

97
Confidential

A CONTEXTUAL ANALYSIS of
THE OXFORD INSTITUTE OF METHODIST THEOLOGICAL STUDIES
[1947-1997]
Dow Kirkpatrick

"My proposal is that in the very first session....you focus on the theme of 'The Context of the Oxford Institute.' This would give the (Contextual Theology Working) group an opportunity to reflect seriously on the particular context of our mutual theological reflection."

(Letter from Mary Elizabeth Moore, July 16)

I.
A DEFINITION.

Two ways of linking faith to life confront us. They come from opposite directions. The faith arrived at is, in each, qualitatively different from the other.

One begins with the context and moves to faith.

The other begins with an accepted faith and moves toward the context.

The first option: "popular" pedagogy - arises out of an event(s) which is(are) presented to a group of persons who help each other discover the faith shaped by their common experience.

The second: "elitist" pedagogy - assumes someone possesses a truth which is to be conveyed rationally, to be accepted or rejected by logic acceptable to the hearer.

Our problem is: In the English language there is no verb for "faith" so we use "to believe."¹ This distorts the faith by locating it in logic rather than in living. The elitist pedagogy is, for most of us, the most natural way of teaching and learning.

I choose the first, a popular pedagogy which begins with context and moves to faith, that is, to understand how the context shapes our theologizing. For me, the ability to make this choice is a gift of liberation theologies, especially the faith of the oppressed poor of Latin America.

The context can only be identified and analyzed by living inside it with intentional awareness. It cannot be done logically from outside. Therefore to do what I have been asked to do in this paper, I must speak personally.

II. THE GENESIS OF THE OXFORD INSTITUTE.

How do we define contextually this theological Institute? I will briefly set the story of its beginning and development - as I experienced it. Please understand, I am very much aware, I was not the only person around as these events unfolded.

This is not a history of the Institute. It is my analysis of the context which shaped its formation.

"The Short Twentieth Century" (1914-present) sets the time of our context, according to historian, Eric Hobsbawm².

Our context was, and is, defined by one characteristic - **WAR**. From 1917 to the present this planet has passed through a variety of forms of war (WW I; Interim; WW II; Cold War; Pax Americana).

This Institute had its beginning precisely at the end of WW II, which opened the global context to four definitive elements:

1. Emerging New Nations.
2. Wider Opening of Communications/Travel.
3. New Churches; New Mission.
4. Broader Spectrum of Theologies.

Two other elements, not so visible in the beginning, are more clearly identifiable in the later development of the Institute. They, in my opinion, are crucial for the future of theology:
5. Pluralism, and 6. Fundamentalism.

THE WAR: Globalized the Human Venue.

In 1946 Marjorie and I, with our two year old son, found ourselves sailing on the maiden voyage of the Queen Elizabeth. The ship had been used to transport troops during World War II before being put into passenger service. A Navy Chaplain, I had come directly from Bikini, an atoll in the Pacific, where the U.S.A. tested the first atom bomb above water.

In 1944 during doctoral studies at Drew University, I had been awarded the Pilling Fellowship for study abroad. We were delayed in making use of the Fellowship by the war. We chose Oxford in 1946-47 and were warmly welcomed at Mansfield College, in part because the war left them with a small student body.

We became close friends of Elizabeth & Reginald (Rex) Kissack. He was pastor of Wesley Memorial Methodist Church in the city of Oxford. He also served as chaplain to overseas students.

Rex and I talked at great length about the need for an international Methodist presence, a center where persons from all parts of the world could gather and be a living memorial to the place where Methodism was born.

We were aware that all over the globe persons were giving a lifetime to doing theology under the Wesleyan banner with no place nor possibility of knowing and interacting with each other. Before the war international travel had not been easily available. During the conflict it had been difficult at best.

Such a center could serve several purposes: It would give the World Methodist movement a larger agenda than simply that of dedicating shrines. And it would correct the view which regards Aldersgate as the primary, if not only, birthplace of Methodism. Faithful to Wesley's balance of vital piety with sound learning Oxford would be recognized equally with Aldersgate in the birth of the Wesleyan movement.

