

**A Note from M. Douglas Meeks:**

This issue of *OXFORDnotes* contains the final reports of the Working Groups of the 11<sup>th</sup> Oxford Institute of Methodist Theological Studies. It also marks the transition to issuing *OXFORDnotes* only in digital form, on the Institute website, as a record of Institute meetings.

The following reports demonstrate the centrality of the theme of “New Creation” to the Wesleyan tradition, and the vitality of the community of scholars in this tradition that gathered to take up this theme this past August.

M. Douglas Meeks,  
Vanderbilt Divinity School

**I**

**Biblical Studies Working Group  
Conveners: Bruce C. Birch, Lung-  
kwong Lo**

The Biblical Studies Working Group was fortunate to have a plenary address by Néstor Míguez and twelve papers

from colleagues around the world to provide an excellent basis for a wide-ranging and productive conversation. In general, the Institute theme on New Creation provided rich possibilities for biblical exploration. A wide range of texts and themes related to creation and new creation were discussed, and our frustration was that there was so much more that could have been fruitfully explored. The attached list of papers shows the extent of our discussion. Nevertheless, omitted or touched upon only in passing were texts such as the flood story, Deutero-Isaiah, Isaiah’s peaceable kingdom, new creation in Christ (2 Cor. 5), Jesus’ healing miracles, and the born again theme of John 3. Our group found the theme to be an excellent topic for exploration but the possibilities to be far too extensive for even a cursory survey of all the major texts.

It is impossible to adequately summarize the insights and challenge that emerged from our discussions. Here we offer only some observations and issues gleaned from our reflections together and grouped under some organizing categories.

## **Method and Process in Reading Texts**

Our discussions have demonstrated again the importance of attention to social and cultural location, both as we can discern this in the text and as we cultivate critical consciousness of the social and cultural contexts and communities out of which we ourselves read.

Interpretive interactions with biblical materials drawn from the arts, popular culture, and missional praxis can enrich our readings of texts, heighten their transformative power, and make them more accessible to a wider audience.

Careful reading of texts sometimes exposes new challenges and problematic issues. Some images that functioned helpfully in one historical/social context may not do so in another.

The reading, refraining, and reinterpretation of problematic texts (e.g. laws on women in Deuteronomy, Genesis 22, 1 Timothy 2:8–15) is itself a hermeneutical act of New Creation.

## **Provocative Themes Worthy of Wider Use and Fuller Exploration**

New Creation considered as a word of response and recovery to those who have experienced trauma seemed especially insightful and appropriate to readings of Ezekiel and Revelation.

The possibility of reading creation themes in Qoheleth in relation to the figure of Eve in Genesis seems both provocative and promising.

Wisdom as a personified female figure in Proverbs and later wisdom-influenced texts is worthy of fuller exploration, especially in light of wisdom's role in creation. Does this suggest a role for wisdom in New Creation?

Biblical texts on New Creation offer a fruitful ground on which to explicitly read in conversation with our own Wesleyan tradition as several papers demonstrated.

The relationship of cosmic renewal to the resurrection of Jesus' body (explored in Mark and Luke-Acts), and to Paul's understanding of redemption from sin and brokenness as inclusive of the non-human creation suggests implications for current work for ecological justice and the responsible use and distribution of earth's resources.

Explorations of Paul's use of Jesus' teachings and of Jesus' ministry as a praxis to be imitated by disciples (Mark) suggest an ongoing transformative dynamic in the Jesus tradition itself. The witness of Jesus' life and ministry no less than his resurrection has power to re-create us and our communities.

A number of provocative images and themes in Revelation were given

insightful treatments that invite further attention and development:

- The embodiment of the final coming of God's kingdom in the form of a city.
- The problematic of juxtaposed female images of whore and bride and the limitations of those images given the vast changes in social role for women in our time.
- The implications of these texts for faithful life in this world and not simply escape into the next.
- The comprehensive character of God's New Creation in this vision—God's people made pure, the cosmos made whole, the power of evil rendered impotent, the structures of our social relations made just (city), the pain of our suffering comforted and healed, and the full presence of God in our midst made eternal.

### **Tentative Conclusions on New Creation as a Biblical Theme**

New Creation as an expression of hope for the future always functions as well to critique the present.

New Creation in its biblical expressions is always transformational in intent. In various texts the theme of New Creation speaks out and calls us to transformations in human relationships, in socio-economic and political

structures, in our individual and essential being, and in the non-human elements of creation. Except for the Pre-Institute focus on renewal of the inner self, the individual and environmental dimensions of the transformations envisioned in New Creation were not as fully discussed.

New Creation imagery in the Bible speaks of God's hope for us and all creation as both realized and future. The kingdom is both in our midst and yet to come. To resolve this tension in either direction would be to distort the biblical witness and rob us of the power of these images to enable both urgency in mission and perseverance in hope. We also suggest that God's New Creation has elements of radical continuity and discontinuity with elements of the present creation.

New Creation texts have their greatest potential for transformation of lives, societal structures, and understanding of the church's mission when they are read out of the experience of or in solidarity with the poor, the oppressed, the suffering, and the marginalized. All experiences of pain and brokenness have potential as a hermeneutical lens through which to read in solidarity with God's intention to bring New Creation to all who are denied the full gifts of present creation.

