

Perfect Love Restored: The Language of Renewal in the Hymns of Charles Wesley

Paul W. Chilcote

Restoration implies something lost and something found. The terms renewal, retrieval, recovery, revival all point in the same direction: to be new again, to find again, to get again, to have life again. In talking with a craftsman who restores vintage automobiles one day I learned that restoration means more than just making a vehicle's exterior look nice. A full restoration involves replacing nearly every part on the car with a newer, better working one, from the gauges on the dashboard to the lining of the trunk walls. Such restoration entails a lengthy, painstaking, and often complex, process. To restore literally means to build up again and this was the primary impetus behind the Wesleyan revival that arose within the Church of England during the eighteenth century. The Wesley brothers spearheaded a movement of spiritual renewal aimed at building up the church for the work of God's mission in the world.¹ The purpose of this essay is to examine the language of renewal in the hymns of Charles Wesley and to identify the salient elements of restoration, recovery, and renewal in his lyrical theology.

The Language of Renewal

An exhaustive analysis of Charles Wesley's own "concept of renewal" here is hardly thinkable. So I am imposing two rather serious limits to the linguistic analysis of this study. First,

¹ The Wesleyan tradition as a movement of renewal in the church continues to invite thoughtful studies. See Paul W. Chilcote, ed., *The Wesleyan Tradition: A Paradigm for Renewal* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2002); cf. Howard Snyder, *Signs of the Spirit: How God Reshapes the Church* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1989) and his earlier work, *The Radical Wesley and Patterns of Church Renewal* (Grand Rapids: Francis Asbury Press, 1987). With regard to the theological underpinnings of the Wesleyan paradigm of renewal, see Paul W. Chilcote, *Recapturing the Wesleys' Vision: An Introduction to the Faith of John and Charles Wesley* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004) and Paul W. Chilcote, *A Faith That Sings: Biblical Themes in the Lyrical Theology of Charles Wesley* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2016).

I examine Charles's use of terms such as renew, restore, and revive (and their derivatives or cognates) in order to glean a roadmap for a larger exploration of his concept of renewal.

Secondly, I restrict myself to one primary, albeit pervasively influential source, namely, the 1780 *Collection of Hymns for the Use of the People Called Methodists*.² This *Collection* constitutes a body of lyrical material well-known and formational within the life of the movement; the hymns included in this *Collection* shaped the definition and ethos of the Methodist people, perhaps, more than any other. While I fully recognize the limitations and dangers of this design, I am also convinced of its benefits, and the portrait of renewal that emerges is both authentic and compelling.

A detailed examination of the *Collection* as a whole reveals some interesting facts which lead to several broad but significant generalizations related to the concept of restoration. The verb "to renew" (in the form renew[s] and renewed) appears thirty-four times in the hymns of the *Collection*.³ Wesley uses the language of renewal primarily with regard to the change of one's heart (six instances) and the restoration of love (six instances). These two categories dominate this particular set of hymns, especially when hymns that reference similar concepts, such as the renewal of the mind, spirit, soul, or self (corollary to the heart) and hymns that emphasize the recovery of holiness and the image of Christ (corollary to love), are included. Taken together, these two categories constitute two-thirds of these hymns. In addition to this, Charles also prays

² Franz Hildebrandt & Oliver A. Beckerlegge, eds., *The Works of John Wesley. Volume 7. A Collection of Hymns for the Use of the People Called Methodists* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983; hereinafter *Collection*). Hymn texts presented here are those which appeared in the first edition of the original source; all bibliographical references refer both to the original location of the hymn and the location of the text in the *Collection*. I have used "Charles Wesley's Published Verse," Duke Center for Studies in the Wesleyan Tradition website, prepared and introduced by Randy L. Maddox, with the assistance of Aileen F. Maddox, with thanks for this amazing resource: <https://divinity.duke.edu/initiatives/cswt/charles-published-verse>.

³ *Collection*, Hymns 60, 69, 89, 105, 118, 138, 152, 227, 243, 248, 253, 286, 292, 294, 303, 312, 314, 331, 334, 343, 346, 351, 362, 389, 398, 404, 445, 461, 465, 467, 479, 496, & 522.

for the renewal of strength, vigor, or labor (six hymns) and emphasizes God's work in the more cosmic dimensions of renewal. But these hymns demonstrate that Wesley conceives renewal primarily in terms of a personal, interior, and spiritual change.

