

CHAPTER 8

Charles Wesley and the Poor

S T KIMBROUGH, JR.

Introduction

The Introduction to *Sermons by the Late Rev. Charles Wesley, A.M.* (1816), according to tradition written by Charles's wife Sarah, says that "John affectionately discharged the social duties, but Charles seemed formed by nature to repose in the bosom of his family."¹ Thus was established, at least in part, the basis for the prevalent generalization that John was the socially engaged brother and Charles the socially less-engaged, poet-hymn writer, and family man.

Charles's *Journal*, letters, sermons, and even his hymns paint a somewhat different picture. However, let it be clear from the outset that no attempt to romanticize Charles's contribution to the achievement of social justice in eighteenth-century England will approach reality. John and Charles were different in this matter as in many others. While they have often been viewed as almost identical "twins" in thought and deed, some have drawn the contrasts sharply. Frank Whaling has claimed that "when we examine the brothers within the broader Methodist context, their dissimilarities pale into significance beside the basic unity of their hearts and minds."² In contrast, Erik Routley says this of John and Charles:

They were in some ways complementary; yet, in fact, they saw less of one another than brothers engaged in such work as theirs might be expected to do, and their approach to religion and life differed in matters so fundamental that open disagreement between them was not only possible, but was probably as infrequent as it was only because they spent so little of their time in company.³

In addressing the subject of Charles Wesley and the poor, what is there to be said about Charles that cannot be said of John? Does

Charles make a contribution to this subject that is uniquely his own? Perhaps the uniqueness of his contribution lies not so much in differences of ethical and theological views and practice, but in the way he opened for the church to remember its responsibility to the dispossessed of the earth.

The description of the social engagement of the brothers in the Introduction to the 1816 volume of sermons mentioned above is important for understanding the background and influences on Charles. Samuel, the eldest brother, had a tremendous impact on the young Charles, especially at Westminster School, where he was an Usher when Charles arrived there as a young scholar. The influence of his churchmanship, scholarship, and poetry on Charles are well known. Charles was also aware that "the infirmary for the sick and poor at Westminster was first projected by him (Samuel), and his strenuous endeavours eminently promoted its success."⁴

It is common knowledge that the small group of students at Oxford which included Charles and John followed in Samuel's footsteps, so to speak, in a concern for others—visiting the sick and those in workhouses and prisons, establishing a charity school, and instructing the uneducated poor. The outcasts of society were objects of their passion, even before "conversion."

Certainly the involvement with the dispossessed prisoners and poor in the Colony of Georgia, the encounter with the horrors of slavery (the cruelties of which Charles viewed as "a public act to indemnify murder"⁵), and the disillusionment of the mission to Native Americans intensified the passion of the brothers for the outcasts of society. Finally, this description (probably written by Sarah Wesley) of the social task and engagement of Charles and John is both succinct and insightful:

They were neither to be intimidated by danger, affected by interest, or deterred by disgrace: and surely it required no common degree of resolution to expose themselves to the rude ignorance of the best censure of their particular friends; yet all these evils were incurred by this mode of reforming the outcasts of mankind. It is not possible to imagine that, in their situation in life, men of learning and abilities, distinguished by academic honours, could have been actuated by any motive but the purest benevolence.⁶

The labouring poor are the most numerous class in every country; they are not less necessary to the happiness of a nation than to the higher ranks of society. In the year 1738 their education

was totally neglected; few of them were taught the duty of attending churches, and there was no possibility of doing them good but by some extraordinary mode of communication, as their ignorance and vicious habits removed them out of the reach of those salutary methods appointed by government.

It was a matter of national importance that so large a part of the community should be instructed in the principles of religion and the social duties of life; and it is in this point that the names of John and Charles Wesley and the Rev. George Whitefield will be peculiarly held in honour by the candid and unprejudiced.

They directed their labours to those who had no instructor, to the highways and hedges; to the miners in Cornwall and Newcastle, and the colliers in Bristol. These unhappy creatures married and buried among themselves, and often committed murders with impunity. It was always dangerous to pass their woods till these clergymen visited them, and, by their active and unremitting endeavours, a sense of morals, decency, and religion, was introduced: the ignorant were instructed, the wretched relieved, and the abandoned reclaimed. In their arduous task they not only met with opposition from the clergy, but shameful treatment from the magistrates, who (to the disgrace of the times be it mentioned), so far from punishing or restraining a lawless mob assembled to abuse them, encouraged and often instigated their excesses.⁷

Charles Wesley's *Journal* includes records of his encounters with the poor. Here one finds him with and among the poor as friend, teacher, and pastor. The following entry in particular indicates attitudes that are formative in Charles's understanding of and ministry to the poor.

