

**communications****From M. Douglas Meeks:**

This issue of OXFORDnotes initiates our discussion of the theme of the Tenth Oxford Institute of Methodist Theological Studies (August 12-22, 1997 at Somerville College, Oxford): "Trinity, Community and Power: Mapping Trajectories in Wesley Theology." We are grateful to the authors of the pieces that appear in this issue and hope that there will be additional offerings prior to the Institute.

There will be a pre-Institute conference of Two-Thirds World participants August 9-12. We look forward to a report of the proceedings of this conference sometime during the first week of the Institute.

Members should have heard from the Conveners of their Working Group regarding the contribution they would like to make in the Group. Please respond as soon as possible, since the new feature of Interdisciplinary Group meetings will require careful planning on the part of Conveners.

With all good wishes,

M. Douglas Meeks

**From Timothy Macquiban:**

We are pleased that Westminster College, Oxford, is associated with the work of the Oxford Institute. The British Secretary, Rev. Tim Macquiban, is Director of the Wesley and Methodist Studies Centre in the College and will head up the team which will provide administrative support for the Institute. Tim Macquiban can be contacted in the following ways:

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Administrator of the Centre is Penny Fowler who can be contacted on 01865-247644 Ext. 5366 or e-mail: [p.fowler@ox-west.ac.uk](mailto:p.fowler@ox-west.ac.uk) regarding travel arrangements.

At the Institute Jenny Impey and Barbara Young will again be part of the team to ensure the smooth running of the office and all activities.

We look forward to seeing you in August and hope for fine weather in Oxford.

Timothy Macquiban

**working  
groups****Systematic Theology**

The doctrine of the Trinity has become the focus of intense interest and debate over the last two decades. This comes after centuries of relative neglect, during which most theologians assumed either that the doctrine had already been fully explicated or that the doctrine was an unwarranted abstraction with little relevance to contemporary theological concerns. The surprise of the doctrine reclaiming theological interest has been heightened by the way that it has drawn this interest from across the spectrum of theological schools, bringing voices into conversation who were seldom talking with one another. The goal of the Systematic Theology Group at this Oxford Institute is to join this conversation, engaging the renewed interest in Trinitarian theology appreciatively, yet critically, with an eye to its interplay with distinctively Wesleyan emphases and concerns.

One of the characteristics of the recent theological proposals concerning the Trinity is a greater emphasis of the integrity of each of the three "persons." This emphasis reflects the prominence that the person and work of the Holy Spirit has taken in Christian life and thought over the last century. A few of our presentations will focus specifically on this aspect of pneumatology analyzing the

roots of its current prominence, its implications for models of spiritual life, and its potential dangers or distortions of Christian praxis.

A second characteristic of recent theological debates about the Trinity is the claimed correlation of models of hierarchy or community in God with assumptions about hierarchy or equality in human social structures. Several of our presentations will engage this claimed correlation. Some will use the correlation as a framework for proposing a Wesleyan Trinitarian model for human social structures, while others will test the claimed correlation against the example of Wesleyan theology and Methodist practice.

A third characteristic or theme of recent interest in the Trinity is the suggestion that a more adequate understanding of the nature of being a "person" can be derived from a Trinitarian model of personhood than from the individualistic model of the Enlightenment that is currently dominant. Several of our presenters are drawn to this suggestion and plan to articulate the values of a Trinitarian model of personhood. Among these values are a greater appreciation for the relational nature of human life, the centrality of communal support to human life and action, and the integrity of the interaction between God and humanity in the spiritual journey.

A fourth theme prominent in recent expositions of Trinitarian theology is the use of interplay between the "persons" of the Godhead as a way of countering (or nuancing) the classical emphasis on the impassibility of God. It is frequently argued that a truly Trinitarian model of God provides more help in dealing with issues of suffering and theodicy than classical models. This claim has also been singled out for attention in proposals for our group.

And a couple of our proposals have been drawn to one other characteristic of the present discussion, namely the frequent use of the doctrine of the Trinity to model how doctrine per se functions "practically" in norming personal and corporate Christian life in the world.

- Randy Maddox

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### Contextual Theology

The Contextual Theology Working Group is peopled by scholars from around the world, gathering to reflect on theological convictions emerging in their various regions of Africa, Asia, Europe, North America, South America, and the Pacific. A new group for the Oxford Institute, the Contextual Theology group will focus on questions of the Trinity, community and power as they are raised in diverse cultural contexts. The Trinitarian experience of God is often interpreted as communal and inclusive. Such views of God are particularly important as people

seek to live in a world of cultural, ethnic and personal diversity, and to respond to urgent cries for justice and release from domination.

