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The Christ-Mysticism of Charles Wesley

The Eucharist and the Heavenly Jerusalem

Francis Frost

The Methodist movement, which occupied the center of the stage in the religious history of the England of the eighteenth century, was one—albeit the most important, of a series of spiritual awakenings which, during the same period, revitalized Protestantism as a whole. In particular, besides Methodism, mention needs to be made of two other dynamic movements of renewal. On the other side of the Atlantic Ocean, there took place in New England, in the early part of the eighteenth century, a revival which, in large measure, owed its inspiration to the greatest theologian of New England, and possibly the greatest theologian of the history of North American Protestantism, namely Jonathan Edwards (1703–1758). In his *Thoughts on the Religious Revival in New England* (1746), he offered theological reflections on the happenings in New England, which were to have an impact on a much wider sphere of Protestant renewal. (*The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, 2 volumes; The Banner of Truth Trust, volume 1, 1984 reprint, pp. 365–430). Of the eighteenth-century movement for spiritual renewal, known as Pietism, the Lutheran branch was the most influential. It had its roots in the preceding century, in the pioneer work of Philipp Jacob Spener (1635–1703), but reached its culmination, a century later, in the spiritual theology and missionary activity of Nikolaus Ludwig von Zinzendorf (1700–1760). Zinzendorf welcomed the exiled Moravian Brethren to his vast estate in Saxony, where, under his leadership, they founded the brotherhoods, dedicated to unceasing worship of Jesus, the slain Lamb of God, and later to an extraordinary missionary outreach. These brothers were known as the Herrnhuter Brüder, the word *Herrnhut* referring to this unbroken vigil of praise and thanksgiving. As is well known, John Wesley visited Herrnhut after his Aldersgate conversion, whilst, prior to that, both he and his brother, Charles, had direct contact with Moravian missionaries, on their way to Georgia in 1735, and then again, both during their first missionary experience and afterwards.

The nub of these three strands of spiritual and theological reawakening: Lutheran Pietism in Germany; English-speaking revivalism spreading throughout the North American continent and involving all the Protestant denominations; the Methodist movement in England, was renewed and ardently faith-inspired attachment to the very Person of Jesus as Lord and Savior and prayerful intimacy with him, in the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, such intimacy with Jesus, in the Spirit, issuing in selfless love of neighbor. The intensity and authenticity of this spiritual renewal could not but produce an evangelical spirituality which was trans-confessional, that is, which was capable of transcending denominational differences and the divisions resulting from them. More than that, it brought about an

explicit awareness of the trans-confessional character of this evangelical spirituality. Those who were touched by it to the point of a gospel-inspired conversion of heart, were convinced that, whatever visible denominational differences might separate them from each other at the level of doctrinal formulation or institutional and ministerial structures, they were nevertheless one with each other in an authentic, because faith-inspired, invisible spiritual love of Jesus and mutual love in him. At the same time, what was never lost sight of was that the possibility of this spiritual oneness in Christian love is wholly dependent on the unspeakable mercy of God towards us, who are divided from each other by sin, as revealed in the mystery of our reconciliation in the crucified Jesus. In Zinzendorf, the insistence on intimacy with Jesus crucified and direct contact with his wounds reaches the intensity of that Christ-Mysticism to which St. Paul gives utterance when he writes to the Corinthians: “For I am determined not to know anything among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified” (1 Corinthians 2:2).

Although both the Wesley brothers were at one in adhering to the key of insights of trans-confessional evangelical spirituality, as they have just been briefly expounded, they came to a point in their own spiritual development, where they felt obliged to part company with Moravianism. Going beyond the positive aspects of Moravian evangelicalism, Zinzendorf sought to impose on his disciples a quietist understanding of the Christian life and of spiritual experience which John Wesley, in particular, knew to be incompatible with the data of Scripture, because it made no room for the exercise of freedom in collaboration with God’s grace and for spiritual progress in grace.

It was at the point at which this quietism led to a neglect of the New Testament ordinance of celebration of the Lord’s Supper, that John Wesley decided to make the final break. He withdrew his followers from the Fetter Lane Society of which Moravians were also members, thus defending the conviction, shared by Charles as well, that the ordinance of the Lord’s Supper is the principal means by which the Christian achieves that spiritual growth into the fullness of Christ which Moravian quietism belittles in the faith-relationship with Christ.

Such an understanding of the mystery of the Eucharist puts it in a unique relationship to that eschatological fulfillment of the here and now oneness of Christians, of whatever denomination, in the invisible love of Jesus in the Spirit, one which trans-confessional evangelicalism insists; in particular, the theological expositions of Jonathan Edwards.

