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The Missiology of Charles Wesley

An Introduction

Tore Meistad

The purpose of this presentation is to analyze Charles Wesley's contributions to the theology of missions.

My contribution to the study of Charles Wesley will be to offer an introduction to the missiological character of his theology, as it is revealed in his hymns. To some degree I am building upon previous research on Charles Wesley; however, my emphasis is on his missiology, which, as far as I know, has not been investigated in depth so far.

A few clarifications are required to begin with. In this article I distinguish between the *mission of God* and the *mission of the church*. To God's mission, which is one, is related the adjective *missional*. The mission of the church is multi-faceted and includes various forms of evangelization as well as educational, agricultural, health, peace, and social programs. Charles Wesley never developed a theology of missions (or missiology) in a systematic form; however, his mission ideas are implied in his hymns. My purpose is to bring these ideas together in a coherent shape.

First, I will review the historical use of Charles Wesley's hymns in the Methodist revival movement, as Charles and John Wesley directed this themselves. Second, it will be necessary to survey the contributions of the Wesleys to the modern missions movement. Third, I will turn to my primary concern of analyzing some of the missional motifs found in Charles Wesley's hymns.

The Use of Charles Wesley's Hymns in Early Methodism

The early Methodists were known as a singing people; "Methodism was born in song."¹ The singing of hymns gave the people of the revival an opportunity to understand the Methodist message, to be socialized to its new spirituality and express their spiritual experience and growth in God's grace.²

The late Tore Meistad was formerly Associate Professor of Religion, Finnmark State College of Higher Education, Alta, Norway. A first draft of this article was presented July 9, 1998, to the conference on "Wesleyan Hymnic Spirituality and Mission," Bristol, England.

¹The quotation is the introductory sentence of the 1933 British Methodist Hymnbook (Thomas A. Langford, "Charles Wesley as Theologian," in S T Kimbrough, Jr., ed., *Charles Wesley: Poet and Theologian* [Nashville, TN: Kingswood Books, 1992], 97–105; henceforth cited as Langford followed by page number). The Methodists in Cornwall were nicknamed "the canorum" after the Cornish word for "singer," *canor* (John Wesley, ed., *A Collection of Hymns for the Use of the People Called Methodists* [London: J. Paramore, 1780; Reprinted in "The Bicentennial Edition of the Works of John Wesley," vol. 7, Franz Hildebrandt, Oliver A. Beckerlegge, and James Dale, eds. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983; reprint, Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1989)], 62; henceforth cited as *WJW* followed by volume and page number).

²In contrast to the European continent, prior to the Methodist movement the congregational singing of hymns was not a common practice in England; Drury gives the credit to John Wesley for

Methodist gatherings began and ended with the singing of a hymn. While the worship liturgies in the Lutheran and Calvinist traditions were organized around the preaching of the gospel, it may be fair to say that those in the Wesleyan traditions were organized more around the *singing* of the gospel, however, without neglecting the preaching. This consistent use of hymn-singing demonstrates that the hymns were an important missionary tool of early Methodism.

The constant stream of new hymns and hymnals, written and published by Charles and John Wesley, in itself was a tremendous encouragement for increased hymn-singing.³ The production of Wesleyan hymns and hymnals was by no means accidental. It served intentional purposes for the promotion of the revival. Most of these hymns paraphrase the biblical accounts and contextualize them in the experience of the Methodist revival.⁴ For these reasons poor people, most of whom were illiterate as well, were given an opportunity to be acquainted with the scriptural basis of the way of salvation. At the same time they could recognize their own experience in light of the biblical structure for interpreting reality.⁵ Furthermore, the hymns clarified the Wesleyan theological emphases. On publishing his *Collection of Hymns for the use of the People Called Methodists* (1780),⁶ John declared, "This book is in effect a little body of experimental and practical divinity."⁷ The hymns therefore were valid expressions of the Methodist theology and ethos. Tyson concludes: "In these hymns we touch the foundation of the Wesleyan revival; they communicate the practical, experimental connections of basic Bible doctrines";⁸ and Mitchell supports his conclusion by calling the 1780 *Collection* "the true embodiment of the theology of the Methodist movement."⁹

having "started the eighteenth-century hymnodic revolution" (B. C. Drury, "John Wesley, Hymnologist," *Proceedings of the Wesley Historical Society* 32 [1959–60], 103). In church worship the congregations were used to listening to choral singing of the psalms of David. Isaac Watts (1674–1748) had introduced hymn-singing at the beginning of the 1700s, which would later be taken up by some Anglican religious societies and in Dissenter congregations. Both religious traditions heavily influenced the Wesleys, who promoted the singing of hymns as early as in the days of Oxford Methodism.

³W/W, 7:61.

⁴Research indicates that Charles Wesley worked quite seriously with the Scriptures (S T Kimbrough, Jr., "Charles Wesley and Biblical Interpretation," in *Charles Wesley: Poet and Theologian* [1992]). He always attempted to establish the proper text, for instance, by using various translations, his own included (Langford, 112).

⁵Assessing the educational significance of hymns during the 1700s, Langford (98) compares them with the stained glass windows in Medieval Europe.

⁶This collection is published as vol. 7 in *The Bicentennial Edition of the Works of John Wesley*. Unfortunately, the comments suggested are quite general, and they do not offer much help "in specifying Charles Wesley's role as a distinctive theologian" (Langford, 102).

⁷W/W, 7:74.

⁸John R. Tyson, *Charles Wesley: A Reader* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), 26; henceforth cited as Tyson 1989.

⁹T. Crichton Mitchell, *Charles Wesley: Man with the Dancing Heart* (Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill Press, 1994), 143. Langford claims that the sentence, "Methodism was born in song," is an appropriate introduction to Charles Wesley's theology no less than to his role in the Methodist move-

Most of Charles Wesley's hymns include implicit challenges for missions, as indicated in the hymn, "Come, ye that seek the Lord."¹⁰ Sources of the contents of this hymn are biblical accounts, classic Christian doctrinal traditions, the Methodist experience of salvation, and an implicit interpretation of this experience indicating a basic theology of discipleship which moves from sanctification to missions. From God's unmerited grace in Christ, which is the soteriological center of Charles Wesley's hymns, the challenges for personal growth and missionary responsibility are apparent.

The mission of the Methodist movement was "to reform the nation . . . [and] spread scriptural holiness over the land."¹¹ The hymns of Charles Wesley were one of the most significant tools to perform this mission.

The Wesley Brothers in the History of the Modern Mission Movement

It has been stated often that the Wesley brothers did not contribute much to the theology of missions. Apart from John's statement, "I look upon *all the world* as *my parish*,"¹² they never provided a theological basis for missions.

Contrary to this position, however, there are indications that "The influence of [John Wesley] on the modern missionary movement has been consistently underrated, probably on account of its indirect nature."¹³ Investigating the historical backgrounds of the Church of South India, Bengt Sundkler expresses a similar conclusion. His book, *Church of South India: The Movement Towards Union*, opens by stating, "The evangelistic missionary zeal of John Wesley and the hymns of Charles Wesley created a new spiritual climate in Britain . . . and this same Evangelical Revival also changed the climate and the conditions of church life in other parts of the world, as for instance in South India."¹⁴ In his presentation of the history of the modern missions movement the prominent missiologist,

ment. His hymns are theological texts in poetic form, "'a theology one can sing.' In this sense it is a theology with which one can praise; it is a theology with which one can pray, a theology with which one can teach; it is a theology which one can use to initiate, to guide, and to envision the final hope of Christian existence" (Langford, 97).

¹⁰Charles Wesley, *Hymns for Our Lord's Resurrection* (London: William Strahan, 1746), 17–18; henceforth cited as *HLR* followed by page number.