Participants will present papers that accentuate the distinctive ways in which people understand and relate with God, establish community life, and exercise power in relation to the particularities of their contexts. As a group, we will seek first to discern the richness of our various traditions, both in conceptuality and in actual practice. In the course of dialogue, we will likely discover common threads running through Wesleyan/Methodist traditions in different parts of the world, as well as distinctive threads running through the traditions as they emerge in particular social contexts.

The overarching purpose of this working group will be to discover the dynamic relationship between people's understandings of God and the perspectives and practices of community and power within the various streams of the Wesleyan/Methodist traditions.

- Mary Elizabeth Moore

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### Wesley Studies

*One of the issues in the Wesley Studies Group is that of Wesley's understanding of the Trinity and its implications for our conceptions of Christian community. Professor Kenneth Collins (Asbury Theological Seminary) lays out the thesis of the paper which he is currently*

*preparing for presentation in the Wesley Studies group.*

Drawing from a diversity of materials, I will demonstrate that since Wesley considered the essence of God to be fundamentally relational (holy love) at its core that human redemption, as a restoration of the *imago Dei*, consequently involves the undermining of autonomous, self-possessive pride. Indeed, for Wesley, God is humble and lowly not simply as revealed to creation (Matt. 11:28) but is so in terms of the divine nature itself since each of the persons of the Godhead is other and relationally directed. In light of this, it is not surprising to learn that Wesley highlights the salient virtue of humility, which expresses a proper relation to others, in his sermon "The Circumcision of the Heart" and elsewhere as very conducive to sanctification or divinization.

The upshot of all this is that the power of the church, as a community of the redeemed, according to Wesley, constitutes a different kind of power than the grasping, acquisitive, self-absorbed power of the sinful self which is rife in the world. To be sure, it is the "otherness" of this power, informed by love and strengthened by community, which is both remarkably attractive and healing, and it is the uncanniness of this power that characterizes the distinctiveness of the church's mission to a hurting world.

- Kenneth Collins

## articles & opinions

### Gutenberg's Nightmare

Surviving copies of the Gutenberg Bible reveal how precious printed matter was in the mid-fifteenth century. Brilliant sepia-black letters rest on stark white paper, itself high-quality linen; each page is laid out with the utmost precision; spaces are left for hand-painted illuminations. Such was the beginning of printing. By the end of Gutenberg's century, printed books had already begun to show signs of sloppiness as printing technology proliferated. Girolamo Savonarola, Oral Roberts of the late fifteenth century, flooded the presses in Florence and elsewhere with tracts, pamphlets and sermons. By the early sixteenth century, books were often printed on cheap paper, and their bindings when carefully opened reveal the use of earlier printed pages shamefully recycled to glue together the spines of newer books.

But despite the proliferation of print, furthered late in the eighteenth century with the use of pulp paper, printing required a large capital outlay for a press and its accouterments, and it still required costly technical skill until just twenty years ago. The printing process was to be adjudicated carefully, typically through editors and editorial committees, so that

the publication of a book by a reputable press itself carried a degree of communal endorsement. Even typing required a certain degree of effort, so that when I received a letter with printed letterhead and a typed address (in those past days) I opened it immediately as being of the utmost importance. No longer.

With the advent of microcomputers and graphical user interfaces that allowed the development of desktop publishing, the world is now flooded with print in a way that would surely make Johann Gutenberg hurl. The image of Mickey Mouse as "The Sorcerer's Apprentice" comes to mind—now a novice printer, with ream after ream of paper spewing out from his laser printer, entirely beyond control. And nowhere is the mindless and artless production of printed matter worse (in my opinion) than at academic conferences.

It may have been an honorable idea at first. "If we copy the papers ahead of time," I think someone said, "then we can read them and spend our time at the Conference discussing them." Wondrous optimist! Perhaps you do not subscribe to Saint Augustine's teaching on Original Sin; but having attended many conferences for which papers were available ahead of time, I have come to have sincere doubts as to whether the ensuing discussion revealed that participants had indeed read the papers. What I tend to find is someone wandering through, not really interested in the conversation, but asking "Could I just get

a copy of the paper?" and off to the next session (or whatever).

One effect of copying papers ahead of time is that it leaves the presenter at a loss as to what she should do at the conference. Should she lead a discussion of the paper, presuming the conferees have read it? Good joke, she thinks, so she says, "Well I'll just summarize some of this." Silent screams of terror rise from souls trapped in the conference room, for those with experience know that summarizing so often takes longer than reading the actual text, and informal summarizing is inevitably less well prepared than the text itself. The presenter has been cheated of the opportunity of presenting the text on which she labored, and the conferees have been equally cheated by getting the unprepared off-the-cuff summary. "Well at least we can take a copy of the paper." (No thanks; I'll wait to see if it's published.)