This brings us to the purpose for which the Wesley brothers published in 1745, a veritable hymnological corpus of Eucharistic theology and spirituality entitled, *Hymns on the Lord’s Supper*. In his biography of Charles Wesley, Thomas Jackson reproduces *in extenso* the last hymn of the collection, No. 166. He sees in it an illustration of the purpose of the whole collection and his reason is this: This hymn, not only underlines forcibly the contrast between sacramental, graced intimacy with Jesus and the unveiled glory towards which it is moving, but also

deplores the infrequency of receiving communion to which Christians have become accustomed, precisely because, frequent communion as the mainstay of graced intimacy with Jesus, is the primary means of hastening the incoming of the heavenly Jerusalem at the end of time. Hence it is not surprising that 23 hymns, out of a total of 166, are devoted to the Eucharist and its relation to the incoming of the heavenly Jerusalem, under the title: "The Sacrament a Pledge of Heaven," the third section of the whole corpus. In this section, Charles Wesley is influenced in part by the fifth section of Brevint's treatise: "The Christian Sacrament and Sacrifice," entitled "Concerning the Sacrament, as it is a Pledge of Future Glory," but only in part, because, not only do some of the 23 hymns bear no connection in content to the content of the fifth section of Brevint's treatise, but, also, they all give expression to the unrepeatable spiritual creativity of Charles Wesley's poetic genius, in a harmonious interweaving of the various theological themes which relate the mystery of the Eucharistic celebration of Jesus crucified to the Jesus of the second coming at the end of time.

Of the collections of hymns published successively by the Wesley brothers, throughout the period when the Methodist movement was establishing its own particular theological and spiritual identity, the collection of *Hymns on the Lord's Supper* is thought by many to be the most outstanding expression of what Charles Wesley's poetic creativity was able to achieve, when put at the service of the contemplation and proclamation of Jesus crucified and of the infinite mercy of God towards sinners therein revealed, central to trans-confessional evangelical spirituality. His debt to the latter was indeed great. Yet, from a theological point of view, the outstanding quality of the collection can only be explained by a shift in emphasis which puts the mystery of the Eucharist at the center of Christian spiritual experience.

The exposition which follows, can only given an inkling, lift the veil so to speak, on a spiritual and poetic creativity which exploits this shift of emphasis to the full; all the more so, because it is limited almost exclusively, where the collection of *Hymns on the Lord's Supper* is concerned, to the third section: "The Sacrament a Pledge of Heaven."

Hence, what follows will deal successively with the following major themes, the first of which will be divided into two sub-themes:

- I. Charles Wesley's Debt to Trans-Confessional Evangelical Spirituality
- II. His Comparison of Moravian Quietism with Eucharistic Spiritual Experience
- III. Eucharistic Growth into the Fullness of Christ
- IV. The Eucharist as "Realized" Eschatology

In discussion of these themes, there will be no attempt at statistical analysis of the repeated occurrence of biblical word or image, but rather a highlighting of

those places where the poetic creativity of Charles Wesley, in the citation and interpretation of biblical words and images is particularly striking.

I. Charles Wesley's Debt to Trans-Confessional Evangelical Spirituality

1. The eschatological fulfillment of invisible oneness in love

In "Motives to a Compliance with what is Proposed in the Memorial," the title of the second part of *A Humble Attempt to Promote Explicit Agreement and Visible Union of God's People in Extraordinary Prayer*, which Jonathan Edwards published in 1748, he seeks to draw out the theological and spiritual implications of the Scottish *Concert of Prayer*, the first proposal to pray for Christian unity, and which was made to Protestant Christians of whatever denomination by Presbyterian ministers in Scotland. Although, in the course of his reflections, Edwards cites, along with other passages from Scripture, the key verses of chapter four of St. Paul's epistle to the Ephesians, concerning the unity of local churches as the visible unity, at least from a Catholic perspective, of one sacramental body, which is at one and the same time and irreversibly so, a mystery of love and an institution, he never develops this understanding of Christian unity. Rather does he see, as the visible counterpart to the invisible oneness of love, brought about by concertation in prayer for unity across the denominations, and autonomous national churches, civil society, albeit embodied in national entities which are also separate from each other. But if concertation in prayer for unity, insofar as it involves a certain institutional visibility in a coming together, if not in the same place—this stage had not yet been reached—at least, at the same time, implies the aspiration to a unity which is not only invisible as oneness in love, but also, to some degree at least is institutionally visible, how is such a unity to reach its plenitude? The answer of Edwards would seem to be the gathering of all the nations, of all that God has created, into oneness at the end of time. Such a concept of the implementation of the aspiration to Christian unity as being necessarily eschatological would seem to be implied right from the starting point of Edwards' reflections by the quotation of a text from Zechariah to serve as an introduction to the whole treatise: "Thus saith the Lord of hosts; It shall yet come to pass, that there shall come people and the inhabitants of many cities; and the inhabitants of one city shall go to another, saying, Let us go speedily to pray before the Lord, and to seek the Lord of hosts; I will go also. Yea, many people and strong nations shall come to seek the Lord of hosts in Jerusalem" (*Zech.* 8:20–22). This is the Jerusalem of an apocalyptic vision: there will be universal Church unity, in a reign of God over the nations to which autonomous, denominationally separated churches have been inseparably linked.

