

Wisdom from Charles Wesley for Contemporary Songwriters

Glimpsing the Passion of Theology in Lyrical Form

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TO ACCESS THIS POWERPOINT

- Go to sites.duke.edu/lruth and look for public presentations.
- You'll also find there the fuller studies comparing the most-republished evangelical hymnody up to the Civil War and the most-used CCLI songs.



WHY? WHY SO LITTLE THEOLOGY?

A suggestion: “Songwriters are afraid if they become theological they will lose their passion for God.”

QUESTIONS

- Do we love God for theological reasons?
- Do we know that God loves us in theological ways?
- Do we separate theology from piety, especially in our songwriting and song selection?

CHARLES WESLEY

- A Positive Example of Integration of Head and Heart, Theology and Piety, Theology and Love
- A Positive Example of Theology Fueling Passion for God.
- He offers several lessons for the contemporary song writer.

LESSONS FROM WESLEY

- Be taken up with a fundamental paradox of the Christian faith: the Incarnation

THE PARADOX IN CHRIST'S BIRTH

- **The appearance of the invisible**

God, the invisible appears.

God, the blest, the great I AM

Sojourns in this vale of tears,

And Jesus is his name.

“Glory Be to God on High,” Hymn 4, *Hymns for the Nativity of Our Lord*, 1745

THE PARADOX IN CHRIST'S BIRTH

- The “start” of the source of all existence

Emptied of his majesty
Of his dazzling glories shorn,
Being's source begins to be,
And God himself is born!

“Glory Be to God on High,” Hymn 4, *Hymns for the Nativity of Our Lord*, 1745

THE PARADOX IN CHRIST'S BIRTH

- **The containment of the uncontainable**

See the eternal Son of God,

A mortal son of man

Dwelling in an earthly clod,

Whom heaven cannot contain!

“Glory Be to God on High,” Hymn 4, *Hymns for the Nativity of Our Lord*, 1745

THE PARADOX IN CHRIST'S BIRTH

- The juxtaposition of heavenly glory and earthly humbleness

Go see the King of glory,
Discern the heavenly stranger,
So poor and mean,
His court an inn,
His cradle is a manger.

“Join All Ye Joyful Nations,” Hymn 6, *Hymns for the Nativity of Our Lord*, 1745

CONTEMPLATION OF THE PARADOXICAL GOD

Lo! He lays his glory by,
Emptied of his majesty!
See the God who all things made,
Humbly in a manger laid.

“Sing, Ye Ransomed Nations, Sing,” Hymn 12, *Hymns for the Nativity of Our Lord*, 1745

CONTEMPLATION OF THE PARADOXICAL GOD AS A BASIS FOR WORSHIP

See in that infant's face
The depths of Deity,
And labor while ye gaze
To sound the mystery;
In vain: ye angels gaze no more,
But fall and silently adore.

“Let Earth and Heaven Combine,” Hymn 5, *Hymns for the Nativity of Our Lord*, 1745

THE PARADOXICAL GOD SAVES

Gaze on that helpless Object
Of endless adoration!
Those infant hands,
Shall burst our bands,
And work out our salvation.

Strangle the crooked serpent,
Destroy his works for ever,
And open set
The heavenly gate,
To every true believer.

*“Join All Ye Joyful Nations,”
Hymn 6, *Hymns for the Nativity of
Our Lord*, 1745*

THE PARADOX & THE CRUCIFIXION

'Tis done! My God hath died,
My Love is crucified!
Break, this stony heart of mine,
Pour, mine eyes, a ceaseless flood;
Feel, my soul, the pangs divine,
Catch, my heart, the issuing blood.

THE PARADOX & THE CRUCIFIXION

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

THE POWER OF BLOOD DIVINE

Bind up my wounds by opening thine,
Apply the balm of blood Divine
To save a sinner poor.

