THE INFLUENCE OF PARADISE LOST ON THE
HYMNS OF CHARLES WESLEY

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ABSTRACT

An overview of the prose writings of John Wesley, and the hymn writing of his brother Charles, shows that John Milton was an important influence on both men. A search of the literature indicates that critics have rarely noticed this, and although some work has been done on John's abridgement of *Paradise Lost*, there are no qualitative studies of its effect on the hymnody of Charles. Although the singing of hymns is a potential way of influencing language and doctrine of all singers, it is particularly important for people who have little other education. Charles Wesley, as the most prolific English hymnwriter, was influential in educating generations of church-goers.

He used *Paradise Lost* in several ways: 1) by simple appropriation of diction, 2) by combining it with the Bible in four specific ways, i.e., a) simple addition of images and language from *Paradise Lost* to biblical sources, b) magnification of a biblical idea by projecting it through a scene in *Paradise Lost*, as in the case of the hymn, "Soldiers of Christ Arise" which is influenced by Book 5, c) the use of the Bible and *Paradise Lost* as joint "pre-text" to create a new concept, and d) the use of *Paradise Lost* to "Christianise" a Psalm. Psalm 24 is used as an example.

Obvious reasons why Charles Wesley might wish to imitate
Milton, such as Milton's popularity in the eighteenth century, and Wesley family connections with Milton, are explored and considered not significant, but a common classical education is important. The two men have similar theological views in two doctrines essential to the Wesleyan revival: a) justification by faith and b) universal redemption. Other similarities are their expression of views on covenant theology, the nature of the goodness of God, and the name of God as "all in all." Their audiences were different but their purposes were similar: to teach "serious godliness" by inculcating doctrine and inspiring faith in a way that would touch the minds and hearts of their readers.

Three appendices are presented: one on the problem of the hymn as a literary genre, the second on the audience for Wesley hymns, and the third on the history of literary criticism of the Wesleys.
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I should like to acknowledge the support of Dr. Paul Stanwood, who first encouraged me to satisfy my curiosity on this topic, and has continued to take an active interest in it. I would also like to thank Dr. Dennis Danielson who, while Visiting Professor in the department of English at UBC, provided constructive criticism and enthusiasm as my advisor. Dr. Gerald Hobbs, Associate Professor of Church History at Vancouver School of Theology, has straightened out some nice points of theology, and offered helpful advice on hymnology and Charles Wesley. I appreciate the co-operation of the staff of United Church Archives and Emmanuel College, Toronto; staff at Drew University, Madison, New Jersey, and the Librarian of the Wesley Historical Society Library, Southlands College, London.

Finally, to my father, Rev. H. Maurice Hart, much gratitude for having set me on the road, and for providing early editions of Wesley texts, without which this thesis could hardly have been written.
PREFACE

The drive behind this thesis is a personal one, but needs some explanation.

When I first formally studied Milton under Dr. Paul Stanwood at UBC in 1982 I was surprised to find that the diction was familiar to me. I had never read Milton in all my life, so where were the words coming from? The answer seemed to be in the hymns of Charles Wesley. In writing a couple of papers on the topic I proved this to be so, and decided to look further.

In the war-time Cornwall of my childhood in England, the fountain-head of all religion and anything that could be called culture was West End Methodist Chapel, Callington. As the minister's daughter, I was required to sit through two sermons and sing ten hymns each Sunday. It was here that I learned to love words, for what else was there to do but to sing hymns and read the hymn-book during the sermon? To be more specific, it was here with the attention that can only come to a child trapped by boredom, that I read, sang, re-read and sang again the hymns of Charles Wesley. The long words intoxicated me. I searched for them like gold in the desert. I loved the two-word lines, like "inextinguishable blaze," and "indissolubly joined," and the idea of a God who was "incomprehensibly made man." I was hooked on parallels and alliteration, the words rolled round my tongue, the un- and the in- words were splendid and complicated. What is more, everyone sang those words; looking back now, I
see that must have accounted for the wide vocabulary of those rural people, many of whom had had no high school education.

And then there was the superb arrogance of John Wesley's 1780 Preface, fortunately reprinted at the front of my hymn book. How could he not only say, but cause to be printed, "Many gentlemen have done my brother and me the honour to reprint many of our hymns...I desire that they would not attempt to mend them; for they really are not able. None of them is able to mend either the sense or the verse...that we may no longer be accountable for the nonsense or the doggerel of other men"? But he had said it and it was still being printed. This Preface opened to me a new world of power and style and morality - the assurance of the eighteenth century voice. Bernard Manning calls this document "one of the noblest pieces of eighteenth century prose extant,"¹ and says that he too had his childhood influenced by it.

When I and some three million English Methodists were singing some of the 245 hymns of Wesley in our hymn-book, were we also singing the words and taking in the ideas of Milton? The 1983 publication of the critical edition of the 1780 Collection of Hymns for the use of the People Called Methodists in the Oxford Edition of the Works of John Wesley, gave proof by its notations that Milton was used as a source more than any other poet. My concern has been to find out why and how Wesley did it. And this thesis is the result of my enquiries.

INTRODUCTION

John Wesley (1703-91) and his brother Charles (1707-88) were perhaps the most influential and prolific writers of the eighteenth century.\(^2\) Between them, they published over four hundred works,\(^3\) from small pamphlets to large, multi-volume collections, and though their aim was to make no personal profit, sales and subscriptions were sufficient to finance Charles in his marriage,\(^4\) and John in his support of the itinerant preachers of the new "Methodist Revival."

As a writer, John is best remembered in the literary world

\(^2\) Apart from their own religious writings, opposition from satirists produced a flood of reactionary literature. This is examined in some detail in Albert M. Lyles, *Methodism Mocked: the Satiric Reaction to Methodism in the Eighteenth Century* (London: Epworth Press, 1960). The social impact of the Methodist revival has begun to be studied only recently because of the revived interest in the lives of ordinary people. The voluminous literature it created is one of the few documentary sources for middle and lower class life of the period. Dr. Rupert Davies, Wesley College, Bristol. *Personal Communication*, 1984.

\(^3\) Richard Green, *The Works of John and Charles Wesley: a Bibliography* (London: Kelly, 1896) lists 417 published works of the two brothers. Others have been found since.

\(^4\) In a letter to Mrs Gwynne, his future mother-in-law, (Jan. 3, 1749) he notes the value of his and his brother's publications at 2,500 pounds, "exclusive of the book I am now publishing which will bring in more than 200 pounds clear." The book to be published was his own *Hymns and Sacred Poems* (1749). Frank Baker, *Charles Wesley as Revealed by his Letters* (London: Epworth Press, 1948), p. 63. John was critical of this unilateral act of publication. He writes: "As I did not see these [hymns] before they were published, there were some things in them which I did not approve of." *Plain Account of Christian Perfection* *Works of the Rev John Wesley* (London: Wesleyan Conference Office, 1872), IV, 449.
for his *Journal* which he edited and re-edited and which eventually reached twelve volumes, and in the religious world for his *Sermons*. He also wrote a number of doctrinal works in response to particular needs, such as *An Earnest Appeal to Men of Reason and Religion* (1743), and some political tracts, one of which supported Samuel Johnson's stand on the American Colonies. He wrote on medicine, electricity, music and logic, wrote a history of England, and produced short grammars of English, French, Latin, Hebrew and Greek, as well as an English dictionary. As an abridger of works, he deserves to be remembered for having reduced fifty historical and theological books to a readable size and made them available in cheap form as his Christian Library—a sort of Readers' Digest of the eighteenth century—which all preachers were expected to read and assimilate. He produced an

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5 *A Calm Address to Our American Colonies* (1775) was actually an unacknowledged reduction of Johnson's tract, *Taxation No Tyranny*. By removing Johnson's philosophical introduction and abbreviating other parts, Wesley, according to T.W. Herbert, "made it easier to read and more rapid in tempo." It sold 100,000 copies. Johnson seems to have had no objection to the plagiarism, for in February 1766 he wrote to Wesley, thanking him for publishing his work. For further details of this and other editorial work of Wesley see Thomas Walter Herbert, *John Wesley as Editor and Author* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1940). John Wesley had several meetings with Samuel Johnson, and John's sister, Patty (Martha Hall) was a regular visitor to Johnson. See Harry Belshaw, "The Influence of John Wesley on Dr. Johnson's Religion," *London Quarterly and Holborn Review* (1943), pp. 226-34. [Hereafter this journal is referred to as *LQHR*.]

6 "There are thousands in this society who will never read anything besides the Bible and books published by Mr. Wesley" *Memoirs of the First Forty-Five Years of the Life of James Lackington* (London: 1791), p. 49. Quoted by James Dale, "The Theological and Literary Qualities of the Poetry of Charles Wesley in Relation to the Standards of his Age" (Diss. Cambridge
abbreviated version of *Paradise Lost* in 1763, an abridgement of the poems of Edward Young, and a three-volume anthology, *A Collection of Moral and Sacred Poems*, for the Countess of Huntingdon which would, he hoped, not offend her taste.

Of special interest to readers of George Herbert is his printing of *Select Parts of Mr. Herbert's Sacred Poems* (1773) containing twenty-three unaltered poems from *The Temple*, the "most considerable printing of Herbert's poems between the editions of *The Temple* in 1709 and 1799." In addition, John's gifts as editor created the *Collection of Hymns for the use of the People Called Methodists* in 1780. The contents of this were largely the edited hymns of his brother Charles, who by this time had written some 6000 hymns, many of which were sung as the foundation of the Revival. The *Collection*, intended as a supplement to other hymn-books of the Wesley brothers, contained...

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525 hymns but omitted many that had to be included in later editions. Particularly important omissions are those for church festivals, the Hymns on the Nativity of Our Lord and the Hymns on the Last Supper.

Because of the religious importance of the Wesleys and the many misconceptions surrounding their "enthusiasm", theological analysis of their work has flourished at the expense of the literary. However, in recent years, books and papers have been written on the importance of John as an editor and prose writer and an analysis has been done on his use of the English language. Some writers have looked at the diction of Charles, documented his literary borrowings, and looked at his use of metre and rhetoric. One writer, T.B. Shepherd, has taken a useful overall view of Methodism in the literary context of the

9 "Hark the Herald Angels Sing," "Christ the Lord is Risen Today" and "Jesu Lover of My Soul" are all missing from the Collection. For a complete list of the hymn-books published in Wesley's lifetime see CHPM, pp.788-791.

10 The question of authorship of the hymns has provoked much discussion, particularly because John's editorial intention was to publish most of the hymn-books under joint authorship. The traditional view that most of the hymns are by Charles, and that the translations from the German are by John has not been essentially challenged. However, attempts have been made to attribute to John some original compositions and also to claim for Charles, some of the translations. For the purpose of this thesis, I will consider all hymns to be by Charles unless noted to the contrary.

eighteenth century. Much of this work has been published in the theological rather than the literary press; hence, there has been a tendency in academic literary circles to marginalize the works of both the Wesleys. With one or two exceptions, literary critics have tended to perpetuate factual errors, or make condescending generalizations from inaccurate information. This is particularly unfortunate when the critic is a reputable one.


13 The prize must surely go to John T. Shawcross, who manages to introduce three factual errors into part of his only sentence mentioning either of the Wesleys in his Milton 1732-1801: The Critical Tradition (London: Routledge, 1972), p.4. He writes: "the hymn-writer John Wesley brought the poem [Paradise Lost] into more usual rhythms in Paradise Lost Improved (1763)." However, it was Charles, rather than John who was the hymn-writer. John, as editor, was meticulously careful to keep the poem as close to the original poetry as possible. His methods of keeping the blank verse have been well documented by Herbert, who says, "No matter what the reason for an omission was, Wesley took great care to preserve the general integrity of Milton's line." J.W. Edit, p.78. See also Oscar Sherwin, "Milton for the Masses: John Wesley's edition of Paradise Lost," MLQ 12 (1951), pp.267-285. As for the title, it is difficult to know where Shawcross found it, for he repeats this error when quoting the 1763 edition in the Milton Encyclopedia (I, p.22). The correct title is An Extract from Milton's Paradise Lost: with Notes (London: Henry Fenwick, 1763). At least Shawcross got the date right. Another influential writer, Basil Willey, gets caught in the "enthusiasm" trap and so gives an inaccurate picture. He writes: "Wesley and Whitfield range the world, converting their ten thousands, not by rational ethical suasion, but by impassioned appeals to the heart." Eighteenth Century Background (New York: Columbia U.P. 1940), p.109. Whitfield may have done so, but John Wesley prided himself on commonsense and reason. In a letter to Charles (Dec. 26 1761) he writes: "We are always in danger of enthusiasm, but I think no more now than anytime in the last twenty years." For a useful short summary of the emotion/reason argument surrounding the Wesleys, see Bernard E. Jones, "Reason and Religion Joined: the Place of Reason in Wesley's thought." LQHR 1964:110-113. See also appendix III of this thesis.
The poet who exerted the greatest literary influence on the Wesley brothers was John Milton; so, in this thesis I shall attempt to do two things. First, I shall explore the ways in which *Paradise Lost* was incorporated into the hymns, and secondly I shall explore the reasons why Milton and his work were so important to John and Charles Wesley. I have chosen to work only with *Paradise Lost* here in order to narrow the field of discussion, for it is clear that other works of Milton were influential too. Of particular interest is the apparent influence of "On the Morning of Christ's Nativity" on Charles Wesley's *Nativity Hymns*, and there are echoes from "Lycidas," the Psalm paraphrases, the sonnets, and *Paradise Regained*.

When considering how the Wesleys used *Paradise Lost*, I shall look first at simple appropriations of diction, and then at the specific cosmic and spatial imagery of *Paradise Lost* which describes so well the Wesleyan view of the nature of God, and indeed may have been influential in forming it. But Charles Wesley not only takes Milton's cosmic imagery as descriptive of God's nature, he internalises it too, so finding in *Paradise Lost* a rich vocabulary with which to capture the emotional range of the soul. More interesting still is Wesley's conflation of images from the Bible and *Paradise Lost*. Taking each book as his
pre-text, he frequently blends passages to create a new, composite idea, or as a method of expanding a biblical story. Tradition says that Charles Wesley's hymns are entirely biblical but I hope to demonstrate that many of the best of them owe a large measure of their content and form to the ideas and language of Milton in *Paradise Lost*.

When we come to ask the question "why?", at first the answer may seem rather obvious. It might well be assumed that the high standing of Milton in the literary circles of the eighteenth century would be sufficient reason for the Wesleys to imitate his work, but close examination of texts and a look at family influences suggests that there were deeper causes. The most fundamental point of compatibility is their theology. Milton and the Wesleys shared a common theology and expressed it with emotion and a powerful conviction suited to their purposes and their audience. Their declared purposes were surprisingly similar, for Milton wrote his poem to "justify the ways of God to men" (*PL* 1:26) and Wesley wrote his hymns, recommending them, as John said, as a means of improving a person's faith devotion and hope, and of "increasing his love to God and man." A similar education, in which the study of epigrammatic Latin verses led to a love of classical and biblical poetic forms and a desire to imitate them, was also a common link between Milton and the

14 A leading proponent of the "bible as the only influence" school is Dr. Ernest Rattenbury. See n.45.

15 Preface to the 1780 *Collection*. CHPM, p.75.
Wesleys. What is more, both John and Charles came from a family of poets, where the poetry of Milton was a commonplace and where Milton, the man, was admired and respected and had been an acquaintance, if not a friend to earlier generations of their mother's family.\textsuperscript{16}

In addition to exploring the "how" and "why" of Wesley's debt to Milton, I will provide background appendices to examine the critical tradition, to consider the hymn as a genre, and to discuss the audience for which the Wesleys wrote.