In his poem "Catholick Love," which was appended to a separate publication of John Wesley's sermon, "Catholick Spirit" (1755),* Charles expresses an understanding of invisible oneness in love, whatever the denominational, geo-

graphical, or cultural dispersion may be, similar to that of classical trans-confessional evangelicalism, when he writes in stanza 6:

For these, howe'er in Flesh disjoin'd,
Where'er dispersed o'er Earth abroad,
Unfeigned, unbounded Love I find,
And constant as the Life of God;
Fountain of Life, from thence it sprung,
As pure, as even, and as strong.

At the same time, in the following and last stanza, he shows that he sees the solution to the visible dispersion which accompanies earth-bound oneness in love, in the fulfillment of this love in the blessedness of heaven:

Join'd to the hidden Church unknown
In this sure Bond of Perfectness,
Obscurely safe, I dwell alone,
And glory in th'uniting Grace,
To me, to each Believer given,
To all thy Saints in Earth and Heaven.

On the other hand, the whole of this last stanza of "Catholic Love" reveals a notable difference between Edwards' understanding of the heavenly fulfillment of "here and now" oneness in invisible love and Charles Wesley's. Because for the latter, the Christian is able to aspire to the perfection of love in a conformity to Christ which affects the whole of life, whether such perfection is attained in the course of life on earth, or only at death, there is a here and now fellowship between the saints in heaven who possess this perfection and those progressing towards it on earth. In other words, although we still await the incoming of the heavenly Jerusalem as the gathering up of all creation into the oneness of the risen Jesus, a sharing in the essential constituent of that oneness: the perfection of love, is given to us now. In stanzas 2 and 3 of No. 96 of the *Hymns on the Lord's Supper*, the fourth of the hymns on the eschatological dimension of the Eucharist, Charles Wesley puts it this way.

The Church triumphant in thy Love,
Their mighty Joys we know,
They sing the Lamb in Hymns above,
And we in Hymns below.

Thee in thy glorious Realm they praise,
And bow before thy Throne,
We in the Kingdom of thy Grace,
The Kingdoms are but One.

2. *Christ-Mysticism*

As the culmination of the insistence of trans-confessional, evangelical spirituality on the centrality of the crucified Jesus to all authentic Christian spiritual experience, the spiritual theology of Zinzendorf can, without exaggeration, be termed a *Christ-Mysticism*. There are several aspects to the intensity with which he expounds the nature of spiritual intimacy with the crucified Jesus, and, in particular, with the nail prints in his hands and feet and with the hold in his pierced side.

In the first place, there must be a real *seeing* of the wounded Jesus. “If we, therefore, want to invite people to the marriage, if we want to describe the bridegroom, it must be said like this: ‘I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus, as he hung upon the cross,’ (1 Corinthians 2:2, altered), as he was wounded. I point you to his nail prints, to the side, to the hole which the spear pierced open in his side. Do not be unbelieving; let it be as present to you as if he had been crucified before your eyes, as if he stood there before your eyes and showed you his hands and his side” (*Londoner Reden*, lecture 3). To the objection implied in the words of St. John: “Blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed” (John 20:29), Zinzendorf replies, “. . . in reality and truth one has the creator of all things, the fatherly Power, the God of the entire world, standing in His (Jesus’s) suffering form, in His penitential form, in the form of one atoning for the whole human-race—this individual object stands before the vision of one’s heart, before the eyes of one’s spirit, before one’s inward man.” (*Londoner Reden*, lecture 7). In other words, the “seeing” is neither physical seeing, nor the face to face vision of heaven. Rather, it is a mystical seeing, an intuitive seeing, a seeing with the eyes of the heart because the heart is infused with loving faith.

What give dramatic quality, to all the hymns of Charles Wesley, which invite us to contemplate Christ’s crucified and bleeding from his wounds for our sakes, is the summoning up of all his poetic artistry to make this contemplation a real seeing. He literally placards the mystery of the crucifixion in front of us, to make us “look on him whom we have pierced” (John 19:37). To those who would remain indifferent, he says like St. Paul to the Galatians, “. . . who hath bewitched you, that ye should not obey the truth, before whose eyes Jesus Christ hath been evidently set forth, crucified among you” (Galatians 3:1).

