How might the hymnody Methodists use shape the social conscience of the church today to 'serve the present age?'[1]

Rev Miriam Moul (Superintendent Minister, Oxford Circuit)
Oxford Institute of Methodist Theological Studies 2024

"These are our neighbours and our friends,
the ones who run in fear from war,
who dread abuse by power or state,
or seek the means to be less poor;
these are the ones we have denied,
as in each one the Christ has cried."[2]

Throughout the generations, the Methodist people have sung their theology. In the preface to the current authorised collection of British Methodism, *Singing the Faith*, it is noted "our history and experience bear witness to the power of music in worship. It speaks to the heart, mind, soul and will, allowing us to respond to God's grace and the glory of God's creating and redeeming love in Jesus Christ. Singing hymns in worship assists us in meeting with the living God and helps us to grow in faith, discipleship and fellowship."[3]

This paper will seek to begin a conversation on the contrasts between the hymns of social justice that the Methodist people, and particularly leaders of worship, choose to sing and those that are often left unsung. The authorised collection *Singing the Faith* will be examined along with hymnody from other sources. The question of what is seemingly 'acceptable' to sing and what is 'unacceptable' due to content will be explored with reference to specific examples. The first section will examine a snapshot of Charles Wesley's contextual hymns along with the early Methodists commitment to social justice. The second will explore what

[1] C. Wesley, 'A Charge to keep I have,' in Trustees for Methodist Church Purposes, *Singing the Faith,* (London: Hymns Ancient & Modern, 2011), number 658.
[2] Singing the Faith 716, There are no strangers to God's love, Andrew Pratt (b.1948).
[3] B.Bircumshaw and P. Brophy, Preface, in Trustees for Methodist Church Purposes, *Singing the Faith,* (London: Hymns Ancient & Modern, 2011) p.vii.

is seen to be acceptable or unacceptable to sing in worship today, drawing on contextual evidence and reflecting on hymns that are sung or not sung in *Singing the Faith.* This section will also explore some of the issues that congregations are seemingly less comfortable singing about, offering examples of hymns that might be used to expand the repertoire of congregations today. The final section will address the question of whether the songs congregations sing might more directly confront or lament the social justice issues of 21st century life, and if so, how might leaders of worship feel emboldened to choose a more diverse and 'gritty' diet of hymns for their congregations?

1. Charles Wesley, hymnody and social justice

Charles Wesley's prolific writing of verse is the stuff of legend within Methodism. Frank Baker notes that 'during one phenomenal five-year period (1762-66) he wrote no fewer than 6248 scriptural hymns – an average of 1250 per year.'[4] This is especially remarkable given that hymn-singing was forbidden in the Church of England until thirty-three years after his death. "Wesley created a liturgical art form for which his own church had no place in its worship during his lifetime."[5] It is clear that "the leaders of the Methodist movement recognised the potency of congregational singing as a legitimate medium of theology."[6]

Charles Wesley's writing gave expression to the life of the early Methodist movement and continues to do so for the Methodist people today. There are wonderful stories of Charles Wesley's dedication to writing and the prolific nature of it. Commentators note that on several occasions, Charles surprised his friends by riding his horse directly to their front

[4] F. Baker, *Charles Wesley's Verse: An Introduction,* (London: Epworth Pressm 1988), p.9.
[5] S.T Kimbrough Jr, 'Hymnody of Charles Wesley' in in C Yrigoyen Jr (ed.), *T&T Clark Companion to Methodism,* (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2014), p.41.
[6] P.W Chilcote, *Evangelism in the Methodist Tradition,* in C Yrigoyen Jr (ed.), *T&T Clark Companion to Methodism,* (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2014), pp.225-226).

