ISAAC WATTS, THE WESLEYS, AND THE EVOLUTION OF 18TH-CENTURY ENGLISH CONGREGATIONAL SONG

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Isaac Watts and John Wesley, as theologians and hymnwriters, contributed greatly to the development of English-language Protestant hymnody in Britain and in the nascent United States. Due to his popularizing of "hymns of human composure," Watts (1674-1748) has been given the title of the "Father of English Hymnody," although his compositional output was not more than a few hundred hymns. Charles Wesley (1707-1788) contributed over 6,500 hymns to the corpus of Christian hymnody. Although most are not used today, that his work is represented in hymnals from across the denominational spectrum is a testament to their universality. John Wesley (1703-1791), through editing his brother's hymns and by including them in ever-increasing numbers in his hymnals both in England and in the United States, ensured that Charles' hymns would receive the exposure to propel them to popularity. The relationship amongst the three men reveals a difference of centuries. Watts' philosophic mind was thoroughly grounded in the 17th-century, while the Wesleys' more practical speculations anticipated 19th-century developments. The work of all three, whether in sermon, hymn or treatise, evidences a scriptural, "evangelical" Christian piety. The following discussion will focus upon Isaac Watts' probable influence on the Wesleys, primarily as demonstrated through John Wesley's first hymnal, the Collection of Psalms and Hymns (1737), and through one of his last major hymnals, A Collection of Hymns for the People called Methodists (1780). Charles Wesley's indebtedness to Isaac Watts will be proposed briefly through a comparison of two hymns. Although many commonalities may be attributed to their similar historical positions, the works of Isaac Watts were known to the Wesleys and, critical though they were at times of his theology or even his manner of presentation, the Wesleys imbued much from their Non-conformist predecessor.

I

John Wesley read Isaac Watts at Oxford and was familiar with his writings and theology. Further, there can be no doubt that Wesley greatly respected Watts as a theologian. In a 1765 journal entry Wesley wrote of his positive relationship with the Dissenters, although, "... many of them did, however, differ from me both in opinions and modes of worship. I have the
privilege to mention Dr. Doddridge, Dr. Watts, and Mr. Wardrobe.” 1 Wesley thought so highly of some of Watts’ theology that he included forty-four pages of Watts’ text on original sin, The Ruin and Recovery of Human Nature, in his own volume titled, On Original Sin. 2 That Watts and John Wesley had a relationship of mutual respect, and that Wesley recognized Watts’ preeminent reputation in theological circles, is apparent when John eulogized his brother Charles saying that, “His least praise was, his talent for poetry; although Dr Watts did not scruple to say, that ‘that single poem, “Wrestling Jacob,” is worth all the verses which I have ever written.’” 3 Yet, Wesley’s praise was not uncritical. A 1788 journal entry records Wesley’s reaction when he read Watts’, “ingenious treatise upon the ‘Glorified Humanity of Christ.’ But it so confounded my intellects, and plunged me into such unprofitable reasonings, yea, dangerous ones, that I would not have read it through for five hundred pounds. It led him into Arianism.” 4 Their differences are in some ways as significant as their profound similarities.

Both Wesleys, as well as all English hymnists subsequent to Watts, owe him for having established hymn-singing as normative. Both Dissenters and Anglicans used the psalter as their primary hymnal, reluctant to sing anything beyond scripture. These translations were not always the smoothest. The preface to The Bay Psalm Book (1640) represents a common understanding of the time:

If therefore the verses are not always so smooth and elegant as some may derive or expect; let them consider that God’s Altar needs not our polishings. For we have respected rather a plain translation, then to smooth our verses with the sweetness of any paraphrase, and so have attended Conscience rather than Elegance, fidelity rather than poetry, in translating the Hebrew words into English language, and David’s poetry into English meter. 5

Although The Bay Psalm Book was an American Puritan publication, these sentiments reflect a general English piety which, “attended Conscience rather than Elegance.” Isaac Watts is the first to compose “hymns” not related to the Psalms but still intended for congregational use. Furthermore, Watts’ talent for paraphrase subsequently allowed him to metrify the Psalms in an “elegant” manner. Previously, no one had taken the liberty to do so. Compare this stanza from Psalm 98 from the Bay Psalm Book:

2This text is reproduced in its entirety in John Wesley’s The Doctrine of Original Sin: According to Scripture, Reason and Experience. (Salem, OH: Schmul Publishing, 1999.) Incidentally, Wesley’s sermon, “The Almost Christian,” is commonly titled for the time. Isaac Watts titled one of his hymns, “The Almost Christian,” and he might have known about it from Matthew Mead’s (another Dissenter) sermon of the same name preached in 1661.
Unto Jehovah all the earth,
Make yee a joyful noyse;
Make yee also a cheerful sound,
Sing prayse, likewise rejoice.⁶

with Isaac Watts’ translation of the same psalm excerpt:

Let the whole earth his love proclaim
With all her different tongues;
And spread the honors of his name
In melody and songs.⁷

The remainder of this paraphrase of Psalm 98 is commonly known as the hymn “Joy to the World,” which contains an overtly Christian message and which exhibits a liberty another Dissenter or Anglican of the time might not have been willing to procure. John Wesley’s publication of the first hymnal for use in Anglican worship, not to mention the many hymns of Charles Wesley, owes much to the foundational work of Isaac Watts.

II

A comparison of John Wesley and Watts might best begin with Wesley’s first hymnbook, the Collection of Psalms and Hymns (1737), commonly known as the “Charles-town hymnal.” Printed during John’s missionary activities in present-day South Carolina, Winfred Douglas claims this volume not only to be John’s first hymnal, but the first “real” Anglican hymnal.⁸ Thirty-five of these hymns are by Watts, six from Samuel Wesley, Sr, five from Samuel Wesley, Jr., and none from Charles Wesley. Within the Watts’ hymnic corpus, Wesley utilized nineteen hymns from Hymns and Spiritual Songs (1707), fourteen from The Psalms of David Imitated in the Language of the New Testament (1719), and two from Horae Lyricae (1706). In his preface to his famous 1780 hymnal, John Wesley urged printers and publishers who might reprint his hymns, “...to let them stand just as they are... or to add the true reading in the margin.”⁹ Yet, Wesley always usurped considerable editorial liberty in the hymns he included in his hymnals, Watts being the primary beneficiary of such endearing tendencies in the 1737 publication. An analysis of Wesley’s alterations reveals the theological values and liturgical piety both of Wesley and Watts.¹⁰ In general, Wesley observed the following principles of editing:

⁶Preface.
⁸Winfred Douglas, Church Music in History and Practice (NY: Charles Scribner’s, 1937), 235.
¹⁰John Wesley, A Collection of Psalms and Hymns. (Charles-Town: Lewis Timothy, 1737), 42; Frank Baker and George Williams, facsimile editors, (Charleston: The Dalcho Historical Society, 1964.) Wesley’s hymnal is divided into three major sections: Psalms and hymns for Sundays, for Wednesdays and Fridays, and for Saturdays. All following references to hymns, unless stated otherwise, are from this volume.
(1) Affectionary endearments are removed. Wesley seems reticent to utilize excessively affectionate language towards God. In the hymn, “Blest be the Father and his Love,” Wesley altered the second stanza from, “Great Son of God from whose dear wounded Body rolls . . .” to, “Forth from thy wounded body rolls.” Further, “How sad our State by Nature is,” originally contained the phrase, “To the dear fountain of thy Blood,” which became, “blest fountain.” The sixth stanza of the same hymn stated originally, “In thy kind Arms I fall,” which became, “Into thy arms I fall.” Such revisions may seem anomalous for Wesley, the man who only months later had a “strange heartwarming” experience. Yet, he maintained this restraint consistently throughout his life, evidenced particularly in his refraining from using “Dear” as an address toward God. The suppression of excessive endearments is perhaps best seen not as an indication of Wesley’s undue formality but rather as an illustration of Watts’ unique approach to hymnody. Watts’ Dissenting tradition owed to the Calvinists not only a renewed emphasis on the individual, but “an exaltation of reason and a concentration upon man as God’s chief handiwork.”

