

**“DIGGING DEEP INTO THE MINE”  
CHARLES WESLEY AND THE BIBLE**

-Randy L. Maddox

For: Frank Baker<sup>1</sup>

Charles Wesley was confined to Bristol for much of 1760–61 by an extended illness. He spent his time writing a series of short hymns occasioned by passages spanning the Bible. He published the results in 1762 as a two-volume set.<sup>2</sup> Within a year of issuing this set, Wesley decided to do more extensive collections of hymns on each of the four Gospels and the Acts of the Apostles. He began with a volume on the Gospel of John in December 1763; moved to Acts in November 1764; then to Matthew, which he finished in March 1766; and wrapped up Mark and Luke in a flurry between March and April of 1766. These five manuscript volumes remained unpublished at Wesley’s death.<sup>3</sup>

In the middle of these six years devoted to writing hymns suggested by specific scriptural texts, Charles penned the following stanzas occasioned by John 5:39, “Search the Scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life, and they are they which testify of me” (AV).

1. Christ himself the precept gives,  
    (Let who will the word despise,)  
Bids me in the sacred leaves  
    Trace the way to paradise,  
All His oracles explore,  
Read, and pray them o’re and o’re.
  
2. Who with true humility  
    Seek Him in the written word,  
Christ in every page they see,  
    See, and apprehend their Lord;  
Every scripture makes Him known,  
Testifies of Christ alone.

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<sup>1</sup>I never had the privilege of studying with Frank Baker directly, but I have benefitted immensely over the years from his tireless work as a bibliographer and transcriber of Wesley texts, as well as his skill in interpreting these texts.

<sup>2</sup>*Scripture Hymns* (1762). Transcriptions of this set and all other hymns that Charles Wesley published during his lifetime are available online at The Center for Studies in the Wesley Tradition (CSWT) at Duke Divinity School: <http://www.divinity.duke.edu/initiatives-centers/cswt/wesley-texts/charles-wesley>.

<sup>3</sup>Transcriptions of all known verse left in manuscript by Charles Wesley at his death are also available online at CSWT on this page: <http://www.divinity.duke.edu/initiatives-centers/cswt/wesley-texts/manuscript-verse>. I cite from these transcriptions, retaining Wesley’s spellings, capitalization, etc. Readers can find on the site full details for the location and province of each manuscript item. The transcriptions also identify where these manuscript items have been published in major scholarly collections after Wesley’s death.

3. Here I cannot seek in vain;  
 Digging deep into the mine,  
 Hidden treasure I obtain  
 Pure, eternal Life Divine,  
 Find Him in his Spirit given,  
 Christ the Way, the Truth of heaven.<sup>4</sup>

These stanzas capture Wesley's deep appreciation for the Bible as a definitive locus of divine revelation and the main source for seeking spiritual truth. It also hints at some characteristic tendencies in engaging (or "mining") the Bible.

The significance of the Bible for Charles Wesley is no accident. As a pious Anglican, he participated regularly in morning and evening prayers, with a pattern of daily readings that covered the Old Testament once and the New Testament (except Revelation) three times a year. This was reinforced by his study at Westminster and Oxford. He added the role of occasional leadership in morning and evening prayers with his ordination. Such repeated public exposure to Scripture, along with his private study, shaped Wesley's life and his work deeply.

There have been survey treatments by scholars demonstrating how this immersion in the Bible shines through in Charles's hymns and poetry—which are permeated with scriptural excerpts, allusions, and metaphors.<sup>5</sup> This is true even when the subject matter of the verse is not explicitly religious. To give just one example, note how (in a private poetic lament of betrayal) Wesley describes his initial relationship with Thomas Williams in the imagery of the parable of the Prodigal Son (Luke 15:11–32):

Poor reckless Prodigal, by Grace Divine  
 Drawn from his Husks, his Harlots, and his Wine,  
 My Arms receiv'd him with a fond Embrace,  
 I kiss'd the Filth and Sorrow from his Face,  
 For him I join'd th' acclaiming Host above,  
 And lov'd him with my heavenly Father's Love.<sup>6</sup>

There have also been surveys of Wesley's biblical hermeneutics, or *how* he drew upon the Bible in his poetic work. These studies have highlighted particularly his use of typology and allegory, as well as his Christocentric reading of the

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<sup>4</sup>Hymn on John 5:39, MS John, 88–89.

<sup>5</sup>See in particular, Randall D. McElwain, "Biblical Language in the Hymns of Charles Wesley," *Wesley and Methodist Studies* 1 (2009): 55–70; Samuel J. Rogal, "Scripture References, Allusions, and Echoes in Works by Charles and John Wesley," *Trinity Journal* 25 (2004): 75–91; Henry Wansbrough, "John and Charles Wesley," in *The Use and Abuse of the Bible: A Brief History of Biblical Interpretation* (New York: T&T Clark, 2010), 128–45; and J. Richard Watson, "Biblical Text and Metaphor in Charles Wesley's Hymns," *Hymnology Annual* 3 (1993): 193–203.

<sup>6</sup>Lines 21–26 of MS Address to a Friend. Details on the situation of this private poem are given in the introduction to the online transcription.

whole canon.<sup>7</sup> In the present essay I seek to complement such survey treatments by “digging deep into the mine” of Charles Wesley’s use of the Bible. I probe four topics, drawing on a wide range of resources, to shed further light on Wesley’s understanding and use of the Bible—in his personal life, in his creative work as a poet/hymn writer, and in his overarching vocation as a pastor/practical theologian.

### WESLEY’S FOCUS ON THE BIBLE AS THE PRIMARY SITE TO MINE

The first area to probe more deeply is Wesley’s focus on the Bible as the primary source to mine in seeking spiritual truth. In the hymn on John 5:39, he explained this focus by noting that *Christ* points us to the “sacred leaves.” His deeper assumption becomes explicit in the final entry in the manuscript volume of hymns on the Gospel of John:

Amen! we thus our seal set to,  
Our faith’s entire assent subjoin,  
That all and every word is true,  
Inspir’d, infallible, divine.<sup>8</sup>

As these lines suggest, Wesley stood within the majority Anglican stance of his day in strongly affirming the integrity and accuracy of the text of Scripture.<sup>9</sup> He also shared the contemporary tendency to evoke a dictation model of the inspiration of the Bible, referring to Scripture as God’s “written word” or “oracles.” Consider a couple of examples:

The written word, by which we steer  
From all mistake secure,  
It bids us make our calling *here*  
And our election sure.<sup>10</sup>

Authority in things Divine  
Belongs to God and God alone:  
Whate’er His oracles enjoin  
Our only rule of life we own.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>7</sup>The best examples are S T Kimbrough, Jr., “Charles Wesley and Biblical Interpretation,” in Kimbrough (ed.), *Charles Wesley: Poet and Theologian* (Nashville: Kingswood, 1992), 106–36; Kimbrough, “Charles Wesley’s Lyrical Commentary on the Holy Scriptures,” in Kimbrough (ed.), *Orthodox and Wesleyan Scriptural Understanding and Practice* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2005), 171–206; John Roger Tyson, “Transfiguration of Scripture: Charles Wesley’s Poetic Hermeneutic,” *Asbury Theological Journal* 47.2 (1992): 17–41; and J. Richard Watson, “Charles Wesley and the Bible,” *Revue de la Société d’Études Anglo-Américaines des XVII<sup>e</sup> et XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècles* 64 (2007): 79–91.

<sup>8</sup>Hymn on John 21:25, MS John, 467.

<sup>9</sup>On this larger context, see Justin Champion, “Directions for the Profitable Reading of the Holy Scriptures’: Biblical Criticism, Clerical Learning and Lay Readers, c. 1650–1720,” in A. Hessayon & N. Keene (eds.), *Scripture and Scholarship in Early Modern England* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2006), 208–30; and Thomas R. Preston, “Biblical Criticism, Literature, and the Eighteenth-Century Reader,” in Isabel Rivers (ed.), *Books and their Readers in Eighteenth-Century England* (New York: St Martin’s Press, 1982), 97–126.

<sup>10</sup>Hymn 144, st. 3b, *HSP* (1749), 2:226.

<sup>11</sup>Hymn on Acts 15:28, st. 2a, MS Acts, 298.

Readers may catch an echo of Article VI of the Articles of Religion of the Church of England in the second selection. This article affirms the “sufficiency of Scripture,” insisting that “whatsoever is not read therein, nor may be proved thereby, is not to be required of any [person], that it should be believed as an article of the faith.” The article was crafted in the sixteenth century by Thomas Cranmer to help define the newly formed Church of England over against the Church of Rome, by embracing the Protestant emphasis on Scripture as the “rule of faith.”

