

“Anticipate Our Heaven Below” The Emphatic Hope and Abiding Tone of Charles Wesley’s Eschatology

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In 1740 Charles Wesley and his brother John published a volume of *Hymns and Sacred Poems* that included one by Charles titled “For the Anniversary Day of One’s Conversion.”¹ The first third of this eighteen-stanza hymn glories in the assurance of God’s love that had been experienced by the convert, culminating in the wish for “a thousand tongues to sing my dear Redeemer’s praise” (st. 7). It then pivots from praise to proclamation, devoting the remaining stanzas to multiple invitations for others to join in this experience, promising that they would thereby “anticipate your heaven below” (st.18, ln. 3). In 1753 John Wesley published an abridged form of this hymn that started with stanza 7.² This shortened version quickly became a favorite among Methodists, leading to its placement as the first hymn in the 1780 *Collection of Hymns for the People Called Methodists* and in many hymnals published by Methodist groups since then.

As one of his best-known hymns, “O for a Thousand Tongues” is a fitting text to launch an investigation of Charles Wesley’s eschatology—that is, his understanding of the ultimate Christian hope and its implications for present life. This essay pursues that topic by exploring three questions suggested by the hymn’s concluding stanza: 1) Why did Wesley find it necessary to stress *anticipating heaven below*? 2) What did he highlight in this anticipation? and 3) Where did limitations remain in the scope of his anticipation?

Wesley’s Setting: A Transcendent Spiritualized Eschatology

Charles Wesley’s suggestion that authentic Christian conversion involves anticipation of heaven *below* reflects awareness of—and some resistance to—a tendency to transfer much of God’s saving work to the realm of heaven above. This tendency permeated Christian circles in Wesley’s day, and remains quite prevalent today. So it would be helpful to begin by reminding ourselves that the tendency stands in tension with central elements of Scripture and early Christian tradition, and tracing how it became prominent in later Christian understanding.³

¹*HSP* (1740), 120–23. All Wesley verse (published and manuscript) cited in this essay can be found in transcription on the website of the Center for Studies in the Wesleyan Tradition: <http://divinity.duke.edu/initiatives-centers/cswt/wesley-texts>.

²[John Wesley,] *Hymns and Spiritual Songs, Intended for the Use of Real Christians of all Denominations* (London: Strahan, 1753), 57–58.

³For more discussion and documentation of the summary that follows, see Colleen McDannell & Bernhard Lang, *Heaven: A History* (2nd edn. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001); Alister E. McGrath, *A Brief History of Heaven* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2003); and Terence

Hebraic Hope for Long Life in an Ideal Creation

One of the most central convictions running through the Old Testament is affirmation of God’s “covenant faithfulness”—that the holy and loving God will honor those who live in the ways that make for justice and peace (*shalom*). In the earliest parts of the Old Testament this is expressed in a claim that the just will live long lives and be blessed with prosperity, while the wicked will die young (cf. Prov. 10:22, 27). The focus is on this life, with any suggested afterlife presented as a “shade” or faint image of present existence.⁴

Over time it became clear that immediate blessing and retribution are often not evident in the present age. In the book of Job we see the deep perplexity that this realization created, but we also see Job’s refusal to surrender his conviction about God’s justice! This same conviction permeates the Old Testament prophets. At times it led them to explain to the Israelite nations that the reason for their current misfortunes was their failure to live within the guidelines of God’s covenant. But more deeply it brought the prophets to insist that God would soon act in a new way *in history* to remove current injustices, change people’s hearts (Jer. 31:31–34; Ezek 36:24–35), and restore creation to its intended state of peace and flourishing. Isaiah 11:6–8 paints a vivid image of such a creation where lions dwell peacefully alongside lambs, children play harmlessly among snakes, and all manner of plants and animals flourish. Isaiah 65:8–15 details some of the social-political dimension of God’s promised redemption:

But be glad and rejoice forever in what I am creating;
for I am about to create Jerusalem as a joy, and its people as a delight.
I will rejoice in Jerusalem, and delight in my people;
no more shall the sound of weeping be heard in it, or the cry of distress.
No more shall there be in it an infant that lives but a few days,
or an old person who does not live out a lifetime;...
They shall build houses and inhabit them;
they shall plant vineyards and eat their fruit....
They shall not hurt or destroy on all my holy mountain, says the Lord.

Apocalyptic and New Testament Vision of Resurrected Life in Renewed Creation

For all of its grandeur, Isaiah’s visionary hope remains set in the present age, assuming the current realities of birth and death. One might be blessed with long life, but not eternal life. More importantly, Isaiah’s vision does not address how things might be made right for those who suffered unjustly *in the past*. Eventually some of the latest voices in the Old Testament began to express a more dramatic and more inclusive vision of hope—they promised God’s cataclysmic judgment of present evil, followed by the resurrection of all persons (past and present) and recreation of *all* things (heavens and earth) in a state of unending life and abiding *shalom*!

Nichols, *Death and Afterlife: A Theological Introduction* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2010), chaps. 1–3.

⁴See Philip S. Johnston, *Shades of Sheol: Death and Afterlife in the Old Testament* (Downer’s Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2002).

This minority voice within the Old Testament witness was endorsed by the resurrection of Christ and became the normative expression of Christian hope. The New Testament clearly affirms the resurrection of *all persons* for judgment. It also retains the assumption that God’s redeeming concern is for *all* creation! Consider the witness of Paul: “We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labor pains until now; and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly while we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies” (Romans 8:22–23).⁵

Alternative Greco-Roman Focus on Immortal (Human) Life

Expectation of a new creation, teaming with life, in which resurrected humanity dwells, carried over from the New Testament to many early Christian writers. But we also see from the earliest years of the church the influence of a rather different model of hope for human afterlife, a model that was at home in the Greco-Roman culture within which the church was taking root. In its popular form this model held that the essence (*geni*) of the human person, or at least of certain heroic persons, was of such inherent value that it simply could not be terminated at death—the *real* person does not die; instead, death marks the point where one’s essential nature is freed to enter a transcendent eternal state pictured as peaceful gardens (the “Elysian fields”).

Two characteristics of this alternative vision of hope should be highlighted. First, the state of the person immediately after death is fully conscious and filled with delight. Often there was stress that they are *more fully alive* after death; they are able, for example, to think faster, see more clearly, and feel more deeply than they could in their physical bodies. Second, in this vision hope is focused almost entirely on human welfare. These characteristics were heightened as Plato’s philosophy, with its counterposing of matter and spirit, permeated Greco-Roman culture. Death was increasingly seen as the time when human spirits were *set free* from our bodies and this earthly existence, to enter into the eternal delights of a purely spiritual realm.

Growing Christian Assumption of a Conscious Intermediate State

The emphases of the Greco-Roman model of the afterlife proved attractive to Christians and were increasingly adopted—initially as characterizing the state of humans *between* our death and the resurrection of our bodies. The possibility of such an intermediate state is, at best, hinted at in a few places in the New Testament. But by the Middle Ages popular Christian imagination usually took for granted that humans enter a conscious disembodied state at death. Few echoes continued of biblical texts portraying the dead as “asleep” in the grave, awaiting the resurrection. Moreover, although there is even less support in the New Testament for viewing the human state after death as exceedingly better than our present embodied existence, popular belief embraced this aspect of the Greco-Roman model as well. There is no more relevant example than the opening lines of a hymn in John and Charles Wesley’s first collection of *Hymns and Sacred*

⁵The spiritualizing trajectory that we are tracing tended to obscure the scope of God’s anticipated saving work in Scripture. Among recent works helping us to recognize this holistic scope again are N. T. Wright, *Surprised by Hope: Rethinking Heaven, the Resurrection, and the Mission of the Church* (New York: HarperOne, 2008); and J. Richard Middleton, *A New Heaven and New Earth: Reclaiming Biblical Eschatology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2013).

Poems (1739):

We deem the saints, from mortal flesh releas'd,
With brighter day, and bolder raptures blest:
Sense now no more precludes the distant thought,
And naked souls now feel the God they sought.⁶

Increasing Shift to a Transcendent and Spiritualized Final Hope

As conviction of the ideal nature of our disembodied intermediate state spread among Christians, it created some tension with the traditional hope for future resurrection of the body and reunification of the person. Expectation of such reunification persisted through the medieval period, often portrayed as reclaiming the very body placed in the grave (or its regathered parts when necessary)!⁷ But this reclaimed body was assumed to be quickly transformed into the most ethereal form of matter, fit to return to the heavenly realm. Dieric Bouts's 1450 painting of the resurrected saints in paradise is representative.⁸ Raised in bodily form into a paradisiacal garden, the saints are portrayed as being led by angels to the top of a mountain, where they ascend into heaven, their bodies turning progressively translucent as they rise.

