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*Poetry as the Handmaid of Piety: Hymns as a Catalyst for
Human Development in Early Methodism*

Abstract

In the preface to the 1780 edition of *Hymns for the People Called Methodist*, John Wesley stated, “When Poetry thus keeps its place, as the handmaid of Piety, it shall attain, not a poor perishable wreath, but a crown that fadeth not away.”¹ While John Wesley may have never used the term “human development,” a student of Wesley would quickly observe that Wesley and the early Methodists were focused on the transformation of individual human lives as well as the society in which they lived. This paper explores the connection between the hymnody of early Methodism and human development. John Wesley’s theology is briefly surveyed to propose the doctrine of Christian perfection as the guiding vision for the early Methodists. From this vantage point, Christian perfection, as the renewal of the image of God, is suggested as the telos of human development in early Methodism. Evidence is examined in the hymns of the Wesley’s, as well as the design of the 1780 hymnbook in particular, to reveal how these poetical works might have been intended to serve as a catalyst for Christian perfection in the lives of eighteenth century Methodists. Implications are suggested for twenty-first century approaches to human development in the context of evangelism and mission.

Key Words: John Wesley, Methodist, Christian perfection, human development, hymnody, evangelism

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Introduction

The term “human development” is used by various academic disciplines such as psychology, biology, anthropology and economics. Within these disciplines, the science of human development is studied from various angles including the biological and psychological development of the self, the development of communities such as religious fellowships, economic development and the development of society as a whole. While John Wesley never used the terminology of “human development,” there is abundant evidence that Wesley’s chief concern was for the transformation of both the human individual and the society in which he lived. For the purpose of this paper, Wesley was focused primarily upon human development as represented by the psychological development of the self and the religious communities to which they belonged. Although focused upon the personal and communal, Wesley saw the fruit of this transformation leading to the process of change in society as a whole.

Wesley has been identified as a “folk” or practical theologian for his ability to connect theology in practical and missional ways to the individual and the community.¹ This in no way diminishes the significance of Wesleyan theology, but emphasizes Wesley’s commitment to doing theology that had an impact on discipleship and the spiritual life of people. While Wesley has been studied through many lenses and from multiple angles, the clarion call for Wesley and the early Methodists was to Christian perfection. In 1790, near the end of his life, Wesley writes in a letter to Robert C. Brackenbury what could be his most definitive statement on the purpose of the Methodist movement: “I am glad brother D— has more light with regard to full sanctification. This doctrine is the grand depositum which God has lodged with the people called Methodists; and for the sake of propagating this chiefly he appeared to have raised us up.”² This paper will present evidence for a connection between early Methodist hymnody and human development through the lens of that “grand depositum” of Christian perfection.

Wesley’s Anthropology and Soteriology

In order to place Wesley within the context of human development, it is helpful to briefly survey his theology related to humanity as well as the order of salvation. Wesley’s anthropology and soteriology reveal his views on the state of humanity and God’s vision for human beings.

John Wesley’s view of Christian anthropology is rooted in his understanding of humanity created in the image of God and thus an initial state of perfection. According to Wesley’s understanding, this image in which humanity was created consisted of the natural, political and moral image:

“So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him:” (Gen. i. 26, 27:)—Not barely in his natural

image, a picture of his own immortality; a spiritual being, endued with understanding, freedom of will, and various affections;—nor merely in his political image, the governor of this lower world, having “dominion over the fishes of the sea, and over all the earth;”—but chiefly in his moral image; which, according to the Apostle, is “righteousness and true holiness.” (Eph. iv. 24.) In this image of God was man made.⁴

John Wesley considered that although humanity was created in the *imago Dei*, this image was broken in the fall. In Wesley’s words, “He died to God, the most dreadful of all deaths. He lost the life of God: He was separated from Him, in union with whom his spiritual life consisted.”⁵ The state resulting from original sin was that of the “natural man” who was totally corrupt.⁶ However, Wesley also saw that through God’s grace, which is made possible through Jesus Christ, this image could be renewed by the power of the Holy Spirit. Although renewal of the image of God is possible, Wesley points out that the *imago Dei* does not imply either angelic or Adamic status.⁷