It is hard to imagine a stronger affirmation of this Protestant emphasis than the opening stanza of Wesley’s manuscript hymn on Acts 24:14, written in 1765:

The written word, entire and pure,  
The word which always shall endure,  
My rule of faith and life I own;  
Not reason, or tradition vain,  
Not the authority of man,  
Not an internal light *alone*.<sup>12</sup>

This stanza calls to mind John Wesley’s claim to be a “man of one book.”<sup>13</sup> Such quotes could suggest that both Wesley brothers eschewed reading or using for theological warrant anything besides the Bible. In John’s case, it can be shown that his claim must be read rhetorically, as he emphasized elsewhere consulting early Christian tradition, other readers of Scripture, and even God’s revelation in the “book of nature” to aid in interpreting Scripture.<sup>14</sup> What about Charles? Did he reject (or neglect) consulting these other sources?

### ***Not Reason ...***

Consider first the dismissal of reason in the hymn on Acts 24:14. Charles Wesley was surely not rejecting the use of logic in making sense of the Bible. A recently published list compiling his inventories of his personal library includes at least three handbooks of logic (by Aldrich, Richardson, and Sanderson<sup>15</sup>). For evidence that he drew upon these resources, one need only consult Wesley’s 1750 published sermon on *The Cause and Cure of Earthquakes*, which develops an extended case that Scripture portrays God as the sole cause of earthquakes.<sup>16</sup> One can disagree with Wesley’s reasoning on the topic, but cannot miss the frequent invocation of logic in his exposition and application of biblical materials.

<sup>12</sup>Hymn on Acts 24:14, st. 1, MS Acts, 475.

<sup>13</sup>*Sermons on Several Occasions*, Vol. 1 (1746), Preface, §5, *The Bicentennial Edition of The Works of John Wesley* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1984–) 1:104–5. Hereafter cited as JW, *Works*.

<sup>14</sup>See Randy L. Maddox, “The Rule of Christian Faith, Practice, and Hope: John Wesley on the Bible.” *Methodist Review* 3 (2011): 1–35; online: <http://www.methodistreview.org>.

<sup>15</sup>For this and subsequent references to Wesley’s catalogue lists of his library, see Randy L. Maddox, “Charles Wesley’s Personal Library, ca. 1765,” *Proceedings of the Charles Wesley Society* 14 (2010): 73–103.

<sup>16</sup>[Charles Wesley,] *The Cause and Cure of Earthquakes* (1750); reprinted in Kenneth G. C. Newport (ed.), *The Sermons of Charles Wesley* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 225–37.

Moving to a broader sense of appeal to reason, Wesley was not adverse to consulting the writings of pre-Christian historians, philosophers, and poets (who would not have had access to the special revelation found in the Bible<sup>17</sup>). He was introduced to their works during his study at Westminster and Oxford, where he was required to translate classic Greek and Latin writers into English. He retained in his personal library such figures as Aesop, Marcus Aurelius, Cicero, Epictetus, Homer, Juvenal, Cornelius Nepos, Ovid, Persius, Plutarch, Terrence, Virgil, and Xenophon. Echoes of several of these writers resound in hymns and poems that Wesley composed throughout his life.<sup>18</sup>

There is some reason to believe that Charles Wesley developed a particular interest and skill during his university years in rendering classical works into English verse, a skill which John Wesley turned to for translations of Latin verse in the opening section of his *Doctrine of Original Sin* (1757). While John does not identify the source of his translations, Henry Moore (who knew both brothers) attributes them to Charles.<sup>19</sup> If Moore had a manuscript in Charles's hand as evidence for this claim, it has not survived. Conversely, the published and manuscript verse that remains extant provides little evidence of Charles Wesley continuing to paraphrase or versify classical writings after 1738. Whatever his early interest, this was not a source that Wesley chose to mine throughout his life, like he did the Bible.

Overall, reason played a positive—but constrained—role in Wesley's interpretation and application of biblical teaching throughout his life. What he rejected in the hymn on Acts 24:14 was appeal to this "authority of man" as an *alternative to* (or adjudicator of the credibility of) God's special revelation in Scripture. In terms of the debates of his day, he rejected deists, who:

... sitting in the scorner's chair  
Cast all thine oracles away,  
Led by their own *sufficient* light  
To horrors of eternal night.<sup>20</sup>

### ***Or Tradition Vain ...***

The second alternative to the written word that Wesley rejected as a rule of life and faith in the hymn on Acts 24:14 is "tradition vain." Once again, broader consideration

<sup>17</sup>Some in Wesley's day assumed that such classic writers who affirmed truths shared with Christian teaching were drawing these from Jewish revelation or an earlier special revelation to Noah. I have found no indication of Wesley's stance on this supposed dependence.

<sup>18</sup>See Henry Bett, *The Hymns of Methodism in their Literary Relations* (London: Epworth, 1920), 136–43; and Frank Baker, *Representative Verse of Charles Wesley* (London: Epworth, 1962), xi–xiv, xxii–xxv.

<sup>19</sup>Henry Moore, *The Life of the Rev. John Wesley* (London: J. Kershaw, 1824–25), 2:368–69. Cf. the file in the online website of Charles's manuscript verse: "Translations of Latin Classics."

<sup>20</sup>"For the Arians, Socinians, Deists, Pelagians, etc.," st. 3, *Hymns of Intercession for all Mankind* (Bristol: Farley, 1758), 28.

makes clear that he was not intending to preclude consultation of Christian tradition entirely from theological reflection or spiritual discernment—just those traditions based solely on “the authority of man.”

In the first place, most Protestants balanced the affirmation of Scripture as the rule of faith with recognition of the value of a communally-shared sense of the central and unifying themes in Scripture, as an aid in interpreting particular passages. Specifically, they commended consulting the Apostles’ Creed when seeking to interpret Scripture correctly.<sup>21</sup> A key example of this stance in the Church of England was Bishop John Pearson’s *Exposition of the Creed* (1659). Pearson was recommended to the Wesley brothers by both of their parents and was the standard textbook on doctrine at Christ Church in Oxford.<sup>22</sup> A copy appears in Charles’s catalogue of his library, drawn up at about the same time that he was writing the hymn on Acts 24:14. One clear reflection of assuming the Apostles’ Creed in interpreting the Bible is unwavering affirmation of the triune nature of God—a stance exemplified in Wesley’s *Hymns on the Trinity* (1767).<sup>23</sup>

Going deeper, in the late seventeenth century the Church of England expelled from its ranks the puritans who championed stringent suspicion of tradition. The voices that defined the Church of England by the beginning of the eighteenth century placed significant authority in the precedent of the early church (the first three centuries) in matters of teaching and practice. The Wesley brothers inherited from their parents this *Anglican* appreciation for the primitive church. It was reinforced and deepened during their time at Oxford University.<sup>24</sup> It remains evident in Charles’s personal library, which included books by William Cave and Claude Fleury commending primitive Christianity as a model for the church.

During their studies at Oxford the Wesley brothers came under the influence of the non-jurors, a fragmentary branch of the eighteenth-century Church of England who placed particular emphasis on early Christian precedent, especially concerning liturgical practice. Both John and Charles adopted this emphatic stance for a time. It is evident, for example, in an opening paragraph of a manuscript essay that Charles wrote during his Oxford years defending the practice of weekly Eucharist.

When Christians began to depart from the pure word of God, the ground and pillar of the faith, and to deviate from that unerring rule of interpreting it, the tradition of the holy Catholic Church, and to set up human reason and private opinion

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<sup>21</sup>See the examples collected in Scott Jameson Jones, *John Wesley’s Conception and Use of Scripture* (Nashville: Kingswood Books, 1995), 45–53.

<sup>22</sup>For the parents’ recommendation, see Samuel Wesley, *Advice to a Young Clergyman* (London: C. Rivington & J. Roberts, [1735]), 46; and Susanna Wesley’s letter to John, Nov. 10, 1725 (JW, *Works*, 25:183). On its assignment at Christ Church, see *PWHS* 47 (1989): 33–35.

<sup>23</sup>See *Hymns on the Trinity* (Bristol: Pine, 1767) on the CSWT website. Wesley drew his arrangement and the choice of biblical passages from William Jones, *Catholic Doctrine of the Trinity, proved by above an Hundred Short and Clear Arguments* (Oxford: Sheldonian, 1756).

<sup>24</sup>See the opening sections of Geoffrey Wainwright, “‘Our Elder Brethren Join’: The Wesleys’ *Hymns on the Lord’s Supper* and the Patristic Revival in England,” *Proceedings of the Charles Wesley Society* 1 (1994): 5–31.

as the test and standard of the truth; from that time, I say, may we fairly date the beginning of innovation, the rise of error, and the introducing of corruption. That this is fact may be shown in a multitude of instances, but I choose to confine myself to that notable one of the holy sacrifice of the Eucharist.<sup>25</sup>

Charles goes on to charge both Rome and the Protestant reformers with departing from the primitive norm of weekly celebration of Eucharist, gathering a range of early Christian sources to demonstrate this as the original practice.