Yet, he is deeply aware that such *seeing* is a mystical seeing in loving faith. Faith sees what yet is veiled from sight. Hymn No. 30 of *A Collection of Hymns for the Use of the People Called Methodists*, which is a classical example of how he understands the invitation which Jesus, the incarnate Lamb of God, addresses to sinners to discover his infinite mercies, opens with the words, “See, sinners, in the gospel-glass.” Because Wesley wants this first line of the hymn to supply its controlling insight, giving it is unity, he draws attention to the four words, “See,

sinner” and “gospel-glass” by the use of assonance: the two “s’s” and the two “g’s,” and also by the chiasmic arrangement of them. We must look into a mirror to see, whilst it is to sinners that the gospel is proclaimed. “See” by the irregularity of stress which the imperative form of the verb introduces: “S-e-e!” is highlighted in its own right. For, what are we to s-e-e with such insistence and urgency? The answer is “the gospel.” But the gospel, for Charles Wesley, is the very person of Jesus, and, therefore, the subject of the whole hymn, even as he is the subject of the majority of hymns of the entire hymnological corpus. But we are warned by the word “glass” with which “gospel” is coupled, that we can only dimly see the things of God: “. . . now we see through a glass, darkly, but then face to face” (1 Corinthians 13:12).

If the question is asked: “Why this painful contrast of veiled seeing with the face to face vision, the aspiration to which is the cause of the pain in the seeing of faith?” Wesley supplies an answer in another vivid contrast in juxtaposition, of the two states, in stanzas 2 and 3 of Hymn No. 101 of *Hymns on the Lord’s Supper*, the ninth in the series on the eschatological dimension of the Eucharist:

That heavenly Life in CHRIST conceal’d
 These earthen Vessels could not bear,
 The Part which now we find reveal’d
 No Tongue of Angels can declare.

The Light of Life Eternal darts
 Into our Souls a dazzling Ray,
 A Drop of Heav’n o’erflows our Hearts,
 And deluges the House of Clay.

In other words, in the Eucharistic encounter with Jesus through faith, something of the “heavenly life in CHRIST” really is given to us. But it is only a “dazzling Ray,” or a “Drop” of living water because “these earthen Vessels,” that is, ourselves, could not bear any more of the heavenly light and bliss. Yet, the measure in which this share in heavenly life is given, and its very possibility are a profound mystery even for the angels. “The Part which now we find reveal’d / No Tongue of Angels can declare.”

Indeed, as we shall see later on, the affirmation by Wesley of the central place in Christian experience of the encounter with Jesus in the Eucharist gives its full weight to the insistence of Zinzendorf on an exclusiveness and intimacy of contact with Jesus, which finds its clearest expression in the *spousal* language of the mystics. We must not only look at the wounds of Jesus we must enter into them, especially into the hole in his side. Therefore, Zinzendorf, using *spousal* language will say:

**Catholic Spirit. A Sermon on 2 Kings x.15.* By John Wesley (1755), 29–31. See Frank Baker, *Representative Verse of Charles Wesley* (London: Epworth Press, 1962), 203–204.

The bride and those invited have one object, one beauty, one virtuousness of the Bridegroom to admire. They admire that this man, the Son of God, the creator of the world, should have wanted to die on the cross for his poor human beings, that he obtained his bride with his blood, that he bought back his fallen bride, his fallen wife, his adulteress and on the cross saved this his property, his possession, his creature, as a spoil. This is also the impression which the bride hearts have, which the souls have who throughout their whole life know nothing and want to know nothing other than their Bridegroom. (*Londoner Reden*, lecture 3).

Echoing this idea of the bride as the Bridegroom's property and giving vivid expression to the mutual bodily indwelling of Bridegroom in bride and bride in Bridegroom, Wesley will say:

And will He not his Purchase take,
 Who died to make us all His own,
 One Spirit with Himself to make,
 Flesh of his flesh, Bone of his Bone?
 (*Hymns on the Lord's Supper*, No. 114, stz. 6)

II. His Comparison of Moravian Quietism with Eucharistic Spiritual Experience

Hymn No. 54 of the *Hymns on the Lord's Supper*, which figures in the second section of the collection: "As it [the Lord's Supper] is a Sign and a Means of Grace," was manifestly composed by Charles Wesley within the context of the young Methodist Movement's growing awareness of being in possession of a much richer understanding, both of Christian spiritual experience and of the Christian life as a whole, than Moravianism. Hence, the depth of theological and spiritual insight, to which Wesley reaches, by the putting of his deftness in the use of poetic figures of speech at the service of biblical truth, makes of the contents of this hymn a sufficient illustration of the difference between the role which communion at the Lord's Supper occupies in Moravianism, on the one hand, and in the biblical Arminianism of the Methodists, on the other. An analysis of how Wesley's poetic artistry reaches to this continued, in relation to the content of the hymns on the eschatological dimension of the Eucharist, in the section which follows.