Charles's preferred terminology with regard to renewal, however, revolves around the concept of "restoration" (seventy-seven instances of restore[s], restored, Restorer, unrestored, and All-restoring in sixty-one hymns).⁴ Here again, the two categories previously discussed are preponderant. Fifteen hymns refer to the interior restoration of love, holiness, perfection, purity, or the image of God. Thirteen hymns describe the restoration of the soul, spirit, or self. Most of the remaining hymns elevate the personal dimension of God's restorative work as well – the recovery of life, peace, health, and most importantly, paradise or heaven (seven hymns). Wesley identifies the source of restoration in seven hymns, celebrating the fact that we are restored by grace, by Jesus or Jesus' blood, and by the action of God – the "All-restoring." Only three hymns refer to the restoration of God's kingdom, the universal restorative work of God in nature, and the eschatological consummation of all things in Christ. Interestingly, nearly half these hymns are couched in the past tense – "restored" – with the implication that the renewal is an accomplished fact. While Charles affirms an eschatological "not yet" with regard to the restorative work of the Triune God, he also alludes to the present reality of restoration, a dimension of God's work to be celebrated. Wesley casts almost all his uses of the term "restore" in the form of prayer, as in "Thine image to my soul restore."⁵ In these hymns the singer yearns

⁴ *Collection*, Hymns 9, 38, 56, 59, 60, 63, 72, 87, 95, 98, 103, 105, 106, 119, 129, 159, 163, 164, 166, 167, 172, 173, 179, 199, 203, 211, 219, 243, 248, 253, 266, 282, 321, 333, 345, 346, 353, 357, 358, 364, 374, 378, 383, 385, 390, 396, 398, 414, 420, 435, 440, 449, 461, 468, 498, 510, 511, 514, 519, 520, & 522.

⁵ *Hymns and Sacred Poems* (Bristol: Farley, 1742), 68, stanza 6; *Collection*, Hymn 106:6.

for restoration and reaches out toward it in hope with great expectation.⁶

In a number of these hymns Wesley enhances this “language of renewal” with compounded or multiple uses of these terms. Several selections from a dozen such hymns suffice to illustrate Charles’s exploitation of the images through this device.⁷ In his lyrical paraphrase of the Aaronic blessing (Num 6:24-26), he prays:

Come, Father, Son, and Holy-Ghost,
One God in Persons Three,
Bring back the heavenly blessing, lost
By all mankind, and me:

Thy favour, and thy nature too,
To me, to all **restore**;
Forgive, and after God **renew**,
And keep us evermore.⁸

Throughout his literary corpus, Charles employs a unique expression to define the outcome of God’s restorative process. He describes the fully restored disciple as a transcript of the Trinity, one of his most poignant metaphors. Without using that specific language, one of his hymns on the Trinity articulates this portrait of the redeemed child of God:

Thy powerful, wise, and loving mind

⁶ Allusions to “revival,” “retrieval,” and “recovery” lead to the same conclusions. In addition to the simple affirmation of the process being God’s work (four hymns), Charles’s use of the term “revive” (eleven hymns) connotes new life or resurrection for the believer more than any other emphasis. See *Collection*, Hymns 38, 44, 57, 159, 210, 243, 368, 424, 440, 477, 505. He provides a panoply of images associated with the concept of “retrieval” (twelve hymns). See *Collection*, Hymns 3, 6, 32, 89, 166, 192, 198, 261, 333, 346, 449, & 515. God retrieves us in the sense of saving us from sin, ruin, the loss of Eden, hell, the Tempter’s power, and Satan’s hands; positively, God retrieves for us our souls, his favor, his love, and preponderantly (three hymns), his image. Texts related to “recovery” (just four hymns including the terms “recover” and “recovered”) focus on peace, love, and purity – finding one’s way home. See *Collection*, Hymns 71, 167, 360, & 461.

⁷ See *Collection*, Hymns 38, 60, 105, 159, 243, 248, 253, 346, 398, 440, 461, & 522.

⁸ *Short Hymns on Select Passages of the Holy Scriptures* (Bristol: Farley, 1762), 1:60, Hymn 200, originally a single eight-line poem; *Collection*, Hymn 243:1-2. Emphasis added.

Did our creation plan,
And all the glorious Persons join'd
To form thy fav'rite, man.

Again thou didst, in council met,
Thy ruin'd work **restore**,
Establish'd in our first estate,
To forfeit it no more:

And when we rise in love **renew'd**,
Our souls resemble thee,
An image of the Tri-une God
To all eternity.⁹

Two couplets from another Trinity hymn succinctly reiterate this salient conception of restoration:

Restorer of thine image lost,
Thy various offices make known;

O that we now in love **renew'd**,
Might blameless in thy sight appear.¹⁰

In a composite lyrical exposition of Psalm 130:8 and Jeremiah 4:1, Wesley tersely describes the holistic consequences of spiritual renewal, implied in the supplication of the child of God: “My fallen nature **renew**” and “Thy kingdom now **restore!**”¹¹ This conjunction of personal and cosmic dimensions of renewal pervades Wesley’s thinking, as we shall see. In a hymn “For Children” he weaves together the language of recovery, restoration, and renewal in this moving prayer:

Answer on them the end of all
Our cares, and pains, and studies here,
On them, **recover'd** from their fall,
Stamp't with the humble character,

⁹ *Hymns on the Trinity* (Bristol: Pine, 1767), 58, Hymn 87:2-3; *Collection*, Hymn 248:4-6. Emphasis added.

¹⁰ *Trinity Hymns*, 98-99, Hymn 14:1 & 4; *Collection*, Hymn 253:1 & 4. Emphasis added.