Among elements that this painting captures is the marginalization of restored earthly existence to medieval Christian hope. Dante's *Divine Comedy* is characteristic in ignoring this theme, content to portray the church triumphant existing eternally in a heavenly realm adjacent to the angels. Moreover, there is no suggestion in Dante that earthly creatures other than humans participate in God's final redemption. We see here one result of an emphasis running back to the early church that cast humans as microcosms of the whole cosmos (containing all dimensions in our nature). This emphasis inclined Western Christians to read biblical imagery of salvation of the animals as more properly about healing of the "animal nature" (i.e., the passions, etc.) of humanity—and to assume that God need only redeem humanity to redeem the "cosmos."⁹

Commitment to the literal meaning of Scripture in the Reformation led some like Luther to reaffirm animal salvation, drawing on Isaiah and Romans 8. Calvin's cautious response was more typical. He allowed that there would be a renewed earth, but resurrected humans (in ethereal bodies) will not live on it, they will merely contemplate it from their heavenly setting.

⁶"On Reading Monsr. de Renty's Life," *HSP* (1739), 16. The Wesley brothers did not indicate individual authorship in these early collections, and this poem does not appear among Charles Wesley's manuscript collections. John Wesley had a particular interest in de Renty, so it is possible he authored this poem.

⁷This topic is covered with fascinating detail in Carolyn Walker Bynum, *The Resurrection of the Body in Western Christianity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995).

⁸The painting is in public domain and available on the internet at several sites, including: http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Dieric_Bouts_-_Paradise_-_WGA02965.jpg.

⁹For a discussion of the degree to which Eastern Orthodoxy held on to more of a hope for the salvation of the whole creation, see Stanley S. Harakas, "The Earth Is The Lord's: Orthodox Theology And The Environment," *Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 44 (1999): 149–62.

He then cautioned against useless debate over why God would do such a seemingly needless thing. Such cautious affirmation of biblical imagery soon confronted the strong spirit/matter dualism of Enlightenment thinkers like Descartes. With “science” now reducing animals to mere machines, defense of the notion that they, or anything physical, participate in final salvation was increasingly rare. Popular Christian belief in the West came to anticipate final salvation as the deliverance of individual humans at their death from their earthly setting, and from all but the most ethereal of bodies, into an eternal spiritual realm.

Wesley’s Inheritance of this Transcendent Spiritualized Eschatology

This was as true in eighteenth-century England as anywhere, and Charles Wesley clearly imbibed this transcendent spiritualized understanding of our final hope (eschatology). It is reflected, for example, in one of his early sermons—delivered to his congregation in Frederica, Georgia, on April 18, 1736—when he describes the ultimate hope of faithful servants of Christ as having “an house eternal in the heavens.”¹⁰ And it shines through even more clearly in the many hymns on death that Wesley authored over the course of his life.

When he is reflecting out of a biblical passage where the imagery is strong, Wesley can portray the dead as “sleeping” in the grave, to rise at Christ’s second coming, and then be taken up into heaven.¹¹ Elsewhere he more carefully leaves only the body in the grave to await Christ, insisting that our souls go immediately to God.¹² And he specifically emphasizes their conscious enjoyment of blessing. For example, the long elegy he wrote on the death of his friend Robert Jones in 1742 closes with these lines:

A dying saint can true believers mourn?
 Joyful they see their friend to heaven return; ...
 With everlasting joy upon his head
 Starts from the flesh, and gains his native skies;
 Glory to God on high!—The Christian dies!
 Dies from the world, and quits his earthly clod,
 Dies, and receives the crown by Christ bestow’d,
 Dies into all the life and plenitude of God!¹³ }

Wesley’s general assumption is expressed even more sharply in hymns that he crafted for Methodists to sing at funerals of their friends, where we find stanzas like the following:

¹⁰“Sermon on Psalm 126:7,” §6, Newport, *Sermons*, 128.

¹¹The clearest example is a funeral hymn based on 1 Thess. 4:13, in *HSP* (1742), 127–28.

¹²E.g., Hymn for Believers, #27, st. 15, *HSP* (1749), 1:235; and Hymn 36, sts. 8–9, *PFD* (1772), 39.

¹³Charles Wesley, *Elegy on the Death of Robert Jones, Esq.* (Bristol: Farley, 1742), 24 (lines 518–29). See also Hymn 3, *Funeral Hymns* (1759), 4–6; and Hymn on Rev. 14:13, st. 1, *SH* (1762), 2:428.

Rejoice for a brother deceased,
(Our loss is his infinite gain,)
A soul out of prison released,
And freed from its bodily chain:
With songs let us follow his flight,
And mount with his spirit above,
Escaped to the mansions of light,
And lodged in the Eden of love.

Or

'Tis finish'd! 'tis done!
The spirit is fled,
The prisoner is gone,
The Christian is dead!
The Christian is living
In Jesus's love,
And gladly receiving
A kingdom above.¹⁴

As we will explore in more detail later, Wesley allowed that final Christian hope includes the resurrected body, but he characteristically stressed the ethereal nature of this body, and gives little hint that resurrected saints might dwell in a renewed creation.

The Reflection of Transcendent Eschatology in Christian Spirituality

A change in understanding of last things (or eschatology) as far-reaching as that which we have just traced was sure to find some reflection in other areas of Christian faith and practice. One significant reflection of the transcendent emphasis (i.e., the distancing of the realm where God's full redemption is realized from this present age) is the prominence in Wesley's day of the pilgrimage metaphor for characterizing present Christian life.

Patient Pilgrimage – A Spirituality Attuned to Transcendent Hope

While there are strands of the pilgrimage metaphor in Scripture, they do not constitute the dominant pattern of biblical spirituality. The Bible generally presents peaceful human life in a flourishing physical world as God's loving gift in creation. Suffering and evil are portrayed as corruptions of this original ideal, and death (or at least early and unjust death) is considered a curse. God's salvific activity in the present corrupt age is focused on restoring the peaceful and flourishing condition of the whole creation, with humanity in its midst.

This allowed, Scripture does portray life in the present corrupt age as threatened and

¹⁴ *Funeral Hymns* (1746), Hymn II, st. 1(p. 3); and Hymn VI, st. 1 (p. 8). There are many similar examples in this collection, *Funeral Hymns* (1759), and MS *Funeral Hymns* (1756–87).

often short, and encourages readers to be prepared for death. These themes resonated strongly with Christians experiencing the repeated conquests and frequent plagues of the unfolding Middle Ages. Some (particularly monastics) began to identify preparation for death as the primary purpose of life. Such suggestions fostered the spread of a model of spirituality that adopted pilgrimage as a dominant metaphor—where Christians understand themselves as currently placed in an alien and dangerous setting, with the task of making their way home.¹⁵ Cast in these terms, the challenge for Christian life is less the need to contend with the *temporary corruption* of God’s ideal creation, and more the *temporary endurance* of this probationary setting. Life in this world is less God’s blessing than it is our dominant challenge (almost a curse); and death is less a curse than a desired release into a more ideal state (heaven above). Proponents are drawn less to the hope of Isaiah 65:8–15, and more to the conclusion of Ecclesiastes 7:3, “the day of death is better than the day that one was born.”

The elaborate tour through the various levels of hell, purgatory, and heaven in Dante’s *Divine Comedy* (ca. 1320) provides some sense of this shift. Life in the present world is part of the narrative mainly as the implied setting where persons decide their future state. The most developed and well-known articulation of this metaphor for the Christian life is John Bunyan’s *Pilgrim’s Progress* (1678). In this allegory we watch the pilgrim (named “Christian”) negotiate the many wearisome obstacles that comprise life in this world—which all tend to distract him from his heavenly goal, the Celestial City.