doors, bursting through and shouting "Pen and ink! Pen and ink!", he would then sit and rapidly write down the hymn he had been composing on the journey.[7] Charles' primary mode of expression was through poetic verse and almost everything that he had to say was expressed through this medium. Berger notes "He wrote love poetry, commented on political issues and events of the day, from an earthquake in Lisbon to the loss of the thirteen North American colonies."[8] Despite the prolific hymn-writing of Charles Wesley, it is important to note that he did not necessarily intend all the poems he wrote in hymnic style to be sung. An example of this is Wesley's *Hymns Occasioned by the Earthquake (1750).* Westerfield-Tucker notes 'Wesley's intention in writing the hymns and the sermon "on the occasion" was to offer a theological and pastoral reflection on a current crisis."[9] Some commentators suggest that Charles Wesley did not intend these hymns to be sung in the Methodist societies, noting that this is clear from Part 2 of the poem on Lisbon.[10] Yet the appearance of a number from that collection in edited form in the 1780 *Collection of Hymns for the Use of the People Called Methodists,* might suggest otherwise.[11] Whether these hymns were to be sung or not, Charles wrote within his context, a time of crisis, in hymnic form with awareness, sensitivity and theological understanding. How congregations would have received these writings is an interesting matter to ponder. Would the early Methodists have been more willing to sing of devastation and despair than today's predominantly middle-class Methodist congregations and communities? Are today's Methodists content to sing of the poor, abused and hurting, or of the crises of the world, as if they are outside of, rather than within? It could be argued that

[7] J.R Tyson, *Assist me to proclaim: the life and hymns of Charles Wesley,* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B Eerdmans, 2007), p.255.
[8] T. Berger, *Theology in Hymns? A Study of the relationship of Doxology and Theology according to A Collection of Hymns for the Use of the People Called Methodists (1780),* (Nashville: Abingdon Press 1995), pp.66-7.
[9] K.B Westerfield-Tucker, "On the Occasion": Charles Wesley's hymns on the London earthquakes of 1750, Methodist History 42:4 (July 2004), https://archives.gcah.org/items/f8e26fb6-85e4-4b2e-8eb3-05a14ef20b61 last accessed 20/7/24, p.1.
[10] S.T Kimbrough Jr, 'Hymnody of Charles Wesley' in in C Yrigoyen Jr (ed.), *T&T Clark Companion to Methodism,* (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2014), p.41.
[11] Westerfield-Tucker, "On the Occasion", p.25.

Charles Wesley was prepared to face up to difficult matters and encouraged the Methodist people to face them. Two examples from his '*Hymns occasioned by the earthquake'* indicate this willingness:

> "Hither, ye worms, come up,
> who from his judgements fly
> and meet him on the mountain top
> And on his love rely;
> Safe in the sacred Rock
> Look down on all beneath,
> And at destruction smile and mock,
> the pointless darts of death."[12]

Also:

> "Amidst impending plagues and woes
> Extol his saving power:
> Earth hath not yawned, on us to close,
> Or opened to devour."[13]

Concerns of Social Justice within the Methodist movement

From the earliest days of Methodism, the concerns of the poor, dispossessed and marginalised have been at the forefront of practice, writing and hymnody. The Oxford Methodists in the 1730s spent a good deal of their time, money and energy in a ministry of care for the poor, "educating children in the workhouses, taking food to the needy, and providing wool and other materials from which people could make clothes and other durable goods to wear and sell."[14] The Wesleys came to enjoy the company of those on the margins of British society, prisoners, orphans, the sick and impoverished, industrial workers, miners and colliers. Dean

[12] C. Wesley, *Hymns Occasioned by the Earthquake, March 8 1750, Pt II, https://divinity.duke.edu/sites/default/files/documents/49_Earthquake_Hymns_%281750%29_Pt_II_Mod.pdf, last accessed 20/7/24, Hymn 4 verse 9.*
[13] C. Wesley, *Hymns Occasioned by the Earthquake*, Hymn 8 verse 2.
[14] R.P Heitzenrater, *Wesley and the People Called Methodists, 2nd edition,* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2013), p.137.

notes “Charles Wesley’s hymns…emphasised that God was ‘the portion of the poor’, quoting Wesley:

> Which of the Christians now
> Would his possessions sell?
> The fact ye scarce allow,
> the truth incredible,
> that men of old so weak should prove,
> And as themselves their neighbour love.
>
> Of your redundant store
> Ye may a few relieve,
> But all to feed the poor
> Ye cannot, cannot give,
> Houses of lands for Christ forego,
> Or live as Jesus lived below.”[15]

Cracknell and White also note that Charles Wesley set the sentiments of care for the poor in verse in his hymns:

> “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.”[16]

It is evident that Charles Wesley wrote contextually about the issues of the time. He was not afraid to tackle complex matters of theology in his hymns or grittier subjects that modern sensibilities might shy away from. If Methodists today are truly to ‘Sing All’[17], should that not also include the social justice matters of today? Should Methodists seek to sing in solidarity with, rather than simply about the poor? Another question to ponder might be, how might Methodist congregations in the twenty-first century recapture Charles Wesley’s

[15] J. Dean (ed.) *A Heart Strangely Warmed: John and Charles Wesley and their writings,* (London: Canterbury Press, 2014), pp.231-232.
[16] K. Cracknell and S.J White, *An Introduction to World Methodism,* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), p.214.
[17] Bircumshaw and Brophy, Preface to Singing the Faith p.xi.

willingness to write and sing hymns that reflect the messiness and brokenness of the world today?

