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## Wesley's "Singing the faith: Soundings of lyrical theology in the Methodist tradition" (book review)

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# Book Review

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Wesley C., P. (2020). *Singing the faith: Soundings of lyrical theology in the Methodist tradition*. Nashville, TN: GBHEM Publishing. \$20.95. 220 pp. ISBN 9781945935633

Author and theologian, Dr. Paul Chilcote received his Ph. D from Duke University Divinity School where he studied with renowned Wesley scholar, Dr. Frank Baker. He has authored thirty books including *A Faith that Sings* and *Come Thou Long Expected Jesus*. A former professor of Historical Theology and Wesleyan Studies at Ashland University Theological Seminary, Dr. Chilcote received the Saddlebag Award in 2017. He currently serves in retirement as Director of the Centre for Global Wesleyan Theology at Wesley House, Cambridge.

A term first used by S.T. Kimbrough, Jr. in 1984, Lyrical Theology describes theology that is contained in hymns, songs, poetry, and liturgy. This theological doctrine is embedded within the lyrics which are often rhythmic and filled with emotion. *Singing the Faith* details the progression of lyrical theology through the history of Methodist sacred music and was written with the intent of making the reader more aware of the theology embedded in Methodist hymns, and how their theological beliefs and lives are shaped by singing their faith.

Through eight chapters, Chilcote traces the musical development of the Methodist hymnwriters and lyricists who shaped the theology of their congregations. From pietism, camp meeting hymns, to Boston personalism and the Social Gospel Movement, Chilcote brings the reader on an extensive historical journey through hymnody and lyrical theology. It is his opinion that these lyricists were just as important as the theologians who molded the Methodist religion over the past three hundred years. The criteria for choosing his candidates focused on the longevity of the compositions and whether the lyrical content reflected theological concerns that developed, not only historically but also in modern times. Although he examined works by fifty-two hymnwriters, in his opinion only four truly held to the title of ‘lyrical theologian’. Chilcote places most of his analysis on the theological contribution of these writers, lyrical theologian Charles Wesley, Fanny Crosby, Charles A. Tindley, and Fred Pratt Green along with John Wesley, due to the importance of his work translating German Lyrical Theology.

In his final two chapters, Chilcote focuses on the pioneers of Indigenous Lyrical Theology and on the development of Methodist Lyrical Theology around the

world in places such as Latin America, Europe, and Africa. The epilogue includes Kimbrough's eight statements on the theological impact of global song and the book closes with an extensive appendix which features signature texts for each of the fifty-two Methodist composers contained in his research.

*Singing the Faith* is an excellent resource for church musicians and hymnwriters, not only of the Methodist faith but for every believer. Theology and church music students will find it invaluable for the insight into the history of lyrical theology and demonstrative highlights on the power of singing theology and how it helps to shape and reinforce a believer's faith.

**Reviewer**

Elizabeth A. Nolan, Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary.