

Douglas, J. D., Comfort, P. W., & Mitchell, D. (1997, c1992). *Who's Who in Christian History*.

## **WESLEY, CHARLES** (1707–1788)

*Celebrated hymn writer; cofounder of Methodism*

Charles Wesley was the younger brother of the famous John Wesley. He was as committed to Christian work as John was, but of a gentler spirit. Historically, he was absolutely indispensable to the Methodist movement. His contribution was no less than his illustrious brother's.

Charles Wesley was converted in May 1738, three days before John. Both men went to Oxford and were instrumental in keeping the Holy Club alive. Charles Wesley's ministry began at Bristol in 1739, and like his brother he suffered a good deal of persecution in the early days. He lived into his eighties, long enough to see an acceptance of his preaching and principles.

It is by his hymns that Charles Wesley is known worldwide. The number of hymns he wrote is approximately eight thousand. It could be said that he wrote three hymns a week for fifty–seven years.

The first hymnal of the Evangelical revival was edited by Wesley. It was called *Collection of Psalms and Hymns* (1738). A year later a joint effort by Charles and John was published called *Hymns and Sacred Poems*. Charles's last hymn book was called *A Pocket Hymn Book* (1786).

Charles's purposes in writing hymns were to provide Christian teaching and material for public praise and to objectify his rich personal faith. He equaled the Calvinist hymn writer Isaac Watts in his use of the Scriptures and excelled him in his faculty for juxtaposing scriptural references and allusions. For example, "Love Divine" quotes from [2 Corinthians 3](#), [Psalm 106](#), and [Malachi 3](#), among other sources. Not only was Scripture his guide; classical and contemporary literature provide some of his sources. "Love Divine" finishes with a quotation from Joseph Addison and was written with a tune by Purcell in mind. Wesley was filled with the best of literature in the English, Latin, and Greek languages. He associated this literature with Scripture and used it to illuminate Scripture, producing the amazing lyrics by which his people were taught.

As Charles Wesley composed his hymns, Germany was ready for his music as it was ready for Handel's music. The individualism of Wesley's religious approach and that of Handel's music flow from a common cultural source. The music that came naturally to the composer (who furnished the tunes for the early evangelical hymn books) was the music of the opera house and the concert room—solo and chorus, melody and bass, aria and continuo.

Wesley wrote a seasonal hymn for each of the great Christian seasons. Many of these have survived into contemporary use, such as "Lo, He Comes" for Advent, "Hark the Herald Angels Sing" for Christmas, "Christ the Lord is Risen Today" for Easter, and "Hail the Day That Sees Him Rise" for Ascension.

Hymn books from the time of Isaac Watts onward were written also for reading as well as for congregational singing. This is why most Christians carried with them a "pocket hymnal"; they were used daily for devotions—either read or sung.

Wesley raised two musical sons who both contributed greatly to the music of the church. They were Charles II and Samuel. Both of the sons followed in the footsteps of their father, and Samuel was the most prolific in composition, fashioning much of his work after the great J. S. Bach. When Charles Wesley died, he left the Methodist church a wealth of hymns and songs that have endured through these ages as timeless treasures.

See: Charles Wesley. In *Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia*.  
[Charles Wesley](#)