¹¹ *Scripture Hymns*, 1:279, Hymn 881:1 and 2:11, Hymn 1178; *Collection*, Hymn 398:1 & 4. Emphasis added.

Rais'd by the nurture of the Lord,
To all their paradise **restor'd**.

Error and ignorance remove,
Their blindness both of heart and mind,
Give them the wisdom from above,
Spotless, and peaceable, and kind,
In knowledge pure their minds **renew**,
And store with thoughts divinely true.¹²

In just over one hundred hymns of the *Collection* (about one out of five hymns), Wesley uses forms of the verbs renew, restore, and revive. The location of these hymns in the volume reveals some interesting facts. First, these hymns appear in every section of the *Collection* except for one – “Describing Hell” (perhaps no surprises here). This fact, at the very least, demonstrates the pervasiveness of these themes. Half the hymns, however, appear in just five of the twenty-nine sections. Sixteen hymns are found in Part IV. Section VII. For believers groaning for full redemption and thirteen are drawn from Part IV. Section I. For believers rejoicing. These constitute nearly a third of the hymns related to renewal. Fourteen hymns come from two sections (seven hymns each), both of which focus on the process of being “brought to birth.” The remaining seven hymns relate to the intercessory ministry of the believer.

It is somewhat dangerous to draw anything but very broad generalizations from this kind of analysis, but two conclusions can be made boldly and without qualification. First, the theme of restoration or renewal pervades this *Collection*. For comparative purposes, a parallel analysis of the term “faith,” which could easily be argued the most central theme of the Wesleyan revival, appears in 120 hymns in this corpus, not that much more in number than the set of hymns we have been exploring here. Secondly, these hymns that allude to restoration and renewal focus the

¹² *Hymns for Children* (Bristol: Farley, 1763), 35-36, Hymn 40:2-3; *Collection*, Hymn 461:2-3. Emphasis added.

singer on the goal of the fullest possible restoration and the joy that accompanies it. While this is primarily personal and interior, it is not exclusively so.

These are some of the conclusions we can draw from this raw data, the minute detail, related to the language of renewal in the *Collection*. Of greater significance, however, are the major themes that revolve around these images. Three particular themes – distinct but inseparable from one another – characterize Wesley’s concept of renewal: the restoration of perfect love in the child of God, the recovery of God’s rule, and the revival of the church as God’s instrument of renewal in the world.

“To Perfect Love Restored”

In several selections from *Hymns and Sacred Poems* (1742), Wesley describes the condition of “a poor sinner.” The heading for his lyrical paraphrase of Revelation 3:17 simply replicates the verse: “Wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked.” In order to properly envisage the goal toward which restoration moves, one must consider humanity’s loss and the plight of the human condition. The opening stanzas of this hymn describe the fallen state of humanity in graphic terms and concludes that humanity “gasps to be made whole.” In the face of human desperation, Charles offers this vision of renewal in love:

In the wilderness I stray,
My foolish heart is blind,
Nothing do I know; the way
Of peace I cannot find;
Jesu, Lord, restore my sight,
And take, O take the veil away,
Turn my darkness into light,
My midnight into day.

Naked of thine image, Lord,
Forsaken, and alone,
Unrenew’d, and unrestor’d

I have not thee put on:
Over me thy mantle spread,
Send down thy likeness from above,
Let thy goodness be display'd,
And wrap me in thy love.

Jesu, full of truth and grace,
In thee is all I want:
Be the wanderer's resting-place,
A cordial to the faint;
Make me rich, for I am poor,
In thee may I my Eden find,
To the dying health restore,
And eye-sight to the blind.

Cloath me with thy holiness,
Thy meek humility,
Put on me thy glorious dress,
Endue my soul with thee;
Let thy image be restor'd,
Thy name, and nature let me prove,
With thy fulness fill me, Lord,
And perfect me in love.¹³

Unrenewed and unrestored, those who are blind and lost in the wilderness seek wholeness. First, God restores sight. Next, God offers companionship for a journey leading back to Eden – a process that restores health. The ultimate goal is the restoration of the image of God which solicits the supplication of the singer, “With thy fullness fill me, Lord, / And perfect me in love.” This hymn essentially explicates the *via salutis* as a process of restoration. Wesley conflates this pathway toward wholeness into the four lines of a hymn based on Matthew 14:36:

Come, Saviour, come, and make me whole,
Intirely all my sins remove,
To perfect health restore my soul,
To perfect holiness and love.¹⁴

¹³ *HSP* (1742), 44-45, stanzas 4-5, 7-8; *Collection*, Hymn 105:3-4, 6-7.

¹⁴ *Scripture Hymns*, 2:170, Hymn 171, lines 5-8; *Collection*, Hymn 396:8.

This theme of “love restored” dominates the lyrical theology of Charles Wesley. He views this as God’s most treasured promise. In a lyrical paraphrase of Micah 7:20 he enunciates this first element in his concept of renewal:

Let us to perfect love restor’d
Thine image here retrieve,
And in the presence of our Lord
The life of angels live.¹⁵

I have no need to fully explicate this central Wesleyan theme (of both brothers) as it has been explored in great detail.¹⁶ Several important observations about this aspect of restoration are germane, however, and well-illustrated with hymns from the *Collection*.