2. What do Methodist congregations sing on the theme of social justice today?

This section will use evidence from my own practice as a serving Methodist Presbyter and Superintendent, along with colloquial evidence and perceptions of what is acceptable or unacceptable to be sung as a part of worship. A number of hymns will be chosen for brief reflection in order to emphasise varying themes.

I currently serve as the Superintendent Minister of the Oxford Circuit and Minister of Wesley Memorial Methodist Church and Cowley Road Methodist Church. The two churches pride themselves on their liberal, inclusive and expansive theology and their heart for matters of social justice. The congregation at Wesley Memorial particularly loves to sing and are open to learning musically. The Oxford Circuit even has its own songbook brought together before the release of *Singing the Faith* to provide a collection of more modern, liberal and expansive hymns and songs.

Preaching and singing about social justice are commonplace at Wesley Memorial and the congregation regularly sings hymns from the Justice and Peace section of *Singing the Faith.* Favourites include *Longing for light, we wait in darkness, Heaven shall not wait, Beauty for brokenness, Show me how to stand for justice,* to name a few. These include important themes of social justice, for example:

Beauty for brokenness (Singing the Faith 693 - Graham Kendrick b.1950)

> "Shelter for fragile lives,
> cures for their ills,
> work for all people,
> trades for their skills;

lands for the dispossessed,
rights for the weak,
voices to plead the cause of those who can't speak.'[18]

Heaven Shall Not Wait (Singing the Faith 701 – John L. Bell and Graham Maule)

"Heaven shall not wait
for the rich to share their fortunes,
the proud to fall,
the elite to tend the least:
Jesus is Lord;
he has shown the master's privilege –
to kneel and wash servants' feet before they feast."[19]

Longing for light, we wait in darkness (Singing the Faith 706 – Bernadette Farrell b.1957)

"Longing for peace, our world is troubled
Longing for hope, many despair.
Your word alone has power to save us.
Make us your living voice."[20]

These are commonly sung and loved within the congregations I have served across the last nine years of travel in itinerant ministry, in Oxford and in east Kent. What is it about these hymns that makes them acceptable? Aspects of them are undoubtedly challenging to the relative privilege of the Methodist communities that I have served. In many ways, the examples above offer a broad brushstroke of social justice issues – poverty, conflict, employment, human rights, voices for the disenfranchised. It could be argued that these broad themes, while discomforting, if the words of the hymns are reflected on deeply, do not offer specific challenge beyond a general concern for social justice. I might also suggest that there is a danger of 'othering' those experiencing the circumstances sung about and assumptions that these issues are happening outside of the privileged congregational communities, when it

[18] Singing the Faith 693, 'Beauty for brokenness', Graham Kendrick, 1993.
[19] Singing the Faith, 701, 'Heaven shall not wait,' John L. Bell and Graham Maule, 1987.
[20] Singing the Faith, 706, 'Longing for light, we wait in darkness', Bernadette Farrell, 1993.

is clear that there is poverty, pain and abuse present within too. The hymns that are sung do not address in depth some of the specific aspects of social justice that today's congregations might not feel comfortable singing about – abuse, murder, rape, war crimes. I would suggest that it is for this very reason that the examples above have become popular hymns of social justice in British Methodism today. Singing about the general concern for social justice rather than specific more unpalatable themes is enough for many congregations. After choosing a hymn that reflected on some of the deeper issues of social justice, I was once told 'we don't want to sing about that unpleasant stuff in worship.' This is only one example but the question remains of how congregations might be encouraged to look beyond their comfort zone and in doing so be enriched by a deeper understanding and reflection.