A conference is intended to be an oral event—an occasion to confer. It is an opportunity for new ideas and new research to be vetted without the pressure of the publication process. But when an academic conference comes to be dominated by crude print, it is cheapened immensely (like a good college that becomes a third-rate university). The worst effect of the move to mass-produced printed papers at academic conferences is that it excuses scholars from the art of making excellent oral presentations of their work.

There is a genuine need in the academic world for conferencing in which a presentation is not due until the moment it is presented, the presenter reads or presents his research as he designed it for the conference, conferees are neither required nor expected to have read anything in preparation, and the presenter can then revise his ideas (perhaps substantially) on the basis of peer impressions and comments before committing them to the publication process. Perhaps this process cannot be expected in all cases now, but we spend enough time in academic conferences to warrant serious consideration of how our time is best spent, and in many cases, I am persuaded, the use of an oral conferencing method will prove superior to the premature copying of papers.

Ted A. Campbell



### An Oxford Walk

If you enjoy walking, you're bound to enjoy Oxford. Bring your best walking shoes and consider scheduling an extra day or so before and after the Institute to spend some time walking in this charming city and its countryside. Here is a walk that covers some of my favorite Oxford haunts: it will take two-three hours.

This walk will allow you to see the city, with its University and Colleges. Take a right outside the door of Somerville College, walk down the Woodstock Road

and St. Giles. About halfway down St. Giles (stay to the right) there's a pub called "The Eagle and Child" (known locally as "The Bird and the Baby"). If it's open, you can see a plaque noting that Oxonians C. S. Lewis, J. R. R. Tolkien and their literary friends called the "Inklings" used to meet here.

If you continue on in the same direction (street names change every block or so), you'll pass the Martyrs' Memorial and St. Mary Magdalene's Church on the left and you'll eventually come to "Carfax," the street crossing that defines the middle of Oxford (residence at the University is defined in terms of miles from Carfax). Continue walking in the same direction (south), and you'll pass Christ Church College on your left. John and Charles Wesley were "scholars" of Christ Church. Christ Church charges an admission fee for visitors, but if you tell them you need to pray in the Cathedral (which is also the Chapel of the College), I think they'll let you by. Do say a prayer.

Continuing down the street in front of Christ Church (here it's called Abingdon Road), you'll come to "Folly Bridge," which crosses the Thames, except that in Oxford the Thames is called the "Isis." Folly Bridge is the site of the medieval ford where cattle were driven across the river, hence the name "Oxen Ford." There's a nice pub close by called "The Head of the River."

Behind the pub you can cross into Christ Church Meadow and walk along the

towpath by the Isis. Follow the path until you see a humpback bridge that crosses a smaller stream, the Cherwell (pronounced "Charwell"), that branches off to the left, and follow the path to the left along the Cherwell. From Christ Church Meadow you can look across to the City and see its spires beyond a surviving portion of the ancient city wall. I always liked this view because I imagined that it was how the city appeared as one approached it in the middle ages.

Along the Cherwell you may see students and others "punting" on the river—lazily floating along, propelling the punt by a pole. You're supposed to take your lover, a bottle of wine, and a book of poetry. You could try a spiritual companion, a bottle of Welch's grape juice and a *Hymnal*, but I can't guarantee the same results.

The path along the Cherwell will take you eventually to the High Street. Turn left, and you'll pass several Colleges along the way. The great Church on the right is St. Mary's, the University Church, where John Wesley preached on at least four occasions. Notice the stone-carved angel above the pulpit—I think she's asleep.

Just past St. Mary's the Turl Street turns off to the right. Down this street is Lincoln College, of which John Wesley was a Fellow. Lincoln will let you in at certain times of the day, and you can visit the "Wesley Room" there. Jesus College is also located on the Turl, and there are stories about American tourists on the

Turl who "can't tell Lincoln from Jesus," etc.

The Turl runs from the High Street to the Broad Street. Another Oxford tradition likens the Church of England to the Turl, with "The High at one end, the Broad at the other, and Jesus in the centre."

Follow the Turl to the Broad Street. Turn left at the Broad, but: WARNING! You could lose a lot of money here: the Broad Street has some of the best bookshops in Britain, including Blackwell's. In the middle of the Broad Street, just past the Car Park, there is a cross made of bricks in the street. This marks the site where, during the Reformation, three Protestant bishops (including Archbishop Cranmer) were burned at the stake. The Broad Street ends at the Church of St. Mary Magdalene (turn right), and the Martyrs' Memorial commemorates these three bishops.

You're now back on St. Giles. You can stop at the Eagle and Child again for refreshment, but remember what the General Rules stipulate about spirituous liquors. As a sober alternative, you might have tea at Brown's on the next corner. Think about your fellow Working Group members, laboring over a paper on divine impassibility. When you come to St. Giles Church, take the Woodstock Road to the left of the fork, and Somerville College will be on your left.

Ted A. Campbell

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