

S T Kimbrough, Jr.
Editor

Charles A. Green
Assistant Editor

**Imagination and Struggle
Charles Wesley and Christian Practices
(1739–1749)**

**PAPERS PRESENTED
AT
THE NINETEENTH ANNUAL MEETING
OF
THE CHARLES WESLEY SOCIETY**
*October 17–19, 2008
Princeton Theological Seminary
Princeton, New Jersey*

Contributors	3
Introduction	5
<i>S T Kimbrough, Jr.</i>	
Minutes of the 2008 Annual Meeting	9
An Important New Resource for Study of Charles Wesley	13
<i>Randy L. Maddox</i>	
Singularity in Early Methodism	17
<i>Patrick A. Eby</i>	
Charles Wesley and Christian Practices	35
<i>Paul W. Chilcote</i>	
“From Strength to Strength Go On”: Images of Growth in the Hymns of Charles Wesley	49
<i>Charles Edward White</i>	
What Writers of Contemporary Worship Songs Can Learn from Charles Wesley: Reflections and Axioms	65
<i>Lester Ruth</i>	
Charles Wesley as Revealed by His Manuscript Journal	85
<i>Kenneth G. C. Newport</i>	

Proceedings of The Charles Wesley Society 2008

Published in the United States by
The Charles Wesley Society

Editor, S T Kimbrough, Jr.
Assistant Editor, Charles A. Green

Copyright © 2009 by The Charles Wesley Society. All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise, without the prior permission of The Charles Wesley Society.

The Charles Wesley Society
Archives and History Center
Drew University
Madison, NJ 07940

Paul W. Chilcote, *President*
Timothy S. Alexander-Macquiban, *Vice President*
Patrick A. Eby, *Secretary*
Robert J. Williams, *Treasurer*
Peter S. Forsaith, *Secretary-Treasurer for the United Kingdom*
S T Kimbrough, Jr., *Director of Publications*
Jason Vickers, *Program Coordinator*

Board of Directors

Friedemann W. Burkhardt
Kenneth G. C. Newport

Maxine Walker
Carlton R. Young

Contributors

Randy L. Maddox is Professor of Theology and Wesleyan Studies, The Divinity School, Duke University, Durham, NC.

Patrick A. Eby is a Ph.D. candidate at Drew University, Madison, NJ.

Paul W. Chilcote is Professor of Historical Theology & Wesleyan Studies, and Director, Center for Applied Wesleyan Studies, Ashland Theological Seminary, Ashland, OH.

Charles Edward White is Professor of Christian Thought and History, Spring Arbor University, Spring Arbor, Michigan.

Lester Ruth is Lily May Jarvis Professor of Christian Worship, Asbury Theological Seminary, Wilmore, KY.

Kenneth G. C. Newport is Pro Vice Chancellor, Liverpool Hope University, Liverpool, England.

Charles Wesley and Christian Practices

Paul W. Chilcote

Over the past twenty years, two questions dominate the focused attention given to Christian practices: “What does it mean to live the Christian life faithfully and well?” and “How can we help one another to do so?”¹ The concept of practices linked with specific communities of faith, of course, is nothing new, but contemporary students of ecclesial practices are discovering much about how these activities both shape people and reflect their values and senses of meaning. Perhaps no movement has exerted greater influence in these rediscoveries than the Valparaiso Project on the Education and Formation of People in Faith directed by Dorothy Bass.² In their essay on “A Theological Understanding of Christian Practices,” Craig Dykstra and Dorothy Bass define Christian practices precisely as “things Christian people do together over time to address fundamental human needs in response to and in the light of God’s active presence for the life of the world.”³ Elsewhere Dykstra describes these practices in a somewhat more conversational style:

Christian practices are not activities we do to make something spiritual happen in our lives. Nor are they duties we undertake to be obedient to God. Rather, they are patterns of communal action that create openings in our lives where the grace, mercy, and presence of God may be made known to us. They are places where the power of God is experienced. In the end, these are not ultimately our practices but forms of participation in the practice of God.⁴

Charles Wesley’s life and ministry revolved around the same concerns that have fueled the revival of Christian practices in our own time. His primary questions were those with which I began this presentation. His driving passion was to live faithfully in Christ and to establish communities in which others claimed this as their primary vocation as well. Despite the fact that Christian practices were central to early Methodism, little has been written about the way in which spiritual disciplines shaped the lives of the Methodist people. Among scholars interested in such questions, Hal Knight, undoubtedly stands out among them in

¹ See Dorothy Bass’s discussion of these questions in her forward to Craig Dykstra, *Growing in the Life of Faith: Education and Christian Practices*, 2nd edn. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005), pp. xii–xiv.