Thurs., June 22d [1738]. I comforted Hetty,⁸ under much divine destiny because, she was not in all points affected like other believers, especially the poor; who have generally a much larger degree of confidence than the rich and learned. I have proof of this today at Mr. Searl's, where, meeting a poor woman, and convincing her of unbelief, I used a prayer for her, that God who hath chosen the poor of this world to be rich in faith, would now impart to her his unspeakable gift.⁹

That the poor's capacity for confidence includes the divine destiny of richness of faith is primary to a theology of mission, as Charles understood, interpreted, and practiced it. God is not a substitute for their need nor the "only way out" of destitution. Those who have been dispossessed by and in this world can see God more clearly than others, for nothing material stands between them and God. There-

fore, as Charles prays the prayer "For a Family in Want," he does not pray condescendingly for a family on the margin of society, but for a family that is sustained by the Living Bread in ways of which others can only dream. Such a family knows what it means, in the words of Charles Albert Tindley, to have "nothing between my soul and my Savior." Hence God is "the portion of the poor," for those who possess nothing, understand as no one else what it means to depend fully on God's Word.

O God, who knowest the things we need,
Before thy children cry,
Give us this day our daily bread,
As manna from the sky.

By providential love bestowed
Thy blessings we receive,
And satisfied with scanty food
Miraculously live.

We live, but not by bread alone,
Without distracting care,
A life invisible, unknown,
A life of faith and prayer.

We on thy only word depend,
Who nothing here possess,
Relieved by the unfailing Friend
Of indigent distress.

The portion of the poor thou art,
Who thy commands obey,
And trust thou never wilt depart,
But keep us to that day.

The poor in every age and place
Thou dost, O God, approve
To mark with thy distinguished grace,
To enrich with faith and love.¹⁰

A second entry from the *Journal* that informs our subject is that of Saturday, August 10th [1745]:

I preached at Shepton-Mallet, where a great door is opening, and there are many adversaries. One of the devil's drunken champions attempted to disturb us; but my voice prevailed.

They desired me to meet their little Society at an unusual place, to disappoint the mob. I walked forward toward the town, then

turned back over the field, to drop the people, and, springing up a rising ground, sprained or broke my leg, I knew not which; but I fell down when I offered to set my foot to the ground. The brethren carried me to an hut, which was quickly filled with the poor people. It was soon noised about town that I had broke my leg; some said my neck, and that it was a judgment upon me. The principal man of the place, Mr. P., sent me a kind message, and his bath-chair to bring me to his house. I thanked him, but declined his offer, on account of my pain, which unfitted me for any company, except that of my best friends,—the poor. With these I continued praying, singing, and rejoicing for two hours. Their love quite delighted me. Happiest they that could come near to do anything for me. When my strength was exhausted, they laid me on their bed, the best they had; but I could not sleep for pain.¹¹

The poor as “his best friends” is a theme that surfaces a number of times in Charles’s hymns and poems. It is a perspective that shapes his missional engagement as a clergyman and Christian. It is not enough merely to do something for the outcasts of society. They must become one’s best friends! Hence, in his *Short Hymns on Select Passages of the Holy Scriptures* (1762), he wrote,

Help me to make the poor my friends,
By that which paves the way to hell,
That when our loving labour ends,
And dying from this earth we fail,
Our friends may greet us in the skies
Born to a life that never dies.¹²

Here Charles is reflecting on Luke 16:9, “Make to yourselves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness; that when ye fail, they may receive you into everlasting life.”

Charles is driven by a fundamental principle which he records in his *Journal* on Thurs., July 25th [1754, at Lakenham]:

The rain drove me into brother Edward’s. Only the sincere and serious attended. The poor have a right to the Gospel. I therefore preached Christ crucified to them, from Zech. xii.10.¹³

In one of the sacred hymns/poems written “After Preaching to the Newcastle Colliers” (Hymn 2) and published in *Hymns and Sacred Poems* of 1749, Charles affirms the fulfillment of that right in his own ministry.

Even now, All-loving Lord,
Thou hast sent forth thy word,
Thou the door hast opened wide:
(Who can shut thy open door!)
I the grace have testified,
Preached Thy Gospel to the poor.¹⁴

One instance in the *Journal* provides a different picture of the socially engaged Charles Wesley. Here he assumes the role of a civil arbitrator on behalf of the poor. The entry for July 5th [1751] describes an incident at Worcester at which rioters were present and he doubted whether he had any business there at the time. "Yet," he says, "at the desire of the poor people, I went to their room at seven."¹⁵ Thereafter, the rioters began creating havoc by throwing dust on everyone. Charles immediately went to the Mayor.

I spent an hour with him, pleading the poor people's cause. He said he had never before heard of their being so treated; that is, pelted, beat, and wounded, their house battered, and windows, partitions, locks broke; that none had applied to him for justice, or he should have granted it; that he was well assured of the great mischief the Methodists had done throughout the nation, and the great riches Mr. Whitefield and their other teachers had acquired; that their societies were quite unnecessary, since the Church was sufficient; that he was for having neither Methodist nor Dissenter.

I easily answered his objections. He treated me with civility and freedom, and promised, at parting, to do our people justice. Whether he does or not, I have satisfied my own conscience.¹⁶

This view of Charles as the civil arbitrator recalls the Charles Wesley in Georgia negotiating a settlement with a Native American tribe. As Tories and supporters of the monarchy, Charles and John Wesley were not engaged in efforts to reform the governmental and societal structures which perpetuated oppression of the poor in the eighteenth-century England, but they did attack head-on the problems and results of such oppression within English society. The account just cited clearly shows that civil disobedience often evoked significant exercise of civil responsibility, even from Charles, to the extent that a civil authority was confronted with injustice against the poor.