¹¹*Cf.* Wade Crawford Barclay, *To Reform the Nation*, vol. 2 in *Early American Methodism: 1769–1844* (New York: The Board of Missions and Church Extension of The Methodist Church, 1950), 1.

¹²Letter to John Clayton, March 28, 1739 (*WW*, 25:616). This statement actually does not refer to world missions but to the legal right John Wesley had as a fellow of Oxford University to preach in all the parishes of the Anglican church.

¹³Stephen Neill, Gerald H. Anderson, and John Goodwin, eds., *Concise Dictionary of the Christian World Mission* (London: United Society for Christian Literature, Lutterworth Press, 1971), 645; henceforth cited as *CDCWM* followed by page number.

¹⁴Bengt Sundkler, *Church of South India: The Movement Towards Union* (London: Lutterworth Press, 1965, revised edition; first published 1954), 19; henceforth cited as Sundkler followed by page number.

Herbert J. Kane, too, argues for a fresh assessment of the Wesleyan contribution to modern missions:

These revivals were . . . two phases of one event—a mighty outpouring of spiritual power, which eventually affected the whole of Christendom in the first decades of the eighteenth century. The leading figures in the Pietist movement were Spener, Francke, and Zinzendorf. The great preachers of the Evangelical Awakening were Wesley and Whitefield in England and Jonathan Edwards and Whitefield in America. The connecting link between the two phases was Wesley’s personal contact with Zinzendorf and the Moravians and Whitefield’s study of the works of Francke.¹⁵

Kane here suggests that John Wesley—and I will add Charles as well—together with George Whitefield played a key role in the development of modern missions by functioning as “the connecting link” between German Pietism and the great revivals in the Anglo-American world. This is a fair interpretation of the historical facts. But I would suggest that the Wesley brothers also developed a theology, which should be acknowledged as a significant contribution to modern missions.

The hymns of Charles Wesley clearly demonstrate that he offers a substantial theological contribution to the understanding of missions. In general he affirms the teachings of his brother John, but he also offers independent contributions. As documented by Sundkler,¹⁶ it is a historical fact that his hymns have been an inspiration to the missionary zeal and theological reflection of missions and ecumenicism even in the 1900s.

The Wesleys aimed at a revival of the original Christian church. Mission was considered to be the essence of the life of the original church and not one activity among others. This ecclesiology was basic to Methodist missiology as well.¹⁷

¹⁵Herbert J. Kane, *Concise History of Christian World Mission: A Panoramic View of Missions from Pentecost to the Present* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1981), 81.

¹⁶Sundkler, 187, 269, 302.

¹⁷In describing the original Christian church Charles Wesley is referring to how the first Christians spread the gospel by making their homes a “church”: “To Jesus they perform’d their vow, / A little church in every house” (Tyson 1989:185). For this reason they had no need of establishing either missionary societies or agencies of evangelization, because the movement itself was nothing less than a missionary organization. For instance, John Wesley’s ordination of Thomas Coke (1747–1814) in 1784 (against the will of brother Charles) for ministry in America should be understood in light of John Wesley’s zeal for missions (*CDCWM*, 646) and not, as it is often misinterpreted, as a political move. After 1784 the number of persons whom John Wesley ordained increased; they were all ordained for work in different parts of the world. Rollmann (“Early Methodism in Newfoundland” [1998]: <http://www.mun.ca/rels/meth/texts/origins>) makes the point that several Methodist lay preachers were ordained by the supposed Greek bishop Erasmus during John Wesley’s absence from London, 1764. However, with the exception of one preacher, all those ordained left the Wesleyan connection. Laurence Coughlan was later ordained by the bishop of London and traveled to Newfoundland in 1766, where he was appointed a missionary for the Society for the Proclamation of the Gospel.

Barclay (*Missionary Motivation and Expansion*, vol. 1 in *Early American Methodism* [1949], 104) gives Coke rather than John Wesley and Francis Asbury the credit for launching the foreign missions course of early American Methodism. Besides Coke’s work among the European Americans he

Missional Motifs in Charles Wesley's Hymns

Baker estimates the total number of Charles Wesley's hymns and poems at around 9,000.¹⁸ His poetry is so voluminous and covers such a range of themes that it is not possible in this presentation to cover all his production in order to make a comprehensive evaluation of his ideas. On the other hand, a few theological themes are recurrent in his hymns. In his *Journal* he declares, "The power and seal of God is never wanting while I declare the *two great truths* of the everlasting Gospel, universal redemption and Christian perfection."¹⁹ I will demonstrate that, according to him, these doctrines aim at a missionary outreach of the church.

The Creating, Atoning, Life-giving Triune God Incarnated

Charles Wesley has a Trinitarian image of God.²⁰ His hymns are crowded with references to all three persons in the godhead in a way that emphasizes the plurality rather than the unity in the persons of God. This indicates that he is deeply rooted in the Byzantine or Eastern Orthodox conceptions of God as a multi-

established Methodist Missions among Indians in Canada. He was instrumental in missions to the West Indies, Sierra Leone, Nova Scotia, and Gibraltar, and he also considered making a missionary journey to Africa (Barclay 1949:109). Five years earlier than the William Carey tract (1791), which according to many released the modern missionary movement, Coke published the first Methodist missionary tract, *An Address to the Pious and Benevolent proposing an Annual Subscription for the Support of Missionaries* (London, 1786). He organized work among 70,000 French prisoners of war that were kept captives in England during the Napoleonic Wars (1796–1815), and he also was one of the founders of the Methodist Missionary Society in 1813. His zeal for opening new areas for Christian missions led to his death in 1814 on a voyage to India while leading a group to initiate missions in Ceylon and India, a project which he himself financed by contributing £6,000 out of his own pocket (*CDCWM*, 117, 380). He contributed to the first Methodist missions to South Africa as well (Nolan B. Harmon, ed., *The Encyclopedia of World Methodism*, 2 vols. [Nashville, TN: The United Methodist Publishing House, 1974], 1:529).

The first Methodist missions abroad were initiated by Nathaniel Gilbert as early as 1760, who actually established the first Protestant missions among the black population in the West Indies (*CDCWM*, 646).

¹⁸Frank Baker, ed., *Representative Verse of Charles Wesley* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1962), xi.

¹⁹Thomas Jackson, ed., *The Journal of the Rev. Charles Wesley, M.A.*, 2 vols. (London: Wesleyan Methodist Book-Room, 1849), 1:286; henceforth cited as *CWJ* followed by volume and page number.

²⁰*Cf.* Wilma J. Quantrille, *The Triune God in the Hymns of Charles Wesley*, Ph.D. dissertation (Madison, NJ: Drew University, 1989), 15.

Quantrille (106–108, 131) observes that Charles Wesley is using metaphors of God emphasizing the Trinitarian plurality as well as the Trinitarian unity of God. The plurality model is expressed by "Elohim," "Eternal Persons Three," "Joint-Authors," "Holy Triad," "Triune God," and "Three-One." The unity model is expressed by "Jehovah," "Godhead," "Adoring One," "One Eternal Deity," "Unity Divine," "Lord," and "Very God." The fact that he maintains the distinction between unity and plurality in the Triune God indicates that the persons of God are unique at the same time that they are indwelling each other, thus allowing God to act according to various needs.

