Finding Wonder, Love, and Praise: Weaving the Threads of Wesleyan and Methodist Theology and History Into a Twenty-First Century Worship Tapestry

Dirk Damonte
jdirkdamonte@mac.com

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholar.smu.edu/theology_music_etds

Part of the Christianity Commons

Recommended Citation
https://scholar.smu.edu/theology_music_etds/6

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Perkins Thesis and Dissertations at SMU Scholar. It has been accepted for inclusion in Doctor of Pastoral Music Projects and Theses by an authorized administrator of SMU Scholar. For more information, please visit http://digitalrepository.smu.edu.
FINDING WONDER, LOVE, AND PRAISE:
WEAVING THE THREADS OF WESLEYAN AND METHODIST THEOLOGY AND
HISTORY INTO A TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY WORSHIP TAPESTRY

Thesis Approved by:

Dr. C. Michael Hawn
University Distinguished Professor
Emeritus of Church Music
Director, Doctor of Pastoral Music Program

Dr. Elaine A. Heath
Dean and Professor of Missional and Pastoral Theology
Duke Divinity School, Retired

Rev. Samuel Yun
Lead Pastor
Embrace United Methodist Church
FINDING WONDER, LOVE, AND PRAISE:
WEAVING THE THREADS OF WESLEYAN AND METHODIST THEOLOGY AND
HISTORY INTO A TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY WORSHIP TAPESTRY

A Thesis Presented to the Graduate Faculty of Perkins School of Theology

Southern Methodist University

in

Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

for the degree of

Doctor of Pastoral Music

by

J. Dirk Damonte

B.M., Piano Performance, University of Puget Sound
M.A., Worship and the Arts, Pacific School of Religion
M.Div., Pacific School of Religion

April 5, 2022
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am deeply grateful for the vision, passion, and compassion of Dr. C. Michael Hawn, who is not only my thesis advisor but who created the Doctor of Pastoral Music program. Gratitude also to my colleagues in the 2017 DPM cohort. Your friendship and inspiration are lasting highlights of my time at Perkins. Many thanks to Rev. Dr. Elaine Heath for being the second reader on this project, and my friend and colleague Rev. Samuel Yun for being the community advisor.

The staff and congregation at Los Altos United Methodist Church have been a source of constant love, support, and encouragement, not just during this process, but over the course of forty years of ministry.

I have been blessed by the generosity and support of many good friends. Lifelong friends Bill and Cindy Golden generously offered their beautiful house in the forest for extended periods of writing. My dear friend and colleague, Rev. Debbie Weatherspoon, first brought me the brochure for the Doctor of Pastoral Music program, and has been a source of constant support, encouragement, and feedback. Kristina Sinks, someone who has gone from singing in our youth choirs to being a close friend read many of the first drafts of chapters and offered wonderful editorial help.

Finally, nothing would be possible without an amazing and wonderful family. My mom, Mary, my sons and their partners, Dustin and Sunshine, and Dylan and Nadine, and especially my spouse, Carol, have been understanding, supportive, encouraging, and offered welcome relief during this process. I am grateful beyond words.
DEDICATION

I dedicate this work to my grandson, Henry Roy Damonte, who was born in the middle of my work on it. No one embodies wonder, love, and praise more than he does.
ABSTRACT

The United Methodist Church has seen a decline in membership for many decades. Accompanying this numeric decline has been a decline in the vitality of worship in many churches. This denomination traces its roots to a renewal movement in the Church of England, led by John and Charles Wesley, which spread across the Atlantic and took hold in the American colonies, where it soon became a separate church. This new church was characterized by lively and Spirit-filled worship and exponential growth. This thesis explores and analyzes the theology of the Wesley brothers and the Wesleyan movement, the history of that movement as it developed into a new denomination in colonial America and the United States, the worship practices that emerged with that history, and the music that inspired that worship. That analysis is applied to a modern worship context with new musical expressions of Wesleyan ideas and practical application of the core of Wesleyan theology and practice.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS .................................................................................................................................................. iv  
DEDICATION .................................................................................................................................................................... v  
ABSTRACT ....................................................................................................................................................................... vi  
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION ........................................................................................................................................... 1  
  Planting the Seeds .......................................................................................................................................................... 1  
  Finding Wonder, Love and Praise ................................................................................................................................. 4  
  Perspective ..................................................................................................................................................................... 6  
CHAPTER 2: THE FOUNDATION ....................................................................................................................................... 8  
  Roots .............................................................................................................................................................................. 8  
  Essential Beliefs .......................................................................................................................................................... 9  
  Means of Grace .......................................................................................................................................................... 15  
  The Full Wesley ......................................................................................................................................................... 17  
  Synergy ..................................................................................................................................................................... 20  
CHAPTER 3: “A DISTINCTLY AMERICAN RELIGION” ................................................................................................... 21  
  The United Methodist Church .................................................................................................................................. 21  
  Beginnings ................................................................................................................................................................. 23  
  Schism ......................................................................................................................................................................... 32  
CHAPTER 4: METHODIST WORSHIP ............................................................................................................................... 36  
  John Wesley’s Views on Worship ............................................................................................................................... 37  
    Paragraph 1: Earnest worship over social propriety ................................................................................................. 38  
    Paragraph 2: Heartfelt versus perfunctory performance of prayers ........................................................................... 38  
    Paragraph 3: The performance of music in worship ............................................................................................... 39  
    Paragraph 4: Sincerity of the preacher ..................................................................................................................... 40  
    Paragraph 5: Worthiness of all to receive Holy Communion ................................................................................... 40  
    Paragraph 6: Methodists should attend Anglican worship ......................................................................................... 41  
  The Sunday Service ..................................................................................................................................................... 42  
  American Methodist Worship ........................................................................................................................................ 44  
  Development of Methodist Worship .......................................................................................................................... 46  
  Case Studies ................................................................................................................................................................. 51  
  Observations ................................................................................................................................................................. 55  

vii
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Why of Worship</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER 5: MUSIC</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roles of Music in Worship</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Charles Wesley</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Charles Wesley’s Technique and Theology</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Modern Adaptations of Charles Wesley</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“O For a Thousand Tongues to Sing”</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Come, Thou Long Expected Jesus”</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“And Are We Yet Alive”</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Love Divine, All Loves Excelling”</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Who You Are”</td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“At This Table”</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Plowshares”</td>
<td>86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER 6: THE WORSHIP TAPESTRY</td>
<td>88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weaving the threads</td>
<td>88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identifying Values and Priorities</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inclusion</td>
<td>92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Worship We Choose</td>
<td>95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creekside Crossings</td>
<td>96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inspiration and History</td>
<td>96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Practicum Committee Work</td>
<td>99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Crossings Tapestry</td>
<td>101</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Music</td>
<td>102</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scripture</td>
<td>106</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prayer</td>
<td>107</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Message (Sermon)</td>
<td>111</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fellowship/Community</td>
<td>112</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Action</td>
<td>112</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Always Weaving</td>
<td>113</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CODA</td>
<td>115</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APPENDIX A: JOHN WESLEY’S LETTER ON WORSHIP</td>
<td>119</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX B: “O For a Thousand Tongues to Sing,” arr. Dirk Damonte........................................ 121
APPENDIX D: “And Are We Yet Alive,” arr. Dirk Damonte ....................................................... 124
APPENDIX E: “Love Divine, All Loves Excelling,” by Dirk Damonte .......................................... 125
APPENDIX F: “Who You Are” by Dirk Damonte ........................................................................ 126
APPENDIX G: “At This Table” by Dirk Damonte ......................................................................... 127
APPENDIX H: “Plowshares” by Dirk Damonte ............................................................................. 128
REFERENCES .................................................................................................................................. 129
Planting the Seeds

In the summer of 1974, when I was sixteen, my Methodist Youth Fellowship (MYF) from Burlingame United Methodist Church traveled to England to visit some of the historic Wesleyan sites. We visited Wesley’s Chapel on City Road and John Wesley’s House in London. We also visited the Wesley Archives which were adjacent to the chapel and house. Housed in the archives was a small, single manual pipe organ that had belonged to Charles Wesley. The docent told our group that they rarely let anyone play it, but if any in our group played the organ, they would be welcome to give it a try. My friends all pushed me to the front even though I didn’t play the organ at all. The docent asked if I would like to try. So, I did. I sat down at Charles Wesley’s organ, and thought for a moment, pondering what I could play. I then played a boogie-woogie on Charles Wesley’s organ. Several of my friends laughed. The docent looked like he might need CPR at any moment. My dad was leading the trip. It was difficult to read the look on his face, although I like to think he was secretly smiling. I meant no disrespect. It was the only thing I could think of to play.

Redemption would come for me about thirty years later. I was now serving as Minister of Music and Worship Arts at Los Altos United Methodist Church. One of our associate pastors was a Wesley scholar. He and I co-led a Wesley Heritage trip to England. He would offer information and insights about John Wesley I would offer information and insights about Charles Wesley. The organ that I had played thirty years ago was now housed in the Foundery Chapel, a small chapel located at Wesley’s Chapel in London. Once again, a docent offered to let me play it. This time I played several Charles Wesley hymns, ending with “Hark! the herald angels
This docent was much more pleased. He said, “We believe that is the actual organ on which Charles Wesley composed that very hymn!” I smiled to myself, resisting the temptation to correct the docent that the tune I had just played was written later by Felix Mendelssohn (1809–1847) as part of a larger work about one hundred years after Charles Wesley wrote the poem. I had come a long way since the boogie woogie.

While my sixteen-year-old self could not have known it then, that experience in London in 1974 had a lasting and life-altering impact. Something inside of me wanted to know about the man who sat at the organ, about the hymns that had been played on it, about the ways the music made on that instrument had helped form the church I loved so much. When I sat down at that same organ thirty years later, I could feel sixteen-year-old me smiling, grateful for the journey that brought me back, this time offering talks on Charles Wesley and leading a different Wesley hymn each day.

I have returned to the Wesley brothers’ England as often as I can. It always feels like a journey home. In addition to the two trips I have mentioned above, one additional journey had a profound effect on my connection with the Wesleys, my understanding of church, and set me on the path toward this thesis and the Doctor of Pastoral Music degree at Perkins School of Theology.

In the summer of 2007, the youth choir at Los Altos United Methodist Church, the Starfire Singers, directed by Carol Damonte and accompanied by me, traveled on tour to the United Kingdom. One of the highlights of this trip was the opportunity to sing for a Sunday service at City Road Chapel. For me, it was a deeply moving, inspiring experience. My history

---

1 For a picture of this, go to https://drive.google.com/file/d/1-yCzKwrJoxgODN5bERbb9UTi2oMDFgpm/view?usp=sharing
2 For a video of this, go to https://drive.google.com/file/d/1ze9m_KYke8VwixU12Nh4J7wYwES_oSK6/view?usp=sharing
and the church’s history all converged, and, as the choir sang one of my original compositions, “Pass Your Bread,” I connected with the legacy of worship and music that this beautiful chapel represented. Beyond my personal experience, I was intrigued by the interplay of different dynamics in the worship service. The service was very formal in structure, following what I believe now to be The Methodist Worship Book.\(^3\) In many ways the service seemed dry and formal. More than a few of the youth in the choir proclaimed it “boring.” And yet, while reading prayers and liturgy out of a book, elements to this worship service that were anything but boring to me. The church was full to overflowing. The sermon was relevant, timely, and challenging, with a clearly progressive view, calling the congregants to action. During communion, after the youth choir sang, a number of African congregants spontaneously broke out in song, with the entire congregation joining in. I later learned that the church had a robust ministry with immigrants from several African countries. Clearly, this church and this worship was spirit-filled and alive.

This was not the experience at most of the other churches we visited on our musical tour through the United Kingdom that summer. Other churches, using the same service book as the one they used at City Road, were less than half full of aging parishioners, and the worship was tired and lifeless. Our youth choir often more than doubled the number of people in worship. In almost every church we went to, I heard many laments from members that they wished they could attract youth, capture the energy of our enthusiastic choir, revitalize their church.

In these different locations I saw the same worship book, the same heritage, yet vastly different trajectories. It was on that tour with the Starfire Singers that I began to wonder how the church, and particularly its worship, could be revitalized by learning and practicing specific

aspects of Wesleyan theology, history, and worship. Ten years later, those questions and that yearning for a deeper understanding of music and worship led me to the Doctor of Pastoral Music degree program at Perkins School of Theology.

**Finding Wonder, Love and Praise**

The United Methodist Church started out not as a denomination or an institution, but as a radical movement that ended up breaking off from the established Anglican Church. In its earliest days in eighteenth-century England, and subsequently in eighteenth-century colonial America, this movement spread at an astounding rate. At the heart of this movement was the work of John and Charles Wesley, young Anglican priests who dreamed about what the church could be and how it could be more expansive, inclusive, and connected to the way of Jesus.

John Wesley’s reworking of the Sunday Service, his “Means of Grace,” and Charles Wesley’s amazing corpus of hymns were the theological underpinnings of this movement. The movement was lived out in class meetings, prayer meetings, and other gatherings which were alive with the Holy Spirit. Furthermore, the movement reached beyond the walls of the local meeting places and into environments and communities that had largely been ignored by the Anglican establishment. This outreach and the music, preaching, and spiritual practices that spoke to the early Methodists were built on the traditions of the Anglican Church, and yet they transcended those traditions as well.

Over time, as the Methodist movement became its own denomination, and the denomination became an institution, the Wesleyan spirit of renewal and vital Christian practice has largely been lost. A movement that arose to revitalize and reform the institutional church has itself become part of that institution. In recent years, mainline Protestantism has seen a decline in
worship attendance and participation. By learning, adapting, and applying core Wesleyan principles of theology, lessons taught by Wesleyan and Methodist history, and the ways worship and Methodist hymnody developed and contributed to that movement, I believe that we can recapture some of the spirit of the early Wesleyan renewal.

Using historical analysis, identifying key characteristics of the Wesleyan/Methodist Movement, and through specific practical application of these findings to the Creekside Crossings worship service at Los Altos United Methodist Church, this project explores ways of re-instilling United Methodist Worship practices with essential Wesleyan theology, applying and adapting this history and worship practice to the twenty-first-century Church.

Chapter 2 explores the questions: what are the essentials of Wesleyan theology? How did they develop? How do they translate to our present context? This chapter examines the history of the Methodist movement in England, using historical texts, some of John Wesley’s original writings, and the writings of modern Wesleyan scholars, to distill ideas that may be claimed as essential, core beliefs and practices, and how they might be applied to the present context.

Chapter 3, “A Distinctly American Religion,” looks at the growth of the Methodist movement in the early United States. Using original sources and historical accounts, I trace the explosive growth of this movement from its first arrival in the mid-1700s through the early part of the nineteenth century. A particular focus will be on the ways American Methodism deviated from Wesleyan Methodism from the beginning, and how this impacted Methodist theology, practice, and growth in the United States.

Chapter 4 explores those characteristics and practices that do and do not make worship distinctly Methodist. The chapter first analyzes a letter from John Wesley in which he clearly
voices his views about how worship should and should not be conducted. The chapter traces the development and evolution of American worship practices from John Wesley’s *The Sunday Service of the Methodists in North America* to the camp meetings and revival services of the early movement. The chapter includes case studies of the worship practices of five current United Methodist pastors.

Chapter 5 will focus on the role of music in the Wesleyan movement. I will examine the enormous contributions of Charles Wesley to the movement and highlight ways he expressed the theology in ways that made it real and relevant. The chapter offers ideas for adapting Wesleyan hymns to modern worship contexts. It includes several examples of reimagined Wesleyan hymns that I have arranged or composed.

Chapter 6 brings weaves these threads of theology, history, worship practice, and music together. A significant part of this chapter is dedicated to applying the Wesleyan principles and practices discussed in earlier chapters to an actual worship service, Creekside Crossings, at the Los Altos United Methodist Church.

**Perspective**

This thesis is one perspective among many. One of the beauties of the Wesleyan movement is the way it has been adapted and applied to a rich and varied panoply of faith traditions. Chapter three shows that there are over seventy active denominations that claim Wesleyan roots.

The perspective offered here comes from deep within The United Methodist Church, the mainline denomination in the Wesleyan tradition. It comes from someone who is the son and grandson and nephew of Methodist and United Methodist preachers and teachers. I was shaped
and formed by this church, by this heritage, by this denomination. My hope and my prayer is that, in some small way, this work contributes to its relevance and vitality.
CHAPTER 2: THE FOUNDATION

Roots

It all begins with John Wesley. This might seem obvious for a study seeking to trace the threads of Wesleyan theology from their origins and weaving them into contemporary United Methodist worship. What is far less obvious is what it means to begin with John Wesley. Anyone who has grown up as a United Methodist could probably join the groaning, almost sing-song unison response of our confirmation classes, when asked, “Who is John Wesley?” The expected answer, “The founder of Methodism!” Pressed further, the more astute United Methodists might be able to describe what Albert Outler called “the Wesleyan Quadrilateral.” Some might even be able to name scripture, tradition, reason, and experience. We might even find those in our churches who could quote some of the better known maxims attributed to Wesley, “Do all the good you can, by all the means you can, in all the ways you can, in all the places you can, at all the times you can, to all the people you can, as long as ever you can,” or, “In essentials, unity; in non-essentials, liberty; and, in all things, charity.” Already there are inconsistencies and questions. John Wesley never used the word “quadrilateral.” No record exists that John Wesley uttered or wrote those two famous citations attributed to him.  

---

1 While never specifically referred to as such by John Wesley, the quadrilateral is the notion, present throughout his writing and teaching, that our faith is formed by Scripture, tradition, reason, and experience. See The Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church (Nashville: The United Methodist Publishing House, 2016), Part III, ¶ 105, Section 4—“Our Theological Task,” Kindle edition.

2 Kevin Watson has written about several misappropriated Wesley quotes on his blog, kevinmwatson.com. Start here: https://kevinmwatson.com/2013/04/29/wesley-didnt-say-it-do-all-the-good-you-can-by-all-the-means-you-can/ to find links to other quotes. For a more in-depth analysis of the myths that have grown up around John Wesley see Richard Heitzenrater, “The Wesleyan Tradition and the Myths We Love,” in A Living Tradition: Critical Recovery and Reconstruction of Wesleyan Heritage, ed. Mary Elizabeth Mullino Moore (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2013), iBook. Heitzenrater points out that Wesley himself was prone to exaggeration, historical revision, simplification, and leaving out inconvenient facts to enhance and promote a positive portrayal of the rise of Methodism and his role in it. Successive generations of those telling the Methodist story “perpetuated, multiplied, and magnified” these inaccuracies and myths.
The broad strokes of John Wesley’s life are also well known, at least to most long-term Methodists. These include the following: raised in a large family; son of an Anglican priest and a devout, strict, educated mother; saved from a fire at the Epworth rectory when he was five; went to Oxford; started the “Holy Club” at Oxford, leading to Methodism. Before we can reclaim an understanding of Methodist theology and piety, we need to appreciate the twists and turns, failures and triumphs, and doubts and struggles in his life that led to the core principles of Methodism.

This chapter is not a biography of John Wesley, or of his brother, Charles. Neither is it a history of the Methodist movement. Numerous sources are available on these subjects. I do not offer an in-depth analysis of Wesleyan theology and doctrine. The purpose of this chapter is to identify essential Wesleyan beliefs so that we can trace their threads through almost three-hundred years and connect them to the practice of worship today.

**Essential Beliefs**

A common methodology for reframing the identity of a tradition and evaluating current practice is to examine the essential truths and vision of the founders. This is often accompanied by a lament that the current practices have lost their authenticity, and a corollary call to return to those essential truths and beliefs. Because The United Methodist Church has been embroiled in a divisive and painful debate over human sexuality—who can and cannot be included in the full life of the church—this cry for a return to essential beliefs is being voiced from all sides. Is it

---


possible to identify threads of authentic Wesleyan theology and practice that can be woven into a tapestry that depicts who United Methodists are and how they express their faith today or, more to the point, that portrays the potentials and possibilities of who United Methodists may become? That is the question at the heart of this work.

John Wesley said that the purpose of Methodism was “To reform the nation and, in particular, the Church, to spread scriptural holiness over the land.”6 In a 1789 sermon, near the end of his life, Wesley described Methodists as “a body of people who, being of no sect or party, are friends to all parties, and endeavour to forward all in heart-religion, in the knowledge and love of God and man.”7 Throughout his long career Wesley maintained these core tenets of the movement he inspired.

Scholars often divide Wesley’s work into three broad arenas: personal, theological, and organizational.8 While he consistently preached strongly worded and unequivocal sermons, much of the time he was wrestling with his own faith journey. A letter he wrote to his brother Charles in June 1766 is one example. “I do not love God. I never did. Therefore I never believed, in the Christian sense of the word.”9 This struggle accompanied him throughout his life. Knowing this is helpful in examining John Wesley’s work on salvation more deeply.

As Wesley was struggling with the assurance of his own salvation, he was developing a theology of salvation that encompassed some of the traditional teachings of the Church of England, but also broke significant new ground. At the heart of John Wesley’s commitment to spiritual renewal is his desire to reclaim the biblical understanding and the Christian tradition of

---

7 Heitzenrater, Wesley and the People Called Methodists, Chapter 6.
9 Heitzenrater, Wesley and the People Called Methodists, Chapter 5.
salvation, and to inspire Christians to seek after and embody that salvation. Wesley himself broadened the popular definition of salvation. He explains, “By salvation I mean, not barely (according to the vulgar notion) deliverance from hell, or going to heaven, but a present deliverance from sin, a restoration of the soul to its primitive health. . . the renewal of our souls after the image of God in righteousness and turn holiness, in justice, mercy, and truth.” Wesley defined a “‘way of salvation’ (via salutis) that mirrors the spiritual pilgrimage: prevenient grace, conviction of sin, repentance, justification, assurance, regeneration, sanctification, Christian perfection, and final salvation.” Each of these terms carries a nuanced theological meaning within Wesley’s context.

If there is a word that sums up Wesley’s theology, it would probably be grace. Wesley came to believe that God’s grace is a part of everything we do in our spiritual journey. United Methodist theologian Marjorie Suchocki writes, “Wesley thought of God’s redemptive grace as operating under three categories: prevenient, justifying, and sanctifying grace.” Prevenient grace is the grace that is present in us before we are even aware. It is God’s desire for relationship with us. For it to connect, however, it requires a response from us. Suchocki calls this response “a practice of loving that itself is enabled by God, and enacted by the Christian.” Once we are aware of God’s grace and respond to it and, thus, become aware of our own sinful nature. Because we are in this relationship of grace, we repent, leading to justification or

---


14 Suchocki, “Wesleyan Grace.”
pardon.\textsuperscript{15} Sanctification begins with our justification.\textsuperscript{16} With sanctification, we are renewed, reborn. In this transformative experience, we naturally believe that we have been delivered of sin. Wesley is quick to caution that it is “seldom long” before we discover that “sin was only suspended, not destroyed.”\textsuperscript{17} This is where what Wesley describes as “the gradual work of sanctification” begins.\textsuperscript{18} In this journey, he says, “we wait for entire sanctification, for a full salvation from all our sins.”\textsuperscript{19} He also calls this “Christian Perfection,” which he defines as “perfect love.”\textsuperscript{20}

Wesley argued that we are justified by faith alone, that faith is “the condition, and the only condition, of justification.”\textsuperscript{21} Wesley believed, though, that once this justification has occurred as a result of our faith, it leads to repentance, and our repentance results in good works (“fruits”). He believed God commands us “both to repent and to bring forth fruits meet for repentance.”\textsuperscript{22} Wesley encourages works of piety, such as prayer, the Lord’s Supper, Scripture reading, meditating, fasting or abstinence, and acts of mercy, such as feeding the hungry, welcoming the stranger, visiting the prisoner, the sick, etc. He stresses that all of these must be predicated by faith, and only faith is required for justification or sanctification, but that justification and sanctification will necessarily lead to repentance and these acts of piety and mercy.

Richard Heitzenrater calls John Wesley’s sermon, “The Scripture Way of Salvation,” “perhaps the single best homiletical summary of [Wesley’s] soteriology, or doctrine of

\begin{footnotes}
\item[18] Wesley, “The Scripture Way of Salvation.”
\item[22] Wesley, “The Scripture Way of Salvation.”
\end{footnotes}
salvation.” Wesley was forging a new way, something in between those who believed we are justified by our good works and those who believed we are justified by faith alone. The last part of this sermon focuses on the idea of “entire sanctification,” a concept that he argued vehemently in favor of despite widespread questioning and pushback from his followers and detractors alike. It continues to be voiced as an essential concept that has been lost in mainstream United Methodism. Wesley insisted that entire sanctification, “a full salvation from all our sins,” is entirely possible in this life, and we should actively seek it.

It is easy to see how this could become a stumbling block, and why it has been an easier course over the development of Methodism to let it slip out of our consciousness. It is also easy to see why Wesley repeatedly focused on this. For one thing, Wesley was never one to back down from a theological fight! The more pushback he received, the more vociferous his response was likely to be. In the case of achieving entire sanctification, or Christian Perfection, in this lifetime, he received pushback from all corners, including even his brother. Part of the reason for John’s insistence on the possibility of achieving this is that to not believe it would be to limit the power of God at work in our lives. He also may have been so insistent because of his strong aversion to antinomianism (anti-legalism), which he strongly believed would be the result of believing we are already saved. If we don’t believe it is possible to achieve Christian Perfection in this lifetime, why bother? We can be saved by faith alone.

Dangers exist, however, in emphasizing the quest to achieve entire sanctification in this lifetime. It can lead to self-righteousness, boasting, and spiritual competition. Kevin Watson

---

23 Heitzenrater, Wesley and the People Called Methodists, Chapter 5.
24 See, for example, Kevin Watson, Old or New School Methodism? The Fragmentation of a Theological Tradition, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019).
26 Heitzenrater, Wesley and the People Called Methodists, Chapter 5.
27 Ted Campbell, Wesleyan Beliefs: Formal and Popular Expressions of the Core Beliefs of Wesleyan Communities, (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2010), Chapter 7, iBook.
writes that in early American Methodism, “[Methodists] were . . . exhorted to pursue a climactic, or crisis, experience of entire sanctification where they received complete freedom to love God and neighbor.”

This “exhortation” can easily become manipulation or group-pressure of the sort often exhibited in Pentecostal and Evangelical altar calls.

Modern United Methodist theologians are extremely helpful to us in translating Wesley’s core beliefs into our modern context. With regard to entire sanctification, John Cobb writes that “the self-righteousness which does not appear in the one who is truly loving can hardly help but appear here among those who believe themselves to be entirely sanctified.”

“Nowhere in this process,” he writes, “is there any room for boasting.”

But Cobb suggests that perhaps we can reframe the concept, so that it isn’t so much a once-and-for-all attainment of Christian Perfection, but as something to strive for moment-by-moment. He interprets John Wesley’s sermon, “The Repentance of Believers,” through this lens. Cobb suggests that Wesley is depicting entire sanctification not as a one-time, permanent condition, but as a possibility that exists in every moment. This interpretation allows grace and continual connection with God, rather than self-righteousness and one-upmanship.

Marjorie Suchocki believes that “the task of theology is not simply to repeat the past in contemporary language, but to incorporate into the tradition as much current knowledge of the world as is feasible.”

She asserts that all of God’s works are works of grace, including God’s creative works and God’s redemptive acts. There is nothing un-Wesleyan about incorporating current knowledge into the tradition, and adjusting our embodiment of Wesleyan beliefs.

---

28 Watson, Old or New School Methodism?, 47.
31 John Cobb, Grace and Responsibility, 111.
32 Suchocki, “Wesleyan Grace.”
33 Suchocki, “Wesleyan Grace.”
accordingly. Randy Maddox suggests that engaging in authentic Wesleyan theological reflection and work in contemporary times would emphatically not be a “simple collation and repetition” of Wesley’s works, but rather using Wesleyan theology as a means of informing and expanding contemporary Christian life and witness. This, Maddox points out, is exactly what Wesley did.\textsuperscript{34} Wesley was an avid student, not just of theology and religion, but of science, medicine, history and the natural world.\textsuperscript{35} We are truly connected to the thread of Wesley’s theology and accept the Wesleyan concept of grace when we continually respond to God’s guidance to enter into a deeper and fuller relationship with God, turn away from destructive behavior and toward love, follow God’s initiative to lead us into a perfect union with God and God’s creation, and apply God’s grace to all that we are and all that we do.

**Means of Grace**

John Wesley offered practical suggestions that advocated for how his followers should conduct their lives. He frequently referred to “The Means of Grace”—daily practices that could lead the people called Methodists into deeper relationship with God and enhance the process of sanctification.

Elaine Heath, in her book *Five Means of Grace: Experience God’s Love the Wesleyan Way*, writes of the

five means of grace that John Wesley called “instituted,” meaning these are spiritual practices that were instituted in the New Testament and are binding for all time and in all places. The five means of grace are prayer, searching the Scriptures, the Lord’s Supper, fasting, and Christian conferencing. One beautiful aspect of Wesley’s theology is that spiritual practices are seamlessly integrated with practices of loving our neighbors well.


\textsuperscript{35} Heitzenrater, *Wesley and the People Called Methodists*, Chapter 6.
This is why Wesley said there is no holiness but social holiness. A life of genuine prayer inevitably leads to a life of hospitality, mercy, and justice.36

Wesley didn’t intend for this list to be exhaustive, nor was it restrictive. Rather, he believed that almost anything could become a means for us to connect with God and live more fully in God’s love and grace. Wesley’s means of grace is neither a to-do list nor empty rituals or rote routines. Wesley considers these acts to be examples of conduits for grace to imbue our lives. Our lives of faith are both personal and social in Wesleyan spirituality, and the means of grace were ways to grow deeper in our faith and our discipleship in every aspect of life.37 Likewise, these practices were not meant to be limited to worship or quiet times of devotion. Ted Campbell refers to them as “a distinctive combination of evangelical and sacramental spiritual practices,” and as such the means of grace play an essential role in Wesleyan and Methodist spirituality and piety.38 The Wesleyan means of grace are central not only to the heart of Wesleyan beliefs and practices but to the entire life of faith for Wesley. These five practices are woven into everything else. They overlap, interweave, lead into and out from each other, and can be practiced in every facet of life. The first three in particular—prayer, searching the scriptures, and the Lord’s Supper—are essential aspects of worship for Wesley and for Methodists. A few years after John Wesley’s sermon on “The Means of Grace,” the Wesleys issued the General Rules, clarifying their expectations of members of their Societies. In the General Rules, the means of grace were called “ordinances of God,” and the list was somewhat expanded. According to Campbell, “[T]he full list of ‘ordinances of God’ required in the General Rules is as follows:

37 Heath, Five Means of Grace, Preface.
the public worship of God
the ministry of the word, either read or expounded
the supper of the Lord
family and private prayer
searching the Scriptures
fasting, or abstinence.”

While this list, appearing in the General Rules, appears to be more formal and more codified, it is also indicative of the fluid nature of Wesley’s understanding of the means of grace. Worth noting, in the ordinances, is the more explicit references to worship and worship practices.

The integral relationship between spiritual practices and loving our neighbors introduced by Heath earlier will be influential for how worship may reflect Wesleyan theology using the five means of grace as our framework for our practice.

**The Full Wesley**

In addition to John Wesley’s theology, he also devoted much of his life’s work to organizing the Methodist movement. Though persons holding a variety of theological positions within the United Methodist Church claim that this body has strayed from Wesley’s core values in one way or another, few suggest that Methodism has betrayed his obsession with organization and structure. Perhaps a similar drift has occurred regarding the spirit of the structures and systems John Wesley instituted. Though this thesis is not a study of Methodism, Methodist History, Methodist Polity, or Methodist Organizational Structure, all these influence and help shape the practice of worship. As we move toward connecting the threads of Wesleyan theology, belief,

---

history, and thought to the possibilities of how we might worship today, it is essential to understand these roots.

The Wesleys grew up in a deeply religious household rooted in the Church of England. In the Church at this time, religious societies sprang up and were sanctioned by the Church. These religious societies were small groups of laity under the guidance of a Church official, who were “expression[s] of Christian piety and social concern.” Samuel Wesley was involved in the religious society movement, starting the Epworth Society in his parish. Rules of order detailed how the societies would be structured and the charitable works in which they would engage. The societies were also connected with other societies within the broader Church. John Wesley grew up and became active in this society system within the Church.

Scholars debate who started the group commonly called “The Holy Club” at Oxford. The leading contenders for the founding of the Oxford Society, its formal name, were John, Charles, and William Morgan. These three, along with their “old friend” Bob Kirkham, began meeting regularly and formed the nucleus of the Oxford Society. From Oxford, societies were established in London, then Bristol, and eventually throughout the British Isles. Eventually, John Wesley organized the societies into smaller classes and bands. Classes were larger than bands and organized geographically rather than by gender or age. They were also open to everyone in the society, while the bands were more selective. During the formation and spread of the societies, John Wesley and Methodist preachers were routinely being banned from

---

40 Heitzenrater, Wesley and the People Called Methodists, Chapter 1.
41 Heitzenrater, Wesley and the People Called Methodists, Chapter 1.
42 Richard Heitzenrater writes, “the beginnings of a movement are not often easy to pinpoint.” Heitzenrater, Wesley and the People Called Methodist, Chapter 2.
43 Heitzenrater, Wesley and the People Called Methodists, Chapter 2.
44 We will discuss the spread to America in the next chapter. In between Oxford and establishing Societies in London, Bristol, and beyond, the Wesleys did spend time in Georgia, where John influenced and established societies. Heitzenrater, Wesley and the People Called Methodists, Chapter 2.
45 Heitzenrater, Wesley and the People Called Methodists, Chapter 3.
preaching in the Church of England buildings. They began the practice of “field preaching,” often drawing crowds in the tens of thousands.46

The significance of this for this study is the importance of each level of organization. Field preaching was reaching vast numbers of mostly poor people, generally overlooked by society and the Church, who were hungry for a word of hope.47 The societies that were springing up as part of the Methodist movement often included some of these same people but had taken an additional step of commitment. Wesley required tickets, to be renewed regularly, for membership in the societies. The requirements for the ticket were “a desire to flee from the wrath to come, to be saved from their sins.” Continuance in the society required people “to evidence their desire of salvation, First, By doing no harm . . . Secondly, By doing good . . . Thirdly, By attending upon all the ordinances of God.” These would come to be known as the General Rules of Methodism.48 Within the societies, smaller groups—classes and bands—met for accountability, study, spiritual growth. In the spirit of the Evangelical Revival in England and much of the Western world in the first half of the eighteenth century, evangelical conversions were an important marker of spiritual vitality in the Methodist movement.49 Most of the dramatic conversions were happening not at the big worship events, but in the small groups.50

Chapter 4 will take a much deeper look at worship practices, and how they have evolved and diversified and developed alongside the growth of Methodism. One informed the other, and it is difficult to imagine that a movement that began with four young men in Oxford almost

46 Heitzenrater, Wesley and the People Called Methodists, Chapter 3.
48 Heitzenrater, Wesley and the People Called Methodists, Chapter 3.
49 Heitzenrater, Wesley and the People Called Methodists, Chapter 3.
50 Heitzenrater, Wesley and the People Called Methodists, Chapter 3.
three-hundred years ago would have expanded the way it has without both their unique theology and meticulous organization.

**Synergy**

Paul Chilcote describes Wesleyan theology as “conjunctive,” bringing together two different ideas to create balance. Rather than either/or it becomes both/and. This is the true genius of Wesleyan theology, and it can guide us forward in our weaving together of historic threads with modern reality to create worship that is vibrant, relevant, and Wesleyan. Everything that John Wesley used to develop what became known as the Methodist movement was derived from somewhere else, including the Church of England, the Moravians, and the Arminians. His conjunctive approach synthesized his own lifelong spiritual journey and struggles with revealed truths from ancient texts and a variety of traditions. In doing so, he articulated a theology that “proclaimed the grace of God and consistently preached about God’s inclusive love.”

This synergism would cross the Atlantic and take hold in the American colonies, and it would continue to spread like wildfire and take on surprising new dimensions and forms. Chapter 3 will discuss the rise of Methodism in America, the ways it distinguished and distanced itself from its British origins, and how it became the global institution that it is now.

---

CHAPTER 3: “A DISTINCTLY AMERICAN RELIGION”

The United Methodist Church

The United Methodist Church today has 6,806,334 lay members in the United States and 6,471,921 lay members in Africa, Asia, and Europe.¹ The World Methodist Council tracks statistics for member churches, which includes a wide array of Methodist and Wesleyan-affiliated churches, and lists 39,745,196 members worldwide, and 51,286,152 in “communion” worldwide.² This list includes over 70 different Methodist or Wesleyan rooted denominations. These statistics demonstrate amazing growth for a movement that started with four young men seeking to deepen their relationship with God in eighteenth-century Oxford!

Most of this study will focus on The United Methodist Church. In addition to the lay membership listed above, that church has 37,009 clergy in the United States and 10,394 in Africa, Asia, and Europe. There are 32,257 organized local churches in the United States and 12,869 in Africa, Asia, and Europe. The Church in the United States is divided into 419 districts, 56 Annual Conferences, 46 Bishops/Episcopal Areas, and five Jurisdictions. The Church in Africa, Asia, and Europe is divided into seven Central Conferences.³ The United Methodist Church, in addition to local churches, has many Boards and Agencies, including Communications, Discipleship Ministries, Finance and Administration, Global Ministries, Higher Education and Ministry, Religion and Race, The Status & Role of Women, United Methodist Men, The United Methodist Publishing House, United Methodist Women, and

³ “United Methodists At-A-Glance.”
Wespath (Pension and Benefits). Yet despite a century and a half of unprecedented growth and worldwide expansion, in the United States the United Methodist Church has been in decline for decades.5

As with the previous chapter, this chapter is not intended to be a comprehensive history or analysis of the rise and decline of Methodism in the United States. Developing a model of worship that incorporates piety, practice, and theology in the Wesleyan tradition as expressed in the United Methodist context in the United States requires some understanding of the historical trajectory that has brought the Church to where it is today. This chapter offers a broad overview of that trajectory. In its first 200 years, the Church recorded a steady increase in membership. Since 1970, it has experienced a steady decline. At the time of the 1930 census taken during the high point of the Church’s flourishing, Methodists made up 6.5% of the United States population.6 Today, while it is still the third largest Christian denomination (after Catholics and Southern Baptists), only 2.5% of the population identifies as United Methodist.7 While many factors have been named as possible causes of this half-century decline, the primary cause is the denomination’s aging demographic. The leading cause of attrition is death.8 Additionally, a Pew Research Institute study shows a decline among 18–29-year-old United Methodists in the United States and an increase in those over the age of 65.9

---

4 “Agencies” (website), The United Methodist Church, https://www.umc.org/en/content/agencies (accessed August 28, 2020)
6 “United Methodist Membership Statistics.”
8 Hahn, “US dips below majority of membership.”
Concurrent with the steady decline in membership in the U.S. Church, the Central Conferences (Africa, Asia, and the Philippines) have seen an unprecedented rise in membership. Between 2015 and 2017 membership in United Methodist Churches in these regions has increased from 5.7 million to 6.4 million. It is believed that this year (2020) membership in the Central Conferences will bypass membership in the United States jurisdictions.¹⁰

Understandably, there has been a great deal of consternation within the denomination about the U.S. decline. Countless books, seminars, seminary courses, sermons, and demographic studies have been devoted to it. A cottage industry of church growth consultants has emerged. That is not the focus of this study. In order to make meaningful assessments of current worship practices, however, and much more importantly, raise ideas for future worship practices, it is vital to understand the contextual milieu in which The United Methodist Church exists and to understand how it got to this place.

**Beginnings**

From the earliest beginnings of the Methodist movement in America, there has been something of a disconnect between Wesleyan influence and control and a spontaneous, lay-led movement.¹¹ While some trace the beginnings of Methodism in America to John and Charles Wesley’s time in the Georgia colony, there is scant evidence of any lasting influence from their brief time there.¹² In fact, John Wesley’s time in Georgia could hardly be considered a success, and he left feeling disappointed and dejected.¹³

---

¹⁰ Hahn, “US dips below majority of membership.”
¹³ Heitzenrater, Wesley and the People Called Methodists, Chapter 2.
The rise of Methodism in the American colonies was part of a broad and growing expansion of Protestant Christianity in the colonies, a growth that began almost 150 years before the seeds of Methodism were planted.\textsuperscript{14} There were Congregationalists, Anglicans, Baptists, Dutch and German Reformed, Lutherans, Presbyterians, Quakers, as well as smaller sects, already established by the 1760s.\textsuperscript{15} The first half of the eighteenth century saw an explosion of spiritual renewal known as “The Great Awakening.”\textsuperscript{16} This was a part of Pietism, a transatlantic reform movement aimed at recovering “authentic” faith. Pietism centered on the conversion experience marked by inner transformation.\textsuperscript{17} In the colonies, The Great Awakening was characterized by large and enthusiastic revival meetings. Two of the most popular and effective revival leaders were Jonathan Edwards (1703–1758) and George Whitefield (1714–1770). Whitefield was one of the earliest Methodists in England, and one of its most effective preachers, although his Calvinistic theology put him at odds with John Wesley’s strong anti-Calvinist sentiments.\textsuperscript{18} In the colonies, Whitefield embarked on six evangelistic tours between 1738 and 1770. His extemporaneous, open-air preaching was highly effective and led to numerous conversions.\textsuperscript{19} There is no question that Whitefield’s preaching was well-known and inspiring. There is not, however, evidence that it led to much organizational growth in the Methodist movement.\textsuperscript{20}

While Methodist beginnings in the American colonies grew out of Pietism, the distinctly Methodist movement seems to have begun spontaneously and serendipitously, led by lay people

\textsuperscript{15} Norwood, \textit{The Story of American Methodism}, 61.
\textsuperscript{16} Norwood, \textit{The Story of American Methodism}, 63.
\textsuperscript{17} Richey, et al., \textit{American Methodism}, 1.
\textsuperscript{18} Heitzenrater, \textit{Wesley and the People Called Methodists}, chapter 3.
\textsuperscript{19} Richey, et al., \textit{American Methodism}, 3.
\textsuperscript{20} Norwood, \textit{The Story of Methodism}, 61.
who brought it with them to the colonies. Societies around Baltimore, led by Robert Strawbridge (ca. 1732–1781) and his wife Elizabeth, and New York, led by Barbara Heck (1734–1804) and Philip Embury (1729–1775), sprang up at “about the same time,” making competing claims as the birthplace of American Methodism.21 Addressing the question of beginnings, the 1787 Discipline22 includes this account:

_QUEST. 2, What was the Rise of Methodism, so called, in America?_  
_Ans. During the Space of thirty Years past, certain Persons, Members of the Society, emigrated from England and Ireland, and settled in various Parts of this Country. About twenty Years ago, Philip Embury, a local Preacher from Ireland, began to preach in the City of New-York, and formed a Society of his own Countrymen and the Citizens. About the same Time, Robert Strawbridge, a local Preacher from Ireland, settled in Frederick County, in the State of Maryland, and preaching there formed some Societies. In 1769, Richard Boardman and Joseph Pilmoor, came to New-York; who were the first regular Methodist Preachers on the Continent. In the latter End of the Year 1771, Francis Asbury and Richard Wright, of the same Order, came over.23_

This compact history, written by the white, male clergy who gathered in conference together, is accurate in its facts, but also lacking in nuance and detail. It doesn’t mention the role of women, from the very beginning, partnering with Philip Embury and Robert Strawbridge, nor does it acknowledge the multi-racial character of these early societies.24 A letter from one of the early society members, Thomas Taylor, written to John Wesley in 1768, provides a more complete picture of the rapid development of the Methodist movement. The purpose of Taylor’s letter is to

---

22 The Discipline, now called The Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church, is the book “outlining the law, doctrine, administration, organizational work and procedures of The United Methodist Church” (https://www.umc.org/en/content/glossary-book-of-discipline-the). The first Discipline was a report on the Christmas Conference of 1784, which is when the Methodist Episcopal Church in America was established. Originally, the Discipline followed the form of Wesley’s Large Minutes, a series of questions and answers reflecting the state of the church and its mission, expectations for clergy and for membership, etc.  
implore John Wesley to send Methodist ministers to the colonies. He begins by recounting the success of George Whitefield:

Most part of the adults were stirred up, great numbers pricked to the heart, and by a judgment of charity several found peace and joy in believing. The consequence of this work was, the churches were crowded and subscriptions raised for building new ones. Mr. Whitefield’s example provoked most of the ministers to a much greater degree of earnestness. And by the multitudes of people young and old, rich and poor, flocking to the churches, religion became an honourable profession . . .

But Taylor reports that the effects of Whitefield’s preaching did not stick, and that before long “the generality were pleading for the remains of sin, and the necessity of being in darkness.” He then describes the work of first Philip Embury, then of Captain Thomas Webb (1724–1790), among others, “calling sinners to repentance and exhorting believers to let their light shine before men [sic].” What began as small gatherings in the Embury home quickly grew and needed larger and larger spaces, until the group made plans for building “the first preaching-house on the Methodist plan in all America . . .” Finally, Thomas Taylor implored Wesley to send “an able, experienced preacher—one who has both gifts and graces necessary for the work.”

Taylor’s letter describes the “state of religion in New York.” At this same time, Robert and Elizabeth Strawbridge began a Methodist class in their home in Maryland, and from there itinerated in Maryland, Virginia, and Pennsylvania. They, too, erected a meeting house. Among their converts were notable African American preachers like Jacob Toogood, a former slave who is called “the first Black preacher in America” and white leaders such as William Watters and Freeborn Garrison. Unlike their New York counterparts, the Strawbridges saw little need to

---

seek ordained reinforcements sent by Wesley. In fact, Robert Strawbridge administered the sacraments (baptism and holy communion) as early as 1762 and would resist the efforts of the Wesley-sent preachers to bring the nascent societies into conformity.\textsuperscript{29}

John Wesley responded to pleas such as the one in Thomas Taylor’s letter by sending successive pairs of preachers. Richard Boardman (1738–1782) and Joseph Pilmore (1739–1825) came in 1769, Francis Asbury (1745–1816) and Richard Wright (?–??) in 1771, Thomas Rankin (1736–1810) and George Shadford (1739–1816) in 1773, and James Dempster (1740–1804) and Martin Rodda (1742–1815) in 1774.\textsuperscript{30} The British clergy found the spontaneous Methodist initiatives to be out of compliance with the norms of Wesleyan practice and polity.\textsuperscript{31} Their reports back to England were a mix of enthusiasm and optimism, particularly with regards to the response of “[t]he number of Blacks that attend the preaching,” and a sense of being overwhelmed and under-staffed.\textsuperscript{32}

As Wesley’s emissaries tried to organize and bring order to these already flourishing Methodist societies, they faced three significant challenges. The first was to channel the revival spirit and fervor present among the colonists while remaining clearly within the Church of England. The second was to distinguish Methodist doctrine and theology, particularly free grace and free will, amid the Calvinist predestinarian preaching that was rampant at the time. The third was to navigate the challenges of creating a space of welcome for all in a slaveholding society. This last one in particular would remain a challenging and divisive issue as the church and the country took shape.\textsuperscript{33}

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{29} Richey, et al., \textit{American Methodism}, 6.
  \item \textsuperscript{30} Richey, et al., \textit{American Methodism}, 9.
  \item \textsuperscript{31} Richey, “Early American Methodism.”
  \item \textsuperscript{33} Richey, et al., \textit{American Methodism}, 10.
\end{itemize}
The rapid growth of the Methodist movement can be broadly attributed to three confluencing factors: the spontaneous and simultaneous rising of communities of witness led by committed and visionary lay preachers, the work of itinerant preachers sent by John Wesley who created conferences within which their work was organized, and the discipline and doctrine prescribed by Wesley and enacted by these itinerant preachers. Though it is impossible to know what the movement would have looked like without any of these factors, it is unlikely that it would have grown and developed the way it did if any of these had been absent or diminished.

It is also true, however, that the spontaneous lay-led beginnings and the distance between the colonial Methodists and their British forebears (particularly the Wesleys) had significant influence on the direction American Methodist development would take. The movement begun by lay people in the American colonies had an independent streak that was not always in alignment with Wesleyan form and structure. The American Revolution only compounded this disconnect. John and Charles Wesley were strongly anti-revolution and pro-Tory and, while John counseled his emissaries in the colonies to remain neutral, he couldn’t follow this advice himself. In 1775 he published *A Calm Address to Our American Colonies*, one of several loyalist publications. Charles wrote “To the American Rebels,” a poem that included the lines:

Your unprovok’d Rebellion brings
   Our more disloyal deeds to mind,
(Disloyal to the King of Kings)
   In league against your Country join’d,
Ye our ingratitude reprove,
   Against our heavenly Father’s Love.

---

34 Richey, “Early American Methodism.”
35 Richey, “Early American Methodism.”
Several of Wesley’s preachers shared these loyalist sentiments, with some collaborating with the British military. Because of this, and the insistence that the Methodist movement be identified as a movement within the Anglican Church, many in the colonies viewed Methodism as pro-British. Others, however, served the rebel cause and were sympathetic to the revolution. Most of Wesley’s appointees, and the other Anglican priests in the colonies, fled back to England. The one notable exception was Francis Asbury, Wesley’s assistant in America and a future bishop, who went into hiding in Delaware when the war broke out, but who sympathized with the American cause.

The Revolutionary War, the flight of most of the British Methodist and Anglican preachers, and the distrust of Wesley and the British movement hastened the independence and eventual separation of the Methodist movement from the Anglican Church in America. The organization of an independent church was first attempted at the Fluvanna, Virginia conference, held in May of 1779, ordaining their own preachers and authorizing them to celebrate the sacraments. Asbury called “official” conferences in 1779 and 1780, declaring all who had separated at Fluvanna no longer Methodists “till they come back.” The Virginians relented, asking Asbury to personally visit the southern circuits to strengthen the union and quell the schism, but the seeds had been planted.

John Wesley was nothing if not resilient and resourceful, and resolute in his desire to be in control. Thus, with the end of the Revolutionary War, he issued a new set of instructions, in a pastoral letter “to our brethren in North-America.” In it, he acknowledges “a very uncommon train of providences” that caused the colonies to become “Independent States,” further

---

39 Richey, “Early American Methodism.”
acknowledging that “no one either exercises or claims any Ecclesiastical Authority at all.” He declares that “as our American Brethren are now totally disentangled both from the State, and from the English Hierarchy, we dare not intangle [sic] them again, either with one or the other. They are now at full liberty, simply to follow the Scriptures and the Primitive Church.”

Wesley had ordained Thomas Coke (1747–1814), already an ordained presbyter in the Church of England, with an additional episcopal ordination, giving him the power to ordain others. Wesley was vesting Coke with formal authority so that Coke could clearly be seen as a leader in America.

While still maintaining his commitment to the Church of England in Britain, Wesley sent Coke and his associates to America with a plan for setting up a new and separate church. This included Wesley’s *The Sunday Service for the Methodists in North America*, which was his adaptation of the Book of Common Prayer, making it significantly shorter. Wesley also abridged the Anglican Church’s Thirty-Nine Articles of Religion to twenty-four and supplanted the Book of Homilies with his *Sermons* and *Notes*. All Methodist preachers were to preach only the doctrine contained in these.

Armed with these documents, Wesley sent the newly ordained Superintendent Thomas Coke, along with two freshly minted deacons, to America to oversee the establishment and organization of the American Church within Wesley’s narrowly defined parameters. Francis Asbury, already in America and well established as the leader of the Methodists there, was not entirely amenable to the insertion of Coke’s authority and Wesley’s control, and proposed that Wesley’s plan, including the installation of Asbury and Coke as superintendents, should be voted

---

on and approved by the American Conference (consisting of all the Methodist preachers in America). The result was the Christmas Conference of 1784. Asbury advocated for “union but no subordination; connection but no subjection.” The Christmas Conference created the Methodist Episcopal Church, a new denomination that while claiming themselves to be Wesley’s “Sons in the Gospel, ready . . . to obey his commands,” also showed unmistakable signs of a spirit of American independence and liberty.

By the Conference in Baltimore in 1787, the tension between John Wesley and the American church had reached a breaking point. Wesley continued to try to control the American church by appointing a new General Superintendent. The Conference not only rejected this appointment, but in the process rescinded what had been called the “binding minute” pledging to obey Wesley’s commands, and his name was voted out of the American Minutes. Asbury commented, “Mr. Wesley and I are like Caesar and Pompey: he will bear no equal, and I will bear no superior.”

Wesley’s impact and influence on the Methodist Episcopal Church in America was by no means erased, of course. The conference structures, the Articles of Religion, the Sermons, and Notes, all were a part of the DNA of this fledgling denomination. But his control and leadership were gone. Wesley was considered an “esteemed founder,” and his works were considered the standard theological underpinnings for the church. But Wesley would not influence or control the direction the church would take moving forward.

---

44 Francis Asbury, quoted in Heitzenrater, Wesley and the People Called Methodists, Chapter 6.
45 Heitzenrater, Wesley and the People Called Methodists, Chapter 6.
46 Heitzenrater, Wesley and the People Called Methodists, Chapter 6.
Schism

A third component must be added to Wesley’s organizational model and theological foundations and the American traits of independence and autonomy. That component is schism—a factor that continues to be a part of the DNA of the Methodist Church in America. While the twenty-first-century United Methodist Church is facing a looming schism after half a century of debate and division over human sexuality and how scriptural, episcopal, and ecclesial authority is understood, schism, or the threat of schism, has been a part of Methodism from the very beginning. The Wesley brothers spent a good deal of time, energy, and words trying to keep the Methodist movement under the auspices of the Church of England. The first potential schism in the American Methodist movement, occurring with the Fluvanna conference of 1779, was averted by the deft and forceful intervention of Francis Asbury.

Five years after the 1779 Fluvanna conference, the Christmas Conference in 1784 created the Methodist Episcopal Church of America, formalizing the schism with the Anglican Church. Three years later, at the 1787 Conference, the American church rejected John Wesley’s control, separating from the British movement and cementing the American church as a separate and autonomous church. Five years after that Conference, at the 1792 General Conference a group of clergy who objected to the power and authority of the bishops broke off and created the Republican Methodists, later renamed the Christian Church. As the Methodist Episcopal Church weakened its anti-slavery stance, and discriminated against and segregated Black

---

49 Heitzenrater, Wesley and the People Called Methodists, Chapter 6. Loyalty to the Church of England became a point of contention between the brothers, with Charles believing John had gone too far by ordaining preachers and giving sacramental authority. John maintained that he was only ordaining preachers outside of England, and that he remained a committed clergyman in the Anglican Church.
50 The General Conference became the legislative authority for the Methodist Church. The 1792 General Conference was the first one. (See Richey, “Early American Methodism,” in The Cambridge Companion to American Methodism.); Richey, “Early American Methodism.”
members and clergy, the African Methodist Episcopal Church was formed in 1816 under the leadership of its founder, Richard Allen (1760–1831). Three other schisms occurred in the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries. In 1792 the Primitive Methodists were formed around resistance to the centralized episcopal authority of Coke and Asbury. In 1814 the “Reformed Methodists” formally organized, also around resistance to the episcopacy. And in 1829 another schismatic Methodist body, also called “Primitive Methodists,” formed.51 In 1830 the Methodist Protestant Church was formed, a denomination without bishops or presiding elders, with preachers appointed by an elected President, and equal representation of lay and clergy at denominational meetings.52 There were other splits over the issue of slavery, culminating in the Methodist Episcopal Church itself splitting into the Methodist Episcopal Church (MEC) and the Methodist Episcopal Church South (MECS).53 Through all of these schisms and splits, the MEC remained the dominant Methodist denomination. It remained deliberately moderate and continued to show tremendous growth and prosperity.54

The material success, gentrification, and increased status enjoyed by the MEC did not sit well with many Methodists, who felt that the church had lost its way and deviated from its emphasis on sanctification and moderation, and away from Spirit-filled worship to entertainment and performance.55 A significant schism arose between proponents of the holiness movement and leadership in the MEC. This debate between “Old School Methodism” and “New School Methodism” is seen by some as a pivotal moment in the church moving away from an emphasis

51 Richey, “Early American Methodism.”
53 Strong, “American Methodism in the Nineteenth Century: Expansion and Fragmentation.”
54 Strong, “American Methodism in the Nineteenth Century: Expansion and Fragmentation.”
55 Strong, “American Methodism in the Nineteenth Century: Expansion and Fragmentation.”
on entire sanctification and holiness and toward upward mobility and affluence.\textsuperscript{56} Some have identified this as the period when “competing theological visions for Methodism” emerged.\textsuperscript{57} Others have suggested that the emphasis on entire sanctification became an obsession and a litmus test, leading to self-righteousness and self-satisfaction.\textsuperscript{58} What all sides have in common is that they lay claim to their position as authentically Wesleyan.

By the twentieth century, three broad subgroups of American Methodism could be clearly identified: 1) those that would eventually merge in 1968 to become The United Methodist Church; 2) the African Methodist Episcopal denominations; 3) the “holiness” Pentecostal denominations.\textsuperscript{59} These subgroups reflect the schisms and divisions that have taken place over the 250 years of American Methodism. All can trace their roots, and much of their theology, polity, and practice, to some aspect of the church that saw its beginnings in the spontaneous stirrings among a few dedicated lay people in the mid-eighteenth century.

The next chapter will explore in depth the worship practices that evolved as this movement grew, including ramifications of the dispute between “spontaneous, Spirit-led” worship and “entertainment and performance” worship.\textsuperscript{60}

The rich, complicated, and multivalent history of what would eventually become The United Methodist Church has direct bearing on this study in several ways. First, it is important to know our roots, to know where we came from. Knowing that the Methodist movement in America was, from the beginning, marked by dynamic tension between laity and clergy, that


\textsuperscript{57} Watson, \textit{Old School or New School Methodism?} 277.


\textsuperscript{60} These terms were referred to in Strong, “American Methodism in the Nineteenth Century: Expansion and Fragmentation.”
there were significant pushbacks against episcopal authority all along the way, that a tendency
toward appeasement and non-controversy caused disaffection and alienation, may help us
navigate similar tensions and tendencies today. Secondly, understanding that simultaneously
claiming and rejecting John Wesley has been a part of our tradition since the founding of the
original denomination can put today’s competing claims on “authentic” Wesleyan thought,
theology, and practice in perspective, and will perhaps afford us a bit of grace as we attempt to
discern and develop worship in a Wesleyan/Methodist spirit for the twenty-first century. Finally,
recognizing that somehow, all along the way, women and men, laity and clergy, a rainbow hue of
colors, and a panoply of traditions have found in this movement something that kindled their
spirits and ignited their imaginations is inspiring and encouraging. This is the church we aspire to
be. This is the worship we envision.
To articulate and enact the worship we envision, we first need to understand what, if anything, makes United Methodist worship uniquely Methodist. As we have seen in the previous two chapters, no straight line traces the beginnings of the Methodist movement to our present condition. This is perhaps even more true of Methodist worship practices.

Worship is both informed by and revelatory of the theology, ecclesiology, and organizational understandings of a faith tradition. This chapter will examine the different strands that have contributed to the understanding and practice of worship in the Methodist tradition. After a brief exploration of the ways that worship has developed in that tradition, I will consider current worship practices in The United Methodist Church. Finally, I will discuss possible directions for worship that might recapture some of the spirit and intention of the Wesleyan movement.

As noted previously, the Methodist movement was not begun with the intention of becoming a denomination or a church. It was essentially a revival movement within the Church of England. As such, formal community worship was understood to take place within the sanctuaries of the Anglican Church, under the rubrics of the Book of Common Prayer. In the early stages of the Methodist movement, John Wesley and other leaders largely avoided holding meetings at the same time as parish worship. Methodist society members were expected to attend weekly worship at their parish churches and receive the sacraments and rites of the church there.¹

From the beginning, however, acts of worship were a part of Methodist gatherings. Very early on, John Wesley describes a pattern where they “sang, prayed, sang, read, [engaged in]
religious talk, sang” at meetings.\(^2\) One description of a London meeting describes the group “sing[ing] Psalms audibly, against the peace and quiet of the neighborhood.”\(^3\) As the movement grew, and as John Wesley was barred from preaching in more and more Anglican sanctuaries, larger gatherings developed. These “preaching services” developed a more or less regular format: a short opening prayer, a hymn, the sermon, another hymn, and a concluding prayer.\(^4\) Even larger gatherings, not restricted to society members, took place outside, in fields, pit mines, town squares—anywhere a crowd could be gathered—and were designed to bring the gospel message to people where they were, people who would not or could not attend worship at their parish church.\(^5\) While not the intent of the Wesleys and the Methodist movement, these preaching services and field preaching events contrasted starkly with the austere, text-driven, ritually inflexible worship offered in Anglican worship. Inspired by passionate preaching and new hymns by Charles Wesley, these gatherings brought the gospel to the people where they were, combining to provide what Lester Ruth has described as “an intoxicating mix, much more satisfying to the typical Methodist than what she or he experienced in the parish church.”\(^6\)

### John Wesley’s Views on Worship

Because the Methodist movement was intended as a reform movement within the well-established Church of England, the focus of the movement was not specifically on worship. However, John Wesley was not unaware of the disconnect between the passion and enthusiasm of worship at Methodist gatherings and the tired and dull character of much of Anglican worship.


\(^3\) Heitzenrater, *Wesley and the People Called Methodist*, Chapter 2.

\(^4\) Heitzenrater, *Wesley and the People Called Methodist*, Chapter 3.

\(^5\) Heitzenrater, *Wesley and the People Called Methodist*, Chapter 3.

\(^6\) Ruth, “Liturgical Revolutions,” 313.
In a letter to an unnamed friend, dated September 20, 1757, Wesley revealed his strong opinions about worship and how it was to be conducted. The full text of this letter can be found in Appendix A. The letter is a remarkable document that clearly delineates what John Wesley considered effective, authentic worship.

**Paragraph 1: Earnest worship over social propriety**

In the first paragraph, Wesley writes of the “unspeakable advantage” that Methodists experience in their worship. He is most likely referring to Methodist Sunday worship at the West Street Chapel, which John and Charles Wesley leased in 1743 and which had a consecrated altar so that they could perform the sacraments within the requirements of the Church of England. He praises the space as “plain as well as clean,” and the people who gather there to worship as people “most of whom know, and the rest earnestly seek to, worship God in spirit and in truth.” He contrasts these admirable traits with spaces and people who are either more concerned with outward appearances and social propriety, or don’t seem to care at all and have become dull and duty-bound.

**Paragraph 2: Heartfelt versus perfunctory performance of prayers**

The second paragraph emphasizes the heart and spirit of the people who read the prayers. Wesley writes that this is “always one who may be supposed to speak from his heart,” who performs that

---

8 Ted Campbell, introduction to “A Letter to an Unknown Correspondent concerning Methodist Worship (1757).”
part of the service in a way that is “transacting so high an affair between God and man.” It is of note that he refers to the prayers being read, which indicates that these were *Book of Common Prayer* services.\(^9\) Again, Wesley contrasts this with a “careless, hurrying, slovenly manner” of reading prayers, implying that this is the way this solemn duty was carried out in many Anglican churches.

*Paragraph 3: The performance of music in worship*

The third paragraph is a detailed and somewhat nuanced explication of Wesley’s views on the role of music in worship, as well as the manner in which music is to be performed. He affirms music and singing “when it is seasonable,” and encourages that it be done “with the spirit and with the understanding” appropriate to the service and season. He sees music as integral to the overall flow of the service, as “a proper continuation of the spiritual and reasonable service,” and he expects the musician(s) to “[know] what he is about and how to connect the preceding with the following parts of the service.” Music should be “sung in well-composed and well-adapted tones” and functions to “raise the soul to God.” He offers scathing criticism for both the music being used in Anglican worship and for the way it was being performed, using colorful adjectives such as “miserable, scandalous doggerel,” “poor humdrum wretch,” “wild, unawakened striplings,” “indecent” and “drawling.” Four years later, Wesley would codify these thoughts with the publication of his “Directions for Singing” in *Select Hymns* (1761), directions that are printed at the very beginning of the current edition of *The United Methodist Hymnal*.\(^{10}\)

---

\(^9\) Campbell, introduction to “A Letter to an Unknown Correspondent concerning Methodist Worship (1757)”

Paragraph 4: Sincerity of the preacher

The fourth paragraph is about the integrity of the preacher and the sincerity of the message. He praises preachers who “live as [they speak], speaking the genuine gospel of present salvation through faith.” Preaching should focus on inward and outward holiness, and should be done in “clear, plain, simple, unaffected language.”

Paragraph 5: Worthiness of all to receive Holy Communion

Wesley deals with the sacrament of Holy Communion in the fifth paragraph. In the Methodist worship he is extolling, the one who is administering the sacrament “fears God” and “there is no reason to believe” that any of the fellow communicants are unworthy. The service is “performed in a decent and solemn manner. . . enlivened by hymns suitable to the occasion” and concludes with prayer that is not from “feigned lips.” Again, he contrasts this with Anglican worship where he implicates the “unworthiness of the minister” or the “unholiness of some of the communicants.” Wesley is careful not to invalidate the sacrament itself, or the receiving of the sacrament, or the “blessing from God,” even if the celebrant is unworthy. He did suggest that receiving the sacrament in these conditions “greatly lessen[s] the comfort of receiving.”

---

11 Campbell, introduction to “A Letter to an Unknown Correspondent concerning Methodist Worship (1757)”
The last paragraph is a robust defense of Methodists attending Methodist worship. This is remarkable given Wesley’s repeated insistence that Methodists attend Anglican worship. As noted earlier, he considered the worship he describes here to be aligned with the Church of England and The Book of Common Prayer. He clearly believes that Methodist worship has “so many advantages” and that Methodist gatherings worship God in “spirit and in truth.” Other worshippers are “still outward worshippers only, approaching God with their lips while their hearts are far from Him.”

Though this letter was written before the time that the most of this chapter focuses on, it is a seminal document for helping us understand the spirit and momentum that is behind the movement that will eventually become The United Methodist Church. As the Methodist movement grew, and especially as it crossed the Atlantic to America, Methodists were drawn more and more toward the experiential, heart-focused worship that they found at Methodist preaching services and prayer meetings. The formalized, text-based nature of Anglican worship contrasted with the spontaneous, heart-based character of worship at Methodist gatherings. Extemporaneous prayer, the nature of preaching, and the role of music were significant points of difference between Anglican and Methodist worship, and, especially in America, the Methodists were drawn more and more to their unique style.

---

The Sunday Service

John Wesley was clearly aware of the tension and disconnect between Anglican liturgy and Methodist practice, as his 1757 letter shows, and believed that effective, transformative worship was possible within the context of worship based upon the Anglican, *Book of Common Prayer*. He also recognized the need for some reform, particularly in the burgeoning Methodist movement in America. As discussed in Chapter 3, the movement in America, born out of the Great Awakening, led by lay people, fueled by revolution, and distanced geographically and philosophically from the English church and Wesleyan leadership, had taken on a significant life of its own by the time Wesley sent Thomas Coke to America in 1784. Along with Dr. Coke, Wesley sent his *Sunday Service of the Methodists in North America*. This revision of *The Book of Common Prayer* was intended to adapt *The Book of Common Prayer* to the changing circumstances of the American church.15 While he largely kept *The Book of Common Prayer* intact, and some scholars consider his changes “mild,” his edits were not insignificant, and in many ways point the way for the ensuing Methodist approach to worship.16 Overall, his approach to revising *The Book of Common Prayer* was conservative, reflecting his deep love and devotion to it, while also acknowledging the need to contemporize and adapt it to changing times.17 Wesley balanced a desire for clearly articulated and enumerated liturgical forms with the freedom to revise or supplement those forms, and used his strong grasp of scripture and Christian tradition and antiquity to sustain that balance.18 By removing the Psalms that he deemed

17 White, *Sunday Service* intro, 11.
inappropriate for Christian worship,\textsuperscript{19} shortening the service, adding instructions for extempore prayer, and other modifications to \textit{The Book of Common Prayer}, Wesley opened the door for liturgical reform and modification, and for adapting to circumstances and situations. However, he didn’t stray too far, not even codifying some of his regular practices such as extempore prayer.\textsuperscript{20}

John Wesley’s \textit{Sunday Service of the Methodists in North America} received, at best, lukewarm reception. It went through five editions between 1784 and 1790, so obviously it was being used to some extent. However, this use, mostly limited to cities and towns, failed to move most Methodists. For most American Methodists lived in the cultural milieu of a new country with newfound freedoms, and in the midst of a spiritual revival that featured extempore prayer, energetic preaching, and lined-out hymn singing. Thus, \textit{The Sunday Service} with its liturgical prayer and formalized ritual felt alien and did not reflect their experience of Methodist worship or the Methodist movement.\textsuperscript{21} After Wesley’s death and the 1792 General Conference, the 314-page \textit{Sunday Service} was reduced to thirty-seven pages, retaining only the “Sacramental Services \&c.” and the “Articles of Religion.”\textsuperscript{22} Perhaps reflective of the tension between the American church and the Wesleys, and certainly because of significantly different worship practices in the American church, \textit{The Sunday Service} all but disappeared from early American Methodism.\textsuperscript{23}

For Wesley, \textit{The Sunday Service} balanced a faithfulness to his beloved \textit{Book of Common Prayer} with a willingness to change it, relying on scripture and Christian antiquity to justify both

\textsuperscript{19} Wesley was not unique in this practice. The great hymnwriter Isaac Watts, labelled a dissenter by the Church of England, also considered some Psalms unfit for public worship, writing in the Preface to his \textit{Psalms of David Imitated} (1719) that in some Psalms the “Spirit of Devotion vanishes and is lost. . . and they feel scarce any thing of the holy Pleasure.”

\textsuperscript{20} Tucker, “Mainstream Liturgical Developments,” 300.


