

HYMN

Charles Wesley:
"Hymns and Prayers to the Trinity"

Triumph, happy soul, to whom
God the heavenly secret tells,
Father, Son, and Spirit come,
One in Three Himself reveals!
What from man thou could'st not know,
Thou art truly taught of God,
When He doth the faith bestow,
Wash thee in thy Saviour's blood.

Fully certified thou art
By that sacred blood applied,
He who dwells within thy heart,
God, the great Jehovah died:
Now, and not 'till now thou knowst
(Myst'ry learnt by faith alone)
Father, Son, and Holy Ghost,
God in Persons Three is One.

God in Persons Three, appear
God to every troubled breast,
Show Thyself the Comforter,
Be the weary sinner's rest:
Stranger to thy people's peace,
Burthen'd with our sins we groan;
Come, that all our griefs may cease,
Take possession of thy own.

Father, Son, and Holy Ghost,
Heal thy creature's misery;
Thee, the Pearl which Adam lost,
Give us to recover Thee,
Give us in pure love renew'd
Higher by our fall to rise,
Image of the Tri-une God,
House of One who fills the skies.

Howard SNYDER

Charles Wesley's Hymn and Prayer to the Trinity

The Wesleys were thoroughly Trinitarian, as Charles' hymns show. The hymn presented here is a good example. Untitled, it is the tenth of 52 "Hymns and Prayers to the Trinity" that make up the final section of Charles Wesley's 1767 collection, *Hymns on the Trinity*. A facsimile edition of this significant small volume was published in 1998 by the Charles Wesley Society with a preface by S. T. Kimbrough, Jr., and an introduction by Wilma J. Quantrille.

Charles Wesley arranged this collection of 188 hymns in five sections: Hymns on the divinity of Christ, on the divinity of the Holy Spirit, on "the Plurality and Trinity of Persons," on "the Trinity in Unity," and finally "Hymns and Prayers to the Trinity." As Kimbrough points out, the first four sections essentially are "Charles's poetical reworking of William Jones's treatise, *The Catholic Doctrine of the Trinity, proved by above an hundred short and clear arguments, expressed in terms of Holy Scripture* (1756)."

This collection is thus highly theological. Yet, as Quantrille notes, these hymns "were written largely in doxological style" as "expressions of praise, thanksgiving, and prayer to God. Clearly Wesley intended many of the hymns to be sung as liturgical expressions to God as a response to the gift of salvation through Jesus Christ." Wesley keyed the hymns in the final "Hymns and Prayers" section to tunes composed by John Lampe, published in 1746 as *Hymns on the Great Festivals*. So here we have new hymns set to new music.

Thomas Jackson thought highly of this Wesley collection. He wrote in 1841,

There is not in the English language a volume that, in so small a compass, shows more clearly the scriptural doctrine on this subject, with its practical importance; and it has this peculiar advantage, that it proposes the subject, not as a matter of controversy, but of faith, and adoration, of prayer, thanksgiving, and praise. (*Life of Charles Wesley* 2:235, quoted in Kimbrough's preface)

Like John's sermons, many of Charles Wesley's hymns celebrate the present *experience* of the Triune God through faith in Jesus Christ — knowledge of God gained by faith and grace; an experience of God which is heaven begun below. The remarkable hymn reproduced here illustrates this. It was written to be sung to John Lampe's tune *Happy Magdalen, to*

whom [sic]. Whether or not Wesley had Mary Magdalene in mind, clearly this hymn celebrates the restoration and transformation that come through Jesus. Its key theme is that the work and the experience of salvation is the work and experience of the Holy Trinity. This hymn I believe has never appeared in standard Methodist hymnals, but it is worth examining.

The climax of the hymn is the last four lines, which sound quintessential Wesleyan (though not exclusively Wesleyan) themes:

Give us in pure love renew'd
Higher by our fall to rise,
Image of the Tri-une God,
House of One who fills the skies.

Three observations about this hymn: First, the experience of salvation is itself a revelation of the Trinity, according to Wesley. When the sinner receives God's converting grace and is washed in the Savior's blood, he or she learns "the heavenly secret"—that "Father, Son, and Spirit" are "One in Three." To know God in Christ is to know the Trinity. Salvation is not just "me and Jesus" but has larger theological and experiential dimensions. This deep Trinitarian knowledge of God is a "mystery learnt by faith alone."

The intimate unity of the Three-in-One God means that in Jesus' self-sacrifice, God himself died for us. As in other of his hymns, Charles does not shy away from such "death of God" language: "He who dwells within thy heart, / God, the great Jehovah died." Of course this is an affirmation of the full deity of Jesus, but it is more: The fullness of the Trinity participates in Jesus' self-giving for us.

Second, this hymn sounds notes of rest, healing, and restoration. Salvation is more than forgiveness and justification; it is coming to know God intimately, bringing rest and healing. The Trinity is implored—in full expectation that it will be so—to "heal [the] creature's misery"; to "take possession" of the penitent; to enable the sinner to "recover" God. The biblical theme of salvation as the healing of the disease of sin is prominent in both Wesleys, and it comes through here. We think of John's words: Salvation is "God's method of *healing a soul* which is diseased" by sin (Sermon 44, "Original Sin," III.3).

Third, we note (characteristically) the high optimism of grace here. The saving, healing presence of the Trinity means that Christians "in pure love renewed" experience the restoration of God's image and become the very dwelling place of the Trinity: "House of one who fills the skies." Charles Wesley delighted to use such paradoxical language to express the wonder and glory of salvation through Jesus. In writing "Higher by our fall to rise" he means (as John argued in his sermons) that we experience God more fully as a result of the fall than would have been the case had humans never sinned.

Not all Charles' Trinity hymns focus on salvation. Others sound themes of creation, God's sustaining work, final judgment and restoration. The Wesleys saw salvation as a Trinitarian drama involving all of history. Through salvation in Jesus Christ by the Spirit we become experientially, communally involved with the God of the universe who is now effectually working to restore all creation.

Howard A. Snyder is professor of the history and theology of mission in the E. Stanley Jones School of World Mission and Evangelism, Asbury Theological Seminary. He has had a long-standing interest in the Wesleys and early Methodism and also in music and hymnody and has authored several hymns, some of which are posted on his website, wineskins.net. His Ph.D. dissertation at the University of Notre Dame focused on Methodism, Pietism, and Moravianism as renewal movements.

Howard is interested in "psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs" (Eph. 5:19, Col. 3:16) theologically and as expressions of worship but also as a key factor in church renewal and renewal movements. He points to the importance of music (both old and new) in the early Methodist and Moravian movements and in contemporary renewal movements worldwide.