Remembering the Social Imperatives of the Gospel

For Charles Wesley, as for John, the gospel places social imperatives at the heart of the Christian life. This is stated clearly in their preface to *Hymns and Sacred Poems* (1742):

*First, we not only allow, but earnestly contend, (as for the Faith once delivered to the Saints) That there is no Perfection in this Life which implies any Differentiation from attending All the Ordinances of GOD, or from doing Good unto All Men, while we have Time, tho' specially unto the Household of Faith.*¹⁷

Charles and John became convinced through a variety of influences, including Moravian hymn singing, that the wedding of theological verse with music provided one of the most effective ways of celebrating and remembering faith, responsibility, and practice. While John was the primary editor of such verse (though Frank Baker's recent work on Charles's *Hymns for the Nativity of our Lord* [1745]¹⁸ provides new insight on the work of Charles as an editor), it is Charles in large measure who provides the vehicles of memory through his own creative poetic genius.

Therefore, in the light of the citation from the Preface of *Hymns and Sacred Poems* of 1742, it is not surprising to find what one might perhaps call a "Wesleyan Social Manifesto" in that volume:

Help us to help each other, Lord,
Each other's cross to bear,
Let all their friendly aid afford,
And feel each other's care.

Help us to build each other up,
Our little stock improve,
Increase our Faith, confirm our Hope,
And perfect us in Love.¹⁹

Feeling the care of one's kindred is essential to faith of head and heart. Just as one must *feel* the blood of Christ applied, so must one *feel* the care of others.²⁰

The Language of the Poor

Charles Wesley prompts the church's memory of the social imperatives of the gospel and particularly its engagement with the poor by using language that has its social location among the poor and outcast. He uses metaphors, similes, figures of speech, and nomen-

clature with which the dispossessed of eighteenth-century English society could identify.

The poverty stricken, who received little or no medical care for ailments or physical impairments, heard an unfamiliar invitation (to the Great Supper) in the words:

Come, all ye souls by sin oppressed,
Ye restless wanderers after rest;
Ye poor, and maimed, and halt, and blind,
In Christ a hearty welcome find.²¹

The prisons of the day were filled with persons arrested for debts, who had been entrapped by insidious laws and become victims of grave injustices. No doubt they identified with the following words in ways others could not:

Poor debtors by our Lord's request,
A full acquittance we receive;
And criminals, with pardon blest,
We at our Judge's instance live.²²

Notice the language: debtors, acquittance, criminals, pardon, judge. Charles packs into four lines words that are integral to the daily fate of innumerable prisoners of eighteenth-century England and transforms them into words of hope. What welcome thoughts for prisoners, who often had to bribe their guards with money just to have their chains taken off for a few hours during the day, were Wesley's lines:

My chains fell off, my heart was free,
I rose, went forth, and followed thee.²³

From Charles the dispossessed of society hear what they do not hear in the workplace, the street, courts, or prisons: they are on an equal level in this world with every other human being before God. They too are called and loved by God. The unloved are loved.

Love immense and unconfined,
Love to all of humankind,
Love, which willeth all should live,
Love, which all to all would give,
Love, that over all prevails,
Love, that never, never fails:
Stand secure, for thou shalt prove
All the eternity of love.²⁴

Charles's summons to the dispossessed is expressed much more explicitly in the following lines:

Outcasts of men, to you I call,
 Harlots, and publicans, and thieves!
 He spreads his arms to embrace you all,
 Sinners alone his grace receives:
 No need of him the righteous have;
 He came the lost to seek and save!²⁵

He hath opened a door
 To the penitent poor,
 And rescued from sin,
 And admitted the harlots and publicans in.
 They have heard the glad sound,
 They have liberty found
 Through the blood of the Lamb,
 And plentiful pardon in Jesus's name.²⁶

Hymns for Ministry to the Poor

Charles Wesley creates a hymnic, poetically remembered theology that articulates the imperatives of ministry to the poor.

(1) God's universal love includes the poor. God has chosen them and marked them as recipients of God's grace and for the enrichment of faith and love. In reflecting on Luke 4:26, "Unto none of them was Elias sent, save unto a woman that was a widow," Wesley wrote:

The poor I to the rich prefer,
 If with thine eyes I see,
 To bear thy Spirit's character
 The poor are chose by Thee:
 The poor in every age and place
 Thou dost, O God, approve
 To mark with thy distinguished grace,
 To enrich with faith and love.²⁷

The inclusivity of God's love is affirmed for him also in Matthew 2:10: "So those servants went out into the highways, and gathered together all as many as they found, both bad and good: and the wedding was furnished with guests."

God his grace on them bestows
 Whom he vouchsafes to call,
 No respect of persons knows,
 But offers Christ to all:

In the wedding-garment clad
(The faith which God will not reprove)
Poor and rich, and good and bad
May banquet on his love.²⁸

(2) The poor vicariously occupy Christ's place in the world; hence, faithful response to them is faithful response to Christ. Wesley understands Matthew 26:11, "Ye have the poor always with you," in this manner:

Yes, the poor supply thy place,
Still deputed, Lord, by thee,
Daily exercise our grace,
Prove our growing charity;
What to them with right intent
Truly, faithfully is given,
We have to our Saviour lent,
Laid up for ourselves in heaven.²⁹

The constancy of the poor's presence should evoke a conscious daily exercise of mercy as evidence of unending growth in charity and love throughout one's life. What one offers to the poor, one offers to Christ. This is not an abstract theological concept for Charles, but a living reality.