Since 1881 the World Methodist movement had been nothing more than a speech-making conference every ten years. No interim organization. The conferences alternated between the US (& Canada) and Great Britain until 1961.³

The World Methodist Conference for 1941 had been scheduled to meet in Oxford. The cycle was interrupted by World War II. By 1946 some early efforts began to resurrect the world movement. We owe a great debt to Bishop Ivan Lee Holt, Elmer Clark, and Oscar Olson, and a number of British colleagues who not only resurrected it, but reconstructed the world Methodist organization.

By 1956 the concept of a world Methodist center at Oxford had matured into the need for a theological center. At the Lake Junaluska Conference a number of us decided it was time either to abandon the project all together, or to make the leap into an actual event.

I was asked to sound out attitudes in the U.S. Rex would do the same in Britain.

The first Dean I approached, William R. Cannon, Candler School of Theology, affirmed the project and became one of its most enthusiastic members. He attended every Institute. Since his death, a few weeks ago, this is his first absence. To say he will be missed, is an understatement!

With a gift of travel money from Charles Parlin, I visited a number of other seminaries. They were affirmative from the beginning and continue to contribute dynamically to the life of the Institute.

I spoke to persons influential in the newly formed World Methodist council, such as Bishop Holt, Elmer Clark, Oscar Olsen. In those

days it was common to hear U.S. Methodists say, "The British are much more theological than we." I said, "No, they just handle the English language with such facility it sounds like they know more than they do!"

The real reason for this U.S. inferiority complex came from the way persons were chosen to be on the programs of the World Methodist Conferences. When the subjects were assigned to member churches, the British chose the person best suited for each topic. We, on the other hand, had a list of dignitaries who had expense accounts so we matched assignments and availability. Often the person didn't do justice to the subject.

I remember saying to Elmer Clark, "We have superior theological minds in the U.S. but they never get a hearing on the World Methodist platform." His reply was a bit huffy, "Like who?" "Albert Outler, Carl Michalson, Harold DeWolf..." I responded, "Oh, but Outler is not a member of the World Methodist Council," Elmer shot back at me. "That proves my point," I said, "you're running an 'old boys' club'. That's why a theological institute is needed."

By July 1958, after 10 years of hard work on both sides of the Atlantic, the first Oxford Institute of Methodist Theological Studies was held at Lincoln College, where John Wesley had been a don (teacher) and where, along with Christ Church, the Methodist movement was born.

A hundred members were divided one third British, one third US, one third the rest of the world - generally persons already in Britain.

The 35 members of the US delegation came by ship with a paper each day, given by persons not scheduled on the program of the Institute. They were assigned shipboard topics which were given on the Institute program to the British. By the time we landed, we were ready to act out being theological equals with them!

III.
THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE INSTITUTE.

The shift from WW II to the Cold War did provide certain new openings for doing theology:

Emerging New Nations; Opening of Communications/Travel; New Churches-New Mission; Broader Spectrum of Theologies.

In addition to the War, there were interesting conjunctions of the formation of the Institute and global experiences I was having. Similar parallels could be traced in others involved in its development. And, I am sure, in your life.

1955 - Japan & Hiroshima;

My first trip around the world was as a member of the Evangelism Project of Mildred and Lawrence Lacour. With the defeat of Japan the Lacours recognized a faith crisis had been created. The Emperor had been god, now a defeated god.

On the tenth anniversary of the dropping of the atom bomb I was called on to preach the sermon at the Christian memorial service in Hiroshima. The congregation was 350 Japanese, everyone of whom had been touched by the assault.

What was I to say? I was the only person present whose nation had, for the first time in history, used atomic power to kill human beings. What text would you have chosen?

1958 - First Institute; Biblical Theology and Methodist Doctrine.

1961 - The Board of Missions (as it was then called) ask me to serve on a team of five (2 women, 1 bishop, 1 layman, and 1 pastor) to hold consultations with the Methodist Churches on the three continents (1961-Africa, 1962-Latin America, 1963-Asia).

The need for these Consultations was evident. More than 100 new nations had come into being and joined the United Nations.

1962 - the Second Institute was held on The Doctrine of the Church;
1965 - the Third Institute on The Finality of Christ.

I won't continue this linking of contextual experiences with each Institute. An instructive exercise for each of us, perhaps, would be to match the various themes of the ten Institutes with your experience of the context of the times. Note the Sixth Institute theme was "Sanctification & Liberation." The year was 1977.

Themes of the nine previous Institutes: see Appendix.

IV.
A CONTEXTUAL ANALYSIS OF THE FUTURE?

TRINITY - COMMUNITY - POWER.