\textsuperscript{22} White, \textit{Sunday Service} intro, 12.

\textsuperscript{23} Tucker, \textit{American Methodist Worship}, 9.
approaches. By sending *The Service* to the newly independent America, with the accompanying letter acknowledging and encouraging their freedom, he undoubtedly considered his revision to be an adaptation suited to the culture of the newly created, free country. Wesley lived in a culture defined and controlled by the institutions of monarchy and the state church. He couldn’t have grasped the radically different culture that had emerged in the American experiment.

**American Methodist Worship**

Lester Ruth, an ordained United Methodist pastor and professor of Christian worship at Duke Divinity School, contends that much of the scholarship about early American Methodist worship is skewed by a bias toward official church records, documents, and liturgical texts, discounting or ignoring completely the stories and accounts of the people themselves. This has resulted in what Ruth calls a “gross caricature” of early American worship, portraying it as crude, simple, devoid of liturgical or sacramental integrity or structure, and un-Wesleyan. In reality, American Methodist worship was varied and complex, and rather than highly individualistic and pragmatic as many scholars have portrayed it, was deeply communal and connected. This disconnect between prevailing scholarship and actual experience is perhaps due to overly focusing on Sunday worship in the local meeting house, thereby missing where this varied and complex worship was taking place. The reality in early American Methodism was vastly different from later notions of local parishes and resident pastors. Early Methodism was arranged into circuits, with two itinerant preachers serving the entire circuit, typically a four-week circuit. Most

---

Methodists would hear one of their itinerant preachers, at most, once every two weeks, and often not on Sundays.\(^{29}\) This system emphasized connection and belonging to a movement rather than a specific local church.

Quarterly meetings were a way for all in the connection to come together. Originally conceived in England as a business meeting for the circuit, American Methodism quarterly meetings incorporated the shared experience of the great revival meetings of the Great Awakening led by Jonathan Edwards and George Whitefield, among others. The American Methodist quarterly meetings were multi-day gatherings that featured a variety of worship opportunities, including at least two, but more typically four or five preaching services, as well as love feasts and communion services. The preaching services were often open to non-members and included hymn singing, extemporaneous prayer, preaching, and exhortation, followed by a Spirit-driven section that varied widely, sometimes simply consisting of extemporaneous prayer and a closing hymn, other times being the freer and more unpredictable “work of God.” The latter was the more desirable outcome (to the early Methodist thinking), creating a feeling that God was powerfully present, and the people would cry out for forgiveness, or experience sanctification, or shout praises to God and exhortations to those around them, or outbursts of prayer. The ministers would move among the people praying, exhorting, and shouting.\(^{30}\)

Lester Ruth writes that “there was such an ecclesiastical fullness in quarterly meetings that perhaps it is best to reserve the word ‘church’ for these meetings rather than for the smaller parts of the circuit, the societies and classes.”\(^{31}\) This robust and thriving “church” had been in existence well before 1784 and the official birth of the Methodist Episcopal Church. Many, if not

\(^{29}\) Ruth, *A Little Heaven Below*, 17.  
\(^{30}\) Ruth, *A Little Heaven Below*, 50.  
most, American Methodists associated worship with what they experienced at these quarterly meetings and at other preaching services.\footnote{Tucker, \textit{American Methodist Worship}, 8–9.} Consequently, John Wesley’s \textit{Sunday Service} was irrelevant at best, and politically and liturgically offensive at worst.\footnote{Tucker, \textit{American Methodist Worship}, 8–9.} It was an “extra” that had been received by the ecclesiastical organization, and consequently had to be fit into an already vibrant and well-developed worship life. The decision to remove all but the Eucharistic section and make the liturgy largely extempore in the 1792 \textit{Book of Discipline} was a reflection of this already existing practice, built on the foundation of the Great Awakening, and crafted by the shared worship experiences of the Quarterly Meetings for the great majority of American Methodists.\footnote{Tucker, \textit{American Methodist Worship}, 9.} The spirit of freedom and experimentation, hallmarks of the burgeoning American culture, was deeply imbued in the worship practices of the American Methodist movement.

\textbf{Development of Methodist Worship}

The Methodist Church was born in the liturgical tension between form and freedom, between traditionalism and pragmatism, between distinction and inculturation.\footnote{R. Matthew Sigler, \textit{Methodist Worship: Mediating the Wesleyan Liturgical Heritage} (New York: Routledge, 2019), 2.} Each of these apparent dualities has its proponents and its detractors. In every case, it would be over-simplistic and ultimately incorrect to conclude that one has taken precedence over the other. The 1792 Conference’s truncation of John Wesley’s \textit{The Sunday Service} and elimination of any reference to it was not the end of the story for Wesley’s liturgical opus. Likewise, the 1787 Conference’s removal of Wesley’s name from their \textit{Minutes} did not divorce the American church from Wesley’s influence.\footnote{Tucker, \textit{American Methodist Worship}, 15.} These acts are indicators of that tension between form and freedom.
Throughout the course of its history, there has been an ebb and flow of calls for liturgical reform, for greater freedom and flexibility, for a standardized order of worship in American Methodism.\textsuperscript{37} There have been calls to resist the prevailing culture (distinction) and calls to embrace the cultural context (inculturation.) Some have decried the abandonment of tradition in favor of pragmatism, while others have chafed against what they perceive as the inflexibility of rigid traditionalism. Following the Conference of 1792, when Wesley’s \textit{Sunday Service} was essentially discarded, worship rubrics were included in \textit{The Book of Discipline}. Orders of worship for morning and evening prayer services and instructions for worship were found under the heading “Of Public Worship,” with rituals of baptism, communion, marriage, burial and ordination under the heading “Sacramental Services, &c.”\textsuperscript{38} The headings and content of these sections of \textit{The Discipline} would change over the years, but the basic components for Methodist Sunday worship remained largely the same.\textsuperscript{39} General Conferences would continue to develop orders of worship intended to provide uniformity in public worship, and orders of worship for various services began to be published in the official hymnals.\textsuperscript{40} And these continued to be adhered to closely, mostly ignored, or something in between those extremes.\textsuperscript{41}

In 1945, the Methodist Episcopal Church published \textit{The Book of Worship for Church and Home}, the first official Methodist worship book since Wesley’s \textit{Sunday Service}.\textsuperscript{42} The United Methodist Church today has continued the model established by the publication of the 1945 \textit{Book of Worship}, publishing an official \textit{Book of Worship} that, in addition to orders of worship, contains rituals of the church, an array of worship resources including musical and seasonal

\textsuperscript{37} Tucker, \textit{American Methodist Worship}. See especially chapters 1, 2, and 12.
\textsuperscript{38} Tucker, \textit{American Methodist Worship}, 9.
\textsuperscript{39} Tucker, \textit{American Methodist Worship}, 9.
\textsuperscript{40} Tucker, \textit{American Methodist Worship}, 15.
\textsuperscript{41} Tucker, \textit{American Methodist Worship}, 11.
\textsuperscript{42} Tucker, \textit{American Methodist Worship}, 20.
suggestions, and theological rationales. Orders of worship for general worship as well as sacramental services, and an abbreviated Psalter, are contained in the denominational hymnals.

The current United Methodist Hymnal was published in 1989, and The United Methodist Book of Worship in 1992. Both include “The Basic Pattern of Worship,” which is essentially the same as that adopted two centuries prior by the Conference of 1792. This “Basic Pattern” is the four-fold pattern of worship common to Christian liturgy since antiquity. “This pattern goes back to worship as Jesus and his earliest disciples knew it—services in the synagogue and Jewish family worship around the meal table. It has been fleshed out by the experience and traditions of Christian congregations for two thousand years.”

ENTRANCE
The people come together in the Lord’s name. There may be greetings, music and song, prayer and praise.

PROCLAMATIONS AND RESPONSE
The Scriptures are opened to the people through the reading of lessons, preaching, witnessing, music, or other arts and media. Interspersed may be psalms, anthems, and hymns. Responses to God’s Word include acts of commitment and faith with offerings of concerns, prayers, gifts, and service for the world and for one another.

THANKSGIVING AND COMMUNION
In services with Communion, the actions of Jesus in the Upper Room are reenacted: taking the bread and cup,
giving thanks over the bread and cup,
breaking the bread, and
giving the bread and cup.
In services without Communion, thanks are given for God’s mighty acts in Jesus Christ.

SENDING FORTH
The people are sent into ministry with the Lord’s blessing.

46 The United Methodist Book of Worship, I. General Services, Basic Pattern of Worship.
47 The United Methodist Hymnal, 2.
In both resources, this Basic Pattern of Worship is followed by “An Order of Sunday Worship Using the Basic Pattern.” In *The Book of Worship*, upon which the order listed in *The United Methodist Hymnal* is expanded, shows “some of the variety that is possible within the Basic Pattern of Worship.”48 *The Book of Worship* also offers this introduction to “An Order of Sunday Worship Using the Basic Pattern:” “While the freedom and diversity of United Methodist worship are greater than can be represented by any single order of worship, United Methodists also affirm a heritage of order and the importance of the specific guidance and modeling that an order of worship provides.”49

This introductory sentence beautifully articulates the ambiguity and the fluency between pragmatism and traditionalism, between form and freedom, between distinction and inculcation that has been with Methodist worship since the very beginning. The Methodist Episcopal Church was, in many ways, born alongside the United States of America. The spirit of freedom and independence infused both the movement toward political independence and Methodism’s beginnings in colonial America. Free and independent thinking were critical in the formation of both. Both the church and the country prospered and grew from their bold beginnings, and with stability and prosperity came a cultural shift toward cultivating and maintaining that stability and prosperity. As the denomination grew in stature and influence, formal structure of its worship accompanied the construction of more and more ornate churches and a growing reliance on worship professionals to lead the congregation.50 This in turn led to breakoff denominations such

48 *The United Methodist Book of Worship,* I. General Services, Basic Pattern of Worship.
49 *The United Methodist Book of Worship,* I. General Services, Basic Pattern of Worship.
50 Phillips with Burton-Edwards, “How (and Why) Shall We Worship?”
as the Free Methodists, who believed this institutionalization and upward mobility were eroding the founding principles and vital faith of the Methodist movement.51

Of course, attempting to prove a purely traditionalist, institutional, form-centric trajectory, or a purely free, pragmatic, Spirit-led trajectory, ignores the interweaving of what are often portrayed as polarities. John Wesley himself embraced this interweaving. His Sunday Service was accompanied by a letter to the American Methodists declaring that they were “now at full liberty, simply to follow the scriptures and the primitive church, and we judge it best that they should stand fast in that liberty, wherewith God has so strangely made them free.”52 While his devotion to The Book of Common Prayer is clear, he also felt free to draw upon ancient liturgical practices of the early church, continuing the Anglican reliance on Scripture, Tradition and Reason in theological and liturgical work, while also adding a “pragmatism determined by spiritual efficacy in both the individual and the community.”53

The tension has been with us from the beginning. Lester Ruth writes, “The debates between ‘traditionalists’ and ‘pragmatists’ have long raged on American soil. The threat to the integrity of Christian worship is no greater today than at other times—regardless of the strident rhetoric on both sides.”54 In order to have a better understanding of what United Methodist worship looks like today, it is helpful to look at real-life examples.

52 Wesley, Sunday Service, iii.
54 Ruth, A Little Heaven Below, 231.
Case Studies

I reached out to five United Methodist elders in the California-Nevada Annual Conference to learn about their worship practices, and whether and how it ties into their understanding of Wesleyan theology and worship praxis.

Rev. Dr. Theon Johnson III is the pastor of Downs Memorial United Methodist Church in Oakland, California. He has served Downs UMC since 2018, previously serving Glide Memorial United Methodist Church in San Francisco and churches and campus ministry in Mississippi. Downs members are primarily African American, and the church has a long history of advocacy and action for racial equity and human dignity.

Rev. Samuel Yun is the pastor of Embrace Church in Alameda, California. Embrace is a new-church start begun by Sam in 2015. He previously served at Los Altos United Methodist Church in Los Altos, California, and churches and conference staff in Southern California. Embrace members are primarily Asian American Pacific Islander, mostly of Korean descent, mostly young adults.

Rev. Linda Dew-Hiersoux is co-pastor of The Table, a ten-year-old church plant in Sacramento, California. Prior to starting The Table, Linda served churches throughout Northern California. The Table is primarily white with many young adults and young families.

Rev. Dr. Dale Weatherspoon is pastor of Easter Hill United Methodist Church in Richmond, California. He was appointed there in 2017. He previously served churches in Northern California. Easter Hill is a predominantly African American congregation.

Rev. Kathi McShane is senior pastor at Los Altos United Methodist Church in Los Altos, California, where she has served since 2017. Prior to coming to Los Altos, Kathi served churches in Northern California. Los Altos is a predominantly white congregation.
I asked each pastor the same three questions.

1. Is there anything about your worship that you consider uniquely Wesleyan or Methodist?

Theon considers gathering and being sent forth in song as connections to the Wesleyan heritage of understanding that singing our faith assists in people’s theological development that is both practical and dynamic.\(^{55}\)

Sam’s preaching takes a theological approach focused on grace and holiness that he believes is deeply Wesleyan.\(^{56}\) His church also practices weekly communion. His church has been embodying the Wesleyan concept of “the world is my parish” through worship outside the walls of the church and beyond Sundays, mostly via technology.

Linda’s worship follows the basic pattern of worship somewhat closely as outlined in *The United Methodist Hymnal*.\(^{57}\) They observe the liturgical seasons and the Revised Common Lectionary as outlined in *The United Methodist Book of Worship*. Their messages incorporate examples gleaned from their “Kitchen Tables,” which she says is their version of Wesleyan Class Meetings.

Dale uses *The United Methodist Hymnal* and other United Methodist worship resources.\(^{58}\) Singing is a vital part of their worship, and he encourages the congregation to sing according to Wesley’s instructions. They use the Basic Pattern of Worship for their weekly services.

Kathi considers the open communion table as central to her understanding of Wesleyan and United Methodist worship practice.\(^{59}\)

---

\(^{55}\) Rev. Dr. Theon Johnson III’s responses are from email correspondence January 28, 2021.

\(^{56}\) Rev. Samuel Yun’s responses are from email correspondence May 16, 2021.

\(^{57}\) Rev. Linda Dew-Hirsoux’s responses are from email correspondence February 19, 2021.

\(^{58}\) Rev. Dr. Dale Weatherspoon’s responses are from email correspondence February 16, 2021.

\(^{59}\) Rev. Kathi McShane’s responses are from email correspondence May 16, 2021.
2. Do you have a typical order of worship? If so, what is it? Are there reasons for this order? Are there variations? What are they?

Theon’s typical order is: Gathering, Prayer, Song(s), Scripture, Sermon, Invitation and Giving, Communion, Sending forth. He thinks of this order as Reconvene/Reassemble (gather), Request (prayer), Rejoice (music), Read (scripture), Reflect (sermon), Respond (invitation/offering), Recommit (communion), Release (sending forth).

Sam’s typical order is Welcome, Prayer, Praise, Prayer, Message, Communion, Praise, Benediction. He calls it “less liturgical and more informal.” His rationale for it is that it has worked to bring people together, celebrate Jesus in worship, equip people with teaching, practice communion.

Linda follows the order and flow of worship found in *The United Methodist Hymnal*, including the Sacrament of Holy Communion each week. They adapt the order according to liturgical seasons, such as adding candle lighting in Advent.

Dale’s order of worship is: Call to Worship & Welcome, Opening Song, Praise Song, Welcome, Passing the Peace, Announcements, Prayer Hymn and Pastoral Prayer (sometimes that order is reversed depending on the mood and Praise Song sung), offering and offertory prayer, Children’s Moment, Scripture Reading(s), Solo, Sermon/Message, Holy Communion and prayer after Communion (on first Sundays), Announcements, Closing Song, Invitation to Discipleship/Invitation to join the Church, Benediction/Dismissal. Dale considers announcements to be an important part of worship, and places them at different places in the order of worship. He preaches from the lectionary, always including the gospel reading, often along with the Epistle, Psalm or Old Testament reading. There is flexibility in their worship allowing for guest musicians, dancers, community speakers.
Kathi’s typical order of worship is: Gathering—Call to worship and singing; Proclamation—Scripture and sermon; Response—Prayers of the people and offering; Sending forth. She has tried different placement of prayers in the service. She says that she feels that “people coming into worship need a place to safely deposit the worries and concerns they carry in with them.” She has also experimented with moving the Offering to earlier in the service so that it doesn’t appear to be “payment for a good sermon (or not!).”

3. How do you determine your order of worship? Are there specific resources (such as The United Methodist Book of Worship) that you use?

Theon says that his order of worship is “modeled off of the rituals and rhythms of the congregation (informed by resources like The Book of Worship).” His sermons are based on the Revised Common Lectionary because he feels that keeps the local church connected to the broader community of faith.

Sam says that their worship design is minimal, and they have not used resources outside of themselves. They are intentionally connecting their worship to small groups. Worship is the “big event,” small groups are the “main event.” This is another way their worship is “deeply Wesleyan.”

As Linda said previously, their order is determined by the basic pattern of worship in The United Methodist Hymnal. The content, she says, is “excavated from various sources.” They use poetry and prayers written by members of their community, they use videos, especially liking “The Work of the People” (https://www.theworkofthepeople.com), and music chosen by the pastors in consultation with their music team.

Dale lists a variety of sources: prayer, The United Methodist Hymnal, The Faith We Sing, The African American Heritage Hymnal, Songs of Zion, Zion Still Sings, the Bible, Discipleship
Resources (an online United Methodist resource), *The Africana Worship Book, Years A, B and C*, *The United Methodist Book of Worship*, and consultation with the worship team and worship committee.

As Kathi said in her answer to question 2, she likes to move things around in worship, responding to the felt need of the congregation. Kathi likes to begin worship with a “centering moment” that is more reflective, often using poetry or other inspirational readings from a wide variety of sources, preferring this to the more typical call to worship that tends to be “praise, praise, praise.”

**Observations**

To varying degrees, each of these United Methodist pastors considers their approach to worship to be faithful to Wesleyan and Methodist tradition. Yet clearly there is wide divergence in form, content, sourcing, and approaches to worship. This, in and of itself, might be distinctively Methodist. All five pastors indicate a contextual approach to worship, considering both the spiritual development, cultural context and expectations, and spiritual and temporal needs of their congregation. Three of the five offer weekly communion. Obviously, a sampling of five pastors is little more than anecdotal, but in these five the dynamic tension of form and freedom, careful attention to the sacraments, intentional use of music as an element of worship, and, whether spoken or implied, an incorporation of the means of grace into their worship practice are all evident.

Of significance are the things these pastors identify as uniquely Methodist or Wesleyan. The centrality of singing, messages focusing on grace and holiness, following the order from *The United Methodist Hymnal*, small groups modeled after the class meetings, weekly communion,
and open communion are all things that certainly fall within the broad spectrum of current United Methodist practice. Some of them, such as emphasizing grace and holiness, weekly communion, and the use of singing, are things that John and Charles Wesley certainly employed as part of the Methodist movement, although these practices were not unique to them. Using the “Basic Pattern of Worship,” is hardly unique to Methodists, or to Wesley, having been part of the liturgical life of the church since the beginning. Wesley was a strong proponent of using ancient sources from the primitive church, so in that respect using this ancient pattern could be considered Wesleyan. The open communion table of modern United Methodism was not Wesleyan or a part of early Methodist polity, which in fact limited communion to members of the societies. It could be argued that the inclination toward open communion is also part of Methodist DNA, because exceptions to the rules limiting access to communion were common, with both Bishop Asbury and Bishop Coke granting permission for any “real believers” or “serious person who desired it” to receive the sacrament.

What these five pastors have in common is a commitment to the spiritual health, vitality, and growth of the community of faith that they serve. While that commitment is certainly not unique to Wesley or Methodism, the dance between form and freedom, tradition and pragmatism, distinction and inculturation that each engages in as they serve their community is well aligned with our shared Wesleyan and Methodist heritage.

---

60 Ruth, A Little Heaven Below, 125.
61 Ruth, A Little Heaven Below, 127.
**The Why of Worship**

A central question running through this analysis of how we worship is why we worship. Each of the pastors cited above would probably answer this question differently. Glorifying God, gathering in community, finding common purpose, learning about and living the gospel, would undoubtedly be included in most or all their answers. Worship leaders need a clearer and deeper articulation of the why of worship as we move forward into developing worship that is both reflective of our Wesleyan and Methodist heritage and relevant to the twenty-first century world we live in.

The movement John Wesley started was a reform movement within the Anglican Church. Though he did not intend to supplant Anglican worship, as his September 1757 letter shows, he was highly critical of ineffectual worship leadership or worship that was stale and simply going through the motions. The goal of Wesley’s movement was to “reform the nation…and to spread scriptural holiness over the land.” For Wesley, this happened through several means including the development of class meetings, societies, prayer meetings, and preaching services. All of these were intended, at least at first, to be supplemental to worship on the Lord’s Day in the Anglican parish. Public worship was just one of the General Rules developed by Wesley, and existed alongside means of grace that were intended to be regularly practiced far more than once a week. This was a movement intended to convert souls for Christ, to equip holy living and the pursuit of sanctification after conversion, and live the great commandment of love of God and love of neighbor. For Wesley, though, it was a movement within the Anglican church, and it presupposed engagement in Anglican worship. In fact, Wesley believed that Methodist worship

---

64 Heitzenrater, *Wesley and the People Called Methodist*, Chapter 3.
as practiced at class meetings, prayer meetings, preaching services, etc., was “defective” without Anglican worship, especially in the breadth and scope of prayer, scripture, and sacraments.\textsuperscript{65}

As the movement developed, and particularly as it crossed the Atlantic and took root in America, the vitality, energy, emotion, spontaneity, and ecstatic quality of Methodist worship was vastly more appealing than Anglican worship, and for many of the colonists it was all they knew.\textsuperscript{66} Rather than initiating reform and revival within a long-standing institutional faith tradition, Methodism became a fresh, new, and culturally relevant spiritual experience—ecstatic experiences of the Spirit, conversion, exhortation, and testimony were no longer supplemental to established worship, but became established worship.

Early American Methodism focused on God’s grace working within the individual, salvation, renewing our covenants with God and experiencing entire sanctification.\textsuperscript{67} The focus of the service became the sermon, or the exhortation, or both. Scripture lessons were reduced from full chapters to excerpts, or even to single verses.\textsuperscript{68} The why of worship was to proclaim the gospel of salvation, leading to conversion and/or confession.\textsuperscript{69} Sermons were aimed at the heart of the hearer, usually focusing on the doctrine of salvation.\textsuperscript{70} Often sermons were followed by exhortations as an additional means of being sure the offer of salvation and the willingness to accept it had been received by the people.\textsuperscript{71}

Lester Ruth points out that the evangelistic zeal of the early American Methodist church was not un-Wesleyan. Rather, Ruth suggests, “the Wesleys’ broader historical knowledge, greater theological sophistication, and stronger commitment to Anglican churchmanship

\textsuperscript{65} Ruth, “Liturgical Revolutions,” 314.
\textsuperscript{66} Ruth, “Liturgical Revolutions,” 315.
\textsuperscript{67} Ruth, “Liturgical Revolutions,” 317.
\textsuperscript{68} Ruth, “Liturgical Revolutions,” 322.
\textsuperscript{69} Tucker, \textit{American Methodist Worship}, 5.
\textsuperscript{70} Ruth, “Liturgical Revolutions,” 322.
\textsuperscript{71} Ruth, “Liturgical Revolutions,” 322.
provided them a more balanced context for the intense form of evangelical, affective
‘experimental religion’ that was shared by all Methodists.”72 Lacking this balance, and situated
in a distinctly different cultural context than the British Wesleyan movement, the American
expression of Methodism relied on a liturgical pragmatism that tended to rely on numbers as the
metric for success, and consequently adapted their liturgy with increased numbers in mind.73

As the Methodist movement in America became the Methodist Church in America, and
as the Methodist Episcopal Church grew in size, influence, and stature, the why of worship
shifted. Conversion, religious experience, the ability to articulate what one believes became
privatized and individualized.74 Worship leadership became more professionalized. In many
ways, the church had come full circle back to the conditions that existed in the Anglican church
of Wesley’s day that necessitated a reform movement in the first place.

