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The Lord of Life is Risen

Theological Reflections on *Hymns for our Lord's Resurrection* (1746)

John R. Tyson

This paper was presented in celebration and commemoration of the publication of a facsimile reprint of Charles Wesley's *Hymns for our Lord's Resurrection* (1746) by the Charles Wesley Society.¹ My approach in this inquiry into Charles Wesley's theology has been first, to survey the historical and theological milieu of this hymn book in order to provide an interpretive context; second, to pursue an overview of the contents of the hymnal to get a feel for the way these particular hymns function together as a theological corpus; and finally, to examine a few of the main theological themes throughout this collection. I have limited myself to three core themes: (1) Christology, (2) Atonement/Redemption, and (3) the locus of Christ's resurrection.

Introduction

Hymns for our Lord's Resurrection, published in 1746, appeared during one of the most productive periods of Charles Wesley's life and ministry. In this same decade he had already published two editions of *Hymns and Sacred Poems* (1740, 1742), as well as several other substantial volumes like *A Collection of Psalms and Hymns* (1741), *Hymns on God's Everlasting Love* (two editions), and *Moral and Sacred Poems* (1744)—all prior to 1746. In addition to these more extensive collections Charles produced a half-dozen occasional or thematic hymnals, such as *Hymns for the Nativity of our Lord* (1745), which was examined at the 1991 Annual Meeting of The Charles Wesley Society. In 1746 Charles (and his brother John) issued at least another eight of these smaller volumes of hymns.² The smaller collections, like *Hymns for the Public Thanksgiving-Day* and *Hymns for Times of Trouble* (2nd Series), contained a mere six hymns, while others like *Hymns of Thanksgiving for the Promise of the Father* (*Hymns for Whitsunday*) contained 32 hymns and over a thousand lines of text.³ The Wesleys published at least 6,890 lines of poetry in 1746, and they probably produced somewhat more than that amount.

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¹Charles Wesley, M.A., *Hymns for our Lord's Resurrection* (Madison, New Jersey: The Charles Wesley Society, 1992). A facsimile reprint edition with introduction and notes by Oliver A. Beckerlegge. The page numbers in this article correspond to the original pagination of the 1746 edition, found at the top of the pages of the reprint edition. In this paper, *Hymns for our Lord's Resurrection* are cited by hymn, stanza, and page number (e.g., III:7, p. 5).

²There is some uncertainty about the precise date of publication of several of the hymnals from this period.

³*Cf.* Appendix A for a delineation of the contents of eight Wesleyan hymnbooks from 1746.

Regrettably, we have no direct indication as to why the Wesleys produced and published the resurrection hymns; not even a passing reference has survived in the brothers' published works, nor have I found any such suggestion among their unpublished correspondence. The absence of any external reference to the composition of these hymns, as well as the lack of manuscript evidence that traces the task of composition or revision to either John or Charles, puts the inquirer in the throes of what Frank Baker has so aptly described as "the vexed problem of joint-authorship."⁴ A series of scholars have attempted to establish criteria of analysis, which by examining matters like word choice, rhyme, meter, and style, seek to ascertain the authorship of the Wesleyan hymns.⁵ Based on this kind of internal evidence, as well as the sort of annotations which Oliver Beckerlegge has found in later editions of the hymnbook,⁶ I think it can be safely assumed that Charles Wesley wrote the sixteen hymns in this slim collection; though I doubt that his authorship can be demonstrated with absolute certainty.

By 1740 the Wesleys were operating almost exclusively outside of the formal bounds of the traditional Anglican parochial system. They continued to understand themselves and the Methodists as loyal members of the Church of England, but their itinerant, open-air evangelism (in other pastors' parishes), and willingness to work through various religious societies, enabled them to fill in some of the gaps that had emerged in the Anglican parochial system and take their message to where the people were. This was a period of serious social dislocation, as people migrated from the southeast and south-midlands, north to jobs in the north-midlands and emerging industrial regions. Elie Halévy appropriately suggested that the early Methodist structures were particularly well suited to operate in the changing, "half-urban, half-rural" social context of England in the 1740s.⁷

⁴Frank Baker, ed., *Representative Verse of Charles Wesley* (London: Epworth Press, 1962), p. lviii.

⁵Henry Bett, *The Hymns of Methodism in Their Literary Relations* (London: Epworth Press, 1912), pp. 21–26; J. Ernest Rattenbury, *Evangelical Doctrines of Charles Wesley's Hymns* (London: Epworth Press, 1941), pp. 21–25; Newton Flew, *The Hymns of Charles Wesley: A Study of Their Structure* (London: Epworth Press, 1953), pp. 15–27; George Vallins, *The Wesleys and the English Language* (London: Epworth Press, 1954), pp. 68–69; and Frank Baker, *Representative Verse* (London: Epworth Press, 1962) pp. lviii–lix. I attempted to summarize, expand, and apply these "canons" of identification in my dissertation research, "Charles Wesley's Theology of the Cross: An Examination of the Theology and Method of Charles Wesley as Seen in His Doctrine of the Atonement," unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Drew University, 1983, pp. 83–131.

⁶Oliver A. Beckerlegge, "Introduction," *Hymns for our Lord's Resurrection*, p. iv, reports finding a 1754 edition of the hymn book with editorial annotations in John Wesley's hand. This would seem to support the hypothesis that Charles wrote and published these hymns, and that John subsequently made editorial improvements in them. It is also interesting to note, as Beckerlegge does, that Charles did not include John's emendations in his 1777 edition.

⁷Elie Halévy, *The Birth of Methodism in England* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971), p. 72. Alan Gilbert, *Religion and Society*, p. 72, stressed that "the ability to exploit early industrial social structures was one of the secrets of the Methodist success."