Many New Creation texts are eschatological in character. We came back

frequently to texts in the Book of Revelation. We have already mentioned some fruitful themes for further exploration. Here we simply note that these texts of apocalyptic hope seem particularly sensitive to the social locations from which they are read. Yet we seem to agree that these apocalyptic texts must nevertheless be read and reflected upon in all of our diverse locations. At opposite ends of a spectrum of readings of these texts we might find:

- The readings of those left in suffering outside of the history written by the privileged, who can only hope for an eruption of God's absolute power that brings hope of a new and just city, a vanquishing of evil, and an end to suffering.
- The readings of those who are the church in privileged settings who often find these texts embarrassing, fantastic, or irrelevant. We suggest that the descriptions of Babylon's privileges (Rev. 18) strike all too close to home, but make all the more urgent the hearing of the summons to "come out of her" (18:4). Then it will be possible to welcome the coming of the new and just city, to witness God's tender comfort of the dispossessed, and to claim the promise of 21:5 "I am making all things new"—perhaps even ex-Babylonians.

## II

### **Wesley Studies Working Group Conveners: Ted Campbell and Elaine Robinson**

The working group of 23 participants from four different countries (England, Japan, Brazil and the U.S.A.) interacted with the content of 19 papers related to the theology and practice of John and Charles Wesley in relation to the theme of The New Creation. Points of convergence within the discussion would include the following:

- 1) theology and practice for the Wesleys was personal, but not individualistic; the personal understanding and experience of God is formed within the context of the Christian community or the church.
- 2) the theology of creation and redemption involves all of creation, the plant and animal kingdom are included in the vision of the new creation. While the opening plenary by Dr. Maddox was affirmed as helpful, there was a sense that the Wesleyan themes of the Kingdom of God, heaven, hell, hope, and embodiment all deserve significant attention as well.

3) the new creation is both present and future, it is both processive and instantaneous.

4) the vision of the new creation is focused on redeemed individuals gathered into accountable groups (classes, bands and select bands) who live out the will of God in the society. While national, global and cosmological dimensions are not well developed, these themes are not entirely absent. It is essential that 21st century Methodists not expect those who founded the movement in the 18th century to address the topic of this conference in the language of current discourse.

5) the power and presence of the Trinitarian God is at the very heart of the Wesleyan understanding of grace and of the new creation.

6) the motivation for change is connected to the work of the Spirit of God which enables and empowers change.

Points of divergence within the discussion would include the following:

1) the amount of time and attention that needed to be given to the old creation, the consequences of the fall and the doctrine of original sin. John Wesley's single largest tract focused on Original Sin.

2) differences emerged within the group about the best approach to the topic; many engaged in the discussion from the perspective of systematic theology, others favored a more social- history approach, and yet others wanted to explore the implications of the theme from a more cosmological and liberationist perspective. This diversity was both enriching and at times limiting.

Suggestions for the future topics would include the following:

1) explore more deeply the nature and shape of the new creation for the 21st century.

2) connect the theme of the next institute with learning and discourse from this institute and related themes of previous themes.

3) explore the differences between the Wesley brothers in relation to a particular topic or theme; e.g. spiritual formation, prayer, leadership development.

4) explore the theology and practices of John Wesley in relationship to the supernatural.

5) engage the topics of Heaven and Hell.

Suggestions for the process in the future would include the following:

- 1) have papers available a few weeks before the Institute began (either for purchase in print or for free on the internet.
- 2) limit the presentation to a brief summary of the key point and the supporting arguments, then allow an equal or greater amount of time for discussion.
- 3) at least one meeting with another working group to allow a more diverse discussion and dialogue.
- 4) do not limit the number of papers.
- 5) explore and improve the use of the internet as a means to facilitate distributions and empower discussion.

**III**  
**Nineteenth and Twentieth Century**  
**Wesleyan Traditions**  
**Conveners: Douglas M. Strong and**  
**Margaret Jones**

We engaged with the idea of new creation as Utopia (“no place”) or as liberation and identified these questions among many others:

- 1) Reform is always specific and located within the social context. Can the new creation in fact be implemented?
- 2) Does it reach towards the cosmos?
- 3) Is John Wesley over-estimated as a theological resource? We suggest

that this group is the key group in the Institute—the group where we “walk across the bridges from Wesley to the contemporary scene.”

We asked questions about institutional organization as the new creation—is it to be identified with the kingdom of God on earth? Structures may have a negative function: do they anticipate or inhibit the eschaton?

The theme of millennialism was prominent in our discussions of North American Methodist/Wesleyan traditions. We noted a relationship between cultural location and eschatological views. But we also saw in some contexts a tendency to begin with social praxis and then establish the theological justification within a post/pre-millennial framework.

Perhaps the group’s strongest learning experience was the awareness of context—even Wesleyan terminology is contextual, and we had to attend to one another’s languages.

Within the group we had ten denominations represented. We gained a new understanding that there are many Methodisms, and that what may be presented as Wesleyan “universals” are always contextually located.

We returned many times to the personal vis-a-vis the social aspects of the new creation. In considering the interface between theology and social

action we asked whether a theology derived from John Wesley provides sufficient resources for social/political change.

We noted an important transition between the 18<sup>th</sup> century Wesleyan stress on inward transformation and a 19<sup>th</sup> century stress on outward behavior. What happens when the latter becomes routinized and reified?