² See the inaugural volume in the Practices of Faith Series, edited by Dorothy C. Bass, *Practicing our Faith: A Way of Life for a Searching People* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1997). Since its inception, scholars have explored a number of Christian practices, such as honoring the body, testimony, song, and the gift of time, in this publishing project. The Valparaiso Project website (www.practicingourfaith.org) invites the reader to “explore a way of life shaped by practices that respond to God’s grace and reflect God’s love for you, for others, and for all creation.”

³ Craig Dykstra and Dorothy C. Bass, “A Theological Understanding of Christian Practices,” in Miroslav Volf and Dorothy Bass, eds., *Practicing Theology: Beliefs and Practices in Christian Life* (Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans, 2001), p. 18.

⁴ http://www.practicingourfaith.org/prct_what_are_practices.html

the work he has done on the “means of grace.” In a fairly recent book, he identifies some of the Christian practices that continue to enrich the heirs of the Wesleyan tradition. He explores eight “life-enriching practices,” as he calls them, under the four rubrics of personal devotion, worshiping together, letting go, and reaching out.⁵ While reclaiming these important aspects of the Wesleyan heritage, he actually gives very little attention to Charles Wesley and fails to give even passing mention to the formative role that sacred song has played as faithful practice in this “singing church.” Kenneth Carter, in a more recent study entitled *A Way of Life in the World*, discusses the six practices of searching the scriptures, generosity with the poor, testimony, singing, Holy Communion, and life together, but also fails to describe Charles’s role in inculcating these practices in any way.⁶

The fact of the matter is that Charles Wesley’s hymns and his own life-pattern reflect the centrality of Christian practices (as defined today by Bass and Dykstra) and demonstrate his desire that all people participate in the practice of God. The topic of Charles Wesley and Christian practices suggests a terrain much too expansive to explore in anything other than a cursory fashion in this brief presentation. What I suggest, however, is a brief exploration of the primary practices that shaped Charles Wesley’s life followed by an examination of four salient themes through the lens of hymns he composed on the death of nine early Methodist women.

I. Spiritual Practices in the Wesleyan Tradition

Those practices that exerted the greatest influence on the life of Charles Wesley reflect his immersion in the Anglican heritage he loved and emulated. It is not too much to say that he apprenticed himself to the great spiritual masters within the Church of England. His vision of the Christian life revolves around Anglican practices that have stood the test of time. While not a practice per se, Wesley’s understanding of grace is the critical foundation upon which he built a life of faithful discipleship. So it is here that we must begin. But upon this solid foundation, then, he practiced mutual accountability, established a holistic spirituality conjoining works of piety and works of mercy, and celebrated life as song.

The Foundation of Grace

“Grace upon grace” summarizes Wesley’s understanding of the Christian life. The practice of Christianity begins in grace, grows in grace, and finds its ultimate completion in God’s grace. Grace is God’s unmerited love, restoring our relationship to God and renewing God’s own image in our lives. Life, to put it rather

⁵Henry Knight, *Eight Life-Enriching Practices of United Methodists* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2001).

⁶Kenneth H. Carter, Jr., *A Way of Life in the World: Spiritual Practices for United Methodists* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2004).

simply, is all about a God who delights in relationships that liberate and restore the human spirit. Spiritual restoration founded upon God's unconditional love is the cornerstone of all practices in the Wesleyan spirit. Christian discipleship—the arena of God's continuing activity in the life of the believer—is, first and foremost, a grace-filled response to the free gift of God's all sufficient grace.