The “sociable” element in worship was reclaimed, which is evidenced in Watts’ idea that hymns are the Christian’s words to God, not vice versa. The growing knowledge of the importance of the congregation’s response to God naturally encouraged a more “subjective” approach to hymnody, evident in Watts’ frequent, although not sole, use of first person “I,” “me,” and “my” in his hymn texts. In so doing, Watts’ texts are often an individual’s supplication to God, or perhaps an observation of God’s mighty acts, in which it is only natural to use such endearments. Perhaps it is erroneous not to do so. Both Wesleys composed in first person, as will be discussed later. However, John’s reluctance to use endearments may have reflected an idea which he stated in the preface to his Hymns and Spiritual Songs (1753), that, “There is not an hymn, not one verse inserted here, but what relates to the common salvation; and what every serious and unprejudiced Christian, of whatever denomination, may join in.” Wesley, then, had no less evangelical fervor than Watts. However, he was intentionally careful that the texts not be so individualistic that they could not be shared amongst all humanity.

(2) Excessive emotionalism is altered. Occasionally, Watts composed certain phrases which Wesley seemed to view as excessively emotional. In Watts’ hymn, “O Thou that hear’st when Sinners cry,” Wesley changed a phrase in the third stanza from, “Thine holy joy, my God restore,” to, “Thy saving strength, O Lord restore.” There seems to be a certain exuberance in “joy,” (i.e., an implication of a state beyond the status quo) not found in “strength” (perhaps implying more of a fortitude to bear the status quo). In the hymn immediately prior, “Amidst thy Wrath remember Love,” the orig-

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2Davies, 99.
inal, "I'll mourn how weak my graces be" became the more Wesleyan, "My helpless Impotence I see." The concept of "mourning weak graces" perhaps echoed too strongly Watts' latent Calvinism. Wesley's language is almost "less spiritual," in the sense that "grace" (both for Wesley and Watts) is a term imbued with theological implications. It may even be considered theological jargon. "Helpless Impotence" could apply to matters either earthly or spiritual depending on its context. Much of the analysis of the prior topic applies here as well. However, it might be well to note that not only was this hymnal published prior to his Aldersgate experience, in this respect at least, Wesley may have altered his thinking during the course of his long life. His, "Servant of God, Well Done!" composed in 1770 on the death of George Whitefield, contains the exultant phrase, "O happy, happy soul! In ecstasies of praise long as Ages roll . . . ." Although his approach to Moravian spirituality was far from uncritical, there is little doubt Wesley's experience with the intensely emotional and spiritual Moravians continued to have an effect on his view of the seeming dichotomy between the subjective and objective throughout his life.

(3) Alterations are made in favor of a first-person setting, often exemplified in a direct address or prayer to God. In the ensuing discussion, an alteration to "first person" does not necessarily imply that "I" or "me" has replaced "we" or "us," but rather that the hymn has been personalized in some way to emphasize the singer’s individual relationship with God. The Moravian experience had exposed John Wesley to the intensely personal hymns of the German pietists for whom Count von Zinzendorf was a prime representative. Like Watts, the pietists stressed the personal elements of faith in that there may be noted, "... a more personal and individual tone and with it a tendency to reproduce special forms of Christian experience often of a mystical character." The pietists, probably significantly for Wesley, accentuated the need for spiritual or "mystical" experiences to produce active, tangible results. In their hymnic emphasis on the individual and the individual's relationship with God, they mirrored Isaac Watts. In their belief in the importance of visible sanctification they might have shared at least some common ground with Wesley. Wesley favored setting hymns in the first person only if the hymn was meant as an address to God (a prayer) or a confession/recognition of sin.

