Nurturing Disciples Of Christ By Singing Wesleyan Hymns In View Of The Cultural Context Of Chinese Methodist Churches In Singapore

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NURTURING DISCIPLES OF CHRIST BY SINGING WESLEYAN HYMNS
IN VIEW OF THE CULTURAL CONTEXT OF
CHINESE METHODIST CHURCHES IN SINGAPORE

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NURTURING DISCIPLES OF CHRIST BY SINGING WESLEYAN HYMNS
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CHINESE METHODIST CHURCHES IN SINGAPORE

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in
Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements
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Lily Wong Kueng Mee
ABSTRACT

Hymn singing was an important practice in the early Methodist movement, a heritage still recognized among Methodists today. In addition to their sermons, John and Charles Wesley used hymns as the primary vehicle to convey the theology and doctrine of Methodism. Unfortunately, the culture of hymn singing is slowly disappearing in many local Methodist churches in Singapore. Due to the rising dominance of contemporary Christian music (CCM) and unique linguistic context in Singapore, congregations who retain hymn singing are struggling as they face the possibility of losing this tradition among younger generations. The restrictions imposed on worship gatherings by the current COVID-19 pandemic have exacerbated this problem. This thesis examines the Wesleyan hymn heritage, discusses the reasons for the decline in hymn singing in Methodist congregations in Singapore, and proposes a methodology for helping the Chinese Methodist churches in Singapore to regain the heritage and distinctiveness of Methodism. The goal of my research is to recover discipleship formation through hymn singing. While not advocating a form of denominational triumphalism, Methodists do not need to abandon their distinctive identity, unique experience, and vibrant expressions of the Christian faith in hymn singing to have efficacious worship in the twenty-first century.
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CHAPTER 1:
THE WESLEYAN CONCEPT OF DISCIPLESHIP

What is “discipleship” to John Wesley?

In the Wesley brothers’ era, the term “disciple” was not specifically used to describe a follower of Christ. ¹ John Wesley used “Justification,” “Sanctification,” “Perfection” to characterize the Christian life. He would also chose terms like “real Christian” or “mature Christian” to depict a Christian who vigorously pursues growth in Christ.² John Wesley’s ministry established a pattern of life for a Christian who manifested faith of Christ rather than developing a program for discipleship. This approach is apparent among Methodists today, for example, through the United Methodist Discipleship Ministries.

Wesley defined three essential doctrines for the Methodist movement—repentance, faith, and holiness.³ However, the distinctiveness of Wesley is not his doctrines but his emphasis on pursuing a full Christian life. For Wesley the quest for spiritual maturity and perfection is fundamentally the pursuit of “holiness.” In the introduction of his essay, “Advice to a People Called Methodist,” John Wesley emphasized a Methodist Christian should be pursuing holiness both in an inward and outward fashion—holiness of heart and life, an oft-repeated phrase in Wesleyan teaching.⁴ In fact, when Wesley used the term “Methodist,” he was not addressing a specific group of Christians, but all Christians. All who are inwardly renewed by the love of God will are obliged to express it through an outwardly transformed life—a life that governs by the will and love of God. Wesley believed a true

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² These terminologies can be seen in John Wesley’s sermons and writings, i.e., “Christian Perfections,” “Advice to a People Called Methodist.”
⁴ The first paragraph of the writing. John Wesley, Advice to a People Called Methodists (1745), Loc 28 of 157, Kindle.
believer of Christ should bear the mind of Christ and to walk as Christ walked (Phil 2:5; 1 John 2:6). This mandate was the most repeated biblical phrase (over fifty references) in John Wesley’s published sermons, and the theme of his lifelong attempt to define the nature of a true Christian.  

In this chapter I will discuss the process of shaping a true Christian, a disciple of Christ. The discussion will begin with Wesley’s theology of salvation as a journey of experiencing and receiving God’s abundant grace. I will follow this topic with an examination of the ultimate goal of salvation—Christian perfection or the synonymous term, Christian holiness. Christian perfection is a lifelong pursuit emphasizing inward and outward holiness. Wesley believed that Christians manifested their faith by practicing two types of good works. These works are means of grace that encourage Christians to experience God and be empowered by the Holy Spirit. He believed that in doing so, Christians would be able to live out the holy life of love in accordance to God’s commandment, escaping the coming wrath before the glorious throne.

**Beginning of the Spiritual Pilgrimage: The Journey of Faith in Grace**

The characteristics of a true follower of Christ are justice, mercy, truth, and universal love. These traits are not simply a list of virtuous or ethical attitudes, but the description of a transformed heart and life, an extension of Christian faith. Wesley described the faith of a true Christian as “a sure trust and confidence which he hath in God, that his sins are forgiven; and that he is, through the merits of Christ, reconciled to the favor of God.”

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6 The flow of thought in this chapter is taken from chapters 5, 6, and 7 of the book on John Wesley by Wilfred Ho Wait Tat, a lecturer of Trinity Theological College, Singapore, and a senior pastor in the Methodist Chinese Annual Conference, Singapore. Some of Wesley’s sermons that Rev. Ho discusses are referred in this chapter. See Wilfred Ho Wai Tat, *Behold, John Wesley: A Soterio-Pastoral Theologian* (Hong Kong: Virtue & Wisdom Link Ltd., 2017), chaps. 5, 6, and 7.

7 Wesley, “Advice to a People Called Methodists,” Loc 38.
that salvation is a life long journey of pursuing and imitating Christ until it is accomplished in glory. The dynamic imagery of spiritual pilgrimage becomes a primary feature of the Wesleyan heritage. Furthermore, the pilgrimage is viewed as the journey of grace as it begins solely with the free mercy and grace of God and could only be accomplished by the grace of God.

**Phase One: Prevenient Grace**

Wesley believed God’s grace acts in every phase of a person’s life, including before and after conversion. He divided the journey of salvation into four phases: Prevenient Grace, Justification, Sanctification, and Perfection. The first phase, Prevenient Grace, begins when the individual does not respond to God in faith, but instead responds to His divine love which surrounds all humanity with one’s natural conscience. Through the work of the Holy Spirit and the grace of God, every person’s conscience is driven to long for God from time to time. It precedes any and all of the conscious impulses, thus prompting the first wish to please God by living out the enlightenment of the Son of God, “to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God” (Mic 6:8; NKJV). It is inevitable for some to deny the experience of grace or to forget about it later. However, for those who desire God, grace will abound, propelling the seeker toward repentance and deeper faith, and the second phase—Justification.

**Phase Two: Justification**

The process of justification or pardon is often referred to as conversion—receiving the salvific work of Jesus Christ in faith. The act of conversion signifies the forgiveness of all our

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sins. Such a decisive change in human heart may be sudden and dramatic or gradual and cumulative. It occurs only under the prompting of God’s grace and through the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Hence, faith is the only condition for attaining justification—neither good works nor the inherent goodness of humankind. The price of justification is paid by the death of Jesus Christ on the cross. The immediate effect for whoever believes in Christ is the experience of the pardoning love of God and restoration to God’s favor. The believer will be filled with the peace of God, joy unspeakable, and full of glory.  

Phase Three: Sanctification

When a person experiences justification, it marks the new birth in his spiritual life. However, the saving work of God does not end at the point of conversion. New birth is the threshold for pursuing holiness, also marking the beginning of the process of sanctification. Conversion is both a starting point and part of ongoing journey towards holiness in faith. The Holy Spirit works in the hearts of the converted and restores them inwardly, while the grace of God continues to nurture the spiritual growth of the newborn Christian to conform to Christ’s divine nature. There are two dimensions in sanctifying grace. First, it enlightens the Christian to the realization of all past sins and the will to stay away from the sinful life and mindset. Secondly, as the Christian experiences “the love of God shed abroad in our heart by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us,” the love for this world and earthly things will be banished, while the love for God and one another will grow.

Phase Four: Perfection

Sanctification is a gradual and lifelong process of growing towards perfection (a synonym for complete holiness). From the point the believer is born again, sanctifying grace enables the Christian to “abstain from all appearance of evil,” and to be “zealous of good works.” In other words, Christians will still experience inward struggles because sin is still present to a certain extent during the process of sanctification. Wesley believed God’s grace has the power to defeat the bondage and ruling of sin on humanity. If Christians continue to be open to God’s grace in the midst of the struggle, persevere with the help of the Holy Spirit, and practice works of piety and mercy (to be discussed further), they will then reach complete sanctification—perfection, the eventual destiny of the pilgrim. For Christian perfection, Wesley meant a full restoration of the image of God in humanity, a cleansed and “completed” state specifically referred to as perfect love. It is the divine love of God that fills the heart. It is the pure love of one who is freed from all sins and evil nature of the heart. It is also the fullness of love for God which brings complete obedience and imitation of divine love, displayed in the thorough love for neighbor.

The Ultimate Goal of the Pilgrimage: Christian Perfection

Six months before his death at the age of eighty-seven, Wesley’s letter to his friend Brackenbury reiterated that the main mission for the Methodist movement was to advocate the doctrine of Christian Perfection. Wesley firmly believed Christian Perfection is the

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ultimate goal of a Christian spiritual life, and he dedicated his life to pursuing it. What then, is his definition of Christian Perfection?

Wesley used the word “perfect” in a biblical sense.\(^{15}\) Perfection, though synonymous with holiness, did not mean sinless to Wesley. For Wesley, “perfection” was a dynamic concept that signified continuous growth and advancement toward a greater degree of maturity—in the Greek \(\text{τελείωσις} (\tau\epsilon\lambda\epsilon\iota\iota\omicron\sigma\iota\varsigma)\).\(^{16}\) Despite receiving the pardon and forgiveness of sins through the work of Jesus Christ on the cross, the power of sin is broken by the grace of justification, but this did not mean that Christians were free from their imperfection on earth as in eternity. This is one of the points on which he was criticized by the Reformers in his era. They believed “perfection” was a static condition, a state that cannot be improved on—no longer ignorant or committed to sin, experiences no more physical infirmities, struggles no more with temptation, and no longer in need of the redeeming power of the blood of Christ.\(^{17}\)

In Wesley’s sermon “Christian Perfection,” he first discussed three areas in which humanity is imperfect. First, Christians as mortals could never have full cognition in the knowledge of God Almighty, except for the general truths that God has revealed.\(^{18}\) Second, Christians are not exempted from “physical infirmities” and all natural defects, both inward or outward.\(^{19}\) Wesley emphasized that the concept of “infirmities” did not refer to sin. All Christians can never be completely rid of temptations until they return to God in eternity. The lies and temptations of the evil will always return. Even the incarnated God, Jesus Christ, had

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\(^{17}\) Wilfred Ho Wai Tat, *Behold, John Wesley*, 190.


\(^{19}\) The examples of natural defects are “slowness of speech, impropriety of language, ungracefulness of pronunciation; to which one might add a thousand nameless defects, either in conversation or behavior.” See “Christian Perfection,” I.7.
to face all kinds of temptations until the end of his mortal life. Wesley reminded Christians not to view salvation with a “once saved, forever saved” mentality, remaining stagnant in their spiritual life as a result. This will eventually lead to a regression of their spiritual life. Christians should pursue the life of holiness by growing in grace ceaselessly, advancing in the knowledge and love of God daily.

Next, Wesley discussed the perfection of humans on earth in the second part of his sermon. He described two stages in the growth of perfection based on the New Testament. The first stage—“infants in Christ”—means that the Christians who trust in the Lord are set free from outwardly sinful deeds. The second stage refers to those who are “strong in the Lord,” becoming perfect by freedom from both evil thoughts (inward) and sinful attitude (outward). In other words, both “infant” and “strong” Christians are perfect as they do not commit sins. Apart from outward perfection, the “strong” Christians are perfect in their thought and temperament too. Wesley pointed out Jesus’s teachings on the source of evil and sinful thoughts, “For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts” (Mark 7:21, KJV). In contrast, if a Christian is of pure heart—loving and desiring God whole-heartedly, surrendering all his thoughts, words, works, and everything else in life to the glory of God, being open for God to mold, renew, and recreate, he will gradually be free from evil thoughts and actions. This also means freedom of the soul from evil thoughts or anything contrary to that of love, to be in control of emotions and thoughts like Jesus was, the master and the teacher. In short, the Christian experiences a renewed life with conformity of heart and life to the mind of Christ, walking as Christ walked.

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20 “Christian Perfection,” I.8. John Wesley’s understanding of sin was influenced by orthodox Christian belief, such as the separation of God and humans caused by human sinfulness, the nature of God, and the need for humans to repent of their sins and seek salvation. See Martin V. Clarke, British Methodist Hymnody: Theology, Heritage, and Experience (London: Routledge, 2018), Loc 16 of 209, Kindle.
Other than a heart guided by love, Christian perfection also calls for a life governed by pure love. At the 1759 conference in Bristol, Wesley defined Christian perfection based on this biblical commandment “loving God with all our heart, mind, soul, and strength... and our neighbor as ourselves.”

A true Christian who has been filled and cleansed by the holy love of God, would respond to this love by expressing it outwardly toward others, out of a pure desire to do the will of God. This love would permeate our heart, mind, and soul, directing all our actions and temperaments to glorify God daily. Christians who are convicted and have received the salvation by faith would have experienced an inward transformation, filled with holy love and grace, will be gripped with the desire to live out the fruit in outward behavior, driven by a transformed life that is “rejoicing evermore, praying without ceasing, and in everything giving thanks” (1 Thess 5:16, KJV).

Christian perfection—the final state of sanctification—is to attain holiness of heart and life by loving God and loving humanity out of a pure intention and loving heart. The transformation of one’s heart is the crux of salvation and Christian perfection. In fact, the Wesleyan revival in the eighteenth century advocated a distinctive theology known as “religion of the heart.”

John Wesley’s Aldersgate experience explained the essence of this theology. He was uncertain of his salvation although he was a Christian since young and already a pastor. On the night he attended a society meeting in Aldersgate Street, he had a strange feeling of warmth in his heart while listening to a reading of Martin Luther’s preface to the Epistle to the Romans which was about the transformative work God does in the heart of humankind.

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27 Wesley defined this concept as complete salvation or full sanctification. See “The Scripture Way of salvation,” III.10–13.
through faith in Christ. With this significant experience of his “heart strangely warmed,” Wesley began to feel assured of gaining salvation by trusting in Jesus Christ alone. His heart was warmed by the assurance that he was a child of God who had been freed from the jurisdiction of the law of sin and death. God cannot simply be a God of cognitive assent, but also a God of experience and reciprocal relationship. Every Christian should receive a personal experience of a “heart strangely warmed,” regardless the form.

Therefore, as a real Christian pursuing holiness, Wesley emphasized on personal encounter with God that would change the heart—a renewed heart in the image of God, a heart that is repentant, is assured and forgiven; a heart that submits to God wholly; a heart that permeates joy and love, as well as a heart of pure intention and warm affection.

A heart that surrenders completely to God’s divine love and enthrones the Holy Redeemer marks the beginning of the journey of pursuing holiness. Without these experiences of affections or tempers, Wesley ascertained that one might be knowledgeable about Christianity, carry out spiritual practices, but may not be a true and mature Christian. Although Wesley underlined the importance of heartfelt faith, he did not mean that a Christian should be satisfied with his affection and love for God only. “Evidence of the changed heart, inward holiness, is in outward holiness, love of neighbor or social holiness.” Wesley believed a real faith would not remain in the heart but instead be displayed through outward behaviors. Christians with a renewed heart that conforms to Christ will show his love to others, reiterating once again Wesley’s teaching of the holiness of heart and life.

Moving Towards Ultimate Goal: Pursue Christian Perfection Through Means of Grace

30 Wesley stated this point in “Upon Our Lord’s Sermon on the Mount IV,” 1748. Refer to Young, Music of the Heart, 12.
Wesley defined means of grace as “outward signs, words, or actions ordained of God, and appointed for this end—to be the ordinary channels whereby He might convey to men, preventing, justifying, or sanctifying grace.” From this definition, means of grace is fundamentally a channel where God bestows God’s sovereign grace to humanity. With God’s gift of grace, we can be drawn to God, to seek God, to receive God’s grace, and to respond to God through the means, not by the means. In other words, the ability of responding to God is made possible by grace. Therefore, Wesley’s concept is the theology of grace. Others should not accuse Wesley of advocating the concept of gaining salvation through works as Wesley would never view means of grace as a replacement of the power of the blood of Christ in the atonement of sin. He was clear that both justification and sanctification could only be accomplished through grace by faith, and these means play a vital role in nourishing a Christian’s spiritual faith, while facilitating the growth towards perfection. Thus, every Christian, no matter lacking or advanced in faith, needs to practice the means of grace which can deepen the knowledge and the love of God, for continued holiness. However, the premise is that the means of grace is effective only when it serves the pursuit of the end goal of faith—Christian perfection. Moreover, an effective means of grace is empowered by the Spirit of God.

In order to pursue holiness of heart and life, Wesley introduced two categories of means of grace—works of piety and works of mercy. Works of piety refers to those works that help in building the vertical dimension in the relationship between God and humanity. These works include “public, family, and private prayer; receiving the Lord’s Supper;

searching the Scripture by hearing, reading, and meditating; and fasting or abstinence as health permits.”36 By pursuing holiness through works of piety, the heart and affection for God may be strengthened as the sinful nature and mindset would be cleansed and infused by the tempers and mind of Christ. Wesley believed that it is a possibility for Christians to lose their salvation, but there is also hope that it can be more firmly rooted.37 Hence, Christians should practice works of piety constantly to stay close to God’s heart, and to grow and uphold one’s spirituality to the standard of perfection.

On the other hand, works of mercy are represented by the horizontal dimension which covers the relationship among people. Works of mercy facilitate a channel for Christians to share their love first to the community of faith, building up one another, and then be motivated to go into the world and share God’s love to all. Wesley was against pursuing holiness in solitude as he believed it was hard to grow in love for God and each other while alone. He believed that their hearts could only be transformed progressively in a community of grace and love.38 The community of faith which has experienced the grace and love of God will arrive at a fuller knowledge of the will of God, henceforth loving their neighbors fervently as they love God. Wesley himself was charitable to all poor people, and according to some testimonies, he never rejected any requests from them.39 Not only did Wesley live out his love for humankind and his neighbors, he too encouraged the Methodist community to embrace the poor and needy in all practical ways.40 The importance of loving one’s neighbors is undeniable for Christians because as it is the commandment of God, and a means to

37 “A Plain Account of Christian Perfection,” 16.
39 The testimony can be found in Heitzenrater, Wesley and the People called Methodists, 251–252.
40 John helped the poor and needy in various practical ways. He attended medical lectures in order to provide free medical service for the poor, provided job opportunities for women, and cared about social justice and politics. See Collins, K. J., The Theology of John Wesley: Holy Love and the Shape of Grace, (Nashville: Abingdon, 2007), 266–67.
manifest sanctification within the community. This begs the question: What compelled Wesley to love others wholeheartedly?

Wesley referred to works of mercy as attending to both temporal and spiritual needs of others. Despite providing daily needs to those poor and needy, caring for those who are imprisoned, sick, or suffering, good works also include helping to save souls from death in all kinds of ways. Wesley apparently did not place greater emphasis on physical needs than that of the soul, nor viewed care for physical necessities as a means to win the soul. The acts of kindness that he listed in his sermon are clearly related to Matthew 25:31–46, the parable of the final judgement before the glorious throne. Like the teaching of Jesus in this parable, Wesley strived to serve and help the needy and poor, as it would have been done to Christ. After listing the examples for works of mercy in his sermon, Wesley commented: “This is the repentance, and these the ‘fruits meet for repentance,’ which are necessary to full sanctification. This is the way wherein God hath appointed his children to wait for complete salvation.” It seems that Wesley again related “complete salvation” to the final judgement, an element of eschatology. In other words, loving and caring for the poor, needy, and the least of society could be a decisive factor in the Christian’s end when the Lord returns.

Wesley especially stressed the importance and necessity of carrying out works of mercy to those who choose to only uphold the salvation through faith and hence disregard the works of mercy. As seen from the goats in the parable who ignored the need of others, they lost their salvation and were relegated to eternal punishment.

Wesley emphasized the importance, or rather indispensability of both works of piety and works of mercy in attaining the state of Christian perfection. However, Wesley seemed to a distinction in the degree of the importance between the two good works. As mentioned

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above, Christians without works of mercy would not be able to escape the coming wrath during the final judgement. Their salvation could be at risk should they choose to neglect the commandment of God to love their neighbors. Thus, even the most mature Christian should not take justification grace for granted, as one may fall away or even lose one’s faith, not to mention attaining full sanctification. Moreover, in Wesley’s later sermon “On Zeal” (1781), he argued that works of mercy are worth more attention in developing perfect holiness. In his sermon, Wesley differentiated true Christian zeal from various manifestations of false zeal that cause pain and hurt to others in the name of religion. His assertion is “true Christian zeal is none other than the flame of love.” Christians could bear a strong affection for the gospel and church, but it is not real passion if done without love, which is “the image of the invisible God; for God is love, and he that dwelleth in love, dwelleth in God, and God in him.” With the concept of concentric circles, Wesley then described the order of the good works that Christian should pursue in order to live out the real zeal.

In a Christian believer love sits upon the throne which is erected in the inmost soul; namely, love of God and man, which fills the whole heart, and reigns without a rival. In a circle near the throne are all holy tempers;—longsuffering, gentleness, meekness, fidelity, temperance; and if any other were comprised in “the mind which was in Christ Jesus.” In an exterior circle are all the works of mercy, whether to the souls or bodies of men. By these we exercise all holy tempers—by these we continually improve them, so that all these are real means of grace, although this is not commonly adverted to. Next to these are those that are usually termed works of piety—reading and hearing the word, public, family, private prayer, receiving the Lord's supper, fasting or abstinence. Lastly, that his followers may the more effectually provoke one another to love, holy tempers, and good works, our blessed Lord has united them together in one body, the church, dispersed all over the earth—a little emblem of which, of the church universal, we have in every particular Christian congregation.

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46 “On Zeal,” III.12.
47 John Wesley did not mention “concentric circles” in his sermon, but his argument gives the impression of this form and it would be easier to understand his thought in this form. This naming is found in Miles, “The Arts of Holy Living,” 145.
48 “On Zeal,” II.5 (emphasis added).
Wesley seemed to rank the importance of the five aspects—love, holy tempers, works of mercy, works of piety, and church. But he was definitely not suggesting that Christians should pursue only love and ignore the rest. He was trying to argue that all five aspects are interrelated and all of them worthy of a Christian’s zeal. However, loving God and humanity wholeheartedly is the greatest demonstration of Christian zeal, because they are the ultimate fruits of the holy tempers and all the good works. Christians should be most passionate for the innermost circle—love. They should not be satisfied with remaining in the outer circles. It is important for Christians to be earnest for all their ministries shared by the Christian community. However, if one is unable to perform both good works due to any circumstances, works of mercy should be chosen first. The reason is so that by practicing works of mercy, holy tempers may be nourished, cultivating a disposition that makes pure and holy love attainable—the highest calling for a Christian. In other words, although works of piety and works of mercy are both important means of grace, they are both secondary to the higher goal of love.

Wesley’s emphasis on the works of mercy over works of piety seemed to contradict his earlier teaching in “The Scripture Way of Salvation” (1765), where he indicated that both good works are essential for growing towards Christian perfection. In part three of “On Zeal” Wesley asked, “Are you better instructed than to put asunder what God has joined than to separate works of piety from works of mercy? Are you uniformly zealous of both?” These questions seem to be directed towards Methodist Christians in his era who had the tendency of focusing on works of piety and neglecting the works of mercy. Wesley did not deny the importance of practicing the works of piety and makes it clear that works of piety play an important role in the pursuit of Christian perfection. It is, in fact, the inclination to not value

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51 Wilfred, Behold, John Wesley, 228.
works of mercy that caused him to press their importance on the Methodist Societies. In the introduction of Wesley’s sermon “On Visiting the Sick,” he warned “Surely there are works of mercy, as well as works of piety, which are real means of grace . . . those that neglect them, do not receive the grace which otherwise they might. Yea, and they lose, by a continued neglect, the grace which they had received. Is it not hence that many who were once strong in faith are now weak and feeble-minded.”

Despite works of piety, Wesley encouraged Christians to grasp all opportunities to show love and care to the needy in person. Wesley treated works of mercy as a means of gaining holy tempers: “While you minister to others, how many blessings may redound into your own bosom! Hereby your natural levity may be destroyed; your fondness for trifles cured; your wrong tempers corrected; your evil habits weakened, until they are rooted out; and you will be prepared to adorn the doctrine of God our Savior in every future scene of life.” However, one must understand that all the good works, including works of piety, should be performed out of pure intention and love, not with the mindset of legalism or any other agenda. In other words, it is possible for a Christian to perform the acts of kindness but have no religion if he is doing the actions merely to fulfil the obligation of Christian.

Wesley always linked faith and love together while teaching about good works, “faith working through love.” He believed that faith is not a spiritual matter that is invisible, but something that is firmly embedded in the visible relationship and behaviors between God and humanity. Since God is love, as children of God and true followers of Christ, Christians are filled first with holy love and subsequently moved by the Spirit of God to let love pour out from their hearts and be channelled to others unconditionally. Without love, Wesley declared that all the good works are in vain and have lost their efficacy in ensuring the growth of faith.

Wesley, referring to 1 Corinthians 13:3, warned believers to stay alert: “It is most sure, that if you give all your goods to feed the poor, yea, and your body to be burned, and have not humble, gentle, patient love, it profiteth you nothing. O let this be deep engraved upon your heart: All is nothing without love!”

In short, all spiritual practices or means of grace must be practiced in the divine love of God and also out of pure love. When expressed without love, one will fall into the temptation of pursuing perfection solely with actions, and hence view justification as something which originates from human merit rather than in Christ’s saving work alone.

