



# SOUTHWESTERN JOURNAL OF THEOLOGY

## MISSIOLOGY

“FOR THOSE WHO SPURN THE  
SPRINKLED BLOOD!” PRAYING WITH  
CHARLES WESLEY FOR MUSLIMS

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## ***“For Those who Spurn the Sprinkled Blood!” Praying with Charles Wesley for Muslims<sup>1</sup>***

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While contemporary occidental perceptions of Islam are derived from a variety of media, earlier eras were far more limited as to the number of sources about this religion. In the eighteenth-century, for example, European print culture was the major—and for many, the sole—medium that shaped Western thinking about Muslims and their beliefs. And in the British Isles, one book in particular stands out as key to understanding the way Islam was viewed by the British of this era, namely, *The True Nature of Imposture Fully Display'd in the Life of Mahomet* (1697) by Humphrey Prideaux (1648–1724), Dean of Norwich for the last twenty-two years of his life. Viewed as a clear and learned author,<sup>2</sup> Prideaux's work went through seven editions in twenty years and became a standard interpretation during the early Enlightenment of Muhammad (c. 570–632) and the religion he founded.<sup>3</sup>

Prideaux had intended that this work be part of a much larger volume tracing the decline of Eastern Christendom in the three centuries following the rise of Islam and the way in which bitter theological divisions had rent the churches of the East and had consequently contributed to their ruin at the hands of Muslims.<sup>4</sup> In the 1690s, though, there appeared a number of Deist works rooted in a rationalistic temper of mind that was critical of all religious arguments based on divine revelation. Prideaux reckoned that the deleterious impact of these works would not have been as great

<sup>1</sup>This paper was initially given as an address at “A Thousand Tongues to Sing’: A Symposium Celebrating the Theology and Hymns of Charles Wesley,” held at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville, Kentucky, on 10–11 March 2008.

<sup>2</sup>James Darling, *Cyclopaedia Bibliographica* (London: James Darling, 1854), 2450.

<sup>3</sup>Philip Almond, “Western Images of Islam, 1700–1900,” *Australian Journal of Politics and History* 49 (2003): 412–13.

<sup>4</sup>Humphrey Prideaux, *The True Nature of Imposture Fully Display'd in the Life of Mahomet*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (London: William Rogers, 1697), v–xi.

if it had not been attended by a “giddy Humour” that especially gripped younger church leaders in England of “following whatsoever hath gotten into fashion and vogue.”<sup>5</sup> Lest he give these opponents of Christianity ammunition for their attacks, Prideaux decided to make his biography of Muhammad part of an overall response to Deism, in which he would show, by way of Muhammad’s beliefs and life, the marks of a fraudulent religion and why such marks were not a part of the Christian Faith.<sup>6</sup>

Prideaux’s work would be remembered and prized in the following century not so much for his refutation of the Deists as for his polemical portrayal of Muhammad as an “impostor,” though it was recognized that there were definite flaws in his biographical account.<sup>7</sup> One eighteenth-century reader who was especially critical of his study of the prophetic founder of Islam was his French contemporary, Henri Comte de Boulainvilliers (1658–1722), whose own life of Muhammad was published posthumously in 1730. Boulainvilliers was prepared to admit that Prideaux was “a very judicious historian,” but he took issue with his presentation of Muhammad as “an impostor, as ignorant as contemptible.”<sup>8</sup> Rather, Boulainvilliers believed that the origins of Islam lay in noble, though misguided, motives: “the intellectual love of an invisible object,” namely God, and “a zeal to procure him some sort of new adoration, an ardour to combat tenets . . . thought erroneous, and above all, an imagination heated with rapid ideas.”<sup>9</sup> Although such a sympathetic portrayal would become more common in the West in the latter half of the nineteenth century,<sup>10</sup> in the eighteenth century it was, as Boulainvilliers’ anonymous English translator admitted, “new and surprizing [*sic*], . . . and even contrary to all that we have hitherto been taught concerning” Muhammad.<sup>11</sup>

Certainly John Wesley (1703–1791) found it so when he read the work in November of 1767. The novelty of Boulainvilliers’ life of the prophet of Islam led Wesley to suspect that he was reading, not history, but a “romance,” that is, sheer fiction at best. Comparison with Prideaux’s standard life only confirmed the Methodist preacher in his opinion.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., ii.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., xvi–xix. The subtitle of this work, which announces an appendix, is noteworthy in this regard: *With A Discourse Annexed, for the Vindicating of Christianity from this Charge; Offered to the Consideration of the Deists of the Present Age.*

<sup>7</sup>Almond, “Western Images of Islam, 1700–1900,” 413.