Watts did not set every hymn in first person. Many are in third person. This is consistent with his more "humanistic" or "sociable" view of hymnody being humanity's expression of faith toward God. In many cases, Watts' hymns are not even a human response to God. They are confessions of faith to each other. In a sense, they are crenal expression in the Dissenting


*Auguste Francke, a pietist theologian and hymnwriter, established the first German orphanage in the late 17th century.*
Church, as much for one another as for the individual or for God. Therefore, it is not surprising that, in addition to the many highly personal hymns or hymn stanzas ("Were the whole realm of nature mine..."), many treat the doctrines of the faith with almost a clinical lucidity. The first hymn in A Collection of Psalms and Hymns exhibits the editorial practices in this regard of both Watts and Wesley. A paraphrase of Psalm 33, Watts’ original stays faithful to the original text (although significantly omitting the lines referring to praising God with musical instruments) and is set in third person in faithfulness to the psalm. Wesley, though, changed the “He gathers” (reference to God) in the third stanza to become “Thou gatherest,” utilizing a second-person tone to express supplication (although “He” is again employed in further references to God). Wesley modified the first stanza of, “Jesus, his Spirit and His Word,” to the direct address of, “Jesus, thy Spirit and thy Word.” In an effort to make a hymn a prayer, Wesley often personalized the previously “objective” text as a direct address to God.

In other instances, John Wesley clearly favored a more subjective, third person approach, usually in an effort to reconstruct the hymn in the form of a prayer. “The Voice of my beloved sounds” originally states in the final stanza, “And when we hear our Jesus say, Rise up, my Love, make haste away! Our heart would fain out-fly the Wind, And leave all the earthly Loves behind.” This is a credal statement of fact. Yet Wesley, in wishing to personalize the text, phrased it as follows, “And when I hear my Jesus say Rise up, my Love, and haste away! My Heart would fain out-fly the Wind, and leave all earthly Loves behind.” Reference to having “heard my Jesus say” implied not particularly the singer speaking to God, but that God is using the hymn as a conduit to communicate with the singer. This differs from Watts’ conception of hymns being humanity’s words to God. Similarly, “Amidst thy Wrath remember love,” is set in first person in the original text, which Wesley preserves. However, several subtle alterations lend the hymn an air of prayer. The third stanza contains the phrase, “beneath my Father’s frown,” which became, “Father, beneath thy Frown.” The original ninth stanza stated in a matter-of-fact way, “But I’ll confess my guilt to Thee, and grieve for all my sin,” which became in Wesley, “Lord, I confess my guilt to thee, I grieve for all my sin.” Watts’ statement is almost made in abstraction, though it speaks of confessing guilt, it might be argued that the text does not actually confess the guilt. Wesley, the profound theologian, added a necessary clarity to these phrases. God is addressed and there can be no doubt that guilt is actually being confessed. Prayers to God, then, could result in active sanctification in the life of the believer, an important matter for the pietist-influenced Wesley.

(4) In the interest of brevity, stanzas are excised. Wesley’s tendency for brevity is especially evidenced in his approach to altering Watts’ Psalm par-
aphrases. Wesley’s paraphrase of Psalm 100 contains only four stanzas. Watts’ version in *The Psalms of David Imitated in the Language of the New Testament* sets the Psalm into two parts, the first of which is a “plain translation” containing four stanzas, the second of which is simply “a paraphrase” containing six. Wesley altered the opening phrase from, “Nations attend before his throne,” to, “Before Jehovah’s awful Throne.” In this instance at least, there seems to be no theological concern about the “propriety” of the Psalm. The two excluded stanzas of Watts’ Psalm paraphrase are essentially praise-filled and reflect accurately the theme of the Psalm. It seems that Wesley was, in this instance, driven by his concern, “That the service of the Lord’s Day, the length of which has been complained of, is considerably shortened.”17 Wesley himself thought Isaac Watts to be too pro­fuse a writer. In his journal entry for Friday, February 17, 1769 he wrote, “I abridged Dr. Watts’s pretty ‘Treatise on the Passions.’ His hundred and seventy-seven pages will make an useful tract of four-and-twenty.”18 Additionally, Wesley edited Watts’ version of Psalm 146 so as to omit two stanzas, one of which might have been too theologically morbid for Wesley, “Princes must die and turn to dust: Vain is the help of flesh and blood . . . .” Watts, perhaps given that his paraphrases were so controversial because of the liberties he assumed, generally utilized not only more of the psalter, but more of each Psalm. In many cases the Psalm was paraphrased in its entirety. Wesley built on the foundation Watts laid and seized even more liberties with his alterations of the Psalms in particular.

