Missio Dei and the Wesleyan Mission-Church Paradigm

Paul W. Chilcote
Asbury Theological Seminary

John and Charles Wesleys' rediscovery of a “mission-church paradigm” in eighteenth-century England fueled the renewal of the church and offers a model of enduring significance for a global community of faith today.¹ This paradigm, drawing committed Christian disciples perennially to Jesus and to one another in community (centripetal movement) and spinning them out into the world in mission and service (centrifugal movement), reflected an apostolic vision of the people of God in their view. This essay examines those aspects of Wesleyan theology that provided the foundation for this vision, identifies hymns of Charles Wesley that inculcated missional praxis related to the missio Dei, and projects implications for a faithful practice of mission-church today.

Theological Foundations of a Mission-Church Paradigm

A robust theological foundation undergirded the missional vision that gave birth to a dynamic movement of spiritual renewal under the leadership of the Wesleys.

In the mind of these Anglican reformers, mission began with God and not with them. They conceived a “missionary God,” because the God they had come to know in Jesus Christ was a God of love who was always reaching out from self to others—an expression of God’s love and grace they described as God’s prevenient action. The missional practices of the Wesleys and of the Methodist Societies they founded mirrored this understanding of God’s nature and character. Moreover, they firmly believed that God was active and at work in the world to save and restore all creation. These primary convictions led the Wesleys to reclaim mission as the church’s reason for being and evangelism as the heart of that mission in the world. They developed a holistic vision of mission and evangelism that refused to separate faith and works, personal salvation and social justice, and physical and spiritual needs.

The Wesleys anchored this missional vision in the fundamental affirmations of the Christian faith, namely, in the doctrines of Creation and Redemption, Incarnation, and Trinity, all of which point to the “centrifugal nature” of God’s activity. They understood God’s creation of all things out of nothing, for example, as a sheer act of grace, an extension of God’s love motivated by nothing but God’s loving character. The Incarnation—God taking on human flesh in the person of Jesus of Nazareth—demonstrated the same missional quality. In the fullness of time, God entered human history and reached out to the beloved through Jesus Christ in order to re-create and restore all things in Christ. God’s mission—God’s evangelistic activity—God’s proclamation and embodiment of good news—in their view, began in creation, continues through redemption, and stretches out toward

This vision is consonant with a contemporary missiological consensus summarized in the term *missio Dei*, or the “mission of God.” As Darrell Guder has argued, “Mission is the result of God’s initiative, rooted in God’s purposes to restore and heal creation” (Darrell L. Guder, ed., *Missional Church: A Vision for the Sending of the Church in North America* [Grand Rapids, MI: W. B. Eerdmans, 1998], 4).


It is important to note that the Wesleys made this discovery without ever using this more contemporary language concerning it. The words *mission* and *evangelism* hardly ever appear in the Wesleyan corpus, but the Wesleyan Revival was at once profoundly missional and evangelistic in nature. David Bebbington has argued that one of the “striking symptoms of discontinuity” between the Evangelical Revival under the Wesleys and the previous two centuries was “a new emphasis on mission.” The impetus for this development, in some measure, was the triumph of Wesleyan Arminian theology over entrenched Calvinism by the end of the eighteenth century (David Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s* [Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1989], 40).

the consummation. This description of God’s missionary character, in fact, even reflects God’s Triune nature.6

The Wesleys built their theology of mission upon the understanding of a Three-One God postured in perpetual, grace-filled, outward movement—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in perennial interaction with one another and the world in a great dance of love. While mission belongs to God, the Wesleys believed that all people have the privilege of participating in God’s mission through their own proclamation and embodiment of the good news of God’s love in Christ. In the same way that God entered human history and took on flesh in the person of Jesus, the Wesleys sought to live incarnationally by investing themselves in the lives of God’s children wherever they found them. Charles Wesley used a powerful image to communicate this understanding of mission and God’s call to be “Gospel-bearers.” He described the Christian as a “transcript of the Deity.” That means essentially that God writes God’s self into our very being so that when other people “read” our lives, they perceive God in us:

Cloath’d with Christ, aspire to shine,
Radiance He of Light Divine;
Beam of the Eternal Beam,
He in God, and God in Him!
Strive we Him in Us to see,
Transcript of the Deity.7

The theological method of the Wesleys reinforced this foundational vision. Instead of setting aspects of the Christian faith over against each other—for example, forcing a choice between either personal salvation or social action—the Wesleys tended to see matters of faith from a both/and perspective.8 Personal salvation, they would argue, must be held together with social action—works of piety with works of mercy—in Christian discipleship. This approach to Christian thought and praxis shaped their understanding of mission and evangelism—and their doctrine of the church, as we shall see momentarily—in profound ways. Several excerpted couplets from a hymn by Charles Wesley illustrate this synthetic method:

---


8 I explore this “conjunctive methodology” in Recapturing the Wesleys’ Vision where I identify eight primary syntheses, including faith and works, Word and Spirit, personal and social, form and power, heart and head, pulpit and table, Christ and culture, and piety and mercy. Cf. Kenneth J. Collins, The Theology of John Wesley: Holy Love and the Shape of Grace (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2007), where the author employs essentially the same interpretive framework.
Let us join (‘tis God commands),
Let us join our hearts and hands
Still forget the things behind,
Follow Christ in heart and mind
Plead we thus for faith alone,
Faith which by our works is shown.9

Note the intimate connection of hearts and hands, heart and mind, faith and works. The words of brother John reveal the direct application of this principle to the missional vocation of all Christians:

By experience [the genuine Christian] knows that social love (if it mean the love of our neighbour) is absolutely, essentially different from self-love, even of the most allowable kind, just as different as the objects at which they point. And yet it is sure that, if they are under due regulations, each will give additional force to the other, “till they mix together never to be divided.”10

Genuine love of self, rooted in God’s affirmation—God’s prior love—must find expression in love of others. The two must always be held together. One of the most important legacies left by the Wesleys is this effort to hold faith and love—the form and power of godliness, love for God and love of neighbor—together in a growing, dynamic, vital expression of the Christian faith.

This conjunctive method informed the Wesleys’ conception of the church and the relation of the Methodist Societies to that larger body, while the cultural and ecclesial context in which they lived helped them to clarify their peculiar vision and mission. Rupert Davies has provided the most incisive analysis of this dynamic tension and identifies, perhaps the most unique quality of early Methodism:

A “society” acknowledges the truths proclaimed by the universal church and has no wish to separate from it, but claims to cultivate, by means of sacrament and fellowship, the type of inward holiness, which too great an objectivity can easily neglect and of which the church needs constantly to be reminded. A society does not unchurch the members of either church or sect... it calls its own members within the larger

10 Quoted in Chilcote, Recapturing the Wesleys’ Vision, 47; from John Wesley’s Plain Account of Genuine Christianity, 6.1.6.
church to a special personal commitment which respects the commitment of others.11

The Wesleys designed the Methodist Societies, in other words, to function as catalysts of renewal within the life of the larger church. Having rediscovered a mission-church paradigm within the life of their own ecclesiolae in ecclesia (“little churches within the church”), their hope was that the leavening action of these small groups of committed missioners would reawaken the Church of England to its primary vocation in the world, namely, the missio Dei. The Methodist Societies were like little dynamos spinning inside the church and building momentum in order to reestablish a centrifugal force in the church itself, spinning it out, in turn, in mission. There can be no doubt that the cell structure of the Methodist organism accounts for the dynamism and growth of the movement and its influence.12

It is not too much to claim that three concepts taken together—church, evangelism, and mission—defined early Methodism. A missional ecclesiology emanated directly from the Wesleys’ theological vision and method. God forms gospel-bearers in and through the community of faith, which is itself a manifestation—imperfect though it may be—of the gospel in the world. The Wesleys concluded that the central purpose of the church is mission—God’s mission. They attempted to replicate the model of the church they discovered in the pages of the New Testament. The church, they believed, is not called to live for itself but for others. It is called, like Christ, to give itself for the life of the world. It is not so much that the church has a mission or ministries; rather, the church is mission. The church of Wesley’s England had exchanged its true vocation—mission—for maintenance, a confusion that often slips into the life of the church in every age. It desperately needed to reclaim its true identity as God’s agent of love and shalom in the world. The Wesleys firmly believed that God raised up the Methodists specifically for the task of resuscitating a mission-church.