<sup>8</sup>Henri Boulainvilliers, *The Life of Mahomet* (London: W. Hinchliffe, 1731), 169. The French original of this book had been published the preceding year. For a brief note on Boulainvilliers, see “Boulainvilliers, Henri,” *The Encyclopædia Britannica*, 11<sup>th</sup> ed. (New York: Encyclopædia Britannica, Inc., 1910), 4:318.

<sup>9</sup>Boulainvilliers, *Life of Mahomet*, 170. Ibid., 224, 244.

<sup>10</sup>Almond, “Western Images of Islam, 1700–1900,” 412–24.

<sup>11</sup>Boulainvilliers, *Life of Mahomet*, ii.

I went to Canterbury. Here I met with the Life of Mahomet, wrote, I suppose, by the Count de Boulainvilliers. Whoever the author is, he is a very pert, shallow, self-conceited coxcomb, remarkable for nothing but his immense assurance and thorough contempt of Christianity. And the book is a dull, ill-digested romance, supported by no authorities at all; whereas Dean Prideaux (a writer of ten times his sense) cites his authorities for everything he advances.<sup>12</sup>

### **For the Mahometans**

Implicit agreement with Prideaux's portrayal of Muhammad is also found in a little-known hymn by Charles Wesley (1707–1788) that well reveals the hymn writer's marvelous ability to convert rich Christian doctrine into hymnody and prayer. Entitled *For the Mahometans*, it employs fundamental truths of Christian orthodoxy to impart to the singer a prayerful response to what is termed "the dire apostasy" of Islam. It contains a particularly compelling example of one way in which Christians have responded to Muslims in the centuries-old encounter between their two religions, even though certain phrases of the hymn do not fall within the bounds of current political correctness.

Sun of unclouded righteousness,  
 With healing in thy wings arise,  
 A sad benighted world to bless,  
 Which now in sin and error lies,  
 Wrapt in Egyptian night profound;  
 With chains of hellish darkness bound.

The smoke of the infernal cave,  
 Which half the Christian world o'erspread,  
 Disperse, thou heavenly Light, and save  
 The souls by that Imposter led,  
 That Arab thief, as Satan bold,  
 Who quite destroy'd thy Asian fold.

O might the blood of sprinkling cry  
 For those who spurn the sprinkled blood!  
 Assert thy glorious Deity,  
 Stretch out thine arm, thou triune God!

<sup>12</sup>John Wesley, journal entry for 23 November 1767, in *The Works of John Wesley*, 32 vols. ed. W. Reginald Ward and R.P. Heitzenrater (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1993), 22:113–14.

The Unitarian fiend expel,  
And chase his doctrine back to hell.

Come, Father, Son and Holy Ghost,  
Thou Three in One, and One in Three!  
Resume thy own, for ages lost,  
Finish the dire apostasy;  
Thy universal claim maintain,  
And Lord of the creation reign!<sup>13</sup>

The original appearance of this hymn was in Charles Wesley's 1758 volume *Hymns of Intercession for all Mankind*. Taken out of context it would be easy to see in the hymn an apologetic purpose with the goal of refuting Islam. However, the textual context in which the hymn was first published speaks of a somewhat different aim in Wesley's mind, namely, prayer desirous of the salvation of Muhammad's followers. His brother John also understood the hymn in this light, for he included it, along with four others from the 1758 hymnal, in a sub-section entitled "For Believers Interceding for the World" in what became the standard Methodist hymnal, *A Collection of Hymns, for the Use of the People called Methodists* (1780).<sup>14</sup> Alongside this hymn for Muslims in the latter hymnal, there are also hymns *For the Heathens* and *For the Jews*—three categories of people mentioned in one of the Collects for Good Friday from the Anglican *Book of Common Prayer*, which both the Wesleys would have known well and of which Charles was particularly fond:

O merciful God, who hast made all men, and hatest nothing that thou hast made, nor wouldest the death of a sinner, but rather that he should be converted and live: Have mercy upon all Jews, Turks, Infidels, and Hereticks, and take from them all ignorance, hardness of heart, and contempt of thy word; and so fetch them home, blessed Lord, to thy flock, that they may be saved among the remnant of the true Israelites, and be made one fold under one shepherd, Jesus Christ our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with thee and the Holy Spirit, one God, world without end.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>13</sup>*The Works of John Wesley*, ed. Franz Hildebrandt, Oliver A. Beckerlegge, and James Dale (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1983), 7:608.