Charles sings about the dimensions of this grace in a selection from his *Hymns and Sacred Poems* of 1749, building upon a favorite text from Ephesians 3:

What shall I do my God to love?
 My loving God to praise
 The length, and breadth, and height to prove,
 And depth of sovereign grace?
 Thy sovereign grace to all extends,
 Immense and unconfined;
 From age to age it never ends;
 It reaches all mankind.
 Throughout the world its breadth is known,
 Wide as infinity;
 So wide it never passed by one,
 Or it had passed by me.
 The depth of all-redeeming love
 What angel tongue can tell?
 O may I to the utmost prove
 The gift unspeakable!⁷

Mutual Accountability

Despite the sibling rivalry that characterized the relationship between John and Charles Wesley, it is abundantly clear that they were intentional about being accountable to one another in virtually every aspect of their living. The way in which they “watched over one another in love” modeled a way of life imitated by their followers. Through their practice they inculcated accountable discipleship among their followers and developed structures that affirmed each Christian's need of others to complete successfully the journey of faith. In his hymns, Charles Wesley celebrated the small groups—the bands and classes—in which the early Methodists provided mutual encouragement and genuine care for one another:

Help us to help each other, Lord,
 Each other's cross to bear;
 Let each his friendly aid afford,
 And feel his brother's care.

⁷Charles Wesley, *Hymns and Sacred Poems*, 2 vols. (Bristol: Farley, 1749), 1:163–64; stanzas 11–13, 15 of Hymn 92; henceforth cited as *HSP* (1749).

Help us to build each other up,
 Our little stock improve;
 Increase our faith, confirm our hope,
 And perfect us in love.⁸

Holistic Spirituality

A third area of practice with multiple layers or dimensions can be subsumed under the term “holistic spirituality.” Fellowship in small groups was just one “means of grace” in a constellation of spiritual practices, the purpose of which was richer communion with God through Christ. In addition to Christian fellowship, or conference, the Wesleys also included prayer and fasting, Bible study, and participation in the Sacrament of Holy Communion among the so-called “instituted means of grace.” They also called these “works of piety.” These activities nurtured and sustained growth in grace and love. They fueled the Wesleyan movement as a powerful religious awakening that was both “evangelical” (a rediscovery of God’s word of grace) and “eucharistic” (a rediscovery of the sacrament of Holy Communion as a way to experience that grace).

Wesley concludes a poetic exposition of the whole armor of God with this reminder of St. Paul’s admonition to the church at Thessalonica:

Pray, without ceasing pray
 (Your Captain gives the word),
 His summons cheerfully obey,
 And call upon the Lord;
 To God your every want
 In instant prayer display;
 Pray always; pray, and never faint;
 Pray, without ceasing pray.⁹

He endeavored to “read, mark, and inwardly digest the Word of God,” as prescribed by the Book of Common Prayer, by immersing himself in the sacred scriptures. One of the most characteristic features of the hymns, of course, is the extent to which they echo the Bible.¹⁰ Wesley practiced the Word by incorporating it into virtually every aspect of his life. There is more than a hint of autobiography in his paraphrase of Deuteronomy 6:7:

⁸ John and Charles Wesley, *Hymns and Sacred Poems* (Bristol: Farley, 1742), p. 83; stanzas 3–4 of the hymn entitled “A Prayer for Persons joined in Fellowship.”

⁹ *HSP* (1749), 1:238; stanza 12 of Hymn 28 on “The whole armour of God” (Ephesians vi). See also Franz Hildebrandt & Oliver A. Beckerlegge, eds., *The Works of John Wesley. Volume 7. A Collection of Hymns for the Use of the People Called Methodists* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983), p. 474; hereinafter referred to as *Works* 7.

¹⁰ See the comment of the editors in *Works* 7:ix.

When quiet in my house I sit,
 Thy book be my companion still;
 My joy thy sayings to repeat,
 Talk o'er the records of thy will,
 And search the oracles divine
 Till every heartfelt word be mine.¹¹

Among these works of piety, Eucharist held a special place for Charles. He viewed sacramental grace and evangelical experience as necessary counterparts of an authentic Christian spirituality. In one of his 166 hymns in *Hymns on the Lord's Supper*, he bears testimony to the importance of the means of grace—those places where God has promised to meet us in our Christian practice—but bears witness to the primacy of the Lord's Table:

The prayer, the fast, the word conveys,
 When mix'd with faith, Thy life to me;
 In all the channels of Thy grace
 I still have fellowship with Thee:
 But chiefly here my soul is fed
 With fullness of immortal bread.¹²

Not only does the sacred meal enable the community to remember the past event of the cross and Christ's redemptive work for all, it celebrates the presence of the living Lord in a feast of thanksgiving and orients the community in hope toward the consummation of all things in the great heavenly banquet to come.