Wesley’s soteriology can also be expressed in terms of the image of God and its renewal within human beings. Perhaps the best summary of Wesley’s *ordo salutis* can be found in his sermon, The Scripture Way of Salvation.⁸ In this sermon, Wesley outlines the order in which the renewal occurs beginning with the prevenient or preventing grace of God that draws persons toward God. Runyon observes, “In Christ Jesus God chooses all humanity for renewal in that destiny for which all were created, to be the very image of God. And prevenient grace seeks to awaken every human being to that possibility.”⁹ Once a person has been awakened to their need for God and they “desire after God,” justification by faith is possible.¹⁰ Again, Runyon provides a helpful perspective: “Justification begins the process of restoring the image of God in us, for our lives are realigned for a purpose....”¹¹ Coupled with justification is the beginning of sanctification or the new birth. Wesley describes the new birth as “the great work, which God does in us, in renewing our fallen nature.”¹² At this point, “there is a real as well as a relative change.”¹³ Or as Collins observes, the relative change of justification is something God does for us in by changing the status of our relation to God and removing the guilt of sin, while the real change of regeneration or the new birth is what God does in us by restoring his image and removing the power of sin.¹⁴ However, for Wesley, the new birth was the beginning of the renewal of the *imago Dei* and not the completion of it.

The Telos of Human Development

For Wesley, the telos of the *ordo salutis* is lodged in the doctrine of Christian perfection and does not end in justification and the new birth. As Wesley states concerning the new birth, “This is a part of sanctification,

not the whole; it is the gate to it, the entrance into it.”¹⁵ A description of this further transformation may be best expressed in Wesley’s treatise on the *Character of a Methodist*. Wesley’s response to the question of “Who is a Methodist?” begins with the first part of the Great Commandment.¹⁶ Wesley begins his description by responding:

A Methodist is one who has “the love of God shed abroad in his heart by the Holy Ghost given unto him;” one who “loves the Lord his God with all his heart, and with all his soul, and with all his mind, and with all his strength. God is the joy of his heart, and the desire of his soul; which is constantly crying out, “Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire beside thee! My God and my all! Thou art the strength of my heart, and my portion for ever!”¹⁷

In this description, Wesley describes an individual who has surrendered him or herself to God and has been transformed in terms of their primary focus of love and devotion. No longer is the self the center of the person’s universe. Rather, God is now at the center of the person’s life and all other things are subservient to loving God. However, the commandment is two-dimensional and Wesley continues his description by referencing the second part of the commandment in which he states:

And while he thus always exercises his love to God, by praying without ceasing, rejoicing evermore, and in everything giving thanks, this commandment is written in his heart, “That he who loveth God, love his brother also.” And he accordingly loves his neighbour as himself; he loves every man as his own soul.¹⁸

Wesley further expands this love of neighbor in terms of the activities of a Methodist directed toward “all men” including feeding the hungry, clothing the naked and visiting the sick and imprisoned.¹⁹ According to Wesley, these activities have the specific aim of addressing the needs of the soul and awakening sinners to their need of God as well as encouraging those who have “peace with God” to continue to mature toward Christian perfection.²⁰ Finally, Wesley sums up the character of a Methodist:

These are the principles and practices of our sect; these are the marks of a true Methodist. By these alone do those who are in derision so called, desire to be distinguished from other men. If any man say, “Why, these are only the common fundamental principles of Christianity!” thou hast said; so I mean; this is the very truth; I know they are no other; and I would to God both thou and all men knew, that I, and all who follow my judgment, do vehemently refuse to be distinguished from other men, by any but the common

principles of Christianity, — the plain, old Christianity that I teach, renouncing and detesting all other marks of distinction. And whosoever is what I preach, (let him be called what he will, for names change not the nature of things,) he is a Christian, not in name only, but in heart and in life. He is inwardly and outwardly conformed to the will of God, as revealed in the written word. He thinks, speaks, and lives, according to the method laid down in the revelation of Jesus Christ. His soul is renewed after the image of God, in righteousness and in all true holiness. And having the mind that was in Christ, he so walks as Christ also walked.²¹

