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Introduction	3
<i>S T Kimbrough, Jr.</i>	
A Tribute to Oliver A. Beckerlegge: 1913–2003	5
<i>S T Kimbrough, Jr.</i>	

2003

The Christ-Mysticism of Charles Wesley	11
<i>Francis Frost</i>	
Charles Wesley and the Thirty-Nine Articles of the Church of England ...	27
<i>J. R. Watson</i>	
Song in the Service of Faith	39
<i>David H. Tripp</i>	
“The Old Ship”	55
<i>Peter S. Forsaith</i>	

2004

Preliminary Explorations of Charles Wesley and Worship	67
<i>Paul W. Chilcote</i>	
Charles Wesley on Worship	83
<i>Karen B. Westerfield Tucker</i>	

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Preliminary Explorations of Charles Wesley and Worship

Paul W. Chilcote

The study of the life and legacy of Charles Wesley is by definition an exploration of worship. Like elder brother John, he viewed the Christian life as a *via devotio*, and his prodigious production of hymns for use in both public and private settings points invariably to the worship of God as the central aspect of his spirituality. Despite the fact that worship was of such focal concern to the Wesleys and their followers, it is surprising that so little has actually been written about Charles Wesley's theology and practice of worship. Even less has been written about what his conservation and critique of the liturgical tradition he inherited might mean for the church today, particularly, in variant and rapidly changing cultural contexts. The work of this conference and that to follow in 2005 is designed, in part, to address some of these concerns.

Background

The subject of Charles Wesley and worship, of course, is nothing new to The Charles Wesley Society. The very first volume of the Society Proceedings, a collection of papers presented at the Fifth Annual Meeting, revolves around the theme, "Worship in Eighteenth-Century Anglicanism and Methodism." Several of those papers speak directly to the themes upon which we hope to re-focus our attention here. Likewise, the subsequent volume, celebrating the 250th anniversary of the Wesleys' joint publication of *Hymns on the Lord's Supper* in 1745, elevates the Eucharistic core of Wesleyan spirituality around which all things related to worship in the tradition inevitably revolve. Even earlier, prior to the inauguration of the *Proceedings*, the theme of the Society's Second Annual Meeting in 1991 was "Corporate Piety: Hymn, Scripture, Worship," and one of the papers presented by Dr. W. F. Smith, "Charles Wesley's Hymns and the Black Worship Experience," was published in a subsequent issue of the *Newsletter* [1, 3 (December 1991) 2–8]. So the theme is nothing new.

Scholarship abounds on Charles's hymns and, if only by inference, their use in worship.¹ His hymns often serve to illustrate the worship practice and theol-

¹For example, see Frank Baker, *Charles Wesley's Verse: An Introduction* (London: Epworth Press, 1964); Louis F. Benson, *The English Hymn: Its Development and Use in Worship* (New York: Hodder & Stoughton, 1915); Henry Bett, *The Hymns of Methodism in their Literary Relations* (London: Epworth Press, 1945); George A. Findlay, *Christ's Standard Bearer: A Study in the Hymns of Charles Wesley*, (London: Epworth Press, 1956); Robert N. Flew, *The Hymns of Charles Wesley: A Study of Their Structure* (London: Epworth Press, 1953); S T Kimbrough, Jr., *A Heart to Praise my God: Wesley Hymns for Today* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996); S T Kimbrough, Jr. & Oliver A. Beckerlegge, eds., *The Unpublished Poetry of Charles Wesley*, 3 vols. (Nashville: Kingswood Books, 1988–1992); Bernard L. Manning, *The Hymns of Wesley and Watts* (London: Epworth Press, 1942); J. Ernest Rattenbury, *The Evangelical Doctrines of Charles Wesley's Hymns* (London: Epworth Press, 1941) and *The Eucharistic Hymns of John and Charles Wesley* (London: Epworth Press, 1948); and Frank Whaling, ed., *John and Charles Wesley: Selected Writings* (New York: Paulist Press, 1981).

ogy of his brother, most particularly those aspects related to John's Eucharistic spirituality.² Recent studies have begun to explore the range of his theology more fully.³ But most of the attention in Methodist liturgical theology highlights the influence of John. In "Worship According to Wesley," Geoffrey Wainwright, for example, demonstrates the Trinitarian shape of worship for the elder brother.⁴ Karen Westerfield Tucker articulates John Wesley's legacy for Methodist worship in the dialectic of form and freedom.⁵ Adrian Burdon identifies the twin themes of "the way to heaven" and "the importance of Christian fellowship" as primary worship paradigms in a brief article on Wesleyan models for liturgical theology, but he really provides little insight into the heart and mind of Charles.⁶ In a wide-ranging exposition of the spirituality of Charles Wesley and its meaning for today Gordon Wakefield approaches the topic. He explores many related themes in that broad terrain blending worship and spirituality, almost (and intentionally) in an indistinguishable manner.⁷ Up to the present time, however, no one has come so close to addressing the theme of "worship according to Charles Wesley," as Craig Gallaway in his study of *The Presence of Christ with the Worshipping Community: A Study in the Hymns of John and Charles Wesley*.⁸ Suffice it to say that much remains to be done around this theme.