Hence, Methodism grew steadily in the emerging manufacturing centers and industrial regions.⁸

This population shift put significant strain upon the Anglican parochial system, which had its strength in the older population centers in the south and southeast. The Wesleys were particularly effective in those places where the Established Church was weak, and where they were able to consolidate religious societies that had already been raised up by the likes of George Whitefield, Benjamin Ingham, David Taylor, Howell Harris, John Nelson, and others.⁹ But working through the religious societies produced nearly as many difficulties as it did gains. By July 1740 the Wesleys were forced to break with the Moravians and their societies because the Moravians advocated a piety based in a spiritual "stillness" before God that did not embrace external helps or "the means of grace." This posture was so antithetical to the Wesleyan reverence for the Church of England, the means of grace, and an activist piety, that separation from the "still brethren" was inevitable. But separation was not achieved without numerous defections to the Moravian camp.¹⁰ This process of consolidation, separation, and self-definition gave the Wesleys both the opportunity and responsibility to create structures that were capable of sustaining the Methodist movement as *they* understood it.

Controversy swirled around the Methodist movement in the 1740s, and Wesleyan hymnbooks of the period bear the imprint of that turmoil. The two series of *Hymns on God's Everlasting Love* (the first 1741, the second 1741–42?), reverberate with echoes of the controversy with Calvinistic Methodists like George Whitefield, Lady Huntingdon, and John Cennick (Wesley's own master at the Kingswood School).¹¹

These disputes over the nature of grace, election, and predestination, were answered in hymnic salvos that championed the Wesleyan conception of "free

⁸Maldwyn Edwards, *John Wesley and the Eighteenth Century: A Study of His Social and Political Influence* (London: Epworth Press, 1933), pp. 141–142. Cf. Anthony Armstrong, *The Church of England, the Methodists, and Society, 1700–1850* (London: University of London Press, 1973), p. 68.

⁹Henry Rack, "Religious Societies and the Origins of Methodism," *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, Vol. 38, No. 4 (October 1967), pp. 582–587. Cf. Rack's expanded treatment in *Reasonable Enthusiast*, pp. 216–237.

¹⁰Cf. Thomas Jackson, ed., *The Journal of Charles Wesley, M.A.*, 2 Vol. (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, reprint, 1980), I, pp. 239–240. Charles's entry for June 11, 1740, "My brother proposed new-modelling the bands, and setting by themselves those few who were still for the ordinances. . . . We gathered up our wreck,—*raros nantes in gurgite vasto*: for nine out of ten are swallowed up in the dead sea of stillness. O, why was this not done six months ago? How fatal was our delay and false our moderation! . . . I tremble at the consequence. Will they submit themselves to every ordinance of man, who refuse subjection to the ordinances of God? I told them plainly I SHOULD CONTINUE WITH THEM SO LONG AS THEY CONTINUED IN THE CHURCH OF ENGLAND. My every word was grievous to them. I am a thorn in their sides, and they cannot bear me."

¹¹John R. Tyson, "God's Everlasting Love: Charles Wesley and the Predestination Controversy," *Evangelical Journal*, Vol. 3 (1985), pp. 47–62, and Horton Davies, "Charles Wesley and the Calvinist Tradition," in S T Kimbrough, Jr., ed., *Charles Wesley: Poet and Theologian* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1992), pp. 186–205.

grace” and the all-inclusive nature of God’s love. Charles’s gospel “all” resounds throughout the current collection; it is a recurring reminder that “Christ hath died and rose for all” (III:7, p. 5). In Wesleyan hymns Christ’s atonement is not limited; “all” may be restored by the “merits” of his passion (XIII:1, p. 17), and the scope of Christ’s dominion extends to “all mankind.”¹²

Items in *Hymns and Sacred Poems* (1740), like the hymns “The Means of Grace” and “The Love Feast,” showed the effects of the “stillness” controversy over the means of grace;¹³ so did the *Hymns on the Lord’s Supper* (1745), though less directly.¹⁴ In a similar fashion, “the Means Ordain’d by [Christ]/The great Unbloody Sacrifice” emerges somewhat unexpectedly in Hymn VI of this collection as the disciples of the Lord ponder where his nourishing presence is made known (VI:5, 6, pp. 9–10).

The Jacobite Rebellion of 1745, when the Stuarts—with French support—sought to regain the English throne, provided political turmoil as a portion of the context of this hymnal. The Rebellion found its reply in two volumes of *Hymns for Times of Trouble For the Year 1745*.¹⁵ The Wesleys’ *Hymns for the Public Thanksgiving-Day, October 9th, 1746*, celebrated the young Pretender’s bloody defeat at the battle of Culloden.¹⁶ But the *Hymns for our Lord’s Resurrection* seem to carry no direct reflections upon these events.

The Wesleys’ hymnals for the major Christian festivals evidence the connection between their hymnological productivity and the chaotic events of the 1740s. While they did not react, at least directly, to theological or political turmoil, *Hymns on the Nativity* (1745), *Hymns for our Lord’s Resurrection* (1746), *Hymns for Ascension-Day* (1746), and *Hymns of Petition and Thanksgiving for the Promise of the Father*, subtitled *Hymns for Whitsunday* (1746), established a sort of Methodist liturgical year and supplied the societies with catechetical and celebrative materials that corresponded to the main Christian festivals. These hymnals replicated the rhythm of the Anglican festive seasons for those accustomed to them, and instilled an awareness of the festivals in those who were not accustomed to them. In this way the occasional hymnals solidified Methodism’s connection to the Church of England, and yet popularized the great festivals in Methodist society rooms. I believe these hymns played a

¹²Cf. I:12, p. 2; II:7, p. 5; IV:1, 5, p. 6; VII:1, p. 10; XI:3, 4, p. 5; XIII:1, p. 17; XV:5, p. 19; XVI:1, p. 19, XVI:5, p. 20.

¹³George Osborn, ed., *The Poetical Works of John and Charles Wesley*, 13 vol. (London: Wesleyan-Methodist Conference, 1872), Vol. I, pp. 233–236, and 350–356 [hereafter cited as *Poetical Works*].