\textsuperscript{16} Samuel Annesley (1620-1696), the Puritan divine, was the maternal grandfather of John and Charles Wesley, a close friend of Richard Baxter, and probably known to Milton. Annesley's uncle, Arthur Annesley (1614-1686), according to Shawcross, was "a friend of Milton's and a frequent visitor to the poet after the Restoration." See "Annesley" entry in Milton Encyclopedia. The importance of the Puritan tradition of devotion and theology which the Wesley brothers inherited particularly from their mother, Susanna, puts them in a direct line with Milton. John Newton quotes Milton's line "As ever in my great Task-Master's eye" (Sonnet VII) as being the essence of the 'serious Godliness' which set the tone for the rest of their lives. John A. Newton, Susanna Wesley and the Puritan Tradition in Methodism (London: Epworth Press, 1968), p.132. Samuel Wesley, the father of John and Charles, was one of the earliest poets to imitate Milton. See n.51.
PART I

HOW CHARLES WESLEY USED PARADISE LOST

1. Appropriations of Diction

Charles Wesley borrowed phrases from other poets and from prose works also with an assurance borne of long familiarity with a wide range of literature. This has been noted by many commentators. Shepherd and Dale have explored his debt to the eighteenth century and his own influence on the literature of the period.17 Henry Bett was one of the earliest critics to list allusions in the hymns to non-biblical sources such as classical authors, Shakespeare, Herbert, Milton and other poets, and his work formed a foundation for the many detailed allusions recorded in the 1983 edition of the Collection.18 A study of these allusions confirms my own impression that after the Bible, Milton is by far the most frequent and substantial source for both the Wesley brothers.19

17 Shepherd, Methodism and Literature, and Dale, Diss.
19 CHPM records fifty-three allusions from Paradise Lost, some of which are rather doubtful. I have discovered twenty or thirty more.
The most obvious and least interesting method of appropriation is the direct transfer of a word, words or phrases from *Paradise Lost* into the hymns. Many of these seem to be random, with no similarity of context; they were probably part of the memory bank of a man who knew so much of *Paradise Lost* by heart. Occasionally he will take a line rather than a phrase, as in Eve's address to Adam:

> With thee conversing I forget all time,
> All seasons and their change... (PL 4:369-40)

which appears in a hymn as a direct address from the congregation to God:

> With thee conversing we forget
> All time, and toil, and care:
> Labour is rest, and pain is sweet
> If thou, my God, art here. (CHPM 205:5-8)

The biblical reference is to Christ conversing on the road to Emmaus, but the tone of the garden of Eden is introduced by the phrase, "labour is rest", and this quality seems to be sustained

20 A typical misquotation from Charles is in one of his letters of February 5 1736: "Hail, horrors, hail ['infernal world' omitted] and thou profoundest gloom [should be 'profoundedst hell']. Receive thy new possessor: one who brings a mind not to be changed by place or time." (PL1:250-3). John's journals and letters are peppered with quotations, many of them from Milton, and more than half of them inexact as quotations. However, they are always contextually appropriate.

21 Samuel Rogal is convinced that this hymn is by John, rather than Charles Wesley. "The Role of Paradise Lost in Works by John and Charles Wesley." *Milton Quarterly* 13 (1979): 114-119. However, his evidence is based on conjecture by Curnock, who in deciphering John's diary, saw as co- incidental three hymns on the theme of "journey" at a time when John "writ verse" and was travelling to Oxford. Curnock opens his speculation with the qualification: "If John wrote it...." Nehemiah Curnock, ed., *Journal of the Rev. John Wesley* (London: Kelly, [1910]),II,84.
throughout the hymn. There are many instances of this subtle change of direction caused by Charles apparently being influenced by his appropriations. Later, I will explore more intentional blending of texts, but for the moment I will merely record patterns of diction.

Some phrases are used in the Wesley hymns in exactly the same context in which they are used in *Paradise lost*; among them are the following:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>PL</th>
<th>CHPM</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>love divine</td>
<td>3:225</td>
<td>374:1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>vain design</td>
<td>5:737</td>
<td>258:22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>universal frame</td>
<td>5:184</td>
<td>225:2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dimly seen</td>
<td>5:157</td>
<td>124:2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>loss of eden</td>
<td>1:4</td>
<td>32:8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>parent of good</td>
<td>5:153</td>
<td>232:24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o unexampled love</td>
<td>3:410</td>
<td>33:31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>head of all mankind</td>
<td>3:286</td>
<td>125:2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>girt with omnipotence</td>
<td>7:194</td>
<td>55:7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>hand in hand</td>
<td>12:648</td>
<td>498:18</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Other phrases, such as those listed below, are used in a different context in the hymns:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>PL</th>
<th>CHPM</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>defenceless head</td>
<td>10:815</td>
<td>110:15*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>happy plains</td>
<td>5:142</td>
<td>470:27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>evil day</td>
<td>1:339</td>
<td>258:20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>concentring all</td>
<td>9:106</td>
<td>745:15*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>adamant and gold</td>
<td>3:352</td>
<td>259:3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Some phrases are so similar that they must be aural echoes from *Paradise lost*; among these are some with only a change of pronoun or preposition, and contextual agreement:

Hymns marked * are from the *Methodist Hymn Book* (1933).
Others which sound similar, may have a different, and sometimes opposite meaning to their usage in *Paradise Lost*:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PL</th>
<th>CHPM</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>servant of God 6:29</td>
<td>servant of all 313:1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>advance his praise 5:191</td>
<td>advance thy praise 170:26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>robe of righteousness 10:222</td>
<td>robe thy righteousness 419:24</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Admirers of Wesley's prosody have not been slow to point out what seems to be a unique characteristic among hymn-writers, the regular use of a long, latinate multi-syllable adjective, usually followed by a monosyllabic Anglo-Saxon noun. I am almost certain that he copied Milton here, for it is a pattern which reverberates through *Paradise Lost.* Many of these phrases have just been noted above only as aural echoes from *Paradise Lost.*

CHPM notes very few of these phrases, but Frank Baker confirms my assumption. He writes: "Wesley displayed a Miltonic facility for incorporating polysyllabic Latinate words into the texture of his verse in such a manner that they illustrated his theme, introduced a modulation into the verbal music, and varied without disrupting the rhythm." Baker, *Representative Verse of Charles Wesley Verse,* (London: Epworth Press, 1962), p.xviii. Donald Davie, writing of the "true force" of the Latinisms, notes: "They are not threaded on the stable Anglo-Saxon of his diction in order merely to give a pleasing variety in sound and pace (though they do that incidentally) but so that Saxon and classical elements can criss-cross and light up each other's meaning...in general the Latinisms are Johnsonian." Donald Davie, *Purity of Diction in English Verse* (New York: Schocken Books, 1967), p.78.
However, some with the same long adjective have different nouns, yet are contextually the same:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Adjective</th>
<th>Line 1</th>
<th>Adjective</th>
<th>Line 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>unalterably firm</td>
<td>5:502</td>
<td>unalterably sure</td>
<td>241:22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>unextinguishable fire</td>
<td>2:88</td>
<td>unextinguishable blaze</td>
<td>318:6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>indissolubly firm</td>
<td>6:69</td>
<td>indissolubly joined</td>
<td>258:29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>inbred enemy</td>
<td>2:785</td>
<td>inbred foe</td>
<td>349:33</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Many of these are used to try to comprehend the incomprehensible. As I shall discuss later, both Milton and Wesley rely on negatives to describe the indescribable world beyond the limits of the physical universe, and when trying to grasp the nature of God. Wesley took longer passages of Paradise Lost and reduced them to this adjective and noun formula as in "Son beloved/Son in whose face invisible is beheld visibly" (PL 6:680-2), which is turned into "The invisible appears in sight" (CHPM 92:23); "sighs now breathed/Unutterable which the spirit of prayer/Inspired" (PL 11:5-7), which becomes "sighs the unutterable prayer" (MHR 277:20), and perhaps the most magnificent and truly impossible stanza of a hymn which has its origin in Milton's "blissful bowers/Of amarantine shade" (PL 11:77-8), and reads:

> Those amarantine bowers,  
> Unalienably ours,  
> Bloom, our infinite reward,  
> Rise our permanent abode,  
> From the founded world prepared,  
> Purchased by the blood of God! (CHPM 65:25-30)

When we realise that those words were meant to be sung, we can appreciate Routley's comment that at least some of the audience for these hymns were well-educated.24 Charles Wesley,

24 See Appendix II for a discussion of the audience for these hymns.
having found this formula, did not merely limit himself to phrases from Milton. He added many of his own such as "unexhausted love", "undistinguishing regard", "unfathomable sea", unutterable peace", "indubitable seal", "interceding grace", "inseparably thine", and "signs infallible". If there were a concordance to the Wesley hymns, we could, I am sure find more; they were an integral part of his hymn-writing skill.
2. Paradise Lost and the Bible

a. Simple Addition

For Charles Wesley, *Paradise Lost* was far more than a source of language and style; its imagery was part of his consciousness, as it must have been for many of his contemporaries. Although he knew his Bible better than most poets of his day, even he might have found it difficult, and probably unnecessary, to separate the two in his hymn writing.\(^{25}\)

One of his simplest and very effective ways of using *Paradise Lost* is to conflate some of its striking imagery and add it to a biblical idea. This can be considered as casual a way of using it as is his simple appropriations of diction. Take, for example, his hymn beginning "Arm of the Lord, awake, awake."\(^{26}\) Its biblical basis is Isaiah 51: 9-11.

\begin{quote}
Awake, awake, put on strength, O arm of the Lord awake, as in the ancient days, in the generations of old. Art thou not it that hath cut Rahab, and wounded the dragon? Art thou not it which hath dried the sea, the waters of the great deep; that made the depths of the sea a way for the ransomed to pass over?
\end{quote}

The original hymn\(^{25}\) is sixteen lines longer than that in *CHPM* and elaborates the biblical concept in

\(^{25}\) The reasons why Wesley used *Paradise Lost* are discussed fully in the latter half of this thesis.

\(^{26}\) This was originally published in *Hymns and Sacred Poems* (1739) and is reproduced in full in Baker, *Representative Verse*, p.17.
each verse. But Wesley changes the biblical idea, which at this point is not particularly vindictive, by adding Milton's language and the concept of Christ casting the Satanic powers into Hell and it becomes:

\[
\text{Arm of the Lord, awake, awake,} \\
\text{Thine own immortal strength put on!} \\
\text{With terror clothed, hell's kingdom shake,} \\
\text{And cast thy foes with fury down! (1-4)}
\]

Milton had provided the scene. It is a *Paradise Lost* concept in *Paradise Lost* language, though not strictly from the text. The line "Cast thy foes in fury down," is actually paraphrasing Milton, but "cast" and "foes" and "fury" all remind us of *Paradise Lost*. Just as Wesley had paraphrased the Milton references to the "hellish crew" in another hymn,27 so he "Miltonises" his own language, adding genuine phrases from *Paradise Lost*, such as "Chrystal walls"(Baker,1.23), and "dispar-ted"wave. The latter is still within the hellish framework, for Milton uses it to describe the chaos on either side of Satan's causeway to hell. (PL 7:416). It is hardly profitable to speculate on whether Charles Wesley was conscious of this type of appropriation, but there are many instances of it. In the following section we will consider what is probably a more intentional use of *Paradise Lost*.

27 See appendix II, Audience.
b. Magnification of an Idea

"Soldiers of Christ, Arise" was one of the early hymns of Charles Wesley, and was an extensive hymn/poem of sixteen, eight-

28 The following four stanzas (supplied from Baker, pp. 45-48) were in Charles's 1742 text prior to its being edited by John for the Collection. John changes the 16 stanza poem of Charles by removing these stanzas and dividing the remaining twelve into three, separately numbered hymns (nos. 258, 259 and 260). To reconstruct the original we must add to CHPM, 258, after stanza 4:

5 Let Truth the Girdle be
That binds your Armour on,
In Faithful firm Sincerity
To Jesus cleave alone;
Let Faith and Love combine
To guard your Valient Breast,
The Plate be Righteousness Divine,
Imputed and Imprest.

6 Still let your Feet be shod,
Ready His Will to do,
Ready in all the Ways of God
His Glory to pursue:
Ruin is spread beneath,
The Gospel Greaves put on,
And safe thro' all the Snares of Death
To Life eternal run.

The following two stanzas were included after stanza 2 of CHPM, 259.

9 Your Rock can never shake:
Hither, He saith, come up!
The Helmet of Salvation take,
The Confidence of Hope:
Hope for His Perfect Love,
Hope for His People's Rest,
Hope to sit down with CHRIST above
And share the Marriage Feast.

10 Brandish in Faith 'till then
The Spirit's two-edged Sword,
Hew all the Snares of Fiends and Men
In Pieces with the Word;
'Tis WRITTEN; This applied
Baffles their Strength and Art;
Spirit and Soul with this divide,
And Joints and Marrow part.
line stanzas. Because the hymn is a close rendering of Ephesians 6:11-18, and follows Paul's metaphor of the Christian in spiritual armour, it has to be taken as a whole to be understood properly. Its first editor was brother John, who, presumably caring less for consistency of metaphor than for his standards of taste, removed four stanzas for the 1780 Collection. Subsequent revisions are legion, but usually change the text beyond recognition, though Paul's basic metaphor is still evident. With only twenty-four of the original 128 lines left in most hymnbooks, it is not surprising that some people, misunderstanding its meaning, have sought to remove it altogether from hymn-books on the grounds that it is a militaristic hymn.\(^2\)

The Biblical source is primarily Ephesians 6:11-18, which reads as follows:

11. Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. 12. For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places. 13. Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. 14. Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth, and having on the breastplate of righteousness; 15. And your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace; 16. Above all taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked. 17. And take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit which is the word of God: 18. Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints.

\(^2\) For a detailed discussion of the transmission of this text and its consequent reduction of Miltonic language, see my paper: "Whither the Wily Fiends?" UBC Dept. English, Dr. A. Globe, April 1983.
Wesley takes this passage and in the first four stanzas of his hymn, elaborates the theme set by Paul in vv.11-13. It is here that most of the *Paradise Lost* allusions are centred; I will discuss these more fully below. In the next stanzas (5 and 6, see n.28) he elaborates on the detail of the armour. In stanza 5, he takes v.14 (the girdle of truth and the breastplate of righteousness) and in stanza 6 adds the footwear of v.15, moving some way from Paul's "gospel of peace" with a Miltonic touch in his phrase, "Ruin is spread beneath" (1.45), obviously derived from "And now all Heaven/Had gone to wrack, with ruin overspread." (*PL* 6:669-70).

Verse 16 sends him to Milton in earnest, for the shield of faith to quench "the fiery darts of the wicked" is not quite dramatic enough for Charles. Where better to get his imagery than the war in heaven from *Paradise Lost*? This time there is a nice reversal of the concept in *Paradise Lost*, where on the battlefield it is Satan who "Came tow'ring, armed in adamant and gold." (*PL*6:110). Now it is the Christian soldier whose shield is the adamant and gold (259:3), and who will use this to subdue Satan, not just the biblical "wicked." 30 This latter point may seem a small one, but it is typical of the way that Wesley enlarges a biblical concept. Nowhere in the biblical text does Paul mention "fiends" (258:19), or "foes" (258:17), or

30 Wesley is translating from the Greek, ("wicked one") rather than using his Authorised Version of the Bible here.
"Satan" (259:6); neither is "Death" (1.47) included; these are all personifications from Paradise Lost.

I have already noted Charles Wesley's familiarity with the Bible, and stanzas 259:2 and n.28:9 which follows it are interesting proof of this. Rather than stay with the Ephesians text at vv.16-17, he adds Thessalonians,5:8 as a source text:

But let us, who are of the day, be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love; and for a helmet, the hope of salvation.

So, using this, the whole of stanza 259:2 becomes an exposition on love, which has been suggested by the idea of the blood of Jesus "quenching" the "fiery dart" in the last line of the previous stanza of which the theme was faith. This provides an easy transition to the concept of love with the words, "Jesus hath died for you/What can his love withstand? Stanza n.28:9 becomes, not just the "helmet of salvation" of Eph. 6:17, but the "Confidence of Hope:/Hope for his perfect Love/Hope for his people's rest/ Hope to sit down...(11.67-71), based on the Thessalonians text. Paul may have been inconsistent in using the "breastplate of righteousness" in one epistle and the "breastplate of faith" in another, but Wesley conflates the passages with ease.

Stanza 10 (n.28) dramatically reflects Charles's occasional lapses of taste which were so embarrassing to his brother John. The consistency and elaboration of metaphor cannot be denied, but the gruesome detail of the injunction to go and part joints and marrow(1.80) while brandishing the two-edged sword (11.74-75)
must surely have been the starting point for John's editorial pencil.

The origin of the metaphor is Hebrews 4:12, but a glance at the text shows no imperatives; merely the statement that the word is a two edged sword and is piercing. Once more, Charles is enlarging the biblical dimension by an intensification of tone. John, having disposed of this stanza, may have felt that others which dwell on the individual pieces of armour(# 5,6 & 8) would be incomplete without it, and were not remarkable for their sentiments anyway. He retained stanza 7(259:1, the shield of faith) as that was almost a commonplace. It was a convenient solution, but one that obliterated the original pattern.