Intertwined with the growing prominence of the pilgrimage metaphor for Christian life was spreading popularity of manuals on the “art of dying” (*ars moriendi*), which offered advice on how to prepare during life for a “good death.”¹⁶ Significantly, given the negative undertones of the pilgrimage metaphor, a common theme in these manuals was the importance of enduring the challenges of this life patiently, rather than seeking escape.¹⁷

Wesley as an Exemplar of the Pilgrimage Metaphor

The pilgrimage metaphor had permeated both the Puritan and Anglican strands of Charles Wesley’s ancestry and he was shaped deeply by it in his upbringing. Thus it too is reflected in his early preaching—beginning with his first surviving sermon, delivered October 21, 1735, on board the *Simmonds*, headed to Georgia.

We know this world is a state of trial and probation, wherein we are placed by

¹⁵See the detailed discussion of this model in its Puritan form in Charles E. Hambrick-Stowe, *The Practice of Piety: Puritan Devotional Discipline in Seventeenth-Century New England* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1982), 54–90.

¹⁶The classic study of the emergence of these manuals is Mary Catherine O’Connor, *The Art of Dying Well* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1942). For excerpts from examples in England see David W. Atkinson, *The English Ars Moriendi* (New York: Lang, 1992). And for a good summary of this genre see Christopher P. Vogt, *Patience, Compassion, Hope, and the Christian Art of Dying Well* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2004), 15–51.

¹⁷See Vogt, *Patience*, 29, 37–38.

providence to work the works of God, to conquer and subdue the enemies of our salvation, and to do penance for those manifold sins and iniquities whereby our nature is wholly corrupted and depraved. Now a state of trial always supposeth a state of danger and whilst we are only in our probation for heaven we may not think ourselves secured from all possibility of losing it.¹⁸

Wesley valued Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*, adopting its language to describe events in the early Methodist movement.¹⁹ He also wrote hymns in the mid-1740s based on the allegory.²⁰ Early stanzas of one of these hymns map well the general contours of the pilgrimage metaphor.

- 1 Leader of faithful souls, and guide
Of all that travel to the sky,
Come, and with us, e'en us abide,
Who would on thee alone rely,
On thee alone our spirits stay,
While held in life's uneven way.

- 2 Strangers and pilgrims here below,
This earth, we know, is not our place,
And hasten thro' the vale of woe,
And restless to behold thy face,
Swift to our heavenly country move,
Our everlasting home above. ...

- 4 Patient th' appointed race to run,
This weary world we cast behind,
From strength to strength we travel on,
The New Jerusalem to find,
Our labour this, our only aim,
To find the New Jerusalem.²¹

¹⁸“Sermon on Philippians 3:13–14,” Newport, *Sermons*, 96–97.

¹⁹See the allusion in his manuscript journal (March 10, 1744), *MSJ*, 2:393.

²⁰The most obvious is “The Pilgrim,” *RH* (1747), 66–68. A manuscript precursor of this hymn (MS Shent, 174a–174b) includes a note that it was to be paired with “The Christian,” *CMSP* (1744), 3:270–71; thus when Wesley asks in the latter, “Who is as the Christian?” he is referring to the pilgrim by this name in the allegory.

²¹“The Traveller,” sts. 1–4, *RH* (1747), 51. Remember that Christian had a guide in *Pilgrim's Progress*, named “Evangelist,” whom Wesley clearly considers to be Christ.

The metaphor is woven through many of Wesley's other hymns.²² In some its negative undertones rise to the surface. For example, the present earth can be characterized as a "world of sin and pain," or a "howling wilderness," to which we have been "banished" to suffer until our death.²³ Our soul can be described as "imprisoned" in the body, chained by fleshly desires.²⁴ Wesley can glory (prior to his 1749 marriage) that he has no spouse or children that might entice him to "basely pant" for natural things, distracting him from his heavenward pilgrimage.²⁵ He can suggest that the sole purpose of life is to prepare for death:

Thou knowst, I come not here to live,
I only come to die.²⁶

And he can present the "privilege to die" as the "sovereign remedy" to the challenges of life.²⁷

More characteristic of Wesley's vocation as a practical/pastoral theologian are hymns he authored in the vein of the art of dying manuals. These hymns guide singers in seeking assurance of justification and spiritual transformation (sanctification) as prerequisites to greeting death with peace, as captured succinctly in a stanza from his collection *Preparation for Death* (1772):

I want the preparation
Before I hence depart,
The knowledge of salvation,
The purity of heart.²⁸

Wesley's deeply Anglican convictions about the art of dying shine through when he emphasizes

²²For a few examples see "The Life of Faith," sts. on Heb. 11:13–16, *HSP* (1740), 11–12; Hymns for Christian Friends, #32, *HSP* (1749), 2:301–2; "On a Journey," *HSP* (1749), 2:243–44; Hymn 93, *Family Hymns* (1767), 121–22; Hymn on Acts 7:3, MS Acts, 108; Hymn on 1 Kings 19:13, MS Scriptural Hymns OT, 19–20; and Hymn on Psalm 39:14–15, MS Scriptural Hymns OT, 49.

²³E.g., "Before a Journey," *HSP* (1740), 125; and Hymn 34, st. 2, *PFD* (1772), 36.

²⁴E.g., Hymn 1, st. 3, *Funeral Hymns* (1746), 2; Hymn 3, st. 3, *Funeral Hymns* (1746), 4; Hymn 32, st. 2, *RH* (1747), 31; and Hymn 34, st. 4, *PFD* (1772), 37.

²⁵See esp. "The Pilgrim," st. 3–7, *RH* (1747), 66–68.

²⁶Hymn 96, st. 3, *Family Hymns* (1767), 124

²⁷See the untitled hymn in Wesley's letter to Sarah Gwynne Jr. (Jan. 15, 1749), MARC, DDCW 5/20 (*UP*, 1:239–40).

²⁸Hymn 4, st. 1, *PFD* (1772), 7. See also the continuation of this series in MS *Preparation for Death*.

the Lord's Supper as an important means of "steering the pilgrim's course aright."²⁹

Wesley's Proneness to Weary Pilgrimage

As hinted at earlier, the undertones in the pilgrimage metaphor of the alien and dangerous nature of this world, combined with the idealized expectations of the state one enters at death, encouraged some Christians to yearn for death.³⁰ Charles Wesley was among this group. Even his daughter Sally recognized that he had "from his very childhood, a sort of eagerness for death, and impatience of life," as contrasted with the strong love of life that characterized his brother John and his sister Martha (Wesley) Hall.³¹

One evidence of such impatience with—or weariness of—life is the frequency with which Charles Wesley mentions in his manuscript journal, during his Georgia ministry and the early revival back in England, his "envy" of the recently deceased.³² Another, somewhat amusing, set of examples are reflections on his birthday (December 18). In 1736 Wesley noted in his journal that he began his new year of life "in a murmuring, discontented spirit, reading over and over the third of Job." Ten years later he commented that he "waked between three and four, in a temper I have rarely felt on my birthday. My joy and thankfulness continued the whole day, to my own astonishment."³³ And in early January 1760 he wrote to his wife, "my dear Sally's wish has been often mine—to have died in my infancy. I escaped many such thoughts last Saturday, by forgetting it was my birthday."³⁴ (In fairness we should note that two hymns he published titled "On His Birthday" are more positive in tone.³⁵) Perhaps the most striking example is in July 1748, three months after he and Sally (Sarah Jr.) Gwynne had lovingly shared their mutual desire to marry; while on a preaching tour, accompanied by Sally and her father, Wesley wrote in his journal one evening, "My old desire of escaping out of life possessed me all day."³⁶

Such accounts have led to the suggestion that Charles Wesley suffered from a form of

²⁹See Hymn 62, *HLS* (1745), 145–46. On this as an Anglican (versus Puritan) emphasis, see Vogt, *Patience*, 36.

³⁰See the example in Hambrick-Stowe, *Practice of Piety*, 18.

³¹Sarah Wesley Jr. makes this comment in a manuscript account of the death of Martha (Wesley) Hall; MARC, DDWF 12/9.

³²E.g., Apr. 2, 1736 (*MSJ*, 1:19); July 10, 1736 (*MSJ*, 1:44); Mar. 11, 1739 (*MSJ*, 1:164); Dec. 1, 1740 (*MSJ*, 1:292); May 6, 1741 (*MSJ*, 1:304); Aug. 13, 1744 (*MSJ*, 2:417); Sept. 29, 1744 (*MSJ*, 2:424); and Feb. 6, 1746 (*MSJ*, 2:454).

³³See respectively *MSJ*, 1:70, and 2:484.