**Discipleship in Wesleyan Tradition**

In 1745, John Wesley wrote a short essay “Advice to the People Called Methodists” defining what he meant by “Methodists”—Christians with faith, hope, and love empowered by Holy Spirit, who honor God by loving and obeying God’s will, live godly and loving lives by doing no harm but doing good to all humankind including enemies, and being accountable for one another with love in the faith community. From this definition, one may deduce that it was not Wesley’s intention to promote sectarianism, but to define what a Christian would be like. These fundamental principles could be applied to all disciples of Christ, not just Methodists. Although Wesley seldom used the term “disciple,” discipleship for him spanned the entire spiritual pilgrimage of a Christian.

Discipleship begins at the moment of conversion, when the person receives Christ in faith and experiences renewal of the heart. By the grace of God and the prompting of the Holy Spirit, the newly born Christian embarks on the journey of pursuing Christian perfection. Christians will seek holiness in heart and in life—to have the mind of Christ (Phil

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54 “On Zeal,” III.11.
55 Wesley, “Advice to a People Called Methodists,” Loc 49.
2:5) and to walk as Christ walked. This lifelong journey can only be accomplished in faith and not by human merit. However, this does not mean that Christians have no responsibility to bear. The disciples of Christ who truly repent and have experienced a transformation of the heart, will gradually change their attitudes and habits, and resolve to perform their duty daily by engaging in Christian activities, submitting to the guidance of the Spirit of God.

Wesley repeatedly emphasized that the disciplines of holiness are the disciplines of love. Therefore, the ultimate goal of discipleship—to have the mind of Christ and to walked as He walked, could be translated as loving God and loving neighbors. Jesus Christ loved and submitted to God fully, from incarnation to his death on the cross. During his life on earth, he never neglected a single need or request from the marginalized. Christ performed all kinds of works of mercy for those he encountered. As a disciple of Christ, Wesley learned to imitate his Master in his heart and life. He spent a lifetime of effort pursuing the holy love that Jesus Christ demonstrated on earth, to God and to His people, by participating in the means of grace. Similarly, discipleship is not about accomplishing certain required actions, but to be the kind of person who fulfils the commandments of God through performing such actions out of love.

Although “being” seems to have priority over “doing,” one must not neglect the acts of piety and mercy. Christians who have experienced the power of grace and a renewal of the heart will not be reluctant to perform the spiritual practices in order to develop an intimate relationship with God and demonstrate sincere love to all people. Consequentially, by performing these “doings,” Christians could cultivate their “beings” to be in line with the divine temperament and the footsteps of Christ. In other words, it is not about the acts or means, but the eventual growth in love.

56 Theodore W. Jennings, Jr., Good News to the Poor: John Wesley’s Evangelical Economics (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1990), 150.
John Wesley believed that Christian perfection is possible for all in this world, not just in the eternal realm. As long we continue to respond to God’s grace, we are able to resist the ceaseless temptations of sin and to achieve both inward and outward holiness in this life. Embodying holiness may happen at any time, either instantaneously or after years of growth in grace. As such, disciples may not exempt themselves from the commandment of loving God and loving neighbors.

58 Charles Wesley had a slightly different view on this concept. He agreed with John in the earlier years that Christian perfection can happen anytime on earth. Later, he inclined to believe that the achievement of perfection exists only in the eternity. However, he shared the same view on the goal and the same means of pursuing the goal. Lorna Khoo, Wesleyan Eucharistic Spirituality: Its Nature, Sources and Future (Adelaide: ATF Press, 2005), 176.
“Methodism was born in song.”¹ This statement reflects the importance of hymn singing to the early Methodist movement. According to historical records, Charles Wesley composed over 8900 hymns and poems throughout his life.² His hymns are impressive in terms of their quantity and the wide range of themes covered, including various theological themes, pastoral concerns that Wesley brothers dealt with, religious experience, distinctive Methodist emphases, and the seasons of the Christian year. It is fair to say that the early Methodists learned their theology through singing Charles Wesley’s hymns even more than John’s sermons and writings. The hymns were used for both public worship and private devotion, often sung or read as a reflection of the singers’ devotion to God’s Word.³ Without hymns, the Methodist revival then may not have achieved such success.

The Wesleys shared theology and doctrine with Methodists members in singable poetic format concurrent with sermons and other writings. The paraphrased and condensed theological concepts in poetic idiom carried the emotional and sensual expression when partnered with memorable melodies and rhythm. Wesleyan scholar S T Kimbrough Jr. is the first scholar who defined this sacred art form as “lyrical theology.”⁴

“Lyrical theology, then, is a ‘sung’ theology, or at least a theology expressed in poetry

and song. This means that the mode of expressing what we so often are accustomed to hear and see in prose comes to fruition in a different world of language.”

A hymn, as a vehicle for congregational singing, is a specific genre of poetic expression. The lyrics are written in metered form, follow a sequence of stanzas, and may incorporate a refrain. The sequence of the stanzas usually develops a theme, tells a story, or paraphrases Scripture, leading the singer to a conclusion in the final stanza. Due to the limited length and time frame, poets need to be selective in their choice of words in order to highlight the main theme and also to express their understanding of this theme succinctly. Although the hymns do not articulate a systematic theology individually, they do offer theological concepts that are condensed and digested and, taken as a whole, can introduce a wide range of theological concepts. Thus, hymn lyrics can also be called “vehicles of theology” as they deliver theology in their own way. Furthermore, while the lyrics shape the theology of the singers, singing them with a tune helps commit the words to one’s memory and even penetrate into the subconscious mind.

Catholic theologian Kubicki said, “there is perhaps no other physical activity that so engages the body, the mind, the spirit, and the emotions of an individual and an assembly than wholehearted singing. The activity of hymn singing allows an assembly to recognize itself as believers and members of a faith community.” The wedding of sacred words and music is able to engage and vitalize both the mind and emotions of the singer. Hymn singing could be effective in establishing a religion of the heart in a way that inculcates theology not only as head knowledge, but also as an experience that is felt. The message will inspire affection towards the Master, bringing the message deeper into the

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heart, evoking a response in worship and life. In John Wesley’s Preface to *A Collection of Hymns for the Use of the People Called Methodist* (1780), he defined hymns as the “handmaid of Piety” or “a means of raising or quickening the spirit of devotion; of confirming his faith; of enlivening his hope; and of kindling and increasing his love to God and man.”

In this chapter, I will discuss the function and contributions of lyrical theology in nurturing disciples of Christ in three aspects: shaping the Wesleyan doctrine and theological concepts, shaping religion of the heart, and shaping the love for the neighbor.

**The Wesleys’ Hymns Shape Doctrine and Theology in a Wesleyan Perspective**

Both John and Charles Wesley composed hymns as a means to impart their faith and theology. The hymns are so filled with Scripture that Rattenbury once stated that the Bible could be reconstructed through Charles’s hymns if it were ever lost. Wesley also addressed almost every conceivable doctrine within the realm of Christian theology in the hymns and their sermons. The hymns used language that could convey divine truth to individual understanding and experience, allowing the Wesley brothers to use hymns as a bridge between Scripture and the human heart. For the Wesleys, hymns were never merely tunes to be sung in Methodist meetings. They also played a large part in the education of Methodist members on the doctrine and the theological ideologies of the Wesleyan movement. The hymns contain essential revealed truths and theological themes, including salvation, universal love, Christian perfection, justification by faith, grace, pardon, witness, and others.

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American religious historian William McLoughlin commented on Charles’ hymns, indicating that they contained a “sermon message with even greater simplicity.”\textsuperscript{11} By combining theology with compelling music and a concise narration, hymns help to deepen the understanding of the message and facilitate the congregation’s experience of God’s mystery more directly and effectively.\textsuperscript{12} Hymns contribute, consciously or subconsciously, to the singer’s theological awareness. Through the musical dimensions of hymn singing, Charles desired to lead worshipers to a new level of theological and spiritual understanding. The combination of rhythm, rhyme, and meter aids musical memory, allows the lyrics to linger in the hearts and minds of the congregation, and creates a theological memory through singing. Some Christians may not be able to memorize biblical passages, but are able to remember scores of hymn stanzas by heart. In addition to recalling doctrines and theological concepts, hymn singing also shapes their doctrinal understanding. The United Methodist Hymnal (1989) editor, Carlton R. Young, summarized the Wesleyan sung theology as “singing what was preached and preaching what was sung.”\textsuperscript{13}

European ecumenist Albert van den Heuvel reiterated the importance of hymn singing, “It is the hymns, repeated over and over again, which form the container of much of our faith. They are probably in our age the only confessional documents, which we learn by heart. As such, they have taken the place of our catechisms.”\textsuperscript{14} Erik Routley noted too that “when a congregation sings [a hymn], they are not far from saying ‘we think this. This is our own idea.’”\textsuperscript{15} In short, hymns singing shapes belief and faith. Similar to \textit{Lex orandi, lex credendi}: how we pray shapes how we believe, and, in turn, affects the way we sing.\textsuperscript{16}

\begin{flushright}
\begin{enumerate}
\item Chilcote, \textit{Singing the Faith}, 58.
\item Kimbrough, \textit{The Lyrical Theology of Charles Wesley}, 22.
\item Hawn, \textit{New Songs of Celebration Render}, xxvii.
\item From the Latin phrase (“ut legem credendi lex statuat supplicandi”) by Prosper of Aquitaine (390–455 CE), meaning “the law of belief stands on the law of supplication (prayer).”
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However, lyrical theology does not simply impart information or knowledge; it transforms one’s thought into action. Singing these moving, memorable, and teachable congregational songs in worship reminds the faith community of their identity in Christ and their responsibility as a disciple. Singing together should then prepare the body of Christ to respond to the proclaimed word by going forth to work and witness.

**Grace in Charles Wesley’s Hymns**

Charles Wesley’s hymns contain a full scope of doctrinal and theological themes. The Wesley brothers’ theology of salvation and grace is distinctive contribution to eighteenth-century doctrine, a time period when the theology of predestination or pre-selection was prevailing. The stages of grace—prevenient grace, justifying grace, sanctifying grace, and finally perfection—could be found in Charles’s compositions, helping Christians understand the theology of grace and remember it through songs.

Prevenient grace leads people to understand their sinful human nature and yearn the redemption and forgiveness of sin from God through Jesus Christ. An example of prevenient grace in a hymn is “Come, sinners to the gospel feast” (1747).

Come, sinners, to the Gospel feast;  
Let every soul be Jesus’ guest.  
Ye need not one be left behind,  
For God hath bid all humankind.

Sent by my Lord, on you I call;  
The invitation is to all;  
Come, all the world! come, sinner, thou!  
All things in Christ are ready now.

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This hymn, presented in twenty-four, four-line stanzas, shows that Charles believed God’s love and salvation are universal, as depicted in phrases like “not one be left behind,” “come, all the world!” The phrase “Come, sinner, thou!” implies the grace of God being made available even before one has become a Christian—Jesus Christ died for all humankind. Therefore, all people are invited to share in the body and the blood of Christ, including harlots, publicans, thieves, drunkards, and hellish crews.20 “But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us” (Rom 5:8, NIV).

Justifying grace is a gift given by God to unworthy humans—salvation accomplished by the death of Jesus. An example of this theology in a hymn is “Where shall my wondering soul begin” (1739).21 This hymn was written after Charles underwent a spiritual conversion. He is affirmed by the pardon of all his sins and obtained the assurance of becoming a child of God.

O how shall I the goodness tell,
Father, which thou to me hast showed?
That I, a child of wrath and hell,
I should be called a child of God!
Should know, should feel my sins forgiven,
blest with this antepast of heaven!

The amazing love of God and the affirmation of salvation was presented skillfully and confidently in another hymn, “And can it be that I should gain” (1738).

He left His Father’s throne above,
So free, so infinite His grace;
Emptied Himself of all but love,
And bled for Adam's helpless race;
‘Tis mercy all, immense and free;
For, O my God, it found out me.22

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20 These groups of sinners appear in stanza 13 of the hymn.
22 Hymnary.org, “And Can It Be that I Should Gain,” https://hymnary.org/text/and_can_it_be_that_i_should_gain (accessed December 15, 2021).
This hymn could be regarded as the spiritual autobiography of Charles Wesley, who had just experienced his spiritual conversion not long before its writing. When he read the conclusion of chapter two in Martin Luther’s commentary on the book of Galatians, he realized that his sinful nature, like all humans, had nailed Jesus Christ to the cross. Despite expressing great joy in his assurance of salvation, Charles also described the process from free grace to glorious affirmation. Grace and love of God are at the core of the theological concept of salvation, which was clearly presented through the stanzas.

Sanctifying grace brings about a radically new life in Christ which involves growing through the journey of pursuing holiness and reaching ultimate perfection. An example of such hymns is “Love divine, all loves excelling” (1747).

Finish, then, Thy new creation;
Pure and spotless let us be:
Let us see Thy great salvation
Perfectly restored in thee;
Changed from glory into glory,
‘til in heav’n we take our place,
‘til we cast our crowns before thee,
Lost in wonder, love, and praise.

This final stanza of the hymn expresses a prayer for full Sanctification, described as “pure and spotless” (2 Pet 3:14) and “until in heaven we take our place.” The prayer reflects the need for Christians to pursue perfection, to be “changed from glory into glory” (2 Cor 3:18).

Temptations abound in the pursuit of holiness, and sanctifying grace is necessary to complete the journey. This theological concept is reflected clearly in the hymn, “God of all power, and truth, and grace” (1741), stanzas 6, 7, and 8.

Thy sanctifying Spirit pour,
To quench my thirst, and wash me clean;

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24 Kimbrough, Lost in Wonder, 51–52.
Now, Father, let the gracious shower
Descend, and make me pure from sin.

Purge me from every sinful blot;
My idols all be cast aside;
Cleanse me from every sinful thought,
From all the filth of self and pride.

Give me a new, a perfect heart,
From doubt, and fear, and sorrow free;
The mind which was in Christ impart,
And let my spirit cleave to thee.26

Charles prayed earnestly for the sanctifying Spirit and the grace of God to be imparted in order to achieve perfection, knowing full well that sanctification is never by human’s credit. Hence, he too prayed humbly for a new and perfect heart that is strengthened in faith, a Christ-like mind, and a life with Christ as sovereign. This sung prayer, the final stanza of “God of all power” (stanza 28), reminds the singers to grasp tightly onto the grace of God and the empowerment of the Spirit in the journey toward pursuing a life of Christian perfection.

Now let me gain perfection’s height!
Now let me into nothing fall!
Be less than nothing in Thy sight,
And feel that Christ is all in all!

The hymns composed for the first two stages of grace mainly focused on personal holiness, the relationship between God and humanity. The third stage of grace, in addition to personal holiness, the emphasized social holiness as part of sanctifying grace.

Help us to help each other, Lord
Each other’s cross to bear;
Let each his friendly aid afford,
And feel another's care.

Up into Thee, our living head,
Let us in all things grow,
And by Thy sacrifice be led
The fruits of love to show.

Touched by the lodestone of Thy love
Let all our hearts agree;
And ever towards each other move,
And ever move towards Thee.

This is the bond of perfectness,
Thy spotless charity.
O let us still, we pray, possess
The mind that was in Thee.  

“Help us to help each other, Lord” (1742) highlights the importance of pursuing holiness in the fellowship of the faith community. Paul wrote to Philippians’ church, “Therefore if you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any common sharing in the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and of one mind. Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others. In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus” (Phil 2:1–5, NIV). Loving one another in Christ and putting others’ interest and needs before oneself are testament to having the mind of Christ and walking as he walked. In other words, Christians will grow in the love of God, share the holy temperament of Christ, and act more like Christ through the lesson of loving one another. Charles used this sung prayer to remind Christians to avoid pursuing holiness on one’s own. He described the potential outcome to “ever towards each other move, / and ever move towards Thee.” He defined this act of love as “the bond of perfectness.”

Apart from learning to love one another in the faith community, Christians need to learn how to love those outside the church—the society. The Wesley brothers paid particular

27 Hymnary.org, “Help us to help each other, Lord,” https://hymnary.org/text/help_us_to_help_each_other_lord (accessed December 15, 2021). This hymn was first published in Hymns and Sacred Poems (1742) with the first stanza beginning “Try us, O God, and search the ground.”
attention to marginalized groups, especially miners, prisoners, widows, and abused or abandoned children. Acts of mercy toward vulnerable members of society demonstrated obedience to the commandments of God. Thus, Charles wrote many hymns and poems to encourage and remind Christians of social concerns and the need to serve the poor. He also expressed his willingness to serve them with his whole life.  

Charles’ witness for his faith was in its entirety, including one’s mind, heart, and hands. An example of this is in the fourth stanza of “Jesus, the gift divine I know” (1762).

Thy mind throughout my life be shown,  
While listening to the sufferer’s cry,  
The widow’s and the orphan’s groan,  
On mercy’s wings I swiftly fly,  
The poor and helpless to relieve,  
My life, my all, for them to give.  

Charles composed this hymn based on James 1:27: “Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, to visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction and to keep himself unspotted from the world” (KJV). Charles expressed his willingness to dedicate not only his time to care and help the poor and helpless, but in fullness “my life, my all, for them to give.” He knew that the last, the least, and the lost are always in God’s mind and, in the pursuit of a life of holiness, emphasized again living out the inward life of faith through outward-looking works of mercy. Hence, in the final stanza, Charles stated “My faith’s integrity maintain; / the truth of my religion prove, / by perfect purity and love.” Loving others and caring for the poor and needy are the means to sustain and witness the integrity of a Christian’s faith.

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28 Kimbrough, The Lyrical Theology of Charles Wesley, 49.
29 This hymn was published in Hymns and Psalms (1762). This particular stanza conveys the social conscience of early Methodists. Kimbrough, The Lyrical Theology of Charles Wesley, 49.
Wesleyan Hymns Shape the Religion of the Heart

Apart from remembering biblical and theological concepts through hymn singing, lyrical theology, wed with appropriate, music creates the opportunity and space for the congregation to imagine, reflect, and meditate while participating through communal singing.\(^{32}\) Furthermore, the congregation is able to sing in response to the doctrine or message that they have just heard in the sermon. Lyrical theology turns passive listeners into active participants in worship. The Wesleys consciously integrated an affective dimension into the process of theological education through music. Understanding theology is not just an intellectual matter but also an expression of faith and worship.\(^{33}\) By combining words and music, the Wesleys hoped to invoke a more holistic spiritual meaning and response in others through strumming the music of the heart. They were striving to achieve emotional and cognitive unity—a theology of the heart and the head. They believed in “the power of poetry to convey convictions, stir the affections, and strengthen moral resolve in the direction of God’s rule.”\(^{34}\)

Besides articulating faith and doctrine, Charles’s hymns also emphasized personal experience in faith and personal response towards faith. He expressed the heartfelt yearnings of personal experience in his hymns in order to shape the faith of the worshipers’ heart. In “O for a heart to praise my God” (1742), Charles spiritually dissects the heart of the believer, drawing upon a wide range of scriptural allusions.

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\begin{align*}
O & \text{ for a heart to praise my God,} \\
A & \text{ heart from sin set free,} \quad [\text{Rom 6:18}] \\
A & \text{ heart that always feels Thy blood,} \quad [\text{Heb 10:22}] \\
\text{So freely shed for me.} & \\
\end{align*}
\]

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\begin{align*}
A & \text{ heart resigned, submissive, meek,} \\
\text{My dear Redeemer’s throne,} & \\
\text{Where only Christ is heard to speak,} & \\
\text{Where Jesus reigns alone.} & \\
\end{align*}
\]

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\(^{32}\) Young, *Music of the Heart*, 29.
\(^{34}\) Chilcote, *Singing the Faith*, 30.
O for a lowly, contrite hear, [Isa 57:15]
Believing, true, and clean, [Ps 51:10]
Which neither life nor death can part [Rom 8:38]
From him that dwells within!

A heart in every thought renewed [Ezek 36:26]
And full of love divine,
Perfect and right and pure and good,
A copy, Lord, of Thine.35

Young defined the eighteenth-century Wesleyan revival as “a distinctive heart
movement with a unique theology—a heart repentant, assured, and forgiven: a heart
overflowing in joyous response; a heart of love, and a heart of perfect intention.”36 The heart
is where the innermost felt and expressed emotions and sentiments reside. “How can a sinner
know” (1749) is a hymn that conveys the Methodist understanding of Christian assurance,
describing the necessity of the heart and the emotions in confirming the salvation and love of
God, apart from what is “seen” to “believe”.

What we have felt and seen
With confidence we tell;
And publish to the sons of men
The signs infallible.

We who in Christ believe
That He for us hath died,
We all His unknown peace receive,
And feel His blood applied.

His love surpassing far
The love of all beneath
We find within our hearts, and dare
The pointless darts of death.37

35 Stanzas 1, 2, and 4 from “O For a Heart to Praise My God” based on Psalm 51:1. This hymn was first published in Hymns and Sacred Poems (1742). Lyrics taken from Young, Music of The Heart, XX.
36 Young, Music of the Heart, 12.
37 Stanzas 2, 3, and 5 of the hymn. Hymnary.org, “How can a sinner know,” https://hymnary.org/text/how_can_a_sinner_know (accessed December 15, 2021). Originally published in Hymns and Sacred Poems (1749). The cited lines are portions of the original stanzas 1, 2, and 3.
Charles Wesley believed that theological integrity and an abundant experiential and emotional life are complementary, each of these two aspects require the other.\textsuperscript{38} Hence, the doctrine in his poems is inextricably connected to his own spiritual interests and experiences. Lyrical theology involves conveying conviction through poetry and prose, as well as enhancing its emotional content with music and rhythm. The hymns’ poetic content revolves around a theology that is clearly conveyed and a touching message that prompts soul-searching. This form of presentation can reach the depths of the singer’s heart and soul.

Furthermore, the composer’s experience and emotional expression can easily connect with the experience of the worshippers and resonate with emotional expression towards God.\textsuperscript{39} Thus, Kimbrough defines lyrical theology as “both words to God and words about God.”\textsuperscript{40}

John Wesley characterized hymns and hymn singing as “a means of raising or quickening the spirit of devotion, confirming faith, enlivening hope, and kindling and increasing our love for God and the human family.”\textsuperscript{41} In Charles’s hymns of Christian experience, we can always find the expression of a raptured soul in its response to God’s wondrous love. The opening phrase of “And can it be that I should gain” reveals Charles’ surprise towards the mystery of salvation, “And can it be that I should gain / an interest in the Savior’s blood?”\textsuperscript{42} As he often does, Charles emphasized this point by posing a rhetorical question as a paradox in stanza two: “’Tis mystery all! The Immortal dies! / Who can explore His strange design?” Charles then begins to tell the salvation story in the following stanza and concludes with a statement of faith: “‘Tis mercy all! immense and free! / For, O my God, it found out me!” Confronted with the wondrous love of God that is beyond human understanding, Charles Wesley’s only response was to surrender himself to God’s love. He

\textsuperscript{38} Young, \textit{Music of the Heart}, 18.
\textsuperscript{39} Kimbrough, \textit{Lost in Wonder}, 11.
\textsuperscript{40} Chilcote, \textit{A Faith that Sings}, Loc 115.
\textsuperscript{41} Written in his Preface to the 1780 \textit{Collection}. Young, \textit{Music of the Heart}, 18.
\textsuperscript{42} Lyrics for this hymn is taken from \textit{Hymns of United Worship} (Hong Kong: Chinese Christian Literature Council Ltd, 1997), 133. Originally published in \textit{Hymns} and Sacred Poems (1739).
expressed his mixed feelings of astonishment and disbelief by bursting into joy proclaiming,

“Amazing love! How can it be / that Thou, my God, shouldst die for me!”

Christians who reflect deeply on the questions posed in the hymn and the unfolding salvation story told in the stanzas, may find their relationship with God and their heart of gratitude deepening. Charles reflected on the biblical passage and merged his own experience and faith struggle into it. His lyricism was a personal testimony to God’s work in his life, placing great emphasis on the personal experience of salvation.43 Through singing Charles’ hymns, one can imagine his journey of faith.

Long my imprisoned spirit lay  
Fast bound in sin and nature’s night; 
Thine eye diffused a quick’ning ray, 
I woke, the dungeon flamed with light; 
My chains fell off, my heart was free; 
I rose, went forth and followed Thee. (stanza 4)

Charles had lived a life in which he felt metaphorically chained in prison and bounded by sin. When the grace of God called him out of darkness into His wonderful light, he noted, “my chains fell off, my heart was free.” Any believer should be able to identify with the struggles and emotions that Charles had gone through in his understanding of faith, even though the circumstances may be different. This empathy allows the singers to share in his deep wonder and gratitude. Another point worth noting was Charles’ use of the first-person pronouns “I” and “me” instead of “you” and “he.” This choice reflects salvation as a personal and intimate experience, a reciprocal relationship with God and not merely a cognitive concept. The believer’s faith vocabulary and affection may reflect Charles’ experience during the act of congregational singing, especially with the stirring tune SAGINA.

Another example of a hymn identifying with Charles’ response to God is “Love divine, all love excelling” (stanza 2):

Breathe, O breathe Thy loving Spirit
Into every troubled breast!
Let us all in Thee inherit;
Let us find that second rest.
Take away our love of sinning;\(^{44}\)
Alpha and Omega be;
End of faith, as its beginning,
Set our hearts at liberty.

Stanza 2 of “Love divine, all love excelling” was no doubt Charles’ personal prayer.

