

## A SOMETIME DIVERSION: THE HYMN TRANSLATIONS AND ORIGINAL HYMNS OF JOHN WESLEY

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*"Methodism was born in song and has made a vitalizing contribution to evangelical hymnody."<sup>1</sup>*

The hymns arising from the Methodist revival stand alongside John Wesley's *Standard Sermons* and his *Explanatory Notes* as important doctrinal teaching tools. The Methodist hymn book, *A Collection of Hymns for the Use of the People Called Methodists*, was published by John Wesley in 1780, and contained only a small subset of the thousands of hymns written by Charles Wesley, as well as a few of other authors. In the preface to the *Collection*, Wesley notes, "As but a small part of these hymns are of my composing, I do not think it inconsistent with modesty to declare that I am persuaded that no such hymnbook as this has yet been published in the English language."<sup>2</sup> As many of the hymnbooks published solely by John Wesley or jointly with Charles failed to attribute authorship to individual hymns, it has been a particular challenge to identify exactly *which* of the hymns were indeed of John's composing. Hymns which have been attributed to John's work in a literary capacity other than an editorial one include hymn translations from the German, Spanish, and French, adaptations of the religious verse of Isaac Watts and George Herbert, a paraphrase of the Lord's Prayer in three parts, and a few original works.<sup>3</sup>

### I

An assumption of convenience has been that all of the translations produced by the Wesleys—over thirty German, one Spanish and one

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<sup>1</sup>*The Methodist Hymnal* (New York: The Methodist Book Concern, 1935), Preface.

<sup>2</sup>John Wesley, "Preface," in *The Works of John Wesley. Volume 7. A Collection of Hymns for the Use of The People Called Methodists*, ed. Franz Hildebrandt and Oliver A. Beckerlegge (Nashville: Abingdon, 1983), 74.

<sup>3</sup>Thomas W. Herbert, *John Wesley as Editor and Author* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1940), 58.

French—were from John's pen. In support of this, Hatfield<sup>4</sup> noted that no translations appeared in separate editions of Charles Wesley's hymns, but only in volumes of which John was an editor, that Charles' daughter always understood John to be the author, and that there was no evidence that Charles ever used or understood German. He also cited a 1740 letter from Philip Molther to John Wesley thanking him for a translation one of Rothe's hymns.<sup>5</sup> In John's words, "I translated many of their [the Moravians'] hymns for the use of our own congregations. Indeed, as I durst not implicitly follow any man, I did not take all that lay before me; but selected those which I judged to be most scriptural and most suitable to sound experience."<sup>6</sup>

In spite of John's claim to the translations, Baker attributed two translations from the German ("O how happy I am here" of Dessler and Richter's "Melt happy soul in Jesus' Blood") to Charles Wesley.<sup>7</sup> He questioned the assumption that Charles knew no German because of his intentions to visit Herrnhut in Germany. Likewise, Rattenbury has pointed out that Charles must have known some German, since it was he who taught English to Peter Böhler.<sup>8</sup> Neither of Charles' translations were included in the *Collection*, possibly because they were a part of the "blood and wounds" school of hymn writing that John found objectionable.<sup>9</sup> On the other hand, nineteen of John's thirty-three German translations and both of the Spanish and French hymns were included.

Wesley's hymn translations originally appeared in five publications: two by John Wesley under the title of *Collection of Psalms and Hymns* (one published in Charleston in 1737—the first songbook of the Church of England—and the other in London in 1738), and three by John and Charles Wesley all titled, *Hymns and Sacred Poems* (London, 1739 and 1740, and Bristol, 1742).<sup>10</sup> Despite the fact that only one of these collections was published in America, Whaling rates as "reasonably certain" that all translations were made in Georgia between 1735 and 1737.<sup>11</sup> Indeed, based on *Journal* entries, four German hymns (by Freylinghausen, Richter, Zinzendorf, and an unknown composer) were translated sometime prior to December 1736.

<sup>4</sup>James T. Hatfield, "John Wesley's Translations of German Hymns," *Publications of the Modern Language Association of America* XI (1896): 171.

<sup>5</sup>Hatfield, 192.

<sup>6</sup>John Wesley, "On Knowing Christ After the Flesh," Sermon 117 (1789), 8.