³⁴Charles Wesley manuscript letter to Sarah Wesley (Jan. 3, 1760), MARC, DDCW 5/106.

³⁵See *HSP* (1749), 1:211–12; and *HSP* (1749), 2:257–59.

³⁶July 20, 1748 (*MSJ*, 2:531); cf. Apr. 3, 1748 (*MSJ*, 2:527–28).

bipolar (manic-depressive) disorder.³⁷ Whatever its physiological bases, his personal tendency to weariness of life led at times to an extreme form of pilgrimage spirituality in hymns that Wesley published as spiritual guides for others. For example, one hymn designed for a mother who had just lost a child (very common in that time) leads her to give thanks to God not just for receiving the child into eternal care but for *blessing* the child with an early death!³⁸ Another hymn invites parents to pray that their children might die in infancy, rather than come of age and risk rebelling against God; though it finally leaves the matter in God's hand.³⁹ Even hymns that allow parents to grieve the loss of a child tend to end on the note that the departed child is now beckoning the parent to join them in the peaceful heavenly realm.⁴⁰

More broadly, Wesley published a number of hymns that place in the mouth of the singer a specific desire for death.⁴¹ Typical is the opening stanza of one of his hymns for those that are seeking redemption in the blood of Jesus Christ:

Weary world, when will it end,
Destin'd to the purging fire!
Fain I would to heaven ascend;
Thitherward I still aspire:
Saviour, this is not my place,
Let me die to see thy face.⁴²

Similar longing emerges frequently in his funeral hymns. The first hymn in his first published collection sets the tone by stressing the blessed state of the dead, then asking on the part of those who remain:

My Saviour, why dost thou delay
To call a poor wanderer home?
Come quickly, and bear me away;
The bride and the Spirit say, Come!⁴³

³⁷M. Robert Fraser, "Strains in the Understandings of Christian Perfection in Early British Methodism" (Vanderbilt University Ph.D. thesis, 1988), 97; and Henry Rack, *The Reasonable Enthusiast* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1993), 51, 252.

³⁸"A Mother's Thanksgiving on the Death of Her Child," *HSP* (1749), 1:278–81; see esp. st. 1.

³⁹"A Parent's Prayer," *Family Hymns* (1767), 153–54.

⁴⁰"On the Death of a Child," *RH* (1747), 36–37.

⁴¹See particularly the 3 hymns labeled "Desiring to be Dissolved" in *CMSP* (1744), 3:266–70; the series of 17 hymns titled "Desiring Death" in *HSP* (1749), 2:59–86; and the third of a series of hymns "For One in Doubt," *HSP* (1749), 1:69–72.

⁴²Hymn 30, st. 1, *RH* (1747), 41. See also Hymn 46, *RH* (1747), 58–59.

⁴³Hymn 1, st. 4, *Funeral Hymns* (1746), 2.

Other funeral hymns strike a bit more of a balance, like the art of dying manuals. For example, one opens affirming that, even though those who live in Jesus are happy now, it is far better to die and escape from this earth. But, it then proceeds to lead singers in submitting to God's will, agreeing to remain patiently in the flesh as long as they can be of help to others.⁴⁴

Love – The Focus of Wesley's Resistance to Overly Transcendent Eschatology

When the transcendent eschatology that Wesley inherited is joined with a spirituality dominated by the theme of pilgrimage, there is an increased tendency to restrict the scope of God's saving work in this life. Much of the divine blessing and transformation of our lives is postponed to heaven. In *Pilgrim's Progress*, for example, the main gifts given to Christian before he reaches the Celestial City are a guide for his journey and a certificate of entrance for when he arrives. In popular culture this tendency is often expressed in the equation of "salvation" with simply having the requisite qualification to enter heaven at death.

There are occasional hints of such a minimal conception of present salvation in Wesley, like one of his hymns for those who are seeking redemption that begins:

What would I have on earth beneath?
Pardon, and an early death.⁴⁵

More characteristically Wesley resisted the popular tendency, by emphasizing at least two other dimensions of God's salvific blessing and transformation of our lives *here below*.

The Witness of Love – Inspired Assurance of Pardon and Adoption

Since Jesus proclaimed that the Kingdom of God was "in the midst" of his hearers (Luke 17:21 KJV), Christians have always assumed that they experience presently some dimension of salvation. At a minimum, this involved a consciousness of pardon (the certification for final salvation). Often, as Charles Wesley illustrates in one of his early sermons, it extended to a general sense of spiritual well-being.

It should be well observed and always remembered, that heaven is begun upon earth. And accordingly our Saviour often means by "the kingdom of heaven" that temper of mind which a Christian now enjoys. He begins to enjoy it, when he begins to be a Christian, when Christ begins to reign in his soul. And the more absolutely he reigns there, the more happiness he enjoys.⁴⁶

Both of these broadly accepted present experiences of salvation focus on states of the human spirit. A related—more debated—dimension gained prominence in Wesley's preaching

⁴⁴Hymn 16, *Funeral Hymns* (1746), 24.

⁴⁵Hymn 7, st. 1, *RH* (1747), 9.

⁴⁶"Sermon on Psalm 126:7" (1736), II.2, Newport, *Sermons*, 126.

and hymns through his engagement with the pietist spirituality of the English Moravians, an engagement that led to his experience of “Pentecost” on May 21, 1738.⁴⁷ As Wesley explained this experience in a commemorative hymn, he then truly *knew* his pardon had been passed in heaven, because it had been “written on my heart.”⁴⁸ The human dimension of assurance remains evident in this explanation, but emphasis is shifting to the *agency of the Holy Spirit*.

Indeed, after his personal Pentecost, Wesley consistently affirmed that God’s saving work includes sending down the Spirit to dwell within our hearts, witnessing to God’s loving pardon of our sin and gracious adoption of us as God’s children.⁴⁹ Conscious reception of the Spirit became one of his marks of authentic faith:

The *pledge* of future bliss
He now to us imparts,
His gracious Spirit is
The *earnest* in our hearts:
We antedate the joys above,
We taste th’ eternal powers,
And *know* that all those heights of love,
And all those heavens are ours.⁵⁰

This emphasis drew the critical eye of many of Wesley’s Anglican peers, who worried that it verged on enthusiasm. His response was resolute:

It nothing helps them to say, “We do not deny the *assistance* of God’s Spirit, but only this *inspiration*, ...this *feeling* of the Spirit, this being *moved* by the Spirit, or *filled* with it, which we deny to have any place in sound religion.” But in “only” denying this you deny the whole Scriptures, the whole truth and promise and testimony of God.⁵¹

At the heart of this rebuttal is Wesley’s deepened conviction that our trust in God’s offer of pardon and adoption is possible only through the “power with the Holy Ghost received.”⁵² It is

⁴⁷Wesley inscribed “The Day of Pentecost” in large letters over his entry for May 21, 1738 in his manuscript journal. This was Pentecost Sunday, but Wesley’s extended narrative concerns his personal experience of the gift of Pentecost (see *MSJ*, 1:106–8).

⁴⁸“For the Anniversary Day of One’s Conversion,” st. 6, *HSP* (1740), 121.

⁴⁹See especially “Hymn for the Day of Pentecost,” st. 5, *HSP* (1742), 165; and “Groaning for the Spirit of Adoption,” *HSP* (1740), 131–32.

⁵⁰“The Marks of Faith,” st.4, *HSP* (1749), 2:221. See also the fifth mark of faith in his post-Pentecost “Sermon on Titus 3:8,” Newport, *Sermons*, 162.

⁵¹*Awake, Thou that Sleepest*, III.8, Newport, *Sermons*, 222.