(3) Love and care of the poor are primary for followers of Christ. They are the highest of callings.

The poor as Jesus' bosom-friends,
The poor he makes his latest care,
To all his successors commends,
And wills us on our hands to bear:
The poor our dearest care we make,
Aspiring to superior bliss,
And cherish for their Saviour's sake,
And love them with a love like his.³⁰

Christ's intimate friends are the poor! For Charles it is taken for granted that one cannot be a friend of Christ without being a friend of the poor. Furthermore, love of the poor is not simply a "beautiful idea" commended by Christ to his followers; rather it is the will of Christ to be borne on one's hands, with which one is to touch, heal, comfort, and care for the poor. Such care is, Charles says, "superior bliss."

(4) The poor bring Christian perspectives on wealth and riches into proper focus. It is clear that John Wesley, while discouraging confidence in worldly wealth, encouraged members of the societies to be economically productive and to use their resources of gain for the good of the gospel and care of the weak. He does not call for a dispossession of all wealth, however.³¹ Charles largely shares John's view here, but borders on calling for total dispossession of all earthly gain. Of Acts 20:33, "I coveted no one's silver or gold or clothing," Charles says:

The servant of a Master poor,
 Possesst of treasures that endure,
 Can no terrestrial good desire,
 Silver, or gold, or gay attire;
 Nor will he judge who riches have,
 Limit the Almighty's power to save,
 Or lump them with invidious zeal,
 And rashly send them all to hell.³²

Charles's letters to his wife indicate, however, that, as did John, he sought to practice a responsible personal financial policy and hence did not totally renounce all earthly goods in an ascetic sense. Yet he struggled greatly with the question of wealth and possessions. This is nowhere more evident than in his powerful and heart-rending response to Acts 4:34-5, "There was not a needy person among them, for as many as owned lands or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of what was sold. They laid it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to each as any had need."

Which of the Christians now
 Would his possessions sell?
 The fact ye scarce allow,
 The truth incredible,
 That men of old so weak should prove,
 And as themselves their neighbour love.

Of your redundant store
 Ye may a few relieve,
 But all to feed the poor
 Ye cannot, cannot give,
 Houses or lands for Christ forego,
 Or live as Jesus lived below.

Jesus, thy church inspire
With Apostolic love,
Infuse the one desire
T'insure our wealth above,
Freely with earthly goods to part,
And joyfully sell all in heart.

With thy pure Spirit filled,
And loving Thee alone,
We shall our substance yield,
Call nothing here our own,
Whate'er we have or are submit
And lie, as beggars, at thy feet.³³

The desire "Freely with earthly goods to part" is at the heart of Wesley's social task, for one's resources are to be used for the salvation, care, comfort, well-being, and improvement of others. Followers of Christ are to "call nothing here our own" (stanza 4, line 4).

(5) The sacraments of the church belong to the poor. The Lord's table knows no exclusivity:

Come, sinners, to the gospel feast;
Let every soul be Jesu's guest;
Ye need not one be left behind,
For God hath bidden all mankind.

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Come, all ye souls by sin oppressed,
Ye restless wanderers after rest;
Ye poor, and maimed, and halt, and blind,
In Christ a hearty welcome find.³⁴

We learn from Charles's *Journal* that he administered Holy Communion to felons, indigents, colliers, and simply the poor. His pastoral concern thrust him into the prisons of Newgate, Oxford, and elsewhere to preach, counsel, read prayers, comfort the condemned, assist with physical needs, and share the body and blood of Christ. He ministered to white and black alike, to thief and murderer.

(6) The ministerial office embodies a mandate of service to the poor. Charles wrote numerous poems that describe and evaluate the office of ministry. In a hymn based on Acts 4:36-7, he draws an analogy for the office from the action of Barnabas, a Levite who sold a field and brought the money and laid it at the apostles' feet.

Ye Levites hired who undertake
 The awful ministry
 For lucre or ambition's sake,
 A nobler pattern see!
 Who greedily your pay receive,
 And adding cure to cure,
 In splendid ease and pleasures live
 By pillaging the poor.

See here an apostolic priest,
 Commissioned from the sky,
 Who dares of all vain self divest,
 The needy to supply!
 A primitive example rare
 Of gospel-poverty,
 To feed the flock one's only care,
 And like the Lord to be.

Jesus, to us apostles raise,
 Like-minded pastors give
 Who freely may dispense thy grace
 As freely they receive;
 Who disengaged from all below
 May earthly things despise,
 And every creature-good forego
 For treasure in the skies.³⁵

"Priests" faithful to the apostolic office are willing to follow Barnabas' example and divest themselves of "all" in order to supply the needy!

Charles knew the dangers of wealth to the office of ministry. On one occasion in *MS Preachers* (1786), he spoke of clergy who, when they began, had hearts that were rightly disposed and only lived to serve God, but they have been corrupted by money, food, and clothing. At first their only hope and aim was Jesus, but the love of earthly things has corrupted them.