The restoration of the heart. One of Wesley’s more famous hymns which appeared in a number of collections, including that of 1780, expresses his most mature vision of a life restored to perfect holiness or love:

O for a heart to praise my God,
A heart from sin set free!
A heart that always feels thy blood,
So freely spilt for me!

¹⁵ *Scripture Hymns*, 2:89, Hymn 1376; *Collection*, Hymn 333:2.

¹⁶ For works that provide analysis of Charles Wesley’s doctrine of sanctification and perfect love, see J. Ernest Rattenbury, *The Evangelical Doctrines of Charles Wesley’s Hymns* (London: Epworth Press, 1941), especially 278-307, and Chilcote, *A Faith That Sings*, especially 60-70, 122-37. The most important comprehensive examination of this theme is John R. Tyson, *Charles Wesley on Sanctification: A Biographical and Theological Study* (Grand Rapids: Francis Asbury Press, 1986). Several articles also explore this doctrine in the theology of Charles Wesley: John R. Tyson, “‘The One Thing Needful’: Charles Wesley on Sanctification,” *Wesleyan Theological Journal*, 45, 2 (Fall 2010): 177-95; Paul W. Chilcote, “‘All the Image of Thy Love’: Charles Wesley’s Vision of the One Thing Needful,” *Proceedings of The Charles Wesley Society* 18 (2014): 21-40; S T Kimbrough, Jr., “Charles Wesley and the Journey of Sanctification,” *Evangelical Journal* 16 (Fall 1998):49-75; Roy S. Nicholson, “The Holiness Emphasis in the Wesleys’ Hymns,” *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 5, 1 (Spring 1970): 49-61; and J. Richard Watson, “The Presentation of Holiness and the Concept of Christian Perfection in the Sermons and Hymns of the Wesleys, 1730-1780,” in *Transforming Holiness* (Dudly, MA: Peeters, 2006), 81-94.

A heart in every thought renewed
And full of love divine,
Perfect and right and pure and good,
A copy, Lord, of thine.

Thy nature, gracious Lord, impart;
Come quickly from above;
Write thy new name upon my heart,
Thy new, best name of Love.¹⁷

Given the fact that whatever is written on the heart reflects the true character of the person, God must restore, or transcribe, the heart fully. This hymn celebrates the heart of the believer – the heart upon which God has written the law of love. God writes on the heart, shapes the character, forms the disciple – restores the image of Christ in the child. In a hymn most likely written for Elizabeth Carr, whom Wesley baptized in the river at Cowley near Oxford in 1748, he prays:

Father, all thy love reveal,
Jesus all thy mind impart,
Holy Ghost, renew, and dwell
Forever in her heart.¹⁸

The restoration of the image of Christ. In a hymn from the section of the *Collection* related to “groaning for full redemption,” Charles appeals to the Trinity to bring this great work to completion:

Father, Son, and Holy-Ghost,
In council join again
To restore thine image, lost
By frail apostate man:
O might I thy form express,
Thro’ faith begotten from above,
Stamp’t with real holiness,
And fill’d with perfect love!¹⁹

¹⁷ *HSP* (1742), 30–31, on Psalm 51, stanzas 1, 4 & 8; *Collection*, Hymn 334:1, 4 & 8.

¹⁸ *Hymns and Sacred Poems*, 2 vols. (Bristol: Farley, 1749), 2:246, Hymn 418:2; *Collection*, Hymn 465:2.

¹⁹ *Scripture Hymns*, 1:4, Hymn 5, on Gen 1:26; *Collection*, Hymn 357:4.

These images actually pervade this section of the hymnal as Charles explores the many dimensions of redemption's goal. He concludes a twenty-stanza reflection on "the mind of Christ," based upon Philippians 2:5, with this confident affirmation:

I shall fully be restor'd
To the image of my Lord,
Witnessing to all mankind,
Jesu's is a PERFECT mind.²⁰

The phrase "restoration of the image of Christ," the positive expression of his "renewal of our fallen nature," reflects the heart of Wesley's vision of "the one thing needful."²¹

The Restoration of Christ-like Love. Restoration of the image of Christ implies Christ-likeness.²² In a hymn which he located in the section on "full redemption" for the two-volume *Hymns and Sacred Poems* published in 1749, Wesley explicitly connects this restoration with conformity to Christ:

We rest on His word
We shall here be restored
To His image; the servant shall be as his Lord.²³

Those who bear the image of Christ conform to him in mind and life, and more than anything else, this infers Christ-like love. The "believer brought to the birth" cries out: "O cut short the work, and make / Me now a creature new! . . . Let my life declare thy power; / To thy perfect love restored."²⁴ Hymns in the "believers rejoicing" section of the *Collection* are replete with

²⁰ *HSP* (1742), 223; *Collection*, Hymn 345:13.