CWPT

THE GREATNESS OF GOD AS EVIDENCED IN THE INCARNATION: WESLEY'S APPROACH TO WORSHIPFUL AWE

- Not God's expansiveness (a sense of scale)
- Not God's power (an awareness of overwhelming, incomparable ability)
- Not God's distance (a sense of his separation from us)
- But the greatness of God on earth (the seeming incongruity/contradiction)

LESSONS FROM WESLEY

- Be taken up with a fundamental paradox of the Christian faith: the Incarnation
- Juxtapose our personal story against a larger, more cosmic Story

SALVATION AS PERSONAL STORY

And can it be that I should gain
An interest in the Savior's blood?
Died he for me, who caused his pain?
For me? Who him to death pursued?
Amazing love! How can it be
That though, my God, shouldst die for me?

SALVATION AS COSMIC STORY

'Tis myst'ry all: th'Immortal dies!
Who can explore his strange design?
In vain the first-born seraph tries
To sound the depths of love divine.
'Tis mercy all! Let earth adore!
Let angel minds inquire no more.

He left his Father's throne above
(So free, so infinite his grace!),
Emptied himself of all but love,
And bled for Adam's helpless race.

THE COSMIC BROUGHT “HOME”

Emptied himself of all but love,
And bled for Adam’s helpless race.
‘Tis mercy all, immense and free,
For, O my God, it found out me!

AS EVIDENCED IN THE INCARNATION:

WESLEY'S APPROACH TO

WORSHIPFUL AWE

- Not God's expansiveness (a sense of scale)
- Not God's power (an awareness of overwhelming, incomparable ability)
- Not God's distance (a sense of his separation from us)
- But the tension between the breadth of God's gracious saving activity in Jesus, in which I have a share.

TRANSLATING INTO SONGWRITING DISCIPLINES

- New Poetic Ways to Trigger Awe:
 - Avoid “holy,” “great,” “mighty,” and “above.”
 - Avoid adjectives ending in –er or –est.
 - But include some sense of the breadth of God’s saving work: a range of persons or the human race or the cosmos and wonder in the singer’s personal share.
- New Poetic Ways to Trigger Gratitude:
 - Speak about human sinning (active verbs, not a noun) and divine saving (active verbs, not a noun)

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- Be taken up with a fundamental paradox of the Christian faith: the Incarnation.
- Juxtapose our personal story against a larger, more cosmic Story.
- Incorporate a dynamic sense of time and remembrance.

THE RESURRECTION *TODAY*

Christ the Lord is risen today,
Sons of men and angels say!
Raise your joys and triumphs high,
Sing ye heavens, and earth reply.

LOOK NOW

See in that infant's face
The depths of Deity,
And labor while ye gaze
To sound the mystery;
In vain: ye angels gaze no more,
But fall and silently adore.

“Let Earth and Heaven Combine,” Hymn 5, *Hymns for the Nativity of Our Lord*, 1745

SEEING THE CRUCIFIED SAVIOR

See the slaughter'd Sacrifice,
See the altar stain'd with blood!
Crucified before our eyes
Faith discerns the dying God,
Dying that our souls might live,
Gasping at His death, Forgive!

OPEN WOUNDS & WARM BLOOD

Still the wounds are open wide
The blood doth freely flow
As when first His sacred side
Received the deadly blow:
Still, O God, the blood is warm,
Cover'd with the blood we are;
Find a part it doth not arm,
And strike the sinner there!

EVOCATIVE THEOLOGY

Beneath my load he faints and dies.
I filled his soul with pangs unknown;
I caused those mortal groans and
cries;
I killed the Father's only Son!

LESSONS FROM WESLEY

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- Incorporate a dynamic sense of time and remembrance.
- Sing a biblical story from the inside out.

PETER'S IMPRISONMENT & RELEASE

Long my imprisoned spirit lay,
Fast bound in sin and nature's night.
Thine eye diffused a quick'ning ray;
I woke; the dungeon flamed with light.
My chains fell off, my heart was free,
I rose, went forth, and followed thee.

JACOB'S (THE CHRISTIAN'S) WRESTLING MATCH

Come, O thou Traveler unknown,
Whom still I hold, but cannot see!
My company before is gone,
And I am left alone with thee;
With thee all night I mean to stay,
And wrestle till the break of day.