Genteelity we now affect,
 Fond to adorn the outward man,
 Nice in our dress, we court respect
 And female admiration gain;
 As men of elegance and taste
 We slight, and overlook the poor,
 But in the rich, with servile haste
 Contend to make our interest sure.³⁶

He accentuates the clergy's divesting itself of responsibility to the poor even more strongly in the following critique, also found in MS Preachers:

The weak, the simple, and the poor
Within thy mercy's arms secure
With confidence we leave:
But O the strong, the rich, the wise,
Ee'r their last spark of goodness dies
Revisit and forgive.³⁷

Charles personalizes these perspectives in a poem written in the first person in the same manuscript, a prayer for a life of poverty and toil in service to Christ.

While preaching gospel to the poor,
My soul impoverish, and secure
By deep humility;
Safe in thy wounds a novice hide,
Then shall I preach the Crucified,
And nothing know but thee.

Here may I covet no reward,
Nor trifles temporal regard,
Or reckon earth my home,
But things invisible desire,
And wait for my appointed hire
Till the great Shepherd come.

A life of poverty and toil,
A thousand lives, one gracious smile
Of thine will overpay,
If thou receive me with well done,
And for thy faithful servant own,
In that triumphant day.³⁸

(7) Discipleship to Christ means social engagement on behalf of the poor and dispossessed. All of the above imperatives are the foundation for Charles's equation of discipleship and social duty/action. While his hymns and poems do utilize language with which the outcasts of society could identify, and many of his hymns remind the church of its responsibilities to them, almost no current hymnals contain hymns by Wesley that challenge the church to specific tasks of social activity for the poor and dispossessed. Yet he did articulate

for the church's memory the social imperatives of discipleship, which are expressed in the following hymn never included in a hymnal:

Your duty let the Apostle show:
 Ye ought, ye ought to labour so,
 In Jesus' cause employed,
 Your calling's works at times pursue,
 And keep the tent-maker in view,
 And use your hands for God.

Work for the weak, and sick, and poor,
 Raiment and food for them procure,
 And mindful of his word,
 Enjoy the blessedness to give,
 Lay out your gettings, to relieve
 The members of your Lord.

Your labour which proceeds from love,
 Jesus shall graciously approve,
 With full felicity,
 With brightest crowns your loan repay,
 And tell you in that joyful day
 "Ye did it unto Me."³⁹

The support of the weak is a duty of discipleship, not an option, and involves manual labor, the use of one's hands. It is Jesus' cause and has been exemplified in the apostle Paul. Charles spells out the social task for Christ's disciples. They are to: (1) work for the weak, sick and poor; (2) procure food and clothing for them; and (3) give of their financial resources in order to provide them relief. The motivation for such action issues from one source—love!

Such statements by Charles Wesley are not numerous in his hymnody, but it is clear that he by no means ignored the social task of discipleship and how it should be implemented.

In Praise of the Saints' Ministry to the Poor

In many of his poems written on the occasion of someone's death, Charles Wesley identified models of Christian discipleship, exemplary behavior that demonstrates the implementation of the social imperatives of the gospel. In verse he praises certain individuals who have been faithful stewards of their lives and resources as followers of Jesus Christ.

Mrs. Mary Naylor, who died on March 21, 1757, is described by Charles Wesley as a person whose every thought was controlled by justice. Above all, she was a nursing-mother to the poor. She exemplified total commitment to the poor. Her entire existence was consumed with labor for the poor. Such actualization of good is godlike. Here one finds a classic Wesleyan paradigm of the wedding of head, heart, and hands: the central focus of her thoughts is justice, her soul was moved by affliction, poverty, and distress, and she labored endlessly on behalf of the poor.

The golden rule she has pursued,
And did to others as she would
Others should do to her;
Justice composed her upright soul,
Justice did all her thoughts control,
And formed her character.

Affliction, poverty, disease,
Drew out her soul in soft distress,
The wretched to relieve:
In all the works of love employed,
Her sympathizing soul enjoyed
The blessedness to give.

Her Savior in his members seen,
A stranger she received him in,
An hungry Jesus fed,
Tended her sick, imprisoned Lord,
And flew in all his wants to afford
Her ministerial aid.

A nursing-mother to the poor,
For them she husbanded her store,
Her life, her all, bestowed;
For them she labored day and night,
In doing good her whole delight,
In copying after God.

Away, my tears and selfish sighs!
The happy saint in paradise
Requires us not to mourn;
But rather keep her life in view,
And still her shining steps pursue,
Till all to God return.⁴⁰

Mrs. Elizabeth Blackwell, who died on March 27, 1772, is also one

who is singled out by Wesley for "Nursing the poor with constant care." Wherever she found the sick and the poor, she was willing to spend her life for them. She possessed an empathy through which a sufferer's despair became her own. Such a person is one who confesses God in all her ways. Faithful discipleship to the Savior reveals living faith by works. This is the personification of the social imperatives of the gospel:

Touching the legal righteousness,
 While blameless in thy sight she lived,
 Thee she confessed in all her ways,
 And all her good from thee received;
 Faithful even then, she flew to tend,
 Where'er distressed, the sick and poor,
 Rejoiced for them her life to spend,
 And all thy gifts through them restore.