Wesley's focus upon love of God and neighbor as the defining characteristics of a Methodist reveals the emphasis of early Methodism upon persons becoming fully human with Jesus Christ as the prime example of this full humanity. As observed previously, John Wesley's soteriology sees the human condition as a distortion of the *imago Dei* and it is this image that needs to be restored in human beings by the power of God. Thus, the pursuit of perfect love could be seen as the pursuit to become fully human. As Meadows notes,

Human beings are created in the divine image, which means having the capacity for personal relationship with God, so that the likeness of God may be reproduced in their lives. The image of God can only subsist in this communion of love, and is marred by sin through the brokenness of that relationship. The ability to know, desire, and choose a life of communion with God is dissipated by the sinful nature and its attachment to false ends. This corruption of the divine image lies at the root of human unhappiness, and is manifest in a general state of dissatisfaction and restlessness. Wesley follows in the spirit of Augustine, by arguing that we are made for a communion of love with God, and our hearts are restless until they find their rest in him.²²

Wesley makes this connection between the renewal of the image of God and Christian perfection in A Plain Account:

"This great gift of God, the salvation of our souls, is no other than the image of God fresh stamped on our hearts. It is a 'renewal of believers in the spirit of their minds, after the likeness of Him that created them.' God hath now laid 'the axe unto the root of the tree, purifying their hearts by faith,' and 'cleansing all the thoughts of their hearts by the inspiration of his Holy Spirit.' Having this hope, that they shall see God as he is, they 'purify themselves even as he is pure,' and are 'holy, as he that hath called them is holy, in all

manner of conversation.' Not that they have already attained all that they shall attain, either are already in this sense perfect. But they daily 'go on from strength to strength; beholding' now, 'as in a glass, the glory of the Lord, they are changed into the same image, from glory to glory, by the Spirit of the Lord.'²³

Wesley further responds at the first conference of Methodist preachers that the definition of the doctrine of sanctification or perfection is "To be renewed in the image of God, 'in righteousness and true holiness.'" ²⁴ Early Methodists were unlikely to have seen themselves as practitioners of human development. Never the less, as they preached the Good News, fed the hungry, clothed the naked, visited the imprisoned, and cared for the widowed and orphaned, one thing dominated their hearts and minds: the renewal of persons in the image of God and becoming fully human.

This call to Christian perfection was central in John Wesley's charge to the Methodist preachers, he states "It is not your business to preach so many times, and to take care of this or that society; but to save as many souls as you can; to bring as many sinners as you possibly can to repentance, and with all your power to build them up in that holiness without which they cannot see the Lord"²⁵ This clarion call not only cast a vision where persons could be free from the guilt and the power, but also the very root of sin. Harald Lindström, in his classic work on Wesley's view of sanctification also asserts the dominant role of the doctrine:

...it is the idea of sanctification that dominates his whole theology. The conception of salvation is determined by the idea of sanctification, because salvation is seen as a process directed to the perfect, real change of the individual. And this process is the necessary condition for final salvation, which is the ultimate goal of the Christian life.²⁶

As Lindström observes, salvation was not finished at justification or even the new birth but continued as the person pursued final salvation or Christian perfection.

There is also evidence to support the consistent presence of this central doctrine in the theology and ministry Wesley. W. E. Sangster remarks:

The doctrine...occupied his [Wesley's] mind from the year 1725. He preached on it before the University of Oxford on the first day of 1733, before he was thirty years of age. It remained one of his chief theological preoccupations till he died on March 2nd, 1791. With passing time, his conviction of its importance grew. He regarded it as the "grand depositum" which God had committed to his followers. It involved him in more controversy and odium than anything else he taught. Yet he never wavered.²⁷

Sangster points to the centrality of the doctrine throughout John Wesley's life. Although his views on Christian perfection caused much conflict, Wesley never the less maintained its central role in the Methodist movement. However, this focus was not limited to Wesley alone, but was also present in the Methodist preachers that he raised up. Thomas Jackson emphasizes this vision among these early Methodists when he describes their work and character:

...their mighty faith in God; their affectionate concern for the young; their enterprise in carrying the gospel into neglected districts; their fidelity in maintaining every part of the Methodist discipline; their undying attachment and fidelity to each other; their intense earnestness in their attempts to alarm the unconverted, to bring penitent sinners into Christian liberty, and to bring all believers to the possession of the perfect love which casteth out fear.²⁸

While John and Charles may have disagreed over the particulars of the doctrine of Christian perfection, Charles nevertheless agreed with his brother concerning the critical importance of full salvation and its central role as the telos of the Christian life. Tyson observes that Charles held an equally high view of the doctrine and saw it as the goal of the Christian life:

From the earliest years of his preaching Charles Wesley pointed to Christian Perfection (the restoration of the imago Dei) as the "one thing needful" for Christians. His sermon by that title made sanctification the constitutive characteristic of Christian faith, and described perfection in the language of recapitulation: "To recover the first estate form which we are fallen is *the one thing needful*; to re-exchange the image of Satan for the image of God, bondage for freed, sickness for health! Our one great business is to erase out of our souls the likeness of our destroyer, and to be born again, to be formed anew after the likeness of our Creator."²⁹

The view of Charles is particularly significant since his hand produced the majority of the hymns and poetical works in early Methodism. It is through these poetical works that the vision of Christian perfection was communicated and kindled among the people called Methodist.

Poetry as the Handmaid of Piety

While it is not the aim of this paper to delve into the science behind the effects of music upon the brain and human development, there is growing scientific evidence that music does have a biological impact upon human beings. Norman Weinberger observes: "It seems fairly clear, even at this early stage of inquiry, that many brain regions participate in specific aspects

of music processing, whether supporting perception (such as apprehending a melody) or evoking emotional reactions.”³⁰ Further he remarks, “Many different regions of the brain respond to the perceptual and emotional aspects of music, and the brain alters itself to react more strongly to musical sounds that become meaningful to an individual.”³¹ While the Wesleys would not have been aware of this evidence, it seems that they were aware of the impact that poetry and hymnody had among those who they were trying to reach with the Gospel as well as those who were pressing on to perfection. The hymns of early Methodism not only seemed to communicate the vision of being renewed in the image of God, but it also appears that they were intended to encourage the pursuit of that renewal and thus were a means of grace. While the hymnody of Methodism has long been associated with the teaching of doctrine among the people called Methodist, somewhat less attention has been paid to the transformative role of hymns.³¹ Never the less, both the content of the hymns as well as the structure and arrangement of the hymnbooks seem to indicate that Methodist hymns were intended to provoke a response within the singer.

John Wesley himself indicates in his preface to the 1780 edition of *Hymns for the Use of the People Called Methodist* that the arrangement of the hymns was intended to mirror the Christian journey:

Such a Hymn Book you have now before you. It is not so large as to be either cumbersome or expensive; and it is large enough to contain such a variety of hymns as will not soon be worn threadbare. It is large enough to contain all the important truths of our most holy religion, whether speculative or practical; yea, to illustrate them all, and to prove them both by Scripture and reason. And this is done in a regular order. The Hymns are not carelessly jumbled together, but carefully ranged under proper heads, according to the experience of real Christians. So that this book is, in effect, a little body of experimental and practical divinity.³³

Wesley's focus in this statement is upon both the theology in the hymns and the way in which the ordering of the hymns is intended to mirror the life of a Christian.

The 1780 hymnbook in particular exhibits this practical structure of the pilgrim way. An examination of the contents reveals this structure:

- Part I contains hymns exhorting sinners and describing various things such as the “Pleasantness of Religion,” “The Goodness of God,” death, judgment, heaven and hell. Part I concludes with “Praying for a Blessing”
- Part II includes hymns describing both formal religion and inward religion.