Since the 1960s, but particularly in the 1990s, Wesleyan scholars have increasingly focused on the influence that the Byzantine tradition had on the Wesleys (for example, Outler, Allchin, McCormick, Maddox). *Cf.* also John Meyerdorff, *Byzantine Theology: Historical Trends and Doctrinal Themes* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1974), 188–189.

faceted and interventionist God who unceasingly acts on behalf of the redemption of humanity.²¹ This is illuminated, for instance, in the collection *Hymns for the Nativity of Our Lord*.²² These hymns all deal with the Incarnation of Christ, or, “Th’incarnate Deity.”²³ Christ is God, the eternal source of divine life, as expressed in creation and salvation. As the Incarnation of God, Christ reveals not only the person of Christ but also the fullness of God.²⁴

Hymn No. IV describes the attributes of God as revealed through the Incarnation: “God on high . . . God comes down”;²⁵ “God, the invisible, appears, / God, the blest, the great I Am”; “Their Maker and their King”; “the eternal Son of God . . . Lord of earth and skies”; “The Prince of peace . . . Jesus is our brother now.”²⁶ The image of God implied is the creating and saving God who is ceaselessly active in assisting humankind in need. The reference to the God who called Moses—and who took the name “I am” (Ex. 3:14) at Sinai—is illuminating; God at this point is revealed as the Creator who cares, and who intervenes in human history to liberate persons and peoples.²⁷ The meaning of the Incarnation is that the invisible God has become “our brother.” The child Jesus, Mary’s child, is the eternal God: “Incarnate see / The Deity / The infinite Creator!”²⁸ “The Prince of peace” points back to the Hebrew prophecies of the Messianic age, in which creation, because of the fall, will be restored to its original state by the offering of this peace to everybody: “Apply to every Heart his Peace, / And bring his Kingdom in!”²⁹

Because Christ is the creator of the world, he also has the power to re-create humankind. This is actually the essential purpose for his Incarnation: “Save us Thou, our New-Creator.”³⁰ As often as Charles Wesley refers to the Spirit’s role

²¹Thy ceaseless, unexhausted love,
Unmerited and free,
Delights our evil to remove,
And help our misery.
(WJW 7:382)

See also George Osborn, ed., *The Poetical Works of John and Charles Wesley*, 13 vols. (London: Wesleyan-Methodist Conference Office, 1868–1872), 9:55; henceforth cited as *PW* followed by volume and page number.

²²Charles Wesley, *Hymns for the Nativity of Our Lord* (Bristol: Felix Farley, 1745); henceforth cited as *HNL* followed by page number.

²³*HNL*, 12.

²⁴“One undivided God we know, / And walk, and talk with God below” (*PW*, 7:292).

²⁵*HNL*, 8.

²⁶*HNL*, 10. In one of his eucharistic hymns he also calls Christ “our Elder Brother” (*HLS*, 113).

²⁷The same reference is used in Charles Wesley’s hymns for Ascension-Day, for instance, “The Lord of Hosts is He, / The Omnipresent I AM” (*Hymns for Ascension-Day*, 4; henceforth cited as *HAD* followed by page number). This idea is crucial to John Wesley as well (*cf.* *WJW*, 1:470, 580–581).

²⁸*HNL*, 16.

²⁹John and Charles Wesley, *Hymns for Whitsunday (Hymns of Petition and Thanksgiving for the Promise of the Father)*, coauthored with John Wesley (Bristol: Felix Farley, 1746. Facsimile reprint by The Charles Wesley Society, Madison, NJ, 1994), 27; with *Hymns for Ascension-Day*. Henceforth cited as *HW* followed by page number.

³⁰Charles Wesley, *Hymns for Our Lord’s Resurrection* (London: William Strahan, 1746), 12; henceforth cited as *HLR* followed by page number.

in the first creation, he also conceives salvation as a new creation. For instance, in his hymn for Whitsunday, No. XVII, "Eternal Paraclete, descend,"³¹ he describes the re-creating work of the Spirit in salvation by alluding to the first creation.

In the Easter hymn, "Jesus, shew us thy Salvation," the last stanza begins: "By the Coming of thy Spirit/As a mighty rushing Wind,/Save us into all thy Merit."³² Charles Wesley here implies that, from a soteriological point of view, Christ's atoning sacrifice was not completed until Pentecost. He clearly indicates that the forensic focus of Western theology is too limited to comprehend salvation in its fullness. Creation, atonement, and re-creation belong together. God's wrath and judgment are not emphasized but rather "God the giver" of new life, "Peace and love."³³ In the Wesleyan perspective salvation is conceived within the context of creation, and the perspective of creation is teleologically oriented.³⁴

One word, which is frequently used in the hymns quoted in this article, is "feel." It is important to understand that this has to do not so much with emotions as with experience.³⁵ This emphasis adds to the focus on the present realization of salvation as implied in the eschatology of the Wesleys.

Universal Redemption

God's grace is universal. Contrary to the Augustinian and Calvinist idea that God's initiative implies God's mysterious choice of which persons are saved and which are not,³⁶ the Wesleys argue for the position that the grace is free and open to every human person. Because human guilt is universal,³⁷ so is God's grace.

The concept of "universal redemption" means that God's grace is universal. Salvation, however, is not. A tension exists in the theology of the Wesleys between the universal call of the gospel and the redemption of a limited number of persons only.³⁸ Their insistence on a universal redemption does not imply a universalism indicating that all persons will be saved in the end, but rather that all persons without exception are atoned for by Christ's sacrifice and surrounded by God's prevenient grace.³⁹ God's grace is instantly poured out on humanity: "And Streams of Grace eternal roll/O're all the Earth below";⁴⁰ and: "And tak'st

³¹HW, 20.

³²HLR, 14.

³³HNL, 8.

³⁴Meyendorff 1974, 219.

³⁵H. A. Hodges and A. M. Allchin, *A Rapture of Praise* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1966), 16.

³⁶John Lawson, *The Wesley Hymns as a Guide to Scriptural Teaching* (Grand Rapids, MI: Francis Asbury Press, 1987), 93.

³⁷HNL, 3.

³⁸At least this was true from their high ideals of Christian discipleship: "The few that truly call Thee Lord,/And wait Thy sanctifying word" (WJW, 7:101).

³⁹Wesleyan universalism focuses on God's promise; however, it also presupposes the response to this grace by the believer: "Thy Promise made to All, and me,/Thy Followers who thy Steps pursue,/And dare believe that God is true" (HW, 9).

⁴⁰HW, 8.

of his Atoning Blood/To sprinkle all Mankind."⁴¹ This is a recurrent theme in the sermons of John Wesley as well as in the hymns of Charles Wesley.⁴² Its significance in the context of this presentation is that this is an important motif for missions. In the messianic age a fundamental change in the history of salvation has taken place. Now is the time for missions.⁴³

The expectation of Christ's immediate return gave the early church a sense of urgency, which characterized its missions. The same was true for the first Methodists: their messianic hope and experience of the fulfillment of its promises sent them out anew every day. Salvation was prepared for everyone; the table of the heavenly banquet was set.

The universality of grace is a characteristic of Wesleyan theology. Charles writes of an "all sufficient grace"⁴⁴ and "all atoning Lamb."⁴⁵ For this reason prevenient grace should not be restricted to a revivalist scheme of the sinner's awakening prior to conversion; rather it expresses the unlimited scope of God's salvation.

Barclay concludes his discussion of the Wesleyan heritage by stating, "The missionary character of the Methodist movement was a natural and almost inevitable outgrowth of its fundamental doctrine of universal redemption."⁴⁶ As indicated, this conclusion can be drawn on the basis of Charles Wesley's hymns as well as from John Wesley's sermons.

The Person in a Corporate Perspective

The goal of Christ's Incarnation is the restoration of all humankind. In the Christmas hymn, "Angels, speak, let Man give Ear" Charles Wesley establishes that Christ is "Born his Creatures to restore," and that the news of salvation is for "Every Tongue and Nation."⁴⁷ He is "An universal Saviour," "the Lord of all creation," and "The Joy of every nation."⁴⁸ It is evident that Christ's Incarnation, as well as his atonement has significance far beyond the individual and personal

⁴¹*HW*, 26. Another example is:

Do we not all from Thee receive
The dreadful power to seek, or leave?
The dreadful power through grace I use,
And chose of God, my God I choose.
(*PW*, 9:203)

⁴²The editors of the new edition (1983) of *A Collection of Hymns for the use of the People Called Methodists* (1780; *WJW*, vol. 7) have identified a great number of references to universal redemption (*WJW*, 7:847).