Of course, much study and work has been done in recent decades to address the need for
revitalization. Initiatives such as “Vital Congregations,” “Rethink Church,” “Spring Forest,”
“Fresh Expressions,” and “Missional Wisdom Foundation” are just a few examples of ways the
church or the parachurch movement is seeking to reclaim relevance and vitality and nurture
community in a changing world.75 Some of these are “reforms” that presuppose the existence,
and, therefore, maintenance of existing hierarchical and institutional structures. Some of them

---

72 Ruth, A Little Heaven Below, 216.
73 Ruth, A Little Heaven Below, 217.
74 Tucker, American Methodist Worship, 238.
(accessed July 23, 2021). “Vital Congregations” and “Rethink Church” were initiatives undertaken by The United
Methodist Church as church renewal programs. “Spring Forest” is a United Methodist intentional community which
hosts a garden, a farm, and a church. “Fresh Expressions” began in the United Kingdom as a joint initiative of the
Church of England and the British Methodist Church and is now an international movement seeking to cultivate
“new kinds of church.” “Missional Wisdom Foundation” experiments with and teaches about new forms of
Christian community.
suggest new initiatives that are not tightly tethered to the institution. Some of them are
movements within the umbrella of the organization but operate somewhat autonomously. What
seems clear is that the present age is a time that is pregnant with possibilities for new forms,
ideas, venues, and focus for our worship.
CHAPTER 5: MUSIC

From the perspective of almost all twenty-first century Christian worship, it is hard to imagine worshipping without music.¹ Music is an intrinsic part of our gathered Christian experience.² In some traditions and genres, worship and music are virtually synonymous.³ Worship music can include, at least from a Western, twenty-first century, Christian perspective, organs, pianos, guitars, orchestra, instrumental ensembles, rock bands, soloists, choirs, and congregational hymns and songs; virtually any combination of instruments and voices, in any genre or style, has found its way into twenty-first century Western worship.

This chapter will examine the roles of music in worship, particularly focusing on music in the Methodist movement and Charles Wesley’s role in and impact on that movement. I will pay particular attention to the ways Charles Wesley conveyed Methodist theology in his hymn texts. I will then offer examples of how Charles Wesley’s hymns can be adapted for modern worship.

**Roles of Music in Worship**

The ways music is integrated into our worship, the choices we make about music, and the ways the music is created reveal much about the liturgical theology of a congregation. Many choices that are made without a second thought, out of habit, preference, or expediency—such as cutting stanzas of a hymn to save time, which instruments will accompany hymn singing, how anthems,

---

1 Quaker worship practice, for example, does not include organized or planned music. See Paul Westermeyer, “Quakers (Society of Friends),” in *Te Deum: The Church and Music* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2009) Chapter 12, Kindle edition.
2 Westermeyer, Chapter 1, “Analyzing the Terrain.”
solos and other non-congregational musical selections are chosen and used (if at all), and how much music to include in a worship service—choices that both reflect and influence the broader theology and ecclesiology of a congregation. As Paul Chilcote writes, “What we sing shapes our theology; our theology shapes what we sing.”

Developing a vision for twenty-first century worship in the Wesleyan spirit and tradition requires an examination of the vital role music plays. This, in turn, requires at least a broad understanding of how music has functioned in worship and how worship music has changed over the ages.

Music has been a part of the practice of worship since ancient times. In fact, music was interwoven throughout daily life in the ancient world. In modern culture, aided by the constantly accelerating sophistication of technology and the ever-expanding reach of social media, music is ubiquitous, present everywhere from elevators and video games to TikTok videos to sporting events. Much of this ubiquity has relegated music to little more than white noise, providing a background ambience that is often unremarkable and goes unnoticed much of the time. On those occasions when music is at the forefront of people’s time and attention, it is often in a performative setting such as a concert or a spectator event that people consume. Paul Westermeyer observes that “[m]usic in modern times tends to be regarded as extrinsic to life—an extra, a commodity, a sophisticated endeavor to which only a few initiates are privy.” Unlike previous eras and other cultures, community participation in music is most often relegated to the sports arena or the highly amplified concert venue for most people in Western culture. This is in

---

6 Westermeyer, *Te Deum*, Chapter 3.
7 Westermeyer, *Te Deum*, Chapter 3.
stark contrast to the Wesleys’ England, where communal song was commonplace and widely practiced.  

Modern-day Western assumptions about music present several challenges with regard to music in the church. The ubiquitous and extrinsic nature of music in the wider culture affects attitudes and practices in the church. When music is a commodity—a thing without intrinsic value—it loses meaning and importance. We may easily treat music as either time-filler or time-waster, adding or discarding it accordingly. The places in society where music is highly valued and engaging tend to be larger concert venues. The audience chooses to connect with and experience the music in these settings, and there is a sense of community in the shared participation, which can often include singing along with the featured performers. This is different from the more intimate and exposed experience of group singing, which has largely disappeared from modern Western culture. Thus, attempts at participatory engagement within worship may feel awkward, generationally skewed, intimidating, and inhibiting.  

I will address these issues in crafting worship that is real, relevant, and faithful to the Wesleyan legacy.

Today’s worship music is likely to include a wide variety of styles and genres, liturgical functions in the service, instrumentation, and combinations of voices, from solos and small ensembles to choirs. Much of the music prepared for worship in our churches is prepared to be presented to the congregation. There can be important functions for such music, but it also runs the risk of putting the congregation in a spectator role rather than active participants in worship.  

Congregational song is the worship music that actively involves and engages the congregation.

---

8 Wren, *Praying Twice*, Chapter 2. One of the gifts of the Wesleys was bringing the kind of singing that was more commonly found in the pub into a Christian context to be included as part of worship.


Brian Wren defines congregational song as “anything sung by a group of people assembled to worship God, not as a presentation to some other group, but as a vehicle for their worship.”¹¹ In spite of the challenges and limitations noted above, congregational song is vital to worship. Wren writes:

I believe that congregational song is an indispensable part of Christian public worship. By “public worship” I mean the assembly of Christian people, from Baptist to Catholic, for the purpose of honoring, praising, and, hopefully, encountering God, whether their worship be “liturgical,” “spontaneous,” or in between. By “indispensable” I mean two steps down from “essential” but three floors higher than “optional” . . . though we don’t have to sing in order to worship, it helps immeasurably if we do . . . when we assemble for worship, congregational song is in most circumstances indispensable.¹²

Wren asserts that “congregational song is in trouble,” due to some of the factors noted above, as well as social mobility and an eroding sense of community.¹³ The history of Christian worship includes times and traditions where congregational song has flourished, where it has been restricted, and even some where it wasn’t practiced at all.¹⁴ As Wren points out, “Throughout Christian history, congregational song has rebounded from trends that diminished it and survived attempts to suppress it.”¹⁵ Certainly the nature of the trouble facing congregational song today is vastly different than the theological and liturgical controversies of the Reformation and before. Recovering from current controversies around the use of music in worship will require theological, liturgical, and practical reflection. In many ways, these struggles mirror the polarities of organized religion and the broader Western church. The best place to start addressing these liturgical crosscurrents is in revitalizing worship; the assets and strengths of congregational song will be essential to that revitalization.

¹¹ Wren, Praying Twice, Chapter 2.
¹² Wren, Praying Twice, Chapter 2.
¹³ Wren, Praying Twice, Chapter 2.
¹⁴ Westermeyer, Te Deum, especially chapters 2–12.
¹⁵ Wren, Praying Twice, Chapter 2.
By its very nature, congregational song is a powerful community builder. It can be argued that no other act of worship builds community or connects the congregation like congregational singing. Congregational song (as well as other well-crafted worship music) is especially useful at conveying theological ideas and shaping the theology of the congregation. Paul Chilcote comments that “[h]ymns and songs have communicated new theological discoveries and rediscoveries in every generation.” In addition to its community building and theology shaping aspects, community song is corporeal, embodied worship; it is inclusive, involving everyone regardless of ability; it is inspirational, transcending the mundane and commonplace; it is ecclesial, uniting the whole church; it is evangelical, extending welcome and invitation to anyone and everyone. Pablo Sosa has taught that “songs put words in people’s mouths, knowledge in their bones, and conviction about whose voice counts. Songs shape how a community lives out its faith.”

None of these attributes of congregational song happen automatically and, in many cases, they are aspirational rather than descriptive. How the music is chosen, how the congregation is encouraged to engage, the instrumentation and arrangement, the lyrical content and melodic line, are all extremely important considerations. Later in this chapter I will offer some examples of different ways old hymns might be given new life. In the following chapter, I will go into detail about each of these considerations.

The people gathered for twenty-first century Christian worship almost universally expect to sing. Because of cultural influences, the commodification of music, the high production

---

16 Westermeyer, *Te Deum*, Chapter 4.  
17 Chilcote, *Singing the Faith*, 3.  
20 Westermeyer, *Te Deum*, Chapter 4.
values of popular music, and social mobility, they may feel more awkward or reticent to do so. But the expectation for congregational singing is there. Paul Westermeyer writes “most of the church goes on singing its song to God as best it can in a wide variety of ways in spite of some of its leaders and their battles, thankful for whatever help it gets to sing and saddened by whatever stifles it.”

Congregational song also must be understood within the context of the more inclusive category of Christian congregational music. The term “Christian congregational music” encompasses “any and all music performed in or as worship by a gathered community that considers itself to be Christian.” The challenges outlined above of more fully engaging the congregation in the physical and spiritual act of singing are accompanied by a lack of attention to all of the music of worship and the ways theology is shaped and expressed through “the interplay of the musical creators’ intentions, performance contexts, previous associations inhering to music style and various situated meanings of song texts.” I will address some of these issues more directly in Chapter 6 as these various threads are woven together to create a model for revitalized worship in the Wesleyan spirit.

Understanding how congregational song has evolved in Wesleyan and Methodist history and tradition offers an important grounding for exploring ways congregational music, including congregational song, can be revitalized and incorporated into twenty-first century United Methodist Worship. As with all things Methodist, it begins with a Wesley: this time John’s younger brother, Charles.

23 Ingalls, Landau, Wagner, 3.
Charles Wesley

Charles Wesley was the eighteenth child of Susanna and Samuel Wesley, born December 18, 1707. He was three and a half years younger than John. Charles was born prematurely and consequently was somewhat frail and sickly. He spent the first few months of life wrapped tightly in a wool blanket, until his original due date. Charles and John were near opposites in temperament, personality, and physical health. Yet they were partners in the Methodist movement for more than fifty years. It was a complicated partnership, at times well aligned as their complimentary gifts brought strength and depth to the movement, at other times acrimonious as they had sharp differences in foundational theological principles such as entire sanctification, concerns bordering on meddling over each other’s marital status and marriage partners, as well as a deep divide over separation with the Church of England.

Charles, of course, is best known for his hymn writing. He was a prolific poet, writing an average of ten lines of verse a day, or roughly one hundred and eighty hymns a year for almost fifty years. But he was also a gifted preacher, a devoted family man, and an indispensable partner with his brother John in the formation and development of the Methodist movement. Understanding the life and vocation of the man who created such a corpus of hymns helps to put them in context.

---

The Methodist movement began more or less simultaneously with John and Charles Wesley. Some scholars erroneously have proclaimed Charles Wesley “the first Methodist.”29 This is due, primarily, to significant evidence that it was Charles who started the Holy Club at Oxford, and to the recognition that Charles experienced his “conversion” three days before John experienced his on Aldersgate Street.30 While the origins of the movement are somewhat unclear and impossible to pinpoint, it is clear that from the earliest beginnings John was the tireless organizational leader and visionary, in close partnership with Charles who was the prolific poet and singer of the faith. It is doubtful the movement would have survived without the contributions of both brothers.31

Writing poetry and hymn texts seems to have been in Charles’ DNA. There was virtually no aspect of his life, whether spiritual, romantic, political, or personal, that Charles didn’t record in poetry.32 He did not seek out notoriety as a writer of hymns, publishing many of his hymns jointly with John and without claiming authorship. Most of his poetical writing went unpublished because he did not want the attention and considered it too private and too personal.33 While his lasting legacy is as the “sweet singer of Methodism,” in his lifetime Charles Wesley was an ordained clergyperson in the Anglican church, known as much for his powerful, extemporaneous preaching as for his hymns.34 He provided a balance to his brother John, trying to maintain

30 Tabraham, Brother Charles, 38–39.
33 Tyson, Assist Me to Proclaim, Introduction.
34 The reference to Charles Wesley as “the sweet singer of Methodism” is quite common in a wide variety of resources. ST Kimbrough has written a one-man musical drama based on this description, “Sweet Singer” (posted October 28, 2015), http://www.stkimbrough.com/page_3a.htm (accessed January 22, 2022); Tyson, Assist Me to Proclaim, Chapters 3 and 4.
discipline among the lay preachers while John tended toward more leniency. While he is widely known to have steadfastly resisted the inevitable split of the Methodists from the Anglican church, in his life of active ministry Charles clashed repeatedly, and often violently, with supporters and officials of the Church of England.

Charles Wesley also lived a more settled life than John, being happily married to Sally Gwynne from 1749 until his death in 1788. Together they had eight children, three of whom survived infancy. The significance of this more settled domestic life to the Methodist movement is that, as he grew older, Charles did less and less itinerant preaching and evangelizing, settling in London most of the year, where he oversaw the care of the Foundery and became the regular preacher and worship leader at City Road chapel when it was opened in 1778. He continued his lifelong practice of working with the poor and marginalized, regularly visiting Newgate Prison. He also socialized with famous musicians, literary figures, and politicians. Much of this was due not only to his own love of music and fine company, but to the extraordinary musical talent of his sons Charles and Samuel, exposing them to some of the best musicians and composers in the area. The irony is that the great hymnwriter of Methodism could not offer his talented sons a venue within the movement for their own musical expression, with no organs in their preaching houses and no opportunities to employ musicians.

All of this—ceasing to itinerate, monopolizing the pulpit at City Road, socializing with the rich and famous, promoting his sons’ musical performances—caused disapproval and

35 Tyson, Assist Me to Proclaim, Chapter 5.
36 Tyson, Assist Me to Proclaim, Chapter 4.
37 Tabraham, Brother Charles, 51–53.
38 Tyson, Assist Me to Proclaim, Chapter 18.
39 Tyson, Assist Me to Proclaim, Chapter 18.
40 Tyson, Assist Me to Proclaim, Chapter 18.
41 Tyson, Assist Me to Proclaim, Chapter 18.
resentment among many of the Methodist lay preachers and rank and file.\textsuperscript{42} By the time of his death in 1788, the Methodist movement was clearly moving toward separation from the Anglican church, and many in the Methodist movement were alienated from him.\textsuperscript{43}

One biographer has commented that Charles Wesley was “both a reforming Methodist and a conforming Anglican.”\textsuperscript{44} This is part of Charles Wesley’s legacy. The creative tension between and within the Wesley brothers is part of the DNA of Methodism. As previously discussed regarding United Methodist history and United Methodist worship practice, there is no straight line from the founding to the present, and no one clear, identifiable lineage passed on from the founding family to United Methodists today. This can seem confusing and ambiguous, certainly, but it can also expand previously unimagined possibilities if we let it.

Without question, the legacy of Charles Wesley is in his poetry and hymns. It is through these hymns that Wesleyan theology finds expression. Almost everyone in every Methodist or Wesleyan tradition can most likely quote more than one Charles Wesley hymn. The same can most certainly not be said of the writings of John Wesley!\textsuperscript{45} A closer look at the ways these hymns explicate and express that theology is helpful in articulating a vision for worship in the twenty first century.

\section*{Charles Wesley’s Technique and Theology}

I will now consider Charles Wesley’s hymns including the ways they nourish the Methodist movement and shape Methodist worship through their theology and use of scripture. As noted previously, no aspect of life escaped his poetical reflection. The corpus of his work encompasses

\textsuperscript{42} Tyson, \textit{Assist Me to Proclaim}, Chapter 18.
\textsuperscript{43} Tyson, \textit{Assist Me to Proclaim}, Chapter 19.
\textsuperscript{44} Tabraham, \textit{Brother Charles}, 98.
\textsuperscript{45} Berger, \textit{Theology in Hymns?} 66.
political commentary, personal reflection, love poems, polemics against what he perceived as the incompetence of many of the Methodist lay ministers, ardent defense of the Anglican Church, and, particularly in his hymns, copious verses with biblical, theological, and doctrinal themes. Paul Chilcote writes, “The vast majority of people called Methodist learned their theology through singing [Charles Wesley’s] hymns. It is not too much to say that Methodism was born in the songs of this amazing hymn writer.”46 Primarily through his hymns, but also in his very effective preaching, Charles Wesley defined and refined Methodist theology and a Methodist approach to biblical interpretation.

There has been much scholarly debate about whether Charles Wesley can be considered a true theologian. Ted Campbell suggests that the term “theologian” implies certain scholarly disciplines and so will always need qualification with regards to Charles (and John) Wesley.47 Consequently, many creative appellations have been added to “theologian” when applying the term to Charles Wesley. He is called “lyrical theologian,” “folk theologian,” “practical theologian,” “experimental theologian,” “praxis theologian,” and “doxological theologian,” among others.48 Ted Campbell proposes the term theologos, “one who gives us words about God.”49 Each of these terms offer insight into the unique ways Charles Wesley draws people deeper into a relationship of “wonder, love, and praise” with God. More recent scholarship concludes that Charles Wesley deserves recognition as a significant contributor both to the history of theology and to contemporary Methodist doctrine and beliefs.50

46 Chilcote, Singing the Faith, 18.
48 These terms have been used, respectively, by ST Kimbrough, Albert Outler, Randy Maddox, J. Ernest Rattenbury, Teresa Berger, and John Tyson.
There are some excellent resources that more closely examine the biblical imagery and Wesleyan theology of Charles Wesley’s hymns.\textsuperscript{51} For the purposes of this study, I will examine some of the literary approaches Charles Wesley employed for expressing this theology and some of the recurring theological themes in his body of work.

ST Kimbrough writes, “[Charles Wesley’s] interpretation of the Christian faith and life integrates biblical, Christological, ecclesial, sacramental, evangelical, catholic, and social outreach foci, all of which impact his lyrical theology.”\textsuperscript{52} It is his ability to encompass all facets of Christian life and Christian belief, from weaving the singer into the biblical narrative to expositing ancient teaching and doctrine in new and relevant ways, that makes Charles Wesley uniquely gifted and widely impactful. Paul Chilcote writes, “His poetic corpus constitutes a biblical, lyrical theology second to none in the English language.”\textsuperscript{53} He was able to integrate holiness and piety with a call to put faith into action with biblical application with sanctification and sacrifice, with themes of love and faith imbuing it all.\textsuperscript{54} His hymns were multivalent, proving useful in worship, in education, and in evangelism.\textsuperscript{55}

Charles Wesley drew inspiration for his hymns from a wide variety of sources. It seems that nothing in his life escaped poetic reflection. An immediate heir to the dissenting English hymn writer Isaac Watts, Wesley took biblical hymn writing to new depths. While Watts masterfully paraphrased psalms and other biblical passages into poetical language, Wesley wove together various biblical passages, finding a Christ-centered focus regardless of whether dealing with Old or New Testament passages, often inserted the singer (himself) into the narrative, and

\textsuperscript{51} Some of these include Teresa Berger, \textit{Theology in Hymns}? Paul Chilcote, \textit{Singing the Faith}; S T Kimbrough, \textit{The Lyrical Theology of Charles Wesley}, and Charles Wesley: Poet and Theologian (editor); John Tyson, editor, \textit{Charles Wesley: A Reader}
\textsuperscript{53} Chilcote, \textit{Singing the Faith}, 19.
\textsuperscript{54} Chilcote, \textit{Singing the Faith}, 20.
\textsuperscript{55} Tyson, \textit{Assist Me to Proclaim}, Chapter 16.
placed each hymn within a distinctively Wesleyan theological interpretation.Charles Wesley used several poetic and interpretive tools in his biblical hymn writing. Chief among them were typology, which is finding a deeper meaning beneath a literal reading of the biblical text; allegory, which is attaching a spiritual identification to every part of the biblical passage; vivid imagery to evoke a sense of immediacy with the biblical narrative; and contemporizing the biblical passage to show its applicability to the present condition.

A significant number of Charles Wesley’s hymns are doxological. Teresa Berger describes this as “the explicit and implicit speech of praise, confession of faith, prayer and thanksgiving, as directed to God for God’s glorification.” While most formal, classical theology centers around statements about God, the doxological theology of Charles Wesley makes theological statements to God.

In the lyrical, doxological, experimental, practical theology of Charles Wesley, some common themes run through his hymns. The central Wesleyan doctrine of Christian Perfection is certainly one of them. Charles Wesley called this doctrine “the one thing needful.” He considered it, along with the concept of universal redemption, to be one of “the two great truths of the everlasting Gospel.” It was also one of the most misunderstood, misapplied, and controversial of Wesleyan doctrines. While John and Charles agreed on the fundamental importance of this doctrine, they had significant differences in some key details. For Charles, the process of sanctification—moving toward Christian Perfection—was a gradual one, only fully realized at the point of transition from this world into the next. To him, it was the restoration of

56 Tyson, Assist Me to Proclaim, Chapter 16.
57 Teresa Berger, Theology in Hymns? 17.
58 Chilcote, Singing the Faith, 21.
59 Tyson, editor, Charles Wesley: A Reader, 360.
60 Tyson, Reader, 360.
the *imago Dei*, the image of God in which each of us was created.\(^6\) His hymns reflect both a rejection of those who extravagantly claimed a kind of angelic perfection in this life and his belief in the gradual process of growth and maturation toward full sanctification.\(^6\) One of Charles Wesley’s favorite images of and metaphors for redemption and sanctification was the cross. Wesley’s theology of the cross encompassed not only his theology of justification and sanctification, but was also, for him, a contemporary event, a part of the life of the Christian.\(^6\)

Wesley emphasized the connection between the cost of Christian discipleship (the cross), and the anticipated inheritance the Christian receives through faith (the crown).\(^6\) All of this is part of the process of moving toward perfection, the process of sanctification.

At the heart of Charles Wesley’s understanding and articulation of our relationship with God are the notions of faith and love. For Wesley, these two overarching themes are closely related, and at the core of his theology. Faith is a recurring theme, appearing explicitly in approximately one-fourth of the 525 hymns in the 1780 *Collection of Hymns for the Use of the People Called Methodist*.\(^6\) He makes a sharp distinction between a dead faith and living faith. It is the living faith which is the foundation of the Christian life.\(^6\) There are three distinct yet inseparable dimensions to Wesley’s understanding of faith: the notion of a lively, active faith; the concept of justification by faith alone; and the idea that faith manifests itself in works of love.\(^6\) One flows to the next, and all three comprise Wesley’s vision of faith.