²For example, see Ole E. Borgen, *John Wesley on the Sacraments: A Theological Study* (New York: Abingdon Press, 1972); John C. Bowmer, *The Sacrament of the Lord's Supper in Early Methodism* (London: Dacre, 1951); and Trevor Dearing, *Wesleyan and Tractarian Worship* (London: Epworth Press, 1966).

³For example, see Teresa Berger, *Theology in Hymns?* trans. Timothy E. Kimbrough (Nashville: Kingswood Books, 1995); James C. Ekert, "Universal Redemption, Assurance of Salvation, and Christian Perfection in the Hymns of Charles Wesley," M.Mus. thesis, Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1978; S T Kimbrough, Jr., *Lost in Wonder. Charles Wesley: The Meaning of His Hymns Today* (Nashville: Upper Room Books, 1987) and S T Kimbrough, Jr., ed., *Charles Wesley: Poet and Theologian* (Nashville: Kingswood Books, 1992); John Lawson, *The Wesley Hymns as a Guide to Scriptural Teaching* (Grand Rapids: Francis Asbury Press, 1987; K. Nichols, "Charles Wesley's Eucharistic Hymns: Their Relationship to the Book of Common Prayer," *The Hymn* 39 (1988) 13–21; Wilma J. Quantrille, *The Triune God in the Hymns of Charles Wesley*, Ph.D. dissertation, Drew University, 1989; James A. Townsend, *Feelings Related to Assurance in Charles Wesley's Hymns*, Ph.D. dissertation, Fuller Theological Seminary, 1979; John Tyson, *Charles Wesley on Sanctification: A Biographical and Theological Study* (Grand Rapids: Francis Asbury Press, 1986); and Barbara A. Welch, *Charles Wesley and the Celebrations of Evangelical Experience*, Ph.D. dissertation, University of Michigan, 1971.

⁴Geoffrey Wainwright, "Worship According to Wesley," *Australian Journal of Theology* 3 (1991): 5–13.

⁵Karen Westerfield Tucker, "Form and Freedom: John Wesley's Legacy for Methodist Worship," in *The Sunday Service of the Methodists: Twentieth-Century Worship in Worldwide Methodism*, ed. Karen Westerfield Tucker (Nashville: Kingswood Books, 1996), 17–30.

⁶Adrian Burdon, "'Till in Heaven . . ."—Wesleyan Models for Liturgical Theology," *Worship* 71 (July 1997): 309–17.

⁷Gordon Wakefield, "Charles Wesley's Spirituality and Its Meaning for Today," *The Charles Wesley Society Newsletter* 3, 2 (October 1993): 2–25.

⁸Ph.D. dissertation, Emory University, 1988.

Worship as Heartfelt Praise

The term “worship” defies simple definition. In common discourse within the life of the church today, it can mean anything from the entirety of the Christian life to a set of praise music in the context of the Christian assembly. I am actually quite happy, at this point, to leave us in a state of “happy ambiguity” with regard to definition, and especially to lean in the direction of widest possible understanding. While it will be important to establish some basic parameters—which I hope to do more descriptively than prescriptively—we do well to start where Charles Wesley would have begun, namely, in Scripture.

There are many biblical texts that immediately come to mind as we contemplate the meaning of worship, all of which could serve as excellent entry points for us. But no text comes more directly to the point, I believe, than John 4:24: “God is Spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and in truth.” In whatever way we define worship, it will have something to do inevitably with the witness of our inner spirit and our encounter with the truth. In anticipation of restoration through the power of God’s grace, with Charles the broken human spirit sings:

Thee I shall then for ever praise,
In spirit and in truth adore,
While all I am declares thy grace,
And, born of God, I sin no more,
The pure and heavenly nature share,
And fruit unto perfection bear.⁹

True spiritual worship, as St. Paul made so abundantly clear in Romans 12, has to do, in fact, with every aspect of life. There can be no separation of worship or liturgy from the totality of life as we really know it. Worship, in this broad sense then, is the grateful surrender of all we are and all we have, a “living sacrifice” of praise and thanksgiving to the God of love who has created all things and bears witness with our spirits that we are the children of God. It is living in and for God in all things.