⁴³*HW*, 14.

⁴⁴*PW*, 5:12.

⁴⁵*PW*, 12:311.

⁴⁶Wade Crawford Barclay, *Missionary Motivation and Expansion*, vol. 1 in *Early American Methodism: 1769-1844* (New York: The Board of Missions and Church Extension of The Methodist Church, 1949), xli.

⁴⁷*HNL*, 6.

⁴⁸*HNL*, 14.

level. Because Christ is the Savior of nations and not only of persons, Wesleyan soteriology has a social dimension as well.⁴⁹

There is no contradiction in the Wesleyan soteriology between social and corporate perspectives on the one hand, and the focus on the person on the other: “The Promise to our Fallen Head/To every Child of *Adam* made,/Is now pour’d out on all Mankind.”⁵⁰ On the contrary, they are interwoven. Persons, society, and nature are included in salvation as the new creation. The focus on the conversion of the individual has therefore nothing to do with either individualism or subjectivism.⁵¹ As demonstrated in the following stanza, the personal emphasis in this soteriology is conceived within a corporate or actually universal context:

4. O might we Each receive the Grace
By Thee to call the Saviour *mine!*
Come, *Holy Ghost*, to all our Race,
Bring in the Righteousness Divine,
Inspire the Sense of Sins Forgiven,
And give our Earth a Taste of Heaven.⁵²

Inaugurated and Realized Eschatology: Salvation Conceived as the New Creation

The cause that makes everything new is the presence of God in the midst of human history.⁵³ The Incarnation of Christ means that “God comes down” to the earth as the great “Giver,” causing that “Peace and love/From above/Reign on earth forever.”⁵⁴ In the experience of the Wesleys and the early Methodists, this is not only something to hope for but also an actual experience; the heavenly happiness can be experienced here and now.⁵⁵ As “The Lord of all creation” and “The joy of every nation” Christ is “An universal Saviour,” whose goal it is to “make us all divine;/ And we the life of God shall know,/For God is manifest below.”⁵⁶

The expression “make us all divine” should not be understood as a deification; according to 2 Peter 1:4 they are not made gods but rather “partakers of the divine nature”;⁵⁷ “For we are made partakers of Christ.”⁵⁸ In a number of hymns

⁴⁹WJW, 7:81–82.

⁵⁰HW, 3.

⁵¹After years of service to the Wesleyan connection the Irish Methodist lay preacher, Laurence Coughlan, who actually brought Methodism to Newfoundland in 1766, was rejected by John Wesley because of excessive subjectivism (Rollmann 1998). After his successful revival in Newfoundland he was still rejected when he attempted to be readmitted to the Wesleyan Connexion (*The Letters of the Rev. John Wesley, A.M.*, ed. John Telford, Standard edition, 8 vols. [London: The Epworth Press, 1931], 5:101–103). This case is an indication that the Methodist rejection of enthusiasm and subjectivism limited the acceptance of persons with any kind of missionary zeal.

⁵²HW, 24.

⁵³HNL, 40.

⁵⁴HNL, 8.

⁵⁵John and Charles Wesley, *Hymns on the Lord’s Supper* (Bristol: Felix Farley, 1745), 83; henceforth cited as *HLS* followed by page number.

⁵⁶HLS, 14.

⁵⁷John Wesley, *Explanatory Notes Upon the New Testament* (Bristol: Pine, 1765), 890; henceforth cited as *Notes* followed by page number.

⁵⁸Heb. 3:14; *Notes*, 818.

Charles Wesley resembles the Byzantine Fathers' saying that "God became human that human might become divine";⁵⁹ he also affirms that this is a free gift to everybody who asks for it.⁶⁰

According to Wesleyan theology the divine nature is love. The concept of "Christian perfection" implies a perfection in love and not a perfection of human nature. The process of sanctification is the process of participating more and more in God's nature, which is love.⁶¹ Discussing the nature of God, as it is revealed in the incident when Jacob the patriarch wrestles with the Lord (*cf.* Gen. 32:24–32), Charles Wesley's main point is that God's nature is love.⁶² Charles Wesley is positive that "God and Love are One";⁶³ God is "pure, universal love."⁶⁴ The foundation of God's universal grace is God's universal love.

⁵⁹Allchin (1988:4, 27) demonstrates that Charles Wesley belongs to the significant tradition of Anglican divines who emphasize the co-inherence of human and divine; to him, the meaning of the Incarnation was humanity's participation in God. Vladimir Lossky, *In the Image and Likeness of God*, ed. by John H. Erickson and Thomas E. Bird with Introduction by John Meyendorff (New York: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1974), 103.

⁶⁰*HNL*, 22; *HW*, 12.

⁶¹*Cf.* Charles Wesley's hymn,

Love divine, all loves excelling
Joy of heaven, to earth come down;
Fix in us thy humble dwelling,
All thy faithful mercies crown.
(*WJW*, 7:545; *UMH*, 384)

God is conceived of as love as well as the ultimate source of love, filling human hearts and lives.

Another hymn uses the metaphor of God as the great potter (*cf.* Jer. 18:1–11), who molds the Christian according to the new divine nature which is given:

My Potter from above,
Clay in Thy hands I am,
Mould me into the form of love,
And stamp with Thy new name:
Thy name is holiness;
Now on this heart of mine
The mark indelible impress,
The purity Divine.

(*PW*, 9:461)

Another example is

3. Eager for thee I ask and pant,
So strong the principle divine
Carries me out with sweet constraint,
Till all my hallowed soul is thine;
Plunged in the Godhead's deepest sea,
And lost in thy immensity.

(*WJW*, 7:532)

⁶²*WJW*, 7:251; *cf.* *The United Methodist Hymnal* (1989), No. 386; henceforth cited as *UMH* followed by hymn number.

⁶³*HLS*, 23.

⁶⁴*WJW*, 7:251; *cf.* *UMH*, 386.

The Wesleyan concepts of holiness and sanctification clearly resemble the Byzantine concept of *theosis* (“participating in God’s nature”) rather than the Western tendency to understand sanctification as a perfect fulfillment of God’s will as prescribed in the law. In the Wesleyan understanding, God’s sanctifying grace works an actual transformation of the person through fresh, divine life. The metaphors of living by the power of Christ’s resurrection (Phil. 3:10), experiencing the restoration of heaven and earth, and the perfect renewal of love, all express the experience of this transformation because of God’s re-creation of the sinner. In the hymn, “Jesus, shew us Thy salvation,”⁶⁵ the focus is on the believer’s mystical experience of being in communion with God.⁶⁶

Precisely because Christians are partakers of the divine nature and not made gods, it is hardly possible to speak of a union with God but rather of a mysterious communion in which human and divine are united. This is particularly emphasized by Charles Wesley in his *Hymns on the Lord’s Supper*; for instance, “We here thy Nature shall retrieve, / And all thy heavenly Image bear.”⁶⁷

Charles Wesley firmly believes that from a personal perspective, salvation implies the restoration of God’s image in the human soul and a rehabilitation of the sinner, as he or she is infused or permeated with God’s love.⁶⁸ This is the beginning of the eschatological transformation of the entire creation. God’s love

⁶⁵*HLR*, 13.

