

## Foreword

IN 1786, NEAR THE end of his long and faithful ministry, John Wesley penned a short essay titled “Thoughts upon Methodism.” In this essay, Wesley warned that the Methodist movement would become a dead sect—having the form of religion but lacking its power—unless they held fast to the crucial insights and practices that birthed the movement. Significantly, the first insight that he emphasizes which early Methodists drew from their broad study of Scripture was “That religion is an inward principle; that it is no other than the mind that was in Christ; or, in other words, the renewal of the soul after the image of God, in righteousness and true holiness,” wrought in us “by the power of the Holy Ghost.”<sup>1</sup>

Every quest or journey is oriented by its goal. The goal of early Methodists was to become faithful and mature disciples of Christ. This meant far more than just affirming Christ as their Lord or having an assurance of his pardoning love. They longed for what they saw promised in Scripture: the transformation of their sin-distorted attitudes and dispositions into ever greater conformity with Christ’s abiding love for God, for neighbor, and for the whole creation. As Charles Wesley put it in hymnic prayers, they longed for the Spirit of Christ to “plant, and root, and fix in me / All the mind that was in thee”;<sup>2</sup> or the Spirit of “Love divine, all loves excelling” to “set our hearts at liberty.”

In other words, while the early Methodists celebrated the freedom *from* sin that comes in the new birth, they fervently desired that greater freedom *for* walking in God’s life-giving ways and participating in God’s saving mission. Implicit in this desire was their conviction that concern for transformation of the heart was not a distraction from or alternative to concern for the world around us. As John Wesley frequently reminded

1. J. Wesley, *Thoughts upon Methodism*, 258.

2. Wesley and Wesley, *Hymns and Sacred Poems* (1742), 222; “Hymn on Phil. 2:5,” st. 10.

them, holiness of heart is reciprocally connected to holiness of life. As we experience the love of God transforming our lives, we are more inclined to engage the world around us in compassionate and transforming ways; and as we engage the world in these ways, empowered by the Spirit, our transformation in Christ-likeness is deepened!

Obviously, this is an ideal. It was my fortune to grow up in a congregation within the broad Wesleyan tradition that included some members whose lives embodied such growing transformation in love divine, and who extended that love to me. The congruence between the faith they articulated and their lives drew me into and grounded me in the Wesleyan tradition. Over the last four decades, as I turned to scholarly study of Wesleyanism, I continued to be drawn to those within it who emulate this congruence. I also increasingly appreciated students of the tradition who approached their subject with a desire not only to understand, but to encourage and help facilitate in the present church the quest for love divine.

Over the years, I have come to prize the author of this collection of essays in particular. Paul Wesley Chilcote is not just a careful and reliable historian of early Methodism, he embodies in his approach to the subject characteristic commitments of early Methodism. To begin with, as Chilcote notes in his helpful introductory study of the faith of John and Charles Wesley, *Recapturing the Wesleys' Vision* (2004), a prominent characteristic of the Wesleyan tradition has been to appreciate and seek to hold together themes and practices that are posed in opposition by some Christian writers or communities—such as: both faith *and* works in salvation; both individual piety *and* social transformation; or both the centrality of the Word *and* the prominence of the Eucharist. Far from a hazy (or lazy) eclecticism, Chilcote contends that this characteristic of Wesleyan theology reflects its concern to do justice to the full breadth of Scripture, the full range of Christian experience, and full salvific concern of the triune God.

But Chilcote does not just defend the “conjunctive” character of the Wesleyan tradition, he has extended it in ways that help correct imbalances in some scholarship on the tradition. One way he has done this is to give Charles Wesley (who is often nearly forgotten) more equal voice with his brother John, particularly probing areas where they differ. Note how this volume opens with a section on the younger brother before turning to essays that engage them both.

Going further, Chilcote has labored throughout his career to recover the stories and witness of the full early Methodist community, not just its leaders. His dissertation recovered the stories of early Methodist women preachers and, in edited collections like *Her Own Story* (2001) and *Early Methodist Spirituality* (2007), he introduces contemporary readers to the writings of several

early Methodist women. Some of the fruits of this dimension of Chilcote's scholarship appear in the third section of the present volume.

In addition to the "conjunctive" character of the theology of John and Charles Wesley, recent scholarship has highlighted how they worked as "practical" theologians—valuing and focusing their efforts on formative expressions of theology like song, liturgy, sermons, etc. In the second section of this volume, Chilcote describes this characteristic of the brothers well. But I would encourage readers to check out how Chilcote *emulates* this same type of practical theology in the appendices to this volume and in books like *Praying in the Wesleyan Spirit* (2001).

One other way that Chilcote embodies the concern of early Methodism that is evident in this collection deserves mention. When the movement started, the Wesley brothers insisted that they were not trying to start yet another "church," but seeking to participate in God's work of breathing new life into the church as a whole. Similarly, in all of his writing on the Wesleyan tradition, Chilcote comes across not as seeking to defend or to recommend that tradition over others, but as trying to distill and offer the pastoral wisdom of Wesleyanism at its best to the larger church, in hopes of helping to heal some of the divides that continue to impede our communion with one another and undercut our witness to the world.

As one who shares this hope, and has been helped to understand the Wesleyan tradition in many ways by Chilcote's scholarship (as well as been enriched by his winsome spirit and deep spirituality), I gladly recommend this collection of his most salient essays.