Charles refers to the John 4 text three times in his sermons, two of which were preached before Oxford University during the early years of the Wesleyan revival. In a sermon on justification by faith he strikes the vital connection between authentic worship and the heart, so characteristic of early Methodism: “God is a Spirit, and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth. He requires the heart; a spiritual not a mere literal obedience, the power of godliness not the bare form.”¹⁰ In the more famous university sermon of 1742, “Awake,

⁹Franz Hildebrandt and Oliver A. Beckerlegge, eds., *The Works of John Wesley*. Volume 7. “A Collection of Hymns for the Use of the People called Methodists” (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1983), 272 (Hymn 153.3). Hereafter referred to as *Works*, 7.

¹⁰Kenneth G. C. Newport, ed., *The Sermons of Charles Wesley* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 192. Hereafter *Sermons*.

Thou That Sleepest,” later published by John Wesley among his “standard sermons,” Charles describes the same essential criterion for authenticity by diagnosing the human deficiency: “Corrupt are we also and abominable; and few are there that understand any more, few that worship God in spirit and truth. We too are ‘a generation that set not our hearts aright, and whose spirit cleaveth not steadfastly unto God’.”¹¹ John Wesley reveals the same attitude in an important letter to a friend years later, in September 1757. In this critical defense of Methodist worship he says that inauthentic worship is outward only; it is a matter of the lips, having nothing to do with the heart. But worship that has integrity consists in “looking upward and looking inward, in hearkening to the voice of God, and pouring out their hearts before Him.”¹² Worship is heart-felt praise of God.

Worship as *Paideia*

It is a cliché anymore to describe worship, and more precisely liturgy, as “the work of the people.” The purpose of this corporate work—this shared labor of love—is to form us in praise. Charles Wesley seems to have learned early in life that worship is *paideia*—life-shaping instruction or formation through action. For the early Christians this classical Greek understanding of discipline must have entailed all those things that are done in the community of faith that shape whole persons in their journey toward maturity in Christ. In this process, however, nothing was more critical than the words and actions of the liturgical assembly. True worship springs from the heart, but worship (defined here in the more narrow sense as the liturgy) also has the potential to shape every aspect of our lives.

The writer to the Hebrews uses the language of *paideia* to describe a vision of the Christian life: “We had human parents to discipline us, and we respected them. . . . But [God] disciplines us for our good, in order that we may share his holiness” (Heb. 12:9–10 NRSV). The concept of a discipline that frees the human spirit and leads the emancipated child of God into a life characterized by holiness of heart and life clearly inspired the Wesleys. Charles bears witness to the potency of the vision:

Loose me from the chains of sense,
Set me from the body free;
Draw with stronger influence
My unfettered soul to thee!
In me, Lord, thyself reveal,
Fill me with a sweet surprise;
Let me thee when waking feel,
Let me in thine image rise.

¹¹*Sermons* 223.

¹²John Telford, ed., *The Letters of the Rev. John Wesley, A.M.* (London: Epworth Press, 1931), 3:227.

Let me of thy life partake,
 Thy own holiness impart;
 O that I might sweetly wake
 With my Saviour in my heart!
 O that I might know thee mine!
 O that I might thee receive!
 Only live the life divine!
 Only to thy glory live!¹³

Authentic worship leads us into an “O that I may . . .” *modus operandi* in life and a desire to praise God in all things. So orthodoxy—the right praise of God—involves a joyful obedience and a daring surrender. It is not too much to say that worship—and specifically the liturgy—shapes us in such a way that we believe in God (faith), desire nothing but God (love), and glorify God by offering our lives fully to Christ (holiness).

St. Paul places this concept of formation at the center of his admonition to Christian parents in Ephesians 6:4 where he commands them to bring up their children “in the discipline and instruction of the Lord” (NRSV). Charles picks up this theme in one of his “family hymns” and refers to this process as a means to “draw their souls to God.”¹⁴ In a hymn written for the opening of the Methodist School in Kingswood he expands the image:

Come, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost,
 To whom we for our children cry!
 The good desired and wanted most
 Out of thy richest grace supply—
 The sacred discipline be given
 To train and bring them up for heaven.
 Answer on them the end of all
 Our cares, and pains, and studies here;
 On them, recovered from their fall,
 Stamped with the humble character,
 Raised by the nurture of the Lord,
 To all their paradise restored.¹⁵

The more famous fifth stanza of the hymn articulates the holistic nature of this formational process:

Unite the pair so long disjointed,
 Knowledge and vital piety:
 Learning and holiness combined,
 And truth and love, let all men see
 In those whom up to thee we give,
 Thine, wholly thine, to die and live.

