

# Proceedings of The Charles Wesley Society

Volume 5

1998

S T Kimbrough, Jr.  
*Editor*

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**PAPERS PRESENTED**  
AT  
**THE NINTH ANNUAL MEETING**  
OF  
**THE CHARLES WESLEY SOCIETY**

*November 1998*  
*Madison, New Jersey*

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*Proceedings of The Charles Wesley Society* 1998

Published in the United States by  
The Charles Wesley Society, 2001

*Editor*, S T Kimbrough, Jr.

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## **Pastoral Values in the Works of Charles Wesley**

Frederick E. Maser

What is the meaning of the expression “pastoral values”? In searching for an answer to this question I turned first to the “Pastoral Letters” of the Apostle Paul. Although these three letters, two to Timothy and one to Titus, were not referred to as “pastoral letters” until about the middle of the eighteenth century, they are today thought of as a manual for the preachers or the clergy. In form, purpose, and language, they are sharply distinguished from what we may term the “Doctrinal Epistles” of the Apostle Paul. In these letters he teaches Titus and Timothy how to organize and care for the Christian communities which he has placed in their charge. He emphasizes the need, in their leadership, for purity of life and doctrine and especially for a dedicated concern in the pastoral oversight of their people. In short, Paul’s letters direct Timothy and Titus in their work, revealing to them the kind of life they should lead and the activities in which they should engage in order to give their ministry pastoral value.

In addition to reading these letters of the Apostle Paul, I consulted several of my colleagues in the active ministry for their definition of the expression “pastoral values.” They generally agreed that the term includes all the duties of the ministry—preaching, counseling, visiting, and the peripheral activities of these tasks. As a result of these studies and interviews, I divided my topic “Pastoral Values in the Works of Charles Wesley” into three headings: (1) the importance of the pastor in the effective use of Charles Wesley’s works; (2) Wesley’s method for supervising the spiritual lives of the members of the Christian community; and (3) pastoral uses of the hymns, letters, and journal of Charles Wesley.

### **The Importance of the Pastor in the Effective Use of Charles Wesley’s Works**

For both the Apostle Paul and Charles Wesley, the preacher or the pastor was the key to an effective ministry. The Apostle Paul in writing to Timothy and Titus of their pastoral duties was especially concerned that they themselves should reveal in their lives and leadership the qualifications that fitted them for their work. To Timothy he wrote, “Stir up the gift of God which is in thee, . . . Be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus” (2 Timothy 1:6, 2:1). To Titus he wrote, “Speak thou the things which become sound doctrine, . . . In all things showing thyself a pattern of good works” (2 Titus 2:1, 7). In addition, when choosing church leaders, they were to select their preachers and leaders carefully, choosing responsible persons, well fitted for their task.

Both John and Charles Wesley would have agreed with the Apostle Paul that an effective ministry or, in this case, a wise use of Wesley’s works, must begin with pastors well qualified for their task. However, John and Charles would have differed concerning the qualifications of the preachers for the Methodist move-

ment. In the matter of gifts and graces, for example, Charles Wesley was tremendously interested in the gifts that were necessary to fit a person for the Methodist work; John was more interested in the grace that sustained him. John wrote to Charles who was busy “purging” the preachers and dismissing those he thought incompetent, “We must have a supply; and of the two I prefer grace before gifts.”<sup>1</sup>

But as Charles was unconvinced, he did not discount the grace of God, but he recognized the need for gifts as well as spiritual grace in qualifying one as a Methodist preacher and pastor. “[Charles] looked at the possible harm an unqualified preacher might do to many persons; [John], at the possible good he might do to some.”<sup>2</sup> For the moment Charles prevailed.

Of William Seward, first martyr of Methodism, he wrote, “I . . . heard him with pain. It was not so bad as I feared, nor so good as to make me believe him called to the work.”<sup>3</sup> But of Michael Fenwick he wrote an almost humorous condemnation: “Went to the Room that I might hear with my own ears one of whom many strange things had been told. I attended diligently in a little room adjoining. But such a preacher have I never heard, and I hope I never shall again! It was beyond all description! I can’t say he preached false doctrine, or true, or any doctrine at all, but pure unmixed nonsense. Not one sentence did he utter that could do the least good to any soul. Now and then a text of scripture or a quotation of a verse was dragged in by the head and shoulders. I could scarce refrain from stopping him. . . . He set my blood a-galloping, and threw me into such a sweat that I expected the fever to follow. . . . Of this I am infallibly sure, that if he ever had a gift for preaching, he has now *totally* lost it.”<sup>4</sup>