Charles Wesley found it impossible to separate his personal experience of God and devotion to Christ from his active role as an ambassador of reconciliation and social transformation in the world. He mentors us in a spirituality that is truly incarnational. He practiced active social service, commitment to the poor, and advocacy for the oppressed. Authentic Christianity, he had learned, is mission; sincere engagement in God's mission is true religion.¹³ The primary means by which he lived out this holistic understanding of Christian discipleship was through the practice of mercy that paralleled the more interior works of piety. His life reveals a missionary vision with an evangelistic core. His most profound desire was to share the good news he had experienced in Christ with others in both word and deed.

¹¹ Charles Wesley, *Short Hymns on Select Passages of the Holy Scriptures*, 2 vols. (Bristol: Farley, 1762), 1:92; Hymn 289; henceforth cited as *Short Hymns* (1762) followed by volume and page number. See also *Works* 7:474. See M. Robert Mulholland, Jr., *Shaped by the Word: The Power of Scripture in Spiritual Formation*, Revised Edition (Nashville: Upper Room Books, 2000) for a helpful articulation of the formative nature of the Word.

¹² John and Charles Wesley, *Hymns on the Lord's Supper* (Bristol: Farley, 1745), p. 39; stanza 4 of Hymn 54.

¹³ See my discussion of these issues in *Recapturing the Wesleys' Vision: An Introduction to the Faith of John and Charles Wesley* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004), pp. 93–104.

Sacred Song

Don Saliers has spent a lifetime exploring the interface of music and faith. His contribution to Dorothy Bass's volume on *Practicing Our Faith*, an essay entitled "Singing Our Lives," describes the way in which the practice of singing can liberate, heal, and transform human life.¹⁴ He reflects more fully on the practice of sacred singing in a more recent volume, *A Song to Sing, A Life to Live: Reflections on Music as Spiritual Practice*.¹⁵ His indebtedness to Charles Wesley, any might guess, is great. Without question, the most important legacy that Wesley left behind is his amazing collection of hymns. An early convert heard the Methodists singing before she even reached their place of worship, the very sound of which, she later testified, set all her passions afloat. She encountered God through Charles's sacred songs and the early Methodist practice of singing.

If Augustine was right in making the claim that "to sing is to pray twice," Charles and the early Methodist people did a lot of praying! Singing praise to God transforms the singer. Sacred song shapes the people of God. Charles's hymns not only formed the minds of the people called Methodists, they also tempered the spirit of this unique community of faith. The hymns themselves were a powerful tool in the Spirit's work of revival and affected the spirituality of the Methodist people, perhaps more than any other single force beside the Bible. Charles reminds us all that a singing faith is a contagious faith.

So Charles Wesley functions as a mentor to us in the cultivation of these particular Christian practices. We do well to apprentice ourselves to him and pay close attention to the way he uses these basic building blocks—these bricks laid one atop the other—in the construction of the faithful Christian life. The lyrical portrait he paints in his hymns is holistic and dynamic. It is rooted in grace, a life of mutuality shaped by acts of piety and acts of mercy, a song to be sung. God works through these practices to conform our lives to the image of Christ. We make Charles's prayer our own, then, as we seek to be faithful:

O thou who camest from above
 The pure celestial fire t' impart,
 Kindle a flame of sacred love
 On the mean altar of my heart!

There let it for thy glory burn
 With inextinguishable blaze,
 And trembling to its source return
 In humble love, and fervent praise.

¹⁴ Don Saliers, "Singing Our Lives," in Bass, *Practicing Our Faith*, pp. 179–93.

¹⁵ Don Saliers and Emily Saliers, *A Song to Sing, A Life to Live: Reflections on Music as Spiritual Practice* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2004).

