

MS Prayer for Truth¹

Wesley penned this set of plaintive hymns one month after learning of his son Samuel's conversion to the Roman Catholic Church (see MS Samuel Wesley, RC). This is surely the background for the prayer expressed throughout the hymns that God would guide the person in discerning the true religion, from amidst the various claimants—including the “partisans of Rome” (Hymn VII). Particular emphasis is given to the need for God's Spirit to open up scripture, as a sure guide in assessing competing traditions. The hymns may reveal some of Charles Wesley's struggle with his initial strong reaction to Samuel's conversion, but they are more likely intended as a model prayer for Samuel.

The gathering of sheets containing this set of manuscript verse must be sorted and pieced together in their current setting. MARC, MA 1977/583/25 includes rough drafts of the first three hymns (presented separately in this collection) and pages 1–8 of the more polished draft that is transcribed below. The final two pages of the polished draft were separated from the rest and now reside in MARC, MA 1977/583/32, item #21.

Both settings of MS Prayer for Truth are part of the collection in the Methodist Archive and Research Centre (Charles Wesley Notebooks Box 4). The transcription below is provided with permission of the Librarian and Director, The John Rylands Library, The University of Manchester.

¹This document was produced by the Duke Center for Studies in the Wesleyan Tradition under the editorial direction of Randy L. Maddox, with the diligent assistance of Aileen F. Maddox.
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**The Prayer of One Seeking the Truth
(Written June 26, 1784)²**

1. O Thou that dost in darkness shine,
With clearest evidence divine
 Inform my willing heart,
Appear the true, and living Way,
That Thee I simply may obey,
 And love with all my heart!

2. This earnest wish if Thou bestow
Thy nature and thy will to know,
 With heavenly wisdom bless,
That taught by thy unerring light
To serve, and worship God aright,
 I may my Maker please.

3. A thousand different paths I view,
But which to shun and which pursue
 Still unresolv'd I stand
Till Thou thy secret counsel show,
Direct me after Thee to go,
 And reach me out thy hand.

4. Thou know'st my feebleness of mind,
My will perverse, my passions blind,
 My reason immature;
But Thou, O God, if Thee alone
My Guide infallible I own,
 Shalt make my footsteps sure.

² Published posthumously in *Unpublished Poetry*, 3:205–206.

5. Wherefore in self-mistrust I flee,
My Guide Infallible, to Thee,
To Thee my soul resign,
And while for light I humbly pray,
Thou wilt not let me miss my way
Who would be led in thine.
6. Or if thro' self-presuming pride,
I have mistook, and turn'd aside,
Misled by my own will,
I now thy Spirit's voice would hear
Till³ following Him with faith sincere
I reach the heavenly hill.

[Hymn] II.⁴

- [1.] Father, that I thy child may be,
That I may thy salvation see,
Assist me to stand still,
Thy kind instructions to receive,
What to reject and what believe,
And how perform thy will.
2. From Thee this good desire proceeds
To follow truth where'er it leads,
While open to the light
All things impartially I weigh,
Made willing God, not man, t' obey
And judge, and act aright.
3. I trust thy mercy to restrain
My blind, implicit faith in man
My rash, prejudging haste,

³Ori., “And.”

⁴Published posthumously in *Unpublished Poetry*, 3:206–207.

And every hindrance to remove,
That fully I may all things prove,
And find the Good at last.

4. Fast let me hold the Good I find,
No longer tost with every wind,
With every specious tale,
But built on the Foundation sure,
The Word⁵ that always shall endure,
The Rock that cannot fail.
5. The Word proceeding from that Rock,
Which the Incarnate Godhead spoke
And his Apostles too,
Can it not save and sanctify,
If He th' ingrafted word apply,
And prove the record true?
6. The word in which I woud believe,
Thou didst by inspiration give;
And if thy Spirit given
Again, with faith inspires my heart,
I know Thee, Saviour, who Thou art,
And find my way to heaven.

**[Hymn] III.
Before reading the Scripture.⁶**

- [1.] O God, to whom for light I look
How shall I know this ancient book,
If it indeed be thine,
Unless thy Spirit breaks the seals,
And to my heart the Sense reveals
As oracles divine.
2. The Church that did from Christ proceed
Whose many parts and members spread
Throughout the Earth I see,
Not one, but all in every age
Have handed down the sacred page,⁷
And left it pure to me.⁸

⁵Ori., “**Rock**.”

⁶Published posthumously in *Unpublished Poetry*, 3:172–74.

⁷Ori., “Have ~~pure preserved~~ the sacred page.”

⁸Ori., “And ~~hand it down~~ to me.”

3. Not one particular alone
The universal Church I own
But all with one accord
Churches diffus'd from east to west
Conspire unanimous t' attest
The heaven-descended word.
4. The Fact historical is plain
But standing on the words of man
I am not satisfied,
I want a more substantial ground,
A Rock on which my faith to found
Which always may abide.
5. What is that Rock, but Christ alone:
O were He to my soul made known
The Truth infallible,
Son of the living God supream!
The faith, the Church that's built on Him
Defies the gates of hell.
6. His Spirit in these mysterious leaves
Unerring testimony gives
To Christ the Lord most high:
O woud He take of Jesus blood,
Blood of the true,⁹ eternal God,
And to my heart apply!
7. The Witness of thy truth I need
(Which whosoe'er believes indeed
Doth in himself possess)
To testify, that I am thine,
To fill with righteousness divine
And love, and joy and peace.
8. Possest of Him I doubt no more,
But God in spirit and truth adore
My Father and my Friend,
Till the bright Image of his Sire
I see with all his angel-quire,
My glorious Lord descend!