Her living faith by works was shown:
 Through faith to full salvation kept,
 She made the sufferer's griefs her own,
 And wept sincere with those that wept:
 Nursing the poor with constant care,
 Affection soft, and heart-esteem,
 She saw her Saviour's image there,
 And gladly ministered to him.⁴¹

In the following verse, "On the Death of Mr. Thomas Lewis," who died in April of 1782, Wesley stresses yet another model of discipleship, that of sacrificial service. Mr. Lewis's self-denial is a deprivation for the sake of others, namely, the sick and poor. He has given up his own food that the hungry might be fed.

A father to the sick and poor,
 For them he husbanded his store,
 For them himself denied;
 The naked clothed, the hungry fed
 Or parted with his daily bread
 That they might be supplied.⁴²

Mr. Ebenezer Blackwell, who died on April 21, 1782, embodied yet another model of discipleship that fulfills the social imperatives of the gospel for Wesley, namely, a financial or economic one. His life demonstrated the responsible use of resources for the poor:

Afflictions kind, unfailing friend,
He wisely used his growing store,
And prized his privilege to lend
To God—by giving to the poor.
The Lord his liberal servant blessed,
Who paid him back the blessing given;
And still, the more his wealth increased,
More treasure he laid up in heaven.⁴³

The above persons fulfill the hope that Charles Wesley expressed for all Christians in the conclusion of his sermon “Faith and Works,” which was first preached in December 21, 1738:

You should see and revere your Saviour in every poor man you ease, and be as ready to relieve him as you would to relieve Christ Himself. Is Christ an hungered? Give Him meat. Is He thirsty? Give Him drink. Is He a stranger? Take ye Him in. Clothe Him when He is naked; visit Him when He is sick. When He is in prison, come ye unto Him.⁴⁴

The Impact of Charles Wesley’s Message of Ministry with the Poor

What conclusions can be drawn regarding the impact of Charles Wesley’s message on socially engaged discipleship and ministry with the poor? It must be noted that numerous texts quoted above were never published and hence until now have had no general impact at all. Certainly Wesley hymns are not known as “social action” hymns. The selections of his texts in most hymnals reflect strong doctrinal statements often embedded in an intense inner spiritual journey and in evangelical/sacramental theology.

The Wesley hymns that survive in hymnals also tend to reflect a “spiritualized” concept of “the poor.” This is not surprising, since Charles himself spiritualized it in many verses. The well-known summons to the dispossessed of society in Charles’s conversion hymn is generally perceived in a spiritualized sense:

Outcasts of men, to you I call,
Harlots and publicans, and thieves!
He spreads his arms to embrace you all,
Sinners alone his grace receives:
No need of him the righteous have;
He came the lost to seek and save!⁴⁵

This is heard and sung as a call to redemption and salvation of the outcasts of society, but not as a call to their socialization. It has traditionally been much easier for the church to invite the poor to salvation, for Christ died for them too, than to invite them to their rightful place in society as children of God, i.e., to socialization—to become friends, brothers, sisters, kindred in the faith and in the church, persons with whom one daily shares and walks, and whom one comforts. The message that Christ embraces all the dispossessed of the earth has been preached with fervor, but the church itself and its members often have not done as Christ did and truly *embraced* them all.

Part of the problem lies in the fact that we are divorced from the eighteenth-century social location of Wesley's language and we can understand it spiritually even if we do not understand its societal context. Nevertheless, it is very clear that Wesley himself fostered a spiritualized concept of the poor in many of his hymns and poems. His verse on Luke 14:21 ("bring in the poor, the crippled, the blind, and the lame") makes this evident.

Needy, impotent to good,
 Disabled, halt, and blind,
 Hungring after heavenly food
 Our souls may mercy find:
 Sinners poor invited are
 To what the rich and full despise,
 Feasted here on Christ, they share
 His banquet in the skies.⁴⁶

But Wesley did not leave the poor merely to the realm of the spirit. Redemption and holiness apply to the social realm as well as in his theology.

It is important to realize, however, that becoming "poor in spirit" is vital for Charles Wesley. Self-understanding of one's own poverty is the fulcrum of humility and service. This is why Jesus' words, "if the salt has lost its taste, how can its saltiness be restored?" (Luke 14:34), move him to say:

O may I ever be
 The least in my own eyes,
 Retain my poverty,
 And labour for the prize,
 And always dread the apostate's doom
 And watch, and pray, till Jesus come!⁴⁷

In his *Short Hymns* (1762), Charles relates the concept of personal poverty to perfection. He responds to the admonition “Be ye perfect” [Greek: “Ye shall be perfect”], as follows:

“Ye shall be perfect” here below,
He spake it, and it must be so;
But first he said, “Be poor;
“Hunger, and thirst, repent, and grieve,
“In humble, meek obedience live,
“And labour, and endure.”⁴⁸

Wesley views personal poverty as a prerequisite to perfection. He continues:

Thus, thus may I the prize pursue,
And all th’appointed paths pass through
To perfect poverty,
Thus let me, Lord, thyself attain,
And give thee up thine own again,
Forever lost in thee.⁴⁹

Interestingly, Christian perfection, a subject on which Charles and John by no means always agreed, is equated with perfect poverty. This is the highest level of spiritualization of the idea of the poor (poverty) to which Wesley soars. Self-effacement and divestment in one’s life of everything that obstructs the personification of perfect love in every thought, word, and deed is the demand of the gospel.

