

Singing and Setting the *Sanctus*: A Proposal for Methodist Eucharistic Practice and Sacramental Living

by

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“Sun., February 3d. At the sacrament and among the bands I was enabled to pour out my soul in prayer, and carried them all with me to the throne of grace.”²

Clearly, “bands”, as found in the above journal entry of Charles Wesley does not refer to the musical ensembles we might imagine today. One may wonder en brief whether the term has anything to do with pipe or brass bands that would accompany some 18th century religious ceremonies. Yet despite considerations like these, “bands” does not carry a musical connotation of any sort. This 18th century usage derives rather from the Moravian based small group settings developed by the Wesley brothers.³ Nevertheless, inclination to read music into the term and the table fellowship described by Charles Wesley, despite the absence of such meaning, appropriately introduces our discussion.

I would like to suggest, that we as Methodists, laity and clergy, would benefit from regular singing and setting of the *Sanctus* during the celebration of communion. By regular singing, I mean each time that communion is celebrated within a Methodist Church. By regular composing, a newly composed *Sanctus* setting need not appear each time the sacrament of communion is celebrated.

Regular composing also does not presume that every local church will want to

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² *The Journal of Charles Wesley*. Vol. 1. March 9, 1736 to December 28, 1747. (Kansas City: Beacon Hill, 1980), 393.

³ E-mail reply from Karen Westerfield Tucker July 7, 2007, 6:59pm.

compose a new setting. Yet regular composing does suggest encouraging and continuing, if applicable, the practice of music-writing for the *Sanctus* within local churches.

I am centering on the *Sanctus* because this eucharistic prayer is common to numerous church traditions. The *Sanctus* is commonly sung in many traditions as well, with Roman Catholic, Orthodox and Anglican fellowships perhaps being the most recognizable who undertake such practice. While the *Sanctus* most often appears within eucharistic liturgy in conjunction with the *Benedictus*, because I am proposing a change in eucharistic practice to be applied across Methodist churches, I have chosen only the first prayer of this common coupling, offering as it were a small, but manageable unit of the Methodist communion liturgy, with the hope that this proposal for change seems feasible.

The prayer of the *Sanctus* derives from Isaiah 6:3:

וְקָרָא זֶה אֶל-זֶה וַאֲמַר קָדוֹשׁ קָדוֹשׁ קָדוֹשׁ יְהוָה יְהוָה צְבָאוֹת
מְלֵא כָּל-הָאָרֶץ כְּבוֹדוֹ

vəqārā' zēh' ēl-zeh və'āmār qādōš qādōš qādōš Adonai səbā'ōt mələ' kōl hā'ārēR kəbôdô

And one called to another and said, “Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of God’s glory”.

Also known as the *qeduššah*, within Judaism, the *Sanctus* and its use within eucharistic prayer dates back to the 7th century. Scholars debate any precise origins before this time.⁴ Certainly, sung versions of the Isaiah 6:3 thrice-holy prayer already exist in Methodist worship literature today. English language musical settings can be

⁴ For a detailed investigation regarding liturgical origins of the *Sanctus*, see Spinks, Brian D. *The Sanctus in Eucharistic Prayer* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP 1991). For a briefer historical account, see Taft, Robert F. SJ. *Beyond East and West: Problems in Liturgical Understanding* (Rome: Edizioni Orientalia Christiana, Pontifical Oriental Institute 1997), 215-216.

found in Methodist hymnbooks from both the United Kingdom and the United States.⁵ Yet regular singing and regular composing of musical settings for the *Sanctus* is not a feature of most Methodist church communion celebrations.

“WHAT WE SING IS WHAT WE BELIEVE”⁶

Why institute change in a classical liturgical practice that is occasioned only once a month by the majority of Methodist congregations, if at all? Some churches do not even use the anaphora of the *Sanctus* when sharing the Lord’s Supper. Besides, and as already mentioned, musical settings already exist. Shouldn’t churches, laity and ministers, be allowed to decide for themselves how to celebrate communion? Addressing questions like these involves recognition that singing and setting the *Sanctus* gives connection to our Methodist worship in a way that is historical, doxological and eschatological.

First, regularly composing for and singing the *Sanctus* liturgically conveys the Methodist principle of connectionalism. By sharing the ancient tradition of *Sanctus* singing with churches around the world, we display “common mission” and “common tradition”. We acknowledge and accentuate the ancient strands of liturgical tradition that we share and have inherited from Christian churches of various expressions including Roman Catholic, Protestant, Orthodox and Free.