²¹ For Wesley, a restored loving spirit is "the one thing needful," and his famous sermon of this title provides a helpful outline for an exploration of holiness and sanctification from his perspective. See Kenneth G. C. Newport, *The Sermons of Charles Wesley: A Critical Edition with Introduction and Notes* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 360-68.

²² In this section I develop themes first explored in an article entitled "'Claim Me for Thy Service': Charles Wesley's Vision of Servant Vocation," *Proceedings of The Charles Wesley Society* 11 (2006-2007): 69-85.

²³ *HSP* (1749), 2:179; *Collection*, Hymn 25:7.

²⁴ *HSP* (1742), 240-41, stanza 4; *Collection*, Hymn 390:2. The penultimate line of this

references to “love renewed,” several of them drawn from the Trinity hymns. “O that we now in love renew’d / Might blameless in thy sight appear.”²⁵ Another from this collection echoes themes already explored:

And when we rise in love renew’d,
Our souls resemble thee,
An image of the Tri-une God
To all eternity.²⁶

As one hymn explaining the purpose of life puts it so succinctly: “[We] rise renewed in perfect love.”²⁷

This personal, spiritual restoration of love divine in the heart of the believer is so central and so pervasive that there is a sense in which all other aspects of renewal occupy a space secondary to this. But this is not fully true; this only reflects part of the story of God’s work of restoration. The spiritual renewal of the person from the inside out – this heart work – leads, or should lead, to robust engagement in God’s rule and reign in the world. The defining elements of Jesus’ life and ministry revolved around the kingdom of God – preached and lived. In this gospel, personal salvation was only the opening act, so to speak, of the much larger drama of redemption. God makes a way possible for the recovery of a partnership abandoned by God’s children, therefore, if those children are to live out their lives – their vocation – with integrity in the world.

“Thy Kingdom Now Restore”

stanza originally read, “Born of God, renew’d, restor’d.”

²⁵ *Trinity Hymns*, 99, Hymn 14:4; *Collection*, Hymn 253:4.

²⁶ *Trinity Hymns*, 58, Hymn 87:3; *Collection*, Hymn 248:6.

²⁷ *HSP* (1749), 2:279; Hymn 203:3; *Collection*, Hymn 496:3.

Perry Shaw, a noted theological educator and proponent of integrated, missional models of education, identifies the core aspects of God’s continuing work into which we are all invited:

The mission of God is the starting point of our identity and calling. The important thing is not what we are doing but what God is doing in this world. God’s creative and redemptive agenda is the consummate restoration of the good. In the revelation of his divine Triune character of love and holiness, and in as much as we are attuned to his nature, we are able to discover our true identity. God entrusts us to partner with him in the accomplishment of his mission—the extension of his shalom Kingdom.²⁸

“Perfect love restored” not only entails the transformation of individual persons and their reconciliation with God through Christ in the power of the Spirit, it also involves the whole community of faith living into this larger redemptive narrative in partnership with God. Charles, like his brother, opposed any truncation of the gospel that failed to acknowledge this parallel calling – the proclamation and performance of God’s shalom in an unjust and discordant world. While he seldom employed language typically used today with regard to this aspect of renewal – this engagement in the reign of God – his hymns address a wide range of concerns related to God’s kingdom.²⁹ Acts of justice and compassion vanquish evil and despair in God’s economy, and Charles calls for those in the community of faith to practice them perennially in their commitment to God’s rule.

Various forms of injustice and circumstances of despair clamored for attention in Wesley’s day, in particular, hunger, poverty, slavery, and war. As one might well expect, several hymns from the section of the *Collection* entitled “For Believers Interceding for the World”

²⁸ Perry Shaw, “Holistic and Transformative: Beyond a Typological Approach to Theological Education,” *Evangelical Review of Theology* 40, 3 (July 2016): 211.

²⁹ See my discussion of this in *A Faith That Sings*, 106-21 (Chapter 8: Dominion: Situated in God’s Shalom); cf. Paul W. Chilcote, “Charles Wesley and the Peaceable Kingdom,” *Proceedings of The Charles Wesley Society* 21 (2017): [forthcoming].

address this issue, but none more potently than Charles's lyrical paraphrase of Isaiah's vision of the peaceable kingdom (11:6-7):

Prince of universal peace,
Destroy the enmity,
Bid our jars and discords cease,
Unite us all in thee.
Cruel as wild beasts we are,
'Till vanquished by thy mercy's power,
We, like wolves, each other tear,
And their own flesh devour.

But if thou pronounce the word
That forms our souls again,
Love and harmony restored
Throughout the earth shall reign;
When thy wondrous love they feel,
The human savages are tame,
Ravenous wolves, and leopards dwell
And stable with the lamb.³⁰

Likewise, Wesley produced an amazing body of hymnody related to the poor, calling forth the compassion of all within the family of Jesus.³¹ Just one example from the *Collection* must suffice here – Charles's reflections on James 1:27:

Thy mind throughout my life be shewn,
While listening to the wretch'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.³²

An affective experience of God's rule in one's heart and an outward performance of the kingdom through works of justice and compassion defined Wesley's vision of shalom, and he considered both dimensions to be essential to the recovery of peace and harmony in the world.