If the above examples represent hymns of social justice which congregations are prepared to sing, then what of those contained within the authorised collection, *Singing the Faith,* that are less popular or even widely unknown*?* The Justice and Peace section of *Singing the Faith* contains thirty hymns and there are several other hymns that reflect these themes within the corpus. Within my own context for ministry, only four or five are regularly sung. There are others that I, personally, have never sung or even looked at until writing this paper.

I'd like to reflect on two specific examples of hymns within the Justice and Peace section that I have never heard sung and to offer a commentary on why that might be the case. The first is written by Delores Dufner OSB entitled *In labour all creation groans*[21] and the second written by Shirley Erena Murray entitled *God weeps.*[22]

[21] Singing the Faith, 704, 'In labour all creation groans, Delores Dufner OSB, 1993.
[22] Singing the Faith, 700, 'God weeps', Shirley Erena Murray, 1996.

In labour all creation groans *(Singing the Faith 704)*

1 "In labour all creation groans
till fear and hatred cease,
till human hearts have understood:
in Christ alone is peace.

2 In labour all creation groans
till unjust wages cease,
till poor are clothed and children fed
and Christ becomes their peace.

3 In labour all creation groans
till prejudice shall cease,
till every gender, race and creed
in Christ will live at peace.

4 In labour all creation groans
till violent crime shall cease,
till force gives way to gentleness
and Christ becomes our peace.

5 In labour all creation groans
till rape and murder cease,
till women walk by night unharmed
and Christ is this world's peace.

6 In labour all creation groans
till false divisions cease,
till differences are reconciled
in Christ who is our peace.

7 In labour all creation groans,
God's justice to increase.
When right in place of might prevails,
then in Christ will be our peace."[23]

This hymn by Delores Dufner, a Catholic nun of the Order of St Benedict and writer of sacred music, was written in 1993 and is one of a small number of her hymns that appear in *Singing the Faith.* Verses one to three and six and seven offer a similar vision and use of

[23] Singing the Faith, 704, 'In labour all creation groans, Delores Dufner OSB, 1993.

language around social justice to the hymns suggested as popular above. They reflect themes of injustice, poverty, prejudice concerning gender, race, and creed, along with false divisions. Verses four and five offer potentially more difficult and confronting themes for congregational singing – violent crime, force, rape, murder, gender-based abuse and stalking. The specificity of language in contrast to the broad brushstroke themes of other social justice hymns is striking. I am certain that most, if not all Methodists would strongly agree with the sentiments expressed in verses four and five of this hymn, however, is singing about those confronting themes, a step too far? In the relative comfort of churches, are congregations prepared to speak of those living in the aftermath of rape and murder, yet alone sing of it? Or does unease at the complexity of these themes become a barrier? If Methodists are truly to 'sing all', should this not mean facing up to the evils of society, where women fear to walk the streets alone at night for fear of attack, where violent crime and abuse are commonplace. My assertion is that the worship of the Church would be enriched, if congregations were prepared to not only speak of and against the evils of the world, but to sing against and lament their existence and prevalence too. One of many reasons why congregations and leaders of worship may avoid choosing hymns such as Delores Dufner's, may lie in the fear of triggering trauma for those who have experienced such evils in their own lives. I would argue that this is clearly an aspect that needs to be considered when choosing hymns. Yet it could also be argued that in singing and speaking of the experience of others, people who have experienced these things will feel seen, heard, represented and a sense of belonging in a community that does not shy away from the complex and devastating aspects of life in the world. I believe this hymn could be sung sensitively in an age-appropriate setting, thus enriching a church community in its understanding, thinking and grasp of the more challenging social justice issues of today.

God weeps (Singing the Faith 700 – Shirley Erena Murray b.1931)

1 "God weeps
at love withheld,
at strength misused,
at children's innocence abused,
and till we change the way we love,
God weeps.

2 God bleeds
at anger's fist
at trust betrayed,
at women battered and afraid,
and till we change the way we win,
God bleeds.

3 God cries
at hungry mouths,
at running sores,
at creatures dying without cause,
and till we change the way we care,
God cries.