⁶⁶Numerous examples could be cited, for example:

No condemnation now I dread;
 Jesus, and all in him, is mine;
 alive in him, my living Head;
 and clothed in righteousness divine,
 bold I approach th’eternal throne,
 and claim the crown, through Christ my own.
 (*UMH*, 363)

Meek, simple followers of the Lamb,
 They lived, and spake, and thought the same.
 Brake the commemorative bread,
 And drank the Spirit of their Head.
 (Tyson 1989:185)

Notice the significant editorial change of John Wesley’s 1780 version in the last two phrases: “They joyfully conspired to raise / Their ceaseless sacrifice of praise” (*WJW*, 7:99). Other examples are, Wesley, John and Charles, *HLS*, 11, 17, 25.

Examples which are taken from hymns quoted in this manuscript are: “He hath been seen, our Living Head” (*HLR*, 17); “In Christ your Head, you then shall know, / Shall feel your sins forgiven” (*WJW*, 7:80; *UMH*, 57); “Up into thee, our living Head, / let us in all things grow” (S T Kimbrough, Jr., ed., *Songs for the Poor: Hymns by Charles Wesley*. Singers’ ed. [New York: General Board of Global Ministries, The United Methodist Church, 1993], No. 2; henceforth cited as Kimbrough 1993, followed by hymn number). *HLR*, 12–14; *WJW*, 7:532.

⁶⁷*HLS*, 25, 27.

⁶⁸*HLS*, 27, 28, 30.

in Christ is “all-victorious.”⁶⁹ Tyson⁷⁰ observes that the hymns of Charles Wesley celebrate these transforming effects of love; for instance,

Love, that makes us creatures new,
Only love can keep us true,
Perfect love that casts out sin,
Perfect love is God within.⁷¹

It is demonstrated that in Charles Wesley’s theology, the theme of re-creation is basic to his conception of redemption; the Eastern Orthodox concept of “recapitulation” (*re-capitulation* = “new [another] head”) is alluded to as well as expressed. The Byzantine Fathers often interpreted salvation in light of St. Paul’s Adam–Christ discussion in Rom. 5:12–21 (*cf.* 1 Cor. 15:22–23). Christ is here interpreted typologically as a second or new Adam,⁷² who returns to humankind everything which was lost in the fall of the first Adam.⁷³ Conceived as restoration, salvation implies that Christ becomes “head,” not only of the person⁷⁴ and of the church (Eph. 1:21–22; 4:15; 5:23; Col. 1:18) but of the universal powers and authorities as well (Col. 2:10). The Creator has reclaimed creation; we are the Creator’s possessions as well as co-workers in the struggle against the evil powers of the world. From this perspective, mission is our response to God’s kingdom, which is universal in extent but not yet fulfilled. To be in mission is to participate in God’s restoration of cosmos. It implies, first, accepting God’s restoration of ourselves as persons, and second, doing whatever we possibly can in presenting God’s transforming love to other persons and societies, and thus assisting nature to recover from the human exploitation of it.

The emphasis on recapitulation is closely connected to the teleological orientation of the Wesleyan concept of Christian perfection. Based in the Greek *τέλειος* (= goal) rather than the Latin *perfectus*, perfection is goal-oriented and

⁶⁹*Hymns and Sacred Poems* (London: Strahan, 1740), 157.

⁷⁰John R. Tyson, *Charles Wesley on Sanctification: A Biographical and Theological Study* (Grand Rapids, MI: Francis Asbury Press, 1986), 162; henceforth cited as Tyson 1986 followed by page number.

⁷¹*PW*, 6:404; *cf.* 7:235, 236, 355; 10:114; 13:167.

⁷²In the following stanza Adam is referred to as the “fallen head” of the human race: “The Promise to our Fallen Head/ To every Child of *Adam* made,/ Is now pour’d out on all Mankind” (*HW*, 3).

⁷³Heavenly Adam [*WJW*, 7:552 renders “Father”], Life divine,
Change my nature into thine;
Move and spread throughout my soul,
Actuate and fill the whole;
Be it I no longer now
Living in the flesh, but thou.

(after Allchin 1988:33)

⁷⁴Similar to the Byzantine Fathers, Wesleyan soteriology was conceived of as healing. Based on the following stanza, Tyson affirms that “Charles Wesley knew no limit to love’s curative power” (Tyson 1986:304): “Nature’s impotent condition/Feels my paralytic soul/Finds in Christ a kind Physician;/By the word of faith made whole” (Tyson 1986:305).

not describing a final phase in spiritual development. The emphasis is on the wholeness of a person and points to the growth towards this wholeness, which is based in a perfect relation or communion with God; “holiness” is synonymous with “wholeness.”⁷⁵ Consequently, the goals of Wesleyan soteriology transcend the person and point to the salvation of all creation.

Because Wesleyan soteriology begins in the creation and ends in the new creation, the transformation of the person becomes a part of the transformation of the entire cosmos (*cf.* Col. 1:15–23; *cf.* Rom. 8:33–39). The theme of salvation conceived as a new creation is elaborated in the hymn, “Then the whole earth again shall rest,” which is written for the celebration of Pentecost. Although it is obvious that for Charles Wesley the justification of the sinner marks the initiation of the Christian life and the beginning of the lifelong way of salvation, both justification and sanctification of the believer are conceived to be one element in the restoration of the cosmos. They are eschatological events on the basis of Christ’s Incarnation at Christmas, his atoning death and resurrection at Easter, and the outpouring of the Spirit at Pentecost. The kingdom, which is actually present in the lives of believers, is a kingdom of love.

In his discussion of Charles Wesley’s theology of salvation, Tyson makes the point that his Pentecostal hymns do more than recount the story of Pentecost; they actually “re-create the event in the lives of contemporary Christians. The singers of these hymns pray for their own Pentecost.”⁷⁶ This observation is basic to the understanding of the dynamics of his hymns within the context of the Wesleyan revival. In it the way is extremely short from the initial experience of salvation to the active engagement in the mission of the movement. Its eschatology can never—no less than in Byzantine theology⁷⁷—be reduced to a separate chapter of Wesleyan theology; it rather qualifies the theology as a whole.

Love as a manifestation of God’s presence

To Charles Wesley, the true mark of Christianity is love. Consequently, this is a key concept in Wesleyan theology. No word is more characteristic of the Wesleys’ soteriology; they actually use it as an apt summation of the gospel. God is love. At the same time love is the power which binds God to the creation.⁷⁸ This love is a manifestation of the kingdom of God that implies two dimensions: first, the believer’s experience of transformation into God’s image (loving God with all one’s heart), and second, the ethical consequences (loving the neighbor).

⁷⁵Tyson 1986:193–194.

⁷⁶*HW*, 25.

⁷⁷Meyendorff 1974:219.

⁷⁸Steadfast let us cleave to thee;

Love the mystic union be;

Union to the world unknown!

Joined to God, in spirit one.

(*PW*, 1:356)

This has more to do with ethics than with emotions. In Charles Wesley's discussion of love in his hymn, "Come, thou holy God and true!"⁷⁹ he suggests that love is where God is, love is the evidence of God's presence. And this presence of God is brought to the widow, the orphan, the shelterless, and the poor, by persons who themselves are transformed by God's love. The outpouring of God's love makes the Christian invincible, and no problem is so big that it cannot be solved by the power of love: "So shall my pure obedience prove/All things are possible to love."⁸⁰

The goal of the Christian religion is to be filled with "the Life Divine,"⁸¹ which implies perfection in love.⁸² As Charles Wesley interprets salvation, the outpouring of this divine love in persons should lead to the renewal of God's righteousness⁸³ in the way this concept is interpreted by the Hebrew prophets, who envisage the restoration of God's will for nature and society as well as for persons. For this reason love is not conceived in emotional terms but as an experience of transformation to God's image. In this way perfection in love is supposed to direct the lives of Christians on this earth,⁸⁴ making them "Servants" who are first given "Pardon, Holiness, and Heaven"⁸⁵ for nothing, and who then are expected to practice the same in the world.⁸⁶ The life of restored persons is characterized by the fruits of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22–23) to be exercised on the global more than on the personal level. The double commandment of love (Mt. 22:37–39) is central to Wesleyan spirituality; however, although the second part of it is focused on personal recipients of Christian love, the concept of neighbor is extended to include all humankind rather than limited to individual persons. Charles Wesley prays, "I want the Spirit of power within . . . Of love to thee and all mankind."⁸⁷

Because of a necessary interconnection between faith and works, love toward one's neighbor by necessity comes out of the experience of God's love. Dealing with mutual assistance, this neighborly love is highly practical.⁸⁸ The dynamics of Wesleyan spirituality are focused on the reception of God's grace, the transformation of the person, and the transmitting of this grace to others. This is evident from the hymn, "Jesus, the gift divine I know."⁸⁹

⁷⁹Kimbrough 1993: No. 1.