However, when the faith community sings it, it is transformed into corporate prayer, kindling an eagerness towards holiness and corporate intercession for all humankind.\(^{45}\) As Christians sing Charles’ hymns, they share in the same expressions, and their hearts will be moved by singing these experiential hymns. These hymns may be composed in the eighteenth century on another continent, but the faith they share remains the same. All Christians share similar struggles and questions as Charles Wesley, the same ones for which he had been seeking answers all his life. In his poetic words, Christians see a resemblance to their lives. The context and circumstance might be different, but the fundamental questions remain the same—questioning the meaning of faith and life.

Charles composed some of his hymns under persecution and dire personal circumstances; he almost lost his life on occasion due to severe illness.\(^{46}\) When he wrote hymns of trust and hope under these circumstances, the message is so compelling that those who sing the hymns will also be encouraged and comforted. A hymn about illness, “And live I yet by power divine?” (1739), was based on the existential experience of the author.\(^{47}\) In

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\(^{44}\) Original line: “Take away the power of sinning.” This stanza was omitted in *A Collection of Hymns* (1780) possibly because John Wesley wanted to avoid the controversial concept that “admits the possibility if continuing to sin.” See J. R. Watson, *An Annotated Anthology of Hymns* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 195. Rev. John Fletcher of Madeley (1725–1785) suggested the alteration “love of sinning.” See Young, *Companion to The United Methodist Hymnal*, 476. Some hymnals substitute “bent to sinning,” but the Fletcher’s alteration is the standard one in most recent hymnals.


\(^{46}\) Kimbrough, *Lost in Wonder*, 110.

such circumstances, Charles could still look up to God for comfort and healing, and one can expect the great impact the hymn would have on those who sing it.

My feeble flesh refused to bear
Its strong redoubled agonies:
When mercy heard my speechless prayer,
And saw me faintly gasp for ease.

The fever turned its backward course,
Arrested by Almighty power;
Sudden expired its fiery force
And anguish gnawed my side no more.\(^\text{48}\)

When Christians face the paradoxes of life or go through failures that are beyond explanation, one may find it hard to see God, challenging one’s faith in God. Hymns allow Christians to express our deepest feelings and struggles to God. Hymns connect the head and heart so that faith is not just head knowledge but also a response of trust from the heart. Lyrical theology will sustain one’s thoughts and actions as one continues to look to God, lifting up his spirituality and embracing every stage and situation in life with faith and hope in God.

**Wesleyan Hymns Shape the Love for Neighbor**

The right doctrine and a religion of the heart can bring about transformation to the head and heart, allowing one to live out a changed life. Charles composed hymns reflecting well-rounded theological concepts and experiential faith, allowing his sung texts to express different Christian sentiments. Some examples are joy, praise, thanksgiving, forgiveness, contrition, grief, lament, trust, and praying for others. Singing these hymns could help to shape the right Christian attitudes in people. In addition to transforming Christians’ attitudes and spirituality, Charles sought to transform a person’s values to be more like Jesus by shifting their center of attention.

\(^{48}\) Stanzas 3 and 4 of “And live I yet by power divine?” in Kimbrough, *Lost in Wonder*, 110.
Charles’s hymns informed the world about the necessity for human transformation. Charles’s sermon based on Titus 3:8 reflected the key theological concept which guided his behavior: “Let it be your constant employment to serve and relieve your Savior in His poor distressed members.” The astounding love of God depicted in Wesley’s hymns does not stop with urging us to realize our true identity in Christ, but also sends us into the world to spread the good news of God’s love to all. From the beginning of their days at Oxford to the end of their lives, the Wesley brothers never failed to bring food for the spirit and the body to prisoners and established orphanages. They also started schools for children of poor miners, and founded medical dispensaries for people who could not afford proper medical care. According to Methodist theologian S. Paul Schilling, hymns play a vital role in the church’s evangelistic witness when they describe the gospel holistically. The process of congregational singing stimulates transformation in Christians’ hearts, moving from belief into action, from head to heart and to hand. Charles composed the following poem based on Acts 20:35:

Your duty let the Apostle show
Ye ought, ye ought to labor so,
In Jesus cause employed,
Your calling’s works at times pursue,
And keep the tent-maker in view,
And use your hands for God.

Work for the weak, and sick and poor,
Raiment and food for them procure,
And mindful of God’s Word,
Enjoy the blessedness to give,
Lay out your gettings, to relieve
The members of your Lord.

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50 Kimbrough, Lost in Wonder, 76.
52 Chilcote, Singing the Faith, 6.
53 “I have showed you all things, how that so labouring ye ought to support the weak, and to remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said, ‘it is most blessed to give than to receive’. ” (Acts 20:35, NIV)
Your labor which proceeds from love,
Jesus shall graciously approve,
With full felicity,
With brightest crowns your loan repay,
And tell you in that joyful day,
“Ye did it unto Me.”

Charles Wesley reminds all Christians to keep Paul (the “tentmaker”) in mind as an example of a servant of Jesus and to “use your hands for God.” Stanza 2 shows that supporting the weak and serving others in Christian labor is a mandate from the gospel, as well as a part of a Christian’s calling. It is the duty of Christ’s disciples to give aid to the weak, sick, and poor. When one does so, he is doing these acts of mercy unto Christ. This could remind the singers about the judgement before the holy throne, “Truly I tell you, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me” (Matt 25:45, NIV).

Charles also emphasized that performing this duty was a response to God’s love, and one must perform it out of love. “‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments” (Matt 22:37–40, NIV). Love for God should come first and unequivocally lead Christians to love their neighbors. Thus, if Christians fails to love their neighbor, they should self-examine and re-evaluate their love for God.

True Christian worship should glorify and honor the Trinitarian God. At the same time, true worship extends God’s love, justice, mercy, and kindness into the world. A worshipper’s heart needs to be fully reminded of “the realities of suffering in the world, the urgency of hearing and living out the hope of the gospel, and the joyous and costly call of

sacrificial living in the name of Christ” when the body of Christ gathers for worship.\textsuperscript{56} In other words, one must encounter the living God of heaven and earth in worship while being deliberately and purposefully sent “into the world,” remembering our neighbors, especially the ones who are blind and poor, oppressed and hungry. Hymn singing provides emotional resolve to face what a Christian’s life and call should be. It can rejuvenate one’s voice, kindle our righteous anger, exacerbate our conviction, and strengthen our resolve.\textsuperscript{57}

“O for a thousand tongues to sing” (1739) is a famous hymn of praise among Methodists. The hymn originally contained eighteen stanzas, but most hymnbooks include only stanzas seven to twelve. These stanzas focus on a universal appeal to praise God. Charles was inspired through a conversation with Moravian bishop and missionary Peter Böhler (1712–1775) who shared: “had I a thousand tongues I would praise Him with them all.”\textsuperscript{58} A closer look at the stanzas of this hymn shows that Charles had included a few unexpected groups of people to join the narrative of praise, groups that are often unrepresented in hymnals:

Harlots, and publicans, and thieves
In holy triumph join!
Saved is the sinner that believes
From crime as great as mine.

Murderers, and all ye hellish crew,
Ye sons and lush of pride,
Believe the Savior died for you,
For me the Savior died.\textsuperscript{59}

The gospel that Methodists hold on to is a gospel of inclusion. Charles expressed his conviction that Jesus died for all, including the criminals. Christians are all sinners, whose sins are just as grave as that of the most depraved criminal, and everyone needs salvation

\textsuperscript{56} Labberton, \textit{The Dangerous Act of Worship}, 34.
\textsuperscript{57} Labberton, \textit{The Dangerous Act of Worship}, 124.
\textsuperscript{59} Kimbrough, \textit{Lost in Wonder}, 88.
“from crimes as great as mine.” Through this hymn, Charles articulated the theology of social outreach: “all humankind is interrelated as creatures of God, who loves everyone and has expressed this love in Jesus Christ. Such inclusive love opposes injustice and seeks justice for all.”60 This hymn calls Christians to be evangelists in a shattered and fragmented world. Jesus said, “I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance” (Luke 5:32, NIV). Jesus sought all sinners. When Christians sing this hymn, all should remember the need for a global outcry of praise to God and also the call to fulfil the mission: praise and outreach to all.61

While meditating on this hymn, Kimbrough stated, “we are not called merely to be bearers of the good news of the transforming power of Christ’s love . . . we are the persons who should embody God’s love in all that we are in thought, word, and deed.”62 Charles challenged all Christians to step out of their comfort zones, to build a bridge with acts of compassion and justice for broken individuals, for the world to come before God. Jesus said, “The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor” (Luke 4:18-19, NIV). Charles understood that Jesus’s mission on earth was an inclusive ministry. As a disciple of Christ, one should embody his inclusive love and seek justice for all. In all aspects of lives, one must remember that Christians are in the world but not of the world. One of John Wesley’s famous teachings about work was: “Gain all you can, save all you can, and then give all you can.”63 John reiterated that the purpose of working was to practice charity, help

60 Kimbrough, Radical Grace, Loc 2269.
61 Kimbrough, Lost in Wonder, 89.
62 Kimbrough, Lost in Wonder, 164.
the poor, and social justice. Christians should not be enveloped by struggles with their dreams and traumas, and hence remain unmoved by God’s heart for the world.

**Lyrical Theology Applicable for Discipleship Today**

The success of the Methodist revival movement has proven the function of hymn singing as a powerful means of imparting theology, inciting passion, and nurturing disciples of Christ. Congregations in Wesleys’ era purchased hymn books to use in Society meetings or for devotional use, and had found their hearts “strangely warmed.” Kimbrough commented, “the hymns of the church are theology. They are theological statements: the church’s lyrical, theological commentaries on Scripture, liturgy, faith, action, and hosts of other subjects which call the reader and singer to faith, life, and Christian practice.”

Likewise, Wesleyan hymns are effective in disciplining Christians to be after God’s own heart in at least three aspects—knowledge, spirit, and mission. Firstly, these poems of faith educate the Methodist members to understand and retain Wesleyan doctrine and theological concepts while assuring them of the saving grace of Christ for all people. Secondly, the experiential expression, the fullness of human emotion, and the introspective aspects in the hymns could prevent the theological concepts from remaining at the cognitive level devoid of practical interest.

Lyrical theology enhances the religion of the heart which emphasizes personal experience in faith and personal response towards faith. Thirdly, the avoidance of self-centredness could transform the heart of the Christians from inward seeking to outward-looking for the needs and sufferings of the world as a response to the love and the will of God.

As lyrical theology, Wesleyan hymns play a vital role in nurturing the head, heart, and life of Christians to be a disciple with genuine fruits of love. However, Christians today may find it difficult to resonate with the musical style and rhetorical language of

Wesley’s era as well as the different cultural context. Having said that, the spiritual ethos and theological ethos behind the compositions are not limited by time period, culture, or geographical location. Despite the metaphors, similes, figures of speech, modes of expression, and syntax being unfamiliar to Methodist Christians today, Charles Wesley’s lyrical theology remains relevant because of the authentic questions that he was asking about God, Jesus, faith, others, the world, and self, are still the same ones Christians are pursuing today. He spoke from the depth of human needs: illness, death, injustice, despair, misuse of wealth and power, and the essential need for personal and social redemption. His innermost cry from the soul is still relatable and can be felt today while singing his experiential hymns.

The lyrical theology found in Charles Wesley’s hymns is holistic, integrating the ethos, spiritual experience, faith, and vision around which Methodism would be shaped. Methodists today still need to respond to the desire to grow in the love for God and for neighbor. Wesley’s hymns still impart these biblical principles to the singers of all ages. Therefore, pastors and church musicians should be conscious and vigilant in their selection of hymns to ensure that they have theological depth and emotional warmth. They should be educated on the role of hymn singing as a means of grace for the spiritual growth of their members and the potential of nurturing disciples after God’s heart through congregational singing. Conversely, a community of faith who is constantly singing songs with shallow theological content may experience a malnourished and superficial spirituality among its members. The potential of nurturing a disciple who understands and practices Christian ethos is hence lost.
CHAPTER 3:
DISCIPLING ASPECTS IN WESLEYAN HYMNALS

The Wesleys’ development of its hymnody was inspired by the living and warm life of faith demonstrated in the Moravian community (German Pietists), a group experienced by the Wesley brothers on their mission trip to the North American colony of Georgia.¹ The Wesley brothers grew up in the Anglican Church of England. The congregational music sung in the churches comprised metrical versions of Psalm texts. These were deemed impersonal by the Wesleys and did not inspire great spiritual depth. Nicholas Temperley, an American musicologist born in the UK, commented that the Anglican Church functioned as an organ of state in the eighteenth century.² Sermons justified conventional morality, charity, and the existing order of church and state with little regard to the emotional and spiritual needs of the congregation. Isaac Watts (1674–1748), father of the English hymn, transformed congregational singing from strict metrical psalmody to include psalm paraphrases and “hymns of human composure.”³ He marked a new milestone in church music by paraphrasing his sermons into easily learned and sung congregational hymns. The Wesley brothers took up the baton from Watts and developed a new style of singing that was more expressive, personal, and related to the experience of congregations in order to respond to the wonder and love of God with rapture of the soul.⁴

The Wesley brothers’ hymns are biblical and highly-crafted expressions of Christian teaching; they are often autobiographical, introspective in nature, and emotional expressions that help Christians to respond to the wonder and love of God. The Wesleys used hymns as

⁴ Young, Companion to the United Methodist Hymnal, 11.
an indispensable vehicle to convey doctrinal and theological education. They viewed hymns as an important means of grace, bringing people to religious conviction through sung theology. Through hymn singing, Christians expressed themselves, their community, and the world with a new spiritual perspective. Therefore, hymn singing can transform the mind, heart, and hands of the members in their pursuit of holiness and in expressing love for God and neighbor. This transformation is both individual and communal. In essence, the warmth and passion of hymn singing plays a crucial role in discipleship, renewing a convicted and heartfelt Christian’s life and faith within an existing church community. This is as true for the Body of Christ today as it was for the Anglican Church in the eighteenth century. The choice of hymns is integral for the formation of disciples.

The recognition of hymn singing in discipleship and the creative energy provided by the Holy Spirit leads to the composition of fresh congregational songs and the publication of new hymns and hymnals. A hymnal serves as a collection of theological witnesses for Methodist members and a manual for enriching worship and private devotion. The constant publication of affordable collections of hymns became one of the distinctive features of the Methodist movement. John Wesley edited the majority of the collections which contained hymns primarily written by Charles. The sixty-four separate collections of congregational songs established a channel to perpetuate their teaching and spiritual ethos. Charles covered a great variety of topics in his writings to encompass all kinds of liturgical themes, pastoral concerns, and spiritual needs. This breadth of topics can clearly be seen in the headings of A Collection of Hymns for the Use of the People Called Methodists, published in 1780.

In this chapter, two authorized Wesleyan hymnals will be examined—A Collection of Hymns for the Use of the People Called Methodists (1780) and The United Methodist Hymnal

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6 Young, Companion to the United Methodist Hymnal, 11.
(1989). The discussion in this chapter will focus on the theme and the purpose of these hymnals by examining their structure and the titles of the contents page, with a focus on discovering the elements for discipleship.

_A Collection of Hymns for the Use of the People Called Methodists (1780)_

The 1780 _Collection_ was published by John Wesley with a handful of his writings. He ploughed through the volumes he and Charles had already published, compiling the rich variety of earlier volumes into one hymnal. The second half of the title indicated this hymnal was specially designed for the Methodist movement. From the Preface of the hymnal, John Wesley explained that the purpose of this publication was to ensure that all Methodist members were able own a hymnal, especially those who could not afford one.7 As Methodist members were required to sing hymns at all worship sessions and gatherings, having one proper collection of hymns would allow them to reduce expenses by not having to purchase multiple hymnals, and to reduce logistical hassle of having to bring several hymnals to every gathering. John wished to provide them a hymnal that contained a variety of themes and a holistic theology that would embody all ordinary occasions, while remaining portable and not too bulky.8

John intended that this hymnal would function as “a little body of experimental and practical divinity.”9 By this he meant for the hymnal to be a resource for theological reflection, spiritual development, and practical application of Christian life in the light of Methodist doctrine. Despite being an autobiographical window into Charles’s personal spiritual pilgrimage, these hymns demonstrate the richness of his scriptural connotations where almost every line of the hymns could be paired with a corresponding biblical passage.

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7 The Preface (2), see Hilderbrandt & Beckerlegge, _The Works of John Wesley_, Vol. 7, 73.
8 The Preface (3), see Hilderbrandt & Beckerlegge, _The Works of John Wesley_, Vol. 7, 73.
Charles expressed biblical teachings by recreating the event afresh in the reader’s imagination. Singers could reimagine the biblical experiences and emotions and reflect upon their own spiritual lives. He also provided theological insights that reflected both his own experiences and those of other Christians. As these hymns were formed and tested by lived Christian experience, Christians were nurtured by invoking the experiences described in the hymns. In other words, John differentiated the “experimental” and “practical” application of a “real” Christian from formal and intellectual faith.  

John believed theology was closely related to Christian experience and actualized in authentic living. In his sermons, John underlined that experience could confirm a doctrine grounded in Scripture. Hence, it is fair to say that experience could enhance the assurance of a Christian’s faith and, therefore, plays a part in shaping the religion of the heart.

John selected hymns that covered the core beliefs and essential truths of Christianity, affirming the spiritual experience of Christians. He carefully organized them under headings according to the spiritual pilgrimage or spiritual biography of one he defined as “real Christian” in the Preface. John Wesley hoped to reflect Wesleyan theology on salvation and Christians’ calling, while resisting the influence of the teachings prevalent in his time—Pelagianism, Antinomianism, and Predestinarianism. Methodist Christians were also encouraged to make good use of this hymnal as a means to build a deeper relationship with God, to reinforce the growth of spirituality and piety for their private devotions, and to develop a deeper commitment to Christian living and service. In other words, this hymnal functioned as a manual of discipleship to affirm the identity in Christ of every Methodist

Christian and reflect distinctive Methodist emphases. While pursuing perfect holiness in the
fear of God, Christians would also develop their love for God and humanity.

The structure of the hymnal reflects these functions (See Appendix 1 for Table of
Contents). The hymnal contains five principal segments, each split into sections and further
sub-categories. The first part depicts the spiritual journey of Christians, from the repentance
of sinners to entering into eternal life. The central theme of the hymnal reflects the influence
of orthodox Christian belief—the fallen nature of human beings and the need for salvation.\textsuperscript{13}

Therefore, John Wesley proclaimed the universality of God’s grace with conviction at the
outset. He believed human sinfulness is the main factor leading to the separation of God and
humans. Thus, it is of utmost importance for humans to repent of their sins and receive the
justification of grace through faith.

\begin{verbatim}
Come to the living waters, come! 
Sinners, obey your Maker’s call; 
Return, ye weary wanderers, home, 
And find my grace is free for all.

Nothing ye in exchange shall give, 
Leave all you have and are behind; 
Frankly the gift of God receive, 
Pardon and peace in Jesus find.
\end{verbatim}\textsuperscript{14}

John then described six important theological aspects of salvation in Part I:

1. The Pleasantness of Religion
2. The Goodness of God
3. Death
4. Judgement
5. Heaven
6. Hell

The love of God and the sacrifice of Christ on the cross that accomplished justifying grace is
one of the theological doctrines of Methodism that Charles’ hymns emphasize and proclaim

\textsuperscript{13} Martin V. Clarke, \textit{British Methodist Hymnody: Theology, Heritage, and Experience} (London: Routledge, 2018), Loc 16 of 209, Kindle.
\textsuperscript{14} Stanzas 2 and 4, hymn 4, Hilderbrandt & Beckerlegge, \textit{The Works of John Wesley, Vol. 7}, 84.
vigorously. This inconceivable love and grace bring joy upon Christians in the new spiritual life that free from the fear of perishing and receiving the promise of eternal life.

Happy the man that finds the grace,  \[\text{[Prov 3:13–18]}\]
The blessing of God’s chosen race,  \[\text{[Jas 3:17]}\]
The wisdom coming from above,  \[\text{[Gal 5:6]}\]
The faith that sweetly works by love.

Happy beyond description he
Who knows, the Savior died for me,
The gift unspeakable obtains,
And heavenly understanding gains.\(^{15}\)

The Wesleys considered the death of Jesus Christ for humankind as disclosure of the goodness of God. Charles expressed the excitement towards this mystery by proclaiming repeatedly, “My Lord, my love is crucified.”\(^{16}\) Although Christians could be freed from perishing upon receiving justifying grace, no human beings can escape physical death. John depicted this cruel but unchanging fact through the first eight hymns in the section on “Death.” Charles applied rhetorical questions, “And am I born to die? / To lay this body down?” to challenge the singers to think about the purpose of living.\(^{17}\) The following five hymns in this section turned the focus toward the “lovely appearance of death!”\(^{18}\) Charles expressed the joy of the life after physical death for Christians, as their “tears are all wiped from these eyes, / And evil they never shall see.”\(^{19}\) Charles even invoked Christians to rejoice upon the departing of a brother in Christ (hymn 48), and for a widow (hymn 52). John enhanced the message by shifting into the theme of “Judgement.” Although the theme may sound solemn, Charles expressed excitement as he waited for Christ’s promised glorious return:

Then, Savior, then my soul receive,
Transported from this vale to live
And reign with Thee above;

\(^{16}\) Final line of the four stanzas, hymn 27, Hilderbrandt & Beckerlegge, \textit{The Works of John Wesley, Vol. 7}, 114.
\(^{17}\) Stanza 1 hymn 42, Hilderbrandt & Beckerlegge, \textit{The Works of John Wesley, Vol. 7}, 133.
Where faith is sweetly lost in sight,
And hope in full, supreme delight,
And everlasting love.  

John depicted the joyous life at the end of the pilgrim’s journey in the following section, “Heaven.” Heaven is a goal or destination for pilgrims in many hymns in this section: “How happy the people that dwell / Secure in the city above!” Charles reminded Christians of their identity as strangers and pilgrims on earth. The end goal is everlasting life with the accomplishment of perfect holiness. This is a recurring theme in Charles’ hymns. He encouraged Christians to lift their eyes of faith to see the everlasting home above with the Lamb seated on the glorious throne. After presenting the immortal hope, John then shifted into a hymn that depicts the despairing denouement of those who reject salvation. The placement of “Death” after “Heaven” highlighted the contrast between the two different endings. Charles expressed the desire to choose to eternal life over eternal death. After describing the blessings and goodness of becoming a Christian, John then summed up the first segment with prayers, seeking the mercy of God and salvation upon oneself and all humankind, “Let all in Thee redemption find, / And not a hoof be left behind.”

After presenting the necessity of salvation, Part II clarifies the tension held between two states of faith—formal (outward) and inward (inner, personal experience). The distinction between formal religion and inward religion is the state of heart towards piety and spirituality. Christians with formal religion present a form of godliness and live out a religious life in the absence of the personal experience of salvation. “A form of godliness was mine— / The power I never knew.” They perform liturgical acts, attend upon all the

ordinances of God and canons of the church, and serve the Lord attentively. The Wesley brothers experienced the two different religious states—before 1738 (including their trip to America in 1736) and after their conversion experiences respectively. John experienced a strict religious upbringing, observed a very disciplined devotional life, and was even ordained as priest. He soon came to the realization that he did not own the faith he preached before his dramatic conversion. Charles had a similar conversion experience three days earlier on Whitsunday (Pentecost) 1738. Henceforth, they emphasized the importance of experiencing a personal faith. They defined Christians who did not have a personal encounter with God as believers who own an outward behavior of real Christians but are missing the substance. Therefore, all of their labors are unfortunately in vain.

I work; and own the labor vain.  
And thus from works I cease;  
I strive; and see my fruitless pain  
Till God create my peace.  

[Heb 4:10]  
[Isa 45:7]

Fruitless, till thou thyself impart,  
Must all my efforts prove;  
They cannot change a sinful heart,  
They cannot purchase love.26  

For the Wesleys, the Christian life is not defined primarily by doing certain activities but by being a certain kind of person; “being” has priority over “doing.” Christians with inward religion obtain religion of the heart. The recurring theme of the four hymns in this section emphasizes that divine love with the empowerment of the Holy Spirit can open the inward eyes of Christians to affirm the faith and transform the heart, mind, and nature of humans. Christians who receive the assurance of faith and power of transformation will then be able to live out the life of love.

We by His Spirit prove  
And know the things of God;  
The things which freely of His love  
He hath on us bestowed:  

[1 Cor 2:12]

His Spirit to us he gave, [1 John 3:24; 4:13]
And dwells in us, we know;
The witness in ourselves we have, [1 John 5:10]
And all His fruits we show.27 [Gal 5:22–3]

Part III of the contents focuses on penitence—the transformation of heart and turning from sin. For Christians without the heart of repentance, faith will stay outward and formal, merely a matter of duty. The importance and necessity of repentance in approaching salvation is clearly shown in the organization of Part III:

1. Praying for Repentance
2. For Mourners Convinced of Sin
3. For Mourners Brought to the Birth
4. Convinced of Backsliding
5. Recovered

John provided plenty of resources that articulate the need for repentance. He included eighty-six hymns across the four sections, for people to practice repentance: “A heart to mourn, a heart to pray; / My business this, my only care, / My life, my every breath be prayer!”28 The ample inclusion of repentant hymns indicates the emphasis of the Wesley brothers on the fact that Christians who previously repented could still sin or even regress in the journey. Furthermore, it also implies that no one is beyond the reach of God’s grace and love, even for Christians who have turned their backs against God during their pilgrimage. John classified these as “backsliders.” Charles seemed to emphasize this theological concept by addressing Jesus Christ as “the sinner’s friend” as well as “Savior,” “Redeemer,” and “judge” in his hymns.29 Jesus is like a loyal friend, the faithful companion through high and low pits in life. Therefore, the intention of these hymns is not to accuse those lacking in faith and have chosen to turn away from God. Charles’ sung prayers stress the unceasing love of God, waiting graciously for those who have lost their personal living faith to repent and return. In

29 The expression “sinner’s friend” can be found in hymns 128, 135, 138, 139, 142; among others, Hilderbrandt & Beckerlegge, The Works of John Wesley, Vol. 7.
other words, calling for backsliders to return seems to be an important quality of Methodism.