⁵ For example of *Sanctus* settings, see for example, *The Methodist Book of Worship* (Peterborough, England: Methodist Publishing House), 204. *The United Methodist Hymnal: Book of United Methodist Worship* (Nashville: The United Methodist Publishing House 1989, 2003) contains settings A – 1989 Elise Eslinger. B – 1985 James A. Kriewald C – Franz Schubert adapted by Richard Proui 1985 D – Carlton R. Young 1989 E – William Mathias 1976, 17-25. *The African Methodist Episcopal Church Hymnal*. (Nashville: AME Church Press 1986). contains a musical setting (Alexander S. Cooper) on pgs. 798.3-4. Methodist settings of the *Sanctus* exist in other languages, but this paper shall limit its discussion to English language versions.

⁶ As quoted from John Bell, Iona Community Hymn-writer and Liturgist, at the Greenbelt Music Festival of 2006.

We enter another level within the multi-leveled foci of “making disciples” by instituting ecclesial practices that are “global in scope, and local in thrust”.⁷ While the connectionalism I am describing could be said to occur without singing the *Sanctus*, simply saying the liturgy, as we shall explore later, dismisses the unique capacity of music to bring its participants closer to God. Moreover, gospel passages such as Matthew 26.30 and Mark 14.26 that read, “When they had sung the hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives”, give us precedent to historically and theologically link music to table celebration and Christian service following the Lord’s Supper .

Second, reciting in song and revising the *Sanctus* melody carries forward our Wesleyan heritage of sacred music writing and singing.⁸ Though music for the *Sanctus* does not fill the corpus of hymnody by Charles or John Wesley, scholars such as J. Ernest Rattenbury and Daniel B. Stevick insist that the heart of Methodist revivalism is to be found musically and eucharistically.⁹ In *The Eucharistic Hymns of John and Charles Wesley*, Rattenbury writes, “Nowhere can the joy of the

⁷ 2004 *Discipline of the United Methodist Church* (Nashville: United Methodist Publishing House 2004), 90, 450. Unfortunately, my copy of the *British Constitutional Practice and Discipline of the Methodist Church* did not make it into my suitcase upon returning to the United States. Yet I am confident similar sentiments regarding “connexionalism” appear in CPD as well.

⁸ Note as well that our Wesleyan heritage includes use of the Order of the Book of Common Prayer for communion practice, where the *Sanctus* would have featured in the liturgy. Recognizing this ‘ironic’ history of Methodist eucharistic practice gives historical reason for emphasizing ecumenism through *Sanctus* singing and setting now that the Methodist and Anglican churches are separate entities. See Bowmer, John C. *The Lord’s Supper in Methodism*. (London: The Epworth Press 1961): “Communion services in early Methodism were conducted according to the Order of the Book of Common Prayer, with Wesley’s ‘Abridgement’ as an authorized alternative. While these services were liturgical, they were by no means formal. Hymns were freely used and extemporary prayer was a prominent feature” 13. Though the *Sanctus* is not an extemporary prayer, the content of the prayer maintains established worship practice while the singing and setting of it references the free use of hymnody in early Methodist worship.

⁹ See Rattenbury, J. Ernest. *The Eucharistic Hymns of John and Charles Wesley*. (London: Epworth Press 1948). See also Stevick, Daniel B. *The Altar’s Fire: Charles Wesley’s Hymns on the Lord’s Supper, 1745*. (London: Epworth Press 2004). Stevick claims the 166 *Eucharistic Hymns of John and Charles Wesley*, though originally published as joint work between the Wesley brothers, as primarily the work of Charles.

Evangelical Revival be more realized than in these Eschatological Hymns [known as the Eucharistic Hymns]. ...and at the Table of the Lord they found the source of their evangelical enthusiasm”.¹⁰ Stevick concurs by describing the book of eucharistic hymns as “the Wesleys’ principle statement of their sacramental doctrine and spirituality”.¹¹ Therefore, our eucharistic theology begins in song. In order to grasp the significance of the sacrament within Methodism, it seems that our historical starting point is the Wesleyan music we have inherited.

Yet our sacramental practice as Christian believers reaches further back than the 18th century in which John and Charles Wesley lived and wrote. Our practice of communion also extends forward to a kingdom we yet await. For reasons such as these, we will, in our discussion, make reference to the Wesleyan *Eucharistic Hymns*, but largely consider how to continue the earlier Christian liturgy of the *Sanctus* prayer. Retrieving the ancient practice of *Sanctus* singing and setting serves as a liturgical hinge that connects our Methodist worship experience to the history of faith that has preceded us.¹² Retrieval enables human consciousness to envision how the eucharist can nourish our daily lives so that we may live and serve others sacramentally.