Away this soft, luxurious pride!
A pilgrim rather let me rove,
Poor with the Son of man abide,
And have no comfort, but his love!⁵⁰

Yet who desires such poverty? he asks. “Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head” (Luke 9:58):

Saviour, how few there are
Who thy condition share,
Few who cordially embrace,
Love, and prize thy poverty,
Want on earth a resting-place,
Needy and resigned like Thee!⁵¹

Perhaps Charles's innovative concept of "perfect poverty" would do more to revive the idea of Christian perfection in our time than might be imagined.

The impact of Charles Wesley's message to the poor has been rather one-sided. When one examines the editorial selection of his hymns in hymnals, it is evident that this process has generally favored a spiritualized concept of the poor. However, Wesley perceives the demand of the gospel not only to call the poor and dispossessed to salvation but to make them our "best friends"—evangelization and socialization.

John Wesley included in the 1780 *A Collection of Hymns for the Use of The People Called Methodists* Charles's hymn "Try us, O God, and search the Ground," which appeared in a number of succeeding hymnals in the Methodist tradition. It contains two stanzas that address the Christian's social engagement. They are quoted above on page 5, beginning with the line, "Help us to help each other, Lord."

The church's memory of Charles Wesley's message to the poor is minuscule at best and a contemporary appropriation of the Wesleyan heritage will be greatly strengthened by a recovery, at least in the hymnic memory of the church, of his texts that wed evangelization and socialization of the poor. This places firmly in the theological memory of the church the paradigm of faith that integrates head, heart, and hands.

In conclusion, I quote one surviving stanza among the Wesley hymns of British Methodism's *Hymns and Psalms* (1983). It is one of the few remaining stanzas of Charles Wesley's in any contemporary hymnal that sustains this memory: stanza 4 of "Jesus, the gift divine I know" (No. 318):

Thy mind throughout my life be shown,
 While listening to the sufferer's cry,
 The widow's and the orphan's groan,
 On mercy's wings I swiftly fly,
 The poor and helpless to relieve,
 My life, my all, for them to give.

5. Leonardo Boff and Virgilio P. Elizondo, "La voz de las víctimas, ¿quién las escuchará?" *Concilium*, No. 232 (1990), 369.
6. Pablo Richard, "1492: La violencia de Dios en el futuro del cristianismo," *Concilium*, No. 232 (1990), 429–430.
7. Hugo Assmann, in Jung Mo Sung, *La idolatría*, 14.
8. Cf. Araya, "Samaritan Servanthood," 3.
9. The phrase is from Eduardo Galeano in his book *Las venas abiertas de América Latina*, 2nd edition (México, D.F.: Siglo XXI, 1979), 3.
10. Pablo Richard, "La teología de la liberación en la nueva coyuntura," *Pasos*, No. 34 (1991), 3.
11. Cf. Victorio Araya, *God of the Poor* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1987), 91–95.
12. Cf. Jung Mo Sung, *La idolatría*, 96–100.
13. Cf. Franz J. Hinkelammert, *La deuda externa de América Latina* (San José: DEL, 1988).
14. Cf. Jung Mo Sung, *La idolatría*, 112–114.
15. Elsa Tamez, "Momentos de gracia en el Quinto Centenario," *Pasos*, No. 39 (1992), 23.
16. Because of the close relationship between economics and ecology, today we are beginning to speak of "the ecological debt" of the North toward the South.
17. From the well known Puebla Document (1979) final document, No. 1147. Cf. Leonardo Boff, "La nueva evangelización, irrupción de nueva vida," *Concilium*, No. 232 (1990), 510–512.
18. Cf. Araya, *God of the Poor*, 70–75.
19. Cf. Iganacio Ellacuría and Jon Sobrino, *Mysterium Liberationis: Fundamental Concepts of Liberation Theology* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1993), 216–18.
20. Cf. Araya, *God of the Poor*, 74.
21. Cf. Ellacuría and Sobrino, *Mysterium Liberationis*, 206–213.
22. Casiano Floristán and Juan José Tamayo-Acosta, *Conceptos fundamentales de pastoral* (Madrid: Cristiandad, 1983), 486–489.
23. "Declaración de Kingston," Nos. 1, 2, 3, 9, in *Cuadernos de Teología*, 11/2 (1991), 38–56.

Notes to Chapter 8

1. *Sermons CW* xxxii. Although it does not bear her name, Sarah Wesley is thought by most scholars to be the author of the Introduction as well as responsible for the publication of the volume itself.
2. Frank Whaling, ed., *John and Charles Wesley: Selected Writings and Hymns* (New York: Paulist Press, 1981), 29.
3. Erik Routley, *The Musical Wesleys* (London: Herbert Jenkins, 1968), 28.
4. *Sermons CW* vi–vii.