“I will heal their backsliding, I will love them freely: for mine anger is turned away from him” (Hos 14:4; KJV). Charles emphasized repeatedly that it is only God’s ceaseless grace and love that can summon the return of a sinner or a backslider. It is not due to human efforts, but solely the grace of God.

No good word, or work, or thought
Bring I to gain Thy grace;
Pardon I accept unbought,
Thy proffer I embrace,
Coming as at first I came,
To take, and not bestow on Thee:
Friend of sinners, spotless Lamb,
Thy blood was shed for me.\(^\text{30}\)

This stanza reflects this passage of absolution: “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9, NIV).

After sections of calling for repentance, John concludes Part III with assurance and promise from God—“Recovered.” Those who sincerely repent could experience redemption afresh, “purified from all unrighteousness.” Charles expressed the power of transformation in his hymn:

The stone to flesh again convert! [Ezek 11:19]
The veil of sin again remove! [2 Cor 3:16]
Drop Thy warm blood upon my heart,
And melt it by Thy dying love!
This rebel heart by love subdue,
And make it soft, and make it new.\(^\text{31}\) [Job 23:16]

Part IV is entitled “For Believers.” It is the longest part among the five and the themes are wide-ranging, including discipleship during the spiritual pilgrimage:

1. For Believers, Rejoicing
2. For Believers, Fighting
3. For Believers, Praying
4. For Believers, Watching
5. For Believers, Working


6. For Believers, Suffering  
7. For Believers, Groaning for Full Redemption  
8. For Believers, Brought to the Birth  
9. For Believers, Saved  
10. For Believers, Interceding for the World  

These various aspects highlight the practical ethos of the hymnal, which is to nurture and strengthen the faith, hope, and love of a disciple, in order to achieve spiritual edification in perfect holiness. Fundamentally, the central theme of this part is the pursuit of holiness or Christian perfection, made possible through God’s sanctifying grace. The most notable theme in this part is “Believers Groaning for Full Redemption.” The title and the length of this section fully reflect the Wesleys’ theological vision, which they pursued wholeheartedly. John selected more hymns for believers under this section than in other sections. This arrangement emphasizes the importance of the goal of perfect holiness. The hymns are mostly prayers for seeking perfection. Phrases that demonstrate the theme like “sanctify,” “spotless life,” “perfect love,” often appear in the hymns of this section. Charles wrote these hymns in a form of prayers, emphasizing conformity to the mind and nature of Christ as the way to attain the state of entire sanctification. In other words, the Wesleys’ concept of pursuing holiness is dynamic in nature and an ongoing response to the beckoning of the Holy Spirit.

The thing my God doth hate,  
That I no more may do,  
Thy creature, Lord, again create,  
And all my soul renew;  
My soul shall then, like Thine,  
Abhor the thing unclean,  
And sanctified by love divine  
Forever cease from sin.  

[Jer 44:4]  
[Ps 51:10]  
[Rom 12:9]  

That blessed law of Thine,  
Jesu, to me impart:  
Thy Spirit’s law of life divine,  
O write it in my heart!  
Implant it deep within,  
Whence it may ne’er remove,  
The law of liberty from sin.  

[Jer 31:33]  
[Jas 1:25]
The perfect law of love.

Thy nature be my law,
Thy spotless sanctity,
And sweetly every moment draw
My happy soul to Thee!
Soul of my soul remain!
Who didst for all fulfil,
In me, O Lord, fulfil again
Thy heavenly Father’s will!\(^{32}\) \[Luke 22:42b\]

In this part of the hymnal, John presented both aspects of holiness—love for God and love for neighbors. In the last section, “For Believers Interceding for the World,” Charles wrote prayers for races, countries, non-believers, king, parents, masters, children, and those receiving baptism. These hymns are not merely sung to enhance relationship between God and individuals (personal piety), but also a means of expression to love others (social holiness) by mourning with them and interceding for them.

We weep for those that weep below,
And burdened for the afflicted sigh; \[Rom 12:15\]
The various forms of human woe
Excite our softest sympathy;
Fill every heart with mournful care,
And draw out our souls in prayer.\(^{33}\) \[Isa 58:10\]

Part VI is directed especially to the assemblies of Methodist members in the form of bands, class meetings and societies. There are four sections in this part which form the full contents of a meeting:

1. For the Society, Meeting
2. For the Society, Giving thanks
3. For the Society, Praying
4. For the Society, Parting

John prepared adequate materials for members to sing from the beginning of their meetings until the end. It is fair to consider this part as further evidence for the importance of hymn singing in Methodism, both individual and communal. The fifty-nine hymns in this section

contain corporate emphasis. “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord” (Col 3:16; NKJV). For the Wesleys, growing towards sanctification and conforming to God’s standard as a faith community is an important means of grace and the formation of disciples. Through conferencing with one another, Christians could practice living out a life of love by sharing each other’s burden and watching over each other’s soul. It is for this reason that the Wesleys encouraged corporate hymn singing. Believers could experience support from one another on this journey of discipleship through communal singing with heart and voice. They could enhance each other’s faith by singing the sung theology to each other, as well as with one another.

Two are better far than one
For counsel or for fight;
How can one be warm alone
Or serve his God alright?
Join we then our hearts and hands,
Each to love provoke his friend,
Run the way of His commands,
And keep it to the end. 34

Aspects of Discipleship in Collection 1780

The Collection 1780 plays its role as a means of grace in shaping and guiding the lives of individual Methodists (personal holiness) and the faith community they belonged to (social holiness). Its hymns trace the process and development of Christian experience from sinner to Christian, from backsliders to committed disciples of Christ—participating in Methodist societal life, practicing means of grace, and pursuing perfect holiness. This reflected a shift as hymn singing was no longer limited to worship and liturgical festivals in church buildings but integrated into daily Christian living. Hence, it is fair to state that the publication of this hymnal was for more personal devotion and societal meetings than serving a liturgical

purpose. Further evidence of this intent could be observed in Parts IV and V, as well as the omission of festival and sacramental hymns.\textsuperscript{35} Methodist Historical scholar Beckerlegge also highlighted the main purpose of this hymnal for was the benefit of society, not for church worship.\textsuperscript{36} Members of Methodist society were supposed to observe and participate in the liturgical acts held in their local parish churches.

In addition, the nature of the headings and the way John categorized the hymns revealed a strong commitment to evangelism (missional holiness).\textsuperscript{37} John’s primary concern for the first three segments seems to be the propagation of salvation and salvation of all sinners rather than a systematic theology for Methodism. He stated in the first section of the hymnal that God’s will for was for universal redemption, “Beseeeching to Return to God.” Salvation is for everyone as the Lord is “not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance” (2 Pet 3:9; NKJV). The intention is obvious when John placed “O for a thousand tongues to sing” as opening hymn, which fully illustrated God’s greatness through salvific work of Jesus on the cross and thus granted new life in Christ to believers. At the first glance, this hymn appears to be like a praise and thanksgiving hymn, but as we delve deeper into the nine stanzas included in this hymnal, the emphasis again points to “His soul was once an offering made / For every soul of man.”\textsuperscript{38} The motif of this hymn could be defined as a testimony of salvation addressed to both the believers and the world. Furthermore, John even dedicated one whole part to admonishing people, beckoning them to repent and return to God, in order to highlight God’s universal offer of salvation and God’s unconditional love.

On the aspect of language, it could be observed that the Wesley brothers spent much effort to strike a balance between the elegance of the English language and plain and simple

\textsuperscript{35} Other hymnals published in 1740s serve the purpose of festival and sacramental, for example, \textit{Hymns for the Nativity of our Lord} (1745), \textit{Hymns for the Lord’s Supper} (1745), \textit{Hymns for our Lord’s Resurrection} (1746), \textit{Hymns for Ascension Day} (1746), \textit{Hymns for Petition and Thanksgiving [Whitsunday]} (1746).

\textsuperscript{36} Hilderbrandt & Beckerlegge, \textit{The Works of John Wesley}, Vol. 7, 57.

\textsuperscript{37} Clarke, \textit{British Methodist Hymnody}, Loc16.

\textsuperscript{38} Stanza 7, hymn 1, Hilderbrandt & Beckerlegge, \textit{The Works of John Wesley}, Vol. 7, 81.
expressions, ensuring everyone could comprehend and resonate with the lyrics and, in turn, point them towards salvation. The reason for them paying great attention to the simplicity of the language could be due to the targeted group they ministered to and members of the Methodist community who were from the lower class of society and, as a result, may not have had the chance to receive much education. If so, this emphasis is of utmost importance in order to ensure everyone felt included in the community and were able to share the same expression of faith. Therefore, by singing hymns about the eagerness for salvation and repentance, Methodist Christians could develop a secure foundation of evangelical theology in their minds, and feel challenged to be concerned about the salvation of other souls. In other words, this hymnal too helps to form missional holiness in a disciple.

**The United Methodist Hymnal (1989)**

The United Methodist Church was established through a merger of the Evangelical United Brethren Church and the Methodist Church in 1968, two traditions that valued congregational singing. The combined membership consists of believers with various theological perspectives, races, cultures, walks of life and vocational orientation (from professors to farmers), feminists, and traditionalists. In the United States, United Methodist Churches have divergent theological perspectives that range from liberalism to fundamentalism. This was because members came from divergent traditions including the Methodist Episcopal Church in the North and South, the Methodist Protestant Church, the United Brethren, and the Evangelical Church. In sum, United Methodists form “a church uniquely inclusive in membership, episcopal and itinerate in government, and global and ecumenical in ministry.”

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39 Young, *Companion to the United Methodist Hymnal*, 129.
In order to embrace such pronounced differences yet maintaining the continuity with Wesleyan theology, *The United Methodist Hymnal (UMH)*, the first official hymnal of the United Methodist Church, was published in order to respond to the various needs of the diverse group of believers and the present issues in the contemporary churches.\(^{42}\) This hymnal functions as the Statement of Faith or Catechism for United Methodists. In short, it reflects denominational culture and ethos by serving as an avenue to pass down the spiritual heritage from the past to contemporary believers, as well as to future generations. In other words, the hymnal is a symbol of unity by providing all United Methodists a common worship resource despite their theological, historical, and cultural diversity.\(^{43}\)

Intense discussions took place within the hymnal committee as they were deciding on the hymns to be included in this hymnal reflecting division on a few issues. The primary concern was the matter of relevance. Vatican II (1962–65) resulted in a reformation in leadership, language, and music.\(^{44}\) One outcome of this reformation was to embrace the influence of ecumenical Christian community. The previous hymnals were regarded as irrelevant to the society and the world. The content and musical style of hymns reflected traditional worship settings with historical liturgical structures. The sole use of these hymns were challenged by those who promoted popular musical styles, charging earlier generations with a failure to keep up with current trends. Many younger generations no longer resonated with hymnic repertoire, especially the hymn text peppered with religious language preceding their era. This was in part due to the phenomenon that Christian music had entered the entertainment industry and became a popular, saleable commodity in the twentieth century due to the flourishing of religious television programs and commercial recordings. Many churches began to set aside traditional hymnody and shifted to new songs that were written

\(^{42}\) The *UMH* is widely used in Methodist Churches in Singapore among the English-speaking congregations that retain a hymn singing heritage.


\(^{44}\) Young, *Companion to the United Methodist Hymnal*, 121.
about current topics and concerns, set to contemporary language and tunes, and accompanied by contemporary instruments (guitar, piano, and drums). This situation urged The Hymnal Revision Committee (HRC) to consider the use of traditional language in traditional hymns (i.e., thy, thou, didst, etc). The definition of traditional language is “language used in devotional poetry either in the original or in a translation based on English Reformation leader Thomas Cramner (1489–1556) and/or the King James Version until the time of World War II.” The HRC was allowed to substitute or contemporize Public Domain hymns—those not under copyright, on the conditions that the essential message of the hymn and the poet’s original intention were not altered, and that it did not contradict the Social Principles of The Book of Discipline. According to hymnal editor Carlton R. Young, the committee tended to take a conservative approach on this matter as they strived to retain the original lyrics and memorable qualities of traditional hymns.

The next issue that The HRC faced was the application of inclusive language. This consideration, stemming from a growing feminist sentiment, was concerned about how the language in church demeans women. The argument mainly revolved around the generic use of the word “man” and “mankind,” forms that implied for many the exclusion of women. Meanwhile, the concept of inclusive language was expanded further to language that reflected racism, nationalist, militarism, imperialist, and insensitivity to disabled persons. However, while the dominant biblical image and language for God was that of Father, scripture also uses feminine metaphors to describe God and God’s care. Therefore, the final solution for this issue was to render inclusive language for people in both traditional and new hymns, with wide-ranging images or a change of words to fit the new understanding of

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45 Young, *Companion to the United Methodist Hymnal*, 132.
inclusiveness. If a hymn addresses the assembly as a whole, it should reflect both male and
gender in images and pronouns. Meanwhile, the original forms of address, including
masculine references, descriptions, and metaphors for God in traditional hymns should be
preserved.50 One of Charles Wesley’s hymn, “Come, sinners, to the gospel feast” underwent
alteration. The original lyrics for stanza one read: “Come, sinners, to the gospel feast; / Let
every soul be Jesu’s guest; / Ye need not one be left behind, /For God hath bidden all
mankind.”51 The masculine pronoun, “mankind,” was changed to “humankind” in order to
meet the goal of Christian unity and inclusiveness. The HRC also included some hymns that
depicted female imagery in the gospel, e.g., “Women in the night” (UMH 274), “The first one
ever” (UMH 276), and others.

Some ecumenical contemporary hymns expanded the traditional terms for God—for
example, Father, Master, Lord, even Jesus—and replaced these with new forms of address
intended to be non-sexist.52 One example is the refrain of Thomas Troeger’s “Source and
Sovereign, Rock and Cloud”, where “name” and “God” is used:

May the church at prayer recall
That no single holy name
But the truth behind them all
Is the God whom we proclaim.53

Furthermore, the issue of inclusive language was not limited to gender. Another
aspect is language that is offensive to those who are differently abled. A classic example lies
in the opening lines of the sixth stanza of “O for a thousand tongues to sing”: “Hear him. ye
deaf; his praise, ye dumb, / Your loosened tongues employ.”54 The word “dumb” had a
different meaning in its use two hundred years ago, and may offend those who are mute. The

50 Case, Understanding Our New United Methodist Hymnal, 16.
50 Young, Companion to the United Methodist Hymnal, 132.
52 Case, Understanding Our New United Methodist Hymnal, 168.
53 Lyrics taken from the refrain of hymn 113 in The United Methodist Hymnal.
54 Lines 1 and 2, stanza 6, hymn 57, The United Methodist Hymnal.
committee had considered removing this stanza from *UMH* 1989. However, the final decision was to retain the stanza with an indication that it could be omitted.

Apart from paying attention to relevance and inclusiveness, the other issue that troubled The HRC was one regarding ethnic heritage—most selected hymns reflected Euro-American, English-speakers. Neglecting other cultures could hinder the efforts of sharing the gospel message to other nations. Moreover, The HRC also needed to handle the issues of traditional evangelical doctrines amid diverse theological stands, as well as the matter of style and taste. After rounds of in-depth discussions and consideration, the committee decided to compile the hymnal based on the needs of local congregations in the United Methodist Church, rather than skew to the preference of the committee. The editorial committee sought to find a middle ground despite the diversity in traditions and styles and strives to preserve the hymns that have the strongest value and usefulness to most members. As a result of these efforts, *UMH* 1989 is recognized as the most ethnically inclusive major hymnal in the last half of the twentieth century. It has included seventy African American spiritual hymns, black gospel songs and hymns, bilingual Spanish songs and Hispanic music, Asia American sources (Chinese and Korean hymns with translated English lyrics provided), Native American hymns, and hymns from other several nationalities. The shift towards inclusion shows the appreciation of other cultures and nationalities. Notwithstanding the changes, there still remains a diversity of treasured hymns in the past, the work of modern hymnologists, evangelical songs, and praise choruses. Therefore, it is possible to make a bold claim that this hymnal offers something for everyone.

Based on the contents of the hymnal, it clearly reflects an emphasis on worship services and sacraments (See Appendix 2 for Table of Contents). The editorial committee

56 Young, *Companion to the United Methodist Hymnal*, 149.
arranged the contents to begin with the service order for public worship, Holy Communion, and Baptism. They included musical responses to the sacraments to enrich the rites and participation of the congregation. This demonstrated the influence of Vatican II on Christian unity particularly through Eucharist.\textsuperscript{58} The Wesley brothers encouraged the reading and singing of Psalms as an important liturgical heritage in worship, leading The HRC to provide a segment of liturgical Psalter at the later part of the hymnal for use in public worship. They selected one hundred Psalters psalms to be read or sung along with the readings of the Common Lectionary (1983).\textsuperscript{59} The last part of the contents includes the Service of Christian Marriage and Service of Death and Resurrection, as well as orders for morning and evening daily prayer and praise, followed by the Creeds and Lord’s Prayer in traditional, ecumenical, contemporary, and various ecclesial versions. The provision of multiple versions of Creed and prayer shows the principle of “offering something for everyone.”

The hymns are organized in five parts:

1. The Glory of the Triune God
2. The Grace of Jesus Christ
3. The Power of the Holy Spirit
4. The Community of Faith
5. A New Heaven and a New Earth

Apart from reflecting the Wesleys’ strong belief in the Trinity, this arrangement, corresponding to the pattern of Apostles’ Creed—the persons of the Trinity, church, and eschatological hope—provides an initial theological and liturgical interpretation of hymns as proclamation of faith in worship. The editorial committee deliberately provided hymnic resources aligned to significant events of the Christian year. This purpose is first demonstrated in part two, “The Grace of Jesus Christ.” The hymns are arranged according to Christ’s gracious life—from Advent to the Ascension, teaching the doctrine based on the

\textsuperscript{58} Young, \textit{Companion to the United Methodist Hymnal}, 16.

\textsuperscript{59} Preface to Psalter in \textit{The United Methodist Hymnal}, 736. The Revised Common Lectionary was not released until 1994 and thus not in time for use in \textit{The UMC}.
event. Two major events in church calendar are the incarnation and resurrection of Christ. The committee hence supplied ample hymns for Christmas and Holy Week (from Palm/Passion Sunday to Easter). Part four, “The Community of Faith,” includes hymns for ecclesiology, sacraments, other various rites of passage, and particular times of worship. This again highlights the liturgical needs in worship.

Part three reflects a Wesleyan focus by organizing the hymns in order of salvation based on the distinctive Wesleyan understanding of grace—the spiritual journey from prevenient to sanctifying grace and the pursuit of personal and social holiness. This is presented under “The Power of the Holy Spirit.” The HRC placed the emphasis on the Wesleyan doctrine that the experience of grace is solely empowered by Holy Spirit. Two sections named “Prayer, Trust, Hope” and “Strength in Tribulation” are listed under “Sanctifying and Perfecting Grace” too. These sections reaffirm the understanding that Christians need to rely on the power of the Holy Spirit to grow in grace and eventually become more Christlike.

The last part includes hymns on eschatology, “A New Heaven and A New Earth.” Eschatological hope is one of the emphases in Wesleyan hymns that occurs often. Moreover, many African American spirituals and gospel songs contain a “heaven” verse, with image of going home, e.g., “Swing low, sweet chariot, / coming for to carry me home.”60 In a hurting and broken world full of injustice and tribulation, there is a need for hope of eternity which was expressed in the eschatological hymns. The aspect of “Judgement” and “Hell” in the 1780 Collection has been transformed into “Return and Reign of the Lord” and “The Completion of Creation.” While this change is an affirmation of hope and promise, it undermines the Wesleyan teaching on “a desire to flee from the wrath to come.”

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60 Hymn 703, The United Methodist Hymnal.
Aspects of Discipleship in *UMH 1989*

*The United Methodist Hymnal* (1989) is a collection of old and new hymns, which carries sectarian characteristics while striving to be ecumenical and contemporary. This hymnal seeks a middle ground to sustain various needs and respond to the many considerations respectively. While the hymnal hopes to achieve ecumenical unity in song, the goal is to be a full manifestation of the Wesleyan tradition. The *UMH* 1989 places an emphasis on the necessities of public worship and liturgical planning. It serves the worship needs by providing resources for various aspects in public worship though some hymns may be adapted to personal and private devotion. In addition, the Wesleys’ emphasis on Christian conferencing has been neglected. The hymnal presented the concept as “church” rather than “small group” or “fellowship.” This again reflects the pattern of expressing and forming the Christian experience through the overall activities of worship.

In conclusion, the *UMH 1989* provides a comparable set of hymns for the contemporary spiritual pilgrimage within the context of worship. Although there are only seventy hymns and poems by the Wesley’s family, the efforts to retain Wesleyan theology in the core doctrine of grace, salvation, and perfect holiness, both personal and social, is clearly seen. Moreover, the adaptation to remain relevant and inclusive helps to educate and enhance the discipling aspect of mission. United Methodists pursue the goal of “offering something for everyone” in the hope of achieving unity among the various ethnic and theological perspectives they hold and to spread gospel to all people regardless of culture, socio-economic status, and language of origin. The ecumenical range of hymnody also summons contemporary Wesleyan Christians to greater sensitivity to the needs of other cultures, minority groups, and ecumenical world. Therefore, the focal point and the function of *UMH* 1989 may be different from *Collection* 1780, but it too contains the three aspects of discipleship—personal, social, and missional holiness in different contexts.
The challenge for remaining ecumenical and more relevant for the times is to enhance vital and experiential relationship with God yet continue to retain the fundamental core of Wesleyan doctrine and heritage no matter how the times change. Wesley’s notion of the hymnal as an expression of “a little body of experimental and practical divinity” should not be forgotten. Therefore, the accuracy of its doctrinal content is of utmost importance to nurture a disciple whose heart and life conforms to the mind of Christ and walks as Christ walked.
CHAPTER 4:
DISCIPLING ASPECTS IN CHINESE HYMNALS

Historical Background of Chinese Hymnals

Protestant missionaries introduced the Chinese people on the mainland to the practice of hymn singing and hymnal publication during their evangelism efforts in the early nineteenth century. China’s government started opening its doors to Westerners after signing the Treaty of Nanking with the British government in 1842. Under the treaty, British traders could only live and trade in five ports of China: Canton, Amoy, Foochow, Ningpo, and Shanghai. Soon, more Protestant missionaries were being sent to China. However, the Chinese government considered Christianity illegal in the nineteenth century because Christian teaching was viewed as a threat to its imperial authority and control of society. This restriction lasted for nearly two decades until the signing of the Treaty of Peking in 1860 with Britain, France, and Russia. This treaty opened more ports to the West and Christianity was gradually recognized as a legitimate religion at the treaty ports. Authorities allowed missionaries to enter the inland to evangelize and convert Chinese people and build churches.

Because earlier missionaries were not allowed to preach the gospel, they focused on the study of Chinese language, translation of scripture and hymns into Chinese, and writing tracts in Chinese. They incorporated hymns into the propagation of the gospel and education of biblical truths. Since the structure of a hymn is similar to Chinese poetry—both contain stanzas of text in metrical form—hymn singing was recognized as one of the more powerful and effective pedagogical tools for enhancing memory and propagation of the gospel.

Missionaries compiled and published hymnals by translating Western hymns into Chinese.

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They either translated hymns themselves or were assisted by Chinese converts or tutors.

However, it was challenging and time consuming for the missionaries to fully master Chinese language and Chinese poetic style. Chinese people were using two styles of Mandarin in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries—Wen-li (文理) and colloquial dialects. Wen-li was a classical poetry language which was only mastered by government officials and highly educated intellectuals, while the colloquial style was the common speaking language.

Between these two styles, Wen-li was more suitable for translation from English as it was closer to the structure and expression of Western hymn texts. However, common people found it hard to understand and sing the texts. Ironically, the elites did not fully appreciate Wen-li hymn texts because the translators often had to ignore the rules of Chinese poetry to suit the rhythm of the original hymn. In other words, a hymnal in Wen-li style had a limited pool of users. Missionaries at different regions had to convey Christian doctrine to the people in their vernacular languages or dialects. Therefore, at least 208 hymnals appeared between 1818–1936 in numerous dialects and were largely regional and sectarian.

The missionaries’ difficulty in mastering Chinese poetry language due to the dichotomy between the classical poetic language and vernacular languages often affected the understanding of Chinese Christians. One of the major difficulties was the choice of appropriate Chinese characters to accurately convey the Christian message. Often, the literal


5 Classifications of Chinese varieties in the late-nineteenth and early twentieth centuries often followed river systems, which were historically the main routes of migration and communication in southern China. Each region has its own vernacular language. Therefore, missionaries had to communicate and convey the doctrine to the people in their regional dialect or heart language, although Standard Chinese (standard Mandarin, based on the Beijing dialect of Mandarin) was common in China. This situation continued until 1930s when standard Mandarin was adopted as an official language of China. See Wikipedia, “Chinese language,” https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chinese_language (accessed December 15, 2021).


translation of the hymn texts did not register with Chinese readers and changed the original meaning. Moreover, speaking Chinese characters requires tonal inflection, increasing translation difficulties. Changing tones for the same written Chinese character could convey an entirely different meaning. Therefore, the translation is not merely a appropriate choic of words, but the correct tonal inflection of the words needed to match the melodic structure of hymn tune in order to ensure the accuracy of meaning.8

During the May Fourth Movement (socio-political revolution) in 1919, Chinese intellectuals challenged the role of Chinese cultural institutions in guarding traditional Chinese ideologies from Western powers.9 The students started to question Christianity, viewing Christian teachings and missionaries as a form of “cultural imperialism.” Consequently, the outbreak of this movement led to the indigenization of Christian literature. One major transformation birthed from this movement was the introduction of Bai-Hwa (白话, “plain language”), or conversational style of speaking and writing. This new Chinese literary style was much easier to learn and master than Wen-li and much easier for people with a certain level of education to understand. Hence, Chinese Christians and missionaries were deeply impacted by the new written style, and the translated hymns in Bai-Hwa became accessible to larger groups of Chinese people.10

In 1922, the National Christian Council of China was established to connect the Protestant churches and the already established Church of Christ in China.11 Chinese church leaders were eager to produce indigenous Christian literature and hymns in order to distance themselves from the West and to move away from the dominance of nineteenth-century gospel songs. They wished to craft a Christianity acceptable to the Chinese mind and heart.