In writing of another brother he stated, “A friend of ours (without God’s counsel) made a preacher of a tailor. I, with God’s help, shall make him a tailor again.”<sup>5</sup> On another occasion he wrote, “My chief concern upon earth . . . was prosperity of the Church of England; my next, that of the Methodists; my third, that of the preachers; and if their interests should ever come in competition, I would give up the preachers for the good of the whole body of the Church of England.”<sup>6</sup>

In short, for Charles, pastoral care, whether it be in preaching, counseling, administration or in any of the numerous tasks of the pastor, must begin with a person equipped with intelligence, ability, and some training, as well as with a spiritual experience. He went so far as to urge “that no more be allowed to preach with us, till my brother and I have heard him with our own ears, and talked fully with him, and if need [be] to keep him with us some days.”<sup>7</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Frank Baker, *Charles Wesley as Revealed by His Letters* (London: The Epworth Press, 1948), 83; henceforth cited as “Baker” plus the page number(s).

<sup>2</sup>John Whitehead, *The Life of the Rev. John Wesley* (Philadelphia: William S. Stockton, 1845), 211. Originally printed in two volumes in London by Stephen Couchman, 1793, 1796.

<sup>3</sup>Baker, 82.

<sup>4</sup>Baker, 102–103.

<sup>5</sup>Baker, 86.

<sup>6</sup>Baker, 102–103.

<sup>7</sup>Baker, 84.

In addition, around 1750 and 1751, the brothers became deeply concerned about the daily lives of their preachers when they heard of the immoral conduct of one of their number, James Wheatley. Wheatley was not only living an immoral life, but, when confronted by the Wesleys, he boldly threatened to expose all the preachers whom he said were living as himself. The charge was shown to be false when Wheatley was confronted by a number of the preachers whom he had particularly castigated. Nevertheless, the incident caused the Wesleys to scrutinize more narrowly the men whom they were receiving into the itinerancy.

Finally, toward the end of the year 1751, the brothers drew up an agreement about the qualifications for the preachers: "With regard to the preachers, we agree—

1. That none shall be permitted to preach in any of our societies, till he be examined, both as to grace and gifts; at least, by the assistant, who, sending word to us, may, by our answer, admit him a *local* preacher.
2. That such preacher be not immediately taken from his trade, but be exhorted to follow it with all diligence.
3. That no person shall be received as a traveling preacher, or be taken from his trade, by either of us alone, but by both of us conjointly, giving him a note under both our hands.
4. That neither of us will re-admit a traveling preacher laid aside, without the consent of the other.
5. That, if we should ever disagree in our judgment, we shall refer the matter to Mr. Perronet [probably Vincent Perronet, an Anglican priest in whom the brothers had great confidence]."<sup>8</sup> This was followed by a sixth statement in which both brothers dedicated themselves once again to the cause of Methodism.

It would seem as though Charles had a great deal to do with drawing up this momentous document, but both brothers certainly agreed on the need for qualified leaders for the Methodist movement. Even as Paul in his pastoral epistles stressed the need for both gifts and grace in the lives of Titus and Timothy, the Wesleys sought to stress similar needs among the Methodist preachers.

One might think that this emphasis on qualifications by Charles is unnecessary today when we have a well educated, highly trained, dedicated ministry. However, Methodism still has ministerial counselors who have had little or no training in counseling and a number of preachers who cannot present a clear, logical sermon, and this is unfortunate. The need for clarity in preaching today is as necessary as when Halford E. Luccock first paraphrased the Apostle Paul by say-

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<sup>8</sup>Luke Tyerman, *The Life and Times of John Wesley*, 3 vols. (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1872), 2:129–130.

ing, “thou I speak with the tongues of men and of angels and have not *clarity*, I am become as sounding brass or a tinkling cymbal.”

That thought came to my attention recently when in going through one of my scrapbooks, I re-read a letter from a noted female author, who, during her lifetime wrote two best sellers in addition to a large number of other successful books. She was a Methodist in one of our large Methodist churches where one would expect the most brilliant preachers and pastors to be assigned. She was commenting on what she said was a well organized article by a Methodist preacher. Then, in a more ironic vein, she added, “We cannot say this comes from having written a lot of sermons (judging by various mazes I’ve sat through on a Sunday morning).” She seemed to think that Methodist preaching had not improved much since the days of Charles Wesley.