---

\(^6\) Tyson *Assist Me to Proclaim*, Chapter 15.
\(^6\) Tyson, “‘I preached at the cross, as usual’: Charles Wesley and Redemption,” in *Charles Wesley: Life, Literature and Legacy*, 210.
\(^6\) Tyson, “‘I preached the cross,’” 212
As important and central the concept of faith is to Wesley’s theology, faith “is but a means to love’s end.” The heart of Wesley’s theological vision can be summarized in three pervasive themes, each related to the love of God in Christ. The first is the sufficiency of God’s grace. The next is our calling to holiness of heart and life. And finally, God’s pure, universal love. Love is clearly the overarching theme that informs all the rest of Wesley’s theology. There are over fifteen hundred references to love in Charles Wesley’s published hymns.

Charles Wesley’s vast corpus of hymns and poems reveal a living, breathing, real and relevant theology. Moving toward an articulation and a realization of contemporary application of Wesleyan theology to twenty-first century worship, it is essential to retain the vitality and relevance of Wesleyan lyrical theology. This requires adapting eighteenth-century hymns to twenty-first century contexts. In the next section, I offer examples of how this might be accomplished.

**Modern Adaptations of Charles Wesley**

Adapting Charles Wesley’s hymns for contemporary congregations and settings is not new. Compilations such as “Prisoners of Hope” by the Charles Wesley Project and “Love Divine: The Songs of Charles Wesley for Today’s Generation” have been around for more than a decade. Contemporary composers such as Dan Damon, Jane Marshall, Mark Miller, Penny Rodriguez,

---

70 Chilcote, *Singing the Faith*, 23.
71 For each of the songs in the following section, a link to a Google drive file for both the lead sheet and the mp3 recording will be provided. For best playback quality and consistency, I recommend downloading the audio file to your device. These recordings are mostly in demo form, with solo voice and limited accompaniment.
72 “Prisoners of Hope,” by The Charles Wesley Project, was produced at Asbury Seminary in 2007; “Love Divine: The Songs of Charles Wesley for Today’s Generation” was produced by Kingsway Worship in 2010. These are but two examples of several re-settings of Charles Wesley hymns.
and Carl Gladstone have written new settings for Wesley texts and rewritten Wesley texts.73
What follows are seven examples of ways that music in the spirit of Charles Wesley can be created. I have arranged two Charles Wesley hymns using the hymn tunes from The United Methodist Hymnal.74 I have rewritten the hymn tunes for two Charles Wesley texts, also from The United Methodist Hymnal. I have written new words and music inspired by two Charles Wesley hymns. And I have written a new refrain incorporating some of the ways Charles Wesley weaves together biblical texts and ideas to convey a contemporary message.

“O For a Thousand Tongues to Sing”75, 76
This hymn, originally titled “For the Anniversary Day of One’s Conversion,” was probably written in May 1739, to mark the one-year anniversary of Charles Wesley’s conversion experience on Pentecost, 1738.77 Charles’ poem has eighteen stanzas. For the 1780 Collection, John Wesley pared it down to nine stanzas. In The United Methodist Hymnal there are seven stanzas used in hymn 57, and seventeen of Charles Wesley’s original eighteen stanzas are used in hymn 58.78 John Wesley’s edit begins the hymn with the original stanza seven, and this edit has endured in subsequent versions, even as the number, order, and selection of subsequent stanzas

---

73 See All Loves Excelling: New Tunes to Familiar Charles Wesley Hymn Texts (Nashville: Abingdon, 2017) for examples of new compositions by Mark Miller and Dan Damon, among others; for Carl Gladstone’s work, see carlthomasgladstone.com
75 https://drive.google.com/file/d/12GbaXON7gx8pK1d4_iVtLSQWTOaTZFF/view?usp=sharing
76 https://drive.google.com/file/d/1P8LIRngVfR9ELOPphumz1DiTjOxgP79/view?usp=sharing (also see Appendix B).
77 Tyson, Charles Wesley: A Reader, 107.
78 The United Methodist Hymnal, 57, 58. The Charles Wesley stanza that is omitted includes the phrase “And wash the Ethiop white,” which is perhaps a melding of Biblical imagery and Aesop’s fables but is impossible to justify in any context and certainly merits exclusion.
change from hymnal to hymnal. Since the 1780 Collection, “O for a thousand tongues” has been the first hymn in almost all Methodist hymnbooks.  

Teresa Berger writes that this hymn “has become the leitmotif of Methodist singing, and one of the most important witnesses to Methodist spirituality.” As such, my approach to this iconic Wesleyan hymn is to leave the well-known (to United Methodist Americans, at least) tune intact and provide a livelier arrangement. I did this by converting the time signature to 5/4, changing the chord progression, and inserting an original refrain in between my stanzas two and three and four and five. I also modulated between stanza three and four. In the spirit of John Wesley, I cut two stanzas from the stanzas of The United Methodist Hymnal number 57; I deleted stanza four because the language “his blood can make the foulest clean” is not language typically used in my worship context, and I believe it would be off putting without significant exegesis. I eliminated stanza six because the language “Hear him, ye deaf, his praise, ye dumb . . . ye blind behold. . . leap, ye lame. . .” can justifiably be construed as insensitive toward people with differing abilities, and casts those differing abilities as infirmities.

“Come, Thou Long Expected Jesus”  

One of the practical struggles that those of us responsible for planning worship music face is the tension between a culture that wants to sing Christmas music from Halloween on and the theological and liturgical necessity of an Advent season of waiting and preparation. The gift of Charles Wesley’s “Come, thou long expected Jesus,” set to Rowland Prichard’s beautiful tune

---

79 Tyson, Charles Wesley: A Reader, 107.  
80 Berger, Theology in Hymns? 74.  
81 https://drive.google.com/file/d/1tq64GSOCqo4ecOuAGFC_C6qCrrBA7_/view?usp=sharing  
82 https://drive.google.com/file/d/1QmF02vfvy-XrRABgBlUxaPQuuTdmvEg/view?usp=sharing (See also Appendix C).
HYFRYDOL, is an Advent hymn of expectation, longing and hope, and a deep reflection on incarnation, that has become an enduring classic.

The hymn comes from Charles Wesley’s *Hymns for the Nativity of Our Lord* (1745, rev. 1777). This volume of eighteen hymns went through numerous revisions and reprints, often fraught with mishap and misfortune.83 “Come, thou long expected Jesus” was number ten in this collection and is one of the least revised of all of Charles Wesley’s hymns. The version we sing today, found in *The United Methodist Hymnal* (No. 196), is virtually the same as Charles Wesley’s original. The only change, made by John and accepted by Charles, was a change from the original “from our fears and sin relieve us” to “from our fears and sins release us.”84

My setting of this hymn slows the tempo to allow for a gospel 3/4 feel. I have changed the chords and written a three-part vocal harmony. One of the most striking things about this hymn is the plea for Jesus to come to us. This is a central theme of Advent, and while it has soteriological and eschatological overtones, it also speaks to us in the immediacy of our lives today. We need to know the incarnate deity now, in today’s world. We need to be set free, delivered, released from our fears and sin. Thus, I inserted a simple phrase, “come to us,” at the beginning, middle and end of each stanza.

“*And Are We Yet Alive*”85, 86

This hymn in *The United Methodist Hymnal* (No. 553) is familiar at least to anyone who attends the denomination’s Annual Conference. Since John Wesley’s later days, this hymn has opened

---

84 Baker, “Metamorphosis,” 382.
85 https://drive.google.com/file/d/1PtTmyL9Nbs8YzdJtqraOvjDPuUwkWHd/view?usp=sharing
86 https://drive.google.com/file/d/17FZr4C10KsaD90Yov5EiRmljcpKAQXl/view?usp=sharing (See also Appendix D).
sessions of Conference on both sides of the Atlantic. The hymn was originally four stanzas of eight lines each. It was originally published in *Hymns and Sacred Poems*, vol. 2 (1749). In the 1780 *Collection*, Charles’ fourth stanza was omitted. In *The United Methodist Hymnal*, the words for the same three stanzas are used, but rather than three stanzas, it is split into six. The tune, DENNIS, by early nineteenth-century Swiss music educator Hans Georg Nägeli, is familiar and best known when paired with John Fawcett’s text, “Blest be the tie that binds” (1782). This combination of tune and text creates a sense of comfort and familiarity. Splitting the stanzas into four lines from the original eight, however, has the effect of diluting some of the power and imagery that Charles Wesley created in the original poem and disrupting his flow of ideas.

I have written a new tune for this text and have rejoined the dissected stanzas. In between each stanza I have written a short refrain, “we are alive, we are alive, we are alive in Jesus’ name! We are alive, we are alive, Jesus’ love, it is our way.” The recorded example is in a pop ballad style. My intention was to write something that could lend itself to a variety of styles. I believe this could just as easily be more up-tempo rock or any number of other styles.

“*Love Divine, All Loves Excelling*”

This hymn, if not the best summation of Wesleyan theology in one hymn, is certainly among the top two or three. Paul Chilcote considers it Charles Wesley’s signature hymn. He writes, “The great hymn writer celebrates the effects of the indwelling Spirit of Love: she relieves trouble,
secures rest, removes the desire to sin, and liberates the hearts of those who put their trust in Christ, the Alpha and Omega.” And while Charles Wesley borrowed the line “lost in wonder, love and praise” from a hymn by Joseph Addison (1672–1719), Charles Wesley infuses that phrase with deep meaning and practical application.

The hymn first appeared in *Hymns for Those that Seek and those That Have Redemption in the Blood of Jesus Christ* (1747). The second stanza sparked some controversy over the doctrine of Christian Perfection, particularly the lines about “find that second rest” “take away our power of sinning.” As noted earlier, although the Wesley brothers were in agreement about the centrality of the doctrine, they differed on when and how Christian perfection could be attained. In 1761, they each published their own hymnals, which included this hymn. Charles omitted the second stanza, while John included it. In the 1780 *Collection*, however, John did omit stanza two. The United Methodist Hymnal (No. 384) includes all four stanzas. The original third line of stanza two, “take away our power of sinning” (italics in the original) has been changed to “take away our bent to sinning.” The best-known hymn tune among United Methodists in the United States for this text is John Zundel’s majestic and triumphant tune BEECHER (1870).

The hymn tune that I have composed for “Love divine, all loves excelling” is not majestic and triumphant, but more reflective. I believe this offers a different perspective on these words, allowing the meaning of the words to sink in. At the end of each stanza, I have added a brief refrain using the words “Lost in wonder, love and praise.”

---

94 “Love divine.”
95 “Love divine.”
This is inspired by Charles Wesley’s epic hymn “Wrestling Jacob,” or “Come, O Thou Traveler Unknown.” *The United Methodist Hymnal* (No. 386) offers four stanzas of this hymn with the hymn tune CANDLER. The original fourteen stanzas appear as poetry on the following page (No. 387). It first appeared in *Hymns and Sacred Poems* (1742) and twelve stanzas (omitting stanzas 5 and 7) appeared in the 1780 *Collection.*98 In Charles Wesley’s obituary in the Minutes to the Methodist Conference in 1788, John Wesley wrote, “His least praise was his talent for poetry; although Dr. [Isaac] Watts did not scruple to say, ‘that single poem *Wrestling Jacob,* is worth all the verses which I have ever written.’”99 Just over two weeks after Charles’ death, while preaching at Bolton, John Wesley attempted to sing the hymn, but broke down at the lines in the first stanza “my company before is gone, and I am left alone with thee.”100

Teresa Berger suggests that “Wrestling Jacob” was never meant to be sung as a hymn, but rather a lyrical poem or ballad.101 As a lyrical poem, it takes the reader on a marvelous journey through the process of repentance, justification and assurance of pardon.102 Typical of Charles Wesley, he uses a biblical text, in this case the Genesis story of Jacob wrestling with God (Gen 32:24–32), applies it to his own struggle with God, conversion experience, and realization of God’s grace through the love of Jesus Christ. This poem is an excellent example of several of the rhetorical literary devices Charles Wesley used in his poetry. He connects the Old

---

96 https://drive.google.com/file/d/1_4XhyHZ2kwD9hFS5F4PJ8YNnW-OiYJ4/view?usp=sharing
97 https://drive.google.com/file/d/1msjKRnNRRcZNNzzoZCpscUFH8bkum2zxo/view?usp=sharing (See also Appendix F).
100 *Collection*, 250.
Testament story of Jacob wrestling with God to his own spiritual struggle. John Tyson describes the ways Charles Wesley so brilliantly used typology to “make the connection between the Old Testament type and the New Testament reality to which it pointed.” In this poem, Wesley begins with a first-person accounting of the encounter with the unknown traveler, the “man” that wrestled with Jacob until dawn in Genesis 32:24. Wesley pivots from that Old Testament identification to identifying the unknown traveler with Jesus in stanza 3 by asking the question, “Art thou the Man that died for me?” At this point in the poem, Wesley employs allegory, as he (and by extension the reader) are the primary actor in the drama, and as he interprets every facet of the Jacob story through the lens of his Christian spiritual struggle and the revelation of God’s love through Jesus Christ. The poem is also an excellent example of how Wesley contemporized a biblical passage to make it applicable to the present condition. This poem is set in the present tense, and the one who wrestles with God is the narrator, what Teresa Berger describes as “the ‘I’ of the poem.”

Since this is considered one of Charles Wesley’s masterpieces, I am including it in my Wesley hymn rewrites. It presents significant challenges when adapting it for use in contemporary worship. We will never sing a fourteen-stanza hymn! The United Methodist Hymnal suggests one approach, which is to eliminate ten of the stanzas. The editorial decision was to suggest stanzas 1, 2, 8 and 9 for singing. Much of the effect of the progression of the lyrical poem is lost, however. Also lost is the impact of Charles Wesley’s repeated lines, first in stanzas 3, 4, 5, and 7 (“till I thy name, thy nature know”) and then in stanzas 9 through 14 (“thy nature and thy name is Love”). This rhetorical technique—epimone or the frequent repetition of a significant phrase—employed by Wesley is echoed in the appellation of a repeated chorus or

---

103 Tyson, Assist Me to Proclaim, Chapter 16.
104 Berger, Theology in Hymns? 95.
refrain in contemporary versions of hymns, a technique I have also used in the previous four examples.

I decided to take a completely different approach and distilled what I perceive to be the essence of Wesley’s hymn down to two stanzas with a refrain. It is admittedly lacking in the depth, nuance, and scriptural allusions of the original. But I try to convey the process of transformation that comes from the encounter with the love of Jesus. The refrain is a paraphrase of Wesley’s one-line refrain in stanzas 9 through 14 of the original.

I thought I felt you near,
but my vision wasn’t clear,
I couldn’t tell that you had hold of me.
I tried to cling so tight,
and I wrestled through the night,
Then with the dawn my weary eyes could see. . .

Who you are,
and what you are,
and how you are is love.
Love, oh, oh,
Who and what and how you are is love.

Once I let go I see
it’s you have hold of me,
and now I know your love can never end.
You’ve been here all along,
Your voice in every song,
My weakness and my doubt your love transcend. . .

Who you are,
and what you are,
and how you are is love.
Love, oh, oh,
Who and what and how you are is love.

This could be used as a stand-alone worship song. It could also be used effectively as a response to a reading of Genesis 32:24–32. Another idea would be to read the entire text of Wesley’s “Wrestling Jacob,” and sing the song as a response.
“At This Table”\textsuperscript{105, 106}

For John and Charles Wesley, the sacrament of holy communion was one of the essential means of grace.\textsuperscript{107} Both brothers believed that the sacrament should be received frequently, at least weekly, preferably even more often.\textsuperscript{108} The prominent place given to hymn singing in the Wesleyan movement dovetailed with their emphasis on frequent communion to create a need for more hymns that could be used during the Lord’s Supper.\textsuperscript{109} This resulted in the 1745 publication \textit{Hymns on the Lord’s Supper} which, at 166 hymns, is probably the largest single collection of hymns devoted to the eucharist in Christian history.\textsuperscript{110} Very few of these are widely used in United Methodist worship today. “Why did my dying Lord ordain” (No. 54 in the Wesleys’ collection) includes an articulation of the central importance of the means of grace and a beautiful explication of why communion stands above the others. Here are stanzas 4 and 5 of this hymn:

\begin{quote}
The prayer, the fast, the word conveys,  
When mixed with faith, thy life to me,  
In all the channels of thy grace,  
I still have fellowship with thee,  
But chiefly here my soul is fed  
With fullness of immortal bread.
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{105} \url{https://drive.google.com/file/d/1tKE1SXpfuW4mcPkZcGlxRdpUeQlQE1SB/view?usp=sharing} \textsuperscript{106} \url{https://drive.google.com/file/d/1VtIa-7SNAG_CgVjs8kfzCXkWcHFs_Szz/view?usp=sharing} (See also Appendix G).
\textsuperscript{107} See Chapter 2 for a more complete discussion of the means of grace.
\textsuperscript{110} “Hymns on the Lord’s Supper (1745),” editorial introduction
Communion closer far I feel,
   And deeper drink the atoning blood,
The joy is more unspeakable,
   And yields me larger draughts of God,
'Till nature faints beneath the power,
   And faith filled up can hold no more.¹¹¹

As beautiful as these stanzas are, the language is somewhat cumbersome and likely will not resonate with contemporary worshipers. My goal in writing “At This Table” is to convey the same sense of the sacred mystery of communion and its place among the means of grace in contemporary language and in the form of a praise song.

We’ve been given many gifts,
Many ways to know your grace.
In your word, and ours to you,
When we sit in sacred space.
And we thank you for the ways
That help us know you best.
And of all the sacred pathways
One rises over all the rest:

At this table, joy unspeakable,
Love so complete, inconceivable,
Endless grace, now receivable,
All found here

In this bread, broken lives made whole,
In this cup, love finds every soul,
Full communion is accomplished goal
At this table
All found here
At this table

---

The song “Plowshares” was written for the Los Altos United Methodist Church Advent 2021 worship series, “Swords Into Plowshares.” Each week of the series focused on one of the four songs (canticles) in the first two chapters of Luke. The song was sung each week of Advent. My intention in writing this was to follow the inspiration of Charles Wesley in weaving together disparate biblical passages and applying them to the season of expectation and anticipation.

So turn us into plowshares
to feed your hungry earth.
The promise of the harvest feast
is born in Jesus’ birth.

So we sing your songs with you,
And we join in your dance.
In you we are made new,
Christmas is our second chance.

The first line, “turn us into plowshares,” echoes Isaiah 2:4. The second and third lines echo Isaiah 9:3. In the song, we become the swords, and we are turned into instruments of God’s peace, responsible for each other and for bringing the harvest. In truly Wesleyan fashion, this promise is fulfilled in Jesus’ birth. The second stanza incorporates the theme of the canticles of Luke that our worship will be focusing on.

This song was incorporated into Advent worship as part of an opening of worship that was the same each week. It began with a prerecorded opening which led directly into singing “Plowshares” live.  

---

112 https://drive.google.com/file/d/1u4UHNJlac9vWx3YaoPzTl2zk67GAMQAU/view?usp=sharing
113 https://drive.google.com/file/d/1y0-DjhCzByFte0Y8LmGX2xI7iDOFUV/view?usp=sharing (See also Appendix H).
114 https://drive.google.com/file/d/1OjEDqfUDJMA5vZCACOEZnmldNq8RSz3/view?usp=sharing
The Wesleyan movement is built on a theology of grace and love. That theology is carried, transmitted, refined, and expanded on with the music of congregational song. The threads of theology, history, worship and music can be woven together to create new and vital worship for the church of today and tomorrow.
CHAPTER 6: THE WORSHIP TAPESTRY

Weaving the threads

I have used tapestry as a metaphor for the worship that can be created from the threads of Wesleyan and Methodist theology, history, worship resources and practice, and music. In this chapter, the tapestry emerges.

Metaphors are useful in pointing us toward a concept or entity that is difficult to grasp in concrete terms. Judith Kubicki writes that “[M]etaphor has an integral role in liturgical language since, as religious language, it is concerned with expressing or exploring our relationship with mystery. . .[T]he elements of mystery (e.g., God, forgiveness, love, death, the hereafter, etc.) that liturgical language addresses require an expansiveness and confounding of meaning that is beyond the scope of the literal and the precise”¹ Metaphors are not the thing itself, and the danger in using or overusing one metaphor is that it can become synonymous with the larger concept or entity, and ultimately be taken literally. This is what has happened with the overuse of exclusively masculine metaphors for God. They lose their power and become what Kubicki calls “dead” metaphors.²

In considering tapestry as a metaphor for the United Methodist worship I am envisioning, I am especially drawn to the image of the various threads that have been explored in this thesis being woven together to create something that is beautiful, effective, and tells a story of who we are. These threads begin with the Wesleys and early Methodism but are joined by threads of Wesleyan scholars and theologians, Methodist traditions and practices, and an increasingly

---

² Kubicki, 66.
diverse body of worship leaders who have added their threads along the way. A particularly apt feature of tapestries is that they are woven in a specific way to create the beautiful and often intricate image on the front, while the back is a jumbled and incoherent mess of knots and loose threads. Viewed from the back, a tapestry does not make much sense, and one can easily focus on following one thread or another, or to dismiss it as worthless. Viewed from the front, a good tapestry is beautiful and transcendent. What follows is an attempt to weave together the threads of Methodist and Wesleyan theology, history, worship practices and music to create a tapestry that reflects both who we are and who we aspire to be as the body of Christ, gathered in community for worship. These threads can be woven in a wide variety of ways to produce much different tapestries than the one I present here. One of the beautiful things about our heritage and tradition and about the artists who continue to create in that heritage and tradition is that it can be interpreted and embodied in widely divergent, yet still faithful, ways. This is simply one rendition.

There are limitations to the tapestry metaphor, of course. Once a tapestry is created it usually hangs on a wall, sometimes for hundreds of years, only taken down for periodic cleaning. At best tapestries are depictions of dynamic events or symbols. They are not dynamic in and of themselves. Each time we worship we are contributing to an existing tapestry or creating a new one. Though this metaphor is useful as a framework, other metaphors may describe the ongoing creation process equally well or better. Lester Ruth and Lim Swee Hong use the metaphor of rivers to describe the histories of contemporary worship and praise and worship. C. Michael Hawn uses the metaphor “streams of song” to describe diverse movements in Christian

---

hymnody. These metaphors have the advantage of fluidity and the possibility of confluence. Since metaphors are by their very nature ambiguous, and because we are using metaphor to speak about a beautiful and profound mystery, it is good to hold several metaphors in our imagination as we craft and create worship.

**Identifying Values and Priorities**

Worship theologian and author Sally Morgenthaler said in an interview with *Christianity Today* that, “At its foundation, worship is real people meeting a real God, not a patty-cake rehearsal. Where are the psalms of lament, of confession? Is it more than ‘nice’? I have experienced God’s presence through what seemed like hell, like darkness that was outside of God’s reach. But like the psalmist in Psalm 139, I’ve learned God is there. Always. Life happens, and come what may, God is in the midst of it.” Morgenthaler is suggesting here that worship is something more than a formulaic feel-good experience. Real people meeting a real God means real experiences and real stories of real life.