This vision, as you might well expect, was deeply rooted in scripture. When John Wesley adapted the Puritan Covenant Renewal Service for use in his own communities, he linked this annual event with one of Jesus’ most poignant images for the

11 Rupert Davies, ed., Works, 9:3.
12 Mike Henderson has identified eight major principles that led to the success of Wesley’s system, all of which have missiological import: 1. Human nature is perfectible by God’s grace. 2. Learning comes by doing the will of God. 3. Mankind’s nature is perfected by participation in groups, not by acting as isolated individuals. 4. The spirit and practice of primitive Christianity can and must be recaptured. 5. Human progress will occur if people will participate in “the means of grace.” 6. The gospel must be presented to the poor. 7. Social evil is not to be “resisted,” but overcome by good. 8. The primary function of spiritual/educational leadership is to equip others to lead and minister, not to perform the ministry personally (see John Wesley’s Class Meeting: A Model for Making Disciples [Nappanee, IN: Francis Asbury Press, 1997], 127–60).
church, namely, the vine and branches of John 15. In this passage, Jesus presents a picture of the church. As we abide in Christ—who is the true vine—we take nourishment from him as the source of all life. We are constantly drawn into the center, to the core, to the source. There is something similar here to the centripetal force of the wheel, something that persistently draws us closer to Christ and closer to one another. But the purpose of the vine is not simply to be drawn in, to revel in its connectedness and fellowship. The vine does not exist for its own benefit but for the benefit of others through its fruit. What continues to give vitality to the church is the centrifugal force that spins us out into the world with the fruit of the Spirit. As we share this fruit with others, they are enabled to taste and see that God is good. The Wesleys came to believe that a church turned in on itself (that is, only centripetal) will surely die, for it has lost its reason for being. But a church spun out in loving service into the world (that is, also centrifugal) rediscovers itself day by day. “Offering Christ,” to use Wesley’s own terminology for the work of mission, involves both word and deed, both proclamation and action; it connects the gospel to the world. Jesus’ mission was characterized by healing those who were sick, liberating those who were oppressed, empowering those who stood on the margins of life, and caring for the poor. In all of these actions he incarnated shalom, God’s vision of peace, justice, and well-being for all, and his disciples, the Wesleys taught, are called to do nothing less.

In this dynamic conception of a mission-church, the Wesleyan genius was to hold mission and evangelism together without pitting personal salvation against social justice. Mission for the Wesleys meant partnering with God in the realization of shalom in the world. Such a task is necessarily rooted in Christ, for we cannot speak of God’s reign apart from Christ or of Jesus without God’s reign. The way in which the Wesleys envisaged this essential connection between evangelism and mission is, perhaps, one of their greatest contributions to the life of the church today. In her attempt to present an authentic Wesleyan perspective on this relationship, Dana Robert has made recourse to St. Paul’s image of the church as a body. In this paradigm, an organic relationship exists between these two crucial practices of the church; while evangelism is the heart, mission is the body itself. The body moves in different contexts—interacting, engaging, constantly at work. But the heart sends the life-giving blood throughout the whole. Without the heart—without Jesus at the center—there is no vitality, no abundant life. But the body lives to continue the mission of Jesus in the world, namely, to announce and demonstrate the reign

---

13 See Dana L. Robert, Evangelism as the Heart of Mission, Mission Evangelism Series, no. 1 (New York: General Board of Global Ministries, The United Methodist Church, 1997).
of God. The heart and the body, evangelism and mission, Christ and culture, are interdependent and interconnected, and this is the essence of the Wesleyan synthesis—the dynamism of the mission-church paradigm.