In addition, there is little doubt that both John and Charles, as the Apostle Paul, also stressed the necessity for purity of doctrine among the necessary qualifications for a Methodist preacher; and that need is paramount today. Methodism has increasingly become an activist organization. It is doubtful if many Methodists have ever studied the Articles of Religion or any of the works of the Wesleys. It would seem as though few preachers wish to clutter-up their friendly morning talks or their highly ritualistic worship with doctrinal sermons. Doctrinal preaching demands a little more time than the fifteen or eighteen minutes usually assigned for the morning sermon, and it is rapidly becoming an outmoded form of preaching. Activism is certainly a necessary part of church life, but it must be based on Christian doctrine or else the church loses its high purpose of proclaiming Christ and the realm of God and becomes only one more lobby for various forms of human welfare. At any rate, the first pastoral use of Charles Wesley’s works is to remind us of the need for the highest qualifications in those who seek to become Methodist ministers.

### **Pastoral Supervision**

In returning now to our opening statement, it is significant to note that if Paul taught Titus and Timothy something about pastoral values in organizing their Christian communities into a church, he also taught them a great deal about caring for its membership. Later, in early Methodism, it was John who provided the class meetings and bands, or the *organization* for caring for the Methodist membership, but it was Charles who wrote the hymns and poems for the Methodists and emphasized the need for house to house visitation in the pastoral care of souls. When he entered upon a settled ministry at Bristol and later at London, he spent his mornings studying and his afternoons “visiting from house to house.” In addition, he wrote numerous letters to comfort, guide, and exhort his people.<sup>9</sup> He was also careful to guard against the use of any unworthy or unscriptural

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<sup>9</sup>Baker, 116–128.

hymns within the societies. He wrote to Brother Shent on one occasion that he had no objection to allowing a certain William Darney to preach but only under certain conditions. One of these was that he “does not introduce the use of his doggerel hymns in any of our societies. I cannot in conscience agree to his putting nonsense into their mouths. Indeed they themselves would never consent to it. But he has utterly refused to promise forbearance: therefore I promised him that in whatsoever society of ours he uses his own verse, in that society *he shall preach no more.*”<sup>10</sup>

It is significant that when Charles died, John said of him “His least praise was his talent for poetry.” John was probably thinking of Charles’s work as preacher and pastor, the latter activity which caused him to be greatly loved by the Methodists of both Bristol and London.

He extended his counseling and affection likewise to the members of his own family. He was the first of the three brothers to visit his sister Hetty in London after an escapade that alienated her parents and led to a disastrous marriage, and he urged John to write to her. He counseled John Lambert, husband of his sister Anne, and on July 19, 1738, he wrote in his Journal, “I found my brother and sister Lambert [at Mr. Bray’s], and preached to them the gospel of forgiveness, which they received without opposition.” He even sought to develop a better relationship between his brother John and his wife, who on June 21, 1751, came to Charles for consolation and help. In his Journal he writes:

I found my sister in tears; professed my love, pity, and desire to help her. I heard her complaints of my brother, carried her to my house, where, after supper, she resumed the subject, and went away comforted.

*Sat., June 22nd.* I passed another hour with her [his brother John’s wife] in free, affectionate conversation; then with my brother; and then with both together. Our explanation ended in prayer and perfect peace.

Charles frequently applied the word “sister” to any female Christian, and he does not specifically say that the “sister” here was John’s wife; but, at this time, Charles and his brother’s wife were on good terms. Three months before, he had visited her, kissed her, and welcomed her into the family. In May he had met her again at the “Horsefair” or the Methodist meeting house at Bristol usually termed “The New Room at the Horsefair, Bristol,” and he had treated her as a sister. At any rate, Charles had used an effective method for counseling, speaking first to one, then the other, and then both together. At least the session ended in peace.

He also became a close friend of his sister Kezia who nursed him through a serious illness. Later, after his “conversion” experience, at the home of Mr. Bray, he urged her to find, by faith, a Savior in Jesus Christ. At first she stoutly maintained she had all faith necessary for salvation, but later, feeling unsure of her faith, she listened to her brother and probably had some kind of experience akin

<sup>10</sup>Baker, 86 and 87.

to his. This must have brought happiness to Charles who was always a pastor seeking souls.

In 1984, John R. Tyson and Douglas Lister in an article in the *Quarterly Review*<sup>11</sup> recorded an hitherto unpublished fragment of Charles Wesley's Journal. In it one cannot help but note Charles's pastoral concern for his family, as well as for the Methodist preachers and the Methodist people. Writing in Byrom's shorthand, as if to keep the matter secret, Charles also relates a long and difficult counseling experience with one who might be termed a "Methodist madman." It is easily understood why he wanted to keep this part of his Journal secret since the "madman" referred to Lady Huntingdon as that "vile, wicked woman, . . . That nasty baggage, that hypocritical goat." The man was evidently psychotic, and it is amazing how patiently and persistently Charles counseled with him.

