

Proceedings of The Charles Wesley Society

Volume 6

1999–2000

S T Kimbrough, Jr.
Editor

Charles A. Green
Assistant Editor

PAPERS PRESENTED
AT
THE ELEVENTH ANNUAL MEETING
OF
THE CHARLES WESLEY SOCIETY
July 2000
Liverpool, England

Frederick E. Maser: 1908–2002	3
Introduction: 1999 and 2000	7
<i>S T Kimbrough, Jr.</i>	
The Image of Christ in the Poor: On the Medieval Roots of the Wesleys’ Ministry with the Poor: Synopsis	11
<i>Ted A. Campbell</i>	
Perfection Revisited: Charles Wesley’s Theology of “Gospel-Poverty” and “Perfect Poverty”: Synopsis	13
<i>S T Kimbrough, Jr.</i>	
Charles Wesley’s Experience of Salvation: The Evidence of the Sermon Corpus	15
<i>Kenneth G. C. Newport</i>	
A Single, Steady Aim: Images of Hope in Wesleyan Hymnody	31
<i>Elaine A. Robinson</i>	
“Experimental and Practical Divinity”: Charles Wesley and John Norris . .	59
<i>J. Richard Watson</i>	
Charles Wesley’s View of the Self	73
<i>Martin Groves</i>	

Ted A. Campbell, President

J. Richard Watson, Vice President

Wilma J. Quantrille, Secretary

Charles A. Green, Treasurer

E. Alan Rose, Secretary-Treasurer for the United Kingdom

S T Kimbrough, Jr., Director of Publications

Elaine A. Robinson, Program Director

Board of Directors

Friedemann W. Burkhardt *Kenneth G. C. Newport*

John R. Tyson

Paul W. Chilcote *Kenneth D. Shields*

Maxine E. Walker

Timothy S. Alexander-Macquiban

Carlton R. Young

Proceedings of The Charles Wesley Society 1999–2000

Published in the United States by
The Charles Wesley Society, 2002

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

Copyright © 2002 by The Charles Wesley Society. All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise, without the prior permission of The Charles Wesley Society.

The Charles Wesley Society

Archives and History Center
Drew University
Madison, NJ 07940

Ted A. Campbell, *President*

J. Richard Watson, *Vice President*

Wilma J. Quantrille, *Secretary*

Charles A. Green, *Treasurer*

E. Alan Rose, *Secretary-Treasurer for the United Kingdom*

S T Kimbrough, Jr., *Director of Publications*

Elaine A. Robinson, *Program Director pro tempore*

Board of Directors

Friedemann W. Burkhardt Kenneth G. C. Newport

Paul W. Chilcote Kenneth D. Shields

Timothy S. Alexander-Macquiban

John R. Tyson

Maxine E. Walker

Carlton R. Young

To Translate a Heartbeat

Tomas Boström

Background

In the little village where I live, far out in the Baltic Sea, there is a thousand-year-old monastery. Here French, German, and English monks got to know us Nordic people, who were known not to be too pious. We liked to imagine that these missionaries were met with strife and conflicts. But experience and knowledge tells us that the encounter took place very respectfully. The Cistercians didn't simply come to missionize; they also had a vision, which was rooted deep in their vocation—to encounter new countries, new situations, and new people was something they considered most important. Their strategy built on a thousand years of experience, commitment, and dedication in the encounter. The organization was enormous and pretty impossible to question. Highest up in the hierarchy was the pope (personified divine presence). Under him were cardinals, bishops, priests, and a monastic system in which the power structure was clear and designed to create submission and obedience.