⁸⁰S T Kimbrough, Jr., *Lost in Wonder* (Nashville: Upper Room Books, 1987), 137.

⁸¹*HLR*, 9.

⁸²*HLR*, 7.

⁸³*HAD*, 6.

⁸⁴*HW*, 5.

⁸⁵*HW*, 28.

⁸⁶In his Eucharistic hymn, "Author of Life Divine" (*HLS*, 30), Charles Wesley indicates that sanctification leads to discipleship.

⁸⁷*PW*, 1:307. The concepts "all Mankind" or just "Mankind" are among the favorite phrases of Charles Wesley (cf. *HLS*, 9, 10, 11, 13, 16, 20, 21, 25, 27, 33).

⁸⁸Kimbrough 1993: No. 2.

⁸⁹*WJW*, 7:521–522; Kimbrough 1993: No. 11.

In 1757 Charles Wesley wrote a poem in memory of the Methodist, Mrs. Mary Naylor. In this poem he described an ideal Methodist, a true imitator of Christ, whose character was formed by God's justice and love. The way the concept "justice" is used clearly resembles that of the Hebrew prophets, for example, Amos.⁹⁰ In the Wesleyan tradition, then, justice is conceived in the context of God's love.

The Messianic Kingdom and the Year of Jubilee

Charles Wesley's eschatology is dependent on the Hebrew prophecies of the Messianic kingdom breaking in with justice and peace.⁹¹ Besides the dependence on prophecies of the messianic age, for instance, Is. 61,⁹² his eschatology is also inspired by the Hebrew idea of the year of Jubilee, the year of restoration for nature and societies as well as persons.⁹³ In the sabbatical year (Lev. 25:1-7) the soil should be given opportunities for rest to regain its fertility. But in the year of Jubilee (Lev. 25:8-55) justice in the social order should be re-established. People who have lost their property because of debt are to return to their property, and slaves are to regain their freedom. This was the reason why the first Christians shared their economic resources, as well as distributed their surplus to the poor (Acts 2:45; 4:34-5:11). Consequently, the first Methodists, who intended to revive the life of the original Christian church, made a just distribution of economic, educational, and medical resources their top priority. This is evident in John Wesley's sermons as well as in Charles's hymns.

Over and over again the Wesleys are using Jesus' teaching of the judgment (Mt. 25:31-46) in the way they develop their understanding of how a genuine Christian life ought to look. This makes their concerns for the poor the center of their image of discipleship, as in the hymn, "Your duty let the apostle show."⁹⁴ The last stanza refers to the motif of the Christian as a steward of God's possessions, which is particularly typical of John's theology and ethics; "our" posses-

⁹⁰Kimbrough 1993: No. 12.

⁹¹Charles Wesley's hymn, "Our earth we now lament to see," was included in *A Collection of Hymns for the Use of the People Called Methodists* (WJW, 7:607). Originally its title was "Peace" (PW, 6:112-113).

⁹²Charles Wesley actually wrote a hymn on this scriptural passage:

The Spirit of the Lord our God
(Spirit of power, and health, and love)
The Father hath on Christ bestowed,
And sent him from his throne above;
Prophet, and Priest, and King of peace,
Anointed to declare his will,
To minister his pardoning grace,
And every sin-sick soul to heal.
(Stookey 1992:144)

⁹³I have earlier analyzed John Wesley's theology and the activities of the Methodist movement in light of the Jubilee (Meistad 1992).

⁹⁴Kimbrough 1993, No. 10.

sions are no more than loans from God and should be administered according to God's will and love.⁹⁵ This resonates with the Jubilee year sharing with the poor.

The popular hymn among Methodists, "O for a thousand tongues to sing"⁹⁶ was the first hymn in *A Collection of Hymns for the use of the People called Methodists* (1780). The date of its composition is significant, May 21, 1739, which is the first anniversary for Charles Wesley's experience of assurance of faith; it is also just six weeks after the revival had begun among the colliers in Bristol. Because this hymn is particularly representative in its expression of the basic theology as well as the program of the Methodist movement, it might be regarded as a part of the Wesleyan Methodist canon (if such a body of texts could be established). For this reason it is particularly significant to observe the direct admonishment for mission in the hymn.

8. My gracious Master, and my God,
Assist me to proclaim,
To spread through all the Earth abroad
The Honours of Thy Name.

These lines and those which follow express the experience of salvation as the Messiah breaks into one's life.

10. He breaks the Power of cancell'd Sin,
He sets the Prisoner free:
His Blood can make the Foulest clean;
His Blood avail'd for me.
11. He speaks; and listening to His Voice,
New Life the Dead receive,
The mournful, broken Hearts rejoice,
The humble Poor *believe*.
12. Hear Him, ye Deaf; His Praise, ye Dumb,
Your loosen'd Tongues employ;
Ye Blind, behold your Saviour come,
And leap, ye Lame, for joy.⁹⁷

The salvation that is experienced is elaborated in detail. The biblical framework consists of the Hebrew prophecies of liberation of the captives, to be expected in

⁹⁵This is indicated in a number of sermons by John Wesley:

1781: Sermon No. 87, "The Danger of Riches" (*WJW*, 3:227–246).

1786: Sermon No. 88, "On Dress" (*WJW*, 3:247–261).

1788: Sermon No. 108, "On Riches" (*WJW*, 3:518–528).

1789: Sermon No. 122, "Causes of the Inefficacy of Christianity" (*WJW*, 4:85–96).

1790: Sermon No. 131, "The Danger of Increasing Riches" (*WJW*, 4:177–186).

⁹⁶*WJW*, 7:79–81.

⁹⁷The hymn, which consisted originally of eighteen stanzas, was first published in *Hymns and Sacred Poems* (London: W. Strahan, 1740), 120–123. The stanza which begins "O for a Thousand Tongues to sing" is the original stanza 7. Stanzas 8, 10–12 are printed here, as in the original.

the Messianic age. Now the Messiah has come in Jesus Christ, and the dawn of his kingdom is experienced in the lives of the Methodists. The contents of this experience are (a) liberation from sin as well as from social evils (references to Is. 61:1; 1:18; Gal. 2:20); compared to the continental reformers, Charles Wesley's insistence that salvation removes the power of sin and not the guilt of sin only, is significant; (b) renewal by the experience of fresh, divine life (references to Jn. 11:24; 1 Jn. 3:14; Mt. 5:3-4); (c) healing as a part of God's re-creation of the world (references to Mt. 11:4-5; Mk. 7:37; Is. 35:5-6; Acts 3:8). An interpretation which is too spiritual, indicates that the spiritually dead and blind are referred to here, but this risks missing the significant message of restoration.