<sup>14</sup>This hymnal was the product of much careful thought and arranging by John Wesley. See Beckerlegge, "Introduction," in *The Works of John Wesley*, 7:22–30.

<sup>15</sup>*The Book of Common Prayer* (London: Everyman Publishers, 1999), 161–62; J.R. Watson, *The English Hymn. A Critical and Historical Study* (New York: Clarendon Press, 1997), 220. For Charles Wesley's love of the Anglican prayerbook, see *Charles Wesley: A*

This clear textual link to *The Book of Common Prayer* is further confirmation that the hymn *For the Mahometans* is first and foremost concerned with prayer for the salvation of Muslims. In what follows, a stanza by stanza analysis of the hymn is undertaken to bring out the riches of this particular hymnic text.

### “Sun of Unclouded Righteousness”

Sun of unclouded righteousness,  
 With healing in thy wings arise,  
 A sad benighted world to bless,  
 Which now in sin and error lies,  
 Wrapt in Egyptian night profound;  
 With chains of hellish darkness bound.

The hymn begins with a reference to Malachi 4:2 and its promise of the advent of the Messiah, the “Sun of righteousness,” who will bring blessing to a world that is enchained in the “hellish darkness” of sin and doctrinal error. The Old Testament image from Malachi 4 was a favourite one with Wesley.<sup>16</sup> In one of his earliest hymns, which was written around the time of the first anniversary of his conversion and which has been transmitted as *O for a Thousand Tongues to Sing*, what was originally the second stanza of eighteen ran thus:

On this glad day the glorious Sun  
 Of Righteousness arose,  
 On my benighted soul He shone,  
 And fill'd it with repose.<sup>17</sup>

The phrase “Sun of Righteousness” naturally brings to mind the contrast of light and darkness. Here it is the hymnwriter’s own “benighted soul” that has been illuminated with light. In *For the Mahometans* the

*Reader*, ed. John R. Tyson (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 33–34; cf. Watson, *English Hymn*, 233–43.

<sup>16</sup>For the various hymns that contain references to this verse, see *The Works of John Wesley*, 7:819; John Lawson, *The Wesley Hymns: As a Guide to Scriptural Teaching* (Grand Rapids: Francis Asbury Press, 1987), 214; *The Unpublished Poetry of Charles Wesley*, 3 vols. ed. S.T. Kimbrough Jr. and Oliver A. Beckerlegge (Nashville: Kingswood Books, 1992), 3:228, 276. See also Charles Wesley, “For a Minister of Christ,” Redemption Hymn XVII, Stanza 9, in *Charles Wesley*, ed. Tyson, 228; “Christ, Whose Glory Fills the Skies,” Stanza 1, in *An Annotated Anthology of Hymns*, ed. J.R. Watson (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 169.

<sup>17</sup>For this stanza and the other seventeen stanzas, see *Charles Wesley*, ed. Tyson, 108–09. For the date of the hymn’s composition, see *idem*, 107.

hymnwriter and singer look forward to a similar work being done in a “sad benighted world,” by which is clearly meant the Muslim nations, one of them, Egypt, being specifically mentioned.

The vivid image of being “wrapped in Egyptian night profound” recalls the way that one of the ten plagues, the plague of “thick darkness,” mentioned in Exodus 10:21–22, came “over the land of Egypt.” According to the KJV rendering of the Exodus passage, it was a darkness that was palpable—it could be “felt.” In the hymn the term “wrapped” well captures the horror of being so surrounded by darkness. By contrast, the One who brings healing and blessing is “unclouded,” without a particle of darkness.

### “That Imposter”

The smoke of the infernal cave,  
Which half the Christian world o’erspread,  
Disperse, thou heavenly Light, and save  
The souls by that Imposter led,  
That Arab thief, as Satan bold,  
Who quite destroy’d thy Asian fold.