The Cistercians were actually no exception, even if their order emerged out of a protest. Their task was clear—to serve. Naturally they served the worldwide church, but especially the people they met. That was their mission. The way they chose to walk was already there. It had been used by traders, sailors, and warriors throughout all the years. The Cistercians took advantage of the functioning routes and initiated new encounters in existing gathering places. Where trade was conducted, there they went. Where political decisions were made, there they wanted to end up. And where laws were interpreted, there they settled. At old cult places they broke bread with each other. It was typical for them—and challenging for us—that they never thought they had reached the goal. Every settlement was only a stop on the way. The goal was always ahead of them, but even so, they could establish some future perspective. They sowed and waited for the harvest, they dug trenches in swamps and invested in future acres, they broke stone for houses that are still there after a thousand years. The way had no other purpose than to create places for encounter. Those wanderers chose the way. But the choice was not only their own, there was also a submission under something, which was bigger than the commitment of the individual. There was sacrifice. For example, they chose not to have their own economy or a family life of their own. In this sacrifice there is the acknowledgment of a value, which was estimated differently than usual.

They made themselves unique, chosen and exclusive. They were one with their task, with body, soul, and spirit. Nothing was in the way of their total commitment.

I start with the Cistercians because on our island they are associated with future and innovation, even if they perhaps perceived themselves just as carrying on an old tradition. What they were is one thing; how they were perceived and interpreted is a different thing altogether. They were very conscious of their history and historical values, though history did not serve itself but became a tool to make something entirely new happen. They trained themselves continuously to learn from their mistakes, to make enemies into allies, and to see the value in something others had dismissed. Their will could be called stubbornness, a stubbornness that motivated them and defeated seemingly unsurpassable obstacles. They became one with the way. The way was not only a means of transportation but the reality within which one wanted to develop and find one's identity. A meeting place here and now.

To Interpret or to Translate?

As a Scandinavian with a language different from English I sometimes become very jealous of English-speaking people. But sometimes I feel sorry for them. When I try to work with the poetry of Charles Wesley, language (or the lack of language) is both a burden and an advantage. I am forced to understand what Wesley writes and expresses in a different way than an English-speaking interpreter.

Already at my confirmation I learned that the Methodist church understands the Bible based on the word, tradition, faith, and experience at every given time. I would think that some of this understanding still is alive. Such is our attitude towards the original text. It becomes clearer and clearer to me that our relation to the words of the Wesley brothers is more strict than our relation to holy scripture. The reasons for this are many and not difficult to bear with. The situation certainly would have been different, if Charles Wesley had written his songs in Aramaic, or if John Wesley had written his diaries in New Testament Greek. The English language is a little too big and too global in order to dare to be open for a really boundless gaze. The result is always there already, in the original language, and only a little less than three hundred years old. Chronologically, geographically, culturally, and linguistically the original text is too close for us. So much has happened in our world since the days of the Wesleys. In what way does the twenty-first century remind us of eighteenth-century England? Which new libraries are open today? And which ones have we closed a long time ago?

In Sweden two song writers above others have been engaged in the translation of the texts of Charles Wesley. Both of them have done it respectfully and passionately, filled with enthusiasm for this fantastic Englishman. Arne Widegård (author and Methodist minister) and Anders Frostensson (author and Lutheran minister) have approached Wesley with the same awe, but emerged from the encounter with two entirely different results. Widegård related to Wesley like an exegete relates to the original text. He became the Methodist theologian, and for him every single word expressed more than the word actually contained.

Lovingly and responsibly he weighed every word on a golden scale. Not a single syllable was supposed to be lost. The original was translated word by word. The result was splendid, surprisingly beautiful, but seldom passionate. There was a commitment to the original which threatened to choke every breath. Frostensson, on the other hand, interpreted a hymn as a whole (even starting from his rich knowledge of Wesleyan lyrics and theology). The result is something totally different than a literal translation, maybe not even faithful to the original, but full of life and touching, relevant, and vital. The risk I want to point out is that we tend to become equally fundamentalist interpreters of Wesley as we are liberal interpreters of the Bible. And I do not know what is worse.