I will not try to establish a connection between the current context and the principle theme of this 10th Institute. That is the assignment for this work group and the entire membership.⁴

I would like to propose my analysis of the context which connects with the sub-title of our theme: "Mapping Trajectories....."

The popularly accepted analysis of our present context is: 'PAX AMERICANA.' It assumes our world is at peace, because capitalism defeated all forms of socialism.

A theology based in the triune nature of God, biblical community and charismatic power, to be adequate to the global future, must challenge 'PAX AMERICANA' as the continuation of the WAR of the "Short Twentieth Century."

Simply stated the theological task is to **redefine success and failure**, in other words to redefine current definitions of the **Kingdom of God**.

Two theological issues must be dealt with: **Pluralism & Fundamentalism**.

Two questions arise for all theologies out of the present context:

How can we preach Christ in a pluralistic world?

How can we tell those oppressed by poverty that God loves them?

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August 13, 1997.

APPENDIX

OXFORD INSTITUTES Themes, Papers & Authors

1958 - July 19-29, First Oxford Institute: "Biblical Theology and Methodist Doctrine" Reginald Kissack, Warden. Lincoln College.
Published in The London Quarterly and Holborn Review, July 1959.

- Editorial Comments, A. Raymond George & Lilian Topping.
- The Findings of The Institute.
- A Theological Evaluation of Natural Theology, Harold DeWolf.
- Some Recent Developments in Science and their Implications to Theology, Charles Coulson.
- Prevenient Grace, E. Anker Nilsen.
- The Doctrine of Conversion, Harold Roberts.
- The Holy Spirit in Biblical Theology, Mack Stokes.
- Perfection, William R. Cannon.
- The Relation of Faith and Order in the New Testament, George Claude Baker, Jr.
- The People of God, Rupert E. Davies.
- Can the Distinctive Methodist Emphasis be said to be Rooted in the New Testament? Franz Hildebrandt.
- Wesley's Doctrine of the Last Things, William Strawson.
- The Development of Theology in American Methodism in the Nineteenth Century, David C. Shipley.
- The Future of the Methodist Tradition, E. Gordon Rupp.

Others omitted in the London Quarterly:

- The Problem of Faith and Belief and our Apologetic Concern, Stanley Hopper.
- Justification, Philip Watson.
- Grace and Faith in the Old Testament, Norman Snaith.
- Kerygma and Response in the New Testament, Kingsley Barrett.
- Assurance, Raymond George.
- Bible Study Romans 1-8, A. Marcus Ward and Ernest W. Saunders.

1962 - July 17-27 - Second Oxford Institute: "The Doctrine of the Church," Harold Roberts, Warden. Lincoln College.
Published by Abingdon. 1964. Edited by Dow Kirkpatrick.

- Do Methodists Have a Doctrine of the Church?", Albert Outler.
- The Biblical Doctrine of the People of God, C. H. Dodd.
- The Ministry in the New Testament, C.K. Barrett.
- The Doctrine of the Church at the Reformation, E. Gordon Rupp.
- Baptism and the Family of God, Robert Cushman.
- Confirmation and the Lay Membership of the Churches, Herbert J. Cook.

NOTES

1. see Paul Hessert, CHRIST & The End of Meaning. The Theology of Passion. Element Publishers. 1993.

2. The Age of Extremes. Vintage Books/NY. 1994. I am in debt to Brazilian friend and member of this Institute, Ely Cesar, for pointing me to this book by a well known historian, who has contributed to the debate over the relation of Wesley and revolution.

I make reference to this volume, not that I have completed enough of it to claim the ability to analyze it critically. Rather Hobsbawn, and others you will know better than I, asks enough questions to enable us to probe the many simplistic analyses currently offered to link theology and context.

3.

1881 - London, England.
1891 - Washington, D.C.
1901 - London, England.
1911 - Toronto, Canada.
1921 - London, England
1931 - Atlanta, Georgia.
WAR
1947 - Springfield, Mass.
1951 - Oxford, England.
1956 - Lake Junaluska, N.C.
1961 - Oslo, Norway.
1966 - London, Eng.
1971 - Denver, Co.
1976 - Dublin, Ireland.
1981 - Honolulu, Hawaii.
1986 - Nairobi, Kenya.
1991 - Singapore.
1996 - Rio de Janeiro, Brazil.