In his life of Muhammad Prideaux had written that Muhammad “used to withdraw himself into a Solitary Cave near Mecca,” where, according to Prideaux’s rendering, he concocted his religious beliefs,<sup>18</sup> an assertion that is reflected in the first line of the second stanza. Picking up the theme of darkness from the first stanza, Wesley now likens Muhammad’s teaching to “smoke,” which, spreading out from that cave near Mecca, went on to engulf half of the Christian world of that era. From the Arabian Peninsula, Islam, with seemingly invincible military might, had decimated the Byzantine Empire. Within eighty years of the death of Muhammad key centers of Ancient Christianity had fallen before the onslaught of Islam: Damascus was conquered in 635, Jerusalem fell in 638, Alexandria was taken in 642, Carthage in 698, and by 708 the entirety of what once had been Christian North Africa was in the hands of Muslim rulers. And so, Wesley noted, Muhammad’s beliefs “quite destroy’d [Christ’s] Asian fold.”

Prideaux argued that the downfall of those Western Asian churches had been due to internal decay and the fact that they had turned Christ’s “Holy Religion into a Firebrand of Hell for Contention, Strife, and Violence among them.”<sup>19</sup> The hymn makes no allusion to this perspective, though John Wesley did state around the very time that his brother’s hymn was written: “blind and bitter zeal, and . . . endless thirst after vain jangling

<sup>18</sup>Prideaux, *True Nature of Imposture Fully Display’d*, 14.

<sup>19</sup>*Ibid.*, viii.

and strife of words . . . have reigned for many ages in the Greek Church, and well-nigh banished true religion from among them.”<sup>20</sup> Both John and Charles had a deep appreciation for the theological riches of Eastern Orthodoxy, but that did not blind John—not presumably Charles—to the significant problems of the churches of that communion.<sup>21</sup>

Noteworthy is the way Charles described Muhammad in this stanza. The founder of Islam is “that Imposter,” the way he was frequently described by eighteenth-century occidental authors, an epithet made popular by Prideaux. He is “that Arab thief,” as bold as Satan in his attacks on Christianity. Charles’ brother John had a similar opinion of the devastation caused by Muhammad and his followers. Ten years before his reading of Boulainvilliers’ biography of Muhammad, the elder Wesley stated that prior to the Deists of his day no opponent of the Christian Faith had hurt Christianity as much as Muhammad.<sup>22</sup> As for the latter’s followers, Wesley was blunt: they have “no knowledge or love of God.” It should not be surprising then to find that their history had been so bloody, for, Wesley averred,

ever since the religion of Mahomet appeared in the world, the espousers of it . . . have been as wolves and tigers to all other nations, rending and tearing all that fell into their merciless paws, and grinding them with their iron teeth; . . . many countries, which were once as the garden of God, are now a desolate wilderness<sup>23</sup>

Nevertheless, despite this past history and the way that Muslims had wrought such destruction upon the Eastern churches, Charles Wesley can

<sup>20</sup>John Wesley, *The Doctrine of Original Sin, According to Scripture, Reason, and Experience*, in *The Works of the Rev. John Wesley, A.M.*, 14 vols., 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (London, 1830), 9:217.

<sup>21</sup>Tore Meistad has argued that the Wesleys’ “soteriology and cosmology reveal that their deepest roots” are in the soil of Eastern Orthodoxy rather than that of the Latin Fathers. Tore Meistad, “The Missiology of Charles Wesley and its Links to the Eastern Church,” in *Orthodox and Wesleyan Spirituality*, ed. S.T. Kimbrough, Jr. (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2002), 205–31. Cf. Ted A. Campbell, *John Wesley and Christian Antiquity: Religious Vision and Cultural Change* (Nashville: Kingswood Books, 1991).

<sup>22</sup>John Wesley to Augustus Montague Toplady, 9 December 1758, in *The Letters of the Rev. John Wesley, A.M.*, 8 vols., ed. John Telford (1931; reprint, London: Epworth Press, 1960), 4:48.

<sup>23</sup>John Wesley, *Doctrine of Original Sin*, 216. It needs to be noted that on occasion John Wesley can view Islam in a more positive light. Tony Richie, “John Wesley and Mohammed: A Contemporary Inquiry Concerning Islam,” *The Asbury Theological Journal* 58 (2003): 79–99.

pray that Christ, the “heavenly Light,” would dispel their darkness and save their souls.