⁵²“For the Anniversary Day of One’s Conversion,” st. 4, *HSP* (1740), 120.

evoked and sustained by the *inspiration* (or in-breathed presence) of the Holy Spirit—a crucial dimension of God’s saving work in which we anticipate heaven below.⁵³

The Indwelling of Love – Power for Spiritual Transformation

There was another dimension of present salvation that Wesley connected consistently to the indwelling of the Spirit after 1738. From his earliest sermons Wesley rejected the reduction of “salvation” to just assurance (and happiness) that we are pardoned. He insisted that “a constant progress towards Christian perfection” or actual Christ-likeness in this life is “the indispensable duty of all Christians.”⁵⁴ But the stress in his early sermons was on our human efforts in this regard, with a clear concession of the limits of these efforts—our ultimate hope is to “be removed into a better soil, and grow up to perfection in heaven.”⁵⁵

This changed dramatically in 1738. Like his brother John, Charles was encouraged by the English Moravians to expect that when he received the indwelling of the Spirit he would have instantaneous and complete deliverance from both outward acts of sin and inward inclinations to sin—i.e., Christian perfection *in this life*.⁵⁶ Also like John, this expectation was passed on in Charles’s preaching in the months following his personal Pentecost, where he promised among the immediate effects of saving faith not only pardon of the guilt of sin but liberty from the power of sin, overflowing love to God and others, and outward lives of obedience and holiness.⁵⁷ This promise shines through in his hymns from this period as well. For example, a hymn on John 16:24, “Ask and ye shall receive, that your joy may be full,” has singers implore God for the benefits of salvation, which include the mind of Christ, liberty from sin, and perfect love.⁵⁸ It affirms that these benefits were secured by Christ’s atonement, and pleads for God to bestow them personally, climaxing in stanzas addressed to Christ and the Spirit:

11 Heavenly Adam, life divine,
Change my nature into thine:
Move and spread throughout my soul,
Actuate and fill the whole:

⁵³See the portrayal of the Holy Spirit’s witness as an anticipation of heaven below in “Congratulation to a Friend upon Believing in Christ,” st. 6, *HSP* (1739), 204; “The Invitation,” *RH* (1747), 6; Hymn 4, *HFC* (1763), 6; and Hymn 95, *Family Hymns* (1767), 101.

⁵⁴In his 1735 “Sermon on Philippians 3:13–14,” Newport, *Sermons*, 96.

⁵⁵“Sermon on Psalm 126:7” (1736), II.2, Newport, *Sermons*, 126.

⁵⁶For a fine discussion of this initial expectation, and its progressive revisions, in John Wesley see Richard P. Heitzenrater, “Great Expectations: Aldersgate and the Evidences of Genuine Christianity,” in *Mirror and Memory: Reflections on Early Methodism* (Nashville, TN: Kingswood Books, 1989), 106–49.

⁵⁷See his Dec. 21, 1738 “Sermon on Titus 3:8,” Newport, *Sermons*, 160–63.

⁵⁸Hymn on John 16:24, *HSP* (1739), 219–21. This collection was published in March 1739; the hymn likely dates from late 1738.

Be it I no longer now,
Living in the flesh, but thou.

- 12 Holy Ghost, no more delay,
Come, and in thy temple stay;
Now thy inward witness bear
Strong and permanent, and clear;
Spring of life, thyself impart,
Rise eternal in my heart!

The suggestion conveyed in this early post-Pentecost hymn is that all of these graces are showered upon believers in a single blessing.⁵⁹ But once again, Charles's course paralleled brother John. Comments in Charles's manuscript journal reveal that his personal reception of the transforming effects of the Spirit was more complex than the expectation held up in his initial revival preaching and hymns. Charles clearly received new peace and power on May 21, 1738; yet he frequently concedes in the following weeks the continuing presence of inward temptations and inclinations to sin (including his characteristic desire for death).⁶⁰ Significantly, this did not lead him to return the achievement of Christian perfection to heaven above.⁶¹ Instead, Charles moved over the next couple of years to portraying Christian perfection as something Christians should normally expect in a discrete experience, subsequent to their initial conversion.⁶² Indeed, he crafted a rich set of hymns for believers who are currently waiting for this "full redemption."⁶³ Their focus can be illustrated by an excerpt from the first in the set.

- 3 From actual blame
I am sav'd by thy name,
But mourn, 'till thou save me from all that I am;
'Till more than subdued,
'Till entirely renew'd

⁵⁹See particularly sts. 8–9.

⁶⁰See, for example, June 1–7, 1738, *MSJ*, 1:114–16.

⁶¹See his criticism of those who deny that full redemption is available now in Hymn on Psalm 119:126, st. 4, *HSP* (1742), 268; and Hymn on Rev. 2:18ff, st. 9, *HSP* (1742), 291.

⁶²John also made this move, though the brothers did so in different ways—John, by distinguishing the "new birth" from entire sanctification; Charles, more typically by contrasting "pardon" and "entire renewal." This created some tension, as Charles generally continued to invoke the biblical language of "new birth" to describe full renewal. See J. Ernest Rattenbury, *The Evangelical Doctrines of Charles Wesley's Hymns* (London: Epworth, 1941), 261–64; and John R. Tyson, *Charles Wesley on Sanctification* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986), 219–25.

⁶³See the thirty-seven "Hymns for Those that Wait for Full Redemption," *HSP* (1749), 2:147–95.

Both my heart, and my nature are wash'd in thy blood.

...

- 7 Come, Jesus, and cleanse
 My inbred offence,
O take the occasion of stumbling from hence,
 The infection within,
 The *possible sin*
Extirpate, by bringing thy righteousness *in*.⁶⁴

This twofold model of full redemption is more memorably invoked, with emphasis on the role of the indwelling Spirit, in another of Wesley's best-loved hymns, published in 1747:

- 1 Love divine, all loves excelling,
 Joy of heaven to earth come down,
Fix in us thy humble dwelling,
 All thy faithful mercies crown;
Jesu, thou art all compassion,
 Pure unbounded love thou art,
Visit us with thy salvation,
 Enter every trembling heart.
- 2 Breathe, O breathe thy loving Spirit
 Into every troubled breast,
Let us all in thee inherit,
 Let us find that second rest:
Take away our *power* of sinning,
 Alpha and Omega be,
End of faith as its beginning,
 Set our hearts at liberty.⁶⁵

What remains consistent from 1738 in this revised model is the conviction that God's present saving work includes more than pardon, it extends to renewal of our moral nature. Wesley continued to affirm:

From sin, the *guilt*, the *power*, the *pain*,
Thou wilt redeem my soul.
Lord, I believe; and not in vain:

⁶⁴*HSP* (1749), 2:148; emphasis in the original.

⁶⁵Hymn 9, sts. 1–2, *RH* (1747), 11–12; the emphasis on “power” was added by Wesley in the second edition of this collection.

My faith shall make me whole.⁶⁶

And he continued to highlight love of God and neighbor, evoked by the witness of the Spirit, as a central dimension of anticipating heaven below.

When thou dost in my heart appear,
And love erects its throne,
I then enjoy salvation here,
And heaven on earth begun.⁶⁷

The expectation of holiness *in this life* resounds in Wesley's hymns through the rest of his life.⁶⁸ As one expression, the triad "pardon, holiness, and heaven" became his typical summary of the full scope of human salvation (adding the eternal dimension).⁶⁹ But a significant shift in emphasis concerning this expectation took place in the 1760s. Hymns published through the first two decades of the revival (after embracing the distinction between initial conversion and full redemption) frequently encourage seeking full redemption *now*, by imploring God to "cut short the work."⁷⁰ They also suggest that the change can take hold *quickly*, as in a 1742 hymn on Psalm 51:10, praying for a "heart from sin set free," which concludes:

Thy nature, dearest Lord, impart,
Come quickly from above,
Write thy new name upon my heart,
Thy new, best name of love.⁷¹

These suggestions came back to haunt Wesley in the early 1760s, when controversy broke out among Methodists in London. The focus of the controversy was the claim of some members that they had received Christian perfection instantaneously, by the simple affirmation "I believe." They portrayed this perfection as angelic or absolute, such that there was no need for growth

⁶⁶Hymn on 1 Cor. 10:11, st. 20, *HSP* (1740), 74; emphasis added.

⁶⁷"Rejoicing in Hope," st. 18, *HSP* (1742), 182.

⁶⁸One of the clearest examples is Hymn for Believers, #27, st. 14, *HSP* (1749), 1:235.

⁶⁹E.g., "After the Death of a Friend," Part III, st. 2, *CMSP* (1744), 3:265; "The Great Supper (Luke 14:16–24)," st. 3, *RH* (1747), 63; Hymn 144, st. 2, *HSP* (1749), 1:245; Hymn 3, *HFC* (1763), 6; and "At the Baptism of a Child," st. 4, *Family Hymns* (1767), 64.

⁷⁰E.g., "Growing for Redemption," Pt. I, st. 8, *HSP* (1742), 75; Hymn on Luke 12:50, st. 5, *HSP* (1742), 136; "Waiting for the Promise," st. 4, *HSP* (1742), 240; Hymn 30, st. 2, *RH* (1747), 41; and "For One in a Declining State of Health," st. 5, *HSP* (1749), 1:268.