Jesu, confirm my heart's desire
 To work, and speak, and think for thee;
 Still let me guard the holy fire,
 And still stir up thy gift in me;

Ready for all thy perfect will,
 My acts of faith and love repeat,
 Till death thy endless mercies seal,
 And make the sacrifice complete.¹⁶

II. Examples of Spiritual Practice in the Lives of Women

There were many other distinctive practices that helped define early Methodist spirituality, such as testimony, covenant renewal, Morning and Evening Prayer, early morning preaching services, and the development of Sunday Schools, advocacy programs, and systems of economic support, just to name a few. In the second half of the presentation, however, I would like to explore four themes that are pervasive in a series of hymns Charles wrote to memorialize the lives of nine early Methodist women.¹⁷ My contention is that in these hymns on the death of the faithful departed we encounter a composite portrait of Christian practice at its best—at least, at its best as conceived by Charles Wesley—an idealized vision held up before the Methodist people for their emulation.

The nine women included in this survey all died between the years 1755 and 1786, but most of them in the sixth decade of the eighteenth century. Their names are Grace Bowen, Lady Hotham, Mrs. Lefevre, Mary Naylor, Anne Wigginton, Hannah Dewal, Elizabeth Blackwell, Hannah Butts, and Mary Horton. Some of the women were well-known in their day; others were virtually unknown beyond the limited circle of the Methodist Society in which they thrived. The most lengthy hymn extends to forty-one stanzas in five parts. The shortest memorials—two examples in this sample—are hymns of only fifteen stanzas each. The more lengthy elegies follow a fairly consistent pattern involving several parts. The opening section, while acknowledging the reality of death, celebrates God's victory over death and the triumph of a faithful life. Subsequent segments often provide some of the biographical detail related to the subject, particularly elevat-

¹⁶ *Short Hymns* (1762), 1:57; stanza 1 of Hymn 183, based upon Leviticus 6:13.

¹⁷ Wesley originally published epitaphs for Grace Bowen, Mrs. Lefevre, Mary Naylor, and Anne Wigginton in *Funeral Hymns* (London: [W. Strahan], 1759). Funeral hymns for Elizabeth Blackwell, Hannah Butts, Hannah Dewal, and Lady Hotham were published posthumously and only existed in manuscript during Wesley's lifetime (*MS Funeral Hymns* [1756–82], MARC, Charles Wesley, Box II C.24 DDCW 2). The manuscript version of "Mrs Horton," i.e. the elegy on her death in 1786, covers ten pages, with other pages removed (See MS Henderson, MARC, DDCW 3/9). Subsequently, all of these texts were published together in the appendix of a nineteenth century edition of Charles Wesley's journal, entitled "Selections from the Poetry of The Rev. Charles Wesley, Illustrative of His Journal and Correspondence"; Thomas Jackson, ed., *The Journal of the Rev. Charles Wesley, M.A.* (London: John Mason, 1849), 2:287–431. Because of the inaccessibility of the Horton text at present, reference is made herein to the version published in Jackson's edition of Charles Wesley's journal.

ing her experience of salvation by grace, or even outlining the way of salvation. The hymns almost always conclude with something approaching a vision of heaven—a description of the joys and ecstasies of life eternal with God.

Of greatest importance for our purposes here are those portions of these hymns that develop a portrait of the subject's faithful practice, generally, as one might well expect, in the biographical sections. To illustrate, Wesley devotes almost the entirety of Part III in his hymn "On the Death of Mrs. Mary Naylor" to the development of such an idealized portrait.

Mercy, that heaven-descending guest,
Resided in her gentle breast,
And full possession kept;
While listening to the orphan's moan,
And echoing back the widow's groan,
She wept with them that wept.

Affliction, poverty, disease,
Drew out her soul in soft distress,
The wretched to relieve:
In all the works of love employ'd,
Her sympathizing soul enjoy'd
The blessedness to give.

Her Saviour in his members seen,
A stranger she receiv'd him in,
An hungry Jesus fed,
Tended her sick, imprison'd Lord,
And flew in all his wants t' afford
Her ministerial aid.