<sup>7</sup>Frank Baker, *The Representative Verse of Charles Wesley* (New York: Abingdon Press, 1962), 167-170.

<sup>8</sup>J. Ernest Rattenbury, *The Evangelical Doctrine of Charles Wesley's Hymns* (London: The Epworth Press, 1941), 21.

<sup>9</sup>Baker, 170.

<sup>10</sup>Hatfield, 172-174.

<sup>11</sup>Frank Whaling, ed., *John and Charles Wesley: Selected Writings and Hymns* (Mahwah: Paulist, 1981), 66.

Translation work continued through July 1737.<sup>12</sup> There is no evidence from the *Journal*<sup>13</sup> or from his letters<sup>14</sup> that Wesley translated any hymns during his short visit to Herrnhut during the summer 1738. The German translations included works of several Moravians, including Spangenberg and Zinzendorf, and of Lutheran Pietists, including Tersteegen, Gerhardt, and Scheffler; these hymns were important contributors to Wesley's spiritual development, and many continue to be included in modern hymnals.<sup>15</sup>

The basis of Wesley's selection of particular hymns as a subject for translation is not entirely clear, although it is likely that it involved a combination of the inherent merit of the hymns and their relevance to his own need. The translations, although greatly simplified and shortened, accurately rendered the meaning of the text. Divergences from the original were sometimes made on theological grounds (e.g., references to chasing away evil spirits at the sign of the cross), and in consideration of issues of rhetoric and good taste (e.g., sensuous metaphors common in the Pietistic hymns).<sup>16</sup> In his translation of "O God, my God, my all Thou art" from the Spanish—"Wesley at his best"<sup>17</sup>—there is no effort to Christianize the text of Psalm 63 on which it was based, a practice common to both Isaac Watts and Charles Wesley. Regardless of the language or the author, "his grappling with the words of these hymns with their notions of praise, love, faith, surrender, prayer, joy, assurance, set him on the road to seeking a new inner dynamic that would creatively integrate all his other gifts. The future ingredients of his life and spirituality were already present: mysticism and inner religion."<sup>18</sup>

## II

Despite a penchant for poetic writing expressed at an early age, John Wesley's hymns and sacred poetry are considered by modern scholars to be more pedestrian than those of his younger brother. This relatively low esteem of John's poetic writing, in fact, echoes opinion of longer standing. On seeing the result of his ode paraphrase of Psalm 104, his mother reportedly advised, "I would not have you leave off making verses; rather make poetry

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<sup>12</sup>Nehemiah Curnock, ed., *The Journal of the Rev. John Wesley, A.M. (Standard Edition)*, Vol. I, (London: The Epworth Press, 1938), 299-370.

<sup>13</sup>Curnock, Vol. II, 3-63

<sup>14</sup>John Telford, ed., *The Letters of the Rev. John Wesley, A.M. (Standard Edition)*, Vol. I, (London: The Epworth Press, 1931).

<sup>15</sup>Whaling, 17.

<sup>16</sup>Hatfield, 183-184.

<sup>17</sup>R. Newton Flew, *The Hymns of Charles Wesley: A Study of Their Structure* (London: Epworth, 1953), 31.

<sup>18</sup>Whaling, 19.

sometimes your diversion, though never your business."<sup>19</sup>

Positive identification of the original hymns of John Wesley remains a task for which there has been no satisfactory solution.<sup>20</sup> There is the likelihood, considering the numerous entries in his *Journal* between January and July 1737 of "writing verses" or "making hymns," that many, if not all, were composed in Georgia.<sup>21</sup> However, since they were published jointly with Charles in the 1739, 1740, and 1742 hymnals in which the hymn translations appeared, there is no identification either to specific author or to location of composition. Autobiographical allusions in the title, or references in the writings of John Wesley, have been useful determinants in certain cases.<sup>22</sup>

Based on the characteristics of the hymn translations, Henry Bett<sup>23</sup> proposed a series of criteria to be used to distinguish the original hymns of John from those of Charles Wesley:

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**Table I. Characteristics of John Wesley's Hymns**