We will return to the first four stanzas to consider them in detail. The first has little influence from Paradise Lost and is faithful to the biblical source text, except that the imperative tone is heightened by the command, "Arise", and echoes of the Hebrew God of might and battle are introduced by adding the phrase, "of Hosts" to the word "Lord." Now the battle scene has a hint of more than personal struggle implied in the Pauline passage. In opening stanza two with the word, "stand", Wesley is evoking all the "stand, stand and fall" word play in Paradise Lost, and though it is such a common word, Milton uses it entirely in the same sense and with the same authority as does Paul, so there may well be a circle of allusions here. We guess Wesley is in Paradise Lost now because of the "Panoply of God" (1.12) which is not in the Authorised Version of the Bible,
although in the Greek, *panoplia* may be translated as "whole armour." Milton and Wesley are using the Greek word; we can surmise that Milton's usage for his description of Christ and the angels who are fighting the war in heaven was a perhaps subconscious hint to Wesley to use it also. In *Paradise Lost* we have:

*He in celestial panoply all armed*
Of radiant Urim, work divinely wrought,
Ascended... (PL 6:760-2)

*Up rose the victor angels, and to arms*
The matin trumpet sung; in arms they stood
Of golden *panoply*, refulgent host (PL 6:525-8)

The last line of stanza two is more than the repetition of Paul's "stand" (Paul uses it three times, twice as the infinitive, "to stand", and once as an imperative, "stand therefore"), it is "stand entire", another echo of Milton, if not a direct quotation as can be seen below:

*In cubic phalanx *firm* advanced entire,*
Invulnerable, impenetrably *armed:* (6:399-400)

*Or how the sun shall in mid-heav'n stand still*
A day *entire*... (12:263-4)

*Hindered not Satan to attempt the mind*
Of man, with *strength entire*, and free will armed. (10:9-11)

*and retain*
*Unalterably *firm* his love *entire.* (5:501-2)

Now we have a sense that the individual Christian (or the small group, "ye" that Paul and Wesley are addressing), has been joined by the whole host of heaven; they are all fighting for him, and

31 The marginal note in *CHPM* records this as the Vulgate version also.
with him ("in close and firm array" 1.18) in what they know will be a victorious battle. Once more this is a Miltonic magnification of concept. But the war is still in progress; the "wiles of the devil"(v.11) joined to the "principalities and powers and rulers of the darkness of this world" of Paul's warning (v.13) are enlarged into "legions of wily fiends"(1.19) and "Sons of Night"(1.21). Wesley is perhaps conflating the "wily adder" (PL 9:625) and the "wary fiend" (PL 2:917) and any number of fallen angels from Milton's Hell. Part of the war in heaven is God's command to "Pursue these sons of Darkness" (PL 6:715); on another occasion, Milton speaks of "Sons of Light" (PL 11:80) which may well be an aural source for Wesley's "Sons of Night."

The whole of stanza three relies on Paradise Lost, from its opening reiteration of "stand then" (which is also an echo of Paul's "stand therefore"(v.14)), to the word, "foes" which remind us of all the "foe/woe" patterns in Paradise Lost, and particularly the phrase "mock their vain design" which is an effective condensation of the words "derision" and Laugh' st in Christ's response to God in Book 5:

Mighty father, thou thy foes
Justly hast in derision, and secure
Laugh'st at their vain designs and tumults vain.

(PL 5: 735-7)

Even the word "meet"(1.21) implies confrontation when considered as part of this Miltonic war. We might also stop to appreciate Wesley's skill in balancing the opposing armies with a parallel couplet having the same first words, and alliterative second words:
But meet the Sons of Night
But mock their vain design

If any proof were needed that Wesley is not copying Milton, but integrating *Paradise Lost* into own poetic work, it can be found in passages like this.

Moving back to line 19, the "close and firm array" must surely come from the Miltonic angels at the beginning of the battle in the war in heaven who "front to front/Stood in terrible array." (*PL* 6:105-6). Earlier, in Book 4 they had "closing stood in squadron joined" (*PL* 4:863) in their combat with Satan. In stanza 4, the phrase "indissolubly joined/To battle all proceed" reflects the angels who, on God's command, "move indissolubly firm" (*PL* 6:70) toward the battle field.

Having studied this hymn in some detail we are left with the impression that Wesley took the biblical text and super-imposed upon it the matrix of the war-in-heaven scenes from *Paradise Lost*. This is entirely appropriate from a theological viewpoint, for in a sense Milton's own battle scenes merely dramatise and place in a cosmic perspective the vision of Paul. What Paul only records as fact - that we are dealing with cosmic powers - is given flesh and blood, but with a difference. In *Paradise Lost* the reader is a spectator in the war, not a combatant. Charles Wesley in blending the personal imperatives of the Pauline message with the dramatic action of *Paradise Lost*, changes the rather lonely Pauline concept of the little group, the "ye" of the early church, and gives Christians the support of the whole host of heaven.
c. Creating Something New

As we have examined how Charles Wesley used *Paradise Lost* in his hymns we have moved from examples of simple appropriation of diction, to a study which shows the magnification of a biblical passage through the influence of *Paradise Lost*. In "Soldiers of Christ Arise" we saw that there was more than mere magnification; rather, each text had interacted with the other to create a new concept in the hymn.

This latter concept of engagement of a text with its pre-text, comes close to Ryken's description of intertextual criticism, where the critic is less concerned with a source *per se*, than with the "intertext," the life between texts. Ryken notes that "the Bible itself provided Milton with the classic example of intertextual literature,"32 noting particularly the re-interpretation of the Old Testament in the light of the New, so that the Old Testament is a "continuous presence" within it.

This was equally true for Wesley; his exegetical stance was deeply indebted to Matthew Henry's *Commentary*, written a century earlier.33 The *Commentary* consistently reads New Testament meanings into the Hebrew Scriptures, and Charles Wesley finds this entirely acceptable, firmly believing that everything in the

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Bible points to the salvation of mankind by the death of Christ. If, for example, we examine at random a selection of his Short Hymns on Select Passages of Holy Scripture (1762) which is arranged in canonical order, we can find hardly any of the 1328 hymns from Genesis to Malachi that does not mention Christ as Lord and Saviour. For seventeenth and eighteenth-century poets steeped in the biblical tradition, Ryken's concept is a commonplace which is assimilated into their work unconsciously as "form", and consciously as content, when they come to use what Davie calls "the hallowed canon" as a short-cut to the understanding of their readers. Allusion to a familiar word or phrase is enough to create a whole structure of imagery in the reader who has the background to understand the allusion. For example, Sin's phrase at the entrance to Hell, "this powerful key/Into my hand was giv'n, with charge to keep/These gates forever shut" (PL 2:274-5), takes on a splendid irony when we realise it is a parody of the Mosaic injunction in Leviticus "therefore shall ye abide at the door of the tabernacle of the congregation... and keep the charge of the Lord, that ye die not." (Lev.8:35). Paradise Lost is full of such allusions; indeed, its texture and multi-layered meanings exist because of them.

Wesley, taking the Bible together with Paradise Lost, evokes some powerful images also. For example, one (CHPM, 85) which is familiar to Methodists, is usually sung as a purely biblical

34 Davie, Purity of Diction, p.75.
hymn. It was originally entitled "Prayer for a Blessing Before Reading the Scriptures", and starts with the invocation, "Come Holy Ghost, our hearts inspire." The third stanza reads:

Expand thy wings, celestial dove,
Brood o'er our nature's night;
On our disordered spirits move,
And let there now be light.

The only gloss in CHPM correctly notes its biblical source as the opening passage of Genesis:

And the earth was without form and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters. And God said, Let there be light: and there was light. (Gen.1:2-3)

But there is no dove here, just the Spirit, which in the New Testament came down from heaven as a dove to announce the sonship of Christ at his baptism in Jordan. (Mk.1:10) The other biblical dove is the one that Noah sent from the ark "to see if the water were abated from off the ground." (Gen.8:8). But it is Milton who has blended at least two of these three images in his invocation to the Holy Spirit:

Instruct me, for thou know'st; thou from the first
Wast present, and with mighty wings outspread
Dove-like sat'st brooding on the vast abyss

35 The roots of the opening line of this hymn may be found in Bishop John Cosin's translation of the Veni Creator Spiritus in his Collection of Private Devotions (1627) which was permitted to be sung in churches, being included in the Ordinal of the 1662 Prayer Book. John Dryden made another translation, "Creator Spirit by whose aid," while Isaac Watts moves from the original Latin text, but takes a similar opening line in his hymn "Come Holy Spirit, Heavenly dove;" however, his dove does not "brood." Wesley uses the iambic metre of Watts, but his text is a medley of biblical sources with overtones of Milton.
And mad'st it pregnant; what in me is dark
Illumine... (PL 1:19-23)

And Charles Wesley not only picks up the conflation of images and the language, he moves it on from Milton's simile to his own metaphor of human nature, "brood o'er our nature's night/On our disordered\(^3\) spirits move..." (11.9-10). The biblical and Miltonic texts have blended to create something deeper that carries, but is not limited by, the message of each.\(^3\) The context is noteworthy also, for the burden of the hymn is that we rely on the inspiration of the Spirit in order to comprehend Scripture. This is Milton's plea before writing his epic poem.

A less familiar and more personal expression of the same metaphor and the same Miltonic language can be seen in a stanza of Charles Wesley's following hymn:

Long o'er my Formless Soul
The dreary Waves did roll;
Void I lay and sunk in Night:
Thou, the overshadowing Dove,
Call'dst the Chaos into Light,
Bad'st me Be, and live, and love.

(Baker, Rep Verse, 4:8-13)

This has echoes of Paradise Lost 3:9-13:

Before the sun,
Before the heav'n's thou wert, and at the voice
Of God, as with a mantle didst invest

\(^{36}\) Donald Davie (p.74) likes the word, "disordered." He thinks it is "set against the vast image of primeval chaos. It is the exact word; but by its very exactness, like the epithets of Johnson, it gives a dry effect of understatement, which creates the urbane tone."

\(^{37}\) The concept of God brooding over the abyss is seen also in PL 7:233-37. The idea is used again by Wesley in CHPM 117, which opens with a similar stanza and also includes the word "abyss."
The rising world of waters dark and deep,
Won from the void and formless infinite.

This concept of Wesley's is far removed from the cool tone of his invocation hymns above. This records, in the first person, established proven fact. It is about personal re-creation, a new birth, and the descriptive, external language of Milton has been appropriated for this intense spiritual journey. His use of the word "void" as an adverb, with its special overtones of the spatial void is most effective, and as a verbal pun, would do justice to Milton himself.

We will remain with the dove image to consider another instance of the blending of texts. This time, Charles Wesley takes the idea of the dove in the ark, expands it with the help of Paradise Lost, and applies it to the human soul estranged from God:

Loosed from my God, and far removed,
Long have I wandered to and fro,
O'er earth in endless circles roved,
Nor found whereon to rest below;
Back to my God at last I fly,
For Oh! the waters still are high!

Selfish pursuits and nature's maze,
The things of earth, for thee I leave.
Put forth thine hand, thine hand of grace,
Into the ark of love receive!
Take this poor flutt'ring soul to rest,
And lodge it, Saviour, in thy breast!

(CHPM,110:13-24)

His biblical sources are Genesis 8:8-9 for the story of the dove and the ark, and possibly Job 1:7:

And the Lord said unto Satan, whence camest thou?
Then Satan answered the Lord and said. From going to
and fro in the earth and from walking up and down in it.
For a topic such as the soul estranged from God, the satanic reference is valid, but here the text has been mixed up with Milton's Satan. There are at least four passages which may have been used: "thrice the equinoctial line/He circled, four times crossed the car of Night/From pole to pole (PL 9:63-5);"All this dark globe the Fiend found as he passed/And long he wandered." (PL 3: 498-9). All the fallen angels are also "wand'ring o'er the earth" (PL 1:365), while the philosophers in hell "found no end in wand'ring mazes lost" (PL 2:561). The biblical Satan merely "walks up and down"; he does not "wander." The word "endless" occurs in Paradise Lost only nine times, but it is a powerful adjective and seems to carry all the woes of hell with it. This then is an example of scattered phrases from Paradise Lost, together with a basic biblical story which make up the theme of estrangement, abandonment and loss, and come together in a hymn of regret, penitence and hope.
d. "Christianising" a Psalm

I have already mentioned Charles Wesley's habit of re-interpreting the Hebrew scriptures in the light of the New Testament story. Today, the idea of changing a Psalm into a purely Christian message would be offensive to Christians; even so, we can regret that the splendid language and imagery of the following hymn can no longer be sung with integrity.38

Our Lord is risen from the dead
Our Jesus is gone up on high
The powers of hell are captive led,
Dragged to the portals of the sky.

There his triumphal chariot waits,
And angels chant the solemn lay,-
Lift up your heads, ye heavenly gates;
Ye everlasting doors, give way!

Loose all your bars of massy light,
And wide unfold the ethereal scene:
He claims these mansions as his right;
Receive the king of glory in!

Who is this king of glory? Who?
The Lord that all our foes o'ercame,
The world, sin, death, and hell o'erthrew;
And Jesus is the Conqueror's name.

Lo! His triumphal chariot waits,
And angels chant the solemn lay,-
Lift up your heads, ye heavenly gates;
Ye everlasting doors, give way!

Who is this king of glory? Who?
The Lord, of glorious power possessed;
The King of Saints, and angels too,
God over all, for ever blessed.

38 The text, taken from hymn 176 in the Methodist Hymn-Book (1933), [hereafter quoted as MHB] is given here, as it is not in CHPM nor in Baker, Representative Verse.
If we put the source passage from Psalm 24 alongside this hymn, we can see that the double pattern of question and answer is sustained throughout by Wesley:

Lift up your heads, O ye gates; and be ye lift up, ye everlasting doors; and the King of Glory shall come in. Who is this king of glory? The Lord strong and mighty, the Lord mighty in battle. Lift up your heads, O ye gates; even lift them up ye everlasting doors; and the King of Glory shall come in. Who is this King of Glory? The Lord of Hosts, he is the King of Glory.

(Ps.24:7-10)

Wesley's theme is the Miltonic concept of the enigmatic, hard-to-reveal name of God in the Old Testament, being expressed by the name of Christ. We will consider this in some detail in section II,2e of this thesis; at present it is worth noting that this is a favourite theme of Charles Wesley, and it is the basis of the hymn "Wrestling Jacob", where the identity of Jacob's assailant is at first undisclosed, only to be revealed as the name of "love." Similarly in this present hymn, the mystery of "Who is this King of Glory?" is answered by the news, "Jesus is the conqueror's name.

It will be seen that Wesley is faithful to the setting of the Psalm, but he carries the military metaphor into the triumphal ascension through the imagery of *Paradise Lost*. Certainly, there is no biblical precedent for this.39 A closer look at the story of creation in book 7 of *Paradise Lost* makes it clear that Milton had already incorporated the Psalm into his interpretation of God's view after the sixth day of creation:

39 However, both Milton and Wesley would have been aware that this Psalm was sung at Evensong on Ascension Day.
Followed with acclamation and the sound
Symphonious of ten thousand harps that tuned
Angelic harmonies. The earth, the air
Resounded...
While the bright pomp ascended jubilant.
"Open ye everlasting gates," they sung,
"Open ye heav'n's, your living doors; let in
The great Creator from his work returned
Magnificent...
He through heav'n
That opened wide her blazing portals, led
To God's eternal house... (PL 7:557-76)

Apart from the "powers of hell", which I will consider later,
all that is missing from the heavenly scene is the "triumphal
chariot," and a search for this leads to what may have been an
additional vision which Charles Wesley used, this time, the scene
of Christ entering heaven:

Girt with omnipotence, with radiance crowned
Of majesty divine, sapience and love
 Immense, and all his Father in him shone.
About his chariot numberless were poured
Cherub and Seraph, Potentates and Thrones,
And Virtues, winged spirits, and chariots winged

Heaven opened wide
Her ever-during gates, harmonious sound
On golden hinges moving, to let forth
The King of Glory... (PL 7:194-207)

But what of the powers of Hell? Psalm 68 seems to be the pre-text
for Wesley here, (and possibly for Milton too) for there is a
combination of chariots, angels and the captivity image:

The chariots of God are twenty thousand, even thousands
of angels: the Lord is among them, as in Sinai, in the
holy place. Thou hast ascended on high, thou hast led
captivity captive... (Ps.68:17-18)

However, Wesley cannot think of the phrase, "led captivity
captive" without thinking of Milton's "Arch-foe subdued/ Or
captive dragged in chains" (PL 6:259-60), which in his "portals
of the sky"(1.4) he links to the "blazing portals" of heaven in Paradise Lost(7:575). What is more, while he is thinking of Milton's hell, he is reminded of Sin, opening the gates of hell to let out Satan, her father:

> and every bolt and bar
> Of massy iron or solid rock with ease
> Unfastens....
> the gates wide open stood,

> With horse and chariots ranked in loose array.