- Part III contains hymns focused on “Praying for Repentance,” “for Mourners convinced of Sin,” “Convinced of Backsliding,” and “Recovered.”
- Part IV is focused upon “Believers” including hymns focused on believers “Rejoicing, Fighting, Praying, Watching, Working, Suffering, Seeking full Redemption, Saved, and Interceding for the World.”
- Part V is for the societies and includes hymns for “the Society Meeting,” for “Giving Thanks” for “Praying” and for “Parting.”³³

Manning remarks:

The arrangement is quite unlike that with which we are now all familiar: hymns, I mean, arranged as they are in almost all our books under the three main heads: God, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost; Man, his needs and moods; the Church, its privileges and services. Wesley arranged his hymn-book as a spiritual biography of the ‘sort of person whom he called in the Preface a real Christian.’³⁵

It appears that for Wesley, this structure was intended to make the hymnbook a companion for those journeying toward perfection and seeking renewal in the image of God. As previously observed, the renewal of the *imago dei* is a theme that emerges quite frequently in Wesley’s writings; however, the theme also appears in many of the hymns of early Methodism. It is notable that in at least five of the prefaces to early Methodist hymn collections, a defense, explanation or call to Christian perfection is included. These prefaces are spread over a long period of time, and give insight into the development of the doctrine. One of these works includes Charles Wesley’s 1762 collection of scripture hymns.³⁵ Eby observes that the 1762 collection of poetry with Charles’ reflections on scripture had the purpose ‘both to prove and guard the doctrine of Christian perfection.’³⁷ In the preface to the 1738 collection, Wesley makes the observation that holiness is best accomplished in community. In that famous statement, which is frequently taken out of context, Wesley states:

Directly opposite to this is the gospel of Christ. Solitary religion is not to be found there. “Holy solitaires” is a phrase no more consistent with the gospel than holy adulterers. The gospel of Christ knows of no religion, but social; no holiness but social holiness. “Faith working by love” is the length and breadth and depth and height of Christian perfection.³⁸

In the preface to the 1740 edition, Wesley proclaims, “This great gift of God, the salvation of our souls, which is begun on earth but perfected in heaven, is no other than the image of God fresh stamped upon our hearts.”³⁹ Describing the experience of those being renewed in the image of God,

Wesley further states

... their spirit rejoiceth in God their Saviour, even in the midst of this fiery trial, which continually heightens both the strong sense they then have of their inability to help themselves, and the inexpressible hunger they feel after a full renewal in his image, in righteousness, and all true holiness. Then God is mindful of the desire of them that fear him: He remembers his holy covenant, and he giveth them a single eye and a clean heart. He stamps upon them his own image and superscription; he createth them anew in Christ Jesus;⁴⁰

Of course, the actual hymns and poems penned by John Wesley and primarily, Charles are the substance of these collections.

The hymn writing of Charles Wesley took a radical departure from the majority in the eighteenth century. Rattenbury remarks that, "His hymns gave wings to the doctrines of the Evangelical Revival, so that they flew everywhere; their personal emotional character disseminated truth as no other medium could have done."⁴¹ John Tyson affirms the impact of Charles Wesley's hymns beyond the dissemination of doctrine that Rattenbury describes:

His hymns were born in his own spiritual pilgrimage, life experiences, and personal study of the Bible. They were loaded with biblical phrases and doctrines, as well as vibrant emotion. Set in first-person form, they placed biblical words and experiences upon the singer's lips. In this way Wesley's hymns, like his sermons, were intended not simply to narrate evangelical doctrines and experience, but to induce them. By taking up the first-person language he had learned from the Moravians and Martin Luther, Wesley was able to make the singers of his hymns participants in the experiences they sang about. This was a relatively new development in hymnody, one that broke pattern with Wesley's evangelical precursors like Isaac Watts and added a new vitality to singing in church. It brought his hymns their hallmark sense of immediacy that has helped them endure through the ages.⁴²

Wesley himself hints at this transforming role of hymns in his 1761 directions for singing:

VII. Above all sing spiritually. Have an eye to God in every word you sing. Aim at pleasing him more than yourself, or any other creature. In order to this attend strictly to the sense of what you sing, and see that your heart is not carried away with the sound, but offered to God continually; so shall your singing be such as the Lord will approve of here, and reward when he cometh in the clouds of heaven.