This hymn was longer than the 1780 version, which included only the following original stanzas: 7-10, 12-14, and 17. The outline of the hymn may be sketched in the following way:⁹⁸

A: First doxology

1. The hymn opens with a doxology to God, and the context is universally including heaven as well as earth. The experience of salvation as sanctification ("love"/"saints below") leads to a natural desire to glorify God. As a Messianic people the Methodists are a part of the church universal.

2-6: These stanzas portray the author's personal experience of salvation. They report Charles Wesley's decisive spiritual experience.

2: "This day" is referring to the day of Pentecost, May 21, 1738, when he for the first time experienced assurance of faith; he obviously is feeling a need to glorify God on this first anniversary. He likens his experience of assurance to being transferred from darkness to light.

3: Classical Reformation rhetoric ("legal strife") is alluded to as the basis of his experience, which is expressed as being transferred from death to life (references to Rom. 3:21; 1 Jn. 3:14). The emphasis is different, however, because it relates to the sudden and total transformation of the forgiven sinner.

4: This stanza defines the experience of May 21 as a deep personal experience of faith ("To call the Saviour mine") as well as an experience of empowerment by the Spirit (reference to Rom. 8:14-16).

5: Christ's atoning death was experienced as applied to him personally (references to Rom. 5:8, 18);⁹⁹ the concept of "feeling" relates to experience rather than emotion.

6: This stanza defines the experience of May 21 as an experience of assurance (references to Mt. 16:19; Rom. 8:16); the concept of "knowing" relates

⁹⁸Kimbrough (1996:17-27) suggests another outline: "Prologue" (1), "Conversion" (2-8), "Who is Jesus?" (9-11), "What is our response?" (12-18). The last section has the following subheadings: "Outreach to the Marginalized," "Universal Outreach to All," and "Outreach to Every Individual." Similar to my interpretation, he affirms Christian outreach to the world as a response to God's transforming grace.

⁹⁹This is a different perspective from that of Luther, for instance, who insists that the application of the atonement takes place at baptism.

to an intimate personal experience rather than to knowledge as a cognitive phenomenon.

B: *Second doxology*

7. God is praised, whose gracious salvation the Methodist people have experienced (references to Ps. 119:172; 145:1). The language (“a thousand tongues”) is universal as well as pneumatological (*cf.* Acts 2:3), indicating that God’s salvation is for the world and not for the Methodists alone, and that salvation, the Spirit, and missions, belong together.

8–9: These stanzas call the Methodists to mission.

As a natural response to their experience of salvation, the Methodist people are admonished to proclaim God’s grace around the world (references to Mt. 9:31; Ps. 66:2).

8: The mandate for missions is pronounced explicitly, however, as more of a promise of empowerment, for which the singer is praying.

9: The great Christological hymn of St. Paul (Phil. 2:5–12) is probably alluded to, indicating that the exalted God still is the humble servant, who cares for people. This allusion serves to strengthen the universal tone of the hymn.

C: 10–12: *Salvation is elaborated theologically.*

The salvation, which they have experienced, is elaborated in detail. The biblical framework consists of the Hebrew prophecies of liberation of the captives, to be expected in the Messianic age. Now the Messiah has come in Jesus Christ, and the dawn of his kingdom is experienced in the lives of the Methodists. The contents of this experience are:

10: Liberation from sin as well as from social evils (references to Is. 61:1; 1:18; Gal. 2:20); compared to the continental reformers, Charles Wesley’s insistence that salvation removes the power of sin and not the guilt of sin only, is significant.

11: Renewal by the experience of fresh, divine life (references to Jn. 11:24; 1 Jn. 3:14; Mt. 5:3–4).

12: Healing as a part of God’s re-creation of the world (references to Mt. 11:4–5; Mk. 7:37; Is. 35:5–6; Acts 3:8). One should not so spiritualize the interpretation of deaf and blind that one misses the significant message of restoration.

D: 13–16: *The Methodist message for mission is elaborated.*

The remaining selected stanzas of the hymn included in the 1780 edition are a summary of the Wesleyan message in poetic form. They essentially stress that God’s salvation is for everyone; nobody is excluded from God’s grace.

13: Universal emphasis: All nations are offered salvation, which is free for everyone on the basis of God’s grace and the sinner’s faith (references to Is. 45:22; Eph. 2:8).

14: Personal emphasis: Christ’s atoning death is for every person on earth (references to Is. 53:6; Jn. 1:29; Rev. 5:6; Is. 53:10).

15: All the outcasts of this world are included in the offer of God’s salvation. In affirming that he himself is no better than “harlots and publicans,”

Charles Wesley establishes that a basic solidarity in sin exists among all humankind. The solidarity in light of God's grace is equally important (reference to Mt. 21:31).

16: Not even murderers and people condemned to hell are excluded from Christ's offer of salvation; he died for every single person.

E: 17–18: *Conclusion*

18. All who experience forgiveness and justification, which is described as "heaven below," should also expect the door to be opened for the experience of love as they are moving towards sanctification (reference to 1 Tim. 1:15).

The Poor: "Jesus' Bosom Friends"

With the heavy emphasis on the restoration of justice, peace, and love in the soteriology of Charles Wesley, his focus is on the poor.¹⁰⁰ He honors them, calls them "Jesus' bosom-friends,"¹⁰¹ and obviously approves his brother John's statement, "I love the poor."¹⁰²

John and Charles Wesley struggle to reach an understanding of poverty based on social and economic causes; poverty was, as indicated in this hymn, a matter of "unrighteousness." They therefore threw themselves into a lifelong struggle against poverty. Contrary to the upper classes, which did not actually mingle with the poor, they wanted "to make the poor our friends."¹⁰³

To the Wesleys, therefore, charity is far more than the Christian expression of kindness and philanthropy; it results from and is directed by the transformation of persons in God's kingdom.¹⁰⁴ Furthermore, their charity has a global perspective, whose ultimate goal is the removal of the causes of poverty.¹⁰⁵

The Wesleyan attitudes to the poor were a matter of total identification and giving themselves up for them. They applied Christ's word on radical discipleship (Mk. 8:34–38) to their relations with the poor, and they made the poor their special responsibility.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁰This is well documented in the publication edited by S T Kimbrough (1993), *Songs for the Poor: Hymns by Charles Wesley*.

¹⁰¹Kimbrough 1993, No. 3.

¹⁰²John Telford, ed. *The Letters of John Wesley, A.M.* Standard edition, 8 vols. (London: Epworth Press, 1931), 3:229.

¹⁰³John Wesley's rules for the stewards of the Methodist societies are illuminating to the Wesleyan attitudes to the poor: "(11) If you cannot relieve, do not grieve, the poor. Give them soft words, if nothing else. Abstain from either sour looks or harsh words. Let them be glad to come, even though they should go empty away. Put yourself in the place of every poor man and deal with *him* as you would God should deal with *you*" (*WJW*, 20:176–177; June 4, 1747).

¹⁰⁴John Wesley's rules for the stewards of the Methodist societies include, "(9) You are continually to pray and endeavour that a holy harmony of soul may in all things subsist among you; that in every step you may keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" (*WJW*, 20:176; June 4, 1747).

¹⁰⁵Tore Meistad, "John Wesley's Theology of Salvation as a Model for Social Change," *ALH-forskning* (Research series, Alta College of Education), 2(1992).

¹⁰⁶*Cf.* Theodore W. Jennings, *Good News to the Poor: John Wesley's Evangelical Economics* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1990).

The Experience of Salvation Leads Naturally to Mission in One's Own Context

Charles Wesley's idea of the growth of the Christian in discipleship is developed in numerous hymns¹⁰⁷ that demonstrate how the Wesleyan theology of redemption is structured in three parts.¹⁰⁸ First, reconciliation in Christ is due to the victory of God's love over sin and death (received in justification). Second, the believer is re-created as God's grace is imparted, or, the Spirit dwells within (received in sanctification). Third, the renewal of the Christian is actualized through discipleship, which is a life in love and in the imitation of Christ; this is worked out through the diaconal and missionary outreach of the church.