(PL 2:877-9,884,7)

and so with a nice reversal, Wesley turns this into:

> Loose all ye bars of massy light,
> And wide unfold th'ethereal scene: (9-10)

so that Jesus, who the "world, sin, death and hell o'erthrew", can enter heaven. Of course, this is even more complex than it may seem on first reading, because Milton's scene in hell is itself an ironic reversal of the relationship between Christ and his father in Heaven. Charles Wesley seems to be both acknowledging Milton's irony, and at the same time adding his own witness to the "Lord of glorious power possessed" by transforming the bars of iron into the bars of light.
3. The Cosmic Scene

One of the almost impossible tasks of finite human beings is to put into words the infinite. Apocalyptic visions, as in the Revelation of St. John provide a wealth of imagery; they are also open to wild representation by the literal minded. Milton has a story to tell which somehow has to express all the glory of the divine nature in a way that will not be misunderstood. To do this, he shows contrasts; the evil of Satan in the depths of hell, in opposition to the goodness of God in the heights of heaven. The brightness, glory, light and shining splendour of God, Christ and the hierarchies of angels, set against the dreary gloom and eternal sorrow, pain and torments of hell. For his readers, all of whom would have had their world view shaped by the Genesis creation story where there is no place called chaos, he pictures this as a frightening space, a void formless and infinite without bounds, as Danielson says quoting Roy Daniells "a wild amoral ocean from which God has in some sense... retracted his controlling power."40 One of Milton's descriptions is of:

\[
\text{a dark} \\
\text{Illimitable ocean without bound,} \\
\text{Without dimension; where length, breadth, and highth,} \\
\text{And time and place are lost; where eldest Night} \\
\text{And Chaos, ancestors of Nature, hold} \\
\text{Eternal anarchy...} \\
\text{(PL 2:891-6)}
\]

Even so, these cosmic dimensions cannot be sustained by straight description. In order that the reader can comprehend the vastness, and boundlessness of the universe, Milton encourages him to use his own imagination, to stretch his ideas beyond the known and the finite, from the circumscribed globe with its land and sea masses to the "illimitable ocean without bound." His technique is to use negative adjectives which force the reader to imagine one concept and negate it into something greater. Some of the negatives in *Paradise Lost* are: impenetrable, impossible, inaccessible, incomprehensible, indissolubly, inimitable, inutterable and unutterable, invisible, unimaginable, unknown, unlimited, unnumbered, unsearchable, unspeakable, and most common of all, innumerable.

It is not surprising that both John and Charles Wesley should want to borrow this language. Their classical education alone would suggest these Latinate negatives, but add to this their religious inheritance with its strange mixture of Puritan personal emotion and High Anglican restraint\(^2\), add the poetic influences of Herbert, Crashaw and Milton and also the contacts with Moravian mysticism, and we have a background which is bound to express itself in an urge to reach the infinite and beyond.

\(^2\) Suzanna provided the Puritan background, and his father, Samuel, the High Church influence. However, Samuel himself came from Dissenting stock, his father, John Wesley, having suffered an early death as a direct result of his unwillingness to sign the Act of Uniformity of 1662. Clarke, *Wesley Family* provides extensive background.
One of John's free translations from the German of Ernest Lange (1650-1727), was written and published in Georgia in his 1737 *Collection of Hymns* before his "conversion". At this time he was very attracted to the Moravians, and to the mysticism of William Law, a view he was later to repudiate as leading to a form of "quietism." The hymn beginning "O God thou bottomless abyss" which describes the "attributes of God" (*CHPM* 231 & 232) is an interesting mixture of mystical language and Latinate negatives. The first line comes directly from *Paradise Lost*, "The dark unbottomed infinite abyss" (2:405), while phrases such as "height immense," "unfathomable depths," "sea/void," and "all-infinite," betray Milton as the source, and are probably derived from Satan's speech, "to tread/ Th'unfounded deep, and through the void immense/To search " (2:828-30). Unlike *Paradise Lost*, though, the bottomless abyss is God; a concept repeated at the beginning of a stanza of another of his translations (*CHPM* 182:13) where Wesley writes "O love, thou bottomless abyss!" Milton has created the fearful godless chaos, and John Wesley has taken this space and placed the God of love in it, so using it to extend his, and his readers' concept of the nature of God.

If we look at the first four lines of stanza two, we can see John Wesley appropriating Milton's concept of the eternal

42 Typical mystical vocabulary in this hymn is "ravished," (231:10), "O'erpowered I sink, I faint, I die" (231:12), "sweet the joys" (232:39). After the first stanza, the diction becomes more rigorous.
incomprehensibility of God, which can also be considered to be a cosmic view. Milton's invocation to light is a probable source:

God is light,
And never but in unapproached light
Dwelt from eternity, dwelt then in thee,
Bright effluence of bright essence increate.
Or hear'st thou rather pure ethereal stream,
Whose fountain who shall tell? Before the sun,
Before the heavens thou wert...

(PL 3:3-9)

and Wesley has:

Eternity thy fountain was,
Which, like thee, no beginning knew;
Thou wast ere time began his race,
Ere glowed with stars the ethereal blue.

(CHPM 231:13-16)

In the last eight lines of this stanza, words and phrases such as "unspeakable," "undiminished ray," "unchangeable," and "unbounded sea" are all reminiscent of Milton's Latinate negatives. It is interesting to see that the only Miltonic gloss provided by the editors of the Collection is for the phrase "Parent of Good" (CHPM 232:25). Other works of John sustain similar patterns from Paradise Lost, notably his trio of paraphrases on the Lord's Prayer (CHPM 225, 226 & 227). As might be expected when the theme is determined by the words of the Lord's Prayer, the greatest opportunity to rely on the cosmic descriptions of Milton is at the beginning where the adoration of God is linked to heaven and earth. We have the "universal frame" (CHPM 225:2; PL 5:154), "endless ages" (1.4) and "ages of endless date" (PL 12:549). There is God's view of "Nature's expanse before thee spread" (1.10; PL 3: 56-9; 5:649) and "hell's deep gloom" (1.12) reminiscent of Satan in hell speaking of his "mournful gloom" (PL...
1:244). At line 14, the phrase "Prostrate before thy face we fall" echoes "prostrate fall/Before him reverent" (PL 10:1087). In hymn 226 there are many more allusions.

It is instructive to see that by the time John wrote this in 1742 he is preferring to use the imagery of Milton in a cooler and more descriptive way. This is in contrast to his brother Charles, who, as we shall see, more frequently uses it to record the nature of God, the excursions of the human soul, and the interactions between them. Charles is always more personal and subjective than John. His striking internalisation of cosmic imagery in his hymn to the holy spirit has already been noted above. He also uses it to describe heaven, but he rarely writes about hell. Indeed, in the 1780 Collection, hell is mentioned only four times in 525 hymns, and one of those is in the sense of a state of spiritual estrangement from God (CHPM 97:22,27-8).

At a time when early Methodists were in danger of their lives from mob violence, he wrote a hymn to take their minds off their earthly troubles. "Come on my Partners in Distress" was first published in 1749 in eight stanzas, but John omitted stanza 3 in 1780 (CHPM 324), possibly because it had hints of mysticism. The missing stanza reads:

Ironically, the only hymn about hell in the Collection (# 78) is from Hymns for Children. Threatening children with hell was a popular way of encouraging good behaviour in the eighteenth century; Isaac Watts also writes about the terrors of hell in his children's hymns.
See, where the lamb in glory stands.
Incircled with his radiant bands,
And join th' Angelic powers,
For all that Height of glorious Bliss
Our everlasting portion is,
And all that heaven is ours.

The visual imperative "see" encourages the singer to dwell on the physical aspects of heaven. It is Milton's heaven, with its "height of glorious bliss," the indescribable dimension which requires the co-operation of the viewer to be comprehended. Most of the other stanzas in this hymn are worth comment but 2, 5 and 6 (CHPM 324) are especially significant. Stanza two opens with the expansive phrase:

Beyond the bounds of time and space
Look forward to that heavenly place,
The saints' secure abode;
On faith's strong eagle pinions rise,
And force your passage to the skies,
And scale the mount of God.

Suddenly the reader/singer/viewer becomes one of Milton's fallen angels. It was Moloch who wanted

all at once,
O'er heav'n's high tow'rs to force resistless way,
...

But perhaps
The way seems difficult and steep to scale
With upright wing against a higher foe?

But the Christian has hope, for he has the "eagles wings" with which to "mount up" (Isaiah 40:31). However, the mention of the "mount of God" reminds Wesley of Satan's powers "hastening to 'win the mount of God' in the war in heaven in Book 6 of Paradise Lost (6:88). Stanza 5 with its magnificent phrase, "And wide diffuse the golden blaze/Of everlasting light," as well as having
associations with the indefinable descriptions in *Paradise Lost*, also shows Charles Wesley's skill as a poet, with his d/t alliterations and expansive flat vowel sounds. It is this sort of poetry which caused Rattenbury to eulogise Wesley's "power of ascensional flight." 44 The other noteworthy couplet is in lines 35-36, "And lo! we fall before his feet/And silence heightens heaven." Here is the dimensional antithesis of falling and height, and once more the attempt to grasp the impossible, in a mystical attempt to heighten heaven itself. After all the noise of the "sounding courts", we are left with only silence.

In describing the nature of God, one of Charles's best hymns is "Infinite unexhausted love" (CHPM 207). His source text is Ephesians 3:18-19:

> To comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and depth and height; And to know the love of Christ.

And he writes a verse or verses on each of the dimensions in the text. He uses the Latinate negatives, and in stanza three, grace extends [length], "immense and unconfined," its breadth is "wide as infinity"(1.14). There are the words, "all-redeeming," "utmost," "unspeakable," and the phrase "deeper than hell,"

44 J. Ernest Rattenbury, the Wesleyan theologian, in his *Evangelical Doctrines of Charles Wesley's Hymns* (London: Epworth Press, 1941) downplays the value of literary allusions in Charles Wesley's hymns, as merely giving a "tang of erudition to a kind of poetry in which it is often missing" (p.47). He goes on to rejoice in his "visualisation", and quotes stanza 2 and half of stanza 5 of this hymn to prove his point(pp.53-54). Presumably he was unaware of the influence of *Paradise Lost* on Wesley's visualization. The editors of CHPM provide no Milton notations for this hymn.
which may be an echo of Satan's "myself am hell/And in the lower deep a lower deep" (PL 4:75-76). The paradox in the last two lines, "And sink me to perfection's height/The depth of humble love" is a masterpiece of antithesis, and an effective aphoristic summary of the spatial elements in the whole hymn.

Perhaps nothing demonstrates Charles Wesley's reliance on the Bible and Paradise Lost more than his treatment of the theme of darkness and light. In the Bible this is both external or factual, as in the creation story, but more frequently symbolic of the inner state of the soul, as in the stories of Job and the prophecy of Isaiah in the Hebrew Scripture. In the New Testament, the theme is all-pervasive too, being seen in the sayings of Christ, the light of the world; in the gospels and in interpretation in Paul's epistles and the First Epistle of John. So when Wesley uses light and darkness as spiritual states he is doing no more than re-state biblical truth. But those who claim the Bible as his only influence have not realised the imaginative pictorial power of Paradise Lost, which acts as an intensifier of the biblical language. We have already observed some light imagery in the hymn "Come on my Partners in Distress" and many more examples could be chosen. Hymn 328 in the Collection opens with the lines; "Eternal Beam of light divine,/Fountain of unexhausted love," which evokes the opening of Book 3 of Paradise Lost; "Hail holy light, offspring of heaven's first-born/Or of

45 For a discussion of the literature on the light imagery in the Bible and in Milton, see Ryken, p.23n.
th'eternal co-eternal beam," and also the "fountain of light" of 3:375. Another hymn in the Methodist Hymn Book (1933) starts with the lines:

All praise to thee who dwells in bliss,
Who made both day and night,
Whose throne is darkness in the abyss
Of uncreated night. (MHB 934)

To anyone familiar with Paradise Lost, the last two lines give a strangely satanic view of God, for it is Belial who fears to be "swallowed up and lost/In the wide womb of uncreated Night" (PL 2:149-50), and it is Satan who sees the dark throne of Chaos, "Bordering on light" (PL 2: 959-60). On the other hand, Wesley's diction also reminds us of God in bliss whose skirts appear to be "dark with excessive bright" (PL 3:380); once more it is the composite of Milton's language and the addition of biblical material that produces such a powerful effect.
PART II

WHY CHARLES WESLEY USED PARADISE LOST

1. Exploration of the Obvious

A simple but partial response to the question of why the Wesley brothers incorporated existing poetry into their hymns is that, as with the Bible, the poetry was already in their literary repertoire and was available to be used at will. As I have noted earlier, both brothers memorized poetry, and recommended the practice to others. Thomas Herbert, in writing of John's skill as an editor and author, notes that "so thoroughly did he saturate himself with the world's great literature that nearly all his writings contain, here and there, quotations so aptly used that allusiveness never halts the perspicuous flow of his language." We might note in this context that over half of

Charles, in later life writes to his daughter Sally, "I allow you a month longer to get the Fourth Night Thought [of Young] by heart" (Letter of April 8, 1773). She must have been less enthusiastic than he wished, for four years later (Oct. 11th, 1777), he is still comparing her unfavourably with a Miss Morgan, who "follows the plan of study which I have given her; she has got a good part of Prior's Solomon by heart....Why am I not so useful to my own daughter?"

Thomas Walter Herbert, J.W. Edit., p. 6. Frank Baker writes in his Introduction to the new, Oxford edition of the Wesley Letters,"He was very fond of inserting English verse into his letters, especially to women correspondents, and an incomplete list of those quoted includes Addison, [John] Byrom, Churchill, Congreve, Cowley, Dryden, Gambold, Herbert, Milton,
the more than twenty quotations from Milton in John's letters are slightly wrong, but they blend in so well that it would be pedantic to complain. Obviously, he was not writing letters with a copy of *Paradise Lost* at his elbow.

Early correspondence with their parents, particularly their mother, while they were at Oxford, shows that she welcomed and approved of the poems that her sons sent to her, but she was anxious that John particularly should not be carried away by his poetic gifts. John seems to have retained this advice, for he repeats it in different form as late as 1780 in the Preface to the *Collection of Hymns for the use of the People Called Methodists*. He says "when poetry thus keeps its place as the handmaid of piety it shall attain, not a poor perishable wreath, but a crown that fadeth not away." Charles, as his brother said in the same passage, was "born a poet"; his conversion


48 "I like your verses on the 65[th] Psalm, and would not have you bury your talent" (Samuel to John, January 26 1724/5); "I hope at your leisure you will oblige me with some more verses, on any, but rather on a religious subject...." (Susanna to John, November 24 1724); "I would not have you leave making verses...Rather make poetry sometimes your diversion, though never your business." (Susanna to John, April 22 1727).

49 CHPM, p. 75.

50 He writes also of the "True spirit of poetry, such as cannot be acquired by art and labour, but must be the gift of nature. By labour a man may become a tolerable imitator of Spenser, Shakespeare, or Milton, may heap together pretty compound epithets, as "pale-eyed," "meek-eyed" and the like. But unless he is born a poet, he will never attain the genuine spirit of
merely confirmed him in his vocation to write and at the same time it released his emotional energy. He seems to have used the writing of poetry very much as John used his diary and journal writing, as a personal release from tension, and as a reflection of his spiritual journey. All his life he composed poetry "on the run," barging into John's study in the Oxford days, calling for pen and paper, and later as an old man, jumping off his pony when arriving at the house of a friend, and writing down verses before saluting his company.\(^{51}\) Some of his poems seem to have needed little revision, among them the early ones which are generally considered the best.\(^{52}\) Others he revised many times, and many more were just rough drafts which were never intended for publication.\(^{53}\) When we consider the exuberance of many of the hymns, and the surprising metrical range - he wrote in about one hundred metres- and the sheer number of hymns, we might wonder if he thought about his poetry at all. But a look at the best of them shows very detailed craftsmanship, tightly

poetry.\(^{(CHPM,p.75)}\)

\(^{51}\) Baker, Representative Verse, p.xii quotes a long passage of anecdotal description about Charles's erratic writing habits, from Henry Moore's Life of John Wesley (1825), II, 368-9.