We saw the 19<sup>th</sup> century both in terms of its roots in the 18<sup>th</sup> century and as setting a trajectory for the 20<sup>th</sup>.

This-worldly new creation schemes offer both danger and promise. When the new creation is “realized” we see its limitations. On the other hand, schemes that have not yet been realized can become idols.

We had very few papers on the 20<sup>th</sup> century and wondered if we were unwilling to engage with our history of decline.

#### **Possible Future Directions for this group:**

- Study the 20<sup>th</sup> century and the present
- Attend to global strands
- Analyze the breakdown of the combination of revivalism and reform
- Learn/teach each other more about holiness churches
- Pay attention to multiculturalism/interreligious dialogue

Reflect on the significance of World War II

And the impact of industrialization and urbanization

We should take some responsibility for attempting to chronicle decline (*The Death of Christian Britain*)

It would be helpful to have a prepared description of each national grouping of Wesleyan/Methodist churches to enable participants better to understand the context of papers.

#### **IV**

#### **Systematic Theology Working Group Conveners: Charles M. Wood and Norman Young**

Several years ago Bishop Walter Klaiber wrote a very helpful article, “Gibt es eine methodistische Exegese?” (*Theologie für die Praxis* 18/1 [1998]: 1–13), in which he called attention not so much to the content or product of Methodist biblical exegesis as to some notable characteristics of its style, i.e., some ways or features of doing exegesis that seem distinctively (though perhaps not exclusively) Methodist. As the Systematic Theology Working Group reflected in its final session on its work together over the past few days, many of the comments centered on a similar theme regarding systematic theology—a

theme that had not been raised explicitly heretofore, but that gradually emerged in this closing conversation. Is there a “Methodist” systematic theology? The question is not, “Has any Methodist ever written a systematic theology, or engaged in systematic theological reflection?” It is rather, “Is there a Methodist approach to systematic theology? Are there any distinctively Methodist ways of doing systematic theology that we may have become conscious of in our work together?” Comments made by members of the group on what they had gained from the experience indicate that there might well be some such points to ponder.

Members:

Affirmed the indispensable link between the doing of theology and its implications for life (“a commitment to the living implications of what we think and say” seemed a common thread in our work, in keeping with Wesleyan “responsible grace”).

Affirmed the indispensability of the concrete—i.e., of particular Christian and human practices, particular narratives and anecdotes—for theological understanding.

Appreciated the collegial way in which the group has been conducted and has done its work. It has been “an event of church.”

Experienced and received real energy through doing theology in community. The urgency of the theological task and the enormous resources entrusted to us became evident through our participation in the group. This awareness permits us to be more intentional about making a contribution in line with our own individual abilities, knowing that there are others in the community with expertise in other areas. No individual has to “know it all.”

Noted that the divisions that have hampered much Methodist conversation in the recent past did not hamper the group from making progress on common tasks. We found much common ground, across a great variety of backgrounds and contexts.

Experienced in the group the reality of theology as a network of interrelated relationships that constituted a new “we.”

Noted that the way in which the group “conferenced” together was a model for how systematic theology

should be done. This raised the question: How do we create the proper conditions for doing theology in our several places?

Noted that the opportunity to learn from colleagues and to engage in mutual criticism in a generous and humble spirit is crucial for ongoing teaching and scholarship.

Noted the need to encourage local church communities to learn to see God at work in small, concrete events, while at the same time seeing the larger picture.

These various points do not, of course, constitute an adequate portrayal of a Methodist approach to theology, but are only suggestive in a preliminary way. If we had turned to the question deliberately and explicitly, the outcome might have been quite different.

In addition, there were insights expressed about various theological topics related to the overall theme of the new creation, most of which also bear some implications for the doing of theology:

The Wesleyan image of the life to come as involving continued growth and development in relation to God, rather than as a static “rest,” was thought to have much potential for

many theological areas.

The radicality of the Incarnation (e.g., the Ascension as the taking into the very being of God of the experience of full humanity), and what this implies for our understanding both of God and of ourselves, was frequently noted.

The discussion was found to prompt a need and also a trajectory for further pneumatological exploration, if the Spirit is the energy of the new creation.

The value of engaging in concrete, piecemeal cooperation with God’s grace in developing alternative renderings of new creation, rather than in trusting in grandiose rational schemes, was amply brought out in the work of the Institute of the whole and was also implicitly affirmed in the work of the group.

The pressing need for new ecclesiologies to help us understand and embody the new creation in community was also brought home to us.

Members reported a new-found energy and hope for the possibility of re-creation in their own specific social settings.

In conclusion, several members affirmed the importance of the relationships formed in our group and in the Institute as a whole for their anticipated future theological work; and several noted that the increased presence, visibility, and participation of “Two-thirds World” members—and the consequent awareness of the importance of doing theology “from the underside of history”—was a very welcome feature of this Institute.

## V

### **Christian Mission and Globalization Working Group**

**Conveners: Rui de Souza Josgrilberg  
and Theodore Runyon**

#### **I. Highlights of the Group**

What is the shape of Christian mission today, given the realities of the capitalist global market economy and the increase of religious pluralism everywhere? Do we need to rethink the claims of Christ in this new context? This working group treated these two foci, globalism and pluralism, and asked whether our Wesleyan heritage can throw light on them.