It was the ability to weave phrases and images from scripture and the experiences of real Christians that made the hymns of Charles Wesley uniquely qualified as catalysts of the renewal of persons in the image of God. At the end of the preface to the 1780 hymnbook, John Wesley speaks of the relationship between the hymns and renewal:

That which is of infinitely more moment than the spirit of poetry, is the spirit of piety. And I trust, all persons of real judgment will find this breathing through the whole collection. It is in this view chiefly that I would recommend it to every truly pious reader as a means of raising or quickening the spirit of devotion, of confirming his faith, of enlivening his hope, and of kindling or increasing his love to God and man. When poetry thus keeps its place, as the handmaid of piety, it shall attain, not a poor perishable wreath, but a crown that fadeth not away.⁴³

Here, Wesley makes a strong connection between hymns and holiness. Poetry is seen as the “handmaid” or servant of “piety.” In this analogy, poetry or hymns would serve the cause of holiness as persons employed the hymnbook.

Many of the hymns of early Methodism explicitly include the imagery of the renewal of persons in the *imago Dei*. Following the design of the 1780 hymnbook, this vision can be found all five parts of the collection. In the first section under the heading of “The Pleasantness of Religion,” Wesley pens an invitation to those who are beginning to pursue God. He writes in hymn 18:

1 Maker, Saviour of mankind,
Who hast on me bestowed
An immortal soul, designed
To be the house of God,
Come, and now reside in me,
Never, never to remove;
Make’ me just, and good, like thee,
And full of power and love!

2 Bid me in thy image rise,
A saint, a creature new ;
True, and merciful, and wise,
And pure, and happy too:
This thy primitive design,
That I should in thee be blest;
Should, within the arms divine,
For ever, ever rest.⁴⁴

In this hymn Wesley poetically describes not only the theology of humanity being created in the image of God, but the process by which that image might be renewed within a person.

In part two of the collection, Wesley describes “formal religion” or religion based upon works and the form of religion rather than the inward heart religion of Methodism. Hymn 89 describes the vain attempt to work for God’s favor:

4 I wait my vigour to renew,
Thine image to retrieve,
The veil of outward things pass through,
And gasp in thee to live.
5 I work; and own the labour vain.
And thus from works I cease;
I strive; and see my fruitless pain
Till God create my peace.⁴⁵

In part three of the 1780 collection, under the section entitled, “For Mourners Convinced of Sin,” Wesley speaks a prayer for those who have come face to face with their sinful nature. Hymn 110 not only expresses the need for restoration, but the hope that one can be free from sin:

6 For this only thing I pray,
And this will I require,
Take the power of sin away,
Fill me with chaste desire;
Perfect me in holiness;
Thine image to my soul restore;
Love me freely, seal my peace,
And bid me sin no more.⁴⁶

In part four of the hymnbook, Wesley includes a section for believers who are rejoicing in what God has done and will do. In hymn 219, Wesley expresses for the singer a prayer of consecration to God:

4 My soul, and all its powers,
Thine, wholly thine, shall be;
All, all my happy hours
I consecrate to thee:
Me to thine image now restore,
And I shall praise thee evermore.⁴⁷

Also in part four under the section, “Groaning (or Seeking) for Full Redemption,” Wesley voices a prayer for those who are seeking Christian perfection. In hymn 357, he expresses the singer’s need for God’s grace and the promise of perfect love:

3 God of all-sufficient grace,
My God in Christ thou art;

Bid me walk before thy face,
 Till I am pure in heart;
 Till, transform'd by faith divine,
 I gain that perfect love unknown,
 Bright in all thine image shine.
 By putting on thy Son.

4 Father, Son, and Holy Ghost,
 In council join again,
 To restore thine image lost
 By frail, apostate man :
 O might I thy form express,
 Through faith begotten from above,
 Stamp'd with real holiness,
 And fill'd with perfect love.⁴⁸

In the fifth and final part of the hymnbook, Wesley includes a section entitled, "For the Society Meeting," which were songs meant to be a part of the life of the community. The vision of the restored image of God is present here as well as exemplified in hymn 475:

4 O that all with us might prove
 The fellowship of saints!
 Find supplied, in Jesu's love,
 What every member wants:
 Grasp we our high calling's prize,
 Feel our sins on earth forgiven,
 Rise, in his whole image rise,
 And meet our Head in heaven!⁴⁹