1. preference for simpler measures of 4 or 6 lines and 8 syllables  
(Charles Wesley's were more variable)
  2. consecutive rhymed line endings approximately 50% of the time  
(CW preferred alternate)
  3. 8-syllable line divided into two sections of 4 syllables  
(CW was more fluent)
  4. tendency to repeat and elaborate a thought
  5. tendency to begin successive lines with parallel expressions
  6. carries sentences from one line to the next
  7. last verse echoes first
  8. more academic vocabulary; favorite words: duteous, dauntless, boundless
  9. avoidance of non-verb compounds
  10. avoidance of polysyllabic words
  11. use of adjectives beginning with "un"  
(CW preferred "in")
  12. use of triads of nouns and sometimes verbs
  13. stiffness of movement
  14. use of formal 18th century phrases
  15. use of "I'd", "I'll"
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<sup>19</sup>John Whitehead, *The Life of the Rev. John Wesley, M.A.* (Philadelphia: Stockton, 1845) quoted in Herbert, *John Wesley as Editor and Author*, 48.

<sup>20</sup>Teresa Berger, "Charles Wesley: A Literary Overview," in *Charles Wesley: Poet and Theologian*, ed. ST Kimbrough (Nashville: Kingswood, 1992), 25.

<sup>21</sup>Curnock, Vol. I, 311-370.

<sup>22</sup>Rattenbury, 21.

<sup>23</sup>Henry Bett, *The Hymns of Methodism* (London: Epworth Press, 1945), 21-29.

Baker<sup>24</sup> discounted the importance of numbers 4, 5, 7, 9-12 of Bett's list. Rattenbury<sup>25</sup> questioned number 2, but noted that number 3, found in twenty-four of the twenty-nine translations discussed by Hatfield, was "striking." Beckerlegge,<sup>26</sup> observing John to be "a man of reason" and Charles to be "a romantic," advised emphasis on numbers 13 and 14. There is common agreement, however, that no one characteristic may be taken as diagnostic, but found in combination, they are strongly indicative of John Wesley's authorship. It is clear that any hymns containing clichés, botches, or expletives are the work of Charles, not John, and that John's hymns avoided sentimentality and erotic language applied to God.<sup>27</sup>

Considering Bett's criteria and the critiques of Baker and Rattenbury, Beckerlegge<sup>28</sup> compiled a list of hymns they considered to have been the work of John Wesley. These are given below, along with their numbers in the *Collection* and the date of the original publication:

**Table II. Original Hymns of John Wesley**

	Collection #	Original date of publication
Father of lights, from whom proceeds	96	1739
Jesu, thou knowest my simpleness	170	1742
Father of all, whose powerful voice*	225	1742
Son of thy Sire's eternal love*	226	1742
Eternal, spotless Lamb of God*	227	1742
Peace, doubting heart, my God's I am	264	1739
My God if I may call thee mine <sup>29</sup>	281	1739
Fondly my foolish heart essays	282	1739
Eternal beam of light divine	328	1739
Come, Holy Ghost, all quick'ning fire		
Come and my hallowed heart inspire	341	1740
O Love, I languish at thy stay	368	1742

\*Paraphrase of the Lord's Prayer

Such a list continues to be subject to revision. While Flew expressed admira-

<sup>24</sup>Baker, ix.

<sup>25</sup>Rattenbury, 22.

<sup>26</sup>Oliver A. Beckerlegge, "The Sources of the 'Collection,'" in *The Works of John Wesley. Volume 7. A Collection of Hymns for the Use of The People Called Methodists*, ed. Franz Hildebrandt and Oliver A. Beckerlegge, 37.

<sup>27</sup>Rattenbury, 24. In hymns edited by JW, "dear Redeemer" was often altered to "great Redeemer," and CW's "Jesus, lover of my soul" was omitted from the *Collection*.

<sup>28</sup>Beckerlegge, 38.