A nursing-mother to the poor,
For them she husbanded her store,
Her life, her all, bestow'd;
For them she labour'd day and night,
In doing good her whole delight,
In copying after God.¹⁸

These hymns, as you can discern immediately from four stanzas of one particular hymn, reflect a wide range of practices, including hospitality, testimony, forgiveness, healing, social service, sick visitation, prison ministry, and generosity, but four practices stand out by virtue of their pervasiveness. I will call them gracious imitation, active faith, holy friendship, and generous inclusivity.

¹⁸ *Funeral Hymns* (1759), pp. 52–3. The complete poem of sixty-three stanzas appears on pages 49–61. S T Kimbrough, Jr. included three of these stanzas in his publication of *Songs for the Poor* (New York: GBGMusik, 1997), pp. 23–24; Hymn 12.

Gracious Imitation

All of these hymns, first and perhaps foremost, reflect lives lived in “gracious imitation” of Christ. The women memorialized by Charles practiced to be like Jesus in virtually everything they did. Two of the women featured here, Hannah Dewal and Elizabeth Blackwell were relatives and frequently hosted Wesley on his many visits to Lewisham, just southeast of London. Hannah’s passion to be more like Jesus impressed him deeply. He describes the character-shaping value of her imitative practice. She was “transparent as the crystal stream.” There were “no sudden fits of transient love” in her demeanor. Attributing every act of kindness to God’s grace, she “waited all [Christ’s] mind to gain.” She was “careful to be, and not to seem, what’er she was.” Wesley identifies the guiding principle of her life in stanza four of the hymn:

On him she fix’d her single eye,
 And steady in his steps went on,
 Studious by works to testify
 The power of God in weakness shown.
 A quiet follower of the Lamb,
 She walk’d in him she had received,
 And more and more declar’d his name,
 And more and more like Jesus lived.¹⁹

Quite a number of the sub-themes under this general heading could be drawn directly from the opening chapters of Thomas à Kempis’s *Imitation of Christ*, particularly from his discussion of the centrality of truth and justice in the desire to imitate the Lord.²⁰ “Justice composed her upright soul,” claims Wesley of Mary Naylor, “Justice did all her thoughts controul, / And form’d her character.”²¹ In her efforts to practice the life of Christ, she never put darkness for light, “Evil for good, or wrong for right, Or fraud for piety.” “The truth she lov’d,” he celebrates, “And spoke it from her heart.”²² Lady Hotham reflected all these values in a life oriented around “the love of truth, the dread of sin, the hunger after God.”²³ The gracious imitation of Christ leads to spiritual renewal—the restoration of the capacity to love as God loves—and, in Charles’s estimation, Mrs. Lefevre exemplified the fullest possible realization of this lofty ideal.

¹⁹ *MS Funeral Hymns*, p. 43.

²⁰ The formative influence of Thomas à Kempis’s *Imitation of Christ* on both brothers requires no extended discussion here. They undoubtedly encountered this devotional classic originally in the translation of George Stanhope (London, 1699). Beginning in 1735, John Wesley published several editions of *The Christian’s Pattern*, as he entitled it, based upon the earlier translation of John Worthington.

²¹ *Funeral Hymns* (1759), p. 51.

²² *Funeral Hymns* (1759), p. 52.

²³ *MS Funeral Hymns*, p. 3.

She was (what words can never paint)
 A spotless soul, a sinless saint,
 In perfect love renew'd;
 A mirror of the Deity,
 A transcript of the One in Three,
 A temple fill'd with God.²⁴

Active Faith

A second practice relates directly to the Wesleyan conception of “faith working by love” drawn from Galatians 5:6, namely, active faith. Both Wesleys referred perennially to the need to translate faith into action. When Charles uses expressions like “practical faith” or the “full assurance of faith,” or admonishes the believer to press on toward the “obedience,” “triumph,” or “righteousness of faith,” he refers to the process by which faith is made effective in love. Standing squarely in his Anglican heritage, he affirms that faith—God’s restoration of the capacity to entrust one’s life to God—is the foundation of the abundant life, but also claims that faith is but a means to love’s end. The practice of this “active faith” dominated the life of the Methodist Society.²⁵