All of these experiences illustrate the "pastoral uses" of Charles Wesley's works by emphasizing the need today as then in our societies or churches for pastoral supervision through counseling, through house to house visitation, through correspondence, and, above all, through directing persons to the Savior Jesus Christ.

For this reason I doubt if Charles Wesley would have approved of the abbreviated version of the Book of Common Prayer that John sent to America for the use of the Methodists, entitling it *The Sunday Service*, etc. Charles was a devoted Anglican to whom the Book of Common Prayer was almost as sacred as the Bible. In addition, through his pastoral ministry he had learned of the desperate need for forgiveness experienced by many persons. It is doubtful, therefore, that he would have changed the indicative form of absolution to the precatory, as did John in The Order for the Administration of the Lord's Supper found in *The Sunday Service*. Both the brothers believed that the service of Holy Communion was a converting, as well as a confirming ordinance, and an indicative form of absolution would aid toward this end. Holy Communion, therefore, is as much a pastoral resource for converting persons as for preaching or counseling.

Furthermore, it is curious that in the historic development of American Methodism we have come to the place where we have no service entitled "Holy Communion" or "The Lord's Supper." Instead we have four services of *Word and Table*. In two of these there is neither an indicative nor a precatory form of absolution but a kind of declaration in which the congregation and the leader assure each other their sins are forgiven. It seeks to emphasize the priesthood of the believer more than the gift of absolution from God. In the third service no absolution is provided. Only the fourth service preserves Wesley's precatory form of absolution, and it is the service I love, possibly because its precatory prayer and "comfortable words" provide the assurances I need.

It is not within the scope of this paper to ponder why Methodism today is drifting farther and farther away from either an indicative or precatory form for

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<sup>11</sup>Spring, 1984, 9-19.



assuring persons of the forgiveness of their sins. At least, we have not drifted as far as the man of whom John Wesley speaks of in his *Journal*. Wesley had been preaching to a large number of Roman Catholics, "One of whom," he adds, "he had declared frankly but a few days before, 'I would fain be with you, but I dare not; for now I have all my sins forgiven for four shillings a year; and this could not be in *your* church.'"<sup>12</sup>

The Wesleys, of course, believed that forgiveness is a grace provided by Jesus Christ and extended to the sinner not by the priest but by Christ himself on condition of faith and repentance. It depends not on the words or the intent of the priest or the amount of money provided by the sinner. This experience often included an assurance by the Holy Spirit of full salvation, giving the sinner a reason for rejoicing in the love of God.

Today, however, forgiveness is seldom preached from the pulpit, and perplexed sinners are forced to rely on a reasonable amount of church attendance, a spasmodic generosity, and a number of good deeds to assure themselves of a place in heaven. The resulting assurance is not very assuring. Charles Wesley would probably say that we need a return to Methodist basics and the kind of pastoral counseling which leads to faith in Jesus Christ for salvation. We need also to become as familiar with Charles Wesley's hymns as were the early Methodists.

Robert Southey is purported to have said of Charles Wesley's hymns, "Perhaps no poems have ever been so devoutly committed to memory as these, . . . . The manner in which they were sung tended to impress them strongly on the mind; the tune was made wholly subservient to the words, and not the words to the tune."

F. Luke Wiseman said in his *Drew Lectureship in Biography*, "It would be easy to select twenty hymns whose literary claim entitled them to a permanent place in the anthology of eighteenth-century lyrics. But their chief value lies in their delineation of spiritual experience."<sup>13</sup>

It might be a helpful project, if someone would gather a group of Charles Wesley's hymns under appropriate titles such as Invitation, Penitence, Forgiveness, At the Holy Communion, Life in the Spirit, etc., and publish them as one of the Pastoral Uses of Charles Wesley's works. This emphasis brings me to the third part of this article.

### **Charles Wesley's Hymns, Letters, and Journal**

There are a number of pastoral uses of Charles Wesley's hymns and the first is in their relation to the Holy Scriptures. Henry Bett in his splendid study *The Hymns of Methodism* has centered one chapter on "The Hymns and the Scriptures." After listing a number of scripture references to be found in the hymns, he adds the following paragraph.

<sup>12</sup>Vol. 3, 398.

<sup>13</sup>F. Luke Wiseman, *Charles Wesley: Evangelist and Poet* (New York: Abingdon Press, 1932), 5.