In his very last sermon, “On Faith,” written in January 1791, John Wesley asked the all-important question about the goal of the Christian life: “How will [the faithful] advance in holiness, in the whole image of God wherein they were created!” He responded with reference to the dual foci of the Christian life and afforded a different language to contemplate the interface of evangelical piety and mission: “In the love of God and man, gratitude to their Creator, and benevolence to all their fellow-creatures.”

Benevolence, here, is Wesley’s term for mission. But in his sermon “On Family Religion,” he demonstrated how the family of God must build this mission upon the foundation of gratitude—the two being distinct but not separate. “And if any man truly love God he cannot but love his brother also,” Wesley maintains. “Gratitude to our Creator will surely produce benevolence to our fellow-creatures. If we love him, we cannot but love one another, as Christ loved us. We feel our souls enlarged in love toward every child of man.”

The Wesleys believed that God calls the community of faith to live for others. The primary method of mission in the Wesleyan tradition is for those within the family of God to become God’s partners in the redemption of the whole world. As I have written elsewhere:

> The primary question for the Methodist is not, am I saved? The ultimate question is, for what purpose am I saved? For the Wesleys, the answer was clear. My neighbor is the goal of my redemption, just as the life, death and resurrection of Christ are oriented toward the salvation of all humanity.

“Benevolence,” for the Wesleys, consisted of all efforts to realize God’s shalom in the life of the world. This mission, this goodwill toward our fellow-creatures, this

---

14 Works 4:196, emphasis added.
16 Albert C. Outler, ed., Works, 3:336, emphasis added. Cf. Wesley’s discussion of Paul the apostle’s conception of “neighbor love” in his exposition of 1 Corinthians 13:1-3, in which he observes: “such a love of our neighbour as can only spring from the love of God. And whence does this love of God flow? Only from that faith which is of the operation of God; which whoever has, has a direct evidence that ‘God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself’” (Works 3:295).
ministry of reconciliation, this benevolence, manifests in particular ways in the Wesleyan tradition, but none more distinctive than outreach to the marginalized and resistance to injustice, both actions expressed through works of mercy that bear witness to God’s rule over life.18 “The first Methodists, who intended to revive the life of the original Christian church,” as Tore Meistad demonstrated, “made a just distribution of economic, educational, and medical resources their top priority. This is evident in John Wesley’s sermons as well as in Charles’s hymns.”19

The Mission-Church Paradigm Reflected in Charles Wesley’s Hymns

Methodism was born in song, and the followers of the Wesleys learned their theology—that is to say, they discovered their missional vocation—by singing it.20 Mission-church images pervade the hymn corpus of Charles Wesley. Even the most famous of all the hymns, “O For a Thousand Tongues to Sing,” is nothing other than a mission manifesto, calling all believers “to spread through all the earth abroad / the honors of thy name.”21 Another favorite hymn reminds all singers of their responsibility before God:

A charge to keep I have,
A God to glorify,
A never-dying soul to save,
And fit it for the sky;
To serve the present age,
My calling to fulfil;
O may it all my powers engage
To do my Master’s will.22

20 See Works, 7:1. Not enough research has been devoted to the topic of how Christian hymnody shapes, or misshapes, mission theology. Certainly, there have been periods in the history of the church in which “mission hymns” have encouraged a triumphalist model of Christian mission. How choral traditions, from “praise songs” to “classic hymns,” form the attitudes of believers today with regard to mission remains a major area of concern. It is a part of my argument that the Wesley hymns helped to form a missional vision among the early Methodist people and inculcated healthy practices that balanced evangelism and mission, physical and spiritual concern, warmhearted faith and compassionate engagement for justice in the world.
22 Works, 7:465.
These words communicate an extremely important principle: God has chosen the faithful for service, not privilege, and the primary vocation of Jesus’ disciples is “to serve the present age” by bearing the gospel in word and deed to everyone, everywhere. Jesus’ disciples are called to use all their gifts, all their powers, to declare the amazing love of God to all.