¹³*Works*, 7:428 (Hymn 278.4, 5).

¹⁴*Works*, 7:637 (Hymn 456.8).

¹⁵*Works*, 7:643 (Hymn 461.1, 2).

My contention here is quite simple: Wesley viewed the liturgy of the church as the primary matrix in which this nurture raised and restored the children of God. This *paideia* in the worshipping community involves both heart and head. Through both Word and Sacrament, to use a more specific liturgical vocabulary, God offers us spiritual nourishment in our journey of faith, providing the necessary guidance for us to find our way home.

A Provisional Lens: The Isaiah Motif

What I propose here is not so much an exploration of Wesley's theology of worship as it is an examination of how he illustrates perennial themes related to God's people involved in worship. In an effort to flesh out the foundational concepts of worship as heart-felt praise and life-shaping discipline I want to import a motif that is not without some dangers; but I find it helpful in exegeting Wesley nonetheless. I refer to the so-called "Isaiah Motif" drawn from the call of the prophet in Isaiah 6:1–8, a pattern one time fashionable for ordering the various acts of Christian worship. A reminder of the text might prove helpful:

In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lofty; and the hem of his robe filled the temple. Seraphs were in attendance above him; each had six wings: with two they covered their faces, and with two they covered their feet, and with two they flew. And one called to another and said:

"Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts:
the whole earth is full of his glory."

The pivots on the thresholds shook at the voices of those who called, and the house filled with smoke. And I said: "Woe is me! I am lost, for I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips; yet my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts!" Then one of the seraphs flew to me, holding a live coal that had been taken from the altar with a pair of tongs. The seraph touched my mouth with it and said: "Now that this has touched your lips, your guilt has departed and your sin is blotted out." Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?" And I said, "Here am I; send me!" (NRSV).

The paradigm for worship embedded in this narrative involves, at least, a five-fold progression. (1) Adoration, "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts," moves the worshiper to (2) Confession, "Woe is me!" to (3) Forgiveness, "your guilt has departed and your sin is blotted out," and through (4) Proclamation, "Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying," to final (5) Dedication, "Here am I; send me!" While there is an abiding truth in this sequence of devotion, it is dangerous to transpose it mechanically into worship.¹⁶ It is always important to remember that the in breaking Word gives and sustains life. At times God acts unpredictably in worship. There is also a potential danger in mechanically imposing this struc-

¹⁶See, in particular, the critique of the three-fold pattern of vision, contrition, and commission drawn from the Isaiah text in Paul W. Hoon, *The Integrity of Worship* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1971), 51, 287.

ture upon Wesley. But while it is artificial to choreograph God's presence and movement or to plot these serially in a service of worship, much less to squeeze Wesley into this mold, there is a certain "evangelical" logic in the Isaiah motif that resonates with a Wesleyan understanding of the divine/human encounter. This is well worth exploring. Hence I will examine these specific dimensions of worship briefly before indicating, in conclusion, what may be a more normative pattern for all Christian worship and certainly for Charles Wesley, namely, the four-fold rhythm of Eucharistic action.

Adoration

The Isaiah narrative opens with an overwhelming sense of awe, majesty, and wonder. Our first response to God is an acknowledgment of whom it is we worship.¹⁷ Virtually every day of Charles Wesley's life began with Morning Prayer, including the words of the ancient prayer of praise, the *Te Deum*:

We praise thee, O God: we acknowledge thee to be the Lord. All the earth doth worship thee, the Father everlasting. To thee all Angels cry aloud: the Heavens, and all the powers therein. To thee Cherubim and Seraphim continually do cry, Holy, holy, holy, Lord God of Sabaoth; Heaven and Earth are full of the Majesty of thy Glory.

In the *Collection of Hymns for the Use of the People called Methodists* (1780), Wesley alludes to the Isaiah Sanctus in at least four hymns of the section "For Believers Rejoicing."

Meet and right it is to sing,
In every time and place,
Glory to our heavenly King,
The God of truth and grace.
Join we then with sweet accord,
All in one thanksgiving join:
Holy, holy, holy, Lord,
Eternal praise be thine!¹⁸

The poetry drawn from his earlier collection of *Hymns on the Trinity* emphasizes the awe with which one should approach God and the glory of God's tremendous and mysterious majesty:

Holy, holy, holy Lord,
God the Father and the Word,
God the Comforter, receive
Blessing more than we can give!