Even more impressive than a mere list of references is the way in which one allusion to scripture calls up in the memory of Charles Wesley a number of passages which contain a similar thought or employ a similar metaphor. Thus in the first line of a famous quatrain he had in mind the passage in Psalm XXXVI.9, 'For with Thee is the fountain of life,' and this reminds him instinctively of three other places in scripture where the thought of a living spring occurs: 'Let him take the water of life freely' (Revelation XXII.17); 'Then sang Israel this song, Spring up O well; sing ye unto it' (Numbers XXI.17); 'The water that I shall give him shall become in him a well of water springing up into eternal life' (John IV.14). It will be seen that all these are plainly recalled in the lines:

Thou of life the fountain art,  
 Freely let me take of Thee,  
 Spring Thou up within my heart  
 Rise to all eternity.<sup>14</sup>

This is a pastoral use of the Wesley hymns which could form the basis for a study throughout the fall and winter or especially during the Lenten season, namely, a study of the hymns with a view to finding the scriptural passages upon which the verses are based. Of special value in such a study would be volume 7 of the Wesley Works project where many of the scriptural sources are listed. In addition, *The Unpublished Poetry of Charles Wesley*, edited by S T Kimbrough, Jr., and Oliver A. Beckerlegge should prove helpful.

The study could be extended to reconstruct the life of Christ from Charles Wesley's hymns. Christ's birth is signaled by that famous carol "Hark! The herald angels sing" and every step of his life is marked by Wesley's hymns, even including his ascension, reflected in that magnificent hymn "Christ whose glory fills the skies." The second coming of Christ is also found in the hymns, especially the line "Suddenly return and never,/nevermore thy temple leave" from the hymn "Love divine, all loves excelling."

A second pastoral use of the hymns of Charles Wesley could be a study of the hymns in relation to Methodist doctrine. It has been stated that the early Methodists learned Methodist doctrine from their hymns, and we have seen how careful Charles was that the hymns to be used in the Methodist Societies should be based on scriptural truth. We also know that both John Wesley and John Fletcher objected to a key word in the hymn "Love divine, all loves excelling." Charles had written "Take away our *power of sinning*" which both Fletcher and John Wesley believed tended toward Calvinism. John simply omitted the entire verse from the 1780 *A Collection of Hymns for the Use of the People Called Methodists*. He also corrected a line in hymn 148, changing it from "death" to "Faith alone confirms me his."

In addition, the hymn "Come, sinners to the gospel feast" is certainly in opposition to Calvinism and many other hymns set forth particular Methodist doctrines. A study of hymns like "Come, thou long-expected Jesus" and "O love

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<sup>14</sup>Henry Bett, *The Hymns of Methodism* (London: Epworth Press, 1946), 72.

divine, what hast thou done" would give people today a deeper understanding of Methodist beliefs. There is also both historical and doctrinal value in the famous "O for a thousand tongues to sing." It was written on the anniversary of Charles Wesley's highly significant religious experience at the home of John Bray which occurred a few days before his brother's Aldersgate experience. It could become the basis for a discussion on the meaning of conversion in Methodist doctrine and the place of conversion in the lives of the brothers; a subject which has become a center for debate in many theological circles. At any rate, one pastoral use of the hymn would be to direct a discussion on conversion and its application in today's world.

Another hymn which could be used to teach biblical history and Methodist doctrine is "Blow ye the trumpet, blow." Its ringing chorus "The year of Jubilee is come!/The year of Jubilee is come!/Return, ye ransomed sinners, home" is simply a jumble of words to the average Methodist who has not the remotest idea of the biblical significance of the year of Jubilee nor of the way in which Jesus himself used the word "ransom."

From here it would be possible to move into a discussion of Charles Wesley's theory of the atonement as found in his hymns. Throughout history there have been numerous theories of the atonement or attempts to explain how the death of Christ on the cross can save a sinner from perdition. There are those who see the life of Christ and the cross as a recapitulation of all of history; others see it as a moment when Christ triumphed over the forces of evil; still others see it as a deification of humanity, arguing that Jesus took humanity on himself and by his life, death, and resurrection freed it from the corruptibility, which is the consequence of sin, and deified it. There are those theologians who see in the cross a ransom, a sacrifice, a satisfaction, a substitution, and some see it as a moral influence. Charles uses two of these theories in his hymns. Again and again he emphasizes the idea of a substitutionary death. Christ died for me—in my stead. Think of only one among numerous examples.