4 God waits
for stones to melt,
for peace to seed,
for hearts to hold each other's need,
and till we understand the Christ,
God waits."[24]

Shirley Erena Murray is a Methodist hymnwriter from New Zealand known for the directness with which her hymns confront contemporary issues. This hymn was written in 1996 and its inclusion in the 2011 publication of *Singing the Faith* indicates that it was believed to have something to say to the Church. The image of God weeping, bleeding and crying at the behaviour and injustice of humankind is a powerful one. It could be argued that these images in themselves may be off-putting or uncomfortable for congregational singing. The themes

[24] Singing the Faith, 700, 'God weeps', Shirley Erena Murray, 1996.

then explored of abuse, “anger’s fist”, “battered and afraid women”, “hungry mouths” and “weeping sores” are stark and confront the reader and the singer with images of pain, distress and discomfort. Yet they are real and honest depictions of the life of the world. If congregations only sing of the joyful, wonderful, ‘mountain top moments’, how can the gospel be real and shared with those for whom life is full of messiness, hurt and brokenness? If the hymns congregations sing do not reflect the real pain and need for God in the world, then much is missing. If the hymns sung on social justice are simply nice tunes, expressing some hope that God might act, with a few seemingly empty platitudes thrown in, where is the true passion for social justice? Where is the true message that Christians are not just to sing but to act for social justice? It could be argued that leaders of worship might be bolder in their hymn choices on social justice to more truly reflect the concerns and crises of our present age.

These two hymns represent a number that appear within the Justice and Peace section of *Singing the Faith.* Other writers such as Ruth C. Duck[25], Fred Kaan[26], Martin Leckebusch[27], Douglas Galbraith[28], Andrew Pratt[29], Anna Briggs[30], Alan Gaunt[31], John Bell and Graham Maule[32] and Fred Pratt Green[33] are also represented. Themes within these hymns are broad and varied – broken families, peace, food poverty, sexual abuse, dementia and social care. It might be suggested that Bell and Maule’s *‘As if you were not there’* provides a helpful summing up for this section:

[25] Singing the Faith, 695, ‘Come, now, you blessed, eat at my table, Ruth C. Duck.
[26] Singing the Faith, 712, ‘Put peace into each other’s hands’, Fred Kaan, 1989.
[27] Singing the Faith, 703, ‘In an age of twisted values, Martin Leckenbusch, 1999.
[28] Singing the Faith, 714, ‘The God who sings, Douglas Galbraith.
[29] Singing the Faith, 716, ‘There are no strangers to God’s love’, Andrew Pratt.
[30] Singing the Faith, 718, ‘We lay our broken world,’ Anna Briggs.
[31] Singing the Faith, 719, ‘We pray for peace,’ Alan Gaunt, 1991.
[32] Singing the Faith, 701, ‘Heaven shall not wait,’ John L. Bell and Graham Maule, 1987.
[33] Singing the Faith, 711, ‘Pray for the Church, afflicted and oppressed’, Fred Pratt Green, 1982.

"As if you were not there,
famine and flood together
usher death, disease and terror;
stricken mothers wonder whether
God heeds prayer,
as if you were not there.

As if you were not there,
we televise the dying,
watch the helpless victims crying,
salve our consciences by sighing,
'Life's unfair!'
as if you were not there."[34]

I would assert that without a broader range of social justice themes in the hymnody that Methodists sing, there is the danger of doing as Bell and Maule describe, salving our consciences by sighing 'life's unfair!'

Hymns beyond Singing the Faith that might have a place in worship

There are many hymn writers beyond the corpus of *Singing the Faith* who reflect on themes of social justice in their hymn writing. These hymns reflect a plethora of themes within the overarching area of social justice including refugees, mental health, natural disasters (much like Charles Wesley), terror, torture, conflict, the affects of abuse, those disenfranchised or disregarded. These hymns have often been written in the context of world events. Here I will offer a few short examples which give a flavour of other collections of hymns on social justice.

Seeking God's presence in deprivation (Graham Adams)

"Where is God when single parents

[34] Singing the Faith, 724, 'As if you were not there', John L. Bell and Graham Maule, 1989.

meet eviction in the face?
Where is God when teens in trouble
are not given time and space?

Where is God when racist taunting
turns the fear in 'us' on 'them'?
Where is God if half-truth tabloids
make us hastily condemn?"[35]

In these two verses of Graham Adams thought-provoking hymn, there is much to commend for congregational singing. These verses face the reality of life today without sugar-coating issues in expansive language but sharing truth starkly and uncompromisingly. The question remains as to whether a congregation would willingly sing such a hymn. I would suggest that there may be some disquiet within congregations, particularly of singing about 'half-truth tabloids.'