¹⁷See Robert E. Cushman, "Worship As Acknowledgment," in *Faith Seeking Understanding: Essays Theological and Critical* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1981), 181–97.

¹⁸*Works*, 7:346 (Hymn 212.1). Note the explicit reference to the Communion Service of the Book of Common Prayer in the opening line.

Thee while dust and ashes sings,
 Angels shrink within their wings;
 Prostrate Seraphim above
 Breathe unutterable love.

Fain with them our souls would vie,
 Sink as low, and mount as high;
 Fall, o'erwhelmed with love, or soar,
 Shout, or silently adore!

"All honour and glory to Jesus alone!" Charles cries, as he stands in beatific rapture *coram Deo*—before a "universe filled with the glory of God."¹⁹ It is the radiance of God's nature, revealed most fully in the dual graces of creation and redemption, that overtakes the awestruck child:

Th' o'erwhelming power of saving grace
 The sight that veils the seraph's face,
 The speechless awe that dares not move,
 And all the silent heaven of love!²⁰

Charles Wesley understood that worship, particularly through the historic liturgy of the people of God, has the power to bring us into an awareness and acknowledgment of the Holy. It is not surprising that one of the most memorable lines in all of Charles Wesley's verse concludes his great hymn concerning God's essential nature: "Lost in wonder, love, and praise."

Repentance and Forgiveness

The prophet can only respond: "Woe is me! I am lost, for I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips!" When we contemplate our own lives in relation to this God, or compare them with the life of Christ, we are overwhelmed, as well, by our inadequacy, our brokenness, our fallen condition. In the Wesleyan tradition, repentance is a paramount concern because it strikes at the very heart of salvation. Confession and forgiveness are central to the Christian view of what it is we need to be saved from and what it is we need to be saved into. For Charles, no less than for his brother, salvation is both legal and therapeutic; it is related both to Christ's redemptive work for us and the Spirit's transforming work in us; it revolves around freedom from sin and freedom to love. Repentance is like the threshold of a door that opens the way to our spiritual healing. It is like the first step in a journey that leads us home.

Nowhere in Scripture is repentance and forgiveness more poignantly expressed than in Jesus' parable of the lost child in Luke 15. Stripped of dignity, value, and identity, the critical turning point for the estranged son in the story

¹⁹*Works*, 7:342, 344, the closing lines of Hymn 210.1 and 7.

²⁰*Works*, 7:92 (Hymn 9.10).

comes with these important words, "But when he came to himself. . ." Both John and Charles define repentance as "true self-understanding." The prodigal "came to himself." In the depth of his despair, he remembered who he was and to whom he belonged. Charles plays with this image in his sermon on Ephesians 5:14. As he turns directly to the text itself, he admonishes:

Wherefore, "Awake thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead." God calleth thee by my mouth; and bids thee know thyself, thou fallen spirit, thy true state and only concern below: "what meanest thou, O sleeper? Arise! Call upon thy god, if so be thy God will think upon thee, that thou perish not."²¹

For Charles, repentance signifies a true self-knowledge that leads to contrition and total reliance upon God's pardoning mercy in Christ.

He employs this image in a hymn celebrating God's universal grace as it is made manifest in the context of the worshipping community of God's people:

Sinners, obey the gospel word!
Haste to the supper of my Lord;
Be wise to know your gracious day!
All things are ready; come away!

Ready the Father is to own
And kiss his late-returning son;
Ready your loving Saviour stands,
And spreads for you his bleeding hands.

The Father, Son, and Holy Ghost
Is ready with their shining host;
All heaven is ready to resound:
"The dead's alive! The lost is found."²²

In the successive stanzas Charles layers the imagery of spiritual emotion, elicited from the struggle to know God and to entrust one's life to God: pardon, favor, peace; the seeing eye, the feeling sense, the mystic joys; godly grief, pleasing smart; meltings, tears, sighs; guiltless shame, sweet distress, unutterable tenderness; genuine meek humility, wonder.