There are some overarching values and priorities that I have identified as central to creating worship with the threads of Wesleyan and Methodist theology. While the Wesleyan movement did not start out as a worship movement—in fact the Wesleys intended for worship to take place primarily in the well-established Anglican churches of the day—the movement was fueled and inspired by innovative worship expressions accompanied by original hymn texts set to a variety of hymn tunes. There are many facets to the Methodist movement, and certainly many

---

5 Kubicki, *The Song of the Singing Assembly*, 64–67
areas within the church today, that need revival and renewal. The values and priorities identified here are applicable to other aspects of United Methodist life, such as stewardship and discipleship—including class meetings, Sunday School, membership, and evangelism. This study is limited to ways that worship can be reinvigorated and revitalized by weaving in the threads of our Wesleyan traditions.

Later in this chapter I will apply these values and priorities to a specific worship service in a contemporary praise and worship style. While style and genre are nuanced concepts that raise specific challenges and opportunities, these values and priorities transcend style and genre. They apply to all worship.

Grace

As discussed in Chapter 2, the concept of grace is an overarching theme in Wesleyan theology. In our worship, we have the opportunity to embody at least five of the “ordinances of God” that Wesley identified as “means of grace:” worship, preaching the word, reading scripture, prayer, and holy communion. Worship should also help point people toward daily practice of all the means of grace. This is a core principle. The progression of grace in our lives—prevenient, justifying, sanctifying—is an essential part of the Wesleyan understanding of grace. United Methodist elder, theologian, and wordsmith John Thornburg suggests that the journey of prevenient–justifying–sanctifying grace is echoed today in the journey of hospitality–solidarity–mutuality. Prevenient grace is expressed in worship by remembering that in “the same way God loves us before we have an awareness of that love, so it’s essential to treat those who come our way...as people who are already loved by God.” Thornburg suggests that justifying grace might best be embodied in worship through our intercessions. Bold intercession is much more
than a hospital report. It is seeing beyond our human limitations of retributive justice, and glimpsing God’s vision for us all. The task is to create beautifully crafted intercessions that effectively ask God to help us see all of God’s creation as God does. Thornburg says, “If we see people the way God sees them, then we know what they have endured, how they’ve suffered, what they’re afraid of, and so we’re better able to stand in solidarity.” At the heart of sanctifying grace is the question “How can I be more like Jesus today than I was yesterday?” Thornburg suggests that “the way to embed sanctifying grace in worship is to have people report how God is working within them.” This can be a challenge, he says, particularly in congregations “made up mostly of privileged white folks.” Thornburg points out that in church “we often ask How much? and How many? . . . but we rarely ask How far? How far have we come on the journey of faith? What has God been doing? How are we attempting to be more watchful for God? That is the essence of sanctification.”

Inclusion

The Wesleys’ focus on grace and the all-encompassing love of God calls us as Christians to live lives that exude that love and grace. This begins by ensuring that everyone is included, an essential tenet of worship. God’s table is the table where all are included, and God’s house is a sanctuary where all are welcome. In his “Progressive Wesleyan Declaration,” Paul Chilcote declares, “We embrace the holistic and all-inclusive vision of God’s restoration of beloved community.” Worship must be a manifestation of that beloved community.

---

7 John Thornburg, email correspondence, January 20, 2021.
The worship experience manifests inclusion in several ways. The first area of inclusion is the worship space: Does everyone feel welcome in the space? Is the space accessible to all? Do we actively seek out the ones who may seem isolated and alone? Does our welcome begin even before people walk through the door? Are greeters present who are trained in hospitality and openness? The second way we practice inclusion is in the worship leadership: Are persons of different genders, sexual orientations, ethnicities, and races, as well as people from different economic and educational backgrounds regularly included in worship leadership?

Inclusion must also be demonstrated in the language we use. This begins with the metaphors we use for God. Judith Kubicki writes that we “constantly need to search for new ways to open the assembly’s imagination to Divine Mystery.”9 Because the masculine image of God is so pervasive, this means eliminating, or at least mostly eliminating, male references to the Divine. This can be awkward, and at times controversial, but the only way to break free from the dead metaphor and the limited imagination it engenders is to pause from using it. One option is to alternate gender pronouns, i.e., if one refrain refers to God as “he” the next one substitutes “she,” and the next one “they.” As we move toward that beloved community and a vision of the radical inclusivity of God, we also need to move beyond gender specific pronouns. This is a challenge for many, particularly older generations. Our trans and non-binary siblings can help us expand our vision of God. Referring to God as “they” broadens our understanding of Trinity—a theological framework so essential to Wesleyan theology!

Using inclusive and expansive language for God is a process and should be approached with pastoral sensitivity rather than a crusade. It begins with worship leadership, with lyric editing ahead of time, with careful crafting of written liturgies and prayers, and with practiced

9 Kubicki, The Song of the Singing Assembly, 68.
inclusion in the words of worship leaders. But it also must include grace when others forget, or simply do not embrace the commitment to using inclusive language.

One of the most remarkable ways the Wesleys modeled inclusion was by bringing the movement to the people and reaching out to people who did not feel included by the established Church. This is a critical thread to weave into this vision for worship. Connecting and creating community—not just with those who choose to come through our doors, but those who, for whatever reason, are not present in our worship space on Sundays—is vital to this vision.

It is also essential to acknowledge the hurt and damage that exclusion, particularly exclusion in the name of religion, has caused to God’s family. Exclusive attitudes and behaviors include racism, sexism, heterosexism, cisgenderism, ableism, ageism, classism—anything that separates us and preferences one group of people over others. We must be explicit in our welcoming and including, and in our confessing and making amends when we fall short. While the Wesleys couldn’t have imagined all the issues of inclusion and discrimination that face us today, their inclusion of people from all classes of society, their commitment to serving the poor and imprisoned, their forceful condemnation of slavery, and their inclusion of women in the movement all speak to a spirit of inclusion and support a progressive movement today toward full inclusion of everyone.

These values and priorities, and the underlying principles and understandings of worship, manifest themselves differently in the various elements of worship. The patterns and movement of Spirit-full worship reflect our values and priorities regardless of format, style, and musical genres.
The Worship We Choose

Every decision we make regarding worship—from the amount and style of music and the choice of leadership to the ways we pray and the content of the sermon—reflect and shape the theology of the congregation. This includes the intentionality, or lack of it, that goes into worship planning, and which parts of the service receive the most attention in the planning. I will go into more detail about this in the “Creekside Crossings” section. Some general considerations are worth exploring briefly.

As discussed in Chapter 4, United Methodist worship resources provide a “Basic Pattern of Worship” and “An Order of Sunday Worship Using the Basic Pattern.” These worship resources also affirm the “freedom and diversity” of United Methodist expressions of worship while also affirming “a heritage of order and the importance of the specific guidance and modeling that an order of worship provides.”\(^{10}\) This offers both broad latitude and a solid and reliable structure, both of which have benefits and inherent dangers associated with them. For those who are more drawn to the “freedom and diversity,” the danger can be an “anything goes” ethos, which can devolve into poorly planned and chaotically executed worship services. For those drawn to the “heritage of order,” the danger can be rote adherence to the prescribed order of worship with little attention or creativity. Ironically, this also can devolve into poorly planned worship services.

It can be seductively easy, especially in the life of a busy pastor, for worship to slip into a process of little more than filling in the slots of a predetermined order. Careful consideration of each component of worship—thoughtful selection of music, whether sung by the congregation, by a worship ensemble, or experienced instrumentally; incorporation of the means of grace, and

the progression of grace; the form and content of prayer; how scripture is incorporated and used; the form, content, and general length of the message or sermon; how worship fosters (or impedes) fellowship and community—are essential to the process of creating meaningful, relevant worship that is a faithful weaving of the threads of our Wesleyan tradition. I will consider each of these elements with particular attention to how they will be woven into the specific worship context that will hold this expression of worship in a Wesleyan/Methodist tradition.

Creekside Crossings

Creekside Crossings is the contemporary praise and worship service at the Los Altos United Methodist Church in Los Altos, California. It began in February 2001 and has been one of the Sunday services at Los Altos ever since. The service is at 5:00 Sunday afternoons. Before describing how this service will serve as a vehicle for the worship I am envisioning, it is helpful to know some of the history of the service and my personal involvement with it.

Inspiration and History

In 1998, I was asked to lead music and worship at the 6th International Christian Youth Conference on Evangelism (ICYCE) in Saint Simon’s, Georgia. This was a gathering of youth and young adults from more than forty different countries, sponsored by World Methodist Evangelism (WME). The World Director of WME, Dr. H. Eddie Fox, asked me to bring a group of musicians and “lead some praise music.” Up to this point, my experience with music in church

---

This is the term suggested by Lester Ruth and Lim Swee Hong in A History of Contemporary Praise & Worship. It combines the “rivers” of Praise & Worship and Contemporary Worship.
was primarily hymns out of *The United Methodist Hymnal* combined with contemporary music, much of it original, that our youth choir performed. While the feeling in worship was informal and included contemporary music, I was not at all familiar with the praise and worship movement or its music. In preparation for the ICYCE event, I went to a Christian bookstore and bought the *Maranatha! Praise* music books, volumes one through four. Some of this music was familiar, and I chose dozens of songs from these books for the conference.

One of the deep joys of leading music at ICYCE is the opportunity to work with musicians from many different cultures and traditions. Attendees at the conference are invited to bring musical instruments, and we have an international ensemble helping lead the music and the worship. They would share music from their traditions, and we would add that to the mix. A group from Australia asked if they could teach a song from their country, and of course I said, yes. The song was “Shout to the Lord” (1993) by then Hillsong worship leader, Darlene Zschech. The response was stunning. While everyone sang well to the music I had selected and was leading, they collectively rose to an entirely different level singing this song. Most knew the song well. They lifted their hands and closed their eyes. They sang with power and emotion. The Spirit filled the place, and it was a deeply worshipful experience. We sang that song many, many times during the week of the conference.

That experience had a profound effect on me. I had grown up in progressive, mainstream, Methodist and United Methodist churches, where the emphasis was on powerful preaching and excellent music. We followed the Order of Sunday Worship Using the Basic Pattern reasonably closely. The worship was very good most of the time but was more intellectual than emotional. Singing “Shout to the Lord” with hundreds of young people from more than forty countries was unlike anything I had ever known.
When we returned from ICYCE in Georgia, one of our associate pastors (who was the guitar player on the Georgia trip) and I decided to begin planning for a contemporary service at Los Altos United Methodist Church. He and I traveled to a Worship and Arts Conference at Willow Creek Community Church in South Barrington, Illinois. Using resources from that conference we fashioned a template for our contemporary service.

We decided to hold the service in our social hall, called Creekside Center, and so we called the service Creekside Crossings. We installed a sound system, projectors, and screens, I recruited a band, called the Creekside Worship Band, and we launched the service on February 4, 2001. We used a modified version of the worship pattern we had learned at Willow: two up-tempo songs; one slower song to lead into prayer; community prayer; a song that was particularly relevant to the theme and message; the message; a closing song, also usually up-tempo. We selected music from a variety of Contemporary Christian Worship (CCW) and Contemporary Christian Music (CCM) sources, drawing especially from Hillsong, Chris Tomlin, David Crowder, and Matt Redman.

I was aware of the theological tension between much of this music and the more progressive and inclusive theology of our church. For the most part I chose not to modify lyrics in the songs, instead opting to present a more expansive and welcoming image of God through spoken song introductions, the prayer time, and the messages. I called it “praise and worship for the rest of us.”

For much of the time Creekside Crossings has existed the service has been followed by a community dinner. This was an integral part of the service for many years, and the time of

---

12 The Willow “seeker service” was front loaded with a lot of music, as well as some sort of skit, followed by a message (called “teaching”) that was somewhat short and geared toward unchurched people. Their midweek service, which was intended for more committed members, had less music to begin, which was followed by a long “teaching.”
fellowship after the service really was an extension of the service. We stopped the dinners for a while when it became impossible to find volunteers to help with dinner, then resurrected the dinners when we hired a full time Food Service Manager, then stopped again when the costs were too prohibitive. The service has lost some of its vitality and community connection with the loss of these dinners.

The impetus to launch this service was the personal experience I had leading similar worship at ICYCE in Georgia. But the concept of adding a contemporary worship service at Los Altos United Methodist Church had been brewing for several years. It finally came to fruition in February 2001.

Practicum Committee Work

As part of the preparation for this thesis and moving into a new iteration of Creekside Crossings, I convened a practicum committee to discuss all aspects of this worship service. The committee consisted of two members of the Creekside Worship Band, two regular Crossings attendees, the co-chair of our Passionate Worship Committee, who is a gifted musician and frequent attender at Crossings, and our Senior Pastor. As a group, we read Five Means of Grace by United Methodist professor, author, and theologian Elaine Heath, and discussed ways we might better integrate the means of grace into worship. We also discussed United Methodist liturgical scholar James F. White’s “A Protestant Worship Manifesto.”

---

13 For many years, Los Altos United Methodist Church modeled its governance structure around Bishop Robert Schnase’s Five Practices of Fruitful Congregations (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2007). “Passionate Worship” is one of those five practices.


The primary issues discussed in the practicum committee revolved around hospitality, relevance, and congregational participation. Hospitality, a key value of the Crossings community, was cited by almost every member of the committee as being of primary significance. It is both a characteristic of this service that has drawn people to it and that members of the committee emphasized as central to the identity of the service, and something that there is a strong desire to improve and strengthen. Beginning in Advent 2019, we changed the setup of the room to be small clusters of chairs around tables, with Keurig coffee machines and light snacks available before, during, and after the service.16

Our discussions of relevance had to do with how and if scripture is used and a concern for not becoming too “churchy” in our language. In reading James White’s manifesto, we had good discussion, particularly around the place of scripture, use (or not) of the lectionary, and a balance between music that is best for reflection and inspiration, and music that is participatory and easily accessible for congregational involvement.

In addition to the discussions of hospitality and relevance, the practicum committee offered many useful and significant suggestions for ways Crossings could be more inclusive, hospitable, accessible, and relevant. These included taking care not to make “insider assumptions,” creating worship experiences that are more interactive, offering resources for more in-depth bible study and faith exploration, and providing concrete and meaningful service opportunities.

Creekside Crossings will be the tapestry woven from the threads of Wesleyan theology and Methodist history and worship practices, with music drawn from a variety of sources. Those

---

16 The change in set up and the addition of Keurig machines and light snacks was intended as a first step toward a broader realization of a culture of hospitality in this service. Soon after instituting these preliminary changes, in person worship was suspended for two years due to Covid-19.
threads include the practical discussion and constructive suggestions offered by the practicum committee.

*The Crossings Tapestry*

Applying the insights and lessons learned from studying the trajectory of Wesleyan/Methodist theology, history, and worship practice to the already existing worship service known as Creekside Crossings is a process that involves concrete practices to be implemented, and far more nuanced infusions of practical theology that are directly connected to those threads of theology, history, and worship practice. For the most part, the components of the service will remain the same. There will be music, prayer, scripture, a message that is both relevant and biblical, and regular communion. Some components, such as enacting specific means of grace, offering explicit ways to enact the faith that is fostered in worship with acts of mercy, service, and justice in the world, and more fully developed times of fellowship and community will be added in.

The service will be renamed and rebranded. The name of the service will change from “Creekside Crossings” to simply “Crossings.” The reasons for this are to take out the localized, and somewhat insider, connotations of the word Creekside, which is connected to the specific place of Creekside Center at the Los Altos United Methodist Church. A tagline will be added to the name Crossings: “where faith and life intersect.” Preaching in open air markets and fields, opening meeting houses, establishing class meetings, and bringing the movement and its worship to the people was a primary strategy of the Wesleyan movement. At Crossings, our overarching

---

17 For an example of a recent Crossings service, incorporating some of the changes articulated in this chapter, see [https://drive.google.com/file/d/1t_qZ48pBJ67UrCZcVnAHLpAm6Y8A2sgl/view?usp=sharing](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1t_qZ48pBJ67UrCZcVnAHLpAm6Y8A2sgl/view?usp=sharing) The service includes two of the original Wesley settings discussed in Chapter Five: “Love Divine, All Loves Excelling” starts at 30:36, and “At This Table” starts at 51:07.
theme will be that this service, at 5:00 on a Sunday night, is the last stop for people before they move into their week, whether that is at home, school, or work. The service will include a focus on practical Christianity, the ways faith is lived out in the world.

The practicum group will transition into being the Worship Design Team for Crossings. This group will meet quarterly for planning and evaluating, focusing specifically on the components discussed below and their efficacy, impact, and relevance.

Music

As discussed in Chapter 5, music is essential to worship. Paul Westermeyer’s concern that “[m]usic in modern times tends to be regarded as extrinsic to life—an extra, a commodity, a sophisticated endeavor to which only a few initiates are privy” is a valid concern from a consumerist point of view and is an important reminder that the music of worship is not a commodity. Music also must be considered as intrinsic, present in virtually every facet of modern life. The very fact that it has become so ubiquitous is testimony to its universality and appeal. Music pervades every part of life and deserves critical attention regarding its uses in worship. The process for selecting worship music must be intentional about which music lends itself well to congregational singing and which music is better suited for meditation or reflection. Rather than projecting the words for every song and assuming the congregation will sing, a more careful discernment of how the music is used will increase the connection and effectiveness of all the music.

We will continue to draw from the deep well of CWM and CCM. There is a wealth of good praise and worship music that does not include harmful (or that can be modified to not

---

include harmful theology) and other theological perspectives antithetical to United Methodist tenets such as exclusive Calvinist theology. There is a caution here, however. There has been considerable discussion among my colleagues in worship leadership about whether and when to stop using music by composers or groups who are known for exploitative or abusive behavior. I don’t have a clear answer to this. It is important to be aware when music by a certain artist or organization could be triggering. This then becomes a pastoral issue. For example, one of the songs in the Crossings repertoire is “No Longer Slaves” (2015) by Bethel Music. The message of this song, “I am no longer a slave to fear, I am a child of God,” resonates deeply with many in our congregation, and certainly is in alignment with a Wesleyan view of grace and redemption. The church that generates Bethel Music, Bethel Church in Redding, California, is well known for a strongly anti-LGBTQIA+ stance, advocating conversion therapy and lobbying for laws restricting or eliminating the rights of LGBTQIA+ persons, as well as making national headlines for proclaiming that the tragic death of the daughter of one of their worship leaders could be reversed through directed prayer.\(^{19}\) A theological argument could be made that such positions, and such discriminatory advocacy is continuing to live as a slave to fear. My approach in worship is to surround that song with words of affirmation that everyone is a child of God, and God doesn’t want any of us to be beholden to fear. It will be necessary to take a similar approach with music from Hillsong considering multiple high-profile resignations of church leaders and an explosive documentary series detailing abuses of the worldwide church.\(^{20}\) In other cases, such as

---

\(^{19}\) [https://www.bethel.com/]: for more on Bethel’s anti-LGBTQIA+ stance and lobbying, see [https://anewscafe.com/2018/04/03/redding/the-truth-behind-bethels-gay-panic/]: for more on Bethel’s controversial attempt to resurrect a dead toddler, see [https://www.washingtonpost.com/religion/2019/12/19/after-toddlers-death-church-has-tried-days-resurrect-her-with-prayer/]

whether or not to sing the songs of Catholic composer David Haas following multiple allegations of abusive sexual conduct, my choice for now is not to use his songs.\(^{21}\) There is further conversation to be had around this, and it is especially important to listen to those who might be triggered by these music choices.

In choosing music from CCM and CWM sources, lyrics will be modified to use more inclusive and expansive language for God, and to filter theology that is contrary to the theology of grace, love, and welcome that we want to convey. Alternative sources, such as The Convergence Music Project and Plural Guild will be regularly used.\(^{22}\) I will continue arranging and recasting Wesley (and other traditional) hymns in ways that are more suited to the Crossings ethos, as well as use the sources for “retuning” traditional hymns listed in Chapter 5.

I consider several factors in arranging and recasting Wesley hymns. In the case of hymns that I have changed the feel or the time signature, such as “O for a thousand tongues to sing” and “Come, thou long-expected Jesus,” I am trying to find a fresh expression for hymn tunes that may feel tired, stale, or just old to the people who gather for worship at our evening service. Casting “O for a thousand tongues” in 5/4 offers a jazzy, upbeat feel. It also focuses the singer’s attention more on the words as it is necessary to pay attention to how they fall in this different rhythm. Casting “Come, thou long-expected Jesus” in a more reflective, slower way, with rich harmonies, also calls attention to the words. Adding the simple refrain “come to us” turns it into more of a petition and allows for deeper reflection. The new hymn tunes for “Love divine, all


\(^{22}\) Convergence Music Project can be found at [https://convergencemp.com/](https://convergencemp.com/); Plural Guild can be found at [https://www.pluralguild.com](https://www.pluralguild.com).
loves excelling” and “Are we yet alive?” are both intended to change the feel and impact of the hymn.

At Crossings the music is led by a worship band consisting of drums, bass, one or two guitars, keyboard, and two to four singers (in addition to the instrumentalists who also sing). It is amplified and run through a multi-channel mixing board. Brian Wren and Paul Westermeyer, among others, suggest that microphones, amplification, and soloist or small-ensemble led music is a detriment to congregational song and singing. It is important to take these concerns seriously. It is also true that resisting these accoutrements of twenty-first century contemporary worship is futile and a waste of energy. Technology, including screens, computers, and sound systems, are embedded parts of modern culture. A better approach is to intentionally foster times for congregational singing, as well as more explicitly indicating other worship functions of music not intended for singing.

An important component of how music is selected for this service and how it is used is the cultural consideration. Monique Ingalls writes that “[m]usical style can communicate specific cultural values to a given audience and is often a basis for social inclusion or exclusion.” Choosing music from diverse sources helps ameliorate this danger. However, Latinx pastor, justice advocate, and author Sandra Maria Van Opstal writes that “[l]eading worship in relevant, dynamic ways for the future of a diverse church depends on our ability to share leadership . . . This approach is distinctive in that it is not primarily about collecting songs and components from different traditions.” This must be more than tokenism, and certainly more than

appropriation. It is creating diverse worship teams and sharing leadership with a broad spectrum of people. This is a particular challenge for strongly homogeneous congregations like the one served by the Crossings service. But the essential value of inclusiveness cannot be fully achieved until this is accomplished. It will take work, and advanced planning, and intentionality.

Music is the key to this service as well as how we live out the values and priorities of Wesleyan theology, history, and worship practice gleaned from this study of the threads. The Wesleys clearly considered music a priority as well. The time and attention given to compiling, editing, printing, distributing, and reprinting the multiple hymnals they published bears witness to this. Unless our music reflects our values, shapes our theology, and influences our ethical choices, nothing else will matter.

Scripture

The choice and use of scripture in the worship experiences of Crossings was the subject of considerable discussion among the participants of the practicum group. We have not followed the lectionary in our worship planning for many years but instead have developed four-to six-week worship themes, each week’s worship framed around some aspect of that theme. The Design Team or pastor chooses a scripture passage for each week as the worship themes are fleshed out. This has worked well and resonates with our congregation. The weekly pericope is shorter than traditional lectionary readings.

The Wesleys stressed the primacy of scripture. Searching the scripture is one of the means of grace. Both Wesley brothers were immersed in scripture and were strong proponents of daily Bible study. Charles Wesley showed a deep scriptural fluency in his hymn texts. But the goal isn’t necessarily quantity, but quality. Elaine Heath notes, “The goal in searching the
Scriptures is to increasingly bear the love and grace of God to our neighbors because God’s word has become alive in us.”