9 The May Fourth Movement or “New Culture Movement” was an anti-imperialism and anti-foreign movement launched by a group of over three thousand students at Tiananmen Square, Beijing. One of the examples of Chinese cultural institutions is Confucianism. See Hsieh, A History of Chinese Christian Hymnody, 99.
The first elected president of the council, Chinese theologian and Christian poet Tzu-chê Chao (趙紫宸, 1888–1979), advocated the indigenization of Chinese hymnody by contextualizing the Western hymn texts with the words and phrases that aligned with Chinese culture and heritage, even if it meant departing from the intention of the original language or composing new texts. With the awareness and eagerness to distance themselves from Western influences, a union Chinese hymnal *Hymns of Universal Praise* (*HUP*, 1936) was eventually published for the use of all Christian churches in China under the leadership of Chinese theologian and hymnwriter Timothy Ting-fang Lew (劉廷芳, 1891–1947) and edited by Methodist missionary Bliss Wiant (1895–1975), a professor at Yenching University (Chinese name Tian-xiang Fan 范天祥). This hymnal had a profound impact on the Chinese churches in China, also affecting Chinese churches in Taiwan, South East Asia, and North America. The Chinese Methodist Conference of Malaysia had even adopted this hymnal as the official hymnal for their Methodist churches in 1936.

In this chapter, I will review the development of the three editions of *Hymns of Universal Praise*, the prominent Chinese hymnal for Chinese Christians. A discussion of the influence of this collection on a more recent hymnal (*Hymns of United Worship*, 1997) that is influential for Chinese Methodist churches in Southeast Asia will follow. I will emphasize the theme and purpose of the hymnal by examining the structure of the content with a focus on discovering elements for discipleship.

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12 Hsieh, *A History of Chinese Christian Hymnody*, 2. Chao, often hailed as the “Father of Chinese hymnody,” compiled two Chinese hymnals that were responsive to Chinese culture and sensibilities. First hymnal is *Tuan Qi Sheng Ge Ji* (團契聖歌集, “Christian Fellowship Hymns”, Peking, 1931), a hymnal that included 121 of Chao’s hymns and translations in the Wen-li style. A second hymnal, *Mien Zhueng Sheng Ge Ji* (民眾聖歌集, “Hymns for the People,” Peking, 1931), contained 54 new hymns by Chao in colloquial Mandarin, with tunes drawn from ancient Chinese sources and folk songs, as well as new Chinese melodies. Ten of the hymns from these two hymnals were selected to be included in *HUP* 1936. See C. Michael Hawn, “Hymns of Universal Praise.”

13 Hawn, “Hymns of Universal Praise.”

Hymns of Universal Praise 1936

In the early 1930s, Chinese church leaders began to be conscious of the need for the churches’ own identities to align with nationalistic sentiments. National Christian Council of China observed that churches started to look for their own voice and heritage in Christianity. They were no longer satisfied with Western translated hymns and tune as these did not adequately express the nation’s religious genius and fervor. In 1931, the Chinese Anglican church published a hymnal containing native hymns, A Collection of Songs for the Praise of God.15 The hymnal committee had invited Chinese Christians to compose hymn texts and the amount of submissions was overwhelming. They received over two thousand new Chinese hymn texts of all types and themes, of which only fifty were selected for the new Chinese Anglican hymnal.16 The success of this hymnal publication evidenced the advancing hymnological development in China.

On the other hand, Chinese churches in late nineteenth century moved towards ecclesial self-determination by implementing the Three-Self movement—self-governing, self-supporting, and self-propagating—to establish indigenous churches.17 Missionary-initiated churches had become fragmented with too many denominations promoted by Western ecclesial entities. Instead of producing “harmony” (a concept drawn from Confucianism) among Christians, the result was competition. As a result, church leaders and missionaries compiled a hymnal that could be used across most denominations in China.18 They believed that sharing one hymnal among various denominations and churches could be a force for unity. After the publication of A Collection of Songs for the Praise of God in 1931, various churches in China decided to compile a new union hymnal with this goal in mind.

15 Leung, The Emergence of a National Hymnody, 47.
16 The hymnal contains 466 hymns in total.
17 Hawn, “Hymns of Universal Praise.”
improving the style and greater relatability of the hymnal to the modern interdenominational theological views. Six denominations participated in this union hymnal project—Church of Christ, Chinese Anglican Church, East China Baptist Convention, Methodist Episcopal Church North (MEN), Methodist Episcopal Church South (MES), and North China Kung Li Hui (Congregational Church).\(^\text{19}\) The combined membership of these six denominations was about three quarters of the entire Protestant church membership in China, representing most of the churches in this extensive and epoch-making hymnal project.

The editorial committee was made up of 23 members, and consisted of Chinese pastors, missionaries, and musicians.\(^\text{20}\) Adopting the production of *A Collection of Songs for the Praise of God* as blueprint, they spent four years compiling a hymnal that could meet the needs of a diverse group of Christian worshippers. The first step was deciding which hymns should be included in this hymnal, a decision the editorial committee felt they could only make after understanding the hymn preferences of various denominations. They decided to request for all churches to submit three hundred hymns, in three categories: one hundred essential hymns, one hundred important hymns, and one hundred desirable hymns.\(^\text{21}\) After the submission, the editorial committee collaborated and identified a maximum of three hundred essential hymns to all churches. The important and preferred hymns chosen were based on the needs of each group—with consideration for their contribution to the enrichment of the hymnal. Despite the submitted lists of hymns, the editorial committee ensured that the inclusion of self-composed Chinese hymns made up at least ten percent of the total number.\(^\text{22}\) After consolidating the list of hymns, the committee decided on 467 hymns from the lists and appointed a group of pastors and musicians to work on the texts and tunes of the selected

\(^{21}\) Leung, *The Emergence of a National Hymnody*, 49.
\(^{22}\) Leung, *The Emergence of a National Hymnody*, 50.
hymns. The task force referred to fifty-three Western hymnals and thirty-one local hymnals in order to choose the best version of each hymn to edit and re-translate. They relooked at the choice or tunes, composing new tunes in the style of indigenous music when some Western hymn tunes did not match the Chinese pronunciation and intonation. Chinese music is mostly based on the pentatonic scale (five-tone gapped scale) in contrast to the Western music that uses the seven-tone diatonic (heptatonic) scale in an octave. Because traditional Chinese music was based on a gapped pentatonic scale without half-tone intervals, the early Chinese Christians faced difficulty in singing “fa” and “ti” (fourth and seventh notes in heptatonic scale) in the hymns.

The editorial committee went through a lengthy and rigorous process of textual screening, selecting, editing, and re-translating, finally producing an ecumenical Chinese hymnal with a strong cultural flavor. They decided on 514 hymns, including 62 original Chinese texts and 72 special arrangements of ancient Chinese tunes or new compositions. These original Chinese compositions incorporated strong cultural elements in their choice of words, expression, philosophies, and tunes, the latter sometimes rooted in Buddhism, Confucianism, or Taoism. Nevertheless, the writers inculturated these concepts and philosophies into liturgical artifacts praising God and edifying Christians. The ultimate goal of the editorial committee was to produce a hymnal with high standards in terms of spiritual thought, literary style, and music, that could express praise and the loftiest aspirations of all Christian churches in China. They hoped this hymnal would enrich the quality of hymns and

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23 Among Western hymn writers, hymns by Charles Wesley and Isaac Watts were the most selected and translated. See Leung, *The Emergence of a National Hymnody*, 98.

24 Leung, *The Emergence of a National Hymnody*, 71.


hymn singing to inspire and enhance the piety and worshipping heart of the Christian community. They kept the themes of the hymns wide and varied to ensure the availability of suitable hymns for all events and aspects of the church’s life. Most importantly, they wanted to make sure the hymns could be understood and resonated with all Christians, regardless of age group or education level. Furthermore, the committee aimed to produce a hymnal that could be a channel for evangelism by including texts accessible to non-Christians.27

The content of *HUP* (1936) covers well-rounded aspects for Christian living and across different age groups. It has ten principal segments, each split into sub-categories (See Appendix 3 for a full Table of Contents):

- Adoration
- The Church Year
- The Church
- The Christian Life
- Times and Seasons
- Special Occasions
- The Home
- Youth
- Children’s Hymns
- Gospel Songs.

The contents of the hymnal paint a picture of the state of Chinese churches and aspirations for Chinese worship in early twentieth century, and illustrates the unique culture of Chinese people. “The Church Year” provides hymns for all aspects of the life of Jesus, including his circumcision and presentation in the temple. “The Church” contains hymns on the sacraments, mission, and service. The subcategory, “Sacraments and Other Rites,” includes hymns for “Confirmation and Reception into Full Membership” in addition to hymns for “Baptism.” It also provides hymns for other rites of passage including “Ordination and the Ministry,” “Marriage,” and “The Burial of the Dead.” The editors then depicted the missions of the church in both eternal kingdom and earthly kingdom under the subcategory,

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27 Leung, *The Emergence of a National Hymnody*, 51.
“The Coming of the Kingdom.” In addition to “Missions: The Spread of the Gospel,” churches should pray for the country (“The Nation”), hope for “International Peace and World Brotherhood,” serve the society (“Social aspiration and Service”), and care for the poor (“The Dignity of Labor”). The two segments above reveal the nature, development, and mission of the Chinese ecclesiology of that era.

Under “The Christian Life,” the subcategories document the journey of a disciple. It begins with confession leading to profession of faith and continues with the path of the pilgrim throughout life, towards heaven and life everlasting. It is worth noting that a few significant theological emphases of Wesleyan tradition are included: “Penitence,” “Love,” “Holiness,” “Discipleship,” “Fellowship” (band, class meetings, and the Methodist understanding of “society”), and “Pilgrimage.”

“Times and Seasons” contains hymns for various seasons and times in life. The subcategories of this part include hymns for the traditional times for daily prayer and public worship (Morning, Evening, Lord’s Day) and the changing of seasons applicable to the Chinese culture. “Spring and Seed Time” and “Thanksgiving for Harvest” reflects the reality that agriculture was the main source of revenue and a daily activity for Chinese people during this era. The next section, “The Home,” also relates to the daily life in the Chinese cultural context. The editors included hymns for blessing and celebrating long life (“For a Long Life Celebration”), honoring parents, and remembering ancestors (“In Memory of Ancestors”). Long life and filial piety are two values that hold entrenched and profound meanings for Chinese Society, a fact unchanged since Confucianism. Christianity also values filial piety: “Honor your father and your mother, so that you may live long in the land the Lord your God is giving you” (Exod 20:12; NIV).

However, “Women’s Meetings,” a subcategory of “Special Occasions,” is one that was not compliant with traditional Chinese cultural values. Women were inferior to men in
ancient Chinese feudal society until 1949. Even though women were disparaged, the status of women was valued and promoted in Christianity, contributing to the ministry of Jesus reflected in the Body of Christ: “So, in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise” (Gal 3:26–29; NIV). The inclusion of hymns portraying female imagery in the gospel is considered a breakthrough for Chinese society in that era.

Following hymns for women, parents, and ancestors, the hymnal includes hymns for the younger generation, “Youth” and “Children’s Hymns.” Both parts contain hymns for formation of disciples, “Ideals and Enthusiasm” for youth and “Likeness to Christ” for children. “School and College Life” is another subcategory under “Youth,” indicating that education is one of the most significant values in traditional Chinese society.

The final category of contents is “Gospel Songs.” The subcategories depict the process for non-Christians to turn to God for salvation and grow in faith during the Christian pilgrimage, engaging in the formation of a disciple. While the hymnal strives to provide songs for all occasions and aspects of Chinese culture, evangelism is still the mission of Christians and churches (Matt 28:19–20), regardless of ethnicity, region, nationality, and culture.

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Between 1936 and 1977, China experienced the second World War and various changes in language, social customs, and a rapid growth in science and technology. The changing political reality raised new theological issues. Many Chinese Christians, facing new challenges such as language, culture, and a new-political system, left China following the Revolution of 1949 and the creation of the People’s Republic of China under Mao Zedong.29 Despite these changes, *HUP 1936* continued to play an indispensable role in uniting Christians of Chinese churches in China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, and other countries in Southeast Asia, drawing them into a common fellowship of love and praise. However, new needs surfaced from the contemporary Christians, leading to the decision for a revision of the hymnal. A second edition was published at the end of the Cultural Revolution (1966–1976) in mainland China. This edition has a greater impact on Chinese who had migrated to other countries and could not be published on the Chinese mainland due to the political changes and resistance to Christianity there.

In 1969, the Chinese Christian Literature Council (CCLC) initiated a survey regarding the need for a revision with churches who use *HUP 1936*.30 Apart from various ecclesial bodies, CCLC also consulted four persons from the original editorial committee, including Bliss Wiant. The results from the survey and consultation showed that the response for the call to revise the hymnal was positive and enthusiastic. An advisory committee consisting of CCLC and two representatives from each of the five church bodies—The Church of Christ in China, Hong Kong Council; the Anglican Church, Hong Kong and Macao Diocese; The Chinese Methodist Church; the Wei Li Kung Hui (the Methodist Church), and the Swatow Baptist Church—was formed in 1970. The advisory group first conducted a survey to ask for

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churches’ opinions on the hymns and tunes to be omitted from the hymnal. Questionnaires were disseminated to churches through respective denominational headquarters in Hong Kong, Taiwan, Singapore, and Malaysia. After collecting the responses, the editorial committee led by Wong (Heyward) Yongxi (黃永熙, 1917–2003), a choral conductor, composer, and church musician, began the process of removing the hymns that could not stand the test of times.\(^{31}\) They revised the hymn texts containing archaic Mandarin that were too difficult for the modern Chinese to understand. In addition, they also amended translations that were literal and had departed from the meaning of the original texts. In addition to ensuring that the lyrics were suitable for the singers and true to its original meaning, the committee considered changes in hymn tunes. After comparing different hymn tunes for the same text in various hymnals, they established uniformity in selection. They also changed the keys of some hymn tunes, bringing them more within the vocal range of congregations.

After years of effort, the revised edition consists of 680 hymns, 408 hymns which were retained from the original version and 216 newly selected hymns.\(^{32}\) The hymns were divided into similar categories as the original hymnal, with an expanded section of “Service Music” (See Appendix 4 for Table of Contents). The goal was to accommodate the relevant expressions of the contemporary Christian faith, yet retain the heritage.\(^{33}\) Therefore, they published a bilingual edition (Mandarin and English lyrics) in 1981 for the benefit of overseas Chinese Christians.

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31 Some nationalistic hymns in the 1936 edition were removed, such as “We love our native land,” “The land that Thou hast chosen,” and “O save my country, Lord.” See Hsieh, A History of Chinese Christian Hymnody, 141.

32 Leung, The Emergence of a National Hymnody, 118.

33 The editorial committee preserved two early Chinese hymns in their original forms and archaic language (in Appendix of HUP 1977): the Nestorian hymn from eighth century “The highest heavens with deep reverence adore” and the hymn text by Yu-shan Wu “Lord, before all time thou wast.” They too retained some historically significant Chinese hymn texts, e.g., hymn text written by Emperor K’ang Hsi “From the cross the crimson flows.” The committee wished to testify the existence of Chinese Churches in earlier eras. See Hsieh, A History of Chinese Christian Hymnody, 140.
Because the end of the twentieth century was rife with political and ecclesial changes, churches felt the need to revise the *HUP* again.\(^{34}\) The revision project started in 1994 under the editorship of Heyward Wong until 1997, thereafter transferred to his student, Angela Tam (譚靜芝, b. 1956), a former director of the church music department at Alliance Theological Seminary (Hong Kong). Wong believed that congregations should be exposed to new trends in hymnology and congregational singing. Thus, the scale of this project was greater than the second edition. The editorial committee was formed by representatives from the Anglican Church, the Methodist Church, and the Church of Christ in China. This hymnal contains more categories of hymns than earlier editions because the committee wanted to present psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs to churches (Col 3:16) and cover various aspects in modern life.\(^{35}\) Other than Chinese compositions, it also boasts a comprehensive collection of Western congregational songs, ranging from plainsong, traditional hymns, and African American spirituals to contemporary hymns and global songs. The difficult lyrics were revised once again due to the changes in language and Chinese education overseas. The editorial committee renewed the content and style of the hymns, reflecting recent developments in hymn writing. Furthermore, the committee chose hymns that espoused current theological views. Hence, the editorial committee included many contemporary hymns—Western compositions of late twentieth century and new Chinese compositions. They retained only 176 hymns from the first edition.\(^{36}\) Apart from the 775 hymns and spiritual songs, the hymnal also contains spoken prayers, responsive readings, and a large section of eighty metrical, chanted, and responsorial psalms for congregations (See Appendix 5 for Table of Contents). Furthermore, the editorial committee provided explanation and

\(^{34}\) Leung, *The Emergence of a National Hymnody*, 118.


\(^{36}\) Leung, *The Emergence of a National Hymnody*, 127.
historical background for each season in the liturgical year. These elements are beneficial for worship planning and spiritual formation.

Another change in this edition was the revised heading of “Social Concern,” rather than “Social Aspiration” as seen in earlier editions. Under this heading, the hymns explore subjects such as “Justice,” “Human Dignity,” “Environmental Conservation,” “Culture and Technology,” “Stewardship,” “Service,” and “Labor,” all of which are topics of concern to contemporary society. The forty-seven hymns and responsive readings in this part were translated into Chinese for this hymnal. In addition to a wide range of hymnody, HUP 2006 is a liturgical companion and a resource for theological education and pastoral ministry.

The Function of HUP in Discipleship Formation

The development of the three editions of HUP reflects a need to continually renew the repertoire for congregational singing in light of changing political realities and theological perspectives. In order to accommodate the migration of Chinese overseas, the hymnal evolved from a modest indigenous hymnal on the mainland into a hymnal that could serve various needs of the Chinese diaspora. All three editions have retained an ecumenical character allowing it to be used regardless of denominational affiliation, regional diversity, and ethnicity. The three editions of HUP developed a more unified ecumenical awareness than a sectarian consciousness. Because the hymnals’ contents cover various aspects of modern Christian living, liturgical practice, and church life, each edition supports the formation of Christ’s disciples for its time. Therefore, borrowing John Wesley’s description of the 1780 Collection, HUP could be classified as “a little body of experimental and practical divinity.”

Missionaries translated English hymns into Chinese texts to spread gospel to Chinese speaking people. HUP 1936 attempted to contextualize Christian faith by including hymn
texts and tunes that were poetically and musically more responsive to Chinese culture to help Chinese Christians better understand Christian faith and worship in their cultural expressions. Taiwanese church musician and ethnomusicologist, I-to Loh once said,

Contextualization is a genuine expression of faith and art forms. It is by no means a self-expressionism, a flaunting of one’s “exotic” skills. It is, on the contrary, a rediscovery of the essence and values of one’s own culture, a cultivation of self-esteem, a search for truth, goodness, and beauty in the Christian arts. It is also an affirmation that God is not partial to a particular (especially Western) art form and its Christian expressions, but that all sincere and genuine expressions of art are acceptable and pleasing to God.37

Although the subsequent editions tried to retain this heritage with its indigenous awareness and advocacy, the effect was sadly not as significant as in the first edition—a regional book for primarily mainland China making contextualization much easier. Chinese people who migrated to other Asian countries struggled to adapt to their new cultural setting. Thus, they needed hymns that conveyed new practical divinity that related to their new cultural situations. Though the generations that fled to other countries may retain aspects of the culture of the motherland, it could be a challenge for the following generations to share the identity of Chinese in mainland China. This issue will be addressed in Chapter 5.

Hymns of United Worship 1997

Hymns of United Worship is a hymnal issued specifically for Chinese Methodist Christians in Southeast Asia. Preparatory work for this hymnal started in 1988 while the executive board of World Federation of Chinese Methodist Churches (WFCMC) felt the need to publish a bilingual hymnal (Mandarin and English texts) for Chinese Methodist Churches in different regions, particularly Malaysia, Singapore, Hong Kong and Taiwan.38 Bishop C. N. Fang,

former Bishop of Malaysia Methodist Church (1976–1988) was a strong advocate of this hymnal project because the Methodist Chinese churches in Southeast Asia did not have their own sectarian hymnal even though Wesleyan tradition had great emphases on hymn singing.\(^{39}\) WFCMC appointed a music committee to head this project. The team was led by Chang Hung Da, composer and musician from Taiwan, joined by WFCMC representatives from Singapore, East and West Malaysia, and Hong Kong. Distance soon proved to be an obstacle for the committee, making it hard for them to gather in discussion. The selection and editing of hymns eventually fell onto two main people—Chang Hung Da and assistant editor, Mary Yoke Thue Gan (b. 1954), representing Singapore. The typesetting was done in Singapore while publishing was directed by Chinese Literature Council Ltd in Hong Kong.\(^{40}\)

The music committee held their first discussion in Taipei in 1988 and decided to produce a “united” hymnal—the concept of “united” referring to the breadth and selection of repertoire.\(^{41}\) The committee first collected a list of favorite hymns from different Chinese churches in the region. They wished to unite the churches by retaining common traditional Chinese hymns. They had received over one thousand hymns titles. However, the committee decided to publish a portable and practical hymnal, and hence, only two hundred hymns were selected from the submitted hymns list. The committee’s final selection of hymns comprised a collection of common hymns sung by the churches—a decision that deviated from the committee’s original intention of collecting favorite hymns from the respective churches. The challenge then was to sort through several Chinese hymnals to decide on the final version for each hymn in HUW because the same hymn may have different translations in various Chinese hymnals. The lack of a uniform translation for many hymns made it difficult for Chinese Christians to remember hymn texts they encountered while using different hymnals.

\(^{39}\) Mary Gan, interview by Lily Wong Kueng Mee, August 30, 2021, question 2. See Appendix 7 for the complete interview.

\(^{40}\) Gan, interview, question 6.

\(^{41}\) *Hymns of United Worship*, Foreword.
or while attending services of other churches. The publication of HUW was a milestone for Chinese Methodist churches in standardizing the use of the same hymn text in different regions. Furthermore, the committee decided to include a special section of “Contemporary Chinese Works.” These thirteen new Chinese hymns were either new compositions or translations with newly composed tunes. The purpose was to ensure that the churches have a “balanced diet” between treasured traditional hymns and modern compositions. The use of current language and musical styles found in recent hymns contributed to expressing faith and theology in more relevant terms. Additionally, the committee wished to educate and inspire Chinese churches to appreciate compositions and musical forms from their own cultures while advocating the writing of new hymns with Chinese and Asian melodies and compositional styles.42

The first draft of the hymnal, consisting of two hundred and sixty hymns, was used at the Second Mission Conference of the World Federation of Chinese Methodist Churches in Hong Kong (1992) as a trial.43 The draft had two versions: traditional Chinese and simplified Chinese respectively.44 The attendees were advised to take the hymnal home, use it, and submit their feedback to the music committee. After receiving the feedback and the necessary adjustments were made, HUW was officially published in 1997, structured in seven parts (See Appendix 6 for a full Table of Contents):

Adoration and Praise
The Church Year
The Church
Christian Life
Gospel Hymns
Service Music
Contemporary Chinese Works

42 Hymns of United Worship, Foreword.
43 Hymns of United Worship, Foreword.
The Function of HUW in Discipleship Formation

With 260 hymns only, HUW was still able to cover the aspects necessary for Christian living. “Christian life” contained the most hymns (80 out of 260 hymns). Nineteen hymns focus on “Witness” and “Invitation” in the selection of “Gospel Hymns.” The seventeen hymns in “Service Music” include selections from “Introit” to “Close of Worship and Amen.” Judging from the number of hymns in each part, the committee designed the hymnal to meet the needs of the worshipping communities in the churches of the Chinese diaspora.

This hymnal acknowledges its cultural roots by including selected Chinese compositions from HUP 1936, an example being Chinese Christmas carol, “Stars of ice, wheel of moonlight bright” (hymn 72). Ching-fu Tian (田景福, b. 1911) composed the text and Wiant composed the tune YENCHING (燕京) in the style of Chinese music. Another example is “In quest of truth unwavering” (hymn 205). The hymn text shows the importance of education to traditional Chinese culture under the influence of Confucianism. The writer, N.Z. Zia (谢扶雅, b. 1892) managed to reframe the concept of education into the idea of nourishing the Christians with truth.

In addition, under “Contemporary Chinese Works,” there are six translations of Wesley brothers’ texts, with new tunes in Asian musical styles composed by Singaporean-born composer and Canadian professor Lim Swee Hong (林瑞峰, b. 1963). The themes of the six hymns includes selections for Holy Communion (“Still for thy loving kindness”), Trinity (“In whom we live”), Salvation (“Tis finished! The Messiah dies”), Fellowship (“Blest be the dear uniting love” and “Jesus, Lord, we look to thee”), and Self-dedication as a response to God’s love (“Jesu, thy boundless love to me”). This is a minimal effort towards reminding
the Chinese Methodist congregations about their culture, and simultaneously reinforcing the teaching and emphases of Wesleyan doctrines.