#### **A. Christian Mission and Globalism**

Christian missionary outreach is largely in the developing nations of the world. There economies are forced to integrate themselves in the dominant capitalist world economy in order to survive. This often undermines local economies in favor of trans-national corporations that utilize the land to produce for export rather than for local markets, with the result that the GNP goes up and a small minority is enriched while the general population suffers from both scarcity of basic foodstuffs and inflation due to this scarcity.

Moreover, the natural environment is often misused and exploited in the search for minerals and lumber for export to the developed world.

Wesley addressed similar problems in 18th century England in his essay, “The Present Scarcity of Provisions,” when land use for production of horses for export and grain use for distilling meant a shortage of foodstuffs in local markets and increased prices. He called for government controls to make basic foods available to everyone, curtail distilling, reduce land rents for tenant farmers, and reduce the national debt and taxation by curtailing unnecessary military expenditures.

The working group examined the ideology of global capitalism, that free markets bring benefits to all by shifting capital to developing countries where

wages are lower, bringing development. By eliminating tariffs, prices are reduced. Competition also drives prices down. But over against these supposed benefits the group critiqued capitalism as creating a culture of violence and polarization within countries and war between countries. Capitalism defines human nature in terms of consumerism. Through the media the free market spreads western morality and values and undermines local ethical standards. Development often introduces bribery and corruption on the local and national levels. Salvation is seen in terms of new technologies, but new technology is not new creation.

Globalism needs a clear understanding of human sin, and a redefinition of the goal and purpose of human life. It is the Christian responsibility to develop alternative economic models more consistent with the gospel. Christians therefore need to dialogue ecumenically and with other religions to make a common religious case to question the free market ideology and to work for better laws that will raise living standards and avoid the unemployment resulting from shifts in capital in the free market.

Those in the Wesleyan tradition need to recover the Wesleyan mission with the poor and to break down class divisions and economic barriers.

## **B. Christian Mission and Pluralism**

**1. *The Wesleyan basis for dialogue with other religions:*** Wesley's doctrine of prevenient grace provides the presupposition for entering into dialogue. He saw the work of the Holy Spirit as present in other religious traditions as "an inward voice" calling human beings everywhere to acknowledge the reality of God and the witness of conscience. The working group wanted to expand this Wesleyan base by referring to the "missio Dei," the witness to the Trinitarian God, as the foundation for mission today. Also recognized in Wesley was the distinctive Christian message of God's love that comes to full expression in Christ, which makes possible the change from "servants of God," as found in other religious traditions, to "sons and daughters of God," those who are the conscious recipients of divine love.

**2. *Themes for mission:*** Ecology. The first missionary mandate was to work and care for the earth and life on the planet (cf. Gen.2:15).

Gender and shared mission. The role of women in mission must be further emphasized.

Response to the HIV/AIDS global crisis. This is a task the churches have just begun to respond to.

Signs of the New Creation in the world. Christians should support and

nurture those social movements and governmental initiatives that are consistent with Kingdom ethics. Joining with other religions in common tasks and concerns. This would include exposing and opposing destructive aspects of the free market. And making common cause to protect the earth.

**3. Implications for Theological Education.** The importance of dialogue with the other religions is already widely recognized in our seminaries. The Wesleyan basis for this should be spelled out more explicitly. However, the importance of an eco-theology is not as widely recognized and needs to be developed in the different national and international contexts.

## VI

### **Worship and Spirituality Working Group**

**Conveners: Karen Westerfield Tucker and Judith Maizel-Long**

The Worship and Spirituality sub-group of the Eleventh Oxford Institute for Methodist Theological Studies met between August 11<sup>th</sup> and August 20<sup>th</sup>. Participants were for the most part from the United States and Britain, and were enriched by representatives of Methodism in Latin America, Singapore, Germany and New Zealand. Papers were presented which covered aspects of the

### New Creation

- in relation to hymns from Charles Wesley to contemporary hymn writers
- and hymnals;
- in how hymnwriters have responded to crisis and context;
- in the experience of God in the present-day highly developed and multifaith culture of Singapore;
- in liturgical ecstasy in early American Methodism;
- in the spirituality of early Methodist Women;
- in current eucharistic theology and practice in United Methodism and British Methodism;
- in images of the Kingdom of God in American Methodist Sunday Schools;
- in preaching in America to Hispanic congregations, and by a sample of women preachers;
- in the liturgical and practical aspects of exorcism;
- in the impact of contemporary culture in the St. Thomas Mass for doubters and fringe members of the church in Germany;
- in technology and the commodefication of liturgy; and
- in the uses of art in worship and spirituality, in relation to a painting by Graham Sutherland.

There was rich discussion and contribution from those who did not present papers. We found that the papers addressed and responded to one another.

*What Has the Group Learned about the New Creation?*

**New Creation as the gift of God:** We discovered the limitations of our concepts in relation to the New Creation. The New Creation does not come by our talk, or our actions, or our worship, it is God's gift to us. It may be discerned, in parabolic actions and through words, for example, in many places and times. These are not God's New Creation, they are signs and foretastes of it. The New Creation is to be sought after, and the longing itself is a gift of prevenient grace.

**New Creation in the Old Creation:** The New Creation is to be discerned, already present and not yet in its fullness, in the Old Creation, indicating that it is appearing by the transformation of the latter. The personal, social, and cosmic dimensions of the New Creation have all to be dealt with. To take any of these dimensions on isolation is to give a partial account, or to have a partial understanding.