(5) *Any hint of nationalism is removed.* Here, Wesley’s piety differed greatly from Watts’, due largely to their different social and historical situations. Isaac Watts was a Dissenter, a tradition alternately persecuted or tolerated. Yet, the Dissenters, “. . . made a particular point of insisting that they were patriots and Protestants second to none of His Majesty’s subjects.”19 Patriotism, it would seem, ran higher amongst the Dissenters than amongst those in the Establishment. Two dates were of great particular significance to the Dissenters, the failure of the Catholic Guy Fawkes to blow up Parliament and the accession of William of Orange that guaranteed a Protestant throne in England. In his *Hymns and Spiritual Songs*, Watts included hymns for both occasions. These are prefaced/entitled, “Popish idolatry reproved: a psalm for the 5th of November,” “The church saved and her enemies disappointed: composed for the 5th of November, 1694,” and “Power and government from God alone: applied to the Glorious Revolution by King William or the happy accession of King George to the throne.” Wesley was no less English, and was, it could be argued, part of the Establishment. Yet, his experience was shaped by a few more decades than

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19Davies, 109.
Watts. Even in his 1737 hymnal, significantly before the American revolution, Wesley realized the importance of the potential “universal” appeal of his hymns. At least he thought these hymns should not be attached unnecessarily to a particular nation or time. His alterations of Watts’ nationalism in the 1737 hymnal is particularly appropriate and wise given that this volume would be used across the Atlantic in a social and political setting far different from that experienced by the average English subject. Wesley never would have considered including the stanzas found in Watts’ *Hymns and Spiritual Songs* titled, “Nature with all her pow’rs shall sing:”

This Northern isle, our native land,
Lyes safe in the Almighty’s hand:
Our foes of vict’ry dream in vain,
And wear the captivating chain.

He builds and guards the British throne,
And makes it gracious like his own;
Makes our successive princes kind,
And gives our dangers to the wind.\(^{20}\)

These stanzas are not even dedicated to the particular historic, patriotic occasions aforementioned. Rather, they were prefaced, “A song of praise to God from Great Britain.” Wesley would have considered this perspective too myopic. Referring back to his 1737 hymnal, the third book begins with the Watts’ hymn, “Behold the lofty Sky,” which originally contained the phrase, “Ye British Lands rejoice,” which Wesley changed to, “Ye happy Lands rejoice.” In another hymn, the original, “The British Isles are the Lord’s,” was thoughtfully recast to, “Remotest Nations are the Lord’s,” in obvious awareness that the intended audience of this volume will live in a “remote” land. A primary difference between the two hymnwriters is evident in this editorial practice. Watts is a product of the 17th century complete with his own theological nomenclature and worldview. Wesley’s mind anticipated the globalization of the 19th century in his awareness of the possibility of other nations being favored by God beyond Britain.

(6) *Antiquated language is reduced.* As mentioned, Watts’ unconscious conservatism was manifest even in his terminology and phrases. Some of Wesley’s phrases may seem antiquated now, but they are in general often more clear to modern readers than Watts’. Bernard Lord Manning observed of Watts’ antiquated style that, “... many of his words have lost caste; and verse after verse of his psalms and hymns we find ruined by a turn of phrase

\[^{20}\text{Isaac Watts, Hymns and Spiritual Songs Composed on Divine Subjects (Unknown: 1719?), 136.}\]
that, once venerable, is become comic.” 21 In “Come, ye that love the Lord,” the second stanza contains a phrase which in the original read, “But favorites of the heavenly King” which has been clarified to the more inclusive and less Calvinist, “But Servants of the heavenly King.” Another hymn originally contained the phrase, “all his hellish crew,” in describing Satan, which Wesley updated to the more understated, “with his infernal crew.” An arguably less-successful work titled, “Behold what wondrous grace,” included the phrase, “Send down thy Spirit, holy Dove,” but which became, “Show’r down thy Influence, holy Dove.” Here again is Wesley’s tendency to “universalize” the overtly theological terms of Watts by making them comprehensible to the average, uneducated layperson. To “send the Holy Spirit” entailed a completely religious connotation, while to “send an influence” might be done by anyone. Even relatively early in his career he evidenced a particular “Methodist” evangelical piety not to be found in Watts.  