In vain thou strugglest to get free,
I never will unloose my hold;
Art thou the Man that died for me?
The secret of thy love unfold:
Wrestling, I will not let thee go
Till I thy name, thy nature know.

'Tis Love! 'Tis Love! Thou diedst for
me;

I hear thy whisper in my heart.

The morning breaks, the shadows flee,

Pure Universal Love thou art:

To my, to all, thy bowels move—

Thy nature, and thy name, is Love.

THE REALLY GOOD SAMARITAN

...The thieves have rob'd, and stript, and bound...

My putrid wounds stand open wide,
My head is faint, and sick of pride,
And all corrupt my heart...

But Life I see in death appear!
The good Samaritan is near...

Bind up my wounds by opening thine,
Apply the balm of blood Divine

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- Put the emphasis upon divine activity (Let God have good, strong verbs).

PILING UP VERBS FOR JESUS

Did not his word the fiends expel?
The lepers cleanse, and raise the
dead?

Did he not all their sickness heal?
And satisfy their every need?
Did he reject his helpless clay?
Or send them sorrowful away?

O FOR A THOUSAND VERBS

He breaks the power of cancelled sin,
He sets the prisoner free;
His blood can make the foulest clean
His blood availed for me.

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- Be mesmerized by the Trinity.

STRUCTURING BY THE PERSONS

Sinners, turn, why will you die?
God, your Maker, asks you why?
God, who did your being give,
Made you with himself to live;
He the fatal cause demands,
Asks the work of his own hands,
Why, ye thankless creatures, why
Will you cross his love, and die?

Sinners, turn, why will you die?
God, your Savior, asks you why.
God, who did your souls retrieve,
Died himself that you might live.
Will you let him die in vain?
Crucify your Lord again?
Why, ye ransomed sinners, why
Will you slight his grace, and die?

Sinners, turn, why will you die?
God the Spirit asks you why.
He, who all your lives hath strove,
Wooed you to embrace his love.
Will you not the grace receive?
Will you still refuse to live?
Why, ye long-sought sinners, why
Will you grieve your God, and die?

THE HOLY SPIRIT & THE SON IN THE ECONOMY OF SALVATION

Spirit of faith, come down,
Reveal the things of God,
And make to us the Godhead known,
And witness with the blood:
'Tis thine the blood to apply,
And give us eyes to see
Who did for every sinner die
Hath surely died for me.

No man can truly say
That Jesus is the Lord
Unless thou take the veil away,
And breathe the living word;
Then, only then we feel
Our interest in his blood,
And cry with joy unspeakable,
Thou art my Lord, my God!

THE FATHER & THE SON IN THE ECONOMY OF SALVATION

Arise, my soul, arise,
Shake off thy guilty fears;
The bleeding Sacrifice
In my behalf appears;
Before the throne my surety stands;
My name is written on his hands.

Five bleeding wounds he bears,
Received on Calvary;
They pour effectual prayers,
They strongly speak for me:
Forgive him, Oh! Forgive, they cry,
Nor let that ransomed sinner die.

The Father hears him pray,
His dear anointed One;
He cannot turn away
The presence of his Son:
His Spirit answers to the blood,
And tells me I am born of God.

AWED BY GRACE

(THE COMMON ELEMENT IN THE LAST SEVERAL POINTS)

- Grace portrayed as gracious, cooperative activity of a Triune God
- From our point of view, undeserved and lavish

LESSONS FROM WESLEY FOR THE CONTEMPORARY SONG WRITER

- Be taken up with a fundamental paradox of the Christian faith: the Incarnation.
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- Sing a biblical story from the inside out.
- Put the emphasis upon divine activity (Let God have good, strong verbs).
- Be mesmerized by the Trinity.

THEOLOGY AND THE FIRE OF THE LOVE OF GOD?

- Wesley demonstrates that profound theology is oil, not water, when thrown on the fire of the love of God.

SOURCES OF HYMNS

- *To access all the published hymns of Charles Wesley, google Duke Wesley Texts.*
- *To see a list of Wesley texts for which new music has been written, go to charleswesleysociety.org.*