¹⁴*Poetical Works*, III, pp. 181–342 for a reprint of this hymnal. Eucharistic Hymn LXXXVI, depicting those who would urge the singer to “leave the channels of His grace” as the satanic tempter, punned the “still” brethren in Wesley’s sharp retort: “Get thee behind me, fiend,/On others try thy skill,/Here let thy hellish whispers end,/To thee I say, *Be still!*” Cf. *Ibid.*, pp. 276–77.

¹⁵*Hymns for Times of Trouble and Persecution* (London, 1744); *Hymns for Times of Trouble* (n.p., n.d.; 1745?). *Poetical Works*, IV, pp. 57–82, and pp. 83–90.

¹⁶*Poetical Works*, IV, pp. 93–104.

significant part in the process of consolidating the Methodist movement, providing it with a sense of identity and stability.

The practical context of these hymns has some bearing upon their theological acumen as well as their vitality. They wrapped classical Christian doctrines in poetical experiences so that they come forward with freshness and vitality.¹⁷ I would also be willing to suggest that locating these hymns within the context of the life of the Methodist Society explains, in part, why Wesley so willingly follows the pattern of those resurrection narratives which place women, like Mary Magdalene, in a primary role in receiving and communicating the gospel. Hymn III in this collection is particularly interesting in this regard, since it is based on the encounter and conversation Mary Magdalene had with the risen Lord (John 20:11–18). She is “highly favour’d,” not only because of the expanse of Divine Grace, but because in Jesus’s direction to her: “. . . go to my brethren, and say unto them, I ascend unto my Father and your Father . . .” (20:17), Mary has been chosen to be a teacher of the teachers of humankind:

Highly favour’d Soul! to Her
Farther still his Grace extends,
Raises the glad Messenger.
Sends her to his drooping Friends;
Tidings of their living LORD
First in Her Report they find:
She must spread the Gospel-Word,
Teach the Teachers of Mankind.
(III:3, p. 4)

John Wesley, in his *Explanatory Notes Upon the New Testament*, saw this commissioning of Mary as a witness to the “brethren” as a powerful—though unspoken—testimony of her forgiveness. He wrote: “Thus does [Jesus] indicate in the strongest manner the forgiveness of their fault, even without mentioning it. These exquisite touches,” John continues, “. . . show how perfectly Christ knew our frame.”¹⁸ Charles’s application of the passage embraced John’s reading of the biblical text and extended beyond it to offer a model and perhaps a mandate for the work of women as witnesses and teachers of the gospel—roles which women certainly held within the fellowship of the early Methodist bands, classes, and societies.

¹⁷Cf. S T Kimbrough, Jr., “Charles Wesley and Biblical Interpretation,” in *Poet and Theologian*, pp. 106–37, and John R. Tyson, “The Transfiguration of Scripture: Charles Wesley’s Poetical Hermeneutic,” *Asbury Seminary Journal*, vol. 47, No. 2 (Fall 1992), pp. 17–42, for examinations of the interconnection of biblical text, theological doctrine, and poetical vitality in Charles Wesley’s hymns.

¹⁸John Wesley, *Explanatory Notes Upon the New Testament* (Salem: Schmull Publishers, 1976 reprint), p. 270.

An Overview of the Contents of the Hymnal

It is safe to say, I think, that most of the sixteen pieces in *Hymns for our Lord's Resurrection* are relatively unknown. One of them, number VIII in this collection, "Rejoice, the Lord is King," is familiar to us;¹⁹ but it was originally written for and published in John Wesley's *Moral and Sacred Poems* (1744). It is not clear which of the Wesleyan hymnbooks popularized "Rejoice, the Lord is King," but it was soon to appear in almost every evangelical hymn book (including Calvinistic hymnals) published for over a century. Ironically, it was not included in the standard Methodist hymnbook of 1780 (though it did appear in Thomas Coke's American hymnbooks and John Wesley's *Pocket Hymn Book* of 1785)²⁰ and did not reappear in the Wesleyan hymnals until the revised edition of 1875.²¹ It was quite fortunate that Charles decided to reprint this popular hymn in *Hymns for our Lord's Resurrection*. Its inclusion may have preserved the hymn for modern Methodists, because through his hymnals of 1744 and 1746 it passed out of the Wesleys' storehouse and into the general currency of the evangelical revival. In this way the hymn was very popular almost in spite of John Wesley's subsequent exclusion of it from the 1780 hymnbook.

Each of the first six hymns in the present collection draws its setting and inspiration from a particular biblical passage. The first hymn urges "All ye that seek the Lord" to go to the tomb with Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome. In that setting the singer is drawn into the wonder of the open tomb and angelic visitation. We hear afresh the angel's annunciation:

Go tell the Followers of your Lord
 Their JESUS is to Life restor'd;
 He lives, that They his Life may find;
 He lives, to quicken all Mankind.
 (I:12, p. 2)

The readers or singers travel to the tomb in the person of Mary Magdalene; after observing the empty tomb and the tokens of the place where Jesus was laid, they share in the amazing encounter she has with the risen Lord:

¹⁹It is #715 in *The United Methodist Hymnal* (1989), #46 in *Hymns of Light and Life* which is used by the Wesleyan Church and the Free Methodist Church, #729 in the *British Wesley's Hymns and a New Supplement*, #243 in the *British Hymns and Psalms* (1983).

²⁰Cf. Beckerlegge, "Introduction," *Hymns for our Lord's Resurrection*, pp. iv-v.

²¹John Julian, ed., *A Dictionary of Hymnology* (London: John Murray, 1915), p. 955.