**“For Those Who Spurn the Sprinkled Blood!”**

O might the blood of sprinkling cry  
 For those who spurn the sprinkled blood!  
 Assert thy glorious Deity,  
 Stretch out thine arm, thou triune God!  
 The Unitarian fiend expel,  
 And chase his doctrine back to hell.

Jesus Christ is mentioned in the Qur’an some twenty-five times, where he is honoured as One who was virgin-born, a prophet, and miracle-worker. But the Qur’an explicitly rejects his crucifixion, and by extension, his resurrection.<sup>24</sup> It would be for this reason, among others, that John Wesley, who was quite conversant with the Qur’an, rejected it as divine revelation. In his words, the book contained “the most gross and impious absurdities.”<sup>25</sup> How much of the Muslim holy book Charles had read is not known, but as this third stanza makes clear he is very aware of the Muslim denial of the crucifixion. The Muslims, for whose salvation he is praying, are “those who spurn the sprinkled blood.”

As John Tyson has observed, the “most common word in Charles Wesley’s redemption hymns is blood.”<sup>26</sup> Its biblical associations with death and sacrifice make it well suited to express the heart of Wesley’s soteriology: the salvation of sinners is rooted in Christ’s shedding of his blood on the cross,<sup>27</sup> his dying in the stead of all of humanity. More specifically, Tyson has shown that Wesley’s use of the phrase “sprinkled blood,” which is dependent in large measure on verses from the Book of Hebrews, sought to communicate the idea of spiritual cleansing and reconciliation to God.<sup>28</sup>

<sup>24</sup>Qur’an 4:157–8. Yet, there are two other texts, Qur’an 3:54–5 and 19:27–34, which imply that Christ died. For further discussion of the Christology of the Qur’an, see F.P. Cotterell, “The Christology of Islam,” in *Christ the Lord*, ed. Harold H. Rowdon (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1982), 290–95; Geoffrey Parrinder, *Jesus in the Qur’an* (New York: Barnes & Noble, 1965).

<sup>25</sup>John Wesley, *Doctrine of Original Sin*, 216.

<sup>26</sup>John Tyson, *Charles Wesley on Sanctification: A Biographical and Theological Study* (Grand Rapids: Francis & Taylor, 1987), 115. Cf. Wesley’s various uses of the term “blood” *Ibid.*, 115–55.

<sup>27</sup>Charles Wesley, “Passion Alone Hath Purchas’d our Peace,” Hymn XIX, Stanza 2, in *idem, Gloria Patri, etc., Or Hymns to the Trinity* (London, 1746), 9.

<sup>28</sup>Tyson, *Charles Wesley on Sanctification*, 123–27.

So, for example, using this image to stress the idea of reconciliation, Wesley could write:

Jehovah's co-eternal Son  
 Did in our flesh appear beneath,  
 He laid his life a ransom down,  
 For every man he tasted death,  
 To justify us by His blood,  
 And bring the sprinkled world to God.<sup>29</sup>

Similarly, in a poem based on Mark 15:34 ("My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me!"), Wesley declared:

Casting a dying look  
 Thy God thou couldst not find,  
 Because thy Spirit had forsook  
 Our whole apostate kind,  
 Nor could our fallen race  
 Rise and return to God,  
 Or e'er retrieve thy Spirit's grace,  
 But thro' thy sprinkled blood.<sup>30</sup>

Thus, in using this imagery in *For the Mahometans* Wesley was praying that, despite the fact that Muslims reject the crucified Christ, his atoning work—"the blood of sprinkling"—might prove efficacious and save some of them. But this will only happen, Wesley went on to assert, if God acts with divine power:

Assert thy glorious Deity,  
 Stretch out thine arm, thou triune God!

Here Wesley purposely touches on another fundamental difference between Christianity and Islam: the nature of God. One of the central themes of the Qur'an is that "God is only one God, He is far above having a son."<sup>31</sup> Hence, readers of the Qur'an are admonished by Mohammad: "believe in God and His messengers and do not speak of 'a Trinity'."<sup>32</sup> But, Trinitarianism is central to Christianity, a fact that Wesley celebrated again

<sup>29</sup>Charles Wesley, "Short Hymn on Romans 1:16," in *Charles Wesley*, ed. Tyson, 474.

<sup>30</sup>*The Unpublished Poetry of Charles Wesley*, 2:69.

<sup>31</sup>Qur'an 4:171. All quotations of the Qur'an are from *The Qur'an*, trans. M.A.S. Abdel Haleem (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004).