Let us begin by reading the first stanza of Hymn No. 54.

Why did my dying LORD ordain
 This dear Memorial of his Love?
 Might we not all by Faith obtain,
 By Faith the Mountain-sin remove,
 Enjoy the Sence [*sic*] of Sins forgiven,
 And Holiness the Taste of Heaven.

How, then, does Charles Wesley in this stanza, put poetic figures at the service of biblical truth in a way which underlines the difference between the Moravian and the Methodist understanding of Christian spiritual experience? In the first couplet the repetition of the hard consonant "d" ("dying," "ordain," "dear") is alternated with the soft labial sound of "Lord" and "Love." Yes indeed, the command of Jesus to celebrate the Eucharist as a memorial of his dying love for us on the cross, involves a certain "hardness," by its being so categorical. But, Oh! What a mystery of love enactment of the sacramental Lord's Supper, is underlined by the enfolding of "LORD" in "dying" and "ordain" and the enfolding of "Memorial" in "dear" and "Love"; this enfolding being worded in such a way as to further enfold two of the words with the consonant "d" in the chiasmic positioning of the "dying LORD" on the one hand and the "Memorial of His Love," on the other. The ordinance or command really is nothing else but the necessary consequence of Jesus's total sacramental self-giving for our salvation.

Yet, Wesley's capacity for deep spiritual and emotional empathy with all that is genuine in evangelical spirituality, makes him, in the last couplet, give full weight to the Moravian concept of justifying faith, as stillness in total abandonment of self to God, leading to a psychologically felt communication by God, of holiness, to the soul in a single instant. The almost sensuous overtones of the "s's" in "Sence of Sins Forgiven," echoed in the double "s" of "Holiness" and the "s" of "Taste," give full weight to what is of authentic spiritual value in Moravian stillness. The pause which the reciter of the verse is bound to make, in the last line after "Holiness," underlines the "Taste of Heaven," making it a definition of what this stillness communicates to us: a foretaste of heavenly bliss.

Yet Wesley cannot but put a question to this understanding of justifying faith: "Might we not all by Faith obtain, / By Faith the Mountain-Sin Remove" refers ". . . for verily I say unto you, If you have faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye shall say unto this mountain, Remove hence to yonder place; and it shall remove" (Matthew 17:20)? Does the comparison between faith and a grain of mustard seed not imply a process of growth, of which Moravian stillness takes no account, but, without which, purification from our "Mountain-Sin" is utterly impossible? And, if so, does celebration of his Supper (Hymn No. 166 of the Eucharistic hymns shows that this was Wesley's understanding of how the early Christians fulfilled that command) not find its *raison d'être* in the need for such growth to be assisted by further gifts of God's grace? It is to the answers to these questions that we must now turn.

III. Eucharistic Growth into the Fullness of Christ

These questions require a full development of two points, raised earlier, in the section on Christ-Mysticism, concerning the way in which the spiritual insights of Charles Wesley bring to completion, so to speak, the Christ-Mysticism of Zinzendorf. In the first place, Wesley makes us understand, better than

Zinzendorf, the reason why the seeing of the crucified Jesus in loving faith, is, in our earth-bound spiritual experience, veiled in a darkness which puts it into vivid contrast with the stupendous illumination of seeing Jesus face to face in heaven. Yes, as we saw earlier, a “dazzling Ray” of eternal life is “darted” into our souls, although they inhabit a “House of Clay.” But, in the awaited fulfillment, “The Ray shall rise into a Sun, / The Drop shall swell into a Sea” (*Hymns on the Lord’s Supper*, No. 101, stanza 4). The reason, then, for such a contrast is the intrinsic link of the faith-seeing to a process of growth towards Christian perfection, which, alone, can prepare it for the eschatological fullness. Both Wesley brothers took very seriously the injunction of the epistle to the Hebrews: “Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord” (Hebrews 12:14). Secondly, Charles shows us that intimate union with Jesus, in communion at the sacramental memorial of his Supper, is the deepest experience of our earth-bound existence and, as such, is not only the surest guarantee of the fullness to come, but also the most efficacious means of growing towards it.

There is no better way of developing further these themes than illustrating them by direct quotation from the hymns on the eschatological dimension of the Eucharist, whilst taking account of a certain doctrinal dependence of Charles Wesley on Brevint’s treatise. But our starting point must be the subsequent verses of Hymn No. 54, the first stanza of which was analyzed in the preceding section.