In one of the great Trinitarian hymns included in John and Charles Wesley’s *Hymns on the Lord’s Supper*, the singer beseeches God:

> Claim me for Thy service, claim
> All I have and all I am.

> Take my soul and body’s powers,
> Take my memory, mind, and will,
> All my goods, and all my hours,
> All I know, and all I feel,
> All I think, and speak, and do;
> Take my heart—but make it new.\(^{23}\)

The disciple of Christ asks the Three-One God to claim every aspect of his or her life in an oblation that can only be described as covenantal. In typical Wesleyan fashion, a series of “alls” characterizes the plea: all I have; all I am; all my goods; all my hours; all I know, feel, think, speak, and do. The all-encompassing sacrifice of self—the offer of one’s whole being in service to God—rests secure, as Charles makes abundantly clear throughout, on the foundation of a heart transformed by God’s prevenient action. One can hear echoes of the baptismal covenant, perhaps, in Charles’s use of language. The sacrament of baptism, of course, is that place where discipleship begins, that event in which God claims each person as God’s own. It also signals the commitment of the individual and the community to God’s mission. Baptism establishes the mission-church, and the sacrament of Holy Communion sustains it. The ambiance of many Wesley hymns elicits a profoundly missiological vision of Christian community and engagement with the dominion of God in the world. In hymns such as these, Charles Wesley cultivated a profound vision of servant vocation modeled after that of Jesus—a missional conception of Christian discipleship summarized tersely in the simple phrase: “Claim me for Thy service.”

Charles Wesley goes to great lengths to specify the character of this Christian

service. In the practice of mission, the servant simply offers to others what he or she has freely received from God. “This only thing do I require,” sings Christ’s co-missioned disciple, “Freely what I receive to give, /The servant of thy church to live.” Servants, in other words, engage in an evangelistic mission in life—offering God’s grace to all in word and deed. The unique feature of Wesley’s vision, however, is the way in which he connects the sharing of grace with the restoration of the mind of Christ in the believer. In a composite hymn, opening with a lyrical paraphrase of “Jesus and the woman at the well” (John 4:10-15), Wesley conjoins the “mind” of Philippians 2 with the “action” of James 1, yet another important conjunction in his missional vision:

Thy mind throughout my life be shown,
   While listening to the wretch's cry,
The widow's and the orphan's groan,
   On mercy's wings I swiftly fly
The poor and helpless to relieve,
   My life, my all for them to give.

To have the mind of Christ, in other words, is to care for the poor.

Happy soul, whose active love
   emulates the Blessed above,
in thy every action seen,
   sparkling from the soul within:
Thou to every sufferer nigh,
   hearest, not in vain, the cry
of widow in distress,
   of the poor, the shelterless:
Raiment thou to all that need,
   to the hungry dealest bread,
to the sick givest relief,
   soothest hapless prisoner’s grief:

24 The limited space of this essay does not permit elaboration of these particular areas of service. Suffice it to say that texts such as Luke 4:16-19 and Matthew 25:31-46 establish something of a template for mission service in the world. In many of Charles Wesley’s lyrical eulogies for Methodism women, these images figure prominently as he celebrates the legacy of their mission in God’s world. See in particular, Thomas Jackson, ed., The Journal of the Rev. Charles Wesley, M.A., 2 vols. (London: John Mason, 1849), 2:323–98.
26 Works, 7:522.
Love, which willest all should live,
Love, which all to all would give,
Love, that over all prevails,
Love, that never, never fails.
Love immense, and unconfined,
Love to all of humankind.27

Notice in particular Wesley’s language of “active love.” A disciple with a living faith is the one whose whole heart has been renewed, who longs to radiate the whole image of God in his or her life and therefore hears the cry of the poor and wills, with God, that all should truly live! The Wesleyan vision of mission, thus understood, is a life, not just an act, which unites piety and mercy, worship and compassion, prayer and justice. It involves a humble walk with the Lord that is lived out daily in kindness and justice. Healing those who were sick, liberating those who were oppressed, empowering those who stood on the margins of life, and caring for the poor, it must always be remembered, characterized Jesus’ mission and models that mission to which all are called in his name.