<sup>32</sup>Qur'an 4:171. Cf. Qur'an 5:72-73 and 5:116-17. The latter includes Mary in the Trinity.

and again in his hymnody, for in the words of John Tyson, the “doctrine of the Trinity pervaded Charles Wesley’s theology.”<sup>33</sup>

Wesley thus encouraged those who sang his hymns to worship the

Coequal Coeternal Three  
Thy Glorious Triune Deity  
Let all Eternally proclaim.<sup>34</sup>

Though in this world the triunity of God far exceeded humanity’s ability to explain—“inexplicably Three and One,” as Wesley said<sup>35</sup>—yet the Methodist hymnwriter delighted in orthodox Trinitarian declarations such as:

Thou are the co-eternal Son,  
In substance with thy Father one,  
In person differing we proclaim,  
In power and majesty the same.<sup>36</sup>

Or this:

Three uncompounded Persons One,  
One undivided God we proclaim:  
In essence, nature, substance one.<sup>37</sup>

Moreover, he was confident that in the world to come,

There, there we shall see  
The Substance Divine,  
And fashion’d like Thee  
Transcendantly shine,  
Thy Personal Essence

<sup>33</sup>Charles Wesley, ed. Tyson, 47. For a fuller study, see A.M. Allchin, “The Trinity in the Teaching of Charles Wesley: A Study in Eighteenth-Century Orthodoxy?” *Proceedings of The Charles Wesley Society* 4 (1997): 69–84.

<sup>34</sup>Charles Wesley, Hymn XVIII, Stanza 2, in *Gloria Patri, etc.*, 9.

<sup>35</sup>Charles Wesley, Hymn XV, in *ibid.*, 8. Cf. “One Inexplicably Three, One in Simplest Unity,” Stanza 3, in *The Works of John Wesley*, 7:393. Cf. Hymn 255, Stanza 1, in *ibid.*, 396.

<sup>36</sup>Hymn 245, Stanza 2, in *ibid.*, 387.

<sup>37</sup>Hymn 255, Stanza 2, in *ibid.*, 397. Cf. Hymn 248, Stanza 2, in *ibid.*, 389:

“A mystical plurality  
We in the Godhead own,  
Adoring One in Persons Three,  
And Three in nature One.”

Be bold to explain,  
 And wrapt in thy Presence  
 Eternally reign.<sup>38</sup>

Wesley's commitment to the Trinity was also rooted in his consciousness that redemption was a Trinitarian affair:

Come, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost,  
 Whom one all-perfect God we own,  
 Restorer of thine image lost,  
 Thy various offices make known;  
 Display, our fallen souls to raise,  
 Thy whole economy of grace.

Jehovah in Three Persons, come,  
 And draw, and sprinkle us, and seal<sup>39</sup>

Little wonder then that Wesley regarded the denial of the Trinity, which robbed God of his glory and undermined the economy of redemption, as a “doctrine [from] hell.”

One final point about this third stanza that needs to be noted ties it to the larger historical context in which the hymn was written. By terming Islamic theology “Unitarian,” Wesley was linking it to one of the major theological challenges of his day, namely the rise and expansion of Socinianism or Unitarianism among both Anglicans and Dissenters. In fact, around the same time when Charles would have been writing this hymn or even preparing it for publication, his brother was engaged in writing one of his major works, *The Doctrine of Original Sin* (1757), a detailed response to John Taylor (1694–1761), pastor of the Presbyterian work in Norwich, in that day one of the leading towns in England.<sup>40</sup> A well-known Hebraist, Taylor also became infamous for being, as his latest biographer G.T. Eddy has put it, a “radical champion of freedom of thought on theological questions.”<sup>41</sup> In particular, Taylor's *The Scripture Doctrine of Original Sin* (1740) was viewed as a powerful attack on

<sup>38</sup>Hymn XIX, Stanza 4, in *Gloria Patri, etc.*, 10. For a similar thought, see John Wesley, Hymn 324, Stanzas 5–6, in *Works of John Wesley*, 7:481.

<sup>39</sup>Hymn 253, Stanzas 1–2, in *ibid.*, 394.

<sup>40</sup>For a critical overview and analysis of Wesley's work, see Martin Schmidt, *John Wesley: A Theological Biography*, 2 vols., trans. Denis Inman (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1966), 2:80–97.