Let us, then, read the second stanza of Hymn No. 54.

It seem’d to my Redeemer good
 That Faith should *here* his Coming wait,
 Should here receive Immortal Food,
 Grow up in Him divinely great,
 And filled with Holy Violence seize
 The Glorious Crown of Righteousness.

Having established, in the first couplet, that faith is not reducible to blissful stillness, because it includes an eschatological dimension: waiting for the second coming of our Redeemer who will fulfill the promises in which faith has believed, Wesley can move on to the need for Eucharistic food to grow towards the fullness. “Grow up in Him divinely great,” (line 4) is a quotation of Ephesians 4:15, “That we . . . may grow up into him in all things which is the head, even Christ.” Christ, the head, becomes “Him divinely great,” because Wesley is thinking of Titus 2:13, in which the Godhead of Jesus is explicitly affirmed: “Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Savior Jesus Christ.” Jesus, then, is to be identified with the God who is “eternal, immortal, invisible,” of 1 Timothy 1:17. That is why the Eucharist is described as “Immortal food,” the juxtaposition of a Latin word with an Anglo-Saxon one underlining the startling contrast between the humble food which is bread and the Eternal, Immortal, Invisible God. “Grow up” of the Authorized Version aptly

renders the sense of ἀξίωμεν: increase until maturity is reached. That is why Hymn No. 102 quotes not only Ephesians 4:15, “Up into our Head we grow” (stanza 2, line 6), but also, in lines 2 and 3 of stanza 3: “And to his Stature rise, / Rise unto a perfect man;” Ephesians 4:13: “Till we all come to the unity of the faith, and the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.” In the word “stature,” Wesley carefully reproduces what is the Authorized Version’s translation of the Greek word, ἡλικίας, meaning the prime of life. It is not, then, a question of simply progressing from youth to old age in the service of Christ, but of reproducing in our lives the very perfection of the manhood of Christ, as line 3 effectively states. The Eucharistic food enables us to regain the *imago dei* which Adam lost, and which is now to be likeness to Christ: “We his image shall regain” (stanza 3, line 1).

It is this regaining of the image which makes us progress from the darkness of faith-seeing to the beatific vision. In the words of 1 John 3:2, which Wesley quotes in several of his hymns seeing Jesus as he really is, is intrinsically linked to having become like him. In other words, in growing up into him who is “divinely great,” we grow up into the capacity to see him. That is why Hymn No. 93 sandwiching together Titus 2:13 and 1 Timothy 1:17, calls Jesus “the great Invisible” (stanza 1, line 7), the juxtaposition of a Latin and an Anglo-Saxon word, once again underlining the rich biblical content of both words:

We now are at His Table fed,
But wait to see our Heavenly King;
To see the great Invisible. (1:5–7)

The need for Eucharistic bread in order that this heavenly transformation might take place is all the more apparent, when our human weakness and powerlessness are taken into account. In stanza 2 of Hymn 102, line 6, quoted above: “Up into our Head we grow” is preceded by “In our weakest Nonage, here.” The word “Nonage,” which the *Oxford English Dictionary* defines as “the period of immaturity or youth,” would seem to be a compression into one word of Brevint’s statement: “We are now neither of age to enjoy our inheritance, nor able to bear the weight of eternal glory . . .” (Section V, paragraph 3). It is obviously meant by Wesley to be contrasted by the reader with “Image,” at the beginning of the next stanza, so that its meaning would be “non-Image,” the state we are in without the sacramental grace of baptism and Eucharist. Wesley faces us with the same perspective when at the beginning of Hymn No. 113, he writes “Give us, O Lord, the Children’s Bread.” This is clearly a reference to the rebuke addressed by Jesus to the Canaanite woman: “it is not meet to take the children’s bread and to cast it to the dogs” (Matthew 15:26). The “Children’s Bread” designates, in the first place, the privileges enjoyed by the people of the First Covenant, and especially the manna sent down by God from heaven. Wesley indicates this first, and an Old Testament state of understanding by the second line, “By Ministerial

Angels fed,” which is a reference to the role attributed by St. Paul to angels in the Old Testament dispensation in Galatians 3:19. But, at a second level of understanding this angelic bread is our Eucharistic Bread, come down from heaven in the very person of Jesus. Wesley tells us this in the third line in parentheses: “(The Angels of thy Church below).” These are the ministers of the Eucharist, so that this line could be a reference to the angels of the seven churches of the Book of Revelation, understood by some exegetes, at least, as the bishops of these churches. Yes indeed, our weakness is such that, like the Canaanite woman, we have to be for a privilege, to which, in principle, we have no right, but which nevertheless becomes our right through the pure goodness of God: “Nourish us with preserving Grace” (line 4), “preserving” including the idea of the prevenience of that “Grace.”