\(^{52}\) My own observations are confirmed by Dale, Diss, pp.98-99. He thinks Charles's best poetry was written in the years 1739-49; certainly he was most prolific then. Dale also comments on the quality of his poetry: "Nobody but a born poet could have produced such a vast quantity of good hymns and some which are so abysmally bad that one has to turn to Keats and Wordsworth to match their badness as verse." p.184.

\(^{53}\) This thesis concentrates on published hymns, most of which are still sung today.
controlled diction, and skilful use of rhetorical devices. If we add to this his careful interweaving of allusions, we can see that the unity of these hymns must have required concentrated, intentional work.

There is no doubt that Milton was the most copied and the most popular poet in the early eighteenth century; that in itself might be good reason for the Wesleys to appropriate his language and style. Yet they never wrote in blank verse in imitation of Milton as did their father, Samuel, and many other poets, nor were they slaves to fashion. Indeed from their Oxford days onward, they were quite happy to swim against the tide of public opinion, though they were still prepared to defend themselves against it. John was more aware of contemporary taste, and, as we have seen, he frequently edited out Charles's more senti-

54 Samuel Wesley (1662-1735) was, as well as being a clergyman, a minor and prolific poet in his own right. He was commended by Nahum Tate, then poet laureate, for his monumental, Miltonic Life of our Blessed Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ: an Heroic Poem in Ten Books (1693). Tate's fulsome eulogy ended with the lines:

Here pious souls, what they did long desire
Possess their dear Redeemer's Life entire
Here with whole Paradise Regained they meet,
And Milton's noble work is now complete.

Charles was more critical. He noted in one of his letters "that the verses are (some of them) tolerable, the notes good, but the cuts best of all." Baker, C.W.Letters, p.142. Samuel is rather doubtfully credited with writing the "first essay on the sublime" in the manner of Milton in his Hymn of Peace to the Prince of Peace (1713). Raymond D. Havens, The Influence of Milton on English Poetry (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press,1922),p.109. Unfortunately, Havens' substantial work makes no mention of the influence of Milton on Charles Wesley.

55 For a discussion of contemporary attacks and some responses see Lyles, Methodism Mocked.
mental effusions. Typical of his awareness of taste is his re-writing of the poetry of George Herbert to suit an eighteenth-century audience. Charles had more natural affinity with the previous century in his emotional temperament, his love of tradition, and what Dale calls his liking "to look back rather than forward."

But Milton was still the master, even if he was not to be copied slavishly. Some indication of the value that John put on Paradise Lost can be seen in his preface "to the Reader" in his Extract from Milton's Paradise Lost (1763). He sees it as the greatest poem in the English language, but feels it is too hard for "persons of a common education" to comprehend. He writes:

Of all the poems which have hitherto appeared in the world, in whatever age or nation, the preference has generally been given, by impartial judges, to Milton's "Paradise Lost." But this inimitable work, amidst all its beauties, is unintelligible to abundance of readers: The immense learning which he has everywhere crowded together, making it quite obscure to persons of a common education. This difficulty, almost insuperable as it appears, I have endeavoured to remove in the following Extract: First, by omitting those lines which I despaired of explaining to the unlearned; and, Secondly, by adding short and easy notes; such as, I trust, will make the main of this excellent poem clear and intelligible to any uneducated person of a tolerable good understanding.

In a letter to Charles dated December 26 1761, John describes some of the nativity hymns as "namby-pambical." The 6th edition had been printed that year, which proved that at least the hymns were popular.

His technique, evident in his earliest Charlestown collection of 1737, is to regularise the metre of Herbert's poetry for congregational singing. This diminishes Herbert's style, but Canon Hutchinson feels it was a valuable means of keeping his poetry alive in the minds of people in an otherwise arid period (see n.7).

Dale, Diss, p.176.
To those passages which I apprehend to be peculiarly excellent, either with regard to sentiment or expression, I have prefixed a star: And these, I believe, it would be worth while to read over and over, or even to commit to memory.

London. January 1, 1763.

Oscar Sherwin notes that about 1900 lines were cut out, strange proper names were omitted, and long similes were converted into short ones. It is interesting to see that about one fifth of the remaining poem was marked with the "star" which must have been quite a challenge to those who took seriously John's advice to commit it to memory.

But even John and Charles who admired Milton so much, when it came to their own hymns would have been reluctant to copy him for the sake of doing so. After all, the growing prevalence of Miltonic parodies, including one by their brother, Samuel, junior, would be enough to discourage mere imitators. No, if Charles and John incorporated the poetry of Milton into their hymns, they did so for reasons other than habit or fashion.

59 See Introduction to this thesis, n.13 for further comment.

60 The parody is entitled "THE DOG: A Miltonick Fragment," and begins:
Thee Sister, gladly would my verse provoke
Nor other need expect I, than to wake
Thy strain melodious; while without Rhyme
Or hapy Reason, unexperienced Lays
And unapprov'd unless when sung by Thee,
Audacious I attempt, and rise to sing
A Dog...

(Poems (1736))

For further details of Samuel Wesley, junior, see Appendix II, n.115.
2. Theological Compatibility

a. Justification by Faith

As has often been said, the Wesleys produced no new theology; they merely brought together the best of the catholic tradition of the church which had been so fragmented by religious controversy. They brought it in a form of New Testament wholeness and universality that appealed to the rich and poor, and especially to the thousands of unchurched and unwanted people for whom the Church of England was a representation of authority rather than love. John preached his sermons in clear, understandable prose. "Our main doctrines," he said, "which include all the rest, are three, that of repentance, of faith, and of holiness. The first of these we account, as it were, the porch of religion; the next, the door; the third is religion itself." Charles Wesley put these doctrines into verse so that they could better be remembered:

61 The list of the fifty tiles in John's "Christian Library" shows his eclectic theological base. He includes Orthodox, and early church fathers, mystics, and well known English and continental writers. Green, Works of John and Charles Wesley, notes "It is impossible to read over the list of authors and subjects without being impressed with the wide range from which the subjects are taken." p.62.

62 From The Principles of a Methodist Further Explained, (1746). Quoted in CHPM, p.194n.
To him that in thy name believes
Eternal life with thee is given;
Into himself he all receives-
Pardon, and holiness, and heaven.

(CHPM, 92:13-16)

The particular foundation of their message was Luther's understanding of the Pauline and Augustinian doctrine of justification by faith, rather than by works. To put it simply, Wesley's "order of salvation" understood that Christ's free-will death cancels a person's sin. If this person acknowledges sin, he or she is pardoned, and realizing the love that "bought" the pardon (faith), loves others in return. In doing good works to others, he or she is further sanctified (holiness) and can either in this life or the next "be perfected" (heaven). The hymns repeat this theme in a variety of combinations of language, metre and rhyme suited to every condition of believer or unbeliever.

A long tradition in the reformation church had stressed this in prose and verse. Luther's hymn based on Psalm 130 states:

Tis through thy love alone we gain
The pardon of our sin;
The strictest life is but in vain
Our works can nothing win... (MHB 359:9-12)

In the Church of England, Article 11 of the Thirty-Nine Articles formulated the doctrine, and the quiet, reflective voice of George Herbert ponders "The two vast spacious things...Sinne and

63 Charles writes in his journal of September 6 1739, "I spake with great boldness at night on my favourite subject, justification by faith only; and triumphed in the irresistible force of that everlasting truth." CWJ,I,169.

64 For a discussion of the audience for these hymns see Appendix II of this thesis.
Love" through many of his poems. In more formal theological terms, it is the imputed "merit" of Christ, rather than a person's own merit which is the saving factor. Milton's stance on this is clear, for he writes: "As therefore our sins are imputed to Christ, so the merits or righteousness of Christ are imputed to us through faith."

The word "merit" is the clue to examining this doctrine in Paradise Lost. It appears eleven times; four times it is attributed to Christ, for it is by his "merit more than birthright" (3:309) that man will be saved. In contrast, Satan's assumption of his own merit is seen as the central evil of his pride. With a nice Miltonic balance, there are four references to Satanic merit in the poem. The most ironic is at the beginning of Book 2 where "High on a throne of royal state.../Satan exalted sat, by merit raised/To that bad eminence." (2:1,5-6). Of the three remaining instances of the word "merit", two appear in a negative sense, as temptation. In her dream, Eve hears Satan offer her the fruit. If she will only eat, he tells her, she might "sometimes/Ascend to heav'n, by merit thine, and see/What life the gods live there.(5:79-81). The second temptation is that of Sin, telling death that they will make "a monument/Of merit high to all th' infernal host" (10:258-9) to bridge the gulf between


De Doctrina Christiana (1660), I.22.
heaven and earth. In each of these instances, there is an ironic twist caused by the personal assumption of merit that really belongs only to God. The only occasion in the whole poem where merit is considered as a virtue for man is in the prelapsarian dream of an ideal world (7:155-8), but the Fall is the theological reality on which Milton bases his story.

A hymn writer like Charles Wesley must resist any tendency to irony, so he has to stress the positive message that merit belongs to God and not to man. He does this regularly and well; a typical hymn reads:

Thy ceaseless, unexhausted love, 
Unmerited and free,  
Delights our evil to remove,  
And help our misery.  

(MHB 49:1-4)

This sacrificial love is "all-sufficient" (i.e., sufficient for everyone and entirely sufficient) for our redemption:

By thine own eternal spirit  
Rule in all our hearts alone;  
By thine all-sufficient merit  
Raise us to thy glorious throne.  

(MHB 242:13-16)

He also stresses that the only thing required from mankind is what Milton calls the "free/ Acceptance of large grace" (12:304-5), and he invites his audience with the words:

Then let us submit his grace to receive,  
Fall down at his feet and gladly believe:  
We all are forgiven for Jesus's sake;  
Our title to heaven his merits we take.  

(MHB 311:13-16)

The genre is not suitable for irony, but as I will note later, Charles was at times bitterly ironic in his hymns of anti-Calvinist polemic. In note 113 of this thesis, we can observe the delicate irony of the phrase, "The rich are permitted to follow the Poor."
That Milton and Wesley had this central doctrine in common is significant, especially at a period when it was under attack. In eighteenth-century England it was a theme rarely heard, for though it was part of the Articles of the Church of England, was expounded further in the *Homilies* and had been defended by Hooker in his *Discourse on Justification*, subsequent theologians had reduced the doctrine to wrangles about justification and sanctification. Patrides makes the important comment that Milton in *De Doctrina*

expounds the distinctly Protestant thesis that "it is faith alone that justifieth." Yet man's justification, Milton added, must be through "a faith not destitute of works", "by a living, not a dead faith; and that faith alone which acts is counted living." 68

It is quite possible that the Wesleys never read this work of Milton for it was not published until 1825, but as this is exactly the message which they proclaimed in sermons, hymns and in the way they lived their lives, it is evident that consciously or unconsciously they found *Paradise Lost* a most compatible support for their evangelistic work.

b. Universal Redemption

One of the most violent controversies in the early days of the Methodist revival was between the Calvinists, represented by George Whitefield, and the Wesley brothers who rejected Calvin's "horrible decree" of predestination. Theirs was a message of universal redemption; they shouted from the pulpit and field that Christ died for everyone, and Calvinism seemed directly opposed to this. John considered late in life that Calvinism was "the very antidote to Methodism and the most deadly and successful foe it ever had." Conversely, and equally valid, is Shepherd's opinion that 'Arminianism' (i.e., the doctrine of universal redemption) was the dynamic force that gave life to the whole Methodist movement and that whenever Charles wrote about it he "became wild and his verse began to sing." As I will show, Charles becomes his most cosmic, expansive and Miltonic when expounding on the universality of the love of God. Shepherd says it "introduces a spaciousness into his verse." It let loose a flood of satire too. His Hymns on God's Everlasting Love (1741) contain so many references to anti-Calvinism that today they have to be purged of their polemic. For example, the still-sung verse,

69 Letter of John Wesley to Lady Maxwell, 1788, in Works VIII, 83.
70 Shepherd, Methodism and Literature, p. 113.
Arise, O God, maintain thy Cause!
The Fulness of the Gentiles call:
Lift up the Standard of thy Cross,
And All shall own Thou died'st for All.
(Baker, 20:65-68)

seems to be merely a call to the universality of the gospel, but
originally it was preceded by four verses, the first two of which
explain the Calvinist stance in the words of Calvin himself. One
of them is a direct address to God:

"Thou hast compelled the lost to die;
Hast reprobated from thy face;
Hast others saved, but them past by;
Or mock'd with only Damning Grace."
(53-56)

And then the question is asked:

Still shall the HELLISH DOCTRINE stand?
And thee for its dire Author claim?
No - let it sink at thy Command
Down to the Pit from whence it came.
(61-64)

Admittedly, some of these attacks were against a distorted,
eighteenth-century view of Calvinism; similarly, the Wesleys, who
were called Arminian, were, as Alfred Pask has pointed out, close
to Arminius in thought, but much more in "temper of mind", and
were a long way from the "aberrations of later Arminians."71

71 Alfred H. Pask, "The Influence of Arminius on John
Wesley" LQHR (1960):258-263. The label "Arminian" is rather vague
and can cover a wide range of thought. Milton's views in Paradise
Lost are close to the "Calvinist Arminians" of his time; The
Wesleys had dropped the Calvinist view altogether. See also early
correspondence between John and his mother; she writes: "the
doctrine of predestination, as maintained by the rigid Calvin-
ists, is very shocking, and ought utterly to be abhorred; because
it directly charges the holy God with being the author of
sin (August 18,1725).
Although Milton was at one time in favour of the doctrine of predestination and as Bush says, "regarded himself as a Calvinist as late as 1644-5," the general tone of Paradise Lost is universalist. Bush goes further and says that the most important thing about De Doctrina Christiana is Milton's repudiation of the grim Calvinistic doctrine of election and reprobation in favor of the liberal Arminian view and his own central position of Christian liberty.

There is no record of what Charles felt about Milton's doctrinal stance, but there are passages in Paradise Lost which entirely support the Arminian position, and that in dramatic terms which would have appealed to Charles and which underscored the Christian's free choice. For example, God speaks of Satan:

I made him just and right, 
Sufficient to have stood, though free to fall. 
Such I created all th'ethereal Powers
And Spirits, both them who stood and them who failed;
Freely they stood who stood, and fell who fell.
Not free, what proof could they have giv'n sincere 
Of true allegiance... 
As if predestination overruled 
Their will, disposed by absolute decree 
Or high foreknowledge; they themselves decreed
Their own revolt, not I.

(3:98-104;114-7)

However, the most prominent passage in Paradise Lost suggesting special salvation for the elect is part of God's speech in Book 3, where he says "Some I have chosen of peculiar grace/Elect above the rest; so is my will" (3:183-4), and John Wesley, as late as 1771 still considers Milton to be anti-Arminian. He writes to Mrs Bennis (July 20 1771), "My chief objection to Milton's doctrine of Election is that I cannot reconcile it with the words of St. Peter... 'God is no respecter of persons'."

Bush, p.xxi.
The whole story of *Paradise Lost* might be considered as an exercise in the two doctrines of faith that were the keystone of the Methodist Revival, justification by faith, and universal redemption, created by God and expressed in the words and actions of Christ. The themes of freedom of choice for man and angels, love, grace and forgiveness are told by Milton in epic form. For him, it is one story told in twelve books. For the hymn-writers, it is the same story told repeatedly. They need the same imagery and the same words to express the length and breadth and depth and height of the love of God, and to urge the response of mankind in intellectual and emotional terms.

And sometimes they do use exactly the same words in exactly the same context. James Dale, in the introduction to the 1983 Collection, rightly indicates the connection in one hymn to the "whole anti-Calvinist argument in Book 3" of *Paradise Lost*. 74

One stanza reads:

O unexampled love!
O all-redeeming grace!
How swiftly didst thou move
To save a fallen race!
What shall I do to make it known
What thou for all mankind hast done!

(CHPM, 33:31-36)

This echoes Milton's "O unexampled love/Love nowhere to be found less than divine!" (*PL* 3:410-1), as he speaks of Christ's willing offer of himself to die in place of man. The idea of "swiftness" comes, not from the Bible but from *Paradise Lost* also, for there

74 CHPM, p.42. This is probably the only discussion in print of the theological agreement between Charles Wesley and Milton.
God asks, "Where shall we find such love?" and Christ quickly intervenes on behalf of man:

but all the heav'nly quire stood mute,  
And silence was in heav'n...  
And now without redemption all mankind  
Must have been lost...  
... had not the Son of God [said]  
Behold me then, me for him, life for life  
I offer...  