<sup>29</sup>This hymn was attributed to John Wesley by Betts, but was not included in Beckerlegge's listing. Based on our examination of the sources, we propose that the hymn "O God if I may call thee mine" cited by Beckerlegge as a John Wesley original not included in the *Collection* is, in fact, the hymn referred to by Betts.

tion for "Peace doubting heart," stating that, "John proved that he could write a very great hymn," he still expressed doubts concerning its authorship, noting that the word "shout" was a particular favorite of Charles.<sup>30</sup>

### III

The organization of the *Collection* gives a preliminary indication of Wesley's theology. It was patterned after Freylinghausen's hymnbook, emphasizing the inner experience of the *ordo salutis* rather than being organized according to theological ideas or dogmatic themes.<sup>31</sup> The majority of space in the hymnal was devoted to various circumstances in the spiritual lives of believers, an area of special interest for the German Pietists.<sup>32</sup>

If Wesley did, indeed, prepare all of the hymn translations and compose all his original hymns in America, they were written during the time of great spiritual turmoil that preceded Wesley's Aldersgate experience. His *Journal* gives insights into the nature of his struggle. A storm during the passage to America on the *Simmonds* caused Wesley to doubt the depth of his faith. In a conversation with Gotlieb Spangenberg, "He [Spangenberg] said, 'My brother, I must first ask you two questions. Have you the witness within yourself? Does the Spirit of God bear witness with your spirit, that you are a child of God?' I was surprised and knew not what to answer. He observed it, and asked, 'Do you know Jesus Christ?' I paused and said, 'I know he is the Saviour of the world.' 'True,' replied he; 'but do you know he has saved you?' I answered, 'I hope he has died to save me.' He only added, 'Do you know yourself?' I said, 'I do.' but I fear they were vain words."<sup>33</sup>

Upon leaving America, his personal assurance of faith was still wanting:

It is now two years and four months since I left my native country, in order to teach the Georgian Indians the nature of Christianity: but what have I myself learned in the mean time? Why, (what I the least of all suspected,) that I who went to America to convert others, was never myself converted to God...

If it be said, that I have faith... I answer, So have the devils,—a sort of faith; but still they are strangers to the covenant of promise. So the apostles had even at Cana in Galilee. . .even then they, in a sort, "believed on him;" but they had not then "the faith that overcometh the world." The

<sup>30</sup>Flew, 30.

<sup>31</sup>Johann A. Freylinghausen, "Spiritual Songbook, 1705," in *Pietists: Selected Writings*, ed. Peter C. Erb (New York: Paulist Press, 1983), 169.

<sup>32</sup>Teresa Berger, *Theology in Hymns?: A Study of the Relationship of Doxology and Theology According to a Collection of Hymns for the use of the People Called Methodists* (1780) (Nashville: Kingswood, 1989), 73-74.

<sup>33</sup>John Wesley, *Journal*, February 7, 1736.

faith I want is “a sure trust and confidence in God, that, through the merits of Christ, my sins are forgiven, and I reconciled to the favor of God.” I want that faith which St. Paul recommends to all the world, especially in his Epistle to the Romans: That faith which enables every one that hath it to cry out, “I live not but Christ liveth in me... I want that faith which none can have without knowing that he hath it.<sup>34</sup>

In light of Wesley’s questions about his own spiritual condition, surprisingly few of the hymns and translations focus on the experience of the legal state. A sense of dejection and struggle is, however, present as an undercurrent in many of the hymn texts, both translations and originals, as Wesley put in poetic phrases the concepts that he treated in his later sermons. It was as if Wesley had taken the advice Peter Böhler later gave concerning his ministry: “I was, on Sunday, the 5th, clearly convinced [by Peter Böhler] of unbelief, of the want of that faith whereby alone we are saved. Immediately it struck into my mind, ‘Leave off preaching. How can you preach to others, who have not faith yourself?’ I asked Böhler, whether he thought I should leave it is or not. He answered, ‘By no mean.’ I asked, ‘But what can I preach?’ He said, ‘Preach faith till you have it; and then, *because* you have it, you *will* preach faith.’”<sup>35</sup>

Of the hymns that Wesley later included in the *Collection*, a few of the originals and translations are included in the section concerning the personal experience of the path to salvation, being classified under “Praying for Repentance” (one original), “Mourners Brought to the Birth” (one translation), and “Convinced of Backsliding” (one original). While none of these hymns was common in later Methodist hymnals,<sup>36</sup> other translations on the subject of repentance and backsliding, not included in the *Collection*, have been included in Methodist worship.