PUT YOUR MONEY WHERE YOUR MOUTH IS

Before continuing our discussion of the *Sanctus*, allow me to offer an anecdote from my experience of worship within United Methodist churches. It may help clarify what I am trying to convey with this proposal. Strangely enough, I catch

¹⁰ Rattenbury, 65, 73.

¹¹ Stevick, 5.

¹² Though the *Sanctus* is an ancient practice, for an example of an early Methodist order of worship with the *Sanctus* prayer, see *John Wesley’s Sunday Service of the Methodists in North America* (The United Methodist Publishing House), 133.

myself singing or humming tunes from Sunday morning services on occasion. In the middle of the week, days away from Sunday morning, I might sing to myself, for no apparent reason, a hymn that was shared in a particular service, like *Be Thou My Vision*. Yet I also sometimes sing musical elements that are “standard” to what a visitor would find in a United Methodist church in the United States. One such tune is the doxology that typically follows the offertory of many United Methodist services, *Praise God from Whom all Blessings Flow*.¹³

To recall by random singing or hear within my random thoughts, the doxology “Praise God from whom all blessings flow...”, I cannot help but visualize the offertory in my home church, First United Methodist Church of Clinton, Mississippi. I am transported to sitting in one of the back row pews. I can see the ushers receiving the offering plates and distributing them amongst the congregation. I can nearly feel those same plates passing through my hands. I can remember the precise gesture of my own giving.¹⁴ I see the plates eventually gathered, brought forward and blessed in front of the altar.

If I were to reflect with slightly more intensity, I may not only visualize the procession and choreography that accompany my memories of the doxology. I would probably also begin to think about charity, sacrifice, ecclesial and devotional generosity. These thoughts need not emerge in any particularly high theological sense. I might simply conjure up notions of giving and its connection to the church

¹³ This doxology actually derives from a longer hymn, “Awake, My Soul, and with the Sun”, written by Thomas Ken. The music derives from the OLD 100TH, *Genevan Psalter*, 1551, attributed to Louis Bourgeois. [<http://www.cyberhymnal.org/hym/p/r/praisegf.htm>; last visited July 2007]

¹⁴ This involves a “no-look” sweeping over of my right hand and releasing some denomination of a dollar bill depending on how generous I was feeling that morning.

and my faith in such a way that potential arises to transform my living in that particular moment. I might remember the passage of the poor widow and two coins from Matthew 12. On the other hand, I may think about Matthew 6 and the way in which life is given and sustained by God. I might think further into what other everyday opportunities could be informed by this new musically sensed understanding of *caritas*. All of these ponderings would have been sparked by remembering a liturgical song.

“MUSIC IS A HIGHER REVELATION THAN ALL WISDOM AND PHILOSOPHY”¹⁵

Hypothesizing about how remembering a sung liturgy like the doxology may inform my life of faith is not fanciful or exaggerated religious thinking. Choosing the example of the United Methodist doxology is in fact, ironically fitting. The potential for liturgical memory to produce real and meaningful acts of Christian service within and beyond worship coincides with Teresa Berger’s pivotal work, *Theology in Hymns?: A Study of the Relationship of Doxology and Theology According to a Collection of Hymns for the Use of the People Called Methodists (1780)*. Her book positions doxology as corporate devotional language *par excellence*. Berger, of course, writes her book with a more expansive concept of doxology than a United Methodist tune that follows the offertory. She considers the doxological within Methodist hymnody proper. She writes of its capacity to speak about God and how historically, the doxological nature of Methodist hymnody

¹⁵ Bottom, J. “The Soundtracking of America”. *The Atlantic Monthly* (Boston March 2000. 285:3), 59.

promoted “heartfelt Christian living within an existing church community”.¹⁶

Therefore, returning to our main topic of the *Sanctus*, her thinking seems applicable to our consideration of how the sung *Sanctus* enriches Methodist eucharistic worship and encourages sacramental life.

Berger differentiates “theological reflection” from “doxological speech”. For Berger, theological reflection is a pursuit conducted mainly for the church and doxological speech performed “primarily, to God”.¹⁷ In partnership with the heavenward nature of doxological speech, doxology also promotes the connective. Berger asserts, “...even when theological differences exist people are often still able to sing and pray together”.¹⁸ Strikingly, her evaluation of doxology echoes John Wesley’s understanding of the eucharist, “In the purpose of God, his Church and heaven go both together: ...Whosoever are admitted to this *Dinner* of the Lamb, unless they be wanting to themselves, need not doubt of being admitted to the Marriage Supper of Him, who was dead, but *now liveth forevermore*”.¹⁹ Both her distinction between theological reflection and doxological speech and her situating the doxological within the context of corporate worship clarifies for us how musically reciting liturgical text like the *Sanctus* enhances Methodist eucharistic worship doxologically.