And can it be, that I should gain  
An interest in the Saviour's blood!  
Died he for me?—who caused his pain!  
For me?—who him to death pursued.  
Amazing love! how can it be  
That thou, my God, shouldst die for me?<sup>15</sup>

Unfortunately Charles committed the error which grows almost naturally out of the substitutionary view of the atonement. In his hymn "Arise, my soul, arise" he pictures the suffering Christ as pleading with God the Father to forgive those who have sinned, thus developing a dichotomy in the Godhead with the Father providing leniency and mercy almost against divine will. In addition, Charles

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<sup>15</sup>*Hymns and Sacred Poems* (London: Strahan, 1739), 117.

writes in stanza 5, "My God is reconciled!" But the Scriptures see the need for humanity to be reconciled to God, not God to humanity. Paul writes, "Be ye reconciled" (2 Corinthians 5:20). For Paul, God is already reconciled to humanity. There never was a time when God was not. In Christ God sought to reconcile the *world* unto the Godhead, not the Godhead to the world. At any rate, however we may interpret the hymn, it can lead to a very profound discussion, if the pastor has the theological background to lead it.

Charles also writes of the idea that through the cross of Christ we are *ransomed*. The hymn we quoted earlier speaks of the *ransom* theory of the atonement; a very profound, and when understood, a beautiful theory.

There is both a Greek and a Hebrew idea of the concept of ransom. The Greek view is adequately set forth by William Barclay in his volume *The Mind of Jesus*.<sup>16</sup> The Hebrew view is set forth in James Denney's book *The Death of Christ*.<sup>17</sup> It would be a matter for extended study, however, to discover the extent to which Charles shared these views.

The most important thing to remember, however, about Charles Wesley's hymns is that, though some of them rest upon a particular theory of the atonement, many of them rise high above every theory of the atonement as he soars into the realm of the eternal love of God. This is most clearly revealed in his magnificent hymn "Wrestling Jacob." I quote the last few stanzas.

Yield to me now—for I am weak,  
 But confident in self-despair!  
 Speak to my heart, in blessings speak,  
 Be conquered by my instant prayer:  
 Speak, or thou never hence shall move,  
 And tell me if thy name is Love.

'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 mercies move—  
 Thy nature and thy name is Love.

I know thee, Saviour, who thou art—  
 Jesus, the feeble sinner's friend;  
 Nor wilt thou with the night depart,  
 But stay, and love me to the end:  
 Thy mercies never shall remove,  
 Thy nature, and thy name, is Love.

<sup>16</sup>San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1961, 265.

<sup>17</sup>New York: A. C. Armstrong and Son, 1903, 44–45.

Charles here soars to the infinite heights of eternal truth. The cross is the highest expression of God's love. There is no theory sufficiently adequate to define it. As one writer has expressed this love, it means that

When Jesus entered the world, when He healed the sick, comforted the sad, fed the hungry, forgave His enemies, He was saying: 'God loves you like that.' When he died upon the cross He was saying: 'Nothing that men ever can do to God will stop God loving them. There is no limit to the love of God. There is no end beyond which that love will not go. . . . That is why nothing less than death on the Cross would do. If Jesus had refused or escaped the Cross, if He had not died, it would have meant that there was some point in suffering and sorrow at which the love of God stopped, that there was some point beyond which forgiveness was impossible.' But the Cross is God saying in Jesus: 'There is no limit to which my love will not go and no sin which my love cannot forgive.'<sup>18</sup>

There is no sin so terrible but that God's love can forgive and transform the sinner into the beauty of the divine nature.

I leap for joy, I take the prey,  
And as a bounding hart fly home,  
Through all eternity to prove,  
Thy nature, and thy name, is Love.

This is Charles Wesley at his best—drowning all theories of the atonement in the truth of eternal love.

As a third alternative, there is a less profound but more entertaining use of the hymns by a study of the stories surrounding the hymns. There are a large number of books centering in the stories of the hymns—how they came to be written and incidents that have grown up around them. Most of these stories are factual, but some are fanciful so that the study might help in ascertaining the truth about some of the hymns.

My old friend, the late Emory Stevens Bucke, former Book Editor of The Methodist Publishing House, once told me he expected one day to write a book on "Stories Preachers Love to Tell." One of these centered in a little town that was severely struck by a hurricane. During the hurricane the pastor of the Episcopal Church went into the church tower and played on the carillon "The Church's One Foundation." He played all through the storm, seeking to bring hope to those in the community who could hear the hymn high above the hurricane. All other buildings in the community were badly damaged or destroyed but the church stood firm, and the pastor continued playing.

Bucke said that a friend of his went to that town in order to inquire into the truth of the legend. Bucke's friend was a skeptic and the story sounded contrived. He related to the pastor the story that was being circulated about the church and about his part in keeping up the morale of the community by ringing out a great

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<sup>18</sup>Barclay, 280.

hymn on the carillon. When he was finished the pastor said, "Well, that's a great story! Aside from a few small inaccuracies, it's a fine story."