By the time they returned from Georgia, the Wesley brothers were distancing themselves from the non-jurors' rigid insistence on primitive precedent in liturgical matters. But they retained throughout their lives the assumption that the earliest Christian community modeled Christian life in its most pristine form. This conviction shines through in opening stanzas of Charles's hymn "Primitive Christianity," published in 1743:

1. Happy the souls who first believ'd,  
To Jesus, and each other cleav'd,  
Join'd by the unction from above,  
In mystic fellowship of love.
2. Meek, simple followers of the Lamb  
They liv'd, and spake, and thought the same;  
Brake the commemorative bread,  
And drank the Spirit of their head.
- ...
7. O what an age of golden days!  
O what a choice, peculiar race!  
Wash'd in the Lamb's all-cleansing blood,  
Anointed kings, and priests to God!<sup>26</sup>

This appreciation for the faithful model of Christian life in the early church runs throughout Wesley's writings on Scripture, as does his embrace of the classic Christian creeds.

***Not an Internal Light alone – Charles Wesley on Experience / the Spirit***

If appreciation of early Christian tradition was imbibed with his Anglican upbringing, another concern permeating Charles Wesley's mature work reflects pietist influences embraced as an adult. This embrace is epitomized in Wesley's experience of assurance of God's love on May 21, 1738—Pentecost Sunday. His preaching and verse compositions thereafter consistently stressed *experiencing* God's gracious work, as *mediated by the Holy Spirit*.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>25</sup>“And Upon the First Day of the Week,” in Newport, *Sermons*, 280–86; see p. 281.

<sup>26</sup>[Charles Wesley,] “Primitive Christianity,” in John Wesley's *An Earnest Appeal to Men of Reason and Religion* (2<sup>nd</sup> edn. Bristol: Farley, 1743), 52–55.

<sup>27</sup>See John Roger Tyson, “Charles Wesley and the Language of Evangelical Experience: The Poetical Hermeneutic Revisited,” *Asbury Theological Journal* 61.1 (2006): 25–46.

How did this new emphasis impact Wesley's understanding and use of Scripture? Its most foundational implication can be discerned in a hymn where Wesley affirms the role of the church, throughout its history, in handing down Scripture:

2. The Church that did from Christ proceed  
Whose many parts and members spread  
Throughout the Earth I see,  
Not one, but all in every age  
Have handed down the sacred page,  
And left it pure to me.
3. Not one particular alone  
The universal Church I own  
But all with one accord  
Churches diffus'd from east to west  
Conspire unanimous t' attest  
The heaven-descended word.<sup>28</sup>

Readers today, with our heightened awareness of text critical issues and debates over the canon, will balk at Wesley's affirmation of the purity and unanimity with which the biblical texts were passed down. But the more important thing to notice is that he proceeds in this hymn to insist that historical continuity is *not enough* to instill conviction of the truthfulness of Scripture:

4. The Fact historical is plain  
But standing on the words of man  
I am not satisfied,  
I want a more substantial ground,  
A Rock on which my faith to found  
Which always may abide.
5. What is that Rock, but Christ alone:  
O were He to my soul made known  
The Truth infallible,  
Son of the living God supream!  
The faith, the Church that's built on Him  
Defies the gates of hell.
6. His Spirit in these mysterious leaves  
Unerring testimony gives  
To Christ the Lord most high:  
O woud He take of Jesus blood,  
Blood of the true, eternal God,  
And to my heart apply!

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<sup>28</sup>“Before Reading the Scriptures,” st. 2–3, MS Prayer for Truth, 3–4.



Rather than supposedly objective criteria alone (like the historical transmission of its text), the mature Wesley ultimately grounded *assurance of the truthfulness of Scripture* in the testimony of the Holy Spirit.

This is not to suggest that Wesley viewed the testimony of the Spirit as an irrational act or a mere authoritarian stamp of approval. He recognized that conviction of truth is connected to understanding of the matter at hand. And (as will be shown below) he appreciated the role that careful study of the text, drawing on scholarly tools, brings to understanding. But Wesley's mature writings insist as well on the indispensable contribution of the Holy Spirit to this task of *understanding Scripture*, particularly in its saving sense. At times he could put this point sharply:

Proud learning boasts its skill in vain  
The sacred oracles t' explain,  
It may the literal surface shew,  
But not the precious mine below;  
The saving sense remains conceal'd,  
'Till by the Spirit of faith reveal'd,  
The book is still unread, unknown,  
And open'd by the Lamb alone.<sup>29</sup>

More typical, he routinely encouraged those preparing to study Scripture to pray for the Spirit's presence and aid in this endeavor:

Come, Holy Ghost, (for, mov'd by thee,  
Thy prophets wrote and spoke:)  
Unlock the truth, thyself the key,  
Unseal the sacred book.<sup>30</sup>

If Wesley's mature writings affirm dependence upon the Spirit in understanding biblical texts, they place even more stress on the Spirit's role in enabling *personal embrace* of the saving truth in Scripture. He avoids any suggestion that humans inevitably adopt and practice what they have been taught is right. He was convinced that the incapacity of our fallen nature runs deeper than this, affecting every dimension of our being. One might grasp even the spiritual meaning of Scripture and still lack the inclination and power (in eighteenth-century terms, the "virtue") to live accordingly. Thus Wesley can insist:

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<sup>29</sup>Hymn on Isaiah 29:11, *Scripture Hymns* (1762), 1:324. Similar is the hymn on Luke 24:45, MS Luke, 361.

<sup>30</sup>"Before Reading the Scriptures," st. 2, *HSP* (1740), 42–43. See similar in the hymn on Acts 20:32, st. 3, *Scripture Hymns* (1762), 2:275; hymn on 2 Timothy 3:16, st. 1, *Scripture Hymns* (1762), 2:337; and hymn on Rev. 1:3, *Scripture Hymns* (1762) 2:412.

Thy word in the bare *literal* sense,  
 Though heard ten thousand times, and read,  
 Can never of itself dispense  
 The saving power which wakes the dead;  
 The meaning *spiritual* and true  
 The learned expositor may give,  
 But cannot give the virtue too,  
 Or bid his own dead spirit live.

But breathing in the sacred leaves  
 If on the soul thy Spirit move,  
 The re-begotten soul receives  
 The quickning power of faith and love;  
 Transmitted thro' the gospel-word  
 Whene'er the Holy Ghost is given,  
 The sinner hears, and feels restor'd  
 The life of holiness and heaven.<sup>31</sup>

Notice the insistence in this hymn on sinners not only hearing but *feeling* the Spirit's work. Wesley was aware that many of his fellow Anglicans were uncomfortable with this pietist theme. But from 1738 onward, he held his ground firmly:

It nothing helps them to say, "We do not deny the *assistance* of God's Spirit, but only this *inspiration*, ...this *feeling* of the Spirit, this being *moved* by the Spirit, or *filled* with it, which we deny to have any place in sound religion." But in "only" denying this you deny the whole Scriptures, the whole truth and promise and testimony of God.<sup>32</sup>

To summarize, Wesley's newly appropriated emphasis on experiencing the Holy Spirit's movement in Christian life was connected directly in his mature writings to the possibility of understanding, believing, and personally embracing biblical revelation. This makes all the more important the rejection, in his hymn on Acts 24:14, of "the internal light *alone*." Once again, Wesley was distancing himself from an extreme position—a stance that champions the authority of an inward sense of the Spirit's leading in direct contrast to the authority of the written text of Scripture (a position that many ascribed to the Quakers in Wesley's day). As Wesley expressed his alternative conviction:

Doctrines, experiences to try,  
 We to the sacred standard fly,  
 Assur'd the Spirit of our Lord  
 Can never contradict his word:

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<sup>31</sup>Hymn on John 6:63, *Scripture Hymns* (1762), 2:249.

<sup>32</sup>Charles Wesley, *Awake, Thou that Sleepest*, III.8, Newport, *Sermons*, 222.

Whate'er his Spirit speaks in me,  
 Must with the written word agree;  
 If not: I cast it all aside,  
 As Satan's voice, or nature's pride.<sup>33</sup>

Attunement to the voice and movement of the Spirit was vital, but always in conference with God's revelation in Christ and Scripture.

