

# Methodist Hymnology Anticipates the Fullness of the Blessing

by Bishop W. F. Mallalieu

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*Bishop W. F. Mallalieu explores the rich theological and emotional heritage of Methodist hymnology, emphasizing its role in expressing the fullness of Christian blessing.*

**Scripture:** Psalm 51:10, Psalm 95:1, Psalm 96:1, John 4:23, Acts 16:25, Ephesians 3:17, Ephesians 5:19, Colossians 3:16, 1 Thessalonians 5:16, Revelation 5:9

**Topics:** "Wesleyan Theology", "Christian Hymnody"

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## Description

Bishop W. F. Mallalieu reflects on the profound impact of the hymns of Methodism, particularly those by the Wesleys, which express a wide range of Christian experiences and emotions. He emphasizes the theological depth, Biblical accuracy, and experiential nature of the hymns, highlighting the Wesleys' exceptional intellectual and spiritual journey towards salvation and sanctification. Mallalieu underscores the hymns' ability to inspire, comfort, and guide believers in their pursuit of a deeper relationship with God, pointing out their unmatched quality and relevance in nurturing faith and Christian growth.

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## Transcript

O, for a thousand tongues, to sing

My great Redeemer's praise;

The glories of my God and King,

The triumphs of his grace!

My gracious Master and my God,

Assist me to proclaim,

To spread through all the earth abroad,

The honors of thy name.

Jesus! the name that charms our fears,

That bids our sorrows cease;  
'Tis music in the sinner's ears,  
'Tis life, and health, and peace.  
He breaks the power of canceled sin,  
He sets the prisoner free;  
His blood can make the foulest clean;  
His blood availed for me.

-- Charles Wesley.

O come, let us sing unto the Lord; let us make a joyful noise to the rock of our salvation. Let us come before his presence with thanksgiving, and make a joyful noise unto him in psalms. -- Psa. xcv, 1, 2.

O sing unto the Lord a new song; sing unto the Lord, all the earth. Sing unto the Lord, bless his name; show forth his salvation from day to day. -- Psa. xcvi, 1, 2.

And at midnight Paul and Silas prayed, and sung praises unto God; and the prisoners heard them. -- Acts xvi, 25.

And they sung a new song, saying, Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof; for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation; and hast made us unto our God kings and priests; and we shall reign on the earth. -- Rev. v, 9, 10.

THE poets of Methodism have been of the first order. All Protestantism recognizes this fact. They have caused every chord of the human heart to vibrate. They have given voice to every emotion of the soul. Genuine penitence, complete consecration, appropriating faith, the sweet comfort of pardon, the assurance of justification, the holy joy of the new birth, the lofty inspirations of exultant hope, the highest heights and deepest depths of Christian experience, have all found fitting expression in our hymns.

Theodore Parker is reported as saying on one occasion that Methodist people were accustomed to sing their hymns for the purpose of exciting their emotions and making themselves happy. This man may have known much about many things, but he was all wrong in regard to Methodist singers. He might just as well have said that the birds sing in the springtime for the purpose of exciting their emotions and making themselves happy. Methodists sing, and the birds sing, because they are happy. The poet Shelley had heard the English larks sing, and he writes:

"Higher still and higher  
From the earth thou springest,  
Like a cloud of fire;  
The blue deep thou wingest,

And singing still dost soar, and soaring ever singest."

And so let all Methodist people and all other Christian people sing, for no beings this side the gates of pearl have so much reason for singing as those who have been redeemed by the blood of the Lamb, and have been saved through faith.

There is much theology in the hymns of the Wesleys. This theology is Biblical and experimental. It is a theology that can be preached and lived. It has been exemplified by the good men and women of all ages, but especially in the last hundred and fifty years. The Wesleys were men of exceptional intellectual endowments; they were men of logical minds; their sensibilities were keen; their perceptions were clear and well defined; they had acute mental faculties; they had high powers of imagination; they were strong, vigorous thinkers. The Wesleys were cultured men, most highly cultured for the times in which they lived. They were born and reared in a home where both father and mother were scholarly, and their home associations brought them into terms of intimate fellowship with not a few who were eminent for their learning. All this was supplemented by the training to be derived from the best preparatory schools in England; and this was followed by the full classical course of Oxford University. Thus, when they entered upon the active duties of life, they were probably as well equipped as any two young men in all England. And it must be remembered that they were studious all through their lives, were men of letters, and, besides, all their work as preachers of the gospel, and the organizers and administrators of the greatest religious movement of modern times, they performed an amount of literary labor that was far superior in quality and quantity to any of the writers of their times.