**New Creation in Word and Sacrament:** The New Creation is celebrated, proclaimed, and anticipated in word, song, and in the Holy Communion. For those in the Wesleyan

tradition, preaching and music are our essential expressions of worship. The Eucharist is of central importance in our worship, as the promised meeting place with our risen and ascended Lord Jesus Christ and a foretaste of the New Creation in the heavenly banquet prepared for all creation, not only for the human parts of it.

**The New Creation and Postmodernity:** The old creation, or at least our understanding of it, appears to be at a point of change, the end of modernity. As Methodists we need to keep abreast of these changes, in order to contextualize and express the worship and open the door to experiences of the New Creation in new cultural forms, such as the visual arts.

*What Have We Yet to Learn about the New Creation?*

**Spirituality and the New Creation:** What is the relationship of sanctification, holiness, happiness, and healing to the New Creation? How do we speak of these individually, and yet together? Can we explore the relationship between *love/agapé* and the New Creation? The Creation and the New Creation are risky, and demand of us the risk of a life lived in love.

**Time and the New Creation:** How should the Christian community offer its narratives of time and liturgical time in the light of the New Creation? What

does it mean in terms of the New Creation to gather on the Lord's Day, to fail to do so, or to choose another day for the gathering of the congregation?

**The Church and the New Creation:**

The Church is not the only channel for God's New Creation. The Church often fails in its vocation to be the harbinger and instrument of the New Creation. There exists the biblical metaphor of travail as the prelude to the New Creation; the New Creation is costly, and demands of the church and of individuals to live a cruciform life. The Church needs new prayers and hymns to express confession, lament, repentance and praise in its failures of vocation.

**Relationships in the New Creation:**

In ecological relationships, we need to explore how to take care of the old creation in the light of the New Creation. We have found a need to acknowledge Christian relationships with the Jews; how can we talk about the New Creation in the light of that dialogue? How do we interpret "Kingdom of God" and the "New Creation" to the congregations in worship and spirituality? Is there a Methodist spirituality?

**[No report for Group VII]**

**VIII**

**Ecclesiology and Discipleship**

**Working Group**

**Conveners: David Lowes Watson and  
Nora Q. Boots**

The theme of "The New Creation" tended to focus the group on a low ecclesiology, drawing on Wesley's ecclesiological pragmatism. It was in reaching out to others that Wesley saw the true purpose of the church. Living the gospel that he preached was more important than ecclesiological exactitude. Tradition was less essential to him than reaching out to the tanners in Cornwall, the keelmen in Newcastle, the colliers in Kingswood and Staffordshire, the drunkards, the swearers, and the sabbath-breakers of Moorfield, and the harlots of Drury Lane. Episcopal succession and parish incumbency were incidental to the apostolic spirit that empowered Christians, clergy and lay, to labor for the good of souls. In short, his concept of the church was subordinate to the ultimate nature and purpose of the God who was in Christ — a God with a clear mission to redeem humanity and the whole of creation.

Papers lifted up phrases such as "Planned Obsolescence," "Living Organism," "Communion Ecclesiology," and "Living at the Boundaries." The Church's common life therefore has a rhythm of coming and going: a

*gathering* in order to be nurtured in discipleship and formed in holiness, and a *scattering* in order to fulfil its apostleship and enact its witness. There was much discussion around these concepts and what they would mean for the Orders of Ministry and for the Laity.

There was a marked emphasis on an incarnational ecclesiology. If we are to think of the *New Creation*, then the church must have direct knowledge of *this* creation. Two presenters used film and video materials to link theological concepts with contextual issues. A recurring theme was the necessity of interaction with the world, and the need for the church to learn from the world in its embodiment of *missio Dei*. A particular focus in this regard was the contribution of one of the group who teaches English Literature in a church-related university, and who asked why there was not more dialogue between those who teach theology and Christians who teach in other fields.

All of this pointed to the need for the church in general and Christians in particular to have a clear identity. If the world is to help us define the gospel by evincing the presence of Christ beyond the church, then the church must be sure of its peculiar contribution to the coming reign of God.

The papers and discussions that focused on discipleship were challenged by the theme of *New Creation* to press for a

radical following of Christ that would point toward the coming reign of God. The need for accountability (i.e., mutual accountability, as in the Wesleyan tradition) was a common thread, and the concept of formative community was stressed as the *locus* of this.

Radical discipleship—a commitment to following the teachings of Jesus in all his offices: priest, prophet, and ruler—likewise required an assessment of whether Methodism can ever be an inclusive church. If we go back to our Wesleyan roots, should we not seek to be an order, or a movement? In turn, it was pointed out that reforming movements tend to judge the church rather than work within its structures as *ecclesiolae in ecclesia*.

One contextual challenge in this regard was the following proposal that the group should ask the Institute to endorse the publication of all clergy stipends in world Methodism as a means of raising consciousness if we are to be faithfully Wesleyan in announcing and embodying the New Creation. The group could not come to any consensus, and the proposal was withdrawn.

#### **A Proposal to Publish the Stipends of Methodist Clergy Worldwide**

In exploring the Wesleyan theological traditions, the Oxford Institutes of Methodist Theological Studies have increasingly, indeed inexorably, evinced concern for the poor. One Institute was devoted to

this theme entirely, and our present focus on *New Creation* once again makes it inescapable.