³⁰ *Scripture Hymns*, 1:316, Hymn 989:2; *Collection*, Hymn 436:2.

³¹ See S T Kimbrough, Jr., "Charles Wesley and the Poor," in *The Portion of the Poor: Good News to the Poor in the Wesleyan Tradition*, edited by M. Douglas Meeks (Nashville: Kingswood, 1995), 147-67.

³² *Scripture Hymns*, 2:380, Hymn 738:2; *Collection*, Hymn 354:4.

A hymn written by Henry More, a seventeenth-century Cambridge Platonist, and adapted by John Wesley, was most likely included among the intercessory hymns of the *Collection* because of its focus on the recovery of God's rule in this world:

On all the earth thy Spirit shower;
The earth in righteousness renew;
Thy kingdom come, and hell's o'erpower,
And to thy sceptre all subdue.³³

Charles declares his trust and hope in God's promise in a stellar hymn on the Incarnation:

All glory to God in the sky,
And peace upon earth be restor'd!
O Jesus, exalted on high,
Appear our omnipotent Lord:
Who meanly in Bethlehem born,
Didst stoop to redeem a lost race,
Once more to thy creature return,
And reign in thy kingdom of grace.³⁴

But there is an eschatological dimension of this kingdom work, as well, and Wesley's vision of God's rule extended far beyond this earthly realm.

God's restoration extends, in fact, to the entire cosmos, a concept Charles links with the image of new creation in 2 Corinthians 5:17. On November 1, 1755 a devastating earthquake hit Portugal, and the shock waves quickly spread, both literally and figuratively, across Europe. Once word of this tragedy reached Britain, King George II declared February 6, 1756 a day of fasting and prayer. Early in the new year, Charles published a set of seventeen hymns designed for use on this day.³⁵ He published two of these hymns which enunciate an apocalyptic theme in the section describing judgment in the *Collection*:

³³ *Hymns and Sacred Poems* (London: Strahan, 1739), 187, stanza 12; *Collection*, Hymn 445:1. See the note on this hymn in *Works*, 7:623-24.

³⁴ *Hymns for the Nativity of our Lord* (London: [Strahan], 1745), 23, Hymn 18:1; *Collection*, Hymn 211:1.

³⁵ See the Editorial Introduction to this collection of hymns:

Every fresh alarming token
More confirms thy faithful word,
Nature (for its Lord hath spoken)
Must be suddenly restor'd:
From this national confusion,
From this ruin'd earth and skies,
See the times of restitution,
See the new creation rise!³⁶

In the second hymn Charles anticipates the joy of those who have aligned themselves with the purposes of God on the day of the Lord. The partner of God

Sees this universe renew'd,
The grand millennial reign begun,
Shouts with all the sons of God
Around th' eternal throne.

Resting in this glorious hope
To be at last restor'd
Yield we now our bodies up
To earthquake, plague, or sword.³⁷

One of Wesley's hymns entitled "At the Parting of Friends," and included in the final section of the *Collection*, reflects the apex of his lyrical account of the consummation. This hymn is replete with the language of restoration and renewal:

These eyes shall see them fall,
Mountains, and stars, and skies,
These eyes shall see them all
Out of their ashes rise;
These lips his praises shall rehearse,
Whose nod restores the universe.

According to his word,
His oath to sinners given,
We look to see restor'd
The ruin'd earth and heaven,

https://divinity.duke.edu/sites/divinity.duke.edu/files/documents/cswt/54_Hymns_for_the_Year_1756.pdf.

³⁶ *Hymns for the Year 1756; Particularly for the Fast-Day, February 6* (Bristol: Farley, 1756), 22, Hymn 15:5; *Collection*, Hymn 59:3.

³⁷ *Hymns for the Year 1756*, 23, Hymn 16:3-4; *Collection*, Hymn 60:3-4.

In a new world his truth to prove,
A world of righteousness and love.

Then let us wait the sound
That shall our souls release,
And labour to be found
Of him in spotless peace,
In perfect holiness renew'd,
Adorn'd with Christ, and meet for God.³⁸

“Build Up Thy Rising Church”

Wesley could not conceive any form of restoration outside the framework of the church – the community of God’s faithful people.

Now, Jesus, now thy love impart,
To govern each devoted heart,
And fit us for thy will:
Deep founded in the truth of grace,
Build up thy rising church, and place
The city on the hill.³⁹

Embracing God’s gift of faith which leads to holiness of heart and engaging in partnership with God in the realization of shalom – holiness of life – only become real as these practices are lived out in community and in the concrete realities of life. While Wesley clearly affirmed that God’s nod can, in and of itself, restore an entire universe, he also believed that God chose to include the church in this work – “to serve the present age.”⁴⁰ While God will most certainly bring all things to completion in the end, the present affords the church ample opportunity to reflect God’s work of restoration now. Moreover, the success of the church in this vocation depends, in large measure, on its ability to diagnose the condition of the church and to reclaim its true calling in

³⁸ *Hymns for those that seek, and those that have Redemption in the Blood of Jesus Christ* (London: Strahan, 1747), 61, Hymn 48:6-8; *Collection*, Hymn 522:6-8.

