

“Hymns for the Methodist Preachers” (1760)¹

[cf. Baker list, #240]

Editorial Introduction:

The early 1750s were a period of growing tension between John and Charles Wesley over the nature and goals of the Methodist movement. A key point of divergence concerned the use of lay preachers. While open to this in principle, Charles was convinced that John was encouraging far too many who had neither the gifts nor the grace to take up the calling. For more on this dimension of the tensions, see Richard P. Heitzenrater, “Purging the Preachers: the Wesleys and Quality Control,” in *Charles Wesley: Life, Literature & Legacy*, edited by Kenneth Newport & Ted Campbell (Peterborough: Epworth, 2007), 486–514.

Even if they were persons of deep spiritual character and clear gifts for preaching, there was another dimension to the challenge of the lay preachers—many of them chafed at the restriction from administering the sacraments. When one of their assistants had sufficient training and could find a willing bishop, the Wesleys supported them seeking ordination. But few were thus qualified.

Things came to a head in October 1754, when two lay preachers, Charles Perronet of London and Thomas Walsh in Reading, administered the sacrament of Holy Communion. Charles Wesley suspected that John was ready to bow to the desires of such preachers, in order to provide for sufficient sacramental ministry among the Methodist faithful. This would have amounted to separation from the Church of England, and Charles strongly resisted it. He began to muster support prior to the scheduled Conference at Leeds in early May 1755. One form of this preparation was his poetic *Epistle to John Wesley* (1755).

In part because of the pressure brought by Charles, John Wesley read a paper at the Leeds Conference that affirmed the purposes of the Methodist movement but insisted that they could be upheld without separating from the Church of England. Some of the most recalcitrant lay preachers took this as reason to withdraw from the connection, joining dissenting churches that would ordain them. As things settled down, John published an abridgment of his Leeds paper as a chapter in *Preservative Against Unsettled Notions in Religion* (1758) titled “Reasons against a Separation from the Church of England.”

While Charles appreciated this move, he desired to reenforce the point. So, in early 1760 he published two runs (10,000 copies) of *Reasons against a Separation* as a separate tract, appending to it seven “Hymns for the Use of the Methodist Preachers.” While these hymns seek to encourage the preachers in their work of renewing the populace of England, they also make clear that this work is to remain within the Church of England!

Like his *Epistle to John Wesley* (1755), Charles republished *Reasons ... with Hymns* in 1785, after John had ordained two lay preachers for the Methodists in North America.

Editions:

[Charles Wesley.] *Reasons against a Separation from the Church of England ... with Hymns for the Preachers among the Methodists (so called)*, 13–22. London: Strahan, 1760.

2nd London: Strahan, 1760.

Included in JW’s *Works* (Bristol: Pine, 1773), vol 23 [hymns on pp. 129–40].
np, 1785.

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**HYMNS
FOR THE USE OF THE
METHODIST PREACHERS.**

Hymn I.²

- [1] O Lord, our strength and righteousness,
Our base, and head, and corner-stone,
Our peace with God, our mutual peace,
Unite, and keep thy servants one,
That while we speak in Jesus' name,
We all may speak, and think the same.
- 2 That Spirit of love to each impart,
That fervent mind, which was in thee,
So shall we all our strength exert,
In heart, and word, and deed agree
T' advance the kingdom of thy grace,
And spread thine everlasting praise.

²Manuscript versions appear in MS Preachers, 4–5; MS Preachers Extraordinary, 10–11; and MS Miscellaneous Hymns, 118–19.

- 3 O never may the fiend steal in,
Or one unstable soul deceive:
Assail'd by our besetting sin,
And tempted sore the work to leave,
Preserve us, Lord, from self and pride,
And let nor life, nor death divide.
- 4 Pride, only pride, can cause divorce,
Can separate 'twixt our souls and thee:
Pride, only pride, is discord's source,
The bane of peace and charity:
But us it never more shall part,
For thou art greater than our heart.
- 5 Wherefore to thine almighty hand
The keeping of our hearts we give,
Firm in one mind and spirit stand,
To thee, and to each other cleave,
Fixt on the Rock which cannot move,
And meekly safe in humble love.

Hymn II.³

- 1 Forth in thy strength, O Lord, we go,
Forth in thy steps and loving mind,
To pay the gospel-debt we owe,
(The word of grace for all mankind)
To sow th' incorruptible seed,
And find the lost, and wake the dead.
- 2 The wand'ring sheep of England's fold
Demand our first and tenderest care,
Who under sin and Satan sold
Usurp the *Christian* character,
The Christian character prophane,
And take thy *church's* name in vain.

³Manuscript versions appear in MS Preachers, 5–6; MS Preachers Extraordinary, 11–12; and MS Miscellaneous Hymns, 119–20.