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SAMPLE

## Preface

MY JOURNEY AS A serious student of John and Charles Wesley began around 1974. As a Methodist undergraduate student, majoring in theology and history at a Lutheran institution, I came to appreciate my middle name—Wesley—as never before. I loved my time at Valparaiso University. I enjoyed living inside a Christian tradition different from my own. But this juxtaposition pushed me to ask questions about my identity. What differences distinguished these two great Protestant traditions? What did they hold in common? I discovered, for example, that Lutherans retained a rich Eucharistic heritage, something lost in the ambiguities of the American frontier among Methodists and in need of recovery. Followers of Martin Luther helped me reclaim that lost treasure in terms of my own spirituality. So I began a rather intense study of the Wesleys in hopes of other discoveries that might emerge.

At around the same time, as a child of a Methodist parsonage, and having come through a period in which I claimed I would do anything other than go into the ministry, I was nudged by the Holy Spirit to rethink that judgment. Indeed, during the Advent season of 1974, and in the Chapel of the Resurrection at Valpo, I sensed a firm call to seminary to pursue a path into the United Methodist ministry. In my mind, I linked this call with a teaching vocation as well, so I began looking for a school that had a robust doctoral program, anticipating that I might want to pursue further studies beyond my ministerial training. In conversations about all this with my mentor, he advised me to leave the region of my birth—the Midwest—with hopes that such a change would raise my horizons and broaden my vision. Convinced that I wanted to do more in Wesley studies, I began my quest and quickly settled on Duke University, the divinity school of which provided the foundation for my ministerial pursuits, and the graduate school of which afforded the unique opportunity for me to study closely with both Frank Baker and Bob Cushman.

In my final year of my master of divinity degree program, I did not have as much clarity as this might suggest. In fact, I struggled with a divided mind. One part of me wanted to pursue doctoral studies in liturgical and ecumenical theology. I had a place in mind for that—Union Theological Seminary—and hopes of working with Geoffrey Wainwright, who was both a liturgical theologian and a Wesleyan scholar. But when I learned that Frank Baker, my beloved instructor in Wesley studies at Duke, was planning to retire a year beyond my graduation, that event made my decision for me. There was no way I could pass up the opportunity of studying with the foremost student of John and Charles Wesley in the late twentieth century. Having sat at his feet in his classroom and his home, I knew who this was. Dr. Baker represented two things, in particular, that I have always sought to emulate since those days: he was an exceptional scholar and an authentic follower of Jesus, academic excellence and genuine humility bound together in one person. Dr. Baker welcomed me with open arms as his last doctoral student.

When I launched into my studies, I never realized how many doors this would open. I always thought that obtaining a doctorate entailed drilling down and focusing in, not opening up and reaching out. I didn't know how much the personal connections I had made with other classmates, scholars, and leaders within the church, in particular, would lead me in totally unanticipated directions. So, after I completed my studies, the adventure began. In the course of it all, the most precious gift Frank Baker bestowed on me was, ironically, my own voice. He did all he could do to help me find that voice. He let me know when I was hiding it, perhaps in deference to scholars I considered high above me. He also affirmed it when he heard it. I can still hear him saying, "There it is. Can you hear it? That's your voice." He instilled my confidence in that voice by affirming me and made me feel more like a son than a student. After the committee deliberated over my dissertation defense, he was the one to invite me back into the room. He shook my hand, as is the custom, with the greeting, "Dr. Chilcote." He also said that I could now call him "Frank." But I found that so difficult. He was always Dr. Baker to me.

Dr. Baker produced a collection of his salient essays, and so did my theological mentor, Dr. Cushman. Those two volumes provided the impetus for me to consider the possibility of this present collection. I confess that it still feels somewhat self-serving, and I sit uncomfortably with that feeling. But many, particularly my students, convinced me that the breadth of this collection and the quality of the insights into the Wesleyan heritage it affords make this a worthwhile endeavor. I hope you find this to be true.

I hardly know where to begin to thank all those who have supported me along the way and who contributed to the development of this book

over the years. But the words of St. Paul to the Philippians come immediately to mind.

I thank my God every time I remember you, constantly praying with joy in every one of my prayers for all of you, because of your sharing in the gospel from the first day until now. I am confident of this, that the one who began a good work among you will bring it to completion by the day of Jesus Christ. It is right for me to think this way about all of you, because you hold me in your heart, for all of you share in God's grace. (Phil 1:3-7a)

I hope this book makes abundantly clear to you that Wesleyan theology and practice is all about grace and love. My research in Wesleyan studies put me inevitably into circles of beloved colleagues with sharp minds and open hearts. My students across several continents shaped my thinking, contributed their unique insights from their own contexts, and encouraged me in both my teaching and my scholarship. I come from a family with deep roots in the Wesleyan heritage, and my immediate family has encouraged and supported me more than any others, particularly my wife, Janet, to whom I dedicate this book. A special word of thanks to my dear friend and colleague, Randy Maddox, who graciously agreed to provide a foreword for this volume. He is one of the most dependable people I have ever known, and he has done a great honor to me in this. To all these dear colleagues, friends, and family members, I want you to know how much "I hold you in my heart" and will continue to do so as we engage in this quest for love divine together, in grace and with joy and peace in our hearts.

Paul W. Chilcote

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