



DISCOVERY

edited by
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Charles Wesley's Earliest Evangelical Sermons

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It is difficult to imagine that after more than two centuries of Wesleyan studies, something so important as six manuscript sermons by Charles Wesley might still remain unpublished. There can be little doubt that the sermons will contribute significantly to our theological understanding of the Rev. Charles Wesley, and the earliest years of the Methodist movement.

These shorthand manuscript sermons discovered in the Methodist Archives in Great Britain are remarkable in a number of ways. They illustrate the vitality and power of Charles Wesley's prose, the variety of sermon structures he employed (which undoubtedly served as models for the early generations of lay preachers), and the important influence of the Homilies of the Church of England in the development of early Methodist theology.¹

There are a total of 102 manuscript shorthand pages, comprising eight sermons or sermon fragments, and six completely different sermons. These sermons vary in size from the 10,100 words of the sermon Charles preached before the University of Oxford on July 1, 1739, to the 2,900 words of his sermon from Luke 18:9f, with the combined total of the six sermons exceeding 40,000 words of text. There are a total of five sermon booklets made up of 324mm. by 200mm. sheets folded horizontally in the middle and most of them

¹The Homilies were first published as a whole in 1547 under the careful supervision of Archbishop Cranmer. The vast majority of Charles Wesley's quotations in the shorthand sermons come from book one, sermons two to five, the homilies on: "The Misery of Man"; "Salvation"; "Faith"; and "Good Works." All of these sermons are believed to be the work of Cranmer himself, with the exception of "The Misery of Man," which almost certainly belongs to Bishop Bonner of Queen Mary's reign.

stitched together along the fold.

Although it is unusual to find joint contributions to "Discovery," this particular discovery has involved a number of persons. It is impossible to give a complete history of the shorthand manuscript sermons, but we do wish to recognize all those who have played a part in our own particular efforts.

The account begins with a conversation between Dr. Richard Heitzenrater and Tom Albin at Perkins School of Theology in Dallas, Texas, in December of 1979. During the discussion the existence of several manuscript shorthand sermons was mentioned as a possible source for the study of early Methodist spirituality.² In December of 1980, John Tyson³ asked Tom Albin if he would attempt to locate the sermons in the Methodist Archive holdings at the John Rylands University Library in Manchester. Although the shorthand sermons were not listed in the card catalogue at that time, they did appear in the typescript list of contents found in Charles Wesley, Box 5, Diary Box Presses. Thanks to the persistence of Mr. D. W. Riley and his staff, the sermons were discovered and permission granted for photocopies to be made. Mr. Albin discussed the sermons with colleagues in Cambridge and sent copies to be deciphered by the Rev. Dr. O. A. Beckerlegge and Mr. Tyson. These men confirmed the importance of the documents. Later Mr. Tyson decided to focus his research on Charles Wesley's hymns in the period from 1748 to 1788. This left Albin and Beckerlegge to decipher the manuscripts and produce a critical edition of each sermon. Each worked on the manuscripts independently and with the aid of the Literary and Linguistic Computing Center in Cambridge, the critical edition was prepared for publication.⁴ Every sermon has been deciphered and checked by at least two individuals working independently, and in the

²These sermons were known to be in the Archives when they were at City Road, but it was not certain if they had been transferred with the other materials to Manchester and deposited in the John Rylands Library in 1977.

³The Rev. Tyson is Assistant Professor of Theology at Houghton College, Houghton, New York. Currently he is writing a Ph.D. dissertation on Charles Wesley's doctrine of the atonement under the supervision of Dr. James Pain of Drew University.

⁴These sermons, along with all other known Charles Wesley sermons have been entered into the University computer and an exhaustive concordance of all significant works has been produced as a part of Tom Albin's Ph.D. research. A special word of thanks is due to John L. Dawson, Ph.D., who produced the concordance; Cinzia Caballero who typed and edited the bulk of the computer material; and all the LLCC staff there for their encouragement and assistance. After the thesis is complete, a copy of this concordance will be placed in the Methodist Archives and will be available for consultation there or at the LLCC in Cambridge with Thomas Albin's written permission.

case of some sermons⁵ there have been more. The result still leaves some problems unsolved, others with tentative solutions. However, the vast majority of the sermon texts are clearly rendered and significantly more reliable than if the work was the product of any single individual's effort. We are now looking for an opportunity to make these sermons available to interested persons by means of publication in a scholarly journal.

A summary outline of all the manuscript documents follows:⁶

Luke 18:9ff — 4 MS pages; an incomplete and early draft.

Luke 18:9ff — 8 MS pages; complete, a later draft.

John 8:1ff — 12 MS pages; a complete booklet and an earlier draft.

John 8:1ff — 13 MS pages; complete, a later draft.

Romans 3:23-4 — 14 MS pages; a complete booklet with a preaching register containing three entries dating from January 1 to March 11, 1739; also a fragmentary benediction.⁷

Romans 3:23-5 — 18 MS pages; a complete booklet with the longhand University prayer written on an unnumbered page inside. Charles Wesley preached this University sermon on Sunday, July 1, 1739. Although it contains sections copied from the other Romans 3 sermon above, it is a different sermon.

Titus 3:8 — 12 MS pages; a complete booklet with four entries in the preaching register between the dates of December 21, 1738 and March 4, 1739.

I John 3:14 — 21 MS pages; a complete booklet with a sermon register containing 19 entries for the period July 16, 1738 to April 1, 1739. The sermon has two parts and each is noted distinctly in the register.

⁵For example, the John 8:1 manuscript sermon had three readers, vis., the present editors and Mr. Douglas Lister, who is skilled in nearly twenty different types of early English shorthand. We are grateful for the time and attention he and his wife gave to checking the deciphered texts and to offering solutions to difficult passages.

⁶Texts listed here in the order they are found in the New Testament.

⁷It is interesting to note that Charles Wesley dated January to March in the "New Style" which did not come into widespread use in England until 1751.