Regretfully, as a hymnal for Methodists, HUW has omitted some essential Wesleyan teachings. First, it does not reflect Wesley’s concept of grace: Prevenient grace, Justification grace, and Sanctification grace, not to mention perfection or holiness. Though there are some hymns with these themes, the editorial committee might have designated a category for it to highlight this theological understanding. Second, the hymnal does not suggest the concept of pilgrimage under “Christian life.” Hymns for Christians to sing at every stage of their faith were not available. Third, while HUW carries an abundance of hymns about praising and loving God, it does not contain sufficient hymns regarding means of grace, such as prayer, Scripture reading, Holy Communion, fellowship, and others. Furthermore, volume of hymns with the themes of loving ones neighbors or of concerns for justice are markedly lacking.

In summary, although the hymnal contains twenty-eight hymns by the Wesley brothers and works of other Wesleyan composers, it is not sufficient as an attempt to shape an integral theology of discipleship in the Wesleyan tradition. The hymnal contains a few more recent hymns, including “When in our music God is glorified” by Methodist composer Fred Pratt Green. However, the contents do not propel the disciples to pursue personal or social holiness and may not be helpful for contemporary Christians to face the difficulties of the modern world or speak to their existential needs. The lack of hymns advocating love of neighbor or issues of justice is a shortcoming of this Wesleyan hymnal.

Conclusion

Chinese Methodist churches in Southeast Asia should reconsider the selection of songs they provide for congregations from the Methodist heritage and Chinese cultural contexts in order to nurture a disciple after God’s heart. Given the current lack hymns from
the Wesleyan tradition, Methodist congregations could end up losing their roots in Wesleyan theology. As a result, the unique experience and expression of the Christian faith from the Wesleyan heritage could be eroded, affecting the quality of discipleship over time. If the Wesleyan input were strengthened, coupled with increased awareness of Wesleyan theological distinctiveness, this could foster a stronger sense of belonging among Methodist members, giving them a surer sense of their identity as Methodists and making them think twice about leaving for other churches. Church members would hopefully grow in their desire to pursue holiness.
CHAPTER 5:
HYMN SINGING IN SINGAPORE CHINESE METHODIST CHURCHES

Methodist missionaries started their mission works in Singapore in the late 1880s coinciding with diasporas of immigrant laborers from India and China. In 1885, the South India Conference (Methodist) sent missionaries to the region where they established Methodist churches. The chief missionaries were James M. Thoburn (1836–1922), American bishop of the Methodist Episcopal Church in 1888, William F. Oldham (1854–1937), an India-born British-American Bishop of the Methodist Episcopal Church who became the Missionary Bishop for Southern Asia, and Charles Phillips (1851–1951), who established the first Methodist center in Singapore.

In the same year, Bishop James M. Thoburn conducted the first evangelistic meeting on the shores of Singapore with hymn singing accompanied by organ. In general, Methodist worship liturgy in the early years only featured western components—a reflection of the influence of American Methodism at the time. Hymn singing was introduced to Singapore Methodists in the early stages of mission work. Singapore being a multiracial society, saw the need for Christian services to be conducted or translated into ethnical languages—Malay, Tamil (an Indian language) or Hokkien, Teochew, and Cantonese (Chinese dialect language). Therefore, churches sang Western hymns either in its original language (English) or translated into vernacular languages. Although the non-English-speaking churches drew their resources for worship from India and China, these resources were mostly translations.

2 Charles Phillips was an Elder of Prinsep Street Presbyterian Church Singapore before the arrival of Methodism. He wrote to Rev. James M. Thoburn in 1883 inviting him to send missionaries to Singapore. More details see Sng, *In His Good Time*, 84–85, 105.
4 Singapore society consists of Indian, Malay, Chinese, and Straits Chinese (Peranakan, ethnic group of mixed Chinese and Malay heritage where the males are known as *babas* and the females are known as *nyonyas*).
from the West. It was not until the 1930s that churches began to pay attention to indigenous hymns and worship forms. However, the missionaries “imported” or borrowed most aspects of worship from the West, a trend that continues to this day.

The Methodist Church in Singapore matured and became a conference in 1976. It was organized as a general conference comprised of three annual conferences that were birthed from linguistic distinctions: the Chinese Annual Conference (CAC); the Emmanuel Tamil Annual Conference (ETAC); and the Trinity Annual Conference (TRAC) for English-speaking Methodists. Today, the division by language lines no longer fully corresponds to the linguistic realities today. It is the mission of CAC churches to reach out to the Chinese community be they English-speaking or Chinese dialect speaking, resulting in most churches starting English services to cater to their needs. The Tamil Methodist church (Short Street) also provides English services. TRAC churches on the other hand have developed services in Mandarin and various Chinese dialects, even Tagalog for Filipinos.

In this chapter, I will discuss the current hymn singing trend for all Chinese services of CAC churches and the challenges they face. I will then suggest methods to encourage hymn singing, especially hymns that carry a Wesleyan ethos, followed by a case study to demonstrate these methods.

**Hymn Singing for Chinese Services of CAC Churches**

CAC today is made up of seventeen local churches. These local churches conduct weekly worship services and ministries in Mandarin, English, six different dialects (Hokkien, Cantonese, Foochow, Hakka, Teochew, Hinghwa), Bahasa Indonesia, and Tamil. A survey

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6 Lim, “Chinese, Tamil, and English Congregations,” 212.

on the practice of hymns singing in Chinese services was conducted for sixteen of the local CAC churches. Changi Methodist Church was not included as it only has English services. According to the survey, eleven churches retain the tradition of hymn singing (See Appendix 8 for the survey). Of the eleven churches, a majority only sing hymns in traditional services or include hymns occasionally, for example, during monthly Holy Communion. The hymnal most commonly used is *Hymns of United Worship* (1997). Other resources include *Hymns of Universal Praise* (1977), *Hymns of Praise* (赞美诗, 1978), *New Hymns of Praise* (颂主新诗, 2011), or the Internet and YouTube. In general, these Chinese resources are mostly translated texts set to traditional Western hymn tunes. They are meant for use in all denominations and contain no significant Methodist theological focus.

Unsurprisingly, senior adults are the fondest of hymn singing in congregations. The percentage of youth and children singing hymns is very low. Most of the churches do not provide hymnic repertoire for children and, if they do, only for children choirs. Concerning children and young people, only Telok Ayer Chinese Methodist Church demonstrates a slightly higher frequency in the use of hymns. In comparison, hymns make up less than half the repertoire of worship songs in the other churches. Some churches try to introduce hymns to young people by arranging the musical style of the hymn for a band rather than the organ or piano. Even so, the main repertoire of music in their services is still contemporary Christian music (CCM) while hymns are selected occasionally, usually during the major events of year such as Christmas and Easter.

Notwithstanding the current trends, the results of the survey reveal that most pastors still recognize the value and importance of hymns in nurturing the spiritual lives of their members, including younger generations. This is because of the breadth of doctrinal and biblical themes in hymns. Even though CCM styles may help worshippers experience intimacy with God and express their affections and emotions to God, such a narrow
theological scope, emphasizing primarily on the love and grace of God, does not nurture a holistic faith. Furthermore, pastors acknowledge the inadequacy of CCM in teaching Wesleyan doctrine. Although they understand the benefit of hymn singing and agree with the function of hymns in discipleship, they dare not introduce hymns singing to younger generations despite the theological narrowness of CCM songs. Their hesitation stems mainly from two issues: the musical styles of classical hymns no longer appeal to current generations, and younger generations lack of the experience to understand Chinese translations of the hymn lyrics.

 issue one: the challenge of contemporary christian music (ccm) amongst singapore methodists

During the 1970s, the charismatic movement started to permeate Methodism through its educational system when the Anglo-Chinese Secondary School recorded the first instance of Methodist charismatic experience. The charismatic movement in Singapore Methodist churches was commonly associated with praise and worship. At the beginning, students of Methodist schools experienced a renewal and practiced praise and worship in their Christian fellowship groups. This movement then penetrated Sunday schools and youth meetings in churches, and eventually spread to church services. Since then, the encounter with the charismatic movement and the praise and worship style of singing has left a great impact on the worship of Singapore churches.

Chinese-speaking Methodist churches in Singapore define this worship style as 敬拜赞美 (meaning worship and praise), the normative term to describe the less formal type of

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8 Lim, "Chinese, Tamil, and English Congregations," 211.
worship. They are still dominantly evangelical in theology and expression rather than Pentecostal. Their praise and worship services focus on lengthy expository preaching and implicit worship expressions where the Pentecostal worship is musically-driven with vigorous physical worship expressions, intense prayer ministry, and speaking in tongues.

Apart from the style of worship, the rapid expansion of independent evangelical megachurches in 1990s also affected the membership of Methodist churches, especially among the younger generations. There are three megachurches in Singapore—New Creation Church (1983) founded by Pastors Joseph Prince, Henry Yeo, and Joshua Lee; Faith Community Baptist Church (1986) founded by Pastor Lawrence Khong; and City Harvest (1989) founded by Pastor Kong Hee. These megachurches share a similar worship format and are organized as a celebration of the Lord’s presence, usually led by relatively young and charismatic personalities. Their worship no longer includes the elements of a traditional choir and congregational hymn singing but employs CCM styles led by a praise team and band. The songs are delivered through high amplification that overwhelms the communal voice and discourages participation. Some of them even incorporate the use of multimedia and performing arts such as breakdancing and drama into worship. All of these worship practices successfully attract the younger generations as they are familiar and comfortable with the repertoire of music, instrumentation, and the contemporary expression used in the songs and worship.

As the result, Methodist churches face a crisis in membership decline among the younger members, which affects the church participation and succession of leadership in the near future. Therefore, they either include a segment of CCM singing in every worship in

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11 Sng, In His Good Time, 336.
addition to three hymns (opening song, song of response following the sermon, and closing song) in order to transform the service into a blended service or provide a contemporary service to meet the needs of younger generations while retaining a liturgical service for adults and seniors.\textsuperscript{12}

**Issue Two: Chinese as a Second Language for Singapore Younger Generations**

Apart from the impact of charismatic movement and CCM, Chinese services of Methodist churches also face the challenge of language. Before its independence in 1965, Singapore schools were organized according to four languages—Malay, Tamil, Chinese, and English—with Chinese schools being the most popular. The situation had a drastic change in 1980s when first Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew (serving from 1959–1990) decided to promote bilingualism in its education policy—a dual-language learning system. Prime Minister Lee firmly believed that English proficiency could prevent Singapore from falling behind in the world and would reinforce Singapore’s development by connecting the country to the global economy. English became the compulsory medium of instructions in all primary and secondary schools in 1987, while the ethnic languages would be taught in schools as secondary languages.\textsuperscript{13} Students develop their English skills in every class—from language and arts to math and science—studying their Asian mother tongue as one of the subjects. Eventually, English became the first language for Singaporeans born after 1980s. In addition, English also became the primary language in most official settings for Singapore. Long term

\textsuperscript{12} The theological implication of Contemporary Worship is based on 1 Corinthians 9:22b: “I have become all things to all people so that by all possible means I might save some” (NIV). The worship-making is about providing effective and experiential worship with the contemporary soundscape in order to reach out to congregational members and transform them. See Lester Ruth and Swee Hong Lim, *A History of Contemporary Praise & Worship: Understanding the Ideas that Reshaped the Protestant Church* (Grand Rapid, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2021), Loc 167 of 350, Kindle.

dominant use of English for the new generation of Chinese Singaporeans caused the Chinese language to be neglected.

The language and curricular reformation had repercussions. Traditional Chinese families have grandparents speaking in Mandarin or other Chinese dialects, bilingual children who are more fluent in Mandarin if they graduated from Chinese schools, and grandchildren who are mainly English-speakers. The mixture of languages in household has impacted the membership of Mandarin services directly. It is safe to say that church members who are forty-years old and below are more fluent in English than Mandarin. The chart below compares the proportion of Chinese resident population aged five years and over who spoke English most frequently at home between year 2010 and year 2020.14

From the chart, we can see that the usage of English at home has increased ten to twenty percent for all age groups, with the most change (28.5 percent) occurring in age group from 15–24. However, most of the younger generations are still able to understand and speak their mother tongue due to the different languages spoken at home and studying it in school.

From the survey conducted in English speaking households (all ethnic groups), there were 87 percent of families who also speak a second language at home, with 56.1 percent speaking

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Mandarin. Hence, the younger generations could not be treated as English educated students, but a group with “Chinese as second language” (CSL).

In order to meet the needs of the CSL group, leaders of most Chinese worship services started to switch their language from Mandarin to English (or bilingual) in Sunday school, youth fellowship, and youth services. This quick solution seems effective in encouraging the younger generations to stay in Chinese churches, but may keep them away from attending Chinese service in the long term. Regardless of their proficiency in Mandarin communication and comprehension, they remain more comfortable learning and expressing their faith in English, whether in song, prayer, sermon, or sharing. Over time, Chinese services are experiencing a diminishing attendance in younger members and, therefore, are not able to nurture future leaders who can speak Mandarin fluently.

**Strategies for Encouraging a Hymn Singing Culture Among the Chinese Methodists in Singapore**

**1A. Education**

Despite the challenges mentioned above, most of the pastors (from the survey) believe in the potential for younger generations to sing hymns if intentional teaching and guidance is provided. Resistance to hymns may be the result of a lack of understanding of the rich theology and their identification with life experience as well as the deep emotions they express. Pastors and music directors should provide hymn education on the biographies of hymn writers (musicians and authors), circumstances that lead to writing hymns, biblical foundations of hymns, use of hymns in worship, key theological concepts, and cultural

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15 This is the first survey about the usage of second language at home. Thus, DOS does not able to provide comparison.
influences in the hymn’s formation, so as to help singers of all ages understand the content they sing. Apart from cognitive understanding, pastors and music directors can address the hermeneutical aspects of hymns, guiding the singers to respond to the theological and experiential expressions in the hymns as reflected in their lives. In order to contextualize the expression of faith to one’s contemporary living, they should be guided to reflect on their spiritual health in their daily lives. Bearing in mind this need, members should not select songs of worship purely based on familiarity and musical preference.

Wesleyan tradition boasts of a long heritage of theology and hymns, which has ironically become a challenge for Singaporean Methodists today because it has become unfamiliar to them. Pastors and music directors should make an utmost effort to equip their members with Methodist doctrines, ensuring that one should at least understand some key Wesleyan theology, such as different stages of grace, Christian perfection, and means of grace. Hymns should be a part of teaching those concepts as music is a great way to teach theology. Furthermore, they could introduce Wesleyan hymns through Wesleyan seminars or courses and from the pulpit to help members to discover the distinctiveness of Wesleyan theology.

Educational advocacy of Wesleyan teachings and singing of Wesleyan hymns are not intended to promote sectarian triumphalism or exclude all other hymns, but rather to imbue and enhance the theology in these hymns with the Wesleyan ethos. Pastors, music directors, and educators should be knowledgeable of Methodist history, theology, and hymn appreciation to use hymnody effectively in discipleship formation.

1B. Introduce Hymn Singing at a Young Age

Hymn singing is an excellent way to inculcate Wesleyan theology at young age. The Wesley brothers strongly believed in the importance of hymnody in the spiritual nurturing of
children. John Wesley was profoundly inspired during his visit to Moravian community at Herrnhut where he saw one of their constitutions: “Our little children we instruct chiefly by hymns; whereby we find the most important truths most successfully insinuated into their minds.” The Wesley brothers agreed that early spiritual nurturing was of eternal importance. Hence, they produced several collections of hymns especially for children, such as *Hymns of Children* (1763).

Children’s hymns containing holistic doctrines and biblical values can lay a solid foundation for a child’s faith. The first eight hymns in *Hymns of Children* (1763) teach children about Christian faith: of God, of the Creation and Fall of Man, of the Redemption of Man, of the Means of Grace, of Hell, and of Heaven. The Wesley brothers believed that right doctrine should lead to life transformation in God’s grace, a concept illustrated in the sixteenth hymn of the hymnal, “Author and end of my desires.” The hymn reflects the thought that right behavior is rooted in Christian theology and comes not from self-discipline alone, but God’s grace. Proper guidance to internalize the message in the hymns can shape the spiritual experience of a child at a young age, and hence lead to worship.

In summary, hymns can assist children in articulating their theology, shaping their spiritual experience, and inspiring their hearts to worship and live out the life of a disciple. The impact would be greater if the children’s hymns could correspond to Wesleyan ethos while using plain and simple Chinese expressions that children can relate to. Children may not fully comprehend the meaning of the hymns they sing, however, learning great hymns in

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18 The three benefits are referred to in McElwain, “*No Room for Mirth or Trifling Here,*” 3–8. Wesleyan children hymn that carry these functions are “Praise him, praise him! Jesus, our blessed redeemer” by Fanny Crosby, published in *Bright Jewels for the Sunday School* (1869); “Star-Child” by Shirley Erena Murray, first published in *Every Day in Your Spirit* (1993).
childhood will influence their future appreciation of hymns. They will grow into a fuller understanding eventually if churches play their parts in education and discipleship.

2. New Wesleyan Hymns that could Inspire Chinese Methodists

Chinese Methodists in Singapore have a shortage of Wesleyan hymn resources that could also inspire them musically. Most of the existing Western hymns were translated into archaic Chinese and used expressions that are beyond the understanding of generations who speak Chinese as second language. Hence, it is common and necessary to have bilingual hymn lyrics printed side by side while singing in worship to meet the linguistic needs of all worshippers. In addition, the tunes and classical accompaniment of the traditional Western hymns are no longer appealing to contemporary generations due to popularity and prevalence of CCM styles. Although some Mandarin services have attempted to contemporize the musical style and accompaniment, the results are, according to the survey, not satisfying.19

The congregational singing text and musical style employed should appeal to contemporary singers, especially Millennials and Gen Z. From a linguistic perspective, singers prefer contemporary Chinese expressions and idioms that they understand and use. On the other hand, worshipers need a wide range of Wesleyan theological themes in sync with today’s musical styles to nurture their spiritual growth. Composers could consider developing local musical approaches that merge Chinese cultural musical styles (including the five-tone gapped pentatonic scale) with contemporary instrumentation and compositional idioms familiar to younger generations.

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3. Hymnody Resources on Social Media

All Singaporean churches faced the same challenge during the Covid-19 pandemic—not being able to gather physically for worship, warranting a shift to online worship. In April 2020, the Singapore government prohibited onsite services for two months in a nationwide lockdown. Although onsite services have resumed, albeit with many rules and restrictions, at the time of this writing congregations are still prohibited from singing in service in a bid to minimize the spread of the disease. Hence, worship leaders pre-record all music and share congregational singing via live broadcast. This could be a great challenge for churches who lack recording facilities and technological skills. In this challenging period, online resources and social media play an extremely critical role.

It would be helpful to establish a YouTube channel for Chinese hymns to share digital resources. The channel could provide recordings of hymn singing and accompaniment tracks for churches to use in worship and ministry. In addition, music videos with lyrics and creative arts with attractive visuals and engages the body could enhance the appreciation of hymns, especially for the younger generation.

Hymns could be categorized into different themes, such as hymns for children, hymns for different events of Christian year, and every season of a Wesleyan spiritual journey—from the repentance of sinners to entering into eternal life. The purpose of this channel would be to provide hymns for Methodists to sing at every stage of their lives (personal) and in worship (social). In addition, by uploading the hymn recordings online, they could play a part in the propagation of salvation as non-believers will have the opportunity to hear the gospel (missional).
Case Study: Composition of Church Theme Song for Telok Ayer Chinese Methodist Church

The congregation I serve, Telok Ayer Chinese Methodist Church, decided on a new church theme for the years 2021 to 2026—“Following Christ, being disciples: Pursuing holiness, living out holy love.” During the discussions among the church leaders on how to help church members live out the theme, we studied how John Wesley viewed the means of grace. Hence, all pastors, ministry staff, and lay leaders read from John Wesley’s sermons and books by Wesleyan authors to understand his core theological views. We were divided into small groups to share and discuss about how Wesley viewed holiness and the means of grace he advocated. After multiple rounds of Christian conferencing, we finally sorted out the essential Wesleyan theological concepts on the means of grace that we would like to convey to members.

The pastoral team wished to compose a theme song to introduce the new church theme. We decided to follow the footsteps of our founders in educating the members through hymns. We hope to use the hymn to not only to enhance our members’ memory, but also as a means of learning Wesleyan theology. The theological themes that we included in the hymn were spiritual journey of grace, religion of the heart, pursuing holiness through loving God and loving neighbors, and final judgement (eschatology).

The hymn was first composed in Chinese (Mandarin) and translated into three languages—English, Hokkien (Chinese dialect), and Bahasa Indonesia, as we have four congregations, one worshipping in each respective language. The title of the hymn is based on the church theme—“基督门徒，圣洁圣爱” (“Disciples of Christ, Growing in Holy Love”). The church theme is included in the refrain too (See Appendix 9 for the music score).
1. 全能上帝恩福无垠 [O God, from whom grace and blessings flow,]
差遣爱子拯救万民 [You sent your Son to save the world;]
预设恩典感化众心 [Prevenient grace, awakened hearts,]
主爱常伴圣灵亲临 [Filled with your Spirit and your love.]

2. 基督完全谦卑谦己 [Christ was perfect in humility;]
全然顺服天父意旨 [He chose to keep the Father’s will.]
求主改变顽固之心 [Our stubborn hearts, Lord, will you change;]
心灵异暖生命更新 [Our spirits warmed, our lives transformed.]

3. 基督居首圣洁仁义 [Christ is the head o’er his holy church,]
爱神爱人不遗余力 [Like him, we love both God and man.]
完全生命一生所求 [A perfect love, our life’s pursuit]
惟靠主恩精进不休 [While leaning on the grace he provides.]

4. 将来那日主前蒙恩 [And when the final day arrives,]
将我本分向主面陈 [I will before him my grace-works lay;]
逃避主怒进入永生 [To flee from wrath, and enter life:]
荣耀归神万古永恒 [Glory to God, furthermore.]

Refrain:
我愿效法基督样式 [I will follow the ways of Christ.]
忠心作主门徒一世 [The Lord’s disciple I’ll faithfully be.]
奋力追求圣洁生命 [Holiness I will pursue,]
竭力活出圣爱使命 [Living out holy love.]

The first stanza focuses on God’s abundant grace. A Christian’s spiritual journey is a journey of grace—to be a Christian is entirely by God’s grace and through the Holy Spirit who is with us for the rest of the journey. The second stanza focuses on the religion of the heart. “A heart strangely warmed” is included as a reference to John Wesley’s conversion experience on May 24, 1738, in Aldersgate, England—now called Aldersgate Day in many Methodist churches. The third stanza shifts the focus to a Christian response to the gracious God—the pursuit of perfect holiness through loving God and loving neighbors. The last stanza shifts the attention to heavenly signs in the future. When the day arrives, Christians have to give an account before God. However, God’s unceasing grace will be there for us to flee from his wrath if we keep our charge.
We first introduced the theme song in August 2021, where all four congregations gathered on Zoom to celebrate the 130th Church Anniversary. The pastoral team and two children’s choirs (Mandarin and English) recorded the theme song to present as a song of response to the sermon. The tune is based on the pentatonic scale which gives the Chinese ethnic flavor. The accompaniment is composed in a contemporary style and with a variety of instruments. After the service, the members expressed their appreciation towards the hymn. The introduction was successful and well received.

After the Anniversary Sunday, we released another four singing tracks (in the various languages and at a slower tempo) in video format as a teaching aid for members to learn the hymn. It was disseminated to members through social media—church website, church Facebook account, and YouTube. We also play the hymn in worship weekly for two months, as either a song of response or a song of sending forth. Cell group leaders played the video for their members during gatherings too. Meanwhile, we produced a video to share the process of composing the hymn and to inform members of the main theme in each stanza, and ended with questions of reflection. At present, with all the teaching aids, members are familiar with the hymn and are confident singing it. The last step we took was to produce a

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22 Telok Ayer Chinese Methodist Church, “相约星期三 Midweek Manna,” TA Theme Song 2021 to 2025, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OtB_UH9kniE&list=PL09A0Nh2c8rAKYSAJfKx6EQ5ZtQo0qP&index=3 (accessed December 15, 2021).
choir arrangement adding choral harmony and rearrangement of voicing. This version has been used as closing song for CAC Annual Conference Closing Service on November 18, 2021.

**Conclusion**

This case study proves the feasibility of reviving Wesleyan hymn singing through the use of multimedia and compositions that speak to modern era. What we sing will shape our theology and character. Chinese Methodist churches should examine their musical repertoire carefully as it is their responsibility to deliver the Wesleyan heritage and provide members with songs that can strengthen their faith and shape their hearts and lives to the mind of Christ, to walk as Christ would walk in today. It is the role of Methodist Churches to guide members to an understanding of the treasure in hymns and to help them experience the goodness of hymn singing. Since most CAC pastors affirm that the Methodist Church is the custodian of the Wesleyan heritage and believe in the effectiveness of hymn singing in the formation of a disciple, they should not be deterred by language and lack of resources. Methodist churches should not abandon their heritage of hymn singing in order to accommodate the members’ preferences in return for membership growth. On the contrary, they should help members who are bilingual or who speak Chinese as second language to recognize their unique identity and mission as Chinese disciples of Christ. Most importantly, this discipling effort should begin at a young age. A case study will be presented in the final chapter.