### ***The (largely) Missing "Book of Nature"***

Charles Wesley's practice of engaging Scripture in conversation with reason, tradition, and spiritual experience is fairly similar to the balance found in his brother John. But John joined many contemporary Anglicans in also prizing the study of God's revelation in the natural world (the "book of nature") alongside study of Scripture. Thus, in the midst of publishing *Explanatory Notes* upon the New Testament (1755) and the Old Testament (1765) for his followers, John Wesley took time to provide them as well with his *Survey of the Wisdom of God in Creation* (first edn., 1763). His main goal in this (eventually five-volume) work was to strengthen the faith awakened by Scripture and deepen readers' appreciation of God's power, wisdom, and goodness. But his consultation with current studies of the natural world also helped John to rethink some of his understandings of Scripture.<sup>34</sup>

The inventory of Charles Wesley's library reflects far less interest than his brother in current studies of the natural world.<sup>35</sup> The theme of God's revelation in and through the natural world is also less prominent in Charles's verse.<sup>36</sup> The most common examples are his poetic rendering of psalms on this theme, like his first stanza in the rendering of Psalm 19:

Our Souls the Book of Nature draws  
 T' adore the First Eternal Cause,  
 The Heavens Articulately shine,  
 And speak their Architect Divine,  
 And all their Orbs proclaim aloud  
 The Wisdom and the Power of GOD.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>33</sup>Hymn on Isaiah 8:20, st. 1, *Scripture Hymns* (1762), 1:310.

<sup>34</sup>For more on this larger Anglican tendency and John Wesley's example, see Randy L. Maddox, "John Wesley's Precedent for Theological Engagement with the Natural Sciences," *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 44.1 (Spring 2009): 23–54; esp. pp. 38–39.

<sup>35</sup>There are a couple of texts in classic physics (Caspar Bartholin and an abridgment of Isaac Newton), but little evidence of the current explosion in study of the natural world and its implications for natural theology (mainly two works by John Cook).

<sup>36</sup>This point is developed (with contrast to John Bunyan and Isaac Watts) in William Jordan Doggett, "Bright and Beautiful: Images of Nature in English-Language Hymns and Hymnals for Children" (Graduate Theological Union [Berkeley] Ph.D. thesis, 2005), 46–54. See also Brian Beck, "Rattenbury Revisited: The Theology of Charles Wesley's Hymns," *Epworth Review* 26.2 (1999): 71–81, esp. pp. 78–79.

<sup>37</sup>For the entire psalm see MS Psalms, 38–42.

Only on rare occasion does the emphasis that God, the author of creation, can shine through nature as well as through grace emerge in Charles's other verse.<sup>38</sup> This is not to say that he joined the more strident Protestant voices among the Dissenters of his day in contending that nature, in its current fallen state, could reveal nothing of God. But Charles Wesley was certainly less likely than Richard Baxter, a moderate Dissenter, to suggest that if one's Bible and other books were taken away there would still be adequate resource to know God because:

The world's thy Book. There I can read  
Thy Power, Wisdom, and thy Love;  
And thence ascend by Faith, and feed  
Upon the better things above.<sup>39</sup>

For Charles, the Bible remained the indispensable site to mine in seeking truth about God.

### ***Abiding Focus on "Matters of Faith and Practice"***

Whatever the detriments of Charles Wesley's relative neglect of the book of nature, it had at least one benefit—it insulated him from the ill-fated efforts of some of his contemporaries to demonstrate the full concord between scriptural accounts of creation, the flood, and so on with current models of physics. While Wesley had one such "concordist" book in his library (Thomas Burnet's *Theory of the Earth*, 1690), there are few echoes of this agenda in his writings. Instead, following the lead of 2 Timothy 3:16–17, Wesley's appeals to Scripture focus on its import for matters of Christian faithfulness and holy living. As he framed it in his fifth stanza of a hymn on that passage:

The secret lessons of thy grace,  
Transmitted thro' the word, repeat,  
To train us up in all thy ways,  
To make us in thy will compleat,  
Fulfil thy love's redeeming plan,  
And bring us to a perfect man.<sup>40</sup>

Or return to Wesley's hymn on John 21:25, quoted to open this section about Wesley's focus on Scripture as the source for seeking God's truth, this time adding the second half of the hymn.

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<sup>38</sup>The best example is Hymn 28, *Hymns of Petition and Thanksgiving for the Promise of the Father* (Bristol: Farley, 1746), 31–32.

<sup>39</sup>Richard Baxter, "The Resolution," §4, in *Poetical Fragments* (London: B. Simmons, 1681), 54.

<sup>40</sup>See hymn on 2 Timothy 3:16–17, *Scripture Hymns* (1762), 2:337–38. For other allusions to this passage, see Hymn #144, st. 3, *HSP* (1749), 2:226; hymn on Isaiah 8:20, st. 2, *Scripture Hymns* (1762), 1:310; and hymn on Acts 24:14, *MS Acts*, 475–76.

Amen! we thus our seal set to,  
 Our faith's entire assent subjoin,  
 That all and every word is true,  
 Inspir'd, infallible, divine:  
 That all doth perfectly suffice  
 T' obtain the end for which 'tis given,  
 Able thro' faith to make us wise,  
 And fit us for our thrones in heaven.<sup>41</sup>

## WESLEY'S TOOLS FOR MINING THE BIBLE

Having established the centrality of mining the Bible for Wesley, his deep reliance upon the Spirit in this endeavor, and the focus of the truth that he sought, what do we know about the tools he used to engage this task?

As a devoted Anglican, Wesley read and cited regularly the currently authorized English translation of the Bible, known popularly as the King James Version (1611). But Wesley did not confine himself to this version. When he cited from the book of Psalms, for example, he almost always used the translation of the psalter (by Miles Coverdale) that was part of the *Book of Common Prayer*. His library also included Coverdale's translation of the New Testament, from the first English version of the Bible authorized for the Church of England by Henry VIII in 1539 (often called the "Great Bible"). Moreover, Wesley owned an English rendering of Theodore Beza's translation of the New Testament into German (in 1556), along with a German New Testament and the Geneva Bible (1560) in French.

Ultimately, Charles Wesley valued the original Hebrew and Greek texts of the Bible over any translation. Within his library were a Hebrew Testament, two Hebrew psalters, a copy of the Septuagint (the Old Testament in Greek), and four different Greek New Testaments.<sup>42</sup> It is clear that he turned to these when producing items like his *Short Hymns on Select Passages of the Holy Scriptures* (1762), because he frequently substitutes his own English translation, to reflect more closely the Hebrew or Greek.<sup>43</sup>

For help reading the Scripture in these various languages, Wesley's library was stocked with standard texts on Greek and Hebrew grammar (like Busby and Buxtorf). He also owned several commentaries, and a recent study of early Christian customs (by Fleury). Thus, while his library was relatively modest in size, it included the major tools necessary for mining Scripture.

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<sup>41</sup>Hymn on John 21:25, MS John, 467.

<sup>42</sup>See Maddox, "Charles Wesley's Personal Library," 77–78.

<sup>43</sup>The first such appeal to original languages is in *Scripture Hymns* (1762), 1:14 (on Genesis 4:7). Cf. Kimbrough, "Charles Wesley's Lyrical Commentary," 176–81.

## THE SCOPE OF WESLEY'S MINING IN THE BIBLE

When Wesley engaged in mining the Bible, utilizing these various tools, how broadly did he explore?

### *Focused on the "Protestant" Canon*

The first point to note is his conservative stance within Anglicanism concerning the canon. Throughout Wesley's life the King James Version included the sixteen books commonly called the "Apocrypha," placed in a separate section. Article VI of the Anglican Articles of Religion affirmed these works as worthy to read "for example of life and instruction of manners," though not as authorities for doctrine. Wesley's father specifically encouraged reading the apocryphal books as aids for understanding the more authoritative books in the canon.<sup>44</sup> As such, it is not surprising to find scattered allusions to the Apocrypha in Wesley's hymns.<sup>45</sup> But there is no evidence of him writing a full hymn on a text from the Apocrypha.<sup>46</sup> Likewise, we have no record of Wesley preaching on a text from an apocryphal books, and no clear examples of citing these books in his sermons.<sup>47</sup> In other words, Charles Wesley generally restricted his mining of Scripture to the shorter "Protestant" canon.

### *Commending and Engaging the Whole Protestant Canon*

At the same time, Wesley encouraged by both exhortation and example engaging the *whole* of the Protestant canon. This entailed, in particular, challenging the tendency of many Christians to dismiss the Old Testament, either explicitly or by simple neglect.

Wesley's specific commendation of the Old Testament in the early months of the revival was generally Lutheran in tone, focused on the role of the law in awakening sinners to their need of forgiveness. For example, after preaching in June 1740, he observed in his journal, "I am more and more persuaded that the law has its use, and Moses must bring us to Christ. The promises to the unawakened are pearls before swine. First the hammer must break the rocks, then we *may* preach Christ crucified."<sup>48</sup>

But Wesley's concern soon grew to include challenging any suggestion that the emphasis on grace and forgiveness in the New Testament should be posed

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<sup>44</sup>Samuel Wesley, *Advice*, 29–30.