The Institutes have likewise fostered and been fostered by significant publications in this area, projections for another such volume having been announced just this week. The bibliography of Wesleyan Studies has grown rapidly, even explosively, as witnessed by the rich sampling we have on display at our plenary gatherings. Those of us teaching courses in the field, basic or advanced, have resources in abundance.

However, there is an increasing tension at these Institutes and, for some of us, in Wesleyan Studies as a whole. As John Walsh pointed out at the conclusion of the Institute devoted to Wesley and the Poor, to plumb the man's theology it is necessary to walk at least minimally in the man's shoes. Some of us here have faced the raw opposition of the world in our work, but most of us are protected from it by academic tenure or ecclesial space. Far from facing angry mobs, some of us have been known to change our sermons in mid-delivery just because someone frowned.

In short, the third of the tasks presented at the first Conference in 1744 is increasingly unavoidable.

*What to Teach* and *How to Teach* have been well addressed, but if we continue much further without considering *What to Do*, our contribution to the church runs the risk of becoming less than Wesleyan. His writings and his editions were a significant component of his ministry, but not the chief reason we honor him. This is not to argue for the incorporation of a practical aspect into the Institutes *per se*. That has been tried and found wanting, with the pitfalls of artificial immersion or a token nod toward those on whose grassroots ministry we rely far too much to carry this freight for the rest of us. But if one asks what it is that theologians do best, then surely the answer is publication.

Therefore, the Working Group in Ecclesiology and Discipleship, drawing on the work of these gatherings over the past twenty-five years, asks the Eleventh Oxford Institute to endorse the publication of the stipends of all ordained Methodist clergy world-wide, beginning with the least and ending with the greatest (*The General Spread of the Gospel*). The purpose of this publication will be to make explicit what is always implicit as we convene, namely, that some of us are in ministry at minimal compensation, and others are

compensated on a par with the higher levels of their own society, and certainly with the highest of the world.

The listing would be by Conference, and would be introduced by essays explaining the contextual factors needed for an informed reading of the figures. The essays would also include other contextual realities of mission and ministry, in particular the sacrifices made by our sisters and brothers that do not always receive our sympathy or solidarity. The proposal does not seek to publish information that is not readily available from any Conference Office, but rather to demonstrate what we all know to be a marked disparity between those of us serving in the Two-Thirds World and those of us in the Western World, most especially in the USA. If we are truly a connectional community, the extent of this disparity is unacceptable. Who better than those of engaged in theological reflection to point it out to the church, and where better to start than with the clergy? Such a *conscientization* would surely be a compass heading toward the *New Creation* that has so energized our deliberations during the past two weeks.

Submitted by David Lowes Watson

## IX

### **Practical Theology Working Group Conveners: Philip Amerson and Pamela Couture**

Papers in the practical theology section offered a variety of perspectives on “Building Community for the New Creation.” Our call stated: “Building Community for the New Creation involves practices that connect a web of persons, families, local congregations, cities, suburbs and rural areas, societies, cultures, and nations. Where are the connections in the web tenuous or broken, and what theological practices, suggested by a theology for the New Creation, would help the web of relationships (in) community to flourish? Practices for reflection include those that are considered within the traditional ‘practical theological disciplines’ and those that are not represented within academic disciplines but are emerging as important for the wholeness of community life.” Our work on building community in the working group developed around four themes: theology and culture, the role of the church, communal practices that embody the new creation, and marks that help us recognize the new creation.

As we summed up our experience at the end of the Institute, the Practical Theology group thought that its own

practice as a group offered a glimpse of the New Creation. We were an interdisciplinary group—some of whom identify ourselves as practical theologians and others who identify ourselves as systematicians, historians, or church leaders—yet we engaged in dialogue across our differences. The “mood” of the group was variously described as “generous...no, more than generous, open...open to a dialogue about different theological practices, practices from different contexts. We have strengthened one another and enriched one another so as to share a different theological vision.” Other words describing the mood were “gratitude, delight in resonance, expectancy, and fortification.” We were concerned not only for what was said but for who said it and for the context from which he or she spoke. (We enjoyed the occasional personal contributions from our translators!) Some participants found moments of frustration, wishing that we could get to particular issues more quickly and that real differences and tensions had been more evident. Some would have preferred that, as an Institute, we could have engaged in immersion experiences and that worship would have included eucharist and preaching. In the end, some were saying, “After two weeks, what have we done?” But, overall, members of the group said that, as a

result of the experience, they would write differently, understand practical theology differently, and understand the UK and polity differently.

The summaries that follow introduce the common themes that emerged from our papers and discussions.

### **I. Theology and Culture**

In John Wesley’s *Thoughts on Slavery* he recognized that people who do not profess Christianity sometimes live more consistently with gospel practices than those who do profess Christianity. The work of several of our participants demonstrated modern day versions of this insight. Carlos Intipampa showed that the values and practices of the Aymara gospel of the indigenous people of Bolivia may at times express a religious sensibility that is closer to Jesus’ gospel than the institutionally-shaped religious experience of Christians after Jesus. Pamela Couture’s paper on participatory music arose from the observation of music groups who “acted more like the church than the church.” Fred Smith’s description of his local church used images of Shalom and Beloved Community to interpret the way that his congregation acts out the Bishops’ Initiative on Children and Poverty. Sileshebo Sileshebo of Zambia called the church to a series of practices that go beyond the traditional functions of congregations to include African-

inspired images of shared struggle, relatedness, memory, shared stories, creativity and imagination. We concluded that Wesleyan understandings of the New Creation operates on a variety of levels that people are searching for new words to express, including the cosmic and the cultural.