For refugees (Anna Jarvis)

"We sit with bruised and broken souls
and watch our peace depart.
The grief of loss of innocence
has torn us all apart.
They came on boats to find a home
that wasn't filled with fear.
How many found a watery grave
for them, there's no peace here."[36]

Anna Jarvis' moving hymn 'for refugees' was written in 2015 after the body of a refugee child washed up on a beach in Greece. Would this be acceptable for a congregation to sing?

[35] G. Adams, 'Seeking God's presence in deprivation (34) in J. Berry, A. Pratt, J. Eldred and A. Sardeson (eds.), *Hymns of Hope and Healing: Words and music to refresh the church's ministry of healing*, (London: Stainer and Bell, 2017), Number 34.
[36] A. Jarvis, 'For refugees' in J. Berry, A. Pratt, J. Eldred and A. Sardeson (eds), *Hymns of Hope and Healing,* Number 35.

In brokenness we bring to you (Carolyn Sanderson)

> "And some are trapped in darkened minds;
> no room for light or hope or prayer.
> Yet down among the graves we see
> you drive out demons of despair."[37]

When we see love contorted and embattled (about abuse) (June Boyce-Tillman)

> "Protect us from a premature forgiveness,
> from preachers' words that reinforce the pain,
> from glib dogmatic institution statements
> that crush bright anger's liberating flame;
> so when in time the Kairos moment beckons
> we will find trust in humankind regained."[38]

Both of the above may present a challenge for congregations to sing and would need to be chosen for appropriate contexts where themes of mental health and abuse could be sensitively discussed and reflected upon.

In reflecting on what is seemingly acceptable or unacceptable to be sung in Methodist congregations, there are a number of different questions, perspectives and perhaps barriers too. Should congregational singing truly reflect the life of the world and the concern for social justice that is a part of the Methodist DNA? I believe that hymnody should reflect all aspects of human life; the joyful, the painful, the challenging, the broken and sinful nature of the world. I, like so many Methodists throughout the ages have learned my own theology through hymnody; from *'Tell me the stories of Jesus'*[39] and *'Shine, Jesus, Shine'*[40] as a child,

---

[37] C. Sanderson, 'In brokenness we bring you' (18) in J. Berry, A. Pratt, J. Eldred and A. Sardeson (eds.), *Hymns of Hope and Healing,* Number 18.
[38] J. Boyce-Tillman, 'When we see love contorted and embattled (about abuse), in J. Berry, A. Pratt, J. Eldred and A. Sardeson (eds.), *Hymns of Hope and Healing,* Number 69.
[39] William H. Parker, 'Tell me the stories of Jesus' (1885).
[40] Singing the Faith 59, 'Lord, the light of your love is shining,' 1989, Graham Kendrick.

to the glorious *'Thou God of truth and love'*[41] and *'O thou who camest from above'*[42] to *'O God, you search me and you know me'*[43] and *'Let us build a house.'*[44] If congregations and leaders of worship restrict what is sung about, or shy away from complex issues of social justice, then I believe our worship, theology, and practice will be the poorer for it.

3. What might be done to increase the diversity of what is sung?

Much of this paper has already sought to argue that a more diverse and 'gritty' diet of hymns of social justice for congregations would enrich the life, worship, witness and mission of the Church. There is a great deal of hymnody and poetic material that could be adapted to join the corpus of hymnody that is the weekly diet for Methodist congregations.

One of the challenges of using hymnody around social justice is the danger of 'othering', pitting those we are singing about against congregations. Congregations are, of course, diverse, and the experience being sung about may be that of people within the congregation itself. Pastoral sensitivity is essential in this aspect of worship. One way in which 'othering' might be avoided is in using material that has not been written about, but with, those experiencing poverty. In his project to produce liturgy with one hundred pastors, theologians, students, artists and activists from various Christian traditions, churches, and walks of life from about fifty countries, Claudio Carvalhaes produces some moving work. For example:

[41] Singing the Faith 620, 'Thou God of truth and love,' Charles Wesley.
[42] Singing the Faith 564, 'O thou who camest from above,' Charles Wesley.
[43] Singing the Faith 728, 'O God, you search me and you know me,' 1973, Bernadette Farrell.
[44] Singing the Faith 409, 'Let us build a house where love can dwell,' 1994, Marty Haugen.