- 3 Or shameless advocates for hell,
 Their crimes they Sodom-like confess,
Or varnish'd with a specious zeal,
 An empty form of godliness,
The power they impiously blaspheme,
And call our hope a madman's dream.
- 4 Haters of God, yet still they cry,
 "The temple of the Lord are we!⁴
The church, the church!"—Who dare defy
 Thy self-existent deity,
Proudly oppose thy righteous reign,
And crucify their God again.
- 5 'Gainst these by thee sent forth to fight,
 A suffering war we calmly wage,
With patience meet their fierce despite,
 With love repay their furious rage,
Revil'd, we bless; defam'd, intreat;
And spurn'd, we kiss the spurner's feet.
- 6 Arm'd with thine all-sufficient grace,
 Thy meek unconquerable mind,
Our foes we cordially embrace,
 (The filth and refuse of mankind)
We gladly all resign our breath,
To save one precious soul from death.

Hymn III.⁵

- 1 So be it, Lord! If thou ordain,
 We come to suffer all thy will,
The utmost violence to sustain
 Of those that can the body kill,
But having push'd us to the shore,
The feeble worms can do no more.

⁴Cf. Jeremiah 7:4.

⁵Manuscript versions appear in MS Preachers, 6–7; MS Preachers Extraordinary, 12–13; and MS Miscellaneous Hymns, 120–22.

- 2 We come, depending on thy name,
For we have counted first the cost:
Let ease, and liberty, and fame,
And friends, and life itself be lost,
We come our faithfulness t' approve,
And pay thee back thy dying love.
- 3 Not in a confident conceit
Of our own strength, and virtuous power,
We offer up ourselves, to meet
The fierceness of that fiery hour:
Left to ourselves we all shall fly,
And I shall first my Lord deny.
- 4 I first, of ill o'ercome, shall yield,
Apostate from thy glorious cause,
Shall vilely cast away my shield,
And hate the haters of thy cross,
Retort the sharp opprobrious word,
Or smite with the offensive sword.
- 5 Strange fire will in this bosom burn,
Unless thou quench it with thy blood;
Impatient of their cruel scorn
My spirit will throw off the load,
"And Baal's priests with wrath repel,
And send th' accursed brood to hell."
- 6 Or I shall gaul the *mitred* race
By satire keen, and railings rude,
By proud contempt, and malice base,
Scurrilous wit, and laughter lewd,
Laughter which soon itself bemoans,
And ends in everlasting groans.
- 7 But do not, Lord, from us remove,
While sin and Satan are so near,
But arm us with thy patient love,
That only to ourselves severe

The world we may, like thee, oppose,
And die, a ransom for our foes.

Hymn IV.⁶

- 1 Master, at thy command we rise,
 No prophets we, or prophets' sons,
Or mighty, or well-born, or wise;
 But quick'ned clods, but breathing stones,
Urg'd to cry out, constrain'd to call,
And tell mankind—He died for all!
- 2 We speak, because *they* hold their peace,
 Who *should* thy dying love proclaim:
We *must* declare thy righteousness,
 Thy truth, and power, and saving name,
Though the dumb ass with accent clear
Rebuke the silence of the seer.
- 3 But shall we e'er ourselves forget,
 And in our gifts and graces trust,
With wild contempt the prophets treat,
 Proudly against the branches boast,
Or dare the rulers vilify,
Or mock the priests of God most high!
- 4 *Let them alone*, thy wisdom cries,
 If blind conductors of the blind!
Let them alone, our heart replies,
 And draws us to the work assign'd,
The work of publishing the word,
And seizing sinners for our Lord.
- 5 Here let us spend our utmost zeal,
 Here let us all our powers exert,
To testify thy gracious will,
 Inform the world how kind thou art,
And nothing, know, desire, approve,
But Jesus—and thy bleeding love.

⁶Manuscript versions appear in MS Preachers, 7–8; MS Preachers Extraordinary, 14–15; and MS Miscellaneous Hymns, 122–23.

Hymn V.⁷

- 1 Jesu, thy waiting servants see
Assembled here with one accord,
Ready to be sent forth by thee,
To preach, when thou shalt give, the word:
Now, Lord, our work, our province shew,
For lo! We come, thy will to do.
- 2 O what a scene attracts our eyes!
What multitudes of lifeless souls!
An open vale before us lies,
A place of graves, a place of skulls,
The desolate house of England's sons,
A church—a charnel of dry bones!
- 3 The slaves of pride, ambition, lust,
Our broken pale, alas, receives!
The world into the temple thrust,
And make our church⁸ a den of thieves,
Her grief, her burthen, and her shame,
Yet all assume the church's name.
- 4 Her desolate state too well we know,
But neither hate her, nor despise:
Our bosoms bleed, our tears o'erflow;
We view her, Saviour, with thine eyes,
(O might she know in this her day!)
And still we weep, and still we pray.
- 5 We pray that these dry bones may live:
We see the answer of our prayer!
Thou dost a thousand tokens give,
That England's church is still thy care,
Ten thousand witnesses appear,
Ten thousand proofs, that God is here!