## II. The Role of the Church

The New Creation is God's work, but it is a work in which the church participates. This participation occurs in various contexts, identities, meanings, old and new practices, diversity and difference. The New Creation may also be found as presence of Christ beyond the institutional church.

Within the institutional church Michael Coyner described challenges to the church of North and South Dakota, USA, where depopulation has created "frontier" counties. "Frontier" have less population than rural counties. New models of ministry are needed to serve isolated, low population churches. These new forms also raise uncomfortable questions about affirmations of lay ministry—do we only affirm lay ministers when it is pragmatic to do so?

Mercy Oduyoye of Ghana described the trends that challenge the Methodist Church of Ghana in worship/ritual and social/ethical issues. Worship is being updated by music that communicates a lack of understanding of the mission of

the church and the social/ethical issues in which the church must involve itself. Oduyoye fears that the ecstasy of worship style may divert the church from an honest mission with people that is at its heart.

David Rice in the United Kingdom offered Wesley's understanding of providence as a basis for congregations who come together as intentional communities around specific missional activities that then articulate their meaning in worship. This kind of intentional community is very different than on that comes together on Sunday morning as a focus, and then says, "Now what?" Michael Mather of Indianapolis, Indiana, suggested that sanctification involves a series of practices—healing, forgiveness, household economics, singing, and hospitality—that might take on new forms in faithfulness for the present day.

In ministry beyond the institutional church Robert Jones of the United Kingdom described the attempts of his organization to build trust between Protestant and Catholic children in Northern Ireland through summer camping experiences. After years of promoting reconciliation, however, he questions on a deeper level how possible it really is to love our enemy. Still, he affirmed the pursuit of respect, mutual understanding, partnership, and friend-

ship that might reduce the hostility between deeply divided groups.

Also reflecting on ministry beyond the institutional church, Ray Fitzgerald of Maryland, United States, suggested that Syriac spirituality can provide a basis for “spiritual care.” Spiritual care speaks to the broken hearted and the need for healing among the poor, the sick and the imprisoned. The Syriac understanding of spirituality bases this care within the incarnation.

In the ministry of the church to the world on behalf of peacemaking, Philip Amerson reviewed the various positions toward war within the Methodist tradition—from pacifism to just war theories—and argues that the present United Methodist president of the United States, in the “war on terrorism,” has failed to consider either pacifism or just war as a response to 9/11 – rather, “time for careful moral reflection was an unaffordable luxury.” It is not yet clear how the United Methodist Church will fulfill its peacemaking vocation with the challenges of war that continue to threaten.

We were helped by our member Mary Elizabeth Moore’s plenary address on “repair of the world” to bring a focus on hope in the midst of sin and evil. Persons in our group particularly appreciated her raising the issues of racism and homophobia, reparations and reconciliation, as wounds and responses

to wounds of the world. We are people who are born of God’s essential goodness, yet all of us live with the effects of “white privilege” on our lives, and those of use who are white are responsible for the ways that we use that privilege. As we discussed the various services of reconciliation of which we have been a part, we have wondered whether there is been enough “truth” told for “reconciliation to be possible.

Our group recognized that the church and the world are deeply wounded by racism, colonialism, homophobia, paternalism and war. Our willingness to struggle within in the church and the world to heal the wounds of the world is essential to the New Creation.

### **III. Communal Practices**

The New Creation in God’s work; but it is work in which we participate. We shape our lives and our lives are re-shaped by the practices in which we engage. These practices, as we have seen, are economic, political, ecclesial, social, and personal: but ultimately, they aim toward the practices that embody love and justice and that participate in Christ, in this world and the eschaton.

Rather, than reflecting on specific practices, Clive Marsh sought to understand the meaning of “having the mind of Christ.” Such a phrase is too often associated with ecclesiology. Rather, having the mind of Christ involves

“practicing Christ,” or engaging in practices that help us take on Christian identity; “reifying” Christian experience, or making concrete the words, signs, and symbols of who Christ is for us today; “negotiating” Christ, or living in the dynamism of the meaning and activity of Christ’s presence for us today.

Others of our group, however, had specific practices in mind. Anthony Reddie wrote of the importance of narrative for the Africans of the diaspora in England, in order that they may undergird their identities and challenge the racism with which they are faced. Story-telling was a significant theme. Andrew Wood offered the idea that testimony is a means of grace, a story that is undeserved and unmerited, that knows no bounds in its portrayal of suffering or its vision of harmony and justice. Kevin Armstrong proposed the revival of the practice the scop: the person who witness to faith through humor and outlandish behavior. We nominated many people and groups as possible modern-day scops. See, for example, the Raging Grannies ([www.raginggrannies.com](http://www.raginggrannies.com)).

Amy Oden offered a study of hospitality in the early Methodist societies. She described the ways that the early societies welcomed the stranger and cared for the stranger’s physical and spiritual needs. In hospitality, Christ can be

recognized. For Kathy Armistead practical theology is about wisdom: the wisdom to be able to recognize God working in the particular, experiencing how things play out in the world.