At the same time, progress towards perfection is inseparable from communion in love with those who are making the same spiritual journey. Wesley’s reference to the image of growth, in dependence on Ephesians 4, would suggest to a Catholic, given the ecclesiological perspective of that chapter, that communion in love with others is based on a reality of the ontologico-sacramental order and is, of the trans-confessional spirituality of Jonathan Edwards, Wesley does not seem to go beyond the invisible bond of communion brought about by Christian love. This for him is the meaning of Jesus’s prayer for unity after the Last Supper, and, in particular of the petition of Jesus for those who would become his disciples through the apostolic preaching, “that they may be perfect in one” (John 17:23).

A remarkably original hymn, No. 104, represents this petition made by Jesus on earth, as being continued by his unceasing intercession for us in heaven (Hebrews 7:25). To “Returning to his Father’s Throne, / Hear all the interceding Son,” of stanza 1, corresponds, in stanza 2: “I will that those Thou giv’st to me, / May all my heavenly Glory see, / But first be perfected in One.” The “holiness,” then, of which Hebrews says that it is required for “seeing the Lord” (see above for the reference) includes the perfection of this bonding in love with others.

It cannot be otherwise since the visible eschatological fulfillment of this invisible love is the heavenly marriage feast. Hence, Wesley devotes two of the hymns of the third section of *Hymns on the Lord’s Supper*, Nos. 105 and 106, to inviting us, in the language of the Book of Revelation, to contemplating this glorious perfecting of communion in love: “Lift up your Eyes of Faith and see / Saints and Angels join’d in One” (beginning of No. 105). On the other hand, the allusions to not making the mistake of the man who was admitted to the wedding-feast without a wedding garment (Matthew 22:11–12): “Admitted to the Heavenly Feast” (Hymn No. 93, stanza 2, line 4) or “Shall soon in all His Image drest,” sandwiched in between: “And perfect us in One,” and “Receive us to the Marriage-Feast” (Hymn No. 111, stanza 2, lines 5,4, and 6), is a further warning

of the absolute necessity to prepare for “seeing the Lord” by growth in the holiness of communion in love.

IV. The Eucharist as “Realized” Eschatology

In the section on *Christ-Mysticism*, we saw how the Christ-Mysticism of Charles Wesley, like that of Zinzendorf, culminates in an expression, in spousal language, of mystical intimacy with Jesus crucified. What, as was there suggested, is developed further by Wesley, is the crucial role of frequent communion at the celebration of the Lord’s Supper in that spousal relationship. It is because Eucharistic communion is of the sacramental order that its key role in bringing about mystical intimacy with Jesus fully justifies, for Wesley, the use of the language of conjugality belonging to the natural order, to describe what takes place between Jesus and the soul of the believer in this mystical relationship.

Hymn No. 114, already quoted, is a startlingly original illustration of what has just been stated. It is because the church originates physically from the body of Jesus, in the flow of blood and water from his open side on the cross, as Eve from out of the side of Adam, that, through the sacraments of baptism and the Eucharist, but above all through the Eucharist, to which baptism is a sacramental initiation (hence the mention of blood before water in John 19:34, which Wesley faithfully reproduces) she, the church, is constituted in a true bridal relationship to Jesus, and, in her turn, through the celebration of baptism and the Eucharist, with which her ministers are charged, is able to establish the individual believer in this spousal relationship.

2. He sleeps; and from his open’d Side
The mingled Blood and Water flow;
They both give Being to his Bride,
And wash his Church as white as Snow.
3. True Principles of Life divine,
Issues from these the Second Eve,
Mother of all the faithful Line,
Of all that by his Passion live.

With this context of the church as such, as the true bride of Christ, the sacramental intensity of the spousal relationship between Jesus and the individual believer, though not in isolation but in a communion of love with others, since Wesley uses, not the singular “me” but the plural “us,” is rendered in stanza 6, already quoted:

6. And will He not his Purchase take,
Who died to make us all His own,
One Spirit with Himself to make,
Flesh of his Flesh, Bone of his Bone?

The justification of the application of the language of natural conjugal intimacy, to the mystical intimacy with Jesus, brought about by the Eucharist, is in the subtle combination of Genesis 2:23: “And Adam said, ‘This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh,’” with 2 Corinthians 3:17, “Now the Lord is that Spirit: and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty.” The language of conjugal intimacy must be understood spiritually, because it is spiritually through the very Person of the Holy Spirit, that the risen Jesus is able to unite the Christian soul to himself, albeit in a bodily union, since the risen Jesus has a real body, more real, in its glorified state, than our earthly, mortal bodies. The Eucharist, precisely because in its application to us of the merits of Christ’s passion, also transcends the limits of our earthly condition, makes such a bodily union, with Jesus in the Spirit, a graced possibility.