4. see "The Trinity from the Perspective of the Woman" by Maria Clara Bingemer (Brazilian Catholic) in Faith Born in the Struggle for Life? A Rereading of Protestant Faith in Latin America Today, edited by Dow Kirkpatrick, trans. by Lewistine McCoy. pp. 116-136. Eerdmans. 1988.

also, Leonardo Boff, Church: Charism & Power: Liberation Theology and the Institutional Church. Trans. by John W. Diercksmeier. Crossroad/New York. 1985. 182 pp. This is the book which caused the Vatican to silence Boff for one year.

- Ordination and the Ministry in the Church, Philip S. Watson.
- The Lord's Supper, Raymond George.
- The Discipline of Life in Early Methodism Through Preaching and Other Means of Grace, Gerald O. McCulloh.
- The Unity of the Church, Frederic Greeves.
- The Church and Modern Man, Thomas Trotter.

1965 - July 20-30 - Third Oxford Institute: "The Finality of Christ." Dow Kirkpatrick, Warden. Lincoln College.
Published by Abingdon. 1966. Edited by Dow Kirkpatrick.

- The Christian Claim for the Finality of Christ, D.T. Niles.
- The Christology of the New Testament: Jesus and the Son of Man, Morna Hooker.
- Word, Wisdom, and Process, David E. Jenkins.
- Non-Christian Views of Christ:
 - Buddhism - H. Ratanasars.
 - Sikhism - Pamela Wylam.
 - A Jew Looks at Jesus - Will Herberg (not at Oxford)
- The Finality of Christ in Perennial Perspective, J. Robert Nelson.
- The Finality of Christ in a Whiteheadian Perspective, John Cobb, Jr.
- The Finality of Christ in an Eschatological Perspective, Carl Michalson.
- Language, Truth and Logic, A. J. Ayer. (At Oxford, not published).
- The Finished Work of Christ in Word and Sacrament, Gordon Rupp.
- Christ and Christianity, Dow Kirkpatrick.

1969 - July 21-31 - Fourth Oxford Institute: "The Living God." Raymond George, Warden. Lincoln College.
Published by Abingdon. 1971. Edited by Dow Kirkpatrick.

- Introduction, Rupert Davies.
- Conflicting Theological Models for God, Theodore Runyon.
- Theistic Verification, David Pailin.
- Is 'The Living God' a Theological Category? Paul Hessler.
- The Living God in the Living Word, William Strawson.
- The Presence of the Living God Amidst the Cultural Revolution of a People, Christie H. Rosa.
- Modernization and the Search for a New Image of Man, Emerito P. Nacpil.
- Prayer and Action, Ian Ramsey.
- The Gospel as Power: Explorations in a Theology of Social Change, Thomas W. Ogletree.

1973 - July 23-Aug. 2 - Fifth Oxford Institute: "The Holy Spirit." José Míguez Bonino, Warden. Lincoln College.
Published by Tidings. 1974. Edited by Dow Kirkpatrick.

- The Spirit of God in the Natural World, Bolaji Idowu.
- The Holy Spirit and People of Various Faiths, Cultures, and Ideologies, S. J. Samartha.
- The Holy Spirit and Liberation Movements: the Response of the Church, Richard Tholin.
- The Holy Spirit and the Incarnation, Maurice Wiles.
- The Spirit of God and the Human Spirit, Andre Pieters.
- The Gifts of the Spirit in the Church, Peter Stephens.
- The Holy Spirit and the Ordained Ministry, Daniel C. Arichea, Jr.
- The Holy Spirit and Sanctification: Refinding the Lost Image of Creation, Thomas A. Langford.
- Charismatic and Pentecostal Movements: a Challenge to the Churches, Walter J. Hollenweger.
- "The Spirit Groans": The Sunday Sermon, Jose Miguez Bonino.

1977 - July 18-28 - Sixth Oxford Institute: "Sanctification and Liberation". Rena Karefa-Smart, Warden. Lincoln College. Published by Abingdon. 1981. Edited by Theodore Runyon.