⁷¹"Hymn on Psalm 51:10," st. 8, *HSP* (1742), 31.

after the event, or for the continuing atoning work of Christ.⁷²

Wesley was deeply troubled by this cadre within the Methodist movement. His pastoral response took the form of preparing the two-volume *Short Hymns on Select Passages of the Holy Scriptures* (1762). He wove throughout these hymns insistence that sanctification or growth in Christ-likeness is a gradual (and often painful) journey, rejecting specifically those who hope to leap to glory in an instant.⁷³ The expectation that singers are encouraged to embrace in many of these and subsequent hymns is that they will experience entire sanctification only as they reach the end of their lives.⁷⁴ But Wesley carefully avoids restricting anticipation of heaven below to our last gasp, by introducing emphasis in these same hymns that the Spirit graciously transforms us *in progressive degrees*, with perfection as the “last degree.”⁷⁵

Continuing Spiritualized Tone of Wesley’s Anticipative Eschatology

These and related emphases in Wesley’s hymns ran counter to the tendency of rendering God’s victory over sin and evil largely transcendent (confined to heaven above). He championed an *anticipative* eschatology—affirming significant foretastes of God’s saving work now. But what did he assume, and encourage others to expect, about the scope of God’s saving work?

Specifically, did Charles Wesley offer similar resistance to the *spiritualized* tone of the eschatology that he inherited? It would be remarkable if he had. This tone remained strong in Western Christianity well into the next century, allowing Ludwig Feuerbach to charge in 1841 that preoccupation with heaven above led Christians to neglect both human culture and the natural world, as well as the body with its physical needs and desires.⁷⁶ On the other hand, Charles’s brother John was one of the minority voices in late eighteenth-century England striving to reclaim the holistic scope of the biblical account of salvation.⁷⁷ There is little evidence

⁷²See W. Stephen Gunter, *The Limits of “Love Divine”* (Nashville: Kingswood Books, 1989), 215–21.

⁷³See the extended analysis in S T Kimbrough Jr., “Charles Wesley and the Journey of Sanctification,” *Evangelical Journal* 16 (1998): 49–75.

⁷⁴E.g., Hymn on Matt. 5:48, *SH* (1762), 2:139; Hymn on Matt. 20:22, *SH* (1762), 2:179; Hymn on 2 Cor. 3:11, *SH* (1762), 2:306; and Hymn 36, st. 3, *PFD* (1772), 29.

⁷⁵See particularly the hymn on 2 Cor. 13:11, *SH* (1762), 2:306. A similar emphasis on degrees of transformation into holiness can be found in the hymns on Deut. 7:22 (1:93); Ezra 3:11 (1:209); Mark 4:26–27 (2:200–201); Mark 5:41, st. 3 (2:203); Rom. 6:6 (2:279–80); Gal. 5:24, st. 3 (2:310); 1 Thess. 1:3, st. 1 (2:323); and James 5:7 (2:387–88).

⁷⁶Ludwig Feuerbach, *The Essence of Christianity* (New York: Harper & Row, 1957; German original, 1841), 287–92, 308–17.

⁷⁷See Randy L. Maddox, “Nurturing the New Creation: Reflections on a Wesleyan Trajectory,” in M. D. Meeks (ed.), *Wesleyan Perspectives on the New Creation* (Nashville, TN: Kingswood Books, 2004), 21–52; and idem, “Celebrating the Whole Wesley: A Legacy for Contemporary Wesleyans,” *Methodist History* 43.2 (2005): 74–89.

that Charles took up this agenda alongside John. For the most part his writings reflect the reigning eschatology—with its spiritualized final hope and resonant present implications.

Anticipation for Souls, but what about Bodies?

For example, we noted above that Charles Wesley embraced the model of entering a disembodied intermediate state at death. In keeping with Scripture, he affirmed that our souls are joined again with the resurrected body at Christ’s second coming. But he characteristically underscored the spiritualized nature of this body, as in a hymn on 1 Cor. 15:44.

A body natural, by food
And sleep sustain’d, to death I give;
A body spiritual, endued
With nobler qualities, receive,
A permanent, ethereal frame,
From all material dregs refined,
Composed of pure angelic flame,
And meet for mine eternal mind.⁷⁸

Very little of our present body remains! Its material nature per se is deemed dregs to be excluded from what God values eternally.

So how should the material body be valued by Christians now? In particular, should pursuit of physical health be viewed as part of God’s clear will for each of us? John Wesley thought so, assuring his followers of God’s unquestionable desire for them to have present health of soul and body.⁷⁹ An alternative strand in Christian tradition, passed on most proximately by English Puritans, tended to view calamity and disease as divinely intended, to teach a spiritual lesson (if only not to become too attached to earthly things). On these terms, the desire for recovered health must remain clearly subordinate to accepting God’s providential intent.⁸⁰

Perhaps because he suffered from chronic physical ailments, Charles Wesley provides strong echoes of this alternative view. In a hymn framed to be a prayer by parents whose child has small-pox, after invoking God’s saving concern in the first stanza, Wesley affirms in the second stanza:

Love inflicts the plague severe,
Love the dire distemper sends:
Let thy heavenly messenger

⁷⁸*SH* (1762), 2:296. See also “Funeral Hymn,” *HSP* (1742), 125–27.

⁷⁹See his letter to Alexander Knox (Oct. 26, 1778), in John Telford (ed.), *The Letters of the Rev. John Wesley, A.M.* (London: Epworth, 1931), 6:327.

⁸⁰See David Harley, “Spiritual Physic, Providence and English Medicine, 1560–1640,” in Ole Grell & Andrew Cunningham (eds.), *Medicine and the Reformation* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 101–17.

Answer all thy gracious ends:
Give us power to watch and pray
Trembling at the threaten'd loss:
Tear our hearts from earth away,
Nail them to thy bleeding cross.

The following stanzas walk a fine line, leading the parents in surrendering to God's will, while simultaneously authorizing their weeping (by the example of Jesus), as they wait for God's ultimate purpose (life or death) to become clear.⁸¹ The same tension is evident in a hymn for a sick friend, which beseeches Christ to remember his own experience of human infirmity, and to bestow healing as the Great Physician, but concludes on the note:

Till Thy love's design we see,
Earnest, but resign'd to Thee,
Suffer us for life to pray,
Bless us with her longer stay.⁸²

In these and many other hymns Wesley ultimately (if pastorally) encourages submission to God's *loving* design as more important than seeking renewed health. But he never disparages the longing for healing. Nor does he disdain those who suffer. If anything, he is more liable to the charge of treating suffering as a desirable state—a harbinger of approaching death!⁸³ More importantly, as one who suffered much himself, Wesley was drawn to the divine empathy portrayed in Christ crucified. He repeatedly holds up the suffering Christ in his hymns as both a display of God's empathizing love and a role model for the Methodist people.⁸⁴ Finally, Wesley never casts doubt on the appropriateness of seeking medical care, for the Great Physician often heals through physicians and medicine.⁸⁵

Anticipation for Humans, but what about the Cosmos?

Broadening the consideration, where will humans dwell in our future “angelic” bodies? Wesley's typical answer is “Our glorious mansion in the sky, [which] shall evermore endure.”⁸⁶

⁸¹“For a Child in the Small-Pox,” *Family Hymns* (1767), 76–78.

⁸²“Oblation of a Sick Friend,” st. 8, *Family Hymns* (1767), 87 (emphasis in original).

⁸³See “For One in Pain,” *HSP* (1749), 1:263–64.

⁸⁴This theme is masterfully surveyed in Joanna Cruickshank, *Pain, Passion, and Faith: Revisiting the Place of Charles Wesley in Early Methodism*. (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow, 2009).

⁸⁵See esp. “For One that is Sick, #2,” st. 1, *HSP* (1749), 1:261; and “The Physician's Hymn,” *HSP* (1749), 2:248–50.

⁸⁶Hymn XIII, st. 2, lines 3–4, *Funeral Hymns* (1746), 20. See also “The Musician's Hymn,” st. 6–10, *RH* (1747), 35–36 (the New Jerusalem in the sky); Hymn 22, st. 2, *HSP* (1749), 2:30 (beyond the bounds of time and space); and Hymn on Rev. 22:17, *SH* (1762), 2:430.