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23 Choir version, see Telok Ayer Chinese Methodist Church, “华语诗班呈献《基督门徒，圣洁圣爱》,” *TA Theme Song 2021 to 2025,* [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v167pnEekc&list=PL09A0NHh2c8rAKYSAJfKx6E95ZtQ0oQkP&index=2](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v167pnEekc&list=PL09A0NHh2c8rAKYSAJfKx6E95ZtQ0oQkP&index=2) (accessed December 15, 2021).
CHAPTER 6:
CULTIVATING A WESLEYAN HYMN SINGING CULTURE AMONG YOUNGER GENERATION—CASE STUDY ON THE CHILDREN CHOIR OF TELOK AYER CHINESE METHODIST CHURCH (TACMC)

In this chapter, I will present a case study on Praise Choristers, the Chinese children choir of Telok Ayer Chinese Methodist Church. This study examines the effectiveness of intentionally introducing Wesleyan hymn singing at a young age to nurture the disciples of Christ.

Praise Choristers was founded in July 1994 by Mary Gan, the founding Principal of Methodist School of Music Singapore. The current choir is made up of about twenty children from three to sixteen years old. The choir members are mainly children of members from the Chinese service. The choir was set up with the purpose of training “Chinese as second language” children to sing Chinese Christian music and to serve in the Chinese service.

As the current choir conductor, I often face difficulties in selecting songs that are suitable for this group of children with a wide age disparity. Other than the limited resources of Chinese Christian music for children, other challenges include the difference in their capacity for understanding theological concepts and their Chinese proficiency. In addition, the repertoire and musical styles suitable for younger children are no longer attractive to the youths (twelve years old and above). Whenever I select a hymn for its in-depth theological concept, the translated lyrics prove to be beyond their understanding. I resort to translating the lyrics and theological concepts into English to help them understand the words they sing. The children learn the pronunciation of the Chinese words by heart even though they have limited comprehension of the lyrics. Traditional Western hymn tunes do not appeal to them.

In the past year, the COVID-19 pandemic has also forced us to bring choir practice onto an online platform such as Zoom. In an online practice, children are easily distracted unless the songs are very attractive. I had to make the hard decision to sacrifice the breath of theological teaching and turn relate to more children through CCM. The worship songs for children by
Chinese praise band “Stream of Praise” provide one model because song lyrics are written in a simple Chinese vernacular idiom that speaks directly to children and in a musical style that speaks to their generation.¹

**Wesleyan Hymn Singing Project 2021**

In accordance with the church theme “Following Christ, being disciples: Pursuing holiness, living out holy love,” I wish to educate the children with a Wesleyan emphasis on being disciples who pursue holiness through loving God and neighbors. Unfortunately, I could not find many Chinese resources that both relate to this message and are suitable for this generation. Hence, I decided to either rearrange the existing hymns or compose new songs for them. It took about two months for the choir to learn the music, record, and produce a music video. Praise Choristers recorded five projects which were presented during five services throughout the year—Good Friday, Mother’s Day, Father’s Day, Church Anniversary, and Christmas.

1. **Good Friday Service (April 2)—“十字架 Near the Cross” by Fanny Crosby (See Appendix 10 for rearranged score)**

   It is common for Singaporean children to observe Good Friday because Good Friday (rather than Easter) and Christmas are the only two Christian observances recognized by the local government. Schools are closed on those days, granting parents an opportunity to guide their children through the Passion service. Asian Christians have a strong identification with the suffering of Christ as a part of their spirituality, especially because of our own personal

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Chinese Christian spirituality stresses the need to know about death in order to understand living (不知死，焉知生). Therefore, we encourage children to observe Good Friday to understand the truth about being “buried with [Christ] in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through your faith in the working of God, who raised him from the dead” (Col 2:12; NIV).

I chose “Near the Cross” (1869) by Fanny Crosby in the official hymnal that my church is using—Hymns of United Worship (1997), no. 118. While this hymn originally had four stanzas, I found that these were too many for the choir to learn since it was their first attempt singing hymns as a choir. I chose stanzas 1 and 3 for the presentation as they emphasized the message of grace and the identity as a disciple of Christ. I decided to use only stanza 1 from the version in the hymnal and stanza 3 from a version I found online. The version online used simpler expressions in its language and its translation emphasized on the identity as a disciple based on Galatians 2:20, “I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me” (NIV).

For the refrain, two translations are sung in Chinese churches in Southeast Asia. One version is similar to Crosby’s refrain conveying the eschatological image “till my raptured soul shall find / rest beyond the river.” The other version focused only on the cleansing power of Christ’s blood. I decided to teach both versions to provide the choir with a more holistic understanding of Christian faith and through this, teach them about God’s grace. Hence, both translations of the refrain were recorded for the video presentation, with the eschatological image appearing only at the end of the video.

In addition to the stanzas and refrains, I realized that in order for it to be a holistic pedagogy, the choir should be able to respond and internalize the message from the hymn.
Therefore, I composed a short bridge to act as a personal response towards the redeeming grace of God and to be faithful followers of Christ.²

真奇妙，真奇妙，[So amazed, so amazed,]
我的主竟为我死在十架。[That my Lord died on the cross for my sin.]
感谢主，感谢主。[Thank You Lord, thank You Lord,]
我一生跟随祢直到天家。[All my life, I’ll follow You unto heav’n.]

These self-composed lyrics were inspired by Charles Wesley’s “And can it be that I should gain.” The Wesleyan teachings were conveyed in relatively simple Chinese language, allowing them to be more relatable to the younger generation. I hoped the choir would be able to appreciate God’s bountiful grace and begin to learn about being Christ’s disciple from Wesleyan ethos.³

2. Mother’s Day Service (May 9)—“爱 Love” by Lily Wong Kueng Mee (See Appendix 11 for score)

The focal point of this hymn is the difference between heavenly love and earthly love, as well as a Wesleyan emphasis on loving God and neighbors. There are two stanzas and two refrains, with a bridge in between each stanza and refrain.

The first stanza describes the love of God for us while the second stanza focuses on our earthly mothers.

Stanza 1 translation (not for performance):
When I was yet formed, you knew me and loved me;
When I worry about tomorrow, you care for me and teach me.
When I am lonely and lost, you encourage me and come alongside me;
When I am ignorant and rebellious, you discipline me and bear patiently with me.

Stanza 2:
When I was yet born, you knew me and loved me;
As I grow up, you care for me and teach me.
When I am upset and in need, you encourage me and come alongside me,

² All self-composed songs refer to composition of both lyrics and music.
³ For music video see Telok Ayer Chinese Methodist Church, “Near the Cross,” Praise Choristers, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DRNJY-vPyrY&list=PL09A0Nh2c8pxLo6hAzXoMV1xgM1lYjr1&index=1 (accessed December 15, 2021).
When I am disobedient, you discipline me and bear patiently with me.

It is noticeable that the second half of each sentence remains the same, introducing changes only in the first half, such as “formed” versus “born.” These changes highlight the fact that although mothers can appear to love like God loves, the extent of love is distinctively different. God’s love is beyond a mother’s love, an emphasis brought out in the bridge where I demonstrate the greatness of God’s love to the extent of sacrificing his one and only Son (John 3:16). The difference is further enhanced in the two refrains. The first refrain talks about how it is solely out of grace for us to be received as children of God, whereby the second refrain shows that mother’s love is a revelation of God’s love on earth. Therefore, as children of God and of a Christian mother, we should live out a holy life of love for God and for people. This was my first attempt to introduce the concept of “holy living” to the choir.4

3. Father’s Day Service (June 20)—“我的大英雄 My Superheroes” by Lily Wong

Kueng Mee (See Appendix 12 for score)

Similarly, the focus of this hymn is the similarity between our heavenly Father and earthly father, with an emphasis on holiness again. I first requested for the choir to describe their fathers. After compiling their ideas, I depict two main characteristics of earthly father in the stanza—superhero and best friend. Apart from singing, I designed a dialogue between myself and the choir in the music video to further explain the idea and to bring the focus from the earthly father to our heavenly Father, with both sharing the characteristics of a superhero and best friend but to different extent. Instead of singing, I decided to let the choir to try

something new, opting to convert stanza 2 into a rap about the differences between the two fathers:

天上爸爸是全能，创造世界创造我；
赐下爱子为救我，丰盛恩典到永恒。
地上爸爸也不赖，带我认识这世界；
学像天父般爱我，使我每天都快乐。

English translation (not for performance):
My heavenly Father is almighty, he created the world and he created me;
He sent his beloved Son to save me, to grant me abundant grace for eternity.
My earthly father is good as well, he leads me to know this world;
He loves me with our Heavenly Father’s love, he brings me happiness everyday.

After the rap, I inserted another dialogue before entering the refrain, which is the children’s response towards the two fathers. At this point, I included the concept of Christian perfection, “Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect” (Matt 5:48; NIV). I also placed further emphasis on loving God and neighbors as an outward behavior of holy living (Matt 22: 37–39). The choir then responded to the teachings in the refrain.\(^5\)

Apart from teaching the choir to be a disciple who pursues holiness, it was also my intention to educate the parents through Mother’s Day and Father’s Day videos. I hoped the song would serve as a reminder to parents to love their children with the love of God and to guide them to live a holy life. In so doing, I want to remind them of their identity as children of God who should first strive to live out a holy life.

4. Church Anniversary Service (August 1)—“基督门徒，圣洁圣爱 Disciples of Christ, Growing in Holy Love” by Lily Wong Kueng Mee

Church Anniversary Sunday is the day for the church members to remember the history of church and its founding in order to be reminded about God’s grace and provision, and the

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\(^5\) For music video see Telok Ayer Chinese Methodist Church, “My Superheroes,” Praise Choristers, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D6Z6uuu87mg&list=PL09A0Nh2c8pxLo6hAziXoMV1xgM11Yjrl&index=3 (accessed December 15, 2021).
mission of the church. I believe it is beneficial for children to observe and participate in the celebration of the Church Anniversary observance to understand the uniqueness of TACMC and affirm their identities as members of this Methodist congregation.

I have described the details of this hymn in Chapter 5. For this choir, they only recorded stanza 3 and the refrain. However, I taught them the entire hymn in Chinese and explained the main theological concepts in each stanza. To enhance their memory, I designed actions for them to do as they sing the refrain. This has successfully etched the church theme into their memories, even for a four-year-old. At this point, the choir begins to have a clearer idea of a disciple of Christ in Wesleyan ethos.

5. Christmas Sunday Service (December 19)—“爱在圣诞 Love at Christmas” by Lily Wong Kueng Mee (See Appendix 13 for score)

I composed a Christmas hymn in a pentatonic scale with three stanzas and a refrain to illustrate a theme about love in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. In first stanza, I described the love of God that is revealed through the incarnation of Jesus Christ, bringing warmth and hope to this broken world. In second stanza, I established that the best way to repay God’s love towards us is by sharing our love with this world. In last stanza, I provided a reflection for the singers—若爱主耶稣，当爱人如己, If we love our Lord, we should love all too (Matt 22:37–40). The heart of loving others would transform into actions. Children may think they are unable to do great things for others, but it is my hope for them to know that even their smallest deeds can reflect the great love of God (Matt 10:42, 25:31–46). To this end, I provided a short response about God’s love in the refrain.

The teaching on loving others should not remain only in one’s cognitive understanding but should be converted into actions. Therefore, I guided the choir to draw two pictures: first on how God loves the world through Christmas and second, on practical ways
to share their love with people. These drawings are shown in the music video to remind the choir and all viewers to start sharing their love to people around them during Christmas season. After presenting this music video in the Christmas Sunday service, I would add this hymn into our repertoire of Christmas hymns for the Chinese service congregation to sing.

Reflection

After a year of education on discipleship within Wesleyan ethos through lyrical theology, I am convinced by the Moravian constitution that once moved John Wesley to say that, “[by hymns] the most important truths [are] most successfully insinuated into [children’s] minds.”

I strongly agree that the songs we teach our children have great theological significance. In other words, the hymns contribute to their theological understanding and spiritual development. We should not underestimate our children’s ability to understand great theology and their desire to be inspired to live it out. After a year’s effort, it is evident that the Praise Choristers are beginning to grasp the true meaning of being a disciple of Christ. With newly composed Chinese lyrics that could speak to the young age and CSL group, and tune that carries Chinese ethnic flavors, the choir expresses their enjoyment in learning all the hymns. For this reason, I will continue to compose or translate hymns to educate younger generation about other liturgical acts in worship, such as Holy Communion and Baptism, or different seasons in their spiritual journey—repentance to the final day. I will also work on short hymns they can sing to strengthen their daily walk with Christ. I will continue to use Chinese expressions they can understand and musical styles that consist of ethnic and contemporary elements.

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6 For music video see Telok Ayer Chinese Methodist Church, “Love At Christmas,” Praise Choristers, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IZWgiRiPtf8&list=PL09A0HNh2c8pxLo6hAzXoMV1xgMiYr1&index=5 (accessed December 17, 2021).
Conclusion

The Wesley brothers made great efforts in nurturing disciples of Christ through hymn singing. Lyrical theology could deliver biblical and theological truths in a Wesleyan perspective, enhance the religion of the heart, enliven spiritual life, and enlighten the head, heart, and life of Christians to be disciples producing genuine fruits of love. With this goal, the Wesley brothers produced hymnals with a variety of themes and a holistic theology in order to provide resources for their members to pursue personal, social, and missional holiness. With the changes of era, the context and spiritual needs of Methodists may change, but the function and potential of lyrical theology remains.

Due to the contribution of Western missionaries, Chinese Methodists in Singapore are heavily influenced by Western practices of worship and music. Chinese hymnody is mostly translated from the West and tunes retain a Western flavor. It is disappointing to discover that among the various Chinese hymnals used in Singapore Chinese Methodist churches, there is no distinctive Wesleyan hymnal imparting a strong Wesleyan ethos. In fact, most of the churches have abandoned the tradition of hymn singing due to the challenge of language and the rise and availability of CCM styles. Therefore, the renewal and cultivation of Wesleyan hymn singing as a valuable means of grace in nurturing disciples of Christ becomes a pressing need.

In John Wesley’s Preface for *The Collection* (1780), he firmly believed that “when poetry thus keeps its place, as handmaid of piety, it shall attain, not a poor perishable wreath, but a crown that fadeth not away.”8 Chinese Annual Conference (CAC) should educate churches that hymn singing is not an outdated tradition to be abandoned conveniently in order

---

to stem declining membership. They need to help Chinese churches recognize that being
trendy in musical style is not an ideal solution to retain the younger generation but an
accurate and profound spiritual diet presented in an appropriate style. Church leaders need to
understand that the younger generation is not simply an English-speaking group, but also
speaks Chinese as second language. They should not underestimate the younger generation’s
ability to express and comprehend theological doctrines in the Chinese language through
hymn singing.

In order to revive and renew the tradition of nurturing disciples of Christ by singing
Wesleyan hymns, CAC should place a great emphasis and effort on equipping churches with
Wesleyan doctrines (including pastors and younger generation). Meanwhile, they should
encourage compositions of new Wesleyan hymns that could speak to contemporary Chinese
Methodists and make effective use of social media to provide Chinese hymn resources for
Chinese churches. The effectiveness of this approach has been proven in the two case studies
of TACMC members, albeit on a limited scale. It is exciting to envision a new era for
Chinese Wesleyan hymnody in Singapore.

This thesis proposes ways to combine the truths of Wesleyan discipleship with the
music of the heart for this age. As Charles Wesley noted in his hymn “A Prayer for
Children,” “Come, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost,”9

Unite the pair so long disjoined,
Knowledge and vital piety:
Learning and holiness combined,
And truth and love, let all men see
In those whom up to thee we give,
Thine, wholly thine, to die and live.

---

9 From Hymns for Children (1763), a hymn sung “At the opening of a school in Kingswood.”
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*Table of Contents for*
*A Collection of Hymns for the Use of The People Called Methodist 1780*

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<td>Lord’s Prayer/Prayer</td>
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<td>Dismissal</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Benediction</td>
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<td>Canticles</td>
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Psalms: Ps 1a–Ps 150e
### APPENDIX 6:
*Table of Contents for Hymns of United Worship 1997*

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Hymn</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Praise and Adoration</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>The Church Year</td>
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</tr>
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<td></td>
<td>Christmas/Epiphany</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
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</tr>
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<td>The Church</td>
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<td>Christian Life</td>
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APPENDIX 7:
Interview with Mary Gan: Hymns of United Worship

1. Which year was the concept of publishing the Hymns of United Worship formed?
1988—The Music Committee of the World Federation of Chinese Churches (WFCMC) was tasked by the Executive Council to explore publishing a bilingual hymnal for the use of Chinese Methodist Churches in the different regions. The first meeting was held in Taipei in the spring of 1988.

2. How did this concept first come about?
The Methodist Church is known as a singing church. We have a rich Wesleyan tradition of hymn singing. However, the Chinese Methodist churches were using hymnals published by other denominations as there was no hymnal published by the Chinese Methodist churches. There was a felt need that we should have a hymnal of our own. Bishop C. N. Fang (Bishop of the Methodist Church in Malaysia, 1976–1988), was a strong proponent and encourager of this Methodist hymnal project.

3. Were the editorial committee members all Methodists?
Yes, they were representatives from the members of WFCMC from Singapore, East and West Malaysia, Hong Kong, and Taiwan. Chan Hung Da (Taiwan), Chairman of the WFCMC Music Committee, became the Chief Editor responsible for the selection and editing of hymns. The preparation for printing-typesetting of music and text was done in Singapore under the direction of Mary Gan, the assistant editor.

4. Who were the intended target audience for this hymnal? Was it meant to be a denominational hymnal, or for use in the wider church community?
The main target users were the Methodist churches. However, other denominations were welcome to use the hymnal too. The hymnal was thus given a generic name, Hymns of United Worship, to encourage users from beyond the Methodist church.

5. What were the goals of the publishing committee while editing these hymns?
The main goal of the editorial committee was to publish a collection of bilingual (Chinese-English) hymns suitable for the use of Chinese Methodist Churches in different regions, especially in Malaysia, Singapore, Hong Kong, and Taiwan. As a “United” hymnal, we focused on what we have in common by keeping the most treasured traditional Chinese hymns commonly used by these churches. At the same time, we aimed to encourage Chinese churches to value and encourage the writing of hymns using Chinese and Asian compositional techniques. Thus, we included a special category called “Contemporary Chinese Works”.

6. Were there any challenges faced in choosing the hymns? Besides this, were there any other challenges?
There is a vast repertoire of hymns used by the different churches represented in the WFCMC. A survey, though not very comprehensive, found that over 1,000 hymns were reported to be used by the churches surveyed. It was not practical or feasible to have a hymnal of 1,000 hymns. The challenge was to be selective and focus more on “what hymns do these churches have in common?” Even so, we had to ‘sacrifice’ many well-loved hymns due to the limited number of hymns to be included in the hymnal.
As this is an international hymnal project involving representatives from different countries, it was difficult to meet as a committee. The selection and editorial responsibility eventually
fell mainly on the shoulders of Taiwan and Singapore representatives. The Chinese Christian Literature Council Ltd in Hong Kong was appointed to be the publisher.

7. **How were the 260 hymns eventually chosen?**

Except for the 13 newly composed/translated Chinese hymns, the remaining 247 hymns were mainly chosen from the most commonly used hymns by the churches surveyed from Taiwan, Malaysia, Singapore and Hong Kong.

8. **What editorial philosophy is this hymnal based on? For example: based on the church liturgical calendar, or stages of growth in the Christian life, etc.**

The hymnal was structured under 7 categories that included “Adoration and Praise,” “The Church Year,” “The Church,” “Christian Life,” “Gospel Hymns,” “Service Music,” and “Contemporary Chinese Works.”

The “Adoration and Praise” category was subdivided into *Holy Trinity—Holy Father, Jesus Christ, Holy Spirit, and Creator.*

The “Church Year” includes *Advent, Christmas/Epiphany, Passion, Eastertide/Ascension.*

“The Church” category includes *Public Worship, Communion of Saints, and Striving for Christ.*

“The Christian Life” category includes *Trust/Hope, Prayer/Thanksgiving, Call/Dedication, Fellowship/Family.*

“Gospel Hymns” are subdivided into *Witness and Invitation.*

“Service Music” includes *Introit, Infant Baptism, Offertory, Holy Communion, Mission, Doxology, Close of Worship and Amens.*

“Contemporary Chinese Works” were by Lim Swee Hong (Singapore, music set to Charles Wesley texts), Chan Hung Da (Taiwan, text and music), David Yeung (Hong Kong, text and music) and Victor Chan (Hong Kong, music set to text by John Fan).

9. **If you were given the opportunity to edit and publish a hymnal for Chinese Methodist Churches today, how would you do it?**

An *ideal* hymnal for Chinese Methodist Churches would include the following characteristics:

i. The Editorial team should consist of both pastors/theologians and musicians. The pastors/theologians will scrutinize the text and theology of each hymn while the musicians will ensure the quality of music and that the text and music are compatible.

ii. Bilingual (Chinese-English)—in the Singapore and Malaysian context, this is especially essential due to the bilingual education system.

iii. The use of *simplified* Chinese characters as the younger generations are familiar only with simplified Chinese. This is the case not only for Singapore, but also Malaysia and many countries around the world. However, if the hymnal is for use in Taiwan or Hong Kong, then an alternate *traditional* Chinese character edition need to be provided.

iv. The repertoire would be comprehensive as well as inclusive, meaning there should be representative hymns from the early church to the present day, from western, Asian, contemporary as well as global styles and traditions. As a Chinese Methodist hymnal, special emphasis could be given to Wesleyan and Chinese traditions.

v. Besides the usual indexes (e.g. *Index of Titles, Index of Authors, Composers and Arrangers, Index of Tune Names, Metrical Index, Scriptural Index …etc*), there should be an *Index of First Lines in Numerical Notation.* This is because many Chinese can read numerical notation, not western musical notation.

vi. It would be ideal to include notes or a commentary on each hymn, brief information about the authors, composers and suggestions on appropriate use in worship.
vii. Recordings of new or not so familiar hymns would be provided to help congregations learn the hymns.
viii. A systematic plan to introduce the hymnal and teach new hymns to the Church School students, youths and adult congregational members.

10. What do you think of the ways hymns are used in Chinese Methodist Churches today? What are the strengths and weaknesses of the Chinese Methodist Churches, or how can it be improved?
The Chinese Methodist Churches in Singapore are blessed because of the availability of a wide repertoire of Christian songs and hymns from published hymnals as well as the internet. There are also talented composers in some churches, e.g. Queenstown Chinese Methodist Church and Telok Ayer Chinese Methodist Church. Recordings of their new compositions could be shared with others churches. There is also a Methodist School of Music that provides resources and training for the churches.

The weakness is the use of limited repertoire; the tendency for churches to be contented with only the “contemporary” style of songs, ignoring the vast and rich heritage of hymns from more than 2,000 years of church history. There is a need to make a conscious effort to introduce a wide variety of congregational songs/hymns with good theological content and musical styles.

Another weakness is many worship pianists often cannot play the hymns as written with their rich harmonies. Their lack of confidence in playing hymns often result in “dragging” and “uninspiring” hymn singing, perpetuating the biased and mistaken notion that hymn singing is “boring” and not “exciting”!

11. What words of encouragement do you have for the Chinese Methodist Churches in Singapore?
I would encourage the Chinese Methodist Churches in Singapore to do the following:
- Widen the hymn repertoire of congregations.
- Have a systematic plan to introduce and teach new hymns not only to the adult congregations, but also to Church School students and youths.
- Consider editing or re-translating some of the traditional Chinese hymn text that are too difficult for the younger generations to understand or appreciate.
- Invest in the training of pianists/organists and worship band musicians. Make full use of the training and resources provided by the Methodist School of Music.
- Organize regular hymn festivals and hymn appreciation courses.
- Strengthen pastors and worship leaders’ understanding of the role of hymn singing in the spiritual formation of the church. It is important that pastors receive sufficient training in hymn appreciation at theological seminaries. The CAC Board of Worship & Music could also provide continuing education in this aspect for pastors who lack such training in seminary.
- Finally, be good stewards of God’s gift of music!

Mary Y. T. Gan
Founding Principal (Retired)
Methodist School of Music
Appendix 8:
Consolidated Survey Results on Congregational Singing
for Mandarin Services of CAC Churches

1. Does the Mandarin community in your church use *Hymns of United Worship* (HUW 1997)? Or other hymnals (e.g., *Hymns of Universal Praise* (HUP 1977), etc)?
   - Ang Mo Kio (AMK)—HUW
   - Bukit Panjang (BP)—NIL
   - Charis—*HUW* occasionally
   - Foo Chow (FC)—*Hymns of Praise* (HUP 1978)
   - Geylang—*HUW* is one of the resources
   - Grace—NIL
   - Hakka—*New Hymns of Praise* (2011), but it is seldom used
   - Hinghwa—*HUW* is used once a month for our Holy Communion Sunday
   - Holy Covenant (HC)—*HUW*
   - Kum Yan (KY)—*HUW*
   - Paya Lebar (PL)—*HUW*
   - Queenstown—*HUP, HUW*
   - Sengkang—1% usage *HUW*, through Powerpoint
   - Telok Ayer (TA)—*HUW*
   - Toa Payoh (TP)—NIL
   - Yishun—NIL

2. If your church does not normally use a hymnal, and supposing you need to sing a hymn, where will you find such resources?
   - AMK—Internet, other hymnals
   - BP—Other hymnals
   - Charis—internet
   - FC—NIL
   - Geylang—NIL
   - Grace—Internet
   - Hakka—Internet
   - Hinghwa—Internet
   - HC—*HUP*
   - KY—NIL
   - PL—Internet
   - Queenstown—NIL
   - SengKang—YouTube
   - TA—Other hymnals and internet
   - TP—NIL
   - Yishun—NIL
3. If your church sings hymns, do members of all age groups like to sing hymns?
   (1 means you don’t sing hymns at all, 10 means they love to sing hymns)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Church</th>
<th>Children</th>
<th>Youth</th>
<th>Adults</th>
<th>Elderly</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
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<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BP</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Charis</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FC</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Geylang</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grace</td>
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<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hakka</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hinghwa</td>
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<td>Queenstown</td>
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<td>8</td>
</tr>
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<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TA</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TP</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yishun</td>
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<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4. If your church does not sing hymns, in your services,
   a. What songs do you usually sing?
   - AMK—We have traditional and contemporary services. We sing hymns at the traditional services, while for the contemporary services, we use contemporary Christian music (CCM) and sometimes sing traditional hymns with contemporary musical style.
   - BP—We sing mostly contemporary songs and traditional hymns with contemporary musical style.
   - Charis—CCM
   - FC—赞美之泉 Stream of Praise
   - Geylang—We sing contemporary songs such as Stream of Praise, 小羊诗歌 Lamb Music, 新心音乐 New Heart Music Ministries, 约书亚乐团 Joshua Band, and other songs translated from English. However, because of copyright issues relating to live broadcasting, we now only select songs from Streams of Praise and New Heart Music Ministries. Our blended worship sessions include a combination of hymns and contemporary songs. We select the most appropriate songs based on the sermon topic and church calendar.
   - Grace—CCM
   - Hakka—CCM
   - Hinghwa—Common mainstream Chinese choruses, such as Joshua Band, Stream of Praise, 天韵 Heavenly Melody, 泥土音乐 Clay Music.
   - HC—CCM
   - KY—NIL
   - PL—CCM
   - Sengkang—Contemporary worship songs.
   - TA—We mainly use hymns, while including some songs of praise. We use appropriate CCM as songs of response after our sermons.
b. Do you think these songs are sufficient for the spiritual formation and worship life of believers?