(3:213-237)

Dale does not have opportunity to point out that the next stanza of this hymn builds both on the Miltonic language and the concept of universal redemption. The Paradise Lost context has gone because Wesley is, probably unwittingly, using an aural echo of the opening of Book 4 of Paradise Lost, "O for that warning voice which he who saw/Th'apocalypse heard cry..."(4:1-2). Wesley writes:

O for a trumpet-voice  
On all the world to call,  
To bid their hearts rejoice  
In him who died for all!  
For all my Lord was crucified,  
For all, for all my Saviour died.  

(CHPM 33:37-42)

Using the word 'all' five times in one stanza can only be done by a good poet, and it is a measure of Wesley's skill that this is still a popular hymn and the repetition seems to be unimportant. It is probably saved by the clarion call of that opening Miltonic line.75

75 Some of the offence caused to the Calvinist camp by this hymn is illustrated by W.P. Burgess, who, writing in 1845 notes that the lines have been "altered to meet the views of the disciples of Calvin." Wesleyan Hymnology: A Companion to the Wesleyan Hymn Book... (London:Riley,1845),p.84. Rather than not use this hymn at all, which we must take as a back-handed compliment to Wesley, nineteenth century Calvinists removed
Universality indicated by the word "all" is a feature of many of Wesley's hymns; it is also the word that occurs constantly in *Paradise Lost*, and many times in the sense of salvation for all. In Book 12 there is the warning that the "wolves" will appropriate "the Spirit of God, promised alike and given/To all believers" (12: 519-20); earlier in the same book, the coming of Christ is foretold to Adam and Eve:

He shall endure by coming in the flesh  
To a reproachful life and cursed death,  
Proclaiming life to all who shall believe  
In his redemption, and that his obedience  
Imputed becomes theirs by faith, his merits  
To save them, not their own, through legal works.  
(12:405-10)

In this passage we see the joining of the two doctrines. There is universality in the word "all" and the concept of justification by faith in the merits of Christ. As will be seen later, when Charles Wesley presents his most doctrinal assertions of faith, he draws freely on rhetorical patterns used also by Milton.

nearly every reference to the word "all". The verse reads:

O unexampled love  
O rich redeeming grace,  
How swiftly did'st thou move  
To save a fallen race,  
How shall we make the tidings known  
Of what thy love, thy grace has done?

In the stanza beginning, "O for a trumpet voice" the last couplet is changed to read: "Let each the joyful news proclaim/ Till every sinner hears his name."

76 This leaves unresolved the issue of whether Milton felt salvation was for believers only; Wesley would have not required belief as a pre-requisite to salvation.
c. Covenant Theology

While justification by faith and the Arminian stress on universal redemption are the foundation of theological compatibility between Milton and Charles Wesley, there are other, less central themes which are also significant.

The idea of New Covenant is an outcome of the move from law to grace, typically, but not entirely a change from the Old Testament legal covenant between God and the Hebrew people, to the New Testament emphasis on the "acceptance of large grace" in Christ. In Paradise Lost this is best expressed by the archangel Michael's explanation to Adam:

So law appears imperfect, and but giv'n
With purpose to resign them in full time
Up to a better cov'nant, disciplined
From shadowy types to truth, from flesh to spirit,
From imposition of strict laws to free
Acceptance of large grace, from servile fear
To filial, works of law to works of faith.
(12:300-6)

As Shawcross has shown in a recent paper, the idea of Covenant appears in most of Milton's works, notably in Comus, Samson Agonistes, Paradise Regained, On the Morning of Christ's Nativity, and Lycidas. But he considers that Paradise Lost "most reflects the covenant theology." He quotes the passage above, and considers others which reflect Adam's liability under a "pre-law"

state. His notes on the literature of Covenant do not include the work of Richard Alleine (1611-1681), who was most influential in the view of the New Covenant held by the Wesley brothers.

John Wesley was so impressed by the idea of personal covenant with God that he adapted a liturgy prepared by Alleine, and used it with his new "Methodists." He writes in his *Short History of the People Called Methodists* of what happened on August 6th 1755:

I mentioned to our congregation in London a means of increasing serious religion, which had been frequently practiced by our forefathers, - the joining in a covenant to serve God with all our heart and all our soul. On Monday, at six in the evening, we met for that purpose in the French church at Spitalfields. After I had recited the tenor of the covenant proposed, in the words of that blessed man, Richard Alleine, all the people stood up in token of assent, to the number of about eighteen hundred. The Covenant Service is still used by Methodists - in a modified form - as a unique liturgical act of personal renewal. It speaks of the "new Life in Christ" to which "we have entered, having been admitted to that New Covenant of which our Lord Jesus Christ is mediator." The text proceeds in the form of a contract:

On one side the Covenant is God's promise that He will fulfill in and through us all that he declared in Jesus Christ...
On the other side we stand pledged to live no more unto ourselves but to him who loved us and gave himself for us...

Continuing with prayers of adoration, thanksgiving and confession, the liturgy ends with a declaration of total commitment

78 *Works*, XIII,337.

79 "The Order of Service for Such as would Enter into or Renew their COVENANT WITH GOD," *Book of Offices* (London: Methodist Publishing House, 1936), pp.53-57.
which may be considered a secular version of monastic vows. As might be expected, Charles's hymn reflects the theology:

Come let us use the grace divine,
And all with one accord,
In a perpetual covenant join
Ourselves to Christ the Lord.
(CHPM 518:1-4)

With the exception of the phrase "celestial host" at line 19, there are no overtones of Milton. It needs none, for they are both drawing on the same biblical source.
d. The Goodness of God

Paradise Lost contains many passages which express the goodness of God in creation, among which is Adam and Eve's hymn of praise in the Garden:

"These are thy glorious works, Parent of Good,
Almighty, thine this universal frame,
Thus wondrous fair; thyself how wondrous then!
Unspeakable...

these declare
Thy goodness beyond thought, and power divine."
(5:153-159)

But Milton reserves his choicest, most descriptive language, and thus the highest praise for the intentional sacrifice of Christ, which was not "beyond thought" but an act of will requiring thought and reason:

ambrosial fragrance filled
All heav'n, and in the blessed Spirits elect
Sense of new joy ineffable diffused.
Beyond compare the Son of God was seen
Most glorious; in him all his Father shone
Substantially expressed, and in his face
Divine compassion visibly appeared,
Love without end, and without measure grace.
(3:135-42)

It is this offer which releases the angelic hymn to the Father, "omnipotent, Immutable, immortal, infinite/Eternal king; thee Author of all being/Fountain of light (3:372-5), which itself culminates in the apostrophe to the Son, "O unexampled love/ Love nowhere to be found less than divine!"(3:410-1)

Because this theme of the saving grace of the love of God was the centre of the message proclaimed by the Wesleys, they
must have found Milton's expressions of this to be a convenient echo of their own thoughts. Unlike later hymn writers who frequently see the goodness of God only in the created, natural world, John Wesley's section, "Describing the Goodness of God," in his Collection of Hymns for the use of the People Called Methodists has no hymns at all on the glories of creation. All seventeen hymns are on the death and passion of Christ, and the personal subjective response of the human soul. We have already noted one of these which includes the stanzas beginning "O unexampled love" and has many other echoes of Milton. One stanza begins with the line, "Jesus, transporting sound! and the next keeps the image of music:

Jesus, harmonious name!
It charms the hosts above;
They evermore proclaim,
And wonder at his love;
Tis all their happiness to gaze,
Tis heaven to see our Jesu's face.

(CHPM 33:7-19)

We can see the source for this in the singing of the hierarchies of angels(7:192), and the "Cherub and Seraph, Potentates and Thrones/And Virtues, winged spirits..."(7:198-99) who surround

80 One can look almost in vain for any hymns by Charles Wesley on the blessings of God in creation. Even in his poems on the Psalms, he turns almost every Psalm of praise into a hymn of salvation. An exception is Psalm 150, which is worth recording for its rarity, brevity, and simplicity: Breathe in praise of your Creator, Every soul his honours raise, Magnify the Lord of nature, Magnify the God of grace, Hallelujah, Fill the universe with praise!

Short Hymns on Select Passages of Holy Scripture,(1762),#832.
Christ at the beginning of Creation. The opening of the golden hinges of the gates of heaven is the "harmonious sound" (7:205) which Wesley, probably unconsciously weaves into the opening lines of the two stanzas, "Jesus, transporting sound," and "Jesus, harmonious name."

Another typical hymn personalises Milton's objective view of the sacrificial event, stressing the paradox of immortality and death, but we can still see the language of Paradise Lost in the opening line and in line 3:

> O Love divine! What hast thou done!
> Th'immortal God hath died for me!
The Father's co-eternal Son
Bore all my sins upon the tree:
The immortal God for me hath died,
My Lord, my Love is crucified.

(ChPM 27:1-6)

Still another hymn from this section reflects the opening lines of Paradise Lost, the taste of the fruit which:

> Brought death into the world, and all our woe
With loss of Eden, till one greater Man
Restore us... (1:3-5)

Charles Wesley is obviously thinking of this when he writes:

> Adam descended from above
Our loss of Eden to retrieve (ChPM 32:7-8)

His Adam is the Christ, the second Adam, and Milton's "greater man." In this characteristic pattern of using his source, he takes the phrase, "the world and all our woe" and reverses the words "all" and "world" into the merely descriptive "all the world" ending with an individual subjective appeal in the lines immediately following; this is, after all, a hymn and not an epic poem:
Great God of universal love,  
If all the world through thee may live,  
In us a quickening spirit be,  
And witness thou hast died for me. (*CHPM* 32:7-12)

In a chapter devoted to the doctrinal elements of Wesley's hymns, Bernard Manning makes an interesting comparison with the hymns of Isaac Watts. He writes of "one quality which distinguishes them sharply" from those of Wesley, and describes this as Watts's ability to set the

faith of the Incarnation, The Passion and the Resurrection against its cosmic background. He surveys the solar system, the planets, the fixed stars, the animal creation from the beginning to the end of time.

And he goes on to say that this quality is missing in Wesley whose only concern is "God and the soul."\(^{81}\) We have seen that John Wesley, like Watts, can use the cosmic language in a purely descriptive way. My own observation is that Isaac Watts and John Wesley appropriate the external "creation" elements of *Paradise Lost*, while Charles Wesley takes this same language for his more subjective purposes.

But we have seen that Milton, for all the glory of his cosmic imagery, is closer to Charles in his appreciation of where the centre of God's goodness lies.\(^{82}\) So when Charles is able to add Milton's own words for the redemptive action of Christ, he

\(^{81}\) Manning, pp.42-43.  

\(^{82}\) I am in no way denying that John (and possibly Watts too) also felt this to be the central point of his view of God. I am merely recording what appears in the hymns.
has sufficient descriptive power to encompass his message of universal salvation.
The Name of God as "All in All"

In an illuminating essay on Milton's use of the word "all," Michael Fixler concentrates his attention on two special usages, both of which I contend are also used by Charles Wesley. He writes of the Pauline phrase "that God may be all in all" (I Cor.15:28) and notes that:

In Paul as in Milton, the word moves from an adjectival designation of completeness to a nominative absolute and seems to be the only intended name of God beyond the name of his Son... when all tends to become All or All in All, it never appears as a designation of the Father's transcendence with being somehow associated with the Son's identifiable name and function as Love.

The second point which Fixler makes is that:

Whenever all serves to signify any aspect of God's transcendence, and thus takes on the property of a name, it partakes of a certain enigmatic quality.... In Paradise Lost the use of Love as a name for the Son also takes on that enigmatic quality.83

It would be unwise to state categorically that Wesley derives his similar treatment from Milton; in fact there is some evidence that a common source might be Jakob Boehme (1575-1624), the Protestant mystic.84 However, it is still valuable to look at two hymns and see how he also links the All in All concept with Love centred in the Son.


84 See Fixler, p.128n. The "Boehme" entry in the 11th edition of Encyclopaedia Britannica notes that Boehme uses the word "abyss" in a sense "altogether unexplained by its biblical use." Of significance to the "Wrestling Jacob" hymn is Boehme's phrase: "the being of all beings is a wrestling power."
One of the few hymns of Charles Wesley which has found a place in anthologies of poetry is "Wrestling Jacob," which begins with the lines, "Come O thou traveller Unknown" (CHPM 136). It is a Christianised and personalised version of the Genesis story of Jacob who wrestles with God until the break of day (Genesis 28:10-22). The poet, or his persona, holds on to the invisible Man-God-Christ figure who knows him by name, but who will not disclose his own name. The poet says he realises that his assailant knows who he is:

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But who, I ask thee, who art thou?
Tell me thy name, and tell me now.  (CHPM 136:11-12)
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At the end of the next three stanzas [there is an additional stanza in the unedited version] he is still proclaiming:

```waltz
Wrestling, I will not let thee go
Till I thy name, thy nature know.
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Gradually the drama moves as the demanding interrogation goes on. The enigmatic, hidden nature of God will be revealed if God is named, for, as in the creation story, the creation (i.e. the nature or essence) and the naming of the creatures are one.

At line 35 comes the tentative question as an altered refrain, "And tell me if thy name is LOVE." Immediately the next stanza opens with the blinding declaration:

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85 "Dr. Watts did not scruple to say, that 'that single poem, Wrestling Jacob, is worth all the verses which I have ever written.'" John Wesley in the 1788 Minutes of Conference. J.W. Works, XIII,514.

86 See also the story of creation in Paradise Lost 8:352-3, "I named them as they passed, and understood/Their nature"
'Tis Love! 'Tis Love! Thou diest for me;
I hear the whisper in my heart.
The morning breaks, the shadows flee,
Pure Universal Love thou art;
To me, to all, thy bowels move -
Thy nature, and thy name, is LOVE. (37-42)

From then on the tension relaxes and certainty grows as he speaks of prayer which is "grace/Unspeakable." It is "Through faith I see thee face to face/I see thee face to face and live!"

Each of the final five stanzas ends with the refrain, "Thy nature, and thy name, is LOVE."

Fixler discusses the Jacob story as a pattern for God's refusal to answer Adam's question about the name of God in Book 8 of Paradise Lost. He comments that "in Paradise Lost and in the Old Testament, God demonstrates himself as love without identifying himself by this name," and he also notes that "the peculiar function of Christianity was to reveal Love as God's hitherto secret name." The parallel with Wesley's concept in this hymn is striking.

In another hymn (CHPM, 201), which is a muted but powerful apostrophe to Christ, Charles Wesley again writes of the Name, all-sufficient love, all in all, and to the partially undisclosed nature of God, or Christ. Unlike "Wrestling Jacob," this is not a narrative poem; rather, it is a partial catalogue of benefits which Jesus offers to the believer. It opens with an address to the enigmatic "Love":

Thou hidden source of calm repose,
Thou all-sufficient love divine... (CHPM 201:1-2)

87 Fixler, p.134.
It speaks of help and refuge from physical and spiritual ills and
ends the stanza with the words "I hide me Jesus in thy name."
The benefits of the Name are declared in the next stanza, which
picks up the word in the opening line, "Thy mighty name salvation
is." The third stanza begins:

Jesus, my All in All thou art
My rest in toil, my ease in pain, (13-14)

and it proceeds to enumerate as a form of antithesis the qual-
ities contained in the "all in all." "In war my peace, in loss
my gain...," ending with the paradox:

In grief my joy unspeakable
My life in death, my heaven in hell. (23-24)

This last line is glossed in CHPM as being derived from the line
of Paradise Lost (1:255) "Can make a heav'n of hell a hell of
heav'n." This is certainly probable, but not as important as the
whole theme which, according to Fixler's observations, is wholly
Miltonic in concept.
3. Similarities of Purpose

A seventeenth-century poet and an eighteenth-century hymn writer may well have their theology in common, but what about their purposes? What is their intention in writing? Is there any common ground there?

First, in dealing with question of differences in genre, we must note that Wesley's hymns had more immediate practical application than any epic poem could possibly have, and that the audience for the Wesley hymns was certainly not the "fit though few" which Milton had in mind. Even so, at the personal level of the relationship of poet to his work there is a common purpose. If we consider Milton's invocation to the Holy Spirit at the beginning of Paradise Lost, where he pleads, "what in me is dark/Illumine...That.../I may assert eternal providence/And justify the ways of God to man"(1:22-6) we can identify two elements: his declared need of divine help, and his desire to write about the nature of God. Michael Fixler sees another undeclared aim, that of expressing the love of God as an act of devotional worship. He writes:

All of Christian doctrine, Milton tells us, consists of "FAITH, or KNOWLEDGE OF GOD, and LOVE, or THE WORSHIP OF GOD." Knowledge and love of God, then, are correlative and complementary, as are their variant terms, faith or belief, and worship.... Thus it is not surprising that the

88 For a discussion of audience see Appendix II of this thesis. The problems of hymns as a literary genre are discussed in Appendix I.
poem [*Paradise Lost*] has two ends, the one direct, to affirm faith and enhance the knowledge of God, the other oblique, to express the love of God devotionally, in a poetic act of worship. Faith is the substance of the poem's argument explicitly stated at their outset. Love is less evidently an attribute of its mode, which is oblique but unremittingly devotional.°

A moment's reflection on the purpose of hymns, particularly those of the Methodist revival, will suggest that this dual purpose of instruction and worship is exactly what they were for. Why else did Charles repeat his doctrines in so many different ways if it was not an instructional device for the uneducated to hold on to their theology, and why was corporate singing to catchy, popular tunes such an essential part of the revival if it were not for the purpose of instilling a sense of corporate worship into an otherwise diverse group of people? But this was not just an assumption. As usual, John was ready to explain the process. In writing about the hymns of his brother, Charles, he stresses their value for the very same elements that Fixler sees in *Paradise Lost*; namely, faith which is confirmed (he does not call this a didactic act but all his life considered it to be so), devotion which is enlivened, and love which is increased: He writes in the Preface to the *Collection of Hymns for the use of the People Called Methodists*:

> I would recommend it [the Collection] to every truly pious reader: as a means of raising or quickening the spirit of devotion, of confirming his faith, of enlivening his hope, and of kindling or increasing his love to God and man (CHPM, p.75)

° Fixler, p.125.
The second element in Milton’s invocation plea is his need of divine assistance, without which he will not be able to justify the ways of God to man, nor will he be able to write a good poem. From our knowledge of the prolixity of Charles’s writing, it might be assumed that he was confident of his own powers, but this was not so. A sensitive man, with a wide range of emotional feeling, he was subject to moments of supreme joy, but also to deep gloom about his real or supposed inadequacies. His prayer life was rigorous, and there is little doubt that he prayed for guidance before writing any hymns. We can consider as typical his hymn for the Methodists to use before reading the scriptures, "Come holy Ghost our Hearts Inspire," which is very similar in tone to Milton's invocation to the Holy Spirit.

So for each man we can see the divinely inspired "serious Godliness" in his writing; each was saturated in the language and literature of the Bible, and was prepared to use it as a literal or allegorical quarry, both as a starting point and the end purpose in his own work. They both had a natural strong sense of dramatic visualization and a musical ear. It seems entirely appropriate that the words of one of the greatest English poets should have been, and should still be sung by a wide variety of people through the hymns of the greatest English hymnwriter.

Their musical interests would make an interesting comparison. Milton's inherited interest in music is well known, while Charles's sons were accomplished musicians, and his grandson was Samuel Sebastian Wesley, the nineteenth-century composer of church choral music. See Eric Routley, The Musical Wesleys (London: Herbert Jenkins, 1968).
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APPENDIX I : HYMNS AS A LITERARY GENRE

At first glance it seems paradoxical that one of the most commonplace examples of English poetry - the hymn - has been largely ignored by the literary critics. An immediate answer might be that many hymns are so bad that they are not worth remembering, and this is fair comment. Even the most rigorous hymn-book editors have to give way to popular sentiment and include hymns which have no literary merit but which have devotional impact. Not all are so bold as Garrett Horder, the nineteenth-century critic, who almost alone at the time was pleading for excellence in hymns. "What right has it to be there unless it be poetry?" he wrote, a sentiment echoed by his twentieth-century disciple, H.A.L. Jefferson who, seventy years later was still fighting the same battle. He speaks rather hopefully of the "growing recognition that although not all poems are hymns, a good hymn should be true poetry. For long failure to perceive this led to the production of dreadful doggerel which one regrets found place in hymnals."  


Even while acknowledging the value of the pursuit of excellence, the question of whether a hymn is a poem is still an open one. In 1924, at a paper read before the Cambridge University Congregational Society, Bernard Manning, then Fellow and Bursar of Jesus College, was quite clear. He writes:

Hymns do not form a subdivision of poetry. They are a distinct kind of composition, neither prose nor poetry: they are, in a word, hymns; and I refuse to be drawn any nearer than that to a definition.... A hymn like "Jesu, lover of my soul", may be poor religious poetry: but, in the face of its place in English religion, only imbecility will declare it a poor hymn.  

If we allow the hymn a distinctive tradition in its own right, one that both parallels and incorporates the English poetic tradition, we must still wonder what ingredients in the genre have discouraged serious criticism. Even if we ignore the "dreadful doggerel" and forget about the poetry of those who have been included as poets in their own right - Herbert, Blake, Cowper, Addison, and others - and so receive criticism elsewhere, we are still left with a large body of "poetry" that is worth consideration. Wesley is of particular interest. Obviously he wrote far too much; no one can be expected to keep up the quality of his work when writing over 6000 poems, but he must be judged by his best work and some of that is exceptionally good.  

94 Manning, Wesley and Watts, p.109.

95 As brother John said after re-reading a collection of the hymns, "Some are bad, some mean, some most excellently good." JWJ, 15 December 1788.
Donald Davie writes of the confusing categorisation of "lyrical" and "religious" poetry and notes that because of this preconcepton, "a large body of the best verse of this period [i.e the eighteenth century] goes unregarded altogether." And he puts Cowper, Charles Wesley and John Newton in this category along with the earlier Dodderidge and Watts. He writes:

These poems manifest the same virtues as the secular poetry of the period; and to prove that they do so is to show that such qualities as prosaic strength, exactness and urbanity are not to be looked for only in poetry of a special and very limited kind...

This being so, perhaps as Frank Baker suggests, the main reason for the "comparative neglect of Charles Wesley's poetry by literary students" is the basic content of the hymns. Indeed, it is quite evident that hymns of a personal or mystical nature make many people uncomfortable. In the past 150 years, well-educated classes of English society have been happy to sing the Watts' hymn of corporate piety "O God our Help in Ages Past" or even Blake's "Jerusalem" which has rather stirring suggestions of dedication to a better England, but they have been even happier to allow Lyte's "Abide with Me," an emotional hymn of personal consolation, to be sung by the masses at Football Association Cup Finals.

96 Davie, Purity of Diction, pp.70-71.

97 Baker, Rep. Verse, p.xvi. Apart from the unusual metre, this is why the poetry of George Herbert is unsuitable for use by most congregations.
Much of the Wesley corpus is personal, didactic and doctrinal, what John called "a little body of practical and experimental divinity" and not everyone feels they either need or understand it. Church-goers are offered a wide selection of contemporary hymns, many of which are lacking in doctrinal or spiritual value but in a predominantly secular age, it is the church festival hymns that have the greatest audience, and so keep the classical tradition alive. Most people have heard, if not sung, Wesley's "Christ the Lord is Risen Today" at Easter, and his "Hark the Herald Angels Sing" at Christmas, but they and most church-goers would hardly be aware of some of the hymns rarely sung outside Methodist circles, but which are "most excellently good." Consider the following which was originally a funeral hymn, and is now sung at the New Year:

Our life is a dream, Our time as a stream
Glides swiftly away
And the fugitive moment refuses to stay.
The arrow is flown. The moment is gone,
The millenial year
Rushes on to our view, and eternity's here.

\[CHPM:485\]

This is a hymn which has echoes of Shakespeare, a contraction of past and future time into the present moment, classical diction and a nostalgic, even romantic sense of urgency. If this latter observation sounds paradoxical, it is merely a reflection of the paradox inherent in the Christian faith and the human condition which is a feature of so many of Wesley's hymns.

Perhaps the greatest hindrance to serious study of hymns is their inconstancy of text, which means that a modern critic,
From its inception, the English hymn as a genre had operated on a principle of diction which is peculiar to itself. The rule is: if you don't like it, change it. Hymns are partly in the oral tradition, in that their true purpose is not fulfilled unless they are vocalised. They are not, however, altered by oral transmission, as ballads were, for the text of a hymn exists before the eyes. Alteration is done by editors to suit current needs and taste. Often it is done very badly but...hymns must be altered.98

Isaac Watts suggested that his hymns could be altered by the leader of worship if he found an "unpleasing word", but John Wesley, himself an adapter par excellence, was quite unrelenting when it came to others tampering with his, or his brother's hymns. He wrote in the Preface to his 1780 Collection:

Many people have done my brother and me (although without naming us) the honour to reprint many of our hymns. Now they are perfectly welcome to do so, provided they print them just as they are. But I desire they would not attempt to mend them - for really they are not able. None of them is able to mend either the sense or the verse. Therefore I must beg of them one of these two favours; either to let them stand just as they are, to take them for better or worse; or to add the true reading in the margin, or at the bottom of the page, that we may no longer be accountable either for the nonsense or for the doggerel of other men.

(CHPM p.75)

This injunction by the leader of the Methodists was taken so seriously, that in their succeeding hymn-books few alterations were made and those with much apology as being necessary to suit

contemporary taste (i.e., exclusion of "bowels of compassion" and the "man as worm" imagery). There were fewer hymns on the attractions of death, and the number of stanzas was reduced to accommodate the depleted stamina of later congregations. Purists have raged, saying that all sense is lost when, for example, a meditation on the Lord's Prayer loses half its verses, or the original fourteen, eight-line stanzas of "Wrestling Jacob" are reduced to a mere four stanzas. However, hymns have to be sung by successive generations, and they have to be sung with assent. The language must be understood and affirmed by people who often have no sense of history. Martha England points out:

> The result of insistence upon absolute purity of text would be to end the lives of some great hymns and relegate them to rare book rooms where the pure texts live another, quieter life.

This sentiment is put in more positive form by John Telford, the editor of the **Methodist Hymn Book** of 1904, which was the first to break away from the 120-year tradition of Wesley text. In his preface he rationalises changes by explaining that "In many cases the omission of a verse or verses rescued a hymn from

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hopeless neglect." But some editors are less skilled and more imaginative than others; some have doctrinal axes to grind, and some are just careless. Julian in his Dictionary of Hymnology notes at least seventeen variants of "Jesus Lover of My Soul," for example. Horror stories of badly botched texts abound; a notable one being the change from Wesley's phrase, "inextinguishable blaze" (CHPM:318) to the bland "ever bright undying blaze," in Hymns Ancient and Modern, Songs of Praise, and the BBC Hymnal. Today, with the increasing demand for "inclusive language," even more changes are being made with little thought to the integrity of the text.

Faced with all these difficulties, how does the modern worshipper or student of literature rediscover the poetry of the hymn tradition? Selections in most undergraduate anthologies are


102 Anti-Arminian sentiments caused editorial alterations in the Wesley hymns; many of their statements of universality were removed in the early nineteenth century. See n.102.

103 Even replacing the pronoun "he" with the word, "God" can become tiresomely repetitive and may upset the stress of a line. Of more concern is the substitution of "creator" for "father," for while the three syllables can usually be slid into two, the nurturing concept of parenthood is lost. It would seem time to come back to Milton (and Wesley) for the word, "parent." On the other hand it is encouraging to see the recovery of feminine images by the inclusion of stanzas that were omitted in previous editions of a hymn book. Of special note is Dr. Rupert Davies' "re-discovery" of a stanza which Catherine Winkworth had omitted in her translation of Joachim Neander's hymn, "Praise to the Lord the Almighty." It includes the lines, "He as a mother doth speed,/ Spreading the wings of grace o'er thee." Hymns and Psalms: 16(14-15).
sadly inadequate, and rarely are courses given at graduate level. The non-academic enquirer has been equally badly served in the popular anthologies of poetry of the eighteenth century.

One solution has been to publish collections of hymns in their original form as books of devotional poetry. Another advance

The Norton Anthology of Poetry contains no Wesley at all, while the standard undergraduate eighteenth century text, (Bredvold's Eighteenth Century Poetry and Prose, 3rd. ed. (New York: Ronald Press, 1973), includes six hymns by Watts and only two by Charles Wesley: "Wrestling Jacob" - which is a fine poem and hymn, and the rather sentimental "Jesus lover of my Soul" which John had refused to put in the 1780 Collection because it was in poor taste. A hint that the genre rather than the poetry is problematic is seen in Bredvold's editorial comment that Charles is "pre-eminent among English hymnwriters" in congregational song, whose requirements were "simple diction and construction, resonant lines, the reiteration of the plain gospel truth, and the expression of sentiments that could be understood and shared by the many." p.692.

The Penguin Book of Eighteenth Century Verse, edited by Dennis Davidson, (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1973), includes eight hymnwriters: Addison (1 hymn), Watts (3), Byrom (1), Dodderidge (1), Toplady (1), Cowper (2), Newton (1) and John Wesley (1). The latter is one of John's translations from the German; there is no mention of Charles. David Nicol Smith's choice for The Oxford Book of Eighteenth Century Verse (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1926), includes only four Wesley hymns in a total of 449 poems, and Lord David Cecil in editing the Oxford Book of Christian Verse in 1941, included less than "one in ten" hymns, a fact which provoked C. Ryder Smith to write a useful article on the genre problem ("Can a Hymn be a Poem?" Expository Times 52 (1941), pp. 275-277). However, Donald Davie's recent edition of the The New Oxford Book of Christian Verse (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981), includes more hymns and more originals of Charles Wesley, including the hard-to-find full text of "Soldiers of Christ Arise" in its pre-edited form of sixteen stanzas.

This seems to a growing field. Alan Kay, ed. Fifty Hymns of Charles Wesley (London: Epworth Press, 1957) was followed by a collection specifically designed to re-acquaint Anglicans with their heritage: H. A. Allchin and A. M. Hodges, A Rapture of Praise; Hymns of John and Charles Wesley (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1966). However, this collection does not use
has been in the more academic field, where in 1962 pioneer work on a critical edition of three hundred of the best of the Wesley hymns was done by Frank Baker in his *Representative Verse*, a book which complements the 1983 *Collection of Hymns for the Use of the People Called Methodists* - the critical edition of John's 1780 work. As I have mentioned elsewhere, though this new critical edition is good, it is still limited by the selection made by John in 1780. It was intended only to supplement the festival and sacramental books already in existence and so excludes Nativity and Easter hymns and the Eucharistic hymns. The latter are just being rediscovered by the Methodist and Anglican churches. It is to be hoped that critical editions of these books will be forthcoming.