Both John and Charles Wesley had a wonderful religious experience. For years they were faithful in the observance of all the outward forms of religion; they were servants without being the sons of God; they were diligent in prayers and preaching, and in pastoral work and the study of the Bible, in self-denial and self-sacrifice, in almsgiving and fasting; but they did not, for some years after they had entered the ministry, come into the possession of a conscious, joyous experience of salvation. Eventually they found this experience, and then they attained the witness of the Spirit in harmony with the teachings of the Scriptures. We are absolutely sure that these earnest souls did not rest satisfied with this experience. They did not fail to notice the exceeding fullness and scope of the plan of redemption. Concluding from the clear teachings of the Word of God, and from the testimony of multitudes of mature Christians, with whom they were more or less intimately associated, that believers may be wholly sanctified, that they may enter that blessed state where they love God with all the heart, these two brothers, in their public discourses and in their hymns, illustrated, taught, and encouraged such an experience, and it is believed that they both came in due time into its personal enjoyment.

So highly endowed by nature, so thoroughly cultured in the home and the schools, so rich in Christian experience, and both possessed of poetical genius and masters in theology, it is no wonder that the Wesleys have left as a heritage for all God's people such a collection of hymns as have never been excelled in the history of the Christian Church. To any one who studies these hymns it will be manifest that they are of the widest possible range. John Wesley, in the Preface to a Hymn-book which he issued in 1779, takes occasion to say:

I do not think it inconsistent with modesty to declare that I am persuaded no such Hymn-book as this has yet been published in the English language. In what other publication of the kind have you so full and distinct an account of Scriptural Christianity? such a declaration of the heights and depths of religion, speculative and practical? so strong cautions against the most plausible errors, particularly those that are

now most prevalent? and so clear directions for making your calling and election sure, for perfecting holiness in the fear of God?

May I be permitted to add a few words with regard to the poetry? Then I will speak to those who are judges thereof, with all freedom and unreserve. To these I may say, without offense: 1. In these hymns there is no doggerel; no botches; nothing put in to patch up the rhyme; no feeble expletives. 2. Here is nothing turgid or bombastic on the one hand, or low and creeping on the other. 3. Here are no cant expressions; no words without meaning. Those who impute this to us know not what they say. We talk common sense, both in prose and verse, and use no word but in a fixed and determinate sense. 4. Here are, allow me to say, both the purity, the strength, and the elegance of the English language; and, at the same time, the utmost simplicity and plainness suited to every capacity.

These hymns are adapted to each and every phase and degree of Christian experience, and furthermore, next to the Bible are they full of inspiration, encouragement, full of warning and entreaty, full of calls to penitence and reformation, full of promise and instruction, full of all comfort and helpfulness to those who desire to know the possibilities, even the highest possibilities and attainments of the Christian life. These hymns are full of faith, hope, love, victory; they are for the living and dying, the rejoicing and the suffering, the triumphant and the struggling in all lands and for all times.

Any sincere soul will be very greatly helped in the search for a clean heart, and for perfect love by the careful study of the hymns of the Wesleys which relate to these all-important matters. If with these hymns there might be combined some precious passage of the Word of God, it would seem that any one might find the green pastures and the still waters to which the good Shepherd welcomes all his flock.

How better can we close this chapter than to offer from the heart the prayers of the following selections from the Wesleyan hymns? They have expressed the earnest longings of millions of souls on earth and in glory, and richest blessings have been realized in their use. God waits to be gracious to all who seek him, to all who search for him with all the heart, to all who importunately cry to him.

Come, Savior, Jesus, from above,  
Assist me with thy heavenly grace;  
Empty my heart of earthly love,  
And for thyself prepare the place.  
Nothing on earth do I desire  
But thy pure love within my breast;  
This, only this, will I require,  
And freely give up all the rest.  
-- Tr. by John Wesley.

O, that with all thy saints I might  
By sweet experience prove

What is the length, and breadth, and height,  
And depth of perfect love!

-- Charles Wesley.

The thing my God doth hate  
That I no more may do,  
Thy creature, Lord again create,  
And all my soul renew:  
My soul shall then like thine,  
Abhor the thing unclean,  
And, sanctified by love divine,  
Forever cease from sin.

-- Charles Wesley.

O, come, and dwell in me,  
Spirit of power within!  
And bring the glorious liberty  
From sorrow, fear, and sin.  
The seed of sin's disease,  
Spirit of health, remove,  
Spirit of finished holiness,  
Spirit of perfect love.

-- Charles Wesley

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