"What are the inaccuracies?" asked Bucke's friend.

"Well," said the pastor, "I was not here during the hurricane, since I was visiting my sister, so I could not have been playing on the carillon. Secondly, I have no idea how to play a carillon even if I had been here. Thirdly, the church never owned a carillon, and fourthly, the church was badly damaged and we had to secure help to restore it. But, outside of those few inaccuracies, it's a great study. I wish you well with it."

The study of the stories surrounding the hymns might help clear up some historical errors, beside providing inspiration and giving us a more accurate picture of the background of the hymns. This would be an excellent pastoral use of Charles Wesley's hymns.

It is also of interest to learn that Samuel, the youngest surviving son of Charles Wesley, while studying manuscripts in the Fitzwilliam Museum in Cambridge, discovered three hymns of his father which had been set to music by George F. Handel. Charles may have met the composer through a Mr. Rich, Lessee of Covent Garden where Handel produced some of his operas. Either Mrs. Rich, who had been converted under the Wesleys, or Charles himself, may have requested the composer to provide the tunes. Unfortunately, only one of the hymns is in our current hymnal: "Rejoice! The Lord is King."<sup>19</sup> The other two hymns are "Sinners, obey the gospel word" and "O love divine, how sweet thou art." The tunes are GOPSAL, CANNONS, and FITZWILLIAM.

The group making this study will need to search in our Methodist libraries for the vast number of Wesley's hymns not found in our Methodist hymnal. Particularly helpful, however, are *Our Hymnody*, by Robert Guy McCutchan, now out of print; *The Hymns of The United Methodist Hymnal*, edited by Diana Sanchez, and *Companion to The United Methodist Hymnal*, by Carlton R. Young.

A fourth pastoral use of the hymns is in pastoral visitation when the pastor might well use the hymns and the Bible in visiting the homes of his or her people. I am convinced that pastoral visitation is rapidly becoming a thing of the past, which is unfortunate. It is partly due to the fact that the pastor does not know what to say when visiting a home. He or she feels uncomfortable, and the visit makes the people uncomfortable.

When I was a District Superintendent, a lady in one of my churches told me of the pastoral visit of her preacher to her home. When he entered he sat down in the front room and said nothing. There was a lengthy silence. Finally, she broke the silence by saying, "Pastor, would you like a cup of tea?" He answered, "That would be nice!" She brought him the tea. He drank it amid a profound

<sup>19</sup>Lightwood, *Samuel Wesley*, 193ff.

silence. When he finished he placed his napkin on the coffee table and said, "Well, I must be going." And he left.

Some ministers need training in visitation and the use of the resources at hand to make their visits meaningful. A pocket hymn book of Charles Wesley's hymns would be useful in pastoral visitation. At least it would give the pastor something to talk about in addition to anything he/she might want to say about the church and its program. But the hymns would need to be selected with care, and prefaced in each instance with a short description of the manner in which they should be used. Most of the hymns could be used as pastoral prayers uttered before the minister departs. Charles Wesley, himself, used his hymns in this way, singing them to his listeners; but, for the average person, an attempt at song might prove fatal. Reading the hymn should be sufficient.

In turning to Charles Wesley's Journal, one finds almost an endless number of pastoral uses for this remarkable record. It is not as extensive or as well organized as the Journal of his brother John; but it is far more interesting and written in a livelier style. Someone has said that John's life as reflected in his Journal is a noble monotony. This is hardly fair. John's Journal was written for the edification of the Methodist societies whereas Charles was writing for his own and his family's enjoyment. John published portions of his Journal at regular intervals, whereas Charles never intended his work for publication. In fact, part of Charles's Georgia Journal was indecipherable until it was discovered that these portions had been written in the more or less unknown shorthand of John Byrom, a friend of the Wesleys and author of numerous hymns including "Christians, Awake." Other parts of his later Journal may have been destroyed by Charles himself. It ends rather abruptly in 1756, and here and there is marred by gaps. In spite of these deficiencies, it is a remarkable document, written in a readable, entertaining style. It could easily form the basis for a study group which could be divided into smaller groups or "bands" to report on special projects.

One small group might search for an eighteenth-century map of Great Britain and place it side by side with a modern map to trace the travels of Charles while he was in the itinerancy. Particular note should be made of what portions of the country were neglected and what sections were saturated with Methodist societies and why. Did the Methodist message have an appeal only for certain classes, and if so, how does that relate to Methodism's task for today?