S T Kimbrough Jr. articulates the essence of this missional vision succinctly: “To be emptied of everything but love is what it means to serve a God who in Christ was emptied of all but love.”28 Those who are truly servants of Christ in the world, and those communities that rediscover what it means to be a mission-church, empty themselves, like Jesus, and find their greatest reward in the realization of God’s dream of shalom for all. Certainly, the fundamental vision of Christian mission is being sent to continue and participate in that movement of God toward humanity that began with the mission or sending of Christ and the Holy Spirit. The Wesleys and their followers realized that this is a mission of global proportions.

This Wesleyan vision of a “mission-church paradigm”—of active participation in the missio Dei—offers much to a church needing to rediscover the central place of evangelism and mission as constitutive practices of the whole people of God. While evangelism includes all of those activities that draw others in, mission reaches out to all, and particularly to those dear to God’s heart who are most vulnerable and in need. In imitation of Christ, a mission-church woos others into the loving embrace of God and then helps them to see that their mission in life, in partnership

with Christ, is to be the signposts of God’s reign in this world. In his hymn, “For a preacher of the gospel,” Charles Wesley reminds us of this transforming call of God upon our lives:

I would the precious time redeem
And longer live for this alone,
To spend and to be spent for them
Who have not yet my Saviour known:
Fully on these my mission prove,
And only breathe to breathe thy love.29

Missio Dei and Shalom: Implications for a Faithful Practice of Mission-Church Today

While never using the language more typical of contemporary discourse—namely, that of missio Dei and shalom—the Wesleys’ vision of authentic Christianity most certainly revolves around these themes. They preached and sang about a community of authentic faith that announced and demonstrated the reign of God in word and deed. They had clarity about the goal of shalom toward which the Spirit sought to orient the mission and ministry of church. A number of implications flow from this Wesleyan vision for a faithful practice of mission-church today: the foundation of reconciliation; the centrality of the heart; the performance of righteousness, joy, and peace; and the vocation of waging justice and compassion.30 Perhaps on the deepest level, these implications take the form of questions rather than declarations.

Reconciliation: The Foundation of the Peaceable Reign of Christ (2 Corinthians 5:19)

Everything for the Wesleys begins with God’s unfathomable gift of reconciliation. Paul the apostle writes to the embattled church in Corinth: “God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them; and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation” (2 Cor. 5:19 KJV). In summary statements such as this one, Paul captures God’s total mission to which, he believes, the entirety of the scriptural witness bears testimony. Friendship with God characterizes this vision of life. Those drawn into this realm love both God and neighbor.

29 Works, 7:597.
Christ makes this kind of existence possible by breaking down all the barriers that divide people and disrupt God’s intended harmony in the created order. Reconciliation itself is both the foundation and the sign of God’s peaceable reign and the nearness of God’s rule. While the reconciliation of the believer in Christ to God is an accomplished fact, the reconciliation of the cosmos is a continuing process into which the community of faith is invited as the representative of God’s alternative vision in the world. God’s people are called to stand in the juncture, as it were, between the old world that is passing away and the new world—the peaceable reign—that is being birthed in Christ, despite all appearances. What does reconciliation mean in this time of deep polarization and antipathy toward the “other”?

The Centrality of the Heart (Luke 17:21)

Charles Wesley never wavered from his conviction about the centrality of the human heart. In his *Explanatory Notes upon the New Testament*, brother John made the point abundantly clear: “For behold the kingdom of God is within or among you—look not for it in distant times or remote places: it is now in the midst of you: it is come: it is present in the soul of every believer: it is a spiritual kingdom, an internal principle. Wherever it exists, it exists in the heart.” Participation in the missio Dei necessarily entails the transformation of our innermost feeling and thinking—a change of heart. If any are to participate in God’s rule, they must first turn their hearts to God. Before turning their attention outward, they must first attend to their deepest interior need. Repentance, therefore, stands perennially at the doorway of God’s dominion.