(7) Wesley further Christianized the Psalms. Here, Wesley owed Watts much in establishing a legitimate foundation for “updating” the Psalms. Wesley’s own Anglican tradition was meticulous about its use of the Sternhold and Hopkins, and Tate and Brady psalters, in which the Psalms were literally, and often cumbersomely, metrified. Certainly there were a few select other texts that could be sung, i.e., Christian hymns such as “Veni Creator,” the “Venite,” the “Te Deum,” as well as the canticles of the New Testament. Yet, the volume was primarily a psalter and there was no attempt at manipulating the texts. Watts, of course, varied in his approach. Some of his texts, such as, “Our God, our Help in Ages Past,” based on Psalm 90, made no attempt to supplement the paraphrased verses with Christian theology. Others, such as, “Jesus Shall Reign,” based on Psalm 72, is so explicitly Christian and is based so loosely on the Psalm that to call it a “paraphrase” might be a misnomer. Wesley continued with Watts’ tradition in his addition of Bishop Ken’s doxology at the conclusion of, “Praise ye the Lord,” based on Psalm 147. A cursory examination of the Watts’ hymns included in Wesley’s 1737 collection reveals that Wesley preferred to include Watts’ texts when they were unequivocally Christian. This must not be construed as proposing the idea that all Wesley’s included hymns were overtly Christian. Indeed, he even included one of Watts’ settings of Psalm 90 which makes no specific Christian references in the original or in his revisions. 22  

(8) Wesley altered latent humanism in favor of new-found evangelicalism. Wesley was careful not to include any phrases of inherent humanist “works righteousness.” In one sense, this idea may be traceable to differing ideas about the meaning of hymnody between the two men. Even Watts’ radical use of hymns as, “our word to God,” not, “God’s word to us,” evidences

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a type of humanism which Davies maintains is a response to, or an appro-

priation, by Calvinism of some rationalist ideas. In the 1737 hymnal, 

Wesley included Watts’ hymn based on Psalm 90 whose last phrase origi-
nally read, “Till a wise Care of Piety fit us to die, and dwell with Thee.” That 
an attention to our “piety” will somehow prepare a Christian for heaven, 

without an overt reference to a Christian faith, is a dubious concept for 

Wesley who altered it to read, “Till from the Chains of Sin set free We find 
immortal Life in thee!” In this adjustment, God does the “setting free,” and 

no work on a human being’s part ensures “immortal life.”

The eight aforementioned basic observations must not be unduly extrap-

olated past the 1737 collection. Indeed, a weakness of the comparison may 

be that this work was accomplished before Wesley’s conversion experience 
at Aldersgate. Further, John Wesley lived a long life, and his ideas and 

approaches toward theology and hymnody did not remain static. After all, 

1737 was prior to Charles’ emergence as a hymn writer. Throughout his 
career, John relied less on Watts’ texts and more on his brother’s. However, 

that John Wesley so revered the hymns of Isaac Watts to the extent that one-
half of his first hymnal was composed of Watts’ works suggests that John 
Wesley admired and was influenced by this seminal mind of the 17th and 
18th centuries.

III

Possibly John Wesley’s most important collection, A Collection of 

Hymns for the People Called Methodists, was published in 1780 and con-
tains 535 hymns, of which the majority are from Charles Wesley with only 
seven from Watts. By this time, Charles was well-known as the hymnwriter, 
and John as the theologian, although both men could fulfill either capacity 
nearly equally. Both the Wesleys had passed their most productive years and 
had developed workable ideas, both theologically and otherwise. Simply by 
the lack of Watts’ texts in this volume one can discern that Watts had been 
eclipsed in John Wesley’s mind. Watts’ direct influence at this point is min-
imal. However, that the Wesley brothers still shared certain propensities with 
Watts is evident particularly in their treatment of the psalms. There is always 
a difficulty in a type of negative inference, but it must be noted the number 
and character of the Psalms both Watts and the Wesleys omit from their vol-
umes. In Watts perhaps the omissions are more significant for he actually, if 
not explicitly, intended to metrify the entire psalter. The Wesleys’ conception 
of hymnody developed significantly from the days of the early revolution-