<sup>41</sup>G.T. Eddy, *Dr Taylor of Norwich: Wesley's Arch-heretic* (Peterborough: Epworth Press, 2003), 40.

confessional Christianity on both sides of the Atlantic.<sup>42</sup> Proof of this is found in the fact that among those who published a response to it, in addition to John Wesley, was Jonathan Edwards (1703–1758), the most important American theologian of the eighteenth century. Imbued with the optimistic confidence in human reason that was typical of so many in his day, Taylor also deprecated what he called “Athanasianism,” that is, Nicene Trinitarianism, because of what he believed to be its denial of God’s unity.<sup>43</sup> Eddy thinks Taylor was probably closest to Arianism in his theological convictions,<sup>44</sup> but John Wesley thought otherwise and regarded Taylor as a Unitarian.

When Charles refers to Muhammad as a “Unitarian fiend,” then, he is making vivid for his contemporaries the deep concern that Christians ought to have about the theological perspectives of Islam. It is noteworthy that John Wesley could tell the future hymnwriter Augustus Montague Toplady (1740–1778) in December of 1758—the year in which Charles Wesley published *For the Mahometans*—that “no single person since Mahomet has given such a wound to Christianity as Dr. Taylor.”<sup>45</sup>

### “Lord of the Creation Reign”

Come, Father, Son and Holy Ghost,  
 Thou Three in One, and One in Three!  
 Resume thy own, for ages lost,  
 Finish the dire apostasy;  
 Thy universal claim maintain,  
 And Lord of the creation reign!

Over against Islam’s Unitarianism, Wesley’s Christian faith, as we have seen, affirms that there is within the Godhead a Triunity. Wesley now calls on this Triune Being to bring an end to the rule of Islam. He has one parting remark about the religion founded by Muhammad: it is a “dire apostasy.” This is an interpretation that views Islam as an heretical departure from Christianity, which is a perspective that stretches back to one of the earliest Christian respondents to Islam, namely the theologian John of Damascus (c.655/675–c.749), who included it in his *On Heresies*.<sup>46</sup>

<sup>42</sup>*The Works of John Wesley*, ed. W. Reginald Ward and Richard P. Heitzenrater (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1993), 20:245 n. 47.

<sup>43</sup>Eddy, *Dr Taylor of Norwich*, 40.

<sup>44</sup>*Ibid.*, 40, 150–52.

<sup>45</sup>John Wesley to Augustus Montague Toplady, 9 December 1758, in *Letters of the Rev. John Wesley*, 4:48.

<sup>46</sup>For the section of this work dealing with Islam, see John of Damascus, *Saint John of Damascus: Writings*, trans. Frederic H. Chase Jr. (New York: Fathers of the Church, 1958),

The hymn ends, though, on a positive stress on the universality of the Christian faith: the Triune God is the Creator of all that exists and thus has a right to reign as creation's Lord. This includes all of humanity and thus, in the context of this hymn, there is here an implicit challenge for missions to the Muslims.<sup>47</sup>

Rightly understood, this hymn is a prayer for the salvation of the Muslims, but it ends with an implicit call to action—namely missionary outreach to the Muslim nations. In this respect it is similar to another hymn that was included in the volume of hymns in which *For the Mahomtans* was published. This one was entitled *For the Heathens*:

Lord over all, if thou hast made,  
 Hast ransomed every soul of man,  
 Why is the grace so long delayed,  
 Why unfulfilled the saving plan?  
 The bliss for Adam's race designed,  
 When will it reach to all mankind?

Art thou the God of the Jews alone,  
 And not the God of Gentiles too?  
 To Gentiles make thy goodness known,  
 Thy judgments to the nations show;  
 Awaken them by the gospel call—  
 Light of the world, illumine all!<sup>48</sup>

153–60. Cf. Daniel J. Sahas, *John of Damascus on Islam: "Heresy of the Ishmaelites"* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1972). For a general study of the life and thought of John of Damascus, see Andrew Louth, *St John Damascene: Tradition and Originality in Byzantine Theology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002).

<sup>47</sup>Tore Meistad noted, "Most of Charles Wesley's hymns included implicit challenges for missions." Tore Meistad, "The Missiology of Charles Wesley: An Introduction," *Proceedings of the Charles Wesley Society* 5 (1998): 39.

<sup>48</sup>John Wesley, "For the Heathens," Stanzas 1–2, in *The Works of John Wesley*, 7:609.