Wesley’s original hymn, “Father of lights, from whom proceeds,”<sup>37</sup> introduces the section of the *Collection* on “Praying for Repentance.” Here he noted God’s general providence:

Father of lights, from whom proceeds  
What’er thy every creature needs

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<sup>34</sup>Wesley, *Journal*, January 29, 1738.

<sup>35</sup>Wesley, *Journal*, March 4, 1738.

<sup>36</sup>Hymnals and hymn commentaries consulted: *Hymnal of the Methodist Episcopal Church with Tunes* (New York: Nelson and Phillips, 1878); Charles S. Nutter and Wilbur F. Tillett, *The Hymns and Hymn Writers of the Church: An Annotated Edition of the Methodist Hymnal* (New York: The Methodist Book Concern, 1911); *The Methodist Hymnal* (New York: The Methodist Book Concern, 1935); *The Untied Methodist Hymnal* (Nashville, United Methodist Publishing House, 1989); and *The Primitive Methodist Hymnal* (London: Primitive Methodist Publishing House, 1889).

<sup>37</sup>#96 of the *Collection*.

Whose goodness providentially nigh,  
Feeds the young ravens when they cry. . . .

In an expression of self-knowledge, he recognized not only his position in the "legal state," but also God's activity in his own life:

Since by thy light myself I see  
Naked, and poor, and void of thee  
Thy eyes must all my thoughts survey,  
Preventing what my lips would say;  
Thou seest my wants. . . .<sup>38</sup>

God is omniscient, knowing

...the baseness of my mind,  
...how unsubdued my will,  
...how wide my passions rove. . . .<sup>39</sup>

Wesley wished for that same level of self-knowledge to

...feel the indigence I see  
...all my vileness own  
Abhor the pride that lurks within,  
detest and loathe myself and sin.<sup>40</sup>

and concluded with a prayer for divine assistance:

Ah, give me, Lord, myself to feel,  
My total misery reveal;  
Ah, give me, Lord (I still would say),  
A heart to mourn, a heart to pray. . . .

The themes of this hymn echo those of the translation of Richter's, "My soul before Thee prostrate lies,"<sup>41</sup> originally published in 1737, but which Wesley did not include in the *Collection*. There is a self-knowledge:

My wants I mourn, my chains I see?  
No more her power let nature boast. . . .

<sup>38</sup>Cf. John Wesley, "The Spirit of Bondage and of Adoption," Sermon 9 (1746), II.1; "The Image of God," Sermon 141 (1730), III.1.

<sup>39</sup>Cf. Wesley, "The Spirit of Bondage and of Adoption," Sermon 9 (1746), II.3.

<sup>40</sup>Cf. Wesley, "The Spirit of Bondage and of Adoption," II.8.

<sup>41</sup>Hymn #394 of *Hymnal of the Methodist Episcopal Church with Tunes* (1878) which includes four of the original twelve verses.

and an acknowledgment of God's power and sufficiency:

God will destroy the power of hell.

The response of obedience to God, however, is one of *joyful* confidence:

One only care my soul shall know,  
Father, all thy commands to do;  
And feel, what endless years shall prove,  
That thou, my Lord, my God, art love.

Although Wesley's spiritual life during his years in Georgia may have been in turmoil, having been convinced from conversations with Spangenberg and Böhler of his own unbelief, the majority of his original hymns and the hymns he translated applied to the life of the believer: believers rejoicing, fighting, suffering, groaning for full redemption. When included in later Methodist hymnals, hymns included in "For Believers Rejoicing" in the *Collection* are found in sections on "Justification" or "Justification and Adoption." Those Wesley designated as "Groaning for full Redemption" are variously categorized as hymns on "Consecration and Holiness," "Sanctification and Growth," and "Christian Perfection."

In the *Collection*, Wesley included five translations (one of them in two parts) and one original hymn (a loose three-part paraphrase of The Lord's Prayer) in the section, "For Believers Rejoicing." Wesley's paraphrase of The Lord's Prayer, "Father of all, whose powerful voice,"<sup>42</sup> and his translation of Ernst Lange's, "O God, thou bottomless abyss,"<sup>43</sup> like several of his later sermons,<sup>44</sup> focus on God as creator and sustainer, and on the attributes of God:

Father of all, whose powerful voice  
Called forth this universal frame...  
Wisdom and might and love are thine...