<sup>45</sup>See James H. Charlesworth, "The Wesleys and the Canon: an Unperceived Openness," *Proceedings of the Charles Wesley Society* 3 (1996): 63–88 (81–87 on Charles).

<sup>46</sup>See the "Scriptural Index to the Poetry of Charles Wesley," in S T Kimbrough Jr., *The Lyrical Theology of Charles Wesley: A Reader* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2011), 296–339.

<sup>47</sup>Newport, *Sermons*, includes two sermons citing Ben Sirach (Ecclesiasticus); but the sermon on Mark 12:30 (citing Ben Sirach on pp. 353–54) was written by John Wesley and copied by Charles, while the sermon on Luke 16:10 (citing Ben Sirach on p. 293) cannot be confirmed as written by Charles as we have no manuscript copy or other evidence of provenance.

<sup>48</sup>S T Kimbrough Jr. & Kenneth G. C. Newport (eds.), *The Manuscript Journal of the Reverend Charles Wesley* (Nashville: Kingswood, 2007), 264.

against emphasis on Christian faithfulness to God’s ways—as embodied in Old Testament law and echoed in New Testament writers like James. This challenge found particular expression in growing tensions between the Moravian and Methodist wings of the revival, as captured in an excerpt from a letter Wesley wrote to the Methodist society in Grimsby, Lincolnshire, in April 1743:

I do not fear your listening to the other gospel (preached by poor Mr. Parker and his German<sup>49</sup> friends) till you listen to flesh and blood, and cast off the yoke of Christ and all the Scriptures. All the Scriptures are point blank against them. And therefore they are wise in refusing to stand by the law and the testimony [Isa. 8:20]. They have cast out St. James from the canon. They all reject the whole Old Testament, and most of the New. Nay, some of them have said they saw no occasion for any more than the Epistle to the Romans. Now shall we give up them or the word of God? ... Let all Scripture (seeing all is given by inspiration of God) be *equally* dear to you, but at present you should more especially study what is more especially wanted by you. Read again and again the Epistle of St. James—of stillness. If any among you have even drunk the deadly thing, St. James will help them to an antidote. Should any deny the glorious liberty of the sons of God (liberty from all sin, liberty to fulfil the whole law), St. John’s epistles will confirm you in the hope of the gospel.<sup>50</sup>

Like his brother John, Charles Wesley considered the deepest blessing of the New Covenant to be liberty (through the indwelling Spirit) *to embrace* God’s life-giving ways embodied in the law, rather than liberty *from* the law. Like Christ (in Matthew 22:40), Charles Wesley distilled “the law and the prophets” to the two-fold command of love:

The two commands are one:  
 Ah, give me Lord, to prove  
 Who loves his God alone  
 He must his neighbour love,  
 And what thine oracles enjoin,  
 Is all summ’d up in love divine.<sup>51</sup>

Reflecting this conviction of the unified message of Scripture, Charles Wesley modeled engaging both Testaments in his various leadership roles within the Methodist revival. His first day assuming preaching responsibilities in Bristol (August 31, 1739) is characteristic; he preached on Isaiah in the first service and Matthew at two other gatherings.<sup>52</sup> Surviving records of the biblical texts for Charles’s sermons through his life are much less extensive than those for his

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<sup>49</sup>At this stage Wesley consistently referred to the Moravians as “the Germans.”

<sup>50</sup>Charles Wesley, manuscript letter to the Grimsby Society and William and Elizabeth Blow (MARC, DDCW 6/32). I have expanded abbreviations and modernized punctuation.

<sup>51</sup>Hymn on Matt. 22:40, *Scripture Hymns* (1762), 2:181.

<sup>52</sup>Kimbrough & Newport, *Manuscript Journal*, 192.

brother John.<sup>53</sup> But these limited resources reveal a similar concern to preach across the canon, documenting Charles preaching on texts from two-thirds of the books in the Bible.<sup>54</sup>

The best indicator of Charles Wesley's valuation of the *whole* Bible is his religious verse. A significant portion of his poetry and hymns are paraphrases of scriptures, particularly the Psalms. An even larger set are spiritual or pastoral reflections spawned by meditation on specific texts. This genre is epitomized in the two volumes of *Scripture Hymns* (1762), which contain over 2300 hymns, written on texts from every book in the Protestant canon—with nearly two-thirds devoted to Old Testament texts.

### ***Favoring Some Veins within the Mine***

While Charles Wesley affirmed and valued the entire Protestant canon, he was drawn to some favorite veins in this mine. Like other interpreters, he had a “working canon” of books and passages that he considered most expressive of the central themes in Scripture. I have argued elsewhere that the first Epistle of John was particularly prominent in John Wesley's working canon, as evidenced by his preaching.<sup>55</sup> The excerpt cited earlier from the letter to the Methodists in Grimsby makes clear that Charles Wesley also valued John's epistles. But perusal the register of Charles's preaching indicates that his favorite veins lay elsewhere.

There are over 1350 occasions where we can identify with some confidence the text on which Charles Wesley preached. Of these occasions, the book on which he preached most often was Isaiah (about 210 times, or 15% of the total)! This is followed in frequency by the Gospel of John (about 180 times), Luke (about 170 times), Matthew (about 140 times), Acts of the Apostles (about 85 times), and the book of Revelation (about 65 times).

The prominence of Isaiah is due in part to Wesley preaching a series on that book several times in his early ministry (beginning that first day in Bristol). But Isaiah remains prominent when one turns attention from overall citations of a book to favored passages for individual sermons. We can document Wesley's use of most biblical passages only a few times during his life. There are eight passages, however, that the surviving records show Wesley using as his text at least twenty times each. In canonical order, these include: Isaiah 35, Isaiah 55:1, Lamentations 1:12, Matthew 11:28–30, Luke 14:15–24, Luke 15:11–32, John 1:29, and 1 John 3:14.

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<sup>53</sup>The most extensive records for Charles are limited to 1738–51, with intermittent glimpses elsewhere. A much larger set of records make possible an extended register of John Wesley's preaching, which is available on the CSWT website: <http://divinity.duke.edu/initiatives-centers/cswt/research-resources/register>.

<sup>54</sup>See the register of Charles Wesley's preaching on the CSWT website: <http://divinity.duke.edu/initiatives-centers/cswt/research-resources/cw-register>.

<sup>55</sup>See Maddox, “Rule of Christian Faith,” 27–30.



Interestingly, we have a surviving manuscript sermon for only one of these texts, 1 John 3:14.<sup>56</sup> Wesley's preaching on this text occurred mainly in the first year of the revival, when he still relied on a written manuscript. Later sermons were increasingly preached without even a set of notes.<sup>57</sup> Fortunately, this does not mean that we have little idea what Wesley emphasized in these other sermons, because he published hymns on all but one of the other texts around the same time that it became prominent in his preaching.<sup>58</sup> The emphases in these hymns surely echo aspects of his oral sermons.

### ***With Particular Attention to "Christ Crucified"***

The most surprising passage among the list of favored sermon texts for Charles Wesley might be Lamentations 1:12, particularly since there is no evidence that John Wesley ever preached on this text. What it reflects is Charles's growing practice of gathering his hearers around the cross to gaze upon the suffering Christ.<sup>59</sup>

From early in the Methodist revival Charles Wesley presented Christ's crucifixion as a display of God's love for sinners.<sup>60</sup> In late August 1741, he began to elaborate this point by preaching on Christ's seven last cries on the cross, as recorded in the gospels.<sup>61</sup> While the sermon (or series) does not survive, Wesley again composed a set of hymns on these cries about the same time.<sup>62</sup> Although it does not appear in any gospel, tradition had long put in Christ's mouth one more cry of Christ from the cross, as the capstone to the others—Lamentations 1:12, "Behold and see; is it nothing to you, O, all ye that pass by? Is there any sorrow like unto my sorrow?"<sup>63</sup> By the mid-1740s this text had assumed the same role for Wesley: "[I] set before their eyes Christ crucified, and crying from the cross, 'Is it nothing to you?'"<sup>64</sup> The numerous instances of this passage as his text were some version of preaching on "Christ crucified." The passage also echoes in his best known contemporaneous hymns on the crucifixion.<sup>65</sup>

<sup>56</sup>See Newport, *Sermons*, 130–51.

<sup>57</sup>See his stress of this practice already in Kimbrough & Newport, *Manuscript Journal*, Feb. 11, 1739 (p. 169).

<sup>58</sup>For Isaiah 35, see *HSP* (1740), 107–10; for Isaiah 55:1, see *HSP* (1740), 1–6; for Lamentations 1:12, see *HSP* (1742), 22–24; for Matthew 11:28–30, see *HSP* (1742), 91–92; for Luke 14:15–24, see *Hymns for Those that seek and Those that have Redemption in the Blood of Christ* (London: Strahan, 1747), 63–66; and for John 1:29, see *HSP* (1742), 27–28.