A few times he even alludes poetically to the Elysian fields.⁸⁷

What about the physical universe? It is hard to distill a consistent answer from Wesley's poetic allusions. Some seem to imply that it perishes in God's final judgment of evil.⁸⁸ More frequently Wesley echoes the biblical language of a renewed creation, or "new heavens and earth" emerging from the ash of God's purging flame.⁸⁹ The disjunction between these alternatives could be reconciled if the renewed creation is a *temporary* stage of God's redeeming work—the setting for the millennium—which is rendered needless (and disappears) after a thousand years, with the ascension of all saints into heaven. Many early church writers who championed the millennial reign of Christ on a renewed earth gave it such penultimate status.⁹⁰ Wesley was quite possibly alluding to the same status in hymns that speak of Christ returning to a renewed earth "to reign before thy saints alone, and *then* through all eternity."⁹¹

Whether he viewed the renewed creation as temporary or permanent, the only humans likely to dwell in it would be Christians alive at Christ's second coming (and their offspring), now in transformed bodies. Reminiscent of Calvin, Wesley portrays prior saints, who have finished their race and are now with God in a disembodied state, as observing from a distance.

Nothing hath the just to lose
By worlds on worlds destroy'd:
Far beneath his feet he views
With smiles the flaming void:
Sees this universe renew'd,
The grand millennial reign begun,
Shouts with all the sons of God
Around th' eternal throne.⁹²

As if to underline the point, in the next stanza of this hymn Wesley stresses that when these saints' soul and resurrected body (dust) are rejoined at the second coming, they will "both fly up

⁸⁷Cf. Hymn 6, st. 8, *Funeral Hymns* (1759), 12; and Hymn 10, st. 1, *Funeral Hymns* (1759), 18.

⁸⁸See particularly Hymn 174, *HSP* (1749) 2:237–38; Hymn 40, "Thy Kingdom Come," *HIM* (1758), 33–34; and Hymn 16, *HFN* (1781), 22–23.

⁸⁹E.g., Hymn 48, "At the Parting of Friends," sts. 5–8, *RH* (1747), 60–61; Hymn 15, *HY 1756*, 21–22; Hymn on Malachi 4:6, *SH* (1762), 2:123.

⁹⁰Even Irenaeus, who most emphasized the enduring goodness of creation, has it pass imperceptibly from the scene as the eternal state takes hold. See Christian Smith, "Chiliasm and Recapitulation in the Theology of Irenaeus," *Vigiliae Christianae* 48 (1994): 313–31.

⁹¹Hymn 9, st. 4, *HFN* (1781), 14 (emphasis added). See also Hymn on Joel 3:18, *SH* (1762), 2:75–76; Hymn on Acts 3:21, *MS Acts* (1764), 49; and Hymn 11, Pt. 2, sts. 5–6, *MS Patriotism* (ca. 1781), 26.

⁹²Hymn 16, st. 3, *HY 1756*, 23.

to heaven.”⁹³ The (possible) transformed generation inhabiting the renewed earth during Christ’s millennial reign would ascend thereafter to join the other saints in their eternal heavenly home.

Similarly, one looks in vain among Charles Wesley’s works for explicit mention of other animals inhabiting the renewed earth! Like many before him, Wesley is prone to interpret biblical passages that could suggest redemption of all creatures in an analogical manner. The lion and wild ox of Isaiah 11 become analogies of humans who act like wild beasts, and the promise of that chapter is of a time when “human savages are tame.”⁹⁴ The new creation promised in Isaiah 65:17–18 is interpreted as the renewal of human souls in holiness and love.⁹⁵ And his one hymn on Romans 8:18–23, picks up only the human groaning for adoption (*part* of the groaning of the whole creation in Paul).⁹⁶ In other words, Charles Wesley provides another example in the long tradition in Western Christianity of the focus on humanity (the “microcosm”) largely subsuming the rest of the cosmos in God’s final redeeming work.

Before dismissing this point as interesting but inconsequential, recall the interplay between eschatology and ethics. What we are convinced that God values *ultimately* serves a significant factor (consciously or unconsciously) in what we value *now*. It is no accident that John Wesley, who preached a pioneering sermon reclaiming the ultimate salvation of animals, was known for championing animal welfare.⁹⁷ Nor inversely, given his lack of clear affirmation of God’s final redemption of animals, is it surprising that a contemporary advocate of animal welfare should admonish Charles Wesley for failing to include among his numerous hymns any encouraging humane treatment of animals.⁹⁸

Anticipation of the Reign of Mutual Love, but what about Socio-Political Structures?

The notion of the millennium was introduced in the preceding section. It deserves a bit more exploration. It emerged in pre-Christian Judaism as a way of handling the alternative hope offered in Isaiah (long life in the present world) and Daniel (eternal life in a reconstituted world). As an option to forcing a choice between these two visions, some suggested that Isaiah was describing a still-future thousand-year golden age in this world, while Daniel was describing the final state after this age. Many early Christians adapted this as a distinction between a thousand-

⁹³Ibid., st. 4. Similar emphasis in “Hymn for Believers, #27,” st. 15–16, *HSP* (1749), 1:235; Hymn 4, st. 5, *HOE* (1750), Pt. I., 8; and Hymn 36, sts. 8–9, *PFD* (1772), 39.

⁹⁴See “The Eleventh Chapter of Isaiah,” *CMSP* (1744), 3:243–47; and Hymn on Isaiah 11:6–7, *SH* (1762), 1:316.

⁹⁵*SH* (1762), 1:383–84. For other examples, see Hymn on Isaiah 50:31, st. 14, *HSP* (1742), 227; and Hymn on Isaiah 55:17–18, *SH* (1762), 1:383–84.

⁹⁶“Groaning for the Spirit of Adoption,” *HSP* (2740), 131–32. Wesley skips Rom. 8:18–23 in *SH* (1762)!

⁹⁷See Randy L. Maddox, “Anticipating the New Creation: Wesleyan Foundations for Holistic Mission,” *Asbury Journal* 62 (2007): 49–66; esp. 58–59.

⁹⁸See the public letter to Charles Wesley, signed “A Bible Christian,” in *The Westminster Journal* (Apr. 18–25, 1772), p. 2.

year reign of Christ on a purified earth and subsequent eternity in God's heavenly presence. They championed this penultimate period on earth in part to provide the otherwise missing fulfillment of God's promise in Isaiah of *shalom* pervading this creation.

Charles Wesley inherited both the expectation of an earthly millennium and this central rationale of its purpose, as evidenced by a stanza in a 1747 hymn:

According to his word,
His oath to sinners given,
We look to see restor'd
The ruin'd earth and heaven,
In a new world his truth to prove,
A world of righteousness and love.⁹⁹

The path of this expectation from the early church to Wesley was far from smooth.¹⁰⁰ Affirmation of a literal earthly millennium nearly disappeared from Christian circles by the fifth century of the church age. It began to be reclaimed in the early Reformation, particularly among Anabaptists. In response, the major continental Protestant traditions specifically condemned the notion. It was also condemned briefly by the newly independent Church of England in the mid sixteenth century.¹⁰¹ But Britain proved to be fertile ground for the notion of a future earthly era with radically transformed socio-political structures—particularly among anti-episcopacy, anti-monarchy Puritans. This interest took radical form in the “Fifth Monarchy Men,” who tried unsuccessfully to initiate the new age in the 1650s by revolt.¹⁰² Their example understandably cast a pall over millennialism. Indeed, scholars have often suggested that affirmation of a literal millennium ceased to be a serious option for all but the most fringe Christian groups in England by Charles Wesley's birth. But Warren Johnston has recently demonstrated quite the contrary. Johnston shows not only that interest in millennialism continued in English circles through the end of the seventeenth century but that this included Anglican proponents, who interpreted millennial prophecies in a way that focused on the peace and tranquility of the church, legitimizing the monarchy and episcopacy.¹⁰³

One such Anglican affirmation of a earthly millennium, published as an extended essay

⁹⁹Hymn 48, st.7, *RH* (1747), 61

¹⁰⁰For more details and documentation of the following discussion see, in particular, Crawford Gribben, *Evangelical Millennialism in the Trans-Atlantic World, 1500–2000* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011).

¹⁰¹By Article 41 of the 42 Articles adopted in 1553; this article was removed from the official standards in 1563.

¹⁰²Bernard Capp, *The Fifth Monarchy Men* (London: Faber and Faber, 1972).