He comes His own to claim,
 He calls thee by thy Name:
 Drooping Soul, rejoice, rejoice,
 See Him there to Life restor'd!
Mary—know thy Saviour's Voice,
 Hear it, and reply *My LORD*.
 (II:6, pp. 3–4)

The third hymn of the collection returns to Mary's encounter with the risen Lord; we are "Happy *Magdalene*, to whom/Christ the Lord vouchsaf'd t'appear!" (v. 1). The hymn focuses our attention upon the events and words of that meeting as a means of emphasizing the reconciliation and union with Christ that comes to us through his death and resurrection. As v. 7 urges:

Hear, ye Brethren of the LORD,
 (Such He you vouchsafes to call)
 O believe the Gospel-Word,
 Christ hath died, and rose for all:
 Turn ye from your Sins to GOD,
 Haste to *Galilee*, and see
 Him, who bought *Thee* with his Blood,
 Him, who rose to live in *Thee*.
 (III:7, p. 5)

Hymns number IV and VI are based on Johannine texts, the former emphasizing Jesus' solidarity with the disciples prior to his ascension (John 20:17b). Wesley wrote: "Jesus, the Rising Lord of all,/His Love to Man commends,/Poor Worms He blushes not to call/His brethren and his Friends" (v. 1). The latter hymn (VI) merges language from Jesus' bestowal of the Holy Spirit upon his disciples (John 20:19–23), with the events of Luke 24:25–28, as the risen Christ met two disciples on the road to Emmaus: "And beginning at Moses and all the prophets, he expounded unto them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself" (v. 27). The hymn then turned to the passage describing Jesus's staying with those same two disciples (Luke 24:30–32) and making himself known to them in the breaking of bread, to show how Jesus continues to come to his disciples in the creatures of "Living Meat" and "Heavenly Bread," through Eucharistic encounters.

Hymns VII and VIII are an interruption in this progression through biblical texts that expound the Easter events. Number VII, "Jesu, shew us thy salvation," is an exposition of a portion of "The Litany or General Supplication" from *The Book of Common Prayer* which encompasses the entire Christ event from incarnation through ascension.²² Charles Wesley's methodology here was similar to

²²"By the Mystery of thy holy Incarnation; by thy holy Nativity and Circumcision; by thy Baptism, Fasting, and Temptation; *Good Lord, deliver us*. By thine Agony, and bloody Sweat; by thy Cross and Passion; by thy precious Death and Burial; by thy glorious Resurrection and Ascension; and by the Coming of the Holy Ghost, *Good Lord, deliver us*." *The Book of Common Prayer* (1945), p. 55. The portions in italics were not included in Wesley's version of the litany.

that of the preceding hymns, but the subject matter and span of treatment is much broader; this suggests that the hymn might be more suitably located at the beginning of the hymnal as an introduction or at the end of it as a sort of summary of the Christ event.

Hymn VIII, "Rejoice, the Lord is King," draws its key allusions from the Pauline theological corpus (1 Cor. 15 and Phil. 4:4), and while its contents are harmonious with the preceding hymns, it does not contribute significantly to the progression through the biblical texts about Easter. The next five hymns are mosaics of biblical phrases and allusions. They are structured more like "Rejoice, the Lord is King" than the six hymnological expositions that preceded it.

In Hymn XIV, "Ye Men of *Israel*, hear," Peter's post-resurrection sermon (Acts 2:22-36) provides the outline for an exposition of the saving life and death of Christ. The last hymn in the collection, XVI, "All Hail the True *Elijah*," continues the expository style by using the bodily ascension of Elijah (2 Kings 2:1-15) as the basis for a typological exposition of Jesus' ascension and its significance for those who believe:

By Faith we catch thy Mantle,
The Covering of thy Spirit
By Faith we wear,
And gladly share
Thine All-involving Merit.
We rest beneath thy Shadow,
Till by the Whirlwind driven,
From Earth we rise,
And mount the Skies,
And grasp our LORD in Heaven.
(XVI:5, p. 20)

This vacillation between textual and thematic approaches gives the hymnal the feel of a haphazard collection, despite the fact that a basic theological progression and fundamental unity is maintained through the salvation-history progression from Christ's resurrection to his ascension. The collection is vivified by Charles's willingness to turn biblical characters into channels of contemporary Christian experience. Like the biblical narrative, Wesley seemed particularly interested in the experiences which women like Mary the mother of James, and Salome, and especially Mary Magdalene, had with the risen Christ on the first Easter morn.²³ But Peter's denial²⁴ and his sermon from Acts 2:22-36, as well as Elijah's mysterious departure from earth, also become in Charles Wesley a poetical means to communicate and induce Christian faith and experience.

²³Hymns I, II, and III.

²⁴XI:2.

Theological Constants

Charles Wesley's hymns taught foundational Christian theology, in a memorable form; this, I think, was a significant part of their popularity in his own day, and their resiliency even in our day. By looking at the theological constants that emerge in this hymnal we glimpse something of the catechetical value of the book, as well as Wesley's creative way of crafting classical doctrines into fresh forms.

1. Christology

One of the constants of the Wesleyan hymnological corpus was a persistent emphasis upon a robust Christology. The Risen One was described as God's "Co-eternal Son" (XIV:1, p. 17). His deity was stressed through an identification such as "the Rising God" (III:6, p. 5). Many of the traditional christological titles are applied in these sixteen hymns, including "Prince of Peace" (IX:2, p. 13; XIV:2, p. 18), "Immanuel" (X:4, p. 15), "Saviour" (II:4, p. 3), "Master" (III:2, p. 4), and "Lord" (19 occasions).

An interesting and, I think, theologically significant tension emerges when one compares Wesley's frequent use of the name "Jesus" (24 instances) over against the mere nine applications of "Christ." Most of us, I suspect, are conditioned to think in terms of theological language that refers readily to the "earthly Jesus" and to the "risen Christ" or to "the Jesus of history" as well as to the "Christ of faith." But this is not how Charles Wesley's christological language functions. Instead, Wesley delights in associating the historical Jesus directly with the resurrection:

Go tell the Followers of your Lord
 Their JESUS is to Life restor'd;
 He lives, that They his Life may find;
 He lives, to quicken all Mankind.
 (I:12, p. 2)

So also the singer of these hymns goes with Mary to the tomb on Easter morn, and asks "Jesus, wilt Thou not appear?" (III:4, p. 4). By emphasizing the continuity between the historical Jesus and the resurrected One, Wesley stresses the awesome miracle of the event, as well as establishes a poetical-theological connection by stressing the resurrection of Jesus in his humanness (and as we shall see later) also in our humanness. On the other hand, Charles readily follows the phrasing of St. Paul, in affirming that "Christ hath died" (III:7, p. 5), which seems to emphasize the same contrast from the other side of the equation—the irony that the eternal God would die.