<sup>59</sup>For extended reflections, see Joanna Cruickshank, *Pain, Passion, and Faith: Revisiting the Place of Charles Wesley in Early Methodism* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow, 2009).

<sup>60</sup>See, for example, Kimbrough & Newport, *Manuscript Journal*, April 8, 1740 (p. 238), and April 13, 1741 (p. 298).

<sup>61</sup>See *ibid.*, August 29, 1741 (p. 328), and September 3–6, 1741 (p. 330).

<sup>62</sup>The earliest version of these hymns can be found in MS Thirty, 159, 188–96. They also appear in MS Shent, 47–50; and MS Richmond, 38–46. Wesley did not choose to publish them.

<sup>63</sup>For an example familiar to Wesley, see Richard Baxter, *The Saints' Everlasting Rest* (London: Underhill & Tyton, 1650), 76.

<sup>64</sup>Kimbrough & Newport, *Manuscript Journal*, November 28, 1746 (p. 483). The same conjunction appears in a journal letter on June 20, 1746 (MARC, DDCW 6/12).

<sup>65</sup>In addition to *HSP* (1742), 22–24; see "O Love Divine" on pp. 26–27; and "On the Crucifixion," *Hymns on the Great Festivals, and other Occasions* (London: for M. Cooper, 1746), 8–10.

To be sure, Wesley preached “Christ crucified” from other texts as well. Part of his attraction to Isaiah was the ease of rendering it in these terms. Consider his sermon on November 14, 1740, “I preached Christ from, ‘Who is this that cometh from Edom with dyed garments?’ etc. [Isa. 63:1]. He was evidently set forth before our eyes as crucified.”<sup>66</sup> More broadly, on January 24, 1748 he “preached Christ crucified ... from ‘They shall look upon me, whom they have pierced, and mourn,’ [Zech. 12:10].”<sup>67</sup> And in April 1750 he set Christ as crucified before a morning congregation from John 19:30, “It is finished.” Characteristically, he followed up that evening with an exhortation from Lamentations 1:12!<sup>68</sup>

## **EVOLVING PRACTICES IN WESLEY’S MINING OF THE BIBLE**

This final section traces some variations in Wesley’s characteristic practices of mining the Bible in his preaching and his scriptural verse. The variations reflect, in part, Wesley’s transition from (1) a novice Anglican priest, to (2) an eager new preacher in the evangelical revival, to (3) a seasoned preacher in the Wesleyan branch of the revival, to (4) the increasingly worried preserver of Wesleyan Methodism’s connection to the Church of England.

### ***Practices in Preaching***

Consider first Wesley’s use of the Bible in preaching. Like most of their peers, neither Wesley brother was an “expository preacher,” if that label denotes preachers who devote sermons to detailed examination of specific passages of Scripture. The texts that Charles and John cite for their sermons usually provide only the general topic to be discussed, and often disappear in the discourse. But this is not because they turn to sources outside of Scripture. Their surviving sermons are replete with biblical quotation and allusion, often stringing together snippets from a wide range of passages.<sup>69</sup> They were generally more concerned to draw on Scripture as a whole in developing their topic than to expound upon a single text.

This concern remained constant in Charles Wesley’s preaching over the course of his ministry. The changes evident in his practices of engaging the Bible concern how he selected the texts/topics on which to preach.

### **From Borrowing Sermons and Expounding the Lesson**

Charles’s decision to accept ordination and join his brother in the trip to Georgia was rushed. He had seldom filled the pulpit prior to this. With John’s help, Charles crafted a couple of full-scale sermons during the voyage over (including a delay at the Isle of Wight). But he also copied several of John’s

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<sup>66</sup>Kimbrough & Newport, *Manuscript Journal*, 287.

<sup>67</sup>Ibid, 516–17.

<sup>68</sup>Charles Wesley letter to Sarah Wesley, April 5, 1760 (MARC, DDCW 7/2).

<sup>69</sup>A good example is Charles’s published sermon *Awake, Thou that Sleepest*, in Newport, *Sermons*, 213–24.

sermon manuscripts, and preached these repeatedly over the next couple of years.<sup>70</sup>

The practice of new priests using sermons by others was common, continuing a historic function of the *Homilies* in the Church of England. The other historic guideline for Anglican priests was to read (and, ideally, expound upon) the assigned lessons at morning and evening prayer. Charles took up this responsibility on his arrival at Frederica, Georgia in March 1736: “At ten this morning I began the full service to about a dozen women whom I had got together, intending to continue it and only to read a few prayers to the men before they went to work. I also expounded the second lesson with some boldness, as I had a few times before.”<sup>71</sup> For various reasons, Charles’s role in Frederica as secretary to James Oglethorpe and parish priest did not go well. By May it became necessary to change places with his brother John in Savannah, where “the hardest duty imposed on me was the expounding the lesson morning and evening to one hundred hearers. I was surprised at my own confidence, and acknowledged it not my own.”<sup>72</sup> The change in location did little to improve Charles’s health or decrease his sense that he was ill-fitted for his assignment. On July 25, 1736 he resigned his role as secretary to James Oglethorpe and began the journey back to England.

Wesley returned to England sick, with neither ability nor interest in a parish assignment. As his health improved, he accepted a few opportunities in the second half of 1737 to fill the pulpit in parish churches around London on Sundays. A crafted sermon was expected on such occasions and Charles largely relied upon manuscripts copied from John.

### **To Consulting the Oracle**

In December 1737 Charles Wesley’s health declined again. During his convalescence he became increasingly close to some Moravian-influenced friends, including Peter Böhler, who helped facilitate his “evangelical Pentecost” on May 21, 1738. When Wesley began accepting invitations to fill parish pulpits in the London area again, about a month later, he used this as an opportunity to champion his new evangelical views—by preaching brother John’s published sermon *Salvation by Faith*, or his own newly drafted sermon “The Three-fold State” (on 1 John 3:14).<sup>73</sup> While some pastors and parishes (like George Stonehouse in Islington) welcomed this new message, many others chose not to invite Wesley back. Over the next year his preaching increasingly moved out of parish churches into prison chapels, private homes, society meetings, and eventually onto the streets!

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<sup>70</sup>The two sermons written during the voyage are available in Newport, *Sermons*, 95–122. For sermons copied from John, see Newport, *Sermons*, 298–390. The online register compiles the instances of using these sermons from John.

<sup>71</sup>Kimbrough & Newport, *Manuscript Journal*, March 11, 1736 (p. 2).

<sup>72</sup>Ibid, May 19, 1736 (p. 34).

<sup>73</sup>See Newport, *Sermons*, 130–51.

Wesley's preaching also moved away from the written manuscript during this period! He recorded one of the first instances (October 20, 1738) in his journal:

Seeing so few present at St Antholin's, I thought of preaching extempore. Afraid, yet ventured on the promise, "Lo, I am with you always" [Matt. 28:20], and spake on justification from Rom. 3 for three-quarters of an hour without hesitation. Glory be to God, who keepeth his promise for ever.<sup>74</sup>

An even more striking change in the role of Scripture in Charles Wesley's practice of preaching emerged in early 1740. He described the first instance in a journal letter to John:

Sunday, March 30. I was greatly distracted by an unusual unnecessary premeditating what to preach upon. My late discourses had worked different effects. Some were wounded, some hardened and scandalized above measure. I hear of no neuters. The word has turned them upside down. In the pulpit, I opened the book and found the place where it was written, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor, etc." [Luke 4:18]. I explained our Lord's prophetic office and described the persons on whom alone he could perform it. I found as did others that he owned me.<sup>75</sup>

It was soon common for Charles to turn to Scripture not just as the repository of his text, but as the oracle directing him to a text. Consider a single day in 1741:

Friday, April 24. Spoke to the colliers from the first scripture that presented, Isa. 50:7 ... Rode quickly to Mr Hooper's. Here I had resort to the oracle, which gives clear and unambiguous answers to all that consult it. The first word that struck me was Job 30:1. ... The usual congregation came to the room at six .... I left God to choose me a text and opened the book where it is written, "And now I beseech thee, let the power of my Lord be great according as thou hast spoken" [Num. 14:17].<sup>76</sup>

This spontaneous dependence upon Scripture (or the Spirit) is quite a pendulum swing from Wesley's initial routinized practice of expounding the assigned lesson!<sup>77</sup>

### **To a Standard Stock of Sermons**

As he settled into the role of a traveling preacher in the Methodist revival, Wesley's preaching took on a routinization of its own. Perusal of the register of his preaching through the later 1740s and early 1750s reveals a fairly standard stock of sermons texts, which are repeated at the various stops in his journey. If he was simply opening his Bible to a text, then his Bible had some well-worn creases! More importantly, it fell open to a set of texts that balanced emphasis on justification and assurance with texts of holiness and Christian hope.