⁹The word "one" is written above "true" as an alternative.

Hymn IV.¹⁰

- [1.] In search of the Religion true
O God, I know not what to do,
 But humbly look to Thee,
Who only canst direct me right,
Illumine with celestial light
 And give me eyes to see.
2. That truth I in the means may find
A candid, free, impartial mind
 To me vouchsafe to give,
With judgment sound, and reason clear,
So shall I weigh, and read, and hear
 And all thy mind receive.
3. Obstinate prejudice remove,
That I may all religions prove,
 And hold the balance even:
Make me indifferent to the Way
(Whate'er it be) which safely may
 Conduct my soul to heaven.
4. From sloth, and pride, and passion free
And wilful ignorance, to me
 The worship pure make known,

¹⁰Published posthumously in *Unpublished Poetry*, 3:174–75.

Most acceptable in thy sight,
In which Thou chiefly dost delight,
And wilt with glory crown.

5. Thine Oracles the answer give,
They teach me to repent, believe,
And Christ my Lord confess,
My faith by my obedience prove,
Worship Thee in the Spirit of love
And truth of holiness.

6. While thus I worthily adore
My God, I can inquire no more,
Assur'd that mine Thou art,
Who dost in Christ thyself reveal;
I own thy manifested will
And give Thee all my heart.

Hymn V.¹¹

[1.] The word of God, by all confest
Of truth th' indubitable test¹²
My perfect Rule I own,
The Word which doth his mind reveal
To those that woud perform his will,
And worship Him alone.

¹¹Published posthumously in *Poetical Works*, 13:258–59; and *Unpublished Poetry*, 3:175–76.

¹²Ori., “Of faith truth th' indubitable test.”

2. Tis here I seek, and hope to find
My Lord, who hath my heart inclin'd
Himself to serve and please:
I ask his Spirit's promis'd light
To guide my wandring feet aright
Into the way of peace.
3. Scripture¹³ doth Christ The WORD declare,
The Spirit, his own Interpreter,
Doth testify of Thee;
Son of the living God most high,
Born for a sinful world to die,
Thy death hath ransom'd me.
4. Thy Spirit doth the power infuse,
Thro' which I now my Chuser chuse:
He breaks my heart of stone:
From Him my holiness proceeds,
My faith, and hope—and love that leads
Directly to thy¹⁴ throne.
5. Thro' Him the Crucified I know
And let all other knowledge go,
As trivial, void, and vain;
And blest with evidence divine,
And certified, that Thou art mine,
Eternal life I gain.

¹³Ori., "~~The word.~~"

¹⁴Ori., "his."

6. The Spirit doth the truth reveal,
The pledge, the witness, and the seal,
To all believers given,
Thy word of all-sufficient grace
Prepares me for that happy place,
And builds me up to heaven.

[Hymn] VI.¹⁵

- [1.] See, Lord, thy meanest servant set
Humbly attentive at thy feet,
Thy welcom will to prove;
Help me to chuse the better part,
And teach my inexperienc'd heart
The lessons of thy love.
2. Thou only knowst what is in man
Me, Saviour, to myself explain
And true repentance give;
Bid me from sin this moment cease
And then I follow after peace
And in thy presence live.
3. Author of faith, the grace bestow
Thro' which I may my Saviour know,
And feel thy blood applied,
In Thee my Lord and God believe
And by thy hands and feet perceive
Jehovah crucified!
- [4.] Me let thy dying love constrain
To love my loving Lord again
And walk in all thy ways,
And never from thy footsteps move
Till call'd to meet Thee from above,
I see thy heavenly face.

¹⁵Published posthumously in *Unpublished Poetry*, 3:176–77.

[Hymn] VI[I].¹⁶

1. O God who didst the Seers inspire,
If Thee sincerely I desire
 To know, revere, obey,
Thy all-inlightning grace afford,
And by the Spirit, and the word
 Point out my heavenly way.
2. While from fallacious man I cease,
To none, for real happiness,
 But to Thyself I go:
They only find, who learn of Thee,
The science of felicity
 And life eternal know.
3. In vain the Partisans of Rome
Divine authority assume
 And all mankind condemn,
“God cannot help us to believe,
Unless implicit we receive
 The written word from Them.”
4. But he that reads, thy Spirit perceives
Breathing throughout the sacred leaves
 Interpreting thy will;
The soul o’rwhelm’d with doubts and fears
The voice of whispering Wisdom hears,
 “To know thy God, be still!”

¹⁶The two pages containing this last hymn are found in MARC, MA 1977/583/32, item #21. The pagination and theme make clear that they belong to this set. Published posthumously in *Unpublished Poetry*, 3:71–72.

5. Faith comes by hearing of thy word,
And witnessing of Christ the Lord
Thy Spirit seals it thine;
Thou dost confirm thy word of grace,
Which true believers all confess
The Saving power divine.
6. Spirit and life, thy words, convey
A power the Speaker to obey
In all that Thou hast said;
The evangelic faith impart
To every unopposing heart,
And bring to life the dead.
7. Wherefore, if thou the grace permit,
Attentive at my Teacher's feet
I wait, till Christ appears!
Now, Lord, eternally the same,
Speak, and declare thy Father's name,
For now thy Servant hears.
8. Determin'd here I still abide,
Scripture my rule, and God my Guide;
And when my Lord I love,
And when the Truth I fully know,
In glorious liberty I go,
To sing thy praise above.