In practical theology we recognize that we participate in the New Creation by particular practices— new forms of interdependence between lay and clergy ministry, peacemaking, reconciliation, hospitality, leadership, reparations, music making—though these particular practices seek a common vision in “the mind of Christ,” in “wisdom,” in stranger love.

#### **IV. Marks of the New Creation**

OK, perhaps we created a new practice—community as scop. We met to discuss the practices of the New Creation in an Upper Room. We decided to follow the suggestions Nestor Miquez in the first convenors’ meeting that we divide into small groups to facilitate participation. To do this, our first Upper Room was too small for us, except during our initial exercise. We didn’t need much room to attempt to draw our own countries on newsprint so we could show people where we came from. We laughed a lot, as we are, to a person, better theologians than cartographers. Our second Upper Room, where we spent most of our time, was actually Mike and Connor Mather’s sitting room, four stairways up, above the

stonecutters. They hospitably allowed us to use their bedrooms as our break out rooms. We heard several stories written by Connor Mather about the consequences for Harry Potter if he didn't cross the street in a group of twenty. We particularly appreciated the 100 % attendance record of one of our members who said of both Upper Rooms, "My cardiologist wouldn't like this." Perhaps a mark of the new creation from the beginning, for us, was courage, flexibility and laughter.

Though we seek to participate in the New Creation by the practices mentioned in this report, we also recognize the need for Marks of the New Creation that will help us know its presence among us - to recognize something transformatively new, rather than reconstructed or reorganized, something that communicates our corporate spirituality. But what constitutes these marks? We discussed the need for the Marks of the New Creation in group, but perhaps we need to revisit this question five years hence. If we "glimpsed" the New Creation in the kind of community of discourse we were able to establish in our "Upper Room," and if the way we engaged one another really does give us new ways of being Wesleyan Christians as writers, teachers, church leaders, and if five years from now we can say that some permanent, positive transformation

really has occurred, then we will be able to say that we were "marked" by the New Creation in this Institute a particular way.

## X

### **Theological Ethics and Technological Change Working Group Conveners: Sondra Wheeler and Stephen Plant**

The group met 11 times and received 11 papers. The papers covered a wide range of topics with a diversity of methods. At the close of each day the group identified significant themes and recurring questions. The full range of conversation is impossible to capture, even in the notes taken of each session. This document lists the questions that were central to the group's ongoing discussion.

Early on, the group identified questions of epistemology and method. How do we know what we know? How do we frame our arguments? What difference does the language we adopt for our discussion of ethics and technology make? In conversation we teased out distinctions between technological devices, technology as a process of development, and our cultural context which gives to technology a central and orienting role in society.

Several papers directly addressed issues of how technology is to be understood. How real is the newness continually offered to us by new technologies? Is technology an anticipation of “new creation,” perhaps even helping it to come about? Or does technology constitute a secular bastard of Christian eschatology, asserting human mastery and the adequacy of technological solutions to fundamental problems of human life. These questions relate to the much broader question of how eschatology affects ethics—and ethics, eschatology?

Papers addressing the use of computer technology turned our attention to the other pole of the Christian narrative, to creation, to the psycho-somatic unity of human persons, and to the significance of human embodiment in time and space. How is technology affecting anthropology and our sense of what it means to be human? What is the significance of physical presence in a world in which we speak of cyberspace and virtual reality? These questions have profound ecclesiological and sacramental dimensions.

Anthropological questions arose again in the context of biotechnology. What effect do reproductive technology and genetic intervention have on our understanding of humanness?

Biotechnology is one aspect of our larger efforts to circumvent the limitations and vulnerability of human

existence. Our valorising of human survival as an “absolute good” also has environmental and political dimensions. It raises the questions:

- 1) To what extent are human beings continuous with the rest of creation, and in what sense discontinuous with it?
- 2) What is meant by human responsibility for creation and stewardship of it? To whom are we accountable? We talked about the resources offered by John Wesley in answering these questions, for example concerning the status of non-human creatures.
- 3) What does it mean to “play God”?

We discussed whether our sense of the relation of humanity with the rest of creation had been fundamentally altered by technology, for example by the expansion of our horizons to microscopic and cosmic dimensions.

One working group paper, and Manfred Marquardt’s plenary paper, led to discussion of globalization and political theology. How is God’s political power manifested, if at all, in the various transformations designated by the term “globalization”? Do our common Christian affirmations and the moral principles we found upon them ground our political action and provide real grounds for moral discrimination?

Salient in our ongoing discussion was the degree to which different and incommensurable forms of discourse were brought to the table, and the difficulty we had in finding sufficient common language. Also clear was the degree of passion and personal investment evoked by issues close to the heart of who we are as human persons, as Christians and as communities of faith. Disagreements were often sharp and basic, mediated by personal carefulness and respect, perhaps made easier by the fact that we were not called upon to make actual decisions.

Recurrent in our reflection was the acknowledgment of the tensions endemic to Christian theology—between the material and the spiritual, between the realized and unrealized dimensions of eschatology, between the concrete and located and the transnational and indeed trans-historical character of the church. They made us continually aware of the complexity and messiness of real issues, and the danger of generalities.



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Methodist Theological Studies,**

**Editor:**

Randy L. Maddox

email: [rmaddox@div.duke.edu](mailto:rmaddox@div.duke.edu)