The convenient rhyme between "restor'd" and "Lord" appears on at least five occasions in this hymnal.²⁵ Perhaps the one most characteristic of Charles's Christology is this instance:

²⁵II, p. 4; V, p. 8; IX, p. 14, XIII, p. 17; and XIV, p. 18.

4. This JESUS is restor'd
 To Life by Power Divine;
 We all proclaim our Living LORD,
 And in his Praises join:

We are his Witnesses,
 He *is* gone up on high,
 Exalted to his Native Place,
 He lives no more to die.
 (XIV:4, p. 18)

Charles Wesley considered the resurrection of Jesus to be a demonstration of his deity, and, like the apostle Paul, Wesley preferred to say Jesus was raised according to the power of God (Rom. 6:4); both writers stress the resurrection as a demonstration of Jesus's Deity, and a vindication of the power of God.

Charles Wesley applied the classical titles of "Prophet, Priest, and King" to describe the interconnection of the person and work of Christ. But, predictably, each of these receives a bit of refurbishing at Wesley's hand. Jesus is found to be typified in the prophet Elijah in Hymn XVI, "For Ascension-Day":

1. ALL hail the True *Elijah*,
 The LORD our GOD* and Saviour!
 Who leaves behind,
 For all Mankind,
 The Token of his Favour.

 The never-dying Prophet,
 A while to Mortals given,
 This solemn Day
 Is rapt away
 By flaming Steeds to Heaven.
 (XVI:1, p. 19)

*Wesley's footnote: So *Elijah* signifies.

This is an interesting verse; Jesus is identified with Elijah because both figures were "never-dying Prophet[s]."

Charles described Jesus as "Our Captain and King" (XIII:2, p. 17), appellations which he typically associated with Christ's victorious power "O'er Sin, Earth, and Hell" (XIII:2, p. 17). As the "Mighty Conqueror" Jesus was both "King of Saints" and "Prince of Peace" (IX:2, p. 13).

2. *The Atonement/Redemption*

J. Ernest Rattenbury correctly noted there is a sense in which Charles Wesley, even in his *Hymns for our Lord's Resurrection*, was drawn more emphatically to Good Friday than to Easter. Perhaps Rattenbury overstated the matter a bit when

he wrote: "Good Friday, not Easter, was central in his [Charles Wesley's] thought."²⁶ But the present collection of hymns is replete with sacrificial imagery, as well as intercessory language and allusions. The whole of Jesus's life, from "the first blood-shedding" of his circumcision, to the "highest point of Passion, by [his] Sufferings on the Tree," could be viewed through Christ's high priestly role (cf. VII, pp. 10–12). There is some solid insight in Rattenbury's assessment of the dominance of the priestly element in Charles's thought, but he overstated the case when he argued that Wesley preferred the theology of Hebrews and the Apocalypse to that of the Pauline corpus.²⁷

These hymns evidence most of the elements of classical atonement language. Substitution is a persistent note throughout: Christ is said to die "in your stead," and "in our stead," and "for me."²⁸ The culpability for Christ's death is brought powerfully to the singer through Wesley's poetical reconstructions: "I have nail'd Him to the Tree" (III:5, p. 5). The term "merit" is twice used to describe the virtue or effects of Christ's death for us, and the intercession of Christ allows him to plead the "merit" of his death "for all mankind" before the throne of judgment.²⁹

More characteristic, however, was Wesley's attraction to images of "blood" and "blood-shedding" to express the saving significance of Christ's death.³⁰ Rattenbury was correct to point out that for modern readers the word "blood" probably "obscures what it symbolizes more than illuminates it."³¹ A portion of this chasm of understanding can be traced to Wesley's biblicism, and our own corresponding forgetfulness of those strands of biblical tradition which utilize sacrificial imagery to describe Christ's death.³²

In Wesley's hymns, as in St. Paul and the Epistle to the Hebrews, "blood" became a graphic, shorthand expression for "the death of Christ seen in its saving-significance."³³ Thus when Wesley has us sing, "We hop'd to feel thy Blood *applied*," he bids us to experience the saving effects of Christ's death (Hymn V:3, p. 7). The other element of his fascination for this sort of atonement language was its vivid poetical impact. With it he could paint a picture of the crucified Lord upon the canvas of our hearts, minds, and imaginations:

²⁶J. Ernest Rattenbury, *The Evangelical Doctrines of Charles Wesley's Hymns* (London: Epworth, 1941), p. 165.

²⁷Rattenbury, *Evangelical Doctrines*, pp. 167–68.

²⁸I:10, p. 2; XII:2, p. 16; V:2, p. 7.

²⁹IV:5, p. 6; and XIII:1, p. 17.

³⁰Charles Wesley's hymns use the term "blood" in a soteriological context more than 800 times, which was roughly twice the total number of occurrences the word had in the Authorized Version of the Bible which Wesley used.

³¹Rattenbury, *Evangelical Doctrines*, p. 202.

³²Cf. John R. Tyson, *Charles Wesley on Sanctification* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986), "An Interest in Jesus's Blood," pp. 115–157, for a survey of his use of "blood" language and imagery.

³³Johannes Behm, "Hima," in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, 10 Volumes (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1976), Vol. I, p. 174.