- Intro.: Wesley and the Theologies of Liberation, Theodore Runyon.
- Wesley's Doctrine of Sanctification From a Liberationist Perspective, Jose Miguez Bonino.
- Justification, Sanctification, and the Liberation of the Person, Rupert E. Davies.
- Methodism and Social Change in Britain, John Kent.
- John Wesley on Economics, Thomas W. Madron.
- Holiness and Radicalism in Nineteenth-Century America, Timothy Smith.
- Whither Evangelicalism? Donald Dayton.
- The Wesleyan Movement and Women's Liberation, Nancy Hardesty. (Not offered at Oxford).
- Sanctification and Liberation in the Black Religious Tradition, James H. Cone.
- The Methodist Witness and the African Situation, Kwesi A. Dickson.
- A Liberating Pastoral for the Rich, Dow Kirkpatrick.

1982 - July 26-Aug. 6 - Seventh Oxford Institute, "The Future of the Methodist Theological Traditions." Keble College. Published by Abingdon. 1985. Edited by M. Douglas Meeks.

- The Future of the Methodist Theological Traditions, Douglas Meeks.
- A New Future for Wesley Studies: Wesley Studies Working Group Papers, Albert Outler.
- Wesley as Read by the Poor: Salvation, Justice, and the Theological Task W.G., Elsa Tamez.
- Ecclesial Location and Ecumenical Vocation: Ecclesiology and

Sacraments in an Ecumenical Context W.G., Geoffrey Wainwright.
 -Evangelism and Wesley's Catholicity of Grace, Wesley Ariarajah.
 -Evangelism in the Wesleyan Traditions W.G., David Watson.
 -John Wesley's Development in Faith: Wesleyan Spirituality and Faith W.G., James Fowler.
 -A Retrospect, Brian E. Beck.

1987 - July 27-August 6 - Eighth Oxford Institute, "The Significance of Methodist Teaching and Practice for Confessing the Apostolic Faith." Somerville College.
 Published by Kingswood Books under the title. "What Should Methodists Teach? Wesleyan Tradition and Modern Diversity." 1990.
 Edited by M. Douglas Meeks.

-Introduction, What Should Methodists Teach? Wesleyan Tradition and Modern Diversity, Douglas Meeks.
 -Prospects for Methodist Teaching and Confessing, Brian Beck.
 -Methodists in Search of Consensus, Albert Outler.
 -Righteousness and Justification, Kingsley Barrett.
 -Reflections on the Church's Authoritative Teaching on Social Questions, José Míguez Bonino.
 -Teaching Authoritatively Amidst Christian Pluralism in Africa, Mercy Amba Oduyoye.
 -Consensus and Reception, Gillian R. Evans.
 -Toward the Common Expression of the Apostolic Faith Today, Gunter Gassmann.
 -Methodism and the Apostolic Faith, Geoffrey Wainwright.
 -Pluralism: The Relation of Theology to Religious Studies, Adrian Hastings.
 -Reflections and Open Tasks, Douglas Meeks.

Work Groups: Current Biblical Criticism and Methodist Teaching - Pieter Borgen / Wesley Studies: What and How Did John Wesley Teach? / Methodist Teaching and Social and Economic Issues of the Nineteenth Century - Donald Dayton / Methodist Economic and Social Teachings and the Challenge of Liberation Theology - / Methodist Evangelism and Doctrine - David Watson / Contemporary Methodist Theology and Doctrinal Consensus - Ted Runyon.

1992 - July 27-Aug.6. Ninth Oxford Institute, "Good News to the Poor in the Wesleyan Tradition." Somerville. Published by Kingswood Books. 1995. Title: The Portion of the Poor: Good News to the Poor in the Wesleyan Tradition by M. Douglas Meeks.

Introduction: On Reading Wesley with the Poor, Douglas Meeks.
 -Wesley and the Poor: An Agenda for Wesleyans, Theodore Jennings.
 -Good News for the Poor: A Black African Biblical

Hermeneutics, Itumeleng Mosala.

-The Imitatio Christi and the Great Commandment: Virtue and Obligation in Wesley's Ministry with the Poor, Richard Heitzenrater.

-"Good News to the Poor": The Methodist Experience After Wesley, Donald Dayton.

-Anointed to Preach: Speaking of Sin in the Midst of Grace, Rebecca Chopp.

-Proclaiming Christ in All His Offices: Priest, Prophet, and Potentate, David Watson.

-The 500th Anniversary of the European Invasion of Abya-Yala: An Ethical and Pastoral Reflection from the Third World, Victorio Araya Guillen.

-Charles Wesley and the Poor, Steve Kimbrough, Jr.