³⁹ *Scripture Hymns*, 2:432; Hymn 870:5; *Collection*, Hymn 512:5. Emphasis added.

⁴⁰ *Scripture Hymns*, 1:58, 188; *Collection*, Hymn 309:1.

the mission of God. Wesley's desire to revive primitive Christianity and to reclaim a missional vision of the church emanate from these concerns.

Primitive Christianity. Charles, like his brother, came to the conclusion that their beloved Church of England had abandoned its first love. They contended that circumstances coalesced in a way that compromised the spiritual vitality of the church. Their vision was truly “ancient-future,” more concerned about a way forward filled with hope than a critique of the church's malaise or faithlessness, and they drew their vision from the earliest Christian communities of the New Testament. While the church, in some measure, retained the form of the primitive faith – something that lay dormant in its statements of faith and neglected practices of worship and discipleship – it had lost the power of godliness. In the face of this challenge, the Wesleys raised up a movement of renewal with the intention of rediscovering Christian authenticity.⁴¹

In 1743, at the outset of this revival, John Wesley published *An Earnest Appeal to Men of Reason and Religion* to defend the Methodist movement against the claim that he and his brother were attempting to undermine the established church. In his second edition of this tract he appended a poem of his brother entitled “Primitive Christianity.” In this lengthy composition Charles articulated the ideal of Christian faith and practice that the Methodists were trying to emulate and restore. This poem functions as a manifesto of renewal for the movement, structured

⁴¹ In addition to the resources listed in fn. 1 above, see several of my previous articles that examine the Wesleyan paradigm of renewal from multiple angles: “The Wesleyan Revival and Methodism in Cuba,” [with Phil Wingeier-Rayo] *Quarterly Review* 17, 3 (Fall 1997): 207-21; “An Early Methodist Community of Women,” *Methodist History* 38, 4 (July 2000): 219-230; “**Error! Main Document Only.** Wesleyan and Emergent Christians in Conversation: A Modest Proposal,” *The Epworth Review* 36, 3 (July 2009): 6-25; and “Lessons from the ‘Society Planting’ Paradigm of Early Methodist Women,” *Witness: Journal of the Academy for Evangelism in Theological Education* 27 (2013): 5-30.

in large measure on the outline of 1 Peter 2, and parallel in thought and aspiration to John's *The Character of a Methodist*.⁴²

The poem – Hymns 16 and 17 of the *Collection* – is presented there in its original two-segment division, Part I in fourteen and Part II in sixteen stanzas.⁴³ The opening line, “Happy the souls that first believed” establishes primitive Christianity as the ideal and pattern for Charles's (and John's) reparative mission. “Still let us in thy Spirit live,” he sings, “And to thy church the pattern give.”⁴⁴ Elsewhere he moves beyond aspiration to prescription with regard to this pattern and identifies some of its constitutive elements:

Let us each for other care,
Each his brother's burthen bear,
To thy church the pattern give,
Shew how true believers live.

Free from anger, and from pride,
Let us thus in God abide,
All the depth of love express,
All the height of holiness.⁴⁵

Reflecting nostalgically on the “golden days” of Jesus' first followers in the primitive church, he simply asks, “Where shall I wander now to find / The successors they left behind? (lines 17-18)” and then demands, “show me where the Christians live” (line 24).⁴⁶

⁴² This classic tract is available in many editions and multiple formats. A digital version may be accessed at <https://www.umcmission.org/Find-Resources/John-Wesley-Sermons/The-Wesleys-and-Their-Times/The-Character-of-a-Methodist>. See also Steve Harper's concise and compelling summary of the characteristics Wesley sets forth in the document: *Five Marks of a Methodist: The Fruit of a Living Faith* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2015).

⁴³ Charles Wesley, “Primitive Christianity,” in John Wesley, *An Earnest Appeal to Men of Reason and Religion*, 2nd edn. (Bristol: Farley, 1743), 52–55; *Collection*, Hymns 16 & 17.

⁴⁴ *Hymns for the Use of Families* (Bristol: Pine, 1767), 14, Hymn 12:2; *Collection*, Hymn 477:2.

⁴⁵ *HSP* (1749), 1:248, Hymn 147:4-5; *Collection*, Hymn 495:4-5.

⁴⁶ The editors of the definitive edition of the *Collection* indicate the potential connection here with Antoinette Bourginon and the similar question she poses in *Light of the World*. See *Works*, 7:99, notes on the respective lines.