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23 Davies, 99.
24 David W. Music, “Wesley Hymns In Early American Hymnals and Tunebooks,” The Hymn 39 (October 1988): 37-42. Music observes that Charles had begun writing hymns by the 1730s and 
that, “... if John did not see fit to include any hymns by Charles in this first hymnal, it was not 
because his brother had written none.” Music’s article, while not dealing exclusively with the 
Charles-town collection, explores the rather slow incorporation of Wesley hymns into American 
hymnals.
ary Watts. No longer are hymns not directly related to Psalms so unusual. The 1780 *Collection* is not a metrified psalter and would not claim to include most of the Psalms. Yet, it *does* contain versions of many Psalms and omits others. Watts omitted 13 Psalms (8.6% of the psalter) while the Wesleys omitted 36 Psalms (24% of the psalter). Again, Wesley did not intend to metrify the psalter, whereas Watts did, so the comparison must not be taken too far. However, the six Psalms commonly omitted between the two hymnals contain the following themes, which either theologian might have found “unfit” for the modern Christian.

Psalm 52: This Psalm, about those who do evil in contrast with those who do good, might be summarized in verse 5, “Surely God will bring you down to everlasting ruin: He will snatch you up and tear you from your tent.” Psalm 53: Watts omitted only verses 4-6 (half the Psalm). Wesley omitted it entirely. The theme might be summarized in verse 5, “God scattered the bones of those who attacked you; you put them to shame, for God despised them.” Psalm 54: This Psalm seems to imply a strong dichotomy between “good” men and “bad” men, of which the psalmist is definitely the “good.” This might be summarized best in verse 5, “… in your faithfulness destroy them.” Psalm 64: The theme of this Psalm is very similar to that of Psalm 54 as exemplified in verse 2, “Hide me from the conspiracy of the wicked. . . . “ Psalm 70: This Psalm embodies the same sort of thought and is exemplified in verse 2, “. . . may all who desire my ruin be turned back in disgrace.” Psalm 108: This Psalm also references giving, “us aid against the enemy,” but also contains a verse referring to musical instruments as well as verses which recite Hebrew geography. Psalm 137: This is the, “By the rivers of Babylon” Psalm, devoted to a captive singing a song in a foreign land.

John Wesley, in his preface to *The Sunday Service* (1784), remarked that, “Many psalms [are] left out, and many parts of the others, as being highly improper for the mouths of a Christian Congregation.” William Wade’s analysis of the omitted Psalms determines that the omissions fall into five categories, “curses, wrath, killing, and war; descriptions of the wicked, lack of faith, or special personal circumstances at odds with salvation by faith; concerns exclusively historical or geographical.” Perhaps Watts’ prejudices against certain Psalms influenced the young Wesley.

IV

Most of the preceding analysis has centered upon a comparison and contrast of John Wesley and Isaac Watts. Charles Wesley, though, certainly knew as many of Watts’ hymns as his brother knew. Whereas Watts’ accomplishment could be found in his disciplining the Common and Long meters from the rugged metrical psalmody of the 17th century, Charles Wesley’s

26Quoted in *Sunday Service*, James White’s “Introduction,” 11.
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can be found in his development of about sixty-five meters to convey the subtleties of a hymn text. Consider the comparison between a communion text of both.

Isaac Watts', "Twas on that dark, that doleful night," is found in *Hymns and Spiritual Songs*. The hymn is set in seven stanzas in Long Meter, and basically recounts in a metrified fashion Christ’s Last Supper with His disciples, with an interruption of two stanzas in order to place historical events in their cosmic context. Immediately following Jesus’ words of institution, these two stanzas remind us of the historical import. "Justice," it seems, metaphorically will deliver its blow of, "heavy vengeance in our stead," for humanity’s, "black crimes of biggest size." Then Jesus finished His soliloquy, urging the disciples to, "Do this . . . till time shall end." The last stanza concludes with an address to Jesus along with eschatological allusions to the final "marriage-supper of the Lamb."