Musically reciting liturgical text like the *Sanctus* combines the doxological elements of song and prayer to which Berger appeals. She posits, “Thus, in most

¹⁶ Berger, Teresa. *Theology in Hymns?: A Study of the Relationship of Doxology and Theology According to a Collection of Hymns for the Use of the People Called Methodists (1780)*. Trans. Timothy E. Kimbrough. (Nashville: Kingswood Books 1995), 61.

¹⁷ Berger, 23.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Wesley, John. *Hymns on the Lord’s Supper*, 17.

cases, doxology finds its fullest expression in song, not in spoken words”.²⁰ The *Sanctus*, as a eucharistic prayer, provides “primary” access to God. Combined with music, this primary access is heightened in the mystery of the Divine. Its words of praise are conjoined with language “outside” of human speech. Connected to the worship of a congregation engaged in the institution of the Lord’s Supper, the *Sanctus*, on the one hand, grounds the believer within the company of others who will soon be satiated by the bread and wine – “The whole earth is full of God’s glory”. On the other hand, the *Sanctus* and its “Holy, Holy, Holy is Yahweh of hosts” foreshadows what Berger calls the “soteriological categories” expressed by Wesleyan writing. The sung *Sanctus* points towards the “specific and unmistakable view of faith” “that those “admitted to this *Dinner* of the Lamb” are assuredly redeemed by the one who “*now liveth forevermore*” .²¹

The soteriological thrust of singing and setting the *Sanctus*, while cosmically orienting participants to God, does not separate believers from the concerns of others. Neither does it elevate them beyond the faithful work to be undertaken away from the communion table. Rather, the union with God communicated by doxological liturgy like *Sanctus* singing and setting establishes a powerful assumption for Christian witness – “that God is approachable by humankind, God is the only One worthy of humankind’s adoration”.²²

²⁰ Berger, 158.

²¹ Berger, 80, 157. Wesley, *Ibid*.

²² *Ibid*, 158. More remains to be researched and articulated regarding how to “legitimate” and “authenticate” the high claims of doxology. Berger writes, “It is obvious, of course, that not every act of praise qua doxology rightly corresponds to the saving acts of God that enable the doxological encounter between God and human kind...Illegitimate forms of doxology deny by their very content any correspondence with the saving acts of God...[and] Whenever doxology (or any prayer for that matter) is used as a platform for dogmatic and/or moral instruction this danger [of illegitimate doxology] is near”, 165-66. “But how does doxology authenticate itself as the encounter of praise between God and human

British Local Preacher David Carter agrees. He claims that feast hymns within the Methodist Church not only instituted “ecclesiological innovation” but “articulated in singable form a new ecclesial consciousness”.²³ Of what we are conscious is partly described by George Steiner in *Real Presences*, which states, “music and silence define humanity”.²⁴ Suturing the train of thought from Berger, Carter and Steiner, it therefore seems that what is being defined by musical doxology like the *Sanctus* is our identity individually and corporately, the gift of being humans created by God, our common share in *Imago Dei*.

Because we Methodists are a “singing people”, music for us is as Steiner also establishes, a “grammar of the overwhelming”.²⁵ Singing and setting the *Sanctus* are practices that do more than enliven communion, retrieve or update historical worshipping methods. Learning, creating, practicing and remembering liturgical music like the *Sanctus*, as vernacular for that which exceeds us, communicates a way for us, within and outside the ekklesia, to orient ourselves to God.

kind? It does so, not the least of all, by resisting false objects for praise, and by avoiding the ever-present dangers of idolatry and self-glorification...[rather]...it is the very Spirit of God at prayer in us, the *testimonium sancti spiritus internum, that authenticates* this prayer [the doxological]” 167, 169. For this essay, we shall sustain further questions about doxological legitimacy and authentication for another day. Further research, it seems, could involve Trinitarian and pneumatological exploration vis-a-vis thinkers such as Augustinian who gives foundation to Berger’s notions by stating, “Therefore, the Holy spirit, of whom he has given us, causes us to remain in God, and God in us” 202. Berger’s explanations could also perhaps be strengthened by re-fashioning what may sound as sectarian in other historical claims like Schleiermacher’s “Hence the world can be viewed as a perfect revelation of divine wisdom only in proportion as the Holy Spirit makes itself felt through the Christian Church as the ultimate world-shaping power” 737. Augustine. *On the Trinity: Books 8-15*. ed. Gareth B. Matthews trans. Stephen McKenna (Cambridge UP 2002). and Schleiermacher, Friedrich. *The Christian Faith*. ed. H.R. Mackintosh and J.S. Steward (Edinburgh: T&T Clark 1999).