Hanging, bleeding, panting, dying,
 Gasping out thy latest Breath,
 By thy precious Death's Applying
 Save us from Eternal Death.
 (VII:5, p. 11)

Wesley's language about "blood" was easily wedded to classical images of purchase and manumission. Jesus "bought *Thee* with his Blood" (III:7, p. 5); or again, "His Blood, the Purchase-Price lay down, / Endure the Cross, and claim the Crown" (V:9, p. 8). In similar fashion, by his death Jesus "ransom'd our Race" (X:4, p. 15). Because of the sacrificial connotations of the biblical atonement images, Wesley occasionally connected them with cleansing metaphors: Jesus died and rose "To purge thy guilty Stain" (II:5, p. 3). Charles was characteristically interested in the freedom, or cleansing, from the effects of sin which come to the Christian through Christ's "blood" or death, and these themes connected Wesley's treatment of the atonement with sanctification and Christian perfection. Hymn III, for example, bids us to turn from our sins towards God: "Him, who bought *Thee* with his Blood, / Him, who rose to live in *Thee*" (III:7, p. 5); the singer of Hymn V (p. 7) yearns and thirsts after the formation of Christ within:

3. Why then, if Thou for me hast died,
 Dost Thou not yet Thyself impart?
 We hop'd to feel thy Blood *applied*,
 To find Thee risen in our Heart,
 Redeem'd from all Iniquity,
 Sav'd, to the utmost sav'd, thro' Thee.
4. Have we not then believ'd in vain,
 By Christ unsanctified, unfreed?
 In us He is not ris'n again,
 We *know* not but He still is dead,
 No Life, no Righteousness we have,
 Our Hopes seem buried in his Grave.
5. Ah! Lord, if Thou indeed art ours,
 If Thou for us hast burst the Tomb,
 Visit us with thy quickning Powers,
 Come to thy mournful Followers come,
 Thyself to thy weak Members join,
 And fill us with the Life Divine.
 (V, p. 7)

Christus Victor imagery played a prominent role in Charles Wesley's discourse about the saving death of Christ.³⁴ Once again, the language is vivid and

³⁴Gustaf Aulén, *Christus Victor: An Historical Study of the Three Main Types of the Idea of the Atonement* (New York: Macmillan, 1969), is the standard treatment of this approach.

picturesque: Jesus “for us” has “burst the Tomb” (V:5, p. 7). Or again, “The Bands of Death are torn away,/The yawning Tomb gives back its Prey” (I:6, p. 2). Like Martin Luther, Wesley saw in the atonement and resurrection a victory over the “tyrants” (Luther’s term), “O’er Sin, Earth, and Hell” (XIII:2, p. 17). For Wesley this conquest is not relegated to the historical past; rather, it impinges upon our present experience:

Thy Conquest we feel
O’er Death and o’er Hell,
Redeem’d from the Grave,
We are bold to proclaim Thee Almighty to save.
(X:1, p. 14)

3. *The Risen Christ*

If one were to inquire about the location of the risen Christ, the hymnal offers three replies. The hymnal’s most predictable response would be to indicate that the risen Christ has ascended into heaven. In Hymn I (I:9, p. 2), Wesley seems to pun the Imperial emblem, the “Roman Eagles”—who could not “chase” the risen Lord into the skies—over against the “eagles” of Isaiah (40:31), “. . . they that wait upon the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles.” Thus our author concludes:

10. The Lord of Life is ris’n indeed,
To Death deliver’d in your stead;
His Rise proclaims your Sins forgiven,
And shews the Living Way to Heaven.
(I:10, p. 2)

In several instances Jesus’ resurrection was presented as both an evidence of our forgiveness, and as a marker on the path which the faithful will also tread. In Hymn IV, for example, the risen Lord addresses humankind, through the person of Mary Magdalene:

6. Sinners, I rose again to shew
Your Sins are all forgiv’n,
And mount above the Skies, that you
May follow Me to Heav’n.
(IV:6, p. 6)

The road to heaven leads through the cross of Christ, but Christians also have their crosses to bear and Wesley does not hesitate to connect the way of suffering (*via dolorosa*) with the way to heaven; the “cross” must be endured before we can claim the “crown.” Stanza 10 of Hymn V seems to imply that Christians not only share in the sufferings of Christ, but may be called to emulate Christ’s sufferings:

9. Ought not our Lord the Death to die,
 And then the glorious Life to live?
 To stoop; and then go up on high?
 The Pain, and then the Joy receive?
 His Blood, the Purchase-Price lay down,
 Endure the Cross, and claim the Crown?
10. Ought not the Members all to pass
 The Way their Head had pass'd before?
 Thro' Sufferings perfected He was,
 The Garment dipt in Blood He wore,
 That we with Him might die, and rise
 And bear his Nature to the Skies!
 (V:9–10, p. 8)³⁵

Charles Wesley's theology of suffering was one of the distinctive elements of his thought, and it was an element which distinguished Charles's theology from that of his brother John.³⁶ Beginning with a few examples from the mid-1740s and becoming more emphatic in *Short Hymns on Select Passages of the Holy Scriptures* of 1762,³⁷ Charles gradually drew a line of connection between the suffering of the saints and the process of sanctification. A few of Charles's later hymns evidence John's displeasure with this viewpoint through notation which the elder Wesley made upon Charles's manuscripts.³⁸ There are also instances in which published hymns that used extravagant language about the purifying effects of human suffering, such as stanzas 5 and 6 in "Hosannah to Jesus On High" (first published in Charles's *Funeral Hymns* of 1746) were tactfully omitted from subsequent editions.³⁹

These kinds of instances provide some insight into John Wesley's editorial control (and occasional lack thereof) over contents of the Methodist hymnbooks. Hence, some of Charles's most poignant statements of his theology of suffering appear only in those hymnals which escaped brother John's editorial attention. The numerous examples of these kinds of hymns are found in Charles's *Hymns and Sacred Poems* (1749), a collection which John lamented having not seen

³⁵In a similar fashion, stanza 6 of Hymn VII includes the singers in Christ's crucifixion, that they might share in the victorious power of his resurrection. "From the World of Care release us,/By thy decent Burial save,/Crucified with Thee, O JESUS,/Hide us in thy quiet Grave:/By thy Power divinely glorious,/By thy Resurrection's Power/Raise us up, o'er Sin victorious,/Raise us up to fall no more." *Hymns for our Lord's Resurrection*, p. 11. Cf. Hymn X:4, p. 15.