5. Journal CW 1:37.
6. *Sermons* CW xxiii–xxiv.
7. *Sermons* CW xxvii–xxviii.
8. Hetty was the nickname for Charles's sister Mehetabel.
9. Journal CW 1:108.
10. Stanzas 1–5 are from *Hymns for the use of Families on Various Occasions* (Bristol: Pine, 1767), #132, entitled "For a Family in Want;" see *The Poetical Works of John and Charles Wesley*, ed. George Osborn, 13 vols. (London: Wesleyan-Methodist Conference, 1868–1872), 7:157–8. Stanza 6 is from MS Luke, 56, and is based on Luke 4:26; see *Poetry* 2:90.
11. *Journal* CW 1:401–2.
12. *Hymns on Select Passages of the Holy Scriptures* (1762), 2:226, #364. MS Luke, 232–3, includes a variation of the first line: "Help us to make the poor our friends." See *Poetry* 2:157.
13. *Journal* CW 2:105.
14. *Hymns and Sacred Poems* (1749), 1:312.
15. *Journal* CW 2:84.
16. *Journal* CW 2:85.
17. *Hymns and Sacred Poems* (1742), iii.
18. *Hymns the Nativity of our Lord*, (London: Strahan, 1745; facsimile reprint with introduction and notes by Frank Baker, Madison, NJ: The Charles Wesley Society, 1991).
19. *Hymns and Sacred Poems* (1742), 83; see the 1780 *Collection of Hymns for the Use of the People Called Methodists*, #489, Works 7:676. Lines 4 and 5 of the stanza beginning, "Help us to help each other, Lord," originally read:

Let each his friendly aid afford,
And feel his brother's care.

The United Methodist Hymnal (1989) includes selected stanzas at #561, "Jesus, United by Thy Grace."

20. See Teresa Berger, *Theologie in Hymnen? Zum Verhältnis von Theologie und Doxologie am Beispiel der "Collection of Hymns for the use of the People called Methodists" (1780)* (Altenberge: Telos Verlag, 1989), 147ff., for Charles's emphasis on "feeling" and religion of the heart. An English edition of this work, translated by Timothy E. Kimbrough, is forthcoming in 1995 from Kingswood Books under the title *Theology in Hymns? Reflections on the "Collection of Hymns for the Use of the People Called Methodists" (1780)*.

21. *Hymns for those that seek, and those that have Redemption in the Blood of Jesus Christ* (1747), 8; henceforth cited as *Redemption Hymns*.
22. *Hymns on the Trinity* (1767), 15.
23. *Hymns and Sacred Poems* (1739), 118. See "And can it be that I should gain," #363 in *The United Methodist Hymnal* (1989).
24. *Hymns and Sacred Poems* (1749), 1:38.
25. *Hymns and Sacred Poems* (1739), 102.

25. *Hymns and Sacred Poems* (1739), 102.
26. *Redemption Hymns* (1747), 4.
27. MS Luke, 56; *Poetry* 2:90.
28. MS Matthew, 260; *Poetry* 2:37.
29. MS Matthew, 319; *Poetry* 2:46.
30. MS Acts, 421; *Poetry* 2:404.
31. See Manfred Marquardt's discussion of John Wesley's views on economic responsibility in *John Wesley's Social Ethics: Praxis and Principles*, tr. John E. Steely and W. Stephen Gunter (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1992), 35–41.
32. MS Acts, 419; *Poetry* 2:403.
33. MS Acts, 74–5; *Poetry* 2:297–8. Stanza 2, line 1: an earlier version in the MS reads "abundant" for "redundant." For an edited version for contemporary hymnals see *A Song for the Poor*, 22–3.
34. *Redemption Hymns* (1747), 8.
35. MS Acts, 75; *Poetry* 2:298–9. It is interesting that Osborn omitted the first two stanzas above in his edition of the *Poetical Works*; he did include the third stanza with the fourth (not printed here), which appears in MS Acts.
36. See MS Preachers 1786, 1–4; *Poetry* 2:44.
37. See MS Preachers 1786, 19–22; *Poetry* 3:57.
38. MS Preachers 1786, 9–10; *Poetry* 3:49, stanzas 2, 5 and 6 of six stanzas.
39. MS Acts, 421; *Poetry* 2:403–4.
40. From the poem "On the Death of Mrs. Mary Naylor, March 21st, 1757," which was published in *Journal CW* 2:338, 339, 341; stanza 1 from Part II (stanza 3); stanzas 2–4 from Part III (stanzas 2–4); stanza 5 from Part I (stanza 2).
41. *Journal CW* 2:390; from the poem "On the Death of Mrs. Elizabeth Blackwell," Part I, stanza 3, and Part III, stanza 7.
42. *Journal CW* 2:407, stanza 7 of the poem.
43. *Journal CW* 2:407, stanza 3 of the poem "On the Death of Mr. Ebenezer Blackwell."
44. *Charles Wesley's Earliest Evangelical Sermons*, ed Thomas R. Albin and Oliver A. Beckerlegge (Ilford: Wesley Historical Society, 1987), 36.
45. *Hymns and Sacred Poems* (1739), 102.
46. MS Luke, 216; *Poetry* 2:152.
47. MS Luke, 220; *Poetry* 2:220.
48. *Short Hymns* (1762), 2:140.
49. *Ibid.*
50. *Ibid.*, 2:226.
51. MS Luke, 144; *Poetry* 2:115.