²³ Carter, David. *Love Bade Me Welcome: A British Methodist Perspective on the Church*. (London: Epworth Press 2002), 3.

²⁴ Steiner, George. *Real Presences*. (Chicago: UChicago Press, 1989), 102. See also from Berger, “Silence, as such is an important indicator of how the explicit and abundant praise of God (and the image it conveys of the One who is adored) is an approach to a mystery that far exceeds human imagination and expression”, 159.

²⁵ Steiner, 190.

Inside the church, one way in which the *Sanctus* orients us to God emerges in its location within the eucharistic liturgy. Typically, the *Sanctus* prefaces the anamnesis in the communion order of service.²⁶ In the anamnesis, we mainly recall the ministry, crucifixion and ascension of Jesus. Thus, the *Sanctus* prepares participants to enter into a time of recollection upon who Christ is as Son of humans, Son of God and Risen Lord. We have touched upon how categorizing and understanding the *Sanctus* as doxological can inform such anamnetic reflection. Considering the *Sanctus* as doxological, we have direct access to imagining the fullness of Christ in the act of communion. Yet rather than delve further into how singing and setting the *Sanctus* influences and enlivens the actual worship service, I want give weight to why we as Methodists should sing and set the *Sanctus* based upon how it informs our Christian service “outside” of the church.

CHRISTIAN SERVICE SOUNDS LIKE THE SANCTUS

In order to move forward with how singing and setting the *Sanctus* can effectively compel Methodists to service in God’s name, we may want to look back to the function of the Lord’s Supper with relation to service in Methodist beginnings. Despite the diminished emphasis upon sacramental worship within current Methodism, Stevick positions the 18th century Wesleyan Movement as “at the same time both evangelistic and eucharistic”.²⁷ Nostalgically concurring, and drawing a commonality between the foundations of the Wesleyan Movement and Orthodox eucharistic theology, Petros Vassiliadis expands Stevick’s claim by stating, “For whatever missionary reasons, the

²⁶ For example, see *Service of Word and Table I*, 37. *The United Methodist Book of Worship* (Nashville: The United Methodist Publishing House) 1992.

²⁷ Stevick, 7. For a note regarding “diminished” eucharistic practice within Methodist churches, see *His Presence Makes the Feast: Methodist Conference 2003 Report, Holy Communion in the Methodist Church*. [http://www.methodist.org.uk/static/news/papers/holy_communion03.htm; last visited July 2007] “In Methodism, many factors, such as infrequency of celebration and the tendency to ‘tack’ the Lord’s Supper on to the end of an ‘ordinary’ service, led to many habitually neglecting Communion despite repeated Conference statements.” Paragraph 154, pg. 31.

eucharistic experience gave way to the Christian message, eschatology to Christology (and further and consequently to soteriology), and the even (the kingdom of God) to the bearer and center of this even – Christ, and more precisely his sacrifice on the cross”.²⁸ However we track the evolution of sacramental praxis in the Methodist church and the Christian church proper, development of what would become the Methodist Church began with an approach to Christian ministry that intertwined sacramental practice with sacramental living.

In *The Duty of Constant Communion*, John Wesley unreservedly promotes communion as a frequent and necessary Christian practice for Methodists. Celebrating communion is simply what Christians are supposed to do. It is “a plain command of Christ”, and a principle means of grasping redemption, “namely, the forgiveness of our past sins and the present strengthening and refreshing of our souls”. It is an obvious praxis for anyone with “any desire to please God, or any love of his [sic] own soul”.²⁹ In this 1787 sermon, however, the intention of Wesley’s words still focuses on the contour of Methodist worship. It is not until 1794, however, in his exposition regarding *Hymns on the Lord’s Supper*, that we get a sense of how we can develop sacramental lives through partaking and contemplating of the eucharist:

Our Saviour hath given us by his death three kinds of life: and he promises to nourish us in every one of them, by these tokens of bread and wine, which he hath made this sacrament. ...[The first is] to set out as new and fresh the Holy sufferings, which purchased our Title to Eternal Happiness. The second is, both to represent and convey to our Souls, all necessary Graces to qualify us for it: and the third is, to assure us, that when we are qualified for it, God will faithfully

²⁸ Vassiliadis, Petros. “Holiness in the Perspective of Eucharistic Theology”, *Orthodox and Wesleyan Spirituality*. ed. ST Kimbrough, Jr. (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press 2002), 105.