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<sup>74</sup>Kimbrough & Newport, *Manuscript Journal*, 150.

<sup>75</sup>CW journal letter to JW, March 28–April 1, 1740 (MARC, MA 1977/503, Colman Collection, Box 5).

<sup>76</sup>CW journal letter to JW, April 14–25, 1741 (MARC, MA 1977/503, Colman Collection, Box 5).

<sup>77</sup>There are scattered instances of Wesley expounding the assigned lesson after this, but typically only when he has been invited to speak in a Church of England parish church.

### **While Championing Methodism’s General Connection to the Established Church**

Even when Wesley’s spontaneous practices in preaching were most pronounced, they were balanced by appreciation for routine practices of reading Scripture. He continued to attend morning and evening prayers, and encouraged the Methodist faithful to do so. Thus, when Charles noted in a journal letter to John that he had met the Methodist bands on Tuesday morning, July 22, 1740, instead of going to morning prayers at the church, he added “which, I mention to show my disapprovation of it, but it could not be helped.”<sup>78</sup>

Over the years Charles became increasingly concerned that the Methodist societies were drawing away from the Church of England.<sup>79</sup> As one means of countering this drift, after he married and stopped regular travel, Charles increasingly insisted on preaching both services on Sunday at the main Wesleyan chapels in either Bristol or London (depending on his residency). He thought it was important in general for an ordained priest to exercise such a leadership role over the lay preachers, and worried in particular that the lay preachers often spoke disrespectfully of the established church.<sup>80</sup> On the other hand, Charles’s example in the pulpit was itself mixed. He followed the order of service in the *Book of Common Prayer*, including reading the assigned scriptural lessons, but freely added extemporaneous prayer and hymns. More relevant to the current focus, the few records that survive from Wesley’s later years show little concern to use the assigned lesson as the text for his sermon.<sup>81</sup>

### ***Practices in His Scriptural Verse***

Some noteworthy transitions in practice can also be discerned in the verse that Wesley devoted specifically to biblical texts, particularly when viewed within his larger context.

Through the mid eighteenth century both the established Church and most Dissenting traditions in England largely restricted use of verse in public worship to reading or singing the biblical psalter in English metrical translations. The *Book of Common Prayer* contained only a few other items versified for worship.<sup>82</sup> A broader range of hymns were allowed in private devotion, but even here influential exemplars restricted themselves to versifying parts of the Bible that were lyrical in origin and impulse, like the songs of Moses (Ex. 15, Deut. 32), the song

<sup>78</sup>CW journal letter to JW, July 19–August 2, 1740 (MARC, MA 1977/503, Colman Collection, Box 5).

<sup>79</sup>This concern is developed in Gareth Lloyd, *Charles Wesley and the Struggle for Methodist Identity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007).

<sup>80</sup>See the letter CW wrote to JW on June 16, 1779, responding to protest that some preachers had raised to his practice, in *Arminian Magazine* 12 (1789): 441–42.

<sup>81</sup>The most extended records are from the “Bristol Diarist” in late 1764 and early 1765, which are detailed in the online register.

<sup>82</sup>The Veni Creator, the Te Deum, the Benedicite, the Benedictus, the Magnificat, the Nunc Dimittis, the Quincunque Vult, Lamentations, and the Lord’s Prayer

of Deborah and Barak (Jud. 5), the song of Hannah (1 Sam. 2), the ten canticles of the Song of Songs, and so on. Isaac Watts emerged as the master of such poetic paraphrase of biblical texts in Dissenting circles, pushing the limits of this constraint at times. But concern was quickly voiced when hymns moved much beyond paraphrasing Scripture, portraying this as a privileging of (fallen) human creativity over divinely inspired text.<sup>83</sup>

This preference for paraphrasing Scripture was surely instilled in Charles Wesley early in life. The stance of his father is clear in a letter that Samuel Sr. sent to Samuel Jr. in August 1706: “Rob not yourself of so much pleasure and profit as you will find in your translations of the Bible into verse, and Sunday exercises of the same nature, if you are but so happy as to reconcile fancy and devotion, which have too long been enemies.”<sup>84</sup>

During his time in Georgia and his convalescence after returning to England, however, Charles was exposed to a different type of hymnody by the Moravians. While informed by Scripture, Pietist hymns were less constrained to paraphrase specific texts. Appealing to the precedent of the “new song” of the Lamb (Rev. 14:3), they penned creative verse attesting to and giving thanks for God’s transforming work in their lives. As a pastoral renewal movement, they crafted hymns to help others acknowledge their need of God’s grace and lead them towards personal appropriation of this grace.<sup>85</sup>

### **Initial Mix of Traditional Anglican and Pietist Sensitivities**

One of the fruits of Charles Wesley’s personal Pentecost in 1738 was the breaking forth of what would remain through his life a prolific stream of religious verse. For the first few years this stream reflected a mix of traditional Anglican and pietist sensitivities. Consider, for example, the hymns that can be traced with some confidence to Charles in John Wesley’s 1739 collection of *Hymns and Sacred Poems*. Three are poetic paraphrases of biblical texts that are lyrical in nature: The 53<sup>rd</sup> Chapter of Isaiah (pp. 87–90); the Magnificat, i.e., Luke 1:46–55 (pp. 134–35); and Isaiah 51:9 (pp. 222–23). But nine others that are titled by a scriptural text are more evangelical/pietist in nature, elaborating a soteriological theme suggested by the text.<sup>86</sup> An excerpt of his hymn on John 16:24 (“Ask, and ye shall receive, that your joy may be full”) is representative:

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<sup>83</sup>See Richard Arnold, *The English Hymn: Studies in a Genre* (New York: Peter Lang, 1995), 1–63; and J. Richard Watson, *The English Hymn: A Critical and Historical Study* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1997).

<sup>84</sup>George J. Stevenson, *Memorials of the Wesley Family* (London: S. W. Partridge, 1876), 99.

<sup>85</sup>See Steffan Arndal, “Spiritual Revival and Hymnody: The Hymnbooks of German Pietism and Moravianism,” *Brethren Life and Thought* 40 (1995): 71–93.

<sup>86</sup>*HSP* (1739) – John 15:18–19 (pp. 24–26), Hebrews 12:2 (pp. 91–92), Galatians 3:22 (pp. 92–94), Matthew 5:3 (pp. 97–99), Romans 4:5 (p. 105), Acts 1:4 (pp. 106–7), Acts 2:41ff (pp. 192–93), Acts 4:29 (pp. 202–3), and John 16:24 (pp. 219–21).

- 1 Rise my soul with ardor rise,  
 Breathe thy wishes to the skies;  
 Freely pour out all thy mind,  
 Seek, and thou art sure to find;  
 Ready art thou to receive?  
 Readier is thy God to give.  
 ...
- 6 Since the Son hath made me free,  
 Let me taste my liberty,  
 Thee behold with open face,  
 Triumph in thy saving grace,  
 Thy great will delight to prove,  
 Glory in thy perfect love.

A similar mix of Charles's paraphrases of biblical texts and more evangelical/pietist hymns on biblical texts appear in *HSP* (1740) and *HSP* (1742).

### Fading Practice of Paraphrase

Indeed, through much of the 1740s Charles Wesley appeared intent on continuing the practice of paraphrase, while expanding his crafting of free-ranging hymns. This is most evident in his effort to render the entire psalter into verse. The first evidence of this labor appeared in 1743, when John Wesley added thirty-seven paraphrased psalms by Charles to the second edition of *Collection of Psalms and Hymns* (1741). A second installment appeared in a notebook known as MS Fish, which contains paraphrases of forty-three additional psalms. The fullest expression of the project is Wesley's manuscript notebook known as MS Psalms, which incorporates all but one of the items in these two earlier sources and adds thirty-four other renditions of psalms in metrical verse. MS Psalms contains 113 items traceable to Charles Wesley, covering 109 of the psalms. It was bound together around 1749, leaving gaps in the notebook for verse on psalms that he had not yet taken up.<sup>87</sup> And then, Wesley laid the project aside, never to be completed.

Indeed, Wesley largely laid aside the practice of paraphrasing biblical texts by 1750. The last major set of paraphrases that he published are in *HSP* (1749), at the beginning of volume one, and these all have manuscript predecessors that trace to the mid-1740s.<sup>88</sup> Outside of that opening section, the hymns titled by biblical texts in the two volumes of *HSP* (1749) are mostly free-ranging in style. They reflect Charles's transition from primarily an Anglican priest to now dominantly an evangelist, spiritual guide, and practical/pastoral theologian of the Wesleyan movement. In other words, while the contrast is less clear in the first decade of the revival, by 1750 one can agree with J. Richard Watson that Charles Wesley

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<sup>87</sup>Wesley mentions his "new version of the psalms" in a letter to Sarah Gwynne Jr., January 3, 1749 (MARC, DDCW 5/12).