Son of thy Sire's eternal love,  
Take to thyself thy mighty power;  
Let all earth's sons thy mercy prove,  
Let all thy bleeding grace adore.  
The triumphs of thy love display...  
Thou cloth'st the lilies of the field,  
And hearest the young ravens cry...

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<sup>42</sup>John Wesley, "Father of all, whose powerful voice," #225-227 of the *Collection*.

<sup>43</sup>Ernest Lange, "O God, thou bottomless abyss," tr. J. Wesley, #231-232 of the *Collection*.

<sup>44</sup>John Wesley, "On Divine Providence," Sermon 67 (1786); "The Unity of the Divine Being," Sermon 120 (1789).

Giver and Lord of life, whose power  
And guardian care for all are free...

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O god, thou bottomless abyss...  
Greatness unspeakable is thine...  
Unchangeable, all-perfect Lord...  
What lives, and moves, lives by thy word;  
It lives and moves and is from thee.  
Thy parent hand, thy forming skill...

Thine, Lord, is wisdom, thine alone;  
Justice and truth before thee stand...  
All things in thee live, move, and are,  
Thy power infused doth all sustain...<sup>46</sup>

Other hymns of rejoicing speak of justification and the new birth in the very personal terms that Wesley included in the later addition to his pre-Aldersgate sermon, "The Circumcision of the Heart":<sup>47</sup>

Covered is my unrighteousness,  
Nor spot of guilt remains in me<sup>48</sup>

Fully absolved...I am  
From sin and fear, from guilt and shame...  
Who died for me, ev'n me t'atone...  
For me, ev'n for my soul...  
Jesus hath lived and died for me.<sup>49</sup>

Now righteous through thy wounds I am;  
No condemnation now I dread;  
I taste true salvation in thy name,  
Alive in thee, my living head!<sup>50</sup>

Wesley included three of his original hymns, and four of his translations in the section titled, "For Believers—Groaning for full Redemption," in the *Collection*. Of these hymns, Gerhardt's "Jesu, thy boundless love to me"<sup>51</sup> and Wesley's "Come Holy Ghost all quick'ning fire"<sup>52</sup> present similar, yet contrasting views of sanctification. The imagery of being "as a little child"

<sup>45</sup>John Wesley, "Father of all, whose powerful voice," #225-227 of the *Collection*.

<sup>46</sup>Ernest Lange, "O God, thou bottomless abyss," tr. J. Wesley, #231-232 of the *Collection*.

<sup>47</sup>Cf. John Wesley, "The Circumcision of the Heart," Sermon 17 (1733), I.7.

<sup>48</sup>Johann Rothe, "Now I have found the ground, wherein," tr. J. Wesley, #182 of the *Collection*.

<sup>49</sup>Count Zinzendorf, "Jesu, thy blood and righteousness," tr. J. Wesley, #183 of the *Collection*.

<sup>50</sup>Wolfgang Dessler, "Into thy gracious hands I fall," tr. J. Wesley, #188 of the *Collection*.

<sup>51</sup>Paulus Gerhardt, "Jesu, thy boundless love to me," tr. J. Wesley, #362 of the *Collection*.

appears with almost identical language in both, and there is a self-knowledge of the writer's sinfulness. In Wesley's words,

Come, Lord, and form my soul anew,  
Emptied of pride and wrath and hell;  
...I myself abhor;  
All, all my vileness may I feel...

Be anger to my soul unknown;  
Hate, envy, jealousy, be gone!

Gerhardt expressed his condition as,

More hard than marble is my heart  
And foul with sins of deepest stain...

Both hymnists pray for a union with God. For Gerhardt,

Nor ever may we be parted be  
Till I become one spirit with thee.

And for Wesley:

Thy mighty working may I feel,  
And know that I am one with God!

Gerhardt's opening line immediately gives the central focus of his hymn. It is a hymn of supplication, yet of gratitude, springing from a "thankful heart." He used the word "love" ten times in the course of the nine verses, characterizing God's love as "boundless," "pure," and "cheering." What does this love look like? In times of suffering, it is "peace"; in weakness, it is "power."