Charles Wesley’s, "In that sad memorable night," from *Hymns on the Lord’s Supper* (1745) deals with the Last Supper as well. As is to be expected, the fact that both writers set the same historical event results in obvious similarities. In these similarities, both uniqueness and a progressive, historical development may be seen. Charles Wesley moved beyond the confines of Long and Common meters, utilizing 8.8.8.8.8.8. in five stanzas. All five stanzas, with the possible exception of the introductory first, recount the narrative faithfully but poetically. The very first line of the hymn contains much implied meaning, for it is not merely a "sad" night, but it is one which is "memorable," implying Jesus’ command to "do this" from the very beginning. Wesley’s version contains implications for the reader. Wesley’s first stanza remarks of the "death-recording" rite which expresses Christ’s "love." He then proceeded in a trope-like fashion to expound upon the traditional words of institution, saying that Christ’s body is given, "... to purchase life and peace for you, pardon and holiness and heaven, Do this My dying love to show, accept your precious legacy, and thus, My friends, remember me." There is an important personal connection to the activity taking place. The cosmic grandeur of Watts’ fourth and fifth stanzas is reduced to, "My blood so freely shed for you for you and all the sinful race," in Wesley’s fourth. The final stanza is not so much a personal supplication as in Watts’ final stanza. Wesley set the entire hymn in such a way that one’s own personal response is required from the first stanza in which the reader is reminded, "when Jesus was for us betrayed." Watts’ text has Christ betrayed by "pow’rs of earth and hell." Wesley’s use of imagery and descriptive adjectives expands much from Watts’ rather sparse setting. Wesley used phrases such as, "dying love," "solemn memory," "kind concern," "precious legacy," and also personification in His, "blood that speaks your sins forgiven." Interestingly, this hymn does not use first person in relationship to the reader. There is a clear awareness of the Christian community in that His blood was shed for "all mankind."
Isaac Watts, according to Bernard Lord Manning, expressed a vastness and universality of faith in his hymns. To Watts, time and space cannot limit God, for, “Nature with open volume stands” as a testimony for Christ’s love, and it may involve “Millions of years my wond’ring eyes shall o’er thy beauties rove, and endless ages, I’ll adore the glories of thy love.” The Christian’s response to this universality is one of utter futility, for, “Were the whole realm of nature mine, that were a present far too small.” Although Watts certainly produced profoundly personal texts, they are not so much introspective. These hymns always assume an understanding of the Christian in community both with God and with neighbor. These hymns may begin personally, but they proceed to remove the thoughts from oneself onto the greatness of God beyond. “Survey,” a word frequently used in Watts, best sums up this teleological effect. Charles Wesley employed plenty of grandeur—the heavenly, herald angels may sing “Glory to the newborn King,” in which all the nations will “joyful rise,” but Wesley brought this cosmic scope down to the heart of every believer who implores this same Christ to, “fix in us a humble home . . . formed in each believing heart.” Whereas Watts is expansive, Charles Wesley is deep. “Depth of mercy! Can there be mercy still reserved for me? Can my God His wrath forbear? Me, the chief of sinners, spare? I have spilt his precious blood, trampled on the Son of God, filled with pangs unspeakable! I, who yet am not in hell!” This truly Wesleyan evangelical fervor is intensely introspective, aiming for an experience as deep and profound as that of an Aldersgate.

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Isaac Watts broke the long tradition of poorly-executed metrical psalmody with his publication of artful Psalm paraphrases and through his venturing into the realm of non-Scripture based hymn texts as could be found in his *Hymns and Spiritual Songs*. He was constrained by his thorough Calvinism and conservative worldview not to proceed any further. Both John and Charles Wesley read Watts and gleaned much from him. John so admired Watts that his first hymnal is half-filled with Watts’ texts. That Charles Wesley displaced Watts in John’s mind is a tribute to Charles’ skillful ability to continue Watts’ tradition beyond the point where Watts himself could have enlarged it. But these innovations came from no one but Watts originally and without which both Wesleys would have been severely impeded. That modern congregational hymnody is able to express such a wide range of emotions and faith conditions proceeds from and is a testament to the precedence of Isaac Watts, and John and Charles Wesley.