A full paragraph from another of Charles Wesley's sermons is well worth quoting in its entirety at this point. It is taken from his sermon on 1 John 3:14, which Charles preached at least twenty-one times during 1738 and 1739, just at the outset of the revival and as a consequence of the brothers' shared reawakening to living faith. The sermon itself is a depiction of the three states of human-

²¹*Sermons*, 216. Cf. John Wesley's sermon on "The Way to the Kingdom," II.1: "This is the way: walk ye in it. And first, repent, that is, know yourselves. This is the first repentance, previous to faith, even conviction, or self-knowledge. Awake, then, thou that sleepest. Know thyself to be a sinner, and what manner of sinner thou art. Know that corruption of thy inmost nature, whereby thou art very far gone from original righteousness . . ." (*Works*, 1:225).

²²*Works*, 7:90 (Hymn 9.1, 2, 5).

ity, describing those who do not know and do not seek God, those who do not know but seek God, and those who know God. It is a compelling appeal to come to one's self so as to know God fully. Charles pleads:

"Therefore also now, saith the Lord, turn ye even to me with all your heart, and with fasting and with weeping, and with mourning. And rend your hearts and not your garments, and turn unto the Lord your God; for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and of great kindness, and repenteth him of the evil." Oh that this infinite goodness of God might lead you to repentance! Oh that any one of you would even now arise and go to his Father and say unto him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before thee, and am no more worthy to be called thy son!" He sees you now, while you are a great way off, and has compassion, and only awaits your turning towards him, that he may run and fall on your neck and kiss you. Then will he say, "Bring forth the best robe (even the robe of Christ's righteousness) and put it upon him, for this my son was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found."²³

Healing is only possible when our brokenness is acknowledged and confessed. Henri Nouwen understood, it would seem, as Charles Wesley had discovered earlier, that forgiveness is the name of love in a wounded world. Forgiveness is liberation from our enslavement to sin through the power of God's love in Jesus Christ. Liturgy offers us the gift of divine forgiveness; God comes to us in Christ with "healing in his wings."²⁴ Reconciliation and restoration are only possible through the intervention of God's grace. That grace is offered, first and foremost, Wesley believed, in the context of a worshiping community, characterized by the hospitality of God and proclaiming boldly to all:

His bleeding heart shall make you room,
His open side shall take you in.
He calls you now, invites you home—
Come, O my guilty brethren, come!²⁵

Proclamation

"Then I heard the voice of the Lord, saying . . ." Charles Wesley celebrated the presence of the Word of God and trusted in its power. It is not too much to claim that the Wesleyan revival was nothing less than a rediscovery of the sacred Christian Scriptures. "The Bible, the whole Bible, nothing but the Bible—," one Wesleyan scholar observed, "this is the theme of John Wesley's preaching and the glory of Charles's hymns."²⁶ It is not without value to remember that the most critical works related to Wesleyan doctrine—John's Standard Sermons and *Explanatory Notes upon the New Testament* and Charles' hymns (particularly the

²³*Sermons*, 142.

²⁴For Charles' multiple references to this Mal. 4:2 image, see *Works*, 7:157, 252, 270, 385, 420, 530, 608, 611, and 630, in addition to "Hark, the Herald Angels Sing."

²⁵*Works*, 7:117 (Hymn 29.6.3–6). Emphasis added.

²⁶*Works*, 7:3.

1780 Collection)—are all oriented primarily around the community of God’s people in worship. The proclamation of God’s Word in corporate worship and the rediscovery of the “living Word” among the early Methodist people was the life force of the movement. The essential content of Charles Wesley’s preaching was the inclusive love of God revealed to us in Jesus Christ. Nowhere in the Wesleyan corpus is the living encounter with this good news summarized more poignantly than in the familiar lines of his great hymn, “Wrestling Jacob”:

’Tis Love! ’Tis Love! Thou diedst for me;
 I hear thy whisper in my heart.
 The morning breaks, the shadows flee,
 Pure Universal Love thou art:
 To me, to all, thy bowels move—
 Thy nature, and thy name, is LOVE.²⁷

This inclusive, unconditional love is made known to us through the Word and the Spirit. For Wesley, the Word (Jesus Christ and the story of God’s love in Scripture) is distinct from, but can never be separated from the Spirit of God. Three hymns that Charles intended for use “Before reading the Scriptures” (Hymns 85–87 from Section III. Praying for a Blessing in the 1780 Collection) and one of his most noteworthy hymns of petition that precedes them (Hymn 83, “Spirit of faith, come down”) demonstrate this essential connection. He identifies the Holy Spirit as the “key” to the sacred book, the active force that opens to us the treasure of God’s message of grace and love: “Come, Holy Ghost,” he implores, “Unlock the truth, thyself the key, / Unseal the sacred book.”²⁸ “Now the revealing Spirit send,” he prays, “And give us ears to hear.”²⁹ Only the Spirit is able to “Reveal the things of God” by removing the barrier to our spiritual sight.