Be Still

> *"Be still, the noise is frightening, confusing, disturbing.*
> *Hush, here I am – your God, you'll find me in the questions.*
>
> *The indifference of the pious breeds a deafening silence.*
> *Hush, here I am – your God, you'll find me in the noise.*
>
> *The evil one has set his foot upon me.*
> *Hush, here I am – your God, you'll find me in the pain.*
>
> *We cry out to you, the One who says:*
> *Hush, here I am, your God, you'll find me in the joy of my people."*[45]

Trenchtown Psalm

> "Praise God in the ghetto
> Sing songs of hope in the slums
> The mountains and seas
> are littered with trash
> still your love shines through
> pollutions contaminates farms and
> neighbourhoods
> Still your love shines through
> Help us, O God,
> to transform this
> Dirty and dangerous world into a
> Sanctuary of your glory."[46]

These offer two suggestions of ways in which hymns and poems of social justice might share the voice of those experiencing poverty and social justice issues rather than privileged writers seeking to speak with the voice of the marginalised. One might also ask whether issues around climate change and the environment might be sung of too in hymnody within the Church? There are aspects of this throughout the current collection of hymns, but as this

[45] C. Carvalhaes, *Liturgies from Below: Praying with People at the Ends of the World*, (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2020), p.160.
[46] C. Carvalhaes, *Liturgies from Below,* p.161.

becomes an ever more pressing issue, I wonder whether more hymns on climate change may appear.

The question of what might be done to increase the diversity of what is sung remains difficult to answer. Trends in hymn singing ebb and flow and with the possibility of a new authorised book of liturgy post-Methodist Worship Book[47] (1999) there may be opportunities to promote other hymnody. I would suggest that maybe a wider variety of hymnody might be included in Worship Leader, Local Preacher and Ministerial training. Perhaps a conversation could be encouraged at Local Preacher's meetings to encourage a broader use of social justice hymnody? Or a study day on social justice hymnody might take place within a Circuit or District? My suspicion is that if many leaders of worship were introduced to some of the less 'popular' social justice hymns then a greater diversity might result.

Conclusion

This paper has sought to begin a conversation and reflect on the use of hymnody on themes of social justice throughout British Methodism and more specifically within Methodist congregations today. I would suggest that I have raised more questions than I have answered (and beg your forgiveness). Within it I have sought to argue both that to sing a wider variety of hymns on social justice would enrich the Church's life of worship, witness, service and mission, and that a deeper engagement with themes of social justice rather than a broad brushstroke might also be beneficial. There are a great many hymnwriters and a great many sources to draw from already within the Methodist hymn book, *Singing the Faith,* as well as beyond. Perhaps what is needed is an emboldening of leaders of worship in facing criticism, rather than the traditional feedback of 'nice hymns', along with a greater sharing of

[47] Trustees for Methodist Church Purposes, *Methodist Worship Book,* (London: Methodist Publishing, 1999).

resources, and a commitment to dig deeper in our engagement with the 'gritty' nature of some social justice issues. Some might question whether Methodists still sing their theology and heart for social justice – I would assert that Methodists do, but there is a deepening and broadening that might benefit the church in multiple ways. Perhaps Martin Leckenbusch sums up well the earnest hope for a deepening understanding and will to act in the arena of social justice:

"Show me how to stand for justice:
how to work for what is right,
how to challenge false assumptions,
how to walk within the light.
May I learn to share more freely
in a world so full of greed,
showing your immense compassion
by the life I choose to lead."[48]

Bibliography

Baker, Frank, *Charles Wesley's Verse: An Introduction,* (London: Epworth Press, 1988).

Berger, Teresa, *Theology in Hymns? A Study of the relationship of Doxology and Theology according to A Collection of Hymns for the Use of the People Called Methodists (1780),* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1995).

Berry, Jan; Pratt, Andrew; Eldred, Janet and Sardeson Anne (eds.) *Hymns of Hope and Healing: Words and music to refresh the church's ministry of healing,* (London: Stainer and Bell, 2017).

Bircumshaw, Barbara and Brophy, Peter, Preface in *Singing the Faith,* (London: Hymns Ancient & Modern, 2011).

Carvalhaes, Claudio, *Liturgies from below:* Praying with People at the Ends of the World, (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2020).