Wesley's hymn, on the other hand, is a hymn of supplication with some hopeful rays, but lacking the joy and thankfulness found in Gerhardt. "Love" appears only twice in this hymn. As in other of his hymns, ideas are in accord with his sermons. He seeks assurance of his salvation:

Now to my soul thyself reveal,  
Thy mighty working let me feel,  
And know that I am born of God.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>52</sup>John Wesley, "Come, Holy Ghost, all-quic'ning fire," #341 of the *Collection*.

<sup>53</sup>Cf. John Wesley, "The New Birth," Sermon 45 (1760), II.4.

Thy witness with my spirit bear  
That God, my God, inhabits there...<sup>54</sup>

To Wesley, Christian perfection means that,

My will be swallowed up in thee...  
...my hallowed heart be love,  
And all my spotless life be praise<sup>55</sup>

and he again seeks the personal assurance:

Still to my soul thyself reveal,  
Thy mighty working may I feel,  
And know that I am one with God!<sup>56</sup>

In other works included in this section of the *Collection*, Wesley referred to Christian perfection as the restoration of the *Imago Dei*:

Renew thine image, Lord, in me,<sup>57</sup>

involving the joint witness of the Spirit of God with the human spirit,

Ceaseless may Abba, Father cry,<sup>58</sup>

a human spirit which is viewed as “thirsty,” “faint,” “blind,” “mournful,” and “drooping.”<sup>59</sup>

“Drooping” may be a good word to describe Wesley at this time of his life and work. It is as if, as a young man in his early thirties, Wesley associated suffering only with mental anguish, and not with bodily pain. In fact, much of his hymn writing was done in the weeks and months immediately following the contested marriage of Sophie Williamson! Combining this with his spiritual anguish, it is little wonder that, “his sacred song is set in a minor key...a wail of distress and disappointment.”<sup>60</sup> A comparison of two hymns in the “For Believers Suffering” section of the *Collection* illustrate the agony of his soul. In his original hymn, “Eternal beam of light divine,”<sup>61</sup> he gives evi-

<sup>54</sup>Cf. John Wesley, “The Witness of the Spirit, II,” Sermon 11 (1767), I.4.

<sup>55</sup>Cf. John Wesley, “The Great Privilege of those that are Born of God,” Sermon 19 (1748), II.1.

<sup>56</sup>Cf. John Wesley, “The Scripture Way of Salvation,” Sermon 43 (1765), III.17.

<sup>57</sup>Johann Freylinghausen, “O Jesu, source of calm repose,” tr. J. Wesley, #343 of the *Collection*; cf. John Wesley, “The Image of God,” Sermon 141 (1730), I.1.

<sup>58</sup>Gerhard Tersteegen, “Thou hidden love of God, whose height,” tr. J. Wesley, #335 of the *Collection*; cf. John Wesley, “The Witness of the Spirit, II,” Sermon 11 (1767), III.7.

<sup>59</sup>John Wesley, “O Love, I languish at thy stay!” #168 of the *Collection*.

<sup>60</sup>Curnock, Vol. I, 35.

dence of great psychological suffering, speaking of a “wounded soul,” “grief and fear,” “warring passions,” and a “trembling heart,” and prays for God’s “easy yoke.” In contrast, the two following hymns, “Thou Lamb of God, thou Prince of peace,” of Richter and Zinzendorf’s, “O thou, to whose all-searching sight,” suggest the presence not just of a suffering spirit, but also of physical suffering:

When pain o’er my weak flesh prevails...  
When grief my wounded soul assails...  
And free from pain thy glories sing.<sup>62</sup>

No foes, no violence I fear,  
No fraud...

If rough and thorny be the way...  
...toil and grief and pain shall cease.<sup>63</sup>

#### IV

There is no doubt that John Wesley’s contact with the Moravian and German pietist hymns had a profound effect on his own devotional theology, whether expressed in prose or in poetry. Even though his doctrinal ideas became solidified in Georgia, the hymns John wrote or translated in that setting, unlike those of Charles, do not focus on doctrinal teaching, but on the *experience* of the faith.<sup>64</sup> This experienced faith, for Wesley, was one of searching almost to the point of desperation.