²⁹ *John Wesley’s Sermons: An Anthology*. ed. Albert c. Outler and Richard P. Heitzenrater. (Nashville: Abingdon Press 1991), 502-503.

render to us the Purchase. And these three make up the proper sense of those words, *Take, eat, This is my Body*.³⁰

Without stressing or debating the apparent ransom view of atonement in Wesley's words, what seems to pervade the notions of "purchased" "Title to Eternal Happiness", our souls recognizing "all necessary Graces to qualify us for it" and the God who will "faithfully render to us the Purchase" is a deep-rooted eschatological vision of how the life of faith is fed by the Last Supper. As the United Methodist report, *This Holy Mystery* states, "Holy communion is eschatological".³¹ Methodist communion may begin as a feast in chapel. Its satisfaction lies in transforming our lives according to the invitation to Christ's body.

Wesley begins *The Duty of Constant Communion* with a verse from the Lucan account of communion, "Do this in remembrance of me", and thereby intimates the anamnesis that would follow the *Sanctus* in Anglican liturgies of his day. Yet in the excerpt from *Hymns on the Lord's Supper*, Wesley seems to rely upon the Johannine narrative and touch upon Orthodox views of spirituality -

John 6:54 Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood have eternal life, and I will raise them up on the last day; **55** for my flesh is true food and my blood is true drink.

John 6:54 ὁ τρώγων μου τὴν σάρκα καὶ πίνων μου τὸ αἷμα ἔχει ζωὴν αἰώνιον καὶ γὰρ ἀναστήσω αὐτὸν τῇ ἐσχάτῃ ἡμέρᾳ **55** ἢ γὰρ σὰρξ μου ἀληθὴς ἐστὶν βρῶσις καὶ τὸ αἷμά μου ἀληθὴς ἐστὶν πόσις

The word, eat, or τρώγων – can also be translated "gnaw" (6.54). Receiving the body of Christ, for Wesley, is not an action that reaches completion at the communion table. Rather, Wesley seems to advise Methodists to keep chewing over their spiritual

³⁰ Wesley, John and Charles. *Hymns on the Lord's Supper*, extracted from Dr. Brevint (London: G Paramore 1794; Online at John Rylands University Library of Manchester: Religion and Philosophy), 18.

³¹ "This Holy Mystery" Phillips, L. Edward et al. *The Book of Resolutions of the United Methodist Church: 2004* (Nashville: The United Methodist Publishing House), 893.

food so that the memory and meaning of the eucharist carries over into their daily lives. The application of the sacrament to daily living is an eschatological exercise made manifest in connectional works that help others access God. Orthodox theologian Vassiliadis, in concert and in response to Wesley's elaborate depiction of eucharistic life summarizes, "This is what *eucharistic spirituality and holiness* is all about: an act, behavior, and struggle directed towards the unity of the universe (humankind and the whole of creation). It is the affirmation of the created world (history and everything in material creation), and the referring of it all (anaphora) back to the Father [sic] Creator, while always keeping alive the vision of the eschaton".³² We become connected to one another, to heaven, to our history of faith, and are drawn collectively by the promise that Christ will come again.

How do singing and setting the *Sanctus* spur our consciousness to develop the lived eucharistic spirituality that Wesley and Vassiliadis describe? Nearness to the Holy host of communion is made more acute and the bond between sacramental practice and Christian service in everyday life is strengthened as we sing, learn, create, repeat and remember the musical hook of the *Sanctus*.³³ Flatly put, crafting and singing the *Sanctus* provides a mnemonic device by which our calling to sacramental life and our calling to commune as God's people can be remembered. We construct a sacramental approach and give eschatological meaning to, "I've got this song stuck in my head..." The extent to which the single line, "Holy, holy, holy is Yahweh of hosts; the whole earth is full of God's glory" can unlock the three-fold eucharistic life Wesley portrayed may vary

³² Vassiliadis, 112.

³³ For further discussion regarding the "link" between liturgy and lived service, see entry "The Liturgical Movement" Keith F. Pecklers and Bryan D. Spinks, *The New Westminster Dictionary of Liturgy and Worship*. Ed. Paul Bradshaw. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press), 283-89.

depending upon the individual or the working of the Spirit.