To my mind, today Wesley can be interpreted and translated based on one of the ways represented by Widegård and Frostensson. I do not want to decide which way is the right one. I cannot really imagine a compromise or a third way. As I experience it, one way leads to the brain, while the other one goes to the heart. In my attempts to translate I prefer to follow Frostensson, which means to view the details from the perspective of the whole text, and not to see the whole text with the perspective of the details. It is about so much more than simply the word. There is the whole context, the time, and the spirituality in which Wesley lived, the conditions, the culture, the society.

To interpret Charles Wesley today is thus not only a question of language, but more a question of how to find relevant interpretations of images, symbols, and expressions that were natural in eighteenth-century England, but which lack resonance in the twenty-first century.

Another interesting dimension (but maybe more of a side note) is that Charles Wesley in fact also was a translator, interpreting his brother. That the unanimity is not always a total one, probably should be seen as a valuable addition of spice to Methodist theology.

I want to clarify my thoughts by the following example:

Happy the Multitude	Lyckliga Människor	Happy People
<i>Original</i>	<i>Svensk tolkning</i>	<i>English translation</i>
Happy the multitude But far above our sphere Redeemed by Jesus blood From all we covet here! To him, and to each other joined They all were of one heart and mind.	Lyckliga människor, ja, mer än man förstår, skuldfria i Guds son befriade av nåd! Nu sjunger vi varandras väl. Vi är ett hjärta, är en själ.	Happy all the people, beyond what we can grasp redeemed from guilt by Christ and free because of grace! Now sing we for each other's weal. We are one heart, we are one soul.
His blood the cement was Who died on Calvary, And fastened to his cross. They could not disagree: One soul did all the members move The soul of harmony and love.	Hans död förenar oss, ur graven föds ett liv Tecknet det är ett kors, den död vi lever i. Så gränslös är den friheten. Gud vidrör oss med kärleken.	His death unites us here, from the grave life is born. The cross betokens this, the death we live in here. So limitless our freedom is. God touches us with caring love.

<i>Original</i>	<i>Svensk tolkning</i>	<i>English translation</i>
Their goods were free for all, Appropriated to none, While none presumed to call What he possessed his own; The difference base of thine and mine Was lost in charity Divine.	Vem spelar ingen roll, Gud kommer som en vän. Helt utan förbehåll Gud ger och ger igen. Så rivs en mur, vi ser varann. Vi får och ger med nådens hand.	No matter who it is, God comes to us as friend. Without the least demand, God gives and gives again. A wall torn down, we all are seen. Receive and give with gracious hands.
No over plus, or need, No rich or poor were there, Content with daily bread Where all enjoyed their share; With every common blessing blessed They nothing had, yet all possessed.	Öra för någons nöd, och mod att våga se. Du som är livets bröd, du hör oss när vi ber. Välsigna oss och allt vi fått, välsigna och gör allting gott.	An ear for some one's need an eye that dares to see. You who are bread of life, you hear us when we pray. Bless us and what you give to us, bless us and let your world be whole.

What I want to emphasize here is the message as a whole in the hymn. I think that this hymn summarizes a lot of Wesleyan theology, where grace is central along with the responsibility of participation, and the mystery of the holy supper is also stressed. How is this message made understandable and singable today? How can one plant it in the hearts of people?

I think the secret lies in the generosity and the will to bless, which Charles Wesley expresses so often. There is a respect for the individual person. There is also the self-evident focus of the message. The rhythm of the heart that loves, loves the gospel's promises, loves the responsibilities, loves people. Charles Wesley writes pilgrim hymns meant to receive new life in the context of someone else. The written hymn is not the goal, but the singing of the hymn. The hymn is on its way from God's heart to mine, and on its way it passes a desk in England a couple hundred years ago.

Here I want to return to the Cistercian monks who came to "my" island. Their goal was to meet people amidst their duties, to share everyday life, history, and the future, and to make God become present. The goal was not the important thing, the way was central because there the encounter took place. This is how I think Charles Wesley would like to see his hymns, as meeting places on the way—even today, as a heartbeat in the midst of life.