Elizabeth Blackwell exemplified this practice: “Her living faith by works was shown,” claims Wesley. Moreover, her cultivation of the ability to “[make] the sufferer’s griefs her own, And [weep] sincere with those that [weep]”—her habituated pattern of empathetic concern, in other words—authenticated God’s gift of faith in her life.²⁶ Four of the nine hymns under our investigation refer explicitly to the story of Mary and Martha in Luke 10, with specific reference to this concern about the practice of active faith. In every instance, Charles avoids the typical elevation of Mary and the concomitant spiritualization of the text; rather, he applauds both hands and heart and celebrates the conjunction of both in the life of the faithful disciple of Christ. Describing the character of Hannah Butts, he sings:

Walking in her house with God,
 Portion’d with the better part,
 She her faith by actions show’d,
 Martha’s hand and Mary’s heart.²⁷

Mary Horton, he observed, chose “to sit delighted at the Master’s feet, And listening to His word,” but she also “ran the way of His commands, / And minister’d, with Martha’s hands.”²⁸ Lady Hotham “toil’d with Martha’s hands,” Charles

²⁴ *Funeral Hymns* (1759), p. 47.

²⁵ See my discussion of this understanding of faith in “Charles Wesley and the Language of Faith,” in *Charles Wesley: Life, Literature & Legacy*, ed. Kenneth G. C. Newport and Ted A. Campbell (Peterborough: Epworth Press, 2007), pp. 299–319.

²⁶ *MS Funeral Hymns*, pp. 52–3.

²⁷ *MS Funeral Hymns*, p. 37.

²⁸ Jackson, *Journal of Charles Wesley*, 2:414.

reminds the would-be disciple of Jesus, but she also possessed Mary's part by "listening for her Lord's commands."²⁹ According to Charles, Anne Wigginton provided "a pattern to believers" because she was "Possesst of Mary's better part, and Martha's hands."³⁰ He points to the importance of Martha's and Mary's spirit both indwelling the believer so that heart, head, and hands are fully conformed to the image of Christ.

Holy Friendship

The third practice reflected in these hymns is holy friendship. The early Methodist people lived in ever-widening circles of holy friendship. Certainly, one of the most important aspects of this practice for the women, in particular, was the way in which friendships created space for them. As J. Raymond has described it, friendship helped "to create the world as women imagine it could be."³¹ It is not surprising to find early Methodist women describing their friendships as precious, invaluable, blessed, and the delight of their hearts.³² The establishment of these relationships, however, depended to a large degree on the practice of befriending the "other." On a very practical level, friendship mirrored the theological concern for accountable discipleship. Given the fact that the Wesleys viewed the Christian life as a journey, companionship—sharing bread with one another—bound the pilgrims together inextricably and promoted the kind of spiritual growth that is only possible in community. These women provided spiritual guidance to one another, often directing their companions through the difficult terrain of the journey. "Can you her artless warmth forget," asked Charles concerning Grace Bowen, "Her eager haste to turn your feet / Into the narrow road . . . / Whene'er ye stray'd from God!" No one could ever forget her "kind counsels," "fearful warnings," "loud protests," and "silent tears"—all of these efforts at spiritual direction being expressions of holy friendship.³³

We should be careful not to underestimate the importance or value of these friendships, so powerfully exemplified in the life of Hannah Dewal:

For friendship form'd, her swelling heart
 With pure, intense affection glow'd;
 She could not give her friend a part,
 Because she gave the whole to God.
 Her friend she clasp'd with love entire,
 Enkindled at the Saviour's throne,
 A spark of that celestial fire,
 A ray of that eternal Sun.³⁴

²⁹ *MS Funeral Hymns*, p. 4.

³⁰ *Funeral Hymns* (1759), p. 32.

³¹ J. Raymond, *A Passion for Friends: Towards a Philosophy of Female Affection* (London: Women's Press, 1986), p. 205. Cf. M. Hunt, *Fierce Tenderness: A Feminist Theology of Friendship* (New York: Crossroads, 1991).

³² See Paul W. Chilcote, *Early Methodist Spirituality: Selected Women's Writings* (Nashville: Kingswood Books, 2007), pp. 54–55.

³³ *Funeral Hymns* (1759), p. 26.

³⁴ *MS Funeral Hymns*, p. 44.