There is no simple answer to the question of whether hymns as a genre can, or should be treated as poetry. Many hymns are popular because they have been wedded to a good tune; they have lived, much in the same way that secular songs have done, on the strength of tune, rhythm, and words which arouse an emotional response in the singer, or the hearer. Many of these are not worth critical attention as poems. On the other hand, the best hymns of poets such as Wesley certainly deserve serious appraisal as poems. As I will show in Appendix III, they have been sadly neglected in the field of eighteenth-century literary studies.
APPENDIX II: AUDIENCE

If eighteenth-century congregations in the Church of England were still singing their metrical psalms and the Dissenters were using the hymns of Dodderidge and Watts, what was the public for some of the 6000 hymns which were written by Charles Wesley?¹⁰⁷

Received opinion says that Wesley wrote for the poor and illiterate, those outside the churches who were suddenly touched by the warmth of the Revival which took fire after the conversion of John and Charles in May 1738. This is only partly true. Certainly "every meeting began and ended with singing and prayer" as John said later in life, and no one reading many of the hymns addressed to "harlots and publicans and thieves" (CHPM: 29, 25-30),¹⁰⁸ or to the Newcastle or Staffordshire Colliers,

¹⁰⁷ There are many histories of hymnody in England; one of the best ones is H.A.H. Jefferson, Hymns in Christian Worship (London: Rockliff, 1950). The usual round figure given for Charles Wesley's hymns is 6000, but Frank Baker, Representative Verse, p.xi. notes 8,989 poems "as Charles left them"; not all of them were hymns.

¹⁰⁸ See also CHPM: 2, "Come sinners to the gospel feast." One original stanza (Redemption Hymns, 1747) which was excluded from the 1780 Collection reads:

Sinners my gracious Lord receives,
Harlots, and publicans, and thieves,
Drunkards and all the hellish crew,
I have a message now to you.

The phrase, "hellish crew" is never used in that form by Milton in Paradise Lost, but it summarises his more specifically unsavoury crews: horrid crew(1:51), rebellious(4.952), hapless(5:897), godless(6:49), wicked(6:277) atheist(6:370), cursed(6:806), and monstrous(11.474).
(CHPM: 38,209 and 210) could doubt that they were for the common people. However, some hymns were personal expressions of faith later appropriated for corporate use,\(^{109}\) such as the great conversion hymns. "Where shall my wond'ring soul begin?" (CHPM:29) and "And Can it Be?" (CHPM:193), while some, as Eric Routley has pointed out, "have nothing to do with the reclamation of the illiterate and the poor. They are for the building up of the literate and substantial, John Wesley's 'rich sinners'."\(^{110}\)

Both John and Charles, trained in the best of classical traditions at Charterhouse and Westminster and Oxford, strove for precision of language in a mixture of latinisms and strong Anglo-Saxon words. Moreover, after the first few years of their mission, they were deeply involved in the education of children, setting up a school at Kingswood, Bristol upon principles of education laid down by Milton and Locke. This required that hymns had to be written for children in reasonably clear language, and was also the motivation for the publication of the simple

\(^{109}\) There has been some discussion about whether in some of the personal hymns Charles was speaking for himself, or whether he was using a persona. The most recent writing on the topic is: Michael J. Townsend, "The Hymns of Charles Wesley: Devotional Verse or Congregational Hymnody?" The Methodist Heritage (Wimbledon, U.K: Southlands College, 1984), pp.11-26. (The Principal's Lectures, Spring Term 1984).

\(^{110}\) Routley, Musical Wesleys, p.42. On the other hand James Dale comments, "A great many of the converts were illiterate, and others from the middle classes might not have any great familiarity with works other than The Bible, Paradise Lost, and - possibly - the Night Thoughts and Hervey's Meditations." Dale, Diss p.140.
grammars, the dictionary, and the abridgement of *Paradise Lost*.  

Hymns are to be sung, and a glance at the astonishing variety of Charles's metres suggests that some of the tunes must have already been in existence and thus dictated the form of the verse. He appropriated folk tunes, operatic ballads, and drinking songs. He lived in the age of Handel, who wrote three tunes for him, but perhaps more importantly, provided the Baroque framework for his experimental rhythms. The Bach chorales were coming into fashion at this time, too, and must have been influential. Did the congregations just pick up all these complicated tunes and use them easily? The answer is probably no. Routley suggests that the "cathedral music" of the evangelicals was created in the foundation homes which they provided for destitute children. The *Lock Hospital Collection* of Martin Madan is an example of the material taught to these children. Horace Walpole explains to John Chute in a letter dated October 10 1766:

I have been at one opera today - Mr. Wesley's. - They have boys and girls with charming voices; that sing hymns in parts to Scotch ballad tunes; but indeed so long that one would think they were already in eternity, and knew not how much time they had before them.  

But the interaction between hymn and tune must have been a powerful way to implant Christian doctrine in an audience that had few other outlets for emotional expression. Never since

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111 John Wesley, *An Extract from Milton's Paradise Lost*, (London: Paramore, 1763). This is discussed on p 50 of this thesis.

112 JWJ, V,188n.
pre-Reformation days had ordinary people been allowed such exuberance in their worship. They took full advantage of it.

When John Wesley described his hymn-book of 1780 as a "little body of practical and experimental divinity," he was already aware that for many people who were still in an oral tradition, this was their only source of instruction. From Watts onwards, Dissenters who could read used their hymn-books as a devotional aid in much the same way that the prayer book or missal was used in other denominations. Thousands of copies of the Wesley hymnbooks were printed in a size that could be kept in the pocket and used during breaks in the working day. For those with more leisure and more education the language of the hymns would carry echoes, not just of the Bible, but of a classical and literary heritage. Donald Davie writes of Charles's intention towards his mixed audience:

In the Methodist Chapel, [and, he might have added, the band meeting and class meeting] as in the drawing room, the poet used the language spoken by his hearers. He did not try to heighten, to disrupt, or even, in the first place, to enrich that language, but to sharpen it, to make it more exact and pure, and thereby (paradoxically) more flexible. He seldom used shock-tactics. His concern was not to create a distinctive style, but to contribute to a common stock, to safeguard a heritage and to keep it bright as new.113

Probably Charles and John had less concern with the preservation of the language than Davie suggests. Their primary aim was to tell a story and to save souls. But as well-trained poets, of great integrity, having a genuine appreciation and compassion for

113 Davie, Purity of Diction, p.80.
"all sorts and conditions of men and women, they were confronted with the challenge of speaking in a language that all could welcome and understand and yet feel no sense of condescension. It is intriguing to look at Charles's educational technique. Take, for example, a couplet from one of his Nativity hymns, which incidentally expresses the whole doctrine of the incarnation in nine words. The couplet is:

Our God, contracted to a span
Incomprehensibly made man

If we take out the two "difficult" words, we are left with seven monosyllabic common words that still convey the essence of the message, except for the concept of incomprehensibility which is a subjective emotion rather than a fact. The span was a common form of measurement, so the word "contracted" is not really essential either. The uneducated would still get the message of the incarnation, while educated singers might just pick up the reference to George Herbert's "The Pulley"

114 In childhood they had been taught to respect even the most unruly of their father, Samuel Wesley's, parishioners, and to treat the family servants with courtesy. At Christmas time, the poor of the parish were always served a meal before the family and their friends had their own dinner, a fact which may have been echoed in the delicate irony of one of the lines from Hymns for the Nativity of our Lord (16:25-30) "The rich are permitted to follow the poor."

The shepherds behold
His promised of old
By angels attended, by prophets foretold.
The wise men adore
And bring him their store,
The rich are permitted to follow the poor.
When God at first made man
Having a glasse of blessings standing by;
Let us (said he) poure on him all we can:
Let the worlds riches, which dispersed lie,
Contract into a span.

It would be satisfying to leave it there, with the assumption that Charles had borrowed directly from Herbert, a favourite poet of his mother's. But perhaps he got it from brother Samuel, also a fair poet in his own right, and who provided material for many of Charles's hymns. He had used Herbert's phrase for his more pedestrian reflection on the nativity:

The co-eternal son of God
The mortal son of man
Whose wond'rous love the Godhead show'd
Contracted to a span.

In exploring sources for Wesley hymns we are frequently confronted with these options. Some of these are discussed in the body of this thesis; this merely indicates the complex nature of

115 Samuel Wesley, junior (1690-1739), had been financially responsible for Charles's education at Westminster School and as both surrogate father and usher at the school had been as influential as anyone in forming the poetic talent of his young brother. His own book of poetry, Poems on Several Occasions (London: Edward Say, 1736) had been published while he was headmaster at Tiverton School, and his urbane honesty is revealed in his preface to this. He writes: "it was not any Opinion of Excellency in the Verses themselves that occasioned their publication, but merely the Profit proposed by the Subscription." A friend of Pope and Swift, he had supported Bishop Atterbury, and so lost any chance of preferment as a clergyman when the Bishop was banished to France by Horace Walpole in 1723. Adam Clarke feels that the younger Samuel Wesley would have achieved fame, "if he had not the name of Wesley." Memoirs of the Wesley Family (London: Kershaw, 1823), p.435. His parody on Milton is mentioned in n.60 of this thesis.

116 See index entry under "Wesley, Samuel, junior" in CHPM, p.847.
the education task, and some of the ways that the Wesleys used
to woo their audience.

There is no opportunity here to discuss fully the fate of the
Wesley hymns in the nineteenth century and beyond. Their audience
broadened of course, as the middle classes became better educated
and the working classes at least held on to the oral tradi-
tion. Studies in popular culture indicate that local communi-
ties were deeply influenced by the hymns. Robert Colls in writing
of a northern industrial village in that period says:

Methodism was music: music spearheaded its mission;
it marked out the good life and pointed out the
bad; it sang out the dead and sang in the reborn
Just as John Wesley had identified with religion a
real or supposed experience, so did the songs of
Methodism reflect that experience factor.

"Singing out the dead" introduces the sometimes forgotten fact
that hymns were an essential part of a "good death" in the eyes
of the Victorian faithful. If one considers the long tradition
of "holy dying" this is not necessarily a morbid activity. It was
merely a means by which relatives and friends gained some
knowledge of the state of the soul of the dying person as a
confirmation of a good life well lived and perhaps as personal
assurance of the same fate. Last words were very important.

117 O.A. Beckerlegge gives a useful summary of the powerful
impact of hymns in the Methodist tradition in his introductory
section, "The Hymn-Book in Methodist Worship" CHPM, pp.61-69.

118 Robert Colls, The Collier's Rant: Song and Culture in
Wesley had gone to his God quoting the words of Isaac Watts "I'll praise my maker"; could his followers do less? Many such stories found their way into the *Methodist Magazine*, and they were collected into illustrated books, one at least being published as late as 1941.\(^{119}\) We may blanch at their sentimentality, but it is difficult to deny that they were very popular.\(^{120}\)

As I suggest in the preface to this thesis, the educational value of the hymns was probably very high in an age before the advent of radio and television. Today, the doctrinal, devotional and poetic content of the hymns are their chief attraction.


\(^{120}\) Over six hundred death-bed scenes based on hymns from the 1876 *Methodist Hymn Book*, are reported in G.J. Stevenson, *The Methodist Hymn Book: Illustrated with Biography, History, Incident, and Anecdote*, 2nd ed. (London: Kelly, 1894). Nearly every one fits a peculiarly predictable pattern of a long painful illness being lightened by the patient's reliance on the words of a Wesley hymn.
APPENDIX III : CRITICAL OPINION ABOUT THE WESLEYS

Those who have discovered the virtues of the poetry of Charles Wesley have always been surprised that others have not done so also. In recent years there has been a flood of literature on the Wesleys, but it still reaches a limited audience and has not penetrated the wider literary consciousness. Indeed, a side effect of specialist studies seems to be that the hymns themselves are used less, while the publication about them increases.

Some of the earlier neglect can be accounted for by the problems of the hymn genre, noted in Appendix I. Also there was (and in some places there still is) a lingering suspicion of the "enthusiasm" that clung to the Methodist movement, and the judgement of influential critics like Sir Leslie Stephen, man of letters, editor of the DNB and author of the "minor masterpiece" History of English Thought in the Eighteenth Century, did not help. In this work, he admires John Wesley's prose but dismisses the Methodist movement in a couple of lines as having


no "elevated theology," a symptom of which was "the absence of any literature possessing more than a purely historic interest." He goes on to compare it unfavourably with the writings of the Oxford Movement.  

Another Victorian, George MacDonald, writing in 1869, relegates the hymns to the category of "songs"; he doubts their "literary merit" but at least he calls some of them "real lyrics." Edmund Gosse is rather more generous. He writes that Charles, "In a family of distinguished rhyming divines...was the one who rose nearest to the purely secular standard of a poet."  

It is interesting to see that he makes this distinction between secular and religious poetry, but perhaps his Calvinistic childhood had jaundiced his view of hymns as potential literature. He goes on to say that these "sacred songs...reach at their noblest the highest level of Protestant religious poetry since George Herbert." When we consider that he was only looking at a 120-year time frame and also note the confines of the label "Protestant religious poetry" even this praise seems somewhat cool.

One of the most influential guides to public opinion in the early twentieth century was the eleventh edition of the Encyclo-


Again, there is no more than faint praise for the Wesley corpus of hymns. The Earl of Selborne, who wrote the "Hymn" entry, must have been commenting on the rather undigestible editions of Wesley hymns available at that time. He writes of their "tedious Length," notes that they "lose force by redundancy" and are apt to be repetitive. (This was a teaching device more important to Charles than poetic excellence). "But," he goes on, "he has great truth, depth and variety of feeling; his diction is manly and always to the point; never florid, though sometimes passionate and not free from exaggeration; often vivid and picturesque." W.H. Hutton in the 1913 edition of the *Cambridge History of English Literature* becomes quite expansive, giving two or three pages to the Wesleys and summing up John as "a master of direct English and simple strength." He thinks "his Journal has all the charm of a pious Pepys...In pathos and descriptive power, its simple narrative shows the rugged force of Walt Whitman." He goes on to say:

John ... had not the taste for 'style' which was born in his brother Charles. John was no poet; but Charles...has left some verses that will never die.... He can be virile, felicitous, vivid; if his sweetness often cloys, he has a depth of feeling which frequently

126 There are many critics of this period who use the "manly" appellation for Charles Wesley's hymns; a study of the phrase "manly diction" would be rewarding in the context of womens' studies today.


brings him within the ranks of the poets. (X, 369)

Hutton has a mild regard for the Wesleys, and his judgement is
typical of many others of the period; it is salutary to note that
he speaks of hymns being 'read' rather than sung. The problem of
the hybrid genre is evident. By 1928, Oliver Elton, in his Survey
of English Literature,1730-80, gives fourteen pages to the Wesley
brothers in which he offers good, descriptive, critical appraisal
of John and Charles, and even includes other members of the
Wesley family. Even so, in spite of some approval, he still
dismisses Charles as a writer who "often attains to poetry, and
is oftener on the brink of it."129

Into this decidedly cool atmosphere came Bernard Manning,
an academic Congregationalist, who in his lecture at Cambridge130
soundly blasted Methodists for failing to recognise the literary
value of their inheritance. Speaking of the 1780 hymn-book with
its Supplement of 1831 he declares:

You may think my language about the hymns extravagant: therefore I repeat it in stronger terms. This little book - some 750 hymns - ranks in Christian literature with the Psalms, the Book of Common Prayer, the Canon of the Mass. In its own way, it is perfect, unapproachable, elemental in its perfection. You cannot alter it except to mar it; it is a work of supreme devotional art by a religious genius. (Manning, p.14)

The call did not fall on deaf ears, and the next decades saw a

129 Oliver Elton, A Survey of English Literature,1730-1780

130 See note 94 of this thesis.
multitude of papers on the Wesley corpus, many of which were published in the Methodist scholarly journal, *The London Quarterly and Holborn Review*. In 1945, Henry Bett, enlarged and revised his earlier work of 1913, producing *The Hymns of Methodism*. This addresses questions of authorship, biblical and literary allusions, the influence of church fathers, mystics, and classical authors as well as matters of metre and rhyme.

But the wider world was apparently still unaware of these literary treasures. Brompton Harvey in a 1934 paper dealing with the influence of Methodism on the Romantic movement, notes that great attention has been paid to the effects of Methodism in "the sphere of politics, manners and social order" but "curiously it is in the world of literature where presumably social and ecclesiastical passions are quiescent that there has been an egregious blindness...a perverse tradition that...Methodism has no literary importance." It was probably this paper that roused Dr. T.B. Shepherd to do a thorough study of eighteenth century literary influences on Methodism, and its own effects on subsequent literature of the period.

131 One paper tests in some detail Manning's claim about the Psalter, the Prayer Book and the Mass, and finds it valid. A.S. Gregory, "Nearer While We Sing" *Proceedings Wesley Historical Society* 42 (September 1980) pp.128-131.


134 Shepherd, *Methodism and Literature*. This is, however, still published by Methodism's own publishing house. Actually, its influence at the time was minimal because most of the edition
The literary critics were not entirely silent during this time. In the Warton Lecture on English Poetry read to the British Association in 1943, George Sampson gave priority of place to the Wesleys when speaking of hymn-writing in the eighteenth century. He complains:

Is it not strange, the histories of prosody barely mention him [Wesley]. If his hymns had been addressed to Pan or Apollo or some other heathen deity, or if they were written in some foreign tongue, how loud the praise would be! But alas, he addressed the Christian deity in English, and his poems are dismissed as mere hymns. 135

He goes on to justify the hymn which "has been the poor man's poetry, the only poetry that has ever come home to his heart... [it] echoes in the heart when the sermon is forgotten." 136

While we might argue about the absolute importance he gives to hymns in the hearts of the poor, we cannot deny the value of his plea that people be given "real hymns, not deceptive imitations." He looks to Charles Wesley for "real hymns."

It is quite beyond the scope of this summary to discuss the critical literature in detail, but one of the strongest literary proponents of Charles, the poet, is Donald Davie, who in a chapter of his Purity of Diction in English Verse, gives close attention to the "classicism of Charles Wesley." He sees in his inconspicuous allusions to biblical and classical was destroyed in an air-raid. It was republished in 1946.

136 Ibid., p.37.
literature a relationship to his, (Davie's), definition of excellence in pure diction, "the practice of refurbishing old metaphors gone dead, rather than the hunting out of new ones."

He points out that emotionalism is contained and "intellectual strength does not dessicate the emotions, but gives to them validity and force" and appreciates that Wesley's skill with paradox is central to the Christian faith. These are ideas that have been explored further in the body of this thesis.

137 Davie, Purity of Diction, pp.80-81. For further discussion of Davie's essay see p.91 of this thesis.