Yet the final verse of Hymn No. 114 suggests that this unspeakable union with Jesus in his paschal mystery, whilst vouchsafed to our earthly existence, can only reach its fullness in its becoming a heavenly reality through the second coming of Jesus.

7. He will, our Hearts reply, He will;
 He hath ev’n here a Token given,
 And bids us meet Him on the Hill,
 And keep the Marriage-Feast in Heaven.

(“And bids us meet Him on the Hill” is a reference to Revelation 14:1.)

That, which C. H. Dodd called “realized eschatology,” is one of the central themes of the whole of section 3 of the *Hymns on the Lord’s Supper*, is suggested not only by its title, “The Sacrament as the Pledge of Heaven,” but also by its presence in the first hymn of the series, No. 93. By its moving to and fro between earth and heaven, between the Eucharist celebrated on earth, and the marriage feast in heaven, No. 93 sets up the framework, so to speak, of what is to come in the hymns that follow.

More particularly, the final stanza, number 4, could almost be titled: “realized eschatology,” because of its emphasis on the Eucharist as an anticipation of the heavenly marriage-feast. This is best seen if we take the final stanza in two stages: lines 1 to 6, and then 7 to 12. The first six lines read:

By Faith and Hope already there
 Ev’n now the Marriage-Feast we share,
 Ev’n now we by the Lamb are fed,
 Our Lord’s celestial Joy we prove,
 Led by the Spirit of his Love,
 To Springs of living Comfort led.

“Faith and Hope” are “already there,” because in the words of Hebrews: “faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen” (11:1). Because the Eucharist is “Ev’n now the Marriage-Feast” in which “we share,” in

which “we are fed by the Lamb” it enlivens the “substance” of faith, of which Hebrews speaks, in its relation to hope. We know that, in the experience of this Eucharistically nourished faith, we are in intimate contact with the “Joy” of our Savior’s heavenly state, because the Holy Spirit tells us so, by its witness of love in our hearts. In several of the hymns of the third section of the *Hymns on the Lord’s Supper*, in dependence in part on Brevint’s treatise, Wesley links, to the Eucharistic celebration, the gift of the Spirit as an *earnest* (the word the Authorized Version uses to translate the Greek ἀρραβών) of our future glory; the chief scriptural references being 2 Corinthians 1:22 (ἀρραβῶνα) and Ephesians 1:4:

O let us still the Earnest feel,
Th’ unutterable Peace,
This Loving Spirit be the Seal
Of our Eternal Bliss!
(Hymn 94, stanza 4)

Lines 7 to 12 of stanza 4 of Hymn No. 93 read:

Suffering and Curse and Death are o’re,
And Pain afflicts the Soul no more
While harbour’d in the Saviour’s Breast,
He quiets all our Plaints and Cries,
And wipes the Sorrow from our Eyes,
And lulls us in his Arms to rest!

Line 9, “While harbour’d in the Saviour’s Breast,” likens Holy Communion to the reclining of St. John on the breast of Jesus at the Last Supper. This leads to the conclusion that, even now, by the Eucharistic celebration, we are in a state of liberation from all suffering and pain, even from death, in other words, from all that the book of Revelation promises a liberation only at the end of time (Revelation 7:17, 21:4, 22:3). This is why Wesley deliberately enfoldes the “harbouring in the Saviour’s Breast” with the references to these promises: lines 7–8, “Suffering and Curse and Death are o’re, / And Pain afflicts the Soul no more,” and lines 10–11, “He quiets all our Plaints and Cries, / And wipes the Sorrow from our Eyes.” The “lulls us in his Arms to rest,” whilst being doubtless a reference to Revelation 14:13, “Yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labours; and their works do follow them,” harks back to the being “harbour’d in the Saviour’s Breast,” thus bringing to its conclusion the process of moving to and fro between the here and now celebration of the Eucharist and its fulfillment in the marriage feast of the heavenly Jerusalem.

Conclusion

Was Bernard Manning not right to maintain that there is a timelessness about the best, at least, of Charles Wesley’s hymns which puts them on an equal foot-

ing with the Latin hymns of the Middle Ages? Perhaps the most apt conclusion, therefore, to the above reflections on the Christ Mysticism and eschatology in the Eucharistic hymns of Charles Wesley, would be the last verse of the Latin hymn:

*Iesu, quem velatum nunc aspicio,
Oro fiat illud quod tam sitio:
Ut, te revelata cernens facie,
Visum sim beatus tuae gloriae. Amen.*