- AMK—The content of hymns is richer. However, our youths today do not have a strong enough foundation in Chinese to understand the lyrics and their meaning, so these hymns are not able to touch them.
- BP—Most of our songs can achieve these objectives.
- Charis—This is possible to a certain extent.
- FC—Not sufficient.
- Geylang—Yes
- Grace—Sufficient.
- Hakka—Contemporary songs have certain shortcomings compared to hymns, but our children and youths find it difficult to understand the meaning of hymns.
- Hinghwa—Sufficient.
- HC—Sufficient. Modern technology has led to poorer memory among people. Shorter choruses are more easily internalized. Hymns are richer in content, but contain deeper and more difficult language. If our members are not conversant enough in the language, and we offer no analysis or explanation, they will neither understand what they sing nor be able to remember it. If their language ability is good enough, they should be able to understand. Even if they are touched by the songs, they might not be able to remember the content. When encountering various situations in life, the songs that more easily come to mind are shorter choruses, and this applies to the elderly today as well. They might not be able to memorize “Trust and Obey”, but can memorize “耶稣知我心 Jesus Knows My Heart” (CCM).
- KY—NIL
- PL—No, its scope is narrow.
- Queenstown—These songs can to some extent aid in the spiritual formation and worship life of our members, especially the better compositions. However, these songs alone may not be sufficient. For example, many contemporary songs sound like pop songs, but do not cultivate in our members hearts of reverence towards God.
- Sengkang—Not sufficient.
- TA—CCM have simple lyrics and stir our emotions, thus to some extent, can benefit our spiritual formation and worship life. However, they are more theological narrow, and lack comprehensiveness.
- TP—Still okay.
- Yishun—In some ways, contemporary songs are beneficial for our spiritual formation, for these songs do not give people the sense of being out of their reach, and their lyrics are easier to understand.

c. Can these songs enable believers to understand the full range of biblical truth (e.g., promoting understanding of God’s attributes, or encouraging them to love God and other)?

- AMK—Hymns are richer in content. However, as mentioned above, our members need to have a good enough standard of Chinese.
- BP—This is mostly possible, unless the particular has some other areas of thematic focus.
- Charis—Not comprehensive.
• FC—Not helpful, because the song lyrics focus mainly on emotions.
• Geylang—Yes
• Grace—Yes
• Hakka—No
• Hinghwa—Yes, but these songs mainly engage their emotions to spur them to love God and others.
• HC—Not sufficient.
• KY—NIL
• PL—No, only certain aspects.
• Queenstown—These songs cannot help believers understand the full range of biblical truth. I think that neither contemporary songs nor hymns can fully enable believers to understand the full range of biblical truth. But I agree that hymns can achieve this better than contemporary songs.
• Sengkang—Generally these contemporary songs do not express truths comprehensively and are more focused on expressing emotions. Sometimes, the song lyrics are based on short passages of Scripture, but these passages might be taken out of context and could mislead worshippers.
• TA—Such songs are not comprehensive in content. CCM focus on our relationship with God, but are severely lacking in emphasis on doing good or loving others. In terms of our relationship with God, many short choruses tend to express this in terms of romantic love, and while this deepens our expression and emotions of love towards God, it diminishes our reverence towards him. Such expressions of love lay too much emphasis on emotions, and if it is not accompanied by sound knowledge, will not strengthen us spiritually.
• TP—NIL
• Yishun—CCM fall short in terms of over-emphasizing God’s grace and love, with lyrics that tend to be too individualistic and emotion-based. This could subtly influence believers to think of our faith a purely individual thing, leading to a deficient ecclesiology.

d. Can these songs help believers to understand Wesleyan theology?
• AMK—To some extent.
• BP—Not so directly, because while we sing the songs, we usually turn our focus to the theme of the song (e.g., “reverence”) or are reminded of it, and only thereafter are we able to consider its theology. More mass education on Wesleyan theology is needed (many Methodists do not clearly understand the theology of our denomination), including explaining the Wesleyan theology in the lyrics of hymns composed by Charles Wesley.
• Charis—No
• FC—No
• Geylang—No
• Grace—No
• Hakka—No
• Hinghwa—No
• HC—Depends on the content of the song.
• KY—NIL
• PL—There are very few Methodist contemporary Christian songs.
• Queenstown—No. Very few of these songs are composed by pastors or members knowledgeable in Wesleyan theology.
• Sengkang—No
TA—No
TP—No, as these songs not written in a Methodist context.
Yishun—No

5. Do you think hymns are still suitable for believers today, especially the younger generation? Why?

AMK—Traditional hymns and their arrangements do not resonate easily with youths. There are contemporized versions of hymns in English, combining depth of content and more modern tunes. But it seems like there are no equivalent contemporized hymns in Chinese.

BP—Yes. As long as the worship leader and music team prepare well, and they are confident in leading the hymn, the congregants will be better able to accept the hymn. Furthermore, Chinese translations of hymns face the challenge of lyrics that are difficult to pronounce (along with more “rigid” tunes). This is the main reason that youths and children are not willing to accept (or even reject) hymns. In other words, language ability and proficiency are closely related to this problem.

Charis—Not suitable, as the problem is that the musical arrangements and mode of singing, as well as the words used, need to be modernized.

FC—Suitable: solid biblical and theological foundation. Not suitable: lyrics that lack a contemporary feel; or lack emotional connection.

Geylang—Hymns definitely have their value and necessary place, because they offer sound theology in depth, clarity and a fixed format. As long as we teach them properly, the younger generation should be able accept hymns.

Grace—Perhaps the question is not about suitability, but more because we seldom sing hymns in our contemporary services, or tend to sing the same few hymns. The younger generation has little exposure to hymns, and prefers contemporary tunes and songs, and worship that focuses on the heart.

Hakka—The style of music used by hymns is different from contemporary music, and is difficult of youths to appreciate.

Hinghwa—Not suitable, because the forms of melodies and lyrical expressions that the younger generation is used to make it difficult for them to appreciate hymns.

HC—Hymns are rich in truth content, and if this is taught, analyzed and explained, can be helpful for believers. The language used in hymns is passing out of use, and people today find it hard to resonate with the tunes. Therefore, if hymns are explained and recomposed for today, we might be able to convey their essence.

KY—Actually traditional hymns with understandable lyrics can still be suitable. E.g., “Amazing Grace.” Besides, if the tunes are not too difficult, the younger generation can still sing them. E.g., “I Surrender All.”

PL—It can be made more appealing to the younger generation through the musical arrangement. We should do so in order to give them a richer repertoire for worshipping, and thereby be more comprehensively nurtured spiritually.

Queenstown—Hymns are still suitable for younger believers today. Their theological content is biblical and transcends the ages. But the lyrics can be modified to suit people today; the musical arrangements can also be modernized, and the hymns can be sung in a livelier fashion.

SengKang—Hymns are suitable for any generation. Churches find hymns unsuitable because we lack in reverence for God and our understanding of commitment, and of course, the difficult melodies in some hymns are another reason.
• TA—Actually hymns are suitable for any age group, as long as we allow singers to recognize and resonate with the hymn lyrics and music. Some existing hymns, especially those with refrains, are easier for modern believers to accept.
• TP—Not suitable. Some reasons include language ability the style of the songs.
• Yishun—Even if our youths know how to sing hymns, they may not understand the meaning of the lyrics. This applies both to English or Chinese hymns. There are three main reasons. First, the lack of teaching. Second, the musical genre is old, so unless believers like classical musical, they would find that hymns do not fit with modern music culture. Third, the lyrics are not expressed in contemporary style, so believers find it difficult to resonate with it.

6. Does your church see the need to promote hymns (especially Wesleyan hymns)?
• AMK—Yes
• BP—Yes, but we need sufficient reasons and platforms to promote this.
• Hakka—Yes
• TA—Yes
(Only 4 churches responded to this question)

a. What are the benefits?
• AMK—This is our heritage.
• BP—To understand the hymns and maybe even the theology of our tradition.
• Charis—This helps us to promote the theology, the distinctives and the atmosphere of our denomination, and increases our sense of belonging.
• FC—The songs are whole sermons in themselves.
• Geylang—Rich in theological insights.
• Grace—This will allow believers to know and learn to appreciate the rich content and theology of our hymns.
• Hakka—Rich in content and educational in value.
• Hinghwa—To pass on the Wesleyan spirit and solid theology.
• HC—This can help in our understanding of key ideas in our Methodist tradition, because the hymns written by the Wesley brothers express their beliefs and theology. This can become teaching content.
• KY—We can better understand our Methodist denomination through Wesleyan hymns.
• PL—For its rich theological content, especially when we are Methodists.
• Queenstown—This is part of the rich spiritual heritage of our denomination (Wesleyan hymns), with deep and wide-ranging content, and richness of theological thought, which can help our believers in their spiritual growth, worship life, and understanding of our denomination.
• SengKang—The music is the medium, the words are the essence. Hymns help us to understand and grasp important doctrines more easily.
• TA—This is one of the means of grace to nurture disciples. To pass down the Wesleyan spirit and theology.
• Toa Payoh—NIL
• Yishun—This is part of our Wesleyan tradition and the legacy of our churches.

b. What are the challenges?
• AMK—Same as question 5.
• BP—Need to analyze the Wesleyan theology in the lyrics Charles Wesley’s hymns, which often cannot be understood directly.
• Charis—We need renewal rather than rigid adherence, to avoid dwelling on past practices and losing touch with present reality.
• FC—How to modernize the musical style of hymns? How to make them more understandable?
• Geylang—The younger generation today is exposed to a diversity of musical genres, so to simply pick one genre and promote it for the sake of promoting it, the results will not be ideal, and may even backfire on us.
• Grace—How can hymns be sung suitably in contemporary services?
• Hakka—The language of the lyrics has to be easy to understand, and the musical style needs to be contemporized.
• Hinghwa—Too many verses, which the praise and worship teams as well as members are not familiar with.
• HC—Once again, the language and score need to be interpreted, such as using plain language to explain older expressions and bring out their wisdom.
• KY—Lacking in a holistic understanding of our faith.
• PL—For Mandarin congregation, the Chinese translation is not always modern enough, and not always as poetic as the English original.
• Queenstown—It is a challenge to help believers to appreciate hymns better and understand the value of singing them. E.g., some hymn melodies are not as “moving”, making our task harder.
• SengKang—Translated terms (from English to Chinese) may not fit well with the tune, and some terms are not easy to understand.
• TA—The language is deep, difficult to understand and does not flow well, and our exposure to it is limited to Sunday services. The tunes are unfamiliar. Not many hymns are translated to Chinese, and even less are suitable according to contemporary language expressions.
• TP—We do not intentionally promote hymns, and seldom use them.
• Yishun—(1) old English and Chinese language is difficult to understand; (2) old-style tunes are not appreciated by all.

7. If we wish to promote hymns among today’s Chinese-speaking communities (regardless of age), what suggestions do you have?
• AMK—When singing hymns, why do we need to sing them with a traditional tempo and style. For example, there are more modern versions of the Doxology. Besides, if we can combine hymns and contemporary songs in combined services, this can be a way to help our congregation to appreciate both genres. Many hymns come with moving background stories, and these can be included in our sermons to help youths better understand and accept these hymns.
• BP—Publicize Wesleyan hymns (less familiar songs) more on social media, but this needs to be in good quality, or let the Board of Worship and Music of CAC suggest to church worship teams several Wesleyan hymns suitable for special dates in the church calendar.
• Charis—To promote hymns in the Chinese-speaking communities of today involves many aspects, and simply providing a hymnal is not enough. Beyond that, we need the proactive commitment of gifted brothers and sisters, and attract talented people who can play various musical instruments, and invest in these people and the fees to train them. Moreover, we need to coordinate with the whole worship service and be ready to renew and evolve our ways. We need to more frequently explain the background stories to hymns, comment on the content of the hymns, and tie this in with our sermons.
- FC—Explain; compose; introduce the backgrounds to hymns.
- Geylang—It might help to compose or select suitable contemporary music for new renditions of hymns. But for hymns where lyrics and tune are seamlessly interwoven, we should not force them apart, such as How Great Thou Art, Amazing Grace, Holy Holy Holy, And Can It Be, Old Rugged Cross etc.
- Grace—NIL
- Hakka—Use contemporary music and language to compose songs with the same depth of content as hymns.
- Hinghwa—Old tunes need to be sung in new ways, or even re-composed, with melodies that are catchy for people to listen to and sing; re-write the lyrics (adding English terms, and modify the verses) to make them short songs easier to sing (especially for the younger generation with lower proficiency in Chinese). Of course, these adjustments should not compromise the essence of the original compositions.
- HC—Our church introduces a hymn during each Holy Communion Sunday. A short introduction to the message conveyed by the hymn helps congregants to sing it with better understanding and allow the message to take root in their hearts. The tune can be re-rendered with some contemporary elements, such as with musical accompaniment from modern instruments.
- KY—The songs alone do not carry much power to change lives. They need to be complemented with prayer, biblical teaching, meditation and response to God’s call, and personal resolutions etc. in order to transform lives.
- PL—Start introducing to the children, but we need good lyricists who can simplify the lyrics for the children. For adults, need worship leaders who understand and appreciate such hymns to lead the congregation in singing them. Music accompaniment needs to be appropriate and appealing too.
- Queenstown—Many hymns have background stories. If we can let our younger generation know these stories, they will better appreciate these hymns. We need to help our younger generation see the theological depth of hymns. Hymns are old tunes that need to be sung in new ways. Lyrics need to be modernized, avoiding the use of too many old and difficult terms. Pastors and leaders need to come to a consensus to sing hymns in worship services. Church Music Sunday should be celebrated each year. The younger generation needs to have the opportunity to witness the grandeur of hymns through choral presentations.
- SengKang—Start with looking into the musical arrangements, and uploading these hymns on YouTube, for more people to listen and be exposed to them. We should begin teaching this in our children Sunday schools.
- TA—Believers who are middle-aged and older should not lose this “market” which remains fairly large, especially including Chinese churches overseas. For the younger generation for whom Chinese is a second language, if copyright allows, perhaps old hymns can be sung in new ways, or re-composed with new tunes or lyrics. We should start with listening to hymns, for experience the hymns themselves is better than any advertisement about them. We can also consider producing a video or channel on hymns, to classify hymns as a vital element in a believer’s faith journey, just as how the Psalms help people to approach God and appropriately express their emotions before Him, such as pain, sadness, temptation, failure, parting, thanksgiving, etc.
- TP—Hymns need to incorporate a contemporary feel, if not they cannot meet the needs of people today.
- Yishun—if we wish for contemporary believers to like hymns, the church needs to take a multi-pronged approach to teaching and adapting hymns, to rekindle the interest of
believers in hymns. Taking Amazing Grace as an example: although many believers know this hymn, they generally considered it as a hymn sung in traditional liturgical churches or during funeral services. But after Chris Tomlin re-composed the song in 2006, this hymn began to appear frequently in modern worship playlists, and even became a hymn that many believers love to sing. In addition, we need to intentionally arrange for suitable Sundays or church seasons when we can introduce and teach Wesleyan theology and hymns.

Thank you for your precious time and sincere feedback. May God bless you.
APPENDIX 9:
Theme Song of Telok Ayer Chinese Methodist Church

基督门徒圣洁圣爱（华）
曲/调：黄勤娟

F B♭ Gm9 C7 F
B♭ Gm9 C7 F C/E Dm F/C Gm/B♭ F/A G C7
1.全能上帝恩福无垠，差遣爱子拯救万民；
2.基督完全谦卑虚己，全然顺服天父旨意；
3.基督居首圣洁仁义，爱神爱人不遗余力；
4.将来那日主前蒙恩，将我本分向主面陈；

Am Dm G7/B Gm C7 F C7 F C/E Dm F/C
预设恩典化众心，主爱常伴圣灵降临。我愿效法基督样式，
求主改变顽固之心，心灵异暖生命更新。
完全生命一生所求，惟靠主恩精进不休。
逃避主怒进入永生，荣耀归神万古永恒。

Gm/B♭ F/A G C7 F C/E Dm B♭ Gm B♭maj7/C F
忠心作主门徒一世；奋力追求圣洁生命，竭力活出圣爱使命。
Disciples of Christ, Growing in Holy Love

Tune & Lyrics: Lily Wong
Translation: Jasper Ngoh

1. O God from whom grace and blessings flow,
   Pre-venient grace, a-
   wa-kened hearts, filled with your Spir-rit and your love. I will fol-low the
   ways of Christ, the Lord’s dis-ci-ple I’ll faith-ful-ly be. Ho-li-ness I will pur-sue,

2. Christ was per-fect in hu-mil-i-ty,
   Our sub-born hearts, Lord,
   life’s pur-suit, while lean-ing on the grace he pro-vides.
   Li-ving out ho-ly love.

3. Christ is the head o’er his ho-ly church,
   A per-fect love, our
   en-ter life; glo-ry to God, for e-ver more.

4. And when the fi-nal day a-rives,
   To flee from wrath, and
   will you change, our spi-rits warmed, our lives trans-formed.

you sent your Son to save the world;
he chose to keep the Fa-ther’s will;
like him, we love both God and man;
I will be-fore him my grace-works lay,
APPENDIX 10:
“十字架 Near the Cross” for Good Friday Service (April 2)

十字架 Near the Cross

Lyrics: Fanny Crosby
Rearrange: Lily Wong

1. Jesus keep me near the cross, there a precious fountain, Free to all a
2. Near the cross! O Lamb of God, bring its scenes before me, Help me walk from

Refrain 1

In the cross, in the cross, be my glory stream, flows from Calvary's moun-
day to day, with its shadows over me.

Bridge

Ev er; Till my raptured soul shall find, rest beyond the river. So amazed,

Refrain 2

Thank you Lord, all my life I'll follow you unto heaven. In the cross, in the cross,

Ev er; Till my raptured soul shall find, rest beyond the river.
APPENDIX 11:
“爱 Love” for Mother’s Day Service (May 9)

爱 Love

Tune & Lyrics: Lily Wong Kueng Mee

J = 120

F C/E Bb/D F/A Bb Am Dm Gm7

[对天父]
当我还未成形时，你知道我，深爱我；当我忧虑明天时，你照顾我。

[对妈妈]
当我还没出生时，你知道我，深爱我；当我渐渐长大时，你照顾我。

C F C/E Bb/D F/A Bb Am Dm Gm7

教导我：当我孤单、迷失时，你鼓励我、陪伴我；当我无知、悖逆时，你管教我、
教导我：当我不安、需要时，你鼓励我、陪伴我；当我不肯、听话时，你管教我、

Bridge
C Bb/C C7 Dm Dm7/C Bbmaj7 F/A Gm

等待我。我常常感到感恩，你怎能如此爱我；付出一切的代价，
等待我。我常常感到感恩，你怎能如此爱我；为了我付出很多，

F/A Bbmaj7 C Dm Dm7/C Bbmaj7 F/A

牺牲爱子为救我。[天父]孩子无论你如何，你总是我的宝贝，没有
每天辛苦为了我。[妈妈]孩子无论你如何，你总是我的宝贝，

Gm F/A Bb C Bb/C C7 Refrain F Bb C

任何的事物，隔绝我对你的爱。亲爱天父谢谢你，让我成为
将你赐给我，我一生一世爱你。亲爱妈妈谢谢你，让我成为

F Dm Bb Gm C7 F Bb

你宝贝，不是因为我配得，完全是因你恩典。亲爱天父我爱你，
你宝贝，你学像天父爱我，我感到非常幸福。亲爱妈妈我爱你，

C F Dm Bb Gm C7 F

教我看你为至宝。活出圣洁的生命。一生爱你，也爱人。
你也是我的宝贝。我要学习听从你。爱神，爱你，也爱人。
English Translation (not for performance):

[To our Heavenly Father]
1. When I was yet formed, you knew me and loved me;
   When I worry about tomorrow, you care for me and teach me.
   When I am lonely and lost, you encourage me and come alongside me;
   When I am ignorant and rebellious, you discipline me and bear patiently with me.

[Bridge]
I am always thankful, for how you so love me;
paying the greatest price, to sacrifice your Son to save me.
[Heavenly Father] Child, no matter what you do, you are my dearest child.
There is nothing at all, that can separate you from my love.

[Refrain]
Dear Heavenly Father, thank you, for letting me be your beloved child,
not because I am worthy, but completely because of your grace.
Dear Heavenly Father, I love you, teach me to see you as my greatest treasure,
to live a holy life, to love you and others all my life.

[To our mothers]
2. When I was yet born, you knew me and loved me;
   As I grow up, you care for me and teach me.
   When I am upset and in need, you encourage me and come alongside me,
   When I am disobedient, you discipline me and bear patiently with me.

[Bridge]
I am always thankful, for how you so love me;
sacrificing so much for me, and working hard every day for me.
[Mother] Child, no matter what you do, you are my dearest child,
our Heavenly Father gave you to me, so I shall love you all my life.

[Refrain]
Dear mother, thank you, for letting me be your beloved child,
you love me with our Heavenly Father’s love, I feel so very blessed.
Dear mother, I love you, and I treasure you, I wish to learn to obey you,
to love God, love you, and love all others.
APPENDIX 12:
“我的大英雄 My Superheroes” for Father’s Day Service (June 20)

我的大英雄 My Superheroes

Lyrics / Tune: Lily Wong Kueng Mee

Rap:
天上爸爸是全能，创造世界创造我；
赐下爱子为救我，丰盛恩典到永恒。
地上爸爸也不赖，带我认识这世界；
学像天父般爱我，使我每天都快乐。

爸爸，你是我的大英雄，辛苦工作为了家，你勇敢又强壮，有你在我就不怕。
爸爸，你是我的好朋友，陪我玩乐，陪我笑，你教我人生道理，有你陪伴我长大。
我要完全像天父，圣洁生活，荣耀神，听从爸爸的教导，学习爸爸好榜样。
谢谢我的大英雄，谢谢我的好朋友，不忘你们的恩情，一生一世爱你们。
English Translation (not for performance):

[To our Fathers]
Father, you are my superhero, working hard for our family.  
You are brave and strong, with you around I am not afraid.  
Father, you are my best friend, playing and laughing along with me.  
You teach me all about life, you journey with me as I grow up.

[Refrain]
I wish to emulate my Heavenly Father, to be holy and glorify God.  
To obey my father’s teachings, and to learn from my father’s good example.  
Thank you my superheroes, thank you my best friends.  
I will never forget your kindness. I will love you all my life.

[Rap]
My heavenly Father is almighty, he created the world and he created me;  
He sent his beloved Son to save me, to grant me abundant grace for eternity.  
My earthly father is good as well, he leads me to know this world;  
He loves me with our Heavenly Father’s love, he brings me happiness everyday.
APPENDIX 13:
“爱在圣诞  Love at Christmas” for Christmas Sunday Service (December 19)

爱在圣诞  Love At Christmas

Tune & Lyrics: Lily Wong Kueng Mee
Translation: Timothy Ang

1. 小小主耶稣，降生伯利恒，卑微马槽里，
   Little Jesus, born in Bethlehem, humbly down he came,

2. 小小的婴孩，荣耀之子，深爱你和我，
   Little ba-by boy, glorious Son of God, deeply loves us all,

3. 小你和我，一生要学习，若爱主耶稣，
   All our lives we learn, if we love our Lord,

4. 因爱世 上人；绝望的世界，伤痕和泪水，
   Shows our Fa-ther’s heart; How can I re-pay, but to share this love,

5. 显天父心意；我无以报答，愿付出爱心，
   So loved he the world; In this world’s des-pair, full of wounds and tears,

6. 当爱人如己；小小的举动，大大的爱心，
   We should love all too; Lit-tle things we do, show our God’s great love,

7. 因爱胜人；希望永相随。主的爱，主的爱，
   In this Christ-mas tide, God’s love warms all heart.

8. 给冷 漠世界，一丝的温暖。Love of God, love of God,
   Love of God, love of God.

9. 圣诞佳节里，主爱暖人心。
   To this dre-a-ry world, a fee-ling of warmth.

10. 温暖我心深如海。我们爱，我们爱，让人看见神的爱。
    Warms my heart deep down in-side. L et us love, let us love, that the world may see God’s love.
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