No man can truly say
 That Jesus is the Lord
 Unless thou take the veil away,
 And breathe the living word.³⁰

Or again:

While in thy Word we search for thee
 (We search with trembling awe!)
 Open our eyes, and let us see
 The wonders of thy law.³¹

Both brothers taught a doctrine of “double inspiration” with regard to the Bible that is of particular importance to the worshipping community. As John

²⁷*Works*, 7:251 (Hymn 136.7).

²⁸*Works*, 7:185 (Hymn 85.2.1, 3–4).

²⁹*Works*, 7:186 (Hymn 86.3.3–4).

³⁰Hymn 7:182–3 (Hymn 83:1.1; 2.1–4).

³¹Hymn 7:186 (Hymn 86.2).

observed in a gloss on 2 Tim. 3:16 in his *Notes*, “The Spirit of God not only once inspired those who wrote it, but continually inspires, supernaturally assists those that read it with earnest prayer.”³² Charles articulates the same understanding in his characteristic fashion.

Inspirer of the ancient seers,
Who wrote from thee the sacred page,
The same through all succeeding years;
To us in our degenerate age
The spirit of thy Word impart,
And breathe the life into our heart.

While now thine oracles we read
With earnest prayer and strong desire,
O let thy Spirit from thee proceed
Our souls to waken and inspire,
Our weakness help, our darkness chase,
And guide us by the light of grace.³³

“Come, Holy Ghost, our hearts inspire,” pleads Wesley, “for you are the ‘Source of the old prophetic fire’.”³⁴ His concern throughout is for a dynamic, relational, vibrant encounter with God through the Spirit, who can

Inspire the living faith
(Which whosoever receives,
The witness in himself he hath,
And consciously believes),
The faith that conquers all,
And doth the mountain move,
And saves whoever on Jesus call,
And perfects them in love.³⁵

There can be no question that the proclamation of the Word—in fields, in chapels, in distinctive early morning services, and as the essential prelude to the celebration of Communion in parish churches—was the principal means of gathering converts into Christian fellowship and of nurturing them in it.

Dedication

On the most basic level, all worship is response. In answer to the Lord’s question, “Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?” Isaiah responds by saying, “Here am I; send me!” In Charles’s vision of the worshipping community, and certainly in the practical experience of the early Methodist Societies, God commis-

³²John Wesley, *Explanatory Notes upon the New Testament* (Salem, OH: Schmuel Publishers, Rare Reprint Specialists, n.d.), 554.

³³*Works*, 7:186 (Hymn 87.1–2).

³⁴*Works*, 7:185 (Hymn 85.1.1, 3). Emphasis added.

³⁵*Works*, 7:183 (Hymn 83.4).

sions the faithful as ambassadors of Christ and graciously enables each disciple to reaffirm his or her true vocation. Charles's hymns reflect a myriad of potential responses to God's call, both individual and corporate. While each deserves full attention in its own right, I will simply mention two interrelated aspects of dedicatory response in Wesley, namely, mission and Eucharist. The former aspect, related to Wesley's missiological ecclesiology, is, most likely, immediately obvious to most; the latter, reflecting the absolute centrality of Charles' sacramental vision of life, affords, I believe, some of Wesley's most important insights and contributions to contemporary conversations about worship.

(a) The imperative of mission.

Charles' hymns frequently reflect an understanding of the Christian life in which the most appropriate response to God's transforming grace is Christian outreach to the world and participation in God's mission to restore justice, peace, and love to all.³⁶ In one of Wesley's greatest missionary hymns, as S T Kimbrough, Jr., has observed, there is an intermingling of praise and mission, for to follow means faithful service. How does one know and feel sins forgiven, anticipate heaven on earth and own that love, even in this world, is heaven? Through service to God and others—by breaking out of the world of self and reaching out to others!³⁷

In Charles Wesley's vision of the church—and particularly the authentic community of faith in continuous praise of God—mission flows directly out of our encounter with God's Word in worship. Mission, like worship itself, is an essential activity of the whole people of God. In imitation of Christ, and through our encounter with the living Word, we learn to woo others into the loving embrace of God and then help them to see that their mission in life, in partnership with Christ, is to be the signposts of God's reign in this world. In his hymn, "For a preacher of the gospel," Charles Wesley reminds us of this transforming, missionary call of God upon our lives:

I would the precious time redeem,
And longer live for this alone,
To spend and to be spent for them
Who have not yet my Saviour known;
Fully on these my mission prove,
And only breathe to breathe thy love.