<sup>88</sup>See the paraphrases of Isaiah 26, 27:1–6, 44, 51, 61 & 62; and Matt. 5:3–12 in *HSP* (1749), 1:3–34.

rarely paraphrases, as Watts does; he is much more likely to apply the biblical text to some purpose that he has in mind, as an illustration of a point or as an example of a particular situation. His technique is that of a poet, but his practice is also that of a preacher, expounding a text rather than just reading or reproducing it. And as a good preacher can transform a text by an imaginative treatment of it ... Wesley's work does just this: it takes what is given from the Bible and "dissolves" it, transforms it into a part of human experience.<sup>89</sup>

### **Proclaiming the Drama of Salvation – in the Soul and in History**

As Watson goes on to note, Wesley was particularly concerned to relate biblical material creatively to the drama of personal salvation. An excellent example is his hymn "Wrestling Jacob," based on the account of Jacob wrestling with the messenger of God in Genesis 32; it shuns any attempt to paraphrase, providing instead an insightful "psycho-drama of the human soul ... the message of the evangelical revival."<sup>90</sup>

Wesley also related biblical material creatively to the drama of political and natural events. Through the 1740s and 1750s, as he helped shepherd the Methodist people, he was particularly prone to draw on apocalyptic-toned texts in Scripture to offer hope in the face of threatened wars and natural disasters. His general stance is captured in a journal letter entry when Charles had been called to London because his brother John was ill and expected to die.

Monday, December 3, 1753. I was at a loss for a subject at five when I opened the Revelation and with fear and trembling began to expound it. Our Lord was with us of a truth and comforted our hearts with the blessed hope of his coming to reign before his antients gloriously. Martin Luther in a time of trouble used to say, "Come, let us sing the 46 Psalm." I would rather say, "Let us read the Revelation of Jesus Christ." What is any private or public loss or calamity, what are all the advantages Satan ever gained or shall gain over particular men or churches, when all things good and evil, Christ's power and antichrist's, conspire to hasten the grand event, to fulfil the mystery of God, and make all the kingdoms of the earth become the kingdoms of Christ.<sup>91</sup>

Charles's interest in apocalyptic material is reflected in the catalogue of his library, which contains three commentaries on Revelation (by Bengel, Daubuz, and Mede). His specific affinity with emphasis on the impending return of Christ is evidenced by a manuscript transcription in his hand of a published letter by David Imrie espousing this theme.<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>89</sup>Watson, "Charles Wesley and the Bible," 79–80.

<sup>90</sup>Ibid., 89.

<sup>91</sup>CW Journal Letter, Nov. 29–Dec. 11, 1753 (MARC, DDCW 8/4).

<sup>92</sup>Kenneth Newport drew attention to this letter in Wesley's hand (MARC, DDCW 1/51) in an article titled "Charles Wesley's Interpretation of Some Biblical Prophecies According to a Previously Unpublished Letter Dated 25 April 1754," *Bulletin of The John Rylands University Library* 77 (1995): 31–52. The letter does not list a source, so Newport took it as original to Wesley. But it lists being written from St. Mungo, which is in Scotland, an area Charles Wesley never visited (he was in Bristol in April 1754). It is actually Wesley's transcription of *A Letter from the Reverend Mr. David Imrie, Minister of the Gospel at St Mungo, in Annandale; To a Gentleman in the City of Edinburgh* (Edinburgh: s.n., 1755).



In this vein, when Charles Edward Stuart (grandson of James II) returned to Scotland and gathered troops in late 1745 to invade England, Charles Wesley prepared fifteen new hymns for a second edition of *Hymns for Times of Trouble and Persecution* (original, 1744). Most of the new hymns continue the tone of the first edition, calling for God's protection and deliverance. But Wesley included five based on texts in Isaiah, Joel, and Zephaniah that suggested the current troubles portend an imminent final judgment of the world, and exhorted his readers to be ready.<sup>93</sup>

Wesley took a similar pastoral/prophetic stance in a collection penned a decade later, in the context of continuing dangers of invasion and the recent Lisbon earthquake, leaning this time on texts from Jeremiah and Ezekiel. The hymns shift seamlessly from the prophets' address to Israel to Wesley's exhortation of his fellow Britons.<sup>94</sup> Another hymn occasioned by the Lisbon earthquake, based on Rev. 16–17, stands as Wesley's most striking adaptation of an apocalyptic text to proclaim the near impending end of the world.<sup>95</sup>

### **Modeling Spiritual/Pastoral Meditation upon Scripture**

Wesley's apocalyptic interpretation of national events spanned the 1750s, evident still in a hymn he penned in 1759 on Rev. 19:11, in the context of another threatened invasion by France.<sup>96</sup> But the practice faded rather abruptly in the early 1760s, in response to controversy that broke out among Methodists in London. The focus of the controversy was the claim of some members that they had received Christian perfection instantaneously, by the simple affirmation "I believe." They portrayed this perfection as angelic or absolute, such that there was no need for growth after the event, or for the continuing atoning work of Christ. They suggested that only those who are entirely sanctified would be accepted at the final judgment. Adding to the frenzy, one leader (George Bell) proclaimed that this judgment was just around the corner—setting a date for Christ's return in February 1763.<sup>97</sup>

Wesley was deeply troubled by this cadre within the Methodist movement, because he recognized the underlying dismissal of the established Church and the lives of most Christians. He was also confined to Bristol by an extended illness.

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<sup>93</sup>See the hymns on Zephaniah 1:12, Isaiah 26:20–21, and Joel 2 in *Hymns for Times of Trouble and Persecution* (2<sup>nd</sup> edn., Bristol: Farley, 1745), 52–66; designated "Hymns for 1745" on the CSWT website.

<sup>94</sup>See the hymns based on Ezekiel 9 and Jeremiah 4 in *Hymns for the Year 1756* (Bristol: Farley, 1756), 7–17. The six hymns on Jeremiah are examples of paraphrase, but they date originally from the mid 1740s.

<sup>95</sup>See *Hymns occasioned by the Earthquake, March 8, 1750, Pt. I; To which are added An Hymn upon the Pouring Out of the Seventh Vial, Rev. xvi, xvii, etc., Occasioned by the Destruction of Lisbon* (Bristol: Farley, 1756), 10–12; designated "Hymn on the Lisbon Earthquake" on the CSWT website.

<sup>96</sup>*Hymns on the Expected Invasion, 1759* [London: Strahan, 1759], 11–12

<sup>97</sup>See W. Stephen Gunter, *The Limits of "Love Divine"* (Nashville: Kingswood Books, 1989), 215–21.

So his pastoral response took the form of preparing the two-volume *Scripture Hymns* (1762). He wove throughout these hymns insistence that sanctification is a gradual (and often painful) journey, rejecting specifically those who hope to leap to glory in an instant.<sup>98</sup> He highlighted God's promise to stay with the church, inviting his readers to pray for God to shower the fullness of gifts and graces upon the church.<sup>99</sup> And while his hymns on Revelation show clear confidence in God's victory, including Christ's return to reign on earth, Wesley now placed the emphasis on laboring faithfully until Christ comes, however long that may be.<sup>100</sup>

More broadly, from this juncture on, Wesley's hymns on biblical texts typically modeled the ideal articulated in his hymn on John 5:39, which was cited at the beginning of this essay; namely, he immersed himself in Scripture, reading and praying it over and over, with a particular concern to "trace the way to paradise."

[List of Frequent Abbreviations]

<i>HSP</i> (1739)	<i>Hymns and Sacred Poems</i> (London: Strahan, 1739).
<i>HSP</i> (1740)	<i>Hymns and Sacred Poems</i> (London: Strahan, 1740).
<i>HSP</i> (1742)	<i>Hymns and Sacred Poems</i> (Bristol: Farley, 1740).
<i>HSP</i> (1749)	<i>Hymns and Sacred Poems</i> , 2 vols. (Bristol: Farley, 1749).
MARC	Methodist Archives and Research Centre, The John Rylands Library, Manchester University, Manchester, England.
<i>Scripture Hymns</i> (1762)	<i>Short Hymns on Select Passages of the Holy Scriptures</i> , 2 vols. (Bristol: Farley, 1762).

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<sup>98</sup>See the extended analysis in S T Kimbrough Jr., "Charles Wesley and the Journey of Sanctification," *Evangelical Journal* 16 (1998): 49–75.

<sup>99</sup>See, for example, hymn on Psalm 122:6, *Scripture Hymns* (1762) 1:276–77.

<sup>100</sup>See *Scripture Hymns* (1762), 2:411–32.