He contrasts “a pure, believing multitude” (line 10) – his definition for the authentic community of faith – with “different sects” (line 21) which peddle a false gospel devoid of the “genuine mark of love” (line 26). Charles celebrates the signs of God’s re-edifying presence (re-building the community of faith) among the Methodist people and endorses a classical vision of *ecclesia semper reformanda*.⁴⁷ While little direct critique of the Church of England will be found in this poem – Charles was a consummate son of the Church – in other hymns of the *Collection* he points to the pressing need of reform. The church’s heart, he claims, like the heart of every individual, must to be transformed. “To all thy church and me,” he pleads, “Give a new, believing heart / That knows and cleaves to thee.”⁴⁸ “Fill our church with righteousness,” he prays, “Our want of faith supply.”⁴⁹ A healthy church is a faithful church. But Charles knew his own church well enough to know that its deficiencies were not limited to benign neglect or spiritual amnesia; there were also forces within the church that were antithetical, in his view, to God’s mission in the world. Like his Puritan forebears, he yearned for the church to be a pure as well as a faithful community of God’s people.

He exposed hypocrisy and corruption in the church, therefore, and applied a more radical prescription in hopes of recovery. Reflecting on the image of the church as the temple, as described in Jeremiah 7, he unleashed one of his most scathing criticisms of leaders within the church whose attitudes and actions were antithetical to the gospel:

The men who slight thy faithful word
In their own lies confide,
These are the temple of the Lord,

⁴⁷ See “*Semper Reformanda: The Wesleys and Renewal*,” *World Christianity and the Fourfold Gospel* 4, 2 (September 2017): [forthcoming] in which I examine the classic aspects of reform that defined the Wesleyan revival and connect it with movements of reform which preceded it.

⁴⁸ *Scripture Hymns*, 2:25; Hymn 1211:1; *Collection*, Hymn 172:2.

⁴⁹ *Scripture Hymns*, 1:331; Hymn 1025:1; *Collection*, Hymn 454:1.

And heathens all beside!
The temple of the Lord are these,
The only church and true,
Who live in pomp, and wealth, and ease,
And Jesus never knew.

The temple of the Lord—they pull
Thy living temples down,
And cast out every gracious soul
That trembles at thy frown:
The church—they from their pale expel
Whom thou hast here forgiven:
And all the synagogue of hell
Are the sole heirs of heaven!⁵⁰

Despite malaise and disease in the church, Charles believed that a faithful remnant could always be found. Even among dry bones, the Spirit was at work to raise up authentic followers of Jesus “to spread / The dead-reviving news.”⁵¹ God would send this “chosen band” through every nation, leaving no one behind, and restoring everyone who responded in faith to their “first estate.”⁵² Charles believed that God was restoring the church through the people called Methodists and that they were “Raised by the breath of love divine.” “We urge our way with strength renew’d,” he claimed, “The church of the first-born to join.”⁵³

Missional Vision. Charles and his brother rediscovered a “mission-church paradigm” in their own day.⁵⁴ As I have written elsewhere:

⁵⁰ *Scripture Hymns*, 2:13-14; Hymn 1185:1-2; *Collection*, Hymn 91:1-2. The second stanza quoted here does not appear in the *Collection*, but is included from the original for emphasis. In the *Collection*, the original eight-line stanzas were subdivided into two four-line stanzas.

⁵¹ *Scripture Hymns*, 1:391; Hymn 1157:1; *Collection*, Hymn 440:1.

⁵² *Scripture Hymns*, 1:391-92; Hymns 1157, 1158, & 1159; *Collection*, Hymn 440:2-5.

⁵³ *Redemption Hymns*, 52; Hymn 41:8; *Collection*, Hymn 69:6.

⁵⁴ See my discussion of this central rediscovery of the Wesleys in “The Mission-Church Paradigm of the Wesleyan Revival,” in *World Mission in the Wesleyan Spirit*, edited by Darrell L. Whiteman and Gerald H. Anderson (Franklin, TN: Providence House Publishers, 2009), 151-64 and “*Missio Dei* and the Wesleyan Mission-Church Paradigm,” in *Missio Dei in the United States: Toward a Faithful United Methodist Witness*, edited by Kathy Armistead (Nashville:

They believed that God designed the church as a redemptive community, a family that lives in and for God's vision of shalom in the world. God calls the church to bear witness to this dominion in every aspect of life. The church in this biblical paradigm draws committed Christian disciples perennially to Jesus and to one another in community for the purpose of spinning them out into the world in mission and service.⁵⁵

The singular goal of this church-as-mission, in Wesley's understanding, is to partner with God in the restoration of perfect love, in all its dimensions, in the life of the world. Faithfulness in this adventure, which is both task and gift, entails an all-encompassing engagement of the disciple in God's reign. The difficult work of restoration claims of each disciple, "All I have and all I am."⁵⁶ Charles Wesley invites every child of God into the grand narrative of God's restoring work in which the blind are restored, the deaf hear his voice, and the lepers are cleansed – in which God makes all things new and establishes the rule of shalom. Moreover, he invites the community of faith to celebrate the God "Who **now** is reviving His work in **our** days."⁵⁷

New Room Books, General Board of Higher Education and Ministry, [forthcoming].

⁵⁵ Chilcote, *A Faith That Sings*, 116.

⁵⁶ *Hymns on the Lord's Supper* (Bristol: Farley, 1745), 129, Hymn 155:3; *Collection*, Hymn 418:3.

⁵⁷ *HSP* (1749), 1:311, Hymn 197:11; *Collection*, Hymn 38:6. Emphasis added.