While Wesley may have considered his pre-Aldersgate sermons (with the notable exception of “The Circumcision of the Heart”) generally unfit to be included in his *Sermons on Several Occasions*, since at that point he did not consider himself an “altogether Christian,”<sup>65</sup> he seemed not to have the same hesitation including the hymns from the pre-Aldersgate period of 1735-1737 in the *Collection*. Perhaps Wesley, looking backwards with a more mature perspective on the meaning of the Aldersgate experience<sup>66</sup> saw a continuing usefulness for a large percentage of his poetic works exactly *because* they

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<sup>61</sup>#328 of the *Collection*.

<sup>62</sup>Christian Richter, “Thou Lamb of God, thou Prince of peace,” tr. J. Wesley, #329 of the *Collection*.

<sup>63</sup>Count Zinzendorf, “O thou, to whose all-searching sight,” tr. J. Wesley, #330 of the *Collection*.

<sup>64</sup>Albert C. Outler, ed., *John Wesley* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964), 12.

<sup>65</sup>Richard P. Heitzenrater, “Preface,” in *John Wesley’s Sermons: An Anthology*, ed. Albert C. Outler and Richard P. Heitzenrater (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1991), 9.

<sup>66</sup>Richard P. Heitzenrater, “Great Expectation: Aldersgate and the Evidences of Genuine Christianity,” in *Aldersgate Revisited*, ed. Randy L. Maddox (Nashville: Kingswood, 1990), 91.

were experiential, rather than doctrinal.

In considering John Wesley's role as editor of the *Collection*, Beckerlegge noted: "Why in fact Wesley chose one hymn rather than another is usually impossible to say: he selected those that *in his judgment* best served his purpose, although another man might well have chosen differently among such riches. So also with the content of the individual hymns."<sup>67</sup> Such alternative choices are, in fact, evident in later hymnals from various Methodist and Reformed traditions. All of Wesley's nine original hymns appear, at least in part, in the *Collection*; only four of these<sup>68</sup> are included in two Methodist hymnals of the late 19th century.<sup>69</sup> Three hymns not included in the *Collection*, but found in later hymnals are attributed to John Wesley. On the basis of meter (8688: "O Sun of righteousness arise," 6686: "We lift our hearts to thee," and "Ye simple souls that stray"), these are unlikely to be the work of John Wesley.

While Wesley's original hymns quickly fell from favor, his translations have found a more widespread acceptance; sixteen of the twenty-one translations in the *Collection*, as well as several not included in that hymnal by Wesley are found in 19th and 20th century hymnals.<sup>70</sup> Of particular interest in this latter group is Gerhardt's 16-verse hymn, "Commit thou all thy griefs,"<sup>71</sup> divided (and abridged) to form a second hymn, "Give to the winds thy fears," both of which are found in a number of hymnals of the Methodist and Reformed traditions. Why did Wesley fail to include this in the *Collection*? Perhaps it was the touch of Calvinism:

Leave to his sovereign sway  
To choose and to command

Or perhaps he objected to the underlying air of optimism.

It is commonplace in this day to hear of those who are caught in unending loops of psychological and spiritual depression. Such was Wesley's condition during his period of ministry in Georgia. For Wesley, however, this experience, caught in the texts of his hymns, was a formative one that produced much fruit in his later sermon texts. It was good that he took his mother's advice not to give up his day job.

<sup>67</sup>Oliver A. Beckerlegge, "John Wesley as Hymn-book Editor," in *The Works of John Wesley. Volume 7. A Collection of Hymns for the Use of The People Called Methodists*, ed. Franz Hildebrandt and Oliver A. Beckerlegge, 56.

<sup>68</sup>Come Holy Ghost, all quick'ning fire," "Father of all, Whose powerful voice," "Father of lights, from whom proceeds," "Peace, doubting heart, my God's I am."

<sup>69</sup>*Hymnal of the Methodist Episcopal Church with Tunes and The Primitive Methodist Hymnal*. John Wesley's hymns are not represented in Methodist hymnals of the twentieth century.

<sup>70</sup>See reference 35 for Methodist hymnals reviewed. Reformed hymnals including Wesley's translations include: *Hymns and Songs for Social and Sabbath Worship* (New York: Randolph & Co, 1978); *The Church Hymnary*, rev. ed. (London: Oxford University Press, 1927).

<sup>71</sup>Whaling, 91-93.