³⁶Cf. *Charles Wesley on Sanctification*, pp. 261–268, for a discussion of this aspect of Charles's theology.

³⁷There are other MS Scripture hymns from the 1760s onward.

³⁸Cf. Osborn, *Poetical Works*, IX, p. 100, Hymn 319; XIII, pp. 129–130, #3275; and XIII, pp. 156–157, #3321, for examples of these kinds of emendations.

³⁹Osborn, *Poetical Works*, VI, p. 191.

prior to its publication.⁴⁰ *Hymns and Sacred Poems* (1749) carried an entire section of hymns entitled “The Trial of Faith,” and these were replete with examples of the emphasis we have been examining.⁴¹

Christ’s and the believer’s destiny in heaven were strongly sounded in number XVI of *Hymns for our Lord’s Resurrection*, which is entitled “For Ascension-Day.” In that instance Jesus was found to be typified in the “never-dying Prophet” Elijah. Like Elijah, the Lord “A while to Mortals given,/This solemn Day/Is rapt away/By flaming Steeds to Heaven” (XVI:1, p. 19). In this hymn, we (the singers) become the disciples witnessing the ascension of the Lord. We are urged “Come see the Rising Triumph,/And prostrate fall before Him” (XVI:2, p. 20). The awe-inspiring vision elucidates a shout of acclamation as the risen One mounts above the skies, and we long to “Pursue the LORD,/To Heaven restor’d,/The GOD of our Salvation” (XVI:2, p. 20). In the Lord’s departure the faithful receive “A double Power,/A larger Shower/Of his descending Spirit” (XVI:3, p. 20). Thus, “The Spirit of our Master/Shall rest on each Believer,/And surely we/Our Master see,/Who lives and reigns for ever” (XVI:3, p. 20). In a similar fashion, Wesley turns Elijah’s fallen mantel, which was taken up by his successor Elisha, into the saving effects of the cross which are taken up by the Christian: “By Faith we catch thy Mantle,/The Covering of thy Spirit/By Faith we wear,/And gladly share/Thine All-involving Merit” (XVI:5, p. 20). Living in the merits of Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit enables the singer to live in hope and anticipation “Till by the Whirlwind driven,/From Earth we rise,/And mount the Skies,/And grasp our LORD in Heaven” (XVI:5, p. 20).

Charles’s second “location” for the risen Christ is *within* the Christian. This development allowed Wesley to merge resurrection images with Pauline theological language about Christ being formed within the Christian; hence, one lives not in him/herself, but “in Christ.”⁴² Since as early as 1736, when Charles first preached his brother’s sermon “The One Thing Needful” while they were on their Georgia mission, Charles had tended to think of sanctification in terms of the restoration of the *Imago Dei* (the created Image of God) within every person, which occurred through the formation of the image or mind of Christ within the

⁴⁰John Wesley, *The Works of John Wesley*, 14 Vol. (London: The Wesleyan Conference, 1872—various reprints), XI, p. 391. In his “Plain Account of Christian Perfection” John wrote: “In the year 1749, my brother printed two volumes of ‘Hymns and Sacred Poems,’ there were some things in them which I did not approve of.”

⁴¹Cf. Osborn, *Poetical Works*, IV, p. 283 – V, p. 485 for the texts of “Hymns and Sacred Poems,” 1749 edition. Of particular interest are the eleven hymns entitled “For the Trial of Faith,” *Poetical Works*, V, pp. 141–156. Charles’s hymn entitled “Christ also suffered, leaving us an example,” from this same collection, can also be found in *Charles Wesley: A Reader* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), pp. 248–250.

⁴²This theme is emphasized throughout the Pauline corpus, but especially Romans 8, and Galatians 5. For a brief discussion of the pivotal role “in Christ” plays in Charles Wesley’s soteriology, cf. *Charles Wesley on Sanctification*, pp. 198–204.

Christian by the power of the Holy Spirit.⁴³ This development aligned Wesleyan theology with that of the early Eastern Church Fathers (Irenaeus *et al.*), and gave its approach to sanctification a predominantly Christocentric character. So it is not surprising to find Charles Wesley linking the resurrection of Christ rather directly with sanctification or Christian Perfection. In Hymn VII, for example, the risen Christ, “Glorious Head,” and “triumphant Saviour” “High enthron’d above all Height” intercedes for us in the “Father’s Sight,” to “Send us down the purchas’d Blessing, / Fulness of the Gospel-Grace” (VII:8, p. 12). The hymn concludes with the Christian’s plea for the coming of the Holy Spirit which will “save us” into Christ’s “sinless Mind”:

9. By the Coming of thy Spirit
 As a mighty rushing Wind,
 Save us into all thy Merit,
 Into all thy Sinless Mind;
 Let the perfect Gift be given,
 Let thy Will in us be seen,
 Done on Earth as ’tis in Heaven:
 LORD, thy Spirit cries Amen!
 (VII:9, p. 12)

The resurrection can be used metaphorically, as it was in Hymn X, to describe the birth of Christian faith within the human heart: “Thy Spirit attests / The Truth in our Breasts, / Thy Witness imparts / The First Resurrection of Faith to our Hearts” (X:2, p. 14). Much more often, however, justification and sanctification are merged in Wesley’s theology. Hence, we are urged “Turn ye from your Sins to GOD, / Haste to *Galilee*, and see / Him, who bought *Thee* with his Blood, / Him, who rose to live in *Thee*” (III:7, p. 5).⁴⁴ Making the same point with another characteristically Wesleyan phrase, Charles wrote: “JESUS, wilt Thou not appear, / Shew Thyself alive to me? / Yes, my GOD, I dare not doubt, / Thou shalt all my Sins remove; / Thou hast cast a Legion out, / Thou wilt perfect me in Love” (III:4, pp. 4–5).