⁷Manuscript versions appear in MS Preachers, 8–10; MS Preachers Extraordinary, 15–17; and MS Miscellaneous Hymns, 123–25.

⁸“Our church” reads “God's house” in MS Preachers Extraordinary.

- 6 Here then, O God, vouchsafe to dwell,
And mercy on our Sion shew;
Her inbred enemies expel,
Avenge her of her hellish foe,
Cause on her wastes thy face to shine,
And comfort her with light divine.
- 7 O light of life, thy Spirit shed,
In all his chearing, quick'ning power:
Thy word that rais'd *us* from the dead,
Can raise ten thousand, thousand more,
Can bring them up from nature's grave,
And the whole house of Israel save.

Hymn VI.⁹

- 1 Great guardian of Britannia's land,
To thee we here present our blood,
Set forth the last, a desperate band
Devoted for our country's good,
Our brethren dear, our flesh and bone,
We live, and die, for them alone.
- 2 *Our brethren*; tho' they still disclaim,
And us despitefully intreat,
With scornful rage cast out our name,
Trample as dirt beneath their feet,
Out of their synagogues expel,
And doom us to the hottest hell.
- 3 If thou preserve our souls in peace,
Our brethren shall afflict in vain:
Most patient, when they most oppress,
We all their cruel wrongs sustain,
And strengthen'd by thy meek'ning power,
The more they hate, we love the more.

⁹Manuscript versions appear in MS Preachers, 10–12; MS Preachers Extraordinary, 17–19. MS Miscellaneous Hymns, 125–27.

- 4 No, never shall their rage prevail,
Or force us the dry bones to leave:
The more they push us from the pale,
The closer we to Sion cleave,
And daily in the temple found,
Delight to kiss the sacred ground.
- 5 If some defile the hallow'd place,
The truth, and us with slanders load,
Or fiercely from their altars chase,
And rob us of the children's food,
We will not quit thy house and word,
Or loath the offerings of the Lord.
- 6 Should those who sit in Moses' seat,
Conspire thy little flock to harm,
Judge in their courts, and scourge, and beat,
And bruise us with the ruler's arm,
Matter of joy our shame we make,
And bear it, Saviour, for thy sake.
- 7 Or should they stir the people up
Our goods to spoil, our limbs to tear,
Sustain'd by that immortal hope,
Their lawless violence we bear;
Or laid in bonds our voices raise,
And shake the dungeon with thy praise.
- 8 A gazing-stock to fiends and men,
When arm'd with thine all-patient power,
As sheep appointed to be slain,
We wait the last, the fiery hour,
And ne'er from England's church will move,
Till torn away—to that above.

Hymn VII.
The Preacher's Prayer for the Flock.¹⁰

- 1 Shepherd of souls, the great, the good,
For the dear purchase of thy blood
To thee in faith we pray:
The lambs and sheep of England's fold,
Now in thy book of life inroll'd,
Preserve unto that day.
- 2 Whom thou by us hast gather'd in,
Defend the little flock from sin,
From error's paths secure:
Stay with them, Lord, when we depart,
And guard the issues of their heart,
And keep their conscience pure.
- 3 Soon as their guides are taken home,
We know the grievous wolves will come,
Determin'd not to spare;
The stragglers from thy wounded side,
The wolves will into sects divide,
And into parties tear.
- 4 Ev'n of ourselves shall men arise,
With words perverse and soothing lies,
Our children to beset,
Disciples for themselves to make,
And, draw for filthy lucre's sake,
The sheep into their net.
- 5 What then can their protection be?
The virtue that proceeds from thee,
The power of humble love:
The strength of all-sufficient grace,
Receiv'd in thine appointed ways,
Can land them safe above.

¹⁰Manuscript versions appear in MS Preachers Extraordinary, 7–9; and MS Miscellaneous Hymns, 115–17.

- 6 Now, Saviour, cloath them with thy power,
And arm their souls against that hour
 With faith invincible,
Teach them to wield the Spirit's sword,
And mighty in the written word
 To chase both earth and hell.
- 7 When I from all my burthens freed,
Am number'd with the peaceful dead,
 In everlasting rest,
Pity the sheep I leave behind,
My God, unutterably kind,
 And lodge them in thy breast.
- 8 Ah! Never suffer them to leave
The church, where thou art pleas'd to give
 Such tokens of thy grace!
Confirm them in their calling here,
Till ripe by holiest love t' appear
 Before thy glorious face.
- 9 Whom I into thy hands commend,
Wilt thou not keep them to the end,
 Thou infinite in love?
Assure me, Lord, it shall be so,
And let my quiet spirit go
 To join the church above.
- 10 Sion, my first, my latest care,
The burthen of my dying prayer,
 Now in thine arms I see;
And sick on earth of seeing more,
I hasten home, my God t' adore
 Thro' all eternity.