There seems to be at least implicit evidence that the hymns of early Methodism were intended for an impact far beyond the diffusion of the movement's doctrine. These hymns could be viewed as catalysts employed by the leadership of early Methodism to seek and save the lost, but even more to cast the vision for persons to be renewed in the image of God and discover what it means to be truly human. In Wesley's understanding, as this transformation occurred at the individual and communal levels, it logically led to a process of change in the society as a whole.⁵⁰

Implications

Modern practitioners of missions and evangelism have much to learn from the early Methodist movement, but perhaps one of the most significant, was Wesley's willingness to not only employ the most effective tools of revival, but to reflect theologically upon those tools to ensure that they would communicate the fullness of God's message. Neither the Wesleys'

hymns nor their collection of hymns were haphazardly constructed. Rather, through thoughtful reflection upon the great doctrines of their tradition and the texts of scripture coupled with the zeal and passion of the primitive church, the early Methodists set out, "Not to form any new sect; but to reform the nation, particularly the Church; and to spread scriptural holiness over the land."⁵¹ In the same way, we may set out in our contexts to identify the best tools for mission and evangelism, but we must be careful to reflect theologically upon those tools and the inherent messages they may communicate.

This paper suggests that the hymns of early Methodism demonstrate the power of music and poetry to impact the lives of those seeking God for the first time or those who are yearning for the restoration of the image of God in their lives. It is both an encouragement and a warning to our time. The encouragement is to seek those tools that will enable effective outreach among those living without Christ. The warning is to ensure that the message we are communicating is one that is in keeping with the best of the Wesleyan tradition which does not only seek a person's deliverance from sin and death, but also seeks the transformation of persons so that they can become fully human and reflect God's image for the world to see.

Endnotes

¹ Albert Outler identifies Wesley as a "folk-theologian who found effective ways to communicate the gospel to mass audiences who cared little about the complexity of his sources or the cultural import of his evangelistic messages. See A.C. Outler, *Theology in the Wesleyan spirit*, (Nashville: Tidings, 1975), 3. Ken Collins characterizes Wesley, "as a practical rather than a speculative theologian. Wesley spoke of time and eternity and of things present and things to come and offered the glad tidings of salvation, even to the very least of all." See K.J. Collins, *The Theology of John Wesley: Holy Love and the Shape of Grace*, (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2007), 3.

² J. Wesley, *The Works of John Wesley*, ed. Thomas Jackson, 14 vols. (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Books, 2007), 13:9; hereafter cited as *Works* (Jackson)

³ J. Wesley, Sermon 45, "The New Birth," in *Works* (Jackson), 6:66.

⁴ *Ibid.* 67.

⁵ For a full discussion on Wesley's view of the "natural man" see "The Doctrine of Original Sin," in *Works* (Jackson), 9:434-464.

⁶ J. Wesley, Sermon 76, "On Perfection," in *Works* (Jackson), 3:411-413.

⁷ Albert Outler observes, "The result is the most successful summary of the Wesleyan vision of the *ordo salutis* in the entire sermon corpus." See John Wesley, Sermon 43, "The Scripture Way of Salvation," in J. Wesley, *The Works of John Wesley - The Bicentennial Edition* CD-ROM, R.P. Heitzenrater, ed., (Nashville, Abingdon Press, 2005).

⁸ T. Runyon, *The New Creation: John Wesley's Theology Today*, (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1998), 42.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ T. Runyon, *The New Creation: John Wesley's Theology Today*, (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1998), 42.

¹¹ J. Wesley, Sermon 45, "The New Birth," in *Works* (Jackson), 6:65.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ K.J. Collins, *The Theology of John Wesley: Holy Love and the Shape of Grace*, (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2007), 201.

¹⁴ J. Wesley, Sermon 45, "The New Birth," in *Works* (Jackson), 6:74.

¹⁵ "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind"; and, 'Love your neighbor as yourself'" (Luke 10:27 NIV)

¹⁶ J. Wesley, "The Character of a Methodist" in *Works* (Jackson), 8:341.

¹⁷ Ibid, 343.

¹⁸ Ibid, 346.