³⁶See, in particular, the analysis of "Glory to God, and praise and love" in S T Kimbrough, Jr., *A Heart to Praise my God* (17–27), where he discusses response in terms of "Outreach to the Marginalized," "Universal Outreach to All," and "Outreach to Each Individual," and Tore Meistad, who provides similar insight into the hymn in "The Missiology of Charles Wesley and Its Links to the Eastern Church," in *Orthodox and Wesleyan Spirituality*, ed. S T Kimbrough, Jr. (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2002), 214–18.

³⁷Kimbrough, *A Heart to Praise*, 23.

My talents, gifts, and graces, Lord,
 Into thy blessed hands receive;
 And let me live to preach thy word;
 And let me to thy glory live:
 My every sacred moment spend
 In publishing the sinner's friend.

Enlarge, inflame, and fill my heart
 With boundless charity divine!
 So shall I all my strength exert,
 And love them with a zeal like thine;
 And lead them to thy open side,
 The sheep, for whom their Shepherd died.³⁸

(b) The imperative of Eucharist.

The connection between mission and sacrament is extremely intimate for Wesley, and can be discerned most clearly, I believe, in his concept of Eucharistic sacrifice. In Charles' sermon on Acts 20:7 (more properly what might be described as an introductory "treatise" to a larger, unfinished work on the sacrament) we encounter a concept of sacrifice consonant with the view he espouses in his *Hymns on the Lord's Supper* devoted to this theme. Charles views the sacrament as a "re-presentation" of the sacrifice of Christ.³⁹ As J. Ernest Rattenbury has demonstrated, his stress is persistently on the two-fold oblation of the church in the sacrament; the body of Christ offered is not merely a sacred symbol of Christ's "once-for-all" act of redemption, but is also the living sacrifice of the people of God.⁴⁰

In his Eucharistic hymns Charles clarifies the sacrificial character of the Christian life, in which the worshiper participates repeatedly at the table of the Lord, and its relationship to Christ's sacrifice on the cross. In this regard, he reflects the position of Daniel Brevint: "The main intention of Christ herein was not the bare remembrance of His Passion; but over and above, to invite us to His Sacrifice".⁴¹

While faith th' atoning blood applies,
 Ourselves a living sacrifice
 We freely offer up to God;
 And none but those His glory share,
 Who crucified with Jesus are,
 And follow where their Saviour trod.

³⁸*Works*, 7:597 (Hymn 421.3–5).

³⁹*Sermons*, 277–86. Cf. Bowmer, *The Lord's Supper*, 223–32.

⁴⁰See Rattenbury, *Eucharistic Hymns*, 123–47.

⁴¹Rattenbury, *Eucharistic Hymns*, 178. Taken from Brevint's influential treatise, *The Christian Sacrament and Sacrifice*.

Saviour, to Thee our lives we give,
 Our meanest sacrifice receive,
 And to Thine own oblation join,
 Our suffering and triumphant Head,
 Through all Thy states Thy members lead,
 And seat us on the throne Divine.⁴²

The only authentic Christian life from the Wesleyan point of view, Robert Cushman once observed, is the cruciform life. Worship is recapitulation, and as we repeatedly participate in the Eucharistic actions of offering, and thanking, and breaking, and giving—the constitutive aspects of an authentic, sacrificial life—God conforms us into the image of Christ. Our lives become truly Eucharistic as faith working by love leads to holiness of heart and life. In the midst of our journey, we continue to pray with Charles:

O Thou who this mysterious bread
 Didst in Emmaus break,
 Return, herewith our souls to feed,
 And to Thy followers speak.

Unseal the volume of Thy grace,
 Apply the gospel word,
 Open our eyes to see Thy face,
 Our hearts to know the Lord.

Of Thee we commune still, and mourn
 Till Thou the veil remove;
 Talk with us, and our hearts shall burn
 With flames of fervent love.

Enkindle now the heavenly zeal,
 And make Thy mercy known,
 And give our pardon'd souls to feel
 That God and love are one.⁴³

I leave you then with two interrelated questions. Could it be that the four-fold Eucharistic action—offering, thanking, breaking, and giving—provides not only a pattern for authentic Christian worship in general, but a model of authentic Christian discipleship in the world in particular? What resources within the Wesleyan corpus might be brought to bear upon this theme of central importance today?

⁴²Rattenbury, *Eucharistic Hymns*, 236 (Hymn 128.4).

⁴³Rattenbury, *Eucharistic Hymns*, 204 (Hymn 29).