In worship, scripture will be chosen that is relevant to the week’s message, and that points toward deeper engagement. For this process to be more than scriptural proof-texting, we will offer an online and printed resource each week that will include daily scripture suggestions, questions for reflection, with particular attention paid to the ways the scripture of the day applies both to the theme and to daily living. The practice of daily scripture reading as well as practical application of the biblical principles will be regularly encouraged and modeled by worship leadership.

Prayer

Our prayer time at Crossings consists of the sharing of community prayers, followed by a pastoral prayer. This is a very important time in the service for those who attend in person and for the online community. We will develop ways of integrating the online community in our prayers in a more interactive way. Possibilities include sharing prayer requests onscreen in real time or having the prayer leader reading the prayers in the chatroom out loud during the prayer time.

John Thornburg’s suggestion, cited earlier, that the Wesleyan concept of justifying grace is well lived out in bold intercessory prayer that helps us see all of God’s creation as God does, will be a guide to how we approach prayer time at this service. Once a quarter, we will have prayer workshops with all the Crossings prayer leaders and work on crafting such prayers. The

---

goal here is not to write specific prayers ahead of time, but to help build a vocabulary of prayer that is an expression of God’s justifying grace.

The Sacrament of Holy Communion

In his sermon, “The Duty of Constant Communion,” John Wesley proclaims:

This is the food of our souls: this gives strength to perform our duty, and leads us on to perfection. If therefore we have any regard for the plain command of Christ, if we desire the pardon of our sins, if we wish for strength to believe, to love and obey God, then we should neglect no opportunity of receiving the Lord’s Supper. Then we must never turn our backs on the feast which our Lord has prepared for us.27

As discussed in the previous chapter, the Wesley brothers published Hymns on the Lord’s Supper in 1745, consisting of 166 eucharistic hymns almost entirely written by Charles, clearly demonstrating the centrality of the sacrament to the Wesleyan Methodist movement.28 Another collection, Redemption Hymns (1747) includes a twenty-four-stanza poem entitled “The Great Supper.” In this poem, the Lord’s table functions “as a paradigm of welcome, inclusion, and winsome love. God extends the invitation to all to join together at the table and desires that none be left behind.”29

The Wesleys are addressing something more than the frequency of the sacrament, although the emphasis on Christians receiving communion “as often as [they] can” cannot be dismissed.30 The essential function of communion for “the strengthening and refreshing of our souls” is of profound theological and liturgical significance.31 Too often communion is tacked on

---

30 John Wesley, “The Duty of Constant Communion.”
31 John Wesley, “The Duty of Constant Communion.”
to the end of a worship service with little thought or attention, and the words of the Great Thanksgiving are rushed through and spoken with little intention or understanding. Thankfully, that is not the situation at Los Altos United Methodist Church, where a variety of Great Thanksgiving rites are used, and the time allotted for the sacrament is not rushed. But to weave this essential thread of Wesleyan theology and teaching into Crossings, additional attention, planning, and intentionality needs to be exercised.

Historian, theologian, and author Diana Butler Bass writes, “The Jesus supper overcomes social divides, heals brokenness with reconciliation, and treats everyone at the table with dignity.”32 She juxtaposes the feast that the father prepares for his son in the parable of the prodigal son with the Last Supper meal, the event that institutes the communion we celebrate today. She suggests that both the parable and Holy Thursday offer a contrast between the ‘‘last supper’’ of the world of death where the tables are “set by ‘Caesar,’” and the ‘‘first feast’’ of God’s desire for humanity, a table set with true forgiveness and equality, in a world of genuine love, a table where everyone is seated and sated.33 This suggests a dramatic shift in our theology and praxis of communion—a shift from somber remembrance accompanied by rote recitation of static words to a celebration, a feast that reflects a vision of God’s creation seated together at the heavenly banquet.

To accomplish this as a regular and sustainable act of worship, Holy Communion cannot be rushed or tacked on, and must be an integral and focused part of worship. The service will incorporate a variety of Great Thanksgiving rites drawn from a variety of progressive and

---

33 Diana Butler Bass, “Sunday Musings.”
contemporary sources. In addition, the church will sponsor an annual writing workshop where participants will be encouraged to create new prayers, Great Thanksgivings, and other worship resources.

Communion is an act of hospitality, celebrating and offering God’s abundant grace through the feast we share. Everyone is always welcome at the table, and this will be explicitly emphasized in worship. Communion elements will be placed on each of the tables in the Crossings worship space and, following the Great Thanksgiving, congregants will be invited to serve each other the sacrament. After the service, a simple meal will be served, extending the table and the act of communion into a shared meal and meaningful fellowship.

There is, of course, a practical side to establishing a sustainable pattern of communion followed by a community meal. The financial and human resources currently available for this service are such that this model of communion and a subsequent fellowship meal are feasible once a month. This aligns with the long-standing practice of the church that the first Sunday of each month is communion Sunday. John Wesley is clear that the responsibility for “constant communion” does not belong to the church. He asks, “What if the Church had not enjoined it at all? Is it not enough that God enjoins it?” Instilling our practice of the sacrament of Holy Communion with a Wesleyan ethos does not require a certain frequency as much as it requires theological reflection and attention to connecting the observance of communion within the community of the church to living the practice in daily life in the larger community. Elaine Heath writes, “Grace is given to us through sharing food and drink. . . [This brings] home to us

34 A few of these sources include Plural Guild (https://www.pluralguild.com/), the Worship Design Studio (https://www.worshipdesignstudio.com/), and A Sanctified Art (https://sanctifiedart.org/). There are, of course, many more. Keeping and growing a file of Great Thanksgivings that will work well in a particular worship setting is an essential practice to cultivate.
35 John Wesley, “The Duty of Constant Communion.”
with clarity the missional meaning of the Lord’s Supper. We take Christ’s life into ourselves so that we can bear Christ’s life among our neighbors.”  

Each time communion is celebrated it must be explicitly connected to the call to “become the Communion bread that God gives to the world.”

Message (Sermon)

The messages will be varied around the worship themes developed by our Worship Design Team. They will be relevant to contemporary issues, infused with and inspired by scripture but also considering extra-biblical sources such as poetry, inspirational or secular reading, music, or video clips. The message-bringer will sometimes be one of the pastors, sometimes a lay person.

At regular intervals, at least once a month, we will extend an invitation to someone in the Crossings community to bear witness or share a testimony of the kind suggested by John Thornburg. Persons may share a story of how God is working in their lives, how their faith intersects with their lives, how their weekdays reflect the faith they nurture on Sundays.

Working with the Worship Design Team, we will lay out a broad plan for a year of Crossings, including themes and potential worship leaders. These annual planning meetings will especially look at making sure the means of grace are being actively practiced, that essential issues of justice and inclusion are regularly emphasized, and that our leadership is broad and diverse. Once a quarter, this team will meet to fine tune the worship for each coming quarter, filling in specifics and identifying areas of need and growth.

---

Fellowship/Community

The spirit of fellowship and community that our communion practice engenders must be present each week. It begins as soon as people arrive in the worship space. We will have intentionally allotted time before and after each worship service for fellowship and community. Coffee and cookies will be set out ahead of time. The monthly fellowship meal will be a significant time for fellowship and community.

Social Action

A strong component of the Wesleyan movement was their commitment to serve those in need. This was a part of John and Charles Wesley’s daily lives, and something they encouraged in others. The Wesleys believed that while salvation is through faith alone, once a person has that faith it is manifested in good works. Paul Chilcote writes that “[the] central proclamation of the gospel. . . from the Wesleyan point of view, is God’s free grace received by faith and worked out in love.”38 Worship that connects the threads of Wesleyan theology must connect faith with acts of mercy, justice, and service. Each worship series will explicitly connect to an opportunity for an ethical response—a personal commitment or involvement in specific acts of service and social action in the world. For example, after Easter our worship theme will be about creation and signs of resurrection. We will be partnering with greenfaith to engage in specific ways to reduce our consumption and honor creation.39 Every worship series will have concrete steps people can take to reshape their ethical priorities and live their faith by their actions. These will be published in the online resource each week.

In addition, the Crossings community will adopt one Sunday a month to bring worship to those who are imprisoned at Elmwood Correctional Facility. We will travel to the jail immediately after worship and lead a time of praise and worship. An integral part of this is offering time for the men who attend worship to share their testimony. This is a way of connecting all of us and sensing God’s spirit move through us all.40

Always Weaving

Every one of us is a work in progress. We learn, we grow, and we stumble; we fall, and we pick ourselves up, and keep moving, always moving toward perfection. Worship must be viewed through this lens. Too often we have fallen into the rut of letting worship become stale and stagnant and the same from week to week to week. One of the intangibles of the Wesleyan movement is the fluidity of the movement. John Wesley was constantly adapting to winds of change. How else might one explain an ardent royalist who was vehemently against the American Revolution writing to the American church once the war was over that they were now “at full liberty, simply to follow the Scriptures and the Primitive Church.”41 The unique and perhaps serendipitous genius of the Wesleyan and Methodist movement is that it was founded by two brothers who, though both devoutly faithful, had dramatically opposite temperaments. Ironically, John Wesley, the more methodical, organized, and seemingly rigid, was the one who bent the rules to breaking. He was more apt to overlook the shortcomings of his local preachers, and was creatively able to adapt to rapidly changing circumstances. Charles, the more emotional,

40 At the time of this writing, the jail has not yet resumed in person worship led by visiting churches. They anticipate this happening by summer, 2022.
creative genius who could shape disparate scriptural references into poetic metaphors, was the rigid loyalist to the Church of England and was constantly trying to remove local preachers who didn’t pass muster.

The creative tension of this fraternal partnership birthed a movement fraught with creative tension, squabbles and schisms, wildly divergent interpretations of scripture, reason and tradition, and expressions of faith in cathedrals and campgrounds, prisons and preaching halls, sanctuaries, and social halls. Trends have come and gone, the institutional church has waxed and waned, and still there are sparks of hope and inspiration lighting up throughout the connection. If we pay attention to the movement of the Spirit, always deepening our communion with the Sacred Mystery through the abundant means of grace, and remember, celebrate, and enhance our interconnectedness with all of God’s creation, the sparks will continue to fly.
While my hope and prayer is for this thesis to help catalyze worship that intentionally and consciously weaves together threads from our unique United Methodist history, theology, practices, and perspectives, the inescapable truth is that it has been written at a particular temporal point in the long trajectory of who we are. I write this final section of my thesis as the two-year mark for a devastating and divisive global pandemic has passed. We are two months into a brutal destructive invasion of Ukraine by Russia. It has just been announced that the General Conference, the decision-making body for The United Methodist Church, has been postponed until 2024, effectively skipping an entire quadrennium. This, in turn, has left the denomination in even more chaos than it already was. A long-expected exodus of conservative, “traditionalist” churches, has begun as many have announced their intention to leave The United Methodist Church to form the Global Methodist Church before the General Conference initiates a protocol and process for that to happen. Other churches, not affiliated with the traditionalist movement and not intending to join the Global Methodist Church are leaving as well. Recently, the Western Jurisdiction College of Bishops announced that the bishop of my Annual Conference was being placed on leave pending investigation. In my local church, there has been an unprecedented amount of staff turnover, culminating in the retirement of our senior pastor this June.

I am particularly struck by how all these struggles, and particularly the ones consuming the church, involve significant issues around how power is used and abused, how authority is understood and exercised, how biases favoring some people, groups of people, or socially held beliefs are given preference over others, and how maintenance and preservation and strengthening of the hierarchy and the institution is placed before any compassionate and faithful
living of the gospel. This is true at global, national, and regional levels. At the global level, the role of the central conferences is being debated and reconsidered, and significant resources are being used to secure particularly African and Asian alliances with the traditionalist stance. Nationally, the church is fractured, and churches are leaving in droves over the understanding of scripture, of episcopal authority, and of inclusion or exclusion based on gender and orientation. The suspension of a bishop has caused anxiety, fear, and many, many questions in the California-Nevada Annual Conference. It is enough to cause even the hardiest, most fervent United Methodist to throw up their hands and wonder if there is any hope.

After five years at Perkins School of Theology pursuing the Doctor of Pastoral Music degree, I have an answer to the question of whether there is any hope. Yes. Unequivocally, emphatically, yes! One of the things I have learned during the researching and writing of this thesis is that from its very first days the Wesleyan/Methodist movement was fraught with struggles, schisms, and disagreement. Most of these had to do with very similar issues as our current struggles. As I have learned and studied and grown, I have done so alongside five of the brightest, most diverse, most talented colleagues I have ever known. I can answer with an unqualified yes because I believe in the work that the five colleagues in the 2017 Doctor of Pastoral Music cohort are doing. It is bold and creative and transformative.

Most of this thesis was written during the time of Covid, a time of social isolation, suspension of in-person worship, uncertainty, and disruption. My practicum group had only met in person twice when the pandemic hit. The intention was to implement the worship woven from these threads before the final chapter was written, and for the final chapter to be a reflection on what worked, what didn’t, how these changes were received, and ways the ideas expressed here might be modified. As with many things, that intention had to be adjusted as the service was
suspended for two years. So, some of the threads have yet to be woven, and much of what I have proposed is still aspirational. My hope is that we will launch Crossings (where faith and life intersect) on Pentecost Sunday, June 5, 2022.

One of the realizations during the pandemic time is that things probably will not ever go back to being the same as they were before the pandemic. That certainly seems true of church. Church had to adapt drastically and rapidly during that time. Some were able to do this easier than others. I am deeply grateful for a remarkable team of video, audio, and recording professionals and volunteers who made the transition at Los Altos happen almost seamlessly and with excellence. Now, as people trickle back into the buildings for worship, a looming question is: now what?

The simple answer to that looming question is—we just don’t know. Our world and our country and our churches are not yet far enough removed from the virus and the shutdowns to know what normal will look like. There are not nearly as many people back in the pews and sitting at the tables as there were before March 2020, but maybe more will come. The things we learned about technology are being adapted to some sort of hybrid model, but what exactly that looks like simply isn’t clear yet.

I believe that the threads of Wesleyan theology, history, worship practice, and music can help us through this time, as they have helped through so many times before. A theology of grace, the means of grace, of living life in a progression of grace, of being motivated by our faith into tangible acts of mercy and justice, of proclaiming that God’s love includes all and embraces all, is a vital theology for these times. A history that demonstrates people of faith adapting to the vicissitudes of life, speaking out against the injustices in society, working to improve the lives of working people and children and immigrants, splitting away from the dominant denomination
when conscience dictated, reuniting when the Spirit moved, is a history that speaks to the uncertainty that currently grips our denomination, our nation, and our world. Worship that offers form and structure alongside freedom and creativity, that makes space for new expressions and honors the traditions that formed it, that proclaims the Good News and laments suffering, is worship that can inspire the souls wearied by war, injustice, and pandemic. Music that fills the air with new melodies and timeless truths, that sings the age-old story with fresh new words, that dances to the rhythm of the world and lifts the heart with melody, is music that can sing songs of hope and justice and joy. Perhaps it is just for such a time as this that these threads are woven.

        My prayer is that we find ourselves as we are lost in wonder, love, and praise.
A letter to an Unknown Correspondent concerning Methodist Worship (1757)¹

Truro
September 20, 1757

Dear Sir,

The longer I am absent from London, and the more I attend the service of the Church in other places, the more I am convinced of the unspeakable advantage which the people called Methodists enjoy: I mean even with regard to pubic worship, particularly on the Lord’s Day. The church where they assemble is not gay or splendid, which might be an hindrance on the one hand; nor sordid or dirty, which might give distaste on the other; but plain as well as clean. The persons who assemble there are not a gay, giddy crowd, who come chiefly to see and be seen; nor a company of goodly, formal, outside Christians, whose religion lies in a dull round of duties; but a people most of whom know, and the rest earnestly seek to, worship God in spirit and in truth. Accordingly they do not spend their time there in bowing and courtesying, or in staring about them, but in looking upward and looking inward, in hearkening to the voice of God, and pouring out their hearts before Him.

It is also no small advantage that the person who reads prayers (though not always the same) yet is always one who may be supposed to speak from his heart, one whose life is no reproach to his profession, and one who performs that solemn part of divine service, not in a careless, hurrying, slovenly manner, but seriously and slowly, as becomes him who is transacting so high an affair between God and man.

Nor is their solemn addresses to God interrupted either by the formal drawl of a parish clerk, the screaming of boys who bawl out what they neither feel nor understand, or the unseasonable and unmeaning impertinence of a voluntary on the organ. When it is seasonable to sing praise to God, they do it with the spirit and with the understanding also; not in the miserable, scandalous doggerel of Hopkins and Sternhold,² but in psalms and hymns which are both sense and poetry, such as would sooner provoke a critic to turn Christian than a Christian to turn critic. What they sing is therefore a proper continuation of the spiritual and reasonable service; being selected for that end (not by a poor humdrum wretch who can scarce read what he drones out with such an air of importance) but by one who knows what he is about and how to connect the preceding with the following part of the service. Nor does he take just ‘two staves’, but more or less, as may best raise the soul to God; especially when sung in well-composed and well-adapted tones not by a handful of wild, unawakened striplings, but by a whole serious congregation; and then


² This is a reference to The Whole Book of Psalms Collected into English Metre, by Thomas Sternhold, John Hopkins, and others, originally published by John Day of London in 1562, often called the Old Version.
not lolling at ease, or in the indecent posture of sitting drawling out one word after another, but all standing before God, and praising Him lustily and with a good courage.

Nor is it a little advantage as to the next part of the service to hear a preacher whom you know to live as he speaks, speaking the genuine gospel of present salvation through faith, wrought in the heart by the Holy Ghost, declaring present, free, full justification, and enforcing every branch of inward and outward holiness. And this you hear done in the most clear, plain, simple, unaffected language, yet with an earnestness becoming the importance of the subject and with the demonstration of the Spirit.

With regard to the last and most awful part of divine service, the celebration of the Lord’s Supper, although we cannot say that either the unworthiness of the minister or the unholiness of some of the communicants deprives the rest of a blessing from God, yet do they greatly lessen the comfort of receiving. But these discouragements are removed from you: you have proof that he who administers fears God; and you have no reason to believe that any of your fellow communicants walk unworthy of their profession. Add to that the whole service is performed in a decent and solemn manner, is enlivened by hymns suitable to the occasion, and concluded with prayer that comes not out of feigned lips.

Surely, then, of all the people in Great Britain, the Methodists would be the most inexcusable, should they let any opportunity slip of attending that worship which has so many advantages, should they prefer any before it, or not continually improve by the advantages they enjoy! What can be pleaded for them, if they do not worship God in spirit and in truth, if they are still outward worshippers only, approaching God with their lips while their hearts are far from Him? Yea, if, having known Him, they do not daily grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ?

J.W.
APPENDIX B: “O For a Thousand Tongues to Sing,” arr. Dirk Damonte

O For a Thousand Tongues to Sing

words by Charles Wesley
music by Carl G. Glaser
arr. by Dirk Damonte

Copyright © 2022 Excellsis Music
O For a Thousand Tongues to Sing

To Coda

mournful, broken hearts rejoice, the humble poor believe.

With heart and voice we lift our song, we sing creation's praise. We sing with joy, we

sing with hope, we sing through all our days!

Anticipate your heaven below and own that love is heaven.

Come, Thou Long Expected Jesus

Wesley/Prichard

arranged by Dirk Damonte

Come to us, Come to us
Come, thou long-expected Jesus,
Born thy people to de-

Jesus, born to set thy people free;
Come to us, Come to
us from our fears and sins release us, let us find our
born to reign in us for ever, now thy gracious
rest in thee.
Come to us, Come to us
Israel's kingdom bring.
Come to us, Come to us
Is - rael's

strength and consolation, hope of all the earth thou art;
own eternal spirit rule in all our hearts alone;
dear desire of every nation, joy of every longing heart.
by thine all sufficient merit, raise us to thy glorious throne.

Copyright © 2022 Excelsis Music

123
APPENDIX D: “And Are We Yet Alive,” arr. Dirk Damonte

And Are We Yet Alive

words by Charles Wesley
music by Dirk Damonte

And

troubles have we seen,
what mighty conflicts past,
let us make our boast
of his redeeming power.

Glory and thanks to Jesus give
for his almighty grace,
which saves us to the uttermost,
till we can sin no more.

served by power divine
us take up the cross
till we the crown obtain,
and gain in Jesus' praise
we join and in his sight appear.

We are alive, we are alive, we are alive in Jesus' name!

We are alive, we are alive, Jesus' love, it is our way.

Copyright © 2022 Excelcis Music
APPENDIX E: “Love Divine, All Loves Excelling,” by Dirk Damonte

Love Divine, All Loves Excelling

words by Charles Wesley
music by Dirk Damonte

Love di-vine, all loves ex-cel-ling,
Breathe, O breath thy lov-ing Spi-rit,
Come, Al-might-y to de-liv-er,
Fin- ish, then, thy new cre-a-tion,

joy of heaven, to earth come down;
fix in us thy hum-ble dwell-
in-to ev-ery trou-bled breast!
Let us all in thee in her-

let us all thy life re-cieve;
sud-den-ly re-turn and ne-

pure and spot-less let us be;
Let us see thy great sal-

- ing;
all they faith-ful mer-cies crown-
- it;
let us find that se-cond rest;

- ver,
ne-ver-more thy tem-ples leave.
-

- tion
per-fect ly re-stored in thee;

Je-sus, thou art all com-pas-sion
pure, un-bound-ed love thou art,

Take a-way our bent to sin-
ing
Al-pha and O-me-ga be;

Thee we would be al-ways bless ing
serve thee as thy hosts a love;

changed from glo-ry in to glo-ry
still in heaven we take our place,

vis-it us with thy sal-
end of faith, as its be-gin-
ing,
set our hearts at li-

- ing,
pray and praise thee with out ceas-
ing,
glo-ry in thy per-fect love

- we cast our crowns be-fore thee,
lost in won-der, love and praise;

Lost in won-der, love, and praise.
Lost in won-der, love, and praise.

Lost in won-der, love, and praise. Lost in praise.

copyright © 2021 Excelsis Music
Who You Are
a reflection on Charles Wesley’s “Wrestling Jacob”

words and music by Dirk Damonte

Who you are, and what you are, and how you are is love! Love

Oh, Who and what and how you are is love!

2. Once
APPENDIX G: “At This Table” by Dirk Damonte

At This Table

inspired by stanzas 4 and 5 of Charles Wesley's hymn, "Why did my dying Lord ordain"

words and music by Dirk Damonte

Copyright © 2022 Excelsia Music
APPENDIX H: “Plowshares” by Dirk Damonte

Plowshares

words & music by Dirk Damonte

So turn us into plowshares
To feed your hungry earth
The promise of your harvest feast is born with Jesus’ birth
So we sing your song with you
and we join in your dance,
in you we are made new
Christmas is our second chance.

copyright © 2021 Excelsis Music
REFERENCES


———. 2022. “At This Table” (lead sheet). https://drive.google.com/file/d/1Vtla-7SNAg_CgVjs8kfzCXkWcHF5_Szz/view?usp=sharing

———. 2022. “At This Table” (mp3). https://drive.google.com/file/d/1tKE1SXpfuW4mcPkJcGlXrdpeUeQIE1SB/view?usp=sharing

———. 2022. “Come, Thou Long-Expected Jesus” (lead sheet). https://drive.google.com/file/d/1QmF02vfvy-XtRABgBLUxaPQncTdmv/eg/view?usp=sharing