The covenant with God gave the Hebrew people responsibilities more than privileges. In the same way the goal of the Christian's experience of redemption is to spread the gospel to "the present age," as expressed by Charles Wesley's hymn, "A charge to keep I have."¹⁰⁹ In it he clarifies that his charge is to glorify God. And he glorifies God by being a servant to his contemporaries. He is not empowered by God for his own sake, but to engage them in doing the will of his Master. *Everyone* has received "a charge" from God to be a steward, and this charge is always "contemporary and holistic."¹¹⁰ The genuine Christian is the one who imitates Christ's humility and servanthood.¹¹¹

The ultimate goal of Wesleyan soteriology is the redemption of the Christian's neighbor and not merely the redemption of the Christian's own soul. For this reason, this soteriology as a whole is an implicit theology of missions. That this is a distinctive Wesleyan perspective is evident from a comparison with Pelagian soteriology:

Soteriology	Pelagian	Wesleyan
Goal of MY redemption	MY redemption	YOUR redemption
Instrument for redemption	Merits earned by good works to YOU as my neighbor	God's redemption of ME
Basis of redemption	Human (supported by divine) powers	God's grace in Christ and empowerment by the Spirit
Fundamental question	"How can I be saved?"	"For what purpose am I saved"?

¹⁰⁷See *PW*, 13:43.

¹⁰⁸*Cf.* Tyson 1986:84.

¹⁰⁹*UMH*, 413; *WJW*, 7:465.

¹¹⁰S T Kimbrough, Jr., *A Heart to Praise My God: Wesley Hymns for Today* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996), 31; henceforth cited as Kimbrough 1996 followed by page number.

¹¹¹*HNL*, Hymn 4:2.

The focus of the Western soteriologies is chosen from their fundamental theological issue: “How can I [a sinner, who has transgressed God’s law] be saved?” They therefore inevitably tend to focus on *my* redemption. In Wesleyan soteriology this question is significant but not primary; it leads to the more basic question, “For what purpose am I saved?” This variation leads to a difference in the attitude toward the neighbor in Wesleyan and Pelagian soteriology (as interpreted in the medieval ages). While Pelagianism reduces the neighbor to an instrument for *my* redemption, the *neighbor* is the goal of my redemption in Wesleyanism. For this reason a call to mission is implicit in Wesleyan soteriology. This explains why its theological contribution was one of several forces in spawning the modern mission movement.

Another implicit call to mission is the dedication of the life of the Christian to do whatever God’s will is. The emphasis on universal redemption in Charles Wesley’s soteriology has obvious consequences for missions. Charles Wesley’s hymn, “Thy will, O Lord, whate’er I do,”¹¹² indicates that if we want to learn what God’s will is, we need to look for God’s love. And to be guided by God’s love means to give oneself entirely to salvation of the world (*cf.* Jn. 3:16). Christ’s self-giving love should become “the goal, purpose, and style of our lives.”¹¹³

Explicit call to mission

So far, the hymns referred to indicate various implicit motifs for missions. But Charles Wesley’s hymns are also crowded with explicit admonitions to be engaged in mission. Kimbrough¹¹⁴ makes the point that the hymn “Ye servants of God” is a cry against oppression and persecution not unlike the contemporary African-American “We shall overcome.”¹¹⁵ In his *Hymns of Intercession for All Mankind* Charles Wesley also included a prayer “For the Heathen,” which explicitly refers to the need of missions to the Gentiles.¹¹⁶ The title of this hymn indi-

¹¹²S T Kimbrough, Jr., *Lost in Wonder: Charles Wesley, The Meaning of His Hymns Today* (Nashville, TN: The Upper Room, 1987), 31.

¹¹³Kimbrough, 1987:35.

¹¹⁴Kimbrough, 1996:193.

¹¹⁵*UMH*, 181.

¹¹⁶*WJW*, 7:609; *PW*, 6:138. John Wesley concluded his tract *Thoughts Upon Slavery* (1774) by quoting the third stanza of Charles’s hymn (*WJW*, 11:79).

In the second stanza the concept “Gentiles” is used in the biblical sense as opposed to “Jews” in order to include all humankind in the salvation of God. The references to heathen idols and the “pagan hearts” of the “dark Americans” in the third stanza seem to be prejudiced to a modern mind; however, this is obviously not Charles Wesley’s intention. On the contrary, by the reference to the descendants of Ham, Noah’s son, who were supposed to be the African race (*cf.* Ps. 105:23), his point is simply to affirm that the grace of salvation is offered to the black as well as to the white races.

John Wesley more explicitly criticizes the Western—so-called Christian—civilization in comparison with the so-called heathen nations, for instance: “With regard to most of the commandments of God, whether relating to the heart or life, the heathens of Africa or America stand much on a level with those that are called Christians For instance: the generality of the natives of England, commonly called Christians It is not easy to say, when we compare the bulk of the nations in Europe with those [Indian nations] in America, whether the superiority lies on the one side or the other” (*WJW*,

cates an increased awareness of the mission to the Gentiles among the Methodists. Considering that this particular idea of mission had been neglected by the church since the church of the apostles until it was revived by the German Pietists, particularly Zinzendorf (1700–1760), Wesleyan Methodism should be considered an early exponent of the modern missions movement.

In his hymn, “Blow Ye the Trumpet, Blow,”¹¹⁷ Charles Wesley pulls his primary missional motifs together. Christ’s atonement ushers in the year of Jubilee, and the mission of the Messianic people and the reestablishment of economic justice are the proper human responses to the liberation of all who are in bondage.

Because Charles Wesley’s theology is conceived within the context of the Jubilee as well as universal redemption, his soteriological and missional perspectives do not know any limits of God’s saving grace and love. Our perspectives should be as unlimited:

Teach me to cast my net aright,
The gospel net of general grace,
So shall I all to Thee invite,
And draw them to their Lord’s embrace,
Within Thine arms of love include,
And catch a willing multitude.¹¹⁸

Charles Wesley himself was an outstanding example to be imitated when it comes to the outreach of the gospel. For years he was an active evangelist of the Methodist revival. In his hymn, “For a preacher of the gospel,” he testifies to his restless desire to spread the good news in being consumed by God’s love:

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

(after Mitchell 1994:87–88)

Conclusion

Basic to Charles Wesley’s hymns is a coherent missiology, which comes out of his soteriology. Answering the universal corruption of humankind by the universal redemption of God’s grace and love, the hymns point to the promises as well as actual experiences of transformation, as creation is restored and partici-

1:616–617). He is even more explicit in this comment: “Yea, what is most dreadful, most to be lamented is that all these Christian churches!—churches . . . that bear the name of Christ, the Prince of Peace, and wage continual war with each other!” (*WJW*, 1:508).

¹¹⁷*UMH*, 379.

¹¹⁸*PW*, 5:126

pates in the nature of God. This universal perspective includes all persons, independent of their gender, racial, economic, and religious characteristics. Because the goal of salvation is the redemption of the Christian's neighbor, missions is the essence of the church.

Similar to the theology of missions of German Pietism, Wesleyan missiology should be understood as a rejection of the former idea that civil governments should take responsibility for missions as well. The idea of mission to the Gentiles is combined with the idea of winning individual souls, and that this is the responsibility of the church. In contrast to Pietist missiology, however, the Wesleys are anxious to avoid the Pietist subjectivism by conceiving the redemption of the soul in a cosmic and holistic perspective. Although they are speaking of "souls," whole persons are always implied, and the restoration of salvation includes the created world and social structures no less than human persons.