Chilcote, Paul Wesley, 'Evangelism in the Methodist Tradition,' in Yrigoyen Jr, Charles (ed.), *T&T Clark Companion to Methodism,* (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2014), pp.221-239.

[48] Singing the Faith, 713, 'Show me how to stand for justice', Martin Leckenbusch, 1999.

Cracknell, Kenneth and White, Susan J, *An Introduction to World Methodism,* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

Dean, Jonathan (ed.), *A Heart Strangely Warmed: John and Charles Wesley and their writings,* (London: Canterbury Press, 2014).

Heitzenrater, Richard P, *Wesley and the People Called Methodists, 2nd edition,* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2013).

Kimbrough Jr, S.T, 'Hymnody of Charles Wesley', in Yrigoyen Jr, Charles (ed.), *T&T Clark Companion to Methodism,* (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2014), pp.36-60.

Trustees for Methodist Church Purposes, *Methodist Worship Book,* (London: Methodist Publishing, 1999).

Trustees for Methodist Church Purposes, *Singing the Faith,* (London: Hymns Ancient & Modern, 2011).

Tyson, John R, *Assist me to proclaim: the life and hymns of Charles Wesley,* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B Eerdmans, 2007).

Other sources

Westerfield-Tucker, Karen B, "On the Occasion": Charles Wesley's hymns on the London earthquakes of 1750, Methodist History 42:4 (July 2004), https://archives.gcah.org/items/f8e26fb6-85e4-4b2e-8eb3-05a14ef20b61 last accessed 20/07/2024.

Wesley, Charles, *Hymns Occasioned by the Earthquake, March 8 1750, Pt II, https://divinity.duke.edu/sites/default/files/documents/49_Earthquake_Hymns_%281750%29_Pt_II_Mod.pdf,* last accessed 20/7/2024.

Hymns

Adams, Graham, 'Seeking God's presence in deprivation,' (Hymns of Hope and Healing 34)

Bell, John L and Maule, Graham, 'As if you were not there,' 1989 (Singing the Faith 724).

Bell, John L and Maule, Graham, 'Heaven shall not wait,' 1987 (Singing the Faith 701).

Briggs, Anna, 'We lay our broken world,' (Singing the Faith 718).

Duck, Ruth C, 'Come, now, you blessed, eat at my table,' (Singing the Faith 695).

Dufner OSB, Delores, ‘In labour all creation groans,’ 1993 (Singing the Faith 704).

Farrell, Bernadette, ‘Longing for light, we wait in darkness,’ 1993 (Singing the Faith 706).

Farrell, Bernadetter, ‘O God, you search me and you know me,’ 1973 (Singing the Faith 728).

Galbraith, Douglas, ‘The God who sings,’ (Singing the Faith 714).

Gaunt, Alan, ‘We pray for peace,’ 1991 (Singing the Faith 719).

Green, Fred Pratt, ‘Pray for the Church, afflicted and oppressed,’ 1982 (Singing the Faith 711).

Haugen, Marty, ‘Let us build a house where love can dwell,’ 1994 (Singing the Faith 409).

Jarvis, Anna, ‘For refugees,’ (Hymns of Hope and Healing 35).

Kaan, Fred, ‘Put peace into each other’s hands,’ 1989 (Singing the Faith 712).

Kendrick, Graham, ‘Beauty for brokenness,’ 1993 (Singing the Faith 693).

Kendrick, Graham, ‘Lord, the light of your love is shining,’ 1989 (Singing the Faith 59)

Leckenbusch, Martin, ‘In an age of twisted values,’ 1999 (Singing the Faith 703).

Murray, Shirley Erena, ‘God weeps,’ 1996, (Singing the Faith 700).

Parker, William H, ‘Tell me the stories of Jesus’ (1885).

Pratt, Andrew, ‘There are no strangers to God’s love,’ (Singing the Faith 716).

Sanderson, Carolyn, *‘In brokenness we bring to you,’* (Hymns of Hope and Healing 18).

Tillman – Boyce, June, *‘When we see love contorted and embattled,’* (Hymns of Hope and Healing 69).

Wesley, Charles, ‘A charge to keep I have,’ (Singing the Faith 658).

Wesley, Charles, ‘O thou who camest from above,’ (Singing the Faith 564).

Wesley, Charles, ‘Thou God of truth and love,’ (Singing the Faith 620).