responses to modernity.)

Possible questions to be addressed:

1. In what ways has Wesleyan theology responded to modernity?
2. How have our church members been influenced by modernity?
3. How has Wesleyan theology related to fundamentalism and modernism?
4. How has Wesleyanism dealt with modern science?
5. How have Wesleyan biblical scholars handled modernity?
6. What are the connections between Wesleyan ethics and postmodernity?
7. How has postmodernism informed Wesleyan hermeneutics?


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(WTS cont. from p. 7)

8. What are the sociological issues relating to modernity's influence on Wesleyans?

9. How has modernity shaped contemporary Wesleyan worship?

In addition to a 250–300 word summary of the project, proposals should include your name, mailing address (home and business), telephone number(s), and current position. The deadline for proposals for the 1992 WTS Annual Meeting is February 1, 1992. Notification of participation will be May 1, 1992.

Submit proposals to Susie Stanley, Western Evangelical Seminary, 4200 SE Jennings Ave., Portland, OR 97267; tel. (503) 654-5466.



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