¹⁰³Warren Johnston, *Revelation Restored: The Apocalypse in Later Seventeenth-Century England* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2011).

in the *Athenian Mercury* in 1691, was almost certainly authored by Samuel Wesley Sr.¹⁰⁴ This helps explain how the theme appears so naturally, without defensiveness, in Charles Wesley's verse. It also casts light on a central characteristic of Charles's depictions of the millennium. They focus more on the restored piety and love that (he believed) characterized the early post-Pentecost church than on renewed *shalom* among all creatures and in human social structures (as in Isaiah). The following stanzas are representative:

But may we not expect to see
The genuine pristine piety
 On this our earth restor'd;
The heavenly life again made known,
The Christians all in Spirit one,
 One Spirit with their Lord?

Surely Thou wilt from heaven descend,
The dark apostacy to end,
 And re-collect thine own:
These eyes our beauteous King shall view,
Jesus creating all things new
 On his millennial throne!

Then shall thy church in Thee abide,
Renew'd, and wholly sanctified,
 And pure as those above;
No power shall then impair our peace,
Or break the bond of perfectness,
 The unity of love.¹⁰⁵

To be sure, Wesley believed that Christ's millennial reign would put an end to "infernal war," establishing peace beyond the confines of the church; a point he particularly emphasized in the face of military threats to Britain or British loyalists abroad.¹⁰⁶ But he gave no countenance to

¹⁰⁴The essay comprises the entire issue of the *Athenian Mercury* [later *Athenian Gazette*], Vol. 4, numb. 6 (Oct. 17, 1691). As Charles Gildon notes on p. 13 on his history of the Athenian Society (prefaced to the collected issues of the *Athenian Mercury* 1691–92), Samuel Sr. wrote the (unsigned) answers to most theological questions in the set. Gildon specifically ascribes the essay on the millennium to Wesley (p. 19).

¹⁰⁵Hymn on Acts 6:1, st. 4–6, MS Acts (1764), 98–99. See also Hymn 156, *HLS* (1745), 139–41; Hymn 22, *WH* (1746), p. 25; Hymn on Isaiah 60:21, *SH* (1762), 1:381–82; Hymn on Acts 3:21, st. 4, MS Acts (1764), 49; Hymn on Mark 9:2, MS Mark (1766), 94–95.

¹⁰⁶E.g., "A Hymn for the English in America," sts. 8–9, *HOE, Pt. II* (1756), 22; Hymn 9, *HTD* 1759, 23–24; and Hymn 12, st. 8, *HNF* (1782), 21.

suggestions that Christ's cause might be advanced presently by forceful overthrow of perceived unjust social structures. He dismissed the rebellious colonists in North America as the equivalent of the discredited "Fifth Monarchy" movement.¹⁰⁷ And he pilloried the popular uprising in the early 1780s in Britain, led by Lord George Gordon, against the Catholic relief act.¹⁰⁸ Posing no threat to the monarchy and the established Church of England, Wesley located hope for peace and reconciliation, even with the rebel Americans, in the Spirit's work of renewing hearts.

Prince of Peace, and Israel's King,
With thyself the blessing bring:
Peace divine thy Spirit imparts;
Plant thy kingdom in our hearts. ...

Sprinkling us with thy own blood,
Reconcile us first to God,
Then let all the British race
Kindly, cordially embrace.¹⁰⁹

What made the church central to this, both now and in the millennium, was Wesley's deep conviction of the role of *community* in this heart-renewing work, where the Spirit nurtures us with "social grace" and enables us to grow in mutual love.¹¹⁰

There is much to appreciate in Wesley's hope for a time when the church epitomizes Christ's reign of "perfect, pure, millennial love."¹¹¹ He clearly expected anticipative realizations of this love in the church of his day, pouring out in ministry to the broader society, particularly acts of mercy for the poor.¹¹² But Wesley's historical and social location rendered him largely blind to (or suspicious of!) the concern more pressing for many of his descendants—how to embody that ideal of love in transformed social-political structures.¹¹³

¹⁰⁷See Hymn 17, esp. st. 3, *HFN* (1781), 23–24.

¹⁰⁸In [Charles Wesley,] *The Protestant Association* (London: Paramore, 1781).

¹⁰⁹"For Peace," sts. 4 & 6, *HNF* (1782), 23.

¹¹⁰See particularly "The Love Feast," Part III, st. 1, *HSP* (1740), 183; "The Love Feast," Part IV, st. 4, *HSP* (1740), 185; "A Prayer for Persons Joined in Fellowship," Part 4, *HSP* (1742), 86–87; and "At Meeting of Friends," *RH* (1747), 43.

¹¹¹Hymn on Luke 3:6, st. 2, MS Luke (1766), 40.

¹¹²See S T Kimbrough Jr., "Charles Wesley and the Poor," in M. D. Meeks (ed.), *The Portion of the Poor* (Nashville: Kingswood Books, 1995), 147–67; and idem, *Radical Grace: Justice for the Poor and Marginalized—Charles Wesley's Views for the Twenty-First Century* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2013).

¹¹³See the balance of appreciation and reservation in Martin Groves, "Charles Wesley's Spirituality," in K. Newport and T. Campbell (eds.), *Charles Wesley: Life, Literature, & Legacy* (Peterborough: Epworth, 2007), 446–64; esp. 457–58.

Abbreviations Used in Notes

Published Wesley Hymn Collections

- CMSP* (1744) = *Collection of Moral and Sacred Poems*. Edited by John Wesley. 3 vols. Bristol: Farley, 1744.
- Family Hymns* (1767) = *Hymns for the Use of Families*. Bristol: Pine, 1767.
- Funeral Hymns* (1746) = *Funeral Hymns*. [London: Strahan, 1746.]
- Funeral Hymns* (1759) = *Funeral Hymns*. London [Strahan,] 1759.
- HFC* (1763) = *Hymns for Children*. Bristol: Farley, 1763
- HFN* (1781) *Hymns for the Nation in 1782*. London: Paramore, 1781
- HIM* (1758) = *Hymns of Intercession for all Mankind*. Bristol: Farley, 1758.
- HLS* (1745) = *Hymns on the Lord's Supper*. Bristol: Farley, 1745
- HNF* (1782) = *Hymns for the National Fast, Feb. 8, 1782*. London: Paramore, [1782]
- HOE* (1750) [Pt. I] = *Hymns occasioned by the Earthquake, March 8, 1750* [Pt. I]. London: [Strahan], 1750
- HOE, Pt II* (1756) = *Hymns occasioned by the Earthquake, March 8, 1750, Pt. II; to which are added an Hymn for the English in America, and another for the Year 1756*. 2nd edn. Bristol: Farley, 1756.
- HSP* (1739) = *Hymns and Sacred Poems*. London: Strahan, 1739
- HSP* (1740) = *Hymns and Sacred Poems*. London: Strahan, 1740
- HSP* (1742) = *Hymns and Sacred Poems*. Bristol: Farley, 1742
- HSP* (1749) = *Hymns and Sacred Poems*, 2 vols. Bristol: Farley, 1749
- HTD* (1759) = *Hymns to be Used on the Thanksgiving Day, Nov. 29, 1759, and After it*. [London: Strahan, 1759]
- HY 1756* = *Hymns for the Year 1756; Particularly for the Fast-Day, February 6*. Bristol: Farley, 1756
- PFD* (1772) = *Preparation for Death, in Several Hymns*. London, 1772.
- RH* (1747) = *Hymns for those that seek, and those that have Redemption in the Blood of Christ*. London: Strahan, 1747.
- SH* (1762) = *Short Hymns on Select Passages of the Holy Scriptures*. 2 vols. Bristol: Farley, 1762.
- WH* (1746) = *Whitsunday Hymns* (1746) (subtitle); original full title is *Hymns of Petition and Thanksgiving for the Promise of Father*. Bristol: Farley, 1746.

Other Sources:

- MARC = Methodist Archives and Research Centre, The John Rylands University Library, Manchester England.
- MSJ = *The Manuscript Journal of the Reverend Charles Wesley, M.A.* 2 vols. Edited by S T Kimbrough, Jr., and Kenneth G. C. Newport. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2007.
- Newport, *Sermons* = *The Sermons of Charles Wesley: A Critical Edition with Introduction and Notes*. Edited by Kenneth G. C. Newport. New York: Oxford University Press, 2001.