Yet if we recur to the Jewish origins of the *Sanctus*, or *qeduššah*, Spinks clearly asserts that the words of the *Sanctus* refer to heavenly visions within the Hebrew Bible. He states, “this particular acclamation of praise was considered in some circles to be an important element in the angelic repertoire...and can be traced in the Qumran literature, the old Testament Pseudepigrapha, the *yorde merkāvāh* or hekhalot literature, and in the evolving prayers of the Synagogue”.³⁴ For Methodist worship, the celestial understanding of the *Sanctus* language is shared. Yet the association of singing and setting the *Sanctus* with the sacrament of communion particularizes interpretation of the prayer’s celestial language. By remembering the *Sanctus* and its melody, we are led to recall a eucharist that “as the primary Mystery of the church, is the authentic and dynamic expression of the communion of the people of God, and a proleptic manifestation of the kingdom to come...[and] reflection of the communion that exists between the persons of the Holy Trinity”.³⁵ By the Spirit and for the Creator’s glory, the church’s practitioners are directed towards the redeeming and returning Christ.

THEREFORE, LET US SING TOGETHER AN OLD SONG ANEW

‘This all sounds alright, but what if I can’t sing? Charles Wesley was a great hymn-writer. I am just a layperson?’ Methodism grew in partnership with the widespread use of lay gifts. Take for example, lay preachers. Though a formal use and network of lay preaching within United Methodism has ceased, the tradition of lay preaching continues to make a distinct contribution to British Methodism. In fact, in many areas of England, the Methodist presence would significantly decrease or altogether

³⁴ Spinks, 25.

³⁵ Vassiliadis, 107.

disappear without the efforts of lay preachers helping to facilitate worship. When lay preachers conduct services, they bridge the worlds of laity and clergy. They offer a perspective rooted in the concerns of “normal” people, and yet shaped by the call to proclaim the good news.

While contemporary United Methodism may not have within its structure a network of local preachers, UMC laity share with their British siblings contributions to worship in other ways such as leading congregational prayers and reading Scripture. From my experience in both British and American Methodist churches, the speech of laity has shaped and determined our culture of worship from the preached word to prayers and readings. Lay contribution extends to the sacraments and their surrounding liturgy. Artistically, paraments, vestments, stoles and other visuals are often created by lay persons. Yet to what extent does the voice of laity form the musical elements of worship? How often do we sing lay composed songs or perform lay composed music? Likewise, even if we consider music composed by music ministers, does the number of newly composed and congregationally used hymns or sacred music greatly increase? Of the number of pieces that are new, to what extent do they exhibit lay and clerical collaboration? Does not such collaboration also highlight Methodist connectionalism and our universal membership in the body of Christ? If we collaborate in so many word oriented modes of worship, why would we not also want to extend our mutual approach of constructing worship to the music we sing?

Addressing questions like these exceeds the scope of our discussion. Yet together, as those lay and ordained, we can begin to imagine and eventually undertake the process of innovating new music by way of setting the *Sanctus*.

Isn't singing the *Sanctus* enough? Why should we also compose new settings for it as a congregation? Ethnomusicologist Bruno Nettl argues, "If music expresses personal or group identity, it plays a role in negotiating relationships between unequals, as a way for a dominant group to reinforce its hegemony, or for a subordinate population to fight back at some level".³⁶ Hopefully, creating sung liturgy will not promote oppression or sparring. Rather, encouraging and undertaking the task of composing for the *Sanctus* at least provides opportunity for all voices from youth to the mature within the church to contribute their particular musical "accent". *Sanctus* composing makes way for enculturation and localization, by encouraging local churches, their members, adherents and clergy, to contribute to music-making that speaks of and for their particular context. Yet composing for the *Sanctus* also reinforces the connectional, because singing and the sharing of songs is a connectional enterprise. The risk of stratifying our Methodist communion practice is averted. The liturgical "lyric" remains the same. By maintaining the *Sanctus* anaphora as the common denominator and singing the *Sanctus* corporately, mutuality and community under God are fostered by connecting our identities to the sharing of eucharistic song.

But won't the most talented simply be the ones who end up composing? How is this really going to work at the local level of the church? Critically acclaimed jazz pianist Brad Mehldau exclaimed in *Down beat Magazine* – "It's the improvisation you love to hear, someone playing play off the cuff, and almost sounding like God".³⁷ Admittedly, Mehldau speaks as an expert, and in this interview, he is referring to the music-making of jazz professionals. With the liturgical music of the *Sanctus*, however, Mehldau's words

³⁶ Nettl, Bruno. *The Study of Ethnomusicology: Thirty-one Issues and Concepts*. (Chicago: Univ. of Illinois Press 2005), 256.

³⁷ Anonymous. *Down Beat*. (Chicago: Mar. 2007; 74:3), 10.

still have something for us. We can all “play off the cuff” as we all have equal access to the Spirit that inspires holy song. Accessing the Divine through the doxological qualities of singing and setting the *Sanctus* is not a Gnostic exercise, pantheistic move or reserved from some especially spiritually talented group of folk. Rather, the *Sanctus* words and the voicing of them belong to God. Because we sing them and contemplate them as recipients of the Body and Blood, we find melody for them not within talent that we possess. We uncover music that fits from the Christ who compels us to eat and live with thanksgiving.

‘Practically’ speaking, because the *Sanctus* is a single sentence, it would seem that the task of composing a setting would be more manageable. Forming *Sanctus* settings can occur in a variety of ways, to be determined according to the preference of the local congregation. One possibility is that the musically inclined could partner with those less musical to write *Sanctus* settings. Other approaches would vary from church to church, and we shall not prescribe methods in this essay. As introduced earlier, every congregation need not feel as if *Sanctus* composing is necessary. Again as well, the argument here is that composition for the setting of the *Sanctus* allows forum for enculturation and localization to take place, while also rooting such efforts in a “universal” liturgy.

Singing and setting the *Sanctus* the echoes the sentiments of the British report, *His Presence Makes the Feast*, that Holy Communion is like the “performance of a great musical work...[where] these physical actions symbolise both the occasion and the continuing process by which Divine grace impinges on human lives and mysteriously enters them”.³⁸ In the act of public worship and the public in which we live, internalizing

³⁸ *His Presence Makes the Feast*, paragraph 4, pg. 29.

the *Sanctus* through singing and crafting of song helps to “make apparent the inherent link between the Table and holy living, both individual and corporate...[as] the Eucharist can be a means to express the unity in Christ that already exists as a gift from God in spite of our failure to manifest it”.³⁹ Once more, at the simplest level, we provide persons with a melodic mnemonic device to aid their awareness of Christ’s nourishment being with them whether they find themselves at the communion table or not.

TRADITION IS NOT HISTORY OR THE PAST: *Tradition is the church’s self-conscious now of that which has been handed on to it not as an inert treasure, but as a dynamic principle of life.*⁴⁰

In the Fall of 2006, while serving 3 Methodist churches in Nottingham, England, a church member from one church approached me about forming a morning “worship music group” as counterpoint to the evening church choir. At a planning meeting for this group, I asked interested church folks to bring music of any genre or style that mattered to them. I thought it would be helpful to listen to each other’s music and then discuss together what type of sound we wanted to establish for the music group. Among the CD’s were Taizé, Iona and contemporary Christian music examples. The people who arrived ranged in age from 20 something to 50+. We listened to the various CD’s, rested our index fingers above our lips, and nodded in approval. I then placed within the CD player a Kinks album that I had brought along. As the acoustic riffs of *Lola* began, suddenly feet began to tap and smiles cracked upon faces, especially those who were 50+. It could be said that our meeting became “spirit-filled”, “incarnational” or “glorious” of God by way of music.

³⁹ *This Holy Mystery*, 926, 928.

⁴⁰ Taft, “Response to the Berakah Award: Anamnesis”, *Beyond East and West: Problems in Liturgical Understanding*, 290.

In the following Lenten season of 2007, I asked these same persons, along with other small groups within the church to read *Share This Feast* as a Lenten study. *Share This Feast* is a thin booklet produced the British Methodist church which aims at increasing awareness with regards to the significance of the eucharist and sacramental life. Many were perplexed that there could be 6 weeks worth of material to learn about communion. Some initially thought the idea of the study as strange and just plain boring. By the time of Holy Week, however, many within the church relayed how intentional investigation of the Lord's Supper had made more meaningful their participation at the Table and more sacramental their Christian lives.

We never explored the possibility of setting or singing the *Sanctus*. I do not know if I would want a *Lola-esque* riff accompanying my *Sanctus* singing. But the transformation I witnessed from these two memories convinces me there is fertile ground to be tilled with regards to linking traditions of eucharistic worship and musical creation within Methodism. Presumably, this paper could just as well have discussed the sacrament of baptism. Gathering together at the communion table with anthem amongst the feasting faithful, however, is more of what I hear concerning “a vision of a church that is centered and directed while being radically open and relational, a church therefore capable of creating like subjects”.⁴¹ Though the task of setting and singing the *Sanctus* may seem to some to make calculus of Jesus' request to divide the bread and wine amongst ourselves, musically orienting ourselves to the ancient liturgy voices a unified hope that however we formulate eucharistic celebration or sacramental life, we sing knowing that for all people, Christ will come again.

⁴¹ Jones, Serene. *Feminist Theory and Christian Theology*. (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress 2000), 175.