I will, through grace I will;
I do return to thee:
Take, empty it,
O Lord, and fill
My heart with purity:
For power I feebly pray;
Thy kingdom now restore,
Today, while it is called today,
And I shall sin no more.32

What sins cling to us tenaciously? How have we failed to be an obedient church?

31 Emphasis original; cf. *Hymns and Sacred Poems* (1739), 174; *Hymns and Sacred Poems* (London: Strahan, 1740), 65, 141.
Righteousness, Joy, and Peace (Romans 14:17)

To describe the fruit of this transformation in the direction of God’s rule, Wesley invariably alludes to Romans 14:17—the kingdom of God is righteousness, and peace, and joy. In Christ’s reign, peace displaces discord and anxiety, joy supplants sorrow and discouragement, and righteousness dislodges depravity and sin. The contrasts between the kingdoms of this world and the peaceable reign of Christ could not be more stark in Charles’s poetry. For those who conform their lives to this world, “joy is all sadness,” “mirth is all vain,” “laughter is madness,” and “pleasure is pain.” But those who have the mind of Christ experience full and abundant life:

All fulness of peace,
All fulness of joy,
And spiritual bliss
That never shall cloy,
To us it is given
In Jesus to know
A kingdom of heaven,
An heaven below.33

While each of these constitutive elements of the peaceable reign relate directly to the individual at a deeply personal level, they also have a critical social dimension. Charles perceives a peculiar trajectory related to Christ’s peaceable reign. God’s dominion begins in the human heart most certainly, but extends into the church, and then expands yet further to the poor and the persecuted. In what ways do we perform or display righteousness, joy, and peace in our world today? Does “the world” perceive these dynamic virtues in us? How might we embody these more faithfully?

Waging Justice and Compassion (Isaiah 11:6-9)

In his peaceable reign, Christ inextricably binds righteousness, joy, and peace together with justice and compassion. Faithful disciples of Jesus must translate the personal gifts of righteousness, joy, and peace, therefore, into concrete acts of justice and compassion in the world. The early Methodists attended to those who were distressed, afflicted, and oppressed. The Wesleyan missional vision admonishes all to intercede, in not only prayer but also action, on behalf of humanity with regard to the atrocities associated with a fallen world.

33 Hymns for those that seek, and those that have Redemption in the Blood of Jesus Christ (London: Strahan, 1747), 32.
Charles Wesley’s brilliant lyrical paraphrase of Isaiah 11:6-7 provides a powerful illustration of the theme:

But if thou pronounce the word
    That forms our souls again,
Love and harmony restored
    Throughout the earth shall reign;
When thy wondrous love they feel,
The human savages are tame,
Ravenous wolves, and leopards dwell
    And stable with the lamb.35

He depicts the compassionate character of those whose lives have been conformed to the image of Christ through their ministry alongside the marginalized. What are the most significant arenas of injustice in our world today? How do we appropriately engage in the life and death decisions that confront so many around our globe? How do we prioritize our acts of compassion and justice in a world so torn by hatred and strife?

The Wesleys articulate an inclusive vision of Christ’s peaceable reign—the goal of God’s mission in our world. In a lyrical paraphrase of the parable of the great banquet in Luke 14:15-24, Charles sounds a note of eschatological urgency with regard to the ultimate victory of God’s inclusive love. God invites all to the table. God offers grace to every soul. God excludes none from the gracious offer of life in the reign of shalom to come. With the Wesleys we pray ultimately, with all creation, for the fullest possible realization of the peaceable reign of Christ in and for all as we participate in the missio Dei:

Come then to thy servants again,
    Who long thy appearing to know,

34 Hymns of Intercession for All Mankind (Bristol: Farley, 1758), 4.
35 Short Hymns on the Scriptures, 1:316.
Thy quiet and peaceable reign
   In mercy establish below:
Appeas’d by the charms of thy grace
   We all shall in amity join,
And kindly each other embrace,
   And love with a passion like thine.\textsuperscript{36}

\textsuperscript{36} Hymns for the Nativity of Our Lord (London: [Strahan,], 1745), 24.