The practice of friendship, however, extended far beyond the circle of the loveable and lovely. In fact, the early Methodists acted in the spirit of Charles's injunction to "make the poor their bosom friends" quite seriously, and the way in which they established lasting friendships with the forgotten and marginal of their own day remains one of their most compelling testimonies.³⁵

In this regard, Charles's frequent reference to Matthew 25 in the elegies should be no surprise. The women practiced discerning Christ in "the distressing disguise of the poor," to use the words of Mother Teresa. Wesley provides the following portrait of Elizabeth Blackwell's character, shaped by her practice of befriending the least in her community:

Nursing the poor with constant care,
Affection soft, and heart-esteem,
She saw her Saviour's image there,
And gladly minister'd to Him.³⁶

In similar fashion, he describes Mary Naylor as "a nursing mother to the poor," as noted earlier. Grace Bowen rejoiced "an hungry Christ to feed" and "to visit Him in pain." To the poor, Wesley sings, she gave her all.³⁷

Generous Inclusivity

This third practice of holy friendship leads seamlessly into the fourth and final practice I would like to explore is generous inclusivity. Charles Wesley actually develops some of his most powerful lyrical images around this theme. None is more potent, perhaps, than the expansion of the heart by means of faith's influence in the direction of greater love—the ultimate goal of all Christian practices. A single stanza reflection on Psalm 81:10 captures the essence of this image:

Give me the enlarged desire,
And open, Lord, my soul,
Thy own fullness to require,
And comprehend the whole;
Stretch my faith's capacity
Wider and yet wider still;
Then, with all that is in thee,
My soul forever fill!³⁸

"Fill'd with purity of love," Hannah Dewal embraced the world with wide-spread arms. Particularly in her death, Wesley observes that her soul was drawn out to all humankind. Earlier in this hymn he describes the foundation of this expansive vision:

³⁵ This is a line from a poem of Charles Wesley that remained unpublished until 1990.

³⁶ *MS Funeral Hymns*, p. 53.

³⁷ *Funeral Hymns* (1759), p. 25.

³⁸ *Short Hymns* (1762), 1:268; Hymn 841, on Psalm 81:10. See also *Works* 7:529; Hymn 361.

Celestial charity expands
 The heart to all the ransom'd race;
 Though knit to one in closest bands,
 Her soul doth every soul embrace.
 She no unkind exception makes,
 A childlike follower of her God;
 The world into her heart she takes,
 The purchase dear of Jesu's blood.³⁹

Elizabeth Blackwell sought to discern the image of God in every fellow creature and this practice shaped her into a person “whose love,” in Wesley’s words, “did the whole world embrace!”⁴⁰ Struggling to find the words to express the depth of this love restored in the life of Mary Naylor, Charles creates this magnificent image: “[She] stretch’d her arms of charity, / Ingrasping all mankind.”⁴¹

Conclusion

All of these practices shaped the women of whom Charles Wesley sang, and his own range of practices, rooted in the tradition of his beloved Anglican church, formed him into a faithful witness to the love that would not let him go. The evangelistic import of the believer shaped by the practices of the faith was not lost on Charles Wesley, nor should it be lost on us. Several stanzas from his hymn “On the Death of Mrs. Elizabeth Blackwell” bear witness to the larger significance of the God-shaped character formed in those who apprentice themselves to the Christ:

Her living faith by works was shown:
 Through faith to full salvation kept,
 She made the sufferer’s griefs her own,
 And wept sincere with those that wept.

Nursing the poor with constant care,
 Affection soft, and heart-esteem,
 She saw her Saviour’s image there,
 And gladly minister’d to Him.

By wisdom pure and peaceable,
 By the meek Spirit of her Lord,
 She knows the stoutest to compel,
 And sinners wins without the word.

They see the tempers of the Lamb,
 They feel the wisdom from above,
 And bow, subdued, to Jesu’s name,
 As captives of resistless love.⁴²

³⁹ *MS Funeral Hymns*, p. 45.

⁴⁰ *MS Funeral Hymns*, p. 54.

⁴¹ *Funeral Hymns* (1759), p. 56.

⁴² *MS Funeral Hymns*, pp. 51–3; stanzas 7 and 4.

