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**SALVATION AS FLOURISHING
FOR THE WHOLE CREATION:**

A WESLEYAN TRAJECTORY

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When the elderly John Wesley contemplated the mediocrity of moral character and the ineffectiveness in social impact of Christians in eighteenth-century England, he listed a major cause as inadequate understanding of doctrine.¹ By this he meant the broad lack of knowledge of Scripture among those claiming adherence to Christianity. But at times he highlighted specifically the inadequacy of the reigning popular understanding of “salvation,” insisting that salvation involved “not barely (according to the vulgar notion) deliverance from hell, or going to heaven” but a restoration to health or wholeness.² More to the point, he joined his brother Charles in stressing that Christians can “anticipate your heaven below,”³ or enjoy significant degrees of this health and wholeness *now*.

¹JW, Sermon 122, “Causes of the Inefficacy of Christianity,” *Works*, 4:86–96; esp. §6, p. 89.

²JW, *A Farther Appeal to Men of Reason and Religion*, Pt. I, §3, *Works*, 11:106.

³This famous line appeared first in st. 18 of CW’s “For the Anniversary Day of One’s Conversion, *Hymns and Sacred Poems* (1740), 123; a hymn abridged by JW in later collections to start with st. 7 (“O for a Thousand Tongues to Sing”).

Background: The “Vulgar” Embrace of a Transcendent and Spiritualized Eschatology

The Wesley brothers’ suggestion that authentic Christian salvation involves anticipation of heaven *below* reflects their awareness of—and resistance to—a tendency to transfer much of God’s saving work to the realm of heaven above. This tendency permeated Christian circles in their day and remains 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 belief, and tracing how it became prominent in later Christian understanding.⁴

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 (e.g., Prov. 10:22, 27). The focus is on this life, with any suggested afterlife presented as a “shade” or faint image of present existence.

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.

⁴For more discussion and documentation of the summary that follows, see McDannell & Lang, *Heaven: A History*; and Nichols, *Death and Afterlife*, chaps. 1–3.

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*!

This minority voice within the Old Testament witness was endorsed by the resurrection of Christ and became the normative aspect 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

⁵The spiritualizing trajectory we will trace next has tended to obscure the cosmic scope of God’s anticipated saving work in Scripture. Among recent works helping us to recognize this again are Wright, *Surprised by Hope*; and Middleton, *New Heaven and New Earth*.

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 was freed to enter a transcendent eternal state often 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 was fully conscious and filled with delight. Often there was stress that they are *more fully alive* after death; they were 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 was 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. 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 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 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 deemed humans to be *microcosms* of the whole cosmos (containing all forms of being 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."

⁶"On Reading Monsr. de Renty's Life," *Hymns and Sacred Poems* (1739), 16. This poem was likely written by JW.

⁷This topic is covered with fascinating detail in Bynum, *Resurrection of the Body*.

⁸http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Dieric_Bouts_-_Paradise_-_WGA02965.jpg.

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. 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.

***The Wesley Brothers' Inheritance of
this Transcendent Spiritualized Eschatology***

This was as true in eighteenth-century England as anywhere, and the Wesley brothers clearly imbibed this transcendent spiritualized understanding of our final hope (eschatology) in their upbringing and education, as is reflected in their early writings. Consider, for example, the well-known section of John's preface to his first volume of *Sermons* (1746): "I am a spirit come from God and returning to God; just hovering over the great gulf, till a few moments hence I am no more seen—I drop into an unchangeable eternity! I want to know one thing, the way to heaven—how to land safe on that happy shore."⁹ Or how it permeates hymns that Charles crafted for Methodists to sing at funerals of their friends, where we find stanzas like:

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.¹⁰

⁹JW, *Sermons* (1746), Preface, §5, *Works*, 1:105.

¹⁰CW, Hymn II, st. 1, *Funeral Hymns* (1746), 3.

The Impact of Transcendent Eschatology on Christian Spirituality

A change in understanding of last things (eschatology) as far-reaching as that which we have just traced was sure to impact other areas of Christian faith and practice. One significant impact of the transcendent emphasis (the distancing of the realm where God's full redemption is realized from this present age) was the prominence in the Wesley brothers' 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 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.¹¹ 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.”

¹¹See the detailed discussion of this model in its Puritan form in Hambrick-Stowe, *The Practice of Piety*, 54–90.

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—all of which 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."¹² 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.¹³

The Wesley Brothers' Reflection of the Pilgrimage Metaphor

The pilgrimage metaphor permeated both the Puritan and Anglican strands of the Wesley brothers' ancestry and they were shaped deeply by it in their upbringing. It is apparent in John's early sermons like the claim in a 1725 homily on death: "We all agree in calling life a burden . . . death is not only a haven, but an entrance into a far more desirable country";¹⁴ and he overtly endorsed it by publishing an abridged version of *Pilgrim's Progress* in 1743. Likewise, Charles wrote a series of hymns in the mid-1740s based on the allegory. The opening 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.

¹²For a good summary of this genre see Vogt, *Patience, Compassion, Hope*, 15–51. For excerpts from examples in England see Atkinson, *The English Ars Moriendi*.

¹³See Vogt, *Patience*, 29, 37–38.

¹⁴JW, Sermon 133, "Death and Deliverance," §4, *Works*, 4:208.

- 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.¹⁵

The negative undertones of the pilgrimage metaphor rise to the surface in some of Charles's hymns. The present earth can be characterized as a "world of sin and pain" to which we have been banished to suffer until our death. He 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.¹⁶ And he can suggest that the sole purpose of life is to prepare for death, which is a blessing when it comes early.

What would I have on earth beneath?
 Pardon, and an early death:
 Out of the vale of tears
 I long on mercy's wings to fly,
 To leave my sins, and griefs, and fears,
 To love my God, and die.¹⁷

The Wesley Brothers' Shared Initial Push Back — Affirming *Present Spiritual Hope*

Charles Wesley's occasional longing for "pardon, and an early death" emulates the focus of the "vulgar" notion of salvation almost entirely on escaping hell and going to heaven. But what was more characteristic of both Charles and John *after their experience of the renewing work of the*

¹⁵CW, "The Traveler," sts. 1–4, *Redemption Hymns* (1747), 51.

¹⁶See CW, "Before a Journey," *Hymns and Sacred Poems* (1740), 125; and "The Pilgrim," st. 3–7, *Redemption Hymns* (1747), 66–68.

¹⁷CW, "Hymn VII," *Redemption Hymns* (1747), 9.

Spirit in 1738 was how they pushed back against the tendency to postpone the divine transformation of our lives until the afterlife. They began to emphasize almost immediately two dimensions of God's salvific work in our lives *here below*.

The Witness of Love – Inspired Assurance of Pardon and Adoption

Ever since Jesus proclaimed that the Kingdom of God was *in the midst* of his hearers (Luke 17:21), Christians have assumed that they can experience some dimension of salvation in their present life. At a minimum this involved a consciousness of pardon (the certification for final salvation). Often it extended to a general sense of spiritual well-being. Notably, both of these are states of the human spirit. A more debated dimension gained prominence in the Wesley brothers' preaching and hymns through engagement with the pietist spirituality of the English Moravians in 1738. They shifted emphasis from the *human* dimension of assurance to the *agency of the Holy Spirit*.

For example, conscious reception of the Spirit became one of Charles's 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.¹⁸

This emphasis drew the critical eye of many Anglican peers, who worried that it verged on enthusiasm. Charles's 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.¹⁹

¹⁸CW, "The Marks of Faith," st.4, *Hymns and Sacred Poems* (1749), 2:221.

¹⁹CW, *Awake, Thou that Sleepest*, III.8, *Sermons*, 222.

John Wesley too, after 1738, emphasized that our human trust in God's pardoning love is possible only as it is awakened by the witness of the Spirit that sheds the love of God abroad in our heart. His comment in a letter to Samuel Walker is characteristic: "I hold a *divine* evidence or conviction that Christ loved *me* and gave Himself for *me* is essential to if not the very essence of justifying faith."²⁰ Or, as he put it in an earlier letter: " [We affirm] that inspiration of God's Holy Spirit whereby he fills us with righteousness, peace, and joy And we believe it cannot be, in the nature of things, that a [person] should be filled with this peace and joy and love ... without perceiving it. ... This is ... the main doctrine of the Methodists."²¹

The Indwelling of Love – Power for Spiritual Transformation

If the Wesley brothers' introduction to the emerging pietist revival in England played a positive role in forming their conviction about the nature of saving faith, their second emphasis about truly holistic salvation was framed in resistance to certain tendencies of colleagues in this revival. They came to worry that some of these colleagues focused so much on salvation as God's forgiveness of our guilt as sinners (the theme of Romans 1–3) that they marginalized the equally biblical theme (e.g., in Romans 7–8) of God's Spirit healing our spiritual debilitation resulting from sin. Two of John Wesley's classic comments on salvation capture this concern:

By salvation I mean, not barely (according to the vulgar notion) deliverance from hell, or going to heaven, but a present deliverance from sin, a restoration of the soul to its primitive health.²²

What is *salvation*? ... It is not a blessing which lies on the other side of death ... it is a present thing There is a *real* as well as a *relative* change. We are inwardly renewed by the power of God. We feel the "love of God shed abroad in our heart by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us," producing love to all humankind.²³

²⁰JW, Letter to Samuel Walker, Sept. 19, 1757, *Works*, 27:93.

²¹JW, Letter to "John Smith," Dec. 30, 1745, §13, *Works*, 26:181.

²²JW, *Farther Appeal to Men of Reason and Religion*, Pt. I, §3, *Works*, 11:106.

²³JW, Sermon 43, "The Scripture Way of Salvation," §I.1–4, *Works*, 2:156–58.

Key English Moravians who helped draw John and Charles Wesley into the revival in 1738 also connected justifying faith with holy living, but in a way that proved problematic. They encouraged the brothers to expect that when they experienced the assurance of God’s love they would be immediately and completely renewed—all of their doubts and fears would be gone, and all sinful inclinations would be replaced by Christ-like inclinations. While both brothers found that their deepened assurance of God’s love awakened new strength to resist sinful inclinations, they also recognized that the inclinations were still present. This realization did not lead them to forfeit the concern for full spiritual healing. Instead they progressively distinguished between the initial renewing effect that accompanied a sense of pardon and the further transformation of our inclinations that the Spirit makes possible in this life.²⁴ Charles, for example, crafted a rich set of hymns for believers who were waiting for this full redemption, a longing captured in an early stanza of the first hymn in the set:

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
Both my heart, and my nature are wash’d in thy blood.²⁵

Over the decades of ministry among their Methodist people some shifts and tensions emerged between John and Charles about the dynamics of sanctification, and the nature of its full expression (Christian perfection) in this life. But both continued to affirm that God’s Spirit made possible authentic Christian holiness “here below,” nurtured in the means of grace.²⁶

²⁴The best study of the expectations instilled by the English Moravians, and JW’s later revisions, is Heitzenrater, “Great Expectations.” For a parallel consideration of CW, see Maddox, “Anticipate Our Heaven Below,” 23–25.

²⁵See the thirty-seven “Hymns for Those that Wait for Full Redemption,” *Hymns and Sacred Poems* (1749), 2:147–95. This is the third stanza of the first hymn, 2:148.

²⁶See the Introduction to JW, *Works*, 12:15–24; and Maddox, “Anticipate Our Heaven Below,” 25–27.

John Wesley’s Broadening Precedent for Anticipating the Flourishing of *all* Creation

While the Wesley brothers remained in general agreement after 1738 about the present possibility—through grace—of anticipating the *spiritual* dimensions of salvation (or “heaven”), John progressively diverged from Charles (and the majority stance of his day) in affirming *other* dimensions in which God called us to “anticipate our heaven below.” A good background for highlighting this divergence is again Bouts’s painting of the resurrected saints ascending to heaven from the restored paradise.²⁷ As each saint ascends, note not only that their body dissipates, but they each enter heaven alone, and leave the restored paradise behind (reflecting an assumption that the “new heavens and new earth” were a temporary reality, a setting for the millennium but not eternity). If what God cares about ultimately (i.e., in eternity) is any guide for what we should care about during this life, then there is nothing in Bouts’s painting to counter the charge leveled by Ludwig Feuerbach in 1841: “Nature, the world, has no value, no interest for Christians. The Christian thinks only of himself and the salvation of his soul.”²⁸ In another setting I have shown that Charles Wesley also offered little to counter this charge.²⁹ By contrast, in the remainder of this essay I will highlight three areas in which John Wesley consciously challenged the restriction of a Christian’s present concern to spiritual dimensions of salvation.

Anticipation of the Flourishing of Bodies, not just Souls!

We noted above that John Wesley imbibed in his upbringing the popular understanding of salvation as the human *spirit* spending eternity in heaven. But through the later decades of his life John took the scriptural imagery of bodily resurrection and of the new heavens and earth ever more seriously. Ultimately (drawing on a suggestion of Charles Bonnet, a prominent Swiss biologist) he was drawn to a model of the afterlife in which humans are embodied and reside in a physical universe, though we are higher on the “chain of being” than in our current setting.³⁰

²⁷See note 8 above.

²⁸Feuerbach, *Essence of Christianity*, 287.

²⁹Maddox, “Anticipate Our Heaven Below,” 27–34.

³⁰JW even republished a translation of an extract from Bonnet titled *Conjectures Concerning the Nature of Future Happiness* (Dublin: Dugdale, 1787).

While most clear in his later writings, this emphasis on our bodies participating in ultimate salvation was consistent with John Wesley's *life-long* conviction that God's saving concern in the present includes our bodies. To appreciate fully this precedent in Wesley we need to remember the Puritan piety that remained dominant in his day.³¹ A good sense of this piety can be gained from Lewis Bayly's *Practice of Piety*, one of the most popular books of its time, which included a section on the "practice of piety in glorifying God in times of sickness."³² Bayly's most central (and repeated) point was that Christians should recognize that illness and affliction do not beset us by chance; they are sent providentially by God—in part as punishment for our sins, but even more as a type of treatment administered by the divine Physician. The purpose of this divine physic is to draw forth our repentance, and to "wean our hearts from too much loving this world and worldly vanities."³³ The most important response to affliction is to sanctify it, by giving thanks for it and allowing it to have this twofold effect. This is not to say that Bayly, or other Puritans, discounted the help of physicians. As part of their rejection of the *miraculous* efficacy of sacraments and relics, they stressed God's use of "second causes" in effecting providence.³⁴ Thus Bayly ruled out neither prayers for healing nor solicitation of medical advice. But he cautioned: 1) this concern should be secondary to drawing from our affliction the spiritual benefit of reconciliation; 2) our trust for healing must remain grounded in God, not the human physician or medicine; and 3) we should not desire restored health *over* death, but trust that the eventual outcome is God's providential will.³⁵

Charles Wesley's various hymns on illness echo the Puritan stance presented in Bayly, including caution about assuming that God's primary concern is our present health.³⁶ By contrast, John Wesley was less hesitant to assure sufferers of God's desire to provide healing *now*. His stance is epitomized in advice he gave Alexander Knox in a 1778 letter: 'It will be a double blessing if you give yourself up to the Great Physician, that he may

³¹For a broader treatment of this topic, see Harley, "Spiritual Physic."

³²Bayly, *Practice of Piety*, 792–855.

³³*Ibid.*, 799, 826.

³⁴See Harley, 'Spiritual Physic', 112.

³⁵Bayly, *Practice of Piety*, 803–5, 815–17, 818.

³⁶See Maddox, "Anticipate Our Heaven Below," 27–29.

heal soul and body together. And unquestionably this is his design. He wants to give you ... both inward and outward health.³⁷ While Wesley did not underline the word, he surely intended “unquestionably” to be emphatic

If this is God’s design, then for John Wesley it was obvious that we should *co-operate* by doing all that we can to restore and preserve our physical health.³⁸ How seriously he felt about this is evident in his instructions to his lay assistants about their ministry among the Methodist people. As they visited the various societies, Wesley charged them to leave behind books that could provide ongoing guidance, highlighting most often two works that should be in every house: 1) his excerpt of Thomas a Kempis’s *The Imitation of Christ*, which Wesley valued as a guide to spiritual health; and 2) *Primitive Physic*, which he had prepared as a guide to physical health.³⁹

Most Methodists today are unaware of the second volume, and scholars who come across it often dismiss it as a collection of “home remedies.” This seriously misjudges its nature and its centrality to John Wesley’s ministry. He read broadly on the topic of medicine throughout his life and gathered many of the remedies in *Primitive Physic* from medical authors of his time. This was as much a use of his scholarly gifts to provide aids for his people as was his collection of theological writings in the *Christian Library*. Moreover, in the preface to this volume (and in other publications) John added advice for preserving health to his suggestions for treating wounds and illnesses. He was interested not simply in offering cures but in promoting wellness.

John Wesley was also clear that Methodist ministry to others should address their needs for physical healing as well as for spiritual healing. This conjunction came naturally, because the Anglican model in which Wesley was trained expected priests to offer medical care as part of their overall ministry, at least in smaller villages. To be sure, he was aware of the efforts of the newly-founded Royal College of Physicians to professionalize the practice of medicine by restricting the ranks of those certified to offer treatment. But Wesley recognized that there were simply not enough certified physicians available yet, and the poor were the ones most likely to be left without care. Deep concern about this led him to take

³⁷JW to Alexander Knox, Oct. 28, 1778, *Works*, 32:661.

³⁸For more details on what follows, see Maddox, “John Wesley on Holistic Health”; and the Introduction to JW, *Works*, 32:1–65.

³⁹JW, “Large Minutes,” Q. 42, *Works*, 10:920.

the “desperate expedient” of opening free clinics in Bristol and London where he offered medical treatment for the poor.⁴⁰ It was also led him to include basic medical texts in the readings assigned for his lay assistants, so that they could offer medical advice as they rode their circuits, and to create a lay office of the “visitor of the sick” within Methodist societies.

As all of this reflects, John Wesley longed for his followers to see that anticipation of God’s salvific commitment to the flourishing of life involved nurturing not only our souls but our bodies in this life, and addressing both of these dimensions in our outreach to others.

Anticipation of the Flourishing of Society, not just Individuals!

A second area in which John Wesley broadened Christian anticipation of God’s salvific work beyond the spiritual dimension is suggested by his well-known aphorism: “The gospel of Christ knows of no religion, but social; no holiness, but social holiness.”⁴¹ This aphorism is well known because it has been invoked by so many Methodists since the late nineteenth century to warrant their focus on socioeconomic transformation as they embraced the emphases of the Social Gospel movement, Liberation Theology, and the like. In other words, this is one place where his heirs have been ready to claim Wesley’s legacy. But few of those making this claim recognized that Wesley’s primary focus in the specific text cited is different from the implication they were suggesting.⁴²

In the early years of the revival—the context of this quotation—the dimension of the *social* character of salvation on which Wesley focused most attention was corporate support and accountability for our ongoing growth in grace. He inherited this appreciation for “religious society” from his father, who sponsored a small group in his parish at Epworth; and he shared it with his brother Charles, who described such corporate support as the divinely intended way to “nourish us with social grace.”⁴³ The depth of John’s appreciation is evident in the multi-layered structure of support groups that he progressively crafted for the benefit of his Methodist people.

⁴⁰See JW, *A Plain Account of the People Called Methodists*, §XII:1–2, *Works*, 9:275.

⁴¹JW, *Hymns and Sacred Poems* (1739), Preface, §5, *Works*, 13:39.

⁴²See on this point, Thompson, “From Societies to Society.”

⁴³See CW’s hymn written for love feasts, *Hymns*, #507, st. 1, *Works*, 7:698.

While the dimension of corporate spiritual formation is always central in Wesley's affirmations of the social character of salvation, a second dimension can be discerned as well in nearly every case. He took it for granted that those who were being renewed in the Methodist societies would be expressing this change in society at large. Note how this comes through in his longest elaboration of the Methodist understanding of salvation:

By *salvation* [the Methodist] means holiness of heart and life. ... a Methodist is one who has "the love of God shed abroad in his heart by the Holy Ghost given to him"; one who "loves the Lord his God with all his heart, and with all his soul, and with all his mind, and with all his strength." ... [and] this commandment is written in his heart, that "he who loveth God, loves his brother also." ... His obedience is in proportion to his love, the source from whence it flows. And therefore, loving God with all his heart, he serves him with all his strength. ... Lastly, as he has time, he "does good unto all men"—unto neighbours and strangers, friends and enemies. And that in every possible kind; not only to their bodies, by "feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, visiting those that are sick or in prison," but much more does he labour to do good to their souls.⁴⁴

This "social service" dimension of salvation as flourishing found its most formal expression in the General Rules, which admonished Methodists 1) to do no harm to others and 2) to do as much good for the bodies and souls of others as they could.⁴⁵

While modern Methodists who invoke the aphorism "no holiness but social holiness" would appreciate such acts of caring for the needy and suffering, their focal concern has been to transform political and economic structures that ignore the poor or cause human suffering. Is there evidence of this focus in John Wesley's affirmation of the social character of salvation? There is indeed, though it emerges only in his later years. The clearest expressions are two tracts: *Thoughts on the Present Scarcity of Provisions* (1773), which proposes several political and economic moves to increase production of basic foods; and *Thoughts upon Slavery* (1774), which focuses on undercutting supposed humanitarian and theological justifications for slavery, but thereby lays the basis for support of political moves to abolish slavery.

⁴⁴JW, *Character of a Methodist*, §§4–16, *Works*, 9:35–41.

⁴⁵*The Nature, Design, and General Rules of the United Societies*, *Works*, 9:69–73.

What accounts for the rareness of emphasis on socioeconomic transformation in Charles Wesley's writings, and in John Wesley's earlier years? Many have assigned it to conservative political commitments which the brothers inherited, that led them to distrust all revolutionary agendas. But few have recognized how these commitments were grounded in a specific Anglican premillennial eschatology expounded by their father—which stressed *passive obedience* to the current (imperfect) king and church, while waiting for Christ (the *true king*) to return and institute the millennial age of earthly peace and tranquility through the *true church*.⁴⁶ Both John and Charles reflect this eschatology (and relative political conservatism) in their early ministry, and Charles retained it through his life. By contrast, in his later years John embraced an emerging emphasis on the hope for “latter day glory”—a culminating age of *this world*, effected by the Spirit through the church, where humans enjoy the peace and justice promised in the prophets.⁴⁷

While it is not without its problems, this new emphasis allowed John Wesley to broaden 1) his confidence in the present empowering affect of the Spirit and 2) his conviction that God values human co-operation, such that they applied not only to the personal realm but also to societal realities. But what is most significant is the way he wove personal and socioeconomic transformation together by continuing to highlight the role of small support groups in nurturing both the inclination and the tenacity that sustained service to others in need and the struggle to transform socioeconomic structures.

Anticipation of the Flourishing of all Creation, not just Humans!

The final way in which John Wesley broadened Christian anticipation of God's salvific work in his later years is the one that most differed from the spiritualized model he had inherited. It is also likely the one that is least familiar to his present heirs.

If the spiritualized model of “heaven above” found it difficult to admit human bodies to the afterlife (allowing them only in an ethereal form), it struggled all the more with notions of animals or the physical elements having a place in ultimate salvation. But as Wesley continued

⁴⁶See Maddox, “Millennial Hopes.”

⁴⁷See JW, Sermon 63 (1783), “The General Spread of the Gospel,” §§13–27 (esp. §16), *Works* 2:490–99.

to probe the biblical witness to salvation in his sixties, he decisively shifted the focus of his ultimate hope from “heaven above” to the promised new creation. Indeed, the new creation became one of the most prominent themes of his late sermons. These sermons leave no doubt that this future creation will be a physical place, even as Wesley speculated about how dramatically each of its basic elements would be improved over present conditions. Most importantly, while both his father and his brother Charles assumed that the “new heavens and new earth” were a temporary part of God’s blessing (the setting of the millennium), John Wesley came to affirm this biblical promise as God’s intention for eternity.⁴⁸

John also became convinced that the range of animals would be present in this renewed creation. He had likely sympathized with the view that animals had souls for some time (a clear minority view in his day), possibly devoting one of the required lectures in his Oxford degree program to this topic. He offered a guarded reaffirmation of this point in 1775.⁴⁹ Then in 1781 he boldly affirmed final salvation for animals in his sermon “The General Deliverance.”⁵⁰ While not unprecedented, this sermon was unusual for its time and is often cited today as a pioneer effort at reclaiming the doctrine of animal salvation in the Western church.⁵¹ Wesley reinforced the point of his sermon two years later by placing in the *Arminian Magazine* an extended extract of John Hildrop’s spirited defense of animal salvation, which contested the alternative comments of such notables as John Locke. In the preface to his extract Wesley noted that some might think that this issue was an ingenious trifle, but he considered it central to our confession of the wisdom and goodness of God. As Hildrop had argued, to allow that God did not redeem all that God created and called good would mean that God had not truly overcome the work of Satan.⁵²

The connection of the issue of animal salvation to affirmation of God’s goodness lies behind what is surely the most unusual element in the aged Wesley’s reflections on the cosmic dimension of new creation. He had long doubted the adequacy of a theodicy that justified God’s goodness in permitting the possibility of the fall by noting that God

⁴⁸See in particular JW, Sermon 64, “The New Creation,” *Works*, 2:500–10.

⁴⁹See JW, Sermon 55, “On the Trinity,” §11, *Works*, 2:382.

⁵⁰JW, Sermon 60, “The General Deliverance,” *Works*, 2:437–50.

⁵¹See the reference in Linzey, *Christianity and the Rights of Animals*, 36.

⁵²The extract of Hildrop’s *Free Thoughts upon the Brute Creation* (1742–43) is scattered through *Arminian Magazine* 6 (1783). Hildrop’s reference to Satan is on p. 598.

would eventually restore things to their pre-fallen condition. In Wesley's view, a truly loving God would only permit the present evil in the world if an *even better* outcome might be achieved by allowing this possibility than without it. On these terms, he believed that God would not just restore of fallen creation to its original state, God would recreate it with greater capacities and blessings than it had at first.⁵³ What all might this entail? Drawing again on the work of Bonnet, Wesley proposed in "General Deliverance" that as compensation for the evil they experienced in this life God would move the various animals higher up the chain of being in the next life—granting them greater abilities, including perhaps even the ability to relate to God as humans do now!⁵⁴

Whatever we make of this speculation, the most significant aspect of Wesley's reflection on this cosmic dimension of ultimate salvation is his sense of its relevance for present Christian life. He defended his speculation about God's future blessings of animals on the grounds that it might provide further encouragement for us to imitate now the God whose "mercy is over all his works."⁵⁵ Lest this be left in generalities, he frequently exhorted against abusive treatment of animals.⁵⁶

In short, in his later years John Wesley increasingly encouraged Methodists to "anticipate their heaven below" by participating in God's salvific concern for the flourishing of all creation.⁵⁷

A Continuing Wesleyan Agenda

Such is the legacy that John Wesley in particular bequeathed to his ecclesial descendants and—through them—to the whole church. I wish that I could next recount how his descendants fully embraced this legacy and gladly shared it with others. Unfortunately, the historical reality was more mixed than this, particularly in the North American setting where Methodism most flourished through the nineteenth and twentieth century.

⁵³See JW, Sermon 59, "God's Love to Fallen Man," *Works*, 2:423–35.

⁵⁴JW, "General Deliverance," §III.6–7, *Works*, 2:448.

⁵⁵*Ibid.*, §III.10, *Works*, 2:449.

⁵⁶See Runyon, *New Creation*, 202–5 for a convenient collection of such exhortations.

⁵⁷For more on this point, see Maddox, "Anticipating the New Creation"; and Snyder, *Salvation Means Creation Healed*.

The early circuit riders in North America followed Wesley's instructions to offer medical advice as part of their ministry, until increasing professionalization made this unacceptable. In the nineteenth century Wesley's commitment to this aspect of holistic salvation was honored more by building colleges across the continent that emphasized training physicians and nurses. At the turn of the century this was supplemented by establishment of several church-supported "charity" hospitals.⁵⁸ Then came the financial pressures of health care in recent decades, which have largely removed the church from direct involvement, and have again left the poor in danger of inadequate access. Methodists are only beginning to explore how to honor their Wesleyan legacy within this new reality.

While twentieth-century Methodists picked up and elaborated Wesley's emphasis on socioeconomic transformation, most of them had meanwhile abandoned the small groups that Wesley valued for nurturing the inclination and tenacity for consistent engagement in social service and advocacy.

Finally, Wesley's support of animal welfare, and their ultimate salvation, continued in some strands of British Methodism into the nineteenth century.⁵⁹ But there is little evidence that this particular emphasis in the Wesley's mature understanding of salvation carried across the Atlantic to the North American church, or that it was consciously echoed on either side of the Atlantic by the later nineteenth century.

In other words, we who stand today in the traditions tracing back to the ministry of the Wesley brothers face much the same challenge as they did—the challenge of reclaiming an understanding and embodiment of the full scope of salvation affirmed in Scripture—the flourishing of *all* creation.

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⁵⁸These transitions are traced well in Holifield, *Health and Medicine*.

⁵⁹Cf. Turner, *All Heaven in a Rage*, 50, 72, 161; and Thompson (a Methodist minister), *Essays Tending to Prove Animal Restoration*.

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