A second project might compare the contents of Charles Wesley's Journal with that of his brother with certain specific questions in mind. How did each of the brothers respond to the physical reactions caused at times by Methodist preaching? Read those sections of the Journals that deal with this subject and note the differences in the attitude of the brothers. Why do not these phenomena occur today? Has Methodism lost or gained by its more stable services? Were these eighteenth-century reactions the work of the Holy Spirit? Are we today in danger of becoming merely a useful ethical society with significant social principles

and aims rather than a Spirit-filled church proclaiming Jesus and the Kingdom of God? This was one of the great fears of John Wesley. He did not fear that Methodism would ever cease to exist, but he did fear that it might one day become a dead sect, having the form of religion without the power.

This could lead to a discussion on *What is holiness? What is Christian perfection?* Here a recent book by John R. Tyson entitled *Charles Wesley on Sanctification* . . . would be helpful, since it deals with the subject in relation to his hymns.

Other pastoral uses of Charles Wesley's works center in his letters and sermons. Both are difficult to secure. There are a significant number of letters at the end of the Jackson edition of Charles Wesley's Journal published in 1849. Then, in 1948, as I have already noted, Dr. Frank Baker issued a helpful paperback entitled *Charles Wesley as Revealed by His Letters*.<sup>20</sup> These are a judicious selection of the vast collection of Charles Wesley's letters now in the Frank Baker collection of The Divinity School Library of Duke University. Another source of his letters has also been provided by Dr. Baker who has included a number of them in the two volumes of John Wesley's letters so far published as part of the Wesley's Works project. As other volumes are published, more of Charles Wesley's letters will be included to give depth and meaning to his brother's correspondence. Any Methodist library will be able to supply Dr. Baker's work on the letters, and they are well worth reading.

In speaking of the letters Dr. Baker has said, "Here we cannot but agree with John Wesley's tribute, 'I am very sensible that writing letters is my brother's talent rather than mine.' . . . Whilst Charles Wesley can be just as concise as his brother, and even more aphoristic, his letters are usually more rounded off; there are more touches of humor and of tenderness, more passages of description and exhortation and more variety."<sup>21</sup>

Charles's humor is in his side remarks rather than in the telling of humorous stories. Of one preacher he wrote, "Alex Coats is come. He may have both sense and grace: but I wish he had a little more utterance."<sup>22</sup> When visiting Boston on his way home to England after his Georgia experience, Charles writes: "I am wearied with this hospitable people, they so vex me and tease me with their civilities. They do not suffer me to be alone. The clergy, who come from the country on a visit, drag me along with them . . . I am constrained to take a view of this New England, . . . I cannot help explaining, 'O happy country, [England] that cherishes neither *flies*, nor *crocodiles*, nor *informers*.'" In writing to his brother, after John had ordained men for America, his humor becomes sharply ironic. "What foul slanderers these [enthusiasts?] are! How have they for three score years said [John Wesley was?] . . . a Papist: and lo he turns out at last a Presbyterian!"<sup>23</sup>

<sup>20</sup>London: Epworth Press, 1948.

<sup>21</sup>Baker, 6.

<sup>22</sup>Baker, 88.

<sup>23</sup>Baker, 27 and 135.



In addition to his humorous asides, his letters contain a great deal of information concerning the Methodist movement itself and how it was directed by him and his brother. They touch on the theological controversies of the day and reveal his concern for the church, the Methodist movement, itself, and for souls, although hardly in that order. They also reveal his love for his wife, Sally, and his deep affection for the members of his family. One of the pastoral uses of Charles Wesley's works would be a study of his family life as seen in his letters, and especially his *Hymns for the Use of Families*. His family faced many of the problems that trouble families today, although they were free from some of the temptations that face today's youth, such as the use of drugs. On the other hand, they faced diseases that today are easily cured, and they faced numerous deaths within the family circle that must have been shattering. Through it all, Charles's tender love and concern kept together a family that eventually produced a series of musicians, beginning with Charles, Jr., and continuing through Samuel, his brother, and his brother's son, Samuel Sebastian, all of whom not only became noted musicians and organists but who are remembered with memorial plaques to this day in England.

But above all, any pastoral use of Charles Wesley's works should center in keeping alive our Methodist doctrines and traditions. Paul urged Timothy and Titus, in his pastoral letters, to care for the Christian communities which he placed in their charge by the worthy example of their own lives and also by timely exhortations and the teaching of the word so that those in their care might be made "perfect, furnished unto all good works" (2 Timothy 3:17). In like manner we are urged through the pastoral uses of Charles Wesley's works to uphold the standards of Methodist doctrine and history, to the end that The United Methodist Church may fulfill the important task to which God has called her in this critical hour of the world's history.

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