Charles often blended the sanctifying power of Christ’s resurrection—a sort of realized eschatology—with the eschatological future when resurrected Christians join their Lord in Heaven. Hymn XV of the present collection drew these two aspects of Christian life together:

3. All thy Resurrection’s Power,
 All thy Love, From above,
 On thy Servants shower.
4. Perfect Love! we long t’ attain it,
 Following fast, If at last
 We, ev’n we may gain it.

⁴³Cf. *Charles Wesley on Sanctification*, pp. 47–67 and 181–227.

⁴⁴Cf. V:5, p. 7; and XIII:1, pp. 16–17, for other instances.

7. Children of the Resurrection,
Lead us on To the Crown
Of our Full Perfection.
8. There, where Thou art gone before us,
CHRIST, our Hope, Take us up,
To thy Heaven restore us.
(XV:3–4, 7–8, p. 19)

In another example, Hymn VII of this collection, the triumphant procession of Christ ascending into heaven allows the Christian to live a heavenly life “here,” “perfectly renew’d in Love.” Wesley wrote:

7. By the Pomp of Thine Ascending,
Live we here to Heaven restor’d,
Live in Pleasures never ending,
Share the Portion of our LORD:
Let us have our Conversation
With the Blessed Spirits above,
Sav’d with all thy great Salvation,
Perfectly renew’d in Love.
(VII:7, p. 11)

While in this verse the singer anticipates living “here to Heaven restor’d,” other instances reverse that order, seemingly implying that Charles expected “full Perfection” only upon entering heaven:

7. Children of the Resurrection,
Lead us on To the Crown
Of our Full Perfection.
8. There, where Thou art gone before us,
CHRIST, our Hope, Take us up,
To thy Heaven restore us.
(XVI:7–8, p. 19)

One of the ongoing dialogues between the Wesley brothers and among the early Methodists involved this very question: Could Christian Perfection be realized in this life, or was it received “in the article of death,” in the translation from this life to the life to come? The “Minutes of Conference” from the annual meeting of 1747 indicate that there were three points “allowed by our Brethren who differ with us on entire sanctification.” One of the questions that separated the Methodists at the 1747 Conference was, “Should we expect to be saved from all sin before the article of death?”⁴⁵ John Wesley’s reply to this question would be,

⁴⁵John Wesley, *Works*, XIII, p. 388.

and would remain, an unequivocal “yes.” But there is ample evidence to suggest that Charles’s more typical response ran in the opposite direction.⁴⁶

The third “location” for the risen Christ, as recorded in this collection, is in Christ’s eucharistic presence. Hymn VI (pp. 9–10) draws significantly upon images from the Lucan recounting of two disciples’ encounter with the risen Lord on the road to Emmaus (Luke 24:13–44). It turns the section of that narrative which recounts their table fellowship with the Lord into a metaphor for describing the fellowship which Christians have with the risen Christ through the means of his Supper.⁴⁷ In Charles’s poetical treatment of the biblical narrative we are the disciples of the Lord, once again requesting that he stay with us for a time, that Christ would once again make his life-giving power known to us through the breaking of bread:

5. Come in, with thy Disciples sit,
Nor suffer us to ask in vain,
Nourish us, LORD, with Living Meat,
Our Souls with Heavenly Bread sustain;
Break to us now the Mystic Bread,
And bid us on thy Body feed.
6. Honour the Means Ordain’d by Thee,
The great Unbloody Sacrifice,
The deep Tremendous Mystery;
Thyself in our inlighten’d Eyes
Now in the Broken Bread make known,
And shew us Thou art all our own.
(VI:5–6, pp. 9–10)

Conclusion

These sixteen hymns have served us well as an introduction to Wesleyan theology; one can readily imagine them playing a similar role in the Methodist society rooms of the 1740s. In this collection we meet Charles Wesley’s characteristic poetical styles, and his dramatic hermeneutical approach, which not only described but also induced Christian piety and experience. Charles’s biblical imagery and linguistic dexterity emerged in his use of characters and names from both testaments, notably the Hebrew Bible, to describe the resurrection of Jesus.

⁴⁶Telford, ed., *Letters of John Wesley*, V, p. 39. Cf. *Charles Wesley on Sanctification*, pp. 227–303, “A Brotherly Debate,” for a full account of the development of the Wesleys’ respective views on Christian Perfection; pp. 237–248 address the question of “The Article of Death.”

⁴⁷Luke 24:30–32, 35 “. . . so he went in to stay with them, he took the bread and blessed it and broke it, and gave it to them. And their eyes were opened and they recognized him; and he vanished out of their sight. They said to each other, ‘Did not our hearts burn within us while he opened to us the scriptures? . . . Then they told what had happened on the road, and how he was known to them in the breaking of the bread.’”

The christological span and center of his work was well attested throughout *Hymns for our Lord's Resurrection*, as was Charles's penchant for synthesizing classical theological themes into a variegated whole: the risen Christ is ascended on high, and yet is also incarnate in the faith-filled hearts of Christians, as well as in the eucharistic communion. Sanctification, or Christian Perfection as restoration of the image of God, through the work of the Holy Spirit who establishes Christ and Christ's love within the Christian, was another Charles Wesley theme that was well attested in this hymnbook. Many of his standard atonement metaphors are illustrated here, and if Charles's theology of suffering and blood-atonement imagery (however faithful to biblical language they may be) are difficult for modern ears, his willingness to focus so much of the action of this hymnal upon Mary Magdalene and the other women who were the risen Christ's first witnesses has a welcome and contemporary feel to it.

All in all, I am very pleased that The Charles Wesley Society has elected to reprint the *Hymns for our Lord's Resurrection*. In my view the collection has stood well the test of time, and offers the modern reader, singer, and congregation a celebrative and catechetical engagement of classical Easter themes, and in a form that epitomizes the Wesleyan tradition.