¹⁹ Ibid. "to awaken those that sleep in death; to bring those who are awakened to the atoning blood, that, "being justified by faith, they may have peace with God;" and to provoke those who have peace with God to abound more in love and in good works. And he is willing to "spend and be spent herein," even "to be offered up on the sacrifice and service of their faith," so they may "all come unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ.""

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Meadows, Philip, "The Journey of Evangelism," *The Oxford Handbook of Methodist Studies*, (Oxford University Press, 2010), 419.

²² J. Wesley, "A Plain Account of Christian Perfection" in *Works* (Jackson), 11:378-379.

²³ Ibid. 11:387.

²⁴ J. Wesley, "Minutes of Several Conversations" in *Works* (Jackson), 8:310.

²⁵ H.G.Å. Lindström, *Wesley and Sanctification: A Study in the Doctrine of Salvation*, (Wilmore, KY: Francis Asbury Pub., 1981), 217-218.

²⁶ W.E. Sangster, *The Path to Perfection: An Examination and Restatement of John Wesley's Doctrine of Christian Perfection*, (Nashville: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, 1943), 25.

²⁷ T. Jackson, *The Lives of Early Methodist Preachers*, (Stoke-on-Trent: Tentmaker Publications, 1998), 24.

²⁸ C. Wesley & J.R. Tyson, *Charles Wesley: A Reader*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), 41-42.

²⁹ N.M. Weinberger, 'Music and the Brain', *Scientific American Special Edition*, 16, 3 (2006), 36.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ See Berger's work on the connection between doxology and theology in T. Berger, *Theology in the Hymns: A Study of the Relationship of Doxology and*

Theology According to the Collection of Hymns for the Use of the People Called Methodists (1780), (Nashville, Tenn: Kingswood Books, 1995). Also see Rattenbury's work describing the literary characteristics of Charles Wesley's hymns as well as the distinctive Methodist doctrines which they present in J. E. Rattenbury, *The Evangelical Doctrines of Charles Wesley's Hymns*, (London: The Epworth Press, 1942).

³² J. Wesley, "List of Poetical Works" in *Works* (Jackson), 14:340

³³ J. Wesley, Franz Hildebrandt, Oliver A. Beckerlegge, et al., 'A Collection of Hymns for the use of the People Called Methodists', Anonymous Translator, vol. 7 of *The Bicentennial Edition of the Works of John Wesley* (Nashville, Abingdon Press, 1983), 77-78.

³⁴ B.L. Manning, *The Hymns of Wesley and Watts*, (London: Epworth Press, 1943), 11.

³⁵ The historical context of the 1762 collection is near the end of the revival and around the time of the Maxfield/Bell controversy. As Charles develops this collection, he is keenly aware of the distortions that Maxfield and Bell had been disseminating related to Christian perfection.

³⁶ P. Eby, 'Images of Perfection in Charles Wesley's Short Hymns', *Wesleyan Theological Journal*, 46, 1 (2011), 183

³⁷ J. Wesley, "List of Poetical Works" in *Works* (Jackson), 14:321.

³⁸ *Ibid.* 323.

³⁹ *Ibid.* 327.

⁴⁰ J.E. Rattenbury, *The Evangelical Doctrines of Charles Wesley's Hymns*, (London: Epworth Press, 1954), 15.

⁴¹ J.R. Tyson, *Assist me to proclaim: the life and hymns of Charles Wesley*, (Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans Pub., 2007), 57-58.

⁴² J. Wesley, Franz Hildebrandt, Oliver A. Beckerlegge, et al., 'A Collection of Hymns for the use of the People Called Methodists', *The Bicentennial Edition of the Works of John Wesley* (Nashville, Abingdon Press, 1983), 7:75

⁴³ *Ibid.* 102.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.* 190.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.* 219.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.* 355.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.* 526.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.* 659.

⁴⁹ J. Wesley, Sermon 63, "The General Spread of the Gospel," in *Sermons II*, ed. Albert C. Outler, vol. 2 of *The Bicentennial Edition of the Works of John Wesley* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1976-), 485-499

⁵⁰ J. Wesley, "Minutes of Several Conversations" in *Works* (Jackson), 8:299.